

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful



Surat al-An'am 6:19

قُلْ إِنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ
وَإِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ

Say: 'Indeed He is the One God, and
I indeed disown what you associate
[with Him].'

Learning Objectives

- Define the terms *tawhid*, *muwahhid*, *shirk*, and *mushrik*
- To distinguish between the four different aspects of *tawhid*
- To examine *shirk* and hidden *shirk*

Key Words

تَوْحِيدٌ *tawhid* belief in the oneness of Allah

مُوحِدٌ *muwahhid* someone who believes in *tawhid*; monotheist

شُرْكٌ *shirk* polytheism; belief in more than one god

مُشْرِكٌ *mushrik* someone who believes or practices *shirk*



Having a proper understanding of *tawhid* is so important that all the *anbiya* and the *a'immah* (a) took every opportunity to explain it so that people did not fall into the sin of *shirk*.

Even during the Battle of Jamal, which was fought against a number of rival Muslims, Imam Ali (a) took the time to explain *tawhid*.

When the battle was about to begin, a Bedouin Arab approached Imam Ali's (a) camp requesting to talk to him. He was taken to Imam and all those around Imam were looking forward to see what matters the Bedouin wanted to discuss with Imam in that critical situation. The Bedouin Arab suddenly raised the subject of *tawhid*, saying,

“Do you say that indeed Allah is one?”
Imam Ali's (a) companions objected to him, saying,

“Is this the proper time to discuss such matters? Don't you see that *Amir al-mu'minin* (a) is busy in handling the affairs of the war?”

Thus the companions attempted to take the Bedouin away from Imam and prevent him from continuing his talk. However, the Imam said,

“Let him speak, for what this Bedouin is seeking is the very thing we demand from these people with whom we are fighting.”

Imam Ali (a) meant that the war was actually for *tawhid* and the principles of *tawhid*. If the people of the opposite side truly had a correct understanding of *tawhid*, then they would have never fought against the Imam, who was the representative of *tawhid*. Therefore, Imam chose to take time to explain *tawhid* to that Bedouin Arab in the very difficult and tense moments of the war.

Tawhid and shirk

La ilaha illallah is the foundation of Islam and the essence of *tawhid* – the belief that there is no god but Allah. He is One and Unique, and is the only Creator. Someone who believes in the oneness of Allah is called a *muwahhid* (monotheist).

The opposite of *tawhid* is to believe that there is more than one god, or to associate anyone or anything with Allah as His partners. This is called *shirk*. A person who believes that there is more than one god is called a *mushrik* (polytheist). *Shirk* is the greatest sin in Islam.

“Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) has said:
The greatest of the greater sins is to attribute partners to Allah.”

Such is the graveness of the sin of being a *mushrik* that Allah says in the Holy Qur'an that He may forgive all sins except that of *shirk*:

Surat an-Nisa 4:48



إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا
دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ
فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

Indeed Allah does not forgive that any partner should be associated with Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes. And whoever associates anything with Allah has indeed devised a great sin.

The Qur'an clearly warns that all kinds of *mushrikin* (polytheists) will suffer the punishment of hell:

Surat al-Ma'idah 5:72



إِنَّهُ مَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ

Indeed whoever ascribes partners to Allah, Allah shall forbid him [entry into] paradise, and his abode shall be the fire.

Except those to whom guidance about *tawhid* has not reached. These people will be judged by God in a different way.

Levels and degrees of *tawhid* and *shirk*

On the surface, a believing Muslim is a *muwahhid* because he declares that there is no god but Allah. However, *tawhid* has many aspects and levels, as does *shirk*. As such, a Muslim has to be aware of all these aspects so that he does not fall into the sin of *shirk* at all.

REMEMBER...

“ A proper understanding of *tawhid* is so important that Imam Ali al-Ridha (a) narrated the following very powerful *hadith* on his journey to Iran when he was summoned there by Ma'mun, the cruel and cunning Abbasid caliph of the time. Imam declared that Allah has said,

“ The phrase *la ilaha illallah* is My fortress. Whoever enters My fortress shall be safe from My punishment. ”

The Imam then paused for a moment and continued,

“ but there are conditions [for this], and I am one of its conditions. ”

This *hadith* of Imam Ali al-Ridha (a) is known as the ‘*hadith* of the golden chain’ because every person in the chain of narration was sinless. Allah commanded angel Jibra'il to tell it to Rasulullah (s), who narrated it to Imam Ali (a), who narrated it to Imam Husayn (a), who narrated it to Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), who narrated it to Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), who narrated it to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a), who narrated it to Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a), who narrated it to Imam Ali al-Ridha (a). ”



AL-ASMA AL-HUSNA
The 99 Beautiful Names of Allah

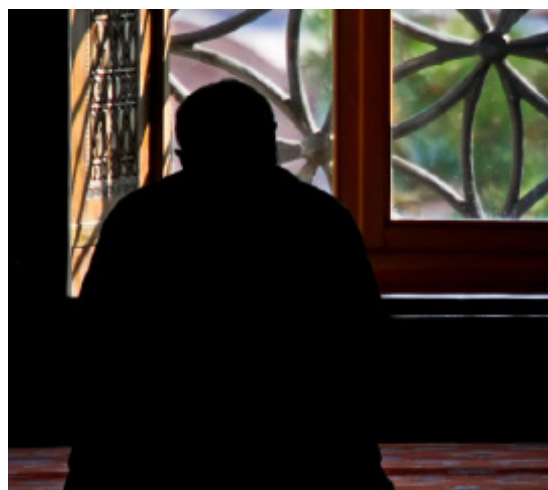
الْأَحَدُ AL-AHAD
THE ONE

Allah is One, but not in the meaning of the number one, because the number one carries the possibility of becoming two or three, and beyond. It is also not exactly the same as being unique, because even a unique thing can be made up of hundreds of other parts. When we say Allah is One, it means He is not one in number, He does not have any parts, or a body, and He is not divisible even in imagination. The special name of Allah to describe this unique oneness is **Ahad**.



REFLECTION

Think back to the lesson on proofs of Allah's existence. One way of proving Allah's existence was to consider the intelligent design in the universe. How does intelligent design in the universe also prove to us that there cannot be more than one God?



The four aspects of *tawhid*

TAWHID IN ESSENCE	TAWHID IN ATTRIBUTES
- Allah is One and there is none like Him. - He is self-sufficient and needless. - There is no other Creator except Him. Surat al-Ikhlās 112:1-4 قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ Say, 'He is Allah, the One. Allah is the All-embracing. He neither begets, nor was begotten, nor has He any equal.' We know that there can only be one creator of the universe because of the universe's intelligent design, described in previous lessons.	Allah's qualities such as mercy, knowledge, power, etc., are His very being; they are not additional to Him, or parts of Him, nor have they been acquired. Consider a cup of tea. If sugar is added to it, it becomes sweet. The sweetness of the tea is an additional quality to the tea. It can be removed, but the tea will remain as tea. Now consider sugar. The sweetness of sugar is an essential quality of the sugar, and is not an additional quality, nor can it be separated from it. Consider a knowledgeable man. The knowledge was acquired by him. It is not an inherent essential quality of his. It is possible he can forget the knowledge he acquired, but still be a man. Allah's qualities are not separate to Him, nor acquired, nor part of Him – they are His very being. “Imam Ali (a) has said: "The perfection of devotion to Him is the rejection of attributes to Him, because anything that is attributed must mean that it is separate from the object [Allah]."
TAWHID IN CREATION AND WILL	TAWHID IN WORSHIP
The universe, with all its systems, norms, causes and effects, is Allah's act and work, and arises from His will. Surat al-Kahf 18:39 لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ There is no power except by Allah!	Restricting worship only to Allah. Oneness in worship was the most important point expressed by the <i>anbiya</i>. Surat al-Ma'idah 5:76 قُلْ أَتَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَمْلِكُ لَكُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا وَ اللَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ Say: 'Do you worship, besides Allah, that which has no power to bring you any benefit or harm, while Allah – He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing?'

The first three types of *tawhid* described in the table above are theoretical, and are studied in order to establish correct ideas and thinking about *tawhid*.

The fourth type of *tawhid* is practical, and can help a person to become truly *muwahhid*.

The difference between theoretical and practical *tawhid* can be summarised as follows:

THEORETICAL TAWHID	→	PRACTICAL TAWHID
Insight into perfection Perceiving the unity of Allah To see	→	Movement aimed at reaching perfection Bringing man into unity To go

How *shirk* manifests itself

TAWHID IN ESSENCE	TAWHID IN ATTRIBUTES
• Believing that there is more than one god or that Allah has partners • Believing that God has delegated parts of the affairs of the creation to other beings, like angels, demi-gods or prophets • Believing in idols or that Allah manifests Himself in idols or different beings • Hidden <i>shirk</i> – see below	• Thinking that Allah's qualities are separate from Him or are a part of Him • Ascribing any of Allah's qualities to a human being or other creature • Ascribing human qualities to Allah, such as making mistakes, or that He has a body, or sits on a throne • Hidden <i>shirk</i> – see below
TAWHID IN CREATION AND WILL	TAWHID IN WORSHIP
• Attributing any creation to other than Allah • Assuming that anything can take place in the world without the Will of Allah • Believing in theories of creation that do not involve Allah • Hidden <i>shirk</i> – see below	• Worshipping things other than Allah such as angels, spirits, sun, moon, stars, idols, etc. and paying homage to them, making offerings and sacrifices to them, and believing they can guarantee fulfilment of needs independently. • Hidden <i>shirk</i> – see below

Hidden *shirk* (*al-shirk al-khafiyy*)

There is a very thought-provoking *ayah* in the Holy Qur'an. Allah says:

Surah Yusuf 12:106

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا
وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

And most of them do not believe in Allah except that they ascribe partners [to Him].

“

Rasulullah (S) has warned against it: "Abstain from hidden *shirk*. The worst thing that I fear for you is your hidden *shirk*; so rise above it since among my followers, *shirk* is more hidden than the creeping of the ant on a hard stone in the dark night."

”

In this *ayah*, Allah is saying that even though many people may believe in Him, they still commit *shirk*. The *shirk* being referred to here is known as *al-shirk al-khafiyy* or hidden *shirk*. Hidden *shirk* is when a person believes and says that there is no god but Allah, but his thoughts and actions do not reflect his belief. This kind of *shirk* is very subtle and difficult to spot.

Some examples of hidden *shirk* include:

- 1 **Riya (showing off):** This occurs when someone does an action with the intention of *ibadah*, but in reality they do it to show off. Their intention is for the sake of others, rather than Allah! The Qur'an tells us clearly:



Surat al-Kahf 18:110

فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا
صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him act righteously, and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord.

Allah says in the Qur'an:



Surat al-Ma'un 107:4-6

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ
صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ

So woe to those who pray, who are unmindful of their prayers, those who show off.

Riya can affect us in different ways. Can you think of some other examples?

- 2 **Giving preference to one's desires:**
Allah tells us in the Holy Qur'an,



Surat al-Furqan 25:43

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ
تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا

Have you seen the one who has taken his desire to be his god?

Each time we give our own desires preference over what Allah wishes us to do, we have taken our desires as our lord. This can be in something *haram*, as well as in some thing *halal*. For example, if we eat *haram* food because we really want to, we have taken our desire above what Allah has commanded us. At a higher level, even if we are doing something *halal* and we give preference to our desire over Allah, it can be a form of *shirk*. For example, if it is time for *salah* and we are watching TV or playing a computer game and we decide to finish our game or our programme first and then pray later, then we are giving our desires priority over what Allah wants us to do!



Rasulullah (S) has said:

One who offers *salah* in an ostentatious way is a polytheist. One who keeps the fast, or gives alms, or performs the hajj to show the public his righteousness or to earn good name, is a polytheist.

REMEMBER...



Allah is the ultimate source of all blessings for us. He created the system of cause and effect. Allah is the one who provides us with food and clothes through the means of our parents. He is the one who cures us when we are sick through the means of medicine. This does not mean that we should not thank others when they help us and are kind to us; Islam says that thanking others is also very important. Imam Ali ar-Ridha (a) says:



Whoever does not thank the one who does him a favour from among Allah's creatures has not thanked Allah. ﷻ

However, we should always remember that Allah is the original source of all these favours and more. One way to do this is to always say 'jazakallah' (may Allah reward you) when thanking others, rather than just 'thank you'. In this way, we are reminding ourselves and the other person that it is Allah who is the ultimate source of kindness and also that it is Allah who has allowed the other person to be able to provide the kindness. If we consider the doer of good to be the original source of the kindness independent from Allah, then there is no doubt that this is a form of *shirk*.



3 Following someone in disobedience:

Obedying someone in matters that would lead to disobeying Allah is also a form of *shirk*. For example, if friends tell you to listen to music or to go somewhere *haram* and you listen to them, then you have given them preference over what Allah wants you to do.

4 Seeing one's self as self-sufficient and without need.

Allah tells us in the Holy Qur'an,



Surat al-Alaq 96:6-7

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّا

Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers himself without need.

Thinking that 'I am so clever' or 'I am good looking' or 'I am so rich' etc. and believing that these are our achievements without realising that Allah has given these blessings to us and thanking Him for them is also a form of hidden *shirk*. We should rather always say: 'I have knowledge because Allah has blessed me with it, I have strength because Allah has granted it to me', etc. This constant realisation that all we have is because of Allah's grace, is true *tawhid*.

5 Seeing others as the cause of our blessings:

Another form of hidden *shirk* is when we consider anyone other than Allah as the cause of the good things that come to us. Explaining this type of *shirk*, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) says:

“

One who says:

"If such and such were not there, I or my family would have perished or would have been afflicted by misfortune."

As you can see, he creates a partner for Allah who provides for him and protects him.

”

6 To love something more than to love Allah:

Allah is the only one who deserves our unlimited love and attachment. If loving something stands in the way of our love for God then a true monotheist would put the love for God before anything else.



FIQH FACTS

The only time you are allowed to disobey your parents is if they ask you to do something *haram* or prevent you from doing something *wajib*. For example, if a daughter wants to wear *hijab* and her parents refuse, then she is allowed to disobey them in this.

REMEMBER...

“ The *ma'sumin* would not like personal praise. For example, whenever someone spoke highly of Imam Ali (a) he would say: I know myself better than others, and my Lord knows me better than I know myself. O Allah, do not deal with me according to what they say, and make me better than what they think of me and forgive me [those short-comings] which they do not know [about me]. ”

We should try and adopt this same habit and recite these same sentences whenever we are praised.



“

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) says:

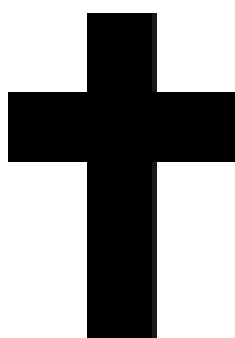
By Allah, the iman of a person cannot be pure till he loves Allah more than his near ones, his mother, his father, children, wife, other people, and wealth.

”

Tawhid and other faiths



Zoroastrianism



Christianity



Hinduism

Let us examine other faiths and compare their beliefs in God with tawhid in Islam:

- Zoroastrians believe in a god of evil (darkness) and god of goodness (light), both being equal and eternal. The god of good is called *Yazdan* and the god of evil is known as *Ahriman*.
- Christians also believe that God is present in three forms. This is known as the belief of trinity, with God represented as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They also use paintings, statues, and other art to depict their sacred figures and stories from the Bible. What does the Qur'an say about the belief of trinity?
- A group of Muslims known as *Nusayris* call Imam Ali (a) their god because of his extraordinary personality.
- Another group of Muslims known as *ghulat* (extremists) believe that Allah has delegated His powers or entrusted all affairs to the *a'immah*, or that they are somehow incarnations of Allah. According to them, the *a'immah* independently give life and death, and also sustenance. According to all Shi'a *ulama*, any person who has this belief or similar views about the *a'immah* is a *mushrik*.
- In Hinduism, there are three main gods, and their scriptures claim that there were many other gods and goddesses. However, they say that behind all these gods, there is also a single spiritual entity called Brahma.
- Buddhists do not believe in God. But they worship the statue of Gautam Buddha as their god.
- The ancient Egyptians considered their kings (the Pharaohs) to be living gods.
- In the Shinto religion of Japan, gods are thought to reside in particular trees, rocks, and streams. Before World War II (1935-1945), the Japanese honoured their emperor as god. On 2 September 1945, Emperor Hirohito who was considered and worshipped by the Japanese as their god, officially surrendered and announced his defeat. Thousands of Japanese wept, seeing their god in such a humiliated condition. On 1 January 1946, Emperor Hirohito renounced all claims to divinity that formerly had been claimed for him. The constitution of 1947, which he approved, changed him from 'sovereign' to 'symbol of the state'.
- Some people believe that there are separate gods for every kind of phenomenon. For example, there are separate gods for wind, sea, rain, etc. This is another form of *shirk*. These people consider different creations to be the handiwork of different gods, and so they worship multiple deities. This kind of *shirk* has also been denounced in the Holy Qur'an.



Surah Yusuf 12:39

أَرَبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ
أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

Are different lords better, or
Allah, the One, the Supreme?



HIGHER LEVEL

Faith in Action

Hidden shirk does not fall under the ruling of manifest *shirk* in terms of not being forgiven by God and we should always strive to ensure we do not succumb to any form of *shirk* or hidden *shirk*. One way to do this is to always make sure our *niyyah* for our actions are purely for the sake of Allah. A good way to do this is to see the command of Allah to Rasulullah (s) who would say:

Surat an-An'am 6:162-163

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي
وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ
الْعَالَمِينَ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَبِذَلِكَ
أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

Say: 'Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. He has no partner, and this [creed] I have been commanded [to follow], and I am the first of those who submit.'

Memorise these *ayat* of the Holy Qur'an and get into the habit of reciting them before you begin your *salah* or before doing any good deed. This will help ensure your *niyyah* for doing the action is solely for the pleasure of Allah.

Some groups of Muslims accuse the Shi'a of committing *shirk* because they say we invoke others instead of Allah, by making *tawassul* (intercession) to the *ma'sumin*, or saying things like 'ya Ali madaad' (O Imam Ali, help me).

In response, we say that we fully agree that *shirk* is the greatest sin, and this has been emphasised by the *a'immah*. However, going for *ziyarah* and asking a *Ma'sum* to help is not a matter of *shirk* because we do not see them as having independent power from Allah; rather, they are agents of Allah that act on His behalf. Allah Himself says:

Surat al-Ma'idah 5:35

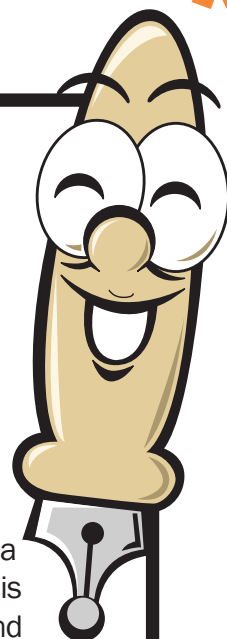
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ

O you who believe! Be wary of Allah, and seek the means of approach to Him.

Design a leaflet to explain the difference between *tawassul* and *shirk*.

KEYPOINTS

- 1 Someone who believes in *tawhid* is called a *muwahhid* (monotheist). Someone who believes in more than one god is called a *mushrik* (polytheist).
- 2 Even a *muwahhid* can succumb to forms of *shirk*. Hidden *shirk* is when a person believes and says that there is no god but Allah, but his thoughts and actions do not reflect his belief.
- 3 Examples of hidden *shirk* include showing off, purposely committing sins, thinking oneself as self-sufficient, and obeying others instead of obeying Allah.



TEST YOURSELF

- 1 Define the terms *tawhid* and *shirk*.

- 2 What are the four different aspects of *tawhid*?

- 3 What is the difference between *shirk* and hidden *shirk*?

- 4 Give two examples of hidden *shirk*.

- 5 Would the following be considered as *shirk*? Explain why or why not.
 - a Making a public donation to a charity.
 - b Wearing the football kit of your favourite football team even though their sponsor is an alcohol or betting company and their logo is printed on the shirt.
 - c Finishing your homework when you know prayer time has set in.
 - d Praising and thanking your best friend for helping you out of a difficulty.
 - e Eating *haram* food.

NOTES

A vertical sheet of lined paper with a green cloud-shaped sticker at the top that says "NOTES". The paper has horizontal ruling lines and a curled bottom edge.