

Monotheism of the Qur'an

Monotheism means a belief in the Unity of Allah in every respect. He is One in person. He is the only Creator. It is He alone who manages the world. It is He alone who deserves worship and adoration. He is One in many other aspects.

Most of the verses of the Qur'an on this subject emphasize the Unity of Allah with regard to creation, command (management of the world) and worship. They first draw the attention of man to the fact that Allah alone is the Creator of the world. He alone has the sovereign authority over it. Then they draw the conclusion that He alone deserves worship.

It appears from the Qur'an that most of the heathen Arabs believed or were inclined to believe in the Unity of Allah with regard to creation and command. The holy Qur'an says:

"If you were to ask them, who created the heavens and the earth and has subdued the sun and the moon? They would definitely say: Allah. Then bow is it that they go astray!?" (Surah al-Ankabut, 29:61).

The Qur'an cites the homogeneous, well-knit and unique system of the world as a proof of the Unity of its creator. It wants us to think over the compactness and all-pervasiveness of this system to be sure that it has been designed and is being managed by One Supreme Being. That is how we arrive at the unity with regard to creation and command. The Qur'an says:

"Your Lord is One. There is no god but He, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Surely ire the creation of the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, the ships which sail on the sea for the benefit of the people, the water that Allah sends down from heaven with which He revives the dead earth and replenishes it with all kinds of animals, ire the movements of the winds and in the clouds held between the sky and the earth, there are signs (of Allah's Sovereignty) for the people who have sense". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 163 – 164).

Tens of other verses in different Surahs of the Qur'an draw the attention of man in various ways to the eloquent signs of the Unity of the Creator implied in this system.

Refutation of polytheism

The Qur'an refutes the theory of the plurality of gods in the following manner.

"Allah has not taken to Himself any son, nor is there any other god with Him. Otherwise each god certainly would have taken off his creation, and some of the gods would have gained superiority over the others. Glory be to Allah who is far above what they allege. He has the knowledge of the seen and the unseen alike. Therefore exalted be He above the deities they associate with Him " (Surah al-Mu'minun, 23:91 – 92).

Should the world have more than one creator their subsequent relation with it is bound to assume one of the following forms:

1. Each of them would have sovereign authority in one part of the world, for example in that part which he himself created. In this case the various parts of the world would have different systems totally independent of each other. But we see that the whole world has one compact and inter-related system.
2. One of the creators and the regional gods would hold a position superior to that of all others, and in this way maintain some sort of co-ordination and general harmony. In this case the one who exercises supreme authority will be the real sovereign of the whole world and all others will be his functionaries only.
3. Each of these gods would have authority over the world and be free to act independently and to issue commands as he pleases. In this case there will be complete chaos and confusion, and no law and order will be left, as the Qur'an says:

"Had there been gods besides Allah, both the heavens and the earth would have been ruined. So glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Throne, free of what they ascribe to Him " (Surah al-Anbiya, 21:22).

Thus the uniformity of the system which prevails over the entire world contradicts the theory of the plurality of gods with separate dominions, and its compactness denies the theory of several gods with one dominion.

The presumption that two or more gods may exercise authority over the whole world, but they always

and everywhere co-operate with each other and issue uniform commands, is a fantastic idea. Their plurality entails automatically that they must differ at least on one occasion.

The causes and the agents

The Qur'an stresses the Unity of Allah with regard to creation and command. It holds that He alone has created everything and He alone exercises authority over the whole world. At the same time it does not deny the existence of the system of causation and its true role. The Qur'an says:

"Allah sends down water front the sky and therewith revives the dead earth to life. Surely in this there is a sign for those who pay attention". (Suraal-Nahl, 16:65).

Here it mentions water as –a means of giving life to the earth.

What is deduced from the Qur'an in respect of the causes and their role is that the Almighty Creator knows everything and can do whatever He likes. But He has created the world in a particular way and has laid down for it a particular system in which certain things perform the role of producing certain others. But their role is that of Allah's obedient functionaries, who accomplish the jobs allotted to them unhesitatingly and comply with His commands dutifully, without infringing them in the least.

The enormous magnetic power of the sun, though a gigantic force in its own vast field, is still subject to the command of the Creator. The magnetic power of the earth is also a mighty force. But it is also subservient to the command of Allah, who empowers a small bird to resist it and remain aloft in the space for hours.

Narrating the story of Prophet Ibrahim (P) the Qur'an says:

"The idol worshippers cried: "Burn him and avenge your gods if you are men of actions ". We said: Fire, "Be coolness and peace for Ibrahim ". They planned to harm him, but We frustrated their plans". (Sura al-Anbiya, 21:68 –70).

So whenever Allah deems it fit, He may prevent fire from burning.

If, with the advancement of technology, man can now neutralize a mine or an incendiary bomb, he has made, by giving an electronic signal, then why should not Allah be able to prevent the action of a thing which He has made?

The miracles

A sensible man having some knowledge can easily understand the nature of miracles if he takes into consideration the relation of material causes to Allah, His will and His command. The Islamic outlook on the world supports the occurrence of miracles. It finds no contradiction between it and the law of causation, which enunciates that no phenomenon appears without a cause, because from the Qur'anic point of view a miracle is a phenomenon which has a special cause, viz. the will of Allah.

Not only this that the occurrence of the miracles has no contradiction with the universal law of causation in principle but for practical purposes also it is not inconsistent with the normal system of cause and effect. Man while evaluating the scientific and experimental laws does, not sit waiting for the discovery of absolute and unexceptionable rules. All those who are conversant with the advanced experimental sciences know well that the law of relativism is applicable to most of the laws of these sciences. The discreet and well-informed scientists do not believe in their absolute and one hundred per cent reliability. Anyhow, they use these relative laws in their scientific studies and depend on them in arriving at scientific and technical results, unless the subsequent scientific progress proves the falsity of any one of them.

In our ordinary day-to-day life also we do not sit waiting for the one hundred per cent reliability of anything.

All sensible persons of the world travel by cars, railway trains, ships and aeroplanes serviced by experienced technicians and driven by dutiful drivers, navigators and pilots, though all know that none of these means of transport can be relied upon one hundred per cent. The most well equipped means of transport, serviced and guided by the most experienced and responsible personnel, may occasionally meet an accident or go out of order and overturn. The reason is that man bases his calculations on normal conditions, and not on exceptional circumstances, especially such exceptional circumstances the chance of which is very meagre, say one per thousand or even lesser. The miraculous events take place in very exceptional circumstances by the command of Allah. Their ratio to the normal events is extremely meagre, even less than one per million. From this it is evident that belief in the occurrence of miracles by the will and command of Allah does not militate against the value and theoretical and practical reliability of the normal system of cause and effect.

Superstitions not to be confused with causes

One of the most valued teachings of Islam is that for the purpose of identifying the causes and knowing their total effect we should rely on clear knowledge and proof instead of baseless myths and superstitions. Belief in physical myths causes backwardness in science and industry and privation from

the exploitation of nature. This happened in the case of medicine for centuries. Similarly the superstition regarding the occult influence of the heavenly bodies on human affairs and the use of the valuable astronomical appliances like astrolabe for divination obstructed human progress in many ways.

The superstitious belief in the effectiveness of the imaginary metaphysical factors is even more harmful, for it diverts man away from the principle of Unity of Allah and throws him into the trap of polytheism. That is why the Qur'an expressly warns against relying on superstitious metaphysical ideas (Surah al-Najm, verses 28 and 123). It tells us that we should always depend on definite knowledge (Surah al-Baqarah, verse 3) and clear proof (Surah Yunus, verse 68 and Surah al-An'am, verse 58).

Supplication

Allah has made supplication one of the effective causes having influence on human affairs. It means that one should be wholeheartedly attentive to Allah and seek His help by earnest prayer. It is true that He knows everything. He knows what one wishes. He knows the inner secrets of everyone. But as in the case of human relations with nature, efforts and exertion are essential and 'no gain without pain' is the maxim similarly in the case of human relations with Allah a system of supplication has been laid down. The Qur'an says:

"When My slaves question you about Me, tell them that I am close to them. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls Me; therefore let there answer My call and put their trust in Me so that they may be on the right way". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:186).

In respect of supplication sometimes it is asked whether the will of Allah is subject to any change. Why does He want us to supplicate Him when His will is immutable?

The answer to this question, from the Islamic point of view is that Allah is Eternal and His will is also eternal and invariable. But the same eternal and immutable will has decided that a big part of the universe, that is the part of nature should always be in the state of 'to be' instead of 'to have been'. In this part every moment new phenomena appear which are caused by preceding factors. Supplication is a sort of effort and work and as such has a role and effect prescribed by the same eternal will.

Thus Allah is Eternal. His knowledge and will are also eternal. Still new phenomena appear every moment. Your effort or your supplication play an effective role in producing some of them.

"All who dwell in the heavens and the earth implore Him. Every moment He brings about a new manifestation of His power". (Surah al-Rahman, 55:29).

If you are afflicted with a hardship, do not lose heart. Do not give up effort. Make devout supplication to

Allah, for you cannot make a prediction that you will have no way out of your present predicament. The Qur'an says:

"Every moment He brings about a new manifestation of His Power".

Then why should you despair. It is possible that a new situation may develop soon.

In the Qur'an there are several instances of the events which suddenly took a turn contrary to all expectations, such as seeking help by Prophet Musa (P) (Surah Taha, verse 25 and 26) and praying for birth of a child by Prophet Zakariya (Surah Maryam, verses 1 – 9). The study of such examples shows definitely that from the Qur'anic point of view supplication is as effective a cause as any other. As the Creator of the world has given a role to light, heat, electricity, magnetism etc., in the causation system and has made certain herbs and chemicals a cure for certain diseases, similarly He has given to the supplication fulfilling the requisite conditions, a role in the fulfillment of human desires. The effect of supplication is not merely psychological, and suggestive. It is true that it awakens many dormant faculties of man and impels him to make such efforts as were not expected of him. But according to the Qur'an supplication is more effective than that. It is an independent cause and its effect is not limited to strengthening the will-power or any other such result.

Unity in Regards to Worship

As we have said earlier, the Unity of worship is the first and foremost thing that is emphasized by the Qur'an in regard to monotheism. The Qur'an considers it to be the logical result of the Unity of Allah in respect of 'creation and command'. We know that it is Allah alone who has created this world and it is He alone who manages it. None else has any independent role in this respect. Others only perform the specific duties allotted to them by their Creator. All the sources of power in the world such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the wind, the thunderstorms, the lightning, the water, the earth, the jinn, the angels etc. are all subservient to Him and execute His commands. When we know all this, there is no meaning of worshipping any of these mere functionaries or prostrating ourselves before their statues and images. The Qur'an says:

"O Mankind, worship your Lord, who has created you and those who lived before you, so that you may become pious. It is your Lord who has made the earth a bed for you and the sky a canopy, and sends down water from the sky to produce fruits for your provisions. So do not set up anything equal to Allah knowingly". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:21,- 22).

"Some people regard the jinn as Allah's partners, although He Himself created them, and in their ignorance impute to him sons and daughters. Glory be to Him! He is far above what they allege. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How can He have a child when He has no wife,

and He Himself has created everything. Such is Allah, your Lord. There is no god but He, the creator of all things. Therefore worship Him. He takes care of all things ". (Surah al-An'am, 6:101 - 103).

"Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Adore not the sun nor the moon; but adore Allah who has created them ". (Surah Fussilat, 41: 37).

"Yet there are some people who take for themselves objects of worship besides Allah, loving them as Allah should be loved; but those who believe, love Allah more ardently". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:165).

If worship and submission is by way of seeking assistance it is Allah's exclusive right as it is He alone who can meet the needs of the creatures.

"Say: shall we call instead of Allah, that which can neither benefit nor harm us". (Surah al An'am, 6:71).

Furthermore, if the worship and submission of an imperfect being is due to its being attracted irresistably towards the glory and majesty of a perfect being even then it is Allah's exclusive right, because it is only He who deserves such love and devotion.

Unity in regard to submission and obedience

From the Qur'anic view-point obedience is of two kinds:

(1) Obedience accompanied by total submission and unconditional surrender to what a man is told to do,

According to the Qur'anic conception of the Unity, this kind of submission which is in fact 'servitude' is due to Allah alone, and none else deserves it.

(2) Obedience to those who exercise rightful control on us, because either our own interests or public interests or human instinct make it obligatory for us to obey them. Such is the case of the obedience to the Prophet, the *Imam* and those who genuinely represent him during the period of his occultation.¹ The same applies to the obedience of the parents etc.

This kind of obedience is conditional. It is obligatory provided those who hold the position of issuing injunctions do not transgress the limits of law and equity. One is required to evaluate from this angle every instruction he receives from them and should refrain from acting upon them if they are opposed to

law and justice. He must not obey an instruction which is contrary to the Divine law, for no creation is to be obeyed in contravention of the command of the Creator. Of course in the case of the Holy Prophet and the Imams, their infallibility is enough to vouchsafe this aspect, for they cannot be suspected to say anything contrary to the command of Allah.

Thus this kind of obedience is not absolute, and does not involve blind and unconditional submission.

Submission to the command of Allah

One of the results proceeding from the Unity with regard to submission and obedience is that the believers in the Unity of Allah are required to – make total submission before His commands and revelations in all religious matters. In order to safeguard the unity and solidarity of their ranks and to guard against sectarianism, they are not allowed to have any discretion in this regard. The Qur'an says:

"Let the people of the Gospel judge in accordance with what Allah has revealed in it. Those who do not judge in accordance with what Allah has revealed, are wicked indeed. And to you We have revealed the Book with the truth, confirming whatever scripture was before it. So judge between them according to what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their whims, departing from the truth that has come to you. For everyone of you We prescribed a Divine law. Had Allah pleased, He could have made you one single ummah, but he did not do so in order to test you by the laws He gave you. So vie with one another in good deeds. All of you will return to Allah and then He will give you His judgment on the differences that existed between you". So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not be led by their desires, but beware of them lest they should tempt you away from some part of that which Allah has revealed to you. If they reject your judgment, know that it is Allah's will to make them suffer for some of their sins. There is no doubt that many people are wicked. Is it the pagan law that they wish to be judged by? Who is better judge than Allah for a people who are firm in their faith?" (Surah al-Maidah, 5:47 – 50).

These verses offer the followers of the previous messages a reasonable and logical way of avoiding internecine strifes. Every individual and group should deduce from the revelation the way of doing good and should hasten toward it. In this way instead of futile conflicts among the followers of the divine religions, there should be mutual competition for virtuous deeds. The question as to what is right should be left to the religious texts known to have a divine origin. In case there is a difference of opinion with regard to their interpretation, the question may be left to the day when the truth will be unveiled by Allah and every controversy will be finally settled.

This appears to be the only way of achieving solidarity among the followers of revelation. Otherwise not only the followers of different prophets, but even those who believe in the same prophet and the same

scripture but adhere to different denominations, various wings of the same sect or even different religious leaders, will always be at daggers drawn with each other and the light of the `School of Revelation' will be dimmed.

That is why the Qur'an considers the belief in the Unity of Allah to be the basis of its entire system and regards the sectarian strife as deviation. It disavows all religious wrangling and regards it as contrary to the spirit of monotheism and a big hurdle in the way of unifying the social system on the basis of revelation. Only clear academic discussion free from selfish and biased quarrel is all that is allowed.

The Unique and Matchless God

Tawhid is a revolutionary concept and constitutes the essence of the teachings of Islam. It means that there is only One Supreme Lord of the universe. He is Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent and the Sustainer of the world. The Qur'an says:

`Say: You may be sure that Allah is One. He is Needless (Independent). He begot none nor was He begotten. There is none like Him ". (Surah al-Tawhid, 111:1 - 4).

Intrinsic Unity

The prominent thinkers of the Muslim world hold that none being like Allah means His intrinsic Unity as propounded by the philosophers and the mystics.

The simplest way in which it can be described is this: When we say that Allah is without a like, it means that on principle there can be no partner of Him. It cannot even be supposed that there can be more than one God. Oneness is His absolutely essential and indispensable attribute.

Hence to be able to grasp the idea of His Unity, it is enough to have in mind the correct conception of Him. If we are conversant with the true meaning of this word, we shall automatically come to the conclusion that Allah is One. He cannot be more than one because plurality is inconsistent with His Existence.

Suppose there is a line which extends infinitely on both the sides. Suppose there is another line at a distance of a metre which runs parallel to the first and also extends infinitely in both the directions. There is no problem in supposing the existence of two such lines. That is why it is said that two parallel lines are those which are equidistant from each other throughout their length and never meet even if extended infinitely.

Irrespective of the controversy whether this definition of the parallel lines is correct or incorrect and absolute or relative, it is clear that it is possible to suppose the existence of two such lines.

Now let us suppose that there is a body which grows infinitely bigger and bigger in all its dimensions, its length, breadth and height. Now can we suppose the existence of another body beside the first, which also grows infinitely? No, we cannot, because the first body will fill all the space and no room will be left for the second one, whether finite or infinite, unless the second body penetrates into the first one. But is it possible for a body to penetrate into another body itself and not in the space between its molecules? Of course, not. Hence, it is not possible to suppose the simultaneous existence of two bodies infinite in all directions and in all their dimensions.

So far we have talked of infinite bodies. The supposition of the existence of one such body automatically negates the existence of another. But it does not negate the existence of something non-corporeal. For example, it does not negate the existence of an infinite soul which should have penetrated into an infinite body.

Now let us consider a being infinite in every respect of existence. Is it possible to suppose the existence of two or more such beings? No, it is not, because if it is presumed that two such beings exist, the existence of each of them will be limited at least by that of another. As such neither of them will be infinite.

Hence Allah has no like or equal. On principle there cannot be two or more gods.

So far we have been able to know that there is a Creator, who is the Source of Existence and who is without a like. But is this the final limit of human knowledge about Him? Can we not go a step further and have some more knowledge of this Source of Existence?

Some scholars tend to believe that man can have only one 'cognizance', that is he can know that there is a source of existence, but further cognizance or knowledge is not within his reach.

These scholars hold that any name or attribute which may be used to express the Source of Existence with a view to add to the knowledge about Him, is likely to be totally unconnected with Him and will add only to one's ignorance and misunderstanding.

According to this view the highest stage of knowledge which man can attain about the Creator is only that He exists and that He is above all that man can conceive or imagine. The cognizance of the Source of Existence proceeds only in one direction, viz. considering the source to be above all that human mind can conceive.

Evaluation of extremist view

The view to which these scholars tend is very attractive and of much value so far as it negates –all unreasonable and mythical ideas about Allah. But if we evaluate it from the realistic point of view, we find it somewhat extremist. If human knowledge about Allah is so limited that no reference can be made to Him except by means of the word `He', which is absolutely vague, then how have we learnt that He really is?

It appears that the great scholars who have tended to this view, have mistaken complete and all-round cognition for the relative one. A thing may have tens of characteristics which distinguish it from other things. By knowing anyone of these characteristics we can identify it and need not have a full knowledge of all its distinctive features. That is not the case with Allah alone, but the same principle applies to all that exists. For example, you have two children. You can recognize each of them easily.

But are you aware of all their physical and moral characteristics.

Hence if it is a question of an all-round cognition of Allah, we must admit that it is humanly impossible.

But if it is a question of the cognizance of certain of His attributes and such relative knowledge as may distinguish Him from all others, of course man should have such knowledge so that he may be aware of His existence. As a matter of fact without having such knowledge, it is futile to talk of Allah.

Hence our inability to have a complete and all-round cognition of a reality does not mean that we should express inability to have any. sort of knowledge of it. There is a middle stage, rather there are several intervening stages between an absolute and all-round cognizance and an absolute and all-round non-cognizance viz. "relative cognition from one or more directions".

A careful study of knowledge, its value and its limits shows that human information about this world is mostly relative. For this reason modern science is basically concerned with knowing the features of things and not their essence. The cognition of the Source of Existence also has similar limitations. When an intelligent and well informed person thinks of Allah, he exclaims from the core of his heart; "I don't know what You are; You are what You are".

However the same person when he looks at His signs and at a part of His distinctive marks, he gets somewhat acquainted with Him. Though this knowledge is far lesser than absolute cognition but, while possessing it, one can talk about `Him' with certainty.²

It may be said that anybody who believes in Allah, identifies Him at least with one of His attributes by means of which he recognizes Him. The cognizance of Allah is accompanied at least by some such

attributes as the Creator, the Sustainer, the Origin, the Self-Existent etc.

1. For details see Dr Murtaza Mutahery's Master and Mastership, which is to be found at

<http://www.al-islam.org/mastership/> [1]

2. Ayatullah Baqir al-Sadr, He, His Messenger and His Message, which is to be found at <http://www.al-islam.org/revealer/>

[2]

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