

**AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF
ISLAMIC WORSHIP**
**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO PRAYER AND FASTING**

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Preface

I HAVE ALREADY shone light on the subject, which is discussed in this tract, in my previous sermons. Back then my audience was general public who couldn't grasp the deeper meanings and hence I had to limit my talks to quite simple explanations. Later I saw the need to write a separate treatise on this very subject for the educated and the intelligentsia so that more profound meanings could be presented to them in relation to the concept of worship. Although, there is scope for fair amount of adjunct and all the realities hidden in the concept of worship are not covered in this paper, I am hopeful that whatever is presented will be enough for intellectual satisfaction of most of the intelligentsia. For now, only two articles on Prayer and Fasting are being published. Articles on Zakath (Obligatory Charity) and Hajj (Great Pilgrimage) are still due to be penned down. But free time is awaited for that. And friends and loved ones have been demanding not to halt publishing what has already been written awaiting what must be written. Therefore these pages are being presented to the readers as first part of this tractus.

Abul A'ala

THE REALITY OF WORSHIP

According to the Qur'an, worship is that actual purpose for which human beings were created in the first place:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

I created the jinn and humans for nothing else but that they may worship Me (51:56)

The purpose for which the prophets of God (peace be on them all) were sent in the world was nothing else but that they invite human beings to God's worship:

أَن آغْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ

We raised a Messenger in every community (to tell them): "Worship God and shun the Evil One." (16:36)

Therefore it is absolutely important for us to know what is meant by worship and the true spirit of the rites and rituals obligated to us by Islam. If we do not learn these things then we will fail to achieve the purpose for which we were created.

Pre-Islamic Dark Age Concept of Worship

Worship in Islam does not mean only 'devotion' but obedience too. To consider worship only in the sense of devotion is actually a pre-Islamic Dark Age thinking. Pre-Islamic people in the Dark Age used to assume their deities to be human-like. They used to believe that just as an important person, a leader or a king, is pleased by sycophancy, acts gracious because of offerings made to him, can easily be persuaded

merely by standing before him with hands folded and heads bowed in humiliation and helplessness and hence can be exploited just like that, in the same way their gods too would likely demand flattery, gifts, offerings and demonstrations of helplessness to them. Only through such tricks and gimmicks these gods can be made gracious towards them and exploited through appeasement. Based on this concept, pre-Islamic Dark Age religions used to deem the performance of few specific rites and rituals as worship.

Hermitic Concept of Worship

Likewise, the meaning of worship in Islam is not even that man is supposed to ardently seek God by renouncing worldly life, cultivate his inner powers through meditation, self-annihilation and spiritual exercises, create powers of performing miracles, relieve himself of the responsibilities of worldly life and finally achieve salvation in the afterlife. Such a concept is found in those religions that are based on monasticism which regard the world a prison for man and the physical body a cage for his soul; to whom worldliness and godliness are diagonally opposed to each other; which seek the way to salvation outside worldly life, its responsibilities and relationships and to whom material decline or dissociation with all things material is obligatory.

Islamic Concept of Worship

Islam's concept is totally different from these two. In Islam's view, man is the slave of one God only- his Creator, Sustainer and Sovereign is God Almighty alone. God had anointed him as his vicegerent on earth. Gave him some powers. Charged him with some

obligations and duties. Granted him authority over a part of His Kingdom and subjects. His job is to fulfil the purpose his Master gave him, execute the tasks given to him and exercise his authority and power according to the law and pleasure of the Real Sovereign. The more he exerts himself, with ever greater zeal, in discharging his duties and the related services, in his earthly life and the more he follows his Master's Law, with loyalty and obedience, in exercising his authority, the more successful he will be. His upcoming success is dependent on the fact that at the end of the term of his anointment, when he presents himself before his Lord, for accountability, it should be proved from his life's record on earth that he was a dutiful and obedient slave and not someone who was lazy, irresponsible and disobedient.

From this point of view, those two concepts of worship which were mentioned in the beginning are wrong and totally wrong. A person who sets aside some amount of time for devotional worship to God, thinks, that by performing few specific rituals, he has rendered the rights of God and is now free to do whatever he likes in his life, is like a servant whom you have hired on a full-time basis and are supporting him by giving him full salary, but all he does is saluting and bowing to you night and day and thereafter goes about horsing around with no holds barred, or serves whoever he wants. In the same way, the likeness of the person who renounces the world and its affairs, shuts himself in some corner and spends all of his time in praying and counting the beads on the rosary is that of a gardener you hired to take care of your garden. But instead of tending to your garden, he stands devoutly before you with his hands folded,

chanting 'My Lord! My Lord!' from morning to evening and then evening to morning and just keeps parroting the instructions you gave him regarding gardening slowly and melodiously instead of taking care of the garden as per the instructions. Whatever opinion you have about such servants, Islam has the same opinion regarding such worshippers too and whatever action you take against such servants, God too takes the same action against the people who worship under the influence of such wrong concepts.

Islam's concept of worship is that your entire life should be spent in the service of God. You should consider yourself to be a permanent and whole-time servant. Not a single moment of your life should be free from worshipping God. Whatever you do in this world should be in accordance with God's Law. Everything you do- sleeping and waking up, eating and drinking, walking and talking- should be guided by the Moral Law of God¹. You should bind yourself in

¹ In the current times, a certain gentleman has caused great disruption by ignoring the distinction between Moral Law and Physical Law. In his view, following the Physical Law is worship to God, regardless of whether it is done according to the Moral Law or not. On this basis, they regard even those to be worshippers of God, His vicegerents and pious believers who organize society and supply it power by their scientific inventions in accordance with the Physical Law even if God's Moral Law is ignored in utilizing this power. This is a grave mistake which turned 'kufr' (denial of God) into Islam (submission to God), rebellion into worship, disobedience into obedience and distorted the true spirit of Islam's mission. This gentleman doesn't even know that the basic purpose of the advent of Islam is to educate humanity in exploiting the Physical Law of God in accordance with His Moral Law. If man was only meant to live according to the Physical Law, then there wasn't any need to raise any prophet or send any Book for his education. His mere animal instincts would have been enough for this purpose. If man's only job is to function as per the Physical Law alone, then there won't be any difference between him and an animal. Just as a wolf mangles a sheep, which is but Physical Law for it, so is it for a

relations which God wants you to be in and either end them or mend them in ways shown to you by God. You should carry the burden of some of the tasks entrusted to you by God and the responsibilities relating to you in this worldly life, with total willingness and discharge them in ways to which God has guided you through His Messengers. You should always be cognizant of your responsibility of standing before God, in everything you do and at every moment, with full realization that you have to render account of each and every thing you do. Whether you are at home with wife and kids or talking to your neighbour or with friends and colleagues in society or doing your business with your partners and clients, always be conscious of the limits set by God. Even in the darkness of the night where you can break God's Law without being seen by anyone, you should be aware that God is watching you. Even when you are in a forested area, where you know fully well that there is no possibility of anyone catching you or witnessing the crime you are about to commit, you should fear God and refrain from doing it. Even when you could make a lot of profit through lying, dishonesty and wrongdoing and there is no one to stop you, you should be afraid of God and forsake the ill-gotten profit because God is displeased with it. And when loss is caused to you in being truthful and honest, even then you should

man who is more powerful than his fellow man to mangle him. If a nation could make more bombs and bombers and enslave another nation through this power, then this too is but Physical Law for it. This ideology lowers human beings from the position of humanity to the level of beasts and wild animals. And Islam is miles away from pronouncing man's beastliness worship of God.

accept to bear it just because God will be pleased with it.

Hence, renouncing the world, shutting oneself in remote corners and chanting God's name is not worship, rather following God's Law by entangling oneself in worldly affairs and shouldering all the responsibilities is worship. Remembrance of God is to get yourself embroiled in things that distract you from God and yet remember Him. Remember God and firmly hold on to His Law when life of this world gives you innumerable chances to break it, throws temptations of making big profit or fears of huge loss at you. Come to power, form a government but remember that you are not god over His slaves but you yourself are a slave of God. Assume the office of Chief Justice and despite having the power of wrongdoing, bear in mind that you are appointed to serve justice. Be a treasurer and dispenser of earth's wealth but remember that you are not its owner but a trustee and have to render account of each and every penny to the Real Owner. Be a commander of the army but let fear of God protect you from getting drunk with power. Take up the tough job of politics and governance in your hands and then show the world how it is done by following the principles of truthfulness, justice and righteousness. Take the reins of trade, finance and industry in your hands but conduct your business by making a distinction between the pure and impure in the ways to the growth of your business. The unlawful will come in your way at every step, in thousands of attractive forms and yet it should not make you stumble. The paths to lies, deception, fraudulence and illicit sex lay open before you in every direction and you see worldly success and materialistic pleasures

standing at every corner wearing dazzling crown, but the fear of God and accountability to Him become chains in your leg. You may find thousands of problems in enforcing even a single punishment from the punishments ordained by God, wastage of life and property in firmly holding on to justice and truth and following God's Law would seem synonymous with making the heaven and earth your enemies and yet your determination stays unshaken. This is real worship. This is what is called 'Remembrance of God' to which the Qur'an has pointed out thus:

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَانْتَشِرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَابْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَاذْكُرُوا
اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

But when the Prayer is ended, disperse in the land and seek God's Bounty, and remember God much so that you may prosper. (62:10)

Spiritual Development and the Path to Seek God

Islam has shown this very path to seek God and spiritual development. Man cannot find God in forests and mountains or remote corners of seclusion. He will find God in the midst of the tumultuous battle of the worldly lives of human beings. And he will find Him so close as though he is seeing Him with his own eyes. He will come across the benefits of unlawful things, have the chances of wrongdoings and find the roads to illicit sex at every step of his way but he would walk away from all these things out of the fear of God. He has gained access to God! He found God at every step of his way rather saw Him with his eyes. And had he not found and seen Him then how and why would he be able to traverse this difficult valley, safely?! The one who did everything- in the market, at home, during

But this doesn't mean it is the only worship rather these rituals prepare the person for the real worship. They act as the requisite training for it. These rituals prepare that specific mindset, fashion that particular character, mold that disciplined habits and mature traits and lay down the foundation of that social system without which human life cannot be turned into God's worship. Except for these four ingredients, there is just no other way by which this purpose could be achieved. On this very basis, they are declared as the 'Pillars of Islam' i.e. these are the pillars upon which the edifice of Islamic life is erected and sustained.¹

¹ The same gentleman whom we have referred to in the earlier footnote, has clearly denied the testimony of faith and the four rituals as the pillars of Islam and in their stead has composed, on his own, a list of ten rituals as the pillars of Islam. This person is ignorant of his own ignorance. He is neither acquainted with Islam nor knows the meaning of the word pillar. He is neither aware of in what capacity these five things are declared to be the pillars of Islam nor could he understand that if these five things were not to exist at all then there won't be anything called Islam. And the irony is that this gentleman does not regard the five things declared by the Messenger of God (peace be on him) as the pillars of Islam to be the pillars of Islam and instead considers the things which he himself has drawn up to be the pillars of Islam. Which means that, to this mister, Islam is not what the Messenger of God presented but something concocted by this wrangler of Cambridge. On one hand there is high-handedness of this reverend and on the other hand lack of knowledge and materialism have led to a situation where people hold an organization under the leadership of such a person to be an Islamic organization and his leadership an Islamic leadership! As though there is no need to look at the beliefs, religious knowledge and character of such a leader. Mere organization and leadership are purposes in themselves whether it is under Umar ibn Al Khattab or Hitler or Mussolini. God save us! How extreme have today's evils gone!

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THE STATUS OF RITES AND RITUALS IN ISLAM

This is the gist of the Islamic concept of worship. Islam wants to turn man's entire worldly life into worship. It demands that not a single moment of human life be free from God's worship. It becomes incumbent with the testimony of لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ (There is no god but God) that man should become the slave of God whom he has accepted as his object of worship. And becoming and staying God's slave itself is worship. But it is easier said than done. Practically turning the entirety of a human being's life, with all its aspects, into worship is not as simple as it sounds. It requires extraordinary training. It specifically requires the training of the mind, building of a strong character, molding of habits and traits in a special shape. And it should not be limited to the preparation of individual characters alone but rather a social system be created which can prepare individuals for this worship on a large scale wherein the power of society backs the individual, shores him up, rectifies his weaknesses. This is the reason for which Islam has made rituals like Prayer, Fasting, Zakath and Hajj obligatory.

humanity. The more man makes progress towards attaining perfection in his humanity by breaking away from the bondage of his animal desires and makes successful endeavour to achieve the highest goal of God's pleasure by decorating himself with morality and human qualities the more he would be spiritually developed.

recreation and in the hustle and bustle of business-with the sense that God is not far away from him, has found God and very close at that. Who could be more strong and faithful than the one who performed the faith-shaking tasks of politics, governance, wars, peace, finance, trade and industry and yet remained steadfast within the limits set by God by avoiding the satanic ways of success?! Who could be more knowledgeable and cognizant of God than him? If he is not a saint and the one close to God then who is?

From Islamic viewpoint, this is the only way for the growth of man's spiritual powers. Spiritual development does not mean that you increase your willpower by doing exercises like a wrestler and thereby make demonstrations of miracles. On the contrary, spiritual development stands for control over desires, proper utilization of the powers of body and mind and exertion to be as close to the divine morality as possible. If you could tread the path in your worldly life, which is riddled with temptations at every step, keeping away from satanic and beastly ways and remain steadfast on it with total realization and correct discernment in a way which behoves the status of man, then you will certainly make immense progress in your humanity on a daily basis and get closer to God with every passing day. And spiritual development doesn't mean except for this.¹

¹ Many people use the word 'spiritual development' but themselves do not know what it actually means. Hence, they spend their entire lives in search of a useless thing and involve themselves in a wild goose chase. And despite all this hard work, still cannot figure out where they were supposed to reach and where they have ended up, although reflecting over the word 'spirituality' itself will make the matter clear. Obviously, the word spirit in the word spirituality refers to human spirit and not some other spirit. Therefore, spirituality is just another name for

standing at every corner wearing dazzling crown, but the fear of God and accountability to Him become chains in your leg. You may find thousands of problems in enforcing even a single punishment from the punishments ordained by God, wastage of life and property in firmly holding on to justice and truth and following God's Law would seem synonymous with making the heaven and earth your enemies and yet your determination stays unshaken. This is real worship. This is what is called 'Remembrance of God' — to which the Qur'an has pointed out thus:

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PRAAYER

Reminder

The first and foremost thing needed to turn man's life into worship is constant refreshment, reinvigoration and reactivation of the realization that he is a slave of God and that he is supposed to do everything in the capacity of a slave. The reason why such a persuasion is needed is because the God whose slave he is, is out of his sight and beyond the ken of his perceptions. But in contrast to this, there is a demon inside of his self who constantly tells him that he is his (i.e. demon's) slave. And millions of such demons are spread out in the world, each one claiming that man is his slave. These demons are felt and seen by man and they demonstrate to him their powers in ever new ways. Because of this dual reason, man's realization that he is a slave of God and has to render his servitude to none but Him, gets lost. The formula of making mere verbal confession of God's divinity is not enough to keep this realization alive and effective or even as an intellectual formula, but rather it is absolutely imperative to refresh it repeatedly. This is what prayer does. This is what prayer reminds you first thing in the morning. When you are busy in the hustle and bustle of your work, it pulls you away twice from your business for a little while, to brighten up the realization of servitude, if it had gone dim. At late afternoon, which is a time for recreation, it once again notifies you that you are a slave of God and not that demon

which lived inside of you. And finally, at night, a time for which both the inner and the outer demons have been waiting all day to paint it dark with sins, prayer once again comes face to face with you forewarning you of not to be a slave of these demons but of God alone.

This is the first merit of prayer. On this basis, it has been described as the 'Reminder' in the Qur'an. If there wasn't anything in prayer other than this, even then this quality alone would be enough to make it the pillar of Islam because the more one reflects over the importance of its merit, the more it gets certain that being a slave of God is practically impossible without this reminder.

Sense of Duty

Since you have to follow God's commandments every step of your way and discharge the duties you have been commissioned to do, being mindful of the limits set by Him, it is but necessary that sense of duty be inculcated in you. Doing your duty with alacrity and obedience should become your second nature. The one who doesn't even know what the hell duty is and what its significance is, obviously could never be up to the task. Similarly, a person who knows the meaning of duty but has been trained in such a bad way that despite knowing it, he doesn't care to do it, can neither be trusted nor is suitable for any active service. Hence, it is absolutely crucial to arrange for the training of people appointed to responsible service, in dutifulness and obedience. Its advantage is not only the sustained preparation of useful people but also the differentiation between useful and useless people on a daily basis. It gets clearer every day, who the trustworthy are and

who not, of the many hopefuls. For all active services, it is critical to have mandatory practical test for the evaluation of people so that the untrustworthy ones do not remain in the service.

Look at the army. In how many different ways it makes its cadets work out to make them understand their duties and discharge them. At many different hours in the night, a bugle is sounded. Soldiers are ordered to assemble. Made to do the drill. All this for what? Its first objective is to instill in the soldiers, the habit of obeying orders. To create a sense of duty in them. To cultivate the habit of working for one system and training. Its second objective is to test the soldiers on a daily basis. It is tested every day, who the useful ones are and who are the useless ones who have joined the army. Those who neither get up at the sound of the bugle nor do the drills as told, will get kicked out because they cannot be trusted as they will not answer the call of duty when the occasion presents itself.

This is the care taken for worldly armies for whom the time for action comes in years, that they are tried and tested every day. But for the army which Islam wants to raise, every time is time for action. It is on duty, every time. For it, the battlefield is always hot. It has to discharge its duties at every moment in life. It has to serve. Fight the evil forces. Be mindful of not overstepping the limits set by God and enforce the Divine Decrees. Islam is not just a doctrine but a practical service too- a service from which there is no leave, holiday or respite. Round the clock, 24/7, it is pure service. Now keep the example of the army in mind and think what kind of strict discipline, extraordinary training and tough tests are required for such a hard and practical service?! Why would mere

verbal testimony to its belief be enough that a person be kept in its army who has to perform such an important service?! After the announcement, it is imperative to strap him in the grips of discipline. Only by going through this discipline could he be of any help to Islam. If he is not ready to live through this discipline, answer the call of duty and obey the orders, then he is absolutely useless to Islam. God and His religion have utterly no need for such useless people.

It is for this dual purpose for which prayer is made obligatory for five times a day from morning to night. It blows its bugle five times every day so that the soldiers of God could hearken and answer to its sound from everywhere and prove that they recognize their duties, are loyal to God and ready to obey His commandments with acknowledgment of His Supreme Authority. By this method, soldiers get trained on one hand and on the other hand the difference between a believer and a hypocrite ever comes out into the open. Sense of duty, readiness, discipline and obedience develop in those people who answer to this call with punctuality and perform the movements according to the rules. In sharp contrast to this, those people who don't even move from their place after hearing the call, prove by their inaction that either they don't recognize their duty or even if they do are not yet ready to discharge it or they just do not acknowledge the Authority itself Who has instituted it a duty or they are so deficient in their understandings that they are not prepared to obey the first and most important commandment of the One Whom they consider their God and Lord.

Even if they do have faith, they are not true to their conviction. They do not even have the courtesy

and the quality to be ready to take troubles to practice what they preach. In the first case, they are not Muslims. And in the second case they are so useless and unfit to stay in the Islamic community.

Based on this, the Qur'an has said relating to prayer:

إِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Truly Prayer is burdensome for all except the devout

(2:45)

Prayer truly is burdensome but only to those who are not ready to obey and serve Him with fear. In other words, the one who finds prayer burdensome, himself proves that he is not ready for obedience and service to God. It is mentioned, on this basis, in the Qur'an:

فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَالْحَوَانُكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ

But if they repent and establish Prayer and give Zakah they are your brothers in faith.

(9:11)

Which means that without prayer, one cannot be a part of Islam's religious community. On this basis, the Qur'an describes itself as:

هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ

يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٠١﴾

it is a guidance for the pious for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond the reach of perception, who establish Prayer and spend out of what We have provided them.

(2:2-3)

Based on this, the hypocrites have been declared thus:

وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كَسَالٍ

When they rise to Prayer, they rise reluctantly (4:142)

That is, whenever they rise up for prayer, they do so begrudgingly as though it will kill them.

And:

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ ﴿٥﴾

but are heedless in their Prayers (107:5)

Making a reference to this, it is mentioned in the hadith:

بين العبد وبين الكفر ترك الصلاة

The difference between a believer slave and 'Kufr' (Denial of God) is the abandoning of Prayer.

Prayer is that bridge by burning which man goes from faith to denial.

On this basis, the Mercy unto all the worlds, Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) remarked:

"I wish to put the houses of those people on fire who would not leave their houses even after hearing the Azaan (call to Prayer)."

The Messenger of God said, on this very basis:

العهد بيننا وبينهم الصلاة فمن تركها فقد كفر

The basis of our treaty with the Bedouins of Arabs is Prayer. If the Prayer is abandoned then he will be a Kafir (Denier of God) and the treaty will be broken.

Today, the result of this unfamiliarity with religion is that even those who neither pray, nor budge from their place upon hearing the Azaan or even realize who the Muezzin (Caller to Prayer) is calling and for what, are considered Muslims. And it is being commonly assumed now that Prayer is not particularly important in Islam; one can be a Muslim even without it, in fact is a Muslim and on top of that can be the leader of the community too!

Islam was alive as a movement and back then the situation wasn't as what it is today. It is mentioned in an authentic narration:

It was agreed upon by the companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) that of all the deeds in Islam, the only one, whose abandoning is considered kufr (denial of God) is prayer.

Building of Character

The third important thing prayer does is that it molds the human character in such a special form which is absolutely needed to lead an Islamic life or to put it in another way, turn life into worship of God. You see it everywhere in the world, that commensurate with the kind of task a group has to do and the kind of objectives it has to achieve, a system of training is devised. For example, the purpose of civil service of the empires is to administer its affairs with loyalty and that's why the entire emphasis in the training for civil service is laid on the loyalty to the reigning government and enhancing the efficiency of its administration. No question of piety and purity there. No matter how dirty one's private life is, he can still join the civil service and get promoted too. Because being righteous, following the principles of truth and doing politics on the basis of morality is not what the government is interested in. Similarly, the purpose of organizing armies is to regularly upgrade their warfare capabilities.

Therefore, the soldiers are trained purely from the point of view of killing. They are made to do parades so that they could function in an organized way. They are taught the use of weapons so that they can become experts at the art of bloodshed. They are acclimatized

to obedience so that the government can make use of them whenever it wants and for whatever objective it has. Since there is no objective in mind other than this, the question of producing piety in the soldiers doesn't even arise in anyone's mind. If the army is disciplined then this is enough for the objective of the government without it getting least bothered about the army's moral condition even if the soldiers happen to be adulterers, drunkards, liars, dishonest and oppressors.

In marked contrast to this, Islam wants to create a society whose first and foremost objective is to enforce virtues and eradicate evils; which has to follow the permanent principles of morality in politics, trade & industry, law & justice, war & peace, international relations, in short in every department of civilization it has to enforce God's law on earth for which it prepares its clerks, soldiers and officers under another training system so that it creates that specific character which is suitable for this special kind of service. The foundation of this character rests on Islam's doctrines. Fear and love of God, making the seeking of His pleasure one's mission in life, acknowledging Him to be the Real Sovereign, holding oneself accountable to Him – these are the doctrines on which the Islamic character is built. A Muslim cannot take even a single step on the Islamic path unless he has the full conviction that he is being watched by God every time, everywhere and in every situation, that God is aware of every move he makes, sees him in the dark too, is with him when he is alone, knows even his intentions hidden in his heart, isn't unaware of the thoughts and decisions brewing in his mind. It is possible to hide from the world but not from God. A man can escape all the punishment of the world but not God's. A virtue can go waste in the

world or can get paid in the form of vice but this is impossible for it to happen when it comes to God. The bounties of the world are limited but God's bounties have no limits on them. The profit and loss of the world is ephemeral and flimsy but the profit and loss with God is permanent and everlasting. This very conviction prepares man to obey God's commandments and His law. On the strength of this belief he gets ready to differentiate between the lawful and unlawful which God has ordained in everything in life. This very thing prevents him from slavery to his desires, profiteering, greed for pleasures and highly profitable yet immoral ways. This creed alone has the power to make man stay on the straight path of justice, truthfulness, high moral values and recognizing and following the truth. This faith alone can exhort him to rise up for the toughest task of reforming the world, a task whose difficulties and responsibilities a non-believer cannot bear to even imagine. Prayer is what refreshes these concepts again and again, and firmly welds them in the mind. If you pay close attention you will know that the process of the building of Islamic character begins with the intention of offering prayer and then each and every word or statement related to prayer is placed in a way by which a man's character molds itself into the desired form automatically.

When you make the intention to pray, the first you do is to check yourself whether you are clean or not. Is there any dirt on your clothes? Have you done your 'Wudhu' (ablution). Now think why do you get these thoughts when you can stand up to pray with impurity on your body or dirt on your clothes with nobody to catch you? Who could know about your situation? Then why won't you go through with it? The answer is

because you have to stand accountable to God for this deed on the Day of Judgement. This very thing makes you meet all the requirements of ritual purification and ablution which are mandatory for prayer. And there is no power on earth which can make you do it.

After this, you start your prayer. Here, all your efforts are focused on reciting the verses of the Qur'an or the supplications or glorifying God in the ordained way only, be it in standing, sitting, bowing or prostrating positions. But why do you do it in the way you are told to do? All these things are done slowly and steadily. But if you were not to recite them or recite something else or admix with them some nonsense of your own, then no one would know anything about it. Then tell me, whose fear, whose knowing of the secret and a belief in whose punishment is forcing you to perform the prayer correctly?

You came across the schedule of the prayer in various situations. Sometimes, you find yourself in a forest. Sometimes in the dark of the night. All other times you are alone in your home. Sometimes you are busy in your favourite pastimes. And sometimes you are absorbed in your work. Sometimes the severity of the cold would not even allow you to take your scarf off and at other times the scorching heat of the sun seems ready to roast you. In short, you go through such different situations quite regularly. In all these situations, what is that force which pulls you to offer prayer? If it isn't faith in God, the conviction of Him being the All-Hearing and the All-knowing, the fear of His displeasure and the desire to earn His approval then what is? It isn't necessary that you have these concepts fresh in your conscious mind all the time. A

character is built from the concepts which are embedded in the subconscious. The concept that dives into the deep recesses of the mind and gets ensconced there is in reality the most solid concept which is the root cause of the regular production of characteristic traits.

Now take a look at those things which are recited in the prayer. Each and everything of them are filled to the brim, from first to last, with the fundamental concepts of Islam and its spirit. Reciting these topics again and again keeps all these articles of the faith fresh in the mind and impressed on the memory, on the foundation of which rests the edifice of Islamic character.

First and foremost, let's look at Azaan (call to prayer). In what words, you are informed of the time for prayer, five times of each and everyday:

الله أكبر الله أكبر

God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest

أشهد ان لا اله الا الله

I bear witness that there is no god but God

أشهد ان محمدا رسول الله

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God

حي على الصلاة

Come to Prayer

حي على الفلاح

Come to Success

الله أكبر الله أكبر

God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest

لا إله إلا الله

There is no god but God

What an amazing call this is! Every day for five times of the day, this call reminds you that all those walking on earth, claiming to be gods are liars. There is only One in the heaven and earth who is worthy of greatness and hence deserves to be worshiped. Come and worship Him. In His worship alone lies your well-being both in this world and the hereafter. Who wouldn't get shaken up by this call? How is it even possible that one who has faith wouldn't budge from his place even after hearing such an extraordinary call and wouldn't run to take a bow before his Master even after listening to such a great testimony?!

After this, you stand up for the prayer. You are facing the 'Qibla' (the direction of the Ka'ba, in Makkah), standing in the presence of the King of the universe, with clean body in clean clothes. The first words that come out of your mouth are these:

إني وجهت وجهي للذي فطر السماوات والأرض حنيفاً و ما أنا من
المشركين

I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth and I am not of those who associate others with God.

After this forthright proclamation, you raised your hands up to your ears as though you are disavowing the world and all it contains*. Then you fold your hands by saying 'Allahu Akbar' (God is the Greatest)†.

*Raising up the hands is actually indicated of two things: surrender, by for shaking resistance or disavowal i.e.lifting hands Off of the things man was concerned with.

† Standing before someone with hands folded is an expression of extreme respect, reverence and slavish humility. That's why kings have made it a part of the royal Court etiquettes since antiquity. But Islam specifies it only for the Divine court.

Standing before your King in a courteous manner with folded hands. What would you implore after this:

سبحانك اللهم وبحمدك و تبارك إسمك و تعالي جددك و لا إله غيرك
Flawless are You O God All praise is to You! Your name is Blessed! Most High is Your Majesty! There is no god but You!*

أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم
I seek refuge in God from Satan, the Accursed!

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ①

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

أَتُحْمَدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ② الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ③ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ④ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ
 وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ⑤ أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ⑥ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ⑦
 غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ⑧

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds. The Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. Master of the Day of Recompense. You alone do we worship and You alone do we turn to for help. Guide us on to the Straight Way, the way of those whom You have favoured, who did not incur Your wrath, who are not astray

After this you recite some of the verses of the Quran. In each of which Islam's fundamental principles, its moral teachings and practical guidelines are mentioned and signposts of the straight path are shown the guidance of which you have just asked for. For instance:

وَالْعَصْرِ ① إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكْفُورٌ ② إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
 وَتَوَّصُوا بِالْحَقِّ ③ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالصَّبْرِ ④

*Flawless means that God is free from all kinds of defects, flaws, weaknesses and making mistakes and all praise is for God alone for he is the epitome of perfection and excellence.

By the time! Lo! Man is in a state of loss; save those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and counsel each other to hold on to truth and counsel each other to be steadfast

In these brief words, man has been told that he cannot escape from loss and failure unless he chooses to worship God and do good deeds. But personal piety isn't enough, rather your society too should be infused with the spirit of righteousness, which is critical for your success. Your own history is testifying to this truth. For example:

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالذِّينِ ۖ قَدْ لِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ ۖ وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى
طَعَامِ الْيَسْكِينِ ۖ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ ۖ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ ۖ
الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرْآءُونَ ۖ وَيَسْتَعُونَ الْيَهُودَ ۖ

Did you see him who gives the lie to the Reward and the Punishment of the Hereafter? Such is the one who repulse see the orphans away. And urges not the feeding of the needy Woe, then to those who pray. Those who do good (in order) to be seen. And deny people the articles of common necessity

In these short but effective statements, it is being instilled in the minds what impact belief in the hereafter has on man's moral life and how not believing in it deprives man's social attitude and individual behaviour of sincerity and compassion.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ ۖ الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ ۖ يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ ۖ
كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ ۖ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ ۖ نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُبْذَرَّةُ ۖ الَّذِينَ
تَقْلَعُ عَلَى الْأُفْدَةِ ۖ إِنَّمَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّؤَصَّدَةٌ ۖ فِي عَمَدٍ مُّمَدَّدَةٍ ۖ

Woe to every fault finding back biter. Who amasses wealth and counts it over again. He thinks that his

wealth will immortalize him forever. Nay, he shall be thrown into the Crusher. And what do you know what the Crusher is? It is the Fire kindled by God. The Fire that shall rise to the hearts (of criminals). Verily, it will close in upon them. In outstretched columns

These are just two to three samples from which it can be assessed why reciting some or the other portion of the Quran is made obligatory in the prayer. The aim is only remind man repeatedly every day at many times God's commandments, His instructions, and His teachings. This world, this vast field of action, in which man has been sent to work, can stay well, only when he is called away from work in little breaks so that the sections of the Law and the Guide Book according to which he has live, remain fresh in his mind.

After reciting these guidelines, you bow by saying 'AllahuAkbar' (God is the Greatest). By placing your hands on your knees and bending* over before your King, you repeat:

سبحان ربي العظيم

Flawless Is my Lord, the Magnificent

Then you straighten up and say:

سمع الله لمن حمده

God has listened to the one who praised Him

Then you say 'Allahu Akbar' (God is the Greatest) and fall down in prostration[†] and repeat:

*This bowing is a progression of that submission which was made at the start of the Prayer by raising hands.

† It is the completion of that surrender and submission which means that man has thrown his head, which is filled with ego, pride, vanity and narcissism down on the ground before his God. Now there is not even a trace of madness of Sovereignty in his head. The slave is now totally obedient to his God.

سبحان ربي الأعلى

Flawless Is my Lord, the Most High

Then you raise your head by saying 'Allahu Akbar' (God is the Greatest), sit down with reverence and say these words:

التَّحِيَّاتُ لِلَّهِ وَالصَّلَوَاتُ وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ، السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ
وَبَرَكَاتُهُ، السَّلَامُ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى عِبَادِ اللَّهِ الصَّالِحِينَ، أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا
اللَّهُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ-

Salutations to God and prayers and good deeds. Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the mercy of God and his blessings. Peace be on us and on the righteous servants of God. I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger.

The index finger of the right hand is raised during this testimony in the Prayer because this is the proclamation of a Muslim of his faith and he has to especially focus on and emphasize it while saying it.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ
إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ، وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا
بَارَكْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

O God, let Your Peace come upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as you have brought peace to Abraham and his family. Truly, You are Praiseworthy and Glorious. O God, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as you have blessed Abraham and his family. Truly, You are Praiseworthy and Glorious

These are the invocations which are repeated night and day in the five Prayers but another supplication is made in the last unit of the last Prayer at night before going to bed. It is 'Du'a Al Qunoot' (دعاء القنوت)

Supplication of Devoutness). It is a sublime confession which the slave makes to his God in the tranquil hours.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَسْتَعِينُكَ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُكَ وَنُؤْمِنُ بِكَ وَنَتَوَكَّلُ عَلَيْكَ وَنُثْنِي عَلَيْكَ
الْحَيْرَ وَنَشْكُرُكَ وَلَا نَكْفُرُكَ وَنَخْلَعُ وَنَتْرُكُ مَنْ تَفَجَّرَكَ اللَّهُمَّ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ
وَلَكَ نُصَلِّي وَنَسْجُدُ وَإِلَيْكَ نَسْعَى وَنَحْفِدُ وَنَرْجُو رَحْمَتَكَ وَنَخْشَى
عَذَابَكَ إِنَّ عَذَابَكَ بِالْكَفَّارِ مُلْحَقٌ-

O God! We beg help from You alone; ask forgiveness from You alone, and turn towards You and praise You for all the good things and are grateful to You and are not ungrateful to You and we part and break off with all those who are disobedient to you. O God! You alone do we worship and pray exclusively to You and bow before You alone and we hasten eagerly towards You and we fear Your severe punishment and hope for Your Mercy as your severe punishment is surely to be meted out to the unbelievers.

These declarations are not in need of any explanation. Anybody can see for themselves what kind of emotions, motives and intentions Islam uses to foster its civil service, army and every member of its society, what kind of thoughts it creates in their minds and what kind of traits it develops in them? An army raised merely out of parades is no use to Islam. It isn't in need of a civil service which merely has organizing skills either. It wants those soldiers and civil servants who have God-consciousness in their hearts, besides discipline, who besides being ready to fight and sacrifice also have the power to change hearts and mold characters, who not only run the affairs of the world but also reform its inhabitants. When you look from this point of view, your heart will testify that a system of training for the achievement of Islamic objectives, better than Prayer is impossible. Only a person, who goes through this form of training in a

correct way, can be expected to bear the heavy burden of trusts, responsibilities and rights of God's creatures with devoutness to Him. And even by staying at the bottom of river, he would not allow himself to get wet.

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

Surely Prayer forbids indecency and evil (29:45)

On this very basis, Prayer has been the essential part of Islamic movement since antiquity. Prayer has been the foremost pillar of Islam in the Law of all the prophets sent by God. Because whenever the Islamic movement was beset with decline and decay, it came as a result of the breaking down of the training system of Prayer.

فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهْوَاتِ فَسُوفَ يَلْقَوْنَ

عَذَابًا

They were succeeded by a people who neglected the Prayers and pursued their lusts. They shall presently meet with their doom. (19:59)

The reason obviously is that Islamic character is critical to tread the path of Islam and this character can be built only through the training system of Prayer. When this system breaks down then characters get ruined which inevitably results in decline and decay.

Self-Control

Along with building character, Prayer produces the power of self-control in man too, without which the purpose of building the character cannot be achieved. As such, the task of character-building is simply that it renders the human self cultured by training it but if this cultured and well-trained 'self' fails to get total control

of its psychological and physical faculties which act as tools for it, then the purpose of this training and sophistication which is right attitude and proper conduct cannot be achieved. For example, assume that man is the name of an entity made up of a driver and a car. This entity can function only when all the components of the car and all its powers are in the driver's control, and the driver is cultured, trained and knows the directions. You have trained the driver but if the steering, break and accelerator are not in his total control or he has loose control over them, then he won't be driving the car rather the car will be driving him. And since the car only knows how to move and does not have the faculties of vision, differentiation and directions of its own, it would drag him all over the place in crooked manner. According to this example, man's physical strengths, mental faculties and base desires fall under the category of car while his 'self' is like the driver. This car is just as ignorant as the actual motorcar, the difference is it has life and the motorcar is lifeless. This car also has desires, emotions and motives and is always trying to make the driver not drive it instead it drive him. The aim of the teachings of all the prophets was to prepare this driver not to allow the car to drive him instead he drive it. And by the dint of his own choice journey with it on the highway which leads to the desired destination. And it is not enough to civilize and train the driver by giving him the knowledge of the directions, teaching him how to drive a car and the etiquettes of being a good driver but it is also necessary that the steering wheel, break and accelerator are kept tight at all the times and the driver's grip doesn't get loosened on them because this insolent car is trying to deviate.

The reason the conditions of physical movements, ritual purification, punctuality etc are applied along with implorations and glorifications is so that the driver could be in total control of his car and become an expert in driving it according to his will. By this way, the insolence of the car is broken five times a day. Breaks are applied. Steering and accelerator are tightened up and the driver's grip is made firm. It is early morning; the sleep is delightful; the indolent self says 'just lie down, why would you rise up and where would you go at this hour?'. Prayer says 'it is time. Rise and shine. If there is need for shower then take it or else do your Wudhu (ablution). Don't care if it's winter. If there is no hot water then so be it. do your ritual purification and march to the mosque'. Now, of these two opposite demands, if you were to listen to the demand of the self then the car will drive you. And if you were to meet the demand of the Prayer, then you will drive the car. Similarly, at the hours of Zuhr (Early afternoon), Asr (Late afternoon), Maghreb (Sunset) and Isha (Nightfall), the self keeps on making excuses of busy schedule, making profit, saving from loss, recreation, pleasure, hardships etc and is ever busy in finding the opportunity to take over you the moment you let your guard down. But at every moment, Prayer whips you, waking your sluggish willpower up and demands from you to get the car under your control and not be a slave to it. This battle is fought every day in different times, situations and forms- sometimes in a journey or sojourn, in summer or winter, during rest or at work, at leisure or in grief. In these different kinds of conditions, the struggle rages between the demands of the self and the call of the Prayer and you are put to test every time. If you

listened to the self, then you lost. The servant has become the master. You gave yourself up to a blind and ignorant car. Now it will take you on crooked roads and you would be helplessly following her. Contrary to his, if you fulfil the demands of Prayer, then you could break the rebellious power of this car, become its ruler and develop strength to make use of the various parts and powers of this machines as per your knowledge, attentiveness and will.

Based on this, the immediate and inevitable consequences of wasting the Prayer mentioned in the Qur'an is that man becomes subordinate to his base desires, deviates from the straight path and inclines more and more to the crooked ways.

فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَٰعِدِهِمْ خَلْفًا أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهَوَاتِ فَسُوفَ يَلْقَوْنَ
عَذَابًا

They were succeeded by a people who neglected the Prayers and pursued their lusts. They shall presently meet with their doom. (19:59)

A Programme For Preparing Individuals

Whatever has been said till now is just one aspect of the benefits of Prayer. That is, how Prayer prepares the individuals. Now before turning to its other aspect, take an overall look at this programme for preparing the individual.

There are five parts to this programme:

- 1) To keep the realization of this truth fresh in man that he is not a sovereign in this world but rather a slave of the Lord of the worlds. And he has to function here in this world in this very capacity.

- 2) To make him dutiful as a slave and create in him the habit of discharging his duty.
- 3) To differentiate between the dutiful and the undutiful and separate the undutiful ones.
- 4) To install an entire system of thoughts, an entire ideology in man and establish it in such a way that he develops a strong character.
- 5) To produce in man the power to live his life in a manner which he finds it right according to his creed, knowledge and insight. And be able to exploit all the powers of his body and mind towards this direction. There should not remain any looseness in his character that although he does understand the right things but does wrong things forced by the desires of his self.

It is through Prayer Islam prepares each and every member of the society it creates. By age 10 every boy and girl of this society has to compulsorily offer Prayer. And after attaining puberty, it becomes so obligatory that it cannot be annulled except if he has lost his sense and understanding or the woman is in her periods. Be it illness, travel or even war, he has to discharge this responsibility. If he cannot move his hands and feet then he should offer Prayer through indications. If he is unable to find water then he should perform 'Tayammum' (Dry Ablution) with purified sand or dust. If he does not know the 'Qibla' (The direction of Prayer towards the Ka'ba in Makkah) he should just go by his guess and pray in that direction. In short, no excuse will be entertained in this matter. When the time for Prayer comes then a Muslim is entrusted to discharge this duty in every case.

It can be said without any fear of contradiction that except for Islam there is no other social system in the world which has devised such a complete method for its constituent parts to train the people individually. In general, the social systems of the world focus entirely on making the structure of the society and binding the individuals in external restrictions and hardly any effort is made to prepare each and every component of the group from the inside and form the society according to social principles. After all, a social group is like a wall made out of bricks. If each and every brick is not strong then the wall will overall be weak similarly if there is weakness in the character of the individuals, their thoughts are not consistent with the principles of the society and practically harbour thoughts to go against the society's way, then mere external restrictions cannot sustain the system of the society for long. Rebellion will break out at the end and the system will breakdown.

Organizing the Society

Now we should take a look at another aspect of Prayer. It is obvious that personal character alone cannot give any results unless the society does not have this character too. And individual cannot achieve his objective unless the people amidst whom he is living his life do not cooperate with him in achieving his goal too. It is impossible for a person to live according to the principles he believes in until the entire social life is not established on those principles. Man was neither born alone nor can he do anything by being alone. His entire life is tied to his kith and kin, friends, neighbours, people with whom he does business and numerous other acquaintances in multiple

kinds of relationships. He is commissioned by God to do exactly this in the world: enforce God's Law in the social life and for these social relationships. Following and enforcing this Law itself is worship. If a person is surrounded by people who do not believe in this Law or are bent on breaking it or their interpersonal relations are such that they are not prepared to cooperate with each other in implementing it, then it would be impossible for a lone person to follow the Law even by himself let alone enforcing it in social life.

Moreover, for a Muslim, this world is battleground for tough struggle, competition and tussle. Here, there are huge gangs of people rebelling against God who are enforcing laws made by themselves with full force and against them, a Muslim is obligated by God, with a very heavy back-breaking responsibility of enforcing His Law. He is required to put an end to man-made laws wherever they are in force and establish in their place the system of life ordained by the Law of God, the One and Only without any associates in His Sovereignty. This extraordinary task given by God to a Muslim cannot be done by a single Muslim all by himself against the huge gangs rebellious of God! Even if there are millions of Muslims in the world, they cannot succeed in facing the organized might of their opponents if they work separately as individuals. For this purpose, it is inevitable that all those people who want to worship God, come together to form a gang of their own, become each other's helpers, back each other up and struggle collectively for their mission.

It is not enough for Muslims to merely come together, rather it should be done in a right way. The

creation of a social system itself isn't enough but a righteous one is needed in which the relationship of a Muslim with fellow Muslims should exactly be like how Islam wants. There should be love and compassion between them, unity and unanimity in what they do, the common will to God should not only be there but it should be constantly dynamic too. This dynamism should become their second nature. Each one of them should know what behaviour they should adopt in the society when they become leaders and how they should obey when someone else becomes their leader, how they should move at his command, to what extent their obedience to him is obligatory and where they should call him into question and at what point he ceases to be worthy of their obedience.

Congregational Prayer

Along with building personal character, Prayer also creates the entire structure of this social system from the scratch, erects and sustains it and keeps it dynamic so that it would operate like a machine and that's why offering Prayer five times a day collectively in a congregation has been declared obligatory. According to the Islamic Law, every single person offering Prayer separately on his own cannot be relieved of his duty rather the congregation of all the Muslims in the mosque for praying collectively is as obligatory as Prayer itself, with the exception of a Muslim finding himself in a place where there is no possibility of collective Prayer. The purpose of this emphasis on collective Prayer in a congregation is to maintain the social system of Muslims in a right and dynamic form. Congregation of Muslims for five times in a mosque is the foundation of their social system.

The strength of this entire system is dependent on the strength of this foundation. The moment it gets weakened then the entire system will collapse.

Azaan (Call to Prayer)

It is an order that one should get up and turn towards the mosque taking a break from work the moment the Azaan is heard. Listening to the voice of this 'Divine Summon' and Muslims marching towards a central location is demonstrative of an army drill. Wherever the soldiers are, the moment they hear the sound of the bugle, get it immediately that their commander is calling them. Only one emotion is produced in their hearts for this summon: they have to obey the commander. And they all do the same thing the moment they get this thought: leave everything else, get up and gather at one point. Why is this method used in the military? Firstly, to create the quality and habit of listening to the order and being ready for it in every soldier at a personal level. Secondly, all these soldiers can become a group, a gang, a team and the habit of gathering themselves at one place at one time on their commander's order so that the entire army could work for one single purpose at one single call whenever any important mission comes up. In military terms it is referred to as 'Speed of Assembly' and this is the life-line of military life. If an army does not have the ability to assemble in this way and its soldiers are obstinate and wayward then even if every soldier of this army happens to be a maverick, a self-styled hero, it just cannot accomplish any task. A well-organized fifty soldiers of the enemy could kill even a thousand gallant soldiers of this kind by targeting them separately. As per this prudence, it is

made into a general rule for the Muslims that wherever a Muslim were to hear the Azaan, he should stop whatever he is doing and head out to the mosque. They are made to do this drill of assembling themselves at one place five times a day because the duty of this army of God is harder than all the other armies of the world.

As has been already pointed out above, for other armies, the time to go on a mission comes in decades and for which they are made to go through all this training. But this army of God has to go on a mission every time. Along with that, a big concession has been given to it that it is ordered to assemble in a 'godly cantonment' (i.e. the mosque) at the sound of the 'godly bugle' (i.e. the Azaan) for only five times throughout the day.

Assembly in the Mosque

This was merely the benefits of Azaan (Call to Prayer). Now you gather in a mosque and this act of gathering itself has numerous benefits. Here you see each other and get acquainted with one another. In what capacity did you see and get acquainted with each other? In the capacity of you being the slaves of God, followers of His Messenger, believers in the same Book and having the same purpose in life. You have gathered in the mosque for this very purpose and you will go out of the mosque to work towards this purpose alone. This kind of introduction automatically creates a thought that you are all one party and group. Soldiers of this one party, brothers and comrades of one another. Your goals and objectives, profit and loss are common in the world. Your lives are connected to each other. Rise as one or fall as one.

And when you see each other, you obviously see with your eyes wide open. And this seeing is not like one enemy sees another enemy but rather like a friend seeing a friend, like a brother seeing a brother. When you look with this perspective, that a certain brother on mine is in rags, some other brother is in hardships, someone else has entered the mosque with a face full of signs of starvation, someone is physically handicapped then compassion burns in your heart. Those who are rich will show mercy to the poor and the helpless. People who are in dire straits will be emboldened to reach out to the rich people and tell them of their situation. It will get known that someone has not come to the mosque because he is ill or in trouble, then you will visit him. The news of someone's death breaks out and you will participate in his funeral and express your condolences to his grieving near and dear ones. All these things increase mutual love, bring one another close and turn people into helpers and backers of each other.

Now think about it a little: you have assembled in a sacred place and for a sacred purpose. You were not pulled here by the love of any film star. You did not gather here for alcohol and gambling. This is not a meeting of adulterers and fornicators whose hearts are filled with lust and impure desires. This, in fact, is the assembly of virtuous slaves of God. All of them have gathered in the house of God, to worship Him and declare their slavery to Him. First of all, in such a situation, man himself feels ashamed of his sins. But if he has committed a sin before his brother-in-faith and he is present in the mosque too, then merely coming face to face with him would be enough to make the sinner die inside. And if there is passion in the

Muslims for admonition and they know how to counsel one another with love and compassion, then this gathering would be a cause for extraordinary mercy and blessing. In this way, all the Muslims will cast away each other's vices together and reform each other together. And the entire society will progressively become a society of righteous people.

Alignment of the Rows

These are just the benefits of assembling in the mosque. Now just look at how many great blessings are there in offering Prayer collectively.

In the mosque, all Muslims have equal status. If a labourer were to come early to the mosque, then he will be in the first row and if a rich man came late then he would stand in the last rows. No matter how rich or powerful one be, he cannot have his seat reserved in a mosque. None has the right to stop a Muslim from standing at any place in the mosque or remove him from a place where he had been from before. No one is authorized to jump the rows or cleave them apart to reach his place. No one in the mosque is rich or poor, superior or inferior. Neither a person gets impure because someone touched him nor does he lose his honour if someone stood next to him. A janitor could enter the mosque and stand next to the Governor. This is that Social Democracy which no one was successful in creating but Islam. Every day, for five times a day, the superiority and inferiority complexes of the individuals of society are rectified here to an equal level. Arrogance is purged out from the greatness of the great people. Inferiority complex is removed from the insignificance of the insignificant people. And

everyone is reminded that all of them are equal in the sight of God.

Just as this alignment of the rows erases class discrimination in the same way, it kills the bigotries of tribalism, nationalism, racism etc. There are no blocks of various human groups based on discriminatory symbols in the mosque. All Muslims, who enter the mosque, whether they are black or white, Asian or European, Semitic or Aryan and no matter how much differences they have in their tribes and languages, nevertheless offer their Prayer standing in one row.

Every day for five times a day, this assembly eradicates all those bigotries which are created in a human community due to extrinsic differences. It creates human unity. Cements internationalism and installs this thought into the brains that the bigotries of race, lineage and caste are all false. All human beings are slaves of God, then they become one Ummah (Global, multinational, multiracial, multilingual religious community of Islam). And when they stand shoulder to shoulder in a row, bow and prostrate together, such abilities to make organized, collective movements are cultivated in them to produce which an army is made to do parades. Its purpose is to create unity and unanimity in action that they become one body by joining together in the worship of God.

Group Supplications

Supplications which are made to God in the Prayer, make all these benefits of the alignment of the group doubly potent. All supplicate to their Master with one voice

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

You Alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help

إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Guide us to the Straight Path

السلام علينا وعلى عباد الله الصالحين

Peace be on us all and on the righteous slaves of God

In not a single supplication in the Prayer, will you find singular tense. Wherever you look young will find plural tense. Together with collective movements and worship, these collective supplications instill every day into the minds of every Muslim that he is not alone, that he is not to want and ask for himself alone rather his life is connected to the society. His wellbeing lies in the wellbeing of the society, his safety lies in the society staying on the right path and when peace and prosperity are showered on the society then he himself could enjoy them too. This thing purges individualism from the heads and produces social mindset. Prayer cultivated the feelings of well wishing and the connections of sincere love and in this way the sense of socialism in the Muslims is uplifted five times a day for every day so that their behaviour stay correct in the vast field of life.

Leading the Prayer

These collective rituals cannot be performed without an Imam (a leader). Even if two people were to offer Prayer then it is mandatory that one of them leads the Prayer and the other follows him. When the congregation stands up for Prayer, then it is strictly forbidden to offer Prayer separately, rather there is no such Prayer. It is a commandment that the people who keep on coming for Prayer to the mosque should join the ranks standing behind the Imam. The office of the

Imam is neither class, race or group specific nor does it require any degree or diploma. Any Muslim can become an Imam although the Shariah recommends a few qualities to keep into consideration when making someone an Imam.

Each and every thing of the way the relationship between the Imam and the followers is forged is extremely meaningful. Every Muslim is given full training on leadership and following the leadership in this relationship. It teaches how the social system of Muslims should be in the vast mosque called the world which lies outside the small mosque? What his duties are? What his rights are? And how his conduct should be after becoming Imam? On the other hand, how the society should follow him and in what things? What should the Muslims do if he makes a mistake? How far should they follow him in his mistake? When are they authorized to stop him? When can they exercise their right to demand correction of his mistake from him? And at what could they remove him from leadership? All these things are like practice to run a big government on a small scale, which the Muslims are made to do five times a day for every single day in even the smallest of the mosques.

It has been instructed that such a person be elected Imam who is God-fearing, of righteous character, has religious knowledge and a senior member of the society. Even the order of these attributes are mentioned in the hadith detailing which quality is preferred over which. By this very example, instructions have been given on what things are to be kept in mind while electing leader of the state too.

It has been instructed that such a person should not be Imam with whom the majority of the society is

displeased, who doesn't have few or more opponents. But if the majority of the society hates to follow the leadership of a certain person then he should not be made Imam. Here too, a rule is laid down for the election of the leader of the state. A man with a bad reputation whose bad behaviour and wickedness are hate by common people is unworthy of becoming leader of the Muslims.

It is ordained that the person who becomes Imam should take the weak people into consideration too who are praying behind him. He should not recite lengthy portions from the Quran and make long bows and prostrations keeping only the young, strong and healthy people into mind who have time to spare rather he should also keep in mind that there are older people too in the society and such busy people too who have come to offer Prayer by leaving their business unattended and who have to get back to their work after the Prayer. The Prophet (peace be on him) has set such a great example of mercy and compassion in this matter that he used to shorten the Prayer whenever he heard the cry of a child so that the mother of the child is not distressed if she happens to be in the rows. It is as though the leader of the state is being educated in how to conduct himself when he becomes the leader.

It is ordained that if a mishap were to happen to the Imam during the prayer due to which he is not in a position to lead the Prayer, then he should step back immediately and let the man standing behind him take his place to lead the Prayer. Here, once again, an instruction lies for the leader of the state. The same responsibility lies with him too that when he were to find himself unworthy of leadership or unable to handle it then he should step down and vacate his

place for a deserving person. There is neither shame in it more selfishness.

It is ordained that the action of the Imam must be strictly followed. It is strictly forbidden to make a move before he does. As a matter of fact, it is mentioned in the hadith that a person who bows or prostrates before the Imam does will be raised as a donkey on the Day of Resurrection. Here the nation is being taught how to follow its leader.

If the Imam were to make a mistake like for instance he stood up when he was supposed to sit or sat down when he was supposed to stand up, then it is ordained that he should be cautioned against by saying "Subhan Allah". The meaning of Subhan Allah is 'God is Flawless'. Saying Subhan Allah at the Imams mistake means that it is God alone Who is free from flaws and making mistakes. You are a human. It is not surprising if you were to slip or err. This is the way to object to the Imam.

And when the Imam is objected to in this way then it is binding on him to correct his mistake and on top of that make two extra prostrations at the end of the Prayer as an admission of his mistake. However, if the Imam is certain that he has to stand or sit at this point despite being objected to, then he can do so with full confidence and in this scenario the congregation has to follow him, despite it having the conviction that the Imam is in the wrong. After finishing the Prayer, the followers have the right to prove to the Imam that he was in the wrong and demand from to redo the Prayer.

This behaviour of the congregation towards the Imam is with regards to only those mistakes that are related to ordinary details but if the Imam were to change the structure and order of the Prayer, going

against the Sunnah (way) of the Prophet or recite the Quran by distorting its words or practice polytheism or commit 'Kufr' (Unislamic practice) or commit open sin or carry out an act deviating from the Divine Law or he has gone crazy then it is the responsibility of the congregation to stop the Prayer, separate itself from him, remove him and install someone else in his place.

Just as big a sin is disobeying the Imam in the first scenario, even bigger is the sin of obeying him in the second scenario.

This exactly is the situation, on a bigger level, with regards to the state and its leader. As long as the leader conducts himself within the limits of the Islamic constitution, his obedience is obligatory on Muslims, if they disobey him then they would be sinning. The most they can do to him is caution him. And if despite their cautioning, he makes mistakes in ordinary matters then they must stay obedient to him. But if he crosses the limits set by the Islamic constitution then he can no longer be leader of the Muslim state.

Whatever analysis presented here so far as regards the objectives and effects of the Prayer, is although has not covered all of the aspects, it makes one thing very clear as to why Prayer is regarded as the greatest pillar of Islam. Pillar is the structure on which rests the edifice. The foremost support of the supports that required to raise and sustain the edifice of the Islamic life is that such traits are produced in the members of the Islamic community, individually and socially, that are needed to fulfil God's rights of worshiping and serving Him and shoulder the responsibility of God's vicegerency on earth.

They should truly believe in the Unseen, accept God as their sole Sovereign and be His dutiful and

obedient slaves. Islam's thought-system and philosophy of life should be running through their veins in such a way that it produces a solid character in them and their practical behaviour is molded accordingly. They should be in such total control of their psychological and physical faculties that they use them according to their faith and creed. If a group of hypocrites is produced in them or has entered from the outside then it should get distinct from the believers. The system of their community should be established on the principles of Islam and it should operate like a well piled machine. Social mindset should prevail in them. There should be love, compassion, cooperation and equality in them. There should be unity of spirit and action in them. They should be understanding of the limits of leadership and fellowship and have the capability of working with total discipline. Since all these goals are achieved by establishing Prayer, that is why it is declared as the pillar of Islamic religion. If this pillar were to fall then the personal character and social structure of the Muslims will collapse and they would be rendered incapable for the great mission for which the group was created. On this very basis, it is said Prayer is the backbone of the religion, one who brought the Prayer down has brought the religion down!

FASTING

The importance of these objectives is so extraordinary in Islam that Prayer alone was not been enough to achieve them, Rather another pillar of fasting was added to strengthen the pillar of Prayer. Like Prayer, fasting too has been considered a pillar of Islam since antiquity. Although the forms have been different in regards to the detail injunctions nevertheless fasting itself has always been an integral part of divine laws. It has been an obligation in the religion of all the prophets (peace be on them all).As it is mentioned in the Quran:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ

Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you (2: 183)

This verse makes it clear that this method of training has some special connection with the nature of Islam.

Fasting is not that kind of filler which is as distinct and separate as Zakath (mandatory charity) and Hajj (Great Pilgrimage) are but rather in reality its nature is almost like the pillar of Prayer as a supplement and back up. Its job is to enhance and solidify the same effects which are produced in human life through prayer. Prayer is a daily routine system of training which impacts a person for short periods of time five times a day every single day. And then leaves him by giving him small doses of education and training. But fasting is a month long once in a year extraordinary

system of training which keeps a person in a tight grip of strong discipline continuously for approximately 720 hours so that the effects which year light in the daily routine training get stronger. We will make a detailed analysis I have this extraordinary training system works and creates desired impact on human psyche in the following pages.

Effects of Fasting

The law of fasting is that at the end of the night with the manifestation of first signs of dawn, all of a sudden, eating, drinking and having sex get forbidden and remained so till sunset. During this period sipping even a drop of water and swallowing even a grain of food, voluntarily, or not allowed. And having sex to get prohibited for husband and wife. And then in the evening at a specific time this prohibition gets lifted all of a sudden. All those things which was forbidden just a moment ago become lawful again and remain lawful throughout the night until the appointed hour of the next Fast when all these things get locked down again. This process starts from the first day of the month of Ramadan and continues for one whole month. As if for full 30 days people are made to follow a strict discipline. Eat Suhoor (pre-dawn meal) at its appointed time, eat Iftar (food to break the fast) at it's specified time and fulfill his lustful desires as long as it is permitted and stop himself from things not allowed for him when the permission gets withdrawn.

Sense of Submission

The first thing that comes to the fore upon contemplating this training system is that by this method Islam wants to solidify the acceptance and

declaration of God's sovereignty in man's consciousness and wants to make it so strong that man should practically submit his freedom and sovereignty to Him. This acceptance of submission is in actuality the essence of Islam and the basis of a person being a Muslim or not. The religion of Islam does not only demand the acceptance of the existence of The Lord of the worlds or mere acknowledgement of the Creator and Sustainer of the system of this universe to be God, the One, the Overpowering, from a metaphysical viewpoint alone rather it's real objective is to make man accept the logical and natural consequence of accepting this fact too. That is when he accepts that the Creator, Sustainer Lord and Administrator of him and the universe is God The Almighty alone and acknowledges that none is God's partner or associate in creating, sustaining, fostering and administering the universe then along with this acceptance and acknowledgement he should surrender himself to the sovereignty and rule of God too. He should give up in thought and action is wrongful claim to his freedom from God and adopt the same attitude towards Him which is slave necessarily has for his Master. This very Sign is the distinctive feature between Islam and Kufr (Denial of God). Kufr is nothing but a human regarding himself sovereign in opposition to God and not an accountable to Him. And adopt a way of life accordingly. And Islam is nothing but a human regarding himself a slave of God holding himself accountable to Him and living his life with this sense of slavery and responsibility in the world. So just as true acceptance, from the heart, of God's sovereignty is necessary for entering the state of Islam and exiting the state of Kufr, in the same way it is necessary that

the sense of being God's slave remains alive and active at all the times in man's heart for him to stay in Islam. Because the moment this sense departs the attitudes of sovereignty and responsibility returned the state of Kufr is produced in which man operates, thinking neither God is his suffering nor is he accountable to Him.

As has been mentioned earlier the first and foremost objective of prayer is to constantly keep this very state of Islam fresh in man and this is the objective of fasting too. The difference is Prayer keeps refreshing it in small intervals and the fasts of Ramadan constantly keep a man under this condition for up to 720 hours for one time in the whole year so that it effectively gets ingrained in his heart and mind and the effects remain for the rest of the 11 months of the Year. Firstly, no person would ever be ready to get into the strict discipline of fasting unless he deems God as his Sovereign and surrenders his freedom and sovereignty to Him. And then when he desists from eating, drinking and having sex in the daytime continuously for 13 to 14 hours and all of a sudden falls himself away from the demands of his 'self' at the end of the suhoortime and leaps towards fulfilling the demands of his self at the Iftar time as though in reality his hands, mouth and throat were being ruled by someone else, which get shut down and opened up at His command. It means that during all this time he is always conscious of God being his Sovereign and him His slave. Throughout this long period of one month this realization did not leave his conscious or subconscious minds because had it left then it would not be even possible for him to not break the rules.

Obedience

The inevitable and automatic consequence of the sense of slavery is obedience to the commands of the One Whom man considers his Master. Search natural and logical connection exists between the two that they just can't get separated. There is no possibility of contradiction between the two because obedience is, in reality, a consequence of accepting over lordship of one Sovereign.* You cannot obey someone unless you

*It seems appropriate here that the readers clearly understand few terms. The terms God and Lord in English carry the same meanings as Allah الله and Al Rabb الرب in Arabic. In Hindi, the terms Dev and Devata have nearly the same connotations. Various nations of the world have used these terms in reference to those beings in whose hands lie the powers of giving profit and causing loss, who rule the universe on big or small scales and in obeying whom lies mankind's success and salvation. Ignorant nations have always had this belief and still have that such beings are many and innumerable which also include angels and Jinns, even some of the Kings, saints and miracle-doers too. So nearly in every language we find plural tenses of these terms. Therefore in Arabic there is Aaliha (gods) آلهة and Arbaab (lords) أرباب In Persian/Farsi, there is Khudaeagan (gods) خدائگان and Khudavandan (lords) خداوندان In English, there is 'gods' and 'lords' (with small letters) and in Hindi 'Devon' (gods) देवन 'Devata' (lords) देवता But the concept of a Supreme God, above all of these gods, has existed in all of these nations. A Supreme Being, the Creator of this universe. This very Being is referred to as Allah in Arabic, Khudaeagan in Persian/Farsi, God with capital G in English and Parameshwara in Hindi. And it doesn't occur in plural tenses in any language. What Islam calls towards is this: all the authority and power in the universe which you refer to by the names of 'Ilah' (god) إله Khudavand خداوند god etc is in the hands of that same Being alone, there is only His rules in the universe, causing profit and loss is in His hands alone and all those whom you consider god or lord, under the impression that they have any power or authority, are slaves just like you having no part whatsoever in the real power or authority. Therefore, there are not many Ilah, Rabb, Khudavand, Devata or god but He alone Whom you call by the name of Allah الله and its synonyms. As per this knowledge, the difference in the terms would be that for a non-Muslim the previous terms will remain as they are and he would use separate

acknowledge his overlordship. And when you have accepted someone's overlordship then how can you refrain from servitude and obedience to Him. Man is neither so stupid to keep on obeying someone's orders for no reason when in reality he does not accept that person's or being's right to rule over him, nor does he have the courage to turn away from the obedience of Whom he actually regards, in letter and spirit, his Sovereign Authority, Lord and Cause of profit and loss. Thus, in reality, acknowledgement and servitude of overlordship and obedience are inseparable and logic demands that there should be total harmony between the two too in every respect.

The unity between overlordship and sovereignty inevitable leads to the unity of servitude and obedience and associating anyone or anything in overlordship and sovereignty will most certainly lead to association in servitude and obedience. When you consider only one Being as your Lord then you will serve only Him. When you consider ten beings as your lords then you have to serve these ten lords. This is just not possible to accept one Lord and serve many lords or accept the lordship of ten and serve only one.

Determining the Lord will inevitably lead to the determination of slavery and servitude. Whom you acknowledge to your Lord you will inevitably obey him to. It is just not possible to acknowledge someone

words for smaller gods and a big God. But for a Muslim, God and lord would be the same Allah alone. God with the capital G would remain and referring to Him with small g would cease altogether. The words 'Dev' and 'Devata' would get lost in the word 'Parameshwara'. Words 'Khuda' and 'Khudavand' would be replaced by 'Khudavandan Alam' (Lord of the worlds) and none of these would be used in the plural tense.

to be your lord and obey someone else. Contradiction in verbal acknowledgement and practical servitude is possible but actually impossible in real emotions of the heart, consciousness of the mind and the actions or movements of the limbs. No sane person could fathom that the direction of his servitude could turn towards someone whom he does not consider his Lord instead of someone whom he does consider his Lord. As against this logic dictates that the impression of the one towards the overlordship of whom your servitude is directed should actually be engraved on your mind even if you are expressing the overlordship of someone else.

The increase and decrease in the acknowledgement and servitude of overlordship will inevitably result in the increase and decrease of obedience. The stronger the sense you have of you being a slave and someone being God, the stronger your obedience will be to Him and the weaker this sense gets the weaker your obedience will be, to the extent that if there is no sense at all then there won't be any obedience.

After careful consideration of these points, it becomes absolutely clear that Islam's objective is nothing other than making people accept the overlordship of God and deny the overlordship of everyone else but Him. That man does not render his servitude and obedience to anyone but God Almighty. When He says:

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ

Unquestionably, pure religion is devoted to God alone* (39:3)

*The actual meaning of the Arabic word 'Deen' دِين is obedience and the reason why it is used for religion and community figuratively is

Then it means that obedience is purely and sincerely for God alone free from the admixture of obedience to any other separate being. When He says:

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

And they were not commanded except to worship God being sincere to Him in religion. (98:5)

Then it means that man is obliged to serve God alone and the condition to render servitude to Him is that man should not mix servitude to any other being in His servitude.

When He says:

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلَّهُ لِلَّهِ

And fight them on until there is no more oppression and there prevail justice and faith in God (8:39)

Then it means that a Muslim's obedience is dedicated in its entirety to God alone and he is at war with all those powers who want to divide his obedience up, who demand from a Muslim to obey them too besides the Lord or obey them instead of the Lord.

And when He says:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

He it is who has sent his Messenger with the guidance and the true religion that he may make it prevail over all religions (9:33)

Then it clearly means that obedience to God is dominant over obedience to everyone else. Obedience and servitude with all its divisions and aspects should

because religion and community are but names for the system of obedience and entering which a man accepts to follow a law and a discipline.

be brought under the divine obedience. Obedience to anyone is allowed only by the Lord's leave and obedience to anyone not mandated by God will be disallowed. It is a requirement of this true religion which has been sent through His Messenger. As per this requirement, obedience to anybody is not exempted from the confines of the true and fundamental obedience to the Lord of the worlds be it obedience to one's parents, family, clan, society, nation, government, leader, clergy, religious elders, a person or an institution by serving which man earns his livelihood or be they man's own self and its desires. Real obedience is to none but God alone. One who has accepted His overlordship and dedicated his obedience sincerely to Him can obey anyone by being under God's obedience. He shall listen to someone only to the extent allowed by God. And where God's permission ends, then he shall come out as a rebel to everyone and obedient to God alone. The purpose of fasting is precisely to give training of this kind of obedience. It keeps man in the state for hours each day of the whole month making him await the permission from the Lord of the worlds even to meet his basic necessities. Not even a grain of food or a drop of water could go down the throat until it is permitted. For each and everything he turns to the Law of the Lord; whatever is permissible in it is permissible for him too even if the entire world gets unanimous in declaring it to be forbidden. And whatever is forbidden in it is forbidden for him too even if the whole world makes it permissible together. In this condition nobody's permission is a permission except the One True God's. Nobody's order is an order for him and nobody's prohibition is prohibition for him. From the desires of

his own self to every human being and institution in the world, there is no power on earth on whose authority a Muslim could neither forsake fasting nor break it in the month of Ramadan. In this matter neither the son is obliged to obey his father nor wife her husband, neither servant his master nor citizens their government, neither followers their leader nor disciples their spiritual guide. In other words greater and actual obedience to God overwhelms obedience to all these people. This long practice and exercise of 720 hours leaves impressions on the heart of the one who fasts like an engraving on a stone, that he is the slave of only one Master, follower of only one Law and has the yoke of only one Master around his neck.

In this way fasting pulls man's obedience to everyone else from all directions and directs it to one Central authority and keeps it in this place for 12 to 14 hours of every single day of the 30 days of Ramadan so that he could ascertain the reference of his slavery and Central figure of his obedience nicely and properly and prevent the scattering of his obedience away from the central point after the end of this discipline when restrictions are lifted. Although seemingly only two desires (the desire for food and sex) have been sorted out for this training and all the restrictions of discipline are put on these two alone, the real spirit of fasting is to make man live in total awe of the realization of Gods overlordship and man's servitude and obedience to Him leading him to live these hours by becoming such an obedient person that he should stop from anything God wants him to stop from and sprint to do all those things God wants him to do. The real purpose of making fasting obligatory is to produce and cultivate this state of mind and not to stop man from

eating drinking and having sex. Therefore the stronger this state of mind is the more complete fasting will be and the less stronger it gets the more defective the fast will be.

If someone fasted in a stupid way where he avoided those things which could break his fast but kept on doing all the other things Forbidden by God then the likeness of his fast is that of a dead body which has all the organs from which human body is composed of but has no life in it because of which human is a human. Just as no one can call this lifeless body human in the same way no one can consider a fast without its spirit a fast. This is what the Prophet (peace be on him) said:

من لم يدع قول الزور و العمل به فليس لله حاجة في أن يدع طعامه و شرابه

One who did not desist from lying and acting on it then God does not care if he desists from eating and drinking.

The words 'acting on lies' added to the words 'saying lies' are very meaningful. These words are actually the Paragon of all disobedience. The one who declares his belief in God and then disobeys Him is in reality denying his own declaration. The real goal of fasting is the attestation of this declaration through practice. But if he has been denying this declaration while fasting then what remains except for hunger and thirst?! God was not in need of the hollow cavity of his stomach in the first place. The Prophet (peace be on him) has explained this point in another way:

كم من صائم ليس له من صيامه إلا الظمأ و كم من قائم ليس له من قيامه إلا السهر

How many are those people who fast in the day get nothing from their fasts but hunger and thirst. And how many are those who stand up for prayer at night get nothing from it but being wakeful all night.

And the Quran has explained it in even more clear words:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

Believers fasting is enjoined upon you as it was enjoined upon those before you that you become God fearing (2:183)

The real purpose of making fasting obligatory is to produce 'Taqwa' (God consciousness) in man. The real meaning of Taqwa is consciousness and fear. In Islamic terminology it means being fearful of God and disobeying Him. The best explanation of this word which I came across is the one given by Ubayy ibn Ka'b. Umar ibn Al Khattab asked him the meaning of Taqwa. He answered: 'O Leader of the Believers! Did you ever happen to walk a road on both sides of which were thorny bushes and the road was narrow?' 'Many times' Umar replied. 'Then', continued Ubayy, 'What would you do in such a situation?'. Umar said: 'I would gather my clothing, lift it up to my calves, watch my steps and take each step carefully from the fear of thorns lest my clothes get turned by them'. Ubayy said: 'That is what Taqwa is!' the road which is being traversed by man has both sides covered with thorny bushes of extremism, desires and inclination of the self, temptations, evil whisperings, misguidance and disobedience. Walking on the road by saving one's clothing from its thorns and not getting entangled in the bushes of maliciousness and immorality by deviating from the path of obeying the truth is Taqwa. And God has made fasting obligatory to produce this

Taqwa in man. It is a potent tonic which has the properties of giving the powers of piety and uprightness but getting these powers from it is dependent on man's own capacity. If man were to understand the objective of fasting, is ready to take the power given by fasting and try to foster the quality of fear of God and obedience to His Commandments then this thing can produce so much Taqwa in him that never mind Ramadan he could walk the straight highway of life, guarding his clothing from this thorny bushes on either side of the road for the remaining 11 months of the year too. In this scenario he won't have any limits on the consequences (i.e. points) and benefits (i.e. rewards) of fasting but if you were to fast being oblivious to its real purpose with the only intention of breaking it at the end of the day and does not focus on gaining Taqwa then obviously he won't find anything in his record of conduct other than hunger, thirst and being wakeful all night. That's why the Prophet (peace be on him) said:

كل عمل ابن آدم يضاعف الحسنة بعشر أمثالها إلى سبع مائة ضعف
قال الله تعالى إلا الصوم فإنه لي وأنا أجري به

Every deed of son of Adam increases in worth in the sight of God. One good deed increases from 10 times to 700 times. But God almighty says that fasting is an exception. It depends on My Will. I can give however much I want.

The possibility for increase and enhancement in the case of fasting is unlimited. The more man tries to gain Taqwa from it the more it grows. He can earn points from zero to millions, billions and even trillions, in fact even earn the maximum points. Since it is dependent on man's capacity of his willingness to gain Taqwa or not and to what extent if he decides to gain

it, it is not said in the above mentioned verse that you will definitely become a pious, God fearing person by fasting but the word 'لعلكم' perhaps* is used, the right meaning of which is it is 'expected' or 'possible' that you might gain Taqwa through it.

Building Of Character

Taqwa is the life of Islamic character. The basic concept of the kind of character Islam wants to build for every Muslim individual is hidden in the word Taqwa. Sadly, the meaning of this word has got very restricted these days. People think that adopting a certain style and manners, avoiding a few popular and prominent sins and abstaining from a few disgusting acts that have gained importance in people's imagination is Taqwa. When in fact it is a term that has vast meaning encompassing all aspects of human life. The Glorious Quran divides, in principle, the mode of human thinking and conduct into two categories:

The first category is the one in which man:

1. Doesn't consider any superior power other than worldly, watching over him, and leads a life thinking that he is not accountable to any superhuman Sovereign.

* Generally people translate it as 'so that' but this is not correct linguistically. The Arabic word لعل is used to denote expectation, anticipation and possibility. In contrast to this 'so that' gives the meaning of purposiveness. If God wanted to tell the purpose of making fasting obligatory then he would have said لَتَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ 'so that they could be of the God-fearing' instead of لعلكم تتقون 'perhaps you may gain Taqwa'. Probably people could not understand its wisdom confused by the connotation of doubt in the word. That's why they translated لعل as 'so that' so what was supposed to be explained through right translation is explained through wrong translation.

2. To him, worldly life is the only life, worldly profit is the only profit and worldly loss is the only loss and decides to adopt or rejecting a way in the light of worldly profit and loss alone.
3. To him, moral values are worthless compared to material benefits and moral and spiritual loss is of little value compared to material loss.
4. He doesn't follow any moral code rather creates his own morality as per the circumstances and changes it when the circumstances change.

The second category is the one in which man:

1. Considers himself to be subservient and accountable to a superior Sovereign Who is the Knower of the seen and the unseen and leads a life thinking that he has to render the account of his deeds of all his life to the Sovereign.
2. To him, worldly life is only the first stage of the actual human life and regards the profit and loss of this first stage to be temporary and deceitful and determines his conduct on the basis of those profits and loss which will manifest in the permanent life of the hereafter.
3. To him moral and spiritual values or more valuable than material benefits and gives more importance to moral and spiritual loss than material loss.
4. He follows such a moral code which he cannot alter or abrogate according to his own objectives and interests. He does not have that freedom.

The comprehensive name the Quran gave to the first kind of mode of thinking and conduct is 'Fujoor' * فُجُور and the second kind 'Taqwa' † تقوي. These are actually two different paths in life which are diabolically opposed to each other and do not meet anywhere from their points of origin to their points of end. By taking to the path of Fujoor (ungodliness), man's entire life with all its parts and departments gets oriented towards a particular style in which the outward forms of Taqwa may get visibility but there is absolutely no way the spirit of Taqwa could be seen. Because all the intellectual components of Fujoor (ungodliness) are mutually and logically connected and not a single intellectual component of Taqwa could make any inroads in this well-knit system. In sharp contrast to this man's entire life takes a completely different turn upon choosing the part of the Taqwa. He thinks in an another way. Looks at every problem and issue of the world with a different view point and takes recourse to another behaviour in every instance and circumstance in life.

The difference in these two paths is not only related to personal life only but social life too. A society which consists of ungodly individuals has a majority of ungodly people and whose leadership is in the hands of ungodly people will inevitably have its entire civilization ungodly. The spirit of ungodliness will prevail in every part of this civilization- social

*Now a days we refer to it as materialism, utilitarianism, pragmatism and opportunism.

†Since the Western mindset is a stranger to this kind of mode of thinking and conduct to a large extent, search words are hardly found in the modern era which could deliver the meaning of Taqwa. The Popes and the Bishops did not leave the word 'piety' worthy of using it to describe Taqwa.

norms, morality international behaviour etc. It is very much possible that either most or some of its individuals may appear to be above personal selfishness and profiteering but the utmost level they could reach is that they may lose their personal interests for national interests whose growth is connected to their growth and whose decline is connected to their decline. So even if the hue of Fujoor (ungodliness), in personal form, we're to fade a little, it will not make any difference because at any rate the national attitude will continue to be on the principles of materialism, utilitarianism, pragmatism and opportunism. In the same way Taqwa too is not a personal thing alone. When a society is composed of God fearing individuals or such individuals are in a majority and the leadership is in the hands of the God fearing then godliness prevails in its social behaviour in every capacity. It doesn't decide its conduct based on temporary and urgent interests rather it follows a permanent constitution and dedicates all its efforts for a fixed mission irrespective of the profit and loss caused to the nation. It doesn't go after material interests rather make lasting moral and spiritual benefits as its goal. It doesn't make outbreak principles according to circumstances rather follows truth in every situation because it does not care how much little power its rival nations have. It is rather afraid of the God above and is ever concerned with the thought of Day of Judgement which will arrive anyway.

In Islamic view the root cause of everything wrong with the world and destruction of humanity is Fujoor (ungodliness) and it wants to kill this snake of ungodliness or at least defang it so that even if the snake lives it may not have the power to bite humanity.

For this purpose, it starts to pick out people and fill its party with them who have godly disposition. It has no use for those people who have an ungodly bent of mind whether they were born in Muslim households by coincidence or have the deepest sympathy for the Muslim nation. It actually needs people who are conscious of the responsibilities, who take stock of themselves, who keep an eye on their intentions and wants, who don't need any external pressure to follow the law rather there lies a scrutinizer in them who commands them to follow the law and prevents them from breaking it which is not even known to the police or the court of public opinion. It wants individuals who have the firm belief that someone is watching them all the time, who have the fear that there is one court in which they have to stand for trial anyhow, who are not slaves to worldly profits, personal or national interests, who have their eyes set on the real consequences in the hereafter, the greed for even the biggest profit or fear of the biggest loss in the world could not pull them away from the mission of the Lord of the worlds and the moral principles shown by Him, whose efforts and endeavours are for earning the pleasure and approval of God alone, who have to conviction that the end is going to be good for the followers of truth and bad for the followers of falsehood even if it doesn't turn out that way in the world. And then it is looking for individuals who have the patience to make incessant and fruitless efforts for a right and higher cause for decades nay their entire lifetimes, who have such resoluteness that the ease of wrong ways, the profits and pleasures obtained from those ways fail to pull them away from the straight path, who possess such endurance that they are not staggered by any amount

of failures, hardships, dangers and problems, who have such single-mindedness that they just march past every kind of temporary and urgent interest focusing on their goal alone, who could put trust in the Lord of the worlds for far-reaching and late-coming results even if these results do not appear to ever come out in their worldly lives. Only these people can be trusted and only this kind of trustworthy people are needed for the task Islam wants its party to accomplish. There is no other powerful way than fasting to develop and strengthen this essential substance of Taqwa found in them. Just take a cursory glance at the discipline of fasting it will be revealed to you how this thing grants maturity and durability to these attributes in a complete way. A person is told that God has made fasting obligatory to you. You should not eat and drink anything from morning to evening. Anything that goes down your throat will break your fast. If you had avoided anything in the public but ate the food hiding from them then you might be considered a fasting person in public eye but not in God's. Your fast can be approved only when you observe it for God but if you fast for some other reasons like health or earning good name then it will not have any value in the sight of God. You neither get any reward in this world if you fast for God nor any punishment if you break it. When you stand before God after your death only then would you get your reward or punishment. A man is let go after giving him these few instructions. No soldier, spy or a man from the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) is appointed to keep an eye on him not to eat in public. But there is no one to stop him from eating secretly. And holding him accountable to whether he is fasting for the pleasure and approval of

God or not is beyond any public opinion or government. Take a look at what kind of states his heart goes through upon meeting all the requirements of fasting:

1. He has total conviction of God being the Lord of the worlds, Knower of the hidden, Absolute Authority and he himself being His subject and accountable to Him. And his faith did not dwindle a bit in the entire period of his fast.
2. He has strong conviction in the hereafter, his accountability and reward and punishment. And this faith did not dwindle at least for 12 to 14 hours when he was meeting the requirements of fasting.
3. He has a sense of duty in him. He understands his responsibility. He takes stock of his intentions himself. He is a guardian over his own heart. When the desire to break the law or commit sin rises in the depths of his heart, he crushes it then and there with the full might of his willpower. It means that he is not dependent on any external pressure to follow the law.
4. Whenever he is given a choice between materialism on one hand and morality and spirituality on other, he chose morality and spirituality. When the question of preference arose between this world and the hereafter he chose the hereafter. He had enough strength to bear material loss and difficulty for the sake of moral benefit and accepted worldly loss for the sake of other worldly profit.
5. He does not consider himself free in any matter that he could fast in a cool season with pleasant weather and in appropriate time. Rather he finds himself

forced to fast at exactly the same time prescribed by the Law, irrespective of how harsh the weather is, how unfavourable the circumstances are and how detrimental fasting will be from the point of view of his personal interests.

6. The sense of responsibility, endurance, single mindedness, trust and the power to face worldly temptations are present in him at least to the extent that he does something for the sake of God's pleasure the result of which is postponed until the next life. For this thing he voluntarily curbs his desires. Throat is getting cracked due to the scorching heat of the summer. Ice cold water is just an arm's length away. He could easily drink it but he does not. Food is ready. He could eat it if you wants to but he won't. Husband and wife are young. Lust is storming inside them. If they want they could seal the deal unbeknown to anyone, but they don't do it. This neglect of potential profits, appreciation of potentially avoidable losses and steadfastness on one's chosen path of truth is not based on the hope of a profit which will be accrued in this world but it rather is related to a purpose about which it has already been notified that there is no hope of getting it before the Day of Resurrection.

These are the thoughts and feelings that arise in man's heart the moment he decides to fast. When he does fast, these thoughts and emotions practically become a force. When he repeats this act (of fasting) for 30 days, this force gets stronger and stronger. Fasting for 30 days every year throughout life from puberty to death makes this force gets firmly established in man's instincts. All this is not for the

purpose that these qualities are made use of only for fasting or the month of Ramadan rather this is for the purpose of preparing the 'dough' of man's character from these ingredients, free from Fujoor (ungodliness) and devoted to Taqwa. Can anyone say that there is a way better than fasting for this purpose? Can any other course be prescribed instead of this for making Islamic type of character?

Self-control

Only two desires have been chosen to be disciplined in this training: Food and sex. But along with these two, a third desire has also come under fire: Rest. Because standing up for the Taraweeh prayers (special prayers in Ramadan) and disturbing the sweet sleep at the last hours of the night by waking up for suhoor, takes a toll on rest.

Of the demands made by the animal life, there are three which are of primordial and basic nature: Demand for food for one's survival, demand for mating with the opposite sex for the survival of the species and demand for rest to regain the spent energies.

The demands of these three needs is the origin of all animal desires and the stimulant of all animal actions. And these demands are so powerful that they force the animal to do whatever it does.

Even the fundamental demands of the best structure (i.e. human body) which is given to man as his tool and servant are these three too. And since he is a superior animal above all other animals, his demands are superior too. He asks for a variety of tasty foods, demands food prepared in different ways and this

demand branches out in so many different ways that an entire world is required to meet it. He not only demands to mate with the opposite sex for the survival of his kind but also creates niceties and subtleties in it—he wants variety, opulence of adornment, beauty, joyful ambience, sensual atmosphere, in short so many branches come out of these demands too that they don't seem to stop anywhere. Similarly, his rest too produces innumerable branches which also seem to have no end. He just not only wants to regain the energies he lost but also does not want to create any opportunity to lose his energies as far as possible. He shies away from toiling hard. Tries to get his work done without any hard work, makes plans of various sorts to accomplish his goal without hard work or with the least amount of hard work. And he especially feels that his life is threatened when he has to work hard for goals that are above the animal goals. In this way, an endless net of desires is knitted from these three basic desires which wants to encompass man's entire life. Thus, this servant, this obstinate animal of man had only these three weapons, big weapons, with which it tries to make man his servant instead of it being man's servant and constantly tries to turn the right and natural kind of relationship between itself and man into its opposite. That is, instead of man riding it, it wants to ride man, dragging him all over the place according to the desires. If man does not impose his authority on it with full force and loosen the reins of judicious will then ultimately it will overpower him. Then he will be the slave of His servant and the servant will be his mater. The bounty of the knowledge of names and concepts which God Almighty bestowed on him, will be used in the service of this blind, ignorant and

foolish animal. They will be used in falling low rather than flying high. They become an instrument for achieving lowly animal goals than high human goals. They will have no use other than finding ever new ways to fulfil the desires of this animal night and day. Consequently, this animal becomes the worst kind of all the animals. Could there be any limits to the wickedness of an animal who has human being as its servant? If the ability to make a fleet is available to a hungry bull then what pasture had the strength to save itself from getting trapped in the economic interests of this raging bull? If a greedy dog were to get the power of manufacturing tanks and fighter jets, then what bone or piece of flesh has the courage to escape it's canine teeth? If a wolf were to learn the skill of creating a nation of wolves and has the talent to use the powers of press, propaganda and even long range cannons then how much room (Lebensraum) can the earth spare to provide preys to it? If a horn billy goat could produce erotic novels, nasty dramas, nude pictures, arousing music, dirty dancing, vulgar acting, beauty enhancing products and also has the capability to create colleges, clubs and film studios for the training and preparation of nanny goats then who could take the responsibility of determining the limits of his indulgences?

In order to save him from the abyss of lowliness, it is not enough to present the real objective of human life to him and show him the correct utilization of his energies but along with this it is also important to practically establish the natural quality of the relationship he has with this animal and through practice and training the rider be made string enough to steadily ride his animal, hold the reins of his will firmly and be in control of it so much so that instead of

running according to its desires, he should make it run straight according to his will. The reason why God entrusted this animal to us is because we could utilize it and make it the means to reach our goals. It's brain is the means for thinking. Its senses are means to gain knowledge. Its hands and legs are tools for action and work. Of all the things God has made subservient to us in the world, the most useful thing is the human body. All the natural desires it has are related to its real needs, meeting which is our duty. It is its right that we provide it comfort, nutritious food, meet its demand of the survival of its species and do not waste it for no reason. But at any rate, it is made to serve us and our purpose in life. It should be subservient to our will not we subservient to its desires. It does not have the status of making us fulfil it's desires like a Sovereign but its true status is that it should present its desires to us like a slave and it is the job of our well trained and judicious self-consciousness to either accept or reject its petition whenever and whichever way we deem appropriate.

One of the most important objectives of fasting is to grant a human being this authority over his animal body. Fasting seizes the three desires which are the source of all animal desires, the three very powerful weapons with which this animal frequently rises up to subjugate us. After seizing them, it firmly bridles it by giving the reins in the hands of that self-consciousness which believes in God and has determined to tread the path shown by Him. At this moment, the helplessness of this animal is quite the spectacle. From morning to evening, it keeps us asking for food and water but we pull it back. It wants to lay its hands on the food but we don't allow it to make that move. It says 'fine then.

At least allow me to smoke a cigarette or hookah or chew a gum, anything that would put my fire out'. But we reject its plea. As soon as it run towards its pair, in vain, upon seeing her, to have sex with her, we pull the reins. In this way, after denying it its desires, we finally give it food and water at the time appointed by our Master. Now this exhausted animal would want to rest but as soon as we hear the Azaan to the Isha (Night Prayer) we pull its ear and make it stand straight and drag him to the mosque. In other days, we make it stand only a little in the Isha Prayer, but in Ramadan, apart from the ordinary prayer, we make it to stand for the extraordinary units of the Taraweeh prayer too. After this tiresome pursuit, poor fellow runs to get some sleep saying its goodbye. But at the last hours of the night when its every fiber is intoxicated with sweet sleep, we whip it so hard that all its hangover will be gone announce to him that our Master had ordered us to feed you at this hour instead of daytime. Therefore eat whatever you want to eat.

This is the practice which we are made to do for 30 days, every year, so that we can establish our total control over this servant. By this, we become effective rulers of our own bodies and bodily faculties. The tyrannical heroism of the animal desires comes to an end. It creates power in us to curb our desires to whatever extent we want. A person who is not used to confronting his desires, is habituated to fulfil the demands of his self without any question and to whom everything call of his animal instincts enjoys the status of a commandment that has to be obeyed, cannot do anything big in the world. To achieve big things in the world man's self-consciousness should have enough strength to keep the desires of his self under control

and utilize the faculties God had installed in his mind and body in accordance with his will. That's why, sometimes observing voluntary, non-obligatory fasts during the year other than the obligatory fasts of Ramadan has been liked and encouraged by the God so that the grip of this authority is tightened. But there is a difference between the authority given by the Islamic fast to man's self-consciousness over his mind and body and the authority gained from non-Islamic practices of self-abnegation or from the exercises of developing one's willpower or which is obtained by great people on their own. This second kind of authority is actually the dictatorship of an ignorant and despotic self-consciousness which is not submissive to any Sovereign superior to itself, not bound by any Law and order and not a follower of any knowledge. It does have authority over its physical and psychological faculties but it is not necessary rather not possible that it would use them in the right way. The diseases of monasticism and withdrawal from the world, its comforts and pleasures are generated from this kind of authority. It's because of this authority that the lawful rights of body and mind were usurped. Based on this very authority, man waged war against his own nature. Based on this very authority, man used his talents for downfall and decay instead of the development of culture and civilization. Because of this authority, many of the great men of the world tried to impose their overlordship on God's slaves and used their powers for oppression instead of truth. In contrast to this the kind of authority Islamic fasting grants his self-consciousness over mind and body doesn't makes it into a despotic dictator but rather makes it obedient to God and His Law. It is not an ignorant self-

consciousness which is its own guide but a self-consciousness which follows the guidance, the knowledge and the enlightening Book of God. It doesn't consider the mind and body given by God as his own property so that it could rule it as per his own understanding rather it considers them to be a trust from God and rules over them in accordance with the Will of God. A believing and pious person, whose self-consciousness has submitted itself to the Will of God Almighty, can never oppress anyone in the world never mind violate the rights of his body and oppress his companion which God has made it his best helper for his lifetime. He shall feed it with the best foods, clothe it with the best clothes, shelter it under the best house, shall give it the utmost rest and provide it with all the amenities to meet its every natural desire. Not because his self wants it but because God has set these rights for it and fulfilling these rights will result in earning God's pleasure*. However, when the same self demands him to resort to unlawful means or unlawful foods in order to eat better food, incites him to make plans not liked by God, wear nicer clothes and travel in nicer cars, tempts him to open the doors closed by God for the gratification of its lust, when it neglects

* On this basis the Prophet (peace be on him) said: 'first give charity to yourself then to your family and then to others'. Spending charity on oneself or one's own family sounds weird. But, in reality, the style of Islamic thinking is quite different. A person who eats for his own self he is just eating the food but if he feeds himself and his children with his lawfully earned money with the realization that it is a right set by God then he is doing an act of virtue. He deserves reward from God for each and every morsel. Commenting on this very Singh the Prophet (peace be on him) said: 'The situation of a believer is like that of Prophet Moses' mother who breastfed her own son and was even paid for it. In the same way, a believer fulfills the rights of his own self and his children and gets paid for it by God too.

discharging its duties and services imposed by God for comfort and convenience and when it does not want to sacrifice its desires or itself where God's pleasure demands that those desires be sacrificed, then in all these scenarios, the self-consciousness of the believer will enforce its sovereign authority with all its might and pull it away from the path of rebellion and disobedience and puts him on the straight path. This is what a believer is made to practice in Ramadan so that when a delicate situation arises in life, which happens everyday and all the time, the reins of his will do not fail in keeping this obstinate animal under control.

A Comprehensive Road Map of Personal Development

Whatever has been said till now was related to the training of individuals. Now before turning to the social aspect of fasting, let us take a comprehensive look at this programme of individual training.

As I have mentioned before the real purpose of Islam is to create a society of righteous people which will build human civilization on the foundations of virtue and goodness. For this purpose it is not content with laying out the principles and creating a system of civilization implementing these principles alone but along with that it also makes arrangement to prepare individuals for its social system, so that each and every individual of this society be in agreement with this system according to their thoughts, character and conduct. And instead of forced obedience with rebellious inclinations, they follow it with the sincere belief of their hearts and the personal strength of their characters.

The tasks Fasting has to accomplish in this scheme are these:

1. Through this training, each and every individual of the society be prepared to practically surrender their sovereignty to the Lord of the worlds so that he could bring his entire life under the Divine Law.
2. To engrave on the minds that God is the Knower of the hidden and the open and the belief of the Day of Judgement through practice and exercise in such a way that man starts following the Divine Law openly and secretly out of his sense of personal responsibility and not any external pressure.
3. This spirit should be blown on every individual that except for servitude and obedience to God they should become deniers of everybody else, in thought and practice and they should purify their servitude to God in such a way that they should not find even willingness to obey commandments, Law or authority which is not sanctioned by God.
4. Every individual be trained in morality in such a way that he should gain total authority over his desires. He should have so much control over his mind, body and all their faculties that he could use them according to his creed, knowledge and insight. The qualities of patience, endurance, diligence, trust in God, steadfastness and single-mindedness are produced in him and such a strength is produced in his character that he could confront external temptations and the illicit inclinations of his self.

These are the objectives for which Islam has made fasting in Ramadan obligatory on every individual who is a member of the Islamic society. No rational and

adult person, be it male or female, is exempted from this obligation. If a person is unable to fulfil this obligation due to illness, travel or some other lawful excuses then 'Qada' (observance after its actually time) or 'Fidya (expiation) becomes mandatory. In any case, man cannot escape the obligations of fasting by being in the sphere of Islam. Although it is not necessary that those qualities will be produced to their highest grades in all those people who through the training of fasting, which is what is intended from it, because the personal capacity too is required for the creation and perfection of these qualities, nevertheless the nature of this system of training itself has this distinctive quality to produce these qualities in man and no better system may no system other than this could be prescribed to produce these qualities. If anyone were to take an honest look at it, he will have to admit that there is someone no social system other than Islam which has made such vast and all-encompassing arrangements for the training of people that entire populations could enter its sphere and keep receiving moral training by themselves. And furthermore, if any person were to turn out to be incompetent to be a part of this social system then he automatically gets distinguished from the rest immediately revealing to the society that this person has given up fasting without any legal excuse and hence they have in their midst such a person who doesn't recognize sovereignty of God and is a slave to his animal instincts. The society learns, in time, about the existence of a decomposing organ in its body by this revelation and it gets the chance to get itself rid of its poison. As far as Islam is concerned, it has at least made full arrangements for the identification of such

people and has provided an opportunity for every Muslim society to be cautious of such people and take appropriate steps to either reform them or remove them from its sphere. Now it is a different thing if an insensitive Muslim society-in-name-only fail to take advantage of this opportunity and not only foster such people in their midst but hail them as its leaders.

Social Aspect of Fasting

Like Prayer fasting too is an individual act in itself but just as prayer is turned into a social act from an individual act by applying the condition of congregation, in the same way fasting too has been turned into a social act from an individual act by just a little wise tactic thereby increasing its benefits and merits which just cannot be measured. That tactic is just this: Setting a special month for fasting. If the Laws Giver wanted the training of mere individuals then giving the commandment that a Muslim fast for 30 days at any time throughout the year would have sufficed. In this way, all these objectives could have been achieved which were mentioned before. In fact this format is more appropriate for the exercise of self control because the ease created from fasting together could not be created from fasting alone and everyone will have to use their willpowers relatively more forcefully for every person to discharge their obligation. But in the eyes of the All-Wise, One Who made Islam's Law, this way of training individuals is of no use which doesn't bring a righteous society into existence. That's why He did not like making fasting just an individual act but rather specified a month in the entire year so that all the Muslims could fast at the same time and that very system of training churning

out righteous individuals could be helpful in creating a righteous society too.

Few brief points are being listed down about the increase that has occurred in the moral and spiritual benefits of fasting due to this wise tactic.

Atmosphere of Taqwa

The foremost merit of social system¹ is that it creates a special kind of psychological ambience. A person who has been doing something individually, with a specific mindset and is surrounded by people who neither have his mindset nor are they involved in what he is doing, will find himself a total stranger in such an atmosphere. His mindset will be limited only to him and will be totally dependent on his psychological strengths. It will not receive any help from the surroundings for its growth and development. On the contrary, the various impacts from the surrounding atmosphere will decrease it instead of increasing it. But if the entire atmosphere is in that state of mind, if all the people are doing the same thing, with the same thought and mindset then the scene will be totally different. This will create such a social atmosphere in which the entire society will be on the same wavelength and the internal quality of mind of every individual will reach ever new heights by deriving its nutrition from external assistance of the atmosphere. If only one person is naked and the people surrounding him are all clothed then imagine how embarrassed he would be? What a large doses of shamelessness he might need to get naked? And even then how frequently his extreme nakedness will get defeated due to different impacts of the atmosphere? But when everyone is naked in the same bathroom,

poor shame will not get a chance even to wander there by mistake! And one person's shamelessness will increase manifold times with the help of other's shamelessness. How hard it is for each and every soldier to fight battles separately and bear their hardships? But when an entire army marches together, then it creates a Tsunami of the emotions of bravery and heroism in which every soldier will be moving forward intoxicated with those emotions. Be it virtue or vice, social psychology plays an extraordinary role in the development of both. When a society does evil things together then the emotions of vulgarity, shamelessness and licentiousness will brim over. And when the society does virtuous things together then there will be a flood of chaste thoughts and virtuous emotions, in which the wicked people too become righteous even if it is for a little while.

The Law Giver has made use of Ramadan for this very purpose by declaring it to be the month of fasting. Just as you see that every grain crop reaches to its harvest time only when its season comes and you see it spread all over the fields, in the same way the season of Ramadan is the season of goodness, virtue, God-consciousness and purity in which it is not the vices but the virtues that spread, entire populations get filled with the fear of God and the spirit of charity permeates them and everywhere the fields of sobriety appear verdant. Man feels embarrassed to commit sin in this period. Every person tries hard to save himself from sins and appeals to the sense of honour of his brother-in-faith when he sees him committing sin. Every person develops the desire in him to do some good deeds, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the afflicted, to participate in good works, to stop a

vice from happening. In this period, people's hearts get softened, hate grows for vice and affection for virtue, temperaments lean more towards repentance, fear and return to godliness, righteous become more righteous and even though the wickedness of the wicked may not necessarily turn into righteousness yet this "laxative" cleanses them to a great extent. In short, with this wise strategy the Law Giver has made such arrangements that the entire Islamic population is cleansed for a month every year, it is overhauled, radically transformed and overall the Islamic spirit is revived anew in it once a year. Based on this, the Prophet (peace be on him) said:

إذا دخل رمضان فتحت أبواب الجنة و غلقت أبواب جهنم و سلسلت الشياطين

When Ramadan comes, the doors of paradise are opened, the doors of Hell are closed and the demons are chained.

And in another hadith:

إذا كان أول ليلة من شهر رمضان عقدت شياطين و مادة الجن و غلقت أبواب النار فلم يفتح منها باب و ينادي مناديا باغي الخير أقبل و يا باغي الشر أقصي

When the first night of Ramadan arrives, then the demons and Jinns are chained. The doors of Hell are closed. Not a single door remains open. The doors of Paradise are opened. Not a single door remains closed. At that a caller calls: 'O the seeker of virtue! Move ahead. One the seeker of vice! Stop right there'.

The final test conducted on a coma patient is that a glass is placed next to his nose, if some fog is formed on it then it means the patient is alive otherwise even the last hope of his survival is extinguished. Similarly, if you want to test any Muslim neighbourhood then

observe it in the month of Ramadan. If there is a surge of God-consciousness, fear of God and some righteousness in them in this month then consider that they are still alive. But if the market of virtue is cold, the signs of sinfulness and impiety are obvious and the Islamic sensitivity seem to be dead, then you better read *إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون* 'To God we belong and to Him we return' because after this not a single breath is predestined for a "Muslim"*

Sense of Community

Another important benefit of social activity is that it creates natural and real unity in the people. Race, language, native land or collaboration of economic interests cannot create natural nationality. A man will find someone congenial with whom he concurs in thought and action. This is a real relationship which binds people together.

And there is disharmony in thought and action with someone then hearts can never meet even if both of them are born to the same mother. When a person is

* This was with respect to the Islamic standard of the test but now other standards have been invented to for this diagnosis, replacing the Islamic standard. If any population of Muslims is in slavery then it is tested in this way: how eager are the Muslims for their national interests (i.e. the economic and political interest of the community)? How far are they willing to drag themselves for safeguarding these interests? How excited are they in taking the names of Islam and Islamic power in their meetings and rallies? And if the population is free then it is tested in this way: How many airplanes it has? How many trains has it launched? How many schools and factories has it set up? How much has it empowered its women to be shameless? How far has it succeeded in trying to be more like Europe in culture, Civilization and Society? if the population comes out victorious from these ordeals then it is said: 'Thank God Islam is alive'!

"Once again our caravan is on the road".

surrounded by people who have mentality and action different from his, then he would clearly find himself a stranger among them. But when a lot of people function with the same state of mind then strong relationships of mutual unanimity, camaraderie, accord and brotherhood develops. There will not remain any strangeness among them. The partnership of heart and soul and the agreement in action welds them together.

Whether it is virtue or vice, in both the cases, this is how social psychology works. This is how the consumption among the alcoholics creates their respective brotherhoods. But the difference is that in the path of victory there is involvement of the psychology of the individuals the natural inclination of which is towards tearing these individuals apart. That's why this path is unstable and full of garbage. In contrast to this, personal psychologies are suppressed in the path of virtue, human soul gets true satisfaction and man treads the path with chaste emotions. Therefore, the partnership in righteous thought and action is that excellent bond of brotherhood against which no other stable social bond could even be conceived of.

Just like Prayer, the social fasts of Ramadan creates this kind of brotherhood in the Muslims. All the people, undergoing the hardship of hunger and thirst together to seek God's pleasure, shunning vices out of His fear, stopping one another from vices, running towards virtues out of His love, exhorting one another to righteousness- all these things creates the best kind of unity, right and natural nationality, purest social mindset and such compassion and camaraderie which is free from impurity.

Spirit of Mutual Cooperation

The third extraordinary aspect of social worship is that it brings all the people on three same level temporarily. Even though the rich stay rich and the poor stay poor, yet for a few hours, fast makes the rich go through the same mental and physical which his poor brother goes through every day. Consequently, he truly understands his poor brother's problems, and the will to earn God's pleasure exhorts him to help his poor brothers out. On the face of it, it might seem quite a small letters thing but it's moral and civilizational benefits are immense. A nation whose rich understand the pains of its poor and have practical sympathy for them, which not only gives charity to institutions but also delivers aid to individuals by finding such needy people, not only the weaker sections of such a nation remain immune from destruction, not only its social prosperity remains intact but also a relationship of love instead of jealousy is established between the rich and the poor, a relationship of gratitude and gratefulness is created between the two classes and that class struggle could never happen in this nation which happens in those nations whose rich do not even know what poverty and hunger are? Who ask during droughts why are people dying? Why don't they eat cake when they can't find bread?

Fasting is the second practical pillar of Islam through which Islam prepares the people individually by giving them a special training and creates a special kind of society out of them by binding them together. The structural components of the ultimate objective of Islam of bringing a righteous state and rule of God into existence are manufactured by prayer and fasting in such a way that its soldiers, generals, officers,

bureaucrats, ministers, teachers, professors, judges, muftis, entrepreneurs, labourers, factory workers, farmers, voters, representatives, citizens, in short every member of its society become worthy only after going through this training, creating a righteous, civilizational and political system which is referred to as 'Khilafah 'Ala Minhaaj An Nubuwwah' خلافة علي منهاج النبوة Caliphate According To The Prophetic Methodology. Trying to establish the Divine Caliphate by using untrained individuals is nothing but a fancy with which God and His Messenger have nothing going to do.

