

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah,
most Kind, most Merciful



Surat al-Mu'minun 23:52

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً
وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

And indeed this community of yours is
one community, and I am your Lord, so
be wary of Me.

Learning Objectives

- To identify *tawhid* as the absolute unifying factor for all Muslims, regardless of what sect they belong to
- To examine some of the differences in the understanding of *tawhid* amongst different sects in Islam
- To outline strategies that will foster unity among Muslims

Key Words

مَذْهَبٌ / مَذَاهِبٌ Madhhab/madhahib
sect/sects

تَوْحِيدٌ Tawhid
belief in the
oneness of Allah;
unity of Allah

أَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ Ahl as-Sunnah
a term used to
refer to the Sunni
sect of Islam

All Muslims believe in *tawhid*

Today, Islam is divided into many *madhahib* (sects). These include the *Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* (or simply *Ahl as-Sunnah* or Sunnis), who then split into *Barelvi*, *Salafi*, and *Deobandi*, amongst others. There are also *Zaidis*, and *Ismailis*, as sub-sects of Shi'a faith.

However, no matter to which *madhhab* a Muslim belongs, they are all united and unanimous in the belief of *tawhid*, represented by the phrase *la ilaha illallah* (there is no god but Allah). In addition, all Muslims agree that Rasulullah (s) is Allah's last prophet, and that there will be a Day of Judgement where everyone will be questioned about their beliefs and actions.

All Muslim sects agree that anyone who does not believe in any of the above three basic principles (*tawhid*, *nubuwwah*, *ma'ad*) is not a Muslim.

As Muslims, we should always hold onto these common things and try to be as united as possible, especially when Islam's enemies want to harm us by all possible means. Allah tells us in the Qur'an: →

ACTIVITY AND IDEAS

On post-it notes, write down the names of all the sects of Islam that you know.

Create a poster with the word ISLAM in the centre, and stick your post-it notes around it.

Surat al-Mu'minun

23:52

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً
وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

And indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so be wary of Me.

We should be aware of the differences

Even though unity of Muslims is essential, we should however be aware of the differences between the school of the *Ahlul Bayt* and other sects. This is because many people think that the difference between the school of the *Ahlul Bayt* and other Muslims is simply the issue of leadership after the death of Rasulullah (s). The issue of leadership and the rightful successor after Rasulullah (s) is indeed a key difference, but some other differences are more fundamental and relate to matters of *usul* (*tawhid*, *nabuwwah*, *ma'ad*).

In this lesson, we will examine some of the differences in the understanding of *tawhid* held by other Muslim schools of thought.

Allah commands the *ahl al-kitab* not to attribute false things to Him. It is important therefore to have a correct understanding of Allah.

Differences in the understanding of the other *usul* of Islam, as well as differences in *fiqh* between various schools of thought, will be covered in other modules.

Surat an-Nisa 4:171

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ
وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ

O People of the Book! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not attribute anything to Allah except the truth.

FIQH FACTS

Because of the common and unifying belief in *tawhid*, it is:

- *Wajib* to organise the funeral rites for a Muslim even if they are of a different sect
- Permissible for a Shi'a to marry a non-Shi'a, though it is better not to do so. However, for both men and women, if there is danger of being misled, then it is *haram*.
- Possible for Muslims to inherit from one another, no matter their sect.

As we have already said, phrases such as 'hand of Allah' and 'spirit of Allah' are metaphorical; they are not referring to the literal hand or soul of Allah. As such, they have often been used as titles for personalities who have a close connection with Allah.

Some Muslims accuse the Shi'as of exaggerating the position of Imam Ali (a) and the *a'immah*. They claim that the Shi'as have invented merits for them. Allamah Amini, the great scholar and author of the great work of research *al-Ghadir*, attended a gathering during his journeys in which one of the Sunni scholars challenged him on this very point:

Sunni scholar: “You Shi'as exaggerate and elevate matters in the case of Ali ibn Abi Talib (a). For example, you call him by the titles such as hand of Allah, eye of Allah, etc. To give such titles to a companion is not correct.”

Allamah Amini: “If Umar ibn al-Khattab had described Ali (a) with these titles, what would you have to say?”

Sunni scholar: “The saying of Umar would be sufficient proof for us.”

Allamah Amini asked for an authentic Sunni book. They brought him the book as requested. He turned to the page where this narration was written:

A man, who was busy in *tawaf* of the *Ka'bah*, glanced at a woman in an indecent manner. Imam Ali (a) saw him in this condition and hit him with his hand. The man approached the caliph Umar to complain against Imam Ali (a). He narrated the entire incident to Umar. Umar replied: “Indeed, the eye of Allah saw and the hand of Allah struck.”

When the Sunni scholar saw this tradition, he understood its implication and submitted to Allamah Amini.

The metaphorical meaning of these titles of Imam Ali (a) is that the eyes and hands of Imam Ali (a) never make a mistake in what they see or do because they are devoted to *tawhid* and have been perfected by Allah, who has made Imam Ali (a) *ma'sum*:



Surat al-Ahzab 33:33

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ
الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

Indeed Allah wishes to repel all impurity from you, O *Ahlul Bayt*, and to purify you with a thorough purification.



Faith in Action

Unity amongst Muslims is of paramount importance. Can you think of various ways in which you can promote unity?

DID YOU KNOW?

The issue of whether God's attributes are eternal or not sparked some significant points of difference and debate in early Islam. One such issue was that of whether the Qur'an is eternal or created. This issue arose because some Sunni schools of thought believed that the *kalam* (speech) of Allah, is eternal, and not created. This is because they say that Allah is eternally *mutakallim* (speaking).

As mentioned above, Shi'as distinguish between Allah's essential attributes and His actions. Our belief about the Qur'an is that it is the speech of Allah, and His revelation sent by Him, and that Allah created it, sent it, and guards it.

Tawhid according to other Muslim schools of thought

MISCONCEPTION	WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL OF THE AHLUL BAYT SAY?
1 Allah has a body Some Sunni sects hold the belief that Allah has a physical body. There are some <i>ayat</i> in <i>Qur'an</i> which ascribe the words used for limbs to Allah. For example, <i>ayah</i> 2:115 talks about the 'face of Allah' and <i>ayah</i> 5:64 mentions 'the hand of Allah'. Some Sunni schools of thought have taken these <i>ayat</i> in their literal sense, and believe that Allah actually has a face and a hand, and that He sits on a throne. DID YOU KNOW? Anthropomorphism means attributing human form or other characteristics to Allah. The schools of thought that believe that Allah has limbs, or that He descends to the earth, or that He laughs and talks, have attributed anthropomorphic qualities to Allah.	Shi'as firmly believe that this is not the case. Allah does not have a body, nor face, nor hands, nor fingers, nor legs, etc. He does not change with time, and does not occupy any physical place for He is the creator of time and physical space. The expressions used in these <i>ayat</i> are used in a metaphorical and symbolic sense, and not in a literal sense. For example, 'face of Allah' is used to describe the presence of Allah, and 'hand of Allah' is used to describe the power of Allah, and 'throne of Allah' is used to describe His kingdom and authority. This metaphorical meaning of these <i>ayat</i> can be proven from the <i>Qur'an</i> itself. For example, <i>ayah</i> 55:27 says that everything shall perish except the 'face of Allah'. It is not logical that only the face of Allah will remain, while the rest of Him will die! Hence, it cannot be anything physical.
2 All Allah's attributes are eternal The <i>Qur'an</i> describes Allah with numerous adjectives such as living, knowing, powerful, and being eternal. Some Sunni schools say that all Allah's attributes are eternal.	According to the Shi'a belief, Allah's attributes can be put in two categories: • Those attributes which describe His essence, such as living, powerful, etc. • Those attributes which describe His actions, such as creating, sustaining. Shi'as believe that the first group of attributes are eternal whereas the second are not necessarily. The reason for this distinction is obvious. Actions need an object. For example, if we say that Allah was giving sustenance eternally, then we will have to admit the existence of sustained things eternally. In other words, we will have to admit that the world has been eternal. However, it is against our belief that anything other than Allah is eternal.

MISCONCEPTION

3 Allah can be seen on the Day of Judgement

Linked to the above misconception, some Sunni scholars believe that Allah can be seen. Some of them, like Ahmad ibn Hanbal, say that He can be seen in this world, as well as in the Hereafter. Others say that He can only be seen in the Hereafter.

Sunni scholars use the following *ayah* as their proof:

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ
إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

Some faces will be fresh on that day, looking (*nadhira*) at their Lord.

[*Surat al-Qiyamah* 75:22-23]

DID YOU KNOW?

In *Munajat al-Sha'baniyyah* Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) talks about the eyes of the heart. What do you think that means?

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL OF THE AHLUL BAYT SAY?

Shi'as believe that Allah can never be seen physically anywhere, neither in this world, nor the Hereafter. This is because Allah has no physical body. This view is supported by the Qur'an and logic. Allah says:

لَّا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ

The sights do not perceive Him. [*Surat al-An'am* 6:103]

The word used in *ayah* 75:23 for 'looking' that the Sunnis say is proof that Allah can be seen, is *nadhira*. As we know that rationally it is impossible to see God like an object, therefore *nadhira* may well mean looking by the eyes of the heart.

فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ
وَلَكِن تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

Indeed, it is not the eyes that turn blind, but it is the hearts in the breasts that turn blind! [*Surat al-Hajj* 22:46]

Moreover, in Arabic, the root word of *nadhira* does not only imply 'looking' but also means 'expecting'. Therefore, *ayah* 75:23 does not imply that people will 'see' Allah but that they will be looking forward to or expecting the blessing of Allah. The usage of *nadhira* in the Qur'an:

فَهَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا سُنَّتَ الْأَوَّلِينَ

Do they expect anything but the precedent of the people of the past? [*Surat al-Fatir* 35:43]

وَإِنِّي مُرْسِلَةٌ إِلَيْهِم بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ الْمُرْسَلُونَ

I will send them a gift, and see what the envoys bring back. [*Surat an-Naml* 27:35]

Allah is not a physical object that we can pin-point and ultimately see, nor does He occupy space. Hence it is impossible to see Him.

Imam Ali (a) was asked by one of his companions, Tha'lab al-Yamani, whether he had seen his Lord. Imam replied,

"How can I worship something that I do not see?"

When asked how he saw Him, Imam replied,

"Eyes do not reach Him with physical sight, but the hearts reach Him with the realities of belief."

Similarly, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) was once asked,

"Will Allah be seen on the Day of Resurrection?"

When asked how he saw Him, Imam replied,

"May He be exalted and glorified from that! The eyes can only reach an object that has colour and shape, but Allah, the Exalted, is the Creator of colours and shapes."



HIGHER LEVEL

Allah says in the Qur'an :

Surat al-Mu'minun 23:52

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

And indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so be wary of Me.

Why is it necessary for Muslims of all sects to promote and maintain unity?

What would be the consequences of Muslims not being united?

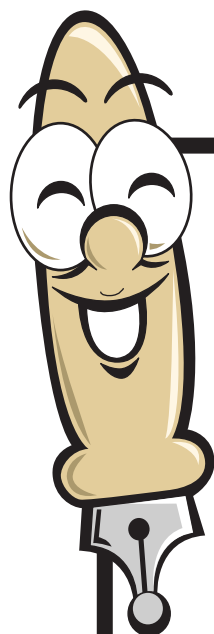
Design a campaign to foster unity amongst Muslims of different sects in your area.



- 1 What are the three fundamentals of religion (*usul*) that all sects of Islam believe in?

- 2 Certain *ayat* of the Qur'an mention various body parts in relation to Allah, such as His 'hand' or 'face'. Does this mean Allah has hands or a face? Explain your answer.

- 3 Using logic and proofs from the Qur'an, explain why Allah cannot be seen.



KEYPOINTS

- 1 All Muslims, no matter which *madhhab* they belong to, are united and unanimous in their belief of *tawhid* – the belief that there is no god but Allah.
- 2 However, there are some differences in the understanding of *tawhid* between the different *madhahib*.
- 3 Some Sunni schools of thought believe that Allah has a physical form and can be seen in the Hereafter. The Shi'a school of thought firmly rejects this.