

Publications

2020

Islam

Emad Hamdeh

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, HAMDEHE@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/publication>



Part of the [Islamic Studies Commons](#), and the [Islamic World and Near East History Commons](#)

Scholarly Commons Citation

Hamdeh, E. (2020). Islam. *Religion, Spirituality and Health: A Social Scientific Approach*, (). Retrieved from <https://commons.erau.edu/publication/1484>

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Islamic Ritual
Emad Hamdeh Ph.D.
Embry Riddle University

Emad Hamdeh is an Assistant Professor of Arabic Studies at Embry Riddle University. He has published several articles on Islamic law, modern Muslim reform movements, and Islamic education. Hamdeh is also a consultant on issues related to Islamic counseling, ethics, and mental health. Hamdehe@erau.edu

Introduction to Islam

Islam, the religion of 1.2 billion people around the world, provides its followers guidance on how to live according to God's teachings. The word "Islam" means submission, and in this context, refers to voluntary submission to will and teachings of God. The word Islam stems from the same root word as "peace" *salām*, by submitting to God one finds inner peace in this world and eternal peace and happiness in the next. One who submits to God is called a Muslim. What makes someone a Muslim? There are six elements of belief that make one a Muslim:

One God: The oneness of God is the most important element of Islam. Islam rejects the idea that God can have any partner, helper, wife, or son. There is only one God and He has no partner.

Angels: Angels are a creation of God who, unlike mankind, do not have free will. They continuously carry out His commands and do not disobey Him.

Scripture: Islam is not limited to the revelation that was sent to prophet Muhammad, but was also the message of previous prophets. Therefore, the Qur'ān teaches that previous religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, in their authentic and original forms were based on the Oneness of God. Islam is a continuation of the same message that previous prophets delivered. Therefore, to be a Muslim one is required to believe in and accept the scripture of previous prophets such as the Torah of Moses, the Gospel (*Injīl*) of Jesus, and the Psalms of David. However, these scriptures were lost, abandoned, or changed over time. Muhammad did not bring a new message, but conveyed the same message as previous prophets. Therefore, the Qur'ān does not erase previous scriptures, but confirms what was correct in them and clarifies what was altered. In this sense, the Qur'ān can be considered "the final testament."

Prophets: Muslims believe in all prophets such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad. Islam is a tradition that started with Adam, continued through other prophets, and is practiced today by Muslims. Muslims believe in Jesus as a prophet of God rather than God's son or part of a trinity. Although Muslims believe in the miracles Jesus performed, such as resurrecting the dead and healing the sick, they believe they were done through God and not as God.

Hereafter: Islam is a religion that emphasizes belief in the hereafter. There will come a time when life on this world will cease to exist. At such a time, God will resurrect all mankind on the day of judgment and question them about their actions in this world. Whoever believed and did

good will enter paradise and be rewarded with eternal pleasure and bliss. Those who rejected the truth after it came to them and led evil lives will suffer in hell.

God's Decree: Part of submission to God's will is to believe in and accept His decree. These are generally out of human control such as the weather, one's parents, the period one is born in, and when one dies. When something happens that is out of one's control, be it good or bad, a Muslim is required to believe in it and accept it as part of God's overall plan. In the end, God only decrees what is good. Although something may appear bad there is wisdom in God's decree and good will come out of it.

The belief in these six elements are what make one a Muslim. If one believes in the major teachings of Islam they are considered a Muslim even if they commit sins. In other words, people are not excommunicated for their actions but rather for their rejection of one of the clear pillars of Islam's teachings. In terms of practice, Islam has five pillars; (*shahāda*) the testimony that there is only one God and Muhammad is His messenger, (*ṣalāt*) ritual prayers, (*zakāt*) giving alms to the poor, (*ṣawm*) fasting during the month of Ramadan, and (*hajj*) pilgrimage to Mecca.

Lifestyle

Islam is a religion of both belief and law. Islamic law encourages Muslims to live upright and healthy lifestyles. The consumption of pork, alcohol, intoxicants, and drugs are prohibited in Islam. Most Muslims only eat halal meat. This means they can eat any meat if it was slaughtered according to the standards Islamic law. At the family level, Islam encourages marriage and prohibits adultery and fornication. Muslims can express themselves sexually only to their spouses. Any sexual relationship outside of traditional marriage between both man and woman is prohibited.

Because Islam seeks to protect the family and society from illicit sexual relationships, it requires modest dress for both men and women. Women wear hijab which is meant to cover their entire body except their face and hands. The hijab is worn in public and in the presence of any marriageable man. They uncover the hijab in the privacy of their homes, in front of their husband, father, brothers, uncles, children, or other women. The hijab symbolizes modesty and protection of women. A woman's beauty is not for public display, but is a private matter that only her husband and closest relatives can see. Because Islam emphasizes the importance of modesty, some Muslims would not stare at, be alone with, or be in physical contact with someone of the opposite gender. In Western culture, lack of eye contact or handshaking may be misunderstood as a sign of low self-esteem, but this is done out of modesty and has no relation to self-esteem or lack thereof.

Muslims have two major holidays; Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. The former is celebrated during pilgrimage season and the latter is celebrated at the end of Ramadan. These holidays take place during the Islamic lunar calendar and will therefore change slightly every year on the Gregorian calendar.

For more information on the basic beliefs of Islam see:

Brown, D. (2017). *A New Introduction to Islam*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Brown, J. A. (2011). *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Esposito, John. 2016. *Islam: The Straight Path*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ramadan, Tariq. 2009. *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rituals in Islam

Rituals in Islam are at their core spiritual experiences that are meant to develop and transform the lives of practitioners. Although some consider rituals to be dry and lack of meaning, Islamic rituals are intended to have a distinct impact on the lives of Muslims. These rituals have been successfully used by some mental health professionals to help Muslim clients cope with their challenges. Islamic spirituality is a field that is rich with discussions on how to cure the psyche and heart. Muslim scholars have used rituals and scripture to prescribe remedies for the “psyche” or what in Arabic is called the *nafs*. In this regard, one might argue that early Muslim scholars recognized and proposed solutions to psychological problems long before the modern emergence of the field of psychology. Nevertheless, these rituals are meant to reform and develop the spirit and tame the ego or the self. Islamic rituals are often analyzed from two different yet closely related perspectives; legal and spiritual. The former is beyond the scope of this chapter and I will therefore focus more on the spiritual meanings and implications of Islamic rituals.

For more information on Islam and psychology see:

Utz, Aisha. 2011. *Psychology from the Islamic Perspective*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House.

Hamdan, A. (2007). A Case Study of a Muslim Client: Incorporating Religious Beliefs and Practices. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 35(2), 92-100.

Hamdan, A. (2008). Cognitive restructuring: An Islamic Perspective. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 3(1), 99-116.

Hanin Hamjah, S., & Mat Akhir, N. S. (2014). Islamic Approach in Counseling. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 53(1), 279-289.

Group Rituals

Islam has several group rituals but none is as famous as hajj, or pilgrimage. Hajj, which literally means to set out to a place, is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is a once in a lifetime obligation for all Muslims who are financially and physically able. Hajj takes place in the city of Mecca during the 8-12th days of the last month in the Islamic calendar called Dhul Hijjah. Hajj is one of the world’s largest annual gatherings with approximately two million people. Hajj comprises of

several group rituals and rites that revolve around the actions of previous prophets, especially Abraham and his family. However, pilgrims do not perform the rituals of hajj as a reference to specific historical events, but they do so out of obedience to God.

ṬAWĀF & SA'Ī

During hajj pilgrims enter a state called *ihrām*, which consists of wearing only two white clothes. These two pieces of cloth are similar to the shroud Muslims are buried in. The purpose of wearing the *ihrām* is so that pilgrims can focus on the larger picture, their answering God's call. *Ihrām* is also intended to create a sense of equality among all pilgrims. It strips them of everything besides their core humanity. It creates a sense of equality between the black and white, rich and poor, ruler and ruled. *Ihrām* removes all symbols of class, rank, or society and all are equal. Hajj can be viewed as a celebration of the multiplicity of cultures and lifestyles. Class and race are manmade division, but during hajj, all pilgrims are equal before God performing in worship.¹

While in this state of *ihrām* pilgrims collectively perform the rituals of hajj. *Ṭawāf* which consists of walking around the Ka'ba seven times counterclockwise, is the ritual that is most associated with hajj. The Ka'ba is a brick cubed building, and although there is nothing inherently holy about bricks, it is what the Ka'ba symbolizes that is most important. The Ka'ba is the building all Muslims face when they perform their five daily prayers. The Qur'ān highlights that *righteousness is not about pointing your face east or west*.² Rather, it is the good actions, such as helping the less fortunate, that result out of rituals that are important. *Ṭawāf* reminds Muslims that just as the Ka'ba is the center of ritual, God is to be the center of their life and that our life revolves around God.

Ṭawāf is followed by running between two hills known as the *Ṣafā* and *Marwa*. This ritual is called *sa'ī* which literally means to seek or search. *Sa'ī* is a reenactment of Abraham's wife Hagar. She was left in the desert with her infant son and started running between the two hills in search of water for her infant son Ishmael. She ran between the two hills seven times before finding the well of Zamzam and quenching the thirst of her infant son. Her running between the two hills is symbolic of the life of this world, one must work hard, but in the end, there is ultimately relief. It also symbolizes human desperation and need of God. Despite being in a barren desert, Hajar's optimism reminds people that no matter how difficult life gets, there is always hope. It may appear that there is no way out of a situation, after all she was in a desert with no sight of water, but God will send relief from where you least expect it. Millions of pilgrims, both men and women, from all over the world follow in her footsteps each year. This is also an implicit message about the status and equality of women in Islam. Hajar was a slave girl from Egypt who had no status or wealth. Yet, her devotion caused God to establish an eternal ritual based on her footsteps.

UDḤIYA (SACRIFICE)

¹ Malcolm X's pilgrimage is an excellent example of how hajj can remove racism from one's mind and society. See Nikpour, G. (2014). *Revolutionary Journeys, Revolutionary Practice: The Hajj Writings of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Malcolm X. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 34 (1), 67-85.

² Qur'ān 2:177

Hajj also includes other rituals such as sacrificing an animal and sharing its meat with the poor. *Udhiya* is a ritual sacrifice of an animal that is performed at the end of hajj. This takes place on the festival of sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) which is one of two Muslim holidays. Islamic slaughter guidelines instruct that animals be slaughtered in the most humane manner in order to minimize pain and avoid making the animal frightened. The animal is to be fed, given drink, and comforted. The knife is to be sharpened and hidden from the animal to not frighten it. The meat is then shared with the poor and needy regardless of their religious background.

Udhiya is a ritual that originated when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, but God replaced sent down a sacrificial lamb in his place. The command to slaughter his son may appear harsh and lead one to question why God would do such a thing. However, Abraham had complete faith and certainty that obeying God will always result in good even if he did not understand it. The lesson from the story is that God does not will injustice or oppression, but that He does test our faith. This is like a trust activity in which one falls and must put their complete trust in their partner to save them. Such a person knows that falling is bad and they do not want to hurt themselves, but they demonstrate their total trust that the other person will rescue them from harm before they hit the ground.³ Similarly pilgrims must trust in God even when it goes against their wishes and desires, because God knows best.

The purpose of the sacrifice is to demonstrate this commitment and love to God. The Qur'ān gives this sacrifice an internalized pietistic interpretation: *Neither their flesh nor their blood reaches God, but rather the piety on your part reaches Him.*⁴ In other words, sacrifice is not about the animal or its size, but about the spiritual impact the ritual of sacrifice has on the individual.

When Abraham was about to slaughter his son, the devil appeared and tried to tempt him to disobey God. Abraham then pelted Satan with some stones. A ritual of hajj is when pilgrims throw pebbles at three walls as a reenactment of Abraham. However, the primary concern is not that of Abraham's actions, but rather the pilgrims' confrontation of the temptations of their own souls. With the throw of each pebble the pilgrim is to throw away a bad addiction or habit and submission to God's commandment.

‘ARAFAT

The most important part of hajj is when all pilgrims gather on the mountain of Arafat. Arafat falls on the 9th day of Dhul Hijja and it is the most important part of hajj. It is on this mountain that Adam and Eve reportedly met after descending from paradise. Arafat literally means “to get to know,” and it is on that mountain that Adam and Eve met. On the day of Arafat, pilgrims gather on the mountain and spend the day there until sunset. They spend their day in supplication and prayer, begging for forgiveness.

³ Hindy, I., & Khan, N. (2017). Living Abraham's Legacy: Relevance of Rites and Rituals in the Modern Age. Retrieved September 8, 2017 from <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/ed/ibrahim-hindy/living-abarahams-legacy-relevance-of-rites-and-rituals-in-the-modern-age>

⁴ Qur'ān 24:37

The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said “Hajj is Arafa,” because it is the most important ritual of hajj.⁵ The pilgrims’ standing and gathering on Arafat reminds them of the day of judgment. Witnessing millions of people of all backgrounds, all dressed in *iḥrām*, desperately longing for God’s forgiveness reminds one of the day of judgement.

Some of the pilgrims gather on a part of the mountain called the mount of mercy where the prophet Muhammad delivered his farewell sermon where he voiced far-reaching religious, economic, social and political reforms. The pilgrims spend the day on Arafat in supplication and these are emotionally charged moments. As the day comes to an end many pilgrims shed tears as they ask God for forgiveness, acceptance, and to fulfill their needs in this world and the hereafter. The day of Arafa is one of the best days of the year due to God’s overwhelming forgiveness toward the pilgrims and Muslims at large. In one tradition, the Prophet Muhammad said “There is no day on which God frees more servants from the fire than the day of ‘Arafa.”⁶ Muslims who are not performing hajj that year usually spend the day in fasting out of reverence for that day.

REFLECTIONS ON HAJJ

Hajj is a journey that resembles the equality of humans before God. It is a rehearsal of the day of judgement. People leave all their worldly things and go to a place where they are stripped of all materialism besides two white pieces of cloth. Similarly, when Muslims die they are buried in only two white pieces of cloth. Before going to hajj, a pilgrim should pay all their debts and ask others for forgiveness for all wrongs. The pilgrim is then gathered among a sea of people from all walks of life who left their families and businesses behind in their journey to Mecca. This represents the scene on the day of judgment when all stand before God as equals and no wealth, status, or power can be of avail except for one’s good actions.

For more information on Hajj see:

Uddin, A. T. (2008). The Hajj and Pluralism. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 6(4), 43-47.

Katz, M. (2004). The Ḥajj and the Study of Islamic Ritual. *Studia Islamica*, (98/99), 95-129.

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES WUDU (ABLUTION)

Ablution is a washing ritual that consists of washing certain limbs with water before certain acts of worship. It begins with an intention to purify oneself for ritual worship. It consists of washing the hands, mouth, rinsing the nose, washes the face, wipes the head and ears, and ends with washing the feet. This is a necessary form of purification that one must be in prior to performing *ṣalāt* or touching the Qur’ān. Ablution becomes nullified by the release of natural discharges

⁵ *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, 1949.

⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1348.

(urine, gas etc.) or sleep. At the external level, wudu ensures that one is pure from any physical impurities.

The ultimate purpose of wudu is internal and not external. In a famous tradition the Prophet said “When someone stands to perform wudu and washes his hands, the sins flow out of his hands; when he washes out his mouth, the sins flow out of his mouth; when he blows water out of his nose, the sins flow out of his nose, and so on until he washes his feet.”⁷ It reminds one of the importance of spiritual purity before God. The washing of the exterior limbs is not an end rather, it is a means of directing attention to one’s interior purity. This meaning should be pondered while performing the ritual of wudu. For instance, while rinsing out one’s mouth one should repent of the bad things one has said, and so on for the rest of the limbs.⁸

The ritual of wudu is performed numerous times a day by practicing Muslims. The connection between wudu and the removal of sins is not only a figure of speech, but a matter of fact that reminds Muslims of God’s love. This link between repentance and purity is found in the following Qur’ānic verse: *God loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.*⁹

REFLECTIONS ON WUDU

In the Qur’ān water often represents the rejuvenation of life, cleanliness, and purity. Muslim scholars recommend wudu be performed at times of anger. Wudu is intended to bring calm, remove anger, and bring one back to their senses. It washes away any impact Satan may have on the heart. Although wudu has many spiritual benefits, it also encourages cleanliness and the individual and community level.

ŞALĀT

Şalāt is the second pillar of Islam and can be performed individually or as a group. This ritual is both public and private and is the most visible aspect of everyday Muslim religious life. Even when performed in congregation, it is an act that is meant to be a one on one communication with God. *Şalāt* which is performed five times throughout the day is sometimes translated as prayer, but this often leads to confusion. Prayer, as in supplication, is an act that can be done at any time and is called *dū‘ā*, whereas *şalāt* is a ritual prayer performed at particular times of the day. In this chapter, I use terms prayer and *şalāt* interchangeably.

One of the origins of the word *şalāt* is *şila* which means connection or contact because *şalāt* is intended to put one in direct contact with God. The term *şalāt* appears over 80 times in the Qur’ān which demonstrates its importance in Islam. However, the Qur’ān does not provide the

⁷ *Şahīḥ Muslim*, 1967.

⁸ Katz, M. H. (2005). The Study of Islamic Ritual and the Meaning of Wuḍū’. *Der Islam*, 82 (1), 125.

⁹ Qur’ān 2:222.

details of how it is to be performed, rather the details are found in actions and teachings of the Prophet (the Sunna).

Islamic tradition provides an elaborate manual of how prayer is to be performed. Although each of the five daily prayers consists of a fixed sequence of movements (standing, prostrating, kneeling, sitting), each accompanied by a fixed Arabic recitation, each prayer has a different number of prayer cycles (*rak'āt*). For example, the morning prayer consists of two cycles, the noon and afternoon prayers have four cycles, the prayer after sunset has three cycles, and the night prayer has four cycles. There are some nuances in the performance, yet the *ṣalāt* has remarkable stability from time to time and from one locality to another, across different juridical schools of thought.¹⁰

Ṣalāt provides the framework of each Muslim's day, it starts with a pre-dawn prayer, afternoon, late afternoon, after sunset, and night prayer. The prayers take about 5-10 minutes each and although Muslims are encouraged to perform them in congregation in a mosque, they can be performed anywhere. *Ṣalāt* times are not fixed on an exact time, but one has a window of time to perform the prayer. For example, the window for afternoon prayer might start at noon and end at 4 p.m. This provides Muslims a four-hour window to perform the prayer.

Ṣalāt consists of standing, reciting the Qur'ān, reciting praises of God, bowing, and prostrating. It has several external obligations that are detailed in Islamic law and most Muslims learn these at a young age. Beyond these external obligations *ṣalāt* is a form of meditation, at the essence of which is connecting to God. Although some may argue that repetition renders the formulas of rituals meaningless, others have demonstrated that there is a proliferation of meanings emerging because of the undermining of the formality of the text by repetition.¹¹ While some religious traditions call to prayer using a bell, smoke, or blowing in a horn, Muslims call to prayer with chanted words. The call to prayer (*adhān*) begins with the repeated statement of *Allahu Akbar* which means "God is greater". This means that God is greater than whatever one might be doing at the time of prayer. The prayer interrupts one's day, because one might be immersed in work or school, but *ṣalāt* serves to temporarily break one's connection to this world and reconnect them with the hereafter. The call to prayer also states *Come to ṣalāt, come to success* because it is through the prayer that one finds the true meaning of success.

Ṣalāt plays an important role in the process of reforming and shaping the self. By submitting to the discipline of *ṣalāt*, Muslims seek to generate and maintain their submission to the guidance offered by God. *Ṣalāt* offers a normative framework for proper personal conduct and shields one from sins. The Qur'ān emphasizes the impact prayer should have on those who perform it: *Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and perform the ṣalāt. Verily, the ṣalāt prevents from immoral sins and evil deeds.*¹² The point is not that *ṣalāt* itself makes one a better Muslim than others, but that it instills a sequence of practice into all moments of everyday life prompting

¹⁰ Sirry, M., & Omar, A. R. (2014). Muslim Prayer and Public Spheres: An Interpretation of the Qur'ānic Verse 29:45. *Interpretation*, 68 (1), 42.

¹¹ Haeri, N. (2013). The Private Performance of *Salat* Prayers: Repetition, Time, and Meaning. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86 (1), 5-34.

¹² Qur'ān 29:45

practitioners to assert and enact belief as the unequivocal commitment to God five times a day.¹³ Prayer occupies one so thoroughly that it is intended to discourage and prevent them from engaging in sin.

Ṣalāt is not only a place to release cathartic emotion, but a place where Muslims purposefully mold their intentions, emotions, and desires in accord with standards of Islamic piety. It is a very organized and structured ritual that provides space for the analysis, assessment, and refinement of the self in order to incorporate piety into one's life. It is not a space that is detached from routine living.¹⁴ Saba Mahmood's ethnographic study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt is one of the most influential works addressing Islam's role in constituting selves and moral subjectivities. She demonstrates how *ṣalāt* has served both as "a means to pious conduct and an end. Ritual prayer is an end in that Muslims believe God requires them to pray, and a means insofar as it is born out of, and transforms, daily action, which in turn creates or reinforces the desire for worship."¹⁵

Ṣalāt is intended to bring one relief and comfort. The prophet Muhammad explained that "my comfort has been made in the *ṣalāt*,"¹⁶ and he often told Bilal, a freed Abyssinian slave who was designated to call the prayers, "O Bilal, call for *ṣalāt* and bring us comfort by it."¹⁷ The famous Muslim scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1350 C.E) wrote a book called *The Secrets of Prayer (Asrār al-Ṣalāt)*, in which he describes the inner meanings of *ṣalāt*. He explains that when Muslims are not in prayer, they are likely to be distracted with their worldly affairs. This disconnection causes stress and a longing for peace. *Ṣalāt* brings one comfort just as one who was tired and finds comfort when he returns home because he broke away from the fatigue he endured outside.¹⁸

REFLECTIONS ON ṢALĀT

Ṣalāt is a practice that is intended to be an integral part of one's life. It is a ritual prayer that is not performed only once a week, but five times each day. The consistency of prayer in the daily life of a Muslim is intended to keep them connected to God. It is a refuge from the hardships and difficulties of life and provides constant opportunity for silence, calm, meditation, and reflection. If done with focus, it has a tremendous impact on the soul and in relieving stress. A major theme

¹³ Henkel, H. (2005). Between Belief and Unbelief Lies the Performance of Salāt: Meaning and Efficacy of a Muslim Ritual. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11(3), 489.

¹⁴ Mahmood, S. (2001). Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Ṣalāt. *American Ethnologist*, 28 (4), 828.

¹⁵ Ibid 834.

¹⁶ *Sunan Nasā'ī*, 3939

¹⁷ *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, 4985

¹⁸ For an excellent translation of Ibn Qayyim's book see Al-Jawziyyah, I. (2013). *Inner Dimensions of the Prayer: Comparison of Differing Experience Between Performing Ṣalāt and Listening (to Music)* (A. Ibn Khālid, Trans.). Birmingham: Dar as-Sunnah, 72.

of *ṣalāt* and the call to *ṣalāt* is the that of *Allahu Akbar*. This reminds the one who is praying that God is greater than themselves, their problems, worries, and stress. One finds relief in losing their problems in the presence of God.

It is highly encouraged that Muslims perform *ṣalāt* in congregation because of the spiritual benefits of being part of a believing community. It is for that reason that the Qur'ān almost always connects prayers with charity. When prayer is performed in congregation, there is an implicit understanding that the congregants will get to know each other and help those who are less fortunate.

For more information on *ṣalāt* see:

Doufesh, H., Ibrahim, F., & Safari, M. (2016). Effects of Muslims Praying (salat) on EEG Gamma Activity. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 24, 6-10.

Al-Jawziyyah, I. (2013). *Inner Dimensions of the Prayer: Comparison of Differing Experience Between Performing Ṣalāt and Listening (to Music)* (A. Ibn Khālid, Trans.). Birmingham: Dar as-Sunnah.

Katz, Marion. 2013. *Prayer in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

QUR'ĀNIC RECITATION

Muslims believe the Qur'ān to be God's words revealed to the prophet Muhammad. The Qur'ān's divine origin accounts for the reverence Muslims have for the holy book. When recited, the Qur'ān is a powerful and compelling communication of God's words. The word "Qur'ān" means recitation or "the most recited." Muslims believe the Qur'ān was not delivered in written form, but recited by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad, who then recited it to the Muslim community. The Qur'ān is rhythmic, but not poetry. It has prose, but it is not a dry text. It is a mix of rhythm and prose that captures the attention of the listener. Its rhythmic and demanding features makes it easy to memorize and millions of Muslims have the entire Qur'ān memorized by heart.

Qur'ān is not read, but rather melodiously recited to appeal to the emotion of the reciter and listeners. When the Qur'ān is recited it often moves its Arab and non-Arab listeners to tears. It has a tremendous impact on Muslims because they believe it to be *the* words of God. This notion creates a direct connection with the words being recited and stirs the emotions of the listener.

For Muslims, the Qur'ān has always been a means to help reduce stress and anxiety. The Qur'ān describes itself as a remedy for emotional and spiritual stress. *O mankind! There has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers.*¹⁹ There are a number of studies that have argued that the Qur'ān reduces stress and

¹⁹ Qur'ān 10:57.

anxiety.²⁰ Qur'ānic recitation is a means for Muslims to find spiritual and emotional rest and tranquility. *Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God, verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest.*²¹

REFLECTIONS ON QUR'ĀNIC RECITATION

From the moment the Qur'ān was revealed to Muhammad, Muslims have memorized its words, studied them, and passed them down to later generations. There is a combination of majesty, intimacy, and solace that Muslims find in Qur'ānic recitation. When the Qur'ān is recited, either in *ṣalāt* or on its own, it is closely listened to with full attention of the heart and mind. The Qur'ān describes the impact it should have on its listeners: *Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rending asunder by the awe of God. Such are the parables which We put forward to mankind that they may reflect.*²² This verse implies that if the Qur'ān can have such an impact on a mountain, it could change one's heart no matter how hard it may have become.

Additionally, Muslims have gone at great lengths to preserve the Qur'ān in its original Arabic.²³ This preservation provides Muslims with great certainty that the Qur'ān has not been altered and is the word of God Himself. This belief provides certainty and comfort in being directly connected to God through His word without any intermediary or alteration. Listening to the word of God directly causes a state of awe and reverence and satiates the longing one has to connect directly to God. In this sense, the Qur'ānic recitation is an important element and tool to help reduce stress and bring a sense a peace to the heart.

For introductory books on the Qur'ān see:

Ernst, C. W. (2013). *How to Read the Qur'ān: A New Guide, with Select Translations*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Mattson, I. (2013). *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Sells, M. A. (2007). *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations*. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press.

²⁰ Babamohamadi, H., Sotodehasl, N., Koenig, H. G., Jahani, C., & Ghorbani, R. (2015). The Effect of Holy Qur'an Recitation on Anxiety in Hemodialysis Patients: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 54(5), 1921-1930. Mahjoob, Monireh, Jalil Nejati, Alireaza Hosseini, and Noor Mohammad Bakhshani. "The Effect of Holy Quran Voice on Mental Health." *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 1 (2016;2014;): 38-42.

²¹ Qur'ān 13:28

²² Qur'ān 59:21

²³ For an excellent study on the preservation the Qur'ān see Azami, M. M. (2011). *The History of the Quranic text: From Revelation to Compilation. A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*. Leicester: UK Islamic Academy.

CONCLUSION

Islam considers itself a religion that is based on internal and external experiences. One must perform external actions and rituals to achieve internal spiritual results. Rituals are part of human nature, whether they be related to celebration, sports, marriages, birthdays, or funerals. Islamic rituals serve as a vehicle for expression and awaken emotional and spiritual states among those who practice them. For example, prostration is a bodily expression and verbalization of submission, gratitude, and glorification of God. Islamic rituals are expressions of submission, sacrifice, and love toward God. These external rituals are symbols for the internal emotion and spiritual state. The Qur'ān highlights this point *Whoever honors the symbols of Allah—indeed, it is from the piety of hearts.*²⁴

Although some may argue that the repetitive nature of some rituals diminishes their meaning, in Islam they are constant expressions of love that strengthen one's connection to God. Islamic acts of ritual worship are called *'ibādāt*, which mean acts of submission. The term *'ibādāt* stems from the root word *'abd* which means a slave. These rituals are intended to be done as acts of slavery, not slavery in the sense of a cruel master and an oppressed slave. Rather, they are as the great Muslim scholar Ibn Qayyim explained "Ritualized devotion (*'Ibāda*) is the highest station of love. It is a popular saying that: 'Love has enslaved him (*'abdahu*) as though he is property' and this is the true love of the Divine."²⁵

²⁴ Qur'ān 22:32

²⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, M. (1982). *Madārij Al-Sālikīn Bayna Manāzil Iyāka Na'budu wa Iyāka Nasta'im*, Beirut: Dār Ihyā Al-Turāth Al-'Arabī, 3:28.