

Fast 19: Prayer (continued)

- Apart from ch. 32, v. 15 quoted in the last Study, there are other places in the Quran where it is mentioned that when certain people hear the Quran they spontaneously bow and fall down:

“Surely those who are given the knowledge before it, fall down prostrate on their faces, when it is recited to them, ...

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ إِذَا يُتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ
يَخْرُونَ لَلَّذِّقَانِ سُجَّدًا ۝١٣٤...

And they fall down on their faces, weeping, and it adds to their humility.” — ch. 17, v. 107, 109

وَيَخْرُونَ لَلَّذِّقَانِ يَبْكُونَ وَيَزِيدُهُمْ خُشُوعًا ۝١٠٩

Obviously, these people possess knowledge, and when the word of God is recited before them they not only understand it but its truth reaches the depth of their hearts and strikes such a chord with them that they fall before God, weeping with humility. Can this be a picture of a ritual recital of the Quran?

- Speaking of the previous prophets and their immediate followers, it is stated:

“When the messages of the Beneficent were recited to them, they fell down in submission, weeping. But after them came an evil generation, who wasted prayers and followed lusts, so they will meet with ruin, except those who repent and believe and do good” — ch. 19, v. 58–60

إِذَا تَتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا ۝٥٨
فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا
الشَّهْوَاتِ فَسَوْفَ يَلْقَوْنَ غَيًّا ۝٥٩ إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ
وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا

So, in the times of the earlier prophets too, the word of God had the same effect as it did on the Holy Prophet’s companions. But their next generation “wasted prayers and followed lusts”. Their prayers ceased to be humble and sincere, and no longer kept them away from wrongdoing, although they still performed prayers as rituals.

- Prayer is also described as sustenance or means of subsistence (*rizq*). The Holy Prophet is told:

“And enjoin prayer on your people, and steadily adhere to it. We do not ask from you a sustenance (*rizq*). We provide for you.” — ch. 20, v. 132

وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا لَا نَسْأَلُكَ
رِزْقًا لَكِن نَنْزُقُكَ

Prayers are a means of sustenance. God does not benefit from our prayers, nor does His greatness and His power increase because people are praying to Him. He does not need that sustenance from us. In fact, He is the One Who nourishes people through their prayers. If a person regards his prayers as his sustenance, he would feel that he is getting inner satisfaction and fulfilment from them.

- So much did the Holy Prophet regard prayer as sustenance that he is directed:

“Rise to pray by night except a little, half of the night, or lessen it a little, or add to it, and recite the Quran (distinctly) at a leisurely pace. Surely We shall charge you with a weighty word. The rising (to pray) by night is surely the firmest way to tread and most effective in speech. Truly you have by day prolonged occupation.”

— ch. 73, v. 2–7

قُمِ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ۖ بَصِّفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ
 قَلِيلًا ۖ أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا ۗ إِنَّا
 سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا ۖ إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ
 أَشَدُّ وَطْأً وَأَقْوَمُ قِيْلًا ۗ إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْعًا
 طَوِيلًا ۗ

These are the *Tahajjud* prayers, said in the early hours before the *Fajr* prayer, and are optional for Muslims. The Quran is to be recited in these prayers at a slow and deliberate pace, pronouncing the sound of each letter distinctly. This is for pondering over the meaning of the recitation and letting it enter into the depths of the heart. This recitation is quite the opposite of the rapid way in which it is done during the *Tarawih* prayers that we mostly see.

The above passage goes on to say that, because the Holy Prophet has been charged with the most powerful word of God to deliver to the world, his rising to pray at night will give him the spiritual strength and the firm inner conviction with which his preaching to people will become most effective. He is told here that he should pray at length at night because he has too much work to do during the day! One would think that he would be told to rest at night so that he could work more effectively during the day. But according to the Quran it is the rising at night to pray which makes him stronger to carry out his mission during the day. Instead of food and sleep, he is fed and strengthened by prayer.

- It was not only the Holy Prophet, but other Muslims also, who prayed at night:

“Your Lord knows indeed that you (O Prophet) pass in prayer nearly two-thirds of the night, and (sometimes)

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَ
 نِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَآئِفَةٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ

half of it, and (sometimes) a third of it, as do a group of those with you. And Allah measures the night and the day. He knows that (all of) you are not able to do it, so He has turned to you (mercifully); so read of the Quran whatever is easy for you.” — ch. 73, v. 20

يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ ۗ عَلِمَ أَن لَّنْ نَحْضُوهُ فَتَابَ
عَلَيْكُمْ فَاقْرَأُوا مَا تيسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ

Muslims were only too keen to follow the example of the Holy Prophet, of praying for as long as two-thirds of the night, or at least one-third of it. This is purely optional for a Muslim, but they did it because they could feel the benefit of it. Allah did not want them to suffer this voluntary hardship beyond their capacity, so He instructed them to do as much as was easy for them. Here the words “read of the Quran” mean reciting it during the night prayers in the standing posture. But these can be taken more generally as applying to reading and reciting the Quran at any time and occasion.

It can be seen that these two teachings, (1) reciting the Quran “at a leisurely pace” mentioned in verse 4 above, and (2) reading of it “whatever is easy for you” mentioned in verse 20, are **violated and contradicted** in the way that the Quran is read in the practices known as *khatam-i Quran*. The aim there is to finish the Quran as fast and as hastily as possible, and “whatever is easy for you” is certainly not what people there do.