

The status of prayer in Islam

Q: I hope that you can explain to us the status of prayer in Islam.

A: Praise be to Allaah.

Prayer occupies a great status in Islam that is not shared by any other act of worship. This is indicated by the following:

1 – It is the pillar of the religion, which cannot stand without it.

According to a hadeeth narrated by Mu'aadh ibn Jabal (may Allaah be pleased with him), the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: «Shall I not tell you of the head of the whole matter and its pillar and top?» I [Mu'aadh] said, “Yes, O Messenger of Allaah.” He said, «The head of the matter is Islam, its pillar is prayer and its top is jihad» [Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 2616; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi, 2110].

2 – It is second in status to the Shahaadatayn (twin testimony of faith) as further proof of the soundness of a person's belief and as visible evidence of the beliefs that reside in the heart.

The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: «Islam is built on five [pillars]: the testimony that there is no god but Allaah and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, establishing prayer, paying zakaah, performing pilgrimage to the House, and fasting Ramadaan» [Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 8; Muslim, 16].

Establishing prayer means performing prayer in full with all its words and actions, at the appointed times, as it says in the Qur'aan (interpretation of the meaning): "Verily, As-Salaah (the prayer) is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours" [al-Nisa' 4:103].

3 – Prayer occupies a special position among other acts of worship because of the way in which it was enjoined.

It was not brought down to earth by an angel, rather Allaah wanted to bless His Messenger Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) by taking him up to heaven and addressing him directly concerning the obligation of prayer. This is something that is unique to prayer among all the rituals of Islam.

Prayer was enjoined on the night of the Mi'raaj [Prophet's ascent to heaven], approximately three years before the Hijrah.

Fifty prayers (per day) were enjoined at first, then the number was reduced to five, but the reward of fifty remains. This is indicative of Allaah's love of prayer and its great status.

4 – Allaah erases sins by means of prayer

Al-Bukhaari (528) and Muslim (667) narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said – and in the hadeeth of Bakr it is narrated that he heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say – «What do you think if there was a river by the door of any one of you and he bathed in it five times a day, would there be any trace of dirt left on him?» They said, "No trace of dirt would be left on him" He said, «That is like the five daily prayers, by means of which Allaah erases sin».

5 – Prayer is the last part of religion to be lost, and if it is lost the whole religion is lost.

It was narrated that Jaabir ibn 'Abd-Allaah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: «Between a man and shirk [associating others with Allaah] and kufr [disbelief] there stands his giving up prayer» [Narrated by Muslim, 82].

Hence the Muslim should be keen to perform the prayers on time, and not be lazy or take the matter lightly. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “So woe unto those performers of Salaah (prayers) (hypocrites), Those who delay their Salaah (prayer from their stated fixed times)” [al-Maa’oon 107:4-5].

And Allaah warns those who cause their prayers to be lost by saying (interpretation of the meaning): “Then, there has succeeded them a posterity who have given up As-Salaat (the prayers) [i.e. made their Salaat (prayers) to be lost, either by not offering them or by not offering them perfectly or by not offering them in their proper fixed times] and have followed lusts. So they will be thrown in Hell” [Maryam 19:59].

6 – Prayer is the first thing for which a person will be brought to account on the Day of Resurrection:

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: «The first deed for which a person will be brought to account on the Day of Resurrection will be his prayer. If it is good then he will have prospered and succeeded, but if it is bad then he will be doomed and have lost. If anything is lacking from his obligatory prayers, the Lord will say, ‘Look and see whether My slave did any voluntary prayers, and make up the shortfall in his obligatory prayers from that.’ Then all his deeds will be dealt with likewise» [Narrated by al-Nasaa’i, 465; al-Tirmidhi, 413. Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami’, 2573].

We ask Allaah to help us to remember Him, give thanks to Him and to worship Him properly.

Reference: al-Salaah by Dr. al-Tayyaar, p. 16; Tawdeeh al-Ahkaam by al-Bassaam, 1/371; Taareekh Mashroo’iyyat al-Salaah by al-Balooshi, p. 31.

Islam Q&A