

**PAPER FOR PRAIRIE GROUP, 2004**  
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***THE SECOND PILLAR IN ISLAM: SALAT***

In this paper I intend to describe the basic form of *Salat*, including the slight variations between the *Sunni and Shi'ite* Muslims. Then I will visit Mystical Muslim prayer as practiced by Sufis, and *100 Names for Allah*. Finally I will describe what possibilities and implications for a spiritual practice, if any, are there for us.

**Introduction to *Salat***

*Salat*, or the Islamic ritual prayer, is the most important form of worship in Islam. The abandonment of the regular practice of *Salat* is considered the line between belief and disbelief.<sup>1</sup>

The prayer cycle of *Salat* is so important that a person wanting to know if you are a Muslim will not ask, "Are you Muslim?" but rather will ask, "Do you do *Salat*?" By this question, they mean, "What is your intention concerning *Salat*?" for that distinguishes a true Muslim. While not all Muslims observe *Salat*, generally it is assumed that Allah understands a person's intentions. If a prayer is missed, but the intention is present, the prayer can be made up later.

Muslims pray almost anywhere as long as the area is clean and their intentions are pure. They must face Mecca, the religious center of the Muslim world. The direction one faces toward Mecca is called the *qibla*. In the Mosque it is a prayer niche in the wall, the *mihrab*. Outside, or with other Muslims in rooms devoted to prayer, they determine which direction to pray so they will face Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional story about why Muslims pray five times a day comes during Muhammad's journey to Jerusalem to ascend God's throne. Since it is the only pillar prescribed for Muslims in heaven, it is considered unique among all the pillars of Islam.

As the story is told: God instructed Muhammad to tell the Muslims that they should pray 50 times a day. On his way down the mountain, Muhammad met Moses who told him he should go back and renegotiate, that the people could never pray that many times. This cycle was repeated

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<sup>1</sup> Mohamed, Mamdouh, *Salaat: The Islamic Prayer from A to Z*. Mamdouh N. Mohamed, Publisher, 2003. .p.14.

<sup>2</sup> An interesting article about Muslims in New York adapting their prayer cycle to life in New York appeared in the *New York Times*, on May 28, 2004. It described Muslim cab drivers (about half the 40,000 New York cab drivers) who gather in South Asian and Muslim owned restaurants that provide prayer space in basements or back rooms. They also know where every Mosque is in New York, so that if a fare takes them near to a Mosque they can pray there. They keep their prayer rugs in the trunks of their cabs, although performing the necessary ritual ablutions is often the most difficult problem. Since 9/11 some have been more reluctant to prostrate themselves in public, but others gather near the airline terminals where they are in line to pick up fares, performing the full cycle of prayers, believing that God will protect them. .

several times, until God reduced the number to five. At that point Muhammad told Moses he just couldn't go back any more, and so the number remained at five. God told Muhammad that the Muslim who prays five times a day will be rewarded as if he had prayed fifty times.<sup>3</sup>

*Ka'Bah* was the first shrine built for worshipping Allah. It is a square building covered by black cloth, in Mecca. It was the first *Salat* direction for humankind. Then later Allah commanded the people to face *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* in Palestinian Jerusalem. Mohammad, however, always had the desire to face the *Ka'Bah* in Mecca. After some time had passed, Allah granted the Messenger his wish and commanded the people to face the *Ka'Bah* in Mecca. Muslims have been facing the *Ka'bah* since that time.

The perception that Muslims all over the world are facing Mecca gives them the sense that they are performing *Salat* in ever enlarging circles around the earth, with the smallest circle closest to the *Ka'Bah* in Mecca, and the largest circle as large as the circumference of the whole earth.

The essence of *Salat* is submission, felt most completely when the person prostrates himself. It also is that moment when the Muslim can ask Allah for his needs to be met. *Salat* is also a source of spiritual ascent, unmediated as it is between the supplicant and Allah.

During the week, *Salat* is performed at home or in the fields, as well as (if possible) in the neighborhood Mosque. On Friday at noon, congregational prayers are performed in the Central Mosque of the city, bringing the members of the community together. These Friday noon prayers have the additional purpose of adding a social, economic, and political dimension to the ritual. The *imam* gives a sermon, usually on ethical and moral issues.

Throughout Islamic history, the *imam* has mentioned the name of the ruler during the Friday sermon, giving that ruler legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> The government contains close control over the Mosques, including the selection of the *imam*. One can conjecture that in volatile times, the relationship of the *imam* to the current ruler is a significant one.

The scriptural source for the Friday service is found in the *Quran* (Sura 62:9-10)<sup>5</sup>:

O believers, when proclamation is made for prayer on the Day of Congregation, hasten to God's remembrance and leave trafficking aside; that is better for you, did you but know.

Then when the prayer is finished, scatter in the land and seek God's bounty, and remember God frequently; haply you will prosper.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Nasr, Seyyed Hossein in Chapter 7, *Islam, in Our Religions*, Arvind Sharma, ed. HarperSanFrancisco. p.473

<sup>5</sup> Arberry, A.J. tr. *The Koran, Interpreted*. Macmillan Publishing, N.Y., 1955. p.278.

The *Salat* is always performed in Arabic, even when it is not the native tongue of the supplicant. Other prayers, which I will describe later, can be performed in one's native tongue. The ritual prayers are considered to be beyond the individual and temporal situations of the supplicant, and so are performed in the universal language of Arabic.

Before *Salat*, Muslims take off their shoes. They unroll their prayer rug, which usually has the image of the Grand Mosque of Mecca woven into it. If there is no rug, and they are not in the Mosque, the use of newspaper is acceptable.

The Muslims prefer to pray together, even though they are allowed to pray alone. When they are together, they line up in rows, with the *imam* who is the leader of the prayer, in charge. The men and women pray separately. A woman is allowed to lead the other women in prayer, but not the men.

Muslims begin formally to teach their children to perform *Salat* by the age of seven. The adolescents participate with the adults, and *Salat* is performed until death.

*Salat* is intended to nurture the soul, comfort the heart, ease one's life, connect one with Allah, as well as purify the heart and mind. In time, it is said, *Salat* becomes an irresistible source of tranquility.

### The Call to Prayer – *Adhan*

If you live in a Muslim country, there is a 'call to prayer' or *adhan* five times a day, with the time determined by your location and the time of year. The *muezzins* traditionally call from the *minaret*, a tall tower connected to the mosque about 15 minutes before the prayer is to begin. In current times, the *adhan* may be a recording broadcast through speakers in the tower, or from the top of a tall building.<sup>6</sup>

The *adhan*:

#### English Translation

God is great (recited four times-- this phrase is called the *takbir*.)

I witness that there is no god but God.

I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God.

#### Spoken Arabic Phrase

*Allahu Akbarthis*

*Ashadu al-la ilaha illa Llah*

*Ashhadu anna Muhammadar-rasulu-Llah*

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<sup>6</sup> In a news article from Hamtramck, Michigan (2004) the following was reported: A noise-ordinance change that would allow mosques to broadcast calls to prayer on loudspeakers will be put to a citywide vote after opponents gathered hundreds of petition signatures. The more than 630 signatures submitted to the city clerk's office were enough to force the City Council to rescind its permission to broadcast the calls or to put it to a public vote. "We decided not to rescind the amendment, so it goes to the ballot," said council president Karen Majewski. (The outcome is unknown.)

Rise up for prayer (twice)	<i>Hayya 'al-s-salah</i>
Rise up for salvation (twice)	<i>Hayya 'ala-l-falah</i>
God is great (twice)	<i>Allahu Akbar</i>
There is no God but God.	<i>La ilaha illa-Llah</i>

(Note: Shiites add: I attest that  
“Allah is close”)

In non-Muslim countries, Muslims may determine the time of prayer by consulting a computer program, printed prayer charts, or Muslim web sites.

Generally, the times for Salat are:

- (1) early morning before dawn (two prayer cycles)
  - (2) noon prayer (four prayer cycles)
  - (3) mid-afternoon prayer (four prayer cycles)
  - (4) sunset (three prayer cycles)
- and (5) evening, between an hour after sunset and midnight (four prayer cycles).

(Note: Shi'ites combine the second and third daily prayer cycles, as well as the fourth with the fifth, so they do three ritual prayer cycles a day.)

It is important to note that these calls to prayer are calls to the temple. While a Muslim can pray alone, the center of *Salat* is the prayer at the Mosque. (During the week many Muslims pray in their fields and homes, with the Friday noon prayer being the time for everyone to come to the Central Mosque.)

The words, the ritual movements, even the time of day and number of times *Salat* is practiced are all prescribed in considerable detail. Such a description is a little bit like “describing a handshake” as one author has said.<sup>7</sup> And yet such a detailed, somewhat dry description is necessary to understand the precision with which the ritual is observed.

### Ritual Ablution

Probably the most difficult of the rituals to perform five times a day, especially as part of a busy life perhaps in a non-Muslim country, is *Wuduu*, the ritual ablution. Cleanliness is an important element in *Salat*. The way one cleanses oneself is traditionally prescribed. It is believed it helps Muslims achieve spiritual purification as well as physical cleanliness in the *Wuduu* ritual cleansing.

In *Wuduu at a Glance*, Mamdouh N. Mohamed gives these nine steps:  
(1) Wash both hands.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, Malcolm. *Islam for Dummies*, Wiley Publishing, 2003. p. 145.

Wash the right hand with the left. Then wash the left with the right.

- (2) Rinse the mouth  
Put some water in the mouth and rinse (3 times)
- (3) Inhale water through the nose  
Inhale water and blow it off (3 times)
- (4) Wash the face  
From the right ear to the left ear, and from the edge of the hair to the beard/chin (once)
- (5) Wash both arms, including elbows  
Wash your right arm with the left hand, and your left arm with the right hand (3 times)
- (6) Wipe your head  
From front to back and back to front (once)
- (7) Wipe both ears  
Place the index finger inside the ears and the thumbs outside  
Move the fingers from top to bottom and vice versa (once)
- (8) Wash both feet  
Wash the right foot, including the ankles, then the left.  
(3 times) <sup>8</sup>

### **Ritual Salat**

Following is the basic form of the ritual bowing. Each cycle is called a *rak'a* :

1. Stand with your feet slightly apart. Raise your hands, palms facing forward at head level, and say the first *Takbir*. (*God is Great*, or technically *God is Greater* said four times)

Move your hands down to your sides and say the first Sura<sup>9</sup> (a chapter or book of the *Qur'an*) and one other passage from the *Qur'an*

The first Sura:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate  
the All-merciful, the All-compassionate,  
the Master of the Day of Doom.

Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour.  
Guide us in the straight path,  
the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,  
nor of those against whom Thou art wrathful,  
nor of those who are astray.<sup>10</sup>

Say a second *Takbir*.

<sup>8</sup> Mohamed, Dr. Mamdouh N. *Salaat: The Islamic Prayer from A to Z*. Mamdouh N. Mohamed, publisher, 2003. p. 6

<sup>9</sup> The first Sura is the *Fatiha*. It is called "the opening", and is said to be the equivalent of the whole *Qur'an*. It is recited 17 times a day in the ritual cycles of daily prayers. It is also recited when contracts are signed, or when one visits a tomb, as well as when one wishes a sick person to heal. The foreshortened version of the *Fatiha* is "May God open for you".

<sup>10</sup> Arberry, A.J. *The Koran: Interpreted*. p. 29.

2. Bow with your hands on your knees, saying three times: *Glory to God the Almighty.*
  3. Stand again and say, *God hears those who praise Him. O our lord, Praise be to you.* Say a third *Takbir.*
  4. Bow down with your forehead touching the ground and with both of your hands flat on the ground. Say, *Praised be my Lord, most high; praise to him.* Say a fourth *Takbir.*
  5. Sit up with your left foot and leg folded under you and your right leg from the knee to the foot straight back, toes on the ground, sole of the foot facing back.
  6. Make a second prostration (as in #4) and return to sitting.
- This basic prayer ritual is repeated between two and four times, depending on the time of day.

### Rak'as – Ritual Cycles

After the second Rak'a (ritual cycle) and the cycles which follow, a greeting (the *tahiyya*) is spoken which asks blessings for Muhammad. At the end of all the cycles, the witnessing (*tashahhud*) is recited, followed by the prayer for a blessing of Abraham and Muhammad. Then after a prayer for peace, the Muslim turns his head to the right and to the left and says "peace be upon you" (*al-sakamu'alaykum*).

After the final cycle at the end of *Salat*, the worshipper can say voluntary prayers (*du'a*). After standing, he says *al-salamu'alaykum* and perhaps an additional cycle of two *rak'as*.

An example of a voluntary prayer would be:

There is no God except God, the One. He has no partners. To Him belongs sovereignty and to Him belongs praise. He is all-powerful over everything. O God! None can deny that which you give and none can give that which you deny. The greatness of the great shall not prevail against you.<sup>11</sup>

Voluntary prayers are also used throughout the day, and at special times. This prayer, attributed to Muhammad, is often said upon going to bed:

All praise belongs to God who provided rest to my body, restored my soul to me and allowed me to remember Him.<sup>12</sup>

### Ritual Space - The Mosque (*Masiid*)

*Masiid* is the Arabic word for Mosque. It means "place for prostration." Any place, as long as it is not ritually impure may be called a *Masiid*. While this definition is expansive, there are also clear directions for the building of a classical mosque. These come from Mohammad's first house in Medina. His house had a large courtyard in the middle, with rooms on the East for his wives. On the south side were two rows of pillars which supported a large flat roof which shaded the area. The roof of the house was oriented toward Mecca. It was only after the conquest of Iran that the domed minarets begin to be used for mosques.

<sup>11</sup>Clark, Malcolm. *ibid.* p. 146.

<sup>12</sup>*ibid.* p. 146

**Major mosques will have most of the following elements:**

1. *Qibla* wall with a prayer niche (*mihrab*) facing Mecca
2. Pulpit (*minbar*) to the right of the *mihrab*.
3. Minaret
4. Fountain or other facility for purification
5. Prayer hall
6. Lighting fixture above central prayer area
7. Separated space for women.<sup>13</sup>

**Mosques are devoid of images, both human and divine. Their prohibition of images goes back to the Jewish Bible's references:**

**Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (Exodus 20:4 KJV)**

**Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire;**

**Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, The likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, The likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth.**

**The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, The likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth. (Deuteronomy 4:15-18 KJV)**

**In spite of the prohibition against 'graven images' Mosques are highly decorated with wonderful designs of calligraphed sayings from the Qur'an, along with motifs from nature, and designs both geometrical and elaborate.<sup>14</sup>**

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<sup>13</sup>ibid. p. 148

<sup>14</sup>One of my sources, *Salat: The Islamic Prayer from A to Z* by Mamdouh N. Mohamed had an introductory page about the photography in the book, in which he cites three *Fatwaas* by Sheikhs to support his use of photography. One of the *Fatwaas*, by Sheikh Ibn 'Uthaymiin follows:

With regard to photography in which the camera captures and produces photographs with no human creation in the image, this is not considered an act of image creation, but it is merely the capture of an image created by Allah the Almighty. The Hadiiths which prohibit image creation refer to those images created by humans to rival Allah's creation. When, for instance, a letter is photocopied, the new copy is not the creation of the machine operator, who in fact might be illiterate, and those who are familiar with the original letter will recognize the copy to be by the same writer. Nevertheless, photography becomes forbidden when used for forbidden purposes. That is, the means to achieve a forbidden matter are also forbidden.

### The Sufi Practice of *Salat*

The Sufi movement is the mystical manifestation of Islam. Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, who has written *The Reality of Prayer in Islam*, says

. . . ritualized movements only represent the outward dimension of *Salat*. They are a necessary requirement for the worshiper to perform,

but without the appropriate inner preparedness to achieve unity with God they are devoid of meaning.<sup>15</sup>

The external rituals of *Salat* are described with usual descriptions. The inner dimensions, however, are of much more significance in Sufi Practice.

Professor Angha says,

One of the main preconditions for prayer is the worshiper's *presence of heart*, (emphasis his) which means that during prayer he commits himself entirely to seeking God without letting any worldly thoughts interfere in this endeavor. . . Similarly, the place of prayer indicates the worshiper's entire devotion to God, and his detachment from worldly affairs during the act of prayer.<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to say:

Each of the five prayers has its own significance, and its *raka'at* represents different aspects of the worshiper's devotion to and union with God.<sup>17</sup>

He makes a distinction between the rites and rituals of Islamic prayer as being distinct from the inner reality of prayer, which is known by the mysteries seen in the lives of the saints and eminent Sufis.<sup>18</sup> The ritual of the prayer protects the Muslim from evil deeds (primarily because they are busy performing the prayer), but it does not prevent them from thinking evil thoughts. The object of the prayer cycle for a Sufi is to bring closeness to God. If the prayer is performed for any other reason, then it is not prayer.

*Dhikr* (remembrance of God) brings inner purification.

Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani has said:

*Dhikr* is the tiller of the heart, the abundance of the harvest, and the sustainer of the intellect.<sup>19</sup>

### Ablution in the Sufi Tradition

The ritual ablution, already described earlier in this paper, is given a deeper meaning in the Sufi tradition. Sayyid Muhammad Murbakhsh said:

Cleanse four things by four things: your face with the tears of your eyes, your tongue with the *dhikr* (remembrance) of your creator, your heart with humility to your protector, and your body by return to your Lord.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Angha, Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh. *Al Salat: The Reality of Prayer in Islam*. M.T.O. Shamaghsoudi Publications, Riverside, Ca. 1998. p. iii.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. v, vi.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. vi.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 14

Ablution as it is practiced in the Sufi tradition, is described in this way:

While washing the face say, "O God,  
shine Thy light upon my face when faces are in darkness."  
(Indicating purity of intention and the truth of devotion.)

While washing the right hand say, "God,  
give me my book in my right hand and the eternity of paradise  
in my left hand.

While washing the left hand say, "God do  
not give me my book in my left hand, . . . and do not make it  
a chain around my neck. I seek refuge in Thee  
from the flames of fire."

When washing the head say: "God, cloak me in thy grace. . . "

When washing the feet say: "God make my steps firm. . .  
and turn my efforts in the direction that pleases Thee."

When ablutions are over, say: "God I beseech Thee  
for the completeness of ablution, of prayer, of contentment  
and of forgiveness."<sup>21</sup>

### The Prayer Cycle in the Sufi Tradition

The middle prayer, in the Sufi tradition, has a special significance. Just which prayer in the cycle *is* the 'middle prayer' is not clear. Theologians have differed on the answer. At some point in time, each of the prayer times has been declared the 'middle prayer'. The significant point is that the 'middle prayer' represents all the prayers of the daily cycle, *if the presence of heart is true.* (emphasis mine.)

Professor Angha says:

The sunset prayer is the sowing of the seed,  
the night prayer is the growing of its roots in darkness and  
concealment

the morning prayer is the emergence of the first bud,  
the noon prayer is the growth of its branches and leaves,  
and the afternoon prayer is the fruit of the tree of devotion. . .  
whoever neglects his afternoon prayer, has harmed his family and  
wealth.

(he explains 'family and wealth' as)  
all your faculties and those people in your keep, such as your wife,  
children and so on. Just as prayer is necessary for you,  
you should call those in your keep to prayer.<sup>22</sup>

### The Purpose of Prayer in the Sufi Tradition

In the Sufi Tradition, the purpose of prayer is to give expression to the longing for God, a connection to the Divine. The ritual prayer cycles enable the Sufi practitioner to open their hearts so they can feel in the presence of God, with no separation. The external forms of prayer are only

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 20

the beginning. You can do the outer forms of prayer for years without ever praying internally. Sufis believe you have to develop a heart that can pray as well.<sup>23</sup>

The practice of opening the heart is one of remembrance. Abu-Hamid al-Ghazali has said that remembrance has four basic meanings:

First, it is an act of constantly striving to be mindful of God. Prayer invites the Sufi into God's presence.

Second, remembrance is the repetition of a mystical formula or Divine Name.

Third, remembrance is an inner state in which the person is overwhelmed by God's love. This is the remembrance of the heart.

Fourth, remembrance becomes constant. It is a deep and stable condition, known as remembrance of the soul.<sup>24</sup>

In Arabic, remembrance means both repetition and remembrance. The repetition of the Islamic prayer cycle, the recitation of the ninety-nine names of Allah, the dance of the dervish are all acts of prayer that, through repetition, bring the qualities of remembrance in the Sufi, and move him toward submission and oneness with God.

**The Point Toward Which Prayer is Directed in the Sufi Tradition (*Qiblah*)**

The traditional bow toward Mecca is, in the Sufi Tradition, deepened by an internal embracing of the direction "that the praying person's entire being must, outwardly and inwardly, be drawn."<sup>25</sup>

The Qur'an says:

The fools among the people will say,  
'What has turned them from the direction  
they were facing in their prayers aforetime?'

Say:

"To God belong the East and the West;  
He guides whomsoever He will  
to a straight path." Sura 2:135<sup>26</sup>

The Sufi's believe that this internal direction of Allah, is more important than the physical direction of one's prayers.

Professor Angha says,

*Qiblah* is the cardinal point that faces you and it is in its direction that the praying person's entire being must, outwardly and inwardly be drawn. Outwardly it is the site that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has designated, and inwardly, by the commandment of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), it refers to the clear mirror of the devoted believer's heart, in which none other than God shall be contained. Likewise the intention of prayer is closeness to God, and presence

<sup>23</sup> Fadiman, James and Frager, Robert eds. *Essential Sufism*. Castle Books, 1997. p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Angha. p. 49

<sup>26</sup> Arberry tr. p. 46.

of heart is its seal. "Wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction" *Qur'an, 2:144*<sup>27</sup>

### The Ninety-Nine Names for God in the Sufi Tradition

It is said that Allah has three thousand names. One thousand are only known by angels, 1,000 known only by prophets, 300 are in the Torah, 300 are in Zabur (Psalms of David) 300 are in the New Testament, and 99 are in the Qur'an. One name which has been hidden by Allah is called *Ism Allah al-a'zam*: The Greatest Name of Allah.<sup>28</sup>

If a person wishes to repeat a Name of Allah, he should first say at least 700 times: *La ilaha illa'llah Muhammad Rasulullah* (There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger).

He should clean himself with a full ablution. He should not eat meat on the day of the ablution. The place chosen for the repetition should be clean. The repetition should be said during the night, and the person should be alone. It should be recited with good intention, preferably in a manner prescribed by a sheikh.

Attributes are associated with each of the ninety-nine names. The repetition is intended to bring the attribution to the person doing the repetition. It should never be repeated as 'a want.' It should be repeated with the sense that if it is good for them, Allah will give it to them. If they do not receive the attribute, then it is either not good for them, or it is not the right time.

Some of the names are to be repeated during one of the regular Muslim prayer cycles. Some are to be repeated anytime. *As-Salam*, for example, should be repeated 160 times to a sick person. It will help them regain health.

Shems Friedlander says,

While one is repeating a Name there should be no speaking and no interruptions. If thoughts intrude while you are repeating the Name, then remain seated with closed eyes. Make your humility perfect. Imagine that you are dead and the mourners have departed, leaving you alone to face the Judgment. Concentrate all your senses, expel all preoccupations and wayward impulses of the heart and direct your perception toward Allah. Now, continue to repeat the Name.<sup>29</sup>

One of the ninety-nine names is *Ar-Rahman*, The Beneficent. He who gives blessings and prosperity to all beings without showing disparity. (The first description is the attribute.). *Ya-Rahman*. He who repeats this Name 100 times after each farz (obligatory) prayer will have a good memory, a keen

<sup>27</sup> Angha, p. 49

<sup>28</sup> Friedlander, Shems. *Ninety-Nine Names of Allah*. HarperSanFrancisco. 1993.

p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 12.

awareness, and be free of a heavy heart. (The second description is an appeal to that attribute.)<sup>30</sup>

**PART II: What Are The Possibilities and Implications within *Salat* for Unitarian Universalist Spiritual Practice?**

As I have read the literature describing both the traditional and Sufi practice of *Salat* in Islam, I have noticed four categories of purposes to which the practices are aimed. They are:

1. Promotes certain qualities of spirit. Among them would be, for example,
  - Provides tranquility
  - Comforts hearts
  - Gives 'presence of heart'
  - Eases lives
  - Purifies hearts and minds
  - Nurtures souls
2. Strengthens theological categories. Among them would be,
  - Promotes submission
  - Enables supplication
  - Provides unmediated access to Allah
  - Intention, as known by Allah
3. Reinforces communal practice. These would be,
  - Marking sacred space
  - Marking sacred time
  - Defining sacred direction
  - Defining sacred language (Arabic)
  - Proscribing idolatry
4. Reinforces political and social mores. Among them would be,
  - Friday sermons of a political nature
  - Prayer of peace
  - Prayer for Mohammad and Abraham

If we imagine a continuum with the most Fundamentalist Muslim on the left, and the most Esoteric Sufi on the right, each of these categories would have very different manifestations in actual practice.

For the first category, *Promotes certain qualities of spirit*, the Fundamentalist Muslim would find comfort and tranquility in the assurance that the path to Allah is clearly marked and requires only that they adhere to it absolutely. The Esoteric Sufi would find comfort and tranquility in the merging of Self and Love.

For the second category, *Strengthens theological categories*, the Fundamentalist Muslim would practice *Salat* as an act of radical submission to the will of Allah. The Esoteric Sufi would practice *Salat* as an

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 18

act of unmediated Love, and life as a reflection of the Allah's names and qualities.

For the third category, *Reinforces communal practice*, the Fundamentalist Muslim would understand sacred space, time, direction, and language as prescriptive, and seek to perfect his ability to practice more fully and perfectly. The Esoteric Sufi would understand the importance of sacred space, time, direction, and language as symbolic and representative of the intention of the heart.

For the fourth category, *Reinforces political and social mores*, the Fundamentalist Muslim would be aligned with the political and social dictates of the Imam and political authority. The Esoteric Sufi would find Abraham and Mohammad alive through his practice and actions.

Unitarian Universalists in the present day would, I believe, be most likely to gravitate toward the Sufi end of the continuum, at least in style of practice. Indeed, we find widespread use of the poetry and stories of Jelalluddin Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, made accessible for Western minds by Coleman Barks.<sup>31</sup> In my own church a small group of friends celebrate "Rumi's Wedding" (his death) each December 17th by gathering to have a meal and read his poetry. A selection from Rumi (adapted) is the source of the round, *Come, Come, Whoever You Are* in our Unitarian Universalist hymnbook.<sup>32</sup>

They are by no means in the category of Esoteric, or Ecstatic Sufism, which would include the practice of "whirling" (as is practiced by *Whirling Dervishes*) and little of the getting and spending so necessary in our Western culture.

So while we might be inclined to look to the Sufis as the sole source for Unitarian Universalist practice coming out of the Muslim tradition, I will choose to take the middle way, and look both to the traditional practice of *Salat* as well as some Sufi sources for possible enrichment of our 21<sup>st</sup> century Unitarian Universalist practice of ritual and of prayer. I will suggest six possible ways we could deepen the ritual and prayer life in our congregations as a reflection of Muslim traditions. My intention is not to appropriate Muslim traditions, 'westernize' them, and claim them as an expression of our pluralism. I intend rather to explore the larger categories in Muslim practice as a reflection of areas we might attend as we deepen the spiritual practice of our members. These are not exhaustive, but are possibilities suggested by the practice of *Salat*.

1. The prayer cycle of five times a day communal prayer.
2. Attention to sacred time and place (with a comment about direction and purification)
3. Attention to idolatries.
4. Intention
5. Recite, not just read<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Barks, Coleman tr. *The Essential Rumi* HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> *Singing the Living Tradition*. Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press. 1993. #188

<sup>33</sup> Angha. Gabriel told Mohammad to recite, not merely to read.

6. Acknowledgement of presence of heart
7. Names for God

**The cycle of gathering five times a day for prayer**

With our emphasis on the individual, Unitarian Universalists (and others) are surprised even to consider the congregational once-a-week worship service part of their spiritual practice. They assume that a spiritual practice is done alone, or in a small group. They assume our worship has other purposes. *Salat* can provide a critique of our radically individualistic concept of spiritual practice and communal worship, and give us a different vantage point with which to consider the purposes of our worship services.

If we are to take our guidance from the traditional practice of *Salat*, we could incorporate the practice of five times a day for gathered prayer in our spirituality retreats. I have found leading retreats that structured gathering and disbursing of the group provides a rhythm that is very nourishing. When the rhythm is structured around the rising of the sun, the fullness of the day, and the waning light of evening, it strengthens attentiveness to our participation in the rhythms of life, rather than our efforts to override them.

Taking guidance from the *Sufi* practice, we could suggest a communal practice, even at work or home, agreeing with other UUs to set aside times for a specific practice throughout the day, strengthened by the intention of others.

Realistically, I know from experience that it is very difficult for most UUs to set aside even ten minutes a day for meditation, spoken or silent. At the same time, in my once a month *Living by Heart* classes in which we sit in silence for ten minutes, the people report how starved they are even for that experience together. Such a rhythmic, ritual, communal observance is so important for the nurturing of the human spirit that part of our role as ministers should include at least nudging our members in the direction of some regular, communal practice.

On Sunday, when our congregations come together, *Salat* can serve as a reminder of the importance of communal movement in ritual worship. It can remind us that we are not serving an aggregate of individuals a program of independent and unrelated elements, however interesting, enlightening and engaging. Our worship affects individual hearts and minds but has its most power and effect when it is experienced communally.<sup>34</sup> How we move as liturgical leaders--the invitations we give to be silent, to sing, to pray, to pay attention, are experienced as more significant when we can gather the whole congregation into our invitation.

We would eschew mindless ritual, for ritual's sake. At the same time, we might look at the human impulse which created *Salat* and consider how

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<sup>34</sup> See Vogt, Von Ogden. *The Primary of Worship*. Starr King Press, 1958. p. 155. He says, "The first requirement, then, for a normal church of the future, is the centrality of its structure of worship. The desirable norm calls for a church that is not primarily a house of ideas or of practical activities or a house of the arts but a house of prayer for all people, a place of common worship."

we might attend to the regular, communal, ritual needs of our people. Our Sunday morning worship, and regular retreats which include a cycle of ritual prayer can be a step toward fulfilling this human yearning.

***Attention to sacred time and place (with a comment about direction)***

In our quest to be universal, we have perhaps neglected the specificity of time and place for ritual prayer which *Salat* provides. In my first church, I discovered, somewhat to my dismay that by starting the worship service at the time announced I was breaking radically from the tradition of the church which was to gather informally until the people ‘settled’ and then determine intuitively that the worship should begin. Not knowing this was the tradition, and assuming the time stated was the time intended, I rang the bell my first Sunday ‘on time’, creating some chaos as people rushed to ready themselves for the worship service to begin.<sup>35</sup>

*Salat* calls us back to attention to sacred time, creating the expectation that the communal worship will begin at the announced time, that we are beginning time ‘set apart’ from regular time, whether with a bell, an Invocation, the formal lighting of the Chalice, and/or the wearing of liturgical robes. It also calls us to some discipline about the end of sacred time, with the snuffing of the chalice, a Benediction, a bell, and/or a formal Postlude, rather than applause.

It would seem that the practice of facing Mecca, universalized into some sense of temporal direction, does not pertain to us.<sup>36</sup> The need to be oriented however, is a human one. Stephen R. Covey has suggested to the business community that we should attend to our moral and ‘true north’ principles.<sup>37</sup> Some of our members use Covey’s ‘compass’ in their daily planning programs in a program of alignment of their values and intentions with their daily activities. The Sufis may be a source of direction when we are inclined to universalize our religion into a trivialized version of ‘any direction will do,’ and the idea of turning toward Mecca doesn’t help.

Rumi says,

Keep walking, though there’s no place to get to.

Don’t try to see through the distances.

That’s not for human beings. Move within,

but don’t move the way fear makes you move.<sup>38</sup>

There are directions to point toward. *Salat* invites us to be intentional about the directions we are pointing when we lead our congregations in worship and spiritual guidance.

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<sup>35</sup> I admit that having a *muezzin* announce the service from a tower might be more than could be expected—though at the same time the bells of my local Catholic church, which ring in my neighborhood ten minutes before the mass is to begin have provided my life a modicum of ritual attention.

<sup>36</sup> I am reminded of Rev. Norma Veridan’s Mother, a second generation Universalist, when asked if she wanted the body of her son returned to Fitchberg, Ma. for burial after he was killed in World War II, said, “No, we are Universalists. The world is our home. He can be buried where he died.”

<sup>37</sup> Covey, Stephen R. *First Things First* Simon and Schuster, 1994. p. 51

<sup>38</sup> Rumi, Jelaladin. *The Essential Rumi*, Coleman Barks, tr. HarperSanFrancisco. p. 278.

### Attention to Idolatries

This is familiar territory. We Unitarian Universalists are cautious about idolatries. Emerson said, “When the half-gods go, the gods arrive.”<sup>39</sup> We are cautious about worshipping half-gods. Our churches are either devoid of symbols, or include all the symbols of the major world religions, relativizing any one symbol. In our church in Dallas, a ‘centennial quilt’ which was a commissioned piece of fiber art and is a central piece of art in honor of our centennial in our sanctuary—the centennial quilt is moved every year so that it doesn’t become a permanent expression of our faith. First Unitarian Church of Chicago has an empty apse, symbolizing the emptiness at the center of our faith. Our flaming chalice symbol, traditionally surrounded by two intersecting circles, has the chalice off-set, again emphasizing emptiness at the center—reminding us of the centrality of mystery. We are familiar with the concern about idolatry.

Our idolatries, however, may be more subtle. In our quest to remove idolatrous symbols we may fail to see the idolatries of ‘rightness’ which plague us. The Islamic prohibition against images, in an effort to stem the human tendency to cling to symbols as if they were the truth they represented, serves as a reminder to us of the ways we cling to images of who we are, the truths we hold, and the ‘precious’ nature of our faith—specialized forms of idolatry which may pertain to us more than other religions which use the arts to represent their beliefs.

It is interesting to note that a refined sense of calligraphy and pattern has arisen in the Islamic culture, primarily because of the prohibition against images of the holy. We might consider strengths that our concern with idolatry has given us. Perhaps they can be found in our musical and intellectual representation of the holy.

### Intention

The pattern of the Sufis is to attend to the forms of traditional Islamic practice while considering intention more important than the outward forms. This too resonates with our practice. Substance is more important than form for us, and intention is more important than outcome. *Salat*, however, can serve as a reminder that form is important. So is the outcome of our actions.

*Salat* leads us to ask the question, “What are the forms that give shape to our intentions?” What forms give shape to our intention to have mystery at our center? What forms give shape to our intention to move toward justice? What ritual forms give shape to our intention to be inclusive, and welcoming, and anti-racist? What ritual forms give shape to our intention to love without reservation? These are more vexing questions, to which I cannot give a satisfying answer. I can only say that *Salat* calls us to think of those forms within which we are shaped, and to reexamine our dependence on prescription to mould our action.

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<sup>39</sup> Quotation from Earl Holt in a sermon of that title.

### Recite, not just read

Harry Scholefield chided me and our generation of ministers about our tendency to ‘use’ texts rather than to ingest them. He believed we had become consumers of texts, rather than spiritual leaders whose ministry flowed out of them. He felt that we should live with our texts (more than a week) before we preached them. *Salat* calls us to a similar place. While we might call the practice of reciting the prayers of *Salat* “rote”, we might take seriously the word of Gabriel to Mohammed to recite, not merely to read. Reciting our texts ‘by heart’ might lead us to a depth of understanding we had not anticipated.<sup>40</sup>

### Acknowledgement of presence of heart

Our tradition has provided the corrective of mind in addition to heart in religion. Our religion must make sense. It must correspond to our experience and knowledge.

*Salat* may provide a reminder that our religion must also provide a sense of presence and speak to the heart of our lives. This may be the primary appeal of the Sufis, especially Rumi, who teaches that religion is the path to uniting with Love. The qualities which have been cited earlier in this paper which *Salat* can provide are qualities which we may want to consider as universally important to the nurturing of the human spirit.

Heart is deeper than emotion. It is deeper even than intention. Presence is knowledge deeper than knowing. It is knowing deeper than experience.

### Names for God

*Salat*, in Sufi practice, includes naming the attributes of God. There are ninety-nine names, as described earlier in this paper, with the aim to find *the One who is Named* (the hundredth name, or the name of mystery).

Teaching our members to name their experience of God (or Life, or their Higher Power, or any name with which they can begin) is a profoundly important practice. In Dallas, our pastoral prayer begins with the invocation, “God of many names, and mystery beyond all our naming. . .” This gives our members permission to boldly name and acknowledge the half-gods as they experience them. If one cannot name the angels with whom they wrestle, the gods they serve as well as the gods they have rejected—they are left without a language to speak their praise and gratitude and yearning. *Salat* may call us to the practice of naming the attributes of the gods we serve and repudiate—giving us freedom to worship.

Naming attributes for God (Allah) not as a theological posit, but as a religious existential reality we encounter may take us closer to the *salvation by character* our spiritual ancestors posed, than any of our efforts to be good in the present century.

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<sup>40</sup> See *Living by Heart: A Guide to Devotional Practice*. Video by Harry Scholefield and Laurel Hallman, 1996, and Workbook by Laurel Hallman, 2003.

### In Conclusion

***Salat*** as a practice which leads to exclusivity, perfectionism, and even terrorism, does not have appeal for twenty-first century Unitarian Universalists. This perception is only of one aspect in a long continuum of belief and practice, including the mystical practice of the Sufis. ***Salat***, seen as an interesting corrective to our own practice of ritual and prayer, and even as a call to Love, may perhaps deepen our sense of who we are and who we are called to be, as ministers, as a worshipping community, and in our collective and individual spiritual practice.

## Appendix I:

The following is a worship shaped by the Muslim practice of *Salat*. It was created by Mark Belletini, and is offered as one liturgical example of *Salat* adapted for our tradition.

from Prayer Manual *Lawami'u CEI-bayyinat* by Fakhr al-Din ar Razi of Jerusalem,  
as found in Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use by Constance E. Padwick 1961/1996 Oneworld Oxford:

*"The worship of the eyes is weeping, the worship of the ears is listening, the worship of the mouth is praise, the worship of the hands is distribution of goods and giving, the worship of the body is effort and accomplishment, the worship of heart is trembling awe and hope, the worship of the spirit is satisfaction and surrender...."*

Note: All of these prayers come from the above source, adapted for more inclusive language, modern expression and vocabulary, and edited for length and usefulness for North American, non-Muslim devotion.

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1. The Call To Prayer (*chanted, if possible; the ancient Arabic can be used if known, or this English rendition which fits the chant tune. Taped versions of the Call can be used, if desired, or a new chant can be written, using these words.*)

Great is Al'Lah! Great is Al'Lah!  
And Al'Lah is but One.  
And Muhammed proclaims the One.

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## 2. Prayers

I stand facing the direction point, (qibla) and raise my hands to the level of my ears, and I say:

"I make my intention, to prostrate myself twice according to the prayer rite of the hours." (*those who cannot kneel and prostrate themselves may simply bow toward the qibla or even just nod.*)

1. *Y fattaha l'bab fi kulli* You Opener of the Gate in Every Circumstance, I greet You with my heart, my heart that is here, that is here, for there is no other place right now for me but here, standing your audience hall, speaking openly and without doubt of your compassion for me. Great are You, and Most Holy. Before you all of your messengers cry out Holy! Holy! Holy! day and night, and I join their praisesong in gladness. May there be symmetry between my inward heart and my outward life. Come and blot out the transgressions of my heart, where I put the many before your Oneness, and put creatureliness before the fountain of all creation. I praise you and remember your messenger Muhammed.

2. There is no God but you,  
You who transcend all embodiment, or division, or naming!  
There is no God but you,  
You who are exalted beyond concept, or type, or simile or metaphor or locality or direction.  
There is no God but you,

You who are not perceived, nor made visible in our imaginations, nor comprehended through the suppositions of the mind, nor grasped by thought or experiment. You are the One, the only Permanence, transcending mate or offspring or companionship or localization or modality, and you alone I praise.

3. To you be grateful praise...praise that shall illumine my heart.

To you be grateful praise...praise that shall illumine my grave.

To you be grateful praise...praise that shall illumine my hearing.

To you be grateful praise....praise that shall illumine my seeing.

To you be grateful praise....praise that shall illumine my flesh.

To you be grateful praise....praise that shall illumine my very bones.

Let my praise be my only treasure, kept in the store of your Transcendence over all the worlds.

4. O You who are but One,

appoint me for light in my heart and light in my tomb

and light before me and light behind me.

Appoint me for light in my right hand and light in my left hand

and light above me and light below me

and light in my understanding and light in my seeing and light in my face,

and light in my flesh, and light in my blood, and light in my bones.

Increase the light in my life, give me light, and appoint me to the service of light,

and suffuse my whole being with light, and more light and still more!

Plunge me into the sea of You, who are the One Light, the fountain of being that holds at bay the whole of Non Being.

And may my last acts be acts of light, my last words be words of light

and my best day be the day when I enter the gates of Your own ineffable Light.

5. O You who are the gate of Mercy to them that show Mercy,

open Your Gate to me, I who need Your mercy.

May I not present my case to others

with an endless drone, but rather may I turn to You,

who are open when all others are closed.

Your generosity is wider than even the poorest of the

poor who are by all counts the most generous on this earth,

for Your poverty is Your Glory.

Whoever came to You for your Hospitality without you giving to them of Your fullness?

I am a weary one at Your Door. I am anxious, and I knock.

Do now open Your Gate, and fling wide Your Doors and bring me to

Your embracing Oneness.

In full abandon I place my trust in your freehanded grace,

where my weariness will at last find a rest.

6. (evening prayer)

Oh my God, my eyes are at rest, and the stars are setting.

Hushed are the movements of the birds in their nests. Asleep are the monsters of the deep.

And still you are Justice itself that knows no change;

you are the Equity that never swerves, the Lasting which ever endures.

The governors of the world are locked away now in their great bedrooms,

guarded by bodyguards hung with armaments; but the Door to Your

chamber is always open, unguarded even by Your messengers. Oh my God,

each lover is now alone with the beloved of their heart,

and now I come to your open arms, you who are my Beloved.

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