

A STUDENTS GUIDE TO THE 'PHILOSOPHY OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM'

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CONCEPT OF WORSHIP

UNIQUENESS

The concept of worship in Islam is unique among the religions of the world.

IMPLICATION

The word which the Holy Qur'an has used for worship is '*ibadat*, Which means:

1. Submission to God,
2. Service to Him.

The word "worship" denotes: in the English language what is termed as "adoration."

The word "ibadat" denotes: the act of becoming 'abd, namely, slave¹.

Consequently, the full connotation of the term 'ibadat' is to hand over or deliver oneself solely to God.

In other words, the worshipper has to negate himself entirely and affirm the supremacy and absolute authority of God in all respects.

¹ **According to Islamic terminology**, this term does not refer to slavery in terms of imprisonment, rather, it refers to Servitude in terms of service. Namely, service in reference to his Creator through whom he attains true freedom, instead of becoming a slave unto himself or others.

THE SCOPE OF WORSHIP

A HOLISTIC SCOPE OF WORSHIP

1. Worship forms only a part of human life in other religions.
2. In Islam it is meant to cover the whole life.²

² *The purpose behind the creation of man is 'ibadat' (worship) as mentioned above, which implies the act of becoming and remaining an Abd (one who lives a life of service in accordance to the Will of God). As many faculties and powers man possesses that many ways and modes of expression manifest. Utilizing each faculty in accordance to the function bestowed upon it will be regarded as worship in terms of Shukr (gratitude), while, misusing any of the faculties will be regarded as Kufr (ingratitude). Therefore, the proper utilization of any of the human faculties in accordance to the Will of God will be regarded as 'ibadat' whether it be in thought, word or deed. Each creature has been taught its Salat (mode of forming a relation with its Creator) and Tasbih (its mode of self-expression) and Allah knows the Salat and the Tasbih of each creature, while, there are many whose Tasbih (modes of expression) humans do not understand. In short, an Abd is one who has submitted (surrendered, handed over, delivered) his will to the Will of God, acting in accordance to it by performing Tasbih (expressing himself with all the faculties bestowed upon him in accordance to the Will of God) which manifests itself in the form of Shukr (gratitude) resulting in the Ibadat of the One and only God whose Will alone he follows. Resultantly, every good act of an Abd will be regarded as worship be it related to his daily chores, work, sports, social activities etc. be it related to the activities performed inside a masjid or those outside of it.*

RELIGIONS BESIDES ISLAM

1) Other religions are dualistic.

- a. They divide the world between God and the Devil.
- b. They divide human activity into two water-tight compartments, bearing two different labels of the religious and the secular.

EXAMPLE:

For instance, Christianity preaches with all the force at its command:

Give “unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s”

2) Similarly, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism teach an irreconcilable conflict between the physical and the spiritual.

Hence, the acts of worship in all these religions are purely devotional and ceremonial in the same way as they are in Christianity.

The fact is that all the non-Islamic religions are basically committed to the doctrine of dualism, and consequently they stand for condemning the worldly relations as outside the scope of religious life, Hence, their notion of worship is of a partial type, viz, it is confined to rituals and ceremonies.

3) Believing the world to be essentially evil, the great non-Islamic religions teach escape from the world and the obligations of worldly life as the way to attain saintliness.

ISLAM

1) Islam, on the other hand, refuses to acknowledge dualism and affirms monism or a unitary outlook on life.

Dualism belongs to the realm of appearance, while Reality is unitary even in its cross-sections.

2) Islam teaches that because God is Absolutely Good, all His actions must always be good, whether they pertain to the domain of the Spirit or to the realm of Matter.

- a. The universe is the Act of God.
- b. It is God's creation.
- c. Hence it is essentially good.

3) Islam, on the other hand, teaches the fullest utilization of physical situations and consequently leading the social life in all its fullness.

ACCORDING TO ISLAM, IT IS AN INSULT TO GOD:

- A. To despise as worthless anything that God has created.
- B. To refuse to bring into play the different faculties and powers with which God has endowed the human beings.

THE FIVE BASIC FACULTIES

Now, the different basic faculties which God has given to us fall under five heads:

1. Physical;
2. Mental;
3. Moral;
4. Aesthetic;
5. Spiritual.

PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSFORMING LIFE INTO A LIFE OF WORSHIP

Islam wants us to live a life wherein all these different faculties and the corresponding aspects of human activity are realized and fulfilled to the fullest.

This is so because Islam does not regard the worldly life as evil. It is essentially good and can become evil only if:

- It is pursued for its own sake,

Or:

- In obedience to one's passions and appetites.

But if the worldly life is led in obedience to the Commands of God, every worldly act becomes an act of worship.

THE CEREMONIAL ACTS OF WORSHIP

Side by side with teaching this philosophy of transforming the whole life into a life of worship, Islam also teaches the ceremonial acts of worship because they too play a vital role in building up the human personality.

THE THREE INSTITUTIONS

Such ceremonial acts of worship have been given to us in Islam in the form of the following three institutions:

1. Obligatory institutional Prayers;
2. Fasting;
3. Hajj (Pilgrimage).

ZAKAT

Zakat is also included among 'ibadat or devotions because it entails sacrifice of money at regular periods and according to a fixed rate in submission to the Command of God. It is, however, distinguished from Prayers, Fasting and Pilgrimage inasmuch as it does not involve any ceremonies.

THE DEVOTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In fact, strictly speaking, there are only two devotional institutions in Islam which involve ceremonies, and they are:

1. Prayers,

And:

2. Pilgrimage.

It may be remarked in passing that the Muslim jurists have also included marriage among the ceremonial devotions. We are not, however, concerned with that here.

THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE PILLARS OF ISLAM

We may now take up the rationale behind:

1. Prayers,

2. Fasting,

3. Zakat,

4. Hajj.

PRAYERS

ISLAM HAS BEEN BUILT UP ON FIVE PILLARS-

- One of faith,
- Four of action-
-And Prayer forms the most important pillar of action.

THE QUESTION ARISES HERE AS TO:

- What is the need of Prayer?

CONSTITUTION OF THE HUMAN PERSONALITY

1. It is an age-old conviction of humanity that the human personality is constituted of three factors, viz.,
 - a. body,
 - b. mind,
 - c. Soul.
2. It is also an established fact that it is the nature of human personality to develop and evolve.

THE LAW OF EVOLUTION: has been universally acclaimed as the true principle underlying the existence of all organisms. All of us know that the human body is an evolutionary thing.

THE HUMAN EVOLUTION

1. THE EMBRYONIC STAGE OF EVOLUTION

We are told in Biology that the earliest form of every human baby that comes into this world is that of a life-germ, which in just an infinitesimal speck is unnoticeable by the human eye.

This speck evolves in its embryonic stage by acquiring more and more developed forms, until it develops into a full-fledged human personality and comes into this world to play its role in the life of humanity.

2. THE PHYSICAL STAGE OF EVOLUTION

We also know that when a human being enters the world, it has all the human features and human limbs; but it is not yet fully grown.

Rather, its physique has to undergo a continuous process of development day in and day out, for years and years, and then alone it acquires maturity of physique- although even then its physical possibilities are not exhausted, because it has still to go a long way to become, for instance, a Gama.³

3. THE MENTAL STAGE OF EVOLUTION

Similar to the physical evolution is the process of the evolution of human consciousness.

³The famous Pakistani Muslim physical culturist, who rose to be the world-champion of his time in wrestling.

LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

There are three levels of Consciousness. Vis.,

1. The levels of Instincts,
2. The level of Reason,
3. The level of Intuition.

FORMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

There are five forms of consciousness, viz,

1. Physical consciousness,
2. Theoretic consciousness,
3. Moral consciousness,
4. Aesthetic consciousness,
5. Spiritual consciousness.

1. THE INSTINCTIVE LEVEL

“INSTINCTIVE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PHYSICAL CONSCIOUSNESS”

When a human baby comes into this world, its reason and intuition are dormant, namely, they are not active. Even all the instincts are not active.

In fact, the only instinctive activity present at the time of birth is in connection with the sense of taste.

The eyes of the baby open only a day or two after birth, but even then the sense of sight is in a very simple form.

EXAMPLE

For instance, the child does not seem to distinguish between different objects, which capacity develops only gradually.

In the same way do all other senses develop.

2. THE RATIONAL LEVEL

“RATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THEORETIC CONSCIOUSNESS”

Thus, human reason starts functioning only when the primary senses have developed to an appreciable extent.

This occurs when the child has learnt to talk and begins to ask questions. Then begins his education in which he gets the opportunity of developing his intellect.

“RATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS”

This situation continues for some time when the third stage is reached, viz, moral consciousness starts asserting itself. The moral consciousness continues to deepen and widen as life progresses.

3. THE INTUITIVE LEVEL

INTUITIVE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AESTHETIC/SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Moral development, in its turn, leads to two further realms, firstly of aesthetic consciousness and then of spiritual consciousness.

It must be clear at this stage that it is not only the human body which evolves from a life-germ into a full-fledged state, but the human consciousness also evolves through a continuous process.⁴

⁴ *The need for instinctive development awakens ones theoretic consciousness, the need for Rational development awakens both the theoretic and moral consciousness, the need for intuitive development awakens both the aesthetic and spiritual consciousness.*

THE BALANCED DIET

DEVELOPMENT NECESSITATES NOURISHMENT

Now, the human body cannot develop and evolve without being continuously fed and taken care of. Similar is the case of the human mind; and similar *must* be the case of the human soul.

KINDS OF NOURISHMENTS

- 1.** We feed the human body with physical food.
- 2.** We feed the human mind with ideas or mental food.
Similarly,
- 3.** We must feed the human soul with spiritual food.

THE NUTRITIOUS DISCIPLINE

- a.** There is a whole science of dietics and nutrition concerning the human body.
- b.** There is a whole system of education for the cultivation of the mental faculties and for feeding what is called the mind.

Q: What should be our attitude to the human soul, then?

A: The only rational and natural answer to this question is that, just as we try to feed the body with different types of food, and just as we try to feed the mind continuously, it is our duty to our own selves to feed the soul also continuously.

NUTRITION BY NATURE

We have already pointed out that:

- a.** The food for the body is physical in its nature,
- b.** The food for the mind is mental in its nature.
- c.** Therefore, the food for the soul should be spiritual⁵ in its nature.

THE PRE-REQUISITES

We have been told in Islam that the food for the soul is the remembrance of God, and this remembrance is to be performed in a state of communion, with similar pre-requisites that we observe in connection with the administration of physical and mental foods.

⁵ **Ethico-Religious (spiritual plus Moral)**

THE FIRST PRE-REQUISITE

IN TERMS OF PREPARATION

- a. The first pre-requisite in connection with the physical food is to eat it with preparation and devotion.

Similarly,

- b. The first pre-requisite in connection with the mental food is to receive it with preparation and the fullest attention.

Therefore,

- c. The first pre-requisite in connection with spiritual food must be that it should be administered after preparation-

Which Islam prescribes in the form of:

- i. Pre-prayer ablution (*Wudu*),
 - ii. Fixing up the attention (*niyyah*),
 - iii. Withdrawing the thought from all sides and concentrating it upon God-
- And devotion in the sense of remembering God with all the heart and soul.

THE SECOND PRE-REQUISITE

IN TERMS OF HEALTH

- a.** The second pre-requisite in connection with the physical food is that it should be of a healthy type.
- b.** The same pre-requisite holds in connection with mental food, viz., and the ideas which can ensure the healthy development of the mind are always those which are sound and good.

Similarly,

- c.** The second pre-requisite in connection with the spiritual food is that our remembrance of God should be centered on the One and True God and not on the man-made false deities and idols.

Thus Islam has laid the most profound emphasis on the avoidance of “shirk” (polytheism) and believing in the One and Only God, called in the Holy Quran by the personal name of Allah, as alone worthy of worship.

THE THIRD PRE-REQUISITE

IN TERMS OF INTAKE

- a.** The third pre-requisite in connection with the physical food is that it should be administered at regular intervals during the day and the night; otherwise the physical organism will not grow properly and may not grow at all.
- b.** Similar regular routine is necessary for feeding the mind. Human education must be continuous in order to build up the human mind in a healthy state and on a sound pattern.
- c.** It is evident from this that the third pre-requisite of feeding the soul should be regular and continuous feeding, and this Islam has provided in the most natural form by prescribing the five obligatory prayers during the day and the night, or, during one cycle of night and day.

THE EARLY MORNING

SPIRITUAL BREAKFAST

The first prayer is said before sunrise when the day is about to begin and the person has to plunge himself whole-heartedly into his major engagements.

It forms the spiritual breakfast and is timed to act as a fore-runner of the physical breakfast.

THE MID-DAY

SPIRITUAL LUNCH

Then there comes a lull in our physical stamina at noon when we have to replenish our energy by eating lunch.

Islam prescribes that we should replenish on that occasion our spiritual energy also by offering the *Zuhr* or mid-day prayers.

THE AFTERNOON

SPIRITUAL STIMULANT

Later in the day we again need a cup of tea or some light refreshment.

Islam desires us to have a spiritual stimulant also at that time in the form of '*Asr* or afternoon prayers.

THE EVENING

SPIRITUAL DINNER

Again, when the sun sets and night begins and a new phase starts and the time for dinner comes. Islam wants us to reinforce our spiritual energy also by means of the *Maghrib* (sunset) prayers.

THE LATE-NIGHT

SPIRITUAL NUTRIENT

Later on, comes the time for going to bed when healthy and strong people like to take some nutrient in order to pass the night in radiant sleep. Islam desires us to strengthen ourselves spiritually through *'Isha* (night) prayers and to go to bed while we are in a state of spiritual ecstasy.

FASTING

THE FIRST AID KIT

THE NEED FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT

We know in connection with the human body that it needs not only nutrition in the form of food but also medical treatment whenever it loses its balance and any function of the body gets impaired.

SPIRITUAL MEDICINE

Similar is the case with the human soul, and Islam has taken the greatest care to see that the human soul gets not only the spiritual food but also the spiritual medicine.

This spiritual medicine has been provided in the form of obligatory fasting during the month of Ramadan and optional fasting at other periods.

Although fasting is essentially spiritual medicine, it is also a great remedy for physical defects and ailments, so much so that even the most serious diseases can be cured through certain types of fasting without the aid of medicine (See Bernard McFadden's *Encyclopedia of Physical Culture*).

SPIRITUAL DISEASES

Reverting to the spiritual aspect of life: the greatest enemies of man are those that reside within his own person as,

THE APPETITIVE SELF

For instance, greed and lust and other appetites and passions which pertain to the baser-self called in Islamic terminology as *nafs-al- ammarah*, or, the Appetitive Self.

1. It is because of these baser appetites that human beings debase themselves by committing crimes of intemperance against the body, the mind and the soul; and they wrong others by committing different types of injustices against them.
2. It is these baser appetites, again, which cause human beings to deny the spiritual values and to forget God.⁶

⁶ ...(Quran 91: 7-8) Verse 8 implies that the human self is capable of wickedness (Fujur), which is the urge of the lower self, or the “Impelling Self” (Quran 12:53), and also of virtue (taqwa), which is the urge of the higher self, or, the Moral Reason named as the “Reproaching Self” (Quran 75:2). But the urge of the lower self should be made subordinate to the urge of the higher self in order that it becomes finally powerless in respect of compelling the individual to follow the path of Desire in defiance of the call of Duty,- the human-self attaining finally the stage of the Beatified Self (Quran 89:27).

Quranic Foundation Vol 1 P. 274-275

SUBJUGATING THE BASER-SELF

Now, the only way to subjugate (overcome) the baser self is to constantly perform:

- Psychological,
- Spiritual exercises.

Whereby the aggressiveness of the baser self is smashed and it starts obeying the dictates of reason.

- i. He whose life is governed by the baser self is worse than beasts.
- ii. He whose life is governed by reason is really man (human).
- iii. He whose life is governed by spiritual aspirations and enlightenment based on the love of and obedience to the One True God; verily he is pure gold; for he rises in his stature even above the angels.

This is the goal which Islam has set for every Muslim and for this purpose Islam has prescribed:

- The obligatory,

And:

- The optional fasts.

ZAKAT

IMPORTANCE OF ZAKAT

Zakat is one of the pillars of Islam and, as such, stand next in importance only to institutional Prayer.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ZAKAT AND PRAYER

While prayer is an obligation towards one's own self and towards God, *Zakat* is an obligation towards others.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ZAKAT

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him) has laid down the law about Zakat saying; "It so to be taken from the rich and given to the poor."

This means that:

1. Zakat is a tax which is levied on those who can save after satisfying their basic needs.
2. Zakat Is utilized for the assistance of those who do not possess the means of fulfilling their basic needs.

A STATE-INSTITUTION

Zakat has been conceived in Islam as a state-institution. It is meant to be collected by the Islamic state and to be deposited in the state bank as a social welfare fund.

In Islam, it is the obligation of the state to guarantee the basic needs to all the citizens, and this obligation is fulfilled through the institution of Zakat, as the Holy Qur'an says:

“Verily, charity is meant for:

- 1. The destitute,*
- 2. Those who are short of means,*
- 3. The officials (of the department of Zakat),*
- 4. Those who are converts and their financial difficulties entitle them to help,*
- 5. The emancipation of slaves,*
- 6. Extricating the people from the burdens of their bad debts,*
- 7. The defense of Islam,*
- 8. Assisting the stranded travellers.” (IX: 60).*

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

WESTERN GOVERNMENTS

Since some time, a social insurance tax has been levied by certain western governments and it is said that that step is a landmark in the history of social welfare.

THE ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT

But it was Islam which instituted the department of social welfare and guaranteed the welfare of all citizens for the first time in the history of mankind.

This department was inaugurated and organized by the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) himself and it continued to develop as the Islamic economic order was stabilized more and more until, during the rule of Caliph Omar (RDA), it assumed its full-fledged organizational structure.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BUREAU OF STATISTICS

Caliph Omar (RDA) established the *Diwan*, i.e. The Bureau of Statistics, wherein the particulars of every citizen were maintained and as a consequence everyone who needed help was assisted financially without any hardship and to the fullest extent.

1. Those who were incapable of earning, viz.
 - a. The old people,
 - b. The crippled,
 - c. The orphans,
 - d. The widows, -
-were given handsome pensions and stipends.
2. Those who were capable of earning but were unable to enter into trade because of lack of money were given the fullest financial assistance to start and build up their trade.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ECONOMIC IDEAL

The consequence of all this was that within thirty years after the advent of Islam, namely, during the rule of Caliph Omar (RDA), not a single family could be found who would accept *Zakat*; which means that every Muslim had become so rich that he or she was paying *Zakat* rather than being in need of accepting it.

**PILGRIMAGE TO MAKKAH
(HAJJ)**

THE SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage to Makkah is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and consequently it enjoys an eminent place among Islamic religious institutions.

We might mention here certain spiritual and social benefits which it confers of the pilgrim: -

1) THE SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

THE INSTITUTION'S WHICH CULTIVATE THE HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS IN MAN

A Muslim is a person who is meant to be God-conscious in all actions of his life and this higher consciousness is cultivated in Islam by means of different Islamic institutions like:

- a.** Prayers,
- b.** Fasting,
- c.** Zakat.

It is in the Hajj, however, that it assumes its highest form, for the pilgrim is required not only to give up his regular work for a number of days, for the sake of journey to Makkah and the participation in congregational communion with God there, but he must, in addition, sacrifice many other amenities and comforts of life. Cut off from the worldly pursuits in this he enters a spiritual experience of the highest type.

THE IDEAL OF A PILGRIM

Every member of the great assemblage at Makkah sets out from his home with this object in view.

- i. He discards all those comforts of life which act as a veil against the inner spiritual experience.
- ii. He puts on the simplest un-stitched dress and he is required to avoid:
 - a. All indecent thoughts,
 - b. All evil talks,
 - c. All disputes.

*All the prayers and all symbolisms which he observes during the Hajj express only one ideal and only one goal, namely, **intoxication in the love for God.***

It is the same when he runs between the hills of *Safa* and *Marwa* and it is the same when, like a moth whirling around a flame, he walks and runs around the *Ka'bah*.

2) THE SOCIAL BENEFITS

THE INSTITUTE OF EXCELLENCE

The Hajj excels all other institutions of the world in its wonderful influence in leveling all distinctions of:

- a.** Race,
- b.** Color,
- c.** Rank.

Not only do people of all races and all countries meet together in the House of God as members of one family, but they are all clad in the same dress-the same two sheets of seamless white cloth-and there remains nothing to distinguish the high from the low.

THE END

