***Salah*: Why should we even bother?**

**MODULE: 4**

**Class title**: *Salah: why should we even bother?*

**Aim of lesson**: To understand prayer as fundamental to one’s attainment of Paradise, and the need to perfect and improve *Salah*

**Category**: Worship, Motivational

**Class Format**: Power Point Presentation

*(Greeting to students) Assalamu ‘alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

*(Ta’awwudh) A’oodhu billahi min Ash Shaytaanir Rajeem*

*(Tasmiyah) Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

*(Du’a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul ‘uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*

*[Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verses 25-28]*

Slide 1-2 )

Something that I have been giving a lot of thought to lately while trying to decide upon a topic is the multiple things we can speak about; for e.g. Day of Judgment, gratitude, gender relationships, entertainment or screen time. However, one of the common excuses that comes up usually around the topic of *Salah* is, that life is too busy so we forget, we get caught up, saying that “we’re at tuition, the mall, at dinner, running errands, studying up late for exams” and thus we missed our *Salah* and could not safeguard it.

Nowadays now that we are in quarantine, this is basically the one time in our life where we have no excuses whatsoever- of course we don't have any legitimate excuses otherwise as well, but right now even the most invalid excuses don’t exist! If someone were to ask you why you aren’t praying, you essentially have to understand that it's because something is wrong with your understanding of *Salah* and not really because of the circumstance or the context.

Therefore, what is the most pertinent time to talk about *Salah*, than now! *Salah* is supposed to be the best way to actually connect to Allah SWT, your purpose and your *deen*. Let’s discuss it in depth- about why we have to do it, what it consists of, why is it that we sit down five times a day -sometimes more if you're doing the voluntary prayers -and raise our hands up to our head and go down in *ruku’* and then in *sujoo*d and why is this needed?

Why are we doing it at all? Why should one spend so much time in their life dedicating themselves to this very practice. We should conceptually know why we’re doing it otherwise how will we see the point of it? So again, let's start with a dua as we start with anything in life we start by asking Allah SWT for assistance and help.

*(Du’a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul ‘uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*

*[Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verses 25-28]*

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I’m certain that all of us must have heard the story of how *salah* came to us. The story of how *salah* came to us is actually something really interesting and unique. Usually what happened during time of the Prophet ((PBUH)) is that when Allah SWT wanted to send down a commandment; so for instance in the case of the commandment of Zakah or Hajj etc, it would come to theProphet ((PBUH)) via divine inspiration, or angel *Jibreel* (AS) delivering the message.

However, there was only one commandment that did not come down in this way. Let’s suppose that something in your life happens in one way every single time and then one time it happens in a really different way, so you will take that really different way as an exceptional moment, as something really special right? It’s going to strike you as unique and you will question as to what was so important that it happened in such a unique way? Similarly, when the *Prophet* ((PBUH)) received the commandment of *Salah*, he was called to Allah SWT. So rather than sending angel Jibreel down, Allah SWT brought the *Prophet*  (PBUH) up to Himself. This is what we call the journey of Al-Mairaj- the magnificent journey where the *Prophet* (PBUH) ascended the levels of the heavens, and that's where he received the order of *Salah*.

Initially when Allah SWT gave the commandment of *Salah*, He said fifty *salahs*. How many *Salahs* do we pray right now? 5. If you're taking 10 minutes per prayer, to pray five times a day that would be 50 minutes. How much time will it take you if you had to pay 50? that's 500 minutes. More than 8 hours per day! That would take up your entire day. Then what happens is, Musa AS told the Prophet(PBUH) that no, people won't be able to pray that much, go back and you ask for a reduction. So, then he went back and then he came down with a reduction and then Musa AS sent him back again to ask for further reduction. The Prophet (PBUH) went till Allah reduced prayer from 50 to 5.

So that actually holds a lesson in itself for us. If we had to pray 50 *Salah* a day, would we be able to do anything else? probably not other than just basic tasks like eating and using the toilet.

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The fact that Allah SWT wanted our entire life to be full of 50 prayers shows to us that our entire life’s purpose is *Salah*. Our life is supposed to be full of *salah* and everything else is supposed to be on its side.

So it's almost like Allah is telling us that the purpose of your life is *Salah*, or *Salah* is your real life and everything else that we fill our life with is just motions or it's just stuff that we have to do to make life go by.

And yet if we look at our lives, what we actually do is the complete opposite. *Salah* is something that we squeeze into our day when we find time, if that. Our lives don't revolve around *salah*, *Salah* revolves around our lives. If we're in class what happens? *Salah* is an afterthought. If you're at the mall, a sale is more urgent.

Now that's something for us to think about, because something is seriously wrong with us when we put aside the very purpose of our life and the very purpose of our existence in order to watch a sports game, or be on house party with our friends, or play ludostar or talk on call with someone. That's why we miss our Maghrib and Isha? that's something we seriously have to think about.

Now, the first thing I want you guys to to do is to clarify your understanding of *Salah*. The purpose of my life is *salah*. Everything else around it is just things that we have to fill up in order to survive. Now we have to first start by reorienting our perspective towards *Salah* to begin with. Our day should be full of *Salah*, and everything else needs to come on the side needs to circle around *Salah*, not the other way around.

Slide 5:

Moving onto the next point. If I were to ask all of you, do you believe? I'm sure all 43 of you would say; of course we believe! what kind of question is that? If I asked you, are you Muslim? Your response would be; of course! I'm Muslim there's a reason why I'm here!

Do you know that the very thing that separates Muslims from non-Muslims is *Salah*?

There's a hadith of the Prophet (PBUH):

***‘Abdullah bin Buraidah narrated that his father said:***

*“The Messenger of Allah ((PBUH)) said: ‘The covenant that distinguishes between us and them is prayer; so whoever leaves it, he has committed Kufr.’” (Sahih)*

That's something that we should all seriously be thinking about. You and I should have goosebumps right now thinking about all of the *salah* that we have ever missed. Do we really want to commit disbelief? then why is that we take *Salah* so lightly? Why is that for us it's such a passing matter. “I missed my *Salah*, but it’s okay, I’ll make it up!”- such a causal approach!

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Do you know what it was that made Iblees into *shaytan*? He didn't refuse to believe in Allah. He didn’t say that Allah wasn’t One. What Iblees did was that he refused to make a *sajda.* He refused to make one *sajda,* imagine all of the *sujood* that you and I forget, or are too distracted to make.

Slide 7:

Do we lament on how casually we miss our *Salah*? I’ll give you a common circumstance many face; you had basketball practice after school. Your school classes end at 1:20, 1:30 you have basketball practice, so you think that you will pray when you get home and by the time you get home by 5 o'clock it's *Asr* time. Another common occurrence; in the morning your alarm rings, you wake up and you're think yawning and eyes sticking together; I'm so sleepy. I can't possibly wake up and make wudu right now anyway. I'll pray tomorrow. We don't even think twice about it, we miss our *salah* so casually.

Now how many of you have ever gotten burnt? How many of us have ever been burned by a match stick? You're putting something on the stove or while putting bread in the toaster, you got burnt, it's stings terribly. Your finger throbs for hours. If any of you have gotten a major burn, you know that this pain lasts for months and weeks and and it's painful every time you touch it, it's raw to the flesh and it's stings, you can feel the pain of it in your entire body.

Now imagine. The fire of *Jahannum* and how that's going to be. It will be so many times worse than the fire of this world. Imagine your entire body burning again and again in that fire of *Jahannum.* It's a disgusting thought, it makes us stick to our stomach it makes me feel really queasy.

I don't want to hear about this. Of course you don’t to hear about it. None of us want to realistically go to Hell and make Allah SWT unhappy with us. Why would I willingly do that? And yet we miss our *Salah*.

And Allah SWT tells us in the Quran. The people of Paradise will ask the people of Hell:

*What has brought you to Saqar (74:42)*

*They will say, “We were not among those who offered Salah (obligatory prayer) (74:43)*

We take the matter so lightly; we hear it all the time. “Oh yeah, he's a Muslim but, he doesn't pray”. Or we’ll hear ourselves say, “I'm a practicing Muslim I just pray three out of five prayers”. The question is, are we of those who don’t pray?

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Now let me ask you a question. It may sound a little like a broken record. You’ll often hear elders say about forgetting *Salah*, do you ever forget to use the bathroom? Do you ever forget to eat?

If you think about it, that's so true. We so casually say “oh, you know I missed my *salah* because I forgot or I was busy doing this or busy doing XYZ” but have you guys ever forgotten to eat?

Do you ever forget to use the bathroom? No, right? You fulfill your physiological and bodily needs. You would never starve yourself all day. You would never do that to your body because you have to take care of your body otherwise you're gonna starve, get weak, be cranky and that's not good for your health.

However, how many times have you starved your soul of *salah*? If you can’t do that to your body, why is that you can do that to your soul? And this is so strange because as Muslims we know that one day our body will leave us, in a few years, it could be any time whatsoever. It could be 10 days for some of us, 10 years for some, 40 years for the others, eventually we know the fact that our body is going to leave us. What's going to be left? our soul.

So, why is that we don't actually focus on feeling feeding our soul? What is temporary, is our body which we constantly focus on – and yet what is permanent; which is our soul; we completely neglect and pay no attention to. How is that logical? Shouldn’t be focusing on the food for our soul? Which is *Salah*?

Growing up we hear that music is food for the soul, but according to our its *Salah* first and foremost. If you don't get up and pray five times a day and raise your hands and prostrate in front of the Lord who created you, you are essentially starving your soul.

Slide 9:

Now most of these points we discussed, cover those who don't pray at all or pray irregularly. Some of us may be thinking that these points don't apply to me because I pray five times a day, I do my bit and I'm a good Muslim. I feel pretty positive about where I stand. However, we need to be thinking about how does the *Prophet* (PBUH) say about this?

*Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said,*

*“****The first action for which a servant of Allah will be held accountable on the Day of Resurrection will be his prayers. If they are in order, he will have prospered and succeeded. If they are lacking, he will have failed and lost.***

*Sunan al-Tirmidhī 413*

So, the first thing that I you and I will be asked about on the Day of Judgment is about our prayers. If I have them sorted and they’re good then I have basically passed most of the test and if they're lacking, then I have failed and lost. Think of your *salah* as a foundation. The foundation of your being, your faith and your Iman is your *salah*.

Slide 10:

How many of you have ever played Jenga? If you have, then you know that you can pull out the bricks on top if you want your structure to survive. That’s a pro tip for Jenga by the way! Try to get as many bricks from the top; if you want to win! We can use this metaphor for *salah* and for our *deen* basically.

If you take out the bricks at the bottom, if you weaken the foundation and loosen the important pillars that the building needs to be rested upon, then your whole building will collapse. Whereas if your foundation is in place, it's solid, it's not crumbling -it's not half-hearted, you know *Salah* isn’t rushed- if everything is in place the way it needs to be, your faith, you soul and your place as a Muslim is basically well-rested.

Slide 11:

Now in Surah Ma’un Allah SWT says

*So, Woe to those performers of Salāh (107:4)*

*who are neglectful of their Salāh (107:5)*

Now it's important to note about these ayah is that when Allah SWT says in the Quran “*Fa wailul-lil musalleen”,* He's not talking about those who don't pray. He's talking about the *“Musaleen*”. He’s talking to the ones who do pray! He’s saying; destruction and damage and ruin and end to those who pray. So we should be asking ourselves, why do those pray being warned of a failure like that? And if you go to the grammatical analysis of this, “wail” means destruction, but it is also the name of one of the valleys of *Jahannum.*

Why is a valley of *Jahnnum* and those who pray being put together? Because Allah SWT is talking about in the next ayah; that it is those who are neglectful of their prayer and they're those who make a show of their deeds, and so they are those who are heedless of their prayer?

Slide 12:

What is it to be heedless of your prayer? To be irregular. For eg. One prayed their *Salah* but went to sleep before praying *Isha*, or didn’t set an alarm for *Fajr* intentionally. Secondly, it’s those people who are neglectful of their *Salah* timings. They always intentionally wait to pray until the last minute or they pray after the time is gone.

I'm just sitting doing my work, doing everything else in the world except for praying and the last thing that I will do in my day is come to my *Salah*. This *ayat* is also talking about those people. It’s also talking about those people who pray very quickly and in a rush.

When they pray it basically feels as though they just pecked their limbs, they just went down, got back up and went back down. That's what this *ayat* is also talking about. They create the habit in which the moment they say “*Allah o Akbar*”, they've zoned out, frequency out and they're just going up and down. They have no idea what’s going on from one ruku to another. They’ve hardly though about Allah SWT- it’s like mere exercise.

Slide 13:

When they finished prayer, it’s like a ticked to-do list item. It’s done, but they didn't really remember Allah SWT at all, they were just busy with their worldly thought. Right now, I need you guys to be thinking about yourself. I need you to look within, retrospect and really, truly ask yourself am I one of those who does their prayer as an exercise?

When I pray do I actually think of Allah SWT? When I pray, do I actually know that I am standing in front of the Lord of the worlds. When I say *“Allah o Akbar”* do I really mean that Allah SWT is the greatest? Is Allah SWT really the greatest for me? Or am I still thinking about my to-do list about what I have to do for the rest of the day after I finish my *Salah*.

I need you to be thinking about *Zuhr* right now, you just probably just prayed a few hours ago. So when you we’re praying was you thinking pattern like this; “okay after I pray, I'm going to have my lunch, after that I’m going to call back this person, I have to get started on this homework, and then I wonder if xyz YouTuber has put up her new video, wonder what’s going to happen in the next episode of my show” Were you thinking about all of that? Or were you standing on your prayer mat thinking about how you’re standing in front of the Lord of the worlds and He's watching you right now. Did you contemplate on your tiny, measly existence?

Slide 14:

Then the *Prophet*  (PBUH) said in another hadith says

*Abdullah ibn Mughafal reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “****Verily,******the worst thieves among people are those who steal from their prayers****.” It was said, “O Messenger of Allah, how do they steal from their prayers?” The Prophet said, “****They do not complete its bowing or its prostration” (Sahih)***

Now what does it mean steal from their prayers? if I prayed my *Zuhr*, how can I steal from *Zuhr* then? The *Prophet*  (PBUH) answered that question, they do not complete their bowing or prostration. What does that mean? That means that when they go into *ruku* and *sujood* they don't do it properly. I want you to ask someone at home to observe your posture when you go to *ruku*. Often when you go down in *ruku* you don't actually bend your back into a 90-degree angle where you are staring at the middle point in front of you, really spending a few seconds in your *Ruku* reading *tasbeeh* and really thinking about Allah SWT.

Are you the kind of person who just does down and gets back up in one second. Like a snap of the fingers, how can the minimum of 3 times reading “*Subhaana Rabbiyal-'Adheem*” be even done in that? When you go into sujood are you the one who goes down and your nose touches the ground and you’re back up again. It’s almost like a race! you don't actually go down press your nose and your forehead against the ground, press the palms of your hands against the ground and think of the fact that I'm with the Most Powerful. When you get back up from sujood, you sit in the middle of the two s*ujood* for a few seconds before you go back down. If your two *sujood* hardly look separated, then you have a problem- and according to this hadith you are the worst of the people who steal from their prayers.

Do you know, according to some scholars if you don't do this properly, your prayer is basically invalid- so it's something for us to really think about that. What's the point of us spending all this time making the effort to pray if you're not really even praying properly? so you might as well just fix the quality of your prayer, right?

Slide 15:

Now in another place in the Quran, Allah SWT says,

*“Success is really attained by the believers (23:1)*

*Who concentrate their attention in humbleness when offering Salah (prayers)” (23:2)*

Those people are successful who are attentive in their prayers and essentially those people who are not attentive in their prayers are the ones who are unsuccessful.

Essentially what does that mean? if I'm unsuccessful I may qualify for Hellfire and who are those who are unsuccessful? they are those who are not attentive in their prayers. Now you need to question yourself, are you the one who goes on auto-pilot the moment *Salah* begins?

When I start praying I start daydreaming, isn't that true? the moment we raise our hands to pray thats exactly when I start planning the rest of my day. Haven’t you heard people say that I get my best thoughts and ideas when I'm praying? that's not a good thing, that means that you're basically not paying attention to what your purpose is and why you're here to begin with and instead you're thinking about every random thing in the world; comebacks to an insult, food ideas etc

And that's really ironic because the reality is that when you pray *salah* thats actually when you should be completely unaware of your surroundings. What we are required to do actually is to have *khushu* in our *salah* and have attentiveness- where you isolate yourself from everything else so that when you come to *salah* that it's just you and your Lord.

You remember the fact that right now as I say Allahu Akbar, as I am standing here, this could potentially be my last prayer. When we pray do we have that fear in us? That awareness and that sensation within you that Allah SWT is watching me right now? this heightened awareness that I am reading the words of the Quran. Allah SWT is listening to every single one of those words, so what am I even saying? are my feelings in there, am I engaging my emotions in the process?

Slide 16:

Now I know that this can be difficult and so far everything we've discussed has basically been about why you need to have awareness in *salah* and what the repercussions of not being attentive in your *salah*. Now the question is how can we make our *salah* better then?

I'll be giving you all a few of tips and obviously this list is inexhaustive since improving your *salah* is a life long journey; as your *deen* grows you will also improve and you will discover more and more inner dimensions within your *Salah*.

Slide 17:

Tip # 1: Change your mindset.

We see *salah* often as a burden, that's the last thing we want to do. It’s usually at the bottom of our list because its so boring for us, it's such a burden where it's it's something that we never look forward to doing.

It would hep to see *salah* in a different light, where five times a day, you're being able to connect with your Lord. There is beautiful, heartwarming incident in the seerah. Every time the *Prophet* (PBUH)’s heart would be heavy he would go to Bilal RA and he said:

*When telling Bilal (ra) to pronounce the*adhan*(call to prayer), he said, “O Bilal, give us rest with it.” [Abu Dawud]*

So he would see *salah* not as a burden instead, he would say that ‘*salah* is the coolness of my eyes’. You know, the coolesness of your eyes is that when you think of something or when you look at it you go oh yeah, it brings you joy and contentment. So how do you think of *Salah* as something you are excited about?

That firstly starts with you thinking of *salah* as a place where you vent, so think of your *salah* as five times a day where Allah SWT is giving me this opportunity to basically come to Him and tell Him all of my problems. I can come to Allah SWT and I can complain to Him and let Him know that x person said this, and y person did this and I’m feeling so terrible and I wish this was going right. You need to start building a relationship with Allah SWT.

You need to see your five times prayer as your five times a day an opportunity given by Allah SWT for you to connect. You need to start thinking of Allah SWT as your friend. As someone you want to speak to, as someone you want to spend time with then you will want to go to *Salah*, because what is *salah* is your one-on-one time with Allah SWT. Prayer needs to be the time in your day where you go like, okay, I'm gonna go there and I'm gonna calm myself down that is gonna be the time of my day where I get my answers, I released my burdens, I vent, I get everything off my chest, I connect with my purpose and I connect to who I am as a person. You need to look forward to *salah* as your time to tell Allah SWT everything.

Think of it as this; we all look forward to those conversations with our best friend at the end of the day where we tell her everything that happened. Similarly, *Salah* can become your coping mechanism, as your tool to deal with your daily life, as basically like your therapeutic tool- then you will start to look forward to it your entire *Salah* will be changed. I know for me first thing that's what began to change my *Salah* when I tried to stop looking at it as a burden instead of looking at it as an opportunity, that's when I started to enjoy it and that's what a lot of people say about *Salah*.

Slide 18:

Tip # 2 Mindfulness

Now, the world around us is so fast-paced, there’s a constant stimulus overload going on around us all the time, with constant distraction. Psychologists all around the world now recommend that you take a few minutes out of your day to meditate.  You take a few minutes out of your day to basically reconnect with your purpose, with your own self, with your own inner voices and you basically practice mindfulness. Now what is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means spending a few minutes of your day to just focus on what is happening in this very moment instead of just thinking about 50 things at once. These days even when we enjoy a meal it’s with distraction, while using our phone. When do we actually just do one thing without distraction? Hardly ever. So, think of *Salah* as your time to meditate, to focus. Doing that can be so incredibly beneficial for your mental health, well-being and effective in reducing anxiety and stress.

The entire purpose of my life is to enter Jannah. You’ve been given the answer key to your exam; which is *Salah*. So how does it make sense to focus on everything else but the answer; which is good *Salah* and still expect to ace the test?

Slide 19:

Tip #3: Prioritize *Salah*.

Think of your *salah* as something you have to do now, not later. It’s the most urgent matter you have. We often like to think, I’ll do it later; I’m just 16 I’ll fix my *Salah* when I’m 22, then when you’re 22 its when you’re 30 and the cycle goes on. No. you fix your *salah* now. Today. Not making it a priority is something you’ll regret, fixing it will ONLY bring goodness to your life; calmer, more peace, and make Allah SWT more pleased with you. You have to make your *salah* priority. When you have fifty-one things going on after quarantine and suddenly your life is incredibly busy- you have to make sure there is enough time and preparation for prayer to be part of your busy life. Make sure there’s a certain kind of balance in your life.

So you have to do is prioritize. Tips to do that can be to keep daily prayer alarms. Another tip can be to make use of the 7 second lag. In that basically there is 7 seconds between you thinking something and actually doing it- if you think *azaan* is happening and within those 7 seconds of that thought you immediately get up- you’ll manage to pray otherwise you’ll end up in a cycle of procrastination.

Another thing you can do is for instance if you have trouble waking up for *Fajr*, you ensure you’re sleeping on time, you can tell your family members to wake you up, you can make genuine dua to Allah SWT to wake you up for *fajr*, keeping your alarm at a distance so you don’t snooze and go back to sleep. If you're doing your end of the bargain, Allah SWT will wake you up. You have to make your best effort.

Slide 20:

Tip # 4: Know the meaning behind the words.

One of the major ways you can take to improve your *salah* is to actually understand what your *salah* is, actually know what you're reading in *salah*. How can you concentrate on reading something you don’t even understand? If its gibberish to you, how will you build a connection?

A baby step towards this is to understand the meaning behind *Surah Fatihah*! To know the meaning behind a surah that is a major chunk of your prayer. When you read “*iyyaka* na’budu *wa iyyaka nastaeen”* and you know the meaning behind it, you know, the fact that it means oh Allah SWT, you will be only one I ask help from, and you are the only one I go to for help. If you know *“ihdinas siratul mustaqeem*” then you know you are asking Allah SWT to guide you to the straight path. If you know the meaning you won’t be reading like a parrot, then you're going to have emotion and feeling behind that as well.

Slide 21:

So with that I'm going to end our talk. I hope we gained a lot from it today inshallah. The key summary points are that:

-Our *salah* is important since it is the first thing, we are going to be asked about we want to be asked about on the day of judgment.

-Our *salah* cannot not have loopholes otherwise our success in the hereafter could be jeopardized as we read in Surah Ma’un. If you're not praying, you need to start praying and if we are praying then we need to fix our prayers.

-We can take many many steps to fix our prayers and the number one step that we can take is to change our mindset about it; as it being a big event of our day that we look forward to not a tick mark.

So I pray that all of you including myself begin to see the *salah* as something that we look forward to and as the Prophet (PBUH) said for it to be the coolness of the our eyes

*(Du’a for end of a gathering) SubhanaRabbikaRabbulIzzati ‘ammayasifunwasalamun*

*‘alalmursaleen, walhamdulillahiRabbil ‘alameen*

*(Parting salutation to students) AssalamalaikumwarahmatullahiwaBarakatuh*