Fast 16: Prayer — Times of prayer

"Prayer indeed has been enjoined on the believers at fixed times." (4:103)

اِنَّ الصَّلٰوةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ كِتٰبًا مَّوْقُوْتًا ۝
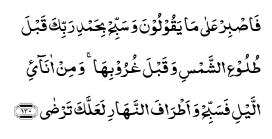
- The institution of prayer in Islam is a perfectly regularized institution, and it is the first lesson which a Muslim learns in the organization of things. Without divesting the individual of the liberty to pray to God at whatsoever place and time and in whatso-ever manner he or she likes, Islam has thoroughly organized the institution of prayer.

- As stated earlier, prayer brings about not only the development of the individual but also a perfect development of society, being a means for the unification of humanity. This latter object cannot be obtained without a properly organized institution of prayer with a fixed place and fixed times and a uniform method, so that through it individuals may be brought together. Hence it is that the Holy Quran requires prayer to be said at appointed times, as stated in the verse quoted above.

- The Quran does not explicitly state the times of prayer, but it does give indications of these times. For example, it is stated:

"Keep up prayer from the declining of the sun till the darkness of the night, and the recital of the Quran at dawn. Surely the recital of the Quran at dawn is witnessed." (17:78)

اَقِمِ الصَّلٰوةَ لِدُلُوْكِ الشَّمْسِ اِلٰى غَسَقِ الَّيْلِ وَ قُرْاٰنَ الْفَجْرِ ؕ اِنَّ قُرْاٰنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُوْدًا

Now, as the practice of the Holy Prophet shows, there are four prayers which follow one another successively: the early afternoon prayer (*ẓuhr*), the late afternoon prayer (*aṣr*), the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) and the night prayer (*ishā*). The time of each of the first three extends till the starting time of the next prayer (except for the short time when the sun is actually setting, just prior to the *maghrib* prayer). These four prayers are, therefore, spoken of **together** in the words "from the declining of the sun till the darkness of the night". The times of the first of these, *ẓuhr,* and last of these, *ishā,* are clearly mentioned. The morning prayer (*fajr*) is mentioned separately as "the recital of the Quran at dawn".

- In another verse it is stated:

"So bear patiently what they say, and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and glorify Him during the hours of the night and parts of the day, that you may be well-pleased." (20:130)

فَاصْبِرْ عَلٰى مَا يَقُوْلُوْنَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوْعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوْبِهَا ۚ وَمِنْ اٰنَآئِ الَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَاَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضٰى ﴿٣٠﴾

Here the morning prayer, *fajr*, is indicated in "before the rising of the sun", and the late afternoon prayer, *aṣr*, is indicated in "before its setting", while the two evening prayers are spoken of together as being "during the hours of the night".

• A third verse of the later Makkah period throws further light on the times of the prayers:

"And keep up prayer at the two ends of the day and in the first hours of the night." (11:114)

وَاَقِمِ الصَّلٰوةَ طَرَفَيِ النَّهَارِ وَزُلَفًا مِّنَ الَّيْلِ

The "first hours" of the night refers to the time immediately after sunset and indicates the *maghrib* prayer. The "two ends of the day" indicate the *fajr* time at one end and the *ẓuhr* to *aṣr* period at the other end.

• There is a comprehensive Hadith report in which the Holy Prophet has described how he was taught the times and the manner of the five daily prayers by the angel Gabriel. Maulana Muhammad Ali has summed up that report as follows:

"The different times thus are:
ẓuhr — when the sun begins to decline till *aṣr;*
aṣr — when the sun is about midway on its course to setting till it begins to set;
maghrib — after the sun sets till the disappearance of the red glow in the west;
ishā — after the disappearance of the red glow till midnight;
 fajr — after dawn till sunrise.

Where the days are too short, the *ẓuhr* and the *aṣr* prayers may be combined, and where the nights are too short, the *maghrib* and the *ishā* may be combined. Where the days or nights extend over 24 hours, the times of prayer may be fixed in accordance with the times of work and rest. Thus the morning prayer may be said on rising from sleep, the *maghrib* and the *ishā* when going to bed, and the *ẓuhr* and the *aṣr* in the middle of the day's work."