

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful



Surat al-Isra 17:44

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ
وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ
وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ
إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but that it celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed He is Most Forbearing, Most Forgiving.

Learning Objectives

- To explain the importance of understanding what we recite in *salah*
- To understand the significance of the two *surahs* recited in *qira'ah*
- To memorise the meaning of the two *surahs* and *tasbihat al-arba'ah*

Key Words

حَمْد
تُسَبِّحُ

Hamd
praise

Tasbih
glorification

The importance of understanding salah

How can we glorify Allah with all our heart, if we are just mindlessly reciting words of which we do not know the meaning? How can our *salah* elevate us to the level of *mi'raj* if there is no soul in our *salah*?

Understanding the recitation of *salah* gives our *salah* significance, increases its value, and allows it to soar. Once we understand what we are reciting we will be able to pray with our heart and mind, concentrating fully on our dialogue with Allah.



Ali Hadi, knocking on the bathroom door, called out, “Hurry up Mahdi, I want to do *wudhu* as well!”

Mahdi replied, “I’m done.”

Mahdi walked into the *salah* room, pulled his sleeves down over his wet arms, and stood on the *musalla*. *Allahu Akbar!* He recited, with his palms by his ears in *takbirat al-ihram* and he began his *salah*.

Ali Hadi then joined his younger brother in the family *salah* room. He watched young Mahdi bounce up from *sujud* and into *qira’ah*. Mahdi zoomed through *Surat al-Fatihah* and then went into *ruku*. He finished his *salah* and then turned to his brother and said, “Ali Hadi, I remembered all the words of *salah* and the actions too! And I finished in record time!”

Ali Hadi said lovingly, “Mahdi! It is great that you have learned the method of *salah* and can now pray by yourself. But there is much more to *salah* than the actions; shall we take your *salah* to the next level?”

Mahdi asked, “Next level?”

Ali Hadi explained, “When we stand before *Allah* we must be calm, and we must concentrate on the words we are reciting. Do you remember that every action has a deeper meaning?”

Mahdi replied, “Yes, like *niyyah*. When I say *qurbatan ilallah* with all my heart it means that my *salah* is only for Allah.”

Ali Hadi continued, “Yes, and in *qiyam* we are standing in front of *Allah* as His humble servants. Our *salah* should be performed slowly and gracefully, not in a rush. Isn’t it rude to rush our meeting with the Lord of the worlds? Did you know that Rasulullah (s) says that the one who doesn’t perform his *ruku* and *sujud* properly is like a crow pecking?”

Mahdi looked embarrassed and said, “I don’t want to be a crow! I think I was reciting my *surahs* too fast as well!”

Ali Hadi said, “We can try harder to make our *salah*

even better each time we pray. It will help if you understand what you are reciting. Your *salah* will become sweeter.”

Mahdi asked, “So now I have to learn the meaning of the Arabic?!”

Ali Hadi replied, “Well you don’t have to. But let’s say a man knocks on our door and says something to you in Chinese and then leaves. Wouldn’t you be curious to know what he was saying?”

Mahdi replied, “Not really, he’s a stranger and he won’t come back.”

Ali Hadi asked again, “What if he does? What if he comes back five times every single day? Wouldn’t you want to know then?”

Mahdi concluded, “If he comes every day, I’ll have to learn Chinese!”

Ali Hadi laughed, “Well, we knock on *Allah*’s door in *salah* and we speak to Him in Arabic. What is the point if we don’t understand what we are saying? If we want our *salah* to reach the next level and become our *mi’raj*, then we should understand our words and actions.”

Mahdi asked, “That makes sense, but why Arabic? Why not English? I already know and understand English, and *Allah* knows everything, so He will know what I am saying anyway.”

Ali Hadi smiled and explained, “Because Arabic is the language of the *Qur’an*, and it is the language that Allah chose for us to speak to him in.”

Mahdi agreed, “I get it now. Oh, oh, and I know another reason! If Allah chooses the language of *salah* then all the believers around the world are saying the same words, so there’s more unity!”

Ali Hadi replied, “Exactly. So are you ready to understand your *salah*, Mahdi?”

Understanding *qira'ah*

Qira'ah means recitation, and it is a *wajib* part of *salah*. In the first and second *rak'at* of any *salah*, it is *wajib* to recite *Surat al-Fatihah* and any other complete *surah*. In the third and fourth *rak'at* it is *wajib* to recite either *Surat al-Fatihah* or *tasbihat al-arba'ah*. We must try and understand the meaning and significance of *Surat al-Fatihah*, *Surat al-Ikhlās*, and *tasbihat al-arba'ah* within *salah*.

In *Risalat al-Huquq*, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) tells us:

The greatest right of Allah is that you worship Him without associating anything with Him.

Therefore, when we stand in *salah* we should be thinking about the translation of the Arabic *ayat* we are reciting as well as their significance. The more words and phrases we become familiar with the more we will understand *salah* and the sweeter our worship will become.

Beginning in the name of Allah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah,
most Kind, most Merciful

The recitation of every *surah* in *salah* must begin with *bismillah*.

By beginning everything we do with Allah's name, we are expressing our love towards Him by remembering Him before everything else. We are bringing His blessings into every task we perform. Similarly, by beginning *salah* with *Bismillah*, we are asking Allah for the strength to fulfil our *salah* with complete sincerity and to the best of our ability. In doing so, we are recognising that we cannot perform any task without His help and guidance. Beginning in Allah's name is a great privilege and we should thank Allah for allowing us to lead our lives in His name. The countless blessings we receive in return for this act alone are a reflection of His generosity and love.



FIQH FACTS

The following short *surahs* need to be recited in pairs and cannot be recited on their own – *Surat adh-Dhuha* and *Surah Inshira* as well as *Surah Quraysh* and *Surat al-Fil*.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) tells us:
Bismillah is the crown of all the *surahs*.

DID YOU KNOW?

Every *surah* of the *Qur'an* begins with *bismillah*, except *Surat at-Tawbah*. Yet there are still 114 *bismillahs* in the *Qur'an* as *Surat an-Naml* has two!



FIQH FACTS

RULING 978

Based on obligatory precaution, it is *wajib* for a man to recite *Surat al-Fatihah* and the other *surah* aloud in the *salahs* of *fajr*, *maghrib*, and *isha*. And based on obligatory precaution, it is obligatory for a man and a woman to recite *Surat al-Fatihah* and the other *surah* in the *salahs* of *dhuhr* and *asr* in a whisper.

Surat al-Fatihah

Al-Fatihah means the opening. This *surah* gives us a summary of the core principles of Islam that are discussed throughout the Holy *Qur'an*. Just as a seed is identified as the mother of a tree, *Surat al-Fatihah* is known as *umm al-kitab* (the mother of the book). Within its seven *ayat*, it introduces the belief of *tawhid*, the mercy of Allah, the importance of *ibadah* and our prayer to Allah to guide us on the right path.

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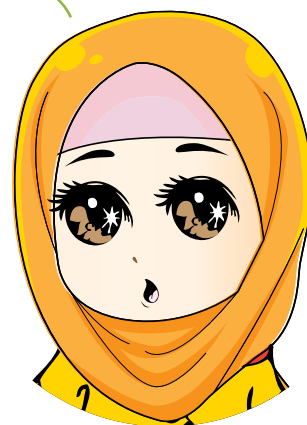
In the name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds

It is vital that we recognise that everything in this life is from Allah; even when we think that blessings have reached us through other than Him, their origin and source is Allah.

Once we realise this we begin to recognise the greatness of Allah, and as a result we say '*Alhamdulillah*' from the heart. As our Lord (*rabb*), Allah is our nourisher and cherisher, Who guides us to perfection if we choose that path. As our nourisher, Allah provides for us physically through the creation of the sun, earth, air, and material blessings, as well as spiritually through the *anbiya*, *a'immah* (*a*), and the *Qur'an*.



الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful

Allah's mercy exceeds His anger. His kindness and mercy cannot be measured and is unlimited. It is out of His infinite mercy that He created us. It is also out of His *rahmah* that He has allowed us to repent if we disobey Him, and has promised to accept our *istighfar* (repentance).

Even Allah's anger is caused by His mercy, just as a parent may become angry if their children misbehave in order to correct their behaviour. Similarly, a police force in a society brings peace and security by putting criminals in jail.

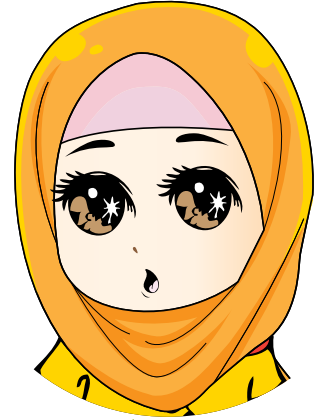
Achieving a balance between fear of Allah's wrath and hope of His mercy will help guide us in our actions.



مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

Master of the Day of Judgement

The universe and everything within it belongs only to *al-Malik*, the Master. The mention of the Day of Judgement reminds us that a day will come when all our deeds will be judged. As long as we are alive, until this day comes we still have time to do good deeds, improve ourselves and ask for forgiveness.



إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

You [alone] do we worship, and to You [alone] do we turn to for help

Total submission to Allah is the meaning of 'You [alone] do we worship'. This *ayah* highlights the insignificance of everything other than Allah. All our faith and hope should be with Allah alone. He is the only one to Whom we should turn for help and guidance.

إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Guide us on the straight path

Sirat al-mustaqim means the straight path. Here, we are asking Allah to guide us towards and keep us on the straight path. We need to be guided towards the straight path because there are many crooked paths that may lead us astray. We need His help to recognise the truth and to remain with the truth.



صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

The path of those whom You have blessed, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor are astray.

The path of perfection is to be found and not created; Allah has set it out for us and sent guidance in the form of the Qur'an and the *Ahlul Bayt* (a). Because He is just and fair, He does not punish us for going astray without first sending us guidance and showing us the right way.

The Qur'an is filled with stories of people who followed the guidance which was given to them correctly and sincerely and hence were guided to the right path. It also gives the example of those who distorted the guidance after they received it and incurred His wrath, and those who misunderstood it and did not follow it correctly and went astray. In *Surat al-Fatihah* we pray to Allah to make us from the first group.

Discussion Box

Individually or in small groups, try to find examples from previous nations of people who received guidance from Allah but later on incurred His wrath and became *maghdubun alayhim*.

Surat al-Ikhlâs

Surat al-Ikhlâs was revealed to Rasulullah (s) to answer the questions that the non-Muslims had regarding Allah. Through its four short *ayat*, *Surat al-Ikhlâs* describes Allah, by saying He is one, and that He is eternal, unique, and has no kinship, creator, or resemblance to any other thing.

This concept of the unity of Allah is called *tawhid* and is the seed and the spirit of the teachings of all the *anbiya*. The beliefs and laws of the religion of Islam revolve around the central belief of *tawhid*. The recitation of this *Surat al-Ikhlâs* carries the *thawab* of reciting one-third of the Qur'an!

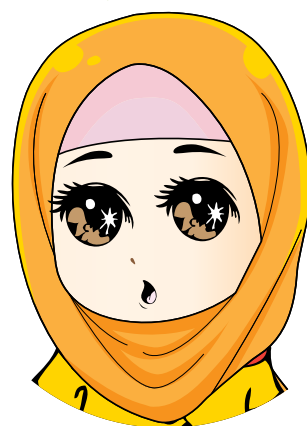
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

Say: He is Allah, the One

In this *Surah*, Allah uses the word *ahad* to explain His oneness instead of the word *wahid*. Allah is both *wahid* and *ahad*. In Arabic, *wahid* is the word for the number one (1). He is *wahid* because He is the only God. However, *ahad* has a deeper meaning. It is the one that cannot be divided or multiplied, and does not come after anything. *Ahad* has no gender and describes the absolute oneness of Allah.



اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

Allah is the All-Embracing

Samad means someone who is needless of everything and everyone but everything and everyone is in need of Him.

Imam Husayn (a) narrates the explanation of *samad* from his grandfather, Rasulullah (s):

Allah is *Samad*, Who is not from anything and is not in anything or on anything; He is the creator of everything and all are from Him by His power; what He has created to perish will perish at His will, and what He has created to remain will remain in His knowledge. This is Allah, *al-Samad*.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

He neither begets, nor was begotten

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

Nor has He any equal

Allah is unique. There is nothing equal or similar to Him in any way. All His qualities are infinite and unlimited. Allah is perfect. He is perfect in every aspect.



Tasbihat al-arba'ah (the four glorifications)

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ
وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ

Glory be to Allah, and all praise is for Allah,
and there is no god but Allah, and Allah is
greater [than what He is described as]

Once we understand that *Allahu akbar* means that Allah is the greatest, we can begin to ponder over His greatness and recognise the insignificance of everyone and everything else.

La ilaha illallah means there is no god but Allah. This declaration is an important reminder of *tawhid* and also reminds us to exclude all idols from *salah*, even materialistic idols! If we cannot separate ourselves from the *dunya* or from something particular in the *dunya*, then we will not be able to focus only on Allah during *salah*, and we will not be fulfilling the right of Allah.



AL-ASMA AL-HUSNA The 99 Beautiful Names of Allah

الحميد

AL-HAMID
THE PRAISED ONE

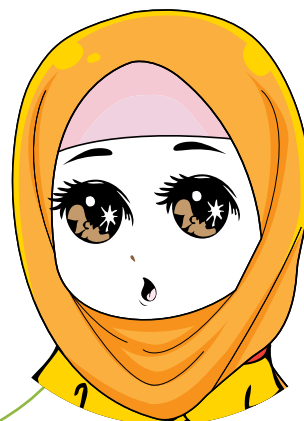
All of creation submits to Allah's will and is engaged in His praise, glorification, and remembrance. The angels in the heavens, the animals, the birds, the mountains, and the wind, all glorify and praise Allah in their own way.

In *Surat al-Isra*, Allah tells us:

Surat al-Isra 17:44

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but that it celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed He is Most Forbearing, Most Forgiving.



FIQH FACTS

RULING 980

A woman can recite *Surat al-Fatihah* and the other *surah* in the *salah* of *fajr*, *maghrib*, and *isha*, aloud or in a whisper. However, if someone who is not her *mahram* can hear her voice and it is an instance of when it is unlawful to make her voice heard by someone who is not her *mahram*, then she must recite them in a whisper. And if she intentionally recites them aloud, then based on obligatory precaution, her *salah* is *batil*.

RULING 991

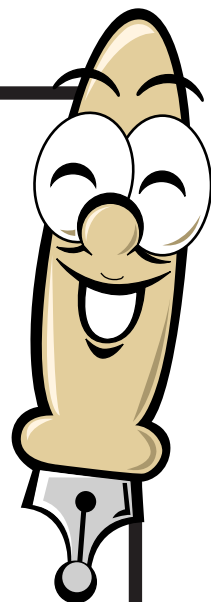
In the third and fourth *rak'at* of *salah*, a person can either recite one *Surat al-Fatihah* or say one *tasbihat al-arba'ah*, and it is better to recite it three times. And a person can recite *Surat al-Fatihah* in one *rak'ah* and *tasbihat al-arba'ah* in the other *rak'ah*, although it is better that he recites *tasbihat al-arba'ah* in both *rak'at*.

RULING 993

Based on obligatory precaution, it is *wajib* for men and women to recite *Surat al-Fatihah* and *tasbihat al-arba'ah* in a whisper in the third and fourth *rak'at* of any *salah*.

KEY POINTS

- 1 Understanding *salah* enables us to pray with our heart and mind and allows our *salah* to soar.
- 2 By beginning with *bismillah*, we are expressing our love for Allah, and our reliance and dependence on Him alone.
- 3 *Surat al-Fatihah* is the opening chapter of the Qur'an; it introduces key concepts of Islam that are discussed throughout the Qur'an.
- 4 *Surat al-Ikhlās* describes Allah: He is one, He is eternal, unique, and has no kinship, creator, or any equal.
- 5 Everything in creation praises Allah in its own way. He is the only one who is worthy of praise.



Faith in Action

The Practical *Tasbih*

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) teaches us that:

One of the most difficult and important things that Allah has made necessary for creation is abundant remembrance (*dhikr al-kathir*).

This does not mean simply the recital of ***subhanallahi wal-hamdu lillahi wa la ilaha illallahu wallahu akbar***, although this is a part of it. Abundant remembrance is to remember Allah in what is *halal* and what is *haram*.

We can perform the practical *tasbih* by remembering Allah before we act. If a certain action means obedience to Him, we should perform it; but if we are about to do something that will displease Allah, then we should abandon it. Through practical *tasbih* we are glorifying Allah through our actions and by constantly remembering Him.

Reflect over the meaning of *tasbihat al-arba'ah*.

Make a pledge that you will increase your remembrance of Allah by performing the practical *tasbih* this week.



TEST YOURSELF

- 1 Why should we understand the recitation of *salah*?

- 2 *Surat al-* _____ talks about the _____ of Allah, this is called *tawhid*.
- 3 Describe three principles of Islam that *Surat al-Fatihah* introduces.

- 4 Allah is *al-Hamid*; what does this mean?
