

December 10, 2010

Khutbah



Title: [The Treasure of Prayer](#)

DVD title: Protecting the Middle Prayer
True Worship in Our Heart

Opening Duas. Allah (swt) gives us this brief ‘āyat with deep meaning. He says in Surah al-Baqarah:

Safeguard the *salat*, and especially the middle *salat*. And stand before Allah in utmost obedience. And if you fear danger, then make *salat* on foot or riding, and when you are safe, remember Allah for He has taught you which you do not know. (2:238-9)

These two simple ‘āyat in the Qur’ān have a lot more meaning than is obvious. It is very common in many *khutbahs* to speak about the five pillars of Islam. Though I don’t do that often, I thought today that it would be good to talk again about prayer. Since prayer is one of the first things that goes, when your time goes, when your mind goes, your health goes, your attention goes.

When we discover the real treasure of prayer, we discover one of the greatest, hidden secrets of Allah (swt). Certainly, remembrance of Allah (swt) should go on all the time. But prayer must be something about other than just remembering Allah. Five times a day, at certain times, it is ordained that every Muslim should pray. We all know that this is difficult at times, especially if one tries to do it on time. It is ordered by Allah (swt) in this *surah* that I read to you, and that we should pay special attention to the middle prayer. We know that the ritual aspect requires us to stand and to recite Qur’ān; to bow, prostrate and kneel; to at times audibly recite certain prayers, and at other times silently

recite refrains and recitations. These actions and movements involve not only our minds and our lips, but our bodies. These recitations that are heard involve our senses. They are material worship. They are the worship where our physical self apparently does the work, but there is much more.

People who pray all the time, perhaps people who pray more and better than we do, do not necessarily represent the best of Islam. They have perfected a material worship, but sometimes even in that, you find them to become arrogant. There are those who purposely rub their heads in the ground to make marks on their head so that everybody can see that they pray. There are also those who try not to do that, but who try just to do their prayer properly without being obvious. Because these actions are manifold, and repeated many times a day, the first part of the order of Allah is to guard the prayers. It is in the plural. For those of us who crave to have recognition of our spirituality; for those of us who like to think that our spirituality, our external, material spirituality is sufficient, even; for those of us who think that by creating a manifestation or forms of spiritual expression (whether Islamic prayer or other kinds of prayer), we have missed a great deal. We have missed the privacy, the simplicity, the quietness, the discipline, the focus, the opening up of doors of miracles in our lives by paying attention.

The second part of the admonition about the mid-most prayer refers to the prayer of the heart, also, not just the ‘Asr prayer. The heart is in the middle or the center of our body. It is also the center of the mind and the center of our being. It does not just mean Dhuhra prayer or ‘Asr prayer, depending on which one you start with. It means the prayer that is in the mid-most part of our body. In other words, protect the prayer as it comes in your heart. Place the prayer deeply into your heart, what you are doing, what you are saying, what you understand, what you are acting, what you hope for. For every prayer we do, we should protect the center, the heart, in which the prayer has to come. The purpose of *ibāda*, the worship of the heart, is the *ibāda* in the *qalb* (to obtain peace in one’s heart).

The heart is in between what is on the right and what is on the left, what is above us and what is below us, what is in front of us and what is behind us.

I am sure that you are all familiar with those ‘āyat from Qur’ān that reflects that. It is in the middle, between the most righteous and pure aspect of our being and the most rebellious and disrespectful part of our being. The heart is placed between our mind, which can think rationally, and some other places that often don’t think so rationally. It is in the center between that which is our future and that which is our past. It is between that which is right before us in our decisions and in our attitudes and what is just behind us, what we have turned our back to. This is the axial point in prayer. This is the middle to protect. The Prophet Muhammed (sal) said, **“The hearts of the children of Adam are between the two fingers of the All Merciful. He turns them whichever way He wills.”**

What are these two fingers of Allah? They are the attributes of the power of punishment, the loving and delicate beauty and balance of the beneficence of the Almighty. Between the punishment and the mercy, that’s where we are. Real worship, true worship is worship in our heart, not just the worship of our body and with our body. If our heart is empty and does not pay attention; if our heart does not heed the worship on the material side as well as the spiritual aspect, then there is no consistency, no balance. When it only heeds the ritual aspect, the material side, the peace of our material being, the peace we hope to get from doing ritual prayer is not realized. That is why the Holy Prophet (sal) said, **“Ritual worship is only possible with a heart that is quiet and at rest.”** That doesn’t mean if you have a heart that is not quiet and at rest that you shouldn’t pray. It means the real prayer takes place in that state. Even the outer prayer is only possible to be acceptable and completed when our heart is quiet.

‘How to approach our salat’ means that we should try to quiet our hearts. As we begin our prayer, we should quiet our hearts. How do we do that? Prayer, by definition, is our calling out to Allah (swt), our supplicating to the Creator. It is the meeting with this

Creator. A place of this meeting can be anywhere physically. You can go to Starbucks or Panera, or to a park. It can be in the desert, or on a mountaintop, or in a room, or outside or inside. For this meeting, it is always in the same place: it is always in the heart. The heart is the essence of our body. If our heart is dead, we die. Even when our brain can pretty well be dead, we can be put on a respirator and live and breathe. The heart is the essence of our body and the basis of our sense of our self. Everything is dependent on our heart. The Holy Prophet (sal) said:

A piece of meat is in a man's body. When it is in a good state, the whole being improves. When it is in a bad state, the whole being falls apart. Beware! The piece of meat is the heart.

What does it mean that “it improves”? The whole being improves and the whole being falls apart. If we understand the heart, we can see. Sometimes, we think that our heart is doing the right thing, but everything around us is falling apart. Then it is not doing the right thing. That is to say that our prayers, for ourselves, for others, for all those around us, which of course should be ahead of the prayers for our self, are not being made properly. They are being made selfishly, self-centeredly, egotistically, or even just automatically. The prayers that are prescribed by Allah are supposed to be performed at certain times. The best way to do them is to be in a congregation, turning toward Mecca, following the *imam* who leads the prayer. The person should lead the prayer, not because they want the approval of others. They should lead it quietly and simply and sincerely and not hypocritically and indeed, at times, should be very careful to offer it to others before themselves to lead it.

We should follow with the same attitude. Allah (swt) prescribes very clearly these three kinds of worship. The Prophet (sal) and others have given us guidance on how close to the time we should pray, how to make those prayers properly, and all the details of the prayers. So many have written on prayer. The time for the inner worship, however, is

timeless. The time for inner prayer is endless. It is continuous for our whole life, here and beyond in the Hereafter. Where is the mosque for the inner prayer? It is in the heart. Who joins you in the inner prayer? Our senses, our faculties, memories, loves which could be listening, thinking somewhere else while you are praying, looking at something while you are praying, feeling some emotions while you are praying, that is your congregation within you. Those you love, those you hold dear to you, those you care about, those you are praying for—you have to get that congregation to stand very close to you, just like you get the congregation in jamat to stand shoulder to shoulder.

The language of the inner world is the language of submission (*islam*), intention (*niyyat*) and peace, (*salaam*). You are standing in *islam*; you are making the intention for the prayer, and it is to be hopefully in a state of peace you are doing this. Who is the *imam* for the inner prayer? It is that yearning, that irresistible desire to know the Truth, to affirm the Truth, to submit to the Truth, to know in the Haqq of Islam. That is who it is. That's who we should follow. What is the direction of the inner prayer? Towards Allah. Where is Allah? Wheresoever you turn your attention, your face, towards the unity of Allah. Where is that? Everywhere. What is it? The unity of Allah is seen in His eternal beauty, His eternal mercifulness, patience.

The pure heart is the one who performs that prayer. A heart like this prays when it sleeps, prays when it is awake, prays in life, prays in death. A heart and a soul that is like this is in constant service, being near those who have hearts like this (and not many people are, but you are). Whether the person or persons appear to be awake or asleep is in constant service. Each of us is in constant service ourselves. The inner worship of the heart is the whole life of the individual. It is to hear the recitations, not just outwardly. Yes, there is some kneeling and bowing, but it is not necessary outside of the times it is prescribed. The leader of the prayer is really the Nuri Mohammed (the light of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him).

When you are not standing the *fard* or *sunnah* or *nafle* prayer, but yet you are praying, you know this is because there is someone, some thing, worth praying for—not because it is prescribed. Prescribed is taken care of. Allah (swt) says, “**Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help.**” We say it so many times in Surah al-Fatiyah. These words are a sign of the state of the perfect person, the one who serves and seeks help, the one who passes from a physical being into nothingness, being in the world but not of it, being one with Allah. The heart of that being receives the greatest blessings of Allah. One of these blessings is mentioned by the Prophet (sal) when he said, “**The prophets and those who are beloved of Allah continue their worships in their graves, as they did in their houses while they were in this world.**”

All the signs that have come through these simple words, all the thoughts that are embraced by these simple concepts, everyone of them becomes a transmitter of the *baraka*. Every one of them qualifies as a companion on the path—not a human companion, a companion of ideas, values, and principles. In other words, the heart we are discussing, that sustains life and without which there is no life, is the heart that holds the eternal truth and eternal life within it. It continues the recitations, here and in the Hereafter. You do not have to worry that the graves are not deep enough to stand up in or to bow down in or to kneel in. That’s not the way the worship takes place in the grave. The worship takes places in the grave by your memory, by what you know, by how you speak to Allah, by your imploring of Allah.

When you have been removed from this physical world, and when all that is left is the inner state, that internal heart continues its recitations to Allah all the time. All you have to remember is when we have passed out of this world, we are challenged to, required to, remember Allah (swt). When the ritual worship of our physical being and our worship of our heart unite at the same time, when we are standing and praying and our heart is alive, that is when our prayer is complete. Shaykh Nooruddeen last week said, “Who of us here have ever made one perfect prayer?” Yet most people criticize themselves saying, “I

don't pray right. I miss my prayers," as if it is some strange thing nobody else has experienced. Believe me, it's not. But to strive toward a good prayer, there's nothing wrong with that. To try to perfect oneself, what could be wrong with that? It brings nearness to Allah. What does that mean? When you make a prayer that you know is a really good prayer, and you remember what you need to remember, and find yourself thinking, "*Alhamduli-Llāh*, that was a really good prayer," that's when Allah is near. That is the nearness of Allah (swt) that you are feeling.

Inwardly, one becomes so wise, because true knowledge just rushes into your heart, mind and intellect, even in one prayer done correctly. It takes a lot of effort. If you come to prayer sincerely, if you serve others sincerely, if you have love in your heart, and want to make yourself unseen by others but aware of the Divine Presence, then all that effort to turn against all that is good and right goes away, and all the possibility of only turning to what's good and right comes to you. *Inshā'a-Llāh*, there is a lot to pray for these days. Prayer in Islam is a form, but when we pray for others, we keep our hearts open to their needs, so our prayer washes over their needs. *Bismillah*. (Closing duas.)