



Nazareth Letter February 2024

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

For our sharing this month it is a huge privilege to have Imam Shahzad Ahmed from the Bait ul Futuh Mosque and his brother Imam's from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community with us.

Praying for the World

“Silence is the language of God, all else is poor translation” (Rumi)

We have begun our prayers today by meditating in silence. A prayer that unites us and calls us into the holy presence of God/Allah- the Creator of all. Though our understanding and faiths may differ in many ways, we are all called to worship, honour and obey God. From listening and sharing and reflecting together on our own sacred texts we learn not only more about other faiths but also more about our own and how it is perceived by others. We learn more about our practice of prayer and our ways of praying and more about our relationship with God and one another. Our aim today is to discover both the things we share but also to honour the differences in our faith traditions and practices. Our faiths are not the same but our aim is to cross the boundaries and prejudices that can sometimes divide and to listen-listen more deeply to the questions and understanding of others. We are seeking a deeper obedience to God. The word obedience comes from the Latin *obedire* which literally means to listen to, to hear, to pay attention- the word also derived from this is *obeisance* which means to show someone great respect-this is a respect reflected with the body- a bow, an act of humility and reverence towards another. Our obedience To God is reflected in our loving attention both in word and through our bodies to God/Allah but also to one another. When we pray our prayer is not just the words we use, but our showing up, our physical presence- our physical attentiveness to the wonder of God and the way we treat all God/Allah has created.

So often what people believe divides us and feeds our prejudices, is in fact misunderstanding. The temptation is to fear or feel threatened by the faith we do not comprehend, possess, or cannot control. So our sharing this month is about leaning from one another- giving one another our full presence, attention and setting aside our territorial/competitive selves to rediscover our universal souls in God.

The Holy Qur'an: Prayer

And when My servants ask thee about Me, say: ‘I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to Me. So they should hearken to Me and believe in Me, that they may follow the right way.’ [2:187]

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

O thou who art bearing a heavy responsibility, Stand up in Prayer at night except a small portion thereof — Half of it, or make it a little less than that Or make it a little more than that — and recite the Qur’an slowly and thoughtfully. Verily, We are charging thee with a weighty Word. Verily, getting up at night is the most potent means of subduing the self and most effective in respect of words of prayer. Thou hast indeed, during the day, a long chain of engagements. So remember the name of thy Lord, and devote thyself to Him with full devotion. [73:1-9]

Observe Prayer at the declining and paling of the sun on to the darkness of the night, and the recitation of the Qur’an in Prayer at dawn. Verily, the recitation of the Qur’an at dawn is specially acceptable to God. And wake up for it (the Qur’an) in the latter part of the night as a supererogatory service for thee. It may be that thy Lord will raise thee to an exalted station. And say, ‘O my Lord, make my entry a good entry and then make me come forth with a good forthcoming. And grant me from Thyself a helping power.’ [17:79-81]

Eyes cannot reach Him but He reaches the eyes. And He is the Incomprehensible, the All-Aware. [6:104]

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 6.5-18

Concerning Prayer

‘And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

‘When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

‘Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

‘And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In our texts both from the Holy Qur’an and The Holy Gospel these are some of the wonderings I invite us to share:

- I wonder what it means when we say “Allah/God is near
- I wonder what it means when we say God/Allah answers our prayer
- Does Allah/God only answer the prayers of the faithful
- The Qur’an talks about standing up in prayer and getting up in the night. Can you tell us about when you pray and your physical posture in prayer and how this helps your prayer.
- I wonder what it means to recite the scriptures slowly and thoughtfully and why this is important.
- I wonder what it means to remember the name of the Lord
- I wonder why is the recitation of the Qur’an at dawn “specially acceptable”
- I wonder why praying together is important in your tradition.
- Where are the places you pray
- What is the form your prayer takes
- How many times a day do you pray and why and what happens if you miss prayer
- In the Lord’s prayer Jesus teaches us to call God “Our Father” I wonder what God is called in the Muslim tradition.
- I wonder how through prayer God is merciful
- I wonder what is the significance of fasting and is it necessary

Let us end by sharing in prayer together.

Richard Carter