

15. Is Belief In Invisible Power The Basis Of Shirk (Polytheism)?

There is no doubt that a sincere request for fulfilment of needs is possible only when the person making the request reckons the requested person or entity to be powerful and capable enough to fulfil his need. Sometimes, this power is an apparent and a physical one such as when we ask someone for water and he fills the vessel with it and hands it over to us.

Sometimes too, this power is an invisible power, far from the natural channels and beyond the domain of physical laws. For example, a person believes that Imam Ali (a) could lift the door of the fort of Khaybar which was not within the power of an ordinary man and pull it off not by human power but by an unseen power. Or that 'Isa (a) could, by his curative healing, cure the incurable disease without the use of medicine or any kind of operation.

If belief in this unseen power is such that it is supported by the Power and Will of Allah, it will be similar to the belief in the physical power which does not involve *shirk* (polytheism). This is because the same God who has placed the physical power in that particular person also gives the unseen power to another person but without assuming the creature to be the Creator and without taking that person to be independent of God.

The Views Of Wahhabis

They say: If someone asks one of the *Awliya' Allah*, whether dead or alive, to cure his sick ones or to find his lost ones or to help him in repaying his debt, such requests involve the belief in the sovereignty and power (of the one whom he asks) where he is prevailing over the natural system and the laws in force in the world of creation. Belief in such sovereignty and power of someone other than God is the same as the belief in the divinity (Godliness) of that person and asking something from him under this bond will be *shirk* (polytheism).

If a thirsty person in the desert asks for water from his servant, he has observed the order prevailing

over the laws of nature and such an asking will not be *shirk* (polytheism). However, if he asks water from a Prophet (S) or an Imam who is concealed under the soil or lives in some other place, then such a request involves the belief in his unseen sovereignty (of providing him with water without the physical causes and means) and such a belief is exactly the same as the belief in the divinity of that person.

Abu Al-'A'la Al-Mawdudi¹ is the one who has emphasized this matter and says:

إن التصوّر الذي لأجله ندعو الإنسان الاله وتستغيثه ويتصرغ إليه هو لا حرم تصور كونه مالكا للسلطة المهيمنة على قوانين الطبيعة.

“The reason that man calls God and beseeches Him is because he thinks Him as the One possessing sovereignty over the laws of nature and dominance over such power which is outside the scope of the influence and limits of physical laws.”²

Our Viewpoint

Their basic mistake is that they imagine the belief in the unseen power of someone to be absolute source of polytheism and dualism. They have neither wished nor have been able to differentiate between the power which is dependent on the sovereignty of God and the power which is independent and separate from God. The *shirk* (polytheism) which they speak about is related to the second one.

The Holy Qur'an very explicitly mentions the names of some personalities who all possessed unseen powers and command of their will was dominant over the laws of nature. We shall mention here, from the viewpoint of Qur'an, the names of those *Awliya' Allah* who possessed such powers.

1. Unseen Sovereignty Of Yusuf (a)

Yusuf (a) tells his brothers as such:

اذهبوا بِقَمِيصِي هَذَا فَأَلْفُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِ أَبِي يَأْتِ بِصِيرًا

Take this my shirt and cast it on my father's face, he will (again) be able to see.” (Holy Qur'an, Surah Yusuf, 12:93)

And so when his command was carried out:

فَلَمَّا أَن جَاءَ الْبَشِيرُ أَلْقَاهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ فَارْتَدَّ بَصِيرًا

Then, as the harbinger of happy news arrived and put the garment over his face his eyesight was

restored. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Yusuf, 12:96)

Apparently, this verse shows that Ya'qub (a) regained his sight owing to the will and acquired power of Yusuf and this action was not the direct act of Allah. Rather, it was the act of Allah through some channel; otherwise there was no reason for Yusuf to order his brothers to put his shirt over their father's face. Instead, it was enough for him to just pray. This action is nothing but the appropriation of the representative of Allah over a part of the world but by the Will of Allah and such a representative is the possessor of unseen sovereignty which Allah gives in special circumstances.

2. Unseen Sovereignty Of Musa (a)

Musa (a) is ordered by Allah to strike his staff upon a mountain so that twelve fountains i.e. the number of tribes of the sons of Israel, come out of it. As the Qur'an says:

اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ ۖ فَانْفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا

Strike the rock with your staff. So there gushed from it twelve springs. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:60)

In another place he is charged with striking his staff over the sea so that every drop of it becomes the size of mountain for the Bani Israel to pass. As Qur'an says:

فَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْبَحْرَ ۖ فَانفَلَقَ فَكَانَ كُلُّ فِرْقٍ كَالطَّوْدِ الْعَظِيمِ

Then we revealed to Musa: Strike the sea with your staff. So it had cloven as under, and each part was like a huge mound. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Shu'ara, 26:63)

Here, one cannot imagine that the will and wish of Musa (a) and the striking of his staff played no role in the appearance of the fountains and mountains.

3. Unseen Sovereignty Of Sulayman (a)

Prophet Sulayman (a) is a great beloved one of Allah who possessed wide unseen Powers and because of this great Divine Bounty, he has been described with the sentence وَأَوْتَيْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ in *Surah Al-Naml*, no. 27, verse 16 and the details of these bounties and talents have come down in *Surah Al-Naml*, no. 27, verse 17 to 44, *Surah Saba*, no. 34, verse 12, *Surah Al-Anbiya*, no. 21, verse 81 and *Surah Saad*, no. 34, verse 36–40. Referring to these verses will acquaint us with the magnificence of the gifted powers of Sulayman. In order that the readers become aware of these powers, we shall mention some of the verses related to this *wali Allah* so that it becomes clear that belief in the unseen power of the

servant of Allah is a matter which Qur'an itself has pointed out.

From the viewpoint of Qur'an, Sulayman (a) had dominancy over the *Jinns* and birds and was aware of the languages of the birds and insects; as Qur'an says:

وَوَرِثَ سُلَيْمَانُ دَاوُودَ ۗ وَقَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عُلِّمْنَا مَنْطِقَ الطَّيْرِ وَأُوتِينَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ ۗ إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْمُبِينُ
وَحُشِرَ لِسُلَيْمَانَ جُنُودُهُ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنْسِ وَالطَّيْرِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَتَوْا عَلَىٰ وَادِ النَّمْلِ قَالَتْ نَمْلَةٌ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّمْلُ
ادْخُلُوا مَسَاكِنَكُمْ لَا يَحْطِمَنَّكُمْ سُلَيْمَانُ وَجُنُودُهُ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ فَتَبَسَّمَ ضَاحِكًا مِنْ قَوْلِهَا وَقَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ
نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ

And Sulayman was Dawud's heir, and he said: O men! we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given all things; most surely this is manifest grace. And his hosts of the jinn and the men and the birds were gathered to him, and they were formed into groups. Until when they came to the valley of the Naml, an ant said: O Naml! Enter your houses, (that) Sulayman and his hosts may not crush you while they do not know. So he smiled, wondering at her word, and said: My Lord! Grant me that I should be grateful for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Naml, 27: 16-19)

If you refer to the story of 'Hud' in Qur'an which was given charge by Sulayman to deliver his message to the Queen of Saba, you will be astonished by the unseen power of Sulayman. Therefore it is requested that you kindly refer and ponder deeply over *Surah Al-Naml*, verses 20-44.

According to the specification of Qur'an, Sulayman possessed unseen dominancy and the movement of the wind took place as per his wish and command. As the verse says:

وَلِسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ عَاصِفَةً تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا ۗ وَكُنَّا بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَالِمِينَ

And (We made subservient) to Sulayman the wind blowing violent, pursuing its course by his command to the land which We had blessed, and We are Knower of all things. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:81)

The point which is worthy of attention is the sentence *تجري بأمره* which shows that the wind was blowing as per his command.

4. 'Isa (A) And His Unseen Sovereignty

By examining the verses of Qur'an, one can follow the unseen power of 'Isa (a). For indicating his power and position, we present here some verses. The Holy Qur'an narrates from 'Isa (a) as such:

أنني أخلق لكم من الطين كهيئة الطير فأنفخ فيه فيكون طيراً بإذن الله. وأبرئ الأكمه والأبرص وأحي الموتى بإذن الله وأنبئكم بما تآكلون وما تدخرون في بيوتكم إن في ذلك لآية لكم إن كنتم مؤمنين

I create you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission and I heal the blind and the leprous, and bring the dead to life with Allah's permission and I inform you of what you should eat and what you should store in your houses, most surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Aale Imran, 3:49)

If 'Isa (a) relates his actions to the Will of God, it is because no Prophet is the possessor of such authority without the Will of God. As verse says:

وما كان لرسول أن يأتي بأية إلا بإذن الله

And it is not in (the power of) an apostle to bring a sign except by Allah's permission. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Ra'd, 13:38)

On the other hand, 'Isa (a) attributes the unseen actions to himself and says: I cure, I make alive, I give the news. The words **أبرئ ، أحيي ، أنبئكم** which are all **صيغة مثلكم** (the first person) bear witness to this fact, it is not only Yusuf, Musa, Sulayman and 'Isa (a) who possessed unseen powers and supernatural sovereignty but a group of prophets³ and angels possessed and still possess unseen sovereignty and Qur'an describes Jibra'eel as **شديد القوى** (mighty in power) and the Angels as **فالمديرات أمراً** (regulator of affairs).

In Qur'an, the Angels have been introduced as the managers of the affairs of the world, the takers of the lives of people, the protectors and guards of the people, the writers of deeds, the destroyers of sinful nations and tribes, etc., etc. Those who have the basic knowledge of Qur'an are aware that the Angels possess unseen power and by relying on the Will and power of Allah, they perform extra ordinary acts.

If belief in unseen sovereignty involves (belief of) divinity in that person, then, as far as the Qur'an is concerned, all of these prophets and angels should be introduced as **الهة** gods.⁴

As mentioned before, the solution to this dilemma lies in this that one should differentiate between 'independent power' and 'acquired power'. Belief in independent power (of a creature) is the source of *shirk* (polytheism) in all the circumstances whereas belief in acquired power with regards to any action is monotheism.

So far, it has been clarified that belief in the unseen power of the awliya' Allah along with this belief that they are dependent on the eternal Power of God and are only the channels appointed by God, is not only far from *shirk* (polytheism) but is purely (*tawhid*) monotheism. The basis of *tawhid* is not this that the

actions which are dependent on the natural powers are related to man and the actions that are dependent on the unseen powers are related to God. Rather, the reality of *tawhid* is to believe that all the powers whether dependent on natural powers or dependent on unseen powers are all related to God and manifest Him to be the prime source of all types of powers and strength.

Now it's time to discuss the matter of asking extraordinary actions from the *Awliya' Allah*.⁵

Is It Shirk (Polytheism) To Request For Extra-Ordinary Actions?

Any phenomenon, as per the laws of cause and effect, has a cause for itself and the existence of such a phenomenon is not possible without that cause. As a result, no phenomenon remains without a cause in this Universe. Miracles and wonders of the Prophets and other *awliya'* too are not without a cause. The only thing being that there is no natural and physical cause for them and this differs from saying that there is no cause (at all) for them.

If the staff of Musa (a) is changed into a snake, or the dead are made alive by 'Isa (a) or the moon is cut into two halves by the Holy Prophet (S) of Islam and the pebbles start glorification of God in the hands of the Holy Prophet (S), etc., are all with some cause. The only point is that in these cases, the natural causes or the well-known physical causes are not at work and it is not that they are basically without a cause.

Sometimes it is thought that asking natural actions from someone is not polytheism but asking some extraordinary acts from him is polytheism. Now we shall examine this very view.

Reply

The Holy Qur'an mentions instances where in the Prophets and others have been asked to perform a series of extraordinary acts which are outside the scope of natural and physical laws. The Holy Qur'an narrates these requests without criticizing any of them. For example, the tribe of Musa (a), as per the stipulation of Qur'an, turned towards Musa (a) and asked water and rain from him so that they could be saved from the severe famine. As the Qur'an says:

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ إِذِ اسْتَسْقَاهُ قَوْمُهُ أَنِ اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ

...And we revealed to Musa when his people asked him for water: strike the rock with your staff..
(Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf, 7: 160)⁶

It is possible that it may be said that there is no objection in asking extraordinary acts from a living person but our point concerns such request from dead people. However the reply is obvious since, life and death cannot bring any change in any action which is in accordance with the principle of monotheism such that we declare one to be polytheism and the other as monotheism. Life and death

can have effect on usefulness or un-usefulness but not on polytheism and monotheism.

Sulayman (a) Seeks The Throne Of Bilqis

In summoning the throne of Bilqis, Sulayman (a) asked an extraordinary act from those present in his gathering. He said:

أَيُّكُمْ يَأْتِينِي بِعَرْشِهَا قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ قَالَ عَفْرَيْتُ مِّنَ الْجِنِّ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَقُومَ مِن مَّقَامِكَ وَإِنِّي عَلَيْهِ لَقَوِيٌّ أَمِينٌ قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ طَرْفُكَ فَلَمَّا رآه مُسْتَقَرًّا عِنْدَهُ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي

***Which of you can bring to me her throne before they come to me in submission?' One audacious among the jinn said: 'I will bring it to you before you rise up from your place, and most surely I am strong (and) trusty for it.' One who had the knowledge of the Book said: 'I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.' Then when he saw it settled beside him, he said: 'This is by the grace of my Lord.'* (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Naml, 27:38-40)**

If such views (asking for extraordinary acts is polytheism) are true, then asking miracles in all ages and times from the claimants of Prophethood is blasphemy and polytheism. This is because the people asked for miracles (which required extraordinary acts) from those claiming to be prophets; not from God who has sent them. They were told as such:

إِنْ كُنْتُمْ جِئْتُمْ بِآيَةٍ فَآتِ بِهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

If you have come with a sign, then bring it, if you are of the truthful ones. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf, 7: 106)

All the nations of the world used to employ this method in recognizing the true prophets from the false ones and the prophets were always inviting the nations to come and see their miracles. The Qur'an too narrates, without objection, the people's demand for miracles from the Prophets which shows its acceptance of this matter.

If people wishing to investigate come to 'Isa (a) and say: 'If you are truthful in your claim, then you cure this blind or that one suffering from leprosy'. Then, not only has he not become a polytheist but he will be counted amongst the holy men and will be praised in this action. Now, if after the (apparent) demise of 'Isa (a), his people ask his holy soul to cure another sick one amongst them, then why should he be regarded as polytheist when the life and death of that person plays no role in polytheism and monotheism.[7](#)

In short, as per the specification of Qur'an, a group of selected servants of Allah possessed the power of performing extraordinary acts. They would utilize these powers in certain circumstances and sometimes too, the people would approach and ask them to put these powers into action. If the Wahhabis say that no one possesses the power to fulfil these affairs, then these verses bear witness contrary to their saying.

If they reckon such asking to be polytheism, then why did Sulayman and the others make such a request? If they say: Asking for fulfilment of one's need from the *awliya'* through extraordinary means involves the belief in their unseen sovereignty then our reply is that unseen sovereignty is of two types; one is pure monotheism and the other the source of polytheism.

If they say that asking miracles only from the divine living personalities is proper and not from the dead, then we reply that life and death are not the basis of polytheism or monotheism.

If they say that asking cure for the sick by unusual means is (like) asking for the actions of Allah from someone other than Him. We say that the basis of polytheism is to consider that person as God and that he is source of divine activities. Asking for some unnatural act is not similar to asking for the acts of Allah from someone other than Him. This is because the standard to judge an Act of Allah is not that it should be above the limits of ordinary laws so that such requests becomes (the same as) requests for His Acts from someone else. Rather, the criterion for an Act of Allah is this that the doer should be independent in performing that act. If a doer performs an act relying on the divine power, then to ask such an act will not be considered as asking for the Act of Allah from someone other than Him and it makes no difference whether that act is ordinary or unusual.

Regarding specific request for cure from the servants of Allah, we say: Sometimes it is imagined that asking for cure and the like of it from the *awliya'* is (the same as) asking for the Acts of Allah from someone other than Him and the Qur'an says:

وَإِذَا مَرَضْتُ فَبُهِرَ اللَّهُ لِي فِي إِفْسَافِي

And when I am sick, then He restores me to health. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Shu'ara, 26:80)

So, how can we say: "O Prophet of Allah, cure my sickness! The same is true for all that we ask which are of extraordinary nature."

Reply

This group has still not been able to differentiate the divine acts from the human acts. They imagine that any act which is not by natural way should be called as the divine act and any act which is having natural aspect and physical cause should be called as human act.

This group does not wish and is unable to compare the scale or measure of divine act from the human act. The measure for divine and human acts is never to see whether that act is ordinary or not; otherwise we have to consider the works of magicians as divine acts and consider themselves as Gods.

Rather, the measure in the divine acts is this that the doer depends on Himself in His actions and does not seek help from anyone. Such an act is a divine act. However, if a doer who performs his acts under the light of divine power will be a non-divine one, whether that act is having a physical and ordinary aspect or is something extraordinary.

While performing any act whether ordinary or outside the scope of laws of nature, man always depends on God and seeks help from His power and any act which he performs is fulfilled under the light of such power which is acquired from God. Therefore, possessing such power and similarly, the ability to fulfil our wishes and requests by them are never a source of polytheism because in all the stages we say that God has given them such power and God has authorized them to utilize it.

The great teacher, Imam Khomeini (ra)[8](#) says about divine acts as such:

“The divine act is that act where its performer performs it without interference from outside and without seeking help from another power.”

In other words, the divine act is that act which is performed independently and its performer is needless of others. Non-divine act is exactly opposite to this.

God creates the Universe, gives sustenance and cures the sick without seeking help from any power. No one interferes in His affairs either wholly or partially and His Power and Strength is not acquired from anyone.

However, if someone other than God performs an act, whether ordinary and simple or extraordinary and difficult, his power is not from himself. He does not perform that action by his own power.[9](#)

In other words, whenever we believe a being to be independent either from the viewpoint of existence or influence, we will deviate from the path of monotheism. This is because belief in independence in the original existence is similar to his being needless of God in existence. Such a being can be no one except Allah Who is needless of anything in life and His existence is related only to Himself.

Similarly, if we consider his existence to be created by Allah but believe that he is independent in his actions whether ordinary and simple or extraordinary and difficult then in such a case, we have inclined towards polytheism. This is because independence in action finally leads to independence in the original life and existence and if we consider an ignorant Arab to be polytheist it is because they believed that the charge of running the affairs of the world and or the affairs of the people have been transferred and entrusted to their gods and they are independent in them.

Such was the belief of most of the polytheists during the period of ignorance and at the time of the

advent of Islam. They believed that the angels and or the stars (which are created ones) were managing the affairs¹⁰ or that at least some of the divine affairs like *shafa'a* and 'forgiveness' were entrusted to them and they were having complete freedom in them.

If the group of Mu'tazalites¹¹, who reckon man to be the creation of God (from the viewpoint of existence) but believe him to be independent in actions and efficacy, ponder deeply over their own sayings, then surely they will realize that such a belief is one kind of hidden *shirk* (polytheism) even though it is not equal to the *shirk* of the polytheists. The difference between these two types of *shirk* is clear. One claims independence in managing the affairs of the world and the divine affairs while the other claims independence of man in his own affairs.

^{1.} Syed Abu Al-'A'la Al-Mawdudi (1903 – 1979 A.D.) was a Pakistani Sunni Hanafi scholar, journalist, imam and political activist and head of Jamaat-e-Islami. His numerous works covered a wide range of topics such as Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, law, philosophy, politics and history.

^{2.} Al-Mustalahat Al-Arba'a, page 18.

^{3.} The discussion about unseen sovereignty of Prophets and Awliya' Allah is sufficient in this treatise and we have discussed them in detail in our book 'Spiritual power of the Prophets' and this book (in Persian) has been printed several times.

^{4.} Surah Al-Najm: 53:5.

^{5.} Surah Al-Nazi'at, 79:5.

^{6.} Also refer to Surah Al-Baqarah , no. 2,verse 60.

^{7.} For more information about the miracles of 'Isa (a), refer to Surah Aale 'Imran, no. 3, verse 49 and Surah Al-Ma'idah, no. 5, verses 100 and 110.

^{8.} For more discussion and details on such topics, refer to two books by Imam Khomeini (ra) (1902 –1989 A.D.): Forty Hadith– An exposition available at: <https://www.Al-islam.org/forty-hadith-exposition-second-revised-edition-...> [1] and Adab as-Salat: The Disciplines of the Prayer available at:

<https://www.Al-islam.org/adab-salat-disciplines-prayer-second-revised-ed...> [2]

^{9.} Kashf Al-Asrar, page 51.

^{10.} When 'Amr bin Lahi asked the Syrians the reason for worshipping idols they replied: "We ask rain from them and they send rain for us, we seek help and they help us". With this belief, he took the idol of Habal to Mecca. (Refer to Sira Ibn Hisham, vol. 1 page 77).

^{11.} Mu'tazila is a school of Islamic theology that flourished in the cities of Basra and Baghdad, during 8th to 10th centuries A.D. It was founded in 8th century in Basra by Wa'il ibn 'A'la' (d. 748 A.D.). Mu'tazila school of theology was opposed to Ash'arism or Ash'ari theology which was theological school of Sunni Islam founded by the Arab theologian Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari (d. 936 A.D.).

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