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A General Outlook at Islamic Rituals

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[NOTICE: This treatise was first published in 1979 by the World Organization for Islamic Services (WOFIS) of Tehran, Iran, in booklet form when the great author and religious authority was still alive. After his martyrdom, it was published again by the Translator in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., in 1981. Two copies of the U.S. edition were deposited at the Library of the U.S. Congress in the American capital, Washington, and this title by al-Sadr may be the only one kept by the said Library.]

Introduction

Rituals enjoy an important role in Islam. Their injunctions represent an important part of jurisprudence and a worshipping conduct which formulates a noticeable phenomenon in the daily life of the pious.

The system of rituals in Islamic jurisprudence represents one of its fixed facets which cannot be affected by the general trend of life or the circumstances of civil progress in man's life except by a small portion, contrarily to other judicial aspects which are flexible and dynamic. The method of application and utilization of these judicial aspects is affected by the circumstances pertaining to civil progress in man's life, such as the system of making deals and agreements.

In the sphere of worship, the man of the age of electricity and space prays, fasts, and performs the pilgrimage just as his ancestor from the age of the stone mill used to pray, fast and perform the pilgrimage.

It is true, however, that in the civil aspect of getting prepared to perform a rite, this person may differ from that: for this travels to his place of pilgrimage in a plane, while that used to travel with a camel caravan. And when this covers his body—while saying his prayers or during other occasions—with clothes manufactured by machines, that covered his body with clothes he hand-sewed. But the general formula of worship, as well as its method and legislation, is the same. The necessity of its application has never suffered any change, nor has its legislating value been affected or shaken by the continuous growth of man's control over nature and his own means of living.

This means that Islamic Shari'a (Jurisprudence) has not prescribed prayer, fast, pilgrimage and other Islamic rituals temporarily, or as a juridical formula limited to conditions such Shari'a lived in its early epochs of history. Rather, it has enjoined these rituals on man while he uses atomic energy to mobilize the engine just as it has enjoined them on man while ploughing his field with a hand plough.

Thus do we conclude that the system of rituals deals with the permanent needs in the life of man, for whom they are created, the needs which remain the same in spite of the continuous progress in man's way of living. This is so because the application of a fixed prescription requires a fixed need. Hence, this question comes up:

Is there really a fixed need in the life of man, ever since jurisprudence started its cultivating role, remaining as such until today, so that we may interpret—in the light of its stability—the stability of the formulae whereby jurisprudence has treated and met this same need, so that in the end we may be able to explain the stability of worship in its positive role in man's life?

It may seem, at first glance, that to suggest such a fixed need of this sort is not acceptable, that it does not coincide with the reality of man's life when we compare today's man with the man of the future. We certainly find man getting continuously further—in the method, nature of problems, and factors of progress of his own life—from the circumstances of the tribal society, his pagan problems, worries, limited aspirations and the method of treating and organizing these needs in which the concluding jurisprudence appeared. Therefore, how can rituals—in their own particular juristic system—perform a real role in this field which is contemporary to man's life-span, in spite of the vast progress in means and methods of living?

If rituals such as prayers, ablution, ceremonial bathing (*ghusul*), and fast had been useful during some stage in the life of the Bedouin man—taking part in cultivating his behaviour; his practical commitment to clean his body and keep it from excessive eating and drinking—these same goals, by the same token, are achieved by modern man through the very nature of his civilized life and the norms of social living. So, it would seem that these rituals are no longer a necessary need as they used to be once upon a time, nor have they retained a role in building man's civilization or solving his complex problems!

But this theory is wrong. The social progress in means and tools, for example, in the plough changing in man's hand to a steam or electric machine, imposes a change in man's relationship to nature and to whatever material forms it takes. Take agriculture, for example, which represents a relationship between the land and the farmer: It develops materially in form and context according to the norm of development described above.

As regarding worship, it is not a relationship between man and nature, so that it would be affected by such sort of development or progress. Rather, it is a relationship between man and his Lord. This relationship has a spiritual role which rules man's relationship with his brother man. In both cases, however, we find that humanity historically lives with a certain number of fixed needs faced equally by

the man of the age of oil (animal oil used for lighting) as well as that of the age of electricity.

The system of rituals in Islam is the fixed solution for the fixed needs of this sort, and for problems whose nature is not sequential; instead, they are problems which face man during his individual, social and cultural build-up. Such a solution, called "rituals," is still alive in its objectives until today, becoming an essential condition for man to overcome his problems and succeed in practicing his civilized vocations.

In order to clearly get to know all of this, we have to point out some fixed lines of needs and problems in man's life, and the role rituals play in meeting such needs and overcoming such problems.

These lines are as follows:

1) the need to be linked to the Absolute One

2) the need for subjectivity in purpose and self-denial

3) the need for inner sense of responsibility to guarantee implementation

The system of rituals is a way to organize the practical aspect of the relationship between man and his Lord; therefore, it cannot separate his evaluation from that of this very relationship and of its role in man's life. From here, both of these questions are inter-related:

First: What value is achieved through the relationship between man and his Lord in his civilized march? Is it a fixed value treating a fixed need in this march, or is it a sequential one linked to temporal needs or limited problems, losing its significance at the end of the stage limiting such needs and problems?

Second: What role do rituals play as regarding that relationship, and what is the extent of its significance as a practical dedication to the relationship between man and God?
What follows is a summary of the necessary explanation concerning both questions.

The Link Between The Absolute One is a Two-Fold Problem

The observer, who scrutinizes the different acts of the stage-story of man in history, may find out that the problems are different and the worries diversified in their given daily formulas. But if we go beyond these formulas, delving into the depth and essence of the problem, we will find one main essential and fixed problem with two edges or contrasting poles from which mankind suffers during his civilized advancement throughout history.

Looking from one angle, the problem is loss and nonentity, which is the negative side of the problem. And from another angle, the problem is extreme in entity and affiliation. This is expressed by connecting the relative facts to which man belongs to an Absolute One, thus expressing the positive side of the same problem. The Concluding Jurisprudence (of Islam) has given the name "atheism" to the first

problem, which it expresses very obviously, and the name "idolatry" and Shirk (believing in one or many partners with God) as also an obvious expression of it. The continuous Islamic struggle against atheism and Shirk is, in its civilized reality, a struggle against both sides of the problem in their historical dimensions.

Both angles of the problem meet into one essential point: deterring man's advancing movement from a continuously good imaginative creativity. The problem of loss means to man that he is a being in continuous loss, not belonging to (affiliated with) an Absolute One, on Whom he can lean in his long and hard march, deriving help from His Absolutism and Encompassment, sustenance, and a clear vision of the goal and affiliation, through that Absolute One, his own movement to the universe, to the whole existence, to eternity and perpetuity, defining his own relationship to Him and his position in the inclusive cosmic framework.

The movement at loss without the aid of an Absolute One is but a random movement like that of a feather in the wind: The phenomena around it affect it while it is unable to affect them. There is no accomplishment or productivity in the great march of man along history without a connection to and promulgation with an Absolute One in an objective march.

This same connection, on the other hand, directs the other side of the problem, that of extreme entity, by changing the "relative" to an "absolute," a problem which faces man continuously. Man weaves his loyalty to a case so that such loyalty freezes gradually and gets stripped of its relative circumstances within which he was accurate, and the human mind will derive out of it an "absolute" without an end, without a limit to responding to its demands.

In religious terminology, such an "absolute" eventually changes to a "god" worshipped instead of a need that requires fulfillment. When the "relative" changes to an "absolute," to a "god" of this sort, it becomes a factor in encircling man's movement, freezing its capacities to develop and create, paralyzing man from performing his naturally open role in the march:

Do not worship another "god" beside God else you should be forsaken **(Qur'an, 17:22).**

This is a true fact applicable to all "gods" mankind made along history, albeit if they were made during the idolatry stage of worship or its succeeding stages. From the stage of tribe to that of science, we find a series of "gods" which mankind treated as "absolutes" and which deterred mankind, who worshipped them, from making any true progress.

Indeed, from the tribe to which man submitted his alliance, considering it as an actual need dictated by his particular living circumstances, he went then to the extreme, changing it to an "absolute," without being able to see anything except through it. Hence, they [these gods] became an obstacle in his way for advancement.

It was to science that modern man deservedly granted alliance, as it paved for him the way to control

nature. But he sometimes exaggerated such an alliance, turning it into an absolute alliance with which he was infatuated, an "absolute" one to worship, offering it the rituals of obeisance and loyalty, rejecting for its own sake all ideals and facts which can never be measured by meters or seen by microscopes.

Accordingly, every limited and relative thing, if man wove out of it, at a certain stage, an absolute to which he thus relates himself, becomes at a stage of intellectual maturity a shackle on the mind that made it because of its being limited and relative.

Hence, man's march has to have an Absolute One.

And He has to be a real Absolute One capable of absorbing the human march, directing it to the right path no matter how much advancement it achieves or how far it extends on its lengthy line, wiping out all "gods" that encircle the march and deter it.

Thus can the problem be solved in both of its poles. Such a remedy is shown by what Divine Jurisprudence has presented man on earth: The Belief in God as the Absolute One to Whom limited man can tie his own march without this Absolute One causing man any contradiction along his long path.

Belief in God, then, treats the negative aspect of the problem, refusing loss, atheism and non-entity, for it places man in a position of responsibility: to whose movement and management the whole cosmos is related. Man becomes the vice-regent of God on earth. Vice-regency implies responsibility, and a reward which man receives according to his conduct, between God and resurrection, infinitude and eternity, as man moves within such a sphere of responsible and purposeful movement.

Belief in God also treats the positive aspects of the problem—that of the extreme in entity, forcing restrictions on man and curbing his swift march—according to this manner:

First: This aspect of the problem is created by changing what is limited and relative into an "absolute" through intellectual exertion and by stripping the relative of its circumstances and limitations. As for the Absolute One provided by the belief in God, this has never been the fabrication of a phase of the human intellect, so that it may become, during the new phase of intellectual maturity, limited to the mind that made it.

Nor has it ever been the offspring of a limited need of an individual or a group, so that its becoming absolute may place it as a weapon in the hand of the individual or group in order to guarantee its illegal interests. For God, the Praised One, the Sublime, is an Absolute One without limits, one Whose fixed Attributes absorb all the supreme ideals of man, His vice-regent on earth, of comprehension and knowledge, ability and strength, justice and wealth.

This means that the path leading to Him is without a limit; hence, moving towards Him requires the continuity and relative movement and a relative acceleration of the limited (man) towards the Absolute

One (God) without a stop.

O thou man! Verily thou art ever toiling on towards thy Lord— painfully toiling, but thou shalt meet Him … **(Qur'an, 84:6)**

He grants this movement His own supreme ideals derived from comprehension, knowledge, ability and justice, as well as other qualities of that Absolute One towards Whom the march is directed. The march towards the Absolute One is all knowledge, all potential, all justice and all wealth. In other words, the human march is a continuously successive struggle against all sorts of ignorance, incapacitation, oppression and poverty.

As long as these are the very goals of the march related to this Absolute One, they are, then, not merely a dedication to God but also a continuous struggle for the sake of man, for his dignity, for achieving such supreme ideals for him:

***And if any* [*folks*] *strive* (*with might and means*)*, they do so for* (*the good of*) *their own souls: for God is free of all needs from all creation* (Qur'an. 29:6)**

***He, then, that receives guidance benefits his own soul: but he that strays injures his own soul. Nor art thou set over them to dispose of their affairs* (Qur'an, 39:41)**

On the contrary, whimsical absolutes and false gods cannot absorb the march with all its aspirations, for these manufactured absolutes are the children of an incapable man's brain, or the need of the poor man, or the oppression of the oppressor; therefore they all are linked to ignorance, incapacity and oppression. They can never bless man's continuous struggle against them.

Second: Being linked to God Almighty as the Absolute One Who absorbs all of the aspirations of the human march means, at the same time, rejecting all of those whimsical absolutes which used to create an excessive entity. It also means waging a continuous war and an endless struggle against all sorts of idolatry and artificial worship. Thus, man will be emancipated from the mirage of these false absolutes which stood as an obstacle in his path towards God, falsifying his goal and encircling his march:

***As fort the unbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in sandy deserts which one parched with thirst mistakes for water, until, when he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing: but he finds God* (*ever*) *with him* (Qur'an, 24:38).**

***Are many lords* (*gods*) *differing among themselves better, or the One God, Supreme and Irresistible? If not Him, you worship nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which God has sent down no authority* (Qur'an, 12: 39–40).**

***Such is God your Lord: to Him belongs all Dominion. And those whom you invoke besides Him have not the least power* (Qur'an, 35:13).**

If we consider the main slogan God put forth in this respect: "There is no god but Allah," we will find out that it links the human march to the True Absolute One with the rejection of every artificial absolute. The history of the march, in its living reality, came across the ages to emphasize the organic link between this rejection and that strong and aware tie to God Almighty.

For as far as he goes away from the True God, man sinks into the quagmire of different gods and lords. Both rejection and the positive link to "There is no god but Allah" are but two faces for one fact: the fact which is indispensable to the human march along its lengthy path. It is but the Truth which is worthy of saving the march from loss, helping it exploit all its creative energies, emancipating it from each and every false and obstructing absolute.

Rituals are Practical Expressions

Just as man was born carrying within him all potentials for the experience on life's stage, plus all seeds of its success, such as awareness, activity and conditioning, so was he born tied by nature to the Absolute One. This is so because his relationship with the Absolute One is one of the requirements of his own success whereby he overcomes the problems facing his civilized march, as we have already seen, and there is no experience more sustaining and inclusive, more meaningful, than this of Faith in man's life.

It has been a phenomenon attached to man since time immemorial. During all stages of history, such a social and continuous attachment proves—through experience—that escaping towards the Absolute One, aspiring towards Him from beyond scopes lived by man, is a genuine inclination of man no matter how diversified the shapes of such inclination are, how different its methods and degrees of awareness.

But Faith, as an instinct, is not enough to guarantee bringing to reality an attachment, connection, to the Absolute One in its correct form, for that is linked to the Truth through the method of satisfying such an instinct. The correct behaviour in satisfying it in a manner parallel to all other instincts and inclinations, being in harmony with it, is the only guarantee of the ultimate benefit of man. Also, the behaviour according to or against an instinct is the one that fosters the instinct, deepens, eliminates or suffocates it. So do the seeds of mercy and compassion die within man's self through the continuous and practical sympathizing with the miserable, the wronged, and the poor.

From this point, Faith in God, the deep feeling of aspiring towards the unknown and the attachment to the Absolute One have all to have some direction which determines the manner of satisfying such feeling and the way to deepen it, fixing it in a way compatible with all other genuine feelings of man.

Without a direction, such feeling may have a setback and may be afflicted with various sorts of deviation, just like what happened to the strayed religious sentiment during most epochs of history.

Without a deepened conduct, such feeling may become minimized, and the attachment to the Absolute

One ceases to be an active reality in man's life, one capable of exploiting good energies.

The religion which laid the slogan of "There is not god but Allah," promulgating with it both rejection and affirmation, is the director.

Rituals are factors which perform the role of deepening such feeling, for they are but a practical expression and a manifestation of the religious instinct; through it this instinct grows and gets deepened in man's life.

We also notice that in accurate rituals—being a practical expression of the link to the Absolute One—both affirmation and rejection promulgate. They are, thus, a continuous confirmation from man to his link with God Almighty and the rejection of any other "absolute" of those false ones. When one starts his prayers by declaring that "God is Great" (*Allahu Akbar*), he confirms this rejection.

And when he declares that God's Prophet is also His Servant–Slave and Messenger, he confirms this rejection. And when he abstains from enjoying the pleasures of life, abstaining from enjoying even the necessities of life for the sake of God (when he, for e.g., fasts), defying the temptations and their effects, he, too, confirms this rejection.

These rituals have succeeded in the practical sphere of bringing up generations of believers, at the hands of the Prophet (ص) and his succeeding pious leaders, those whose prayers embodied within their own selves the rejection of all evil powers and their subjugation, enslavement, and the "absolutes" of Kisra [Khosroe] and Caesar got minimized before their march as did all "absolutes" of man's whims.

In this light do we come to know that worship is a fixed necessity in man's life and civilized march, for there can be no march without an "absolute" to whom it is linked, deriving from him its ideals. And there is no "absolute" that can absorb the march along its lengthy path except the True Absolute One (God), the Glorified One.

Besides Him, artificial "absolutes" definitely form, in one way or another, an absolute which curbs the march's growth. Attachment to the True Absolute One, then, is a fixed need. And there can be no attachment to the True Absolute One without a practical expression of this attachment, confirming it and continuously fixing it. Such a practical expression is none but worship. Therefore, worship is a fixed need.

Subjectivity of Purpose and Self-Denial

In each stage of the human civilization, and in each period of man's life, people face numerous interests whose achievement requires a quantitative action to some degree. No matter how diversified the qualities of these interests are, or the manner of brining them to life from one age to another is, they can still be divided into two types of interests:

One: interests the materialistic gains and outcomes of which go to the individual himself, on whose work and endeavour depends the achievement of that interest;

Two: interests the gain of which goes to those other than the direct worker or group to which he belongs. In this second type are included all sorts of labour which aim at an even bigger goal than the existence of the worker himself, for every big goal cannot be usually achieved except through the collective efforts and endeavours of a long period of time.

The first sort of interests guarantees the inner motive of the individual: its availability and effort to secure it, for as long as the worker is the one who reaps the fruits of the interest and directly enjoys it, it is natural to find in him the effort to secure it and to endeavour for its sake.

As for the second kind of interests, here the motive to secure these interests is not sufficient, for the interests here are not only the active worker's: Often his share of labour and hardship is greater than that of his share of the huge interest. From here, man needs an upbringing of subjectivity of purpose and self-denial in motive, i.e., that he must work for the sake of others, the group. In other words, he has to work for a purpose greater than his own existence and personal materialistic interest.

Such an upbringing is necessary for the man of the electricity and atom age as it equally is for the man who used to fight with the sword and travel on camel-back. They both confront the worries of construction and of the great aims and situations which demand self-denial and working for the sake of others, sowing the seeds the fruits of which may not be seen by the person who sowed them. It is necessary, then, to raise every individual to perform a portion of this labour and effort not merely for his own self and personal materialistic interests, so that he will be capable of contributing with self-denial, of aiming at a purely "objective" goal.

Rituals perform a large role in this upbringing. These, as we have already seen, are acts of man performed for the sake of achieving the pleasure of Almighty God. Therefore, they are invalid if the worshipper performs them just for his own personal benefit. They are improper if the purpose behind them is personal glory, public applause, or a dedication for one's own ego, within his circle and environment. In fact, they even become unlawful acts deserving the punishment of the worshipper himself!

All this is for the sake of the worshipper who tries, through his worship, to achieve an objective, a purpose, with all what this implies of truthfulness, sincerity; he must totally dedicate his worship to the Almighty God alone.

God's Path is purely one of serving all humanity. Each act performed for the sake of God is but an act for the sake of God's servants, for God is totally sufficient, independent of His servants. Since the True Absolute God is above any limit, specification, not related to any group or biased to any particular direction, His Path, then, practically equates that of **all** mankind's. To work for God, and for God alone, is to work for people, for the good of all people, all mankind. It is a psychological and spiritual training that

never ceases to function.

Whenever the juristic path of God is mentioned, it can be taken to mean exactly all mankind's path. Islam has made God's Path one of the avenues to spend *Zakat*, meaning thereby: to spend for all humanity's good and benefit. It also urged to fight for the Cause of God in defence of all the weak among humans, calling it *Jihad*, i.e., "fighting for the Path of God;"

Those who believe (***in God***) ***fight in the cause of God, and those who reject Faith fight in the cause of Evil: So fight against the friends of Satan: Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan.*** (**Qur'an, 4:76**).

Besides, if we come to know that worship demands different types of endeavour, as it sometimes imposes on man only some physical exertion, as in prayer, and sometimes psychological, as in fasting, and other times financial, as in *Zakat*, and in yet a fourth one an exertion on the level of self-sacrifice or braving danger, as in *Jihad*. If we come to know all of this, we will be able to figure the depth and capacity of the spiritual and psychological training practiced by man through different rituals for the objective purpose, for giving and contributing, for working for a higher goal in all different fields of human endeavour.

On this basis can you find the vast difference between a person who grew up on making endeavours to please God, brought up to labour without waiting for a compensation on the working grounds, and one who grew up always measuring a work according to the extent which he can achieve for his own personal benefit, basing it on the gain he gets from it, not comprehending—out of this measuring and estimating—except the language of figures and market prices.

A person like this latter one can be none other than a merchant in his own social practices, regardless of their field or type.

Consider upbringing on the objective purpose. Islam has always tied the value of a work to its own motives, separating them from its outcomes. The value of an act in Islam is not in the results and gains it brings forth to the worker or to all people; rather, it is the motives behind it, their purity, objectivity and self-denial. For example, the person who reaches the discovery of a medicine for a dangerous disease, thus saving the lives of millions of patients.

God does not evaluate his discovery according to the size of its results and the number of those patients it saves from death; rather He estimates it according to the feelings and desires which formulate within the discoverer the motive to make an effort to make that discovery. If he did not make his effort except to get a privilege that enables him to sell it and gain millions of dollars, this deed of his is not considered by God to be equal except to any other purely commercial deed.

The egoistic logic of self-centered motives, just as they push him to discover a medicine for a chronic disease, may as well push him in the same degree to discover means of destruction if he finds a market

that buys them. A deed is considered to be commendable and virtuous if the motives behind it go beyond the ego: if it is for the sake of God and the servants of God. According to the degrees of self denial and the participation of God's servant in its making, a deed is elevated and highly evaluated.

The Inner Sense of Responsibility

If we observe humanity in any of its historical periods, we will find it following a particular system of life, a specific manner in distributing rights and responsibilities among people, and that is done according to the amount it acquires of securities for its members to cling to this system and to its implementation, thus it will be closer to stability and the achievement of the general goals expected from that system.

This fact is equally true concerning the future, as well as the past, for it is an established fact of man's civilized march along its lengthy trip.

Among the securities is that which is objective, such as penalties enforced by the group to punish the individual who transgresses beyond his limits. And among them is that which is inner, i.e., man's inner sense of responsibility towards his social obligations, towards whatever obligations the group demands of him, determining, spontaneously, his own rights.

In order to be an actual fact in man's life, the inner sense of responsibility needs the belief in an "overseer", "supervisor," from whose knowledge not an atom's weight on earth, beneath it, above it or in the sky escapes, and to a practical application through which such sense grows and according to which the feeling of such an inclusive supervision lays roots.

This "overseer" from whose knowledge not even an atom's weight escapes is created in man's life as a result of his link with the True Absolute One, the all-Knowing, the Omnipotent, the One Whose knowledge encompasses everything. This link with His self saves man the need for such supervision, thus enabling the creation of an inner sense of responsibility.

The practical application, through which this inner sense of responsibility grows, materializes through practicing rituals: Worship is the duty imposed by the Unseen, and by this we mean that checking it externally is impossible. Any external measures to enforce it can never be successful, for it stands through the self's own purpose and the spiritual attachment to work for God; this is a matter which cannot be included in the calculation of a subjective supervision from the outside, nor can any legal measure guarantee that either.

Rather, the only capable supervision in this respect is the one resulting from the attachment to the Absolute One, the Unseen, the One from Whose knowledge nothing escapes. The only possible assurance on this level is the inner sense of responsibility. This means that the person who practices worship is performing a duty which differs from any other social obligation or project such as when he

borrows and pays back, or when he contracts and adheres to the terms.

When he borrows money from others and he returns it to the creditor, he performs a duty which lies within the range of social supervision's monitoring; hence, his estimation of the predicament of social reaction dictates to him the decision to do so.

The ritual duty towards the Unknown is one whose inner implication none knows except God, the Praised, the Omnipotent, for it is the result of the inner sense of responsibility. Through religious practices, such an inner feeling grows, and man gets used to behaving according to it.

Through the medium of such feeling can we find the good citizen. It is not sufficient for good citizenship that a person is anxious to perform others' legal rights only because of his apprehension of the social reaction towards him should he be reluctant to do so. Rather, good citizenship is achieved by the man who does not relax his own inner sense of responsibility.

In Islam, we notice that it is often recommended to perform optional rituals privately, rather than publicly. There are even rituals which are secretive by nature such as fasting, for it is an inner curb which cannot be checked externally. There are rituals for which a secretive environment is chosen, avoiding the public stage, such as the nightly *Nafl* optional prayers the performance of some of which requires after midnight timing [such as *salat al–layl*, night prayers].

All this is for the sake of deepening the aspect of worshipping the Unseen, linking it more and more to the inner sense of responsibility. Thus, this feeling gets deepened through the practice of rituals, and man gets used to behaving on its basis, forming a strong guarantee for the good individual's performance of his duties and obligations.

A General Look at Rituals

If we cast a general look at the rituals we have observed in this book, comparing them with each other, we can then derive some general impressions about these rituals. Here are some of these general impressions/outlooks.

The Unseen in Explaining Rituals

We came to know previously the important role worship plays in man's life and that it expresses a fixed need along his civilized march.

From another aspect: If we scrutinize and analyze the particulars, the details, in the light of advanced science, we will then be acquainted with the pieces of wisdom and secrets which Islamic jurisprudence expresses in this regard and which modern science has been able to discover.

This wonderful agreement between the outcomes of modern science and many particulars of Islamic

jurisprudence, and whatever rules and regulations it decides, expresses an amazing support for the position of this jurisprudence, deeply emphasizing its being God-inspired.

In spite of all of this, however, we quite often face unseen points in worship, i.e., a group of details whose secrets cannot be comprehended by the person practicing worship, nor can he interpret them materialistically; for why must sunset prayer rite be three prostrations while the noon-time prayer is more than that? And why should each *rak'a* include bowing down once instead of twice, two prostrations instead of one? Other questions of this sort can also be put forth.

We call such an aspect of worship, which cannot be interpreted, "unseen." We find this aspect, in one manner or another, in most rituals brought forth by the Islamic jurisprudence. From here, we can consider obscurity in the meaning we have already mentioned as a general phenomenon in rituals and one of their common characteristics.

This obscurity is linked to the rituals and to their imposed role jointly, for the role of these rituals, as we have already come to know, is to emphasize the attachment, the link, the connection, to the Absolute One and to deepen it practically. The bigger the element of submission and yielding in a worship is, the stronger its effect in deepening the link between the worshipper and his Lord.

If the deed practiced by the worshipper is understood in all its dimensions, if it becomes clear in its wisdom and benefit in all details, the element of submission and yielding gets minimized, and it will be dominated by motives of profit and benefit seeking, no more a worship of God as much as it is a deed of seeking a benefit practiced by the worshipper so that he might derive advantage out of it, profiting by its results.

Just as the spirit of obedience and attachment in the soldier grows, getting deepened through military training, by giving him orders and requiring him to perform them with obedience and without discussion, so does the feeling of the worshipping person grow, getting deepened in its attachment to his Lord through requiring him to practice these rituals in their unseen aspects with submission and surrendering.

Submitting and surrendering require the assumption of the existence of an unseen aspect and the attempt not to question this unseen aspect of worship. Demanding its interpretation and limitation of interest means stripping worship of its reality—as a practical expression of submission and obedience—and measuring it by measurements of benefit and profit like any other ordinary deed.

We notice that this obscurity is almost ineffective in rituals representing a great general, public, benefit, one that conflicts with the personal interest of the worshipper, as is the case with *Jihad* which serves a great public purpose which collides with the desire of the individual performing it to preserve his own life and blood, and also in the case of *Zakat* which represents a great interest contrasting the strong desire of the person paying it to keep his wealth and money for himself. The issue of *Jihad* is very well understood by the person performing it, and the issue of *Zakat* is generally understood by the person who pays it.

Neither Jihad nor *Zakat* thus loses any element of submission and obedience (to God), for the difficulty of sacrificing life and possession is what makes man's acceptance of a worship—for which he sacrifices both life and possession—is indeed a great deal of submission and obedience. Add to this the fact that *Jihad* and *Zakat* as well as similar rituals are not meant to be merely aspects of upbringing just for the individual, but they also are for the achievement of social benefits which they secure. Accordingly, we observe that obscurity is highlighted more and more in rituals dominated by the educating aspect of the individual, such as prayer and fasting.

Thus do we derive the conclusion that the unseen in worship is strongly linked to its educating role in attaching the individual to his Lord, deepening his relationship with this Lord.

When we observe the different Islamic rituals, we find in them an element of inclusion of all different aspects of life. Rituals have never been limited to specific norms, nor have they been restricted to only needs which embody the manner of glorifying God, the Praised, the High, like bowing, prostrating, praying and invoking; rather, they have been extended to include all aspects of human activity. *Jihad*, for example, is a rite. It is a social activity. *Zakat* is a rite. It, too, is a social activity, a financial one. Fasting is a rite. It is a nutritional system. Both ablution and *Ghusu1* (ceremonial bathing) are norms of worship. They are two ways of cleansing the body.

This inclusion of worship expresses a general trend of Islamic upbringing aiming at linking man, in all his deeds and activities, to the Almighty God, converting each useful deed into an act of worship, no matter in what field or type. In order to find a fixed basis for this trend, fixed rituals were distributed to the different fields of human activity, preparing man to train himself on pouring the spirit of worship over all his good activities, and the spirit of the mosque over all places of his actions: in the field, factory, shop or office, as long as his deed is a good one, for the sake of God, the Glorified, the Sublime.

In this respect, Islamic jurisprudence differs from two other religious trends: One is a trend to separate worship from life, and the other is a trend to limit life to a narrow frame of worship as do monks and mystics.

As for the first trend, it separates worship from life, leaving worship to be conducted at places made especially for it. It requires man to be present in these places in order to pay God His dues and worship Him, so much so that when he gets out of them to different aspects of life, he bids worship farewell, giving himself up to the affairs of his life until he goes back again to those holy places.

From here came Islamic jurisprudence to distribute the rituals on the different aspects of life, urging the practice of rituals in every good deed. It explains to man that the difference between the mosque, which is God's house, and man's home is not in the quality of building or label; rather, the mosque has deserved to be God's house because it is the yard whereupon man practices a deed that goes beyond his ego and from which he aims at a bigger goal than that dictated by the logic of limited materialistic gains, and that this yard ought to extend to include all life's stages. Each yard, whereupon man does a

deed that goes beyond his self, his ego, aiming thereby to achieve the pleasure of God and to please all people, does, indeed, carry the mosque's spirit.

As for the second trend, which restricts life in a narrow frame of worship, it tries to confine man to the mosque instead of extending the meaning of the mosque to include all yards which witness a good deed of man.

This trend believes that man lives an inner conflict between his soul and body, and that he cannot accomplish one of these two, the duality of worship and the different activities of life, for they paralyze worship itself, obstructing its constructive upbringing role in developing man's motives and in achieving the objective, enabling him to go beyond his ego and narrow personal interests in various scopes of his deeds.

God, the Glorified and Praised One, never insisted on being worshipped for the sake of His own Person, since He is independent of His worshippers, so that He would be satisfied with a worship of this sort, nor did He ever put Himself as the goal and objective of the human march, so that man may bow his head down to Him within the scope of his worship, and that is it!

Rather, He meant such worship to build the good person who is capable of going beyond his ego, participating in a bigger role in the march. The exemplary achievement of this goal cannot be reached except when the spirit of worship gradually extends to other activities of life, for its extension—as we have already seen—means an extension of objectivity of purpose and the inner feeling of responsible behaviour, the ability to go beyond the self, to be in harmony with man within this inclusive cosmic frame, with eternity, immortality that both encompass him.

This is to be done unless it is at the cost of the other [the interest of the worshipper himself]. Therefore, in order for him to spiritually grow and to be elevated, he has to deprive his body from the good things, to shrink his presence on life's stage to continuously combat his desires and aspirations in different aspects of life, until he finally achieves victory over all of them through long abstention and deprivation as well as the practice of certain rituals.

Islamic jurisprudence rejects this trend, too, because it wants rituals for the sake of life. Life cannot be confiscated for the sake of rituals. At the same time, it tries hard to ensure that a good man pours the spirit of worship over all of his norms of behaviour and activity. This must not be taken to imply that he has to stop his different activities in life and confine himself to the altar's walls; rather, it means that he converts all his activities into rituals.

The mosque is only a base from which a good man sets to conduct his daily behaviour, but it is not limited to that behaviour alone. The Holy Prophet (ص) has said once to Abu Tharr al-Ghifari: "If you are able to eat and drink for the sake of none save God, then do so!"

Thus, worship *serves* life. Its upbringing and religious success is determined by its extension, in meaning

and in spirit, to all aspects of life.

Worship and the Senses

Man's perception is not merely through his senses, nor is it merely an intellectual and non-material reasoning. It is a mixture of reasoning plus material and non-material feeling. When worship is required to perform its function in a way with which man interacts perfectly, one which is in harmony with his character, worship becomes comprised of one's mind and senses; worship, then, must contain a sensitive aspect and a non-material intellect, so that it will be compatible with the worshipper's personality, and the worshipper, while performing his worship, thus comes to live his attachment to the Absolute One through all his existence.

From here, the intention, as well as the psychological contention of worship, always represents its intellectual and non-material aspect, for it links the worshipper to the True Absolute One, the Praised, the High. There are other aspects of worship which represent its material aspect:

- The *qibla* towards the direction of which each worshipper must face while praying;

- The Haram [Ka'ba in Mecca], which is visited by both those who perform the pilgrimage and the Umrah, around which they both perform tawaf;

- The Safa and Marwah, between which he runs; Jamratul Aqabah, at which he casts stones;

- The Mosque, which is a place specifically made for worship, one in which the worshipper practices his worship.

All these are things related to the senses and tied to worship: There is no prayer without a *qibla*, nor *tawaf* without a *Haram*, and so on, for the sake of satisfying the part related to the senses in the worshipper and giving it its right and share of worship.

This is the midway direction in organizing worship and coining it according to man's instincts as well as particular intellectual and sensual composition.

Two other directions face him: One of them goes to the extreme in bringing man to his senses, if the expression is accurate at all, treating him as if he had been a non-material intellect, opposing all sensual expressions of his within worship's sphere. As long as the True Absolute One, the Praised One, has no limited place or time, nor can He be represented by a statute; then worshipping Him has to stand on such a premise, and in the manner which enables the comparative thinking of man to address the Absolute One Truth.

Such a trend of thinking is not approved by Islamic jurisprudence, for in spite of its concern about the intellectual aspects brought forth by the *hadith* that says: "An hour's contemplation is better than a year's adoration," it also believes that pious worship, no matter how deep, cannot totally fill man's self or occupy

his leisure, nor can it attach him to the Absolute One Truth in all his existence, for man has never been purely a mere intellect.

From this realistic and objective starting point, rituals in Islam have been based on both intellectual and sensuous premises. The person who performs his prayers practices through his intention an intellectual adoration, denying his Lord any limits or measurements, or anything like that. For when he starts his prayer with "*Allaho Akbar!*" (God is Great), while taking at the same time the holy Ka'ba as his divine slogan towards which he directs his feelings and movements, he lives worship by both intellect and feeling, logic and emotion, non-materialistically as well as intellectually.

The other trend goes to the extreme when it comes to the part relevant to the senses, changing the slogan to an identity and the hint to reality, causing the worship of the symbol to substitute what the symbol really stands for, and the direction towards it instead of the reality to which it points; thus, the worshipper sinks, in one way or another, into *shirk* and paganism.

Such a trend totally annihilates the spirit of worship, and it stops its function as a tool linking man and his civilized march to the True Absolute One, converting it into a tool for linking him to false absolutes, to symbols which changed—through false intellectual stripping of the matter—to an absolute. Thus, false worship becomes a veil between man and his Lord, instead of a link between both of them.

Islam has rejected such a trend because Islam indicted paganism in all its forms, smashing its idols and putting an end to all false gods, refusing to take any limited object as a symbol for the Truly Absolute One, God, the Glorified, or as a personification of Him.

Yet it deeply distinguished between the meaning of the idol which it crushed and that of the Qibla it brought forth the meaning of which conveys nothing more than a particular geographic spot which happens to have been divinely favoured through linking it to prayers for the sake of satisfying the worshipper's aspect relevant to the senses.

Paganism is really nothing but a deviated attempt to satisfy such an aspect, and Islamic jurisprudence has been able to correct it, providing a straight path in harmonizing between the worship of God, as being dealing with the Absolute One Who has neither limit nor personification, and the need of man who is composed of feeling and intellect to worship God by both of his feeling and intellect!

Conclusion: The Social Aspect of Worship

Essentially, worship represents the relationship between man and his Lord. It provides this relationship with elements of survival and stability. This has been formulated in the Islamic jurisprudence in a way which often made it an instrument for the relationship between man and his brother man, and this is what we call the social aspect of worship.

Some rituals, by nature, force segregation and the establishment of social relations among those who

practice that ritual. For example, *Jihad* requires those worshippers fighting for God to establish among themselves such relations as would naturally happen among the corps of a fighting army.

There are other rituals which do not necessarily impose congregating, but in spite of this, they are linked, in one way or another, to congregation in order to bring forth a mixture between man's relation with his Lord and his own relationship with his brethren men.

Among prayers' rituals is the congregation in which the individual's prayer becomes a group's worship, strengthening the ties among the group, deepening the spiritual links among them through their unity in practicing rituals.

The tenet of pilgrimage has definite timings and places, and each participant in it has to practice it within those timings and places; hence, such participation evolves as a great social activity.

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