Prescribed Prayers (Salah) – Obligatory Acts



And to establish the Prayer in conformity with all its conditions, and keep from disobedience to Him in reverence for Him and piety." He it is to Whom you will be gathered.[[1]](#endnote-2)



They establish the Prayer in conformity with its conditions, and out of whatever We have provided for them (of wealth, knowledge, power, etc.), they spend (to provide sustenance for the needy, and in God's cause, purely for the good pleasure of God, and without placing others under obligation.)[[2]](#endnote-3)



Order your family and community to establish the Prayer, and be diligent in its observance. We do not ask you to provide for Us; rather, it is We Who provide for you. (So, all your worship is for your own benefit.) And the (desired) outcome is in favor of piety and righteousness.[[3]](#endnote-4)

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Narrated Wa'ilibn HUJR: I purposely looked at the prayer of the Apostle of Allah (peace\_be\_upon\_him), how he offered it. The Apostle of Allah (peace\_be\_upon\_him) stood up, faced the direction of the qiblah and uttered the takbir (Allah is most great) and then raised his hands in front of his ears, then placed his right hand on his left (catching each other). When he was about to bow, he raised them in the same manner. He then placed his hands on his knees. When he raised his head after bowing, he raised them in the like manner. When he prostrated himself he placed his forehead between his hands. He then sat down and spread his left foot and placed his left hand on his left thigh, and kept his right elbow aloof from his right thigh. He closed his two fingers and made a circle (with the fingers). I (AsimibnKulayb) saw him (Bishribn al-Mufaddal) say in this manner. Bishr made the circle with the thumb and the middle finger and pointed with the forefinger.[[4]](#endnote-5)

Abu Humaid As-Saidi said, "I remember the prayer of Allah's Apostle better than any one of you. ... I saw him raising both his hands up to the level of the shoulders on saying the Takbir..."[[5]](#endnote-6)

Narrated by 'Ubada bin As-Samit

Allah's Apostle (SallallähuAlaihiWasallam)  said, "Whoever does not recite Al-Fatiha in his prayer, his prayer is invalid."[[6]](#endnote-7)

What is a fard, or obligatory, duty?

These are the duties clearly prescribed by God and deemed obligatory upon every Muslim, namely the five daily prayers, the fast, giving prescribed alms, and so on. We gain reward for performing these obligatory duties; however, neglecting these duties is a huge sin. A human who rejects a *fard*, or obligatory duty, is rejecting one of the Divine commands and disobeying God and is therefore rejecting faith. The obligatory duties are divided into two categories, referred to as *fard al-‘ayn* and *fard al-kifâyah*. *Fard al-‘ayn* defines the duties every individual Muslim is required to perform according to the Islamic faith. These are duties that are a prescribed obligation of the individual, duties that do not cease to be the duty of individuals when carried out by others, for example the prayer and fasting. *Fard al-kifâyah* is a duty that is not prescribed upon the individual alone, but incurred upon Muslims as a (local) community. This obligation is fulfilled for all Muslims when performed by a few members of that community. However, if the entire community abstains from performing this communal obligation, all Muslims in that community are deemed responsible, and all will be classified as sinners. For example the funeral prayer, if the funeral prayer is performed by a group of the Muslim community, it ceases to be obligatory upon all, but if the whole community abstains from performing the funeral prayer, the entire community is responsible and considered sinners.

The Conditions of Prayer [[7]](#endnote-8)

How many acts are compulsory for prayer?

There are twelve compulsory conditions of performing the prayer, six of which are prior to the prayer, and six during the prayer. The six acts that are compulsory prior to the prayer are the actions necessary to perform worship. These are called the “Conditions ofPrayer.” The six obligatory acts during prayer are the actions that must be included in the prayer for the prayer to be valid, and these are referred to as the “*Rukn*s, or Elements, of Prayer.”

What are the conditions prior to prayer?

These are the conditions that must be performed before prayer:

1. Purification from the *hadath*(ritual impurities)

2. Purification from the *najâsah*(material impurities)

3. *Satr al-‘awrah*

4. *Istiqbâl al-qiblah*

5. *Al-waqt*

6. *Niyyah*

What is purification from the hadath(ritual impurities)?

Before the prayer, a person must be purified of ritual impurities known as *hadath*, which prevents the person from performing worship. This is done by performing ablution before the prayer or by performing *ghusl* (bathing) when in a state of major impurity, such as seminal emission after marital relations and wet dreams.

What is purification from the najâsah (material impurities)?

*Najâsah*is the word given to material impurities. Before praying, a person’s clothing, body, and the area for prayer must be purified from any substance that is classified as impure. The impurities that invalidate the prayer were mentioned in the previous chapter on *tahârah*.

However, it is to be noted here that one must ensure the cleanliness of underwear and private parts after the call of nature and must be careful about letting not even a drop of urine splash on their body or garments. Cleaning the private parts with water and using toilet paper to dry the private parts is certainly the best way for a thorough cleansing.

In addition, one must take great care that the drops of urine have come to an end before making ablution. In particular, men must ensure that there are no drops of urine before making the ablution, for the emission of any urine after the ablution, no matter how small the amount, invalidates the ablution. Therefore, men should be very sensitive about this matter. In order to be sure men can adopt habits that are recommended, such as coughing while waiting for the release of urine to cease or taking a brisk walk after relieving themselves.

What is satr al-‘awrah?

*Satr al-‘awrah*is covering the parts of the body not permitted to be seen by others.

These are the areas of the bodies of both men and women prohibited to be seen by other people. During the prayer, a man must cover at the least from his navel to below the kneecaps, whereas a woman must cover her entire body, with the exception of her hands and face.

In addition to this, we must also consider the fact that during the prayer, we stand before our Creator; therefore, it is necessary to dress accordingly when we pray. A person should avoid wearing tight clothing while praying, and is not permitted to pray while wearing thin clothing through which the color of the skin is apparent.

What is istiqbâl al-qiblah?

The direction to be faced during the prayers (*qiblah*) is the Ka’bah, which is in the city of Mecca. *Istiqbâl al-qiblah*means literally turning towards the Ka’bah to perform the prayer. The *qiblah*does not only consist of the structure of the Ka’bah. According to the Islamic faith, the *qiblah*is a pillar of light rising above the Ka’bah into the highest Heaven, and beneath the Ka’bah to the very center of the earth. So whether we are on a plane or beneath the grounds surface, we can turn towards this pillar of light that is in alignment with the Ka’bah and pray. If we do not know the direction of the *qiblah*, the best thing to do is ask somebody else if possible. If there is no possible means of learning the direction of the *qiblah*, then we must try to determine the direction using our own initiative, the direction that our hearts believe to be correct. In which case, if we do pray in the wrong direction by mistake, our prayers will still be valid. If we realize that we prayed in the wrong direction by mistake, or learn the course of the *qiblah*after praying, we are not obliged to repeat the prayer. However, if we pray without inquiring or trying to determine the right direction by our own instincts, then we must perform the prayer again.

What is al-waqt?

Every prayer has a prescribed time during which the prayer must be prayed. Performing the five daily prayers on time is an obligation upon every Muslim. This is called *al-waqt*, “the prescribed time.” It is not permissible to pray before the prescribed time begins, and a prayer performed after the prescribed time ends is not classified as fulfilling our duty of performing the prescribed prayer. This is compensating for the prayer we missed.

What is niyyah?

The *niyyah*, or intention for the prayer, is the desire of praying for the sake of God and acknowledging which prayer is to be performed. For instance, affirming “O Lord! I intend to pray the *fard* of the noon prayer for Your pleasure” in the heart is sufficient for fulfilling the condition of the intention for prayer. There is no requirement of specifying the number of *rak’ah*s (units) of the prayer. When praying in congregation the imamand those following him must have the intention of doing so. The intention for praying a congregational prayer should be: “I comply with the imam” asserting that the individual intends to conform to the imam during the prayer. And the imam’s intention should be words to the effect of: “I intend to lead the prayer of those who comply with me.”

What are the obligatory acts during the prayer?

The obligatory (*fard*) acts during the prayer are:

1. *Takbîratul-iftitah*

2. *Qiyâm*

3. *Qirâ’ah*

4. *Rukû‘*

5. *Sajdah*

6. *Qa’dah al-âkhirah*

What is Takbîratul-iftitah?1

*Takbîratul-iftitah*, or the opening *takbîr*,2is proclaiming God’s name by reciting “Allâhuakbar” at the beginning of the prayer. The intention for the prayer must be made before the opening *takbîr*is pronounced, and the *takbîr*must be pronounced while in the standing position, looking at the point where one puts his forehead during prostration. While reciting the *takbîr*, one raises the hands with the palms facing the *qiblah*, according to the Hanafis, to the ears, with the thumbs touching the earlobes (or in front of the chest for women). In addition to this, a person should not eat, drink, speak or perform any action of disrespect between the intention and *takbîr*of the prayer.

This opening *takbîr*is also called the *takbîratul-ihrâm*(*takbîr*of consecration). The person praying enters into the consecrated state of prayer after the recitation of this formula of consecration, and thus things which are not part of the prayer become forbidden for the person who gets into this consecrated state of prayer.

What is qiyâm?

*Qiyâm*means standing upright during the prayer. It is compulsory to perform the obligatory prayers in the standing position. However, those who are unable to pray standing up may perform the prayer in the sitting position. A person who begins the prayer standing but during the prayer feels too weak to pray in the standing position may continue the prayer in the sitting position.

What is qirâ’ah?

 During the prayer, it is compulsory to recite a portion of the Qur’ân–this is called *qirâ’ah*. It is compulsory to recite three short or one equally long verse of the Qur’ân while standing during the prayer. During the congregational prayers, the imam recites verses of the Qur’ân, and those who comply with the imam for the prayer do not recite the Qur’ân themselves but listen to the imam’s recitation.

What is rukû‘?

*Rukû‘* is bowing during the prayer to the extent that the head and back are straight in alignment towards the *qiblah*while holding the kneecaps with the fingers spread out. According to the Hanafis, women are not required to bow fully duringprayer. They bow over slightly and do not hold the knees during the *rukû‘* but simply place both hands on the knees.

What is sajdah?

*Sajdah*is prostrating by placing the nose, forehead, hands, knees, and feet on the ground. During prayer, we prostrate by firstly placing both knees, then both hands together with the head on the ground. It is compulsory to perform the prostration twice during every *rak’ah*(unit) of the prayer. It is not advisable to prostrate on a soft object that prevents the individual from sensing the firmness of the ground.

Prostration is the most important element of the prayer; it is the ultimate display of a person’s respect and submission to the Creator. Prostration is the clear expression of devotion, a believer’s demonstration of servitude. This is why the Prophet said: “The closest a servant comes to God is when he prostrates.”

Throught the prayer the eyes of the praying person should point to the spot where the forehead rests in the prostrations.

What is qa’dah al-âkhirah?

*Qa’dah al-âkhirah*is remaining in the seated position following the prostrations of the final *rak’ah*of the prayer for a duration sufficient to recite *at-tahiyyât*. This is called the last sitting. In the Hanafi School, during *qa’dah al-âkhirah*, or the last sitting, men sit in the kneeling position with the outer side of the left foot and leg on the ground and the right foot and toes pointing downwards, whereas women sit on the left hip and leg, with both legs facing towards the right. Altering the methods of the sitting position due to health or disability reasons is permissible.(7)

**References**

1. **6:72/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**  [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. **8:3/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**  [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. **20:132/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**  [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. **SUNAN ABU DAWOOD…(Book #3, Hadith #0725)** [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. **Bukhari Vol.1, Hadith no. 791, Narrated Muhammad bin Amr bin Ata** [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. **(Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 1, Book 12, Hadith no. 723)** [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. **THE YOUNG PERSON’S GUIDE TO LIVING ISLAM by ASLI KAPLAN, TUGHRABOOKS** [↑](#endnote-ref-8)