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The Purpose of the Acts of Worship

The purpose of acts of worship is to draw man's attention to the privilege he has in the universe. That purpose is achieved by fully recognizing the Creator of the universe, having a spiritual journey towards Him, shedding off of all kinds of material pollutions from oneself, being illuminated with God's light, and being absorbed in infinite joy as a result of affinity with God Who is Absolute Beauty and Infinite Perfection.

This requires belittling the worldly pleasures against the pleasure of affinity with God hence being indifferent to fortune and misfortune in the world. In this relation, the Holy Qur'an says:

لِكَيْلا تَأْسَوْا على ما فَاتَكُمْ ولا تَفْرَحُوا بِما آتاكم

"So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant at what He has given you... (57:23)"

This is the virtue of being pious and detached from the world, which is the outcome of getting to know God and man's full attention to a metaphysical world.

The Islamic piety is not against the principles of everyday life

When the topic of piety and detachment of the world comes up and quotations from the Holy Qur'an or the Imams (as) are mentioned, a kind of misunderstanding is created in the minds of certain people. They will say to themselves that these two contradict each other. Islam—the perfect religion, while inviting people to be pious and detached from the world, has taken every aspect of human life into consideration.

It is against seclusion, irresponsibility to social undertakings, and indifference to the events happening in the human society. Islam equally blames the oppressors and the oppressed as the agents behind the spread of oppression and corruption. They are both entitled to punishment. The Hoy Qur'an depicts the

assembly of the two groups in hell:

كُلَّما دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ لَعَنَتْ أُخْتَها، حَتّى إذا ادَّارَكُوا فِيها جَمِيعاً قَالَتْ أُخْراهُمْ لأُولاهُمْ رَبَّنا هَؤُلاءِ أَضَلُّونا فَآتِهِمْ عَذاباً ضِعْفاً مِنَ النَّارِ، قَالَ لِكُلٍّ ضِعْفٌ ولَكِنْ لا تَعْلَمون

"Whenever a nation shall enter, it shall curse its sister, until when they have all come up with one another into it; the last of them shall say with regard to the foremost of them: our Lord! These led us astray; therefore give them a double chastisement of the fire. He will say: every one shall have double but you do not know. (***7:38***)***"***

Piety, meaning lack of interest in the worldly affairs in one's mind and hear and abstinence from pleasure seeking in practice, is the outcome of a kind of enlightenment in one's soul in a way that man sees the world as transient and subject to decline. As a result of such an insight, man considers his personality as one created for eternal life hence finding himself too dignified to have tendency towards a mortal, material life. The leader of the pious, Imam 'Ali (as), in sermon No 32 of *Nahjul Balagha,* says:

وَلبِئسَ المَتْجَرُ أنْ تَرى الدُّنيا لِنَفسِكَ ثمَناً ومِنْ مَالَكَ عِندَ اللهِ عِوَضاً

"*How bad is the transaction that you allow,* (*the enjoyment of*) *this world to be a price for yourself as an alternative for what there is with Allah for you*"

That is to say, man's human personality and the eternal life of the Hereafter is so sublime that if he loses the two but gains the whole world, it would be a bad transaction. The pious man finds his prosperity and his ultimate goal in the illuminated world of affinity with God and His pleasure. In this relation, Imam Sajjad (as), in the eighth part of the Whispered Prayed of the Devotees, says:

فَقَدِ انْقَطَعَتْ إلَيكَ هِمَّتي وانْصَرَفَتْ نحْوَكَ رَغْبَتي، فَأنتَ لا غَيرُكَ مُرادي ولكَ لا لِسِواكَ سَهَري وسُهادي، ولِقاؤكَ قَرَّةُ عَيني وَوَصْلُكَ مُنى نفسي... ورِضاكَ بُغْيَتي.

"*For my aspiration has been cut off from everything but You and my desire has turned toward You alone, You are my object, none other; to You alone belongs my waking and my sleeplessness. Meeting You is the gladness of my eye, joining You is the wish of my soul. Toward You is my yearning, in love for You my fervent craving. Your good pleasure is the aim I seek.*"110

Quoting Imam Sajjad (as), Abu-Hamza ath-Thumali, says:

مَولايَ، بِذِكْرِكَ عاشَ قَلبي وبمُناجاتِكَ بَرَّدْتُ ألم الخوفِ عنّي

"*O Master Lord, in Your remembrance my heart takes delight, with prayers I hold communion with You, it freezes the pain of fear that torments me*."[2]11

A pious man is not one who does not possess anything but one who is not slave of anything.

Therefore, a pious man is a sublime soul released from the humiliating, materialistic captivity and soaring in the infinite space seeking God. Such a man has become familiar with supernatural pleasures. His joy and sorrow depends on that type of pleasure, not on worldly pleasures, which are little provision and exposed to rapid annihilation.

Therefore, when a man reaches that stage of spiritual perfection to find himself above the world and its desires, he will never become captive of carnal desires. He neither violates other people's rights nor allows them to violate the rights of other human beings. Acting on the basis of his religious duty, such a man is steadfast in preserving his own rights and those of others in defending justice, and will not spare his life in the path of God.

The vivid lives of the Imams (as), and at the top of them the life of Imam 'Ali (as), is good examples. Being at the zenith of piety and detached from the world both physically and spiritually, Imam 'Ali (as) displayed to the world the highest degree of respect for other people's rights, defense of social justice, and proved consistency of piety with living a social life and a sound way of living.

Summary

A spiritual virtue, which makes man's real personality outstanding and in the light of which man's Hereafter and worldly life becomes meaningful is piety, an outcome of man's heart being illuminated with the light of God's cognition and man's affinity with God. This is not possible except by worshipping Him ad performing what is known as religious duties. The present decadence is due to man's failure to know himself.

The reason why corruption has spread throughout the world, the human society has been entangled in the bottleneck of a bestial life, and there is no way out is because man has failed to recognize his own stand. He has been deviated from acts of worship and God seeking path, which is his special task. Man's big sin is failure to get to know himself, which will lead to knowledge of God.

Being A Servant of God Is Man's Dignity

The fact that God has assigned acts of worship for human beings is a sign of God's grace towards man. By calling man to His House and by giving him the honor of being called the servant of Allah, God has made man distinct from other creatures. If human beings could only understand what dignity this title gives, they would ignore all the worldly titles and would not think of anything other than qualifying for that title.

When man becomes servant of God, his heart will be put at rest. He will neither feel sad about any misfortune nor rejoice at any fortune. When he passes away, he will receive God's mercy, will enjoy the everlasting bliss, and will associate with the prophets and the Imams, that is a great victory.

Impact of Worship at Soul

God-seekers believe that acts of worship and religious duties are different from one another in terms of leaving a certain impact on soul and its perfection. Some of them have the quality of purification while others adorn the soul; some of them remove darkness from the soul while others illuminate man's soul. For example, charity purifies man's heart from the evil of love for wealth. In this relation, the Holy Qur'an says:

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِها

"Take alms out of their property, you would cleanse them and purify them thereby. (***9:103***)***"***

Observing fast –*Sawm*– strengthens one's will and power of resistance against carnal desires, leading to piety and immunity. In this relation, the Holy Qur'an says:

يا أَيّها الّذينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيامُ كَما كُتِبَ عَلى الّذينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقونَ

"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil. (***2:183***)***"***

The virtue of prayer is to illuminate man's soul with the light of the heavens and the earth. The Holy Qur'an says:

وَأَقِمِ الصّلاةَ لِذِكْري

"Keep up prayer for My remembrance. (***20:14***)***"***

Nevertheless, Hajj has a double purpose—it has the quality of purification and it is ornament as well. They both remove darkness of mammonism from heart and bring about illumination of God's remembrance.

Almsgiving, being far from one's family, having no ease and comfort of one's home, one's business and jobs, tolerating the sufferings of a trip, having to put up with short-tempered co-travelers, sunburn, insufficient sleep, performing rather unfamiliar acts are not pleasant by the norms of the superficial intellect.

Yet, throwing pebbles at Satan in Mina, waling at fast pace, getting out of one's normal clothes, and shaving one's hair are extremely useful in purifying man's heart from the evil of arrogance, egotism and in taming the haughty and the disobedient souls. This is party of the purifying quality of Hajj.

As for the ornamental virtue of Hajj, it is both moral and spiritual. Hajj congregation leads to Ummah's supremacy among other nations.

Hajj, A Lively Act

Hajj, which is full of meaning and spirit, can be inspiring and bring about such ritual effects. Ceremonial rites devoid of truth are not expected to bring about prosperity or dignity. In this relation, the Holy Qur'an says:

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرَى لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ

"Most surely, there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart or he gives ear and is a witness. (***50:38***)***"***

Beyond doubt, like healing medicine, religious duties are composed of ingredients with divine formula, which will leave great effects on the human societies. Nevertheless, susceptible temperaments are needed to manifest those effects.

Hajj of most people is devoid of spirit

Unfortunately, most people who go on Hajj have neither a heart to understand the meaning of Hajj nor give an ear to those who have a heart so as to perform the Hajj rites which are full of spirit.

They would rather perform the Hajj rites hastily, get out of the state of Ihram and restriction, and then engage in taking photos, buying souvenirs, or doing business. They think they have achieved the ultimate goal of Hajj and return home purified like when they were born of their mother!

Hajj Devoid of Spirit Has No Living Effects

Hajj devoid of spirit cannot possibly purify man's heart from vices and adorn it with virtues nor can it turn human beings divine. Socially too, it cannot give dignity to the ummah nor can it give supremacy or world leadership to the ummah.

A clear proof of Muslim's Hajj being abortive in our times is the fact that this great religious duty is performed every year with much glory but, unfortunately, does not produce the intended result. Its radiant effects, including purification of the soul and the ummah's supremacy, some of the inevitable

results of Hajj as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, are not noticeable.

1. See as-Sahifat al-Kamila as-Sajjadiyya
2. See Duaa Abu-Hamza ath-Themali

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