



Qur'an and Prayer

۴۱) ادب العظمین: ان کا نامک اور ان کے تمام کاموں کا
 ۴۲) یوم الدین: حساب، کتاب کا دن
 ۴۳) اھلنا الصراط المستقیم: (اے لوگو! تم
 راستے پر چلنے کی توفیق عطا فرما جس میں کوئی کمی نہ ہو۔
 (سج) راستے پر۔
 ۴۴) الممضوب علیہم یعنی پیوستہ۔



Whilst the Qur'an provides no formal lessons on prayer it informs Muslim prayer in a number of ways.

The Qur'an opens in prayer. The first sura, the *Fatihah*, is used in the five times a day ritual *salah* prayers: twice in the morning prayer, three times in sunset prayer, four times in the noon, afternoon and evening prayer, making a total of at least seventeen times a day. Moucarray describes the Qur'an as opening with a prayer from man, whilst 'the rest of the Qur'an is God's response' providing guidance as to the "straight path" which man has sought and prayed for.⁷⁵ Kenneth Cragg also described the *Fatihah* as 'the only place where the Qur'an "prays" – save in narrative situations of the patriarchs and the prophets where there is address to God ...'⁷⁶. But these observations do not give a complete picture of the relationship the Qur'an has with prayer.

There are numerous qur'anic phrases which are used, even recommended, as part of the regular *salah*, or at least as a main constituent of *dhikr*. *Surat al-Ikhlās* (Q112) 'enters into most *salat* performances and countless litanies of praise'⁷⁷. Whilst, as our co-authored article reminds us, the final two suras (Q113 and Q114) are frequently used as protection from evil. I have heard it observed that, rather like

⁷⁵ Moucarray, Chawkat, *Two Prayers for Today: The Lord's Prayer and the Fatiha*, Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithy, 2007:23

⁷⁶ Cragg, Kenneth. *The Mind of the Qur'an*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973:83

⁷⁷ Graham, William A. and Navid Kermani, 'Recitation and aesthetic reception', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006:124

Celtic circling prayer, the main text of the Qur'an is bounded by the *Fatihah* at the beginning and by the two invocations of protection at the end. *Surat al-Baqarah* concludes with a prayer for forgiveness which is 'often recited before going to sleep'⁷⁸. Amongst other examples of regularly used Qur'an portions is *Surat Yā Sīn* (Q36) which 'is recited at burials, on the approach of death and on the "Night of Quittance" (*laylat al-bara'a*, a kind of Muslim All Souls Night)'. Indeed, one of the distinct differences between the important, authoritative Hadith material so beloved of faithful Sunni Muslims for all that it teaches about Islamic practice, and the Qur'an, is that it is the latter, the Qur'an which is taken on the tongue in prayer and worship.

There are theories that formulas in the Qur'an, not least summary phrases providing names of God, are pre-existing prayer phrases from Christian or Jewish, if not other sectarian communities from the region in which Islam emerged⁷⁹. Neuwirth suggests that this could be true of some of the many *qul* ('say') phrases in the Qur'an⁸⁰. The Andalusian mystic philosopher, Ibn al-Arabi, set out specific guidance on how to use the beautiful names found in the Qur'an to call on God⁸¹. Meanwhile the style and sound of the Qur'an, not least its tight rhyming patterns, are deemed by many to 'actualise the revelatory act itself' when correctly recited, creating the nearest thing to encounter with God in prayer that conservative Islam will admit⁸².

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁹ Motzki, Harald. 'Alternative accounts of the Qur'an's formation' in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 61

⁸⁰ Neuwirth, Angelika. 'Structural, linguistic and literary features', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006:108

⁸¹ McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. 'The tasks and traditions of interpretation' in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006:195

⁸² Graham and Kermani, 'Recitation ...', 118.

As Cragg observes, there are examples of extempore prayer in narrative passages in the Qur'an. Amongst these are the accounts: of the mother of Miriam who prayed for a child whom she could dedicate to God and Zechariah's prayer for a virtuous offspring (*Ahl- 'Imran*, Q3:35-36 &38), of Abraham who dedicated the place of worship, requesting that those who followed on would be nation submitted to God(*al-Baqara*, Q2:128-129) and of Noah initially lamenting his drowning son (*Hud*, Q11:45). Commentaries do not dwell on these as lessons about prayer but it is clear that exemplars of faith are people of prayer. Unsurprisingly, then, it is a verse enjoining the performing of prayer from the setting of the sun to the darkness of the night (*Bani Isra'il*, Q17:78) which is the most commonly used to adorn mosque hall *mihirabs*⁸³. The Qur'an attests to the centrality of prayer in the life of Muslims, even as it provides the phrases and sounds with which the prescribed liturgical prayers are offered.

⁸³ Blair, Sheila and Jonathan Bloom. 'Inscriptions in art and architecture' in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006:170