SALAH
Islamic Prayer

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SUITABLE FOR GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES
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Islam is a complete way of life and provides guidance for all aspects of human existence. Be it spiritual, mundane, political, social, economic or any other aspect- you will never be short of advice or instructions for the best way forward! For the spiritual well being of an individual it is a must that he/she establishes a strong link with the creator and that this bond is nourished on a regular basis. Humans can never stay in a single state of mind and will always find themselves wandering both in thought and action. It becomes an imperative therefore that a system of monitoring and regulation is provided for a man on a daily basis which brings him back to His creator. It is for this very purpose that five a day formula has been advised for believers to regulate their thoughts and actions by communicating with their creator five times in a day. This cycle of regular communication starts from the first prayer; first thing in the morning, then the second at lunch time, the third one a little later in the afternoon, the fourth immediately after sunset and the last one before going to bed. This system, of regular talking to your creator, leads to a strong bond with Him and acts as a regular reminder of our shortcomings and weaknesses. When Salah is performed with the intention of deriving the maximum benefit from it, the five a day formula is the best way forward to improving our personality and a massive opportunity for one’s personal spiritual upliftment.
A Loving Relationship

Islam teaches a relationship with our creator that is based on love, care, compassion and thanksgiving to the most merciful God. God describes Himself in the Quran as the Most Loving:

“And He is the Ever Forgiving, the Most Loving” (85:14)

God further promises forgiveness and Mercy in unambiguous words:

“Tell them, (O Prophet): “My servants (mankind) who have been prodigal to their own hurt, do not despair of God’s Mercy. Surely God forgives all sins. He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (39:53)

Therefore going deeper into our spiritual state during prayers (salah) requires that we have a presence of heart and are mindful of the words being said during the prayers. Islamic relationship with the Creator is not limited to following orders and abstaining from the prohibitions, so that one avoids hell fire. Instead all acts of worship and abstinence should be done out of love for God. God says in the Qur’an:

“... God will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him.” (Qur’an, 5:54)

 Salah should be like the meeting of those in love such that the hearts are stirred and there is immense warmth which transcends any other form of romance and love. It is far from being like a dry, soulless, life-less ritual done for the sake of a mere legal or obligatory reason! God describes in the Qur’an:

“And (yet) among the people are those who take other than God as equals (to Him). They love them as they (should) love God. But those who believe are stronger in love for God.” (Qur’an, 2:165)
One performing the salah should feel a yearning to go back to performing the next salah and there should be a feeling of longing, so when we raise our hands to start the prayer, warmth and love should fill our hearts at the thought of meeting with our God; the Merciful Lord. Prophet (peace be upon him) used to say

“O God, I ask You for the longing to meet You” (An-Nisa’i, Al-Hakim)

The Prophet, peace be upon him also said:

“Any person who combines these three qualities will experience the sweetness of faith: 1) that God and His messenger are dearer to him than anything else; 2) that his love of others is purely for God’s sake; and 3) that he hates to relapse into disbelief as much as he hates to be thrown into the fire.” (Bukhari)

This is what we need to feel whilst doing our prayers, the love of our creator- a love that supersedes all other forms of it- If you feel this love for Him, it will be a feeling so intense, so sweet and so uplifting that you would wish the prayer never ends!

The way we perform the prayer and the postures we adopt whilst performing it are just a means to the end and not the end in itself. This is why understanding the purpose behind our salah or prayer and the essence of Salah is most important as otherwise it will be reduced to just a lifeless ritual of certain acts and postures. Having understood the spiritual aspect and the true purpose and essence of Salah, let us look at the physical aspect of how and when we are required to perform the salah.
Preparation for Salah

Each time we offer our prayer we need to wash ourselves and this act is called Wudhu or ablution.

The Quran instructs the believers to perform Wudhu before every Salah in the following verse:

“O’ Believers! When you stand up for Prayer wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and wash your feet up to the ankles” (5:6)

Wudhu is performed in the following manner:

Make your intention to do Wudhu and say Bismillah (in the Name of God) and wash your hands three times. Now rinse your mouth out three times, swirling your finger around the interior of your mouth. Then rinse your nose three times pouring water up to the soft part of nose and blowing out. Next in line is washing your face from forehead to chin three times. Then wash your arms from wrists till elbows three times each side, starting with the right arm. Now wet your hands and wipe over your head and ears. The last part is washing your feet up till the ankles, again three times and starting from the right side. This completes our Wudhu or ablution.

The following Hadith explains how Wudhu was done by Prophet pbuh:

‘Uthman ibn ‘Affaan called for water to do wudhu. He washed his hands three times, then he rinsed his mouth and nose, then he washed his face three times, then he washed his right arm up to the elbow three times, then he washed his left arm likewise. Then he wiped his head, then he washed his right foot up to the ankle three times, then he washed his left foot likewise. Then he said, “I saw the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) doing
Facing Kabah, Qibla

It is a part of Salah that we all face one direction, towards the first house of God i.e Kabah, this direction is called Qibla. In UK it’s the south east direction. After this we find a clean and tidy place and making our intention we begin our Salah as follows.

Cycles of Postures- Rakah

Salah or five times prayer is performed in cycles of humble postures and each cycle is called one unit or one Rakah. Each Rakah has three main components to it:

- Qiyam or the standing posture
- Ruku or the bowing down posture and
- Sujood or prostrating; twice in each Rakah.

In the last unit or Rakah a fourth component is added which is called Tashahud or the sitting posture, the prayer is ended by turning our head towards the right and left shoulders and saying salaam on each side.

In each of these postures either parts of Quran are recited or praises of God or supplications are made to our Creator. Since a Muslim
should pray right away and obviously he or she would be unable to memorize the whole text of the prayer in the same day so those who are new to Islam can recite simple and easy praises of God like SubhanAllah (glory be to God), Alhumdulillah (All praise are due to God) or Allahu Akbar (God is the Greatest) three times in each posture, until they learn and memorise the prayer in Arabic; as God Almighty does not put a burden on anyone that they cannot bear.

Learning to pray when your language is not Arabic can seem to be a very difficult task. However it is not as difficult as it may appear to you. A certain amount of text is memorized and the same text can be recited in all the five daily prayers. Therefore the Prophet peace be upon him instructed new Muslims to learn a short supplication:

(Subhaan-Allaahi wal-hamdu Lillaahi wa laa ilaaha ill-Allaahu Wallahu akbar wa la hawla wa la quwwata illa Billaah) which they can recite in all their five daily prayers. *(Nasai, Ibn Abi Aufa)*

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**How to Perform the Salah**

1) After performing Wudhu we face the direction of Kabba (south east in UK) and make intention of performing the salah.

2) Now standing up straight we raise our both hands, palms facing forward, up to our shoulders and say Allahu Akbar (God is the Greatest). Then we fold our arms over our chest, right arm over the left and start reciting.

3) Then we recite Thana or praises of God

Subhaana Kallaahumma wabi humdika wa tabaarakasmuka wa ta aala jadduka wa laa ilaaha ghayruk.
“Glory be to You, O Allah, and all praises are due unto You, and blessed is Your name and high is Your majesty and none is worthy of worship but You”

4) First chapter of the Quran called Fatiha is to be recited next and in each cycle or Rakah whilst standing (Qiyam). Here are the 7 verses of Fatiha:

Bismillaahir Rahmaanir Raheem
Alhamdu lillaahi Rabbil Aalameen
Ar-Rahmaanir-Raheem
Maaliki Yawmid-Deen
Eeyaaka nabudu wa Eeyaaka nastaeen
Ihdinas-Siraatal-Mustaqeem
Siraatal-lazeena an amta Alyhim ghayril-maghdoobi Alyhim wa lad-daaalleen

“Praise is only for Allah, Lord of the Universe; The most Compassionate, the Most Merciful; The Master of the Day of Judgement; You alone we worship and to You alone we pray for help; Show us the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed, who have not deserved Your wrath, nor gone astray”

Apart from Fatiha during Qiyam or standing posture Thana or praise is recited before Fatiha in the first Rakah only and at least a verse of Quran is recited after Fatiha in the first two Rakahs but not in the third and fourth Rakah. So in third and fourth Rakah we recite only Fatiha in the standing posture.

An example of a short surah or chapter to be recited in first two rakahs after Fatiha is sura Ikhlas:
Qul huwallaahu ahad, Allaahus-Samad. Lam yalid walam yulad. Walam yakullahu kufuwan ahad.

_Say: He is God, the unique One. God is free from wants and needs. He begets not, nor was he begotten and there is none like unto Him._

**Ruku**

After completing recitations of standing posture or Qiyam we say Allahu Akbar and put our hands over the knees and bend our back in line with the knees with the face towards the floor, the bowing posture called Ruku-in here we recite

Subhaana Rabbi-yal Azeem: “Glory to my Lord the Exalted”. This is recited three times.

Then we raise our head up again saying

Sami Allaahu liman hamidah: “Allah listens to him who praises Him”:

Rabbanaa lakal hamdu: “Our Lord, all praise is to You”

And we straighten our back.

**Sujood-Prostration**

Next we say Allahu Akbar and put our forehead on the floor along with our hands and feet in prostration called Sujood, in this posture we recite:

Subhaana Rabbiyal Aalaa: “Glory be to God, the Most High.”
We sit between the two prostrations saying Allahu akbar each time we change our posture and then get up for the second rakah or cycle.

After repeating the second cycle we sit down after raising our head from the ground- this is called Tashahud

**Tashahud**

After completing the second rakah prostrations next step is to sit and recite the following:

Athahiyyaatu lillaahi was-salawaatu wat tayyibatu. Assalamu alaika ayyuhan-nabiyu wa rahmatullaahi wabarkatuhu. Assalamu alaina wa alaa ibaadil laahis saaliheen.

*All compliments, all physical prayer and all worship are for Allah. Peace be upon you, O’ Prophet, and Allah’s mercy and blessings be on you. Peace be on us and on all righteous slaves of Allah.*

Now we raise our index finger whilst our hands are on our knees in the sitting posture and recite

Ash hadu alla ilaha illallahu wa ash hadu anna Muhammadan abduhu wa rasooluh.

*I bear witness that no one is worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Muhummed is His servant and Messenger.*

If it is a two rakah salah then we continue on to the next part of recitation until we end but if it is a three or four rakah salah we say Allahu Akbar and get up to complete the third and fourth Rakah as
above. And in the last Rakah we sit down and recite the recitations as above plus


Oh Allah, send grace and honour on Muhummed and on his family just as you sent grace and honour on Ibrahim and on his family. Surely, you are praiseworthy, the Great. Oh Allah, send your blessings on Muhummed and his family, just as you sent blessings on Ibrahim and his family. Surely, you are Most Praiseworthy, the Exalted.

Then we end our prayer by saying

Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullaah: “Peace and mercy of Allah be on you”

We say this whilst turning our faces towards right and left shoulder respectively.

This completes our Salah!

**Timings and Rakah in Each Salah**

1) Morning or Fajr prayer can be performed between dawn and sunrise and there are 2 compulsory Rakah in this Salah

2) Dohar or Afternoon Salah is performed between the time Sun passes its zenith till the shadow of a thing equals its size and it has 4 compulsory Rakah
3) Asr or Late afternoon Salah is performed when Dohar ends till just before sunset and it has 4 compulsory Rakah

4) Magrib Salah is performed after sunset till twilight disappears and it has 3 compulsory Rakah

5) Isha Salah is offered after twilight disappears till dawn, although offering up till midnight is preferred and it has 4 compulsory Rakah

I tend to see these as a direct hotline telephone to contacting our creator 24434!

In addition to the compulsory Rakah one can do voluntary Rakah in each Salah however, as you keep growing in your journey and learning Salah properly, you can keep adding the voluntary parts. Compulsory Rakah is what you should start with and keep performing them regularly.

Qiyam, Ruku and Sujood was always part of Prophets’ Prayer

The humble postures that make up the performance of Islamic prayer or Salah have always been a part and parcel of prophetic method of communicating with the creator. We humble ourselves in these postures as an acknowledgement of the greatness, benevolence, mercy and thanksgiving towards our loving and caring creator. Let us examine texts from bible to see how the well known prophets prayed to God.
Qiyam or Standing

Prophet Ayyub pbuh or Job used to pray standing or in Qiyam:

“I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me” (Job 30:20)

The Jews used to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to display their piety. Jesus pbuh condemned the pride but not the practice of praying standing (Matt 6:5). In fact, he endorsed it when he said to the disciples,

“Whenver you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions” (Mark 11:25).

Standing before the Lord in prayer was a common practice. One of the most impressive cases is found in 2 Chronicles 20 where a corporate act of prayer is described. When Judah was about to be invaded by the combined military forces of Moab and Ammon, Jehoshaphat called the people to pray to the Lord. He stood in the assembly in the house of the Lord and prayed for liberation while the people were “standing before the Lord” (2Chr 20:5, 13). Hannah presented to the Lord her petition while standing, and the Lord answered her (1 Sam 1:26).

Ruku or Bowing down David and other prophets pbuh

Psalm 95:6 Come, let us bow down (Ruku) in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
Kings 18:42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down (Ruku) on the ground, and put his face between his knees,

Chronicles 7:3 And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground (Ruku) upon the pavement, and worshiped, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endures for ever.

Nehemiah 8:6 Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down (Ruku) and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Sujood or Prostration by Jesus pbuh and all other prophets pbut

Matthew 26:39 And he [Jesus] went a little farther, and fell on his face (Sujood), and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Luke 6:12 And it came to pass in those days, that he [Jesus] went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

Genesis 17:3-4 And Abram fell on his face (Sujood): and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Numbers 20:6 And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and
they fell upon their faces (Sujood): and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them.

**Tashahud or Sitting Down**

The practice of praying to the God while sitting down is rare in the Bible but not totally absent. A good example is Prophet David pbuh, who

"Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: "Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" (2 Sam 7:18).

This is the posture assumed by an individual who is seeking instructions from the Lord, through his prophet (e.g. 2 Kings 4:38; Ezek 8:1; 33:31), and who is ready to serve him.

This booklet has been written with an intention to inspire people into looking at how we can communicate with our creator in the best possible way and how the messengers of God communicated with Him. The booklet also gives the reader an insight into how Muslims are the only group of people who pray the way the Prophets including Moses, Jesus, Abraham, Jacob, Job, David and Muhummed peace be upon all of them- prayed.

May we all find the way to our creator and start communicating with Him, directly, without the need of any intermediaries or priests, imams or any form of clergy! God communicates with and conveys various meanings to man via incalculable signs He has embedded in each and every aspect of His creation: from the grandest to the humblest and most ordinary. God says:
“And how many signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away from them!” (12:105)

However, like any other communication type, this type of communication, likewise, ought to be a two-way process, in order that it remains productive, meaningful and strong, insofar as man, the recipient of God’s communicated Word and Message, is concerned. God has afforded man a number of opportunities to reciprocate both His direct and indirect communication initiatives. Man is asked to pray five times a day, supplicate, remember, praise, glorify and sing praises to Him, at certain appointed and recommended times, or whenever and wherever he feels disposed to do so. What better way to achieve this than trying to connect every few hours a day-five times a day—every day—every week—every month and every year we live on this planet!
OTHER ESSENTIAL READINGS

Jesus in the Quran

Common Misconceptions About Islam

Women in Islam

Is there a Creator
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