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The Post-prayer Supererogatory Devotional Acts (ta'qibat wa nawafil)

Prayer means presence in the Court of God and participation in the spiritual banquet to which God has invited His servants. Just as attendance to a party has some preliminaries and protocol, the same is true in discharging divine obligation.

Prior to the arrival of the time of prayer, our infallible Imams(as) used to prepare themselves for it, and after the prayer, they also used to engage in other post-prayer devotional acts (*ta'qibat*), such as the remembrance of God, hymning His praises, with their faces toward the *qiblah*. Were they not considering prayer as the apple of their eye? Does man easily detach his heart and close his eyes from the apple of his eye?

The *adhan* and *iqamah* are a form of welcoming prayer while post-prayer devotional acts are its guide.

Heedlessness to post-prayer devotional acts and supplications is a sign of lack of interest to the prayer itself.

As recorded in the *hadiths*, going early to the mosque and waiting for the commencement of prayer have been encouraged and enjoined while the person waiting for the prayer has been described as “guest of God”.^{[1](#)} Performance of supererogatory acts and supplications after the prayer is also recommended.

The Holy Qur'an says:

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ * وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ

“So when you are done, appoint, and turn eagerly to your Lord.”^{[2](#)}

Now, we shall deal with some issues pertaining to post-prayer devotional acts (*ta'qibat*):

Post-prayer devotional acts (ta'qibat)

Imam as-Sadiq (as) says: “As you finish saying your obligatory prayer, engage in supplications and other devotional acts.”^{[3](#)}

The same Imam (as) also says: “Supplication after dawn (*subh*), noon (*zuhr*) and sunset (*maghrib*) prayers will be accepted (*mustajab*) (by God).”^{[4](#)}

The Imam (as) also says elsewhere: “The *tasbehat* of Hadhrat Zahra (as) (34 times “*Allahu akbar*,” 33 times “*al-hamdu lillah*,” and 33 times “*subhan Allah*”) is better in the sight of God than a thousand *rak'ahs* of recommended (*mustahabb*) prayer.”^{[5](#)}

We read in a *hadith* that anyone who recites this *tasbehat* has observed the injunction in “*Remember Allah with much remembrance*.”^{[67](#)}

Of course, supplication (*du'a'*) and other devotional acts have their merits and so do work and struggle to earn an honest living, and one should not pose as hindrance to the other. Some think that instead of supplication (during its apportioned time) if they go to work, they will end up more productive and successful.

The Messenger of Allah (S) says: “Supplication after the dawn (*subh*) prayer is more effective for life and acquiring of sustenance.”^{[8](#)}

Invoking benediction and malediction

Invoking benediction and salutations on the embodiments of human perfection, and cursing and invoking malediction on the manifestations of polytheism and personifications of disbelief and tyranny, are among post-prayer devotional acts.

In those that are deemed as post-prayer supplications, we can come across numerous cases of both *salawat* and curse (*la'n*), and it is an instance of *tawalla* (befriending the truthful) and *tabarra* (being inimical to the people of falsehood) in the living and guided school (*maktab*).

The narrated *salawat* has its own merit. The recital of “*Allahumma salli 'ala Muhammad wa ali Muhammad*” itself has been mentioned as one of the post-prayer devotional acts.

Regarding the case of curse (*la'n*), Imam al-Baqir (as) says: “After you finish your obligatory prayer, do not rise up unless you invoke curse upon the Umayyad tyrants.”^{[9](#)} This is because the said ignominious and corrupt family is an example of the *taghuts* and one of the most vivid portraits of opposition to the infallible Imams and progeny of the Prophet (S), and thus, deserving every kind of curse and aversion!

After every obligatory prayer, Imam as-Sadiq (as) used to curse and pray for damnation of four men and

four women (who were among the stern enemies of the station of Imamate). [10](#)

How good Islam is for setting as part of its programs aversion to the tyrants, corruptors and *taghuts* alongside its devotional and religious programs! Its prayer, its *Haji* and other acts of worship are accompanied by disavowal (*bara'ah*) and declaration of aversion toward infidels, polytheists and hypocrites. [11](#)

So, post-prayer devotional acts also include invoking curse on enemies of God and opponents of the line of divine leadership.

Tasbihat Hadhrat az-Zahra' (as)

Another post-prayer devotional act (*ta'qibat*) is the *tasbihat* of Hadhrat az-Zahra (as); that is, reciting 34 times “*Allahu akbar*,” 33 times “*al-hamdu lillah*,” and 33 times “*subhan Allah*” after finishing one’s obligatory prayer. This *tasbih* (*tasbihat*) was taught by the Messenger of Allah (S) to his daughter Fatimah(as), and its recital has been highly emphasized as having huge spiritual rewards.

Imam al-Baqir (as) says: “There is no eulogy better than the *tasbihat* of Hadhrat az-Zahra (as), and if there were any, the Messenger of Allah (S) would have taught it to his daughter.” [12](#)

In numerous traditions, it is stressed that to have a rosary (*tasbih*) with 34 beads from the sacred soil of Imam al-Husayn (as) and to recite *tasbihat* with it has great rewards, and even counting its beads without the recital of *tasbihat* is good and valuable. [13](#)

And it is stated in a *hadith* that the beads themselves glorify (*dhikr*) God. [14](#)

The *turbah* of al-Husayn (as) is reminiscent of the epic in Karbala’ and reviver of the culture of martyrdom, and it makes human beings familiar with the Doyen of the Martyrs (as) himself, divine leadership, *jihad*, martyrdom, self-sacrifice, struggle against tyranny, and remaining steadfast against oppressors.

The *tasbihat* of Hadhrat az-Zahra (as), as stated, has been mentioned even in *hadith* books of the sunni people (Ahl as-Sunnah) [15](#) but it is nowhere mentioned that the name of the said *tasbihat* is *Tasbihat Hadhrat az-Zahra' (as)*!

Prostration of gratitude (sujud shukr)

Gratitude for the blessings endowed by God, the Exalted, is a sign of gnosis (*ma'rifah*), courtesy and servitude. In the verses of the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions, expressing gratitude for blessings has been highly enjoined, and it has been stated that recollection of blessings enhances a human being's love for God and makes divine blessings perpetual and abundant. [16](#)

It is true that due gratitude for blessings is beyond the capability and power of man, but he ought to express thanks as far as he can for the favors and blessings of God. One form of expressing gratitude is to prostrate on the ground and express gratefulness to the Lord.

And this prostration of gratitude (*sujud shukr*) is considered as one of the post-prayer devotional acts (*ta'qibat*).¹⁷ The late 'Allamah Majlisi has allotted the entire volume 83 of *Bihar al-Anwar* (with the exception of a few pages at the end of the volume) to the narrations about post-prayer devotional acts while quoting 63 *hadiths* of the infallible Imams (as) about the prostration of gratitude.

Prostration after prayer is a token of gratitude for successfully offering the prayer.¹⁸

In the *sujud shukr*, the recital of “*shukran lillah*” (thanks to Allah) three times is enough, but it is stated in a *hadith* that if a person would say “*ya rabb, ya rabb*” (O Lord, O Lord) in a single breath, God will address him, thus: “*Labbayk! Ma hajatuk?*” (What is your wish that I may grant you?)¹⁹

Imam as-Sadiq (as) said: “The prostration of gratitude after the obligatory prayer makes the prayer complete, earns the pleasure of God, and elicits the admiration and approbation of angels. God will ask the angels many times, “What is the reward for this grateful servant?

They will say to God, “your mercy, your paradise, solution to his worldly problems, and any other reward that your angels many say. They hear no response, saying: We do not know the reward for this *sujud*.” God will say, “Just as he thanked Me, I will also give thanks to him.” And with this statement, He teaches the angels that divine pleasure and gratitude to him are more sublime than mercy, paradise and solution to worldly problems.²⁰

It is mentioned in a *hadith* that God said to Hadhrat Musa (as): “The reason why I appointed you to the station of prophethood was your prostrations after prayer.”²¹

Supererogatory prayers (nawafil)

Apart from daily obligatory prayers (with seventeen *rak'ahs*), there are also other recommended prayers (*mustahabb*) which have abundant rewards. And since these prayers are additions to obligatory prayers, they are called *nawafil* (sing. *naflah*). The Arabic word “*nafl*” means surplus and addendum.

The number of *rak'ahs* of supererogatory prayers is two times that of obligatory ones, i.e. 34 *rak'ahs*. They are as follows:

1. The *naflah* of the dawn (*subh*) prayer has two *rak'ahs* to be performed before the obligatory prayer;
2. The *naflah* of the noon (*zuhr*) prayer has eight *rak'ahs* to be performed before the obligatory prayer;
3. The *naflah* of the afternoon (*'asr*) prayer has eight *rak'ahs* to be performed before the obligatory prayer;

4. The *nafilah* of the sunset (*maghrib*) prayer has four *rak'ahs* to be performed after the obligatory prayer;
5. The *nafilah* of the night (*'isha'*) prayer has two *rak'ahs* to be performed after the obligatory prayer; and
6. The *nafilah* of the night (*tahajjud*) has eleven *rak'ahs* to be performed before the *adhan* of the dawn prayer, the first eight *rak'ahs* of which is called "*salat al-layl*"; the next two *rak'ahs* "*salat ash-shafa*"; and the last *rak'ah* as "*witr*".^{[22](#)}

It is stated in a *hadith* that *nafilah* prayers are like a gift and are accepted under all circumstances.^{[23](#)} Notwithstanding all the emphasis and encouragement about the performance of recommended (*mustahabb*) prayers, they must be said on the basis of interest and love, and a person must not impose them on himself. In the beginning, he has to acquire mental readiness as well as interest of heart. Then and only then he should perform them.

Imam ar-Ridha' (as) has said: "Sometimes, hearts are willing and ready, while at other times they are not. Perform the act of worship when the heart is willing."^{[24](#)}

For this reason, there are some leniencies and facilities in optional prayers; things that are not present in obligatory ones. This ease is meant to attract more people to perform recommended prayers. Some of these leniencies and facilities are the following:

1. One may perform the recommended prayer standing or sitting.
2. One may only recite *Surah al-Fatihah* and then proceed to *ruku'*.
3. One's doubt whether he is in his first, or second *rak'ah* does not render the prayer invalid, and he may freely evaluate which *rak'ah* he is in.
4. The commission of one or more mistakes does not require any *sujud sahwi* (prostration for forgetting a certain essential act or recital in prayer).
5. It is better for the worshipper to go to the mosque to perform obligatory prayers but for recommended prayers, there is no such injunction.

These leniencies are meant to encourage people to perform these constructive acts of worship. Even if someone cannot perform an optional prayer on its appointed time, he can do so later in a compensatory manner (*qadha*). For doing so, according to a *hadith*, God will address the angels, saying: "Look at my servant! He is performing in a compensatory manner something that I have not obliged him to!" (And in another *hadith*, it is added: "I take you as witnesses that I have forgiven him.")^{[25](#)}

It is stated in a *hadith*, thus: "*nafilah* prayers are compensation for deficiencies in obligatory prayers."^{[26](#)}

And they are like alms that a person gives.^{[27](#)}

Night supererogatory prayers (tahajjud)

Among *naflah* prayers, *tahajjud* occupies a special station, the performance of which has been much emphasized in verses of the Qur'an and *hadiths*, compared to other recommended prayers. For this reason, the saints (*awliya*) of God were heedful and used to offer the *tahajjud* and mid-night vigils.

It is such that God has made incumbent upon His most beloved servant, Hadhrat Muhammad (S), to perform the night supererogatory prayers by commanding him, thus: “*And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a supererogatory (devotion) for you.*”^{[28](#)}

In describing those who are observing the night vigils and performing the *tahajjud*, the Glorious Qur'an says:

وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

“And pleading (Allah’s) forgiveness at dawns.”^{[29](#)}

وَعِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ... وَالَّذِينَ يَبِيتُونَ لِرَبِّهِمْ سُجَّدًا وَقِيَامًا

“The servants of the All-beneficent are... those who spend the night with their Lord, prostrating and standing (in worship).”^{[30](#)}

كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ

“They used to sleep a little during the night.”^{[31](#)}

We read in another verse that men of God forsake the warmth of their beds in order to perform litanies at dawn and the night supererogatory prayer. Their reward does not pertain to paradise, its nymphs and the like. There are things that God has reserved for them which shall make them joyful:

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ

“No one knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort as a reward for what they used to do.”^{[32](#)}

As such, all the prophets (as) were heedful of the night supererogatory prayer,^{[33](#)} and the Messenger of Allah (S) enjoined Hadhrat ‘Ali (as) for several times, saying: “The night prayer (*salat al-layl*) is (obligatory) upon you; the night prayer is upon you; the night prayer is upon you.”^{[34](#)}

It is stated in a *hadith*, thus: “The nobility of the faithful lies in his night prayer.”^{[35](#)}

And Imam as-Sadiq (as) said: “The houses in which the night prayer is performed and the Qur’an is recited are like shining stars for inhabitants of heaven.”^{[36](#)}

In addition, waking up early and breathing the fresh air at that time bestows health to the body, as said in a *hadith*.^{[37](#)} And in another *hadith*, in addition to its spiritual effects, its curative feature has also been mentioned.^{[38](#)}

The night supererogatory prayer is a sign of man’s love and affection for his Creator, and this interest distances him from sleep and urges him to tell his secrets to the Beloved and pray for his needs at midnight. If this love is not present, what would motivate a person to cease resting and talk with his Loved One in a mystical fashion in the darkness of the night?

We read in a divine *hadith* (*hadith qudsi*) that God says: “He is telling a lie who claims that he loves me but when the night comes, he sleeps. Does not every lover wish for privacy with his beloved?”^{[39](#)}

The night supererogatory prayer also requires opportunity and chance (*tawfiq*) which must be sought from God.

Sometimes, sins and lies are the reason behind man’s deprivation of the night supererogatory prayers, and the sweetness of worship and litany is taken away from him.

It is thus mentioned in a *hadith*: “Verily, once a person tells a lie, his lie makes him deprived of the night prayer (*salat al-layl*).”^{[40](#)}

Through constant performance of *tahajjud* and other acts of worship at night, man can attain a station of perfection, purity of soul and proximity to God, in which condition he would possess divine eyes, ears and hands (in the sense that he will no longer look at anything except that which is wholesome, nor listen to anything but good, nor do anything except good) and attain a stage where every supplication of his will be accepted.^{[41](#)}

^{[1](#)}. Mustadrak al-Wasa’il, vol. 1, p. 336.

^{[2](#)}. Surah ash-Sharh 94:7-8.

^{[3](#)}. Mustadrak al-Wasa’il, vol. 1, p. 336.

^{[4](#)}. Ibid.

^{[5](#)}. Ibid.

^{[6](#)}. Surah al-Ahzab 33:41

^{[7](#)}. Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol. 4, p. 1023.

^{[8](#)}. Mustadrak al-Wasa’il, vol. 1, p. 336.

^{[9](#)}. Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 121.

^{[10](#)}. Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol. 4, p. 1037.

^{[11](#)}. It is appropriate here to mention the four hundred martyrs of Iran who, while shouting “Death to America” and “Death to Israel” on the days of Hajj pilgrimage on the bloody Friday of Makkah in 1987, were shot by the ruling Wahhabis in Hijaz and attained martyrdom. It is lamentable to note that such slogans which are taken from the verse of the Qur’an and are

enjoined by the Qur'an (to declare disavowal and immunity against the polytheists during the Hajj rites) have been regarded by the crooked-minded ones as repugnant to the spirit of worship in Hajj; hence, their murderous act!

[12.](#) Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 1024.

[13.](#) Jawahir, vol. 10, p. 405.

[14.](#) Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 1033.

[15.](#) For example, see: sahih Muslim, vol. 1, p. 418, sahih Bukhari, vol. 1, p. 110, sunan ibn majah, vol. 1, p. 299 (in the discussion on post-prayer devotional acts).

[16.](#) Surah Ibrahim 14:7: "If ye give thanks, I will give you more."

[17.](#) Bihar al-Anwar (Beirut Edition), vol. 83, p. 194. In this book, around 87 Prophetic traditions and 38 verses of the Qur'an about the issue of expressing gratitude have been quoted.

[18.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 83, p. 200.

[19.](#) Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 1071.

[20.](#) Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 1071; Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 123.

[21.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 83, p. 200.

[22.](#) In Bihar al-Anwar, the whole Volume 84 has been allotted to the traditions pertaining to the supererogatory prayers and hundreds of hadiths have been narrated in this regard.

[23.](#) Qassar al-Jamal, vol. 2.

[24.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 84, p. 47.

[25.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 84, p. 43; Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 3, p. 56.

[26.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 1, p. 177.

[27.](#) Qassar al-Jamal, under the word "nafilah".

[28.](#) Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:79.

[29.](#) Surah Al 'Imran 3:17.

[30.](#) Surah al-Furqan 25:63-64.

[31.](#) Surah adh-Dhariyat 51:18.

[32.](#) Surah as-Sajdah 32:17.

[33.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 84, p. 136.

[34.](#) Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 22.

[35.](#) Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 21.

[36.](#) Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 22.

[37.](#) Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 5, p. 272.

[38.](#) Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 22.

[39.](#) It is quoted from Misbah ash-Shari'ah.

[40.](#) Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 204.

[41.](#) Thawab al-A'mal, p. 88.

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