

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

نَحْمَدُهُ وَنُحِبُّهُ عَلَى رِسْوَالِهِ الْكَرِيمِ سَيِّدِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ جَاءَهُ الرُّسُلُ

PHILOSOPHY OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

*Prayers-Fasting-Pilgrimage (Hajj)-Social Insurance
Tax (Zakat): the Rationale Behind Them*

Concept of worship

The concept of worship in Islam is unique among the religions of the world. The word which the Holy Quran has used for worship is *'ibadat*, which means submission to God and 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, slave. 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.

Worship forms only a part of human life in other religions. In Islam it is meant to cover the whole life. Other religions are dualistic. They divide the world between God and the Devil. They divide human activity into two water-tight compartments, bearing two different labels of the religious and the secular. 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”

Similarly, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism teach an irreconcilable conflict between the physical and the spiritual. Hence, the act of worship in all these religions are purely devotional and ceremonial in the same way as they are in Christianity.

The fact in 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.

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.

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. The universe is the Act of God. It is God’s creation. Hence it is essentially good.

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

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

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;

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.

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. 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 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. In fact, strictly speaking, there are only two devotional institutions in Islam which involve ceremonies, and they are Prayers and Pilgrimage. It may be remarked in passing that the Muslim Jurist have also included marriage among ceremonial devotions. We are not, however, concerned with that here.

We may now take up the rationale behind Prayers, Fasting, Zakat and Hajj.

Prayers

Islam has been built up on five Pillars—one of faith and four of action—and Prayer forms the most important pillar of action. The question arises here as to what is the need to Prayer? It is an age old conviction for humanity that the human personality is constituted of three factors, viz., body, mind and soul. 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. 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 embryonic stage by acquiring more and more develop forms, until it develops onto a full-fledge human personality and comes into this world to play its role on the life of humanity. 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*.

Similar to the physical evolution is the process of the evolution of human consciousness. There are three levels of Consciousness, viz., the levels of Instincts, the level of Reason and the level of Institution; and there are five forms of consciousness, viz, physical consciousness, theoretic consciousness, moral consciousness, aesthetic consciousness and spiritual consciousness.

When a human baby comes into this world, its reason and intuitions 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. For instance, the child does not seem to distinguish between different object, which capacity develops only gradually. In the same way do all other sense develop 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. 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. 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.

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

We feed the human body with physical food. We feed the human mind with ideas or mental food. Similarly, we must feed the human soul with spiritual food.

There is a whole science of dietics and nutrition concerning the human body. There is a whole system of education for the cultivation of the mental faculties and for feeding what is called the mind. What should be our attitude to the human soul, then? 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.

We have already pointed out that the food for the body is physical in its nature and the food for the mind is mental in its nature. Therefore, the food for the soul should be spiritual in its nature. 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.

The first pre-requisite in connection with the physical food is a to eat it with preparation and devotion. Similarly, the first pre-requisite in connection with the mental food is to receive it with preparation and the fullest attention. Therefore, the first prerequisite in connection with spiritual food must be that it should be administered after preparation—which Islam prescribes in the form of pre-prayer ablution (Wudu), fixing up the attention (niyyah) and 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 connection with the physical food is that it should be of a healthy type. The same pre-requisite holds in connection with mental food, viz., the ideas which can ensure the healthy development of the mind are always those which are sound and good. Similarly, 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 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. 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. It is evident from this that the third prerequisite of feeding the soul should be regular and continuous feeding, and this Islam has provide 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 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. 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.

Later in the day we gain 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. Again, when the sun sets and night begins and 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. 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) prayer so to go to bed while we are in state of spiritual ecstasy.

Fasting

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. 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*).

Reverting to the spiritual aspect of life: the greatest enemies of man are those that reside within his own person as for instance greed and lust and other appetites and passions which pertain to the base self called in Islamic terminology as nafs al ammarah or, the Appetitive Self. 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. It is these baser appetites, again, which cause human beings to deny the spiritual values and to forget God.

Now, the only way to subjugate the baser self is to constantly perform psychological and spiritual exercises whereby the aggressiveness of the baser self is smashed and it starts obeying the dictates of reason. He whose life is governed by the self is worse than beasts. He whose life is governed by reason is really man. 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

Zakat is one of the pillars of Islam and as such stand next in importance only to institutional prayer; and while prayer is an obligation towards one's own self and towards God, Zakat is an obligation towards others. 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 Zakat is a tax which is levied on those who can save after satisfying their basic need and is utilized for the assistance of those who do not possess the means of fulfilling their basic needs.

Zakat has been conceived in Islam as a state-institution. It is meant to be collect 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 Quran says:

"Verily, charity is meant for the destitute, and those who are short of means, and the officials (of the department of Zakat), and those who are converts and their financial difficulties entitle them to help, and for the emancipation of slaves, and for extricating the people from the burdens of their bad debts, and for the defense of Islam, and for assisting the stranded traveler." (iX:60)

Since some times 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. 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. Caliph Omar (RDA) established the Diwan, i.e. The Bureau of Statistics, wherein the particulars of every citizen were maintained and as a consequence every one who needed help was assisted financially without any hardship and to the fullest extent. Those who were incapable of earning, viz. the old people, the crippled, the orphans and the widows, were given handsome pensions and stipends. 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. 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*)

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 on the pilgrim:

- (1) 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 prayers, fasting and 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 congregation 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. Every member of the great assemblage at Makkah set out from his home with this object in view. He discards all those comforts of life which act as a veil against the inner spiritual experience. He puts on the simplest un-stitched dress and he is required to avoid all indecent thoughts, all evil talks and all disputes. All the prayers and all symbolism 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 Hajj excels all other institutions of the world in its wonderful influence in leveling all distinctions of race, color and rank. Not only the people of all races and all countries meet together in the house of God as members of any 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.

