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Let's Welcome Prayer!

To embark on the constructive form of worship, i.e. prayer, we shall cite a set of physical and spiritual preliminaries in terms of cleanliness and purity of body and soul as well as other preparations.

Preliminaries of prayer

Preliminaries are those essentials whose performance or provision prior to prayer is necessary. They are as follows.

Purification (taharah)

For the performance of the prayer, the one praying must be in a state of ritual and spiritual purification (*taharah*). Sometimes, he does so by ablution (*wudhu'*), taking a bath (*ghusl*), and under certain circumstances, by performing dry ablution (*tayammum*).

Ablution is part of faith (*iman*), and in the words of Imam al-Baqir (as), "Prayer without ablution is not prayer at all,"[1] and in some *hadith*s ablution has been described as the "key to faith" and "half of faith.[2]

Imam ar-Ridha' (as) made an interesting statement regarding ablution when he said:

1. Ablution is a courtesy toward God ensuring that the servant is clean while praying and standing before God;

2. It aims at purging him of all pollution and contamination;

3. In addition, it is the shedding of laziness and discarding sleepiness; and

4. It makes the heart and soul ready to stand in front of God, the Exalted.[3]

In this noble *hadith*, the Imam (as) has pointed out all the physical and spiritual dimensions of ablution, i.e. cleanliness and purity as well as preparation of the soul, acquisition of enthusiasm to worship and the paving of the spiritual ground for worship.

The late Faydh Kashani said: “Rising from materiality all at once toward spirituality is hard, but performance of ablution gradually prepares man for it.”[4]

Ablution (wudhu’) in every state

The inner luminosity and purity blessed by ablution (*wudhu’*) is significant. It is therefore emphasized in the *hadith*s that a person must always be in a state of ablution; ablution is likened to a light;[5] and sleeping while in a state of ablution has been considered like life and night vigil.[6]

To perform ablution has been recommended for supplication, recitation of the Qur’an, *ziyarah*, and many other good and devotional acts.[7]

Without ablution, it is forbidden to touch the verses of the Qur’an and the names of Allah, the Prophet and Imams (as).[8] The same ruling applies even if the name of Allah appears in different forms, such as the logos of institutions and establishments (such as the logo of the Islamic Republic of Iran).

Ablution permits entrance into the Presence of God, and specific supplications for its different steps have also been mentioned in books. There are many issues concerning ablution which cannot be covered in this volume. It should not remain unsaid, however, that it is unlawful to use water if it reaches the bound of what may be considered as extravagance. The Messenger of Allah (S) has said:

أَلْوُضُوءُ مُدٌ وَ ٱلْغُسْلُ صَاعٌ وَ سَيَأْتِي أَقْوَامٌ يَسْتَقِلُّونَ ذٰلِكَ فَأُولٰئِكَ عَلىٰ خِلاَفِ سُنَّتي.

“For ablution a *mudd*[9] and for taking a bath (*ghusl*) a *sa’*[10] are enough, but there will come people in the future, people who will regard this amount as not enough (and they will consume more volumes of water). Therefore, they will go against my tradition.”[11]

Purification (*taharah*) for prayer has the following stages:

1. Outward purification from impurities and pollutions;

2. Purification of the bodily limbs from sins and offenses;

3. Spiritual purification from moral corruption[12]—just as we read in supplications: “O Lord! Cleanse my heart of polytheism!”

If, at the time of prayer, it is necessary for the body and clothing to be clean from impurities, is it not essential for the heart and soul to be free of arrogance (*kibr*), ostentation (*riya’*), envy (*hasad*), and rancor (*kinah*)?

Will not inner pollution and outer cleanliness be a type of hypocrisy (*nifaq*)?

Bathing (ghusl)

Sometimes, instead of ablution one has to perform *ghusl* (ritual bathing). One of these cases is ritual impurity caused by sexual intercourse (*jinabah*) and the entire body must be washed according to the rulings stated in the books on practical laws (*risalah al-'amaliyyah*). Some *hadith*s indicate that during *jinabah*, sperm (*mani*) comes out from under every hair, all bodily parts and limbs—"*min tahti kulli sha'r*",[13] unlike urine which has a specific and limited passageway. And perhaps this is the reason why in *ghusl* the entire body must be washed. These *hadith*s may also be referring to the activity of the sex-related cells at the time of *jinabah* as they exist and are active in the entire body.

Dry purification (tayammum)

If there is no water for ablution or taking a bath, or the time for ablution is limited, or the use of water is harmful to the health of the person, or the price of water is extremely exorbitant, or water is needed for drinking and saving a life, one must perform dry ablution (*tayammum*).

That is, based on the instructions indicated in books on practical laws, one must strike both hands against clean earth and wipe the forehead and back of the hands. Clean earth is necessary!

We read in a hadith that Hadhrat 'Ali (as) prohibited performing dry ablution on soil taken from near the streets (which is usually unclean).[14]

Clothing and place of the one praying

A male worshipper must cover his private parts ('*awrah*) during prayer which is from the navel to the knees. The female worshipper must cover her entire body except the face, hands and feet up to the ankles.[15]

This covering must also be done with clean and lawful clothing. It is better for the clothes of the one praying to be white, clean and fragrant smell and for the one praying to wear a ring with the *'aqiq* stone during prayer,[16] and it is better for him not to use black, dirty and tight clothes, or the clothes of a person who is careless about the physical purity or impurity.[17]

Similarly, the place carpet or thing upon which the prayer is performed must be acquired lawfully (*halal*).[18] The use of the fixed property of a deceased who owes *khums*[19] or *zakat* is unlawful (*haram*) and praying there is invalid (*batil*), and if a piece of land is purchased with a sum of money whose *khums* or *zakat* is not paid, it is unlawful to occupy it and invalid to pray there.[20]

There are many issues pertaining to place and clothing. In addition to obedience and the spirit of submission to the divine commands, there are three other aspects which we shall mention below:

1. Observance of courtesy

The exigency of courtesy while standing in front of God in the precinct of His Glory and Grandeur demands that prayer must be performed with inner and outer purity and concentration. Even praying in front of the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) and Imams (as) is sometimes regarded as an impolite gesture and makes the prayer invalid.[21]

2. Observance of the rights of others

Some of these conditions are related to the observance of the rights of others. That the clothing and place of the one praying is lawful and legally acquired means to observe the right of the Islamic government (in levying *khums*) and the right of the society's deprived (in the payment of *zakat*) and other people. Even praying near highways and along the streets is unlawful if it causes obstruction to pedestrians.[22]

The genuine satisfaction of the owner of rights is essential. If he outwardly says that he is satisfied (for us to occupy his place and pray there), but we know for certain that he is not, occupation of the place is unlawful, and the prayer offered there is invalid. On the contrary, if he outwardly expresses his lack of satisfaction, but we know for certain that he is actually satisfied, to pray there is valid.

3. Observance of priorities

Besides the main conditions, there are some recommended (*mustahabb*) points that are indicative of Islam's attention to priorities. For example, under ordinary and non-emergency situations the location of the one praying must not only be lawfully acquired, it must also be stable, flat and clean. Prayer in some places is emphasized more, such as in the mosque, which shall be dealt with later.

Focus of direction in prayer (qiblah)

Prayer is performed facing the Holy *Ka'bah* (in Makkah) which is called the "*qiblah*". Although God is everywhere, focusing on a single sacred point, such as the *Ka'bah,* inspires monotheism and, is reminiscent of the monotheistic line of Ibrahim (as).

For a Muslim the command is final, so all prayer must be performed facing the *Ka'bah*, otherwise our worship would lack the spirit of obedience (*ta'abbud*) and submission (*taslim*) and hence be futile.

During the early period of Islam, the *qiblah* of the Muslims for many years was Bayt al-Muqaddas (in Jerusalem). The Messenger of Allah (S) did not like the *Ka'bah*, which was then a temple full of idols, to be set as the focus of direction in worship. After the migration (*hijrah*) (to Madinah), however, circumstances emerged that led to the change of the Muslims' *qiblah* from Bayt al-Muqaddas to Masjid al-Haram (in Makkah). One of the reasons behind it was the insults and abuses suffered by the Muslims at the hands of the Jews (in Madinah), who were saying, "You do not have a *qiblah* of your own and you

are praying facing our *qiblah*."

The Messenger of Allah (S) was distressed by this situation and waiting for a way out from God. Until, verses of the Qur'an were revealed with the order, "Wherever you are, henceforth, face the Masjid al-Haram and pray."[23] The verses of the change of *qiblah* teach the Muslims throughout the history, that they should be independent and free; that they should not debase themselves in front of others even in matters of worship; and that they should live honorably with an identity of their own.

This command of the change of *qiblah* also served as a trial for the Muslims—to identify those who are totally obedient and subservient to the commands of God and the Prophet (S), and those who always question and complain.

Besides facing the *Ka'bah* while praying or reading the Qur'an, it is better for Muslims to face the *Ka'bah* while sleeping and eating; while slaughtering animals by placing them with faces toward the *qiblah*, otherwise their meat will become unlawful (*haram*). This specification of direction in all affairs toward the *ka'bah* of monotheism makes it impossible for Muslims to be negligent of God in all their daily activities.

Moreover, this specification of direction toward the *Ka'bah* creates a wonderful order and stunning unity, when all Muslims, in whatever part of the world they may be, face toward that divine point at the time of prayer. If someone from space takes a look at those who are praying on earth, he will see numerous circles whose epicenter is the *Ka'bah*, and monotheism (*tawhid*) as the central point in the minds, hearts and souls of Muslims.

Because of the attention to the *qiblah*, astronomy, geography and the detection of direction also flourished among the Muslims.

Yes, the *Ka'bah* is the memento of the monotheistic struggles of Ibrahim, Isma'il and Muhammad (may peace be upon them all). In his global uprising, Hadhrat al-Mahdi (as) will also incline toward the *Ka'bah* and reform the world. It is this *Ka'bah* that is taken as the *qiblah* of every Muslim at the time of prayer and worship.

Call to prayer (Adhan)

The recital of the call to prayer (*Adhan*) and *iqamah*[24] is among the acts prior to the prayer and prepares the ground for greater attention to God during prayer.

The *Adhan* is a silence-breaking, rhythmical, short, substantial, and constructive message which is chanted, while repeating the most fundamental statements of faith and giving direction to the activities of Muslims.

The *Adhan* is the announcement of the existence of Islam, of the beliefs and deeds of Muslims, and a rejection of all false deities.

The *Adhan* is a sign of the openness of the propagation environment as well as the declaration of the intellectual stance of Muslims in a clear and lucid manner.

This monotheistic message is the first that is whispered to the new-born child and the initial lessons about God imparted to it. For adults, it has always acted as a warning against complacency.

The *Adhan* is the only sound that reaches the inhabitants of heaven.[25]

The *Adhan* is a sound that makes devils flee and feel dejected.[26]

Reciting the *Adhan* with a beautiful voice and listening to the *Adhan* at home, particularly at the time of sickness, is strongly recommended.

In a *hadith*, the Messenger of Allah (S) has said:

سَيَأْتي عَلىٰ ٱلنَّاسِ زَمَانٌ يَتْرَكُونَ ٱلأَذَانَ عَلىٰ ضُعَفَائِهِمْ.

"A time will come when the people will belittle the *adhan* and assign it to the weak among them."[27]

It is stated in a *hadith* that on the Day of Resurrection, when most of the people will be abased due to shame, the callers to prayer (*mu'adhdhin*s) will be raised honorably with exalted statures (lofty stations).[28] The *mu'adhdhin* has a share in the reward of those who prayed through the agency of his *Adhan*.

Bilal

Bilal al-Habashi was a Muslim from Africa appointed by the Messenger of Allah (S) to be the *mu'adhdhin*. When the *adhan* was sent down through a revelation, the Prophet (S) taught it to Bilal who had a strong voice.[29] That the Prophet (S) designated him to be the *mu'adhdhin* has some lessons for us, among which are the following:

1. Giving identity and honor to slaves, for Bilal was a slave who became a mouthpiece of Islam and harbinger of the *ummah*;

2. Giving identity to blacks, proving that color of the skin is not a criterion (of piety);

3. Condemning the arrogant disparagement and ridicule of Bilal by the polytheists and hypocrites, and their pretension of generosity and boasting;[30]

4. True faith, piety and merit compensate for external shortcomings of expression. Although Bilal used to pronounce "sh" (ش) as "s" (س) and had this pronunciation defect, God laid more emphasis on his spiritual perfection and inner beauty.

Bilal was the first person in Islam to recite the *adhan*.[31] He believed in the Prophet (S) at the very beginning of the Prophetic mission and for the sake of his faith, he endured the severest tortures under the scorching heat of the sun in the deserts of Hijaz by repeating "*ahad, ahad*" ((God is) One, (God is) One).

During the conquest of Makkah, at noontime (*zuhr*) Bilal also climbed on top of the *Ka'bah* as ordered by the Prophet (S) and recited the *adhan*, after the idols were shattered.[32]

Bilal participated in the Battles of Badr, Uhud and Khandaq.

After the Messenger of Allah (S), he did not recite the *adhan* for any one else. He recited the *adhan* only when requested by Hadhrat Zahra (as) who missed the time of her father. While Bilal was still halfway in his *adhan*, the people and Hadhrat Zahra (as) wept.[33]

This conduct of Bilal demonstrated that the *adhan* must only be recited for the sake of truth and at the time of deserving leader.

One day, 'Umar (ibn al-Khattab) said to Bilal: "It was Abu Bakr who bought you and set you free. Why do you not recite the *adhan* for the prayer he is leading?"

Bilal replied: "If he freed me to earn for himself the pleasure of God, I owe him nothing. However, if he had some other motive, then I am ready to be his slave but I will never recite the *adhan* for someone whose caliphate was not endorsed by the Prophet (S)."[34]

Bilal was not even willing to recite the *adhan*, which is a religious message to encourage an army which he did not recognize as being rightfully guided.

Bilal—that Ethiopian slave attained such a position under the auspices of faith that he became the herald of the Apostle's (S) itinerary and the public treasurer.[35]

If at the time of prayer, students throughout Europe and America recite the adhan, will they not make people reflect?

This brings to mind the late Martyr Nawwab Safawi[36] who urged his companions to recite the *adhan* at noontime (*zuhr*) and sunset (*maghrib*) wherever they may be. It was this very *adhan* that struck fear and terror at the heart of the *taghuti* system (Pahlavi monarchy). This is the meaning of the *hadith* which states, "On hearing the *adhan*, Satan gets furious and flees."[37]

It is not without reason that Gladstone[38] (a British statesman) said before the British Parliament: "So long as the name of Muhammad is recited from the top of minarets, the *Ka'bah* exists, and the Qur'an is the guide of Muslims, it will be impossible to implement our policies in Muslim territories."[39]

It is because of its rich content and constructive monotheistic dimensions that its recitation is strongly

recommended in announcing prayer.

1. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 256.
2. Muhajjah al-Baydha', vol. 1, p. 281.
3. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 257.
4. Muhajjah al-Baydha', vol. 1, p. 281.
5. Qassar al-Jamal, vol. 1, p. 311.
6. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 266.
7. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, under the section on ablution.
8. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, under the section on ablution.
9. A mudd is approximately equivalent to three-fourth kilogram. (Trans.)
10. A sa' is approximately equivalent to three kilograms. (Trans.)
11. Muhajjah al-Baydha', vol. 1, p. 301.
12. Muhajjah al-Baydha', vol. 1, p. 281.
13. Muhajjah al-Baydha', vol. 1, p. 308; 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2, p. 105.
14. Wasa'il ash-shi'ah, vol.3, p.349. نَهىٰ أَمِيرُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِين أَنْ تَيَمُّم ٱلرَّجلُ بِتُرَابِ أثر ٱلطَّرِيق
15. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, Issue 788.
16. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, Issue 789.
17. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, Issue 864.
18. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, Issue 866.
19. Khums: literally means one-fifth. According to the Shi'ah school of jurisprudence (fiqh), this one-fifth tax is obligatorily levied on every adult Muslim who is financially secure and has surplus in his income out of annual savings, net commercial profits, and all movable and immovable properties which are not commensurable with the needs and social standing of the person.

Khums is divided into two equal parts: the Share of the Imam (sahm al-Imam) and the Share of the Sayyids/Sadat (descendants of the Prophet) (sahm as-Sadat). Accordingly, the Share of the Imam is to be paid to the living Imam, and in the period of occultation ('asr al-ghaybah), to the most learned living mujtahid who is the giver's marja' at-taqlid (Source of Emulation).

The other half of the khums, the Share of the Sayyids/Sadat, is to be given to needy pious Sayyids who lack the resources for one's year respectable living in consonance with their various statuses. For more information, see Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, Khums: An Islamic Tax, https://www.al-islam.org/khums-islamic-tax-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi [1] (Trans.)

20. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, Issue 874.
21. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, Issue 884
22. Tawdhih al-Masa'il, Issue 898.
23. The lengthy verses concerning the change of qiblah are the verses 142 up to 149 of Surah al-Baqarah. See the exegesis of the verses for detail.
24. Iqamah: a shortened form of Adhan, heralding the commencement of prayer (salah). (Trans.)
25. Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 7, p. 689.
26. Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 7, p. 692.
27. Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 7, p. 690.
28. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 615.
29. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 612.
30. In this regard, see Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 21, p. 133 where the abusive words of the polytheists uttered against Bilal have been mentioned.
31. Safinah al-Bahar, vol. 1, under the word "Bilal".
32. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 614.

33. Safinah al-Bahar, vol. 1, under the word “Bilal”.
34. Safinah al-Bahar, vol. 1, under the word “Bilal”.
35. Lughatnameh-ye Dehkhoda, under the word “Bilal”.
36. Martyr Sayyid Mujtaba Nawwab Safawi was the founder of Fada’iyan al-Islam organization, which was established in 1323 AHS (circa 1944) and one of the religious parties and organizations in Iran at the time with a long record of sound faith in Islam and in the role of the ‘ulama’ in leading the people. The assassination of ‘Abd al-Husayn Hajir and General Razmara (the Shah’s Prime Ministers) was one of this group’s militant undertakings. Nawwab Safawi and other members of the group were arrested by the Shah’s agents in 1344 AHS (circa 1965) and were expeditiously tried and executed. (Trans.)
37. Kanz al-‘Ummal, vol. 7, p. 692.
38. It refers to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time. (Trans.)
39. Tafsir Nemuneh, vol. 4, p. 438, under verse 58 of Surah al-Ma’idah.

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[1] https://www.al-islam.org/khums-islamic-tax-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi