

## Fast 17: Prayer

- We now move on to the mention of prayer in the verses under discussion:
 

“...who believe in the Unseen **and keep up prayer** and spend (on good works) out of what We have 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.” (ch. 2, v. 3-4).
- A general point to note is that the Quran here begins with a list of the most basic principles of Islam, and these are in fact the fundamentals of religion itself: belief in a Higher Being, prayer to him, doing good to others, belief in revelation from God, and in the life after death. This shows that there is a systematic, rational arrangement of the subject-matter in the Quran, in that it begins with an overview of religion itself.
- After belief in God, the first practical teaching of Islam is mentioned: prayer. It is mentioned first because it is the way of communicating with the Unseen God and turning belief in Him into a heart-felt reality.
- In the expression “keep up prayer” (*yuqimun as-salat*) the word for “keep up” is derived from *iqama*, meaning to establish. This expression about prayer indicates not just praying but fulfilling all the requirements of prayer. These are both physical and spiritual. The physical ones are well known to Muslims and include the state of ablution for prayer, the times of prayer, the postures and the essential words of prayer. The spiritual ones include praying with humility of heart and full attention of mind.
- Too often, prayer in Islam is considered as a ritual requiring adherence to detailed rules of all kinds. In Islamic literature going back 1200 years various points have been discussed such as how high a person should raise his hands when saying *Allahu Akbar* in prayer, whether it is up to the shoulders or up to the ear lobes, how high or low should a person place his hands on his chest, how far should his right hand go over his left arm, etc. etc. There are far too many examples to give here.
- But the Quran contains numerous references showing that it is the **feelings** during prayer which are important. It instructs Muslims to pray as follows:

“Call on your Lord humbly and in secret...

أَدْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً...

and call on Him, fearing and hoping. Surely the mercy of Allah is near to the doers of good.” — ch. 7, v. 55,

وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ

الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

The meaning of “in secret” is that no one knows you are praying to God, so that your supplications are purely between you and Him. The “fearing” here relates to being acutely aware of your shortcomings and faults, and the “hoping” is hoping for forgiveness.

- Prayer is repeatedly called the “remembrance of God” (*zikrullāh*) in the Quran:

“...and keep up prayer for **My remembrance.**” — ch. 20, v. 14

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي ﴿١٤﴾

“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 (thing).” — ch. 29, v. 45

أَتْلُ مَا أُوْحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ ۗ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ

“O you who believe, when the call is sounded for prayer on Friday, hasten to **the remembrance of Allah** and leave off business.” — ch. 62, v. 9

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا الْبَيْعَ

Clearly, “remembrance” is done with the mind and the heart. Those who consider that “remembrance of Allah” is certain words and expressions which are chanted as *zikr* should read what the Quran says about this remembrance:

“those who believe and **whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah.** Now surely in Allah’s remembrance do hearts find rest.” — ch. 13, v. 28

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ﴿٢٨﴾

“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.” — ch. 57, v. 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

These verses tell us that: (1) contentment of the heart is brought about by the remembrance of God, and (2) this remembrance must be done with humbleness of the heart. It cannot be by mere words. The second verse quoted above indicates that, after a long time passes over the establishment of a religion, the hearts of its followers become “hardened”. They still say their prayers physically, with their bodies and their words, but the hearts are too hard to allow the remembrance of Allah to penetrate into them from the motions of the external body.