



The Second Pillar : Prayer in the Life of A Muslim

The Muslim's prayers are one of the many types of worship in *Islaam*. They are an outward expression of a Muslim's belief in *Allaah*. The prayer is also a practical sign of obedience to the command of *Allaah*. As such it is something that is performed on a daily basis¹ so that a Muslim is never unmindful of the One who created him and provided for him with all that he can see and observe on this earth - all of which has been subjected to him, for his use and benefit. *Allaah* said:

And He has subjected to you [for your use and benefit] all that is in the Heavens and the Earth. It is all as a favour and kindness from Him. Verily in this are signs for a people who think deeply. [Jaathiyah 45:13]

Since human-kind have been created to fulfil a purpose - which is to worship *Allaah* - there must be a way to express this worship - otherwise it would be meaningless - and this is why the Muslim's prayer consists of physical actions: a number of different postures. So a Muslim stands, bows and prostrates. And this is a sign of humility, gratefulness and obedience.

When a Muslim faces the *qiblah* (the direction of prayer) he also knows that he must turn his heart away from all other things to *Allaah*, the One True God. When a Muslim stands in front of *Allaah*, having folded his hands and arms, it is a sign of humility and defeat in front of *Allaah*, the One True God. In this posture a Muslim also brings to mind the Day of Judgement where he will have to stand and account for

his deeds. When a Muslim bends his back and bows to *Allaah*, it is a sign of lowering oneself in obedience to *Allaah*. It is a sign of acknowledging one's own shortcomings and weaknesses in front of the all-Powerful God who is Most-Perfect. While in this position a Muslim says: "How perfect is my Lord, the Most Great". Then when a Muslim prostrates, placing his or her noble limbs upon the earth, it is an extreme sign and the end result of humility. Whilst in this position a Muslim says: "How perfect is my Lord, the Most High". In this posture a Muslim returns his limbs to their place of origin: the dust from which they were created.

The prayer is a constant reminder therefore, for all of humanity - for the black or the white, for the rich or the poor, for the powerful or the powerless, for the employer or the employee - of *Allaah*, the One True God, that He is their Creator and Lord, that they have no privilege or benefit - whether it be on account of wealth, power or status - except that it has come from *Allaah* and so they have no reason to become proud or arrogant over one another. Also, that they recognise their great dependence upon Him for all their needs.

The five daily prayers have enormous benefits, both for the individual and also for the society at large. Since a Muslim has to perform ablution² for the prayers it ensures physical cleanliness for the duration of the whole day. In *Islaam* great importance is given to cleanliness. The Prophet Muhammad (sallallaahu alaihi wasallam) said: "Cleanliness is one-half of faith".

¹ The five daily prayers are performed at dawn, immediately after mid-day, late afternoon, sunset and at night (a couple of hours after sunset).

² This consists of washing the hands, the face, the mouth, the nose, the arms and elbows, wiping over ones head, and washing the feet and ankles.

Then by the performance of prayer, at stated times and in congregation (praying collectively in the mosque, where all the Muslims stand shoulder to shoulder, feet to feet in straight rows) a Muslim learns to be punctual, to develop and have a sense of duty, to have self-discipline, self-control, patience, efficiency, and to build his character. It might seem that repeating something five times a day is a bit repetitive and can get quite tiresome. But this is far from the truth. This is because the prayer does not consist of mere actions. Rather a Muslim is actually speaking to *Allaah* throughout the whole prayer, while he is standing, bowing or prostrating: speaking to the One who created him and fashioned him from a mere sperm drop to a fully grown human being who possesses sight, hearing and understanding.

Say: He is the One who initiated the process of your creation and then gave you the faculties of hearing, seeing and understanding. Little thanks is it that you give [Mulk 67:23]

So this reminds him of his lowly origins. At the same time, while standing in front of his Lord, a Muslim feels the emotions of love, hope and fear. And every time a Muslim performs the prayer his faith and belief in the One True God is increased and strengthened due to these feelings, which are a result of the words and actions of the prayer.

The prayer not only helps in building individual character but also assists in building the whole structure of community organisation and social discipline. Daily prayer keeps this organisation alive and working and prevents it from becoming ineffective. This is why performing prayer in congregation is obligatory. Such regular meetings of individual Muslims, helps to form a 'community centre'. When Muslims assemble in the mosque, they have all come for one objective. These feelings unite them, despite the differences in their race, language, colour or nationality. A strong

sense of brotherhood is created and kept alive by the institution of the five daily prayers.

Some of the other benefits of the five daily prayers that are performed in congregation include: mutual help and co-operation, equality and brotherhood, tolerance, unity, respect for the rights of others, love and affection, and unity. The prayer also prevents a Muslim from doing unjust and shameful deeds as *Allaah* said:

Verily, prayer prevents from shameful and unjust deeds. [Ankaboot 29:45]

There are also many instances and circumstances in which the prayer is performed collectively, besides the five daily prayers. There is the weekly Friday prayer which is considered as a minor form of a day of celebration. Muslims bathe and dress well for this occasion and everyone is encouraged to attend this prayer since a small sermon is given before prayer, and which serves as a reminder for the Muslims.

Then there are the two Eed³ prayers. The two days of Eed are days of celebration and joy. An additional prayer is held on these two days in the early morning and all Muslims are strongly encouraged to attend, along with their families. This is a time when all Muslims meet each other, give greetings to each other and also visit each other.

Muslims also perform collective prayer on the occasion of an eclipse, both for lunar and solar eclipses. An eclipse is one of most striking signs of *Allaah*, the One True God. It is quite a fearful and awe-inspiring event and thus Muslims perform prayer while this phenomenon takes place. Muslims do not believe that an eclipse is an omen or anything superstitious as thought by many in

³ A day of celebration is known as Eed. Muslim have two 'Eeds' in their calendar. One is called 'Eed ul-Fitr' and marks the end of the month of fasting, Ramadaan. The other, known as 'Eed ul-Adhaa' commemorates the end of the rituals of pilgrimage which were performed originally by the Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) in Makkah.

both past and present times. Rather, it is one of the clear signs of *Allaah's* power and so it is a time when Muslims perform prayer to acknowledge this fact.

Another occasion of collective prayer is when there has been a prolonged absence of rain. So Muslims come out into the open and perform the pray for rain. Here they beseech and invoke *Allaah*, the One Who sends the winds and the rains, that He blesses them and sends upon them, rain. This is at a time when their livelihood may be at stake and so in mutual concern for themselves and each other, they embark together to perform this prayer. Again this instils the notion of brotherhood and mutual care and consideration amongst the people.

Death is an inevitable reality and for this occasion there is the funeral prayer. Attending the deceased Muslim's funeral and performing the prayer over him is one of the many rights that a Muslim has over another Muslim. All the Muslims come and

take part in this prayer out of a sense of respect and responsibility and after it, assist in the burial. This make them remind themselves that they too, will be placed into the earth, ready to be raised again to be held accountable for their deeds. Thus, helping them to not lose track of their goal in life and become too heavily immersed the pursuits of life.

So it can be seen how the prayer in *Islaam* is linked to every sphere of the life of a Muslim and also to the life of Muslim community. When one knows that human-kind has been created to worship *Allaah* - the One True God - then it is understandable that the prayer should play a vital role in daily life, in helping Muslims to fulfil their duty to their Creator and Lord, in helping them to create love and affection between themselves, and in helping them to seek assistance for their daily individual and collective needs as well as constantly reminding them of what is yet to come - the Hereafter.