



Frequently Asked Questions on Islam and the Muslims: Part 5

This is a series aimed at creating a thorough understanding of the essential teachings that underlie Islam, mainly for non-Muslims, in a brief, yet concise manner.

Question 5. Although you have touched upon “Tawheed” (Monotheism) somewhat already, can you give a more thorough explanation of it?

When we read the Qur’aan and the Prophet’s explanation of it in his “Sunnah” (the way, the model of conduct), we find that Allaah speaks of Himself and of the requirements of Tawheed from three angles

- a) Affirming and establishing that all the actions related to creating, owning, regulating, sustaining, providing, and so on are unique to Him alone and not shared by any of the creation.
- b) Affirming what belongs to Him of Lofty Names and Praiseworthy Attributes, and by all of that His knowledge, perfection, power, wisdom, and other qualities and attributes are known.
- c) Affirming that all forms of worship (whether actions of the heart, statements of the tongue or actions of the limbs), internal and external are due to Him alone, alongside the mentioning these forms of worship and cautioning from directing them to others besides Him or alongside Him. Additionally, all acts of worship must fulfil two conditions a) that they are sincere and b) that they are in accordance with the Scripture.

However, the Qur’an also addresses the opposite of Tawheed, which is known as Shirk, and this only perfects the understanding of Tawheed, and complements the knowledge of what is required of it. Shirk, in the Qur’an, has also been addressed as follows:

- a) It is to ascribe the qualities that are unique to Allaah, to other than Him. So for example claiming someone has absolute power over life and death, or the rain, or the clouds, or having independent knowledge of the unseen matters, or the ability to forgive and pardon, or to heal and provide, and other such affairs. Similarly, it is to ascribe the defective qualities of humans to Allaah. Hence, it is to either reduce Allaah to the defective qualities of humans, or to raise humans by ascribing them the unique qualities of Allaah.
- b) To give the Names or attributes that are unique to Allaah, and befit Him alone, to the creation, or vice versa, which is giving the names or attributes that only

benefit the creation, to Allaah. It is important to note here that what is being negated here is the reality behind the names and attributes, and not just the mere name or attribute itself, since there are many names and attributes common to Allaah and the creation, such as seeing, hearing, knowing, or such as the one who forgives, or the one who is just, or the one who is kind and so on. There is one reality of these names and attributes for Allaah, and yet another one for the creation, and there is no likeness between them. Hence, orthodox Muslims, affirm the Names and Attributes of Allaah, as they have been reported in the Book and the Sunnah, without i) negating them, ii) distorting their meanings iii) specifying a modality for them or iv) likening them – in their reality and true nature - to those of the creation.

- c) To direct any of the forms of worship (which includes actions of the heart, statements of the tongue and actions of the limbs) to anyone besides or alongside Allaah, such as absolute love, fear, hope, reliance, or seeking forgiveness, or supplication, or ritual sacrifice, or prayer and other affairs of worship and devotion. Examples of Shirk would include, relying upon talismans, believing in fortune-tellers (i.e. that they have independent knowledge of the Unseen), calling upon the Saints, knocking on wood for good fortune – and many other things that have been documented in the Book and the Sunnah and which are all based upon superstition and lies against Allaah.

Thus, Tawheed is in knowledge and action, and its antithesis, Shirk, too is in knowledge and action, and it is for this reason that orthodox Muslims are always greatly concerned with these affairs in all times and stages of their lives. This forms the very fabric and basis of Islaam, and is the arena in which Muslims strive to educate themselves, so that they proceed upon knowledge and understanding, in realising the actual purpose of their lives.

It is also important to mention here that there are Muslim factions, past and present, who have deviated, from the point of view of both knowledge and action, in the arena of Tawheed.

From the point of view of knowledge:

Then there are two extremes in the middle of which is the balance of Orthodox Muslims. The first faction went to extreme in affirmation, and hence affirmed qualities and attributes for Allaah believing that they are the same in essence as those of the humans, and they are the Anthropomorphists (Mushabbihah). Thus, they only conceived of the reality of the attributes in terms of the reality of human attributes. In reality, the Lord this faction was worshipping was reduced to nothing but an idol.

The second faction went to an extreme in negation and denied altogether the attributes and qualities that Allaah has affirmed for Himself, and their denial was in one of three ways:

- a) Complete denial (known as Ta'teel), and hence they stripped Allaah of any attributes at all
- b) Denial based upon interpolation or distortion of these attributes to other than their intended meanings (known as Ta'weel and Tahreef) and
- c) Negation of any meaning for these attributes and negation of having any knowledge of them (known as tafweedh).

And the Lord this faction was worshipping was reduced to a non-existent, uncharacterised Lord.

Orthodox Muslims are in between the two extremes and describe Allaah with what He described himself and what His Messenger described Him with, and they negate from Him whatever He and His Messenger negated from Him – this being the sound and correct principle in knowing Allaah. Hence, they affirm for Him all of His Names and Attributes, with their meanings, while negating any resemblance between them and those of the creation, and without distorting and interpolating them and without enquiring into their true realities. Everyone of Allaah's Names requires that we affirm either two or three matters, depending upon whether the Name is transitive or non-transitive. Hence, the Name "Al-Aleem" which means "All-Knowing", requires a) that we affirm this Name for Allaah, that He has named Himself with it b) that we affirm for Allaah the attribute that it indicates, i.e. "Ilm" (knowledge) and c) how this Name and the corresponding attribute relates to the creation – and this is that Allaah's knowledge encompasses every single think and is the knower of all things past and present, manifest and hidden. The Name "al-Aleem" is an example of a transitive name. As for the non-transitive names, then they just require two matters, so for example the Name, "al-Hayy" (Ever-Living), then this requires that we a) affirm the name "al-Hayy" for Allaah and b) that we affirm for him the attribute that it contains, which is perfect, ever-lasting life. And this manner we come to have a detailed knowledge of Allaah – based upon what He himself has revealed about himself – in opposition to all the other religions, ways and calls, which are based upon ignorance and false information concerning Allaah.

And from the point of view of action: Then they are those who direct the various forms of worship to other than Allaah, such as wearing talismans, saint-worship, supplicating to the dead, seeking intercession through intermediaries, showing absolute and unconditioned love, fear, hope or reliance, or other than that from the actions of the heart, to things besides or alongside Allaah and so on. All of this is considered Shirk. There are two types of Shirk, that which expels from Islam and contradicts Tawheed, and that which does not. The one that does not expel from Islam or contradict Tawheed absolutely, is what is known as "riyaa" or showing off, doing actions for the sake of other than Allaah.

Question 6: Can you give some quotations of the Qur'aan to highlight what you have just covered?

Yes, the Qur'an is replete with all of this, and likewise is the Sunnah (the Prophet's statements and actions) and we will draw upon statements from the Sunnah later in this series. As for the Qur'an, then by way of example only:

On Tawheed (Monotheism)

O mankind! Worship your Lord (Allāh), Who created you and those who were before you so that you may become Al-Muttaqûn (the pious). Who has made the earth a resting place for you, and the sky as a canopy, and sent down water (rain) from the sky and brought forth therewith fruits as a provision for you. Then do not set up rivals unto Allāh (in worship) while you know (that He Alone has the right to be worshipped). **Baqarah – 2:21-22**

And your ilāh (God) is One ilāh (God - Allāh), Lâ ilāha illa Huwa (there is none who has the right to be worshipped but He), the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. **Al-Baqarah - 2:163**

Or were you witnesses when death approached Ya'qûb (Jacob)? When he said unto his sons, "What will you worship after me?" They said, "We shall worship your ilāh (God - Allāh), the ilāh (God) of your fathers, Ibrâhim (Abraham), Ismâ'il (Ishmael), Ishâque (Isaac), One ilāh (God), and to Him we submit (in Islâm)." **Al-Baqarah - 2:133**

And We did not send any Messenger before you (O Muhammad) but We inspired him (saying): Lâ ilāha illa Ana [none has the right to be worshipped but I (Allāh)], so worship Me (Alone and none else)." **Al-Anbiya - 21:25**

Say (O Muhammad (Peace be upon him)): "He is Allāh, (the) One. Allāh-us-Samad (The Self-Sufficient Master, Whom all creatures need, He neither eats nor drinks). He begets not, nor was He begotten; "And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him." **Al-Ikhlaas 112**

Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, so worship Him (Alone) and be constant and patient in His worship. Do you know of any who is similar to Him? (of course none is similar or coequal or comparable to Him, and He has none as partner with Him). [There is nothing like unto Him and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer]. **Maryam 19:65**

And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allāh, so call on Him by them, and leave the company of those who belie or deny (or utter impious speech against) His Names. They will be requited for what they used to do. **Al-A'raaf 7:180**

On Shirk (Associating Partners with Allaah)

Surely, they have disbelieved who say: "Allâh is the Messiah [‘Iesa (Jesus)], son of Maryam (Mary)." But the Messiah [‘Iesa (Jesus)] said: "O Children of Israel! Worship Allâh, my Lord and your Lord." Verily, whosoever sets up partners in worship with Allâh, then Allâh has forbidden Paradise for him, and the Fire will be his abode. And for the Zâlimûn (polytheists and wrongdoers) there are no helpers. **Al- Mai’dah - 5:72**

Verily, Allâh forgives not that partners should be set up with him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He pleases, and whoever sets up partners with Allâh in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin. **An-Nisaa – 4:48**

And (remember) when Luqmân said to his son when he was advising him: "O my son! Join not in worship others with Allâh. Verily! Joining others in worship with Allâh is a great Zûlm (wrong) indeed. **Luqman – 31:13**

And they worship besides Allâh things that hurt them not, nor profit them, and they say: "These are our intercessors with Allâh." Say: "Do you inform Allâh of that which He knows not in the heavens and on the earth?" Glorified and Exalted be He above all that which they associate as partners with Him! **Yunus 10:18**

Surely, the religion (i.e. the worship and the obedience) is for Allâh only. And those who take Auliya’ (protectors and helpers) besides Him (say): "We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allâh." Verily, Allâh will judge between them concerning that wherein they differ. Truly, Allâh guides not him who is a liar, and a disbeliever. **Az-Zumar 39:3**

Say (O Muhammad): "Call unto those besides Him whom you pretend [to be gods like angels, Iesâ (Jesus), ‘Uzair (Ezra), etc.]. They have neither the power to remove the adversity from you nor even to shift it from you to another person." Those whom they call upon [i.e. the Prophets and the Righteous] desire (for themselves) the means of nearness to their Lord (Allâh), as to which of them should be the nearest and they [‘Iesa (Jesus), ‘Uzair (Ezra), angels, etc.] hope for His Mercy and fear His Torment. Verily, the Torment of your Lord is something to be afraid of! **Al-Israa 17:56-57**

On some the forms of worship (by way of example only)

Invocation. Supplication: "And the mosques are for Allaah (Alone), so invoke not anyone along with Allaah". **Al-Jinn 72:18**. And whoever invokes (or worships), besides Allaah, any other *ilaah* (god), of whom he has no proof, then his reckoning is only with his Lord. **Al-Mu’minoon 23:117** And your Lord said: "Invoke Me, [i.e. believe in My Oneness (Islaamic Monotheism)] (and ask Me for anything) I will respond to your (invocation). **Al-Ghafir 40:60**

Love: And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allāh as rivals (to Allāh). They love them as they love Allāh. But those who believe, love Allāh more (than anything else). If only, those who do wrong could see, when they will see the torment, that all power belongs to Allāh and that Allāh is Severe in punishment. **Al-Baqarah 2:165**

Fear: So fear them not, but fear Me, if you are (true) believers. **Aali Imraan 3:175**

Hope: So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord. **Al-Kahf 18:110**

Reliance, Trust: And put your trust in Allaah if you are believers indeed. **Al-Ma'idah 5:23**. And whosoever puts his trust in Allaah, then He will suffice him. **At-Talaaq 65:3**

Reverance, Homage: Verily, they used to hasten on to do good deeds, and they used to call on Us with hope and fear, and used to humble themselves before Us. **Al-Anbiya 21:90**

Repentance: And turn in repentance and in obedience with true Faith (Islamic Monotheism) to your Lord and submit to Him, (in Islaam) **az-Zumar 39:54**

Seeking aid, assistance (i.e. in those things that only Allaah has power over): You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything). **Al-Fatihah 1:5**

Seeking refuge: Say: "I seek refuge with (Allaah) the Lord of mankind. **An-Naas 114:1**

Imploring assistance, succour: (Remember) when you sought help of your Lord and He answered you. **Al-Anfaal 8:9**

Ritual Sacrifice: Say (O Muhammad): "Verily, my *Salaat* (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allaah, the Lord of the '*Aalameen* (mankind, jinns and all that exists). "He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims." **Al-An'aam 6:162-163**

Fulfilment of vows: They (are those who) fulfill (their) vows, and they fear a Day whose evil will be wide-spreading. **Ad-Dahr 76:7**

As has already been mentioned, this is by way of example only, and one is encouraged to read the Qur'an and its explanation to get further insight into this.