

Fast 7: Prayer — humility in prayer

- The spirit of humility before God in prayer is emphasised in the Quran. We have already seen the verses:

“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﴾

- Near the beginning of the Quran, it is stated as a teaching for the Israelites, and of course the same teaching applies to Muslims also:

“And keep up prayer and give the due charity and **bow down with those who bow down. Do you tell people to be good and neglect your own souls while you read the Book?** Have you then no sense? **And seek assistance through patience and prayer, and this is hard except for the humble ones**, who know that they will meet their Lord and that to Him they will return.” (2:43–46)

وَاقْبِلُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ
الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾ أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ
أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ
﴿٤٤﴾ وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا
لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ
أَنْهُمْ مُلْقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنْهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

- The words “bow down with those who bow down” indicate congregational prayer.
- The acts of praying and of giving in charity are not sufficient. Sincerity is required, so that to “tell people to do good”, portraying yourself as religious, but neglect to do it yourself, is condemned here.
- Prayer is the means of seeking the assistance of God. A person must persist with *patience* in his efforts to achieve self-improvement, and have recourse to prayer. Prayer feels a hard thing and is unproductive of results, **unless** a person assumes an attitude of humility and takes prayer to be the way of meeting God. “Humility” means that when praying we think of ourselves, before God, as entirely powerless and totally reliant on Him to achieve anything. And we think of ourselves before God, not as holy, or high and mighty, but as ordinary sinners and mortals.

- Praying with humility is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran as well:

“Call on your Lord **humbly and in secret.**” (7:55)

أَدْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً

“And remember your Lord **within yourself humbly and fearing,** and in a voice not loud, in the morning and the evening, and do not be one of the heedless. Surely those who are with your Lord are not too proud to serve Him, and they glorify Him and prostrate themselves before Him.” (7:205–206)

وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَدُونَ
الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ وَلَا تَكُنْ
مِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لَا
يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَيُسَبِّحُونَهُ وَلَهُ
يَسْجُدُونَ

- “Within yourself” means that the remembrance of the Lord, in prayer or outside prayer, must firstly be from the heart. It must be accompanied by feelings of humility for oneself and awe for God. And, except for the loud recitation by the imam in congregational prayer, any other prayer must be in a low voice at the most.

“Has not the time yet come for the believers that **their hearts should be humble for the remembrance of Allah** and the Truth that is revealed, and that they should not be like those who were given the Book before, **but time was prolonged for them,** so their hearts hardened. And most of them are transgressors.” (57:16)

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ
اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَمَدُ
فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

- This verse warns Muslims not to become like the followers of earlier religions sent by God, who, due to the passage of time, became “hard hearted”, i.e., their hearts did not melt with humility before God. It indicates that Muslims too, with the passage of a long time after the coming of Islam, would lose humility of heart and consider themselves as God’s chosen ones regardless of their misdeeds.