**The Twenty-first Word**

**The five daily Prayers and cures for the wounds of the heart caused by involuntary thoughts and doubts**

**In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.**

**Surely the Prayer is a timed prescription for believers. (4:103)**

**FIRST STATION:** ONCE A WELL-KNOWN AND SOCIALLY IMPORTANT old man said to me: “Prayer is okay, but five times a day is too much; it bores and wearies.” A long time after this, my carnal soul told me the same thing. I realized that its laziness had

caused it to listen to this satanic idea. Understanding that those words had been spoken in the name of all carnal, evil-commanding souls, I told myself: “Since my soul orders evil, and one who does not reform his own soul cannot reform others, I will begin with my own soul.” I said: “O soul! In response to such ignorant words said in the bed of indolence and the tor- por of idleness, hear from me the following five warnings.”

*FIRST WARNING:* O wretched soul! Is your life permanent? Do you have a document that you will live until next year or even tomorrow? Your weariness comes from your fancy that you will live forever. You complain as though you will remain here forever in eternal enjoyment. If only you under- stood that your life is short and passes in vain, you would understand that, far from causing boredom or weariness, spending one twenty-fourth of it on a fine, agreeable, easy, and gracious act of service which is the means to happiness in the real, eternal life actually arouses vigor and gives pleasure.

*SECOND WARNING:* O gluttonous soul! Every day you eat, drink and breathe; do these cause you boredom? They do not, because these needs recur and so give pleasure when satisfied. Thus the five daily Prayers should not bore you, for they attract and conduct the needs of your companions in the house of my body—the sustenance of my heart, the water of life of my spirit and the air of my spiritual intellect.

The food and strength of a heart exposed to endless grief and pain, and inclined to infinite pleasure and ambition, may be obtained by knocking on the One All-Compassionate and Munificent’s door through supplication. Also, for a spirit connected with most beings and moving quickly to the other world amid cries of separation, the water of life may be imbibed by turning, through the five daily Prayers, toward the spring of the Everlasting Beloved, the All- Permanent Worshipped One, Who suffices and substitutes for everything.

Further, a conscious inward sense, a luminous and infinitely delicate faculty, and a subtle mirror to the Eternal Being, which by nature desires the eternity for which it was created, is most needy of “air,” of relief and relaxation, so that it can deal successfully with the distressing, crushing, and suffocating conditions of worldly life. It can “breathe” only through the “window” of Prayer.

THIRD WARNING: O impatient soul! Is it at all sensible to think today of the hardship or difficulties of past worship and troubles of past calamities, and so be distressed, and to imagine the difficulties of future worship or service of Prayer, and the pain of future misfortune, and so display impatience? In being thus impatient you resemble a foolish commander who, although the enemy’s right flank has joined his right flank and thus reinforced him, sends a significant force to the right flank only to weaken the center. Also, although no enemy forces are attacking the left flank, he sends a large contingent there and tells it to fire, thereby weakening his center more greatly. This encourages the enemy to attack the center and rout the troops.

Thus, you resemble this commander. For past troubles are now a mercy. Their pain has gone, while their pleasure remains. Hardships have changed into blessings, and trials and toils into rewards. So why should you be weary? Rather, feel a new eagerness and a fresh zeal, and make a serious effort to continue praying. Also, the future has not come yet, so why should you worry about it? This is as ridiculous as complaining now about future hunger and thirst, of thinking of them now and feeling bored and wearied. Since this is the reality, consider only today when it comes to matters of worship. Say: “I am spending one hour out of twenty-four on pleasant and elevated acts of service, the reward for which is great and whose trouble is little.” Your bitter disappointment will change into a pleasurable endeavor.

O impatient soul! You are charged with three types of perseverance: in worship, in refraining from sin, and in the face of misfortune. If you are sensible enough, consider and follow the reality in the comparison in this third warning. Calling, “O All-Persevering One!” derive strength from these three types of perseverance. Using your God-given power of perseverance in the proper way will suffice for every difficulty and misfortune, so hold on to that power.

*FOURTH WARNING:* O foolish soul! Is this duty of worship so fruitless and its reward so little that you feel weary? Whereas if someone offers you money or threatens you, he would make you work until evening, and you would work without respite. So, are the five daily Prayers in vain while they are your weak heart’s “food” in this guest-house of the world, sustenance and light in your grave (a station to eternal life), a document and warrant on the Day of Judgment, and a light and a mount on the Bridge, which everyone has to cross?

Is the Prayer’s reward so little? If someone promised you a present of a hundred dollars, he would make you work for several days. Though he may go back on his word, you would trust him and work without respite. So if One Who never breaks His promise says that He will reward you with something like Paradise and a gift like eternal happiness, and employ you for a very short time in a most agreeable duty—if you leave that service undone or act reluctantly as if being forced and in a manner to accuse Him of His promiseor belittle His gift, would you not deserve a severe reprimand and a terrible punishment? While you work without slacking at the most difficult jobs in this world out of your fear of imprisonment, does the fear of an eternal imprisonment like Hell not give you zeal for so light and pleasant an act of service as the Prayers?

*FIFTH WARNING:* O worldly minded soul! Are your sluggishness in worship and deficiency in the prescribed Prayers due to your many worldly preoccupations? Are you pressed for time on account of the struggle for livelihood? Were you created only for this world that you should spend all your time on it?

You know that you are superior to all animals in respect of you potential, but even a sparrow can do a better job than you when it comes to satisfying your daily needs. Why do you not understand from this that your duty as a human being is not to labor only for worldly aims like animals but to work for the real, everlasting life. Besides, most worldly concerns are trivial and useless matters from which you derive no benefit. Yet, leaving aside the most essential things, you spend your time acquiring useless information, as if you were going to live for thousands of years. For example, you waste your precious time on worthless things like learning what the rings around Saturn are like or how many chickens there are in the United States. Are you preparing a doctorate in astronomy or in livestock statistics?

If you say: “The essential requirements of earning a livelihood keep me from the Prayer and make me tired,” my answer will be as follows: Suppose that you work for a daily wage of ten dollars, and someone comes and tells you: “Dig here for ten minutes, and you’ll find a brilliant emerald worth $100.” If you reply: “No, I won’t come, because the boss will cut my wage by 20 cents, and so I will earn less,” you can see how foolish that argument is.

In just the same way, you work in your orchard for your livelihood. If you abandon the prescribed Prayers, all the fruits of your work are limited to a worldly, insignificant, and unproductive livelihood. However, if you spend your rest periods praying, which is the means for your spirit to become lively and your heart to experience ease, you also will discover two mines which are important sources for both a productive worldly livelihood and your provisions for the Hereafter: First, through a sound intention, you will receive a share in the glorifications offered by your orchard’s plants and trees. Second, whatever produce is eaten, by people or animals, will return to you like alms. But this will happen only if you work in the Real Provider’s name and within His permission’s sphere, and consider yourself a distribution official distributing His property among His creatures.

See what a great loss one who does not pray suffers, what significant wealth he loses, and he is deprived of the two mines that support one’s efforts with high motives and actions with strong morale. As he ages, he will grow weary of gardening and saying: “What’s all this to me? I’m leaving the world anyway, so why bother?” slides into idleness. But one who both prays and works for his livelihood says: “I will try harder to perform the obligatory worship and earn legitimately and honestly so that I may send more light to my grave and procure more provisions for my life in the Hereafter.”

In short: O soul, yesterday has left you and you have no guarantee that you will be alive tomorrow. Your life consists of today. Set at least one hour aside for the mosque or the Prayer mat, a savings box and reserve fund for the Hereafter. Set this hour aside for your real future. Also know that each new day is the door to a new world. If you do not pray, your world of that day will go dark and wretched and will testify against you in the World of Immaterial Forms or Representations. Each day, everyone has a private world, the nature of which depends on one’s heart and deeds, contained in this world. Just as a magnificent palace reflected in a mirror assumes the mirror’s color and quality, just as an uneven mirror shows the finest things to be coarse, so do you change your own world’s appearance through your heart, mind, deeds, and attitudes. You may cause it either to testify for or against you.

If you pray and turn toward the All-Majestic Maker, your private world will be illuminated suddenly. Prayer resembles a powerful electric light switched on by your intention to pray. It disperses your world’s dark- ness and shows that the changes and movements in this confused, tumul- tuous world arise from, and for the purpose of, a wise order and a meaningful arrangement of Divine Power. It disperses over your heart a light from the light-filled verse: *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth* (24:35). And, illuminating your world on that day through its reflection, that light will cause your world to testify for you through its luminosity.

Never say: “My Prayers mean almost nothing when compared with the reality of what Prayer should be.” For just as the date-palm stone encapsulates and contains the tree itself (the difference is only between the summary and the fully evolved or elaborated form), a great saint’s Prayer is fully evolved while that of ordinary people like us (even if we are unaware of it) has a share in that Divine light, and a mystery in its truth. However, our perception of and illumination by that truth varies according to our degrees.

Just as there are many stages and degrees between a date-palm’s stone and the fully grown tree, praying and benefiting from our Prayers are characterized by possibly even more numerous degrees and stages. However, the basis of that luminous truth is present in each degree or stage.

O God! Bestow blessings and peace on him who said: “The prescribed Prayers are the pillar of religion,” and on his Family and Companions.