

## Prayer

My goal with this assignment was to experience what I perceive to be the most obvious outward sign of the Muslim religion. Just about anywhere in the Muslim world one can hear the call to prayer. My objective with this assignment was to note the five prayer times and see how they fit into my busy western life.

I have been in Muslim countries before and was familiar with the Adhan. Indeed, I have often awoken aggravated with the early morning (dawn) call to prayer. Hearing someone sing through a megaphone at 5 AM is quite disruptive to a good lie in. However, my perception is that many Muslims awaken every day at this time to perform the first prayer of the day.

My plan was to first identify the five necessary times to pray for my location in (\*\*). Once identified, I would mark the time and reflect on what a Muslim would be doing at this time. As a non-Muslim I do not see the point of performing the actual prayers.

The task of identifying the correct times for prayer was easy enough with the aid of the Islamicity website (<http://www.islamicity.com>). The website has a calculator that uses your zip code to identify the correct times for prayer.

For my home in (\*\*) the times are as follows:

1. Dawn (Fajr) 5:06 AM
2. Noon (Zuhr) 12:45 PM
3. Afternoon (Asr) 4:17 PM
4. Sunset (Maghrib) 6:59 PM
5. Night (Isha) 8:26 PM

Before I begin my narrative of my experiences with this endeavor, some background information is necessary. Muslims are commanded by the Koran to perform five prayers each day. Each prayer consists of a prescribed number of iterations of a common prayer. This prayer is referred to as Raka'ah in Arabic. At most time four Raka'at are completed; however, during the dawn (fajr) prayer only two are completed.

All prayers are completed facing in the direction of Mecca. From my location in (\*\*), I assumed that this direction would be roughly East-Southeast. Apparently there are maps produced for the traveling Muslim that show them the proper direction to pray. I can recall from my travels that many hotels in Islamic nations had an arrow pointing towards Mecca. For my location in (\*\*) I was surprised to find that the correct direction for prayer was actually northeast. This would follow a great circle route (shortest distance) to Mecca.

I normally awake at around 5:00am; thus, I didn't think that adding in a Muslim prayer would require much in the way of adjustment. For a Muslim the first task they would complete would be the ablution. This is a cleaning ritual that must be performed every time prior to prayer. I was thinking of this as I showered and brushed my teeth. On a typical day I drink a cup of tea after showering; however, I had decided that I would instead reflect on the prayers that Muslims would say.

The first thing that a Muslim will do is to clear his mind and prepare it for God. This is referred to as Niyah. The prayer begins with the phrase "Allah Akbar" which means "God is great". Following this, a Muslim will recite the first seven verses of the Koran. One then bows and says "Glory be to the God Almighty" three times. While rising from the bow one says "God hears those who call upon him; Our Lord, the most high." This is followed by a prostration where one says "Glory be to my Lord most high" three times. Sitting and then standing, one repeats the phrase "Allah Akbar" several more times. This standard prayer is repeated several more times during a typical prayer.

On my first morning I was struck by the similarities of these statements to those of Christianity. My impressions of Christian worship are that many of the same statements are made.

Throughout the course of the first day I endeavored to take some time to reflect on the Muslim prayer at the appointed prayer times. Due to work constraints I had to do the noon time prayer about 45 minutes early. I don't think it would have worked so well to try and pray during fifth period with a bunch of tenth graders. I managed to have the time free for the remainder of the prayer times.

At the end of the first day, during the nighttime prayer (Isha) I took some time to reflect on the day's experiences. By far the most prominent impression is that the statements made by a Muslim during prayer are quite similar to those made by a Christian. A subconscious perception that I seem to have held is that Muslims and Christians have very different views. As I fell asleep that night I continued to ponder this.

For the second and third day I seemed to have worked out any great difficulties regarding the timing of the prayer. One of the challenges on the first day was that my routine got thrown off and I didn't get my second cup of tea ready in a to-go cup. I ended up having to get a chai on the way to school. I avoided this on the second and third day.

My thoughts during the prayer times returned several times to the Muslim prayer and its similarities to Christianity. It seems to me (a non-Christian) that every statement made by the Muslim could be uttered inside a Christian church without raising an eyebrow by a Christian.