

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Preparing Properly for Ramadan:

Reflection on Prayer/Salat

Asalaamu aleikum. Because we are in the month of Rajab, approaching Sha'bān and the month of Ramadan, I think we need to take more time to reflect on prayer. So much of our time in these months should be involved with extra prayers, especially during Rajab. I hope some of you are doing the extra prayers every day, so you have at least sixty rak'as , thirty prayers. We are encouraged also to fast during these months: the first three days, the middle three days, and the last three days of Sha'bān, and extra prayer days and time for contemplation and preparation. We are cleaning the house, making ready for our friend to arrive in a few months. *Inshā'a-LLāh* we are all going to be here to greet that friend, *inshā'a-LLāh*.

We are encouraged to contemplate fasting long before we fast, long before the month of Ramadan. We are encouraged to understand some of the background of these prayers. So let's see what Allah Swt says in the Qur'an on this subject. Allah Swt says in Surah al-Baqarah:

And stand for the *salat* and pay *zakat*, and whatever good you send forward for yourselves you shall find it with Allah. Truly, Allah sees what you do.

Again, on the benefits of prayer:

And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you, and has not placed any difficulty upon you and your *dīn*, and has made you follow the creed of your forefather Ibrahim. And He has named you Muslims from before in earlier scriptures, as well as in this Revelation, in order that the Messenger may be witness over you, and that you may be witness over the people. So establish the *salat*, and pay the *zakat*, and hold fast to Allah. He is

your protector, and excellent is He the Protector, and excellent is He the Helper.

Again, in Surah al-Rūm:

And extol the limitless glory of Allah when you enter the night and when you greet the morning.

This tells us that these are the times we should not just wake up, but the implication is that we should pray and remember Allah. Again, He says in other *'āyāt*:

Surely ritual prayer was a timely prescription for all those who believe.

Perform ritual prayer at the two ends of the day and in some watches of the night, and perform at the sinking of the sun, and extol the praises of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before it sets.

And extol the praises of your Lord in the watches of the night, and the end of the days, so that you may earn His good pleasure.

Any questions about the necessity of prayer? Raise your hands. Okay. Passed! Just like they do in Congress. After many years of prayer, you come to realize that really our lives are much better lived when we live them around the prayer, instead of the prayer around our lives. I have said this again and again, and revised this statement many times. Prayer is something we can all focus on during these months, because we get into that deteriorated state of rushing to do our prayers, of thinking that our *dunya* life (our worldly activities) is so much more important. It is such a pleasure sometimes to be in countries where so many people stop and go and do their prayer. Some of you have experienced this. We have this little community, and it is a little country. We should really try to live our lives around our prayers. Wouldn't it be nice if people came here and

they said, “Look at those people. They stop everything and run to prayer.” Just like what you see happen in other countries.

There is of course the Prophetic tradition called al-Akbar, which are traditions that are not limited just to *hadith*. Just like *salawat* can mean prayer as well as supplication. We learn from these Traditions about the Ansars. They were citizens of Medina who embraced Islam and welcomed and supported the Prophet (sal). The *mujharūn* were the immigrants who came from Mecca to Medina. The Prophet (sal) was once asked by one of these people about the dawn prayer, and who performed it for the very first time. He informed the questioner that the very first person to perform that prayer was Hazrat Adam. Then the Prophet (sal) said,

The dhuhr prayer was first performed by Ibrahim (as) when Allah Swt delivered him from the fiery furnace of Imra. The ‘asr prayer was first performed by Yaqub (as) when Jibreel gave him the news about Yusuf, and when Allah Swt relented toward him and accepted his repentance. The prayer of the first third of the night was performed by Yunus (Jonah) when Allah Swt brought him forth from the belly of the whale. Then Jibreel came to him and said, “Allah pronounces the greetings of peace upon you, and he says to you, ‘I ask you with this difference in view of the torment that I have inflicted upon you in the realm of the lower world, are you well pleased with me?’” And Yunus (as) stood up and performed four rak’as of ritual prayer and said, “I am indeed well pleased with my Lord. I am truly well pleased with my Lord.”

If we can remember the origin of these prayers when we are doing them, the circumstances under which they were earned, revealed and performed, the blessings that Allah Swt was giving with these prayers, and the lessons that were learned with these prayers, I think our prayers will take on some new meaning and new life. The first two ritual prayers the Prophet (sal) was commanded to perform was the *salat* of *fajr* and the

salat of maghrib. He made this a regular part of his practice. He was then told to practice two cycles of ritual prayer every morning and two cycles in the evening. This continued until the time of the Isra Miraj. It was on that night the Prophet (sal) was transported to the heavenly journey. He came face to face with Allah Swt, at which point he was given first 20, then 15, then 10 and then 5 prayers to do. I should say that he was given 20; he negotiated the rest at the behest of Sidna Musa who was his ombudsman with Allah Swt.

At this point was added the midday prayer, *dhuhr*; the afternoon prayer, *asr*; and the night prayer, *isha*. The *salat of fajr* is the first of the light of day, and it was customary for religious scholars to begin their listing of the prayers after the midday prayer. It was based on the saying of the Prophet (sal) in a *hadith*: ***“Jibreel came to me beside the House, and there he led me in the midday prayer as soon as the sun had declined from the meridian, just enough to lengthen his shadow by the width of the strap of his sandal.”*** The tradition begins with the definition of timings of midday prayer as a beginning prayer. The scholars treated this as the beginning of the five appointed prayers on the grounds that it was the first prayer which the Prophet (sal) prayed.

The prayers are also looked at in other ways. One, it is a prayer that everyone prays. Then there are the prayers of the elect, and of the spiritual elect, and the prayers of the elect of the elect. There is some dialogue on this also. One of the great Sufic masters said, *“The salat of the Elect serves to awaken the people who are submissive and humble, and the people who are vigilant, the people who watch over their hearts / qulub, the people who are welcome guests of Allah Swt.”* In another report:

Yusef bin Islam was passing through one of the large congregational masajid of Khorasan, when he came across an enormous halkah / circle of people. He stopped to ask someone about the halkah, and he was told that it was the halkah of Hatim. He was speaking about the subject of abstinence, pious caution, and fear

and hope. Yusef turned to his companion and said, "Come on. Let's ask him a question on the subject of salat. If he gives us a satisfying answer, we will join his khanaqah." He then went up to Hatim and said, "Asalaamu aleikum. I have a question to ask you." "Go ahead and ask it," said Hatim. The following conversation took place.

He said, "I wish to ask you about salat." "Do you wish to ask about salat as to its spiritual experience /marifah or about the discipline / adab to be observed in its performance? There are two different questions here requiring two separate answers." Yusef said, "In that case, let me ask you about the adab to be observed in its performance." Hatim replied, "It means that you rise to the occasion, and walk to the place of worship with an attitude of total dedication and devotion. It means that you begin the actual prayer with the appropriate niyyat, and pronounce the declaration of Allah's greatness by saying, "Allahu Akbar" in a spiritual glorification. It means you recite from Qur'an with a clear and distinct enunciation. It means you perform the act of bowing with humility, the act of prostration with submission, the testimony with sincerity, and the salutation with a feeling of compassion."

Yusef's companions then prompted him to ask about the significance of salat as a spiritual experience, marifah, gnosis. So he went ahead and asked the second question, to which Hatim responded, "It means that you set the garden of Paradise to your right during prayer, and the fire of hell on your left, with the bridge beneath your feet, and the balance beneath your eyes. You worship your Lord as if you could see Him, and even if you do not see Him, know He is seeing you." "O young man," he said. "How long have you been performing the ritual prayer?" "For twenty years," he said. Yusef said to his companions, "Come, let us perform this kind of prayer for the next 50 years!" And then he turned to Hatim and asked, "Where did you find out about this?" And Hatim replied, "From those

books of yours which you used to dictate to us.”

It's a long story, and I think we should try to remember all this when we pray. I'm not relating this to confuse, but hopefully we can benefit from remembering that the prayers are deep. These are the months to pray for so many things: for acceptance of our repentance, for the health and well-being of our community, for the depth of our *iman* / faith, for the continuation of our livelihood and work, for the poor who are in need, and the *zakat* we are able to give. It begins with our moving towards the months as we are moving toward the *masjid*. It doesn't begin when we are just living our daily life, nor standing outside chatting before the *khutbah* or the prayer. But when our intention to go to prayer begins, that's when our movement to the mosque begins. It continues when we enter the *masjid*, when we sit, and if we prepare ourselves and dress properly and look the part.

If we follow these things and remember what Hatim said, we would see the prayer in its totality in a different way, and it would change our lives. It will adjust our lives, and organized our lives. If we do that just one time today, properly: making *wudu* properly, moving to the *masjid* properly, making the *niyyat* properly, doing the motions properly, remembering what is on our right and our left properly, it will change our attitudes. So as this month of Rajab is coming to its middle, and Sha'bān is approaching, and Ramadan is soon to follow, we will all prepare properly. Because we know that the doors of hell will be closed, and the gates of Paradise will be open. We can dedicate ourselves again and again and again to learn over and over again what we have forgotten just in this last year, and to learn more that we never knew before. Allah has promised us a great peace and a great reward, the reward of His nearness and awareness of His nearness, *inshā'a-llāh*.
Asalaamu aleikum.