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The *Ādāb* of Prayer (*Ṣalāh*) in *Kitāb Al-Luma‘ fī Al-Taṣawwūf* of Abū Naṣr ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī Al-Sarrāj Al-Ṭūsī

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Abstract

Abū Naṣr ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī was born in Ṭūs in Khurāsān in the middle of 10th century CE and died in the same place in 988 CE. He was honored with the title “the peacock of the poor” (*tāwūs al-fuqarā’*). In his book *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj explains on the definition of Sufism, the origin of the name, on its principles and practices and these have their roots in the sayings and practices of the beloved Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), the blessed Companions, and the pious Muslims. For our purpose here, we are only going to focus on the part of the *ādāb* of the religious rituals, particularly on the *ādāb* of the ritual prayer. How do the *Ṣūfīs* define *ādāb*? What is it that makes it differ from the external requirement of the Sharī‘ah? What are the *ādāb* of prayer? How do the Prophet (pbuh), the blessed Companions and the *Ṣūfīs* exemplify the best *ādāb* of ritual prayer, and what we can learn and imitate from these par excellent Servants of Allah Ta‘ālā. These are some of the questions that we will try to deal with in this paper. The methodology is a literature review, and we will also refer to the works of other scholars, of which, primarily, are the works of *Hujjat al-Islām*, Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 450/1111).

Keywords: *‘Ilm al-Taṣawwūf* (Sufism), *Ādāb*, *Ṣalāh* (Prayer), Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj.

Abstrak

Abū Naṣr ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī dilahirkan di Ṭūs di Khurasan pada pertengahan abad ke-10 M dan meninggal dunia di tempat yang sama pada 988 CE. Beliau diberi penghormatan dengan gelaran “merak orang miskin” (*tāwūs al-fuqarā’*). Dalam bukunya *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj menerangkan tentang definisi tasawuf, asal usul nama, prinsip dan amalannya dan ini berakar umbi dari ucapan dan amalan Nabi Muhammad (saw), Sahabat yang dirahmati, dan orang-orang Islam yang soleh. Untuk tujuan kita di sini, kita hanya akan menumpukan pada bahagian *ādāb* ritual keagamaan, khususnya pada *ādāb* solat ritual. Bagaimanakah para *Ṣūfī* mentakrifkan *ādāb*? Apakah yang membezakannya daripada keperluan luaran Sharī‘ah? Apakah warna-warna doa? Bagaimanakah Nabi (saw), para Sahabat yang dirahmati dan para *Ṣūfī* mencontohkan *ādāb* doa yang terbaik, dan apa yang boleh kita pelajari dan tiru daripada Hamba-hamba Allah Ta‘ālā yang sangat baik ini. Ini adalah beberapa persoalan yang akan kami cuba selesaikan dalam kertas kerja ini. Metodologi adalah kajian literatur, dan kami juga akan merujuk kepada karya ulama lain, yang mana, terutamanya, adalah karya *Hujjat al-Islām*, Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (w. 450/1111).

Kata kunci: *‘Ilm al-Taṣawwūf* (Tasawuf), *Ādāb*, *Ṣalāh* (Solat), Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj.

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Introduction

Abū Naṣr ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī was born in Ṭūs in Khurāsān in the middle of 4th/10th century¹ and died in the same place in 378/988 (Lory, 1997). He came from a family of *Ṣūfīs* and he himself was a *Ṣūfī* in the true sense of the word, and due to his well-known piety and authoritative exposition on Sufism, he was honoured with the title “the peacock of the poor” (*tāwūs al-fuqarā*) (Lory, 1997). Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj lived during the period when some of the teaching and practices of the *Ṣūfīs* had long been under the scrutiny of the orthodox scholars, and the utterances of some of them such as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d.ca. 261/875) and al-Ḥallāj (d. 304/922) had put their doctrines and mystical experiences into question. Thus, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj’s book *Kitāb al-Luma*’, was an attempt to defend Sufism against all these negative claims and to delineate the doctrines and practices of the *Ṣūfīs* and that all these are in line with the teachings of the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh) and the blessed Companions. He was claimed to be the first *Ṣūfī* to expound systematically the principles and practises of his fellow brethren in a complete treatise and this effort was taken later by other well-known *Ṣūfīs* scholars and writers such as Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380 or 390 A.H.), Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/966), Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Hujwīrī (d. 470 A.H.) and Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 450/1111) (Sells, 1996). In his book *Kitāb al-Luma*’, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj explains on the definition of Sufism, the origin of the name, on its principles and practices, and that these have their roots in the sayings and the practices of the Prophet (pbuh), the blessed Companions, and the pious Muslims. He also explains further on the mystical stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*) of the *Ṣūfīs*, on the *ādāb* of the *Ṣūfīs*

in each of the religious rituals, on audition (*samā’*) and ecstasy (*wajd*), on the miracles (*karāmah*) and ecstatic expression (*al-shaṭhiyyāt*) of some of the *Ṣūfīs*, and many other aspects that are part and parcel of the *Ṣūfī*’s life and experience (Nicholson, 1963).

For our purpose here, we are only going to focus on the part of the *ādāb* of the religious rituals, particularly on the *ādāb* of the ritual prayer. How do the *Ṣūfīs* define *ādāb*? What is it that makes it differ from the external requirement of the *Sharī’ah*? What are the *ādāb* of prayer? How do Prophet (pbuh), the blessed Companions and the *Ṣūfīs* exemplify the best *ādāb* of ritual prayer, and what we can learn and imitate from these par excellent Servants of Allah Ta‘ālā. These are some of the questions that we will try to deal with in this paper. Most of the materials that are referred to are from *Kitāb al-Luma*’, and some are taken from the Book of Prayer of *Ihya’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* of Imām al-Ghazālī, and some from the sayings of other *Ṣūfīs*. Hopefully, these precious pearls and gems of the teachings of our pious Masters will illuminate our struggle and effort in perfecting our religious rituals.

Definition of *Ādāb*

In the beginning of the chapter on the *ādāb* of the Seekers (*Kitāb Ādāb al-Mutaṣawwifāh*) of his *Kitāb al-Luma*’, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj quotes the Qur’ānic verse, “O ye who believe! Save yourselves and your families from the Fire.....” (*Sūrat al-Taḥrim*, 66:6).² Ibn ‘Abbās in his *Tafsīr* said that the meaning of the verse is that Allah is invoking the believers to discipline (*addabū*) and teach (*‘allamū*) themselves and their families so that they will be saved from the hellfire (Maḥmūd & Surūr, 1960). Al-Sarrāj also quotes a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (pbuh) which states, “No sire ever begot a son more excellent than Good

¹ The first date on the left is in A.H. and the second date on the right is in C.E. This format applies for the rest of other dates in this paper.

² Translation of Qur’ānic verses are based on *The Holy Qur’an*, trans. ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali (Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media Sdn. Bhd., 1997)

Manners (*ādāb ḥasan*)” and another *ḥadīth* which says, “God disciplined me (*ādābbanī*) and made my Manner (*ādābī*) the most excellent.” Hence, *ādāb* or ‘right action’ is part and parcel of Islam, but how do we define *ādāb*. Al-Attas in his *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* define *ādāb* as “acknowledgement of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition of the proper places of God in the order of being and existence” (al-Attas, 1995). Thus a believer who has inculcate *ādāb* in himself knows the right action in order to act in the best manner towards each things surrounding him, i.e., either toward himself, or to his family, or to his society and the environment, and ultimately towards his Creator.

Al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), the famous *Ṣūfī* of Basra during the Umayyad period and who belongs to the class of the Successors (*Tābi‘ūn*), was asked, “What manners (*ādāb*) are the most useful in this world and bring one nearest to God in the next world?”; he answered, “Understanding of the religion such that the hearts of the learned people are directed to you, abstinence from the world such that it brought you near to the Lord of the worlds, and knowledge (*ma‘rifah*) of what is upon you that you owe to Him, and the perfection of Belief (*īmān*) encompasses this *ma‘rifah*” (Maḥmūd & Surūr, 1960). Al-Jalājilī al-Baṣrī, a *Ṣūfī* in the 4th century *Hijrah*, was reported to say, in regarding the importance of *ādāb*, that “Unity (*tawḥīd*) is the caused for the necessity of Belief (*īmān*), hence someone who does not have *īmān*, does not have *tawḥīd*, and *īmān* necessitates *Shari‘ah*, hence someone who does not have *Shari‘ah*, does not have *īmān* and does not have *tawḥīd*, and *Shari‘ah* necessitates *ādāb*, hence someone who does not have *ādāb*, does not have *Shari‘ah* and does not have *tawḥīd*” (Maḥmūd & Surūr, 1960). Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, moreover, divides men, according to their perfection of *ādāb*, into three classes: the people of the world, the people of the

religion, and the people of the elect among the religion. Among these three classes, it is the third group that has the highest level of *ādāb*; some of their *ādāb* consist of purifying the heart, observance of the inner secrets, fulfilling the (spiritual) contract after they made the pledge, preserving the time, less attention to idol thought and non-essential matters, and the specific *ādāb* of each of the religious ritual. For the purpose of our intention here, we will focus on their *ādāb* of prayer as portrayed to us by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj in his *Kitāb al-Luma`*.

The *Ādāb* of *Ṣalāh* (Prayer) in *Kitāb al-Luma`*

Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj writes that prayer is the pole of the religion, the ‘delight of the eye’ (i.e., the joy and pleasure) of the Knowers (*al-‘ārifīn*), an ornament of the Truthful ones, a state of contact, reverence, submissiveness, fear and glorification of the Lord Almighty, secret conversations with Him, drawing near to Him and turning away from other than Him. Hence, before the servant presents himself, by performing his prayer, to his Creator, it is prerequisite that he prepares himself physically and spiritually. First, it is the requirement of the *Shari‘ah* that the believer must be clean physically, either his body, his clothes or the place on which he is going to perform the worship. Then he has to cover his bodily parts, with specific instructions for man and woman, and knows when it is the time of prayer and the direction of the *qiblah*. These last two required some knowledge of astronomy and geography, and Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj writes quite extensively that Muslims should have substantial expertise of these three subjects such as knowing the rising and setting of the moon and the sun, the extent of the shadow, and the time and direction of each region in *Dār al-Islām*. Knowing the exact time of prayer, moreover, can help the sincere servant prepare himself to be ready for the preferred time of prayer, which is the time right after

the call of prayer (*adhān*) (Nicholson, 1963).

For preparing the place of prayer, if it is not being done in the mosque, some *Ṣūfīs* prefer that the place of prayer should be done in a dark room, preferably facing close to the wall and never should it be done in busy places such as near the street or markets. Moreover, there should not be distracting objects in front of them or around the surrounding area, such as praying on the beautiful carpets with the elaborate design that can distract their attention while praying. The Prophet (pbuh) once prayed with a beautiful cloak, which has elaborate design around its border, a gift by a companion, Abū Jahm. However, after he had finished with his prayer, he removed it and said, “Take it back to Abū Jahm, for it distracted me from my prayer. Bring me Abū Jahm’s cloak of coarse wool” (Holland, 1989).

In other words, preparation for the physical aspect of prayer should lead the believer to prepare also his mind, heart and consciousness before facing and submitting in front of his Creator. The Prophet (pbuh) says, “A servant is in prayer as long as he waits for prayer.” Hence, before one commences one’s prayers, one should be in the state of waiting and preparing one’s heart and mind towards what one is going to accomplish. For the people of the elect, before they begin their prayers, they observe a few *ādāb* such as contemplation of the heart, observance of the heart from idle thoughts, desires and all kinds of disturbances, and constant remembering of God, i.e., remembering only Him and exclude everything other than Him. Hence, before one begins one’s prayer, the heart is already in the presence (*ḥuḍūr*) of Allah Almighty, and the believer stands up to pray as if he is already in the state of prayer. As Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj says, “He stands from the (state) of prayer to the (state) of prayer” (Maḥmūd & Surūr, 1960).

Moreover, among the excellent *ādāb* before prayer is to wait for the call of prayer (*adhān*) while the state of oneself has been

cleaned physically and is ready to pray. Once the call is heard we should follow the Prophet (pbuh)’s advice as he says, “When you hear the call, repeat what the *mūadhdhin* says.” By repeating the glorious call, we should remind ourselves the majesty of Almighty, and fear for the final call of the Resurrection Day, as al-Ghazālī says, “When you hear the call to prayer given by the *mūadhdhin*, let yourself feel the terror of the Summons on Resurrection Day.” Then review your heart either it will respond in fear or it will respond in joy and happiness for meeting one’s Creator. As for the Prophet (pbuh), the beloved of the creation and the Creator, it is pure joy and comfort, since he used to say to his companion Bilāl (r.a.), who was the first *mūadhdhin* in Islam, “Comfort us, Bilāl!” As for the *mūadhdhin*, he will have a priceless reward in the hereafter as mentioned in this *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (pbuh), “On the Day of the Resurrection, three people will find themselves on the ridge of black musk. They will have no reckoning to fear, nor any cause for alarm while human accounts are being settled. First, a man who recites the Qur’ān to please God, Great and Glorious is He, and who leads the prayer to people’s satisfaction. Second, a man who gives the call to prayer in a mosque, inviting people to God, Great and Glorious is He, for the sake of His good pleasure. Third, a man who has a hard time making a living in this world, yet not distracted from the work of the Hereafter” (Holland, 1989).

After the call of prayer, the believer then is ready to stand up for praying, facing the *qiblah*, while his heart is facing the Lord Almighty. Abū Sa’īd al-Kharrāz (d.c. 892-

899),³ a well-known *Ṣūfī* of the school of Baghdad and was known as “the Tongue of Sufism” due to his well-known and enormous writings on Sufism – it is reported that he wrote 400 books on the states of annihilation (*fanā*) and subsistence (*baqā*)– was asked, “How should one enter upon prayer?” He answered, “That you face Allah Almighty as you face Him on the Day of Resurrection, and you stand between His two Hands while there is no interpreter between you and Him, and He draws near to you, and you confide to Him since He is the Greatest King” (Arberry, 2001). Then facing the Majesty, with the head looking down in humility and shamefulness, due to our sins and weaknesses, we hope that He will forgive us, as Prophet (pbuh) says, “When a man stands up to pray, directing his desire, his face and his heart towards God, Great and Glorious is He, he will come out of that Prayer as on the day his mother gave him birth” (Holland, 1989). However, this shamefulness (*al-ḥayā*) of our sins would not come by easily if the heart is still not clean and not yet open to spiritual knowledge; however, the Prophet (pbuh) has a practical advice regarding this. Abū Hurayrah once asked him, “Of what sort is shamefacedness (*al-ḥayā*) towards Allah?” The Prophet (pbuh) then said, “Be ashamed before Him as you are ashamed before a righteous man of your family” (Calverly, 1977). By His will and guidance, this *al-ḥayā* towards a righteous man will lead us towards *al-ḥayā* of the Most Righteous One.

Then with full concentration, we are ready to pronounce *takbīratu 'l-ihrām*, i.e., the pronouncement of *Allahu Akbar* with a clear voice, while simultaneously saying the *niyyah*, i.e., the intention of doing the prayer only for Allah’s sake, with our inner voice. Abū al-Qāsim al-Jūnayd (d.

298/910), another famous *Ṣūfī* of the school of Baghdad, was reported to say, “For everything there is the cream, and the cream of prayer is *al-takbīratu 'l-ūlā* (i.e., the first *takbīr*), and the meaning of that is that *al-takbīratu 'l-ūlā* is accompanied with *niyyah* which is without it the prayer is not permissible, and it is your contract that your prayer is only for Allah Almighty” (Nicholson, 1963). In other words, for a prayer to be valid, both *takbīr* and *niyyah* must be pronounced simultaneously, the former by the lips and the latter by the heart, and not one preceding the other. Moreover, attentive awareness of the heart must also be present with the pronouncement of *Allahu Akbar*, as al-Ghazālī says that even if it is difficult for us to achieve perfect awareness while praying then at least we must be conscious while pronouncing the *takbīr* and *niyyah*: “Presence of the heart (*ḥudūr al-qalb*) is the very spirit of prayer. Attentiveness to the initial ‘*Allahu Akbar!*’ represents the bare minimum required to keep the spark of this spirit alive Of God we beg His gracious support!” (Holland, 1989).

An *‘arīf* was also reported to say, “It is desirable that when you say *Allahu Akbar*, you associate your saying of *Allah* with glorification when [mentioning] the *alif*, reverence when [mentioning] the *lām*, and observation and nearness when [mentioning] the *hā*’.” Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz also writes, “When you lifted both hands for *takbīr*, there should not be in your heart anything other than Majesty [of Allah], and at the time of *takbīr*, there should not be [in your heart] anything greater than Allah until you forget this world and the next world due to His Magnificence.” On this saying, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj comments that if the person’s heart is filled with things other than Allah then he is not *ṣādiq* (i.e., the truthful one) in his saying of *Allahu Akbar* (Nicholson, 1963). Hence, during this glorification of

³ See W. Madelung, “Abū Sa‘īd Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Kharrāz,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed. (1978), 4:1083.

Allah, our hearts must be fully attentive towards Him, while we intend to do the prayer in the best manner possible and sincerely for His sake only.

This attentiveness of the heart, according to one's capacity, must be extended throughout the whole prayer. Other than performing all the obligatory rituals and uttering all the necessary verses and phrases, these attentiveness and conscious awareness of the mind and the heart are the most important *ādāb* of prayer. The one who has perfected this *ādāb* has reached the level of 'excellence' (*ihsān*), a *maqām* (or level) for the one whose heart has been clean and pure and his inner eyes are opened towards the spiritual realm. The Prophet (pbuh) when he was asked what is *ihsān*, he said, "That you should worship God as if you saw Him....." (al-Attas, 1995). This perfection is not easy to attain, but it is not an excuse not to put our best effort towards it.

Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj says that there are four aspect among the *ādāb* of prayer: "The presence of the heart (*ḥuḍūr al-qalb*) at the *miḥrāb* (i.e., prayer niche), witnessing (*shuhūd*) of *al-'aql* (the intellect) upon the Giver, the humility (*khushū'*) of the heart without suspicion, and submission (*khudū'*) of the bodily part without expectation; because the presence of the heart lifted the veil, witnessing of *al-'aql* lifted the blame, humility (*khushū'*) of the heart opened the doors, and the submission of the bodily parts brought reward." Hence, *ḥuḍūr*, *shuhūd*, *khushū'*, and *khudū'* should be part and parcel of one's prayer; only then the prayer is considered perfect and complete. Moreover, the Prophet (pbuh) himself says, "Prayer is nothing but submissiveness (*maskanah*), humility (*tawāḍu'*), supplication (*taḍarru'*), sighing and remorse, holding out your hands saying: 'O Allah! O Allah!' Otherwise it is abortive" (Holland, 1989). To attain this perfection of prayer is not easy, it needs effort and patient by the one who is praying: but we can begin by following some of the advices on prayer that we can find in the Holy

Qur'ān, in the *hadīth* of our beloved Prophet (pbuh), and in the sayings and examples as put forward by some of the *Ṣūfis*.

An *ārīf* was reported to say that if your inner eye is not opened to 'see' Him, then "know that He is watching over you and knows what is in your conscience." Hence if we truly believe that Allah is watching over us, then we would be ashamed if our heart and mind wander away to things other than Him during the performance of our prayers. Thus, we have to understand and give our attention to what we are doing and saying in each part of our prayers, as mentioned further by the *ārīf*, "know what you are saying, and take from each *āyah* its taste and its understanding because there is nothing in the prayer except what you understood" (Nicholson, 1963). And there are verses such as ".....until you know what you are saying" (*Ṣūrat al-Nisā'* 4:43), "Do not be one of those who are neglectful (*al-ghāfilīn*)" (*Surat al-A'rāf* 7: 205), and "And perform the Prayer to remember Me" (*Ṣūrat Tā Hā* 20: 14) that remind us that our prayer will be nothing if we are not even aware what and why we are doing such and such action and reciting such and such verses and phrases. Moreover, the Prophet (pbuh) was reported to say, "Though he performs the whole prayer, a man maybe credited with no more than one sixth or one tenth of it. A man gets credit only for that part of his prayer of which he is conscious" (Holland, 1989). Hence for his prayer to be truly accepted, the one who is praying must be conscious and attentive throughout his whole prayer.

Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz also advises that when we recite, be aware that Allah is listening to us, and whenever we give our testimony or supplicating to Him or invoking blessing, then we should comprehend what we are saying and what we are addressing, and to whom we addressed it. This is especially so when we are doing our prostration since the Prophet (pbuh) says, "The servant is never close to God, Exalted is He, than when he is

prostrating himself in worship” (Holland, 1989). Hence, in the same manner, Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz says that there should not be anything close to our heart during prostration other than Allah Almighty. Moreover, in the Holy Qur’ān, Allah Himself, says “Prostrate yourself and draw near” (*Sūrat al-‘Alaq* 96: 19) and “Muḥammad is the Messenger of God: and those who are him are strong against the Unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. Thou wilt see them bow and prostrate themselves (in prayer), seeking Grace from God and (His) Good Pleasure. On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration” (*Sūrat al-Fath* 48: 29). Abū Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, also says, “The servant is nearest to God, Great and Glorious is He, when he prostrates himself in the prayer, so that is the time to make any supplications” (Holland, 1989). Moreover, prostration is a sign of our lowliness and abasement as servant of Allah Almighty; hence during prostration al-Ghazālī suggests that “we reflect in our origin and contemplate on the composition of our body parts which are made of water and clay so that our humility to Allah will increase,” and he says again, “when you place yourself in the position of lowliness, you should be aware that you belong there. You are restoring the branch to its root, for of dust you were created and to dust you shall return.”

There are also many verses in the Holy Qur’ān which command us to be careful with one’s prayer and not fill it with defects and shortcomings, and the one who has been successful in guarding his prayer will have an abundant reward: “Those who remain steadfast to their prayer And those who guard (the sacredness) (*ḥāfizūn*) of their worship. Such will be the honored ones in the Gardens (of Bliss)” (*Sūrat al-Ma‘arij*, 70: 23, 34 & 35), and “Those who humble themselves (*khāshi‘ūn*) in their prayers And who (strictly) guard their prayers. These will be the heirs. Who will inherit the Paradise: they will dwell therein (for ever)” (*Sūrat al-Mu‘minūn*, 23: 2, 9, 10

& 11). As for those who are heedless in their prayer, Allah warns with the verse, “So woe to the worshippers. Who are neglectful (*sāhūn*) of their prayer” (*Sūrat al-Mā‘un*, 107: 4 & 5). And the Prophet (pbuh) liken the one who are heedless in their prayers like the Children of Israel, “That is just how the Children of Israel behaves, so God, Great and Glorious is He, spoke to their Prophet through inspiration, saying ‘Tell your people: ‘You present your bodies before Me and you offer Me your tongues, but you keep your heart from Me. What you are doing is futile.’” Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is also reported to say, “Every prayer that the presence of the heart is not there will only lead to swift penalty” (Holland, 1989).

Moreover, the Prophet (pbuh) indicates to us if a person’s prayer has been done in a state of heedlessness or not, as he says, “If a man’s prayer does not deter him from indecency and mischief, he gain nothing from Allah but remoteness” (Holland, 1989). In other words, since a prayer is full of glorification towards our Creator, and full of supplication for repentance, guidance and forgiveness, then a prayer should deter us from doing more sins and wrongdoing. However, if we are heedless towards what we have said and performed in our prayers, then all those ritual would not have an effect on our hearts and consciousness, and it is almost as good as not praying at all, as the Prophet (pbuh) says, “Many of those who pray derive nothing from their prayer except weariness and strain” (Holland, 1989). May we be not included among this group of people, and may we strive to follow those who are praying as if they ‘see’ Allah and know that Allah is also watching over them.

There are many stories of these pious people on the humility and the humbleness of their prayer that we could take as an example of. For example, Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz says that he once saw a man, when this man wanted to stand to pray, his face became reddened out of fear and reverence of Allah Almighty. His fear and awe towards

Allah were so great that he asked one of his companions to check on the number of the cycle of his prayer lest he would miss-count the number of his cycles. It is also reported that Muslim ibn Yasār, due to his full concentration on his prayer, did not even aware of the collapse of the column near him while he was praying. Al-Ghazālī also reports that there was a pious man who had a gangrenous limb, which needed to be amputated, but this was seemed to be impossible until someone said, “He won’t feel a thing while he is at prayer.” Hence, the operation was done while he was praying and it was successful.

To attain the perfection of prayer like these pious people we need to know the root cause of the problem of our inattentiveness in prayer, which is al-Ghazālī says, “The love of this world. That is the origin of every fault, the basis of every shortcoming, the source of all corruption. Filled with the love of this world, a person become so attached to it that he fails to make provision for the Hereafter. He then has no hope of experiencing the pure bliss of communion in prayer” (Holland, 1989). Thus, the lesser we love towards this world, the easier it will be for our mind and heart not to wander away from what we are doing and saying in front of our Creator, as al-Ghazālī says again, “The solicitude of this life and the solicitude for the next abode are in the heart like water which is poured into a vessel full of sesame oil. According to the amount of water that enter into it the oil goes out, inevitably, for they do not mix.” In other words, the love for this world will only lessen our love for Him; however, the more we love Him, the more it will be for our hearts to be attentive towards Him during our prayers, since only He, and nothing else, has the right to occupy our hearts all the times.

Finally, at the end of the prayer, we give our salutations (*salām*) to the left and right of our shoulders to the angels and to the other believers who are praying with us. And may we come out of the prayer with the same state while we are praying such as presence

(*ḥudūr*) of the heart, deference (*murā‘āh*) and observation (*murāqabah*) of our inner thoughts and senses, and with the same contract with Allah that we have made when we entered our prayer (Maḥmūd & Surūr, 1960). And we thank Allah for guiding us to complete the prayer and we hope that He accepts it and will not return it back to us in the Hereafter as a punishment lest we have been careless in performing it, as mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, “But if someone performs his prayer at the wrong time, without correct ablution, not bowing and prostrating properly and not observing due humility, his prayer will rise up all dark and gloomy, saying: ‘May God neglect you as you have neglected me.’ Then when it has reached wherever God wishes, it will be folded up like an old rag and he will be slapped with it in the face” (Holland, 1989). Moreover, al-Ghazālī advises us to imagine that this prayer of ours could be the last in our life before being called by the Almighty; then we should take due care of it and perform it in the best possible manner, and treat it as leave-taking worship as the Prophet (pbuh) says, “Make your worship a leave-taking worship.” Perhaps we may not live long enough to perform another one like it.

Furthermore, there are other *ādāb* of prayer as observed by the *Ṣūfīs*. Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj writes three of them, which are in *Ṣūfīs’* preference, they prefer not to pray as the *Imām* (i.e., the leader of the prayer), praying in the first *ṣaf* (row), and prolonging prayer. As for being the *Imām*, they prefer someone else to do it since the responsibility of the *Imām* is great; it covers also the other people who pray with him, as the Prophet (pbuh) says, “the *Imām* is the guarantor.” For the *Ṣūfīs* as long as the believer can recite the Opening chapter (*al-Fātiḥah*) and another *sūrah* (chapter) of the Holy Qur’ān correctly it is enough for him to lead the prayer. As for avoiding the first row, they are doing it so that other people may have the chance to do their prayers there since it is believed that the first row is the most excellence place to pray behind the *Imām*.

Moreover, they prefer not to tussle and shove other people just for the sake of contending this most excellent spot, and they are more willing to let other people to have it. As for the third *ādāb*, they prefer not to prolong their prayers lest their minds wander away and will be more easily exposed to the temptations and whispering of *shayṭān* (i.e., the devil). Moreover, prolonging the prayer will increase the possibility for someone to make mistakes and fall to wandering thoughts and doubtfulness (*waswās*). Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj advises that it is better for us to perform our prayers correctly than increasing the number of prayers and prolonging them, as Prophet (pbuh) says: “My prayer is the briefest among man performed in perfection” (Hollland, 1989). It also reported that ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir (d. 37/657), a close and pious companion of the Prophet (pbuh) and one of the early convert to Islam, used to pray rather quickly. When someone asked him about this, he said, “Did you see me skip any of the essentials?” The answer was, “No!” He then said, “I was forestalling the distraction of *shayṭān*.”

In this chapter on the *ādāb* of prayers, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj also points out on the importance of supererogatory prayers and the performance of extra rituals beyond that is required on individual Muslims. These extra activities are often observed by the *Ṣūfīs* and the pious people in accordance with the *ḥadīth qudsī* of the Prophet (pbuh) which says, “The Apostle of God said: “God said: ‘Whoever treats a friend of Mine as an enemy, on him I declare war. My servant draw near Me by means of nothing dearer to Me than which I have established as a duty for him. And My servant continues drawing nearer to Me through supererogatory acts until I love him; and when I love him, I become his ear which he hears, his eye with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. And if he asks Me [for something], I give it to him. If indeed he seek My help, I help him. I have never hesitated to do anything as I hesitated [to

take] the soul of a man of faith who hates death, for I hate to harm him”” (Graham, 1977) Moreover, the most excellence supererogatory acts are the ones performed in the last third of the night, which is the most difficult period of the time for a servant to wake up from his sleep in order to serve his Lord, as the Prophet (pbuh) says, “our Lord descends each night to the nearest heaven when the last third of the night remains. Then He says: ‘Who entreats Me, that I may answer him? Who asks [something] of Me, that I may give to him? Who asks My forgiveness, that I may forgive?’”

The *Ṣūfīs* are well known for their rigorous and disciplined manner in observing these supererogatory acts, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Jūnayd who never left and tired in performing these supererogatory practices in spite of his old-age and weakness. When asked about this matter, he said, “A state by which I reached to Allah Almighty in the beginning (i.e., in my youth); then how it is possible for me to abandon it when I’m at the end (of my life).” Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj also reports of a man who even when he travels in the desert alone, he never misses any of the supererogatory worship that he usually performs voluntarily at home such as the night prayers, all the virtuous practices, and excellent habits and *ādāb*; Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj says that the condition of this type of people are that they strive that their practices at home and during travel are the same, no less than the other. Al-Sarrāj also reports that there is a companion among his companions who among his habits is that whenever he eats something, stands up and prays two cycles, or whenever he drinks or wear clothes or enter the mosque or comes out the mosque, he stands up and prays two cycles; likewise, whenever he feels happy or angry, he stands up and prays two cycles (Maḥmūd & Surūr, 1960. These are some of the examples given by al-Sarrāj to show how devoted these pious people are towards their supererogatory acts and practices.

Conclusion

In short, prayer has a paramount importance as part of the religious life of a Muslim as the Prophet (pbuh) says, “Prayer is a pillar of religion, to neglect it is to prepare the downfall of the religion,” or according to another *ḥadīth*, “Of all a man’s actions, the first to be examined on the Day of Resurrection will be the prayer. If it is found to be complete, it will be accepted of him along with the rest of his works, but if it is found wanting it will be rejected along with the rest of his deeds.” Hence, if our prayer are not accepted, then likewise the rest of our good deeds are not accepted; thus to be certain that these are accepted, we have to strive to make our prayers to be accepted. We have delineated above some of the advices on prayer that has been set

down by our Prophet (pbuh), his blessed Companions, and the pious people after them. Hopefully, by striving to follow these advices, and by His Mercy and Forgiveness, our prayers will be accepted in the Hereafter. Although it is not easy to fill our prayer with *ḥuḍūr*, *shuhūd*, *khushū‘* and *khudū‘*, the effort should be there, as al-Ghazālī says, the root of the problem lies in the love for this world. Thus, the less we love this world, the more we will love Allah Almighty, and the more our hearts will be conscious of Him during our prayers. Hence by cleaning and purifying our hearts, the light of the love of Allah will shine through, then only then our prayer will be as what the Prophet (pbuh) says, “That you should worship God as if you saw Him,” and this is the *maqām* of *iḥsān*.

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