



Worldly and Hereafter Effects of Prayer in Nahj al-Balagha

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Abstract: *Prayer is one of the most significant acts of worship for Muslims. Undoubtedly, every action has its consequences and outcomes. The Holy Quran explicitly mentions some of these effects. Similarly, Imam Ali (AS) has highlighted certain impacts of prayer, many of which are recorded in the revered book, Nahj al-Balagha. The central question of this study is: What effects of prayer are mentioned in Nahj al-Balagha? This research, based on the collection of information through a library-based method and its analysis through a descriptive-analytical approach, aims to elucidate the impacts of prayer from Imam Ali's perspective in Nahj al-Balagha. The findings indicate that the effects of prayer in Nahj al-Balagha can be categorized into two groups: worldly and hereafter effects. Some of the worldly effects include: achieving perfection in faith; becoming a means of nearness to God; being the pillar of religion; serving as a sign of religiosity; being the fountainhead of other righteous deeds; fostering steadfastness in goodness; purifying from impurities; leading to the remission of sins; fostering indifference toward worldly goods; liberating one from bonds and constraints; being a source of hope and a path to salvation; acting as a safeguard for individuals; and promoting humility while avoiding arrogance, polytheism, and hypocrisy. The hereafter effects include serving as a shield against the torment of Hell.*

Keywords: *Prayer, Nahj al-Balagha, Imam Ali (AS), Worship.*

1. Introduction

One of the daily acts of worship performed by Muslims five times a day is prayer (Salat). Prayer signifies servitude and obedience (Tabrizi, n.d., p. 1145), submission, reverence, bowing, and a special form of worship unique to Muslims. Its equivalent term in Arabic is Salat (Dehkhoda, 1334 AH, 1372 SH, Vol. 13, p. 20100; Mo'in, 1375 SH, Vol. 4, p. 4810). In Islamic jurisprudence, it is defined as bowing (ruku) and prostration (sujud) in a prescribed manner with specific pillars and recitations (Tusi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 56).

In Islam, prayer is a mandatory legal and religious duty, and it has various effects that can be categorized into worldly and hereafter impacts. The Quran mentions some of these effects, such as prayer serving as a deterrent against immorality and wrongdoing:

"Indeed, prayer restrains [one] from shameful and unjust deeds" (Surah Al-Ankabut: 45).

This study aims to explore the worldly and hereafter impacts of prayer from the perspective of the exemplar of worshippers, Imam Ali (AS), as documented in the esteemed Nahj al-Balagha. The central question addressed is: What are the worldly and hereafter impacts of prayer as presented in Nahj al-Balagha? It is essential to note that not all prayers yield these outcomes; rather, the depth of these effects depends on the believer's sincerity and their profound understanding of the majesty of the Creator. For instance, Imam Ali (AS), upon hearing about a Kharijite man who spent the night praying, remarked: "Sleeping with certainty is better than praying with doubt" (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 97, edited by Subhi Salih).

From this statement of Imam Ali (AS), two important points can be derived:

Not all prayers result in positive worldly or hereafter outcomes. A foundational certainty and sound belief system are prerequisites for prayer to have value and effects. Prayer without faith or with uncertain belief lacks significant impact.

Proper prayer is an outcome of comprehensive belief. Therefore, a worshipper must first transform doubt into certainty before engaging in prayer to realize its intended effects. Otherwise,

superficial prayers may even have negative consequences. As Imam Ali (AS) stated: "There will come a time when worship becomes a means of self-superiority over others" (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 102).

In this case, a person's superficial prayer not only fails to elevate their value but becomes a tool for arrogance and superiority, deviating from its essence as humble worship before the Creator. On the other hand, authentic prayer leaves profound positive effects.

Regarding previous works, there are books such as Prayer in Nahj al-Balagha by Alireza Rajali Tehrani, The Mystery of Prayer in Nahj al-Balagha by Ali Davani, and The Image of Prayer in the Light of the Quran and Nahj al-Balagha by Mojgan Moharram and Mohammad Mokhtari. However, these works briefly and superficially touch upon the effects of prayer without addressing them comprehensively, as this study aims to do.

Additionally, the only scholarly article linking prayer and Nahj al-Balagha is titled The Doctrinal Pillars and Foundations of Islam, Particularly Prayer from the Perspective of Nahj al-Balagha by Hossein Razmjoo. Yet, this article does not explore the impacts of prayer. Hence, this paper offers a novel contribution by examining the effects of prayer in Nahj al-Balagha, an area not previously studied in detail.

The author has utilized translations of Nahj al-Balagha by Dr. Shahidi, Mr. Ansarian, and Feyz al-Islam, with modifications where necessary, taking full responsibility for the translations of the sayings. In the following sections, the worldly and hereafter impacts of prayer in Nahj al-Balagha will be discussed, starting with the worldly effects and then the hereafter effects.

Completion of Faith

Faith (Iman) signifies believing in unseen realities, such as God and the afterlife, accompanied by practical commitment to religion. Linguistically, Iman derives from the root "-m-n," which denotes creating assurance and tranquility in oneself or others. It also means affirming someone's words based on certainty of their truth and eliminating fear, anxiety, and distress (Ahmad Ibn Faris, 1404 AH, Vol. 1, p. 133; Ibn Manzur, 1413 AH, Vol. 1, pp. 223-227). The association of faith with peace and assurance through belief in God likely underlies the use of the term "aman" for Iman (Mostafavi, 1374 SH, Vol. 1, pp. 150-151).

One worldly effect of prayer is its contribution to the perfection of religion and faith. The more consistent an individual is in observing prayer, the closer their faith moves toward completion. Imam Ali (AS) highlights this in Sermon 80:

"O people, women are deficient in faith, deficient in shares, and deficient in intellect. As for the deficiency in their faith, it is due to their inability to perform prayer and fasting during their menstrual days."

Ibn Maytham, in his commentary on this statement, explains that the deficiency in faith is due to the cessation of prayer and fasting during menstruation, as these acts contribute to spiritual refinement and faith completion (Ibn Maytham, 1404 AH, Vol. 2, p. 223). Al-Khu'i attributes this deficiency to a state of impurity that prevents the spiritual closeness required for worship (Khu'i, 1429 AH, Vol. 5, p. 305). Ayatollah Subhani interprets it as a reduction in one's spiritual rank before God (Subhani, p. 562).

While this deficiency in faith among women due to their temporary inability to pray and fast does not imply fault, it indicates a missed opportunity for spiritual growth. This emphasizes the strong connection between prayer and faith completion, as prayer serves as a crucial means of attaining spiritual perfection. Although the completion of faith is a worldly effect, it bears profound implications for the hereafter.

A Means of Closeness to God

The term closeness (taqarrub) linguistically means striving or hastening toward one's benefits. When applied to a servant's closeness to God, it signifies a spiritual proximity achieved by embodying virtues and purging oneself of flaws (Raghib Isfahani, 1412 AH, pp. 664-665). In simpler terms, it refers to approaching God and earning His pleasure. In the Quran and Islamic texts, the concept of nearness to God is expressed through terms like qurb, 'inda rabbihim ("in the presence of their Lord"), and 'indallah ("with God").

In Nahj al-Balagha, prayer is explicitly described as a means of attaining closeness to God in three instances:

Prayer with Almsgiving

"Indeed, almsgiving has been made alongside prayer as a means of closeness for Muslims" (Sermon 199).

Here, Imam Ali (AS) highlights that both prayer and almsgiving serve as tools for Muslims to draw nearer to God.

Prayer as the Offering of the Pious

"Prayer is the offering of every pious person" (Saying 136).

Imam Ali (AS) indicates that prayer brings individuals closer to God, provided that the prerequisite of piety exists.

Prayer as a Regular Obligation

"Maintain prayer, guard it, increase it, and draw closer to God through it, for it has been enjoined upon believers at prescribed times. Do you not hear the response of the people of Hell when asked, 'What led you to Hell?' They will reply, 'We were not among those who prayed.'" (Sermon 199).

In this sermon, Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes prayer as an essential means of spiritual proximity to God. This concept is echoed in translations of Nahj al-Balagha, where phrases like *taqarrabu biha* are rendered as:

"Seek closeness to God through prayer" (Ansarian).

"Perform prayer frequently and make it a means of nearness to your Lord" (Arfa').

"Draw near to God through it" (Feyz).

"Seek proximity to God with prayer" (Shahidi).

Imam Ali (AS) further underscores the importance of prayer in his claim to precedence among leaders:

"O God, I am the first to turn to You, the first to hear and respond, and none preceded me in prayer except the Messenger of Allah (PBUH)." (Sermon 131).

In this statement, Imam Ali (AS) takes pride in his precedence in prayer, regarding it as a sign of his legitimacy in leadership and a measure of his closeness to God. From a correct perspective, the closest servants to God are the most deserving leaders of the Muslim community, as appointing a less virtuous leader over a more virtuous one contradicts divine justice and wisdom.

The Pillar of Religion

Prayer is the most significant act of remembrance of God, similar to how pillars uphold houses and tents, providing stability without which they cannot stand. Similarly, religion and faith cannot exist without prayer. Based on this, prayer is described as a sign of religiosity and the pillar of religion. Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes:

"Fear God, fear God, regarding prayer, for it is the pillar of your religion" (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 47) (Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH; Ardbili, 1381, Vol. 1, p. 423).

As long as the pillar remains firm, the structure does not collapse; however, if the pillar is removed or damaged, the structure will fall. This metaphor is further elaborated in a narration from Imam Baqir (AS), who explains how prayer serves as the pillar of religion:

"Prayer is the pillar of religion, comparable to the central pole of a tent. When the central pole stands firm, the ropes and pegs are effective. If the pole tilts or breaks, neither the ropes nor the pegs can serve any purpose." (Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, 1403 AH, Vol. 79, p. 218).

The status of prayer as the pillar of religion is affirmed in other narrations, with various sources attributing the same phrase to other infallible Imams (Fetel Nishaburi, 1375, Vol. 1, p. 137; Tusi, 1407 AH, Vol. 2, p. 237). Thus, according to Imam Ali (AS) and other infallible Imams, prayer is the foundation of religion, and without it, a Muslim's faith cannot remain intact.

A Sign of Religiosity

Religiosity has its signs, and one of the most important among them is the establishment of prayer. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"The establishment of prayer is the emblem of the faith" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 110).

This emphasis extends to the performance of funeral prayers for the deceased. It is considered a sign of the deceased being a Muslim if an infallible Imam performs the prayer. Imam Ali (AS) illustrates this by stating:

"You are aware that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) stoned the married adulterer and then prayed over him and granted his inheritance to his family" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 127).

Some may have assumed that a married adulterer could no longer be considered a Muslim. Imam Ali (AS) clarifies that the Prophet (PBUH) prayed over such individuals, signifying that they remained within the fold of Islam despite their sins. This behavior highlights that while such actions constitute grave sins, they do not render a person an unbeliever. The Prophet (PBUH) would not have prayed over them if they were deemed disbelievers.

The Source of All Other Acts

Imam Ali (AS) writes to Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr:

"Perform prayer at its appointed time, neither hastening it due to idleness nor delaying it due to preoccupation. Know that every action of yours depends on your prayer" (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 27).

The phrase "every action of yours depends on your prayer" indicates that prayer holds a central and foundational role in all human actions. If prayer is performed correctly and completely, all other deeds will follow suit. This statement from Imam Ali (AS) aligns with the Quranic verse: "Indeed, prayer restrains one from shameful and unjust deeds" (Surah Al-Ankabut, 45).

Therefore, prayer serves as the source of righteous deeds, keeps one away from vices, and ultimately leads to success in the hereafter.

This statement can be interpreted in two ways:

In this world, all human actions are influenced by prayer. If prayer is performed correctly, it blesses other actions, ensuring their correctness.

In the hereafter, as stated in narrations, prayer will be the first deed examined. If it is accepted, other deeds will be accepted as well:

"The first thing a servant is accounted for is prayer. If it is accepted, all other deeds will be accepted" (Kulayni, Al-Kafi, 1407 AH, Vol. 3, p. 268).

Ibn Maytham further comments on the concluding statement:

"All righteous deeds of a person are dependent on their prayer. When a person preserves their prayer, they are likely to preserve their other actions. However, negligence in prayer leads to negligence in other deeds, as prayer is the pillar of religion and the highest form of worship. The Prophet (PBUH) described prayer as the best form of worship and emphasized that it will be the first deed examined on the Day of Judgment." (Ibn Maytham, Vol. 4, p. 428).

This highlights the pivotal role of prayer as the source and foundation of all other acts.

The Relationship between Prayer and Steadfastness in Righteousness

Prayer, as one of the highest Islamic acts of worship, is a source of other righteous deeds. It also protects individuals from vices and encourages good behavior, particularly within families. Imam Ali (AS), referencing the Quranic verse "And enjoin prayer upon your family and be steadfast therein" (Surah Taha, 132), states:

"The Messenger of Allah (PBUH), despite being assured of Paradise, would exert himself in prayer because God had commanded him: 'Enjoin prayer upon your family and be steadfast therein.' The Prophet would instruct his family in prayer and persist in performing it himself" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199).

Imam Ali's words link prayer with enjoining good and steadfastness in righteousness. Similar themes appear in other verses, such as those that pair prayer with patience (Surah Al-Baqarah, 45, 153). Additionally, the Quran's instruction to the Prophet following his Prophethood, "O you wrapped in a garment, arise and pray the night except for a little" (Surah Al-Muzzammil, 1-2), underscores the role of prayer in enduring difficulties, enjoining good, and forbidding evil.

Allama Tabatabai explains:

"The Prophet (PBUH), having faced mockery and harm in his mission, sought solace in wrapping himself in a garment for rest. However, he was commanded to arise and perform night prayers, finding resilience through prayer and patience rather than seeking comfort in sleep. Just as Muslims are instructed to seek help through prayer and patience, this guidance strengthened the Prophet to endure greater challenges and trials." (Tabatabai, Tafsir al-Mizan, 1417 AH, Vol. 20, p. 60).

Thus, prayer fortifies individuals to withstand hardships, such as the challenges of enjoining good and calling others to truth, particularly within families. The Prophet's actions, as narrated by Imam Ali (AS), serve as a model for nurturing prayer and encouraging worship in children, emphasizing the parents' responsibility toward their families.

Purification from Impurities

One of the worldly effects of prayer is purification from impurities. Imam Ali (AS), referencing a comparison made by the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), states:

"The Prophet likened prayer to a hot spring at a man's door in which he bathes five times a day and night. Can any dirt remain on him?" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

Undoubtedly, if a person washes themselves five times a day, no trace of dirt or impurity will remain. In Arabic, the term al-daran refers to filth or dirt (Ibn Faris, 1404 AH, Vol. 2, p. 271; Sahib Ibn Abbad, 1414 AH, Vol. 9, p. 286), and al-hamma derives from hamu al-shams, meaning the heat of the sun (Murtada al-Zabidi, 1414 AH, Vol. 19, p. 343). Shooshtari, in his commentary, explains that al-hamma refers to hot water used for healing purposes, and the daran mentioned here symbolizes the dirt of sins and inner impurities (Shooshtari, 1376 SH, Vol. 13, p. 160).

Thus, prayer is likened to a special hot spring used for treating ailments, as Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi notes in his commentary:

"Prayer is not like an ordinary spring; rather, it is a unique source with extraordinary effects in removing impurities." (Makarem Shirazi, Vol. 6, p. 728).

It is important to mention that prayer revives the spirit of taqwa (God-consciousness) within a person and, in accordance with the verse:

"Indeed, prayer restrains one from shameful and unjust deeds" (Surah Al-Ankabut, 45), it prevents future immoral acts while simultaneously inviting repentance for past transgressions. Thus, one of the key effects of prayer, as highlighted by Imam Ali (AS) in Nahj al-Balagha, is purification from impurities.

Cause of Sin Forgiveness

Sin, in its broad sense, includes acts of disobedience, wrongdoing, and transgression (dhamb, ithm, khatā, etc.) (Dehkhoda, 1372 SH, Vol. 11, p. 17006). A sinner is one who defies God's commands (Moin, 1375 SH, Vol. 3, p. 3396). In the Quran, various terms, such as dhamb, ithm, sayi'ah, 'asā, and khatā, are used to describe sins.

Prayer plays a vital role in erasing sins. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Indeed, prayer sheds sins as leaves fall from trees" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

Imam Ali (AS) compares sins to excess leaves surrounding the sturdy trunk of a tree, which, when a refreshing breeze blows, fall away like autumn leaves. Similarly, prayer serves as a revitalizing breeze that causes sins to fall away and lightens the burden of the individual. This statement aligns with the Quranic verse:

"Indeed, prayer restrains one from shameful and unjust deeds" (Surah Al-Ankabut, 45).

Moreover, prayer not only prevents immoral behavior but also leads to the forgiveness of certain past sins and paves the way for repentance and seeking God's mercy.

Therefore, one of the notable effects of prayer is the shedding of sins, which purifies the individual and facilitates their spiritual renewal.

Detachment from Worldly Pleasures

Another worldly effect of prayer is detachment from material possessions. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"A group of believers, who are not distracted by the adornments of this world, nor by the delight of children or wealth, have truly understood the essence of prayer. Allah, the Exalted, says: 'Men whom neither trade nor sales distract from the remembrance of Allah, the establishment of prayer, and the giving of zakat'" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

This indicates that true attention to divine remembrance through prayer leads to an indifference to commerce, trade, and worldly pleasures. For the sincere worshipper, the world becomes a mere tool for worship and closeness to Allah rather than a means for indulgence in desires or transient enjoyments.

Consequently, prayer instills a sense of detachment from worldly possessions, guiding individuals toward their proper use and helping them avoid excessive indulgence.

Freedom from Bondage

Another profound effect of prayer is liberation from shackles and bondage. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Prayer unties the knots of sins from the servant's neck" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

The term "ribaqa" refers to a rope with multiple nooses, typically used to tether animals in a row (Makarem Shirazi, 1386 SH, Vol. 7, p. 727). Sins weigh heavily upon a person's soul, burdening them with guilt and distress. However, turning toward Allah through prayer allows one to metaphorically untie these bonds, overcoming desires and worldly attachments.

When the worshipper faces Allah and declares, "You alone we worship, and You alone we seek for help" (Surah Al-Fatiha, 5), they free themselves from all illusory ties, achieving true freedom in the light of servitude to Allah.

Thus, prayer provides liberation from the chains of sin, as highlighted by Imam Ali (AS).

Source of Hope and Path to Salvation

Hope (amal) is defined as trust, expectation, and anticipation (Farsi Dictionary, under the term "hope"). Its Arabic equivalents include amal, raja', tama', and 'asa'. One of the effects of prayer is fostering hope in Allah and His forgiveness. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"A sin that leaves me with enough time to perform two rak'ahs of prayer and seek Allah's pardon does not distress me" (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 299, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

This statement does not imply that Imam Ali (AS) would commit sins but rather emphasizes a profound truth: as long as a person maintains their bond with Allah through prayer, they can remain hopeful for salvation from the consequences of sin and for relief from worldly and otherworldly burdens. This is because maintaining servitude to Allah keeps the door of repentance open. Despair in Allah's mercy, on the other hand, is regarded as a grave sin (Surah Al-Hijr, 56).

Imam Ali (AS) also underscores the critical role of prayer in enabling repentance and seeking divine forgiveness. Thus, prayer serves as a source of hope, ensuring that individuals never despair of Allah's mercy.

Consideration for Others

Moderation and avoiding extremes are essential in every endeavor, including prayer. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"When you lead people in prayer, do not prolong it excessively or make it too short, for among them may be one who is sick or in need. I asked the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) when he sent me to Yemen, 'How should I lead them in prayer?' He said: 'Lead them in prayer as you would lead the weakest among them, and be compassionate toward the believers.'" (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 53, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

This guidance highlights the responsibility of the prayer leader to consider the circumstances of those praying in congregation, including the sick, those in difficulty, or the weak. Lengthy prayers might discourage or burden the congregation, while overly hasty prayers might compromise their quality and validity.

Thus, moderation and consideration for others are essential in prayer. This principle, as demonstrated in prayer, extends to other aspects of life. Therefore, beyond being an act of worship, prayer also serves as a lesson in social ethics, teaching individuals how to navigate communal life with empathy and balance.

Habit of Discipline

One of the effects of prayer is cultivating a habit of discipline. Imam Ali (AS), in a letter to the governors of cities, instructs:

"As for prayer: lead the people in the noon prayer when the sun has turned to the west, and the shadow has reached the size of a goat's pen. Lead them in the afternoon prayer when the sun is still shining, leaving enough daylight for traveling two leagues. Perform the evening prayer when the fasting person breaks their fast, and the pilgrim moves toward Mina. Pray the night prayer when the twilight has disappeared until one-third of the night has passed. Perform the Morning Prayer when a person can

recognize the face of their companion. Lead the congregation in prayer according to the capacity of their weakest members, and do not cause aversion or hardship for them" (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 52, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

From this directive, several important points emerge:

Training people, particularly rulers, to be disciplined in performing tasks and managing governmental affairs.

Considering the conditions of all individuals during prayer, which suggests that such rulers would also consider people's circumstances, particularly the weak, in other matters.

In another letter to Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, Imam Ali (AS) advises:

"Perform prayer at its appointed time. Do not hasten it due to idleness, nor delay it due to being occupied. Know that all your actions are secondary to your prayer" (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 27, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

This directive underscores the importance of prioritizing prayer while also highlighting the role of discipline in the conduct of Muslim leaders.

Sanctification of the Place of Prayer

Another effect of prayer is the sanctification of certain places. Any location where prayer is performed becomes sacred. Mosques and other places of worship are sanctified because they are spaces where the remembrance of Allah takes place. Imam Ali (AS), describing the world, states: "The world is the place of prostration for Allah's friends, the prayer site of His angels, the descent of revelation, and the trade ground for His saints" (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 131, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

If the term salat in this context is understood to mean "prayer," it supports the notion that prayer sanctifies locations. Ibn Maytham interprets this phrase as referring to the prostration of angels before Adam (AS) (Ibn Maytham, Vol. 5, p. 314). Dibaj explains "the mosque of Allah's friends" as referring to places where the saints of Allah prostrate, worship, and uphold the truth. He also notes that some angels are assigned to worship on Earth (Dibaj, 1424 AH, Vol. 6, p. 2826). However, Nawab Lahiji interprets salat in this context as "supplication," which would not pertain to the discussion of prayer sanctifying places (Nawab Lahiji, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 305).

The world itself holds little intrinsic value, but through the prayer and worship of Allah's servants, it attains beauty and sanctity. Therefore, any place where prayer is performed frequently becomes sacred and deserving of greater respect.

Preservation of Humanity

One of the effects of prayer is its ability to preserve and protect human beings. In other words, through prayer, people are less inclined to commit acts of oppression or injustice, which contributes to the safeguarding of individuals. Imam Ali (AS), addressing this concept, states in Sermon 192: "And for this reason, Allah has safeguarded His believing servants through prayers, almsgiving, and striving through fasting on appointed days — calming their limbs, humbling their gazes, subduing their rebellious desires, softening their hearts, removing arrogance from them. Additionally, the prostration that presses the dignified faces into the dust fosters humility, placing the precious parts of the body upon the ground signals modesty, and the fasting that causes bellies to cling to their backs leads to submission. Through almsgiving, the fruits of the earth and other resources are redirected to the needy and the poor. Look at the impact of these actions (prayer, fasting, prostration, and almsgiving): how they crush the branches of pride and prevent the sprouts of arrogance and self-conceit from emerging." (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 192, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

In this sermon, Imam Ali (AS) elaborates on the values, significance, and effects of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, viewing them as shields against oppression and the deceit of Satan. Key insights derived from this sermon include:

Protection from Injustice and Oppression:

Prayer serves as a safeguard, protecting individuals from engaging in acts of oppression and injustice.

Defense against Satanic Deceit:

Prayer and related acts act as barriers against Satan's plots, aligning with the Quranic verse: "Indeed, prayer restrains [one] from shameful and unjust deeds" (Surah Al-Ankabut, 45).

Inner Peace and Reassurance:

Prayer ensures calmness and tranquility of the body and soul, preventing moral and ethical corruption. Repentance and heartfelt attention to Allah bring inner peace and free individuals from mental distress.

Moral and Ethical Cleansing:

Prayer helps protect individuals, especially influential groups like students and academics, from moral corruption and societal vices. It fosters a state of purity, aligns behavior with divine guidance, and promotes proximity to Allah.

Tranquility of the Heart:

Since Allah is the ultimate purpose of human nature, the soul finds true peace only in His presence. Prayer fulfills the innate longing for divine connection.

Combatting Selfishness and Arrogance:

Prayer represents the core of Islamic teachings aimed at eradicating selfishness and pride. It constantly redirects human attention toward Allah, thereby eliminating the roots of arrogance and its associated evils.

Prevention of Arrogance and Self-Conceit:

Beyond merely halting the growth of arrogance, prayer prevents its emergence altogether.

Humility in Actions and Appearance:

Humility in the heart is reflected in outward expressions, particularly in the eyes. Prayer fosters this humility, visibly manifesting as a subdued gaze.

Therefore, one of the key effects of prayer, as highlighted by Imam Ali (AS) in Nahj al-Balagha, is the preservation of human beings from internal and external corruption, safeguarding their morality, spirituality, and social integrity.

Avoidance of Arrogance

Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Prayer has been made obligatory to purify [humans] from arrogance" (Nahj al-Balagha, Wisdom 252).

Prayer inherently involves humility and submission before Allah (Ibn Maytham, Vol. 1, p. 636). It consists of acts such as bowing (ruku), prostration (sujud), and reverence (khushu) (Fi Zilal Nahj al-Balagha, Vol. 4, p. 366). These elements of prayer are incompatible with arrogance, making prayer an effective means of purifying individuals from this moral illness.

Avoidance of Polytheism (Shirk)

Polytheism (shirk) refers to associating partners with Allah in sovereignty or lordship (Ibn Manzur, 1413 AH, Vol. 7, p. 100). Shirk can be classified into two categories:

Major Shirk: Ascribing partners to Allah.

Minor Shirk: Acts like ostentation (riya), hypocrisy, and considering others alongside Allah in deeds (Raghib Isfahani, 1412 AH, p. 452; Sajjadi, 1373 SH, Vol. 2, p. 1054).

One of the effects of prayer is distancing oneself from shirk. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Allah sent Muhammad (PBUH) with the truth to deliver His servants from worshipping idols to worshipping Him" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 147, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

Since prayer is one of the most significant forms of worship, it can be interpreted as part of this transition from idolatry to servitude to Allah. Furthermore, Nahj al-Balagha highlights the theocentric content of prayer, such as the recitation of Surah Al-Ikhlâs and the monotheistic invocations in ruku and sujud, which negate all forms of polytheism.

If performed correctly and free from ostentation, prayer not only prevents major and minor forms of shirk but also establishes the foundation for the correctness of other deeds. This is because a person's internal beliefs form the basis of their external actions.

Avoidance of Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy (nifaq) stems from the Arabic root nafaqa, meaning to create an opening or a hidden escape route, similar to a mouse hole (Farahidi, 1414 AH, Vol. 3, p. 1825). Hypocrisy refers to entering religion through one way while leaving it through another (Raghib Isfahani, 1412 AH, p. 819). It involves pretending to believe outwardly while concealing disbelief inwardly, essentially a divergence between one's inner state and outward behavior (Fayoumi, 1928, Vol. 2, p. 618).

Prayer helps individuals distance themselves from hypocrisy. Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes consistency between one's inner self and outward actions, stating:

"Whoever does not differ in their inner self and outward appearance, and whose actions and words align, has fulfilled their trust and purified their worship" (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 26, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

This statement underscores sincerity and the alignment of outward actions with inner beliefs. A person who performs their worship sincerely and free from any impurities strives to harmonize their inner and outer selves, adhering to divine commands and maintaining trust.

As the clearest example of worship, prayer distances individuals from moral corruption and ensures they uphold both divine and societal responsibilities.

Transition to Hereafter Effects

Having discussed the worldly effects of prayer in Nahj al-Balagha, two examples of its effects in the hereafter, as mentioned in Imam Ali's (AS) words, are presented below:

A Shield against the Fire

According to Quranic verses, after death and on the Day of Judgment, individuals will either enter Paradise, reside among the people of A'raf, or face Hellfire. One of the effects of prayer is preventing individuals from entering Hell. Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes this in Nahj al-Balagha:

"Safeguard the matter of prayer, preserve it, perform it abundantly, and seek closeness to Allah through it, for it has been enjoined upon the believers as a timed obligation. Have you not heard the response of the people of Hell when they are asked: 'What caused you to enter Hell?' They reply: 'We were not among those who prayed'" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

Imam Ali (AS) consistently advised his followers to establish prayer, stating:

"Fear Allah, fear Allah concerning prayer" (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 47).

He urged them to maintain it, saying:

"Safeguard the matter of prayer and preserve it"

And to pray frequently and seek closeness to Allah through it:

"And seek closeness to Him through prayer"

He emphasized that prayer, as a prescribed obligation, is to be performed at specific times throughout the day and night:

"For it has been enjoined upon the believers as a timed obligation."

Imam Ali referenced the Quranic passage where the people of Hell confess that their neglect of prayer led to their punishment:

"When asked: 'What caused you to enter Hell?' They reply: 'We were not among those who prayed'" (Surah Al-Muddathir, 42-43).

Thus, safeguarding prayer and praying frequently serve as shields against Hellfire. Conversely, neglecting prayer leads some to Hell due to their indifference. Furthermore, the acceptance of other deeds is contingent upon the acceptance of prayer. If prayer is not accepted, other actions will also be rejected. Al-Kulayni corroborates this in Al-Kafi, elaborating on this statement from Imam Ali (AS) with additional details cited by Nahj al-Balagha commentators (Al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, 1407 AH, Vol. 3, p. 431).

A Means of Ascension in the Ranks of Paradise

Another effect of prayer is entry into Paradise and ascension through its ranks. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) exerted himself in prayer even after being given the glad tidings of Paradise, as Allah commanded him: 'Command your family to prayer and be steadfast in it.' Thus, he would command his family to pray and persevere in performing it himself" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199, Sharif al-Radhi, Subhi Salih, 1414 AH).

Despite receiving the promise of Paradise, the Prophet (PBUH) continued to exert himself in prayer, as Allah commanded him to enjoin his family to perform it and to remain steadfast. He persistently encouraged his family to pray and exhibited patience and dedication in fulfilling this command.

This demonstrates that even though the Prophet (PBUH) had been assured of Paradise, he strove in prayer to ascend further in its ranks. While many pray out of fear of Hell, the Prophet (PBUH), who was far removed from such a fate, prayed out of profound recognition of Allah's greatness, engaging in worship and submission. This devotion elevated him to the highest ranks of

Paradise. Thus, prayer is one of the most significant means of entering Paradise and ascending through its degrees.

2. Conclusion

This study aimed to elucidate the effects of prayer as highlighted in Nahj al-Balagha. It concluded that prayer holds numerous effects and blessings, categorized into two domains:

Worldly Effects:

Distancing oneself from polytheism and hypocrisy.
Completing one's faith.
Drawing closer to Allah.
Acting as the pillar of religion and a sign of religiosity.
Inspiring virtuous deeds.
Cleansing from impurities.
Shedding sins.

Hereafter Effects:

Serving as a shield against Hellfire.
Facilitating entry into Paradise and progression through its ranks.

The neglect of prayer is identified as a cause of punishment in Hell, while its proper observance protects against such fate. Most of the statements attributed to Imam Ali (AS) on the subject of prayer in Nahj al-Balagha are echoed in the sayings of other infallibles, as noted by commentators of Nahj al-Balagha.

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