

The 7 Levels Of Prayer (Most Never Reach Level 5)

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SUMMARY

Al-Ghazali's teachings on prayer reveal a profound hierarchy of spiritual consciousness, emphasizing that many Muslims remain at the initial levels of mechanical prayer without experiencing deeper connections. He outlines seven levels of prayer, each representing a deeper engagement with the divine, from the mechanical performance of prayer to the ultimate state of being in communion with God.

- Level 1: The Prayer of the Body** - Mechanical execution of prayer without mental or emotional engagement; valid but lacks transformation.*
- Level 2: The Prayer of the Mind** - Awareness of actions and words; begins to feel like real prayer but can lead to spiritual pride.*
- Level 3: The Prayer of the Heart** - Emotional connection to prayer; genuine feelings of gratitude and humility emerge, marking a shift in personal experience.*
- Level 4: The Prayer of Presence** - Awareness of God's presence during prayer; transforms the experience into a dialogue rather than a monologue.*
- Level 5: The Prayer of Witnessing** - Dissolution of the subject-object divide; prayer becomes a shared experience between the worshipper and the divine.*
- Level 6: The Prayer of Annihilation** - Temporary disappearance of the self during prayer; profound but difficult to describe or maintain.*
- Level 7: The Prayer of Subsistence** - Effortless prayer that embodies a deep connection with the divine; the individual returns transformed after experiencing annihilation.*
- Progression and Practice** - Focus on perfecting the current level of prayer rather than rushing to higher levels; each level is complete and offers its own spiritual insights.*

You've been praying [music] for years, five times a day, every day, thousands of prayers. But Al-Ghazali taught that most Muslims [music] die without ever moving past the first level of prayer. They perform the motions correctly, [music] fulfill the legal requirements, and completely miss the point of what prayer actually is. In his master work, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Al-Ghazali identified seven distinct [music] levels of prayer consciousness.

Each level is complete and valid on its own, but each unlocks deeper dimensions [music] of what happens when you stand before Allah. Most people's prayer stays at level one or two their entire lives. Some reach three or four. Very few ever taste five, six, or seven. Level one, the prayer of the body. This is where everyone begins. The prayer of the body is mechanical performance of [music] the physical actions, standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting, moving through the postures in the correct sequence.

You learned this when you were taught how to pray. You can do it half asleep, and many people do. At this level, Al-Ghazali wrote, "You're praying with your body, but not your mind or heart. Your lips recite Fatiha, while your mind plans dinner. You go into ruku while thinking about tomorrow's meeting. You prostrate while replaying an argument from yesterday. [music] The body is in prayer position, but consciousness is everywhere except prayer.

This level is valid. Your prayer counts. You fulfilled the obligation. But Al-Ghazali was fierce on this point. This level is like eating food without tasting it. Like having eyes but seeing nothing. Like being technically [music] alive but not actually living. The body prays, the deed is recorded, but nothing transforms. You finish prayer the exact same person who started it.

The diagnostic for this level is simple. If you can't remember what you recited in the prayer you just finished. If you don't know whether you bowed twice or three times in [music] the last unit. If you're not sure which surah you recited, you're at level one. Your body was there, but you were absent. To move beyond this level requires one practice. Count your breaths during prayer. Not as a meditation technique, just as awareness training.

Before you say Allahu Akbar to begin, take a breath [music] and count one. Before you recite Fatiha, count two. Continue through the entire prayer. This forces your mind to stay with your [music] body. You cannot count and wander simultaneously. Do this for 40 prayers in a row, and you'll begin noticing when you leave and when you're present. Level two. The prayer of the mind.

At this level, you're present to what you're [music] doing. Your mind is tracking the movements, aware of the words you're saying, following the sequence consciously. You know which raka'ah you're in. You hear yourself reciting. You feel the positions as you move through them. You're no longer on autopilot. Al Ghazali described this as [music] the beginning of real prayer. Because now there's a you actually doing it, not just a body going through motions while you're mentally absent.

But he also warned, "This level can become a trap." Many people reach level two and think they've arrived because compared to level one, this feels like such an improvement. The trap is that at level two, you're still operating as an individual performing [music] an action. You think, "I am praying to Allah." There's a subject, [music] I, an object, Allah, and an action, praying, connecting them.

This creates subtle spiritual pride. Look how present I am. Look how focused. I'm really praying now. The ego infiltrates the prayer by claiming ownership of the quality of the prayer. The diagnostic for [music] this level, you finish prayer feeling accomplished about how well you focused or disappointed [music] about how much you wandered. Either way, you're evaluating your own performance, which means you're still centered on yourself. Al-Ghazali taught that to move beyond this requires understanding what you're actually saying.

Most people recite Arabic they don't understand. They know the translation intellectually, but they're not connecting [music] sound to meaning in real time. The practice, translate one phrase [music] per prayer into your native language and say it silently after saying it in Arabic. Today's prayer, translate Bismillah Ar-Rahman

Ar-Raheem and [snorts] whisper the meaning to yourself. Tomorrow's prayer, add Alhamdu lillahi Rabbil Alameen.

Build slowly. When you understand [music] what you're saying, the mind stops being an observer and becomes a participant. Level three, the prayer of the heart. This is where prayer becomes personal. The heart here means the emotional center. The place where you actually feel what you're saying. At level three, when you say Ar-Rahman, Ar-Raheem, you don't just understand the words. You feel gratitude for divine mercy.

When you bow, you don't just [music] perform the posture. You feel humility arising naturally. When you prostrate, you don't just put your forehead on the ground. You experience surrender [music] in your chest. Al-Ghazali wrote that this is the first level where prayer begins to change who you are because emotion is what embeds experience into the soul. You can think about humility and remain proud.

You can understand surrender and stay controlling. But, when you feel humility, when you taste surrender, even for a moment, something shifts permanently. At this level, prayer becomes refuge. You're not praying [music] because you have to. You're praying because you need to. The world is heavy. The nafs [music] is turbulent. The mind is noisy, and prayer is the only place where you can put it all down.

You enter prayer burdened and leave lighter. Not because circumstances changed, [music] but because you touched something that made the burden less significant. The diagnostic for this level, you start protecting your prayer time. You get irritated when someone interrupts. You look forward to prayer not as obligation, but as respite. Fajr becomes the best part of your day because it's quiet and your heart is soft from sleep.

The emotions you feel during prayer are genuine, not manufactured. But al-Ghazali warned this level has its danger, too. Emotional dependency. You start thinking good prayer equals strong feelings and bad prayer >> [music] >> equals no feelings. When emotions are absent, you feel like you failed. You chase the spiritual high instead of recognizing that consistency matters more than intensity.

The practice to deepen this level, after each prayer, [music] sit for 2 minutes and ask yourself, "What did I feel during that prayer? Gratitude, peace, longing, nothing? Don't judge it. Just notice. Over time, you become aware of the subtle emotional textures of prayer. And you learn that even nothing is something worth noticing. The noticing [music] itself is the heart awakening.

Level four. The prayer of presence. At level four, something shifts fundamentally. >> [music] >> You're no longer just aware of what you're doing and feeling. You become aware of who you're doing it for. Not as concept, but as experienced presence. When you say "Iyyaka na'budu", "You alone we worship", you feel addressed as if someone is actually receiving your words.

>> [music] >> Prayer stops being monologue and becomes dialogue. Al-Ghazali described this as the level where the veil thins. In levels one through 3, you're praying toward Allah. At level 4, you're praying with Allah

present. The difference is not theological, it's experiential. You could be saying the exact same words, performing the exact same motions, but the quality of the space changes. [music] There's someone there.

Not imagined, not projected, [music] but felt with a certainty that needs no proof. This is the level Al-Ghazali himself reached, according to what he wrote in *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, during his period of retreat after his spiritual crisis. He described praying and suddenly feeling that he wasn't alone, that the prayer was being heard, not in the abstract sense [music] of God knows all things, but in the intimate sense of God is paying attention to this prayer, this person, this moment.

At this level, the content of what you say starts mattering differently. When you recite, "Guide us to the straight path," and you feel the prayer is heard, you're no longer reciting a formula. You're actually asking for guidance from someone who can [music] actually guide you. When you say, "You alone we ask for [music] help," and you feel presence, you're actually requesting help from someone who can actually help. The diagnostic for this level, sometimes during prayer, you weep.

Not from emotion, not from sadness, but from overwhelming recognition that you're not talking to the ceiling. Someone is there. [music] The tears come from the collision of your isolation with the sudden experience of being witnessed, known, [music] attended to. The danger of this level, according to Al-Ghazali, is attachment to the experience of presence. You start needing to feel Allah present, or you think the prayer is deficient.

You compare today's prayer, where you felt nothing, to yesterday's, where presence was overwhelming, and feel like you're regressing. But presence doesn't come on demand. It comes when the heart is ready to receive it. And readiness is not something you control. The practice for this level. Begin every prayer by standing silently for 30 seconds before saying the opening [music] Allahu Akbar.

In that silence, cultivate the awareness that you were about to address the king of all existence. You're about to speak to the one who holds your next breath in his hand. Feel the weight of that. Let it settle in your chest. Then begin. This prepares the soil for presence to take root. >> [music] >> Level five. The prayer of witnessing. Level five is where the subject-object [music] split begins to dissolve.

You're no longer you praying [music] to him, who is other than you. The boundaries blur. Al-Ghazali called this the station of *mushahadah*, witnessing, where you see with the eye of certainty that the one praying and the one being prayed to are not as separate as they appear. This sounds like philosophical abstraction, but Al-Ghazali described it in concrete terms in the *Ihya*. At this level, [music] when you bow and say, "Subhana Rabbiyal Azeem."

"Glory to my Lord, the Magnificent. You're not a small thing glorifying a big thing. The glorification is happening through you, but not from you. Your tongue is moving, but you're not the one moving it. The praise is praise praising itself through the temporary form called your body. He wrote that at this level. >> [music] >> You understand the Hadith where Allah says, "I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes."

Not metaphorically, literally. The consciousness aware in you is not separate from divine consciousness temporarily focused through a human nervous system. When you pray, God is not receiving your prayer from a distance. He's experiencing his own worship through you. This level terrified Al-Ghazali when he first touched it because it seems to erase individual responsibility. If Allah is the one praying through me, who's responsible for the quality of the prayer?

If I'm not actually the doer, why make effort? He resolved this paradox by recognizing that both are simultaneously true. You are the doer [music] and you're not the doer. Your will is real and your [music] will is his will manifesting in particular form. The effort matters and the effort is his energy. The diagnostic for this level, you start seeing everything as prayer, not just the formal salah.

Walking becomes prayer. Speaking becomes prayer. Breathing becomes prayer because you've recognized that the same consciousness present in formal prayer is present in every action and the formality of salah is just training you to recognize what's always true. The danger here is losing the form. People reach this level and think I don't need to pray formally anymore because [music] everything is prayer.

This is spiritual bypassing. Al-Ghazali was adamant the formal prayer is the anchor. It's the disciplined reminder that you're not just flowing with life. You're offering it all back consciously five times a day. Without the form, witnessing becomes vague and the edge of discipline is lost. The practice during prayer, particularly during sujūd, instead of thinking I am prostrating to Allah, shift to prostration is happening.

Remove the I from the sentence and see what remains. Not as belief, just as experiment. [music] Does the prostration lose anything when you stop claiming ownership of it? Or does it deepen? Level six, the prayer of annihilation. >> [music] >> Level six is where Al-Ghazali becomes difficult to follow because language starts failing. He called this fana fi al-salah, annihilation in prayer.

Not annihilation of the prayer, but annihilation of the one [music] praying. You enter prayer as someone and somewhere during the prayer that someone disappears. [music] In the Ihya, Al-Ghazali admitted he could only describe this indirectly because direct [music] description would be gibberish to anyone who hasn't experienced it. He said, imagine you're reading a gripping book and you become so absorbed that you forget you're reading. [music] You forget there's a book. You forget there's you holding the book. There's just the story unfolding and [music] no one watching it. That's the closest analogy to what happens in level six prayer. You begin with Allahu Akbar.

You recite Fatiha. You bow, prostrate, sit, move through the forms. But at some point, usually in the prostration, if it happens at all, the person doing all this vanishes. The body continues praying, but there's no one inside the body experiencing I am praying. There's just prayer happening and the awareness witnessing the prayer is not personal anymore. It's vast, impersonal, eternal. Al-Ghazali wrote that you cannot force this level. You cannot technique your way into it.

It happens by grace and only after years of [music] sincere practice at the previous levels have purified the vessel

enough that consciousness [music] can temporarily vacate the individual self. He also wrote that it never lasts the whole prayer. You might touch it for a few seconds in one prostration. Then you're back to normal consciousness. And the return is jarring because you realize how much noise being someone actually generates.

The diagnostic, if you've experienced this, you know. If you haven't, >> [music] >> no description will convince you it's real. The certainty it leaves behind is like the certainty of taste. You can't prove to someone who's never tasted [music] salt what salt tastes like. But anyone who's tasted it knows beyond argument. The danger of this level is the most subtle, spiritual pride. "I experienced annihilation in prayer."

is a sentence that immediately recreates the self that was supposedly annihilated. The ego returns claiming [music] ownership of selflessness, which is the ultimate contradiction. Al-Ghazali warned that people who reach this level and talk about it have probably not actually reached it because the experience itself burns away the one who would report it. There is [music] no practice for this level. You prepare the ground by perfecting the previous five [music] levels, and then you wait.

Al-Ghazali said you pray for decades [music] not expecting this to happen, and if it never happens, that's fine. The longing for it is itself a veil. The best approach is to pray as well as you can at whatever level you're at, and trust that if level six is meant [music] for you, it will arrive when you're ready, not before. Level seven, the prayer of subsistence. The seventh level is not higher than the sixth. It's what comes after the sixth.

Al-Ghazali called it baqa, subsistence or remaining. If level six is annihilation, level seven is what you become after annihilation. This is [music] the rarest level, which Al-Ghazali said he only touched briefly >> [music] >> and could not maintain, though he knew masters who lived there. At level seven, you return from annihilation, but you don't return to who you were before. You come back, but you're not the same person who left. The individual self reconstitutes, but it's now transparent [music] to what it experienced in annihilation.

You're someone again. You have a name and a history and a personality, but you know it's all costume, all temporary form, [music] all divine play. In this level, Al-Ghazali wrote in the Ihya, prayer becomes effortless. Not easy, but effortless in the sense that you're no longer fighting yourself to pray. The part that resisted prayer, that wanted to sleep through Fajr, that found [music] excuses to delay, has been burned away.

What remains prays the way fire burns, not because it's trying to, but because it's fire's nature to [music] burn. He described people at this level as those who pray as if they see Allah. And if they don't see him, they know he sees them. The Hadith of Ihsan fully embodied. They're not performing prayer toward an absent deity. They're not even conscious of praying to a present deity. They're simply [music] being prayed through by the divine will. And the distinction between their will and his [music] will has become so fine that it's academically present, but experientially absent.

>> [music] >> The diagnostic is not something you can self-assess because by definition, if you're at this level, you're not measuring levels anymore. But others can see it. Al-Ghazali said, you recognize someone at level seven by the effect their prayer has on you. When you pray behind them, your own prayer deepens. When you

see them pray, you feel the presence of something real. Their salah radiates a quality that can't be faked and doesn't need to be advertised. The danger of level seven is that there isn't one.

The purification required to reach this level has burned away everything that could be damaged [music] by reaching it. But there's a danger for people who hear about this level and think they're there when they're not. Al-Ghazali wrote that many people claim spiritual [music] states they haven't earned. And level seven is particularly vulnerable to this because it sounds so attractive. Effortless prayer, constant presence, dissolution of struggle.

But the path to it goes through level six, and level six is the death of every comfortable spiritual identity you've built. There is no practice for this level because you cannot practice being what you've become. You simply live it. And the living is the practice. But Al-Ghazali did say this. If you want to know if you're anywhere near this level, >> [music] >> check whether prayer is still an effort. If it is, you're not there yet.

And that's not a problem. Most of the ummah across all time has lived and died at levels three or four. And those are beautiful levels with their own completeness. Where you are and where you're going. Al-Ghazali ended his chapter on prayer levels with a teaching most people ignore. Don't try to jump levels. The spiritual path is not a race. Someone at level two who tries to force themselves into level five will create psychological [music] damage.

The levels unfold naturally when the previous level is fully inhabited. His recommendation was this. Identify honestly which level describes your current prayer. Not your best prayer on your most focused day, but your average prayer on an average That's your level. Then, focus all your effort on perfecting that [music] level, not on reaching the next one. If you're at level one, make level one perfect.

Know every movement, every word, every requirement. If you're at level two, make level two perfect. Be completely present for every second of every prayer for a month before worrying about feeling [music] anything. The levels are not achievements to collect. They're deepening revelations of what prayer actually is. At level one, prayer is duty. At level two, prayer is discipline. At level three, prayer is relationship.

At level four, prayer is [music] encounter. At level five, prayer is recognition. At level six, prayer [music] is disappearance. At level seven, prayer is being. Each level is complete. >> [music] >> Each level is worship. Each level is accepted. But each level also contains an invitation to go deeper. And the invitation is always the same. >> [music] >> Bring more of yourself to the prayer. Level one brings the body.

Level two adds the mind. Level three adds the heart. [music] Level four adds awareness. Level five adds witnessing. Level six adds everything and loses everything. [music] Level seven lives what remains. The progression is the progressive offering of all of you until there's nothing left that's not offered. And in that nothing, everything is found. Al-Ghazali's final word on this, from the Ihya, "When you stand in prayer, stand as if it's the last prayer you'll ever pray, because one day it will be, and you won't know which one.

This urgency applies to every level. Pray level one as if you'll never reach level two. Pray level four as if you'll never taste level five. And if you die at level three, die praying level three as perfectly as you can, because the perfection of any level is better than the shallow reaching for a level you're not ready for.