

The Missing Ingredient In Our Salah!

Imagine the inconvenience one would have to undergo in arranging to meet the country's president? Imagine the numerous phone calls to parliament and the influence of the rich and 'powerful' people that would be required just to arrange a simple meeting with him? And finally, when the scheduled time does arrive after hours of anticipation, how alert and ecstatic wouldn't one be? Yet, the 'prominent' man, hard-pressed for time, would give one an inattentive hearing and will be eager to conclude the meeting. How disappointing?

Now compare all this effort with just a 'simple' wudu, donning of clean respectable clothing, and there you are, in the Majesty's court. With no hassle and no appointment, you have the distinguished opportunity of conversing with your Beloved Creator, The King of Kings with His full attention focused on you. Yet ironically, this time round, we are the ones 'too busy' in our thoughts to dedicate a few attentive moments to our Allah!

Allah Ta'ala states that an intoxicated person should not perform salāh until he is aware of what he says, that is, until he is sober. However, while commenting on this verse and the deplorable state of our salāh, Imām Ghazali رحمه الله mentions, "There are many who despite not being intoxicated are yet 'unaware' of what they utter in their salāh (due to being inattentive)."1 Moulānā Dhul Fiqār دامت برکاتهم has also very aptly compared our salāh to a passenger aboard an aeroplane. The passenger is asleep and therefore totally oblivious of his surroundings. It is only when the aircraft prepares for landing and the wheels forcefully strike the runway, does he awaken and realise what is happening around him. He states that, so too is the pitiable state of our salāh. That is, during our salāh, we are so unmindful of Allah Y; it is as though we also 'fly' in our own world of thoughts (touring countless destinations with neither a visa nor a passport at hand!). It is only when the imām makes the salām, do we 'awaken' from our 'slumber' only to realise that the salāh has terminated!

These comments really serve as a perfect reflection of our daily salāh. So in truth, isn't it time for us to improve on the 'outdated version' of salāh which we have been performing ever since!

In the Quran, Allah Y constantly reminds us of the need to improve our salāh by saying, "Establish your salāh (i.e. perfect it)". The Ūlamā have defined a perfect and attentive salāh to mean that when one stands before Allah Y,

being conscious of his Divine presence, (a) one should be motionless i.e. avoiding all unnecessary movement, while (b) divorcing oneself from worldly thoughts – worldly thoughts should not be voluntarily imported to the mind. Yes, if they arise naturally, one should just ignore them and continue with the salāh. Disregarding this vital ingredient of concentration has led to our salāh becoming somewhat 'bland, boring and mechanical'. What did I just recite? Which rakat am I in? Do I have to stand up now, or sit for tashahud? are questions which haunt one in nearly every salāh. Remember that salāh is in reality a great gift from Allah Y which keeps us connected to Him despite our numerous involvements. However, as long as we don't make an effort to improve our concentration, salāh will continue to be regarded as a burden. For, Allah Y states, "(Salāh) is difficult and burdensome except for those who are mindful."2

The ahādīth also explicitly state that concentration in salāh is the factor which determines the amount of reward one receives for the salāh. Nabi sallallahu alayhi wasallam has

mentioned, “Whoever makes a thorough wudu and then performs an attentive salāh, while being mindful and conscious of what he says, will complete his salāh with all his (minor) sins erased like the day his mother gave birth to him.”³ A similar narration has it as, “Jannah becomes wājib (guaranteed) for this person.”⁴ Note again that, these benefits depend on the level of one’s concentration in the salāh. So why deprive ourselves when a little effort will make for a better, as well as a more enjoyable, salāh!

THE ‘SECRET INGREDIENTS’ TO A BETTER SALĀH

ADVANCE PREPARATION –Try and complete all needs and duties before the approach of salāh, or at least leave them in such a condition that would not distract the mind during the salāh. It is sinful to perform salāh in an uneasy distracted state of mind when one is able to avoid it. A distracted mind also refers to performing salāh when in need of relieving oneself or of even passing ‘wind’ (i.e. flatulence). In fact, if such an acute need does occur during the salāh, the salāh should be terminated and only resumed once at ease (irrespective of whether, by doing so, the salāh with congregation is missed or not).⁵

A METICULOUS WUDU – Perform a thorough wudu maintaining the fard, sunnah and mustahab aspects. Utilise a moderate amount of water and desist from all worldly talk. Involvement in such talk ruins the spirituality of the wudu totally. Remember! The key to salāh is wudu. So, a better wudu will surely lead to a better salāh.

SWITCH THE MIND OFF –The stepping stone to an attentive salāh is to ensure one commences it with a tranquil and relaxed mind. To achieve this, try and be seated in the Musjid (or the place of salāh) before time and recite a little amount of zikr. Just as how the blades of the fan continue to rotate well after the switch is turned off, so too is the effect of all activities on one’s mind. Coming early for salāh will also secure the good fortune of performing the salāh with the first takbīr (takbīr ūlā) which is extremely meritorious.

CLEAR THE AREA – Perform the salāh away from any distractions such as the radio, nasheeds which are playing, discussions of people, noise etc., as these naturally distract and divert the mind during the salāh. If possible, try to perform salāh on a plain printed musalla instead of a heavily designed one. Otherwise, one would be concentrating on the designs and counting of the domes and minarats instead of counting the number of rakats.

TIPS – Some Ūlama have recommended a simple though effective technique to achieve concentration. In every posture of salāh, one should meditate on only three things. These are: (1) My Allah is watching me, (2) My Allah is listening to me, and (3) My Allah is aware of me. With this frame of mind, one should recite the various tasbīhāt, qirat etc. of the salāh. Those who are well versed in Arabic should ponder over the meanings of the verses while others should try to learn the meanings of a few sūrahs, especially Sūrah Fātihah, since it is recited most often. Many of us have our set sūrahs for a 2, 3 and 4 rakat salāh. Hence, on completion of Sūrah Fātihah, before even thinking and realising what sūrah to choose and recite, we are already half way through these sūrahs. In this case, we should recite other sūrahs such as Sūrah Yasin, Tabarak etc. Pronouncing the letters loud enough as to hear it yourself (but not loud enough as to disturb others) is also extremely useful in focusing one’s attention in the salāh. We should also try to perfect the outer postures of salāh including the focusing of one’s gaze in each posture. If greater concentration is achieved by closing the eyes during the salāh, then in this case only, one may close the

eyes.⁶ However, the ideal would be to achieve this concentration by keeping them open as was the Sunnah (practice) of our Nabi sallallahu alayhi wasallam.

THE YAWNS... – More often than not, yawning is the result of one being absent-minded during the salāh. Nonetheless, if it does occur, one should first try to suppress it (by closing the mouth). If one is unable to do so, then the right hand should be used to cover the mouth, if one is in the standing position. Otherwise the left hand should be used if in any other posture of the salāh.

NOTE: It is makrūh to use the hand to cover the mouth when yawning during salāh if one is able to suppress it by doing so with the mouth only.⁷ Sounds such as ‘Ha...’ etc. should not be uttered while yawning as this has been prohibited in the Ahadith.⁸

FIDDLING – The most obvious and apparent sign of an inattentive mind is that of fiddling and fidgeting. Saeed Ibn Musayyib رحمه الله, a great Tābi‘ī, once saw a man who was fidgeting with his beard during the salāh and commented, “If this man was attentive, his body would have (also) being motionless.”⁹ If the mind is alert and attentive, subsequently, the physical body also becomes composed and tranquil. Let us avoid all unnecessary movement during the salāh.

SHORT AND SWEET – Initially, concentration should be developed by performing shorter (not quick and hasty) salāhs while trying to focus in each posture. Once the desired concentration is achieved, one may then perform lengthier rakats of salāh. This was the practice of many of our pious elders.

A GROSS MISUNDERSTANDING – A common understanding of an attentive salāh is that, one should be totally absorbed and oblivious of one’s surroundings during the salāh. This is incorrect. Experiencing such a condition is simply a gift from Allah Y and is in no way a requirement of salāh. In fact, at times this may even be a subtle scheme from Shaytan to sway us away from mustering up courage and attempting to perform a perfect salāh. Since, one would think that such a salāh is out of my reach and impossible for me to perform, so I’ll just carry on with my old inattentive one. Nevertheless, an attentive salāh simply means that one should be aware and realise what one is doing during the course of the salāh. For example, one should be conscious of the fact that now I am reciting Sūrah Fatiha, or now I am going into ruku, sajda etc. this much is sufficient when initially correcting our salāh.

If after carefully practicing on these points, one still does not achieve the desired concentration, one should not be disillusioned. Remember that concentration comes through practice while salāh has to be performed in all circumstances, with or without concentration. Shaytan will find this to be an ideal opportunity to sway us away from salāh with thoughts such as, ‘what good is your salāh if your mind is wandering all over the place?’ The Ūlama state that our effort is to ‘try’ to concentrate in the event of not having achieved concentration. Allah Y wants to see our sincere attempt in developing that better salāh. If one entertains stray thoughts during the salāh, repent sincerely and make a resolute intention of improving the salāh. In addition to this brief compilation, the following books should also be consulted:

1) IS YOUR SALAH CORRECT – by Moulana Fadlur Rahman Azmi دامت برکاتہم

2) And especially, the transcribed bayans of Moulana Abdul Hamid Ishaq دامت برکاتہم entitled, ANWAARUS SALAH.