

# Interpreting the Meaning of Islamic Ritual

## The spiritual significance of ritual prayer

according to

al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d. 1224/1809)

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Ritual prayer, *al-ṣalāh*, is the most central ritual of Islam. According to the Qur’ān, prayer forms the foundation of all worship and it is by means of prayer that man responds to the divine summoning: “*Adore Me and perform prayer in remembrance of Me!*”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, prayer enables him to realize the meaning of his existence, “*And I did not create the jinn and mankind except that they may worship Me*”<sup>2</sup>, and comply with the essence of prophetic messages: “*They were only commanded to worship God devoting to Him an exclusive cult as monotheists and to perform prayer and pay the prescribed alms; that is the upright religion*”<sup>3</sup>.

It is mainly in prayer that the believer is in direct contact with the Qur’ānic revelation and it is through its regular performance that he marks his adherence to Islam and obedience to divine law. Being the second pillar of Islam, the prayer includes the renewal of the profession of faith (*al-shahāda*) and represents its practical application: “*Those who believe in the invisible and perform prayer*”<sup>4</sup>. Revealed to the Prophet by the Archangel Jibrīl (Gabriel) and established as a daily ritual when he reached the summit of Ascension (*mi’rāj*), prayer also embodies the contemplative aspect and the spiritual dimension of Islamic practice.

Required five times a day according to a sacred spatial orientation, the ritual prayer sanctifies the daily rhythm of the believer. It also allows him to constantly renew the link with the three founding realities of Islamic life<sup>5</sup>, that is God (and His speech), the Prophet and the community (*al-umma*). As an act of worship prescribed on a regular basis, it is through prayer that man directs his inner “face” (*wajh*) and centre of his being to God, to glorify and declare His praise, to abase himself as a submissive servant to Him, for addressing his request for clemency and guidance and, above all, to realize the recollection (*dhikr*) of God: “*Turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are turn your faces towards it*”<sup>6</sup>.

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1 *Qur’ān*, 20 : 14.

2 *Ibidem*, 51 : 56.

3 *Ibidem*, 98 : 5.

4 *Ibidem*, 2 : 2.

5 Cf. MONNOT, Guy, « ṣalāh », *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, Leiden : Brill, 1995, vol. VIII, pp. 925.

6 *Qur’ān*, 2 : 144.

By performing *ṣalāh* man associates himself to the cosmic and angelic adoration: “the seven heavens glorify Him, and all that is therein; there is naught that celebrates not His praise”<sup>7</sup>. In fact, prayer is an act of gratitude (*shukr*) expressing the recognition of divine benefactions (*ni‘ma, faḍl*), and in this way it distinguishes the believer from the disbeliever (*kāfir*) who refuses to recognize his dependency on God and to express gratitude for divine bounty. The various dispositions of prayer engage all the human faculties, in particular the consciousness by intention, the speech by recitation as well as the limbs by the various movements and positions. Prayer thus incorporates all modes of worship and actualises in a ritual framework the relationship between man and God, between creature and Creator.

The spiritual significance of ritual prayer has only recently attracted the attention of academic research. C. E. Padwick<sup>8</sup> is probably the first author having dedicated a whole study on Islamic spiritual practices. The work offers above all an exposition of the variety of meanings the concept of prayer (*du‘ā, ṣalāh, dhikr* etc.) takes within Islamic devotional practice. The purpose of this essay is to enrich the doctrinal spectrum of the subject and to show that the interpretations of *ṣalāh* are in fact developments of its original meanings as they appear in the Qur’ān and in the Hadith literature. The essay hopes thus to contribute to the debate concerning the genuine Islamic origin of Muslim spirituality such as it has been initiated by such scholars as L. Massignon<sup>9</sup> and P. Nwyia<sup>10</sup> in the fields of terminology and hermeneutics respectively. We do certainly not pretend to treat this subject in an exhaustive way, the objective being rather to highlight that Islamic practice, far from constituting a closed system of predefined norms devoid of any interpretative potential, represents a dynamic reference which has never ceased to inspire Muslim thought in a creative way.

The introductory part of this paper will be treating the fundamental ideas as to what constitutes the significance of ritual prayer in the Qur’ān and secondly in the sayings of the Prophet. Without getting too much into details, our main concern will be to develop further some key issues highlighted in the article of *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. The second and main begins with an extract from a contemporary *fiqh* treatise, introducing the presentation of a selection of extracts from the writings of two illustrious Sufi authors which, despite of their interest, have not yet been translated. The

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7 *Ibidem*, 17 : 44.

8 PADWICK, Constance E., *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use*, London: S.P.C.K., 1961.

9 MASSIGNON, Louis, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Paris: P. Geuthner, 1922.

10 NWYIA, Paul, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* (2<sup>nd</sup> edit.), Beirut : Dar al-Mashreq, 1991.

texts of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and of Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d. 1224/1809) have been chosen first because of their originality and secondly because of the historical and geographic distance that separates them, which shows that interpreting Islamic practice has never ceased to preoccupy Muslim thinkers of any cultural background. This paper being only a first introduction to this vast subject, a future research is planned to include other works such as the *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* of Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1235) or the *Ḥujja Allāh al-bāligha* of Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dahlāwī (d. 1176/1762).

### 1. Universal and *muhammadan* adoration – *ṣalāh* according to the Qur’ān and the sayings of the Prophet

#### **The *ṣalāh* in the Qur’ān – Primordial and universal act of worship**

In the Qur’ān the term *ṣalāh* does not mean the systematic ritual of prayer, but generally expresses an act of praise (*ḥamd*), glorification (*tasbīḥ*) and therefore worship (*‘ibāda*), revealed since the beginning of humanity and practiced by all prophets: “*And We made them leaders, guiding by Our command, and We inspired in them the performance of good deeds and the maintenance of prayers and the payment of alms, and they used to worship Us*”<sup>11</sup>. The Qur’ān relates various anecdotes which show that ritual prayer forms with the ritual almsgiving (*zakāh*) the essential practical element of the messages of all the prophets. Finally, *ṣalāh* constitutes the form of adoration of those who adhered to the pure religion, the *ḥunafā’*: “*So set your purpose for religion, as a ḥanīf – a nature given by God, upon which He originated mankind. [...] That is the upright religion, but most people do not know. Turn to Him and fear Him and establish prayer and do not be among the idolaters*”<sup>12</sup>. As the seal (*khatm*) of the divine messengers, the Prophet Muhammad also receives several times the order to perform this primordial prayer: “*Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and maintain prayer; truly prayer prohibits lewd acts and indecency*”<sup>13</sup>.

As praise and glory, prayer is not reserved for mankind alone, the entire creation is in a perpetual prayer (“*Do you not see that everything in heaven and on earth, as well as the birds spreading their wings to proclaim His glory? They know all the*

<sup>11</sup> *Qur’ān*, 21 : 73. See *ibidem*, 14 : 37 for Abraham, 10 : 87 for Moses and 19 : 31 for Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 30 : 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 29 : 45.

prayers and praises of their own and God is fully aware of what they do!"<sup>14</sup>; "Before God bows down everything, the people of heaven and earth, angels and creeping things, and they do not boast!"<sup>15</sup>) and it constitutes the principal activity of the angels. Thus every element of creation, whether it belongs to the mineral, vegetal, animal, human or angelic order has its particular way to perform prayer.

As for the human form of prayer, the Qur'ān gives only few details about its modalities, the elements it mentions being those which are shared with the universal prayer alluded to above: standing (*qiyām*)<sup>16</sup>, inclination (*rukū'*)<sup>17</sup>, prostration (*sujūd*)<sup>18</sup> as far as concerns body movements, praise (*ḥamd*)<sup>19</sup>, glorification (*tasbīḥ*)<sup>20</sup> and magnification (*takbīr*)<sup>21</sup> for speech, inner recollection (*khushū'*)<sup>22</sup> and remembrance of God (*dhikr*)<sup>23</sup>. Often associated with ritual almsgiving (*zakāh*) as an active corollary of faith, prayer, offered exclusively to God, embodies the vertical aspect of worship, while the ritual alms, being offered to creatures, represent the horizontal aspect. The importance of prayer is underscored by the fact that it must be accomplished in any situation, that is, during travel, illness or war, which is not the case for fasting, for example, although it constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam, too.

### **"Pray as you see me praying" — The Prophet's prayer**

Unlike the Qur'ān, in the Hadith, when it comes to prayer, it is the Islamic form of prayer that constitutes the main subject. The various prophetic sayings explain above all the various normative aspects (*al-ahkām*) of prayer and its virtues or benefits (*al-fadā'il*). As for the meaning of prayer, we can distinguish various aspects. Firstly, the *ṣalāh* distinguishes the Muslim from the unbeliever as it is expressed in numerous sayings such as the following: "Between man and belief there is only the abandon of ritual prayer"<sup>24</sup>. The jurists have subsequently taken up this issue and discussed how should be considered those Muslims who do not perform prayer. Further, we find the idea of purification and regeneration associated to ritual prayer, such as it appears in

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14 *Ibidem*, 24 : 41.

15 *Ibidem*, 16 : 49.

16 *Ibidem*, 2 : 238.

17 *Ibidem*, 22 : 77.

18 *Ibidem*.

19 *Ibidem*, 15 : 98.

20 *Ibidem*.

21 *Ibidem*, 17 : 111; 74 : 3.

22 *Ibidem*, 23 : 2.

23 *Ibidem*, 86: 15; 20 : 14.

24 Cf. for the Hadiths cited AL-GHAZĀLĪ, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad, *op. cit.*

the following two Hadiths: “The five prayers are like a broad river flowing nearby and where you wash five times a day” and “Each of the five prayers erase the sins committed between the time of its completion and before prayer”. The contemplative aspect of the *ṣalāh* is highlighted by the fact that it is in the prayer that the believer meets his Lord as the Prophet met Him in his Night Journey (*al-Isrā’ wa al-Mi‘rāj*): “Prayer is the Ascension (*mi‘rāj*) of the believer”. The idea of being face-to-face with God appears in numerous Hadiths, as does the idea of conversation (*munājah*) between the servant and his Lord: “When the servant begins to accomplish prayer, God lifts the veil that is between them and is face to face with him (*wājahahu bi-wajhihi*); [...] a herald then cries: If the one who converses (*al-munājī*) [in this prayer] knew with Whom he converses (*man yunājī*), he would vanish”<sup>25</sup>.

In fact, the sayings of the Prophet concerning *ṣalāh* stipulate the *Muhammadan* form of the universal and primordial prayer exposed in the Qur’ān. Furthermore, the rules that are stipulated by the Hadith are designed to encourage a contemplative experience.

## 2. The spiritual meaning of *Ṣalāh*

Ritual prayer and its preludes form the first chapter of Fiqh manuals, some of which have been translated into English<sup>26</sup>. As one could expect from a jurisprudential treatise, there is not much information about the meaning of prayer, but, the linguistic and technical material it contains merits to attract our interest, as can be seen in the following extract from a contemporary reference work on Fiqh:

“From the point of view of linguistics (*lugha*) the term *ṣalāh* means “motion, humiliation, invocation (*du‘ā*) or “request, invoking the good”. God says: “Pray over them because your prayer is for them a source of tranquillity”<sup>27</sup> i.e. invoke God for them.

In legal terminology (*istilāh*) [*ṣalāh* is defined as:] “A series of movements and specific words introduced by the *takbīr* [saying *Allāhu akbar*] and closed by the *taslīm* [saying *al-salām ‘alaykum*]”<sup>28</sup>.

As can be seen from this classical definition of prayer according to the science of Fiqh, only the technical aspect is considered here. As we will see in the Sufi

25 Cited from IBN ‘AJĪBA, Aḥmad, *Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa al-kabīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2004, p. 244.

26 The *Salvation of the Soul and Islamic Devotions* by ABOU QUASIM, Mohamed (London/Boston: Paul & Kegan, 1984) is a translation of Ḥasan Shurunbulālī’s (d. 1069/1695) *Nūr al-iḍāh*, a Hanafi Fiqh manual on *‘ibadāt* that is used in many Near Eastern Islamic curriculums.

27 Qur’ān, 22 : 78.

28 AL-ZUḤAYLĪ, Wahba, *Al-Fiqh al-islāmī wa adillatuhu*, Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1997, vol. I, p. 572.

writings, this technical aspect is regarded as a means to achieve the inner meaning of prayer. When the Fiqh definition insists on the act of “entering” and “quitting” prayer through the *takbīr* and the *taslīm*, it does in fact describe the *ṣalāh* as a sacred “state”. The notion of *taḥrīm* which denotes the act of the *takbīr* as far as it marks the beginning of the prayer, expresses the idea that the state into which one enters while praying is to be protected from profane elements. It is thus *ḥarām*<sup>29</sup>—sacred, forbidden, inviolable—to everything that is foreign to its sacred character<sup>30</sup>. The concept of *iḥrām* is certainly very close to the one of purity which is often associated with prayer in the Hadiths, as we have seen in the previous chapter. The linguistic definition too makes reference to the inner meaning of *ṣalāh*, since the request (*du‘ā*) constitutes the basic theme of the surat *al-Fātiḥa* which is recited in every cycle of prayer and tranquility (*sakīna*) may be regarded, within religious experience, as a verily contemplative attitude.

If the meaning of ritual prayer as it is described in the Fiqh treatises somewhat implies an interior dimension of ritual prayer, the Sufis have always sought to develop further certain of its aspects in order to integrate this most fundamental Islamic ritual in their spiritual experience, as will be seen in the following passages.

### **Al-Tirmidhī and the primordial covenant**

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892)<sup>31</sup> from the region of Khurasān in today’s eastern Iran is a rather singular figure of early Islamic spirituality. Nonetheless, his writings, especially those which concern the doctrine of sainthood (*al-walāya*), exercised a profound influence on medieval Sufi writers, such as the Shadhiliyya authors<sup>32</sup>, Persian Sufism and Ibn al-‘Arabī<sup>33</sup>. The juridical thought of al-Tirmidhī has not yet been studied, despite the numerous writings of the author on this issue and the originality of his approach. A Moroccan researcher has recently edited one of these treatises, the *Ithbāt al-‘ilal*<sup>34</sup> (“The Affirmation of Legal Reasons”), which gives us the occasion to explore

29 The same term is used for the most holy place of Islam, the Mosque in Mecca, *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*.

30 It is for this reason, as Muslim scholars explain generally, that only passages from the Qur’ān or invocations from the Hadith are permitted to be pronounced during prayer.

31 Cf. RADKTE, Bernd, *Al-Ḥakīm at-Tirmidhī – Ein islamischer Theosoph des 3./9. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg, 1980; GEYOUSHI, Muhammed Ibrahim, “Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī: His works and thoughts”, *The Islamic Quarterly*, n° 14, 1970, p. 159 ff.

32 Cf. GOBILLOT, Geneviève, “Présence d’al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī dans la pensée shādhilī”, *Une voie soufie dans le monde, la Shādhiliyya*, GEOFFROY, Eric (dir.), Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2005, p. 31-52.

33 Cf. CHODKIEWICZ, Michel, *Le sceau des saints*, Paris: Gallimard, 1986, p. 42-49.

34 AL-TIRMIDHĪ, Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ḥakīm, *Kitāb ithbāt al-‘ilal*, ZAHRI, Khalid (éd.), Rabat: Manshūrāt Kulliyya al-Ādāb wa al-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyya, 1998.

al-Tirmidhī's interpretation of the significance of *ṣalāh*. The notion of *'ilal* is actually taken from the science of the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, and denotes the purpose and the reason for which God has established a legal ruling<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, the text by al-Tirmidhī on the *'illah* of ritual prayer is supposed to reveal why God has rendered obligatory prayer.

“The reason for [the obligation] of prayer is that its performance (*al-qiyām*) corresponds to the surrender (*taslīm*) of the soul to God, for when man gives his limbs to distraction (*ghafla*), they deploy their carnal passions (*shahwa*) and engage in what is not permitted to them. [Prayer] was then prescribed for the soul so that it may renew its surrender, since Islam means that the servant agrees to perform the act of total servitude (*al-'ubūdiyya*) for God and to surrender the soul to Him by obeying Him voluntarily in what God has ordained for the purpose of preserving total service. This is the covenant (*mīthāq*) to which God has engaged the servant and to which He engaged the seven limbs, namely hearing, sight, speech, belly, sex, hands and feet. [...] So when [the servant] accepts this pact from his Lord, he has herewith surrendered his soul to Him and this Islām. Then he commits himself to the fidelity [towards this covenant] until the term of his earthly existence.

When [the servant] wanders in pursuit of those passions which are not allowed to him, he needs to renew his surrender [to God]. For, similarly, if he violates the principle and returns to the passion idol worship, he needs to renew Islam. Thus when he returns to the passion of acts of disobedience (*ma'āṣī*), he needs to renew the surrender of his soul in obeying Him. Hence he performs ritual prayer, because praying humiliates the soul (*tadhillu al-nafs*) and the standing of the servant before his Lord, refraining himself from all sorts of passions, thus joining them before Him, is the manner of the servant who wants to fulfil what he has promised in regard to surrender and to make up for what he has neglected”<sup>36</sup>.

This short extract shows how al-Tirmidhī follows a rather singular “psychological” approach. The thematic frame of his interpretation is determined by the opposition between the worldly tendencies of man (*shahwa*) and the covenant he took with God to fulfil the requirements of servitude (*al-'ubūdiyya*). Ritual prayer, engaging the limbs by obedience and the soul by surrender, is thus a means to remain faithful to the divine covenant as it permits man to preserve externally and internally his servitude. It therefore represents the assimilation of the essence of Islam, namely *taslīm*, surrender.

The doctrinal implications of this seemingly simple interpretation are in fact quite vast. The notion of covenant (*mīthāq*) has since al-Junayd (d. 297/911)<sup>37</sup> the func-

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35 For further explanations regarding the “intentionalist approach” of Islamic law see the excellent study by Bernard G. Weiss (*The Spirit of Islamic Law*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

36 AL-TIRMIDHĪ, Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ḥakīm, *op. cit.*, p. 91-92.

37 Cf. ABDEL-KADER, Ali Hassan, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1976, p.76-81.

tion of exposing the primordial meaning of spiritual practice. The attainment of *'ubūdiyya* means then the return to the state when the spirits acknowledged the absolute Lordship of God, as it is described in the Qur'ān<sup>38</sup>. The *'illa* of the *ṣalāh*, as explained by al-Tirmidhī, includes thus implicitly the idea that by the performance of ritual prayer man is able to fulfill the primordial covenant he took with God before creation. The obligatory character of prayer is only a consequence of the engagement which man's spirit took with God. Al-Tirmidhī's interpretation integrates the *ṣalāh* into a larger theological doctrine and conveys to it a fundamental function in regard to man's spiritual destiny.

### **Ibn 'Ajība and the prayer as a means to spiritual realization**

The Moroccan Sufi Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība<sup>39</sup> (d. 1224/1809), disciple of al-Darqāwī (d. 1239/1823), is one of the most read 19th century authors of Sufism. In his writings he realizes a remarkable synthesis between the spiritual tradition of the Maghreb and the classical Sufism of the Orient. Having turned relatively lately to *taṣawwuf* after a successful career as *'ālim*, he manages to blend the essentialist approach of the *darqāwīyya* with the doctrinal and terminological elaboration characteristic of the Middle East.

In his *Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa al-kabīr* ("The Major Exegesis of the Fātiḥa"), Ibn 'Ajība treats various aspects of what he calls the science of the law (*sharī'ah*) insofar as it constitutes the external aspect of spiritual realisation<sup>40</sup>. He firstly elucidates the relation between the five pillars of Islam, of which prayer occupies the second position after the testimony of faith (*al-shahāda*).

"As the unbelievers used to prostrate themselves and to pray before idols, ritual prayer has been rendered obligatory in order to efface unbelief from the exterior limbs after it has been effaced from the heart and the tongue [by the testimony of faith]. Furthermore, the performance of ritual prayer includes the intimate conversation (*munājāh*) with God five times a day, so that [the believer] may achieve vigilance (*murāqabah*) of God's [presence] and [remain in] constant consciousness of His unity which he has attested in the testimony"<sup>41</sup>.

38 *Qur'ān*, 7 : 172.

39 Cf. MICHON, Jean-Louis, *L'autobiographie du Soufi Marocain Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība*, Milan: Archè, 1982, and by the same author *Le soufi marocain Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība et son Mi'rāj* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Paris: J. Vrin, 1990.

40 The two other sciences are consequently the science of the spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*) and the science of supreme reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*).

41 IBN 'AJĪBA, Aḥmad, *Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa al-kabīr*, Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004, p. 240.



The author proposes two reasons for the institution of ritual prayer, the first being determined by the historical context in which the Islamic revelation has occurred. But this contingent factor is in fact only an expression of a spiritual significance. Prayer effaces exterior unbelief (*kufr*) as it effaces interior “unbelief”, in other words, being distracted from God’s presence. A little bit further, Ibn ‘Ajība explains the merit and excellence of ritual prayer.

“There is no doubt that the presence of prayer (*ḥaḍra al-ṣalāh*) is the most supreme of all presences, because it is the moment of intimate conversation [with God] and the mine of pure relationship in which the flashes of [divine] light shine and [His] secrets are revealed”<sup>42</sup>.

Three motives appear in this passage. Firstly, there is the notion of intimate conversation with God, *al-munājāh*. The excellence of prayer consists in the fact that it constitutes the context in which man may communicate with the divine, or rather in which God addresses Himself directly to His servant. Purity as well as the divine light and secrets are in fact consequences of the conversation motive, for they denote the impact the *munājāh* produces on the inner being of the one praying. When God speaks to man, the other-than-Him, i.e. “impurity”, vanishes and this divine speech, which in fact is the Qur’ān one recites in prayer as Ibn ‘Ajība explains further<sup>43</sup>, illuminates and raises him in a way that gives him access to the perception of divine realities or secrets.

In another passage Ibn ‘Ajība explains the secrets and etiquettes of the basic cultic (*‘ibādāt*) and social (*mu‘āmalāt*) norms treated by the *sharī‘ah*. The following extract concerns the secrets (*asrār*)<sup>44</sup> of ritual prayer:

“The secret of the obligation of prayer and the specification of its moment is to establish the requirements of servitude (*al-‘ubūdiyya*) and to manifest the magnificence of divine Lordship (*al-rubūbiyya*). In fact, this is required from the servant at any time, but since God knows the weakness of the servant and his inability [to fulfill them constantly], He ordered him to stand before Him in these specific moments, especially when he rises from his sleep in order that his day begins with the worship of his Lord, as an act of gratitude for the dissipation of the darkness that befell him at night [...]”<sup>45</sup>.

This explanation of Ibn ‘Ajība reminds of al-Tirmidhī’s as far as the notion of *‘ubūdiyya* concerns and the idea that man is wanted to abide in a state of perpetual

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42 *Ibidem*, p. 244.

43 *Ibidem*, p. 254.

44 The notion of *asrār* has been developed by al-Ghazālī in his *Ihyā’* and suggests that Islamic rites have an inner and hidden meaning that gives access to a contemplative experience.

45 *Ibid*, p. 253.

servitude. The Moroccan author adds an expression that reveals the spiritual meaning of servitude, namely the manifestation of divine Lordship. In the teaching of the *dar-qāwiyya*<sup>46</sup>, the *'ubūdiyya*, being identified as the station of the Prophet, corresponds to the highest spiritual rank (*maqām*) due to its being the state in which the otherwise unattainable God reveals Himself to man through His Lordship (*al-rubūbiyya*).

The approach of Ibn 'Ajība actually considers ritual prayer within the scope of spiritual realisation. Despite man's weakness, the *ṣalah* allows him to progress in the spiritual path by constantly imposing upon him a ritual act that embodies the station of *'ubūdiyya* which represents the purpose of Sufism. Ritual Prayer is thus an indispensable element of the spiritual path.

### 3. Conclusion

Far from exhausting the subject, the two extracts give an impression of the doctrinal richness of the theme and of its immense hermeneutic possibilities. On the other hand, there are some leitmotifs which appear in each of them and which in fact are further developments of the Qur'ānic and prophetic concepts of ritual prayer. The notion of regeneration as it appears above all in the Hadiths receives a "primordial" significance with al-Tirmidhī. Insisting on the renewal (*tajdīd*) of the surrender to God, the purifying regeneration alluded to in the prophetic sayings, is interpreted as being essentially a re-actualization of the spiritual relationship between man and God. Another major theme appears to be the servitude (*'ubūdiyya*). In the Qur'ān, servitude is expressed in its active form as adoration (*'ibāda*) of which prayer, as we have seen, constitutes the most important modality. In both texts, the actual purpose of ritual prayer is to perpetuate man's servitude to God, since man's passion and weakness cause him to forget what constitutes his essential attribute. The contemplative aspect of *ṣalāh*, basically expressed in terms of "meeting the Lord" in the Hadith, is presented as a consequence of the servitude that man achieves through prayer. Again, the notion of "conversation" seems fundamental and is therefore exploited in the scope of spiritual progress such as it is described in the Sufi writings.

This concise study of two Sufi texts on the spiritual significance of prayer and their relation to the Qur'ān and the Hadiths shows how the interpretation of Islamic practice represents a rich field for academic research, because it contributes in a sig-

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46 Cf. for exemple AL-DARQĀWĪ, al-'Arabī, *Majmū'a al-rasā'il*, Abu Dhabi: Majma' al-Thaqāfī, 1999, p. 106, p. 110, p. 130, p.145.

nificant manner to the understanding of the various aspects of the Islamic religious experience and its ritual expressions.

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