

How can we prayers help our character and behavior?

In order to answer this question we need to consider what we do in our prayers, and how each part of our prayer influence us, and in what way.

Prayer involves three phases, standing, bowing and prostrating. We do several things during each of these phases, When we are standing we focus and confirm our intention to pray to God, then we seek protection in God from Satan, then we recite the Qur'an. When we are bowing we celebrate God and his attributes. As we rise from bowing we state that God hears our prayers. During our prostration we are close to God and celebrate and praise his attributes, and seek his forgiveness. Each of these acts we are connected to God and under his protection and close to his forgiveness and mercy.

Standing in prayers

The intention

Before we enter prayers we state our intention to pray, and state which prayers we are offering. Muslims pray five times each day: Dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and night prayers. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that our deeds are dependent on our intention and what is motivating our actions (Indeed deeds are dependent on intentions, and every person gets what he intends. If our motivation is for worldly gain then we get what we intended; but if our migration is to God and his messenger, then we get what we intends) Bokhari. . In other words our actions must be motivated by the desire to get close to God and to do something good and reach out and help others. If our intention is selfish or if we are motivated by wrong or evil motives then our actions are not accepted and we are deprived of any reward. For example when we give charity in order to be praised for our generosity or to be recognized for our charitable deeds, then we get no reward, in contrast when we give in secret or help those who need our help without hurting their feelings or by reminders of our generosity, then indeed we are rewarded. The Qur'an warns us not to cancel our charitable deeds by reminders of our generosity: chapter 2, verse

The seat of our intention or motivation is our hearts. We do not have to declare our intention for God knows what is deep in our hearts: “He knows what the eye holds, and what the chest conceals” Ghafir 40:

Therefore deeds are only accepted if they are good deeds, and only if motivated by the desire to help and to get close to God and gain his pleasure.

Seeking protection in God from Satan

Before we recite the Qur’an we turn to God seeking his protection from the evil influence of Satan, who appeals to our human weakness. The Qur’an tells us to seek protection in Allah from Satan before we recite the Qur’an:

“When you recite the Qur’an seek protection in Allah from Satan the rejected one”

An-Nahl (the Bees) 16:

No one can help us and protects us from Satan, an avowed enemy to man except God. The Qur’an states that Satan is an enemy to man, therefore we should treat him like an enemy:

“Indeed Satan is an enemy to you, therefore treat him like an enemy”

Fatir (Originator) 35:

When we turn to God seeking his help and protection we admit our weakness and utter dependence on God. In return God promised to help us and protect us. The Qur’an states that those protected and close to God are indeed immune and protected from Satan:

“Indeed you have no authority over my servants; enough is God as a disposer of affairs”

Al-Isra’a (Night Journey) 17: 63

“Those who are righteous when they are afflicted by evil thoughts of Satan bring God to remembrance; and behold they can see clearly”

Al-Araf 7: 201

The way to gain God’s pleasure and protection is to obey his orders and strive in his cause. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that nothing brings closer to God more than obeying what he made obligatory on us; and if we keep coming closer to God with optional service e then gain his love and his protection. (Narrated by Muslim) The Qur’an tells us to be mindful of God and to strive in his cause and to try to get close to him, and to gain his pleasure “O you who believe be conscious of God, and see the means of getting close to him, and strive in his cause in order that you may be successful” Al-Maeda (The Table) 5:

Seeking protection in God from Satan also means that we chose to follow the way of God, and turn away from any other path, that will lead us astray:

“This is my way leading straight, follow it, follow not other paths for it will scatter you astray far rom the path of God”

Al-Ana’m (The Cattle) 6:

In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful

Before we start reciting the Qur’an we invoke and celebrate the name of God, most gracious, most merciful. These are two of the names or attributes of God. The Qur’an mentions many names or attributes for Allah. These are called the most beautiful names of God or his attributes of perfection. We know God by his

names as he described himself in the Qur'an in 99 names. They tell us about God the creator who created everything, and who takes care of his creation. God provides for us and he guides us to his way. He is forgiving and merciful and accepts our repentance. He is just and wrongs no one. He knows what we do. He holds us accountable

Why does God orders us to invoke these two particular attributes? Because they illustrate his power as well as his mercy, Ar-Rahman is a name exclusive to God. It illustrates his attribute that everything depends on him and originates from him, and he takes care of everyone and everything. The Qur'an states:

“Say: call on Allah or call on Ar-Rahman, whoever you call on to him belongs the most beautiful names”

Al-Isra'a (Night Journey) 17:

Ar-Raheem illustrates the wide mercy of God that is available to all, The Qur'an explains that God's mercy supercedes he anger

“And my mercy supercedes my anger”

Al-Ana'm (The Cattle) 6:

God's mercy extends to all things

“And my mercy extends to all things”

Al-Araf 7: 159

This general mercy is for all human beings, animals, birds and every living creature. We exhibit this mercy in the way a mother looks after her baby or an animal looks after her young, or a bird feeds her young. This is small portion of God's mercy that he extends to his creation. The rest of God's mercy he extends to his creatures on the Day of Judgment,

However, there is a special mercy that God has saved for those faithful of his servants, those who believe and give charity

“And my mercy extends to all things, I will write it for those who are righteous, and give in charity and who believe in our signs”

Al-Araf 7: 159

The opening chapter of the Qur’an

When Muslims stand up to pray they recite the Qur’an, God’s own words. We are therefore reciting God’s words and listening to what God wants us to do. God tells us what our obligations are, and shows us his way that we should follow, and warns us not to follow the way of Satan. The Qur’an explains morals and ethics that we should live by, and how we should treat each other with kindness and justice, and be good to our parents, families and neighbors.

During prayer we are talking to God offering devotion to him, and reciting his own words, The opening chapter of the Qur’an summarizes the important concepts of faith

1-Celebrate the praises of God and his attributes of perfection

2-There is a Day of Accountability, when every soul will be judged by God and no soul is treated unjustly

3-Seek help in God

4-Worship and serve God alone

5-Seek guidance from God

6-Follow the way of God, not the way of those who are misguided or the way of those whom God is angry with

“In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful. All praise to God the Lord of the worlds. Most gracious, most merciful, the controller of the Day of Judgment. We do worship you and we seek your help. Guide us to the straight way, the way of those whom you have blessed, not the way of those you are angry with or the way of those who are misguided”

Al-Fatiha (Opening chapter) 1-7

A Muslim then recites other verses of the Qur’an that he have memorized. Listening to the Qur’an recited in our prayers with devotion and humility allows the Qur’an to reach our hearts, and improve our character, and hopefully improve our life and make us better human beings.