

Symbolism of Islamic Prayer

Dr. Rodney Blackhirst

In some respects salat or the canonical Islamic prayer ritual is the most important of the five essential observances called the Five Pillars of Islam, for it is the only one to which the believer is required to adhere every day. The Testimony of Faith is the most essential of these pillars in absolute terms - without it one is simply not a Muslim -, but Testimony is only required once in a lifetime, as is the Pilgrimage to Mecca and in the case of the Pilgrimage it is only if circumstances permit. The Fast of Ramadan and the Poor Tax are annual requirements, and for these there are exceptions. The prayer, however, is daily and there are no exceptions except the allowances made for menstruating women. In the practical life of the Muslim, therefore, the salat is the greatest burden of the Law. The Koran, strictly speaking, only petitions believers to practice "regular prayer" (most often, "keep regular prayer and pay the poor tax") but in the codifications of Islamic Law this settled into five canonical times per day: at first light, at noon, midnight, after sunset and at night. Not only is this cycle a personal discipline and a means by which the believer punctuates the day with worship, it also has a symbolic significance that illuminates the deepest roots of the Islamic faith. So to do the prescribed bodily postures and movements of the prayer ritual which are themselves cyclic in nature - salat is measured in terms of cycles or rakas - and are part of the same symbolism. This symbolism concerns the primordial myth of cyclic regeneration. As the final revelation and at the same time a reiteration of the primordial revelation, Islam has the cosmic cycle - and especially its approaching end - as a central theme. The theme takes symbolic form in the cycles of the daily prayer times and, more explicitly, in the cycles of the prayer gestures and movements.

As far as the cycle of prayer times is concerned, it is based on the daily movements - risings, settings and culminations - of the Sun and provides Islam with its particular development of solar symbolism. In Christianity and other religions solar symbolism is expressed in terms of the Sun's annual cycle - its passage between the equinoxes and the solstices - but in Islam the annual cycle is determined by lunar movements not solar and instead it is the daily cycle of the Sun from east to west and from the heavens to the underworld to which Islamic spirituality is attuned. In this, the daily movements of the Sun repeat, within twenty-four hours, the same cycles it completes in a year so that dawn and dusk are parallel to the equinoxes and noon and midnight to the solstices. Even though Islam assiduously avoids even the impression that the Sun itself is an object of worship and so, for example, forbids prayer during the actual risings and settings of the Sun (noting, however, that, conversely, it provides special prayers to mark an eclipse of the Sun in a directly helio-focused way), the prayer times are nevertheless arranged around the two axes of the Sun's diurnal movement - the horizontal and, in the greater cycle, equinoctial, axis of East-West and the vertical, solstitial axis of Up-Down. In the Christian perspective, the two axes of the equinoxes and the solstices introduces a cruciform symbolism that develops the identification of Christ with the annual death and resurrection of the Sun. Islam, of course, makes no such development but the symbolism of the solar cross is nevertheless marked by the prayer times; opposite to the dawn prayer is the dusk prayer and opposite to noon prayer is the night prayer. The fifth prayer time

in this arrangement, asr, represents a projection of the centre of this cross (the quintessence) and thus is marked for special attention: it is the "middle prayer" that the Koran specifically yet cryptically adjures Muslims not to neglect, the designation "middle" referring to its centrality, not to it being in the "middle of the afternoon" as externalists will commonly explain. Despite there being five prayer times - and this, with the Five Pillars, gives Islam the five-pointed star as one of its emblems - the symbolism of the prayer times is essentially axial and fourfold (and thus is related more to the symbolism of the Kaaba than to the Five Pillars) and marks the cross of the four extremes of the Sun's daily course which, in turn, are the same four extremes marked by equinoxes and solstices in the annual cycle. By extension, both daily and annual solar cycles reiterate the still greater cycles of cosmic time including the cycle of the Four Ages which cycle is near its completion as the very existence of Islam signals. We need only note that the primordial perspective of Islam - in which the duality of night and day is more essential than the quartnerity of the seasons - tends to see the two solar axes as separate rather than developing them together into cruciform symbolism as does Christianity.

Throughout Islamic symbolism the two axes marked by the Sun are presented as expressions of the fundamental distinction between the notions of "deputy" (khalifah) and "slave" (abd). The Islamic understanding of the human condition is founded upon these two interdependent, indeed axial, ideas. On the one hand, according to the Islamic view, man is a deputy of God on earth. He is appointed as God's representative, and as such he has responsibility for the earth and its resources. The all-important correlary of this, however, is that man is also the slave of God and as such is utterly dependent upon Him and is bound to obey His laws and to exercise the right of deputation according to God's revealed wishes. In his status as khalifah Islam conceives of man as a free, noble and self-responsible agent, but in his slavery to God this freedom is held in check, man is kept from a self-deceiving Prometheanism, and he must confess to himself and to his God his mere creaturehood. This amounts to the distinctive Islamic formulation of the Biblical doctrine of stewardship, for man controls but does not own his earthly habitation. In axial terms, the dignity of God's khalifah denotes a vertical symbolism while the humility of His abd is horizontal by contrast. Prayer in Islam is always conceived as dhikr or "rememberance" and in the cycles of the canonical prayer the worshipper is reminded of exactly the deputy-slave distinction (khalifah-abd) and exactly this understanding of the human place in the Creation. This is not achieved by functional or liturgical differences between the various daily prayers, however. The format and content is the same in every case. There is no special ritual for the dawn prayer or the night prayer or the others. The only thing that distinguishes the two axes is the number of prayer cycles (rakas) to be made at each juncture: in this the prayers of the dawn-dusk axis are comparatively brief (two and three rakas respectively) - while the prayers of the noon-night axis are longer (both four rakas each), which difference reflects the relative velocity of the Sun at the equinoxes compared to the solstices and also the varying lengths of the Four Ages. But there is no difference between one rakas and another. The rakas is the basic unit - one complete cycle of prayer. And so the structure of the rakas is the primary mnemonic by which the believer is reminded that he is both the deputy and the slave of God, and it is in the structure of the rakas, not in distinctions between various prayer times, that the axial symbolism sketched above is most explicit.

There are several worshipful postures of the human body admitted in Islamic ritual practice, but two of them are of fundamental significance: standing (qiyam) and prostration (sajda). The prayer begins in the standing posture. The Muslim faces the direction of the kaaba in

Mecca - which is to say the qibla - in an upright but relaxed standing position, with the feet slightly apart and the hands either folded near the navel, over the breast or hanging free naturally, according to minor divergencies between different schools of thought. It is in this position that the Muslim is to be conscious of being God's khalifah. This is clear from the liturgy recited at this point:

...You alone do we worship, and to You alone do we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path...

This is the fatihah or Exordium to the Koran which is conspicuous among the Koranic revelations in being a prayer directed to God which is moreover conspicuous for being in the plural. The Muslim does not pray to God in this context in terms of I, me or mine. Rather, the fatihah is a collective prayer and standing in this position, symbolically facing his Lord, the Muslim represents not only himself but all mankind and even all Creation as khalif. In his capacity as God's deputy, man is also intercessor, and in the standing position of prayer the Muslim stands as intercessor to God on behalf of his fellow creatures. The vertical, standing posture is unique to man and betokens his unique position over and above all creatures: his uprightness confers upon him a distinguished place in creation. It is the physical correlative to the status of man as pole between the various ontological realms, between the earth and the heavens, between God and God's created order. The standing position with which the prayer ritual begins, therefore, fulfills the vertical symbolism of the two axes we are considering.

The prayer then proceeds - via an intermediary bowing posture which itself is highly suggestive of a cross configuration and which is in fact indicative of the Asr or "middle" prayer time - to sajda in which the Muslim drops to hands and knees and presses his forehead to the earth. This is the quintessential gesture of submission and obedience in Islam which at once acknowledges God's supremacy over man and man's subservience under God. It is the gesture of surrender and as the mystics of Islam describe it of fana or annihilation of the ego before the Divine. It thus expresses man's slavery, for in prostrating himself the Muslim acknowledges God's absolute Lordship. The annihilation of the ego is further symbolized in sajda by the fact that the face of the worshipper is hidden from view in this position; the surrendering of all selfhood is expressed, throughout the Islamic tradition, in the veiling of the face. One of the strictures of Islamic art, for instance, is a prohibition on portraying the Holy Prophet's face. This is because the Prophet is submitted to God paradigmatically and is, as it were, always in sajda. Sajda is a direct, physical expression of homage, alliegence, fealty, compliance and service. It is by this posture that the worshipper is reminded of his lowly status as creature and of Islam's demand of man that he relinquish all pretensions to self-sufficiency - pretensions that may too readily accompany the status of deputy - and place himself unreservedly and faithfully, like a dutiful servant, in the hands of his Master. That the head is pressed to the earth brings the Muslim to the horizontal plane, and the symbolism of the second of the axes we are considering comes into play. The horizontal axis is receptive, submissive and passive as opposed to the active and dynamic vertical axis. In prayer, the Muslim moves from the vertical position, signifying man as khalif, to the horizontal, signifying abd. A cycle of prayer or rakas is constituted of sequences of movements from the standing posture, to sajda, and is completed when the worshipper returns to the standing position again.

In Islam's own account of its spiritual heritage the salat is a restoration of the ancient Abrahamic mode of worship. In the Traditions of the Prophet, the Angel of the Koranic revelation, Jibreel, taught the movements of the prayer to Muhammad instructing him that

this is the way that his ancestor Abraham prayed. The prayer, therefore, is part of Islam's claim of returning to the pure Abrahamic faith. The symbolism of the prayer, however, is more primordial than Abraham for it must be remembered that Abraham is the post-deluvian founder of the semitic monotheisms and was himself restoring a former order from the depravity of his father's paganism; the prayer ritual instituted by Abraham was not unique to him but only a new codification - appropriate to the new post-deluvian conditions - of yet older, indeed, primordial modes. In truth, the salat, in its essential aspects, is the prayer of Adam, just as Islam was his religion. This is obvious since Islam acknowledges that there were prophets before Abraham and does not hesitate to say that these prophets all prayed to the same God in the same manner. In mythological and visionary formulations of Islamic prophetology Muhammad, as the "seal" of the prophets, is imam (prayer-leader) to all previous prophets back to Adam and they pray the salat together. That Islam traces its heritage to Abraham is the specific means by which it situates itself within the semitic family, but beyond the semitic family and before Abraham was Noah and before Noah was Enoch and before Enoch Adam, and all of these were prophets and all prayed the prayer of the prophets. Abraham was responsible for the particular adaptation of the salat after the Flood in the context of his covenant with God, the emblem of which is, in Islam as in Judaism, circumcision. But Abraham was not the first prophet and the primordialism of Islam is not confined to the semitic family but extends back to the ante-deluvian prophets and specifically to the first prophet, Adam himself. In any case, while the prayer ritual is ascribed to Abraham its basic symbolism is certainly more primordial and is not, in the first instance, Abrahamic itself. The only explicitly Abrahamic motif in salat comes at the end when, in the canonical liturgy, the worshipper - raising his index finger to the qibla - calls a blessing upon Muhammad and his family and upon Abraham and his. In other respects, the whole symbolism of the prayer is Adamic. As we have seen, the principle movements enact the doctrine of stewardship and the essential relation of man as khalifah and abd to God and the Creation - all of this concerns Adam as primordial man and God's steward, not (at least in the first instance) Abraham as father of the semites. If the particular liturgical formulation of the prayer employed by Islam is Abrahamic, it is nevertheless the Abrahamic formulation of a more primordial, Adamic, symbology, and we have identified its core symbolism, namely the axial contrast of deputy and slave.

While the legal postures - standing, bowing, prostration - of the prayer ritual obviously enact the gestures of a slave doing obeysance to his Master, at a more profound level they also enact the story of Adam. In the standing posture, facing the universal centre, the qibla, the Muslim is Adam in the sense of everyman and in the liturgy he speaks as Adam for all creatures and all creation. The corresponding symbolism of the sajda then becomes clear. In the prostrate posture, with face occluded and forehead to the earth - the paradigmatic gesture of the whole spirituality of Islam - the Muslim is Adam returned to the passive clay from which he was created. Here we must remember that while Islam, even more than Judaic and Christian cosmogonies, insists on creatio ex nihilo, which the Koran presents in the starkest terms:

Creator of the heavens and earth! When He decrees a thing, He need only say Be! and it is!
(Kor. 2:117)

it also absorbs the primordial Adamic mythology in which God fashions, in a demiurgic manner, the primordial man. "We are the clay, You are the potter, we are all the work of Your hand!" said Isaiah (64:8) and similiarly Jeremiah, "As clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in mine, O House of Israel" (18:5) both of which reiterate such passages from Genesis as: "Of dust you are and to dust you shall return." On these matters the Koranic

account is no different:

He is the Mighty One, the Merciful, who excelled in the creation of all things. He first created man from clay... (Kor. 36:7-8)

When the Muslim presses his forehead to the earth in submission, he is making the Adamic confession that he was born of this earth and that he is but as clay in the hands of His creator. The Koran has a persistent fascination with Adam's lowly origins. Although Islam counts Adam as the first of God's Prophets, and although the angels were made to acknowledge him, and although the Islamic perspective absolves Adam from the responsibility of an original sin and presents him as God's appointed deputy, he is nevertheless born of the common clay of the Earth, as the word Adam itself signifies, and the Koran dwells upon his ignoble origins. It is because Adam is born of mere clay that Satan (Iblis) rebels, refusing to acknowledge a creature of such low birth. In the symbolism we are considering, however, the stuff from which Adam was made - earth, clay, dust - is essentially malleable and submissive to the craftsman's will and so is an emblem of submission to God. In the standing position, the Muslim is Adam as God's deputy over creation, but the humility of sajda reminds us of Adam's origins and the primal, submissive state of the earth from which he was crafted. Moreover, the movement of the worshipper from the vertical to the horizontal and back to the vertical, constituting a single rakas, enacts the birth of Adam from the soil. In sajda he is malleable clay. In qiyam he is the upright form Allah has molded from the clay.

The notion that man is earthborn or autochthonous, which is to say made of the very same soil he tills and over which he labours, upon which he lives and in which he is finally buried, is a core tenet of the universal doctrine of cosmic cycles. The story of Adam is both the Biblical and Islamic autochthony. In the craftsman analogy that underpins it clay is a prima materia that offers no resistance to the shaping hands of the craftsman God. It bends entirely to His will and is shaped entirely according to His design. And just as there is an axial paradox in the human state, given that this lowly slave is also dignified by the title vice-regent and stands over all other creatures, so Adam is given as his domain the very earth from which he was formed. And it is the fate of all the children of Adam - for the Koran also dwells upon his status as "ancestor of all" quite aside from Abraham as "ancestor of Arabs" - to return in death to the Earth and, at the end of time, to re-emerge resurrected. In the myth of cosmic cycles, more explicit in traditions less adapted to the impending climax of a cycle, the primordial man was born from the earth like a plant, and his body is like a seed that shall grow anew, be resurrected, at the commencement of a new cycle. Adam is an earth-man, not explicitly a plant-man, but the plant motif is suggested by the "Tree in the Midst" with which he is associated; this is an important assimilation made in Jewish mysticism where the body of Adam Kadmon is superimposed upon the Tree of Life and more dramatically in Christianity where Christ is hung on the same Tree. In these traditions primordial man and primordial plant are usually separate, though man is made of the soil in which the tree grows, and there is always an implicit interchangeability between one symbol and the other. In traditions focused upon the climax of the current cycle we find a linear perspective that envisages a single trajectory from creation to Last Judgement. Islam is such a tradition, but more than either Judaism or Christianity, it is aware of the greater cycle, which is again an instance of its inherent primordiality. There are both verses of the Koran and many Hadith that speak of cycles of creation, even if the immediate concern of Islam is this current cycle. Certainly, in Islamic sources, the children of Adam are said to rise from their graves like plants in a vegetative cycle of births, as is explicit in Traditions such as the following:

Abu Hurairah relates that the Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace, said: Everything in the human body disappears except the little bone at the end of the spine from which its second creation is compounded. Then Allah will send down rain from heaven and people will be grown like vegetables.

This is recorded by both Bukhari and Muslim, the two most authoritative editors of the Hadith literature. The resurrection is here presented in terms of the vegetation cycle. Man is made of earth, born of the earth, but is also plant-like in this respect and so at the resurrection rises from the dead like a plant. In other perspectives the primordial plant-man rises from the earth at each new creation in a cycle of creations and resurrections. In particular, it is usual that the Iron Age lays the seeds for a new Golden Age. In the Islamic perspective, the Paradise or Garden that awaits believers is a renewed Eden, a return to the Edenic state, a cyclic return to the primordial garden. In Eden, of course, Adam was truly a native, an aboriginal, an autochthon, born of the soil. His punishment for transgression was to lose his home and to be sent into exile and to have to be naturalized elsewhere. An Adamic homesickness for Paradise is the characteristic mood of all Islamic spirituality. Salvation is a return. The Islamic perspective, finally, is cyclic. And Allah is He to whom the returners return.

Much of the symbolism of the Muslim prayer illustrates these themes, especially by way of the axial, Adamic contrast of khalifah and abd. The cycle of standing and prostration in a single rakas illustrates a vegetative cycle; it enacts the birth of Adam and ritualizes his dual status as deputy and slave, but the same gestures and movements also rehearse the death and rebirth of the resurrection of the sons of Adam. Sajda, then, symbolizes death. By the same symbolism the prayer mat symbolizes the grave and for this reason the traditional and symbolically correct design for the prayer mat is a stylized Eden of four rivers with the Tree of Life, the destination to which the believer aspires and for which his soul yearns. More significantly, it will be noticed that the position of sajda, with forehead to the ground, and arms and legs rounded into the body, is distinctly embryonic or foetal in form and suggests the embryonic seed sleeping in the grave awaiting the Last Judgement when "Allah will send down rain from heaven..." It is far easier to see this when the worshipper is dressed in traditional Islamic costume which is loose fitting and designed to facilitate the movements of the salat, not hinder them as do modern Western clothing. The traditional robes dissolve the specific outlines of the human form - itself indicative of the notion of returning to the malleable passivity of the clay of Adam - and in sajda they make the human form seem foetal, consistent with the order of symbolism we are exploring. The return to the vertical axis in the prayer then enacts birth (and resurrection), the whole movement signifying the cyclic creation/re-creation of the primordial man. In the bowing posture that is between standing and prostration Muslims will typically enlongate their backs so as to create a right-angle with their bodies. This underlines, as we said, the integral cross symbolism, but it should also be noted that, in fact, the consequence of stretching the back and forming such an angle with the back in this way is to mark the bone at the base of the spine - named in the Hadith as the seed of resurrection - as the corner of the right-angle. That this is what is being emphasised is apparent if one witnesses a pious Muslim at prayer straining to perform every gesture in the exact, prescribed manner. The secret to performing the bowing posture correctly is that one shapes the back to emphasise the base of the spine. Other details of the ritual make similiar allusions to the themes of cyclic regeneration.

Autochthony is also a theme of Abrahamic religion, but adapted to the conditions after the

Flood. Like Adam, Abraham is bound to leave his actual ancestral home - the land to which he has a connection by birth - and to find a home elsewhere. There, in the Promised Land, he must form a legitimate connection with a new home, a new soil. The immigrant cannot enjoy true and natural autochthony but in order to be naturalized they must acquire an autochthony of sorts, and this is what happens in the story of Abraham. Thereafter, the claim of being son of Abraham becomes synonymous with a claim to the (acquired) autochthony of the patriarch. The equation expressing the autochthony becomes:

"I will make your descendants like the dust on the ground: when men succeed in counting the specks of dust on the ground, then they will be able to count your descendants. Come, travel through the length and breadth of the land, for I mean to give it to you."

by which the descendants of Abraham are identified with the dust and soil of the land, each descendant like a speck of dust, a speck of the land itself. Circumcision, which is the outward sign by which the promise and covenant are made, is here, as in other traditions, directly emblematic of autochthony by way of primordial serpent symbolism, for the penis is serpentine (an Edenic symbolism) and the serpent is reborn from its hibernation in the earth each year and the foreskin represents the skin it sheds each spring: to remove the foreskin is a mark of the new-born, the serpent in spring, and so also an emblem of the Golden Race who are the new-born of the great cycle. This motif, when adopted as a racial extension from an illustrious ancestor, is appropriately marked on the organs of generation and in Judaism at least becomes the mark of a "Chosen People". We see then the full sense of why the salat is attributed to Abraham in Islam, namely that the story of Abraham is about the acquisition of autochthony and so reiterates exactly these otherwise Adamic themes.

A further important symbolism emerges in the story of Abraham, too, for the revelation of the equation of his descendants with the specks of dust on the ground occurs in a dream, before which, we are told, Abraham "fell into a deep sleep". This is of great importance in Islamic prophetology, for the deep sleep state is the ground of prophecy, even in the case of Muhammad who - according to the Hadith - would suddenly drop into deep slumber (and even snore) when receiving the Koranic revelation. Deep sleep is analogous to the prophetic state - to the Unlettered purity of Muhammad, in Islam - in its pure passivity. By this analogy we return again to the axial symbolism of khalifah and abd, for the waking, conscious mind of man accompanies his uprightness of posture, while he returns to the horizontal plane to sleep, and the waking mind is indicative of his dignity as khalif while the opposite to the waking mind, the mind in deep sleep, is perfectly passive, abd. The standing posture of the prayer therefore symbolizes the waking consciousness, the bowing posture the dreaming mind, and sajda the mind in deep sleep. Further, the mind in deep sleep is, by this chain of associations, equivalent to the clay, the prima materia, from which the primordial man was made. In the Abrahamitic autochthony it is the sleep of Abraham that is actually the soil from which his descendants spring. In salat, sajda is the point at which the worshipper seeks to utterly submit to his Lord, to annihilate the false ego, to be perfectly submissive to Allah's every impression, like clay, like a prophet, like the sleeping mind, like an obedient slave to God.

This finally brings us to a point that needs to be made concerning not just the postures of prayer but also the prayer times. The Koran adjures the faithful to maintain vigils of prayer throughout the night and in Islamic symbology in general the dark night and not sunlit day is spiritually fertile and significant. This is consistent with Islam's general lunar symbolism. In practise, even the dawn and dusk prayers are made in darkness because dawn is really first

light (defined by a piece of black cotton distinguished from the night, which occurs well before sunrise, and which allows for only shadowy forms) and dusk is really after the full appearance of the stars and the end of solar shadows. In the voluntary prayers given in the Muslim canon there are long cycles of rakas through the night and throughout the holy month of Ramadan the pious pray through the night, amongst other ways the fast reverses the normal flow of diurnal and nocturnal life. This is because the so-called "dark sun", the "sun at midnight", is central to Islam's core. By this we mean the union of waking consciousness with the sleeping mind, or in other terms, conscious submission. This is the very essence of Islam's lunar symbolism. The moon is nothing less than the sun of the night and a symbol of the waking mind united with the complete passivity of the sleeping mind. This again is what is enacted in the salat. Time and time again, cycle after cycle, in five sets per day, the believer, standing in qiyam, falls to the floor in sajda, which movement enacts carrying the waking state to the sleeping state. The Muslim's life is punctuated with this dhikr. Time and again the believer, in sajda, face occluded and forehead to the passive earth, foetal-like, - more often than not praying in darkness because of the organisation of the prayer times - is, as it were, an image of one conscious in deep sleep. With the formulaic cry of "God is Most Great" - the takbir, "Allahu akbar" - which expresses the transcendent, incomparability of the Divine and as a ritual formula dissolves the created, relative world before the Absolute, the worshipper, plunges, as it were, into the depths of the sleeping mind, namely that part of ourselves that is perpetually in submission to Allah and offers no resistance whatsoever to His Will. The method of Muslim prayer is just this: to consciously identify oneself with this deepest stratum of oneself that is, by nature, in perennial submission, to find in ourselves again the very "clay" of which we are made. This is the deeper and a specifically Abrahamic dimension of the Muslim rite.

To recap: we have here sketched a series a parallelisms all of which are active in the symbolism of Islamic prayer. Both the prayer times and the rakas of the canonical prayer ritual rehearse both astronomical and cosmic cycles. The essential organisation of the prayer times is fourfold, but in other respects Islam resists cruciform developments, emphasizing axial contrast instead. The essential contrast is between khalifah and abd, deputy and slave, which contrast is enacted in the two primary postures of prayer, standing and prostration. While the salat is ostensibly a restoration of the ancient Abrahamic prayer, these postures enact primordial and Edenic, Adamic themes. Specifically, the position of sajda - the fullest expression of submission - by placing the forehead to the earth, symbolically equates with the prima materia from which Adam was made. Further, the prayer ritual becomes, in certain of its movements, a symbolic enactment of the birth of Adam, and in this we find the particular Biblical and Islamic expression of the creation of the primordial, earthborn man. In other autochthonies the primordial man is explicitly a plant-man in a vegetative cycle of Ages, but in this tradition man is clay to God the Divine Potter, although the dead shall still rise from their graves like plants and the idea of the plant-man is implicit. Autochthony is also the concern of the Abrahamic dimensions of the prayer, but then by extension to the "clay" of the sleeping mind. This in turn reveals the profound (lunar) theme of the "sun at midnight" in which the conscious mind seeks to embrace the primeval submission of the deep sleep state. In the specific linear perspective of the monotheisms, it is usual to speak of one Creation and one Judgement, but Islam is finally cyclic, for the resurrected return to the Edenic Paradise. Certain of the movements of the ritual also enact the embryonic dead in their graves and their resurrection into the after-life, the new cycle, growing up out of the earth like plants. When the Muslim prays, all of these parallels of symbolism are activated, and by constant repetition, day after day, cycle after cycle, Islam hopes to actualize these symbols in the believer's soul.

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