

### Fast 8: Prayer — Its purposes

- Prayer to God is the result of accepting the existence of God. The aspiration to rise to moral greatness is implanted in human nature more deeply than even the aspiration to rise to material greatness. But the only way to rise to moral greatness is to be in touch with the Source of purity and the Source of the highest morality. That way is prayer.
- The Quran says:

“And Allah’s are the best names (or perfect attributes), so call on Him thereby.” (7:180)

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا

By *al-asma' al-husna* (“best names”) are meant *names expressing the most excellent attributes of the Divine Being*. By *calling on Him thereby* is meant that we should always keep Divine attributes before our minds, endeavouring to possess those attributes. So we should try to be in touch with the Being Who possesses the perfect attributes, the Being Who is free from all defects. Prayer is but an attempt to be in touch with Him. In prayer we “call on Allah”, and in that calling we refer to His great attributes.

- In many sayings of the Holy Prophet, prayer is spoken of as *munājāt* or *confidential relations* with the Lord. In one saying it is related that man should worship God as if he were seeing Him. This shows that real nature of prayer is to be in an actual connection with God, and that means becoming imbued with Divine morals.
- Prayer is the means of purification of one’s inner self and the suppression of evil tendencies. Referring to the soul, the Holy Quran says:

“He is indeed successful who purifies it.” (91:9).

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ۖ

And prayer is spoken of as a means of purification for the heart:

“**Recite** what has been revealed to you of the Book and **keep up prayer**. Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil; and certainly the **remembrance of Allah** is the greatest (force).” (29:45).

أَتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ  
الصَّلَاةَ ۖ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا  
تَصْنَعُونَ

The **recitation of the Book**, the **keeping up of prayer**, and the **remembrance of Allah** are really identical; for the Quran is recited in prayers, and the Quran is the best

means of the remembrance of Allah. The Quran is pre-eminently a Book that manifests the glory, greatness, grandeur, goodness, love, purity, power, and knowledge of the Supreme Being. While, as generally understood, by the remembrance of Allah is meant His glorification and praise by man in prayer, it is also here meant **Allah's remembrance of man** or His raising him to a place of eminence. Thus the significance would be that through prayer to God, not only is man freed from the bondage of sin, but (which is greater than this) he is raised to a place of higher eminence.

- According to the Quran, God told Moses in his first revelation that the object of prayer is the “remembrance of Allah”:

“Surely I am Allah, there is no God but I, so serve Me, and keep up prayer for My remembrance.”  
(20:14).

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ  
الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي ﴿٢٠﴾

*Remembrance* obviously conveys the significance of bearing in mind. Therefore prayer is far from being a mere mechanical ritual performed by the body.

- Another verse indicating that purification of the soul is the object of prayer is as follows:

“And keep up prayer at the two ends of the day and in the first hours of the night. **Surely good deeds take away evil deeds.** This is a reminder for the mindful.” (11:114).

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفِي النَّهَارِ وَزُلْفَا مِّنَ  
الَّيْلِ ۖ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ۗ  
ذٰلِكَ ذِكْرِي لِلذّٰكِرِيْنَ ﴿١١٤﴾

Prayer should lead to the doing of good deeds, which of course removes the tendencies to do evil.

- The more often, therefore, a person reverts to prayer, to that state in which, disengaging himself from all worldly attractions, he feels the Divine presence as an actual fact, the greater is his certainty about the existence of God, and the greater the restraint upon the tendency to break the moral laws of God. Prayer, thus, by checking the evil tendencies of man, purifies his heart of all evil, and sets him on the right road to the development of his inner faculties.