

THE WORTH OF THE PRESCRIBED PRAYERS (SALAT)

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

The prescribed prayers are the pillar of the religion.

A parable to understand the value and importance of the daily prescribed prayers

If you would really like to understand, with the certainty that two plus two makes four, how valuable and important prescribed prayers (salat) are, and with what slight effort is their reward gained, and how foolish and harmful is the one who does not pray, then listen attentively to this parable:

Once upon a time an important ruler sends two of his servants to a beautiful farm, giving each twenty-four gold coins. The farm is two months' away. He gives them these orders: 'Use this money for the ticket and other necessities for the journey and after arrival. There is a station one day away where trains, ships, cars and planes are available, any of which you may take according to your money.'

The two leave after receiving these instructions. One is so fortunate that he spends only a little of his money before he arrives at the station. He makes such profitable use of his capital that his lord likes him. So his property is increased a thousand fold. The other man, being unfortunate and stupid, spends twenty-three of his twenty-four coins in gambling and the like before he arrives at the station. He has only one coin left.

His friend says to him, 'Spend this coin on the ticket. If you don't, you'll have to go on foot and suffer hunger. Our lord is generous; maybe he will pity and forgive you. They may let you take the plane, so we can reach our farm in a day. If not, you'll have to go on foot and endure two months of hunger while crossing the desert.'

If that unfortunate one doesn't listen to his friend and spend his last coin on the valuable ticket, if he chooses, instead, to spend it on vice for passing pleasure, even the most unintelligent person will agree what great folly and loss that man stands in.

Now, O man who does not pray, and O soul of mine, which doesn't incline to prayer, listen to the explanation!

That important ruler is our Lord, our Creator. Of the two travelers, one is religious and performs his prayers with fervor. The other, unmindful, represents the people

who don't like praying. The twenty-four coins stand for the twenty-four hours of a day. The farm is Heaven, while the station so near is the grave. The journey is from the grave to the eternal life. People cover that long journey at different times according to their deeds and conduct. Some of the truly devout pass the span of a thousand years in a day like lightning, some fifty years in an hour with the speed of imagination. The Quran alludes to this truth in two of its verses (al-Hajj, 22.47; al-Sajda, 32.5).

The ticket is salat, the prescribed prayer. An hour is enough for the prayers in a day. If you spend twenty-three hours a day on the affairs of this world and don't reserve the remaining hour for the important prayers necessary for the other world, it shows your foolishness, and stands you in a condition of grave loss. You may be tempted to pay over a half of your money to a lottery in which one thousand people are participating although the possibility of winning is one in a thousand. Whereas, if you pray, the possibility of winning is ninety-nine percent. If, then, you do not use one of your twenty-four coins to obtain this chance, to gain an inexhaustible treasure, wouldn't any sensible person understand how contrary to reason and wisdom such a conduct is?

Moreover, in prayer, there is comfort for the soul and mind. Nor is it difficult for the body. Furthermore, with the right intention, all the deeds and conduct of one who prays become like worship. In this way, his little lifetime is spent for the sake of the eternal life in the other world. And his transient life gains a kind of permanence.