

# Prostration of Forgetfulness

**Description:** The lesson will explain what to do in different situations when you make mistake(s) in *salah*.

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## Prerequisites

- Prayers - Advanced

## Objectives

- To learn the meaning of '*sajdah as-sahw*'.
- To appreciate the occasions when it is done.
- To learn what to do if a *ruk'n*, *wajib*, or a recommended act of *salah* is missed.
- To learn the two methods of doing *sajdah as-sahw*.
- To understand some common examples of when to make *sajdah as-sahw*.

## Arabic Terms

- *Imam* - someone who leads the prayer.
- *Rakah* - unit of prayer.
- *Rukn* - (plural: *arkan*) essential component; a pillar without which something cannot stand.
- *Sajdah* - prostration.
- *Sajdah as-sahw* - prostration of forgetfulness.
- *Salah* - the Arabic word to denote a direct connection between the believer and Allah. More specifically, in Islam it refers to the formal five daily prayers and is the most important form of worship.
- *Takbiratul-Ihram* - saying '*Allahu Akbar*' that commences the prayer.
- *Tashahhud* - the saying "*At-tahiy-yatu lil-lahi.... Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasuluh.*" in the sitting position of the prayer.
- *Tasleem* - The salutation of peace that ends the prayer.

· *Wajib* - (plural: *wajibaat*) obligatory.

## Meaning

The Arabic word for prostration is ‘*sajdah*.’ It means to put one’s head, hands, knees, and toes on the ground. The two *sajdahs* made at the end of *salah* to make up for major errors are known as the ‘prostration of forgetfulness’ or *sajdah as-sahw* in Arabic.



## Importance

We human beings are forgetful by nature and even forget when we are praying to Allah. Our Creator is well aware of that fact and He made His Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, forget on some occasions in the prayer. This way the Prophet showed us how to correct our mistakes in the prayer. Making up for our mistakes in prayer is a great mercy from Allah because He could have made us repeat the prayer for every mistake, but He did not.

## When Are Prostrations of Forgetfulness Required?

They are two occasions when they are required:

- I. When you add or subtract to the acts of *salah*.

Examples of addition:

You pray 5 *rakahs* instead of 4.

You do three prostrations instead of two.

You make *tashahhud* at the end of first *rakah*.

Example of subtraction:

You pray 3 *rakahs* instead of 4.

You do one *sajdah* instead of two.

You get up for the third *rakah* without doing the first *tashahhud*.

- II. When you forget the number of *rakahs* and are in doubt, (for example) whether you prayed three or four *rakahs*.

## Missing a *Rukn* (Essential Component or Pillar of *Salah*)

If you omit the *Takbiratul-Ihram*, then there is no prayer for you, regardless of whether you left it intentionally or due to forgetfulness, because you never started the prayer.

If you omit a *rukun* other than the *Takbiratul-Ihram* deliberately, your *salah* is invalid.

If you left a *rukun* out of forgetfulness and you reached the next *rakah*, then the *rakah* in which you left the *rukun* is invalid and the following *rakah* takes its place.

If you did not reach the next *rakah*, you must return to the *rukun* you omitted and perform it and follow it by what comes after it in the course of the *salah*.

In both of the above situations, you offer the “prostration of forgetfulness”.

## Missing a *Wajib* (Obligatory act of *salah*)

If you leave out something *wajib* unintentionally, like the first *tashahhud* or a prostration, you simply do *sajdah as-sahw* at the conclusion of prayer. However, if it is left intentionally, then the prayer is invalid.

## Missing a Recommended Act in Prayer

You do not have to make the “prostration of forgetfulness” if you forget to perform one of the recommended acts of prayer.

## Method of *Sajdah as-sahw*

You have a choice between two ways of doing it:

1. Immediately **before** *tasleem* at the end of *salah*.

Before concluding the prayer with *tasleem*, you say *Allahu Akbar*, and then make the first prostration.

In the prostration you say, *Subha-na Rabbi al-A'la* three times. Then you say *Allahu Akbar* and return to the sitting position.

Then you say *Allahu Akbar* again and make the second prostration and say the same words as you did in the first prostration.

You then say *Allahu Akbar* for the last time, return to the sitting position, and turn your head to the right and then to the left, saying each time “*As-Salamu 'Alaikum wa-Rahmatullah.*”

## 2. Doing it **after** *tasleem*.

Another way is to continue your *salah* and end it with *tasleem* as you normally would.

After that you say *Allahu Akbar* and prostrate for your first prostration, and say *Subha-na Rabbi al-A'la* three times. Then you say *Allahu Akbar* and return to the sitting position.

Then you say *Allahu Akbar* again and do your second prostration and say *Subha-na Rabbi al-A'la* three times.

Finally, you say *Allahu Akbar* the last time and return to the sitting position, and then turn your face to the right saying "*As-Salamu 'Alaikum wa-Rahmatullah.*"

## Further Notes/Examples

1. If you realize before making *tasleem* that you have added anything to the *salah*, for example an extra *rakah*, you may do *sajdah as-sahw* before or after *tasleem*.
2. If you did not pray one or more *rakah*, you must get up and complete them, then at the conclusion of prayer you do *sajdah as-sahw*.
3. If you forgot to perform *sajdah as-sahw*, but remembered shortly afterwards, then you should do it as soon as you remember it. However, if a long time has passed, then you do not have to do anything and your prayer is still valid.
4. If the *Imam* offers *sajdah as-sahw*, everyone else behind him also does it, even if no individual made a mistake.
5. If you make a mistake behind an *Imam*, you do not offer your own *sajdah as-sahw* because the Prophet said, "Indeed, the *Imam* was made to be followed."[\[1\]](#)
6. What do you do if you are uncertain about how many *rakahs* you have prayed? You assume and go by the number you are more certain of. For example, in a four *rakah* prayer, you think you more likely prayed three *rakahs*, then you pray another one and do *sajdah as-sahw*. If you think you prayed four *rakahs*, all you do is do *sajdah as-sahw* at the end. If you are unable to decide which of the two is more probable, it could have been three or four *rakahs*, you assume and go by the lesser count, i.e. three *rakahs*. You pray another *rakah* and then do *sajdah as-sahw*.

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Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Saheeh Al-Bukhari

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