

THE FIVE DAILY PRAYERS

Prayers are enjoined on believers at stated times.

Al-Quran, 4:103

The five daily prayers are of paramount importance to Muslims. Since these prayers must be performed within certain periods of time throughout the day and night, determining the starting time of those prayers have been the focus of Muslim astronomers very early on together with the determination of *qiblah*.

The prayer times depend very much on the movement of the sun. Hence, finding the position of the sun from dawn to dusk is imperative.

Brief History of The Five Daily Prayers

Initially Muslims performed only two prayers daily, one in the morning and one in the evening. This continued for about 11 years after Islam was first introduced by the Prophet (pbuh).

When he was around 51 years old, he was invited by Allah for a miraculous journey to the heavens and it was then that he received the command for five daily prayers. However, the command was devoid of the times for those prayers. It was only later that Allah revealed two verses outlining the general timing for those five prayers. The first verse is the following:

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفَيْ النَّهَارِ وَرُفُلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ...

And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night...

(Hud, 114)

The second verse is the following:

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْءَانَ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ
قُرْءَانَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا.

Establish worship at the going down of the sun until the dark of night, and (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn. Lo! (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn is ever witnessed.

(Isra', 78)

The broad time for the five daily prayers in these two verses are:

- Zuhr & 'Asr : Going down of the sun (*duluk al-shams*)
- Maghrib & Fajr : Two ends of the day (*tarafay al-nahr*)
- 'Isha' : approaches of the night (*zulf min al-lail*) and dark of night (*ghasaq al-lail*)
- Subh : recital of the Qur'an at dawn (*qur'an al-fajr*)

It is left to the *hadith* to describe the exact starting and ending times of these prayers. There are two *hadith*.

The first *hadith* was narrated by the Companion 'Abd Allah bin al-'Abbas. The Prophet (pbuh) said: