

The Meanings, Philosophy and Dimensions of Worship

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Before embarking on the discussion of prayer, I shall deal with the meanings, philosophy and .dimensions of worship {‘ibadah} and servitude as they are the spirit of prayer

Why worship {‘ibadah}?

Worship {‘ibadah} means the expression of abasement {dhillah}, the highest form of humility and homage, before God. As to its importance, it is enough to state that worship is the purpose behind the creation of all beings and the mission {bi’tthah} of the prophets (‘a) (the creational world {‘alam at-takwin} and the legislative world {‘alam at-tashri}, respectively). God says:

"I did not create the jinn and humans except that they may worship Me."

The mission of all the prophets (‘a) has been to invite the people to worship God:
"Certainly We raised an apostle in every nation {to preach:} 'Worship Allah, and keep away from the Rebel'."

So, the objective behind the creation of the universe and the mission of the prophets (‘a) has been the worship of God. However, it is clear that God, the Exalted, is in no need of our worship:

"Yet Allah is Independent of you."

The benefit of worship returns to the worshippers themselves, as simply as the pupils' decision .to study their lessons is to their own advantage and has no gain for the teacher

Reasons for worship

:The following reasons persuade man to worship and serve God

Greatness of God .1

When man sees the greatness and magnificence of God, he unconsciously feels humble and weak before Him, just as a person who regards himself insignificant before a distinguished .person and scholar, also honors and respects him

Feelings of dependence .2

Man's nature is such that he feels humble before some one upon whom he is dependent. Our very existence depends upon the will of God and we need Him all the time. This feeling of need and deficiency urges man to worship God - for only He is the Ultimately Perfect and Independent. It is stated in some hadiths that if there were no death, poverty and sickness, .some people would never humble themselves before God

Awareness of blessings .3

Man loves to possess and enjoy blessings. Remembering the abundant blessings of God can be the strongest motive for worshipping Him. In the litanies {munajat} of the infallible Imams ('a), the blessings of God, including those that are related to those prior to the birth of man, are initially mentioned, and in this way man shows his love to God and then he humbly presents his requests. God also says:

"Let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them {and saved them} from hunger, and secured them from fear."

.In another verse, man is asked to worship God who created him

Human nature {fitrah} .4

Worship is an instinctive and integral part of human nature. Being innate, man sometimes treads the correct path and worships God. When misled, he is drawn to the worship of the sun, stones, wood, the cow, money, spouses, and taghuts.

The prophets ('a) have not come to instill the sense of worship in man. Rather, their mission is to guide this natural disposition in the right direction. 'Ali ('a) said:

"God thus sent down Muhammad in truth to stop His servants from idol-worship, and invite them to His worship."

Most of the Qur'anic verses related to worship invite people to the divine unity in worship {tawhid fi'l-'ibadah} and not to the spirit of worship, because that spirit of worship already exists in man. It is like the desire for food which exists in every infant, but if it is not guided, he will eat mud instead of food and enjoy eating it!

Were it not for the leadership of the prophets ('a), the direction of this instinct would be elsewhere, and instead of God, false and futile deities would be worshipped. Just as during the forty days of the absence of Hadhrat Musa (Moses) ('a), the people through the temptation of .Samiri started worshipping the golden calf

Role of worship

Worship means devoting all the dimensions of life to the divine will and pleasure. Giving divine meaning to all activities has significant effects on the life of man, some of which are the following:

Making the perishable perpetual .1

Man and all his efforts will perish, but whatever is done for His pleasure will remain as an asset. The Holy Qur'an says:

"That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last."

It also says elsewhere:

"Everything is to perish except His Face"

Changing the material into the spiritual .2

If the purpose behind {man's} deeds be a Godly one if man could set the intention, motive and direction of his activities along the path of the divine will, and conduct himself as a true servant of God, even his mundane acts such as eating, dressing, traveling, visiting, housekeeping, studying, and all his daily chores would become spiritual. On the contrary, sometimes even the most sacred of works, if done with materialistic and worldly motives, could lose their worth.

Individual and collective development .3

Worship of God demands a total disregard of personal whims and caprice; non-glorification of any race, garment, language, land, and city; association with God, the Ultimate Power and Perfection. And gratitude to the Bestower of blessings. Taken together, they play an important role in the intellectual development of the individual and society collectively. Worship means moving along the straight path of God:

"Worship Me. This is a straight path."

"And take recourse in patience and prayer."

Also, worship individually protects human beings from caprice, sin and temptation, and a devoted society that worships God consciously rejects the worship of taghuts, tyrants and superpowers. 'Allamah Iqbal Lahuri said:

*Due to a lack of insight, man serves another man,
He possessed a gem but gave it to others,*

*He is worse than dogs in his slavish demeanor,
I have yet to see a dog bow down before another.*

Worship improves individuals as well as societies. In most cases, the corruption in society .emanates from, and is caused by the inclination to worship any other, besides God

Dimensions of worship

In the culture of Islam, worship {‘ibadah} is higher than its manifestations such as prayer and fasting. Acts which are beneficial to the people are all acts of worship. We shall point to some :activities which are reckoned as acts of worship in Islam

Reflection on the handiwork of God .1

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) said:

“Worship {‘ibadah} is not excessive praying and fasting. Verily, worship is reflection on the handiwork of Allah.”

Reflection that makes human beings better acquainted with God has been regarded as an act .of worship

Earning a living .2

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“Worship has seventy parts, the best of which is to earn a lawful {halal} (income

Seeking knowledge .3

The Prophet of Islam (S) said:

“The act of seeking knowledge in order to refute falsehood and turn deviation into guidance is .equivalent to forty years of worship

Rendering service to the people .4

Many Prophetic traditions assert that service to the people and attending to their problems is far superior to many acts of worship and optional Hajj pilgrimage {‘umrah}. In the words of Sa’di,

Worship is nothing but service to the people.

.It is not rosary, prayer mat and cassock

Waiting for the global government of justice .5

The Holy Prophet (S) said:

"The best act of worship is to wait for the relief {faraj} (with the advent of Imam al-Mahdi ('a))."

It is clear that it must also be accompanied by positive and constructive waiting, which paves the ground for the establishment of the just government of al-Mahdi ('a). Thus, giving divine color {sibghah} to works increases their value and transforms them into acts of worship, at times, even the best acts of worship. Proper intention is like an alchemy that makes every invalid meral into gold. Acts performed with the intention of seeking nearness to God shall become acts of worship. As such, it can be said that the dimensions and manifestations of worship cannot be counted. A benevolent glance at one's father and mother, or the countenance of the 'ulama'; looking at the Qur'an, the Ka'bah, a just leader, or a brother in .faith, are also acts of worship

How we should worship

The manner of performing worship must be learned from the Qur'an and the progeny {'itrah} of the Prophet (S) (after him) just as the address of every house must be sought from its owner. Therefore, we need to see what the verses of the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Infallibles {ma'sumin} ('a) consider as the best acts of worship and how they ('itrah ('a)) describe them. :{'Let us look at the statements of the pious saints {awliya

Conscious worship .1

It is stated in a hadith, thus:

"Two rak'ahs {cycles or units} of prayer of a scholar {'alim} are better than seventy rak'ahs of prayer of an ignorant person {jahil}."

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "What is accepted in prayer is that which is performed or recited on the basis of reflection and consciousness."

It is thus stated in another hadith:

"He who worships without understanding and discernment is like the donkey of a mill but does not advance."

It is essential for the person to know what he is doing and reciting, and who he is addressing,

with total presence of mind and heart.

The Holy Prophet (S) said: "Two rak'ahs of conscious prayer is better than an unconscious night vigil."

The Glorious Qur'an states:

"O you who have faith! Do not approach prayer when you are intoxicated, {not} until you know what you are saying."

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) said: "The sins of the one who performs two rak'ahs of prayer while aware
".of whom he is addressing and what he is reciting shall be forgiven

Fervent worship .2

Just as the sick do not enjoy eating food, the unenthusiastic worshippers will not also acquire pleasure in worship. Worship must be performed with love, enthusiasm, fervor and pleasure
and not indisposition, languidness and despondency.

Cheerfulness in worship is a privilege possessed by the people whose hearts are enamored by Him. Its ground must also be obtained through gnosis {ma'rifah} and attention {tawajjuh}.

Worship under compulsion and imposition leads nowhere. Imam as-Sadiq ('a) said:

"Do not enforce worship on yourself."

Just as we ardently wish to meet a beloved person or a great personality, we must also ardently desire meeting God and worshipping Him. The holy saints {awliya'} and the Infallibles ('a) were astonishingly enamored by the moment of meeting God and worshipping Him. (We
(.shall cite some instances of it in future discussions

Sincere worship .3

Sincerity bestows value and credit to acts of worship. Any act of worship not purely for the sake of God but out of ostentation, hypocrisy, demagoguery and advertisement is devoid of value,
and not accepted by God.

The Glorious Qur'an states:

"And make none sharer of the worship due unto his Lord."

Imam ar-Rida ('a) said:

"You should be skeptical about the piety of one who seeks popularity (in society) through worship."

Such people make use of religion to deceive others. Insincere worship is like a lifeless body
and soulless corpse. And the Glorious Qur'an beautifully states:

”And they are ordered naught else than to serve Allah, keeping religion pure for Him

Worshipping submissively .4

Humility {khushu'} means total attention of the heart to the Lord and Cherisher and a physical and mental state which is worthy of the majesty of God. Worshipping God must be accompanied by a heart filled with the sense of God's grandeur, and its own insignificance before Him. In describing the upright believers, the Holy Qur'an notices the presence of

“humility during prayer”:

“And those who are humble in their prayers.”

This humility of heart should encompass the entire being of the worshipper as if he can see God and feel his own worthlessness in front of His power and glory. This is stated in a hadith:

“Worship God as if you can see Him.”

Another hadith further informs thus:

*“Perform the prayer within its appointed time in such a manner as if it is your last prayer (and
”.(you are bidding farewell to prayer and the world*

Worshipping in private .5

Man is not immune from the snares of Satan, and so many acts of worship are tainted with self-conceit, ostentation and publicity. The way to overcome this defect is to worship in private. The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“The reward for an act of worship done in private is greater.”

However, this does not apply to congregational acts of worship (such as Friday and other congregational prayers, and Hajj pilgrimage); for, congregational prayer in the mosque is superior to individual prayer at home. Worshipping in private, in most cases, prevents
.ostentation and adulteration of acts of worship

Dangers threatening worship

Satan, the avowed and perennial enemy of man is always trying to adulterate his acts of
:worship and render them worthless. He makes use of the following ways

Ostentation {riya'} .1

He who worships not for the sake of God but to win the attention of people or to earn

popularity and a certain status is ensnared by Satan, and his acts of worship become futile. This havoc in worship sometimes occurs in the intention even before the act itself, thus
. {distancing it from the intention of "seeking nearness to Allah" {qurbatan ilallah

Self-conceit {‘ujb} .2

Satan draws man, while in the state of worship, toward self-conceit by regarding his acts of devotion as worthy of acceptance, thus sending them down the drain, though they have been
.started with the name of God and for him. And, as such, man is involved in pride

Sin .3

Undoubtedly, sins efface the good effects of devotional acts. After months of sweat and toil for his farm and orchard to yield fruits and products, as a result of a single instance of negligence a fire might burn all of the harvested products, thus rendering all the farmer's efforts futile. Sin is the fire in the crops of our devotions and deeds which consumes them. In sum, Satan obstructs the pouring of the limpid water into the heart's goblet, or pollutes and contaminates it after the container is full, or makes a hole in the container so as to waste the water.

In the Makarim al-Akhlaq Supplication, Imam as-Sajjad (‘a) thus beseeches God:
"O my Lord! Let me be Your servant but do not contaminate my devotion {‘ibadah} with self-conceit {‘ujb}... Make me honorable {‘aziz} but do not inflict me with pride {kibr}."

In the words of the Glorious Qur’an, giving alms {sadaqah}, which is a material form of worship, is tainted and rendered void by twitting anyone for a favor done to him {minnh}:

"O you who have faith! Do not render your charities void by reproaches and affronts."

Planting a shoot does not take much time, but making it bear fruit, keeping it safely growing, and purging it of pests are difficult. Sometimes, the sins or spiritual maladies wipe off all goodness.

We read in a hadith:

"Verily, jealousy consumes all goodness just as the fire consumes firewood."

It is stated in another tradition: A proud worshipper and a repentant transgressor (sinner) both entered the mosque. Because of his repentant and regretful nature, the transgressor reformed himself and became a righteous believer. Owing to his pride, however, the worshipper turned
.into a transgressor

Ways of avoiding pride and self-conceit {‘ujb}

Among the most potent dangers threatening worship are pride {kibr} and self-conceit {‘ujb}. How can one cure or not become involved in them? By paying attention to the following points, :one may avoid or cure these maladies

Have we really worshipped? .1

Sometimes, man is in a state of compound ignorance {jahl al-murakkab}, thinking that he is engaged in worshipping God while in fact he is going astray and giving extreme importance to his works. At times, unpleasant acts seem “good deeds” to him and Iblis (Satan) is active in this context. The Holy Qur’an points to this “embellishment of evil deeds” {tazyin ‘amal su’} in some of its verses, some of which are the following:

“Is someone the evil of whose conduct is presented as decorous to him, so he regards it as good...”

“Those whose endeavor goes awry in the life of the world, while they suppose they are doing good.”

”.“Their evil deeds appear to them as decorous

Have our acts of worship been accepted? .2

On the discussion about the conditions and signs of the acceptance of worship, you will read that the value of acts of worship and prayer lies in their being accepted. God accepts the worship of the meritorious, pious servants, recognizing their spending and alms-giving. .A person not sure of the acceptance of his acts of worship obviously cannot be proud of them

Futile acts of worship .3

Some sins corrupt and render futile a whole lifetime of prayers and other acts of worship, and people will return empty-handed from the market of deeds. We need to ensure that our prayers .and other acts of worship are not accompanied by those sins

Will we achieve redemption? .4

A noble ending and favorable future are great blessings, which the divine saints {awliya’} have always prayed for. Hadhrat Yusuf (‘a) prayed to God that he die a Muslim (who submits to the divine will):

"Let my death be in submission {to You}."

The Glorious Qur'an states that one of the requests of the men of wisdom to God is for them to die along with the good ones:

"And make us die with the pious."

Requesting guidance along the straight path {sirat al-mustaqim} is the prayer for constancy along the path, and the Holy Qur'an describes the final ending as belonging to the pious:

"And the outcome will be in favor of the God-wary."

Was not Satan with all those acts of worship expelled from the kingdom of God? Were there not those who, after a whole lifetime of prayers and other acts of worship, passed away in the !worst state of misguidance? So, one must not be proud of the present state

Comparing acts of worship and blessings .5

Whatever we have is from God. The blessings of health, active limbs, faculties, and sustenance are all divine graces. Success in worship also originates from Him. We are totally enveloped by His blessings. In order to attain felicity and bliss, He invites, guides, encourages, and provides us with opportunities.

He accepts us in His presence in every place, time, circumstance, age, and condition that we may be in. He also accepts the repentant. He is not tired of hearing repetitive petitions and pleadings, nor does He fall short of entertaining His servants.

He accepts unworthy acts of worship and compensates them worthily. He overlooks shortcomings because His favors and blessings are boundless. What is the value of our acts of worship compared to His Benevolence? *"And what is the worth of our deeds in comparison to"?His favors*

Comparing acts of worship and complacencies .6

Which are greater in number, our acts of worship or our complacencies and sins? The Holy Qur'an has stated many times:

"So where are you going?"

Can our prayers and acts of devotion outweigh our moments of negligence, disobedience, shortcomings, carelessness, and heedlessness?

Imam as-Sajjad ('a) says in a supplication, thus:

"O Lord! With all this negligence of obligations, violation of limits, and transgressions, how can"?I come near You through optional and supererogatory acts

Comparing acts of worship and needs .7

Acts of worship are our provision for the hereafter. A long and winding road is before us. Will these acts of worship suffice all this way and meet all our needs? Was the lamentation of 'Ali

(a) not loud enough when he said, *"Oh... for lack of provision (for the long way)"*?

After this worldly existence, we are in need of God and His favors in the next stages - in the grave, purgatory {barzakh}, Day of Reckoning {mahshar}, and the hereafter. Do all these acts of worship guarantee God's favors?

Abu Darda' says: At the Masjid an-Nabi there was talk about the deeds of those who participated in the Battle of Badr and those who gave their Pledge under the Tree {bay'ah ar-ridhwan}. I said: "The devotion and piousness of 'Ali is greater than all (excluding the Prophet (S))." When they rejected this claim, I narrated this incident which I personally witnessed: "One night, I saw 'Ali (a) hiding in a palm plantation. I followed him but I lost him. I thought he had gone home. A few moments later I heard his voice lamenting: "O God! ...Alas for the sin that I have forgotten but You have recorded in my account of deeds... Alas for the burning flame and..." He wept so much to such an extent that he became unconscious and motionless. I thought he had passed away.

I went to the house of Zahra (a) to inform her of it. She said: "This situation happens to 'Ali out of his fear of God." So, we brought water and 'Ali (a) became conscious. On regaining consciousness, he said: "O Abu Darda'! How do you see me on the Day of Resurrection when I will be called to account, and the wrath of God would be certain for the sinners?" I was dumbfounded and broke down."

Yes, taking pride in our insignificant acts of worship without realizing the extent of our need for the mercy of the Lord is another sign of negligence

Comparing our state of worship with that of the divine saints {awliya'} .8

Our acts of worship as compared to those of Allah's saints are indeed insignificant. Notwithstanding their infallibility, their preeminence in worship, invocation and servitude during their lifetimes were incomparable for all time.

We who are absolutely defective, weak and dependent need to worship more. Learning about the quality of their worship prevents us from being proud of our prayers and other acts of devotion. Now, we shall cite some instances:

1. The Messenger of Allah (S) used to worship so excessively that this verse was revealed:

"Ta Ha. We did not send down to you the Qur'an that you should be miserable."

2. Imam al-Mujtaba (a) said:

"I have never seen anyone who surpassed Fatimah in worship. She used to stand in worship to such an extent that her feet would swell."

3. Imam al-Baqir ('a) said: "Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a) used to perform a thousand rak'ahs {units or cycles} of prayer day and night as the Commander of the Faithful ('a) used to do. He had five hundred palm trees beside each of which he used to pray two rak'ahs of prayer.

4. Imam al-Baqir ('a) narrated: I came in and I saw that my father's feet were swelling; his complexion changing; his eyes turning red; his forehead bearing the mark of prostration. This made me cry. When he sensed my presence, he said, *"Bring to me that written document!"* In the said document, he read to me some of the acts of worship of 'Ali ('a). He put it aside and then said with a sigh, *"Who can worship like 'Ali ('a)?"*

5. While in prison Imam al-Kazim ('a) sometimes was in the state of a single prostration from dawn till noon, so much so that it seemed as if a garment had been spread out on the ground. If our infallible personages ('a) were such, always highlighting their shortcomings in worship and uttering "We do not worship You the way You deserve it" {ma 'abadnaka haqqa 'ibadatik}, is there still any room for pride and self-conceit in relation to what we are performing as "worship" {'ibadah}. Since our acts of worship and that of the divine saints are cheese and ?chalk apart, what should we be proud of

Invalid acts of worship

We have stated that servitude {'ubudiyyah}, obedience {ita'ah} and worship {'ibadah} deserve to be done to the Creator alone, and any worship of a phenomenon, human being, creature, or any other is invalid. These invalid acts of worship stem more out of ignorance than alienation from the guidance of the prophets ('a).

In the Glorious Qur'an, God, the Exalted, reckons worship of any other than Him invalid, futile, as well as unreasonable, for, in seeking assistance from others, you ask from other than God, knowing that all powers belong to Him:

"That power, altogether, belongs to Allah."

If you are seeking honor, be aware that honor also belongs to God and is at His disposal:

"Honor entirely belongs to Allah."

If you are looking for daily provision and sustenance, be it known that the false deities are not the owners of your sustenance:

"(Those whom you worship besides Allah) have no control over your provision."

If you are hoping for gain or refuge from harm from other deities, you should know that they do not have the power to grant any profit nor parry any threat:

"(It) has no power to bring you any benefit or harm."

If you regard the taghuts as superior to you, be reminded that they are also servants of God like you:

"(They) are creatures like you."

If to worship idols means to imitate the ancestors, be wary that they were misguided:

"You and your forefathers have been in manifest error."

If you think on the Day of Resurrection the deities you worshipped will help, be informed that they shall not take into account your acts of worship, and they shall become your enemies:

"No indeed! Soon they will disown their worship, and they will be their opponents."

Without any reason and purpose, you resorted to other deities without any basis for their worship:

"They worship besides Allah that for which He has not sent down any authority."

Nobody and nothing is worthy of worship except God. It is because either these false deities don't exist and are mere figments of the mind, or they are impotent and worthless beings, or, if they ever do anything, it is just temporary, limited and always accompanied by a sense of indebtedness and humiliation. It is thus, not appropriate for a human being to obey them. Man should not serve, obey, adore and submit to any being if it amounts to disobedience to God.

Imam al-Jawad ('a) said:

"Anyone who listens to (obeys) the words of another has worshipped him!"

So, if the one speaking is speaking the truth, we are then true servants, and if he is telling lies, we have then worshipped him futilely. And Imam as-Sadiq ('a) has said in a hadith:

"Anyone who disobeys the Creator by obeying a creature has indeed worshipped the latter."

As such, invalid worship is not only confined to the worship of stone, wood, the sun and the moon. The attachment of the heart and soul to any ungodly idea, statement, power, and government is false worship. Even the acceptance of profane culture can also be considered .as an example of invalid worship

Servitude {‘ubudiyyah} and not worship {‘ibadah}

Outward worship and obedience are useless if they are devoid of total submission to, and acceptance of the will of God. A servant is supposed to unconditionally and totally submit to God. He should put aside his personal likes and dislikes while obeying the commands of God and His religion, and not care about the approval or disapproval of others. This absolute and unconditional submission is exactly what is called servitude {‘ubudiyyah} which is an essential qualification for worship {‘ibadah}.

Notwithstanding all those accounts of worship, since he lacked the spirit of servitude, Iblis (Satan) disobeyed the command of God to bow down before Adam (Adam) ('a) and was thus expelled from the realm of divine mercy.

Arrogance and pride in people, not heeding the call of the prophets ('a) became the reason for their lack of obedience and servitude {‘ubudiyyah}, as they wished to follow their own desires.

The Holy Qur’an states:

“Is it not that whenever an apostle brought you that which was not to your liking, you would act arrogantly?”

It also states elsewhere:

“But no, by your Lord! They will not believe until they make you a judge in their disputes, then do not find within their hearts any dissent to your verdict and submit in full submission.”

So, valuable worship is that which stems from servitude {‘ubudiyyah}, submission {taslim} and willingness {Rida} of man. Worship means total submission to God with a complete negation of the self.

When the decree for jihad was ordained for the Muslims during the early period of Islam, some of them questioned it and said:

“Why did You not respite us for a short time?!”

During the event of the changing of the qiblah {direction of prayer and other rituals} from Bayt al-Muqaddas to the Ka’bah, some asked for the reason behind it. The Glorious Qur’an answers, thus:

“That We may ascertain those who follow the Apostle from those turn back on their heels.”

Another perfect example of submission or servitude to God is the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isma’il (Ishmael) ('a). The father submits to the command of God as he brings his son to the appointed place for sacrifice and puts the knife on his son’s neck. The son also submits and says, *“O father! Do whatever you are commanded to do.”*

Ibrahim ('a) is a perfect example of a submissive and obedient servant in his willingness to sacrifice Isma’il ('a), in leaving Hajar (Hagar) and Isma’il ('a) alone in the barren desert of Makkah as well as in his readiness to be thrown into the blazing fire prepared for him by the .(people of Nimrud (Nimrod

Constancy in worship

To walk does not mean to run and stop intermittently,

To walk means to move slowly but steadily.

Constancy and steadfastness in every activity are praiseworthy; the same is true in the case of

worship.

Islam considers small but constant acts of worship as more valuable than great, yet inconsistent, good deeds.

The Glorious Qur'an states:

"So worship Him and be steadfast in His worship."

The Messenger of Allah (S) is reported to have said:

"The greatest danger against worship is sluggishness (while performing it and at times neglecting it)."

And this subject matter has been recorded in many hadiths:

"The most beloved of all deeds in the sight of God is that which is most constant, no matter how small it is!"

You have to continue for one whole year whatever activity you start to demonstrate constancy. So, constancy in worship and the spirit of servitude in man are essential. Being sometimes obsessed with worship, supplication and the mosque, and after sometime, abandoning those deeds and becoming totally alien to them is not at all desirable.

Opportunity to engage in worship

The asset of a lifespan and its opportunities shall be taken away and fade just like the passing clouds. One must be wary, make the best use of a passing opportunity and render service to God. In a beautiful hadith, 'Ali ('a) has said:

"The day and night are working in you. You also work in them. They are taking (something) from you. You also take (something) from them."

However, we are given life, but are unaware of how we are spending this asset day and night.

Are we making the best use of it? The Messenger of Allah (S) has said:

"The world is just an hour. Spend it in obedience (to God)."

If under certain circumstances the ground for worship and serving God is limited, one must strive hard to make it broader, go to freer environments and worship God; for, the limitation of time and place is not an excuse for one to keep aloof from the worship of God:

"My earth is indeed vast. So worship {only} Me

Enduring difficulties of worship

Worshipping God has accompanying difficulties stemming from the taghuts who create hindrances to prevent people from focusing on God; from the irreligious ones who ridicule the

religious ones; from Satan and the carnal soul that strive to obstruct the human being from the worship of God; and other factors that create obstacles.

Were they not annoying the Prophet of Islam (S) when he was praying in the Ka'bah? Were the combatant Muslims not giving their lives for the sake of the worship of God under the tortures of the taghuts?

Were the likes of Bilal al-Habashi not being whipped in the way of the One True God? Under no condition or circumstance, whatsoever, did the men of God turn back from God, from His worship, from following His religion. Notwithstanding all those afflictions and sufferings she experienced, Hadhrat Zaynab ('a) never missed the supererogatory night prayers along the way from Kufah (in Iraq) to Sham although, because of inability, she performed them sitting. During his last night at the hospital, Imam Khomeini (may Allah be pleased with him) also did not abandon the optional prayers.

The path of truth has difficulties that must be overcome by giving one's life and not being afraid of being hooted or incurring the enmity (of people). 'Ali ('a) said:

"In the way of truth, you must not be afraid because of the scantiness of its followers."

Sometimes, it is possible that because of buying something, taking a meal, or the falling of a load, we insist on stopping the bus, but for prayer, we are reluctant to raise our voice and ask !the bus driver to stop

Promotion of worship

The believer who is devoted to God should engage in promoting the culture of worship. He should not only restrict himself to his own prayer and worship but also acquaint others with God and worship. Exhorting one another to truth and the duty of conveying the message {tabligh} are incumbent upon every believer. God calls on man, after faith and righteous deeds, to exhort one another to truth, and exhort one another to patience and the truth:

"And enjoin one another to {follow} the truth, and enjoin one another to patience."

If ten smokers inhabit a community, many people will become familiar with smoking within a short period. The presence of only a few corrupt elements is enough to corrupt an entire city. Why cannot a number of faithful worshippers then acquaint the people with God and make the environment congenial for the worship of God?

With utmost effort, at home, school, office, city, and village, we must plan for the advancement .of our own divine objectives, and put into action whatever we can along this path

Duty and its conditions

After dealing with the importance of worship and the dangers threatening it, one must know the conditions necessary for worship.

Having duty {taklif} is considered as man's great distinction. Man is the recipient of divine grace and, thereby, obliged {mukallaf} to perform certain duties as God's vicegerent on earth.

This honorable distinction must be celebrated by him.

One of the 'ulama' always used to celebrate the anniversary of his attainment of puberty {bulugh}, saying: "On this day, I assumed responsibility to perform divine duties!"

Just as people felicitate someone on his election to the presidency and the parliament, or appointment as minister, etc. because the public honor him with a responsibility, the day of attainment of puberty and acceptance of responsibility set by God is also a blessed and auspicious day.

:Now, we shall briefly point out the conditions of the assumption of this responsibility or duty

Puberty {bulugh} .1

On reaching their 15th and 9th lunar year respectively, boys and girls attain the age of responsibility. Of course, sons might attain maturity prior to the stated ages.

There are also other types of maturity {bulugh} apart from this one in terms of worship and responsibility, the performance of what is obligatory and refraining from what is forbidden. For example, there is "political maturity," which includes intellectual growth, an awareness of the political concerns of society, correct political thought, and obedience shown to deserving leaders.

Qasim, son of Imam al-Mujtaba ('a), who was martyred in Karbala' said to his uncle, the infallible Imam of the time (Imam al-Husayn ('a)): "If the government is in the hands of a taghut like Yazid, death in the way of fighting against him is sweeter than honey for me." This implies his political maturity.

"Economic maturity" means the understanding of the proper utilization of wealth, be it his own or that of others. The Holy Qur'an states: *"Turn over the wealth of the orphans (to them) when you feel that they have attained enough maturity to reasonably spend it in business, trade and the like."*

"Marital maturity" expects both the man and woman, apart from attaining maturity in terms of assumption of responsibility, to have acquired the capability of managing their lives and performing the corresponding duties, for, in this issue mere physical maturity and legal age are .not enough

Some reminders

a) We have said that puberty {bulugh} is a requisite of responsibility, but this does not mean that those who have not yet attained maturity are totally exempted. In some cases, the Glorious Qur'an also addresses the young, giving orders to them. For instance, they are not supposed to enter a house or room without permission, and must take permission before entering a room at the private resting time of their parents.

And also, Hadhrat Luqman thus commands his son:

"O my son! Maintain the prayer and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong."

b) Although puberty is a requisite for accountability, parents are nevertheless supposed to acquaint their children prior to puberty with the religious rites and traditions, such as prayer and fasting. Sometimes, they are advised to punish them with the aim of showing their seriousness and the dire consequence of neglecting prayers and other duties.

c) Puberty is a requisite for accountability, but if a young person causes financial damage to someone, his parents should provide compensation, because accountability to people is separate from the accountability to God.

d) Maturity is a requisite for accountability, but young people have rewards for their good deeds yet, if they commit a mistake, say something unpleasant, or do something bad, there is punishment for them.

Strength .2

Strength and capability are requisites for accountability. Anyone who is incapable of performing a certain task is not accountable for it. Concerning the divine duties, this parameter of strength is also observed. God thus says:

"We task no soul except according to its capacity."

The Qur'an also states:

"He has chosen you and has not placed for you any obstacle (as well as pressure and difficulty) in religion."

This refers to pressure beyond man's capacity, for religiosity also has corresponding pressure and struggle.

Even in the case of jihad, which entails broader predicaments and difficulties, the Qur'an does not include the sick, infirm and blind as well as other individuals who are incapable of performing jihad.

Freewill {ikhtiyar} .3

If someone is compelled to commit a certain sinful act, or hindered by force from fulfilling a certain duty, he cannot be called to account. It means that a requisite of fulfilling an obligation is freewill {ikhtiyar} and freedom of action. Under compulsion and in an emergency, the verdict about a certain issue is different. An example is the case when a taghuti places hindrances in the way of a Muslim's performance of the Hajj pilgrimage, or the case of someone who is dying .of hunger and no food is available for him except a human corpse

Intellect {'aql} .4

Intellect {'aql} and common sense {shu'ur} are the criteria of man's maturity and his duty. Accountability, liability and responsibility are also undertaken on the basis of one's level of intellect, and those who lack intellect have no obligation and as such, no punishment or reward. In some Prophetic traditions, the intellect has been reckoned as the first created entity and true servitude {'ubudiyyah} as emanating from the intellect. And in the books on hadith, the discussion about the intellect has come first compared to other subjects. In Islam, anything that befogs the mind (such as alcoholic beverages) is unlawful {haram} and anything that enhances the intellect and understanding is encouraged such as teaching, .learning, research, traveling, consultation, etc

Conditions for the soundness of worship

The value of worship lies in its soundness and correctness, which depend on two key factors:

(1) soundness of the purpose, and (2) soundness of its form.

Let us deal first with the "purpose". Seeking divine pleasure and attempting to perform one's duty must be of man's purpose in worship. Therefore, an act of worship which is performed with ostentation {riya'}, or is meant to win people's attention and approval, or performed with the expectation of praise from one other than God, is tantamount to the commission of polytheism {shirk}. Of course, if people take notice of someone's sincere work, there is nothing wrong with that.

In addition to its being unlawful {haram}, ostentation in worship also renders it invalid. One must strive hard so that the pure intention for worship is not mixed with ungodly motives.

Regarding sincerity in action, Imam as-Sadiq ('a) has said:

"And the sincere deed is that you do not expect any appreciation and eulogy from anyone except God."

On the effects of sincerity, the Messenger of Allah (S) is reported to have said:
"There is no servant of Allah, the Glorious and Dignified, who sincerely worships Him for forty days without having springs of wisdom flow from his heart to his tongue."

Sincerity is an academy that produces sages and men of wisdom after a period of forty days.

Let us now deal with "the form of worship".

An act of worship is correct when it is performed in exactly the same form, method and manner as specified by God and orthodox teaching, and not according to personal whims or manners contrary to the dictates of religion.

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

"No saying, action or intention is valuable unless it is done according to the sunnah."

So, the form of worship must also be learned from the holy saints {awliya'}. Hadhrat Ibrahim ('a) beseeches God to show to him the correct form of worship:

"And show us our rites {of worship}."

One must faithfully observe the commands for the prayer to be shortened {qasr} or performed in full {tamam}, the recitation in prayer must be loud or silent, the number of rak'ahs, and the like, otherwise it will have no value at all.

The same is true if it is said that there is a hidden treasure a 100 steps away, which you may possess, if you take 98 or 102 steps, you will not possess it and your efforts will be useless. Similarly, if you want to contact a certain person or a municipality by phone, by dialing one digit more or less, you will be connected to another person or another municipality. So, in worship the form which is commanded must be strictly followed. It is like the grooves of a key, which if they become a little too fine or rough, will no longer open a lock.

On the interpretation of verse {ayah} 189 of Surah al-Baqarah, "And come into houses from their doors," Imam al-Baqir ('a) said: "It means that you have to perform an act according to its
".command

Motives behind changing the form of worship

The Holy Qur'an cites numerous cases on how the past communities incurred divine wrath and chastisement by changing the form of worship. The motive behind this change has assumed
:diverse forms. We shall mention an example from the Qur'an for each of these cases

Changing the form out of obduracy .1

God commanded the Children of Israel {Bani Isra'il} to utter the word "hattah" (which means, "O

God forgive us and wipe off our sins”) at the time of entrance to the holy land. Out of derision and obduracy, they changed it and instead said, “hantah” (which means “wheat”). God vented .His wrath upon them and brought them to perdition

Changing the form out of false enlightenment .2

In Islam, four months are deemed sacred {haram} in which waging war is forbidden. The imposed ceasefire covers three successive months, namely, Dhu’l-Qa’dah, Dhu’l-Hijjah and Muharram, and one separate month (Rajab) which have been described as a whole by the Holy Qur’an as the “four sacred (months)” {arba’atun hurum} in which fighting is prohibited except in the form of defense.

Out of their personal desire and false enlightenment, some people used to interchange these months, setting them in advance or otherwise, and saying: “What is the difference? The point is that every year, we should not wage war for four months.” The Glorious Qur’an condemned this .{changing of the sacred months, regarding it as a sign of unbelief {kufr

Changing the form out of sanctimony .3

It refers to the work of those who, under the garb of religion and religious ruses, want to satisfy their carnal desires, and by means of this, they wish to relieve their conscience and circumvent the laws of God. An example of this can be found in the historical account of the Children of Israel.

Since God had forbidden them to catch fish on the Sabbath, they constructed small pools near the body of water in which they placed the fishes caught a day before, and took them the next day saying, “*We have not caught fishes on the Sabbath!*”

.This event has been described and condemned in some verses of the Holy Qur’an

Conditions for the acceptance of acts worship

Apart from their correctness, acts of worship have conditions for their “acceptance” and “perfection”. It means that by observing them man will attain nearness to Allah, spiritual growth and influence individual as well as society.

Sometimes, an act of worship is correct but does not lead to spiritual growth, just like a medicine which does not heal the patient.

At times, an act of worship relieves us from the punishment (of abandoning it) but does not

make us beloved of God.

The conditions for the acceptance of deeds and acts of worship have been stated in Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions. Some of them are the following:

1. Ideological condition;
2. Political condition;
3. Moral condition;
4. Economic condition;
5. Social condition;
6. Familial condition.

Before explaining the above, it must be emphasized that man should strive hard for the acceptance of his acts of worship and to benefit from his spiritual endeavors. 'Ali ('a) said:

"Pay more attention to the acceptance of the act than you do to the act itself."

For acceptance in a certain position, a person may possibly be required to acquire an entrance card and to act according to the apparent rules, but in the interview he will be rejected for reasons such as moral corruption, bad record, etc. It is also possible for the act of worship to have been performed properly according to the divine rules, but it will not be accepted by God for certain reasons. Is it not sometimes observed that correct works done by unauthorized persons, instead of being appreciated are criticized?! Why? Because acceptance depends on .certain conditions which shall now be discussed

Ideological condition: Faith in God .1

Lack of faith {iman} renders deeds futile:

"Should anyone renounce his faith, his work shall fail."

Those who build the mosques of God should be believers in God and the hereafter:

"Only those shall maintain Allah's mosques who believe in Allah and the Last Day."

And it is the righteous deed of a believing {mu'min} man and woman that brings about pure life:

"Whoever acts righteously, {whether} male or female, should he (or she) be faithful - We shall revive him with a good life."

Anyone who denies God has performed no deed for which he should expect reward. The Holy Qur'an regards the deeds of unbelievers just like ashes that will be blown by the wind on a .windy day, and thus, nothing will be left of them

Political condition: Guardianship {wilayah} .2

Correct and divinely ordained guardianship {wilayah} directs all the servants of God, acts of servitude (to Him), prayer, Hajj pilgrimage, jihad and others, along the divine path. It is like Iran which today, having the guardianship of the jurist {wilayah al-faqih}, is progressing. On the contrary, other Muslim countries, notwithstanding the observance of prayers, fasting and others therein, are in an abject state due to incorrect leadership.

The leader of society is like the driver of a vehicle. If all the passengers are smart, neat and courteous but the driver is drunk or the way is altered, mishap is in the offing. But if the driver is morally sound and well-experienced, no matter if all the passengers are old-fashioned and untidy, this journey will end at its destination.

In a hadith, Imam al-Baqir ('a) is reported to have said:

"Anyone who has faith in God and also performs onerous acts of worship, but has no deserving Imam from Allah, his efforts are useless."

If the divinely ordained leader had been allowed to rule, the worship of God would not have led to the worship of the taghut; the heavenly laws would not have turned into superstitions; the Friday congregational prayers, in all their splendor, would not have been conducted for the interest of the taghuts; and the Hajj - this manifestation of the power and honor of Islam and the Muslims - would not have been transformed into something unproductive or for the advantage of rulers alien to Islam.

We read in a hadith:

"Whoever shall not accept our guardianship {wilayah} (and leadership), his deeds also shall not be accepted by God."

Hadhrat 'Ali ('a) said: *"We are the 'door of Allah' {bab Allah} and the way of Allah will be introduced and known through us."*

So, wilayah is a condition for the acceptance of acts of worship. Along with it, there must also be God-wariness {taqwa}. Imam al-Baqir ('a) said:

".{ ' "There is nothing in the line of our leadership except (good) deeds and piety {wara

Moral condition: God-wariness {taqwa} .3

The story of the two sons of Adam (Adam) ('a) is recorded in the Glorious Qur'an. Both of them offered sacrifices. The sacrifice offered by one of them was accepted while that of the other was not.

God says:

"Allah accepts only from the God-wary."

It has been narrated that upon entering the market, a certain person stole two loaves of bread

and two pomegranates. He then gave the two loaves of bread and the two pomegranates to the poor. He was asked: "What kind of work is this?" He answered: *"God gives one punishment for every sin committed but ten rewards for every good deed done. By stealing those two loaves of bread and two pomegranates, I committed four sins, but since I gave the same to the poor, I have gained forty rewards. If four sins are subtracted from forty rewards, thirty six rewards will remain."* It was said to him: *"Ten times the reward is for the one who does good deeds on the basis of God-wariness {taqwa}. Spending stolen or usurped property in God's way has no reward. Have you not read, "Innama yataqabbal Allahu min al-muttaqin" {Verily, God accepts only those who are God-wary*

Economic condition: Giving people their rights .4

Addressing the needs and rights of the deprived occupies such a degree of importance that sometimes the acceptability of the act of worship depends upon it. Paying the poor-rate {zakat} and earning a lawful income are some examples. Imam ar-Rida('a) says: *"The prayer of one who prays but does not give zakat (and other Islamic taxes) shall not be accepted."* In another hadith, 'Ali ('a) says to Kumayl: "When your food is not acquired through lawful {halal} earning, God will also not accept your glorification {tasbih} and thanks-giving

Social condition: Wishing others well .5

The preservation of society, brotherhood, and a wholesome relationship among Muslims, are of the utmost importance. There fore any saying or action that disrupts good relationships is prohibited. Backbiting {ghiybah}, suspicion {su'i zann}, malevolence, severance of ties, peevishness and envy are some of the vices and actions that cause the non-acceptance of worship.

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "The prayers and the fasting for forty days of one who backbites against a Muslim man or woman are not accepted unless the victim (the person backbitten) concerned forgives him."

The Prophet (S) also said: *"O Abu Dharr! Keep aloof from severing ties with your brother in faith as the deeds of the ones doing so are not accepted."* Imam as-Sadiq ('a) said:

"God does not accept the deeds of any believer who has bad intentions against his brother in faith."

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) also said:

"Verily, bad behavior (toward the people) spoils (good) deeds just as vinegar spoils honey."

In conclusion, speaking ill of others, bad intentions against others, severing ties of friendship, backbiting and the like which weaken the social bonds of Muslims, are considered among the obstacles to the acceptance of worship. Therefore, supplicants and worshippers should have a firm religious relationship with the servants of God so that their acts of worship might become .worthy of acceptance

Familial condition: Good behavior .6

Islam establishes a strong interconnection between devotion, politics, morality, and society. In family affairs, it regards as important the observance of mutual respect and rights between the husband and wife so much so that inattention to them may sometimes lead to the non-acceptance of worship. The severance of earthly ties leads to the severance of heavenly ties.

In this regard, the Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

"God does not accept the prayers and good deeds of an ill-mannered and annoying wife... And the same is true if the husband is such."

Not only does uncivil behavior toward one's spouse hinder the acceptance of worship, but also casting a furious look at one's father or mother, as said by Imam as-Sadiq ('a):

"The prayer of the one who looks furiously at his father or mother is not accepted even though his parents have treated him unjustly."

For, once we are in the state of prayer, we are actually in spiritual ascension {mi'raj} provided that its edifices are firmly established on the ground. However, if they are situated on slippery or soft ground, going up becomes problematic and at times, impossible. Spiritual perfection under the aegis of worship also emanates from good behavior and wholesome social relationships.

Habits such as drinking liquor, gambling, eating what has been prohibited and others, which have been mentioned in the Prophetic traditions, also hinder the acceptance of good deeds. However, it must not be imagined that since God does not accept them, one should not pray and fast, etc. Rather, these examples point out what weakens deeds and decreases their value .on account of the untoward behavior and character of the worshipper

Signs of acceptance

The Holy Qur'an regards the rejection of obscenity and vices as the fruit of prayer - "Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs" - and this virtue is the essence of prayer and a sign of its acceptance and other acts of worship.

In expressing this sign, Imam as-Sadiq ('a) thus said:

"Anyone who wants to know whether his prayer is accepted or not should see if his prayer is keeping him away from sin and indecency. So, the degree of acceptance of his prayer is commensurate with the power his prayer has in keeping him away from sin"

Conditions for the perfection of worship

Besides the conditions for the correctness and acceptance of worship, there are other conditions which relate to the perfection {kamal} of worship, which indicate the higher value, better substance and greater impact of worship. These conditions are the following

Making greater effort .1

Performance of easy tasks and acts of worship can be undertaken by everybody, but an act of worship which is more difficult and necessitates more dedication, effort and endeavor is more valuable and nearer to perfection. The Holy Qur'an praises those who assisted and obeyed the Messenger of Allah (S) during tortuous circumstances.

Imam al-Mujtaba ('a), in spite of having a riding animal, used to travel by foot in performing the Hajj so as to gain a greater reward. The Glorious Qur'an praises those who perform the night supererogatory prayers by leaving their soft, warm beds so as to engage in supplication and prayer.

Imam 'Ali ('a) has said:

"The best of deeds is that in which you have to urge yourself to perform it."

The Holy Qur'an regards as superior the reward and station of great and diligent mujahidin, stating thus:

"And Allah has graced those who wage jihad over those who sit back with a great reward"

Concentrating on what is more important .2

In the performance of works, paying attention to "what is important and what is more important" is an indication of intellect, foresightedness and purposefulness, and Islam

encourages the performance of works which are more in need, more useful and more important, be it in the realm of education, worship, spending money in Allah's cause {infaq}, etc. The Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

"While there are needy relatives, spending on and helping others is worthless."

And Imam 'Ali ('a) said:

"Whenever supererogatory prayers jeopardize obligatory prayers, they will not bring about .nearness to God"

Concentrating on what has lasting value .3

The impact of a deed and act of worship which has the quality of perfection is not fleeting and temporary but of permanent value.

Imam 'Ali ('a) says:

"So many seemingly small and trivial deeds are more fruitful than a large amount of deeds."

Some writings, outstanding works and service centers are blessed with amazing influence and power that so many writings, works and institutions lack. It shows that being blessed is also a .sign of achieving perfection in devotional acts

Acting in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (S) .4

The perfection of deeds and acts of worship is achieved when it toes such actions are in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (S) and the holy saints, and not based on inherited popular communal rituals or traditions. The nearer the worship is to the method of the .Infallibles ('a), the more valuable it is

Having precedence in meritorious works .5

Precedence has value in acts of worship and good deeds, and preeminence in such affairs is the criterion of perfection. The Holy Qur'an in many instances uses the order, "sari'u" and "sabiqu" {be ahead}. It states elsewhere:

"Why should you not spend in the way of Allah, while to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth? Not equal {to others} are those of you who spent and fought before the victory. They are greater in rank than those who have spent and fought afterward. Yet Allah has promised the best reward to each and Allah is well aware of what you do."

So, having precedence in meritorious works (such as spending and jihad in the way of Allah) is one of the criteria of perfection. We read in a hadith that 'Ali ('a) said:

"A good deed becomes more valuable if it is done immediately; the doer regards it as

something small (and as such he does not become proud of it), and does it quietly without expecting anything in return."

Therefore, the best prayer is that which is offered at its first call; the more it is delayed, the lower its merit. The adhan {call to prayer} clearly invites: "Come to prayer; come to success; "{come to the best of deeds {hayya 'ala's-salah; hayya 'ala'l-falah; hayya 'ala khayr al-'amal

Performing devotional acts under difficult circumstances .6

As it demands more sacrifices and has a far-reaching impact, the good and devotional act performed in an atmosphere dominated by tyrants and taghuts is more valuable. Since the pressures of the external environment and natural instincts tend to obstruct worship and servitude to God, overcoming these pressures and worshipping God are signposts of value and perfection. In praising the upright believers, the Glorious Qur'an states:

"Wage jihad in the way of Allah, not fearing the blame of any blamer."

It also states in another place:

"Such as deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and fear no one except Allah, and Allah suffices as reckoner."

Yes, those who safeguard themselves and their religion (such as the wife of Pharaoh) under .the dominance of an oppressor, occupy a loftier station

Fervor and constancy .7

The lack of fervor in worship is a sign of hypocrisy {nifaq}. The Holy Qur'an denounces the lack of enthusiasm of the hypocrites {munafiqun}. On the contrary, enthusiasm and constancy in worship generates spiritual perfection {kamal}.

In the hadiths, a small number of deeds which are constant and regular are considered better than a large quantity of devotional acts which are accompanied by laziness, ennui and abandonment. The Glorious Qur'an promises rewards and abundant good fortune in the field of knowledge and understanding to those who are firmly entrenched on the right path.

"If they are steadfast on the path {of Allah}, We shall provide them with abundant water

Humility .8

Arrogant people regard their acts of worship as great and significant where by they spoil their acts of worship. Whereas the condition for the perfection of worship is that the worshipper

should not reckon his devotional acts as plentiful and be arrogant. In the Makarim al-Akhlaq supplication, Imam as-Sajjad ('a) thus pleads with God:

"O my Lord! Let me be Your servant but do not contaminate my devotion {‘ibadah} with self-conceit {‘ujb}."

There are many hadiths which exhort man not to consider as great his devotions and good deeds. The Qur'an mentions the abundant worship and glorification {tasbih} of angels as well as their remembrance {dhikr} of God. Perhaps, the purpose behind this is to discourage the servants of God on earth from being proud of a few rak'ahs of prayer and worship

Possessing insight .9

Profound awareness and insight in religion is the most valuable attribute of deeds and devotional acts, without which no work can achieve perfection. Imam 'Ali ('a) says:

"Worship without insight and reflection is indeed worthless."

In another hadith, "certainty" {yaqin} is mentioned as follows:

"Verily, small yet constant works based on certainty {yaqin} are superior in the sight of God to many works without certainty (and insight)."

Let us suffice ourselves with this in explaining the conditions for attaining perfection in deeds and worship

Philosophy of worship

All Islamic laws and traditions of worship possess wisdom and philosophy: Firstly, in line with hundreds of Qur'anic verses and hadiths that call on the people to reflect and think, and no school of thought has invited the people to think as much as Islam has done.

Secondly, one of the strong criticisms of the Qur'an against the polytheists and idol-worshippers is their blind and unreasonable imitation of their ancestors.

Thirdly, the Qur'an itself has also mentioned the laws and commands many times along with the reasons behind them. The infallible Imams ('a) have also cited in the hadiths the wisdom behind these laws and commands. Some Muslim scholars have also written books regarding this subject.

In addition, with the advancement of human knowledge some of the secrets of divine laws and religious commands are being unveiled day by day, and with the passage of time the grandeur and image of Islam will be enhanced.

In view of all the above points, it must be noted that:

1. It is not necessary that all the people in all eras should know the wisdom behind all laws. Sometimes, the reason behind some of them is presently unclear but as time goes on, it will become clear.
2. Concerning the philosophy of the laws, one must not only focus on their material benefits and effects, nor pay attention only to their economic, medical and other dimensions but also assess their spiritual and otherworldly outcomes.
3. Anyone who regards God as All-wise and His commands as based on wisdom should not neglect a command merely because of not knowing the reason behind it today.
4. Whenever we do not have strong proof in the Qur'an and hadith of the philosophy of a law, it is better for us to keep silent rather than offering a series of justifications based on conjecture.
5. If some secrets of the universe are revealed to us, we should not become arrogant and expect to know the reason behind everything.
6. We should not go beyond the common axis and fall prey to insinuations. Just as people entrust themselves to a physician and refrain from asking technical questions they are also supposed to accept and abide by the laws of God, for God is the Most Kind, the All-Knowing as well as the All-Wise; He knows the future, as well as the apparent and hidden effects.
7. If we discover a certain secret of God's law, we should not imagine that we have discovered the whole secrets. When one puts his hand under the sea, he has no right to say to the people that the water in his hand is the sea. Instead, he must say, "This water is from the sea, only as much as it fits in my palm." He who understands the philosophy of a law is not supposed to think that that which he understands is the whole truth and there is nothing else. Could the depth of the laws that emanate from the boundless knowledge of God be fathomed solely through the limited human intellect and reason?
8. The same intellect that calls on us to understand the philosophy of laws directs us toward the holy saints.

Now, after these preliminaries, we shall cite some instances from the Qur'an and hadiths which point out the philosophy of laws:

Firstly, we deal with the Qur'an: Regarding the prayer, the Qur'an states that it keeps man away from evil and indecency.

In another place, it states: *"And maintain the prayer for My remembrance."*

In yet another place, it states: *"Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance!"*

Concerning fasting {sawm}, it declares: "O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary."

It is because many sins are outbursts of anger and carnal desire and fasting prevents that

outburst and arouses fear of God {taqwa} in man. It is precisely for this reason that crime rates are and offenses is lower in the month of Ramadhan.

With regard to the Hajj, it says: *"That they may witness the benefit for them."*

The social and political benefits and impacts of Hajj are things that are beyond doubt and skepticism.

It thus states about the poor-rate {zakat}: *"Take charity from their possessions to cleanse them and purify them thereby, and bless them."*

It thus declares pertaining to gambling and intoxicants: Indeed Satan seeks to cast enmity and hatred among you through wine and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah."

And it regards retribution {qisas} as vital for the health of society. The reason for this is that if the criminal is not punished the society will wither and die; crime will prosper while the oppressed will be crushed, and security of life and property will disappear.

These are some of the verses of the Qur'an that point out the effects and reasons behind the divine laws.

We shall now deal with the Prophetic traditions: Among the abundant hadiths regarding this subject, we shall quote some lines of one of the speeches of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) recorded in Nahj al-Balaghah:

"Allah has laid down belief {iman} for purification from polytheism, prayer {salah} for purification from vanity, zakat for purification of the means of livelihood."

Faith in God saves man from polytheistic thinking, futile worship and impotent sources of support.

The prayer which seeks to worship the Fountainhead of all greatnesses and pleads for help from the Epicenter of power and grandeur purges man of pride {kibr}.

Zakat provides succor to the unemployed; motivates and empowers the deprived and bankrupt; revives compassion and benevolence toward the needy; and it excludes love of wealth and the world from the heart of the alms giver. In addition, he will strive hard to compensate for the amount of zakat thus deducted from his wealth by engaging in more economically prosperous activities. It is natural that he who spends a much must also work hard too. Therefore, zakat is a source of sustenance.

In the above hadith Imam 'Ali ('a) points out the philosophy and wisdom behind the divine decrees such as fasting, enjoinder of what is good and prohibition of what is evil, jihad, prohibition of intoxicants and adultery {zina}, implementation of hudud, obedience to the rightful leader, etc.

The natural disposition {fitrah} of man also recognizes and acknowledges the philosophy of some laws. Man, since creation, believes that lying, treachery, slandering, killing, stealing, tyranny, hoarding, etc. are bad, while justice, purity, generosity, charity, etc. are good. This is the divine inspiration referred to in this verse:

"...and inspired it with {discernment between} its virtues and vices."

It must not be overlooked that the advancement of science in various fields has rendered services in explaining the philosophy of religious laws by revealing their benefits. For example, the existence of tapeworms in the flesh of the pig or the harmful effects of alcohol to the human liver and body are not hidden from anyone. This reveals the philosophy behind the prohibition of pork and intoxicants.

Islam discourages urinating while standing, and science shows that some urine remains in the urinary passages if one does so; or, the case of taking a bath {ghusl} it cleanses the effects of the activity of certain nerves and the disequilibrium in blood pressure caused by sexual intercourse {janabah}; all this with the intention of seeking nearness to Him {qurbah} In order to cleanse us from the state of negligence of God.

If Islam forbids using the wood of the pomegranate tree as a toothpick, it is because it is harmful for the gums of the teeth. As such, all the injunctions of Islam regarding the obligatory, the prohibited, the recommended and the undesirable in the spheres of behavior, eating, clothing, and other issues of life contain much wisdom, on which many books have been written by Muslim scholars and researchers. But as a whole, it proves one thing and that is, all the laws of Islam are based on a definite philosophy and wisdom, some of which has been discovered. At any rate, the spirit of obedience demands that we accept and abide by . "everything which we know has been commanded by Allah

Submission as the greatest philosophy of responsibility

Undoubtedly, the commands of God and religious laws have reasons and philosophy, but it is not necessary for us to discover the economic, medical and scientific reasons of all the divine laws and commands. The Muslim must submit to the order of revelation, and this spirit of submission and acceptance demonstrates human perfection, as some orders are meant to test the spirit of submission and servitude. God's order to Ibrahim ('a) to sacrifice Isma'il ('a) is an example, and Ibrahim's ('a) obedience is a sign of perfection in servitude.

Let's take the example of walking; not all the time do we walk to reach a certain point but walking itself is our purpose; as in a march or walking for doing exercise, as well as running in a race that the purpose is just running not reaching anywhere.

In religious commands and divine laws, too, at times the aim is submission to and acceptance of the command and exercise for attracting the Worshipped's satisfaction as well as mere obedience from the creator.

The aim of devotional acts is to nurture the soul of man in the same manner as athletic movements are meant to train the body.

Imam 'Ali and Imam as-Sajjad ('a) have said:

"O Lord! It is already an enough honor for me that I am Your servant."

In Munajat ash-Sha'baniyyah, we read:

"(O Lord

Even if You throw me into the hellfire, I shall announce to its dwellers that I love You!"

: 'Ali ('a) declared

O God! My worship is not out of fear of hell or desire for Your paradise. Rather, it is because I found You worthy of worship and thus I worshipped You."

The divine saints {awliya'} acquire pleasure in worshipping God while sinners are deprived of this pleasure found in the remembrance of God.

Sometimes, a person wants to serve another without having any monetary motive or economic aim. For him, rendering service itself to that great person is itself the aim and is valuable in itself and not the acquisition of knowledge, earning money or the attainment of a certain social standing.

So many are glad to sit beside a certain figure or take pictures with him even if it brings no benefit to him at all. To be with the said person is in itself important for him. If such an act is precious and pleasurable for human beings in this world, should servitude to God and being in His Presence not be a source of pride

Pretext or research?

Keeping in mind what has been discussed so far, it is obvious that there are those who do not possess the spirit of submission and obedience and are looking for pretexts to find fault with religious obligation and religiosity. As such, they bring about the issue of "research" and are looking for the philosophy and reasons behind every religious injunction while claiming to be "intellectuals". Regarding such persons, the Holy Qur'an thus says concerning belief in the Day of Resurrection:

"Rather man desires to go on living viciously. He asks, 'When is this day of resurrection?'"

They are like children who are constantly seeking excuses. Regarding such individuals, the

Glorious Qur'an says:

"If they see a sign, they turn away, and say, 'An incessant magic!'"

Strangely enough, they unconditionally submit to the mechanic, the physician, all external fashions, baseless insinuations and satanic inclinations, but when a religious command comes, they disparagingly become men of research and reasoning

An encounter

One day, someone asked: *"Why does the dawn {subh} prayer have two rak'ahs?"* I replied, *"I do not know. It is the command of God and we have to perform it."*

As soon as I said I do not know, he began posing as an *"intellectual"* and said: *"The world is a world of science. Today, religion without science is not correct..."* I asked, *"Now, you tell me why the leaf of a pomegranate tree is small while the leaf of the grapevine is big and wide?"*

He answered, *"I do not know."* I smiled and said: *"The world is a world of science. Science must give a reason for it..."* His sense of arrogance diminished immediately, so I said: *"Brother! We do accept that the world is a world of science, but it does not mean that all the secrets of the universe must be known to us now."*

There definitely is a relationship between the small leaf of pomegranates and the wide leaf of grapes and their fruits, which the experts on leaves, soil, plants and fruits have not yet discovered. Thus, we acknowledge the existence of secrets, but we will never accept anybody's claim to knowing all of them."

By the way, if we had to know the philosophy of laws first before abiding by them, where would worship of and submission to God be headed? Divine revelation {wahy} is superior to science and more mysterious than human knowledge. Why do so-called intellectuals obey man-made laws and programs, but when it comes to the laws of God and religion, being "men of logic" !?,they find them difficult to believe