



Islam in America

Session 2:

NOVA Life-Long Learning (NOVA-LLI)

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Course Outline

Session 1:

- History of Islam in America: (and watching a video about it)
- Diversity and Demographics of Muslims in America
- African-American Muslims
- Major Muslim Organizations and institutions
- Mosques and Islamic Schools
- Islam in public school books and Islamic Studies in Universities
- Youth challenges
- Muslims in workplace and schools
- Political Participation
- 9/11 and its Aftermath
- Recent American wars
- Islamophobia

Session 2:

- Some unique aspects of daily life of American Muslims
 - Daily prayers
 - Islamic Law and Shai'ah
 - Muslims interacting with other communities
 - Open time for any other questions

Second Pillar of Islam: Daily Prayers (Ṣalaah)

- The Arabic word for the prayer is Salaah
- Root word of Ṣalaah: Ṣila - connection or contact
 - Ṣalaah is the connection of human to Allah
- Salaah refers mainly to the five daily prayers in Islam
- Salaah is a special act of worship and prayer in Islam
- It is the main and central act of worship
- It is offered in a prescribed schedule and manner while withdrawing from other activities

Four different positions of body

Standing



Bowing Down



Prostration



Sitting

Daily Prayers Schedule

1. Early morning (Fajr): Its time is between dawn and sunrise
 - Dawn: About 80 minutes before sunrise
 2. Early afternoon (Dhuhr): Its time starts with decline of sun zenith
 3. Late afternoon ('Asr): Its time starts when sun is more than half-way down towards west
 4. Sunset (Maghrib): Its time is right after sunset
 5. Night (Isha'): Its time starts about 80 minutes after sunset
- Except Fajr, the expiration time (Qadaa) of all other prayers is the starting time of the next prayer (but preferred to be offered as early as possible)
 - Each prayer could take about 10 minutes

Main Conditions to Prepare for Prayers

1. Timing: Offering each prayer within a designated time window
2. Purity of body (from any discharges and impurities)
3. Ablution: It includes rinsing hands, face, arms, wiping head, and rinsing/wiping feet)
4. Purity of clothes and place
5. Direction: Facing towards Makkah
6. Making or having intention

Prayer: What does it include?

- Prayer includes different physical positions and movements
 - Standing, bowing down, prostration, and sitting
- During standing: Recitation of Qur'an from memory
 - First Surah of Qur'an plus some verses from other Surahs
- During other positions: Making certain statements taught by the Prophet (and based on the Qur'an)
- Importance of focus and concentration on every statement and every movement
- Feeling of special humbleness in bowing down and prostration

Offering Prayer in Units

- The prayer is offered in units (Rakats); 2 units or 3 or 4
- One unit includes standing, bowing down, and 2 Sajdahs
- The second unit and last unit is followed by sitting
- Each of the 5 daily prayers require different number of units
- Some units are obligatory, and some are recommended (R)
- Fajr: $2R+2$
- Dhuhur: $4R+4+2R$
- Asr: 4
- Maghrib: $3+2R$
- Isha: $4+2R+3Witr$

Prayer Procedure (in brief)

1. Starting with having a clear intention, raising hands mentioning greatness of God followed by glorification and praises of God
2. Standing respectfully in awe of God and very attentively reciting Surah Fateha followed by reciting other parts of Qur'an with focus on its message and its impact on one's life
3. Bowing in bending position (Rukoo') while glorifying the greatness of God, as a sign of obedience to all that was just recited (or heard from leader of prayer)
4. Standing up with consciousness that God has heard the praise
5. Prostrating (Sajdah) while glorifying God's exaltedness in utmost humility and with feelings of total submission in every aspect of life
6. Sitting (between 2 Sajdahs) to seek forgiveness in matters not performed well in obedience
7. Repeating prostration once again glorifying God's exaltedness in utmost humility and reinforcing commitment of total submission
8. Repeating steps 2 to 7 as many times as the number of required units; and
9. Sitting down for concluding praises to God, and salutations to the Prophet and supplications (Du'a),
10. Exiting the prayer (Salaah) formally by turning the face towards right and left while saying "Assalamu Alaikm Wa Rahmatullah" (peace and blessings of Allah be upon you".

Significance of Daily Prayers

- The most important act of worship of God
- The most important command of God to all prophets and their followers
- Main sign of belief and minimum of practice (in Islam)
- It is the first thing the believers will be asked about in the Day of Judgment
- It is obligatory at all times and all situations
 - (But, with built-in flexibility and concessions for travelers, sick person, women during monthly cycles and child-birth, etc.)

Islam and Divine Laws

- God created this universe and decreed all kinds of laws for each part of this universe (natural laws)
- God created human lives with laws to govern it (regulations inside the human body and around it)
- God sent prophets and books with moral laws for the individuals and human societies
- God gave human beings the ability to develop laws in order to regulate their societies
- All divine laws sent to different prophets are finalized in the form of a code called: Shari'ah or Shariah of Islam

Shari'ah

- Literal meaning of Shariah: A path to water, or a stream of water coming from a spring source
- Shariah can be translated as “The divine code of law”
- Shariah is a system of principles and values covering the entire set of commandments, rulings, judgments, and legal teachings within the Qur'an and Sunnah

Some unique characteristics of Shariah are:

1. **Divine Source:** It is based on ultimate knowledge and wisdom of God
2. **Comprehensive nature:** It covers all aspects of life, such as personal, social, economic, political, etc.
3. **Permanency and validity:** It is stable and applicable for all times
4. **Equality of everyone before the law**
5. **Consideration of both worlds**

Shariah: Basis of Islamic Law

- **Understanding of Shariah is Fiqh**
 - Literal meaning of Fiqh: Understanding precisely and deeply
 - Translated as “Jurisprudence”
 - Fiqh is the human’s interpretations and codifications of Shariah
 - More technically, Fiqh is a principle-based process of understanding and explaining details of Shariah
- There is a single Shariah, but multiple schools of Fiqh
- **Islamic Law:** Specific rulings and regulations (based on Fiqh) that define the scope and degree of requirements and prohibitions of human actions
- Islamic Law is derived from Shariah using Fiqh
- Therefore, Islamic Law is based on Shariah, but not identical to it

Degrees of Lawfulness

- Islam does not simply say to its follower - be good, be virtuous, and be moral
- But it shows one how to be good, how to be virtuous, and what are the acts that could help one become more virtuous
- It is a path with all kinds of specific details
- There are five specific degrees of lawfulness:
 - According to Islamic Law, all human actions are classified into one the following five categories:
 1. Permissible/Neutral (*Mubah*)
 2. Commendable/Recommended (*Mustahab*)
 3. Obligatory (*Fardh/Wajib*): Absolutely required
 4. Detestable/Discouraged (*Makroh*)
 5. Unlawful/Forbidden (*Haram*): Absolutely prohibited

Classification of Human Actions

Permissible/Lawful (*Mubah/Jaaiz/Halal*)

- It includes things that are neither mandatory nor required nor are they regarded as detestable or forbidden
- They are left to human choice, free to do it or not do it
- Examples: To like a particular type of food, gardening or sewing
- No religious requirement or forbidden to do these things
- In Islam, everything is permissible unless discouraged or prohibited by a clear evidence - It forms the principle of permissibility in everything
- Permissible category is the baseline:
 - The upwards levels are Commendable and Obligatory
 - The downward levels are Detestable and Prohibited

Classification of Human Actions

Recommended (*Mustahab*)

- Usually include actions that would benefit one's faith, or character, or health, or life, or others, or the environment
- It is desirable to do and rewarded
- This category is also called Sunnah (from Islamic Law point of view)
[Note that "**Sunnah**" is used in 2 different meanings: 1. An Islamic Law category, and 2. A tradition of the prophet (whenever action is attributed to him) which could consist of anything that he used to do, including obligatory acts]
- There are degrees of Mustahab (commendable, highly commendable) before reaching an absolute requirement

Obligatory (*Fardh/Wajib*)

- Actions that are absolutely important and beneficial
- They must be done because they are full of benefits (whether benefits are obvious or not)
- Getting reward for doing it, and sin for not doing it

Classification of Human Actions

Undesirable (*Makroh*)

- Usually include actions that could lead a person to Haram
- Actions that would lead a person to harm one's faith, or character, or health, or life, or other people, or environment
- Better to stay away from it
- Reward for not doing it, if confronted
- There are degrees of Makroh (detestable, highly detestable) before reaching an absolute prohibition

Prohibited (*Haram*)

- Actions that are very harmful
- Must stay away from it because it harms in numerous ways (whether harms are obvious or not)
- It is a sin to do it
- Reward for staying away from it whenever prompted or confronted
- They are very few, and meant for protection, and not restriction

Permissible Actions and Rewards

- Majority of actions in daily life are permissible
- After trying to observe the first four categories, one can convert a Permissible Act to a Recommended Act and get reward for it - as long as intention is pure
- So, there is a potential of every action (other than what is Haram and Makroh) to be counted as a rewarding action
 - Life can become full of rewarding actions or worship
- In order for an action to be rewarded, both intention and method should be pure
- Examples of each category

Haram :Very few

- *“Say, “The only things my Lord has forbidden are:*
 - *Lewdness and indecencies – what is apparent of them and what is concealed (Al-Fawaahish)*
 - *Iniquities (Al-ithm)*
 - *Transgression without a right (Al-Baghya)*
 - *That you associate or equate with Allah that for which He has not sent down any authority (Shirk)*
 - *And, that you say about Allah what you do not know.” (Verse 7:33)*
- The Haram includes only the above
- So, the general standard is principle of permissibility, unless explicitly specified for prohibition
- However, due to the upbringing and environment of a person, the list of Haram may appear as too many and too difficult to follow

Impact of Circumstances on Rulings

- Islamic laws are valid for all times in terms of the fundamental principals or foundations – no need to update
- But for the extension of the application of the moral code or adapting the application, the laws allow updates to address the new circumstances
- Also, while every action has a general ruling, some actions can be classified differently in different situations and circumstances
 - For example, helping a person is a Recommended action, in general
 - However, it can be classified under all other four categories depending on the nature of help and one's intention
 - For example, helping someone in performing a prohibited action is prohibited
 - Eating pork is prohibited, but it becomes permitted in a starving situation
 - Other examples

Overall Objectives of Shari'ah

Since the main goal of Shariah is to promote human welfare, following of Shariah is meant to fulfill the following overall objectives (Maqaasid Shari'ah) in this world (in addition to earning pleasure of God and success in the next life):

A. To establish justice

- *One of the main objectives of sending messengers and the overall comprehensive theme of Islam is establishing justice (see Verse 57:25)*
- *“Say, “My Lord has commanded justice and balance in every matter.” (7:29)*

B. To preserve the following five values:

1. Faith
2. Life
3. Intellect/reason/mind
4. Honor and lineage/procreation (family)
5. Property

These fundamental protections ensure freedom of thought, affirm the sanctity of life, uphold the power of reasoning, validate the importance of family, and guarantee the security of assets

Misunderstandings about Shariah

- In some Muslim countries, *Shariah* has been limited only to the implementation of criminal laws, and even that in a very brutal manner, which has created a lot of misunderstandings about *Shariah* and given it a bad name
- In fact, the primary and main objective of an Islamic government is to establish justice in the society before implementing any criminal laws
- Here in the United States on the other hand, some individuals and groups claim *Shariah* as a growing threat to the country and they claim that Muslims want to impose *Shariah* on Americans while Muslim Americans are subject to U.S. laws, just like any other citizens.



Relations of Muslims with Other Communities

Humanity as One Family

- The whole humanity is seen as one family in Islam
 - *“O mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other).*
 - **Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.** And Allah has full knowledge and is well-acquainted (with all things and how you treat each other)”. Qur’an (49:13)
 - All humanity coming from a common initial parents

Peaceful Co-existence

- Peaceful co-existence formula
 - As for those (non-Muslims) who do not fight against you because of (your) faith and do not drive you forth from your homelands, **Allah does not forbid you to show them Birr (kindness with love and respect) and to behave towards them with full equity**, for verily Allah loves those who act equitably.
 - **Allah only forbids you to turn in friendship towards those who** fight against you because of (your) faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid (others) in driving you forth. And as for those (from among you) who turn towards them in friendship; it is they who are truly wrongdoers!(60:8-9)
- No forced “conversion” in Islam:
 - “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256)

Peaceful Co-existence

- Acceptance of plurality
 - *“Had your Lord willed, all of the people on earth would have believed. So, can you (O Prophet) compel people to believe?” (10:99)*
 - *“If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community, but they continue to have their differences”. (11:118)*
- Islam has uniquely determined the law and moral principles needed for Muslims to live in harmony with others
- Historically, from Anatolia to Andalusia, and from Africa to Asia, Islam created societies in which different nations, cultures, and religions lived together in harmony, including in places like Jerusalem, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, Cordoba, and Istanbul

Special Place of Jews & Christians among Muslims

- Jews and Christians are called “People of the Book” in the Qur’an
- People of the book are those who ...
 - Have received books from God
 - Have a religious faith
 - Believe in God
 - Believe in angels and most of the prophets
 - Believe in next life
- So, “people of the book” is a title of respect and responsibility
- They are distinguished from pagans and idol worshippers in Qur’an
- Dialogue is suggested with them
 - *“(Believers), argue only in the best ways with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly among them, and say, “We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.” (29:46)*
 - Seeking common grounds

Causes of Objections on Some Verses of Qur'an

1. Misquoting some verses of Qur'an
2. Using erroneous translations
3. Linguistic limitations in interpretation
4. Out of context interpretation
 - a) Disregarding the rest of the verse
 - b) Disregarding context of section
 - c) Disregarding other related texts
 - d) Disregarding historical context
5. Malpractice of some Muslims

Abuse of Islamic Teachings by some Muslims

- Violations of some Islamic teachings by some Muslims
 - Religion has been abused to justify senseless violence
 - Whereas harming innocent is a major crime and an explicit violation of Islam
- While some Muslim groups or some Muslim rulers have deviated from Islamic teachings in history and contemporary times, those actions should not be equated with normative Islam

Response to Violence

- Various forms of violence and terror are committed by individuals, groups, and governments
- Violence committed in the names of various religions & ideologies
- But, violence should not be counteracted with more devastating violence – it enhances that vicious cycle
- Huge resources are devoted to fighting violence by equal or worse violent means
- Need to identify more constructive ways to stem the tide of violence
 - Find out root causes of violence, such as gross injustices and dehumanization of others
 - Understand relationship of peace with justice
 - Need for message of solidarity & kindness

Readings

- Islam: The straight Path John Esposito
 - Islam in Focus Hammudah Abdalati
 - Towards Understanding the Qur'an Zafar Ishaq Ansari
 - Muhammad: His Life Based on Earliest Sources Martin Lings
 - The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an Abdullah Yusuf Ali
 - Islam for Dummies Malcolm Clark
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- The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims, by Nathan Lean
 - **The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West**, by Todd H. Green
 - **The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists**, by Charles Kurzman
 - Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University – tracking Islamophobia: <http://bridge.georgetown.edu/>