

⊛ The Quran emphasizes its centrality, stating "And I did not create jinn and mankind except to worship Me." Worship here is not limited to mere rituals; it encompasses the entirety of a Muslim's devotion, with salaah being the primary expression of this devotion.

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Q) Describe the importance and philosophy of prayer. Also explain its individual and collective benefits.

Prayer (Salaah) holds a central place in the life of a Muslim. Its importance transcends mere ritualistic practice, embodying a profound philosophy that influences the spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions of a Muslim's life. Numerous benefits are attained through salaah for an individual and for a community as a whole.

Importance and Philosophy of Salaah

Salaah represents the second most important pillar of Islam. ⊛ In the literal sense, "salaah" implies worship/prayer. Contextually, it refers to the obligatory five daily prayers. It is important as it is the ^{first and} only worship obligated in the Makki era, in the 10th year of Prophethood when the Prophet (pbu) ascended to the sky during Mi'raj. Allah has ordained salaah as the only worship to be offered daily; the Quran states, "Guard strictly (on) the prayers, especially the middle prayer, and stand up for Allah devoutly obedient."

The Quran (17:78) stresses on establishing five daily prayers which are: Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib and Isha. "The first deed a man would be accounted for on the Day of

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(Abu Dawud)

Judgement is Salaat. "Salaat" has been cited in the Quran above 60 times. In addition, Salaat is the distinguishing factor between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, and its abandonment is considered as disbelief. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "The covenant between us and them (disbelievers) is prayer; so, whoever abandons it has disbelieved." (Tirmidhi)

Individual Benefits of Salaat

Salaat offers numerous individual benefits. To start with, Salaat is a **means of spiritual elevation** by as a Muslim directly communicates with Allah daily. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "When the servant stands for prayer, he is conversing with his Lord" (Bukhari). Further, the Quran^(20:14) emphasizes the importance of maintaining this connection: "And establish prayer for my remembrance." The Prophet (pbuh) also said: "The closest a person is to his Lord is when he is in prostration" (Muslim). Thus, through this connection with Allah, salaat offers spiritual elevation and closeness.

As stated in the Hadith, "Every son of Adam commits sin", it is a fact that humans commit sins. Nonetheless, salaat is a blessing that **cleanses a person from sins**. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "The five prayers and one Friday prayer to (the next) Friday prayer are expiations

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(for the sins committed) between them." Truly, Allah's "mercy embraces all things" (Quran); He ordained every action in the salaah as a means to wipe out sins. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Indeed, when a servant stands to pray, his sins are placed on top of his head and shoulders. Every time he bows or prostrates, they fall away from him."

Not only is salaah a means of cleansing from sins, but **it also acts as a shield against evil.**

Regular prayer promotes self-control and ethical behaviour, guiding Muslims away from immoral actions. "Surely salaah restrains one from shameful and evil acts" (Quran 29:45).

Furthermore, the **peace and comfort** people search for can be found within salaah. "Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort" (Quran 27:31). At ^{when} the time of prayer would approach, the Prophet (pbuh) would address Muezzin Bilal (RA) and say, "O Bilal, call iqamah for prayer, give us comfort by it" (Abu Dawud).

Undoubtedly, salaah is a **source of purification** for the body. "O you who believe! When you rise to pray, wash your face and your hands and arms to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and your feet to the ankles..." (Quran). This act of wudu ensures cleanliness of the body. DALMATIAN

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Moreover, **Salaat makes an individual disciplined and punctual**. This is because each person must structure their routine according to the time of prayer. "Prayer is enjoined upon the believers at a stated time" (Quran).

It is evident in the Quran that Salaat must be resorted to when calamity strikes. Thus, **Salaat is the remedy for problems**. The Quran states: "Seek help through patience and prayer."

Further, **Salaat humbles an individual**. It is in Salaat that a Muslim puts the most noteworthy piece of his body, his and wellspring of acumen, his head, on to the ground and says, "Glory is to my Lord, the Most High." This action makes man realise Allah's greatness, and man's dependence on Him, thus man is humbled and free from pride and arrogance. Allah says, "Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayer" (Quran).

In addition, **Salaat involves physical movements like standing, bowing and prostrating, which contribute to physical well-being**.

The Prophet (paw) said, "Pray while standing, if you are unable, then pray sitting, and if you are unable, then pray lying down." This flexibility in prayer practice ensures that it accommodates various physical conditions, promoting physical well-being.

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Lastly, **salaat serves as a reminder of the Hereafter.** The Quran states, "And those who (carefully) maintain their prayers: They will be in gardens, honoured." This verse reminds believers of the rewards in the Hereafter for those who diligently perform their prayers.

Collective Benefits of Salaat

Salaat has significant collective benefits. To start with, **the Salah in congregation is linked with greater reward.** The Prophet (pbuh) said, "The prayer in congregation is twenty-seven times more meritorious than the prayer performed alone."

The congregational prayers five times a day, Friday congregation, and congregations on Eid is what **unites the Muslims.** Worshippers of different nationality, race, colour and status pray together as one body. All differences between them are forgotten as they stand in rows, shoulder to shoulder, together as brothers. The Quran states, "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah and do not be divided...". This ^{verse} emphasizes the importance of unity among Muslims, which can be achieved through congregational prayers.

Furthermore, congregational prayers **encourage mutual responsibility.** The Quran

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states, "And remind, for indeed, the reminder benefits the believers." The Regular congregational prayers provide opportunities for communal reminders and spiritual encouragement, reinforcing a collective sense of responsibility and accountability.

The Quran highlights that the rewards derived from salah must be reflected in the form of **greater social responsibility, and moral enhancement of those who perform it.**

"So woe to those who pray (but) who are heedless of their prayer - Those who make show (of their deeds)" (Quran). Thus, regular salaah promotes moral behaviour and aids in the eradication of social vices.

Moreover, **salaah increases social strength, mutual cooperation and support.** The Quran states, "The believers are but brothers, so make reconciliation between your brothers..." Regular congregational prayers provide opportunities for interaction and cooperation, promoting reconciliation and support within the community. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other." This Hadith is reinforced in salaah as each Muslim stands side by side, strengthening the social ~~set up~~ setup.

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In addition, **Salah in congregation instills modesty in Muslims.** In Surah An-Nur, Allah advises both men and women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty. Thus, the practice of congregational prayers help believers focus on their worship and suppress practice self-restraint, thereby nurturing a modest disposition.

Lastly, **Salah promotes tolerance by encouraging respect and understanding.** As Muslims gather together for prayer, they show kindness and respect to one another. **The Prophet (Pbuh) said, "He who does not show mercy to our young ones or recognize the honour of our elders is not one of us."** This hadith highlights the importance of mutual respect and understanding, which is cultivated through the practice of congregational prayer, promoting tolerance towards others.