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The Truth of Worship

Worship has various meanings and applications which are different in scope:

(1) Worship is an act which is done only to express servitude to Almighty Allah. Basically it does not bear any relationship with aught but Allah (SWT). Acts of worship include *salat*, *sawm* and *Hajj*.

(2) Worship applies to an act which is done with the intention of *qurbah*, even if it does not primarily bear the title of servitude and even if it is related to the servants of Allah. These include *khums, zakat, jihad, al-amrbil-maruf* and *al-nahy anil-munkar*.

(3) Worship is done with the intention of *qurbah*, even if its correctness does not hinge on this intention. These include all acts which bring about the satisfaction of Allah (SWT). If these are carried out with the intention of *qurbah*, it will be deemed worship in this sense.

(4) Worship refers to obeying one who is independently regarded as *wajibul-ita'ah*, even if there is no intention of paying homage to him and expressing servitude to him.

With lexical analysis and application of the rules of discourse, we might prefer some of these meanings or we might regard them as having ambiguity and as being applicable to all cases while maintaining difference in degree. But obviously in this discussion, we do not intend to resolve issues related to discourse.

In proving that worship is a means to reach *qurbah* with Allah (SWT), we do not rely on traditional proofs. On the contrary, through moral and rational preliminaries, we have reached results from which we found the terms *qurbah* and worship applicable to these acts. As a consequence, it is fitting to carry on the discussion along the same lines and to clarify the matter using issues which explicitly confirm.

Issues which have been proven so far and which can be used to resolve these matters are as below:

(1) Man is a being who should reach ultimate perfection by his voluntary progress and development. Reaching his main goal depends on his free and conscious choice.

(2) The natural and inherent powers, as well as the facilities placed at his disposal are means to reach ultimate perfection. None of them is futile in and foreign to the process of his development.

(3) Man's main goal is to reach *qurbah* with Allah (SWT). The essence of *qurbah* is to intuitively learn of one's existential attachment to and relationship with Allah (SWT).

(4) The movement towards such a destination is an internal journey commencing from the depths of man's heart and soul and having no direct relationship with material things.
With regard to these preliminaries, we can derive the following as conclusion:

First: Human development and attainment of *qurbah* with Allah (SWT) depends on positive and progressive movements. Divestive and negative directions could not be considered as a step towards perfection. As a consequence, abandoning the worship of idols and obedience of the tyrants, secluding oneself and giving up sociability could not be by themselves, considered as means towards *qurbah* with Allah due to their divestive quality.

Second: Any form of activity would be along the course of man's development in case it has a positive relationship with his ultimate aim and perfection (i.e. *qurbah* with Allah and realization of one's existential attachment to and dependence on Almighty Allah).

Third: Such a relationship could be directly sought only among the concerns of the heart and the spiritual and moral states. Consequently the most genuine worship is an activity, freely and consciously, carried out by the heart to find its inherent desire.

Fourth: Other activities of man should be somehow related to this activity of the heart so as to be in the path of development; else they should be either completely abandoned (supposing this could be done, it is contrary to the philosophy of existence of inherent attractions and would require restriction of voluntary development) or they should be considered as means which are excessive and foreign to man's development. In this case, an important part of activities of life should be placed outside the sphere of development. One should have no hope in their contribution to reaching the objective. And this is not correct either.

Thus the only sound means is to transform into worship the various activities of life in the light of intention and *niyyah* and to grant them a development form, so that human faculties would not be wasted and the zone of will–power and choice would expand to the extent demanded by and provided for by Allah (SWT).

A group of people have conceived that since man's process of development starts from the heart and moves towards Allah (SWT), one must dispense with all but the necessary activities of life and choose a remote corner for *dhikr* and heartfelt concern (for Allah) and sever ties with everyone and everything.

Although this group has correctly determined the goal and the summary course (of action), it has missed

the mark in determining the sound path and the precise plan which leads to man's specific perfection (which is marked by being all-embracing and comprehensive) and has overlooked the various dimensions of man's soul.

It must be borne in mind that man's main privilege is the free choice of the path of prosperity and the attainment of a perfection beyond those of the angels. This could be materialized amidst conflicts, struggles, and combats in the light of an all-embracing endeavour. Eradication of some innate desires or severance of social relations would in fact, limit the range of will-power, tighten the zone of struggle and bar many of the ways of progress and development.

Of course, it must be kept in mind that people have different capacities and talents. Each person should select a field commensurate with his capacity and talent. Not every bird could soar like the eagle and not every athlete could test in combat with a champion. But at any rate, the correct means of development is to gradually and proportionately, lead to growth in all dimensions of existence.

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