

جمعية الدعوة والإرشاد
وتوعية الجاليات بحي السلامة
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CONCEPT OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

مفهوم العبادة في الإسلام
باللغة الإنجليزية

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The concept of worship in Islam is misunderstood by many people including some Muslims. Worship is commonly taken to mean performing ritualistic acts such as prayers, fasting, charity, etc. This limited understanding of worship is only one part of the meaning of worship in Islam. That is why the traditional definition of worship in Islam is a comprehensive definition that includes almost everything in any individual's activities. The definition goes something like this, "Worship is an all inclusive term for all that God loves of external and internal sayings and actions of a person." In other words, worship is everything one says or does for the pleasure of Allaah. This, of course, includes rituals as well as beliefs, social activities, and personal contributions to the welfare of one's fellow human beings.

Islam looks at the individual as a whole. He is required to submit himself completely to Allaah, as the Qur'aan instructed: "Say (O Muhammad SAW): "Verily, my Salât (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allâh, the Lord of the 'Alamîn (mankind, jinns and all that exists). He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims." (Qur'aan 6: 162-163)

The natural result of this submission is that all one's activities should conform to the instructions of God, to whom the person is submitting. Islam being a way of life, requires that its followers model their life according to its teachings in every aspect, religious or otherwise. This might sound strange to some people who think of religion as a personal relationship between the individual and God, having no impact on one's activities outside rituals. As a matter of fact Islam does not think much of mere rituals when they are performed mechanically and have no influence on one's inner life.

The Qur'aan addresses the believers and their neighbors from among the people of the Book (Jews and Christians) who were arguing with them about the change of the direction of the Qibla (the direction which all Muslims pray towards) in the following verse: "It is not Al-Birr (piety, righteousness, and each and every act of obedience to Allâh, etc.) that you turn your faces towards east and (or) west (in prayers); but Al-Birr is (the quality of) the one who believes in Allâh, the Last Day, the Angels, the Book, the Prophets and gives his wealth, in spite of love for it, to the kinsfolk, to the orphans, and to Al-Masâkin (the poor), and to the wayfarer, and to those who ask, and to set slaves free, performs As-Salât (Iqâmat-as-Salât), and gives the

Zakât, and who fulfill their covenant when they make it, and who are As-Sâbirin (the patient ones, etc.) in extreme poverty and ailment (disease) and at the time of fighting (during the battles). Such are the people of the truth and they are AlMuttaqûn” (Qur’aan 2:177)

The deeds in the above verse are the deeds of righteousness and they are only a part of worship. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) told us about faith, which is the basis of worship, that it: “...is made up of sixty and some branches: the highest of which is the belief in the Oneness of Allaah, i.e., there is no God worthy of worship but Allaah and the lowest in the scale of worship is removing obstacles from the people’s path.”

Decent work is considered in Islam a type of worship. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said: “No one has eaten better food than that obtained through the labor of his hands. David (peace be upon him), the prophet of Allaah used to earn his living through his own labor.”

Seeking knowledge is one of the highest types of worship. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) told his companions that “seeking knowledge is a (religious) duty on every Muslim.” In another saying he said: “A person who follows a path for acquiring knowledge, Allaah will make easy the path to Paradise for him”

Social courtesy and cooperation are part of worship when done for the sake of Allaah as the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) told us: “Receiving your friend with a smile is a type of charity, helping a person to load his animal is a charity and putting some water in your neighbor’s bucket is a charity.”

It is worth noting that even performing one’s duties are considered a sort of worship. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) told us that whatever one spends for his family is a type of charity; he will be rewarded for it if he acquires it through legal means. Also kindness to the members of one’s family is an act of worship as when one puts a piece of food in his spouse’s mouth.

It is clear, from the previous discussion that the concept of worship in Islam is a comprehensive concept that includes all the positive activities of the individual. This of course is in agreement with the all-inclusive nature of Islam as a way of life. It regulates the human life on all levels: the individual, the social, the economic, the political and the spiritual. That is why Islam provides guidance to the smallest details

of one's life on all these levels: Thus following these details is following Islamic instructions in that specific area. It is a very encouraging element when one realizes that all his activities are considered by God as acts of worship. This should lead the individual to seek Allaah's pleasure in his actions and always try to do them in the best possible manner whether he is watched by his superiors or he is alone. There is always the One True God watching, who knows everything, namely Allaah.

So far we have been looking at non-ritual worship in Islam; however, this does not under evaluate the importance of the ritual ones. Actually, ritual worships, if performed in true spirit, elevate man morally and spiritually and enable him to carry on his activities in all walks of life according to the Guidance of God.

Among ritual worships, Formal Prayer (Salah) occupies the key position for two reasons. Firstly, it is the distinctive mark of a believer. Secondly, it prevents an individual from all sorts of abominations and vices by providing him chances of directly facing his Creator five times a day, wherein he renews his covenant with God and seeks His guidance again and again. Muslims recite in every Prayer: **"You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything). Guide us to the Straight Way."** (Qur'aan 1:5-6.)

Formal prayer is the first practical manifestation of Faith and also the foremost of the basic conditions for the success of the believers: **"Successful indeed are the believers. Those who offer their Salât (prayers) with all solemnity and full submissiveness."** (Qur'aan 23:1-2)

The same fact has been emphasized by the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) in a different way. He said: **"Those who offer their Prayers with great care and punctuality, will find it a light, a proof of their Faith and cause of their salvation on the Day of Judgment."**

After Salah (prayer), Zakah (obligatory charity) is the next important pillar of Islam. In the Qur'aan, Salah and Zakah are usually mentioned together. Like Salah, Zakah is a manifestation of faith that affirms that God is the sole owner of everything in the universe. What men hold is a trust in their hands over which God made them trustees to discharge it as He has laid down: **"Believe in Allâh and His Messenger (Muhammad, peace be upon him), and spend of that whereof He has made you trustees ..."** (Qur'aan 57:7)

In this respect Zakah is an act of devotion, which, like prayer, brings the believer nearer to his Lord. Apart from this, Zakah is a means of redistribution of wealth in a way that reduces differences between classes and groups. It makes a fair contribution to social stability. By purging the soul of the rich from selfishness and the soul of the poor from envy and resentment against society, it stops the channels leading to class hatred and makes it possible for the springs of brotherhood and solidarity to gush forth. Such stability is not merely based on the personal feelings of the rich but stands on a firmly established right, which, if the rich denied could be exacted by force through the court if necessary.

Fasting from dawn to sunset in the month of Ramadan (Siyam) is another pillar of Islam. The main function of fasting is to make the Muslim pure from “within” just as the external legal code makes his external actions pure. By such purity he responds to what is true and good, and shuns what is false and evil. This is what we can perceive in the verse: **“O you who believe! Observing As-Saum (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqûn.”** (Qur’aan 2:183)

In an authentic tradition, the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) reported Allaah as saying with regard to one who fasts **“He suspends eating, drinking, and gratification of his sexual passion for My sake.”** Thus his reward is going to be according to God’s great bounty.

Fasting thus awakens the conscience of the individual and gives it scope for exercise in a joint experience for all society at the same time, thus adding further strength to each individual. Moreover, fasting offers a compulsory rest to the over-worked human digestive system for the duration of one full month. Similarly fasting reminds the individual of those who are deprived of life’s basic necessities throughout the year or throughout life. It makes him realize the suffering of others, and thus promotes in him a sense of sympathy and kindness to them.

Lastly, we come to Al-Hajj (pilgrimage to the House of God in Makkah). This very important pillar of Islam, manifests a unique unity, dispelling all kinds of differences. Muslims from all corners of the world, wearing the same dress, respond to the call of Hajj

in one voice and language: LABBAIK ALLA HUMMA LABBAIK (Here I am here I am O lord!). In Hajj there is an exercise of strict self-discipline and control where not only sacred things are revered, but even the life of plants and birds is made inviolable so that everything lives in safety: “... And he that honors the sacred things of Allaah, it shall be better for him with his Lord ...” (Qur’aan 22:30)

Pilgrimage gives an opportunity to all Muslims from all groups, classes, organizations and governments from all over the world to meet annually in a great congress. The time and venue of this congress has been set by the One True God. Invitation to attend is open to every Muslim. No one has the power to bar anyone. Every Muslim who attends is guaranteed full safety and freedom as long as he himself does not violate its safety.

Thus, worship in Islam, whether ritual or non-ritual, trains the individual in such a way that he loves his Creator most and thereby gains an unyielding will and spirit to wipe out all evil and oppression from the human society and makes the Word of Allaah dominant in the world.

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