

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful

Surat al-Mu'minun 23:1-2

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ
الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ

Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation,
those who are humble in their prayers

Learning Objectives

- To explain the terms *khushu'* and *hudhur al-qalb*
- To outline the benefits of *salah* as mentioned in the Qur'an
- To describe the different methods we can use to improve concentration in *salah*

Key Words

خُشُوع *Khushu'*
humility towards Allah

حُضُور الْقَلْب *Hudhur al-qalb*
presence of the heart

سَالِك *Salik*
a person who is committed to journeying towards Allah and getting close to Him

Salah

Salah is *wajib* for all Muslims. *Allah* has promised many benefits and rewards for those who perform *salah* correctly. These benefits and rewards are both for this life and the Hereafter. The main ones are:

- 1 *Salah* gives an opportunity to get closer to *Allah* by communicating with Him
- 2 *Salah* keeps one away from sins:



Surat al-Ankabut 29:45

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ
وَالْمُنْكَرِ

Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil.

- 3 *Salah* gives rest to the heart:



Surat ar-Ra'd 13:28

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Surely! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance!

- 4 *Salah* is the best exercise of free will.

Naturally, these benefits can only be maximised if one performs *salah* with *khushu'* (heart-based humility towards Allah) and *hudhur al-qalb* (presence of the heart). The heart and mind must be present throughout the *salah*, and one must understand the greatness, majesty, and beauty of Allah. This will cause one's heart to be humbled and submissive.

This kind of feeling is not something that can be achieved once and then let go of; rather it is a constant struggle that one must be aware of.

Salah is a journey of getting closer to Allah for a *salik* (person who is committed to journeying towards Allah and getting close to Him). It is a chance to soar towards Him. It is supposed to be the *mi'raj* of a *mu'min*.

One can think of this journey as that of a pilot flying an aeroplane to a certain destination. Before he can do so, he has to go through all the pre-flight checks, warm the engines, and then take off. Once he lands, he cannot simply disembark and disappear. He has to taxi to stop, let the engines cool down, switch off the plane completely, and then disembark.

Similarly, a person performing *salah* cannot just simply come to the *musalla* and pray and expect to achieve the full fruits of that *salah*. There should be focus and concentration before the *salah*, during the *salah* itself, and after the *salah*.



Let us take a few examples from the aeroplane analogy.



- 1 The pilot must know the procedures of flying a plane before he can take that job.

Do we know the procedures of our journey to Allah? We must know the *fiqh* rules of *salah*, the meanings of the different *adhkar* recited, and the philosophy behind the positions. An interesting way of maintaining concentration during *salah* is to understand the meanings of what is being said, and to recite a range of different recitations for *qunut*, or in the last *sajdah*.



- 2 The pilot must check the aircraft for any excess baggage.

Can our hearts make that journey to Allah or is it too heavy with worldly baggage and attachments? One must cleanse the heart of love and attachment for anything except Allah in order to journey to Him quickly and easily.



- 3 Is the aircraft carrying the correct type of cargo? Are there any dangerous items on board?

Can our hearts soar to Allah if they are being weighed down by sins? The heart of a believer can only gravitate towards Allah if it is free from the burden of sins.



- 4 Has the aircraft been filled with fuel?

Have we done the most important step in the preparation for *salah*? Concentration in *salah* stems from *wudhu*. The spiritual journey towards Allah at the time of *salah* begins at the time of *wudhu*. It is important to bear in mind the *du'as* of *wudhu* when performing it, and to be mindful and attentive at each step.



- 5 Is the pilot wearing his uniform?

Are we dressed appropriately for *salah*? The clothes worn for *salah* must be *tahir*. In addition to this, it is *mustahabb* that they be clean, perfumed, comfortable, and plain. The best garments to wear are those that do not distract one from Allah, rather, they bring one closer to His remembrance. Putting on perfume creates a spiritual environment and increases the reward.



- 6 Has the pilot announced to the control tower that he is about to take off?

Have we recited the *adhan* and *iqamah*? It is highly recommended to recite both the *adhan* and *iqamah* prior to *salah*. This sets the scene for the journey one is about to take. It allows the person to collect his thoughts and build up the focus required for *salah*.

- 7 Take off!

The *takbirat al-ihram* is the starting point of the prayer and symbolises the pushing out of all thoughts from one's mind. It is an expression of His greatness and a declaration that He is the most important and that nothing can take one's attention away from Him.

- 8 Don't switch to auto pilot!

Once the *salah* has started, it is very common for our mind to wander from place to place, whilst the body is 'automatically' completing the act of *salah*. One must try their utmost to remain focused by using different methods, such as:

- Imagining the Day of Judgement
- Imagining this is your last *salah*
- Thinking about the meanings of all the recitations
- If you lose concentration, bounce back fast, i.e. rein your thoughts in and connect them back to Allah

- 9 Has the pilot parked the aircraft?

Have we recited the *tasbih* and the *ta'qibat*? The prayer is an experience, and the journey back from meeting Allah is as crucial as the journey towards Him. Therefore, there are many steps one can take immediately after *salah* to maximise its spiritual benefits. These include reciting the *tasbih*, *ta'qibat*, *ayat* from the Qur'an, and performing *sajdat ash-shukr*.

STORYTIME!



During the battle of Siffin, an arrow went into the leg of Imam Ali (a). The Imam was in great pain because of this injury, and blood was flowing out of his wound. The Muslims tried very hard, but were unable to remove the arrow.

They went to Imam Hasan (a) and asked him what would be the best way to remove the arrow from his father's leg. Imam Hasan (a) replied:

“Be patient and wait until my father stands for *salah*, then at that time pull the arrow out of his leg because at the time of *salah*, my father is so deeply engrossed in communicating with his Lord, asking and begging Him for his needs, that he will not feel the pain.”

The people acted according to what Imam Hasan (a) told them, and while Imam Ali (a) was praying to his Lord, they managed to pull the arrow out. After he finished his *salah*, he noticed that blood was coming out of his leg and asked those around him as to what had happened. The people replied that while he was praying, they removed the arrow from his leg!

DID YOU KNOW?

Using techniques such as meditation and other brain exercises to increase general concentration, can also help in *salah*. A balanced diet and a good sleep cycle also play a part in helping maintain concentration during *salah*.

“

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) has said:

Whoever performs a two *rak'ah salah*, fully knowing what he is saying in it, gets up from it with not a single sin left [unforgiven] between him and Allah.

”



Faith in Action

Choose one of the aeroplane analogies to implement and practice during your *salah* over the next week. Evaluate if this helped you concentrate better.



FIQH FACTS

Rulings 751, 768

The *nawafil* (recommended prayers) compensate for any lack of concentration in the *wajib* prayers.

A *Mustahabb Salah* can be offered while one is walking, or riding, and if a person offers *Mustahabb* prayers in these two conditions, it is not necessary that he should be facing the *Qibla*.'

Wudhu is required for *mustahabb salah* and ladies need to cover as per normal *salah*.

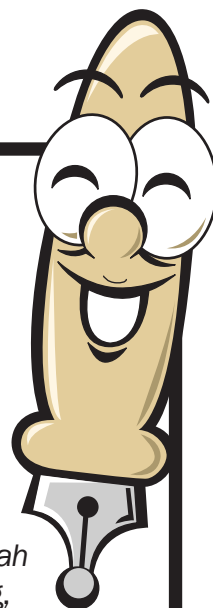
The breakdown for the daily *nawafil* is as follows:

- 8 *rak'at* before *dhuhr salah*
- 8 *rak'at* before *asr salah*
- 4 *rak'at* after *maghrib salah*
- 2 *rak'at* (seated) after *isha salah*
- 11 *rak'at* from midnight until *fajr*
(Known as *tahajjud* or *salat al-layl*)
- 2 *rak'at* before *fajr salah*

Note: *Nawafil* prayers are recited in sets of 2 *rak'at*.

KEY POINTS

- 1 To achieve the maximum benefit from *salah*, the heart and mind must be present throughout.
- 2 Achieving the benefits of *salah* involves steps before, during, and after the *salah*.
- 3 Attention is like a muscle: the more it is exercised, the stronger it becomes.



HIGHER LEVEL



Attention is like a muscle. When we exercise a muscle, it can become tired quickly.

However, with regular exercise and training, we can strengthen it and use it without getting tired. Similarly, being attentive is difficult to begin with, but with regular practice it can be improved and strengthened.

The result is increased spirituality.



- 4 How many *rak'ah* would you pray in a day if you prayed the *wajib* prayers and the *nawafil* prayers?

NOTES

A vertical sheet of lined paper with a green cloud-shaped sticker at the top that says "NOTES". The paper has horizontal ruling lines and a curled bottom edge.