

Fast 15: The oneness of God (*Tauhid*) — Various forms of *shirk*

- The various forms of *shirk* mentioned in the Holy Quran are an indication of the ennobling message underlying the teaching of Divine Unity. These are summed up in the verse:

“...that we shall serve none but Allah and that we shall not set up any partner with Him and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah.” — 3:64

These are really three forms of *shirk* — a fourth will be mentioned separately below.

- The most obvious form of *shirk* is to worship anything besides God, such as stones, idols, trees, animals, tombs, heavenly bodies, forces of nature, or human beings who are supposed to be demi-gods or gods or incarnations of God or sons or daughters of God. The Quran condemns not only idolatry in its gross form, but also in the refined form in which the idol worshipper claims that an idol is used only to enable a worshipper to concentrate his attention, and become more deeply engrossed in Divine contemplation. It says:

“And those who choose protectors besides Him (they say): We serve them only that they may bring us nearer to Allah.” — 39:3.

The fact is that the worshipper's attention is centred, not on God, but on the idol. The material object, which is supposed to be the means of reaching God, acquires a God-like sanctity and sacredness itself.

Refuting nature worship, the Quran says:

“And of His signs are the night and the day and the sun and the moon. Do not adore the sun nor the moon, but adore Allah Who created them...” — 41:37

- The second kind of *shirk*, which is less obvious, is the setting up of partners with God, that is, to suppose that other things and beings possess the same attributes as God Himself. The beliefs that there are three persons in the Godhead, and that the Son and the Holy Ghost are eternal, all-powerful and all-knowing like God Himself, as in the Christian creed, or that there is a Creator of Evil along with a Creator of Good, as in Zoroastrianism, or that matter and soul are co-eternal with God and self-existing like Himself, as in Hinduism — all these beliefs come under this kind of *shirk*.
- The third kind of *shirk* is that in which some people take others for their lords, meaning that they blindly obey their religious leaders in what they declare as right or wrong, or what they say is commanded or forbidden by God.

- The fourth kind of *shirk* is referred to in the verse:

“Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god?” — 25:43, 45:23

Here blind submission to one’s own desires is described as “taking them for god”.

- It can be seen that a Muslim too may be guilty of the third and fourth kinds of *shirk*. Blindly obeying religious leaders without caring to know what Islam actually teaches, or obeying them through fear, constitutes *shirk*. To take one’s desires as god, and submit to and worship them as the goal of life, is a common kind of *shirk*.
- Thus belief in the Unity of God means that true obedience is due to God alone, and whosoever obeys either anyone else, or his own low desires, in preference and opposition to the Divine commandments, is really guilty of *shirk*.
- The various kinds of *shirk* mentioned in the Holy Quran show that, in the doctrine of Unity (*tauḥīd*), it gives to the world an ennobling message of advancement all round, physical as well as moral and spiritual. Man is freed not only from slavery to animate and inanimate objects, but also from subservience to the great and wondrous forces of nature which, he is told, he can subdue for his benefit. It goes further and delivers man from that greatest of slaveries, slavery to man. It does not allow to any mortal the dignity of Godhead, or of being more than a mortal; for the greatest of mortals, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, is commanded to say:

“I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your God is One God.”
— 18:110

- The doctrine of the Unity of God, besides casting off the bonds of slavery which had enthralled the human mind, and thus opening the way for its advancement, carries another significance equally great, if not greater. It is the idea of the unity of the human race. God is *Rabb al-‘ālamīn* — the Lord of all the nations. This signifies that all the nations of the world are, as it were, the children of one Father, and that He takes equal care of all, bringing all to their goal of completion by degrees.
- We further find that the Holy Quran upholds the idea that God, being the God of all nations, deals with all of them alike. He hearkens to the prayers of all, whatever their religion or nationality. He is equally merciful to all and forgives the sins of all. He rewards the good deeds of the Muslim and the non-Muslim alike; and not only does He deal with all nations alike, but we are further told that He created them all alike, in the Divine nature. Human nature is described in the Quran as follows:

“...the nature made by Allah in which He has created mankind.” — 30:30