

Health and Medical Benefits of Salah Focusing on Taraweeh Prayers During the Month of Ramadan

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Abstract:

Religious rituals often involve structured physical movements that contribute to overall well-being. Salah (Muslim prayer), a fundamental pillar of Islam, is a regular low-to-moderate intensity physical activity performed daily. This study examines the health and medical benefits of Salah with a focus on Taraweeh prayers during Ramadan using a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary data. The sequence of postures in Salah standing, bowing, prostration, and sitting, enhances muscle activity, flexibility, balance, and circulation, while Ablution (Wudu) supports hygiene and preventive health. Taraweeh prayers provide additional physical exertion after fasting, aiding glucose metabolism and cardiovascular function. Overall, regular practice of Salah and Taraweeh improves cardiovascular and respiratory efficiency, supports metabolic regulation, reduces stress, and promotes psychological well-being, making it a holistic health-promoting practice for individuals of all ages.

Key words: Salah, Taraweeh, Ablution, Ramadan, stimulate.

1. INTRODUCTION

Salah (Muslim prayer) is the second pillar of Islam and observed by a Muslim to fulfill his faith. It is obligatory for a believer to offer Salah (Muslim prayer) at least five times a day, (1) Fajr, (2) Zuhar, (3) Azar, (4) Magrib and (5) Isha. The Salah (Muslim prayer) requires ablution (washing), physical movement and relaxation. The customary prayer of Muslims -Salah (Muslim prayer) - includes physical movement, mental relaxation and spiritual consistency. It is a series of postures and movements which is performed in a calm and cool condition. It is obligatory to all Muslims to perform regularly and systematically as taught by Allah and His Prophet (PBUH). Salah (Muslim prayer) has a series of physical, physiological, mental, spiritual, health and medical benefits. The obligatory prayer (Salah) observed five times a day which includes 17 Rakaa. A Rakaa is a series of standing, bowing, prostration and sitting. Thus a Muslim will perform 119 postures a day; that is 3570 postures per month and 42840 postures per year. Apart of this compulsory prayer a Muslim practices 10 Rakaa as additional. Salah (Muslim prayer) can be regarded as type of stretching exercise; the physical acts during Salah (Muslim prayer) are gentle, simple exercise suitable for all ages and conditions. During Salah (Muslim prayer) a person performs continues gentle muscle contraction, relaxation with perfect harmony and balance, including flexibility without over exhaustion. The Salah (Muslim prayer) includes little effort like ablution, standing, bowing, prostration, sitting, and relaxation as a short duration and is beneficial for mental, physical and physiological health (Reza et al, 2002).

In the month of Ramadan, all Muslims have to pray additional Rakaa ranging from 8-20 with minimum gap of almost 2 minutes of rest after every 4 Rakaa. This is known as Taraweeh (special prayer) which means sitting and relaxing between. During the day time, all Muslims observe fasting; thus the blood glucose level decreases and after breaking the fast, it goes high and can be balanced by performing Taraweeh (special prayer). Salah (Muslim prayer) is a very good activity for arthritis, osteoporosis, blood pressure, diabetes, varicose veins and muscles of internal organs and heart.

Ablution (washing of certain body parts) is essential for each Salah (Muslim prayer). Ablution is a type of physical and mental preparation to fulfill Salah (Muslim prayer) which comprises of washing the hands, arms right up to the elbow, face, mouth, nostrils, and feet up the ankle, all three times each before going for prayers. The inside and behind the ears, as well as the part of the head above the forehead is wiped once. When ablution is done 5 times a day, besides cleaning vital parts of body from dust, dirt, and other things, it softens and refreshes body and stimulates the biological rhythms of the body and specifically Biological Active Spots (BASes), very much like the idea behind Chinese reflex-therapy.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the health and medical benefits of Salah with particular emphasis on Taraweeh prayers during the month of Ramadan. The research is primarily conceptual in nature and is based on an in-depth review and synthesis of existing literature related to exercise physiology, health sciences, and Islamic prayer practices. The purpose is to systematically interpret the physiological, psychological, and medical outcomes associated with the sequential movements of Salah and the extended performance of Taraweeh.

2.1 Sources of Data

The present study is based entirely on secondary data collected from a wide range of credible sources. These include peer-reviewed journals in the fields of sports science, physical education, medical science, and psychology, along with books and scholarly publications discussing Islamic rituals and their health implications. In addition, reports and guidelines from recognized health organizations, as well as previously published research studies on Salah, Taraweeh, and Ramadan fasting, have been utilized to support the analysis

2.2 Research Approach

A qualitative research approach has been employed to analyze the various postures and movements involved in Salah, such as Takbir, Qiyam, Ruku, Sujood, Jalsa, and Thasleem, along with the preparatory practice of Ablution (Wudu). Each component is examined in relation to its effects on the musculoskeletal system, circulatory and respiratory functions, and mental well-being. Special emphasis is given to Taraweeh prayers, which are analyzed as a form of moderate physical activity performed during Ramadan, particularly in relation to energy expenditure, glucose metabolism, and cardiovascular responses following fasting.

2.3 Analytical Framework

The study follows an integrative analytical framework combining principles of exercise physiology, biomechanics, and medical science. Exercise physiology is used to explain muscle contractions, metabolic changes, and cardiovascular adaptations during prayer movements. Biomechanical analysis helps in understanding posture, balance, flexibility, and joint movements involved in Salah. Medical perspectives are incorporated to evaluate the potential benefits of these practices in preventing or managing conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, and circulatory disorders.

2.4 Conceptual Evaluation of Ablution

Ablution (Wudu) is conceptually analyzed as both a hygienic and therapeutic practice. The repeated washing of specific body parts is examined in terms of its role in maintaining personal hygiene, preventing infections, and stimulating biological active spots similar to reflexology practices. The study also considers its potential effects on the nervous and circulatory systems, as well as its role in preparing an individual mentally and physically for prayer.

2.5 Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study is limited to a conceptual and literature-based analysis of Salah and Taraweeh prayers and their associated health benefits. No primary data collection, experimental procedures, or field investigations have been conducted. The findings are based on interpretations of existing studies and theoretical frameworks, and therefore may not account for individual differences such as age, fitness level, lifestyle, or medical conditions.

3 HEALTH BENEFITS OF ABLUTION (WUDU OR WASHING)

Ablution is a type of physical and mental preparation to fulfill Salah (Muslim prayer) which comprises of washing the hands, arms right up to the elbow, face, mouth, nostrils, and feet up the ankle, all three times each before going for prayers. The inside and behind the ears, as well as the part of the head above the forehead is wiped once. When ablution is done 5 times a day, besides cleaning vital parts of body from dust, dirt, and other things, it softens and refreshes body and stimulates the biological rhythms of the body and specifically Biological Active Spots (BASes), very much like the idea behind Chinese reflex-therapy. During Ablution a person do 26 washing movements for one time prayer and 130 washing movements for five times prayer at least per day. Eight body parts washed during Ablution, which are commonly exposed to dirt and dust. These parts include hands, mouth, nose, face, fore arms including elbow, head, ear lobes and feet.

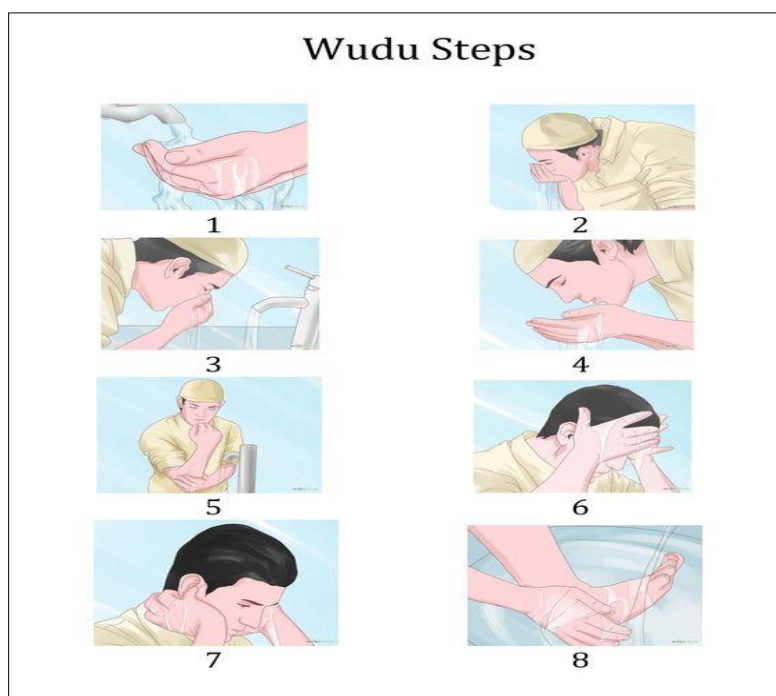


Figure 1 Ablution Steps

1. Hands

Wash hands in between the fingers and rub the surface and edges of the nails. Washing of hands is the only most important means of preventing the spread of infection. They attract germs and parasites etc. because hands are the main contact parts of our body to the outside world, if not washed these germs can cause viral infections of skin and other parts of the body contact infections (WHO 2009).

2. Mouth

The obvious reason behind washing the mouth during ablution is to remove the food particles, which could cause teeth and gum problems that is also the reason why siwak (brushing one's teeth) is also encouraged before ablution. Common cold could be prevented over 30 Percent of the time by daily gargling with plain water. This simple hygienic habit could contribute to public health (Muslim Forum 2007).

3. Nose

Washing one's nostrils, one is also performing a preventive health measure as the germs trapped in the nostrils are removed and do not pass on to the respiratory system.

4. Face

Repeated washing of the face invigorates the facial skin cells and helps prevent early wrinkles as well as having a cleansing effect on the inside of the eyes, which prevents eye infection and retard acne or pimple growth (Muslim Forum 2007).

5. Arms including Elbow

Wash arms including elbow cleans a person's main contact parts of the body to the outside world. It may remain unlearned during Salah (Muslim Prayer) and five times washing keeps one own body parts clean.

6. Head

Rubbing the head from front portion to the back and back to front is a part of Ablution which helps to remove dust and dirt from the head or hair.

7. Ear

Rubbing the ear and ear lobes helps a person to keep his ear and ear lobes from dust and dirt, thus from germs and infections.

8. Feet

The Prophetic tradition of encouraging one to wash between the toes while washing the feet is also extremely important, as it prevents the foot, which in our modern times is trapped most of the day inside shoes, from accruing athlete's foot (Muslim Forum 2007).

Wudu (ablution) cleans a person physically and prepare individual mentally to perform Namaz. Wudu is not only washing the body parts but also a type of water massage which stimulate hands, face, head, ear and feet and nervous system and circulatory system.

4 HEALTH AND MEDICAL BENEFITS OF SALAH (MUSLIM PRAYER)

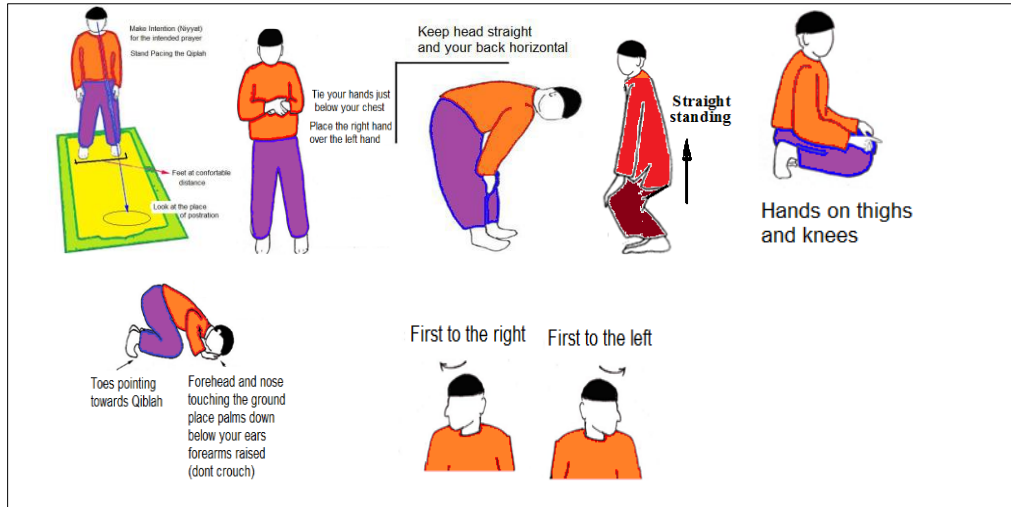


Figure 2 Steps of Salah

1. Takbir -Duration 3 to 5 seconds

After standing in a balanced position feet apart at shoulder level, bring hands, palms open and place thumb behind ear lobes as “Allahu Aakber” is uttered and hands are kept on the chest and hold the left hand by the right hand. This movement of hand and shoulder muscles increases the flow of blood toward torso and also gives a straight upright and balanced posture(S A Sayeed and A Prakash 2013).

2. Qiyam (standing) -Duration more than 13 seconds

In Qiyam body weight is equally distributed, so that the back does not take all strain, and the neck and shoulders are relaxed. Focus the eyes steadily on the spot of Sujood (prostration). Body and mind are relaxed. Back bone is straight and good posture is maintained which ensure blood flow of the lower portion of the body. It is also a good exercise to strengthen lower limb muscles.

3. Ruku (bowing) -This action may take 10 seconds

Bent the body 90 degree forward at the waste level without bending the knees and place the palms on the knees and focus eyes’ on the sport of sujood. This position stretches the lower back and harms string muscle and strengthen the core muscles by maintaining a flexed waist for 10 to 15 second. It reduces back pain and knee pain and improves body balance and pump fresh blood to the brain.

4. Quama -Standing Straight

This is the shortest position in Salah (Muslim prayer). It may last for 3 to 6 seconds. While returning from Ruku (bowing) to this position the performer raises his hands as does in Takbir and keeps arms at side. It is a dynamic posture which involves standing up without any support, the whole body weight equally distributed on both feet. This position exercises the back bone and back muscle and thighs, knees and leg muscles. The blood circulation to the upper body return to the normal level thus the entire body gets relaxation.

5. Sujood -prostration, duration 10 to 12 seconds

Lowers himself slowly in to kneeling position, then keeps palms at the shoulder level fingers straight and together then touches forehead on the ground in Sujood 7 body parts forehead, both palms, both knees and both toes touch the ground this strengthen the hand and neck muscles and stretches the lower back muscles. The blood flow to the brain increased thus the brain is nourished, which is good for concentration, memory, vision and cognitive abilities.it is strengthen the internal organs and reproductive system of both genders (Ghorbani and Moosavi).

6. Jalsa (sitting) duration 4 to 6 second in between 2 Sujood and 30 to 40 second last sitting.

This is similar to Vajrasana in yoga. It stretches the thigh muscles and helps to keep upper body in an upright relaxed position which relaxes the spine. It reduces indigestion and constipation, and it is peptic ulcer and other stomach problem.

7. Peace to the left and right.

This is the final salutation (Thasleen) at the end of the prayer, turning the head right and left slowly increases the mobility and flexibility of neck and massages it. It is a very good form of exercise to the upper vertebra.

During Salah, the metabolism rate increases which causes relative oxygen deficiency and deficiency of nutrients. Due to this phenomenon, vasodilatation takes place, which means increase in caliber of blood vessels and this allows blood to flow back easily to the heart. This temporary phase, during which heart has to do more work, strengthens the heart muscle and thus improves the circulation within the muscle of heart. If one prays continuously, Salah prevents Osteoporosis, which causes fracture of bones as in old age, bones become weaker and thinner and this happens due to loss of mineral content in bones and sponginess of bones as due to regular and repeated movements in Salah, tendon power, cardiovascular reserve, muscle strength and flexibility gets improved. Regular Salah practices help in promoting relaxation, minimizing anxiety, and reducing cardiovascular risk. The risks of having varicose veins, affects very rarely to those, who performs prayers regularly and properly.

5 BENEFITS OF TARAWEEH (SPECIAL PRAYER IN RAMADAN)

In the month of Ramadan, all Muslims have to pray additional Rakaa ranging from 8-20 with minimum gap of almost 2 minutes of rest after every 4 Rakaa. What actually happens in Ramadan, before breaking of fast, the blood glucose and insulin levels remain at the lowest levels due to hunger and after breaking of fast, the ingested foods blood glucose level continues to rise and with it plasma insulin also rises. Within few hours, this blood sugar level reaches its higher level and as soon one starts prayer, the glucose gets circulated in muscles, liver and so on. This circulating glucose gets metabolized into carbon dioxide and water due to physical movements involved in prayers. And this helps in improving flexibility, relieves anxiety, reduces stress and helps in burning calories and all these things are excellent for health.

Taraweeh prayer also increases stamina as one has to perform 20 Rakaa and has to do a total of 340 physical movements continuously. Deep vein thrombosis (the most common cause of ulceration of the legs in the elderly) is prevented by performing Salah and Taraweeh prayers. During the Taraweeh prayers, systolic Blood pressure may rise (the larger number in B.P.) a little and the diastolic Blood Pressure may remain unchanged or even fall. However after the Taraweeh prayers are over, the B.P. may drop to just below normal levels which is a welcome sign. Taraweeh prayers improve respiratory efficiency; circulation in the capillaries surrounding the alveoli is increased, and this brings about enhanced gas exchange and deeper breathing. The increase in the maximal consumption of oxygen is what makes the performer feel better.

Taraweeh prayers activate the sympathetic nervous system which is one of the two divisions of the autonomic nervous system, which supplies motor nerves to the smooth muscles of internal organs and to the heart muscle. Sympathetic nerve fibers arise via spinal nerves in the thoracic and lumbar regions. Their endings release mainly adrenaline, which increases heart rate and breathing rate, raises blood pressure, and slows digestive processes, thereby preparing the body for "fight or flight" and antagonizing the effects of the sympathetic nervous system. Taraweeh performer should achieve weight reduction. This will also reduce both fat and body weight, but fat-free weight will remain constant or may even increase slightly.

It is well known that exercise prevents coronary heart disease (CHD), increases high density lipoproteins (HDL or healthy Cholesterol), increases maximum oxygen uptake, slows the heart, lowers the B.P. slightly, decreases ventricular ectopic activity, enlarges the lumen of the coronary arteries and increases cardiac output. Exercise also improves carbohydrate tolerance and improves late-onset diabetes, and helps cases of chronic respiratory diseases. Beneficial changes have been recorded in the lipid profile, B.P., clotting factors, weight reduction and insulin sensitivity of muscles and other tissues in persons who exercise regularly. Growth Hormone secretion is elevated by fasting and it is further elevated by Taraweeh prayers. As Growth Hormone is necessary for collagen formation, this may be an important factor as to why the skins of those who fast regularly during Ramadan and perform the Taraweeh prayers do not get wrinkled, even when they grow old.

6 Discussion

The present study highlights that Salah (Muslim prayer), including Taraweeh during the month of Ramadan, functions as a comprehensive form of moderate physical activity that integrates physical movement, mental relaxation, and spiritual engagement. The findings derived from the reviewed literature indicate that the sequential postures of Salah—beginning with Ablution (Wudu) and continuing through Takbir, Qiyam, Ruku, Sujood, Jalsa, and Thasleem—collectively contribute to improved physiological efficiency and overall health. These movements involve coordinated muscle contractions, both isotonic and isometric in nature, which help in maintaining muscular strength, joint mobility, and neuromuscular coordination.

From a physiological perspective, Salah promotes enhanced blood circulation and cardiovascular function. The repeated changes in posture facilitate venous return and improve blood flow to vital organs, including the brain and heart. The temporary increase in metabolic rate during prayer leads to mild oxygen demand and nutrient utilization, which in turn results in vasodilatation and improved circulation. This process strengthens cardiac muscles and contributes to better cardiovascular endurance. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that describe Salah as a low-to-moderate intensity physical activity with measurable health benefits.

The role of Ablution (Wudu) extends beyond ritual purification, contributing significantly to hygiene and preventive health. Regular washing of exposed body parts reduces the risk of infections, stimulates peripheral circulation, and may activate certain biological active spots similar to reflexology. This repeated practice not only ensures cleanliness but also prepares the individual mentally and physically for prayer, enhancing the overall therapeutic effect of Salah.

Taraweeh prayers, performed during Ramadan, further amplify these benefits by increasing the duration and intensity of physical engagement. The extended number of Rakaa performed during Taraweeh results in greater energy expenditure, improved glucose metabolism, and enhanced muscular endurance. Following fasting, the body experiences fluctuations in blood glucose levels, and the physical activity involved in Taraweeh helps in regulating these levels by facilitating glucose uptake and utilization. This is particularly beneficial in maintaining metabolic balance and may aid in the management of conditions such as diabetes.

Moreover, Salah and Taraweeh contribute to mental and psychological well-being by promoting relaxation, reducing stress, and enhancing emotional stability. The rhythmic and mindful nature of prayer, combined with controlled breathing and focus, produces a calming effect on the nervous system. This may help in reducing anxiety levels and improving overall mental health. The activation of the autonomic nervous system during prayer also supports better physiological regulation and adaptability to stress.

The discussion also indicates that regular performance of Salah may play a role in the prevention and management of various lifestyle-related diseases, including hypertension, osteoporosis, varicose veins, and cardiovascular disorders. The repetitive weight-bearing and stretching movements help maintain bone density, improve flexibility, and enhance muscular strength. Additionally, the gentle nature of these movements makes Salah suitable for individuals across different age groups and fitness levels. Overall, the integration of physical, physiological, and psychological components in Salah, particularly when combined with Taraweeh during Ramadan, underscores its significance as a holistic health-promoting practice. While the current study is based on conceptual and literature-based analysis, the findings strongly suggest that Salah can be considered not only a religious obligation but also a beneficial daily activity contributing to overall health and well-being.

7 CONCLUSIONS

1. Salah (Muslim prayer) is a holistic activity that integrates physical, physiological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of health.
2. The structured movements involved in Salah act as a form of regular low-to-moderate intensity exercise, improving flexibility, muscle strength, and joint mobility.
3. Ablution (Wudu) contributes to personal hygiene and preventive health, reducing the risk of infections and stimulating circulation through repeated washing.
4. The sequential postures of Salah enhance cardiovascular efficiency, improve blood circulation, and support better oxygen utilization in the body.
5. Regular practice of Salah helps in reducing stress, anxiety, and mental fatigue, thereby promoting psychological well-being and emotional balance.
6. Taraweeh prayers during Ramadan provide additional physical activity, increasing stamina, endurance, and overall energy expenditure.
7. The performance of Taraweeh after fasting helps in regulating blood glucose levels and improving metabolic functions.
8. Salah and Taraweeh together may assist in the prevention and management of lifestyle-related diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, and varicose veins.
9. The repeated movements and postural changes contribute to improved posture, balance, and neuromuscular coordination.
10. Salah is a simple, safe, and accessible form of physical activity suitable for individuals of all ages and fitness levels.
11. Overall, Salah, especially when combined with Taraweeh during Ramadan, can be considered a valuable health-promoting practice alongside its spiritual significance.

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