

Fast 14: The oneness of God (*Tauhid*)

- All the basic principles of Islam are fully dealt with in the Holy Quran, and so is the doctrine of faith in God, of which the corner-stone is belief in the Unity of God (*tauḥīd*).
- The best-known expression of Divine Unity is that contained in the declaration of *lā ilāha ill-Allāh*. It is made up of four words:
 - *lā* (no)
 - *ilāh* (that which is worshipped)
 - *illā* (except)
 - *Allāh* (the proper name of the Divine Being).
- Thus these words, which are commonly rendered into English as meaning “there is no god but Allah”, convey the significance that there is nothing which deserves to be worshipped except Allah. It is this confession which, when combined with the confession of the prophethood of Muhammad (*Muḥammad-ur Rasūl-ullāh*), admits one into the fold of Islam.
- The Unity of God, according to the Holy Quran, implies that God is One in His person, One in His attributes and One in His works:
 - His Oneness in His person means that there are *not more gods* than one, and God Himself *is not made of different gods* who have come together to make one.
 - His Oneness in attributes implies that no other being possesses one or more of the Divine attributes to the perfect extent.
 - His Oneness in works implies that none can do what God has done, or what God may do.
- The doctrine of Unity is beautifully summed up in one of the shortest and earliest chapters of the Holy Quran:

“Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He has no offspring, nor is He born (of anyone); and none is like Him.” — ch. 112
- **Shirk**: The opposite of Unity is *shirk*, implying partnership. In the Holy Quran, *shirk* is used to signify the associating of gods with God, whether such association be with respect to the person of God or His attributes or His works, or with respect to the obedience which is due to Him alone.

Shirk is said to be the gravest of all sins:

“Surely *shirk* is a grievous wrong.” — 31:13

“Allah does not forgive that a partner should be set up with Him, and forgives all besides that to whom He pleases.” — 4:48

One reason why Allah does not forgive *shirk* is simply that the person committing *shirk* does not believe that Allah alone has the power to forgive. Rather, he believes that Allah needs the help of other gods in order to forgive, or that others can forgive without need of Allah. For example, it is a Christian belief that God the Father *cannot* forgive sins, so He sent His son to suffer punishment for people’s sins. How can God forgive a person who himself doesn’t believe that God alone can forgive, and one who turns to priests to whom he confesses his sins to seek forgiveness through them?

- *Shirk* demoralizes man, while Divine Unity brings about his moral elevation. According to the Holy Quran, man is God’s *khalifa*, i.e. God’s representative or deputy on earth (so to speak), and this shows that he is gifted with the power of controlling the rest of the earthly creation:

“And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all from Himself. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.” — 45:12–13

If, then, man has been created to rule the universe and is gifted with the power to subdue everything and to turn it to his use, does he not degrade himself by taking other things for gods, by bowing before the very things which he has been created to conquer and rule?

- This is an argument which the Holy Quran has itself advanced against *shirk*:

“Shall I seek for you a god other than Allah, while He has made you excel all created things?” — 7:140

Man, being as it were the lord of creation under God, and excelling the whole of creation, should not take objects lower than himself as his gods.

Shirk is, therefore, of all sins the most serious because it degrades man and renders him unfit for attaining the high position destined for him in the Divine scheme.

In the next Study we consider the various kinds of shirk.