

## Prayer: The Faithful's Ladder

قُلْ لِعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ

***“Say to My worshippers who believe that they should keep up the prayer...” (14:31)***

Prayer is a spiritual journey in which man traverses the distance between him and Allah. It is a practical institution of worship, that aims at discovering consciously the relation between the devotee and the Creator. It is intended to inspire an abstract spiritual awareness and lively, vivid conscience in the devotee, who desires to be put in close contact with the great divine love.

During prayer, the individual proclaims his lowliness and servitude to his Creator.

One's poverty and weakness are therein clearly impressed upon the soul and thus it realizes the need for a bounteous Creator whose mercy and blessings are unstinting.

In prayer the veils between the individual and the Lord are lifted and the divine beauty and love shine brilliantly on the human soul, which feels intense joy and experiences deep satisfaction. Such times are the most sublime occasions for awakening a conscientious response to learning and taking up the commands of devotion.

In prayer there is a real attempt to abandon sins and secure salvation from its evils. Indeed, there is an urge to restore the soul to its original state of purity. When facing Allah, a person is solemnly determined to abandon wrong habits and boldly attempts to be freed from the chain of materialism and lust.

What follows is a flight to Allah and ascension towards Him. It is a return to the Source, after set intervals in life's daily activity designed to recall one's personal behaviour and dealings both with people and the Creator. Such reflection helps check one's mistakes, wrong impulses and encourages taking relevant corrective measures.

Failing to perform one's obligations towards Allah or maltreating other people, leads to evil. When the individual is in such a state, there arises the pressing need to stand before Allah, humbly entreating Him

for forgiveness and promising to abandon disbelief, with a determination to be upright and virtuous. This opportunity is furnished by daily prayer.

In the individual's heart-felt relationship with Allah, and standing in prayer, one seeks Allah's forgiveness, acknowledges his or her humbleness towards the Creator, and proclaims both repentance and a great desire to choose the righteous path. Thus, one renews the covenant with Allah, identifies the landmarks of the path chosen, and promises to streamline one's life. Praying regularly enhances good traits, weakens evil impulses and diminishes potential for wrongdoing. Consequently, will grows stronger.

Thus, prayer is a practical system of worship specifically intended to protect the soul from its whims and deviant desires. It is an original cure for all its spiritual diseases that subtly cultivates good habits and inclinations.

The Prophet (S) described prayer, its paramount significance, and its role in chastening the soul, and straightening human behaviour by asking *“If there be a flowing river in front of one's house in which he washes himself five times a day; will there remain anything of uncleanness on his body?”* We said "No". The Prophet then said, *“The (daily) prayer is like the moving river; whenever one says the prayer, his/her sins will be forgiven”*.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

A man approached the Prophet (S) and requested, “O Messenger of Allah, advise me”. The Prophet (S) replied,

*“Never purposefully quit prayer. Whoever abandons it intentionally has in fact quit Islam”*.<sup>[2](#)</sup>

It is reported from the Prophet (S) that he had said,

*“What keeps unbelief distant from faith is giving up prayer”*.<sup>[3](#)</sup>

The Prophet (S) said,

*“Everything has a characteristic symbol, and the character of your religion is prayer. Thus, never defile the visage of your religion”*.<sup>[4](#)</sup>

He is also quoted as having said:

*“Whoever makes light of his prayer, he is not from me. He will never meet me at the fountain (of al-Kauthar)”*.<sup>[5](#)</sup>

It is narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a.s):

*“I know nothing better than prayer saving knowledge. Do not you see the righteous slave of Allah, Jesus, son of Mary say: ‘And he has enjoined on me prayer and zakat (poor-rate) so long as I live’”*.<sup>[6](#)</sup>

It is due to the outstanding importance of prayer that it was ordained by Allah as a religious duty in every

divine message propagated by the prophets, as it is the relationship between the slave and his Creator, and a veritable staircase the individual ascends to the pinnacle of righteousness.

The Holy Qur'an, when talking about the prophets and their messages in this life declares:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ ۖ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ

***“And we made them Imams who guided (people) by Our command, and we revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of the alms, and Us (alone) did they worship”. (21:73)***

Prayer is indeed the motto of the faithful and the ummah (the Muslim nation). It is precisely the boundary separating the faithful from those who do not belong to the faithful ummah:

فَأَقِمْوَا الصَّلَاةَ ۖ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَوْقُوتًا

***“...keep up prayer; surely prayer is a timed ordinance for the believers”. (4: 103)***

Prayer is the attribute of the monotheists of all generations and throughout the centuries. The Qur'an talks about Muslims and their habits of worship alongside the Prophet Muhammad (S) extolling them and compares them favorably with the followers of the other prophets and their disciples. Allah the Exalted says in the Qur'an:

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۖ تَرَاهُمْ رُكَّعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا ۖ سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ ۚ نَذِكُمْ مَثَلَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ ۖ وَمَثَلَهُمْ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ كَزَرْعٍ أَخْرَجَ شَطْأَهُ فَآزَرَهُ فَاسْتَغْلَظَ فَاسْتَوَىٰ عَلَىٰ سُوقِهِ يُعْجِبُ الزُّرَّاعَ لِيَغِيظَ بِهِمُ الْكُفَّارَ

***“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the disbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are on their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Torah (Old Testament) and their description in the Injeel (Gospel), like as seed produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may rage the disbelievers on account of them...” (48:29)***

The Qur'an has no goal, when it talks historically of prayer, but to assure the faithful that prayer was the primary rite in all the divine messages and the foundation of their worship after acknowledging faith in Allah.

The Qur'an speaks of the sanctity and importance of prayer in the messages of the prophets. It mentions the supplication of Ibrahim (a.s), the father of the prophets, and the monotheistic adage he received from his Lord, and which he was humbly repeating. That statement represents the spirits of supplication that is constantly flowing in the depths of His followers: a doctrine, an awareness, and a way:

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ ۚ وَبِذَلِكَ أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

***“Say; surely my prayer and my worship and my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. No associate has He; for that I am commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims.”***  
**(6: 162–163)**

Deeply eager for nearness to Allah. Ibrahim (a.s) stretches his hands forward to the Creator, beseeching Him to make him and his offspring regular in prayer, so he says:

رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِي مُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةِ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي

***“My Lord! make me keep up prayer and from my offspring (too), ...” Holy Qur'an (14:40)***

The Qur'an, thus, shows us through examples of the revelation given to the prophets, that prayer was an obligatory duty for their people and their followers. This underscores the importance of prayer, and the extremely great role it played in the messages of the prophets and apostles.

[1.](#) Al-Tousi, al-Tahdhib, Part 3, P. 237.

[2.](#) Al-Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'a, Part 2, 4th Edition, P. 29.

[3.](#) Ibid (also by Ibn Maja in his works of tradition, Section of Tarik al-Salat, Part 1, P. 342.)

[4.](#) Al-Kulaini, al-Kafi, Part 3, P. 270.

[5.](#) Al-Amili, Wasail al-Shi'a, Part 2, P. 16.

[6.](#) Al-Kulaini, al-Kafi, Part 3, P. 264.

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