

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

THE FIVE PRAYERS FROM THE QURAN

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The command to establish prayers has been mentioned numerous times in the Quran. A common misunderstanding is that the number of prayers or the allusion of their times are not mentioned in the Quran. This however is not the case as one notes after consulting the Quranic narratives.

This article will attempt to show that not only are the 5 prayers strongly alluded to (and sometimes mentioned by name), their time periods when they should be read during the day are specifically mentioned. Furthermore, the additional prayer which was enjoined on the Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) (Tahajjud) is also mentioned as an extra prayer for him alone.

The prayer periods are generally understood as follows:

Fajr	Morning prayers just before sunrise
Dhuhr	Noonday prayers (after the sun begins to decline from its zenith)
Asr	Prayers before sunset but after Dhuhr prayers
Maghrib	Prayers just after sunset
Isha	Night prayer
Tahajjud	Deep night prayers usually prayed by some after awaking from sleep

(i) **THE FAJR PRAYER**

The Fajr prayer is actually mentioned by name in the Quran as is the Isha prayer:

024:058

"O ye who believe! let those whom your right hands possess, and the (children) among you who have not come of age ask your permission (before they come to your presence), on three occasions: **before morning prayer (Arabic: Salaat-il Fajri)**; and when you put aside your clothes for the noon; and after the **late-night prayer (Arabic: Salaat-il'isha)**: these are your three times of undress: outside those times it is not wrong for you or for them to move about attending to each other: Thus does God make clear the Signs to you: for God is full of knowledge and wisdom"

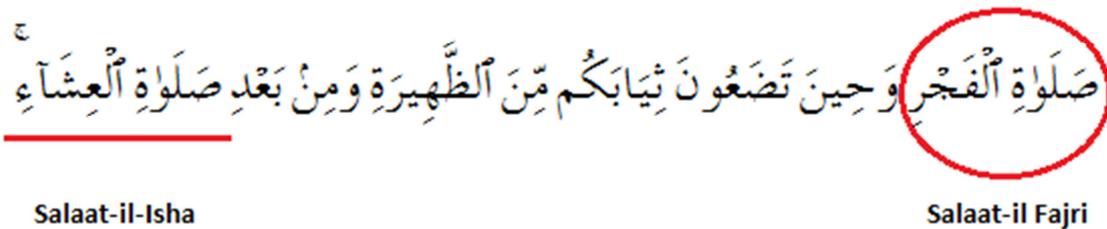


Illustration - Joseph Islam

There are also many other references for the morning prayer and when it should be prayed.

011:114

"And establish regular prayers at the **two ends (Arabic: Salata Tarafayi)** of the day and at the **approaches of the night (Arabic: wazulafan mina al-layli)**: For those things, that are good remove those that are evil: Be that the word of remembrance to those who remember (their Lord)"

In the above verse, Fajr prayer is mentioned along with Isha prayers and are described as prayers at the two ends of the day (Salata Tarafayi = two ends).

The end of the night can be perfectly reconciled with the actual moment at which the sun starts to lighten the sky whilst remaining well below the horizon. This is known as dawn and is a period before actual sunrise (Fajr as it is read today). The end of the day would be the point at which the sun's rays no longer illuminate the sky. This period would not be sunset (as the sun's light still illuminates the sky even though the sun is below the horizon at sunset), but rather would correspond to 'layl' (night). It is at this point Isha prayer is due. (See related articles below)

In this verse, we also find mention of the approach of the night (wazulafan mina al-layli) which is discussed in the section dealing with Maghrib prayers.

Therefore In the above verse, 3 prayers are mentioned, Fajr, Isha and Maghrib.

030:017

"So (give) glory to God, when you reach the evening (**Arabic: hina tumsuna**) and when you reach the morning (**Arabic: hina tusbihuna**)"

Here the arrival at the evening is mentioned as 'hina tumsuna' (Isha) along with the reaching of the morn as 'hina tusbihuna' (Fajr - dawn)

THE DHUHR PRAYER

030.018

"Unto Him be praise in the heavens and the earth! - and at night (Arabic: Ashiyyan) and in the noonday (Arabic: Tuz'hirun - at noon)"

وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَعَشِيًّا وَحِينَ تُظْهِرُونَ ۝

Tuz'hirun

Ashiyyan

Illustration - Joseph Islam

The mention of noonday is specific (Arabic: Tuz'hirun) and we note that the above verse is a reference to prayer as the previous verse indicates and contextualises along with the mention of praise at night (Arabic: Ashiyaan).

Let us note the previous verse again.

Previous verse:

030:017

"Therefore glory be to God when you enter upon the time of the evening (Arabic: tum'suna) and when you enter upon the time of the morning (Arabic: tus'bihun)"

فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ حِينَ تُمْسُونَ وَحِينَ تُصْبِحُونَ ۝

tus'bihun

tum'suna

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Entering upon the evening is clearly a reference to the Isha prayer (prayer at night) and entering the morning prayer (Arabic - Tubsihuna) is a reference to Fajr prayers (dawn). These have been clearly indicated elsewhere in the Quran as times to 'establish prayer' (as in Maghrib - 11.114 and Fajr 24:58). The Arabic term 'Ashiyyan' in verse 30.18 is also mentioned as a time for prayer in verse 24:58. Therefore by virtue of 30:18 and the context given by 30:17, we note the reference of Noonday prayers (i.e. Dhuhr)

The various opinions with regards verse 17:78 and the meaning of the Sun's decline (Arabic: Duluk al-Shams)

I feel it is important to note here the various opinions with regards verse 17:78 and a possibility of this verse also referring to the Dhuhr prayer but equally applicable to other prayers. Let us note the verse first:

017:078

“Establish regular prayers - at the sun's decline (Arabic: Duluk al-Shams) till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer and reading: for the prayer and reading (lit: reading / recitation at dawn - Quran al-fajri) in the morning carry their testimony”

The discussion centres on the interpretation of whether to understand the sun’s decline as that from the zenith (After noonday) or as a decline as in at sunset

The Arabic lexicons pick up the discussions very well and also give variant meanings to the root word D-L-K

= **Dal-Lam-Kaf** = rubbing, squeezing, pressing, decline, sinking, become red, set, incline downwards from the meridian (sun).

However with regards the sun’s decline, we have two main opinions as already described.

OPINION ONE: A reference to sunset

(TA ;) and **ادَّكَّهُ** [signifies the same]. (Ḳ in art. رهو , &c.) And **دَلَّكَ عَيْنَهُ** [He rubbed his eyes]; i. e., a man looking at the setting sun. (Z, TA.) And **دَلَّكَتِ الْمَرْأَةُ الْعَجِينَ** [The woman kneaded the dough]. (TA.) And **دَلَّكَتِ النَّعْلَ**

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

— See also 3. = **دَلَّكَتِ الشَّمْسُ**. (S, Mgh, Mṣb, Ḳ, &c.,) aor. **دَلَّكَتِ**, (Mṣb,) inf. n. **دَلَّوْكَ**, (S, Mgh, &c.,) † The sun set; (S, Mgh, Mṣb, Ḳ, &c.;) accord. to Z, because he who looks at it rubs (يَدْلُوكُ) his eyes, so that it is as though it were the rubber; (TA ;) and in like manner, النُّجُومُ the stars: (Mṣb:) or became yellow, (Ḳ, TA,) and inclined to setting: (TA :) or declined (Ḳ,* TA) so that the beholder almost required, when looking at it, to contract the rays from his eyes with the palm of his hand: (TA :) or declined after mid-

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

OPINION TWO: From the Zenith, as the Sun begins to decline from noonday

day : (Ibn-'Omar, T̂A :) or it signifies (or signifies also, Mṣb) the sun declined from the meridian, or midheaven, (I'Ab, Fr, Zj, Az, Ṣ,* Mgh,* Mṣb, K, &c.), at noon; (I'Ab, Fr, Zj, Az;) and

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

daybreak: if you make the **دلوك** to be the *setting*, the command is restricted to three prayers: in the language of the Arabs, **دُلُوكٌ** is said to be syn. with **زَوَالٌ**; and therefore the sun is said to be **دَائِكَةٌ** when it is declining at noon and when it is setting. (T.A.) [Respecting the phrase **دَلَّكَتْ بِرَاجٍ**

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [4]

Therefore depending on the lean as to which interpretation one favours of the term 'sun's decline' (i.e. whether from zenith or towards sunset) will determine whether one accepts this as a reference to all prayers from noon to sunset (Dhuhr, Asr and Maghrib) or exclusively to 'Maghrib'.

However, it is important to note the closeness with which the 'sun's decline' (**Arabic: Duluk al-Shams**) has been mentioned with 'till the darkness of the night' (**Arabic: ila Ghassaqi-layli**) which appears to indicate a closer relationship which is inherent to Maghrib and sunset rather than Noonday with sunset.

ila
أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ

Ghassaqi-layli

Duluk-e-shams

Illustration - Joseph Islam

THE ASR PRAYER

There are many references to the late Asr prayer which is read up till sunset. Let us look at some:

050:039

“Therefore be patient of what they say, and sing the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting (Arabic: wa-qabla gharub)”

بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ الْغُرُوبِ ۝

wa-qabla gharub

Illustration - Joseph Islam

From the above verse, we note the reference before rising (Arabic - qabla tulu-i - i.e. Fajr) and before the setting (Arabic - Wa qabla l-gharubi). The prayer before the setting of the sun in the late afternoon is Asr.

Also, we note in verse 20:130 that the sides of the day (watarafa l-nahari) are used as separate periods along with the period just before the setting of the sun (Shamsi waqabla ghurubiha) which clearly indicates the period of Asr prayers.

020.130

“Therefore be patient with what they say, and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun (Arabic: Qabla taluhe- Shams - i.e. Fajr), and before its setting (Arabic: Qabla gharubiha - i.e. Asr); yea, celebrate them for part of the hours of the night, and at the sides / parts of the day (Arabic: Watarafa l-nahari): that you may have (spiritual) joy”

The ‘Wusta’ (Middle) Prayer

002:238

“Guard (Arabic: Hafizu) strictly your prayers (Arabic: salawaat), especially the middle (Arabic: wusta) prayer; and stand before God in a devout (frame of mind)”

There are two main points to note here. The prayers are referred to as ‘salawaat’ which is plural (singular: salat). Therefore by simple deduction there has to be clearly more than 1 prayer in the day if this is a reference to the daily prayers.

If the literal meaning of 'wusta' is taken as 'middle' and which seems correct in context, then there are odd numbers of prayers in the daily prayer cycle. Either 3, 5, 7, 9, etc. There has never been any indication to support more than 5 prayers either in scripture or practice, so 7 + can be disregarded as fixed prayer. As we have clear mention of Maghrib prayers and Isha prayers as we will note in the next two sections, we cannot have a midpoint of 4 prayers; therefore this must be a reference to the midpoint of a 5 prayer cycle. The middle prayer therefore can only refer to Asr prayers.

Let's look at what **wusta** means in Arabic and in Quranic usage which indicates 'middle'.

ROOT - WAW-SIN-TAY

Middle, midst, among, best, best part of a thing, mediate/intercede between, most remote from the extremes, equidistant, intermediate, most conforming/equitable/just/balanced, most excellent of them in particular, occupy the middle position.

Arabic Derivates:

Wasatna (prf. 3rd. p. f. pl.): they (f) penetrated into the midst.

Wastan (acc.): best, middle.

Ausat (acc.): average, the best one.

Wusta (acc.): middle, midmost, most excellent.

Wasatan (acc.): justly balanced, exalted.

USAGE OF ROOT W-S-T IN THE QURAN

wasata vb. (1) perf. act. 100:5

100.005

"Cleaving, as one, the centre (Arabic: Fawastana) (of the foe)"

وسط

1. وَسَطَ الْقَوْمِ, aor. يَسِطُ, inf. n. وَسْطٌ (س, Mṣb, K) [and وَسُوْطٌ (as shown below)] and سِطَةٌ, (س, K,) *He sat, [or was, or became,] in the middle, or midst, of the people, or company of men; or among them; (TA;) i. q. † تَوَسَّطَهُمْ; (س, K;) or تَوَسَّطَ بَيْنَهُمْ † (Mṣb :) and in like manner, وَسَطَ الْمَكَانِ [he was, or became, or sat, in the middle, or midst, of the place]: (Mṣb :) and وَسَطَ الشَّيْءِ, and تَوَسَّطَهُ, and تَوَسَّطَهُ †, he was, or became, in the middle, or midst, of the thing: and [in like manner] وَسُوْطُ الشَّمْسِ signifies تَوَسَّطَهَا † السَّمَاءِ [The sun's being, or becoming, in the middle, or midst, of the sky]. (M.) — وَسَطَ الشَّيْءِ also signifies *He, or it, was, or**

As can be seen, the middle (wusta) prayer is the central prayer and is the one that approaches sunset or corresponds to the period of late afternoon. This prayer has been given special attention and has been singled out for mention in the 'group' of prayers (salawaat - plural).

THE MAGHRIB PRAYER

We noted above a reference to 11:114 in which there was an instruction to read prayer at the two ends of the day (Fajr as an end to the night and Isha as an end to the day).

011:114

“And establish regular prayers at the **two ends (Arabic: Salata Tarafa)** of the day and at the approaches of the night **(Arabic: wa-zulafan mina al-layl)**: For those things, that are good remove those that are evil: Be that the word of remembrance to those who remember (their Lord)”

Along with the two ends of the day (Arabic - Salata Tarafayi meaning two ends i.e. Fajr and Isha), we were also informed about the prayer at the approach of the night (wa-zulafan mina al-layl)

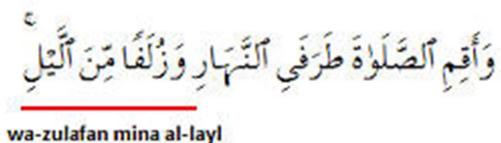


Illustration - Joseph Islam

The Arabic root word Zay-Lam-Fa (which forms the word *zulfa* - plural: *zulaf*) means **to be close to in position or approaching**, in this case, the end of the day. Therefore, the period of **maghrib** can be correctly deduced as it is a period which precedes the onset of **night** (Arabic: *layl*) and after sunset.

Zay-Lam-Fa = draw near, close, closeness, advance, proximity.

Arabic terminology has many derivatives of the root, for example:

Azlafnaa (prf. 3rd. p. f. plu. IV): We brought near, caused to draw near

Uzlifat (pp. 3rd p.f. sing. IV): It is brought near

Zulafan (n. acc.): Early hours

Zulfatan (n. acc.): Night

Zulfaa (v.n.): Approach; near

Here is an example with regards its usage in the Quran and with respect to Prophet David: ^(pbuh)

038.025

“So We forgave him this (lapse): he enjoyed, indeed, a **near approach to Us (lazulfa)**, and a beautiful place of (Final) Return.”

039.003

““Is it not to God that sincere devotion is due? But those who take for protectors other than God (say): "We only serve them in order that they may **bring us nearer (Arabic: Zulfa)** to God." Truly God will judge between them in that wherein they differ. But God guides not such as are false and ungrateful”

أُولِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ

Zulfa

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Earlier in the article under the section of 'Dhuhr' prayers, the expression 'Duluk al-Shams' in the verse below was discussed.

017:078

“Establish regular prayers - at the sun's decline (Arabic: Duluk al-Shams) till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer and reading: for the prayer and reading (lit: reading / recitation at dawn - Quran al-fajri) in the morning carry their testimony”

In support for the Maghrib prayer, it was noted that:

"...the closeness with which the 'sun's decline' (Arabic: Duluk al-Shams) has been mentioned with 'till the darkness of the night' (Arabic: ila Ghassaqi-layli) which appears to indicate a closer relationship which is inherent to Maghrib and sunset rather than Noonday with sunset."

THE ISHA PRAYER

As already mentioned in the opening quoted verse 24:58 with regards the section dealing with Fajr prayer, we noted the mention of **Isha** prayers by name. These are prayers that are recited in the night.

وَمِنْ بَعْدِ صَلَاةِ الْعِشَاءِ

Salaat-il-Isha

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Here are some more examples:

003:017

“The steadfast, and the truthful, and the obedient, those who spend (and hoard not), those who pray for pardon in the watches of the night”

039:009

“Is one who worships devoutly during the hour of the night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), who takes heed of the Hereafter, and who places his hope in the Mercy of his Lord - (like one who does not)? Say: "Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition”

025:064

“Those who spend the night in adoration of their Lord prostrate and standing”

In verse 11:114, we noted instruction to establish prayers at the two ends of the day (Salata Tarafayi = two ends) which was posited as a description for both Fajr and Isha prayers.

011:114

“And establish regular prayers at the **two ends (Arabic: Salata Tarafayi)** of the day and at the **approaches of the night (Arabic: wazulafan mina al-layli)**: For those things, that are good remove those that are evil: Be that the word of remembrance to those who remember (their Lord)”

We also noted in 30:17 a mention of the ‘reaching of eventide’ i.e. prayers at evening.

030:017

“Therefore glory be to God when you enter upon the time of the evening (**Arabic: hina tum'suna - i.e. sunset / evening**) and when you enter upon the time of the morning”

hina

فَسُبِّحَانَ اللَّهِ حِينَ تُمْسُونَ وَحِينَ تُصْبِحُونَ ۝

tum'suna

Illustration - Joseph Islam

The Arabic word 'Tamsuna' is derived from its root word Miim-Siin-Waw which in this context means to arrive at the evening.

Miim-Siin-Waw

To arrive/come/enter in the evening,

to some, to *midnight*: (TA:) *contr. of صباح*:
 (S, K, Mṣb, &c.): and evening, after sunset.
 (Mgh.) — أَتَيْتُهُ ذَا مَسَاءٍ [I came to him in the
evening]. (IAṣr, TA, art. صبح.) See صَبَّاحٌ.
 — أَتَيْتُهُ صَبَاحًا مَسَاءً: see صَبَّاحٌ.

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [6]

THE TAHAJJUD PRAYER

This particular prayer has only been mentioned once in the Quran and has been enjoined on the Prophet. It has been enjoined to a singular person and from the context, it is clear that this command is directed at the Prophet. This is not for the believers as a specific prayer to undertake albeit believers can pray as much as they desire without any restrictions given by scripture except that one does not overburden oneself and keeps a balance (73:20).

017:079

“And pray in the small watches of the morning (**Arabic: fa-Tahajjad**): (it would be) an additional prayer (**Arabic: Nafilatan**) for thee (**Arabic - Laka**): it may be (**Arabic: Asa**) that thy Lord will raise thee to a station of praise and glory!”



Illustration - Joseph Islam

FATAHAJJAD is a 2nd person masculine singular verb - The reference here is to one man.

The additional prayer is then mentioned as **for you** (Arabic: laka) which is again 2nd person masculine singular (personal)- Therefore this can only be a reference to the Prophet given the context and Arabic grammar used.

Support for Tahajjud prayers for the Prophet

050.039-40

“Therefore (O Muhammad) bear with what they say, and hymn the praise of thy Lord before the rising and before the setting of the sun; And in the night-time hymn His praise, and after the (prescribed) prostrations (**Arabic: wa adbara-sajud**)”

After the prostrations here can only refer to Isha prayers.

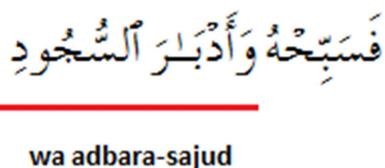


Illustration - Joseph Islam

Also in 20:130, we note an instruction to the Prophet:

020:130

“Therefore (O Muhammad), bear with what they say, and celebrate the praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting. **And glorify Him some hours of the night** and at the two ends of the day that thou may find acceptance”

052:049

And for part of the night also praise thou Him,- and at the retreat of the stars!

076:26

“And during part of the night adore Him, and give glory to Him (a) long (part of the) night”

(Please also see related article below with regards the Tahajjud prayer)

FINAL THOUGHTS

As can be clearly seen, not only are the 5 daily prayers mentioned but we also note the periods that the prayers correspond to. We also note the Tahajjud prayer as an additional prayer that was enjoined on the Prophet.

These periods are referred to as fixed periods (not necessarily by minutes and seconds), but certainly as periods of the day.

004:103

“When you have performed the act of worship, remember God, standing, sitting and reclining. And when you are in safety, observe proper worship. **Worship at fixed times (Arabic - Kitaban Mawqutun) has been enjoined on the believers”**

Please see related article:

- (1) [Time of Fajr and the End of Sehri in the Month of Ramadan](#)
- (2) [Are there 3 or 5 Prayers in the Day?](#)
- (3) [The Tahajjud Prayer](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 3, Page 906

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., Volume 8, Page 2940

[6] Ibid., Volume 8, Supplement, Page 3020

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