

Salat: The Spiritual Journey of the Believer

1. Introduction: From Obstacles to Proximity

In our previous discourse, we examined the hidden obstacles that hinder *qurb-ilahi*—the pursuit of closeness to the Divine. Having identified those barriers, we now turn to the most vital vehicle for achieving that proximity: Salat. In the technical language of our tradition, Salat is not merely a set of ritualized movements or a jurisprudential obligation; it is the "pillar of religion." Just as a structure cannot stand without its central support, faith cannot be established without the foundation of prayer.

Salat is the *Mi'raj* of the believer—a spiritual ascension that allows the wayfarer to transcend the material realm and traverse the World of the Unseen. It is the definitive measure of one's spiritual standing.

The Jurisprudential Significance of Salat On the Day of Judgment, Salat is the first matter to be assessed. The acceptance of all other deeds is contingent upon it: if prayer is accepted, all else is accepted; if it is rejected, all else is rejected.

2. Pre-Journey Preparation: The Divine Appointment

To approach the Almighty, one must cultivate a mindset of profound intentionality. Consider the preparation required for a crucial job interview—an appointment for a career you have long desired. You would not attend in casual attire; you would prepare in advance, ensure you are presentable, and arrive with focused ambition.

When a believer prepares for Salat, they are attending an appointment with the Almighty. This realization must dictate both physical and mental states. The “House of God” demands a level of respect far exceeding any worldly authority. Preparation involves a deliberate transition from “business hours” to the Presence of the Divine.

The Essentials of Readiness

- **Physical Purity:** Performing Wudhu to cleanse the body and spirit.
- **Olfactory Respect:** Removing bad odors and ensuring a pleasant scent.
- **Neatness and Attire:** Dressing with the dignity befitting a meeting with the Creator.
- **Orientation (Qibla):** Positioning the body toward the House of God to focus the soul's intent.
- **The Mental Shift:** Consciously leaving behind worldly ambitions to honor the Divine appointment.

3. The Gateway: Allahu Akbar (The Greatness of God)

The journey commences with *Takbir* (*Allahu Akbar*). For the technical theologian, this is a comparative statement. By proclaiming God is Great, the believer is testifying that God is greater than anything else they possess, value, or fear.

Whether a worldly transaction involves millions or billions of dollars, the believer declares that God is greater. This *Takbir* serves as the moment the traveler "takes a break" from the world. It is the definitive signal that the door to worldly business is closed, and the door to the Divine Presence has opened.

4. Entering the Presence: The Dialogue of Recitation

During the recitation of *Surah al-Hamd*, a profound linguistic shift occurs. In Arabic literature, the first half of the Surah utilizes the "absent pronoun" (the third person), talking *about* God (*Al-Hamdu lillahi... — All praise is for Allah*). However, as the believer progresses, they move into the "status of presence."

At the verse *Iyyaka na'budu* ("You alone we worship"), the pronoun shifts to the second person. The believer is no longer describing God; they are speaking directly *to* Him. This is the heart of the dialogue—the direct address where the servant petitions for guidance.

Stage of the Journey (Al-Hamd 1-4)	The Status of Presence (Al-Hamd 5-7)
Starting with the Name: Invoking the Compassionate and Merciful as the journey begins.	The Direct Address (Iyyaka): Shifting from talking <i>about</i> Him to talking <i>to</i> Him in His presence.
Acknowledging Sovereignty: Recognizing God as the Lord of the Worlds and Master of the Day of Judgment.	The Petition for Guidance: Using the intimacy of the moment to ask for the "Straight Path."

Once the servant finishes their request, the recitation of the second Surah (such as *Surah al-Ikhlās*) represents God's response. While the first Surah is the servant talking to God, the second Surah is God's "word" given back to the believer. It is the sign of being "accepted at the door," where God provides His own self-description as an answer to the servant's call.

5. Communion with the Unseen: Ruku and Sujud

The physical postures of *Ruku* (bowing) and *Sujud* (prostration) align the believer with the rhythm of the celestial world. In the "World of the Unseen," angels are specialized in their worship—some remain perpetually in *Ruku*, while others are perpetually in *Sujud*.

The human believer, however, encompasses the entire celestial spectrum in a single prayer. By moving through these states, the human becomes a microcosmic *Mi'raj*, joining the specialized rhythms of the angelic realm and surpassing them through this totality. *Sujud* is the "paradise of the believer," representing the highest possible state of absolute spirituality and surrender. There is no higher state than this immersion in the Divine.

6. The Final Testimony and the Return: Tashahhud and Salams

Tashahhud is the bearing of witness with "voluntary consciousness." It is not a mechanical habit but a knowing, willing testimony to the Oneness of God and the Messengership of the Prophet (s).

The journey concludes with the *Salams* (Greetings of Peace). This is a theological interaction of reciprocity. The Prophet (s) practices what he preaches: if you greet him, he must return the greeting. When the believer says, "Peace be upon you, O Prophet," the Prophet (s) immediately returns the greeting. This is not a ritualized formula but a live interaction with the Prophet, the righteous servants, and the celestial assembly.

7. Conclusion: Spiritual Renewal and the "Taste" of Prayer

The journey of Salat allows the believer to shed the "dust of the dunya" (the world)—the anxiety, stress, and spiritual exhaustion that coat the soul during daily life. By entering the World of the Unseen, the wayfarer washes away this dust, returning to the physical world with a profound sense of "freshness" and renewed energy.

However, to truly benefit, one must "practice the taste" of prayer. My teacher used to emphasize that the *Salams* should be recited with the conscious expectation of a response. We must move beyond the mechanical and achieve a level of consciousness where the spiritual reality of our words is felt.

May God grant us the blessing to be truly conscious of what we say and what we do in His presence.

Allahumma salli 'ala Muhammadin wa ali Muhammad.

Source Credit: This lecture resource is based on the discourse on *Salat* by Sheikh Mansour Leghaei (<http://ehawza.com>).