

Recite with the Heart

We have now completed al-Fatihah and move on to the Quran recitation after it. Did you ever notice that any Quran recited in Salah is always recited when we are in the standing position? We do not recite al-Fatihah or any other Surah in the sitting position, nor during our Ruku [bowing], nor during our prostration. Why?

The standing position is man's most dignified, honorable and respectful position possible. And because this Quran speaks the most honorable and noble Speech, it is thus only befitting for the most noble Speech to be recited while in the most dignified and respectful of positions. The Prophet ﷺ tells us that he was prohibited from reciting the Quran while in Ruku [bowing] and while in Sujood [prostration]. The Quran is the Speech of Allah, The Most High, and is due our utmost respect. But how many a time have we recited it absent-mindedly, without any feeling or emotion, without any reflection on its powerful words? For many of us, if asked what of Allah's prohibitions did we just recite, we would have no answer. What of Allah's commands did we just recite?

We cannot recall! People stand behind their Imam in prayer. He recites of Hell and Heaven, and they are off drifting of food and drink. If ever were we to conduct a historic interview with a powerful ruler, how attentive would we be? We would grant not only our submissive ears but all our hearts as well, wouldn't we? In fact, we would be so in tune that we'd probably even memorize this ruler's every word as he speaks! So how can we not be mindful of what we're reciting when it is Allah who speaks to us in this meeting? "Will they not seek to understand this Quran or are there locks upon their hearts?"¹

It is said that if our hearts were pure enough, we would never get enough of Allah's words! Remember, it is not in the *quantity* of Quran recited, but in the *quality* of how we recite and its effect on us. The Prophet once prayed an entire night with just one verse, repeating in tears: "If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants, but if You forgive them - indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise."²

¹ Surah Muhammad 47:24.

² Surah al-Maidah 5:118.

So we are to recite with feeling, aware that we are talking to Allah and He is speaking to us. But how do we know what to feel with any given verse? Ibn al-Qayyim gave us basic guidelines to help us even if we lack thorough knowledge of tafseer. He says that:

- If a verse speaks of Allah's favours upon you, His names, His attributes... then it is *Love* that should fill your heart.

- If a verse speaks of Allah's mercy, forgiveness, the people of Heaven...then it is *Happiness, Comfort, and Hope* that should fill your heart.

- If a verse speaks of Allah's wrath, punishment, destroyed civilizations... then it is *Fear and Worry* that should fill the heart.

Thus we are always in a state between *Love, Hope and Fear* when reciting Allah's words. The Quran is greater than we know...

“If We had sent down this Qur’ān upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and coming apart from fear of God. And these examples We present to the people that perhaps they will give thought.”³

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا
مُتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا
لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

³ Surah al-Hashr 59:21.

Satisfy Your Greatest Need

We have now finished our recitation, we pause momentarily, then begin the bow as we simultaneously call out “*Allahu Akbar*” [Allah is Greater!] - A reminder to *refocus* should we have drifted, a reminder that... We stand here on earth in prayer, while Allah looks upon us from above the seven heavens. Our Salah should thus be a beautiful one, especially our bowing, for Allah is beautiful and loves that which is beautiful! We will not meet anyone this day, greater and more grand than Allah. So let us beautify and perfect this prayer to Him:

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيمِ

“How glorified and perfect My Lord is, The Supreme”⁴

Let the palms rest on the knees, fingers apart. Straighten the back and keep it level with the head. Maintain a calm hold till every part and joint is relaxed and has peacefully set in place. “*Subhana Rabbiyya Al-Adheem*”

Focus on the pronoun that means “*My*” [in Rabbi]. It adds that element of bonding, that ingredient for connection and love. He is *My* Lord [Rabbi] who has raised me in His care, clothing me, feeding me, healing me, nurturing me. A heartfelt “*Subhana*” meaning - far removed is He from any imperfection! “*Subhana Rabbiyya- Al-Adheem*” a second and third time as our hearts are humbled in submission before Him. Realize His Majesty, recall His sovereignty. I place all my hopes with *You, My Lord*.

Many of us perform this part of the prayer mechanically, devoid of any emotion or connection like that felt when reciting Quran or when down in prostration. But in reality, Ruku [bowing]’ is an intense symbol of worship and servitude to our Lord! In it lies the essence of tremendous humbleness and humility! The Arabs back then knew this and the arrogant amongst them refused it in bold defiance! One companion requested, in his pledge to the Prophet, that he proceed from the standing position of prayer immediately to the Sujood [prostration] to bypass Ruku [bowing]’ altogether!

Every one of us was created with particular needs, like the need to feel loved, the need to be alone for a while, the need to know that someone special awaits you at home after a long hard day at work, the need to spend time with your

⁴ Transliterated: “*Subhana Rabbiyya- Al-Adheem*” [said 3 times or more].

children and kiss them to sleep, the need to hear good words, etc. When these needs go unsatisfied, an imbalance occurs within us that can affect the quality of our entire day. We might become irritable and cranky and not know why. A need within us has not been met that day.

But we have been created with a need far greater and more critical for our complete well-being than any other...It is the need *to worship*. To satisfy this need, people through the ages have worshiped everything under the sun [and including the sun]. They worshiped idols, water, animals, snakes, the sun, the stars, money, science, and even their own desires. And they exhaust great efforts and wealth to do so. Indeed, this need to worship must be satisfied, but none of the above can satisfy it like worshiping the One True God! And Salah fulfills that satisfaction with Ruku' [bowing] being an essential and critical part of it.

The Prophet and those before us used to feel such satisfaction and pleasure in Ruku [bowing] that they would hold in that position the same length as when in the standing segment of Salah. One companion said that he recited al-Fatihah, then al-Baqarah, ale-Imran, al-Nisa and al-Ma'idah and the companion Abdullah Ibn Zubair was beside him, still in his Ruku' [bowing]! Ibn Zubair was satiating his greatest need.

The Prophet ﷺ once saw a man rushing through his prayer, pecking up and down his Ruku [bowing] and Sujood [prostration]. He said, "*If this man dies [with his prayer] in this state, then he dies belonging to a creed other than the creed of Muhammad.*" Thus, our Ruku' [bowing] should be performed calmly, peacefully, according to the Prophet's example. This worldly life is full of hardships and aches. We laugh one day, only to cry the next. Its demands and toils leave us thirsty and tired.

What can quench this thirst better than prayer? The Prophet ﷺ said, "*The one who does not complete his Ruku [bowing] properly, is like one who is starving and eats just a date or two. It does nothing to satisfy his hunger!*" Let us then, find our comfort and relief in our Ruku' [bowing] and Sujood [prostration] 17 times each day, we bow...Our love for Allah has to grow with that. And when you love Him, He will love you even more for He is the Most Kind, the Most Generous. And who can ever harm you...when the Creator Himself, loves *you*?

