

PRAYER TIMES

أوقات الصلاة

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Have an overview of the importance of praying the five prayers on time
- Understand the importance and benefits of praying at the prescribed time
- Know the signs of the time at which the different prayers are to be said
- Know the reasons behind the option of combining the prayers or praying them separately

JURISPRUDENCE

LEVEL 4

LESSON 1: PRAYER TIMES

In previous years we learnt about the five daily prayers, the importance of praying on time and also how to make up for missed prayers (qada'). In this unit, you will learn about the signs of the time at which the different prayers should be performed and the option of combining or separating the prayers.

IMPORTANCE OF PRAYING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TIME OF PRAYERS (FADĪLAH)

There is quite a long time period in which each prayer can be prayed. However, it is always best to pray each prayer at the beginning of its prescribed time. This time is known as 'fadīlah' or 'prime time'. This creates the spirit of punctuality and discipline in us, and also reflects our dedication and commitment to communicate with Allah (SWT).

Offering our prayer on time is a highly recommended act, take the following hadith qudsi for an example:

“And when he (the worshipper) knows that it is time of Prayer but does not pray, he is indeed careless about Me”ⁱⁱ



Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) has also said:

“Whoever performed the obligatory prayers at the beginning of their times and observed their restrictions, the angels would raise them white and pure into heaven. The prayer would say (to the performer): ‘May Allah (SWT) preserve you as you preserved me and entrust you to a generous angel as you looked after me’. But whoever performed them after the appointed times with no excuse, and did not observe their restrictions, the angels would raise them, black and dark. The prayer would shout at the performer: ‘you have lost me, may Allah (SWT) lose you, and may He not care for you as you did not care for me’.”

PRAYER TIMINGS ACCORDING TO THE QUR'ĀN

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا

“Undertake the prayer at the time of the declining sun to the darkness of the night and the morning recitation; for indeed the morning recitation is witnessed” (17: 78)

It is clear from the above āyah that the *times* of the obligatory prayers are three:

1. The time of the two obligatory prayers, Ḍuhr (noon) and ‘Aṣr (afternoon), which is shared between the two.
2. The time of the two obligatory prayers Maghrib (dusk) and ‘Ishā’ (night) which is also shared between the two.
3. The time for the Fajr (morning) prayer which is specific to it.



THE OPTION OF COMBINING THE PRAYERS

Most of the Sunni schools of law allow the combining of the obligatory prayers only in the case of rain, travel, fear, or other emergencies.

The followers of the Ahlul Bayt (as) usually combine the five prayers into three times, by praying Ḍuhr and ‘Aṣr consecutively after another at around noon, and praying Maghrib and ‘Ishā’ consecutively after one another at Maghrib time. Despite the objections of the Sunnis, this practice is in complete agreement with the Qur'ān as well as authentic traditions from the Prophet (saw).

The above āyah from the Qur'ān clearly endorses our practice by showing that there are three, not five, prayer times. In addition, there are also authentic hadith which testify that the Holy Prophet (saw) used to combine his noon and afternoon prayers and the evening and night prayers, without reasons like fear, travel or rain.

However, we should remember that according to the narrations of the Ahlul Bayt (as), it is more recommended to separate our prayers into five, unless this means that we would miss out on praying in congregation or praying at a mosque or Islamic centre.

Review Questions

Q1. According to the Qur'ān, there are:

- a) Three prayer times
- b) Five prayer times
- c) Three prayer times only when it is raining

Q2. The best time to pray is the beginning time for each prayer about half an hour after the adhān. This is called the:

- a) Mustaḥab time
- b) The Faḍīlah time
- c) The wajib time

Q3. According to the narrations we read in this lesson:

- a) A prayer is best accepted when it is prayed on time
- b) A prayer is accepted the same no matter when it is prayed
- c) Neither of the above

LESSON 2: THE SIGNS OF THE PRAYER TIMES

TIMES

Now that we know it is extremely important for us to offer our prayers on time, we must know the times for each prayer. We learned in previous years how to find out the prayer times using a prayer calendar. However, at times we have no access to a calendar and so we should know the different ways to know the times of prayer including the natural signs for the prayer times.

TIMES OF THE PRAYERS

FAJR PRAYER

Just before dawn a vertical column of whiteness rises upwards from the east. This is called the false dawn. This is not the time for Fajr. When this whiteness spreads and become a horizontal line, it is called the true dawn (al-fajrul *ṣādiq*). This is the beginning of the time for the Fajr prayers. This time continues until sunrise (usually 1.5 hour later). The prime time for Fajr prayers is from true dawn until just before the sky becomes bright (about 20 minutes before sunrise).



ḌUHR PRAYER

The time for Ḍuhr prayers begins when the sun starts declining at midday (directly overhead) and continues until sunset. The best way to know the time for Ḍuhr prayer is to use a stick in the ground.

If a stick, a pole, or anything similar to it, which acts as an indicator is made to stand on level ground, its shadow will fall westwards when the sun rises in the morning, and as the sun continues to rise the shadow cast by the indicator will reduce in size, becoming smallest at Ḍuhr time. And as Ḍuhr passes the shadow cast by the indicator turns

eastwards, and as the sun moves towards west the shadow gets longer. Based on this, when the shadow is the shortest, and it begins getting longer again, this indicates the time for Ḍuhr has begun. The best time for Ḍuhr prayer is usually within an hour after the adhān.

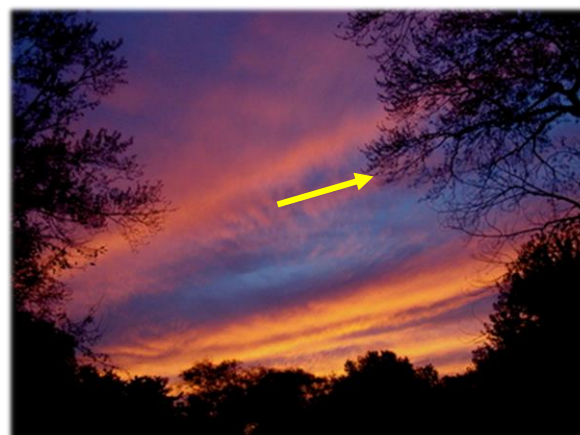


‘AṢR PRAYER

The time for ‘Aṣr prayers is the same that for Ḍuhr prayer. The only condition is that Ḍuhr prayer should be prayed first. The prime time for ‘Aṣr prayer is usually within 2 or 3 hours after midday.

MAGHRIB PRAYER

The obligatory precaution is that the time for Maghrib prayer is when the sun has set and the redness that appears after this disappears from the eastern half of the sky. In other words, sunset is not the time for Maghrib prayers. Rather, we must wait for more than half the sky to go dark. The prime time for Maghrib prayers is from this time until that the entire sky is dark. This is usually one and a half hours after sunset.



Note that the sun sets in a westerly direction

'ISHĀ' PRAYER

The time for 'Ishā' prayers is the same as that of Maghrib. The only condition is that Maghrib prayer should be prayed first. The time continues until Islamic midnight. This is calculated as the halfway point between sunset and true dawn. The prime time for 'Ishā' prayers is from when the redness has gone from the whole sky until one third of the night is gone.

It is important to note that for girls or women in the state of *ḥayḍ*, the time for Maghrib and 'Ishā' extends till Fajr.

Another important point to remember is that if a person sleeps, forgets or has another valid excuse for not praying Maghrib and 'Ishā' prayer before midnight, the time for these prayers extends t

Review Questions

Q1. The time for Fajr prayer is:

- When the first vertical ray of light appears in the horizon
- When the first horizontal ray of light appears in the horizon
- Just before sunrise

Q2. The time for Ḍuhr prayer is:

- When the sun is directly overhead, in other words midday
- An hour after midday
- An hour before midday

Q3. The time for Maghrib prayer is:

- Sunset, when the disk of the sun can no longer be seen
- A little after sunset when the redness disappears from the eastern half of the sky
- When the redness disappears from the sky completely

ⁱ REFERENCES

Jameel Kermalli, Concentration in Prayer, page 7
Ayatollah Sistani, *Islamic Laws* <http://www.sistani.org/> chapter 86, 88, 89
<http://www.madressa.net>
<http://www.al-islam.org/nutshell/#LawsandPractices> – why do the Shia combine prayers?

Wasa'il al-shi'ah, vol. 3, page 90

Hadith al Qudsi

Holy Qur'an

ⁱⁱ (*Hadith al Qudsi*)