

In the Name of Allāh,
the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful

101 Ways to Concentrate in Prayer

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﴿ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ
الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ﴾

Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation
– those who are humble in their prayers[1].

[1] The Holy Qur'ān (Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 1-2).

Transliteration Table

ء	’	ز	z	ق	q	Long vowels	
ب	b	س	s	ك	k	ا	ā
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l	و	ū
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	m	ي	ī
ج	j	ض	ḍ	ن	n		
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h	Short vowels	
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w	ـَ	a
د	d	ع	‘	ي	y	ـُ	u
ذ	dh	غ	gh	ة	ah	ـِ	i
ر	r	ف	f	ال	al		

Preface

Prayer teaches us how to eliminate pride and live a life of inner courage. It can transport us to a higher plane, and make us become aware of a place deep within us that is silent and still, beyond the reach of time and grief. Reciting the verses of the Holy Qur'ān brings peace, enlightenment and tranquillity. The movements affect us deeply and bring us an enormous sense of emotional freedom. It is connection with the Lord. It is what we are born to do.

So, whilst we pray around 1,825 obligatory prayers a year, why do we not effectively benefit from them? Why do we not see continual progress in our spirituality and in our connection and relationship with the Almighty (swt)?

The question is: are we satisfied with our prayer? Is our heart conscious of Allāh (swt) and in awe of Him when we approach prayer? Are we benefitting from prayer the way it was intended?

To find out the answers to these questions, I conducted an anonymous survey over the internet and asked people to participate. The first question in the survey asked: How would you rate your concentration in prayer from 1-10, 1 being poor and 10 being perfect?

Results showed 68% said in the 1-5 (poor to average) range, 29% rated it between 6 and 7, and only 3 people rated their concentration in their prayer in the 8-10 range.

The second question asked: If you are finding it difficult to concentrate in your prayer, why do you think that is? 62% of

the people surveyed stated that their mind was always pre-occupied, 13% put it down to being in a hurry, 11% to weakness of faith, 7% felt that their prayer was repetitive and systematic and 5% put their lack of concentration down to tiredness when approaching the prayer. Some also gave other reasons which included: easily distracted (by children and others), lack of mental preparation before prayer, and feeling pressurised to concentrate.

The third question asked: Have you tried ways to improve your concentration in prayer? 83% replied in the affirmative and 17% said that they had not.

The fourth question asked: If your answer is yes, what are those ways? The responses included: translating the verses in one's mind as it is recited during prayer, breathing techniques, and contemplating prior to prayer.

The fifth question asked: Do you feel your prayer is empty when you don't concentrate in your prayer? 70% said that their prayer felt empty when they lost attention in prayer and 30% said they did not.

The final question asked: Are you willing to try new ways to concentrate in prayer? 98% said yes.

In summary, the survey showed that the majority of the people find it difficult, in most cases, to concentrate in prayer, mainly because the mind is occupied with worldly things. Consequently, they feel their prayer is empty and not submissive towards Allāh (swt). However, most of them have tried new ways to improve their concentration in prayer and

are willing to try other techniques to connect their heart and mind to the Almighty (swt) during prayer.

The ultimate aim of this book is to raise awareness about khushūʿ (submissiveness towards Allāh) in prayer as many of us – as shown by the above survey – are losing touch with our prayer and may have begun underestimating or undermining the power of prayer. The quality of our prayer is the best indicator of the strength of our connection with our Lord. As this connection weakens, we are more likely to face problems at societal, family and personal levels. It is impossible to find someone who has complete khushūʿ in their prayer and has bad traits such as arrogance or backbiting. It is equally impossible to find someone who is corrupt and devious and is fully connected with Allāh (swt) during prayer. The two are incompatible.

Connection to Allāh (swt) during the prayer leads to remembrance of Him outside of the prayer. Therefore, prayer with concentration is a protection against sinful acts, a source of happiness, and strengthens our patience and perseverance. I believe that improving our khushūʿ in prayer is the key to becoming better believers and building a more integrated society as a whole, ʾinshā Allāh.

On a personal note, I felt that to get closer to Allāh (swt) in my prayer, I needed to go through a journey to explore various techniques to achieve this closeness to the Lord. I began my path by reading and learning from our esteemed scholars and what they report from the Holy Qurʾān and ʾaḥādīth. I also began to research and think about other methods, including some contemporary techniques that may

be helpful in sustaining khushū‘ in prayer. The results of this journey are humbly presented in this book. Some comments regarding the points raised in this book are as follows.

The criteria for judging whether the points proposed in this book are helpful or not is that each method must be jurisprudentially correct, independently reviewed, realistic, viable and practical. The research results were put together from different sources, namely from the literature and scholarly (academic and religious) recommendations. Some of the points raised are new suggestions on how to concentrate in prayer. I pray that these and other points can present a different angle to focusing our heart and mind in prayer.

The points do not teach a person how to pray (as one can refer to the jurisprudential books for information on that), rather they suggest methods to improve our concentration and strengthen our khushū‘ in prayer. The points have been written assuming the person knows how to perform the obligatory prayers.

Some points include mustaḥab (recommended) acts to perform before, during and after prayer. They have been checked mainly against Sayid Yazdi's book as commented by Ayatollah Sistani. Please refer to your respective marji‘ for confirmation.

Although I have attempted to select only those ’aḥādīth that are authentic, we must still practice caution when attributing ’aḥādīth to the Holy Prophet (saw) and his family. Therefore, I have written ‘it is narrated’ for each ḥādīth rather than ‘he said’. The latter implies that we are sure of the authenticity of

the ʾaḥādīth, whereas the former attributes the ʾaḥādīth to the narrator but with caution.

You may read through the book and apply/comprehend all the points, but eventually find only one or two points that strengthen your concentration in prayer. Either way, take your time to understand and comprehend the different methods and, once you feel ready, begin to apply them. You might start by applying a few techniques and assess whether they have made any difference to your concentration during prayer. If you feel they have not made difference then you may move to the other points. However, revisit the points that may not have helped you as the time and the environment may have influenced your perception of the method. This book is meant to be continually read and used as the methods and suggestions given in this book are not just for information but for continuous practice on our journey towards Allāh (swt). Indeed, the effectiveness of the points depend on the person applying them, but I pray to Allāh (swt) that you will find at least one point that will help you in your journey towards the Almighty (swt).

In this second edition, I have replaced some points with other relevant points and have corrected some grammatical and text errors in the first edition.

I would like to express my gratitude and thankfulness to the Almighty, the Omnipotent and Omniscient Lord, who has given me the opportunity to serve Him and to search for ways to get closer to Him.

I am indebted to my parents who have always supported and encouraged me to work for the sake of Allāh (swt) and helped me in my quest to find Him. I am forever indebted to my beloved wife, Dr Kawther Abbas, who has always had faith in my endeavours and supported me throughout the years of research and preparation for this book. Her extensive knowledge of the Islamic literature and her precise assessment of the points raised in this book have also been invaluable. Her reward is in no doubt with Allāh (swt).

Finally brothers and sisters, I leave this book in your hands and pray to Allāh (swt) that it can help you, as it did for me, to strengthen your concentration in prayer. Please do not forget me, my family and all the believers all around the world in your prayers.

رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّآ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٢٧﴾

Our Lord! Accept it (this service) from us. Indeed You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing. (2:127)

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London
July 2018/Sha'wal 1439

Chapter 1: Introduction

As Muslims, our spiritual enhancement and sustenance is our prayer. This prayer, or ṣalāh, is the complete submission to Allāh (swt) by comprehending His greatness, beauty and absolute power through uninterrupted communication with Him. It is a time when the believer has the opportunity to reflect on his mistakes, increase his faith and strengthen his connection with the Almighty.

Prayer keeps the believer in the vicinity of Allāh (swt) through continuous remembrance and obedience. If performed with presence of the heart, the prayer educates him by instilling discipline and self-restraint, keeping him away from sins, indecency and evil by purifying his heart with the clean and spiritual nourishment of the prayer. It is also the source of tranquillity and happiness and obliterates anxieties through familiarity with the Beloved.

Allāh (swt) describes the characteristics of a true believer as one who performs the prayer while his heart trembles with fear and awe when He is mentioned:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٢﴾ الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ حَقًّا لَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when Allāh (swt) is mentioned and when His signs are recited to

them they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord, maintain prayer and spend out of what We have provided them. It is they who are truly faithful. They shall have ranks near their Lord and a noble provision. (8: 2-4)

The reward they are granted for opening themselves to the Almighty and preserving His presence in their heart is an elevated position in Paradise. Imām al-Bāqir (as) is narrated to have said:

أول ما يحاسب به العبد الصلاة فإن قبلت قبل ما سواها

The first thing that a servant shall be reckoned for (on the Day of Judgment) shall be his prayers. If they are accepted, all his other deeds shall be accepted too[1].

If prayer is performed with a present and illuminated heart and mind, every other action in life will be performed far from any indecency and wrongdoing.

Why do we worship Allāh?

Human beings are created with a thirst for understanding, an inborn capacity and 'fiṭrah'. Although there is no accurate translation for the word 'fiṭrah' into English, it is often translated as 'the initial disposition', 'the natural tendency of man' or "the natural constitution (al-khilqah) with which a child is created in his mother's womb."[2] Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān that He has created or 'originated' people

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 268.
[2] Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-'Arab Dictionary.

with faith, so we should maintain the prayer and keep away from polytheism:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allāh (swt) according to which He has created mankind. (There is no altering Allāh's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know.) Turning to him in penitence and be wary of Him, and maintain the prayer and do not be among the polytheists. (30: 30-31)

The verse above also indicates that this innate nature which He has created within us cannot be altered. This means that humankind will always tend towards worship of a higher being, whether that worship is for Allāh (swt), or idols such as during the pre-Islamic era, or the "idols" worshipped in the modern era. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me. (51: 56)

Allāh (swt) is not in need of our worship; rather we worship Him to elevate ourselves and seek guidance from Him to reach perfection. Worship is a form of self-development; the more we worship Allāh, the more we develop spiritually, psychologically and socially. This must be done not just by

praying, fasting and performing ḥajj, but also by taking care of our families, visiting the sick and giving charity. In fact the believers can turn their daily activities into acts of worship by purifying their intentions and sincerely seeking Allāh's (swt) pleasure through these activities.

What does the word ṣalāh mean?

Many jurists and Arab litterateurs define the literal root meaning of the word ṣalāh as 'invocation'[1]. There are two forms of invocation in Islam. The first is ṣalāh, which is the prescribed daily prayer that has formal jurisprudential requirements and acts, and the second is du'ā', which is the supplicatory invocation that represents an open-ended conversation with Allāh (swt) that may occur at any time and at any place.

One of the first usages of the word ṣalāh was during Prophet Ismā'īl's time as Prophet Ibrāhīm settled a part of his offspring in Makkah to keep up prayer, which resulted in the frequent use of the word ṣalāh:

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Our Lord! I have settled part of my descendants in a barren valley, by Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may maintain the

[1] E.g. al-Ṣiḥāh al-Lughah Arabic dictionary.

prayer. So make the hearts of a part of the people fond of them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks. (14: 37)

What are the benefits of prayer?

Prayer performed with a present heart and mind has many benefits. A few are listed below:

1. An opportunity to get closer to Allāh. Allāh (swt) has blessed us with many opportunities in the day to get close to Him and communicate with Him. He invites us to His presence five times a day, and wants us to reach Him by contemplating on His essence to better ourselves. Once engaged in prayer, we are in a direct relationship with the Creator who is intimately near, hears everything we say and responds to each request. Allāh (swt) says in sūrah al-Baqarah:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way. (2:186)

If we sincerely supplicate from the depth of our heart to Allāh (swt), He guarantees His response to our cry[1]. This is the manifestation of Allāh's Will as the All-Knowing, the Hearer and the Responsive.

[1] All du'ā' are answered if supplicated sincerely, even if the answers are delayed, or not what we expect.

2. Keeps you away from sins. Allāh (swt) says:

اتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ ۖ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and maintain the prayer. Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs, and the remembrance of Allāh (swt) is surely greater. And Allāh (swt) knows whatever [deeds] you do. (29: 45)

The prayer with a present heart and mind is one that will keep the believer in the constant remembrance of Allāh (swt). Maintaining such a state all the time would make committing sins extremely difficult as the attentive heart would always be aware of the existence of Allāh (swt). Prayer is a form of education and discipline; if performed properly, it should act as a shield against any indecency and evil. It trains the believer to be in a high state of submissiveness with morals that will keep him safely away from sins.

3. Sets your heart at rest. If you seek a tranquil and comfortable heart, one that is satisfied and restful, then you must always be in the vicinity of Allāh (swt) through His remembrance. This is emphasised twice in one verse, which indicates its importance and benefits:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ﴿٢٨﴾

Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allāh. Look! The hearts find rest in Allāh's remembrance! (13: 28)

Pooya Yazdi, in his commentary of the Holy Qur'ān, explains how the remembrance of Allāh, which is the essence of prayer, frees the believer from all worries except the worry of his/her shortcomings towards the Creator:

"Tranquillity and fear are apparently opposite to each other. A true believer seeks tranquillity in the midst of conflicting desires of the worldly life and fears when he feels that there are many shortcomings in his submission to Allāh. The remembrance of Allāh (swt) produces these effects simultaneously in him and sets him free from all worldly worries[1]."

Indeed the only worry we should have in our life is our shortcomings in fulfilling the duties to our Lord. Anything else is insignificant.[2]

4. Liberates you from all types of subjugation. Prayer represents a concrete manifestation of the Islamic conception of freewill. The decision to pray is one that must be made by the individual. Once engaged in prayer, he feels the essence of freedom by breaking free from the chains of family, friends and society and liberates himself to please His Lord. He sets his heart and mind to the Only One, practicing his freewill with security and contentment. This servitude to Allāh (swt) is the ultimate source of freedom.

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[1] Pooya Yazdi, Commentary of the Holy Qur'ān, Commentry on sūrah al-Ra'd, verse 28, [http://quran.al-islam.org] 08/07/2018.

[2] Fulfilling duties to Allāh (swt) is done in various forms (including working to earn a living). Things that do not satisfy and please Allāh (swt) are irrelevant.

5. Relaxes you and strengthens your patience. The Holy Qur'ān emphasises the connection between patience and prayer and how they are achievable only to those who are humble:

وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ۚ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

And take recourse in patience and prayer, and it is indeed hard except for the humble. (2: 45)

If you are about to get involved in a situation that requires patience then it is best to pray first as prayer relaxes the mind, nourishes the soul and strengthens confidence. Your connection with the Everlasting Power, Allāh (swt), will surely make all your hard problems and difficult complications easy.

Some exegetes report that the word ṣabr in this verse means fasting and thus they explain that the believer should revert to prayer and fasting in difficult and strenuous times.

In addition, the Holy Qur'ān describes the people who pray, al-muṣallīn, as those who do not become anxious when evil afflicts them, and do not become greedy and grudging when good is bestowed on them:

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا ﴿١٩﴾ إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا ﴿٢٠﴾ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا ﴿٢١﴾ إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٢٢﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Indeed man has been created covetous: anxious when an ill befalls him and grudging when good comes his way [all are such]

except the prayerful, those who are persevering in their prayers. (70: 19-23)

Concentration in prayer

It is necessary to approach prayer with an unoccupied mind and a present heart filled with awe and reverence of the magnificence of the Lord. The believer must be fully aware of their worthlessness and submit to the Absolute Omnipotent in humility and humbleness.

Allāh (swt) says in sūrah al-Mu'minūn:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۝١ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ۝٢

Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation, those who are humble in their prayers. (23: 1-2)

Taking a moment to ponder on the meaning of these two verses reveals the beauty in their meaning; Allāh (swt) is declaring a joyful bliss for those who deserve the reward. He is guaranteeing success, not just to any believer but to those who, in their prayer, are submissive, humble and have a present heart and mind; those who understand the greatness, majesty and beauty of Allāh (swt) and are fearful of Allāh (swt). This true khushū' (also known as khushū' al-'īmān) is the reverence of the heart before Allāh (swt) with humbleness, dignity and modesty as the heart trembles in the presence of the Almighty. These are the true believers as described by the Holy Qur'ān:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٢﴾ الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ حَقًّا ۚ لَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when Allāh (swt) is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord, maintain the prayer and spend out of what We have provided them. It is they who are truly the faithful. They shall have ranks near their Lord, forgiveness and a noble provision. (8: 2-4)

Notice in these verses Allāh (swt) does not describe the true believers as those who pray, but those who establish the prayer; those who keep the prayer as a core and respected compartment of their daily lives. These believers do not find it difficult to concentrate and establish the connection with the Almighty during prayer (2: 45) and look forward to the next prayer.

In another verse, Allāh (swt) orders the believers to perform the prayer with the correct state of mind:

حَافِظُواْ عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ والصَّلاَةِ الْوُسْطَى وَقُومُواْ لِلّهِ قَانِتِينَ ﴿٢٣٨﴾

Be watchful of your prayers, and [especially] the middle prayer, and stand in obedience to Allāh. (2: 238)

Great emphasis is given to the prayer that is performed with the correct state of mind. One prayer with concentration can hold far more reward than hundreds of prayers without

concentration. Furthermore, the prayer of a believer is accepted according to the level of khushū‘ sustained during the prayer as narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

إن من الصلاة لما يقبل نصفها وثلثها وربعها إلى العشر، وإن منها لما تلف كما يلف الثوب الخلق ويضرب بها وجه صاحبها، ومالك من صلاتك الا ما أقبلت عليه بقلبك

“As for the prayer, half of it may be accepted, or one-third, or a quarter, or one-fifth, or even one-tenth. Another prayer may be folded like an old dress and be thrown back at the face of its owner. No part of the prayer is yours except that part which you perform with an attentive heart[1].”

A submissive believer, known as a khashi‘, does not merely practice humility and modesty in his prayer, but also adopts these and other forms of ’akhlāq in his daily life. Therefore, a khashi‘ can be distinguished from a non-khashi‘ not by the outward submissiveness in his prayer but by his daily actions in life, and whether these prayers have kept him away from indecency and evil as narrated by this ḥādīth from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يَعْلَمَ أَقُبِلَتْ صَلاَتُهُ أَمْ لَمْ تُقْبَلْ فَلْيَنْظُرْ هَلْ مَنَعَتْهُ صَلاَتُهُ عَنِ الْفَحْشَآءِ وَ الْمُنْكَرِ فَبِقَدْرِ مَا مَنَعَتْهُ قُبِلَتْ مِنْهُ

“One who desires to know if his prayer has been accepted or not, should observe if it has kept him away from indecency

[1] al-Majlisī, Biḥār Al-Anwār, vol. 79, p. 305.

and evil, or not; the measure in which it has kept him away (is the measure of his prayer that) has been accepted[1]."

Lack of concentration in prayer

Concentration in prayer can be difficult, especially when our mind is engaged with other 'important' matters in life. We may relate to the times when we say 'Allāhu 'Akbar in takbīrat al-'iḥrām, and we experience an influx of thoughts in the mind. It feels like a door opens up as soon as we perform takbīrat al-'iḥrām and the issues that we have been occupied with march through, and override our feeble attempts to focus solely on our Lord. A few minutes later, we start to doubt what rak'ah we are in and then may need to apply the appropriate rulings of al-shakk fī al-ṣalāh (doubt in prayer) to 'save' our prayer from becoming void (or in some cases we must repeat the prayer).

Sayid Khomeini (ra), in his book 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt[2], describes a beautiful analogy of the concept of thoughts appearing and disappearing during prayer. He calls it 'the bird of imagination'. The imagination (khayal), which is a natural faculty of the human mind, is like a bird that flies from one place to another. If man was to study its movements during a very short period of time (such as the time it takes to pray) he would find that the bird has moved continuously to many trivial and irrelevant places. In other words, his imagination during prayer will contain images and sensations that

[1] al-Ṭabrasī, Majma' al-Bayān, vol. 8. p. 29.

[2] Khomeini, 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt: The Disciplines of the Prayer, Discourse one, Chapter 11.

represent multiple non-connected and unimportant events that may have occurred in the past or might occur in the future. If you were to ask someone about their bird of imagination at the end of their prayer, you may find that they have imagined a particular scene at work, or images of people who they know or anything relating to a recent event. What needs to be done, therefore, is not to halt our imagination during prayer, but steer our imagination towards the Almighty and His bounties. Sayid Khomeini (ra) suggests "acquiring calmness of mind, peace of soul and repose of imagination" to help in limiting the power of the bird of imagination.

The bird of imagination also flutters recklessly outside the prayer. According to researchers, in half the time we are engaged in an activity, our minds drift off to thoughts unrelated to what we are doing. Research conducted by Jonathan Smallwood and colleagues from the University of Wisconsin Madison reports that this is probably related to what we have stored in our 'working memory'. Working memory is the mental workspace that allows us to juggle multiple thoughts simultaneously. He says:

"Our results suggest that the sorts of planning that people do quite often in daily life – when they're on the bus, when they're cycling to work, when they're in the shower – are probably supported by working memory... Their brains are trying to allocate resources to the most pressing problems[1]."

[1] D. Levinson, J. Smallwood, R. Davidson. The Persistence of Thought: Evidence for a Role of Working Memory in the Maintenance of Task-Unrelated Thinking, Psychol Sci. vol. 23, p. 375–380. 2012.

Although they argue that mind wandering, whether conscious or not, may be an indication of underlying priorities being held in working memory, this does not mean that people with high working memories are bound to concentrate less on particular tasks.

Daniel Levinson, Smallwood's research colleague, said:

"The bottom line is that working memory is a resource and it's all about how you use it. If your priority is to keep attention on task, you can use working memory to do that, too[1]."

Therefore, adding the various methods of concentration in prayer and comprehending the importance of concentrating in prayer in our working memory is a viable way to overcome the trivial distractions we get from our working memory during prayer.

The science behind attention

Scott Scheper, in his book, How to Get Focused, discusses three shift phases the mind goes through while in the process of concentrating.[2] Below, the example of prayer is used to describe the phases:

Phase 1: Blood Rush Alert

When you approach prayer and perform takbīrat al-ʾiḥrām, blood rushes to your anterior prefrontal cortex. Within this

[1] Ibid.

[2] S. Scheper, How to get Focussed, Part I, p. 26.

part of the brain sits a neurological switchboard. The switchboard alerts the brain that it is about to shift attention.

Phase 2: Find and Execute

The alert carries an electrical charge that is composed of two parts: a search query (discover neurons that will execute the prayer task) and a command (rouse the neurons once discovered). This process propels you into a mental state of prayer. If you have the ability to continue concentrating, then your brain will continue in phase 2 until the end of prayer. Otherwise it will go to phase 3.

Phase 3: Disengagement

If you get distracted by either an external source (such as, children running around, loud TV or mobile phone) or an internal source (such as worries and random thoughts), your mind rapidly disengages with its current praying state and sends blood flow back to phase 1, which then leads you to phase 2, and once distracted again, you will find yourself back at phase 3.

The method to prevent the entrance of the mind into phase 3 is to maintain sustainable attention (as compared to other types of attention such as selective and divided attention) in our prayer. This is defined as: "a state in which a person remains cognizant despite performing or experiencing something that does not readily keep his or her attention[1]." The person will remain consistently focused on the task at hand for as long as it lasts, from beginning to end. Some

[1] See [http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-concentration.htm] 08/07/2018.

techniques and ideas to achieve sustainable attention in prayer are put forward in the following chapters. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that to achieve khushū‘ in prayer, mastering attention alone is not sufficient. Coupled with attention must be the presence of the heart, which will be explored further in the upcoming chapters. In this book, we will refer to this marriage of the two as concentration.

Improving concentration in prayer

Generally speaking, everyone has had some experiences in full concentration. For instance, you may notice that while watching a movie in the cinema, people are totally still and have given their undivided attention to the movie. It will take a major distraction to break their attention stream. Or when they are in a very important interview, or exam that is crucial to their career. These situations show the great possibility and hope of us reaching full concentration in our prayers. However, hard work, effort and practise are needed to achieve such an undoubtedly difficult task.

To sustain khushū‘ in our prayers, we must always strive to encompass the highest spiritual and mental concentration. We must continuously train our heart, as it is the knowing entity, to be present spiritually, and train our mind, as it is the thinking entity, to be present mentally. When we perform the latter, Scott Scheper says the brain ‘rewires’ itself when it improves attention. This means that our ability to concentrate improves the more we concentrate (albeit it gets slower as we grow up). When we perform the former, our heart becomes content and muṭma'inn (assured) in the presence of the

Almighty. The main question that arises here is that although we know it is possible to improve our concentration in prayer (otherwise Allāh (swt) would have not commanded us to do so), how do we then exercise our mind and heart to concentrate in prayer?

In answer to this question, Mulla Fayd Kashani (ra) quotes a beautiful example from 'Abū Hamid al-Ghazali in Kashani's expurgation (tahdhīb) of the voluminous ethical work of 'Aḥyā'. He says:

"Its example is that of a man under a tree who wanted his thoughts to be clear (from distractions), while the noise of the sparrows on the tree (above) disturbed him. Whenever he chased them off by a stick in his hand to resume his state of contemplation, he found them return again. The following, thus, was said to him: 'Surely this kind of movement is like that of sawani (the camel that is used to draw water from the well and carry the same); and (such circular movement) shall not change. Therefore if you would like to free yourself (from this state of continual distraction) chop off the tree altogether.

Likewise is the tree of material desires: when its branches multiply it attracts various thoughts, the way the sparrows were attracted to the branches of the tree, and the way a fly is attracted to dirt; it would take a long time to chase it off, for indeed whenever the fly is chased away it returns back. That is why it was called 'dhubāb' (that which returns whenever it is chased). Similar is the case with imagination. And these material passions are numerous and hardly does the supplicant

lack in having them. And one origin unites them: love for the world, which is the root cause of every misdeed[1]."

If we go back to the example of watching a movie, the reason people can give their full attention is not solely because it is interesting and enjoyable but also because they can visualise and hear the movie. For the person who is attending an interview or an exam, he gives his full attention not just because it is important for him and his career, but also because he can see and hear the interviewers. Even if their mind is occupied with other things, the interest, possible enjoyment, importance of the task and the visual and auditory interaction supersede and take precedence in attention. This supersession does not take place in believers who struggle in concentrating in prayer. Sayid Khomeini (ra) in his book 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt argues that the "degrees of submission are according to the degrees of understanding the Greatness, Majesty and Beauty" of Allāh (swt)[2]." Understanding here does not merely mean information or knowledge, but the understanding must be encompassed by our hearts, and present in every prayer. This is what is meant by 'seeing' Allāh (swt) during the prayer as narrated by the Holy Prophet (saw) in this ḥādīth:

خف الله في السر كأنك تراه، فإن لم تكن تراه فإنه يراك

[1] Kashani, al-Mahajjah al-Bayḍā', vol 1, p. 376.

[2] Khomeini, 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt: The Disciplines of the Prayer. Discourse one, Chapter 3.

"Fear Allāh (swt) in isolation as if you see Him; and even if you do not see Him, He still sees you[1]."

To apply this, it might be difficult to slay the tree of material desires altogether, however, we must certainly do our utmost to attempt to cut out all such desires during prayer and steer our minds and hearts towards comprehending the greatness, majesty and beauty of Allāh (swt).

Conclusion

Prayer, or ṣalāh, is the journey towards the recognition of Allāh (swt). As this recognition is infinite, prayer has been made obligatory for all believers until their last breath. Once the believer tastes the sweetness of this prayer, he will begin recognising the Greatness and Omnipotence of the Lord. However, recognition is impossible without reverence and submissiveness towards the Almighty. It is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) that he said:

والله إنه ليأتي على الرجل خمسون سنة وما قبل الله منه صلاة واحدة، فأي شيء أشد من هذا؟ والله إنكم لتعرفون من جيرانكم وأصحابكم من لو كان يصلي لبعضكم ما قبلها منه لاستخفافه بها، إن الله لايقبل إلا الحسن فكيف يقبل ما يستخف به؟

"By Allāh, it is possible that a person lives for fifty years and not even a single prayer of his is accepted. Is there anything harder and more painful than this? By Allāh, you will know from your neighbours and your friends that if you talk

[1] al-Barqī, al-Maḥāsīn, vol. 1, p. 3.

to them in the same manner as you talk in your prayer, they will not answer you and think you are ridiculing them. Allāh (swt) does not accept unless it's (prayer) excellent, so how do you expect Him to accept it if it (prayer) is ridiculed[1]?"

Therefore, it is vital for all believers to continuously attempt to strengthen their concentration in prayer by synchronising the mind with the heart and soul. With the challenges and difficulties of daily life, this task is by no means easy. However, "Verily with every difficulty there is ease", "Verily with every difficulty there is ease." (94: 5-6)

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 269.

Chapter 2: The Prerequisites

To establish a connection to the Almighty, we must work hard to build strong foundations of our faith. These foundations are called 'The Prerequisites', as without them, it is impossible to concentrate in prayer.[1]

1. Increase your ma'rifah of Allāh (swt)

An essential prerequisite to concentration in prayer is to know Allāh (swt) accurately; to know Who it is we are communicating with and Who we are beseeching. Searching for this inner knowledge will help us submit to Him and be in His vicinity while in prayer. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَانِتٌ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ ۗ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٩﴾

Is he who supplicates in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing, apprehensive of the Hereafter and expecting the mercy of his Lord...? Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those who possess intellect take admonition. (39: 9)

Indeed, those who have knowledge and those who lack it are not alike. Those who have the inner knowledge of Allāh (swt) will have their heart illuminated with light and their soul nourished with certainty and confidence in His existence.

[1] The prerequisites mentioned in this chapter are part of a larger, more extensive field of research. It is therefore, beyond the scope of this book to extensively analyse each point.

They have the ability to distinguish between ḥaqq (truth) and bāṭil (falsehood),[1] and fear Allāh (swt) in every step of their life. This knowledge teaches them the best of 'akhlāq (ethics) and to worship Allāh (swt) with complete submissiveness and reverence. It gives them happiness and prosperity in this life and the next. The difference between true knowledge and any other knowledge is that the true knowledge of Allāh (swt) is gained not only from reading books, but through other sources that enlighten the heart and soul in Allāh's existence as well.

What are these sources then, and how can we use them to penetrate this knowledge into our hearts? The answer to this question requires detailed and in-depth explanations, and individual efforts to ponder and reflect; however, the following suggestions will hopefully provide indications towards this great knowledge.[2]

a. Try to comprehend Allāh's Divine Unity (tawḥīd) by negating any kind of limitations or attributes from Him, as narrated by Imām al-Riḍhā (as):

إن أول عبادة الله معرفته. وأصل معرفته توحيده. ونظام توحيده نفي الصفات عنه، لشهادة العقول أن كل صفة وموصوف مخلوق

"The very first step to Allāh's worship is to attain inner knowledge of Him, and the origin of attaining inner

[1] People who distinguish between ḥaqq and bāṭil are known as al-Furqān.

[2] For further reading into the entities of the soul and the knowledge of Allāh (swt) (mari'fah), please refer to book Self-Knowledge by Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali.

knowledge of Allāh (swt) is through His Divine Unity. The very basis of His Divine Unity is to negate any kind of limitations from Him, since the intellects are able to witness that every being is created with limitations[1]."

To negate any kind of limitation from Allāh (swt), we must understand that His essence cannot be comprehended, He is not limited by time or space and, as limited beings, we cannot comprehend what is limitless. Therefore, to know Allāh (swt) we can only know Him through His attributes and not His Essence. His attributes, both affirmative (including Omniscience and Omnipotence) and negative (including the fact that He is unseen and He is without partner) are unique and peerless as He is the only Creator. Only with such belief can we attain inner knowledge of Allāh.[2]

b. Believing that the Holy Qur'ān is the ultimate source of true knowledge as Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ ۛ فِيهِ ۛ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢﴾

This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the God-wary. (2: 2)

This book of knowledge should not be read for the sake of attaining and storing knowledge, but to comprehend and transform this knowledge into what we can act upon with wisdom and piety. The Holy Qur'ān was revealed to all mankind, and thus its powerful guidance and teachings can penetrate into even a layperson's heart and transform into

[1] al-Ṣadūq, al-Tawḥīd, p. 34.

[2] For further reading, please refer to Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 1.

wisdom. Mankind has been bestowed with such a noble book of knowledge that should be read on a daily basis in order to sail in the voyage of the ma'rifah of the Author of this Holy Book. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

قُلْ لَئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

Say, 'Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur'ān, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.' (17: 88)

c. Sincere supplication to Allāh (swt) undoubtedly assists in the path to knowing Allāh (swt) as, through our invocation, we strengthen our relationship with our Lord and talk to Him freely with no mediators or helpers. This free communication releases any arrogance and raises our awareness of Allāh (swt). Therefore, the people who hold the true knowledge of Allāh (swt) are the supplicants that invoke Him at the time of distress, affliction and hope:

تَتَجَافَىٰ جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Their sides vacate their beds to supplicate their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend out of what We have provided them. (32:16)

d. Remembrance of Allāh (swt) and continuous presence with Him lead to true knowledge of Allāh (swt):

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ﴿٢٨﴾

Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allāh. Look! The hearts find rest in Allāh's remembrance! (13: 28)

Comprehending the true knowledge of Allāh (swt) therefore is through the presence of Allāh (swt) in the soul and the heart, as the soul will not be shaken by any false knowledge that can trick the heart into disbelief.

e. Knowing ourselves, where we came from, where we are going, and what we are like today, is core to knowing Allāh (swt). Self-knowledge leads us to knowledge of Allāh (swt) and ignoring our true self will cause us to forget Allāh, as the Qur'ānic verse reminds us:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

And do not be like those who forget Allāh, so He makes them forget their own souls. It is they who are the transgressors. (59: 19)

Purification of the self and removing all layers of impurity will allow you to be able to receive His light (nūr) in your heart and illuminate your heart with His presence.

f. Understanding the soul: The soul, or nafs, has several aspects, which have been described in the Holy Qur'ān. Understanding and examining these aspects within our souls is a crucial stepping stone to building our faith:

Al-nafs al-'ammārah bi al-sū' (the soul that is inclined towards evil). The believer must always be in constant battle against this aspect of the soul, which is trying to satisfy its

desires and the material aspects of this life. Prophet Yūsuf (as) describes this soul in sūrah Yūsuf:

وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ نَفْسِيٓ إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌۢ بِالسُّوٓءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّيٓ إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

Yet I do not absolve my [own carnal] soul, for the [carnal] soul indeed prompts [men] to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is all-Forgiving, all-Merciful. (12: 53)

Al-nafs al-lawwāmah (the self-reproaching or accusing soul). This aspect of the soul reproaches itself for succumbing to falsehood and going astray from the Right Path. Allāh (swt) swears by this aspect of the soul:

وَلَآ أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ ﴿٢﴾

And I swear by the self-blaming soul! (75: 2)

Attempt to strengthen your nafs al-lawwāmah by watching over yourself during the day (murāqabah) and bringing yourself to account during the night (muḥāsabah)

Al-nafs al-muṭma'innah (the tranquil soul). This is the highest stage of the soul, where all believers should aspire to reach. It is the soul that easily distinguishes between truth (ḥaqq) and falsehood (bāṭil) and one that fully submits to Allāh (swt). Allāh (swt) mentions this soul in the Holy Qur'ān:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً ﴿٢٨﴾ فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ﴿٢٩﴾ وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي ﴿٣٠﴾

'O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing! Then enter among My servants! And enter My Paradise!' (89: 27-30)

2. Live your life as a submissive believer and refrain from committing sins

Some will argue that it is difficult to live the life of the prophets and the Imāms of Ahl al-Bayt (as); a life that is spent in constant remembrance of Allāh, fearing Him in every action and being fully aware of His existence in every moment. This is supported with the fact that unlike the prophets and Imāms of Ahl al-Bayt (as), we are fallible and with the whispers of the Shayṭān, it is difficult to maintain submissiveness in every action in life. However, the latter obstacles should not be a hindrance in setting our path towards obeying Allāh (swt) in every action we perform, amid the challenges involved. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

And that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and that he will soon be shown his endeavour. (53: 39-40)

In fact, the following narration from Prophet Muḥammad (saw) goes further and says that if you do not live your life as a pious person, your worship will not be accepted, even if you try as hard as possible to better your prayer and fasting:

وأعلم أنكم لو صليتم حتى تكونوا كالحنايا وصمتم حتى تكونوا كالأوتار ما ينفعكم ذلك إلا بورع

"Know that if you were to pray so much that you (bent over) as arches and fast so much that you become [as thin as strings], nothing will be accepted unless it was accompanied by piety[1]."

Therefore, in every action that we do, whether it's at work, or in society or with family and friends, we must do it with full awareness and submission to Allāh (swt). Surely by doing so, we will refrain from committing any sins and thus maintain a pure and present heart in our prayer.

Some recommendations on how to live as a true believer of Allāh (swt) are given in the first eleven verses of sūrah al-Mu'minūn (The Believer):

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ﴿٢﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِلزَّكَاةِ فَاعِلُونَ ﴿٤﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ ﴿٥﴾ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ ﴿٦﴾ فَمَنِ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ ﴿٧﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ ﴿٨﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَوَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْوَارِثُونَ ﴿١٠﴾ الَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ الْفِرْدَوْسَ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation; those who are humble in their prayers, who avoid vain talk, who carry out their [duty of] zakāt, who guard their private parts, except from their

[1] al-Ṭabrasī, Makārim al-'akhlāq. p. 468.

spouses or those whom their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy; but whoever seeks [anything] beyond that, it is they who are transgressors; and those who keep their trusts and covenants, and who are watchful of their prayers. It is they who will be the inheritors, who shall inherit Paradise, and will remain in it [forever]. (23: 1-11)

Briefly, these verses describe the following attributes of a true believer. Those are the believers who:

– Concentrate humbly (defined as khushū', see Chapter One) in prayer.

– Avoid the places where profanity is spoken or where there is useless or harmful talk such as gossip, backbiting and slander.

– Help in fundraising for charitable projects, such as for orphans, the people and Islamic institutions.

– Guard their chastity and avoid committing forbidden sexual acts. The best way to ensure this is through healthy marriages.

– If they agree to keep or do something for another person, be it a secret or a will, stand by their agreement and keep the covenant.

– Continuously observe the prayer at the right time, place and, if possible, in congregation.

The list of attributes begins with concentration in prayer and ends with continuously observing this prayer. This illustrates the importance of prayer to a true believer and, if it is continuously observed with concentration, then the believer is on the correct path to pleasing the Lord.

3. Control your desires

Resisting temptation and controlling desires is an excellent way to facilitate greater concentration in prayer. For instance, by lowering our gaze and not looking at forbidden things, our mind will become clear of any images that could disrupt our imagination and concentration. More importantly, the mind will be spiritually pure and ready to face Allāh (swt) with a clear conscience. Allāh (swt) commands us to lower our gaze as this will serve to purify both our hearts and minds:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Tell the believers to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts. That is more decent for them. Allāh (swt) is indeed well aware of what they do. (24: 30)

It is narrated from Imām ʻAlī (as) that he said:

قَالَ أَمِيرُ المُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلامُ: إِنَّمَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمُ اثْنَتَيْنِ: إِتِّبَاعَ الهَوَى وَطُولَ الأَمَلِ. أَمَّا اتِّبَاعُ الهَوَى فَإِنَّهُ يَصُدُّ عَنِ الحَقِّ وَأَمّا طُولُ الأَمَلِ فَيُنْسِي الآخِرَةَ

"I am apprehensive for you on account of two things: submission to desire and cherishing of inordinate hope. As to desire, it prevents one from ḥaqq (truth, righteousness, God); and as to inordinate hope, it makes man oblivious of the Hereafter[1]."

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 336.

4. Practice patience

Patience is one of the most important characteristics of a submissive believer in prayer. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

O you who have faith! Take recourse in patience and prayer; indeed Allāh is with the patient. (2: 153)

This verse highlights the relationship between patience and prayer as Allāh (swt) instructs those who believe to seek assistance through this combination of acts. This is because prayer needs patience and patience needs prayer.

روي أن عليّاً (عليه السلام): كَانَ إِذَا أَهالَهُ أَمْرٌ فَزِعٌ قَامَ إِلى الصَّلاَةِ ثُمَّ تَلاَ هذِهِ الآية: ﴿وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلاةِ...﴾

It is narrated that whenever Imām 'Alī (as) had a worrying or difficult situation, he would retreat to prayer, and then recite the verse 2: 153 quoted above.[1]

It is important to note that the patience referred to in the Holy Qur'ān does not entail enduring misery and hardship or accepting humiliation, but resisting against temptations to commit sins. True patience is having inner contentment and being thankful to Allāh (swt) despite any misfortunes. Imām 'Alī (as) narrates three types of patience from his teacher, Prophet Muḥammad (saw):

[1] Ibid vol. 3, p. 480.

الصَّبْرُ ثَلاثَةٌ: صَبْرٌ عِنْدَ المُصِيبَةِ وَصَبْرٌ عَلَى الطَّاعَةِ وَصَبْرٌ عَنِ المَعْصِيَةِ. فَمَنْ صَبَرَ عَلَى المُصِيبَةِ حَتَّى يَرُدَّهَا بِحُسْنِ عَزَائِهَا كَتَبَ اللهُ لَهُ ثَلاثَمِائَةِ دَرَجَةٍ: مَا بَيْنَ الدَّرَجَةِ إِلَى الدَّرَجَةِ كَمَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الأَرْضِ. وَمَنْ صَبَرَ عَلَى الطَّاعَةِ كَتَبَ اللهُ لَهُ سِتَّمِائَةِ دَرَجَةٍ مَا بَيْنَ الدَّرَجَةِ إِلَى الدَّرَجَةِ كَمَا بَيْنَ تُخُومِ الأَرْضِ إِلَى العَرْشِ. وَمَنْ صَبَرَ عَنِ المَعْصِيَةِ كَتَبَ اللهُ لَهُ تِسْعَمِائَةِ دَرَجَةٍ مَا بَيْنَ الدَّرَجَةِ إِلَى الدَّرَجَةِ كَمَا بَيْنَ تُخُومِ الأَرْضِ إِلَى مُنْتَهَى العَرْشِ

"Patience is of three kinds: patience at the time of affliction, patience in regard to obedience, and patience in regard to disobedience. One who bears patiently with affliction, resisting it with a fair consolation, God writes for him three hundred degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between earth and heavens. And one who is patient in regard to obedience, God writes for him six hundred degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and the Throne (al-'arsh). And one who is patient in regard to disobedience, God writes for him nine hundred degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and the furthest frontiers of the Throne[1]."

5. Limit interaction with worldly attachments

Interaction with worldly matters can continuously occupy the mind and corrupt the prayer. These include thinking too much about work, wasting time on social networking sites,

[1] Ibid, vol. 2, p. 91.

watching too much television, having senseless conversations, interacting with groups that gossip and backbite, etc. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ ﴿٢٠﴾

Know that the life of this world is just play and diversion, and glitter, and mutual vainglory among you and covetousness for wealth and children like the rain whose vegetation impresses the farmer; then it withers and you see it turn yellow, then it becomes chaff, while in the Hereafter there is a severe punishment and forgiveness from Allāh (swt) and His pleasure; and the life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion. (57: 20)

If we convert our conversations from talking about people, money and materialistic issues, to talking about how to become better people, the Hereafter and non-materialistic issues, then we have taken a step closer to achieving presence of the heart in prayer. It is narrated from Imām 'Alī (as):

مثل الدنيا كمثل الحية ما ألين مسها وفي جوفها السم الناقع، يحذرها الرجل العاقل ويهوى إليها الصبي الجاهل

"The example of the world is like a snake. It is soft to the touch but its inside is full of venom. An ignorant person is

attracted towards it and a wise and intelligent man (one who fears the Lord) keeps on guard from it[1]."

6. Assess yourself on a regular basis

Self-examining on a regular basis is a spiritually uplifting exercise that will help achieve concentration in prayer. It is narrated from Imām al-Kādim (as) that he said:

ليس منا من لم يحاسب نفسه في كل يوم فإن عمل حسناً استزاد الله وإن عمل سيئاً استغفر الله منه وتاب إليه

"He who does not call himself to account everyday is not one of us. When he does so, he must ask Allāh (swt) for more if he notices that he has done a good deed, and if he notices that he has committed an evildoing, he must seek Allāh's forgiveness and must repent to Him[2]."

Try to find a regular time every day to ponder on how the day unfolded and examine your actions critically[3]. This should be done alone and without the interference or interaction of a second person. The best practice is to be honest with yourself; identify your weaknesses one by one and find solutions to it. For example, if there are some defects in your worship, ask Allāh (swt) sincerely for forgiveness and improvement of the defects. Or if you became angry, especially with a family member, release the arrogance in yourself and apologise to the person you were angry with.

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[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 136

[2] Ibid, vol. 2, p. 453.

[3] If that is difficult then attempt once a week or even once a month.

The main aim of self-assessment is to continually progress for the better and not to allow your faith to stagnate. It is paramount to make time to perform this powerful exercise on a regular basis. Once you begin you will realise the improvements it has made to your life, prayer and faith, 'inshā Allāh.

7. Learn the jurisprudential rulings

In order to focus on the inner meaning of the prayer, it is wise to have grasped all the jurisprudential rulings of wuḍū and prayer. The main reason for this is so you are confident that your prayer is performed according to the jurisprudential rulings and your mind is clear to focus on the spirituality of the prayer rather than how to pray. For instance, you may forget to recite the Holy Qur'ān quietly during ẓuhr and 'aṣr prayers.[1] If you realised later on during prayer that you have made a mistake, and you did not know the rulings on how to correct it, your mind may begin to be occupied with thoughts about the validity of the prayers rather than focusing on the connection with Allāh (swt). If however you are aware of the rulings in this regard, you are confident that the prayer is valid as the loud recitation was done unintentionally.[2]

It is therefore advisable to read all the jurisprudential rulings regarding prayer by the 'ālim you follow. You may like to seek a scholar or a learned person to check and witness you perform wuḍū and prayer.

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[1] Jurisprudential rulings say that the Holy Qur'ān recitations at ẓuhr and 'aṣr prayers need to be recited quietly.

[2] Refer to the 'ālim you follow for his ruling on this issue.

8. Humble yourself before Allāh

As humans, we often reveal our selfish nature and pride in our power as this gives us an advantage over others. However, the submissive believer in Allāh (swt) abandons pride, arrogance and feelings of self-sufficiency and stands humbled, meek and submissive before his Lord. This should be the natural behaviour of the believer in all aspects of his life, from work to family life and social activities. Only through a humble attitude can the believer get closer to Allāh (swt) through his prayers. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

Supplicate your Lord, beseechingly and secretly. Indeed He does not like the transgressors. (7: 55)

The believer must be humble enough not to see himself above others. This earnestness prepares the ground for spiritual progress. The first condition for the acceptance of prayer is humility before the Lord according to the ḥadīth al-qudsī as narrated by Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

قال الله تبارك وتعالى: إنما أقبل الصلاة ممن تواضع لعظمتي، ويكف نفسه عن الشهوات من أجلي، ويقطع نهاره بذكري، ولا يتعاظم على خلقي، ويطعم الجائع، ويكسو العاري، ويرحم المصاب، ويؤوي الغريب، فذلك يشرق نوره مثل الشمس، وأجعل له في الظلمات نورا وفي الجهالة علما، وأكلأه بعزتي، وأستحفظه بملائكتي، يدعوني فألبيه، ويسألني فاعطيه، فمثل ذلك عندي كمثل جنات الفردوس، لا تيبس ثمارها، ولا تتغير عن حالها

Allāh (swt) said: "I only accept the prayer of one who has humbled himself to My Majesty, has refrained himself from carnal desires for My sake; who passes his day with My remembrance, does not act haughty over My creation, feeds the hungry, clothes the undressed, shows compassion to the afflicted and shelters the stranger. The light of such a person will shine like the sun and I shall grant him light in darkness and knowledge in ignorance. I will preserve him with My honour and guard him with My angels. When he calls Me, I will answer him, when he asks Me, I will grant him. His example is like the gardens of Paradise, where no fruit ever becomes dry and whose state never changes[1]."

Conclusion

The prerequisites mentioned in this chapter are part of a continual quest to gain proximity to Allāh (swt). They are not points on a list that can be checked off and marked as 'completed' or obligations that are 'fulfilled'. Rather, each prerequisite has degrees, such as degrees of knowledge and patience; they must be constantly worked on, and are part of our daily struggle as believers. Some might argue that the prerequisites mentioned are sufficient to attain full concentration in prayer, as what follows would arise naturally within the heart of a believer. However, the best way to build our relationship with the Almighty (swt) is to constantly build our true knowledge of Him, through the Holy Qur'ān, humbling ourselves before Him, whilst patiently keeping away from indecency, sin and attachment to the world, and at the

[1] al-Barqī, al-Maḥāsin, vol. 1, p. 15.

same time gaining a better insight into the prayer and what Allāh (swt) loves. This will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3: The Preparation

There is a temptation when it comes to prayer, to simply state the takbīrat al-'iḥrām and begin as soon as possible. Yet, much like any important meeting, adequate preparation, from your appearance to your mindset, is essential to the success of the meeting with your Lord.

9. Avoid eating just prior to prayer

Excessive eating prior to prayer is one of the causes of inattention in prayer as the believer will inevitably feel uncomfortable and full. If you are hungry at the time of prayer, it is recommended to eat something light.

It is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

إن البطن ليطغى من أكله. وأقرب ما يكون العبد من الله إذا خف بطنه، وأبغض ما يكون العبد من الله إذا امتلأ بطنه

"The stomach transgresses under the influence of food intake (over-eating). The nearest situation between the Almighty and his servant is when the stomach is light and the worst situation is when his stomach is full[1]."

10. Avoid strenuous activities

Taking part in tiring activities just before prayer can negatively affect our concentration. For instance, if a believer decides to play football shortly before the time of prayer, once

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 6, p. 269.

he approaches the prayer, his body is unlikely to be in an appropriate state to concentrate and submit to Allāh (swt). Exercise is undoubtedly important for the body, but it can result in fatigue that ultimately leads to feeling too exhausted to carry on. It is best therefore to avoid performing such physical activities just prior to prayers.

11. Relieve yourself

It is recommended to use the bathroom prior to wuḍū and prayer:

a. This is so we may find rest from the burden of impurities and empty ourselves of grossness and filth.
b. So the sensation of wanting to relieve yourself is avoided and a person can give his undivided attention to his prayer.
c. This will also help to maintain our state of wuḍū at all times, which is mustaḥab.

12. Concentrate in your wuḍū (ablution)

Wuḍū, or ablution, is a practice that is usually given little attention as it is performed many times daily. It is seen as a routine washing exercise, an inconvenient though necessary obstacle to the correct performance of prayer. If we contemplate the verses of the Holy Qur'ān and the 'aḥādīth, however, it is clear that the process of wuḍū has immense spiritual significance and, if performed correctly and with pure intentions, is the greatest method of preparing oneself for

prayer. The following are some of the spiritual significances that could help the believer in his concentration in wuḍū:[1]

As you approach the water to perform the wuḍū, approach it as if you are proceeding to Allāh's mercy and forgiveness. Purification of sins due to His mercy and forgiveness is synonymous with the purification of outer filths by water.

While you wash away physical dirt during wuḍū, purify and clear your heart and mind from all impurities, in the way the water's purity and cleanliness remove the filth and dirt from the body.

As you lift the water to perform wuḍū, pause for a moment and look at the clarity of the water. As you begin washing, examine your heart and ask yourself: "Is my heart as clear as this water?"

In the following narration from Imām al-Riḍhā (as), a link is made between washing the different parts of the body during wuḍū and prayer:

انما أمر بالوضوء ليكون العبد طاهرا اذا قام بين يدي الجبّار وعند مناجاته ايّاه مطيعا له فيما أمر نقيّا من الارجاس والنجاسة مع ما فيه من ذهاب الكسل وطرد النعاس وتزكية الفؤاد للقيام بين يدي الجبّار. وانّما وجب على الوجه واليدين والرأس والرجلين لان العبد اذا قام بين يدي الجبار فانما يكشف من جوارحه ويظهر ما وجب به الوضوء وذلك أنه بوجهه يسجد ويخضع وبيده يسأل ويرغب ويرهب ويتبتّل وبرأسه يستقبله في ركوعه وسجوده، وبرجليه يقوم ويقعد

[1] Refer to Khomeini, 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt: The Disciplines of the Prayer, Discourse 2, Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

"The servant has been commanded to perform the wuḍū so as to be pure when standing before the All-Powerful and supplicating, and by obeying Him, to be purged from filth and impurity, beside his removing laziness, expelling sleep and purifying the heart to stand in the Presence of the All-Powerful. Confining it (the wuḍū) only to the face, the two hands, the head and the two feet, was because when the servant stands before the All-Powerful, the parts which are exposed are those which are ordered to be washed in the wuḍū: as with his face he performs the sujūd (prostration), with his hands he requests, desires, dreads and supplicates, with his head he inclines to Him in his rukū' (bowing down) and his sujūd, and with his legs he stands and sits[1]."

13. Contemplate on the philosophy of wuḍū at each step and perform the recommended acts

The spiritual journey towards Allāh (swt) at the time of prayer begins at the time of wuḍū. This means that as you begin your wuḍū, your heart and mind must be present as you go through each step of washing. Thereafter, this conscious presence can be carried forward into prayer. The following are descriptions of the philosophy of each step of wuḍū and some recommended acts that can be practised:

– If possible, face the qiblah as you perform your wuḍū.

– Begin with *"Bi 'ismi Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm."*

[1] al-Ṣadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, vol. 2, p. 104.

– Gargle with water prior to wuḍū as this will purify your mouth from any lies, backbiting and other forbidden acts you may have said.

– Rinse your nose with water as this removes any arrogance and pride within you.

– As you wash your face, remember the Day of Resurrection when there will be faces that are illuminated with satisfaction and happiness and faces that are darkened with dissatisfaction and sadness.

– As you wash your right hand, ask Allāh (swt) to make you amongst the people of the right (righteous people), and as you wash your left hand, ask Him to keep you away from the people of the left (sinful people).

– As you wipe your head, ask Allāh (swt) to clear your mind from any evil thoughts and ask Him to help you clear your mind for prayer.

– Finally, as you wipe your feet, ask Allāh (swt) to make you amongst those who will walk on the Right Path, the path of Muḥammad (saw) and his progeny (as).

It is recommended to recite sūrah al-Qadr (97) during the wuḍū; it is also recommended to recite the supplications taught by Imām ʻAlī (as) at every step of the wuḍū:[1]

[1] This supplication has been included as it provides many spiritual lessons of wuḍū that the believer can comprehend for concentration in wuḍū and prayer. This duʻā' can be found online at: [http://www.duas.org/wadhu.htm] 08/07/2018.

Beginning of the wuḍū:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَ بِاللَّهِ وَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الْمَاءَ طَهُوراً وَ لَمْ يَجْعَلْهُ نَجِساً

[I am performing this wuḍū] in the name of Allāh (swt) and for the sake of Allāh; all praise be to Allāh (swt) who made the water pure and did not make it impure.

While washing the hands twice:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي مِنْ التَّوَّابِينَ، وَاجْعَلْنِي مِنْ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

O Allāh, place me among those who ask for forgiveness and among those who are pure.

While gargling:

اللَّهُمَّ لَقِّنِي حُجَّتِي يَوْمَ أَلْقَاكَ وَ أَطْلِقْ لِسَانِي بِذِكْرِكَ وَ شُكْرِكَ

O Allāh, teach me the correct answer for the day I shall meet You and open my tongue for Your praise.

While rinsing the nose:

اللَّهُمَّ لَا تُحَرِّمْ عَلَيَّ رِيحَ الْجَنَّةِ وَ اجْعَلْنِي مِمَّنْ يَشَمُّ رِيحَهَا وَ رَوْحَهَا وَ طِيبَهَا

O Allāh, do not deprive me of the scent of Paradise, and place me among those who will inhale its fragrance, its essence and perfume.

While washing the face:

اللَّهُمَّ بَيِّضْ وَجْهِي يَوْمَ تَسْوَدُّ فِيهِ الْوُجُوهُ وَ لَا تُسَوِّدْ وَجْهِي يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ فِيهِ الْوُجُوهُ

O Allāh! Brighten my face on the day that You will disgrace the faces; and do not disgrace my face on the day that You will brighten the faces.

While washing the right forearm:

اللَّهُمَّ أَعْطِنِي كِتَابِي بِيَمِينِي وَ الْخُلْدَ فِي الْجِنَانِ بِيَسَارِي وَ حَاسِبْنِي حِسَاباً يَسِيراً

O Allāh! Place my scroll of deeds in my right hand and (the certificate of) permanency in the Paradise on my left; and do the reckoning of my account leniently.

While washing the left forearm:

اللَّهُمَّ لَا تُعْطِنِي كِتَابِي بِيَسَارِي وَ لَا تَجْعَلْهَا مَغْلُولَةً إِلَى عُنُقِي وَ أَعُوذُ بِكَ رَبِّي مِنْ مُقَطَّعَاتِ النِّيرَانِ

O Allāh! Do not place my scroll of deeds in my left hand; and do not make it strap around my neck. And I seek refuge with You from the fierce fire.

While wiping the head:

اللَّهُمَّ غَشِّنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ وَ بَرَكَاتِكَ وَ عَفْوِكَ

O Allāh! Cover me with Your mercy, Your blessings and Your pardon.

While wiping the feet:

اللَّهُمَّ ثَبِّتْنِي عَلَى الصِّرَاطِ يَوْمَ تَزِلُّ فِيهِ الْأَقْدَامُ وَ اجْعَلْ سَعْيِي فِيمَا يُرْضِيكَ عَنِّي يَا ذَا الْجَلَالِ وَ الْإِكْرَامِ

O Allāh, keep me steadfast on my path on the day when the feet shall slip; and make my efforts (in the way) that will please You O Master of power and honour.

14. Avoid excessive doubting in wuḍū

Some are plagued by continuous doubts causing them to repeat their wuḍū several times; this inevitably interrupts the spiritual significance of the action and steers focus away from the benefits of wuḍū in enabling mental preparation for prayer. The scholars have given an ideal solution to such obsessions: simply avoid doubt and move on. Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) describes these doubts as the work of Shayṭān:

عن عبد الله بن سنان قال: ذكرت لأبي عبدالله (عليه السلام) رجلاً مبتلى بالوضوء والصلاة وقلت: هو رجل عاقل، فقال أبو عبدالله (عليه السلام): وأي عقل له وهو يطيع الشيطان، فقلت له: وكيف يطيع الشيطان؟ فقال (عليه السلام): سله هذا الذي يأتيه من أي شيء هو فإنه يقول لك: من عمل الشيطان

"Abd Allāh ibn Sinān said: 'I mentioned before Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) about a man who was afflicted with performing

wuḍū and ṣalāt repetitively and described him to be a man of reason.' The Imām said: 'What reason has he in obeying Shayṭān?' I asked him: 'How is it that he is obeying Shayṭān?' He said: 'If you ask him wherefrom his hesitation comes to him, he will tell you himself it is the work of Shayṭān[1].'"

Attempt to concentrate on the benefits of wuḍū in addition to the strict validity of it. The jurisprudence of wuḍū is, of course, essential, but it should not dominate one's mind to the extent that one cannot think of anything else. Allāh (swt) says, after He describes how to perform the wuḍū:

مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَٰكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٦﴾

Allāh does not desire to put you to hardship, but He desires to purify you, and to complete His blessing upon you so that you may give thanks. (5: 6)

15. Give importance to cleanliness and tidiness

Islam greatly emphasises cleanliness, which has both spiritual and physical benefits. Spiritually, it cleanses the soul and thus makes it difficult for Shayṭān to inculcate intrusive thoughts into the mind during prayer. Physically, cleanliness gives you the comfort and relaxation needed prior to prayer. It is important to note here that there is a distinction between cleanliness (naḍāfah) and purity (ṭahārah) as the latter is obligatory for the acceptance of the prayer.

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 1, p. 12.

Some practical suggestions that apply prior to prayer include:

a. If time permits, take a shower to clean yourself so you face Allāh (swt) with a clean body. Enter the shower with an intention to purify yourself from any sins before you meet Allāh (swt). (Note: the shower here does not compensate for the wuḍū).

b. Some 'aḥādīth emphasise the use of the siwāk, as narrated by Prophet Muḥammad (saw):

لولا أن أشق على أمتي لأمرتهم بالسواك مع كل صلاة

"If it was not for the difficulty that it may cause to my 'ummah, I would have ordered them to use the 'siwāk' during every prayer[1]."

The siwāk helps to refresh the breath and give it a pleasant smell. Alternatively, one can use a toothbrush.

c. Make the place of worship clean and tidy. Some report that an untidy place of worship will be a major distracting factor in their concentration during prayer. The believer should therefore make sure that the place where they plan to pray is tidy. This will not only relax and quieten the mind but will also ensure less distraction during prayer.

16. Wear appropriate clothing

It is narrated from Imām 'Alī (as) that he said:

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 22.

إن الانسان إذا كان في الصلاة فإن جسده وثيابه وكل شيء حوله يسبح

"When man is praying, his body, his clothes and everything else surrounding him glorifies [Allāh][1]."

There are a few points to consider when choosing the right clothes to wear that can help us concentrate during prayer:

a. The clothes we wear should be comfortable.

b. As well as wearing ritually pure clothes, which is obligatory for prayer, a believer should face Allāh (swt) with clean clothes that do not have an unpleasant odour that might detract his/her focus away. It is narrated that Imām 'Alī (as) said:

النظيف من الثياب يذهب الهم والحزن، وهو طهور للصلاة

"Clothes express beauty. Clean clothes remove sorrow and unhappiness and are necessary for prayer[2]."

c. Our clothes should not contain things that can act as distractions to us or fellow believers whilst praying. They should preferably be plain and white.

d. The clothes should not be excessively luxurious so one does not appear arrogant in front of Allāh (swt).

e. It is also mustaḥab to wear a khātim ring with 'aqīq stone while praying.

[1] al-Ṣadūq, 'Ilāl al-Sharāyi', vol. 2, p. 336.
[2] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 203.

Al-Shahīd al-Shaykh ʻAli Al-Jabaʻī al-ʻĀmilī (also known as al-Shahīd al-Thāni) has elaborated on the meaning of wearing the appropriate clothing both physically and symbolically by saying:

"The best adornment of the believer's garment is precaution and the most blessed garment is belief. As Allāh (swt) said, Yet the garment of Godwariness—that is the best. (7: 26)

Outward dress is a blessing from Allāh (swt) to preserve the modesty of the sons of Adam; it is a mark of honour which Allāh (swt) has given to the descendants of Adam. He did not give that honour to any other creature; it is given to the believers as a means of carrying out their obligations. Your best garments are those that do not distract you from Allāh, those garments, in fact, which bring you closer to His remembrance, and gratitude and obedience to Him. They should not be such as to move you to pride, conceit, pretence, boastfulness or arrogance: those things are the scourge of the faith, and their legacy is hardness of heart.

When you put on your clothes, remember that Allāh (swt) veils your wrong actions with His mercy. You should clothe your inward part as you clothe your outward part with your garment. Let your inward truth be veiled in awe of Allāh, and let your outward truth be veiled in obedience. Take heed of the overflowing favour of Allāh, since He created the means to make garments for covering physical immodesty and opened the gates for repentance, regret, and seeking succour,

in order to veil the inward parts, and their wrong actions and bad character.

Do not expose anyone's faults when Allāh (swt) has concealed worse things in yourself. Occupy yourself with your own faults, and overlook matters and situations that do not concern you. Beware lest you exhaust your life in other people's actions and exchange your irreplaceable endowed wealth with someone else, thereby destroying yourself. Forgetting wrong actions brings about the greatest of Allāh's punishments in this world, and is the most ample cause for punishment in the next. So long as the bondsman occupies himself with obeying Allāh, with recognizing his own faults and leaving alone whatever might devalue faith in Allāh, he is spared ruin and is immersed in the sea of Allāh's mercy, attaining the gems and the benefits of wisdom and clarity.

But as long as he forgets his own wrong actions, is ignorant of his own faults, and falls back on his power and strength, he will never be successful[1]."

17. Put on perfume before prayer

It is mustaḥab for the believer to put on perfume, and especially musk before prayer, as it is narrated from Imām 'Alī (as):

نِعْمَ الطِّيبُ الْمِسْكُ، خَفِيفٌ مَحْمِلُهُ، عَطِرٌ رِيحُهُ

[1] al-Shahīd al-Thānī, Rasā'il al-Shahīd al-Thānī, p. 117.

"The best scent is musk; its weight is light while its smell is fragrant[1]."

There are two main reasons for this: firstly as you stand in front of Allāh, The Exalted, and embark on this spiritual journey, it is advisable to meet Allāh (swt) with a beautiful fragrance. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment on every occasion of prayer, and eat and drink, but do not waste; indeed He does not like the wasteful. (7:31)

This verse advises us to approach the prayer with the adornment of perfume. This is how Allāh (swt) wants His servants to meet Him during prayer. Some interpret 'adornment' as practicing purity of character and spiritual excellence while approaching prayer.

Secondly the pleasant fragrance creates a spiritual environment for the believer and may increase his attention during prayer.

18. Choose a quiet and comfortable place to worship

Location and atmosphere is essential. Attempt to perform the following prior to prayer:

[1] al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Nahj al-Balāghah, Sayings. 407.

a. Switch off the TV during prayers, even if the TV is switched on for children.

b. If you have children, teach them to be quiet while you are praying and put away their toys. Explain to them why this is important. You may like to encourage them to pray with you, especially if they are older than around seven years old.

c. Switch off/silence (not vibrate) mobile phones.

d. Remove any pictures in front of you that might distract you during prayer.

e. You may like to allocate a special room for prayers, such that an association develops between that room and meeting Allāh (swt). This may not appeal to some who prefer alternating the place of prayer for better concentration (see point 83).

19. Plan which surah to recite in advance

In the first and second units of prayer, the believer has the option of choosing which sūrah to recite from the Holy Qur'ān after sūrah al-Fātiḥah. Usually a short sūrah is chosen. It is recommended to decide this before commencing the prayer. The reasons for this include:

a. Practicing the recitation of a particular sūrah ensures the correct pronunciation and tajwīd rules are applied during the prayer.

b. It can prove as a viable indicator for reflection after prayer for how well we have concentrated during prayer.

c. Understanding and contemplating the meanings of the 'āyāt in the sūrah help us focus on the meanings of the 'āyāt while reciting during prayer. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢٩﴾

[It is] a blessed Book that We have sent down to you, so that they may contemplate its signs, and that those who possess intellect may take admonition. (38: 29)

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا ﴿٢٤﴾

Do they not contemplate the Qur'ān, or are there locks on the hearts? (47: 24)

Would you want to recite the verses while your heart is locked? To open the lock, attempt to read the exegesis of the verses you plan to recite during prayer and ponder over their deep meanings so you may remember the meanings during recitation in prayer. If you are short of time, you may want to read and contemplate the summary of the meanings of the sūrah (but of course it is highly advisable to read the exegesis of every verse). For instance, if you plan to recite sūrah al-Shams (91), contemplate that Allāh (swt) swears by eleven of His creations to emphasise that the only way one can achieve happiness and satisfaction is through the purification of the heart. Thus concentration while reciting the sūrah can certainly be achieved with the contemplation on the eleven creations of Allāh (swt) and the overall meaning of this sūrah.

20. Contemplate on the creation of Allāh (swt)

To be spiritually 'charged' for prayer, try to remind yourself of Allāh's presence and creation. This can be done by contemplating on the wonders of Allāh's creation. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿١٩٠﴾ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَٰذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾

Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for those who possess intellects. Those who remember Allāh (swt) standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [and say], 'Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You! Save us from the punishment of the Fire.' (3: 190-191)

It is not shameful for a believer to acknowledge that their belief in Allāh (swt) is weak and in need of strengthening. As believers, we also need to continuously remind ourselves of the bounties and wonderful gifts that Allāh (swt) has given us so we strengthen our hearts and thus be confident of His presence. As we stand before Allāh (swt) in preparation for prayer, we must ponder over all the physiological systems within our bodies, operating beautifully to keep us alive, beginning from the circulation of blood, heartbeats, the immune system, the nervous system and respiration to gene function. Furthermore, we should contemplate on what is

around us, from the marvels of the cosmos, the animal world and the seas to the microbial world of bacteria and viruses. We have only to look up at the sky and ponder over the miraculous precision of the planets and the sun, the Milky Way and the universe. As we contemplate on these signs, we say:

رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَٰذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾

'Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You! Save us from the punishment of the Fire.' (3: 191)

Moreover, you may wish to pray outdoors (for example, your garden) and contemplate on the creation of Allāh (swt) prior to prayer. If this is not possible, you may take a short walk and contemplate the beautiful creation of the Almighty.

21. Relax your mind

The mind must be in a state of comfort to achieve true submission to Allāh. If you are tired, have just had an argument with someone, or had a stressful day at work, you should try to relax and focus on the journey ahead. Different people use different techniques to relax, but the most common is to sit down for a few minutes and close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, clear your head and try to focus only on Allāh (swt). Of course, this is far easier said than done, but certainly becomes easier with practice. It is reported that great scholars, such as the martyr Muḥammad Bāqir al-Sadr, used to sit for as long as necessary prior to prayer to clear their mind and attempt to be in the vicinity of Allāh (swt).

For further suggestions on the techniques used to relax your mind, refer to Chapter Seven of this book and the wider literature on meditation and relaxation techniques.

22. Treat this prayer as if it is your last

Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān, in sūrah Luqmān:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ ۖ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا ۖ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

Indeed the knowledge of the Hour is with Allāh. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Indeed Allāh (swt) is all-Knowing, all-Aware. (31: 34)

No one knows when or where they will depart from this life. Try to imagine how you would pray your last prayer, with the upmost submission and concentration. Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) emphasised this in the following narration:

يا عبد الله إذا صليت صلاة فريضة فصلها لوقتها صلاة مودع يخاف أن لا يعود إليها، ثم اصرف ببصرك إلى موضع سجودك، فلو تعلم من عن يمينك وعن شمالك لأحسنت صلاتك، واعلم أنك بين يدي من يراك ولا تراه

"O Servant of Allāh! When you offer prayer, pray like someone who bids farewell and fears that he will never return (i.e. pray in such a manner as if it were the last prayer of your life). Then fix your gaze on the point of your prostration. If you know that there is someone on your left or right, you take more care in offering your prayer; then know that you stand

in front of Someone Who sees you even though you don't see Him[1]."

23. Write down your thoughts and worries

Research suggests that one of the best ways to improve concentration is to write down your thoughts. This unleashes any worldly thoughts that occupy the mind. It will also identify any obstructive thoughts so that you can address them later.

Moreover, if you have a particular problem that is causing your mind to be restless, you might want to map out your thoughts prior to prayer using a problem-solution mind map. The idea is to write down 'problem' at the top of a blank piece of paper and map out every single detail and nature of the problem. As you complete this, write down 'solution' on the same paper and map out all possible solutions to this problem. This exercise will calm you down and make the solutions to the problem clear.

Other forms of mental distractions are worries. Dr Sarfraz Jeraj, a psychologist, writes for this book:

"Theories of worry and rumination include positive beliefs (conscious or unconscious) about worry. For example, someone might have a pressing issue on their mind and therefore will worry about finding a solution to this issue or worry to ensure he does not forget. Worries can therefore become very distracting in prayer. It may be useful to mentally 'park' these worries. This assures us that we can stop worrying

[1] al-Ṣadūq, Thawāb al-'A'māl, p. 35.

about something temporarily without having the anxiety that it will be forgotten. This can be done by recording the worry or task we need to do on a post-it note to come back to it later on after completing the prayer. Therefore, if you have a worry and are approaching prayer, write it down prior to approaching prayer so the worry does not distract you during the prayer."

24. Comprehend the philosophy of facing Makkah

When facing the qiblah, turn away from all other directions and face the sanctuary of Allāh (swt). Turn your heart away from all matters apart from Allāh. Make your heart turn towards one of the most ancient bases of monotheism, the centre of tawḥīd and Prophethood. Remember the history of Makkah and the time when the Father of the Prophets, Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) was ordered to build the Kaʿbah and settle his family in this barren land for one main mission: prayer.

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Lord! I have settled part of my descendants in a barren valley, by Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may maintain the prayer. So make the hearts of a part of the people fond of them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks. (14: 37)

Ask Allāh (swt) to make your heart yearn towards the Kaʿbah and purify your soul for prayer as Allāh (swt) ordered

Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) to purify this land and the people who make tawāf, pray, bow and prostrate:

وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿٢٦﴾

When We settled for Abraham the site of the House [saying], Do not ascribe any partners to Me, and purify My House for those who go around it, and those who stand [in it for prayer], and those who bow and prostrate. (22: 26)

And finally, as you face the qiblah, think about the fact that millions of people from different parts of the world are praying towards the Ka'bah and feel the spiritual energy emanating from all the believers uniting under the banner of tawḥīd and prayer.

25. Find Allāh (swt) in your heart and stand in front of Him with piety

As you stand and face the qiblah, empty your heart of all the preoccupations that might distract you from concentrating in your prayer and fill it with the love of Allāh (swt). Take a few minutes to search for Him. If you are sincere in your quest, you will find Him because He is nearer to us than our jugular vein (50: 16). Once you find Him, stand in front of Him with piety and fear and recognise the beauty of the Lord through your heart. To help you do this and to soften the heart, it helps to arrive early for this journey towards Allāh, and spend time reading the Holy Qur'ān or contemplating existence and His creation. Spend at least five minutes reading

and comprehending the Holy Qur'ān before prayer. This will make you dwell in the vicinity of Allāh (swt) and away from the whispers of the Shayṭān.

Spending time reading and pondering over the words of the Holy Qur'ān, without doubt, significantly aids concentration and connection to Allāh (swt) during prayer. Reading the words of Allāh (swt) and His communication with us makes the heart strong, illuminated and ready to meet the Lord.

Furthermore, it is important to contemplate the greatness of the words by sensing the greatness of the Author. As you read the verses, feel the presence of the Throne and His Dominion in your heart and attempt to understand the inner meanings of the verses. Become adorned with the characteristics of every verse. For example, if mercy and the promise of forgiveness are mentioned, become joyful and happy, and if anger and punishment are mentioned, become overtaken with fear. In this way, your mind and soul will react to the characteristics of the verses and you will be in complete contemplation of the Holy Qur'ān. This will undoubtedly prepare you for the journey ahead. Allāh (swt) says:

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ ۚ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا ﴿٨٢﴾

Do they not ponder on the Qur'ān? And if it were from any other than Allāh, they would have found in it many a discrepancy. (4: 82)

26. Identify factors that distract you in prayer and eliminate them

To eliminate the obstructive thoughts in your mind before prayer, it is best to identify the factors that distract you beforehand, and then try to eliminate them. For example, if you are distracted by your children during prayer, you may want to delay your prayer slightly until you find the opportunity to pray in silence. Try your utmost but know that if you cannot, then Allāh (swt) does not expect more than what you are capable of as He mentions in sūrah al-Najm.

وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

And that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and that he will soon be shown his endeavour. (53: 39-40)

27. Complete unfinished tasks

If an unfinished task will affect your concentration during prayer, you could complete the task before approaching prayer. However, if the unfinished task is predicted to take a long time to complete then the prayer must be performed first. For example, if you began cooking before the prayer time and the call for prayer was announced, you would have to decide whether your concentration would be worsened by thinking about the cooking. You should be able to judge and decide appropriately in each circumstance.

28. Recite the 'adhan (call for prayer)

When the time of prayer is established, it is the time for meeting and recognising Allāh (swt). To announce this spiritual occasion, Allāh (swt) has ordained the 'adhān.

Allāh (swt) says in sūrah al-Mā'idah:

وَإِذَا نَادَيْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ اتَّخَذُوهَا هُزُوًا وَلَعِبًا ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

And when you call to prayer they make it a mockery and a joke; this is because they are a people who do not understand. (5: 58)

Calling for prayer, or 'adhān, is a greatly emphasised practice of preparing for prayer. We begin and end with Allāh, as we recite Allāh (swt) is Greater, acknowledge His Oneness and His Prophet, hasten to prayer, happiness and the best acts (i.e. prayer) and affirm that there is no god but Allāh. If recited sincerely, it will no doubt set the scene for the spiritual journey to Allāh (swt) during prayer. It is narrated that the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) said:

المؤذنون أطول النّاس أعناقاً يوم القيامة

"Al-mu'adhinun (those who call for Allāh (swt)) will have the longest necks (i.e. will be the most exalted) on the Day of Judgment[1]."

There is a tendency amongst the believers however to ignore the 'adhān and merely recite the 'iqāmah prior to prayer. This is due to a lack of appreciation of the benefits of

[1] al-Ṣadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, vol. 2, p. 61.

the 'adhān, which is described in this narration from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

من أذن وأقام صلى وراءه صفان من الملائكة، وإن أقام بغير أذان صلى عن يمينه واحد، وعن شماله واحد، ثم قال: اغتنم الصفين

"Whoever recites the adhan and the iqāmah, two rows of angels will perform the prayer behind him; but if he recites the iqāmah without the adhan, one will pray on his right and one on his left and then (the angel) says: the two rows have been done (referring to the two rows comprising of only two people)[1]."

Some points to ponder on:

a. When you hear the call for prayer imagine the call for resurrection:

وَاسْتَمِعْ يَوْمَ يُنَادِ الْمُنَادِ مِنْ مَكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴿٤١﴾

And be on the alert for the day; when the caller calls from a close quarter. (50: 41)

b. As you hear the 'adhān and remember Allāh (swt), let happiness enter your heart, imagine awaiting the good news as your fate is announced on the Day of Judgment 'inshā Allāh.

c. When you hear the three calls beginning with the word 'ḥayyah' (make haste) recited in the 'adhān, prepare yourself

[1] al-Ṣadūq, Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh, vol. 1, p. 28.

to make haste towards prayer, towards success and towards the best and most rewarding task and recite:

لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم

"There is no might or power except in Allāh, the Mighty, the Wise[1]."

29. Perform sujud between 'adhan and 'iqāmah

It is narrated from Imām 'Alī (as) that he said:

من سجد بين الأذان والاقامة وقال: «رب سجدت لك خاضعا خاشعا ذليلا» يقول لله تعالى: ملائكتي! وعزتي وجلالي لأجعلن محبته في قلوب عبادي المؤمنين، وهيبته في قلوب المنافقين

"Anyone who performs prostration between the 'adhān and 'iqāmah and thus says while in prostration, 'I prostrate before You humbly, submissively and meekly' (Rabbi sajattu Lak khāḍi'an khāshi'an dhalīlā) Allāh (swt) will say: 'I swear by my Angels, Honour and Glory, I will place love for him in the hearts of the believers and fear of him in the hearts of the hypocrites [munāfiqīn][2].'"

It is understandable that with our busy lives, we find it difficult to spend much time in prostration before prayer, but spending around a minute prior to prayer in the state of prostration, praising Allāh (swt) for His gifts to us, repenting

[1] Dastghayb, Salāt Khāshi'īn, p. 47.
[2] Ibn Ṭāwūs, Falāḥ al-Sā'il, p. 152.

to Him for our sins and asking Allāh (swt) for help, can greatly improve concentration and submissiveness during prayer. This brief action, if done with sincerity, can no doubt remove arrogance from our hearts and set us in good stead for our journey to Allāh (swt).

30. Recite the 'iqāmah

In addition to the 'adhān, reciting the 'iqāmah is also emphasised prior to prayer in order to prepare the believer to reach proximity to Allāh (swt) during that prayer. 'Adhān is the call to prayer and the 'iqāmah is the opening of the prayer; a shortened form of the 'adhān. 'Iqāmah is the final check to see if our heart is present. When you recite 'Allāhu 'Akbar, it is the final opportunity before prayer to remove any hatred, anger and arrogance from the heart and to hasten towards the best act. When you recite 'Surely the prayers have been established', it is also the time to stand and reach to Allāh (swt). And finally, when you recite 'There is no god but Allāh' it is the final check to see if your heart has gained contentment, as described in Ma'ānī al-Akhbār:

"For Allāh (swt) is the clear proof against the people through His Messenger (s), His message, His explanation and His call. And He is more Majestic than for anybody to possess any argument against Him. So whoever answers Him, for him is light and honour. And one who denies Him, then indeed Allāh (swt) is needless of the universe and He is the quickest in accounting[1]."

[1] al-Ṣadūq, Ma'ānī al-'Akhbār p. 41.

31. Recite du‘ā’ after ’iqāmah

It is recommended to recite a du‘ā’ or verses of the Qur’ān after the ’iqāmah and before takbīrat al-’iḥrām:

Qur’ānic Du‘ā’ After ’Iqāmah

إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَاْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a ḥanīf, and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (6: 79)

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلاَتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

Say, ‘Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of Allāh, the Lord of all the worlds.’ (6: 162)

32. Recite a du‘ā’ before takbirat al-’ihrām

Try to feel the words and their meanings penetrate your heart as you stand in supplication before the Almighty.[1]

Du‘ā’ before Takbīr

يا محسن قد أتاك المسيء وقد أمرت المحسن أن يتجاوز عن المسيء أنت المحسن وأنا المسيء بحق محمد وآل محمد صل على محمد وآل محمد وتجاوز عن قبيح ما تعلم مني

[1] These du‘ā’ have been taken from Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two, p. 117-118.

"O Lord who is Beneficent! This sinful one has come before You and You have ordered the beneficent to show indulgence to the sinners. You are Beneficent, and I am a sinner. Bestow Your blessings on Muḥammad and his progeny, and pardon my evil acts of which You are aware."

اللهم إليك توجهت ومرضاتك ابتغيت وبك آمنت وعليك توكلت، صل على محمد وآل محمد وافتح قلبي لذكرك وثبتني على دينك ولا تزغ قلبي بعد إذ هديتني وهب لي من لدنك رحمة إنك أنت الوهاب

"O Lord, I have turned to You and Your pleasure I seek, and in You I have faith, and in You I rely, send salutations to Muḥammad and his family, and open my heart to continuous remembrance of You, and fix me on Your path, do not cause my heart to deviate (from guidance) after You have guided me, and grant me mercy from Yourself; verily You are the One Who grants."

اللهم رب هذه الدعوة التامة والصلاة القائمة بلغ محمدا (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) الدرجة والوسيلة والفضل والفضيلة بالله أستفتح وبالله أستنجح وبمحمد رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وآله) أتوجه اللهم صل على محمد وآل محمد واجعلنى بهم عندك وجيها في الدنيا والاخرة ومن المقربين

"O Allāh! Lord of this perfect call and the established prayer; give Muḥammad the status of mediation and superiority. I begin with Allāh (swt) and with Allāh (swt) I succeed and with Muḥammad (saw) I turn my face (towards Allāh). O Allāh, send salutations to Muḥammad and his family,

and make me an honourable person in this world and in the Hereafter and amongst the people who are close."

33. Imagine you are standing in front of Allāh (swt) on the Day of Judgment

As you are about to raise your hands for takbīrat al-'iḥrām, imagine standing in front of the Almighty on the Day of Judgment, waiting for your verdict. Remind yourself that He is the Majesty, the Almighty, the exceedingly Compassionate and Merciful, the Knowing, the King, the Owner, the Divine, the Peace, the Provider, the Exalter and the All-Hearing and the All-Seeing. He is the One Who created us, the One Who takes life from us and the One that will judge us. Such thoughts, reflected upon sincerely, should surely be sufficient to fill the heart of the believer with awe.

Conclusion

We should approach the prayer with motivation, a strong heart determined to get closer to Allāh (swt) and a continual remembrance that He is aware of our efforts. This attitude will offer us the best opportunity for a successful prayer.

It may be the case that we do not have time to recite the numerous supplications quoted in this chapter. What is important is that the personal conversation with the Almighty begins before the prayer. Even if we do not recite the specific du'ā' in Arabic, we should try to speak to Allāh (swt) in our own language, sincerely at every step of the preparation, from the wuḍū to the time we stand on our prayer mat.

However, the believer must beware that Shayṭān will cruise around him and enter through any loophole to divert his attention away from the Almighty. Allāh (swt) describes the pious as those who notice when the Shayṭān is distracting them and respond by remembering Allāh:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠١﴾

When those who are God-wary are touched by a visitation of Satan, they remember [Allāh] and, behold, they perceive. (7: 201)

Battling Shayṭān is indeed a jihād, especially at the prayer time. If Shayṭān enters your heart while preparing for prayer, do not give up and give in to him; you must battle against Shayṭān right to the last word in the prayer as he aims to distract you in every possible way so you do not concentrate at all in your prayer. Being aware of his attempts is the first step to shunning him away and hastening towards prayer.

Chapter 4: The Prayer

At this stage, the believer is ready to embark on this spiritual journey to the love and pleasure of Allāh (swt). He will be filled with awe and fear of his Lord, and submits completely with his mind and heart to the One and Only Omnipotent Creator. The following are some ideas that might help the believer along this magnificent journey.

34. Have a sincere nīyyah (intention)

A sincere nīyyah (intention) is the first test of your sincerity in prayer. Having a sincere nīyyah in prayer means praying solely to Allāh (swt) and only for His sake. The intention must be to please Him and no one else, without expecting worldly rewards.

As you affirm your intention (either verbally or in your heart) you should remember it until the end of the prayer. This means that you must be conscious of your intentions throughout the prayer and never allow worldly thoughts to penetrate the soul. Having a sincere, devout intention thus acts as a barrier against misguidance and ensures one is not distracted by secondary motives or concerns.

The nīyyah in prayer must be pure, i.e. must be solely for the pleasure and satisfaction of Allāh (swt), otherwise it will be considered void. For example, without realising it, we may slow down our prayer or make it seem that we have more sincerity when someone else is in the room as we pray. Therefore, unintentionally, our nīyyah is no longer for the sake of Allāh (swt) alone. Once our prayer is not solely for

the sake of Allāh, the quality of the prayer, as well as our concentration in it, will be affected.

35. Know that your hand movement in takbīrat al-'iḥrām is a symbol of leaving worldly matters

As you lift your hands for takbīrat al-'iḥrām and put them down uttering 'Allāhu 'Akbar consider your head to be clear from any thoughts other than those relating to Allāh (swt). With this hand movement you are symbolically expelling all extraneous thoughts from your head, facilitating full devotion to Allāh (swt). The mind and heart should be synchronised and fully devoted to Allāh (swt) as you are ready to affirm your intention to your Lord.

36. Regard all creatures as small in relation to the greatness of Allāh

As we recite 'Allāhu 'Akbar (Allāh (swt) is Greater) in takbīrat al-'iḥrām, we affirm our belief that Allāh (swt) is superior to everyone and everything. We stand with full humility in front of His Majesty without giving any attention to any unworthy creation.

Fayd Kashani in his book al-Mahajjah al-Bayḍā' says in this regard:

"Examine your heart during the ṣalāt. If you tasted the sweetness of the ṣalāt, and if in your soul you felt pleased and happy by it, and your heart enjoyed the supplication to Allāh (swt) and conversing with Him, know that Allāh (swt) has approved your takbīr. Otherwise, without feeling pleasure in supplication, and being deprived of tasting the sweetness of

worship, you should know that Allāh (swt) has denied you and dismissed you from His Threshold[1]."

Regarding the meaning of 'Allāhu 'Akbar, it is narrated in the book Salat (Prayer): The Mode of Divine Proximity and Recognition:

"One meaning of 'Allāhu 'Akbar denotes the eternity, everlastingness, knowledge, power, strength, benevolence, endowment, greatness and honour of Allāh (swt) the Almighty. By saying 'Allāhu 'Akbar, the mu'adhdhin implies, 'Allāh (swt) is He to whom belong the creation and the command.' He brings everything into creation by His Will. All that the creation possesses is due to Him. Also, its return is unto Him. He is the First, before everything, from eternity. He is the Last, after everything, and is Everlasting. He is Evident, more than anything else, but cannot be comprehended. He is the Hidden, more than anything else, but is without limits. (In other words, His being apparent is more evident than the manifestation of anything else and His concealment is more hidden than anything else)[2]."

37. Perform multiple takbir and recite du'ā'

It is recommended to perform 3, 5 or 7 takbīr (as in the hand movement during takbīrat al-'iḥrām), also known as 'takbīrat al-'iftitāḥīyyah' or the 'opening takbīr'. According to

[1] Kashani, al-Mahajjah al-Bayḍā', vol. 1, p.385.

[2] Isfahani, Ṣalāh (Prayer): The Mode of Divine Proximity and Recognition, Section on 'Adhān and 'Iqāmah. See [https://www.al-islam.org/salat-prayer-mode-divine-proximity-and-recognition-ayatullah-mirza-mahdi-isfahani] 08/07/2018.

Sayid Yazdi and as commented by Ayatollah Sistani, you can have the nīyyah of all the takbīrāt as takbīrat al-'iḥrām, but they say it is best if one considers the last takbīr to be the takbīrat al-'iḥrām. It is recommended to recite supplications between the takbir:[1]

Start with three takbīr then recite:

اللهم أنت الملك الحق لا إله إلا أنت سبحانك إني ظلمت نفسي فاغفر لي ذنبي إنه لا يغفر الذنوب إلا أنت

O Allāh, You are the Sovereign, none has the right to be worshiped except You. I have wronged my own soul and have acknowledged my sin, so forgive me all my sins for no one forgives sins except You.

Perform two further takbīr then recite:

لبيك وسعديك والخير في يديك والشر ليس إليك، والمهدي من هديت، لا ملجأ منك إلا إليك سبحانك وحنانيك وتباركت وتعاليت سبحانك رب البيت

Here I am, in answer to Your call, happy to serve You. All the goodness is in Your hands and evil is not attributed to You. Those who are guided are guided by You. There's no refuge from You except with You. Glory be to You! You are good, You are exalted and You are noble. Glory be to You, the Lord of the House.

Perform two final takbīr and begin reciting sūrah al-Fātiḥah.

[1] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two, p. 145.

38. Seek refuge with Allāh (swt) from Shaytan

Shayṭān has vowed to try his best to divert believers away from the straight path until the Day of Judgment. We should therefore be aware of his attempts and try the following:

a. It is recommended to (quietly) recite with a sincere intention "A'ūdhū bi Allāh min al-Shayṭān al-rajīm", which means "I seek refuge with Allāh (swt) from the accursed Satan", before reciting the sūrah of the Holy Qur'ān during prayer.

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ﴿٩٨﴾ إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ لَهُ سُلْطَانٌ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾ إِنَّمَا سُلْطَانُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِهِ مُشْرِكُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

When you recite the Qur'ān, seek the protection of Allāh (swt) against the outcast Satan. Indeed he does not have any authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord. His authority is only over those who befriend him and those who make him a partner [of Allāh]. (16: 98-100)

b. Keep away from satanic actions in life. For example, seeking refuge with Allāh (swt) from Shayṭān in prayer is considered worthless if a person constantly fills their mind with inappropriate thoughts, or constantly looks at what is prohibited. Consider Shayṭān as the 'number one enemy'; if he is present in our souls during our daily lives then it will be difficult to remove him during the prayer. Allāh (swt) reminds us:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٦﴾

Satan is indeed your enemy, so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his confederates so that they may be among the inmates of the Blaze. (35: 6)

39. Contemplate the meaning of the Basmalah

As we begin every sūrah with Bi 'ismi Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm or In the Name of Allāh, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful, it is crucial to comprehend the deep meanings of this verse. Some of these meanings include:

– The Basmalah is the mark of our monotheistic orientation. We must utter Bi 'ismi Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm before we begin any task so we confirm our sincere belief of tawḥīd.

– Reciting the Basmalah is the deepest form of respect towards Allāh (swt) as it teaches us morals and ethics and expresses our love and gratitude towards Him (swt).

– It invokes Allāh (swt)'s blessings on a task.

– Beginning with the Name of Allāh (swt) undoubtedly gives us the strength, the will and the courage to perform the task at hand with complete sincerity and integrity and to the best of our abilities.

– Allāh (swt) has thousands of beautiful names and attributes, but He has chosen the name Allāh (swt) in the Basmalah. The word 'God' in Arabic is 'ilāh, al-'ilāh means 'The God' and al-'ālihah means 'the gods'. Allāh (swt) therefore is the perfection

of the noun; it cannot be made plural or assigned a gender. Allāh (swt) is the Essence, the One and Only Who is worthy of love, compassion and worship as He possesses all perfection.

– Sayid Khomeini (ra) in his book 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt gives an excellent conclusion to the deep meaning of Bi 'ismi Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm:

"the sālik [traveller to Allāh] has to inform his heart, when reciting the Basmalah, that all the outward and inward beings and all the visible and invisible worlds, are under the education of the Names of Allāh, or rather, they are manifest by the manifestation of the Names of Allāh, and all his motions and stillness, and all the worlds, are based on the self-existence of the Greatest Name of Allāh. So, his praises are for Allāh, and his worship, obedience, monotheism and sincerity are all because of the self-existence of the Name of Allāh[1]."

– Allāh (swt) is al-Raḥmān as He is beneficent to all mankind and al-Raḥīm as He is Merciful to the believers, in particular as narrated in Al-Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān:

وَالله إِلهُ كُلِّ شَيْءِ الرَّحْمنُ بِجَمِيعِ خَلْقِهِ، الرَّحِيمُ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ خَاصَّةً

"Allāh (swt) is the Lord of everything, beneficent to all His creation, Merciful to specifically the believers[2]."

[1] Khomeini, 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt: The Disciplines of the Prayer, Discourse Four, Chapter 5, p. 443.

[2] al-Shirazi, Al-'Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, vol. 1, p. 29.

– The mercy of Allāh (swt) extends to the Day of Judgment, as narrated by the Prophet (saw):

إِنَّ للهِ عَزَّ وَجَلّ مائَةَ رَحْمَة، وَإِنَّهُ أَنْزَلَ مِنْهَا واحِدَةً إِلَى الأَرْضِ، فَقَسَّمَهَا بَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ، بِهَا يَتَعَاطَفُونَ وَيَتَرَاحَمُونَ، وَأَخَّرَ تِسْعاً وَتِسْعِينَ لِنَفْسِهِ يَرْحَمُ بِهَا عِبَادَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

"Allāh (swt) has divided mercy into one hundred parts; and sent down to earth one part which He has divided between His servants. Through this one part His servants deal with one another with compassion and mercy, and the other ninety-nine for Himself which He provides His servants with on the Day of Judgment[1]."

– By uttering the Basmalah, the heart is purified from all sins by asking Allāh (swt) for His mercy that encompasses all things.

40. Contemplate the exegesis of surah al-Fātiḥah

Imām al-Riḍhā (as) was asked to explain why sūrah al-Fātiḥah must be read in every prayer. It is narrated that he said:

لأنه ليس شئ من القرآن والكلام جمع فيه من جوامع الخير والحكمة ما جمع في سورة الحمد

[1] al-Ṭabrasī, Majma' al-Bayān. vol. 1, p. 54.

"This is because you will not find anywhere else in the Qur'ān something that includes a collection of good meanings and wisdom as you do in sūrah al-Ḥamd[1]."

Appreciating the significance of sūrah al-Fātiḥah (or al-Ḥamd or 'Umm al-Kitāb) is vital in facilitating undivided attention in prayer. Sūrah al-Fātiḥah is a very personal sūrah. Once it is recited with pure intentions and contemplation, communication with the Almighty can begin without the need for any mediators. The believer must recite the verses with an appreciation of their true significance rather than allowing the recitation to become routine. This is clearly emphasised in this ḥadīth al-qudsī where it is narrated that Allāh (swt) said:

قَسَمْتُ الصَّلاةَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ عَبْدِي نِصْفَيْنِ، نِصْفُهَا لِي وَنِصْفُهَا لِعَبْدِي، يَقُولُ الْعَبْدُ: الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ، يَقُولُ اللَّهُ: حَمِدَنِي عَبْدِي، يَقُولُ الْعَبْدُ: الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ، يَقُولُ اللَّهُ: أَثْنَى عَلَيَّ عَبْدِي، يَقُولُ الْعَبْدُ: مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ، يَقُولُ اللَّهُ: مَجَّدَنِي عَبْدِي، وَهَذِهِ الآيَةُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ عَبْدِي، إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ، فَهُوَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ عَبْدِي وَلِعَبْدِي مَا سَأَلَ، وَيَقُولُ الْعَبْدُ: اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلا الضَّالِّينَ فَهُوَ لِعَبْدِي وَلِعَبْدِي مَا سَأَلَ

"I have divided the prayer between Me and My servant, half of it for Me and half of it for My servant. When My servant says: 'In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful', Allāh (swt) says: 'My servant has remembered Me', and when he says: 'All praise is for Allāh', Allāh (swt) says:

[1] al-Ṣadūq, Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh, vol. 1, p. 310.

'My servant has praised and glorified Me,' and this is the meaning of 'Allāh (swt) hears from the one who praises Him'. And when he says: 'The Beneficent, the Merciful', Allāh (swt) says: 'My servant aggrandised Me.' And when he says: 'Master of the Day of Judgment,' Allāh (swt) says: 'My servant glorified Me.' [In another version: 'My servant has entrusted himself to Me']. And this verse is between Me and My servant. And when he says: 'You alone we worship and You alone we seek help,' Allāh (swt) says: 'This is between Me and My servant and My servant will get what he asked for.' And when he says: 'Guide us to the straight path, the path of whom You have blessed, not those whom You have sent Your wrath nor those who go astray', Allāh (swt) says: 'This is My servant and My servant will get what he has asked for[1].'"

When you begin to recite sūrah al-Fātiḥah, divide the sūrah into two parts. The first part is verses 1 to 4 where you praise and glorify the Almighty (swt). The second part is the remainder of the sūrah where you recite a set of pledges to Allāh (swt). Always have this in your mind prior to the recitation.

Understanding the exegesis (or tafsīr) of sūrah al-Fātiḥah allows its deep meaning to penetrate the heart. The following is a brief exegesis of al-Fātiḥah (1: 1-7):[2]

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[1] al-Ṭabrasī, Majma' al-Bayān. vol. 1, p. 48.

[2] The exegesis of sūrah al-Fātiḥah was inspired by: al-Shirazi, Al-'Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, vol. 1, p. 17-49, Exegesis of sūrah al-Fātiḥah; Qarā'atī, M. A Commentary on Prayer, p. 135; and Imanī, K.F, An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'ān, vol. 1, p. 33.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾

In the Name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful. (1: 1)

– See point 39 for explanation of the Basmalah.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

All praise belongs to Allāh, Lord of all the worlds. (1: 2)

– Praising Allāh (swt) in the form of al-ḥamd is not the same as shukr (thanks) or madḥ (praise), as al-ḥamd is praise and thanks to the extent of worship. As we worship Him and Him alone, this phrase can only be used in association with Allāh (swt).

– One may ask, why is Allāh (swt) praised? The answer lies in the next part of the verse: He is the Lord of all the worlds. Here, 'all the worlds' refer to the sky, the universe and the creatures, from the humans and animals to all other species. The explanation of this is also included in the Holy Qur'ān:

قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ وَمَا رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾ قَالَ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا ۖ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُوقِنِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

He [Pharaoh] said, 'And what is "the Lord of all the worlds?"' He said, 'The Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them – should you have conviction.' (26: 23-24)

الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾

The Beneficent, the Merciful. (1: 3)

– See point 39 for explanation and difference between these two attributes of Allāh (swt): al-Raḥmān and al-Raḥīm.

مَٰلِكِ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾

Master of the Day of Judgment. (1: 4)

– Allāh (swt) is not only the Lord of the universe and everything in it; He is the Owner, Sovereign and Master of the Day of Judgment.

– Man deludes himself into thinking he is the master of his own affairs in this world and tends to neglect the real Master. Here, Allāh (swt) specifically states He is the Master of the Day of Judgment; no man can claim its mastership. When man is asked on that Day:

لِّمَنِ ٱلۡمُلۡكُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَۖ لِلَّهِ ٱلۡوَٰحِدِ ٱلۡقَهَّارِ ﴿١٦﴾

'To whom does the sovereignty belong today?' 'To Allāh, the One, the All-Paramount!' (40:16)

– Meaning of mālik (master): Man is considered the master of his own body parts and can move them whenever he likes, Allāh (swt) is the Master of the Day of Judgment and so He decides the fate of all whenever and wherever He likes.

– The link to the previous verse, 'The Beneficent, the Merciful' and this verse, 'Master of the Day of Judgment' is an interesting one. Allāh (swt) has mentioned two of His greatest attributes and has promised to be beneficent to all mankind. However, in the next verse He reminds mankind that His ultimate justice on the Day of Judgment awaits them.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

You do we serve and You alone do we beseech for help (1: 5)

– After establishing complete obedience and servitude to Allāh (swt) by praising Him, contemplating Him as the Lord of the worlds, stamping the essence of faith in our hearts with tawḥīd, glorifying Allāh (swt) with two of His magnificent attributes and remembering the Day of Judgment, the servant is now ready to address his Lord: "You alone we worship and from You alone we seek help."

– The verse turns to tawḥīd (unity) of worship and tawḥīd of seeking help in the plural form where it states 'we worship' and 'we turn for help'. This emphasises the importance of congregational prayers and unity in Islam.

– Tawḥīd of worship means that we firmly acknowledge that Allāh (swt) alone is worthy of worship and tawḥīd of seeking help means that we firmly acknowledge that we should ask help from Allāh (swt) alone.

– Worship can sometimes be difficult, for example when concentrating in prayer. In this verse Allāh (swt) links worship to seeking help, which encourages us to seek help from Him even when we worship Him.

ٱهْدِنَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾

Guide us on the straight path. (1: 6)

– After addressing Allāh (swt) and pleading for His help, the servant seeks to ask his Lord for the most important request: "Oh Allāh, guide us to the straight path."

– Here are three brief explanations of 'the straight path':

• Worshiping Allāh:

وَأَنِ ٱعۡبُدُونِيۚ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطٞ مُّسۡتَقِيمٞ ٦١

Worship Me. That is a straight path. (36: 61)

• The path of Ibrāhīm (as) and his descendants:

قُلۡ إِنَّنِي هَدَىٰنِي رَبِّيٓ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ دِينٗا قِيَمٗا مِّلَّةَ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفٗاۚ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ١٦١

Say, 'Indeed my Lord has guided me to a straight path, the upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a ḥanīf, and he was not one of the polytheists.' (6: 161)

• Holding fast to Allāh:

وَمَن يَعۡتَصِم بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدۡ هُدِيَ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ١٠١

And whoever takes recourse in Allāh (swt) is certainly guided to a straight path. (3: 101)

All of the above three meanings share the same core principle: the straight path is the path of true belief in the Divine religion of Allāh (swt) with its moral and practical aspects. It is the path of righteousness, justice, and faith.

صِرَاطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ ٱلْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

The path of those upon whom You have blessed – such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray. (1: 7)

The request from the servant for guidance to the straight path in the previous verse is elaborated in this verse. The servant asks his Lord: "Keep us on the path of those whom You, O Allāh, have blessed; not the path of those who incur Your wrath, nor of those who go astray." Who are those whom Allāh (swt) has blessed? And who are those people who incur His wrath and who go astray? As for those whom Allāh (swt) has blessed, Allāh (swt) describes them:

وَ مَنْ يُطِعِ ٱلرَّسُولَ فَأُولٰئِكَ مَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللهُ عَلَيهِم مِنَ ٱلنَّبِيِّينَ وَ ٱلصِّدِّيقِينَ وَ ٱلشُّهَداء وَ ٱلصَّالِحِينَ وَ حَسُنَ أُولٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا ﴿٦٩﴾

Whoever obeys Allāh (swt) and the Apostle – they are with those whom Allāh (swt) has blessed, including the prophets and the truthful, the martyrs[1] *and the righteous, and excellent companions are they!* (4: 69)

An interesting observation in Al-'Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān[2] argues that these are four stages that will eventually build the perfect Islamic society: that of the prophets who lived and struggled for the sake of Allāh, that of the truthful and sincere individuals who preach for Islam and their words attest to their actions, that of the martyrs who faced injustice

[1] Note that martyrs is one of a few other interpretations of the word 'shuhadā'. One other meaning is 'witnesses'.

[2] al-Shirazi, Al-'Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, vol. 1, p. 47.

and defended the truth for the sake of Allāh, and finally the stage of those righteous individuals who spread peace, human rights and respect in a perfect society after it is corrupted with injustice and inhumanity.

When reciting the last verse of al-Fātiḥah, we ask the Almighty in our heart to include us in the ranks of the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous.

– There are several interpretations about the identity of those who incur Allāh's wrath and who have gone astray. However, the general understanding is that those who have gone astray are the misguided people, those who incur Allāh's wrath are the hypocrites and those who pursue the path of hatred against Allāh (swt). The people who incur Allāh's wrath are considered to be worse than the people who have gone astray, as the former consciously rebel against Islamic beliefs and principles.

Finally, after you recite sūrah al-Fātiḥah, take a deep breath and say Al-ḥamdu li 'Allāh Rabbi Al-'ālamīn: Praise be to Allāh, Lord of the Worlds[1]. This is so you praise Allāh (swt) for guiding you to the Right Path and not amongst those who incur Allāh's wrath and who have gone astray.

[1] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 146.

41. Contemplate the exegesis of surah al-'Ikhlāṣ

A brief exegesis of sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ[1] is given here because of its fundamental and concise guidance on the Oneness of Allāh (swt) and that it represents one third of the Qur'ān as narrated by the Holy Prophet (saw):

أيعجز أحدكم أن يقرأ ثلث القرآن في ليلة؟ قيل: يا رسول اللّه ومن يطيق ذلك؟ قال: اقرأوا قل هو اللّه أحد

"Is there anyone of you unable to recite one third of the Qur'ān in one night?' One of his listeners asked: 'O Messenger of Allāh! Who is able to do that?' The Prophet (saw) said: 'Recite, Say: He, Allāh, is One!' (sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ)[2]."

This sūrah represents the purest and most sincere monotheistic beliefs, away from polytheism and any association of partners with Allāh (swt); this is why the sūrah has been named 'Ikhlāṣ. It is thus highly recommended to recite this sūrah in the daily prayers as narrated by Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

من مضى به يوم واحد فصلى فيه بخمس صلوات ولم يقرأ فيها بقل هو اللّه أحد قيل له: يا عبد اللّه لست من المصلين

"If a day passes by and the believer does not recite 'Say: He, Allāh (swt), is One' (sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ) in his prayers, they

[1] The exegesis of sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ was inspired by: al-Shirazi. Al-'Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, vol. 20. p. 425-436, Exegesis of sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ; and Qarā'atī, M. A Commentary on Prayer, p. 173.

[2] al-Ṭayālisī, Musnad Ibn Dawūd al-Ṭayālisī, p. 131.

say to him: Oh servant of Allāh, you are not amongst those who pray[1]."

The following is a brief exegesis of sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ (112: 1-4):

قُلْ هُوَ ٱللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾

Say: He, Allāh, is One (112: 1)

– When we recite 'Say: He, Allāh (swt), is One' we must comprehend that One does not mean 'one' in a numerical sense (i.e. followed by two and three); rather 'One' means that there is no one like Him and no example of Him.

– He is One as described in the book: An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'ān: "He is One with none comparable to Him, without any beginning or end, unlimited by time, space or circumstances. A reality before which all others have no existence. He is the Creator, One, and everything is His creation[2]."

ٱللَّهُ ٱلصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾

Allāh (swt) is He on Whom all depend. (112: 2)

– 'ṣamad' in Arabic is described as 'qaṣd' which means 'seek'. In this context, it means Allāh (swt) is the master that we seek to satisfy our needs. We are all in need of Him, He is needless

[1] al-Kulaynī, Al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 455.

[2] Imanī, K.F, An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'ān, vol. 20, p. 298-299.

and independent of anyone. Other meanings include that He is not material, has no body and does not have bodily features and senses.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾

He begets not, nor is He begotten. (112: 3)

– This verse answers the Jews, Christians and the non-believers that Allāh (swt) does not have a father or son, and it is impossible for any being to be His equal, to be similar to Him or like Him. His relationship with His creation is not like a parent with a child. He is neither in anything nor is anything in Him, as nothing is like Him.

وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌۢ ﴿٤﴾

And none is like Him (112: 4)

– Kufuwan means equal in position, thus this verse means He has no equal in being, does not have a partner or peer and is the Ultimate Unique Being.

– It is narrated that the Commander of the Faithful (as) said:

لم يلد فيكون مولوداً، ولم يولد فيصير محدوداً... ولا كفء له فيكافئه، ولا نظير له فيساويه

"He begets not so as to be born, and nor is He begotten and hence limited. He is incomparable to anyone, so no one

can be compared to Him, and no one is like Him or equal to Him[1]."

In summary, this sūrah gives a concise and clear explanation of the concept of tawḥīd, one that reveals monotheism and neglects all layers of polytheism. The verses describe Allāh (swt) by revealing His Oneness as He is One in Essence and Attributes; He is independent and needless of others; He does not reproduce nor is created; He has no equal in being and does not have parents, children or peers.

If you decide to recite sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ in the prayer, it is recommended also to say Kadhālika Allāhu Rabbī (That is indeed how my Lord is) after the recitation of the surah[2] as described in this narration:

عن عبد العزيز بن المهتدي قال: سألت الرضا عليه السلام عن التوحيد فقال: كل من قرأ قل هو الله أحد وآمن بها فقد عرف التوحيد، قلت: كيف يقرؤها؟ قال: كما يقرؤها الناس وزاد فيه كذلك الله ربي [كذلك الله ربي]

"It is narrated from Abdul Aziz ibn al-Mahtadi that when he asked Imām al-Riḍhā (as) about the Oneness of Allāh (swt) (tawḥīd), Imām al-Riḍhā replied: 'Whoever reads 'Say: He, Allāh (swt), is One' (sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ), believing in it, he will comprehend tawḥīd.' Al-Mahtadi then asked: 'How

[1] al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 186

[2] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 146.

should we read it?' The Imām replied: 'Read it the way people read it,' then he added 'Kadhālika Allāhu Rabbī' twice[1]."

It is common to recite sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ after sūrah al-Fātiḥah, as it is a recommended practice, yet less attention is given to its meaning. However, if we recite 'Kadhālika Allāhu Rabbī' or 'that is indeed how my Lord is' after reciting the sūrah, the Oneness and glorification of Allāh (swt) stated in sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ is emphasised and this may draw attention back to the prayer.

42. Supplicate to Allāh (swt) as you recite the verses

Try to supplicate to Allāh (swt) in your heart from what you read from verses in the sūrah after sūrah al-Fātiḥah. So for instance if the contents of the sūrah mention Hellfire then ask Allāh (swt) in your heart to distant you from Hellfire on the Day of Judgment and take you to Paradise. If however you recite a verse that mentions the mercy of Allāh (swt) then ask for His mercy and forgiveness.

43. Alternate recitation of the second surah

By limiting the recitation of the second sūrah to the same three or four suwar of the Holy Qur'ān, the brain becomes accustomed to repeating these small suwar. Subconsciously our attention will therefore switch to something else. It is in fact makrūh (not recommended) to repeat the same sūrah in the same prayer, except for sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ. The believer can choose from a range of small chapters to recite, beginning

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 1, p. 91.

from sūrah al-Ṭāriq (86) to the final sūrah an-Nās. If you have the time and the capability to recite slightly longer chapters, then recite from sūrah 78 onwards.[1]

It is recommended to recite certain sūrah from the Qur'ān with certain prayers:[2]

– Fajr Prayer: sūrah al-Naba (78); al-Ghāshiya (88); al-Balad (90); al-Insān (76).

– Ẓuhr and 'Ishā' Prayers: al-Shams (91); al-A'lā (87).

– 'Aṣr and Maghrib: al-Takāthur(102); al-Naṣr (110).

– Ẓuhr, 'Aṣr and 'Ishā' on Fridays: first rak'at: al-Jumu'ah (62) and second rak'at: al-Munāfiqūn (63).

– Fajr and Maghrib on Fridays: first rak'at: al-Jumu'ah (62) and second rak'at: al-'Ikhlāṣ (112).

– All Prayers: first rak'at: al-Qadr (97) and second rak'at: al-'Ikhlāṣ (112).

– Fajr Prayers on Mondays and Thursdays: first rak'at: al-Insān (76) and second rak'at: al-Ghāshiya (88).

44. Imagine you are writing what you recite

Some have suggested that imagining writing what they are reciting helps them concentrate in their recitation. With this technique, caution must be taken to concentrate on the

[1] It is best to avoid sūrah al-'Alaq (96) as it has a compulsory sajdah. Also see jurisprudential rulings regarding combining sūrah 93 and 94 and combining sūrah 105 and 106.

[2] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 146.

meaning of the verses as well as the actual words. It is therefore essential to strike a balance between imagining writing what you are reciting and contemplating on what you are reciting, if one seeks to practice this suggestion.

45. Pause after reciting each verse

Pausing after recitation of each verse during the prayer helps to relax the mind and focus on the recitation. For instance, it is narrated from the sixth Imām, Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) that it is makrūh to read sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ in a single breath:

يكره ان تقرأ قل هو الله احد في نفسٍ واحد

"It is not recommended (makrūh) to recite 'Say: He, Allāh (swt), is One' (sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ) in one breath[1]."

Furthermore, it is recommended to pause after completing the recitation of sūrah al-Fātiḥah and before and after qunūt (invocation in the second rak'at).

46. Recite with a beautiful voice

Reciting the verses of the Holy Qur'ān in a beautiful voice gives the believer the ability to focus on the recitation and create a spiritual environment. It is narrated from the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) that he said:

إنّ من أجمل الجمال: الشعر الحسن، ونعم النعمة الصوت الحسن

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 451.

"The most beautiful of all beautiful things are: the beautiful poem and the tone of a beautiful voice[1]."

Do not be discouraged if you feel that your voice is not beautiful. Attempt to make it beautiful by training your voice, especially when reading the Holy Qur'ān with the correct tajwīd[2] rules. Another narration from the Prophet (saw) says:

حسّنوا القرآن بأصواتكم، فإنّ الصوت الحسن يزيد القرآن حسناً

"Make the Qur'ān beautiful with your voices, as the beautiful voice increases the Qur'ān in beauty[3]."

47. Learn new invocations in qunūt

In the second rak'ah of prayer, the believer who is aware of Allāh, while recognising his own degradation and dependence, raises his hands to beseech the Lord, the Self-Sufficient, the Needless. While doing so, he should attempt to learn new invocations in his qunūt (invocation in prayer) that might help him connect to Allāh (swt), while uttering the supplication and comprehending the meaning. For instance, the du'ā' might be personal, such as asking Allāh (swt) to forgive his sins as he mentions them one by one (note that for the acceptance of the qunūt, the jurisprudential requirement is that the du'ā' should be recited in Arabic). Otherwise there

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 615.

[2] Women can only recite the verses loud during prayer in front of a mahram.

[3] al-Ṣadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, vol. 1, p. 75.

are many short supplications that the believer can recite, including this recommended supplication:[1]

Du'ā' for Qunūt

لا إِله إلا اللهُ الحَليمُ الكَرِيمُ، لا إِله إلا اللهُ العَلِى العَظِيمُ سُبْحانَ الله رَبّ السَموواتِ السَبْعُ و رَبّ الارْضِينَ السَبْعُ، وَما فِيهِنَّ وَما بَينَهُنَّ و رَبّ العَرْشِ العَظِيمِ، والْحَمْدُ للّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِين

"There is no God but Allāh (swt) the Forbearing, the most Generous, There is no God but Allāh, the Exalted, the Mighty. Glory be to Allāh, the Lord of the seven heavens, and the Lord of the seven earths and what is inside and what is outside and Lord of the mighty Throne. Praise be to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds."

48. Understand the philosophy behind rukū'

In order to obtain spiritual fulfilment from al-rukū', we must seek to understand the philosophy behind this position:

– The rukū' position is the preparation for complete and absolute surrender to the Omnipotent Lord. It is the stage when the believer extends out his neck and says in his heart uttering his pleas: "*Oh Allāh, this is my neck, a core component of my body and is bowed before Your Glory and Majesty, and this is my head which is the essence of my existence, all at Your service. I provide these to Your Majesty with complete humbleness and submission to Your ever-lasting Power, begging You to accept me as*

[1] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 186.

a humble servant, and that Your Highness owns total and complete control over my life and affairs; *I am under Your mercy. I seek to lose my life, my family, my wealth in Your way and for Your approval.*" This is the 'ādāb or the courtesy we must show when we are in that position.

– The rukū' is the glorification of Allāh (swt). This is why we say when we are in the rukū' position: "Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise belongs to Him". It is the position when the believer witnesses in his heart the veneration of the Lord, and the humbleness of the servant in the bowing position towards his Lord.

– The rukū' position is the preparation for the sujūd position. If you achieve the degree of submission of the rukū', you would qualify for the sujūd as the rukū' is the sign of courtesy ('adab) and if performed in its proper manner, you will be ready to gain proximity to Allāh (swt) in the sujūd.

– Hayder Jafari, an Islamic lecturer and researcher, wrote for this book:

"Upon reflection, prayer can be viewed, symbolically, as a cycle of the whole life of an individual; wrapped up from inception all the way to the return to Allāh (swt) through death. Standing marks the start of life for the believer, and prostration in prayer marks the end. For the latter, the movement of prayer towards the sujūd portrays the return to earth at death in the same way as dying is the return to the Almighty Allāh (swt). By taking this symbolic action of life in prayer, rukū' therefore acts as the bridge in the return to

Allāh (swt); marking the way towards the ultimate ending in sujūd."

49. Perform the recommended acts in rukū'

Some of the recommended acts to be performed in the rukū' position are: to raise your hand and recite 'Allāhu 'Akbar (Allāh is Greater) before and after rukū'. Put your knees all the way back, straighten your back and stretch your neck, recite the ṣalawāt before or after tasbīḥ and recite the following du'ā' before the tasbīḥ in rukū'[1]:

Du'ā' for Rukū'

اللهم لك ركعت ولك أسلمت وعليك توكلت وأنت ربي، خشع لك قلبي وسمعي وبصري وشعري وبشري ولحمي، ودمي ومخي وعصبي وعظامي وما أقلته قدماي، غير مستنكف ولا مستكبر ولا مستحسر

"O Allāh, unto You I have bowed, and in You I have believed, and to You I have submitted my heart, hearing, sight, hair, skin, flesh, blood, mind, nerves, bones, tendons and what my feet carry are humbled before You, with no objection, arrogance and weariness."

In the bowing position, we supplicate to the Almighty by thanking Him for all the countless bounties He has bestowed on us, and acknowledging that all our body parts and organs are incapable of completely thanking the Almighty causes us to then offer sujūd before Him.

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[1] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 157.

50. Alternate the tasbih in rukū‘ and sujūd

It is common practice to recite “Sūbḥāna rabbī al-aẓīmi wa bi-hamdih” which means “Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise belongs to Him” when performing the rukū‘ and “Subḥāna rabbī al-’a‘lā wa bi-hamdih” which means “Glory be to my Lord, The Exalted, and praise belongs to Him” when performing the sujūd. In order to prevent the brain from becoming accustomed to repeating these tasbīḥ, it is recommended to alternatively recite one of the following tasbīḥ three times during rukū‘: subḥān ’Allāh or ’Allāhu ’Akbar or Al-ḥamdu li ’Allāh[1].

51. Praise Allāh (swt) in qīyām for hearing your glorification

When in a state of rukū‘, we recite tasbīḥ and glorify the Almighty Allāh (swt). When we stand upright after rukū‘ (qīyām), we recite “Sami‘ Allāhu liman ḥamidah” which means “Allāh (swt) hears those who glorify Him.” Feel that Allāh (swt) has indeed listened to your glorification, and recite this du‘ā’:[2]

Du‘ā’ for Qīyām

الحمد لله رب العالمين أهل الجبروت والكبرياء، والعظمة لله رب العالمين

[1] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 150.
[2] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 157.

"Praise be to Allāh, Lord of the worlds, worthy of Majesty and Magnificence, and All Power belongs to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds."

52. Understand the philosophy of sujūd

Comprehending the philosophy behind the act of prostrating to Allāh (swt) no doubt provides the spiritual backbone needed to focus during prayers. Sujūd is the most rewarding position the believer can be in. It drives us closer to Allāh (swt) as He states in chapter 96 verse 19[1].

When prostrating, the believer is in a state of humbleness and humility in the presence of the Omnipotent Authority. The wider message is clear: attaining nearness to Allāh (swt) in life can only occur while the believer expresses piety and humility towards his Creator. This can be achieved with sincere and submissive prostration to Allāh, as arrogance and egoistic tendencies are suppressed and anxiety and stress are relieved during this unique Islamic act.

Furthermore, it is narrated that Imām 'Alī (as) was asked about the meaning of prostration, or sujūd and he described it beautifully:

عن معنى السجدة الأولى، قال: تأويلها: اللهم إنك منها خلقتنا، يعني من الأرض، وتأويل رفع رأسك: ومنها أخرجتنا، والسجدة الثانية: واليها تعيدنا، ورفع رأسك: ومنها تخرجنا تارة اخرى

[1] This is a verse of obligatory sajdah, thus not mentioned here.

"The first sujūd means 'O Allāh (swt) you have created us from it', meaning dust (we were dust in the beginning), and as I raise my head from sujūd, it means 'You took us out from it' (we came to the world from the dust). The second sujūd means 'From inside it You will take us back' (that we will again return to the earth), and as I raise my head from the second sujūd, it means 'From it You will raise us a second time' (i.e. on the Day of Resurrection I will rise up from the grave and be summoned)[1]."

This explanation refers to this verse in the Holy Qur'ān when it refers to dust:

مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ ﴿٥٥﴾

From it did We created you, into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you forth another time. (20: 55)

As you raise your head for the first time from the state of prostration, and as you have come to the world from dust, remember your sins and ask Allāh (swt) for forgiveness before you do the second sujūd which is when you return to dust for the final time.

In addition to spiritual benefits, sujūd also has medical benefits according to Dr Mohammed Karim Beebani:

"Sajdah is a unique position as this is the only position in which the brain (or head) becomes lower than the heart and hence for the first time the blood gushes towards the brain with full force whereas in all other positions (even when lying

[1] al-Ṣadūq, 'Ilāl al-Sharāyi', vol. 4, p. 336.

down) the brain is above the heart when it has to work against gravity to send blood to the brain. In the position of sajdah due to the increased blood supply the brain receives more nourishment and it has good effect upon memory, vision, hearing, concentration, psyche and all other cognitive abilities. People who offer their prayers regularly have more will power and can cope with the difficulties of life in a much better manner. They have fewer incidences of headaches, psychological problems and other defects of cognitive functions[1]."

53. Prolong your sujud as much as you can

It is narrated from Imām 'Alī (as):

لو يعلم المصلي ما يغشاه من جلال الله، ما سره ان يرفع رأسه من السجود

"If the worshipper knew to what extent His (Allāh's) magnificence surrounds him during prayer, he would never raise his head from the state of prostration[2]."

The Commander of the Faithful (as) here signifies the importance of prolonging our prostration to Allāh (swt), by revealing to the believers the opportunity they are missing when they take prostration lightly and without sincerity. The state of prostration to Allāh (swt) teaches us humility, obedience, piety and humbleness. Most importantly, it takes us nearer to Allāh (swt) than in any other possible state.

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[1] Saudi Gazette, July 7, 2000.
[2] al-Ṣadūq, al-Khiṣāl, p. 632.

It is also narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) that he heard his father, Imām al-Bāqir (as), in the mosque one night alone in prostration, reciting the following:[1]

Du'ā' for Sujūd

سبحانك اللهم أنت ربي حقا حقا سجدت لك يا رب تعبدا ورقا، اللهم إن عملي ضعيف فضاعفه لي، اللهم قني عذابك يوم تبعث عبادك وتب علي إنك أنت التواب الرحيم

"Glorified be You, O Allāh. You are my Lord most definitely. There is no God but Allāh, I prostrate to You, O Lord, and worship You and serve You. O Allāh, my actions are weak so strengthen it for me. O Allāh (swt), protect me from Your punishment on the day You raise up Your servants, and forgive me, as You are Relenting and Merciful."

54. Recite du'ā' between the two sujūd and during and after sujūd

It is recommended to recite salwāt tasbīḥ during sujūd and du'ā' before the tasbīḥ and during the last sujūd of the prayer.[2]

Du'ā' before tasbīḥ while in sujūd

اللهم لك سجدت وبك آمنت ولك أسلمت وعليك توكلت وأنت ربي سجد وجهي للذي خلقه وشق سمعه وبصره والحمد لله رب العالمين تبارك الله أحسن الخالقين

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 323.

[2] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 167-169.

"Oh Allāh, to You I have prostrated and in You I have believed and to You I have submitted and in You I put my trust and You are my Lord, my face prostrates to Him who created it and brought forth its hearing and seeing. Praise be to Allāh (swt) the Lord of the worlds, blessed be Allāh (swt), the Best of creators."

Du'ā' after the last sujūd

يا خير المسؤولين ويا خير المعطين ارزقني وارزق عيالي من فضلك فإنك ذوالفضل العظيم

"O You Who are the Best from whom people seek their needs, and O You Who are the Best Bestower of gifts! Give me and the members of my family sustenance with Your grace. Undoubtedly You possess the greatest grace."

Du'ā' in between the two sujūd

اللهم اغفر لي وارحمني وأجرني وادفع عني، فإني لما أنزلت إلي من خير فقير، تبارك الله رب العالمين

"Oh Allāh, forgive me and have mercy on me, compensate me and defend me, I stand in need of whatever good You may send down to me. Blessed be Allāh, the Lord of the worlds."

55. Contemplate on the meaning of the tasbīḥ in the third and/or fourth rak'ah

As we move to the third and/or forth rak'ah, we recite this tasbīḥ three times:[1]

سبحان اللهِ والحمدُ للهِ ولا إله إلّا اللهُ والله أكبر

"Glory be to Allāh, all praise is for Allāh, there is no God but Allāh (swt) and Allāh (swt) is the Greatest."

To attain the maximum benefit of this recitation, it is important to contemplate on the meaning of the tasbīḥ. The word subḥān is defined by Arabic litterateurs as 'al-tanzīh' which is translated to mean 'transcendence'. When we say "subḥān 'Allāh" we are saying "O Allāh, You are transcendent above all creators and creations and You are transcendent above all time and space and You are transcendent above all imperfection and deficiency as all Your actions are holy and free from evil and injustice". This meaning is referred to briefly in the Holy Qur'ān when Allāh (swt) refutes the claims of the ignorant and the disbelievers:

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ مَعَهُ آلِهَةٌ كَمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذًا لَابْتَغَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِي الْعَرْشِ سَبِيلًا ﴿٤٢﴾ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا ﴿٤٣﴾

Say: If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of power.

[1] It is wajib to recite this only once; three times is mustaḥab.

Transcendent is He and exalted be He in high exaltation above what they say. (17: 42-43)

As we continue and say "wa al-ḥamdu li 'llāh" we should differentiate between the words 'al-ḥamd' and 'al-shukr' as they are both often translated as 'praise': 'al-shukr' is used to thank Allāh (swt) for a specific grace or bounty that Allāh (swt) has bestowed, whereas 'al-ḥamd' is a more general form of thankfulness where you send your gratitude to Him for all the gifts and graces He has bestowed on you. For example, you may want to thank Allāh (swt) for the birth of your child, and by saying "shukran li-llāh" you have praised Allāh (swt) for the safe delivery of your child but if you say "al-ḥamdu li 'llāh" you go beyond that and praise Allāh (swt) for all His bounties and blessings He has provided.

Finally as you utter "Wa lā 'ilaha 'illā Allāh wa Allāhu 'akbar" you are clearly and firmly stating your monotheistic belief by sincerely believing He is the Only One and no one is greater than Him as well as affirming that He is the Omnipotent and the Omniscient Lord of the worlds and the universe.[1]

56. Focus on the true meanings of the taslīm

When you recite the taslīm (at the sitting position after prostration), send salām (greetings of peace) and bid farewell to the prayer the way a mother bids farewell to a beloved. Take your time and feel the benefits of this spiritual journey that you have just undertaken and the disappointment that is

[1] Refer to exegesis of sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ in this chapter for a more comprehensive meaning of the Oneness of Allāh (swt).

coming to an end. As you bid farewell with the taslīm, you are attaining security from the trials of this world and exemption from the tortures of the Hereafter.

As you recite the last obligatory salām: "Asalāmu ʿalaykum wa raḥmatullāh" which means "Allāh's peace, blessings and mercy be upon you", know that you are sending your salām to the prophets, the Ahl al-Bayt (as), the true believers – deceased or alive – the angels and the jinn, and feel the warmth and blessings of their reply to you as you end this spiritual journey of prayer.

57. Imagine every part of your body will bear witness to the oneness of Allāh (swt)

As you praise Allāh (swt) in the tashahhud, have no doubt in your heart that you bear witness that there is no god but Allāh (swt) and imagine every part of your body to bear witness to His Oneness. Feel the reality of tawḥīd spread through your organs, as each organ has a share of the tawḥīd.

Regarding tashahhud, it is narrated in Miṣbāḥ al-Sharīʿah:

"The tashahhud is praise of Allāh. Be a slave to Him in your innermost being, fearful and humble to Him in action as you are His bondsman by word and claim. Join the truthfulness of your tongue to the pure truthfulness of your innermost being. He created you a slave and commanded you to worship Him with your heart, your tongue and your limbs. Realise your enslavement to Him by His lordship over you. Know that the forelocks of creation are all in His hand. Creatures possess neither breath nor sight except by His power and will: they

are incapable of bringing forth the least thing in His kingdom, unless it is by His permission and will[1]."

58. Remember the greatness of the Prophet (saw) and his progeny during taslīm

As you send your salutations upon the Holy Prophet (saw) and his family during taslīm, remember that they are the people of the Right Path and you aspire to follow that righteous path as long as you are alive. In addition, if the ṣalawāt is recited sincerely, then the believer should expect ten salutations sent to them from Allāh (swt) as narrated by this ḥādīth from the Holy Prophet (saw):

من صلى علي مرة صلى الله عليه عشرا و من صلى علي عشرا صلى الله عليه مائة مرة

"Whoever recites one salutation upon me, Allāh (swt) will reciprocate ten salutations upon the reciter and whoever recites ten salutations upon me, Allāh (swt) will reciprocate this with one hundred salutations"[2]

The importance of the ṣalawāt is emphasised further to the extent that if you hear the name of the Holy Prophet (saw) while reciting the verses during prayer, it is recommended to send your salutations to him and his family at that stage of the prayer.

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[1] Hā'irī, Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī'ah (The Lantern of the Path), p. 53.
[2] al-Sabzawari, Ja'ami Al-Akhbaar, Section 28, p. 153.

The following is a narration from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) that supports this:

عن عبد الله بن سنان قال: سألت أبا عبد الله عليه السلام عن الرجل يذكر النبي (صلى الله عليه وآله) وهو في الصلاة المكتوبة إما راكعا وإما ساجدا فيصلي عليه وهو على تلك الحال؟ فقال: نعم إن الصلاة على نبي الله (صلى الله عليه وآله) كهيئة التكبير والتسبيح، وهي عشر حسنات يبتدرها ثمانية عشر ملكا أيهم يبلغها إياه

"'Abd Allāh ibn Sinān said: 'I asked 'Abū 'Abdallāh (Imām al-Ṣādiq) about a man who mentions the Prophet during prayer in rukū' or in sujūd [positions] and sends his salutations upon the Prophet and his family.' He said: 'Yes, the salutations upon the Prophet and his family are like the takbīr and the tasbīḥ, and it holds ten rewards [ḥasanāt] which is accelerated by eighteen angels who will deliver it (the ṣalawāt) to the Prophet[1].'"

59. Recite the recommended du'ā' during the tashahhud and taslīm

It is recommended to prolong your tashahhud and taslīm in glorification of Allāh (swt) and His Prophet (saw) and his family, and to increase your attention with new invocations. The following du'ā' is suggested during tashahhud and taslīm:

If you are praying three or more rak'ah, recite the following (in Arabic) after the second rak'ah:[2]

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 322.

[2] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 179.

Recitation After Second Rak'at

بِسْمِ اللَّه وَبِاللَّهِ وَالحَمْدُ للَّهِ وَخَيْرُ الأَسْمَاءِ للَّهِ، أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً عَبْدُهُ وَرَسولُهُ، أَرْسَلَهُ بِالحَقِّ بَشِيراً ونذيراً بَيْنَ يَدَيْ السَّاعَةِ، أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ نِعْمَ الرَّبُّ، وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّداً نِعْمَ الرَّسُولُ، اَللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَتَقَبَّلْ شَفَاعَتَهُ فِي أُمَّتِهِ وَارْفَعْ دَرَجَتَه

"In the name of Allāh (swt) and by Allāh, and praise be to Allāh, and the best names are for Allāh. I bear witness that there is no god but Allāh, He alone, there is no partner to Him, and that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, He sent him with the truth giving tidings and portents ahead of the Hour, I testify that You are truly an excellent Lord and that Muḥammad is truly an excellent messenger. O Allāh (swt) bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad and accept his intercession for his 'ummah and raise his degree."

Then praise Allāh (swt) twice or three times (for example, by saying, "Al-ḥamdu li 'llāh" meaning "Praise be to Allāh") and get up for the third rak'at. If you are finishing off the prayer, then recite the following (in Arabic) from the start of your tashahhud:[1]

[1] Ibid, p. 179-180. Translation from: [http://www.tashayyu.org/hadiths/minhaj-waqifa/salat/tashahhud/ chapter-3] 18/03/2014.

Recitation during Tashahhud

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَباللَّهِ وَالحَمْدُ للَّهِ وَخَيْرُ الأَسْمَاءِ للَّهِ، أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُه، أَرْسَلَهُ بِالحَقِّ بَشِيراً ونذيراً بَيْنَ يَدَيْ السّاعَةِ، أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ نِعْمَ الرَّبُّ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّداً نِعْمَ الرَّسُولُ، التَّحِيَّاتُ للَّهِ وَالصَّلَوَاتُ الطَّاهِرَاتُ الطَّيِّبَاتُ الزّاكياتُ الغادِياتُ الرَائِحَاتُ السَّابِغَاتُ النَّاعِمَاتُ مَا طَابَ وَزَكِيَ وَطُهُرَ وَخَلُصَ وَصْفا فَلِلّهِ، أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ، أَرْسَلَهُ بِالحَقِّ بَشِيراً ونذيراً بَيْنَ يَدَيْ السَّاعَة، أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ رَبِّي نِعْمَ الرَّبُّ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّداً نِعْمَ الرَّسُولُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَنْ فِي القُبُورِ، الحَمْدُ للَّهِ الَّذِي هَدانا لِهذا وَما كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدانا اللَّه، الْحَمْدُ للَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِين، اَللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَبَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَالِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَسَلِّمْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَالِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَتَرَحَّمْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَالِ مُحَمَّدٍ، كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ وَبَارَكْتَ وَتَرَحَّمْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيد، اَللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَأَغْفِر لَنا وَلِإِخْوَانِنا الَّذِينَ سَبَقونَا بِالإِيمانِ، وَلَا تَجْعَلُ فِي قُلُوبِنَا غِلّاً لِلَّذين آمَنوا، رَبَّنا إِنَّكَ رَؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ، اَللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَامْنُنْ عَلَيَّ بِالجَنَّةِ وَعَافِنِي مِنَ النَّارِ، اَللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَاغْفِرْ لِلمُؤْمِنينَ وَالمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَلَا تَزِدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبارا، السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُه، السَّلَامُ عَلَى أَنْبِيَاءِ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ، السَّلَامُ عَلَى جِبْرائيل وَميكائيل وَالمَلَائِكَةِ المُقَرَّبِينَ، السَّلَامُ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ بِن عَبْداللَّه خَاتَمِ النَّبيينَ لا نَبِيَّ بَعْدَهُ، وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى عِبادِ اللَّهِ الصَّالِحينَ، السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُه.

"In the name of Allāh (swt) and by Allāh, and praise be to Allāh, and the best names are for Allāh. I testify that there is no god but Allāh, He alone, there is no partner for Him, and I

testify that Muḥammad is His messenger and His servant. He sent him by the truth, giving tidings and portents before the Hour. I testify that You truly are an excellent Lord and that Muḥammad truly is an excellent messenger. Salutations are for Allāh (swt) and the Pure, Good, Righteous, morning, afternoon, abundant, delicate prayers are for Allāh. What is good and pure and unalloyed and clear is for Allāh, and I testify that my Lord is truly an excellent Lord and that Muḥammad is truly an excellent messenger. I testify that the Hour is coming, there is no doubt in it, and that Allāh (swt) will resurrect whoever is in the graves. Praise be to Allāh (swt) who guided us to this, and we would not be guided had Allāh (swt) not guided us; praise be to Allāh (swt) Lord of the worlds. O Allāh (swt) bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, and send benediction upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, and send peace upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, and have mercy upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, as You have blessed and sent benediction and had mercy upon Ibrāhīm and the family of Ibrāhīm. Verily You are Praiseworthy, Glorious. O Allāh (swt) bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, and forgive us and our brethren who preceded us in the faith, and do not place in our hearts malice to those who have believed in our Lord. Verily You are Compassionate, Merciful. O Allāh (swt) bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, and grant me the Garden and save me from the Fire. O Allāh (swt) bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad and forgive the believing men and women and whoso entered my house believing and the believing men and women, and do not increase the wrongdoers [or oppressors]

but in perdition. Peace be upon you O Prophet and the mercy of Allāh (swt) and His blessings. Peace be upon the prophets of Allāh (swt) and His messengers. Peace be upon Jibrā'īl and Mīkā'īl and the angels brought near. Peace be upon Muḥammad bin `Abdullah, the Seal of the Prophets; there is no prophet after him. And peace be upon us and upon the servants of Allāh, the righteous ones. Allāh's peace, mercy and blessings be upon you."

60. If you lose concentration, bounce back fast

If your focus during the prayer slips away, but you know which ra'ka you are in,[1] attempt to bounce back and use this as a warning and attention alarm to concentrate on the remainder of your prayer. If you are reciting from the Holy Qur'ān and realise that you have lost concentration for the last few seconds, pause, take a deep breath and then continue with your recitation with contemplation on the meanings of the remainder of the sūrah. Do not allow one or two slips in concentration to ruin this spiritual journey as you might otherwise begin to get frustrated and lose hope.

61. Pray at a measured pace

It is often the case that we are in a hurry and need to complete our prayer quickly. However, it is unlikely that we will be able to concentrate during that prayer. Generally, if we perform tasks slowly, we tend to gain a deeper focus,

[1] If you do not know which rak'a you are in, you must apply the appropriate rulings of al-shakk fi al-ṣalāh (doubt in prayer). Refer to the jurisprudential books for more information.

appreciation, enjoyment and make fewer mistakes. One who has a true appreciation of whom he is facing in his prayer will be prevented from rushing and will seek to attain spirituality from his Lord by continuing at a measured pace.

62. Fix your gaze during prayer

When the believer stands in front of his Lord, he should stand upright in stillness and modesty, not raising his head as if he is standing in front of his enemy and competitor, and not exaggerate in lowering his head as if he is upset or sad. He should fix his gaze towards the point where he places his forehead while in prostration and places his hands beside his hips in complete respect and submission. His gaze should be fixed during the rukū' position and also as he ascends towards the sujūd:

الَّذِي يَرَاكَ حِينَ تَقُومُ ﴿٢١٨﴾ وَتَقَلُّبَكَ فِي السَّاجِدِينَ ﴿٢١٩﴾

Who sees you when you stand up. And thy movements among those who prostrate themselves. (26: 218-219)

Researchers confirm that fixing the gaze on a small object aids concentration. See point 98 for further details.

63. Shed some tears during prayer while contemplating non-worldly affairs

Some 'aḥādīth report that it is recommended to shed tears in prayer while contemplating non-worldly affairs (deliberately crying due to worldly matters invalidates prayers according to Sayid Yazdi, and as commented by Ayatollah

Sistani). For instance, one may shed tears when contemplating Allāh's existence, the verses of the Qur'ān, or Paradise and Hellfire.

It is narrated that Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) was asked about whether shedding tears during prayer voids the prayer.

عن أَبي حنيفةَ قال: سأَلتُ أَبا عبد اللَّه (ع) عن البكاء في الصَّلاةِ أَ يقطعُ الصَّلاةَ؟ فقال: إِن بكى لذكرِ جنَّةٍ أَو نارٍ فذلكَ هو أَفضلُ الأَعمال في الصَّلاة وإن كان ذكر ميتاً له فصلاته فاسدة

"From 'Abū Ḥanīfah, he said: I asked 'Abū Abdallāh (as) whether shedding tears during prayer will make the prayer void. He said: If he sheds tears when mentioning Paradise or Hellfire, then this is the best act of prayer but if he mentions a dead person known to him and sheds tears (on the demise of the dead person) then his prayer will become void[1]."

The Ahl al-Bayt (as) were known to shed tears in their prayers, as a means of getting closer to Allāh (swt), to ask Allāh (swt) to grant mercy to a community and to enlighten their heart with complete submission to Him. It is narrated from Imām 'Alī (as):

البكاء من خشية الله ينير القلب

"Shedding tears when submitting to Allāh (swt) lightens the heart[2]."

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[1] al-Tūsī, Tahdhīb al-'Aḥkām, vol. 2, p. 317

[2] Mirzā al-Nūrī, Mustadrak al-Wasā'il, vol. 11, p. 245.

It is reported that Imām al-Sajjād (as) used to repeat the verse (1: 4): مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ "mālik yawm al-dīn" which means, "Master of the Day of Judgment" during his prayer. While reciting, he would collapse and when he lifted his head from prostration it was as if he had inserted his head into a bucket of water due to the flood of tears he would shed during the prayer.[1]

However, it is important that one should not merely cry for the sake of it. The tears should flow as a result of fear of Allāh (swt)'s Justice, and as a consequence of our desperation for His Mercy and Forgiveness.

64. Avoid continuous doubting and obsessive repetition of verses

Continuous doubting and obsessive repetition of verses can have a disruptive effect on the prayer. It focuses the believer's attention disproportionately on the literal words recited and less on the meaning or spiritual essence. The scholars say that if you continuously have doubts in your prayer, you should ignore such doubts and continue your prayer as normal. It is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir (as):

إذا كثر عليك السهو فامض في صلاتك فإنه يوشك أن يدعك إنما هو من الشيطان

"When doubts in the prayer become too frequent, do not give heed to them, and regard the prayer to be correct. It is hoped that this state will leave you, as Shayṭān causes it[2]."

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 440.
[2] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 359.

65. Face the ground in humility

As you face Allāh (swt), face Him as a submissive servant. Bow your head whilst standing and sitting and release any arrogance and pride from within you. Understand your worthlessness in front of Him by lowering your head like any creature would in front of its master.

To sit in a humble way, the following are some recommended acts to perform while you are in the sitting position during tashahhud and taslīm:

– Sit in a ṭuruq way: this is when you sit on your left thigh, resting the back of your left foot on top of the right foot.[1]

– Keep your hands on your lap, with fingers close to each other.[2]

– Practise deep breathing techniques; see point 94.

66. Pray like Imam Al-Sadiq (as)

It is imperative that we pray like how the Imams of the AhlulBayt (as) used to pray so our acts during prayer will help us submit to the Almighty (swt). The following narration describes how Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq (as) taught one of his students called Hammad ibn Isa how to pray:[3]

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[1] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 182.
[2] Ibid.
[3] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 311.

جَعَلْتُ فَدَاكَ فَعَلِّمْنِي الصَّلَاةَ فَقَامَ أَبُو عَبْد الله (عَلَيْهِ السَلَامُ) مُسْتَقْبِلَ القِبْلَةَ مُنْتَصِبًا فَأَرْسِلْ يَدَيْهُ جَمِيعًا عَلَى فَخْذَيْهِ, قَدْ ضُمُّ أَصَابِعَهُ وَقُرْبَ بَيْنَ قَدِّمِيهُ حَتَّى كَانَ بَيْنَهُمَا قَدَرَ ثُلَاثَ أَصَابِعَ مُنْفَرِجَاتٌ وَاسْتَقْبَلَ بِأَصَابِعِ رِجْلَيْهِ جَمِيعًا القِبْلَةِ لَمْ يُحَرِّفْهُمَا عَنْ القِبْلَةِ وَقَالَ بِخُشُوعٍ: اللّهُ أَكْبَرُ ثُمَّ قَرَأَ الحَمْدُ بِتَرْتِيلٍ وَقَلَّ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ ثُمَّ صَبَّرَ هَنِيَّةً بِقَدْرِ مَا يَتَنَفَّسُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ ثُمَّ رَفْعُ يَدَيْهِ حِيَالَ وَجْهِهِ وَقَالَ: اللّهُ أَكْبَرُ

وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ ثُمَّ رُكَّعٌ وَمَلَآ كَفَّيْهُ مِنْ رُكْبَتَيْهِ مُنْفَرِجَاتٌ وُرُدِ رُكْبَتَيْهِ إِلَى خَلْفِهِ حَتَّى اِسْتَوَى ظَهْرُهُ حَتَّى لَوْ صَبَّ عَلَيْهِ قَطْرَةً مِنْ مَاءٍ أَوْ دُهْنٍ لَمْ تَزِلْ لِاسْتِوَاءِ ظَهَرَهُ وَمَدَّ عُنْقَهُ وَغَمَّضَ عَيْنَيْهُ ثُمَّ سَبْحٌ ثَلَاثًا بِتَرْتِيلٍ فَقَالَ: سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيم وَبِحَمْدِه

ثُمَّ أَسْتَوِي قَائِمًا فِلْمَا اِسْتَمْكَنَّ مِنْ القِيَامِ قَالَ: سَمِعَ اللهُ لِمَنْ حَمِدَه.. ثُمَّ كِبَرٌ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ وَرَفْعُ يَدَيْهِ حِيَالَ وَجْهِهِ ثُمَّ سَجَدَ وَبَسْطٌ كُفِّيهُ مضمومتي الأَصَابِعُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رُكْبَتَيْهِ حِيَالَ وَجْهِهِ فَقَالَ: سُبْحانَ رَبِّيَ الأَعْلى وَ بِحَمْدِهِ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ وَلَمْ يَضَعْ شَيْئًا مِنْ جَسَدِهِ عَلَى شِئ مِنْهُ وَسَجَدَ عَلَى ثَمَانِيَةٍ أَعْظَمِ الكَفَّيْنِ وَالرُّكْبَتَيْنِ وَأَنَامِلِ إِبْهَامَيْ الرِّجْلَيْنِ وَالجَبْهَةِ وَالأَنْفِ وَقَالَ: سَبْعَةٌ مِنْهَا فَرْضٌ يَسْجُدُ عَلَيْهَا وَهِيَ الَّتِي ذَكَرَهَا اللهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ فَقَالَ: وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ للهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللهِ أَحَدًا وَهِيَ الجَبْهَةُ وَالكَفَّانِ وَالرُّكْبَتَانِ وَالإِبْهَامَانِ وَوَضَعَ الأَنْفَ عَلَى الأَرْضِ سُنَّةٌ, ثُمَّ رَفْعُ رَأْسِهِ مِنْ السُّجُودِ فَلِمَا اِسْتَوَى جَالِسًا قَالَ: اللّهُ أَكْبَرُ.

ثُمَّ قَعَدَ عَلَى فَخْذِهِ الأَيْسَرِ وَقَدْ وَضَعَ ظَاهِرُ قَدْمَهُ الأَيْمَنَ عَلَى بَطْنِ قَدَمِهِ الأَيْسَرِ وَقَالَ: اِسْتَغْفَرَ اللهُ رَبِّي وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهُ.. ثُمَّ كِبَرٌ وَهُوَ جَالِسٌ وَسَجَدَ السَّجْدَةَ الثَّانِيَةَ وَقَالَ: كَمَا قَالَ فِي الأُولَى وَلَمْ يَضَعْ شَيْئًا مِنْ بَدَنِهِ عَلَى شِئ مِنْهُ فِي رُكُوعٍ وَلَا سُجُودَ وَكَانَ مُجَنَّحًا وَلَمْ يَضَعْ ذِرَاعَيْهُ عَلَى الأَرْضِ فَصَلِّي

رَكْعَتَيْنِ عَلَى هَذَا وَيَدَاهُ مضمومتا الأَصَابِعُ وَهُوَ جَالِسٌ فِي التشهد فَلِمَا فَرَغَ مِنْ التشهد سِلْمٌ. فَقَالَ: يَا حَمَّادٌ هَكَذَا صَلَّى

"Hammad said: May I be your ransom, teach me how to pray.

So Abu Abdillah [as] stood facing the Qibla, placing both his hands upon his thighs, combining his fingers, keeping his feet close together so that they were about three fingers apart.

His toes were facing the qibla, and were not angled away from it, then he said with humility, "Allāhu Akbar", then he read sūrah al-Fātiḥah with tartīl (slowly), and sūrah al-'Ikhlāṣ.

He then paused for a moment, breathed, and raised his hands towards his face and said, "Allāhu Akbar" while still standing.

Then he bowed in ruku' placing his palms on his knees, pressing them back so that his back was flat to the extent that had a drop of water or oil fallen on it, it would not have slid off.

He outstretched his neck, and then recited three times "Sūbḥāna rabbī al-aẓīmi wa bi-hamdih", then he stood, saying "Sami' Allāhu liman ḥamidah", then raised his hands to his face and said "Allāhu Akbar" while standing, raising his hands to his face.

Then he prostrated, placing his palms down and his fingers together, in line with his knees, next to his face, and said "Sūbḥāna rabbī al-a'lā wa bi-hamdih" three times.

His prostration was upon eight parts of the body and they were the two palms, the two knees, the large toes of the two feet, the forehead, and the nose, and these are the parts Allāh (swt) mentioned in his book when he said, "And verily the masājid are for Allāh, so do not call upon other than him", and this, the two palms, the two knees, the two big toes, and placing the nose on the earth, is a sunnah.

Then he raised his head from prostration so that he was upright and said "Astaghfir Allāh (swt) rabbi wa atūbuh ilayh", and then said "Allāhu Akbar" and prostrated again, outstretching his elbows in a wing-like manner. He did that procedure twice. During the tashahhud, he kept his fingers close together, then he did his salams and said: O Hammad, pray like this."

67. Practice mindfulness during prayer

Mindfulness is a meditation technique that has been recognized as one of the most powerful ways to calm the mind. It is formally defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn, the Founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program as: "The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally". The essence of mindfulness is to treat thoughts non-judgmentally and accepting it without interpretation and evaluation. Gretty M. Mirdal in her paper on mindfulness says: "It is based on certain key attitudes, so-called attitudinal foundations: being non-judgmental and accepting or observing without evaluation; being patient; having "a beginner's mind", i.e., meeting every situation as if for the first time; trusting one's

intuition; non-striving and experiencing the present moment without focusing on future goals; and letting-go, in the sense of neither grasping nor pushing away[1]".

When we recite takbīrat al-'iḥrām, we are typically distracted by many thoughts that make us wonder about issues other than prayer. Practicing mindfulness during prayer means we are able to be in the present moment (see also point 89) which means we can non-judgmentally accept the thoughts, park them to one side and take our attention back to the prayer.

You may wish to practice mindfulness outside prayer in order to master the technique (see point 94).

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter is to take the reader through various methods that may help in connecting the heart and mind to Allāh (swt) during prayer. Remembering these points and practising them may transform our prayer into a conversation with the Lord and an overflowing river in which we can purify our own souls. It is narrated from the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) that he said:

إنما مثل الصلاة فيكم كمثل السري وهو النهر على باب أحدكم يخرج إليه في اليوم والليلة يغتسل منه خمس مرات، فلم يبق الدرن مع الغسل خمس مرات، ولم تبق الذنوب مع الصلاة خمس مرات

[1] Gretty M. Mirdal. Mevlana Jalāl-ad-Dīn Rumi and Mindfulness. December 2012, Volume 51, Issue 4, pp. 1202–1215.

"The example of prayers is like that of a river outside one's house, into which a believer immerses themselves five times a day. Upon this, no impurities remain on their bodies. Likewise, prayers clean your soul of sins five times a day[1]".

[1] al-Ṣadūq, Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh, vol. 1, p. 211.

Chapter 5: The Consequence

The prayer is an experience – and the journey back from meeting the Lord is as crucial as the journey towards Him. Therefore, there are many steps a believer can take immediately after the prayer to maximise the spiritual benefits of the prayer. These include pre-occupying oneself following the ritual prayer with supplications, remembrance of Allāh (swt), recitation of the Qur'ān and other recommended rituals such as reflection, contemplation and asking for forgiveness.

68. Continue to remember Allāh (swt) after prayer

Prayer can be described as an act of remembering Allāh (swt) as Allāh (swt) informs Prophet Mūsa (as):

وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ لِذِكۡرِيٓ ١٤

And keep up prayer for My remembrance. (20: 14)

In fact, remembering Allāh (swt) does not merely mean uttering His name by tongue, but 'remembering' Him and His glory in our heart. The reward is that the heart will be assured and tranquil:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَتَطۡمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُم بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِۗ أَلَا بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطۡمَئِنُّ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ ٢٨

'Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allāh.' Look! The hearts find rest in Allāh's remembrance! (13: 28)

In another verse, Allāh (swt) describes those believers who remember Him as having fearful hearts:

إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ ٱللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُهُۥ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَٰنًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٢﴾

The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when Allāh (swt) is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord. (8: 2)

According to the above two verses, the significance of the remembrance of Allāh (swt) entails that He instils two seemingly opposing feelings in the believer's heart: fear and tranquillity. A true and humble believer's heart will tremble with fear due to his sins and shortcomings while simultaneously being tranquil in the face of conflicting desires and worldly pleasures.

One other benefit of remembering Allāh (swt) is the joy and happiness that it brings to the heart, as Allāh (swt) says in sūrah al-Jumu'ah:

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةُ فَٱنتَشِرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱبْتَغُوا۟ مِن فَضْلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

And when the prayer is finished disperse through the land and seek Allāh's grace, and remember Allāh greatly so that you may be felicitous. (62: 10)

To put the verse cited in context, where 'disperse' and 'seek grace' and 'remember Allāh' are linked, one must return to their normal affairs with a heightened sense of perception of the remembrance of Allāh, which will also help to perpetuate the 'spiritual high' gained from the prayer.

To achieve this further, it is advisable to spend time after prayer reading the Holy Qur'ān, reciting the recommended du'ā' after prayers (ta'qībāt), reciting ṣalawāt on the Prophet (saw) and his family, performing tasbīḥ (such as tasbīḥāt al-Zahrā (as)) or contemplating the creation of Allāh (swt). This will certainly help maintain the spiritual high gained from the prayers for a longer period, and makes it easier to continue that state into the next prayer.

69. Ask Allāh (swt) for forgiveness

After completing your prayer, take a few minutes to talk to Allāh (swt) in your own language. Mention your sins, acknowledge your faults and ask Allāh (swt) for forgiveness. Know that Allāh (swt) knows your problems and calamities, He wants you to mention them to Him and ask Him sincerely to help you and He will answer. If you feel your prayer lacked concentration, ask Him to help you improve your concentration in the next prayer. You may like to recite the following du'ā' after completing your prayer:[1]

[1] al-Qummi, Mafatih al-Jinan, p. 40 and p. 41.

Du'ā' after Completing the Prayer

الهي هذه صلاتي صليتها لالحاجة منك إليها، ولا رغبة منك فيها، إلا تعظيما وطاعة وإجابة لك إلى ماأمرتني به، الهي إن كان فيها خلل أو نقص من ركوعها أو سجودها فلا تؤاخذني وتفضل على بالقبول والغفران برحمتك يارحم الراحمين وياخير الغافرين وصلى على محمدا وآله الطاهرين

"My Allāh, the prayer I have just prayed was not to put forth any demand before You, nor was there any self-seeking desire to reach You through it. It was nothing but praise, obedience and surrender unto You, in order to carry out that which You have commanded. My Allāh, if there was a break in continuity (disturbance of mind) or a shortcoming, while making the intention, or while standing, bowing down, or prostrating in adoration, do not catch hold of me, (but) be so kind as to bestow a favour on me by affording me through Your mercy absolution and acceptance, O the Most Merciful. With Your mercy, O Most Merciful of those who have mercy. O the Best of forgivers. Greetings and salutations on Muhammad (saw) and his pure progeny."

Du'ā' for Forgiveness

اَللّهُمَّ إنَّ مَغْفِرَتَكَ اَرْجى مِنْ عَمَلى وَاِنَّ رَحْمَتِكَ أَوْسَعُ مِنْ ذَنْبي اَللّهُمَّ إن كانَ ذَنبي عِنْدَكَ عَظيماً فَعَفْوُكَ اَعْظَمُ مِنْ ذَنْبي اَللّهُمَّ إنْ لَمْ اَكُنْ أَهْلاً أنْ اَبْلُغَ رَحْمَتُكَ فرحمتك اَهْلٌ اَنْ تَبْلُغَني وَتَسَعَني لِاِنَّها وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْء بِرَحْمَتِكَ يا اَرْحَمَ الرّاحِمينَ

"O Allāh, indeed, Your forgiveness is more to be hoped for than my deeds; certainly Your mercy is more deep and far-reaching compared to my faults and mistakes. O Allāh (swt) if my errors, in the matter of Your laws, are grave in nature, Your pardon is more substantial and well-known than my transgressions.

O Allāh, if I am not worthy of receiving Your Mercy, Your Mercy is large enough to receive me, as it encompasses everything, through Your kindness.

With Your Mercy O Most Merciful of those who have mercy."

70. Perform two sajdāt of gratitude

It is recommended to prostrate to Allāh (swt) in gratitude twice (sajdāt al-shukr) after every prayer. This is the closest position a believer can get to Allāh (swt) so if time permits, say "Al-ḥamdu li 'llāh"; "Praise be to Allāh" and thank Allāh (swt) by saying, "Shukran li-llāh" in every sajdah at least three times (increase if you have time). Between these two prostrations, it is recommended to rub your forehead and cheeks in the dust[1] as narrated by Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

إذا ذكر أحدكم نعمة الله عزوجل فليضع خده على التراب شكرا لله

"If any of you remember the bounties of Allāh (swt), he should place his cheeks on dust thanking Allāh (swt)[2]."

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[1] First the right cheek and then the left cheek.

[2] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 98.

Giving thanks to Allāh (swt) has many rewards. Allāh (swt) states in sūrah Luqmān that by thanking Him, one is in fact benefiting himself as Allāh (swt) is All-Sufficient and not in need of the believer's gratitude:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَشْكُرْ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾

Certainly We gave Luqmān wisdom, saying, 'Give thanks to Allāh; and whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful, [let him know that] Allāh (swt) is indeed All-Sufficient, All-Laudable.' (31: 12)

Moreover, Imām al-Riḍhā (as) narrates that if the prayer performed was devoid of concentration and submission then the prostration of thanksgiving will help perfect it:

السجدة بعد الفريضة شكرا لله تعالى ذكره على ما وفق العبد من أداء فريضة، وأدنى ما يجزي فيها من القول أن يقال: «شكر لله شكرا لله» ثلاث مرات، قلت: فما معنى شكرا لله؟ قال (ع): يقول هذه السجدة مني شكرا لله على ما وفقني له من خدمته وأداء فرضه، والشكر موجب للزيادة، فإن كان في الصلاة تقصير تم بهذه السجدة

"The prostration after an obligatory prayer is an expression of thanking Almighty Allāh (swt) for granting His servant success to carry out his duty towards Him. The least of what can be said while prostrating is to repeat the following words three times: 'Thanks be to Allāh.' 'What is the meaning of Thanks be to Allāh?' the reporter asked, and the Imām (as)

answered, 'It means that this prostration is a thanksgiving from me to Almighty Allāh (swt) for the success that He has granted me to serve Him and carry out my duty towards Him. Verily, thanking Almighty Allāh (swt) increases graces and grants more success to obey Him. If it happens that a prayer is still imperfect, and the supererogatory prayer has not covered that imperfection, then this thanksgiving prostration will perfect it[1]."

There are three types of gratitude. The first is gratitude of the tongue that we use to praise Allāh (swt) for His blessings and grace on us. The second is the gratitude of the heart, where the heart is thankful to Allāh (swt) for witnessing the constant recognition of His blessings. The third is the gratitude of the limbs as they are enabled to always obey Allāh (swt) and are kept away from transgressions. For example, being able to use the eyes to look at what is ḥalāl and being able to divert the gaze away from the ḥarām, and for the tongue to be empowered to speak the truth, and refrain from lying and backbiting.

Luqmān (as) practiced all these three types of gratitude as he possessed the 'ḥikmah' or wisdom, which constitutes the noble knowledge, correct understanding, pure morals, piety, fear of Allāh (swt) and guidance. Through these attributes, one is able to be grateful to Allāh (swt) in the three ways.

[1] al-Ṣadūq, 'Ilāl al-Sharāyi', vol. 2, p. 360.

71. Assess how well you concentrated after each prayer

If you feel that you struggle with concentration, try to assess your level of concentration after each prayer. Assess sincerely and critically whether your concentration is improving or worsening. Try to make small improvements every week and do a final assessment of your concentration at the end of the week. Try to score yourself out of ten and be as critical of yourself as you can. Keep the scores in a secret place so that this remains a genuine critical assessment of your prayer. After a month, add up your scores and if your concentration is improving then whatever you are practicing is working and you should continue with that method. If your score is relatively low, or is becoming worse or remains unchanged you should revise the methods used, if any, to focus in prayer and evaluate their efficacy.

However, remain optimistic and be patient until you start to improve. If your concentration in one of the five daily prayers is weak, then aim to strengthen it in the next. Never give up attempting to improve your concentration since, as with anything else, concentration is improved through practice and struggle. Once you are successful in getting closer to Him, He will come even closer to you as narrated in this ḥadīth al-qudsī:

من تقرب إلي شبراً تقربت إليه ذراعاً

"Whoever draws near to Me by a span's length, I will draw near him by an arm's length."[1]

72. Contemplate in between combined prayers

If you decide to combine the ẓuhr and 'aṣr, or the maghrib and 'ishā' prayers, spend the time in between the prayers in contemplation, reading the Holy Qur'ān or du'ā' and do not distract yourself with other worldly issues. Without thinking, it is possible to find yourself chatting or using mobile phones in between the prayers.

If concentration in the ẓuhr prayer, for example, was not sufficient, then spend a few moments preparing for the 'aṣr prayer in silent contemplation. Distractions will eventually create obstructive thoughts that will linger on into the prayer and prevent you from focusing fully on Allāh (swt).

Conclusion

The actions and state of mind of a believer after completion of the prayer reflects the mood of the prayer itself. If the mind was pre-occupied with obstructive thoughts and worries during the prayer and no real connection to Allāh (swt) occurred, then at the completion of the salām, the prayer mat would be folded and put away so that the activities of the day could continue. However, if the prayer was recited with concentration and connection, then, on the completion of the salām, the conversation with Allāh (swt) would continue, the heart would be at rest and the day would unfold quite differently. If you realise that your concentration was

[1] Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad 'Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, vol. 5, p. 153.

wavering during the prayer, some methods have been suggested in this chapter that may help you regain focus for the next prayer.

Chapter 6: The Spiritual Upliftment

Building an accurate and positive mindset to prayer is essential for greater spiritual upliftment. Eighteen valuable suggestions that can holistically improve concentration are presented below.

73. Worship Allāh (swt) as if you see Him

Some of us lose concentration in prayer because prayer has become a conversation with the self rather than with Allāh (swt). For the conversation with the Almighty to take place, we need to worship Him as if we see Him and by truly believing in the unseen. This can only happen through having an attentive heart. Sayid Khomeini (ra) said in this regard: "All the ears of his heart will be closed to all other creatures, while the eye of his insight opens to the pure Beauty of the Lord of Majesty, discerning nothing else[1]."

To be able to see Him, we truly believe that Allāh (swt) is looking at us as we stand in prayer, and that the angels surround us at every single movement, witnessing our actions. If we do not make an effort to open our heart to Allāh (swt), we are losing the opportunity to get close to Him. In that case, we should say in our heart: "Shame on me! the Almighty is looking at me and is inviting me for a conversation with Him and I give Him a blind eye and a closed heart! O Allāh, help me open the eye of my insight to Your Majesty."

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[1] Khomeini, 'Ādāb al-Ṣalāt: The Disciplines of the Prayer, Discourse one, Chapter 9.

It is narrated that Imām al-Bāqir (as) has quoted the Holy Prophet (saw) as saying:

إذا قام العبد المؤمن في صلاته نظر الله عزّ وجلّ إليه، أو قال: أقبل الله عليه حتى ينصرف، وأظلّته الرحمة، من فوق رأسه إلى أُفق السماء، والملائكة تحفّه من حوله إلى أُفق السماء، ووكّل الله به ملكاً قائماً على رأسه يقول له: أيّها المصلّي، لو تعلم من ينظر إليك ومن تناجي ما التفتّ ولا زلت من موضعك أبداً

"When a believing servant stands for the prayer, Allāh, the Exalted, looks at him [or he said: He turns to him] until he finishes. Mercy shades him from above, the angels surround him from all sides, up to the horizon of the heaven, and Allāh (swt) assigns an angel to stand at his head, saying: 'O praying one, if only you knew who is looking at you, and to whom you are supplicating, you would not look sideways at anything else, and nor would you leave your position[1].'"

74. Remember death

To communicate with Allāh (swt) during prayer with a soft and present heart, it is recommended to constantly be mindful of death. It is narrated from the Prophet (saw):

قال رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وآله): أكثروا من ذكر هادم اللذات، فقيل: يا رسول الله فما هادم اللذات؟ قال: الموت

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 265.

"The Messenger of Allāh (saw) said: 'Remember often the destroyer of pleasures.' They asked, 'What is the destroyer of pleasures, O Prophet of Allāh?' He replied, 'Death[1].'"

The faculty of imagination is powerful and this can be utilised for one's own benefit. Imagine you have reached the end of your life and your time in this life is over. Imagine your loneliness in the grave and the questioning of the angels Munkar and Nakīr. Bear in mind that your prayer will be with you in the grave testifying as to its validity during your lifetime.

Pondering on the inevitability of death will surely fill one's heart with fear and humility. This is best described in Du'ā' 'Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī:

وَارْحَمْنِي صَرِيعاً عَلَى الْفِرَاشِ تُقَلِّبُنِي أَيْدِي أَحِبَّتِي وَتَفَضَّلْ عَلَيَّ مَمْدُوداً عَلَى الْمُغْتَسَلِ يُقَلِّبُنِي صَالِحُ جِيرَتِي وَتَحَنَّنْ عَلَيَّ مَحْمُولاً قَدْ تَنَاوَلَ الأَقْرِبَاءُ أَطْرَافَ جِنَازَتِي وَجُدْ عَلَيَّ مَنْقُولاً قَدْ نَزَلْتُ بِكَ وَحِيداً فِي حُفْرَتِي وَارْحَمْ فِي ذَلِكَ الْبَيْتِ الْجَدِيدِ غُرْبَتِي حَتَّى لا أَسْتَأْنِسَ بِغَيْرِكَ

"Confer Your benevolence on me when I am (laying) motionless on the (death) bed so that the beloved of my relatives surround me, and grant me Your bountifulness when I am stretched on the funeral bath so that the good-deeded of my community may wash me, and bestow Your kindred tenderness upon me when I am carried while my relatives hand over the extremities of my coffin, and award me Your generosity when I am transported and finally delivered and

[1] al-Majlisī, Biḥār Al-Anwār, vol. 79, p. 167.

left alone in my grave, and have mercy on my solitary confinement in this new residence so that I may not be comforted by anyone but You[1]."

One of the best ways to remember death is to frequently remember your peers, relatives and friends who have passed away. Remember their deaths, their funerals and their bodies beneath the ground. Remember what they used to look like, the positions they held, and how they lived their lives – and how their bodies are now within the grave, their spouses widowed, their children orphaned, their wealth lost and their positions filled by others. When you have considered each one of their lives, think about your life and consider yourself to be one of them and that the time will also come when people will remember you.

75. Pray on time

We learn from the traditions of the Holy Prophet (saw) and the Ahl al-Bayt (as) that they disconnected from people and their affairs at the time of prayer and focused on supplication and privacy with the Absolute Perfect One (swt).

We are all aware that when it is the time for prayer we must leave all worldly things and approach prayer. However, being aware is one thing and actually applying it is another.

[1] Du'ā' 'Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī is a du'ā' narrated by Imām 'Alī (as). It can be found in many du'ā' books and online: [http://www.duas.org/thumali.htm.] 08/07/2018. Translation of du'ā' taken from this website.

When the call for prayer comes and Allāh (swt) is requesting His servant to meet Him, do we respond to this call or not?

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ ۚ فَإِذَا اطْمَأْنَنتُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ ۚ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْقُوتًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

And when you have completed the prayer, remember Allāh (swt) standing, sitting, or [lying] on your sides. But when you become secure, re-establish [regular] prayer. The prayer is indeed a timed prescription for the faithful. (4: 103)

One might question why prayer is enjoined on believers at stated times. There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, one of the fundamental purposes of prayer is remembrance. The five obligatory prayers are spread throughout the day, so we remember Allāh (swt) in the morning, afternoon and the evening. Secondly, prayer is the 'meeting time' with our Lord when we spend uninterrupted time communicating with Him. Allāh (swt) has set times for these meetings. If you had a meeting with a colleague at work or a friend, would you like to be late? And were this meeting to be with Allāh (swt), surely we would want to be on time for the most important of all meetings. Having specific times for our prayers helps us manage our time for the day as it provides an order and a structure to our day. Furthermore, this is fundamental for concentration. Experts say that organising and structuring your day helps you concentrate on the tasks at hand, and this also applies to prayer.

To emphasise the importance of praying on time, it is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) that he said:

من صلى الصلوات المفروضات في أوَّل وقتها فأقام حدودها، رفعها الملك إلى السماء بيضاء نقية وهي تهتف به: حفظك الله كما حفظتني، استودعك الله كما استودعتني ملَكاً كريماً، ومن صلاَّها بعد وقتها من غير علّة فلم يُقم حدودها، رفعها الملك سوداء مظلمة، وهي تهتف به ضيعتني ضيعك الله كما ضيعتني، ولا رعاك الله كما لم ترعني

"When someone offers an obligatory ṣalāt at the beginning of its time and observes its prerequisites, an angel takes it up to the heaven, white and pure, whereby it (i.e. the ṣalāt) says, 'May God take care of you as you took care of me. I have been delivered into the custody of a noble angel.' But when someone offers it after its time has elapsed, without any excuse, and does not observe its pre-requisite etiquette, it is taken up by an angel, black and dark, while it calls out to him (i.e. the one who offered the prayer), 'You neglected me. May God neglect you in the same manner that you neglected me. May God not take care of you in the same way that you did not take care of me[1].'"

Women in their menstruation period can also worship Allāh (swt) at the time of prayer. The daily prayers are an opportunity to dedicate a specific time to worship and remember Allāh (swt) during the day and this can still be maintained while a woman is in her menstruation period. She can sit in her place of prayer, facing the qiblah, recite ṣalawāt, du'ā' and contemplate on the creation of Allāh (swt). Through

[1] al-Ṣadūq, al-'Amālī, p. 328

this, she can continue to be in the vicinity of the Almighty five times a day, even during her menstruation.

76. Divide the time between the ẓuhr and ʻaṣr and maghrib and ʻishāʼ prayers

Many people routinely combine ẓuhr and ʻaṣr prayers and maghrib and ʻishāʼ prayers and do not pray them at their respected times. It is permissible to separate the prayers and in fact, some scholars recommend separating the prayers. There are three main reasons for this:

a) It gives the believer the opportunity to come back to Allāh (swt) more frequently as the prayers are more spread throughout during the day.

b) It can serve as a 'shock to the system' by changing what is usually a routine personal prayer timetable.

c) It gives the believer more time to prepare for the next prayer as some may find it difficult to concentrate for two consecutive prayers.

In some circumstances it is difficult to separate the prayers (for example, while at work or travelling), but one can attempt to pray each prayer at their respected time when they are able to do so.

77. Use your prayer time to find inner peace

Although grief can sometimes be considered as a helpful emotion for concentration in prayer, feeling down with great sadness or even with depression resulting from worldly issues can create the opposite effect. With the stormy sea of life,

many people have problems or calamities, ranging from death in the family, to an illness and other social and family related problems. In such circumstances, the believer may search for inner peace by strengthening his faith in Allāh, through His remembrance, contemplating on the verses of the Holy Qur'ān, seeking patience, and recognising and believing that Allāh (swt) knows his problems. If your calamity persists, remember the calamities that the prophets and the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) went through and how they overcame these calamities with faith and perseverance. Remember that the only worry we should have in our life is the lack of faith and the failure to fulfil the duties to Allāh.

In short, find that inner peace by having faith and hope in Allāh (swt), who is always close to us, knows us best and knows what is in our hearts.

78. Have hope in Allāh (swt) and believe that He will accept your prayer

Hope comes from recognising Allāh's mercy and kindness, and acknowledging His subtle plan. There is no sense in approaching prayer whilst thinking that Allāh (swt) will not accept your prayer. If the prayer is performed with sincere intentions and an effort is made to concentrate and attain a state of submission in prayer, then one must believe that Allāh (swt) will accept that prayer. It is narrated from Imām al-Riḍhā (as):

أحسن الظن بالله فإن الله عز وجل يقول:أنا عند حسن ظن عبدي المؤمن بي إن خيراً فخير وإن شراً فشر

"Entertain the best opinion of Allāh, for Allāh (swt) says: I am as My servant thinks of Me, if good then that's what he experiences, and if bad then likewise[1]."

79. Do not worship Allāh (swt) out of fear but worship Him as He is worthy of worship

Some perform the obligatory prayers because they fear Allāh's (swt) punishment and divine wrath. Although arguably this is not wrong, it should not be the intention of the submissive believer. This is eloquently described by the Commander of the Faithful (as) in the following narration:

إلهي ما عبدتك خوفا من نارك، ولا طمعا في جنتك، ولكن وجدتك أهلا للعبادة فعبدتك

"My God, I do not worship You for the fear of Your Hell, nor for desire for Your Paradise. Rather, I have found You worthy of worship and so I worship You[2]."

Imām 'Alī (as) in this narration does not imply that he does not fear Allāh's punishment, nor does he not desire His Paradise, rather he believes that there is a more powerful and justifiable reason to worship Allāh (swt): because Allāh (swt) is worthy of being worshipped. His heart was immersed in the love of the Almighty that even if Allāh (swt) was to send him to Hell, he would inform the inmates of Hell of his immense love for Allāh (swt) (as narrated in Du'ā' 'Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī). The people who worship Allāh (swt) out of

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 72.
[2] al-Majlisī, Biḥār Al-Anwār, vol. 7, p. 186.

gratitude and love for him are those who are free from any sins, and from Allāh's punishment and wrath:

اِنَّ قَوماً عَبَدوا اللهَ رَغْبَةً فَتِلْكَ عِبادَةُ التُّجارِ وَ اِنَّ قَوماً عَبَدوا اللهَ رَهْبَةً فَتِلكَ عِبادَةُ الْعَبيدِ وَ اِنَّ قَوماً اللهَ عَبَدوا شُكْراً فَتِلكَ عِبادَةُ الاَحْرارِ

"There is a group that worships Allāh (swt) for gain: that is the worship of the trader; and there is a group that worships Allāh (swt) out of fear: that is the worship of the slave; and there is a group that worships Allāh (swt) out of gratitude: that is the worship of the free[1]."

80. Remember when you were at the peak of your spirituality

Humans can be weak and forgetful. Our 'levels' of spirituality might fluctuate in our lifetime, depending on our circumstances. To gain spirituality in prayer, it might be helpful to remember the peak of our spirituality; for instance, during the time of ḥajj or 'umrah pilgrimage, a zīyārah or a significant life event. Remembering the sweetness of those spiritual days might help attain spirituality in prayer.

81. Ask Allāh (swt) in your du'ā' to help you concentrate in prayer

Allāh (swt) loves those who strive hard in His way, so revert to Allāh (swt) and ask Him to help you concentrate in prayer, as Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) did:

[1] al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Nahj al-Balāghah, Wisdom (ḥikam) 238, p. 293.

Du'ā' for Concentration

رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِي مُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةِ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ دُعَاءِ ﴿٤٠﴾

My Lord! Make me a maintainer of the prayer, and my descendants [too]. Our Lord, accept my supplication. (14: 40)

Of course action is also needed with sincere du'ā' if one is to sustain concentration in prayer. This also includes continuous attempts and efforts and not to despair and give up on Allāh's help and mercy as Prophet Ya'qūb (as) informed his sons when he requested them to look for Prophet Yūsuf (as) and his brother:

يَا بَنِيَّ اذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَيْأَسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْأَسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

O my sons! Go and inquire respecting Yūsuf and his brother, and despair not of Allāh's mercy; surely none despairs of Allāh's mercy except the unbelieving people. (12: 87)

Furthermore, concentration in prayer must be achieved naturally without feeling the pressure to concentrate. In any Islamic action, the believer must seek to try their utmost to perform the action. This is all that is expected:

وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

And that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and that he will soon be shown his endeavour. (53: 39-40)

Exercising the heart and mind to concentrate fully in prayer will in no doubt be difficult, but Allāh (swt) has guaranteed us success after difficulty, as stated by these two verses:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٦﴾

Indeed ease accompanies hardship. Indeed ease accompanies hardship. (94: 5-6)

82. Pray at a mosque or an Islamic centre

Whenever possible, attempt to pray your prayer in a mosque or prayer hall. Standing in a house of Allāh (swt) and in front of Him (swt) can help you increase your attention in your prayers:

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَأَقِيمُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ ۚ كَمَا بَدَأَكُمْ تَعُودُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Say: My Lord has enjoined justice, and set upright your faces at every time of prayer and call on Him, being sincere to Him in obedience; as He brought you forth in the beginning, so shall you also return. (7: 29)

It is also narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) that he said:

عن الصادق جعفر ابن محمد (عليهما السلام)، أنه قال: عليكم باتيان المساجد، فإنها بيوت الله في الأرض، ومن أتاها متطهرا طهره الله من ذنوبه، وكتب من زواره

"I request you to attend the mosques, for they are houses of Allāh (swt) on earth, and whoever enters it with purity, Allāh (swt) will purify him from his sins, and he will be written from His visitors[1]."

If the mosque or the place of prayer is decorated with the verses of the Holy Qur'ān and the names of Allāh (swt), one may feel the spiritual strength the environment provides while he is uttering the words of the Holy Qur'ān during prayer. Furthermore, the mosque or the place of worship usually symbolises peace and tranquillity; two essential ingredients for concentration in prayer. And finally, the mosque provides the opportunity for congregational prayers, which symbolise the unity and strength of Muslims (see point 86).

Attendance to mosques has been declining all around the world.[2] For example, a poll conducted in the United Kingdom showed 48% of Muslims in the UK have never attended a mosque and 6% said they only attend for special occasions.[3] This disappointing statistic contributes to the lack of connection with our prayer observed by many of us. Also, a mosque is not just for worship, it serves other purposes, such as a place for learning and social gathering.

On a different but related note, Sir William Muir writes in his book, The Life of Muhammad, about the Prophet Muḥammad's (saw) activities in the Holy Mosque in Madina:

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[1] al-Ṣadūq, al-'Amālī, p. 440.

[2] See [http://wikiislam.net/wiki/Muslim_Statistics_-_Mosques] 08/07/2018.

[3] Anthony Wells - NOP Poll of British Muslims - UK Polling Report, August 8, 2006.

"Though crude in material, and insignificant in dimensions, the Mosque of Muhammad is glorious in the history of Islam. Here, the Prophet and his companions spent most of their time; here, the daily service, with its oft-recurring prayers was first publicly established; and here, the great congregation assembled every Friday, listening with reverence and awe to messages from Heaven. Here, the Prophet planned his victories; here he received embassies from vanquished and contrite tribes; and from hence issued edicts, which struck terror amongst the rebellious to the very outskirts of the peninsula[1]."

83. Attempt to vary your place of prayer

There are some that prefer to pray in an allocated prayer room (see point 18). However others have reported that their concentration in prayer has improved when they pray in different places; be it at different rooms in their residence or in a different location. There are some reasons why this can be beneficial:

a. If you have the opportunity then attempt to pray in the open surrounded by nature (such as your garden) witnessing the limitless signs of Allāh (swt). It could also be useful to travel if possible to the wilderness or near a waterfall for example to feel the calmness of nature and observe and contemplate on the wonderful creations of Allāh (swt) in preparation for prayer and worship.

[1] Muir, W. The Life of Muhammed, p. 177.

b. The Earth will bear witness in the Hereafter for the person's actions in this world. Therefore, praying at multiple places can serve as a witness to you in the next world as narrated by the Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

عن الصادق (عليه السلام) أنه قال: صلوا من المساجد في بقاع مختلفة فإن كل بقعة تشهد للمصلي عليها يوم القيامة

"Pray in mosques at different spots (on this earth) as every spot will bear witness to the person who prayed on the Day of Judgment[1]."

84. Pray the nawāfil as it compensates for the lack of concentration in prayer

Nawāfil, or supererogatory prayers, are optional recommended prayers a believer can pray that have abundant rewards. Since these prayers are additions to the obligatory prayers, they are called nawāfil (singular nāfilah), which means 'surplus' in Arabic. There are many narrations that state the importance of praying the nawāfil and some are noted below:

a. Getting closer to Allāh (swt) and loving Him as narrated from ḥadīth al-qudsī from the Holy Prophet (saw):

قال الله عز وجل: ما تقرب إلي عبد بشئ أحب إلي مما افترضت عليه، وإنه ليتقرب إلي بالنافلة حتى أحبه، فإذا أحببته كنت سمعه الذي يسمع به، وبصره

[1] al-Ṣadūq, al-'Amālī, p. 440.

الذي يبصر به، ولسانه الذي ينطق به، ويده التي يبطش بها، إن دعاني أجبته، وإن سألني أعطيته

"Allāh (swt) said: My servant does not draw near to Me with anything better than his doing that which I have enjoined upon him, and My servant keeps drawing near to Me by doing nawāfil (supererogatory) prayers until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his vision with which he sees, his tongue with which he speaks, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask Me for anything, I would give it to him; if he were to call on Me, I would respond[1]."

b. Compensation for lack of concentration. It is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir (as) that he said:

إنما جعلت النافلة ليتم بها ما يفسد من الفريضة

"Verily the supererogatory act (nāfilah) of worship have been laid down in order to compensate for that which is vitiated out of the obligatory acts[2]."

It is narrated that Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) said:

يرفع للرجل من الصلاة ربعها أو ثمنها أو نصفها أو أكثر بقدر ما سها ولكن الله تعالى يتم ذلك بالنوافل

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 352.
[2] al-Ṣadūq, 'Ilāl al-Sharāyi', vol. 2, p. 329.

"Out of the prayers offered by a man only a half of it or one-fourth or one-eighth rises to heaven in accordance with the extent of his lapses therein. However, God the Exalted compensates for it by means of the supererogatory prayers[1]."

The nawāfil prayers are 34 rak'at, double the number of the obligatory prayers. They are as follows:

– Fajr nāfilah: two rak'ah to be performed before the obligatory prayer.

– Ẓuhr nāfilah: eight rak'ah (prayed two rak'at at a time) to be performed before the obligatory prayer.

– 'Aṣr nāfilah: eight rak'ah (prayed two rak'at at a time) to be performed before the obligatory prayer.

– Maghrib nāfilah: four rak'ah (prayed two rak'at at a time) to be performed after the obligatory prayer.

– 'Ishā' nāfilah: two rak'ah prayed while in the sitting position, (counted as one) to be performed after the obligatory prayer.

– Layl nāfilah: eight rak'at, prayed two at a time, to be performed before the fajr prayer.

– Shafā'ah nāfilah: two rak'at, to be performed after layl nāfilah and before fajr prayer.

– Witr nāfilah: one rak'at, to be performed after shafā'ah nāfilah and before fajr prayer.

Some jurisprudential rulings of obligatory prayers have been wavered for nawāfil prayers.[2] For example, you only

[1] al-Tūsī, Tahdhīb al-'Aḥkām, vol. 2, p. 341.

[2] Yazdi, M. Comments by al-Sistānī. A. al-Urwatul Withqa. Part Two. p. 361-362.

need to recite sūrah al-Fātiḥah before proceeding to rukū‘; you may pray the nawāfil while sitting or standing (standing is better); and if you make mistakes you do not need to do sajdah al-sahw.[1] This ease is to encourage the believers to pray the nawāfil so as to gain their many benefits and rewards.

85. Give importance to night prayers

It is recommended to pray all nawāfil prayers, but special emphasis is given to the night prayers (layl, shafā‘ah and witr nawāfil; also known as tahajjud prayers).[2] It was obligatory on the Holy Prophet (saw) to spend part of the night in worship[3] and performing the night prayers:

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَكَ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَحْمُودًا ﴿٧٩﴾

And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a superogatory [devotion] for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praised position. (17: 79)

True believers follow the Prophet's path by waking up at night and worshipping Allāh (swt) when others are asleep. It is a time where one can find peace and tranquillity in Allāh's presence. Night prayers are the honour of a believer, as narrated in the following ḥādīth from Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

شرف المؤمن صلاة الليل وعز المؤمن كفه عن الناس

[1] These are two prostrations of forgetfulness. For information into how to perform this, refer to the books of jurisprudence.

[2] All three known as ṣalātul layl, or night prayers.

[3] Including performing the night prayers.

"The believer's honour is night prayers and his glory is refraining from (harming) people[1]."

Therefore, to increase spirituality and achieve the presence of Allāh (swt) in your heart during prayer, attempt to perform the night prayers, even if it is only shafā'ah and witr prayers.

86. Pray congregational prayers

It is highly recommended to pray in congregation or jamā'ah. This ultimately builds a bond of togetherness and unity, and instils humility within the prayer. Allāh (swt) says in the Holy Qur'ān:

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

And maintain the prayer, and give the zakāt, and bow along with those who bow [in prayer]. (2: 43)

The word 'rāki'īn' here is plural as it indicates that you should bow your head in worship in congregation with those who bow.

Many narrations note the importance of praying in congregation. For example, it is narrated from Zurārah that he asked Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

ما يروي الناس أن الصلاة في جماعة أفضل من صلاة الرجل وحده بخمس وعشرين صلاة فقال: صدقوا. فقلت: الرجلان يكونان جماعة؟ فقال: نعم، ويقوم الرجل عن يمين الإمام

[1] al-Ṣadūq, Thawaab Al-a'amal, p. 41.

"People narrate prayer in congregation is greater than 25 years of a single person's prayer? The Imām said: Believe this. I said: What about two people praying in congregation? He said: Yes, and the man should pray on the right of the imām[1]."

Such emphasis on congregational prayer must mean that it has many benefits and strengths. In addition to providing strength of unity and togetherness, it also provides spiritual nourishment. When we are in congregation, we feel the spiritual warmth inside the room; one may not know the person beside him, but he knows that he is in the same place as himself, seeking to communicate with his Lord and submit to His Majesty. This is one of the reasons why at the end of the prayer, people sitting adjacent to each other exchange handshakes and supplicate to Allāh (swt) for the acceptance of each other's prayers.

Congregational prayers are recommended anywhere and with as little as two people.[2] Families and friends should try to make it a habit to pray in congregation whenever it is possible to make use of the benefits it provides them.

Furthermore, to stay focused during the ẓuhr and 'aṣr congregational prayers whilst the imām is standing and reciting quietly, it is recommended to softly recite some tasbīḥ, such as "Subḥān 'Allāh", "Glory be to Allāh", "Al-ḥamdu li 'llāh", "Praise be to Allāh", "Astaghfir Allāh"; "I seek forgiveness from Allāh". The tasbīḥ serves not only to keep us

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 371.

[2] The jurisprudential rulings need to be considered here.

focused, but also to keep us in the remembrance and in the vicinity of Allāh (swt) during the congregation.

87. Divide your time between fajr and sunrise

It is highly recommended to spend the time between fajr prayers and sunrise with absolute contemplation and worship of Allāh (swt). It is the time when the believer is unlikely to be engaged in work or other activities, thus having the opportunity to spend the time in worship. Sayyid ʻAbd al-Ḥusayn Dastghayb in his book Prayer of a Submissive Believer suggests dividing the time between fajr and sunrise to perform the following acts of worship:[1]

1. To remember Allāh (swt) and perform various tasbīḥ, in particular the tasbīḥāt al-Zahrā (as).

2. To read the duʻā' recommended for that particular time of day.

3. To read the Holy Qur'ān.

4. To mention your sins; ask Allāh (swt) for forgiveness; and promise Allāh (swt) that you will not commit those sins again.

Together with spending time in worship prior to sunrise, the Holy Qur'ān advises us to do the same prior to sunset, during the night and during the day:

فَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا ۖ وَمِنْ آنَاءِ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضَىٰ ﴿١٣٠﴾

[1] Dastghayb, Ṣalāt al-Khāshiʻiyn: Prayer of a Submissive Believer, p. 64.

So be patient with what they say, and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the sunset, and glorify Him in watches of the night and at the day's ends, that you may be pleased. (20: 130)

88. Plan your work around prayer and not prayer around work

It might be considered as a luxury to be able to plan work around prayer times, especially if the nature of the work does not allow for this. However, try to do this whenever possible. When arranging meetings, appointments, and lunch dates, be wary of the prayer time and be prepared (have a compass, a prayer mat, and be in wuḍū) for the prayer. Instill in your mind when you wake up in the morning that nothing is more important on this day than prayers as no meeting or work is more important than the meeting with the Almighty. By doing so, you have planned for prayer to be performed on time.

89. Exhibit nervousness, shame and guilt before Allāh (swt) over your sins

Imagine you are standing in front of the Almighty in the Hereafter. How would you be feeling? Surely feelings of nervousness, shame and guilt would be evident due to the numerous sins that one has committed in his life.

Awakening a sense of nervousness, shamefulness or guilt undoubtedly revolutionises the soul in a believer. The heart melts with fear and awe as the believer senses his personal shortcomings over the sins that he has committed in his life. An innate sense of modesty also becomes an internal restraint

to the believer, which helps him maintain the correct 'akhlāq and values. All this is encompassed in the umbrella of faith ('īmān) as narrated by Imām al-Ṣādiq (as):

الحياء من الايمان والايمان في الجنة

"Modesty is from faith ('īmān), and whoever has faith will be granted Paradise[1]."

Furthermore, whilst in communication with Allāh (swt), the feeling of genuine remorse as a result of the sins committed, or as a result of one's lack of concentration in the prayers helps to bring the heart closer to Allāh (swt) and establish the presence of the heart during the prayer. It also helps while one is in that state of modesty, shame and guilt to mention one's sins after the prayer and shed some tears while asking Allāh (swt) for forgiveness.

90. Focus on the 'eternal now'

Distracting thoughts are usually a result of an incident that has happened in the past or a situation that might occur in the future. Eckhart Tolle, the spiritual author, says in his book The Power of Now that we can never experience the past or the future, and the only thing that ever has any real value is the present or, what he calls, the 'eternal now'. He says:

"You can always cope with the now, but you can never cope with the future – nor do you have to. The answer, the

[1] al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 106.

strength, the right action or the resource will be there when you need it, not before, not after[1]."

One of the biggest causes of lack of concentration in our prayers is the obstructive thoughts that appear randomly and at random stages of the prayer. If we begin to realise that these thoughts are related to the past or the future, and instead focus on the present prayer, we can turn our minds back to focusing on the communication with the Almighty during the prayer. This, of course, can be applied not just during prayer but before and after it too, as we set our minds to focus on the 'now' and ignore the worries that are usually a result of the past or the future.

Conclusion

Concentration in prayer cannot be achieved without applying continuous methods for spiritual upliftment, as man is constantly in need of strengthening the heart. In this chapter, general practical points have been suggested to increase the level of spirituality, such as praying on time, finding the inner peace, praying in congregation and exhibiting a sense of shame and guilt over one's sins. We ask Allāh (swt) to help us in our journey towards strengthening our spirituality in order to attain His pleasure and reward, 'inshā Allāh.

[1] E. Tolle, The Power of Now, p. 85.

Chapter 7: The Medical and Physical Activities

Concentration is an art that can be enhanced by certain techniques that have been physically and medically researched. Both body and soul should be fully present during prayer. The following are some of these techniques that one can use to increase their concentration in general.

91. Eat a well balanced diet and exercise regularly

If we are serious about concentrating in our prayer, then we should also be serious about making sure our bodies and minds are in good shape. We cannot expect to sustain concentration in prayer if we eat unhealthily and do not exercise regularly. The body will become sluggish, which leads to a sluggish mind that will struggle to focus. The sluggish body will always feel tired and the brain will have a low attention span. It is therefore highly recommended to eat a well-balanced diet and exercise as much as possible.

Harriet Griffey, in The Art of Concentration, offers a different reason why exercise is important for concentration.[1] She states that sporting activities and exercise allow our body to do specific things that often involve coordination, balance and responsiveness so we have no choice but to really concentrate on what we are doing.

So let us make an effort to exercise regularly, not just to live longer, but with the intention of getting closer to

[1] H. Griffey, The Art of Concentration, p. 226.

Allāh (swt). A thirty-minute walk every day will rejuvenate the body and mind, which will result in more focus and enthusiasm.

92. Have adequate sleep

Adequate sleep is absolutely essential for concentration. Studies show that sleep deprivation impairs endocrine and metabolic functions and thus affects concentration.[1] It is advisable to get sufficient sleep each night to keep you refreshed and focused. It is also recommended to sleep early if possible to be able to pray fajr prayer with a conscious mind. This, of course, also means that you can wake up early in the morning to begin your daily duties. Furthermore, it is recommended to take mid-day naps if possible, as the mufassirīn discuss the use of the "power nap" in the exegesis of this verse:

أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَيْرٌ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَأَحْسَنُ مَقِيلًا ﴿٢٤﴾

On that day the inhabitants of Paradise will be in the best abode and an excellent resting place. (25: 24)

Some exegesists[2] suggest that the word 'maqīla' here refers to a resting place at noon, also known as 'qaylūla'. To support this, recent studies show that power naps during the day can refresh the mind, increase alertness, productivity and improve

[1] Goel N, Rao H, Durmer JS, Dinges DF. Neurocognitive consequences of sleep deprivation. Semin Neurol. 2009; vol. 29, pp. 320-39.
[2] al-Shirazi. Al-'Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, vol. 11, p. 170.

memory and learning.[1] Other sleep-related acts which are recommended include performing wuḍū before sleep and sleeping on the right side (also known as the right lateral decubitus).

93. Stay hydrated

Dehydration, some researchers believe, is another reason for lack of concentration. They show that dehydration results in the possibility of experiencing fatigue and a decrease in mental agility.[2] It is therefore advised to stay hydrated which may clear the mind, reduce stress and lead to clearer thought. Allāh (swt) describes water as living:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

And We made every living thing out of water, will they then not believe? (21: 30)

To appreciate the deep meaning of this verse, imagine you are very thirsty on a hot day and are in desperate need of water; your body feels weak and dysfunctional. As you manage to sip some water, it is as if your soul has returned and you feel alive again. That is why the Qur'ān beautifully describes water as living.[3]

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[1] C. E. Milner, K. A. Cote. Benefits of napping in healthy adults: impact of nap length, time of day, age, and experience with napping. J Sleep Res. 18(2): p. 272–281, 2009.

[2] Ganio MS et al. (2011). Mild dehydration impairs cognitive performance and mood of men. Br J Nutr. Vol. 106, pp. 1535-43.

[3] al-Shirazi. Al-'Amthāl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, vol. 10, p. 110.

94. Learn ways to meditate

The core goal of meditation is to focus and eventually quieten the mind and free it from all obstructive thoughts. Meditation brings the mind to focus on one object, thus achieving strength of concentration.

Some techniques teach methods to relax the mind and achieve the accession to inner calm that is needed for concentration. One such technique is to breathe slowly and calmly (e.g. in mindfulness).[1] You begin by sitting in a quiet and comfortable place. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Breathe in deeply and breathe out. Concentrate solely on your breathing; if a thought enters your mind acknowledge it non-judgmentally and stay in the present moment. The key here is to breathe from the abdomen and get as much oxygen in your lungs as possible. The higher levels of oxygen have a calming effect and relax the mind. Ten minutes of this exercise a day can channel concentration and help you master techniques to concentrate in prayer.

Another technique to help you relax your mind through breathing is to place one hand on your upper chest, the other on your abdomen. Breathe slowly allowing the abdominal muscles to move freely with the breath. Do not force or strain. The hand on the upper chest is there to remind you that the upper chest does not lift as you breathe in. Take several

[1] See [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_relief_meditation_yoga_relaxation.htm] 18/03/2014.

breaths in this way, allowing there to be a moment of full suspension of the in-breath before exhaling.[1]

If you are interested in other breathing techniques, you may like to research Equal Breathing, Alternate Nostril Breathing, and Progressive Relaxation.

95. Master stress management

The relationship between stress and concentration can be a negative one. Stress is not always bad; it can be useful for creativity and learning. However, stress only becomes harmful if it is overwhelming, as it disrupts the healthy state of the nervous system. This overwhelming stress can cause tiredness amongst many other symptoms and thus can reduce concentration.

If you believe that stress is one of the reasons why your mind wanders off during prayer then you should try some stress management techniques. One of these techniques is known as Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR), which was developed by the physician Edmund Jacobson in the 1920s. His idea was simple: if you feel your muscles are tense, you should tense specific muscle groups and then relax them to create awareness of tension and relaxation. He proved that this technique could eventually lead to total muscle relaxation.[2]

Furthermore, some suggest hand massaging can relieve stress and headaches. The technique is massaging for around

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[1] Taken from [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_TCS.htm] 08/07/2018.

[2] See [http://www.amsa.org/healingthehealer/musclerelaxation.cfm] 14/10/2013.

90 seconds the web space of the hand that is between the thumb and forefinger.

96. Fast, or reduce your daily food intake

One of the reasons why fasting can increase concentration is that abstaining from food and drink breaks our routine lifestyle and habits, so we are more aware of what we are doing in our day, including the prayer. If you are used to approaching ẓuhr prayer after lunch then your brain will be more alert if that system is broken while fasting. Also, some people who fast experience their neediness for Allāh (swt), which opens their heart to spiritual understanding. This can help the believer get closer to Allāh (swt) in prayer.

Therefore, if you feel that fasting may increase your concentration and want to get extra reward from Allāh (swt), then fasting may indeed be a viable option for you.

97. Sit still for a few minutes to increase your ability to concentrate

Harriet Griffey in her book The Art of Concentration explains how sitting still for a few minutes can help you stay calm, focused and increase your ability to concentrate in a task. She says:

"Start by sitting in a relaxed position, upright in a chair, without slumping. Don't cross your legs; instead sit with your feet flat on the floor, your hands resting palms upwards on your thighs. Use your core muscles to support you, relax your shoulders, lengthen through the back of the neck and drop your chin a little. Try to breathe using your diaphragm and

stomach muscles, not from the upper chest. Now sit still. Be aware of areas of discomfort but, having previously adjusted your position, don't move again; just register the thought and move on. Be aware of any involuntary muscular movements, but consciously relax the limbs in which they occur, and move on. Stay concentrated on your body, rather than drifting away with your thoughts, and do this for five minutes. Don't extend the time, until you are really comfortable for five minutes[1]."

98. Gaze your eyes into a black spot

Fixing our eyes onto one particular space for a few moments can help to gain control over the involuntary muscular movements that may distract us from prayer. You can practice this outside of the prayer by gazing into a black spot in a wall about two inches in diameter. The trick is to consciously leave any thoughts to one side and get back to concentrating on the black spot. Do this for only three minutes a day and assess your concentration. If it is helping, then prolong this practice.

99. Improve your memory

All techniques used to improve memory involve concentration, as people are more likely to recall information which they concentrate on. Memory helps to direct attention to specific memorised events as it gives context for concentration. It is recommended therefore to memorise as many chapters of the Holy Qur'ān as possible and memorise

[1] H. Griffey, The Art of Concentration, p. 196.

the various supplications used in prayer (see point 45) that can improve concentration during prayer.

A recent study has shown a link between working memory[1] and attention.[2] The study showed that working memory may actually enable distractive thoughts (or what psychologists call task unrelated-thought) during a particular task (in our case prayer). They add, "What this study seems to suggest is that, when circumstances for the task aren't very difficult, people who have additional working memory resources deploy them to think about things other than what they're doing[3]".

They further suggest that if the task is complicated and difficult then the link between mind-wandering and working memory disappears.

Working memory is not a bad thing; many studies have in fact shown that it is needed to complete long tasks as described by Cruger: "Working memory helps us stay involved in something longer and keep more things in mind while approaching a task[4]." However, what we learn from the early study is that if our brain considers prayer as an uninteresting

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[1] As described in Chapter 1, the working memory is a mental workspace that allows you to juggle multiple thoughts simultaneously.

[2] D. Levinson, J. Smallwood, R. Davidson. (2012) The Persistence of Thought: Evidence for a Role of Working Memory in the Maintenance of Task-Unrelated Thinking, Psychol Sci. vol. 23, p. 375-380.

[3] D. Levinson, J. Smallwood, R. Davidson. (2012) The Persistence of Thought: Evidence for a Role of Working Memory in the Maintenance of Task-Unrelated Thinking, Psychol Sci. vol. 23, p. 375-380.

[4] See [http://www.ncld.org/types-learning-disabilities/executive-function-disorders/what-is-working-memory-why-does-matter] 16/10/2013.

and very much routine task, then it will deploy working memory resources to occupy the mind with distractive thoughts that are 'more interesting' than the prayer. This is why we have to ensure that our prayer is not considered a systematic and trivial task by alternating recitations and accomplishing the spiritual enhancements outlined in this book.

100. Improve your posture

It is important to be as comfortable as possible while praying. Having a poor posture and unnecessary levels of muscular and mental tension can lead to physical complications as well as reducing energy levels, which can have an impact on concentration. Maria Pattinson, a leadership and communication skills consultant, wrote some recommendations for a correct posture during prayer, exclusively for this book:

"Posture is important in prayer because poor postural habits create aches and pains that can make it difficult to remain focused when praying. The daily wear and tear of sitting hunched over a desk or driving in heavy traffic or coping with the multitude of stresses that are part of contemporary life take their toll on our bodies. The result is felt as lower back problems, frozen shoulders, stiff necks, restricted breathing, painful joints – none of which are conducive to ease in the movements of Muslim prayer. If, on top of the aches and pains, we also start to feel annoyed or irritated with ourselves, then concentrated prayer seems to escape us even further. To help bring mind and body to a

single focus in preparation for prayer, we would do well to draw upon the work of the Victorian reciter F. M. Alexander and his research into postural awareness known now as the Alexander Technique.

F. M. Alexander became aware, though his own vocal problems, that the human body responds to stimuli that are both internal and external. His observations about the use of his own self in the act of public speaking led him to the realization that the 'means whereby' one does an action is inextricably woven with the end that is gained.[1]

If we consider this comment in the light of the actions in praying, then perhaps it is worth considering that the 'means whereby' one becomes aware of posture in prayer will have an impact on the quality of prayer itself. Below is a sequence of actions to try out for yourself as a 'means whereby' during prayer which might bring the mind and body to the present moment, helping to leave the distractions of everyday life behind.

> When you are in the standing position, stand with your weight equally balanced on two feet. Feel a sense of weight dropping down from the shoulders so that the lower part of the body is doing the supporting role. Check that knees are not locked back. Feel that the head is balanced lightly on top of the spinal column, floating up towards the ceiling, crown of the head the highest point, as if held up by a string from

[1] F. M. Alexander, The Use of the Self, p. 66-69.

the crown of the head to the ceiling. Relax the jaws if they are tense.

Breathe through the nose and feel the breath reach down to the stomach. Let the out breath be longer than the in breath. Breathe and inspire yourself to a deeper sense of being present in your body. Breathe slowly, allowing the abdominal muscles to move freely with the breath. Don't force or strain. At the end of the out breath, wait for the natural impulse to take the next in breath. Do not hurry this moment or force the breath. As you move through the various actions of the prayer, notice the effect on your breathing. Aim to keep the breathing low and flowing easily in the body as described above.

If your next action is doing rukū' or sujūd, be aware of unnecessary tensions; release them before actually progressing towards kneeling or prostrating.

By paying attention to the use of our bodies in prayer, we can learn to make less unnecessary effort and increase our capacity to open more fully to receive the blessings of Allāh."

Conclusion

Islam is a holistic religion which not only guides us on how we should live our 'spiritual lives' but all facets of life as they are connected. In this chapter, a holistic approach to concentration has been presented. This is because the mind, body and soul embark on a journey during the prayer and so it is important to pay attention to all these faculties in order to maximise our concentration in prayer. If we eat a balanced diet, drink plenty of water, or try different breathing

techniques with the intention of improving concentration in prayer in order to connect to the Lord, then all these seemingly mundane acts become acts of worship, and actions fī sabīli' llāh (for the sake of Allāh). It is a beautiful way to remember Allāh (swt) during the day and make every action a step towards Him (swt).

Conclusion

101. Keep going and never give up

Sustaining concentration in prayer is a journey. It is not something that can be achieved in one day, especially if a person aims to concentrate in every prayer. Rather, it is an effort that must be exercised for every prayer, and it is only after a sustained effort that true results can be seen.

There will be times when the heart yearns for connection with the Almighty and concentration is natural and the conversation is sweet. There may be other times when you are tired or not in the right state of mind to concentrate. You may face situations when you are busy with work and family and find it difficult to clear your mind for prayer. If these situations and feelings occur, do not give up as these situations are part of the struggle towards achieving submissiveness during prayer.

It is inevitable that there will be fluctuations in our quest to strengthen our concentration in prayer, as it is also the case for our faith and 'īmān in Allāh (swt). The mark of a successful believer is to continuously strive and make an effort to strengthen faith in Allāh (swt) and connection during prayer, even when faced with obstacles along the way. Through this, Allāh (swt) will reward the believer, even though they may not have reached the level of concentration needed during prayer.

So persevere with the knowledge that Allāh (swt) sees all your efforts. He has promised to be with the patient ones, and

grant them a reward without measure as described in the Holy Qur'ān:

إِنَّمَا يُوَفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure. (39: 10)

This is not the end. This is the beginning of the journey towards achieving presence of the heart through a continual struggle against the Shayṭān and distracting thoughts during prayer. We pray to Allāh (swt) to grant us the tawfīq to continue in the journey towards Him and to keep going and never give up.

In Summary

Prayer represents a concrete manifestation of obedience, patience, faith, servitude and freewill. Its essence is sincerity and humility towards the All-Encompassing and Merciful. It opens the heart and mind to Allāh (swt) and purifies the heart from all filth and impurity. It is the act that if it is accepted, all other actions are accepted, and if it is rejected, all other actions are rejected. This means that the whole lifestyle and understanding of a person affects his prayer. It is like a sport, where to play well during a match, you need to practice regularly, live a healthy lifestyle and go running; or an exam where you need to have studied more than what is actually on the exam in order to pass it.

The Commander of the Faithful put it best when he said that worshippers are of three types.[1] The first are those who worship out of fear, and this is the worship of servants: there are plenty of reasons to fear lack of concentration in prayer, as there is no acceptance without concentration and presence of heart. If there is no acceptance of actions then how will we know we are safe on the Day of Judgment, even if we do fulfil the outward bounds of religion? We know of examples from history of tyrants who are cursed by Allāh (swt) to an eternity in Hellfire, and are deprived of His Mercy, yet they also recited their obligatory prayers. It is narrated from Prophet Muḥammad (saw):

كَمْ مِنْ صَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ صِيَامِهِ إِلاَّ الْجُوعُ وَ الظَّمَأُ، وَكَمْ مِنْ قَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ قِيَامِهِ إِلاَّ السَّهَرُ وَ الْعَنَاءُ

"Many receive nothing from fasting except hunger and thirst, and many receive nothing from their prayers except vigil and weakness[2]."

The second group Imām ʻAlī (as) speaks about are those who worship for a reward, and this is the worship of the traders. To trade with Allāh (swt), we must have something that is worth trading. If the basic requirement for prayer is concentration, then we must really question the true value of our prayer. You cannot trade something of low value for something of a very high worth. It is true that Allāh (swt) is Generous, but now there is much more to gain.

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[1] al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Nahj al-Balāghah, Wisdom (ḥikam) 238, p. 293.
[2] Ibid, Wisdom (ḥikam) 145, p. 282.

The third group of people are those who worship out of thankfulness, or because they realise that He truly deserves to be worshipped, and this is the worship of the free man. The motivation for their worship is based on their knowledge of Allāh (swt) and their understanding. They increase in their concentration with their increase in love and knowledge and their prayer really is a connection to Allāh (swt). Every prayer they make moves them closer and closer. There comes a time when the world disappears when they stand on their prayer mat. Like Imām ʻAlī (as), himself, who is known as the Leader of the Pious and Those who Pray (Imām al-Mutaqīn wa al-Muṣallīn).

The Commander of the Faithful (as) was at the peak of this third group, and he shows us the possibilities that prayer can offer. However, we must all know that everyone has a potential to fulfil, and if we make a serious attempt to channel at least a tenth of our care for this world towards the Hereafter we will certainly achieve some presence of the heart in prayer. Let us begin today by gradually striving towards this path and continuously practising the various methods needed to attain the pleasure of proximity to Allāh (swt).

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Glossary

adhān: call announcing the time of prayer

ʾādāb: courtesy, manners

(as): ʿalayhi al-salām/ʿalayhā al-salām; peace be upon him/her

ḥādīth (pl. ʾaḥādīth): the sayings (or tradition) of the Prophet (saw), the Ahl al-Bayt (as), the infallible Imāms and the companions

Ahl al-Bayt: the family of the Holy Prophet which include: himself, Lady Fatema and the twelve infallible Imāms

ʾakhlāq: ethics, manners, attitude

ʿālim: scholar, learned person

ʿaqīq: agate (ornamental stone)

ʿaṣr: afternoon

āyah (pl. āyāt): a verse in the Holy Qur'ān

bāṭil: falsehood

bismillāh: In the Name of Allāh

ẓuhr: noon

duʿāʾ: invocation, supplication, prayer

fajr: dawn

fiqih: jurisprudence

fī sabīli Allāh: for the sake of Allāh

fiṭrah: nature, disposition

ghusl: Islamic ritual bathing

ḥadīth al-qudsī: speech of Allāh (swt), narrated through the Holy Prophet (saw)

ḥajj: pilgrimage of Muslims to Makkah

ḥaqq: truth

halāl: religiously lawful or allowed

harām: religiously unlawful

ḥayyah: 'make haste' (usually recited in the 'adhān and 'iqāmah)

ikhlās: sincerity

'iḥyā: revival

imām: scholar, person who leads the prayer

'īmān: faith

'inshā Allāh: Allāh (swt) willing

iqāmah: opening of the prayer, a shortened form of the 'adhān

'ishā': last of the daily prayers

jamā'ah: congregation

jihād: struggle for the sake of Allāh (swt)

Ka'bah: cuboid building at the centre of the sacred Mosque in Makkah

khātim: ring

khayal: imagination

khushū': submissiveness, humility, concentration in prayer

layl: night

ma'rifah: inner knowledge

madḥ: praise

makrūh: not recommended jurisprudentially

mālik: master, owner

maghrib: sunset

mu'adhdhin: the person who calls out the adhān

mufassirīn: the exegesists of the Holy Qur'ān

muṣallī: a Muslim performing the prayer

musk: a type of perfume

mustaḥab: recommended act in Islam

murāqabah: watching over

muḥāsabah: accounting

muṭma'inn: contented

nāfilah (pl. nawāfil): supererogatory prayers, recommended prayers

nafs: soul

naẓāfah: cleanliness

nūr: light

nīyyah: intention

qiblah: the direction to the Ka'bah in Makkah (which Muslims face during prayer)

qiyām: the standing position in prayer, position after rukū'

qunūt: invocation recited during prayer after the completion of the second rakʿat. Performed in the standing position with the palms of the hands raised upwards

rakʿah (pl. rakʿāt): unit of prayer

rukūʿ: the position of bowing in the prayer

(saw): sallallāhu ʿalayhi wa ālih. May Allāh (swt) send His salutations and blessings upon him (the Prophet) and his family

sajdah (d. sajdāt, pl. sujūd): prostration during prayer, prostration during worship

salām: greetings, peace

ṣalāh/ṣalāt (pl. ṣalawāt): Muslim's ritual prayer

sālik: a gnostic term denoting the traveller to Allāh

Shayṭān: Satan, the devil

shakk: doubt

shukr: gratitude, thanks

siwāk: teeth cleaning twig made from a twig of the Salvadora persica tree

sūrah (pl. suwar): a chapter of the Qur'ān

swt: subḥānahu wa taʿālā. May He be glorified and exalted

tafsīr: an exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān

takbīrat al-'iḥrām: saying, "'Allāhu 'Akbar" (Allāh (swt) is Great), opening of the prayer

ṭahārah: Islamic purity

tajwīd: knowledge and application of the rules of recitation of the Holy Qur'ān

taʿqībāt: recommended duʿā' after the prayer

tasbīh (pl. tasbīhāt): glorifying and praising Allāh

tashahhud: testifying the unity of Allāh (swt) and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, sending salutations upon Muḥammad (saw) and his family, part of the prayer while at sitting position

taslīm: the salām (greetings) with which the prayer is closed, part of the prayer while at sitting position

tawfīq: success, Allāh's help

tawḥīd: believing in Allāh's Oneness; monotheism

'ummah: people, nation

wudū: ritual ablution (made before performing the prayer)

zīyārah: visitation (usually associated with visiting the shrines of the prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt)

﴿ دَعْوَاهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ
وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ
وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

Their call therein will be,
'O Allāh! Immaculate are You!'
and their greeting therein will be, 'Peace!'
and their concluding call,
'All Praise belongs to Allāh,
the Lord of the Worlds!'

The Holy Qur'ān (Sūrah Yūnus, 10)