

Key Themes for the Study of Islam

Edited by

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ONEWORLD
OXFORD

Moosa goes on to elaborate how modern-day Muslims, like their modernist predecessors, can embrace innovation, openness, and pluralism as legitimate, natural dimensions of Muslim tradition or “orthodoxy.” Reason and rationality are not the opposite of faith but its other face.

A further trajectory of the post-modern, post-Enlightenment, post-colonial Muslim mindset is post-patriarchal, opposing not just male-dominated structures but also the language of a male god, Allah. The Islamic feminist Amina Wadud, while opting not to create “a new female-centered goddess tradition post-Islam,” does wrestle with what she terms patriarchal interpretation. She also confronts the boundaries defining Muslim woman, apart from “personal or public insider aspects of identification,” that is, Muslims who claim or project others as “authentic” Muslims because of their names, origins, or locations. She herself does not attempt to speak on behalf of the whole *umma*, or even in terms of a trajectory that sees West/non-West as ambiguous, and perhaps inherently conflictual, entities. Instead, she positions herself as one who imagines “such a thing as a post-Muslim” in order to raise the visibility of Muslim women scholars within Western academic circles and institutions.²⁸

There will be post- post-modern Muslims and perhaps even some post-Muslims, yet all will locate themselves within the debates about modernity highlighted above. Some will project their views in print, others on the Internet, and increasingly through blogs. Muslims – like other cybernauts – have arrived on the dizzying, ever-changing platform of virtual space mediated through the World Wide Web. It is not the final stage of Muslim modernism, just the most recent.

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PRAYER*

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike the word “prayer” in English – which can mean a reverent petition made to a deity, or an act of communion with it, such as in devotion, confession, praise, or thanksgiving – there is no single, equivalent term for “prayer” in the Islamic lexicon. The terms *ibada*, “worship,” and its plural, *ibadat*, “acts of worship,” do encompass different kinds of prayer, but both are understood very broadly indeed. Thus, any licit act – marriage, for example – is regarded as a form of *ibada*, that is, as a way to worship God.

This is not to say that Islam has no practices and devotions that can be described as prayer. Constance Padwick identifies almost all of the numerous kinds of prayer practiced by Muslims in “Type-Names for Devotions,” the opening chapter of her wide-ranging study of prayer manuals in common use. I lightly rearrange the order in which Padwick lists these types – regarding *ibada* as a general or umbrella term, and clustering the remaining terms into the three main categories into which scholarship has tended to subdivide prayer in Islam, namely *dhikr*, *du‘a*, and *salat* (called *namaz* in many parts of the Muslim world):

ibada, “devotion”

salat, “prayer-rite,” *sujud*, “prostration”

* I am grateful to Jamal J. Elias for occasioning this essay, for his invaluable comments and feedback, and for his *limitless* patience; to Bhai Abdul Sakoor Khadun for input; to Zaahira Ebramjee for technical help; and to Ustad, for prayers.

du'a, "supplication," *munajat*, "confidential converse," *su'l*, "petition," *tadarru'*, "humble supplication"

dhikr, "recollection and making mention," *wird*, *hizb*, *hirz*, "devotional exercise," *wazifa*, "daily office," *ratib*, "fixed office"

I retain Padwick's fine translations of these Arabic (and Qur'anic) terms above, but there is no agreement on the English rendering of these. *Dhikr*, "remembrance" or "mystical recollection," describes the measured repetition of pious expressions of praise, or of the attributes (or "names") of God. *Du'a*, "supplication," describes all forms of petition and request. And *salat*, the term most often rendered by the English "prayer" or "prayers" *tout court*, refers quite specifically to a prescribed set of ritual movements accompanied by a set of ritual recitations.

It is entirely appropriate to think of the different kinds of prayer in Islam formally, that is, based on the form that each prayer takes, thus pious-remembrance (*dhikr*), ritual prayer (*salat*), and supplication (*du'a*). But I should like to propose a more heuristically useful set of categories: Prayer of Affirmation, Prayer of Submission, and Prayer of Petition, subdivided as follows:

Prayer of Affirmation

Testimony of faith
 Recitation of the Qur'an
 Adoration of God
 Glorification or praise of God
 Call to prayer
 Praise of the Prophet Muhammad or of other religious figures

Prayer of Submission

Prostration
 Ritual prayer

Prayer of Petition

For forgiveness, mercy, blessing and favor, worldly success, intercession, heaven, protection

PRAYERS OF AFFIRMATION

Testimony of faith (shahada)

Shahada (literally testimony, witnessing) is the name given to the statement "I bear witness that there is no deity other than God and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger," the fundamental doctrinal statement in Islam, affirming God's oneness (*tawhid*) in the first part, and affirming Muhammad's paramount importance in the second. All Muslims must utter this statement at least once, and most utter it repeatedly, especially within the ritual prayer. The "testimony of faith" is often invoked at liminal moments: converts pronounce it when they accept Islam; it is whispered in the ears of newborns; it is recited to those on their death-bed; and many Muslims recite it upon waking so that they will instinctively also do so when they are roused in the grave on Judgment Day.

Recitation of the Qur'an (qira'a)

By virtue of the fact that one may not ritually or liturgically recite the Qur'an without being in a state of ritual purity (with certain specific exceptions), I am inclined to regard *qira'a* as a prayer of affirmation. What is more, most prayers (and much of the ritual prayer) are textually Qur'anic in substance. As A. A. Roest Crolius has observed, "there is perhaps no Scripture that is so totally a Book of Prayer as is the Qur'an." Gerhard Böwering has concurred, suggesting that this is so not only because the Qur'an "contains various prescriptions and descriptions of prayer and includes a great number of prayers, hymns and invocations, but more importantly because it reflects a religious experience of prayer rooted in the heart of the Prophet and reiterated by the tongues of his followers throughout the ages as God's own speech in matchless Arabic."¹ William Graham gets to the heart of the matter when he points out that "chanting the Qur'an is a re-enactment of the revelatory act itself, and how the Qur'an is vocally rendered not only matters, but matters ultimately."² The importance of recitation in Arabic cannot be overstated and is nowhere clearer than in its obligatory use in virtually all forms of prayer. The exception is prayers of personal petition, where Arabic may occur in the repetition of liturgical material, e.g. invocations contained in the Qur'an or those used by others

(Muhammad or pious predecessors), but where otherwise the use of one's native language is both widespread and encouraged (as it is personal conversation with God).

Reciting the Qur'an is not an obligation per se, but Muhammad constantly reminded his followers of the importance of doing so, even as little as a phrase. What is more, memorization of the entire Qur'an is popularly claimed to vouchsafe paradise for the memorizer (*hafiz*), his or her parents and ten other individuals of the *hafiz*'s choosing.

The first chapter of the Qur'an, *Al-Fatiha* ("The Opening"), reads:

¹In the Name of God, Ever Compassionate, Full of Compassion, ²Praise to the Lord of all Creation, ³Ever Compassionate, Full of Compassion, ⁴Sovereign of The Day of Determination: ⁵You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek alleviation. ⁶Guide us on the path of True Direction, ⁷The path of those you favor, not of those who earn Your wrath, nor of those in deviation.

This brief chapter is a fundamental and ubiquitous Islamic prayer and has consequently been likened to the Lord's Prayer in Christianity. Not only is it recited in every unit (or *rak'a*, literally "bowing") of the ritual prayer and in numerous other ritual contexts, notably at the graveside, but it also contains within it several key prayer elements. One such element is the *basmala*, the opening Qur'anic verse, "In the Name of God, Ever Compassionate, Full of Compassion," which appears as the prelude to 112 of the Qur'an's remaining 113 chapters, and which is to be pronounced before any activity. Other elements include praise of God in the second verse, and the supplication in the final two verses.

Adoration of God

Literally "reminder" or "mention," *dhikr* is the term used to describe the repetition of set phrases praising God, in compliance with God's injunction "O you who believe! Remember God with much remembrance" (Q33:41) and God's request and promise, "Remember Me, and I shall remember you" (Q2:152). A simple form of *dhikr* has found its way into the liturgical lives of almost all observant Muslims, namely the repeating after the ritual prayer (and at other times too) of the phrases "God's glory be proclaimed (*subhan Allah*)" and "To God is due all praise (*al-hamdu li'llah*)" thirty-three times each, and thirty-four times "God

is most great (*Allahu akbar*)," expressions described by the Prophet Muhammad as "The phrases most dear to Almighty God" (together with "There is no deity other than God [*la ilaha ill'Allah*]"). Indeed, the remembrance of God through any form of repetition has come to be thought of as *dhikr*, though in Islamic mystical (or Sufi) practice this almost always involves sustained (and often group) recitation. For private remembrance, worshipers use a rosary, called a *tasbeih* or *misbaha* (literally "instrument of glorification/adoration").

One form of Sufi *dhikr* involves repetition of the phrase *La ilaha ill'Allahu* ("There is no god except God"), which gradually gets reduced to *ill'Allahu* ("except God"), then *Allahu*, and culminating in the recitation of the exhaled sound *hu*, the very last (fully vocalized) syllable of the word *Allahu*, which means "He." *Dhikr* is an integral part of Sufi practice. Although the specific formulas may differ from one Sufi group to another, they often comprise the repetition of God's attributes, the two most popular ones being "The Compassionate (Al-Rahman)" and "Full of Compassion (Al-Rahim)," which appear in the opening verse of *Al-Fatiha*. Other "names" commonly used in pious repetition include "The Powerful," "The Loving," and "The Majestic." This is in compliance with God's wish that He be addressed using "His beautiful names" (Q20:8). Repeating specific "names" a given number of times is said to have a spiritually uplifting, curative, or transformative effect.

Glorification of God (takbir), Praise of God (hamd), Call to prayer (adhan)

The *takbir*, or the formula "God is most great (*Allahu akbar*)" is a pervasive "prayer of affirmation:" it initiates the ritual prayer; it is ritually recited on the eve of Islam's two high holidays; and it is the phrase recited at times of triumph (from the playing field to the battlefield), at times of success and on the hearing of good news. It also opens the "call to prayer" (*adhan*), the text of which is as follows:

God is most great! [twice]. I bear witness that there is no deity other than God [twice]; I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God [twice]. Come to prayer! [twice]. Come to success! [twice]. God is most great. There is no deity other than God.³

The call to prayer – now routinely also broadcast over television and radio, as well as on personal computers, mobile phones, and alarm

clocks – marks the diurnal prayer times and signals to worshipers that the next ritual prayer is due and should now be performed. The call to prayer, though not a prayer per se, also invites worshipers to the preeminent place of congregation, namely the mosque from which the *adhan* is issued. The call has acquired powerful liturgical value and is believed to function as a prophylactic against malevolence; on the basis of a popular *hadith*, it is recited in the right ear of every child born in a Muslim household, and is often also recited when one occupies a new home. In many cultures, after the completion of the *adhan*, it is repeated by those hearing it, who also then recite the following supplication:

God, Lord of this perfect call and this performed prayer, grant our master, Muhammad, blessed intercession and give him the hallowed status which You promised You would grant – You never dishonor a promise.

Praise of Muhammad (and other figures)

The word *salawat* (a plural of *salat*, on which more below) occurs twice in the Qur'an, and has come to refer principally to the act of wishing (or "calling down" of) blessings (or "prayers") and peace on the Prophet Muhammad. This pious act is specifically enjoined in the Qur'an as follows:

Verily, God and His angels send/call down blessings/prayers on the Prophet. O you who believe, you (too) send/call down blessings on him, and salutations/peace as well. (Q33:56)

The believer responds by saying "God, send blessings on Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, and salutations and favor." This is also the origin of the widespread practice of repeating the phrase "May God send His blessings and salutations on him" after saying, hearing, or writing the Prophet Muhammad's name. This is often incorrectly rendered "peace be upon him" (and abbreviated "pbuh" in print), an expression reserved for use after the names of all *other* prophets as well as archangels. Some Shi'is also use "peace be upon him" after the name of Muhammad's son-in-law, companion, and successor, 'Ali, an indication of the importance they accord him; Sunnis use "May God be pleased with him/her" for 'Ali and all other companions of Muhammad, though even they sometimes distinguish 'Ali with the phrase "May God ennoble his face." The pronouncing of such

phrases is considered praiseworthy and said to earn God's pleasure and reward.

Sending blessings/prayers and salutations/peace (*salawat*) on Muhammad is a fundamental concept and practice in Islam. It is enjoined in the Qur'an, according to which God, himself, engages in the practice; it is also pronounced as part of the ritual prayer and often precedes and follows *dhikr* exercises. There is a *hadith* that if a worshiper wishes a supplication to God (*du'a*) to be fulfilled, that supplication should be preceded by the ritual utterance of the *salawat*. The benefits and virtues of this prayer are not lost on many Muslims – one accordingly finds the *salawat* mentioned at the beginning of numerous books by pious Muslim.

PRAYERS OF SUBMISSION

Prostration

"Islam" literally means "submission," understood as submission to (the will of) God. The emblematic act of submission is the act of prostration (*sajda* or *sujud*) and is exemplified in the story of Adam's creation. After creating the first human, God asks the host of angels to bow to Adam and they do so, acknowledging God's authority. The fate of Satan (mentioned here by his proper name, Iblis), who refuses to bow (Q17:61) – maintaining that as a creature made of fire, he is superior to Adam, made of mere earth – is proof of the very high cost of disobedience. What is more, his refusal is described as a function of his arrogance. The prostration that is so characteristic of Muslim ritual worship is, therefore, an act of humility, an act of submission, and also an act that echoes a signal moment in the history of creation. Some people develop a dark mark on their foreheads, which is regarded as a sign of great piety, since it signifies a lifetime spent in prayer (of which prostration is an integral part).

The prostration occurs on three principal occasions: (1) in repeating sets of two during every unit of ritual prayer; (2) at fourteen designated points in the Qur'an when one is reciting the text ritually; and (3) voluntarily during sincere supplication. Significantly, prostrations are prohibited at the moment the sun is crossing the horizon at sunrise and sunset and when the sun is at its zenith, most probably because of a desire to avoid any possible conflation of Islam with the worship of the sun.

Ritual prayer (salat or namaz)

Muslims credit the prescription, and especially the number, of the daily ritual prayers to an exchange that took place between God and Muhammad during the latter's ascension to heaven (*mi'raj*) in 621 C.E. One respected *hadith* account reads:

He [God] then made obligatory for me [Muhammad] fifty prayers every night and day. I began my descent until I reached Moses who asked me: "What has your Lord made obligatory for your community?" "Fifty prayers," I replied, to which he said, "Return to your Lord and ask Him to reduce them: your community will not be able to bear that" [...] I kept going between my Lord and Moses until God said, "O Muhammad, there are five prayers every night and day. Each prayer is equal to ten prayers making them equal to fifty prayers."

It is important to keep in mind that just as the Hajj pilgrimage is Abrahamic in origin but an imitation of Muhammad's pilgrimage rituals in its specifics, so too is ritual prayer extra-Muhammad in origin, but an imitation of Muhammad's own ritual prayer in its specifics, down to every last detail. The specifics are thus not to be found in the Qur'an, but in the *sunna*, the practice of Muhammad, following whose example in not only an act of reverence but also adherence to the Qur'anic injunctions to obey God and His Prophet (Q8:46).

Scholars have pointed out that the early seventh century also provides a context for the prescription of ritual prayer, notably the three daily prayers of Rabbinical Judaism, the four obligatory prayers of Manichaeism, the five of Mazdaism, and the seven offices of Byzantine Christianity. Certainly, ritual prayer is not a new feature of worship for the Qur'an, which attests such in times past, e.g. those of Noah, Abraham, and Israel (Q19:58). There are two significant features of the use of the word *salat* in the Qur'an, where it appears sixty-five times: first, it occurs overwhelmingly in the *suras* that, in all likelihood, date from 620 C.E. onward, that is, from a time when ritual prayer became a defining and underpinning feature of Islam; and second, in a third of all instances, *zakat* (purification by giving away part of one's wealth) is mentioned together with *salat*. This "purification" of the soul is matched by the ritual purification that is essential before a ritual prayer can be performed.

The importance of the ritual prayer is enshrined in Muhammad's statement that "Islam is built on five [pillars]: bearing witness that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His Prophet; performing

the ritual prayer; giving alms from one's accumulated wealth; fasting the month of Ramadan; and performing the Hajj if and when able." In theory, a Muslim need only bear witness once (though it is repeated many times in ritual prayer), or perform Hajj once, if at all. And a Muslim may not have sufficient wealth to give alms; or he or she may be unable to fast (atoning with a "payment" of food to the needy). But every Muslim must perform ritual prayers, every day, until death. Even if the worshiper is unwell or infirm, the obligation remains and only God, in infinite mercy, can forgive this debt. On Judgment Day, ritual prayer (having been properly performed) is said to bear witness to a Muslim's submission to God's will, each daily prayer advocating for the worshiper.

The ritual prayers are organized according to a hierarchy of obligation as follows:

Obligatory

(Required by God of all Muslims)

Fard

Non-obligatory

Prescribed (emulating Muhammad's regular practice)

Wajib

Exemplary (emulating Muhammad's occasional practice)

Sunna

Voluntary (optional, supererogatory, by personal decision)

Nafl

The Obligatory ritual prayer is incumbent on all mentally sound Muslims having reached the age of discernment (variously held as being seven or ten years old); for one school of law, willful abandonment of prayer constitutes an act of unbelief, for the others, it is a sin. Muhammad is reported to have warned that "The only thing that separates a person from polytheism and unbelief is the abandonment of ritual prayer." Missing an obligatory ritual prayer incurs a debt, which one can (and must) discharge by fulfilling it at a later time. Performing any of the non-obligatory prayers earns God's pleasure and reward. Naturally, there are numerous states of affair that may prevent or impair one from performing the ritual prayers, but provisions are made for all these conditions. For instance, travel involving a significant distance (the actual distance varies across schools of law) results in the ritual prayers' fixed number of units being reduced.

Typology

The *salat* is a relatively short but elaborate prayer ritual. Detailed descriptions are widely available in everything from books of jurisprudence and children's instructional material, to prayer-manuals and informational pamphlets produced by individuals for private distribution. In Western scholarly literature, three descriptions stand out;⁴ I should like to break down my own brief discussion of the ritual prayer in two ways, first, following these scholars, according to its constituent parts.

If one thinks of the categories of "Obligatory," "Prescribed," "Exemplary," and "Voluntary," that is, the terms used above to categorize ritual prayer by degree of obligation, one also has a typology for the various actions that constitute the ritual prayer. According to the Hanafi school of law, to cite just one of the four Sunni schools, the following are obligatory: (1) Commencing the prayer with an act of sacralization (*takbirat al-ihram*), namely standing facing Mecca, raising one's hands above one's shoulders to the level of one's ears and saying "God is most great!"; (2) "Standing" (*qiyam*) with the arms crossed, or with arms at the sides. *Qiyam* is, incidentally, also the name given to the communal standing at the Plain of 'Arafat on the outskirts of Mecca during the rites of the Hajj pilgrimage. That standing, and inevitably the standing in ritual prayer, presage *Yawm al-qiyama*, the Day of Standing (for Reckoning, equivalent to the Day of Resurrection); (3) Reciting (*qira'a*) "The Opening," from the first chapter of the Qur'an, followed in the first two prayer units (*rak'as*) of the obligatory prayer (and in all *rak'as* of non-obligatory prayers) by another Qur'anic passage of the individual's choosing; (4) "Bowing" (*ruku'* – also the word used for "paragraph" divisions in the Qur'an), by bending at the waist, hands on knees, with one's back parallel to the ground, and then reciting "Glory to my Lord, the great one!" The worshiper then straightens up, saying "God hears the one who praises Him" (the only instance of not using "God is most great" to change posture), and then "To you, Lord, is due all praise"; (5) Prostration (*sujud*), in pairs; (6) "Sitting" (*qa'da*) in every second (and concluding) *rak'a*, palms on knees, and reciting the "Affirmation of faith" and "Salutation," as follows:

To God, salutations, worship and sanctity. Peace, and also God's mercy and blessings, upon you, O Prophet. And peace upon us, and upon the righteous servants of God. I affirm that there is not god but God, and I affirm that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

The last sentence is accompanied by a raising of the finger in physical affirmation of God's oneness. The worshiper then rises and performs subsequent *rak'as*, identical to the first in every way except for the selection of a different Qur'anic passage after "The Opening."

In every final unit of a ritual prayer, a *salawat*, or calling down of blessing, follows, together with an optional prayer of supplication. The ritual prayer then concludes with the worshiper turning the head to the right and left, uttering the greeting, "Peace on you, and also the mercy and blessings of God," said to be addressed to the two recording angels "located" to one's right and left, recording all one's good and bad deeds, respectively. Certain parts of the ritual prayers may only be recited *sotto voce*, others may, under certain circumstances, be recited aloud.

I should now like to break down ritual prayer according to two broad principles that, it seems to me, govern its performance, namely State and Orientation.

State There is state of body and state of mind. State of body encompasses purity and clothing. Islamic law requires that certain parts of the body be obligatorily covered, and that other parts be covered out of modesty and in emulation of Muhammad's practice. Thus, men must minimally cover from navel to knees, and ideally also cover their torsos and heads. Coverage for women is more extensive and, in ritual prayer, must include the hair. Prayer is preceded by a ritual purification (as distinct from a physical one) that may be performed symbolically if no water is available. Its purpose is not to get physically clean but rather to enter a *state* of purity.

State of mind refers to the fact that all ritual prayer must be preceded by an articulated (though not necessarily voiced) statement of intention (*niyya*). The role of intent is critical: Muhammad is reported to have said, "Actions are (assessed) by their intentions." Also of critical importance is adopting the proper attitude of awe for God and humility in the divine presence (*khushu'*). An incorrectly performed action can be remedied (with a corrective prostration, or by repeating the ritual prayer), but one's intention, sincerity, and devotion cannot be postured.

Orientation can be subdivided into time and number, place, direction, and nature (solitary or communal).

Time and Number Ritual prayers are performed at specific times, in particular, the five obligatory prayers. These are listed below together with the number of mandatory prayer units (*rak'as*) in each:

Pre-dawn (<i>Fajr</i>)	2 <i>rak'as</i>
Post-zenith (<i>Zuhr</i>)	4 <i>rak'as</i>
Mid- to late afternoon (<i>'Asr</i>)	4 <i>rak'as</i>
Post-sunset (<i>Maghrib</i>)	3 <i>rak'as</i>
Night-time (<i>'Isha</i>)	4 <i>rak'as</i>

The names for the five ritual prayers derive from the Qur'an; the times at which they are performed are similar to times mentioned in the Qur'an, but ultimately they derive from the personal practice of Muhammad (*sunna*). Mention should also be made of a prayer called *Tahajjud*, performed in the middle of the night, preferably after having slept and awakened, and sometimes valued (but not prescribed) as the sixth daily prayer. Prayer times are not only discernible from the sun's position over the course of a day and obvious from the call to prayer, but they also are published in print and online by mosques and Muslim associations. Their presence in Islamic societies is so pervasive and Muslim life is so conditioned by these prayer times that individuals (even ritually non-observant ones) will frequently schedule meetings by saying, for example, "Come over after 'Asr."

Certain ritual prayers are performed at specific times in the weekly or yearly calendar and differ in significant ways from the five obligatory daily prayers. A prescribed prayer called *Tarawih* is performed communally during the month of Ramadan, and the communally obligatory funeral rite (*Janaza*) is performed entirely in the standing position. Attested, but not widely performed, are prayers in times of fear (*Khawf*); for rain in times of drought (*Istisqa*); during eclipses (*Kusuf*), and so on. There are also many specific voluntary ritual prayers, such as the "Prayer of Thanks" or the "Prayer for the Preservation of One's Faith." The most important weekly ritual prayer is the Friday communal one, and the most important yearly ones are those performed on the feast days.

Place Monnot has observed that "Muslim [ritual] prayer owes its exceptional importance to the constant link which it establish[es] between the faithful individual and the three supreme realities of

his religious universe: the Community, the Prophet and God."⁵ The Community, or *umma*, is not simply those who bear witness, but also those who gather together, optimally five times daily, every Friday and twice yearly on the Feast days, for communal prayer. *Salat al-jum'a*, the Friday prayer, is mentioned once in the Qur'an: "O you who believe! When proclamation is made for prayer on the day of assembly, hasten to remembrance of God, and leave [your] trading" (Q62:9). It is only required of men, stands in for the daily *Zuhr* prayer, and can only be prayed in a mosque or designated site. Because it is intended to bring the community together, this prayer has resulted in the construction and use of *Jami'* (Congregational) mosques, which, as a rule, are significantly larger than neighborhood mosques. Some of the world's most famous mosques are *Jami'*s, for example the *Jami' Masjid* in Delhi, India, or the Great Mosque of Djenne, Mali.

The Friday prayer is different from other ritual prayers in that it includes a two-part ritual-sermon, or *khutba*, delivered either wholly in Arabic or partly in Arabic and partly in the local language. In this respect, the Friday prayer resembles the *Salat al-'Idayn*, the ritual prayers performed on Eid al-Fitr after the end of Ramadan (The Feast of Fast-breaking), and Eid al-Adha at the culmination of the Hajj-pilgrimage (the Feast of Sacrifice).

The ritual prayer may be performed anywhere that is free from ritual impurity. This possibility of performing the ritual prayer in any clean place follows the practice of Muhammad, to whom is credited the statement "The earth has been made for me (and for my followers) a place for praying, and (earth) a substance with which to perform *Tayammum* (dry ablution), therefore anyone of my followers can pray wherever the time of a prayer is due."⁶

A "place of prostration" in Arabic is a *masjid*, which has entered English via Spanish as "mosque," technically a building endowed in perpetuity for the specific purpose of "prostration" (i.e. ritual prayer). A place so designated only temporarily is called "a place of prayer," *musalla* (with other names in other languages, e.g. *surau* in Malay). Related to *masjid* is the word *sajjada* ("[place of] habitual prostration") which, together with *musalla* ("[thing] prayed upon") and *ja-ye namaz* ("place of prayer"), are among the commonest terms for a "prayer mat" or "prayer rug."

One sometimes notices worshipers move a few feet away from their specific place of prostration to perform other ritual prayers. This practice is said to be desirable because on the Day of Reckoning the

spot where a worshipper has prostrated will speak up on that worshipper's behalf.

Direction When performing the ritual prayer, Muslims must obligatorily face the *qibla*, that is, face "the sacred mosque" in Mecca as enjoined in Q2:142–150 (and elsewhere). Indeed, the surest sign of the institutionalization of the ritual prayer is the changing of the direction, or cosmic orientation, of prayer. There is some scholarly disagreement about the direction Muslims faced before the injunction to face Mecca (which can be fairly precisely dated to early in the year 624 C.E.), but the Muslim consensus is that it was Jerusalem, deemed then, as now, one of the three "sacred precincts" (the other two are Mecca and Medina). Muslims are also buried with their heads turned to the right, facing Mecca.

Nature One person (normatively male) takes the role of Imam, or leader of the communal or congregational ritual prayer. He must be of good reputation and education and is typically an older congregant, though a younger congregant's superior knowledge of the Qur'an makes him more qualified; thus, one often finds a teenage *hafiz* (someone who has memorized the Qur'an in its entirety) serving as Imam for a group that includes older, or more well-known, congregants. If there is one other male congregant, he stands next to the Imam, if one female congregant, she stands behind him. All face Mecca. If there are more congregants, they form rows behind the Imam. Worshipers pray in solitude even within a congregation, reciting in a hushed whisper. However, following Muhammad's example, Imams recite certain parts of the ritual prayer audibly, others inaudibly – or more correctly "neither loud nor in a whisper" as the Qur'an enjoins (Q17:110) – and congregants recite a reduced liturgy.

Parkin has suggested that since all words are not uttered by congregants in communal prayer, it may be that the "power" resides in the actions themselves.⁷ All changes of position are audible, so that the congregation may know when to follow. Before the availability and widespread use of microphones, the person standing behind the Imam (and sometimes other designated "criers") would repeat the gesture-changing words loudly so that those in distant rows might hear.

Communal prayer was strongly enjoined by Muhammad: he is reported to have shown unhappiness with those who chose to pray

ritually at home rather than come to the mosque, and also to have said that the virtue of the communal prayer is twenty-seven times greater than that of individual prayer.

PRAYERS OF SUPPLICATION

In Q40:60, God says "Supplicate to me, and I will surely respond." This phrase is always mentioned by the Friday sermon-giver as a reminder to congregants that, besides offering their ritual prayers to God, they must call upon God with any and all requests (*du'a*). The supplication is usually tendered with hands at shoulder level, palms face up, as if receiving God's mercy falling from above (like rain); at the conclusion of the supplication, the palms lightly wipe the face.

Supplications (*du'a*) can be thought of as falling into seven broad types of request: for forgiveness, for mercy, for blessing and favor, for worldly success, for intercession, for heaven, and for protection – in all cases not just for oneself but also for others.

Forgiveness and Mercy

Muslims are enjoined to ask God incessantly to forgive them any wrongdoings or trespasses. Muhammad reports that God said that even if the worshiper were to come to Him with sins equal to the weight of the earth but also with sincere repentance, God would respond with forgiveness in equal measure. A standard supplication for forgiveness and mercy (*istighfar*) reads:

I seek the forgiveness of God Almighty, other than Whom there is no God, the Living, the Eternal, and I turn to him in repentance.

There are numerous other formulae, either derived from the Qur'an, or in emulation of Muhammad or pious figures. Among the many Qur'anic supplications are the so-called "Forty *Rabbanas*," that is, supplications that begin with the word *rabbana* ("O our Lord"). They follow the pattern of the following two popular examples:

O our Lord, we have wronged ourselves and if You do not forgive us, and show us mercy, we shall indeed be among the lost. (Q7:23)

The second is a supplication on behalf of one's parents, and reads:

My Lord, forgive them as they cherished me when I was young.
(Q17:24)

Blessing and Favor

Besides asking for forgiveness, the worshiper is encouraged to ask for blessings and divine favor. Thus, when someone sneezes, that person says "All praise is due to God" and anyone hearing the person sneeze responds by saying, "May God bless you." Similarly, many Muslims rather than say "thank you" express gratitude to others using an Arabic formula meaning "May God reward you."

It is common practice in many parts of the Muslim world for Muslims to visit the elderly and the sick, and to visit saints (living or dead) to seek blessing. The supplications of the old and infirm are said to be heeded by God as are the supplications of those well loved by God.

Worldly Success

Muhammad is reported to have said that the following single supplication, for both success in this world and in the Hereafter, suffices the believer:

Our Lord, give us good in this World, and good in the Afterlife, and protect us from the torment of the Fire. (Q2:201)

That the supplicant can ask for good in this world shows that asking for worldly things is acceptable. Indeed, Islam appears in no way to demonize or devalue success in this life, as long as it is not at the expense of success – and seeking success – in the afterlife. It is standard practice to supplicate and recite other prayers when undertaking a commercial venture, in the hope that God will grant worldly favor.

Intercession

This is the supplication to God asking for Muhammad to intercede on the believer's behalf, an intercession that God has promised as is evident from the call to prayer cited above. It is also supplication to Muhammad himself, and to other religious figures such as saints, where the grace (*baraka*) or station (*maqam*) of the figure, and not

just the words of the supplicant, is relevant to the attainment of the desired result. Grace and station are acquired through God's love of esteemed religious figures, which is why these figures are referred to as "friends of God" (*wali*, pl. *awliya'*).

Some Muslims cannot accept that saints have any special access to God, averring that what distinguishes Islam from other religions is precisely the possibility of direct access. Parkin calls these Muslims "ontological dualists" because they hold that there is an unbridgeable ontological gap between humans and God; the mystics he calls "ontological monists," because they reinforce the ontological oneness with the Absolute, a state of affairs (and relations) that allows for intercession on the part of saints.

Protection

The Qur'an's two closing chapters are commonly recited by Muslims as a means of seeking protection:

"The Dawn" (Q113)

In the Name of God, Full of Compassion, Ever Compassionate
Repeat: I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn, From the mischief of His Creation, And from the mischief of nightgloom when it blots, And from the mischief of sorceresses, spitting on knots, And from the mischief of the envier when he plots.

"Humanity" (Q114)

In the Name of God, Full of Compassion, Ever Compassionate
Repeat: I seek protection, with the Lord of Creation, King of Creation, God of Creation, From the malicious incantations, Of the Accursed, whispering insinuations, in the hearts of jinn and humanity both, fabrications.

As the above make clear, there is much from which to seek protection. For example, Muhammad counseled of the need to be careful of the evil eye, a force that is activated by excessive praise and excessive envy. Popular Muslim belief maintains a number of simple prayers that are traced to him and are recited and then blown on the afflicted individual (or animal, such as a hen no longer yielding eggs). Besides blowing a prayer on someone or into water that is then drunk by the individual in difficulty, religious figures also produce amulets for protection (*ta'widh*), typically worn around the neck.

* * *

Prayer is absolutely central in Islam. From birth, when the Muslim child is first made to hear the various pious formulae that comprise the call to prayer, to death, when the funeral prayer rites are performed in front of the shrouded body and when invocations are recited by supplicants for the well-being of the departed, a Muslim's whole life is permeated by prayer. Indeed, every twenty-four-hour day is divided into time periods in which the five obligatory ritual prayers are to be performed; and there are supplications for every possible situation and event (wearing a new item of clothing, on hearing a dog bark, on seeing the full moon, to ward off the evil eye, to begin one's fast, to increase one's learning, before setting off on a journey ...). Indeed, at practically every moment a Muslim has either just uttered or performed a prayer, or is about to do so. For Islam, there is no religion without prayer.⁸

15

PROPHECY

Devin Stewart

It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad had sent an envoy to a remote Arab tribe to spread the message of Islam. A skeptical member of the tribe did not take the envoy at his word, but traveled to meet the Prophet himself. When he arrived, he addressed the Prophet, "Oh Muhammad, your messenger came to us and claimed that you claim that God sent you."

"He spoke the truth," said the Prophet.

The tribesman asked, "Who created the sky?"

"God," replied the Prophet.

"Then who created the Earth?"

"God."

"Then who created these mountains?"

"God."

"Then who created all the good and useful things in the world?"

"God."

"Your messenger claimed that we must pray five times in the course of a day and night."

"He spoke the truth."

"Then by Him who sent you, did God command you to impose this obligation?"

"Yes."

"Your messenger also claimed that we must pay an alms tax on our property."

"He spoke the truth."

"Then by Him who sent you, did God command you to impose this obligation?"

"Yes."

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