

All Muslims are required to perform obligatory prayer, five times a day. This is called *salāh*. It must be performed in a specified manner and, for men, if possible, must be undertaken in congregation. As mentioned before, *salāh* is one of *Arkān al Islām*. Remember what Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

Buniyal Islām ‘alaa Khamsīn (Islām is built upon five)

Well, *salāh* is the second of those five.



***Salāh* is commonly translated as prayer. Is this an acceptable translation?**

For general day-to-day use, for example, with non-Muslims, it's okay. However, other than that, amongst ourselves, it is better that we use the word '*salāh*.' *Salāh* has a meaning that is entirely different from 'prayer.'



In what sense?

'Prayer' is a very general, non-specific word. In the English language, it can apply to any kind of supplication. People can 'pray' kneeling by their beds, or with their hands raised on a plane, or whispering whilst driving and so on. Informal words to god, such as these, are what people usually consider to be words of 'prayer.' Certainly, Muslims can do all those things mentioned as well, but those actions do not constitute *salāh*. *Salāh* involves specific words, with specific actions, preceded by a specific intention, in a specified manner, and, with respect to the five daily prayers, done at specific times.¹



Why is it important that we perform *salāh*?

The Qur'ān and ahadīth are replete with statements about the benefits of *salāh*. There are advantages for society as a whole, as well as rewards for individuals. Insha'Allāh, we will discuss some of those later. However, it is important to remember that, basically, *salāh* is a commandment from Allāh. Its performance will incur His pleasure; its abandonment will incur His wrath. Allāh says,

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ ۚ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقِيَمَةِ

And they were not commanded except to worship Allāh, (being) sincere to Him in religion, inclining to the truth, and to establish prayer; and to give charity. And that is the correct religion.

Sūrah al Bayyinah; The Qur'ān, 98:5

Ibn Umar narrates that Allāh's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said: "I have been ordered (by Allāh) to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allāh and that Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم is Allāh's Messenger, and offer the prayers perfectly and

¹ The word '*salāh*' can refer to the five, daily obligatory (*farā'id*) prayers, as well as to any additional voluntary (*nawāfil*) prayers that a person may wish to perform over and above that. However, in this book, *salāh* will be used to describe the former, in keeping with its meaning in the five pillars hadīth.

give the obligatory charity, so if they perform that, then they save their lives and property from me except for Islāmic laws and then their reckoning (accounts) will be done by Allāh."
Bukhāri



So, *salāh* is a command?

Yes, and one not to be dismissed. If your mother tells you to clear snow from the driveway, then as an obedient Muslim, you will do so. You will not ask her 'why?' or 'Before I do that mum, tell me what the benefits are' or 'What's in it for me?' Of course, as an intelligent, free thinking person, you will consider those benefits, and indeed your mother may well volunteer to tell you some of them. For example, she may explain that someone might fall on the snow or the car could slide onto the road. However, *those* should not be the reasons why you clear the drive. You do it because your mother has commanded you so, because you love her and wish to obey her, because you fear her displeasure if you should refuse to listen.



Similarly, with regard to *salāh*, we perform it because Allāh has commanded us to do so. Whilst we appreciate the many rewards available for its performance, our prime motive should be to earn Allāh's pleasure and avoid His censure. Tell me. What is the purpose of our creation?



I remember this. For no other reason other than to worship Allāh alone.

That's right. Allāh created us for NO OTHER REASON but to worship Him. He says,

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.

Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt; The Qur'ān, 51:56

Allāh سبحانه وتعالى did not create us just to be doctors, teachers, engineers and so on. Those vocations are simply a means to an end. They allow us, with the Permission of Allāh, to acquire the sustenance we need to perform our real purpose in life, which is to worship Him. *Salāh* is a principle part of that worship. If you abandon *salāh*, you abandon the very reason for your creation.



And yet many people abandon it so easily.

Yes, that's true, but not so the true believer. He makes *salāh* a firm part of his life, as well as of the lives of those around him. A believing father should ensure his family is performing *salāh*. A believing ruler should ensure that the environment in his domain is conducive to regular *salāh* by the population, for example, by ensuring mosques in every neighbourhood. It's not simply a matter of *doing salāh*. We must establish it firmly in our lives.



My uncle is kind, charitable, always helping others. However, he does not do *salāh*. Does this matter?

All the *ulema* agree that not performing *salāh* is one of the *kabā'ir* (major sins). Let me ask you something. Can you name any of the other *kabā'ir*?



Shirk? Murder? Zina?

Yes. Illustrious company eh? To put it into perspective, non-performance of *salāh* is a major act of disobedience to Allāh, standing alongside such other major sins as *zina*² and murder. What if you discovered that this uncle of yours, left home every night to murder passers by on the road? What would you think of his good deeds then?



That's a bit strong isn't it?

Is he still a nice person?



Well, no, definitely not. All his good deeds would be overshadowed by his acts of murder.

Yes. My example may be strong and somewhat exaggerated, but it illustrates a point. *Alhamdulillah*, your uncle is not a murderer, but still, what is the point of all those good deeds, if they are completely overshadowed by one of the most serious evils of all, abandoning *salāh*. Once again, all the *ulema* agree that not performing *salāh* is one of the *kabā'ir*.



What about Muslims who deny *salāh* altogether?

A person who goes further than simple laziness, and denies altogether the concept of *salāh* as an Islāmic duty, is a *kāfir*³. Again, all the *ulema*, past and present, agree upon this matter. The Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

The border that separates a Muslim from shirk and *kufri* is *salāh*.
Muslim



That's very serious.

Be careful with my words above. The person described above is one who 'denies' altogether that *salāh* is an obligatory act to be performed by all Muslims.



My uncle doesn't deny *salāh*, he is just lazy about his performance of it?

Well, the *ulema* differ on this point. Some say, with very strong evidence from Qur'ān and ahadīth, that such a person is also a *kāfir* and has placed himself outside the pale of Islām. Others state that whilst he has committed one of the *kabā'ir*, he has not fallen outside Islām. The discussion of this area of Islāmic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), is beyond the scope of this writing. However, the very fact that it is debated at all, I hope demonstrates how serious missing *salāh* is.



I have a Muslim friend at school who does not perform *salāh*. He says things like 'it's what's in the heart that matters, not *salāh*' and 'so long as you are a good person, that's all that matters.'

Do not be deceived by the words of such people, but rather hold on firmly to *salāh* always. It is irrelevant how pleasant, nice, intellectual, intelligent, clean-cut, smart, or logical such people look or sound. You must remember that his deliberate act of dismissing *salāh* is an act of gross disobedience that may take him outside the fold of Islām. You must not follow such individuals in these matters, and, unless you feel there is real scope

² *Shirk* is associating partners with Allāh. *Zina* is Illicit sexual relations

³ Infidel, a disbeliever, from *kufri* – the act of disbelief.

for guiding them to Islām (*daw'ah*), it is best you steer-clear of them altogether. The Messenger of Allāh, صلى الله عليه وسلم, said, as narrated by Abu Mūsa عنه رضي الله عنه ,

"The example of a good companion (who sits with you) in comparison with a bad one, is like that of the musk seller and the blacksmith's bellows (or furnace); from the first you would either buy musk or enjoy its good smell while the bellows would either burn your clothes or your house, or you get a bad nasty smell thereof."

Bukhāri

NEVER let anybody fool you into believing that the act of *salāh* is not important. Even if the whole world were to abandon *salāh*, you should remain the sole individual who continues to perform it. According to hadīth, *salāh* will be the first act you will be called to account for on the Day of Judgement. Abdullah ibn Qart عنه رضي الله عنه related that the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

The first act that the slave will be accountable for on the Day of Judgement will be prayer. If it is good, then the rest of his acts will be good. And if it is evil, then the rest of his acts will be evil.

Related by at-Tabarāni in As-Sayyid Sābiq's Fiqh as Sunnah



What if my parents are not performing *salāh*? Should I follow them?

The general rule is that you never disobey your parents EXCEPT in acts involving disobedience to Allāh. On that basis, you do not follow them. If they were to discourage you from performing *salāh*, you can and must disobey them. As far as you are able, gently advise them about the obligatory nature of *salāh*, and encourage them to perform it. Insha'Allāh, you will be rewarded greatly for such an effort, both in the *dunya* and the *ākhirah*⁴.



Are there situations where I can miss *salāh*?

Unless you genuinely oversleep, are very young or insane, you cannot miss *salāh*. Having said that, Allāh سبحانه و تعالى does make it easier for people who are travelling. They are permitted to shorten and join their *salāh*. People who are sick also can perform *salāh*, sitting or even lying down.

Muslims at war must even maintain *salāh*. The *mujāhidīn*⁵, should rotate between the performance of *salāh* and the guarding of their fellow fighters. Allāh tells us,

وَإِذَا كُنْتَ فِيهِمْ فَأَقَمْتَ لَهُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَلْتَقُمْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ مَعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوا أَسْلِحَتَهُمْ فَإِذَا سَجَدُوا فَلْيَكُونُوا مِنْ وَرَائِكُمْ وَلْتَأْتِ طَائِفَةٌ أُخْرَى لَمْ يُصَلُّوا فَلْيُصَلُّوا مَعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوا حِزْبَهُمْ وَأَسْلِحَتَهُمْ ۗ وَدَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ تَغْفُلُونَ عَنْ أَسْلِحَتِكُمْ وَأَمْتِعَتِكُمْ فَيَمِيلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَيْلَةً وَاحِدَةً ۗ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنْ كَانَ بِكُمْ أَدَىٰ مِنْ مَطَرٍ أَوْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَىٰ أَنْ تَضَعُوا أَسْلِحَتَكُمْ ۗ وَخُذُوا حِزْبَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ آعَدَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا

And when you are among them and lead them in Prayer, let a group of them stand (in prayer) with you and let them carry their arms. And when they have prostrated, let them be (in position) behind you and have the other group come forward which has not (yet) prayed and let them pray with you, taking precaution and carrying their arms.

Surāh an Nisā', 4:102

⁴ The *dunya* is the life of this world, whilst the *ākhirah* is the superior life of the Hereafter

⁵ Those fighting for the sake of Allāh

Consider that. The *Mujāhidīn*, on the battlefield, anxious about enemy attack, still perform *salāh*. Whereas, many Muslims, even in the comfort and security of their own offices, schools, colleges and workplaces, are too scared and embarrassed to do the same. The former fear the CREATOR, the latter fear the CREATED! The fact that we are still required to perform *salāh*, even in war, is a measure of just how important this action is.



Can *salāh* benefit me in my day to day life?

When you are disciplined about *salāh*, praying it on time and with full attentiveness, you may find that you become more focused in your life generally. For example:

- you don't procrastinate about other areas like homework, household tasks or exercise;
- you plan better because you are conscious of your location in any part of the day, so that you do not miss your *salāh*;
- you are conscious about remaining *tāhir* (clean and pure), so that you are always ready for *salāh*;
- you are aware of the movement of the sun in the sky and other wonders of nature around you;
- You are conscious of your actions and interactions with others, and whether they are pleasing to Allāh.



What are the benefits of performing *salāh* as mentioned in the Qur'ān and ahadīth?

ONE

When times are hard, Allāh encourages us to have patience and turn to *salāh*.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer, Indeed Allāh is with the patient.

Surāh al Baqarah, 2:153

فَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ الْغُرُوبِ

So be patient (O Muhammad), over what they say and exalt (Allāh) with praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting.

Surāh Qāf, 50:39

TWO

If performed at its stated times, *salāh* is the act dearest to Allāh

Narrated Ibn Masūd, رضي الله عنه I asked Allāh's messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم, "Which act is dearest to Almighty Allāh?" He said, "As-*salāh* at the fixed times." I asked, "What next?" He said, "Righteousness to parents." I asked, "What next?" He said, *Jihād* in the way of Allāh."

Bukhāri and Muslim

THREE

Salāh allows us continued Guidance from Allāh

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنِ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ

The mosques of Allāh are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allāh and the Last Day and establish prayer and give zakaah and do not fear except Allāh, for it is expected that those will be of the (rightly guided).

Surāh at Tawbah, 9:18

FOUR

Salāh protects us from shameful deeds

أَتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ ۖ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ
وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ

Recite, (O Muhammad) what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish Prayer. Indeed, Prayer prohibits immorality and wrong-doing, and the Remembrance of Allāh is greater. And Allāh knows that which you do.
Surāh al 'Ankabūt, 29

FIVE

Salāh can remove our evil deeds

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفَيِ النَّهَارِ وَزُلْفًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ ۚ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ذِكْرٌ لِلذَّاكِرِينَ

And establish Prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approach of the night. Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds. That is a reminder for those who remember.
Surāh Hūd, 11:114

Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه narrates, I heard Allāh's Apostle صلى الله عليه وسلم saying, "If there was a river at the door of anyone of you and he took a bath in it five times a day would you notice any dirt on him?" They said, "Not a trace of dirt would be left." The Prophet added, "That is the example of the five prayers with which Allāh blots out (annuls) evil deeds."
Bukhāri

Abu Hurairah narrates, Allāh's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said: "The five (daily) salāh and the Friday to Friday (salāh) make expiation for whatever (minor) sins maybe committed between them, so long as major sins are avoided."
Muslim

SIX

Salāh provides us with a source of Allāh's Mercy

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ
الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

The believing men and believing women are allies of one of another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakaah and obey Allāh and His Messenger. Those – Allāh will have Mercy upon them. Indeed Allāh is Exalted in Might and Wise.
Surāh at Tawbah, 9:71

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

And establish Prayer and give zakaah and obey the Messenger – that you may receive Mercy.
Surāh an Nūr, 24:56

SEVEN

Salāh keeps us in touch with Allāh, maintaining us as one of His beloved

الْيَوْمَ أَجَلٌ لَكُمْ لَطِيبَاتٌ ۖ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ جُلٌّ لَكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ جُلٌّ لَهُمْ ۖ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ
الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ
مُسَافِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِي أَخْدَانٍ ۗ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

Your ally is none but Allāh and (therefore) His Messenger and those who have believed – those who establish regular prayer and give zakaah, and they bow (in worship).

Surāh al Mā'idah, 5:5

وَالَّذِينَ يُمَسِّكُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّا لَا نَضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُصْلِحِينَ

But those who hold fast to the Book⁶ and establish regular prayer – indeed We will not allow to be lost the reward of the reformers.

Surāh al A'raaf, 7:170

EIGHT

Salāh distinguishes Muslims from disbelievers

فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ ۗ وَنُفِصِلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ

But if they repent,⁷ establish prayer, and give zakaah, then they are your brothers in religion

Surāh ath Tawbah, 9:11

The border that separates a Muslim from shirk and kufr is *salāh*.
Muslim

The pact between us and them is *salāh* and whoever abandons it is a disbeliever.
Ahmed, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi

NINE

Salāh ensures success and prosperity in dunya and in the ākhira

الْم تِلْكَ آيَاتِ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْمُحْسِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ
هُمْ يوقِنُونَ أُولَئِكَ عَلَى هُدًى مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

Alif Lām Mīm. These are Verses of the Wise Book, As Guidance and Mercy to the Doers of Good, who establish Prayer and give zakāh, and they of the Hereafter are certain (in faith). Those are on (right) guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are the successful.
Surāh Luqmān, 31:1-5

⁶ The Qur'ān

⁷ Repent from *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh)

The five daily prayers (*Salāh*) [part a]

Questions

1. 'If you abandon *salāh*, you abandon the very reason for your creation.' What did I mean by this?
2. What do we mean by the word *kabā'ir*?
3. Finish this hadīth: "The border that separates a Muslim"
4. Based upon their study of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, what do the scholars say about the person who denies the concept of *salāh* altogether i.e. he does not believe that Muslims are required to pray five times a day?
5. Tell me the hadīth about the importance of good company, as narrated by Abu Mūsa.
6. Will we be questioned about our *salāh* on the Day of Judgement? Elaborate.
7. Why is the word 'prayer' an inadequate translation of the word *salāh*?
8. Name five benefits for the believer of performing *salāh*.
9. In your own words, but as accurately as you can, describe how Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم compared *salāh* with a stream flowing outside someone's house.
10. You must obey your parents at all times, even if they order you not to do your *salāh*? True or False? Explain your answer.
11. For which people is *salāh* made easier?
12. Do *mujāhidīn* have to perform *salāh*? What precautions do they take?
13. According to the hadīth of Ibn Masūd, which three acts are "dearest to Almighty Allāh.



School kids in Zanzibar, Tanzania