

THE QUR'ANIC SEMANTIC LANDSCAPE OF ṢALĀH: EVOLUTION AND INTERPRETATION

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an. While most Muslims understand *ṣalāh* as a ritual that begins with takbir and ends with salam, this perspective limits the comprehensive meaning of *ṣalāh*. The Qur'an, however, employs the term in various contexts and with multiple nuances. This study adopts the semantic framework of Toshihiko Izutsu to explore and analyze these different uses. The findings reveal that in the Qur'an, *ṣalāh* encompasses a range of meanings beyond obligatory prayers, including recitation of the Qur'an, supplication, mercy, blessings, and places of worship. The semantic evolution of *ṣalāh* spans from pre-Qur'anic times to the post-Qur'anic era. In the pre-Qur'anic period, *ṣalāh* generally referred to prayers with worldly connotations and expressions of respect for rulers. During the Qur'anic period, the meaning of *ṣalāh* shifted towards spiritual and eschatological dimensions. In the post-Qur'anic era, particularly within *fiqh* literature, the term has been narrowly interpreted as obligatory prayers and related ritual acts. This study highlights the dynamic nature of *ṣalāh*'s semantic development and its broader implications within Islamic thought.

Keywords: Ṣalāh, Qur'an, Semantic analysis and Toshihiko Izutsu

Introduction

Ṣalāh holds a prominent position in Islam, being a fundamental component of Islamic law (*sharī'ah*). All Muslims who meet the necessary conditions are obligated (*taklīf*) to perform *ṣalāh*. Consequently, discussions on *ṣalāh* are prevalent in various Islamic literatures. However, most existing literatures present discussions on *ṣalāh* primarily from a legal perspective. In other words, the discourse on *ṣalāh* is dominated by *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) literature.¹ This is evident from the extensive and intensive examination of this topic in monumental *fiqh* works from the four major madhabs (Islamic schools of thought) to contemporary times. As a result, discussions about *ṣalāh* often focus on its legal status, procedural details, types,²

¹ Mona Shalih Abdullah al-Marzu', *Fiqh Shalat Imam Al-Bukhari*, trans. Solihin (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2011); Abdul Qadir al-Rahbawi, *Al-Shalah 'Ala al-Mazalib al'Arba'ah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1983); Abdul Qadir al-Rahbawi, *Shalat Empat Mazhab* (Jakarta: PT. Intermedia, 1994).

² TM. Hasbi ash-Shiddiqy, *Pedoman Shalat* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1983); Syaikh Abu Bakar, *I'alah al-Thalibin*, vol. 1 (Mesir: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.); Muhammad ibn Shalih al-Utsaimin, *Fath Dzi Al-Jalal Wa al-Ikram Bi Syarh Bulugh al-Maram; Kitab al-Shalah*, 5 (Jakarta: Darus Sunnah, 2014); KH. Zainal Arifin Djamaris, *Menyempurnakan Shalat Dengan Menyempurnakan Kayfiyat Dan Menggali Makna Filosofisnya* (Jawa Barat: Raja Grafindo Persada, 1997).

methods for achieving concentration (*khushū'*),³ its miraculous aspects,⁴ and similar topics, leading to repetitive and narrowly focused jurisprudential studies.

The exploration of the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an, however, is almost entirely overlooked. Yet, understanding the meaning and evolution of *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an is crucial and urgent. This discussion forms the foundational basis (core of the core) for comprehending the procedural aspects, legal rulings, and other dimensions of *ṣalāh*.

In fiqh literature, *ṣalāh* is typically defined as a series of verbal and physical acts that begin with *takbīr* (the declaration of Allāh Akbar) and conclude with *salām* (the salutation of peace).⁵ This definition represents a practical and concise understanding of *ṣalāh*, describing it as a sequence of ritualistic actions. This definition, however, significantly reduces the broader and more profound meaning of *ṣalāh*. In practice, this limited definition is widely accepted among the Muslim community. Yet, this understanding is not the only meaning of *ṣalāh*. In the Qur'an, the term *ṣalāh* encompasses additional meanings, such as invoking blessings and granting mercy, as illustrated in QS. 33:56;

"God and His angels bless the Prophet- so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace".⁶

In the verse mentioned above, the term "yuṣallūna" (a derivative of *ṣalāh*) means to invoke blessings and grant mercy. This meaning significantly differs from the definition of *ṣalāh* found in fiqh literature. Therefore, this paper aims to explore how the Qur'an uses the term of *ṣalāh* to obtain the Qur'anic worldview (*weltanschauung*) using the semantic approach developed by Toshihiko Izutsu. Izutsu's semantic perspective is chosen because it elucidates the Qur'anic worldview (*weltanschauung*) of *ṣalāh* in detail. Moreover, Izutsu's semantics can capture the evolution or development of the meaning of *ṣalāh* over time, from the pre-Qur'anic period, through the Qur'anic period, to the post-Qur'anic period. Thus, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the meaning of *ṣalāh*.

Qur'anic Semantics: The Theoretical Framework of Toshihiko Izutsu

Muslims regard the Qur'an as a guide (*hudan*) for life in this world and the hereafter. To understand its guidance, Qur'anic scholars have developed and introduced various sciences and approaches to delve into its verses. Numerous methods for interpreting the Qur'an have emerged from the classical and medieval periods to the present day. One of the most notable contemporary approaches is the semantic method pioneered by Toshihiko Izutsu. What exactly is the semantic approach?

Etymologically, semantics is the study of meaning. It encompasses not only individual words but also anything that carries meaning. Izutsu explains that one aspect of semantics is the analytical study of key terms within a particular language,

³ Mukmin Fathi al-Hahad, *Perbaharui Shalatmu; Meraih Shalat Khusyu' Dan Menghilangkan Was-Was*, trans. Miftahul Asror (Yogyakarta: Mitra Pustaka, 2007).

⁴ Sayyid Shaleh al-Ja'fari, *The Miracle of Shalat*, trans. Muhammad Mukhlisin (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2007); KH. Muhammad Sholikhin, *The Miracle of Shalat* (Jakarta: Airlangga, 2011).

⁵ Bakar, *I'ānah al-Thalibin*, 1:20.

⁶ M. A. Abdel Haleem, ed., *The Qur'an*, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 270.

leading to conclusions about the worldview (*weltanschauung*) of the people who use that language. When applied to the Qur'an, or "Qur'anic semantics," it involves an analytical examination of words or concepts to uncover the Qur'anic worldview.⁷ In essence, Qur'anic semantics strives to understand specific concepts in the Qur'an objectively, allowing the text to speak for itself.

In his seminal work "God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic *Weltanschauung*," Izutsu provides concrete examples by exploring the meanings of key Qur'anic terms such as Allah, iman (faith), Islam, wahy (revelation), taqwa (piety), nabi (prophet), and kafir (disbeliever). He begins by examining the basic and relational meanings of these terms. According to Izutsu, each Qur'anic word possesses a fundamental, intrinsic meaning (basic meaning) that remains constant regardless of context.⁸ The relational meaning, on the other hand, is the connotative meaning that arises from the word's specific usage and its relationship with other significant words in the text.⁹ These fundamental and relational meanings form the primary methodology for further analysis, including synchronic and diachronic analyses.

Izutsu posits that synchronic and diachronic meanings can elucidate the basic meanings of words. Diachronically, meaning is viewed in relation to time, capturing the growth and transformation of a word's meaning over different periods.¹⁰ A word might be used in one era and either fall out of use or undergo shifts in meaning in subsequent eras. Synchronic analysis, meanwhile, captures the meaning of a word at a specific point in time. Together, these analyses trace the historical development of a word's meaning from pre-Islamic times through the post-Qur'anic era.

The methodological approach of Izutsu's semantics offers a comprehensive view of the concepts within specific Qur'anic vocabulary. Furthermore, by employing synchronic and diachronic analyses, Izutsu's semantics provides a thorough understanding of the evolution and development of these meanings over time. This study will apply Izutsu's semantic analysis to the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an to reveal how the Qur'an conceptualizes *ṣalāh* and to trace the evolution of its meaning through various historical periods.

The Fundamental Meaning of *Ṣalāh*

The fundamental meaning in the application of Izutsu's semantic methodology is crucial for uncovering the fundamental essence of a word. According to Izutsu, the basic meaning of a word remains inherent and consistent regardless of its usage or context. Linguists have identified several fundamental meanings for the term *ṣalāh*. Abu Hussein Ahmad Ibn Faris Ibn Zakaria, in his work *Maqāyis al-Lughah*, explains that *ṣalāh* primarily means "prayer," as illustrated in the following quotation about the qualities of wine;

وقابلها الريح في دنها وصلّي علي دنها وارتم

⁷ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Relasi Tuhan dan manusia: pendekatan semantik terhadap Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana Yogya, 1997), 2-3.

⁸ Eko Zulfikar, "Makna *Ūlū Al-Albāb* Dalam al-Qur'an: Analisis Semantik Toshihiko Izutsu," *Jurnal THEOLOGIA* 29, no. 1 (September 2, 2018): 112, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2018.29.1.2273>.

⁹ Izutsu, *Relasi Tuhan dan manusia*, 11-12.

¹⁰ Izutsu, *Relasi Tuhan dan manusia*, 33.

"The wine seller aerates the wine in a jar, while invoking blessings upon it and seeking assistance from God (so that the wine does not turn sour)."¹¹

The meaning of *shalat* as prayer can also be found in the following hadith of the Prophet:

إِذَا دُعِيَ أَحَدُكُمْ إِلَى طَعَامٍ فَلْيُجِبْ، فَإِنْ كَانَ مُفْطِرًا فَلْيُطْعَمْ، وَإِنْ كَانَ صَائِمًا فَلْيُصَلِّ. يَغْنَى الدُّعَاءُ

"If any of you is invited to a meal, then accept the invitation. If you are not fasting, then eat the food provided; but if you are fasting, then pray for the host."¹²

The term *ṣalla* in the quotation about the qualities of wine signifies prayer or supplication. Similarly, the term *faḥ yuṣalli* in the Prophet's hadith also means to pray, that is, to invoke blessings and goodness for the one who is fasting. Ibn Manzūr and Sheikh Alī al-Husseinī al-Jurjānī al-Hanafī also mention that the term *ṣalāh* means prayer.¹³ Additionally, Ibn Manzur notes another meaning: *ṣalāh* signifies seeking forgiveness (*istighfār*).¹⁴ The understanding that *ṣalāh* means both prayer and seeking forgiveness comes from the inclusion of supplications, hopes, and pleas for forgiveness within it.

Beyond the meanings of prayer and seeking forgiveness, *ṣalāh* also signifies mercy when it refers to Allah. In Sharī'ah, *ṣalāh* is associated with the words *sujūd* (prostration) and *rukū'* (bowing), which imply seeking blessings and showing reverence.¹⁵ In al-Ta'rīfāt and Maqāyis al-Lughah, *ṣalāh* is described as a form of worship with specific conditions and designated times.¹⁶ Therefore, it can be concluded that the fundamental meaning of *ṣalāh* inherently relates to prayer or supplication. Regardless of where or how *ṣalāh* is used, the meaning of prayer and supplication remains attached to it.

Relational Meaning of Ṣalāh

Relational meaning is the cognitive significance attached to a word due to its specific positioning or its association with other important contextual words. In this regard, Toshihiko Izutsu recommends conducting syntagmatic and pragmatic analyses. Syntagmatic analysis aims to determine the meaning of a word by considering and examining the words that precede and follow the word being studied. Pragmatic analysis, on the other hand, is a comparative analysis of a word with similar (synonymous) or opposite (antonymous) words.¹⁷ Syntagmatic analysis seeks to capture the meaning of *ṣalāh* within its contextual framework. Meanwhile,

¹¹ Abu al-Husein Ahmad Ibn Faris Ibn Zakaria, *Maqayis Al-Lughah* (Kairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2008), 490.

¹² Zakaria, *Maqayis Al-Lughah*, 490.

¹³ Abu Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ali Al-Husseini al-Jurjani, *Al-Ta'rifat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2009), 137.

¹⁴ Ibnu Manzur, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2009), 571, <https://shamela.ws/book/1687/2639>.

¹⁵ Al-Raghib al-Asfahani, *Al-Mufradat Fi Gharib al-Qur'an* (Mesir: al-Maimanah, 1424), 329; Zakaria, *Maqayis Al-Lughah*, 490.

¹⁶ al-Jurjani, *Al-Ta'rifat*, 137.

¹⁷ Izutsu, *Relasi Tuhan dan manusia*, 12–32; Zulfikar, "MAKNA ŪLŪ AL-ALBĀB DALAM AL-QUR'AN," 114.

pragmatic analysis highlights the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Qur'anic terminology.

Ṣalāh in the Qur'an; Syntagmatic Analysis

The term *ṣalāh* and its derivatives appear in 107 verses of the Qur'an. These verses, which narrate the concept of *ṣalāh* within various contexts, reveal a rich tapestry of meanings that are both diverse and multifaceted. This multiplicity of interpretations underscores the complexity and depth of the term *ṣalāh* as it is used in the Qur'anic text. By examining these different contexts, we can uncover a broader understanding of *ṣalāh* that extends beyond its conventional definition as ritual prayer. The following exposition illustrates the diversity of meanings of *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an.

2. Prayer

In the Qur'an, the term *ṣalāh* denotes the ritualistic act of prayer, encompassing a sequence of worship rituals that commence with the *takbīr* (recitation of *Allāh Akbar*) and conclude with the *salām* (utterance of peace), conforming to specific criteria as delineated in fiqh literature. This significance is evident in Q. 2:238, where it pertains to the obligatory five daily prayers.

"Take care to do your prayers, praying in the best way, and stand before God in devotion."¹⁸

The term *ṣalāh* as associated with *al-whusthā* and *qānitīn* in the previously mentioned verse embodies the concept of practical prayer or worship, delineated by the consensus of jurisprudential scholars. In this context, *ṣalāh* specifically denotes the obligatory prayers mandated for Muslims five times daily, from the pre-dawn (*ṣubh*) to the evening (*'ishā*). Moreover, the utilization of the term *ṣalāh* to denote the practical dimension of worship is further exemplified in Q.62:9;

"Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of God and leave off your trading--that is better for you, if only you knew."¹⁹

The term *ṣalāh* as used in the preceding verse is associated with the term *jumu'ah* establishing the semantic construct of Friday prayer. This refers to the religious observance conducted every Friday, obligatory for Muslim men. Moreover, the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an, denoting the ritual act of worship through prayer, is similarly discernible in Q. 9:84;

"Do not hold prayers for any of them if they die, and do not stand by their graves: they disbelieved in God and His Messenger and died rebellious."²⁰

The connection between the term *ṣalāh* and the word *māta* in the cited verse introduces the concept of funeral prayer (*ṣalāh al-janāzah*) within its semantic context. This association underscores the Qur'anic directive prohibiting the Prophet from engaging in funeral rites or offering prayers for hypocrites. It highlights a significant aspect of the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an, revealing its diverse relational meanings encompassing various ritualistic acts of worship, including specific stipulations

¹⁸ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 28.

¹⁹ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 372.

²⁰ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 123.

prescribed for distinct times and scenarios. These include not only the well-known Friday prayer (*ṣalāh al-jumu'ah*) and the obligatory five daily prayers but also the solemnity of funeral prayer (*ṣalāh al-janāzah*). The comprehensive examination of the regulations governing these prayers is a focal point in jurisprudential literature, shedding light on the intricate nuances of Islamic worship practices. This elucidation reinforces the dynamic nature of the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an, reflecting the multifaceted dimensions of religious observance within the Islamic tradition.

2. Blessing

An additional connotation associated with the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an pertains to the notion of blessing. This relational meaning suggests that engaging in prayer fosters a sense of divine favor and grace. This aspect is elucidated in Q. 2:157, where prayer is depicted as a conduit for receiving blessings from Allah.

"These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided."²¹

The term *ṣalawāt* is connected with the term *rabb*. According to Ibn Faris in *Maqāyis al-Lughah*, the term *ṣalāh* emanating from Allah denotes blessings or mercy.²² Furthermore, the term *ṣalawāt* in the verse can be construed as Allah's benevolence granted to those whom He chooses. Hence, the verse underscores the profound significance of *shalat* as not merely a ritualistic act, but as a means to invoke divine blessings and mercy upon the believer. Through prayer, individuals seek spiritual nourishment and guidance, aligning themselves with the will of Allah and inviting His benevolence into their lives. This relational dimension of *shalat* underscores its transformative potential, emphasizing the profound spiritual connection between the worshipper and the Divine, wherein prayer becomes a source of comfort, solace, and spiritual growth.

3. Seeking forgiveness or offering blessings and mercy

The multifaceted nature of the term *ṣalāh* is revealed when considered in conjunction with its relational associations with other significant terms. Among these diverse meanings, one notable interpretation emerges: the act of seeking forgiveness or offering blessings and mercy. This semantic richness is exemplified in Q.33:56, where the term "*shalat*" (*yushallu*) is employed.

"God and His angels bless the Prophet- so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace".²³

Syntagmatically, the term *ṣalāh* (*yushallūn*) demonstrates a close association with the terms *Allāh*, *al-malā'ikah*, and *alladzīna āmanū*, resulting in varied interpretations. When in conjunction with *Allāh*, *ṣalāh* implies the act of bestowing mercy or compassion, a concept expounded by Ibn Faris in *Maqāyis al-Lughah*.²⁴ Conversely, when connected with *al-malā'ikah*, *ṣalāh* assumes the meaning of seeking forgiveness. In contrast, in relation to *alladzīna āmanū*, *ṣalāh* is understood as the recitation of blessings. Hence, the term *ṣalāh* in this verse encapsulates multiple

²¹ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 18.

²² Zakaria, *Maqāyis Al-Lughah*, 490.

²³ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 270.

²⁴ Zakaria, *Maqāyis Al-Lughah*, 490.

meanings, discerned through its syntactic connections with other significant terms inherent within the text.

As a result, *ṣalāh* extends beyond its conventional understanding as ritual prayer, encompassing a broader spectrum of spiritual acts. It suggests an invocation for divine forgiveness or the bestowal of blessings and mercy upon individuals. This interpretation underscores the dynamic nature of *ṣalāh* within the Qur'anic context, portraying it not merely as a set of prescribed rituals but as a profound expression of spiritual devotion and supplication. Furthermore, this nuanced understanding of *ṣalāh* reflects the intricate layers of meaning embedded within the Qur'an, inviting believers to explore its depth and richness.

4. Reading the Qur'an

The term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an extends its meaning to encompass the act of reading the Qur'an. This significance is evident in Q. 17:110 in which it states:

"Say [to them], 'Call on God, or on the Lord of Mercy- whatever names you call Him, the best names belong to Him.' [Prophet], do not be too loud in your prayer, or too quiet, but seek a middle way".²⁵

Syntagmatically, the term *ṣalāh* in this verse is semantically linked with "*tajhar*". Which denotes reciting loudly. This implies a cautionary directive against reciting the Qur'an too audibly during the prayer, nor too softly. This injunction underscores the importance of maintaining a balanced and moderate approach in the recitation of the Qur'an within the context of the *ṣalāh*.²⁶ Such a balanced approach ensures reverence and respect for the sanctity of the prayer ritual while also allowing for an earnest and audible engagement with the sacred text.

5. Invocation (*al-du'ā*)

The term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an, when examined through a syntagmatic lens, also encompasses the concept of supplication or prayer. This semantic interpretation becomes apparent in Q. 9:99 and 103, where the relational dynamics between the term *ṣalawāt* and *akbi* in verse 99, and the correlation of *ṣal* with the pronoun *hum* (them) and the verbs *khuz* (to take), *tuthahhir* and *tuzakki* (to cleanse) in verse 103, contribute to its understanding as prayer. These relational associations illuminate the multifaceted nature of the term *ṣalāh*. These verses elucidate the diverse connotations of the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an, emphasizing its role not only as a ritualistic act of worship but also as a form of entreaty and intercession, underscoring its spiritual significance and efficacy in fostering believers' communion with Allah.

5. Place of worship

The term *ṣalāh*, when analyzed from a syntagmatic perspective, also signifies a place of worship, as evidenced in Q.4:43.

"You who believe, do not come anywhere near the prayer if you are intoxicated,^a not until you know what you are saying; nor if you are in a state of major ritual impurity- though you may pass through the *akbar* - not until you have bathed; if you are ill, on a journey, have relieved yourselves, or had

²⁵ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 182.

²⁶ Muqātil Ibn Sulaimān, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, ed. Abdullah Mahmud Shahatah, vol. 2 (Beirut: Muassasah al-Tarikh al-'Arabiyy, 1423), 227.

intercourse, and cannot find any water, then find some clean sand^c and wipe your faces and hands with it. God is always ready to pardon and forgive".²⁷

The term *ṣalāh* as depicted in the mentioned verse is intricately linked with the concepts of *sukara* (intoxicated) and *junuba* (ritually impure), each carrying dual significances. Firstly, *ṣalāh* represents the practical aspect of ritual worship. Secondly, it symbolizes a sacred space designated for worship or a mosque. The verse underscores the prohibition of individuals under the influence of intoxicants from approaching the act of prayer, as well as the prohibition of those in a state of ritual impurity from residing within the premises of the mosque. Additionally, besides denoting a mosque, *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an extends its significance to encompass the places of worship designated for the Jewish community, as articulated in Q. 22:40.

"Those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, 'Our Lord is God.' If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. God is sure to help those who help His cause— God is strong and mighty".²⁸

This verse thus illustrates the multifaceted nature of the term *ṣalāh* within the Qur'anic discourse, emphasizing its dual role in signifying both the act of worship and the physical space designated for religious practices.

***Ṣalāh* in the Qur'an; Pragmatic Analysis (Synonym and Antonym)**

When delving into its core essence, the term *ṣalāh* is found to be synonymous with *du'ā* (invocation) and *ibādah* (devotion). In the pragmatic scrutiny, the focus is exclusively directed towards lexicons synonymous with "shalat," as no antonyms for the term were identified. While *du'ā* (invocation) and *ibādah* (devotion) share synonymous traits with *ṣalāh*, they possess nuanced distinctions. *Ibādah* (devotion) encompasses a wider spectrum than *ṣalāh*, suggesting that *ṣalāh* constitutes a subset of acts within the realm of worship. Such acts may include charitable deeds, *zakat*, pilgrimage, righteous actions, filial piety, and even acts as simple as smiling at one's kin. On the other hand, *du'ā* (invocation) carries a comparable connotation of supplication, albeit occasionally bearing negative connotations in the Qur'an, as illustrated in Q.17:11 (Yet man prays for harm, just as he prays for good: man is ever hasty).²⁹

***Ṣalāh*; Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis**

Although the term *ṣalāh* was not exclusive to the Islamic epoch and was recognized and employed by pre-Islamic Arab communities, the alignment of its pre-Islamic or pre-Qur'anic connotations with those in the Qur'an and subsequent periods remains subject to debate. An investigation into both synchronic and syntagmatic dimensions would facilitate the exploration of *ṣalāh*'s usage and the evolution of its semantics across temporal boundaries.

²⁷ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 55.

²⁸ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 212.

²⁹ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 176.

Meaning of Ṣalāh; Pre-Qur'anic

The Quran was revealed in the Arabian Peninsula, utilizing the Arabic language as the primary mode of communication among the Arab populace of that era. Many terminologies prevalent in the pre-Islamic Arabian society were incorporated into the Quran, among which is the term *ṣalāh*. However, the understanding of *ṣalāh* before the advent of Islam or during the pre-Qur'anic period differed significantly. Presented below are some pre-Qur'anic interpretations of *ṣalāh*;

2. Seeking divine favor in commercial ventures

The term *ṣalāh* in the pre-Qur'anic epoch denoted supplication or entreaty, particularly in the context of business transactions, as evidenced by excerpts from Arabic poetry:

وقابلها الريح في دنها وصلي علي دنها وارتم

"The wine seller aerates the wine in a jar, while invoking blessings upon it and seeking assistance from God (so that the wine does not turn sour)."³⁰

In the cited poetry, the term *ṣalāh* is understood within the pre-Qur'anic Arabian context as a form of supplication or prayer specifically associated with commercial activities. Given the economic reliance of a substantial segment of the Arab populace on trade, *ṣalāh* in this context reflects the entwining of spiritual and material concerns, particularly the solicitation of divine assistance in matters of business and commerce.

The interpretation of *ṣalāh* as a request for worldly success aligns with the prevalent materialistic orientation of pre-Islamic Arabian society, where economic prosperity held paramount importance, often overshadowing considerations of the afterlife. This pragmatic approach to prayer underscores the pragmatic ethos of the pre-Qur'anic Arabs, wherein appeals to the divine were seen as instrumental in securing tangible benefits in the material realm. This perspective is notably echoed in various verses of the Quran, including Q.23:37, which elucidates the preoccupation with worldly gains and neglect of spiritual transcendence prevalent among certain segments of society.

2. Respect for the King

The term *ṣalāh* in pre-Qur'anic times also denoted a form of reverence or respect towards the king or ruler. Extracts from ancient Arabic literature allude to this significance, showcasing how *ṣalāh* was associated with expressions of deference towards the monarch.

تصلي نحوه من كل فج ملوك الأرض وميولها امام

"All the kings on the face of the earth pay homage to him from all corners of the world, and all the people on the face of the earth turn their faces towards him".³¹

³⁰ Zakaria, *Maqayis Al-Lughah*, 490.

³¹ Wildan Taufiq, *Semiotika untuk Kajian Sastra dan Al-Qur'an*, 2016th ed. (Bandung: Yrama Widya, n.d.), 25.

In this context, *ṣalāh* implied acts of obeisance or homage paid to the reigning authority, reflecting the societal norms of the era. Such deference to the king was integral to the social fabric of pre-Islamic Arabian society, where the monarch held considerable sway over political, social, and religious affairs. The inclusion of *ṣalāh* in the discourse concerning respect for the king underscores its multifaceted nature, signifying not only a spiritual practice but also a socio-political gesture of allegiance and submission. This understanding illuminates the nuanced meanings attributed to *ṣalāh* in pre-Qur'anic Arabia and highlights its role as a symbol of deference and loyalty to the ruling elite. Further exploration of this theme could delve into the intricate dynamics of power and authority in pre-Islamic Arabian society, shedding light on the interplay between religious practices and political structures. Additionally, an analysis of Quranic perspectives on governance and leadership could offer insights into the Quran's stance on the principles of justice, equity, and accountability in the realm of rulership.

Meaning of Ṣalāh: Qur'anic Period

The term *ṣalāh* in the Quran encompasses various meanings significantly different from its pre-Qur'anic usage. Several instances of the term *ṣalāh* in the Quran have undergone modification and Islamization of meaning. For instance, the term *ṣalāh* which originally denoted ritual worship beginning with *akbir* and ending with *salām*, as seen in Q. 2:238 and Q.62:9, has been imbued with a nuanced spiritual significance in Islam. The Quran imbues an otherworldly dimension to the term *ṣalāh*, evident in its objective to serve Allah and seek His approval. In Islam, *ṣalāh* is regarded as the foremost deed to be accounted for on the Day of Judgment, as articulated in the Hadith recorded by Tirmidzi. This indicates that the Quran has expanded the meaning of *ṣalāh* to include a focus on the afterlife. Additionally, the Quran stipulates specific times for *ṣalāh*, such as the Friday prayer mentioned in Q.62:9. Moreover, the Quran employs the term *ṣalāh* with diverse meanings, including blessings or mercy (Surah Al-Ahzab 56), supplication (Q.9: 99 and 103), recitation of the Quran (Q.17:110), among others, as previously elucidated.

These explanations provide insight into the various meanings of *ṣalāh* in the Quran. The foregoing discussion underscores a significant point: the preservation of the meaning of *ṣalāh* as supplication by the Quran. This meaning was evidently utilized by pre-Qur'anic Arab communities. However, the Quranic concept of *ṣalāh* as supplication is characterized by monotheism, where Allah is the sole entity to whom one can turn for requests and hopes. This differentiation from pre-Qur'anic usage, where polytheistic beliefs were prevalent, signifies the Islamization of the term *ṣalāh* by the Quran, as evidenced by the data presented.

Meaning of ṣalāh: Post-Quranic Period

The term *ṣalāh* remains a topic of significant discussion in the realm of Islamic literature even after the Quranic period, highlighting its enduring importance. This is evident from the emergence of various works specifically dedicated to the exploration of *ṣalāh*. Such prominence is unsurprising, considering that *ṣalāh*

constitutes a fundamental aspect of Islamic jurisprudence. What, then, is the meaning of *ṣalāh* in the post-Quranic era? This section will elucidate the usage of the term *ṣalāh* and its meanings in the post-Quranic period. To examine the development of the meaning of *ṣalāh* after the Quran, this paper limits the exploration of *ṣalāh*'s meanings to the realm of exegesis, jurisprudence, and hadith literature. This is due to the extensive discourse surrounding the term *ṣalāh* itself. Exegesis, jurisprudence, and hadith literature are expected to represent the evolution of the meaning of *ṣalāh* after the Quranic period.

The term *ṣalāh* in exegesis literature serves as an integral component of faith, prompting Muslim scholars to engage in the study and understanding of the Quran. From the classical era to the present day, Muslim scholars have delved into the Quran, comprehending and elucidating its divine message to the community through countless exegesis texts. Undoubtedly, these texts contain explanations of the term *ṣalāh*. In works of jurisprudential exegesis or fiqh-based exegesis, the term *ṣalāh* is elaborated upon extensively in dedicated chapters. The term *ṣalāh* in these exegesis encompasses a wide range of meanings. For instance, interpretations of the term *ṣalāh* in Q.2: 3 vary across exegesis texts such as Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, illustrating the diverse interpretations offered by scholars regarding the meaning of the term.

“who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them”.³²

Al-Thabari, a distinguished Islamic exegete from the 4th century Hijri, posits that the term *ṣalāh* holds linguistic connotations of supplication or prayer. However, in Q.2:3, it specifically refers to the obligatory prayers prescribed in Islam, known as *al-ṣalāh al-mafrūdhah*.³³ Echoing this interpretation, Ibn Kathīr, a medieval exegete from the 8th century Hijri, and Ibn ‘Ashūr, a contemporary exegete from the 20th century, concur on the understanding of *ṣalāh* in this verse.³⁴ Within this context, *ṣalāh* encompasses the prescribed acts of ritual worship in Islam, including recitation of specific invocations and the performance of ritual gestures such as *takbīr*, bowing, and prostration.

However, interpretations of the term *ṣalāh* diverge across different verses, as evidenced by Q.33:56. Al-Thabari (d.310 AD) suggests that the term *yusallu* derived from *ṣalāh* signifies divine mercy and blessings bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad by Allah. Furthermore, it encompasses the meanings of supplication and blessings. Al-Qurtubi, a prominent commentator from the 7th century Hijri, similarly elucidates that the term *ṣalāh* when attributed to Allah implies divine mercy and Allah’s satisfaction with the Prophet Muhammad, serving as an honor bestowed upon him.³⁵ These interpretations are echoed by Ibn ‘Ashūr, who presents parallel meanings and interpretations.³⁶

³² Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 5.

³³ Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān Fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar al-Tarbiyyah wa al-Turas, n.d.), 242.

³⁴ Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 1 (Riyad: Dār al-Thayyibah, 1999), 168; Muhammad al-Tāhir ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Tahrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 1 (Tunis: Dar Tunisiyah, 2008), 232.

³⁵ al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 16 (Cairo: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Araby, 1967), 232.

³⁶ 'Ashūr, *Al-Tahrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 23:97.

Throughout exegetical literatures, *ṣalāh* assumes various meanings, encompassing practices such as recitation of the Quran and the designation of places of worship. However, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted connotations of *ṣalāh* is typically found in comprehensive exegesis works. Conversely, jurisprudential exegesis, notably exemplified in Tafsīr al-Ṣābunī, often offers a narrower interpretation, focusing primarily on the ritual worship aspect of *ṣalāh* such as the five daily prayers and other prescribed forms of worship. Thus, while *ṣalāh* embodies diverse meanings across Islamic literature, the nuances of its interpretations are contextualized within the broader framework of Quranic exegesis and Islamic jurisprudence.

Likewise, the term *ṣalāh* has emerged as a critical subject within the realm of fiqh studies. It is frequently positioned at the forefront of fiqh treatises, typically following discussions on purification (*ṭahārah*). Abdullah ibn Mahmud ibn Maudud al-Mushili, a prominent scholar of the Hanafi school, delineates that *ṣalāh* carries an etymological connotation of supplication or prayer. However, within the framework of Sharia terminology, as articulated by Maudud al-Mushi al-Hanafi, *ṣalāh* denotes the obligatory act of worship prescribed by the Quran, Sunnah, and consensus (*ijmā*), characterized by specific pillars and recitations at designated times. Echoing this perspective, Utsaimin expounds that linguistically, *ṣalāh* is synonymous with supplication, yet within the terminological context of Islamic jurisprudence, it encompasses acts of devotion to Allah through prescribed utterances and actions, commencing with the *takbir* and culminating with *salam*. They write;³⁷

الصَّلَاةُ فِي اللُّغَةِ: الدُّعَاءُ، وشاهد ذلك قوله تعالى: {وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ} [التوبة: 103] ، أي: ادعُ لهم. أمَّا في الشَّرْع: فهي التَّعَبُّدُ لِلَّهِ تعالى بأقوال وأفعال معلومة، مفتتحة بالتَّكْبِيرِ، مختتمة بالتَّسْلِيمِ. وإن شئت فقل: هي عبادة ذات أقوال وأفعال، مفتتحة بالتَّكْبِيرِ، مختتمة بالتَّسْلِيمِ. أمَّا قول بعض العلماء: «إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ هِيَ: أقوال وأفعال معلومة، مفتتحة بالتَّكْبِيرِ، مختتمة بالتَّسْلِيمِ»

The interpretation elucidated above is frequently encountered in the corpus of fiqh literature. In Indonesia, for instance, fiqh texts that are extensively studied in Islamic boarding schools, such as I'ānah al-Ṭālibīn,³⁸ Fath al-Qarīb, Fath al-Mu'īn, or Mu'īn al-Mubīn, similarly expound upon the concept of *ṣalāh* as demonstrated in the provided excerpt.

This is an interpretation that pertains to practical actions, thus, in fiqh texts, the term *ṣalāh* is extensively discussed regarding its procedures and the actions that must be performed or avoided. As a result, the term *ṣalāh* in fiqh literature has undergone a narrowing and simplification of meaning compared to the meanings used during the Quranic period. In fiqh literature, the word *ṣalāh* is understood and interpreted as supplication and practical worship. This practical approach underscores the meticulous detailing of ritual observances and the adherence to prescribed guidelines within fiqh literature. It reflects a shift from the broader conceptualizations found in the Quran to a more focused and operational understanding of *ṣalāh* as a set of specific actions and supplications. This transition

³⁷ Muhammad ibn Shalib ibn Muhammad al-Utsaimin, *Al-Syarh al-Muntī 'Ala Zad al-Mustafī* (Dar Ibn Zauji, 1428), 5; Muhammad ibn Abi al-Fath al-Ba'li al-Hanbali Abu Abdillah, *Al-Mathla' 'ala Abwab al-Fiqh*, vol. 1 (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1401), 46.

³⁸ Bakar, *I'ānah al-Thalibin*, 1:20.

highlights the pragmatic aspect of religious practice as elucidated in fiqh texts, emphasizing the importance of precise ritual performance in Islamic worship.

In Hadith collections, the term *ṣalāh* is also found, and indeed, discussions on the term *ṣalāh* are extensively detailed in specific chapters. However, in general jurisprudential Hadith compilations, the term *ṣalāh* is expounded as the obligatory worship performed by Muslims or other recommended prayers. Therefore, the discourse is organized into separate chapters, elucidating the rulings, procedures, and intricacies of *ṣalāh*. For instance, al-*Arba'un al-Ṣugrā* of al-Baihaqi expounds on hadiths pertaining to *ṣalāh* that signify obligatory rituals, such as the following hadiths.³⁹

- عَنْ سَالِمِ بْنِ أَبِي الْجَعْدِ عَنْ ثَوْبَانَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: اسْتَقِيمُوا وَلَنْ تُحْصُوا وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ أَفْضَلَ أَعْمَالِكُمُ الصَّلَاةَ وَلَا يُحَافِظُ عَلَى الْوُضُوءِ إِلَّا مُؤْمِنٌ.
- أَخْبَرَنَا أَبُو الْحُسَيْنِ بْنُ بِشْرَانَ أَنَا أَبُو جَعْفَرٍ الرَّزَّازُ ثَنَا عَيْسَى بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الطَّيَالِسِيُّ ثَنَا أَبُو عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ الْمَقْرِي ثَنَا كَهْمَسُ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ (قَالَ ۞) سَمِعْتُ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ بُرَيْدَةَ يُحَدِّثُ عَنْ يَحْيَى بْنِ عُمَرَ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ فِي حَدِيثِ الْإِيمَانِ قَالَ الرَّجُلُ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ أَخْبَرْنِي عَنِ الْإِسْلَامِ مَا الْإِسْلَامُ؟ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: الْإِسْلَامُ أَنْ تَشْهَدَ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَتُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةَ وَتُؤْتِيَ الزَّكَاةَ وَتَصُومَ رَمَضَانَ وَتُحْجَّ الْبَيْتَ إِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ السَّبِيلَ. قَالَ الرَّجُلُ: صَدَقْتَ ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ أَخْبَرْنِي عَنِ الْإِيمَانِ مَا الْإِيمَانُ.....

This continuity from fiqh to Hadith literature demonstrates the comprehensive examination of *ṣalāh* across Islamic textual sources, wherein its significance, regulations, and practices are thoroughly scrutinized and explicated for believers' understanding and adherence.

In various collections of hadith literature, discussions pertaining to *ṣalāh* encompass detailed accounts of pre-prayer rituals, prescribed prayer times, and other associated elements, as evidenced in al-*Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīhain* of al-Hakim.⁴⁰ The evolution of the concept of *ṣalāh* has undergone a discernible reduction in its scope and interpretation. This reduction can be ascribed to the evolving needs of Muslims seeking pragmatic guidance in their daily lives, especially concerning *ṣalāh* as an obligatory ritual of worship. Furthermore, the global spread of Islam beyond the confines of the Arabian Peninsula has contributed to the diversification of interpretations and practices surrounding *ṣalāh*. Despite this reduction, the essence of "shalat" as depicted in the Quranic period remains prevalent in Tafsir discussions, indicating a continuity of its original significance. However, within the realm of fiqh texts, there appears to be a trend towards narrowing down the multifaceted meanings of *ṣalāh*.

In conclusion, the multifarious significance of the term *ṣalāh* extends beyond its role as a practical ritualistic worship, reflecting broader dimensions within Islamic discourse. While its interpretation may have been streamlined in certain contexts, the enduring presence of its Quranic origins in exegesis discussions suggests a continued appreciation for its comprehensive spiritual and doctrinal implications.

Conclusion

The preceding exposition has provided significant insights into the semantic evolution of the term *ṣalāh*. Fundamentally, *ṣalāh* denotes supplication, a connotation

³⁹ Al-Baihaqi, *Al-Arba'un al-Shugra*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub, 1402), 170–75.

⁴⁰ Al-Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Shaḥīhain*, vol. 1 (Jami al-Sunnah, 1420), 546–75.

inherent regardless of its syntactic placement. In the pre-Qur'anic era, *ṣalāh* encapsulated both supplication and reverence towards rulers, reflecting a worldly orientation devoid of eschatological implications prevalent among pre-Islamic Arabs. However, with its integration into the Quranic discourse, *ṣalāh* underwent a transformative process, acquiring broader connotations beyond mere supplication. Quranic usage expanded the term to encompass concepts of mercy, blessings, Quranic recitation, and orientations towards the hereafter, thereby imbuing it with deeper Islamic significance.

Subsequent post-Qur'anic discussions have predominantly framed *ṣalāh* as a ritualistic act within Islam, characterized by prescribed acts of remembrance governed by specific regulations delineated in fiqh literature. Nevertheless, the multifaceted interpretations of *ṣalāh* persist in Tafsir literature akin to its Quranic origins. Thus, while post-Qur'anic discourse emphasizes the ritualistic aspect of *ṣalāh*, the enduring diversity of interpretations underscore its continued evolution and significance within Islamic scholarship.

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