

The Importance of Daily Prayer in Monotheistic Religions

The connection between man and God cannot be conceived in the absence of prayer, because if God speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures, through prayer we answer Him, we speak with God. Therefore, it can be said that prayer is our conversation with God. And these statements are valid in all monotheistic religions, for both Judaism and Christianity or Islam are religions of the book and all three speak of the importance of prayer in the life of the believer, making prayer the true spiritual breath of man.

Saint Paisius the Aghiorite said that “Christ gives us the opportunity to talk to Him continuously through prayer, and we don’t want to? It’s scary! Even more strange is the fact that Christ wants us to talk to Him in order to help us, and for us, it is difficult”. The Hesychast movement brought with it this permanence of talking with God, the constant talking with Him through prayer, this “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner”, repeated endlessly, in sober state of mind that descends into the heart and warms the whole being, thus springing the peace and joy of communion with God..., and for those who rise more in this communion with God and as His gift, the joy of seeing the uncreated light of the kingdom.

The hesychast prayer is the unceasing, permanent prayer, according to the exhortation of the Holy Apostle Paul in Epistle I to Thessalonians 5, 17-18: “Pray without ceasing. Give thanks for everything, because this is the will of God, in Christ Jesus, for you”. To continually keep the mind on God, to concentrate it permanently and to focus it towards the source of your Being and the surrounding world is the effort of the authentic believer.

There are similar forms of Christian hesychasm in Judaism and in Islam, and even if we could identify some similarities in Jewish Hasidism and the Sufi movement in Islam, we will not go so far as to refer to unceasing prayer, but only to daily prayer. But both in one case and in the other, it is about the rhythmicity of prayer, of talking to God, in contrast

to the attitude of contemporary secularized man, who refuses communion with the Creator through prayer.

In Judaism and Islam, which, even if they do not propose unceasing prayer, go, through blessings (in the case of Judaism), or by recommending the prayer outside its five canonical moments and by saying the names of Allah (in the case of Islam), to a kind of unceasing prayer, or at least, if that wording is too pretentious, to a kind of unceasing remembrance of God.

The specificity and manner of performing the daily prayer in Judaism. The liturgical rhythm in which the Jew thinks about his existence is embodied in the cycle of the three daily prayers, but also in the alternation between the six days of the week and the Sabbath day, when any profane activity is suspended for the whole community. In this rhythm of his spirituality, the practice of prayer takes the leading place. Prayer (*tefilah*, feminine noun.) is man's spontaneous address to God, and the Old Testament offers us numerous examples of it, the book of Psalms, and more, attesting the antiquity of a religious attitude that will become essential for Judaism.

Daily prayer is a duty of the faithful Jew, without which the relationship with Yahweh cannot be conceived. Throughout time, the Jewish people have found in prayer the means by which to express their deepest feelings, cry out their pain, or reveal their exuberance and joy. Along with the trials it had to go through in history, the content of prayers changed, they came to express joy, sadness, hope or despair both in terms of the content of the individual prayers, as well as the communal, liturgical ones.

With the disappearance of the Temple in Jerusalem and the emergence of the synagogue worship, the prayers that were said here tried to imitate the main moments of the day when the sacrifices were brought to the Temple. Thus, the synagogue was intended to be a kind of substitute for the Temple, and the greatest limit was the impossibility of making sacrifices within the synagogue cult. But the performance of sacrifices was replaced in the synagogue by the moments of prayer. Thus, "the morning service (*shaharit*, from *shahar* meaning dawn) and the afternoon service correspond to the morning and afternoon sacrifices, and the evening prayer service (*maariv*, from *erev*, meaning evening) recalls the burning, in the evening, of fats and entrails". So the officiating of these services was not performed regardless of the time of day, but at well-established time intervals, depending on the position of the sun in the sky.

As for the particular daily prayers, these remain for the faithful Jew the prayers upon waking, upon going to bed, the prayers of thanksgiving after the meal, the *kiddush* prayers, the *havdala*, some blessings and the public prayers, as well as various other prayers that rhythm his life.

The specifics and manner of performing the daily prayer in Islam. The prayer (*salat*, *du'a*, *nâmez*) represents one of the five obligatory acts of the Muslim believer and the most important after the confession of faith (*shahada*), but also related to it, due to the importance given to it by Muhammad, considering it the Gordian knot of of faith (*qurrat al-âin*, literary “the apple of his eye”). Since then, from the very beginning, it will be considered as the “pillar of Islam”, its support. According to the Qur’anic text, prayer was discovered from the beginning of mankind, and all the prophets practiced it as a way of worshiping God.

As is known, there are five obligatory prayers every day in the Muslim cultic practice, which come together under the term canonical prayer. These are: *As-Subh* – the morning prayer; *Ad-Dhur* – the midday prayer; *Al-’Asr* – the afternoon prayer, taking place halfway between the zenith and sunset; *Al-Magrîb* – the evening prayer and *Al-’Icha* – the night prayer, the period of saying this prayer being included in the time interval between 8 pm and midnight. As early as the Meccan period, the Qur’an begins to describe the various moments of prayer prescribed by the Prophet. Then, little by little, there is mention of a prayer recommended to Muhammad’s companions.

In general, when talking about the daily prayer in the Islamic world, only these are mentioned, but there are other categories of prayers, some highly recommended, others occasional or optional, each of which having its own name. These prayers follow slightly different rules than the canonical prayer. Among these we mention the following: *Salat al-djumu’a* or the Friday prayer, which takes the place of the noon prayer and is held in the mosque. Its performance requires a minimum number of participants, which differ according to the canonical schools. After the call to prayer, this type of collective prayer is preceded by a double sermon that the imam delivers standing up in the pulpit (*minbar*), making a short pause between the two parts of the speech, during which he sits; *Nafila*, *qunut*, *taravih*, which are the benevolent prayers of request, free, formulated in the form of invocations (*du’a*), which can follow the canonical prayer; *Id al-Fitr* or the fasting that celebrates the end of the Ramadan fasting; *Maghfira* or the

prayer of forgiveness; *Ghrama* – the prayer of return to God; *Dhikr* – the invocation of the divine names and other repeated formulas.

From this brief exposition of the daily prayer in Judaism and Islam, with the mention that there are also other forms of prayer in both religions, which remind us of the unceasing prayer of Hesychasm, one does not arrive at the permanent practice of the prayer, except rarely, and this time by very dedicated people. Nevertheless, prayer has a well-established place, a primordial one, in all three monotheisms.

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