

Fast 6: Prayer — Introduction

- The fundamental religious duties recognized by Islam for the individual are: prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage. Among these, prayer undoubtedly occupies the most important position, and is given the greatest prominence in the Holy Quran. Charity comes next to it. Right at the beginning of the Quran, Muslims are described as those who believe in God, keep up prayer, and spend their wealth, talents and energies on charitable works:

“who believe in the Unseen (God) and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them”. (2: 3)

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

- Prayer was the first duty enjoined on the Holy Prophet, and though prayer and charity are often mentioned together in the Holy Quran, prayer always takes precedence. The keeping up of prayer is the frequently repeated injunction of the Quran and it has also been generally recognized as the first and foremost duty of a Muslim.
- There are several reasons why prayer has been given this importance:
 1. It is really the first step in the onward progress of man, and yet it is also his highest spiritual ascent (*mi'raj*).
 2. Prayer keeps one away from evil.
 3. It helps man to realize the Divine in him, and that realization not only urges him to do service for humanity, for no personal gain, but also makes him attain the highest degree of moral and spiritual perfection.
 4. Prayer is also the means of levelling all differences of rank, colour and nationality, and the means of bringing about a cohesion and unity among people which is the necessary basis of a living civilization.
- What prayer really aims at is stated in the very beginning of the Quran. There we are told that a Muslim, who would tread the road to self-development, must accept certain principles and carry out certain duties:

“This Book, in which there is no doubt, is a guide to those who keep their duty, who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى
لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَ
يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٢﴾

given them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you (O Prophet) and what was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are sure. These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that are successful (*muflihūn*).” (2:2–5)

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ
مِن قَبْلِكَ ۖ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ
عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥﴾

- The word *falāh* means ‘success’, and from it *muflihūn* means ‘those who are successful’. This word, whether relating to this life or to the next, carries with it the idea of the complete development of the inner faculties of man, and the achievement of both material and moral greatness; what, in other words, may be called the full self-development of man. This self-development is reached, according to the Quran, by the acceptance of three principles:

1. the existence of God,
2. His revealing Himself to humanity,
3. and the Hereafter,

and by the exercise of two duties:

1. the keeping up of prayer, or seeking communion with God, and
2. the spending of one’s wealth for others or the service of humanity.

- The place of prayer in the self-development of man is given such a prominence in Islam that in the call to prayer the words “come to prayer” are immediately followed by the words “come to success (*falāh*)”, showing that self-development is attained through prayer. On another occasion, using the same word, the Quran says clearly:

“Successful (*aflaha*) indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers”. (23:1–2)

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ
خَشِعُونَ ﴿٢﴾

- Belief in God is the fundamental principle of every religion, but the real conviction that *God exists* comes to man, not by the belief that there is a God in the outer world, but by the realization of the Divine within himself. That this realization is attained through prayer is made clear by what is stated in the beginning of the Quran, as quoted above. The three requisites of a true Muslim are there given in their natural order. The first is a belief in God, the great *Unseen* Who cannot be perceived by the physical eye. The second is the keeping up of prayer, thus showing that belief in the Unseen is turned into a certainty of the Divine existence, a realization of the Divine

within man, by means of prayer; The third requisite, spending out of what God has given, is the natural sequel of the second, and shows that the realization of the Divine in man leads to the service of humanity. In one of the earliest revealed chapters of the Quran, it is stated that prayer is useless unless it leads to the service of humanity:

“So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer, who do good to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness.” (107:4–7)

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ ۗ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ
سَاهُونَ ۗ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَآءُونَ ۗ وَيَمْنَعُونَ
الْمَاعُونَ ۗ

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