

Fast 8: Prayer — Its purposes

- Prayer to God is the result of accepting the existence of God. The desire to rise to moral greatness is implanted in human nature more deeply than even the desire 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 — God. That way is prayer.
- The Quran says:

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

وَاللَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا

By *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* (“best names”) are meant *names expressing the most excellent attributes of God*. By *calling on Him thereby* is meant that we should always keep Divine attributes before our minds, aiming to possess those attributes ourselves. 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 only 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 Muhammad, prayer is called *munājāt* or *confidential relations* with the Lord. In one saying it is related that you should worship God as if you 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 our 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 called a means of purification for the heart:

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

أَتْلُ مَا أُوْحِيَ 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 the same thing: the Quran is recited in prayers, and the Quran is the

best means of the remembrance of Allah. The Quran is above all a Book that shows the glory, greatness, grandeur, goodness, love, purity, power, and knowledge of the Supreme Being. It is generally understood that by the remembrance of Allah is meant His glorification and praise by the person who is praying in prayer. But here it also means **Allah remembering the person** or His raising him to a place of eminence. Therefore the meaning of “recite ... keep up prayer ... and the remembrance of Allah” would be that through prayer to God, not only is a person freed from being a slave to sin, but (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 purpose 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 means “bearing in mind”. Therefore prayer is **far** from being just movements of our body done as a ritual and a ceremony. Your mind and heart have to be in it.

- Another verse indicating that purification of the soul is the purpose 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 مِنَ اللَّيْلِ
إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ذَلِكَ ذِكْرِي
لِلذَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾

Prayer should lead us to the doing of good deeds. When we do good deeds, it removes the tendencies to do evil. Doing good makes you want to stop doing evil.

- Prayer is the state in which a person disconnects himself from all worldly attractions, and feels the presence of God like an actual fact. So the more often he turns to prayer, the greater becomes his certainty about the existence of God, and the greater becomes the restraint on the tendency to break the laws of God. Prayer, therefore, keeps in check our evil tendencies, purifies our hearts of all evil, and sets us on the right road to the development of our inner abilities.