

Fast 6: Prayer — Introduction

- The fundamental religious duties recognized by Islam for the individual are: prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage. Among these, prayer no doubt occupies the most important position. It is given the greatest prominence in the Holy Quran. Charity comes next to it. Right at the beginning of the Quran, Muslims are described as those who believe in God, keep up prayer, and spend their wealth, talents and energies on charitable works:

“...who believe in the Unseen (God) and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them”. (2:3)

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

- Prayer was the first duty which God commanded the Holy Prophet Muhammad to perform. Although prayer and charity are often mentioned together in the Holy Quran, prayer is always mentioned first. The keeping up of prayer is the frequently repeated command of the Quran. It has also been generally recognized as the first and foremost duty of a Muslim.
- There are several reasons why prayer has been given this importance:
 1. It is really the first step in the onward progress of a human being. But it is also the highest that he can rise to, it is his *mi'raj*.
 2. Prayer keeps you away from evil.
 3. It helps you to realize that God has placed His own qualities within you. That realization creates the urge within you to do service for humanity, for no personal gain, because this is just what God does for humanity. It also makes you acquire the best morals.
 4. Prayer is also the means of levelling all differences of rank, colour and nationality between people. It is the means of bringing about cohesion and unity among people, which is the necessary basis of a living civilization.
- What prayer really aims at is stated in the very beginning of the Quran. There we are told that a Muslim, who wants to tread the road to self-development, must accept certain principles and carry out certain duties:

“This Book, in which there is no doubt, is a guide to those who keep their duty, who believe in the Unseen

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى
لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَ

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. These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that are successful (*muflihūn*).” (2:2–5)

يَقِيْمُوْنَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ يُنْفِقُوْنَ ﴿٢﴾ وَ
الَّذِيْنَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِمَا اُنزِلَ اِلَيْكَ وَمَا اُنزِلَ
مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۗ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُوْنَ ﴿٣﴾ اُولٰٓئِكَ
عَلٰى هُدٰى مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ ۗ وَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُوْنَ ﴿٤﴾

- The word *falāh* means ‘success’, and from it the word *muflihūn* means ‘those who are successful’. This word, whether relating to this life or to the next, carries with it the idea of the complete development of your inner faculties, and the achievement of both material and moral greatness. This is the full self-development of a human being. This self-development is reached, according to the Quran, by the acceptance of three principles:

1. the existence of God,
2. His revealing Himself to humanity by sending His messengers,
3. and the Hereafter,

and by the exercise of two duties:

1. the keeping up of prayer, or seeking closeness with God, and
2. the spending of your wealth for others, or the service of humanity.

- Prayer is given such a prominence in Islam for the self-development of man that in the call to prayer (the *Adhan*) the words “come to prayer” are immediately followed by the words “come to success (*falāh*)”. This shows that self-development is attained through prayer. On another occasion, using the same word, the Quran says clearly:

“Successful (*aflāḥa*) indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers”. (23:1–2)

قَدْ اَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِيْنَ هُمْ فِيْ صَلَاتِهِمْ
خٰشِعُوْنَ ﴿٢﴾

- Belief in God is the fundamental principle of every religion, but the real heart-felt belief that *God exists* comes to us, not by the belief that there is a God in the outer world, but by the realization of God’s attributes within ourselves at our human scale. This realization is attained through prayer, as is made clear by what is stated in the beginning of the Quran, quoted above. The three requisites of a true Muslim are there given in their natural order. The first is a belief in God, the great *Unseen* Who cannot

be perceived by the physical eye. The second is the keeping up of prayer. This shows that belief in the Unseen is turned into a certainty of the Divine existence, a realization of God's attributes within ourselves, by means of prayer. The third requisite, spending out of what God has given, is naturally follows the second. This shows that prayer leads to the service of humanity. In one of the earliest revealed chapters of the Quran, it is stated that your prayer is useless unless it leads you to the service of humanity:

“So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer, who do good to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness.” (107:4–7)

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ ۗ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ
سَاهُونَ ۗ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ ۗ وَيَمْنَعُونَ
الْمَاعُونَ ۗ