

Deeper Meanings of Prostration
(PDF version of Candle Posting No. 121)



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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

Ya Ali Madad. May Noor Mowlana Hazar Imam grant peace, prosperity, happiness, barakat, higher spiritual enlightenment, spiritual & luminous tayid (help) and empowerment to you, your family, your Jamat and the worldwide Jamat. Ameen.



Introduction

In this posting, I am going to present exoteric and esoteric knowledge on the topic of 'sujûd' (prostration). I will be using references from the Holy Qur'an, the sayings of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s.), Holy Ginans of our Pirs, teachings of learned Sufis and viewpoints of Ibn al-Arabi from a book entitled 'Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge', written by William C. Chittick, published by State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989. I will also link the concept of prostration to servanthood, unveiling of the Light of Imamate and effacement (i.e., the state of being nothing in presence of the Holy Imam).

I first looked up the root *S J D in 'A concordance of the Qur'an' authored by Hanna E. Kassis, 1983, University of California Press, Berkeley (ISBN 0-520-04327-8). I saw seven entries derived from this root (pp.1067-8) and a list of ayats sorted grammatically under these headings. I have extracted the following definitions from the above-mentioned pages:

SUJÛD (verbal noun) ~prostration, bowing down (in worship)

SAJADA (verb) ~to bow down, to bow in worship, to prostrate oneself

SÂJID (active participle) ~one who bows down, who prostrates himself

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Part 1: What is Prostration (Sujûd)?

In his book, Chittick has presented the following information in his introduction to the topic of prostration (sujûd):

"... Literally, the word [sujûd] signifies being lowly and bending the head to the ground. As a technical term in Islamic sciences, it signifies the placing of the forehead on ground during the canonical prayer (salât); it is the servant's supreme act of humility before his Lord." (p.152)

In the Shia Imami Ismaili Tariqah, the Holy Dua is recited three times a day, i.e., at dawn (fajr), sundown (maghrib) and evening (isha'a). There are 6 raka'ahs in the Holy Dua, thus we perform 18 raka'ahs per day. A prostration is performed at the end of each raka'ah when we hear the sentence 'Allahuma laka sujudi wa ta-a'ti' (O Allah to You is my prostration and obedience). The requirement of a physical prostration is that the person's forehead should touch the ground at the end of each raka'ah. In addition to these, more prostrations are performed during other prescribed prayers and in personal prayers. Let us now explore the multiple dimensions of prostrations.

Part 2: Prostration During Holy Ginan Supplication

There are many ginans in which our Holy Pirs have supplicated and have prostrated to the Light of the Holy Imam. Here is a sample from verse 38 of Moti Venti composed by Pir Hasan Kabirdin (r.a.):

Eji sâmi tamârâ nâmnê partapê kari
mahâ samudh^{ra} dêvê mârag
âvo ka(n)th kirpa karo
lâgu(n) tamârê pâya
mahêr karo morâ sâ(n)hiyâ
abarâ sharan tamâri

O Lord, with the remembrance of your (sacred) name (ism-e azam),
even the vast ocean makes a path.
My Master, have compassion and show your presence,
I prostrate before Thee.
Have mercy on me, my Lord.
I am helpless and dependent on you. ...38

Here is another verse from the ginan Aash **Tamari** Shri Ho Kayam Sami which is also composed by Pir Hasan Kabirdin (r.a.):

Eji Aash kari ne Ya Ali hu(n) tere **dar** ubhi
Kar jodi ne em ma(n)gu(n) Ya Shah
Dejo didar tusi mahavar **dataa**
Ham tere charañe laagu(n)

O Lord! I stand at your door with hope, O Ali!
(And) very humbly I crave, O Hazar Imam!
Bless me with your sublime vision,
O the Exalted Bestower! I fall prostrate at your feet.8

Islam means submission to the Will of Allah, so the act of prostration is shared value across the Muslim Ummah. The act of prostration is also entrenched in our Tariqah practices from the above verses of Holy Ginans. We can see that our Pirs supplicated for didar and salvation while they were in prostration.

Part 3: Prostration and Its Reality

I came across an electronic version of a book entitled, 'Spiritual Journey of the Mystics' (Saluk-e-Arifaan) by Hajj Mirza Jawad Agha Maliki Tabrizi, translated from Persian by Sayyid Hussein Alamdar and first published by Ansariyan Publications (date unknown). Here is the translator's note on the author of the book:

"The present book is the English translation of the Persian book: Spiritual Journey of the Mystics (Saluk-e-Arifaan) - which is the translation of Arabic book: al-Muraqabat fi Amal al-Sunnah, written by the most eminent perfect mystic Late Haj Mirza Jawad Agha Maliki Tabrizi. As the enclosed biography would reveal, he was the most eminent gnostic and ascetic of his period, who had attained the most Exalted mystic position of **Kashf-wa-Shahud**, a spiritual position, whereby the curtains are rolled up from the wayfarer's esoteric eyes, enabling him to see into the unseen far beyond the limits of this material world."

The topic of 'prostration' is addressed as follows in the above-mentioned book:

"Prostration, in its outwardly form and in true manifestation is the most supreme state and spiritual position for a human being, i.e., the position of annihilation in Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him), as it has been mentioned in the traditions [hadiths]:

"A human being in the state of prostration is nearer to Allah than in any other state."

Earlier, we have mentioned about the Noble Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) recommendation for prolonged prostration for everybody. Prostration and especially prolonged prostration is the most important and most elegant state of servanthood, and it is because of this reason that in each prayer unit, it is performed twice, whilst other actions are performed only once. And it is from this consideration that about the prolonged prostration of Ahl-ul Bayt (peace be upon him) and their special Shi'ites a lot of things have been narrated, e.g., Imam al- Sajjad* (peace be upon him), sometimes has recited the following prayer in prostration for one thousand times.

"In reality there is no god but Allah."

*Here it should be understood that the conditions of Imam al-Sajjad [Imam Zainil 'Abideen] (peace be upon him) after the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (peace be upon him) were such that he was mostly confined inside his home." (p.70)

I looked up Farhad Dafftary's book titled, 'The Ismailis—Their History and Doctrines' published by the Cambridge University Press (1990) and found a couple of important statements regarding the piety of Imam Zainil 'Abideen: (a.s.):

"In addition, due to his renowned piety, which has won him the honorific title ('The ornament of the Pious' i.e., Zainil 'Abideen), he had gradually come to be held in great esteem, especially by the pious circles Medina. But since he refrained from any form of political activity and devoted his time mainly to praying (whence his additional title al-Sajjad) ..."

The above facts support the description that Imam Zainil 'Abideen (a.s.) performed extraordinary prayers in prostration as described in the excerpt from the book titled, 'Spiritual Journey of the Mystics (Saluk-e-Arifan)'. The name of our third Holy Imam inspires us to incorporate piety and prostrations in our daily practice. Now let us explore how prostration is presented in the Holy Quran.

Part 4: Key References on Prostration from the Holy Qur'an

"Say: "Whether ye believe in it or not, it is true that those who were given knowledge beforehand, when it is recited to them, fall down on their faces in humble prostration, "And they say: 'Glory to our Lord! Truly has the promise of our Lord been fulfilled!'" They fall down on their faces in tears, and it increases their (earnest) humility." (Holy Qur'an 17: 107-109)

When a pious person is bestowed with higher knowledge or a Divine self disclosure (kashf), he/she sheds tears of gratitude and performs a complete prostration. This act also increases his/her humility. From this, we can understand the full potential of performing prostrations.

"But celebrate the praises of thy Lord, and be of those who prostrate themselves in adoration. And serve thy Lord until there come unto thee the Hour that is certain." (Holy Qur'an 15: 97-98)

The above ayat teaches is to keep up with prostrations, service and dhikr because these would be our assets on the Day of Judgement.

"O ye who believe! Bow down, prostrate yourselves, and adore your Lord; and do good; that ye may prosper." (Holy Qur'an 22: 77)

Once again, the act of submission by bowing and prostrating is being emphasized. If this is augmented with good deeds then one becomes prosperous.

Part 5: What Should We Pray for in Prostration?

Let us read hadiths of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s.):

"Abu Huraira said that Prophet used to say when prostrating himself, "O God, forgive me all my sins, small and great, first and last, open and secret." Muslim transmitted it."

(Source: Mishkat al Masabih translated by Dr. James Robson. Volume 1, p.182)

"Ibn 'Abbas reported that the Prophet used to say between two sujdas, "O God, forgive me, show mercy to me, guide me, heal me, and provide for me." Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi transmitted it."

(Source: Mishkat al Masabih translated by Dr. James Robson. Volume 1, p.183)

"Rabi'a b. Ka'b said: I was with the God messenger at night, and when I brought him his water for ablution and what he required, he told me to make a request. I said, "I ask to accompany you in paradise." He asked if I had any other request to make, and when I replied that that was all, he said, "Then help me accomplish this for you by devoting yourself often to prostration." Muslim transmitted it."

(Source: Mishkat al Masabih translated by Dr. James Robson. Volume 1, p.183)

From the above hadiths, we can see the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s.) has taught us to present a list of noble wishes when we are in full prostration. In this state of humility and submission, we are most near to God and the chances of fulfillment of our noble wishes are the greatest.

Part 6: What is the Deeper Meaning of Prostration (Sujûd)?

In his book, Chittick has presented Ibn al-Arabi's answer to the question, 'What is prostration (sujûd)?' as follows:

"Everything which prostrates itself bears witness to its own root from which it is absent by being a branch. When a thing is diverted from being a root by being a branch, it is said to it, "Seek from which is absent in you, your root from which you have emerged." So the thing prostrates itself to the soil which is its root. The spirit prostrates itself to the Universal Spirit (al-Ruh al-Kull) from which it has emerged. The inmost consciousness (sirr) prostrates itself to its Lord by means of whom it has achieved its level." (p.152)

The key point of the above example of a branch turning towards the soil in search of its root is captured in the following tasbi:

'Astaghafirullahi Rabbi wa Atubu Ilayhi' which means 'I seek forgiveness from my Lord and Sustainer and I seek to return to Him in repentance'.

As the above tasbi is clearly expressing our humble wish to return to our origin, we should aspire to present it mostly humbly in the Huzur Pur Noor of Noor Mowlana Hazar Imam with utmost humility and submission, i.e. in prostration.

Part 7: What is the Prostration of the Heart?

I looked up the root *Q L B in Kassis' 'A concordance of the Qur'an' and have extracted the following definitions (pp.903-906):

QALB (noun masculine) ~a heart

QALLABA (verb) ~to turn something upside down, to turn about, to wring (one's hands); to confound

TAQALLABA (verb) ~to turn about; the act of turning about, going to and fro

INQALLABA (verb) ~to turn about, to turn back, to return, to come back; turning, one who returns

According to the Holy Qur'an, the heart, i.e., the consciousness, fluctuates because all good and evil acts are registered in it. The Holy Qur'an described the states of the heart in 164 ayats thus the state of heart is an extensive topic in esoteric personal searches. The goal of these practices is to reach the state of a 'sound heart', i.e., Qalb-i Salim. One of the states acquired by some Sufis is 'prostration of the heart' which is described below:

In his book, Chittick has presented Ibn al-'Arabi's description of Sahl ibn 'Abdullah al-Tustari who had the experience of 'prostration of the heart':

"Sahl ibn 'Abdallah al-Tustari (d. 283/896) was one of the greatest Sufis, and Ibn al-'Arabi cites him frequently. The Shaykh tells the circumstances of the "prostration of the heart" mentioned here as follows:

"Sahl ibn 'Abdallah had seen that his heart prostrated itself. He mentioned it to a number of shaykhs of his time, but they did not know what he was saying, since they have not tasted that. Hence he set out seeking someone who would recognize it. When he reached 'Abbadan, he went to see a shaykh and said to him, 'O master, does the heart prostrate itself?' The shaykh replied, 'Until eternity without end.' In other words, the heart never lifts up its head from its prostration. Through this question Sahl recognized that God had given the shaykh knowledge of the prostration of the heart. Hence his heart clung to that attribute, and it did not lift up its head from its prostration in this world—nor will it lift up in the next world. After that he never supplicated to God to lift up something which had come down, nor to push down something which had risen up" (III 86.22)"

"Sahl ibn 'Abdallah attain this station when he was a boy of six years. This is why his beginning in this path was the prostration of the heart. How many a friend of God there has been, great in consequence, long in life, who died without achieving the prostration of the heart and without even knowing that the heart prostrates itself—even though he realized the station of friendship and his feet become firmly grounded within it. When the prostration of the heart is actualized, the heart never lifts up its head again. From this fixity in this one step, many steps branch out, while he remains fixed in it. Most of the friends see the fluctuation of the heart from state to state—which is why it is called a 'heart'. But, although the states of the possessor of this station undergo fluctuation, they derive from a single entity which is fixed. This is called 'prostration of the heart'" (II 20:19)." (p.407)

Part 8: What is a Luminous Prostration?

How did the angels prostrate to Hazrat Adam (a.s.)? Let us read the following ayats from the Holy Qur'an:

"And He taught Adam the nature of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell me the nature of these if ye are right." (2:31)

They said: "Glory to Thee, of knowledge we have none, save what Thou Hast taught us: In truth it is Thou Who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom." (2:32)

He said: "O Adam! Tell them their natures." When he had told them, God said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?" (2:33)

And behold, We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam" and they bowed down. Not so Iblis: he refused and was haughty: He was of those who reject Faith. (2:34)"

Here is an explanation from Chittick's book:

"These words derive from the Koranic account of how the angels were commanded to prostrate themselves to Adam. After teaching Adam the names, God tells the angels to name the things, and they reply, "Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge save what Thou has taught us." Then God has Adam tell them the names, and only then does He command the angels to prostrate themselves." (p.399)

So how did the angels bow to Hazrat Adam? Angels are spiritual beings and they prostrate themselves to the level of knowledge (i.e., the Light) of the corresponding entity. Since Hazrat Adam (a.s.) was blessed with the Light of all Divine Names, he was much higher than the angels. So when God commanded the angels to bow to Hazrat Adam, all of them except Iblis, bowed to the Light of Hazrat Adam. This is an example of a luminous prostration. So if we purify ourselves to the extent that we are shown Light in our meditation, our souls would bow to the particular Light if one is obedient and humble.

Part 9: Linking Prostration to Servanthood, Unveiling of the Light of Imamat and Effacement (i.e., Being in the State of Nothingness in the Presence of the Light of the Holy Imam)

In order to illustrate the linkage between prostration, servanthood, nothingness and unveiling of the Light of Imamat, let us first read and analyze the following verses of Sayyed Khan's gnan, Hu(n) re piyaasi piya tere darshanki:

Eji **Di**daari hove so esa chahaave
Sahebji-ku(n) chhod kar orku(n) na **dhiyaave**
Didaari hoy so **dil baandhe**
Din din adka neh **dhare**
Ek man ho kar naam leve
Piyuka **darshan** so kare ji

He who desires the vision should wish not
to pay attention to anything other than the Master.
He who desires the vision attaches his heart to Him,
increasing his love day by day.
Through invoking His name in singleness of mind,
he achieves the vision of the Beloved.

7

In his gnan, Sayyed Khan (r.a.) tells us that if you desire the vision of the Holy Imam, i.e., unveiling of his Light in your personal world, your attention should be focused on his light. He advises us to keep on increasing our love for the Holy Imam, day by day, and concentrate on his name in bandagi. Only then, we will be blessed with the vision of his light. From this verse, we see the spiritual relationship between the murid and the Holy Imam is through ism-i azam. At higher stages, unveiling occurs so we have to be steadfast in our spiritual journey.

Eji Yatim **daasisu(n)** esa na kije
Maara avaguñ hoy so guñ kari lije
Hu(n) re apraadhañ **daasi** tori
Tu(n) chinta mori kiyu(n) na karo
Maara avaguñ hoy **to** guñ karo
Sami Eva veñ maara chint **dh**aro ji

Do not behave thus to this orphan handmaiden.
If I have faults, then make them virtues.
Though a sinner, I am your humble slave.
Why do you not care for me?
If I have faults, then make them virtues,
O Master, and pay attention to these words of mine.

8

The above verse informs us of the state of servanthood which is related to submission and purification. This is a required process because the light only enters into personal worlds of the pure and humble souls.

Eji Nahi kuchh hove so **daasi** kahaave
Apne Sahebji-ku(n) esa bhaave
Nahi kuchh hove so **daasi** kahaave
Nit uth **adka** neh **dh**are
Ek man ho kar naam leve
Iyu(n) kari jaalo **deh** re ji

It is by becoming nothing
that one is called a handmaiden.
Thus one pleases the Master.
It is by becoming nothing
that one is called a handmaiden,
ever arising to increase her love.
Through invoking His name in singleness of mind,
this is how you should destroy bodily attachments.

9

This verse informs us that a humble servant is the one who has embraced nothingness. This is not just a state in one's thought but in one's act of complete submission. This is demonstrated at three levels: by physical prostration, prostration of the heart and prostration of the soul to a higher light.

Eji Ek man **thai** Sahebji-su(n) rahiye
Hetesu(n) rang esa lahiye
Hek man **thai** rahiye Sahebji-su(n)
Chaaho ghaañero kijiye
Prem upar shish **deve**
To piya-ka **darshan** so kare ji

Through becoming single in mind, dwell with the Master.
Through love, such joys are attained.
Through becoming single in mind, dwell with the Master,
and feel intense love. He who sacrifices his head for love
attains the vision of the Beloved.

10

The humble servant concentrates on the ism-i azam, increases his love and attains joy. It is through meditation that he dwells in the light of his master. He sacrifices himself, i.e., his ego, and adopts an attitude of nothingness. He is then blessed with a vision of his beloved, i.e., unveiling of the Light of Imam. This is an infinite process which requires ardent practice, humility and absolute submission.

Part 10: Conclusion

One of the fundamental acts in the practise of faith is a complete prostration to our Lord and creator. The Alid tradition of a thinking and spiritual Islam, an Islam which leads to the development of the human soul to its highest levels, requires that we submit ourselves to He Who is above all else.

In preparation for the Didar of Noor Mowlana Hazar Imam in London, England in 1994, I composed a wish list of 14 prayers. The revised list was presented in Candle posting number 120. The 12th prayer in this list is:

Ya NOOR Mowlana Hazar Imam, teach us about performing sujdas at physical, spiritual (ruhani) and luminous (noorani) levels.

Although, I composed the above wish in 1994, I did not fully understand it at that time. Through this posting, I have now learned about physical prostration, prostration of the heart, and luminous prostration which happens when the soul is enlightened over and over again as it progress in through the Haqqiqat and Marifat portions of its spiritual journey. Al-Hamdulillah!

May Noor Mowlana Hazar Imam bless all of us with his immense love, light, peace and keep us in the safety of servanthood so that we may be able to actualize the experiences of unveiling of the Light of Imamatus over and over again! Ameen.

Part 11: Links:

1. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of Candle Posting 121 :: Deeper Meanings of Prostration ::
2. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of Candle Posting 120 :: My Wish List for the Upcoming Pradramani of Noor Mowlana Shah Karim Al-Hussaini Hazar Imam ::
3. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of Candle Posting 119 :: Unveiling or Self-Disclosure of God ::
4. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of Candle Posting 118 :: Spiritual Dimensions of the Alid Tradition ::
5. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of Candle Posting 117 :: Harnessing Barakat in Your Spiritual and Material Worlds ::
6. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of Candle Posting 116 :: Enlightening Wisdoms of Noor Mowlana Murtaza Ali (a.s.) ::
7. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of Candle Posting 115 :: Harnessing the Power of Sura Ikhlas ::
8. [Click here](#) to download the PDF version of 'Spiritual Journey of the Mystics' (Saluk-e-Arifaan)

Ardent Supplications:

Ya Ali, Ya NOOR Mowlana Shah Karim Al-Hussaini Hazar Imam, create Sunshine in our hearts, light in our foreheads, and bless us all with the inner vision of the Truth!

Ya Ali, Ya NOOR Mowlana Shah Karim Al-Hussaini Hazar Imam, grant the global Jamat luminous (noorani) and spiritual (ruhani) tayid (help) to advance materially, spiritually and intellectually. Ameen.

Haizinda – Qayampaya (Our Present Imam is Living and His NOOR is Eternal)

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[Candle Posting Index Vol. 3](#), [Candle Posting Index Vol. 4](#)

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[81-90](#), [91-100](#), [101-110](#), [111-120](#), [121-130](#)

Rakh Mowla je Noor te Yaqeen (Certainly, we trust in Mowla's Light only),
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