

A contextual analysis on punctuality: An Islamic perspective

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Abstract

One of the most important virtues in Islam is keeping one promise. These promises are either between man and God or man and his kind humans. This promise keep is making one to be punctual. Time is one of the creatures of Allah (SWT) that every other creature benefits from it. Time helps us to know that every living thing has a beginning and an end. Between the beginning and the end of time allowed for every individual to live, is a period of engagement in one activity or the other which may be useful or harmful. In as much time benefits mankind it also destroys him if he fails to use it well. Therefore, this paper analyzes some benefits of punctuality from Islamic point of view. The study appeal to Muslim believers to be punctual in all aspects of their life and concluded with recommendations.

Keywords: Islam, God, creature, Muslim

Introduction

Everything, when lost, can be regained, except time. If it is lost, there is no hope to regain it. That is why time is the most precious thing that can ever be possessed in this life. Islam is a religion that gives utmost importance, greater value and concern to time, it encourages its good utilization and management and equally warns against its misuse and mismanagement in aspects of life. These teachings reflected in numerous verses of the Qur'an as well as the traditions (*Ahadith*) of the noble Prophet (ﷺ) in crystal clear and unequivocal terms. Allah (S.W.T) swears by almost all portions and parts of time to show how important time is. Allah said:

وَالْعَصْرُ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالنَّحَقِّ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالصَّبْرِ

By Al-'Asr (the time). Verily! Man is in loss, except those who believe and do righteous deeds, and recommend one another to the truth and recommend one another to patience” (Q103: 1-3)

Imam ash-Shafi'I said:

Had it been Allah has not revealed any chapter to His creation except this chapter it could have been sufficient for them.¹

In addition to this, Allah (S.W.T) swears by the daybreak,²the early hours of the day (after sunrise),³the night⁴ and He also swears by the day⁵so as to show how important time is in human's life.

The greater value Islam attached to punctuality and time management can be also noticed in different facets of worship such as the five daily prayers. Allah said:

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ فَإِذَا اطْمَأْنَنْتُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْفُوتًا

Then when you have finished the prayer, remember Allah standing and sitting and reclining; but when you are secure (from danger) keep up prayer; surely prayer is a timed ordinance for the believers (Q4:103).

Lack of maintaining or keeping time is called tardiness, as such, if a person is not punctual, keeping or managing his time accordingly, such person is termed as a tardy person. Being tardy is a bad attribute which does not yield any positive result to the addicts but only put him to shame and regret. For this reason, Islam considered it as a condemnable attitude. Allah (S.W.T) explains the great loss and regret of those who do not use their time positively will find themselves on the day of judgment. Allah Says:

وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِخُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَن تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ فَذُوقُوا فَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِن نَّصِيرٍ

Therein they will cry: "Our Lord! Bring us out, we shall do righteous good deeds, not (the evil deeds) that we used to do." (Allah will reply): "Did We not give you lives long enough, so that whosoever would receive admonition, - could receive it? And the warner came to you. So taste you (the evil of your deeds). For the Zalimun (polytheists and wrongdoers, etc.) there is no helper. (Q 35:37).

¹uthaimeen, m. s. (n.d.). *shar usool-ath-thalatha*. Iskandariyyah: Darul-Iman.

² (Qur'an: 89:1),

³ (Qur'an: 93:1)

⁴ (Qur'an: 92:1)

⁵ (Qur'an: 92:2)

Due to the greater concern Islam gave to time, It considers act of not keeping time of prayers as punishable offence before Allah. Allah said:

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ

So, woe unto those performers of Salat (Prayers) (Hypocrites) who delay their Salat (prayer) from their stated fixed times” (Q 107:4-5).

Islam tends to be the religion that gives greater value to time in the face of the earth Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) said:

((قال الله - تعالى - : يُؤذيني ابن آدم؛ يسب الدهر، وأنا الدهر؛ بيدي الأمر، أقلب الليل والنهار))

Allah said, ‘The son of Adam wrongs me for he curses Ad-Dahr (Time); though I am Ad-Dahr (Time). In My Hands are all things, and I cause the revolution of day and night’⁶.

The stand of Islam on the importance of punctuality and lack of tardiness is clear from the above verses of which if taken into consideration, both spiritual and material peace and tranquility will be attained and maintained.

Punctuality

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, Punctuality is the characteristic of being able to complete a required task or fulfill an obligation before or at a previously designated time⁷. In other words, it refers to the fact of happening or doing something at the agreed or correct time and not being late.⁸

It is understood from the above definitions that; Punctuality is the quality of being punctual, and being punctual means to do things promptly at their appointed times. Hence, punctuality revolves around time management. Time management is the process of planning and exercising control of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity. In other words, it denotes: doing the right thing at the right time. So, this shows that doing the right thing at a wrong time or doing a wrong thing at a right time cannot be considered as punctuality or time management, as such, there must be harmony between the two; right thing and right time. Quality of being punctual in any community or society is regarded as a good quality to the beholder.

⁶ Sahih Muslim hadith 5827

⁷ *punctual*. (2019, 11 11). Retrieved from merriam-webster: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/punctual>

⁸ *Punctuality*. (2019, 11 10). Retrieved from oxford learners dictionary : <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/punctuality>

Being punctual and keeping time and promise is the attribute of all the prophets of Allah. Allah (S.W.T) handpicked prophet Isma'il and attributed this quality to him because of his extreme steadfastness in it. Allah said:

وَأَذْكُرُ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صَادِقَ الْوَعْدِ وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَبِيًّا

Also mention in the Book (the story of) Ismail: He was (strictly) true to what he promised, and He was a Messenger (and) a Prophet". (Q 19:54)

Punctuality paves way for a peaceful and tranquil productive Islamic living; it makes one feel content and happy rather than frustrated and guilty. Being early for meetings or other events, gives one time to relax, plan and prioritize activities to bring success.⁹

Keeping time and being punctual in every given society, brings positive changes and development to the person who possesses the attribute as well as the organization, institution or company he works with.

Benefits of punctuality in Islam

In Islam, any good deed one engages in has a reward, even if it is to meet one another with cheerful face¹⁰, being punctual is not an exception from the good humanitarian gesture, for it has spiritual and worldly positiveness and benefits, some of which include:

Being organized

A punctual person is always organized in all what he does, because all the necessary things he needs in delivering his duty are in order, as such, he would not have any hitches or challenges that will militate against his plan. Allah (S.W.T) exhorted the believers to be organized and have orderliness in their affairs. Allah (S.W.T) said regarding the believers in the battle field:

وَإِذَا كُنْتَ فِيهِمْ فَأَقَمْتَ لَهُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَلْتَقُمْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ مَعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوا أَسْلِحَتَهُمْ فَإِذَا سَجَدُوا فَلْيَكُونُوا مِنْ وَرَائِكُمْ وَلْتَأْتِ طَائِفَةٌ أُخْرَى لَمْ يُصَلُّوا فَلْيُصَلُّوا مَعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوا حِزْبَهُمْ وَأَسْلِحَتَهُمْ وَدَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ تَغْفُلُونَ عَنْ أَسْلِحَتِكُمْ وَأَمْتِعَتِكُمْ فَيَمِيلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَيْلَةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنْ كَانَ بِكُمْ أَدَى مِنْ مَطَرٍ أَوْ كُنْتُمْ مَرَضَى أَنْ تَضَعُوا أَسْلِحَتَكُمْ وَخُذُوا حِزْبَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ آعَدَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا

When you (O Messenger Muhammad SAW) are among them, and lead them in As-Salat (the prayer), let one party of them stand up [in Salat (prayer)] with you taking their arms with them; when they finish their prostrations, let them take their positions in the rear and let the other party come up which has not yet prayed, and let them pray with you taking all the precautions and bearing arms. Those who disbelieve wish, if you were negligent of your arms and

⁹Importance of being Punctual for Productive Muslim Life in Islam. (2019, 11 9). Retrieved from Islamquote.com: <http://www.islamquote.com/2017/01/27/importance-of-being-punctual-for-productive-muslim-life-in-islam/>

¹⁰ Sahih Muslim 893

your baggage, to attack you in a single rush, but there is no sin on you if you put away your arms because of the inconvenience of rain or because you are ill, but take every precaution for yourselves. Verily, Allah has prepared a humiliating torment for the disbelievers.¹¹

This verse shows how Islam gave great concern to orderliness and being organized, because it is a great weapon in fighting against lateness. As such a punctual person is always organized in all what he does.

Readiness

Among the benefits of punctuality is readiness, a punctual person is always ready to deliver at any point of time and anywhere, because he has the capability, ability and agility in given out to the best of his ability. Readiness is a good sign and indication that one is on a sound peace of mind and conviction. Allah (S.W.T) commands the believers to be ready to defend their faith against aggression. Allah says:

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَآخَرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ

And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war (tanks, planes, missiles, artillery, etc.) to threaten the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides whom, you may not know but whom Allah does know. And whatever you shall spend in the Cause of Allah shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly.¹²

Readiness cannot be over emphasized as the above verse serves as a clear indication on the concept of readiness in Islam, which aimed at realizations and attainments of Muslim plans in all ramifications of life.

Connectivity/Networking

Being punctual brings about having connection and a good rapport between the person and the management of his place of works as well as the customers, and by extension it creates mutual understanding among people. Through Punctuality, one attains long strides in having connection and good rapport with people in a given society. This can be evident in the history of the Prophet (ﷺ) when he got married to Khadijah. What impressed her most was the behavior

¹¹Surah An-Nisa, Verse 102

¹²Surah Al-Anfal Verse 60:

of the prophet (ﷺ) which was full of gentleness, respect, probity, orderliness, truthfulness, trustworthiness and above all his punctuality.^{13, 14}

Respect

In addition to having connection with people, punctuality earns the owner respect, probity as well as integrity. It is also known from the history of the Prophet (ﷺ) that he was revered and by all and sundry because of his punctuality and trustworthiness which made him to be nicknamed Al-Ameen (the trustworthy)¹⁵ This respect continued even after rejection of his prophethood they still have respect for him and did not withdraw their properties given to him by them from keeping. Consequently, when he migrated to Madinah, he had to leave Ali bn Abi Dalib behind, so as to return back their properties as pointed out by Ibn Is'haq.

قال ابن إسحاق: ولم يعلم - فيما بلغني - بخروج رسول الله ﷺ أحد حين خرج إلا علي بن أبي طالب وأبو بكر الصديق وآل أبي بكر، أما علي، فإن رسول الله ﷺ أمره أن يتخلف حتى يؤدي عن رسول الله ﷺ الودائع التي كانت عنده للناس¹⁶

Credibility

Among the positive outcome of being punctual is having a good recommendation by either the management, customers or even by other people who may notice that good character with you, such recommendations is what is known as credibility.

The Prophet (ﷺ) got this before Abu Sufyan bn Harb when Hercules (هرقل) the king of byzantine summoned him. After a series of question from Hercules about the prophet's personality and mission, incidentally, the testimony which this avowed enemy of the Prophet gave regarding the personal excellence of the Prophet's character and the good that Islam was doing the human race, left Hercules wonder-struck the made the Prophet (ﷺ) credible before Hercules, because upon each reply Abu Sufyan gave him, he said that is how all prophets are.¹⁷ In addition, getting a credit even before Allah has to do with punctuality.

عبد الله بن مسعود - رضي الله عنه - أنه سأل رسول الله - صلى الله عليه وسلم - عن أي الأعمال أحب إلى الله تعالى، فقال: (الصلاة على وقتها، قال: ثم أي؟ قال: ثم بر الوالدين، قال: ثم أي؟ قال: الجهاد في سبيل الله)،

On the authority of Abdullah bn Masud May Allah be pleased with him, (wo said that): “verily I asked the messenger of Allah” (ﷺ) “Which deed is the dearest to Allah?” He replied:

¹³al-Mubarakpuri, S. R. (n.d.). Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum. Saudi Arabia § UK § USA § Pakistan: Dar-us-Salam Publishers And Distributors. page 41.

¹⁴Abduljabbar, u. (n.d.). khulastu Nurul yaqeen . Beirut-Lebanon : Darul fikr . page 10-11

¹⁵ Ibid page 13

¹⁶ Ibn Katheer *Albidayah wannihaya*

¹⁷Sahih al-Bukhari hadith 7 page 11-12.

To perform the (daily compulsory) prayers at their (early) stated fixed time.” Then he was asked: What is the next (in goodness)?” He replied: To be good and dutiful to your parents.”¹⁸

The above hadith shows the credit one gets in being punctual to his prayers which is the love of Allah (S.W.T).

Productivity

Productivity is the dream of all organizations. An organization without productivity is like a train without an engine, as such, productivity cannot be attainable or achievable without being punctual, time management as well as self-sacrifice. As a Muslim, if one really wants to attain the level of productivity in his businesses and dealings he must stick to punctuality because it does not only bring about productivity but also blessing. This can be attested in the following prophetic hadith where the prophet (ﷺ) prayed for his nation as thus:

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ لِأُمَّتِي فِي بُكُورِهَا

Oh, Allah bless my ummah in what they do early (in the day)¹⁹

In addition to this, the following hadith also shows the effect on punctuality on earnings and daily life activities in terms of productivity.

عن عمر رضي الله عنه قال: سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول: "لو أنكم تتوكلون على الله حق توكله لرزقكم كما يرزق الطير، تغدو خماصاً وتروح بطاناً" ((رواه الترمذي، وقال حديث حسن)).

Umar (May Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying: If you all depend on Allah with due reliance, He would certainly give you provision as He gives it to birds who go forth hungry in the morning" and return with full belly at dusk".²⁰

If you critically analyze this hadith and logically understand it, it indicates the blessings of wealth and productivity one will have in his dealings by firstly depending and putting his trust in Allah and secondly by striving and making good utilization of time as the mentioned birds in the hadith.

Promotion

The yearn and wish of every worker is to be applauded and to have recommendation, appreciation, and even promotion in the place of his work, this can only come to reality if one manages his time well and uphold to the pillars of punctuality. It is indisputable that faith, consciousness, sincerity and punctuality of Abubakar (R.A) earned him repute and promotion

¹⁸Sahih al-Bukhari hadith 527.

¹⁹Abu dawood 2606 Tirmidh 1212

²⁰Tirmidhi hadith 2344, Ahmad 30/1, ibn majah 4064, hakim 4/318

above the rest of the prophet's companions which led the prophet (S.A.W) to appoint him as imam to lead prayers during his illness. The following hadith highlighted this:

عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى، قَالَ مَرِضَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَاشْتَدَّ مَرَضُهُ فَقَالَ " مُرُوا أَبَا بَكْرٍ فَلْيُصَلِّ بِالنَّاسِ ". قَالَتْ عَائِشَةُ إِنَّهُ رَجُلٌ رَقِيقٌ، إِذَا قَامَ مَقَامَكَ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ أَنْ يُصَلِّيَ بِالنَّاسِ. قَالَ " مُرُوا أَبَا بَكْرٍ فَلْيُصَلِّ بِالنَّاسِ " فَعَادَتْ فَقَالَ " مُرِي أَبَا بَكْرٍ فَلْيُصَلِّ بِالنَّاسِ، فَإِنَّكَ صَوَّاحِبٌ يُوسَفُ ". فَأَنَاهُ الرَّسُولُ فَصَلَّى بِالنَّاسِ فِي حَيَاةِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

On the authority of Abu Musa who said: "The Prophet became sick and when his disease became aggravated, he said, "Tell Abu Bakr to lead the prayer." `Aisha said, "He is a softhearted man and would not be able to lead the prayer in your place." The Prophet said again, "Tell Abu Bakr to lead the people in prayer." She repeated the same reply but he said, "Tell Abu Bakr to lead the people in prayer. You are the companions of Joseph." So the messenger went to Abu Bakr (with that order) and he led the people in prayer in the lifetime of the Prophet."²¹

In addition to this, getting promotion and closeness to Allah depends the devotion and punctuality one possesses in delivering religious duties. Allah says:

وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ

And those foremost [(in Islamic Faith of Monotheism and in performing righteous deeds) in the life of this world on the very first call for to embrace Islam,] will be foremost (in Paradise). These will be those nearest to Allah. "In the Gardens of delight (Paradise)"²².

Conclusion

It is very glaring from Umar bn al-Khattab's recommendation which is corroborated by Covey's time management matrix that Muslim civil servants more especially those in teaching profession ought to identify priority between naming and marriage ceremonies on one hand and their professional work on the other hand. It makes no sense to be absent at lecture and examination periods while attending naming and marriage ceremonies without asking any colleagues to act on one's responsibilities. Where do you get money in order to be recognized at these ceremonies? If it is your work, then priority should be given to the work.

²¹sahih bukhari book 10 hadith 678

²²(Q 56:10-12)

Recommandations

1. We need to respect time by making good use of it.
2. We should prioritize our activities for good planning.
3. Muslims should prioritize *Salat* over every other thing. This call is due to the fact that it is a common practice today to see Muslims being impatient in mosques while waiting for Imams to come and lead prayers just for five minutes. But they do patiently wait for a worldly meeting that may be delayed for one or more hours especially if a superior officer is to attend.
4. We should try to avoid calling a fellow Muslim at the time of *Salat* on phone.

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