

4a — Setting the Prayer Scene and Burning Incense

- ✦ The place you say your Prayer should be special.
- ✦ Every item that can distract you from your Prayer should be taken away.
- ✦ The room should be the one that you don't use regularly, and should be neat and clean, a comfortable temperature, and dark.
- ✦ With comfortable temperature, you do not have to worry or entertain thoughts that may distract you when the room is hot or cold.
- ✦ Your skin will constantly remind you of any discomfort to your body.
- ✦ If the room you use to say your Prayer is slightly dark, the sense of darkness brings into you fear and awe, increasing your concentration by further limiting eyesight.
- ✦ The lesser the items you are able to see during Prayer, the better it is.
- ✦ The walls should be free from pictures and other objects that might attract your attention or give rise to a memory or thought.
- ✦ You are also advised to select an isolated place free from noise and disturbance.
- ✦ You should not have direct access to a telephone, as its ring would only create thoughts in your mind as to the urgency of the call.
- ✦ Also, you should be away from any kind of smell from the kitchen to allow you to focus more on the task at hand, rather than salivating and thinking about food during Prayer.
- ✦ Finally, you should appreciate and respect your communication with Allah by closing doors (not locking them) of the room you pray in, so as not to hear other family members conversing and kids screaming at each other.
- ✦ You should burn incense to perfume your Prayer room.
- ✦ It is a greatly recommended act and carries significant weight in research and science.
- ✦ There is significant evidence on the practical applications of burning incense, as this is one major way to relax one's nerves and emotions, and through deep breathing and meditation, a high inner state of purity is attained.
- ✦ Aroma therapists are experts in this field and the oils they use to apply on the skin or burn to release fumes can significantly reduce stress in the brain, lower muscle activity, decrease the train of thoughts, thereby increasing concentration in Prayer.
- ✦ According to researchers, the aromatic properties of pure, natural essential oils are a catalyst for change in the human mind and body.
- ✦ Essential oil aromas stimulate the part of the brain that affects your mood.
- ✦ Inhaling essential oils can also help one attain a pleasurable emotional balance.
- ✦ Deep breathing and Meditation can relax your mind and thus give you better concentration.
- ✦ Therefore, increasing your level of concentration, through relaxation with essential oils, is highly recommended. Direct breathing on these oils is also helpful.
- ✦ For instance, to relieve stressful thoughts, anxiety or lethargy before Prayer, drip 2-5 drops of Chamomile onto a handkerchief, hold it under your nose and breathe deeply.
- ✦ An aroma therapy lamp, a ceramic vessel equipped with a small basin to hold a mixture of water and essential oil is a good way to diffuse scent.
- ✦ The basin is warmed from underneath by a candle or light bulb.
- ✦ Diffusing relaxing oils like Chamomile, Rose or Sandalwood can significantly reduce over-load in the brain, thus allowing you to be attentive in your Prayer.

4b – Wudhu, as a Way to Increase Your Attention

- ✦ Wudhu (formal/minor ablution) is one of the most effective ways to prepare the scene for your daily Prayer.
- ✦ It has powers to re-organize your thoughts before Prayer and assist you in offering your Prayer with confidence and not to be swerved by Shaytan, the Accursed.

- ✦ Performing Wudhu slowly and contemplating on the words in the dua recommended during every wash would help you a great deal to think about your life, death and the Creator whom you will be standing in front of soon.
- ✦ This way, you employ Wudhu as a strategy to re-organize thoughts and prepare for Prayer.
- ✦ There should be no interval of talking and discussing worldly matters between the performance of Wudhu and your Prayer.
- ✦ If there is an interval, you ought to recite duas.
- ✦ This way the link of concentration is established between Wudhu and Prayer.
- ✦ True, the more time you engage in meditation and the conception of having only one thought before your Prayer, the more chance you have to say your Prayer without any distraction.

THE INVOCATION OF WUDHU

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الْمَاءَ طَهُورًا
وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْهُ نَجَسًا

At the beginning of Wudhu, you start in the Name of Allah (SWT) and praise Him for making the water a pure element.

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي مِنَ التَّوَّابِينَ وَاجْعَلْنِي مِنَ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

At the time of washing your hands, you request Allah (SWT) to place you among those who seek His forgiveness and those who are pure.

اللَّهُمَّ لَقِّنِي حُجَّتِي يَوْمَ الْقَاكِ وَ أَطْلِقْ لِسَانِي بِذِكْرِكَ

At the time of rinsing the mouth, you invoke to Allah (SWT) to teach you the correct way to answer the questions on the Day of Judgment when you shall meet His Divine Presence.

اللَّهُمَّ لَا تُحْرِمْ عَلَيَّ رِيحَ الْجَنَّةِ وَاجْعَلْنِي مِمَّنْ يَشْمُ
رِيحَهَا وَرَوْحَهَا وَطِيبَهَا

At the time of rinsing the nose, you request Allah (SWT) not to deprive you from the smell of Paradise and to place you among those who smell its fragrance.

اللَّهُمَّ بَيِّضْ وَجْهِي يَوْمَ تَسْوَدُ فِيهِ الْوُجُوهُ وَلَا تُسْوِدْ
وَجْهِي يَوْمَ تَبْيِضُ فِيهِ الْوُجُوهُ

At the time of washing the face, you ask Allah (SWT) to brighten your face on that Day when He will disgrace and darken the faces of a great number of people.

اللَّهُمَّ أَعْطِنِي كِتَابِي بِيَمِينِي وَالْخُلْدَ فِي الْجَنَانِ
بِيسَارِي وَحَاسِبِنِي حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا

At the time of washing the right forearm, you plead to Allah (SWT) to place the scroll of your deeds in your right hand and the certificate of permanency in Paradise in your left hand, and that He should render your accounts leniently.

اللَّهُمَّ لَا تُغَطِّنِي كِتَابِي بِشِمَالِي وَلَا مِنْ وَرَاءِ ظَهْرِي
وَلَا تَجْعَلَهَا مَغْلُوبَةً إِلَيَّ عُنُقِي وَاعْوِذُ بِكَ
مِنْ مَقْطَعَاتِ النَّيِّرَانِ

At the time of washing the left arm, you ask Allah (SWT) not to place the scroll of your deeds in your left hand, nor on your back, and He should not hang it around your neck. You also seek refuge from the fierce Eternal Fire of Hell.

اللَّهُمَّ غَشِّنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ وَبَرَكَاتِكَ وَعَفْوِكَ

At the time of wiping the head, you request Allah (SWT) to cover you with His Mercy, Blessings and Pardon.

اللَّهُمَّ ثَبِّتْنِي عَلَى الصِّرَاطِ يَوْمَ تَزِلُّ فِيهِ الْأَقْدَامُ وَاجْعَلْ
سَعْيِي فِي مَا يُرْضِيكَ عَنِّي يَا ذَا الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

Finally, at the time of wiping the feet, you ask Allah (SWT) to keep you steadfast on His Path on that Day when feet shall slip, and make your efforts like of those that will please Him.

4c – Understanding and Appreciating Allah's Presence

- ✚ It is always to your benefit if you were to ponder the Existence of Allah and His Power, Signs and Decisions related to this world and the next.
- ✚ Appreciating His presence is one way of bringing humility into your heart and humbling yourself in Prayer, performed with attention and concentration.
- ✚ It is only He Who looks at you Mercifully during your Prayer, and you ought to keep this in mind every time you say your Prayer.
- ✚ A good example is from The Prophet (S) who used to treat Prayer very seriously and gave his full attention and concentration.
- ✚ He appreciated and knew his Creator well enough to fear His Presence and attend with full concentration when standing before Him.

al-Khumeini (RA) reports a tradition that: For ten years the Prophet of Allah (S) stood on his toes (in his Prayer) until his blessed feet became swollen and his face turned pale. And he would stand erect all night, until a time came when the Lord consoled him (with the following verse): We have not sent down The Qur'an on you to cause you distress.

✚ al-Saduq (RA) quotes the following advice from Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (AS) that he gave to one of his trusted companions:

- O Servant of Allah! When you offer Prayer, pray like someone who bids farewell and fears that he will never return (i.e. pray in such a manner as if it were the last Prayer of your life).
- Then fix your gaze on the point of your prostration.
- If you know that there is someone on your left or right, you take more care in offering your Prayer; then know that you stand in front of Someone Who sees you and you don't see Him.

4d – Reminding Yourself of Allah

- ✚ One of the reasons why Adhan and Iqamah have been much emphasized before Prayer is to establish a strong link between the worshipper and his Creator, before you venture into this sacred journey of Prayer and be in direct communication with the Almighty.
- ✚ This way, you start reminding and convincing yourself of the presence of Allah before you begin Prayer.
- ✚ The Great Scholar, al-Mutahhari (RA) quotes a tradition, which is referenced in the book Light Within Me:

● The aim in Dhikr (remembrance) of Allah is that the heart be always aware of al-Haqq (The Most Truthful, a Name of Allah, for its practice banishes inattention.

● al-Khumeini (RA) comments: while remembering Allah, do you not see that respecting and obeying such a Benefactor is essential for you? He is the Creator and King of this vast cosmos, whose infiniteness cannot be measured or even conceived by human intellect.

● We, human beings, creatures crawling on one of the smallest planets miserably fail to grasp the extent of our own small world, whose sun cannot be compared with far greater suns of innumerable galaxies. Our solar system is nothing compared to other lesser solar systems, which still elude the keen eyes of great explorers and investigators of the world.

✚ We have been advised by the Scholars in Islam to try and remember Allah at all times possible.

✚ This includes repeating certain phrases of worship and servitude, or it can be in the form of meditation, appreciating this world and the hereafter.

✚ al-Taba Tabai (RA) in his book, al-Mizan Volume Two, discusses the way of living that is happier and the life that is more durable. In this narration, al-Daylami narrates in his al-Irshad that Allah, at one stage during the Ascension (the Day of Meraj), told the Prophet (S):

As for the happy way of living, it is that in which the person is not tired of remembering Me, does not forget My bounties, and does not ignore My rights (on him). He seeks My pleasure day and night. The ever-lasting life is realized when the person works for his spiritual benefit until the world loses its significance for him, and looks small in his eyes. The hereafter becomes great for him.

He gives preference to My pleasure over his own desire; seeks My pleasures; thinks the right of My bounty great; keeps in mind what I have done for him (i.e. for his benefit); remembers Me day and night whenever he is tempted to commit any wrong or sin; keeps his heart clean from that I dislike; hates Shaytan and his whisperings, and does not let Shaytan establish a hold over, or a passage to his heart.

When he acts like this, then I put (My) love into his heart, until I make his heart, as well as his leisure and engagement, and his thought and speech, a part of (My) favors which I have bestowed on those of (My) Creations who love Me; and I open his heart's eye and ear, so that he hears with his heart and looks with his heart to My Majesty and Greatness; and I make the world straitened for him and make him hate it with all its pleasures; and I caution him of the world and all that it contains, as a shepherd protects his sheep from dangerous pasture lands.

When this happens, he flees from people and transfers from the house of termination to the abode of eternity, and from the house of Shaytan to the Seat of the Beneficent Allah. O Ahmad! I adorn him with dignity and majesty. So, this is the good way of living and the eternal life, and it is the status of those who are pleased (with Me).

So, whosoever acts for My pleasure, I give him three characteristics:

I teach him gratitude, which is not polluted by ignorance, remembrance, that is unadulterated with forgetfulness, and love that takes preference over the love of creatures.

Then when he loves Me, I love him and I open the eye of his heart to My Majesty. I do not keep (My) special beings hidden from him. I converse with him secretly in the dark of night and the light of day, until he ceases talking with and sitting with the creatures.

I make him hear My talk and the speech of My Angels. I make My secret known to him, which I have kept hidden from all (My) creation. I dress him in modesty, until all the creation is awed of him. He walks on the earth (and all his sins are) forgiven. I make his heart hearing and seeing, and I do not hide from him anything of the Garden or the Fire. I make known to him the terror and afflictions awaiting the people on the Day of Resurrection, and about the things I will question the rich and the poor, as well as the learned and the ignorant.

I will make him sleep (in peace) in his grave, and I will send Munkar and Nakeer (AS) to question him. He will not experience the sorrow of death, or the fright of the prelude (of the next world). Then I will erect his weighing scale for him, and will unroll his book (of deeds). I will then put his book in his right hand and he shall read it unfolded. Then I will not keep any interpreter between Me and him.

So these are the attributes of the lovers. O Ahmad! Make your concern one concern, make your tongue one tongue, and make your body (i.e. your person) alive that is never oblivious (of Me). Whoever is oblivious of Me, I do not care in which valley he perishes.

5a – *Relaxed and Alert State of Mind*

- ✚ An alert state of mind is one of the many vital ingredients of Prayer.
- ✚ If you are tired and exhausted, it is better to rest and do some deep breathing and relaxation exercises before you make the commitment to stand in front of your Lord.

- ✚ And yes, it is preferred to pray a bit late but with attention and concentration.
- ✚ Of course, the delay in performing Prayer from its allocated time should only be for the length of time one has to relax and rejuvenate himself, gain energy to stand before the Almighty. As Imam Ali (AS) has advised us:
 - Do not offer Prayer in the state of drowsiness.
 - While offering Prayer, do not think about yourself because you are standing in front of Allah.
 - Indeed, only that portion of the Prayer will be accepted that he has paid full attention towards Allah.

- ✚ al-Saduq (RA) reports from Imam Ali (AS) that he said:
 - None of you should ever stand for Prayer in a lazy or drowsy state, nor should you let (random) thoughts pass through your mind (in the state of Prayer).
 - For, in that state, you stand before your Glorious and Almighty Lord.
 - Verily, the reward a devotee derives from Prayer is equal to the extent of it that he offers with an attentive heart.

In Fiqh al-Ridha it is stated:

- When you want to perform the Prayer, do not go to it lazily, sleepy, hurriedly, or unmindfully.
 - Approach it calmly, solemnly and slowly.
 - You should display submission, imploringly and humbly to Allah. You are to show awe and signs of fear and hope, with caution and apprehension.
 - Thus, you are to stand before Him, as an escapee and sinful slave stands at attention before his master; on the alert, with joined heels, erected trunk, not looking to right and left, reckoning as if you see Him.
 - If you do not, He certainly does see you...
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- ✚ The posture of the Aimmah (AS) in Prayer always allowed them to relax and be comfortable.
 - ✚ Your posture in Prayer also has to allow you to remain alert and aware.
 - ✚ There is a two-way relationship between slumping and distraction.
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- ✚ Good posture means there is musculoskeletal balance.
 - ✚ This balance helps to protect the joints in the spine from excessive stress.
 - ✚ It also guards against injury and possible deformity.
 - ✚ Good posture helps prevent distress and pain that lead to distraction.

5b – Understanding What You Recite

- ✚ It is clear that if you don't try to learn and appreciate the meanings of the verses and glorification you proclaim in your Prayer, you stand very little chance of developing and maintaining the concentration you need to focus in Prayer.
- ✚ Focusing on the meanings of what you recite would generally keep your mind busy and involved in Prayer.

✚ Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (AS) has said:

■ One who offers two units of Prayer with the knowledge of what he says therein, he does not finish them without God forgiving him every sin that there is between him and God.

✚ Understanding every word of what you recite in Prayer is helpful in developing a tranquil mind and in allowing you to control your immediate thoughts and feelings that would distract you from your Prayer.

✚ You also need to appreciate the words and its meaning in your language of preference, recite and understand them so that your mind does not wander and remains focused on the task at hand.

✚ However, one would not think or ponder on the meanings for this is not the time for it, but only occupy his mind with the meanings of the phrases being recited.

✚ The Prophet of Allah (S) is quoted to have said to Abu Dhar:

■ Two light units of Prayer offered with contemplation are better than a whole night spent in worship.

Takbir

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ

Allah is Great

Translation of Chapter of Al-Hamd

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I commence with the Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Special Praise be to Allah, the Sustainer of the creation

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Compassionate, the Merciful

مَا لِكَ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

Lord of the Day of Judgment

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Guide us to the straight path

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

The path of those whom You have favored, n of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray

Translation of Chapter of Al-Ikhlās

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I commence with the Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

O' Prophet! Say: Allah is One - the Eternal Being

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

Allah is He Who is independent of all beings

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

He begets none, nor was He begotten

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

And none in the creation is equal to Him

Translation of the Dhikr During Ruku (Bending) and Sajdah (Prostration)

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيمِ وَ بِحَمْدِهِ

Glory be to my High Sustainer and I praise Him

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى وَ بِحَمْدِهِ

Glory be to my Great Sustainer, Most High, and I praise Him

Before Going into Prostration

سَمِعَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ حَمِدَهُ

Allah hears and accepts the praise of one who praises

Istighfar, Between Two Prostration

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَ أَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

I seek forgiveness from Allah Who is my Sustainer, and I turn to Him

While Standing

بِحَوْلِ اللَّهِ وَ قُوَّتِهِ أَقُومُ وَ أَقْعُدُ

I stand and sit with the help and strength of Allah

Translation of Tasbihat Al-Arba-ah

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ

Glory be to Allah, and all praise is for Him and there is no one worth worshipping other than Allah, and He is Greater than any description

Translation of Tashahhud and Salam

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ

I testify that there is none worth worshipping except the Almighty Allah, Who is One and has no partner

وَ أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

And I testify that Muhammad is His servant and Prophet

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَيِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

O Allah! Send Your blessings on Muhammad and his progeny

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَ بَرَكَاتُهُ

O Prophet! Allah's peace, blessings and grace be upon you!

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْنَا وَ عَلَيِ عِبَادِ اللَّهِ الصَّالِحِينَ

Allah's peace be on us, those offering prayers - and upon all pious servants of Allah

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَ بَرَكَاتُهُ

Allah's peace, blessings and grace be on you believers!

5c – Proper Pronunciation

- ✚ Arabic language is considered one of the sweetest of all the languages.
- ✚ So, reciting Prayer with proper Makhaarij (proper pronunciation) and Tajweed (following the rules of the Arabic Language) and learning the rules of reciting the Qur'an, would make your efforts in maintaining attention a lot easier.
- ✚ If you possessed these qualities in you, then you would never feel tired and exhausted reciting long Chapters of the Qur'an or reading long and repeated glorification during Prayer.
- ✚ Because, you would be deeply involved in the parts of the recitation itself.
- ✚ This is an effective way to prolong your bending (Ruku) and prostration (Sujud), and a way to lengthen your Prayer without discomfort.
- ✚ For those whose mother-tongue is not Arabic and have yet to master the correct recitation of the Arabic verses involved in Prayer, you are advised to at least learn to read the compulsory parts of the Prayer correctly and with proper pronunciation.
- ✚ This way they are sure your Prayer is valid.
- ✚ You should also try and not completely focus on his recitation, as you would lose your focus on Allah.
- ✚ However, there is no excuse for not learning to recite with proper Makhaarij and Tajweed.

5d – Confidence

- ✚ In his book Self Building, al-Amini writes:
 - If one does not succeed in the very first attempt, instead of getting disappointed, he should become more determined and serious in trying again, until attaining domination over the self gradually.
 - The mind should be cleansed thoroughly from scattered thoughts and should be motivated to pay attention towards God Almighty.
 - If attaining such a kind of attention is not possible within a day, few weeks or even few months, he should not be disappointed because, after all, such kind of devoted attention is possible.
- ✚ To have firm intention and belief that whatsoever the case, you will never be misled in Prayer.
- ✚ You need to be confident and accept with full heart that Shaytan's forces are weaker than what you have been endowed with by your loving Lord, the Most High. Allah (SWT) states in The Qur'an: Indeed! The cunning of Shaytan is feeble.
- ✚ Self-confidence is arguably one of the most important traits you can possess.
- ✚ Self-confidence reflects your assessment of your own self-worth.
- ✚ It will play a large part in determining your level of attention and concentration in Prayer.
- ✚ Building self-confidence and defeating the distracting thoughts in Prayer takes time and effort.
- ✚ Goal setting is probably the most effective way of building self-confidence.
- ✚ By setting measurable goals, achieving them, setting new goals, achieving them and so on, you prove your ability to yourself.
- ✚ You are able to prove to yourself that you are able to perform and achieve effectively.
- ✚ You can see, recognize and enjoy your achievement, and feel real self-worth in that achievement.