

The Impact and Effectiveness of Prayer in Individual and Social Well-being

Sayed Ziaoddin Olyanasab

Associate Professor, Department of Quranic Studies and Hadith, Hazrat-e Masoumeh University, Qom, Iran

E-mail: z.olyanasab@hmu.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v8i5.2702>

Abstract

Prayer is the pillar of religion and the foremost among acts of worship. Performing prayer is considered one of the most significant religious practices, a defining characteristic of prophets, and a crucial foundation for fulfilling their mission. Like any other form of worship, prayer holds value only when its intended purpose is realized, meaning it must be impactful and effective. According to the Quran, the essential elements of an impactful and effective prayer include humility before the Almighty God, consistency and vigilance in performing prayers, remembrance of God during prayer, and the establishment (iqama) of prayer rather than merely reciting it. Functionally, effective prayer creates a foundation for the growth of individual and social values, fosters psychological tranquility in the worshiper, reduces crime at both individual and societal levels, aids in resolving various issues, and eliminates the effects of inappropriate behavior from the human psyche. This study employs a qualitative research method of a descriptive-analytical nature and aims to examine the effectiveness and impact of prayer on individual and social well-being. The findings indicate that impactful prayer elevates individual and social values, guides the worshiper toward inner peace, and significantly reduces the likelihood of sin and disobedience within personal and social contexts.

Keywords: *Prayer; Spiritual Well-Being; Religion and Health; Individual Well-Being; Social Well-Being*

Introduction

One of the ritual acts of worship performed daily by Muslims in five instances is prayer (*Salat*). Prayer signifies servitude and obedience (Tabrizi, n.d., p. 1145), submission, reverence, bowing down, and a specific form of worship for Muslims. Its equivalent term in Arabic is "Salat" (Dehkoda, 1334 AH; 1372 SH, vol. 13, p. 20100; Moein, 1375 SH, vol. 4, p. 4810). In Islamic jurisprudential terminology, it is defined as bowing and prostrating in a specific manner, accompanied by certain prescribed pillars and recitations (Tusi, n.d., vol. 1, p. 56).

Prayer, according to Islamic teachings, is both a legal and religious obligation with effects that can be categorized into worldly and otherworldly outcomes. The Qur'an highlights some of these effects, such as prayer acting as a deterrent against immoral and evil deeds: *"Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing"* (Al-Ankabut/45).

This study aims to examine the worldly and otherworldly effects of prayer from the perspective of Imam Ali (AS), the role model of worshippers, as presented in the noble book *Nahj al-Balagha*. It seeks to answer the question: What are the worldly and otherworldly effects of prayer based on the esteemed text of *Nahj al-Balagha*? It is important to note that not all prayers produce these effects. Rather, the prayers of a believer, performed with correct faith and profound reverence for the greatness of the Creator, yield greater and deeper impacts. For instance, Imam Ali (AS) was informed that a member of the Khawarij stayed awake the entire night for prayer. He remarked, *"Sleeping with certainty is better than praying with doubt"* (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Wisdom 97).

From this statement by Imam Ali (AS), two key points emerge:

1. Not every prayer results in positive worldly and otherworldly effects. Certainty is a prerequisite, as prayer without faith or with uncertain faith holds little value or impact.
2. Proper prayer is the result of comprehensive faith. Therefore, a worshipper must first transform their doubts into certainty and then perform prayer to achieve its intended effects. Otherwise, superficial prayers may even yield negative consequences. As Imam Ali (AS) states: *"And worship becomes a means of seeking superiority over people"* (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Wisdom 102).

Based on this, the prayer of some individuals may not only fail to elevate their status but may also become a means of self-superiority among people. In such cases, their outward prayer is neither true worship nor genuine humility before the Creator; rather, it becomes an idol disguised as worship. Conversely, genuine prayer leaves numerous positive impacts.

Regarding the background of the subject, it should be noted that several books, such as *"Prayer in Nahj al-Balagha"* by Alireza Rajali Tehrani, *"The Secret of Prayer in Nahj al-Balagha"* by Ali Davani, and *"The Image of Prayer in the Mirror of the Qur'an and Nahj al-Balagha"* by Mojgan Moharram and Mohammad Mokhtari, have touched upon the effects of prayer only briefly and superficially. None of them have explored the effects of prayer in a distinct and comprehensive manner as this article intends to do. Additionally, the only scholarly article addressing prayer in *Nahj al-Balagha* is *"Doctrinal Pillars and the Foundations of Islam, Especially Prayer, from the Perspective of Nahj al-Balagha"* by Hossein Razmjou, which also does not focus on the effects of prayer. Therefore, the present article is innovative in its approach, as it delves into the effects of prayer in *Nahj al-Balagha*, a topic that has not been separately and thoroughly investigated in previous works.

It is worth noting that the author has utilized the translations of *Nahj al-Balagha* by the late Dr. Shahidi, Mr. Ansarian, and Feyz al-Islam. However, with modifications to these translations, the responsibility for the translation of the narrations lies with the author.

The discussion will proceed to examine the effects of prayer in *Nahj al-Balagha* in two categories: worldly effects and otherworldly effects. First, the worldly effects will be addressed, followed by the otherworldly effects.

1. Leads to the Perfection of Faith

Faith (*Iman*) refers to the belief in unseen matters, such as God and the Hereafter, accompanied by practical commitment to religion. Linguistically, *Iman* is a verbal noun derived from the root 'A-M-N, meaning to instill assurance and tranquility in one's heart or another's. It also implies affirming someone's statement based on confidence in its truthfulness and the absence of falsehood, as well as the removal of fear, anxiety, and terror (Ibn Faris, 1404 AH, vol. 1, p. 133; Ibn Manzur, 1413 AH, vol. 1, pp. 223–227). The attainment of tranquility and assurance through belief in God and affirming His existence likely accounts for the association of the term '*Aman* (security) with the concept of *Iman* (Mostafavi, 1374 SH, vol. 1, pp. 150–151).

One of the worldly effects of prayer is its role in perfecting faith and religion. The more a person adheres to prayer, the closer their faith moves toward perfection. In this context, Imam Ali (AS) states in *Sermon 80*:

"O people, women are deficient in faith, deficient in shares, and deficient in intellect. As for their deficiency in faith, it is because they abstain from prayer and fasting during their menstruation."

In his commentary on this statement, Ibn Maytham explains that the deficiency in faith is due to the omission of prayer and fasting during these periods, as prayer and fasting contribute to the perfection of faith and are complementary to spiritual discipline (Ibn Maytham, 1404 AH, vol. 2, p. 223). Khu'i, in his explanation of this sermon, attributes the deficiency in faith to the state of impurity and ritual uncleanness, which hinders the spiritual proximity required for certain acts of worship (Khu'i, 1429 AH, vol. 5, p. 305). Ayatollah Subhani interprets the deficiency in faith as leading to a reduction in one's value before God (Subhani, p. 562).

Based on this, women's temporary disconnection from prayer and fasting during certain periods is considered a type of deficiency in faith. This is because the special spiritual connection that prayer establishes between them and their Lord is temporarily weakened. While this matter does not diminish women's dignity or worth, it remains a fact that during such times, they are deprived of certain spiritual tools for enhancing their faith, such as prayer and fasting. Imam Ali's (AS) statements suggest a close relationship between prayer and faith, with prayer being a means of perfecting faith.

Although the perfection of faith is a worldly effect, it carries numerous consequences in the Hereafter.

2. Facilitates Proximity to God

Linguistically, *taqarrub* (proximity) means striving or hastening toward one's benefit. When used to describe a servant's proximity to God, it refers to a spiritual closeness achieved by adopting qualities of perfection and purifying oneself from flaws and deficiencies (Raghib Isfahani, 1412 AH, pp. 664–665). In other words, *taqarrub* denotes drawing closer to God and attaining His pleasure. In the Qur'an and religious texts, proximity is expressed with terms such as *qurb*, '*inda rabbihim*, and '*indallah*. In *Nahj al-Balagha*, prayer is identified in three instances as a means of attaining proximity to God:

A. Prayer Combined with Almsgiving

In one passage, it is stated: *"Then indeed, almsgiving was made alongside prayer as a means of drawing near for the people of Islam"* (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199). Here, almsgiving (*zakat*) and prayer are presented as means of attaining closeness to God for Muslims.

B. Prayer as a Means for the Righteous to Draw Closer

In another saying, Imam Ali (AS) asserts: *"Prayer is the means of proximity to God for every pious person"* (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Wisdom 136). This statement implies that prayer, when accompanied by piety, leads to closeness to God.

C. Regular Observance of Prayer as a Path to Closeness

In a different passage, it is emphasized:

"Adhere to prayer, maintain it, perform it frequently, and draw closer to God through it."

For prayer was enjoined upon the believers at prescribed times. Do you not hear the response of the people of Hell when asked, 'What led you to Hell?' They replied, 'We were not among those who prayed'" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

According to the author's research, all Persian translators of *Nahj al-Balagha* have translated the phrase *taqarrabu biha* as: *"Draw closer to God through prayer"* (Ansarian), *"Pray frequently and make it a means of proximity to your Lord"* (Arfa), *"Approach Him through it (prayer)"* (Feyz), and *"Draw near to God with your prayer"* (Shahidi). Based on this, Imam Ali (AS) explicitly commands seeking proximity to God through prayer.

In another sermon, while discussing his precedence over other caliphs, Imam Ali (AS) declares: *"O God, I was the first to turn to You, to hear and respond to Your call. None preceded me in prayer except the Messenger of God (PBUH)"* (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 131).

This sermon elaborates on the reasons for Imam Ali's (AS) insistence on governance and the qualities of a just ruler (Makarem, 1386 SH, vol. 5, p. 411). Ibn Maytham explains that this sermon is a reproach to his companions, criticizing their failure to follow the truth and a just Imam (Ibn Maytham, vol. 8, p. 256).

Imam Ali (AS) considers precedence in prayer a source of pride and a testament to his legitimacy in governance and proximity to God. From a proper Islamic perspective, the closest servant to God should lead the Muslim community, as placing an inferior person above a superior one contradicts divine justice and wisdom.

3. The Pillar of Religion

Prayer (*Salat*) is the most important means of remembering God, akin to how the pillars of houses or tents provide stability and cannot stand without them. Similarly, religiosity and faith cannot be sustained without prayer. For this reason, prayer is considered a sign of religiosity and the pillar of religion. Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes this, stating:

"By Allah, by Allah, regarding prayer, for it is the pillar of your religion" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Letter 47; Ardbeli, 1381 SH, vol. 1, p. 423).

As long as the pillar stands firm, the structure remains intact; however, if the pillar collapses, the structure will fall. The same narration from *Nahj al-Balagha* is also attributed to Imam Baqir (AS), who elaborates on how prayer functions as the pillar of religion:

"Prayer is the pillar of religion. It is like the central pole of a tent. When the central pole is stable, the ropes and pegs are functional. If the pole tilts or breaks, neither the ropes nor the pegs can serve their purpose" (Majlisi, 1403 AH, vol. 79, p. 218).

The idea that prayer is the pillar of religion is confirmed in other narrations, with some sources quoting the same phrase from other infallible Imams (*Fatal Neyshaburi, 1375 SH, vol. 1, p. 137; Tusi, 1407 AH, vol. 2, p. 237*). Thus, according to Imam Ali (AS) and other infallibles, prayer is the pillar of religion, and without it, the essence of faith for a Muslim cannot endure.

4. A Sign of Religiosity

Religiosity has markers, one of the most significant being the establishment of prayer. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Establishing prayer is the essence of religion" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 110).

This emphasis extends to the establishment of prayer for the deceased as a sign of their adherence to Islam. Imam Ali (AS) mentions:

"Indeed, you know that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) stoned the adulterer who was married, then prayed over him and granted his inheritance to his family" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 127).

Some may have assumed that a married adulterer is no longer considered a Muslim. However, Imam Ali (AS) clarifies that the Prophet (PBUH) prayed over such individuals, affirming their status as Muslims who had sinned. This behavior demonstrates that prayer signifies a connection to Islam and distinguishes believers, even in cases of significant wrongdoing.

5. The Source of Other Deeds

Imam Ali (AS), in a letter to Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, writes:

"Perform prayer at its appointed time, neither hastening it due to leisure nor delaying it due to preoccupation. Know that all of your deeds depend on your prayer" (Letter 27).

The phrase *"all of your deeds depend on your prayer"* suggests that prayer occupies a central and pivotal role relative to all other human actions. When prayer is performed properly, it positively influences the rest of one's deeds. Conversely, neglecting prayer leads to disorder in other aspects of life. This statement by Imam Ali (AS) reflects the verse:

"Indeed, prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Al-Ankabut 45).

Thus, prayer serves as the source of virtuous deeds, distancing individuals from immoral acts and ultimately leading to salvation in the Hereafter. Imam Ali's (AS) concluding phrase, *"Know that all of your deeds depend on your prayer"*, carries dual meanings:

1. In this world, other deeds follow from the quality of one's prayer. A person who prays properly is likely to excel in their other actions due to the blessings of prayer.
2. In the Hereafter, as narrations suggest, prayer is the first deed to be accounted for:

"The first matter a servant will be judged upon is prayer. If it is accepted, all other deeds will be accepted" (Kulayni, 1407 AH, vol. 3, p. 268).

Ibn Maytham explains this final phrase by stating:

"All of a person's righteous deeds depend on their prayer. When a person guards their prayer, they are likely to safeguard their other deeds as well. Conversely, neglecting prayer leads to greater negligence in other actions. This is because prayer is the pillar of religion and the highest form of worship. The Prophet (PBUH) considered prayer the most superior act of worship and emphasized that it is the first matter to be judged on the Day of Resurrection" (Ibn Maytham, vol. 4, p. 428).

Based on the explanations of the commentators and translators of *Nahj al-Balagha*, the centrality of prayer in relation to other deeds becomes clear. Prayer is the source from which all other righteous actions originate.

6. The Relationship Between Prayer and Perseverance in Virtues

Prayer, as one of the most superior Islamic acts of worship, serves as the source of other righteous deeds and keeps individuals away from evil and immoral actions. It is closely connected to *enjoining good and forbidding evil* (*Amr bil Ma'ruf wa Nahi anil Munkar*), particularly within the family context. In other words, individuals encourage good within their family and admonish inappropriate behavior when they encounter it. In this regard, Imam Ali (AS), referencing the verse:

"And enjoin prayer upon your family [and people] and be steadfast therein" (Ta-Ha 20:132), states: *"The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) would exert himself in prayer even after being given the glad tidings of Paradise. This was because Allah commanded him: 'Enjoin prayer upon your family and be steadfast in it.' The Prophet (PBUH) would enjoin his family to prayer and show patience in establishing it himself"* (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

Imam Ali (AS) links prayer with *enjoining good* and perseverance in virtues, as indicated in his sermon. This connection is similar to verses that pair prayer with patience (e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:45, 153). Moreover, God's command to the Prophet (PBUH) at the onset of his Prophethood—*"O you who wraps himself [in clothing], arise [to pray] the night, except for a little"* (Al-Muzzammil 73:1-2)—underscores the role of prayer in fostering resilience, enduring hardships, and promoting good while forbidding evil.

Allameh Tabataba'i explains:

"It seems the Prophet (PBUH) faced mockery and harm due to his mission and became sorrowful for God's sake. To alleviate his grief, he wrapped himself in a garment for a moment of rest. At that time, he was commanded, 'O you who wraps himself, arise and pray the night.' This instruction implies that instead of seeking solace in rest, the Prophet (PBUH) should fortify himself against great sorrows and bitter tribulations through prayer and patience, as was commanded to all believers: 'Seek help through patience and prayer'" (Al-Mizan, 1417 AH, vol. 20, p. 60).

Thus, prayer strengthens individuals to face challenges, such as enduring the difficulties of enjoining good and promoting righteousness, especially within the family. The Prophet's (PBUH) actions, as conveyed by Imam Ali (AS), serve as a guide for parents to nurture their children in worship and encourage them to pray. Parents should not remain indifferent to the spiritual well-being of their family.

7. Purification from Impurities

Another worldly effect of prayer is purification from impurities. Imam Ali (AS), referencing a comparison made by the Prophet (PBUH), states:

"The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) likened prayer to a hot spring at one's door, in which one bathes five times a day and night. In such a case, no filth or impurity would remain on the person" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

Undoubtedly, if a person bathes five times daily, they will remain entirely free from dirt or impurities. Linguistically, *daran* means filth (Ibn Faris, vol. 2, p. 271; Sahib ibn Abbad, 1414 AH, vol. 9, p. 286), while *hammam* derives from *hamo al-shams*, referring to the heat of the sun (Murtada al-Zabidi, 1414 AH, vol. 19, p. 343). In his commentary, Shushtari writes:

"Hammam refers to hot water used for therapeutic purposes. The term 'daran' here signifies the filth of sins and inner impurities" (Shushtari, 1376 SH, vol. 13, p. 160).

Prayer, therefore, resembles a special kind of hot water used for healing. As Ayatollah Makarem notes in his commentary:

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

Additionally, prayer revives the spirit of piety in a person, fulfilling the Qur'anic verse: *"Indeed, prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing" (Al-Ankabut 29:45).*

Prayer encourages repentance for past sins and serves as a means of avoiding future immoralities. Hence, one of the significant effects of prayer, as mentioned by Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balagha*, is the purification of an individual from impurities.

8. Causes the Shedding of Sins

Sin refers to acts of crime, disobedience, transgression, or error (Dehkhoda, 1372 SH, vol. 11, p. 17006). A sinner is one who violates divine commands (Moein, 1375 SH, vol. 3, p. 3396). In the Qur'an, various terms such as *dhanb* (sin), *jurm* (crime), *ithm* (iniquity), *sayyi'ah* (evil deed), *'asiy* (disobedience), and *khata* (mistake) are used to denote sin.

Prayer facilitates the shedding of sins. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Indeed, it (prayer) sheds sins as leaves fall from trees and releases them as ropes are untied" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

Imam Ali (AS) likens sins to excessive leaves surrounding the sturdy trunk of a tree. When a life-giving breeze blows, the autumn leaves fall away. Similarly, prayer acts as a spiritual breeze, causing sins

to fall away and lightening a person's burden. This teaching aligns with the Qur'anic verse affirming that prayer prevents indecency and wrongdoing:

"Indeed, prayer restrains one from indecency and evil" (Al-Ankabut 29:45).

Prayer not only prevents future sins but also facilitates the forgiveness of past sins, paving the way for repentance and seeking divine mercy. Therefore, one of the effects of prayer is the cleansing of sins, leading to spiritual purification.

9. Indifference to Worldly Pleasures

Another effect of prayer is fostering indifference to worldly possessions. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Among the believers are those who have recognized its (prayer's) true worth—men whom neither the glitter of worldly possessions nor the joy of children and wealth distracts. Allah says: 'Men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah, performing prayer, and giving zakat'" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

Here, Imam Ali (AS) describes believers who understand the significance of prayer and are not consumed by worldly attractions such as trade, transactions, or material pleasures. Their focus on divine remembrance and spiritual elevation leads them to view worldly matters as temporary and tools for worship rather than means of indulgence in excessive desires.

Thus, prayer cultivates detachment from worldly gains and fosters proper use of material resources while avoiding excessive indulgence in worldly pleasures.

10. Freedom from Constraints

Prayer also liberates individuals from spiritual and moral constraints. Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes this, stating:

"It (prayer) unties the knots of sin as ropes are loosened" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

The term *ribaq* refers to a rope with multiple loops used to tether animals, keeping them in line (Makarem Shirazi, 1386 SH, vol. 7, p. 727). Sins are likened to heavy burdens that weigh on a person's conscience. When an individual turns toward God, meeting their Creator and expressing servitude through prayer, they take steps toward freeing themselves from the shackles of desire, sin, and worldly attachments. Reciting the verse:

"You alone we worship, and You alone we seek help from" (Al-Fatiha 1:5), allows the heart to break free from all illusory constraints, attaining true freedom through submission to God.

Hence, one of the significant effects of prayer, as highlighted by Imam Ali (AS), is the liberation of the individual from the bonds of sin and worldly desires, guiding them toward genuine spiritual freedom.

11. A Source of Hope and a Path to Salvation

Hope signifies trust, expectation, aspiration, and anticipation (*Moein Persian Dictionary, under the term "hope"*). In Arabic, equivalent terms include *amal*, *raja*, *tama'*, *asa*, and others. One of the effects of prayer is instilling hope in God's mercy and forgiveness. Imam Ali (AS) states:

"A sin does not distress me if I have time to perform two units of prayer afterward and seek God's forgiveness and well-being" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Wisdom 299).

This does not imply that Imam Ali (AS) would ever sin if given the opportunity to pray. Rather, it points to subtle and profound concepts: as long as a person maintains the relationship of servant and Creator, preserving humility and reverence toward God, they can hope for deliverance from the worldly and otherworldly consequences of sin, alleviation of hardships, and success in this life and the Hereafter. So long as a servant retains their bond of servitude, even with sins, the path to repentance remains open. One must not despair, as despair of God's mercy is itself a grave sin (*Al-Hijr 15:56*).

This narration also highlights the critical role of prayer in facilitating repentance. Thus, repentance, coupled with prayer, serves as a source of hope and a means for the forgiveness of sins, as emphasized by Imam Ali (AS).

12. Consideration for Others

One of the essentials in all actions is maintaining balance and avoiding extremes. Regarding prayer, Imam Ali (AS) advises:

"When you lead prayer for the people, do not prolong it excessively, nor should you neglect it, for among them are those who are ill or have needs. When the Prophet (PBUH) sent me to Yemen, I asked him how I should pray with them. He said: 'Pray with them as the weakest among them would pray, and be merciful to the believers'" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Letter 53).

From this instruction, it is evident that the prayer leader must consider the circumstances of the congregation, including the sick, the troubled, and the weak, demonstrating compassion and mercy toward believers. Lengthy prayers may lead to frustration, while overly hasty prayers risk neglecting their proper fulfillment. Therefore, moderation and consideration for others are essential in prayer.

This principle applies beyond prayer; if one is required to consider the weak during worship, they are naturally obligated to do so in other aspects of life. Thus, prayer is not only an act of worship but also a guide for social conduct and living harmoniously in society.

13. Fostering Discipline

Another effect of prayer is cultivating a habit of discipline. Imam Ali (AS), in a letter to the governors of cities, instructed:

"Pray the noon prayer with the people when the sun declines and its shadow is the length of a goat pen's wall. Perform the afternoon prayer when the sun is still bright and a portion of the day remains sufficient to travel two farsakhs before sunset. Pray the evening prayer when the fasting person breaks their fast, and the pilgrim sets out from Arafat toward Mina. Offer the night prayer when twilight disappears and up until one-third of the night has passed. Perform the morning prayer when faces can be recognized, and

lead the congregation in a manner that considers the weakest among them, avoiding actions that cause frustration or discouragement" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Letter 52).

From this instruction, several points emerge:

- A focus on instilling discipline in the people, especially rulers, for their tasks and administrative duties.
- Emphasizing consideration for the condition of all individuals during prayer, suggesting that rulers must also account for the needs of their subjects in other affairs.
- Imam Ali (AS) further advises Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr:

"Perform prayer at its prescribed time, neither hastening it out of idleness nor delaying it due to preoccupation. Know that all of your deeds are dependent upon your prayer" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Letter 27).

This guidance emphasizes the importance of prayer, its precedence over all other tasks, and the role of discipline as a fundamental quality of Muslim leaders. Prayer thus becomes a cornerstone of time management and organizational skills in life.

14. Sanctification of the Place of Prayer

One of the effects of prayer is the sanctification of certain places. Any location where prayer is performed becomes sacred, and mosques and places of worship are revered because they are sites where God is remembered. Imam Ali (AS), in describing the world, states:

"The world is the prostration ground of God's beloved ones, the prayer place of His angels, the descent of His revelation, and the marketplace for His friends" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Wisdom 131).

If the term *salat* in this context refers to prayer, it supports the idea that prayer renders places sacred. Ibn Maytham interprets this statement as referring to the prostration of angels before Adam (*Ibn Maytham, vol. 5, p. 314*). Dibaj explains that "*the mosque of God's beloved ones*" refers to the places where divine saints prostrate, worship, and uphold justice, while "*the prayer place of His angels*" implies that some angels are tasked with worship on earth (*Dibaj, 1424 AH, vol. 6, p. 2826*). Conversely, Nawab Lahiji interprets *salat* here as a form of supplication (*Nawab Lahiji, n.d., vol. 1, p. 305*), which is unrelated to the current discussion.

The world itself holds little intrinsic value but gains beauty and worth through prayer and worship. Therefore, any place where frequent prayer occurs becomes sanctified and deserves greater respect.

15. A Safeguard for Humans

Another effect of prayer is its role in protecting individuals. Prayer fosters an environment where people are less likely to wrong or oppress one another, thus safeguarding humanity. Imam Ali (AS), in Sermon 192, warns against oppression and states:

"Allah has protected His believing servants from such (oppression and evil) through prayers, almsgiving, and striving in fasting during prescribed days. These acts calm their limbs, humble their eyes, subdue their egos, soften their hearts, eliminate arrogance, and instill humility. Prostration rubs their noble faces into the dust, humbling them. Laying their valued bodily parts on the ground manifests submission, and

the affliction of hunger through fasting fosters modesty. Almsgiving directs the fruits of the earth and other blessings toward the needy. Reflect on how these actions (prayer, fasting, prostration, and almsgiving) crush the sprouts of pride, curb the emergence of arrogance, and restrain selfishness" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 192).

From this sermon, several significant points regarding prayer emerge:

1. **Protection Against Oppression:** Prayer shields individuals from engaging in oppression or injustice.
2. **Defense Against Satan's Schemes:** Prayer acts as a barrier against Satan's manipulations, in line with the Qur'anic verse: *"Indeed, prayer restrains one from indecency and wrongdoing" (Al-Ankabut 29:45).*
3. **Inner Peace and Serenity:** Prayer provides calmness to the body and soul, preventing indulgence in sin. Through repentance and heartfelt devotion to God, prayer grants inner tranquility and freedom from mental agitation.
4. **Guidance for Students and Influencers:** Especially for intellectuals and students, who play pivotal roles in shaping society, prayer offers moral fortitude and protects them from ethical corruption. It fosters closeness to God, hope, and a balanced approach to speech and action.
5. **A Foundation for Combatting Arrogance:** Islamic teachings emphasize combating selfishness and arrogance, maintaining awareness of God's presence, and eliminating the roots of pride and its consequences.
6. **Prevention of Arrogance and Self-Conceit:** Prayer not only halts the growth of pride but also prevents its emergence altogether.
7. **Humility of the Eyes:** A humble heart leads to submissiveness in all limbs, especially the eyes, which most visibly reflect inner humility.

Thus, one of the profound effects of prayer, as highlighted by Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balagha*, is its role in protecting individuals—spiritually, morally, and socially.

16. Avoidance of Arrogance

Imam Ali (AS) states:

"Prayer was ordained to protect against arrogance" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Wisdom 252).

This is because prayer entails humility and submission before God (*Ibn Maytham, vol. 1, p. 636*). Prayer consists of acts such as bowing, prostration, and reverent acknowledgment of God's majesty (*Fi Zilal Nahj al-Balagha, vol. 4, p. 366*). Thus, the postures and invocations of bowing and prostration are incompatible with arrogance and serve to cleanse individuals of the spiritual illness of pride.

17. Avoidance of Polytheism

Polytheism (*shirk*) refers to associating partners with God in sovereignty or lordship (*Ibn Manzur, 1413 AH, vol. 7, p. 100*). It is categorized into two types: major polytheism, which involves attributing partners to God, and minor polytheism, which includes acts such as ostentation, hypocrisy, or considering others alongside God in certain matters (*Raghib Isfahani, 1412 AH, p. 452; Sajjadi, 1373 SH, vol. 2, p. 1054*).

Prayer plays a significant role in distancing individuals from polytheism. Imam Ali (AS) states: *"Allah sent Muhammad (PBUH) with the truth to lead His servants away from the worship of idols and toward the worship of Himself"* (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 147).

Given that prayer is one of the most important acts of worship, it aligns with the mission of guiding people away from idol worship. Furthermore, *Nahj al-Balagha* repeatedly emphasizes the significance of prayer and its associated effects. The content of prayer—including the recitation of *Surah Ikhlas* (Chapter of Sincerity) and the theocentric invocations in bowing and prostration—embodies monotheism and negates all forms of polytheism.

When prayer is performed sincerely and free from ostentation, it protects individuals from all types of polytheism. This, in turn, lays the foundation for the integrity of other deeds, as inner beliefs form the basis for external actions.

18. Avoidance of Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy (*nifaq*) is derived from the term *nafaq*, which denotes a hidden passage or tunnel that provides an escape route, similar to a burrow (*Faraheedi, 1414 AH, vol. 3, p. 1825*). Hypocrisy involves entering religion through one path and exiting through another (*Raghib Isfahani, 1412 AH, p. 819*), displaying outward adherence to Islam while concealing disbelief within (*Fayoumi, 1928 CE, vol. 2, p. 618*). Hypocrisy also includes having a dual nature, deceitfulness, and ostentation (*Anwari, 1375 SH, vol. 8, p. 7882*). It manifests not only in faith but also in acts of worship and social interactions, and it is broader than mere ostentation (*Naraq, 1408 AH, vol. 2, p. 412*).

One of the effects of prayer is distancing individuals from hypocrisy and duality. Imam Ali (AS) advises maintaining consistency between one's inner and outer states:

"Whoever does not differ between their secret and public actions, and whose deeds align with their words, has fulfilled the divine trust and achieved sincere worship" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Letter 26).

Here, Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes sincerity and the alignment of one's inner self with their outer actions.

Thus, performing worship sincerely and free of any impurities ensures consistency between one's inner beliefs and outward behavior. Such a person strives to uphold the rights of divine commands and trusts. Prayer, as the most evident form of worship, purifies individuals from corruption and ensures that they maintain both divine and societal responsibilities.

After discussing the worldly effects of prayer in *Nahj al-Balagha*, two examples of its otherworldly effects as conveyed by Imam Ali (AS) are presented:

1. A Shield Against Hellfire

According to the Qur'an, after death and on the Day of Resurrection, people will either enter Paradise, remain among the people of *A'raf* (the Heights), or enter Hell. One of the effects of prayer is that it prevents individuals from being cast into Hellfire. Imam Ali (AS) states in *Nahj al-Balagha*:

"Observe the prayer, safeguard it, perform it frequently, and seek closeness to Allah through it. Verily, prayer has been prescribed for the believers at appointed times. Have you not heard the response of the people of Hell when asked: 'What brought you to Hell?' They will say: 'We were not among those who prayed'" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199; An-Nisa 4:103).

Imam Ali (AS) consistently emphasized the importance of prayer to his companions:

"By Allah, by Allah, regarding prayer" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Letter 47), urging them to safeguard it:

"Observe the matter of prayer and safeguard it" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

He advised performing it frequently and using it as a means to draw closer to Allah:
"Seek closeness to Him through it" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

Prayer is prescribed for believers at specific times throughout the day and night, as a mandatory obligation:

"Verily, prayer has been prescribed for the believers at appointed times" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

The Qur'an recounts the response of the people of Hell when asked why they were cast into Hellfire:

"They will say: 'We were not among those who prayed'" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

Thus, safeguarding prayer and performing it diligently prevents entry into Hell, while neglecting it leads to punishment in Hellfire. Furthermore, the acceptance of all other deeds depends on the acceptance of prayer. If a person's prayer is rejected, their other deeds will also be invalidated. This teaching, conveyed by Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balagha*, is also mentioned with additional details in *Al-Kafi* and referenced by commentators on *Nahj al-Balagha* (Kulayni, 1407 AH, vol. 3, p. 431).

2. A Means of Ascension in the Ranks of Paradise

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

"The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) exerted himself in prayer even after receiving the glad tidings of Paradise, as Allah commanded him: 'Command your family to perform prayer and be steadfast in it.' He would command his family to pray and was patient in establishing it himself. Prayer, along with almsgiving, has been made a means of drawing closer to Allah for the people of Islam" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

The Prophet (PBUH), despite being assured of Paradise, would endure great effort in his prayers, as Allah had instructed him:

"Command your family to perform prayer and be steadfast in it" (Sharif al-Radi, Subhi Saleh, 1414 AH, Sermon 199).

Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) repeatedly urged his household to pray and showed perseverance in his own prayers. Despite the certainty of his entry into Paradise, he sought higher ranks within it through the act of prayer. Unlike those who pray out of fear of Hell, the Prophet (PBUH), having received the promise of Paradise, was far removed from such fears. His understanding of God's greatness was profound, leading him to perform acts of worship and submission that elevated him to the highest ranks of Paradise.

Therefore, prayer is one of the most significant means for entering Paradise and ascending within its ranks.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the effects of prayer as presented in *Nahj al-Balagha* and concluded that prayer yields numerous benefits and blessings, which can be categorized as follows:

Worldly effects of prayer:

- Avoidance of polytheism and hypocrisy.
- Attaining perfection in faith and closeness to God.
- Being the pillar of religion and a sign of religiosity.
- Inspiring righteous actions and purifying individuals from impurities.
- Shedding sins.

Otherworldly effects of prayer:

- Prayer serves as a shield against Hellfire, preventing entry into Hell for those who diligently perform it.
- Prayer facilitates entry into Paradise and advancement within its ranks.

Most of the teachings from Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balagha* regarding prayer are corroborated by narrations from other infallible Imams, as highlighted by the commentators of *Nahj al-Balagha*.

References

The Holy Qur'an

Nahj al-Balagha'

1. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, A. H. (n.d.). *Sharh Nahj al-Balagha* (Ibn Abi al-Hadid). Maktabat Ayatollah al-Uzma al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi, Qom, Iran.
2. Ibn Babawayh, M. b. A. (1362 AH). *Al-Khisal*. Qom: First Edition.
3. Ibn Manzur. (1413 AH). *Lisan al-Arab*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Tarikh al-Arabi.
4. Ibn Maytham, M. b. A. (1404 AH). *Sharh Nahj al-Balagha*. Daftar Nashr al-Kitab, Tehran, Iran.
5. Ibn Faris, A. b. H. (1404 AH). *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lugha* (Edited by Abdul Salam Muhammad

- Harun). Qom: Daftar Tablighat Islami.
6. Arbali, A. b. I. (1381 AH). *Kashf al-Ghumma fi Ma'rifat al-A'imma* (Edited by Rasuli Mahallati, S. Hashim, and Bani Hashemi). Tabriz: First Edition.
 7. Ansarian, H. (1388 SH). *Translation of Nahj al-Balagha*. Dar al-Irfan, Qom, Iran.
 8. Anwari, H. (1375 SH). *Farhang-e Bozorg-e Sokhan*. Amirkabir Publications.
 9. Tabrizi, M. b. H. b. K. (n.d.). *Burhan Qati*. Fereydoun Elmi Publications.
 10. Al-Zubaidi, M. M. (1414 AH). *Taj al-'Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus* (Edited by Ali Hilali and Ali Siry). Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
 11. Khui, H. b. M. (1429 AH/2008 CE). *Minhaj al-Bara'a fi Sharh Nahj al-Balagha* (Ali Ashour, Ed.). Beirut.
 12. Dehkhoda, A. (1372 SH). *Loghat-Nama*. University of Tehran Press.
 13. Al-Dibaj al-Wadi, M. (1424 AH). *Sharh Nahj al-Balagha* (Edited by Khalid bin Qasim Mutawakkil). San'a, Yemen: Mu'assasat al-Imam Zayd bin Ali al-Thaqafiyyah.
 14. Al-Raghib al-Isfahani. (1412 AH). *Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an*. Damascus: Dar al-Qalam.
 15. Sajjadi, S. J. (1373 SH). *Farhang-e Ma'arif-e Islami*. Komesesh Publications.
 16. Sharif al-Radi, M. b. H. (1414 AH). *Nahj al-Balagha* (Edited by Subhi Saleh). Qom: First Edition.
 17. Shushtari, M. T. (1376 SH). *Bahj al-Sabaghah*. Tehran, Iran: Dar Amir Kabir.
 18. Sheikh Hurr Amili, M. b. H. (1418 AH/1376 SH). *Al-Fusul al-Muhimmah fi Usul al-A'imma (Takmilat al-Wasa'il)*. Qom: First Edition.
 19. Sheikh Hurr Amili, M. b. H. (1409 AH). *Wasail al-Shi'a*. Qom: First Edition.
 20. Shahidi, S. J. (1378 SH). *Translation of Nahj al-Balagha*. Tehran, Iran: Scientific and Cultural Publications.
 21. Sahib b. 'Abbad. (1414 AH). *Al-Muhit fi al-Lugha* (Edited by Muhammad Hassan Al-Yasin). Beirut: Alam al-Kitab.
 22. Tabatabai, S. M. H. (1417 AH). *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*. Qom: Daftar Nashr Islami.
 23. Tusi, M. b. H. (1407 AH). *Tahdhib al-Ahkam* (Edited by Khurassan). Tehran: Fourth Edition.
 24. Tusi, M. b. H. (n.d.). *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (10 vols.). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi.
 25. Fatal Nishapuri, M. b. A. (1375 SH). *Rawdat al-Wa'izin wa Basirat al-Mutta'izin*. Qom, Iran: First Edition.
 26. Al-Farahidi, K. b. A. (1414 AH). *Al-'Ayn*. Aswa Publications.
 27. Al-Majlisi, M. B. (1403 AH). *Bihar al-Anwar* (Beirut Edition). Beirut: Second Edition.
 28. Mostafavi, H. (1374 SH). *Al-Tahqiq fi Kalimat al-Qur'an al-Karim*. Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

29. Al-Zubaidi, M. M. (1414 AH/1994 CE). *Taj al- 'Arus fi Sharh al-Qamus*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Fikr.
30. Moein, M. (1375 SH). *Farhang-e Farsi*. Amirkabir Publications.
31. Al-Maghniyah, M. J. (1979 CE). *Fi Zilal Nahj al-Balagha*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin.
32. Makarem Shirazi, N. (1386 SH). *Payam-e Imam Amir al-Mu'minin (AS)*. Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiya.
33. Naraqi, M. M. (1408 AH). *Jami' al-Sa'adat*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami.
34. Nawab Lahiji, M. B. M. (n.d.). *Sharh Nahj al-Balagha* (Edited by Hussein ibn Mu'in al-Din Meybodi). Tehran, Iran: Akhwan Kitabchi.
35. Hashimi Khui, H. b. M. (n.d.). *Minhaj al-Bara'a* (Edited by Ibrahim Miyanchi). Tehran, Iran: Maktabat al-Islamiya.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).