

## THE MUSLIM AT PRAYER

It is important to identify ourselves as much as we can with the Muslim as he prays, and not simply to look on critically as spectators.

It is therefore helpful to try to appreciate and understand the **Call to Prayer** and the commonest Muslim prayer, the **Fatihah**.

[A] **THE CALL TO PRAYER** (chanted five times a day with variations from every mosque throughout the Islamic world):

*"God is most great, God is most great, I bear witness that there is no god but God; I bear witness that Muhammed is the Apostle of God. Come ye unto prayer. Come ye unto good. Prayer is better than sleep. Come ye to the best deed. God is most great. God is most great. There is no god but God."*

(Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* p.30)

Q – Is there any way in which we can hear this as a Call to Prayer, and pray with and for Muslims whenever we hear it?

[B] **THE FATIHAH** (the first surah of the Qur'an, recited as part of the prayers five times a day):

*"In the name of the merciful Lord of mercy.  
Praise be to God, the Lord of all being,  
The merciful Lord of mercy,  
Master of the Day of Judgement.  
Thee alone we worship  
And to Thee alone we come for aid.  
Guide us in the straight path,  
The path of those whom Thou hast blessed,  
Not of those against whom there is displeasure,  
Nor of those who go astray."*

(Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'an* p.74)

In observing the postures which the Muslim adopts for his ritual prayer, remember:

- Mohammed may well have learned these postures from Syrian Christian monks of the Coptic Church
- Prostration is found in the Bible (eg Ezekiel 1:28, Psalms 95:6 & 134:2, Matthew 26:39, Luke 22:41)
- The Muslim is trying to express his total submission to God in a physical way
- Muhammed first taught Muslims to pray towards Jerusalem like the Jews. It was only when his message was rejected by the Jews that they changed the direction to Mecca.

Q – Can we as Christians share this prayer?

Are there any sentiments which we would not want to express in prayer?

- Compare the Fatihah with the Lord's Prayer. What are the main similarities and the main differences between the two prayers?
- The Arabic word for this kind of formal prayer is salat, and needs to be distinguished from du'a which means prayers of personal petition. How can we explain to the Muslim the difference between salat and du'a in Christian prayer?
- We can point out that the Lord's Prayer is recited by some Christians rather like the Fatihah.

### **Read Acts 10: 1-6.**

Cornelius needed to hear the proclamation of the Gospel before he could believe. But if God could speak in this way about the prayers of Cornelius before he believed, how should this affect our thinking about the prayers of the devout Muslim?

### **Read Genesis 10: 1-18.** (Especially verses 2-11)

Abraham seriously misjudged Abimelech and his relationship with God. How might we be guilty of making the same mistake about Muslims and their attitude to God?

## **FOR ACTION**

Ask a Muslim to explain to you his salat, the formal prayers which he prays five times a day.

Ask him to explain what prayer means to him and what are the different kinds of prayer that can be offered – the formal prayers (salat) and informal. Personal prayer (du'a).

Find a Muslim Prayer Manual which gives the words of the ritual prayers with translation.

If you know a Muslim well enough, ask if you can pray with him, and offer a prayer to God about any special needs you or he may have. Ask your Muslim friend to suggest what postures you should adopt for prayer – standing, kneeling or sitting.

The following is an example of a prayer prepared by an Indian Christian for use in the home of a sick Muslim friend:

“O God, creator of the universe – You who created and now sustain all your creation with the word of your power; we worship You. We remember how great You are, and yet how loving You are. There is no-one like you. We remember, too, that You are closer to us than our jugular vein. You know all things and so we are assured that You know each of us – our sin and our sickness. We thank You that You are able to deal with our sinfulness and to heal our diseases. We remember the words that You spoke through your prophet Isaiah, that all we like sheep have gone astray but You have laid our sins upon Him, even Jesus, and by His being punished we are healed. Look in mercy on this my friend who is ill, and according to Your will and for your glory heal him from his sickness and cleanse him from his sinful ways. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Amen”

- Note
1. The element of praise and worship
  2. The stress on God's love and nearness.
  3. The quotation from the p[rophets]
  4. Prayer in Jesus the Messiah's name
  5. Choice of vocabulary.

(It would be good to use the sick person's name in the prayer.)