

Understanding Tawhīd & Shirk

ABU HANZALA AL-RIPAWĪ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds. Salutations and peace be upon our master Muhammad, the prince of the worlds; and the leader of all prophets and messengers sent to guide the world. O Allah! We ask thee to guide us to the truth and on the right path.

The most important thing a sensible and a wise person ought to do in these difficult times is to strive to save his own self from eternal hellfire. That is not possible, except by knowing the correct belief and true *tawhīd*¹, as described and explained by leaders of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* – scholars and pious gnostics among them.

Shirk means to associate partners with Allah. To negate his oneness.

There are two types of shirk: *shirk fi al-dhāt* and *shirk fi al-ṣifāt*.

Shirk fi al-dhāt would be to consider something like Allah in His essence, *dhāt*. Just as He is pre-eternal (*qadīm*), to also consider something else to be *wajib al-wujud* (necessarily existing) would be *shirk*. To believe something else to be without beginning or end would be *shirk*. This is associating partners in His *dhāt*.

Similarly, only Allah is worthy of worship. If someone believes this for anything else, it would be *shirk fi al-dhāt*. Or to believe that Allah has a wife or children like Christians who said Mary is His wife and Jesus is His son or some Jews who said Ezra or even Moses were the sons of god. This is *shirk* in His essence. Because it's believing something else to be pre-eternal.

Shirk fi al-ṣifāt is associating

¹ belief in One God, Allah; true and unflinching monotheism.

partners in His attributes such as Seeing, Hearing, Knowledge, Will, Life, Power and Existence. These are the attributes of Allah. Just as His *dhāt* is pre-eternal, so are His *ṣifāt*. His attributes have four qualities:

1. **Qadīm** — they existed pre-eternally. They weren't given to Allah. They have always existed. Just as His *dhāt* is *qadīm*, so are His *ṣifāt*.
2. Intrinsic (*dhātī*) not gifted (*‘aṭā’ī*). *Dhātī* means without being given by anyone and *‘aṭā’ī* means given by someone.
3. Unlimited. They have no limit. How far can Allah see? There is no limit. How much knowledge does He have? No limit.
4. Impossible to cease existing. They will never undergo *fanā* (non-existence) and it isn't possible for them to.

If anyone proves any one of these four qualities for any creation, this would be *shirk fi al-ṣifāt*. e.g. someone says, 'the knowledge I possess has not been given to me' - this would be *shirk fi al-ṣifāt* as he considers his attribute to be

intrinsic (*dhātī*). Even for the Messenger of Allah (*rasūlullāh*) ﷺ who is the greatest in creation, we must bear in mind these four qualities.

For e.g. the knowledge of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

1. It isn't pre-eternal, whereas, the Knowledge of Allah is - *qadīm*. The knowledge of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is what we call *ḥādith* (created).
2. It isn't *dhātī*, rather Allah gifted it to him ﷺ.
3. **The Knowledge of Allah is unlimited** but the knowledge of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ has a limit. Though it is so expansive that we don't know that limit. But it is limited compared to the Knowledge of Allah.
4. It is **impossible for the Knowledge of Allah to cease existing**, but, it is possible for the knowledge of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to become non-existent. Yet, it won't happen that the knowledge of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ becomes non-existent because Allah said, 'And every

coming moment of yours is better than the last. So, we say it is hypothetically possible for it to not exist but it won't occur. Whereas, the Knowledge of Allah cannot possibly be non-existent.

If someone acknowledges these four differences and accepts any attribute for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, then that wouldn't be *shirk*. But if we ignore the differences and prove an attribute for someone and believe it to be the same as the Divine Attributes, then that would be *shirk*.

Some people are mistaken. They say believe that the knowledge of the unseen is for Allah [and that He did not bestow it to anyone else]; so, if we prove that Allah has bestowed this knowledge of the unseen upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, they would still deem it *shirk*. We say, 'recall the four differences.' They say, 'We don't believe in these differences. It's *shirk* and that's that.' If so, then everyone is a *mushrik*. Do humans see? Yes. Does Allah See? Yes. So it's *shirk*. How will you save yourselves from *shirk*? You'll reply: 'the Seeing of Allah is *qadīm*, ours is *ḥādīth*. His Seeing is *dhātī*, ours is 'aṭā'ī. His is unlimited, ours is limited and His will never cease, ours will. So it's not *shirk*.' Such people don't accept

that it's *shirk* when they see and Allah Sees, but when we say the Messenger of Allah ﷺ possesses the knowledge of the unseen as does Allah, it is deemed *shirk*! Fear Allah!

If these four differences are kept in mind, it can never be *shirk*. Seeking help from Allah and seeking help from prophets and saints. Is it *shirk*? No. Because the help of Allah is *qadīm*, theirs is *ḥādīth*. His help is *dhātī* and theirs is 'aṭā'ī and without Allah giving power, not even a leaf can move. For Allah it is unlimited and for them it is limited and his help cannot cease whereas it is possible for theirs to be non-existent. So how can it be *shirk*?

And if someone is stubborn and doesn't accept, then tell him: 'you see and Allah Sees, you hear and Allah Hears, you speak and Allah has Speech, you have a will and Allah Wills.'

Allah says: "For Him is whatever is in the heavens and the earth." So, if I get into your car and you say, 'What are you doing?! That's my car!' I'll say, 'That's *shirk*, because everything belongs to Allah so this car does too.' So, I take the car and drive away. Your saying it's your car is *shirk*. You'll say, 'it's my car! Allah being the owner is *qadīm*, mine is *ḥādīth*. He is the *dhātī* owner, I'm 'aṭā'ī. He is unlimited, I'm

limited. His ownership can't cease, mine can.'

So when it comes to yourself, you recall all the differences but when it concerns the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, you forget all. So who's in the wrong, me or the one who does the above?

Show me any belief of Ahl al-Sunnah where Sunnis don't believe in these four differences.

For e.g., it is said that visiting mausoleums is *shirk*. If merely visiting them is *shirk*, then millions of Muslims become *mushrik* because they visit the mausoleum of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ during hajj. They reply, 'not merely visiting but doing acts of *shirk* whilst there.' So we ask, 'like what?' They say, 'prostration.'

Prostrations are of two types: worship and respect. The prostration of worship is to prostrate to something believing it to be a god.

The prostration of respect is that which the angels performed before Adam ﷺ or which Mu'adh ﷺ performed before the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ stopped him.

So the prostration of worship is *shirk* and the prostration of respect is *ḥarām* and a major sin. But it's not *kufr* or *shirk*.

The prostration that you claim to

see at mausoleums, how do you know which type it is unless you ask? To claim to know this would be knowledge of the unseen which you deny for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ but claim it for yourself!

If a man stands up after *ṣalāh* and claims the imam was prostrating to the wall, those in the first row were prostrating to the imam and those in the second row were prostrating to those in the first; therefore they're all doing *shirk*. What would we say? That apparently we were prostrating before each other but our intention was to prostrate to Allah. How is that *shirk*?

Remember well, we prostrate towards the *Ka'bah* but the prostration is for Allah. Whoever intends to prostrate to the *Ka'bah* becomes a *mushrik*.

So what is the deciding factor? The intention. If we disregard this, then we would be committing *shirk* even in *ṣalāh*. So if you consider the intention in *ṣalāh* then why do automatically deem it *shirk* if someone prostrates at a grave? And the reality is, even the most ignorant Muslim won't prostrate to a grave in order to worship it. If he's asked, he will definitely say he did so out of respect.

And another matter. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'I don't fear my

ummah will commit *shirk*.' Whereas there are others who believe the entire *ummah* does *shirk*! They exclaim *shirk*, *shirk*, *shirk* and *bid'ah*, *bid'ah*, *bid'ah* for everything. They have a daily litany of one *tasbīh* of *shirk* and one for *bid'ah*!

They say *Milad* is *shirk* even though it is the biggest eradicator of *shirk*. Was Allah born that He would have a *milad*? *Milad* can only be for creation! *Milad* itself proves that we consider the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to be created because it is creation that is born and not the Creator.

They exclaim *shirk* at everything. So we must understand *tawīd* correctly.

There are two other types of *shirk* that we don't accept: *shirk fi al-ta'zīm* and *shirk fi al-maḥabbah*.

The reason we don't the first is because *ta'zīm* (respect) is unmeasurable. They say if you respect someone as much as you do Allah, this is *shirk fi al-ta'zīm*. We don't accept this because can you show the amount of respect we have for Allah? How can you measure it? Is it this much, this much, 2 miles, 4 miles, what? If you can't measure it, how can you decide that we have respected Allah and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ the same amount and therefore committed

shirk? You can't.

If you say we prostrate to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ for worship, then that is *shirk fi al-dhāt*, not *fi al-ta'zīm*. So there is no such thing as *shirk fi al-ta'zīm*, yet, *shirk fi al-ta'zīm* has been made the basis of someone saying, 'to think of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in *ṣalāh* is worse than thinking of your cow or donkey.'

When asked to clarify, it is said, 'in *ṣalāh*, only Allah should be respected. If you think of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, it will be out of respect. So now you're respecting both Allah and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, therefore it's *shirk*. Yes, if you think of your donkey or cow, it won't be out of respect so not *shirk*.'

This means that thinking of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is worse than thinking of a donkey or cow. This is wrong. When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to pray, the inner attention of the *Ṣaḥābah* (the Prophet's ﷺ noble Companions) was towards Allah and their outer attention was towards the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

One companion said, 'When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would lead *ṣalāh*, I would see his beard moving.' This is in [*Ṣaḥīḥ*] Bukhārī.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was once in *ṣalāh* and during bowing, he

removed his sandals. Those in the first row then removed theirs. Those in the second row saw those in the first and thought they must have seen the Messenger of Allah ﷺ do so, so they also removed them until the entire *masjid* removed them.

So they used to look at the Messenger of Allah ﷺ during *ṣalāh*.

Similarly, in his final days, when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ became ill, he didn't attend the *masjid* and prayer was taking place. He ﷺ removed the curtain from his door and saw the *Ṣaḥābah* praying. It is in *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* that *Ṣaḥābah* were looking towards the Messenger of Allah ﷺ too and became so elated that it was close that they would break their prayer.

But did the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, 'you've committed *shirk*. Why did you look at me? Repeat your *ṣalāh* and be attentive to Allah.' **No.**

Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ؓ once led *ṣalāh* as the Messenger of Allah ﷺ might have been late for *Zuḥr* (early afternoon prayer). The Messenger of Allah ﷺ returned and as he arrived, *Ṣaḥābah*, during prayer, would make way to allow the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to continue to the front. They would hit one hand on the other and when they all did so as to alert Abu Bakr to move back, the noise became loud.

But because Abu Bakr ؓ would offer *ṣalāh* with utmost attention, he didn't notice. When he eventually did, he turned back, moved back and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ moved ahead and led *ṣalāh*.

After *ṣalāh*, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ asked, 'Why did you move back?' Abu Bakr said, 'How can the son of Abu Quḥāfah lead whilst the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is present?'

So moving back in prayer, is that out of respect or disrespect? Surely, it is out of respect. During prayer he is moving back for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ so it is respect. *Ṣalāh* is for Allah yet he is respecting the Messenger of Allah ﷺ during it which means respecting the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is respecting Allah.

Not that we consider the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as God. No. But why do we respect him? Because he is the Messenger of Allah. We respect the Messenger of Allah ﷺ for Allah!

So this moving back is actually for Allah because He has ordered us to respect the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

If moving back for him was wrong, it was incumbent upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to forbid it. There are three types of *ḥadīth*: *qawl*, which is a saying of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. *Fiʿl*, describing an action of the Messenger

of Allah ﷻ and *taqrīr*, that which occurred before the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he didn't forbid, or stop it from being carried out.

If moving back was *shirk*, it was *wājib* upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to stop that act. He would have made Abu Bakr recite the *kalimah* again and all those who agreed too. So we learn that respecting the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in prayer doesn't make it deficient, it actually perfects it.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was once praying the solar eclipse prayer and he looked skywards and stretched his hand upwards as if to grasp something. The *Ṣaḥābah* asked after *ṣalāh*, 'O Messenger of Allah ﷺ. We saw you do something new today.' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ didn't say, 'Why were you observing me. You're praying to Allah. Seek forgiveness.' Rather, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Paradise was presented to me and I saw its fruit. I wished to bring it to you but then I moved my hand back and decided against it because if I did, you would eat from it till judgement day and it wouldn't finish.'

If it doesn't finish, that wouldn't be the unseen and whoever believes by seeing, his faith is discounted. That's why the Messenger of Allah ﷺ didn't grasp it.

But what is proven is that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ can perform such miracles and *Ṣaḥābah* saw this during prayer.

Do you all read *al-taḥiyyāt*? You do. Do you say, '*as-salāmu 'alayka ayyuhān nabī*'? Who do you think of? The Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Out of respect or disrespect? Out of respect. And Allah made it *wājib*. So Allah made it *wajib* in *ṣalāh* to remember His beloved and to do so out of respect. If it was *shirk*, Allah would not make it *wājib*.

Similarly, *shirk fi al-maḥabbah*. They say, 'if you love someone as much as you love Allah, it's *shirk*.'

I ask, how do you measure it? Do you love your wife 2kg or 3kg? A mile or two? Circle or square? White or black? Love doesn't have a colour or size or shape. If it can't be measured, then how can you say someone loves the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as much as he loves Allah and therefore it's *shirk*?

There's no such thing as *shirk fi al-ta'zīm* or *shirk fi al-maḥabbah*. There are only two types of *shirk* and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'I do not fear *shirk* for my *ummah*.'

People say, 'These Barelwis can only speak about respecting the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Why do they not speak on *tawḥīd*?' Come, sit here and deliver a

speech on *tawhīd* and then I shall do the same. We'll see who delivers a better discourse on *tawhīd*. I don't say this out of arrogance. I'm a student. But the quality of speech on *tawhīd* that we can deliver, no one else can.

Allah created Adam ﷺ and the angels said, 'We worship you so why do you create man?' So Allah asked the angels to name certain things and they couldn't but taught Adam the names of all things. So Allah ordered them to prostrate to Adam. Was this for worship or respect? Respect. They all did it except Satan. What did he deny? *Tawhīd*? The worship of Allah? No. He refused respect of a prophet.

So if someone refuses the respect of a prophet but proclaims tawhid, tawhid with his tongue, Allah says, 'He denied, became arrogant and was amongst those of hell and of the *kafirs*.' He was destroyed.

This means that *tawhīd* is not accepted by Allah that is void of respect for prophets. Only that *tawhīd* is accepted by Allah which is accompanied by respect for prophets.

Praise to Allah, we respect prophets, consider them a creation, not the creator. Nothing is comparable to Allah, neither in His essence or His attributes. If there is anyone after Allah, it is the Messenger of Allah ﷺ

and Allah Himself has ordered the respect of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Only that *tawhīd* is accepted that has this respect otherwise if there is *tawhīd* without respect, this is the way of Satan and will lead one to hellfire.