

Islamic rituals of worship and meditation

By Dr Musharraf Hussain

Ritual means ‘a way of doing something’. Islamic rituals of prayer and meditation, fasting, charity and pilgrimage are specifically done at fixed times, in a particular place in a particular way. They are performed in a set order as prescribed and demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad. From him they have been passed down from generation to generation. They have remained unchanged from his time over the past fourteen centuries.

Thus Islamic rituals connect Muslims to their Glorious past and something that is far bigger than individuals. As well as connecting them to their past they connect Muslims all over the world, the Ummah whether in the East or West performs the rituals in the same way. Giving a complete sense of unity and solidarity. Moreover they connect people to the deepest selves as they have a positive effect on our brains.

The fast moving lifestyle, the increasing busy schedules and the growing bombardment of information leaves us with little time for relaxation and spiritual activities. How do you escape this maddening crowd? Where is the spiritual peace? Where is the sanctuary?

It’s in the daily prayers and the Islamic rituals! They are like natural breaks in the day. The daily prayers provide an ideal way of cleansing oneself of the noise pollution and our busy schedule. They allow us to turn off the aggravations of daily chores and worldly distractions. They allow us opportunity, time and space to escape our daily routines and to be in an elevated form of consciousness and awareness of God.

They provide us that ‘spiritual support’. This can be the musallah – prayer mat – or a corner of the room reserved for salah. The Prophet would go to the mosque whenever he was faced with a dilemma, to regain a balanced perspective.

The ritual of praying in congregation for example helps to ground and align us and gives us a sense of belonging to a community. This is why the Prophet stressed the attendance of Friday congregation he said, ‘anyone who misses three consecutive Friday congregations is not from us’.

Friday should be the day of relaxation a time of meditation and socialising with other Muslims. This is an intrinsic part of human nature.

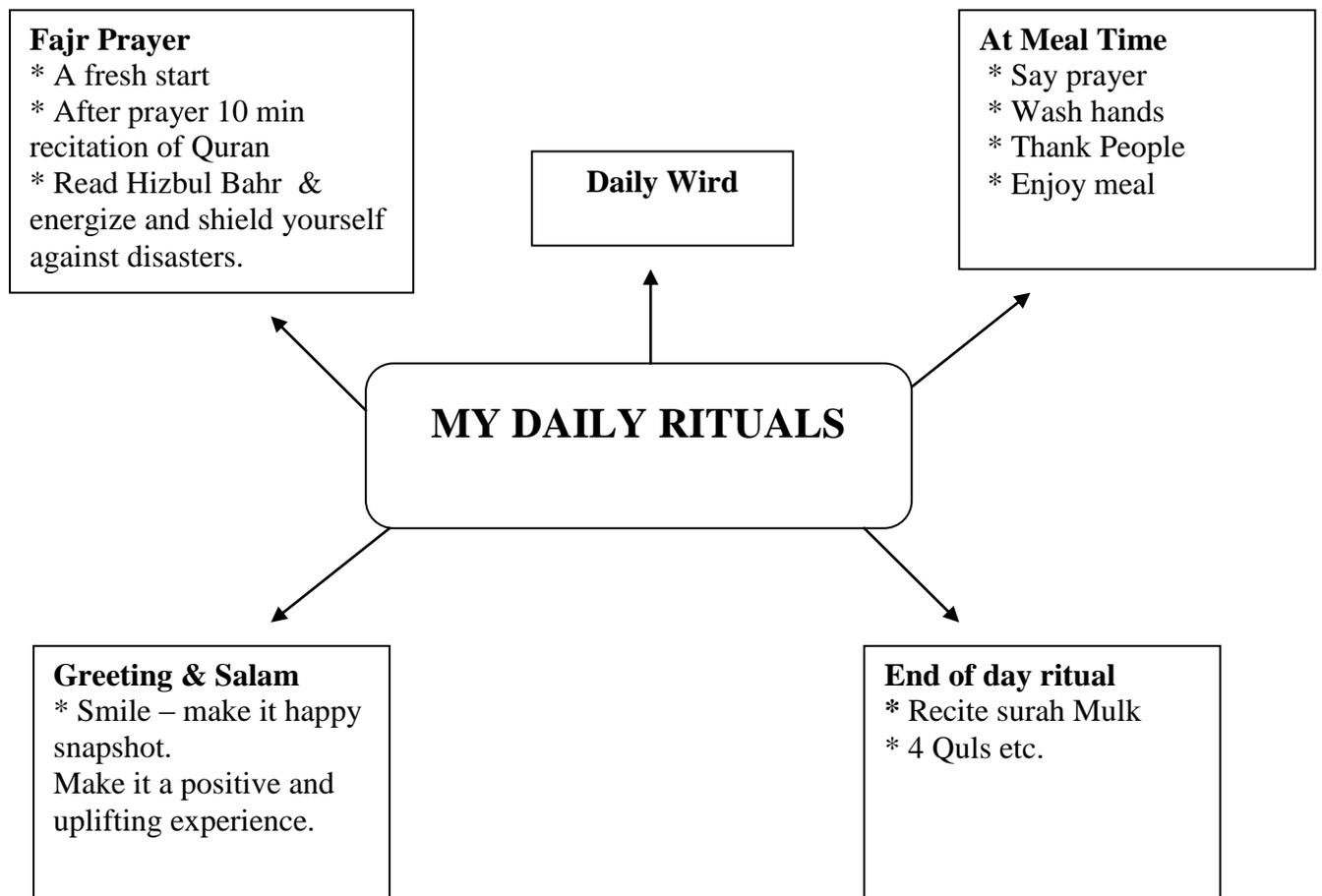
Every culture and country has some kind of rituals to which they religiously adhere it becomes part of the social fabric.

The funeral prayer and paying condolences to the deceased family is a powerful ritual, which helps the family to overcome the pain and grief that is gripping them. The presence of others amidst them gives them a real sense of being a part of a bigger community, than their immediate family. This lightens their burden of grieving. It energizes them to continue their lives and gives them hope for the future.

When we are faced with problems and difficulties we normally resort to ritual as a form of defence. In these situations Allah says, “O Believers seek help through the ritual of prayer and patience as Allah is with those who are patient”.

The human brain loves rituals

To brain cells work together to lay pathways for incoming signals. When actions are repeated, or prayers said over and over again a pathway is created in the brain. It’s like a track across a field, the more trodden the stronger it gets. These rituals become habits and this helps in overcoming obstacles and hurdles. One is more likely to endure difficulties with much lighter spirit and greater possibility of succeeding.



Some spiritual teachers will give their students wirds to recite daily. A wird is literally – a watering place; in Islamic spiritual circles it's a portion of Quran, a Prophetic prayer or a Divine name recited repeatedly at a set time. This is used in meditation either silently or chanted aloud.

The wird helps to focus the mind and is very soothing and calming as well as being invigorating. The repetition of a Quranic verses, a prophetic prayer or Divine name (for example Ya-Lateef (O! Sublime or Ya Hayyo ya quyyum O living and eternal). Clears the mind of intruding thoughts. My own experience is that really makes you feel light and leaves you in a calm and a serene state.

The spiritual masters recommend that you sit in a quiet spot preferably after Fajr prayer. Sit in a relaxed and a comfortable position. Begin by breathing deeply and slowly with eyes closed. Concentrate on the 'wird'; repeat it slowly or silently or aloud. Don't let your thoughts wander. Focus on the wird and gradually the distractions will eventually fade away and you will feel Divine proximity a sense of closeness, happiness. Physically you will be relaxed, refreshed and much more alert (Alhamdulillah). And ready for a fresh start to a new bright day.