

Fast 11: Prayer — Its regulated form

- By means of the established form of prayer, man is drawn out of his worldly struggle five times a day, and made to realize that equality, fraternity and love are the real sources of human happiness. The time spent on prayer is not, therefore, wasted even from the point of view of active humanitarianism; on the contrary, the best use of it is made in learning those great lessons which make life worth living.
- The Holy Quran says:

“And keep up prayer and give the due charity and bow down with those who bow down.” (2:43)

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

“Prayer indeed has been enjoined on the believers at fixed times.” (4:103)

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْقُوتًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

“O you who believe, when the call is sounded for prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off business. That is better for you, if you know.” (62:9)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا الْبَيْعَ ذِكْرٌ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

- *Why is prayer regulated in Islam, with a fixed form?* The purpose of prayer in Islam is **not only** the purification and development of the individual worshipper. More than that, one purpose of prayer is to level all differences between people, and bring about love, concord and a true union of humanity.
- This object cannot be achieved without a regularly instituted form of prayer, so that everyone should gather together at the stated times and should stand up reverently, bow down and prostrate themselves before their great Maker as one body.
- Even apart from this, prayer as an institution could not have been kept alive unless there was an outward form to which all people should try to conform. An outward form is needed to remind people of the underlying idea.
- The end Islam has in view is the moral elevation of **the community as a whole** and not the elevation of particular individuals separately. Without **uniformity** the community or nation, as a whole, cannot make any progress. To have uniformity, there must be a form.

- Muslims are required to assemble at particular times in mosques or other appointed places, and to follow the lead of the Imam. **But:**
 - Every prayer is divided into two parts, one to be performed in congregation, the other alone.
 - Even in the congregational part there is ample scope for the individual to give expression to the soul's sincerest desire before its Maker, and for an outpouring of the true sentiments of the heart.
 - In the individual part of the prayer, he or she may select any portions of the Quran to recite, and also give vent to his/her own feelings by making any supplications and in any language that the worshipper chooses, in any of the four postures, the posture of standing, bowing, prostration and sitting.
- The Islamic mode of worship is calculated to concentrate attention on one object, the realization of the presence of God. The ablution preceding prayer, the reverential attitude in standing, the bowing down, the kneeling with the forehead placed on the ground, and the reverent sitting posture — all help the mind to realize the presence of God as a fact; and the worshipper, as it were, finds his heart's joy in doing honour to the Great Master, not only with his tongue but with his whole body, adopting a reverent attitude.
- The spirit of humility in man finds particular expression in the reverential postures which must be adopted in prayer. The whole prayer is a most solemn and serious affair during which the worshipper does not turn his attention to anything else, nor does he indulge in any movement which should distract his attention or disturb his prayerful attitude.
- The prayer is thus an undisturbed meditation on the Divine, and it is for this reason that in Islam it is not accompanied with music but by recitations from the Quran speaking of Divine love, mercy, power and knowledge.
- In cases of sickness, or when one is on a journey, the worshipper is permitted to say his prayers in any posture which he finds convenient. In such a case he is willing to humble himself in any position, but since his bodily condition does not allow him to assume the prescribed posture, a departure from regular procedure in that case does not affect the sincerity of him who prays or the efficacy of his prayer.