

DOES PRAYING FIVE TIMES A DAY IS BORING AND WEARYING?

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Surely the prayer is a timed prescription for the believers. (4:103)

Once, a man of considerable age, great stature, and high social position said to me: 'The prayer is OK, but five times a day is too much; it bores and wearies.'

A long time after the man said this, I gave ear to my carnal soul, and I heard it say exactly the same things. I realized that with the ear of laziness, it was taught the same lesson by Satan. Then I came to understand that those words had issued from the man in the name of all evil-commanding souls. So I said to myself: Since my soul orders evil, and one who does not reform his own soul cannot reform others, I shall begin with my own soul.

I said: O soul! In response to those words which you uttered in compound ignorance, in the bed of indolence, in the torpor of idleness, hear from me the following five warnings:

First warning

O wretched soul! Is your life permanent? Have you any documents showing that you will remain until next year, or even until tomorrow? What causes your weariness is your fancy that you live forever. You complain as though you will remain in the world for eternal enjoyment. Try and understand that your life-time is short, and that it passes all in vain. Then you would surely understand that-far from causing boredom or weariness-spending one twenty-fourth of it on a fine, agreeable, easy, and gracious act of service which is the means to happiness in the real, eternal life, in fact arouses vigor and gives pleasure.

Second warning

O gluttonous soul! Every day you eat, drink and breathe; does any of that cause you boredom? It does not; because since the need recurs, it gives pleasure, not boredom, to satisfy it. That being so, the five daily prayers should not cause you boredom for you have companions in the house of the body, namely the heart, the spirit, and inward God-directed faculties, and the prayers attract and conduct to each of them its sustenance, water of life, and air.

The food and strength of a heart which is exposed to endless grief and pain, and inclined to infinite pleasures and ambitions, may be obtained by knocking through supplication on the door of One All-Compassionate and Munificent.

For a spirit which is connected with most beings and speedily traveling to the other world amid cries of separation, the water of life may be imbibed by turning through the five daily prayers towards the spring of mercy of an Everlasting Beloved.

Finally, a conscious inward sense, a luminous God-directed faculty by nature desires the eternity for which it was created. It is a mirror to the Eternal Being and is infinitely delicate and subtle. It is surely most needy of 'air,' of relief and relaxation, in the distressing, crushing, and suffocating conditions of this worldly life, and it can only 'breathe' through the 'window' of the prayers.

Third warning

O impatient soul! Is it at all sensible to be thinking now of the hardship of worship past, the difficulties of praying, of troubles and calamities, and be distressed, and to anticipate the difficulties of future duties of worship and service in prayer, and the pain of future misfortunes, and show impatience?

In such impatience as this you resemble a foolish commander. When one flank of the enemy forces have come over to join the right flank of his forces, thus becoming fresh reinforcements for that flank, he sends a significant contingent from the center of his defenses to that right flank, thus weakening the center. Also, while no enemy forces are attacking the left flank, he sends a big contingent to that flank and even gives the command of fire. Thus he leaves the center without any significant strength at all, and seeing this, the enemy attacks the center and puts it to rout.

Indeed, you resemble this commander, for the trouble of the past days has today become mercy; the pain they caused has gone, while their pleasure remains. The hardships have changed into blessing, and the trial and toil into reward. That being so, it should not cause you weariness, rather, it should arouse you to new eagerness, a fresh zeal, and a serious effort to continue. As for future days, since they have not come as yet, it is the same lunacy as complaining and being distressed now about future hunger and thirst to think of them now and feel bored and wearied.

Since this is the truth, if you are sensible, you will consider only today with respect to worship, and say: 'I am spending one out of its twenty-four hours on pleasant and elevated acts of service, the reward for which is great and whose trouble is little.' Then your bitter disappointment will change into a pleasurable endeavor.

O impatient soul! You are charged with three types of perseverance. One is perseverance in worship. Another is perseverance in refraining from sins. A third is perseverance in the face of misfortunes. If you are reasonable enough, take as your guide the truth contained in the comparison in this third warning, and call in manly fashion, 'O Most Persevering One!,' and derive strength from these three types of perseverance. If you do not use up in the wrong way the power of perseverance that Almighty God has given you, it will suffice for every difficulty and misfortune, so hold out with that power.

Fourth warning

O foolish soul! Is this duty of worship so fruitless, and is the reward for it so little that it causes you weariness? Whereas if someone were to offer you a little money, or to threaten you, he could make you work till evening, and you would work without listlessness.

Again, are the five daily prayers in vain, which in this guest-house of the world are the 'food' for your weak heart, and in your grave (which will be a station for you to eternal life) sustenance and light? Are the five daily prayers useless which on the Last Day, when you will anyway be judged, will be a document and warrant, and on the Bridge, over which you are bound to pass, a light and a mount? Or is the reward for them little? Whereas if someone were to promise you a present worth a few hundred dollars, he could make you work for several days. Though the man may go back on his word, you would trust him and work without showing any signs of tiredness.

The One for Whom the breaking of promise is inconceivable, promises you a reward like Paradise and a gift like eternal happiness, and employs you for a very short time in a most agreeable duty. If you, in return, do not perform that service, or act in a manner to accuse Him of His promise or belittle His gift by working reluctantly like someone forced to work, do you not think that you will deserve a severe reprimand and terrible punishment? While you serve without slacking in the heaviest toil in this world out of fear of imprisonment, does the fear of an eternal imprisonment like Hell not give you zeal for so light and pleasant an act of service as the prayers?

Fifth warning

O worldly-minded soul! Are your sluggishness in worship and deficiency in the prescribed five daily prayers because of the multiplicity of your worldly preoccupations, or because you are pressed for time on account of the struggle for livelihood? Were you created only for this world that you should spend all your time on it?

You know that, with respect to your potential, you are superior to all the animals; and that, with respect to providing for yourself the necessities of worldly life, you are less capable than a sparrow. Why, then, do you not understand that your basic duty is not to labor like animals but, like a human being, to toil for the real, everlasting life? Most of what you call worldly pre-occupations are various trivial, useless matters which, although they do not concern you, you meddle in and confuse officiously. Leaving aside the most essential things, you spend your time, as though you had thousands of years to live, on acquiring useless information. For example, you waste your precious time to take an interest in worthless things like what the rings around Saturn are like, or how many chickens there are in America.... Why? Are you preparing a doctorate in astronomy or in statistics about livestock?

What about if it is not unnecessary pre-occupations but the essential requirements of earning a livelihood that keep me from the prayer and cause weariness?

Answer: Assume you work for a daily wage of one dollar, and someone comes to you and offers: 'Come and dig here for ten minutes, and you will find a brilliant and an emerald worth a hundred dollars.' You reply, 'No, I won't come, because my wage will be cut by ten cents and my subsistence will be less.' You know perfectly how foolish an argument that would be. In just the same way, you work in this orchard of yours for your livelihood. If you abandon the prescribed prayers, all the fruits of your work will be limited to only a worldly, insignificant and unproductive livelihood. However, if you assign the periods of rest to the prayer, which are the means to the liveliness of the spirit and the ease of the heart, then you will discover two 'mines' which are an important source both for a productive worldly livelihood, and your provisions for the Hereafter.

Through a sound intention, you will receive a share in the glorification offered by all the plants and trees, whether flowering or fruit-bearing, that you grow in your orchard.

Whatever is eaten of the orchard's produce, whether by animals or men, cattle or insects, buyers or thieves, it will become like almsgiving from you. But on condition that you work in the name of the Real Provider and within the sphere of His permission, and consider yourself a distribution official sharing out His property among His creatures.

So, see at how great a loss he stands who abandons the prayers, what significant wealth he loses, and how he is left deprived of those two mines, which support his endeavors with high motives and his actions with strong morale. For, as he grows old, he will grow weary of gardening and, saying, 'What's all this to me? I am

leaving the world anyway, so why suffer so much trouble?,' he will let himself slip into idleness. But the other man both performs his prayers and works for his livelihood. He says: 'I shall try harder both to perform the obligatory worship and earn legitimately and honestly, so that I may send more abundant light to my grave, and procure more provisions for my life in the Hereafter.'

In short: O soul! Know that yesterday abandoned you, and as for tomorrow, you have no documents that you will live to see it. Therefore your life consists in the present day. So set at least one of its hours aside for mosque or prayer-mat, a savings box for the Hereafter, a sort of reserve fund, set aside for your real future.

Also, know that for you and for everyone each new day is the door to a new world. If you do not perform the prayer, your world of that day will go dark and wretched, and will bear witness against you in the world of symbols, the immaterial, essential forms of beings. For everyone has, each day, a private world contained in this world, and its nature is dependent on each person's heart and deeds. Just as a magnificent palace reflected in a mirror takes on the color and quality of the mirror-if the mirror is black or red, the palace appears black or red. If the mirror is clear and even, it shows the palace in its beauty, and if it is not, it shows it to be ugly. Just as an uneven mirror shows the finest things to be coarse, so you too change the appearance of your own world with your heart, mind, deeds, and attitudes, and you may cause it to testify either in your favor or against.

If you perform the prescribed prayers, and turn through them towards the All-Majestic Maker, your own private world will be all of a sudden illuminated. It is as though the prayer were a powerful, electric light and your intention to perform it meant switching it on. Prayer disperses your world's darkness, and shows the changes and movements in its confused, tumultuous world to be actually arising from, and for the purpose of, a wise order and a meaningful arrangement of Divine Power. It disperses over your heart one light from the light-filled verse, 'God is the Light of the heavens and the earth'², and, illuminating your world on that day through the reflection of that light, it will cause your world to testify in your favor through its luminosity.

Never say, 'My prayers mean almost nothing when compared with the reality of what prayer should be.' The stone of a date-palm encapsulates and contains the tree itself, the difference being only between the summary and the fully evolved or elaborated form. Also as the prayer of a great saint is fully evolved, the prayers of ordinary people like you and me -even if they are unaware of it-have a share of that Divine light. Even if you are not conscious of it, there is a mystery in this truth, but perception of that truth and their being illuminated by it, varies according to the degree of each.

Just as there are many stages and degrees from the stone of a date-palm to the fully grown tree, so also performing the prayers and benefiting from them have degrees and stages, possibly even more numerous. However, in each degree or stage, the basis of that luminous truth is present.

O God! Bestow blessings and peace on him who said: 'The prescribed prayers are the pillar of religion,' and on all his family and Companions.
