

The Oneness of God

by Zahid Aziz¹

“And your God is one God; there is no God but He! He is the Beneficent, the Merciful.” — The Holy Quran, 2 : 163

“Blessed is He Who sent down the *Furqan* [the Quran] upon His servant that he might be a warner to the nations — He, Whose is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and Who did not take to Himself a son, and Who has no associate in the kingdom, and Who created everything, then ordained for it a measure. And they take besides Him gods who create nothing, while they are themselves created, and they control for themselves no harm nor profit, and they control not death, nor life, nor raising to life.” — 25 : 1–3

Words similar to those quoted above occur throughout the Holy Quran, conveying the most basic and fundamental teaching of Islam that there is only One God, and there is no god besides Him. It is the mission of Islam to preach this doctrine, exhorting people to accept and adhere to this concept in terms of their beliefs, worship and way of living, so that their belief in it is strengthened.

The over-riding importance of this doctrine lies in the fact that belief in One God is the basis of human progress, whether it is material progress, intellectual progress or moral progress, and makes a person rise to the highest that he is capable of. As we will see, taking other things to be god instead of the One God, or as well as the One God, limits and restricts a person’s outlook and prevents him from fully developing the powers that have been placed in his nature as a human being.

Of course, this loss of full development does not only apply in case of a person who actually holds the belief that there are other gods besides the One God. The same applies in case of a person who may hold it as a belief that there is only One God but whose practical actions show that he regards other things as gods.

I have so far mentioned people who believe in other things and beings to be gods. What about those who do not believe in any god at all? According to the Quran, they also, by their outlook and behaviour, believe and consider something or other to be their god.

¹ Friday *Khutba* at Lahore Ahmadiyya Centre, Darus Salaam, London, 2nd January 2009.

When the Holy Prophet Muhammad arose, the belief in One God or *tauheed* had been greatly corrupted in the whole world. Beliefs in, and worship of, other things — the practice which is called *shirk* — was prevailing everywhere. His own people, the Arabs, while believing in one God, also worshipped idols of stone who they thought could answer their prayers. Islam taught that the idols themselves were created things, not creators, and were subject to the laws of nature, just as their worshippers were. The idols were helpless, not helpers. What was worse was that the idols could not give their votaries any moral guidance. So they remained trapped in their ignorance, superstition, immoral and barbaric practices, and oppression of and injustice towards the weak. They considered the idols as justifying their own selfish and evil behaviour. As the Quran says, “their associate-gods have made look good to them” their evil practices such as killing female children and making human sacrifices. The Quran challenged them to provide *knowledge* and *evidence* that their beliefs and vile practices were justified. Are they supported by some phenomenon in nature, or by reason and sense, or by some authoritative writing? No, these were based on conjecture and their own low desires and superstitions.

The asking for knowledge and evidence and arguments also shows that the Quran requires true beliefs to be supported by these criteria. This is why the early Muslims developed a civilization which laid stress on knowledge, learning, investigation, logic and reason in all fields of life.

Many critics of Islam admit that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was very successful in reforming the wrong beliefs and practices of his fellow Arabs that were based on idol-worship. But they claim that this was because it was a crude form of idolatry which is easy to argue against, refute and prove false. They claim that the beliefs of knowledgeable religious nations, such as Christian and Jews, are based on sophisticated philosophies and the Holy Prophet could neither grasp nor refute them.

This, of course, is not correct. Islam identified not only crude and simplistic idol worship but also the more subtle forms of *shirk* or believing other things or beings to possess God’s attributes.

In the great civilizations in history, such as the Babylonian, Greek and Roman civilizations, it was believed that there are different gods controlling different aspects of nature or life. For example, there was a god of harvest, god of water, god of weather, god of war, god of wealth, god of the sun, and god of the tribe or nation. Islam taught that it is the same God Who controls everything:

“And your God is one God; there is no God but He! He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits mankind, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between heaven and earth, there are surely signs for a people who understand. Yet there are some people who take for themselves objects of worship besides Allah ...” — 2 : 163–165.

All the various phenomena mentioned point to one God, and not different gods controlling different things.

“He it is Who shows you the lightning causing fear and hope and (Who) brings up the heavy cloud. And the thunder celebrates His praise...” — 13 : 12–13

This says that lightning, rain and thunder are brought about by the one God. The Holy Prophet Muhammad did not himself know what gods were believed in by nations such as the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Hindus or the Chinese. Yet the Quran mentions the functions they ascribed to different gods and tells us that the one God controls all those functions.

This concept taught by the Quran led to Muslims making a scientific study of the world, their studies then providing Western sciences with the basis upon which to build modern science. The Quran teaches that man, instead of worshipping the sun, moon or stars, should worship God Who created them — and that means studying how He makes them work and using them for our benefit because that is what they have been created for.

Jews and Christians both claim to believe in One God. But they had also assigned some of God’s powers to others. The Quran argues against the Christian claim that Jesus was the son of God. Having sons is a requirement of humans. The son assists the father and eventually takes the place of the father. God cannot remain a father to the son permanently nor can the son remain a son permanently. One day the son must replace the father, and so must this cycle continue. Moreover, the belief that the ‘son’ died for the sins of mankind and paid the penalty for everyone’s sins reduces and removes a person’s own aspiration to overcome sin.

The Jews, as well as followers of other religions, were also making another kind of person into a god, and that was the religious cleric, priest or leader. Of course, they did not literally worship such individuals but the Quran nonetheless says:

“They take their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah...” — 9:31

They were blindly obeying their religious guides in whatever they instructed them as to what God wanted them to do, what He allowed and what He forbade. Those who revere their religious leaders in this way are neglecting the power of sense and reason that God has bestowed on all human beings and are demeaning themselves to a position lower than that which God has given them.

This kind of taking others as gods is, of course, not confined to followers of religions other than Islam. We see many Muslims doing the same. In some sects it is believed by the ordinary members that they can only please Allah if they please the leader of the sect. It seems that they can find out in this world if Allah is pleased with them because if they see that their leader is pleased with them then it follows, according to their thinking, that Allah is pleased with them. Without literally worshipping their leader or priest, or actually calling him as God, they accord to him that very Divine position because all their efforts are directed towards pleasing him. In effect they relegate Allah to the back seat as if Allah had handed over His authority to their religious head. The Holy Prophet Muhammad never placed himself on such a pedestal. It once happened that one of his Companions, being respectful towards him, said to him: “Let it be whatever Allah pleases and whatever you please”. Hearing these words, the Holy Prophet said: “Do you make me a partner with Allah?”

Another kind of *shirk* is described in the Quran as follows:

“Have you seen him who takes his low desire for god? — 25 : 43 and 45 : 23

Those who do not follow the true belief in one God, whether they are disbelievers in God, or members of a non-Islamic religion, or Muslims themselves, will often be found to take some low desire of theirs as the god that they worship. They will do anything, violate any moral standard, commit any injustice against others, in order to satisfy their base desire. Often, they seek the satisfaction of some low desire under the pretext of following a religion or some noble sounding concept or way of life. This is the most subtle form of *shirk* and the most difficult to remove within oneself.

Committing *shirk* makes a human being fall and tumble down from the high position that God has given him. As the Quran says:

“Whoever sets up partners with Allah, it is as if he had fallen from on high, then the birds had snatched him away, or the wind had carried him off to a distant place.”

— 22 : 31

From: www.ahmadiyya.org/islam/intro.htm
