Concentration and Attention of Mind in Prayers

Attention of the mind means that a person should be aware as to what he is reciting and what he is doing. He should be conscious of the greatness of the High and Mighty Allah and be in awe of Him and he should realize that Allah (S.w.T.) deserves total and complete attention. He should consider himself an accused in the fulfilment of his duty of worship and slavery of Allah (S.w.T.).

He should confess his mistakes with all humility before Allah (S.w.T.) and be hopeful of His widespread Mercy and unlimited beneficence. In essence, he should balance his feelings with both fear and hope; a desperate fear of Allah (S.w.T.)'s wrath, and yet not despairing of His boundless mercy.

The degree of concentration possible, will of course vary with individuals but we must mention here, the perfection in concentration achieved by Amir ul-Mu'mini-n (a.s.) and the exceptional example of Ebad bin Bushr. In the battle of Siffi-n an arrow head pierced the thigh of 'Ali (a.s.). It was not possible to pull it out because of the unbearable pain it caused. When Imam Hasan (a.s.) was consulted in the matter, he told the people to just wait till 'Ali (a.s.) stands for prayer and to remove the arrow while 'Ali (a.s.) was praying. Accordingly the arrow was pulled out while 'Ali (a.s.) praying and 'Ali (a.s.) was totally oblivious of the excruciating pain. When 'Ali (a.s.) stood for prayers, the world ceased to exist for him. His entire being was totally immersed in the contact he had established with his Creator and his relationship with Him.

In Safinat'ul-Biha-r, volume 2, Page 145 it is mentioned that on the way to a battle, the Messenger of Allah (S) encamped at a spot to spend the night. The night watch was entrusted to Ebad bin Bushr and Ammar Yasir. It was agreed that Bushr would vigil the first part of the night and, Ammar the other half. So Ammar Yasir went to sleep and Bushr was guarding the camp. The infidels decided to attack the sleeping Muslims. An attacker moved stealthily and came near the camp but he saw Bushr standing in prayers.

However, Bushr was so still that the attacker could not understand whether it was a tree, an animal or man. To make sure the infidel shot an arrow towards Bushr. It pierced Bushr but he continued to recite the prayer with the same composure. The second arrow was shot but Bushr didn't show any sign of discomfort. Finally the third arrow struck and Bushr shortened his prayers and awoke Ammar. Ammar awoke to find Bushr smeared in blood. He asked why he had not woken him at the first arrow. Bushr replied, "I was reciting Surah al-Kahf in the prayers and I didn't like to discontinue. And if there had been no risk to the life of Prophet (S) and the

Muslims and fear of dereliction of the duty entrusted to me I would have continued my prayers till I were dead." Continuing the topic of concentration it needs to be added that it is necessary for the worshipper to be in awe of Allah (S.w.T.) and to be sincere, patient and unhurried with his prayers. Every time a person offers his prayers he should pray with the intensity of the one who is offering the last prayer of his life and who will not get another chance for repentance and seeking forgiveness.

It is also important to bear in mind that the words expressed during recitation of prayer are not merely a verbal exercise. The words in fact embody the principles on which our thoughts, actions and philosophy are to be based. For example when we say: Thee alone we worship, worship does not imply only rituals; worship is a total commitment to live and die as would please the Almighty, and not as we would prefer ourselves. It is a total subjugation to His will, which we express by implicit obedience to all His commands. With this awareness of Allah (S.w.T.)'s supremacy, it is only natural that we will seek the fulfilment of our needs and wishes from Him alone with no expectation from any other source. Even while our desire remains unfulfilled we can have the comforting assurance that our appeal lies with the ultimate authority, Who is the best giver, the best supporter and Who alone knows what is best for the invoker in his interest.

The Barriers Should be Removed

It is necessary that we distance ourselves from Satanic instigations and avoid the causes that obstruct the acceptance of Prayer. Some of these are pride, thinking highly of ones own deed, considering oneself praiseworthy, showing off, especially not fulfilling the husband's rights causes the prayer of wife to remain unaccepted. Non-payment of Zakat and not fulfilling the rights of others. Similarly, jealousy, arrogance, eating Hara-m things and drinking wine.

"Allah only accepts from those who guard (against evil)." (Surah al-Ma-'ida 5:27)

Thus the Prayer of a transgressor and sinner is not accepted. Some of the factors that decrease divine rewards for prayers are sloth, sleepiness, unmindful prayers, or praying in hurry or reciting it while restraining urine, stool or flatulence. Prayers are to be recited with due humility, sincerity with the eyes half open. During prayers are some of the practices that fetch additional divine blessings like applying perfume, wearing the most ritually pure clothes, wearing a ring of Aqi-q (cornelian), combing hair and brushing eenth before Prayers.