

Dialogue on prayer (1)

We have reached the topic of prayer. It has been related from the Prophet (s.a.w.), “Prayer is the buttress of religion. If it is accepted, by Allah, the Most High, every other good deed by the faithful is accepted. And if it is rejected, every other good deed is rejected”.

Prayer is an audience with the Creator, convened at prescribed daily times. Allah has outlined the times at which prayers are said and the manner which they must be conducted. During this audience you be fully absorbed in the experience. You talk to Him and invoke His Mercy. You come out of this encounter with clear conscience and serene heart. It is quite natural that you may feel the presence of Allah while you say your prayer.

It is no wonder that Imam Ali (a.s.) used to remove the arrows embedded in his body in battle while fully engrossed in the spirit of worship, for it used to help him take his mind away from pain.

When Imam, Zainul Aabideen (a.s.) used to do wudhu his face would turn pale. And when members of his family asked why he looked so haggard, his reply was, “Don’t you know in whose presence I am going to be?”. When he started prayer, it sent shivers down his spine. And when asked why he was shivering, he replied, “I want to have audience with my Lord and implore Him. That is why I tremble”.

The story of Imam al-Kadhim’s (a.s.) worship is a model for all devout Muslims. When the Caliph Harun ar-Rashid ordered him to be imprisoned in his dungeons, the Imam passed most of his time in worship, giving thanks to Allah for answering his prayer and availing himself of that golden opportunity.

Above all, prayer is a manifestation of inner feeling that we all belong to Allah, the Most High, who has overall control over everything. And when you utter the phrase, “Allahu Akbar” at the start of every prayer, all material things should become insignificant because you are in the presence of the Lord of the universe who controls every aspect of it. He is greater than everything. As you recite the Chapter of “al-Fatiha”, you say, “You do we worship, and You do we ask for help”. Thus, you rid yourself of dependency on any mortal.

With that exquisite feeling of submission to Him, you enrich your spirit five times a day. And if you want

more spiritual upliftment, you may perform mustahab prayer.

* Does this mean there are two types of prayer – i.e. wajib and mustahab?

– Yes, that is true.

* I know the wajib prayers. They are the ones we say five times a day – subh, dhuhr, asr, maghrib, and isha.

– No, those are not the only wajib prayers. There are more:

1. Prayer for ayaat (signs, or natural occurrences). (Please refer to the Second Dialogue on Prayer).
2. Tawaf payer that pilgrims say during umra and hajj. (Please refer to the Dialogue on Hajj)
3. Prayer for the souls of the dead. (Please refer to the Dialogue on Death Related Matters).
4. Any compulsory prayer not said by the father who had passed away. [It is incumbent on his eldest son to say it on his behalf]. (Please refer to the Second Dialogue on Prayer).
5. Any prayer that becomes compulsory because of hire (ijarah), oath, votive offering, or any other reason.

However, the five daily prayers should have the following:

- a. The time of prayer.
- b. The Qiblah.
- c. The Place where prayer is said.
- d. The clothes of the person saying the prayer.
- e. The taharah necessary to saying prayer.

It should be noted, though, that these five prerequisites should be present in other types of prayer, except for the time of prayer, as will be explained in detail later on, inshallah.

Now, I am going to discuss each of these points in detail.

* So, you'll start with the time of prayer.

– Yes:

1. For each of the five prayers there is an appointed time that must not be taken lightly. The time for Subh prayer is from the start of dawn till sunrise. The time for Dhuhr and Asr prayers is from zawal to

sunset. The first portion is confined to Dhuhr prayer and the second to Asr prayer in as long as each of which takes.

* How would I know the time of zawal?

– It is the midway between sunrise and sunset.

The time of Maghrib and Isha starts from sunset and lasts till midnight. The first part is confined to Maghrib and the latter part to Isha in as long as each of which takes .

[You should not start Maghrib prayer until the dusk, appearing in the East, disappears from the sky].

* Could you explain what Eastern dusk is?

– It is a reddish colour that appears in the East, opposite the direction of sunset, that disappears once the whole disc of the sun descends below the horizon.

* How can I determine midnight that heralds the end of time for Isha prayer?

– It is the mid–point between sunset and dawn.

* Suppose, come midnight and I had deliberately not said Maghrib and Isha, what should I do?

– You have to hasten to offer it before the onset of dawn with the niyyah of alqurbal mutlaqah (The intention must be made with a view to seeking closeness to Allah, i.e. without stating whether it is being said on time “ada” or in lieu “qadha”).

When saying any prayer, it is important to observe the appointed time of each prayer before you set out to say it.

2. The Qiblah: You ought to set your face towards the qiblah, which is the place where the Holy Qa’ba, in Mekkah, is situated.

* Should I fail to determine the direction of the qiblah, after exhausting all means, what should I do?

– Set your face towards the direction you feel the qiblah could be in.

* If I was still undecided as to where would the qiblah be?

– Say your prayer, facing any direction you think the qiblah is in, on the basis of probability .

* Suppose I said prayer, facing a direction I thought was, approximately, the right one, then I found out I was wrong, what would happen?

If the deviation from the direction of the qiblah is less than 45 degrees to right or left, your prayer is in

order. If, however, the degree of tilt was greater than that, or you said your prayer facing the opposite direction, and there was still time to repeat the prayer, you should do so. Should the time of prayer elapse, you need not repeat the prayer.

3. The place where prayer is said, [Be aware that the place where you say prayer should be ownerless, i.e. not usurped, because prayer shall not be in order in a place that is maghsoub].

Among what is considered maghsoub are possessions, such as property and furniture, that although taxable, yet khums tax on them was withheld. I shall discuss in some detail matters pertaining to khums in another session. I just want to remind you against complacency and indifference when it comes to paying religious dues.

* And if the property or land was not maghsoub but the prayer mat, for instance, was?

– Likewise, [performing prayer on such a mat would render prayer invalid].

The spot where you do prostration must be tahir not najis.

* Is the spot of prostration where you place your forehead?

– Precisely, such as the clay tablet (turba) and similar objects.

* What about the rest of the place, that is where you stand or sit, etc.?

– Taharah is not a prerequisite, provided that the source of najasah, if present, is not wet.

However, there are few more points concerning the place where you say your prayer:

a. It is not permissible, during prayer and otherwise, to turn your back on the graves of the Infallibles (a.s.), especially when the act entails insularity.

b. [Both the prayers of a man and a woman would not be in order, if they were very close to one another and standing side by side, or the woman was slightly ahead]; the distance between the two positions where they say prayer should not be less than ten yards, if there is no barrier, such as a wall, separating the two.

c. Prayer is mustahab at mosques, and the most honoured ones are the Grand Holy Mosque at Mekkah, and the mosque of the Prophet (s.a.w.) at Medinah. Prayer is also recommended at the holy shrines of the Infallibles (a.s.).

d. It is strongly recommended that women choose the most secure (sitr) place, even within the boundaries of their own home.

5. There are certain conditions that should be met when putting clothes on for prayer:

a. The clothes must be tahir and [not maghsoub]. However, what is worn during prayer should have been acquired lawfully. This, though, only applies to that which covers the private parts. Also, we should take into consideration that there is a difference between what is acceptable for a man to cover himself with and a woman. For example, in a man's case, garments, such as a pair of knee-length shorts, would suffice. Whereas for a woman, wearing such a garment would not do, for she is required to cover her body during prayer.

b. It should not be a part of an animal, such as the skin of an unslaughtered animal even if it is not sufficient by itself to cover one's private parts].

* Would prayer be valid if the person who said it was wearing a leather belt, bought from a Muslim dealer or made in an Islamic country, albeit there was no information about the slaughtering of the animal from whose hide the belt was made?

– Yes, the prayer is in order.

* What about a leather belt acquired from non-Muslims or made in non-Muslim countries?

– The prayer shall be in order, [unless you knew that the hide used was that of an unslaughtered animal].

* If I was not sure as to the nature of the material of the belt, whether real or synthetic?

– Generally speaking, prayer can be said with such a belt on.

c. Products made from carnivorous animals are not allowed to be worn during prayer, even if they were of these which could cover the private parts. [And other products made from animals, whose meat is not permissible to consume].

d. Pure silk garments must not be worn by men during prayer. As for women, wearing silk clothes is allowed.

e. Pure, or adulterated, gold jewellery is not allowed for men. However, there is no harm in wearing fake jewellery.

* Even if it was a wedding ring?

– Yes, the prayer will not be in order with such a ring worn. Not only this, it is forbidden for men to wear gold at all time.

* What about gold caps on teeth and gold pocket watches?

– These are permissible and the prayer said with these things on is in order.

* Suppose I did not know that my ring was made of gold, or I knew but forgot to take it off before I said prayer. Would my prayer still be valid?

– Yes, the prayer is in order.

* And women?

– They are allowed to wear gold at all time, including prayer time.

I still have two more things on the clothes worn during prayer. It is obligatory to cover the private parts, i.e. the penis, testicles, and posterior.

Women have to cover their entire body including hair, but excluding the face, hands – to the wrists, and feet – to the ankles during prayer. They should do this even when they are alone.

These are the preliminary steps of prayer. Prayer itself comprises a number of parts and duties. They are, niyyah, takbiratul ihram, standing, recitation of some chapters of the Holy Qur'an, dhikr (remembrance), ruku', sujud (prostration), tashahhud, tasleem. The order, as well as continuance, of all these series of acts and utterances should be paramount, as you shall find out later on.

* Why didn't you start with adhan and iqamah (a shortened form of adhan, heralding the inauguration of prayer)?

– Before I answer your question, I should say that some of these acts and utterances are called the fundamental parts; they are niyyah, takbiratul ihram, iqamah, ruku' and sujud. Thus, they are set aside from the other parts of prayer in that if any of these five fundamental parts is not properly executed or missed out either deliberately or inadvertently, the prayer is rendered invalid.

And now to answer your question, I have this to say: Reciting adhan and iqamah in daily prayers is a strongly mustahab act. So, you shall be rewarded if you stick to reciting them prior to your daily prayer.

* What should I say for adhan?

– You can say the following:

Allahu Akbar (God is Great) – four times and each of the following phrases twice:

Ashhadu Alla Illaha Illal Lah (I bear witness that there is no god but Allah).

Ashhadu Anna Mohammadar Rasoulul Lah (I bear witness that Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah).

Hayya Alas Salah (Hasten to prayer)

Hayya Alal Falah (Hasten to success)

Hayya Ala Khairil Amal (Hasten to the best of good deeds)

Allahu Akar

La Illaha Illal Lah (There is no god but Allah)

* And Iqamah?

– You should say each of the following phrases twice:

Allahu Akbar

Ashhadu Alla Illaha Illal Lah

Ashhadu Anna Mohammadar Rasoulul Lah

Hayya Alas Salah

Hayya Alal Falah

Hayya Ala Khairil Amal

Qad Qametis Salah (prayer is being offered)

Allahu Akbar

And

La Illaha Illal Lah (once)

* What about bearing witness to the vicegerency of Imam Ali (a.s.)?

– It is mustahab, i.e. it is not an integral part of either adhan or iqamah.

* So, the first part of prayer is niyyah.

– Yes.

* What is niyyah?

– It is your intention to offer prayer, that is you seek to be close to Allah and gain His favour and reward by way of submission.

* Could you explain to me what you mean by submission?

– It is the inner spiritual feeling that goes hand in hand with all kinds of acts of worship; this can be summed up as feeling of humility before the Creator.

* Is there a particular utterance?

– No, it is a mindset. That is why it does not have a particular utterance; its seat is the heart. If, however, you do not set your mind to performing prayer seeking nearness and submission to Allah in those utterances and movements, your prayer shall be rendered null and void (batil).

The second fundamental part of prayer is takbiratul Ihram.

* What is takberatul Ihram?

– In a still standing posture, facing the qiblah, you say: Allahu Akbar. You should say it in Arabic, stressing the sound of (hamza) in the word (‘Akbar). You should also clearly utter the rest of the letters of this word and the others. It is preferable, though, to pause between takbiratul Ihram and the start of the recitation of the Chapter of Al-Fatiha (Suratul Fatiha).

* You said I must say takiratul ihram while standing. How should I go about saying prayer, if I was unable to stand unaided due to illness, for example?

– You can say your prayer in a sitting position; if not, you can say it lying on your right or left hand side, with your face towards the qiblah. [Whenever possible, lying on the right hand side must be given precedence over the left hand side].

* If I was not in a position to do either?

– You could offer prayer while lying on your back with your legs pointing to the qiblah.

* Suppose I could only manage takbiratul ihram in a standing position.

– Yes, you could utter the phrase of takiratul ihram from a standing position and perform the rest of your prayer from a sitting one in any way possible.

The third fundamental part of prayer is the recitation.

After takbiratul ihram, you recite Surat (Chapter) of al-Fatiha [and another full chapter after it]. The recitation must be carried out correctly. You must also not forget to recite the Basmalah (an acronym for Bismillahir Rahman ar Rahim: In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful) at the beginning of every chapter, except for Chapter of Tawbah.

* If I have not sufficient time to recite the second chapter?

– You could leave it out. You could do so, should you be ill and cannot recite the second chapter. The same goes for situations of fearfulness or when you are in a hurry.

* In what manner should I recite the two chapters?

– [Men have to recite them in such a manner that recitation is audible during Subh, Maghrib and Isha prayers. As for reciting the two chapters during Dhuhr and Asr, these should be done in an inaudible voice].

* What about women?

– They are not required to recite the two chapters audibly. [They should, though, adhere to reciting inaudibly during Dhur and Asr prayers].

* Suppose I was ignorant of the rule on reciting audibly or inaudibly, or I made a mistake in the manner of reciting, i.e. I got mixed up, would my prayer still be valid?

– You need not worry; your prayer should be in order.

* Now I know what I should recite during the first and second raka'. What should I read during the third and fourth raka'?

– You have the choice of either reciting the Chapter of al-Fatiha only, or utter the tasbeehat (or dhikr) [inaudibly in both the cases] except the Basmalah where you can recite it in an audible voice.

* If I choose to read the tasbeehat, what should I say?

– It suffices to say, in a lowered voice, “Subhanallah, wal Hamdu Lillah, wala Illaha Illal Lah, Wallahu Akbar”: Glory be God, and Praise be to God; there is no god but God; God is the Greatest. These phrases could be said either once or three times, whichever you prefer.

* Are there any other requirements for the recitation?

– Yes, you must observe the correct pronunciation of the Arabic words, both individually and within the context of other words; when you stop on a word, you must always pronounce it with an ending tone (sukoon), i.e. you should ignore the accent on the last letter, be it fatha, kasrah, dhamma, etc.

Conversely, you must pronounce the words with their full harakat (diacritical marks, such as shaddah, maddah, tanween, hamzatul wasl or hamzatul qat', appearing above the characters or below them that denote and aid the proper pronunciation of the words, both independently and in relation to other words in the sentence), usually found in the print of the Holy Qur'an.

In a word, you should master the rules of correct recitation, in the same way, you are required to do when reciting the verses of the Holy Qur'an, such as idgham (amalgamation or doubling of certain letters – after noon sakinah), qalqalah (resonating the sound of such letters as, qaf, taa', baa', jeem, daal, especially when you are stopping on them). Some of these can be found at the end of the words of (Ahad, Assamad, Yelid, Youled in Chapter of al-Ikhlās).

* Could you give me an example of hamzatul wasl and hamzatul qat'?

– Words in Chapter al-Fatiha, such as (Allah, Arrahman, Ihdina) start with hamzatul wasl which is not accentuated when these words are used in a context of the sentence, i.e. the way they are pronounced is determined by the pronunciation of words immediately before them. Thus, they are more or less silent. As for hamzatul qat', it is the one that should be pronounced very clearly. The way this type of hamza is pronounced is not determined by its proximity to other words. Examples of such a hamza are found in the words of (Iyyaka and An'amta) in the same Chapter.

And if I may add, to ensure that your recitation and other utterances during prayer are perfect, you should seek the help of those who have mastered prayer to enlighten you. This may sound somewhat stringent; yet you must endeavour to acquire the ability to guarantee that your prayer is correct.

The fourth fundamental is qiyaam (standing upright).

Although this is self-explanatory, yet it is the only part or unit of prayer that carries a double message. It could be a rukn as in the case of uttering takbiratul ihram and the qiyaam immediately before ruku. Thus, it qualifies for the characteristics of and is governed by the rules of any other rukn. Or it could be a compulsory act (wajibat), not a rukn, such as the standing while reciting the two chapters or tasbihat, or standing up from a bowing position. Rules of wajibat should, therefore, apply.

The fifth fundamental is ruku.

* How should I do ruku?

– You bend your body, placing the palms of your hands on your knees, and saying (Subhana Rabiya Adheemi wa Bihamdih: Glory and praise be to my Lord) once, or you say either (Subhanal Lah: Glory be to God), or (Allahu Akbar: God is Great), or (Alhamdu Lillah: Praise be to God) three times each.

You should then stand upright, saying as you do the movement (Sami'llahu Limen Hamidah: May God accept the words of those who praise Him), after which you prostrate.

The sixth fundamental is sujood.

You must do two prostrations (sujoods) in each ruku.

* How should I do sujood?

– Put your forehead, the palms of the hands, the knees and toes on the floor, forming an angle out of the torso and thighs. It should be noted, though, that you must place your forehead on the earth or what is grown in it, except that which is edible or can be worn.

* Could you give me an example of what cannot be used for sujood because it is of that which could be consumed or worn?

– Vegetables and fruits cannot be used for sujood, nor can cotton and flax.

* So, what are the other things that are permissible to use for sujood?

– You may use earth, sand, stone, shingle, wood, or inedible leaves. You may choose to do prostration on paper made of pulp, cotton, flax, or chaff.

You should not use grains such as wheat and barley for sujood, nor wool, tar, glass, and crystal. The best object you can perform sujood on is the earth taken from land of Karbala, Iraq where Imam Hussain (a.s.) is buried.

* Suppose I was unable to conduct sujood on any permissible object or matter because it was either unavailable or out of fear for myself?

– In the event of non-availability of any of the permissible things for sujood, you may use tar or bitumen. If not, you may prostrate on anything you deem possible, such as the garment you are wearing or your hand. If your well-being was threatened, you may act according to that which would be conducive to preserving yourself.

Moreover, do not forget to observe the requirement of symmetry and level of the places where you rest your forehead, your knees, and the toes of both feet, i.e. none should be higher than the other by the depth of a fist, i.e. with four folded fingers (about ten cm.). [Nor should the level of the spots where you stand and prostrate be].

* Having taken this posture, what should I do next?

– You should say (Subhana Rabiya Al 'Ala wa Bihamdih: Glory and Praise be to my Lord, the Most High) once, or (Subhanal Allah), or (Allahu Akbar), or (Alhamdu Lillah) three times. Then, lift your forehead and sit down still and composed, putting the legs under the buttocks, crossing the right foot over the left one, and saying (Allahu Akbar). You should do the second sujood in exactly the same way you did the first.

* If I was unable to bend for sujood properly due to sickness, for example, what should I do?

– Try to bow as far as you can, placing the object of sujood on a raised place, provided that you position all other parts of your body during the posture of sujood on their respective spots.

* And if I was not able to do so?

– You may nod with your head to the place of sujood. Should you not be able to do so, you may use your eyes as a substitute; close them to denote performing sujood and open them to express the lifting of the forehead from the place of sujood.

The seventh fundamental part of prayer is tashahhud.

Tashahhud is compulsory to say after the second sujood of the second ruku of every prayer and after

the last ruku of maghrib, dhuhr, asr and Isha prayers

* How should I go about uttering it?

– Say (Ashhadu Alla Illaha Illal Lah, Wahdahu La Sharika Lah, Wa Ashhadu Anna Mohammadan Abduhu Wa Rasuluh. Allahumma Salli Ala Mohammadiw Aali Mohammad: I bear witness that there is no god but God, and that Mohammad is His servant and messenger; May peace be with Mohammad and his Pure Progeny). It is noteworthy, however, that you sit still and that your reading should be continuous.

The eighth fundamental is tasleem.

Saying tasleem is mandatory in the last ruku of every prayer. It is said immediately after tashahhud, while you are still in your sitting position.

* What should I say?

– The bare minimum is to say (Assalamu Alaikum: May peace be with you). It is highly recommended, though, that you add (Wa Rahmatul Lahi wa Barakatuh: and God's mercy and blessings), (Assalmu Alaika Ayyuhan Nabiyyu wa Rahmatul Lahi wa Barakatuh: May peace, mercy of the Almighty and His blessings be with you, Oh Prophet), and (Assalamu Alaina wa Ala Ibadil Lahis Saliheen: May peace be with us and the good among Allah's servants. Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatul Lahi wa Barakatuh: May peace, mercy, and blessings of the Almighty be with you).

* Is there any reason why you did not mention qunoot (the raising of both hands for supplication in prayer)?

– Qunoot is mustahab once in every prescribed prayer and other voluntary ones [except Shefa' prayer]. If you wish, you can say it, with your both hands raised in supplication, after you have finished reciting the second surah of the second ruku, i.e. immediately before bowing.

* Is there any particular supplication I can say in qunoot?

– No, there is not. However, you could recite a verse from the Holy Qur'an, invoking your Lord; you may ask Him for anything.

* Now that you have explained to me how to say prayer, I would like to ask you if there are any actions or otherwise that invalidate prayer?

– Yes, there are:

1. When prayer is stripped of any of its fundamental units, such as niyyah, takbiratul ihram, ruku, and sujood, it can no longer be valid.

2. Whatever spoils ablution, such as breaking wind, is bound to nullify prayer, [even if it happens, unintentionally or out of necessity, after the last sujood].

3. The head or the torso should not be turned away fully from the qiblah.

* And if the turn is slight so much so that it would not spoil the actual facing of the qiblah?

– This does not invalidate prayer, although it is maqrouh.

4. Deliberate laughing nullifies prayer.

5. [Deliberate weeping or crying for worldly matters invalidates prayer]. Weeping for any matter relating to the Hereafter is in order.

6. Intentional speech, albeit pronouncing a single letter, other than utterances pertaining to prayer itself, renders prayer invalid. The only exception here is the response to a salutation, which is compulsory, by repeating that salutation.

7. Doing anything that spoils the movements or utterances of prayer, such as rocking or swaying, invalidates prayer.

8. Eating or drinking during prayer is not allowed, even if this does not spoil the acts and utterances of prayer.

9. [Deliberate crossing of one's hands, over the abdomen, while standing in prayer, in situations other than taqiyyah (dissimulation about one's religious beliefs in order to protect oneself, family or property from harm)].

10. Deliberate utterance of the word "Amen", after the imam has finished reciting "Al-Fatiha" [or the person who is praying alone says it after he has recited it], if there was no case for taqiyyah.

I should also, explain to you another important aspect concerning prayer, i.e. doubt about the proper execution of its acts and/or utterances.

* Does doubt render prayer invalid?

– It is not always the case. Some doubts do invalidate prayer. Others can be rectified and the third category can be ignored.

However, I should outline to you general principles you may observe, should you harbour any doubt about the proper execution of prayer.

1. Whenever you suspect the validity of any prayer after you have finished it, you need not worry; the prayer shall be in order.

* Could you give me an example?

– Suppose, you have just finished performing subh prayer. Immediately afterwards, you became suspicious whether you have done two ruku or more. In such a case, you should deem the prayer valid.

2. Whoever doubted the validity of any part of the prayer after he had finished it, they should deem that part valid and the whole prayer too.

* For example?

– If you grew doubtful about the correctness of your recitation, ruku, or sujood after you had performed them, you need not pay attention, and should deem the prayer in order.

3. Whenever you suspect that any part of prayer was not carried out properly, after you have entered into a subsequent part, you should deem the previous one in order, and the prayer shall therefore stand.

* I'd very much appreciate it, if you could give me an example.

– Suppose you were reciting the second chapter in a given ruku and the doubt crept into your mind that maybe you did not recite the first one, or forgot to recite it completely. In this case, you should deem the recitation of the chapter done. Similarly, if you were on going to bow, you should carry on with what you were about to do. Accordingly, your prayer shall be in order.

4. Whoever has a habit of doubting the correctness of the prayer, need not pay attention to such suspicion. The prayer shall, therefore, be in order.

* For example?

– Say, when you perform subh prayer, you frequently get mixed up as to the number of ruku you have done. You need not act on this suspicion and therefore render your prayer in order. Or suppose you have a habit of mistaking the number of sujood, e.g. whether you did one sujood or two. You should assume that prayer is in order.

* How can one reach a conclusion that they are prone to unusual level of doubt?

– He who has made a habit of being doubtful knows that shortcoming. It suffices to say that the frequency of their doubt is more than what is normally expected of the average person. For instance, they may doubt that they did something wrong in one out of every three prayers they had performed.

5. When you are unsure how many ruku you have done in subh, maghrib, or between the first and second ruku of every four-rak'a prayer, to the extent that you cannot decide the number of ruku either way, the prayer shall be invalid.

* Could you give me an example?

– Say, you were praying Subh, and you became doubtful as to whether it was the first ruku you were in or the second. After a short pondering, you should make up your mind as to which ruku you were in. If this does not materialize either way, i.e. the first or second ruku, you must assume that your prayer is null.

* If I had a strong inkling that it was, the first ruku for example?

– In this case, you should act on that probability and carry on your prayer by doing the second ruku; your prayer should, accordingly, be valid.

* And what about the possibility of growing doubtful between the third and fourth ruku of a four-rak'a prayer?

– Should you make up your mind as to the number of ruku, you should act accordingly and do the remaining ruku.

* If I remain undecided?

– This needs discussing in some detail as each case has its own ruling. Here, though, are some of these situations:

1. If the doubt arises as to whether the ruku was the third or the fourth, no matter at what stage the doubt took place, you should assume that it is the fourth. You should, therefore, carry on with the prayer and after you have finished it, you either do two ruku from a sitting position or one ruku from a standing position. This is called *salatul ihtiyat* (precautionary prayer).

2. If the doubt arises as to whether the ruku was the fourth or the fifth, after having placed your forehead on the sujood spot for the second sujood, albeit before starting the utterance, you should assume that it is the fourth ruku. You should, therefore, carry on with your prayer; after you have finished it, you should perform *sajdatay-as-sahu* (two compensatory prostrations in lieu of any commission or omission in prayer due to forgetfulness).

3. If the doubt arises as to whether the ruku was the first or the second, at the time of executing the second sujood, you should assume that it is the third ruku. You should, therefore, carry on with your prayer, doing the fourth ruku. Once you finish prayer, you should perform *salatul ihtiyat* [in this case, it should be one ruku from a standing position].

* How should I go about *salatul ihtiyat*?

– Immediately after you have finished the prescribed prayer, you should begin *salatul ihtiyat*. That is, without any turning with your body to either side. In short, you should refrain from any action or saying which could invalidate prayer.

The way to say salat al-ihram is by starting with takbiratul ihram, then recitation of the Chapter of al-Fatiha [in a lowered voice]. There shall be no need to recite a second chapter. The subsequent movements and utterances would be bowing for ruku, sujood, tashahhud, and tasleem. That is, if the choice was for salat al-ihram to be said from a standing position. If it was for it to be said from a sitting position, there must be a second ruku before you do tashahhud and tasleem.

* What about sajdah-as-sahu?

– After you do niyyah, immediately after you have finished prayer, it is preferable you do takbiratul ihram too. You should, then, do sujood. And as you are in a prostrating position, you should say (Bismillahi wa Billah. Assalamu Alaika Ayyuhan Nabiyyu wa Rahmatul Lahi wa Barakatuh: In the name of God. May peace and blessings be with you, Oh Prophet). You should raise your head, go to a crouching position, and do a second sujood in exactly the same way. After you have finished the second sujood, you should do tashahhud and tasleem.

It should be noted, however, that sajdah-as-sahu is a means of making up for other lapses that could happen during prayer. These are:

- a. [When you inadvertently speak, while you are praying].
- b. [When you inadvertently utter any sentence of tasleem prematurely, i.e. while the prayer is still in progress].
- c. Should you forget to say tashahhud, it is preferable that you say it first before you do sajdah-as-sahu.
- d. [If, after you have finished your prayer, doubt arises about omitting any act or utterance, or unnecessarily commissioning something, you should perform sajdah-as-sahu]. It is also advisable that you perform sajdah-as-sahu, if you have forgotten one of any two sujoods in your prayer. That is, after you do the sujood in lieu. You can also resort to doing sajdah-as-sahu, if you have suspected that you were in a standing position instead of a sitting one. To sum up, it is advisable that you perform sajdah-as-sahu if you realized that you either omitted and/or committed any deed or saying during prayer.
- e. You can perform sajdah-as-sahu as many times as need be.

* Now that you have explained to me how prayer should be conducted and what to do when one realizes that they have made a mistake or an oversight during prayer, I'd appreciate it, if you could demonstrate to me how you say, for example, isha prayer. (My aim was to observe him while he was saying it). He agreed. The following is a description of what he did:

He first performed ablution (wudhu). After reciting adhan and iqamah, he set his face towards the qiblah, raised both his hands and put them close to his ears and, in a raised voice, uttered (Allahu Akbar).

He then started reciting the Chapter of al-Fatiha and followed it by the Chapter of al-Ikhlās. Immediately after he finished reciting the second chapter, he bowed, by placing both his hands on his knees, and said while in that posture (Subhāna rabīyal adheemī wa biḥamdih), and as he was going back to an upright position, he said (Sami'allāhu limen ḥamidah: May God accept the words of that who chants His praise). From the standing position, he went down for prostration. After he placed his forehead on the sujood spot, he said (Subhāna rabīyal 'ala wa biḥamdih). Upon raising his head, he went back to a sitting position and said (Astaghfirul lahi wa atoobu ilaih: I seek forgiveness from God and declare my repentance in His presence). No sooner had he uttered these words, he went for a second sujood, after which he went back to a sitting position, uttering the same phrase while he was sitting. Thereafter, he stood upright again.

When he stood upright for the second time, he repeated the recitation of the two chapters, and before bowing, he raised both his hands for qunoot and recited (Rabij'alni muqeeṣas salati wa min thurayyati, rabbāna wa taqabbal du'a. Rabānagh fir lee wa liwalidaya wa lilmu'mineen yawma yaqumul hisaab: My Lord! make me, and my offspring, keep up prayer, O our Lord! and accept my prayer. O our Lord! grant me protection, my parents, and the believers on the day when the reckoning shall come to pass).

On completing the supplication, he went for the bowing position for the second time now, repeated the same utterances while bowing (ruku). On raising his head, the two sujoods then followed in exactly the same way in the first ruku. As soon as he completed the second sujood, and in a sitting position, with his hands resting on his thighs, he pronounced tashahhud by saying (Ashhadu alla illaha illal lah, wahdahu la shareeka lah, wa ashhadu anna Mohamman abduhu wa rasuluh. Allahumma salli ala Mohammadiu wa aali Mohammad: I bear witness that there is no god but God, and that Mohammad is His servant and messenger. May God's peace be with Mohammad and his Pure Progeny).

My father then stood up for the third ruku. In his upright and still position, and in a lowered voice, he recited (Subḥānal lahi, wal ḥamdu lillahi, wala illaha illal lahu, wal lahu akbar: Glory be to God, praise be to God, there is no god but God, and Allah is great); he recited these phrases three times. He then did ruku and sujood, and stood up for the fourth ruku, which he did in exactly the same way as the third one.

On going back to the sitting position after he performed the second sujood, he uttered tashahhud and tasleem (Assalamu alaika ayyuḥan nabiyu wa rahmatul lahi wa barakatuh. Assalamu alaina wa 'ala ibadil lahis salihēen. Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatul lahi wa barakatuh: May God's peace and blessings be with you, O Prophet! May peace be with us and the good among God's servants. May peace be with you).

It is worth noting, though, that I observed my father while he was praying dhuhr and asr, which are a four-ruku prayers. He said both in the same way he said isha prayer. The only difference, however, was that he recited both the chapters in a lowered voice, except for basmalah. In maghrib prayer, he concluded it at the end of the third ruku, by uttering tashahhud and tasleem after he completed the second sujood. As for subh prayer, he concluded the prayer at the end of the second ruku, for subh is a

two-ruku prayer.

Having observed how my father goes about conducting prayer, I have noticed few points I would like to share with you:

1. He is very keen on saying prayers at their prescribed times. In this regard, he used to cite the hadith (saying or tradition) from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), "The precedence of the onset of the time of a prayer, over saying it at the end of that time, is similar to the precedence of the Hereafter over this world".
2. At times, he used to say asr prayer immediately after dhuhr. He often does the same when it comes to isha prayer which he says immediately after maghrib. When I asked him as to why he used to do that, he said you have the choice of saying these prayers either consecutively or separately.
3. When he gets ready for prayer, his appearance assumes a dimension of humility and submissiveness; I often hear him recite the Holy Verse,

"Successful indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers". (23/1)

4. He made a habit of paying great attention to the proper execution of all actions and utterances of prayer, be it a pause, a stillness of posture, or the sequence and continuance of movements and utterances.
5. My father did his best in executing the recitation of the two chapters of the Holy Qur'an during prayer, by giving due attention to the proper pronunciation of the letters in a word and the word itself in relation to other words in the particular verses. He treated other utterances in the same way.
6. I have also noticed that he used to perform special prayers either before the time of the five daily prayers or after he had finished. When I asked him as to what they mean, he told me that those were voluntary prayers that are mustahab to offer.
7. Among other meritorious acts of worship he used to do after prayer, is asking God's forgiveness for himself, his parents, his relatives, and the brethren. Also, he often uses his rosary beads to chant the praise of the Almighty in a particular way, in that he chants (Allahu Akbar) thirty four times, (Alhamdu Lillah), and (Subhanal Lah) thirty three times each. He told me it is called Tasbihuz Zahra' (Praising of the Lord as used to be carried out by the daughter of Prophet Mohammad, Fatima az-Zahra' 'a.s.').

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