

# **THE MUSLIM CONCEPTION OF WORSHIP**

by

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The Muslim conception of worship must not be confused with what is in vogue among other religions. Allah, the God of the Quran, needs no worship, nor does He require any praise or thanksgiving. If we worship Him, we do so for our own good. This statement may seem to a freethinker a mere dogmatic assertion on the part of the Quran; but he will appreciate its significance if he will apply himself to study human psychology in the case of a person who adores something. Such adoration results in imitation of what appears to the adorer good, beautiful or sublime in the thing adored. If we consider our own moral code and such knowledge as we possess, we will find that we were not born with them, but took them from others by a process of imitation. They attracted our fancy and we admired them. Then we came to love them and extol them and this love reaches its zenith in adoration and worship.

If a character is the first requisite for good citizenship, then we need two things to the shaping of it. First, it must be brought home to us that true worship lies in imitating the way of our Deity; secondly, that the object of our worship, that is, our Deity, must possess attributes which go to make the best form of character.

It should not be forgotten that what merely pleases our senses cannot edify or induce real morality. Aesthetic taste may commend such things, but they do not make up a character. It is the mind and not the body which needs that elevation which can only be attained through meditation. Therefore, anything that hinders us from true contemplation must be excluded from our worship. For this purpose all Muslim mosques are bare of decorations. They are erected after the model of the House of God at Makka—four homely walls of earth with an unhewn piece of rock as its cornerstone. For the same reason Muslim worship is never accompanied by singing or other forms of music or the burning of incense. These doubtless create a sort of rapture in the mind, but they also tend to intoxicate the spirit. Besides, we experience the same feelings when we attend any place where music is performed or look on any cheerful scene. These things may to some extent assist our meditations in our worship, but they mislead us as well. We must listen rather to the music of our own minds and create in ourselves a sort of mental happiness which may in its inception no doubt resemble that given by the aforesaid ceremonial adjuncts. But we have to soar higher than this. In order to free us from any deception, our adoration should be stripped off of all the "paraphernalia" of worship loved by other religions. It should consist purely of meditation. We need recital and gesticulations to a certain extent, the latter to relieve monotony, the former to furnish subjects for contemplation. Besides, different postures for meditation suit different persons. But the movements in prayer should indicate reverence and submission to the Lord, while our recitals should refer to those Divine

Characters with which we must imbue ourselves. We have only to contemplate the beauties of the objects of our adoration to obtain inspiration for our deeds.

But God is transcendental and stands beyond the perception of our senses. It would be absurd to say that He is “knowable,” yet it cannot be denied that we feel His presence by reason of certain manifestations of Himself. Most Buddhists of the present day evince atheistic tendencies, but they should not forget that the Lord Buddha believed in the existence of intellect, compassion and liberality in the working of nature. How then could we disbelieve in the existence of the Great Mind, if these were the conditions of mentality? We must have some conception of God for our meditation. We need not bother about dogmatised theology, for nature itself, and in itself, is the best revealer of its Maker. If the universe presents the highest type of civilisation and is the work of the Mind that seems to possess the best qualities, we must discover the object of our adoration by the aid of natural theology. This is a very difficult task, and wrong data may easily lead us to erroneous conclusions. How gracious then was the Revealer of the Quran, Who saved us the incalculable labour of this research work in the pages of nature! If the universe refers to certain qualities of its Maker, they are no other than the attributes of Allah given in the Quran, The Holy Book does not claim to furnish us with an exhaustive list of the Divine attributes. It speaks only of such Excellent Names as can come within our comprehension and the scope of our imitation. It shows us how to inspire ourselves, with all that they require. If the Holy Prophet summarised all our religion in one word when he said,

“Imbue yourself with the Divine character,” the Quran expounded that dictum. The Quran gives us one hundred attributes of God, and it is our contemplation of these names in order to clothe our character with them which has been called worship in the Quran. If we, therefore, glorify God, when the God of Quran clearly says that He needs no worship, we are, in fact, glorifying the coming man who has to be evolved from our inner selves, equipped as stated above. In reciting certain Holy Names in our prayer we keep before us, as it were, a sacred cast in which we have to mould our character. Why should we look for a Christ, when each one of us possesses the Kristus in ourselves? All of us are Christs; Krishnas and Ramchandras potentially. It is our duty to seek to actualize those high capacities. They may come to the surface in the course of our earthly career or in the Hereafter. Our Holy Prophet assures us of this when he says that through implicit obedience to our Lord, "He becomes our limbs and joints."

I wonder why secularized minds take exception to such a religion as this. We do not ask them to worship a fetish, but to deify themselves by worship. By deification I mean attaining to the highest morals, which they will find when they study these hundred Holy Names set forth in the Quran. In the words of the Quran I could ask them, "And what (harm) would it have done them, if they had believed in Allah or the Last Day and spent (benevolently) of what Allah had given them?" if worship in the Quran means to fulfil the requirements of those Names. We, as good citizens, must behave ourselves in seemly fashion, we must observe certain rules of good conduct in life, and it is impossible to think of a better system of morals than that

carved out on the lines of the said Names. All religionists, doubtless, believe in the same one God, but we differ from one another in our conception of Him, and especially as to the attributes ascribed to Him. This, in fact, is what divides the world of religion into different cults and creeds, and which has, as the Prophet says, been the cause of much trouble and discord. In our formula we refer to that particular conception of God which has reached us through Muhammad. The message came in the form of the Quran which is really a commentary on these Names. The Book may thus be divided into seven parts:

- (1) Allah standing as a central figure in the Quran.
- (2) His hundred attributes.
- (3) Virtues and Sins. The former are the shadows of these names, cast by our activities, while the latter are sins engendered when we violate their sanctity.
- (4) Quranic laws that are meant to develop the said virtues, or, in other words, to enable us to translate these Names into our actions.
- (5) Heaven or Hell. Heaven is the abode of those who clothe themselves with the Divine attributes, while Hell will be inhabited by those who act contrary to these Names.
- (6) Reference to certain phenomena of nature in order to elucidate some of these Names, as we read of *Rahman* and *Rahim* in the Quran (2: 63-164).

(7) The Book refers to certain righteous persons and also speaks of certain wicked ones. This classification also is due to the attributes.

Allah, as I said, is the Proper Name of the Deity. But proper names are meaningless, as a grammarian would say. They do, however, indicate certain characteristics of the person so named. Similarly, these hundred attributes give us various features of God. They have been called in the Holy Quran the Excellent Names.