

Belief in Allah (part 1 of 2): The Categories of Tawheed

Description: The concept of *Tawheed* (monotheism) is ingrained in the very heart of the testimony of faith (*Shahadah*). This two part lesson aims to furnish the believer with an understanding of what this unique concept holds. Part one discusses the categories of *Tawheed*.

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Published on 14 Dec 2011 - Last modified on 30 Jan 2023

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Prerequisites

- An Introduction to Pillars of Islam and Articles of Faith (2 parts).

Objective

- To understand the categories of *Tawheed*.

Arabic Terms

- *Tawheed* - The Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah with respect to His Lordship, His Names and Attributes and in His right to be worshipped.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Shirk* - a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.

Belief in Allah, the proper name in Arabic of the one and only God, consists of four matters:

- (a) Belief in Allah's existence.
- (b) Allah is the Lord.
- (c) Allah is entitled to worship.
- (d) Allah is known by His Most Beautiful Names and Attributes.

(a) Belief in Allah's Existence

It is not required that Allah's existence be proven by scientific, mathematical, or philosophical arguments. His existence is not a 'discovery' to be made by the scientific method or a mathematical theorem to be proven. Every human being has an innate belief in a Creator. This belief is not a result of learning or personal deductive thinking. It is outside influences that effect this innate belief and confuse a person as the Prophet said:

"There is no child who is not born with a natural belief in Allah, but his parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magian." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*)

Also, mere common sense bears witness to Allah's existence. From a ship one learns of the ship-builder, from the cosmos one learns of its Creator. Allah's existence is also known by answers to prayers, the miracles of prophets, and the teachings of all revealed scriptures.

(b) Allah is the Lord

Allah is the only Lord of heaven and earth. He is the Lord of the physical universe and the Lawgiver for human life. He is the Master of the physical world and Ruler of the affairs of men. Allah is the Lord of every man, woman, and child.

(i) Allah is the sole Lord and Ruler of the physical world. The term 'Lord' here specifically means that He is the Creator, Controller; the Kingdom of the heaven and the earth belongs exclusively to Him, and He owns them. He alone brought existence out of non-existence and all depend on Him for their conservation and continuance. He did not create the universe and leave it to pursue its own course according to fixed laws and cease to take any further interest in it. His power is required at every moment to sustain all creatures. Creation has no Lord besides Him.

"Say (O Muhammad): 'Who provides for you from the sky and the earth? Or who owns hearing and sight? And who brings out the living from the dead and brings out the dead from the living? And who disposes the affairs?' They will say: 'Allah.' Say: 'Will you not then be afraid of Allah's punishment (for setting up rivals with Allah)?" (Quran 10:31)

He is the ever-ruling King and the Savior, the Living God, full of wisdom. No one can change His decisions. Angels, prophets, human beings, and the animal and plant kingdoms are under His control. Historically, few people have denied the existence of the Lord; throughout ages people for most part have believed in One God, a Supreme Being, a supernatural Creator.

(ii) Allah is the only Ruler of the affairs of men. Allah is the supreme Lawgiver^[1], the Absolute Judge, the Legislator, He distinguishes right from wrong. Just like the physical world submits to its Lord, human beings must submit to the moral and religious teaching of their Lord, the Lord who sets apart right from wrong for them. In other words, Allah alone has the authority to make laws,

determine acts of worship, decide morals, and set standards of human interaction and behavior. His is the command:

"His is the Creation and Command." (Quran 7:54)

(c) Allah is Entitled to Worship

Allah has the exclusive right to be worshipped inwardly and outwardly, by one's actions and by one's heart. Not only can no one be worshipped *apart* from Him, absolutely no one else can be worshipped *along with* Him. He has no partners or associates in worship. Worship, in its comprehensive sense and in all its aspects, is for Him alone.

"There is no true god worthy of worship but He, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate." (Quran 2:163)

Allah's right to be worshipped can not be over emphasized. It is the essential meaning of *Laa ilaaha ill-Allaah*. A non-Muslim enters Islam by testifying to Allah's sole right to be worshipped. It is the crux of Islamic belief in Allah, even all of Islam. It was the central message of all prophets and messengers sent by Allah. They all declared clearly:

"Worship Allah! You have no other god but Him." (Quran 7:59, 11:50, 23:32)

It was the central message of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all. If Allah alone creates, gives life and death, provides food and security, gives hearing and sight, then He alone must be worshipped.

Worship in Islam consists of every act, belief, statement, or sentiment of the heart Allah approves and loves, everything that brings a person closer to His Creator. It includes everything Allah has legislated in the Quran or through His Prophet's *Sunnah*. It includes 'external' worship like the daily ritual prayers, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage as well as 'internal' worship such as faith in the six articles of faith, reverence, adoration, love, gratitude, and reliance. An act of worship is not accepted unless it conforms to the following:

(i) It is done exclusively for Allah and none should have any share in it, including one's own self. Worship is not to be done even to satisfy the soul's base desires, such as receiving praise or showing-off. This is the meaning of *Laa ilaaha ill-Allaah*.

(ii) It must conform with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. It must be performed in the exact manner performed by him, without any addition or omission. This is the implication of *Muhammad Rasool-Allaah*.

Allah is entitled to all types of worship, the worship of the body, soul, and heart. It remains incomplete unless it is done out of reverence and fear of Allah, divine love and adoration, hope in divine reward, and extreme humility. Giving anyone else - prophets, angels, Jesus, Mary, idols, or nature - a portion of worship due to Allah is called *Shirk* and is the most enormous sin in Islam.

(d) Allah is Known by His Most Beautiful Names and Attributes

Allah is known by His Most Beautiful Names and Attributes as they appear in the Quran and *Sunnah*, without corrupting or denying the obvious meaning, imagining their "how," or thinking of them in human terms.

"And the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah, so call on Him by them." (Quran 7:180)

Therefore, it is inappropriate to use First Cause, Author, Substance, Pure Ego, Absolute, Pure Idea, Logical Concept, Unknown, Unconscious, Ego, Idea, or Big Guy as divine names. Any name which one seeks to affirm for Allah must have been revealed in the Quran or *Sunnah*.

The Names of Allah indicate His perfection and freedom from deficiencies. Allah does not forget, sleep or get tired. His seeing, like all other attributes, is not like human sight. He is not unjust, and has no son, mother, father, brother, associate, or helper. He was not begotten and He begets none. He stands in need of none as He is perfect. He does not become or resemble humans and has no need to do so to "understand" human suffering. Allah is the Almighty (*al-Qawee*), the One Incomparable (*al-'Ahad*), the Acceptor of Repentance (*al-Tawwab*), the Most Compassionate (*al-Raheem*), Ever-Living (*al-Hayy*), All-Sustaining (*al-Qayyoom*), all-Knowing (*al-'Aleem*), All-Hearing (*al-Samee'*), All-Seeing (*al-Baseer*), the Pardoner (*al-'Afuww*), the Helper (*al-Naseer*), and the Healer of the Sick (*al-Shaafi'*). There are many other names mentioned in the Quran and *Sunnah*.

All praise and glory is due to Him for His absolute perfection and majesty.

Endnotes:

[1] God's existence proven by the existence of a supreme Lawgiver is called the 'ethical' argument by Western theologians.

Belief in Allah (part 2 of 2): Shirk, the Opposite of Tawheed

Description: The concept of *Tawheed* (monotheism) is ingrained in the very heart of the Testimony of Faith (*Shahadah*). This two part lesson aims to furnish the believer with an understanding of what this unique concept holds. Part two discusses the greatest violation associated with *Tawheed* i.e. the aspect of *Shirk*.

By Imam Mufti

Prerequisites

- An Introduction to Pillars of Islam and Articles of Faith (2 parts).

Objectives

- To learn the precise meaning of the word '*shirk*' and understand its severity.
- To know what are the greater and lesser forms of '*shirk*'.
- To be aware of the some of the forms of '*shirk*' prevalent in our societies.

Arabic Terms

- *Tawheed* - The Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah with respect to His Lordship, His Names and Attributes and in His right to be worshipped.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Shirk* - a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.
- *Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- *Riyaa* - It comes from the word *ra'aa* meaning to see, to behold, to view. Thus the word *riyaa* means showing off, hypocrisy, and dissimulation. Islamically *riyaa* means to perform acts which are pleasing to Allah with the intention of pleasing other than Allah.

The Arabic word *shirk* is the opposite of *tawheed*, Allah's oneness, and is more inclusive than polytheism and idolatry. It means associating Allah with other deities. *Shirk* is to associate others with Allah in certain aspects designated as unique to Him and exclusively His in the Quran and *Sunnah*.

There is no issue upon which Islam is so strict as the one of monotheism (*tawheed*). Associating partners with God (*shirk*) is the deadliest sin, the greatest violation with which the Lord of the heavens and the earth may be defied. Death in the state of *shirk* permanently severs a person from divine grace:

**"Surely Allah forgives not that a partner be set with Him (i.e. the sin of *shirk*), and forgives all besides that to whom he pleases."
(Quran 4:48)**

Shirk has many forms, some of which will be discussed below.

The Greater *Shirk*

Acts which fall under this category of *shirk* are regarded as unforgivable. Allah will not forgive them unless one repents.

"Verily, Allah does not forgive *shirk*, but He forgives other than that to whom He pleases"

This category contradicts the very purpose of creation, as expressed in Allah's statement:

**"I have not created jinn or mankind except to worship Me Alone."
(Quran 51:56)**

In this category of *shirk*, acts of worship are directed to beings *other than* Allah or *alongside* Him, as is their rewards. Allah gives an example of this type in the Quran, in His saying:

"So when they ride in the ships, they call upon Allah, being sincerely obedient to Him, but when he brings them safe to the land, lo, they commit *shirk* with Him." (Quran 29:65)

The Quran stresses in many verses that Allah does not share His powers with any partner. It warns those who believe their idols will intercede for them that they, together with the idols, will become fuel for Hellfire on the Day of Judgment.

The greater *shirk* includes invoking or supplicating to a false deity, prophet, angel, saint, idol, or anything besides Allah. Christians pray to a man who they believe to share divinity with Allah, the Prophet of Allah Jesus, peace be upon him. Catholics direct certain types of worship to saints, angels, and Mary, which they regard as "veneration". All these things are regarded as *shirk*.

It is also considered *shirk* to pray to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, or to graves of holy men.

Believing in the legislation of others, whether governments or religious leaders in opposition to the clear teachings of Islam is also a major form of *shirk*, as Allah says:

"They (referring to Jews and Christians) took their rabbis and their monks to be their Lords besides Allah." (Quran 9:31)

They took them as lords besides Allah not by directly praying to them, but by willfully accepting their changing the lawful into prohibited and the forbidden into lawful in Allah's religion. They gave them the authority that only Allah has - to legislate in divine law.

Another form of major *shirk* is giving any creation a portion of divine love reserved for Allah.

"And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides

Allah as rivals (to Allah). They love them as they love Allah. But those who believe love Allah (more than anything else)..." (Quran 2:165)

Lesser Forms of *Shirk*

Swearing by other than Allah and carrying out religious acts for worldly gain, like showing off or to win favors are two of the lesser forms of *shirk*. Allah's Messenger said:

"The thing I fear for you the most is 'lesser *shirk*.' The companions asked 'Oh! Messenger of Allah, what is "lesser *shirk*?" He replied showing off, for surely Allah will say on the Day of Resurrection when people are receiving their rewards, 'Go to those for whom you were showing off in the material world and see if you can find any reward from them.'" (*Ahmad, at-Tabarani, al-Baihaqi*)

Once, the Prophet announced:

"O people, beware of hidden *shirk*! The people asked, 'O messenger of Allah, what is hidden *shirk*?' He replied, 'When a man gets up to pray and strives to beautify his prayer because people are looking at him; that is hidden *shirk*.'" (*Ibn Khuzaymah*)

Showing off (*riyaa* in Arabic) is the practice of performing any of the various forms of worship in order to be seen and praised by people. Doing religious acts to impress people destroys the spiritual benefits of righteous deeds and incurs sin on the person. Sometimes, even the most pious are not spared of it because it is so hidden and the motivating force behind it is so ingrained. Getting rid of it involves that one concentrate upon the fact that they are performing the worship for Allah's pleasure alone, and not the pleasure of people.

A Muslim must take great care to ensure intentions begin pure and remain pure whenever righteous deeds are being done. In order to ensure this, the saying of Allah's name is enjoined in Islam before all acts of importance. A series of informal prayers (*du'as*) have also been prescribed by the Prophet before and after all natural habits to turn them into acts of worship and develop awareness of Allah.

Everyday Examples of *Shirk*

Astrology and Horoscopes

Predicting the future by means of comparing the positions of stars and constellations, in conjunction with the time of year that a person was born is a type of *shirk*. Only Allah knows the future, so it is impossible to predict future events by studying the stars. This is a form of *shirk* because belief in astrology credits astrologers with knowledge of the future, as well as the fact that they ascribe certain powers to created objects - stars - that neither Allah nor science has assigned.

Fortune-Telling

Reading palms, looking into a crystal ball, and other forms used to foretell the future are forms of *shirk* for the same reasons given above.

The Number 13

A common example of *shirk* is belief that the number thirteen is an unlucky number, especially in the West, where it is not uncommon for tall buildings not to have a thirteenth floor. It is *shirk* because it assigns the ability to bring bad fortune to a mere number!

Lucky or Unlucky Creatures

It has been a common custom for certain animals or objects to be associated with good or bad luck for many centuries in many parts of the world. For example, black cats, magpies, rabbits' feet, and horseshoes are thought to bring good luck. All of these examples are *shirk* because the ability to bring good or bad luck is assigned to Allah's creation.

All Muslims should avoid all forms of *shirk*, and the only way one can be sure to do so is if they study its different forms and understand well the concept of *tawheed*. *Shirk* is the gravest of sins in Islam, more severe than other grave sins such as murder and adultery, for it vies with the sole right of Allah to worship. Thus, it is worthy that Muslims do their best to avoid *shirk* and become eligible to enter the Gardens of Paradise.

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