

## Acts Of Worship And Servitude (Ibadah)

One of the reasons we were created was to worship and serve Allah; in this regard, Allah states, ***'I did not create the jinn and mankind except that they should worship me.'*** (*Qur'an, 51:56*)

God's worship has two primary definitions. The first is that worship is more than just the fulfilment of the compulsory actions; rather, it encompasses the entirety of one's existence, from family life to even recreation. The Holy Prophet stated, 'Worship consists of ten parts, nine of which are to do with earning a lawful living,<sup>1</sup>' whilst Imam al-Ridha (A) explained the intellectual dimension of worship, saying, 'Worship is not found in copious amounts of fasting or praying but rather, worship is to reflect on the command of Allah.'<sup>2</sup>

The second definition of worship stems from the principle that in reality, nothing in creation can 'serve' Allah as He is not in need of anything from His creation; Imam Ali (A) describes Allah, stating, 'He is near things but not [physically] adjoining; He is far from them but not [physically] separate.'<sup>3</sup> Indeed, if all of creation joined together to 'serve' Allah, it would not add an iota to His kingdom and indeed if all of creation joined together to reject Allah it would not detract an iota from His kingdom and therefore, to 'serve' Allah, in fact, means to serve His creation.

Allah describes this servitude in the covenant He made with the Children of Israel, saying, ***'You shall not worship anyone but Allah and you shall do good to your parents, to the near of kin, to the orphans, to the needy [and] you shall speak to people in good terms, keep up the prayer and pay the alms taxes.'*** (*Qur'an, 2:83*)

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A) unites both these forms of worship within his supplications, seeking divine opportunities to fulfil both: 'I pray humbly, for after all, I am the smallest of the small, like an atom or even inferior to it. Guide my heart to that in which You employ those that pray, by means of which You cause the devout to worship and whereby You save the lazy. Save me from that which would remove me from You and cause me to live a praiseworthy life.'<sup>4</sup>

Worship and servitude, therefore, entail a holistic, fulfilling and balanced life wherein neither the Creator

nor the created are neglected, whilst everything is performed with the higher intention of proximity to Allah.

## Story 1

Ayatullah Sayyid Sadiq Shirazi narrates:

‘One day, one of my father’s students went to his house before the lesson started and in a manner of urgency, said to him, “Sayyid, I have a question that I would like you to give me an answer to and I would like you to dedicate time to this question even if it sounds unimportant!” Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Shirazi replied, “Yes, go ahead and ask.”

‘So the student asked, “My master, if you knew that you would be leaving this world in one hour or one day, what would you do in this short time that is left for you of your life? [5](#)”[6](#)

‘Ayatullah Shirazi had a habit of taking his time and thinking very hard before answering any question but this time he answered straight away without taking any time. This means that he had already thought about the question before and so the answer was ready in his mind! ‘He replied, “I would not do anything other than what I am doing now.”[7](#)”[8](#)

Ayatullah Shirazi was sitting and reading the book, *al-Jawahir*, and he was preparing to teach his lesson to his students.

## Story 2

Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Bahjat narrates that Ayatullah Shaykh Murtadha Taleqani was invited to partake in an iftar with a number of scholars, including the grand Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Qasim al-Khoei.

When the food was presented and everyone sat at the table, Ayatullah Taleqani said, “There is no salt on the table![9](#)” [10](#) and he did not stretch his hand towards the food, although the distance between the place where the food was served and the kitchen was quite long and it seemed that the food was coming from another house. Not only did Ayatullah Taleqani not stretch his hand towards the food until salt was brought, the others too did not stretch their hands towards the food out of their respect for him, including Ayatullah Khoei.

After the sitting had concluded and all were ready to disperse, Ayatullah Khoei addressed Ayatullah Taleqani, saying, ‘O Shaykh, if you were tied to this Prophetic practice to such an extent, it would be better to carry with you a little salt so people would not have to wait for you like that.’

It was then that Ayatullah Taleqani took out a small bag of salt which he was carrying in his pocket and said, ‘I *was* carrying salt with me but I wanted this good Islamic tradition to be observed!’[11](#)

### Story 3

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Shirazi had a habit of refreshing his ablution exactly 10 minutes before the call to prayer set in. One of his grandsons asked him, 'Why do you perform the ablution now whilst it's not time yet time for the prayer?' He replied, 'It is from the etiquettes of the servant to prepare himself for what his Master commands from him and it is better to perform that act even before the Master would command the servant to perform it!'

### Story 4

After the authorities imprisoned Shahid al-Sadr for the last time, his sister Shahidah Aminah bint al-Sadr went out of the house to see the situation and did not find any soldiers there; she considered this a bad sign.

She went back to her room and changed her clothes; she tied the dresses of her sleeves around her wrists, came out of her room and asked Shaykh al-Nu'mani, 'O Shaykh, do you think this would protect my body from being shown whilst under torture?' to which he replied, 'God-willing, they will not take you to the prison.'

Aminah al-Sadr then said, 'I swear by Allah that I am not scared; I have been waiting for this moment. How happy I would be if I was martyred with my brother and how miserable I would be if I stayed after him.'<sup>12</sup>

She returned to the room and brought out a bag with a collection of letters and pictures and said to Shaykh al-Nu'mani, 'This is a life's worth of memories. When they imprison me, I ask you to burn it in order to ensure they are not taken by the authorities.'

### Story 5

Sayyid Hadi al-Qazwini narrates about his grandfather, Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini:

'If there is a trait which I believe he is fully deserving of, it is that he was and continues to be extremely humble.

'After his immigration to the United States of America in 1987 and until his return to Karbala, Iraq, in 2003, Ayatullah al-Qazwini established a number of Islamic centres and institutions, including the first full-time accredited Islamic school (comprising Kindergarten to Grade 12) in southern California. Not only did he establish the school, he was also eager to teach the young Muslim students, Qur'anic recitation, Qur'anic *tafsir* and *akhlaq*. The Islamic school was also part of an Islamic centre that conducted weekly programs during which Ayatullah al-Qazwini would lead the prayers and conduct religious lectures and sermons.

‘As children, my cousins and I would frequently accompany our grandfather to the nightly programs at the Islamic centre. I clearly remember that Ayatullah al-Qazwini would leave the house to arrive at the Islamic centre at least an hour (and sometimes more) before the program commenced. He would open the front gate of the complex as well as the front door of the building himself. As children, we would sometimes wonder why we would go to the centre so early, when it was only a 10 minute drive from home.

‘When asked why he arrived so early, Ayatullah al-Qazwini would respond, “It is because I fear someone may come early and have to wait behind the closed doors of the centre.”

‘I have not forgotten this statement by His Eminence, a reflection of his humble nature as well as his utmost consideration for others, especially the believers.

‘Another incident I remember, which also expresses Ayatullah al-Qazwini’s immense humility and servitude, is more recent. After his return to Karbala, he made it a habit to visit the shrine of our holy 8th Imam, Ali al-Ridha (A) in the city of Mashad, Iran, on an annual basis during the highly recommended Al-Ziyarat al-Rajabiyah season.

‘But unfortunately, more recently, Ayatullah al-Qazwini’s health has deteriorated and as a result, it has been difficult for him to perform any strenuous activities, although he still makes sure to observe his daily routine of visiting the numerous projects he has established in the holy city of Karbala, such as the orphanage and school for orphans, a large hospital project, an Islamic seminary, as well as others.

‘Nevertheless, even with his ill health, he has managed to visit the 8th Imam in Mashhad annually. During his trip to Mashad in Rajab 1431 AH, I had the honour to also visit the city at the same time. I decided to go primarily to visit the holy Imam as well as to be at Ayatullah al-Qazwini’s service as he had just performed a surgery and needed assistance, especially in moving.

‘The doctor had asked him to rest as much as possible and not to leave his place of residence until he was fully able to move. However, I remember His Eminence asking for help to go to visit the shrine of the holy Imam and saying that he needed to go, since the reason he was there was to visit the holy Imam on a daily basis. To prepare for His Eminence, I went ahead and prepared a wheel chair so that I may push him and he would not have to exert energy and tire himself. Once Ayatullah al-Qazwini was ready to leave, I brought forth the wheel chair for him to use. However, he refused to use it. I inquired as to why and he responded, “My son, I do not want you to tire yourself whilst pushing me on this chair.” I replied to him, “My dear grandfather, I am here at your service and this is the least I can do for you.” However, His Eminence insisted, and did not allow me to push him at all. Instead, he walked, taking frequent breaks to rest for some moments and then continuing to walk towards the shrine of the holy Imam.’

## Story 6

Sayyid Ahmad Khomeini recounts:

‘The reason for the Imam’s (Khomeini) migration to Paris goes back to certain events. The Iraqi government had made it known to him that he had two choices: to remain living in Iraq and refrain from his political activities or to continue his political activities elsewhere.

‘In response, the Imam stated, “I take interest in both politics and religion and I shall never turn back or stand down from my political points of view.” He faced me and said, “Bring both mine and your own passports.”

‘The situation in our house on the eve of our proposed departure was something to be seen. No one was his or her usual self. My undivided attention was focused on the Imam. As on previous nights, he slept at the usual hour, arising to perform the midnight prayer an hour and a half before sunrise, as always. I remember him gathering the family and saying, “Don’t be at all upset. Surely there is no way one can remain here and keep one’s silence. If we were to do so, how would we answer Allah? One’s religious duty is of paramount importance; one cannot shirk the responsibility that this duty carries with it.”

‘The midday prayer, led by Imam, was performed along the Iraqi border as we headed for the Kuwaiti frontier. The officials told us to wait and it became apparent that Kuwait had been informed of our plans to enter their country. Eventually someone from the office came and spoke to us for one hour saying, in a nutshell, “no admittance!”

‘We returned back. The Imam was suffering from extreme fatigue and this worried me greatly. He could tell by my facial expression that I was annoyed at his being kept waiting for such a long period and said, “Does this kind of thing upset you? We too must go through a bad time at the national frontiers as do others, in order to appreciate just one of the thousands of discomforts that are brought upon our brothers. Be strong!”

## Story 7

Shaykh Muhammad Salih narrates:

‘My roommate from Somalia and I had been studying in Qom for several years and our financial situation had become so bad that we could not even afford to buy books in which to study from and annotate. We had asked where we could be given books and were told to visit His Eminence, Ayatullah Sayyid Shahab al-Din Mar’ashi Najafi, as he was a great collector of books and known to distribute books from his collection.

‘So one day, we went to his house and knocked on the door. An assistant opened the door and said to

us, “Sayyid is resting right now but he would not like it if he had visitors and I sent them away. He won’t be resting long; wait here and when he awakens, I will call you.”

‘It wasn’t long before the assistant announced that the Sayyid had awoken and was inviting us into his room. We walked in and what we saw shocked us. His room was bare except the mattress he was sitting on and around it were some books and notepads. Seeing his condition of poverty such that even his mattress was torn and tattered, whilst he was a grand scholar and we were merely students, we began to cry.

‘Having observed his situation, we felt very embarrassed to ask for any financial aid from him and so we began to excuse ourselves, saying, “We just came to give you salutations and regards.” He replied, “No, you came here with an intention, so ask what you intended!”

‘We stated our need for books and he responded, “Forgive me, I have nothing to offer you at the moment but if you go to [such and such street and such and such a person], he is a businessman. Tell him that I have sent you; take whatever money you want from him and tell him I will repay the debt.” And with that we took our leave.’

‘I still don’t know how Sayyid Mar’ashi slept on that mattress,’ Shaykh Muhammad Salih concluded, with tears in his eyes.

1. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 103, p. 18, hadith no.81.

2. Al-Harrani, Tuhaf al-Uqul, hadith no. 422.

3. Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 178.

4. Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah, supplication no. 47. His Supplication on the Day of 'Arafa:

<https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-a...> [1]

5. This question may have been the manifestation of the noble narration in which Prophet Muhammad says, ‘Work for your life as though you will live forever and work for the hereafter as though you will die tomorrow.’ (Tanbih al-Khawatir, vol. 2, hadith no. 234)

6. It is necessary for every individual to keep an updated will and for it to be in accordance with the Islamic law as Allah says, ‘Bequest is prescribed for you when death approaches one of you. If he leaves wealth behind for parents and near relatives according to its usage, it is a duty incumbent upon those with piety.’ (Qur’an, 2:180); see also Qur’an, 5:106. Allah warns that death may come at any moment, leaving a person unable to make his will if it is not already completed. He states, ‘So they will not be able to make a bequest nor shall they be able to return to their families.’ (Qur’an, 36:50). Also, Prophet Muhammad (S) is narrated to have said, ‘Whoever dies without having made a will, dies the death of ignorance.’ (Wasa’il al-Shi’a, vol. 13, p. 186, hadith no. 5)

7. This answer demonstrates Ayatullah Shirazi’s preparedness for death. He did not have to write a will, make up for any missed deeds (qadha), distribute any compensation (kaffarah), approach anyone to seek forgiveness, etc. This action is the manifestation of the noble verse, ‘And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds until when death comes to one of them, then he says, “Surely now I repent.”’ (Qur’an, 4:18)

8. This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Prophet Muhammad (S) says, ‘He who makes the hereafter his greatest concern from morning to night, Allah instils needlessness in his heart and mends his affairs for him; he will not depart from this life before having collected all his sustenance. But the one who makes this life his greatest concern from morning to night, Allah instils poverty between his eyes and disbands his affairs; he will not collect from this life more than has been allotted to him.’ (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 151, hadith no. 104)

9. This incident is a manifestation of the noble narration of Prophet Muhammad (S), ‘Begin your meal with a pinch of salt for

it removes 70 diseases of the stomach.'

[10.](#) This incident is a manifestation of the noble narration of Imam Ali al- Hadi (A), warning people not to leave Prophetic practices, 'Had I said to you that the one who abandons the tasmiyah (writing or saying bismillah) is like the one who abandons the Salah, I would have spoken the truth.' (The Message of the Qur'an by Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi, p. 28)

[11.](#) This incident is a manifestation of the noble verse,

'Whoever joins himself to another in a good cause, shall have a share of it. And whoever joins himself to another in an evil cause shall have the responsibility of it.' (Qur'an, 4:85)

[12.](#) This statement is the manifestation of the noble verse,

'Whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them and nor shall they grieve.' (Qur'an, 2:38)

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[1]

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