

Prayer is the Ends and not the Means

Shaykh Dr Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti

The Friday sermon delivered at the Umayyad mosque, Damascus, on the 1st Jumada al-Thani 1431 (after Hejira) which corresponds to the 14th May 2010 (CE).

Praised be God. Praised be God. Praised be God; a praise commensurate to His bounties and equivalent to His plentiful blessings. O our Lord, for you is praise befitting Your sublime essence and Your majestic dominion. Transcendent are You; O God I am unable to enumerate Your exaltations, for You are as You exalt Yourself. I testify that there is no deity except God alone, who has no partner, and I testify that Muhammad is His slave, His Messenger, and His pure and intimate friend; the best Prophet God sent. God sent him to the whole world as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner. O God send your blessings, peace and grace upon our master Muhammad¹ and upon the family of our master Muhammad; continuous and inseparable peace and blessings until the Day of Judgement.

I exhort you, O Muslims, and my wrongful self, to fear² God, the Exalted. To proceed, O slaves of God: we all know that we are slaves belonging to God, the Transcendent and Sublime. Our beginning is from Him and our end is to Him. We move in His grasp, the verdict is His verdict and the dominion is His dominion. This is a reality that without doubt we all know and are imbued with. Our certainty in this servitude necessitates that we always cling to the threshold of God, the Magnificent and Glorious, adhere to His door and hold fast to the prayer niches of servitude to Him. Our certitude in this servitude necessitates that we know, without any doubt, that we are in constant need of God, the Magnificent and Glorious, and that we do not need anything except Him. At all times we need God, the Magnificent and Glorious, and hence the slave who knows his servitude to God must unceasingly pray to God, the Magnificent and Glorious, not abstaining from supplicating to Him and not abstaining from seeking the rain of His Mercy. If one enters a period of ease, he prays to God and asks Him to make his ease long lasting and that He does not confiscate His blessing. He prays that God makes permanent the bounty of His benevolence, kindness and generosity. If one enters a period of affliction, he prays to God, the Transcendent and Exalted, to remove the evil from him, to eliminate the adversity and to return him to a state of well-being.

Accordingly the man, who knows the humbleness of servitude to God, does not detach himself from the awareness of his need for God, the Transcendent and Exalted. He is, each moment, in pressing need of the loving kindness of God and

1 An invocation that is recited each time the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

2 The Arabic term "*taqwa*" is often translated as fear or piety. It is a concept that may be defined as following the commands of God and avoiding His prohibitions with reverence and awe for the majesty of God. The Arabic derivation of *taqwa* indicates that it gives rise to the protection of God.

His safekeeping and protection. This is the first point that we must all know.

The second matter that is required from every slave, and knower of the humility of his servitude to God, the Magnificent and Glorious, is that they know that their prayer, always directed to God, the Magnificent and Glorious, is in on of itself the ends and not the means to another objective. This is amongst the most important realities and we all must all know it. Hence the slave who has knowledge of the nature of his belonging to God, the Transcendent and Exalted, must announce the humbleness of his servitude to God. He is certain of the pressing need that calls him to announce that he is poor, wretched and broken at the threshold of God; whether God, the Magnificent and Glorious, responds to him or not, whether God accepts him or not. His announcement of this reality is the fundamental aim of his entity announcing that he is a slave of God. He wants to announce that he is poor, broken and wretched slave adhering to the threshold of God, the Magnificent and Glorious. How does he announce this? He announces this through complains to God about his wretchedness, through his needs that he exhibits at the door of God and through his belonging to the dominion of God, the Transcendent and Exalted.

The man who has tasted the pleasure of servitude finds pleasure in confiding in God, the Magnificent and Glorious. Revealing his nature as a poor slave and wretched beggar stationed at the door of God, the Magnificent and Glorious, whether God responds to his needs or not and accepts him or not. His burning thirst becomes apparent by the expression of his servility and by the expression of his servitude and his belonging to God, the Magnificent and Glorious. Know, o slaves of God, that this is reality because it is the bridge that should be pass between you and His drawing near to you. The drawing near of the slave to God through prayer is by its nature the ends and not the means to another objective.

The difference between the one who prays, his servitude driving him to the door of God, and a requester whose flippancy drives him to realise what he requests is the following. The invoker who stands in the prayer niche of servitude to God finds his prayer to be an objective in on of itself. Whereas the following proverb applies to the requester dribbling saliva in anticipation of gain, purpose, money, position of honour, or anything else; “the person in need is so careless- he only wants (his need) to be accomplished”. God forbid that anyone of us, knowing that he is a slave belonging to God, make his servitude to God a manipulative tool to arrive at what he seeks in this lower world or any other type of booty. So know the difference, o slaves of God, between the request through which one of us seeks the attainment of his desires and the prayer by way of which the slave faces God, the Magnificent and Glorious. The slave is humble holding fast and standing at the prayer niche of servitude finding pleasure in announcing his poverty and wretchedness in front of God, the Transcendent and Exalted.

Many confuse the prayer with request. One of them may turn away from God, the Transcendent and Exalted, because this lower world dances away in front of him and because pleasures rotate around him. Hence he forgets his Master who

bestowed all these blessings upon him and preferred him with all these pleasures. When the blessings vanish and the affliction becomes apparent, such as an illness effecting his being or poverty after wealth infiltrating his existence or his household, you will see him searching for someone to guide him to an accepted invocation. Searching for a forms of invocation that are said to him that if he prays with them then he will find a guaranteed response and you will see him asking here and there. What does he seek? He does not seek, in this state, to announce his servitude. He seeks to knock at any door that he finds to achieve his aims and to achieve his objective. He has lost after being in profit. So guide me to that which will save me from this loss.

This man, when he acts in such a way, is expressing his request when he asks for it. He makes the prayer a servant for his request. We ask God, the Magnificent and Glorious, to not make us from amongst those who spoil the prayer and from amongst those who forget their servitude to God, the Transcendent and Exalted. They make the prayer, which is worship and servitude to God- as is related in the authentic sayings (of the Prophet)- they make from amongst the prayer a request for an objective and gain to be salivated over. We should know well this reality, o slaves of God.

The Chosen One, may God send his peace and blessings upon him, says, “Prayer is worship” and in a narration, “Prayer is the essence of worship”.

Many often ask the reason why when they draw near to God, the Magnificent and Glorious, with profuse prayers yet then they do not find a response. I is a question that is repeated much. ‘We have prayed to God, the Magnificent and Glorious, again and again and we have read the speech of God, the Magnificent and Glorious, **“Your Lord has said, 'Call upon Me and I will answer you”**³, yet here we are having prayed and he has not responded to us’, as they say. The response to this is clear and I have mentioned it to you o slaves of God.

First, man should know that he is need of being bound to the prayer niche of his prayer and servitude to God; at all times, regardless of whether he is in a state of ease or in a state of difficulty. So much so that he is not amongst those who God, the Transcendent and Exalted, said about them, **“There are among men some who serve Allah on the verge:”** that is in one state, **“if good befalls them, they are, well content; but if a trial comes to them, they turn on their faces: they lose both this world and the Hereafter: that is loss for all to see!”**⁴.

Are you only in need of God when distress afflicts you? Or when disasters afflict you? You are, at all times, in need of God. Is the prayer an expression of an instrument that God puts at your disposal? To attain your desires that you salivate after? No the prayer is an announcement of the humility of your servitude to God, an announcement of your everlasting poverty towards God.

3 A translation of the meaning of a verse from the Qur'an: chapter no 40: verse no. 60: i.e. Q (40:60).

4 Q (22:11)

Is it not strange how a man clings to a man or woman; clings to him or her with a strong attachment. Look at him and how he gains pleasure in announcing to his beloved his poverty, his humbleness in front of the other. He is only expressing his humbleness to God: he says, 'I have a pleasure in my humbleness and submission.' This is the state of man with another man. So how should the state of man be his Master? How must your state be with your Master and your Lord? The God in Whose grasp you are, the God from Whom you began and to Whom you will return, the God who is the judge of His Kingdom- all of it. Is not pleasurable for you to announce your poverty to Him? Your submissiveness? Your misery?

This reality, when we absorb it, will be the certain response. The declaration of God is not attached to discrepancy in any way or form, o slaves of God. No one should belittle prayer when the characteristics, that I have mentioned to you, have materialised in it.

How many prayers have conquered a nation and destroyed a civilisation and replaced it with another civilisation!

How many prayers have demolished a king's throne and eradicated tyranny!

How many prayers have transformed comfortable sweet breezes into a destructive tornado!

How many prayers have changed a trickle of running sparkling water into a flood and destruction!

Nay how many prayers have transformed well-being into malady and epidemic!

How many prayers have transformed disease that has taken seat in the body into well-being and a cure.

This is what history articulates and what days and nights say.

One must never underestimate the prayer when it rises from the humility of servitude to the Self-Existing One of the heavens and earth.

One must never belittle the prayer when it springs from broken, wretched, and servile hearts that pulsate with the humility of servitude to God, when it rises, crossing throats, to the kingdom of God.

I deliver this sermon and seek the forgiveness of God, the Majestic.

Seek His forgiveness and He will forgive you.