

Out of Jewish Roots

Studies of Prayer Patterns in Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Bahá'í Worship

by Ted Brownstein

Abstract

Daily prayer is one of the essential practices of the Abrahamic religions. Some of the progressive elements of this series of revelations are demonstrated by this paper as an exploration of the development of liturgy and personal prayer patterns from its roots in Judaism and subsequent development in Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

Introduction

Progressive revelation is central to Bahá'í theology. It is the bedrock upon which belief in the fundamental unity of religion is built, as it provides a conceptual basis for seeing the interconnections between the world's diverse religions. All are seen as equally valid paths to God. At the same time each is seen as a spiritual advancement, built upon the traditions and successes of its predecessors.

*...in accordance with the principle of progressive revelation every Manifestation of God must needs vouchsafe to the peoples of His day a measure of divine guidance ampler than any which a preceding and less receptive age could have received or appreciated. (WOB 102)**

Less well known but perhaps equally significant, is the Bahá'í understanding of progressive revelation within the history of each religion. Receptivity of the people to new spiritual insights grows as previously revealed teachings are digested and absorbed. Thus spiritual advancement is seen as an ongoing process within each religious community. To the extent that believers grasp and apply the fundamental teachings of their founding prophet, capacity for further learning is generated. Light begets light.

* All "authoritative" publications are cited by abbreviation; see Appendix I, page 291. Words of Prophets/Manifestations are italicized (i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice).

This divinely purposed delay in the revelation of the basic laws of God for this age, and the subsequent gradual implementation of their provisions, illustrate the principle of progressive revelation which applies even within the ministry of each Prophet. (KA, Notes, p. 220)

In view of the central importance of progressive revelation, in both its macro and micro aspects, Bahá'í scholars have a special interest in documenting the interdependence of the world's religions. By identifying the specific threads of belief and practice as they persist and develop, scholars put flesh on the skeleton of progressive revelation. In addition, we often find an inter-fertility. It is not just the newer religions which borrow and adapt practices of the older, but also vigorous older religions adopting from latter revelations, as the value of new light becomes apparent. A unified vision of the interplay and interdependence of the world's spiritual heritage emerges.

The stepwise advancement of progressive revelation is seen to exist in all regions of the earth and encompass all spiritual traditions. In cases where we know only the current spiritual practice of an indigenous tribe and little of its history, it is assumed by faith that earlier developmental stages must have existed. The task of tracing the step-by-step progress is made easier when the spiritual history of a sequence of revelations is recorded in sacred books. This is precisely the case with the Abrahamic religions. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, coupled with the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, which constitute a millennia long series of discrete revelatory stages. The existence of the relevant sacred books, Torah, New Testament, Qur'án, Bábí and Bahá'í Writings, facilitate the work of any scholar who seeks to trace the specifics and mechanisms of progressive revelation.

This paper seeks to explore both the continuities and progressive unfoldments in daily prayer within the Abrahamic family of religions. Of course, this history is extensive and this paper cannot hope to trace the hundreds of forms that daily prayer has taken over the millennia. Nevertheless, certain interesting patterns emerge from a study of major trends. Worship has been transformed from its focus on communal sacrifices to a focus on individual communion with God through prayer. Daily prayer has now become, not only one of religion's essential practices, but the heart and soul of spirituality. The progressive elements of this transformation are seen blossoming within the sequence of divine revelations running from Moses to Bahá'u'lláh. These elements are traced in this paper from their roots in ancient Israel Temple sacrifice, through the development of synagogue and church liturgies of Judaism and Christianity, five-times daily prayer of Islam and the obligatory prayer of the Bahá'í Faith.

In general, we may think of spiritual progress growing out of the teachings of each new Prophet. Of special interest are those spiritual innovations that arise out of popular custom without a claim of divine mandate that are subsequently sanctified by a later Prophet. To illustrate, there is no requirement for daily obligatory prayer in the Torah. Rather Jewish prayer practices developed over time at the Jerusalem Temple and were well established by popular custom within the Jewish Community before being sanctified by the revelations of Christ, Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh.

Transformation: From Human to Animal Sacrifice

The history of the Abrahamic religions demonstrates patterns of worship with decreasing emphasis on communal worship orchestrated by a priesthood and increasing emphasis on individual worship. Prior to Abraham, child sacrifice was common in Near Eastern culture. The sites of ancient sacrificial cemeteries have been found from Amman, Jordan to Carthage in Tunisia. These cemeteries date from between the 15th century BCE and the 4th century BCE. (Some scholars claim that child sacrifice continued at Carthage into the second century CE but that conclusion is not universally accepted.) The burned skeletons of otherwise healthy children were buried in urns along with inscribed prayers and vows.

Child sacrifice was a deeply entrenched custom in Israel as well. Instances of child sacrifice persisted into the period of the Kings. Moabite King Mesa offered his son out of desperation while fighting a losing battle (2 Kings 3:27). Judahite Kings Ahaz and Manassah “*do evil in the sight of the LORD*” by burning their sons as offering (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). A site of child sacrifice in the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) was destroyed during Josiah’s Reform in the late seventh century BCE (2 Kings 23:10; see http://www.usbible.com/Sacrifice/sacrifice_israel.htm) The continuance of human sacrifices was a provocation to the Hebrew prophets. The prophet Micah decried those in his day who “*give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul.*” (Micah 6:6-7)

In the Torah, Genesis 22, we find a poignant tale wherein an angel of the LORD puts an end to child sacrifice. It depicts Abraham traveling to Mount Moriah, binding his son, Isaac, and preparing to offer him in sacrifice in obedience to God’s command. An angel intervened, halting the sacrifice. The story stirs compassion both for Isaac, as the intended victim, and for Abraham, as the one who must wield the sacrificial knife. The reader’s sympathy for them prepares the way for the change in worship that follows. The old ways will give way to new ones. From then on offerings would be of animal only. As

we read the story we emotionally align ourselves with Abraham and wonder how he will have the emotional strength to kill his own child. God says, “*Take your son, your only son, the one you love and sacrifice him as a burnt offering.*” Not only is Isaac described as Abraham’s son, but he is “the only son” and “the one you love.” All this would make it incredibly difficult for Abraham to go through with the sacrifice. Later the emotional volume is raised even higher. As Abraham is climbing the mountain with his son, Isaac asks, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Isaac of course does not realize that he is the intended sacrificial victim.

Isaac is bound and laid out on the altar, but an angelic hand intervenes and halts the sacrifice. A sheep whose horns happen to be caught in a nearby bush, is offered up as a substitute. Thereafter those who worshipped in the Abrahamic tradition would no longer follow the long standing practice of sacrificing first born children. The reform was later encoded in the Torah prohibiting all human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5).

Can the ban on human sacrifice aptly be termed “progressive revelation?” Some may object claiming that God never commanded the sacrifice of children. Indeed we have no ancient record of any such pre-Abrahamic command. Yet progressive revelation need not be limited to abrogation of one divine law by another. Revelation of new laws that change common practices serves the same purpose. Clearly the ban on human sacrifice can rightly be called “progress” as it raised the value of human life and transformed belief regarding what God required from His worshippers. This new vision of God was less harshly demanding, more compassionate.

Further this ban was the first in a chain of reforms that would span multiple revelations. Soon thereafter the first foreshadows of the end of the sacrificial cult appeared.

Does the LORD delight in sacrifice and burnt offering rather than obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to obey is better than to sacrifice, to heed is better than the fat of rams. [1 Samuel 15:22]

Although further centuries would be required, the end of the sacrificial cult was destined to follow.

Transformation: From Sacrifice to Prayer

From Abraham’s time through the Exodus, obligatory worship revolved primarily around cultic worship with animal sacrifices on special occasions presided over by holy men, such as priests or family patriarchs. Prayer was largely spontaneous. We find no information regarding systematic daily worship, either prayer or sacrifice during

the patriarchal age. Prayer at that time appears to have been on an “as needed” basis and consisted primarily of petitions in times of need. (Genesis 20:7) Only with the Torah, and the establishment of the Tabernacle along with a professional priesthood, do we find regulations regarding obligatory daily worship of any kind.

Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day constantly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight ... And you shall offer it with grain offering and drink offering ... for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD... (Exodus 29:38-42)

And you shall make an altar to burn incense on... Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning when he tends the lamps. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. (Exodus 30:1, 7-8)

Surprisingly, however, the instructions to the priests contain no mention of prayers to be offered in conjunction with the daily burnt offerings. Prayer continued to be primarily associated with petitions for aid (Numbers 21:7) or special occasion blessings (Leviticus 9:22; Numbers 6:24-26). Odd as it may seem to us, in view of our contemporary association of worship and prayer, there apparently were no formalized daily prayers in the time of either Abraham or Moses. If regular prayers of praise or thanksgiving were used, we have no record of them. The earliest mention of daily pray in the Biblical record appears around the time of the establishment of the Israelite monarchy under Kings David and Solomon.

The enlargement of the role of prayer was coupled with an expanded view of the purpose of prayer. Prayer was no longer limited to petitions for aid which tend to arise spontaneously in response to specific hurtful or potentially hurtful situations. In contrast, daily prayers were used day in and day out, during good times and bad. Prayer became a vehicle for a wider variety of spiritual expressions including praise, thanksgiving and lamentation.

The book of Psalms contains 150 sacred songs, many ascribed to David. Expressions such as “Give thanks unto the LORD, for He is Good” (136:1), “Every day I will bless you” (145:2) and “Hallelujah, Praise ye God” (150:6) indicate that praise and thanksgiving were an integral part of tabernacle and temple worship. The existence of a collection of songs indicates some sort of regular use. Yet the Psalter contains little explicit indication of how or when these sacred songs were sung. One notable exception is Psalm 92, which reads in part:

*A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath Day.
 It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
 And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
 To declare Your loving kindness in the morning,
 And Your faithfulness every night,
 On an instrument of ten strings,
 On the lute and on the harp,
 With harmonious sounds. (Psalm 92:1-3)*

The paradox here is that despite the pledge of daily praise, we find the superscription associates the psalm with the Sabbath rather than daily worship. Even though the words of the song refer to daily praise, we do not know whether there was any kind of a daily worship service at the tabernacle, or if such existed what the contents of the service might have been. We know even less about the prayer life of average Israelites. Did they have daily or special occasion prayers? Were the psalms known and used by common people in the course of their everyday lives? We simply do not know. We do know, however, that if such existed, it was not mandatory or encoded in sacred literature. Worship during that early period still revolved primarily around sacrifices.

In his prayer dedicating the Jerusalem Temple, it is significant that King Solomon refers to the Temple as “a house of prayer” rather than a house of sacrifice. This phrase broke new ground, helping to create a new prayer emphasis. He pleaded, “*May You hear the supplication of...Your people Israel, when they pray towards this place... (also) the foreigner when he comes and prays toward this Temple ...*” (1 Kings 8:30, 43). “*When anyone sins,*” “*when Israel is defeated,*” “*when there is famine in the land*” (1 Kings 8:22:53) the people were directed to pray towards the new Temple. The presence of God resided in the Holy of Holies of the Temple as represented by the miraculous Shekinah Light that resided above the outstretched cherub’s wings above the Ark of the Covenant. Within the Ark were the Tablets of Moses containing the Ten Commandments. Thus, Solomon’s Temple with its Shekinah Light was a suitable magnet for supplication and petition. However, even in connection with Solomon’s House of Prayer, we find no descriptions of daily prayer.

Some verses in the Psalms and Prophets seem on first reading to refer to daily prayer routines. These verses were later used anachronistically as evidence of the antiquity of the practice. However, rather than being daily prayer as we now conceive it, offered every day of the year, good times and bad, these references on close reading can be seen as describing relatively short periods of intense prayer during times of trouble. In the Psalms, we find David

praying for relief three times a day. *“As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice”* (55:17). The context shows that David had been betrayed by an unnamed friend and was praying for God’s protection against this new enemy (vv, 18;21). Daniel is also described praying three times a day in response to trouble, a royal prohibition against worshipping the God of Israel. (Daniel 6:10). Prayer was still for special occasions, medicine to be administered on an ‘as needed’ basis.

A significant innovation in the role of prayer was expressed in the Psalms of David and became even more fully developed in the writings of Jeremiah. A new intimacy arose, establishing a different sort of relationship. Previously prayer had been formal and emotionally distant as implied in the imagery of the supplicant humbly entering a royal court in order to petition the King. Now, we see something more than the vertical standing of sovereign versus subject. David poured out his heart to God in prayer, shared his inner life and inmost feelings, expressed negative emotions, lamentations, fears, doubts, as well as joy and exhilaration.

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? (Psalm 22:1)

O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger, nor chasten me in your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me O LORD, for I am weak. O LORD, heal me for my bones are troubled. (Psalm 6:1-2)

I will praise you O LORD, with my whole heart. I will tell of your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You. (Psalm 9:1-2)

Jeremiah took this intimacy a step further. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple, he wrote a series of poems called Lamentations, describing the dejected state of the Jewish nation. He poured out his heart in sorrow without making request for relief. His sole interest was for God to see him and to recognize his pain of heart. *“O LORD, behold my affliction...”* (Lamentations 1:9). *“See O LORD, for I am in distress”* (1:20). The purpose of these prayers was neither praise nor petition, but open self-expression. Jeremiah’s freeness of speech allowed him to go so far as to express disappointment with God. *“You fooled me, O God, so that I was fooled.”* (20:7) For this reason, Wellhausen called Jeremiah, *“the father of true prayer...his book contains...confessions of personal troubles and desperate struggles.”* (Idelsohn, 15) God was now more than the Almighty Sovereign Creator of Heaven and Earth. He had also become “the Friend.”

The Babylonian Exile brought new challenges to worshippers of Yahweh, the God of Israel. They were deprived of their Temple and the accompanying sacrificial rites. Prayer thus took on greater and greater importance. Even after the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple, many Jews remained in Babylon and shortly thereafter spread even further afield. By the third century BCE, significant Jewish populations could be found throughout the Hellenized Middle East. Synagogues, as a center of Jewish spiritual life arose during the Second Temple period as a practical adaptation to life in the Diaspora. Travel to the Temple entailed a difficult and expensive journey from Alexandria, Rome or Babylon. Large numbers did manage to get to the annual pilgrimage festivals, Passover, Pentecost and Succoth, but only the most affluent could afford to attend three times each year. Furthermore, Temple worship took place amidst the congregated throng and allowed little place for study, discussion of the Holy texts or private meditation. The synagogue developed as a supplement to Temple worship, a place for Torah reading and Sabbath prayer.

As a relatively late development, synagogues are not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The earliest appeared during the third century BCE in lower Egypt and slowly spread around the Mediterranean. (see Second Temple Synagogues, <http://www.pohick.org/sts/>) Remains of early synagogues in Europe have been found in Delos, Greece, and Ostia, Italy. The spiritual advantages of weekly Sabbath gatherings for study and prayer invigorated Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Once these advantages were recognized, synagogues began to appear in the Holy Land around the first century BCE as witnessed by ruins discovered at Gamala and Capernaum (Galilee region), Masada, and eventually reaching even to Jerusalem in the shadow of the Temple Mount by the mid-first century CE.

The earliest synagogue in Judea has been unearthed at Qumran, the sectarian Jewish community in the Judean Desert where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. This group despised the corrupt Jerusalem priesthood and separated themselves to a life of isolation in the desert. They redefined the Temple as their holy community made up of living stones (Isaiah 54:11) and extended priestly rituals of purity to all community members. In obedience to the Laws regarding Temple rites, they bathed several times daily as the priests did, and offered the sweet fragrances of prayer, the burnt offerings of the lips (Hosea 14:2), twice daily as a substitute for the evening and morning sacrifices as prescribed in the Torah for the Temple. At Qumran, prayer was not just for the priests, nor was it limited to festival days or times of need. Rather prayer was systematized and became daily practice for the entire community. As far as we know, this is the first instance of obligatory daily prayer that is now central to Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

According to the beliefs of the Qumran community, God had abandoned the Holy of Holies of the Temple and now resided among them. The estrangement from the Temple cult may have given the synagogue its initial boost in the Holy Land, but its growth encompassed both establishment and antiestablishment Jews. A Greek inscription at the site of the Jerusalem synagogue declared, "Theodotus, (son) of Vettenu, priest . . . built the synagogue for the reading of the law and the teaching of the commandments." Priests also saw value in the synagogue as a supplement to Temple worship, primarily as a library to allow public access to the sacred scrolls. It was a place for reading and studying Torah. But while the Temple stood, prayer was not yet a focus of synagogue activity.

After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, Judaism underwent a major transformation. The cessation of the Temple cult brought an end to the leadership role of the priesthood within the Jewish community.

As their world began to urbanize, the rabbis offered a bold new concept of a Judaism which was no longer dependant on the agricultural environment . . . Rites of sacrifice lost their *raison d'être* . . . In the eyes of most Jews, sacrifices could only be offered at the centralized cultic site in Jerusalem. Consequently, Titus' destruction of the Temple meant that the various daily, weekly and monthly sacrifices as well as the annual festivals could no longer take place.

(<http://www.pohick.org/sts/Intrononotes.html>)

First century Rabbis met at the Council of Yavneh to establish the canon of the Tanakh and establish schools for the study of those sacred texts. The Talmud grew out of their deliberations. Prayer came to fill the void left by the end of the sacrificial cult and pilgrimage festivals. A systematic liturgy emerged with a specific order of prayers recited at specific times of the day.

Daily Prayer in Judaism

The earliest daily obligatory prayers in Judaism arose after the destruction of the Second Temple. Jews would hold daily gatherings, called *minyans*, in the synagogue up to three times a day. The Talmud specifies that at the times when the morning and evening sacrifices had been offered, the portions of the law that govern the sacrifices should be recited. "your children shall study the law concerning sacrifices and I (God) will consider it as though they had actually offered them and I will forgive their sins." (b. Meg. 31b)

In post-Biblical practice, the Shema is the core expression of Jewish faith, declaring the Oneness of God. "*Sh'ma, Israel, Adonai*

Eloheinu, Adonai Echad" which translated means "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4), the Shema came to be recited twice a day. Whether there was originally a linkage to the morning and evening Temple sacrifices is unknown. Repetition of the Shema is not a Torah Law, but rather a custom that developed long after Moses. Although, the text itself is found in the Hebrew Bible, which was the Book of that Age, there are no instructions within the text stating that the verse should be recited.

Tradition holds that public recitation of the Shema originated in the days of the Second Temple, no later than the first century CE. Recitation of the Shema entailed not just the famous verse affirming the oneness of God (Deuteronomy 6:4) but included related passages from the Torah as follows: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which speaks of the unity and love of God, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 which rehearses the results of obedience and disobedience to divine Torah and sets out the necessity of teaching Torah to children, and Numbers 15:37-41 which reiterates the need for obedience to Torah and sets out ordinances related to clothing which serve as symbols of God's covenant with Israel.

Another ancient prayer found in synagogue liturgy is called the Amidah. Based on the example of King David, it is a blessing repeated morning, noon and night (Psalms 55:17-18), three times a day. The Amidah is a prayer that is recited in a standing position from which its name is derived. It contains eighteen benedictions and acknowledges the faith of the forefathers of the Israelite nation. The form of the Amidah was at first somewhat flexible, with only the text of the first and last three benedictions definitely fixed. Spontaneous expressions and petitions were incorporated into the intermediary benedictions. Later the entire text of the eighteen benedictions was solidified. English translations of both the Shema and Amidah are found in Appendix A.

The recitation of these and other prayers was accompanied by the use of tefillin or phylacteries. Small leather cases containing written prayers and other holy words were tied onto the head and hands of the worshipper with long straps. The practice is based on a literal interpretation of the Biblical injunction:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart ... And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes.
(Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

Ablutions were also part of Jewish daily prayer customs. According to the Talmud, Berachot 14b-15a, hands were to be washed before adorning tefillin or reciting either the Shema or the Amidah prayer.

It appears that originally these prayers were said privately but over time the practice developed of congregating morning, noon and night for services. Each service includes the recitation of the Shema. Only the evening and morning services include the Amidah. Orthodox “minyans” or daily prayer services have followed the same basic pattern with little variation from at least the fourth century CE until the present.

As synagogue architecture developed in later centuries, that divine presence was enshrined in an ark at the front of the synagogue containing the Torah scrolls in remembrance of the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Tablets of the Jerusalem Temple. An Eternal Light, representing the Temple’s Shekinah, was suspended over the Ark. Evening and morning animal offerings were transformed into prayers. Priests were no longer needed. A new class of professional religious leaders arose to take their place. Rabbis were scholars, learned in the Holy Books. The new emphasis was on recitation and study of the sacred texts. Although conceived of as only a temporary substitute for the destroyed temple, the synagogue became the center of religious life, the place where the presence of God was seen to reside.

Despite the accommodation to life in the Diaspora, an orientation to the Holy Land and the site of the destroyed Temple was ever present. The irreplaceable sanctity of the Holy City was, according to both the Mishnah and Gemarah, memorialized by the direction one faced while praying.

If one is standing outside the country, one should direct one’s heart to the Land of Israel. If one stands in the Land of Israel, one should direct one’s heart towards Jerusalem. If one is standing in Jerusalem, one should direct one’s heart towards the Temple. If one is standing in the Temple, one should direct one’s heart towards the Holy of Holies. Consequently, if one is in the East, one should turn his face toward the West; if in the West, one should turn towards the East; if in the South, one should turn towards the North; if in the North, one should turn towards the South. In this way, all Israel will be directing their hearts towards one place. (Talmud Berakhot 30a)

The Emerging Christian Liturgy

Christianity was built upon the foundation of Moses and the Hebrew prophets. The first Christians were Jews who continued to attend local synagogue services. In some areas, Christians were forced to separate themselves due to being branded heretics and kicked out of the synagogue. In other places, Christians and Jews continued to

pray together for centuries. There are reports of a fifth century Byzantine Bishop chastising Christian groups for failing to separate from the synagogue.

Long periods of joint worship, however, were the exception rather than the rule. Twenty years after the death of Christ, separate Christian Churches were well established in many large cities in Palestine, Asia Minor (now Turkey) and Greece. Yet, except for a few Apostolic Letters, they had no sacred text of their own on which to base their prayer services. The formation of the New Testament did not begin until decades after the death of Christ. Thus, the young Church was forced to borrow heavily from the text and traditions of Judaism. During those early years, Christians met in small groups in private homes, just as Jews did when communities lacked the resources to have their own synagogue. Congregational worship was weekly, either on the Sabbath or on the first day of the week. The structure was open, flexible and participatory. Anyone in attendance could stand up and spontaneously contribute.

When ye come together (for worship) one brings a psalm, another a teaching, another a tongue, another a revelation, another an interpretation. Let all things be done to edify. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

At that early stage, there was no established liturgy, but rather considerable latitude to shape the service according to the expectations, talents and needs of each particular Church community. Church services were modeled after the synagogue and therefore highlighted reading of the Hebrew Bible, the singing of psalms and teachings (sermons). However, early Church services were distinguished from synagogue services by the presence of miraculous gifts of the spirit such as tongues, revelations and interpretations thereof. Over time, readings from the Gospels were gradually added along with the recitation of formalized Christian prayers and creeds. However, reading from the Old Testament and the singing of Psalms has ever remained an integral part of Christian worship.

Christian Daily Prayer

One of the most significant innovations of the Christian Revelation was a progressive view of animal sacrifice. While acknowledging the divine origin of the Mosaic Law and the sacrificial rites found in the Torah, they were viewed as part of the old Covenant that had been replaced by the New. While Judaism kept the hope of the restoration of the sacrificial cults alive while adapting to the loss of the Second Temple, Christians viewed the end of the cult as permanent. There would no longer be any need for the Jerusalem Temple, altars of burnt offering, or sacrifices of bulls, goats or sheep.

The death of Christ on the cross was seen as a superior sacrifice with the power to cleanse humanity once for all time. Temple rites were reinterpreted; Christ as High Priest offering the value of His Life in a heavenly, rather than earthly, Temple. (Hebrews 9:24-26)

The loss of sacrifice as a means of approach to the divine left a vacuum that prayer filled. Prayer replaced the offerings of incense and the smoke of burnt offerings ascending to God. Christians were to immerse themselves in prayer and to “*pray incessantly*” (Romans 12:12).

The Didache, also known as the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles, is a post-Biblical Christian work generally dated circa 115 CE. In it we find the earlier known set format for daily Christian prayer. It instructs believers to recite the Lord’s Prayer three times each day.

Neither pray ye as the hypocrites, but as the Lord hath commanded in his gospel so pray ye: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil: for thine is the power, and the glory, for ever.’ Thrice a day pray ye in this fashion. (Didache: 8:2-3)

It is unclear how widespread the thrice daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer was among early Christians, since the authenticity of Didache was not universally accepted. Some Christian communities claimed it to be genuine Apostolic Instruction originating in the Jerusalem Council of 50 CE. Clement of Alexandria (second century) cites it once as Scripture, but no one else among the Church Fathers makes any reference to it before the time of Eusebius (fourth century). Eusebius emphatically places it among books that were not to be included in the New Testament canon. Yet apparently Didache enjoyed a wide circulation and was accepted by at least a portion of the Church as a book worthy to be read in Church services. Athanasius reports that it was still used for catechetical instruction in the late fourth century. Thus it seems likely that a considerable number of Christians would have followed its prescription for saying the Lord’s Prayer three times in a day.

Eucharist and Catholic Mass

Another Christian innovation was communion or the Eucharist. Christ had transformed the Jewish Passover into a memorial of His sacrificial death. The bread and wine of the Passover meal became the sacraments of his Memorial from which, over time, the liturgy

Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass developed. For some time the Eucharistic Service was fluid and variable.

All ceremonial evolves gradually out of certain obvious actions done at first with no idea of ritual, but simply because they had to be done for convenience. The bread and wine were brought to the altar when they were wanted, the lessons were read from a place where they could best be heard, hands were washed because they were soiled. Out of these obvious actions ceremony developed...

But we find much more than this essential nucleus in use in every Church from the first century. The Eucharist was always celebrated at the end of a service of lessons, psalms, prayers, and preaching, which was itself merely a continuation of the service of the synagogue. So we have everywhere this double function; first, a synagogue service Christianized, in which the holy books were read, psalms were sung, prayers said by the bishop in the name of all (the people answering "Amen" in Hebrew, as had their Jewish forefathers), and homilies, explanations of what had been read, were made by the bishop or priests, just as they had been made in the synagogues by the learned men and elders (e. g., Luke, iv, 16-27). This is what was known afterwards as the Liturgy of the Catechumens. Then followed the Eucharist...

...bread and wine are brought to the celebrant in vessels (a plate and a cup); he puts them on a table — the altar; standing before it in the natural attitude of prayer he takes them in his hands, gives thanks, as our Lord had done, says again the words of institution, breaks the Bread and gives the consecrated Bread and Wine to the people in communion ... (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09306a.html>)

The text of the Didache provided instructions on how the Eucharist was to be celebrated. Parameters are set such as specific prayers to bless the bread and wine before communion and a specific prayer to follow it. This latter prayer pleads for the unity of the Church by creating an interesting interpretive link between the bread of the last supper and the miracle of the multiplication of loaves.

As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

(<http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lightfoot.html>)

The Didache speaks to Christians and refers to the Eucharist as “your sacrifice.” More was involved than a memorial of Christ’s sacrificial death long past. The offering was brought into the present. The participants could share in and experience of the vital moment of salvation. Here we have one of the earliest hints of Transubstantiation, the doctrine that is the basis for the Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass.

Among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr (c. 101-150 CE) gives further evidence as to the identification of the Last Supper with a sacrificial offering. “...we have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh” (*First Apology*, 1, 62). Transmutation, or transubstantiation as it was later called, is the doctrine that the bread and wine of the celebration of the Last Supper are miraculously changed during the service into the actual flesh and blood of Christ, thus bringing the sacrifice of the cross into the spiritual reality of the celebration.

As to when and how often the Eucharist was celebrated, many scholars link descriptions of Sunday Service liturgy with the descriptions of the Eucharist in both Didache and Justin Martyr’s Apology. But a careful reading leaves that link in doubt. Both texts contain detailed descriptions of weekly services that omit clear reference to the Eucharist, which is previously described in considerable detail. That separation seems strange if the Eucharist and Sunday Service had already been united at the early date. Nevertheless, sometime during the second century the Eucharist became a weekly observance. By the third century, Cyprian (c. 200-258) argued that the Eucharist was to be celebrated daily on the basis of Christ’s prayer, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*”

The liturgy of the Mass incorporates the use of various body positions: kneeling, sitting and standing.

Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours constitutes a series of prayers that were used in Catholic monasteries from ancient times. In its late and complete form, prayer services were held seven times during the day (Psalms 119:164) and once at midnight (Acts 16:25). Each service bore a Latin name, several of which corresponded to the Roman custom of numbering the hours of the day starting from dawn. The schedule may have looked like this:

Lauds – Dawn

Prime – One hour after dawn or approximately 7 AM

Terce – Three hours after dawn, c. 9 AM

Sext – Six hours after dawn, c. Noon

None – Nine hours after dawn, c. 3PM

Vespers – c. 5PM

Compline – 7PM

Matins – Midnight

The monks would sleep in the early evening after Compline, rise at midnight for the Matins and then return to bed thereafter.

This intricate system of prayer did not spring into existence fully formed. The Catholic Encyclopedia expresses the view that the Liturgy of the Hours originally consisted of three daily services, Terce, Sext and None. The writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers instruct all Christians to pray at these hours, but give no indication of whether private prayer or congregational prayer was intended.

Clement of Alexandria and likewise Tertullian, as early as the end of the second century, expressly mention the hours of Terce, Sext, and None, as specially set apart for prayer (Clement, "Strom.", VII, VII, in P.G., IX, 455-8). Tertullian says explicitly that we must always pray, and that there is no time prescribed for prayer; he adds, nevertheless, these significant words: "As regards the time, there should be no lax observation of certain hours – I mean of those common hours which have long marked the divisions of the day, the third, the sixth, and the ninth, and which we may observe in Scripture to be more solemn than the rest" ("De Oratione", xxiii, xxv, in P.L., I, 1191-3). (Catholic Encyclopedia, Electronic Version, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/none.html>)

In stages, the number of times a day specified for formal prayer increased. Practicality limited observance to monasteries as working people could not comply with so rigorous a prayer schedule. By the end of the fourth century, the hours of Vigils (Matins), Lauds and Vespers had been added. The full repertoire of eight services was in place by the end of the fifth century. The selection of these hours was based on certain times that Peter and other apostles are reported to have prayed. Rather than obedience to a specific injunction, the multitude of services is perhaps best understood as an attempt to institutionalize the apostolic mandate to "pray incessantly."

Modern Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Liturgies

Over the centuries, Church liturgies tended to grow more and more structured. Nevertheless, tremendous variety can be found from

one denomination to the next. Virtually all incorporate the singing of psalms (or hymns), a sermon (or teaching) and the Eucharist (or Holy Communion). Many also include recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Catholic and Orthodox Services are highly scripted. For example the Greek Orthodox Service as found in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostomos (<http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/liturgy/liturgy.html>) consists largely of responsive readings coupled with recited creeds and prayers. Protestant Services vary widely from well developed structure found in Lutheran and Anglican Churches to the relative spontaneity of the Baptist and Pentecostal Churches.

Christian Innovations

Judaism began with an orientation to the sacred space of the tabernacle / temple and only later adopted the scattered locations of the synagogue as a proxy. Christianity however began with distributed sacred space, space that was sanctified simply by assembling. *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* (Matthew 18:20) The sacred geography of the past would be abandoned. *“The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.”* (John 4:21) The idealized vision of Christian worship found in the Revelation of St. John portrays a Christian community oriented to a New Jerusalem a spiritual city built on the foundation of the Twelve Apostles with Christ as the foundation cornerstone.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God...And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. (Revelation 21:10, 22-24)

In this vision, Jerusalem retains its Holy status, as it did within Judaism, but the city was to be Temple-less. God and Christ would serve the orienting function that the physical Temple had previously served. Under Byzantine rule, Jerusalem was a center of Christian Life. Churches were constructed at the sites related to the life and death of “the LORD” but the Temple Mount was intentionally left in ruins. The entire City was sacred, but no specific place within the City was identified with the presence of God.

Interestingly both Judaism and early Christianity made the transition from Temple oriented to congregation oriented worship at about the same time during the first century C.E. Jews view this transition as temporary and continued to anticipate the restoration of the sacrificial cult. In contrast, Christianity was born at the tail end of the Second Temple period and viewed the destruction of the Temple as a sign of that a new covenant had replaced the old Law of Moses. Nevertheless, both groups built upon the rituals of animal sacrifices and transformed them into symbolic acts. The breaking of bread, the drinking of wine and most prominently, offerings of incessant prayer took the place of the former rites.

Christ, like David and Jeremiah, poured out His personal lamentations to God in prayer at critical times. Prior to His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane the Gospels report Christ's words, "*My soul is deeply grieved even unto death...Father let this cup pass from me.*" (Matthew 26:38-39) On the cross, Christ's lament took up David's anguished cry from the Psalm, "*God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46) Perhaps one of the most revolutionary innovations by some Protestant groups is the rejection of the recitation of written prayers. Prayers are said in one's own words. For some denominations, such as the Church of Christ and Jehovah's Witnesses, the prohibition extends even to reciting the Lord's Prayer. Although this prayer is the oldest documented portion of the Church liturgy, its repetition is not mandated in the text of the New Testament. Opponents of 'rote prayer' will point out that in the Gospel text, in the verses just prior to the Lord's Prayer, Jesus warns his disciples against repetitive prayer.

When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. (Matthew 6:7-9)

This command has been interpreted as prohibiting the verbatim repetition of any kind. The result is a wholesale dismissal of liturgy. Services in these churches tend to enlarge the teaching / sermon portion of the service.

Within this branch of Protestantism, prayer is seen as a vehicle for establishing a "personal relationship with God." Spontaneous, unscripted prayers uttered in one's own words, serves to create an intimate link with the Divine. Nevertheless, distinct prayer patterns persist even in these 'anti-rote' churches. The use of psalms and hymns (often prayers set to music) is common to virtually all Christian denominations.

Islam

Daily prayer, referred to in Arabic as *al-Salat*, is one of the founding principles of Islam. Muḥammad established specific times of the day and specific regulation for prayer. The Qur'án does not portray *al-Salat* as an Islamic innovation but rather traces its origin back to the Patriarchal Age. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (21:73), Ishmael (19:55), Moses (20:14) and Jesus (19:31) are all said to have practiced regular prayer. Subsequent generations failed to preserve their heritage and ancient prayer practices needed to be reestablished by Muḥammad.

These are some of the prophets whom God blessed. They were chosen from among the descendants of Adam, and the descendants of those whom we carried with Noah, and the descendants of Abraham and Israel, and from among those whom we guided and selected. When the revelations of the Most Gracious are recited to them, they fall prostrate, weeping. After them, He substituted generations who lost the contact prayers (Salat) and pursued their lusts ... (Qur'án 19:58-59)

Current practice is highly structured including specific hours of prayer five times a day. A series of formalized prayers called a *raka'* is used. The cycle is repeated a specified number of times at each designated hours. For example, the morning prayers, called *Salat-ul-Fajr*, consist of two cycles while the noon prayers, *Salat-ul-Zuhr*, consist of four.

Key elements of each cycle proclaim the greatness and oneness as embodied in the phrases, Alláh'u'Akbar (God is Great) and La ilaha illalláh (There is no God but God). In contrast to informal prayers, which can be said at any time of the day or night, *al-Salat* customs are specified for the designated hours. There is almost universal conformity throughout the Muslim world on the following prayer procedure, although some local variants do exist.

5. Ablutions or ritual washing, prior to prayer.
6. Pray facing the Qiblih at Mecca.
7. Verbatim recitation of specified prayers including portions of Qur'án,
8. Use of specific prayer postures such as bowing, kneeling and standing at specific points in the prayer,
9. Performed five times each day at specified hours.

Ritual cleansing is an important part of Islamic prayer practice. Mosques often contain facilities for ablutions. Parts of the body are

washed in a specific order according to a specified procedure. For example, one is to take water in the palm of the right hand and wash the face top to bottom, from forehead to chin. This outward physical preparation is to be accompanied by an inner preparation for the heart's connection with the divine. One then faces Mecca and recites a series of short prayers in praise of God. Each is said from a specified position: standing, kneeling or bowing.

Qur'anic Origins of Traditional Prayer Practices

The general belief among Muslims is that all of the prayer practices associated with *al-Salat* go back at least to the time of Muḥammad. (Some claim they go back to Abraham.) God is said to have revealed these details to Muḥammad during the Prophet's night journey (*Isra'* and *Mi'raj*). In fact, while certain features of *Salat* are clearly set forth in the Qur'án, such as times of day and the direction to face, other specifics such as the text of the prayers to be used, the details of ablutions, the specific positions to go with each part of the text or the number of cycles (*raka'*) to say at each hour, are not recorded in the Qur'án. Rather they derive from secondary sources (*Hadith*) and later traditions.

Chapter 4 of the Qur'án is one of its oldest sections. It deals with a early period in the career of Muḥammad, just after the Hegira, when He resided in Medina. The text shows that even in that period daily prayer routines had already been established. "*Prayer indeed has been enjoined upon the believers at fixed times.*" (4:103) They were performed publicly and accompanied by prostrations (4:102). In times of danger or battle, prayers could be shortened (4:101). This exemption indicates that already in the Medina period, Muḥammad's followers had formalized daily prayers of specified length, which then could be shortened under exceptional circumstances.

The five times for *Al-Salat* are set at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night (before retiring). Most Islamic authorities recognize the authority for these five distinct hours of prayer as originating in the Qur'án:

- Dawn — "*Establish regular prayers . . . the morning prayer*" (17:78); "*at the retreat of the stars*" (52:49); "*before the rising of the sun*" (20:130) "*at the two ends of the day [i.e. morning and evening]*" (11:114).
- Noon — "*(Say) Glory be to Alláh . . . when the day begins to decline.*" (30:18)
- Afternoon (or before sunset) — "*Keep up prayer at the ends of the day [understood as beginning and end of daylight]*" (11:114); "*in the late afternoon*" (30:18)

- Sunset (after sundown) – “*Keep up prayer . . . in the first hours of the night.*” (11:114)
- Night – (before going to bed)- “*So (give) glory to God, when ye reach eventide and when ye rise in the morning.*” (30:17)

Some scholars (mostly non-Islamic) identify only three times of prayer in these verses, dawn, sunset and nighttime. (See *Judaism in Islam* by Abraham Katsh, p. xv) They would understand “when the day begins to decline” as signifying the hour before sunset rather than noon and they would understand “in the first hours of the night” as equivalent to bedtime. Thus the second and third *salats* would be collapsed, likewise the fourth and fifth. If true, separation into 5 prayer times would be understood as a later development.

Interestingly, some Muslims also see evidence for three rather than five daily prayers based upon the text of Qur’án 11:114 which reads, “*And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night.*”

The two afternoon prayers and the two after sunset prayers, which are spoken of together, may...be said together. (Notes to Maulana Muḥammad Ali’s translation of the Qur’án)

As for the Establishing of our PRAYERS, Alláh has mentioned only THREE TIMES in the Qur’án. (<http://www.mostmerciful.com/realities-of-our-daily-prayers--part-three-conclusion.htm> [sic; URL correct])

When we compare ancient Jewish and Islamic prayer practice, some interesting parallels emerge. The Hebrew Bible describes the prayers of Daniel in terms that resemble al-Salat in several particulars. We read, “. . .*he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God . . .*” (Daniel 6:10). Here Daniel (a) faces the Holy City, (b) assumes a kneeling posture, (c) prays three times a day.

If the proposals regarding an original three times prayer in Islam is accurate, it would bring early Islamic practice into closer conformity with Jewish and Christian practice. Disputes with Jews and Christians, during and after Muḥammad’s lifetime, may well have lead to a variety of reforms within Islam as the new religion sought to establish its own independent identity. We know from the Qur’án itself that the direction of prayer, the Qiblih, had been moved from Jerusalem to Mecca for precisely this reason.

Striking similarities exist between the Jewish Shema and the Islamic Shahadah. Both are fundamental confessions of monotheism.

The kernel of the Shema is “*Hear O Israel, the LORD thy God, the LORD is one.*” The Shahadah similarly asserts, “*There is no God but Alláh. (la ilaha illa ‘Iláhu)*” The Shahadah also parallels other Biblical passages such as, “*There is no God but the LORD.*” (Psalms 18:31) Both Jewish and Islamic daily prayers invoke the name of God and offer superlative praise, both acknowledge their respective founders, Moses and Muḥammad, (Compare Tashahhud lines 3-6 with Amidah line 2) and both encourage loyalty to God’s law. (Compare Qira’ah lines 7-9 with portion of Shema from Numbers 15:40) *Al-Salat* is always said in Arabic, regardless of the native language of the believer, as Jewish prayers are always offered in Hebrew.

Animal Sacrifice in Islam

The feast of Eid al-Adha is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Dhul Hijja of the lunar Islamic calendar. It is traditionally marked by the sacrifice of a sheep in remembrance of Alláh’s intervention in Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Ishmael and the substitution of a sheep. Celebrants partake of the meat and share it with the poor. This sacrifice is not a whole burnt offering or an atonement offering of any kind but rather a thanksgiving and communion offering.

It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Alláh: it is your piety that reaches Him... (Qur’án 22: 37)

No one should suppose that meat or blood is acceptable to the One True God. It was a pagan fancy that Alláh could be appeased by blood sacrifice. But Alláh does accept the offering of our hearts... (Yusuf Alí Commentary)

The Historical Connection of Muḥammad with Jewish and Christian Communities

Islam came into existence in sixth century Arabia in response to the idolatry and excesses of the pagan Arabian tribes. Muḥammad intended to reintroduce the pure religion of Abraham, which shared a rich heritage with its Jewish and Christian offshoots. According to the Bahá’í understanding, each new revelation is rooted in and subsequently expands upon the teachings of its predecessors. Muḥammad was neither Jewish nor Christian. He was raised in Mecca and the presence of Jews or Christians in Mecca is in doubt. Secular scholars have raised questions about the sources of Muḥammad’s knowledge of them. Nevertheless Muḥammad had many opportunities for contacts with both Abrahamic Religions.

Historians mention some 20 Jewish tribes that lived in Arabia during Muḥammad’s era including two tribes of priests. Those Jews

spoke Arabic, were organized into clans like the Arabs, and seem to have fully assimilated the values and customs of desert society. Yemen (Southwestern Arabia) was generally considered a Jewish State until around 523 C.E. and had broad influence on Arabic peoples. Whole tribes had converted to Judaism. Jewish customs and traditions were known and practiced by many Arabs. The Qur'án describes three tribes of Jews living in Medina when Muḥammad fled there in 622 CE.

Despite the fact that Arabia was distant from the Talmudic Centers in Babylon and Palestine, the historical record shows that trade and cultural contacts were extensive. Muḥammed accompanied His uncle on trading missions to Syria, where He had come into contact with Christian monks and with Jewish scholars. Later He was asked to lead a similar expedition Himself on behalf of the wealthy widow Khadijah. Thus it should come as no surprise that the Prophet of Islam would have been exposed to Jewish beliefs and practices, not only the customs of Yemenite and Arabian Jews but the wisdom of the Talmud as well. In this environment, it is most probable that Muḥammad had direct knowledgeable of Jewish practices and His revelation accordingly incorporates a considerable number of them into His religious teachings.

The Qur'án retells various stories of the Old and New Testaments. There are extensive references to Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Mary among others. Due to the differences between the Torah and Qur'án in some of the narratives, such as the story of Joseph, some scholars have concluded that cultural contacts were fuzzy, being mediated by time and distance. However, others contend that these differences narrow considerably in light of Talmudic interpretations. One scholar commented "For, astonishingly enough, the Biblical narratives are reproduced in the Qur'án in true Aggadic cloak." (The Haggada or Aggada is a section of the Talmud that specializes in interpreting non-legal matters. See *Judaism In Islam*, by Abraham Katsh, p. xviii) In other words, the text of the Qur'án does not merely repeat the stories told in the Hebrew Bible, but retells them in the light of the most advanced Judaic Studies of the time. If this viewpoint is correct, it would support the suggestion that Muḥammad was familiar with the best of ancient Jewish scholarship.

Similarly, some of the differences between Qur'anic accounts and the Gospels can be explained by alternate traditions within Christianity. For example, some of the details of the life of Mary found in the Qur'án, but missing from the canonical Gospels, can be traced to the *Protoevangelium of James*. (See <http://www.catholicforum.com/saints/stj20001.htm>)

Islamic Innovations within Sufism

Sufism, or *Taşawwuf*, grew out of early Islamic asceticism. It was a mystical movement that sought nearness to God through self-denial. While Sufism may have been influenced by the practices of Christian hermits as well as the Neo-Platonism of Alexandria, and the Vedantism of India, it developed into a major movement solidly rooted within the culture of Islam.

The introduction of the element of love, which changed asceticism into mysticism, is ascribed to Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah (died 801), a woman from Basra who first formulated the Sufi ideal of a love of God that was disinterested, without hope for paradise and without fear of hell. (<http://www.franzholzer.de/html/esufi2.htm>)

The goal of Sufism was a mystical union with the divine. Sexual energy became an analogy for a one-on-one relationship with God. The Song of Songs, a series of love poems found in the Hebrew Bible, may have provided a precedent, Sufism carried the romantic theme to a higher level. Rather than to disdain the passions of sexual energy as asceticism did, viewing all passion as an obstacle to union with the divine, Sufism embraced and transformed that energy into a vehicle of union. The devotee was to have no interest in any other aspect of life or any selfish reason for turning to God. The only motivation was the desire of a lover to be with the Beloved. There were no prayers of petition, no requests for favors, no rewards in this life or hereafter. The love of God became an all-consuming passion.

One of Sufism's chief innovations was the focus on prayer as a vehicle for entering the divine presence. Through prayer the worshipper could enter an ecstatic state of nearness to God. Dance and music were used to enhance the experience. Over time, various Christian and Jewish groups adapted Sufi thought and practice to their own devotions. During medieval times, Christian mystic writers such as Saint John of the Cross and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux embellished the theme of the love of God with romantic images. A major theme of the Kabala (dated to around the 11th century) is union with the Shekinah, the feminine aspect of God. The Hasidic Movement arose among the Jews of seventeenth century Poland. Hasidim used music and dance in ways similar to the Sufi dervishes, to achieve spiritual ecstasy.

Other Possible Parallels

Other possible links between Jewish/Christian practice and Muslim practice can be mentioned, although establishing their presence in the time of Muḥammad is problematic. Ablutions, prior to prayer, are a

marked feature of *al-Salat*. Jews, likewise make use of water for ritual cleansing. The *mikvah* is most commonly known as a basin that women use for monthly purification. In earlier ages, it was also a customary method of ritual cleansing for men. Priests in the Jerusalem Temple and Qumran Sect are well known examples. Catholics also use water for ritual purposes prior to prayer and place basins of holy water at the entrance to the Church sanctuary for symbolic cleansing. We do not know what related cleansing rituals may have been used by either Jewish or Christian worshippers in the East from the time of Muḥammad, but regardless of whether a direct link existed or not, the principle of purification with water is something shared by all three traditions.

Similarly, with regard to the issue of prayer postures, we have already noted that Jews stand, sit and bow their heads for specific prayers, just as Muslims do for the five-times *Salat* prayers. Catholics likewise stand, kneel and sit for various part of the Mass. However, we do not know when these practices were instituted or what form they may have taken in 6th century Arabia.

The Catholic rosary is a series of prayers offered daily that begins with an acknowledgment of monotheism in its Trinitarian form, "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost . . ." This may be seen as a sort of parallel with the opening of *al-Salat* "In the name of Alláh" (*bismilláh*).

Islam claims to represent the True Religion of Abraham. Jews and Christians derive their belief and practice from the same roots, as Qur'án freely acknowledges.

We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismá'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to God (in Islám). (Qur'án 2:136)

Recognition of similarities, whether borrowed practices or shared principles, testifies to a shared history. Progressive revelation serves to explain the dynamics of the processes of innovation and preservation of tradition. Daily prayer practices, such as specific hours for prayer, the direction of prayer, etc. had developed over the centuries as a common custom within Judaism and Christianity despite the fact that neither Moses nor Christ had commanded them. In Islam we find the first codification of laws governing daily prayer. The revelation of Muḥammad confirmed and expanded upon these customary practices. When viewed in the light, progressive revelation becomes more than updating previous revelation. It becomes an evaluation of the innovations that arose during the preceding Dispensation. The

adoption of some of those customs in the subsequent revelation effectively recognizes the value of those initiatives. New spiritual insights are thus seen to be possible, not only during the formative age of each faith, but continuously. While the Manifestations of God (founding prophets) naturally exhibit an extraordinary measure of new light, others, ordinary people who are not inspired prophets, can contribute as well.

Bahá'í Obligatory Prayers

The Bahá'í Age is seen as the age of the world's emerging maturity. Advancement of the individual is stressed. There is no priesthood or clergy. Daily prayer becomes personal and focuses, not on supplication or petition, but upon achieving nearness to God and cultivating spiritual virtues. Congregational ritual is prohibited.

Bahá'u'lláh revealed three obligatory prayers, short, medium and long, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Each of these prayers has its own character and associated practices. In previous Dispensations, daily prayer practices such as the prayers to be recited, times of day, positions and so forth developed by custom rather than coming directly from the teachings of the founding prophet. In confirmation of the customary practices of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Bahá'u'lláh gives specific instructions with each of the obligatory prayers. The worshipper selects one of the three to say each day, at her own option.

Another Bahá'í innovation is the movement of daily prayer from public to private places. The minyan and mass are designed for congregational prayer in synagogue or church. *Al-Salat* may be public or private but is most widely known by the public call to prayer from the minaret, followed by worshippers dropping whatever they are doing to prostrate themselves in market, street or home. In contrast, Bahá'í obligatory prayer is exclusively private. Congregational use of the three obligatory prayers is prohibited. There are other prayers and other occasions for praying together with others. The purpose of obligatory prayer is to enhance a one-on-one relationship between worshipper and the Divine.

The short prayer is to be said at noon. It is primarily a prayer of praise. Like the *Shema* and the prayers of the *Salat*, it proclaims the Oneness of God. "*There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.*"

The medium prayer is perhaps the most similar to al-Salat. It contains petitions (*strengthen my hand O My God*) as well as praise (*exalted art Thou above my praise*) and proclamation of God's uniqueness (*I bear witness to Thy unity and oneness.*) It is to be said

three time a day, requires ablutions, and is accompanied by a series of standing, kneeling and sitting postures.

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh set out specific instruction on ablutions and positions, thus confirming and extending these Islamic innovations which were established by custom rather than prophetic mandate. For example, the instructions accompanying the Medium Prayer state:

To be recited daily, in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Whoso wishes to pray (this one of the three obligatory prayers) let him wash his hands, and while he washeth, let him say: 'Strengthen my hand, O my God, that is may take hold of Thy book ...' Let him stand up, facing the Qiblih ... and say ... Let him then bend down with hands resting on knees and say... (KA)

The long obligatory prayer is said once a day, at any hour. Although ablutions are not required in the text of the Aqdas, washing in preparation for prayer is a recommended Bahá'í practice. The long prayer is also characterized by various postures.

The long prayer lays emphasis on achieving the mystical experience of entering the presence of God. Incessant prayer, purity of heart, selflessness and detachment are the vehicles that transform the soul and open the door to communion with the divine.

...make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence.

O Thou in separation from Whom hearts and souls have melted ... Thou seest, O my Lord, this stranger hastening to his most exalted home beneath the canopy of Thy majesty and within the precincts of Thy mercy...

...Thy call hath awakened me, and Thy grace hath raised me up and led me unto Thee. Who, otherwise, am I that I should dare to stand at the gate of the city of Thy nearness...?

The intimacy and closeness with the Divine that the long obligatory prayer points to, incorporates the sharing of inner feelings of distress and anguish that we previously saw in David, Jeremiah and Christ.

Thou dost perceive my tears and the sighs I utter and hearest my groanings and my wailings and the lamentations of my heart ... My trespasses have kept me back from drawing nigh unto Thee ... and separation from Thee hath destroyed me.

In the long obligatory prayer and elsewhere in the Bahá'í writings, many of the names and attributes given to God exhibit more than the

formal relationship of sovereign to subject. God is the Desire of the World, the Beloved of the Nations, the Best Lover and perhaps most simply and powerfully The Friend.

The desire for and achievability of closeness through prayer depicted here is markedly different than the relationship established through animal sacrifices on special occasions at a distant sanctuary. God is now closer in both time and space, and more encompassing as well in the array of emotions that the worshipper shares with God. The desire to draw near to God has been a constant theme of progressive revelation. In ancient Judaism, communion offerings attempted to breach the gap between the worshipper and the Divine by sharing physical food. Procedures for the offerings are set forth in specific detail in the Torah. The choice, fatty pieces of the sacrificial animal were offered upon the altar as God's portion. The people sat within the sacred precincts of the Temple and ate their portion. In Christianity, communion took the form of the bread and wine which stands in the place of blood and flesh in obedience to Christ's direct commandment as recorded in the Gospels. Islam adopted communion sacrifices by custom. But in the Bahá'í Faith, prayer becomes the sole vehicle of communion. There are no communion meals either by mandate or custom. To "enter the presence," to "mourn separation," to "hasten home to the precincts of majesty," to "stand in the Holy City," these are the goals of spiritual communion. The ancient practice of communion had been transformed from physical acts involving food and blood (either literal or symbolic) to a mystical encounter through prayer.

Even the term "commune" has come to signify prayer. The result of achieving a connection to the Divine is "nearness" and "rapture."

...softly recite thou this commune to thy Lord, and say unto Him: O God, my God! Fill up for me the cup of detachment from all things...break off from me the shackles of this nether world, draw me with rapture unto Thy supernal realm ...
(SWAB 174)

Intone, O my servant, the verses of God...and the sweetness of Thy melody will kindle thine own soul. (BP IX)

Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his own chambers, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty will scatter abroad the words uttered by his mouth and cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. (BP IX)

As seen in the third quotation above, Bahá'í detachment does not lead to disengagement from the world. Bahá'u'lláh forbade monasticism. Detachment represents a freedom to act in the world without becoming entangled or troubled if things do not go as desired.

Further, the Bahá'í definition of prayer is expanded to include loving acts in addition to recited words.

This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. (PT 176)

The concept of action-prayer, as opposed to verbal prayer, may be the start of a new paradigm. In the past, separation from the world through living on a hilltop or at a monastery has been a way to focus oneself completely on spiritual things and to avoid the distractions of the world. Now, immersion in the spiritual life can be attained while living and acting in the world. Service to humanity when performed in a spirit of reverence becomes in itself a form of worship. If the service is selfless and wholly for the benefit of others, a spiritual state of detachment can be achieved that is comparable to that of the Sufi dervish or the Christian hermit. This form of worship may be called “engaged detachment” as a fusion of mystical and humanitarian spirituality. This fusion is especially appropriate for the world’s present Age of Emerging Maturity. The foremost spiritual issue facing our planet is the need to let go of self-absorption and recognize the interconnected oneness of humankind.

Conclusion

Progressive revelation provides a framework for understanding the interdependence of the world’s faiths. It implies the existence of common threads of tradition and practice along with the emergence of new themes from age to age. The combined affect of embracing both old and new yields a continuity of belief and practice on the one hand, and a gradual unfoldment of innovative teachings on the other.

Chart of Innovations for each Dispensation

Items marked “by written law” were established in the foundational sacred texts, e.g. Bible, Qur’án. Those marked “by custom” were established without scriptural mandate. Those marked “sectarian” were practiced by only a minority of the designated religion.

Pre-Mosaic

- End of human sacrifice (by custom)
- Personal prayer is occasional and petitionary

Jewish

- End of human sacrifice (by written law)
- Sanctuary becomes House of Prayer

- Prayer toward Jerusalem (by custom)
- Synagogue as local house of prayer (by custom)
- Introduction of daily prayer liturgy (by custom)
- Three times daily prayer (by custom)
- Designated body positions used for specific portions of daily prayer service: sitting and standing (by custom)
- Ablutions (sectarian)
- Introduction of praise, thanksgiving and lamentation prayers

Christian

- End of animal sacrifice (by written law)
- Emblematic sacrifice in the form of the Eucharist (by written law)
- Church as local house of prayer (by written law)
- Prayer toward Jerusalem (sectarian and by custom)
- Daily prayer liturgy (by custom)
- Three time daily prayer (sectarian and by custom)
- Designated body positions used for specific portions of daily service (sectarian and by custom)
- Prayer forms include thanksgiving, praise and petitions.

Islam

- Absence of obligatory sacrifice
- Prayer toward Mecca (by written law)
- Five (or three) times daily prayer (by written law)
- Designated body positions used for specific portions of daily prayers (by custom)
- Ablutions (by custom)
- Recitation of specific written prayers (by custom)
- Introduction of nearness prayers (sectarian by custom)
- Prayer forms include thanksgiving, praise and petitions.

Bahá'í

- Prayer toward Bahjí

- Daily obligatory prayers to be recited in private
- Text of prayers specified by written commandment of the founding prophet
- Choice of obligatory prayers
- Ablutions by written law
- Designated body positions by written law
- Forms include thanksgiving, praise, petitions, lamentation and nearness prayers.

From this study, several insights about the nature of progressive revelation emerge. First of all, it is apparent that many of the innovations that are introduced by a given Manifestation of God have precedents during the Dispensation of the previous Manifestation. New spiritual laws, in each age, generally adjust or enhance existing practice.

For example, the practice of praying towards Jerusalem was inaugurated by Solomon, during the Jewish Age, practiced by Jews and Christians thereafter, but not formalized into Law until the time of Muḥammad. The direction of prayer (the Qiblih) was later modified by both Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh, changing it to Mecca and Bahjí respectively. It can be seen therefore that one of the functions of each new revelation is to sort through the innovations of the previous age and to confirm, ban or modify them. The effect is thus more comparable to a course correction that striking out in a totally new direction. We find, for example, the innovation of the synagogue confirmed by Christian law, and the daily prayer practice of Judaism and Christianity confirmed by Islamic Law.

New laws are therefore often the first obligatory implementation of existing practices, rather than brand new innovations. In the context of Bahá'u'lláh's explanation that new revelation is tailored to the needs of the age and limited by the capacity of its recipients, it makes sense that change would be gradual.

We also find innovations from one age that are ignored or explicitly rejected in the next, perhaps due to the lack of any divine sanction in the first place. The Jewish practice of tefillin, the literal wrapping of the head and hands with the words of the Law, was never incorporated in a later revelation. Christian customs of celibate clergy and monastic vows of poverty, were rejected by Muḥammad and banned by Bahá'u'lláh. The time between the appearances of the Manifestations of God are often marked by both creativity and sectarian fragmentation of the body of believers. The Prophet, when He appears, examines the innovations of the previous age, confirming some, modifying some, prohibiting others. This serves to distinguish

innovations that are beneficial to the spiritual lives of adherents from those that may be harmful, unnecessary or inappropriate to the new age. New revelations clarify the best path for believers, establish a single standard to reconcile old sectarian rivalries and thereby reunite the people.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh taught, “*This is the changeless faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.*” Thus Bahá'ís would expect to find common threads running through humanity's spiritual history.

Ultimately, in the Bahá'í view, human spiritual history is a single tapestry of interconnected strands.

When seen as a whole the various religions become stages in one comprehensive divine plan. In poetic language, the New Testament describes gentile Christians as branches grafted into the root stock of Judaism. Without Moses and the prophets, Christianity could not exist. The Bahá'í Writings enlarge this analogy, depicting a universal vision of humanity's spiritual development as a single tree with various branches. All are leaves of one tree.

May fanaticism and religious bigotry be unknown, all humanity enter the bond of brotherhood, souls consort in perfect agreement, the nations of earth at last hoist the banner of truth and the religions of the world enter the divine temple of oneness, for the foundations of the heavenly religions are one reality. (FWU 12, emphasis added)

Appendix A

The Shema (extended version)

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in
thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and
shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when
thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and
when thou risest up.

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and
they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and
on thy gates." (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto
my commandments which I command you this day, to love
the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and
with all your soul,

That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season,
the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in
thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou
mayest eat and be full.

Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and
ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he
shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land
yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the
good land which the Lord giveth you.

Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in
your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that
they may be as frontlets between your eyes.

And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them
when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by
the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine
house, and upon thy gates:

That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth. (Deuteronomy 11:13-21)

And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying,

Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribbon of blue:

And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go awhoring:

That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God. [Numbers 15:37-41)

Introduction to the Amidah (Standing) Prayer

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God and God of our fathers,
 God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob,
 The great, might and revered God, the most high God,
 Who bestowest loving-kindness and possessest all things;
 Who rememberest the pious deeds of the patriarchs,
 And in love will bring a redeemer to their children's children
 for thy name's sake.

Appendix B

Modern Orthodox Jewish Prayer Services

The Morning Prayers

- Birchas HaShachar - The morning blessings.
- Pesukei D'Zimra - Verses of Praise from the Psalms.
- Shema and it's Blessings - Shema, preceded and followed by its blessings.

- Amidah - The Eighteen Blessings, which are recited quietly while standing.
- Tachanun - Nefilas Apayim, 'falling on the face'. This prayer is said with head bowed.
- Krias HaTorah - The Reading of the Torah portion.
- Ashrei – Additional Psalms particularly Psalm 20.
- Aleinu – Concluding prayer.

The Afternoon Prayers

- Ashrei - Ashrei is recited.
- Amidah.
- Tachanun
- Aleinu
- Ne'ilah - The Closing of the Gates

The Evening Prayers

- Shema and its Blessings
- Amidah
- Aleinu

Appendix C

Text and Instructions for al-Salat

According to *Islamic Daily Prayer Manual* by Farnaz Khoromi, the words of the daily prayers are composed of the following components, which are combined and repeated in various ways for each of the five prayer times.

- The Intention or *Niyah*
- The Call or *Takbir*
- The Recitation or *Qira'ah*
- The Bowing or *Ruku`*
- The Prostration or *Sujud*
- The Praise or *Tasbihat*
- The Witnessing or *Tashahhud*
- The Greeting or *Salam*

- The Closure or *Khatm*

Niyyah: Face the Qiblah (Mecca) and concentrate the heart for the purpose of witnessing God's presence.

Takbir: Stand. Hold your hands up, thumbs toward your ears, palms out. Say:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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Qira'ah: Stand and recite the following passages from Qur'án 1:1-7 and 112:1-5:

1.	Besmilláhe rahmane raheem,	In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
2.	Alhamdo-le-lahe rabbel alameen,	Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the two worlds,
3.	Ar-rahmane raheem,	Most Gracious, Most Merciful
4.	Maleke yomeddeen,	Master of the Day of Religion
5.	Eeyyaka na'bodo	Thee do we worship
6.	Va eeyyaka nasta'een	And Thine aid do we seek,
7.	Eh'dena serat-al-mostagheem,	Show us the straight path
8.	Seratal-lazeena an'amta alayhem	The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,
9.	Ghayr-el-maghzoobe alayhem va la-zaaleen,	Those whose portion is not wrath, and who go not astray.

1.	Besmilláhe rahmane raheem,	In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
2.	Ghol-ho valla-ho ahad,	Say: He is the unique and only God,
3.	Alláh-ho samad,	Alláh is Omnipresent, (the Eternal, the Absolute),
4.	Lam yaled, va lam yoolad	He begetteth no, Nor is He Begotten,
5.	Va lam yakon lahoo kofavan ahad.	And there is none like unto Him.

Ruku: While standing, lean forward and place hands on knees and say:

Sobhana rabbee-al-zaeeme va be hamde,	Pure is my Creator, the greatest and I praise Him.
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Then stand erect and say:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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Sujud: (Repeat the following sequence twice.) Prostrate, placing forehead, palms, knees and toes on floor and say:

Sobhana rabbee-al-zaeeme va be hamde,	Pure is my Creator, the greatest and I praise Him.
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Then kneel with knees and toes on floor, hands on thighs, back straight and say:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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Tasbihat: Stand and repeat the following sequence three times:

1.	Sobhan-alláhe,	Pure is my God,
2.	Val-hamdo-le-lahe,	Praise is for Him,
3.	Va la-elaha ella laho,	There is no God but He,
4.	Valláho-Akbar.	And Alláh is greater.

Tashahhud: Kneel as before and say:

1.	Ashhado an la-elaha-ella laho,	I bear witness that there is no God but Alláh,
2.	Vahdahhoo la sharika lah,	He is the only one and has no partner,
3.	Va ashhado anna Mohammadnan abdohoo	And I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant
4.	Va rassoolah,	and His messenger,
5.	Alláhomma salle ala Mohammaden	O God, bestow thy Light upon Mohammad
6.	Va ale Mohammad.	and His descendent.

Salam: While still kneeling say:

1.	Assalamo alayka ayyoha-nabeeyo	Greeting to you, O messenger,
2.	Va rahmattolláhe va barakkato,	and the blessings and abundance of God to you.
3.	Assalamo alayna va ala ebadelláhe saleheen,	Greetings to us and the righteous servants of God,
4.	Assalamo alaykom va rahmatolláhe va barakato	Greetings to you all and the blessings and abundance of God.

Khatm: While still kneeling repeat three times:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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