

Opinion 2: this week, the Brunswickan received two opinion articles.

## The truth about Muslims' prayer

by Yahia Fadlalla

Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe, and may His Peace and Blessing be upon all His prophets including Moses, Jesus, and Muhammed.

Dear Reader, this humble attempt is intended to shed *some* light of truth on what's said about Muslims' Prayers mischievously, ignorantly and/or without any prior information or background.

No doubt that prayer, in any religion, is important and well recognized. It strengthens the belief in the existence of God and transmits this belief to innermost recesses of the heart. If one performs it devoutly, it uplifts the spirit, clarifies the conscience and comforts the soul. In the Islamic prayer, every muscle joins with the soul and mind in the worship and glory of God *alone*. In Islam, every individual, man or woman, prays on his/her own behalf and communicates *directly* with God who is All-seeing, All-hearing. There is no clergy exists in Islam, nor is it needed. It is very strongly recommended that prayers are said in congregation. Otherwise, the individual's prayer on his/her own is valid anywhere so long as the place is clean. No temple, no offerings are necessary. In The Qur'an (The Holy book of Islam) the believers are asked not only to *say* but to keep up and perfect their prayers (The Qur'an 2:277;72:20).

The Muslim makes sure of his/her

cleanliness before starting his/her prayer. He/she carries out a prescribed ablution. This ablution draws one's attention to one's own cleanliness both physically and spiritually. Furthermore, the Muslim say his/her prayers in a clean place, directing his/her face towards the *Ka'bah* in Mecca and his/her heart to God, conscious of being a member of the universal brotherhood/sisterhood of Islam. All worshipping the one and only God in one and the same manner, facing in one direction, and when in congregation, keeping in straight line/s. While praying, the Muslim does his/her best not to become distracted by his/her surroundings. He/she recites words of The Qur'an, kneels and prostrates him/herself to God and praises Him. In his/her prayer, a Muslim realizes that the Deity is with him/her, watching and hearing him/her, and responding to his/her supplications. A Muslim's soul is at its peak of joy, he/she feels closest to God when he/she prostrates to Him in praise, and asking for His Guidance and Help. The *Ka'bah* was built by Ibrahim and his son Ishmael as a place for monotheistic prayer. Islamic traditions tells us that Ibrahim put the same Black Stone in position with his own hands in the very place it still occupies today, forming one of the corner stones of the *Ka'bah*. Was not Ibrahim the first distinguished example of the devout Muslim? He was brave enough, even in his youth, to denounce the practice of idol-worship

adopted by his people-including his own father. He went to the wilderness in submission to the will of God, taking with him his wife and child. In a full obedience he was even prepared to sacrifice his own son at his Lord's command. So, Muslims do not face the *Ka'bah* while praying according to a superstition, but rather to deep religious sentiment felt in every believer's heart. As the first place ever built for the worship of God alone it is the focus towards all Muslims direct themselves in their prayers. Also, God says in The Qur'an: "We have seen the turning of your face to Heaven (for guidance O Muhammed) verily We shall make you turn towards a Qiblah (direction) which is dear to you. So turn your face towards the Inviolable Place of Worship and ye (O Muslims) wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces (when ye pray) towards it" (The Qur'an 2:144). Thus, there is *no* contradiction about the direction to be faced in prayer. The divine order is to face the *Ka'bah*. A Muslim who keeps up prayers and humbly does his/her best to perfect them will be felicitous. God says in The Qur'an: "Felicitous indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers, and who shun vain conversation, and who act for the sake of purity" (The Qur'an 23:124, Also see 29:45).

For their high spiritual value the five daily prayers are extremely important in Islam. They should be said by every Muslim sane man or woman.

Prayers are simplified for the traveler and the sick. The five daily prayers were *divinely* instituted in Mecca prior to the prophet's move to Medina. The prophet taught every minute details of the prayers to his followers who in turn taught others. The records of the Prophet's Traditions are rich in such details.

There are several comments made by orientalist on the value and the way the Muslims' prayers are said which warrant discussion:

Anderson commented: "To a Muslim there is little connection between prayer and ethics; a man who rises from prayer to cheat will be rewarded for the prayer and punished for the cheating". Anderson forgot that the reward for such a man may be reduced to nil for praying so insincerely. Were a Muslim to commit an immoral act so closely succeeding his devotions, it would only show how far his mind was from God. Prophet Muhammed (prophet of Islam) was quoted to have said that he whose prayers do not keep him away from indecency has no prayers.

Zwerner tried to connect the act of prayer with animistic beliefs. He put forward such arguments as: "Muhammed forbade prayers being held in or near watering places of camels because camels were created by devils". No one, particularly Muslims, can believe in devils creating anything. It is only God who is the Creator. The logical explanation is that the watering places for camels,

with their dung, would not be clean enough places for the saying of prayers. Besides, who would choose such places to say his/her prayers when there is the the dry desert, the clean shelter of the home or mosque in which to pray?

The Muslims' communal prayer in Mosques was interpreted by Friar Simon and Mark Toledo to be praises to Muhammed and not to God *alone*.

How different from the above conjectures were the admiring remarks of one Pennis who visited Jerusalem: "In the likeness of monks, they [Muslims] pray exceedingly in a very ordered way ... wherever they are on earth at certain hours of the day, with bended knees and prostrated to earth, they adore God devoutly". And in the words of his contemporary Ricoldo: "And what indeed shall I say of their prayer? So great is their devotion that I was astonished when I saw it and proved it by experience".

For any questions concerning this article, and/or Islam, please contact The Straight Path group at 453-9513.

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