

## Salah



### Salah explained from the point of view of a Sunni Muslim.

When I first started praying, I suppose I must have been about 3 or 4. My parents and older sister would pray and I would just want to be involved. I can remember way back then I would stand and put my headscarf on and stand in the rows with my mum and sister or sometimes next to my dad and clasp my hands over my chest; the same as everyone else. While my dad was reciting the first chapters in the standing bit, I would get a bit bored and run off until 'the good bit' came. This was the *ru'ku* the bit where you bend down. My favourite bit was the *sajda* the bit where you put your head on the floor and then come up. I remember also liking the bit where you point with your finger and everyone whispers the *shahadah*.

Funnily enough, as I have got older, my favourite bits of the prayer have remained. I love the *sajda* most. When you put your head on the floor you are declaring yourself as lowly, you are accepting your own smallness and accepting the greatness of Allah. When you are in *sajda* you whisper 'Glory to my Lord the Highest'. This is a real practical demonstration of the first part of the *shahadah*. There is no god but God. Everything in yourself that you hold in this world to be of worth you understand as lowly and you admit to the greatness of Allah. We put too much pressure on ourselves in life and there are so many expectations upon us. When we put our heads to the floor in *sajda* we know that Allah takes that burden of worry away from us. He is in charge and He will look after us.

It is very important when you are praying that you are praying towards Mecca, to the *Qibla*, which in England is South East in direction but in Australia, for example, would be North West. The reason for this is that it was part of the building of the Muslim community. Muslims had always prayed towards Jerusalem, but a revelation came from Allah that the new direction for the Muslim community would be the *Ka'aba*. So, for Muslims there is a sense of togetherness and community in the prayer. We all face the same direction and same time and with the same intention. There is great power and great blessing in unity. As well as this it is important that there is no 'figure' in front of you when you pray. No pictures of people or animals at all. This is because the human psyche tends to love things with eyes and it is difficult to remove the love of the thing in front of you and divorce it from the worship of Allah. Worship is for Allah alone and there must be no confusion and no doubt. The first part of the *shahadah* again; there is no god but Allah.

Towards the end of the prayer there is a sitting and at this point there are blessings sent upon the Prophet and the family of the Prophet Muhammad. This is relevant to the second part of the *shahadah*; 'and Muhammad is His messenger'. This helps us develop the essential relationship with the Prophet and devote time for loving him which in turn sends blessings upon us.

At the end of the prayer we say *salam* to the angels, who are in congregation with you when you pray and respond to every line you speak.

We pray 5 times a day. It seems a lot to someone not used to it, but it really isn't. The prayer times are set at the times you need them most; when you are most likely to need some help returning to Allah. It is not to say that every single prayer we run to it always totally pious and always totally concentrated; sometimes you can't really be bothered to be honest, but you do it anyway. The first step to faith is submission; just do it because you have been told to. The next step is doing it with love and devotion and if you can do that several times a day it is amazingly cleansing and uplifting. Funnily enough, I often find that I may not have been particularly in the mood for prayer and then I find myself totally immersed in it and unwilling to get up from the *sajda* because of the closeness that you experience with Allah when you are in total physical submission to Him.

Women do not pray when they are on their period and this time can be difficult because you are used to the routine and the devotions and after your period it is really nice to have the ceremonial ablution (*ghusl*) and begin praying again.

The Prophet Muhammad said 'If a person were to bathe in a river 5 times a day do you think they would be dirty?' This is as it is with salah, it keeps you clean, it stops you from committing sins between your prayers and keeps you focused on your journey to Allah.

**Task: Read the account of salah**

**All:** Make a list of what Muslims do in salah

**Most:** Make a list of why Muslims pray

**Some:** Reflect upon why women do not pray when they are on their period