

The Spirit of Worship in Islam (part 1 of 3): Worship and Prayer

Description: The meaning of worship, and spirit and purpose of prayer in Islam.

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Ibadah (worship) is an Arabic word derived from *abd* (a slave) and it means submission. It portrays that God is your Master and you are His slave, and whatever a slave does in obedience to and for the pleasure of his Master is *Ibadah*. The Islamic concept of *Ibadah* is very wide. If you free your speech from filth, falsehood, malice, and abuse and speak the truth and talk goodly things and do all these only because God has so ordained to do, they constitute *Ibadah*, however secular they may look in semblance. If you obey the law of God in letter and spirit in your commercial and economic affairs and abide by it in your dealings with your parents, relatives, friends, and all those who come in contact with you, verily all these activities of yours are *Ibadah*. If you help the poor and the destitute, give food to the hungry, and serve the ailing and the afflicted persons, and do all this not for any personal gain of yours but only to seek the pleasure of God, they are nothing short of *Ibadah*. Even your economic activities, the activities you undertake to earn your living and to feed your dependants, are *Ibadah* if you remain honest and truthful in them and observe the law of God. In short, all your activities and your entire life are *Ibadah* if they are in accordance with the law of God, and your heart is filled with His awe, and your ultimate objective in undertaking all these activities is to seek the pleasure of God.



Thus, whenever you do good or avoid evil for fear of God, in whatever sphere of life and field of activity, you are discharging your Islamic obligations. This is the true significance of *Ibadah*, namely total submission to the pleasure of Allah; the molding into the patterns of Islam your entire life, leaving out not even the most insignificant part thereof. To help achieve this aim, a set of formal *`ibadat* (acts of worship) has been constituted, which serves as a course of training. These *`ibadat* are thus the pillars on which the edifice of Islam rests.

Salah (Prayer) is the most primary and the most important of these obligations. And what is *salah*? It is the prescribed daily Prayers which consist in repeating and refreshing, five times a day, the belief in which you repose your faith. You get up early in the morning, cleanse yourself and present yourself before your Lord for Prayer. The various poses that you assume during your Prayers are the very embodiment of the spirit of submission; the various recitals remind you of your commitments to your God. You seek

His guidance and ask Him again and again to enable you to avoid His wrath and follow His chosen path. You read out from the Book of the Lord and express witness to the truth of the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, and also refresh your belief in the Day of Judgment and enliven in your memory the fact that you have to appear before your Lord and give an account of your entire life. This is how your day starts.

Then, after a few hours the *muezzin* (caller to prayer) calls you to Prayer, and you again submit to your God and renew your covenant with Him. You dissociate yourself from your worldly engagements for a few moments and seek audience with God. This once again brings to the fore of your mind your real role in life. After this rededication you revert to your occupations and again present yourself to the Lord after a few hours. This again acts as a reminder to you, and you once more refocus your attention on the stipulations of your faith. When the sun sets and the darkness of the night begins to shroud you, you again submit yourself to God in Prayer so that you may not forget your duties and obligations in the midst of the approaching shadows of the night. And then after a few hours you again appear before your Lord, and this is your last Prayer of the day. Thus before going to bed you once again renew your faith and prostrate before your God. And this is how you complete your day. The frequency and timings of the Prayers never let the object and mission of life be lost sight of in the maze of worldly activities.

It is but easy to understand how the daily Prayers strengthen the foundations of your faith, prepare you for the observance of a life of virtue and obedience to God, and refresh that belief from which spring courage, sincerity, purposefulness, purity of heart, advancement of the soul, and enrichment of morals.

Now see how this is achieved: One performs ablution in the way prescribed by the Prophet. One also says their Prayers according to the instructions of the Prophet. Why do they do so? Simply because they believe in the prophethood of Muhammad and deem it their bounden duty to follow him ungrudgingly. Why do they not intentionally misrecite the Quran? Isn't it so because they regard the Book as the Word of God and deem it a sin to deviate from its letter? In the Prayers they recite many things quietly, and if they do not recite them or make any deviation from them, there is no one to check them. But they never do so intentionally. Why? Because they believe that God is Ever Watchful and that He listens to all that you recite and is aware of things open and hidden.

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