

Home > Soaring to the Only Beloved > Part 5: Suggested Methods of Achieving Attention In Prayer > Finding Unoccupied Time And Unoccupied Heart

Part 5: Suggested Methods of Achieving Attention In Prayer

Imam 'Ali (a) is reported to have said: "*Beware that every deed of yours is performed according to your prayer.*" This means that there is a real link between our prayers and the deeds we perform.

This tradition informs us that the deeds of the human being are shaped according to his prayer. If the prayer infuses the spirit of monotheism in the heart and mind of the worshipper (*musalli*) and orients him accordingly, the deeds that would follow would sparkle with the light of monotheism and the human being would undergo spiritual progress.

Realization of The Importance of Prayers

Praying in the state of indifference and laxity should not be considered as an astonishing phenomenon in the life of one who has not realized the importance of prayer and its vital role in a believer's life. This contention needs no intellectual evidence, as it is crystal clear to every impartial observer.

The emphasis Islam lays on prayer is enough to drive one to appreciate its fundamental role in a person's life and character. Imam 'Ali (a) is reported to have said:

واعلم ان كل شيء من عملك تبع لصلاتك

"Beware that every deed of yours is performed According to your prayer."¹

This means that there is a real link between our prayers and the deeds we perform. This tradition informs us that the deeds of the human being are shaped according to his prayer. If the prayer infuses the spirit of monotheism in the heart and mind of the worshipper (*musalli*) and orients him accordingly, the deeds that would follow would sparkle with the light of monotheism and the human being would

undergo spiritual progress.

However, if it lays a negative effect, the actions that would follow would assume the color of polytheism and remoteness from Divine proximity. Consequently our good deeds would carry no weight at all. Almighty Allah informs us about a people who conjecture that they have done good and are on the straight path, but in reality they have nothing but loss:

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا

الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا

Say (O Our Apostle Muhammad) Shall we tell you who will be the greatest losers in their works? Those whose striving goes astray in the present life, while they think that they are working good deeds. 2

One who always verbally declares that all praises belong to Allah (*al-Hamdu lilLah*), whether in his *qira'a* or elsewhere in prayer, but is oblivious of the true meaning of what he utters may, for example, give away a lot of wealth as alms (*sadaqa*), but always experience a sense of self-esteem (*'ujb*), thinking that he has done a favor on Allah.

This is while the core of praise restricts it for the real doer of good or possessor of an attribute of perfection, which in the language of Qur'an is none other than Allah. The Holy Qur'an says:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

All praises belong to Allah. 3

Whenever anyone does any good 'the doer and the deed' both are the creation of Allah, since their existence as well as subsistence entirely depends on His power. And since He is the sole Creator and whatever He creates is beautiful, every beautiful deed is His:

الذي أحسن كلَّ شئ خلقه

'One who made beautiful all that He created' 4

Furthermore, since He is the sole possessor of all perfect & beautiful attributes, all praises belong to Him:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى

Allah, excepting Him, there is no God;

His are the beautiful Names. 5

Therefore how can one ever think highly of himself for having given something that he really and ontologically does not possess? How can one ever extol himself for a good deed that the Almighty enabled him to perform?

One, however, who understands and always pays attention to the fact that all praises solely belong to Allah and appreciates its true meaning would always thank Allah for the blessing of enabling him to give his wealth for His sake.

To express *takbir* in prayers and be ignorant of its meaning or inattentive of the same, would not make one God-wary in many of his acts. *Allahu Akbar* means that Allah is greater than whatever is described of Him. In simpler words, He transcends the bounds of finitude and is free from every kind of shortcoming or imperfection. He is Infinite and present everywhere:

فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ

'... Whithersoever you turn, there is the face of Allah ...' 6

One, therefore, who does not inculcate this truth in his mind and heart in prayer would always blemish his soul with the taints of 'sin'. Sin, which is disobedience to the Creator, is a *practical expression of polytheism*, whereas the worshipper declares the Non-composite and Infinite reality of His Creator which is equal to the impossibility of even the assumption of a second.

In simpler terms: The Holy Quran informs us of a people who worship their vain desires and consider them as their God:

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ

Have you seen him who has taken his vain desire to be his God? 7

Therefore "obeying" one's vain desires is to worship them, which is tantamount to polytheism. In other words whosoever prefers his vain desires to some of the commands of Allah is practically declaring polytheism.

If the *musulli* were to understand the above, and realized the meaning of *takbir*, and mold the heart accordingly, he would always be deterred from sin. Small wonder it is that the Holy Qur'an says:

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

...And keep up prayer;

Surely prayer restrains one from

indecent and the forbidden... 8

Finding Unoccupied Time And Unoccupied Heart

A very important method of attaining *huduru'l qalb* suggested by some scholars of ethics is to apportion a specific time for prayer, a time in which you have no preoccupations to busy your mind and heart with. Habituating oneself in praying with a free mind would really help the novice in the path of Allah to attain concentration and maintain the same throughout his worship. It is only by means of proper discipline and organization that such a practice can be achieved.

It is impossible for the contemplative who has realized the close link between his prayer and his deeds to be slothful and give less importance to prayer.

1. Imam 'Ali (a), Nahju'l Balagha, letter no. 27

2. Holy Qur'an, 18:103-104

3. Ibid, 1:2

4. Ibid, 32:7

5. Ibid, 20:8

6. Ibid, 2:115

7. Ibid, 25:43

8. Ibid, 29:43

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