Importance of Prayer

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Imam al-Sadiq (AS) narrates that it is written in The Torah: “O’Son of Man, if you empty yourself, i.e. disengage yourself from all other pre-occupations to make yourself available for My worship, I will fill your heart with richness and I will not abandon you to what you seek and long for. And it will be upon Me to close the door of poverty upon you and to fill your heart with awe for Me.

And if you don’t empty yourself for My worship, I will fill your heart with preoccupation with the world. I will not close upon you the door of poverty and will abandon you to what you seek.” (al-Kulayni (RA), Usul al-Kafı,2, "Kitab al-'Iman wa1-Kufr', "Bab al-‘Ibadah", Tradition number 1)

Prayer is the most effective way of spiritual migration towards Allah (SWT) and attaining the exalted position of His nearness. When al-Sadiq (AS) was asked what was the best deed that brings human beings close to Allah (SWT) and is also liked by Him? He replied:

After enlightenment of God’s Essence, I do not know anything better than The Prayer. The most esteemed and favorite deed before Allah (SWT) is Prayer. Prayer is the last dying will of all Prophets (AS).

How good it is that a human being takes a bath or performs ablution, then retires into a secluded corner where he is not seen by anyone, and has the honor of performing genuflection and prostration. When a servant bows himself down into prostration and prolongs it, then Shaytan says, ‘O’, Woe Upon Me! This servant has obeyed Allah (SWT), while I transgressed, and he has offered prostration that I refused’.

In Falah al-Sail Page 23, Chapter 2, On the Description of The Prayer, on the authority of al-Sayyid ‘Ali ibn Tawus (RA), al-Sadiq (AS) said: The Prayer will not be complete except for the one who has full purity and a mature completeness, and is away from temptation and deviation. He knows Allah (SWT) and so stands before Him, submits to Him and persists. He thus, stands between despair and hope, between patience and worry, as if the promises to him have been fulfilled, and the threats upon him have transpired, lowering his fame and manifesting his aim.

He sacrifices for Allah (SWT) his soul, treads upon the road to Him as his goal willingly. He severs the relations of interest for the sake of The One to Whom he bounds and comes, and from Whom he seeks help. Should he achieve all these, The Prayer would be of the ordered

type and of the informed about, and it is the very Prayer which forbids evil and vice.
In Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Book of The Prayer, Muhammad, son of Ya'qub (RA), quotes al-Sajjad (AS) as having said: As regards the rights of The Prayer, you are to know that it is a visit to Allah (SWT) and that in it you are standing before Him. If you realized that, you would deserve to be, through it, in the position of a slave who is humble, desirous, horrified, frightened, hopeful, distressed, and imploring. He is also glorifying the state of The One in front of Whom he stands with complete stillness, solemnity, submission of the limbs, humility, well supplicating to Him for himself, requesting Him to free his neck, which is encircled by his faults .(and consumed by his sins. And there is no power except by Allah (SWT

The Reality of Prayer

Saying your Prayer on time is a highly recommended act, and none other than Allah (SWT) reminds us of this obligation: And when he (the worshipper) knows that it is time of Prayer and he does not pray, he is indeed careless about Me. (Hadith al-Qudsi) In Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 3, Page 90, al-Sadiq (AS) is reported to have said: Whoever performed the obligatory Prayer at the beginning of their times and observed their restrictions, the angels would raise them white and pure into heaven. The Prayer would say (to the erformer): 'May Allah (SWT) preserve you as you preserved me and entrusted me to a generous angel'.

But whoever performed them after the appointed times with no excuse, and did not observe their restrictions, the angels would raise them, black and dark. The Prayer would shout at the performer: 'You have lost me, may Allah (SWT) lose you, and may He not care for you as you did not care for me'.

Prayer has several built in properties that make the worshipper far better than the angels and makes life worth living. Only when the true reality of Prayer is understood then one is awestruck by its daily performance. In explaining the true nature of Prayer, al-Ridha (AS) comments:

The reason for Prayer is that it is the acknowledgment of The Lordship of Allah (SWT) and negating all kinds of partners and plurality for Him. Prayer is standing before The Omnipotent, with humility, humbleness and confession (of sins), and begging forgiveness of the previous sins. Prayer is placing the face on dust five times a day as (a sign of) recognition and confession of His Greatness.

Prayer is for remembering Him and keeping away from arrogance and negligence. Prayer leads to humility, submission and humbleness towards Allah (SWT), and the enthusiasm for the desire to material and spiritual progress (both in this world and the hereafter).

Moreover, Prayer enables a person to constantly engage in remembering Allah (SWT), both day

and night, so as not to forget one's Lord, Master and Creator, since forgetting will cause rebellion. Man, while offering Prayer, stays in the presence of His Lord and in the state of His remembrance, and this very condition constrains and stops him from sins and many kinds of corruption.

In order for you to be part of manifestation of the authority of Allah (SWT) on this earth, you must pledge complete submission, bondage and servitude to The Lord of the Worlds. You must manifest all this in your behavior, in general, by remembering Allah (SWT) at all times and seeking His Will and specifically, by performing the ritual acts of worship e.g. giving alms, fast, etc. Scholars have noted that if a man does not fulfill the conditions of this act of Prayer, he defies Allah (SWT) becoming a rebel and a devil. For man to climb higher in the realm of existence, he must lower himself to Allah (SWT). The more he lowers himself to Allah (SWT), the higher he reaches in the realm of existence.

It has been the practice of Allah (SWT) to conceal important grace to mankind, and Prayer is no exception. S. V. Mir Ahmad 'Ali (RA), in his Commentary of The Qur'an, narrates seven values that have been kept concealed by Allah (SWT), The Most High: According to some reports, The Night of Power (Qadr) is concealed in the year as a whole. This is because man may ever seek His grace every night as much as he possibly can. Similarly, one of these several nights in the months of Sha'ban and Ramadhan are said be The Night of Qadr, The Night of Grandeur.

The Greatest Name of Allah (SWT), with which one could have everything he desires, is concealed in several names, so that one may remember and recite all the Divine Names of The Lord.

The Prayer al-Wusta or the Middle one of the prescribed Daily Prayer is kept concealed in The Five Daily Prayer so that one may offer every one of them with eagerness to earn its special reward.

In one particular hour of Friday, every week, it is said, the prayer is heard without fail. However, the hour is not disclosed particularly so that one may engage in Prayer the whole day as much as he can.

God's pleasure is concealed in Prayer so that one may always worship The Lord. The displeasure of The Lord is mentioned to be in sinning in general so that man may abstain from all kinds of sinning.

The most honorable with Allah (SWT) is the most pious, so that one may acquire piety for himself and seek the friendship of the most honorable ones with The Lord; love the pious and the righteous one, hate impiety, and stay away from disobedience.

The Prophet (S) in his last remaining hours of life further advised his followers to take Prayer seriously, and pray according to what has been prescribed upon them.

The Value of Prayer

Allah (SWT) manifests Himself to His perfect friends in a kind manner, and the attraction of love becomes their guide. As the tradition says that The Prophet of Allah (S) used to be waiting for the time of the Prayer, his longing ever increasing, until at last he would say to Bilal (The Prophet's Caller to Prayer): 'Relieve us, O' Bilal'. (al-Mahajjat al-Bayda fi Tahdhib al-Ahya vol. 1, Page 377)

In advising Abu Dhar (RA), The Prophet (S) says: O' Abu Dhar! Allah (SWT), Glorious is His Praise, has made the pleasure of my eye in (daily) Prayer, and has made me love Prayer like food is made lovable to the hungry and water to the thirsty. And surely, while the hungry one, when he eats is satiated, and the thirsty one, when he drinks he is quenched; I am not satiated from Prayer. O' Abu Dhar! Anyone who voluntarily prays 12 units of Prayer, other than the obligatory, he has earned the right to a House in Paradise.

O' Abu Dhar! Surely, so long as you are in Prayer, you are knocking on the door of The Great King, and whoever knocks long on the door of The King it will be opened for him.

O' Abu Dhar! There is no believer that stands in Prayer but falls on him goodness onto what is between him and The Throne. And, an angel is appointed for him that calls out, 'O' Son of Adam (AS), if you knew what there is for you in Prayer and whom you are calling, you would not turn away'.

O' Abu Dhar! Be like him, who in a deserted place (though alone), calls Adhan and Iqamah (Call for Prayer) and says his Prayer. So your Lord says to the angels, 'Look at My servant! He is praying and no one sees him but Me?' Then descend 70,000 Angels and pray behind him and seek forgiveness for him until the next day. And a man who stands in the midst of night and prays alone, prostrates, and falls asleep while prostrating, Allah (SWT) says, 'Look at My servant! His soul is with me and his body is in prostration; and (be like) a man who is in a war and all his companions flee, but he stays firm fighting until he is killed'. O' Abu Dhar! No man puts his forehead (in prostration) in any place on earth but that place bears witness of that for him on The Day of Judgment. There is no place that a group of people visit but that it starts either sending salutation on them, or cursing them.

O' Abu Dhar! Do you know the reason behind revelation of the verse: 'Be patient, exhort others to be patient, establish Prayer, and fear Allah that you may be successful?' I said, 'I don't know - May my father and mother be sacrificed for you'. The Prophet (S) said, 'For waiting for the next Prayer after every Prayer'.

Prayer and the Day of Judgment

On The Day of Judgment, before one is even permitted to present the good deeds that he has performed in this world, the first question asked will relate to Prayer and only then will he be allowed to proceed. The Prophet (S) has made this clear by saying: All good deeds depend on Prayer. Prayer is the cornerstone of Islam. If Prayer is accepted then the good deeds will be accepted. If Prayer is not accepted, then the good works will not be accepted.

This proclamation becomes clear when we examine Shaykh al-Qummi (RA)'s comments in his Manazil al-Akhirat, that there will be approximately 60 stations over The Bridge on The Day of Judgment. Each one of us will have to answer questions satisfactorily at each of those stations. Only after one is finished with one station, is he going to proceed to the next one.

Each station is named and the first station, according to Shaykh al-Qummi (RA), is Prayer. Therefore, the first station in The Bridge involves Questioning on Prayer and how you fulfilled this obligation. If, in any case, you don't fulfill the requirements at that station, then unless you get intercession of The Infallible Prophet and Imams (AS) or by your own actions, you would fall down into the bellies of Hell without establishing the remainder of your good deeds in this world. Undoubtedly, the first thing Allah (SWT) will ask on The Day of Judgment is Prayer, and (this comes to us from all The Prophets and Imams (AS.

The Blessings of Prayer

Muhammad, son of Ya'qub, quoting al-Sadiq (AS), says: When you recite the Adhan and the Iqamah, two rows of angels will perform the Prayer behind you; but if you said the Iqamah (only), one row of angels would perform the Prayer behind you. (Furu' al-Kafi, Volume 3, Page. 303)

There are many other traditions to the same effect, some of which say that the length of each row is as the distance between the east and the west.

al-Baqir (AS) has quoted The Prophet of Allah (S) as saying: When a believing servant stands for the Prayer, Allah (SWT) looks at him until he finishes. Allah's Mercy shadows over his head, the angels surround him from all sides up to the horizon of the heaven, and Allah (SWT) assigns an angel to stand at his head, saying: '0' Worshipper! If you know who is looking at you, and to whom you are supplicating, you will look nowhere else, nor will you leave your position.' (Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 22)

He further said: Whoever performs 2 units of Prayer without paying attention to any worldly matter, Allah (SWT) will forgive him his sins. (Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 13)

Considerable importance has been attached to Prayer, and no words can describe the amount of reward Allah (SWT) grants to this individual, who is only fulfilling an obligation. The Aimmah

(AS) have said:

Prayer is what angels love,

Prayer is the practice of The Prophets (AS),

Prayer is the light of understanding,

Prayer is what makes faith strong,

Prayer is what makes actions accepted,

Prayer increases sustenance,

Prayer keeps you away from illness,

Prayer is what Shaytan hates,

Prayer is a weapon to confront your enemies,

Prayer is what will assist you with The Angel of Death (AS),

Prayer is the light in your grave,

Prayer is an answer to Munkar and Nakeer (AS), and

.Prayer is what will help you in the grave till The Judgment Day

Treating Prayer Lightly

Some wives of The Prophet of Allah (S) have said that: The Prophet of Allah (SWT) used to talk to us and we used to talk to him. But when the time for the Prayer arrived he appeared as if he did not know us and we did not know him, as his attention was fully directed to Allah (SWT).

(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 17)

Ibn Tawus (RA) says, in Falah al-Sail, that when al-Husayn (AS) used to perform the wudhu, his face changed color and his joints trembled. Asked about the reason, The Imam said: When one is going to stand before The Owner of The Throne, his color ought to turn pale and his joints to tremble.

The same narrator also states Al-Hasan, son of 'Ali (AS) used to experience a similar condition before and during Prayer. (Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 77, Page 346.)

Unfortunately, many of us treat Prayer as another kind of daily entry in our logbook. Some of us not only treat the timely performance of Prayer lightly, but others do not even offer this obligation, which is a duty that carries immense weight. To those who treat Prayer lightly, The Prophet (S) says:

The one who takes Prayer lightly is not of me. No! By Allah (SWT)! Such a person will not reach The Pond of al-Kawthar. According to The Prophet (S), one who wastes his Prayer will be raised with Qarun and Haman, so that it will be right for Allah (SWT) to put him in Hell together with the hypocrites.

al-Sadiq (AS) said to Zurarah (RA): Don't be negligent in regard to your Prayers.Verily, The

Prophet (May Peace Be Upon Him And is Progeny) said on his deathbed:

One who makes light of his Prayers does not belong to me, or the one who takes intoxicating drinks. And, by God! He will not reach me at The Pond (of al-Kawthar). (Furu' al-Kafi, iii, 269)

al-Kulayni (RA) further reports with his trustworthy narrators, from Abu Basir, that al-Kadhim (AS) said: At the time of his death my father said to me, 'My son, the one who makes light of Prayerwill not receive our intercession'. (Furu` al-Kafi, iii, 270) al-Khomeini (RA) has the following advice to those people who treat the performance of The Five Daily Prayer lightly and of no concern: A devout person should be observant of the times of his worship under every circumstance. Of course, he should observe the timings of Prayer, which is the most important of the acts of worship, and carry it out in the most meritorious part of its time, refraining from engaging in any other work during those times.

In the same way as he assigns a certain time to making an earning and for study and debate, he should do the same in respect of these acts of worship. During this time, he must be free from other pre-occupations, so that he can achieve concentration of the heart. This makes up the quintessence and kernel of worship.

But should he, like this author, offer his Prayers out of compulsion and consider the performance of the worship of The Lord as a superfluous matter, he would, of course, delay it as long as it can be delayed. And when he offers it, he offers the Prayer in a perfunctory manner, considering it as an impediment in the way of what he imagines to be important tasks. However, such worship has not only no spiritual brilliance, it deserves divine wrath, and such a person is one who makes light of Prayerand neglects it as something trivial.

I seek refuge in God from making light of Prayerand not giving it its due importance. (al-(Tawhid, Quarterly Islamic Journal. 27th Hadith – Prayer and Concentration

Genesis of the Prescribed Prayer

al-Majlisi (RA) writes a long narration in his book Hayaat al-Quloob (Part Two), about one of the incidents that took place during Me'raj: At Bayt al-Ma'moor, The Prophet (S) beheld The Ka'bah directly under him, so that if he had dropped anything from his hand, it would have fallen on its roof. The Prophet (S) says:

I heard a voice saying, 'This is the sacred place, and you are the ordained Prophet, imparting honor to the temple. Whatever exists on earth has its similitude in Paradise'.

My Lord then commanded me to open my hand, and take of the water flowing from the right pillar of The Empyrean, which I did; and for this reason it became meritorious to take up water for ablution with the right hand.

A voice then commanded, 'Wash your face with this water that you may be pure to behold The

Light of My Majesty and Glory. Then wash your hands, for you will take My Word. Then draw your wet hands over your head and your feet, which signifies that I will draw The Hand of Mercy over your head, and send down My Blessings on you. Drawing the hand over the foot will elevate you up through several regions where no foot has ever trodden, nor will it ever after you'.

The Most High then commanded, 'Turn towards The Black Stone which is before you and extol Me according to the number of curtains by saying ALLAHU AKBAR!' On account, seven repetitions of this phrase have been recommended for Prayer, because there were seven curtains.

He (S) passed the seven heavens and seven curtains of exaltation and glory, and arrived near the place of communion with The Merciful Lord of Glory. Prayer is The Celestial Ascent of The Believer. When the perfect believer thus ascends, and recites the seven Takbeers, the curtains of darkness, which on account of errors of worldly inclination come between him and The Most High, are removed, and he approaches The Lord of The lords.

The Lord then commanded The Prophet (S), 'Now you have arrived at this place of communion with Me, pronounce My Name'. Accordingly The Prophet (S) said, 'In the Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful', and thus this phrase became established as the beginning to each chapter.

Being commanded to offer praise, he said, 'Thanks to Allah (SWT), The Lord of The Universe', and proceeded in this manner till he recited the whole Chapter 'Praise be to Allah (SWT), The Lord of all creations'.

A voice then commanded him to recite The Chapter of Divine Unity, saying, 'That Chapter is a description of My Praise and Attributes. What likeness can exist between Me and My creations?'

After I had recited this Chapter, 'Say! Allah is One; He is Perfect; He neither begets, nor is begotten; and there is none like Him', the voice said, 'Bow before My exaltation, and put your hands on your knees and look toward My Empyrean'.

On doing this, Light from The Glory of God overpowered me, and I fell into a swoon, and by divine inspiration, I said, 'Praise and Thanks to The God of The Glory'. In purity I named the Lord of exaltation, and I am employed in His Praise.

After repeating this I soon recovered, and the tremor of my spirit subsided, when by divine inspiration, I had seven times pronounced the ascription of praise. It was then ordained that this expression of praise should, in the performance of Prayer, be recited in the bending position.

Allah (SWT) then commanded me to raise my head and stand erect, I heard the voices of the angels uttering praises and ascribing unity and thanksgiving to God. I said, 'Allah (SWT) hears everyone that utters His Praises'.

I looked up and saw a light more intense than that which had caused me to swoon before, and my fear was greater than in the former instance. Out of awe, I fell into prostration before The King, The Lord of The Glory, and placed my face in the dust of humility, and on account of the exaltation, I witnessed, seven times repeated by divine inspiration, 'Glory and praise to The Exalted Allah'. At each repetition of this ascription, my terror diminished, till I recovered from the state of the overwhelming awe, and attained to perfect knowledge of Allah (SWT).

I then raised my head from prostration, and sat till I recovered from the amazement into which I had fallen. By divine inspiration, I again looked upward, and saw a light more overpowering than I had witnessed before, and again fell involuntarily in prostration before The Lord, and repeated seven times, 'Glory and praise to Allah'. Thereafter, I was more worthy of beholding the divine lights.

I again raised my head, and sat for a while, and looked toward the angels.

For this reason, al-Majlisi (RA) says, two prostration in (a unit of) Prayer were established, and sitting a short time after them became meritorious.

The Prophet (S) continues, I then arose and stood in the attitude of a servant before my Lord, when He commanded me to recite again The Chapter of Praise, and afterwards The Chapter of Power (Qadr). I again bent with my hands on my knees, and then prostrated myself with my head on the ground. As I was about to rise, The Most High commanded, 'Mention My favors to you and pronounce My Name'.

By divine inspiration I said, 'In The Name of Allah, and by Him, There is no God but Allah, and all perfect names belong to Allah'.

When I had repeated the two testimonies, He commanded, 'Pronounce blessings on yourself and on your Family'. I prayed, 'O Allah! Have mercy on me and on my Family', which was answered with blessings from The Most High. On looking around, I beheld the angels and spirits of The Prophets arrayed in ranks behind me, and The Most High Commanded me to salute them and I said, 'Peace be upon you and The Mercy and Blessings of Allah'. The Most High then addressed me saying, 'I am your Peace, Mercy, and Blessing, and of the Imams after you'.