

Introduction:

Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an:

وما خلقت الجن و الانس الا ليعبدون (الذاريات: 56)

"I did not create the Jinn and the humans except to worship Me (ya'bodoon)."¹

Thus the exclusive purpose and goal of the creation, presence and existence of the human beings on earth is the '*ibādah*' of the Creator Allah alone. In philosophical terms, this is tantamount to saying that the purpose of man's existence is the realization of the *summum bonum*. Obviously, what is being asserted here is the purposefulness of human life. Its denial is the cynical assertion of meaninglessness. It is another matter whether the meaning of human life is heroism, saintliness, or covering the world with yellow paint. Indeed this question itself can not be raised without assuming a positive answer to the first, namely, that there is meaning or good in human life. Such meaning or good, which is the purpose of all creation, is, according to Islam, the fulfillment of the divine will.² In order to live according to this divine will/objective we will have to understand the meaning and implication of '*ibādah*'. It is so because if '*ibādah*' refers to establishing the pillars of Islam then this does not need the whole life and existence of a human being. And if we can fulfill this divine purpose with this limited and shorter period of '*ibādah*', then how and to what purpose the rest of human life should be spent. But if '*ibādah*' permeates the whole of human life only then his existence will be meaningful and his life will be within the divinely prescribed guidelines and outlined objectives. Besides, without this comprehensiveness and broadness of the meaning and implication of the term '*ibādah*' this aforementioned verse of the Qur'an will conflict with another verse: 'Say: My prayer, sacrifice, life and death are surely for Allah, the Cherisher of the worlds'³.

Concept of 'Ibādah in Islam:

In order to understand the meaning and real implication of the Arabic term '*ibādah*' we will analyze and arrange the discussion of the topic in the following items:

Meaning of 'Ibādah:

In Arabic lexicon, the word '*ibādah*' is used to imply: 'Worship, adoration, veneration; devotional service, divine service; (pl. –at: acts of devotions, religious observations). On the other hand, the words '*ubūda*' or '*ubūdiya*' means: humble veneration, homage, adoration, worship; slavery, serfdom; servitude, bondage.'⁴

The term '*ibādah*', says Maudūdī, too has several different meanings, though all related to each other. The basic concept implied by the root word, '*abd*', is that of (a) acknowledging someone other than oneself as holding supremacy or enjoying overlordship and (b) of abdicating one's freedom and independence in big favour of relinquishing any resistance to or disobedience of him, and (c) of surrendering oneself totally to his authority. Since slavery or bondage too are tantamount to similar status, the first sense the word conveys to the mind of any Arab is of this very factor, namely, slavery or bondage.⁵

Maudūdī then went further to vindicate his explanation of the word '*ibādah*' through references from the Qur'an. He says: 'On studying the Qur'an we find that, the word is used wholly in the three senses explained above, except that on occasion both the first and the second senses are implied, on others the second only, on still others the third only and, in yet other places, all the three'.⁶

The example of its use in the first and the second senses (i.e., bondage, and submission and obedience), according to Maudūdī, are:

"Then We sent Mūsa and his brother Hārūn, with clear proofs of their prophethood to the Pharaoh and his nobles, but they treated them with disdain because of haughtiness born of power. "Should we," they said, "believe in two mere humans like ourselves, and that too of a nation which is in bondage to us?"⁷

"And the Pharaoh reminded Musa of having reared him from his childhood, (to which Musa replied): "As for the obligation you remind me of, is it not a fact that happened only because you had made the Banī Israel your slaves (but for which fact I may never have come into your household)?"⁸

The words 'ābidūn and 'abbadta employed respectively in the two verses imply bondage, submission, and obedience. The Pharaoh used the word 'ābidūn in the first verse in respect of Mūsa and Hārūn's (a) nation 'Banī Israel' to mean their bondage and subservience to the. And Mūsa (a) used the second word 'abbadta in reply to the Pharaoh and meant that the latter had enslaved them and made them do his bidding.⁹

Besides, in many other verses of the Qur'an¹⁰ the root word 'ibādah also is used with its various derivatives to mean bondage and submission/obedience.

There are many verse in the Qur'an where the word 'ibādah along with its derivatives used for exclusively the second meaning.¹¹

The third sense of the word 'ibādah is worship. It has two aspects. The first is that of performing one or more of the various rites of worship, such as bowing before anyone or offering sacrifices before him. It is done with the belief that he is a god in his own right or is someone able to intercede with a major god or having a share in the running of the universe under the control of that god. The other is to believe in any person or anything as having control over the realm of cause and effect, and praying to him, invoking him in times of distress or trial, and seeking his protection against danger or disaster.¹² Both kinds of acts amount, according to the Qur'an, to worship.¹³

The Qur'an repeatedly has drawn our attention to the fact that we should not offer our 'ibādah in any of these three meanings (i.e., bondage, submission, and worship) with absolute sense to anyone else other than Allah.

Professor Muhammad Motiur Rahman says, 'The word 'ibādah is derived from the word 'abd' which means servant, slave, or absolutely submitted to. Total submission to the will of Allah and leading a life according to His commandments and prohibitions is called 'ibādah. It implies that 'ibādah refers to (a) having firm conviction in Allah and His sovereignty, and (b) rendering total obedience to Him following His commands and controls.¹⁴

Slavery or total submission requires giving preference to the will and seeking pleasure of the one to whom one is submitted. Thus the one submitted should not have any independent will or desire. So true 'ibādah or total submission requires curbing one's will, containing it, and finally merging it with the wills of Allah. This is, as the Qur'an would put it, to be colored with the color of Allah.¹⁵

Islamic Concept of 'Ibādah and the Prevailing Misunderstandings:

The Arabic word 'ibādah does not have any equivalence in any language. Though it is translated in English as worship but it is very much different in concept, scope, nature and practice from other religions. In general, 'ibādah is [mis]understood to mean the observance of certain rituals: praying, fasting, giving charity, and other "good" works. In Islam, however, it is much more comprehensive-it is one's entire life.

Worship is an indispensable part of all religions, including the idolatrous ones. It is motivated, however, in each religion by different objectives, assumes different forms, and is performed under a different set of rules.

- 1) In some religions, worship is a means to develop in man the attitude of asceticism and isolation from life. In these religions, it seeks to develop a mentality which anathematizes the enjoyment of the pleasures of this world.
- 2) There are other religions which consecrate certain places for the sake of worship and prohibit its performance at any other place. There are also religions which are of the view that worship can be performed only under the leadership of a particular class of people-the ordained priests. People may, therefore, perform worship under the leadership of priests and only at the places consecrated for it. Thus the nature as well as the forms of worship differ from one religion to the other.

The followers of Judaism and Christianity have set apart a day for Divine Worship; but the followers of Islam have done no such thing. We have no Sabbath. For the Muslims worship does not mean the saying of a few canonical prayers at sated times over a week. Our religious philosophy and our approach to divine worship are quite different. In Islam, worship is a part and parcel of a Muslim's everyday life and he is required to pray five times a day. As the Prophet (saas) was asked by Allah to devote his whole for Him and he has been portrayed to be the role model for the humanity, his followers zealously follow him in every walking moment of their lives. From the moment a Muslim child is born, when the *Azan* is recited in his right ear and the *Iqāmah* in his left, to the time when a Muslim's corpse is lowered into the grave and the earth is sprinkled thereon to the accompaniment of the recital of the verse 55 of Sūrah Tā-Hā, a Muslim is always in communion with his Maker and Cherisher and Sustainer.¹⁶

Islam looks at the individual as a whole. He is required to submit completely to Allah, as the Qur'an instructed the prophet Muhammad to do:

Say (O Muhammad) my prayer, my sacrifice, my life and my death belong to Allah; He has no partner and I am ordered to be among those who submit, i.e.; Muslims.

The natural result of this submission is that one's activities should conform to the instructions of the one to whom the person is submitting-Allah. Islam requires that its followers conduct every aspect of their lives according to its teachings. This might sound strange to those who view religion as a personal relation between the individual and God and as having no impact on those activities that are not connected specifically with any religious rituals.¹⁷

Ibn Taymiyah says, "The word '*ibādah*' is a noun that includes everything that Allah loves and accepts from saying and the physical acts; the hidden (acts by heart) and open (acts by limbs). The acts by limbs include *salāt*, *zakāt*, *sawm* and *hajj*, truthfulness, loyalty, kindness with the parents, having good accord with relatives, keeping promises, ordering what is good and forbidding what is evil, fighting against the *Kuffār* and the hypocrites, kindness with the neighbors, with the orphan, with the poor, with the wayfarer, with the animals, supplication, remembering Allah, reciting the Qur'an, and all things of this nature are from '*ibādah*'. Similarly, loving Allah and His Prophet, fearing Allah and returning and/or repenting to Him, devoting the whole religion for Him, patience with His commandments, gratitude for His mercies, content with His rulings, trusting Him, hoping His mercy, and fearing His punishment and the like are among His '*ibādah*'.¹⁸

Maudūdī says: ¹⁹ Since the word *'ibādah* means bondage and slavery the primary role of a slave is to obey his master and carry out his wishes (thus implying submission and obedience). Next, a slave not only submits himself to the will of his master physically, but mentally too he accepts his supremacy, and if he at the same time has feelings of gratitude for his kindnesses and favours, he is inclined spontaneously to go out of his way in extolling the master and in showing respect and regard for him (thus implying worship). So *'ibādah* is the combination of this three fold service to Allah.

It will be clear to every one with even a cursory that wherever the Qur'an speaks of the *'ibadah* of Allah it does not appear from the context that it is used specifically in one or other of its three different senses, but it encompasses all the three, namely, bondage, submission, and worship.²⁰ Actually, the Qur'an puts its whole *d'awah* and its import in a way that our bondage, our submission, and our worship should all be for Allah, wholly and solely. Therefore, the restriction of the meaning of the term to just any one of the three senses amounts to placing a limitation on the *d'awah* of the Qur'an and the logical result of this would be that those who embrace the Islamic faith with such a restricted understanding of the Qur'anic *d'awah* will be able to achieve only a sub-standard compliance with its precepts and will remain defective in their *Īmān*.²¹

The Prophet taught his followers that Islam is far more than a private personal matter. Islam attaches no value to rituals that are performed mechanically and have no influence on one's inner life. The Qur'an dealt with this issue when it addressed Muslims, as well as local Jews and Christians, during the dispute that arose when the prayer direction was changed from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah in Makkah:

*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward the East or the West, but righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Prophets, and gives his beloved money to the relatives and the orphans and the needy And over the ransoming of the captives, and who observes prayer and pays the poor-due, and those who fulfill their promises when they have made one, and the patient in poverty and affliction and the steadfast in time of war; it is those who have proved truthful and it is those who are the God-fearing.*²²

The deeds mentioned in the above verse are indications that a person is righteous. But they are only a part of worship. Faith, according to the Prophet, is the basis of worship and is:

"made up of sixty and some branches: the highest of which is the belief in the Oneness of Allah, i.e., there is no God but Allah and the lowest in the scale of worship is removing obstacles and dirt from people's way."

All the ritualistic as well as non-ritualistic activities are considered as *'ibādah* in Islam. The following sentences will clarify that every action is deemed as a potential *'ibādah* when that will be done in fulfillment of two conditions:

- The intention behind the activity is wholesome and pure and is done in obedience to Allah and in fulfillment of the person's mission on earth; and
- The acts are done within the limits prescribed by Allah.

Thus in studying, working, taking leisure, walking, sitting etc the believer may also simultaneously be worshipping Allah. Wholesome living according to the commands of Allah is also an act of worship.²³

■ Honest work for earning livelihood is a type of *'ibādah*. The Prophet said:

"Whoever finds himself at the nightfall tired of his work, God will forgive his sins."

It will be regarded to be an act of *'ibādah* when a few conditions will be fulfilled:

- a) The work has to be allowed in Islam
 - b) The work has to be accompanied by a good intention
 - c) The work has to be performed with excellence
 - d) The work has to be within the limits of Allah
 - e) The work must not keep anyone away from his religious and other obligations
- Seeking knowledge is one of the highest types of worship. The Prophet told his Companions that "seeking knowledge is a (religious) duty on every Muslim." He also said:
"Seeking knowledge for one hour is better than praying for seventy years."
 - Social courtesy and cooperation, when done for the sake of Allah, are also a part of worship. The Prophet (saas) said:
"Receiving your friend with a smile is a type of charity, helping a person to load his animal is a charity, and putting some water in your neighbor's bucket is a charity"
 - Useful social activities are also considered as acts of *'ibādah*. The Qur'an and the Sunnah have plenty of references to the fact all social useful activities are *'ibādah*. Among those are: solving dispute between people, visiting the sick, removing obstacles (like rocks, fallen trees, thorns, banana peels) off the road, supporting the oppressed, having justice between two people, helping people in their needs, the good word, even treating the animals kindly, and all things of this nature.

The Prophet (saas) was asked about a woman who were very much known for her much prayers, fasting and charity except that he used to pain her neighbors. The Prophet (saas) said: 'She is in the Hellfire'. Now he was asked about another woman who was not known for her much prayers, fasting and charity (but would do all in less quantity) except that she would not disturb her neighbors. The Prophet remarked, 'She is in the Paradise'.²⁴

- Performing one's duties is also an act of worship. The Prophet told us that whatever one spends for his family will be counted as an act of worship for which he will be rewarded, provided that he has acquired it through Islamically acceptable means. Kindness to family members, no matter how small, is also viewed as acts of worship. The Prophet (saas) visited Sad Ibn Abi Waqqas before his death and said to him:
- Even activities that we enjoy very much, such as sexual relations with one's spouse, are considered acts of worship as long as they are performed in accordance with the relevant Qur'anic and prophetic guidelines. For example, the Prophet once told his Companions that they would be rewarded even for engaging in sex with their wives. They were astonished and asked:

"Are we to be rewarded for doing something that we enjoy very much?" The Prophet replied: "If you satisfy your desires illegally will you be punished?" They replied, "Yes." "So," he said, "by satisfying it legally with your wives you will be rewarded."

It is clear from the previous discussion that the concept of worship in Islam is a comprehensive concept that includes all of the positive activities engaged in by an individual. This is in agreement with the all-inclusive nature of Islam, which regulates life on the individual, social, economic, political, spiritual, and all other levels of one's life. This minute attention to one's activities is the reason why the Qur'an and the example and sayings of the Prophet deal with all aspects of an individual's and a society's life. As following these guidelines is an act of obedience to Allah, He considers them as acts of worship. This very positive attitude encourages individuals to follow the relevant guidelines and thus to bring about personal and social

transformation. It also causes an individual to internalize the guidelines, for even if no one is watching him, he knows that Allah is watching him.

But something will be considered to be an act of *'ibādah* when that will fulfill a few conditions:

- 1) It is done with utmost sincerity and devotion and with complete and absolute form. Allah said:

So whoever hopes for the meeting with His Lord let him work deeds of righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of His Lord.} [18:110]

The Prophet (saas) said "Indeed Allah does not look at your faces nor your wealth but He looks at your hearts and your actions." [Muslim]

Also there is the Hadīth Qudsī where the Prophet (saas) said that Allah said "I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having partners. Thus, whoever does an action for someone else's sake as well as Mine, will have that action rejected by Me to him whom he associated with Me" [Muslim].

Thus as Allah is the ultimate source of everything, He should be accepted as the Lawgiver. Only His law will prevail and laws should be legislated in line with this spirit. The otherwise is tantamount to shirk. Allah says in sūrah Al-Tawbah, verse (31), "They took their priests and their monks as their gods instead of Allah and also the Jesus, the son of Mariam. And they have not been ordered but to worship the one God. There is no god except Him. Glorious and high is He above what they associate with Him."

Adī Bin Hātim, who had been a Christian before accepting Islam, once came to the Prophet (saas). When he heard him reciting the above ayah he said, "O Messenger of Allah, but they do not worship them." The Prophet (saas) replied, Yes, but they prohibit to the people what is halal and permit them what is haram, and the people obey them. This is indeed their worship of them.

- 2) Another vital condition of worship is that it is correct and therefore acceptable to Allah. Our *'ibādah* of Allah should be as He and His Messenger (saws) have commanded us. Allah says

O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and do not let your actions become nullified.} [47:33]

The Prophet (saas) has said "Whoever does an action which we have not commanded will have it rejected." [Muslim] and he (saws) also said "Whoever does an action in a way different from ours will have it rejected" [Abu Dāwūd - Sahīh].

Fudayl ibn Ayyaad, a taabi'ee, said regarding the verse {...that He may test you, which of you is best in deeds...} [11:7], "The most sincere and the most correct" so those who were around him said "And what is the most sincere and the most correct?" He replied "Action, if it is correct but not sincere will not be accepted and action, if it is sincere but not correct will not be accepted until it is both sincere and correct. Sincere means that nothing but the Face of Allaah is sought and correct means that it is in conformity with the Sunnah."

- 3) When anything will be done in a moderate and balanced way, not committing any excess or extremism. This is why the Prophet (saas) asked Abdullah Ibn 'Amr Ibn Al-'Ās, when he was reported that Abdullah stands the whole night in night-vigil prayer and fasts the whole day, to:

*Your Lord has a right upon you, your self has a right upon you, and your wife has a right upon you. So give and fulfill to every owner the share of their rights.*²⁵

*On another occasion, as Anas Ibn Malik reported, "A group of three men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet (saas) asking how the Prophet (saas) worshipped Allah, and when they were informed about that, they considered their worship insufficient and said, "Where are we from the Prophet (saas) as his past and future sins have been forgiven." Then one of them said, "I will perform Prayer throughout the night forever." The other said, 'I. will fast throughout the year.' The third said, "I will keep away from women and will not marry forever." Allah's Apostle (saas) came to them and said, "Are you the same people who said so and so? By Allah, I fear Allah and I am conscious of Him better than you; yet I fast and break my fast, I perform Prayer and sleep, and I (also) marry women. So he who does not follow my Sunnah (tradition) is not from me (i.e. not one of my followers)."*²⁶

*"The Prophet (saas) declared Salman and Abu Darda' brothers. One day, Salman visited Abu Darda'. He found his wife wearing shabby clothes. He asked her, "What is the matter with you Umm Darda'?" She said, "Your brother, Abu Darda' stands in prayer all the night and fasts all the day. He no longer wants anything from this worldly life. Then Abu Darda' came back greeted him and had some food prepared for him. Salman said, "You have to eat with me" Abu Darda' said, "I am fasting." But Salman swore an oath that he must eat with him" Accordingly, they ate together. At night, Abu Darda' wanted to spend the night in prayer but Salman asked him not to do (in that night). Then, he said, "Your body has a right over you and your wife has a right over you. Observe the fast sometimes and also leave it (the fast) at other times; stand up for the prayer at night and also approach your wife at another night. Thus you have to give every thing its right. In the morning Abu Darda' told the Prophet (pbuh) what Salman had done with him. The Prophet (saas), repeating Salman statement, said, "Abu Darda'! Your body has a right over you..."*²⁷

- 4) Worshipping Allah by combining Love, Fear and Hope in all of our actions. 'Ibādah centers around three pillars; love, fear and hope. Verily, 'ibādah comprises of all these; love with humbleness, fear with hope. Allah says describing His believing slaves, 'whom He will love and they will love Him.' [Sūrah al-Maida (5):54] and, 'But those who believe, love Allah more (than anything else).' [Sūrah al-Baqarah (2):165] He said describing His Messengers and Prophets, 'Verily, they used to hasten on to do good deeds, and they used to call on Us with hope and fear, and used to humble themselves before Us.' [Sūrah al-Ambiya (21): 90]

Some of the Salaf have said, 'He, who worships Allah with love alone is a Zindeeq (heretic). He, who worships Allah with hope alone, is a Murjee, and he, who worships Him with fear alone, is a Hurooree (meaning from the Khawarij). He, who worships Allah with love, fear and hope, is a Mumin Muwahhid. Shaikhul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah has mentioned this in his essay, 'al-Ubodiyah,' and he also said, 'Thus, the Deen of Allah is worship, obedience and submission to Him. As for Ibadah, its original meaning also denotes lowliness and submission. One says, 'a pathway that is mu'abbad,' i.e. it has become smoothed out because of being treaded upon. However, the Ibadah that has been enjoined (upon us) encompasses the meaning of submission along with the meaning of love. It embodies the utmost degree of submission to Allah through utmost degree of love to Him One who submits to a person whilst possessing hatred for him is not an aabid (worshipper) of him and if he was to love someone and at the same time does not submit to him, he is likewise not an aabid of him, as is the case of a man who loves his child and friend. Consequently, only one of the two (qualities) is not sufficient as far as the Ibadah of Allah is concerned. Rather, it is necessary

that Allah be the most beloved above all else to the abd (the slave) and that he holds Allah to be the greatest of all. Indeed, none other than Allah deserves total love and submission.' [end quote] [See, Majmoo at-Tawheed an-Najdiyah, p.549]

- 5) Another characteristic of our '*ibādah*' is being aware of the presence of Allah, that His knowledge is with us and He sees and hears us. This fifth point is *Ihsān*. Allah says {The One Who sees you when you stand up for the prayer and when you move amongst those who prostrate themselves} [26:218] and also in the *ḥadīth* of Jibrīl when he said to the Messenger (saws) "*Ihsān* is that you worship Allah as if you see Him and while you see Him not yet truly He sees you" [Muslim].

¹ Al-Qur'an, 51: 56

² Ismā'īl Rājī al- Farūqī, *Al Tawhīd: Its Implication in Thought and Life*, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 4th ed. 1999, pp. 65-66

³ Al-Qur'an, 6: 162

⁴ J. M. Cowan, *The Webr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, (Spoken Language Series Inc.), New York, 3rd ed., 1976, p. 586

⁵ Syed Abul-A'la Maudūdī, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*, Islamic Publications (Pvt.) Limited Lahore (Pakistan)

⁶ Syed Abul-A'la Maudūdī, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*,

⁷ Al-Qur'an, 23: 45-47

⁸ Al-Qur'an, 26: 18-23

⁹ Syed Abul-A'la Maudūdī, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*,

¹⁰ See: Al-Qur'an, 2: 172; 5:60; 16:36; 39:17

¹¹ See: Al-Qur'an, 36: 60; 37:22,23,27-30; 9:31

¹² Syed Abul-A'la Maudūdī, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*,

¹³ See: Al-Qur'an, 40:66; 19:48-49; 46:5-6; 34:41; 72:6; 25:17-18; 34:40,41; 10:18; 39:3

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¹⁶ , *Islam at a glance*, pp. 217-218

¹⁷ WAMY series on Islam, no. 8, See: http://www.sultan.org/books/the_concept_of_worship_in_Islam.pdf

¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Ubūdiyyah*, p. 38

¹⁹ Syed Abul-A'la Maudūdī, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*,

²⁰ See: Al-Qur'an, 20:14; 6:102; 10:104; 12:40; 11:123; 19:64-65; 18: 110

²¹ Syed Abul-A'la Maudūdī, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*,

²² Al-Qur'an, 2:177

²³ Dr. Jamal Badawi, *Islamic Teaching Course*, Islamia School Trust, UK. vol. 1, pp. 14

²⁴ Imam Ahmad, *Musnad*,

²⁵ Imam al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh*,

²⁶ Imam al-Bukhārī and Muslim, *Sahīh*,

²⁷ Imam al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī and Sunan al- Tirmidhī*,