

Fast 14: Prayer and action — *Those who prayed most, worked most*

“Guide us on the right path” (1:5).

إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٥﴾

- Prayer to God does not mean that we have simply to plead before God to grant us this or that favour and do nothing ourselves towards attaining it. Prayer is, in fact, a search for means and is thus an incentive to action. The central idea of the *Fātiḥah*, as already shown, is one of **action** or being **led on to action**, for here the person praying does not ask for certain favours but only to be guided on the right path.
- Prayer is thus only the means of leading a Muslim onwards and **discovering** the path by walking on which he may attain the goal. Prayer for any purpose does not mean that we do not use human means to gain it. Elsewhere in the Quran **the acceptance of prayer** is said to be **a reward** for men and women **for the hard work** they have done:

“So their Lord accepted their prayer, (saying) I will not let the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male or female. Each of you is like the other.” (3:195)

فَأَسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ
مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ

- The rule has been laid down in the Quran in several places that no end can be gained without making a hard struggle for it, for example:

“And that man can have nothing but what he strives for, and that his striving will soon be seen, then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward.” (53:39–41)

وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَأَنَّ
سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾ ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءَ
الْأَوْفَىٰ ﴿٤١﴾

- *Question: What is the need for prayer if a person must work for an objective and use the means to gain it?*
- *Answer:* It often happens that, despite the hardest struggle, a person is unable to achieve what he wants, and finds himself totally helpless. In such a case prayer is a help, a source of strength, to the worker. He does not lose heart nor does he despair, because he believes that, though the means at his disposal have failed, though all around there are difficulties and darkness, though his own strength is failing, yet there is a Higher Power with Whom nothing is impossible, Who can still bring a ray of light to dispel the darkness and Who remains a perpetual source of strength for him in his

helplessness, and that by praying to Him he can still achieve what seems otherwise quite unattainable.

- That is the function of prayer, and it is thus one of the means to gain an end when all other means have failed, and a source of strength to a person at all times, but especially in moments of utter weakness and despair.
- The Holy Prophet Muhammad and his Companions were undoubtedly the greatest believers in prayer. They are spoken of in the Quran as spending two-thirds of the night, half the night or one-third of the night in prayer. It is said to the Prophet:

“Your Lord knows indeed that you pass in prayer nearly two-thirds of the night, and sometimes half of it, and sometimes a third of it, as do a group of those with you.” (73:20)

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ
وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَآئِفَةٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ

and yet this was the very band of men whose love for work knew no bounds, whose energy was inexhaustible and who faced extreme difficulties with an iron determination.

- The Holy Prophet was instructed by the Almighty God to pray much at night *because he has too much work to do during the day!* He is not advised to rest at night because he has too much work to do during the day. The prayer at night will strengthen him to carry out his mission during the day. The Quran says to him:

“Rise to pray by night except a little, half of it, or lessen it a little, or add to it, and recite the Quran 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.” (73:2–7)

قُمِ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ۖ تَصِفَهُ 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 سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا ۗ

The voluntary prayer at night gives a person the strength to do the greatest deeds. It makes him morally perfect, and at the same time gives him strength to make others morally perfect. It is because his words are coming out of a sincere heart which bows to none but God. So they carry conviction to the hearts of others. The Prophet was

doubly strengthened, in his deeds as well as in his prayer, to carry his message to other people, and his true followers should try to get strength in the same way.