

The Spiritual Psychology of Worship	
Author	Zohair Abdul-Rahman - M.D., received ijāzahs in ‘Aqīdah and Ḥadīth
Doubt	58% of respondents to a Yaqeen Institute survey of Muslims from the United States admitted that religious beliefs and practices not making sense to them contributed to feelings of doubt
Why does God ask us to worship Him?  Analogy	God asks us to worship Him out of mercy to us, we are the ones in need of, and stand to benefit from, worshiping God, not the other way around <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A doctor who asks her patients to follow her prescription purely for their benefit, not hers</li> </ul>
‘Ibādah  Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī  Ibn al-Qayyim    Technical definition	Linguistically means to serve, worship, adore, venerate, and deify <p>Defines ‘ibādah as “the pinnacle and purest form of humility”</p> <p>Describes worship as the pinnacle of love: “So the love found in worship is the purest form of love, and thus by Divine Right only due to God”</p> <p>All the meanings that ‘ibādah carries are tied to the inward states underlying the physical expressions of worship</p> <p>Ibn Taymiyyah: “A term that encompasses everything that Allah loves and is pleased with from inward and outward actions and words”  الْعِبَادَةُ هِيَ اسْمٌ جَامِعٌ لِكُلِّ مَا يُحِبُّهُ اللَّهُ وَيَرْضَاهُ مِنَ الْأَقْوَالِ وَالْأَعْمَالِ الْبَاطِنَةِ وَالظَّاهِرَةِ</p>
Biology and worship    Why are there atheists?  Qur’an  Desires   The atheist’s god	Modern neuroscience and psychology tell us that worship is a human universal and seems to be hardwired into our biology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- According to research, just as human beings are driven by their biology to speak, eat, and procreate, they are also driven to engage in the spiritual pursuit of worship</li> </ul> <p>The assumption is that worship exists solely in relation to supernatural entities</p> <p>Provides another perspective: “Have you not seen the one who takes his own desires as a god?”</p> <p>Desire can functionally operate as divine in the sense that a person’s ultimate existential concern represents their true deity  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An individual’s ultimate concern is what an individual loves the most, their highest ambition in life</li> <li>- Even an atheist, must have something that they love most, which is, in fact, their ‘god’ that is worshiped</li> </ul> </p>

Psychology of worship	How are humans hardwired for worship?
Ibn al-Qayyim	Human beings are by nature dependent creatures and must find what will bring them benefit so they can actively pursue it and what will bring them harm so they can actively avoid it <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pleasure and pain are the motivating factors that drive human beings toward benefit and away from harm</li> </ul>
Ibn al-Qayyim	Since human beings are fundamentally motivated to find benefit and avoid harm, they must construct a belief system that informs them of the sources of benefit and harm
Chain of benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some sources are dependent on others e.g. food is a source of benefit but it is dependent on all the work put in from the farm to the kitchen and everything in between. As a person follows the chain of benefit or the chain of harm they will inevitably arrive at the ultimate source of all benefit and harm</li> </ul>
Ultimate source of benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The source is God Almighty, the Owner of Might, the One who determines all things and the One who has power over everything</li> <li>- However, a person could internalize that wealth is the ultimate source of benefit and harm. Another person may think it is fame, status, or gratifying one's desires. Whatever a person conceptualizes as the Ultimate Source of benefit and harm becomes their deity. For its sake they live and for its sake they strive</li> </ul>
Existential dilemma	<p>Everyone is engaged in worship by virtue of their natural state of dependency i.e. they must submit to whatever they perceive has the power to harm or benefit them or else they face the consequences</p> <p>Therefore, the true existential dilemma that faces every human being is not choosing whether to worship but choosing what to worship. What exactly can and will fulfill their needs?</p>
Worthiness of divinity	<p>The Qur'an challenges the divinity of false deities by questioning their real power to benefit and harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Say: Do you worship other than Allah what cannot benefit you at all and what cannot harm you?"</li> <li>- "And they worship beside Allah what cannot harm them nor benefit them"</li> </ul>
Shirk khafi	<p>Someone may profess belief in Allah as the Creator of all, and the only One deserving of worship, while psychologically their ultimate concern may actually be something else</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A person's ultimate concern may be their wealth, status, fame, or personal pleasure</li> <li>- A person may not even be consciously aware of their ulterior motives thus the need for murāqabah (self-monitoring) and muḥāsabah (self-evaluation)</li> </ul>

Core emotions of worship	<p>Qur'an: أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمُ الْوَسِيلَةَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ وَيَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُ          "Those whom they invoke, do themselves seek the means of access to their Lord as to which of them becomes the closest, and they hope for His Mercy and fear His punishment"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeking nearness to God - Love</li> <li>- Hoping in His Mercy - Hope</li> <li>- Fearing His punishment - Fear</li> </ul>
Ibn al-Qayyim	<p>The heart in its journey to Allah is like a bird. Love is the head while fear and hope are the two wings. When the head and both wings are sound, then the bird can take flight. If the head is removed, the bird is dead. If one of the wings is missing, then it is easy prey for every predator</p> <p>الْقَلْبُ فِي سَيْرِهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الطَّائِرِ، فَاَلْمَحَبَّةُ رَأْسُهُ، وَالْخَوْفُ وَالرَّجَاءُ جَنَاحَاهُ</p>
Ibrāhīm ibn Adham	<p>If the kings and their sons knew what we experience of [spiritual] pleasure and happiness, they would fight us for it with their swords</p> <p>لَوْ عَلِمَ الْمُلُوكُ وَأَبْنَاءُ الْمُلُوكِ مَا نَحْنُ فِيهِ مِنَ النُّعِيمِ وَالسُّرُورِ لَجَالَدُونَا بِالسُّيُوفِ</p>
How to feel 'ibādah	<p>The intensity of the experience of 'ibādah is determined by the strength of the foundational sacred emotions (love, hope, and fear) found in a person's heart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The experience will only be as meaningful as the emotions underneath</li> </ul>
Love	The head of a person's spiritual pursuit
Ibn al-Qayyim	<p>When people attempt to define love, they end up merely describing different aspects related to it, such as what causes it or what are the signs that a person is in love</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Love itself is never able to be linguistically defined</li> </ul>
Love and meaning	<p>A person's ultimate beloved defines them as a person. The true purpose and meaning of a person's life is their beloved</p> <p>Love determines the quality, intensity, and context of all other emotional experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Even an act like hatred in the world is only done when something opposes the beloved</li> </ul>
Love is the foundational feeling	<p>A person fears losing their beloved, hopes to be close to their beloved, longs for their beloved, is grieved over what they have missed from their beloved, and happy about experiencing their beloved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Love determines other love as well. A person will love anything that their beloved loves and anything that brings them closer to their beloved</li> </ul>

Objective of a believer Qur'an	<p>To empty the heart of ultimate love for anything other than Allah</p> <p>وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ</p> <p>“And from among humankind are those who take partners beside Allah, loving them with a love that is only due to Allah. And those who believe have even stronger love for Allah”</p>
Negative emotions	<p>When we attach our hearts to anything that is temporary, then it naturally produces insecurity, unhealthy fear, and anxiety as we cannot escape the reality that our beloved will leave us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Wretched is the slave of gold, silver, fine clothes, and garments. If he is given, he is pleased, but if he is not given, he is displeased”</li> </ul> <p>تَعِسَ عَبْدُ الدِّينَارِ وَالذَّرْهَمِ وَالْقَطِيفَةِ وَالْخَمِيسَةِ إِنْ أُعْطِيَ رَضِيَ وَإِنْ لَمْ يُعْطَ لَمْ يَرْضَ</p>
Hadith	
Love for His sake	<p>If a person loves another for His sake, they are able to do so purely without the taint of self-interest which characterizes all relationships that don't extend from a love for Allah. They are able to love a person for who they are, a creation of Allah ﷻ, rather than what needs they fulfill</p>
Hope	<p>Without hope, a person would not have the strength to tread the path to their beloved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hope in the vastness of Allah's Mercy is the propeller that drives a person on the path toward Him</li> </ul>
Qur'an	<p>“And the future will be better for you than the past”</p> <p>وللآخرة خير لك من الأولى</p> <p>The sinner hopes in Allah's Mercy. The poor person hopes in Allah's Providence. The sick person hopes in Allah's Cure. The oppressed person hopes in Allah's Justice. The broken person hopes in Allah's Strength. The lonely person hopes in Allah's Love. The confused person hopes in Allah's Guidance. The depressed and anxious hope in Allah's Plan. Whatever our need in life, we have hope that Allah will fulfill it</p>
Hope and effort	<p>When a person believes they can reach their goal, they will increase in their efforts to reach it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hope in Allah inspires action because you trust that your efforts will be fruitful</li> </ul>
Hope and action	<p>Hope in Allah alone doesn't mean a person dismisses the means Allah has placed in the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “O Messenger of Allah ﷺ shall I tie it (the camel) and rely upon Allah ﷻ or should I leave it loose and rely upon Allah ﷻ? He said, “Tie it and rely upon Allah ﷻ.”</li> </ul> <p>اعْقِلْهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ</p>
Hope versus wishful thinking	<p>Wishful thinking is a wish for things to come to a person without having to put in effort</p>

<p>Hope in difficulty</p> <p>Popular psychology</p> <p>Qur'an</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inspires laziness and complacency</li> <li>- Ignores the means Allah has ordained for things in this world and opposes the prophetic example of proactive reliance on Allah</li> </ul> <p>No matter how bleak a person's situation, the wing of hope tells them that the ultimate end will be theirs if they only have faith</p> <p>Encourages people to 'believe in themselves' and go through life with an attitude of self-sufficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Instills false hope and confidence in a person who has no tangible reason to believe he or she is capable of changing their condition</li> <li>- "But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient"</li> </ul> <p>كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّا غَفِي كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّا غَفِي</p> <p>True independence is only achieved with absolute dependence on the One who is truly Self-Sufficient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only through hope and reliance upon Allah ﷻ can a person be justifiably confident and have good reason to believe in an optimistic future</li> </ul>
Fear	<p>Fear is a positive emotion if it motivates us to stay away from harm and to pursue what is beneficial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One of the greatest assets to a believer that gives them the strength to refrain from temptation and desire</li> </ul> <p>If a person doesn't fear Allah, then they will fear the people and things of this world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fear of poverty, failure, people's judgment, or the aggression of others can shackle a person's heart and drive them wherever the fear goes</li> </ul> <p>The key to only fearing Allah is to only love Allah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We fear being separated from what we want and love in life</li> </ul> <p>The Wrath of God is perfect, unlike the flawed anger of human beings that leads them to transgress. The Anger of God is pure justice</p> <p>Fear of Allah is a strength that keeps us soaring on the journey to Allah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thus, fear of Allah ﷻ means we run to Him, not away from Him</li> </ul>
Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ	<p>"Indeed, if deeds are sincere and incorrect, they will not be accepted. If deeds are correct and insincere, they will not be accepted, but rather they are only accepted if they are both sincere and correct. Sincere means they are done for Allah alone and correct means they are done according to the Sunnah."</p>