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A Commentary on Prayer

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This text explains in detail the meaning of Worship and Intention, as well as how different stages of worship are acquired. He then goes on to explain the different actions of Prayer in detail, such as the first Takbir, & the recitation of the Suras

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Publisher’s Foreword

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful

The invaluable legacy of the Household {*Ahl al-Bayt*} of the Prophet (may peace be upon them all), as preserved by their followers, is a comprehensive school of thought that embraces all branches of Islamic knowledge. This school has produced many brilliant scholars who have drawn inspiration from this rich and pure resource.

It has given many scholars to the Muslim *ummah* who, following in the footsteps of Imams of the Prophet’s Household (*‘a*), have done their best to clear up the doubts raised by various creeds and currents within and without Muslim society and to answer their questions. Throughout the past centuries, they have given well-reasoned answers and clarifications concerning these questions and doubts.

To meet the responsibilities assigned to it, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly (ABWA) has embarked on a defence of the sanctity of the Islamic message and its verities, often obscured by the partisans of various sects and creeds as well as by currents hostile to Islam. The Assembly follows in the footsteps of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (*‘a*) and the disciples of their school of thought in its readiness to confront these challenges and tries to be on the frontline in consonance with the demands of every age.

The arguments contained in the works of the scholars belonging to the School of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (*‘a*) are of unique significance. That is because they are based on genuine scholarship and appeal to reason, and avoid prejudice and bias. These arguments address scholars and thinkers in a manner that appeals to healthy minds and wholesome human nature.

To assist the seekers of truth, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly has endeavored to present a new phase of these arguments contained in the studies and translations of the works of contemporary Shi‘ah writers and those who have embraced this sublime school of thought through divine blessing.

The Assembly is also engaged in edition and publication of the valuable works of leading Shi‘ah scholars of earlier ages to assist the seekers of the truth in discovering the truths which the School of the Prophet’s Household (*‘a*) has offered to the entire world.

The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly looks forward to benefit from the opinions of the readers and their suggestions and constructive criticism in this area.

We also invite scholars, translators and other institutions to assist us in propagating the genuine Islamic teachings as preached by the Prophet Muhammad (S).

We beseech God, the Most High, to accept our humble efforts and to enable us to enhance them under the auspices of Imam al-Mahdi, His vicegerent on the earth (may Allah expedite his advent).

We express our gratitude to Hujjat al-Islam wa’l-Muslimin Shaykh Muhsin Qara’ati, the author of the present book, and Mansoor Limba, its translator. We also thank our colleagues who have participated in producing this work, especially the staff of the Translation Office.

Cultural Affairs Department

Ahl al-Bayt (*‘a*) World Assembly

Foreword

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

The Cultural Center of Qur’anic Lessons was established in 1375 AHS (1996) with the aim of compiling, arranging and publishing the written, audio and visual works of Hujjat al-Islam Shaykh Muhsin Qara’ati.

During the many years of its activity, apart from publishing new books by the author, the *Tafsir-e Nur* {Commentary of Light} in particular, this institute has also presented a book in its edited version, which had been published by other publishers.

Among the works of the writer on the subject of prayer is the book, *Tafsir-e Namaz* {A Commentary on Prayer}, which was initially published by the Performance of Prayer Headquarters. Pursuant to the view of the honorable officials at the Headquarters, subsequent editions of the said book were supposed to be published by the Cultural Center of Qur’anic Lessons.

It is necessary to note that this book has been edited and earlier typographical errors have been corrected as far as possible. Nevertheless, we look forward to receiving the views and suggestions of our dear readers who we invite to communicate with us at this address:

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Preface

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful

أَلْحَمْدُ للهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِيْنَ

وَ صَلّى اللهُ عَلىٰ سَيِّدِنَا وَ نَبِيِّنَا مُحَمّدٍ وَ آلِهِ الطّاهِرِيْنَ وَ لَعْنَةُ اللهِ عَلىٰ أَعْدَائِهِمْ أَجْمَعِيْنَ

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and may the blessings of Allah

be upon our Master and Prophet, Muhammad, and his pure progeny, and may the curse of Allah be upon all their enemies.

I was glad to be present at the holy shrine of Imam ar-Rida (*'a*) and to have started writing this booklet, the drafts of which I had prepared earlier, prior to the beginning of the (Iranian) New Year 1374 AHS (which commenced on March 21, 1995).

In line with the efforts made after the {victory of the} Islamic Revolution in establishing the performance of Islamic prayer {*salah*} in schools, universities, military garrisons, and other public places, I also decided—after writing the books, *Partu-ye az Asrar-e Namaz* {Radiance of the Secrets of Prayer}, *Hamrah ba Namaz* {In the Company of Prayer} and *Yeksad va Chahardah Nokteh Darbareh-ye Namaz* {One Hundred and Fourteen Points about Prayer}—to write about a commentary on the recitals {*adhkar*} in prayer such as the *takbir* {recital of *Allahu akbar* at the beginning of the prayer} and the recital of *Surah al-Fatihah* and another *surah*, bowing down {*ruku'*}, prostration {*sujud*}, *tashahhud* and *salam* so that we could understand better what we are uttering to God in this regard, and have a conscious and gnostic involvement in the act of worship.

Before embarking on the subject proper, let us first take a cursory glance at "Worship {*'ibadah*} and Servitude {*'ubudiyyah*}" which is the soul of prayer as well as all other devotional duties so as to better internalize its sublime station in our lives.

Muhsin Qara'ati

Worship {'ibadah} and Servitude {'ubudiyyah}

What is worship {'ibadah}?

Worship {*'ibadah*} is the purpose behind our creation. The Qur'an states:

﴿ وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالإِنْسَ إِلا لِيَعْبُدُون ﴾

"I did not create the jinn and humans except that they may worship Me." 1

If the work we are doing is for the sake of seeking the pleasure of God, then it is an act of worship. It is so even though it may be a business or professional venture, the pursuit of knowledge, marriage, service to people, or anything that is meant to meet our needs or that of society.

That which makes an action an act of worship {*'ibadah*} is the sacred motives behind its performance and in the parlance of the Qur'an, it has the "divine baptism" {*sibghat Allah*}.2

Natural disposition {fitrah} and worship {‘ibadah}

Some of our actions or activities are based on worship {*‘ibadah*} while others are anchored in natural disposition {*fitrah*}. A habit can be meritorious such as sports or not meritorious such as smoking. But if an action was anchored in natural disposition—that is, if it was done based on the natural disposition and pure mold which God has bestowed on the constitution of every human being—then it would always be meritorious.

The merit of natural disposition compared to worship is that time and place, gender and race, and age and condition have no effect on it, and every human being, on account of his being a human, possesses it. An example of this is the affection given to one’s child that is not true only to a particular generation and period rather, it is common for every parent to do so.[3] Issues such as form and style of dress or food are governed by habit and they vary in different times and places. In some regions, a certain thing is a custom while the same is not regarded as such in other places.

Worship and devotion are also among those actions that pertain to the natural disposition of man, and thus, the most ancient, beautiful and durable buildings constructed by man are related to worship such as temples, churches, mosques, and fire-temples.

Of course, many differences can be seen with respect to forms and types of devotion. One difference pertains to the objects of worship extending from stone, wood and idols to the Beloved Lord, and another difference is in the form and style of worship, which varies from dancing and singing to the most profound and subtle litanies {*munajat*} of the *awliya’* {saints} of God.

The objective of the prophets (*‘a*) has not been to create the spirit of devotion in man but rather to reform worship in terms of its object and form.

The large sums of money spent on the construction of churches, synagogues, Hindu temples, and mosques; considering as sacred the national flags and heroes; and praising the excellences and values of individuals and even objects are all manifestations of the spirit of devotion which exists in man.

Even those who do not worship God worship their spouses, children, credentials, ideology, creed, or path and they are ready to move forward along this way even to the extent of sacrificing themselves. Worship has a deep natural root in man although he may be unaware of it, as Mawlawi (ar-Rumi)[4] says:

همچو میل کوداکان با مادران

سرّ میل خود نداند در لبان

Just like the children’s fondness of their mothers,
He regards not the satisfaction of his desire in frankincense.

God, the All-wise, has endowed man with all desires and instincts while also creating outside of man the means to satiate and meet these desires. If man ever becomes thirsty, water is created (to quench it), and if there is hunger, food also exists. If man is endowed with the sexual instinct, spouses have been created for him, and if the sense of smell is created, things to smell have been created too.

Among the profoundest feelings of man are the desire for eternity, love of perfection and the yearning for immortality. A relationship with God and worshipping Him guarantee the fulfillment of these natural inclinations. Prayer and worship are the relationships of man with the Fountainhead of Perfections, familiarity with the Real Beloved, and seeking refuge in the Eternal Power.

The Root of Worship

Who could recognize God with all His perpetual qualities and perfections without resorting to subservience and obeisance to Him? Through stories and historical accounts, the Qur'an expresses the signs of His power and grandeur.

It states that God gave a child to Maryam (Mary) without her having a husband; He split the Nile River for Musa (Moses) (*'a*)5 and drowned Fir'awn (Pharoah) therein; He made the prophets (*'a*) victorious while being empty-handed, against the superpowers of their respective times, and rubbed the nose of the *taghut*s 6 in the ground.7

It is He Who created you out of lifeless clay, and your life and death as well as honor {*'izzah*} and humiliation {*dhillah*} are in His hand. Is there anyone who could perceive his own weakness, impotence, ignorance, and limitation as well as predictable and unpredictable perils and mishaps, but could not sense the need for the Power of Salvation and for him to submit to It?

In various verses, the Qur'an reminds man of his weakness, saying: At the time of birth, you had no awareness of anything; you were utterly in a state of weakness such that after acquiring strength, you shall also be heading toward weakness again.

In every moment, you are under the threat of different types of dangers.

If the movement (both rotation and revolution) of the earth should slow down or should the day stand still, who could expedite its movement and change it?

﴿ قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِمَاءٍ مَعِينٍ ﴾

"Say, 'Tell me, should your water sink down {into the ground}, who will bring you running water?'"8

﴿ لَوْ نَشَاءُ جَعَلْنَاهُ أُجَاجًا فَلَوْلا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴾

“If We wish We can make it (water) bitter. Then why do you not give thanks?”9

﴿ لَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَاهُ حُطَامًا فَظَلْتُمْ تَفَكَّهُونَ ﴾

“If We wish, We surely turn it (plant) into chaff, whereat you are left stunned (or regretful).”10

﴿ إِنْ نَشَأْ نَخْسِفْ بِهِمُ الأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطْ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسَفًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ ﴾

“If We like, We can make the earth swallow them, or let fall on them a fragment from the sky.”11

The Qur’an mentions these and tens of other examples so as to take man out of his negligence, obliterate his pride and invite him toward worship and submissiveness to the Creator.

The profundity of worship

Worship is an act, which we outwardly consider as a type of humility, but it has deeper profundity.
Worship stems from the soul; it springs from gnosis {*ma‘rifah*}; it emanates from cognition; it originates from piety {*taqaddus*}; it radiates from adoration; it derives from admiration; it comes from seeking refuge and assistance; and it arises from the love of the perfections {*kamalat*} of the Worshipped Being {*ma‘bud*}.

Yes, worship is outwardly a simple act, but if it is other than the above, worship will not be entertained by man. Worship means emptying the heart of material things, letting the spirit fly, and allowing the feet to make steps beyond the seeable and hearable things. Worship guarantees the love of man whose politeness in relation to his Lord is sometimes expressed through eulogy and adoration; at other times through glorification {*tasbih*} and sanctification {*taqdis*}; and yet at some other times, through gratitude and gestures of submission.

Indifference toward worship

Hadrat12 ‘Ali (‘*a*) says:

قَرّتْ إذاً عينه إذا قتَدى بعد السنين المتطاولة بالبهيمة الهاملة و السائمة المرعيّة.

“May I get blind if after having passed so many years of my life (and with the possession of all talent, capabilities, facilities, intellect, knowledge, and inspiration), I now turn into an animal in human form!”

Yes, civilization, technology and the progress of new instruments have made life more comfortable, bestowing comfort and welfare as a gift (to us), but does the perfection of man lie in attaining such material comforts?

If this is so, then the animals are more advanced than man in food, clothing, habitation, and the satisfaction of carnal desire!

In terms of food, they eat better, are more comfortable, and have no need of cooking and preparation!

In terms of clothing, they have no need for sewing, washing and ironing!

In terms of carnal desire, they satisfy it without difficulty and predicament.

In procuring a place for habitation, there are so many birds and insects whose technique in making nests and dens astonishes man.

In essence, has this technological advancement brought about progress in our humanness as well?

Have individual and collective corruptions lessened?

Has this comfort also brought tranquility?

In any case, just not placing the hand of man in that of the infallible and just leaders would be an injustice to humanity, if the heart of man is not linked to God, an insult would have been made to the station of humanity.

The pleasure of God as the axis of worship

Just as heavenly bodies and the earth always have a fixed axis though they make diverse rotations and revolutions, worship, with all its various forms and appearances, is also anchored in a fixed axis, which is the pleasure of God. This is in spite of the fact that spatial and temporal as well as individual and collective circumstances determine the type of movement along this axis.

For example, travel makes (a four-cycle {*rak‘ah*}) prayer a two-*rak‘ah* prayer; illness may necessitate changes in the form of the prayer. Yet, the two-*rak‘ah* or shortened prayer is still a prayer and it is based on the axis of remembering God, seeking His pleasure and performing His command:

﴿ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلاةَ لِذِكْرِي ﴾

“And maintain the prayer for My remembrance.”[13]

The spirit of worship

Worship is the nourishment of the soul and the best food is that which is absorbed by the body. Similarly, the best act of worship is that which is internalized by the soul; that is, if it is performed with enthusiasm and presence of heart. Eating too much food is not beneficial. What is important is eating useful food.

The Holy Prophet (S)14 said to Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari:

إِنّ هٰذَا الدّينَ فَاَوْغِل فيهِ بِرفْقٍ وَلا تُبَغِّضُ إِلىٰ نَفْسِك عِبَادَةَ اللهِ.

Indeed this religion is firm. Therefore, act moderately in relation to it (and when you have no spiritual readiness for worship, do not impose it on yourself) so that the worship of Allah would not be detested by you.15

In another *hadith*, we also read that the Holy Prophet (S) said:

طُوبىٰ لِمَنْ عَشِقَ الْعِبادَةَ وَ عانَقَها.

“Blessed is he who loves worship and is always fond of it.”16

Moderation in worship

The spirit of worship and devotion remains alive when man is moderate in its performance. This has been narrated in the books of *hadith* under the heading, *bab al-iqtisad fi’l-‘ibadah* {section on moderation in worship}.17

Man is healthy when there is proportionality in his bodily limbs, and if a certain body member is bigger or smaller than the normal size, it is considered deformed (or defective in general). In spiritual affairs, man should also harmoniously nurture all that is valuable in himself.

It was reported to the Holy Prophet (S) that under the pretext of worship, a group of his *ummah* {community} had abandoned their spouses and children and had secluded themselves in the mosque. The Prophet stated in a loud voice: “This is not my way and method. I myself am living with my spouses and reside in my house. Anyone who acts contrary to this does not belong to me.”18

Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) narrates the story of a Muslim who had a Christian neighbor that embraced Islam. That Muslim had awakened the former Christian during the first dawn (prior to the time for the dawn prayer {*salah as-subh*}), brought him to the mosque and said to him: “Perform your supererogatory night prayers {*tahajjud*} till the time for the dawn prayer and thereafter, engage in supplication {*du‘a’*} till the sunrise.

Then, read the Qur’an up to the time for the noon prayer {*salah az-zuhr*}.” In this manner, the Muslim urged the former Christian to engage in prayer, recital of the Qur’an and supplication day and night. When the new Muslim returned home, he abandoned Islam and did not go to the mosque anymore.19

Yes, such extremism and lack of moderation in worship will drive people away.

The martyred professor, Murtada Mutahhari,20 narrates that ‘Amru ibn al-‘As had two sons. One was a votary of Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) while the other was a supporter of Mu‘awiyah. One day, the Prophet (S) said to the good son of ‘Amru ibn al-‘As (named ‘Abd Allah): “I have heard that you spend your night in worship and your day in fasting.” He said: “Yes, O Messenger of Allah.” The Prophet (S) said: “This way is not acceptable to me.”21

We read in the traditions:

إنّ لِلْقُلُوبِ إقْبالاً وَ إدْباراً.

“Indeed, there is inclination and disinclination in the heart (of man).”22
You have to take advantage of wherever it inclines and leans to. And whenever it is not ready, do not exert pressure on it otherwise it will unconsciously show a negative reaction.

In the Islamic instructions it is mentioned that you have to divide your time into four parts, and allot time for entertainment and enjoyment, for if you do so, you will also have enthusiasm for other activities.23

The Holy Qur’an gives the title of “violators” to the Jews who engaged in work and went fishing during the Sabbath Day:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الّذِينَ اعْتَدَوْا مِنْكُمْ فِي السّبْتِ ﴾

“And certainly you know those of you who violated the Sabbath.”24

In any case, keeping zeal and ardor in worship is a principle which comes into being through moderation.

Management in worship

Management is confined not only to social, political and economic issues. In fact, devotional affairs are also in need of management.

The principles discussed in management are: Planning and work design; selection of an efficient workforce; discipline and supervision; encouragement and control and the like. In the domain of worship, these principles should also be observed in order to engender advancement and perfection.

Prayer has a specific design; it starts with *takbir* {utterance of *Allahu akbar*} and ends with

salam or *taslim* {salutation}. Its number of *rak'ah*s {cycles}, *ruku'* {bowing down} and *sujud* {prostration} is specified. Its time of performance is determined and its direction is toward the *qiblah* {the *Ka'bah* in Mecca}.

The mere design, however, is not enough. Its performance also necessitates the selection of a competent and socially oriented congregational prayer leader {*imam*}. Through good manners, morality, supervision, and enthusiasm, the people encouraged and persuaded to perform prayer and attend the mosque.

Order and arrangement in the lines of the congregation as well as in following the *Imam* should be observed. In any case, it requires perfect management for it to be conducted in the best possible manner.

Worship as a 24-hour pharmacy

Anyone can have communion with God at any time, under any circumstance, and without any prior arrangement and mediation. Although special times such as the time of dawn, sunset on Friday, after the deliverance of the Friday prayer sermons, when it is raining, and the Night of Power {*layla al-qadr*}25 have particular importance for supplication {*du'a'*} and worship {*'ibadah*}, supplication and devotion are not confined to these periods.

Worship, at any rate, is the medicine for negligence, oblivion and disobedience: *"And maintain the prayer for My remembrance."*26 It is the source of tranquility and serenity and the effacer of anxieties and worries—*"Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance!"*27

Worship as the source of tranquility

You know of ruffian *taghut*s, big capitalists, and possessors of knowledge, industry and technology, but do you know anyone among them who has peace of mind and tranquility of heart?

Do Western societies today have peace of mind and tranquility of heart?

Have the possession of power, industry and wealth brought about serenity, friendship, tranquility, and peace of mind?

Yet, worship and obedience to God bring about such a state for the saints of God that under no circumstance whatsoever would they experience anxiety. At this juncture, it is appropriate for me to narrate two recollections of the Great Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini (*q*):28

After the escape of the Shah from Iran, even though his subservient puppet, Shapur Bakhtiyar was ruling, Imam Khomeini decided to return to his country after 14 years in exile. A reporter in the airplane asked him: "What do you feel now?" He replied: "Nothing!"

This is while millions of enthusiastic Iranians were worrying for the safety of the Imam. Having peace of mind, the Imam was busy in the night supererogatory prayers and remembrance of God.

This tranquility was only because of his constant remembrance of Him.

The other recollection, which I heard from the son of the Imam, the late Hajj Sayyid Ahmad Khomeini, is this: “On the day of the Shah’s escape from Iran, tens of reporters and photo journalists from around the world gathered in the house of the Imam in Paris in order to relay his speeches to the world. The Imam stood on a chair and uttered a few statements.

Then, he turned to me and asked: ‘Ahmad, has the time for the noon prayer {*salah az-zuhr*} arrived?’ I said: ‘Yes.’ Without any delay, the Imam concluded his speech and came down from the chair for the performance of prayer at its initial (and best) time. All were perplexed as to what had happened. I said: ‘The Imam performs his prayer on time’.”

What the Imam did in Paris was a lesson he had learned from his leader, Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*). It has been recorded in history that the chief of the group of Sabeans, a group that has been mentioned in the Qur’an,29 was an arrogant and fanatic scholar.

Whenever he would sit down in a dialogue with Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*), he would not surrender and concede until when, during a certain intricate discussion, his mind became so confused that he said: “Now, my heart has softened and I accepted your logic.” At that time, the call to prayer {*adhan*} was recited. Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*) left the assembly in order to pray.

Although the companions of the Imam (*‘a*) insisted that if he continued the discussion for some moments, the chief of the Sabeans and all his followers would become Muslims, he (*‘a*) said: “To perform the prayer at its earliest (and best) time is more important than discussion. If he really deserves it, he can also accept the truth after the prayer. The Sabean scholar, who saw this dignity, decisiveness, obedience and love for the truth in the Imam (*‘a*), became more interested.30

Worship and acquisitions

Worship is a means to acquire divine help and graces.

﴿ وَاعْبُدْ رَبّكَ حَتّى يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ ﴾

“And worship you Lord until certainty (or death) comes to you.”31

Hadrat Musa (Moses) (*‘a*) engaged in worship and litanies for 40 days and nights on the Mount of Tur for the acquisition of the heavenly book, *Tawrah* (Torah). The Holy Prophet of Islam (S) was busy in the performance of acts of worship in the cave of Hira for a long time before the acquisition of divine revelation. It is thus stated in the traditions:

مَنْ اَخْلَصَ الْعِبادَة للهِ اَرْبَعينَ صَباحاً ظَهَرتْ يَنابيعُ الْحِكْمَةَ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ عَلىٰ لِسانِهِ.

“He who sincerely worships Allah for forty days, springs of wisdom shall appear from his heart to his tongue.”32

Yes, sincere worship is an academy that trains in the course of forty days the sage who would acquire wisdom from the divine fountain and share it with others.

The reciprocal effects of faith and worship

Just as faith draws man toward worship, worship is also effective in strengthening faith. Their similitude is that of a root which delivers water and food to the branches, and in turn, the branches transfer heat and light to the root. Yes, whenever worship improves and increases, man's enthusiasm toward the Object of Worship is also enhanced.

The philosophy of worship according to the Qur'an

The Qur'an regards the remembrance of God as the philosophy of prayer:

***"And maintain the prayer for My remembrance**."*[33]

And the remembrance of God is the source of tranquility of the heart:

"Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance!"[34]

And the consequence of tranquility of the heart is soaring to the celestial realm:

"O soul at peace! Return to your Lord!"[35]

In other cases, the Qur'an considers gratitude to God as the reason behind worship:

﴿ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذي خَلَقَكُمْ ﴾

"Worship you Lord, who created you."[36]

﴿ فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هذَا الْبَيْتِ * الَّذي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَ آمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ ﴾

"Let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them {and saved them} from hunger, and secured them from fear."[37]

In some verses, the educational function of prayer has been pointed out:

﴿ إِنَّ الصَّلاةَ تَنْهى عَنِ الْفَحْشاءِ وَ الْمُنْكَرِ ﴾

"Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs."[38]

For the sake of the authenticity or acceptance of prayer, the performer of prayer has no option but to observe the religious precepts as a whole, the observance of which is itself a strong foundation for abstaining from sin and indecency. Yes, anyone who would wear a white garment will naturally not sit on a dirty and polluted ground.
After enjoining prayer, the Qur'an states:

﴿ إِنّ الْحَسَناتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السّيِّئاتِ ﴾

"Indeed good deeds efface misdeeds."39

Thus, prayer is a practical repentance for past sins, and through this verse, God gives hope to the sinner that if he would perform meritorious acts such as prayer and worship, his misdeeds will be erased.

Prayer in the words of Imam'Ali ('a)

Hadrat 'Ali's (*'a*) many references to prayer and the remembrance of God as recorded in *Nahj al-Balaghah*40 have been compiled in a book entitled, *Namaz dar Nahj al-Balagheh* {Prayer in *Nahj al-Balaghah*}. Here, I shall quote a statement of the Imam (*'a*) concerning the philosophy of glorification and the remembrance of God whose most important manifestation is prayer:

اِنّ الله عَزّ وَ جَلّ جَعَلَ الذِّكْرَ جَلاءً لِلْقُلُوبِ تَسْمَعُ بِهِ بَعْدَ الْوَقَرَة وَ تُبْصِرُ بِه بَعْدَ العَشوة.

Certainly, Allah, the Glorified, the Sublime, has made His remembrance the light for hearts which hear with its help despite deafness, see with its help despite blindness and become submissive with its help despite unruliness.41

Then, concerning the blessings of prayer, the Imam (*'a*) said:

قَدْ حَفّتْ بِهم الْمَلائِكة وَ نُزّلتْ عَليهمُ السّكينَة وَ فُتِحَتْ لَهُم اَبْوابَ السّماءِ وَ اُعِدّتْ لَهُم مَقاعِدَ الكِرامات.

The angels have surrounded them (performers of prayer) and peace is showered upon them. The doors of heaven are opened for them and abodes of blessedness, of which He had informed them, have been prepared for them.42
In another sermon, the Imam (*'a*) says:

وَ انّها لَتَحُتُّ الذُّنُوبَ حَتّ الْوَرَق وَ تُطلِقُها اِطْلاقَ الرِّبَق.

“Certainly, prayer removes sins like autumn strips leaves off from trees, and it liberates you from the rope (of sins) tied around your neck.”43

In continuation, he narrates an interesting comparison from the Holy Prophet (S): “Prayer is like a hot spring situated at someone’s door. If he takes a bath in it five times a day, will then any dirt remain on him?”44

In Sermon 196, the Imam (*‘a*) enumerates some of the moral vices such as pride {*kibr*}, disobedience and oppression {*zulm*}, and then he (*‘a*) says: “It is on account of these perils that God has encouraged His believing servants to perform *salah* and *zakah*,45 to fast during the days when it is made obligatory.” Then, concerning the effects of prayer, he (*‘a*) says:

تَسْكيناً لاَطْرافِهم، تَخْشِيعاً لاَبْصارهِم، تَذْليلاً لِنُفُوسِهِمْ تَخْفِيضاً، لِقُلُوبِهم، اِزالةً لِلْخَيْلاء عَنْهُم اِنْ اَوْ حَشَتْهُم الْوَحْشَة آنَسَهُمْ ذِكْرَك.

{This act of worship} gives their (God’s believing servants’) limbs peace and rest, casts fear in their eyes, softens their spirits, cultivates a sense of humility in their hearts and purges them from pride. At the time of fear, anxiety and loneliness, remembrance of You gives them enthusiasm and intimacy.46

Of course, it is obvious that everyone does not receive such benefits from prayer; rather, it is only that group which is enamored by prayer and the remembrance of God. This group will not exchange them for the entire world.

The effects and blessings of servitude and submission

1. Sense of honor and esteem

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (*‘a*) says in his litanies {*munajat*}:

إلٰهي كفٰى بِي عِزّاً أنْ أكُوْنَ لكَ عَبْداً.

“O Lord! It is already enough of an honor for me that I am Your servant.”47

Which honor is more sublime than that man could talk to his Creator and He in turn would listen to the words of man and grant them?!

In this fleeting world, if a person speaks with a scholar or a great man, he feels a sense of

honor because of his presence and the opportunity to be in conversation with him, and that a person who was once a student of a certain distinguished professor also gives him self-esteem.

2. Sense of strength

So long as a child is holding the hand of his strong and kind father, he feels a sense of strength, but if he is alone, he experiences fear and apprehension lest others annoyed him.

A person who is linked to God feels a sense of strength vis-à-vis the superpowers, *taghut*s and arrogant (powers).

3. Sense of dignity

Dignity {*'izzah*} means not to come under the influence of others. In the school {*maktab*} of the prophets {*anbiya'*} (*'a*), all dignity belongs to God just as all power belongs to Him. Thus, the Qur'an criticizes those who incline to other than God, saying: "Do you want dignity from other than God?"48

It is natural that linking with the Absolute Beloved and Eternal Power gives dignity to man, just as words such as "*Allahu akbar*" {Allah is greater} humiliate the *taghut*s in the eyes of man and make him dignified in comparison to them.

So, the Qur'an orders us to seek power and strength from prayer and worship when we face difficulties and adversities:

﴿ وَالصَّلٰوةِ بِالصَّبْرِ وَاسْتَعِينُوا ﴾

"And take recourse in patience and prayer."49

During critical moments, the saints of God also used to strengthen themselves through prayer. On the afternoon of the ninth day of Muharram in Karbala', the army of Yazid made an assault on the camp of Imam al-Husayn (*'a*). The Imam (*'a*) said: "Postpone the battle for one night as I am fond of prayer and I would like to engage in worship tonight till morning."50

The righteous servants of God are not only fond of the obligatory {*wajib*} prayers but also of the recommended {*mustahab*} prayers. The recommended prayer is a sign of fondness for prayer. There are many people who perform the obligatory prayers due to fear of divine wrath for missing them. With respect to the recommended prayer, however, love rather than fear is not the issue.

Yes, anyone who loves somebody likes to talk with him more and does not want to separate from him. How could man claim that he loves God when he has no enthusiasm for speaking with Him?!

Of course, this distaste for prayer and recommended acts is not without reason. In fact, according to the traditions, sins take away the opportunity for the night and dawn supererogatory prayers.51

In any case, the one who does not perform the optional prayers is not worthy of expecting virtues from God, just like someone who is waiting for the advent of the Reformer {*muslih*} (Imam al-Mahdi (*'a*)) while he himself is not reformed or righteous {*salih*}.

The recommended prayers also compensate for the defects and shortcomings of the obligatory prayers.52 A certain person asked the Imam (*'a*): "My heart is not in my prayer and I do not benefit from the blessings of prayer. What should I do?" The Imam (*'a*) said: "After the obligatory prayers, perform the optional prayers as they compensate for the shortcomings of the former and lead to the acceptance of the obligatory prayers."

It is on account of these effects and blessings that the saints of God paid much attention not only to the obligatory prayers but also to the optional prayers, and they used to keep aloof from those things that obstruct and disturb this religious wayfaring and spiritual ascension such as excessive eating, excessive talking, excessive sleeping, eating unlawful or unlawfully earned food, debauchery, and worldly engagements, which keep man away from worship and make prayer heavy for him. As the Qur'an says:

﴿ وَ إِنّها لَكبيرَةٌ إِلاّ عَلَى الْخاشِعينَ ﴾

"And it (prayer) is indeed hard except for the humble."53

4. Training agent

Although prayer is spiritual and religious communion whose aim is the remembrance of God, Islam seeks to implement this spirit (of communion) under the framework of a set of educative programs, and thus, it has set many requirements for it—i.e. requirements for the correctness of the prayer, requirements for its acceptance and requirements for its perfection.

Cleanliness of the body and clothing, facing the *qiblah*, correct recital of the words, permissibility {*mubah*} of the place and clothing of the performer of prayer are some of the factors necessary for the correctness of prayer, which are related to the body of the performer and not his soul.

However, Islam has framed this prayer in this manner so as to give lessons to the Muslims about hygiene, cleanliness, independence, and the observance of the rights of others.

Just like concentration, complete devotion, acceptance of the leadership of the infallible Imams (*'a*) and payment of those financial obligations such as *khums*54 and *zakat* are requirements for the acceptance of prayer, so too are the performance of prayer at its earliest time, in the mosque and in congregation, that the performer of the prayer wears clean garments, applies perfume, brushes his teeth, and observes the order of the lines and the like are among the requirements for the perfection of prayer.

A keen scrutiny of these requisites makes it clear that each one of them plays a key role in training human beings.

Whichever direction we stand in prayer is toward God, as the Qur'an states:

﴿ فَأَيْنَما تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللّهِ ﴾

"So whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allah!"55

However, in order for Muslim society to understand that it must have a single direction and learn the lesson of unity and solidarity, everyone is ordered to face a single direction. But why is that direction toward the *Ka'bah*?

It is because the *Ka'bah* is the first place to have been selected as a place for the worship of mankind:

﴿ إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنّاسِ لَلَّذي بِبَكَّةَ مُبارَكًا وَ هُدًى لِلْعالَمينَ ﴾

"Indeed the first house to be set up for mankind is the one at Bakkah,56 ***blessed and a guidance for all nations."***57

On one hand, the founder and custodians of the *Ka'bah* throughout history have been prophets (*'a*). Thus, standing facing the *Ka'bah* is a sort of ideological solidarity throughout the ages.

On the other hand, the *Ka'bah* is the source of independence. It is because when the Muslims were still facing the Bayt al-Muqaddas, the *qiblah* of the Jews and Christians, the latter taunted the former, saying: "You are standing while facing our *qiblah*; why do you have no independence?" The Qur'an thus states with utmost explicitness:

﴿ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرامِ وَ حَيْثُ ما كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ لِئَلاّ يَكُونَ لِلنّاسِ عَلَيْكُمْ حُجَّةٌ ﴾

"Turn your face toward the Holy Mosque, and wherever you may be, turn your faces toward it, so that the people may have no argument against you."58

In sum, the *Ka'bah* is the source of independence, unity and solidarity, and these are the educative lessons of prayer.

5. Summoning up spirits!

The market for hypnotism and summoning up spirits has flourished nowadays in the world, but our point is not those things. Our point is that we have to summon up our runaway soul toward the Creator through prayer and let this truant pupil be present in class. One of the blessings of prayer is the summoning up of the rebellious and runaway soul to the Presence of God.

In the *Munajat ash-Shakkin*, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (*'a*) complains in the Presence of God

against his own soul, saying: “O God! I am complaining to You against a soul which is inclined toward carnal desires and is escaping from the truth.”

It is this soul that considers sin to be sweet and light to man, justifying it thus: “You will repent afterward anyway,” or “Others have also done these deeds.” The soul is like a wanton child. If his father is not watchful of him, he will separate from his father and go wherever he wants, and in every moment he is susceptible to every kind of danger.

The best way of controlling this rebellious soul is for man to summon it several times a day to the Presence of God and thereby remove its negligence and save it from drowning in the quagmire of material things.

6. Guardianship {wilayah} over creation!

Among the blessings of prayer and worship is that gradually man acquires dominance over the universe.

First step: The Qur’an says:

﴿ إِنْ تَتّقُوا اللّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقانًا﴾

“If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion59 ***for you.”***60

In another place, it states:

﴿ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ ﴾

“And give you a light to walk by.”61

So, God-wariness {*taqwa*}—the most important aspect of which is servitude to God and prayer—is a step toward the acquisition of light {*nur*} and insight {*basirah*}.

Second step: Those who accept divine guidance and are within the orbit of truth, God will enhance the guidance they possess:

﴿ وَ الّذينَ اهْتَدَوْا زادَهُمْ هُدًى ﴾

“As for those who are {rightly} guided, He enhances their guidance.”62

Hence, their light and guidance shall not cease; rather, on account of the submission and servitude, they are always in a state of advancement and proximity {*qurb*} (to God), and the radiance of their existence shines brighter.

Third step: Since these individuals are exerting effort in the way of God, God will show them many paths leading toward perfection:

﴿ وَ الّذينَ جاهَدُوا فينا لَنَهْدِيَنّهُمْ سُبُلَنا ﴾

"As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways."63

Fourth step: Whenever Satan makes an insinuation to them, they will immediately be reminded and ask forgiveness from Allah:

﴿ إذا مَسّهُمْ طائِفٌ مِنَ الشّيْطان تَذَكّرُوا ﴾

"When those who are God-wary are touched by a visitation (or insinuation) of Satan, they remember {Allah}."64

Fifth step: Prayer is the best means for self-building and keeping aloof from indecency and evil:

﴿ إنّ الصّلاةَ تَنْهى عَنِ الْفَحْشاءِ وَ الْمُنْكر ﴾

"Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs."65

After following these steps, man will acquire dominance over his soul. He harnesses it and will not be entangled by insinuations and desires. As a matter of fact, whenever the pressure of inner insinuation {*waswasah*} and outer *taghut* is intensified, he will again seek assistance through prayer and patience:

﴿ وَالصّلوٰةِ بِالصّبْر وَاسْتَعِينُوا ﴾

"And take recourse in patience and prayer."66

Sixth step: God-wary {*muttaqi*} individuals, whose existence is illuminated with the divine light move a step forward with every prayer, for prayer is not repetition; it is an ascension. The stairs of a ladder are all similar, but every stair brings man to a higher stage. It is like someone who digs a well. Apparently, he is doing a repetitive task and is always digging, but in reality, with every strike that he makes, his well is becoming deeper.

The *rak'ah*s {cycles} of prayer are apparently repetitive, but in reality, they are stairs in climbing the ladder of perfection and for deepening gnosis {*ma'rifah*} and faith {*iman*}.

The performer of prayer does not allow his life to become a grazing land for Satan or to be dominated by him. In the *Du‘a’ Makarim al-Akhlaq*, Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (*‘a*) asks this from God: “O Lord! If my life is a meadow for Satan, terminate it!”

Satan not only gives illusion and fancy but also crushes the soul of man under his feet and makes man negligent of the truth and the reality.

Yes, the Holy Prophet (S) was awake even when he was asleep whereas we are asleep while awake and even while we are praying our souls are the victims of Satan and the imagination. As Mawlawi says:

گفت پیغمبر که عَینایَ ینام

لا ینام القلب عن ربّ الانام

چشم تو بیدار و دل رفته به خواب

چشم من خفته، دلم در فتح باب

The Prophet said, “My two eyes are asleep while my heart doesn’t sleep and forget the Lord of the creatures.

Your eyes are awake and the heart fell asleep. My eyes are asleep while my heart is looking for the opening door.”

In another place, he says:

گفت پیغمبر که دل، همچون پری است

در بیابانی اسیر صَرصری است

باد، پَر را هر طرف رانَد گزاف

گه چپ و گه راست با صد اختلاف

The Prophet said that the heart is like a feather, which is captured in a desert by a wind.

The wind shoots away the feather to every corner vainly. Sometimes to the left and sometimes to the right with a hundred difference.

If this soul is not bridled, every moment it can draw man toward corruption:

﴿ إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلاَّ ما رَحِمَ رَبِّي ﴾

"For the {carnal} soul indeed prompts {men} to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy."67

For this reason, the Qur'an regards paradise as exclusive for those who have no desire for dominance and corruption not only in words but also in the heart.68 And for those who prevent their souls from following their desires, paradise shall be their abode.69

The saints of God are the rulers {*hukama'*} over their minds and thoughts and not condemned {*mahkumin*} by them. As a result of their servitude to God, they have such guardianship {*wilayah*} and dominance {*sultah*} over their souls that they do not allow even an insinuation {*waswasah*} to enter their hearts.

من چو مرغ اوجم، اندیشه مگس

کی بود بر من مگس را دسترس

I am like a bird, He is like Jamshid, and the thought over the fly.
When can I have access over the fly?

After man attains light, cognition and awareness; controls the soul through gnostic, zealous and conscious prayers; sets his soul toward the pleasure of God; and acquires guardianship and dominance over his soul, he will also acquire dominance over creation. His supplications will be effective and he can perform divine works.

The miracles of the prophets (*'a*) are the same authority over creation and mastery over nature, which they performed with divine permission.
They are thus saying:

العُبوديّةُ جُوهِرة كُنهها الرّبوبيّة.

"Servitude {*'ubudiyyah*} is a gem that brings about lordship {*rububiyyah*}."
It refers to the dominance over the creation which results from servitude to God.

It is recorded in the *hadith* that God says:
"Through optional and recommended acts, man gets nearer to Me step by step until such a time that he becomes My beloved {*mahbub*} and once he attains this station, I will become his eyes, ears, tongue, and hand, and all his actions will become divine and purposeful. He will reach a point where like Hadrat Ibrahim (Abraham) (*'a*), he will say:

﴿ إِنّ صَلاتي وَ نُسُكي وَ مَحْيايَ وَ مَماتي لِلّهِ رَبِّ الْعالَمينَ ﴾

"Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of Allah, the Lord of all the worlds."70

The visage of prayer

Whatever can be said and written about prayer would still not be enough to fully describe it. How could it be possible to express in a few words the pillar of religion, the banner of Islam, the reminiscence of religions and prophets, and the pivot of the acceptance of all deeds?

• Prayer is the program for every morning and evening. In the morning the first obligatory word is prayer and in the evening the last obligation is prayer. So, the beginning and the conduct of every day is through remembrance and for the sake of God.

• Prayer is the secret of the one who—wherever he is and whoever he is, whether traveling or not, on the ground or in the air, whether in poverty or in affluence—is subservient to Him and not to other than Him.

• Prayer is the practical ideology of the Muslim in which he expresses his beliefs, ideas, aspirations, and models.

• Prayer means strengthening values and preventing the disintegration of the personality of individuals and members of the society in the same way that if the materials of a building are weak, the building will collapse.

• The call to prayer {*adhan*} is the clarion of monotheism {*tawhid*}, which summons the scattered soldiers of Islam in a single line and under a single banner, and places them behind a just leader {*imam*}.

• The *imam* of the congregation {*jama‘ah*} is one person so as to serve as a clue that the *imam* of the society {*jami‘ah*} should also be one person so as to have centralization in the conduct of affairs.

• The *imam* of the congregation is supposed to attend to the weakest among the people, and this is a lesson that in decision-making, the deprived class of the society must be attended to. While praying, when the Messenger of Allah (S) heard the cry of a child, he hurriedly performed the prayer so that in case the mother of the child had ever participated in prayer, she could quickly attend to the needs of her child![71]

• The first command after the creation of man was the command for prostration addressed to the angels: “Prostrate before Adam (Adam)!”[72]

• The first place on earth that surfaced and became dry was the site of worship (Mecca and the *Ka‘bah*).[73]

• The first task done by the Messenger of Allah (S) after his emigration {*hijrah*} to Medina was the construction of a mosque.

• Prayer is both the enjoinment of what is good {*amr bi’l-ma‘ruf*} and the forbiddance of what is evil {*nahyi ‘ani’l-munkar*}. We say every day in the *adhan* and *iqamah*: “Come to prayer; come to (the means of) success; come to the best of deeds.” That is, of all affairs, the best deed is prayer. Also, prayer keeps man away from corruption and indecency:

﴿ إِنَّ الصَّلاةَ تَنْهى عَنِ الْفَحْشاءِ وَ الْمُنْكَرِ ﴾

“Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs.”[74]

• Prayer consists of movements which have emanated from consciousness and cognition. It is through the cognition of God that by His order, for His sake and because of zeal for Him, we stand in prayer, and thus, the Qur’an has prohibited us from praying while in a state of drunkenness[75] and indolence[76] so that whatever we recite in prayer must be with consciousness and attention.

• Prayer gives awareness. The *Jum‘ah* prayer is held every Friday of the week and prior to it two sermons {*khutbah*s} are delivered. These two sermons are made in lieu of two *rak‘ah*s of prayer, and in a sense, are part of the prayer. According to Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*), the sermons must inform the people of all the issues in the world.[77] Listening to the sermons and then praying means being informed and then praying.

• Prayer means exit from one’s self and soaring toward God. The Qur’an says in this regard:

﴿ وَ مَنْ يَخْرُجْ مِنْ بَيْتِهِ مُهاجِرًا إِلَى اللّهِ وَ رَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكْهُ الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللّهِ ﴾

“And whoever leaves his home migrating toward Allah and His Apostle, and is then overtaken by death, his reward shall certainly fall on Allah.”78

Imam Khomeini says:
Migration {*hijrah*} from the abode of the heart to God is one of the manifestations of this verse. Migration from self-admiration, self-centeredness and self-conceit toward worship of God, love of God and God-wariness is the greatest of migrations.79

• Prayer is in the rank {*manzilah*} of the Greatest Name of Allah {*ism al-a‘zam*}, nay it is the Great Name of Allah itself!

• In prayer, the honor {*‘izzah*} of the Lord {*rabb*} and the lowliness {*dhillah*} of the servant {*‘abd*} is manifested, and this station is already sublime.

• Prayer is the banner of Islam.

Just as a banner is a symbol, prayer is the symbol and the emblem of Islam. Just as a flag is respected, and insulting it is tantamount to insulting a nation and country, insulting and neglecting prayer also means insulting and neglecting the religion as a whole. Just as hoisting the flag is a sign of political vitality and military prowess, performance of prayer is also the same.

Prayer and the Qur’an

In many cases, the Qur’an and prayer have been mentioned together such as in this verse:

﴿ يَتْلُونَ كِتابَ اللّهِ وَ أَقامُوا الصّلاةَ ﴾

“Indeed those who recite the Book of Allah and maintain the prayer.”80

And in another place, it states:

﴿ وَ الّذينَ يُمَسِّكُونَ بِالْكِتابِ وَ أَقامُوا الصّلاةَ ﴾

“As for those who hold fast to the Book and maintain the prayer.”81

Sometimes, one attribute has been mentioned for prayer and the Qur’an, just as the word ‘remembrance’ {*dhikr*} has also been mentioned for the Qur’an:

﴿ إِنّا نَحْنُ نَزّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴾

“Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it.”82

In addition, the philosophy of prayer has also been mentioned as ‘remembrance’:

﴿ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي ﴾

“And maintain the prayer for My remembrance.”83

What is interesting is that sometimes instead of the word ‘prayer’ {*salah*}, the word ‘recital’ {*qur’an*} has been mentioned, such as in this verse:

﴿ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا ﴾

“Indeed the dawn recital is attended {by angels}.”84

It is said that what is meant by the ‘dawn recital’ {*qur’an al-fajr*} is the dawn prayer {*salah as-subh*}.

Apart from the fact that the recital of the Qur’an in the form of *Surah al-Fatihah* and another *surah* is one of the obligatory parts of the prayer, prayer is discussed in most *surah*s {*suwar*} of the Qur’an including both the longest *surah* (*Surah al-Baqarah,* n. 2) and the shortest *surah* (*Surah al-Kawthar,* n. 108).

Prayer and qisas!

The law on *qisas*85 is discussed not only in Islam but in all divine religions according to which the punishment for a person who cuts somebody’s ear is to cut his ear and the penalty of one who breaks somebody’s tooth is to break his tooth as well, in order to implement justice. One of the cases of *qisas* is that the hand of a thief must be amputated. But only four fingers are to be amputated and the palm of his hand should not be included; for, the Qur’an says:

﴿ وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا ﴾

“The places of worship belong to Allah, so do not invoke anyone along with Allah.”86

This is because at the time of prostration {*sujud*} in prayer, he has to put the palm of his hand on the ground. Thus, concerning the penalty for theft, the issue of prayer and prostration must be taken into account and the palm of his hand should not be amputated, so even a thief’s right of worship is respected!

Worship {‘ibadah} and guardianship {wilayah}

Worship {*‘ibadah*} has value when it is not superficial. In fact, it should be associated with cognizance of the heavenly leader and his guardianship {*wilayah*} and associated with humility and its particular disciplines.

Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) was encumbered by a group of holier-than-thou prayer performers who were known in history under the labels, *Mariqun* and *Khawarij*.87 They were those whose foreheads were calloused on account of long and frequent prostrations in prayer. Yet, they revolted against ‘Ali (*‘a*) and unsheathed their swords against him. We also read in the *hadith*s that when the Imam of the Time (*‘a*) would appear, a group of mosques will act against him.

Do not imagine that those who had gone to Karbala’ to kill Imam al-Husayn (*‘a*) were all neglectors of prayer {*tarik as-salah*}. In fact, they used to even attend congregational prayers! Mu‘awiyah and Yazid themselves were mosque-goers!

Yes, worship, which is associated with ignorance {*jahalah*}, regards killing the most devoted worshipper {*‘abid*} among mankind as the greatest form of worship, and goes to kill ‘Ali (*‘a*) on the Night of Power {*laylah al-qadr*} with the aim of seeking nearness to Allah!

Not only prayer but in fact all other forms of worship should be associated with cognizance of the leader of truth and obedience to him. It has been stated in the traditions that God has made *Hajj* obligatory so that the people could gather around His House and establish communication with the infallible Imams (*‘a*) at this center of gathering.

Nowadays, however, millions of people gather around the *Ka‘bah* but because they have no divine leader they have been splintered, and in spite of having this center of unity and economic leverage, they still suffer setbacks from a handful of Jews!

Yes, Islam is a totality which is indivisible. Prayer without the acknowledgment of guardianship {*wilayah*} is unacceptable. Prayer without the payment of *zakah* is invalid. In the same manner, alms-giving without the performance of prayer is nullified.

The precepts of Islam are like limbs of a body none of which can replace the other. The eye can neither assume the function of the ear nor can the ear assume the function of the hand. In Islam also, the performance of prayer cannot replace the payment of *zakat*. In the same manner, neither of the two can be substituted for *jihad* and struggle in the way of God. Rather, the aggregate of them is Islam.

Prayer and leadership

If the prayer is only conducted by the divine leaders, the tentacles of oppression and the *taghut* would be shattered. The *‘Id* {feast} prayer of Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*) commenced with such grandeur and majesty that the oppressive government itself trembled and understood that if they allowed this prayer to be completed, the ‘Abbasid rule would also come to an end. Thus, Ma’mun ordered the Imam (*‘a*) to be taken into custody along the way.

The reason why the prayers of Muslims today are ineffective is that only a part of the injunctions of the Qur’an are practiced while other parts are forgotten. In this regard, the Qur’an states:

﴿ وَ أَقيمُوا الصّلاةَ وَ آتُوا الزّكاةَ وَ أَطيعُوا الرّسُولَ ﴾

“Maintain the prayer and give the zakat, and obey the Apostle.”88

Today, however, some people perform prayers but do not give *zakah*. They are also those who say their prayers and give *zakah* but accept the guardianship {*wilayah*} of infidels {*kuffar*}. In other words, they have faith in God but they do not deny the *taghut*. This is defective faith.
God says:

﴿ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطّاغُوتِ وَ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللّهِ فقد استَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقى ﴾

“So one who disavows the Rebels {taghut} and has faith in Allah has held fast to the firmest handle.”89

That is, both the disavowal of the *taghut* and faith in God are required. Yet, nowadays Muslims have forgotten the declaration of disavowal of the *taghut*s and infidels. So, concerning those who turn to the *taghut*, the Qur’an states:

﴿ أَ لَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الّذينَ يَزْعُمُونَ أَنّهُمْ آمَنُوا ﴾

“Have you not regarded those who claim that they believe…?”90

The degrees of worship {‘ibadah}

If we ask a child why he loves his father and mother, he will reply that it is because they buy him candies, clothes and shoes! But if we ask an adolescent why he loves his parents, he will say: “It is because my parents are the symbol of my identity and personality, and they are kind and sympathetic to me.”

As the child grows older, fondness and appreciation for parents increases and he no longer thinks about shoes and such things. Many children regard rendering services to their parents as a means to their own perfection and nearness {*qurb*} to Allah, and they think beyond material things.

Worship and devotion to God is also like that. Each person worships God for a particular reason. Worship has various stages:

First step: Some people worship God to express gratitude to Him for His graces. In addressing the common people, the Qur’an states:

﴿ فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ ⋆ الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ ﴾

"Let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them {and saved them} from hunger, and secured them from fear."[91]

The first step (stage or degree) of worship, which we shall call 'worship for gratitude', is exactly like the child's love for his parents—it is because of their purchase of candies, clothes and shoes that he loves them!

Second step: At this stage, man worships God due to the effects and blessings of worship and they pay attention to the spiritual and religious effects of prayer. As the Qur'an discloses:

﴿ إِنَّ الصَّلاةَ تَنْهى عَنِ الْفَحْشاءِ وَ الْمُنْكَرِ ﴾

"Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs."[92]

This stage of worship which we call 'worship for advancement' is similar to the love of the adolescent for his parents—he pays respect to them as they have been his tutors and trainers and have protected him from deviations and dangers.
Third step: This is a higher step or stage of worship. God says to Hadrat Musa (Moses) (*'a*):

﴿ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلاةَ لِذِكْرِي ﴾

"And maintain the prayer for My remembrance."[93]

Hadrat Musa (*'a*) performs prayer not because of food and water; it is not because of protection from corruption and wrongdoings either; for, he was essentially far from gluttony and misdeeds. He is among the great prophets {*ulu'l-'azm*},[94] and he says his prayer for the sake of love for God and remembrance of Him. For the saints of God, love for God is the best reason for worship.

Yes, there are children who sit in the front of a religious assembly {*majlis*} along with the adults so that they would be better entertained or served with refreshments better! But there are also individuals who sit along with the adults so as to receive more spiritual benefit from them and they are concerned with entertainment or refreshments. For them, this very fondness of the scholars is a value in itself.

Fourth step: This stage, which is the highest and the most superior stage of worship, is not for gratitude, advancement and enthusiasm; rather, it is for the sake of nearness {*qurb*}—nearness to God.

We have four verses in the Qur’an which make the performance of prostration {*sujud*} incumbent on the one who recites any of them. One of these verses mentions the same issue of nearness {*qurb*} to Allah through worship. The Qur’an states:

﴿ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَربْ ﴾

“But prostrate and draw near {to Allah}.”95

Worship has various degrees and stages which are different from each other depending upon the spiritual degree and faith of the individual.

The visage of worship {‘ibadah}

• Worship {*‘ibadah*} and servitude {*‘ubudiyyah*} brought the Messenger of Allah (S) to ascension {*mi‘raj*}:

﴿ سُبْحَانَ الّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلاً مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الأَقْصَى ﴾

“Immaculate is He who carried His servant on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque.”96

• Worship paves the ground for the descent of angels:

﴿ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمّا نَزّلْنَا عَلَى عَبْدِنَا ﴾

“We have sent down (the revelation through angels) to Our servant.”97

• Worship causes the supplication of man to be granted, for prayer is the covenant of God98 and whoever fulfills the covenant of God, God in turn will also fulfill his covenant:

﴿ أَوْفُوا بِعَهْدي أُوفِ بِعَهْدِكُمْ ﴾

“And fulfill My covenant that I may fulfill your covenant.”99

• The person who does not worship God is more abject than stones and other inanimate objects, for the Qur’an reveals:

﴿ وَ إِنّ مِنْها لَما يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللّهِ ﴾

“And indeed there are some of them (stones) that fall for the fear of Allah.”100

This is while some people do not submit to the Fountainhead and Creator of the universe.

• Worship is the symbol of the will power and the personality of man. The person who is in the midst of his own desires and instincts, if he would wish and decide to move toward God, that act is valuable. If not, the angels who have no desire {*shahwah*} and wrath {*ghadab*} are perpetually in the state of worship.

• Worship makes the most unknown person on the earth the most renowned person in heaven.

• Worship links the small island of man to the Spring of existence.

• Worship means to take a glance at all of existence from above.

• Worship means the blossoming of the dormant, mystical and spiritual faculties in man’s being.

• Worship is a value acquired by man through resolution and will power. It is different from value attained because of family status or because of innate talents which are inborn and not acquired by choice.

• Worship is the renewal of allegiance to God and the new fostering of spiritual life.

• Worship is the barrier to sin and the extinguisher of its effects. It is remembrance and consciousness of God that prevents man from committing sin, and not man’s knowledge of the sin.

• Worship is filling the vessel of the soul with the remembrance of God, which if it is filled with other than Him, is an act of injustice to the essence of humanity.

• Worship is so valuable for the earthly ground in that entrance to this sacred ground without ritual purity is not permissible, such as entrance to the mosque, the *Ka‘bah* and Quds.

• Worship and servitude to God is itself a value even if our supplications and requests are not granted.

• Worship is expressed both in the state of happiness and sadness. When God gives the glad tidings of *Kawthar* to His Prophet (S), He exhorts him to pray:

﴿ إِنّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ ⋆ فَصَلّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ ﴾

“Indeed We have given you abundance. So pray to your Lord.”101

God also enjoins prayer in facing difficulties and painful events:

﴿ وَاسْتَعِينُواْ بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلاَةِ ﴾

"And take recourse in patience and prayer."102

Prayers that relieve difficulty

Whenever we encounter difficulty or want to ask for something, Islam enjoins us to pray to God particularly for the removal of our difficulty or the granting of our request. At this point, it is appropriate to mention one example of these prayers:

The prayer of Ja'far at-Tayyar

Ja'far at-Tayyar was a brother of Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) who, during the emigration {*hijrah*} to Abyssinia, was able through his apt argument and behavior to draw the attention of King Negus and many others toward Islam, and to become the pioneer of Islamic propagation in the continent of Africa.

During the Battle of Mu'tah, he lost both his hands in the way of God and in lieu of hands God gave him two wings in paradise. He, therefore, became well-known as *at-tayyar* {the winged one}.

When Ja'far went to Medina from Abyssinia, the Prophet (S) said: "Would you like me to offer you a precious gift?" The people imagined that the Prophet (S) would give him a certain amount of gold or silver and thus they thronged forward in order to see the Prophet's (S) gift. But the Prophet (S) said: "I shall teach you a prayer as a gift which, if you perform it daily, it will be better for you than the whole world and what is in it, and if you perform it every day, every Friday, every month or every year, God will forgive your sins during the interval of the two prayers (even if it is an interval of one year).103

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) said: "Whenever you have a problem or something to ask, supplicate after saying the prayer of Ja'far (at-Tayyar) {*salah ja'far*} and it will be granted, God willing."

This prayer has been narrated with reliable Sunni and Shi'ah chains of transmission {*isnad*}, and it has acquired the name, *Iksir al-A'zam* and *Kibriyyah al-Ahmar*.104

The manner of performing this prayer has been recorded in the first part of *Mafatih al-Jinan*105 under the deeds {*a'mal*} for Friday after the prayers of the infallible Imams (*'a*).

Of course, this prayer is one of the tens of recommended {*mustahabb*} prayers for the removal of difficulties which have been transmitted. Recently, a book entitled, *Namaz-ha-ye Mustahabb* {Recommended Prayers}, has been written, which has mentioned approximately 350 recommended prayers with their particular names and manner of performance. This diversity itself attests to the importance of prayer, and a prayer for every occasion has been recorded.

The sanctity of prayer

The sanctity of prayer is such that it has been recommended that the time for the execution of some deeds such as making a vow {*qasam*} or giving testimony {*shahadah*} should be after the recitation of prayers.

In *Surah al-Ma'idah* 5:106, the Qur'an states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا شَهَادَةُ بَيْنِكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ حِينَ الْوَصِيَّةِ اثْنَانِ ذَوَا عَدْلٍ مِنْكُمْ أَوْ آخَرَانِ مِنْ غَيْرِكُمْ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ ضَرَبْتُمْ فِي الأَرْضِ فَأَصَابَتْكُمْ مُصِيبَةُ الْمَوْتِ تَحْبِسُونَهُمَا مِنْ بَعْدِ الصَّلاةِ فَيُقْسِمَانِ بِاللَّهِ إِنِ ارْتَبْتُمْ لا نَشْتَرِي بِهِ ثَمَنًا وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَى وَلا نَكْتُمُ شَهَادَةَ اللَّهِ إِنَّا إِذًا لَمِنَ الآثِمِينَ

"O you who have faith! The witness between you, when death approaches any of you, while making a bequest, shall be two fair men from among yourselves—or two from among others,106 ***if you are journeying in the land and the affliction of death visits you. You shall detain the two of them after prayer, and, if you have any doubt, they shall vow by Allah, 'We will not sell it for any gain, even if it were a relative, nor will we conceal the testimony of Allah, for then we would indeed be among the sinners'."***107

It is widely practiced nowadays that oath-taking ceremonies are done in the presence of the Qur'an and by putting the hand on the Qur'an, but the Qur'an itself in this regard states that taking an oath should be done after the performance of prayer!

The Universality of Prayer

Both in cosmic creation {*afarinesh-e takwini*} and in religiously legal precepts {*dasturat-e tashri'i*}, God has applied the loftiest and most perfect programs. For example, in the creation of mother's milk, He has accumulated all the nutrients, which are needed by the infant.

If we take a glance at the creation of man, we realize that whatever is present in nature has also been placed in man.

If there is the sound of thunder in nature, there is the voice (shouting) in man.

If there are plants and herbs in nature, there is growth of hair on man.

If there are rivers in nature, there are veins both large and small in man.

If there are fresh and salty waters in nature, there are salty tears and fresh saliva in man.

If there are many minerals in nature, there are also abundant talents latent in man.

There is a poem attributed to Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) which states:

أتزعَم انّكَ جرمٌ صغير

و فيك نطرى العالم الاكبر

O man! You imagine that you constitute a small body where in fact a big world is placed in you.

Prayer is also a divine handiwork in which God has somehow placed all values.

Which perfection is it that is valuable to man and cannot be found in prayer?

Remembrance of God is a value and it is the only means of giving tranquility to the heart, and prayer is a remembrance of God—“*Allahu akbar*” {Allah is greater}.

Remembrance of the Day of Resurrection is a value and it prevents the commission of sin and corruption, and prayer is remembering the “*Yawm ad-din*” {Day of Judgment}.108

To be in the ranks of the prophets, the martyrs and the righteous is a value, and in prayer we beseech God for us to be in the “*sirat alladhina an‘amta ‘alayhim*” {the path of those whom You have blessed}.109

We declare our aversion and disavowal {*bara’ah*} of the tyrants and deviants by saying: “*ghayri’l-maghdubi ‘alayhim wa la’d-dallin*” “such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray”.110

Justice which is the foremost of the values has been considered a necessary prerequisite for the leader of the congregation {*imam al-jama‘ah*}.

Following the leader of the congregation in prayer is a valuable social principle, which stipulates that instead of obstinacy and individualism, we have to follow a just leader.

In selecting the congregational leader, qualities which are valued are always taken into account: the most just, the most knowledgeable, the most eloquent, etc.

Standing while facing the *qiblah* calls to mind many values. Mecca is the torture site of Bilal; the place of sacrifice of Isma‘il (Ishmael) (*‘a*); the birthplace of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (*‘a*); the base of the uprising of al-Mahdi (*‘a*); the testing ground of Ibrahim (Abraham) (*‘a*); and the place of worship of all prophets and saints.

Everything is movement in prayer—every day and night; in bowing down {*ruku‘*}, prostration {*sujud*} and standing straight {*qiyam*}; and movement in going to the mosque and the place of prayer. Therefore, do not be static, silent and solitary. Rather, always strive and move; of course, for the sake and in the way of God.

In prayer the spirit and soul of man is purged. Prayer removes the dust of pride and vanity because every night and day for many times man places the most sublime part of his body (forehead) on the ground, and prostration on the earth is better than on a stone because lowliness is placing oneself on the ground.

Prostrate on the ground and what grows in it provided that it is not edible so that you would not think of your stomach!

Prostrate on pure earth for traversing impure paths will not lead to purity and the Fountainhead of Purities!

Crying for fear of God is a value, and the Qur'an has praised prostration accompanied by weeping: *"(They would fall down) weeping in prostration."*111

Prayer is a divine code of life which has been prescribed for us from the moment of birth till the point of death. When a baby is born, recite the *adhan* and *iqamah* in his right and left ears, respectively, as it is an admonition for prayer (when he grows up): "*Hayya 'ala's-salah*" "Come to prayer".

At the time of his death, you also bury him with the performance of the "prayer for the dead" {*salah al-mayyit*}. Throughout your life you should always be in a state of worshipping and glorifying God:

"And worship you Lord until certainty (or death) comes to you."112

Prayer is man's union with nature. In determining the prescribed time for prayers particularly the dawn {*subh*} and noon {*zuhr*} prayers, you have to look at where the sun is; in order to determine the direction of the *qiblah*, we have to look at the stars; in performing the recommended prayers on auspicious days, you have to monitor the movement of the moon (in order to determine the exact day). In taking a bath and performing ablution, you have to utilize water, and in performing prostration {*sujud*} and dry ablution {*tayammum*}, you have to touch the ground.

Which Wise Designer has designed this relation of the prayer with the sun, the moon, the stars, water, and the ground?

In one way or another, the other obligatory religious acts are also present in the prayer:

Like the person fasting, the person praying has no right to eat, drink and engage in sexual activity.

The *Ka'bah* is the *qiblah* and the axis of activity of the person praying, just like a person performing *Hajj*.

Like someone engaging in *jihad*, the person praying is also engaged in a *jihad*—the greater *jihad* {*jihad al-akbar*} which is combat with the self {*jihad an-nafs*}.

Prayer is itself the highest form of the enjoinment of good {*amr bi'l-ma'ruf*} and the forbiddance of evil {*nahyi 'ani'l-munkar*}.

Migration {*hijrah*} is one of the most important values in our religion. Hadrat Ibrahim (Abraham) (*'a*) migrated on account of prayer, bringing his wife and son to the *Ka'bah* and saying:

﴿ رَّبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنتُ مِن ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِندَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُواْ الصَّلاَةَ ﴾

"O Lord! I have settled part of my descendants in a barren valley, by Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may maintain the prayer."113

What is interesting is that Hadrat Ibrahim (*'a*) does not say: "I made *hijrah* in order to perform *Hajj* pilgrimage." Instead, he says: "Saying the prayer was my aim in *hijrah*."

In any case, God has encapsulated all values in prayer, with prayer and for prayer.

If adornment and hygiene constitute a value (as they do), Islam thus enjoins:

﴿ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ ﴾

"Put on your adornment on every occasion of prayer."114

That is, put on your clean and perfumed garments when going to the mosque.

At the time of prayer, women are also enjoined to wear their jewelry with which they adorn themselves.115

Even the issue of cleaning the teeth is given attention, and we read in the traditions that praying with cleaned {*miswak*} teeth is equivalent to praying 70 times without *miswak*.116 And it has been said: "Do not eat onion and garlic before going to the mosque"117 so as not to annoy others with the odor of your mouth and drive the people away.

In any case, this is the prayer of Islam, but our prayer is the prayer which we do not perform, or perform carelessly and incorrectly, or perform without being in congregation, or which we perform at its last moments!

The mosques whose custodians were once Ibrahim, Isma'il and Zakariyya (Zechariah) (*'a*),118 and the place where the mother of Maryam (Mary) had made a vow in asking God to let her child be its custodian,119 become places whose custodians in most cases are disabled, aged, sickly, uneducated, and sometimes even bad people! Why is it that being a custodian of the holy shrine of Imam ar-Rida (*'a*) is an honor, but being a custodian of the House of God is not?!

Why should our mosques be such that anyone who comes inside will get sad, melancholic and indolent? Is the mosque a house of mourning? An assembly convened to pray for the dead and on whose door black banners should be hung? Of course, thanks be to God, in recent years a movement has been initiated in the mosques (in Iran) and most of them are now equipped with libraries and provide such other service-oriented activities as interest-free loan funds.

What a beautiful *hadith* it is, which states: "On the Day of Resurrection, these three shall complain against the people: The *'alim* {scholar} to whom the people would not refer; the

Qur’an which was in the house but was not read; and the mosque to which the people paid no attention.120

There are many thing that can be said about the mosque and recently, a book entitled, *Sima-ye Masjid* {The Visage of the Mosque} that explains the status of mosque in Muslim society has been published.

Nevertheless, in a nutshell, the mosque during the early period of Islam was the venue Muslims to gather to make decisions and conduct consultations, in acquiring knowledge and information; it was the base for combatants and strugglers on the Path {*mujahidun*}; the place to attend to the needs of the poor and sick; and the base for rising up against tyrannical governments and delivering fiery sermons against them.

It has been this same sublime status of the mosque that prompted Muslims throughout history to apply the best architectural designs in building them and to endow huge amounts of wealth for their administration so that they could keep on flourishing and thriving.

1. Surah adh-Dhariyat 51:56. In this volume, the translation of Qur’anic passages is adapted from Sayyid ‘Ali Quli Qara’i, The Qur’an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004). {Trans.}
2. Surah al-Baqarah 2:138: “The baptism of Allah {sibghat Allah}, and who baptizes better than Allah? And Him do we worship.”
3. Question: If affection to one’s child is indeed part of one’s natural disposition {fitrah}, how is it that in some epochs such as the Pre-Islamic Period or Age of Ignorance {yawm al-jahiliyyah} some people used to bury their daughters alive?
Reply: The issues pertaining to natural disposition {fitrah} are numerous. Just as affection for one’s offspring is part of our natural disposition, regard for one’s honor is also a part of it. The Arabs during the pre-Islamic period used to regard their daughters as a source of shame and ignominy as they would be taken captive during wars and had no productive power and economic earning. Thus, in a bid to preserve their honor and dignity, they used to dispose of their daughters. Love for wealth and love for life are both related to the natural disposition {fitri}. Some people sacrifice their lives for wealth while others do the opposite, i.e. sacrifice wealth for the sake of their lives. Therefore, sacrificing one’s daughter for the sake of preserving one’s honor is not inconsistent with the natural disposition of man, although it might be a result of ignorance or confusion.
4. Mawlawi: Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi (1207-1273) was the greatest mystic poet in the Farsi language and founder of the Mawlawiyyah order of dervishes (“The Whirling Dervishes”). He is famous for his lyrics and for his didactic epic, Spiritual Couplets. {Trans.}
5. The abbreviation, “‘a” stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, ‘alayhis-salam, ‘alayhimus-salam, or ‘alayhas-salam {may peace be upon him/them/her}, which is used after the names of the prophets, angels, Imams from the Prophet’s progeny, and saints (‘a). {Trans.}
6. The term taghut applies to any idol, object, or individual that prevents men from doing what is good, and leads them astray. The term has been used eight times in the Qur’an. Prior to Islam, taghut had been the name of the one of the idols of the Quraysh tribe. This name is used also to mean the Satan. Moreover, the term is used to indicate one who rebels against lofty values, or who surpasses all bounds in his despotism and tyranny and claims the prerogatives of divinity for himself whether explicitly or implicitly. {Trans.}
7. That is, God subjected the taghuts to the lowest ebb of humiliation and abjectness. {Trans.}
8. Surah al-Mulk 67:30.

9. Surah al-Waqi‘ah 56:70.
10. Surah al-Waqi‘ah 56:65.
11. Surah as-Saba’ 34:9.
12. Hadrat: The Arabic word Hadrat is used as a respectful form of address. {Trans.}
13. Surah Ta Ha 20:14.
14. The abbreviation, “S”, stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa alihi wa sallam {may God’s salutation and peace be upon him and his progeny}, which is used after the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S). {Trans.}
15. Bihar al-Anwar vol. 71, p. 212.
16. Bihar al-Anwar vol. 71, p. 212.
17. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 86.
18. Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 496.
19. Murtada Mutahhari, Sayri dar Sireh-ye Nabawi {A Survey of the Life Conduct of the Prophet (S)}, p. 213.
20. Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari (1298-1358 AHS) was a scholar of unusually wide learning, a prolific writer, eloquent speaker, lecturer, and a cherished student of Imam Khomeini. He was a leading member of the Revolutionary Council until his assassination on May 1, 1979 by the terrorist Furqan group. {Trans.}
21. Murtada Mutahhari, Taharat-e Ruh {Spiritual Purification}, p. 122.
22. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 78, p. 357.
23. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 14, p. 41.
24. Surah al-Baqarah 2:65.
25. The Night of Power (or Decree), has a very special significance in the Muslim calendar because it is the anniversary of that night when the Qur’an was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad. This night has been described as ‘better than a thousand months’, and tradition holds that requests made to God during Laylat al-Qadr will be granted. {Trans.}
26. Surah Ta Ha 20:14.
27. Surah al-Ra‘d 13:28.
28. The abbreviation, “q” stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, quddisa sirruh {may his soul be sanctified}, which is used after the names of pious people. {Trans.}
29. See Surah al-Baqarah 2:62; Surah an-Nisa’ 4:69; Surah al-Hajj 22:17. {Tans.}
30. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 175.
31. Surah al-Hijr 15:99.
32. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 53, p. 326.
33. Surah Ta Ha 20:14.
34. Surah al-Ra‘d 13:28.
35. Surah al-Fajr 89:27-28.
36. Surah al-Baqarah 2:21.
37. Surah al-Quraysh 106:3-4.
38. Surah al-‘Ankabut 29:45.
39. Surah Hud 11:114.
40. Nahj al-Balaghah (The Peak of Eloquence) is a collection of speeches, sayings and letters of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) compiled by Sharif ar-Radi Muhammad ibn al-Husayn (d. 406 AH/1016). The contents of the book concern the three essential topics of God, man and the universe, and include comments on scientific, literary, social, ethical, and political issues. With the exception of the words of the Glorious Qur’an and of the Holy Prophet (S), no words of man can equal it in eloquence. So far, more than 101 exegeses have been written on the Nahj al-Balaghah, indicating the importance of this treatise to scholars and learned men of research and investigation. For more information, visit: http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul [13]. {Trans.}
41. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 222.

42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., Sermon 199.
44. Ibid.
45. Zakah: the tax levied on various categories of wealth and spent on the purposes specified in Surah at-Tawbah 9:60. {Trans.}
46. Ibid., Sermon 196.
47. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 402.
48. Surah an-Nisa' 4:139: "Those who take the faithless for allies instead of the faithful—do they seek honor with them? {If so,} indeed all honor belongs to Allah."
49. Surah al-Baqarah 2:45.
50. Maqtal ash-Shams, p. 179.
51. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 83, p. 127.
52. Tafsir Atib al-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 161.
53. Surah al-Baqarah 2:45.
54. 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, 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, http://www.al-islam.org/beliefs/practices/khums.html [14].
55. Surah al-Baqarah 2:115.
56. Bakkah: the Holy Mosque or the city of Mecca, or the territory where they stand. {Q Trans.}
57. Surah Al 'Imran 3:96.
58. Surah al-Baqarah 2:150.
59. That is, a knowledge which will enable you to distinguish between truth and falsehood. {Q Trans.}
60. Surah al-Anfal 8:29.
61. Surah al-Hadid 57:28.
62. Surah Muhammad 47:17.
63. Surah 'Ankabut 29:69.
64. Surah al-A'raf 7:201.
65. Surah al-'Ankabut 29:45.
66. Surah al-Baqarah 2:45.
67. Surah Yusuf 12:53.
68. Surah al-Qasas 28:83: "This is the abode of the Hereafter which We shall grant to those who do not desire to domineer in the earth nor to cause corruption, and the outcome will be in favor of the God-wary."
69. Surah an-Nazi'at 79:40-41: "But as for him who is awed to stand before his Lord and forbids the soul from {following} desire, his refuge will indeed be paradise."
70. Surah al-An'am 6:162.
71. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 88, pp. 41, 93.
72. Surah al-Baqarah 2:34: "And when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam,' they prostrated, except Iblis: he refused and acted arrogantly, and he was one of the

faithless.”
73. Surah Al ‘Imran 3:96: “Indeed the first house to be set up for mankind is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for all nations.”
74. Surah al-‘Ankabut 29:45.
75. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:43: “O you who have faith! Do not approach prayer when you are intoximated, {not} until you know what you are saying.”
76. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:142: “When they (hypocrites) stand up for prayer, they stand up lazily, showing off to the people and not remembering Allah except a little.”
77. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 89, p. 201.
78. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:100.
79. Sirr as-Salah, p. 12.
80. Surah al-Fatir (or al-Mala’ikah) 35:29.
81. Surah al-A‘raf 7:170.
82. Surah al-Hijr 15:9.
83. Surah Ta Ha 20:14.
84. Surah al-Isra’ 17:78.
85. Qisas (literally means retribution or retaliation) in the Islamic jurisprudence is to be executed against a criminal who committed such crime as murder, amputation of a body limb, or laceration and beating according to legal decree when the victim or his guardians seek retribution in lieu of receiving a fine or blood money. {Trans.}
86. Surah al-Jinn 72:18.
87. The Kharijites {khawarij} or al-Mariqun (a name given to them by Imam ‘Ali and meaning “those who missed the truth of religion”) were a group of quasi-holy, narrow-minded Muslims who were originally followers of Imam ‘Ali and fought alongside him at the Battle of Siffin. Initially they supported arbitration, pushing Imam ‘Ali to accept it; however, later they revolted against it arguing that because God was the only true arbitrator, Imam ‘Ali and those who agreed with him in the arbitration were not simply wrong; they were in fact unbelievers, hence they could have no dealings with them. On Imam ‘Ali’s return to Iraq from Siffin, this group seceded from his army and set up camp on the banks of the Nahrawan canal. The Kharijites (or seceders) became a fierce group who believed that they were the only true Muslims, and as such they began terrorizing people whom they regarded as unbelievers. Imam ‘Ali was at first able to talk to them and persuade some of them to cease their hostilities, but eventually he was forced to take up arms against them. In 659 CE he attacked their army under the leadership of ‘Abdullah ibn Wahab al-Rasibi at Nahrawan almost annihilating them. Nahrawan was the third and last battle Imam ‘Ali engaged in with his internal enemies. {Trans.}
88. Surah an-Nur 24:56.
89. Surah al-Baqarah 2:256.
90. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:60.
91. Surah al-Quraysh 106:3-4.
92. Surah al-‘Ankabut 29:45.
93. Surah Ta Ha 20:14.
94. Ulu’l-‘azm: literally, resolute figures or men of decision. {Trans.}
95. Surah al-‘Alaq 96:19.
96. Surah al-Isra’ (or Bani Isra’il) 17:1.
97. Surah al-Baqarah 2:23.
98. Surah Ya Sin 36:60-61:
 أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يا بَني آدَمَ أَنْ لا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبينٌ وَ أَنِ اعْبُدُوني هذا صِراطٌ مُسْتَقيمٌ
“Did I not exhort you, O children of Adam, saying, ‘Do not worship Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. Worship Me. That is the straight path’?”
99. Surah al-Baqarah 2:40.

100. Surah al-Baqarah 2:74.
101. Surah al-Kawthar 108:1-2.
102. Surah al-Baqarah 2:45.
103. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 18, p. 421.
104. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 91, “Bab Fadl Salah Ja‘far.”
105. Mafatih al-Jinan {Keys to the Gardens of Paradise}: a standard manual of Shi‘i devotion containing the supplicatory prayers of the infallible Imams (‘a) as well as formulae for recitation at particular times or during visitation of the tombs of the Imams (‘a), complied from Bihar al-Anwar {Oceans of Lights} and other sources by Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Qummi, a scholar of vast learning who died in Najaf in 1940. {Trans.}
106. That is, from among the non-Muslims, on non-availability of Muslim witnesses during journey. {Q Trans.}
107. Surah al-Ma’idah 5:106.
108. Surah al-Fatihah 1:4.
109. Surah al-Fatihah 1:7.
110. Surah al-Fatihah 1:7.
111. Surah Maryam 19:58.
112. Surah al-Hijr 15:99.
113. Surah Ibrahim 14:37.
114. Surah al-A‘raf 7:31.
115. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 80, p. 188.
116. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 73, p. 133.
117. Risaleh-ye Ahkam-e Imam Khomeini, “Issue 910”.
118. Surah al-Baqarah 2:125; Surah Maryam 19:11.
119. Surah Al ‘Imran 3:35: “When the wife of Imran said, ‘My Lord, I dedicate to You what is in my belly, in consecration.”
120. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 41.

Intention {niyyah}

The first essential element {*rukn*} of prayer is the intention {*niyyah*}.

Intention means that we have to know what we are doing, what we are reciting, and for whom and for what a certain movement is made.

The value of every deed lies in the intention and motive behind it; not merely in the deed itself. Thus, the quality of the actions of a person who stops on a red traffic light in order to maintain order and respect for the law is different from that of a person who carries out the same actions but out of fear of the traffic officer or of the fine that he might receive for violating traffic regulations. In all forms of worship, especially in prayer, intention occupies a special importance.

In principle, what makes an action a form of worship is the divine intention behind it. If such an intention is not present, even if the outward appearance of a deed is good and proper, it would not have the value of worship.
In this regard, the Holy Prophet of Islam (S) said:

إنّما الاعْمالُ بِالنِّيات.

“Verily, the action is (judged) by the intention (behind it).”1

Yes, the criterion for an action to be judged materialistic or spiritual lies in the intention and motives behind it.

Sincere Intention

Sincere intention means that man acts for the sake of God only and in the depth of his being, God and His pleasure are his aims, without expecting reward, gratitude or admiration from others.2

The loaves of bread that the *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Messenger of Allah (S) gave to the orphans, captives and poor on successive nights at the time of breaking fast {*iftar*} did not have much material value, but since they were given sincerely, on this account God revealed a *surah*.3

And concerning it, ‘Attar an-Nayshaburi says:

گذشته زین جهان، وصف سنانش

گذشته زآن جهان، وصف سِه نانش

No one in this world can describe his sword. No one in the hereafter can describe his three loaves of bread.

We read in history that a certain person was slain in the battlefield and everybody said: “He is a martyr {*shahid*}.” But the Prophet (S) said: “He was killed in the way of a donkey {*qatil al-himar*}!” The people were astonished, but the Prophet (S) said: “His aim in going to the battlefield was not God; rather, when he saw that the enemy was riding a good donkey, he said to himself: ‘I will kill him and take his donkey as war booty {*ghanimah*}.’ But he did not succeed and that infidel killed him instead. So, he was killed in the way of a donkey {*qatil al-himar*}!”4

Making one’s intention sincere is indeed a difficult and taxing work. Sometimes, wicked thoughts penetrate the soul of man to such an extent that he himself is unaware of it. As such, it is narrated in the tradition that ostentation {*riya’*} in matters of worship and polytheism {*shirk*} are more subtle and silent than the movement of a black ant on a black rock during a dark night.5

So many individuals imagine that their intention is nearness {*qurb*} to Allah, but during the ups and downs of their lives, it becomes obvious that their motive is not a hundred percent

pure and sincere.
In the words of ‘Allamah Shahid Mutahhari, intention means self-awareness, and thus, the value of worship lies on gnosis and awareness. We read in a tradition:

نِيّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ عَمَلِهِ.

“The intention of the believer is more valuable than his action.”6

Just like the comparison between body and soul, the soul is better than the body and the humanity of man is related to his soul. In comparing intention and action, intention is better than the act itself because it is the spirit of the action.

Intention is so valuable that even if a person is unable to perform a good deed, God will reward him for he had the intention to do so.7

The motive for seeking nearness {qurb} to Allah

The motive for nearness {*qurb*} means seeking proximity to the Divine Station. When it is said, “So-and-so is near or close to a certain national official,” what is meant is not spatial, bodily and physical nearness, for if it were such, the office attendants are the closest or nearest to him. Rather, what is meant by this nearness is spiritual, emotional in status and nearness in intimacy.

Doing deeds seeking the pleasure of God does not mean that God would be influenced by our deeds and change His attitude or position toward us, and as such, He becomes the subject of events and change. Instead, “nearness to Allah” means exaltation of the spirit through the ladder of existence whose consequence is the acquisition of influence in the creation. That is, proximity to the Fountainhead of Creation and finding Him in one’s heart.

Just as there are differences in the levels of existence among inanimate objects, plants, animals, and human beings, there are also differences on the level of human beings with respect to proximity to the Fountainhead of Creation. Man could attain such nearness to God and be the nearest to Him so that he becomes the vicegerent of Allah on the earth.

Worship which is motivated by nearness {*qurb*} will make man more luminous and perfect and have more existential capacity {*zarfiyyat-e wujudi*}. All forms of worship, recommended prayers in particular, have significant roles in this affair, just as we read in a *hadith*:

لا يَزالُ الْعَبْد يَتَقَرّبُ اِلىّ بِالنّوافِل.

That is, man can always get nearer to God through recommended prayers.8

Obligatory prayer is possibly done on account of fear of hell and the divine wrath, but the optional prayer is a sign of love and the secret of love to the Worshipped Being {*ma‘bud*}.

The degrees of proximity {qurb}

The term "*darajat*" {degrees} has been mentioned frequently in the Qur'an and it has appeared with diverse interpretations—a fact which elicits subtle points. For some, the Qur'an states: *"For them, there are degrees."*9 For others, however, it says: *"They (themselves) are degrees."*10 It is like the case of great figures who even if they sit at the lower section of an assembly, that section can become "high"; they are themselves makers of degree and rank, and are not subject to degree and station.

This spiritual ranking is not exclusive to human beings; for, there is also hierarchy among the angels. The Qur'an thus says regarding Jibra'il (Archangel Gabriel) (*'a*): *"One who is heard and trustworthy as well."*11

In any case, the degrees of human beings in obedience to God are not similar:

1. Sometimes man obeys {*muti'*}, but not out of pleasure.

2. At some other times, he obeys {*muti'*} as well as loves {*muhibb*}; that is, he obeys God based on love and affection.

3. There are also times when he attains perfect gnosis {*ma'rifah*} far higher than obedience {*ita'ah*} and love {*muhabbah*} and whatever he sees is only God. Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) says:

مارَأَيْتُ شَيْئاً إلاّ و رَأَيْتُ الله قَبْلَه و بَعْدَه و مَعَه.

"I do not see anything except God, before it, after it and with it."12

We have to love God for the sake of God

It is said that in order to test the loyalty of his courtiers, Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi set out with a caravan and placed an unlocked container of jewelry on a camel. Along the way, they reached a valley. He roused the camel and thus the container turned upside down and the jewels fell into the valley.

The Sultan said: "Whatever jewels one may get belongs to him." Those who were around him left him, and they engaged themselves in amassing gold and silver. Meanwhile, it was observed that Ayyaz had abandoned the jewels and pursued the Sultan. The Sultan asked him: "Why did you not amass jewels?" In reply, Ayyaz said:

منم در قفای تو می تاختم

زخدمت نعمت نپرداختم

For me, I prefer to cling to you and thus I did not serve the grace {ni'mah}.
Then, from this event Mawlawi concludes:

گر از دوست چشمت به احسان اوست

تو در بند خویشی نه در بند دوست

خلاف طریقت بود کاولیاء

تمنّا کنند از خدا جز خدا

If you are hoping for the Friend's grace, you love yourself not the Friend.
It is contrary to the spiritual path {tariqah} of the awliya' to beseech God something other than God.

The Qur'an has strongly condemned those who call on God only for their own sakes and remember Him only in times of problems and at other times forget or even deny Him:

﴿ فَإِذا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلْكِ دَعَوُا اللّهَ مُخْلِصينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمّا نَجّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴾

"When they board the ship, they invoke Allah putting exclusive faith in Him, but when He delivers them to land, behold, they ascribe partners {to Him}, being ungrateful for what We have given them!"[13]

At any rate, working for one's self is egotism; for the sake of the people is idol-worship; and working for the sake of God and His creatures is dualism; and making one's work and that of the creatures for the sake of God is worship of God.
We thus read in the litanies {*munajat*}:

إلٰهى ما عَبَدتُكَ خَوْفاً مِنْ نارك وَ لا طَمَعاً في جَنّتِك بَلْ وَجَدْتُك

أهْلاً لِلْعِبادَة فَعَبْدتُك.

“O God! My worship is not out of fear of hell or desire for Your paradise. Rather, it is because I found You worthy of being worshipped and thus I worshipped You.”14

Yes, only traders work to earn profits and only slaves work out of fear, but free and noble men worship Him to express their gratitude for the divine graces, just as has been narrated in the words of the Infallibles {*ma‘sumin*}15 (*‘a*):

اِنّ قَوماً عَبْدوا اللهَ رَغْبَةً فَتِلْك عِبادَةُ التُّجار وَ اِنّ قَوماً عَبْدوا اللهَ رَهْبَةً فَتِلك عِبادَةُ الْعَبيدِ وَ اِنّ قَوماً اللهَ عَبْدوا شُكْراً فَتِلكَ عِبادَةُ الاحْرار.

“Indeed there is a group that worships Allah for gain; that is the worship of the trader. There is a group that worships Allah out of fear; that is the worship of the slave. And there is a group that worships Allah out of gratitude; that is the worship of the free.”16
In the language of Hafiz,17

در ضمیر ما نمی گنجد بغیر از دوست کس

هر دو عالم را به دشمن دِه که ما را دوست بس

There is no one in our hearts (minds) but the Friend. Give the two worlds to the enemy as the Friend suffices for us.

In materialistic love, the person loves his object of love for himself, but in spiritual love the person dedicates himself to the Beloved. In the Supplication of Kumayl {*du‘a’ kumayl*},18 ‘Ali (*‘a*) says:

وَاجْعَلْ قَلْبِي بِحُبِّكَ مُتَيِّماً

“O Lord! Make my heart enthralled by Your love!”

Attainment of the state of proximity {qurb}

Attainment of the divine proximity {*qurb-e ilahi*} and motive for nearness {*qurbah*} is achieved in two ways:

One is to recognize the grandeur and station of God and the other is to recognize the meanness and abjectness of other than Him.

The Qur'an always mentions the divine favors and graces to the servants (of God) so as to make man enamored by the love for God. Stating His Attributes, His creatures, His material and spiritual assistance and the many favors, great and small—all in all are meant to enhance our love for God.

On the other hand, there are many verses which indicate the weakness and meanness of other than God, saying: Anyone and anything other than God have neither honor nor power. Even if they combine together to create a fly, they would not be able to do so. Except Him who could answer the call of helpless and the indigent? How could it be proper to discuss others in association with God and regard them as equal to and partners of God?

A Recollection

One of the *maraji' at-taqlid*19 of the Shi'ah world was Ayatullah al-'Uzma Burujerdi. During days of mourning, he used to hold mourning ceremonies in his residence. In one of these assemblies, he was not feeling well. So, he was resting in his private room while listening to the speeches of the orators.

One of those present in the mourning assembly said: "Extend *salawah* (invocation of blessings to the Prophet and his progeny (*'a*)) for the sake of the health and safety of the Imam of the Time and Aqa Burujerdi!"

Suddenly, they found out that he was knocking the door with his staff. His near relatives came and asked: "Is there anything we can do for you?" This great *marja' at-taqlid* said: "Why did you mention my name along with the name of the Imam of the Time (*'a*)? I do not have the worth for you to mention my name along with the name of the Imam and invoke blessings {*salawah*} on us both."20

This religious authority who was a deputy {*na'ib*} of the Imam of the Time (*'a*) was not willing to let his name be mentioned along with the name of an infallible Imam, but many of us, on account of incorrect understanding and impoliteness, place the names of weak and thoroughly needy creatures along with the name of God, the Omnipotent, Absolute and Exalted, as if we regard them as equals.

Quality or quantity?

Islam has paid much attention to the manner of performing a task and the underlying motive and purpose behind it. The Qur'an praises the *better acts* and not the *amount of acts accomplished*, saying:

﴿ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلاً ﴾

“That He may test you {to see} which of you is best in conduct.”21

While in a state of *ruku‘* {bowing down}, Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) gave his ring to a beggar, and on account of this, a verse {*ayah*} of the Qur’an was revealed. Some people imagine that the reason behind the revelation of a verse because of a ring was that the ring was precious and thus they have said: “The value of the ring was equal to the tax and revenue of all of Shamat.”22

This is while a ring with such a price could never be consistent with the simplicity {*zuhd*} of ‘Ali (*‘a*). It was equally incompatible with his sense of justice for him to have such a ring on his hand while some people were in a state of poverty and indigence. But the truth of the matter is that it was on account of the quality of the deed and not its quantity, and on account of the sincerity and intention for nearness {*qurbah*} and not the weight and magnitude of the ring’s value that the following verse was revealed:

﴿ إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاَةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ ﴾

“Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down.”23

A Recollection

Bahlul saw a group of people constructing a mosque and claiming that they were doing so for the sake of God. He inscribed on a stone: “The builder of this stone is Bahlul,” and placed it at the door of the mosque one night. The following day, when the workers saw the inscribed stone, they reported it to Harun ar-Rashid. So, he summoned Bahlul and asked him: “Why have you assumed ownership of a mosque I am constructing?”

Bahlul replied: “If you are really constructing the mosque for the sake of God, then let my name be inscribed therein (as the owner). Anyway, God knows who the real builder is. Besides, He will not commit any mistakes in giving the reward. If it is really for the sake of God, whether my name or your name is inscribed there does not matter.

In doing so, Bahlul let him understand that he had no intention for nearness {*qurbah*} (to Allah), but rather for desire and fame. For this reason, the Qur’an likens the deeds of the infidels {*kuffar*} to a mirage which seems to be water but it is not:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ كفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كسَرَابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمْآنُ مَاءً ﴾

“As for the faithless, their works are like a mirage in a plain, which the thirsty man supposes to be water.”24

In principle, Islam regards an act as righteous if its four constitutive elements are good: the

components of the action, the motive, means, and method.

The motive for nearness {*qurbah*} is necessary not only at the beginning of an act; rather, the intention for divine proximity should remain throughout the course of the action otherwise the act in its entirety becomes void.

If the motor of an airplane malfunctions for only a minute, the airplane will definitely come crashing down. Polytheism {*shirk*} or ostentation {*riya'*} in the intention {*niyyah*}, though for only a moment, will extinguish the entire act and render it useless.

Another recollection

On a certain flight, the passengers of an airplane preparing for take-off were asked to disembark from the aircraft and the flight was delayed for many hours. I asked about the reason behind the delay. Someone said: "A cockroach had been seen in the aircraft!" I exclaimed: "All this delay is because of a cockroach?!"

It was said in reply: "Yes, because there have been many cases when a cockroach would gnaw through a wire and the control system of the aircraft would malfunction and this could lead to a mishap."

Many good deeds are supposed to lead to man's ascension toward God, but because of a spiritual vice, not only do they not lead to his ascension; instead, they would lead to his fall.

The intention gives value to the deed

Let us assume that out of oppression and aggression, someone killed another and it became known later that the victim had been a criminal who was supposed to have been executed. In this case, what the killer had done was beneficial, however the people will not praise the murderer because his intention was killing an innocent person and not executing a corruptor on the earth {*mufsid fi'l-ard*}.

Thus, the usefulness of a work is not enough for it to be regarded as a righteous act. In fact, it is necessary for it to be accompanied by a pure intention as well.

In all instances, the Qur'an lays stress on the intention for nearness {*qurbah*} (to Allah) whether in the case of *khums*, *zakah* and other financial matters, or in the case of war and *jihad* against the enemy. The fact that the Qur'an emphasizes such phrases as *"In the way of Allah,"*[25] *"For* the sake of Allah,"[26] and *"Seeking the pleasure of Allah*[27] is an indication of the importance of the intention for nearness {*qurbah*} to Allah.

If those who are performing beneficial acts on behalf of the people by constructing schools, hospitals, roads, and dormitories have no divine intention, they have committed an injustice to themselves because they themselves will not benefit from those deeds although others will get much benefit from them.

That the Qur'an always mentions righteous deeds along with faith, saying:

"Those who have faith and do righteous deeds,"[28]

or

“Whoever acts righteously, {whether} male or female, should he (or she) be faithful”29

is because of the fact that the goodness of an act alone is not enough; rather, the goodness of the doer is also required.

Two historical accounts

1. Bilal al-Habashi, who was the caller to prayer {*mu‘adhdhin*} of the Holy Prophet (S), would pronounce “sh” {*shin*} as “s” {*sin*} in the recital of the sentence, “*Ashhadu an la ilaha illa’llah*” as he had a defect in pronunciation. The people criticized it, but the Prophet (S) said: “The *sin* of Bilal is *shin* for God.”30

Although outwardly his work was defective, since he had the motive for nearness {*qurbah*} and good intentions, he received the reward.

2. ‘Abd Allah ibn Maktum was one of the sincere Companions of the Prophet (S) and a blind man. One day, this great Companion entered into an assembly where the Prophet (S) and some people were busy talking. As he could not see the other people in the assembly, he talked loudly. Being annoyed, one of those who were present in the assembly frowned at him.

In spite of the fact that frowning and smiling do not make any difference to a blind person as he cannot see, the Qur’an revealed a whole *surah* on account of that very frowning, and reproached the person who frowned in ten successive verses {*ayat*}:

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلّى ⋆ أَنْ جَاءَهُ الأَعْمَى ⋆ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلّهُ يَزّكّى ⋆ أَوْ يَذّكّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى ⋆ أَمّا مَنِ اسْتَغْنَى ⋆ فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدّى ⋆ وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلا يَزّكّى ⋆ وَأَمّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى ⋆ وَهُوَ يَخْشَى ⋆ فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهّى

“He frowned and turned away when the blind man approached him. And how do you know, maybe he would purify himself, or take admonition, and the admonition would benefit him! But as for someone who is self-complacent, you attend to him, though you are not liable if he does not purify himself. But he who comes hurrying to you, while he fears {Allah}, you are neglectful of him.”31

So, the criterion of a deed is not its usefulness or harmfulness with which we would evaluate it and say: “If an action gives benefit to others, it is a righteous deed and if it renders harm then it is an impious act.” Instead, we have to assess the relationship of the action with the person himself—what were his motives in doing it? Or, how is the action per se if it renders neither benefit nor harm to others?

Yes, in the school {*maktab*} of the prophets (*‘a*), morality {*akhlaq*} has essential {*dhati*} value and not merely accidental {*‘aradi*} value. It is not like the morality of a person which is meant to attract customers, maximize the volume of production and gather people

around him.

In the episode of the *‘abasa* {he who frowned}, the criticism is anchored on this: Why did you frown at the blind man? Although the blind man cannot see you, frowning at a believer is in itself an abhorrent act.

In any case, the motive for nearness {*qurbah*} means that all actions must be done according to divine criteria and should not have dire political and social impact upon others.

The motive for nearness {*qurbah*} means that an act must be done for the sake of God regardless of its resultant joy or pain. In describing the true believer, the Qur’an states:

﴿ يُجاهِدُونَ في سَبيلِ اللّهِ وَ لا يَخافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لائِمٍ ﴾

“(They) wage jihad in the way of Allah, not fearing the blame of any blamer.”32

The motive for nearness {*qurbah*} means that one must say the truth and not be concerned about anything or anybody except Him, just as the Qur’an thus describes the divine propagators:

﴿ الّذينَ يُبَلِّغُونَ رِسالاتِ اللّهِ وَ يَخْشَوْنَهُ وَ لا يَخْشَوْنَ أَحَدًا إِلاّ اللّهَ وَ كفى بِاللّهِ حَسيبًا ﴾

“Such as deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and fear no one except Allah, and Allah suffices as reckoner.”33

A recollection

One day, I was engrossed in doing supplication {*du‘a’*} and paying homage {*ziyarah*} in the holy shrine of Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*). One of the pilgrims {*za’irin*} sat beside me and as he recognized me from my TV program every Friday night, he gave me a sum of money, saying: “Aqa Qara’ati! Give this money to the poor.” I said: “Like you, I have also come here for *ziyarah* and (here) in Mashhad I do not know of any poor people. You give it to the poor yourself.”

After sometime, he pleaded with me again and I also repeated my argument, and then I resumed supplication.

He repeated his plea for the third time. I was annoyed and said: “Today, with twenty tumans34 you disturbed my concentration three times. Please do not disturb me. You yourself have to give this money to the poor.” He said: “Aqa Qara’ati! This is not twenty tumans; it is one thousand tumans.”

I was thinking that he wanted to give twenty tumans to the poor. I reflected for some time and my anger faded away. I said to him: “There is an institution here for helping the

orphans." He said: "It is up to you. You spend it as you deem it appropriate." He gave the money to me and left.

I put down the book of supplication and started reflecting. If it is for the sake of God, what is the difference between twenty tumans and one thousand tumans? I realized that this scene was a test for me, reminding me that the motive for nearness {*qurbah*} had not yet become alive in me.

One of the signs of sincerity is that the volume of work, the individuals involved, the places, types of work, and situations make no difference for the person. His only concern is to seek the pleasure of God regardless of whether he benefits from it or not, or the people would know or not, support it or not.

Of course, humanitarianism and doing something for the people is nobler than egotism, but in the absence of a divine motive, it has no divine value.

In the words of Shahid Mutahhari, the motive for nearness {*qurbah*} is an essential condition {*shart-e dhati*} and not a contractual and delegated condition; it is a creational {*takwini*} condition and not a ceremonial {*tashrifati*} one.35

If we say: The condition for reaching Mecca is traversing the way to the city, this is a natural and essential condition, and not a contractual one. Similarly, the condition to attain the station of nearness to Allah is to have the motive for nearness {*qurbah*} and this is an essential condition.

The effects and blessings of a pure intention

Through a cursory glance at the verses of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, we shall find out many effects and blessings of having a pure intention, some of which we shall mention concisely below:

1. Anyone who has a good intention shall have abundant provisions.36 Perhaps this *hadith* means that because of his good intention, his behavior and treatment of people is somehow pleasant and naturally, more people will be attracted to his business and thus he will earn more income.

2. A good intention increases man's success and opportunity, makes his life pure and desirable, and wins him more friends.37

Divine favors for individuals depend on their having a good intention. The purer and more sincere their intention is, the more divine favors they will obtain.

3. It endows long life to man.

It is narrated in the traditions: If a person who just performed *Hajj* pilgrimage would intend and decide when he is returning home to go to *Hajj* again the following year, God will prolong his life on account of that good intention.38

4. A good intention compensates for one's past (sins). 'Ali ('*a*) says: If a sinner having a good intention repents, God will return to him whatever is taken from him as a remuneration (for his sins), and set right whatever problem he might have in his work.39

5. God will give the reward of a good deed to a person for intending to do a good act even if

he actually fails to do so. By having a sincere intention, the unfulfilled works of a person shall be counted, as it has been narrated in the traditions: If a faithful person would say, ‘If God had given amenities to me, I would have done this and that’, and if this wish is sincere, God will grant him the reward of those deeds.40

Even if he sincerely wishes for martyrdom and prays to God for his martyrdom, God will grant him the station of a martyr though he departs from this world on his bed.41 It is enough of a favor that God will give reward for a decision to do a good deed, but regarding an intention to commit a sin, He will not set a punishment for it unless it is actually done.42

6. A pure intention can make the most materialistic affairs of life a means for man’s nearness {*qurb*} to Allah. In the same manner, the most spiritual states such as prostration {*sujud*} and weeping, if they are motivated by ostentation {*riya’*}, will turn into a means of drifting away from God.

We read in the traditions: Just as the body having a soul is firm, religion with a sincere intention is firm.43 Having a pure heart and good intention are among the divine assets and treasures, and the better the intention the more the value this treasure will have.44 Having a serious intention, decision and will power will multiply the physical ability of man.

Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) says: “On the Day of Resurrection, God will group the people according to the intentions they have.”45

For one whose aim is the performance of a duty, it is not important for him the type of work and its outcome. As the Qur’an says,

﴿ وَ مَنْ يُقاتِلْ في سَبيلِ اللّهِ فَيُقْتَلْ أَوْ يَغْلِبْ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتيهِ أَجْرًا عَظيمًا ﴾

“And whoever fights in the way of Allah, and then is slain or conquers, soon We shall give him a great reward.”46

What is important is to struggle in the way of God, but as to whether its outcome is defeat or victory has no effect on the divine reward. In another place, the Qur’an states:

﴿ وَ مَنْ يَخْرُجْ مِنْ بَيْتِهِ مُهاجِرًا إِلَى اللّهِ وَ رَسُولِهِ ثُمّ يُدْرِكْهُ الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللّهِ ﴾

“And whoever leaves his home migrating toward Allah and His Apostle, and is then overtaken by death, his reward shall certainly fall on Allah.”47

It can also be readily inferred from this verse that if a person leaves his home for the sake of God, even though he does not reach his destination, he would be rewarded. What is important is the intention behind the act and not the act itself. What is important is to take

a step along the way and not reaching the destination.

The Messenger of Allah (S) said to Abu Dharr: “Decide to do a good deed though you might not succeed in doing so; for, it is this decision that will take you out from the circle of the neglectful.”48

We read in another *hadith*: “Any deed which is accompanied by a divine intention is great even if that work is simple and trivial.”49

On the contrary, the most important deeds, if they are not based on correct intentions, have no value. The Prophet (S) said: “Most of the martyrs of my *ummah* will depart from this world while lying on their beds while there are many who will be killed on the battlefield but God is aware of their intentions.”50

During the Tabuk expedition, the Holy Prophet of Islam (S) said: “Indeed, those who are in Medina but wish to participate with us in the battlefield shall share in the spiritual reward on account of that intention.”51

Also, in another tradition we read: Anyone who goes to his bed with the intention of waking up to say the night supererogatory prayers, if he remains in his bed and is not able to wake up, God will treat his sleep as charity and his breathing as glorification (of God) {*tasbih*} and give him the reward of saying the night supererogatory prayers.52

It is not without reason that we have been admonished to have sacred aims even in eating and sleeping.53 And if you love a person for the sake of God and imagine him as a good person, even if he is actually a dweller of hell, you are excused.54

The pre-eminence of intention {niyyah} over action {‘amal}

The pre-eminence the intention behind an action possesses over the action itself is that in the performance of action, sometimes ostentation {*riya’*} and showing off are at work, but in the intention—since it is an inner matter and has no outward appearance—there is no place for ostentation, showing off and the like. The other advantage of intention over action is that it is always possible in all places and requires no particular conditions, but performance of an action requires many prerequisites and contingencies.

In the traditions, there is a category known as “*man bala‘*” traditions. This group of traditions states: If somebody hears a tradition which states that such an act has a reward and he performs it, God will grant him that reward even if that tradition is not correct. It is because one who has done so did it with a good intention.

The degrees of intention

1. Sometimes, fear of divine wrath or desire for divine favor prompts man to perform an act. As the Qur’an says in this regard, ***“And supplicate Him with fear and hope.”***55

And in another place, the Qur’an states: ***“And they would supplicate Us with eagerness and awe.”***56

2. A higher degree of intention is that man performs an act on account of gratitude for His

favors whether he earns reward or punishment from God. As Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) says:

لَوْ لَمْ يَتَوَعِّدَ اللهُ عَلىٰ مَعْصِيَتِهِ لَكانَ يَجِبُ اَلاّ يُعْصىٰ شُكْراً لِنِعْمَتِهِ.

“Even if Allah had not warned of the chastisement of those disobedient to Him, it was obligatory by way of gratefulness for His favors that He should not be disobeyed.”57

3. An even higher degree of intention is that without desiring paradise and being afraid of hell, man worships God as he regards Him as the only Being worthy of worship and adoration.

4. The highest degree of intention is that the love for God drives man to perform an act. In this regard, ‘Ali (*‘a*) considers his love for death and meeting Allah as more intense than the fondness of an infant for the breast of its mother.58 And Hadrat al-Qasim, son of Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (*‘a*) says in Karbala’: “For me, death in the way of God is sweeter than honey.”

The role of intention on the penal issues

On the question of punishment, Islam also takes motive and intention into account.

Concerning murder, the penalty for a person who kills another intentionally is distinct from the penalty for one who kills another unintentionally. Each of these two cases has its own particular ruling.59

With regard to swearing an oath, the Qur’an also says:

﴿ لا يُؤاخِذُكُمُ اللّهُ بِاللّغْو في أَيْمانِكُمْ ﴾

“Allah shall not take you to task for what is unconsidered in your oaths.”60

Therefore, if someone gives an oath but he has no serious intention and motive, his oath has no value.

Gnosis {ma‘rifah} as the preliminary step toward the intention for nearness {qurbah}

The best way of acquiring the motive for nearness {*qurbah*} to Allah and a pure intention is gnosis {*ma‘rifah*} and cognition.

• If we only knew, acquiring the endearment of people is in the hands of God.61

• If we only knew, honor and power are only through His hands.62

• If we only knew, benefit and harm to us are not in the hands of others.63

• If we only knew, work for the sake of God has sometimes double, ten times, or seventy times its reward. So, we should not work for the sake of other than Him.

• If we only knew, the elevation of social status does not mean glory because black smoke also goes up!

• If we only knew, the attention and opinion of the people to us have no value because if an elephant would pass by the street, everybody will also look at it!

• If we only knew, we would pay attention to the perils and ignominies of our ostentations!

• If we only knew, there will be a day for us when one's call will not reach the other and only those who have sound hearts shall attain deliverance.64

• And if we only knew what values we shall lose by having corrupt intentions, we would prepare ourselves for the sincere performance of work based on the motive of nearness {*qurbah*} to Allah.

The effects of corrupt intentions

Concluding the discussion on intention, we shall also cite the adverse effects of having corrupt intentions, just as we earlier stated the blessings of a sound intention.

1. Non-acceptance of supplication {*du'a'*}. Imam as-Sajjad (*'a*) says: "A bad intention causes the non-acceptance of supplications."65

Having an ungodly intention not only removes the divine color and devotional nature of actions; it also entails perils.

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) says: "If somebody borrows a certain amount of money without the intention of returning it, it is equivalent to stealing."66 Similarly, if in marriage the person has no intention of giving the dower {*mahriyyah*} to his wife, in the sight of God he is committing adultery {*zina*}.67

2. Deprivation of sustenance {*rizq*}. Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) said: "So many believers have the intention of committing sin and God deprives them of sustenance {*rizq*}."

An actual example of this *hadith* is the story of a garden which has been narrated in the Qur'an:

In *Surah al-Qalam*, verses 16-30, there has been narrated the story of a people who owned a garden and who intended to harvest its yields in the dark so that the poor would remain unaware of their action and they would not have to give any of the fruits to them.

As the dawn came they went to the garden. They saw that the garden had been burned and turned into ashes. Initially, they imagined that they had lost the way, but the wisest among them said: "Did I not remind you not to have such an intention? You had the intention of depriving the poor. Now, God deprived you of it as well."

From this Qur'anic account, it can be understood that sometimes God gives a sort of penalty on account of our motive and intention.68 Of course, this is not a general rule.

3. It causes wretchedness and misfortune. Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) says: “A corrupt intention is a sign of wretchedness.”69

4. The blessing of life and daily living is taken away. In another place, Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) says:

عِنْدَ فَسادَ النِّيّة تَرْتَفعُ الْبَرَكة.

That is, God will take away the blessing from the person whose intention is not sound and he will not be able to make good use of divine favors.70

It is narrated that it was said to someone: “On account of your good work, you have three acceptable supplications.” He was glad and said: “O God! Make my wife the most beautiful woman in the world.” His wife became very beautiful but his life became bitter because he realized that everyone was staring at his wife. He therefore made his second supplication: “O God! Make my wife the ugliest woman in the world.”

His supplication was granted but his life became intolerable with such an ugliness. So, he made his third and last acceptable supplication, saying: “O God! Let my wife return to her original condition.” His supplication was heard and his wife returned to her original state. He made his three accepted supplication but he earned no benefit at all. This is the meaning of taking away blessings from a person and as such, he cannot make good use of the facilities at his disposal.

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 210.
2. Surah al-Insan (or, ad-Dahr) 76:9: “We feed you only for the sake of Allah. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks.”
3. Surah al-Insan (or, ad-Dahr) 76.
4. Muhajjah al-Bayda’, vol. 8, p. 104.
5. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 93.
6. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 210.
7. Muhajjah al-Bayda’, vol. 8, p. 104.
8. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 155.
9. Surah al-Anfal 8:4.
10. Surah Al ‘Imran 3:163.
11. Surah at-Takwir 81:21.
12. Tamashagah-e Raz, p. 114.
13. Surah al-‘Ankabut 29:65.
14. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 186.
15. Ma‘sumin: those possessing the quality of ‘ismah; i.e., the Prophet, Fatimah, and the Twelve Imams (‘a). See A Brief History of the Fourteen Infallibles, 3rd ed. (Tehran: WOFIS, 2001). http://www.al-islam.org/brief-history-of-fourteen-infallibles [15] {Trans.}
16. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 41, p. 14.
17. Khwajah Shams ad-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi (ca. 1325-1391) was the fourteenth century Persian lyric bard and panegyrist, and commonly considered as the preeminent master of the ghazal form. {Trans.}
18. Du‘a Kumayl {Supplication of Kumayl}: The supplication taught by Imam ‘Ali (‘a) to one of his loyal companions and staunch supporters of Islam, Kumayl ibn Ziyad. Usually offered on every night preceding Friday {Laylat’ul-Jum‘ah} individually or in congregation

after Isha' prayers, this supplication envisages divine teachings and solid foundations of religion in order to enable everyone to follow the right path for becoming a worthy Muslim. The Arabic text, English translation and commentary of this famous supplication are available online at http://www.al-islam.org/kumayl [16]. {Trans.}

19. Maraji' at-Taqlid (sing. Marja' at-Taqlid): literally means "Sources of Imitation". Maraji' are the 'ulama' who have reached the position of Marja'iyyah {Religious Reference Authority} because they have possessed such characteristics as justice, piety, superior knowledge, awareness and being oblivious to worldly possessions. The average people refer to them to find answers to their religious problems, and to follow their religious decrees. {Trans.}

20. As narrated by Ayatullah Safi.

21. Surah Hud 11:7; Surah al-Mulk 67:2.

22. Sham or Shamat: up until five centuries ago, included Syria of today, Lebanon and parts of Jordan and Palestine. {Trans.}

23. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:55.

24. Surah an-Nur 24:39.

25. For example, Surah al-Baqarah 2:190.

26. For instance, Surah al-Insan (or, ad-Dahr) 76:9.

27. Surah al-Baqarah 2:207 and others.

28. For example, Surah at-Tin 95:6; Surah al-'Asr 103:3, and many others. {Trans.}

29. Surah an-Nahl 16:97.

30. Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, hadith 4696.

31. Surah al-'Abasa 80:1-10.

32. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:54.

33. Surah al-Ahzab 33:39.

34. Tuman: every tuman is equivalent to ten Iranian rials. {Trans.}

35. See Murtada Mutahhari, Wala-ha va Wilayat-ha, pp. 290-293.
For this book's English translation, see Murtada Mutahhari, Master and Mastership (Karachi: Islamic Seminary Publications, n.d.), chap. 7, "Wala of Control," available online at http://www.al-islam.org/mastership [17]. {Trans.}

36. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 39.

37. Ghurar al-Hikam.

38. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 8, p. 107.

39. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 178: "By Allah, no people are deprived of the pleasures of life after enjoying them, except as a result of sins committed by them, because certainly Allah is not unjust to His creatures. Even then, when calamities descend upon people and pleasures depart from them, they turn towards Allah with the true intention and the feeling in their hearts, He will return everything that vanished from them and cure all their ills."

40. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 40.

41. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 201.

42. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 40.

43. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 78, p. 312.

44. Ghurar al-Hikam.

45. Qassar al-Jamal.

46. Surah an-Nisa' 4:74.

47. Surah an-Nisa' 4:100.

48. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 39.

49. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 87.

50. Muhajjah al-Bayda' vol. 8, p. 103.

51. Muhajjah al-Bayda' vol. 8, p. 104.

52. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 206.

53. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 35.
54. Muhajjah al-Bayda' vol. 4, p. 374.
55. Surah al-A'raf 7:56.
56. Surah al-Anbiya' 21:90.
57. Nahj al-Balaghah, Saying 290.
58. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 5.
59. Surah an-Nisa' 4:92-93: "Anyone who kills a believer by mistake should set free a believing slave, and pay blood-money to his (the victim's) family, unless they remit it in charity… Should anyone kill a believer intentionally, his requital shall be hell, to remain in it {forever}; Allah shall be wrathful at him and curse him and He shall prepare for him a great punishment."
60. Surah al-Baqarah 2:225.
61. Surah Ibrahim 14:37: "Our Lord! …So make the hearts of a part of the people fond of them (Abraham's descendants), and provide them with fruits, that they may give thanks."
62. Surah al-Baqarah 2:165.
63. Munajat ash-Sha'baniyyah.
64. Surah ash-Shu'ara' 26:88-89: "The day (Day of Resurrection) when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart."
65. Surah al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 375.
66. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 12, p. 86.
67. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 15, p. 22.
68. Someone thus narrated to me: "I met one of the disabled war veterans (during the 1980-88 Iraqi imposed war against Iran), who was sitting in a wheelchair. I approached and kissed him. As he smelled my perfume, he asked me to give him my perfume. I said: 'I will buy one for you and I will keep this one.' At any rate, I did not give it to him and we parted ways. An hour later, I went to the toilet and the bottle of perfume fell into the toilet bowl. All of a sudden, I realized that this was a penalty for my stinginess and right there, I wept for my (miserable) state." Yes, we will suppose to have so much regret and remorse on the Day of Resurrection since we have done nothing for God.
69. Ghurar al-Hikam, hadith 1610.
70. Ghurar al-Hikam, hadith 1615.

Takbirah al-Ihram

Allahu akbar {Allah is greater}

The first utterance which is obligatory for the pilgrims {*hujjaj*} to the House of God is the recital of *labbayk*1 the recital of which signals the commencement of their *Hajj* rituals and this state also makes a series of things forbidden for them.

In the same token, prayer commences with the recital of "*Allahu akbar*" {Allah is greater} and this makes such things as eating, drinking and talking, forbidden {*haram*} for the person praying. Thus, the first *takbir* (utterance of *Allahu akbar*) in prayer is called *Takbirah al-Ihram*.

Along the way to Mecca, the pilgrims repeat the recital of *labbayk* whenever they reach any upward and downward slope. This repetition is recommended or optional {*mustahabb*}. In

every bending and standing upright, standing and sitting, it is *mustahabb* for the one praying to repeat the recital of *Allahu akbar*.

"*Allahu akbar*" is the first obligatory utterance in the morning.

It is the first phrase in the form of *adhan* and *iqamah* that a Muslim infant hears at the time of birth, and it is also the last phrase that is recited for the dead (in the prayer of the dead {*salah al-mayyit*}) before he is buried.

It is the only recital which is obligatory {*wajib*} in prayer as well as an essential pillar {*rukn*} of prayer.

It is the first sentence of the Muslim hymn, i.e. *adhan*.

It is the much repeated recital at the commencement of prayer, during the prayer and afterward, such that throughout the day the Muslim repeats it 360 times during the five daily obligatory prayers (not including the *mustahabb* prayers) as shown below:

1. For each of the five daily prayers, the *adhan* is recited and in every *adhan*, "*Allahu akbar*" is repeated six times (30 times in all).

2. For each of the five daily prayers, the *iqamah* is recited and in every *iqamah*, "*Allahu akbar*" is repeated four times (20 times in all).

3. Before the *Takbirah al-Ihram* in each of the five daily prayers, there are six *mustahabb takbir* and the seventh *takbir* constitutes that obligatory *Takbirah al-Ihram* (30 times in all).

4. The *Takbirah al-Ihram* at the beginning of prayers is repeated five times daily.

5. There is one *takbir* prior to every *ruku'* {bowing down} in the 17 *rak'ah*s {cycles} of the five daily prayers (17 times in all).

6. In each of the 17 *rak'ah*s of prayers we have two *sujud*s {prostrations} for each of which it is *mustahabb* to recite *takbir*—before and after the *sujud* (68 times in all).

7. Every prayer has a *qunut* prior to which there is a *takbir* (5 times in all).

8. At the end of each of the five daily prayers, there are three *takbir*s (15 times in all).

9. After every prayer, we recite *takbir* 34 times as part of the *Tasbihat Hadrat Fatimah az-Zahra* (*'a*) (170 times in all).

Yet, what a pity that throughout our lives, we have not recited "*Allahu akbar*" with attention; for, if every day a person would recite "Allah is greater" with faith and perfect attention more than 360 times, he will no longer be afraid of any power, superpower or conspiracy.

Takbir in other prayers

In the *'Id al-Fitr*[2] and *'Id al-Qurban*[3] prayers, not only in the prayers but also before and after the prayers, *takbir* constitutes all the chants.

In the *Salah al-Ayat* {Prayer for Signs},[4] we have five *ruku'* and there is *takbir* for each

ruku‘.

In the *Salah al-Mayyit* {Prayer for the Dead} also, five *takbir*s essentially constitute a pillar of the prayer.

How we should recite the takbir in prayer

Islam has explained the etiquette for every action. In the recital of “*Allahu akbar*” some rules must also be observed such as the following:

1. During the recital of *takbir* in prayer, we should raise both our hands parallel to our ears in such a manner that once both hands become parallel to the ears, the *takbir* has already been recited.
Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*) said: “The movement of the hands during the recital of *takbir* is effective in focusing the attention and having complete devotion and sincerity in supplication to God.”5

2. The fingers of the hands during *takbir* should be stretched together upward.

3. The palms of the hands must be facing the *qiblah*.

The traditions have described the raising of the hands during *takbir* as the adornment of prayer.6

The meaning of takbir

Allahu akbar implies that God is superior to all tangible and intangible, temporal and celestial beings.

Allahu akbar means that God is greater than that which one could describe.

ای برتر از خیال و قیاس و گمان و وهم

وز هرچه گفته‌ایم و شنیدیم و خوانده‌ایم

مجلس تمام گشت و به پایان رسید عمر

ما همچنان در اوّل وصف تو مانده‌ایم

O He who is beyond imagination, analogy, illusion, and fancy! The gathering was finished and our lifespan came to an end. Yet, we are still at the beginning of describing You based on what we have said, heard and read.

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) says: "When you are reciting the *takbir*, everything must be insignificant in your sight except Him."7

That a person would recite the *takbir* with his tongue while his heart is attached to something else is a lie and a deception, and because of this, God takes the sweetness of remembrance {*dhikr*} from him.

Takbir in Islamic culture

The recital of "*Allahu akbar*" has been customary not only in prayer but rather in many affairs and situations. During the early period of Islam the Muslims used to recite the *takbir* both in times of prosperity and adversity. For example:

1. During the Battle of the Trench {*khandaq*}, the Muslims came across a firm rock while they were digging the trench. The pick was broken but not the rock. The Prophet (S) came and crushed the rock with a blow. The Muslims recited the *takbir* in unison and right there the Prophet (S) said: "I saw the fall of the Byzantine and the Persian castles in the sparks and sparkles of the rocks."8

2. During the Battle of Siffin, 'Ali (*'a*) used to recite the *takbir* whenever he slew an enemy. By counting the number of *takbir*s, the Muslims would know the number of those whom he had sent to hellfire.9

3. On the night when Fatimah az-Zahra (*'a*) was sent to the house of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (*'a*) (after the wedding), 70 thousand angels came down to chant the *takbir*.10

4. Our Holy Prophet (S) recited 40 *takbir*s over the body of Fatimah bint al-Asad (mother of Imam 'Ali (*'a*))11 and 70 *takbir*s over the body of his uncle Hamzah.12

5. During the *Hajj* rituals, it is *mustahabb* to recite *takbir* with every stone that is thrown at the representations of Satan.13

6. In the *Tasbihat Hadrat Fatimah az-Zahra* (*'a*) whose reward is equivalent to a thousand *rak'ah*s of *mustahabb* prayers, 34 *takbir*s are included.14

7. When the Holy Prophet (S) was born, the first sentence he was able to utter was "*Mubarakahu Allahu akbar*" {Blessed is He; Allah is greater}.15

8. When Mecca fell into the hands of the Muslims, the Prophet (S) entered the Masjid al-Haram, pointed to the Hajar al-Aswad {Black Stone}, and recited the *takbir*. The Muslims also recited the same *takbir* which brought fear into the hearts of the polytheists.16

9. We read in the traditions: "Whenever a certain thing astonishes you, recite the *takbir*."17

10. During the Battle of Uhud, one of the leading warriors amog the infidels asked for a challenger. Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) came forward and he dealt the enemy such a heavy blow that the Prophet (S) and the Muslims recited the *takbir* with a loud voice.18

11. The Holy Prophet (S) said to Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*): "Whenever you look at the crescent {*hilal*}

or the mirror, or you encounter a problem, say *takbir* three times."19

12. "*Allahu akbar*" was the slogan of Zayd, son of Imam as-Sajjad (*'a*), who revolted against the 'Umayyad rule.20

13. During the Battle of Badr, the Prophet (S) was awaiting the news of the death of Nawfal, one of the enemy chiefs. When he (S) was informed that Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) had slain Nawfal, the Prophet (S) recited the *takbir*.21

14. When Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) came to propose for Hadrat Zahra (*'a*), the Prophet (S) said: "You wait. I have to refer the matter to my daughter Fatimah. But when she was consulted, Hadrat Zahra (*'a*) remained silent and did not say anything. The Prophet said: "*Allahu akbar! Sukutuha iqraruha*" {Allah is greater! Her silence is her approval}.22

15. During the battle against the *Khawarij* (Kharijites), when their commander perished, Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) recited *takbir* and performed prostration, and all the people recited *takbir*.23

16. A group of Jews embraced Islam and they said to the Prophet (S): "The previous prophets had successors. Who is the executor of your will {*wasi*}?" At this juncture, the following Verse of Guardianship {*ayah al-wilayah*} was revealed:

﴿ إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاَةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ ﴾

"Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down."24

The Prophet (S) said, "Let us go to the mosque." When they arrived, they saw a beggar who was glad because Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) while in the state of *ruku'* in prayer had given him his ring. At that moment the Prophet (S) recited *takbir*.25

17. Recital of *takbir* at the time of entering into the holy shrines of the infallible Imams has been enjoined. Similarly, before reading *Ziyarat Jami'ah*, we recite 100 *takbir*s in three stages. According to the late Majlisi, the reason for all these *takbir*s is perhaps for us not to indulge in extremism {*ghuluww*} with regard to the Imams (*'a*) as described in the sentences contained in the *Ziyarat Jami'ah*.26

18. In his judgments, whenever Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) identified the criminal, he would recite *takbir*.27

19. Maytham at-Tammar was hung at the order of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad and then attacked with spears for the crime of siding with Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*). At the moment of his martyrdom, he was reciting *takbir* while the blood flowed from his mouth.28

20. During the ascension {*mi'raj*}, the Prophet recited *takbir* at every heaven he passed by.29

21. Jibra'il (Archangel Gabriel) (*'a*) was beside the Prophet (S) when Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) came in. Jibra'il (*'a*) said: "O Muhammad! By God who appointed you as the Prophet! Compared to

the dwellers of the earth, the inhabitants of the heavens are better and more familiar with this ‘Ali. Whenever he recites *takbir* in the battles, we angels recite it along with him.”30

22. During the Battle of Khaybar, when the Muslims entered the fortress, they recited the *takbir* so much that the Jews had to flee.31

1. Labbayk {Here I am}: In full, Labbayk, allahumma labbayk, labbayka la sharika laka labbayk, inna’l-hamda wa’n-ni‘mata laka wa’l-mulka la sharika laka labbayk {“Here I am, O Lord, here I am, You indeed have no partner, here I am. No doubt, all praise and bounties are Yours, and so is the absolute Domain. You indeed have no partners, here I am”}. Recited in Arabic, it is the talbiyyah, proclaimed immediately after wearing the ihram (white garment) that signifies the beginning of the hajj rituals. {Trans.}
2. Id al-Fitr: the Islamic feast marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. {Trans.}
3. ‘Id al-Qurban (Feast of Sacrifice): the Islamic feast marking the end of the Hajj rituals in the month of Dhu’l-Hijjah, which is associated with the offering of animals for sacrifice. {Trans.}
4. Salah al-Ayat: obligatory prayer for signs or natural phenomena such as a solar eclipse, a lunar eclipse, earthquakes, thunder and lightning, etc. {Trans.}
5. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 727.
6. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 84, p. 351.
7. Sirr as-Salah, p. 78.
8. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 20, p. 190.
9. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 32, p. 60.
10. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 104.
11. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 35, p. 70.
12. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 20, p. 63.
13. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 11, p. 168.
14. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, p. 248.
15. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, p. 273.
16. Tafsir-e Nemuneh, vol. 27, p. 307.
17. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 92, p. 127.
18. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 20, p. 126.
19. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 92, p. 145.
20. Zayd ibn ‘Ali, p. 186.
21. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 19, p. 281.
22. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 93.
23. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 41, p. 341.
24. Surah al-Ma’idah 5:55.
25. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 35, p. 183.
26. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 99.
27. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 40, p. 260.
28. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 42, p. 125.
29. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 86, p. 207.
30. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 39, p. 98.
31. Payambari va Hukumat {Prophethood and Governance}, p. 136.

Surah al-Fatihah

After the recital of *Takbirah al-Ihram*, *Surah al-Fatihah* is to be recited and if this *surah* is not recited in the prayer, the prayer is invalid. “There is no prayer without the Opening of the Book {*fatihah al-kitab*}.”1
The other name of this *surah* is the Opening of the Book {*fatihah al-kitab*} because the Qur’an begins with this *surah*. This *surah* has seven verses2 and according to the tradition of the Most Noble Messenger (S) on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari, it is the best *surah* of the Qur’an.3

Surah al-Fatihah is the only *surah* which is obligatory upon every Muslim to recite at least ten times daily in his five obligatory prayers.

Concerning the importance of this *surah*, it is enough to say that it is narrated in the traditions: “If you recite this *surah* 70 times for the dead person and he revives, do not be surprised.”4

From the name, “Opening of the Book” {*fatihah al-kitab*} of this *surah*, it is clear that all the verses of the Qur’an were compiled during the time of the Prophet (S) and formed into a book and at his order this *surah* was placed at the beginning of the Book. The verses of the blessed *Surah al-Hamd* (or, *Fatihah*) are about God and His attributes, the issue of the Resurrection {*ma‘ad*}, request for guidance on the path of truth, and the acceptance of the sovereignty {*hakimiyyah*} and lordship {*rububiyyah*} of God.

Also, in this *surah* we express our interest to tread the path of the saints of God and aversion and disavowal of the misguided ones and those who have earned the divine wrath.

Surah al-Fatihah is the source of remedies—a cure for both physical ailments and spiritual maladies. In his book, *Tafsir Fatihah al-Kitab*, the late ‘Allamah Amini has narrated many traditions in this regard.

The instructive lessons of Surah al-Fatihah

1. By reciting *Surah al-Fatihah*, man cuts his hope from other than God by saying, “*Bismillah*” {In the Name of Allah}.

2. By saying “*Rabbi’l-‘alamin*” {Lord of all the worlds} and “*Maliki yawmi’d-din*” {Master of the Day of Retribution}, he feels that he is the servant {*marbub*} and the one who is ruled {*mamluk*}.

3. By reciting the phrase, “*Rabbi’l-‘alamin*,” he establishes a connection between himself and the universe.

4. By “*Ar-rahmani’r-rahim*” {the All-beneficent, the All-merciful}, he see himself under the aegis of His vast favor.

5. By “*Maliki yawmi’d-din*” {Master of the Day of Retribution}, his negligence of the Day of Resurrection will be erased.

6. By “*Iyyaka na‘bud*” {You {alone} do we worship}, he abandons his selfishness and desire for fame.

7. By “*Iyyaka nasta‘in*” {to You {alone} do we turn for help}, he removes from his mind the idea of seeking help from other than God.

8. By “*An‘amta ‘alayhim*” {You have blessed}, he understands that the distribution of favors lies in His hand and envy must be abandoned because the envious one in reality is not satisfied with God’s manner of deciding on and allocating sustenance.

9. By “*Ihdina’s-sirata’l-mustaqim*” {Guide us on the straight path}, he wants to ask for firmness in treading the path of truth.

10. By “*Sirat alladhina an‘amta ‘alayhim*” {the path of those whom You have blessed}, he declares his solidarity with those who have traversed the way of God.

11. And finally, by “*Ghayri’l-maghdubi ‘alayhim wa la’d-dallin*” {such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray, he declares disavowal of falsehood and the people of falsehood.

Bismillahi’r-rahmani’r-rahim {In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful}

Among various peoples and communities, there is a custom of beginning an important work with the name of one of the leading figures of that community who is respected and admired, so that the task would be started and pursued with blessing and auspiciousness.

Of course, each person acts according to his or her correct or corrupt ideas and beliefs. Some people commence their tasks with the name of idols and *taghut*s while others do the same with the name and assistance of God and the saints of God. Nowadays, it has become the custom that in constructing important buildings, distinguished figures are the first to strike the pickaxe on the ground. Prior to the Battle of the Trench, the Holy Prophet (S) was also the first to break the ground in digging the trenches.

Bismillah {In the Name of Allah} is the beginning of the book of revelation. *Bismillah* is not only the beginning of the Qur’an but rather the beginning of all heavenly scriptures. *Bismillah* has been the epigraph of the work of all the prophets (*‘a*). When the ark of Nuh (Noah) (*‘a*) was about to set out amidst the waves in the storm, he asked his followers to embark and then he said: *“In the Name of Allah it shall set sail and cast anchor.”*[5]

When Hadrat Sulayman (Solomon) (*‘a*) invited the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) toward God, he began his invitation letter with the phrase, *Bismillahi’r-rahmani’r-rahim* {In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful}.[6]

Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) says: “*Bismillah* is the source of blessing in work, and abandoning it leads to the lack of success of affairs.”[7]

He (*‘a*) also said to someone who was writing the phrase, “*Bismillah*”: “*Jawwiduha*” {Inscribe it well}.[8]

The recital of “*Bismillah*” at the beginning of every work has been enjoined—eating, sleeping, riding on an animal (or a vehicle); marriage and matrimony, and many other tasks. Even if an animal is slaughtered without the utterance of “*Bismillah*”, consumption of its meat is unlawful {*haram*}. The secret behind this is that the food of a goal-oriented religious person must also have a divine connection.

Why do we start each task with “*Bismillah*”?

The products of a factory have the special logo and emblem of that factory. For example, a

porcelain-producing factory puts its logo on all its wares, both big and small. Every country has its own flag hoisted above offices and garrisons, on ships and on office tables. In the same manner, the name of God and His remembrance is also the logo and emblem of the Muslim and the phrase, "*Bismillah*" is the symbol and code of the Muslim.

In every activity, big and small; everywhere, in the mosque or factory; and anytime, in the morning or evening, this blessed phrase is uttered by Muslims, and thus, we read in the *hadith*: "Do not forget *bismillah* even in writing a couplet of a poem." Traditions about the reward of a person who teaches *bismillah* to a child have also been narrated.9

Is *Bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* a part of *Surah al-Fatihah* and a distinct verse {*ayah*}?

Although some individuals have not regarded it as part of the *surah* or have abandoned mentioning it in the prayer, these people have been subjected to criticism by Muslims. For example, one day, Mu'awiyah did not mention *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* in the prayer, and the people strongly protested, saying: "Did you steal an *ayah* or forget it?"10

In his *tafsir* {Qur'anic exegesis}, Fakhr ar-Razi enumerates 16 proofs substantiating the fact that *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* is a constitutive part of *Surah al-Fatihah* and Alusi also expresses this view in his *tafsir*. Ahmad ibn Hanbal has equally stated in his *Musnad* that *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* is a part of the *surah*.

According to the *Ahl al-Bayt*11 (*'a*) of the Messenger of Allah (S) who were a hundred years senior to the leading *fuqaha* {jurists} of the Ahl as-Sunnah, who attained martyrdom in the way of Allah and whose infallibility {*ismah*} and purity have also been stipulated in the Qur'an, the phrase, *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim*, is itself a distinct verse and is part of the *surah*.

The infallible Imams (*'a*) insisted on reciting aloud *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* during prayer. Imam al-Baqir (*'a*) thus says regarding those who were not reciting it during prayer or not regarding it as part of the *surah*: "They stole the best *ayah*!"12

In his commentary on *Surah al-Fatihah*, 'Allamah Shahid Mutahhari identifies Ibn al-'Abbas, 'Asim, Kasa'i, Ibn 'Umar, Ibn Zubayr, 'Ata', Tawus, Fakhr ar-Razi, and as-Suyuti as among those who have regarded *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* as part of the *surah*.

Of course, there is no *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* at the beginning of *Surah al-Bara'ah* (*Surah at-Tawbah*). According to Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*), it is because *bismillahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim* is a phrase of security and mercy and it is not consistent with the declaration of disavowal {*bara'ah*} of the polytheists.

Bismillah {In the Name of Allah}

• *Bismillah* is the indicator of divine baptism {*sibghat Allah*}, and the mark of our monotheistic orientation.

• *Bismillah* is the code of *tawhid* {monotheism} while the name of others is the code of *kufr* {infidelity} and the name of God along with others is the sign of *shirk* {polytheism}. We should not place the name of others beside the Name of God or put the names of others in the place of God's Name. The meaning of *"Celebrate the Name of your Lord"*13 is that even the Name of God should also be free from any sort of polytheism.

• *Bismillah* is the secret of eternity and perpetuity, and anything that is devoid of the "divine color" is perishable.14

• *Bismillah* is the code of love for God and reliance on Him.

• *Bismillah* is the code for keeping aloof from vanity and the expression of impotence in the presence of God.

• *Bismillah* is the code for ensuring actions with the name of God.

• *Bismillah* is the code for the sanctification of actions.

• *Bismillah* is the code for the perpetual remembrance and glorification of God—"O God! I will never forget You in any situation."

• *Bismillah* is the expression of man's objective—"O God! You are my aim; not the people, not the world and not capricious desires.

• *Bismillah* means that we seek help from Him alone and not from others.

• *Bismillah* is indicative of the fact that the content of the *surah* has been revealed from the Genesis of Truth {*mabda'-e haqq*} and the Embodiment of Mercy {*mazhar-e rahmat*}.

The word "Allah"

Some people have regarded the word "*Allah*" to be derived from **"اِلِهَ"** "*aliha*" meaning **"عَبَدَ"** "*'abada*". By "*Allah*" they mean the Real Worshipped Being who has all the perfections. Others, however, have regarded it to have been derived from **"وَلِهَ"** "*waliha*" with the meaning of adoration, love and amazement. Therefore, the word "*Allah*" means the Sacred Essence whose bliss has astounded and fascinated all.

It must be noted that the word **"خدا"** "*Khoda*" or **"خداوند"** "*Khodavand*" ("God" in Persian) is not a perfect translation of the word "*Allah*" because "*Khoda*" originates from **"خودآی"** "*khuday*" which is termed in philosophy as the Necessary Being {*wajib al-wujud*} while the word "*Khodavand*" also means "Owner". For example, in the Persian literature, we say, "*khodavand-e khaneh*" to mean "owner of the house".

The meaning "owner" or "necessary being" falls short of conveying the meaning of "*Allah*". "*Allah*" means the Essence that is worthy of love and worship because It possesses all the perfections.

In the Qur'an, approximately one hundred Names of God have been mentioned, among which "*Allah*" is the most comprehensive one. In principle, each of the Names of God points to one of His Attributes, and not just one sign and symbol for God.

The names of individuals are diverse. Some names are only symbols and are in no way compatible with the character of the person in question; in fact, one's name is sometimes repugnant to one's character such as a liar whose name is Sadiq {truthful}!

There are also times, nevertheless, when the name of a person, apart from it being his own name is also an exact description of himself, pointing to his attributes and excellences such as the name "Sadiq" for a truthful person.

Some names are like the alarm of a clock which only indicates the arrival of a certain period of time. Others, however, are similar to the voice of the *mu'adhdhin* {caller to prayer} which is both symbol and substance.

The Qur'an says:

"To Allah belong the Best Names."15

In the traditions, 99 names of God have been mentioned which are described as *Asma' al-Husna* {the Best Names} and it is stated that anyone who would pray to God with these Names, his request shall be granted.16 And in the *Du'a' Jawshan Kabir*, we call on God with a thousand Names and Attributes.

The presence of the words, "*rahman*" {All-beneficent} and "*rahim*" {All-merciful} after the word "*Allah*" signifies that man commences his work with hope for divine favor and mercy and considers God as the source of all hopes and mercies.

Beginning an action with expressions of mercy signifies that the divine foundation and basis is anchored on mercy and grace, and it is only fitting for man to seek assistance from the Fountainhead of Mercy.

Rahman is a name exclusive for God because it is only His beneficence which is universal, all-encompassing and perpetual. Others either have no beneficence {*rahmah*} or what they have is not all-encompassing. In addition, if others would ever give something, it is because they expect worldly or otherworldly rewards; they give grass in order to get milk!

Regarding the words, "*ar-rahman*" and "*ar-rahim*", we shall elaborate on them under the verse, "*ar-rahmani'r-rahim*".

"Al-hamdulillah" {All praise belongs to Allah}

The words, "*madah*," "*shukr*," and "*hamd*" have identical meanings, but each of them also has its own particular meaning. For instance, the word "*madah*" means "to praise" regardless of whether the praise is worthy, based on flattery or something unworthy, or whether on account of one's excellences, fear, covetousness, beguiling, or ingratiation.

The word "*shukr*" means gratitude for the grace and favor given by others to someone. In the word "*hamd*," however, apart from gratitude and thanks, another meaning is latent and that is worship. Gratitude and thanks to the extent of worship is "*hamd*". Hence, to express "*madah*" and "*shukr*" to others is permissible, but "*hamd*" is exclusive for God because He is the Only One worthy of worship.

"*Al-hamdullillah*" is followed by four descriptions of God: "*rabb al-'alamin*," "*ar-rahman*," "*ar-rahim*," and "*maliki yawmid-din*" which indicate that on account of these divine favors and grandeur, man has to express "*hamd*" to God. But before all these descriptions, the word "*lillah*" {belonging to Allah} appears. It means that "*hamd*" is solely for Him and as He is the Only One worthy of "*hamd*," those descriptions can also be assumed even if they had not appeared afterward.

گر از دوست چشمت به احسان اوست

تو در بند خویشی نه در بند دوست

If your eyes are focusing on the benevolence of the Friend, then you are under the fetter of your self, not under the bond of the Friend.

“Rabb al-‘alamin” {Lord of all the Worlds}

God is the Lord of all the worlds. He is the Lord of whatever is in the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them:

﴿ رّب السمٰوَاتِ وَ الأرْضِ وَ مَا بَيْنهُمَا ﴾

“The Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them”17

And

﴿ هُوَ رَب كلّ شيْءٍ ﴾

“He is the Lord of all things.”18

Hadrat ‘Ali (‘*a*) says about the interpretation of “‘*alamin*”:

من الجمادات و الحيوانات

That is, He is the Lord of the inanimate objects and the animals, the living and non-living things.

Although in the Qur’an sometimes “‘*alamin*” refers to human beings, in most cases “‘*alam*” refers to creatures while “‘*alamin*” points to all creatures. It can be thus understood that He is the Lord of the entire creation and that what some believed during the pre-Islamic period of ignorance {*yawm al-jahiliyyah*} and among some nations that there is a distinct god for every type or kingdom of creatures is a false idea.

God has determined the course of growth and perfection of all creatures after creating them and the divine nurture is the same course as that of divine guidance.

“Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.”19

It is He who taught the honeybee which plant to suck. It is He who taught the ant how to preserve its winter resources. He has created the human body in such a way that it is

automatically hematogenous.

Yes, such a God is worthy of praise and gratitude. One of the peculiar characteristics of man is that he appreciates beauty, perfection and elegance, and expresses gratitude for favors and goodness. God, the Exalted, is worthy of praise on account of His Beauty and Perfection, and He is worthy of being thanked because of His goodness and favors.

Of course, to be grateful to God is not inconsistent with expressing thanks to people provided that it is the command of God and in the way of God. Although anyone can show his appreciation for others in diverse ways, in reality he is praising the Source and Fountainhead.

"*Rabb al-'alamin*" means that the relationship between God and the creatures is a perpetual and close-knit relationship.

"*Rabb al-'alamin*" means that there is the possibility of growth and training for all. Not only the good but the bad also benefit from the divine favors. *"To these and to those—to all We extend."*20

God says: "We assist all and have provided the ground for all so that each person could attain whatever aim he has." Since the world is the abode of prohibition and obstacles, it is natural that not everyone can attain his or her goal.

"*Rabb al-'alamin*" means that God is both the Ruler and the Manager of creation.

The word "*rabb*" is derived from either "رَبَيَ" "*rabiya*" which means "one who bestows growth and training", or from "*rabba*" which means "owner". God is the Owner of the world as well as its Nourisher and Manager. *"All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds."*21

According to the traditions, the phrase *"All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds"*22 is the best gratitude for the favors of God. Thus, it is enjoined to praise {*hamd*} God before any supplication or request is made of Him; otherwise, the supplication is defective.

Not only is it mentioned at the beginning of supplication and adulation but the inhabitants of paradise also repeat the same phrase at the end of a task:

﴿ وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

"And their concluding call, 'All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the all the worlds."23

"Ar-rahmani'r-rahim" {the All-beneficent, the All-merciful}

Translating these two terms into Persian as "*bakhshandeh-ye mehraban*" is not a perfect and expressive translation because according to 'Allamah Shahid Mutahhari,

“*bakhshandeh-ye mehraban*” is the translation of the Arabic words *jawad* {generous} and *ra’uf* {kind}, and not *rahman* and *rahim*. And in principle, there have been no equivalent Persian terms for both these words.

Although both **“رَّحْمٰن”** “*rahman*” and **“رَّحيم”** *rahim* have been derived from the root-word **“رَحْمَة”** “*rahmah*,” “*rahman*,” which encompasses the expansive beneficence of God, and is general and includes all human beings, however “*rahim*” is a mercy which will be showered only on those who are good as a reward for their good deeds. Thus, according to Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) God is *rahman* in relation to all the creatures but He is *rahim* only to the believers. God has made mercy {*rahmah*} incumbent upon Himself: ***“He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself.”***24 Similarly, the Prophet and the Book of Allah are also mercies for all of creation:

﴿ وَ مَا أَرْسَلْنٰكَ إِلا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعٰلَمِينَ ﴾

“We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations.”25

His nourishment and training are based on mercy and His punishment and requital are like the stick of a teacher which is necessary in training. Forgiveness of sins, acceptance of repentance, concealment of people’s faults, and giving respite to compensate for the past are all manifestations of His all-encompassing mercy.

In essence, creation is a manifestation of His mercy and whatever reaches every creature from Him is grace and mercy. Thus, all *surah*s of the Qur’an (with the exception of *Surah at-Tawbah*) begin with *Bismillahi’r-rahmani’r-rahim* {In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful}.

Ar-rahmani’r-rahim alongside *rabb al-‘alamin* means that the divine nourishment is based on grace and mercy. In the same manner, His teaching is also anchored on mercy and compassion: *“The All-beneficent has taught the Qur’an.”*26 And this is itself a lesson for us human beings that the teacher and trainer must be always benevolent and compassionate.

“Maliki yawmi’d-din” {Master of the Day of Retribution}

God is the Master of the Day of Retribution. He is both the Master {*malik*} and the Sovereign {*malik*}. The universe is an estate {*milk*} under His possession {*malikiyyah*} as well as a dominion {*mulk*} under His sovereignty and rule. His possession is comprehensive, encompassing everything. Even the government is under his possession: *“Say, ‘O Allah, Master of all sovereignty!’”*27 In the same token, man, in relation to the limbs of his body, is the master as well as sovereign and commander.

The mastership of God is real, and not delegated and contractual. God is the Master of both the world and the hereafter. Yet, since man regards himself as the master of things and affairs in this world, he tends to become negligent of the Original Master. On that day when all causes will cease to exist, all relations will be abrogated and all tongues will be sealed, at that point, he will feel and discern the divine sovereignty well; for, he shall be addressed, thus: *“To whom does the sovereignty belong today?”*28 When man would just open his

eyes, he will say: *“To Allah, the One, the All-paramount.”*29

The praying person who recites every day, “God the Master of the Day of Retribution” always remembers the Day of Resurrection and Reckoning. Before doing whatever work he intends to do, he first thinks about the book of accounts on the Day of Retribution.

The Arabic word “din”

The Arabic word “*din*” has various meanings:

1. “*Din*” is the divine law and *shari‘ah*, as the Holy Qur’an says: *“Indeed, with Allah religion is Islam.”*30

2. “*Din*” is deed and obedience, as the Holy Qur’an states, thus: *“{Only} exclusive faith is worthy of Allah.”*31

3. “*Din*” as account and retribution, as this noble verse proclaims: *“Master of the Day of Retribution.”*

One of the names of the Day of Resurrection is “*yawm ad-din*”. That is, the day of punishment and reward, just as the Holy Qur’an narrates about those who deny the Day of Resurrection: *“They ask, ‘When will be the Day of Retribution?’”*32 Or, in describing that day the Qur’an says:

﴿ ثُمّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ۞ يَوْمَ لا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلّهِ ﴾

“Again, what will show you what the Day of Retribution is? It is a day when no soul will be of any avail to another soul and all command that day will belong to Allah.”33

“Master of the Day of Retribution” is a warning and a caution—O praying one! Starting today, think of tomorrow; the day when *“Neither wealth nor children will avail;”*34 the day when *“Your relatives and your children will not avail you;”*35 the day when neither the tongue has the permission to ask an apology nor the mind the opportunity to think; the day when nothing will avail and benefit except the grace {*lutf*} of God.

The placement of *“Master of the Day of Retribution”* alongside *“the All-beneficent, the All-merciful”* shows that fear and hope must go hand in hand and encouragement and punishment are together. As the Holy Qur’an says in another verse,

﴿ نَبِّئْ عِبَادِي أَنِّي أَنَا الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ۞ وَأَنَّ عَذَابِي هُوَ الْعَذَابُ الأَلِيمُ ﴾

"Inform My servants that I am indeed the All-forgiving, the All-merciful, and that My punishment is a painful punishment."36

And in yet another verse, God is described as: ***"acceptor of repentance, severe in retribution."***37
At any rate, *"the All-beneficent, the All-merciful"* is a giver of hope while *"the Master of the Day of Retribution"* elicits fear. The Muslim must be between fear and hope, apprehension and aspiration so as neither to feel proud nor to be hopeless of divine mercy.

"Iyyaka na'bud wa iyyaka nasta'in" {You {alone} do we worship and to You {alone} do we turn for help}

"*Iyyaka na'bud"* means that "We are servants of You alone and not of others." This sentence has two dimensions: One is the affirmation of servitude to Him and the other is the negation of servitude to other than Him. Yes, the perfect school {*maktab*} alongside faith in God necessitates denial of the *taghut*, and those who have faith in God but have accepted the hegemony of the *taghut*s are "half-Muslims" or perhaps not Muslims at all!

Faith in God minus the denial of the *taghut* means a captive Muslim! In order to be relieved from the axis of *shirk* {polytheism}, one must seek refuge in the center of unity and power. Thus, while standing in prayer the person praying does not see himself alone by thinking of himself alone.

Rather, as if representing all monotheists, he is saying: "O God! I alone am not deserving and worthy to have a meritorious worship. So, I have joined the other Muslims and we do worship and adore You together. I am not alone; rather, all of us seek assistance from You. Therefore, prayer in principle must be said in congregation, and individual prayer belongs to the next stage.

The preceding verses gave us theoretical monotheism {*tawhid*} and the proper cognition of God, whereas this verse discusses devotional and practical *tawhid*. That is, we should not only recognize God in His Oneness, but we should also, in practice, worship Him alone and we should be monotheist. Why should you abandon God who is the All-beneficent, All-merciful, Sovereign, and Master, and subject yourself to the servitude of others?

Be the servant of God alone, and not the servant of the West or the East, not the servant of gold and silver, and not the servant of the *taghut*s. You do not have even the right to serve and obey the righteous except in cases where God gives you the permission or command. For example, regarding His Prophet, God says: *"Whoever obeys the Apostle certainly obeys Allah."*38 That is, if we obey our father and mother, it is because God commands us to do so and in doing so, we are actually obeying Him.

By the dictate of reason, man must accept servitude to God only because we human beings are in love with perfection and in need of growth and nourishment. God is also the embodiment of all perfections and the Lord of all beings. If we are in need of benevolence and affection, then He is the All-beneficent and the All-merciful, and if we worry about the distant future, then He is the Controller and Master of that day. So, why should we go to others and seek help from them?

"*Iyyaka na'bud"* means that I am with the people, but I have no emotional attachment to other than You. Neither do I isolate myself from the congregation of Muslims for me to

forget Your creatures nor am I be absorbed in the congregation that I would abandon You, the Creator. Rather, I know that the way toward the Creator passes through the creatures.

“*Iyyaka nasta‘in”* means that although we make use of the causes and means You have placed in creation, I know that the effectiveness and efficiency of every cause and means is through Your hand. You are the One giving effect to the cause as well as the One rendering it futile. You bestow effect on something as well as take away its effect. You will is dominant over all laws and nature is subjected to Your will.

“*Iyyaka na‘bud”* means that You alone are worthy of worship and that we worship You not on account of fear (of hell) and covetousness (for paradise), but out of love and affection to You. Which beloved {*mahbub*} is closer and more compassionate to us than You?

“*Iyyaka na‘budu wa iyyaka nasta‘in*” means that it is neither predestination {*jabr*} nor Divine Resignation {*tafwid*}.39 As we say, “*na‘bud*” {we worship}, it follows that we have free will and since we say “*nasta‘in*” {we turn for help}, it means that we are needy and that all affairs are beyond our control.

“*Iyyaka na‘budu wa iyyaka nasta‘in*” means that we perform the prayer in congregation and that we Muslims are standing in one line, in unison and solidarity as brothers and equals.

“*Iyyaka na‘bud”* means: O God! I regard You as present and watching over me and so I am saying,

“*Iyyaka* {You}” for the servant who regards himself in the presence of God, the Exalted, will benefit sooner.

From the beginning of *Surah al-Fatihah*, we have been talking about God in third person, but in this part we are addressing Him in the second person (*iyyaka* {You}). Initially, we are acquainted with God and little by little we begin to reach toward Himself. And it is not only once but rather, as the conversation with one’s beloved is sweet and pleasant, we do repeat the address, “*iyyaka*” {You} (twice).

O God! Although worship is incumbent upon us, in worshipping we are also in need of Your help:

﴿ وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللّهُ ﴾

“We would have never been guided had not Allah guided us.”40

Though to Him alone do we turn for help, seeking assistance from other than Him is permissible provided that it is by His leave. For example, man seeks the assistance of his own talents, faculties and mind, this is not repugnant to the principle of *tawhid*. God Himself thus commands us to cooperation—**“تَعاوَنوا”**—because life without cooperation and assistance is not possible.

Hadrat ‘Ali (‘*a*) said to a certain person who was praying, “O God! Do not make me in need of people”: “This is not a correct sentence. Instead, you say, ‘O God! Do not make me in

need of bad people' because life without cooperation and assistance is impossible."

Anyone who would sincerely say, "*Iyyaka na'bud*," has no more sense of pride, vanity and egoism, and he is obeisant and subservient to the divine commands. He knows that since God has bestowed so much grace upon him, the best of submissiveness must be shown in His presence.

He would stand like an absolute servant in front of his Absolute Master and humbly say, "I am the servant and You are the Master. I have nobody else except You. But You have many others apart from me. You are needless of my worship. On the contrary, I am absolutely in need of Your grace and generosity, and I have to turn to You for help always."

"Ihdina's-sirat al-mustaqim" {Guide us on the Straight Path}

The caravan of creation is constantly moving toward God, the Exalted:

"Toward Him is the return"41

and man is also endeavoring and moving:

"You are laboring toward your Lord"42

and in every movement, there is only one straight path and all other paths are deviant. Islam has also determined both the path and guide for this movement, specified the destination, and given man the means of wayfaring. And it is us who have to choose which way to traverse.

God has endowed the desire for growth, perfection and the quest for truth in the depth of the soul and the natural disposition of every human being. If they are nurtured in the light of the teachings of the prophets (*'a*), this desire and endeavor will earn the special favor of God: ***"As for those who are {rightly} guided, He enhances their guidance."***43

The Qur'an talks about two types of guidance. One is creational guidance {*hidayat-e takwini*} such as the guidance endowed the honeybee about how to suck the nectar of flowers and how to make honey. The other type of guidance is religious guidance {*hidayat-e tashri'i*} which is specific to human beings and it refers to the instructions of the divine prophets (*'a*).

Which one is the Straight Path {Sirat Al-Mustaqim}?

The word "*sirat*" which has been mentioned in the Qur'an more than 40 times means a path that is permanent, luminous and wide. There are numerous paths in the life of man one of which has to choose:

The path of one's desires; the path of people's inclinations; the path of the *taghut*s; the path of our ancestors and the predecessors in terms of ethnic and racial fanaticisms; the path of satanic insinuations; the uncharted paths; and finally, the path of God and the divine saints.

It is natural that the person who believes in God would choose the path of God and the divine saints alone because this path has merits which the other paths do not possess:

• The straight path is the shortest route between two points. So, this is the fastest way to arrive at the destination.

• The divine path is permanent. It is contrary to other paths which change everyday according to one's desires or the desires of others.

• There is only one way between two points; there is only straight path. Other paths are different in one way or another.

• It is the certain and harmless path. It is contrary to other paths where man is always under the threat of perdition.

• This is the way that leads to the destination, i.e. the pleasure of God, in which there is no defeat and failure.

• The straight path is the way of God: ***"Indeed my Lord is on a straight path."***44

• The straight path is the very path of the prophets (*'a*): ***"You are indeed one of the apostles, on a straight path."***45

• The straight path is the path of servitude to God: ***"Worship Me. This is a straight path."***46

• The straight path is the path of trust and reliance on God: ***"And whoever takes recourse in Allah is certainly guided to a straight path."***47

Man should turn to God for help in choosing the path as well as in traversing and keeping on the path. It is just like an electric lamp that should continuously receive electricity from the main source in order to keep alight. Thus, not only the common people but also the prophets of God and the infallible Imams (*'a*) have to pray to God to keep them on the straight path.

Not only in prayer but rather in all conditions and in every task, whether it is in choosing one's occupation or friend, in marriage and in studies, man should always pray to God to keep him on the straight path. It is because there are many cases when a certain person has correct beliefs but he has shortcomings in practice at times even acting to the contrary. The straight path is the middle path of moderation. Imam 'Ali (*'a*) says:

اَلْيَمِينُ وَ الشِّمالُ مَضَلّة و لطّريقُ الْوُسْطىٰ هِىَ الجادّة.

"Left and right are deviations and the path of felicity is the middle way."48

The straight path means to keep aloof from any sort of immoderation {*ifrat*} and profligacy {*tafrit*}; neither the denial of truth nor extremism in truth; neither predestination {*jabr*} nor Divine Resignation {*tafwid*}; neither individualism nor collectivism; neither mere theory nor mere practice; neither worldliness nor otherworldliness; neither negligence of the Truth (God) {*haqq*} nor disregard for the people {*khalq*}; neither intellectualism nor emotionalism; neither forbiddance of good deeds nor plunging into carnal desires; neither stinginess nor extravagance; neither covetousness nor flattery; neither fear nor

impetuosity; etc.

As a matter of fact, we have to always adopt the middle path of moderation in belief and thought as well as in behavior and action.

In moving along the straight path, we have to always seek assistance from God because this path is narrower than a hair and sharper than a sword, and every moment, there is the danger of falling down. The one who will pass by the straight path on the Day of Resurrection is he who did not deviate from the straight path of God in the world whether in the form of intellectual deviations or practical and moral deviations.

One believes in predestination and attributes to God all actions, as if man has no role in charting his own destiny as if he is without control and will. And the other one regards himself as the sole actor of all his deeds, considering the hand of God as tied.

One treats the heavenly leaders as common people while the other one elevates them to the status of divinity, considering al-Masih (the Christ) (*'a*) as the son of God, nay God Himself!

One maintains that *ziyarah* {paying homage} and *tawassul*[49] are acts of polytheism {*shirk*} while the other resorts to even a tree or a wall! Due to misplaced jealousy, one does not allow his wife to go out of the house while the other one, out of dastardliness, sends his wife to the alley and market without having proper Islamic modest dress {*hijab*}.

All of the above are deviations from the course of the straight path. God says:

﴿ قُلْ إِنَّنِي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيَمًا ﴾

"Say, 'Indeed my Lord has guided me to a straight path, the upright religion."[50]

Elsewhere He states:

﴿ جَعَلْنَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسطاً لِّتَكونُوا شهَدَاءَ عَلى النَّاسِ ﴾

"Thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be witness to the people."[51]

It has been recorded in the traditions that the infallible Imams (*'a*) used to say: "We are the straight path." That is, the actual and practical straight path, and the model and paradigm on how to traverse this path are the heavenly leaders.

In their instructions regarding all aspects of life such as work, entertainment, studies, criticism, giving of charity, and expressions of interest, love, anger, and harmony, they have always admonished us to exercise moderation and equilibrium. These instructions have been recorded in the noble *Usul al-Kafi* under the heading, "*Al-Iqtisad fi'l-'Ibadat*" {Moderation in Acts of Worship}.

At this point, we shall quote some Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions in which moderation has been emphasized while going to extremes has been prohibited:

• ***"Eat and drink, but do not waste."***52

• ***"Do not keep your hand chained to your neck, nor open it all together."***53

• ***"Those who, when spending, are neither wasteful nor tightfisted, and moderation lies between these {extremes}."***54

• ***"Be neither loud in your prayer, nor murmur it, but follow a middle course between these."***55

• ***"And those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful among themselves."***56

• ***"And maintain the prayer and give the zakah."***57 That is, keep your relationship with both the Creator {*khaliq*} by praying to Him and with the creatures (people) {*makhluq*} by giving *zakat*.

• ***"And those who have faith and do righteous deeds…"***58 That is, both faith and conviction of the heart, and righteous deeds and behavior are required.

• Although the Qur'an says, ***"And do good to the parents,"***59 in another place it states on the contrary: ***"(But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge,) then do not obey them"***60

• ***"Be witnesses for the sake of Allah, even if it should be against yourselves"***61 and ***"And ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unfair."***62

• On the night of 'Ashura' Imam al-Husayn (*'a*) was praying intimately to God as well as sharpening his sword!

• The pilgrims of the House of God are praying on the Day of 'Arafah and the night preceding the Feast of Sacrifice {*'id al-qurban*}, but on the day of the feast they have to go to the slaughterhouse and familiarize themselves with blood!

• And finally, Islam is not one-dimensional and has not focused on only one aspect while neglecting others. Rather, it has paid attention to all the dimensions of life in a balanced manner.

"Sirat alladhina an'amta 'alayhim ghayri'l-maghdubi 'alayhim wa lad-dallin"

"Sirat alladhina an'amta 'alayhim ghayri'l-maghdubi 'alayhim wa lad-dallin" {The path of those whom You have blessed—such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray}

After asking for guidance along the straight path, the one praying beseeches God to keep him along that path which has been the path of those who have earned divine grace. In *Surah an-Nisa'*, verse 69 and *Surah Maryam*, verse 58, the Qur'an describes this group. Here, we shall cite below the former reference:

﴿ وَ مَنْ يُطِعِ ﴿لرّسُولَ فَأُولئِكَ مَعَ ﴿لّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللهُ عَلَيهم مِنَ ﴿لنّبِيّينَ وَ ﴿لصِّدِّيقِينَ وَ ﴿لشُّهَداء وَ ﴿لصّالِحِينَ وَ حَسُنَ أُولئِكَ رَفِيقًا ﴾

"Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle—they are with those whom Allah has blessed, including the prophets and the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous."[63]

The person praying is invoking God to include him in the ranks of the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous. Aspiring for this path of the upright and pure ones protects from the peril of deviation and aberration, and their memory and reminiscence are always alive in the heart of the one praying.

Who are those who are astray and have incurred the divine wrath?

In the Qur'an, individuals such as the Pharaoh, Qarun (Korah) and Abu Lahab, as well as communities such as the peoples of 'Ad and Thamud and the Children of Israel have been described as those who have incurred the divine wrath. In every prayer, we ask God for us not to be like these individuals and communities that have incurred divine anger and wrath in belief, morality and deeds.

The Children of Israel whose account and civilization have been most frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, they were once superior to all the people of their time. Concerning them, God says: ***"I gave you an advantage over the nations."***[64] But in spite of this advantage and superiority, they incurred the anger and wrath of God because of their reprehensible thoughts and actions. In this regard, the Qur'an states: ***"And they earned Allah's wrath"***[65] That is, this change in their fate was caused by the change in their behavior.

The Jewish scholars distorted the heavenly commandments of the *Tawrah* (Torah):[66] ***"They pervert words (from their meanings)."***[67] The traders and the wealthy among them engaged in usury {*riba'*} and profiteering: ***"And for their taking usury…"***[68] And in reply to the call for *jihad* and struggle, the common people refused to go to the battlefront out of self-preservation and fear, thus saying to Musa (*'a*):

﴿ فَاذْهَبْ أَنتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَاتِلا إِنّا هَاهُنَا قَاعِدُونَ ﴾

"Go ahead, you and your Lord, and fight! We will be sitting right here."[69]

The same intellectual and practical deviations made God removed them from the pinnacle of glory to the abyss of abjectness and ignominy.

So, in every prayer, we have to implore God that we be not of the people who distorted the Book of Allah, the people who took usury, and the people who fled from war and *jihad*;

similarly, that we should not be among the misguided ones; those who, like lost persons, are subject to abjectness and ignominy, and every moment, without having a prior aim, they wander about; they live as opportunists and have no will and power of their own.

Those who are astray—"*dallin*"—are not like the blessed ones—"*an'amta 'alayhim*"—who have been included in the ranks of the prophets and the righteous, and are not like those who have incurred the divine wrath—"*al-maghdubi 'alayhim*"—who are waging war against the religion of God. Instead, they are indifferent, indolent and comfort-seeking individuals who, like animals, are only thinking of the stomach and the flesh, without caring for truth and falsehood.

For them, it makes no difference whether the prophets or the *taghut*s are ruling. What is important for them is that they live in material comfort and ease; anyone who likes may rule. This is the group of the misguided ones because they have not chosen a specific way for themselves.

This verse, "*Sirat alladhina an'amta 'alayhim ghayri'l-maghdubi 'alayhim wa lad-dallin*," is the perfect showcase of *tawalla* {befriending the truthful ones} and *tabarra* {avoiding the people of falsehood}.

At the end of *Surah al-Fatihah*, the person praying expresses his love, fondness and *tawalla* for the prophets, the martyrs and the righteous, as well as his disavowal {*bara'ah*} and renunciation {*tabarra*} of the misguided and those who have earned the divine wrath. This expression of aversion toward the deviant and those who have incurred the anger of God in every prayer makes the Islamic society firm and resistant to the acceptance of their rule. The Qur'an thus exhorts:

﴿ لا تَتَوَلَّوْا قَوْماً غَضِبَ اللّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ﴾

"Do not befriend a people at whom Allah is wrathful."70

1. Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, hadith 4365.
2. The number "seven" is the number of the heavens, the days of the week, the circumambulation {tawaf} of the Ka'bah, sa'i {brisk walking or jogging} between the mounts of Safa and Marwah, and the number of stones to be thrown at the representations of Satan during the Hajj rituals.
3. Tafsir Kanz ad-Daqa'iq.
4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 92, p. 257.
5. Surah Hud 11:41.
6. Surah an-Naml 27:30: "It is from Solomon, and it begins in the name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful."
7. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 76, p. 385.
8. Kanz al-'Ummal, hadith 29558.
9. Tafsir Burhan, vol. 1, p. 43.
10. Mustadrak al-Hakim, vol. 3, p. 233.
11. Ahl al-Bayt: according to authentic hadiths recorded in both the Sunni and Shi'ah sources, the term Ahl al-Bayt, and interchangeably Itrah and Al, is a blessed Qur'anic appellation that belongs exclusively to the Prophet, 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn ('a).

The members of this Family of five, with the Prophet Muhammad (S) at its head, were the ones alive at the time the Qur'anic verses regarding their virtue were being revealed to the Prophet (S). However, nine other Imams from the descendants of Imam al-Husayn ('a) are also included in this chosen Family, the final one being Imam al-Mahdi ('a). {Trans.}
12. Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, vol. 3, p. 177; vol. 4, p. 85.
13. Surah al-A'la 87:1.
14. Surah al-Qasas 28:88: "Everything is to perish except His Face."
15. Surah al-A'raf 7:180.
16. Tafsir Nemuneh, vol. 7, p. 27.
17. Surah Maryam 19:65.
18. Surah al-An'am 6:164.
19. Surah Ta Ha 20:50.
20. Surah al-Isra' 17:20.
21. Surah al-A'raf 7:54.
22. Surah al-Fatihah 1:2.
23. Surah Yunus 10:10.
24. Surah al-An'am 6:12.
25. Surah al-Anbiya' 21:107.
26. Surah ar-Rahman 55:1-2.
27. Surah Al 'Imran 3:26.
28. Surah al-Ghafir (or al-Mu'min) 40:16.
29. Surah Ibrahim 14:48; Surah al-Ghafir (or al-Mu'min) 40:16.
30. Surah Al 'Imran 3:19.
31. Surah az-Zumar 39:3.
32. Surah adh-Dhariyat 51:12.
33. Surah al-Infitar 82:18-19.
34. Surah ash-Shu'ara' 26:88.
35. Surah al-Mumtahanah 60:3.
36. Surah al-Hijr 15:49-50.
37. Surah al-Ghafir (or al-Mu'min) 40:3.
38. Surah an-Nisa' 4:80.
39. Divine Resignation {tafwid} means leaving man to his own devises and suspending the divine will from any effective role. {Trans.}
40. Surah al-A'raf 7:43.
41. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:18.
42. Surah al-Inshiqaq 84:6.
43. Surah Muhammad 47:17.
44. Surah Hud 11:56.
45. Surah Ya Sin 36:3-4.
46. Surah Ya Sin 36:61.
47. Surah Al 'Imran 3:101.
48. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 87, p. 3.
49. Tawassul: literally, to resort to intermediaries. Technically, it refers to the practice of petition prayer addressed to God through a holy personage such as a prophet {nabi} or a saint {wali}. {Trans.}
50. Surah al-An'am 6:161.
51. Surah al-Baqarah 2:143.
52. Surah al-A'raf 7:31.
53. Surah al-Isra' 17:29.
54. Surah al-Furqan 25:67.
55. Surah al-Isra' 17:110.

56. Surah al-Fath 48:29.
57. Surah al-Baqarah 2:43.
58. Surah al-Baqarah 2:82.
59. Surah al-Baqarah 2:83.
60. Surah al-‘Ankabut 29:8.
61. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:135.
62. Surah al-Ma’idah 5:8.
63. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:69.
64. Surah al-Baqarah 2:47.
65. Surah al-Baqarah 2:61.
66. Tawrah (Torah): the scripture revealed to Prophet Musa (Moses) (‘a) in its original form. {Trans.}
67. Surah al-Ma’idah 5:13.
68. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:161.
69. Surah al-Ma’idah 5:24.
70. Surah al-Mumtahanah 60:13.

Surah al-Ikhlas

The importance of Surah al-Ikhlas

In the prayer, after *Surah al-Fatihah*, one of the *surah*s of the Qur’an must be recited. The person praying might choose any *surah*; of course, with the exception of the four *surah*s in which prostration is obligatory.

Among the *surah*s recited in prayer, *Surah al-Ikhlas* (or *at-Tawhid*) is preferable and in the traditions it is thus enjoined: “You have to read this *surah* in at least one of the *rak‘ah*s of prayer everyday so as to be among those who are praying.”1

In terms of importance, this *surah* is equal to one third of the Qur’an, nay one third of the *Tawrah*, *Injil*2 and *Zabur*.3 If this *surah* is also recited after the prayer as a prayer supplement, God shall give the person the goodness of this world and the hereafter.

This *surah* is short, yet its content is very sublime. As Imam as-Sajjad (*‘a*) said, “Since He knew that meticulous and insightful individuals shall emerge in the future, God revealed this *surah* as well as the initial verses of *Surah al-Hadid*.

Recital of this *surah* is enjoined not only in prayer. In fact, frequent recitation of it removes the evil of tyrants and ensures one’s house from mishaps and perils.

Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh, one of the companions and commanders of the army of the Messenger of Allah (S), was buried in the cemetery of Baqi‘ in Medina. The Prophet (S) participated in the burial rites for him barefooted and saying: “Ninety thousand angels have come to participate in the burial of Sa‘d.” The Prophet (S) asked Jibra’il (Archangel Gabriel) (*‘a*): “What is the reason behind your coming down as well as that of all these angels for the burial of Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh?” Jibra’il (*‘a*) replied: “In whatever state—standing, sitting, riding, or walking—he used to recite the *surah*, *“Say, ‘He is Allah, the One’.”*

Concerning the circumstances surrounding the revelation of this *surah*, we read that the Jews, Christians and the idol-worshippers asked the Prophet (S) about God: “Describe your God to us.” In reply to them, the Prophet (S) recited this *surah*. This *surah* serves as the “identity card” of God.

“Qul huwa’llahu ahad”

Tawhid {monotheism} is the most fundamental principle of all heavenly religions and the prophets (*‘a*) have come to eliminate the effects of polytheism, disbelief and idol-worship and to invite mankind toward God.

Tawhid is the spirit and kernel of the teachings of the prophets (*‘a*). Not only beliefs but also laws and morality revolve around the axis of *tawhid*.

Tawhid is the frontier between faith {*iman*} and disbelief {*kufr*}, and entering the fortress of faith without acknowledgment of *tawhid* is not possible: “Say, ‘*La ilaha illa’llah* {There is no god but Allah}’ to attain success”4 and “*La ilaha illa’llah* is My fortress; so, whoever enters My fortress is safe from My wrath.”5

This *surah* consists of the purest monotheist beliefs; hence, this *surah* is called *Surah al-Ikhlas* {Chapter: Purity}. This *surah* refutes the Christian belief in the Trinity, the polytheism of the Jews as well as the belief of the Arabs during the pre-Islamic period of ignorance who regarded the angels as the daughters of God.

Tawhid means the purification of mind and action from any form of polytheism and associating partners with God; neither theoretical polytheism nor practical ostentation. Instead, both the motive and the action itself must be only for the sake of God.

That is, He is One and has no substitute; He has neither similitude nor equal; He has neither limbs nor parts.

That is, He is the Worshipped Being {*ma‘bud*} who is unique in everything. Thus, His Essence is beyond the comprehension and understanding of man.

The reason behind His Oneness is that if there were also another “God”, this “God” would also have been supposed to send prophets to mankind to recognize and obey “Him”!

The reason behind His Oneness is that at the time of danger, all human beings focus only on the One Being and their hearts testify to the fact that only One Being gives hopes to man amid all difficulties.

The reason behind His Oneness is the harmony between the heaven and the earth, the universe and man, and the precise and orderly relations among all creatures. If you would ask three painters to draw a single rooster, for example, asking one of them to draw its head, the second one to draw its body, and the third one to draw its tail or feet, there would be no harmony among the three drawings when you place them together; one might be big while the other one might be small; one may have a dark color while the other one may have a light color.

Yes, the harmony existing between the sun, moon, earth, water, wind, soil, mountain, desert, sea, and others, on one hand, and the needs of man, on the other, signifies that there is only One Creator.

The human being inhales oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide. On the contrary, a plant absorbs carbon dioxide and releases oxygen. In this way, the needs of man and other livings creatures are met, and this harmony is the secret behind the life of men and plants.

The needs of an infant are met through the love and affection of its parents, and the weariness of the day is removed through sleep at night. The water of the eye (tears) has been created salty and the water of the mouth (saliva) fresh. In this way, the salty water cleanses the eyes while the fresh water prepares the food for the processes of chewing and digestion.

Instead of dying, the infant is taught to suck and even before it is born, its milk has been made available in the breasts of the mother. The food of some birds is located along the teeth of whales in the sea. And everyday, animals are satisfactorily provided with food.

During the Battle of Jamal, a Bedouin Arab asked Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) about the meaning of *tawhid*. The soldiers complained to him, saying that it was not the time for such questions. Nevertheless, the Imam (*‘a*) explained to him the meaning and interpretation of *tawhid*, and then said: “It is for this very meaning (of *tawhid*) that we are now fighting.”6

Yes, the struggle of the followers of truth throughout history has been for the sake of hoisting the banner of *tawhid*.

“Allahu’s-samad” {Allah is the All-embracing}

“*Samad*” means impenetrable, indestructible and unchangeable.

He is *samad*. So, He is not material or corporeal because all corporeal things experience change and destruction with the passage of time. Thus, He has no body that can be seen by the eyes or such an attractive force that, though unseen, has corporeality.

He is *samad*, the Impenetrable Force whose will pervades and penetrates all things.

He is *samad*, the Indestructible, the Honorable from whom all honors come and whatever honor and power anyone has emanates from Him. He is not in need of anybody or anything but everything is in need of Him.

He is *samad*, the Absolute Perfect Being, nay the Absolute All-perfect Being who possesses all excellences at the apex of their perfection. In order to attain perfection, all beings are in need of His grace, but He is and will not be in need of any being. His Command is above all other commands and His Will is above all other wills. He is in need of neither sleep nor assistance and partners in doing His work.

He is *samad*, and in a nutshell, He is the Needless God who is always needed by all.

“Lam yalid wa lam yulad” {He neither begat nor was begotten}

He is the Creator of all beings and is not the one who gave birth to them. His work is not reproduction such as “reproducing Himself”. It is instead bringing something into being from non-being or nothing.

In the case of the mother who gives birth to a child, the infant belongs to her genus and is

like her, i.e. a human. But with respect to God, it is impossible for an equal and similar being to be begotten by Him or for Him to have been begotten: ***"Nothing is like Him."***[7]

This sentence is against the belief of the Christians who believe in 'Isa (*'a*) as the son of God, and treat him like God. In the same vein, this verse negates the belief of the polytheists who imagined that the angels were the daughters of God by saying: "God has never begotten a child, whether a girl or a boy!"

Nothing is to be begotten unless that the one who begot is preeminent and superior to the begotten one, not to mention the fact that the one who begot existed prior to the begotten one!

His existence is not like the sprouting of the fruit from the flower; the tree from the seed; the water from the cloud; the fire from the wood. It is not like the emergence of words from the mouth; or the script from the pen. It is not like the emission of scent from the flower, or taste from food. It is not like the flashing of an idea from the mind, or intuition from the heart.

It is not like the appearance of heat from fire or cold from snow. He exists but is similar to nothing and no one. He is neither in anything nor is anything in Him. His relationship with things is not like that of a parent to his child. It is rather the relationship of the Creator {*khaliq*} with the creature {*makhluq*}.

"Wa lam yakun lahu kufuwan ahad" {Nor has He any equal}

He has no equal in being, perfection and action. He is One and no one is similar to Him. He is the One and Only and He has neither spouse nor offspring! He has no equal to be His assistant and partner.

How could man dare to regard His creature as His partner and commit this grievous inequity against Him?

"Polytheism is indeed a great injustice."[8]

O praying one! Do not consider others as His partners and associates in the favors that He bestows upon you, nor attribute to other than Him the things you do. Why do you think of attracting the attention of those who are like you—weak and needy? Try to win the favor of God instead who has no equal, weakness and need.

At the end of the *surah*, we shall take a cursory glance at its sublime content:

﴿ قُلْ هُوَ اللّهُ أَحَد ﴾

That is, He is One in Essence as well as in Attributes. So, He is also One in worthiness to be the Worshipped Being {*ma'bud*}.

﴿ اللّهُ الصّمَدُ ﴾

That is, He is free from want and all things are in need of Him, and He is Alone in being free from want.

﴿ لَمْ يَلِدْ ﴾

That is, He does not reproduce an equal for Him to have a peer and a match.

﴿ وَ لَمْ يُولَدْ ﴾

That is, He is the First and the Last. He is not created to have emerged from something.

﴿ وَ لَمْ يَكُن لّهُ كفُواً أَحَدُ ﴾

That is, He has neither equal nor spouse; neither peer nor partner.

This *surah* negates all layers of polytheism, superstitions, delusions, and deviant beliefs from the Sacred Essence of God, while presenting to us pure and pristine *tawhid*.

According to the traditions, the verses of this *surah* are the interpretation of each other.9 They describe God in a step-by-step process:

First step: Say, “He is my God. He is beyond the comprehension of the human mind and intellect, and He is hidden and absent from any vision.”

At this stage, all the attention is focused on the Essence of God and not on His Attributes. The Essence alone is enough for His being the Beloved {*mahbub*} and the Worshipped Being {*ma‘bud*}. Hadrat ‘Ali (‘*a*) says:

وَ كمالُ الاِخْلاص نَفْىُ الصِّفاتِ عَنْه.

That is, perfect sincerity is that you worship Him without taking into account His Attributes.10 That is, you worship God for the sake of Himself and not on account of the favors that have been given to you.

Second step: “He is Allah, the Worshipped Being who possesses all perfection.”

In this stage, the Essence and Attributes are considered together. “*Allah*” is the Essence that possesses all the good Attributes, and thus He is worthy of worship and devotion. As the Qur’an states,

﴿ وَ للّهِ الأسمَاءُ الحُسنى فَادْعُوهُ بهَا ﴾

“To Allah belong the Best Names, so supplicate Him by them.”[11]

Knowing God through the Attributes is the second step in which “*Allah*” is the comprehensive word for all those Attributes.

Considering God by way of the Attributes is a means that is manifested in the supplications, especially in the *Du‘a’ Jawshar Kabir* where we address God through a thousand Attributes.

Third step: “He is One and Unique in Oneness.”
In this stage, *tawhid* is discussed—*tawhid* in Essence and Attributes. His Essence is One and His Attributes are Unique and Unparalleled. The existence of His Essence and His Attributes are one and the same; not that His Attributes are a separate existence added to His Essence.

He is One who has no second or third. The numerical “one” {*wahid*} is different from oneness as a qualitative concept {*ahad*}. The Qur’an says: “God is *ahad* and not *wahid*.” He is “One” (ontologically) and not “one” (numerically) which may have a second or a third of its kind.

Fourth step: “God is free from want.”
In this stage, the freedom from want which is the pivot of the Divine Essence and Attributes is an important description of God. In addition, it is not just in the form of a predicate, stating: “*Allahu samad*”. It is rather in the form of a fixed description of “*Allah*” and because of this, the word “*Allah*” is hereby repeated: “*Allahu samad*”.

He is One but not in need. Other than Him are many, but all the needs and attention of all those who are needy are geared toward that Independent One!

Fifth step:

﴿ لمْ يَلِدْ وَلمْ يُولدْ ۞ وَلمْ يَكُنْ لهُ كُفُوًا أحَدٌ ﴾

This stage, according to the traditions, is the interpretation of **“الصّمَد”.** He is not in need of begetting a child. Neither is He in need of a father and a mother to beget Him, nor of a spouse, associate and partner to assist Him in His work.

If He were ever born, then He would not be the First, and if He ever gave birth, then He would not be eternal because He would be prone to diminish and dwindle. If He ever had an equal and a peer, then He would not be unrivalled. He is free and exempt from all these things.

﴿ سُبْحَانَ اللّهِ عَمّا يُشرِكُونَ ﴾

“Clear is Allah of any partners that they may ascribe {to Him}!”12

1. The traditions regarding the merits and importance of this surah have been recorded in Tafsir Burhan. In this volume, we shall only quote some of these traditions.
2. Injil: the scripture revealed to Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) (‘a) in its original form. {Trans.}
3. Zabur: the scripture revealed to Prophet Dawud (David) (‘a) in its original form. {Trans.}
4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, p. 202.
5. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 3, p. 13.
6. Tafsir Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 709.
7. Surah ash-Shura 42:11.
8. Surah Luqman 31:13.
9. Tafsir Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 714.
10. Najh al-Balaghah, “Khutbah at-Tawhid”.
11. Surah al-A‘raf 7:180.
12. Surah at-Tur 52:43.

Bowing Down {ruku‘} and Prostration {sujud}

Bowing down {ruku‘}

Bowing down {*ruku‘*} is an essential pillar of prayer. Performing it in an excessive or inadequate manner, whether intentional or unintentional, renders the prayer invalid.

The word “*rak‘ah*” {circle} which is used in counting the cycles of prayer is derived from the word “*ruku‘*”.

The tribe of Thaqif requested that the Prophet (S) excuse them from performing *ruku‘* and prostration {*sujud*} in prayer, saying: “Bending down for us is a shame.” This verse was revealed:

﴿ وَ إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ارْكَعُوا لا يَرْكَعُونَ ﴾

“When they are told, ‘Bow down,’ they do not bow down!”1

Others bow and show reverence in front of human beings like themselves, but you have to bow down and show reverence solely to your Creator.

When the verse, *“So celebrate the Name of your Lord, the All-supreme,”*2 was revealed, the Prophet (S) ordered: “Show reverence to God while you are in *ruku‘* and recite this *dhikr*

{remembrance or glorification}:

سُبْحانَ رَبِّيَ ٱلْعَظيمِ وَ بِحَمدهِ

Subhana rabbiya'l-'azim wa bihamdih.
"Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise belongs to Him."3

We read in the traditions: "*Ruku'* is the sign of courtesy {*adab*} while the *sujud* is the symbol of nearness {*qurb*} to God. Once you do not perform the gesture of courtesy properly, you cannot be ready for the stage of nearness."4

Ruku' is the means of repentance {*tawbah*}, penitence and asking forgiveness in the presence of God:

فَاستَغْفَرَ رَبّهُ وَ خَرّ رَاكِعاً وَ أَنَاب

"Whereat he (David) pleaded with his Lord for forgiveness, and fell down bowing and repented."5

The effects of ruku'

Imam al-Baqir (*'a*) says: "Anyone who perfectly performs his *ruku'* perfectly will be safe from the horror of the grave."6

The more we bow down in humility to God, the more we shall have the power to confront the Satan and satanic ones. Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) says: "Long *ruku'* and *sujud* makes Iblis angry, saying, 'Woe to me! With such quality of servitude, the people will no longer obey me."7

God says to the angels: "See my servants, how they express reverence to Me and they kneel down in front of Me. I shall also exalt them and give them honor and glory."8

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) says: "A long *ruku'* and *sujud* have effects on the longevity of life."9

The etiquette of performing ruku'

We read in the traditions that during *ruku'* the blessed back of the Messenger of Allah (S) would be so bent and so straight that if a drop of water was poured on his back, it would remain in the center of his back and not fall to either side."10

It is thus enjoined: "During *ruku'* stretch your neck as if to say: 'I have accepted the faith even if I am beheaded in His way."11

Among the other etiquettes of performing *ruku'* is that men have to position their elbows outwardly like the wings of a bird and not to attach them to their flanks. We have to place

the palms of our hands on our knees and spread our fingers. The feet must be aligned, neither one of them should be placed forward nor backward. Between the feet there must be the distance of about one hand span.

During *ruku‘* one must look between the feet and after the recital of the *dhikr* for *ruku‘*, while still in the position of *ruku‘* one must invoke blessings {*salawah*} upon Muhammad and his progeny (*‘a*). Of course, repetition of the *dhikr* for *ruku‘* at least thrice has been recommended and is preferred.12

The ruku‘ of the saints of God

Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) says: “Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) would make his *ruku‘* so long that his legs would perspire.”13

Imam ‘Ali (*‘a*) himself thus says in the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balaghah*: “God has angels who are always in the state of *ruku‘* and will never rise up {*qiyam*}.”

Of course, tiredness and hunger are not applicable to the angels. So, those who are gnostics and lovers of God and who perform such long *ruku‘* persuade the angels to praise God. This is the state of the saints of God. Yet, what about us? The Prophet (S) was once sitting in the mosque when a certain man entered and stood in prayer, but his *ruku‘* and *sujud* were defective and done very quickly. The Prophet (S) said: “He is like a crow that would peck and go. If he departs from this world with such a state of prayer, he will not have died under my religion.”14

The history of sujud

After creating Adam (Adam) (*‘a*), God ordered the angels to prostrate before him. All of them prostrated except Iblis.15 On account of this defiance, God expelled him from His Presence.

The Qur’an mentions this episode repeatedly and we know that repetitions in the Qur’an are not without wisdom. It is as if it wants to say: “O man before whom all the angels prostrated! Why do you not prostrate before God, the Creator? O man! Iblis was expelled for refusing to prostrate before you. Once you refuse to prostrate before God, what can you expect?

“Iblis did not prostrate before you. He was saying: ‘I am superior to man.’ Can you afford to say: ‘I am superior to God’? You—who were once non-existent and once you came into the world, weakness and impotence enveloped your entire being, and in the end you shall also humbly depart from this world—how could you dare to be proud in front of the Creator of the universe?

At any rate, the first commandment of God after the creation of man was the command of prostration.

The importance of sujud

• *Sujud* is the best position of man in the presence of God.

• Sujud is the best way to attain nearness to God: ***“But prostrate and draw near {to***

Allah}!"16

• A sign of the loyal Companions of the Prophet (S) was that the effect of prostration could be seen on their foreheads: ***"Their mark is {visible} on their faces, from the effect of prostration."***17

• *Sujud* makes man harmonious and concordant with all of creation. This is because all creatures in heaven and on earth—from the stars to the plants—prostrate and are humble before God: ***"To Allah prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth***,"18 and ***"And the herb and the tree prostrate {to Allah}."***19

• *Sujud* means harmony with the angels of God. Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) says: "There is no layer of the heavens without having therein a group of angels in the state of *sujud*."20

• *Sujud* is the highest degree of obedience and servitude because man places on the earth the loftiest part of his body, i.e. his forehead, and expresses humility and impotence in the presence of the Omnipotent Authority.

• *Sujud* is the most sublime station for the noblest men and women of the world. God commanded His Prophet (S) to prostrate, and that was not only during daytime but also during the night: ***"And worship Him for a watch of the night and glorify Him the night long."***21 And in addressing Hadrat Maryam (Saint Mary)—that pure and devoted woman—He says: ***"O Mary, be obedient to your Lord, and prostrate."***22

• *Sujud* comes after the *ruku'*. It is a more perfect and higher stage than *ruku'*, and brings the person praying to the peak of humility. As such, *ruku'* and *sujud* are usually mentioned together in the Qur'an. For example, ***"O you who have faith! Bow down and prostrate yourselves,"***23 and ***"You see them bowing and prostrating {in worship}."***24

• *Sujud* is the symbol of faith in the divine signs: ***"Only those believe in Our signs who, when they are reminded of them, fall down in prostration."***25

• Nightly prostration is one of the signs of the righteous servants of God: ***"The servants of the All-beneficent are… those who spend the night with their Lord, prostrating and standing {in worship}."***26

• *Sujud* is the adornment of prayer. So, perform it properly. Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) says: "Whenever you perform prayer, perform the *ruku'* and *sujud* well as God will give seventy times the reward or even more."27

• *Sujud* is the source of pride of God to the angels, and thus, it entails His favor such that in every *sujud*, one of man's sins is forgiven and a great reward is recorded for him.28 Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) said: "If man only knew what mercy envelopes him at the time of *sujud*, he would never raise up his head from that state."29

• *Sujud* extinguishes the spirit of egoism and pride, and delivers man from vanity.30

• The Prophet (S) used to say: "On the Day of Resurrection, I will identify my *ummah* by the mark of prostration that they have on their foreheads."31 That portion of the earth on which prostration was made will testify to the devotion of man on the Day of Resurrection32 and even in the world, a radiant point connect it to the heavens.33

• As in the case of *ruku'*, long prostrations result in the permanence of favors and

longevity.34

• *Sujud* is so important that God commands a great Prophet (S) such as Ibrahim (Abraham) (*'a*), to cleanse Masjid al-Haram for those who perform the circumambulation {*tawaf*} of the *Ka'bah*, *ruku'* and *sujud*.35

The wisdom behind sujud

The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (*'a*) was asked concerning the wisdom behind *sujud*. The Imam (*'a*) said: "The first *sujud* means that I was dust in the beginning, and as I raise my head from *sujud*, it means that I came to the world from the dust. The second *sujud* means that I will again return to the soil, and as I raise my head from *sujud*, it means that on the Day of Resurrection I will rise up from the grave and be summoned."36

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) says: "Since *sujud* is for God, it must therefore not be done on anything that is eaten or worn which draws the attention of materialists. *Sujud* must remind man of God, not the stomach, clothing and material things."37

We read in the *hadith* that the reason behind the prostration for forgetfulness {*sujud sahwi*} for unintentional excess and deficiencies (in the number of any essential pillar of the prayer) or misplaced utterance, standing and sitting is that Iblis distracted your attention and created disorder in your prayer.

Therefore, after prayer you perform two prostrations so as to rub his nose in the ground and to inform him that every time he creates disorder, you will again perform prostration before God.38

Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*) said: "The external appearance {*zahir*} of the *sujud* is the placing of the forehead on the ground with sincerity and humility, but its esoteric essence {*batin*} is the detachment of the heart from all perishable things, attachment of the heart to the eternal abode, and relief from pride, fanaticism and all worldly attachments.39

The etiquette of performing sujud

We shall point out some of the rules of etiquette of performing *sujud* as recorded in the traditions:40
After *ruku'* in preparation for the performance of *sujud*, the hands must be placed first on the ground before the knees.

During the *sujud* the hands must be placed parallel to the ears. For men, the elbows must not be placed on the ground and must remain open on both sides like wings. Not only the forehead but also the nose must be placed on the ground. In between the two prostrations, the person praying must place his left foot under the right foot in such a manner that the weight of his body is on the left side because the left is the symbol of falsehood while the right is the symbol of truth.

During *sujud* the person praying, apart from the obligatory recital, has to send *salawah*, supplicate and weep out of fear of God. While rising from *sujud*, he has to recite *takbir* and during the recital of *takbir*, he has to raise both his hands.

The soil of Karbala’

Although *sujud* on any ground, nay on any clean stone and wood, is permissible and correct, the soil {*turbah*} of Imam al-Husayn has great merits. It is said that Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) would not prostrate on anything but the soil of Karbala’.

Sujud on the soil of Karbala’ tears away seven types of veils {*hijab*s} (that separate man from the Source of Light). It uplifts the prayer and makes it accepted. It also brings the person praying out of the abyss of material things, and acquaints him with *jihad*, blood and martyrdom.

Sujud on the soil of al-Husayn (*‘a*) means prayer accompanied by divine guardianship {*wilayah*}.

Sujud on the soil of al-Husayn (*‘a*) means prayer accompanied by martyrdom.

Sujud on the soil of al-Husayn (*‘a*) means commemorating the memory of the martyrs of Karbala’ who offered their blood for the sake of prayer and in the way of prayer.

Sujud on the soil of al-Husayn (*‘a*) means that every day is ‘Ashura’ and everyplace is Karbala’.

Sujud on the soil of al-Husayn (*‘a*) means that in the struggle against falsehood, one should offer his head and soul, but not subject himself to humiliation.

Yes, the shrine of al-Husayn (*‘a*) is one of the gardens of heaven and one of its gate.

Supplication under the dome of al-Husayn (*‘a*) is accepted and prayer in that place is beloved and accepted.

If the beads of a rosary {*tasbih*} made from the soil of Karbala’ are rotated in the hands, there shall be the reward of reciting “*subhan Allah*” {glory be to Allah} for the owner even if he is silent. If he does *dhikr* {the remembrance of God} and uses the rosary, there shall be 70 times the reward for each *dhikr*.

The importance of Karbala’ as mentioned in the traditions is not concealed so as for it to encompass so far as four miles away from the shrine of Imam al-Husayn (*‘a*).41

Prostration of thanks {sujud shukr}

Prostration is not exclusive to prayer. In fact, it is also discussed in other areas and it is even obligatory sometimes such as after the recital of one of the verses for which prostration is obligatory.
One of the ways of expressing gratitude is the prostration of thanks {*sujud shukr*} which is highly recommended.

Sujud shukr means giving thanks for the incessant divine blessings which have been showered upon us and our family.

Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) says: “Whenever you remember a blessing, place your forehead on the ground as a token of thanks and if you see that the people are looking at you, as a respect for that favor, bend a little bit.”42

The Holy Prophet (S) was seen dismounting a camel. He performed prostration five times and said: “Jibra’il came down to me and gave me five types of insight, and for every insight I made *sajdah*.”43

Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) sometimes would faint while performing *sujud shukr*44 and it has been narrated from the Imam of the Time (*‘a*) that the most necessary of the recommended acts {*sunnah*} is *sujud shukr*.45

During the *sujud shukr* any *dhikr* or supplication is permissible, but the recital of “*shukran lillah*” {thanks to Allah} and “*al-hamdulillah*” {all praise belongs to Allah}, and remembrance of the great blessing of the guardianship {*wilayah*} of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (*‘a*) are recommended.46 God said: “The reward of the person who performs *sujud shukr* is that I also give thanks to him.”47

Although there is a specific time and place for *sujud shukr*, the best time nevertheless is after every prayer as a supplement to the prayer.

The blessings of sujud shukr

Many blessings and benefits of *sujud shukr* have been mentioned in the traditions. We shall briefly state some of them below:

If there is deficiency in prayer which is not removed through the recommended and optional prayers, *sujud shukr* will compensate for it. It entails the pleasure of God and removes the distance between man and God. Supplication during the *sujud shukr* is recommended and has the reward of ten *salawat*s and the removal of ten major sins.

Concerning the station and status of *sujud shukr*, it is enough to say that God would be proud of it and express this pride to the angels.48

The prostrations of the saints of God

Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) says: “The reason behind Ibrahim’s (*‘a*) attainment of the station of Friend of Allah {*khalilullahi*} was his many prostrations on the ground.49

On the night when Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) was supposed to sleep on the bed of the Holy Prophet (S) in order to protect him from the swords of his enemies, he asked the Messenger of Allah (S): “If I do so, will your life be safe from danger?” When the Prophet (S) gave an affirmative reply, Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) smiled and performed *sujud shukr* as a gesture of gratitude for this opportunity.50

When the head of Abu Jahl, leader of the polytheists, was brought to the Prophet (S), he performed *sujud shukr*.51

Imam as-Sajjad (*‘a*) would perform *sujud shukr* as an expression of thanks. Whenever a calamity was taken away from him or he initiated the reconciliation between two Muslims, he would make *sujud shukr*. His *sujud* was so long that he would perspire profusely.52

Some points

1. The place of prostration is so important in that we thus read in the traditions: “After prayer, touch the place of prostration with your hand and apply it to your face and body in

order to remain safe from diseases, plagues and unpleasant things."53

2. Try not to forget *sujud shukr* after the *maghrib* {dusk} prayer as the supplication after it is accepted.54

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) said: "Anyone who performs prostration between the *adhan* and *iqamah* and thus says while in prostration, "I do prostrate before You humbly, submissively and meekly," God will place love for him in the hearts of the believers and fear of him in the hearts of the hypocrites {*munafiqin*}.55

3. Prostration is solely for God and it is not permissible to prostrate before anyone including the Prophet of Allah (S),56 let alone in front of the graves of the Imams (*'a*) and their descendants {*imamzadeh*s}, in front of which some people do prostrate as an expression of respect.

When a group of Muslims migrated to Abyssinia, the infidels of Mecca dispatched a delegation to King Negus in order for him not to accommodate the Muslims in his country and thus expel them. In accordance with the customs at that time, the representative of the Quraysh prostrated before the Negus (king of Abyssinia). On the contrary, the Muslim representative, Ja'far, the brother of Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*), did not prostrate, saying: "We do not prostrate to anybody except God."57

The prostration of Hadrat Ya'qub (Jacob) (*'a*) and his sons to Hadrat Yusuf (Joseph) (*'a*) was also not for Yusuf but for God as a token of gratitude for the blessing of reunion with Yusuf: ***"And they fell down prostrate before him**."*58

1. Surah al-Mursalat 77:48. See Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 85, p. 100.
2. Surah al-Waqi'ah 56:74.
3. Jami' al-Ahadith, vol. 2, p. 922.
4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 85, p. 108.
5. Surah Sad 38:24.
6. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 928.
7. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 928.
8. Jami' al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 203.
9. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 928.
10. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 942.
11. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 942.
12. All these etiquettes are recorded in Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, pp. 920-943.
13. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 85, p. 110.
14. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 922.
15. Of course, sujud is solely for God and man was merely assumed the qiblah of the angels.
16. Surah al-'Alaq 96:19.
17. Surah al-Fath 48:29.
18. Surah an-Nahl 16:49.
19. Surah ar-Rahman 55:6.
20. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 91.
21. Surah al-Insan 76:26.
22. Surah Al 'Imran 3:43.
23. Surah al-Hajj 22:77.
24. Surah al-Fath 48:29.
25. Surah as-Sajdah 32:15.

26. Surah al-Furqan 25:63-64.
27. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 85, p. 139.
28. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 466.
29. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 482.
30. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 453.
31. Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol. 4, p. 189.
32. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 189.
33. Mustadrak al-Wasa’il, vol. 4, p. 485.
34. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 928.
35. Surah al-Baqarah 2:125: “We charged Abraham and Ishmael {with its upkeep, saying}, ‘Purify My House for those who go around it, for those who make it a retreat and for those who bow and prostrate.”
36. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 85, p. 139.
37. Al-Faqih, vol. 1, p. 282.
38. Al-Wafi, vol. 8, p. 992.
39. Mustadrak al-Wasa’il, vol. 4, p. 484.
40. These traditions have been recorded in Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, pp. 950-980.
41. The subjects of this discussion have been recorded in the traditions of the book, Kamil az-Ziyarat, Section 89 onward.
42. Al-Wafi, vol. 8, p. 825.
43. Muhajjah al-Bayda’, vol. 1, p. 346.
44. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 459.
45. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 453.
46. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 469.
47. Al-Faqih, vol. 1, p. 334.
48. Al-Faqih, vol. 1, p. 331.
49. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 85, p. 163.
50. Al-Wafi, vol. 8, p. 882.
51. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 5, p. 475.
52. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 85, p. 137.
53. Safinah al-Bahar.
54. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 1058.
55. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 633.
56. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 986.
57. Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 461.
58. Surah Yusuf 12:100.

Dhikr at-Tasbih

“Subhan Allah” {glory be to Allah}

While in *ruku‘* and *sujud*, the person praying glorifies God.
When the verse, *“So celebrate the Name of your Lord, the All-supreme,”*1 was revealed, the Prophet (S) thus said: “Apply this command to your *ruku‘* and say:

سُبْحانَ رَبِّيَ ﴿لْعَظيم وَ بِحَمدهِ

Subhana rabbiya'l-'azim wa bihamdih.
"Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise belongs to Him."

And when the verse, "*You are laboring toward your Lord, the Most Exalted,*"2 was revealed, he (S) said: "Apply this command to your *sujud* and say:

سُبْحانَ رَبِّيَ ﴿لاَعْلىٰ وَ بِحَمدهِ

Subhana rabbiya'l-a'la wa bihamdih.
"Glory be to my Lord, the Exalted, and praise belongs to Him."3

The station of tasbih

Glorifying {*tasbih*} and exalting {*tanziyyah*} God are the root of all authentic Islamic beliefs and thoughts:

Tawhid means regarding God as free from any taint of polytheism: *"Clear is Allah of any partners that they may ascribe {to Him}!"*4

Justice {*'adl*} means considering God as free from any form of injustice: *"They said, 'Immaculate is our Lord! We have indeed been wrongdoers!'"*5

Prophethood {*nubuwwah*} and Imamate {*imamah*} mean treating God as immune from the lack of the purpose, the program and the means delivering the people from the sea of desire and inclination:

﴿ وَ مَا قَدَرُوا اللّهَ حَقّ قَدْرهِ إِذْ قَالُوا مَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ عَلى بَشر مِّن شيْءٍ ﴾

"They did not regard Allah with the regard due to Him when they said, 'Allah has not sent down anything to any human'."6

The Return {*ma'ad*} means knowing God not to have made creation in vain and knowing that the end of the world is not annihilation:

"O Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You!"7

"Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?"8

Yes, God is guiltless of this futile and vain act.

Glorification of God is not only the fountainhead of Islamic beliefs but also the source of enormous spiritual and moral excellences:

Subhan Allah is the source of satisfaction {*rida*}. If we regard Him as free from any defect, it means that we are satisfied with His decrees and submit to the wisdom behind His will.

Subhan Allah is the fountainhead of *tawakkul* {reliance on God}. It is only logical that we have to trust and rely on the One who is free from any need and immune from any weakness and inability: *"Immaculate is He! He is the All-sufficient."*9

Subhan Allah is the source of love for God. The Essence that is clear from any defect and shortcoming is loved by man.

Subhan Allah is the preliminary part of praise and eulogy to God—praise and eulogy for the Essence that is free from filth and unpleasantness. Thus, in the *Tasbihat al-Arba'ah*,10 "*subhan Allah*" comes first before "*al-hamdulillah*".

Subhan Allah is the key to salvation from all superstitions and man-made creeds: *"Clear is Allah, the Lord of the Throne, of what they allege {concerning Him}."*11

Perhaps, it is for these reasons that the command for *tasbih* {glorification of Allah} has been mentioned more frequently compared to other *adhkar* {forms of remembrance to God}. The command for *tasbih* has been repeated 16 times; for *istighfar* {asking forgiveness from Allah} eight times; for the remembrance of Allah {*dhikr*} five times; and for *takbir* {to say, "*Allahu akbar*"} twice. Besides, the command for *tasbih* is meant for all times and conditions so that man should always remember God and regard Him as free from any form of defect and shortcoming:

﴿ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا وَمِنْ آنَاءِ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ ﴾

"And celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the sunset, and glorify Him in watches of the night and at the day's ends."12

You also glorify God at the moment of victory and joyfulness: ***"When Allah's help comes with victory… then celebrate the praise of your Lord."***13

In addition, glorify God in the depths of vicissitudes and adversity for the *tasbih* is the source of deliverance: ***"And had he (Jonah) not been one of those who celebrate Allah's glory, he would have surely remained in its belly till the day they will be resurrected."***14

Yes, on account of man's many limitations, he can never comprehend God. So, it is better for him to admit his own weakness and say, "As You are beyond the scope of the intellect and imagination, You are guiltless of and above what others ascribe to You": ***"Immaculate is He, and greatly exalted above what they say!"***15

Only the sincere servants of God, through divine guidance and succor, can describe God:

﴿ سُبْحَانَ اللّهِ عَمّا يَصِفُونَ ٭إلا عِبَادَ اللّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴾

"Clear is Allah of whatever they allege {about Him},—{all} except Allah's exclusive servants."16

The reward for tasbih

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (S) said that when a servant of God utters, "*Subhan Allah*," whatever is under the Divine Throne glorifies God along with him and 10 times the reward shall be given to him. When he recites, "*Al-hamdulillah*," God shall grant him the blessings of the world till he meets Allah and enters into the blessings of the hereafter.17

Practical tasbih

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) said: "One of the most difficult and important things that God has made necessary for creation is "abundant remembrance" {*dhikr al-kathir*}." He (*'a*) then said: "What it means is not the recital of "*Subhan Allahi wa'l-hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu Allahu akbar*" {Glory be to Allah; praise be to Allah; there is no god but Allah; Allah is greater} although it is also part of them. What it means is 'to remember Allah as to what is lawful {*halal*} and what is unlawful {*haram*}'."18

That is, to remember God when acting; if a certain task means obedience to Him, it has to be undertaken; if it earns His displeasure, it has to be abandoned.

Repetition of tasbih

Someone came to the house of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*). He saw the Imam (*'a*) in a state of *ruku'*glorifying God and repeating the *tasbih* 60 times. While in the state of *sujud*, the Imam repeated the *tasbih* 500 times.19

The repetition of *tasbih* is discussed not only in prayer but in the *Hajj* rites as well. At the time of looking at the Black Stone {*hajar al-aswad*}, during the *sa'i* between Safa and Marwah, and in other cases, the repetition of *tasbih* has been recommended.

For instance, in the prayer, apart from the *dhikr* in *ruku'* and *sujud*, *Tasbihat al-Arba'ah* can also be repeated in the third and fourth *rak'ah*s. Based on both Sunni and Shi'ah traditions, what is meant by the *baqiyat as-salihat* {"lasting righteous deeds"}20 in verse 46 of *Surah al-Kahf* is this *Tasbihat al-Arba'ah*.21 As stated by Hadrat 'Ali (*'a*), the *dhikr* of Hadrat Ibrahim (*'a*) at the time of constructing the *Ka'bah* was "*Subhan Allahi wa'l-hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu Allahu akbar*".22

Remembrance of God {dhikr Allah} in Islamic culture

Let us take a brief look at the remembrance of God {*dhikr Allah*} in Islamic culture:

When surprised and amazed, our faithful ancestors would say: "*Masha' Allah*" {what Allah has willed!} or "*subhan Allah*" {glory be to Allah!}; when entering the house: "*Ya Allah*" {O Allah!}; when separating from each other: "*Khoda hafiz*" {may God protect (you)!}; when

standing: “*Ya ‘Ali!*” {O ‘Ali!}; to remove fatigue while working: “*Khoda quwwat*” {may God give you power!}; in reply to the inquiry after one’s health: “*Al-hamdulillah*” {All praise belongs to Allah}; when offering food: “*Bismillah*” {In the Name of Allah!}; and at the end of a meal, they would recite appropriate prayers and thanks to God.

Grandmothers would start their storytelling: “*Yeki bud; yeki nabud*” {There was once nobody except Him}.

It is clear that to live in such an atmosphere and to be reared in such an environment would encourage the remembrance of God to flow in the heart and His Name to flow from the tongue at any time and in any place.

The tasbih of other creatures

All of creation—the seven heavens and the earth and whatever there is between them—glorifies God.23 The animals such as the birds, inanimate objects such as the mountains,24 thunder and storm25 do so and that too is out of consciousness and instinct!

كُلٌّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُ وَتَسْبِيحَهُ

“Each knows his prayer and glorification.”26

The *tasbih* of the angels is so pervasive that the Prophet (S) said: “There is not a single layer of the heavens except that therein is an angel in the state of prayer and *tasbih*.”27

Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) says: “Whenever Hadrat Dawud (*‘a*) would read the *Zabur*, there was no mountain, stone and bird that did not recit it with him.”28

In the traditions, we are admonished not to strike a blow on the face of four-footed animals for they are glorifying God.29

گر تو را از غیب چشمی باز شد

با تو ذرّات جهان همراز شد

نطق آب و نطق خاك و نطق گل

هست محسوس حواس اهل دل

جمله ذرّات عالم در نهان

با تو می گویند روزان و شبان

ما سمیعیم و بصیریم و هوشیم

با شما نامحرمان ما خاموشیم

If you could see the unseen, to you would be revealed the secret behind every particle of the world.
The voice of water, soil and mud can be heard by the gnostics.
All the particles of the world say secretly to you during the day and night:
"We are hearing, discerning and vigilant. We are silent with you the strangers."

A group of chirping sparrows passed by in front of Imam as-Sajjad (*'a*). The Imam (*'a*) turned to those who were near him and said: "Every morning the birds glorify Allah and pray for power for the day."30

Some people have said that what is meant by the *tasbih* and *sujud* of other creatures is allegorical and not literal. Just as a beautiful painting and a collection of poems respectively testify to the enormous talent of the painter and the inborn disposition of the poet, the mysterious constitution of other creatures bears witness to the knowledge, power, wisdom, and precision of God, declaring Him immune from any sort of defect and shortcoming. This is the very meaning of the *tasbih* of other creatures.

This view is put forward when, in the first place, we have no proof and evidence substantiating this notion. Secondly, we have to resort to allegorical interpretation {*ta'wil*} and analysis when the apparent meaning of a word poses an impossibility such as the verse, ***"The hand of Allah is above their hands,"***31 in which it is impossible for God to have a hand and so we say that what is meant by "the hand of Allah" is divine power. However, in case where we cannot comprehend the meaning, we have no right to resort to allegorical interpretation.

How could we resort to allegorical interpretation when the Qur'an itself says,

﴿ وَ إِن مِّن شىْءٍ إِلا يُسبِّحُ بحَمْدِهِ وَ لَكِن لا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسبِيحَهُمْ ﴾

***"There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification"*?**32

How could we resort to allegorical interpretation when the Qur'an declares,

"And you have not been given of the knowledge except a few {of you}"33?

We read many times in the Qur'an that the Prophet (S) who has access to eternal knowledge, said: ***"I do not know."***34 So what if we also say, "We do not know" and "We do not understand"?

What is interesting is that God has explicitly declared to us our ignorance and lack of knowledge: ***"But you do not understand their glorification."***35 But the proud man is not ready to say: "I do not understand the secret of creation among which is the *tasbih* of other creatures.

Does not the Qur'an categorically disclose that the hoopoe was aware of the sun-worshipping practice of the people of Sheba and reported the same to Hadrat Sulayman (*'a*), saying: "The ruler of Sheba is a woman who is sitting on a large throne and her people are worshipping the sun.36

The hoopoe's knowledge of the peculiarities of the environment and the name of the land, and its ability to distinguish woman from man, ruler from subject, polytheism from monotheism, and the like are all signs of the intelligence of other creatures.

Does not the Qur'an say that one of the ants said to the others,

"Enter your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts should trample on you while they are unaware"?37

In these verses, understanding the movement of human beings, their names (Solomon), their occupation (military), their inattention to where they step, and the ant's concern for the other ants are among the issues that makes us aware of the capacity and power of discernment of other creatures.
Now, if we accept the existence of instinct as we have to accept the text of the Qur'an, then there is no more need to justify and analyze the *tasbih* of other creatures.

1. Surah al-Waqi'ah 56:74.
2. Surah al-A'la 87:1.
3. Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 19, p. 160.
4. Surah at-Tur 52:43.
5. Surah al-Qalam 68:29.
6. Surah al-An'am 6:91.
7. Surah Al 'Imran 3:191.
8. Surah al-Mu'minun 23:115.
9. Surah Yunus 10:68.
10. Tasbihat al-Arba'ah: literally, the four tasbihs; it refers to the recital of "Subhan Allahi wa'l-hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu Allahu akbar" {Glory be to Allah; praise be to Allah;

there is no god but Allah; Allah is greater}. {Trans.}
11. Surah al-Anbiya' 21:22.
12. Surah Ta Ha 20:130.
13. Surah an-Nasr 110:1, 3.
14. Surah as-Saffat 37:143-144.
15. Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:43.
16. Surah as-Saffat 37:159-160.
17. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 7, p. 187.
18. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 80.
19. Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 107.
20. Surah al-Kahf 18:46: "Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of the world, but lasting righteous deeds are better with your Lord in reward and better in hope."
21. Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 540.
22. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 1207.
23. Surah al-Jum'ah 62:1: "Whatever there is in the heavens glorifies Allah and whatever there is in the earth, the Sovereign, the All-holy, the All-mighty, the All-wise."
24. Surah al-Anbiya' 21:79: "And We disposed the mountains and the birds to glorify {Him} with David, and We have been the doer {of such things}."
25. Surah ar-Ra'd 13:13: "The Thunder celebrates His praise."
26. Surah an-Nur 24:41.
27. Tafsir al-Qurtubi, vol. 8, p. 5581.
28. Tafsir Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 444.
29. Tafsir Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 168.
30. Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 206.
31. Surah al-Fath 48:10.
32. Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:44.
33. Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:85.
34. This sentence was repeated four times in the Qur'an among which is in Surah al-Anbiya' 21:109.
35. Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:44.
36. Surah an-Naml 27:22-27.
37. Surah an-Naml 27:18.

Qunut

The word "*qunut*" means obedience accompanied by humility. For example, while addressing Hadrat Maryam (Mary), God says: ***"O Mary, be obedient {uqnuti} to your Lord."***1 What is meant by *qunut* in prayer is the supplication that we recite in the second *rak'ah* of every prayer.

On the interpretation of the verse, ***"And dedicate yourself to Him with total dedication,"***2 Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) says that what is meant by "*tabattul*" is to raise the hands in supplication during prayer.3 The word "*tabattul*" means cutting off hope in other than God.4

The Qur'an thus enjoins us: ***"Supplicate your Lord, beseechingly and secretly."***5 One of the signs of beseeching and weeping in the presence of God is to raise the hands in supplication.6 The indigent man stretches his hands toward the Absolute All-sufficient,

praying to Him alone and purges his heart of other than Him.

Although *qunut* is only optional {*mustahabb*} in prayer, it has, nevertheless, been given such attention that Imam ar-Rida (*'a*) thus wrote in one of his letters to Ma'mun: "*Qunut* is an obligatory *sunnah* in all the daily prayers."7 Of course, the purpose of the Imam (*'a*) is to emphasize the importance of *qunut*. For example, if one forgets to perform it before the *ruku'*, it is recommended to perform a compensatory one after *ruku'*, and if he remembers it during *sujud*, he may also do so after *salam*.

Concerning the etiquette of performing *qunut*, it is thus recorded: You have to raise your hands up to the level of your face; the palms of the hands must be open toward the sky; the two hands must be kept together; the fingers must be close together except the thumbs; at the time of reciting the supplication, you have to look at the palms of the hands and recite it loudly; of course, not to the extent that the leader of the congregation would hear it.8

There is no specific supplication and one may recite whatever supplication one wants. It is also not necessary that the supplication be recited in Arabic as it may also be recited in English. Of course, it is clear that the Qur'anic supplications and the supplications that the Infallibles (*'a*) read in their *qunut* have special virtue and preeminence.

The qunut of different prayers

The number of *qunut* is not identical in all prayers. Each of the five daily prayers has one *qunut* before the *ruku'* of the second *rak'ah*. But the Friday congregational prayer which has two *rak'ah*s have two *qunut*s, one before the *ruku'* of the first *rak'ah* and the other one after the *ruku'* of the second *rak'ah*.

In the *'Id al-Fitr* and *'Id al-Qurban* prayers each of which has two *rak'ah*s, we recite nine *qunut*s; five successive *qunut*s before the *ruku'* of the first *rak'ah* and four successive *qunut*s before the *ruku'* of the second *rak'ah*. Of course, there is a special supplication recorded for these *qunut*s.

Even in the *salah al-ayat* {prayer of natural signs} which has two *rak'ah*s and five *ruku'*s in every *rak'ah*, it is recommended to recite the *qunut* before the second, fourth, sixth, and eight *ruku'*s, though it is enough to have one *qunut* before the tenth *ruku'*.

The *witr* prayer, which is a one-*rak'ah* prayer performed at the end of the night supererogatory prayers, has a long *qunut* and many recorded supplications, such as *istighfar* {to say, for example, "*astaghfirullah*"} 70 times, "*al-'afwu*" 300 times and supplication for 40 believers.

The prayer for rain, like the *'Id* prayers, has five *qunut*s in the first *rak'ah* and four *qunut*s in the second *rak'ah*.

In any case, to prolong the *qunut* is recommended. Abu Dharr asked the Prophet (S): "Which prayer is better?" The Prophet (S) replied: "The prayer whose *qunut* is longer and anyone who would recite his *qunut* longer will have more comfort during the time of the Day of Resurrection."9

The qunut of the Infallibles (‘a)

Ibn Mas‘ud said that the reason behind his acceptance of Islam was his witnessing the prayer of three persons, viz. the Holy Prophet (S), Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) and Hadrat Khadijah (*r*).10

In the *salam* that we give in the *Ziyarah Al Ya Sin* to Hadrat al-Mahdi (may Allah, the Exalted, expedite his glorious advent), we read: “Peace be upon you when you are standing for prayer and *qunut*!”

For each of the Infallibles (*‘a*), there has been recorded long supplications in the *qunut*, which we cannot quote here for lack of space. It is surprising that the *qunut* with all its blessings is not widely and frequently practiced. Were Hadrat ‘Ali and the *Khulafa’ ar-Rashidun* not reciting *qunut* in their prayers?

During *qunut* we should not think of ourselves and our requests only. We have to learn from Hadrat Zahra who said: “*al-jaru thumma ’d-dar.*”11

That is, “Think of your neighbor first and then your family.” God has promised to grant the personal requests of anyone who would pray for others.

In the *qunut* we have to pray against our enemies, asking for the victory of Islam and the Muslims.
In his *qunut* the Holy Prophet (S) would curse a group of people, mentioning their names and descriptions. In the *qunut* of his prayer, Hadrat ‘Ali (*‘a*) used to curse Mu‘awiyah and ‘Amru ibn al-‘As.12 At any rate, *tawalla* and *tabarra* are part of the religion, nay the foundation of our religion:

هَل الدِّين إلاّ ٱلحُبّ وَ ٱلبُغْض؟

“Is the religion other than love and hatred?”13

1. Surah Al ‘Imran 3:43.
2. Surah al-Muzzammil 73:8.
3. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 912.
4. Mufradat ar-Raghib.
5. Surah al-A‘raf 7:55.
6. Ma‘ani as-Saduq, p. 369.
7. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 82, p. 197.
8. Masa’il-e Qunut dar Tawdih al-Masa’il.
9. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 82, p. 200.
10. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 38, p. 280.
11. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 81.
12. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 82, p. 201.
13. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 68, p. 63.

Tashahhud and Salam

Tashahhud

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لا إِلهَ إِلاّ الله وَ أَشهَدُ أَنّ مُحَمّداً عَبْدُهُ وَ رَسُولُه، أَللّهُمّ صَلّ عَلىٰ مُحَمّدٍ وَ آلِ مُحَمّد.

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.O Allah! Send blessings on Muhammad and his progeny.

Among the obligatory parts of prayer is *tashahhud* which is recited in the second and last *rak'ah*s of prayer. In the *tashahhud* we testify and bear witness to the Oneness of Allah and the apostleship {*risalah*} of His Prophet, Hadrat Muhammad (S). Although we have testified again and again to these two facts in the *adhan* and *iqamah*, those testimonies were at the time of the approach of the prayer and this testimony is at the end of the prayer.

There is wisdom behind all these repetitions. It is because man is easily subjected to negligence and forgetfulness, easily forgetting the Owner of the blessings. These sentences are like a rope that protects the ship of humanity from the waves of events.

The slogan of tawhid

"*La ilaha illallah*" is the first slogan of all the prophets (*'a*).

"*La ilaha illallah*" is the testimony that all those who possess knowledge along with the angels do acknowledge:

شهدَ اللّهُ أَنّهُ لا إِلهَ إِلا هُوَ وَ الْمَلائكةُ وَ أُولُوا الْعِلْم

"Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him—and {so do} the angels and those who possess knowledge."1

"*La ilaha illallah*" is the sentence that every Muslim hears at birth, with which he will be buried and which will be recited at his grave {*talqin*}.

"*La ilaha illallah*" is the most beloved of sentences to God and the heaviest of deeds on the Scale.2

"*La ilaha illallah*" is the formidable fortress of God in which whoever enters is safe from His wrath:
"*La ilaha illa'llah* is My fortress; so, whoever enters My fortress is safe from My wrath."3

“*La ilaha illallah*” is the demarcation between *kufr* and Islam. Any unbeliever {*kafir*} who recites it enters the fold of Islam. The Prophet (S) criticized the Muslim who did not pay attention to one of the enemy soldiers when the latter recited “*la ilaha illallah*” and killed him, saying: “With the utterance of this statement, anyone is safe even though we do not know whether he does so sincerely or not.”4

“*La ilaha illallah*” is the slogan of the Muslims at the time of passing the *Sirat* on the Day of Resurrection.5

We read in history that Abu Jahl said to the Prophet (S): “Shall we abandon the 360 idols and accept One God? We are willing to utter 10 sentences but not this statement.” But the Prophet (S) said: “It is this statement that will give you glory and power and will give you superiority over other communities.”6

A glance at the *Du‘a’ al-‘Arafah* of Imam al-Husayn (*‘a*) and the sermon of Imam as-Sajad (*‘a*) at Sham makes the fact clear that the saints of God wholeheartedly bore witness to this, and even the earth and time gave this testimony.

In the *tashahhud* we do not suffice ourselves with merely “*la ilaha illallah*”. We rather add, “*wahdahu la sharikalah*” “He is alone who has no partner”. That is, He is One who has no partner in creation, in control and in legislation: “*wa lam yaku’l-lahu sharika fi’l-mulk*” “And He has no partner in sovereignty.” Servitude to God is the highest honor for the saints of God:

عَبْداً لَكَ اَكُونَ اَنْ عِزّاً بی کفیٰ اِلٰهی

“O Lord! It is already enough of an honor for me that I am Your servant.”7

Servitude to God implies man’s freedom from all forms of restriction, attachment and affection. It thus gives man so much power that he would not be afraid of any superpower. On account of being a sincere servant of God, the wife of Pharaoh became such an impenetrable force that all of Pharaoh’s gold and silver had no effect on her, and although Pharaoh subjected all to his service, she remained the servant of God alone. Her accomplishment was such that she became a model for all believing men and women throughout history:

 وَ ضرَب اللّهُ مَثَلاً لِّلّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا امْرَأة فِرْعَوْنَ

“Allah draws an{other} example for those who have faith: the wife of Pharaoh.”8

In any case, testimony to the Prophet’s (S) servanthood {*‘ubudiyyah*} to God is a preliminary to the testimony of his apostleship {*risalah*}, and this itself has lessons and messages: “*Ashhadu anna Muhammadan ‘abduh...*”.

Testimony to his apostleship means the negation of all man-made schools; acceptance of the eternality and universality of the apostleship of the Seal of the Prophets {*khatam al-*

anbiya'}; and rejection of all the *taghut*s.

Testimony to the apostleship of Hadrat Muhammad (S) is a covenant that God has made with the all the prophets; had they not accepted his apostleship, they would not have attained the station of prophethood.9 Therefore, I am not alone in saying, "*Ashhadu anna Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasulah*" as all the prophets (*'a*) have said so as well.

Pristine Tawhid

What has afflicted most of monotheists nowadays is that they verbally utter, "*La ilaha illallah*" but in practice they turn to other than Him, looking for power and glory somewhere else. They obey other than Him and express love to other than Him.

By the way, polytheism is itself a grave act of injustice and disrespect for His Sacred Essence: ***"Polytheism is indeed a great injustice."***10 It is so because having a partner connotes weakness, impotence and the inability to act, as well as the existence of a similar and equal being—things which are inconceivable with respect to God.

Testimony to the Apostleship

"*Wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasuluh*" "And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger."

Servitude {*'ubuddiyyah*} is the highest station of the prophets (*'a*). Indeed, it is the preliminary stage of apostleship and prophethood: "*'abduhu wa rasulah*".

It is servitude to God that brings the Prophet (S) to the ascension {*mi'raj*}: ***"Immaculate is He who carried His servant on a journey"***11 and it causes the heavenly revelation to descend upon him: ***"We have sent down (the revelation through angels) to Our servant."***12

God also praises His prophets (*'a*) for their servitude to Him. Regarding Hadrat Nuh (Noah) ('a), He says: ***"Indeed he was a grateful servant,"***13 and concerning Hadrat Sulayman (Solomon) (*'a*) He states: ***"What an excellent servant!"***14

One of the distinctions of the prophets (*'a*) in relation to the geniuses and inventors is that the latter have obtained their genius and creativity as the result of intelligence, perseverance and exercise, while the prophets (*'a*) have acquired their miracles as a result of servitude to God and under the aegis of the divine grace, and servitude is the foundation of all the stations of the prophets (*'a*).

Acknowledgment of the servanthood of the prophets (*'a*) prevents any form of extremism, fanaticism and radicalism concerning the stations of the saints of God. It reminds us that the Prophet (S), though the best of creation, is also a servant of God.

It is needless to say that this testimony must be based on sincerity and truthfulness for, the hypocrites {*munafiqin*} used to testify also to the apostleship of the Prophet (S) yet the Qur'an thus reveals about them:

إِذَا جَاءكَ الْمُنَافِقُونَ قَالُوا نَشْهَدُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُ اللّهِ وَاللّهُ يَعْلَمُ

إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُهُ وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَكَاذِبُونَ

"When the hypocrites come to you they say, 'We bear witness that you are indeed the apostle of Allah.' Allah knows that you are indeed His Apostle, and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars."15

Salawat

"*Allahumma salli 'ala Muhammad wa ali Muhammad.*" "O Allah! Send blessings on Muhammad and his progeny."

After bearing witness to *tawhid* and the *risalah*, we invoke blessings for Muhammad and his progeny (*'a*).

Salawat is the symbol of love {*muhabbah*}, friendship {*muwaddah*} and devotion to the family of the Holy Prophet of Islam (S), which the Qur'an regards as the reward for the apostleship of the Prophet (S).16

Salawat is the polish for man's rusty soul17 and it wipes away hypocrisy {*nifaq*}.18 *Salawat* is a factor in wiping away sins,19 a means for opening the gates of heaven,20 the reason behind the angels' supplication for man and asking for the forgiveness of his sins,21 and a means of proximity to the Prophet (S) on the Day of Resurrection and the obtainment of his intercession {*shafa'ah*}.22

The one who has blissful fate is he whose last statement in the world is *salawat*.23
God initially sends blessings {*salawat*} to the Prophet (S) and then orders us to send *salawat*:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

"Indeed Allah and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who have faith! Invoke blessings on him and invoke Peace upon him in a worthy manner."24

From this verse and the following traditions, we have obtained these points below regarding *salawat*:

1. *Salawat* is a verbal gesture of respect, but what is more important is the practical obedience required as is indicated by the phrase, "*sallimu taslima*".

2. The *salawat* of God and the angels is permanent—"*yusallun*" in the present perfect tense.

3. The *salawat* of God is nobility {*kiramah*}; the *salawat* of the angels is mercy {*rahmah*}; and the *salawat* of the people is supplication {*du'a'*}.

4. It is recorded in the traditions: “In addressing Hadrat Musa (*‘a*), God said, ‘Send *salawat* upon Muhammad and his progeny as I and the angels do send *salawat* upon him’.”25

5. The Messenger of Allah (S) said: “To remember God is a form of worship and to remember me is also a form of worship, and the same is true with respect to my successor ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.”26

6. It is recorded in the traditions: “For the acceptance of your supplication, send *salawat* first before supplicating.”27 Not only the sending of *salawat* upon hearing the name of the Prophet (S) but also writing it after his name has reward. The Prophet (S) said: “The angels are praying for the forgiveness of anyone who would send *salawat* to me in his book so long as my name exists in that book.”

The manner of sending salawat

In the main books of the Ahl as-Sunnah, it is narrated that at the time of sending *salawat*, the progeny of Muhammad (S) should definitely be mentioned along with his name otherwise one’s *salawat* is incomplete {*abtar*} and defective.28

In the *Tafsir Durr al-Manthur*, it is narrated from the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Nisa’i*, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, and *Sunan Ibn Majah*, which are among the most important Sunni books, that someone asked the Prophet (S): “We know how to greet you {*salam*}, but how should we send blessings to you?” The Prophet (S) said: “You say,

أللّهُمّ صَلّ عَلىٰ مُحَمّدٍ وَ آل مُحَمّد كما صَلّيْتَ عَلىٰ إبْراهيم وَ آل إبْراهيم إنّكَ حَميدٌ مَجيدٌ.

“O Allah! Send blessings on Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad as You have sent blessings on Ibrahim and the progeny of Ibrahim. You are the Praiseworthy and Holy.”29

Imam ash-Shafi’i, the imam of the Shafi’i school of Sunni jurisprudence, expresses this issue in the following poem:

يا أهْلَ بَيْتِ رَسول اللهِ حُبّكُمُ

فَرْضٌ مِنَ اللهِ في ٱلْقُرْآنِ أنْزَله

كفاكُمْ مِنْ عَظيم ٱلْقَدْر أنّكُم

مَنْ لَمْ يُصَلِّ عَلَيْكُمْ فَلا صَلٰوةَ لَه

O members of the Household {Ahl al-Bayt} of the Messenger of Allah! Loving you is an obligation, which God has revealed in the Qur'an.

*On the greatness and loftiness of your station, it is enough that anyone who does not invoke blessings on you (in invoking blessings on the Prophet (S)), it is as if he has not invoked blessings at all.*30

Yes, remembering Muhammad's progeny in every prayer indicates that after the Prophet (S) we have to refer to his *Ahl al-Bayt* (S) and not to others. And if it is not really so, mentioning the names of persons whose path is not necessary to tread, especially in every prayer, would be an act of extremism.

A certain person was clinging steadfastly to the *Ka'bah* and sending *salawat* but not including the progeny of Muhammad (S). Imam as-Sadiq said: "This is an act of injustice against us."31

The Prophet of God (S) said: "Those who would deprive my progeny of *salawat* cannot smell the fragrance of paradise on the Day of Resurrection."32 Similarly, assemblies where the Name of God as well as that of the Prophet (S) and his progeny are not mentioned will be a source of regret on the Day of Resurrection.33

It is interesting enough that it is thus recorded in the traditions: "When the name of one of the prophets of God is mentioned, send blessings first to Muhammad and his progeny, and then invoke blessings and salutation on that prophet."34

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "The real miser is he who hears my name but does not send *salawat* to me. He is the most unkind and unfaithful among people."35

Salam

After reciting *salawat*, we give three types of *salam* {salutation}: first to the Messenger of Allah (S), second to the saints of God, and finally to the believers and our co-religionists.

In the verse, *"**Invoke blessings on him and invoke Peace upon him in a worthy manner,"***36 God commands us to send salutations {*salam*} upon the Prophet (S) after the *salawat*. In prayer, therefore, after the *salawat* we extend *salam*s to him:

اَلسَّلامُ عَلَيْكَ اَيُّها النَّبِىُّ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللهِ وَ بَرَكاتُه!

Assalamu 'alayka ayyuha'n-nabiyyu wa rahmatullahi wa barakuh!

"May Allah's peace, mercy and blessings be upon you, O Prophet!"
Through the *takbirah al-ihram*, we detached ourselves from creation {*khalq*} and attached ourselves to the Creator {*khaliq*}. At the end of the prayer we also first convey salutation to the gem of creation, viz. the Holy Prophet (S). Then, we extend our salutation to the

righteous servants of God:

اَلسّلامُ عَلَينا وَ عَلىٰ عِبادِ اللهِ الصّالِحِينَ!

As-salamu ‘alayna wa ‘ala ‘ibadillahi’s-salihin!
“May peace be upon us and the righteous servants of Allah!”

This *salam* includes all the past prophets, their successors and the infallible Imams.

God also sends blessings and benediction upon His prophets (*‘a*): ***“Peace be to the apostles!”***37 ***“Peace be to Noah!”***38 ***“Peace be to Abraham!”***39 ***“Peace be to Moses and Aaron!”***40

Through the *salam*, we attach ourselves to the righteous servants of God—an attachment and relationship which are beyond the bounds of time and space, with all the purified and righteous ones throughout history, in all epochs and generations.

Then, it is the turn of our fellow believers at the present time. We send our *salam*s upon those who have participated in the congregation of Muslims who have been standing with us in ranks as well as upon the angels who are present in the congregation of Muslims and the two angels who are assigned to each of us:

اَلسّلامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللهِ وَ بَرَكاتُه!

Assalamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakuh!
“May Allah’s peace, mercy and blessings be upon you!”

We commence the prayer with the Name of God and end it with *salam* to the creatures of Allah.
In these salutations, the hierarchy is observed. We send our *salam* first upon the Messenger of Allah, then upon the prophets, the saints and the righteous, and then the believers and followers.

The physiognomy of salam

• *Salam* is one of the Names of God.

• *Salam* is the salutation of the dwellers of paradise to one another.

• *Salam* is the greeting of the angels at the time of entering the paradise.

• *Salam* is the message of the All-merciful Lord.

• *Salam* is the reception of the Night of Ordainment {*laylah al-qadr*}.

• *Salam* is the first right of Muslims upon one another.

• *Salam* is the key to commencing any discourse or writing.

• *Salam* is the deed of security from every sort of fear and evil.

• *Salam* is the simplest good deed.

• *Salam* is the symbol of humility and meekness.

• *Salam* is the element of love and intimacy.

• *Salam* is the expression of peace and amity.

• *Salam* is the first gift and present between two human beings.

• *Salam* is the wish for the safety of the servants of God.

• *Salam* is the call for world peace.

• *Salam* is the harbinger of hope and the bearer of joy.

• *Salam* is the effacer of past offenses.

• *Salam* is the announcement of presence and the permission to enter.

• *Salam* is the best word at the time of entrance and exit.

• *Salam* is a word which is light on the tongue but heavy in the scale.

• *Salam* is the way for the reformers to reform the society.

• *Salam* is the word addressed to both the dead and the living.

• *Salam* is the source of glory and grandeur.

• *Salam* is the element for earning the pleasure of God and the anger of Satan.

• *Salam* is the means of entrance of the divine secrets into the heart.

• *Salam* is the compensator for sins and the enhancer of good deeds.

• *Salam* is the messenger of fellowship and friendship.

• *Salam* is the agent that crushes vanity and egoism.

• *Salam* is divine courtesy.

• *Salam* is the reception of all that is good and wholesome.

• *Salam* is a form of perfection the abandonment of which signifies stinginess, arrogance, seclusion, wrath, and the breaking of relationship ties.

• *Salam* is the cloud of mercy that we spread out over the people, and as such, we say: "*As-salamu 'alaykum*" {May peace be *upon* you} instead of "*As-salamu lakum*" {May peace be to you}.

The Holy Prophet (S) used to say: “I shall never abandon the practice of greeting children in my life.”41 Although offering *salam* is recommended and replying to it is obligatory, the reward of the one who first offers the *salam* is 10 times more than that of the one who simply replies.

We read in the traditions that the one riding has to convey *salam* first to the one walking; the one standing to the one sitting; and the one arriving to those who are sitting in an assembly.42 And the Qur’an thus exhorts:

﴿ وَ إِذَا حُيِّيتُم بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسنَ مِنهَا ﴾

“When you are greeted with a salute, greet with a better one than it.”43

وَ السَّلامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللهِ وَ بَرَكاتُه!

May Allah’s peace, mercy and blessings be upon you!

1. Surah Al ‘Imran 3:18.
2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 93, “Bab at-Tahlil wa Fadlah.”
3. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 3, p. 13.
4. It refers to Surah an-Nisa’ 4:94: “Do not say to someone who offers you peace, ‘You are not a believer’.”
5. Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 1, p. 188.
6. Faraz-ha’i az Tarikh-e Islami {Highlights of Islamic History}, p. 111.
7. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 402.
8. Surah at-Tahrim 66:11.
9. Surah Al ‘Imran 3:81: “When Allah took a compact concerning the prophets, {He said,} ‘Inasmuch as I have given you of the Book and wisdom, should an apostle come to you thereafter confirming what is with you, you shall believe in him and help him.’ He said, ‘Do you pledge and accept My covenant on this condition?’ They said, ‘We pledge.’ He said, ‘Then be witnesses, and I am also among the witnesses along with you’.”
10. Surah Luqman 31:13.
11. Surah al-Isra’ (or Bani Isra’il) 17:1.
12. Surah al-Baqarah 2:23.
13. Surah al-Isra’ (or Bani Isra’il) 17:3.
14. Surah Sad 38:30.
15. Surah al-Munafiqun 63:1.
16. Surah ash-Shura 42:23: “Say, I do not ask of you any reward for it except the affection for {my} relatives.”
17. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 1216.
18. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 492.
19. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 94, p. 54.
20. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 1220.
21. Mir‘ah al-‘Uqul, vol. 12, p. 109.
22. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 94, p. 63.

23. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 1216.
24. Surah al-Ahzab 33:56.
25. Tafsir Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 4, p. 305.
26. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 94, p. 69.
27. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 94, p. 64.
28. As quoted in Tafsir-e Nemuneh, vol. 17, p. 420.
29. As quoted in Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 16, p. 365; Sahih al-Bukhari, vol. 6, p. 151.
30. Al-Ghadir, vol. 2, p. 303 quoting Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol. 6, p. 323.
31. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 1218.
32. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 1219.
33. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 397.
34. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 94, p. 48.
35. Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 1220.
36. Surah al-Ahzab 33:56.
37. Surah as-Saffat 37:181.
38. Surah as-Saffat 37:79.
39. Surah as-Saffat 37:109.
40. Surah as-Saffat 37:120.
41. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 98.
42. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 84, p. 277.
43. Surah an-Nisa’ 4:86.

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