

PRAYER - A CLOSER CONTACT WITH
REALITY

Dr. Abdul Khaliq

ABSTRACT

Prayer is often perceived as a spiritual practice that bridges the physical and divine realms, yet it can also foster a deeper connection with reality itself. Beyond its religious significance, prayer encourages mindfulness and introspection, allowing individuals to engage more deeply with their thoughts, emotions, and surroundings. It promotes a moment of stillness that enhances self-awareness, helping individuals step outside the rush of daily life to focus on deeper truths. The Tradition "*Al-Salat-o Mi'rajul-Mu'mineen*," which reflects prayer as a spiritual ascension, highlights its transformative potential to elevate believers toward divine knowledge and experience. Thinkers like Iqbal, William James, and Rudolf Otto frame prayer as an experiential encounter with God, emphasizing the personal, cognitive, and creative aspects of prayer in forming a direct relationship with the divine. Iqbal underscores prayer's role in transcending mere ritual, aligning one's will with God's and fostering a personal dialogue with the Ultimate Reality. This practice, rooted in self-reflection, cultivates moral awareness, gratitude, and emotional resilience, guiding individuals through challenges while seeking peace and strength. Ultimately, prayer as a reflective practice enables individuals to navigate the complexities of life with humility, mindfulness, and a deeper sense of purpose, integrating their understanding of the world and their role within it.

Prayer is often seen as a spiritual practice, a bridge between the physical world and the divine. However, beyond its religious and meditative associations, prayer can also be viewed as a way to foster a deeper connection with reality itself. It invites individuals to engage with the world in a more profound and reflective way, allowing them to confront both their inner lives and the external universe with greater clarity. Prayer is a moment of stillness that fosters awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and surroundings. In this sense, it helps the individual step outside the rush of daily life and be more present, focusing on what truly matters. This grounding effect brings people into closer contact with their immediate reality, helping them pause and reflect on life's deeper truths.

Al-Salat-o Mi'rajul-Mu'mineen (prayer is *mi'raj*¹ for the men of faith) is an aphorism very popular among the Muslim orthodoxy — sometimes even recognized as a saying of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him). Whatever its source, the saying is profound and very significant also. Broadly speaking, it points to immeasurable heights in meritorious desert and caliber to which man can rise through the instrumentality of prayer and worship.² The prayer is here declared to be able to elevate himself to such a level that he communicates with no less a Being than God Himself and has a living, experiential knowledge of His presence. William James calls such an experience 'an intercourse with the Ideal Companion'³. This experiential knowledge happens to take place through a special sensation — spiritual sensation we may call it — which is more or less what Rudolf Otto describes as the 'faculty of divination'⁴ or what Father Poulain describes as the 'interior touch'⁵. Man, after having been made by God with His Own hands,⁶ 'came down' to the earth as the 'best of creation', 'the image of God' and as 'the bearer of Divine attributes' whom everything in the heavens and the earth is made to work for, attend to, and serve.⁷ In the act of prayer, he 'returns' to the source of his own being as if to receive for himself an occasional reminder of his "word and justification as a dynamic factor in the life of the universe"⁸ and of his inherently elevated station to which he must justify himself to be equal. It is this reminder, ever kept fresh in daily prayers, which, incidentally, tends to keep the individual away from abominable, prohibited acts and help him lead a moral life.⁹

The aphorism quoted in the beginning above also seeks to bypass the literalist commonsense view that prayer is essentially petitionary in nature so that it may be regarded as a plain request to God to interpose Himself into the usual course of events and change it to various sorts of conveniences of the petitioner as he desires. Prayer, it is implied here, is rather a plea for 'being more' rather than 'having more', for eternal spiritual enrichment rather than for temporal, material benefits. At the authentic level of man-God relationship, even if sometimes I do ask for favours, I in fact say to Him: 'O God! Grant me so and so'; and at the same time: 'O God! I submit to Your will howsoever it comes out to be and am ready to accept it and carry it out'.¹⁰ So what is really important is the attunement of my own attitude to God and a willing declaration of total surrender to His will and pleasure. This, lexically speaking, is really the entire connotation of being a (Muslim).

Iqbal, in the second chapter of his *Reconstruction*, has prefaced his views on prayer with a detailed philosophical discussion of the nature of God, 'the ultimate ground of all experience'.¹¹ The Qur'an, he points out, has emphasized the individuality and personality of God, the Ultimate Ego, Whose "I-ness is independent, elemental, absolute".¹² He goes on to offer a rationale of this point of view by giving his own interpretation of certain attributes of God and of those Qur'anic verses which apparently have a pantheistic import. This entire prefatory account was necessary to provide a suitable context for a discussion of the nature of prayer in two ways. Firstly, a philosophical understanding of God brings into clear focus the nature of religion's ambition which, according to Iqbal, 'soars higher than the ambition of philosophy. Religion is not satisfied with mere conception; it seeks a more intimate knowledge of, and association with, the object of its pursuit. The agency through which this association is achieved is, he points out, 'the act of worship or prayer'.¹³ Secondly, by bringing home to his readers the personal character of God it becomes easier for Iqbal to make them understand the nature of prayer which is an instrument of cognitive association with the 'Great Companion' that God is: Prayer, he holds, is essentially a personal encounter, a dialogue, with the Ultimate Reality.

Religious life, Iqbal points out, can be divided into three periods, namely, of faith, thought and discovery. "In the first period religious life appears as a form of discipline which the individual or a whole people must accept as an unconditional command without any rational understanding of the ultimate meaning and purpose of that

Command ... Perfect submission to discipline is followed by a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority. In this period religious life seeks its foundation in a kind of metaphysics—a logically consistent view of the world with God as a part of that view. In the third period metaphysics is displaced by psychology and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality”¹⁴ It is this direct contact with the Ultimate Reality that is the essence of prayer, according to Iqbal. Prayer is the instrument through which the individual has a vision of what was earlier the object of his faith and thought and so discovers the situation of his personality ‘in a larger whole of life’. This is the maximum to which an ordinary man can go. Prophets, the chosen cognizants and advocates of the highest truth, however, have over and above to play the role of social reformers. In their case “unitary experience tends to overflow its boundaries and seeks opportunities of redirecting or refashioning the forces of collective life.”¹⁵ Thus with them prayer besides being cognitive, as is the case with an ordinary religious consciousness, is also creative.

Ibn Rushd, we are reminded here, too had categorized seekers after truth into three classes: the philosophers, the theologians and the laymen.¹⁶ The philosophers are the people of demonstration who, starting from a scratch, use their reason to reach the Ultimate Reality. The theologians, the people of dialectics, on the other hand, start from certain preconceived doctrines and beliefs and then try to reason out the truth about these doctrines. The masses, who are the people of rhetorics, seek to understand through examples, poetic persuasions and emotional appeals. The philosophers, according to Ibn Rushd, are the best of all. It is they alone who have the right to interpret the esoteric verses of the Qur’an, and then they must withhold their interpretations from the two other categories of the truth-seekers who, being men of superficialities, are liable to be led astray if exposed to the profundities of knowledge of whose assimilation they are not capable. Thus pure demonstrative reason unalloyed by beliefs and emotions is, according to Ibn Rushd, the most excellent instrument of knowledge. Given all his infatuation with, and a strong bias for, Greek rationalism and epistemic naturalism, he could not go farther than this. He could not visualize that there might be still higher ways possible in which reality can be known, and known better.

In fact, if we regard demonstration and discursive reason as the highest form of knowledge available to man, we can never be in a position to know God and for that matter, the Ultimate Reality —

whatever the name we give to this Reality. The entire history of human thought bears witness to this fact. The function of discursive reason, we know, is to conceptualize, and to conceptualize is to divide and relate. But God, being the One Unique Ultimate Reality, is *ex-hypothesi* not subject to division, analysis or composition and also He does not derive His is-ness from being a member of a rational order. So there can be no conceptual awareness of God's nature. Mentioning Kant in this respect as a typical example of rationalism, Iqbal justifies his inability to affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God: this was perfectly consistent with his rationalistic principles.¹⁷ The logical intellect confines its operation to the natural order only; the Divine order is consequently unknowable to it. It incidentally follows from all this that there can be no strictly logical proof for the existence of God in which nature is accepted as the major premises. Nature is temporal and finite whereas God is eternal and infinite. How can the conclusion belong to the order of eternity whereas the premises have been derived from the order of time. The gulf between the empirical and the trans-empirical cannot be bridged over by logical reasoning. Stoics have been known to be among the earliest to uphold a natural theology but then their God was fundamentally an existing entity of the same kind as the world. Hence the inadequacy and the inapplicability of a Stoic approach to the religion of Islam in particular which conceives God as, by and large, essentially different from nature. "The best that can be said of the arguments for the existence of God", A. C. Ewing observed, "is that they give some support to the belief not that they are really conclusive".¹⁸

Does all this mean that the door to the understanding of God is entirely barred against strictly human initiatives. Is God to remain a mysterious being simply entitled to a blind belief. Iqbal's answer is a positive 'no'. In this connection he compares the viewpoints of Kant and Ghazali. Kant held on to the 'forms of perception' and the 'categories of understanding' as the only available equipment with which we approach the objects of our knowledge and thus, consistently with his premises, held that the Ultimate Reality is unknowable. Ghazali, before Kant, had also observed that it is impossible to build theology on rational grounds, and that discursive reason is incapable to grasp the Real. But according to the former there is still another mode of knowledge possible and this is what he calls *ma'rifat* or gnostic awareness. It is through the operativeness of this mode of knowledge that Ghazali, according to Iqbal, very rightly

vouchsafed independence of religion and secured for it the right to exist independently of science and metaphysics.¹⁹

Islam is basically a way of knowledge because in fact all higher religion is essentially experience and recognizes the necessity of experience as its foundation.²⁰ The Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) registered the culmination of the deductive modes of understanding of the earlier prophets to whom certain truths were revealed as ready-made principles of behaviour for a blind and unquestioned observance by their people. This culmination came when ultimately metaphysics was replaced by psychology²¹ and the source of revelation, the major premise hitherto accepted on authority, became the possible fact of human experience. Having become capable of such a supreme achievement man was thrown back henceforth to tap his own resources so as to have the joy of reaching the Ultimate through his own initiatives and efforts. Being too mature now to be led by the nose, man has been called upon to go the natural way and thus investigate into an alternative dimension of the being of God. This is what Iqbal means when he says: "The prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world". In him, he goes on to say, "life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction".²² Thus, in either way, Islam remains a way of knowing. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a prolific writer on Islam, points out that in fact "herein lies one of the major distinctions between the Islamic and the Christian points of view—Christianity is essentially a mystery which veils the Divine from man. The beauty of Christianity lies in the acceptance of God as a mystery and in bowing before this mystery. In Islam, however, it is man who is veiled from God. The Divine Being is not veiled from us; we are veiled from Him and it is for us to try to rend this veil asunder in order to know God. Islam is thus essentially a way of knowledge; it is a way of gnosis. Islam leads to that essential knowledge which integrates our being, which makes us know what we are and be what we know or, in other words, integrates knowledge and being in the ultimate unitive vision of Reality".²³

The very significant intermediate position occupied by the Prophet (peace be on him) as referred to above, also sufficiently explains the remark made by Iqbal "... all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer".²⁴ Prayer in the sense of

canonical prayers may be understood with reference to his the position as belonging to the ‘ancient world’ whereas prayer in the form of a study of nature is to be understood with reference to his position as belonging to the ‘modern world’. The one is deductive; the other inductive. Prayers, of course, both of them are because both of them aim at the ‘ultimate, unitive vision of Reality.’ Only the approaches are different. The former realizes its objective through the recitation of, and contemplation over, certain verses of the Qur’an, the Word of God, alongwith the required bodily postures and movements; the latter through the contemplation of nature, ‘the habit of God’.²⁵ “knowledge of nature’, says Iqbal, ‘is the knowledge of God’s behavior. In our observation of nature we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the Absolute Ego’.²⁶

According to the Qur’anic point of view both the forms of prayer described above are, in the final analysis, equally authentic and are ultimately reducible to the same state of affairs. This is because of the fact that there is no essential disharmony between the ‘Word of God’ and the ‘Work of God’. It is illuminative to note here that the Qur’anic word ‘*ayah*’ has been used for a verse in the Qur’an as well as for a phenomenon of nature. This shows their mutual affinity. “Nature’s Laws’, says Khalifa Abdul Hakim, “are God’s thoughts thinking themselves in orbits and tides. As there are signs of God’s power and wisdom and beauty in all nature outside man, so are these signs inscribed in the hearts of all men — the verses of God’s revelation are inscribed in the letters of light in the starry heavens, in the prophetic consciousness and in the minds and hearts of those who reflect rightly on nature within and nature without’.²⁷ The Qur’anic text, being the Word of God meant to be understood by human beings is necessarily ‘symbolic’ (in a very broad sense of this term); in its descriptions nature which is the ‘Cosmic Text’ is too a fabric of symbols. Through the language of symbols, they both speak forth the presence of God. Incidentally this explains why to Muslim physical scientists mathematics made such a strong appeal. “Its abstract nature furnished the bridge that Muslims were seeking between multiplicity (of nature) and unity (of God). It provided a fitting texture of symbols for the universe — symbols that were like keys to open the cosmic text.”²⁸

That physical nature is replete with significant pointers to the existence of God is a fact very evident to the readers of the Qur’an. When Prophet Moses, for instance, expressed his wish to see God he was directed to look towards the mountain which is just a phenomenon of nature.²⁹ Thus the way prescribed by God for His

cognition was the way through nature. Similarly the mile-stones in Prophet Abraham's way God were the natural phenomena *viz* stars, moon and the sun.³⁰ But exactly how and in what specific sense can a study of nature lead one to God. As explained above, there can be nothing of the sort of deductive demonstration involved here. Any *modus operandi* whatever in this respect is not at all of a strictly 'this-therefore-this' variety. Nature, as already pointed out, is a composition of symbols. These symbols have to be recognized as such and duly interpreted before they can be appreciated as to what do they symbolize. For this interpretative function we are required to have a 'cosmological insight' or, what Iqbal has termed, 'the vital way of looking at the universe'. It is not through logical reason but by a trans-empirical mode of perception, through 'the reason of the heart that the reason knows not of', that we can bridge up the gulf between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal and can have the experience of God the natural way. Thus, in the last analysis, the appeal of a profound observer of nature is primarily not to facts or matters of fact as they stand in their own right but rather to the basic religious intuitions. It is at the recalling of these intuitions into conscious awareness of man and bringing them into active operation in him that the Qur'anic teachings directly aim. The word *ziker*³¹ (remembrance) used for the Qur'an itself is significant. When man becomes oblivious of these intuitions, God wonders as to why his heart has been left alone to be 'locked up'.³² The phrase corresponding to this is 'expanding of the breast' (*inshirah-e sadr*): whomsoever God wishes to show the right path, he expands his breast for Islam.³³ This is what Iqbal means when he points out that the observation of nature sharpens our inner perception so that we can have a deeper vision of it (nature).³⁴ However, we may hasten to point out here that this 'sharpening' of inner perception is not entirely due to man's effort. It requires, as Iqbal correctly points out, the grace of God to eventualize.³⁵ On this subject voluminous literature has been provided by the mystics of Islam who have invariably conceived Divine knowledge as direct and immediate and heavily due to the initiative of God Himself. Al-Ghazali, for instance, says in his autobiographical account *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*: "Attainment of it (the truth) did not come by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument but by a light which God Most High cast into my breast. This light is the greater part of knowledge. Whoever thinks that the understanding of things Divine rests upon strict proof has in his thought narrowed down the wideness of God's mercy".³⁶ It is by virtue of this concept of Divine

grace or *taufiq*, as it is known in characteristic *sufi* terminology, that God remains the logically prior objective of the revealed characterizations of His person in spite of the temporal priority of nature and natural observation.

Incidentally, all this speaks eloquently for the importance that must necessarily be attached to a process of self-culture i.e. to the inculcation of an appropriate orientation of mind and a keen receptivity for the grace of God. By virtue of contemplation and thinking and a clean living we in fact rend asunder the veils of our own superficiality and ignorance. To grasp the meaning of the word as well as the work of God we have to enter into the deeper dimensions of our own being and at the same time keep our physical eyes open. To those who are themselves superficial and uninitiated everything will appear to be superficial too—incapable of any esoteric import. It is such persons who are condemned by the Qur'an as spiritually diseased and the ones involved in self-deception.³⁷ A person who is blind here, says the Qur'an, will be blind in the hereafter,³⁸ meaning thereby that one who does not see the facts of life and existence with the correctness of attitude here and now will never be able to have the bliss of the beatific vision of the Ideal.

Thus the essence of prayer, according to Iqbal, lies in going from the finite to the Infinite. It signifies a process of liberation—liberation from finite, temporal existence and from all that it entails. This being a stupendous task, co-operation of God is needed all along, as already pointed out, which is readily granted to the deserving candidates. Incidentally this entire phenomenon of 'man realizing God through nature and God Himself co-operating with man in this endeavour,' incidentally, speaks well for the essential unity of all existence. Everything is 'more or less' the same. All are egos, as Iqbal puts it. "The world in all its details from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego is", he declares, "the self-revelation of the 'Great I am'".³⁹ Every atom of Divine energy', he goes on to say, "however low in the scale of existence is an ego. But there are degrees in the expression of egohood. Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man."⁴⁰

However, even an ordinary human ego is not entirely perfect because it is not absolutely free. What we have called above the superficial self of man, from which he has to achieve liberation, is, because of its attachment with serial time, determined by the

mechanics of material existence. The real self which is eternal and lives in pure duration is purely free and can most genuinely say 'I am'. In fact "it is the degree of the intuition of I-ness that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being. I too say 'I am' but my I-ness is dependent and arises out of the distinction between the self and the not-self. The Ultimate Self, in the words of the Qur'an, 'can afford to dispense with all the worlds'. To Him the not-self does not present itself as a confronting other — His I-ness is independent, elemental, absolute".⁴¹ Now, as prayer, according to Iqbal is essentially man's translation from temporal associations to a participation in eternal existence, from the drudgery of worldly business to a meeting with God, 'the Ultimate Source of life and freedom', it is to be understood as "essentially ego's escape from mechanism to freedom".⁴² The Qur'an clearly visualizes the possibility of such a translation when it says:

O Company of djin and men, if you can overpass the bounds of the heaven and the earth, then overpass them. But by power alone shall ye overpass them.⁴³

In this act of freeing oneself from the spatio-temporal determiners of finite existence, man continues moving towards the ideal of infinity. And the closer to the ideal he is the more perfect he becomes in respect of his individuality, according to Iqbal, so that there remains lesser and lesser fear of the disintegration of his personality even in the face of the heaviest odds and so makes it possible for him to have an encounter with God, the Infinite, the Absolute. But, to begin with, how can infinity be reconciled with individuality. Iqbal is sometimes accused of having developed the 'self-contradictory' and 'illogical' concept of an 'infinite personality'. However, he has taken pains to justify this concept by explaining in detail that the personality, that God is, is Infinite intensively: not extensively. It is interesting to compare his views in this regard with those of some modern European thinkers. Friedrich Von Hugel, for instance, writes: "Indeed we can safely hold with Lotze not only that personality is compatible with infinitude but that the personality of all finite beings can be shown to be imperfect precisely because of the finitude and hence the perfect personality is compatible only with the conception of an infinite being..."⁴⁴

In view of the above, like a person engaged in ritual prayers whose approach is straight and direct, the observer of nature too has his own mode of travelling into the sphere of eternity and freedom. The natural system of causes and effects, which is the subject-matter of his studies, seems to imply strict determinism; but this is not the

final state of affairs as to the behavior of things. Firstly, “the causal chain ... is itself an artificial construction of the ego for its own purposes. The ego is called upon to live in a complex environment and he cannot maintain his life in it without reducing it to a system which would give him some kind of assurance as to the behavior of things around him”.⁴⁵ Further, “the view of his environment as a system of causes and effects is (in a way) an indispensable instrument of the ego, and not a final expression of the nature of Reality. Indeed in interpreting nature in this way the ego understands and masters its environment and thereby acquires and amplifies its freedom.”⁴⁶ How beautifully Iqbal has put it while talking of the discovery level of religious life : “It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness”.⁴⁷

This reminds me of a brilliant paper read by Professor Osman Amin of U.A.R. at the Department of Philosophy, Punjab University, Lahore⁴⁸ some years ago. He talked at length of his Philosophy of inwardness which he termed as a ‘philosophy of conscious vision’. He also called it interchangeably a ‘philosophy of freedom’ because essential freedom, as he put it, lies in ‘consciousness accompanied by comprehension, the faculty of judging according to clear and distinct reason’. Elaborating a distinction between automatism and consciousness, Prof. Amin made reference to the distinction clearly drawn by Bergson between two very different ways of knowledge, the one being the way of the inward vision, of intellectual sympathy, the other being the way of exterior vision, of applying the testimony of senses or applying the method of logical analysis alone. Consider, Bergson is reported to have said, the difference between the knowledge that one could have of a town from a multitude of photos taken from all possible positions and the knowledge one would have of the same town if one lived in it, loved it, and enjoyed roaming about it. It is only the latter knowledge that is profound and gives control and mastery to one over the object of his knowledge. The former, being fragmentary, binds one down to superficialities. In terms of profundity/superficiality of knowledge the distinction corresponds pretty closely to the distinction made by Spinoza between passive and active emotions, between the state of human bondage and the state of human freedom.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a religio-philosophical thinker, once made a distinction between the fundamental and protective injunctions of the Qur'an. The latter of these are secondary in importance. Their function is simply to protect the spirit of the former which are of primary concern from the Qur'anic point of view. Sayyid Ahmad specially mentioned the institution of canonical prayers to illustrate his point of view. Prayer—and for that matter any religious duty—has an essence as well as a form. The essence of prayer as we have already seen is to have an intimate association with the Great 'I am'. Now this essence has found expression in a variety of forms. The very fact that these forms have differed with different times and circumstances shows that they are not ends in themselves and should not become a matter of dispute. "To every people, ' says the Qur'an, 'have we appointed ways of worship which they observe. Therefore let them not dispute this matter with you". Which side we turn our face while praying, for example, is not a part and parcel of the most-essential spirit of prayer. Iqbal justifiably quotes Qur'anic reference in this regard:

The East and the West is God's: Therefore whichever way you turn there is the face of God."⁴⁹

There is no piety in turning your faces towards the East or the West.⁵⁰

However, the Qur'anic declaration that 'there is no piety in turning your faces towards the East or the West' and so on must be carefully understood and accepted only after making certain qualifications. It, of course, should not at all be taken to imply that various formalities involved in our daily prayers like adhering to certain pre-conditions of cleanliness, choice of a particular direction, joining a congregation in perfect obedience to the *imam* who leads the prayers, and such other observances are futile in any absolute sense of the term. If we accept this interpretation that would lead to a totally esoteric attitude in religious matters. It would unfortunately encourage a sharp distinction between *shari'at* and *tariqat*, a doctrine very popular with the ungenue class of sufis, giving an undue importance to the essential at the entire expense of the formal. The verses rather simply mean that these formalities in their own right i.e. when they are divested of their spiritual content are useless. Those who fulfil the formalities of prayer but are oblivious of its essential character have been condemned by the Qur'an as the people of the hell.⁵¹

The point of view enunciated by Iqbal is that the importance of the formal requirements of prayer— when the essential character of prayer is also retained— lies in the fact that they serve to fortify the

spiritual content and enhance the desired effect. If every time a man goes to prayer he has to undertake a special course of preparation in terms of physical cleanliness, wearing clean garments, giving due recognition to the portion of the day (because to each specified portion thereof is assigned one particular prayer), selecting a clean spot of earth for the performance of the ceremony etc. —that all serves to vouchsafe the attunement of attitude to a single objective and the centralization of attention in respect of it. When a seeker of God has relinquished all worldly business which would at the most be an indirect approach to God and is all set for an ‘I-Thou’ encounter, he faces towards the direction of the *ka’ba* and makes a verbal commitment also: ‘I have turned my face in all sincerity towards Him Who has created the heavens and the earth and I am not of the polytheists’.⁵² Body and mind being closely related, various postures of the body which the person adopts while offering his prayers are a real factor in determining the attitude of the mind. They symbolize humility and single-mindedness and thus accentuate the spiritual realization. Extremely helpful in this spiritual realization is the Prophet’s (peace be on him) directive that the prayee must be as sure of the being of God as if he is seeing Him and that, if that is not possible for him to feel, then he should have at least the conviction that God is seeing him. When a person’s entire attention is thus absorbed, naturally the operation of all his bodily sensations is held in abeyance. Many stories to confirm this psychological fact have been related of the mystics of all times.

Prayer is a method of reflection and introspection. Engaging in prayer provides an opportunity for self-reflection. It is a space to examine one’s desires, fears, motivations, and aspirations. By doing so, individuals can recognize patterns in their thinking and behavior that influence their lives, and they can work towards aligning their actions with their core values. This introspection leads to a more authentic and conscious experience of life. Prayer often includes an expression of gratitude, helping individuals shift their focus from what they lack to what they have. This shift in perspective allows people to see the abundance in their lives, fostering a deeper appreciation for the present moment and the beauty of everyday experiences. Recognizing blessings cultivates a more positive outlook, grounding one in the reality of interconnectedness with others and the environment.

Through prayer, people often search for meaning and a sense of purpose in their lives. This search is not confined to religious

settings but is a universal quest for understanding the greater context of one's existence. Prayer can guide individuals to explore their place in the world and how they contribute to something larger than themselves. This process nurtures a closer relationship with the reality of their personal mission and societal role. In times of hardship, prayer can be a way to find peace and emotional balance. It offers a space for surrendering to what cannot be controlled, accepting life's uncertainties, and seeking strength from a higher power or within oneself. This resilience helps individuals face reality with courage and a sense of calm, no matter how challenging their circumstances may be.

In conclusion, prayer, when understood as a reflective practice, can deepen one's connection to reality by encouraging mindfulness, gratitude, meaning-making, and emotional resilience. It enables individuals to confront both the visible and invisible aspects of existence with humility and openness, fostering a more integrated and conscious life experience.

Notes And Reference

- ¹ *Mi'raj* is the technical term in Islamic literature to denote the event of Divinely initiated, meta-spacial journey of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) towards celestial heights in order to have 'face-to-face' cognitive experience of, and a dialogue with, God, the Holy, the Supreme.
- ² Cf., for example, Allama Muhammad Iqbal (*Bal-e Jibreel*, p.40/364),
سبق ملا ہے یہ معراج مصطفیٰ سے مجھے
کہ عالم بشریت کی زد میں ہے گردوں
- ³ *Principles of Psychology*, vol I, p.316
- ⁴ Cf. H.J.Paton, *The Modern Predicament*, p.162
- ⁵ *Ibid*, p.152
- ⁶ *Qur'an*, 38:75
- ⁷ *Ibid*, 22:65
- ⁸ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religions Thought in Islam*, p.74
- ⁹ *Qur'an*, 29:45
- ¹⁰ The Holy Prophet (peace be on him) is reported to have said *الدعاء مع العبادہ* i.e. prayer is the essential component of servitude to God. This *hadith* adequately brings out the status of prayer in Islam.
- ¹¹ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.50 Islam
- ¹² *Ibid*, p.45
- ¹³ *Ibid*, p.71
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.143
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.100
- ¹⁶ Cf. George F. Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*: translation of Ibn Rushd's *Fasl al-Maqal* ...
- ¹⁷ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.4
- ¹⁸ 'Philosophy' (journal), January 1965, article: 'Awareness of God'.

- 19 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.4
20 *Ibid*, pp. 143-144
21 *Ibid*, p.143
22 *Ibid*, p. 100
23 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, pp. 21-22
24 Allama Muhamma Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.73
25 Qur'an, 17:77 etc
26 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.45
27 Edward F. Barrett (ed.), *University of Notre Dame Law Institute Proceedings*, article 'Natural Law in Muslim Tradition', pp. 35-36
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