

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Fardh of Salaah

O Allah (The Exalted) bless the One when he walked in the desert wild creatures would cling to the hem of his cloak.

The human body is a combination of body and soul. The food for the body comes from the earth and the food for the soul is remembrance. Islam has recognised both and prescribed the prayer. In the morning the body needs breakfast and after offering fajr the soul gets its food, the body gains strength through dinner whilst the soul through Dhuhur, the Asr prayer is offered when the day is coming to an end the body gains strength at this time too. Many people eat at night and the Isha prayer helps the digestion.

Knee Joints

Painful joints can be cured by means of Salaah, when we stand the body becomes weak, however, when we lift our hands naturally we gain strength. Everybody knows for the body to be in a healthy state the back bone needs to be in good condition. It is in Salaah this gives all the parts of the body strength and it cures the pain in the joints.

To stand

The prayer begins whilst one stands and this has many benefits one being that the body gains peace as the Qur'an is being recited. The recitation has a healing effect on the body. It has been suggested by research that the healing is due to the effect of the Arabic sounds.ⁱ

O people! There has come an admonition to you from your Lord, and healing of hearts, and a guidance and a mercy for the believers.ⁱⁱ

And we send down in Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers; and it adds loss only to the unjust.ⁱⁱⁱ

Muslim researchers have shown that when Muslims recite the Qur'an, old thoughts, feelings, fears and guilt are released or healed, and blood pressure and stress levels are reduced. Virtually all of the sounds of the Arabic language are uttered while reciting Qur'an, creating a balance in all affected areas of the body. Some specific sounds, in fact, correspond to major organs in the body. In his research and creation of eurhythm, Rudolph Steiner (founder of the Waldorf Schools), found that vibrations made when pronouncing the long vowels, 'A', 'E' and 'U,' stimulated the heart, lungs, and the thyroid¹, pineal, pituitary², and **adrenal glands** during laboratory tests.

The Takbir (Allahu Akbar) and Qiyam (standing) together are found to improve posture, balance, and self-awareness. This position also normalises blood pressure and breathing, thus providing many benefits to asthma and heart patients due to peace physically and mentally.

Heart illnesses

Many cardiologists³, after research have come up with the conclusion that the illnesses of the heart are reduced when Salaah is offered. In Qiyam the lower body gets blood, in ruku (bow) the middle and in Sajdah (prostration) the blood reaches upper body with less pressure on the heart as whilst a person is stood up the heart has to try and pump the blood to the brain, however, when in prostration the blood reaches the brain without much effort. This means that Salaah helps with blood circulation.

¹ Thyroid gland: This lies in the neck just under the 'Adam's apple'. Thyroid gland produces hormones which control body metabolism.

² A small pea-size organ connected to the middle of the underside of the brain by a short stalk and lying in a hollow in the central bone of the base of the skull, just behind the nose cavity.

³ A science concerned with the study of the structure function, and diseases of the heart.

Ruku

The principal of a medical college, Doctor Muhammad Nawaz said, a surgeon Doctor came to me with his wife (also a surgeon) saying that 'he has pain in the back and knees taking many medication but no cure.' Doctor Nawaz said "do you pray?" He said 'yes five times a day', Doctor Nawaz said; "you do not perform Ruku and Sujood correctly", he showed him the Sunnah method. Some time later after observing the Sunnah correctly he was healed. We all know that back problems are painful and restrict the daily activity of an individual. Ruku saves a person from getting kidney stones and if one has stones it will come out shortly. In ruku the circulation of blood in the body works well benefiting the eyes and mind.

Ruku stretches the muscles of the lower back, thighs, legs and calves, and allows blood to be pumped into the upper torso⁴. It tones the muscles of the stomach, abdomen, and kidneys. Forming a right angle allows the stomach muscles to develop.

This position also promotes a greater flow of blood into the upper regions of body particularly to the head, eyes, ears, nose, brain, and lungs to be released. Over time, this improves brain function and ones personality, and is an excellent stance to maintain the proper position of the foetus in pregnant women.

When coming up from Ruku we place the hands on the thighs it strengthens the spinal cord and creates flexibility.

Prostration

Entering into prostration in a relaxed pace is beneficial for internal organs. Prostration in the Sunnah way⁵ benefits the stomach making it muscular. The Sunnah way will relieve any problems with liver, kidney, back or stomach. When in the position of prostration the blood reaches the head effortlessly. In no other position of Salaah does the blood reach the head sooner then in prostration. The blood goes to the eyes, brain, and other parts of the head and nerves with which the intellect and the eyes become sharp. Shaykh Nakshbandi states; "A person who offers Salaah will have a luminous face due to the fact that in prostration the blood flows to the face. This is why in the tradition it states those who pray Salaah their face will enlighten as the pious."

Shaykh Nakshbandi also said; that "Once he met an American Doctor who said, 'If women find out the fact that to go into prostration creates beauty on the face, they would not lift there heads from prostration.'"

The prostration is said to activate a person's spiritual connection with the universe around them and their enthusiasm for spiritual pursuits. This nerve pathway is also correlated to the health of the brain, nervous system, and pineal gland. Its healthy function balances ones interior and exterior energies. Those people who have peptic ulcer⁶ disease can be cured very quickly via prostration. Lengthy prostration with humbleness and sincerity is beneficial to cure illnesses of the brain as the blood reaches the brain without effort. In prostration the blood comes to the upper part of the body reaching the eyes, teeth, and the face making the crinkles disappear from the cheeks. A person does not look old and gets such ability making the muscles strong. If the prostration is done according to the Sunnah then there will be less chance one will not suffer from problems with block nose, hearing, and headaches.

Sitting position

The position of Qaida, (or Julus) is similar to the "Thunderbolt Pose" in yoga, which firms the toes, knees, thighs, and legs. It is said to be good for those prone to excessive sleep, and those who like to keep long hours. Furthermore, this position assists in speedy digestion, aids the detoxification of the liver, and stimulates peristaltic⁷ action in the small intestine.

Salaam

To conclude the Salaah one will turn the face to the right and left. The "throat" is activated by turning the head towards first the right and then the left shoulder in the closing of the prayer. This nerve path is linked to the

⁴ The trunk of the human body

⁵ i.e. to keep the back straight, placing the hands on the thighs then first place the knees on the floor,

⁶ A breach in the lining (mucosa) of the digestive tract produced by digestion of the Mucosa by pepsin and acid.

⁷ A coordinated succession of contractions and relaxations of the muscular wall producing a wave-like pattern whose affect is to move the contents along. When gut peristalsis fails, a serious condition of intestinal blockage soon develops.

throat, neck, arms, hands, bronchials⁸, and hearing – effecting individual creativity and communication. Another benefit is the chest strengthens and the collar bone is tightened. One should remember this can only benefit when we offer the Salaah correctly with sincerity and not rushing it. It is believed that a person who activates all nerve pathways at least once a day can remain well balanced emotionally, physically and spiritually. Since this is the goal of all sincere Muslims, we all should strive to attain the perfection of stance, recitation, and breathing recommended in the Hadith while performing our prayers similar techniques of perfection are taught in popular yoga, Tai Chi, and many other exercise classes.

Supplication

When the hands are held open for supplication, they activate the heart “chakra,” said to be the centre of the feelings of love, harmony, and peace, and to control love and compassion. It also governs the health of the heart, lungs, thymus⁹, immune system, and circulatory system.

⁸ Lung area.

⁹ A bilobed organ in the root of the neck, above and in front of the heart.

Section One

The Medical Benefits of Taraweeh Prayers^{iv}

During the month of Ramadan, additional prayers are performed after *Salatul 'Isha*, called Tarawih prayers, 20 units with a few minutes break after every 4 units for extolling the Majesty of Allah. After breaking of the fast the blood glucose level continues to rise from the food ingested. Just before the *Iftaar* meals, the blood glucose and insulin levels are at their lowest level. After an hour or so after the *Iftaar* meal, the blood glucose begins to rise and also plasma insulin. Liver and the muscles take up the circulating glucose. The blood sugar reaches high levels in an hour or two and the benefits of Tarawih prayers come into effect. The circulating glucose is metabolized into carbon dioxide and water during the Tarawih prayers. Hence the Tarawih prayers help in expending the extra calories and improve flexibility, coordination, reduce stress-related **autonomic** responses in healthy persons, and relieve anxiety and depression.

Physical and Emotional Well-Being

The gentle exercises performed in Taraweeh prayers improve physical fitness, emotional well-being and increase the **longevity** of the one who performs the *Salaah*. When a little extra effort is made, as in performing the Taraweeh prayers, there will be a betterment in the endurance, stamina, in flexibility and strength. It was noted that the five daily prayers (*Salat*) produce the same physiological changes without any undesirable side effects as those produced by jogging or walking at about three miles per hour. Recent research studies performed on 17,000 Harvard alumni who entered college between 1916-1950 give strong evidence that only moderate aerobic exercise, equivalent to jogging about 3 miles a day, promotes good health and may actually add years to life. Men who expended about 2000 kcal of energy on a weekly basis (equal to a daily 30-minute walk, run, cycle, swim, etc.,) had one-quarter to one-third lower death rates than classmates who did little or no exercise. In addition to the health-boosting qualities of the *Salat*, the *Namazi* will be trained to be ever ready for any unexpected physical exertion such as sudden lifting of children, chairs, or catching a public transportation vehicle. The elderly will accomplish this more securely and efficiently. Hence this is an advantage for the elderly to maintain their physical fitness for a longer period of time. It has been observed that those who fast and perform the Taraweeh prayers report feeling much convalescing and robust.

Mental Health

It is a known fact that exercise improves mood, thought and behaviour. Exercise improves the quality of life, induces greater sense of well-being and energy, reduces anxiety and depression, influences mood favorably and contributes to self-esteem and an aura of confidence; improves memory in the elderly especially with constant repetition of the verses from the Glorious Qur'an and other verses which exalt His Glory. This constant repetition of the Quranic Aayah would help to screen the mind from the incoming thoughts. It has been found by a Harvard University researcher, Dr. Herbert Benson that repetition of a prayer, Aayah of the Quran or remembrance (*Dhikr*) of Allah or muscular activity coupled with passive disregard of intensive thoughts causes a "relaxation response" that leads to the lowering of Blood Pressure and decreases in oxygen consumption and a reduction in heart and respiratory rates. All these are combined in the Tarawih prayer which is an ideal condition for "relaxation response." It combines repeated muscular activity with repetition of *Salat*, chanting of words of glorification of Allah and of supplications. The Tarawih prayer puts the mind in a relaxed state. This calm state of the mind may be partly due to the release of encephalins¹⁰, beta-endorphins (endogenous morphine's) and others into the blood circulation. Endorphins are any one of the neuropeptides composed of many amino acids, elaborated by the pituitary gland and acting on the central and peripheral¹¹ nervous systems to reduce pain. Endorphins are categorized as alpha-endorphin, beta-endorphin, and gamma-endorphin which produce pharmacologic effects similar to morphine. Beta-endorphin found in the brain and GI (gastro-intestinal) tract is the most potent of the endorphins and is a powerful analgesic (pain killer) in humans and animals. For example during childbirth many women release endorphins reducing a woman's sensation of pain. The release of endorphins is associated with an euphoria. During childbirth, women who give birth with little or no medication sometimes label this euphoria a "birth climax."

ⁱ Shahid Athar; Health guidelines from the Qur'an and Sunnah; Islamic Horizons; 1986

ⁱⁱ Surah Yunus; Surah No: 10; verse: 57

ⁱⁱⁱ Surah Bani Israel; Surah No: 17 Verse: 82

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¹⁰ A peptide occurring naturally in the brain and having effects resembling those of morphine or other opiates.

¹¹ All parts of the nervous system lying outside the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord).