

Worship and Prayer

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We sometimes notice points in our Islamic interpretations that raise questions for some of us in connection with worship. For example we are told in the case of prayer that either the Prophet or the Imams have said, "Prayer is the pillar of religion," or if we think of religion as a tent, 'prayer is the pole that keeps it standing.' This remark is also quoted from the narrations attributed to the Prophet, "The requisite for the acceptance of other human deeds is the acceptance of prayer". In other words, the good deeds of the human being will be null and void if prayer is incorrect and thereby unacceptable.

Another Tradition says, "Prayer is the means of proximity of every virtuous being to God." Another Tradition says that the devil is always uneasy with a believer and shuns him who is devoted to his prayer. The Quran, too, shows the remarkable importance of prayer in many verses.

But sometimes it is stated by some persons that all these traditions about prayer must be forged and unreliable and uttered not by the Prophet and his successors but by some devotees in order to win more followers particularly in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the hegira when the matter of worship had gone to such excess that it had more or less led to monasticism and Sufism.

We see that some people concentrated all their efforts on acts of worship to such an extent that they ignored other religious duties. For example there was among Ali's companions a man called Rabi' ibn Husain, who was later known as Khajah Rabi' whose tomb is in Mashhad. He was known as one of the eight famous ascetics of the Islamic world and he went so far in asceticism and devotion that he had dug his own grave long before his death. (It is said that for twenty years he never spoke a word about worldly matters). Sometimes he went and lay in it reminding himself that the grave was his home. The only words he was ever heard to say besides prayer was on the occasion of hearing of Imam Husain's martyrdom. He said, "Woe upon these people who murdered the dear descendant of their Prophet." It is reported that afterwards he repented having uttered a sentence other than the invocation of God.

He was a warrior in the time of Ali, peace be upon him, and one day he came to Hadrat Ali and said that they had doubts about that war they were fighting, as it seemed to them to be unlawful, for they were fighting against those who in their prayer turned their faces to Mecca and uttered the formulas of the Islamic creed. This man at the same time did not want to

abandon Ali, peace be upon him, so he asked to be given a task in which there was no doubt. Ali, peace be upon him, agreed and sent him to a frontier again as a soldier so that in case of fighting he would face non-Muslims or idolaters. This man was a type of ascetic of the time but of what worth was his asceticism and worship? It is useless to be the follower of a man like Ali, peace be upon him, and at the same time have doubts about the way shown by him in a holy war. Sometimes people use the phrase, "Why should one observe a fast based on doubt and uncertainty? It is worthless." Islam requires insight combined with practice but Khajah Rabi' had no insight.

He lived in the time of Mu'awiyah and his son Yazid. He had nothing to do with the social problems of the Islamic society and he used to retire to a corner praying day and night and uttering nothing but the Name of God and regretting his own remark about the martyrdom of Imam Husain, peace be upon him.

This kind of thing does not accord with Islamic teachings and as the saying goes, "An ignorant person either goes too fast or too slowly." Some may say that the phrase, "Prayer is the pillar of religion," is not in harmony with Islamic teachings since Islam pays more attention to social matters than any other. Islam says, "God orders to do justice and benevolence. " (16:92) We sent our prophets with manifestations and the Book and justice to make people do justice also." (57:25) It commands people to direct others to goodness and forbid evil (3:110) Islam as a great religion is the creed of activity and work. If these matters are important in Islam, then acts of worship and devotion are not so significant. Thus, according to such people, one should follow social teachings and leave acts of devotion and prayer to idle people who have no other task to perform.

But such thoughts are wrong and very dangerous. Islam should be recognized as it is. I emphasize this point since I feel that our society is suffering from a sickness. Unfortunately those who have religious ardor are two groups: One group follow the way of Rabi' and think of Islam only as a creed for prayers, hymns and pilgrimage and refer to certain standard books of theology to guide them. They have nothing to do with the world or social regulations or Islamic principles and education.

The reaction to the slowness of this group is the appearance of a second group who go too fast and move on the path of excess. They pay all their attention to social matters, which in itself is a worthy attitude, but ignore acts of worship. I have met people who can well afford to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, an injunction which is regarded as an important matter in Islam. They ignore prayers, and put aside the matter of imitating a religious leader. They believe that problems related to acts of worship should be solved by oneself, without the need of the

guidance of others.

Thus everyone is assumed to be a religious expert or a jurisprudent. One is one's own physician and has no need of consulting a doctor or a specialist. There are some who are slack in fasting and its conditions in the case of permanent residence or on a journey and do not believe in making amends for failure to perform acts of worship in their proper time and place. Both groups consider themselves Muslims but they are not wholly so. Islam does not agree with the phrase, "To believe in some things and disbelieve in other things."⁷⁹ It cannot agree with the acceptance of worship coupled with the rejection of its moral and social questions, or vice versa. You notice that whenever the Quran says, "Perform your ritual prayer," it is followed by, "Pay your alms."

The first injunction concerns the relation between a creature and God and the second one shows the relation between one creature and others. Thus a true Muslim has a dual responsibility towards God and towards human beings and to their society in a permanent way. No Islamic society can be built without worship and invocation of God and prayer and fasting. In the same way, no pious society can exist without directing to goodness and forbidding evils and without kindly relations between individuals, even though a person may be a pious individual.

We see Ali, peace be upon him, as the most exalted, pious man, so much so that his worship was proverbial, a worship full of terror and love and tears. After his death, a man called Zirar, who was a companion of his, met Mu'awiyah who asked him to describe Ali, peace be upon him, for him. Zirar narrated something he had witnessed about Ali, peace be upon him. He said, "One night I saw him in his special worshipping place of worship.' He was twisting with the fear of God like a man bitten by a snake and weeping with deep sorrow and saying, 'Oh, for the fire of hell!"; Mu'awiyah wept on hearing this.

Before Ali's death, Mu'awiyah met Adass bin Hatam and intended to provoke him against Ali, peace be upon him, so he asked him about his three sons who had been killed fighting for Ali, peace be upon him. He wished to hear Adass blame Ali, peace be upon him and so he said, "Was it fair of him to deprive you of your three sons and save his own sons from death in the battlefield?"

Adass answered, "It was I who was unfair to him. I should not be alive while he is buried in the earth." When Mu'awiyah saw that he had failed in his purpose, he asked Adass to describe Ali, peace be upon him, fully for him, which he did. When he ended his narration, he noticed tears flowing down Mu'awiyah's beard and wiping them with his sleeve, saying, "Alas! Time is too sterile to produce a man like Ali." You see how truth reveals itself.

But was Hadrat Ali only a pious man of the altar? No. We see him also as the most social being, well aware of the conditions of the poor and helpless and all who brought their complaints to him. Though he was a Caliph, he went among the people, dealing with their affairs. When he met merchants he shouted, "You should first go and learn Islamic questions of trade." In other words, before engaging in commerce, they should know divine injunctions about what is lawful and unlawful in every deal. He is also reported to have used a phrase to a poor beggar who begged him for something. Ali, peace be upon him, looked at him and saw that he was capable of working but had chosen begging as a trade. He gave him advice and said, "Follow your honor and dignity, " a phrase that he addressed to every person. For work brings dignity and honor.

Ali, peace be upon him, is thus a true Muslim: Pious in worship, a just judge in the court, a brave soldier and commander on the battlefield, a fine orator at the pulpit, a remarkable teacher in his chair, and a wonderful and perfect example in every other accomplishment.

Islam can never approve of half-hearted acceptance of its injunctions or belief in some of them and not in others. This is a wrong way adopted by some ascetics who considered Islam to consist of praying, or those who ignored acts of devotion altogether.

The Quran says, "Muhammad is the Prophet of God and those who are with him are hard against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves. " (48:29)

In this sentence, the feature of an Islamic community is portrayed. In the first part of it, the matter of following faith and the Prophet is expressed and in the latter part, the question of standing firmly against infidels is mentioned. Thus these seeming devotees who make a mosque their home and say no word when they are driven on by a single soldier, are not Muslims. The most important quality of a Muslim according to the Quran is showing firmness and strength against an enemy.

The Quran says, "Faint not, neither sorrow; you shall be the upper ones if you are believers." (3:133) Islam does not allow weakness in religion. Will Durant says in his History of Civilization that no religion but Islam calls upon its followers to be so strong and steadfast.

To bend the neck with helplessness, to dress poorly and in a dirty way, to walk lazily and to pretend to be forelorn and indifferent to all around you and sigh and groan are all contrary to Islam. The Quran says, "And as for the favor of your Lord, announce (it)." (93:11) God has given you blessings like health and strength. Why do you show yourself so helpless? This is ingratitude. Ali, peace be upon him, was never such a man. He stood ably and strongly against enemies.

What about being kind to others ? We sometimes meet devotees who are never kind and are

usually glum and unsociable. They never laugh and seldom smile as if the whole of humanity is indebted to them and yet they suppose themselves to be attached to Islam. Is it enough to stand firmly against enemies and be kind to Muslims? The answer is no. The Quran says, "You will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from God and good pleasure." (48:29) This speaks of those who have the two above qualities of steadfastness and kindness and in their prayers and prostrations sink so deeply in their devotion that you can see in their faces all signs of chastity and godliness. It is narrated from the Prophet that the disciples of Christ asked him with whom they should associate and he answered, "Sit with someone whose sight reminds you of God, whose speech increases your knowledge and whose conduct persuades you into doing good." The verse continues, "That is their description in the Old Testament and their description in the New Testament like a seed-produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them." (48:29).

A nation possessing all the above attributes must be a remarkably fine nation. Now, tell me, why should Muslims be so decadent, docile and miserable. Which of those qualities mentioned before do we possess? What should we expect? Although we admit that Islam is a social creed, why should we scorn worship and prayer and communion with God? Let me assure you that taking prayers lightly is a sin as ignoring them is a sin. On the death of Imam Ja'far Sadiq, peace be upon him, as Abu Bassir came to offer Umm ul-Hanida his condolences, the latter wept and so did the former.

Umm ul-Hanida then narrated something that had happened in the last moments of the life of the Imam. She said that he sank into a trance and then opened his eyes and asked for all his relatives to be present. After they had all gathered there, the Imam addressed them the following remark and then died. He said, "Those who take ritual prayers lightly will never gain our intercession."⁸⁹ You see that he did not speak of those who ignore ritual prayers altogether, for, the consequence of that is obvious.

What does 'taking the ritual prayers lightly' mean? It means that in spite of having time, an opportunity, one may postpone them and just before it is getting too late, perform the acts of devotion hastily and perfunctorily, without giving the mind and spirit the necessary tranquility before beginning to say the ritual prayer.

Experience has shown that in a household where ritual prayers are taken lightly, no interest is shown by its members to pray or to pray properly. One should choose a spot in the house allotted to acts of devotion, or, if possible, a separate room for them and carry on with ablution

without haste and spread a clean prayer-carpet and accompany all the preliminary acts with the convocation of God. Ali, peace be upon him, began with, "In the Name of God and with the help of God. Oh God place me among those who repent; place me among those who cleanse themselves."

Two nights ago I spoke about repentance and explained that repentance meant purifying oneself. Washing the body is the prelude to purifying the spirit; it refreshes the face, but since the intention is to cleanse the spirit, too, it gives one a sacred aspect. Ali, peace be upon him, in his ablution prayed to God to illuminate his face on the Day of the Resurrection where many faces are black with shame and sin. Then he said this prayer on washing his right hand, "Oh God, on the Day of Resurrection, put my book of deeds in my right hand," and on washing his left hand, he said, "Oh God, do not give me my book of deeds in my left hand nor from behind my back. Oh God, do not let it be shackled to my neck; I seek refuge from You from the fire of hell."

Then, on touching his forehead with water, he said, "Merge me into your grace and blessings." Then on touching his feet with water he said, "Oh God, direct my efforts towards such a path of your satisfaction."

Such an ablution which is accompanied by so many pleadings is of a different worth and merit than what most of us are accustomed to perform. We should not lightly disregard all these rites and confine ourselves only to the absolutely obligatory parts.

Let us see what religious authorities say about this. Should we repeat the following sentence three times or only once, "Glory be to God, praise be God, there is no god but God and God is great." An authority may say, "Once is enough, since it is obligatory but the second and third repetitions are recommended."

In the same way, fasting may be taken lightly. I am saying this as a joke, but if I were God I would not accept such fasts. I know some people who stay awake at night in the month of Ramadhan, not to worship and pray, but to drink tea, smoke and eat fruit. In the morning, they say their ritual prayers and go to sleep. Some of them sleep all day and wake up near sunset to say their daily ritual prayers hastily before it is too late and get ready to break their fast. What kind of a fast is this? When you do not give yourself the chance of feeling the pain of abstemiousness? This is fasting lightly and is really an insult to a fast.

Again we go on a pilgrimage to Mecca but perform the rites lightly in the same way as our prayers and fasts. Similarly the matter of the call to prayer may be taken lightly; it is said that the call to prayer should be utterest melodiously to attract and invite people to prayer, in the same way that the Quran should be recited clearly, fluently and with a fine voice. Some people

are gifted with a fine voice, but if you ask them to sing out the call to prayer, they consider it below their dignity to be known as a muazzin. But it is really an honor to be one. Ali himself was one, even when he was a Caliph. There is no disgrace attached to this task and no nobility to forsake it.

Thus no act of worship should be taken lightly. The merit of Islam is in its comprehensiveness, not in being so absorbed in devotion as to ignore every other duty, nor to be so involved in social matters to forget acts of devotion. Although a prayer is for its own sake and for proximity to God, if we scorn worship, we are ignoring other duties, too. Worship is the executive and guarantor of other Islamic injunctions.

Here I end my discourse and pray God to make us true worshippers, to acquaint us with the comprehensiveness of Islam, to make us whole-hearted Muslims, grant us pure intentions, forgive our sins in these precious nights, and grant salvation to our deceased ones.

Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and dishonor and certainly the remembrance of God is the greatest. (29:44)

In Islam, acts of devotion, in addition to their preeminence, are a part of its educational program. By genuineness is meant being a goal of creation irrespective of the matter of human life in any other respect. The Quran says, "And I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me. (51:59)

Worship is a means of the human being's proximity to God as well as one's true perfection. That is, that which is the manifestation of the human being's perfection is, at the same time, a goal in itself. It desires to train individuals morally and socially and so a means has been adopted which is most effective on human morals and spirit. It enables one to forget the self and self-interests.

In social matters, the basic principle is justice, which is respecting other people's rights. This is the main difficulty of humanity in both morality and society. There is no one who is ignorant of morality and its necessity. The difficulty is practising it. When a human being wants to put this principle into practice, that person is faced with interests on one side and morality on the other; truthfulness on one side and profit on the other.

One should either resort to falsehood and treason in order to gain profit, or tell the truth and forsake profit. Here we see a man who speaks of justice, acting against ethics and justice in practice. The only thing that acts as a support to the human being's morality and justice and enables one to forsake profit is faith. Faith in what? In justice and morality themselves. When a person believes in both justice and morality as something sacred? When a person has faith in the basis of sacredness, namely God. So, a person is bound to both justice and morality to the

same extent that one is bound to God, and has faith in Him.

This is the problem of our time: That science is supposed to be sufficient for mankind. If we recognize justice and morality and act according to them, we can be both just and moral. But it is actually shown that when knowledge is separate from faith, not only is it not useful for morality and justice, it is harmful. As Sana'i, the poet, says, "When a thief carries a light, he can pick more choice objects." But with faith, both morality and justice will endure. In Islam,

worship of God is not set up as something separate from morality and justice.

To illustrate this point, here is a question. Where in the world have you seen a guilty person come forth voluntarily for punishment? A guilty person usually flees from justice. The only force that can make a human being voluntarily submit to punishment is faith. We see many examples of this in early Islam. Islam has envisaged punishment for all sins, such as drinking, adultery and theft. At the same time it says, "Punishments are abandoned with the slightest doubt." Islam does not compel a judge or governor to seek out a guilty person; rather it places an urge within a guilty person to come forward for punishment. This kind of thing often happened in the time of both the Prophet and Hadrat Ali. A man would come before them

begging to be punished in order to purify himself.

A man came to the Prophet, confessing adultery. In such matters the confession should be repeated four times to be credible. The Prophet said, "Maybe you mean you kissed her?" The man said, "No. It was adultery." The Prophet said again, "Perhaps you only gave her a pinch," hoping again that he would say, "Yes," and he would then be pardoned. But the man gave a negative answer. This dialogue went on until it was quite clear that adultery had been committed and the man begged for punishment in order to be relieved of punishment in the next world.

There is another case of a woman who came to Ali, peace be upon him, and said, "Oh Commander of the Faithful, I am married and in the absence of my husband, I have committed adultery and I am now pregnant. I wish to be purified from my sin." Hadrat Ali said, "One confession is not sufficient. It should be repeated four times." Then he said, "The punishment for the adultery of a married woman is being stoned to death. If you are dealt this punishment, what happens to the baby in your womb? The baby has done no wrong and must not be stoned. Go away until your baby is born."

After a few months, the woman came again. This time with a baby in her arms and asked to be purified since the baby was born. This was her second confession. Again Ali, peace be upon him, said, "We might stone you but this baby is not guilty. It needs milk and a mother to nurse it. So, go away now since the baby needs you."

The woman returned home uneasily and after two years reappeared before the Imam, and said, "Purify me now as the baby has been weaned and is growing up." Ali, peace be upon him, said, "Go away. This child still needs a mother." The mother wept and said, "Oh God, I have confessed three times but the Imam has sent me away three times and refused to stone me. I cannot bear being polluted with sin."

As it happened, a hypocrite called Amr bin Hariz saw the woman and asked what the matter was. She explained what had happened and the man said, "I will settle this. Give me the child and let me be his guardian." She was not aware that Ali wanted her not to make the fourth confession. They went back to Ali, peace be upon him, and the woman asked to be purified since the man had agreed to look after the child and insisted on receiving the punishment. Ali, peace be upon him, felt very uncomfortable that the matter reached a point where no alternative was left for him but to order her to be punished.

This is an example of true faith in religion capturing one's conscience and making one submit to justice. The purpose of worship is to revive one's religious life and give it freshness and strength. The greater one's faith, the more one turns to God and the less one sins. Sinning and not sinning are not the concern of knowledge; they are the concern of faith and neglecting faith leads to sinfulness.

Let me explain a point about the immaculateness of Prophets and Imams. What does this mean? You may say they never sin. That is true, but there are two answers to this. One is that God intentionally prevents them from sinning. If this is the case, then sinlessness is not an accomplishment. If this is the case, no one could sin, since he is hindered by a power beyond himself. Therefore Prophets and Imams may be supposed to have no superiority over other people except that they are treated discriminately by God. So it is not a question of their desiring to sin but being prevented from doing so by God.

Purity is a high degree of faith in God and thinking constantly of him. A person without faith rarely or never thinks of God; that person is altogether negligent. There are others who are occasionally negligent and commit sins in this state of negligence, but when they turn to God, they naturally avoid sin. But if faith attains a perfect state of permanently thinking of God, a person is never negligent and every act of that person is based on faith.

The Quran refers to those who are engaged in trade but never forget God. It does not speak of avoiding trade and commerce. Islam does not prohibit trading. On the contrary it encourages work and commerce and at the same time expects one to think of God and therefore never sin. Let me give an example. Has it ever happened to you to put your hand in the fire knowingly-? It does not as a rule happen unless you wish to burn yourself. Why do we avoid fire? Because our

knowledge tells us it is dangerous and we are sure of this knowledge. In this way we are pure in relation to fire and our certainty and belief about fire serves as a check. The friends of God, too, are innocent since they are certain of the burning power of sins and thus, thinking of God and thereby being attached to morality, justice and rights, enables them to avoid sin. In Islam the life of both worlds is inter-related. Christianity, on the other hand, separates the reckoning of each world. For example, the other-worldly aspect of the Islamic prayer is thinking of God and fearing Him, otherwise why should so many rites be necessary. Being clean in body makes no difference to God for proximity to Him for He says, "When you stand up for the prayer you should have first performed ablution by washing your face and hands as far as the elbows. "

Cleanliness has been combined with acts of devotion. Again according to the injunction, "When your body is unclean, you must wash yourself completely." Your place of worship must be lawful and not usurped. So must be your prayer-carpet and your clothes. If one single thread of these is gained illegitimately, your prayer is null and void. Again, worship must be combined with respect for others' rights. If a house is seized by force, praying in it is invalid for him who has violated the owner's right. Such a house should have either been bought by the latter in order to render his acts of worship correct, or the owner's satisfaction should have been secured first. The same applies to clothes and carpets. Moreover if a religious tax is due on the property of the worshipper, it should have been paid.

Then we are told to face the Ka'ba in the prayer. Where is the Ka'ba? It is the first temple built in the world for the worship of God. Everyone should perform the ritual prayer standing facing the direction of the first mosque built by the Prophets Abraham and Ismail. Why should we face it? Is God there? The Quran says, "Whither so ever you turn, there is the Face of God." Why should we face the Ka'ba? It is meant as a social education for all to face one spot, for, facing any direction one wants, means dispersion and confusion. Thus facing the first temple is devotion.

Again we are told that there is a definite time for devotion, even to the minute. Morning ritual prayer times is between dawn and sunrise, and performing it even a minute before dawn or a minute after sunrise makes it void. You cannot offer the excuse of being sleepy, for, this has no meaning for God since all hours are the same to Him. But the purpose of regarding time is to train and educate human beings. The same punctuality applies also to noon, afternoon, evening and night prayers.

Prayer and worship are inseparable. In praying you are not free to do what you like, such as crying in memory of something unpleasant or laughing at a funny incident. Praying is the

control of feelings. There is no turning to any side but the point in front, no glancing at anything which might attract your attention. Nor are you allowed to eat or drink while praying. All such diversions are contrary to the spirit of worship, which requires total self-control. Another point is bodily control. Unnecessary movements of the limbs in standing position, in bowing and prostration are not allowed. The whole body must be calm and stable before the phrase allahu akbar is uttered. If you feel pain in some part of your body, rest awhile in the same position before resuming your prayer.

Now we come to other parts of the prayer which means attention to God only, and we utter the phrase, "Greetings to all worthy servants of God." This is a declaration of peace and goodwill towards all good beings. This means mingling worship of God with educational matters. In spiritual matters, the more one forgets one's self, the better it is, but from a social viewpoint, one should never forget others.

In the first chapter of the Holy Quran which we recite as part of the ritual prayer, "We worship only You, Oh, God, and beg only Your help." Here we do not use the word 'I' but 'we' to show that all Muslims are inter-related in an Islamic community. In Islam, 'I' is always replaced by 'we'. All these are lessons to learn. When we say allahu akbar are we expressing our fear of God? It is natural for the human being to be afraid of anything which is great, whether it is a mountain, a sea, or a powerful person. But when we say "God is Greater," in a convinced manner, nothing else and no one can frighten us by their greatness, for God is Greater than anything we may imagine and all other things are trivial in comparison with Him. Hadrat Ali says, "God has manifested Himself in the spirit of the true believers and thus everything else unrelated to God seems small in their eyes."

Smallness and greatness are, of course, relative. If you were in a smaller place before coming here, this hall would seem very large to you; the reverse is also true. Therefore, those who are acquainted with the greatness of God, consider other things insignificant. Sa'di says that for mystics nothing exists but God and only those who understand truth realize the meaning of his words, while others criticize him for those words. He then asks, "If there exists nothing but God then what are the heaven and earth and men and monsters and beasts?" He answers this question himself by saying that all these things are too small to say they exist as compared with God's existence. He then compares this with an ocean and a drop of water and with the sun and a tiny particle.

When you utter the phrase "God is Greater" in all sincerity, His greatness is personified before you and thus nothing else finds enough significance to be flattered or feared or shown humbleness. In this way, devotion to God brings freedom: you become God's servant but free

in relation to everything else. Each of the following words in the ritual prayer has a meaning illustrating God's greatness: "God is great. Glory be to God. Praise belongs to God. Glory be to my great Lord and I am praising Him. Glory be to my great Lord and I am praising Him. Glory be to my Lord the Most High and I am praising Him."

Many other phrases have been used in the ritual prayers. Someone asked Ali, peace be upon him, why in each cycle of the ritual prayer there are two prostrations and only one bowing. You know, of course, that prostration shows more humility than bowing. In prostrating, the head, which is the dearest part of the body, is placed on the low earth, as a sign of humility and worship.

In answer, Ali, peace be upon him, said, "In the first prostration you are reminding yourself that you are made of dust and in the second one you remember that you will die and return to dust and by raising your head once more, you will think of the day you will be raised again for a future life." Let me tell you in connection with the importance of daily prayers that each of us is responsible, not only for the performance of one's own acts of devotion, but also for that of the other members of one's household. This phrase is addressed to the Prophet: "Bid your family to pray and be patient in it." This Command is not only for the Prophet; all of us are duty-bound to it.

What about children? Should they be trained to perform ritual prayer from childhood? The injunction is that children should be taught to perform the ritual prayers from the age of seven. They cannot, of course, yet utter the sentences with the correct pronunciation but they can be trained to observe the form of it as a habit when they begin their elementary education. It should, however, be remembered that force must not be used in this matter. They should be encouraged and give the chance to perform it willingly. There are many ways of encouragement such as praising, rewarding, showing greater affection and providing an environment conducive to such a performance.

Taking a child to congregational ritual prayer in a mosque is an effective way of encouragement and religious training. Even adults are greatly influenced by the spirit of worship in a group. Negligence in making habitual visits to places of devotion causes a frequent lack of inclination towards ritual prayer. This is especially true of children who have not been brought up to regard this as a religious duty and who when they reach the age of manhood, they are quite indifferent towards it.

If the objection is raised that mosques are often not kept clean enough to attract people or that preacher's sermons are sometimes boring, these are matters which could be remedied and not a reason to ignore a religious duty. The Quran says, "What brought you into hell? They shall

answer, 'We were not of those who prayed, neither did we feed the poor and we used to talk vanities with vain talkers.' (74:43-46)

Now you understand why in Islam the ritual prayer has been called a pillar of religion by the Prophet, for everything will be accepted when the ritual prayer is correctly performed. In his last moment of life, Ali, peace be upon him, invited people to take the remark of the Prophet about prayer most seriously. You may have heard that on Ashura (the 10th of Muharram when Imam Husain and his followers were martyred), the martyrdom of Imam Husain took place in the afternoon, so by noon most of the Imam's household and companions were still alive, and only thirty of them were killed before noon. One of the Imam's companions realized suddenly that it was noon and the time to perform the ritual prayer. He begged the Imam for a collective prayer for the last time. The Imam agreed and said, "You have remembered your ritual prayer so may God make you a devoted man in praying."

It was fitting for this warrior to be spoken of thus by the Imam. At any rate, they performed the ritual prayer together on the battlefield, a ritual prayer which is called 'ritual prayer of fear' in jurisprudence, consisting of two cycles instead of four since it must be brief enough to see the line of defence against the enemy when half of the army prays and the other half is on the alert in case of enemy attack. Then the groups change places for performing the ritual prayer and military duty.

Imam Husain, peace be upon him, performed the ritual prayer in this manner, not far from the enemy's line. The shameless enemy did not even at this moment leave them at peace and continued their assaults with their bows and arrows and by their biting tongues, sneering at these devoted soldiers. Two of the men who shielded the Imam in his ritual prayer fell by the enemy's arrows. One of them was Sa'id bin Abdullah Hanafi who was at the point of death when the Imam finished his ritual prayer. When the Imam went to him, Sa'id said, "Oh Abu Abdullah. Have I done my duty?" implying that he would have wished to do more."

This was Imam Husain's ritual prayer in Karbala. In the battlefield of Karbala, he was bowing forward when he received an arrow in his chest, which he drew out from his back. In his prostration, when the right side of his face was on the earth, for he could not lay his forehead on the ground as he had fallen off his horse. At this moment, he said, "In the Name of God and with the help of God and with the religion of the Prophet of God and there is neither might nor power but in God the Most High, the Great. Oh God bless Muhammad and his chaste family." In conclusion I pray God grant us a happy end, give us the favor of worship and devotion to Him, make us true performers of ritual prayer, make our intentions pure, protect us against jinn and human beings, and grant salvation to our deceased ones