

The Concept of Worship in Islam

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Abstract

The Concept and Purpose of worship in Islam is unparalleled to any other religion in existence. Worship in Islam combines the mundane and the modern, the internal soul and the external body. As a phenomenon, worship plays an exclusive and dominant role in Islam. Worship in Islam is a vital aspect of the people's religious life. The supreme significance of worship in Islam may be seen in the Mohammedan view that it has been prescribed by God for all Islamic faithful. In the Quran, it is written: "And assuredly we have sent among every people a messenger" (Quran 16:36). In other words, worship in Islam is a dynamic concept with diverse facets and dimensions. This paper examines this dynamic phenomenon of worship together with its multiplicity of facets proceeding to show in a lucid and succinct manner how worship is conceived as a phenomenon in Islam.

Key Words: Worship, Islam, conception

Introduction

It is an incontrovertible fact that the concept of worship is often misunderstood by several people including Muslims. Worship is often being understood as meaning exclusively the performance of ritualistic acts such as Prayers, Fasting, Charity and so on. This is entirely a limited as well as a partial understanding of worship in Islam. A more cogent definition of worship is a comprehensive one that includes almost everything in any individual's life. This paper shall examine this all-inclusive nature of worship in Islam.

THE CONCEPT OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

For authenticity and clarity, worship can be seen in Islam as 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 of Allah. This includes rituals as well as beliefs, social activities and personal contributions to the welfare of one's fellow human-beings. Islam views an individual as a whole. In this sense, he is expected to submit himself to Allah, as is stipulated in the Quran, just as Muhammad, the founder of the Holy Quran says: "Say (O Muhammad) my prayer, my sacrifice, my life and my death belong to Allah; He has no partner and I am ordered to be among those who submit, i.e. Muslims" (6: 162, 163).

Accordingly, the natural consequence of this submission is that all one's activities should conform in an unquestionable manner to the one to whom one is submitting to, namely: Allah. Islam as a way of life encourages adherents to model their lives after the teachings and stipulations of the Quran in all its ramifications.

It must be emphasized that Islam does not think much of mere rituals when they are performed mechanically and have no influence on one's inner life. In consonant with this, the Quran says:

It is not righteousness that you turn facing toward the East or the West, but righteousness is he who believes in Allah and the last day and the Angels and the book and the prophets, and gives his beloved money to his relatives and the orphans and the needy and for ransoming of the captives and who observes prayer and pays the poor-due; and those who fulfill their promises when they have made one, and the patient in –poverty and affliction and the steadfast in time of war; it is those who have proved truthful and it is those who are the God- fearing (2:177).

The deeds stipulated in the above verse are deeds of righteousness and invariably constitute an integral part of worship. To worship God truly, one has to engage himself in such deeds. Seeking knowledge is considered in Islam also as a pertinent aspect of worship. Islamic sources bear testimony to the fact that this kind of worship, is held so much in high esteem. The prophet told his companions that: "Seeking

knowledge is a (religious) duty on every Muslim” In another saying, he notes that: “Seeking knowledge for one hour is better than praying for seventy years” (Cited in Dike 25).

Showing courtesy to one’s neighbor as well as cooperation is a vital aspect of worship, provided they are done for the sake of Allah. The prophet said: “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 into your neighbor’s bucket is a charity “. (Cited in Reo 27).

In Islam, whatever one Spends for his family is a type of charity and he will surely be rewarded if he acquires his income in a just and legitimate way. Kindness in this way to members of one’s family is an act of worship. Dave has expressed that “Putting a piece of food in the mouth of one’s spouse is an act of worship. The Prophet told his companions that they will be rewarded even for having sexual intercourse with their wives”(12).

Worship can take the form of specific beliefs, feelings and visible acts of devotion paid in homage to God. It could also take the form of acts of goodness generally encouraged in the life of a Muslim.

Worship as a devotion to God entails that one fulfill certain deeds which God has commanded, whether these deeds deal with the inner self, or are obligatory or voluntary. Apart from following Allah’s commandment, this aspect of worship also includes refraining from those things which Allah has forbidden. It also includes anything believed, felt or done as an act of obedience to Allah. Idris has expressed that:

In this respect, worship may also be called servitude as it is an essence of living one’s life in complete servitude to God, doing what he commands and avoiding what he forbids, as a slave lives within the will of his master. In essence, all creations are slaves of God, whether they like it or not, for they are all subject to the law she has placed within his creation (34).

It must be noted that worship must be coupled with love, awe and reverence. No act of obedience is regarded in Islam as worship, if it is not coupled with these feelings.

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Worship in Islam is a right which is solely reserved for God. Islam adheres to the strictest form of monotheism and does not tolerate that any act of worship be directed towards any other being apart from God. It is Allah alone who deserves one's obedience and love. All worship and acts of veneration, homage and obedience must be offered to God alone.

Muslims must love God, fear him, have awe for him, place their trust in Him and revere Him. Muslims have also been commanded to love their fellow Muslims, to have mercy and compassion towards them, to love righteousness and to hate sin. These are all considered acts of worship of the inner self because they are in essence a fulfillment of the commandment of God. Muslims will be rewarded for fulfilling them (Dabur 7)

Worship in Islam can therefore be a ritual or non-ritual one. Ritual worship, if performed in true Spirit, elevates man morally and spiritually and enables him to carry on his activities in all walks of life according to the Guidance of God. Among ritual worship, Salat (ritual prayer) occupies the key position for two reasons.

First, it is the distinctive mark of a believer. Secondly, it prevents an individual from engaging in all sorts of abomination and vices by providing him chances of direct communion with his creator five times a day. Salat prayers are the first practical manifestation of Faith and also the foremost of the basic conditions for the success of the Islamic adherent. The Quran says: "Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers" (23:12). Offering Salat therefore with great care and punctuality is an integral aspect of worship.

Zakat also is an act of worship. This is because it brings the Muslim nearer to Allah. Zakat is a means of redistribution of wealth in a way that reduces differences between classes and groups. It makes for 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.

Fasting (Sawn) is also another Pillar of Islam which guarantees worship in Islam. The main function of fasting is to make the Muslim

pure from within as surely as other aspects of Shariah make him pure from without. By such purity, he responds to what is true and good and shuns what is false and evil. "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for those before you, that you may gain piety". (2:183). Fasting awakens the Conscience of the individual and gives it scope for exercise.

Furthermore, the Hajj, Which is pilgrimage to the House of God, is also a form of worship in Islam. Here Islam manifests an image of 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. 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. Pilgrimage gives an opportunity to all Muslims from all Groups, Classes, organizations and Governments from all over the Muslim world to meet annually in a great congress. Salibu has expressed that:

The time and venue of this congress has been set by 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 (5)

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 make the word of Allah dominant in the world. Worship in Islam is an all-inclusive term for those internal and external sayings and action of a person that are pleasing to Allah. Worship is that which is done in obedience to Allah's will.

Worship in Islam is Allah's decree which cannot be denied. Allah says: "We have prescribed certain rites of worship for every people"(22:34) (Muhib 12). The instinct of adoration and worship of Allah has been placed in the nature of human beings for higher ends, but it misses its object when it is confined only to mere bowing down and prostration. Worship in Islam, at it has been indicated above goes beyond this.

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Invariably, if a Muslim worships Allah, he does it for his own good (17:7). He is actually the recipient of the profit of worship. Worship restrains a Muslim from indecent, abominable things and loathsome deeds.

Conclusion

The concept of worship in Islam is a comprehensive concept that includes all the positive activities of the individual. This is in congruent with the all-inclusive nature of Islam as a way of life. It regulates human life at all levels, individual, social, economic, political and spiritual. That is why Islam provides guidance to the smallest details of one's life on all these level. Invariably, following these details is tantamount to following Islamic instructions in that specific area.

The fact that all the individual's activities are considered by God as acts of worship should lead the individual to seek Allah'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 permanent Supervisor, who knows everything. That Supervisor in the Islamic tradition is called Allah.

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