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Question 34: Is the belief that great divine people {awliya'} have supernatural power tantamount to polytheism {shirk}?

Reply: It is clear that when a person wants someone to do something for him or her, the former thinks that the latter is capable of doing it and this capability takes two forms:

1. This capability may be of material and natural forces as in the case of asking somebody to give us a glass of water.
2. Or, it may be a hidden force which exists beyond the material and natural realm as in the case of the pious servant of God, 'Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus the son of Mary) ('a) who was capable of healing incurable ailments with his Messianic breath.

It is clear that the belief in such a metaphysical power, which is related to and supported by the power and will of God, is like believing in natural power, and it is by no means tantamount to polytheism {shirk}, because the Lord Who has bestowed material and natural power upon human beings can also grant His righteous servants supernatural power.

Now, in elucidating the stated answer the belief that divine people have supernatural power can be conceived in two ways:

1. To believe that a person is an independent and principal source of that power and to consider him the author of divine acts.

No doubt, if we think that this supernatural power is independent of the power of God, it will be tantamount to polytheism because according to this belief someone other than God is regarded as the independent and original source of power, to whom divine acts are attributed, whereas the Lord of the

worlds is the fountainhead of all kinds of power.

2. To believe that the supernatural power of some faithful pious servants of God stems from the eternal power of God, and that this everlasting power is manifested by Divine Command through certain divine people. In fact, they are not independent; rather, they rely both in their existence as well as in exercising supernatural power on God, the Exalted.

It is clear that according to this belief, great divine people are not regarded as gods nor divine acts are attributed to them because righteous people are viewed as servants of God through whom God-given supernatural power is manifested by the decree and inviolable will of God.

In this regard, the Holy Qur'an says:

وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

*“And an apostle may not bring a sign except by Allah’s leave.”*¹

It is evident from what we have stated that apart from the fact that it has nothing to do with polytheism, this belief is totally harmonious with the principle of monotheism and Unity of God.

Supernatural power of great divine people from a Qur'anic viewpoint

With utmost explicitness, the heavenly scripture of Islam mentions the names of a number of righteous servants of God who, by the decree of God, have such extraordinary power. Below are some instances:

1. The supernatural power of Hadrat Musa (Moses) (‘a)

God, the Exalted, ordered His prophet, Musa (‘a), to strike a rock with his staff and fountains of refreshing water gushed forth:

وَإِذِ اسْتَسْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ فَانْفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا

*“And when Moses prayed for water for his people, We said, ‘Strike the rock with your staff.’ Thereat twelve fountains gushed forth from it.”*²

2. The supernatural power of Hadrat 'Isa (Jesus) ('a)

Various instances of the supernatural power of Hadrat 'Isa ('a) are mentioned in the Qur'an, one of which is the following:

أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ
الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

"I will create for you out of clay the form of a bird, then I will breathe into it, and it will become a bird by Allah's leave. And I heal the blind and the leper and revive the dead by Allah's leave."³

3. The supernatural power of Hadrat Sulayman (Solomon) ('a)

The Glorious Qur'an points to the supernatural power of Hadrat Sulayman ('a) and states:

وَوَرِثَ سُلَيْمَانُ دَاوُودَ وَقَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عَلِّمْنَا مَنطِقَ الطَّيْرِ وَأُوتِينَا مِنْ كُلِّ
شَيْءٍ إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْمُبِينُ

"Solomon inherited from David, and he said, 'O people! We have been taught the speech of the birds, and we have been given out of everything. Indeed this is a manifest advantage."⁴

No doubt, the gushing forth of fountains from the rock which Hadrat Musa ('a) stroke with his staff, the creation of a real bird out of clay, the healing of incurable ailments and the revival of the dead by Hadrat 'Isa ('a), and Hadrat Sulayman's ('a) knowledge of the logic and language of birds are extraordinary affairs which are considered as kinds of acts of supernatural power and authority.

Given that many Qur'anic verses point to the supernatural power of the worthy servants of God, will our belief in the purport of these explicit verses of the Qur'an, which bespeak of the extraordinary power of such great divine people, be regarded as tantamount to polytheism {*shirk*} or innovation in religion {*bid'ah*}?

From this, it becomes evident that the belief that righteous servants of God have supernatural power does not mean that they are regarded as gods or authors of divine acts. If such a belief were to imply their divinity {*uluhiyyah*} and lordship {*rububiyyah*}, then according to the Qur'an such prophets like Musa, 'Isa, Sulayman, and others ('a) would be taken to be gods, whereas all Muslims know that the Holy Qur'an considers great divine people as righteous servants of God.

Thus, it is obvious that if in the belief that the nearest ones to God have supernatural power, we can consider this power to be relying on the inexhaustible power of God and regard great divine people as instruments for manifesting divine power.

This belief will not only mean rejection of polytheism but it will also be totally congruent with the principle of true monotheism because the criterion of monotheism and Unity of God is attributing every power in the world to God and believing that He is the author of every power and every movement.

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1. Surah ar-Ra'd 13:38.
 2. Surah al-Baqarah 2:60.
 3. Surah Al 'Imran 3:49.
 4. Surah an-Naml 27: 16.

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