

# The Ninth Word

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.*

*So glorify God when you reach evening and when you rise in the morning; for all praise is His in the heavens and on earth, and towards the end of the day and when you have reached noon.<sup>1</sup>*

Brother! You ask me concerning the wisdom in the specified times of the five daily prayers. I shall point out only one of the many instances of wisdom in the times.

Yes, like each of the times of prayer marks the start of an important revolution, so also is each a mirror to Divine disposal of power and to the universal Divine bounties within that disposal. Thus, more glorification and extolling of the All-Powerful One of Glory have been ordered at those times, and more praise and thanks for all the innumerable bounties accumulated between each of the times, which is the meaning of the prescribed prayers. In order to understand a little this subtle and profound meaning, you should listen together with my own soul to the following five 'Points'.

## **FIRST POINT**

The meaning of the prayers is the offering of glorification, praise, and thanks to Almighty God. That is to say, uttering "Glory be to God" by word and action before God's glory and sublimity, it is to hallow and worship Him. And declaring "God is Most Great" through word and act before His sheer perfection, it is to exalt and magnify Him. And saying "All praise be to God" with the heart, tongue, and body, it is to offer thanks before His utter beauty. That is to say, glorification, exaltation, and praise are like the seeds of the prayers. That is why these three things are present in every part of the prayers, in all the actions and words. It is also why these blessed words are each repeated thirty-three times after the prayers, in order to strengthen and reiterate the prayers' meaning. The meaning of the prayers is confirmed through these concise summaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'an, 30:17-18.

## SECOND POINT

The meaning of worship is this, that the servant sees his own faults, impotence, and poverty, and in the Divine Court prostrates in love and wonderment before dominical perfection, Divine mercy, and the power of the Eternally Besought One. That is to say, just as the sovereignty of dominicality demands worship and obedience, so also does the holiness of dominicality require that the servant sees his faults through seeking forgiveness, and through his glorifications and declaring "Glory be to God" proclaims that his Sustainer is pure and free of all defects, and exalted above and far from the false ideas of the people of misguidance, and hallowed and exempt from all the faults in the universe.

Also, the perfect power of dominicality requires that through understanding his own weakness and the impotence of other creatures, the servant proclaims "God is Most Great" in admiration and wonder before the majesty of the works of the Eternally Besought One's power, and bowing in deep humility seeks refuge in Him and places his trust in Him.

Also, the infinite treasury of dominicality's mercy requires that the servant makes known his own need and the needs and poverty of all creatures through the tongue of entreaty and supplication, and proclaims his Sustainer's bounties and gifts through thanks and laudation and uttering "All praise be to God." That is to say, the words and actions of the prayers comprise these meanings, and have been laid down from the side of Divinity.

## THIRD POINT

Just as man is an example in miniature of the greater world and Sura al-Fatiha a shining sample of the Qur'an of Mighty Stature, so are the prescribed prayers a comprehensive, luminous index of all varieties of worship, and a sacred map pointing to all the shades of worship of all the classes of creatures.

## FOURTH POINT

The second-hand, minute-hand, hour-hand, and day-hand of a clock which tells the weeks look to one another, are examples of one another, and follow one another. Similarly, the alternations of day and night, which are like the seconds of this world—a vast clock of Almighty God—and the years which tell its minutes, and the stages of man's life-span which tell the hours, and the epochs of the world's life-span which tell the days look to one another, are examples of one another, resemble one another, and recall one another. For example:

*The time of **Fajr**, the early morning:* This time until sunrise resembles and calls to mind the early spring, the moment of conception in the mother's womb, and the first of the six days of the creation of the heavens and earth; it recalls the Divine acts present in them.

*The time of **Zuhr**, just past midday:* This resembles and points to midsummer, and the prime of youth, and the period of man's creation in the lifetime of the world, and calls to mind the manifestations of mercy and the abundant bounties they contain.

*The time of **'Asr**, afternoon:* This is like autumn, and old age, and the time of the Final Prophet (PBUH), known as the Era of Bliss, and recalls the Divine acts and favours of the All-Merciful One present in them.

*The time of **Maghrib**, sunset:* Through recalling the departure of many creatures at the end of autumn, and man's death, and the destruction of the world at the commencement of the resurrection, this time puts in mind the manifestations of Divine glory and sublimity, and rouses man from his slumbers of heedlessness.

*The time of **'Isha**, nightfall.* As for this time, by calling to mind the world of darkness veiling all the objects of the daytime world with a black shroud, and winter hiding the face of the dead earth with its white cerement, and even the remaining works of departed men dying and passing beneath the veil of oblivion, and this world, the arena of examination, being shut up and closed down for ever, it proclaims the awesome and mighty disposals of the All-Glorious and Compelling Subduer.

As for *the nighttime*, through putting in mind both the winter, and the grave, and the Intermediate Realm, it reminds man how needy is the human spirit for the Most Merciful One's mercy. And the *tahajjud* prayer informs him what a necessary light it is for the night of the grave and darkness of the Intermediate Realm; it warns him of this, and through recalling the infinite bounties of the True Bestower, proclaims how deserving He is of praise and thanks.

And *the second morning* calls to mind the Morning of the Resurrection. For sure, however reasonable and necessary and certain the morning of this night is, the Morning of the Resurrection and the spring following the Intermediate Realm are certain to the same degree.

That is, just as each of these five times marks the start of an important revolution and recalls other great revolutions, so through the awesome daily disposals of the Eternally Besought One's power, each calls to mind the miracles of Divine power and gifts of Divine mercy of both every year, and every age, and every epoch. That is to say, the prescribed prayers, which are an innate duty and the basis of worship and an incontestable debt, are most appropriate and fitting for these times.

## FIFTH POINT

By nature man is extremely weak, yet everything touches him, and saddens and grieves him. Also he is utterly lacking in power, yet the calamities and enemies that afflict him are extremely numerous. Also he is extremely wanting, yet his needs are indeed many. Also he is lazy and incapable, yet life's responsibilities are most burdensome. Also his humanity has connected him to the rest of the universe, yet the decline and disappearance of the things he loves and with which he is familiar continually pains him. Also his reason shows him exalted aims and lasting fruits, yet his hand is short, his life brief, his power slight, and his patience little.

It can be clearly understood from this how essential it is for a spirit in this state at the time of *Fajr* in the early morning to have recourse to and present a petition to the Court of an All-Powerful One of Glory, an All-Compassionate All-Beauteous One through prayer and supplication, to seek success and help from Him, and what a necessary point of support it is so that he can face the things that will happen to him in the coming day and bear the duties that will be loaded on him.

The time of *Zuhr* just past midday is the time of the day's zenith and the start of its decline, the time when daily labours approach their achievement, the time of a short rest from the pressures of work, when the spirit needs a pause from the heedlessness and insensibility caused by toil, and a time Divine bounties are manifested. Anyone may understand then how fine and agreeable, how necessary and appropriate it is for the human spirit to perform the midday prayer, which means to be released from the pressure, shake off the heedlessness, and leave behind those meaningless, transient things, and clasping one's hands at the Court of the True Bestower of Bounties, the Eternally Self-Subsistent One, to offer praise and thanks for all His gifts, and seek help from Him, and through bowing to display one's impotence before His glory and tremendousness, and to prostrate and proclaim one's wonder, love, and humility. One who does not understand this is not a true human being.

As for the time of *Asr* in the afternoon, it calls to mind the melancholy season of autumn and the mournful state of old age and the sombre period at the end of time. It is also when the matters of the day reach their conclusion, and the time the Divine bounties which have been received that day like health, well-being, and beneficial duties have accumulated to form a great total, and the time that proclaims through the mighty sun hinting by starting to sink that man is a guest-official and that everything is transient and inconstant. Now, the human spirit desires eternity and was created for it; it worships benevolence, and is pained by separation. Thus, anyone who is truly a human being may understand what an exalted duty, what an appropriate

service, what a fitting way to repay a debt of human nature, indeed, what an agreeable pleasure it is to perform the afternoon prayer. For by offering supplications at the Eternal Court of the Everlasting Pre-Eternal One, the Eternally Self-Subsistent One, it has the meaning of taking refuge in the grace of unending, infinite mercy, and by offering thanks and praise in the face of innumerable bounties, of humbly bowing before the mightiness of His dominicality, and by prostrating in utter humility before the everlastingness of His Godhead, of finding true consolation of heart and ease of spirit, and being girded ready for worship in the presence of His grandeur.

The time of *Maghrib* at sunset recalls the disappearance amid sad farewells of the delicate, lovely creatures of the worlds of summer and autumn at the start of winter. It calls to mind the time when through his death, man will leave all those he loves in sorrowful departure and enter the grave. It brings to mind when at the death of this world amid the convulsions of its death-agonies, all its inhabitants will migrate to other worlds and the lamp of this place of examination will be extinguished. It is a time which gives stern warning to those who worship transient, ephemeral beloveds.

Thus, at such a time, for the *Maghrib* prayer, man's spirit, which by its nature is a mirror desirous for an Eternal Beauty, turns its face towards the throne of mightiness of the Eternal Undying One, the Enduring Everlasting One, Who performs these mighty works and turns and transforms these huge worlds, and declaring "God is Most Great" over these transient beings, withdraws from them. Man clasps his hands in service of his Lord and rises in the presence of the Enduring Eternal One, and through saying: All praise be to God, he praises and extols His faultless perfection, His peerless beauty, His infinite mercy. Through declaring: "You alone do we worship and from You alone we seek help,"<sup>2</sup> he proclaims his worship for and seeks help from His unassisted dominicality, His unpartnered Godhead, His unshared sovereignty. Then he bows, and through declaring together with all the universe his weakness and impotence, his poverty and baseness before the infinite majesty, the limitless power, and utter mightiness of the Enduring Eternal One, he says: "All glory to My Mighty Sustainer," and glorifies his Sublime Sustainer. And prostrating before the undying Beauty of His Essence, His unchanging sacred attributes, His constant everlasting perfection, through abandoning all things other than Him, man proclaims his love and worship in wonder and self-abasement. He finds an All-Compassionate Eternal One. And through saying, "All glory to my Exalted Sustainer," he declares his Most High Sustainer to be free of decline and exalted above any fault.

Then, he testifies to God's unity and the prophethood of Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). He sits, and on his own account offers as

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<sup>2</sup> Qur'an, 1:5.

a gift to the Undying All-Beauteous One, the Enduring All-Glorious One the blessed salutations and benedictions of all creatures. And through greeting God's Most Noble Messenger, he renews his allegiance to him and proclaims his obedience to his commands. In order to renew and illuminate his faith, he observes the wise order in this palace of the universe and testifies to the unity of the All-Glorious Maker. And he testifies to the Messengership of Muhammad the Arabian (Peace and blessings be upon him), who is the herald of the sovereignty of God's dominicality, the proclaimer of those things pleasing to Him, and the interpreter of the signs and verses of the book of the universe. To perform the *Maghrib* prayer is this. So how can someone be considered a human being who does not understand what a fine and pure duty is the prayer at sunset, what an exalted and pleasurable act of service, what an agreeable and pleasing act of worship, what a serious matter, and what an unending conversation and permanent happiness it is in this transient guesthouse?

At the time of *'Isha* at nightfall, the last traces of the day remaining on the horizon disappear, and the world of night enfolds the universe. As the All-Powerful and Glorious One, The Changer of Night and Day, turns the white page of day into the black page of night through the mighty disposals of His dominicality, it recalls the Divine activities of that All-Wise One of Perfection, The Subduer of the Sun and the Moon, turning the green-adorned page of summer into the frigid white page of winter. And with the remaining works of the departed being erased from this world with the passing of time, it recalls the Divine acts of The Creator and Life and Death in their passage to another, quite different world. It is a time that calls to mind the disposals of The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth's awesomeness and the manifestations of His beauty in the utter destruction of this narrow, fleeting, and lowly world, the terrible death-agonies of its decease, and in the unfolding of the broad, eternal, and majestic world of the hereafter. And the universe's Owner, its True Disposer, its True Beloved and Object of Worship can only be the One Who with ease turns night into day, winter into spring, and this world into the hereafter like the pages of a book; Who writes and erases them, and changes them.

Thus, at nightfall, man's spirit, which is infinitely impotent and weak, and infinitely poor and needy, and plunged into the infinite darkness of the future, and tossed around amid innumerable events, performs the *'Isha* prayer, which has this meaning: like Abraham man says: "I love not those that set,"<sup>3</sup> and through the prayers seeks refuge at the Court of an Undying Object of Worship, an Eternal Beloved One, and in this transient world and fleeting life and dark world and black future he supplicates an Enduring,

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<sup>3</sup> Qur'an, 6:76.

Everlasting One, and for a moment of unending conversation, a few seconds of immortal life, he asks to receive the favours of the All-Merciful and Compassionate One's mercy and the light of His guidance, which will strew light on his world and illuminate his future and bind up the wounds resulting from the departure and decline of all creatures and friends.

Temporarily man forgets the hidden world, which has forgotten him, and pours out his woes at the Court of Mercy with his weeping, and whatever happens, before sleeping –which resembles death– he performs his last duty of worship. And in order to close favourably the daily record of his actions, he rises to pray; that is to say, he rises to enter the presence of an Eternal Beloved and Worshipped One in place of all the mortal ones he loves, of an All-Powerful and Generous One in place of all the impotent creatures from which he begs, of an All-Compassionate Protector so as to be saved from the evil of the harmful beings before which he trembles.

He starts with the Sura al-Fatiha, that is, instead of praising and being obliged to defective, wanting creatures, for which they are not suited, he extols and offers praise to The Sustainer of All the Worlds, Who is Absolutely Perfect and Utterly Self-Sufficient and Most Compassionate and All-Generous. Then he progresses to the address: "You alone do we worship." That is, despite his smallness, insignificance, and aloneness, through man's connection with The Owner of the Day of Judgement, Who is the Sovereign of Pre-Eternity and Post-Eternity, he attains to a rank whereat he is an indulged guest in the universe and an important official. Through declaring: "You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help," he presents to Him in the name of all creatures the worship and calls for assistance of the mighty congregation and huge community of the universe. Then through saying: "Guide us to the Straight Path," he asks to be guided to the Straight Path, which leads to eternal happiness and is the luminous way.

And now, he thinks of the mightiness of the All-Glorious One, of Whom, like the sleeping plants and animals, the hidden suns and sober stars are all soldiers subjugated to His command, and lamps and servants in this guesthouse of the world, and uttering: "God is Most Great," he bows down. Then he thinks of the great prostration of all creatures. That is, when, at the command of "Be!," and it is,<sup>4</sup> all the varieties of creatures each year and each century – even the earth, and the universe – each like a well-ordered army or an obedient soldier, is discharged from its duty, that is, when each is sent to the World of the Unseen, through the prostration of its decease and death with complete orderliness, it declares: "God is Most Great," and bows down in prostration. Like they are raised to life, some in part and some the same, in the spring at an awakening and life-giving trumpet-blast from the command

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<sup>4</sup> Qur'an, 2:117, etc.



of “Be!” and it is,’ and they rise up and are girded ready to serve their Lord, insignificant man too, following them, declares: “God is Most Great!” in the presence of the All-Merciful One of Perfection, the All-Compassionate One of Beauty in wonderstruck love and eternity-tinged humility and dignified self-effacement, and bows down in prostration; that is to say, he makes a sort of Ascension. For sure you will have understood now how agreeable and fine and pleasant and elevated, how high and pleasurable, how reasonable and appropriate a duty, service, and act of worship, and what a serious matter it is to perform the *‘Isha* prayer.

Thus, since each of these five times points to a mighty revolution, is a sign indicating the tremendous dominical activity, and a token of the universal Divine bounties, it is perfect wisdom that being a debt and an obligation, the prescribed prayers should be specified at those times.

*Glory be unto You! We have no knowledge save that which You have taught us; indeed You are All-Knowing, All-Wise.*<sup>5</sup>

*O God! Grant blessings and peace to the one whom You sent as a teacher to Your servants to instruct them in knowledge of You and worship of You, and to make known the treasures of Your Names, and to translate the signs of the book of the universe and as a mirror to its worship of the beauty of Your dominicality, and to all his Family and Companions, and have mercy on us and on all believing men and women. Amen. Through Your Mercy, O Most Merciful of the Merciful!*

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<sup>5</sup> Qur’an, 2:32.