



Interpretations

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A newsletter about Islam from a progressive
and sometimes interfaith perspective.

Knees on the floor, head to the heavens

EDITORIAL by Stephanie Roy [Ottawa, Canada]

There is far more injustices in this world than I can count and far greater struggles than those I have bore, but for all that I have lived through, there is no greater struggles than keeping my head to the heavens when my knees are on the floor. Whether I am on my knees for worship or due to hardship, reminding myself to continuously seek God's presence can be a challenge. A challenge that every Muslim must struggle to overcome.

I've been told times and times again that worshiping God is easy and being God-conscious is not so hard, and yet it seems to be the last thing on everyone's minds. People who judge and criticize with meanness and authority rather than advise and guide with kindness and humility are far too common in the Ummah. So what is worship? How do we connect with our worship? And more importantly how does our worship connects us with The Creator?

As I stand up and wash my hands (wudhu), I feel nothing but cold annoyance with this meaningless gesture. As I dress and cover at the crack of dawn the only guidance I seek is the path to rest. I prostrate and bow down the same way I used to clean my room as a teenager: reluctantly, but with the knowledge that I must do so in order to avoid a punishment more severe than the struggle it requires to accomplish the task. I say words in jibberish: half because I am pronouncing words in a language I do not speak, half because I am mumbling. I think to myself: this *cannot* be worship!

Two hours later, I meet a stranger on the street, a fellow hijabi, I smile and greet her with peace and blessings of God. She returns my greeting. My heart, earlier so cold and resentful, becomes overwhelmed with joy and peace. I did not bow down, prostrate,

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wash or recite, but I felt God enter my heart. I do not know this sister, but I know that God has brought her in my day to brighten me up and make me rejoice in his Mercy. Thank God for the warmth of my clothing! Thank God that I am not hungry! Thank God that I am safe and sound and have a roof over my head! Thank God!

Could *this* be worship? Could it be that the moment I stop doing things because I feared God and did them because I loved God, my worship finally got meaning? God is great and has provided us with many forms of worship. In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, may each step we take in life be in worship. May each words we utter reflect His Love and Kindness. Because worship doesn't begin or end with standing, prostrating or bowing down before him: worship is the turning your head to the heavens even when your knees are off the ground!

Worship as I understand it in the Qu'ran

By Farouk A. Peru [London, UK]

Human beings were created for the worship of Allah as Quran tells us in 51/56. This is our essential purpose but what image does this conjure for those who read this aya (verse)? For many, it is about filling places of worship (mosques, churches, synagogues, temples of all varieties) and performing rites and rituals for a God who demands this. I do not share this point of view. That is, I do not believe that these devotional acts are technically called 'worship'. They are devotional acts though and the states of being they generate may *lead* to actual acts of worship.

So what is worship in my understanding of the Quranic term? Worship is the direct translation of the word 'ibadah'. 'Ibadah' is the act of servitude. An 'abd' (one who performs ibadah) is one who serves his 'ilah' (god or authority) or 'rabb' (lord). This relationship between the abd and the ilah or rabb is called 'deen'. So deen is a power based relationship. Our task is to become the ibad (plural of abd) of Allah alone. Unfortunately, the pitfall which ensnares most of us is that we end up associating partners with Allah (false gods and lords) or worse still, lose the servitude of Allah completely.

What does it mean to realise (tasdiq) our deen with Allah, that is to serve Him? If we consider Quran 107/1-3, it equates the denial (the *opposite* of tasdiq above) of the deen with driving away those without relations (yateem) and refusal to feed the stagnant (miskeen). So in effect, we worship or serve Allah by doing the opposite – we are to build positive relationships with those who lack support and to feed on every level those who are stagnant in life so they may progress.

What is the goal of these action strategies? The beauty of these smaller suras such as 107 is just that – they are small and so easy to digest. At the end of this sura (107/7), it tells that these people in 107/1-3 are those who present obstacles to a state of optimal existence. This is a state where the energies of life feed into our maximum performance in life. This

state is called 'awan' in Quran and Muslims seek this from Allah when they recite 'iyyaka nasta'in' in the Fatihah. As Fatihah is the opening recitation in Quran, we can see how fundamental this optimum state is.

After we realise a deen with Allah, our next next step would be to 'exclusivise' our deen so that it is only Allah who is our authority and lord and not a false authority. What does it mean to serve Allah alone, that is to totally empower Him (give him deen, so to speak) to run our lives? Once again, Quran does not let us down in explicating that idea. If we look at Quran 2/139 which mentions 'mukhlisoon' ('exclusivisers', contextually for Allah). Who are these mukhlisoon?

Reading 2/139 with consideration to the passage (2/135-141) to be very enlightening. 2/135 speaks about the way of Ibrahim which is totally removed from partnering another authority with Allah. The opposite of this behaviour is be one who is lenient or expects leadership or merely one who acts towards the good without having a direct connection with Allah (huda and nasara personalities). 2/136 speaks about a set of personalities to emulate in terms of belief and to be agents of wholeness and soundness (muslimeen). 2/137 confirms this strategy of belief outlined in 2/135-136 to be what is required to make progress. 2/138 further explicates this as taking on the baptism of Allah – which I interpret to be immersing oneself in the names of Allah. We finally come to the aya in question, 2/139, where we can see much more clearly what being 'mukhlisoon' is – to have all the attributes mentioned so far. 2/140 once again mentions the behaviour which is less than ideal mentioned in 2/135, this time equating them with hiding their witnessing of Allah. This shows that to be mukhlisoon, we must witness Allah in our lives. 2/141 finally ends the passage calling them a nation which has passed, emphasising for us the results of a nation which conceals the light of Allah.

From this long analysis above, I think its clear what it takes to be mukhlisoon, people who have 'exclusivised' their worship so that it is only for Allah. These people are those who follow the way of ibrahim and have shunned any kind of intermediation between themselves and Allah. They

have made themselves workers of wholeness and soundness and strive to immerse themselves in the attributes of Allah. This is what it means to be at the peak of worship.

Interaction between Faith and Worship

By Aymen Ben Cheikh [Tunis, Tunisia]

In Islam, worship is the entirety of the acts that Muslims perform to get oneself closer to God. These acts are mentioned in the Qu'ran and in the teachings of the Prophet (Salla allahu alayhi wa sallam). These acts include all acts of worship such as prayer (salat), the fasting of Ramadan (sawm) and the pilgrimage (hajj), and all the good every day actions when they are done with the only goal of pleasing God. The acts include helping people in need, be good to parents, family and people in general, whether Muslim or not, carry out work well, forgive instead of begin vengeful and avoiding sins regardless of the temptation and opportunity to commit them.

All these acts can be considered worship and have an important consequence in the life of the Muslim performing them. In fact, they bring the believer closer to the Creator where He makes His presence felt in the believer's life and brings the believer peace of mind and happiness to overcome difficulties.

With the Muslims' efforts to stay on the right path, his or her personality evolves. He or she begins to acquire qualities such as patience, forgiveness and compassion. He or she will begin to relish in acts of worship and to accomplish them, not by obligation, but by love.

At this stage, for example, prayer becomes not only a pillar of Islam, but also a refuge for the believer which

provides a space to gain back strength and find peace in order to return to the straight path with a better, clearer, more rational vision.

This change of personality, or evolution, is linked to the dynamic character of the faith in Islam.

According to the Qu'ran and Sunnah, faith increases with good actions and decreases with sins. It can easily be noticed in daily life, sometimes we wander from our path and sometimes everything seems clear; these feelings are the fruit of our actions.

On the other hand, faith guides our acts because our actions are the material reflection of our faith. Consequently, there is a direct relation between faith and acts of worship, a relation between the spiritual and the material.

For these reasons, Muslims cannot neglect the spiritual side to distinguish between good and bad and to make good choices. Neither should the material side (acts) be neglected and relying only on faith because without acts of worship, faith could weaken, see even be lost.

To finish, I would like to add a verse from the Qu'ran, a verse which answers the fundamental question which has concerned all of humanity: why have we been created?

"I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me" [51:56]

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