

Why Does God Mention Worship as the Purpose of Human Creation?

The Purpose of Human Creation in the Quran and the True Meaning of Worship

In the Quran, God states that the purpose of human creation is worship, saying: “And I did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me.”¹ Upon hearing this verse, the first question that arises is, does God need our worship, and why has He declared worship as the purpose of human creation?

The answer to this question has two aspects. The first relates to the word “need.” Using the word “need” in relation to God is due to our limited knowledge and understanding of the Divine. We compare God to ourselves and assume that His actions are driven by need. However, God is the Absolute, Self-Sufficient, and has no needs. In other words, when discussing the purpose of human creation, we refer to the goal that humans are meant to achieve, not God. God does not need to be worshipped. It is humans who need to worship and submit to God to achieve the purpose of creation.

The second aspect of this question relates to the meaning of worship. Most of us imagine worship as performing certain acts like prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage. As a result, it seems strange to us that what benefit do our bowing and prostrating in prayer, or our hunger and thirst during fasting serve that God created us for such acts? Are prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and other acts of worship ends in themselves, or are they means to achieve higher goals?

¹. Quran, 51:56

If you have similar questions about the purpose of human creation, join us to find the correct answers. In this lesson, we will first discuss the true meaning of worship and then explore the relationship between worship and *ma'rifa*.

What Is the True Meaning of Worship?

We mentioned that the Quran states that the purpose of human creation is to worship God, but what does worship mean? To understand the true meaning of worship, we must pay attention to the word “servant” (*abd*) and its meaning, which is the root of worship. *Abd* in Arabic means a slave or servant who is completely obedient to his master. His will is subject to the will of his master, and he never falters in his obedience. Thus, worship is actually servitude and submission, which is a very tangible concept. Servitude is the same obedience and submission that we show our mentors in various fields such as science, art, and sports. We obey our mentors' instructions to become like them and attain the qualities they possess, which we admire and desire to. Without servitude to a mentor, no student can achieve any perfection. This principle applies to all forms of perfection, including supra-rational and human perfections.

Our Mentor and Lord in our human dimension is God. Due to possessing the Spirit of God, we love and aspire to become like Him. Based on what we have discussed, achieving this status is only possible through servitude to God. In fact, the purpose of human creation is not worship in the common and superficial sense, such as prayer and fasting; rather, the goal is servitude. One who is a servant of God and obeys divine commands in all areas gradually expands his capacity to become a manifestation of God's names and attributes. Religious commands—prayer,

fasting, and the like—serve this purpose. Otherwise, mere bowing and prostrating and enduring hunger and thirst have little benefit for a person. A *hadith* by Imam Sadiq says, “Servitude is a jewel whose center is Lordship (*rububiyah*).”² Its outward appearance is that we become obedient and limited; however, what truly happens is our growth and attainment of divine and human perfections. From this perspective, the message of religion is a message of freedom. Religion has not come to restrict us; it has come to liberate us and elevate us to the status we deserve. However, this freedom occurs through servitude to God and liberation from the chains of our animal dimension. Each religious command removes part of the chains from the spirit, and the more we adhere to these commands, the freer we become.

The status of a servant is a very high one. The more successful we are in servitude to God, the more powerful we become and the greater our share of God's names and attributes. The thousand names mentioned in *the Du'a of Joushan Kabir* are not only God's names, but they are also our names, yet in a potential state. Their actualization depends on the extent of our struggle and effort in servitude to God.

Worship as an Intermediate Goal

Alongside all the points we discussed regarding the importance of servitude and worship, there is another very important point that, if neglected, can render our acts of worship ineffective or even harmful. This important point is the acquisition of *ma'rifa*. The astonishing effects of worship do not manifest in many of us because acts of worship are not based on *ma'rifa* and are merely a series of blind

². *Misbahu 'sh-shari'ah*, p. 7.

and aimless actions. *Ma'rifa* differs from knowledge. Knowledge is a mental ability, while *ma'rifa* is a practical ability. Knowledge is knowing, and *ma'rifa* is an asset. Knowledge does not necessarily bring power; what creates power in us is acquiring *ma'rifa*.

The relationship between *ma'rifa* and worship is a reciprocal one; acquiring *ma'rifa* makes worship fruitful, and performing worship, in turn, leads to acquiring *ma'rifa*. Therefore, in some other verses of the Quran, the purpose of human creation is introduced as attaining *ma'rifa* and certainty, stating, "Worship your Lord until you attain certainty." This means that worship is a means to acquire certainty; in other words, worship is an intermediate goal, and the ultimate goal is to attain *ma'rifa* and certainty. We are meant to use the ladder of worship to gain *ma'rifa* about God. If our worship does not align with this purpose, it will result in nothing but physical fatigue. Therefore, someone may pray for sixty years, but not even one of his *rakats* may be accepted because he has worshipped a God whom he had no *ma'rifa* about and naturally had no intention of approaching and resembling.

Considering these points, our greatest effort in life must be focused on acquiring *ma'rifa*. The most important type of *ma'rifa* is self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*), the same *ma'rifa* that we have discussed repeatedly throughout the articles of the School of Humanology, exploring its various dimension.

In this article, we discussed the purpose of human creation and stated that contrary to common belief, the meaning of "worship Me" (*liya'budoon*) in verse fifty-six of *Surah Adh-Dhariyat* does not mean worship; rather, it means servitude. Servitude means submission and obedience to God's commands. Servitude to God gradually

makes us similar to Him and elevates us to the status we are worthy of and for which we have been created, namely the status of Allah's deputy.