

## The Importance of Salah (Prayer)

### The Importance of rayer

“O man! What has deceived you about your generous Lord. Who created you, shaped you, and made you well-proportioned, and set you in whatever form He pleased?” (82,6-8)

Allah the Almighty, Creator of Heavens and Earth addresses mankind, reproaching him: What has seduced you, o man, into such a state that you neglect the One who created you in love and mercy, inducing you to disobey Him and feel secure from His punishment, neither admitting His right upon you nor showing gratitude for the countless blessings bestowed upon you...?

“O my people, worship God. You have no other deity but Him”.

That was the message of every prophet sent to mankind. It was not a new message, but a reminder of the inherent truth that all men carry deep in their souls: that Allah the Creator *alone* is worthy of worship.

No other form of worship can be compared to prayer or “salat”, for it is the basis of the religion without which, there is no religion. Prayer was practiced in some form by the earlier prophets and their followers as an essential part of the religion of God.

Prophet Ibrahim asked Allah's support in this duty: "My Lord, make me an establisher of prayer and (also) of my descendants.

Allah spoke to Prophet Musa saying: "And establish prayer for the remembrance of Me."

Prophet Isa says of his Lord:

"And He has enjoined upon me prayer and charity as long as I live."

And Allah orders Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

"Recite what was revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer." Islam which is the final stage, the completion and confirmation of a monotheistic religion, considers prayer essential, and its denial removes one from the ranks of Islam

Prayer was the first duty ordered of the Muslim community, having been made obligatory upon them in Makkah about three years before "hijrah" or emigration to Medina.

It is proof enough of the Creator's concern that this communion between Himself and His servants be established, that He revealed all other obligations to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) upon the Earth, while due to the importance of the matter, prayer alone was ordered in heaven, on the night of Israa and Mi'raj.

Prayer is expected of every Muslim (and Muslimah) who is sane and of age, for Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) told that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

“The pen has been lifted (i.e. does not register) for three: for the sleeping one until he awakens, for the boy until he reaches puberty and for the insane until he becomes sane.

All others are responsible for their duties before Allah, and the foremost of these duties is prayer.

Prayer is continuously mentioned throughout The Qur’an. Allah in His mercy emphasizes its importance over and over so there can be no doubt. He tells us:

“Keep carefully (adhere) to the prayers and (not forgetting) the middle prayer and stand before Allah in obedience.”

And He says:

“Certainly prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times.”

It is to be noted as well that in Islam the establishment of prayer is emphasized: Quran does not tell us to merely “pray” but tells us to “establish prayer.” It is not to be merely a series of words and movements practiced occasionally without thought but must be established in the heart if it is to give the

desired result. Prayer is to be established for the individual at its proper times and according to its definite conditions. It is to be established in the home and family, and finally in the community as a whole. This is because the prayer ties in the individual (and the group) to Allah in a positive and fruitful way, awakening the believer's heart to his Lord and himself. It also reminds the believer of that day in which he will stand before (his Creator) with nothing between them.

Our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) informed us that:

“The first thing for which the servant (of God) shall be called to account is the prayer. If it was good, all of his work will have been good, but if it was bad, then all of his work will have been bad.

We know from the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that an important purpose of prayer is to wash away sins. Another is its effect on the believer's conscience. But most important of all as Allah tells us in Qur'an is the remembrance of Himself, for that is the source of all benefit.

“Certainly, does prayer prevent the shameful and unjust, and the remembrance of Allah is greater.”

The importance of keeping the prayer is affirmed in every situation: at home or while

travelling, in security or fear, in peace or war, in health or illness. Even if it is not possible to fulfill the usually required conditions of prayer such as: cleanliness or proper dress, there are concessions or substitutes in certain circumstances one might face (such as using dust or soil for purification instead of water, and shortening & joining the prayers during a journey) but *never* is there permission to neglect or postpone the prayer, the only exception being women at the time of childbirth or monthly periods. Even if the person is too ill to move or threatened by an enemy, he must pray, even if only with his eyes or in his heart-as much as he is able and as long as his mental faculties are intact. During the last breaths of his life, the Messenger of Allah in concern for him community continued to remind them: “The prayer...the prayer...”

There are several hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) defining the abandonment of prayer: “*kufr*” or disbelief, which as we know subjects a person to eternal punishment in the hereafter. Among the most well-known of these sayings:

“Between a man and disbelief is (*only*) the abandonment of prayer.”

And:

“The covenant between us and them is prayer, so whoever abandons it has disbelieved.”

Some scholars have interpreted this to mean that anyone who does not pray is to be considered from the kuffar or non-Muslims.

Others have divided such persons into categories, judging them by intention since the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has said:

“Deeds are only according to intentions.”

They hold the view that:

1. The person who denies the words of Allah and His messenger that prayer is obligatory upon him and refrains from it deliberately removes himself from Islam because of his disbelief.

2. The person who admits that he should pray, neglecting due to laziness or pre-occupation with worldly pursuits is still considered a Muslim, although an extremely disobedient one subject to severe punishment in the hereafter.

3. It is generally conceded that a person who claims to believe in prayer, yet not once in his life has prayed (actions being more convincing than words) has died in a state of disbelief.

Had belief been present, he would have made some effort, even if only briefly throughout his lifetime. Shaykh of Islam Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah continues:

“But most people perform prayers at times and leave them at times, not keeping to it regularly. These are the ones who become under the threat, and it is them about whom the saying came that is among the traditions of Muhammad (PBUH) in which he said:

“Five prayers did Allah decree upon servants during the day and night, whoever keeps fast to them as a contract with Allah that He will let him enter paradise. But he who does not keep fast to them has no contract with Allah. If He wishes He punishes him and if He wishes He forgives Him. So the keeper of the prayer is the one who prays at its given times as Allah has ordered and does not postpone it at times or neglect its essential parts, for the one who does those things is subject to the decision of Allah the Exalted. Yet it could be that he might have some extra prayers to complete his obligatory prayers, as it came in the hadith.” (Fatwa Ibn Taymiyyah p.49 of Vol 22). The hadith referred to is one related to Abu Dawood from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saying:

“The first thing people will be called to account for on the day of judgment from their deeds is prayer. Our Lord will say to the angels while He knows most: Look to My servant’s prayer, has he completed it or left it incomplete? So, if it was complete, it is recorded as complete, and if it was lacking anything, He will say: Look, does My servant have any voluntary prayers? And if He had some voluntary prayers He will

say: Complete for My servant his obligatory prayers from his voluntary ones. Then all deeds are taken accordingly.”

Any person who has never been informed of his duties in Islam and therefore is ignorant, is not responsible until he has this knowledge. But once he knows that prayer is binding upon him as Muslim, he is to be judged according to his response.

A number of the Prophet’s companions were of the view that refraining from even a single prayer deliberately until its time has passed is reversion to disbelief and punishable by death. Among them were Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Abdullah Ibn Masoud, Abdullah ibn Abbas, Mu’adh ibn Jabal and others. None of the other companions is known to have disputed this view.

Do the negligent people of today belong to this category of deliberate rejectors, or are they simply ignorant of their duties? Could any believer commit such a sin except out of ignorance? On the other hand, is it possible that ignorance could be so completely widespread?

Since refusing the invitation of our Creator to establish this permanent relationship with Him is the ultimate ingratitude and rejection of His mercy, we can be sure that on the contrary, the person who responds and strives to please his



Lord will be loved by Him and gain the happiness of both worlds. As in the previously mentioned hadith, he is the only one who has a covenant with Allah, and the reward of righteous servants shall be “what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and has never occurred to a human heart.”

Finally, no soul should despair because of sin. The door to repentance (Tawba) is open to all, whatever their previous condition. Most scholars are of the opinion that sincere repentance and regret for the past and determination to correct the situation is all that is needed to be accepted by Allah. One can start anew at any time without even the burden of compensation for years past. For the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has said “Islam destroys what was before it, and repentance destroys what was before it.” The final word is spoken by the Lord Himself:

“Say: O My servants who have committed excess (sinned) against themselves, do not despair of Allah’s mercy. Certainly, Allah does forgive all sins, for it is He who is the Ever-forgiving, Merciful.

“And when those who believe in Our signs come to you, say: peace be upon you. Your Lord has written decreed upon Himself the mercy that any of you who does wrong out of ignorance, then repents even after that and corrects himself, certainly is He forgiving, merciful...”



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