

Let Us Be Muslim Part-III (Salah & Sawm)

By
Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi

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1. Meaning and Blessings Of the Prayer

Brothers in Islam! The basic and most important act of worship among those which Allah has taught us to perform Salah, or the Prayer. It prepares us to worship Him in our entire lives---the purpose for which He has created us. Consider carefully why it is so important, what is its true meaning and significance.

Remembering God

The Prayer is an act of worship. We should, therefore, first recollect what worship means. Worship means revering, serving and obeying God in our whole lives. Being born as God's servants, we can not give up serving Him at any time or under any circumstances and still remain His servant as God wanted us to be when He created us. Just as you cannot say that you are creatures of God for a particular time only, so you cannot say that you will spend only a certain amount of time in worshipping Him and be free to spend the rest as you please. You are born to worship Him. Your whole lives should, therefore, be spent in 'Ibadha, you should not neglect it for a single moment.

It is precisely for this reason that worship does not require giving up the day-to-day world and sitting in a corner chanting God's name. Worship means that whatever you do in the world should be in accordance with God's guidance. Whether you sleep, are awake, eat, drink or work ---in fact, whatever activity you do---you worship Allah if these are done in obedience to Him.

When you are at home with your wives and children, brothers and sisters and relatives, behave towards them exactly as God has laid down. When you talk to your friends and amuse yourselves, remain conscious that you are servants of God. When you go out to work and have dealing with other people, keep in view God's commandments about what behaviour is proper and legitimate and what is not.

When in the dark of night you feel you can commit a sin which nobody in the world can see, then is the

time to remember that God is seeing you and it is He, and not your fellow humans, who deserves to be feared. When you find yourselves in a place where you can commit a crime without fear of the police or any witnesses, then again it is time to remember that God sees everything and refrain from doing anything from doing anything for transient gain which would displease Him. And when following the path of truth and honesty causes you material loss or otherwise puts knowledge that you are pleasing Allah by obeying Him and that your gain from Him will far outweigh any temporary, earthly loss.

Abandoning the world and sitting in secluded places counting rosary beads is, therefore, not real worship at all. Worship is to be engaged in everyday affairs and yet follow the way of God. What does remembering God (*dhikr*) mean? It does not mean merely the continual chanting of 'Allah, Allah!'. The real remembrance of God consists in recalling to mind the name and will Allah when you are caught up in day-to-day worldly activities. Being engaged in pursuits which could tend to make you forget God and yet not forgetting Him is in fact remembering Him. In this life, where opportunities of huge profits lurk, you must unfailingly remember God and remain steadfast in following His law. This is the true remembrance of God. This is the kind of remembrance the Qur'an refers to thus:

Then, when the Prayer is finished, disperse on earth and seek God's bounty; but remember God often, so that you may attain success (al-Jumu 'ah 62: 10).

Blessings of the Prayer

Keep in mind this comprehensive meaning of 'Ibadah and see how the Prayer helps us realize the qualities which are necessary to live in such 'Ibadah, what blessings it confers upon us.

Constant Reminder

It is necessary, first, for us to be constantly aware that we are servants of God, that every moment of our lives must be dedicated to adoring and obeying Him.

To cultivate and keep alive this awareness is not an easy task, because there is a Satan within you whose voice constantly tells you : 'Follow me and great benefits await you'. Similarly, there are multitudes of Satans outside you who, in various guises, keep on telling you: 'Follow us, otherwise you will be in trouble. The spell cast by these Satans and their urgings cannot be overcome unless you are reminded continually that you are slaves to none but God.

This is what the Prayer does. When you get up in the morning, the Prayer reminds you of this even before you start your day. When you are busy in your work during the day, it again reminds you of this fact three times. And when you are about to go to bed, you are reminded once again. This is the first blessing of the Prayer. And this is why the Prayer is described as 'Remembrance' in the Qur'an [al-Ankabut 29: 45]. Its true meaning and purpose lie in remembering God.

Sense of Duty

Second, since at every step in your lives you should obey God, it is imperative that you know what is your duty and you cultivate the habit of performing it promptly. If you do not even know what your duty is, how can you ever please God and obey His orders? And, one who understands his duty but, despite his knowledge, due to indiscipline, does not care to perform it, can never be expected to remain prepared and willing to come forward and obey God, every hour or every day, as he must.

Those who have served in the army or police know how they were made to understand and carry out their duties. A bugle is blown several times during the day and night and parades are held at short notice. The purpose of this is to train people to respond and carry out orders. This routine also quickly distinguishes those who are incapable or too lazy to do so. In like manner, the Prayer summons you five times a day. On hearing it, Allah's soldiers must quickly gather from all sides and prove that they are prepared to obey His call. Any Muslims who do not respond when they hear the Adhan show that either they do not understand the importance and meaning of their duty to God or, if they do understand it, they are so useless that they are unfit to remain in the army of Allah.

It was for this very reason that the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, said that he felt like going and setting fire to the houses of those who did not stir after hearing the Adhan (*Bukhari, Muslim*). And this is why, in one Hadith, performance of the Prayer is described as a mark distinguishing Islam from Kufr (*Muslim*).

During the times of the Prophet and his Companions nobody was considered a Muslim unless he joined the congregational Prayer---so much so that even the hypocrites felt compelled to come. They were rebuked not for abandoning the Prayer, but for the half-hearted way in which they used to perform it: 'And when they stand up to pray, they stand up reluctantly, only to be seen and praised by men, and not remembering God but a little' (al-Nisa 4: 42).

You can hardly be considered true Muslims, this shows, if you do not perform the Prayers. For Islam is not a mere matter of doctrinal faith; it is a way of life to be lived in practice. Islam means surrendering to God and fighting against Kufr and evil every minute lives. Its essential message is: always remain prepared to obey God at a moment's notice.

The Prayer, five times a day, tests again and again whether you are so prepared. Those who claim to be Muslims are tested to see whether they can put their claim into practice. If they cannot, their faith is of little value to Islam. For only they find the Prayer hard and unwelcome whose hearts are devoid of reverence to God and who are not ready to live in submission to Him. 'And it [the Prayer], indeed, is hard save for the humble who know they shall meet their Lord' (al-Baqarah 2: 45). That they find the Prayer too difficult to perform is itself proof enough that they have no faith in God, no certainty about meeting Him, and are unwilling or unprepared to serve and obey him.

The sense of duty to God and being ever-prepared to obey Him is the second blessing that the Prayer confers upon you.

God-consciousness

Third, consciousness of God---being in His presence, His love and His fear, strength to avoid whatever may displease Him---needs to be kept alive constantly in our hearts. You cannot practice Islam unless you believe that God is seeing you all the time and everywhere, that God sees you even in darkness, and that God is with you even when you are alone. It is possible to hide from the world but not from God, to escape from the punishments of the world, but not from His punishments. It is this awareness, this feeling, this belief, which restrains man from disobeying God and which motivates him to observe all the limits Allah has laid down for his life. Without this awareness you cannot live like a true Muslim lives. Allah has enjoined upon you praying five times a day precisely to help strengthen this awareness in the hearts of the faithful. He has Himself thus described this blessing: 'Surely the Prayer restrains from all that is shameful and wrong' (al-Ankabut 29: 45).

This awareness becomes deeply embedded in you through the Prayer. For instance, you may perform the Prayer only when you are clean and have done the ablution (*wudu*). But who is to know if you have not washed, or if your clothes are unclean, or if you are just pretending to have done *wudu*? No one. But you never do such a thing because you are sure that your actions will not be hidden from God. Similarly, no one will know if you do not in fact recite at all those parts of the Prayer which are supposed to be said in a low voice. But you do not 'cheat' in this way. Why? Because you believe that God hears everything; He is closer to you than your jugular vein. And, you perform the Prayer even when you are alone---although there would be nobody to know that you had not performed it---because you fully realize that it is impossible to hide any crime from Him.

That is how the Prayer evokes and sustains in the heart of man fear of God and the belief that he lives in His presence. How can you worship and serve God and remain loyal to Him throughout the twenty-four hours of the day and night unless this fear and this awareness are revived continuously in your hearts? Devoid of this feeling, how can you embrace goodness and avoid evil in your daily lives for the sake of God alone?

Making you ever-conscious of God is the third blessing of the Prayer.

Knowledge of God's Law

Fourth, to worship God you must know what His law is; without knowing it you clearly cannot follow it. Prayer is the instrument through which this knowledge is fostered. The parts of the Qur'an that are recited in the Prayer are intended to teach you the law of God. The Friday congregation and the sermon (*Khutubah*) are also designed to provide you with opportunities to learn Islamic teachings. It is your own fault if you do not take the trouble to find out the meaning of what you are reading in the Prayer. It is no use complaining that you do not understand if you have not bothered to try. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that Friday sermons are delivered in a manner which does little to impart the knowledge of Islam.

Collective Life

It is necessary, *fifth*, that no Muslim should be left alone and on his own in the tumult of life, while worshipping God. Muslims should come together to form strong communities to help each other in their life mission: serving God, obeying Him, observing His law and promulgating it in the world.

Those who are faithful to God and those who reject Him are always arrayed against each other; the struggle between 'surrender' and 'rebellion' is never ending. The rebels break the laws of God and enforce in their place satanic laws. Individually, Muslims cannot effectively resist this process, and it is, therefore, necessary for the true servants of God to join forces. The Prayer is central to the establishment of this collective strength. Congregational Prayer five times a day, the Friday congregation, the congregation of two 'Id festivals---all these together make you like a strong wall and create in you that singleness of purpose, cohesiveness and real unity, which are necessary to make you helpers of each other in the cause of Allah in your day-to-day lives. That the Prayer generates and consolidates the social cohesiveness in the Ummah is its *fifth* blessing.

Brothers in Islam! The Prayer prepares us for 'Ibadah, for serving and obeying God. Even if you do not understand the full purport of the words you recite, it helps keep alive in your hearts the fear of God and the awareness that He is with you everywhere and He is watching over you; it helps remind you, too, that one day you, along with all mankind, will have to appear before God to give an account of your lives. The Prayer keeps ever-fresh the consciousness that you are the slaves of God, and of God only, and that is only to God that obedience and worship are due.

It goes without saying that this faith is all the deeper when you fully appreciate the meaning of the words you are reciting in the Prayer. Then, the power of Prayer is capable of reshaping your entire lives---in thoughts, in words and in deeds.

It is, therefore, important to know the meaning of what you say in your Prayers.

What we Say In the Prayer

Adhan and its Effects

First take the Adhan, by which you are summoned five times a day in the following words:

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest.

Ashhadu an la ilaha illa 'llah

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah.

Ashhadu anna Muhammadu 'r-rasulu 'llah

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

Hayya 'ala 's-salah

Come to the Prayer.

Hayya 'ala 'l-falah

Come to the well-being.

Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest.

La ilaha illa llah

There is no god but Allah.

How powerful the Call and how beautiful the words! And how they constantly and powerfully remind us of how bogus are the claims to greatness made by other beings. On earth and in the heavens there is only one Being who is worthy of worship. In His worship alone lies our well-being in this world and in the Hereafter. Who can fail to be moved on hearing this voice? How can anyone who has faith in his heart hear so powerful a call without wanting to rush and bow his head before his Master?

Wudu: Ablution

On hearing the call of Adhan you get up, go and wash yourselves. What does this show? It makes you realize that having an audience with the Lord of all the worlds is very different from everything else you do. Unless you are clean, your clothes are clean, you performed *wudu'*, you are not worthy of entering His presence. Then, in the course of *Wudu'*, while washing your limbs, you constantly remember Allah. After finishing it you recite the prayer taught by the Messenger of Allah, blessings and peace be on him. Thus not only your limbs but your hearts are washed clean. Look at the words of this prayer:

*Ashhadu an al ilaha illa 'llagh wahdahu la sharika lah,
wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasuluh*

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah; He alone is God, None is His partner.

I bear witness that Muhammad is God's Slave and Messenger.

Allahumma 'j'alni mina 't-tawwabina wa 'j'alni mina 'l-Mutatahhirin

O God! Make me among those who repent and keep themselves Pure.

Niyya: Intention

After this, you stand up for Salah up for Salah. Your faces are directed towards you utter are:

Allahu akbar

Allah is the Greatest.

Proclaiming His sovereignty over everything, you raise your hands to your ears as if you have renounced the world and whatever is in it. You, then, fold your hands; now you are standing reverently before your Lord. Next you make the following submissions.

Tasbih: Glorification

You glorify and praise Allah thus:

*Subhanaka 'llahumma wa bihamdika wa tabaraka 'smuka wa ta'ala
Jadduka wa la ilala ghayruk*

Glory be to Thee, O God, and all the praise that is Thine. Blessed is Thy Name and exalted is Thy majesty. There is no god but Thee.

Ta'awwudh: Seeking Refuge

You now seek His protection:

A 'udhu bi 'llahi mia 'sh-shaytani 'r-rajim

I seek refuge in God from Satan, the rejected.

Bismillah: In His Name

You then seek His blessing and help by invoking His name:

Bismi 'llahi 'r-Rahmani 'r-Rahim

I begin in the name of God who is Most Merciful, the Mercy-giving.

Hamd: Praise and Thanks

You praise Him, thank Him, and seek from Him the guidance for your lives. This is what we do in Surah al-Fatihah, the opening Surah in the Qur'an:

Al-hamdu li 'llahi Rabbi 'l-amin

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.

Ar-Rahmani 'r-Rahim

The Most-merciful, the Mercy-giving.

Maliki yawmi 'd-din

Master of Day of Judgment.

Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'in

Thee alone do we worship and from Thee alone we seek help.

Ihdina's-sirata 'l-mustaqim

Direct us on the straight path.

Sirata 'l-ladhina an'amta 'alayhim

The path of those whom Thou hast favoured.

Ghayri 'l-maghdubi 'alayhim wa la 'd-dallin

Not those who earn Thy anger nor those who go astray.

Amin!

O God! Let it be so. O Lord! Grant this our prayer.

The Qur'an Reading

Then you recite some parts of the Qur'an, each of which is full of wisdom and beauty. There are instruction, admonitions and lessons as well as directions to guide you on the same straight path for which you have just prayed in Surah

Al-Fatihah. Let us look at the meanings of some of those which you often recite in your Prayers.

Surah al-'Asr (103)

Wa 'l-'asr, inna 'l-insana la fi khusr

By the fleeing time! Surely man is in [a state of] loss.

Illa 'l-ladhina amanu wa 'amilu 's-salihah

Except those who believe and do good works.

Wa tawasaw bi 'l-haqqi wa tawasaw bi 's-sabr

And enjoin upon one another to keep to Truth and enjoin

Upon one another to be steadfast.

This Surah teaches us that the only way for man to be saved from loss, failure and destruction is to attain to faith and do good works. Additionally, the faithful must form a group wherein they strive together and help each other in remaining steadfast in the cause of Truth.

Surah al-Ma'un (107)

Ara'ayata 'l-ladhi yukadhdhibu bi 'd-din

Have you seen him who gives the lie to Judgment.

Fa dhalika 'l-ladhi yadu'u 'l-yatim

That is he who pushes away the orphan.

Wa la yahuddu 'ala ta'ami 'l-miskin

And urges not to feed the needy.

Fa waylul li 'l-musallina 'l-ladhina hum 'an salatikhim sahum,

Alladhina hum yura'una wa yamna'una 'l-ma'un

Woe, them, unto those praying ones who are unmindful of their Prayer, those who want to be seen, and refuse [even] small kindnesses. This Surah teaches us that without faith in the Hereafter, which is the basis of Islam, we can never walk on the path of God and fulfil our duties towards our fellow

human beings. Also, a faith which does not lead to responsible and kindly sharing with others is no real faith.

Surah al-humazah (104)

Waylul li kulli humuzati-ni l-lumazah
 Woe unto every slanderer, fault-finder!
A 'l-ladhi jama'a malan wa 'addadah
 To him who amasses wealth and counts it over
Yahsabu anna malaha akhladah
 Thinking that his wealth will make him live forever!
Kalla la yunbadhanna fi 'l-hutamah
 Nay, but he shall surely be thrown into the Crusher;
Wa ma adraka ma 'l-hutamah
 And what could convey to you what the Crusher is?
Naru 'llahi 'l-muqadata 'l-lati tattali'u 'ala 'l-af'idah
 The kindled fire of God, which roars over the hearts
Innaha alayhim musadatun, fi 'amadin mumaddadah
 Surely, it closes in upon them in endless columns.

This Surah, again, instructs us in important social attitudes. It castigates those who engage in slandering others, spreading false reports. Love of worldly wealth is what leads us to treat others with contempt. But that wealth we will have to leave behind, only to see it again as a fire raging in our hearts.

In short, whichever Surahs or Ayahs of the Qur'an you recite in the Prayer they impart some kind of instruction or guidance and point out to you those commandments of God which you should follow.

Ruku': Bowing Down

After reciting these instructions you say *Allahu akbar* and perform ruku'. Bending down before your Master with your hands resting on your knees, you repeat (either three or five or seven times):

Subhana Rabbiya 'l-'azim
 Glory be to my Lord, the Magnificent
 Then you stand up straight and say:
Sami'a llahu li man hamidah
 Allah listens to him who praises Him

Sujud: Prostration

Then, again saying *Allahu akbar*, you prostrate yourselves with forehead on the ground, and repeatedly utter:

Subhana Rabbiya 'l-a 'la
 Glory to my Lord, the Most High.

At-tahiyat: Salutation.

Then you raise your hands, saying *allahu akbar*, sit reverently and say:

At-tahiyati li 'llahi wa 's-slawatu wa 't-tayyibat
 To God belong all greetings of praise, all prayers, all good deeds.
As-salamu 'alyka ayyuha 'n-nabiyyu wa rahmatu 'llahi wa barakatuh
 Peace be on you, O Prophet, and mercy of God and His blessing.
As-salamu 'alayna wa 'ala 'ibadi 'llahi 's-salihin
 Peace be on us and on all true servants of God.
Ashhadu an la ilaha illa llah wa ashhadu anna
Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasuluh

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger. While giving this testimony you raise your first finger: this symbolizes the renewal of your pledge and commitment to the life of witness that you are required to live. While uttering it you must give special attention and emphasis to it.

Salat `ala `n-nabiy: Blessings Upon the Prophet

After this you call down blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him:

Allahumma salli `ala Muhammadin wa `ala ali muhammadin kama sallayta `ala Ibrahima wa `ala ali Ibrahim, innaka hamidun majid.

Allahumma barik `ala Muhammadin wa `ala ali Muhammadin kama Barakta `ala Ibrahima wa `ala ali Ibrahim, innaka hamidun majid

O God! Have mercy of Muhammad and his people just as Thou blessed Ibrahim and his people. Indeed Thou art adorned with the best qualities and art sublime. O God! Bless Muhammad and his people. Most certainly Thou are adorned with the best qualities and art sublime.

Seeking Protection

The whole Salah is an act of prayer, but towards the end you make a special prayer seeking His protection from all kinds of evils that might afflict you.

Allahumma inna a`udhu bika min `adhabi jahannam, wa a`udhu bika min `adhabi `lqabr, wa a`udhu bika min fitnati `l-masihi `d-dajjal, wa a`udhu bika min fitnati `l-mahya wa `l-mamat, wa a`udhu bika min `l-ma`thimi wa `l-maghrim

God! I seek Your protection from punishment in Hell, and I seek your protection from punishment in the grave, and I seek Your protection from the mischief of al-masihi `d-dajjal, and I seek Your protection from the trials of life and death, and I seek Your protection from sins and from indebtedness.

Salam: Greetings

After reciting the above Du`a', the Prayer is complete. Now you have to return from the audience with your Master. How do you do this? The first thing you do on your return is to turn your heads to the right and to the left and pray for the safety and blessings of all those present and everything in the world:

As-salamu `alaykum wa rahmatu `llah
Peace be on you and the mercy of God.

This symbolizes good tidings that you have brought for the world on your return from the presence before God.

The above is the Salah which you offer at dawn before you start work. At noon you present yourselves again. In the afternoon you offer the same Salah again and repeat it immediately after sunset. Finally, before going to bed, you present yourselves for the last time before your Master.

Du`a' Qunut

The concluding part of this Salah consists of **witr**. In the last rak'ah of the day, which turns all the rak'ahs you have prayed into an odd number, you make an important and comprehensive covenant with your Master. This is called Du `a' qunut. The meaning of qunut is affirmation of humility, subservience and service before God. Listen carefully to the words with which you make your pledge:

Allahumma inna nasta inuka wa nastaghfiruka wa nu'minu bika wa natawakkalu 'alayka wa nuthni 'alayka 'l-khayr kullahu wa nashkuruka wa la nakfuruka wa nakhla'u wa natruku man yafjuruk

O God! We seek help from Thee; we ask Thee for guidance; we seek Thine forgiveness; we have faith in Thee; we put our trust in Thee; we give all good prizes to Thee; we thank Thee, and do not commit ungratefulness; we abandon and leave everyone who disobeys Thee.

Allahumma iyyaka na'budu wa laka nusalli wa nasjudu wa ilayka nas'a wa nahfid, wa narju rahmataka wa nakhsha 'adhabaka inna 'adhabaka bi 'l-kuffari mulhiq

O God! Thee only do we worship. For Thee alone we perform the Prayer and before Thee alone prostrate ourselves. All our endeavours and strivings are directed towards Thee, all our goals are centred on Thee. We hope to receive Thy mercy and fear Thy punishment. Certainly Thy dire punishment will befall only those who are disbelievers.

Character-building

Brothers! The call of the Adhan summons you five times a day to the presence of the Lord of the universe; five times a day you put everything aside to rush to Him; before every Prayer you purify your bodies and souls with wudu'; and you are fully aware of the meaning of the things you are saying during the Prayer. In such circumstances is it not inevitable that the fear of God will arise in your hearts, that you will feel ashamed to break God's commandments, that your sins will weigh heavily on your consciences? How, then, when you return to your work after the Prayer, can you justify telling or giving bribes, paying or levying interest, and committing indecent or illegal acts? And how, after doing any of these things, can you possibly go back to God at the next Prayer and seriously reaffirm your obedience to Him? Seriously say, thirty-six times a day, 'Thee alone we worship, Thee alone we ask for help', and afterwards ask favour of others in worship?

Properly understood and performed, Salah must improve your morals and, where necessary, fundamentally change your lives. This is why Allah emphasizes: 'Surely Prayer restrains [man] from all that is shameful and wrong'. If it does not, the reason lies in you, not in the Prayer. It is not the fault of soap and water that coal is black.

Perhaps one great obstacle to Prayer doing its purifying work is that you may not fully understand or give serious attention to the words you recite in Arabic. A little extra effort in learning by heart these recitations in our own language may bring you rich reward.

3. Blessings of the Congregational Prayer

Brothers in Islam! That the Prayer as such has extraordinary power to make us attain to greater and greater heights of obedience and worship is quite obvious. Consider now how much more enriched it becomes, how greatly its efficacy increases in transforming us, when the Prayer is performed in congregation. Indeed in this one single act of Prayer God has given us His choicest gift.

But, first, recollect what worship is and how the Prayer prepares us for it. Worship means making yourselves slaves of God, living in submission to His will, and remaining always ready to obey Him. The qualities that enable you to attain to this state of worship are all developed by the Prayer. These are: consciousness of being a slave to God; faith in God, in His Messenger and in His Book; belief in the life to come; fear of God; awareness that God knows everything and is always close to you; strength of will and preparedness to obey Him; and knowledge of His commandments.

Private Worship of God

Further reflection will show you that an individual, however perfect he may be, cannot worship God as is His due unless other servants of God join him. You cannot obey all the injunctions of God until all those people with whom you have to live day by day, and with whom you have to deal continually, become your partners in this worship. Man is not alone in this world: his whole life is bound in a

thousand and one relationships with his family members, business associates, friends, neighbours and acquaintances. Worship equally encompasses all these people unite in living by the will of God, all of them can succeed in becoming His faithful servants. But if they are, collectively, bent on disobedience or if they do not support each other in following the commands of God, then will it not be virtually impossible for a lone individual to submit his whole life to the law of God?

Careful reading of the Qur'an shows that God does not desire that simply you, as lone individuals, should become loyal and obediently to Him. This is not enough. You should strive to bring the whole world under God, to spread His word, and implement His laws. Whatever the rule of Satan prevails, you must try to root it out. Let God alone, and no one else, be the Sovereign in man's life.

This enormous duty entrusted by Allah cannot be performed by one Muslim alone; nor can hundreds of thousands of Muslims, if they remain individuals, be effective against the forces of the servants of Satan. You must, therefore, work together, single-mindedly, but not singly, to fulfil your noble mission. This entails not merely that you become united, but that you become one, knit together. Your mutual relations should be established on a harmonious basis, without strife and discord. You should obey your leaders and fully understand the limitation of such obedience: where to obey and where to disobey.

See how the congregational Prayer develops all these necessary qualities.

Assembling on One Call

First, as the Adhan summons you to the Prayer, you put everything aside and go to the mosque. The mobilization of Muslims from all sides on hearing this call and their gathering at one centre creates in them a sense of discipline as is found in an 'army'. The sound of a 'bugle' tells 'soldiers' that their 'commander' is calling them; their immediate thought is to obey the call and assemble at a previously agreed place. And so they do. The army adopts such a system to ingrain in every soldier the habit of obedience, both at individual and groups levels, and to weld them into a cohesive team. Thus if they ever face armed combat it will be as a unit with identical objectives. If soldiers, however good they may be individually at fighting, however well trained and brave, fight with each fighting his own battle, a platoon of fifty soldiers of the enemy can defeat one thousand such brave soldiers by picking them off individually.

For exactly the same reason, you are required to assemble for the Prayer five times a day on hearing the call of the Adan, leaving behind everything. But, the resemblance ends here. Beyond this, you, as Muslims, are the army of God and the duty of this army is much harder and radically different than that of any other army in the world. For other armies, wars are fought on one front at a time, and for selfish ends. But the army of God has to wage perpetual war, and that too, against the forces of Satan, within their selves and in the world at large. Gathering five times a day at the sound of the Divine 'bugle' is a sign of its constant readiness for this continuing battle. In view of the gigantic task they face, this strict discipline should look easy.

Purposeful Assembly

Gathering in the mosque, then, itself yields many benefits: here you meet each other, come to recognize each other, and come to know each other. And what makes you come close to one another? You come together as slaves of God, followers of one Prophet, believers in one Book, with a single objective in life, both inside and outside the mosque. Such acquaintance, such unity, and such attachment automatically leaven and quicken in you the feeling that you are all one community, soldiers of the same army, brothers unto each other. Your interests, your aims, your losses and gains, are the same; and your lives are bound in with one another.

Fellowship

Again, you see and meet each other not like enemies or strangers, but like friends and brothers. As such, when you notice that one brother is in ragged clothes, another seems unhappy, another does not have enough to eat, while others are disabled, crippled or blind, then inevitably compassion is aroused

in your hearts. Those of you who are well-off will help the poor and needy; the afflicted will find the courage to approach the rich; you will visit those who, for some reason, cannot get to the mosque; and if one of our brothers dies you will also join in his funeral prayer and share the grief of the bereaved family. All these things strengthen the spirit of mutual affection and make you mutual helpers.

The Sacred Purpose

Think further: you have gathered at a sacred place for a sacred purpose. This is not an assembly of thieves, drunkards, gamblers, or exploiters, but a gathering of slaves of Allah's house. In such a setting, a sincere person would, automatically, feel ashamed of his sins. But his shame would be overwhelming. And he would particularly want to repent if any of those who ever affected by his sin or who witnessed it were gathered with him. Indeed, the blessings of congregational Prayer will multiply manifold if you also know how to counsel each other and help each other in correcting yourselves, with sympathy, love and understanding. Individual deficiencies will then easily be removed and the whole community will quickly grow together in virtue and piety.

Brotherhood

This is how merely getting together to pray benefits you, But there are many more blessings in the way the congregational Prayers are performed.

You stand in a row shoulder to shoulder with each other. No one is higher or lower in status than his neighbour. In the Divine court, in the presence of

God, you all belong to one class, you all have the same status. Nobody feels polluted if a fellow-worshipper's hand or body touches him. We are all equally pure because we are all human beings. We are all slaves of one God and believers in one Din.

All ethnic and linguistic prejudices are also destroyed. Although there are differences among Muslims of family, tribe and country---someone is Sayyid, someone is Pathan, someone is Rajput, someone is Jat, someone belongs to one country and someone to another, some speak one language and some another---yet all stand in one row, worshipping the One God. This signifies that you all are one people, belong to one nation. Divisions on family, tribal or national lines have no basis whatever. What binds you together is that you all serve and worship God. When you are one in the Prayer, why should you be divided about other things?

Uniformity in Movements

Again, when you stand shoulder to shoulder with each other, you look like an army presenting itself for service before its monarch. By standing in a line and by making movements in unison, a remarkable spirit of unity develops in your minds. You are made to do this practice, to become one in the service of God, in such a manner that all of you raise your hands together and move your feet together as if you are not ten, twenty, one hundred or one thousand people, but have become one person.

Uniformity in Prayers

What do you do after thus standing together in one line? With one voice you submit to your Master:

Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'in

Thee alone do we worship; Thee alone do we ask for help.

Ihdina 's-srata 'l-mustaqim

Guide us to the straight path.

Also:

Rabbana laka 'l-hamd

Our God! All praise is for Thee only.

And:

As-salamu 'alayna wa 'ala 'ibadi 'lilahi 's-salihin

Peace be on us and on all true servants of Gods.

Then, as you finish the Prayers, you pray thus for peace, mercy and grace upon each other:

As-salamu 'alaykum wa rahmatu 'allah

Peace be on you all, and the mercy of God.

This means that all of us wish each other well. Everyone unites to pray to one Master for the well being of all. None of us asks for everything for himself only. Everybody's wish is that God's benevolence be bestowed on all, that all be granted the ability to walk on the one straight path and that all share together the blessings of God. In this way the Prayer unites your hearts, creates harmony in your thoughts and develops among you a relationship of well-wishing towards each other.

Leadership

Now remember that we never offer the congregational Prayer without an Imam who leads the congregation. Even when two men pray together, one of them will be Imam and the other follower. Once the congregation (Jama 'ah) has been formed, it is strictly prohibited to perform the Prayer outside it. If you do, your Prayer will be invalid. Latecomers must join the congregation behind the same Imam.

All these teachings are not meant for the Prayer only. In fact, they impart a very important lesson: if you want to live as Muslims, live as you pray: united and organized, to secede from it means that your lives have ceased to be the lives of Muslims.

Nature and Qualities of Leadership

A Muslim's entire life is a life of prayer; the entire earth, for him, is a 'mosque' where only one God is to be worshipped. The relation between the Imam and his followers within the congregational Prayer has, therefore, been designed to teach us important lessons about leadership: how you should relate to your leaders outside the mosque, what their duties and their rights are; how you should obey them, and in what matters; what you should do if they make mistakes; to what extent you are obliged to follow them when they go wrong; on what occasions you have the right and duty to point out their errors; when you can demand that they correct their mistakes; and, at what juncture you can remove them from leadership. How to fashion your organized and communal living is something you can learn about five times a day in any small mosque.

Consider only a few obvious and important principles regarding an Imam and the guidance they provide us in our macro-life.

Piety and Virtue

One: An Imam must be the best in character, piety and righteousness. He must have greater knowledge of Islam, especially of the Qur'an, than others. He should be of mature years. The Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, has also explained other. This tells you, too, which attributes you should keep in view when choosing a leader for a community or state.

Majority Representation

Two: An Imam should be liked and respected by the majority of the congregation; none should lead the Prayer against their wishes. Here again is an important principle for electing a leader.

Sympathy and Compassion

Three: An Imam should lead the congregation in Prayer in such a way that no trouble is caused even to the old in the congregation. He should not make lengthy recitations nor make long **ruku'** and **sujud**, which may suit only the young, strong and healthy and those with plenty of leisure time. He should take note also of those who are old, sick and weak and those who are busy in their work. The Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, set an example of such kindness and compassion and love: if he heard children crying while he was leading the congregation in Prayer, he used to shorten it so that their mothers, if they were behind him, could leave quickly (*Bukhari, Muslim*).

Vacating Office

Four: If an Imam meets with an accident while leading the Prayer, he must immediately hand over his office to one of the men behind. This means that it is obligatory on a nation's leader too to resign when he feels unable to carry out his functions. In this there is no shame, nor should selfishness prevent him from doing so.

Obedience to Leaders

Five: The actions of an Imam should be strictly followed. To make a move before he moves is strictly prohibited, so much so that, according to one Hadith, Imam does will be raised after death as an ass (*Bukhari, Muslim*). Here citizens of a nation have been given a lesson on how they should obey those who govern them.

Criticizing and Correcting Mistakes

Six: An Imam may make a mistake in Salah. For example, he may rise when he should sit, or sit when he should rise. Such errors must be pointed out to him with the phrase, '*Subhanallah*' (Glory be to Allah). To say *Subhaanallah* when the Imam commits a mistake means: Allah alone is pure, holy and above error; as you are a human being it is not surprising that you have made a mistake, but correct yourself. Thus warned, it is incumbent on the Imam to correct his mistake without any hesitation or discomfort, without any feeling of loss of prestige.

If, after this notice of correction, the Imam feels confident that what he did was right he can continue as he thinks fit, and in such an eventuality the duty of the congregation is to follow him in spite of knowing that he is wrong. After finishing the Salah the followers have the right to try to convince the Imam of his mistake and to demand from him that he conduct the Salah afresh.

No Obedience in Sin

Seven: This procedure is limited to situations which involve minor mistakes. But if the Imam, contrary to the Prophet's Sunnah, changes the method of the Salah, or knowingly recites the Qur'an incorrectly in the Salah, or, while conducting it, indulges in act of Kufr or Shirk, or commits a clear sin, it is incumbent on the member of the *jama'ah* immediately to break away from the congregation and discontinue the Salah.

In all the above seven points concerning the congregational Prayer, striking parallels can be drawn between the relationship of an Imam and his followers and a head of state and the citizens of that state.

4.Has the Prayer Lost its Power?

Brothers in Islam! Undoubtedly you often ask yourselves: Why is it that the Prayer, good and beneficial as it is, seems to make no difference to our lives? Why does it neither improve our morals, nor transform us into a force dedicated to Allah? Why do we continue to live disgraced and subjugated?

The usual answer will be that you are not offering the Prayer regularly or in the manner prescribed by Allah and the Messenger. Such an answer may not satisfy you. I shall, therefore, try to explain the

matter in some detail.

Parable of the Clock

Look at the clock fixed to the wall: there are lots of small parts in it, joined to each other. When you wind it, all the parts start working and, as these parts move, the results appear on the clock face outside it which you observe. Both hands move to denote each second and each minute. The purpose of the clock is to indicate correct time. All those parts which are necessary for this purpose have been made so that each of them moves as required. Only when all the parts have been assembled correctly and the clock wound up properly will it begin fulfilling the purpose for which it is made.

If you do not wind it, it will not show the time. If you wind it but not according to the prescribed method, it will stop or, even if it works, it will not give the correct time. If you remove some of the parts and then wind it, nothing will happen. If you replace some of the parts with those of a sewing machine and then wind it, it will neither indicate the time nor sew the cloth. If you keep all the parts inside the case but disconnect them, then no part will move even after winding it up. The presence of all the parts will not serve the purpose for which the clock is made because you will have disrupted their arrangement as well as their connection.

In all these situations, both the existence of the clock and the act of winding it become useless, although an observer from a distance cannot say that it is not a clock or that you are not winding it. He will surely consider that it is a clock and will expect it to be useful as a clock. Similarly, when from a distance he observes you winding it, he will take it as a genuine effort on your part to do the job, hoping to notice the result which comes from winding the clock. But how can this expectation be fulfilled when what looks like a clock from a distance has in reality lost its 'existence'?

Aim of Muslim Ummah

Imagine Islam like this clock. Just as the purpose of the clock is to indicate the correct time, so the aim of Islam is that you should live in this world as the vicegerents of God, as witnesses of God unto mankind and as standard-bearers of truth. You must yourselves follow the commandments of God and bring all other people under Him:

You are indeed the best community brought forth for mankind: you enjoin the doing of right and forbid the doing of wrong, and you believe in God

(Al 'Imran 3: 110).

And thus We have made you a just community, that you might be witnesses unto mankind (al-Baqarah 2: 143).

God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you to accede to power on earth (al-Nur 24: 55).

And fight them, until there is no rebellion [against God], and all submission is to God alone (al-Anfal 8: 39).

Wholeness of Islamic Teachings

To fulfil this purpose, various parts as were required, like those of the clock, have been brought together in Islam. Beliefs and principles of morality; rules for day-to-day conduct; the rights of God, of His slaves, of one's own self, of everything in the world which you encounter; rules for earning and spending money; laws of war and peace; principals of government and limits of obedience to it---all these are parts of Islam. As in a clock, they are linked to each other in such a way that as soon as the winding is done, every part starts moving and, with the movement of all these parts, the desired result is obtained. Rule of God's law in the world, domination of Islam, start manifesting just as, with the movement of the parts of the clock in front of you, the time appears on its face.

In order to fasten together different parts of the clock, screws and small pieces of metal have been used.

Similarly, to join all the parts of Islam together, there is an arrangement called the **Jama 'ah** or organization. Muslims should organize themselves, and have leaders equipped with proper knowledge and endowed with **taqwa**; the brains should help them and the limbs should obey them, as they all strive to live under God.

When all the parts have been brought together and properly assembled, regular winding is necessary to set them in motion and to continue their movement: **Salah** which is offered five times a day provides that winding, creating the energy which sets an Islamic life in motion. Cleaning this clock is also necessary: **fasting** observed for thirty days a year cleans hearts and morals. Lubrication, too, is required: **Zakah** is like the oil which is applied to its parts once a year. Then it is also necessary to overhaul it periodically: **Hajj** is that overhauling which should be performed at least once in a lifetime. And the more often it is done, the better.

Abusing the Clock

The processes of winding, cleaning, lubricating and overhauling are of use only when all the parts are present in the frame, when they are linked in the order designed by the clock-maker, and when all are so trained that immediately on winding they start moving and begin showing results.

Alas, today the situation has become very different. For a start, the very *Jama 'ah*, the organizational structure, which was supposed to link the parts of the clock together has ceased to exist. The result is that all the fittings have come apart, each has gone its own way. Everybody does whatever takes his fancy. There is nobody to question anything. Everyone is autonomous. If someone wants to follow the Islamic code, he can; if he does not want to, he need not.

Since even this so-called freedom has not satisfied you, you have pulled out many parts of the clock and in their place put anything and everything: a spare part from a sewing machine, perhaps, or from a factory or from the engine of a car. You call yourselves Muslims, yet you render loyal service to Kufr, yet you take interest, you insure your lives, you file false law suits, your daughters, sisters and wives are forsaking Islamic manners and your children are being given secular materialistic educations. Some have become disciples of Gandhi; others are following Lenin. Which un-Islamic gadget is there that you have not fixed into the frame of the clock of Islam?

Despite this, you expect the clock to work when you wind it! And you suppose that cleaning, lubricating and overhauling it will also be of use. With a little reflection, however, you should see that in the condition to which you have reduced the clock you can wind it, lubricate it, and overhaul it, for the whole of your lives without any effect. Nothing will happen until you remove the parts brought in from other applicances, replace them with the original parts, and restore the original priorities. Then, and only then, will the winding and so forth produce any results.

Why Worship Rites Are Ineffective

This state of affairs is the real reason why your Salah, Sawm, Zakah and Hajj make no impact upon your lives. First, there are so few among you who perform these acts of worship. Due to the dissolution of Islamic *Jama 'ah* everybody has become autonomous. Whether you fulfil your obligations or not, there is nobody to care. Nor do those who do apparently carry out their obligations do so in a proper manner. They are not constant in attending the congregational Prayer. People are selected to lead the Prayers in the mosque simply because they are fit for no other work: people who exist on the free bread doled out to mosques, who are uneducated, who lack moral caliber. How can congregations led by them turn you into the leaders of mankind? Similar is the situation regarding your Fasting, Almsgiving and Pilgrimages.

Despite all these facts, you may argue, there are nonetheless many Muslims who do discharge their religious duties conscientiously. Why does that make no difference? But, as I have said, when the parts

of the clock have become unhinged and numerous foreign bodies have been inserted in it, it makes no difference if you wind it or not, clean it or not, lubricate it or not. From a distance it does look like a clock. An outside observer may say: This is Islam and you are Muslims. But what he cannot see is how badly its inside machinery has been tampered with.

Our Deplorable Condition

Brothers! You understand why it is so that you pray and fast and yet remain trampled under the heel of cruel tyrants. But, should I tell you something even more distressing? Although most of you no doubt regret this situation but, I would say, 999 people out of 1000 are not prepared to change their situation. They have no urge in their hearts to assemble the clock of Islam again properly. They are afraid that any such reconstruction would mean that their own favourite imported parts would be thrown out, and this they are not prepared to accept. They are afraid that any tightening of various parts would mean that they will have to discipline themselves, and this they are not willing to undertake.

Instead, they prefer that the clock remains a piece of decoration on the wall for people to be shown and told how wonderful Islam is, what miracles it can perform. Those who are supposed to love this clock more than others would like to wind it repeatedly and zealously and to clean it most laboriously; but they want to do nothing to reset its part properly or tighten them, nor will they seek to get rid of the extraneous parts.

I wish I could endorse your attitudes and behaviour, but I cannot say anything which I believe is wrong. I assure you that if, in addition to praying five times a day, you were to offer *Tahajjud* (predawn), *Ishraq* (post-sun rise) and *Chasht* (mid-morning) Prayers, read the Qur'an for hours every day, and observe, over and above Ramadan, extra fasts for five and a half months in the remaining eleven months, you would still achieve nothing. What is needed is to restore the original parts to the clock and fix them firmly. Then even the little necessary winding will make it work smoothly; and the minimal amount of required cleaning and lubrication will be needed.

Wa ma 'alayna illa 'l-balagh

There is no responsibility on us except conveying the truth.

5. Meaning and Blessings Of the Fasting

Brothers in Islam! The second act of worship that Allah enjoins upon you is Sawm or the Fasting. It means abstaining from dawn to sunset from eating, drinking and sex. Like the Prayer, this act of worship has been part of the Shari'ahs given by all the Prophets. Their followers fasted as we do. However, the rules, the number of days, and the periods prescribed for fasting have varied from one Shari'ah to another. Today, although fasting remains a part of most religions in some form by accretions of their own.

O Believers! Fasting is ordained for you, even as it ordained for those before you (al-Baqarah 2: 183).

Why has this particular act of worship been practiced in all eras?

Life of Worship

Islam aims to transform the whole life of man into a life of worship. He is born a slave; and to serve his Creator is his very nature. Not for a single moment should he live without worshipping, that is surrendering to Him in thoughts and deeds. He must remain conscious of what he ought to do to earn the pleasure of God and what he ought to avoid. He should, then, walk on the path leading to Allah's pleasure, eschew that leading to His displeasure just as he would avoid the embers of a fire. Only when our entire lives have become modeled on this pattern can we be considered to have worshipped our Master as is His due and as having fulfilled the purport of 'I have not created jinn and men except to

worship Me'.

Rituals Lead to a Life of Worship

The real purpose of ritual acts of worship---Salah, Zakah, sawn and Hajj---is to help us come to that life of total worship. Never think that you can acquit yourselves of what you owe to Allah only if you bow and prostrate yourselves five times a day, suffer hunger and thirst from dawn to sunset for thirty days in Ramadan and, if wealthy, give the Alms and perform the Pilgrimage once in a lifetime. Doing all this does not release you from bondage to Him, nor of the underlying purposes of enjoining these rituals upon you is to develop you so that you can transform your whole lives into the 'Ibadah of God'.

How does the Fasting prepare us for this lifelong act of worship?

Exclusively Private Worship

All acts of worship include some outward physical movement, but not the Fasting. In the Prayer you stand, sit, bow down and prostrate yourselves; all these acts were visible to everybody. In Hajj you undertake a long journey and travel with thousands of people. Zakah, too, is known to at least two persons, the giver and the receiver. None of these other people will come to know about it.

But the Fasting is a form of 'Ibadah which is entirely private. The All-knowing God alone knows that His servant is fasting. You are required to take food before dawn (*Suhur*) and abstain from eating and drinking anything till the time to break the Fast (*Iftar*). But, if you secretly eat and drink in between, nobody except God will know about it.

Sure Sign of Faith

The private nature of the Fasting ensures that you have strong faith in God as the One who knows everything. Only if your faith is true and strong, you will not dream of eating or drinking secretly: even in the hottest summer, when your throats dry up with thirst, you will not drink a drop of water; even when you feel faint with hunger, when life itself seems to ebbing, you will not eat anything. To do all this, see what firm conviction must you have in that nothing whatsoever can ever be concealed from your God! How strong must be His fear in your hearts. You will keep your Fast for about 360 hours for one full month only because of your profound belief in the reward and punishment of the Hereafter. Had you the slightest doubt in that you have to meet your Maker, you would not complete such a fast. With doubts in hearts, no such resolves can be fulfilled.

Month-long Training

In this way does Allah put to the test a Muslim's faith for a full month every year. To the extent you emerge successful from this trial, your faith becomes firmer and deeper. The Fasting is both a trial and a training. If you deposit anything on trust with somebody, you are, as it were, testing his integrity. If he does not abuse your trust, he not only passes his test, but, at the same time, also develops greater strength to bear the burden of greater trusts in future. Similarly, Allah puts your faith to severe test continuously for one month, many long hours a day. If you emerge triumphant from this test, more strength develops in you to refrain from other sins. This is what the Qur'an says:

O believers! Fasting is ordained for you, even as it was ordained for those before you, that you might attain to God-consciousness (al-Baqarah 2: 183).

Practicing Obedience

The Fasting has another characteristic. It makes us obey the injunctions of the Shari'ah with sustained intensity for prolonged period of time. Salah lasts only a few minutes at a time. Zakah is paid only once a year. Although the time spent on Hajj is long, it may come only once in a lifetime, and for many not at all. In the school of the Fasting, on the other hand, you are trained to obey the Shari'ah of the

Prophet Muhammad, blessing and peace be on him, for one full month, every year, day and night, You have to get up early before dawn for *Suhur*, stop all eating and drinking precisely at a certain time, do certain activities and abstain from certain activities during the day, break your Fast (*Iftar*) in the evening at exactly a certain time. Then, for a few moments only you relax, before you hurry for long late evening prayers (*Tarawih*).

Every year, for one full month from dawn to sunset and from sunset to dawn, you, like a soldier in an army, continuously live a disciplined life, following certain rules all the time. You are then sent back to continue your normal duties for eleven months so that the training you have received for one month may be reflected in your conduct, and if any deficiency is found it may be made up the next year.

Communal Fasting

Training of such profound nature cannot be imparted to each individual separately. Like how an army is trained, everyone has to act at the same time at the sound of the bugle so that they may develop the team spirit, learn to act in unison, and assist each other in their task of development. Whatever one person lacks may be made up by another, whatever deficiency remains in him may be compensated by yet another.

The month of Ramadan is earmarked for all Muslims to fast together, to ensure similar results. This measure turns individuals 'Ibadah into collective 'Ibadah. Just as the number one, when multiplied by thousands, becomes a formidable number, so the moral and spiritual benefits accruing from the Fasting by one person alone are increased a million fold if a million people fast together.

The month of Ramadan suffuses the whole environment with a spirit of righteousness, virtue and piety. As flowers blossom in spring, so does *taqwa* in Ramadan. Everyone tries extra hard to avoid sin and, if they lapse, they know they can count on the help of their many other brothers who are fasting with them. The desire automatically arises in every heart to do good works, to feed the poor, to clothe the naked, to help those in distress, to participate in any good work being done anywhere, and to prevent evil. Just as plants have their season of flowering, so Ramadan is the time of year for the growth and flourishing of good and righteousness.

For this reason the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, said:

Every good deed of a man is granted manifold increase, ten to seven hundred times. But says Allah: Fasting is an exception; it is exclusively for Me, and I reward for it as much as I wish (*Bukhari, Muslim*).

All good deeds grow, this shows, in proportion to both the intention of the doer as well as their results, but that there is a limit to their growth. The Fasting, however, has no such limit. In Ramadan, in the season for the flourishing of good and piety, not one but millions of people jointly water this garden of virtue. The more you sincerely perform good deeds in this month and the greater you avail yourselves of its blessings, the more will you radiate their benefits to our other brothers. The more you sustain the impact of the Fasting on your life during the subsequent eleven months, the more will our garden flourish, and flourish without limit. Should its growth become inhibited, the fault must lie with you.

Where Are the Results?

You are now probably saying to yourselves: We do observe the Fasting and perform the Prayers but the promised results are nowhere to be seen. One reason for this situation I have explained earlier. After snapping the vital links between various parts of Islam and injecting into it many new things, you cannot expect the same results as from the Whole. A second reason is that the way you look at the 'Ibadah has changed. You believe that mere abstention from food and drink, from morning till evening, amounts to 'Ibadah; once you do all these things you have worshipped Allah. Ninety-nine per cent or even more among you are unmindful of the real spirit of 'Ibadah which should permeate all your actions. That is why the acts of 'Ibadah do not produce their full and understanding.

6. True Spirit of the Fasting

Spirit and Form

Brothers in Islam! Essentially every work which we do has two components. The first is its purpose and spirit; the second, the particular form which is chosen to achieve that purpose. Take the case of food. Your main purpose in eating is to stay alive and maintain your strength. The method of achieving this object is that you take a piece of food, put it in your mouth, chew it and swallow it. This method is adopted since it is the most effective and appropriate one to achieve your purpose. But everyone knows that the main thing is the purpose for which food is taken and not the form the act of eating takes.

What would you say if someone tried to eat a piece of sawdust or cinder or mud? You would say that he was mad or ill. Why? Because he clearly would not have understood the real purpose of eating and would have erroneously believed that chewing and swallowing constituted eating. Likewise, you would also call someone mad who thrust his fingers down his throat to vomit up the food he had just eaten and then complained that the benefits said to accrue from taking food were not being realized. Rather, on the contrary, he was daily getting thinner. This person blames food for a situation that is due to his own stupidity. Although outward actions are certainly necessary, because without them the bread cannot reach the stomach, the purpose of eating cannot be achieved by merely fulfilling these outward actions.

The Outward Replaces the Real

Perhaps you can now understand why our 'Ibadah has become ineffectual and empty. The greatest mistake of all is to take the acts of the Prayer and Fasting and their outward shape as the real 'Ibadah. If you do so, you are just like the person who thinks that merely performing four acts---taking a piece of good, putting it in the mouth, chewing it, and swallowing it---make up the process of eating. Such a person imagines that whoever does these four things has eaten the food. He, then, expects that he should receive the benefits of eating irrespective of whether he pushed down into his stomach mud and stone, or vomited up the bread soon after eating it.

Otherwise, how can you explain, that a man who is fasting, and is thus engaged in the 'Ibadah of God from morning till evening, in the midst of that 'Ibadah, tells a lie or slanders someone? Why does he quarrel on the slightest pretext and abuse those he is quarreling with? How dare he encroach on other people's rights? Why does he make money illegally and give money to others illicitly? And how can he claim, having done all these things that he has still performed the 'Ibadah of Allah? Does this not resemble the actions of that person who eats cinders and mud and thinks that by merely completing the four requirements of eating he has actually done the job of eating?

How, too, can we claim to have worshipped Allah for many long hours throughout Ramadan when the impact of this whole exercise in spiritual and moral upliftment vanishes on the first day of the next month? During the 'Id days we do all that Hindus do in their festivals, so much so that in some places we even turn to adultery, drinking and gambling. And I have seen some degenerates who fast during the day and drink alcohol and commit adultery at night. Most Muslims, thank God, have not fallen so low. But how many of us still retain any trace of piety and virtue by the second day of 'Id?

Wrong View of Worship

The reason most of you behave as you do is that the very meaning and purpose of 'Ibadah has become distorted in your minds. You think that mere abstention from eating and drinking throughout the day is the Fasting. You, therefore, are very particular to observe the minutest details about it. You fear God to the extent that you avoid even the slightest violation of these rules; but you do not appreciate that merely being hungry and thirsty is not the purpose but only the form.

This form has been prescribed to create in you such fear of God and love, such strength of will and character, that, even against your desire, you avoid seemingly profitable things which in fact displease Allah and do those things which possibly entail risks and losses but definitely please God. This strength

can be developed only when you understand the purpose of the Fasting and desire to put to use the training you have undergone of curbing your physical desires for the fear and love of God only.

But what happens as soon as Ramadan is over? You throw to the winds all that you gain from the Fasting, just as a man who has eaten food vomits it up by thrusting his fingers down his throat. Just as physical strength cannot be obtained from bread until it is digested, transformed into blood, which spreads through every vein, so spiritual strength cannot be obtained from the Fasting until the person who keeps fast is conscious of its purpose and allows it to permeate his heart and mind and dominate his thoughts, motives and deeds.

Fasting as a Way of Piety

This is why Allah, after ordaining the Fasting, has said that Fasting is made obligatory on you, 'so that you may attain to God-consciousness', *la'allakum tattaqun*.

Note that there is no guarantee that you will definitely become God-conscious and righteous. Only someone who recognizes the purpose of the Fasting and strives to achieve it will receive its blessings; someone who does not, cannot hope to gain anything from it.

Conditions of True Fasting

The Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, has in various ways pointed out the real spirit of fasting and has explained that to go hungry and thirsty while ignoring the spirit carries no value in the sight of God.

Abstention From Falsehood

Once, he said:

If one does not give up speaking falsehood and acting by it, God does not require him to give up eating and drinking (*Bukhari*).

On another occasion, he said:

Many are the people who fast but who gain nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst; and many are those who stand praying all night but gain nothing except sleeplessness (*Darimi*).

The lessons are clear and unequivocal: merely being hungry and thirsty is not by itself worship, but a means for performing real worship. Real worship means desisting from violating the law of God out of this fear and this love of God, pursuing activities that please Him, and refraining from the indiscriminate satisfaction of physical desires. If you fast while ignoring this essence of the Fasting, you are simply causing unnecessary inconvenience to you stomachs.

Faith and Self-scrutiny

The Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, draws attention to another aim of fasting thus:

Whoever observes the Fast, believing and counting, has all his past sins forgiven (*Bukhari, Muslim*). Believing means that faith in God should remain alive in the consciousness of a Muslim. Counting means that you should seek only Allah's pleasure, constantly watching over your thoughts and actions to make sure you are doing nothing contrary to His pleasure, and trusting and expecting the rewards promised by Allah and the Messenger. Observing these two principles bring the rich reward of all your past sins being forgiven. The reason is obvious: even if you were once disobedient, you will have now turned, fully repentant, to your Master---and 'a penitent is like one who has, as it were, never committed a sin at all', as said the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him (*Ibn Majah*).

Shield Against Sins

On another occasion, the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, said:

The Fast is like a shield [for protection from Satan's attack]. Therefore, when one observes the Fast he should [use this shield and] abstain from quarrelling. If anybody abuses him or quarrels with him, he should simply say, Brother, I am fasting [do not expect me to indulge in similar conduct] (*Bukhari, Muslim*).

Hunger for Goodness

The Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, once directed that a man, while fasting, ought to do more good works than usual and ardently desire to perform acts of kindness. Compassion and sympathy for his brothers should intensify in his heart because, being himself in the throes of hunger and thirst, he will all the more be able to realize the misery of other servants of God who are destitute.

In Ramadan, whoever provides food to a person who is fasting to break that Fast will earn forgiveness for his sins, deliverance from the Fire and as much reward as the one who is fasting, without any reduction in the recompense of the latter (*Baihaqi*). Abdullah Ibn 'Abbas tells that Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, used to become unusually kind and generous during Ramadan. No beggar in that period went empty-handed from his door, and as many slaves as possible were set free (*Baihaqi*).

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