

Facts With Deep Meanings

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Islam fixed stated times for prayer, and embellished them with a certain precise, accompanying rituals. It stipulates rules for the prayer's correctness, outlines conditions under which it is fruitless and clarifies the objectives of worship that must be reached in order for the prayer to be complete in its full sense.

These conditions weave from the spiritual atmosphere and the rites a sacred formula encompassing the entire scope of prayer. Islam made every dimension of this formula a fact and a realizable state of consciousness, drawing a line on the map of perfection for the soul. When these lines and factors converge, they result in an inspired deed with concerted results and effects on the soul of the person maintaining prayer and on that individual's way of life.

These conditions and dimensions are:

1. Time:

When offering our prayer five times a day, most of us may not ask why this correlation between prayer and time? Why is it compulsory for us to offer our prayers at the beginning of every new part of the day? Why is prayer connected to the astronomical changes, and the general, natural cycle of the universe?

"Keep up prayer from the declining of the sun till the darkness of the night and the morning recitation, surely the morning recitation is witnessed." Holy Qur'an (17:78)

"Bear then patiently what they say, and glorify your Lord by the praising of Him before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and during hours of the night do also glorify (Him) and during parts of the day, that you may be well pleased" Holy Qur'an (20:130)

This connection and relationship is neither a random choice, nor a harmonious circumstance created by the worshipper. It is actually the sagacious divine hand that leads man to the ladder of perfection. It prepares for him the atmosphere for devotion, surrounding which is the ultimate of the prayer's goals; glorifying Allah, acknowledging His grace, and expressing deep gratitude to Him.

The Most Exalted has tied man's desire for worship with certain time, that he may observe the greatness and omnipotence of his Creator. He then imbibes the essence of submission and its connection to the Great Creator's will. Man becomes so habituated that after every time cycle, he greets the coming one with prayer and thanks. He celebrates the praise of Allah. The daily,

natural changes etch submission and acknowledgement of Allah's greatness and glory on every aware soul that discovers the true rhythm of this world, comprehends its movement, and the direction towards which it moves.

The Qur'an refers to this sense in many places and in every instance wherein it, wants to turn the human beings' attention to the Creator of this world, like in the following verse:

"And He it is Who made the night and the day to follow each other for him who desires to be mindful or desires to be thankful." Holy Qur'an (25:62)

2. Purification:

Bodily purification, basic cleanliness of the devotee's clothes, and the place of prostration are essential conditions for ritual correctness.

The purification demanded here is from any state of un-cleanliness stemming from: nocturnal pollution, menstruation, breaking wind, bodily excretions such as urine, blood and excrement...

etc, and removing its traces by washing with water or effacing it with earth.

Purification then is a bodily and psychological readiness to attain cleanliness, thus perceiving the loftiness of the Creator in front of Whom one must stand, and the exalted-ness of the position to which one aspires, accustoming the worshipper to be always clean and purified. The individual's inclination for immaculateness achieved by getting rid of the physical and spiritual impurities, will grow into a sense of Creator consciousness, interrelated with worship and the desire to be closer to Allah:

"O you who believe, when you rise up to prayer, wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, and wipe a part of your head, and your feet to the ankles. If you are in Junub, then cleanse yourselves, and if you are sick or on a journey, or one of you come from the privy, or you have been in touch with women, and you can find no water, then do Tayamum on clean earth and wipe a part of your faces and your hands with it. Allah desire not to make any uneasiness on you, but He desires to purify you, and to complete His blessing upon you, so that you may be thankful." Holy Qur'an (5:6)

"...certainly a masjid founded on piety from the very first day is more deserving that you should stand in it; in it are men who love that they should be purified; and Allah loves those who purify themselves." Holy Qur'an (9:108)

"Surely Allah loves the repentant and loves those who cleanse themselves." Holy Qur'an (2:222)

Islam emphasizes heavily physical purity, i.e. that of the body, clothes, house, environment etc. Simultaneously, it underlines spiritual cleanliness, and purifying the heart and conscience of

evil, corruption, and deviation. This path links piety and repentance – the two aspects of behaviour essential for correcting the intention and stimulating action towards purity. Islam, by no means wants, to attend to man's physical appearance, bodily state and environment, while ignoring that of the soul and conscience, lest purity be partitioned in the Muslim's conscience, as in the European man, who expresses annoyance with the dirtiness of the street, his clothes and the seat on a bus, while he is inwardly dirty, fetid, and ignorant of his soul's filth, but is never annoyed by telling lies, or swindling others.

3. Qiblah (the direction of prayer):

Qiblah is the direction of prayer, and Masjid al-Haram (the Holy Mosque) in Mecca is the Muslims qiblah, to which their hearts and souls turn, and vibrate for.

At the dawn of Islam, Muslims were turning towards Jerusalem in their prayer. Then the Prophet (s.a.w.) ordered them to change their qiblah, and turn towards Masjid al-Haram in

Makkah al-Mukarramah, when he was addressed by the following verse:

'Indeed We see the turning of your face to heaven, so We shall surely turn you to a qiblah which you shall like; turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face towards it, and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord, and Allah is not at all heedless of what they do.'

"And even if you bring every proof to those who have been given the Book, they would not follow your Qiblah (prayer direction), nor can you be a follower of their Qiblah, neither are they the followers of each other's Qiblah, and if you follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, then you will surely be among the unjust." Holy Qur'an (2:144-145)

That is the exact divine order stating the new qiblah which the Wise Creator has approved to be the qiblah of the Islamic ummah.

Qiblah is the point to which the Muslim turns in his prayer and supplication. It is the direction, whether in wakefulness or sleep to which the Muslim directs his or her heart and feelings. This concept embodies more than a simple definition and imprints on the worshipper's soul indelible impression and a constant awareness.

A single qiblah is then a source of unification of the ummah, whose members sacredly and respectfully turn towards it, several times a day. It is the place to which they look, and incessantly attend. It is the pivot around which their feelings revolve and the point at which their emotions converge. It is the spindle on which the feeling of love and unity are woven. This qiblah which attracts the Muslims and their psychic energy distinguishes the character of the Muslim ummah, and clarifies its direction, and purpose from the rest of the nations.

Identifying the qiblah, and fixing it in one place, was a milestone in the history of worship in that it has set a spiritual center for the ummah to which the souls gather around and made discernable a holy place that incalculates in ourselves the meaning of Islam which grew in its very land. Thus, turning to the Masjid al-Haram - inside Makkah al-Mukarramah - has an import of doctrinal and emotional attraction; a force prompting a continuous spiritual and psychological response.

It constantly reminds us of Islam and its perpetual meanings, and imparts continuous attention to the legacy of the message. It is the site where the Islamic message appeared and from which the Islamic doctrine was initiated and grew. For this reason turning towards the qiblah is considered one element of the spiritual formula which envelops the meaning of prayer in Islam, and is considered a condition for its correctness.

For the sake of preserving the doctrine of unity and purifying the sense of faith from any vestiges of deviation, the effects of the beliefs of other nations, or of the cult of personality, the Qur'an refers to an exceptionally important fact connected to the qiblah which highlights the core of the relationship between man and his Creator.

It cautions that turning towards a certain direction, does not confine seeking Allah to that direction only. It does not mean linking worship to a perceptible, limited thing. Allah the Exalted is never tied to place, time, and direction. He does not need these factors. Facing the qiblah has specific devotional and human goals in mind solely for the benefit of the Muslims. The Qur'an says:

"To Allah belongs the East and the West; whithersoever turn, there is the presence of Allah; He is Infinite, Omniscient." Holy Qur'an (2:115)

"Surely I have turned myself to Him Who originated the heavens and the earth as an upright, and I am not of the polytheists." Holy Qur'an (6:79)

4. Permissibility

Permissibility here signifies that the worshipper is free to make use of anything he needs for offering his prayer. The condition must certainly be present in anything the worshipper uses while praying or during preparation, like the water ablution for, or its utensil, the place of prayer, the clothes. All these have to be purely halal (lawful), never usurped (unlawfully taken from other people), so that one stands in front of Allah, completely clean, and abiding by Allah's orders. In this way, prayer is conducive to preserving rights, and property, and in fighting injustice and coercion.

That is why praying on usurped ground is not correct, making ablution with usurped water is

disallowed and prostrating in stolen garments is forbidden. Moreover, prayer in clothes bought with money from which one has not paid the poor-dues (zakat) is not correct. This is stipulated in order to protect the financial system in Islam, and harmonize its laws and commandment.

5. Presence of Heart and Sincerity:

The Prophet (s.a.w.) is quoted as having said:

‘When one stands up to offer his prayer, he communes with his Lord’.

And he said:

‘Whoever makes light of prayer, he would never meet me at the spring of Kauthar, never by Allah’.

Prayer is quite worthless if it is no more than automatic actions, verbal formulas and soulless physical movements.

Prayer can never achieve its distinct goals, if the worshipper is physically present, but spiritually absent and thus removed from the object to which he offers his devotion. There must be a genuine presence, to the point that one deeply realizes the value of the position of standing in front of Allah and the grandeur of the Creator he speaks to in his prayer. The soul, then, absorbs the meanings of prayer Psychologically spiritually and morally which equates to submission, love of Allah, desire for His reward, uprightness in behaviour, and correctness in dealing with people etc.

The soul is, in this way, affected by the ritual verbal formul s and actions. Every word pronounced by the worshipper and every action performed h-as a correspondingly deep effect on the human spirit. When man prostrates he realizes the meaning of submission and respect for Allah's greatness and becomes aware of the falsity of human prides. When the individual raises his hands to supplicate for parents and his faithful brothers and sisters that soul feels love, mercy, sympathy and love of good towards others. The Qur'an praises highly the respectful devotees and lauds their uniquely sublime position:

"Successful indeed are the believers. Who are humble in their prayers". Holy Qur'an (23:1-2)

The Prophet (s.a.w.) calls sincere hearts to be tied to Allah, to be deeply attached to Him and to have genuine presence in front of Him, by saying:

‘Allah never accepts a prayer if the man's heart is not present along with his body.’

It is related that the Prophet (s.a.w.) was once present in the mosque, when a man came into the mosque and offered his prayer. He did not bow or prostrate perfectly. The Prophet (s.a.w.) commented:

‘He pecked like a crow. If he dies, and his prayer is like this, he will die as a non-Muslim’.

He has also been quoted to have said:

‘Whoever offers two rakas (cycles of prayer) and does not talk to himself of this world, Allah forgives all his previous sins.’

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

‘A heart where love of Allah and fear of Him join together, its reward would be paradise. So when you pray let your heart be present with Allah, because never does a faithful servant of Allah pray to Him with a conscious heart, without Allah gathering the hearts of the faithful round him, and grants him paradise as he is loved by the faithful’.

Presence of heart must certainly be accompanied by the sincere intention to offer the prayer as a means of the nearness to Allah, without hypocrisy, the pretension of being sincere, humble and pious in front of people, or pride over one's prayer. The worshipper should concentrate his intention and will and turn all his feelings and the depths of his existence towards the Allah Glorified.

The soul becomes composed and serene through sincere deeds. Its powers are then ready to receive the blessings of divine perfection. By achieving this, it deserves to be granted divine mercy, forgiveness and ample reward.

The Most Exalted says:

"And whoever submits himself wholly to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others), he indeed has taken hold of the firmest thing upon which one can lay hold; and Allah's is the end of affairs. " Holy Qur'an (3 1:22)

Most certainly, the worshipper must cross the plain both of material and perception in order to spiritually enter the majestic and divine world and be humbly present in front of Allah.

Heavily burdened by life its troubles and sins, the soul finds rest and inhales the fragrance of the nearness of Allah in this spiritually charged atmosphere.

The Prophet was (s.a.w.) was speaking the truth when he used to call Bilal al-Habashi to give the adhan by saying:

."O Bilal, give us rest by it