

The Wisdom behind the Postures and Phrases of Prayer (part 2 of 2): Perfect the postures and seek aid from your tongue

Description: Confirming the importance of the postures of prayer and looking at the importance of the words and phrases we use.

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This is not an article about how to pray or when to pray, this can be found in other places, it is instead a commentary on the power entrenched in the postures and phrases of the prayer. In the previous article we looked at some of the benefits of the postures imbedded in the prayer. We learned that the obligatory actions benefit us in many ways, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Prayer establishes and reinforces our connection to God; from it we gather numerous blessings and benefits.



Any study of Islamic prayer will explain that there are two forms of prayer. One is ritualistic with formal requirements and manners; certain postures and phrases. This is what Muslims refer to as prayer and our discussion about benefits of the postures, movements and positions began in part 1. The other form is supplication and in its more general sense it represents an open-ended conversation with God. He listens to our entreaties and requests through *dua* (supplication) at any time, in any language. In ritual prayer the postures we make and the words we say are for a specific purpose. They are a means to a specific end.

Prophet Muhammad said that, "When any one of you stands to pray, he is communicating with his Lord, so let him pay attention to how he speaks to Him."[\[1\]](#)

The postures of prayer are symbolic of humankind's relationship with God. We stand and assert our existence, we bow to show humility and we prostrate in awe of our Creator's Power and Strength. From this state of complete abasement we acknowledge our complete reliance on and need of God. God however is not in need of our prayers; it is us, the frail human being that is in constant need of His protection and love. Thus the postures of prayer are not a random set of movements. We are about to discover that the phrases of prayer, the words we repeat at least 17 times every day, are also not a random set of sounds and syllables.

Let us begin with the words *Allahu Akbar*. God is the greatest. It is an affirmation that there is none greater and thus none more worthy of worship than God himself. We raise our hands and say *Allahu Akbar* and this signifies the beginning of our audience with Almighty God. We put the world behind us and the prayer has begun, our connection is

secure. Throughout the prayer we repeat the phrase, *Allahu Akbar*, God is the greatest, over and over. Each time we move from standing to bowing or standing to prostrating or prostrating to sitting, we say these words, this phrase precisely, because it changes our psychology. It keeps us focused on the awe and reverence of the one before whom we're praying. It constantly reminds us of the greatness of the Creator and the insignificance of this world.

After beginning the prayer, the believer seeks refuge from Satan and recites the opening chapter of the Quran. This is the chapter that is often referred to as the "Mother of the Book". At that time the Arabs named anything that concisely summarised something, as the "mother" of that thing. *Al-Fatihah* or The Opening is the name of the first chapter of Quran. Due to the magnificence of the words in this chapter hundreds of books, articles and essays have been written on it. A believer repeats these words every day, a minimum of 17 times, and the blessings it brings are amazing and it tightens the bond between God and humankind. The chapter *Al-Fatihah* is a cure of all despondency and all melancholia. It is an obligatory part of our audience with God and it confirms our belief in all that Islam entails. Most importantly it acknowledges that there is none worthy of worship except God alone. **oeYou alone do we worship and from you alone do we seek assistance." (Quran 1: 5)**

Another small portion of Quran is recited before we begin to move through the postures already discussed. God uses very specific words with very specific meanings and contemplating His words of guidance and reassurance is very much recommended. However, reciting Quran is not allowed as we move into the body of the prayer. The phrases we use in the prayer are to praise God.

The bowing position, known in Arabic as *ruku* is established by bending forward until the back is horizontal, putting one's hands on one's knees, and remaining in that position until one becomes calm. In his book *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, Islamic scholar Al-Ghazali said, "Bowling and prostration are accompanied by a renewed affirmation of the supreme greatness of God. In bowing you renew your submissiveness and humility, striving to refine your inner feeling through a fresh awareness of your own impotence and insignificance before the might and grandeur of your Lord. To confirm this, **you seek the aid of your tongue, glorifying your Lord and testifying repeatedly** to His supreme majesty, both inwardly and outwardly."

"The closest a person is to His Lord is when he is in prostration." [2]

Prayer is a gift from our Creator and Sustainer; it is a gift that allows us to get through each day, each hour, each minute of this worldly life that even at the best of times can be fraught with uncertainty and fear. There is great wisdom in the postures and phrases of prayer.

Endnotes:

[1] *Saheeh AlBukhari*

[2] *Saheeh Muslim*

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