The Concept of Worship in Islam
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"We have not created mankind or jinn for any purpose other than to worship Me." [Surah Az-Zariyat 51:56]

Worship in Islam is an all-inclusive term for all that Allah (God) loves of a person; both internally, in the form of intentions and thoughts, as well as externally, in the form of saying and actions. In other words, worship is everything one intends, says or does for the pleasure of Allah. It includes rituals, such as, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and charity; it also extends to beliefs, social activities and personal contributions to the welfare of society.

A believer is required to submit himself completely to the will of Allah. The Qur'an instructed the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

"Say: Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds. No partner hath He: this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who how to His will." [Al-Qur'an 6:162-163].

If one truly loves Allah, then the dearest of things will be to lead a life focused on earning His pleasure. For a devout Muslim, personal pleasure is not about the pursuit of worldly desires, but rather, it is about earning the pleasure of Allah. A true believer is conscious of the existence of Allah at all times. Even during private moments alone, he is aware that Allah knows of his affairs. As a result, the believer will put to the side any selfish desires for attaining status, glory or personal recognition. Instead he will live a life of humility and patience to seek the pleasure of Allah. The believer has full conviction that Allah will reward him for all his good deeds and will hold him to account for all his bad deeds.

An important component of the concept of worship in Islam is the realization that Allah's pleasure is earned through both the performance of ritual acts as well as our dealing with the people around us. Islam does not think much of mere rituals when they are performed mechanically and have no influence on one's inner self.

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East or the West, but righteousness is to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Books, and the Prophets; and out of His love, spend of one's choice wealth for relatives and orphans, for the needy and the wayfarer, for beggars, and for the ransom of slaves; and establish the Salat and pay the Zakat; and to fulfill the pledges that you have made; and to patiently persevere in pain and in adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth and such are the Allah-fearing. [Al-Baqarah 2:171]"
The deeds in the above verse are the deeds of righteousness and they are part of worship. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us about faith, which is the basis of worship. “Faith is made up of about sixty branches: the highest of which is the belief in the Oneness of Allah, and the lowest in the scale of worship is removing obstacles and dirt from people s way.” The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever finds himself at the nightfall tired of his work, Allah will forgive his sins? Seeking knowledge is one of the highest forms of worship. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "seeking knowledge is a (religious) duty on every Muslim” In another saying he said: "Seeking knowledge for one hour is better than praying for seventy years."

Social courtesy and cooperation are a part of worship when done for the sake of Allah as the Prophet (peace be upon him) told us: "Receiving your friend with a smile is a type of charity and putting some water in your neighbor's bucket is a charity." It is worth noting that even performing one's duties is considered an act of worship. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us that whatever one spends for his family is a type of charity. Kindness to the members of one's family is an act of worship as is putting a piece of food lovingly in the mouth of one's spouse. Furthermore, even the acts that we enjoy, when performed according to Divine instructions are considered acts of worship.

It is clear that the Concept of worship in Islam is comprehensive. It includes all positive activities of the individual and is in agreement with the all-inclusive nature of Islam as a way of life. It regulates human life on all levels: the individual, the social, the economic, the political and the spiritual. All activities are considered by Allah as acts of worship, if done in conformance to His guidance. This should lead us to seek Allah's pleasure in our daily actions and always try to do them in the best possible manner, whether we are being watched or we are alone. Indeed Allah is the All Knowing, the All Seeing and the All Hearing.

While worship in Islam is all encompassing ritual and non-ritual actions, the higher priority is given to the ritual acts of worship. If performed in true spirit, the ritual worship elevates the individual morally and spiritually and enables one to perform all activities according to the guidance and pleasure of Allah.

**Salah (Prayers): Among ritual worships, Salah occupies the key position for two reasons.** Firstly, it is the distinctive mark of a believer. Secondly, it protects an individual from all sorts of abominations and vices by providing him chances of direct communication with his Creator five times a day. During the Salah, a believer not only praises Allah but also renews his covenant with Him and seeks His guidance, forgiveness and pleasure. Salah is the first practical manifestation of Faith that leads to salvation. The Prophet (peace be upon him) further emphasized: "Those who offer their Salah with great care and punctuality, will find it a light, a proof of their faith and cause for their salvation on the Day of Judgment." Allah declares that those believers who offer their prayers with sincerity are the successful.

"Successful indeed are the Believers, those who humble themselves in their prayers." 
[Al-Muminoon 23:1 -2]

**Zakah (Obligatory Charity): After Salah, the Zakah is an important pillar of Islam.** In the Qur'an, Salah and Zakah have mostly been mentioned together. Like Salah, Zakah is a manifestation of faith that affirms that Allah is the sole owner of everything in the universe. Muslims believe that the wealth they own is a trust and that Allah expects them to discharge a defined portion of it to the needy. In this respect Zakah is an act of devotion that, like prayer, brings the believer nearer to his Lord. Zakah is also 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 closes down the channels leading to class hatred. Such stability is not merely based on the personal feelings of the rich: it stands on a firmly established right. Zakah is an act of worship that benefits the attitude of the giver by removing from their heart greed and selfishness and replacing it with a feeling of compassion for mankind.
Siyam (Fasting): *Siyam* (fasting during the day time in the month of Ramadan) is another pillar of Islam which functions to make a Muslim pure from "within". By such purity, one promotes what is good, and shuns what is evil. The glorious Qur'an confirms,

"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may (learn) self-restraint." [Al-Baqarah 2:183].

In an authentic tradition, the Prophet (peace be upon him) reported Allah as saying about the 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 Allah's great bounty. Whilst many of us might have food on the table each and every day, how often do we reflect on the many million people in the world that do not? Fasting is an act of worship that awakens one's conscience, and reminds an individual of the suffering of the less fortunate. It thus promotes thankfulness and appreciation to Allah for the many bounties he has provided us.

**Hajj:** Lastly, the Hajj (pilgrimage to the House of Allah in Makkah), which is an act of worship that follows the example of the Prophet Abraham, who re-built the first house for the worship of the one true Allah in Makkah. Muslims from all corners of the world, wearing the same dress, respond to the call of Hajj in one voice and language: (Here I am at your service O Lord!). There are many lessons to be learnt from Hajj. Humility, for example, is one. Men going for the pilgrimage dress in two plain white garments. This is a reminder that Allah is not concerned about the wealth or status that we have accumulated in this world. Instead, when we present ourselves to Allah, everyone is equal and it is only the good deeds that we have conducted that matter. During Hajj there is a strict exercise of self-discipline, where not only sacred things are revered, but even the lives of plants and birds are made inviolable so that everything lives in safety. In addition, a pilgrim is strictly prohibited from entering any dispute or quarrel with another person, regardless of blame.

In summary, the concept of worship in Islam encompasses every aspect of human life, and is central to the goal of freeing the individual, as well as society, from the worship of created things to the worship of the Creator of all things. It is this concept of worship that humanity needs so desperately, and wherein lies the key to our collective salvation.

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