

# The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

## HOW CAN WE LEARN PRAYER IF WE DON'T HAVE HADITH TO TEACH US?

*Joseph A Islam*

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An assertion that is usually made in view of support for the requirement of [Islamic secondary sources](#), particularly Hadith, is that the Quran does **not** furnish the reader with details of prayer. Or conversely it is argued, that if one did not have Hadith, then one would not be able to learn how to pray. This is an erroneous assertion as we will discuss below. What the Quran does not provide is the exact form and content of the prayer as it is prayed today.

The absence of such detail has presented some crucial outcomes in Muslim thinking which will be briefly discussed.

Traditionalists assert that the apparent lack of detail in the form and content of prayer **confirms** the requirement of [Islamic secondary sources](#) as a legitimate source of law and interpretation.

For other Muslims not content with accepting the complete veracity of the Hadith literature, it has caused them to identify the difference between the Hadith and Sunna and to present their understanding as to how the present prayer has been protected by the Sunna. Albeit, that it is accepted that there remains a crucial difference between the Hadith and Sunna (**please see related article [4] below**), an unwarranted conclusion is then drawn which asserts that the Sunna is as authentic as the Quran.

The Quran provides no evidence that any practice of a people (or Sunnah) would remain absolutely free from corruption. A consensus of the practice of a community is not proof of its veracity. In fact, the Quranic narratives seem to suggest based on its narrated history, that practices have often become corrupted.

The only protection from corruption expressed by the Quran is with regards its own remembrance and message (Dhikr - 15:9). This indeed has consensus of the Muslim community but the Quran has been protected in a totally different manner as compared to the Sunna (**please see related article**

**[6] below).** Furthermore, there is no guarantee as to how practices developed in the first decades of Islam from which we have no written literature for analysis. Many practices could have been introduced that were never sanctioned by the Quran. We can only judge the veracity of these practices, in the light of the Quran.

There are also others who whilst rejecting the validity of [Islamic secondary sources](#), have abandoned the physical prayer altogether and reinterpreted all the prayer related Quranic verses in a manner that supports their theology. This interpretation upon scrutiny, I have found to be the least convincing.

A crucial point seems to be absent in all the positions taken above. Rather than accepting Quranic silence in this matter as an indication that the purpose of prayer overrides form and that the Quran has no intention to 'ritualise' prayer in so much as to prescribe pedantic form and content, it has caused many to seek other elaborate explanations. This has further resulted in even more voluminous works to support their respective positions.

The following directives are clear from the Quran

- (1) The requirement to 'establish prayer' (Aqimus-salah)
- (2) The reason and purpose behind prayer
- (3) The various aspects of prayer

Therefore, a proper, more befitting question should be:

**Why is the prayer in the manner that various Muslims pray today with its specific form and specific content not found in the Quran?**

The Quran claims to be 'fussilat' (explained in detail). A scripture cannot be 'fussilat' and then not provide necessary details for human guidance as part of God ordained 'religion'. Therefore, any absence of detail allows flexibility to be considered in the overall light of the Quran. It will be noted later in the article, that the Quran can be very detailed when it deems it necessary.

#### **041.002-3**

"A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful Allah. A Book, where the verses are explained in detail (Arabic: Fussilat), a Quran in Arabic for people who understand"

**Fussilat (Root: Fa-Sad-Lam)** - Detailed, explained in detail, to distinguish, manifest, clear, fully detailed.

The Quran should always remain the ultimate reference point for believers.

**All the necessary aspects of prayer are indeed found in the Quran.** It is silent with regards ritualised form and uttered content. Some of the reasons why this may be the case and its possible wisdom will be discussed later in the article.

Firstly, let us note the various aspects of prayer found in the Quran.

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## VARIOUS ASPECTS OF PRAYER

(1) The directive to establish prayer (**Numerous references - 10:87; 11:114; 14:31; 14:37; 14:40; 17:78; 2:110; 2:277; 2:3; 2:43; 2:83; 20:14; 22:35; 22:41; 24:56; 27:3; 29:45; 30:31; 31:17; 31:4; 35:29; 4:77; 42:38; 5:12; 5:55; 58:13; 6:72; 7:170; 73:20; 8:3; 9:11; 9:5; 9:71; 98:5**)

(2) The details of ablution (**4:43; 5:6**)

(3) A need for a direction - Qiblah, specific for the 'believers' (Mu'mins) (**2:143-44**)

(4) Garments (**7:31**). Please note that in the verse, 'masjid' is specifically mentioned. (For general clothing advice see: **7:26; 24:31; 33:59**)

(5) Allusion of times: (**4:103; 11:114; 17:78; 24:58; 30:18; 2:238; 20:58**) See article: [The Five Prayers from the Quran](#)

(6) That prayers must be observed on time (**4:103**)

(7) Followers of the previous scripture to observe their Qiblah and the 'Believers (Mu'mins) their own Qiblah (**2:145**). God is not direction dependant, His power, knowledge and authority extends everywhere. He cannot be restricted to any direction, East or West (**2:142**). This is also a confirmation that People of the Book will not follow the new Qiblah of the Believers, each directing prayer to their own respective Qiblahs.

(7) Prayer involves prostration (**Sujood - 4:102; 48:29**)

(8) There is more than one prayer (Prayer in plural used - Salawat) (**2:238**)

(9) There is a general form to prayer (**2:238-39**). Standing position (**3:39; 4:102**); Bowing down and prostrating (**4:102; 22:26; 38:24; 48:29**).

(10) Form is not required during times of emergencies, fear, and unusual circumstances (**2:239**).

(11) A mention of a call to prayer and congregation prayer (**62:9**)

(12) Prayer and Dhikr (Remembrance) are not necessarily the same thing (**62:10**) and DHIKR (constant remembrance) is better (**29:45**)

- (13) A warning not to abandon prayer as was the case with those before **(19:58-59)**
- (14) The purpose of prayer - To remember God alone **(6:162; 20:14)**
- (15) Prayer involves utterance **(4:43)**
- (16) The purpose to protect from sins **(29:45)**
- (17) What to do in danger and the shortening of prayer **(4:101)**
- (18) Even garments and mention of a 'Masjid', or a place of prayer **(7:31)**
- (19) The tone of prayer **(17:110)**
- (20) There is a leader of prayer **(4:102)**

So as can be seen above, all the necessary guiding aspects of prayer are mentioned by the Quran.

**(Please see related article [7] below)**

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## **WHY IS THE QURAN SILENT WITH REGARDS FORM AND CONTENT?**

Here are some thoughts in light of the Quran.

### **(1) PROPHET MUHAMMAD <sup>(pbuh)</sup> DID NOT ORIGINALLY ESTABLISH PRAYER. PRAYER FORM AND GENERAL CONTENT WAS KNOWN TO THE MONOTHEISTIC COMMUNITIES**

Prayer was **not originally established by Prophet Muhammad.** <sup>(pbuh)</sup> This is a specific practice (including Zakah - alms giving and charity) instigated of old by the patriarch Prophet Abraham <sup>(pbuh)</sup> (2:128) and practiced by all monotheistic communities after him.

The reader is alerted to a possible paradox created by the [Islamic secondary sources](#). Muslims are informed that prayer details such as quantity (number of times of prayer a day) were given to the Prophet in a night journey, details of story which are primarily sourced from the works of the historian, [Ibn Ishag](#). Yet, it is clear from the Quran that other monotheists such as the People of the Book were already familiar with the prayer and the time periods of prayer are clearly given by the Quran. **(Please see related article [8] below)**

It is further interesting to note the Divine dialogue below with the Children of Israel from verse 2:40 **(Arabic: Ya bani Isra'ila - O Children of Israel)** in this regard.

In 2:40-43 we read (as a directive to the Jews)

"O Children of Israel! call to mind the (special) favour which I bestowed upon you, and fulfil your covenant with Me as I fulfil My Covenant with you, and fear none but Me. And believe in what I reveal, confirming the revelation which is with you, and be not the first to reject Faith therein, nor sell My Signs for a small price; and fear Me, and Me alone. And cover not Truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth when ye know (what it is). And be steadfast in prayer; practise regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship) (Arabic: wa-ir'ka u ma'a l-raki'ina)"

The verse is clear. The Quran is asking adherence from the 'Children of Israel' (Jews) to a prior covenant made with God. This is not a directive to **new** believers. Also note the narrative 'Believe in what I reveal confirming which is with you and be not the first to reject faith'. It is clear by the statement '**bow with those that bow**' (Arabic: wa-ir'ka u ma'a l-raki'ina) that prayer was already clearly known to them. (Please see related article [9] below)

This old practice of prayer (as is the case with Zakat and charity) is a continuum of the message of Islam (**which is not a new religion**) but something **all** prophets followed in submission (as Muslims) (2:136; 3:84; 4:163) This 'Islam' always had both Prayer and Zakat as a defining tenet.

## (2) PURPOSE OVERRIDES FORM

The lack of prayer description should not be an excuse or a conduit for the acceptance of the [Ahadith corpus](#) as a source of law in conjunction with the Quran. Rather it is a clear cue to:

(1) To avoid obsession with ritualistic form. Here is a modern example as to possibly why:

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article1728698.ece>

(2) To concentrate on purpose rather than robotic delivery

It is not the focus of prayer where ones feet are placed (right foot bent at an uncomfortable angle) or whether one places their hands on their navel or chest or indeed, whether one taps the index finger near the knee cap incessantly till the end of prayer. The focus is to remember God with complete heart, mind and soul. A general form is alluded to by the Quran which includes bowing, prostrations etc, a correct way to pray as opposed to any other ritual forms such as whistling and clapping (8:35)

If prayer was defined, this would only further the obsession with rituals, possibly aid loss of focus and the underlying reason for prayer.

The directive to **establish** prayer is the overriding consideration. A reader of the Quran will note the many number of times 'Aqemus Salah' (establish prayer) is mentioned throughout the Quran. So anyone, or any proponent of any sect (albeit schisms are greatly abhorred by the Quran) if they establish prayer (regardless of specific, unimportant rituals such as where to place ones hand,

moving the finger, placement of feet etc), **they are fulfilling the overarching requirement given by the Quran.**

The number of prayers is not as important **as is the commitment behind the prayer when a prayer is enacted** (Although a number of prayers have been enjoined on believers and at particular parts of the day).

This emphasis of commitment over blind form is far too obvious to take lightly. A single prayer done with heart, mind and soul is possibly far better than a plethora of prayers without any concentration or meaning. A suitable analogy can also be made with charity. How much one gives is far less important than how and with what intention it is given. However, one must strive to do as much good as one can.

By the fact that the Quran urges Muslims to establish prayer, is not in itself proof that a particular form is being instituted. However, this also does not imply that the prayer that has reached us today in its various forms, is not in tandem with the Quran's overarching directives and guidance. This may well be the case.

**(Please see related article below: Pray As We Have Taught You How to Pray - Using Verse 2.239 As Support For a Fixed Form Of Prayer)**

### **(3) LANGUAGE OBSESSION**

To understand the irrelevance of prayer in a particular language, one question to ask would be; What language did previous messengers of God pray? Was this Arabic? Did Prophets Noah, Saleh, Moses, Jesus and Zachariya <sup>(pbwt)</sup> pray in Arabic or did they pray in their own languages? What language did the Egyptian Pharaoh's wife beseech her Lord when her pray was accepted (66:11)? It is clear that none of the aforementioned personalities ever prayed in Arabic. Rather, they prayed in their own vernacular.

How important is it to pray in a specific language such as Arabic? Is this another reason why prayer has not been defined in the Arabic Quran? **(See related article [3] below: Do We Have to Pray in Arabic?)**

It is quite possible that the focus is not on language at all, but on meaning and its purpose from the core of one's heart. After all, one may only be praying to be seen by others **(4:142-143)** as one could recite anything they wished without intent.

As rituals or form are not dictated by the Quran, the focus remains solely on intention and connection with God. Overt concentration of form and recitation in an unknown language can result in hampering concentration required to connect with God. God understands all languages and the sincerity with which one imparts them. Certainly one should learn the Arabic language and it is not the purpose of this article to advocate that Arabic should not be the lingua franca of congregations.

However, the crux of the point remains that **one** should **know** and **'feel'** what they say in their prayers.

#### **004:043 (Part)**

**“O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged (Arabic: Sukara), until ye can understand all that ye say...”**

Many use this verse and restrict its purport to intoxicating drinks. Quite apart from the word 'sukara' (root – SKR) having a much wider purport and addressing all states in which a mind can be befogged (such as anger), what is oft forgotten is the reason why 'sukara' in this context has been warned against in the first place (**i.e. because one will not know what they are saying**).

So the real essence of the verse remains that **one must know what they utter in their prayers** with complete heart and mind. Another way at understanding this narrative is that reading a prayer in a foreign tongue with no comprehension is akin to reading prayers with a mind befogged and a possible violation of verse 4:43. This inference would be troubling to many. However, the verse is clear in what message it imparts.

Prayers performed by those who are not 'Believers' (Mu'min) must also be considered. Sincere devotion to one God clearly can be performed by those followers of the previous scriptures such as the Jews and Christians. The Prophet is specifically warned not to seek redress in any form and remain content with those that seek their Lord day and night (**18:28**). Jews, Christians, Sabians all can have potential salvation with their Lord (**2:62: 5:69**).

If only one type of prayer in **one form** was acceptable to God, the following verse would arguably become inapplicable.

#### **006:052**

**“Send not away those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His face. In naught are you accountable for them, and in naught are they accountable for you, that you should turn them away, and thus be (one) of the unjust”**

This also connects well with the following verse in theme:

#### **018:028**

**“And keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His face; and let not thy eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds”**

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## THE QURAN IS NOT AVERSE TO PROVIDING FINER DETAILS - UNDERSTANDING QURANIC SILENCE

In light of the Quran, some very pertinent questions are worth asking with a view to understand the wisdom of the Quranic narratives.

- Why does the Quran deem it necessary to provide the need to establish prayer, details of the various aspects of prayer and then, not provide information about a specific form (including rakats - units etc) or its content?
- Why does the Quran elaborate on other finer details such as the claims of the ancient people with respect to the time the sleepers slept in the cave (Some say 300 years and some 309 - **18:25**) whilst not detailing the form or content of prayer? Why is the Quran seemingly eager to provide subtle information such as the difference of 9 years between the two assertions (**18:25**) and not furnish specific details of a particular act of worship?

This is despite God informing believers that the Quran remains the only source of law, the only tool that the Prophet utilised to admonish and guide with (**50:45**) and that God indeed does not run out of words (**31:27; 6.38**)

- Many other edicts are elaborated by the Quran such as divorce details, transaction details, inheritance, punishments for corruption in the land, adultery, repeated robbery / stealing, murder, manslaughter and even aspects of prayer including ablution (Wudu - **4:43; 5:6**) but **why not** prayer itself?

**It is important in this context to note that prayer cannot be performed without the need for ablution. Why is the practice of ablution elaborated in detail but the associated form and content of prayer is not? This is a significant question.**

Similarly, Zakat (alms giving) is also not defined as a percentage in the Quran nor are all the various ways of how charity should be given. (Note details of recipients are elaborated by the Quran. See 9:60 and related article below dealing with charity (Sadaqah) and Zakat).

The subtleties of the Quranic narratives should be appreciated. There is much wisdom in why the Quran chooses to remain silent on certain matters. The cue is to operate within the subtle Divine boundaries stipulated by the Quran. The Quran gives absolutely no authority to any other source apart from itself.

### 006.114

"Say: "Shall I seek for judge other than God? - when He it is Who has revealed to you the Book, explained in detail (Arabic: Mufassalan)". They know full well, to whom We have given the Book, that it has been sent down from thy Lord in truth. Never be then of those who doubt"

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## EVEN THE AHADITH CORPUS IS INSUFFICIENT TO FURNISH ALL THE DETAILS OF PRAYER

There are two fundamental questions that are very revealing:

(1) Why is there not one hadith from all the hundreds of thousands of Ahadith from various Hadith compilers that teach one how to pray in the form Muslims recognise it today **including every rakah (units) for each prayer**? Surely it is not unreasonable to expect that at least one narrator would have captured the complete salah (prayer)?

The true irony of the matter remains, if one had the inclination to sift through hundreds of thousands of Ahadith they would find that there is **not one hadith** that teaches one completely how to pray from start to finish including all the 'rakahs' (units).

It is inconceivable that whilst many of the finer details with regards Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> life have been captured, such as his intimate relations with his wives, or punishments meted out to his enemies (with all the sordid details) or how he slept, drank or ate, that not one hadith narrates the complete Salah (Prayer). Anyone ardent on unbiased study cannot simply dismiss this observation.

In fact, if one really did acquire the inclination to put the entire Ahadith corpus together, one would only manage to muster something which may 'resemble' the prayer Muslims are familiar with today. Also, one would find many contradictions and incredulous reports.

(2) After the death of the Prophet, how did the Muslims pray for centuries **before** the formal compilations of the Ahadith?

It is also important to note that the famous compilers of Ahadith known to us today were approximately **two centuries** removed in the historical record from any of the immediate companions of the Prophet, let alone the Prophet himself.

Even before Imam Bukhari allegedly completed his Hadith compilation in approx 846 CE, early Muslims **still** performed prayer for nearly 225 years after the Prophet's death (died 632 AD). Islam had spread far and wide in those centuries following the Prophet Muhammad's <sup>(pbuh)</sup> demise and preceding the time of the Hadith compilers. Certainly Hadith could not have taught them the prayer.

(Imam Bukhari (d.870 CE), Imam Muslim (d. 875 CE), Tirmidhi (d. 892 CE), Al Nasai (d. 915 CE), Abu Dawud (d. 888 CE), Ibn Maja (d. 887 CE), Yaqub Kulayni (compiler of the Shia books of Kafi who died 10th century), and Sharif al-Radi (died 11th century - compiler of the Nahj ul-Balagha).

The entire Ahadith corpus does not teach one how to pray nor is it, contrary to popular Muslim belief, **the source of how we learn to pray**. The Ahadith merely confirms (and often contradicts) the form of prayer we understand today and what was in practice at the time the collectors were collating Ahadith reports for canonisation

Muslims became familiar with the ritual prayer through the **perpetual practice and adherence of their Ummah (community)** from generation to generation. Indeed, congregational prayers would have, no doubt, always assisted in keeping consistency and providing stability of form, however no Muslim sifts through the voluminous Ahadith corpus to learn how to pray.

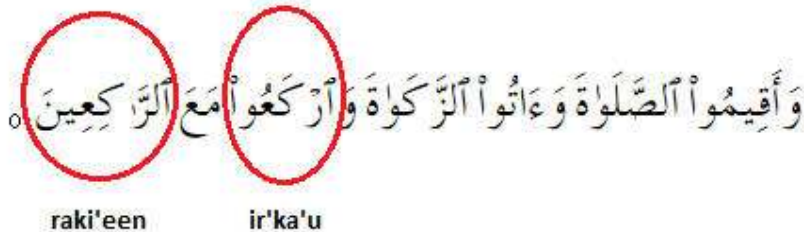
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## BOW DOWN WITH THOSE THAT BOW

In a dialogue with the Children of Israel, one notes the instruction in the Quran for them to **"bow with those that bow"**

### 002.043 (Part)

"... and bow down your heads (Arabic: ir'ka'u) with those who bow down (Arabic: raki'een) (in worship)"



[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

This act of congregational obedience finds historic roots. It remains attested since the time of Prophet Abraham <sup>(pbuh)</sup> (22:26) and would have most likely been followed by all true monotheists en masse.

In the case of Mary, one notes a historic directive, once again affirming the need for congregational prayer obedience.

### 003.043

"O Mary! Be obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow down (Arabic: wa-ir'ka'i) with those who bow down (Arabic: raki'een)"



[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

Thus as noted, monotheistic obedience to congregational prayer was clearly known at the time of the Prophet's ministry and most likely would have influenced the prayer of the early Muslims converting from polytheism.

In this regard at least, the requirement to assimilate during congregational worship along with its general form would have become entrenched into practice.

Albeit, the Quran does not prescribe 'form' and 'utterance' during prayer, the requirement to participate in a prevailing practice is tacitly supported by proxy of the requirement to offer congregational prayers with other believers.

Despite sectarian divides, today's congregational prayers in the main fulfil the basic components of prayer as stipulated by the Quran. Therefore, there would seem little need to reinvent a practice unless it blatantly contradicted the basic directives of prayer.

After all, the limits of a believer's obedience are fashioned by an expectation to follow the best meaning (39:18), to rely on clear proof and to do the best that they can with sincerity (64:16).

#### **064:016**

"So keep your duty to God as **best you can / what you are able (Arabic: ma is'tata'tum)**, and listen, and obey, and spend; that is better for your souls. And whoso is saved from his own greed, such are the successful"

Not only is support for congregational prayer found in verses such 2:43, 3:43, and 62:9-10, one further notes its importance underpinned by other conspicuous verses of the Quran.

In the following verse, despite impending danger, congregational prayer is expected to continue once suitable surveillance is established. Undoubtedly, one cannot perceive a greater risk to life than during armed conflict.

#### **004.102**

"And when you are with them, and you lead for them the prayer, let one party of them stand up (in prayer) with you and let them take their arms with them. Then when they finish their prostrations, let them take their position in the rear and let the other party come up which has not yet prayed and let them pray with you and let them take their precautions and bear arms. The disbelievers wish if you were negligent of your arms and your baggage, to assault you in a single rush (united attack). But there is no blame on you if you put away your arms because of the inconvenience of rain or because you are ill; but take your precautions. Indeed, God has prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment"

**Please see related article [12] below**

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

All necessary aspects of the prayer are imparted by the Quran. The silence is with form and content only which is intentionally not detailed. Some possible reasons for this were discussed under the titles, 'purpose overrides form' and 'language obsession'.

Recognising and appreciating the wisdom behind the silence remains key. The silence should not be used as supporting proof for the necessity of [Islamic secondary sources](#) for providing the details for God's ordained religion. Details with regards the necessities of religious edicts are only to be found in the Quran. The Quran grants no authority to any other source (6:114).

Given the differences between the Sunni and Shia secondary source canon which often leads to serious conflicting theological differences for which some even take each other's life, one finds that the prayer in its general form is uncannily similar. No sectarian divide claims for example that there are 2, 10 or 13 prayers in a day instead of 5 (albeit some may combine their prayers) or that 1 or 2 units must be applicable for every prayer. 2,4,4,3,4 units are generally accepted for each of the five prayers respectively. (There are some Muslims that do recognise only 3 daily prayers - **Please see related article [10] for a Quranic analysis of this claim**).

Therefore, the stabilising factor of the current form of prayer amongst **nearly all Muslims** is not the Ahadith but rather a perpetual practical continuum amongst its followers (perpetual practice) from generation to generation which has led to its stability. A more pertinent question here would be, is the present prayer fulfilling the obligations of the Quran? If so, the requirements of the Quranic prayer would be met.

In the end, if the Quranic directives are being met, we are simply expected to bow down with other believers that bow in worship (2:43, 3:43, 62:9-10, 4:102).

What is questionable is the elaborate ritualistic requirements which many Muslim clerics assert are essentials during prayer, without which, prayer becomes nullified.

Our Lord Almighty is not in need of our prayers. He remains self sufficient. It is we that need to pray to Him to seek our salvation. If one cannot connect and pray with true conviction and devotion because one wants to, but rather prays because one has to, then has such a one truly fulfilled the real purpose of prayer?

### Related Articles:

- (1) [The Concept of Sadaqah from the Quran](#)
- (2) [The Concept of Zakah from the Quran](#)
- (3) [Do We Have to Pray in Arabic?](#)
- (4) [The Difference Between Hadith and Sunna](#)
- (5) [Pray As We Have Taught You How to Pray - Using Verse 2.239 As Support For a Fixed Form Of Prayer](#)
- (6) [The Compilation of the Quran](#)

- (7) [What is 'Salaat' \(Prayer\) from the Quran](#)
- (8) [The Five Prayers from the Quran](#)
- (9) [People of the Book](#)
- (10) [Are there 3 or 5 Prayers in the Day?](#)
- (11) [A Personal Experience with Prayer at Madinat al-Zahra \(Al Andalus\). Near Cordoba, Spain](#)
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