

Tawhid as a Social Approach

The principle of *Tawhid* reserves the authority to determine and dictate in matters pertaining to the world or to human society solely for God. This right belongs solely to God, because He is the creator of mankind and the universe, and the designer of all that is in it. He is perfectly aware of all their possibilities and requirements. He knows all the physical and spiritual potentialities of man and also the hidden treasures of the earth, their balance, composition, equilibrium and utility.

Only He can decide about the mode and programme of human life, and determine the outlines of human relationships and man's social and legal systems. Thus, this is the natural right of God, which follows from the fact that He is man's creator. Therefore, any intervention on the part of others in determining the course of human action, is equivalent to infringement on Divine prerogatives, which in turn amounts to a claim of being equal to God, and hence is tantamount to shirk or polytheism:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ
حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

But no, by thy Lord! They will not believe till they make thee the judge regarding the disagreement between them then find no impediment in their souls touching thy verdict, and submit with full submission. (4:65)

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ
أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا

It is not for any believer, man or woman when God and His Messenger have decreed a matter, to have the choice in the affair. Whosoever disobeys God and His Messenger has gone astray into manifest error. (33:36)

The principle of *Tawhid* negates any right of sovereignty and guardianship of anyone over human society except God. Sovereignty of men over men, when considered as an independent right bereft of responsibility, necessarily leads to repression and tyranny. It is only when the affairs of society are entrusted by a Power Transcendental to an individual or a council of rulers, with a power commensurate with responsibilities, can society be expected to be free from all deviations and excesses. In religious ideology, this Transcendental Power is no other than God Himself, whose wisdom and knowledge encompass all being:

... لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ...

...not so much as the weight of an atom in the heavens and earth escapes from Him (34:3)

His awesome qualities of glory and power, (شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انْتِقَامٍ) do not leave room for any pretext for slightest slip or deviation from His path for those appointed by Him:

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ

Had he invented against Us any saying, We would have seized him by the right hand, and We would surely have cut his life_ vein. (69:44_46)

The Divinely appointed ruler (or council of rulers), unlike a 'majority' or a 'nation', is not susceptible to deception and domination. He is not like a 'party' which can be turned into a tool of dictatorship and repression. He is not an aristocrat who can be either bought, or enticed into participation in an intrigue.

If it is a dictate of reason that orderliness of human life necessitates that all human systems, organizations, and institutions should be linked to a single centre—something which is true of the rest of the universe—that centre can be nothing but the powerful hand of the Almighty God, the Creator of all being.

So sovereignty and authority is solely the right of God, exercised by means of those appointed by Him those who are the most suitable for this office according to the criteria laid down by the Divine ideology. It is by their means that the Divine laws and ideals can be implemented, resulting in realization of a Divine social order:

قُلْ أَعْيَرَ اللَّهُ اتَّخَذُ وَلِيًّا فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ يُطْعَمُ وَلَا يُطْعَمُ قُلْ إِنِّي
أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

Say: "Shall I take to myself as protector other than God, the Originator of the heavens and of the earth. He who feeds and is not fed?" Say: "I have been commanded to be the first of them that surrender. "Be not thou of the idolaters. (6:14)

And

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

Your guardian is only God, and His Messenger, and the believers who perform the prayer and pay the alms while bowing down. (5:55)

And also

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ إِلَهِ النَّاسِ

Say: 'I take refuge with the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind.' (114:1-3)

The principle of *Tawhid* specifies that the absolute right of ownership of all the world's resources belongs solely to God. Nobody else can claim an independent right of ownership over anything. All things are given only as a trust into the custody of man, to be used as means for attaining human perfection and edification.

These natural resources, which are the products of efforts of myriads of creatures and natural forces, should not be allowed to be destroyed, misused, or abandoned without use, or to be used for any purpose other than progress and edification of mankind.

Whatever there is in human hands is for man, but it has been bestowed upon man by God. Accordingly, they should be utilized for purposes as determined by Him; that is for the purpose and end which is natural, and for which they have been created. Its use and employment for a purpose other than that is misuse, deviation from the path of Nature, and corruption. Man's role is merely limited to utilization of these resources in the right way:

قُلْ لِمَنِ الْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

Say: "Whose is the earth and whosoever is therein, if you have knowledge?" They will say,

'God's.' Say: 'Will you not then remember?' (23:84-85)

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً ...

It is He who created for you all that is in the earth (2:29)

... اَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ هُوَ أَنشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا ...

... Serve God! You have no god other than He. It is He who raised you from the earth, and has given you to live therein (11:61)

وَالَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ
وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ اللَّعْنَةُ ...

And those who break the covenant of God after His compact, and who snap what God has commanded to be joined, and who work corruption in the earth—their shall be curse (13:25)

The principle of *Tawhid* assigns equal rights to all human beings on all the resources of the world, which are Divine bounties. All opportunities and possibilities belong equally to all human beings, so that everyone can derive benefit from these resources according to his needs. No region of this realm of bounties provided by God is an exclusive domain of some denied to all others. All are free to exercise their initiative in exploiting the myriads of opportunities scattered throughout the world. There is no discrimination on the basis of ethnic, racial, geographical, historical, or even ideological, grounds .

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً ...

It is He who created for you all that is in the earth (2:29)

We can find numerous such statements in the Qur'anic verses:

وَالْأَنْعَامَ خَلَقَهَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا دِفْءٌ وَمَنَافِعُ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا جَمَالٌ حِينَ
تُرِيحُونَ وَحِينَ تَسْرَحُونَ وَتَحْمِلُ أَثْقَالَكُمْ ...

And the cattle He created them for you; in them is warmth, and uses various, and of them you eat, and there is beauty in them for you when you bring them home to rest and when you drive them forth abroad to pasture; and they bear your loads(16:5-7)

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لَكُمْ... يُنْبِتُ لَكُمْ بِهِ الزَّرْعَ ... وَمَا ذَرَأْتُمْ فِي
الْأَرْضِ ... وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا ...

***...He it is Who sends down to you out of heavens water Therewith He brings forth for you crop
...And that which He has created for you in the earthand He it is who subjected the sea to you
that you may eat fresh meat from thence(16: 10- 14)***

In numerous verses, the Qur'an addresses itself to mankind in general; no specific race, group or sect is implied:

... وَلَوْ شَاءَ لَهَدَاكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

If He willed, He would have guided you all(16:9)

إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ...

Your god is One God(16:22)

Whatever has been mentioned till now was merely a fraction of the vast and multifaceted meanings incorporated in this principle. But this brief discussion is sufficient to show that the principle of *Tawhid* is not just a philosophical and abstract notion without practical implications, which does not cover all dimensions of human existence and is irrelevant to practical life and its orientation. It is not a doctrine that seeks to replace some existing dogmas and to substitute one belief for another in the minds of men.

Rather it is an all-inclusive outlook of the world, man, his situation in the universe, his direction in history, his possibilities and potentialities, his eternal aims and ideals, and the direction and destination of his exaltation.

The principle of *Tawhid* is moreover a sociological doctrine which offers a plan for the creation of a social atmosphere harmonious with human nature—an atmosphere in which man can make rapid, unhindered progress, and attain his highest perfection. It suggests a certain social pattern and delineates its

essential outlines.

Accordingly, it is a manifesto of revolutionary change when applied to *taghuti* societies (societies which are based upon ignorance of the human situation and negation or subversion of man's righteous values). It brings about a revival and reawakening in sickly and dead hearts, inducing storms in stagnant waters of societies. It bulldozes into a level ground their unjust undulations, and brings about a revolutionary change in its spiritual, social, ethical, and economic institutions. In short, it is an all-around assault on the status quo and the ruling forces which protect it, dissipating the atmosphere and transforming the environment which nourish and sustain these forces.

So we see that the principle of *Tawhid* is not merely an old solution to dogmatic and doctrinal problems of faith with a restricted arena of action, but is a new path before mankind. Although it rests on an intellectual and theoretical basis, it is essentially a fresh plan for life and action.

It is on account of such an interpretation of *Tawhid* that we believe the principle of *Tawhid* to be the base and cornerstone upon which the edifice of religion stands. On the contrary, a principle which merely speculates regarding abstract metaphysical, ethical, and gnostic ideas is no more than a feeble apparition which can never provide the great impetus necessary for setting into motion Islam as a constructive ideology and a sociological doctrine.

In every age there were people who, in spite of their faith in God and *Tawhid*, overlooked its practical and social implications; such believers—who existed in every age—have in practice lived like those who do not believe in *Tawhid*, in the sense that their belief did not awaken in them any feeling of disharmony with the non-*Tawhidi* status quo of their times; their belief did not cause them any suffocation and uneasiness despite the putrid, stultifying atmosphere loaded with shirk which engulfed their day-to-day lives.

In the days of advent of Islam, in Mecca, then the centre of the cult of popular Arab idols, there did exist a number of followers of the monotheistic faith of Abraham (A). But since *Tawhid* was no more than an intellectual doctrine of their private and personal faith, their presence did not exert any influence on the social and intellectual atmosphere of the pre-Islamic pagan society. Their presence was not felt even to the slightest degree, nothing was disturbed, and all led a peaceful life. They were undisturbed by the shameful and abominable customs and practices of their countrymen.

With their approach to *Tawhid* as an abstract doctrine, their lack of effect and influence was what can be expected. It was in such conditions that Islamic monotheism emerged as a committed and comprehensive approach with an entirely new programme and model of social existence. At the very first stage, it exhibited the revolutionary appeal of its message as reflected by its followers and opponents. All people at once knew that this message envisaged a new political, economic, and social order, a programme adamant in its vision and unwilling to reconcile with the status quo. It unequivocally negated the status quo and affirmed a new order.

It was this clarity and freedom from ambiguity in its message that inspired such a great enthusiasm and readiness to self-sacrifice in its followers, and forced the opponents to a determined opposition.

This historical truth should be taken as a criterion and standard for estimation of the sincerity of profession of *Tawhid* for all phases of history. Whenever such claims are made by the likes of the monotheists of Mecca before the advent of Islam, we can only doubt the sincerity of their claims. The kind of conception of *Tawhid* which reconciles itself to worship of idols and gods besides the One God, a conception that does not go beyond an abstract doctrine in the believer's mind, is no more than a fake version of the real monotheism as preached by the prophets of God.

It is in the light of such a vision of *Tawhid* that we can discover the secret of influence and expansion of Islam during the early days, and understand the causes of the retrogression, decline and passivity of later ages.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (S) laid down the principle of *Tawhid* as a path before mankind; but, afterwards, it was merely reduced to the status of an abstract theory and a subject of theoretical discussions and debates. In the days of the Prophet (S), it was a fresh world outlook and a new programme of life; later, the same principle served as no more than a topic of theological dissections and leisurely scholarly pursuits.

In the days of the Prophet (S), it formed the infrastructure of the whole system, and the axis of all social, political, and economic relationships; but later it became merely a show-piece and an embellishment of scholarly endeavour. What else could be expected from a decorative and formal auxiliary which had no active and constructive role to play?

From what we have said, it is obvious that *Tawhid* is a model for a new social order and a new life. It is the name of a system regarded as the most appropriate by Islam for the purpose of comprehensive human development and progress. And, similarly, from a theoretical point of view, it is an outlook which is the philosophical foundation and infrastructure of that system.

After this brief introduction, we may return to what we said at the beginning of our discussion, and examine this problem from a different angle. It has been said that the initial opposition to the principle of *Tawhid* came from powerful chieftains of tribes and leaders of pre-Islamic society. This shows that, more than anyone else, the dominant class of the society—or in the words of the Qur'an, the *mustakbirun* (lit. the haughty)—formed the primary target of its blows.

Throughout history, whenever the call of *Tawhid* reached any society, and pronounced its policy with respect to the dominant class, it was immediately faced with the conflicting responses of the two opposite poles of society: opposition and antagonism on the part of the *mustakbirun*, and support and acceptance on the part of the *mustad'afun* (the oppressed section of society). These types of opposite reactions are, in fact, the characteristic quality of true *Tawhid*; that is, at all times whenever the principle of *Tawhid* was propounded, or whenever it will be propounded in its real form, such a typical situation is

bound to arise.

Let us see whichever among the diverse dimensions of *Tawhid* is in direct clash with the interests of the class of oppressors. In other words, what aspect of *Tawhid* and which of its social programmes has this sensitivity of forcing its opponents to oppose it in a relentless and determined manner?

The various characteristics of the *mustakbirun*, as enumerated by the Qur'an, can be of ample guidance to us in this regard. In more than forty places the Qur'an delineates their psychological attributes, their social position, and their ambitious tendencies. Some of these characteristic features we will now discuss.

They passionately negate God as the sole sovereign and absolute master of everything as signified in the dictum :

لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ (there is no god except God); although they may be indifferent to the notion of monotheism as an abstract doctrine with limited or with no practical implications:

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

When it was said to them, 'There is no god but God', they were ever waxing proud. (37:35)

Without any authentic criteria and standards of judging human merit, they consider themselves superior to others on the basis of pagan criteria such as wealth and power:

... فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَقَالُوا مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً ...

...And they waxed proud in the earth without right, and they said, 'Who is stronger than we in might?...' (41:15)

It is under the influence of the same false notions that they reject the Divine Revelation, which is a message for establishing new values and a new social order:

وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا وَوَلَّى مُسْتَكْبِرًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَسْمَعْهَا كَأَنَّ فِي أُذُنَيْهِ وَقْرًا فَبَسَّرَهُ
بِعَذَابِ أَلِيمٍ

And when our signs are recited to such a man, he turns away, waxing-proud, as though he heard

them not, and in his ears were deafness; so give him tiding of a painful chastisement. (31:7)

They opposed the Prophet's call for liberation and change, under the pretext that "had he been truthful, we would have recognized him before others", and that "God should have directly addressed us without a mediator or intermediary", and they waged war against him:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَوْ كَانَ خَيْرًا مَّا سَبَقُونَا إِلَيْهِ ...

And the unbelievers say as regards the believers, 'If there had been aught good in him, they would not have outstripped us in [accepting] him(46: 11)

And:

وَإِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ آيَةٌ قَالُوا لَن نُّؤْمِنَ حَتَّى نُؤْتَىٰ مِثْلَ مَا أُوتِيَ رُسُلُ اللَّهِ ...

And when a sign came to them, they said, 'We will not believe until we are given the like of what God's Messengers were given' (6: 124)

They charged the Prophet, the carrier of the message of *Tawhid*, with ambition and profit-seeking, and by this means and by hankering to support of their outdated and degenerate traditions—which preserved the status quo— they tried to weaken the influence of the call of *Tawhid* among the people:

قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا لِنَلْفِتَنَّا عَمَّا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا وَتَكُونَ لَكُمُ الْكِبْرِيَاءُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا نَحْنُ لَكُمُ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

[Addressing Moses] They said, 'Art thou come to us to turn us from that we found our fathers practising, and that the domination in the land might belong to you two? We do not believe you.'
(10:78)

By repressive, coercive, and deceptive means, they tried to hold the people in the state of exploitation, unconditional submission, and slavery, and to incite them to resist and oppose any efforts of emancipation from their domination:

وَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَطَعْنَا سَادَتَنَا وَكُبْرَاءَنَا فَأَضَلُّونَا السَّبِيلًا

And they [the followers of the mustakbirun on the Day of Resurrection] shall say, 'Our Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and great ones, and they led us astray from the way.' (33:67)

وَإِذْ يَتَحَاوُونَ فِي النَّارِ فَيَقُولُ الضُّعَفَاءُ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا لَكُمْ تَبَعًا فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُغْنُونَ عَنَّا نَصِيبًا مِّنَ النَّارِ

...Then the weak shall say unto those who waxed proud, 'Why, we were your followers, will you avail us now against any part of the Fire?' (40:47)

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّ هَذَا لَسَاحِرٌ عَلِيمٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُخْرِجَكُم مِّنْ أَرْضِكُمْ
فَمَاذَا تَأْمُرُونَ

Said the Council of the people of Pharaoh, 'Surely this man is a cunning sorcerer who desires to expel you from your land; [in the light of what we have said] what do you command?' (7:109–10)

And at last when the prophets and their supporters revolted against the oppressive regimes of the rulers, trying to establish a new order, the oppressors made them the targets of their attacks with extreme ruthlessness:

قُتِلَ أَصْحَابُ الْأُخْدُودِ النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوَقُودِ إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ
بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ

Slain were the Men of the Pit, of the fuel-fed fire, when they sat by it, and were themselves witnesses of what they did to the believers. (85:4–7)

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ ذَرُونِي أَقْتُلْ مُوسَىٰ وَلْيَدْعُ رَبَّهُ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ يُبَدِّلَ دِينَكُمْ أَوْ أَنْ يُظْهِرَ
فِي الْأَرْضِ الْفَسَادَ

And Pharaoh said, 'Let me slay Moses, and let him call to his Lord. I fear that he may change your religion, or that he may cause corruption to appear in the land. (40:26)

These are few of the various characteristics of the oppressors that the Qur'an enumerates in its verses.

There are many specimens where the Qur'an goes beyond portraiture and describes the mustakbirun as a specific type representing a particular class character:

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِم مُّوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ بِآيَاتِنَا فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا ...

Then We sent forth after them Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his Council with Our signs, but they waxed proud (10:75)

وَقَارُونَ وَفِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مُّوسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ ...

And Qarun (Korah), and Pharaoh, and Haman; Moses came to them with clear signs, but they waxed proud in the earth (29:39)

We know about the vanity of the Pharaoh; his aides like Haman, who was his prime minister, and مَلَأُ فِرْعَوْنَ , who are other officials and authorities, the pillars of his establishment—all of them are his guides and advisors devoted to preservation of the oppressive status quo (see 7:126). We also know that Qarun was one who accumulated great amounts of wealth.

The dominant class in pagan society, without any deservedness whatsoever, seizes political and economic power; for perpetuating its exploitive and unjust domination, it also acquires a cultural and doctrinal monopoly, thus bending the public mind into continued submission and conformity with the status quo. In order to safeguard its interests and privileged status, it is willing to enter into an unrelenting struggle against any enlightening and revolutionary movement—a struggle which is fateful and vital for its survival, and a matter of life and death for it.

Now returning to the main two topic of our discussion what was the exact manner in which the prophets propounded the principle of *Tawhid*? Evidently, the prophetic approach to *Tawhid*—which is also the most essential ingredient of their school of thought—is indicative of the particular aspect of *Tawhid* which is unacceptable to the class of mustakbirun, and the reasons for their rejection of it. The nature of prophetic approach to *Tawhid* also explains why this class cannot tolerate this doctrine in its prophetic formulation. We know that the doctrine of *Tawhid* was the first and foremost item in the invitation of the prophets. The following statement of the Prophet (S) is well-known:

قُولُوا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ تَفْلِحُوا

Say, there is no god except God, that you may be delivered.

The following sentence uttered by numerous prophets such as Nuh, Hud, Salih, Shu'ayb and others is the most fundamental issue in the call to their peoples; it is mentioned in several places in the Qur'an:

... يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ...

...O people, serve God, there is no god except Him (7:59)

As can be seen in these statements, what is emphasized more than anything else, is negation of the worship of non-Gods. They represent the prophetic call, warning the unaware, ignorant masses, engulfed in the darkness of paganism and taghut-worship, and calling them to declare war against pretenders to divinity.

Who in a society are pretenders to divinity? What does it mean to wage war against taghut? What social goals are envisioned to be fulfilled by this mobilization?

Usually the phrase 'claim to divinity' is taken to mean a pretension to be 'god' or a 'deity' or a supernatural entity—things in which men have always believed throughout history. This is, of course, a superficial meaning of this phrase. This is not to deny existence of superstitious tyrants of antiquity, who, possessing political and social power, had led the gullible public to believe that the king possessed supernatural qualities. But a close study of words such as 'worship' (*ibadah*) and 'divinity' as they occur in the Qur'an, leads us to conclude that the phrase 'pretenders to divinity' has a much wider meaning.

The Qur'an has used the term worship (*ibadah*) in the sense of unconditional submission and obedience to any person or thing. Whenever we submit unconditionally to anyone, act according to his will, obey his command, and completely resign ourselves to his will, it implies that we 'worship' him by all means.

Reciprocally, if any external or inward force—either belonging to the external world or coming from inside our own personality—so succeeds in making us submissive and docile to it as to acquire a total grip on our body and soul, and channels all our energies in a preferred direction towards preferred goals, it is our 'god' and we are its worshippers (*ubbad*). The following verses of the Qur'an describe this process. Addressing the Pharaoh, Moses (A) says:

وَتِلْكَ نِعْمَةٌ تَمُنُّهَا عَلَيَّ أَنْ عَبَّدتَّ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

That is a blessing thou reproach me with, having enslaved the Children of Israel! (26:22)

The Pharaoh and his colleagues, while conversing with one another, say:

... أَنُؤْمِنُ لِبَشَرَيْنِ مِثْلِنَا وَقَوْمُهُمَا لَنَا عَابِدُونَ

.... *'What, shall we believe two mortals like ourselves, whose people are our servants?'* (23:47)

Addressing his father, Abraham (A) says:

يَا أَبَتِ لَا تَعْبُدِ الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ عَصِيًّا

O Father, serve not Satan: surely Satan is a rebel against the All-Merciful. (19:44)

Addressing humanity, God says:

أَلَمْ أَعْهِدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

Made I not covenant with you, Children of Adam, that you should not serve Satan –surely he is a manifest foe to you? (36:60)

In promise to the 'men of understanding', God says:

وَالَّذِينَ اجْتَنَبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ أَنْ يَعْبُدُوهَا وَأَنَابُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَى...

And those who eschew the serving of idols and turn penitent to God, for them is good tidings
....(39: 17)

Addressing those who ridicule believers for their faith in God and the Revelation, God says:

... مَنْ لَعَنَهُ اللَّهُ وَغَضِبَ عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهُمْ الْقِرَدَةَ وَالْخَنَازِيرَ وَعَبَدَ الطَّاغُوتَ
أُولَئِكَ شَرٌّ مَكَانًا وَأَضَلُّ عَنْ سَوَاءِ السَّبِيلِ

...Whomsoever God has cursed, and with whom He is wrath, and made some of them apes and

swine, and worshippers of taghut—they are worse situated, and have gone further astray from the right way. (5:60)

In these verses, service and submission to the Pharaoh and his clique, or submission to tyrants or to Satan—all these practices are regarded as 'worship'. These, as well as various other verses, indicate the Qur'anic conception of worship as an absolute and total submission to any real or imaginary power, willingly or under compulsion, accompanied with or without a feeling of spiritual adoration and reverence. In all these conditions that specific power or object is the object of worship and deity, and the follower a worshipper and devotee.

This explanation makes it clear that the concept of god or divinity is equivalent to the concept of 'the object of worship'.

In a pagan system, where people are divided into the two classes of the *mustakbirun* and the *mustad'afun*—i.e. the dominating class of rich exploiters, and the class of the downtrodden and the deprived—the most conspicuous manifestation of the relation between the 'object of worship' and the 'worshippers' is the unjust relationship between the two classes.

It is not at all sufficient for the sake of identification of idols and gods of historical societies to make a study of the real or imaginary, animate or inanimate 'deities' of their cults; their true idols and 'gods' are the *mustakbirun* themselves, who have subjugated the oppressed *mustad'afun* to their authority and turned them into worshipping slaves to satisfy their own greed, ambition for power, and predatory ends.

Polytheism (shirk) is the real religion of such societies, since there are multiple poles and powers which exercise their command over the people, and draw them in their desired direction under total submission.

Polytheism and idolatry mean obeying and following someone instead of God or besides God; that is, resignation to the will of non-God's in all affairs of life, surrender to other powers and authorities besides God, and reliance on them as source of guidance and primary means of fulfillment of most important human needs.

The principle of *Tawhid* is in direct contradiction with the cult of polytheism, since it demands the negation of all gods, refusal to submit to their authority, resistance to their domination and authority, total dissociation from their help and sympathy, and, ultimately, their rejection, and total submission to God's will.

The first tenet of the religious doctrine of all prophets of God was exactly this negation of polytheism on the one hand and affirmation of *Tawhid* on the other:

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ ...

And We sent forth among every nation a messenger [saying]: `Serve you God, and eschew idols' (16:36)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ

And We sent never a messenger before thee except that We revealed to him, [saying], `There is no god but I, so serve Me.' (21:25)

The prophets of God denounced corrupt and decadent systems of the polytheists through this principle, and encouraged the people to fight against the current idols (*taghut*)—those who guarded these systems, and rebelled against true human values, and who had imposed upon people their absurd value system in order to maintain their own oppressive status.

Negation of polytheism was actually the negation of all social, economic, and political institutions, which constituted the basic infrastructure of pagan societies, and which used various forms of polytheistic cults as a doctrinal shield to protect and maintain the perverse state of affairs.

The denouncement of gods and idols implies the rejection of all such individuals who, through coercion and deception, indulge in the acts of repression, and impose themselves upon the people in order to satiate their inordinate, unlimited lusts.

Moses, by propounding this principle, and by declaring the supreme authority of the `Lord of all worlds,' waged a war against the Pharaoh and denounced him. The courtiers of the Pharaoh, of course, in return denounced Moses as an unbeliever in their gods, and accused him of the crime of denying traditional deities:

وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ أَتَنْذَرُ مُوسَى وَقَوْمَهُ لِيُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَيَذَرَكَ
وَالْهَتَكَ ...

Then said the Council of the people of Pharaoh, `Wilt thou leave Moses and his people to work corruption in the land, and abandon thee and thy gods?...' (7:127)

But the Pharaoh, as well as his corrupt clique, knew very well that those `gods,' those lifeless idols, did not serve any purpose except as a shield for their own pretension to divinity, and as a vital pretext for the living idols for perpetuation of their own godhood. It was logical that in retaliation to his invitation to submit to the One God, the Lord of all worlds, the Lord of the East and the West, of the earth and heavens, Moses should have been threatened with imprisonment, torture and death.

قَالَ لئن اتَّخَذتَ إِلَهًا غَيْرِي لأَجْعَلَنَّكَ مِنَ الْمَسْجُونِينَ

Said he (the Pharaoh), 'If thou takest a god other than me, I shall surely make thee one of the imprisoned. (26:29)

... قَالَ سَنُقْتِلُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَنَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّا فَوْقَهُمْ قَاهِرُونَ

....Said he (the Pharaoh), 'We shall slaughter their sons and spare their women; surely we are triumphant over them.' (7:127)

لأَقْطَعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ ثُمَّ لأَصْلَبَنَّكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

I shall assuredly cut off alternately your hands and feet, then I shall crucify you all together. (7:124)

This sort of brutal behaviour towards the bearers of the message of *Tawhid* was solely on account of the fact that it is a message of liberation and freedom. It is acceptance of belief in God as the sovereign and the sole authority in one's life, and negation of all pretenders to divinity, that is, contravention of all such claims, by all means. Such is the real spirit of the doctrine of *Tawhid*, and the real essence of Islamic monotheism.

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