**The Different Prayer Times**

*In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.*

*So glorify God when you enter the evening and when you enter the morning—And (proclaim that) all praise and gratitude in the heav­ens and on the earth are for Him—and in the afternoon, and when you enter the noon time.* (30:17-18)

You asked me, brother, why the daily prayers must be prayed at specific five times. I will give just one of the many wise reasons for this. Each Prayer time marks the start of a significant turning point, a mirror to the Divine disposal of power as well as the universal Divine bounties therein. We are therefore ordered to pray at those specific times to give more adoration and glory to the All-Powerful One of Majesty, and to give more thanks for the bounties accumulated between any two periods. To comprehend this subtle and profound meaning a little better, consider these five points together with my own soul:

**FIRST POINT:** Prayer stands for praising, glorifying, and thanking God Almighty. We glorify Him by saying *Subhanallah* (All-Glorified is God) by word and action in awareness of His Majesty. We exalt and magnify Him by saying *Allahu akbar* (God is the All-Great) through word and action in awareness of His Perfection. We offer thanks to Him by saying *Al-hamdu lillah*(All praise and gratitude are for God) with our heart, tongue, and body, in awareness of His Grace. That is to say, the heart of Prayer consists of glorification, exaltation, praise, and thanksgiving. Thus, these three seeds are present in all words and actions that constitute Prayer. Further, following each Prayer, they are repeated 33 times each to confirm and complete the Prayer’s objectives. The meaning of Prayer is pronounced consecutively with these concise utterances.

**SECOND POINT:** The meaning of worship is this: We are God’s servants. Aware of our defects, weakness, and poverty in the Divine Court, we prostrate in love and awe before His Lordship’s perfection, His Di vine Power on Which every creature relies, and His Divine Mercy. Just as His Lordship’s sovereignty demands devotion and obedience, His Holiness requires us to see our defects and seek His forgiveness, and by saying “*All-Glorified is God*,” to proclaim that He has no defect and is absolutely free from the false ideas and imputations of the people of misguidance, and that He is beyond all failings of His creatures.

Also, His perfect Power as the Lord requires that, realizing our weakness and the helplessness of all creatures, we proclaim: “*God is the All-Great*” in admiration and amazement before the majesty of the works of the Eternally Besought One’s Power. Bowing humbly, we are to seek refuge in Him and place our trust in Him. Also, His Mercy’s boundless treasury demands that we declare our need and those of all creatures by praying and asking for His help, and that we proclaim His blessings through praise and gratitude by uttering “All praise and gratitude are for God.” In short, the Prayer’s words and actions comprise all these meanings, and so were ordered and arranged by God.

**THIRD POINT:** Each person is a miniature of the universe. In the same way, the Qur’an’s first sura (chapter), Suratu’l-Fatiha, is an illuminated miniature of the whole Book, and Prayer is a bright index involving all ways of worship, a sacred map hinting at the diverse kinds of worship practiced by all living beings.

**FOURTH POINT:** Just like the second-hand, minute-hand, hour-hand, and day-hand of a clock which tells the weeks, the alternations of day and night, which are like the seconds of this world—a vast clock of God Almighty— and the years which tell its minutes, and the stages of human life-span which tell the hours, and the epochs of the world’s life-span which tell the days look to one another, are examples of one another, resemble one another, and recall one another. For example:

The time for fajr (before sunrise) corresponds to spring’s birth, the moment when sperm takes refuge in the mother’s womb, and to the first of the six consecutive days during which the heavens and earth were created. It recalls how God disposes His Power and acts in such times and events.

The time for zuhr (just past midday) may be likened or corresponds to the middle of summer, the completion of adolescence, and to the period of humanity’s creation in the world’s lifetime. It also points to God’s manifes­tations of mercy and profusion of blessings in those events and times.

The time for ‘asr (afternoon) resembles autumn, old age, and the happy time of the Last Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings. It calls to mind the Divine acts and the All-Merciful’s favors in them.

The time for maghrib (sunset) reminds us of many creatures’ decline at the end of autumn and also of our own death. It thus forewarns us of the world’s destruction at the Resurrection’s beginning, teaches us how to understand the manifestation of God’s Majesty, and wakes us from a deep sleep of neglect.

The time for ‘isha (nightfall) calls to mind the world of darkness veiling all daytime objects with its black shroud, and winter covering the dead earth’s surface with its white shroud. It also brings to mind the remaining works of the dead being forgotten, and points to this testing arena’s inevitable, complete decline. Thus ‘isha proclaims the awesome acts of the All-Overwhelming One of Majesty.

Night reminds us of winter, the grave, the Intermediate World, and how much our spirit needs the All-Merciful’s Mercy. The late-night tahajjud Prayer reminds and warns us of how necessary this Prayer’s light will be in the grave’s darkness. By recalling the True Bestower’s infinite bounties granted during these revolutions, it proclaims how worthy He is of praise and thanks.

The next morning points to the morning following the Resurrection. Just as morning follows night and spring comes after winter, so the morning of the Resurrection or “spring” follows the intermediate life.

Each appointed Prayer time is the beginning of a vital turning point and a reminder of greater revolutions or turning points in the universe’s life. Through the awesome daily disposals of the Eternally Besought One’s Power, the Prayer times remind us of the Divine Power’s miracles and the Divine Mercy’s gifts regardless of time or place. So the Prescribed Prayers, which are an innate duty, the basis of worship, and an unquestionable obligation, are most appropriate and fitted for these times.

**FIFTH POINT:** By nature we are weak, yet everything involves, affects, and saddens us. We have no power, yet are afflicted by calamities and enemies. We are extremely poor, yet have many needs. We are indolent and incapable, yet the burden of life is very heavy. Being human, we are connected with the rest of the world, yet what we love and are familiar with disappears, and the resulting grief causes us pain. Our mentality and senses inspire us toward glorious objectives and eternal gains, but we are unable, impatient, powerless, and have only a short lifetime.

Given all of this, it will self-evidently be understood how essential a support for human spirit it is to present a petition through Prayer and supplication to the Court of an All-Powerful One of Majesty, an All-Compassionate One of Grace, at the time of fajr, and to seek help and success from Him. Such support is direly necessary to bear and endure the troubles and burdens waiting for us during daytime.

Zuhr (noon) is the period of time when the day is at its zenith, and starts to move forward to complete its course. People take a break from their activ­ities. The spirit needs a pause from the heedlessness and insensibility caused by hard work, and Divine bounties are fully manifest. So, praying at this time is good, necessary, agreeable, and proper. This Prayer gives relief from the pressures of daily life and heedlessness. We stand humbly in the presence of the Real Bestower of blessings, express gratitude, and pray for His help. We bow to demonstrate our helplessness before His Glory and Might, and prostrate to proclaim our wonder, love, and humility before His everlasting Perfection and matchless Grace.

‘Asr (afternoon) resembles and recalls the sad season of autumn, the mournful state of old age, and the distressing period at the end of time. The day’s tasks are brought toward completion, and the Divine bounties received that day (e.g., health, safety, and good service in His way) have accumulated to form a great total. It is also the time when the sun fades away, proving that everything is impermanent. We, who long for eternity, are created for it and show reverence for favors received, also are saddened by separations. So we stand up, perform wudu’ (ablution), and pray. Thus praying ‘asr is an exalted duty, an appropriate service, a reasonable way of paying a debt of gratitude, and an agreeable pleasure. We acquire peace of mind and find true consolation and ease of spirit by supplicating at the Eternal Court of the Everlasting, the Eternally Self-Subsistent One, and seeking refuge in His infinite Mercy, offering thanks and praise for His endless bounties, bowing humbly before His Lordship’s Might and Glory, and prostrating humbly before His Eternal Divinity.

Evening reminds us of winter’s beginning, the sad fare wells of elegant summer and autumn creatures, and our sorrowful separation from loved ones through death. It also recalls the time when the lamp of the earth— the sun—will be extinguished, and the earth’s inhabitants will emigrate to the other world following this one’s destruction. It is a severe warning for those who adore transient, ephemeral beloveds, each of whom will die.

By its nature, the human spirit longs for an Eternal Beauty. During the evening Prayer, it turns toward the Eternal Being, Who does all these mighty works and commands huge heavenly bodies. It refuses to rely on anything finite and, standing in the presence of the Everlasting One, cries *Allahu akbar* (God is the All-Great). Then, by saying *Al-hamdu lillah*, we praise Him in awareness of His faultless Perfection, matchless Beauty and Grace, and infinite Mercy. Afterwards, by declaring: *You alone do we worship, and from You alone do We seek help* (1:5), we offer our worship of, and seek help from, His unas­sisted Lordship, un-partnered Divinity, and unshared Sovereignty. Bowing before His infinite Greatness, limitless Power, and perfect Honor and Glory, we demonstrate, with the rest of creation, our weakness and helplessness, humility and poverty by saying: “*All-Glorified is my Lord, the All-Supreme.*” Prostrating in awareness of the undying Beauty and Grace of His Essence, His unchanging sacred Attributes, and His constant everlasting Perfection, we proclaim, through detachment from all other than Him, our love and servant-hood in wonder and self-abasement. Finding an All-Beautiful Permanent, an All-Compassionate Eternal One to Whom we say: “*All-Glorified is my Lord, the All-Exalted*,” we declare our All-Exalted Lord free of any decline or fault.

Then we sit reverently and offer all creatures’ praises and glorifications to the Eternal, All-Powerful, and All-Majestic One. We also ask God to bestow peace and blessings on His holy Messenger in order to renew our allegiance to him, proclaim our obedience to His commands, and renew and strengthen our belief. By viewing the universe’s wise order, we testify to the Creator’s Oneness and Muhammad’s Messengership, herald of the sovereignty of God’s Lordship, proclaimer of what pleases Him, and inter­preter of the Book of the Universe’s signs or verses.

Given this, how can we be truly human if we do not realize what an agreeable duty, a valuable and pleasurable service, a fine and beautiful worship, a serious matter, a significant conversation with the Creator, and a source of permanent happiness in this transient guest-house it is to perform the evening Prayer?

The time of ‘isha (nightfall), when night covers the earth, reminds us of the mighty disposals of the All-Majestic Powerful One’s Lordship as the Changer of Night and Day. It calls to our mind the Divine activities of the All-Wise One of Perfection as the Subduer of the sun and the moon, observed in His turning the white page of day into the black page of night, and in His changing summer’s beautifully colored script into winter’s frigid white page. It recalls His acts as the Creator of life and death in sending the dead entity’s remaining works to another world. It reminds us of the Creator of the heavens and earth’s majestic control and graceful manifestations in the total destruction of this narrow, mortal, and lowly world and the unfolding of the broad, eternal, and majestic world of the Hereafter. It also warns that only the One Who so easily turns day into night, winter into summer, and this world into the other world can be the universe’s Owner and true Master and is alone worthy to be worshipped and truly loved.

At nightfall our spirits, infinitely helpless and weak, infinitely poor and needy, tossed to and fro by circumstances and whirling onward into a dark and unknown future, perform the ‘isha Prayer. In a manner recalling Abraham’s proclamation, *I love not those that set* (6:76), we seek refuge at the Court of the All-Living, the Ever-Worshipped, the Eternal Beloved One. From our transient life in this dark, fleeting world and dark future, we beseech the Enduring, All-Permanent One. For a moment of everlasting conversation, a few seconds of immortal life, we seek the All-Merciful and Compassionate’s favors. We ask for the light of His guidance that will illuminate our world and our future, and bind up the pain from the decline of all creatures and friends.

We forget the world, which has left us for the night, and pour out our heart’s grief at the Court of Mercy. Before death-like sleep comes, after which anything can happen, we perform our “last” duty of worship. To close our day’s activities on a favorable note, we pray and enter the presence of the Eternal Beloved and Worshipped One rather than that of the mortal ones we loved all day; the presence of the All-Powerful and Munificent One rather than that of the impotent creatures from which we begged all day; the presence of All-Compassionate Protector in the hope of being saved from the evil of the harmful creatures before which we trembled all day.

We start the Prayer with Suratu’l-Fatiha, thus extolling and praising the Lord of the worlds, Perfect and Self-Sufficient, Compassionate and All­Munificent, instead of flattering and feeling indebted to flawed, needy creatures. We move on to *You alone do We worship* (1:5). That is, despite our insignificance and being alone, through our connection with the Owner of the Day of Judgment, the Eternal Sovereign, we attain the status of an indulged guest and important officer in the universe. By saying *You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help* (1:5), we offer Him the worship of the huge congregation of all creatures and seek His assistance for them. *Saying Guide us to the Straight Path* (1: 6), we ask to be guided to the radiant, straight path leading to the eternal happiness.

Saying *God is the All-Great*, we bow down and contemplate the Grandeur of the All-Majestic One. Like the plants and animals, that have now gone to sleep, the hidden suns and waking stars are like soldiers subject to His command, and His lamps and servants in this guesthouse of the world.

We think of all creatures’ universal prostration. That is, like the creatures that sleep at night, when all creation living in a certain year or age is discharged from the duty of worship by the command of “*Be*!” *and it is* like a well-ordered army of obedient soldiers, and is sent to the World of the Unseen, it prostrates on the rug of death in perfect orderliness saying, “*God is the All-Great*.” They are resurrected in the spring by an arousing, life-giving trumpet-blast from the command of *Be! and it is*, and rise up to serve their Master. Insignificant humanity makes the same declaration in the presence of the All-Merciful One of Perfection, the All-Compassionate One of Grace, in wonder-struck love, eternity-tinged humility, and dignified self-effacement. We then prostrate and achieve a sort of Ascension.

Thus each Prescribed Prayer time points to a mighty revolution, is a sign to the Lord’s tremendous activity, and a token of the universal Divine bounties. And so this matter is a result of perfect wisdom.

All-Glorified are You. We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

O God! Bestow blessings and peace upon the one whom You sent as a teacher to Your servants to instruct them in knowledge of You and worship of You and to make known the treasures of Your Names; as the interpreter of the signs or verses of Your Book of the Universe; to serve as a mirror, through his worship, to the Grace of Your Lordship; and upon his Family and Companions. Have mercy on us and all believers. Amin. For the sake of Your Mercy, O Most Merciful of the Merciful.

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