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Etiquette and Codes of Prayer

In accordance with the faculty of reason and on the basis of Islamic traditions, prayer too has its etiquette and codes; some of them will be described here, but firstly it would be appropriate to describe the realities of prayer as follows:

1. What is Prayer, and What it Ought to Be?

The literary meanings of phrase prayer means requesting in a humble manner. A little pondering about this definition would reveal:

Because the reality of prayer is requesting and beseeching – an act of the heart and that is internal – therefore, a prayer which does not come out from the heart or in other words from a negligent heart in reality, is not a prayer.

Because prayer is a request in a state of need with humility and is not like other requests or demands; therefore, a prayer or request which is not accompanied by need and humility too will be far away from the reality of prayer.

Since the request and pleading inevitably should be accompanied by hope, it must be understood that hope is an essential part of a prayer; therefore, a prayer which is not accompanied by hope or is accompanied by hopelessness will not be regarded as real prayer.

Since for acceptance of prayer and fulfilment of wants one may trust only someone Who knows about our genuine wants as well possesses the power of their being materialized, therefore, the supplicant must have firm faith in the knowledge and power of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), to whom he is beseeching for fulfilment of his own needs through prayer; a firm faith about His knowledge and wisdom as regard to his needs; as well as His absolute power and authority to grant them.

Since humility and humbleness in front of elderly personalities differ in accordance with their status, i.e. it may be that what is considered as humility and humbleness in front of a certain respectful personality

may not be regarded sufficient in front of a very great respectable personality. And since Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), happens to be Greater than all the great personalities, therefore, one should do his utmost to show his humility and humbleness in front of Him. Because requesting and pleading before such a Magnanimous and Glorious Lord without his permission and consent would be impolite and stubbornness, which is in contradiction with obedience and humility.

Therefore, request from Him should not be without His permission; because of His Love and Benevolence towards His creatures, He had given us such a permission, and has asked us to present our requirements and needs at His threshold, and beseech Him for their grant as the Holy Qur'an says in the following verse:

"And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he cryeth unto Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me."

- Holy Qur'an (2:186).

Since requesting or begging in reality couldn't be anything other than goodness and blessing for the supplicant, and because a human being does not comprehend his real good and bad correctly as Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Man prayeth for evil as he prayeth for good."

- Holy Qur'an (17:11)

i.e. as he strives for his good and blessing also endeavours for his bad and evil (in his imagination considering it as good) even though this goodness might be decorated with evil, as has been narrated in the book Misbah al-Shari'a as follows:

"There is nothing (to be asked) except Allah's nearness and countenance. It is up to the supplicant not to open his tongue except for good and welfare, and should not ask Allah anything other than goodness and blessing, and should never include harmful requests in his prayers. Secondly, if the prayer is not granted, he should never be disappointed and never be suspicious about Allah's promise: 'I answer the prayer of My servants' and should consider that whatever he has asked in his prayer unconsciously, might have been harmful and undesirable, because of this very consideration Allah has not granted it and instead has stored for him other blessings."

2. Secret of Non-acceptance of the Prayer of Righteous

I swear to my own soul that there exists mystery and secret in non-acceptance of at least some parts of the prayers of the righteous and impeccable ones, in spite of the fact that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has himself promised that He will grant such prayers. Because Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), possesses unlimited mercy and compassion towards His righteous servants, and this very

infinite love and affection compels Him to keep them immune from whatever constitutes as bad and evil, even though in their own imaginations they regard it as something good and a blessing.

The non-acceptance of their supplications and wants is due to divine expediency beyond our comprehension like the expediency of getting a child killed through Prophet Khidr [a] – the killing which apparently from the point of view of the parents was evil and bad, but in reality was blessing and goodness for them.

Now let us suppose that this mother and father because of their being unaware of tragic and harmful future happenings would have considered their son's remaining alive as something good and a blessing for themselves, and with this intention would have beseeched Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), for their son's life. Then in that case would the granting of their prayer (with the intention of good and blessing) be – that their son remains alive and instead of being good and blessed makes them losers in both the worlds, or he better be killed so that the parent could be saved from loosing both the words, and instead of him another righteous son be awarded to them? It is obvious that acceptance of their prayer could be materialized only through the killing of their son.

Because a supplicant prays with the intention of achieving goodness, prosperity, and salvation through this means; in case he did not mention anything particular in his prayer and, wished for its grant, then it would be appropriate that he should consider his prosperity and welfare in whatever is granted by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). Now if He sees and is knowledgeable that whatever is being asked by a supplicant (unknowingly) would bring nothing except loss and calamity for him; then in that case the real grant of supplicant's prayer would be not to accept his prayer, instead to bestow upon him whatever is considered good and useful for him.

Non-acceptance of such prayer by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), are commonly practised among human beings, and very often it happens that someone would turn down the request of a dear one for the sake of prudence.

For example, if a sick person mistakenly considers a fatal harmful drug as health-giving and begs his father to give him that medicine, and the father being knowledgeable of its fatal harmful effects, would then the father grant the son's request? Never. And, if he knowingly grants his son's request by giving him that fatal drug, then in that case wouldn't he be criticised by the wise people, and wouldn't it be said that the son requested a health-giving medicine and instead his father gave him a fatal drug?

Similar is the story of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), and his servant, sometimes it may happen that a servant through the means of his prayer asks something from Allah say wealth and property, because, he considers it something good for his wellbeing, but since Allah's vast and infinite wisdom which covers all do's and don'ts relevant to a servant's life affairs knows that wealth and property do not suit this servant; knows that increase of wealth for him even though he is not aware of it would result in his taking distance from truth and reality.

Here it is that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because, of his profound love and compassion towards his servant does not grant the servant's prayer and instead makes him deprived from the wealth and property asked by him in his prayer.

Because, if a servant seeks wealth and property through prayer from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), it is because of this reason that he regards it as a means of good and prosperity for himself, without being aware of the fact that his prosperity and welfare lies in his being poor and destitute instead of being rich and wealthy.

And since Allah, (the Glorious, the Exalted), is knowledgeable about the fact that wealth and property is not the real grant of his prayer, i.e., to bestow upon a servant the blessings which are indeed required for his prosperity and eternal salvation. The real grant of prayer does not mean that Allah should bestow upon a servant whatever is desired by him – even though being aware of the fact – that unknowingly the servant has asked for a thing which would be harmful and disastrous for him. Or, in other words the grant of a servant's prayer could be explained as follows:

In cases where a servant prays for something which would bring good and prosperity for the servant, the grant of his prayer (by Allah) would mean to bestow upon him the desired things.

But whereby a servant unknowingly or in his imagination considering it good for his prosperity, while in reality it is harmful and disastrous for him asks something from Allah the grant of his prayer would be to not to grant his prayer, thus, making him deprived from his desired wants.

The above matter that – occasionally Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), grants a supplicants prayer by non–acceptance of his request has been described in many traditions. Even it has been narrated in some of the traditions, that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because of his love towards a servant, sometimes not only did not accept his prayer, instead due to His love, gets the servant occasionally involved into some minor sins, in order to keep him immune from greater sins like arrogance and self–conceit which would bring greater calamities upon the servant.

Therefore, whatever Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), decides about a servant, without least doubt it would bring for him salvation and prosperity; whatever He does with a servant, even though apparently and over all may not appear in his favour, but relative to that person's affairs and characteristics, certainly means goodness and prosperity, and is executed in accordance with wisdom and prudence. Apart from that, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), bestows all sorts of favours and blessings which are useful for His righteous believers and are permitted by His wisdom and discretion, even though if they do not seek them in their prayers.

3. Questions and Answers

Perhaps acceptance of the above explanation might be a little bit difficult for some people and they might

ask that if such is the case than what is the benefit of prayer? And what are the meanings of prayer's acceptance? In reply it must be said: sometimes the action, deeds, and affairs of a servant are such that divine wisdom dictates to deprive him from a particular thing because of his deeds and actions.

Here it is that if a servant raises his hands for prayer beseeching from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), for good and prosperity, then this same prayer would result in causing the earlier divine discretion which was to deprive the servant from utilization of a particular blessing to be changed to other divine discretion, i.e., to allow the servant from utilization of that particular blessing. Therefore, a prayer might result in lots of rewards and blessings which were denied before, because, of our undesirable actions and deeds. In addition to its being granted by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), a supplication also possesses plenty of precious and valuable advantages.

4. Etiquette of Prayer

There are special etiquette and instructions for prayer, some of them will be described here as narrated in the Islamic traditions as follows:

Being Hopeful towards Allah and Hopeless from Others

One of the etiquette of prayer is that the supplicant for granting of his prayer and fulfilment of his needs should put his trust only in Allah and should not look towards anyone except Him. This etiquette has been described in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

"And call on Him in fear and hope."

- Holy Qur'an (7:56).

And now let us refer to some of the Islamic traditions:

In the famous book of al-Kafi as well as in many authentic books the following tradition has been narrated from Imam al-Sadiq [a] who has quoted from his father who quoted from the Holy Prophet [s] that Allah has said to some of the prophets:

"I swear by My Majesty and Splendour that: whoever puts his hope in someone other than Me, I will cut off his hope, will dress him in the robe of disgrace and wretchedness, will deprive him from My nearness, will cut off communication with him and will hide his memory. Woe be upon him, who takes shelter in other than Me during difficulties, while the solution of difficulties rest with Me. Does he hope in others while I remain living and eternal? Does he go to the homes of human beings for solution of his problems while the gates of their houses remain closed? Does he leave the door of My house while its gate remains always open?

Was there anyone who trusted Me and was betrayed? The hopes of My servants are tied to Me, and I

take care of their hopes. I have filled the sky with those who never get tired of My praise, and have ordered the angels never to close the door between Me and my servants. Does not, the one who faces the problem know that no one can solve it except with My permission? Why does not the servant approach Me for his needs, while I had already blessed him with favours without his asking for them?

Why does he not ask me instead of asking others? Does he imagine that in the beginning I bestow My favours upon the servant and will now deprive him after his request? Am I miser that My servants regard me as miserly? Do not the world and Hereafter belong to me? Are not mercy and benevolence My characteristics? Do not all the desires end with Me? Who has the power to terminate them?

"I swear with My Majesty and Splendour that if all the needs of all of the world's habitants are summed up, and if I bestow upon them in accordance to their wants, not even the equivalent to the weight of a tiny particle will be decreased from My kingdom. Whatever is bestowed by Me, how could be it susceptible to loss or reduction? How destitute and wretched is the one who is hopeless of My blessings? How helpless is the one who disobeys me, indulges into forbidden deeds, disregards My limits and transgresses?"

In another divine tradition (*hadith al-qudsi*) it has been narrated:

"Whatever my servant imagines about Me I am exactly like his imagination, therefore, lest my servant imagine anything except good about Me."

The Prophet [s] has said:

"Beseech Allah with certainty and hope, and request your wants and requirements from Him."

Imam al-Sadiq [a] has said:

"Whenever you beseech Allah for granting of your prayer and needs, imagine that the prayer has been granted and your needs have been provided."

In a tradition it has been narrated that Pharaoh was being drowned he pleaded for help from Prophet Moses [a] and since he turned down his request, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), revealed to him:

"Oh Moses! You did not help Pharaoh because you were not his creator, but if he would have called Me for help, without doubt I would have helped him, after all I happen to be his Creator."

Also, there is another famous tradition that when Korah (Qaroon) asked help from Prophet Moses [a] and did not hear any response, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), reprimanded him that why he did not help Korah?

"It has been narrated in a tradition that on the Judgement Day, when the accounting of deeds is completed, special angels will lead the servant whose sins are greater than his good deeds towards the Hell. While in this state the servant turns his face and looks towards his back, then Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), in spite of being knowledgeable about him orders to bring him back and asks him, why did you turn your face backward and look towards Me? O' Allah! I never imagined, never expected it, and never thought that You will treat me like this '. Replied the servant.

'O' My angels! I swear to my Splendour and Majesty that till he existed, never had such good expectations towards Me, nevertheless, take him to Paradise because now he is claiming to have such good expectations."

Importance of Remaining Hopeful towards Allah

In some of the traditions it has been narrated that whoever expects good from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), He too likes to treat him with goodness and manage his affairs in accordance of his expectations. But here it must be pointed out that one should not be tricked by Satan, and incorrectly may regard carelessness, easy going, and slackness in religious affairs as having good intentions towards Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). Obviously such interpretation does not have any logical reasoning and expecting good from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), should never be used to open the ground for carelessness and laxity in religious affairs.

Otherwise, how come these same people who believe in this fallacy, through utilization of the excuse – expecting good from Allah – do not practice easiness and carelessness in their worldly affairs like endeavouring for earning a living, in spite of the fact that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), with emphasis and swearing has insured the sustenance for all living beings, and only it is in the religious or Hereafter's affairs that the excuse of having good intentions towards Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), is mentioned, thus, showing laziness and carelessness in performance of their religious obligations?

If they are honest in their saying, and truly trust Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), and expect good from Him, they should have practised their same belief in their financial and worldly affairs too. If they would have a compassionate and kind father financially capable of taking care of their living expenses, then in that case because of their having firm trust upon their father's assurance, they would not have been worried about their living, and certainly would not have bothered to make efforts and endeavours for earning a living.

Then how it is that they believe so firmly in their father's words for assuring their sustenace? But do not put their trust and hopes in Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), who has assured in the Holy Qur'an, the provision of sustenace for all living creatures? Are the compassion, benevolence, and blessing of Allah lesser than their father's? Or, is He incompetent in providing the sustenance to His servants? Or, does He show stinginess in providing sustenance to His servants? Is not Allah, the most beneficent and compassionate? Are not His benevolence, blessings, and favours greater than everything and anybody else?

Therefore, those who do not have such good intentions towards Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), in their worldly affairs, should not claim to have such good intentions in their religious affairs, otherwise, their claim would be nothing except an excuse for being negligent and easy going in their religious affairs.

Abstinence from Sinning - Oppression Against People's Lives, Possessions, and Honour

Another etiquette of prayer is that the supplicant should renounce sinning, especially transgressions, oppressions, and eating forbidden (*haram*) things. He should not raise his hand of oppression towards people's lives, possessions, and prestige, instead should endeavour to have a pleasing character. Following are some of the traditions in this regard.

In a divine tradition it has been narrated:

"From you is the prayer; and it is up to Me to grant it; the prayers of all supplicants are granted except those who have filled their bellies with food provided through forbidden (haram) means."

The Holy Prophet [s] has narrated:

"Whoever wishes his prayer be granted by Allah must endeavour to earn his sustenace through lawful means, i.e., he must restrain himself from earning his living through fraudulent and forbidden means."

Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has recommended to Prophet Jesus [a]:

"Say to the oppressors of bani-Israel: Do not beseech Me in the state of idol-worshipping and usury, because, I have sworn that whoever beseeches Me I will grant his needs, and My grant for those who are indulged in idol-worshipping and usury would be nothing except cursing and damnation for them."

It has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s] that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), sent revelation to him:

"Warn the Islamic community (Ummah) not to congregate inside the mosque for offering prayer and beseeching Me while being transgressors or oppressors towards other human beings, in that case till they are busy in prayers and supplications would only be inflicted with My curse and damnation, or otherwise they must remove that transgression from themselves (through obtaining the consent of the oppressed). It is only after this stage that they will become nearer to me, so that I would become their eyes and ears, and would make them companions of the prophets, martyrs, and righteous saints."

About the non-acceptance of prayer of someone in bani-Israel it has been narrated that his prayer was not granted, because, he besought Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), with a contaminated tongue and heart as well as with ill intention.

It has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s]:

"That whoever beseeches Allah with immodest character is like someone who wants to shoot the arrows with a chord-less bow."

Imam al-Sadiq [a] has said:

"Allah does not grant the prayer of a sleeping and negligent heart, therefore, one should pray to Him whole-heartedly, and should beseech him with attention while being fully awakened, only then a supplicant should look forward for his prayer being granted."

It has been mentioned in a tradition that the prayer of the following is not granted:

- 1. "A person who is sitting idle at home, and without making endeavours for earning a living asks Allah for sustenance through prayer."
- 2. Prayer of someone who beseeches Allah to inflict harm upon his fellow companion.
- 3. Prayer of someone who is blessed with wealth by Allah and spent it carelessly in nonsense amusements.
- 4. Prayer of some one who gives a loan to other party without obtaining his signature on a document, and in case the recipient of loan denies, the loan–giver beseeches Allah for the repayment of his money through prayer."

It has been narrated in a tradition that:

"Whoever prays against his neighbours and relatives, or asks forbidden things (haram) from Allah his prayers are not granted."

Also, it has been quoted from the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a]:

"That while beseeching Allah one should not ask for impossible and forbidden things."

5. Factors which Influence Prayer's Acceptance

In addition to the above-mentioned characteristics which prevent prayer's there are other etiquette and manners which provide required background for prayer's acceptance, and it is up to the supplicant to pay attention towards them. Following is a brief description about those factors:

5.1. Shedding Tears and Crying

Fearing Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), beseeching him with tearful eyes, and lowering head upon his threshold are the etiquette of servanthood; in addition to bringing plenty of favours and blessings also provide background for prayer's acceptance. Following are some traditions.

It has been narrated in a tradition:

"There is a bottleneck passage between Paradise and Hell, and except those who shed tears out of fear for Allah's wrath, no one else would be able to pass through it."

It has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s]:

"Allah has sworn with his Splendour and Majesty that My servants do not know the value of shedding tears and crying; are not aware that for their crying what heavy price and sweet rewards have been stored; for them I have provided special palaces in My vicinity, and there is no partner to share it with them."

It has been narrated:

"On the Day of Judgement there is no eye which is not tearful, except the eye which was tearful in the world because of Allah's fear; there is no one with eyes full of tears because of Allah's fear, except that Allah will forbid his body parts from Hell's fire, there is no face with tears of Allah's fear flowing upon his cheeks, but Allah will make it immune from disgrace and abjectness; there is nothing in creation but has its definite dimensions and weight, except a tiny drop a tear shed for the sake of Allah's fear, that through this drop Allah would silence the oceans of His wrath; and if in a community (ummah) a single servant sheds tears, Allah would bestow forgiveness upon the entire community for the sake of that servant's tear."

Of course, there are plenty of traditions about this matter.

5.2. To Offer Thanks, Praise, and Apology

Another etiquette of prayer is to praise and adore Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted); the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a] was asked:

"How to praise Allah and consider Him the Greatest?" The Imam replied: "You must recite the following:

'O' Thou who are nearer to me than my jugular vein; O' Thou who is the distance between a man and his heart; O' Thou who is manifested as the most fascinating scene upon the horizon; and O' Thou, who could not be compared with any other thing.'"

While praising Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), it would be more desirable that we should beseech Him with His sacred names and characteristics, which are relevant to our prayer and needs; must remember His blessings and bounties and should thank Him for that; then we should think about our transgressions and sins, and should offer excuse and Apology.

5.3. Deliberation and Persistence

Also, it would be desirable that the supplicant should take a pause and ponder about his prayer; should avoid haste and hurrying; should insist whatever he desired from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because he likes a servant who insists and shows persistence for his wants. Also one must repeat his needs at least three times.

5.4. Praying Away from People's Sight

It is more appropriate that one should stand in prayer in an isolated place away from people's sight so that he could prevent himself from dissimulation as well as could obey Allah's command. Also it has been narrated that:

"One prayer in privacy is equivalent to seventy prayers performed in the presence of others."

5.5. Standing Together for Prayer

Sometimes it is appropriate that a group of people should stand up for praying together, and it is much better if the number of people be at least forty, or at least four people each of them repeating his wants ten times, or in case there is only one person, it would be much better if he asks for his wants forty times. 1

5.6. Humility and Meekness

Another etiquette of prayer is that one should stand before Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), with a humble heart and in a state of meekness; as much as possible in a pleasing and soft manner of tongue, considering himself as destitute and nothing; and in this manner should present his needs and wants in prayer. It has been narrated that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), said to Prophet Jesus [a]:

"O' Jesus! Beseech me like a poor and destitute who does not have any shelter except Me; beseech Me with a broken heart; in isolation and privacy remember me a lot; I love a servant who uses his tongue in a soft and pleasing manner, in a state of earthiness, but, of course with an alive and awakened heart and not with a sleepy and negligent heart; I like and appreciate My servant's endeavours in sending his heart broken sad voice and melody of his grief to My ears."

Also, it has been narrated that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), said to Prophet Moses [a]:

"Whenever you beseech Me, you must be in a state of trembling with fear, being afraid of my wrath put your face upon dirt by offering prostration; tell your mysteries with a broken heart and trembling with fear; let your heart die because of My wrath; look towards Me in a state of frenzy (in My love), like someone who runs away from the fear of enemy and cries for help and support. You too should cry because of fear of sins and seek My help, because, I am the best helper for My servants."

5.7. Salutations Upon the Holy Prophet [s] and His Holy Progeny Ahlul-Bait [a]

Another etiquette of prayer is to offer salutations upon the Holy Prophet [s] and his Holy Progeny Ahlul-Bait [a] before and after the prayer. Following are few traditions:

"It has been narrated that in appraisal of deeds nothing is more precious and esteemed than sending salutations upon the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] and his Holy Progeny (Ahlul-Bait [a])."

The following has been narrated from Imam al-Sadiq [a]:

"Unless and until a prayer is accompanied by salutations upon the Holy Prophet [s] and his Holy Progeny (Ahlul-Bait [a]) it is far away from being granted."

Also it has been reported:

"That whoever wants to present his needs before Allah must start his prayer firstly by sending salutations upon the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] and his Holy Progeny (Ahlul-Bait [a]), should then remember his own needs and desires and again should finish it by repeating the above-mentioned salutations, because, the salutations offered at both ends of the prayer are undoubtedly accepted immediately and Allah is Greater and Most Compassionate than, that he would accept the two ends (i.e. beginning and end) of the prayer leaving the middle portion unaccepted."

Importance of Sending Salutations Upon the Holy Prophet [s] and His Holy Progeny Ahlul-Bait [a]

Here, it must be added that, sending salutations upon the Holy Prophet [s] and His Holy Progeny Ahlul-Bait [a] are indeed desirable and extremely important as, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), does not accept the belief (*iman*) of someone who does not believe in the vicegerency (*wilayah*) of the Holy Prophet [s] and His Holy Progeny Ahlul-Bait [a] likewise, does not accept the prayers of those who do not send salutations upon them, i.e., as the vicegerency (*wilayah*) of the Holy Prophet [s] and his Holy Progeny Ahlul-Bait [a] is the prerequisite and criteria for belief (*iman*), likewise sending salutations upon them is also essential etiquette and requirement of the prayer.

Also it must be mentioned that salutations upon the Holy Prophet [s] and his Holy Progeny Ahlul-Bait [a] like other deeds and worship consist of outwardly appearance as well as inner character, possess body as well as spirit, and their spirit is that we must discover that what special majesty and splendour are possessed by these noble personalities before Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted); we must appreciate that they are our intercessors and mediators near Him and He does not accept anyone, except through the path of resorting (*tawassul*) to them.

We must discover that indeed they are superior and exalted over our own selves; of course, all these findings and realizations, should be real and true appreciation, in order to influence our actions and

deeds. That is, our actions and deeds must indicate that we have indeed discovered their splendour and majesty; have accepted their superiority and exaltedness above our own selves; and if, with such genuine appreciation and understanding, send salutations upon those exalted ones, undoubtedly, they too would respond to our one salutation with ten salutations, one hundred salutations, and may be many times with infinite salutations, as well as our prayer will be accepted by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

5.8. Sincerity and Heart's Purity

Another etiquette of prayer is that the supplicant should not beseech Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), superficially with tongue, instead should seek Him with profundities of his conscience and from the fathoms of his heart and soul; should purify his inner self from everything other than Him, especially, worldly materialistic affairs which contaminate heart and make the soul unclean; should keep himself away from such thoughts as being suspicious and disbelieving towards Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because such thoughts are indication of disrespect and weakness of faith, which eventually make the heart dead whereby Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), turns his face away from human beings, as the Holy Qur'an said:

"That your thought which ye did think about the Lord, hath ruined you."

- Holy Qur'an (41:22).

5.9. Prevention is Better than Cure

Another etiquette of prayer is to supplicate during happy and good times; such prayer possesses lot of worth and value and could be compared with the prevention before being inflicted with the disease. Otherwise, forgetting prayer and Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), during happy and good times and beseeching Him and stretching hands for supplication only during hard times while being surrounded by calamities in the state of helplessness would not produce any significant gain.

5.10. Remembrance and Preference of Others

It is desirable that during prayer we must keep in mind others while asking our own deeds, whatever we ask from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), it should not be only for our own selves, rather should ask similar things for others as well, and undoubtedly such supplication is more deserving and is nearer for being granted. Further it would be more desirable if we prefer other believers than our own selves, that is firstly we pray for them and then should mention our own wants and desires.

Of course, praying for other believers must be done with sincerity; should be accompanied by one's heart and soul for the sake of mutual friendship, and not for the sake of formalities by the tip of tongue, or with selfish ideas, that praying for others would result in grant of our own prayer sooner, then in that case, it would not produce any result.

Importance of Friendship of a Believer and His Remembrance during Prayer

It must be clearly understood, that regarding the friendship of believers, what really constitutes its axis, foundation, and criteria is – that to be friendly with them, should be only for Allah's sake and not for the sake of any other motive. It is this type of friendship of believers, which have been considered as precious and esteemed in the Islamic traditions and the Holy Qur'an, it has been emphasized a lot, so much so that in accordance with the following narration:

"It has been considered as the most stable pillar of belief."

And in another tradition:

"The faith has been defined, as having such sincere friendships with believers."

In praising the believers who love each other in this manner, a lot has been written in traditions. For example, it has been narrated in a tradition:

"Whenever the two friends shake their hands Allah too puts his hand between their hands and presses the hand of the one who is more steadfast and sincere in that friendship."

Regarding the believer who prays for other believers it has been narrated:

"Whenever a believer prays for a fellow brother believer, an angel from the worldly sky says to him: 'O' servant of Allah! Know that whatever you have asked for your fellow brother believer a thousand times of that would be given to you; the second angel makes triple and so on so forth until the seventh angel announces seven hundred thousands times of reward bestowed upon him. Then Allah announces glad tidings to him saying: 'O' My servant! My treasure never gets emptied through My donations! I will bestow upon you million times of whatever you have asked for your fellow brother believer."

Regarding the believers who help and support each other or fulfil the needs of other believers, there are plenty of traditions. It has been narrated in a tradition:

"Whoever fulfils the wants of a brother believer is like the one who has worshiped Allah with fasting during day and offering night prayer for nine thousands years."

It has been narrated in another tradition:

"Whoever does not mobilize all his resources and strength in

fulfilment of a brother believer's wants has indeed done a treachery towards Allah, His Prophet, and the believers."

The story of Imam al-Sadiq [a] and Hasan bin Yaqtin is very famous in this regard. In summary, Imam al-Sadiq write a brief recommendation letter in favour of Hasan bin Yaqtin to the ruler of Ahwaz as

follows:

"Before Allah there is a heavenly shade or canopy in which no one can rest but without opening a knot of difficulties for a brother believer, or help him, or do some good however small it may be in his favour. And now a brother believer has approached you, regards.

The ruler of Ahwaz after reading this letter came out bare-footed to welcome Hasan, received him warmly, kissed his face, asked him about Imam's condition, then took him inside his home and treated him with warmth and affection, fulfilled his requirements, forgave his taxes, and divided equally all his wealth, horses, and slaves between him and Hasan.

"Of course, he undertook all these good actions and justified them for Allah's sake and in the path of Ahlul-Bait's [a] friendship. After a little while Hasan returned before Imam al-Sadiq [a] and described his encounter with the ruler of Ahwaz then the Imam said: 'By Allah, because of this kindness shown by the ruler towards you I am happy, so too my impeccable forefathers, the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a], the Holy Prophet [s] and Allah."

Also, there are plenty of traditions about those who make believers uncomfortable. For example, Husayn bin Abi al-Ala has narrated:

"Once together with twenty or more pilgrims I went to Mecca and sacrificed a sheep at every lodging station for my fellow pilgrims. Later on when I had a chance of seeing Imam al-Sadiq [a], he said to me: 'woe be upon you Husayn! Why did you hurt the believers and make them feel insulted?' I said: 'I seek Allah's shelter from doing such a thing.' He said: 'I heard that you sacrificed a sheep at each lodging stations for your fellow companions.' I said: 'O' my master! By Allah, in this act I don't have any other intention except seeking Allah's pleasure.'

"He said: 'Did not you realize that perhaps among them there might have been others who would have liked to do the same thing, but since they do not have the financial strength to do such a thing, considered themselves as wretched and insulted?' I said: 'O' son of the Holy Prophet [s] salutation and greetings of Allah be upon you! I seek Allah's pardon, and would never indulge again in such an act.'"

Here, we would overlook from mentioning about plenty of fascinating traditions dealing with this matter, and limiting our discussion to only few above–mentioned narrations.

5.11. Raising Hands Upward in Prayer

To raise hands upward during prayer is another etiquette and code of the prayer, and it is narrated that when the Holy Prophet [s] stood up for prayer and wants he stretched his hands forward exactly the way the poor and destitute stretch their hands forward for receiving food etc.

In this regard when Imam al-Sadiq [a] was questioned, he replied:

- 1. Whenever you seek Allah's refuge, stand facing towards Mecca (*Qiblah*) while the palms of the hands should also be facing (*Qiblah*).
- 2. When you beseech Allah make distance between your fingers while holding your palms towards the heaven.
- 3. When you cut off hopes from everybody and put all your hopes towards Him, you must hold your forefinger pointing towards Him.
- 4. In the state of supplication raise your hands to the level of your head.
- 5. And while crying and shedding tears because of fear of Allah's wrath and punishment, should shake your forefinger.

Raising hands upwards is the etiquette of prayer in sitting and standing position, but occasionally supplication in the state of prostration possesses more merit, part of the prayer should be recited during prostration. Let us describe the state of prostration, briefly.

5.12. Prostration and its Reality

Prostration, in its outwardly form and in true manifestation is the most supreme state and spiritual position for a human being, i.e., the position of annihilation in Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), as it has been mentioned in the traditions:

"A human being in the state of prostration is nearer to Allah than in any other state."

Earlier, we have mentioned about the Holy Prophet's [s] recommendation for prolonged prostration for everybody. Prostration and especially prolonged prostration is the most important and most elegant state of servanthood, and it is because of this reason that in each prayer unit, it is performed twice, whilst other actions are performed only once. And it is from this consideration that about the prolonged prostration of Ahlul Bait [a] and their special Shi^lites a lot of things have been narrated, e.g., Imam al–Sajjad [a]2, sometimes has recited the following prayer in prostration for one thousand times.

"In reality there is no god but Allah."

Also about Imam Kadhim [a]3 and some of his companions it has been narrated that sometimes their prostration prolonged from the day-break till the noon prayer.

During my stay at Najaf al-Ashraf4 for religious education there was a learned Sheikh who was the leader and shelter for pious and mystics. I asked him to tell me the most superior deed which he himself has tried and which is most effective and helpful for a gnostic's spiritual journey. He recommended for me two things:

Firstly: performing a prolonged prostration and reciting the following invocation during each day and night:

"There is no god save Thee Be Thou Glorified. Lo! I have been a wrong doer."

- Holy Qur'an (21:87).

And the aim and intention of this invocation should be that:

'O' Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted)! My soul is imprisoned in this worldly prison and has been bonded in the chains of passions and carnal desires; with my indecent behavior, I have chained and imprisoned my own self; and I never say this unjust statement, that you have done this to me, that you have entangled me into this prison and bondage. Never! You are too Glorious and inviolable for such statements, and it is I who has inflicted upon me such calamity, I have oppressed myself with my own hands.'

That noble saint recommended this prostration to all of his friends, and they practised this recommendation by reciting the above–mentioned invocation in the prostration. Some of them recited one thousand times, some of them even recited a little more or less, and some of them three thousand times and discovered the constructive effects in their own lives.

5.13. Having a Ring in the Hand

Another etiquette of prayer is to put a ring of Turquoise (Firozeh) Red-chalcedony (Aqiq) in the fingers; it has been reported that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted) has said:

"I feel ashamed to reject the supplication of a supplicant having a ring of Turquoise or Red Chalcedony upon his fingers."

Also Imam al-Sadiq [a] has narrated:

"A hand with a Turquoise or Red-chalcedony ring raised in prayer is dearer before Allah than any other hand."

Importance of the Ring

Here it would be essential to mention an important point about putting on a ring; that it is very unlikely that a human being will ever be immune from commitment of sins and transgressions, therefore, it is prudent that in order to compensate for those committed sins, one should engage himself continuously into performance of some of the worship and supplications, and putting ring upon the finger is one of them.

5.14. Paying Alms and Charity

The paying of alms is another etiquette and manner of prayer, which has been emphasized a lot, in

plenty of Islamic traditions; it is desirable that a supplicant should never forget about it. The following has been narrated in a tradition:

"With payment of alms beseech Him for your own sustenance."

5.15. Suitable Timings

It is appropriate that a supplicant should pay special attention about the timings of his prayer. Following are some of the most suitable timings for supplications:

A. Friday Day and Night

It has been narrated from Imam al-Baqir [a]:5

"Every Thursday night till the end of Friday, Allah calls his believing servants from the Upper Heavens, inviting them towards Himself and announces: 'Is there any believing servant who before the day breaks asks forgiveness for his sins and I forgive him, is there any one who seeks anything from me and I grant his requirements, is there a believing servant, who cries for Me, and I respond?"

Also, it has been narrated:

"Allah delays the grant of a supplicant's prayer and fulfilment of his needs until Friday."

Also, it has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s]:

"The day of Friday is the most superior and exalted among all the days in the sight of Allah, even superior than the days of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha. He continued and said: 'there is a special particular hour on Friday, that at that time there is no one who desires anything permissible and proper, but Allah grants his requirements."

The Holy Prophet [s] continued: "During Friday there are two hours which possess special merits; firstly, the hour when the Imam of the Friday congregational–prayer finishes his sermon until the lines of congregational–prayer get readied for the prayer, and the other hour is the end of the day."

- B. The noon (*dhor*) and afternoon (*asr*) of Wednesday, especially, for prayer and cursing of infidels.
- C. During night (*isha*) a), it has been narrated that such opportunity and preference were not given to the past nations.
- D. The first hour of the first half of the Night, it has been narrated from Imam al-Sadiq [a]:

"There is a particular hour during, the night, in which if a believer would offer the prayer, it is impossible but it would be accepted (by Allah). He was asked: 'which hour is it?' The first hour of the first half of the night', replied the Imam"

Also, it has been narrated from the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a]:

"It was at this hour that Prophet David [a] went out to fight against Goliath." Also he said: "Whoever prays during this hour, his prayer is granted but"

E. End portion of night till the dawn or the last one third of the night.

It has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s]:

"Whenever the end portion of night arrives Allah looking at his servants says: 'Is there any supplicant so that I could grant his prayer? Is there any needy so that may I fulfil his needs? Is there any repentant so that I there could accept his repentance? Is there anyone offering apology so that I could accept it?"

In another tradition it has been narrated that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted) says:

"O' righteous ones strive and o' sinners and transgressors stop doing it."

Also it has been narrated:

"Whoever sleeps in that portion of the night till the dawn, Satan urinates in his ears."

Response of Sayyid Ibn Tawus to Divine Proclamation

The most celebrated learned scholar and jurisprudent Sayyid Ibn Tawus (R.A.) who in the words of my own teacher – holds the highest rank in the community after the Sinless Imams [a] and no one else could be compared to him – has responded to this divine invitation with most elegant and sublime themes and sentences. And it would be most desirable if the wayfarer towards the spiritual journey, during this hour of the night should recite those sentences and contents from the book Uddat al–Da^li, in response to that divine proclamation.

Another Important Point From Sayyid Ibn Tawus

It must be mentioned that this pious tradition of responding to divine proclamation, for the first time was established by Ibn Tawus, similarly he was the pioneer of celebrating the first day of his becoming obliged for religious duties as the Day of Feast (Jashn al–Taklif) for thanking Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because of bestowing upon him this distinction (i.e., to perform religious obligations). And it was not heard that before him anyone has done so, therefore, in truth both of the above–mentioned initiatives are indicative of his sagacity, great spirit, and lively mind.

F. At the breaking of dawn, the duration between the real and false day-break, in my opinion this is the best time especially for prayer of sustenance.

G. From dawn till sunrise.

- H. The Night of Power (Qadr), especially the night of twenty-third of the Holy Month of Ramadhan.
- I. The Nights of Awakening (*Shab al–Ahya*), i.e., the first night of the Holy Month of Rajab, the 15th night of the Holy Month of Sha'ban, the night of Eid–ul–Fitr and the night of Eid ul–Adha.
- J. The Days of Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha and the Day of 'Araf'a.6
- K. After finishing the daily mandatory prayers, the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a] has quoted from the Holy Prophet [s]:

"Whoever, after offering daily mandatory prayers supplicates - his supplications are granted."

Ibn Faham says:

I saw the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali, in my dream and asked him about this tradition, he replied that it is correct, and said after the mandatory prayer put your head in prostration and recite:

"O' Allah! By the one who has reported this tradition, by the one who has quoted this tradition from its narrator, send salutations upon all of them and grant my such and such needs."

It has been reported from Imam al-Sadiq [a]:

"Allah has made daily prayers mandatory upon you at times most liked by Him. You too should beseech Him for fulfilment of your needs at those times."

There are traditions regarding beseeching Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), after performance of recommended (*nafilah*) prayers and other recommended deeds.

L. During blowing wind, rain fall, at the day's end, when shadow disappears, and when the first drop of the blood of a martyr is spilled; during all of the above incidents the Gates of the Heaven are opened and the background for the grant of prayer is materialized.

5.16. Suitable Place

Selection of suitable place like the *Raas al–Husayn* (the place where the head of Imam al–Husayn [a]7 is buried), or any other sacred place is another etiquette and manner of supplication, which has been mentioned in some of the traditions; supplication at such places undoubtedly possesses more distinction and is more nearer to be granted.

5.17. Important Thing About the Prayer

It will be sufficient to limit the description about the etiquette and codes of supplication to whatever already has been explained above, with the reminder that what constitute the most important thing in supplication are its esoteric codes and etiquette. Therefore, it is up to the supplicant that he should mobilize his best endeavours for their utilization, keeping in mind that all the profit and loss, good and evil lie in Allah's hand. He should never forget that all his good and welfare rest only in Allah's guardianship, nearness, and pleasure.

Therefore from these considerations in his supplications, he should not think anything, or ask Allah anything, other than these, or whatever contains their background; that a true believer even likes Allah's bounties only from this consideration that he considers them from Him, rather in bounties too does8 not see anything except their relationship with Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). It is because of this reason that all his existence, self, actions, and spirit became indifferent from world and worldliness and is continuously engaged in praise, adoration, and supplications.

Of course, being so is not easy and such state is not achieved without going through harsh rigorous asceticism, and only a small number of favourite gnostics have been able to attain such grace; but others even the good ones and the companions of right-hand (*Ashab ul-yamin*) look, towards the means (*Musabeb al-Asbaab*).

And in their prayers instead of asking only Him, His-nearness, and His-pleasure present other requests and other wants. Therefore, it is for us that if we are not in the category of those special favourite gnostics who don't ask Him anything except Him, and do not ask anything from the beloved except the beloved himself, at least, together with worldly requests, we must be seech Him for bestowing upon us His pleasure and nearness.

And if we are not lucky to have access to such grace at least we must ask him for forgiveness and Paradise together with our worldly deeds. May we be among those whose prayer is:

"Our Lord! Give unto us in the world that which is good and in the Hereafter which is good."

- Holy Qur'an (2:201)

And if we cannot ask this continuously in all the prayers, at least we must ask this in some of the prayers.

Apart from this, what is most important in prayer is humility, earthiness, humbleness, and shedding tears, and it is up to the supplicant that in addition to the heart-brokenness and heart's humility, should not forget the exoteric manifestations of prayer such as: sitting upon dirt, putting dirt upon the face, putting head upon the dirt, opening the head and hairs, putting hands around the neck (like the captives), pleading with tongue in a sweet pleasing manner, begging, and utilizing the most appropriate phrases and sentences relevant to your own needs and His Splendour and Majesty.

1. Group-prayer may seems in contradiction with whatever has been explained earlier about praying in secrecy. Some of the prayers and wants require isolation and privacy and for them congregation and assembly might be harmful, but on the other hand prayers for asking immunity from common disasters should be offered in a group as congregation prayers [Author].

- 2. Here it should be understood that the conditions of Imam al-Sajjad [a] after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn [a] were such that he was mostly confined inside his home. Similarly Imam al-Kadhim [a] was imprisoned by the Abbaside Caliph Harun ar-Rashid, where he remained until his martyrdom. [Tr]
- <u>3.</u> Imam al-Kadhim [a]: The son of the sixth Imam, he was contemporary with such Abbaside caliphs as al-Mansur and Harun al-Rashid. He lived most of his life in Madina with severe restrictions placed upon him and finally died in a prison in Baghdad. After him, the Imams were often not able to live in their traditional home of Madina, but were forced to remain near the caliph in Baghdad or Samara. He is buried in Kadhimayn in Iraq [Tr].
- 4. Najaf al-Ashraf: is the tomb of Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a] in Iraq, which used to be main center of learning in the Shi'i world before the restrictions and pressures placed on the Shi'i scholars of Najaf by the Bathist regime of Baghdad. The Bathist persecution of Najaf reached a high point in May, 1969, when a number of scholars ('ulama) were arrested and tortured, and religious endowments were confiscated [Tr].
- 5. Imam al-Baqir [a]: (57/675–114/372), the son of the fourth imam, he was present at Karbala at a young age. Because of changing political and religious conditions, among them the general revulsion following the events at Karbala, many people came to Madina to learn the religious and spiritual sciences from him. He trained numerous well known men of religion, and mainly for this reason is the first Imam 'Ali [a] from whom large numbers of traditions are recorded. He is buried in the Baqi Cemetery in Madina [Tr].
- 6. Day of 'Araf'a: The ninth day of the Month of Dhu'l-hijja, when all the pilgrims participating in the Hajj must be present at the plain of `Arafa outside Mecca. For the text of the prayer that Imam Husayn [a] recited on this day, see Sheikh Abbas Qummi, Mafatih al-Jinan, pp.350-369, and for a translation of it, see William C. Chittick's A Shi'ite Anthology (Albany, N.Y., 1980), pp.93-113 [Tr].
- 7. Imam Husayn [a]: The younger son of the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a] and Fatimah al–Zahra [a] the daughter of the Holy Prophet [s] Fatimah al–Zahra was born in Madina on Thursday 3rd Sha'ban 4 A.H; like his brother he lived most of his life quietly in Madina under the watchful eyes of the Caliph's officials and spies.

When Mu'awiyyah's son Yazid became caliph, he demanded allegiance from Imam al-Husayn [a], who refused to give it. Finally Imam al-Husayn [a] felt it necessary to go into battle against Yazid to protest against the injustices which were being carried out in the name of Islam. He and a small group of followers including most of his immediate family were cruelly massacred at Karbala. The day of his martyrdom is 10th Muharram, 61 A.H. "Ashura has become the most solemn day of the Islamic calendar, marked by processions and universal mourning. He is buried in Karbala in Iraq [Tr].

- 8. The famous Iranian poet Sheikh Sa'di* has composed the following famous verses in Persian: (be jahan khurram az anam ke jahan khurram az ost, asheqam bar hame alam ke hame alam az ost). "I am happy with this world, because, this happiness of world is from Him, I am the lover of this whole world, because, this whole world is from Him." *Sheikh Sa'di: Mushraf-ud-din Masleh bin Abdullah famous as Sheikh Sa'di was a great learned scholar and poet of Iran in the Seventh Century. He was born in a religious family in Shiraz, south-western Iran in 606 A.H. He received his earlier education in Shiraz and then went to Baghdad for higher education. He travelled a lot and isited Syria, Hijaz and North Africa and used to mix socially with the people in those journeys. His famous works are Gulistan and Bostaan. Sa'di's tomb is located in Shiraz and it attracts large numbers of tourists throughout the year [Tr].
- 9. (goyand tamanai az dost bekun Sa'di az dost nakhuam kard juz dost tamannai). "They suggest me, ask something from my beloved, I would never ask anything from my beloved but beloved himself."

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