

3.1 Preliminaries to Prayer

OBJECTIVES

WE WILL:

- Identify the five preliminary conditions necessary for *ṣalāh*: purity (*ṭahārah*), direction (*qiblah*), timing, place, and clothing.
- Contrast what a person can and cannot perform *sujūd* on.
- Demonstrate how to accurately use a prayer calendar.
- Analyze the importance of seeking permission for where a person can recite one's prayer.

Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said:
“Prayer is to religion as the head is to the body.”¹

Ṣalāh is one of the most important obligations that Allah ﷻ has ordained upon people. It is a source of spiritual nourishment, and means of gaining closeness to Him. However, before offering this very important act of worship, there are some preliminary conditions that must be met:

- **Ṭahārah:** We must be ritually clean and pure (*ṭāhir*), and in the state of *wuḍū'*, in order to pray. We have discussed these in detail in previous lessons.
- **Qiblah:** We must face the direction toward the Ka'bah in Mecca, Arabia.
- **Timing:** Prayers must be offered at the correct times.
- **Place:** Prayer must be offered in an appropriate and permissible place.
- **Clothing:** The clothing worn while offering prayer must meet certain conditions.

Let us discuss some of the above conditions in more detail.

FACING THE QIBLAH

One of the preliminary conditions for *ṣalāh* being valid is the direction in which it is offered. All Muslims must face a certain direction while praying, which is known as the **qiblah**. Physically, the *qiblah* is the Holy Ka'bah in Mecca; and wherever Muslims are, they must find the direction of the Ka'bah and face it while praying. Today, we have some very easy methods for finding the direction of the *qiblah*, such as:

- Downloading an application on our smartphones that will find the *qiblah* based on our location.
- Using a special *qiblah* compass, or any other means that gives us conviction that we are praying in the right direction.

If we are unable to use any of these tools to determine the direction of the *qiblah*, this does not mean that we should delay offering our prayers. Instead, we should pray in the direction that the *qiblah* most likely lies in. If we have absolutely no idea, then we must proceed in accordance with the ruling of our *marja'*:

- Āyatullāh Sīstānī: Pray in any one direction. It is a recommended precaution to pray in all four directions.
- Āyatullāh Khamenei: Pray in all four directions out of obligatory precaution, if time allows; but if time is limited, then a person can pray in any one direction.



TIME OF PRAYER

The times at which one must offer *ṣalāh* have been established by Allah ﷻ. Think of prayer as a checkpoint. As we go about our daily lives, we become very occupied, and at times, we may become oblivious of Allah, the Exalted. As a result, we may also become unaware of whether or not He is pleased with our actions. Since the prayers become *wājib* at certain times throughout the day, it reminds us about our purpose in life, gives us a chance to recalibrate, and helps us reflect on our actions. If we were to pray only whenever we felt like it, then there would no longer be any mandatory checkpoint to help us reflect on our actions and fix them.

It is important for us to be cognizant about the timings of the prayers, and do our best to pray exactly on time when the time first sets in (prime time). Once, Imām ‘Alī ؑ, while in the middle of a battle, paused amongst all of the fighting and looked up to the sky. Many of the companions were puzzled by this and asked what he was doing. The Imām ؑ informed them that he was checking whether the time of the prayer had set in.²

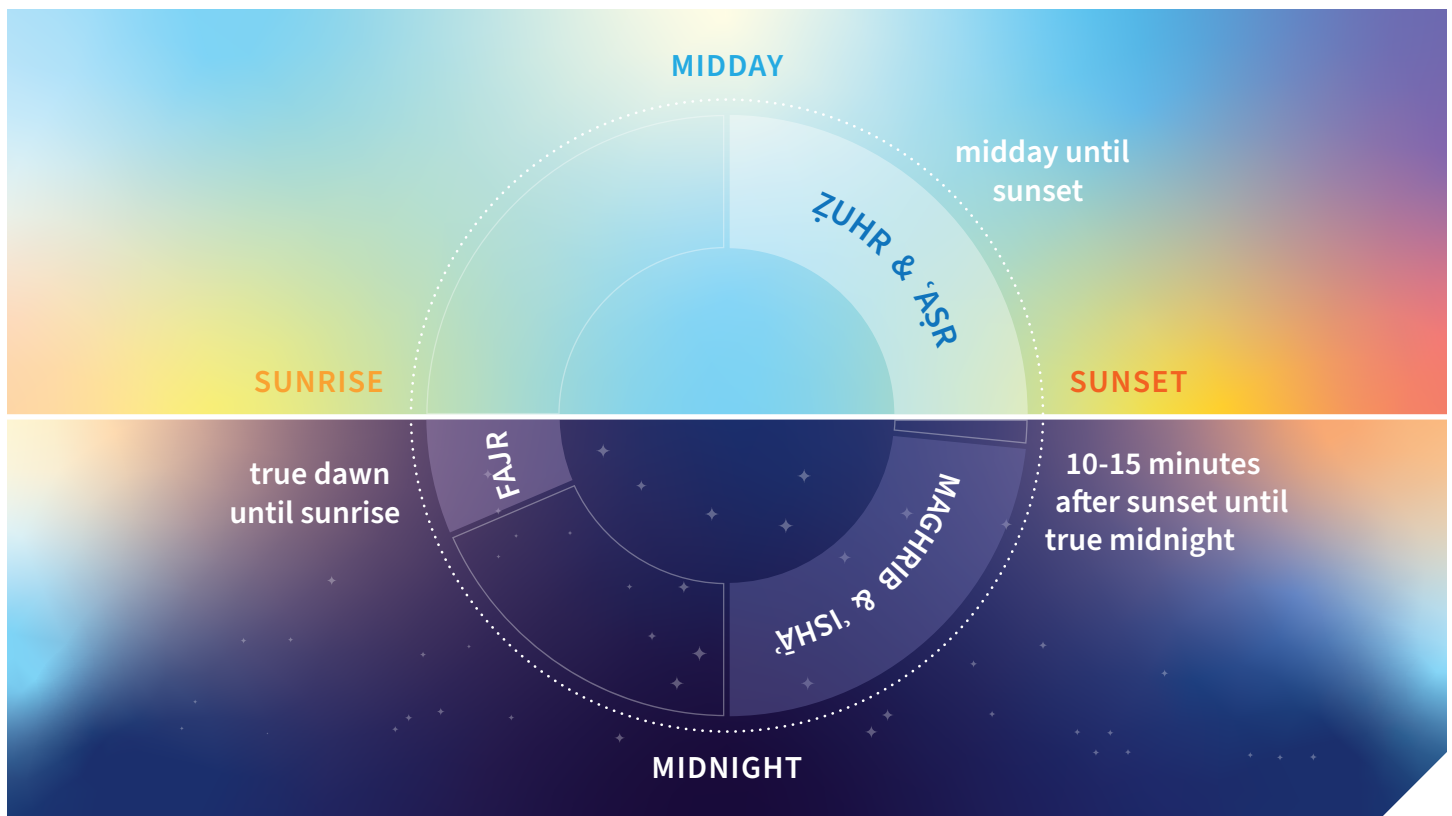
The companions of Imām Husayn ؑ did the same thing in the midst of the battle of Karbalā’. In fact, some companions of Imām Husayn ؑ were martyred on the day of ‘Āshūrā’ while protecting those who were offering their prayers at prime time.³

Through these instances, we learn the importance of praying on time, and not neglecting our prayers even in the most difficult circumstances.

Now that we know it is extremely important for us to offer our prayers on time, we must know the times for each prayer:

- *Fajr* prayer: from the start of true dawn until sunrise.
- *Zuhr* and *‘Asr* prayers: from midday—when the sun is directly overhead in the sky and then starts to decline (halfway between sunrise and sunset)—until sunset.
- *Maghrib* and *‘Ishā’* prayers: from about 10-15 minutes after sunset (when the redness in the eastern part of the sky is gone) until true midnight (halfway between sunset and dawn).

We can refer to a local prayer calendar or *ṣalāh* timing app prepared by reliable sources and endorsed by people of knowledge to find out the exact timings for each prayer. Remember that in larger cities, times can vary by a few minutes here or there when you go from one end to the other. We should make sure we are aware of all of the correct timings to ensure that we offer each prayer within its allocated time.



2 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 83, P. 23.

3 Shaykh Mufid, *Al-Irshād*, Vol. 2, P. 105.

Activity 3.1a: What Time Is It?

Below is an example of a prayer calendar for a particular city. Take a look at the calendar and then answer the following questions:

1. On August 30th, what time is *Maghrib ṣalāh*? _____
2. On August 23rd, what time will *Fajr ṣalāh* be *qaḍā'* at? _____
3. On August 25th, what time will *Zuhr ṣalāh* set in? _____
4. Approximately how many minutes after sunset does the time of *Maghrib* begin? _____
5. BONUS QUESTION: On August 28th, what is the latest time that *'Ishā' ṣalāh* should be offered?

Ramaḍān	August	Fajr (FASTING BEGINS)	Sunrise	Zuhr (NOON PRAYERS)	Sunset	Maghrib (FASTING ENDS)
1	22	5:02	6:26	11:58	17:31	17:51
2	23	5:01	6:25	11:58	17:32	17:52
3	24	5:00	6:23	11:58	17:32	17:53
4	25	4:59	6:22	11:57	17:33	17:53
5	26	4:58	6:21	11:57	17:34	17:54
6	27	4:56	6:20	11:57	17:34	17:55
7	28	4:55	6:18	11:56	17:35	17:55
8	29	4:54	6:17	11:56	17:36	17:56
9	30	4:53	6:16	11:56	17:36	17:57

Qaḍā' Prayers

Missing any one of the daily prayers **deliberately** is forbidden and a major sin. We must do our best to ensure that we pray all of our *ṣalāh* on time. If a person misses a prayer—regardless of the reason—they need to ask forgiveness from Allah ﷻ, and make up that prayer at a later time. This is called offering a *qaḍā'* prayer. For example, if it is night time, and for some reason a person missed their *ʿAṣr* prayer, they need to pray it as soon as possible to make up for that prayer they missed during its specified time. If for some reason, one does not get a chance to make up their *qaḍā'* prayer that same day, then one should have a special place where they can keep track of any *qaḍā'* prayers, and continuously work to make up those missed prayers as soon as possible.



QUR'ĀNIC CONNECTION

Tawbah تَوْبَةٌ : repenting (which we do),
relenting (which Allah does)

- Arabic Root Word: ت و ب t-w-b
- Root Meaning: to turn back
- Occurrences in the Noble Qur'ān: 87 times
- Related Words: التَّوَّابُ (at-Tawwāb):
the Oft-Returning, the Acceptor of Repentance
- Reference: Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah an-Nisā' (4), Verse 17.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER AND PROSTRATION

Allah ﷻ has made the whole earth a place for worship. We can pray in most places, and the place that we are in should not cause us to delay or miss our prayers. However, the environment in which we pray is important, and will affect the spirituality that we feel during our prayers. This is why there are certain rules that need to be followed when it comes to the place where we are reciting our prayers:

1. We must own, or have permission to use the place, where we are praying. If a person prays somewhere where they are not allowed to, then their prayer is not valid.
2. The place of prayer should not be ritually impure (*najis*) and wet. If it is both *najis* and wet, then this would make one's clothes and body *najis*, thereby making one's prayer void. However, if a certain place is *najis* but dry, then one can still pray there. Regardless, the place where one's forehead is placed in prostration (*sujūd*) must be *ṭāhir*, even if it is dry.
3. If a man and a woman are praying in the same area: then:
 - a) According to Āyatullāh Sīstānī, the woman should pray behind the man. However, if there is a barrier between them, then it is okay for them to pray side by side, or for the woman to be in front. If there is no barrier and they are more than 4.5 meters (5 yards) apart, then man does not have to be in front.
 - b) According to Āyatullāh Khamenei, the two should be more than a handspan apart, and the man does not have to be in front.

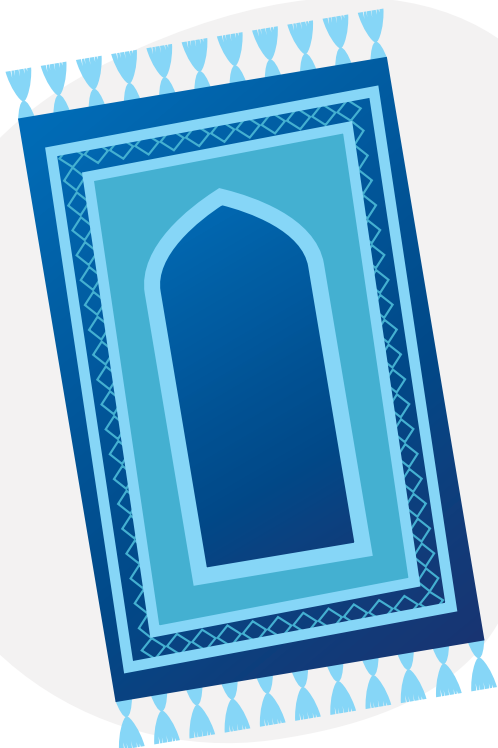
Both of these rulings are according to obligatory precaution (*iḥtiyāt wājib*).

4. The place of prayer must be steady. For example, one cannot pray on a rocking boat. However, it is permissible to pray on a plane if the necessary rules are observed.
5. The place where one performs *sujūd* should be roughly leveled with where they are standing. Therefore, we cannot pray on very steep hills or steps.



THINK-PAIR-SHARE:

What could be some reasons for Allah's ﷻ wisdom behind a person having permission to use a particular place for one's *ṣalāh*? Why can we not assume that because the earth belongs to Allah ﷻ we can pray anywhere?



The Place of Prostration (Sujūd)

The object on which we perform *sajdah* must meet certain conditions. The most important conditions to remember are:

1. It cannot be made of something that can be eaten or worn.
2. It must come from the earth (e.g., soil, dirt, leaves, paper grown from trees, etc.).



Some common objects on which we can prostrate (do *sajdah*) are:

1. Solid clay, which is normally called a *turbah*. The preferred clay is from the grave of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ.⁴
2. A piece of wood that has not been coated with a substance that will be a barrier.
3. Grass, or non-edible leaves.
4. Paper, or tissue paper can also be used, if none of the above are available.

Rewards of Praying in a Masjid

Both attending and praying in the *masjid* are extremely rewarding acts. The *masjid* is the “house of Allah,” and attending the *masjid* shows that we are respecting His house and showing our submission. The following narrations show just how much reward there is in these actions:



Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said:

“Whoever walks to a masjid with the intention of praying in congregation will get the equivalent of 70,000 good deeds for every step that one takes, and they will be raised on many levels...”⁵

Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: “O Abū Dharr, as long as you are sitting in a masjid, for every breath you take, Allah will grant you an extra level in Paradise, the angels will ask for blessings for you, ten good deeds will be recorded for you, and ten bad deeds will be erased.”⁶

4 Ḥurr ʿĀmilī, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasā'il ash-Shī'ah*, Vol. 5, P. 366.

5 Rayshahrī, Muḥammad, *Mizān al-Ḥikmah*, Ḥadīth #8302.

6 *Mizān al-Ḥikmah*, Ḥadīth #8303.

THE CLOTHING FOR PRAYER

When we are going to pray, we should make sure that we dress appropriately. The clothes we wear during prayer must:

Be ritually pure and clean (*ṭāhir*).

One's clothing should not be made from the parts of a predatory animal, or an animal that has not been slaughtered in accordance to Islamic law.



Be *mubāḥ*

This means that we must own them, or have permission to wear them.



Sufficiently cover the body

For women, this means covering the entire body except the face and hands. The feet need to be covered as well if a *non-maḥram* is present (due to the rules of *ḥijāb*). [In order to be certain that a woman has covered the obligatory areas, she must also cover a little bit extra on the sides of her face, and the area below her wrists, and some parts below her ankles—ensuring that when she bends down or goes into prostration, the obligatory parts remain covered.]

For men, this means covering the private parts; but it is better to cover as much of the body as possible.



Not be made of gold or pure silk

if you are a man (this is true at all times, not just during prayer; but if worn during the prayers, then the prayers will be void).



Activity 3.1b: Act One!

In groups of three, create a short skit on your assigned scenario. Be sure to include the problem, the solution and a little bit of humor! Present your skit to the class and vote on the best one! You can even look up more specific rulings from your *marja's* website for extra points.

SCENARIO 1	Muhammad and his family visit a restaurant for dinner. Just as the time for <i>ṣalāh</i> approaches, Muhammad takes a stroll down the hallway and finds a storage closet. He thinks to himself, <i>This place is quiet and suitable for ṣalāh</i> . Can Muhammad pray in the closet, or does he need to ask permission from the restaurant staff?
SCENARIO 2	Just as Muhammad is about to offer his prayers, he notices that there are some drops of blood on his prayer mat. He must have cut his foot and not noticed. Can he still pray on the prayer mat, or does he need to clean the blood first?
SCENARIO 3	Muhammad also notices a large amount of dried blood on his foot and pants. What should he do before starting his <i>ṣalāh</i> ?
SCENARIO 4	Ahmad and his friends go camping in the mountains and set up their tents just before nightfall. It is now time for <i>Maghrib</i> prayers, and everyone prepares themselves for prayers. The campsite is not flat, but rather very uneven and steep. Ahmad tries to recall what he learned in class regarding steep slopes and prayer, but he cannot remember. Can you help him?
SCENARIO 5	<p>Ali is part of his school soccer team and is playing an indoor game on synthetic turf. Ali usually carries his <i>turbah</i> with him, but he forgot to bring it with him this time. It is time for <i>ṣalāh</i>, and he is looking for something to pray on. Ali has the following options and needs your help choosing what to pray on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Pray on the turf, as it's just like grassB. Pray on the wooden basketball court, which is "treated" woodC. Grab a leaf from a tree nearby and prostrate on the leaf
SCENARIO 6	Zahra is staying over at her cousin Zainab's house. It is time for <i>ṣalāh</i> . She opens her cousin's wardrobe to borrow a prayer dress covering for <i>ṣalāh</i> . What should she do before wearing the scarf?

Activity 3.1c: Act One Worksheet (During the Skits)

After each group presents their skit, take two minutes to fill out the problem and solution that was presented. If you still have questions about the problem or solution, then write it down at the end of the worksheet for your teacher.

SCENARIO # 1

Problem

Solution

SCENARIO # 2

Problem

Solution

SCENARIO # 3

Problem

Solution

SCENARIO # 4

Problem

Solution

SCENARIO # 5

Problem

Solution

SCENARIO # 6

Problem

Solution

Questions I still have:
