

VOICES OF ISLAM

Volume 2

VOICES OF THE SPIRIT

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Volume Editor

PRAEGER PERSPECTIVES

PRAEGER

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especially the eyes—close them
 and light spreads,
 open them and
 miracles appear—
 especially Your stark square of black cloth rising
 endlessly up into the night in front of me now
 but Your Face, Lord,
 could I catch a
 glimpse of it at least?

A white owl flies in the night somewhere,
 its impassive face and saucer eyes
 fleeing through the air.

Is this my face, Lord, or
 Your Face

searching everywhere?

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *Mecca/Medina Time-Warp*. Reprinted from a Zilzal Press chapbook, by permission from the author.

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THE IMPORTANCE AND MEANING OF PRAYER IN ISLAM

Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani

Prayer is one of the central elements of Islamic practice and worship. Indeed, it is the second of the Five Pillars of Islam and, along with the testimony of faith, the pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting the month of Ramadan, and paying the poor tax, forms the essential framework of religious life for Muslims. More than that, the observance of the ritual prayer forms the framework of each Muslim's day, from the predawn morning prayer to the night prayer that precedes sleep.

Prayer, in the ritual sense, is an obligation of the faith, to be performed five times a day by adult Muslims. According to Islamic law, prayers have a variety of obligations and conditions of observance. However, beyond the level of practice, there are spiritual conditions and aspects of prayer which represent its essence.

WHAT IS PRAYER IN ISLAM?

In the Holy Qur'an, God says:

I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.

(Qur'an 51:56)

Thus, prayer first and foremost is the response to this Divine directive to worship the Creator. Prayer represents the individual's affirmation of servanthood before the Lord of Creation and submission to His Omnipotent Will. It also represents a willing acknowledgment of our weakness and neediness by seeking Divine Grace, Mercy, Abundance, and Forgiveness. Prayer, then, is a willful, directed action by the believer, seeking direct, unmediated communication with God, for Muslims believe that every human being is of interest

to the Divine. It also represents a concrete manifestation of the Islamic conception of freewill, in that the decision to pray is one that must be made by each individual. In this way, prayer is a uniquely “human” form of worship, for all other creatures submit without question to God’s Will and are engaged in His praise, glorification, and remembrance, as the Holy Qur’an asserts:

and there is not a thing but hymneth His praise; but ye understand not their praise.

(Qur’an 17:44)

Prayer, by its very nature, is a form of request or entreaty, and thus requires the full conscious participation of the one praying, with will, intellect, body, and soul. The one engaged in prayer is in direct connection with the Creator Who hears everything the supplicant says and responds—though not necessarily in the affirmative—to each request. This is the concrete manifestation of God’s role as The Hearer, The Aware, and The Responsive, which represent 3 of the 99 Holy Names and Attributes of God that form the basis of the Islamic conception of the Divine.¹

In Islam, there are two forms of prayer. One has ritual, formal requirements and manners, which are essential to its correct observance. This is called *Salat*. The other form is supplicatory prayer, and in its more general sense, represents an open-ended conversation with God, which may occur at any time or place, with few restrictions or requirements. It is called *du’a*.

Supplicatory Prayer

The term *du’a* is derived from the Arabic verb meaning “to supplicate” or “to call upon.” Other similar terms for such prayer are *munaja*, *nida*, and *al-daru’a*.

Munaja means “a secret conversation with God,” usually with the intention of seeking delivery and relief. Referring to this form of prayer, God says in the Holy Qur’an:

Say: Who delivereth you from the darkness of the land and the sea? Ye call upon Him humbly and in secret, (saying): If we are delivered from this (fear) we truly will be of the thankful.

(Qur’an 6:63)

Nida means “to call upon God while withdrawn from people.” The Holy Qur’an relates the story of the Prophet Zachariah who, having no son, beseeched God in his old age to give him a successor to inherit his prophetic knowledge and duties:

A mention of the mercy of thy Lord unto His servant Zachariah. When he cried unto his Lord a cry in secret, Saying: My Lord! . . . give me from Thy Presence a successor who shall inherit of me and inherit (also) of the house of Jacob. . . (It was said unto him): O Zachariah! Lo! We bring thee tidings of a son whose name is John; We have given the same name to none before (him).

(Qur’an 19:2–7)

Al-daru’a means “a loud entreaty to God for safety,” as mentioned in the Holy Qur’an:

Before thee We sent (apostles) to many nations, and We afflicted the nations with suffering and adversity, that they might submissively entreat (Him)!

(Qur’an 6:42)

Ritual Prayer

The Linguistic Root of Prayer: *Salat*

Ritual prayer in Islam is called *Salat*, a word whose full meaning is best understood by examining its linguistic roots. One of the origins of *Salat* is the root word *silat*, which means “connection” or “contact.” One of Islam’s most renowned philosophers, Ibn Rushd, said:

It derives from the word “connection” (*silat*) in that it connects the servant with his Creator, meaning that the prayer brings him near His Mercy and connects him to His Generosity and His Heavenly Paradise.²

This word is also used in the context of close relations (*silat al-rahim*) whose connections with an individual are due to blood ties and are therefore imperishable in the eyes of the Divine. In this sense, prayer is seen as the unseverable bond between the individual and his or her Lord.

Commenting on this, another renowned Qur’anic exegete, Qurtubi said:

The word *Salat* derives from the word *silat*, one of the names of fire as when it is said, “The wood is burned by fire.”³

Qurtubi attributed six different meanings to the word *Salat* in his commentary on the Holy Qur’an:

Prayer is the invocation of God; it is mercy, as when one says, “O God, bestow prayers on Muhammad”; it is worship, as when God says, “And their worship at the (holy) House” (Qur’an 8:35); it is a supererogatory prayer, as when God says, “And enjoin upon thy people worship” (Qur’an 20:132); and it is God’s praise, as when He says, “And had he

not been one of those who glorify (God)...” (Qur’an 37:143); Prayer is also recitation.⁴

RITUAL PRAYER IN DIVINE LAW (*SHARIA*)

Ritual prayer is bound by detailed obligations and structure. It encompasses both obligatory (*fard*) prayers, which are observed five times daily at specified intervals, and voluntary prayers, which are performed by the worshipper before or after the obligatory prayers as well as at other times.

The Obligatory Nature of Ritual Prayer

The Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace and blessings,⁵ called prayer “the pillar of religion.” No fundamental element of Islam is stressed as much as prayer in the Holy Qur’an. Indeed, God mentions it in over 700 verses of the holy text. Among those that define its role in the religion of Islam are:

Worship at fixed hours hath been enjoined on the believers.

(Qur’an 4:103)

Be guardians of your prayers, and of the midmost prayer.

(Qur’an 2:238)

Enjoin prayer on thy people, and be constant therein. We ask thee not to provide sustenance: We provide it for thee. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for righteousness.

(Qur’an 20:132)

Recite that which has been revealed to thee of the Book, and observe Prayer. Surely, Prayer restrains one from indecency and manifest evil, and remembrance of God indeed is the greatest virtue. And God knows what you do.

(Qur’an 29:46)

(They will be) in Gardens (of Delight): they will question each other, and (ask) of the sinners: “What led you into Hell Fire?” They will say: “We were not of those who prayed.

(Qur’an 74:40–43)

The Messenger of God made ritual prayer the second of the Five Pillars of Islam:

Islam is built on five: testifying that there is no god except God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, establishing ritual prayer, paying the poor-due, pilgrimage and fasting Ramadan.⁶

Thus, the ritual prayer is an obligation from God on every sane, adult Muslim. The Prophet said:

The first thing about which a person will be questioned on the Day of Judgment is prayer. If it is found to be sound all his other actions will be sound as well. If his prayer is not sound all his remaining actions would be spoiled.⁷

The Prophet also said:

Giving up prayer is tantamount to disbelief and associating partners with God.⁸

He also said:

The one who misses one of the ritual prayers, is as if he has lost all his family and property.⁹

And he said:

Ritual prayer is the best means of struggle in the way of God (*Jihad*).

It is reported that the Prophet’s last words were:

Prayer! Prayer! And fear God regarding those whom you are in charge of.¹⁰

Abu Bakr ibn al-Jaza’iri states:

Among the wisdoms in the implementation of prayer is that it purifies and welcomes the worshipper to converse with God and His Messenger, and, while he or she remains in the material world, brings him or her into proximity with the Divine in the next life and wards off indecency and manifest evil.¹¹

God’s Messenger Muhammad said:

The simile of the five prayers is like a flowing river of sweet water in front of the door of one of you, in which he plunges five times a day. What dirt will remain on him? They said, “None.” He said, “Surely the five prayers eliminate sins just as water eliminates dirt.”¹²

God's Messenger also said:

Five (daily) prayers and from one Friday prayer to the (next) Friday prayer, and from Ramadan to Ramadan, are expiations for the (sins) committed in between (their intervals) provided one shuns the major sins.¹³

One of the primary aims of prayer is to prevent iniquity and vice. The Prophet of God said:

The one whose prayer does not prevent him from iniquity and vice, gains nothing from God except remoteness.¹⁴

While the five prayers are an obligation, Muslims are also enjoined to perform other prayers in accordance with the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. These include

- *Witr* (the final prayer to end the day)
- The two festival (*'Id*) prayers
- The Eclipse Prayer (*Salat al-Kushuf*)
- The Prayer for Rain (*Salat al-Istisqa*)

All the above are given in established traditions of the Prophet. Other than these are what are classified as voluntary worship.¹⁵

In addition, there are a number of supererogatory prayers (*sunan*), which were part of the normative practice of the Prophet Muhammad, and which remain part of the everyday worship of many traditional Muslims.

History of Ritual Prayer

After the Prophet Muhammad was commissioned with prophethood in his 40th year, the first order he was given by God was to pray. It is related that the Archangel Gabriel came to him, and a spring of water gushed out from the rocks in front of them. Gabriel then showed the Prophet how to perform the ablution that is a prerequisite of the ritual prayer in Islam. Gabriel then showed the Prophet how to offer the ritual prayer to God. The Prophet then went home and showed his wife Khadija what the Archangel Gabriel had taught him.

After that, the Messenger of God began to pray two cycles (*raka'at*) of ritual prayer twice a day—once in the morning and once in the evening. From that time forward, the Prophet never went through a day without praying. In the ninth year of the Prophet's mission, he was taken by the Archangel Gabriel on a miraculous journey by night to Jerusalem and, from there, ascended to the heavens and the Divine Presence. During this

tremendous journey, God commanded the Prophet and his followers to observe the ritual prayer 50 times a day. Returning from the Divine Presence, the Prophet Muhammad met the Prophet Moses who said, "Seek a reduction, for your people cannot bear it." The Prophet did so and it was granted. After many such dialogues, the command was reduced to observe five prayers, which would be the equivalent of the original command to observe 50. For this reason, Muslims feel a great debt to the Prophet Moses for this intercession on their behalf.

Requirements of Ritual Prayer

In Divine Law (*Shari'a*), there are a number of requirements for valid ritual prayer:

- Purification
- Time
- Direction
- Covering
- Fundamentals of prayer

In addition to these essentials, there are a number of normative practices of the Prophet, which are strongly recommended as part of the ritual prayer, known as *sunna*:

- Congregation/Imamate
- Humility before the Divine (*khushu'*)
- Place
- Attire

Prayer Is According to the Prophetic Pattern

The practice of the Prophet is essential to understand the Holy Qur'an. God said:

Establish prayers (*Salat*) and pay the poor-due (*Zakat*).

(Qur'an 2:43)

From this, it is clear that both prayer and the poor-due are obligations. However, to find the necessary details to complete the prayer, that is, the manner and timing of the prayer and upon whom it is obligatory, and

so on, we must turn to the practice of Prophet Muhammad. Islamic doctrine states that for every single event in his lifetime God revealed to the Prophet's heart what to say and what to do. The Qur'an and the Prophetic Narrations (*ahadith*) both derive from revelation and are thus inseparable sources for understanding and implementing Islam's divine guidance.¹⁶

The Prophet said, "Pray as you see me pray."¹⁷ What is meant here is to follow the method of observing prayer, both in its form and in its inward composure and states.

The Prophet used to practice the ritual prayer constantly, outside the obligatory times. In doing so he was observing God's recommendation:

Nay, seek (God's) help with patient perseverance and prayer: It is indeed hard, except to those who bring a lowly spirit.

(Qur'an 2:45)

According to the scholars of Divine Law, recommended acts are divided into three categories: those acts whose demand is confirmed, known as the "confirmed normative practice of the Prophet" (*sunan al-mu'akkada*). According to Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Masri, "Someone who neglects such an act...deserves censure and blame."¹⁸ Second are those acts that are rewardable in Divine Law, but the one who neglects them deserves no blame. These are called the extra *sunan* (*sunna nafila*). The third category is the superlatively recommended, "meaning those acts considered part of an individual's perfections."¹⁹ These are called the desirable acts (*mustahab*) or decorum (*adab*).

Purification

A precondition of ritual prayer in Islam is that the worshipper be in a ritually pure state and perform his or her prayer in a ritually pure location.

There are two levels of ritual impurity, each with its own remedy:

(1) *Major impurity*: This occurs as a result of menstruation, childbirth, and sexual intercourse or emission. Its remedy is ritual bathing, as prescribed in the Holy Qur'an:

O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say, - nor in a state of ceremonial impurity (Except when travelling on the road), until after washing your whole body.

(Qur'an 4:43)

(2) *Minor impurity*: This occurs due to answering the call of nature, bleeding, vomiting, or sleeping. Its remedy is ritual ablution. This, too, is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

O you who believe! When you get ready for ritual prayer [salat], wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and lightly rub your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles.

(Qur'an 5:6)

The Holy Prophet said:

Ablution is the key to prayer as prayer is the key to Paradise.²⁰

The various schools of Islamic jurisprudence differ slightly in the precise details of ritual ablution and bathing. Emphasized in all, however, is the need to use pure water, free from all contamination, for pure water contains the secret of life and of revivifying what is dead. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

We made from water every living thing.

(Qur'an 21:30)

And:

In the rain which God Sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead. . . .

(Qur'an 2:164)

If water is unavailable, extremely scarce or its use would harm the worshipper, it is permitted to perform substitute ablution using dry earth. The Holy Qur'an says:

And if ye are sick or on a journey, or one of you cometh from the closet, or ye have had [sexual] contact with women, and ye find not water, then go to clean, high ground and rub your faces and your hands with some of it. God would not place a burden on you, but He would purify you and would perfect His grace upon you, that ye may give thanks.

(Qur'an 5:6)

Besides cleansing the body, the worshipper must also take care to ensure that his or her clothes are free from impurities that would nullify the prayer. Traditionally, shoes are removed before the prayer because of their tendency to retain impurities.

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PURIFICATION

Ibn Rushd states that the word for ablution, *wudu'*, derives from the word for light in Arabic, *daw*, signifying the resultant spiritual light that accrues to the one who performs it.²¹

The Messenger of God said:

On the Day of Resurrection, my Community will be called "those with the radiant appendages" because of the traces of ablution. Therefore, whoever can increase the area of his radiance should do so.²²

Abu Hurayra related:

I heard my intimate friend (the Messenger of God) saying, "The radiance of the believer reaches the areas that the water of ablution reaches."²³

Ablution signifies spiritual purity, which the Prophet was granted when the angels washed his heart, both in his youth and again, later, when angels washed it with the water of the holy well of Zam Zam on the Night of Ascension.

To gain the full benefit of ablution, the worshipper must perform it with the realization of its inner aspects, washing away the burdens and darkness of worldly life that distract him or her from Divine service. By removing both the physical and the mental filth that accumulate through the day, one ignites and seals the latent spiritual energy of one's being by means of the special attributes of water. The extremities washed during ablution are the primary means of interacting with the worldly life, and these must be cleansed of the taint left by that contact.

Ablution begins with washing the hands, signifying that the first level of spiritual energy is in the hands. Human hands contain a Divine secret, for they are a reflection of the Divine Attribute of Power, which God has bestowed in a limited degree on humankind. They provide the means for the outward manifestations of humankind's will to change its circumstances. Thus, hands are a source of change, control, and healing. No other creature has been endowed with so great an ability to manipulate its surroundings, and the hands are the main physical instrument of that ability.

The hand can act as a receiver of positive energy. The circle of the body, so clearly illustrated by Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing *Ecce Homo*, is reflected on a smaller scale in the circle of the hand. Energy can be drawn in through the hands and channeled throughout the body. When one rubs the hands together during ablution, one activates a spiritual code that God has given us within our hands: the power of the 99 Beautiful Names and Attributes that God has inscribed on every person's palms.²⁴ The friction between the two hands creates energy in the form of heat and rubbing them together under water locks in that energy, preventing it from escaping. The water

keeps the energy that is generated by rubbing the hands together within the body, where it can be released later.

During the process of ablution the hands are used to convey the water to each other limb and organ, thereby functioning as a dispenser of that divine energy. As the limbs and organs are washed in ablution, each undergoes similar spiritual alterations based on the water, the hands and their energy, and the various movements and recitations that are part of the ablution. For the believer to benefit from the water, it must be pure and clean, otherwise its secret blessings do not reach the body.

On an esoteric level, ablution becomes a metaphor for purifying the heart. Water is always clean in its essence, so the degree of spiritual reception is dependent on keeping the water free from external impurities. If we expand the spiritual metaphor, the water symbolizes the remembrance of God. That remembrance is pure, in and of itself, but can be tainted by the darkness of negativity which derives from wrong intent, wrong will, and wrong action.

The most powerful energy we carry as human beings is our spiritual energy. Second to that is the physical energy of creativity, which manifests during the act of procreation. In the course of physically expressing this creative energy God has placed within us, we enter into a state similar to the spiritual state of annihilation, but not related to the Divine Presence; on the contrary, it is related to the lower self. When this occurs, it is essential to wash the body completely, with the intention to restore the spiritual state of purity lost during the act.

Purification of the heart blocks the influence of Satan on the believer. For this reason, the Prophet is reported to have said:

Ablution is the weapon of the believer.²⁵

Ablution protects the believer from four enemies of the soul: the lower self or ego (*nafs*), worldly desire (*hubb al-dunya*), lust (*hawa*), and Satan. However, only through the remembrance of God can the believer maintain this defense throughout the day. When the heart begins to beat with God's Holy Name, "Allah," Satan is prevented from entering, and the gossips and insinuations of the lower self are gradually reduced until they are no more than a whisper.

At an even higher level of understanding, ablution signifies the state of dissolving the self in the Divine Presence. According to the Sufi master Jili:

...the requirement of using water signifies that purity is not achieved except by the emergence [in the worshipper] of the manifestations of the Divine Attributes, which is the water of life, for water is the secret of life. Dry ablution (*tayammum*) as a substitute [for ablution with water] is the station of purity by necessity, and is thus a symbol of purifying one's self by opposing one's lower-self, combating the tyrannical selfish ego and spiritual exercises. However, even after someone is purified, there is still a chance for [the ego] to exist.²⁶

This is what the Prophet alluded to when he supplicated, "O my Lord give my self its piety and its purity, for You are the best one to purify it."²⁷ His saying "Give my self its piety," is an indication of [the need for] combating the lower-self by means of spiritual exercises. His saying "...and its purity, for You are the best one to purify it," is an indication of the heart's attraction to the Divine, for this [attraction] is far more effective than purifying by means of action and opposing the lower-self.²⁸

Prayer Times

The five times of obligatory ritual prayer are

- *Fajr*: From dawn to sunrise;
- *Zuhr*: From noon until mid-afternoon;
- *Asr*: From mid-afternoon to sunset;
- *Maghrib*: From sunset to early evening;
- *Isha'*: From early evening to the middle of the night.

These times coincide with the significant temporal changes that are part of each day's cycle on earth as this planet moves through its various stations in relation to the Sun. The Sun, which is the focal point of the solar system, thus becomes a guiding light for the worshiper, indicating the beginning and ending of each prayer's interval. In this way, Muslims are reminded of the story of Abraham, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

In his yearning and seeking for God, Abraham holds a metaphorical debate within himself. His first inclination is to bow before a bright star that shines forth at night, taking it as his Lord. However, when that star sets, his intellect rejects it, seeking something greater as Lord. Seeing the Moon, he determines it to be his Lord until it too sets and he seeks something greater still. Seeing the Sun rise, he supposes it must be his Lord, but despite its blazing glory, it too sets. Finally, Abraham concludes that none of these heavenly bodies—and by inference, no created thing—could be his Lord, and thus sets himself firmly on worship of the Unseen Lord:

...when [the sun] set he exclaimed: O my people! Lo! I am free from all that ye associate (with Him). Lo! I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not of the idolaters.

(Qur'an 6:75-79)

Muslims consider the day to begin at sunset, with the evening (*Maghrib*) prayer. This holds tremendous significance on an esoteric, or spiritual, level. The masters of the science of Islamic spirituality, Sufism, see the cycles of prayer as symbolic of the cycles of creation itself. The sunset prayer represents

the station of leaving existence. The night prayer, which follows it, represents the station of darkness and death, annihilation, and nonexistence.

In some Islamic traditions, funeral prayers for those who have passed away during the preceding day are read immediately after the sunset prayer, indicating this time's correlation with death and the afterlife.

The Holy Qur'an says:

It is God that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: Those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed.

(Qur'an 39:42)

Awakening to pray just before dawn represents the return to life, the descent through the darkness of the womb to emerge into the light. Metaphorically, the worshipper moves from the station of nonexistence and annihilation back to the station of existence and rebirth. A new day has come, and with it the worshipper is reborn.

The apex of existence is marked by the noon prayer, which begins just as the Sun reaches the peak of brightness. At the zenith, two kingdoms are present and the prayer joins them: the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth.

The afternoon prayer takes place at a time that signifies the approach of the end, autumn, and the last era of worldly life. According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad and the community of believers he raised appear at the end of humanity's spiritual history, just prior to the Day of Judgment. The coming of the afternoon prayer thus represents the approach of Judgment Day and the Divine Reckoning that it brings. With the setting of the sun, life comes to an end. The worshipper returns to God, taking with him an account of his deeds. With the darkness comes annihilation in the oceans of God's Endless Mercy. It is for this reason that Islam places a strong emphasis on the afternoon prayer.

Thus, each day is a full life cycle, from creation out of nonexistence to Judgment Day and annihilation. Each day has its birth, life, and death. In similar fashion the prayer times reflect the five major stages of life: infancy, childhood, youth, maturity, and old age.

Direction

The worshipper faces the Ka'ba, the holy shrine of Islam, as determined to the best of his or her ability by simple means. This directional focus is called the *qibla*.

The Ka'ba is the House of God, located in the holy city of Mecca in Arabia. It is the goal of the pilgrimage, which is the fifth pillar of Islam. In Islamic

teachings, the Ka'ba is said to mark the location where the Divine House in the Seventh Heaven, beyond which stands the Supreme Throne, which angels constantly circle in praise and worship of God, descended to Earth after the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were cast out of Paradise for their mistake. In the time of Noah's flood, this heavenly sanctuary was taken up to heaven again. Millennia later, Abraham and Ishmael built the Ka'ba in the same location, where it stands today, the first house of worship dedicated to God. By facing this location in prayer, each Muslim aims and hopes to reach that holy location at some point in his or her life.

Initially, in the early days of Prophet Muhammad's mission, the believers faced Jerusalem when they prayed, out of respect for the Temple there. This direction represented respect for the previous Divine dispensations brought by Moses and Jesus and the Israelite prophets. Later, Divine legislation altered the direction of prayer to face the Holy House in Mecca:

We see thee (O Muhammad) turning of thy face for guidance to the heavens: now shall We turn thee to a prayer-direction that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque [Ka'ba]: Wherever ye are, turn your faces in that direction.

(Qur'an 2:144)

Thus, wherever Muslims live, their prayers have a common focus: the Ka'ba.

Because of the presence of this blessed shrine, the area surrounding the Ka'ba is holy. These environs are called the *Haram*, literally "prohibited," meaning a place where sins are prohibited. The Ka'ba itself is located within the "Prohibited Mosque," *al-Masjid al-Haram*.²⁹ The name Prohibited Mosque was given because no one may act on bad desires there. While it is called a mosque, God made it more than that. In reality, it is a place where sins are utterly rejected, not only in their outward forms but also in their inner realities. There, even negative thoughts and intentions are considered blameworthy. Only pure, positive desires, and good thoughts are accepted. Indeed, within the confines of that holy sanctuary, no hunting is allowed; even the cutting of trees and vegetation is proscribed.

God said in the Holy Qur'an:

Glory to (God) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who Heareth and Seeth (all things).

(Qur'an 17:1)

This verse describes the important journey that the Prophet Muhammad made between the Prohibited Mosque in Mecca and the Temple in Jerusalem

(referred to as the "Farthest Mosque," *al-Masjid al-Aqsa*³⁰), a journey that in one moment bridged three divinely revealed religions.

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KA'BA

One of the distinctive characteristics of Islamic ritual prayer is that the worshipper is obliged to keep his vision, both external and internal, concentrated upon the *qibla*. The focus of every worshipper is, and must be, a holy place. People whose understanding is purely external believe facing the Ka'ba is of intrinsic value.

Those with a mystic understanding know that the Ka'ba represents the spiritual pole of this world, around which all creation turns. Looking at photographs of the Ka'ba taken from above, we see the worshippers moving around it in perfectly arranged concentric circles. This assembly gathers in imitation of the heavenly kingdom, for all these circles have one center regardless of their distance from it. At the spiritual level, that center is the Divine Presence. While each worshipper faces the Ka'ba's walls of stone and mortar, these are not the focus. If we remove the four walls, what do we find? Each person facing someone else. In this is a deep and subtle secret that we leave for the reader to ponder.

When the spiritual seeker realizes his or her station on the circle of the People of the *Qibla*, he enters what is known as the Circle of Unconditional Lovers (*da'irat al-muhibbin*). That is the circle of Muslims at the first level in the way of God: the level of love. Such love is not related to any desire, but is a purely Platonic, spiritual love between the believer and his or her Lord. God is the center of the circle, and the believers are each a point on its circumference. Each has his or her own connection to the center. That means each has his or her own direction, *qibla*, toward the Divine Presence. As this connection becomes apparent to the believer, that radius becomes like a tunnel into which the seeker begins to step from the circumference of the circle. Upon making his first steps into that tunnel, he begins to discover countless negative characteristics within himself. As he discovers one characteristic after another, he begins to eliminate them, progressing down the tunnel to become a "seeker in the circle of lovers on the spiritual journey," progressing ever nearer to the *qibla* at the center. In the metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabi, the renowned mystic scholar speaks of a spiritual hierarchy in which the emanations from the Divine are received by a single human receptor who is the leader of all these circles of lovers and through him spreads to the rest of humanity, each according to his or her degree or station. This individual represents the Prophet in his or her time as the perfect servant of God. Thus, under one spiritual leader, all are moving constantly closer to the Divine Presence.

In the Sufi understanding, which delves deeply into the mystic knowledge and symbolism of Islam's outward forms, it is said that the Prohibited

Mosque represents the heart of the believer. Thus, the inner direction of prayer is toward the sanctified heart. What is the sanctified heart? At the first level of spirituality, the sanctified heart is the heart that is purified of all wrong thoughts, negativity, and dark intent. This level is called the Level of the Secret (*sirr*). Once that secret is opened within the sanctified heart, the seeker moves to the heart of the heart, known as Secret of the Secret (*sirr al-sirr*). This is the level of purification from any attachment to worldly desires. Beyond these levels of the heart are “the Hidden” (*khafa*) and “the Innermost” (*akhfa*) levels, representing further stations of purity, in which the heart becomes ever more removed from attachments, turning away from all that is worldly to focus instead on the spiritual realm of the Hereafter. At the highest level, the heart turns away from even that and begins to focus solely on the Divine Presence.

These are levels of achievement. On the spiritual dimension, the believer’s focus is to reach a perfected level of character, to learn from it and to be enlightened from it. In order to progress beyond our state of ignorance we must strive to learn and educate ourselves. This can only be accomplished by keeping the company of enlightened individuals who have successfully traversed the Path of God, to God, and who are granted the ability to guide others. God says:

O ye who believe! Fear God and be with those who are true (in word and deed).

(Qur’an 9:119)

God is aware of every heart. The Holy Qur’an states:

Those who struggle for Us, We will guide them in the right ways, the ways that are suitable to them.

(Qur’an 29:69)

The polished heart of the sincere and true believer (*sadiq*) is a receptacle for God’s Heavenly Lights and Divine Blessings. Such a person is like the sun. When the sun rises, the whole world shines from that source of energy and light, the light of mystical gnosis that makes all things visible. For that reason, the Prophet said, “The heart of the [true] believer is the House of the Lord.”

Covering

The Islamic schools of jurisprudence concur that it is essential (*wajib*) for both men and women to cover those parts of their bodies during prayer which should ordinarily be kept covered before strangers. For men, this

includes what is between the navel and the knee. For women, it is the entire body, except the face and hands.

As we have said, the purity of what covers the body is essential for the prayer to be acceptable. In one of the first revelations to the Prophet Muhammad, God says:

And thy Lord do thou magnify! And thy garments keep free from stain! And all abomination shun!

(Qur’an 74:3–5)

The body is not the only thing that must be covered in prayer. During *Salat*, the worshipper is commanded to look only at the location where he or she will prostrate, not to the left or right. In this way, one covers one’s gaze and directs oneself to the Vision of God, for the Prophet said:

The perfection of religion (*al-Ihsan*) is to worship God as if you are seeing Him and if you do not see Him, know that He sees you.³¹

Thus, the gaze of the believer must be veiled at the time of worship from everything other than God. This derives from a spiritual understanding of the Verse of the Veil in the Holy Qur’an, in which God says:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And God is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty. . . .

(Qur’an 24:30–31)

The emphasis in these verses is on lowering the gaze, meaning to guard the eyes from looking at what is forbidden or impure. In the outer sense, this means to refrain from looking with lustful desire at other than one’s spouse, for the Prophet said, “The two eyes are two adulterers.”³²

In this regard, a renowned contemporary Sufi saint, and my teacher and guide on the spiritual path, Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, relates the story of a judge (*qadi*), called by a woman to annul her husband’s marriage to a second wife. The judge asked the plaintiff, whose face was hidden by a face veil (*burqa*), “Why are you asking me to prevent something permitted in Islamic Divine Law?” The first wife replied, “Your honor, were I to remove my face-veil you would wonder how someone married to so stunning a beauty could seek another woman’s companionship!” Upon hearing this the judge swooned. When he came to, his associates asked him

what had happened. He replied, "On hearing this woman's reply, I had an epiphany. How is it that our hearts turn to all manner of worldly interests, when God Himself is asking us to be with Him alone?"

The next verse says:

they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty....

(Qur'an 24:31)

calling on women to veil their beauty from other than the men in their immediate family, to protect them from men who are all too easily overpowered by desire, and to protect men from their own weaknesses.

Esoteric commentators state that "women" here symbolizes attachments to the worldly life. The spiritual meaning of this prohibition then is that, when coming before the Lord of Creation, the seeker must veil himself or herself from all distractions of the worldly life and focus on the One to Whom prayer is directed.

At an even higher level of spiritual understanding, the word "women" refers to the Divine Attributes of Beauty. Thus, the worshipper is advised to call to mind the Divine Attributes of Majesty, and not become lost in the Attributes of Beauty, which may lead the seeker to lose his or her balance in approaching the Divine Presence.

In the Holy Qur'an, God also said:

O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer (*masjid*).

(Qur'an 7:31)

Here, believers are called upon by God to wear their best and most attractive garments when going to pray. The call to manifest "beautiful apparel" at the "place of prayer" can be interpreted as well to be an instruction to adorn the mosques and beautify them, keeping in mind that:

The places of worship (*masajid*) are for God (alone).

(Qur'an 72:18)

The three major holy mosques of Islam—al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, and al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem—are all highly ornamented with gilding, decorative calligraphy, mosaic tiles, inlaid wood, brilliant lamps, and other decorations. All

other mosques are connected to these for, as we have said, when worshippers stand to pray in any mosque, they must face the Ka'ba, God's Holy House.

God said, "Neither My heavens contain Me nor My earth. But the heart of My Believing Servant contains Me."³³

The heart, too, then is a mosque, and for this reason it also must be decorated. The ornamentation of the heart involves removing everything that distracts one from the worship of God and replacing these impurities with love of the Divine, as we have seen earlier. Anything that brings impurity to the heart extinguishes the light that God has placed there. This is a form of tyranny, for the Arabic word for tyranny (*zulm*) also means darkness. Thus, any darkness which veils the heart from God's Holy Light is a form of oppression. This darkness cannot be removed except through repentance and seeking the intercessory prayers of the Prophet. This is why the aforementioned verses about modesty are followed closely by:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! God doth guide whom He will to His Light: God doth set forth parables for men: and God doth know all things.

(Qur'an 24:35)

"God is the Light" does not mean that God is light, rather The Light is His while God's Essence is unknown. The created cannot know The Creator except by means of His Beautiful Names and Attributes, His Descriptions. God's saying "He is the Light of the heavens and earth" means that whatever is found in the heavens and earth contains that light.³⁴ Since we are from earth, that light is within each of us, for God, being the Just, bestows on all with Divine Fairness. Shaykh Ibrahim Hakki, a renowned Ottoman scholar of the Qur'an, said:

Without a doubt the complete potential for perfection is found within every human being, because God the Most High has placed His own Divine Secrets within the essence of man, in order to manifest from the Unseen His Beautiful Names and Attributes.³⁵

Therefore, as the Prophet said, "Human beings are born of a natural disposition,"³⁶ meaning each human being carries that light of primordial faith and predisposition to submission before God.

Therefore in the Prophet Muhammad, being the epitome of humankind and its highest standard bearer, is found the perfect manifestation of the human embodiment of Divine Grace and the corporeal manifestation of Divine Attributes. It is due to the Prophet's utter submission, in the state of perfect servanthood, that made him the perfect receptacle for Divine Appearances. That is, the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqiqa al-Muhammadiyya*) reflects the heart of the Divine Essence, since the Prophet's heart moves without restriction in the orbit of the 99 Divine Names and Attributes. He has been blessed by being adorned with the 99 Names inside of which is a glowing pearl which has yet to appear. Thus, many commentators assert that the "Light of the heavens and earth" referred to in the above verse is the Light of Muhammad, whom God created from His own Divine Light, and it is this light which shines in the hearts of believers, for the Light of the Prophet is the source of the light of all believers.

APPEARANCE

God says in the Holy Qur'an:

O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer. . . .

Say (O Muhammad): "Who has forbidden the adoration with clothes given by God, which He has produced for His devotees?"

(Qur'an 7:31-32)

Nafi' related:

'Umar entered upon me one day as I was praying in a single garment and he said, "Don't you have two garments in your possession?" I said, "Yes." He said, "In your opinion, if I sent you to one of the people of Medina on an errand, would you go in a single garment?" I said, "No." He said, "Then is God worthier of our self-beautification or people?"

An adjunct to proper covering is proper physical appearance. The most direct method for establishing one's identity as a traveler upon the path of self-purification is to adopt the correct outward appearance, abandoning the dress of the worldly life and putting on instead the apparel of the Hereafter. This is an outward indication of rejecting servitude to the material world (*'abd al-dunya*) and asserting one's true identity as a servant of the Divine (*'abd Allah*).

The dress most conducive to spirituality is the garb of the Prophet Muhammad, the traditional clothing worn by all the Prophets and

Messengers of God. For men, this includes wearing the turban, the cloak (*rubba*), and a ring, and using perfume and a tooth-stick (*miswak*). For women, it involves wearing loose clothing, covering the hair, arms, and legs, with white clothing being the most preferable. Such is the honored dress of the ascetics and lovers of God and His Prophet, those who reject the illusion of the material world and will settle for nothing less than the perfection and truth of reality.

Fundamentals of Prayer

The first and foremost fundamental part of the ritual prayer is intention (*niyya*).

As in all Islamic worship, the worshipper intends the prayer as a fulfillment of God's order done purely for God's sake. The Prophet Muhammad established this as a paramount rule of worship when he said, "Verily all deeds are based on their intention."³⁷

The prayer is initiated by the consecratory magnification of God (*takbir*), followed by multiple cycles, each of which follows the same series of postures and recitations: first standing, then bowing, brief standing, prostrating, a brief sitting, a second prostration, and in the even cycles, sitting after the second prostration. Each of these positions also involves specific recitations. While standing, the first chapter (*Surat al-Fatiba*) and other portions of the Holy Qur'an are recited, either silently or aloud, depending upon the time of prayer. In bowing, the brief standing, prostration, and the brief sitting, God is glorified and praised in short formulas. While sitting, the testimony of faith (*tashahhud*) is recited, along with greetings to and prayers for the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet Abraham, and their families. In addition, there are a variety of supplemental invocations and recitations that are traditionally part of the practice of most worshippers. The basic essentials of ritual prayer number about 15, depending on the school of jurisprudence followed.³⁸

Each obligatory prayer has a prescribed number of cycles to be observed (see the following table).

Prayer	Number of cycles
Maghrib (sunset)	3
Isha' (night)	4
Fajr (dawn)	2
Zuhr (noon)	4
Asr (afternoon)	4

The Positions of Prayer

The movements of the prayer identify the one praying with all other forms of creation, for the prayer's postures are designed to remind the worshipper of mortality and the traversal through the different stages of life. They also resemble the rising and setting of the celestial bodies, as well as the rotation of the planets upon their axes and the orbits of the moons, planets, and suns. These are signs which demonstrate the hierarchical nature of creation and its submission to Divine regulation at every level, for as the Holy Qur'an states:

Among His Signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon.
Adore not the sun and the moon, but adore God, Who created them, if it is
Him ye wish to serve.

(Qur'an 41:37)

God further draws our attention to their submissive nature, saying:

Hast thou not seen that before God prostrate whosoever is in the heavens and
whosoever is on the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the
hills, and the trees, and the beasts, and many of mankind...?

(Qur'an 22:18)

The postures of prayer, then, are symbolic of humanity's relationship to the Divine, moving as they do from standing in assertion of existence and strength, to the bowing of humility and servitude, to prostration in the face of God's overwhelming Magnificence and Power and the corresponding realization of one's utter nonexistence. From this station of utter abasement, the worshipper returns to the intermediate position, between annihilation and independence, to sit between the hands of the Prophet Muhammad, greeting the one who is the intermediary between the Divinity and His creation. The Prophet stands at the station of Perfect Servanthood and is the ultimate exemplar of the condition of servanthood to God. Unlike all other creations, the Prophet Muhammad was divested of all selfhood, dissolved in the Presence of God.

Whithersoever ye turn, there is the presence of God. For God is all-Pervading,
all-Knowing.

(Qur'an 2:115)

THE PEAK OF PRAYER IS PROSTRATION

The Prophet said, "Nothing brings the servant of God nearer to the Divine Presence than through his secret prostration (*al-khafi*)." The Prophet

also said, "Any believer who prostrates himself, will be raised one degree by God." As for what that degree consists of, know that it is not something small, for each heaven might consist of one degree.

For these reasons, many among the pious observe extra voluntary prostrations to God after completing their obligatory prayers. Whenever they encounter a difficulty, whether spiritual or worldly, they seek refuge in their Lord through prostration to Him.

One must cut down self-pride and make the inner self prostrate, for one who truly submits to his or her Lord can no longer submit to his or her self. Once that state is reached, prayer is purely for God. That is why the Prophet said, "What I fear most for my Community is hidden polytheism."³⁹ He feared for his community not the outward polytheism of idol worship, for he was informed by God that his community was protected from that forever,⁴⁰ but the secret polytheism, which is to do something for the sake of showing off.

A man came and asked the Prophet, "O Prophet of God, pray for me to be under your intercession on Judgment Day and grant me to be in your company in Paradise." The Prophet replied, "I will do so, but assist me in that." The man asked, "How so?" The Prophet said, "By frequent prostration [before God]."

The Prophet related that, on the Day of Judgment, as the believers emerge from their graves, angels will come to them to brush the dust from their foreheads. However, despite the best efforts of the angels, some of that dust will remain. Both the resurrected believers and their angelic helpers will be surprised that this dust cannot be removed. Then a voice will call out, "Leave that dust and do not try to remove it, for that is the dust of their prayer-niches, thus will it be known in Paradise that they are My [devout] servants."

This Prophetic Tradition indicates the spiritual value of the prostration of the believers, making as it does even the dust touched by their foreheads hallowed. The power of prayer has a similar effect on the place of prayer itself, as exemplified in the story of the Virgin Mary, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

Whenever Zachariah went into the prayer-niche where she was, he found
that she had food. He said: O Mary! Whence cometh unto thee this (food)?
She answered: It is from God. God giveth without stint to whom He will.

(Qur'an 3:37)

It was there, in the Virgin Mary's hallowed sanctuary, where she used to find her daily provision in the form of fruits out of season, that the Prophet Zachariah went to prostrate himself before God and beseech Him for a child, and it was there that God granted his request.

The places where a Muslim prostrates will bear witness to his or her devotion on the Day of Judgment. It is for this reason that one often sees Muslims changing the location of their prayers, praying the obligatory cycles in one spot and then moving to another area to observe the voluntary cycles (*sunan*).

Ibn 'Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet and the greatest early exegete of the Qur'an, said, "When God commanded Adam to descend to Earth, as soon as he arrived, he went into prostration, asking God's forgiveness for the sin he had made. God sent the archangel Gabriel to him after forty years had passed, and Gabriel found Adam still in prostration." He had not raised his head for 40 years in sincere and heartfelt repentance before God.

The Holy Qur'an tells us that, after God created Adam, He ordered the angels to prostrate before the first man.

When We said to the angels, "prostrate yourselves to Adam," they prostrated themselves, but not Iblis [Satan]: he refused.

(Qur'an 20:116)

Imam Qurtubi, one of the great commentators on the Holy Qur'an, writes in his exegesis that one of the four Archangels, Rafael, had the entire Qur'an written on his forehead. God had given Rafael knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and wrote all of it between his eyes, and he is the angel who inscribed the destinies of all things in the Preserved Tablets before they were created.⁴¹ Rafael's name in Arabic, which differs from his Syriac name Israfil, is 'Abd al-Rahman, Servant of The Merciful. This theme of mercy pervades Islamic thought, for it was through God's Mercy that the Holy Qur'an was sent down to the Prophet, about whom The Merciful said:

We sent thee not but as a Mercy for all creatures.

(Qur'an 21:107)

When God ordered the angels to make prostration to Adam, Rafael was the first to obey, making prostration and placing his forehead, containing the entire Qur'an, on the earth, out of respect and honor for Adam, for he perceived the whole of Qur'an written on Adam's forehead.⁴² Other commentators say the angels fell prostrate before Adam for they perceived the Light of the Prophet Muhammad shining from his form. There is in reality no discrepancy here, for God said in the Holy Qur'an:

Yasin. By the Qur'an, full of Wisdom.

(Qur'an 36:1-2)

The Prophet Muhammad said that Yasin, the 36th chapter of the Holy Qur'an as well as one of his own blessed names, is the heart of the Holy Qur'an, the very Qur'an that the Prophet was carrying in his breast. Thus, the light that shone forth from Adam was the Light of the Prophet within him, who in turn was blazing with God's Holy Word.

The Inner Meanings of the Different Positions of Prayer

Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi said:

Know that one is sometimes transported, quick as lightning, to the Holy Precincts (of the Divine Presence), and finds oneself attached, with the greatest possible adherence, to the Threshold of God. There descend on this person the Divine transfigurations (*tajalli*) which dominate his soul. He sees and feels things which the human tongue is incapable of describing. Once this state of light passes away, he returns to his previous condition, and finds himself tormented by the loss of such an ecstasy. Thereupon he tries to rejoin that which has escaped him, and adopts the condition of this lowly world which would be nearest to a state of absorption in the knowledge of the Creator. This is a posture of respect, of devotion, and of an almost direct conversation with God, which posture is accompanied by appropriate acts and words. . . . Worship consists essentially of three elements: (1) humility of heart (spirit) consequent on a feeling of the Presence of the Majesty and Grandeur of God, (2) recognition of this superiority (of God) and humbleness (of man) by means of appropriate words, and (3) adoption by the organs of the body of postures of necessary reverence. . .

Still greater respect is displayed by laying down the face, which reflects in the highest degree one's ego and self-consciousness, so low that it touches the ground in front of the object of reverence.⁴³

Jili says:

The secrets and inner-meanings of prayer are uncountable so what is mentioned here is limited for the sake of brevity. Prayer is a symbol of the uniqueness of the Divine Reality (*al-Haqq*), and the [position of] standing in it is a symbol of the establishment of the uniqueness of mankind in possessing something from the Divine Names and Attributes, for as the Prophet said, "Verily God created Adam in His Image."⁴⁴

Then the standing towards the Qibla is an indication of the universal direction in the quest of the Divine Reality. The intention therein is an indication of the connection of the heart in this direction. The opening magnification of God's Greatness (*takbir*) is an indication that the Divine Proximity is larger and more expansive than what may manifest to him because nothing can limit its perspective. Even so, it is vaster still than every perspective or vision that manifests to the servant for it is without end.

The recitation of the Opening Chapter, *al-Fatiba*, is an indication of the existence of His Perfection in man because man is the opening of creation,

for God initiated creation by him when He brought from nothingness the first creation.

What Jili is referring to here is the Light of Muhammad, known also as the First Mind, the Universal Man, and the Microcosm of the Macrocosm.⁴⁵ He continues:

Then there is bowing, which is an indication of acknowledging the nonexistence of all creation under the existence of divine emanations and power. Then standing in the prayer is an indication of the station of subsistence (*al-baqa*). Therefore, one says in his prayer, "God hears the one who praises Him," ... an indication of subsistence in that he is the Vicegerent of the Divine Reality. In this way, God relates about Himself by Himself by relating on hearing its truth through the praising of His creation. The prostration is an expression of pulverization of the traits of humanness and their extermination before the unending manifestation of the sanctifying essence. The sitting between the two prostrations is an indication of obtaining the realities of the Divine Names and Attributes. This is because the sitting is firmly positioned in a place as indicated by the verse where God says: "The Merciful was established on the Throne" (Qur'an 20:5).

The second prostration is the indication of the station of servanthood and it is the returning from the Divine Reality to creation. The salutations [upon the Prophet] are an indication of the attainability of human perfection, for they are an expression of praising God, His Messenger and His righteous servants. This is the station of perfection, for the saint is not complete except by his attainment of the Divine realities, by his accord with the Messenger and accord with all of the servants of God.

The two sections of the testimony of faith are *La ilaha illa'llah*, "there is no deity except the one God," and *Muhammadun rasulullah*, "and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Scholars say that *La ilaha illa'llah* represents the Creator and *Muhammadun rasulullah* symbolizes the entirety of creation. The prayer is considered a dual communication: one is between the worshipper and God, the second is between the worshipper and God's perfect servant, the Prophet Muhammad, the archetype of all the Prophets and Messengers. Thus, one part of the prayer is a communication with the Divine, by means of God's Holy Words revealed in the Qur'an and through bowing and prostration, reciting God's glorification, magnification, and praise. The other part is the salutation on the Prophet, in which the worshipper addresses the Prophet personally and directly, as leader of the worshippers and the believers, followed by invoking the Lord's blessings on him and on his family.

These realities in fact reflect the doctrine of the Prophet's having attained the zenith of servanthood (*'ubudiyya*) to God, and thus the entirety of prayer in itself is built around his person. For the Words of God recited are the words revealed to the Prophet and the remainder of the prayer acknowledges

his leadership and spiritual primacy in both this life and the next. Thus, scholars assert that even the positions of the prayer are an indication of the Muhammadan Station, for the physical positions reflect the shapes of the letters of the Prophet's heavenly name, Ahmad, where the first letter *Alif* is represented by the standing position, *Ha* by the bowing stance, *Mim* in the prostration, and *Dal* in sitting for salutation.

Prayer in Daily Life

One may pray individually or communally, in the home, outside, at the mosque, or in virtually any clean place. However, observing the prayers at the mosque and in congregation is strongly encouraged. In addition to the regular daily prayers, there is a special Friday noon prayer, called *Jumu'a*. It, too, is obligatory, and must be performed in a mosque, in congregation. It is accompanied by a sermon (*khutba*) and replaces the normal noon prayer.

Since ritual prayers are performed throughout the waking cycle of the day, they influence the rhythm of the entire day in many Muslim nations. Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories, and universities. Visitors to the Muslim world, where the call to prayer, the *adhan*, is made publicly from every mosque at the onset of each prayer time, are often struck by the centrality of prayer in daily life.

Traditionally, the call to prayer is the first thing a newborn baby hears after birth, as the father or a person of piety recites the prayer call in the infant's right ear and the call to start the prayer (*iqama*) in the left.

Mosques

God says in the Holy Qur'an:

Say: My Lord hath commanded justice; and that ye set your whole selves (to Him) at every time and mosque, and call upon Him, making your devotion sincere as in His sight: such as He created you in the beginning, so shall ye return.

(Qur'an 7:29)

When performed in congregation, prayer provides a strong sense of community, equality, and brotherhood. All Muslims are welcome in every mosque, regardless of their race, class, or nationality. There is no minimum number of congregants required to hold communal prayers. Traditionally, mosques were the centers of their communities, where believers gathered five times daily or, at a minimum, once a week. There, the poor found food and

assistance; the homeless, shelter; the student of religion, learning. Because of the centrality of prayer in Muslim religious life, mosques are often the dominant structures in Muslim villages, towns, and cities. Traditionally, great attention was paid to making these houses of worship more than just halls for prayer. Governments, individuals, and communities invested huge sums to make their mosque the visual focus of its neighborhood. In particular, the great mosques, in which the Friday obligatory congregational prayer was held, often became magnificent examples of architecture and art.

The faithful take off their shoes before entering the house of worship out of respect for its sanctity and in keeping with the commandment to the Prophet Moses, when he entered the hallowed ground around the burning bush:

When he came to the Fire, a voice uttered: O Moses! I am thy Lord, therefore put off thy shoes, for thou art in the sacred valley of Tuwa.

(Qur'an 20:11-12)

THE SINCERE PRAYER

Ibn 'Ata Allah, a renowned Egyptian Sufi scholar of the fourteenth century CE, wrote:⁴⁶

The ritual prayer is the focal point of heavenly discourse, the source of purity by which the avenues of secrets expand and the gleams of lights radiate. So, if you want to know yourself, it is all by the prayer how you would weigh it. If it causes you to desist from worldly influence, then you know you are one who is given happiness. Other than that, you should be aware of what your feet have dragged along to your prayer, and then you will know that you have not obtained the secrets of prayer. Have you ever seen a lover that does not desire whom he loves?

This is what you take from the prayer of discourse with God: when you say, "You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek assistance" (Qur'an 1:4)—and from the discourse with the Messenger, when you say in your prayers, "Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the Mercy of God and His Blessing." You say this in every prayer, whereupon you are cleansed of your sins, only to return to them yet again after receiving the blessings with which the Lord has favored you, which is meeting with your Lord, the highest of blessings.

If one wishes to know his reality and to see his state with his Lord, let him look at his prayer. Either it will produce humility and tranquility or heedlessness and hastiness. So, if your prayer is not of the first type, then seek to throw dirt on your head out of neglect and sorrow.⁴⁷ The one who sits with a perfume maker is given the fragrance of his perfume. The prayer, therefore, is the association with God, so when you attend it and you do not obtain from it anything, it indicates a sickness that resides in you, which is either pride or the absence of proper manners. God says:

"I shall turn away from My revelations those who magnify themselves wrongfully in the earth" (Qur'an 7:146).

It is not desired that one rushes from the mosque after his prayer. Rather, he should remember God after it and seek His forgiveness from his shortcomings in doing so. For perhaps his prayer is not in a state for it to be accepted. But if you were to seek God's forgiveness, thereafter it will be accepted.⁴⁸

Ibn 'Ata Allah's warning not leave the mosque too quickly after performing the ritual prayer also has an esoteric meaning. The mosque, in the symbolism of Sufism, signifies the heart, while prayers signify the connection between the worshipper and the Divine Presence. Thus, Ibn 'Ata Allah here calls on the faithful to maintain the connection with the Divine Source in the heart and not be too quick to push it aside to return to worldly concerns. This means one should strive to keep the connection with the Divine Presence that has been built up through remembrance and prayer, and not fall into heedlessness.

After the Messenger of God used to pray, he would seek God's forgiveness three times. This was related by Thawban, who said:

When he finished from prayer, he would seek God's forgiveness three times and say, "O God, you are the peace and from you is peace. Blessed are you, O Owner of Greatness and Honor."

Ibn 'Ata Allah also wrote:

The simile of one who had performed his prayer without tranquility and humility of heart or presence of contemplation is like the one who presents to the king one hundred empty boxes. Thereafter, he deserves the admonishment of the king because of his lack of intelligence and thought, which the king will utter about him whenever he is mentioned. But the one who prays with tranquility and presence of heart is like the one who presented the king with boxes of precious jewels, for surely the king will delight in that and will return the favor on him and he will always mention to others about the gifts he had received from him. This is because the one who gives has purity of heart, perfection of thought and high aspiration.⁴⁹

I say to you, O servant of God, when you enter prayer you are conversing with your Lord and speaking with the Messenger of God in the Witnessing, because you are saying, "Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and God's mercy and blessings." It is not said, "O you," or, "O so and so," in the language of the Arabs, except to someone who is present in the assembly. So, in your prayers, you should summon his greatness in your mind.⁵⁰

If you wish to know how you will traverse the Bridge on the Day of Judgment, then look at your state in proceeding to prayer in going to the mosque...for in this world, the prayer is the bridge of uprightness that is not seen by the eyes, but by the enlightened hearts and clear vision. God says: "This is my straight way, therefore follow it" (Qur'an 6:153).

So, the one for whom the path is enlightened follows thereon, but the one for whom his path is darkened does not see where he is stepping and is not able to travel the way; therefore, he will remain in his place standing and bewildered. Abu Hurayra related that the Messenger of God said: "The poor of the Muslims will enter Paradise before the rich by half a day, and each day is five hundred years."⁵¹

This is because they were foremost in the world in worship and constant in the Friday prayer and the congregation.

VOLUNTARY WORSHIP

In addition to the fixed, obligatory ritual prayers (*fara'id al-Salat*), Muslims consider supererogatory prayers of great importance. Great emphasis is placed on observing the prayers that the Prophet, upon whom be peace and blessings, used to observe in addition to the five prescribed prayers.

In addition to the obligatory prayers, the Prophet observed certain sets of supererogatory ritual prayers just before and after them. These confirmed *sunan* are well documented.⁵² In addition to these, the Prophet would add additional prayer cycles known as *nawafil*. Each of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence classifies these cycles slightly differently, but all agree on the merit of performing these supplemental acts of devotion. Finally, the Prophet would pray additional ritual prayers independently of the obligatory ones. These include

- Prayer just after sunrise (*ishraq*)
- From 4 to 12 cycles in the forenoon (*duba*)
- Six cycles after the evening prayer (*awabin*)
- The night vigil (*tahajjud* or *qiyam al-layl*).

When asked why he used to pray so much, to the point that his feet were swollen, the Prophet replied, "Should I not be a thankful servant of God?"⁵³

In saying this, the Prophet expressed the essence of supererogatory worship, to show gratitude to the Lord and thus to draw nearer to the Divine Presence. The Prophet related regarding the words⁵⁴ recited in every prayer from the Opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an, "Praise is to Allah, the Lord of the universe," that God responds by saying, "My servant has praised Me."⁵⁵

The Night Vigil

One of the most important supererogatory prayers is the Night Vigil (*Qiyam al-Layl*). The ideal time for voluntary prayer, and indeed for spiritual endeavors in general, is at night—preferably after midnight. This is the time

when the world is asleep, but the lovers and seekers of God (*al-'ibad*) are awake and traveling toward reality and their divine destinations. It is under the veil of the night that the plane of consciousness is clear from the chaos of worldly affairs, for it is a time when the mind and heart operate most effectively.

Prayer before midnight, whether supplicatory or ritual, is very slow; after midnight, it is very fast.

In one of the first revelations, God ordered His Messenger:

Stand (to prayer) by night, but not all night, half of it or a little less. Or a little more; and recite the Qur'an in slow, measured rhythmic tones.

(Qur'an 73:2-4)

And the Messenger of God said:

Two cycles of prayer in the late hours of the night are more valuable than all the riches of this world. But for fear of overburdening my followers, I would have made these obligatory.

Salman, a renowned Companion of the Prophet, in describing the observance of the night vigil said:

The man who considers the darkness of night and people's unmindfulness a boon, and stands up and says the prayer till the morning, he is a man for whom there is all gain and no loss. . . . adopt those medium-type of supererogatory prayers (*nawafil*) which you may put up with perpetually.⁵⁶

The Prophet's wife 'A'isha related:

I used to stand with God's Messenger throughout the night. He would recite *Surat al-Baqara*, *Surat Al-Imran* and *Surat al-Nisa* [i.e., the four longest chapters of the Qur'an].⁵⁷

It is related that the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, would recite the entire Qur'an in one prayer during the night.⁵⁸

A renowned contemporary Sufi saint, and my teacher and guide on the spiritual path, Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, says:

The last third of the night is the best of times to pray at night because God the Most High is looking therein at His servant. Our master 'Abd-Allah al-Daghestani, may God always elevate his stations, used to invite me to his association during the last third of the night because it is the time of heavenly manifestation. He would say that, in this time, there is no veil between God and His servant. So, each of you should awake in the third

part of the night to pray and be present in the hour of heavenly manifestations. Oh God, make us among those who stand in prayer at night, seeking the vision of Your Face.

There is no possibility to receive sainthood without the night vigil. The night vigil is ordained for the Prophet, also for the Friends of God it is considered obligatory and, as related to the community, it is a strong practice (*sunna*). Without a doubt, the servant will not receive the station of sainthood if he is not connected to God. And a token of the one who is connected with the Lord Almighty is the night vigil. This is the greatest means of sainthood, by which God adorns His servant with the secret of sainthood during the last third of the night. Therefore, be awake at this time of the night, whether engaged in your prayer or in something else, so that nothing will obstruct you from being present in this time for which you will obtain this special mercy.⁵⁹

The renowned Egyptian Sufi Ibn 'Ata Allah as-Sakandari said:

Two cycles of ritual prayer before God during the night is better than thousands of cycles of prayer during the day, for the Messenger of God says:

"Keep to observing the night prayer for it is the devotion of the righteous before you, it brings you closer to God, it wipes away offenses, replaces sins and wards off illness from the body."⁶⁰

Without a doubt you do not pray two cycles in the night except that you will find its rewards on your scales on the Day of Requit. Is a servant purchased for any reason other than to serve? Do you see a servant who is purchased merely to eat and sleep, who does not perform his duties? You are nothing more than a servant that God has brought into existence for His worship. He created you for His obedience; your purchase is for His service:

"Lo! God hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because for them is Paradise" (Qur'an 9:111).

We conclude this section with the words of Shaykh Abd Allah al-Fa'iz al-Daghestani, may God preserve his sanctity, who said about the night vigil:

Even if a servant rises in the time of heavenly manifestations and he is a non-Muslim in faith, and he does something in that hour, because of that he too would obtain the level of belief before passing from this life. He will be guided and safe because he was awake during the hours of heavenly manifestations, and he would consequently receive that special mercy. It is not possible for anyone who receives even a drop from that mercy, to remain wretched or to remain in unbelief. He is safe even if a tyrant; in time he will turn back to God, and if he is a sinner, he will repent. There is no ambiguity that this mercy will change his state.

THE PERFECTION OF PRAYER

In reality, prayer is a state of heedfulness that must be kept constantly and perpetually throughout the day. Those committed to this path seek to maintain a state of mindfulness in each breath, not forgetting their Lord for even a single moment.

The perfection of prayer means to be aware of God's Presence, "as if you see Him," and to demonstrate one's devotion and servitude to Him. God said:

I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me. No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me.

(Qur'an 51:56)

God initially commanded the Prophet Muhammad's followers to observe 50 prayers a day, but with His mercy this obligation was reduced to 5. In the Divine Balance, the 5 prayers are thus considered as 50. Calculating the time required to observe 50 prayers, it would require all of a worshipper's waking hours, including one's time to eat and make ablution. Thus, those who observe the five prayers perfectly, with complete submission to God and complete presence before God, will be in fulfillment of the above verse. For those, God will provide sustenance without their needing to work, for they are fulfilling the Divine Directive properly.

The Summit of Worship

Ritual prayer is known as the "summit of worship," for it contains the essential aspects of all five pillars of Islamic worship: the testimony of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage.

The first pillar, the testimony of faith (*al-Shahada*) is observed in each ritual prayer, when one bears witness to the Oneness of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad during the sitting phase.

Charity (*Zakat*), the third pillar consists of giving 2½% of one's wealth to the needy for the sake of God. Ritual prayer encompasses this pillar in the sense that the most important thing that one possesses is the body and spirit. In ritual prayer one give one's whole person and time to God.

The fourth pillar, fasting (*Sawm*) is accomplished immediately on entering the prayer, for one must withhold oneself from all worldly actions, including eating, drinking, relations with others, and, even more stringent than the ritual fast, one may not converse except with the Lord.

The last pillar of Islam, the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) is encompassed when the worshipper directs himself or herself to the Ka'ba, the focal point of the pilgrimage.

Prayer is Ascension to the Divine

The Prophet said:

Ritual prayer is the ascension (*mi'raj*) of the believer.

The Prophet therefore had, according to Islam's esoteric scholars, not just one, but 24,000 ascensions during his life.

When the worshipper begins a sincere prayer, saying "God is Greatest," the ascension begins. If one is truly observant of the rights and duties of the prayers with their perfection, this will be apparent, for as soon as you enter the prayer inspiration of Divine knowledge will begin to enter your heart along with increased yearning for the Divine Presence. If these secrets are not coming to you, it signifies that your prayers are not ascending to the Divine Presence and that you are falling into Satan's traps.

Sayyid Haydar Amuli writes:

His [the Prophet's] words, "I have been given coolness of the eye in prayer," refer to nothing else but the contemplation of the Beloved by the eye of the lover, who draws near in the stillness of the prayer. . . . On seeing the Beloved, the eye too becomes stilled and it ceases to look at anything other than Him in all things.⁶¹

Thus, the worshipper attains the state, related in the Holy Tradition:

...My servant shall continue to draw nearer to Me by performing the supererogatory acts of virtue until I love him; when I love him, I become his ears with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees, his hands with which he grasps, and his feet with which he walks; if he were to ask of Me, I will grant his request, if he were to seek refuge in Me, I will protect him.⁶²

As to the Messenger's state during prayer, his wife 'A'isha reported:

He would weep continuously until his lap became wet. He would be sitting and keep weeping until his auspicious beard became drenched. Then he would weep so much the ground became wet.⁶³

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the first caliph after the Prophet, would stand in prayer as if he were a pillar. Commenting on this, one of the early transmitters of traditions, Mujahid, said, "this is the fearfulness (*khushu'*) in prayer."

The Prophet said, "Pray as you see me pray."⁶⁴ He did not say, "Pray as you have heard I prayed," nor "Pray as I taught my Companions." This hints at something very profound. The vision of the Prophet is something that is

and has been witnessed by countless Friends of God. Thus, the Prophet's saying, "Whoever saw me in a vision, in truth saw me,"⁶⁵ to the Sufi commentators carries the meaning, "Whoever saw me in a vision will see me in reality." For Sufis, the first level of witnessing (*mushahada*) is to sense the Prophet present before them. The final stage of witnessing, which is "to worship God as if you see Him,"⁶⁶ was achieved by the Prophet during the ascension when he was brought to the station of Nearness (*qurb*), "two feet's lengths or nearer" (Qur'an 53:9) to the Divine Presence. The Sufis affirm that true prayer brings the worshipper to the state of witnessing God and His Prophet, thereby attaining true unity with the Beloved. For this reason, prayer is compared to the union of marriage, *wisal*. Indeed, they explain the two salutations of peace, made to end the prayer, as a return from extinction, to greet the world as a new person.

It is said of the Prophet's fourth successor, his cousin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, that when he prayed, he was utterly oblivious to his surroundings. Once he was injured by an enemy arrow, which penetrated his foot. It could not be removed without causing immense pain. He said, "I will pray, at which time remove it." They did as he directed. Upon completing the prayer he asked his companions, "When are you going to remove the arrow?" 'Ali ibn Abi Talib used to say, "Even if the Veil were lifted, it would not increase my certainty," referring to his state of witnessing the Divine Presence.⁶⁷

We conclude with a story, related about the great Sufi master Shaykh Abu Hasan al-Shadhili.

The scholars of Alexandria came to him to test him and he read what was in their hearts before they spoke and said, "O pious scholars, have you ever prayed?"

They said, "Far be it from any of us to leave prayer."

He then recited the verse:

"Lo! man was created anxious, fretful when evil befalleth him, And, when good befalleth him, grudging, except those who (really) pray" (Qur'an 70:19-22).

"So," he asked, "do any of you pray like this?" They were silent. Then the shaykh said to them, "Then, none of you has ever prayed!"

The real prayer is performed purely for the pleasure of God, conversing with Him in variations of delight, humbleness and awe which is void of hypocrisy and repute. No doubt it brings about the remembrance of God and the heart inherits awe of Him.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

Prayer as Divine Service

While the ritual prayer we have just examined in detail is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, in reality all of Islam is essentially a form of prayer. For the

meaning of prayer is worship, and the essence of all worship is to seek God. Seeking the Face of God is the goal of Islam, and the means are the Divinely prescribed forms of action as well as voluntary forms of bringing the worshipper closer to the Divine Presence.

God says:

And to Him prostrate all that is in the heavens and on earth, willingly or by compulsion.

(Qur'an 13:15)

And to God prostrate all that is in the heavens and the earth.

(Qur'an 16:49)

And there is not one thing except that it glorifies with God with His praise.

(Qur'an 17:44)

These verses indicate that all of creation, regardless of form or substance, are in fact in a state of prayer, for prostration and glorification are the essence of prayer. They cannot be other than that—even those who disobey, in their disobedience—are in fact submitting to the ultimate Holy Will of God and the Destiny prescribed for them.

However, the key to the Lord's Bounty is to seek Him and submit willingly with one's entire being. To become a Muslim means to say, "O God! I admit that You are the Creator and I am your slave." This is the first level of submission, slavery, but it is not servanthood. Servanthood is higher.

True servanthood of God means to become obedient. The servant has no will of his or her own but is subject to the will of the master at all times. Islam does not ask human beings to serve a cruel and whimsical master, but rather the Creator of all things, Who is the Aware, the Subtle, in His all-encompassing knowledge of both the needs and the desires of His servants.

One who attains this level of submission in Islam becomes *'abd*, servant to the Lord. In Islam this is considered the highest achievement—the state of servanthood, known as *'ubudiyya*. For that reason the Prophet said, "The names dearest to God are Abdullah (servant of God) and 'Abdur-Rahman (servant of the Most Merciful)."⁶⁹

God says:

Glory to (God) Who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs.

(Qur'an 17:1)

God specified the Prophet Muhammad in this verse with the title "servant," *'abd*, and again, relating to Prophet Muhammad's ascension to the Divine Presence, when He says:

So did (God) convey the inspiration to His Servant- (conveyed) what He (meant) to convey.

(Qur'an 53:10)

For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest!

(Qur'an 53:18)

Of the station the Prophet Muhammad attained in that rapture, Imam Nawawi, one of the great scholars of Islam, says, "Most of the scholars say that the Prophet saw his Lord with the eyes of his head."

The unique greatness of God's Messenger, Muhammad, is that he saw the Lord of Creation, thus making him the perfected monotheist (*muwahhid*). The Prophet Muhammad's grasp of Divine Unity, *tawhid*, was perfected by ascension to the Divine Presence. Everyone else's understanding of Divine Unity falls short of the Messenger's. Despite this, the Prophet maintained absolute humility, never seeing himself as important, but rather as a servant, honored by the Master of masters.

It is related that when the Prophet reached the highest levels and most distinguished stations God revealed to him, "With what shall I honor you?" The Prophet said, "By relating me to You through servanthood (*'ubudiyya*)."⁷⁰

Thus, true prayer is nothing less than Ascension to the Station of true Servanthood, which is the Station of Submission. In that station, Divine Unity becomes manifest, and there, the servant reaches the state where he bears what no ears have heard, sees what no eyes have seen, and tastes the reality of Divine Oneness. In this state of witnessing, the servant perceives only the Lord. He sees all existence through His Existence and the realization that all proceeds from the One. This is known as the Station of Annihilation, in which the servant no longer sees himself or herself, no longer sees anything, but only sees, feels and is immersed in the Presence of the Lord without any partner and with no likeness.

NOTES

1. The Hearer—*al-Sami'*, The Aware—*al-'Alim*, Responsive to those who call on Him—*al-Mujib*.

2. Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *al-Muqaddima*, the chapter of Prayer (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1994), 50.

3. See *Fiqh al-Lughah*, from al-Tha'labi. Also in Qurtubi's commentary on the Qur'an and others.
4. Cited from Qurtubi's commentary by Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *al-Muqaddima*.
5. The traditional reverential phrase used whenever the Prophet's name or titles are mentioned.
6. Bukhari, Muslim, and others.
7. Tabarani.
8. Muslim.
9. Bukhari. The specific prayer mentioned is the afternoon prayer (*Salat al-'Asr*).
10. Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Khandalvi, *Hayat al-Sahaba* (New Delhi, India: Idara Isha'at-e-Diniyat Ltd, 1992), 101.
11. Abu Bakr ibn al-Jaza'iri, *Minhaj al-Muslim*, chapter on Prayer, 1st ed. (Mecca, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), 184.
12. Muslim from Jabir and others from Abu Hurayra.
13. Muslim, Tirmidhi.
14. Tabarani reported it from Anas in his *Kabir*. In another report it reads "... then his prayers are not prayers."
15. Al-Jaza'iri, *Minhaj al-Muslim*, 184-185.
16. The Prophet said:

Verily this Qur'an is difficult and felt as a burden to anyone that hates it, but it is made easy to anyone that follows it. Verily my sayings are difficult and felt as a burden to anyone that hates them, but they are made easy to anyone that follows them. Whoever hears my saying and preserves it, putting it into practice, shall come forth together with the Qur'an on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever dismisses my sayings dismisses the Qur'an, and whoever dismisses the Qur'an has lost this world and the next.

Narrated from al-Hakam ibn 'Umayr al-Thumali by Khatib in *al-Jami' li Akhlaq al-Rawi* (1983 ed. 2:189), Qurtubi in his *Tafsir* (18:17), Abu Nu'aym, Abu al-Shaykh, and Daylami.

17. Bukhari.
18. A. Al-Masri, *The Reliance of the Traveller*, trans. N. Keller (Dubai, United Arab Emirates: Modern Printing Press, 1991), 34.
19. *Ibid.*, 35.
20. Ahmad ibn Hanbal.
21. Ibn Rushd, *al-Muqaddima*.
22. Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurayra.
23. Muslim from Abu Hurayra.
24. On the right palm one sees the Arabic numerals 1 and 8, signifying 18, and on the left 8 and 1, signifying 81. The sum of these is 99.
25. Often cited, but not traced to a known hadith from the Prophet.
26. Without annihilation, that is, to see himself as existent before the Ultimate Divine Reality, which at the highest understanding of spirituality, is associating one's self as partner with God.

27. Muslim, Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad*, and others from Zayd ibn Arqam.
28. Jili, *al-Insan al-Kamil* (the Perfect Human), Chapter "Secrets of Religion and Worship," section "The Spiritual Symbolism of Prayer," 260-261.
29. Also translated as the "Sacred Mosque."
30. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's commentary on this verse summarizes traditional commentaries: "The Farthest Mosque," he writes, "must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah." Muslims purposely built a mosque on this hill, according to tradition on the verified site of earlier sanctuaries. It was a strong concern of the early Muslims to restore the site to its earlier function as a place of supplication venerated by all the prophets, including Abraham, David, and Solomon. Tradition relates that when the Caliph 'Umar visited Jerusalem after its conquest, he searched for David's sanctuary or prayer niche (*masrab Dawud*), which is mentioned in the Qur'an (38:21), the same site on which David's son Solomon later erected the Temple. Satisfied that he had located it, the Caliph 'Umar ordered a prayer niche (*musalla*) to be established there which evolved into a mosque complex later known as the *al-Haram al-Sharif*, according to prophetic tradition the third most venerated location in Islam.
31. Bukhari and Muslim.
32. Bukhari.
33. Ghazali mentioned this in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences*. It is similar to an Israelite tradition related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in *Kitab al-Zuhd* from Wahb bin Munabbih.
34. Ka'b al-Ahbar makes the entire verse refer to Muhammad, it is a metaphor of the Light of Muhammad. The Messenger of Allah is the niche, the lamp is prophethood, the glass is his heart, the blessed tree is the revelation and the angels who bought it, the oils are the proofs and evidence which contain the revelation.
35. Ibrahim Hakki Erzurumi, *Marifetname* (Cairo: Bulaq [Printing House], 1835).
36. Bukhari.
37. Bukhari and Muslim.
38. The basic essentials of the ritual prayer are:
 1. Standing in an upright posture (*qiyam*).
 2. The opening affirmation of God's Supreme Greatness (*takbirat al-ihram*).
 3. Recitation of the Opening chapter of the Qur'an (*Surat al-Fatiba*).
 4. Bowing (*ruku'*).
 5. Calm composure (*tuma'nina*) in the bowing posture.
 6. Straightening up from the bowing posture.
 7. Calm composure in the erect posture resumed after bowing.
 8. Prostration (*sujud*).
 9. Calm composure in the posture of prostration.
 10. Sitting between the two acts of prostration.
 11. Calm composure in the sitting posture.

12. The final testimony (*tashahhud*).
13. Adopting the sitting posture in order to pronounce the final testimony.
14. The invocation of blessing on the Prophet (*al-Salat al-Ibrahimiyya*).
15. The salutation (*taslim*).

39. Al-Hakim in *al-Mustadrak* (authentic). In a similar vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Association with God (*shirk*) is stealthier in this community than creeping ants."

40. The Prophet said, "I do not fear that you will become polytheists after me, but I fear that, because of worldly interests, you will fight each other, and thus be destroyed like the peoples of old." Bukhari and Muslim.

41. Hajjah Amina Adil, *Lore of Light* (Columbo, Sri Lanka: Arafat Publishing House, 1989), p. xiii.

42. Ibid., 9.

43. Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi, *Hujjatullah al-Baligha*, vol. 1, Secrets of Worship.

44. Muslim, Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

45. What is meant here is that Muhammad is the overall, universal opening of creation due to the fact everything was created from his light.

46. Ibn 'Ata Allah as-Sakandari, *at-Tuhfa fi al-Tasawwuf*, from the Chapter on Prayer, arranged and compiled by Dr. 'Ali Hasan al-'Aridh, The Library of the Superior Achievement, al-Fajalah Egypt, pages 94-98.

47. It is related that Ibn 'Abbas said, "If you had performed your prayers and you didn't find in your heart humility, when you read the Qur'an and you don't find a meaning in it and when you remember God by yourself and your tears don't flow, then throw dirt on your head and cry about your loss. Then ask God to provide for you another heart."

48. What Ibn 'Ata Allah means here is that after the prayer, one remembers God by magnification, praise, and glorification following the obligation prayers. It is related from Abu Hurayra in *Sahih Muslim*:

The one who remembers God at the end of every prayer 33 times (by glorification [*tasbih*], praise [*tahmid*] and magnification [*takbir*]) and ends it with, "There is no god except God, He has no partners. To Him belongs the Kingdom and all praise and He has power over all things," his sins will be forgiven even if they were as numerous as the foam of the ocean.

49. Suyuti recorded in his *Jami'* that Abu Hurayra said: "When any of you are in prayer, he is conversing with his Lord."

50. To have the image of the Prophet in prayer is the highest summoning, even outside the prayer. Suyuti reported from Ibn 'Abbas that he had a dream in which he saw the Messenger. Thereafter he went to the house of the Prophet's wife 'A'isha, the Mother of Believers, in which he was shown a mirror. But he did not see himself, he saw the image of the Messenger. Khalid al-Baghdadi added it in his *Treatises in Obtaining Connection*, reporting from al-Hafi in Suyuti's, *Tanwir*. It is noted that this stage is reached after one has obtained constant connection with his spiritual guide (*murshid*) through meditation (*muraqaba*) which guides

him into the presence of the Messenger. Thus, meditation is an evolution after one has passed the higher stations of *dhikr*; by tongue, by heart, then by the combination of both.

51. Tirmidhi related this and it is sound.

52. These are two cycles before the dawn prayer, two or four before the noon prayer and two after, either none or two cycles before the afternoon prayer, two after the sunset prayer and two after the night prayer.

53. Bukhari and Muslim.

54. Part of the Opening chapter of the Qur'an (*Surat al-Fatiba*) whose recitation in prayer is obligatory.

55. Muslim, Malik, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, an-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja.

56. Yusuf Khandalvi, *Hayat as-Sahaba*, 101.

57. Ibid., 105.

58. Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-Awliya wa tabaqat al-asfiya* (The Beauty of the Righteous and Ranks of the Elite), trans. M. Akili (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Pearl Press, 1988), 56.

59. Mawlana Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, *al-Irshad ash-Sharif*, private manuscript.

60. Ibn Asakir reported it from Abu al-Darda' and Ibn al-Sina from Jabir. Daylam recorded something similar from Ibn 'Umar with the notable addition, "...it extinguishes the anger of God and wards off the heat of hellfire from his family on the Day of Judgment." Ahmad recorded it in his *Musnad*, and Tabarani in his *Kabir*, from Ibn Anas, "You should pray the night prayer, even if it's only one cycle." Al-Hafi in Suyuti graded it as sound.

61. Sayyid Haydar Amuli, *Inner Secrets of the Path* (London: Element Books, 1983), 233.

62. Bukhari.

63. Yusuf Khandalvi, *Hayat as-Sahaba*, 101.

64. Bukhari.

65. Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

66. Part of the long "Gabriel Hadith" in which the Prophet describes the three levels of religion: submission, faith and perfection of character. The latter he described as "to worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, know that He sees you." Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim.

67. Haydar Amuli, *Inner Secrets of the Path*.

68. Ibn 'Ata Allah as-Sakandari, *at-Tuhfa fi at-Tasawwuf*, from the chapter of Prayer, pages 94-98.

69. Abu Dawud.

70. Related by Abu Qasim Sulayman al-Ansari.