Muslim Prayers and Rituals

Teacher Background

Muslim Prayer

Salat is the name for the obligatory prayers that are performed five times a day, and are a direct link between the worshipper and God. In Islam, a learned person who knows the Qur'an is chosen by the congregation to lead the prayers. These five prayers contain verses from the Qur'an, and must be said in Arabic, the language of the Revelation, but personal supplication can be offered in one's own language.

Prayers are said at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall, and thus determine the rhythm of the entire day. Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque for Friday prayer, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories and universities. Visitors to the Muslim world are often struck by the centrality of prayers in daily life.

In addition to the five daily prayers, Muslims say personal prayers or supplications throughout the day. These personal prayers are known as du'a, which means 'calling upon God.'

First and last, Islam emphasises each person's duty to submit to the will of Allah. The few rituals absolutely required of believers focus on that goal. The Five Pillars of Islam are the essential religious duties of a Muslim ("one who submits to Allah"). The 1st Pillar repeats the universal creed of Islam and the bedrock of its faith: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet." The 2nd is prayer: all Muslims must pray five times each day, facing toward Mecca; if possible, Muslims should meet together for community prayer on Fridays. Regular and generous almsgiving to help believers who are poor is the 3rd Pillar. The 4th Pillar is fasting during the month of Ramadan and on religious pilgrimages. (In the Ramadan fast, Muslims cannot eat or drink from dawn til dusk, but at night they may have whatever they desire.) The 5th and final Pillar is a Muslim's obligation to make the pilgrimage to Mecca once during his or her lifetime - unless the pilgrimage would be a serious hardship.