

EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF ISLAMIC RITUALS FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

By

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Abstract

Islam is a complete code of life. It guides people in all aspects of life. It teaches mankind to be in peace with the Creator (Allah) and the generality of people. To make peace with God one has to give absolute submission to His will, recognise His oneness, obey His commands and worship Him as the only one who deserves to be worshipped, while good behaviour to people as one would expect from others is also emphasised. Worship in Islam is not an empty ritualism. It is a part and parcel of Muslims daily conduct. It determines the attitudes towards life and helps in attaining moral and spiritual perfection. It is discovered that some Muslim had turned worship in Islam to a show of piety, a mere daily routine and just verbal repetitions of certain formulae. This study aims at shedding more lights on Islamic rituals with emphasis on Salat (devotional worship), Zakat (compulsory charity) Sawm (Ramadan Fasting) Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah with their expected moral and spiritual benefits in relation with character development). It also discusses how worship leads man to selfless service to humanity and urge to the rescue of the indigents. The paper recommends among others total submission to the will of Allah which will adequately manifest in Islamic ritual followed with good deeds.

Keywords: *Islamic Rituals, Worship, Charity, Fasting, Pilgrimage*

Introduction

Islam as a way of life consists of faith and deeds. In Islam, faith without good deeds is useless likewise good deed cannot come without the right faith. Faith therefore means right knowledge, right belief and right thought. *Kalimatush – Shahadah* is the testimony of faith in Islam. It is also a creedal formulae identifying the key Islamic belief. The recitation of this formula with personal conviction is the qualification for entry into Islam. *Ash-hadu anal ilaha illa Allahu, wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasulu llahi.*

I testify that there is no god but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God

This statement is full of meaning. It emphasises pure Islamic monotheism against paganism association and superstition as discussed in Q112: 1-4, 2:163 & 2:255. The testimony also explained the status of the holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasising his universality and Prophethood.

Rituals in Islam are considered the practical manifestation of faith in the unseen God (Allah). Belief in the Angels which were appointed by God to carry out different duties coupled with the belief in the holy books which contain the message of Allah to mankind through the appointed Prophets. The belief in the last day purifies the motives with which a deed is done. Though man chooses either good or evil by his own free will but belief in the last day makes a man work selflessly with the fear of God in his heart in order that he may be accepted and favoured in the other world.

Islamic Rituals

Mustapha (2016) defines Islamic Rituals as the religious duties expected of Muslim as “right of Allah” from His “servant” to express their submission to His Lord. He identifies five fundamental religious duties as *Salat* (devotional worship), *Zakat* (compulsory charity) *Sawm* (Ramadan Fasting) *Hajj* (holy pilgrimage) and *Jihad* (exertion of effort in the cause of Allah) while Musa (1983) also principles of faith in Islam with the exclusion of *Jihad* and inclusion of *Iman* (faith) as the first principle. It is widely referred to as Pillars of Islam.

However, for the purpose of this work we shall concentrate on *Salat*, *Zakat*, *Sawm* and *Hajj* with emphasis on their significance which brings about character development.

1. Salat

This is the second pillar of Islam which is next to the declaration of faith. Mustapha (2016) sees it as including many of the acts of worship like remembrance of Allah, the recitation of the Qu’ran, standing humbly before Allah, bowing, prostrating, supplicating and *takbir*.

Salat is the highest form of physical acts of worship through which three-dimensional aspect of man (body, spirit and soul) are connected in communion with his Creator. Allah prescribed *salat* to the Prophet (SAW) as the acceptable mode of worship for His *Ummah* during his encounter with his Lord on the night of *al-mi’raj* which makes it different from other form of worship in Islam which was enjoined through revelation. Allah ordained for man through His chosen Prophet a special mode of worship in *Salat* which incorporate all posture of worship the angels engages in as servant of Allah without free will and with no course for disobedience to His wishes. This was done to explain the superiority of Allah’s wisdom and exposing the folly in Angel’s apprehension on the creation of man as vicegerent on earth. The Angels opposed to the creation of man, informing Him that man would engage in despicable acts on earth like mischief-making and bloodletting except Allah’s worship which they (the Angels) are particularly created for was put paid to with the ordainment of *salat* as the highest form of worship and subservience for all believes in Him.

a. Kinds of Salat

There are three kinds:

i. Obligatory Salat

This are the prescribed five daily *salat* observed at prescribed time. Q20:130 say:

Therefore (O Muhammad) bear with what they say and celebrate the praises (worship) of your Lord before the raising of the sun and before its going down and worship Him some hours of the night and at two ends of the day that you may find joy.

This verse set out the various periods that the *salat* are to be observed see also Q4:103. The five daily obligatory *salat* are *Salat Subh*, *Zuhr*, *Asr*, *Maghrib* and *Isha*.

ii. Non Obligatory Salat or Sunnah

These are *Salat* which are referred to as *Nafilah*. They are not compulsory but desirable they are founded on the practice of the Prophet. The commonest among them are:

A. The Nafilah which accompany each obligatory Salat. Below is a chart showing the names of the daily *salat*, the numbers of *raka’ahs* (including the *nafilehs*) and the probable times to be performed.

NAME	TIME	NO OF RAKA' AHS		
		OBLIGATORY	SUNNAH BEFORE	SUNNAH AFTER
SUBH	At dawn 5.30 – 6.30	2	2	-
ZUHR	Early noon 1.00 – 3.00	4	2 or 4	2 or 4
'ASR	Late afternoon 3.00 – 5.30	4	2 or 4	-
MAGRIB	Sunset	3	-	2 or 4
'ISHAH	Early night 7.30 – 10.00	4	2 or 4	Shaf' – 2 Witr – 1

(Musa – 1983)

The time indicated above is applicable only to the Tropics; it varies in countries in the temperate zones of the world.

B. Salat Shaf' and Witr: These are special *nafilah* said after *salat Isha*.

C. Salat Duha: This is observed between sunrise and midday. The number *raka'ah* varies with individual.

D. Tahajjud: This is observed between *Isha* and *Fajr* after one has slept and wake up. A midnight prayer. Q17:79 support this.

iii. Special Prayer

These are observed on special occasions and not every day. They are also non-obligatory but have stronger importance than the *sunnah*. These are Jumah prayer, *Salat Tarawih*, *Idul-fitr*, *Id ul – Adha*, *Salat Istisqa*, *Salat Janazah*.

In fact, what is considered ritualism in the Islamic institution of *salat* is only a way to feel divine presence and ponder over its greatness, glory and love by adopting certain reverential postures that can possibly be adopted, the posture of standing, sitting, bowing down and prostration.

2. Zakat

Zakat is an Arabic word which means growth, increase or purification as contained in the Qur'anic verse "Truly he succeeds that purifies it" (Q91:9). Isa (2003) sees it as obligatory alms levied on certain kind of property when it reaches a specified minimum quantity called *NISAB*. A portion of the property of a Muslim bestowed in alms as obligatory charity taken from the surplus of his wealth to be give to the indigent or destitute in the society. To Bashir (1987) it is a fiscal worship by which Islam requires the well – to – do to care for the needs of the poor and to pay a subsidy to maintain public benefits, like hospital, educational institutions, and defence force. The holy Qur'an lays stress on such great deeds of charity as the emancipation of slaves (Q90:13) the feeding of the poor (Q69:34), taking care of the orphan (Q17:34) and even the use of kind words is recommended as charitable deed (Q2:83).

It must be said that, Islam does not open the door of acquisition of wealth without regulation. Property which attracts the payment of *Zakat* must be acquired through legitimate means. Any

wealth acquired through usury (*Riba*), monopoly of foodstuff or essentials commodities or by cheating or by force or through corruption of any kind are regarded as illegal in Islam. The philosophy behind the institution of *Zakat* is that wealth should not remain confined to only the rich in the society. Islam condemns amassing wealth and hoarding it in the hands of few while it encourages sharing with others as the Qur'an declares:

Woe to every (kind of) scandal monger, backbiter who has gathered wealth (of this world) and arrange it. He thinks that his wealth will render him immortal. Nay, he will be sure to be thrown into that which breaks to piece (Q104:17).

The emphasis on the doing of good to man is one of the two mainstays of Islam and this is a constant theme of the holy Qur'an. Spending of one's wealth in the way of Allah for the service of mankind and keeping up of prayer are repeatedly mentioned together in several portions of the *Qur'an*. This shows that Islam attaches as much importance to *Zakat* as done to *Salat*.

1. **Zakat Collection**

Zakat is charged annually on property which has remained in the possession of a person for a whole year when its value reached certain limit called *nisab*. *Nisab* is the *zakat* deductible income or minimum amount of the property of a Muslim upon which *zakat* can be levied.

Zakat is liable on the following three categories of properties:

- i. Silver and gold or currency properties
- ii. Livestock or grazing animals such as camels, cattle, sheep or goats
- iii. Farm produce such as grain or fruit or what is obtaining from the earth such as treasure troves, minerals such as phosphate oil e.t.c and the produce of sea.

With the exception of little variation on its animal, the detail of *Zakat* was levied at the uniform rate of two and a half percent.

2. **People to whom Zakat is Payable**

People who are entitling to *zakat* are mentioned in Q9:60 thus

Alms are only for the poor, the needy and the officials appointed for its collection and those whose hearts are made to incline to truth and captives and those in debt and for the cause of Allah and the wayfarer (traveller in great financial difficulty) (this is) an ordinance from Allah and God is all Knowing, the Wise.

The above mentioned eight individuals that are entitling to *zakat* can be re-grouped into three:

1. Those who stand in need of help including the poor, the needy, those whose hearts are made to incline to truth, captives, debtor and the wayfarer.
2. The official appointed for the collection and distribution of the fund
3. To be spent in the way of Allah

In a properly organised Islamic state, *zakat* is assessed, collected and distributed by specially appointed Government agent. In Nigeria, it is administered by Islamic organisations or individual assessment where the owner of property assessed himself and give out his *zakat* directly to those he feels deserve it.

3. **Differences between Zakat and Sadaqah**

Zakat means obligatory alms taken from the surplus of wealth of the rich Muslims to be given to the indigent or destitute in the society. The percentage amount of *zakat* is fixed and it is payable

only once in a year to specified people mentioned. *Sadaqah* is a general word meaning “voluntary charity” it covers any gift or act of kindness or other which is done for the sake of Allah, without selfish motives. It is paid anytime with any amount of money or any materials like dresses, food, cash and kind e.t.c. Nevertheless both of them work towards improving the welfare of mankind i.e improving the condition of the poor members of the society.

3. Sawm (Ramadan Fasting)

Fasting means abstaining from eating, drinking and sexual pleasure from dawn until sunset. Fasting the month of *Ramadan* is one of the pillars of Islam and an obligation made by Allah Almighty. It is a time for conscious extra efforts to do good and avoid sins.

Fasting for 29 or 30 days of the Islamic lunar month of *Ramadan* is compulsory for all Muslims. Q2:183-185 says:

O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may learn self restraint....

It became an obligation in the second year after *Hijrah* for every Muslim who have reached the age of puberty with sound health and physically fit to keep it. The under age, the very old, the permanently sick are exempted while pregnant women, lactation mother, menstruating women, a wayfarer and so on are temporarily excuse and are allowed to postpone their fasting until they are fit to fast an equal number of days missed.

Apart from the compulsory *Ramadan* fasting, Muslim are encourage to fast on every Monday and Thursday, mid-days of every lunar month, on the day of *Arafah* and other special days in order to maximise the spiritual benefit of fasting. Fasting in Islam is from dawn to dusk. The fasting one are expected to take the early morning meal with which they enter into consecration state where eating, drinking, having sexual intercourse (with spouse), committing immoralities in words and deeds are all prohibited.

4. Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah)

Pilgrimage to the holy city of *Makkah* which is performed in obedience to Allah’s commandment is one of the ritual duties enjoined on all Muslims. *Hajj* is uniformly agreed upon by Muslim Scholars as an obligatory act of worship and one of the pillars of Islam. The obligation of *hajj* is decreed as the last pillar of Islam after *Salat*, *Zakat* and *Sawm*.

This is because *Salat*, the basis pillar of Islam is performed five time daily, so it has to be first pillar of Islam after *Imam*. *Zakat* has to come next because it is always combined with prayer in many verses of the *Qu’ran*, followed by fasting for the whole of the month of *Ramadan*. *Hajj* is a prescribed duty for all Muslim who are able physically and financially to observe it at least once in a life time. The Prophet (SAW) said:

Three persons are not to be held accountable: a sleeping person until he wakes, a minor until he comes of age and a mentally disturbed person until he regain his reason.

The *Hajj* of a minor is accepted. However, if he grows up and becomes more conscious of essence of *Hajj*, he must repeat the pilgrimage likewise a slave who performs *Hajj* and thereafter gains his freedom.

It is also important that the path of the intending pilgrim is free of all dangers, so that the pilgrim’s life and possession are safe and secure. If one is afraid of an epidemic or highway robbery then such person is not under the obligation to perform *Hajj*.

● Duties excepted of a Pilgrim

- Taking up the *Ihram* at the *Meeqat*

- Sleeping in Mina (for atleast 2 day) in the *Tashriq* days.
- Standing the night at *Muzhalifah*
- Stoning the *Jamarat*
- Shaving or cutting the hair
- *Tawaf ul Wada*

Character Development through Islam Ritual

Islam is all-inclusive religion. It is a comprehensive religion that pervades all aspect of man's life including matters of faith and practical living. For a Muslim to conduct his personal and social life in accordance with the tenet of Islam there is need for him to acquire an in-depth knowledge of Islamic ritual with its objectives and essential benefits.

It was earlier mentioned that the Angels opposed to the creation of man and one of the objective of *salat* is to turn man away from those despicable acts of immoralities and indecencies that the Angels feared might be his lot while on earth. The Qur'an specifically mentions moral rectitude as the basis for *salat*.

Recite what is sent to you of the Book by revelation and offer *salat* perfectly verily prayer prevents from sinful and immoral deeds and praising of Allah is greater indeed. And Allah knows what you do. (Q29:45).

Salat allows constant communions between man and Allah. It is a source of spiritual refreshment and illumination of the mind. Without this spiritual refreshment and drawing closer to Allah, man becomes like a machine, pre occupied only with his worldly affair. A spiritual discipline that teaches man humility, God consciousness, respect for Allah's commandment, restraint from evil deeds, fostering Islamic brotherhood, reinforce the virtue of discipline and orderliness, demonstrate obedience to the leader in things lawful, created sense of equality with no distinction of rank, wealth, power, race or colour in the way they stand arrange their row in *salat*. The Prophet (SAW) while emphasising the behavioural attitudinal changes expect from every praying one says:

If the *salat* of anyone does not prevent him from *al-fahsha* and *al-munkar* (all kinds of illegal and sinful deeds) then, his *salat* increases him in nothing but loss and to be far away from His Lord (Allah)

Zakat as an Islamic ritual is a quick reminder that man does not have absolute right over his possessions. Allah as the Creator is the right owner and possessor of the heaven and the earth and everything in them. Man owns possession is provisional and temporary. Muslim with this objective has purified his soul from greed.

Though, Islam encourages hardwork and honest livelihood. It recognises that in any society however wealthy, there will always be some people that need assistance of different kinds. With the institution of *zakat* concentration of wealth in the hands of few individuals will be stopped. Money will be circulated and poverty shall be eradicated.

Fasting inculcate spiritual discipline in a man with deep awareness, strength of will, self control with avoidance of sin. There is no doubt that *salat* brought together five times daily in the mosque on term of perfect equality but this is more effective in fasting because the rich are made to suffer the pang of hunger like their poor brethren, thus reminding the former of their social responsibility.

Fasting is recognised to have medical effect. It rests the digestive organ, allows impurities and excess food to be removing from the body and prevent obesity. It also provides an excellent opportunity to break forever bad habit and addiction such as smoking, alcohol drinking, gambling etc.

The main object of *Hajj* is to lay credence to the Islamic eschatological belief which emphasises the 'gathering' of men and women for judgement irrespective of socio-economic statuses, tribal and national affiliation. No other institution in the world has the wonderful influence of the *hajj* in levelling all distinction of race, colour and rank. Not only do people of all races and all countries meet together as member of one divine family but they all clad in the same dress – in two white sheet – moving towards the same direction, all having but one word speak, *labaika Allah-umma labaik...* Perhaps, it is for this reason that many see *hajj* as a dress-rehearse of the great assemblage before Allah, the Creator on the day of resurrection.

Recommendations

- Allah created man and provides for him a manual wherein instructions on how to live successfully in this life and hereafter are explained. The order of instruction in this manual should be strictly followed. The Quran arranged these Islamic rituals (Pillar of Islam) in such a way that one lead to another. *Iman* (faith in Islamic monotheism), observance of *Salat* five times daily which its constant observance improve God consciousness and Islamic brotherhood. Payment of compulsory charity and fasting that improve the life of the poor, the needy and create peaceful co-existence. He crowns it with *Hajj*. Muslims should therefore be educated not to bring pilgrimage to *Makkah* as the first duty because he will make use of the outcome of the first four duties (*Iman, Salat, Zakat and Sawm*) and also perform them regularly in *Makkah* during *Hajj*.
- Administration of *Zakat* in Nigeria is beset with so many problems, some of which are connected with its payment, collection and disbursement. The refusal or reluctance of the rich to pay it is partly borne out of their mistrust for the recipient or the collectors. The incessantly deteriorating economic condition and the political situation of our country have corrupted almost everybody. Important of *Zakat* payment should be re-emphasis by our religious Institution, now that our country is confronted with different challenges like Boko Haram issues, essential provisions for the I.D.P camps, flood disaster, Herdsmen cases, insecurity, poverty and corruption.
- Nigeria is a multi-religious state. Government cannot take up the duties of *zakat* collection and disbursement. This duties should be taken up by Islamic Organisations and public disbursement should be encouraged has done by some Islamic organisations, who use to broadcast it on television and other social medias. The rich Muslim can emulate this kind gesture when they watch it and also encourage proper accountability.
- It is important to know that bearing Muslim name does not necessarily make one a Muslim or does non-Muslim name make one a non-Muslim. What makes one a good Muslim is the total submission to the will of Allah (Belief in Islamic monotheism) which adequately manifest in his observances of Islamic rituals that differentiate Muslims from non-Muslims, followed with good deeds like kindness to people, good word; patient e.t.c. as explained in Q2:112 thus:

Whoever submit himself entirely to God and he is a doer of good to others is a Muslim: he shall have his reward from his Lord: there shall be no fear for such nor shall they be grieved.

- Muslim clerk should continue to stress the expected outcome of Islamic rituals when encouraging the Muslims to take up the responsibilities they were saddled with by their Creator.

Conclusion

The qualification of a Muslim is right faith (God Consciousness) and good deeds to humanity which bring about peaceful co-existence. The *Qur'an* in many places emphasises the importance of faith, God consciousness and good deeds. It stresses character development through a balance personality that is socially accommodating, intellectually, alert, morally sound and spiritually dedicate to the cause of Allah. It focus is towards the achievement of social solidarity, ethical harmony, human equality and brotherhood in Islam.

It makes it clear that man shall not be judge only through the observance of the Islamic rituals (Pillars of Islam) but through the outcome and positive effect which these rituals inculcate in him. The Qur'an says:

True piety does not consist in turning your face towards the East or West but truly pious is he who believes in Allah and the last day and the angels and the revelations and the Prophets and spend his substance however much he himself may cherish it upon his near of kin, the orphan and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggar and for the freeing of human being from bondage and constant in prayer and render the purifying dues; and (truly pious are) they who keep their promise whenever they promise and are patient in misfortune and hardship and in time of danger. It is they that have proved themselves true and it is they who are conscious of Allah.

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