



CONCEPT OF 'IBADAH (WORSHIP) IN ISLAM: A STUDY OF SOME RELEVANT QUR'ANIC TEXT

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ABSTRACT

'Ibadah is the purpose of creation. 'Ibadah in Islam is a comprehensive concept that embraces all human endeavours. Whatever humans do in sincerity and without disobeying any of Allah's commands is a form of worship and they will be rewarded for it. The concept and purpose of worship in Islam is unparalleled to any other religion in existence. It combines the mundane with the spiritual, the individual with the society, and the internal soul with the external body. Worship has a unique role in Islam, and through worship, a person is regarded as a true Muslim who accords his entire life to the Will of Allah^(s.w.t). This article attempts to describe the concept of 'Ibadah (Worship) in Islam in a precise way.

Keywords: Human nature, 'Ibadah, Islam, Qur'an, Worship

I. INTRODUCTION

Allah^(s.w.t) created the whole mankind only for 'Ibadah (worship) as Allah^(s.w.t) says in the holy Qur'an:

"And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me".¹ O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous".²

The message of all the previous prophets was the same that worship none except Allah^(s.w.t). For example Allah^(s.w.t) says in the holy Qur'an:

"And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], "Worship Allah^(s.w.t) and avoid taghut (false gods)".³

The concept of worship ('Ibadah) in Islam is misunderstood by many people including some Muslims. Worship is commonly taken to mean performing ritualistic acts such as prayers, fasting, charity, hajj etc. This limited understanding of worship is only one aspect of the meaning of worship in Islam. The real definition of worship in Islam is a comprehensive definition that includes every aspect of human life and individual's activities.



II. MEANING OF 'IBADAH

The Arabic word *'Ibadah* is derived from the root word *'Abd* which means slave or full time servant. All the actions of a slave which he makes to please his master are *'Ibadah*, so we are *'Abd* (servants) of Allah ^(s.w.t) and all our actions which are done for the sake of Allah's pleasure are considered as *'Ibadah*. In other words, worship is all-inclusive that one says or does for the pleasure of Allah ^(s.w.t). This, of course, includes rituals as well as beliefs, social activities, and personal contributions to the welfare of fellow human beings.

III. WORSHIP AND HUMAN NATURE

The creation of human being is based on the instinct and impulse which naturally exists in his temperament that he bows; he extends his hands begging favor, and humbly calls showing helplessness to solve his problems. This is the same natural requirement which has been mentioned in the Holy *Qur'an*:

"So keep yourself exclusively on the true way, the creational law of Allah according to which He created man with the quality of choosing right or wrong. There is no altering of Allah's creation. This is the supreme law. But most men do not understand".⁴

Nobody can change the nature created by Allah ^(s.w.t). It means that all the human beings have been created on this instinct that there is no god but Allah ^(s.w.t), the Creator, Lord, worthy of worship. This order exists in human nature can neither change nor any creature can become God. In some moments from the depth of the soul, this voice comes on his lips and man involuntarily declares his devotion and mastery of Allah ^(s.w.t). On the basis of same requirement of human nature, and making the invitation towards oneness of Allah ^(s.w.t), Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S), declared the testimony of greatness and oneness of Allah ^(s.w.t) by giving the proof of going down of stars, moon, and sun. Remember when Ibrahim ^(A.S.) said to Azar, his father:

"Why do you take idols for God? I certainly find you and your people in error". Thus, We showed to Ibrahim the visible and invisible world of the heavens and the earth, that he could be among those who believe. When the night came with her covering of darkness he saw a star, and (Ibrahim) said: "This is my Lord." But when the star set, (Ibrahim) said: "I love not those that wane." When (Ibrahim) saw the moon rise all aglow, he said: "This is my Lord." But even as the moon set, (Ibrahim) said: "If my Lord had not shown me the way I would surely have gone astray." When (Ibrahim) saw the sun rise all resplendent, he said: "My Lord is surely this, and the greatest of them all." But the sun also set, and (Ibrahim ^(A.S.)) said: "O my people, I am through with those you associate (with Allah). I have truly turned my face towards Him who created the heavens and the earth: I have chosen one way and am not an idolater."⁵



IV. GENERAL CONCEPT OF WORSHIP

Obedience is the voice of human nature. But in the long period of human history, different forms and variety of customs came into existence which became mixture of excess and deficiency. One concept of worship, which has been established about the emperors of old times, is that he is not bound to any law or regulation. Every citizen in his kingdom is oppressed and has no influence. He can grant anything to anyone whoever he wants to and can send anyone to gallows without any reason. He can either be made agreed by flattering, gifts and oblation, bribery and influences, or by begging or bowing head down with disgrace and helplessness. Nobody has direct access to him except by making his private courtesans happy to get his gratification. On the basis of this concept offering few specific customary rituals at some particular time was termed as worship. Second concept is, that man related with worldly life can take care of responsibilities of his family and children but cannot make Allah ^(s.w.t) happy by maintaining worldly affairs. To make him pleased it is necessary that he should be separated from all worldly resources and ways leaving his family and children alone, and adopts the life of a monk, and hermit, and in this way nourishes his inner forces by his struggles, abstinence and meditation.

Islam does not merely label the physical appearance and customary rituals as worship, but it provides a purposeful, profound, composed, natural, orderly and scientific philosophy. Islam demands that its followers utilize each and every moment of their lives by adopting this philosophy till death. Otherwise, whenever they break the law of Allah ^(s.w.t) in any task or any responsibility, that act will be considered as a sin instead of worship. And its punishment will be awarded in this world and hereafter. Similarly he deserves reward and requital for his virtuous deeds.⁶

V. CONCEPT OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

According to Islam, spending few moments meditating at the threshold of a temple is not obedience, but in the vision of Islam, man is a devotee of Allah ^(s.w.t). His master, lord, ruler is one and only Lord of universe. Who has assigned some powers and responsibilities and sent him on earth with entrusted duties. The worship by human being is that he should achieve the objectives of his Lord, and use those authorities and powers appropriately and fulfill the assigned responsibilities, and execute all duties which have been assigned by Him. Instead of taking care of the assigned responsibilities, if a person just keeps on bowing his head, tries to get his work done by flattering and fawning, and keeps on counting beads of rosary in a corner, but does not concentrate towards the tasks which have been assigned by his lord, then he will not be submissive, obedient, sincere, and a loyal deputy. Similarly, considering indulging in worship, recitals and meditation as worship by ignoring the assigned responsibilities of Allah ^(s.w.t), contradicts the concept of worship in Islam. Islam requires from its followers that they spend their lives in devotion of Allah ^(s.w.t), and consider themselves as a devotee, and slave, all the times. And whatever tasks they do in their daily life they should be in accordance to the spirit of His commandments. Eating, drinking, sleeping, waking up, walking, talking, dealings, business matters, mode of living, relations, differences, infact whatever step they take it must be in compliance with His law and



they must feel answerable to Allah ^(s.w.t), every time. While treating with children at home, neighbors in street, friends in society, partners in business, colleagues in offices, fellow citizens in country, and with all human beings and creatures of the world, they must be considerate about the marked boundaries of Allah ^(s.w.t). In other words, understand the philosophy of worship, and follow all life their according to its spirit.

Leaving the world, practicing worship and meditation in corners is not worship. But following the commands of Allah ^(s.w.t), while at the same time being stuck in worldly affairs and taking care of worldly responsibilities, is worship. Sitting on the ruling chair and keep this thing in mind that he is not god of the people, but he is a devotee of Allah ^(s.w.t). On the rank of justice; remembering that he is being deputed to do justice on Allah's ^(s.w.t) earth. While being the possessor of treasures of world and wealth, he should be aware that he does not own anything but he is a trustee, and is accountable to the real Owner for each penny. Being the commander of forces, he should not be intoxicated in the arrogance of power but be obedient to truth, justice, and honesty instead of injustice, exploitation, and dishonesty. In politics and running worldly affairs, he ought to be busy in making guiding principles from Allah's ^(s.w.t) law. And must consider Him the real master and himself a representative and perform work for the welfare, protection, prosperity, and development of mankind. In other words, no fear and lust could distract him from the right path, and each and every moment of his day and all his day and night engagements in worldly affairs will become his worship. In case of worship Islam has not discriminated world and religion, but infact it has taught that every act of man that is means for the will of Allah ^(s.w.t), and obedience to His commandments is worship. For instance, avoiding lies, criticizing others, and obscene talks during conversation with people but talking about truth, justice and welfare is worship. Meeting someone with a smile, greeting him, and entertaining him reasonably is worship. Educating children, taking care of rights of spouse, maintaining a good atmosphere at home, living together with family members, and helping them in house chores, also comes in worship. Maintaining good relations with neighbours, taking care of their needs, and enquiring about their well-being is also worship. Avoiding lies, cheating, dishonesty, and swearing wrongly while selling or buying, treating customers in a polite way, weighing correctly, and taking care of etiquettes of business is worship. While doing business or labour in trade, industry, and agriculture, taking care of this matter that Allah's ^(s.w.t) law is not disgraced at any point, and nobody's right has been exploited, the livelihood has been earned through legal means and hard work, is infact worship. Altogether, every time in worldly affairs, preferring Allah's ^(s.w.t) commandments in all matters, following those rules, and avoiding disobedience is the real worship.

VI. PURPOSE OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

According to Holy *Qur'an*, the purpose of creation of life and death is the assessment of human beings to evaluate whose deeds are good, and to what extent. Allah ^(s.w.t) says in Holy *Qur'an*:

"Who created death and life in order to try you to see who of you are best of deed? He is all-mighty and forgiving".⁷

In this short sentence attention has been drawn towards many realities. Firstly, life and death are related to Him, no one else can bless life, or give death. Secondly the life of a man, who has been given capability to do



vice and virtue, is not meaningless. Allah ^(s.w.t) has created him to assess here. Life is the time allowed during intermission and death means the time of examination is over. Thirdly, through this examination, Allah ^(s.w.t) has given chance to everybody so that he can express good and evil, and can show practically that what kind of a person is he. Fourthly, the creator is the judge to decide whose acts are good and bad. Deciding the quality of goodness and badness of the act is not related to the examinee but the examiner. Therefore whoever wants to excel in examination, he should be aware of the requirements of submission to Allah ^(s.w.t). Fifth point is itself hidden in the process of examination; reward or punishment will be based according to the act. To be successful in the assessment there is a need for a comprehensive, disciplined, and all time conquering preparation that could prepare man for both inner and outer assessment. There is a complete course for this training, i.e. "Pure Worships". Without getting trained, neither there is a possibility of human evolution, nor the achievement of real goal. Whoever gets good training he will be ready for real and actual life and can perform his real obligations. That's why if a person receives his charge without getting proper training and takes business of life and universe into his own hands, then it is not expected that his attitude of life will be meeting the high standards of justice, trust, tolerance, peace, love, social welfare, patience, and fear of Allah ^(s.w.t). And if a person continues with his training for whole duration but does not regard the purpose of training then his training will be purposeless. That's why Islam has harmonized process of training and purpose of training in such a way that instead of keeping religion and world in separate chambers, it has absorbed in unity and taught this prayer:

"Give us of good in the world, O Lord, and give us of good in the life to come, and suffer us not to suffer the torment of Hell".⁸

The training course of man to take charge of reign of deity and to lead the life according to the commandments of Allah ^(s.w.t) remain continues with life. And actual responsibilities are also supposed to be accomplished. Worship in fact prepares man that he should take care of rights of Allah ^(s.w.t), and his fellow beings. On this basis whoever gets separated from other people and sits in corner in meditation, he is unable to fulfill the rights of people. Hence on the basis of not understanding the real spirits of worship, the real purpose of worship will be killed. According to Islam religion and world are not opposite forces but they are mutual allies. If religious obligations are done for the sake of hypocrisy, fame, and show off, then there is no reward with Allah ^(s.w.t) and if worldly matters are done according to the will of Allah ^(s.w.t) for the sake of His will then it is just the real worship.

Dealings, business, and adopting ways to earn livelihood, which we just merely take as a worldly task but can be counted as worship as per Holy *Qur'an*, if they are done according to the orders of Allah ^(s.w.t).

"O believers, eat what is good of the food We have given you, and be grateful to Allah, if indeed you are obedient to Him".⁹

This verse tells that searching and spending uncontaminated livelihood, and being thankful to Allah ^(s.w.t) is worship. One more ayah mentions the effort for work, and leaving result on Allah ^(s.w.t), as worship:

"To Allah belong the secrets of the heavens and the earth, and all things will go back to Him. So worship Him and put your trust in Him; your Lord is not heedless of what you do".¹⁰



VII. IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

According to Holy *Qur'an*, worship is the purpose of creation of man so that he can pass through the training process and prepare to participate positively in social life. Allah ^(s.w.t) says:

"I have not created the jinns and men but to worship Me".¹¹

This is a custom of the world that if a thing loses its purpose then nobody guards, protects, or looks after it but instead disposes off these things usually. Above mentioned verse mentions that the real worth of human can be calculated from this act that how much he is actively involved in the obedience of Allah ^(s.w.t). And if he ignores his assigned responsibilities by leaving devotion to Allah ^(s.w.t) then He does not keep him near to Him for long. The importance of obedience is also being clarified by this fact that Allah ^(s.w.t) has mentioned declared testimony in Holy *Qur'an* according to that all human beings have been asked to take oath to be obedient to Allah ^(s.w.t), and this oath has been kept in human's nature. *When your Lord brings forth from their loins the offspring of the children of Adam, He makes them witnesses over themselves, (and asks): "Am I not your Lord?" 'Indeed,' they said: "Yes! We bear witness", lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: "We were not aware of this"*.¹²

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it can be concluded that according to Holy *Qur'an*, the purpose of human creation is to worship Allah. Worship has grasp on every sphere of human life. The five pillars of Islam are the basic course of Islamic worship which train the person's inner self and show him the way to organization, discipline, moderation and balance and produces the concept to fight in a better way against all odds of materialistic world. The Islamic concept of worship liberates whole humanity, from color, creed, prejudice, economic genocide, gender biasness, terrorism, bloodshed. If the system of Islamic concept of worship is practiced whole heartedly with good intentions, then there can be an exemplary and continuous revolution in human society, without any war and fights which can be termed as civic revolution. Islam teaches Muslims to avoid prejudice, greed, lust, ignorance, enmity, jealousy, malice, criticism, mistrust.

END-NOTES AND REFERENCES:

[1] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:56

[2] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:21

[3] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Al-Nahl, 16:36

[4] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Ar-Rum, 30:30

[5] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Al-An'am, 6:74-79



^[6] Sadia Sikandar Awan: *The Role of Worship in the Reformation of an Islamic Welfare Society*, NATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION (NRDF), Peshawar, Pakistan, p. 10.

^[7] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Al-Mulk, 67:2.

^[8] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:201.

^[9] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:172.

^[10] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Hud, 11:123

^[11] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:56.

^[12] *Al-Qur'an*, Surah Al-A'raf, 7:172

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