

## Chapter 4: Practices

The main mandatory acts of worship accepted by both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are:

### The Daily Prayers

Every Muslim from the time he or she attains puberty performs five daily prayers (salah). To be able to start the prayer one must first perform the ritual ablution (wudu) in the prescribed form. Then one stands facing Mecca and makes an intention to perform the specific prayer of the time in order to attain proximity to God.

This intention must be kept all the time during the prayer. If someone at the beginning or later on forgets what he is doing, or prays in order to show off, or for any other selfish motive, his prayer becomes void. The actual prayer starts when the person utters: Allah-u Akbar (God is the Greatest). With this he enters the formal state of prayer in which he remains until the completion of his prayers.

Each prayer consists of two to four units (rak'ah).<sup>1</sup> Each unit consists of:

- i. The recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur'an followed by another chapter such as Tawhid or Qadr;<sup>2</sup>
- ii. bowing down (ruku) and praising and glorifying God in that position;
- iii. Performing two prostrations (sajdah) and then praising and glorifying God.

The prayers are ended by bearing witness that God is One and has no partners and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger with salutations upon him and his household (tashahhud) and offering peace to the Prophet, all the righteous people and all who are engaged in prayers (taslim).

The daily prayer is the most important form of worship and remembrance of the Lord. The Qur'an says: ***Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil, and certainly the remembrance of God is the greatest, and God knows what you do. (29:45)***

## 2 . Fasting

The second act of worship is fasting (sawm) in the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. In this month every mature Muslim refrains from eating, drinking and sexual activity from dawn to sunset.<sup>3</sup> Like any other acts of worship, fasting must be performed with pure intention, that is, to be performed solely for the sake of God and to attain proximity to Him. Along with closeness to God and achieving His pleasure, there are many other benefits for fasting, such as strengthening one's determination, reminding people of God's blessings such as the food that they enjoy everyday which they may take for granted, remembering the hunger and thirst of the Day of Judgement, helping the rich to understand what the poor experience in order to awaken their sense of benevolence and sympathy, weakening one's appetites and lower desires, and letting rational understanding and spiritual awareness flourish. In general the Qur'an says:

***O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil). (2: 183)***

## 3 . Pilgrimage to Mecca

Every Muslim who has attained puberty, and is financially and physically capable, must once in his lifetime perform pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) in the month of Dhu'l-Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. In Mecca is situated the most important Mosque for the Muslims all over the world called Masjid al-Haram, which is the sanctuary of the Ka'bah.

All Muslims direct their face and body towards the Ka'bah in their prayers. The Ka'bah is the cubical construction built by the Prophet Abraham and his son, Prophet Ishmael, on the foundations of what had originally been built by the Prophet Adam. Indeed, to a great extent, pilgrimage to Mecca is a symbolic

Reconstruction of what the Prophet Abraham, the arch monotheist went through in this very place about four thousand years ago. After a long journey, when Abraham arrived in Mecca he was asked by God to make preparation for people's pilgrimage to Mecca. The Qur'an says:

***Do not associate with Me anything, and purify My house for those who circle around it and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim among the people the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every remote path that they may witness the benefits for them and mention the name of God during the appointed days over what He has given them. (22:26-28)***

***Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bekka, blessed and a guidance for the nations. In it are the clear signs, the standing place of Abraham, and whoever enters it shall be secure, and pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men for the sake of God, (upon) everyone who is able to undertake the journey to it; and whoever disbelieves, then surely God is***

### ***Self- sufficient, above any need of the worlds. (3:96 &97)***

Pilgrimage to Mecca is full of unforgettable experiences. Perhaps among them, the most outstanding are selflessness, brotherhood, equality and simplicity. Every year millions of Muslims from different continents leave their home, family, business and whatever is dear to them, and set out on their journey towards Mecca, located in a desert.

Everyone is asked to be present there in the same places at the same time all wearing the same clothes and performing the same rites. The rich and the poor, the king and the ordinary man, the elite and the layman should all stand shoulder to shoulder and wear two pieces of white cloth. This is something that every one should experience

At least once in his lifetime, and then try to implement it in his day to day life.

## **4. Almsgiving**

Giving charity is highly recommended in the Qur'an and Sunnah and the reward for charitable acts are great. Although everything including one's financial possessions belongs to God, the Qur'an presents giving charity as giving a loan to God:

***Who is the one that lends to God a good lending so that God may give him double? (57:11)***

In addition to voluntary charities, there are certain types of charity that are obligatory. For example, one type of almsgiving is zakat, a wealth tax of a small percentage (usually 2.5%). Paying zakat is not a gift for the poor but rather is a right for them that must be observed:

***And in their properties is the right of the beggar and the destitute. (51:19)***

Imam Ali also said:

God the Glorified has fixed the livelihood of the destitute in the wealth of the rich. Consequently, whenever the destitute remains hungry, it is because some rich persons have denied him his share.<sup>4</sup>

Those whose possessions of certain amounts of wheat, barley, dates, raisins, gold, silver, camels, cows and sheep surpass certain quantities must pay zakat on a yearly basis to the less fortunate amongst one's relatives, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarers and etc. Zakat may be spent for food, shelter, education, health care, orphanages and other public services.

It is noteworthy that in many verses, paying zakat is mentioned next to saying one's prayers (Allah) and as a sign of faith and belief in God. Paying zakat is an act of worship, so it must be performed for the sake of God.

Therefore, not only does it help the needy and contribute to the establishment of social justice and

development, but it also purifies the soul of those who pay from miserliness and greed. The Qur'an says:

***Take alms from their wealth in order to purify and sanctify them. (9: 103)***

**Khums:** Shi'a Muslims also believe in another obligatory tax, called khums. In Arabic Khums literally means one fifth. It is a 20% tax on the excess profit that a person annually makes. At the end of one's financial year, one pays 20% of all one's earnings after deduction of household and commercial expenses. <sup>5</sup>The obligation to pay

Khums has been mentioned in the Qur'an:

***And know that whatever profit you may attain, one fifth of it is assigned to God and the Messenger, and to the near relatives [of the Messenger] and the orphans, the destitute, and the wayfarer, if you have believed in God and that which We sent down to our servant [Muhammad]. (8:41)***

Sunni Muslims usually believe that the verse only refers to what Muslims earn when they win a war (booty) and consider it to be a type of zakat.

According to Shi'i jurisprudence, half of the khums belongs to the twelfth Imam, the remaining member of the household of the Prophet and his successor, and the other

Half to the poor descendants of the Prophet, called "sayyids". Khums must be spent under the supervision of a Shi'a religious authority (marji' al-taqlid), i.e. the grand jurist (ayatullah) that one follows in practical issues.

This is to make sure that it is spent in the way that the Imam Mahdi is pleased with. The portion belonging to the Imam is usually spent on Islamic seminaries and other educational projects such as publishing useful books or building Mosques and schools.

## **5. Struggle for the sake of God**

Every Muslim has to struggle hard and strive for the sake of God in different ways to make improvements to human life in general and his individual life in particular. The Qur'an says:

***He has created you upon the Earth and has asked you to develop it. (11:61)***

To be indifferent to human catastrophes or to be lazy in one's personal life is greatly condemned. On the other hand the one who works hard to earn some money to spend on his family and improve their living conditions is considered as a hero in the struggle for the sake of God, a mujhid.

A very outstanding and vital case of this struggle (jihad) is to defend human rights such as liberty, freedom, and Islamic and human values such as justice, dignity, and a Muslim nation's integrity. The Qur'an says:

***Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully and offensively waged, and surely God is able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, "Our Lord is God." (22:39-40)***

***And why do you not fight for the sake of God and the utterly oppressed men, women, and children Who are crying out, "O Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help." (4:75)***

Of course, jihad also includes more personal cases in which one's family, property or reputation is endangered, usurped or damaged. According to Islamic hadiths, the one who is killed while defending his family or land is considered the same as the soldier who is martyred in the warfront.

Jihad must continue until the just cause is achieved. The Qur'an says:

***"Fight against aggressors until oppression is stopped." (2: 193)***

Of course, on a larger scale, a real jihad has always existed from the dawn of creation of mankind, between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and between the party of God and the party of Satan.

This battle will more or less continue till the End of the Time when the Earth will be filled with justice and fair distribution of all resources in the Government of al-MahdÓ.

Jihad whether it be with the pen, the tongue, a weapon or any other means is an act of worship, and must be performed with pure intention, that is, only for the sake of God and for just causes. No one is allowed to fight or struggle for materialistic purposes, for personal glory or the glory of any tribe, race, nation or any other oppressive cause such as occupying others' land to become richer or more powerful.

Indeed, jihad first of all starts within the self of a mujhid (one who struggles). To make sure that one can win the external battle against evil, one has to fight first against his own lower desires and lusts, and must first liberate his own heart from any satanic occupation and regain the dignity and honour that God the Almighty has given human beings. The Qur'an says:

***O the soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him). So enter among My true servants and enter into My Paradise! (89:27-30)***

According to a well-known hadith, once the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said to a group of his companions who had won a battle: "Well-done. Welcome to the people who have completed the minor jihad (al-jihad al-asghar) and on whom the major jihad (al-jihad al-akbar) is still incumbent."

Astonished, the companions who had defeated the enemies and were prepared to give the dearest thing to them, i.e. their life to defend Islam asked, "What is the major jihad?" The Prophet Muhammad (peace

be upon him and his family) replied: “The major jihad is to fight against your own selves [or your souls]”.

Thus, to resist against one’s temptations, and prohibit one’s soul from wrong, and to purify one’s self is the greatest and the most difficult jihad.

At the end, let us refer to some of the merits of those who struggle for the sake of God as explained by God Himself:

***Those who believe, and have left their homes and strive hard with their wealth and their lives in God's way, are much higher in rank with God. These are they who are triumphant. Their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him, and acceptance, and Gardens where enduring pleasures will be theirs. There they will abide forever. Surely with God there is a Mighty reward. (9:20-22)***

## **6 . Enjoining the good and prohibiting the bad**

Enjoining the good (al-amr bi al-ma’r’f) and prohibiting the bad (al-nahy ‘an al-munkar) are two acts of worship

That every mature Muslim has to perform whenever applicable. No Muslim can be indifferent to what happens in the world around him. Part of the social responsibilities of each individual Muslim is to observe human and religious values, and whenever any of them is deliberately overlooked or violated, he must advise and direct those responsible towards performing the good and against committing the bad and sinful acts. (3: 103, 109, 113;7: 199; 9:71, 112; 22:41)

1. The morning prayer (fajr) which is performed between dawn and sunrise consists of two units, the noon (Zuhr) and afternoon prayers (‘asr) consist of four units, the sunset prayer (maghrib) consists of three units and the evening (‘is ha’) consists of four units.
2. In three unit and four unit prayers the third and fourth units consist of recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur’an or alternatively recitation of a specific remembrance (dhikr) called, “al – tasbihat al–arbi’ah” (Four Glorifications) and then bowing down and prostrations. In these prayers the affirmation of the oneness of God and the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad and salutations upon him and his household are performed in both the second unit and the last units after prostrations.
3. Several groups of people are exempted, such as the sick or those who travel.
4. Nahjal–Balaghah (The Peak of Eloquence)
5. There are other cases mentioned in Shi’a jurisprudence in which paying khums becomes obligatory. What has been mentioned above is the most popular one.

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