

Salat — Contact Prayer

The Contact Prayer, or *Salat*, is known as the second pillar of Islam. It is a beautiful gift to us from God. It is the best means in my experience of keeping God foremost in your thoughts and your life.

Ever since I can remember prayer has been special for me. Probably my first truly spiritual experience was when I was praying at about the age of eight.

I grew up next to a wash. It was called a river, but only had water in it after a heavy summer storm or when the snows on the nearby mountains were melting. Most of the time it was like a huge sand box for the neighborhood children to play in. When I was out of school I practically lived in this wash. It was my special refuge when I was upset.

The day I am remembering was one of those upset times. I do not remember what had happened, but I do remember sitting in the warm sand sobbing my heart out, praying to God, and wishing that I could be like the little lizard a few feet away who was the only other breathing creature in sight. Suddenly a deep peace descended upon me and I felt God's healing presence engulf me.

I recognized that feeling immediately when I began to do the Contact Prayers. It was as if my soul were being watered again after a long drought.

But the traditional understanding of a woman's ability to perform this most important practice was a major "bull of inequity" for me.

The Contact prayer is an obligatory practice, which every Muslim should perform within five specific periods of the day. Even in times of war, when attack could be imminent, Muslims are commanded to pray (Quran 4:103-4). God provides for situations when the prayer cannot be done in its normal manner, then it can be done while walking or riding (Quran 2:239). He

makes the religion easy for us, and wishes for us convenience, not difficulty (Quran 5:6).

But I was told I could not perform the Contact Prayer when I was menstruating, because I was not clean. Unhappily I accepted this indignity, not knowing what else to do. However, this edict kept a friend of mine from becoming Muslim. She simply would not accept that she could not pray during the time of the month when she needed it the most.

Like the situation discussed in Chapter 12, the problem here seems to lie with a misinterpretation of the Quranic verse forbidding intimate relations between spouses during the wife's menstrual period.

In vain I looked for verses in the Quran that told me not to pray. Instead I found verse after verse telling me just the opposite, and making it very clear that I must pray regularly. Here is one such verse.

*...Establish
Regular Prayer: for Prayer
Restrains from shameful
And unjust deeds;
And remembrance of God
Is the greatest (thing in life)....
(The Holy Quran XXIX:45 [29:45])*

Here I am commanded to establish regular prayer. And I'm told that the prayer restrains me from doing wrong. Am I not as much in need of this restraint when I am menstruating? And more importantly, how regular would my prayer be if I did not pray for one week out of four?

The believers are described as praying regularly:

*And they observe
their Contact Prayers (Salat) regularly.
(Quran: The Final Testament 23:9)*

Perhaps one might argue that this just applies to men. However, the following verse makes it clear that this argument is incorrect.

*The Believers, men
And women, are protectors,
One of another: they enjoin
What is just, and forbid
What is evil: they observe
Regular prayers....
(The Holy Quran IX:71 [9:71])*

Both men and women must pray regularly. This makes sense not only on an individual level, for each woman's soul, but also in the society. Since the mother almost always takes care of the children while they are very young and the most impressionable, her regular prayer is a critical modeling for future generations. It would be most confusing for young ones if sometimes she prayed and sometimes she did not.

Then I found the following series of verses. To me they make it clear I should not follow the wishes of someone telling me not to pray.

*Have you seen the one who enjoins. Others from praying?
Is it not better for him to follow the guidance?
Or advocate righteousness?...
You shall not obey him; you shall fall prostrate and draw nearer.
(Quran: The Final Testament 96:9-19)*



For those of you who are not familiar with the Contact Prayers, or *Salat* in Arabic, let me try to describe them.

They are a practice that was originally given to the prophet Abraham. I have already noted the similarity of their motions with those in the Jewish prayer and with the motions of a priest performing the mass. The Contact Prayers consist of five

prayers said within specific time frames. The first is said during the dawn before the sun rises, the second a little after noon, the third later in the afternoon, the fourth after sunset before it is dark and the fifth after it is dark. Sometimes Muslims combine prayers, but it is my understanding from the following verse that they should always be said within these specific ranges of time.

*...When ye are free
From danger, set up
Regular Prayers:
For such prayers
Are enjoined on Believers
At stated times.
(The Holy Quran IV:103 [4:103])*

Thus, the prayers should be done “*at stated times,*” and not combined.

Each prayer consists of a set number of units: the dawn has two, the noon has four, the afternoon has four, the sunset has three and the night has four.

Each unit begins in the standing position with the recitation in Arabic of the very short first chapter of the Quran (quoted below). Then you bow and repeat an Arabic phrase or one in your own language glorifying God. Then you go into prostration, and again repeat another phrase glorifying God. If this is an odd numbered unit, you will stand up again. If it is even numbered, you will repeat the *Shahada*, bearing witness that only God is God and that He has no partners. As you move from position to position you say “*Allahu Akbar*” or “God is great.”

Many have asked why the Contact Prayer must be said in Arabic. My honest answer is that I believe it is better to do it in English, or your native tongue, rather than not do it at all. However, from my own experience I believe that at least the short first chapter should eventually be done in Arabic. I have tried both. There were a number of months that I did it all in English. When I went back to my pitiful Arabic, there was a differ-

ence somehow. Perhaps it is that, especially in the case of the first chapter of the Quran, you are speaking God's words as they were revealed. It is not a translation, or an interpretation, but God's actual words.

I've also heard it said that the actual sounds of Arabic act as a combination to open the contact with God, like the combination of a safe. Whatever the reason, as I mentioned above, there was a distinct difference for me, a deepening in the prayer of sorts. I'm not sure how else to describe it. Perhaps you have felt it yourself.

Here is the English translation of that first chapter of the Quran, known variously as the Opener or the Key, or *Al-Fatehah* in Arabic.

*In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful
Praise be to God, Lord of the universe.
Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
Master of the Day of Judgment.
You alone we worship; You alone we ask for help.
Guide us in the right path;
the path of those whom You blessed;
not of those who have deserved wrath,
nor of the strayers.
(Quran: The Final Testament 1:1-7)*

Most Muslims recite other portions of the Quran besides the first chapter in some of their units. I am not comfortable doing so because to me the Contact Prayer is direct contact with my Creator. I feel like I am addressing Him directly, and most of the Quran is addressed to us, not to Him. It doesn't feel right to address God and then recite something totally disconnected, like a verse about Moses and Pharaoh. Also, recitation of any verses that address anyone other than God breaks the commandment in the following verse.

*"And the places of worship
Are for God (alone):*

*So invoke not any one
Along with God;
(The Holy Quran LXXII:18 [72:18])*

So you certainly do not want to recite any verses that address anyone other than your Creator in the Contact Prayer.

In the sitting position many Muslims pray for the families of Muhammad and Abraham. However, this practice is like adding the name of Muhammad to the *Shahada*, as mentioned in the last chapter. It makes a distinction among God's messengers, and I am not comfortable doing so. Besides, we know from the following that our prayers will not help them.

*...Every soul draws the meed
of its acts on none
But itself: no bearer
Of burdens can bear
The burden of another....
(The Holy Quran VI:164 [6:164])*

Not only will our prayer not help them, but praying for the families of Muhammad and Abraham means that you are praying for Abraham's father who threatened to kill him and Muhammad's uncle Abee Lahab who was the leader of the opposition against the early Muslims. For Muslims this is an issue because we are told not to pray at the grave of those who would not fight in God's cause (see Quran 9:83-4). Thus it only makes sense not to pray for the dead who fought *against* His cause.

Before the contact prayer is begun, you perform a symbolic ablution, washing your face, arms to the elbows, wiping your head and washing your feet to the ankles. (See Quran 5:6.) If there is no water available, or you are ill, you can perform the dry ablution as described in the following.

*O you who believe, do not observe the Contact Prayers (Salat)
while intoxicated, so that you know what you are saying.
Nor after sexual orgasm without bathing, unless you are
on the road, traveling; if you are ill or traveling,*

*or you had urinary or fecal-related excretion
(such as gas), or contacted the women (sexually)
and you cannot find water, you shall observe Tayammum
(dry ablution) by touching clean dry soil,
then wiping your faces and hands therewith....
(Quran: The Final Testament 4:43)*

Note that the first part of this verse is the only place where God gives us conditions for not praying. That is only if we are intoxicated, which we never should be if we are following the Quranic injunctions against intoxicants (see Quran 2:219 and 5:90).

Please also notice that this verse describes what things nullify the ritual purity needed for prayer. It also indicates that if you are ill you should still pray but you can do the dry ablution rather than washing.

This verse thus answers the final argument I was given for why I could not pray during my period. I was told that at this time it was like I was ill, and God was making it easy for me by allowing me to skip my prayer. This verse indicates that I should be praying even if I am ill.

To me there is nothing in the whole Quran that indicates I should not be praying during my period. On the contrary, there are many verses that indicate I must pray regularly. Also, the above verses have shown that we should pray when we are ill, if we are afraid we will be attacked during times of war, even if we must do it while walking or riding. It seems to me that there is never any reason not to do our Contact Prayers.



There is one other issue for women related to the Contact Prayers, and that has to do with the congregational prayer on Fridays, known as the *Salat Al-Jumu'ah*, or just *Jumu'ah*, or the Friday Prayer. In many parts of the Muslim world women are not welcome in the mosque and do not attend the Friday con-

gregational prayer. A large portion of my friends had never gone to the Friday Prayer, even though they were born and raised to be Muslim women.

However, the following verse tells all believers to participate in this weekly event.

*O ye who believe!
When the call is proclaimed
To prayer on Friday
(The Day of Assembly),
Hasten earnestly to the Remembrance
Of God,...
(The Holy Quran LXII:9 [62:9])*

All believers, not just men, should follow this commandment to "*Hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of God.*"

In our community the Friday Prayer is a wonderful time. It is the one time in the week that the entire community is together. The services are kept short so that those who are coming from work do not have to take much, if any, extra time for their lunch break. But those who can, stay after the prayer to visit a bit.

A different brother leads the prayer each week, giving two short talks, known as *khutbahs*. These talks are given on Quranic topics or topics of community concern with examples from the Quran. They substitute for two of the units of the noon *Salat* (Contact Prayer). Between the talks, we turn to God in silent repentance. After the second talk the brother leads two units of *Salat*.

If you are Muslim and find yourself alone or in a community where you are not welcome in the mosque for the *Jumu'ah* prayer, please consider starting one yourself. All you need is one other person to follow this important commandment of God. You can rotate giving the *khutbahs*, just reading from the Quran to each other, if nothing else. Who knows, you may find a community growing. Many of my friends have found just that.

In our community we get together again on Friday evenings for a Quran study lead by one of the sisters. (Of course anyone can lead a Quran study. We have just chosen to give the sisters a chance on Friday nights to lead the study in rotation, like the brothers who do the *khutbahs* in rotation at noon.)

Most people come for both the Friday Prayer and the Quran study. So Friday is a wonderful community day for us, and my favorite day of the week.

[*Editorial note:* For additional information on the Contact Prayers and their origin, please see *Direct Contact* by Ihsan Ramadan with Lisa Spray, BSM Press, 2002.]



The following story tells of the birth of a community. Though Patty and her husband began the Friday Prayers with just the two of them and a few others, it was not that long before I was able to attend a Friday Prayer in their home where there was barely room for us all to do the prayer!

Once You Start

About 12 years ago, my brother introduced to us the mathematical miracle of the Quran. When my husband and I examined the mathematical miracle of the Quran, it was so awesome and showed us without a doubt that the Quran must be the word of God. [*Editorial note:* Please see Chapter 18 and Appendix 3 for more information on the mathematical encoding of the Quran.] We began to read the Quran's translation to see what was really written in this book. Certainly we didn't find any of the cruel and inhumane rules that some governments were enforcing as Islamic Law in the Quran. What we found instead was guidance, light, encouragement and a religion and philosophy that promoted only peace and love. I also found

the answer to a question that I had for a long time, “If there is only one God then why are there so many religions?” I realized that all of the monotheist religions are the same and God commanded the Prophet Mohammed to follow the religion of Abraham. I also learned that God commands us not to accept any information unless we as individuals verify it. This is so crucial to our daily lives. Many crimes, punishments and killings in the name of religion could have been stopped if people would have verified the information they were hearing.

My husband and I were completely overwhelmed by what we read in the Quran. We realized for ourselves that what was being practiced in many Muslim countries and communities is not even similar to the teachings that are given in the Quran. When we first really learned about the Quran, we had the Quran with us everywhere we went. When one of us was driving, the other was reading the Quran out loud. We were so excited that we wanted to do our religious obligations as soon as possible. We started praying 5 times a day and giving our *Zakat* [obligatory charity]. We also learned from the Quran that we had to do our Friday group prayers at noon. We would try to go to the mosque in another town to do our group prayers whenever we could. However, some Fridays we could not make it and we were very sad. Fortunately we found out that as long as there are as few as two people, one giving the *Khotbeh* [*khutbah*], and one listening, the Friday Prayer can be observed.

Locally, my husband and I started doing the Friday Prayers with two friends and a co-worker instead of driving all the way to the other town. Soon, our group grew and we had the Friday Prayers in our house. Even at night we would have Quranic studies, where anyone interested in learning about the Quran could gather, read, and discuss verses from the Quran with others. Today, I always look forward to Fridays so I can learn more and more about God’s commandments and how to apply them to my daily life.

– *Patty, Iran*