Etiquette and Codes of Prayer

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In accordance with the faculty of reason and on the basis of Islamic traditions, prayer too has its etiquette and codes; some of them will be described here, but firstly it would be appropriate to describe the realities of prayer as follows: What is Prayer, and What it Ought to Be?

The literary meanings of phrase prayer means requesting in a humble manner. A little pondering about this definition would reveal: Because the reality of prayer is requesting and beseeching - an act of the heart and that is internal - therefore, a prayer which does not come out from the heart or in other words from a negligent heart in reality, is not a prayer.

Because prayer is a request in a state of need with humility and is not like other requests or demands; therefore, a prayer or request which is not accompanied by need and humility too will be far away from the reality of prayer.

Since the request and pleading inevitably should be accompanied by hope, it must be understood that hope is an essential part of a prayer; therefore, a prayer which is not accompanied by hope or is accompanied by hopelessness will not be regarded as real prayer.

Since for acceptance of prayer and fulfillment of wants one may trust only someone Who knows about our genuine wants as well possesses the power of their being materialized, therefore, the supplicant must have firm faith in the knowledge and power of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), to whom he is beseeching for fulfillment of his own needs through prayer; a firm faith about His knowledge and wisdom as regard to his needs; as well as His absolute power and authority to grant them.

Since humility and humbleness in front of elderly personalities differ in accordance with their status, i.e. it may be that what is considered as humility and humbleness in front of a certain respectful personality may not be regarded sufficient in front of a very great respectable personality. And since Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), happens to be Greater than all the great personalities, therefore, one should do his utmost to show his humility and humbleness in front of Him. Because requesting and pleading before such a Magnanimous and Glorious Lord without his permission and consent would be impolite and stubbornness, which is in contradiction with obedience and humility.

Therefore, request from Him should not be without His permission; because of His Love and Benevolence towards His creatures, He had given us such a permission, and has asked us to present our requirements and needs at His threshold, and beseech Him for their grant as the

Holy Qur'an says in the following verse:

"And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he cryeth unto Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me." - Holy Qur'an (2:186).

Since requesting or begging in reality couldn't be anything other than goodness and blessing for the supplicant, and because a human being does not comprehend his real good and bad correctly as Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), says in the Holy Qur'an: "Man prayeth for evil as he prayeth for good." - Holy Qur'an (17:11)

i.e. as he strives for his good and blessing also endeavours for his bad and evil (in his imagination considering it as good) even though this goodness might be decorated with evil, as has been narrated in the book Misbah al-Shari'a as follows:

"There is nothing (to be asked) except Allah's nearness and countenance. It is up to the supplicant not to open his tongue except for good and welfare, and should not ask Allah anything other than goodness and blessing, and should never include harmful requests in his prayers. Secondly, if the prayer is not granted, he should never be disappointed and never be suspicious about Allah's promise: 'I answer the prayer of My servants' and should consider that whatever he has asked in his prayer unconsciously, might have been harmful and undesirable, because of this very consideration Allah has not granted it and instead has stored for him other blessings".

Secret of Non-acceptance of the Prayer of Righteous

I swear to my own soul that there exists mystery and secret in non-acceptance of at least some parts of the prayers of the righteous and impeccable ones, in spite of the fact that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has himself promised that He will grant such prayers. Because Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), possesses unlimited mercy and compassion towards His righteous servants,

and this very infinite love and affection compels Him to keep them immune from whatever constitutes as bad and evil, even though in their own imaginations they regard it as something good and a blessing. The non-acceptance of their supplications and wants is due to divine expediency beyond our comprehension like the expediency of getting a child killed through Prophet Khidr [a] - the killing which apparently from the point of view of the parents was evil and bad, but in reality was blessing and goodness for them.

Now let us suppose that this mother and father because of their being unaware of tragic and harmful future happenings would have considered their son's remaining alive as something

good and a blessing for themselves, and with this intention would have beseeched Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), for their son's life.

Then in that case would the granting of their prayer (with the intention of good and blessing) be - that their son remains alive and instead of being good and blessed makes them losers in both the worlds, or he better be killed so that the parent could be saved from loosing both the words, and instead of him another righteous son be awarded to them? It is obvious that acceptance of their prayer could be materialized only through the killing of their son.

Because a supplicant prays with the intention of achieving goodness, prosperity, and salvation through this means; in case he did not mention anything particular in his prayer and, wished for its grant, then it would be appropriate that he should consider his prosperity and welfare in whatever is granted by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

Now if He sees and is knowledgeable that whatever is being asked by a supplicant (unknowingly) would bring nothing except loss and calamity for him; then in that case the real grant of supplicant's prayer would be not to accept his prayer, instead to bestow upon him whatever is considered good and useful for him.

Non-acceptance of such prayer by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), are commonly practised among human beings, and very often it happens that someone would turn down the request of a dear one for the sake of prudence. For example, if a sick person mistakenly considers a fatal harmful drug as health-giving and begs his father to give him that medicine, and the father being knowledgeable of its fatal harmful effects, would then the father grant the son's request? Never. And, if he knowingly grants his son's request by giving him that fatal drug, then in that case wouldn't he be criticised by the wise people, and wouldn't it be said that the son requested a health-giving medicine and instead his father gave him a fatal drug?

Similar is the story of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), and his servant, sometimes it may happen that a servant through the means of his prayer asks something from Allah say wealth and property, because, he considers it something good for his wellbeing, but since Allah's vast and infinite wisdom which covers all do's and don'ts relevant to a servant's life affairs knows that wealth and property do not suit this servant; knows that increase of wealth for him even though he is not aware of it would result in his taking distance from truth and reality. Here it is that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted),

because, of his profound love and compassion towards his servant does not grant the servant's prayer and instead makes him deprived from the wealth and property asked by him in his prayer.

Because, if a servant seeks wealth and property through prayer from Allah (the Glorious, the

Exalted), it is because of this reason that he regards it as a means of good and prosperity for himself, without being aware of the fact that his prosperity and welfare lies in his being poor and destitute instead of being rich and wealthy. And since Allah, (the Glorious, the Exalted), is knowledgeable about the fact that wealth and property is not the real grant of his prayer, i.e., to bestow upon a servant the blessings which are indeed required for his prosperity and eternal salvation. The real grant of prayer does not mean that Allah should bestow upon a servant whatever is desired by him - even though being aware of the fact - that unknowingly the servant has asked for a thing which would be harmful and disastrous for him. Or, in other words the grant of a servant's prayer could be explained as follows:

In cases where a servant prays for something which would bring good and prosperity for the servant, the grant of his prayer (by Allah) would mean to bestow upon him the desired things. But whereby a servant unknowingly or in his imagination considering it good for his prosperity, while in reality it is harmful and disastrous for him asks something from Allah the grant of his prayer would be to not to grant his prayer, thus, making him deprived from his desired wants. The above matter that - occasionally Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), grants a supplicants prayer by non-acceptance of his request has been described in many traditions. Even it has been narrated in some of the traditions, that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because of his love towards a servant, sometimes not only did not accept his prayer, instead due to His love, gets the servant occasionally involved into some minor sins, in order to keep him immune from greater sins like arrogance and self-conceit which would bring greater calamities upon the servant.

Therefore, whatever Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), decides about a servant, without least doubt it would bring for him salvation and prosperity;

whatever He does with a servant, even though apparently and over all may not appear in his favour, but relative to that person's affairs and characteristics, certainly means goodness and prosperity, and is executed in accordance with wisdom and prudence. Apart from that, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), bestows all sorts of favours and blessings which are useful for His righteous believers and are permitted by His wisdom and discretion, even though if they do not seek them in their prayers.

Questions and Answers

Perhaps acceptance of the above explanation might be a little bit difficult for some people and they might ask that if such is the case than what is the benefit of prayer? And what are the meanings of prayer's acceptance? In reply it must be said: sometimes the action, deeds, and

affairs of a servant are such that divine wisdom dictates to deprive him from a particular thing because of his deeds and actions. Here it is that if a servant raises his hands for prayer beseeching from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted),

for good and prosperity, then this same prayer would result in causing the earlier divine discretion which was to deprive the servant from utilization of a particular blessing to be changed to other divine discretion, i.e., to allow the servant from utilization of that particular blessing. Therefore, a prayer might result in lots of rewards and blessings which were denied before, because, of our undesirable actions and deeds. In addition to its being granted by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), a supplication also possesses plenty of precious and valuable .advantages

Etiquette of Prayer

There are special etiquette and instructions for prayer, some of them will be described here as narrated in the Islamic traditions as follows: Being Hopeful towards Allah and Hopeless from Others One of the etiquette of prayer is that the supplicant for granting of his prayer and fulfilment of his needs should put his trust only in Allah and should not look towards anyone except Him. This etiquette has been described in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an: "And call on Him in fear and hope." - Holy Qur'an (7:56).

And now let us refer to some of the Islamic traditions:

In the famous book of al-Kafı as well as in many authentic books the following tradition has been narrated from Imam al-Sadiq [a] who has quoted from his father who quoted from the Holy Prophet [s] that Allah has said to some of the prophets:

"I swear by My Majesty and Splendour that: whoever puts his hope in someone other than Me, I will cut off his hope, will dress him in the robe of disgrace and wretchedness, will deprive him from My nearness, will cut off communication with him and will hide his memory. Woe be upon him, who takes shelter in other than Me during difficulties, while the solution of difficulties rest with Me. Does he hope in others while I remain living and eternal? Does he go to the homes of human beings for solution of his problems while the gates of their houses remain closed? Does he leave the door of My house while its gate remains always open?

Was there anyone who trusted Me and was betrayed? The hopes of My servants are tied to Me, and I take care of their hopes. I have filled the sky with those who never get tired of My praise, and have ordered the angels never to close the door between Me and my servants. Does not, the one who faces the problem know that no one can solve it except with My permission? Why does not the servant approach Me for his needs, while I had already blessed him with favours

without his asking for them?

Why does he not ask me instead of asking others? Does he imagine that in the beginning I bestow My favours upon the servant and will now deprive him after his request? Am I miser that My servants regard me as miserly? Do not the world and Hereafter belong to me? Are not mercy and benevolence My characteristics? Do not all the desires end with Me? Who has the power to terminate them?

"I swear with My Majesty and Splendour that if all the needs of all of the world's habitants are summed up, and if I bestow upon them in accordance to their wants, not even the equivalent to the weight of a tiny particle will be decreased from My kingdom. Whatever is bestowed by Me, how could be it susceptible to loss or reduction? How destitute and wretched is the one who is hopeless of My blessings? How helpless is the one who disobeys me, indulges into forbidden deeds, disregards My limits and transgresses?"

In another divine tradition (hadith-e-qudsi) it has been narrated:

"Whatever my servant imagines about Me I am exactly like his imagination, therefore, lest my servant imagine anything except good about Me."

The Prophet [s] has said:

"Beseech Allah with certainty and hope, and request your wants and requirements from Him."

Imam al-Sadiq [a] has said:

"Whenever you beseech Allah for granting of your prayer and needs, imagine that the prayer has been granted and your needs have been provided." In a tradition it has been narrated that Pharaoh was being drowned he pleaded for help from Prophet Moses [a] and since he turned down his request, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), revealed to him:

"Oh Moses! You did not help Pharaoh because you were not his creator, but if he would have called Me for help, without doubt I would have helped him, after all I happen to be his Creator."

Also, there is another famous tradition that when Korah (Qaroon) asked help from Prophet Moses [a] and did not hear any response, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), reprimanded him that why he did not help Korah?

"It has been narrated in a tradition that on the Judgement Day, when the accounting of deeds is completed, special angels will lead the servant whose sins are greater than his good deeds towards the Hell. While in this state the servant turns his face and looks towards his back, then Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), in spite of being knowledgeable about him orders to bring him back and asks him, why did you turn your face backward and look towards Me? O' Allah! I never imagined, never expected it, and never thought that You will treat me like this '. Replied the servant. 'O' My angels! I swear to my Splendour and Majesty that till he existed, never had

such good expectations towards Me, nevertheless, take him to Paradise because now he is claiming to have such good expectations."

Abstinence from Sinning - Oppression against People's Lives, Possessions, and Honour

Another etiquette of prayer is that the supplicant should renounce sinning, especially transgressions, oppressions, and eating forbidden (haram) things. He should not raise his hand of oppression towards people's lives, possessions, and prestige, instead should endeavour to have a pleasing character. Following are some of the traditions in this regard.

In a divine tradition it has been narrated:

"From you is the prayer; and it is up to Me to grant it; the prayers of all supplicants are granted except those who have filled their bellies with food provided through forbidden (haram) means."

The Holy Prophet [s] has narrated:

"Whoever wishes his prayer be granted by Allah must endeavour to earn his sustenace through lawful means, i.e., he must restrain himself from earning his living through fraudulent and forbidden means."

Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has recommended to Prophet Jesus [a]:

"Say to the oppressors of bani-Israel: Do not beseech Me in the state of idol-worshipping and usury, because, I have sworn that whoever beseeches Me I will grant his needs, and My grant for those who are indulged in idol-worshipping and usury would be nothing except cursing and damnation for them."

It has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s] that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), sent revelation to him:

"Warn the Islamic community (Ummah) not to congregate inside the mosque for offering prayer and beseeching Me while being transgressors or oppressors towards other human beings, in that case till they are busy in prayers and supplications would only be inflicted with My curse and damnation, or otherwise they must remove that transgression from themselves (through obtaining the consent of the oppressed). It is only after this stage that they will become nearer to me, so that I would become their eyes and ears, and would make them companions of the prophets, martyrs, and righteous saints."

About the non-acceptance of prayer of someone in Bani-Israel it has been narrated that his prayer was not granted, because, he besought Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), with a contaminated tongue and heart as well as with ill intention.

It has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s]:

"That whoever beseeches Allah with immodest character is like someone who wants to shoot

the arrows with a chord-less bow."

Imam al-Sadiq [a] has said:

"Allah does not grant the prayer of a sleeping and negligent heart, therefore, one should pray to Him whole-heartedly, and should beseech him with attention while being fully awakened, only then a supplicant should look forward for his prayer being granted." It has been mentioned in a tradition that the prayer of the following is not granted:

1. "A person who is sitting idle at home, and without making endeavours for earning a living asks Allah for sustenance through prayer." 2. Prayer of someone who beseeches Allah to inflict harm upon his fellow companion.

3. Prayer of someone who is blessed with wealth by Allah and spent it carelessly in nonsense amusements.

4. Prayer of some one who gives a loan to other party without obtaining his signature on a document, and in case the recipient of loan denies, the loan-giver beseeches Allah for the repayment of his money through prayer."

It has been narrated in a tradition that:

"Whoever prays against his neighbours and relatives, or asks forbidden things (haram) from Allah his prayers are not granted."

Also, it has been quoted from the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a]:

"."That while beseeching Allah one should not ask for impossible and forbidden things

Factors which Influence Prayer's Acceptance

In addition to the above-mentioned characteristics which prevent prayer's there are other etiquette and manners which provide required background for prayer's acceptance, and it is up to the supplicant to pay attention towards them. Following is a brief description about those factors:

Shedding Tears and Crying

Fearing Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), beseeching him with tearful eyes, and lowering head upon his threshold are the etiquette of servanthood; in addition to bringing plenty of favours and blessings also provide background for prayer's acceptance. Following are some traditions.

It has been narrated in a tradition:

"There is a bottleneck passage between Paradise and Hell, and except those who shed tears out of fear for Allah's wrath, no one else would be able to pass through it."

It has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s]:

"Allah has sworn with his Splendour and Majesty that My servants do not know the value of shedding tears and crying; are not aware that for their crying what heavy price and sweet rewards have been stored; for them I have provided special palaces in My vicinity, and there is no partner to share it with them."

It has been narrated:

"On the Day of Judgement there is no eye which is not tearful, except the eye which was tearful in the world because of Allah's fear; there is no one with eyes full of tears because of Allah's fear, except that Allah will forbid his body parts from Hell's fire, there is no face with tears of Allah's fear flowing upon his cheeks, but Allah will make it immune from disgrace and abjectness; there is nothing in creation but has its definite dimensions and weight, except a tiny drop a tear shed for the sake of Allah's fear, that through this drop Allah would silence the oceans of His wrath; and if in a community (ummah) a single servant sheds tears, Allah would bestow forgiveness upon the entire community for the sake of that servant's tear."

.Of course, there are plenty of traditions about this matter

To Offer Thanks, Praise, and Apology

Another etiquette of prayer is to praise and adore Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted); the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a] was asked: "How to praise Allah and consider Him the Greatest?" The Imam replied: "You must recite the following:

'O' Thou who are nearer to me than my jugular vein; O' Thou who is the distance between a man and his heart; O' Thou who is manifested as the most fascinating scene upon the horizon; and O' Thou, who could not be compared with any other thing.'"

While praising Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), it would be more desirable that we should beseech Him with His sacred names and characteristics, which are relevant to our prayer and needs; must remember His blessings and bounties and should thank Him for that; then we .should think about our transgressions and sins, and should offer excuse and Apology

Deliberation and Persistence

Also, it would be desirable that the supplicant should take a pause and ponder about his prayer; should avoid haste and hurrying; should insist whatever he desired from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because he likes a servant who insists and shows persistence for his wants. Also one .must repeat his needs at least three times

Praying Away from People's Sight

It is more appropriate that one should stand in prayer in an isolated place away from people's sight so that he could prevent himself from dissimulation as well as could obey Allah's command. Also it has been narrated that:

"One prayer in privacy is equivalent to seventy prayers performed in the presence of others."

Standing Together for Prayer

Sometimes it is appropriate that a group of people should stand up for praying together, and it is much better if the number of people be at least forty, or at least four people each of them repeating his wants ten times, or in case there is only one person, it would be much better if he asks for his wants forty times.

Humility and Meekness

Another etiquette of prayer is that one should stand before Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), with a humble heart and in a state of meekness; as much as possible in a pleasing and soft manner of tongue, considering himself as destitute and nothing; and in this manner should present his needs and wants in prayer. It has been narrated that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), said to Prophet Jesus [a]:

"O' Jesus! Beseech me like a poor and destitute who does not have any shelter except Me; beseech Me with a broken heart; in isolation and privacy remember me a lot; I love a servant who uses his tongue in a soft and pleasing manner, in a state of earthiness, but, of course with an alive and awakened heart and not with a sleepy and negligent heart; I like and appreciate My servant's endeavours in sending his heart broken sad voice and melody of his grief to My ears."

Also, it has been narrated that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), said to Prophet Moses [a]:

"Whenever you beseech Me, you must be in a state of trembling with fear, being afraid of my wrath put your face upon dirt by offering prostration; tell your mysteries with a broken heart and trembling with fear; let your heart die because of My wrath; look towards Me in a state of frenzy (in My love), like someone who runs away from the fear of enemy and cries for help and support. You too should cry because of fear of sins and seek My help, because, I am the best helper for My servants."

Sincerity and Heart's Purity

Another etiquette of prayer is that the supplicant should not beseech Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), superficially with tongue, instead should seek Him with profundities of his conscience

and from the fathoms of his heart and soul; should purify his inner self from everything other than Him, especially, worldly materialistic affairs which contaminate heart and make the soul unclean; should keep himself away from such thoughts as being suspicious and disbelieving towards Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted),

because such thoughts are indication of disrespect and weakness of faith, which eventually make the heart dead whereby Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), turns his face away from human beings, as the Holy Qur'an said:

."That your thought which ye did think about the Lord, hath ruined you." - Holy Qur'an (41:22)

Prevention is Better than Cure

Another etiquette of prayer is to supplicate during happy and good times; such prayer possesses lot of worth and value and could be compared with the prevention before being inflicted with the disease. Otherwise, forgetting prayer and Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), during happy and good times and beseeching Him and stretching hands for supplication only during hard times while being surrounded by calamities in the state of helplessness would not produce any significant gain.

Remembrance and Preference of Others

It is desirable that during prayer we must keep in mind others while asking our own deeds, whatever we ask from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), it should not be only for our own selves, rather should ask similar things for others as well, and undoubtedly such supplication is more deserving and is nearer for being granted. Further it would be more desirable if we prefer other believers than our own selves, that is firstly we pray for them and then should mention our own wants and desires.

Of course, praying for other believers must be done with sincerity; should be accompanied by one's heart and soul for the sake of mutual friendship, and not for the sake of formalities by the tip of tongue, or with selfish ideas, that praying for others would result in grant of our own prayer sooner, then in that case, it would not produce any result.

Importance of Friendship of a Believer and His Remembrance during Prayer

It must be clearly understood, that regarding the friendship of believers, what really constitutes its axis, foundation, and criteria is - that to be friendly with them, should be only for Allah's

sake and not for the sake of any other motive. It is this type of friendship of believers, which have been considered as precious and esteemed in the Islamic traditions and the Holy Qur'an, it has been emphasized a lot, so much so that in accordance with the following narration:

"It has been considered as the most stable pillar of belief."

And in another tradition:

"The faith has been defined, as having such sincere friendships with believers."

In praising the believers who love each other in this manner, a lot has been written in traditions. For example, it has been narrated in a tradition:

"Whenever the two friends shake their hands Allah too puts his hand between their hands and presses the hand of the one who is more steadfast and sincere in that friendship."

Regarding the believer who prays for other believers it has been narrated:

"Whenever a believer prays for a fellow brother believer, an angel from the worldly sky says to him: 'O' servant of Allah! Know that whatever you have asked for your fellow brother believer a thousand times of that would be given to you; the second angel makes triple and so on so forth until the seventh angel announces seven hundred thousands times of reward bestowed upon him. Then Allah announces glad tidings to him saying: 'O' My servant! My treasure never gets emptied through My donations! I will bestow upon you million times of whatever you have asked for your fellow brother believer.'"

Regarding the believers who help and support each other or fulfil the needs of other believers, there are plenty of traditions. It has been narrated in a tradition:

"Whoever fulfils the wants of a brother believer is like the one who has worshiped Allah with fasting during day and offering night prayer for nine thousands years."

It has been narrated in another tradition:

"Whoever does not mobilize all his resources and strength in fulfillment of a brother believer's wants has indeed done a treachery towards Allah, His Prophet, and the believers."

The story of Imam al-Sadiq [a] and Hasan bin Yaqtin is very famous in this regard. In summary, Imam al-Sadiq write a brief recommendation letter in favour of Hasan bin Yaqtin to the ruler of Ahwaz as follows:

"Before Allah there is a heavenly shade or canopy in which no one can rest but without opening a knot of difficulties for a brother believer, or help him, or do some good however small it may be in his favour. And now a brother believer has approached you, regards.

The ruler of Ahwaz after reading this letter came out bare-footed to welcome Hasan, received him warmly, kissed his face, asked him about Imam's condition, then took him inside his home and treated him with warmth and affection, fulfilled his requirements, forgave his taxes, and

divided equally all his wealth, horses, and slaves between him and Hasan.

"Of course, he undertook all these good actions and justified them for Allah's sake and in the path of Ahlul-Bait's [a] friendship . After a little while Hasan returned before Imam al-Sadiq [a] and described his encounter with the ruler of Ahwaz then the Imam said: 'By Allah, because of this kindness shown by the ruler towards you I am happy, so too my impeccable forefathers, the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a], the Holy Prophet [s] and Allah."

Also, there are plenty of traditions about those who make believers uncomfortable. For example, Hussein bin Abi al-Ala has narrated:

"Once together with twenty or more pilgrims I went to Mecca and sacrificed a sheep at every lodging station for my fellow pilgrims. Later on when I had a chance of seeing Imam al-Sadiq [a], he said to me: 'woe be upon you Hussein! Why did you hurt the believers and make them feel insulted?' I said: 'I seek Allah's shelter from doing such a thing.' He said: 'I heard that you sacrificed a sheep at each lodging stations for your fellow companions.' I said: 'O' my master! By Allah, in this act I don't have any other intention except seeking Allah's pleasure.'

"He said: 'Did not you realize that perhaps among them there might have been others who would have liked to do the same thing, but since they do not have the financial strength to do such a thing, considered themselves as wretched and insulted?' I said: 'O' son of the Holy Prophet [s] salutation and greetings of Allah be upon you! I seek Allah's pardon, and would never indulge again in such an act.'"

Here, we would overlook from mentioning about plenty of fascinating traditions dealing with this matter, and limiting our discussion to only few above-mentioned narrations.

Raising Hands Upward in Prayer

To raise hands upward during prayer is another etiquette and code of the prayer, and it is narrated that when the Holy Prophet [s] stood up for prayer and wants he stretched his hands forward exactly the way the poor and destitute stretch their hands forward for receiving food etc. In this regard when Imam al-Sadiq [a] was questioned, he replied:

1. Whenever you seek Allah's refuge, stand facing towards Mecca (Qiblah) while the palms of the hands should also be facing (Qiblah).
2. When you beseech Allah make distance between your fingers while holding your palms towards the heaven.
3. When you cut off hopes from everybody and put all your hopes towards Him, you must hold your forefinger pointing towards Him.
4. In the state of supplication raise your hands to the level of your head.

5. And while crying and shedding tears because of fear of Allah's wrath and punishment, should shake your forefinger.

Raising hands upwards is the etiquette of prayer in sitting and standing position, but occasionally supplication in the state of prostration possesses more merit, part of the prayer should be recited during prostration. Let us describe the state of prostration, briefly.

Prostration and its Reality

Prostration, in its outwardly form and in true manifestation is the most supreme state and spiritual position for a human being, i.e., the position of annihilation in Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), as it has been mentioned in the traditions:

"A human being in the state of prostration is nearer to Allah than in any other state."

Earlier, we have mentioned about the Holy Prophet's [s] recommendation for prolonged prostration for everybody. Prostration and especially prolonged prostration is the most important and most elegant state of servanthood, and it is because of this reason that in each prayer unit, it is performed twice, whilst other actions are performed only once. And it is from this consideration that about the prolonged prostration of Ahlul Bait [a] and their special Shi'ites a lot of things have been narrated, e.g., Imam al-Sajjad [a][24], sometimes has recited the following prayer in prostration for one thousand times.

"In reality there is no god but Allah."

Also about Imam Kadhim [a][25] and some of his companions it has been narrated that sometimes their prostration prolonged from the day-break till the noon prayer.

During my stay at Najaf-e-Ashraf[26] for religious education there was a learned Sheikh who was the leader and shelter for pious and mystics. I asked him to tell me the most superior deed which he himself has tried and which is most effective and helpful for a gnostic's spiritual journey. He recommended for me two things:

Firstly: performing a prolonged prostration and reciting the following invocation during each day and night:

"There is no god save Thee Be Thou Glorified. Lo! I have been a wrong doer." - Holy Qur'an (21:87).

And the aim and intention of this invocation should be that:

'O' Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted)! My soul is imprisoned in this worldly prison and has been bonded in the chains of passions and carnal desires; with my indecent behavior, I have chained and imprisoned my own self; and I never say this unjust statement, that you have done this to me, that you have entangled me into this prison and bondage. Never! Never! You are too

Glorious and inviolable for such statements, and it is I who has inflicted upon me such calamity, I have oppressed myself with my own hands.'

That noble saint recommended this prostration to all of his friends, and they practised this recommendation by reciting the above-mentioned invocation in the prostration. Some of them recited one thousand times, some of them even recited a little more or less, and some of them .three thousand times and discovered the constructive effects in their own lives

Having a Ring in the Hand

Another etiquette of prayer is to put a ring of Turquoise (Firozeh) Red-chalcedony (Aqiq) in the fingers; it has been reported that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted) has said:

"I feel ashamed to reject the supplication of a supplicant having a ring of Turquoise or Red Chalcedony upon his fingers." Also Imam al-Sadiq [a] has narrated:

"A hand with a Turquoise or Red-chalcedony ring raised in prayer is dearer before Allah than ".any other hand

Importance of the Ring

Here it would be essential to mention an important point about putting on a ring; that it is very unlikely that a human being will ever be immune from commitment of sins and transgressions, therefore, it is prudent that in order to compensate for those committed sins, one should engage himself continuously into performance of some of the worship and supplications, and .putting ring upon the finger is one of them

Paying Alms and Charity

The paying of alms is another etiquette and manner of prayer, which has been emphasized a lot, in plenty of Islamic traditions; it is desirable that a supplicant should never forget about it.

The following has been narrated in a tradition:

"."With payment of alms beseech Him for your own sustenance

Source: Spiritual Journey of the Mystics (Suluk-i Arifan)

(.By:Haj Mirza Javad Agha Maliki Tabrizi (R.A