

Part 7: The Meaning of Prayer

...In Islamic traditions we understand the real meaning of '*takbir*' as '*Allahu Akbar min an yusaf*' (God is greater than what is described of Him) ...His ownership is real and ontological (*haqiqi* and *takwini*): He has total control over all His creation, and can lay any kind of effect on any one of them.

Therefore, every sort of knowledge, wisdom, wealth and treasure is His, and totally under His control... we should engrave in our minds the fact that we are placing the most honored part of our body (our face) on the most insignificant of things (earth).

The scope of this short appendix is too limited, and hence we shall only explain some parts of prayer here below:

Niyya (Intention)

It is not necessary for one to pronounce the *niyya* verbally, for the its reality is "the intention of doing an action". The *musalli* (the one who prays) has it in his mind and knows what prayer he is going to recite. The *fuqaha* in their books of jurisprudence mention the necessity of the intention of *qurb* (attaining nearness of Allah). They say that we must pray with the intention of attaining nearness of Allah.

The worshipper is advised to be extremely watchful lest his intention mixes with any of his worldly interests, for that will destroy the edifice of his prayer. Ethicians or the *`ulama-u1-akhlaq* have underscored with convincing proofs the fundamental importance of *niyya* or intention.

Another very important necessity is to maintain one's *niyya* till the end of his *Salat*; for at times, the *musalli* may begin with a purely Divine intention, but when he senses an onlooker around him, he changes his attitude due to the latter's presence.

Takbiratul Ihram

Allah is Greater

This is when the *musalli* pronounces the words '*Allahu Akbar*' translated as 'God is the Greatest' or 'God is greater (than every other being)'. When uttering these words he must inculcate in himself the fact that no being in the world of creation is greater than Allah.

He should visualize the reality that every element of his body and soul is totally dependent upon Allah's Will. Hence he has no reason to think for himself as possessing any degree of greatness whatsoever. Instead he should express his lowliness in front of his Great Lord in a way that he tangibly senses his total dependence to Him.

In Islamic traditions we understand the real meaning of '*takbir*' as '*Allahu Akbar min an yusaf*' (God is greater than what is described of Him).

Qiyam (Standing Upright with no movements)

The Islamic jurists are of the opinion that whoever is indifferent of this pillar of *Salat*, his *Salat* becomes null and void (*batil*). The secret of *qiyam* is very interesting: the *Ahlul Ma'rifa* (the learned scholars) know *qiyam* as referring to *al-tawhidul af'ali* (unity of actions). This means that every action that any being performs entirely stands by the Power of Allah. (This however should not be taken to mean that God does the action for man and man has no role in his action; man has been given a will and can choose the path that he desires.) Therefore, as we stand in *qiyam*, we must place this exalted meaning in our hearts too.

Qira'a (Qur'an-Recitation)

The *musalli* then recites Suratu'l Hamd and another chapter from the Holy Qur'an. Before reciting it, however, he should, in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an, seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan. Then he must recite distinctly (*tartil*) the *Fatihatul Kitab* and inculcate in his mind the meaning of every sentence that he recites. Following is a simple translation of Suratul *Fatiha*:

Suratu' l Fatihah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

1. I begin with Allah's Name, the All-merciful (*al-Rahman*), Whose Grace and Mercy cover every created being, the Ever-Merciful (*al-Rahim*), whose specific Mercy is enjoyed by the believers.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Alhamdu lillahi Rabbil alamin

2. All praises belong only to Allah, the Lord of the worlds. (The Name Allah is a proper noun that refers to the Exalted Being and is believed to manifest all His Perfect qualities and attributes. And the word 'rabb' which we translated as 'Lord' has a much comprehensive meaning. It means 'the Absolute Owner, Provider, Sustainer and Trainer'. This means God provided, and continues providing existence to us; He owns every element of our being; He provides us, out of His Mercy any perfection that He wants, and guides us at every step on our way to His nearness.)

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

Al Rahmanir Rahim

3. The All-merciful (*al-Rahman*), Whose Grace and Mercy covers every created being, the Ever-Merciful (*al-Rahim*), whose specific Mercy is enjoyed by the believers.

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

Maliki yawmiddin

4. Owner of the Day of Judgment (and every existing being). (We must understand the fact that Allah's ownership is not relative or superficial, as is man's. His ownership is real and ontological (*haqiqi* and *takwini*): He has total control over all His creation, and can lay any kind of effect on any one of them. Therefore, every sort of knowledge, wisdom, wealth, treasure is His, and totally under His control.)

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'in

5. You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help.

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Ihdinas siratal mustaqim

6. (O Allah) Guide us on the straight path.

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

Siratal ladhina an'amta `alayhim ghayril maghdubi `alayhim walad dallin

7. The path of those on whom You have blessed; not of those who have earned Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

Having recited Suratu'1 Hamd the *musalli* is allowed to recite any other Sura of the Holy Qur'an apart from those that contain verses, that if read or heard, oblige him to prostrate (or do *sajda*) according to the Islamic law.

Since many of us recite Surat *al-Tawhid* as our second Sara, I shall give a simple meaning of the same in the following pages.

Surat at-Tawhid

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Bismillahir Bahmanir Rahim

1. I begin with Allah's Name, the All-merciful (*al-Rahman*), Whose Mercy covers every dependent being, the Ever-Merciful (*al-Rahim*), whose specific Mercy is enjoyed by the believers.

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

Qul Huwallahu Ahad

2. Say (O Muhammad) He Allah is One (meaning Non-composite He cannot be divided like the divisible one. He possesses Infinite existence)

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

Allahus Samad

3. Allah, the Everlasting Refuge 1

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

Lam yalid wa lam yulad

4. He begets not (i.e. nothing has been separated from his Exalted Nature), nor is he begotten (i.e. he did not separate or come out from another being)

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

Wa lam yakun lahu kufuwan Ahad

5. And there is none like Him (because every other being has been created, and is dependent, save Him the Independent).

Ruku' (Bending In Utter Humility)

Then the musalli bends in humbleness to his Lord, and expresses Allah's Immaculate Nature, as follows:

سبحان ربي العظيم وبحمده

Subhana Rabbiyal `adhimi wa bihamdih

Free from all imperfections is my Exalted Lord,

And I praise Him.

Sujud (Prostration)

Sujud is known to be the **Highest Degree** of submission (*istikana*) to God. Therefore, as we recite the *dhikr* of *sujud*, we should inculcate in our minds the fact that we are placing the most honored part of our body (our face) on the most insignificant of things (earth).

The *dhikr* of *sujud* is as follows:

سبحان ربي الأعلى ويحمده

Subhana Rabbiyal a`alaa wa bihamdih

Free from defects is my Lord, the Most High,

And I praise Him.

1. This is Arthur J. Arberry's translation which is known in some circles to be one of the best available today. Nevertheless, it would not be unbeneficial to understand the word "as-Samad" better. Its means الذي يقصد اليه في الحوائج the One Intended to accomplish one's needs.¹ This meaning is also narrated from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a) as quoted in the sacred text of al-Kafi. `Allamah Tabataba'i in his al-Mizan believes that the other variant meanings given for "al-Samad" in some holy narratives of the Imams (a) are the said meaning's inseparable attributes (lawazim) – see al-Mizan, v.20, p.391. There is another translation from `Izzuddin al-Hayek which reads: 'Allah is the Eternally Besought of all.' vide p.954, An approximate Translation of the meanings of the Honorable Qur'an in the English Language, Dar al-Fikr, Lebanon.

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