

On Some of the Mysteries of Bowing During Prayer

This, according to the elite, is to leave the station of standing in prayer (*qiyām*) by divine command (*amr*) and to be steadfast (*istiqāmah*)¹ in service, which according to the folk of gnosis necessities claim (*daʿwā*).

According to the folk of love (*ahl al-maḥabbah*), it is to leave the station of disloyalty and sinfulness, and to enter the station of submissiveness, poverty, humility, and self-abasement, which is the station of those of the middle way (*mutawassitūn*).

According to the companions of the heart (*aṣḥāb al-qulūb*), it is to leave the station of standing for God through the degree of standing through God, and to leave the station of witnessing the self-subsistent (*qayyūmiyyah*) through the witnessing of the lights of majesty, and to leave the degree of the unity of divine actions through the degree of the unity of the divine names, and to leave the degree of suspended-hung (*tadallā*) through the degree of two bows'-length (*qāba qawsayn*), just as prostration is the degree of or nearer (*aw adnā*).² After this chapter, an allusion to that shall be made, God willing.

So, the reality of standing (*qiyām*) is to be suspended-hung through the self-subsistence of God and arrival at the horizon of the divine volition. The reality of bowing (*rukūʿ*) is the completion of the arc of servanthood and its annihilation in the light of the majesty of lordship. The bowing of the perfect nearmost ones is realised through this degree, according to their rank and their portion from the presence of the all-encompassing, all-inclusive, essential, and attributive divine names, the details of which are beyond the capacity of these pages.

Thus, when the wayfarer reaches the station of bowing, which is the station of annihilation of the names, he says the magnification of God and raises his hands in the same manner as he did at the time of the opening magnifications of God. This magnification and raising of the hands is the esoteric aspect of one of the opening magnifications of God. The magnification of God for the prostration is also thus. In this degree, which is from the degrees that include the servant and which accompanies him to the end of his wayfaring, he magnifies God beyond description. With his own hand he removes and forsakes the degree of suspended-hung, servanthood, and

1 'Abd al-Razzāq supplies nine separate types of steadfastness (*al-istiqāmah*). See al-Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyyah*, pp. 236–7.

2 See Q.53:8–9.

subsistence through self-subsisting, which is not devoid of the semblance of endurance and claim (*da'wā*) and turns empty-handed towards the station of bowing. During the annihilation of the station of two bows'-length the light of the majesty of the throne of the presence of ever-oneness and aloneness theophanises in his heart and he exalts and glorifies God, and considers himself unworthy of magnifying God. So, with a fearful heart and the embarrassment of falling short in fulfilling the duty of this station, which is one of the great stations of the folk of unity (*tawhīd*), he accomplishes this by fulfilling the duties, the best of which is to describe God majestically, which happens after the exalting of God in all the stations of nearmostness. After that, he accomplishes this by praising God, which is an allusion to the unity of the divine attributes in the degree of the essence.

The tongue of the servant in this degree, while exalting, venerating, and praising God, is the tongue of God. Just as it is reported in the following *ḥadīth*: 'When the verse "Then praise the name of thy Lord, the Almighty"³ was revealed, the Envoy of God, may the blessings of God be upon him and his descendants, said: "Ordain that to be in the bowing."⁴

Some of that which has been mentioned in this degree has been alluded to in the *ḥadīth* regarding the prayer of the Prophet during his heavenly ascension. After the Prophet was commanded to bow, he was told, 'And so, look at My throne.' The Envoy of God said: 'I looked at a majesty which overcame me; I fainted; then I was inspired to say "Praise be to my Lord, the Almighty, with His praise", because of the grandeur of what I saw. When I said this, my unconscious state lifted until I had repeated it seven times. Then I returned to my former self.'

'Throne' can have a variety of meanings, and in this degree it probably is intended to mean the throne of ever-oneness, and the majesty of the degree of oneness, and the presence of the names and attributes, all of which is the throne of the essence. It is possible that the unconscious state of the Prophet alludes to the degree of annihilation in the presence of majesty and the casting aside of egotism. Similarly, overcoming the self is also pertinent to this degree and therefore, glorification, veneration, and praising are done through the tongue of God. The inspiration of the holy essence is for the sake of the vision of this majesty and grandeur in the presence of the oneness and aloneness of the drawing together of the names.

Let it be known that for those arriving at the degree of closeness at the beginning of the theophanies—even though they are theophanies of love—there is amazement and bewilderment, which shake and devastate their

3 Q.56:74.

4 Ibn Bābawayh, *Ḥal al-sharāʿ*, p. 333. * Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'ah*, vol. IV, p. 944.

pure hearts under the lights of the theophany of majesty. If the hearts do not have any more capacity and ability they remain in this bewilderment and amazement until the end; 'My nearest ones are under My cloak, no one knows them save Me.'⁵ Among the angels such a class is also found, which are known as the 'bewildered angels' (*al-malā'ikah al-muḥayyamah*). If the receptivity of the hearts, which is one of the primary gifts of the most holy effusion, is increased, then, after this self-effacement, bewilderment, amazement, incomprehension, obliteration, agitation, fear, dumbfounding, perplexity, and loss of consciousness, that receptivity will be helped gradually by the state of stillness, wakefulness, awareness, alertness, and repose until a state of complete awareness is realised. In this degree, which is the degree of investiture, they become worthy of more elevated theophanies. In the same way, the theophanies take place in accordance with their hearts until they arrive at the utmost limit of closeness and perfection. If they are from the perfect ones, the state of the greater isthmus aids them. This inspiration, which entered the devoted, pure, Aḥmadian, Muḥammadian heart from the presence of the unseen, perhaps was of subtle theophanies to comfort that pure light because of the unconsciousness caused by the theophany of majesty.

Summary

According to the authority of *Misbāḥ al-sharī'ah*, Imām al-Šādiq, peace be upon him, said:

A servant of God does not truly bow (*rukū'*) save that God the exalted adorns him with the light of His magnificence, shades him in the shade of His awe-inspiring majesty, and clothes him in the garment of His chosen ones. Bowing is foremost and prostration is second. And so whosoever comes forth with the meaning of the foremost is appropriate for the second. In the bowing there is training (*adab*) and in the prostration there is closeness (*qurb*). Whosoever accomplishes not the training is not suited for closeness. And so bow a humble bowing to God with a heart that is humble and fearful under His sovereignty, a heart that lowers all the limbs of the body to Him, fearfully and sadly because of what it has missed of the ailments of those who bow. It is reported that al-Rabī' b. Khuthaym⁶ used to spend all night till dawn in vigil in a single inclining of prayer. In the morning he would rise up and say, 'Ah! The pure ones

5 See al-Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm (attr.), *Risālah fī al-sayr wa al-sulūk*, ed. Ḥasan Muṣṭafawī, Qum, 1401 AH/1980, p. 31.

6 Al-Rabī' b. Khuthaym was a Kufan well known for his piety, who died c. 63 AH/682.

have gone ahead and we have been separated.' Complete your bowing by straightening your back, for your zeal in undertaking His service would have been diminished were it not for His help. Flee with your heart from the whisperings, deceptions, and tricks of the devil. For God the High raises up his servants in accordance with their humility before Him and He guides them to the roots of humility and submissiveness in accordance with the awareness of His majesty in their hearts.⁷

In this noble *ḥadīth*, there are also allusions to some of what has been mentioned regarding the bowing. Such as it is possible that the 'adorning' (*tazyīn*) of the servant with the 'light of the magnificence of God' (*nūr bahā' Allāh*) is an allusion to the realisation of the degree of the names and attributes according to the states of the wayfarers because 'magnificence' (*bahī*) comes from the names of the attributes; just as the 'shading' (*iẓlāl*) in the 'shade of majesty' (*ẓilāl al-kibriyā'*) is the annihilation of the servant under the great light of majesty; and the 'clothing' (*takassī*) in the 'garment of the chosen ones' (*kiswat al-asfīyā'*) might be an allusion to subsistence (*baqā'*) after this annihilation, because being chosen is in accordance with the presence of the most holy effusion of God and is of the primary favours and gifts, since the degree of annihilation of servanthood in divinity, which is the reality of lordship and the substance of servanthood, is realised through wayfaring; but, being chosen by God and being clothed in the garment of the chosen ones, which is the degree of being bestowed with the robe of prophethood, does not come under the wayfaring of servanthood but under being chosen by lordship. The primary nature of bowing and the secondary nature of prostration, and the connection to the appropriateness of entering the station of prostration through the entering into the station of bowing and fulfilling their duty, emphasises what has been mentioned. The training for absolute closeness, which is attained in the station of prostration, is realised through the reality of the divine names and attributes and annihilation in His presence.

As for the statement of the object of refuge, Imām Ja'far al-Šādiq, 'And so bow...'⁸ it is the model for the manner of bowing for those of the middle way among the folk of wayfaring. This, according to this *ḥadīth*, is comprised of several matters:

One of these is that, during the entire station of bowing with his heart, fearful and submissive and under the sovereignty of majesty and grandeur, the wayfarer is, in all his inward elements and outward bodily parts, responsive, and is fearful of being deprived of the degree of those who bow and

7 Al-Šādiq, *Miṣbāḥ al-sharī'ah wa miftāḥ al-ḥaqīqah*, p. 21. *Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. LXXXII, p. 108.

8 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. LXXXII, p. 108.

being excluded from this noble station, and in every state obtained he should consider himself helpless and incapable. Just as was reported of Rabī' b. Khuthaym, perhaps the eternal favour and the inclusive mercy of God, may He be glorified and exalted, may encompass his state and set aright the shortcomings, that he might achieve a little of the bowing of the folk of gnosis and the companions of the heart.

Another of these matters is that he should straighten his back while bowing and seek freedom from the crooked sovereignty of the soul, and step on its desire and vision, and remove the rust of his desire from the mirror of his own heart and remove the undertakings of his egotism and egoity, because until he sees himself standing through the command of God and taking aspiring steps in this court, he will be deprived of the availments of bowing and the degree of those who bow. When he crushes the head of desire he comes under divine help, 'and there is no strength or power save in God'.

Another of these matters is that he should safeguard the heart from devilish thoughts, deceptions, and tricks, which in this degree, in accordance with the state of the folk of wayfaring, differ, and during annihilation in the names these thoughts colour him.

In short, the path of guidance and wayfaring is one of humility, submissiveness, and abasement before the sovereignty of majesty, which in every degree in some way is exhibited in the heart of the wayfarer. The more the light of majesty and grandeur illuminates the heart and the more that the lights of the theophanies overwhelm the secrets of the heart, the more humility, submissiveness, abasement, and servanthood increases. God is the guide.