

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

<u>Home</u> > <u>A Study of Polytheism and Idolatry in the Qur'an</u> > <u>Chapter 1: Polytheistic Beliefs with respect to Allah > Aversion to Monotheism > Fourth verse</u>

# Chapter 1: Polytheistic Beliefs with respect to Allah

Polytheistic beliefs can be discussed and studied around three pivots:

- 1. Polytheistic / idolatrous beliefs associated with Allah.
- 2. Polytheistic / idolatrous beliefs associated with idols.
- 3. Polytheistic / idolatrous beliefs concerning the Resurrection.

## Allah, the only Creator and Governor of the existing cosmos

Polytheists believed that only Allah was the Creator and Governor of the existing universe. They acknowledged that it was Allah who had created the world and was in charge of governing the sky and the earth, and whatever was between them. This conviction can be construed as a positive and laudable belief because it is compatible with monotheistic belief, and acceptable to monotheists.

A number of verses affirm this matter:

#### First verse

"Say, 'Who provides for you out of the sky and the earth? Who controls [your] hearing and sight, and who brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living, and who directs the command?' They will say, 'Allah.' Say, 'Will you not then be wary [of Him]?' That, then, is Allah, your true Lord. So what is there after the truth except error? Then where are you being led away?"

Command [*amr*] is an infinitive and it has [been preceded by] the definite article *the* [*al*], which signifies generality; therefore, the command [*al-amr*] means all actions. Verse 31 demonstrates the polytheists' doctrinal deviations with regard to Allah's management of affairs. After that, it admonishes them for not

having faith, for not seeking Allah and for being led astray.

"That, then, is Allah, your true Lord", clarifies that the true Lord is Allah and that there is no [other] governor but Allah; belief in an influence besides Allah is nothing more than a fallacy and besides Him all else is falsehood and misguidance. In the forthcoming discussions, we will explain how the Qur'an maintains this belief. Some people fallaciously imagine that there is a facilitator other than Allah. Idols are effective [only] in the dream–world of idol worshippers, not in the real world. It is for this reason that the Qur'an states.

#### "So what is there after the truth except error? Then where are you being led away?"

The sentence "They will say, 'Allah'." is found in many [other] verses of the Qur'an. It means that the polytheists will acknowledge that the one who performs the aforementioned actions is Allah.

The following questions arise: does the verse mean that in the near future the Noble Prophet (*s*) would ask the polytheists these questions and they would give these answers? Would they respond like this assuming that he would ask them these questions? Will their primordial nature dictate this in such a way that if they refer and move according to their natural disposition, they will concede that the executor of these affairs is Allah?

The answer to all three questions is a simple 'yes'.

One delicate point in the verse, "They will say, 'Allah'." is that the response to the aforementioned questions is so clear and lucid that the polytheists do not need to think about it. They unhesitatingly and instantly say 'Allah'. This emphatically affirms that belief in the lordship of Allah is innate and natural.

If the dirt covering the primordial nature of every man is dusted off, he will conceive this truth. Perhaps, the reason why Prophet Abraham ('a) broke the idols [into pieces] was to remove this filth from the surface of the polytheists' primordial nature. It was for this same reason that [after breaking the idols into pieces] he hung an axe around the neck of the biggest idol. [When the polytheists asked him if he had broken their idols into pieces], he stated, "Rather it was the biggest of them who did it. Ask them, if they can speak." 2 By this deed, he intended to awaken them from heedlessness, oblivion and slumber, and revert to their natural disposition. For a short while, a few of them got awakened, but when the atmosphere once again got poisoned, they shouted, "Burn him, and help your gods." 3

#### Vigilance of primordial natures

Sleeping primordial natures [oblivious to truth] sometimes wake up as a result of certain occurrences and revert to themselves:

"When they board the ship, they invoke Allah putting exclusive faith in Him, but when he delivers them to land, behold, they ascribe partners [to Him]."4

It can easily be deduced from this verse that primordial natures awaken when they feel danger and ask for redemption from Allah, the true Redeemer and real Owner of the cosmos. But after being delivered from danger and getting entangled in common habits and practices, primordial natures once again fall asleep.

Perfect monotheism is [only achieved] when conditions are normal and when one believes that it is only Allah who is effective in hardships and ease, affliction and prosperity, indigence and affluence, good health and illness. Here, it is befitting to state that perhaps the wisdom of afflictions and misfortunes is to awaken man's sleeping primordial nature and make it pay heed to Allah. Natural dispositions know Allah better after they get afflicted and conceive that none besides Allah can do anything, but this opportunity does not arise when conditions are normal and ordinary. A detailed discourse about primordial natures will come later.

#### **Second verse**

"Say, 'To whom does the earth belong and whoever it contains, if you know?' They will say, 'To Allah.' Say, 'Will you not then take admonition?' Say, 'Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the Great Throne?' They will say, '[They belong] to Allah.' Say, 'In whose hand is the dominion of all things, and who shelters, and no shelter can be provided without Him, if you know?' They will say, '[All belong] to Allah.' Say, 'Then how are you being deluded?5"6

'Whoever' in verse 84 means rational or intelligent beings. It thus asks who the Creator and Possessor of the earth is and who its rational existents are?7

The dominion [malak t] just like the kingdom [jabar t] is a magnified form. Its root is mulk; [it undergoes mutation] and signifies magnification once 't' has been added. Malak t means total and absolute ownership. The [above quoted] verse means that absolute possession and power over all things is in the hands of Allah. He it is who gives shelter, and the polytheists certainly acknowledge this kind of ownership.

#### **Third verse**

"If you ask, 'Who created the heavens and the earth, and disposed the sun and the moon?' The will surely say, 'Allah.' Then where do they stray? Allah expands the provision for whomever He wishes of His servants, and tightens it for him. Indeed Allah has knowledge of all things. And if you ask them, 'Who sends down water from the sky, with which He revives the earth after its death?' They will surely say, 'Allah.' Say, 'All praise belongs to Allah.' But most of them do not apply reason."8

Verse 61 asks polytheists why they are heading towards idols in spite of conceding that the Creator of everything: the skies, the earth, the moon and the sun is Allah, and despite acknowledging that all affairs are in His hands. Actually, they believe that idols too, are Allah's creatures because they are also part of

the sky and the earth.

Thus, they worship celestial or earthly bodies. Idols are mere created things and are not independently effective because whatever they have, they have got from the Supreme Lord. How then do they conceive the created as the creator, right as wrong and wrong as right? This is not reasonable, as explicitly stated, "But most of them do not apply reason."

"Then where do they stray?" What is right is that they should worship Allah, having acknowledged that all power over all affairs is in His hands, but they have turned the truth upside down and have gone after idols instead of worshiping Allah. Why have they distanced themselves from the truth, forsaken it and gone after falsehood? How can one simultaneously hold these two contradictory beliefs? On the one hand, believe that the creator of the skies and the earth and all existents is Allah, and, on the other hand, hold that a creature besides Allah is a malefactor and benefactor; to believe that the existence of all things, even idols, depends on Allah and, on the other hand, to conceive idols as being independently effective. No reasonable man can hold these conflicting beliefs.

Of course, another belief is that Allah is the one who affects us independently and that idols are dependent on Allah in their being effective; that is to say, Allah has delegated or handed over this power to idols.

This is similar to the belief which we hold with respect to the prophets ('a) and the Im Ims ('a); we believe that Jesus Christ ('a) had powers to resurrect the dead, but with the permission of Allah. If we assume that they are dependent on Allah, going after idols is the same as pursuing Allah, in the same way that going after prophets ('a) and the Im Ims ('a) and asking them [to provide] one's needs is the same as asking one's needs from Allah. This belief has no obstacle from the perspective of affirmative existence, but it is in need of proof. Do polytheists believe that idols are independent of Allah, or maintain that they are dependent on Allah?

It can easily be inferred from the verse quoted above that polytheistic beliefs belong to the first kind; that is to say, they believe that idols can harm and benefit man and are independent of Allah and do not apply reason to their belief system.

#### **Fourth verse**

"If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' They will surely say, 'Allah.' Say, 'All praise belongs to Allah.' Yet most of them do not know. To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. Indeed Allah is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable. If all the trees on the earth were pens, and the sea replenished with seven more seas [were ink], the words of Allah would not be spent. Indeed, Allah is All-mighty, All-wise. Your creation and your resurrection are not but as of a single soul. Indeed, Allah is All-hearing, All-seeing. Have you not considered that Allah makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night; and He has

disposed the sun and the moon, each moving for a specified term, and that Allah is well aware of what you do?

That is because Allah is the Reality, 9 and whatever they invoke besides Him is nullity, 10 and because Allah is the All-exalted, the All-great. Have you not regarded that the ships sail on the sea by Allah's blessing, that He may show you some of His signs? There are indeed signs in that for every patient and grateful [servant]. When waves cover them like awnings, they invoke Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him.

But when He delivers them to the land, [only] some of them remain unswerving. And none will impugn Our signs except an ungrateful traitor. O mankind! Be wary of your Lord and fear the day when a father shall not atone for his child, nor the child atone for its father in any way. Indeed, Allah's promise is true. So do not let the life of the world deceive you, nor let the Deceiver 11 deceive you concerning Allah. Indeed, the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and know soul knows in what land it will die. Indeed, Allah is All-knowing, All-aware."12

The message of this verse is the same as that of the previous verses; it explains that polytheists acknowledge that the creator of the sky and the earth is Allah.

It appears that "Yet most of them do not know" means the same as "But most of them do not apply reason" in the previous verses and 'knowledge' has been used instead of 'reason' and vice versa. This usage is the same as the usage in the first chapter of "Usel al-Kefe" where reason has been employed as a synonym of knowledge vis-à-vis ignorance. It alludes to the point that someone who does not think rationally is ignorant and a person who does not use his intellect remains engulfed in his ignorance.

'Annam E': 'M E' is a conjunction; it means 'which or who (for the singular, dual and plural masculine respectively)'. In this verse, it has been conjoined with the emphatic reflexive *anna* (verily) to produce *annam* E.

'Min shajaratin' (of the trees) elucidates the conjunction m:; it means verily, if the trees which are on the earth become pens.

'Sab'atu abhurin' (seven seas) does not particularly mean 'seven'; it apparently means plenitude, that is to say, many seas.

'The words of Allah would not be spent' means 'not ending'. 'The words' are means known by Allah and His possibilities; that is to say, if all the trees on the earth became pens and all the seas became ink, and one wanted to use them to write the things known by Allah and His possibilities, they would not manage to do so because the words of Allah have no end. This verse is similar to the following verse:

"Say, 'If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the words of

#### my Lord are spent, even if We brought another like it for replenishment'."13

'Midedan' [here] denotes ink and everything else that is a means of writing, not the technical meaning.

'Even if We brought another like it for replenishment' means the utmost help We would give. And this is a clue that 'seven more seas' in the previous verse means plenitude, not the number seven. This point has also become clear, because the things known by Allah and His possibilities are infinite while the seas are finite and limited.

#### Man aspires for unlimited knowledge

Man instinctively aspires for unlimited knowledge; that is to say, no matter how much we know, we still desire to know more. Sometimes, man quits seeking knowledge because he is exhausted, but if acquisition of knowledge were free and devoid of effort, we would all want to have it.

#### "Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Never!"

Imem 'Ale (a) said, "Two greedy persons never get satiated, the seeker of knowledge and the seeker of the world." 14

On the one hand, the feasibility of acquiring unlimited knowledge through ordinary means is impossible because our brains have a limited capacity. Our eyes can read but for a limited time, our ears can listen but for a limited time, and our limited lifespan does not afford us the opportunity to learn all that there is to learn.

In short, our means are limited and our desires are unlimited. How can these two be harmonized? Philosophy too has proved that the reason why man gets thirsty is because there is water [in the external world] which he can drink. Man's inner desires have objective references and can be satiated. It is not possible for him to be thirsty and there be no water on earth. It is not possible for man to have an inner desire which does not have an objective reference to satiate it. Our existence is like a [magnetic] glass which reflects the things existing outside. It cannot lie in imaging.

Considering the three aforementioned preliminary steps, that is: our unlimited desires, our limited means, and our unattainable desires, how can we achieve our desires? Is there any way of achieving them?

Yes, there is, and the way of attaining them is devotion to Allah. It has been transmitted in a divinely inspired *had* th that Allah states:

"O my slave! Obey Me so that I may make you like Myself. When I order a thing to become existent, it becomes existent. [When I make you like Myself], the thing you order [to become existent] will become existent. Your will shall be like My will."15

The knowledge possessed by the prophets ('a) was not acquired through learning. Can all that

knowledge, which encompasses information about the world and the Hereafter, the earth and the sky, animals and mankind, the seas and deserts, be attained by means of ordinary learning?

Asbagh Nubertah says, "The Noble Prophet (s) taught me a thousand chapters of the hale and harem as well as events of the past and future, until the Day of Resurrection, and a million subsections could spring out of every chapter. He even taught me the knowledge of natural afflictions and torments as well as theorems of clear judgment and decisive speech." 16

The Noble Prophet (s) placed all this knowledge at the disposal of Im m 'Al (a) in one moment. Can all this knowledge be attained by [formal] learning? Never! The response to our unlimited needs lies in something else. We have to be obedient and devoted to Allah in order to acquire that knowledge.

After explaining the unlimited power of Allah in the previous verses, the Holy Qur'an explains another manifestation of the power of Allah; that He makes the night pass into the day and vice versa, and that He has guided the sun and the moon.

"That is because Allah is the Reality." 17 Verses prior to this are divided into two sections; one section explains that the knowledge and possibilities of Allah are unlimited and the second section explains examples of this power, such as passing the night into the day and vice versa and guiding the sun and the moon.

In this section, it explains that the one who has the power to do all this is Allah, who is the Truth and the Reality, and is not imaginary. But every existent that is not capable of doing the aforementioned things is imaginary and all the idols are illusive gods. Therefore, idolaters are nihilists, not realists. The Real God ought to have unlimited knowledge and power; otherwise, he would not be the Real God.

"And because Allah is the All-exalted, the All-great": verses 31 and 32 have exposed another aspect of the power of Allah. If you observe carefully, [you will see that] there is a particular order running through verses 25 to 32; initially, the Holy Qur'an explains Allah's infinite power and after that, it mentions instances of that unlimited power. Then, it draws the conclusion that the Real God is different from illusive gods and twice explains some other instances [of Allah's infinite power].

#### The order of Qur'anic verses

It is necessary to explain that verses of the Holy Qur'an have two characteristics: one is that every verse independently has an absolute meaning. The other is that there is a connection between the verses. The relationship and deep connection between the verses becomes clear with meditation.

#### Fifth verse

"Does not Allah suffice [to defend] His servant? They 18 would frighten you of others than Him.

Yet whomever Allah leads astray, has no guide, and whomever Allah guides, there is no one who

#### can lead him astray. Is not Allah an All-mighty Avenger?"19

It has been written in the books entitled "Majma' al-Bay®n" and "Kish®f" that polytheists used to threaten the Noble Prophet (s) with the vengeance of idols and used to say, "We fear lest our gods exterminate you and make you mad [as a punishment] for your vilifying them."

'Of others than Him' means the idols. Of course, former idolatrous nations had also made the same threats against their Prophets ( $\dot{a}$ ); the people of H $\mathbb{E}$ d ( $\dot{a}$ ) had addressed him thus:

#### "All we say is that some of our gods have visited you with some evil."20

Polytheists used to believe that idols were independent of Allah in influencing or affecting events and imagined that idols had the power to exterminate someone or make him mad. In order to refute this fanciful thought, Allah states, "Does not Allah suffice to defend His servant?" This means that Allah suffices to defend his servant and idols are not in the least bit effective.

#### Sixth verse

"If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' They will surely say, 'Allah.' Say, 'Have you considered what you invoke besides Allah? Should Allah desire some distress for me, can they remove the distress visited by Him? Or should He desire some mercy for me, can they withhold His mercy?' Say, 'Allah is sufficient for me. In Him let all the trusting put their trust'."21

In the Holy Qur'an, 'tad' n' (invoke) has the same meaning as 'ta' bud n' (worship), and in this verse too 'what you invoke besides Allah' means 'what you worship besides Allah'.

'Hunna' (they) is a third person, feminine, plural, personal subjective pronoun; it refers to the idols. Polytheists gave their idols female names, such as al-Let and al-'Uzze.

It has previously been said that polytheists used to believe that idols were independent of Allah and could freely influence events. All three verses confirm it.

The sentence "Can they remove the distress visited by Him?" also refutes the assumption that idols have the power to reward and harm anyone.

'Afara'aytum' (Have you considered) refers to the fact that polytheists thought and believed that idols could harm and reward man.

The aforementioned clues affirm that polytheists used to believe that idols were independent of Allah and it is for this reason that Allah at times states, "Does not Allah suffice [to defend] His servant?" or whether anyone besides Allah can do anything? If polytheists believed that idols could harm and reward man with the permission of Allah, the verses would have asked them for reasons and proofs for their believing that Allah had entrusted His powers to idols.

It has been written in "*Tafs Mub n*", "On the one hand, polytheists believed that Allah was the creator of the worlds, and on the other hand, they used to worship other than Allah." This is not surprising, as man sometimes believes in two contradictory ideologies because of his lack of knowledge.

If we observe carefully, we will conceive that even the Muslims and monotheists simultaneously hold two contradictory beliefs; we profess the Unity of Allah but still harbor hidden polytheism [shirk khafs]. On the one hand, we believe that, besides Allah, no one is effective in the world and that all affairs are controlled by Him, while on the other hand, we say that if so and so had not helped us, we would have been exterminated: if there were no doctor to cure me, I would have died. We become inattentive to the main cause and pay heed to apparent causes.

#### "And most of them do not believe in Allah without ascribing partners to Him." 22

Im®m al-S®diq ('a) interpreted this verse thus: "A person who says, if so and so had not helped me, I would have died of hunger, and if so and so had not defended me, my wife, children and I would have been killed", has ascribed partners to Allah and has believed that besides Allah, someone else provided him with sustenance. However, saying that if Allah had not been kind to me by sending so and so to help me and save me from dying does not amount to ascribing partners to Allah."23

The criterion for [distinguishing] hidden polytheism and manifest polytheism will become clear in future discussions. Also, one of the causes and roots of the ignorance of polytheists was their blind imitation of their fathers as well as their relatives.

Imem 'Ale ('a) states that Allah sent His messengers and prophets ('a) to fulfill the pledges of His creation, to exhort them to do good by preaching, to unveil the hidden virtues of wisdom and remind them of His bounties and the signs of His omnipotence; namely, the sky which is raised over them, the earth that is placed beneath them, means of living that sustain them, deaths that make them die, ailments that turn them old and incidents that successively befall them."24

#### **Seventh verse**

"If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earthy?' They will surely say, 'The All-mighty, the All-knowing created them'." 25

'A/-'Azīz' means the invincible All-mighty.

#### **Eighth verse**

"Blessed is He to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, and with Him is the knowledge of the Hour, and to Him you will be brought back. Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, except those who are witness to the truth and who know [for whom to intercede]. If you ask them, 'Who created them?'

#### they will surely say, 'Allah.' Then where do they stray?"26

"If you ask them who created them?" There are differences of opinion regarding who the third person plural objective pronoun them refers to. It has thus been written in [the book of Qur'anic exegesis entitled] "Majma' al-Bay n", "Both objective pronouns refer to idolaters; that is to say, if polytheists were asked who created them, they would respond that it is Allah.

In "Kanz al-Daq i'q", it has been written, "It is probable that the objective pronoun refers to both idolaters and idols."27 These two probabilities have been suggested in "Tafs or Qurtub or .28

If the objective pronoun refers to idolaters, then the verse means that Allah took charge of the affairs of the idolaters when he created them. It is not reasonable for them to go after other than Him. And if the objective pronoun refers to idols, then if the idols are themselves Allah's creatures and the polytheists also admit this, then how do they worship them despite the fact that whatever they have is derived from Allah?

The objective pronoun refers to both the idols and polytheists, encompasses both the object of worship and the worshipper.

Our discussion [so far] has been about laudable polytheistic beliefs, such as; their conviction that the Creator of the existing cosmos is Allah, the Sustainer, Possessor, Creator of life and death, Governor, Lord, Ruler, and Sender of rains.

# Belief that Allah has a child

Some polytheists used to believe that Allah had a child, that angels were Allah's daughters. Of course, the belief that Allah had a child is not peculiar to polytheists; the Jews and Christians also held this belief. The Jews believed that Ezra ['Uzayr] was the son of Allah and the Christians that Jesus Christ ('a) was the son of Allah. In reality, the Jews and Christians hold polytheistic beliefs despite the fact that they are not classified as polytheists. In this regard, there are a number of verses which we will treat hereunder:

"And they say, 'Allah has taken a son.' Immaculate is He! Rather to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All are obedient to Him, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decides on a matter, He just says to it, 'Be!' and it is." 29

In the books of Qur'anic exegesis entitled "Kish®f" and "Majma' al-Bay®n", it has been written that the personal subjective pronoun they means three groups of people; the Jews, Christians and polytheists, and the names of all the three groups have been mentioned in the preceding verses. These verses are indicative of the decadent doctrines of the polytheists and people of the Book (the Jews and Christians) and show how weak their conception and knowledge of Allah is.

They downgrade Him to the level of creatures who have children and descendants knowing that bearing children is contingent upon having a spouse. Therefore, they also have to believe that Allah has a wife. These beliefs show how the polytheists and the people of the Book are overwhelmed by their illusions and delusions, conceiving Him as an ordinary existent who has children and descendants.

Im fm 'Alf ('a) states,

"They are wrong who liken Thee to their idols, and dress Thee with the apparel of the creatures of their imagination, attribute to Thee parts of body fancied by them and consider Thee as a creature created by their [deluded] intelligence."30

It is necessary to say that being caught up in the trap of delusions is not peculiar to polytheists; some [of our] great scholars were also entangled in these kinds of delusions and misconceptions with respect to knowing Allah and imagined that they had attained real knowledge of Allah despite that what they had achieved was nothing more than fallacies. Narrating the following issue bears witness to this:

## **Syatulish Sha'rsns's objection to Mulls Sadrs**

The late Tyatull has written a footnote in "Majma' al-Bay n", printed by Isl miyyah Publications, at the bottom of verse 3 of Strat al-Had d:

"He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and He has knowledge over all things."

Tyatull™ Sha'r™ has written, "Mulla Sadr™ says, 'I used to meditate a lot upon verses such as "Say, 'He is Allah, the One',"31 and the first verses of STrat al-Had™d and felt I understood certain mysteries. Then, I came across a tradition in which Im™ al-Sajj™d ('a) was asked about monotheism. He responded, 'Allah, the High, knew that towards the end of time meditative people will come. It is for this reason that he revealed STrat al-Ikhl™s and the first verses of STrat al-Had™d. Whoever seeks to know more about Allah than what has been revealed will perish.' After coming across this tradition, I became very glad and thanked Allah for granting me the blessing of guidance'."32

After recounting this, the late Sha'r net has said, "We have no doubt that Mull Sadr is a man of great academic knowledge, but this tradition and the likes of it admonish people who engage in contemplation about the true nature of something and imagine that they have gotten its essence although they have not. This tradition intends to stall this type of thinking and state that one should be contented with just knowing that He is One, He neither begat nor was begotten, and that He is the First and the Last. Anything exceeding this should not be uttered."

#### **Second verse**

"They make the jinn partners of Allah, though He has created them, and carve out sons and daughters for Him, without any knowledge. Immaculate is He and exalted above what they allege

# [concerning Him]! The Originator of the heavens and the earth; how could He have a son when He has had no spouse? He created all things and He has knowledge of all things."33

*'Khalaqahum'* (He has created them): In [the book of Qur'anic exegesis entitled] *"Majma' al-Bay\mathbb{L}n"*, three possibilities have been given as to who the pronoun 'them' refers to:

The first possibility is the idolaters; the second possibility is that the pronoun *them* refers to the jinn; that is to say, polytheists made the jinn partners of Allah despite the fact that the jinn were created by Allah.

How can they worship the jinn and make them partners of Allah when they were created by Allah? Can the created be made a partner of the Creator?

The third possibility is that the pronoun refers to both the polytheists and the jinn; that is to say, Allah created both people and the jinn, and both the worshippers and the worshipped. This possibility is better than the other two possibilities.

*'Al-jinn'* (the jinn): What is meant by 'the jinn'? Two possibilities have been given in "Majma' al-Bay®n":

The first possibility is that the jinn are angels because jinn means invisible as well as hidden and the angels too are concealed from the eyes.

The second possibility is the well-known jinn. The following verse can help confirm this possibility:

"Indeed some persons from the humans would seek the protection of some persons from the jinn, thus only adding to their rebellion."34

In interpretation of this verse, it has been said that whenever an Arab intended to travel through the desert at night [during the Age of Ignorance], he would say, "I seek refuge in the beloved of this desert from the ignorant and unwise of his people." They used to say this because they believed that the jinn used to protect them.

The inferior level of the culture and knowledge of idolaters can be deduced from this verse. It can also be understood from this verse that the Jews and Christians are polytheists too, because the beginning of this verse says that polytheists had made the jinn partners of Allah and continues that they had carved out sons and daughters for Him.

The ones who carved out sons for Him are Jews and Christians and the ones who carved out daughters for Him are polytheists. And the outward meaning of "They make the jinn partners of Allah" is that polytheists are of two kinds; one kind believes that Allah has a son and the second kind believes that He has daughters.

#### **Third verse**

"They ascribe to Him offspring35 from among His servants! Man is indeed a manifest ingrate. Did He adopt daughters from what He creates while He preferred you with sons? When one of them is brought the news of what he ascribes to the All-beneficent, his face becomes darkened36 and he chokes with suppressed agony, [and says], 'What! One who is brought up among ornaments and is inconspicuous in contests?' And they have made angels—who are servants of the All-beneficent—females. Were they witness to their creation? Their testimony will be written down and they shall be questioned."37

"They ascribe to Him offspring38 from among His servants!"

This verse reveals the concealed natural disposition of polytheists. They choose daughters for Allah despite the fact that daughters are so displeasing to them that their faces become darkened when they are brought the news of having a daughter and prefer sons [for themselves?] If sons were superior, Allah would have chosen them for Himself. Why would He choose daughters, who are inferior in their opinion, for Himself?

The Holy Qur'an seeks to make polytheists conceive the ugliness and falseness of their polytheistic beliefs, especially verse 18 which indicates that women are more inclined to ornaments and beautification and that their intellectual powers are lower than those of men. To prove the weakness of their beliefs, verse 19 asks them if they had witnessed the creation of the angels. If not, why do you believe that they are females?

#### **Fourth verse**

"Did your Lord prefer for you sons, and [Himself] adopt females from among the angels? Indeed you say a monstrous word!"39

#### Fifth verse

"And warn those who say, 'Allah has taken a son.' They do not have any knowledge of that, nor did their fathers. Monstrous is the utterance that comes out of their mouths, and they say nothing but a lie."40

It can be gathered from Qur'anic verses that idolaters and their fathers had no reason and proof for their beliefs that Allah had a child.

"Monstrous is the utterance that comes out of their mouths."

It is utterly unpardonable for a person to believe that the sky and the earth are creatures of Allah on the one hand and on the other hand to ascribe children to Allah, because children are Allah's creatures.

#### Sixth verse

"They say, 'The All-beneficent has taken a son!' You have certainly advanced something hideous! The heavens are about to be rent apart at it, the earth to be split open, and the mountains to collapse into bits, that they should ascribe a son to the All-beneficent. It does not behoove the All-beneficent to take a son. There is none in the heavens and the earth but he comes to the All-beneficent as a servant."41

'They say' refers to polytheists, because verse 81 of Sirah Maryam, which says, "They have taken gods besides Allah that they may be a [source of] might to them", refers to polytheists and verse 88 is a continuation of that verse.

#### "The heavens are about to be rent apart at it"

explains the uttermost ugliness of this belief.

"It does not behoove the All-beneficent to take a son" explains that it is not reasonable and rational for Allah to possess a son. How can Allah, the Possessor of all creatures and the Creator of the whole existing cosmos and the sky and the earth and the Creator of idolaters and the angels take a son?

"There is none in the heavens and the earth but he comes to the All-beneficent as a servant":

all creatures are humble servants of Allah and none of them is equal to Him.

#### **Seventh verse**

"They say, 'The All-beneficent has taken off-spring.' Immaculate is He! Rather they are [His] honored servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command. He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they do not intercede except for someone He approves of, and they are apprehensive for fear of Him. Should any of them say, 'I am a god besides Him,' We will requite him with hell. Thus, do We requite the wrongdoers."42

It can be inferred from the above that the polytheists conceived Allah's honored servants and angels as His offspring. It can also be deduced that they believed that angels were independent of Allah in affecting and they could intercede without His permission.

Allah repudiates this belief by saying that angels are neither independent nor take precedence over Allah, but submit to Him, and He has complete knowledge of their past and future deeds. It can further be gathered that angels do not have the right to intercede for anyone except those for whom Allah has given permission, and the angels themselves fear and dread Allah's majesty.

If polytheists had believed that angels were dependent on Allah and interceded with His permission, in the way that we believe with respect to the Imems ('a) and prophets ('a), the sentence "they do not

intercede except for someone He approves of" would be unnecessary.

Verse 29 clearly shows that polytheists believed that angels were gods besides Allah. It is for this reason that He states, "Should any of them say, 'I am a god besides Him,' We will requite him with Hell. Thus, do We requite the wrongdoers." This sentence perfectly means that idolaters believed that their idols were independent of Allah.

#### **Eighth verse**

"Allah has not taken any offspring, neither is there any god besides Him, for then each god would take away what he created, and some of them would surely rise against the others. Clear is Allah of what they allege!"43

It can be deduced from [this] verse that polytheists used to conceive as indisputable the belief that Allah had an offspring and partner. If Allah had a son and partner independent of Him, the multiplicity of gods would result in the diversity and incompatibility of gods and their creatures and each of them would desire to dominate the other, which would give rise to disorder in the cosmic order.

#### **Ninth verse**

"Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant that he may be a warner to all the nations. He, to whom belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and who did not take a son, nor has He any partner in sovereignty, and He created everything and determined it in precise measure."44

"He, to whom belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth": Evidently, this description that Allah is the Possessor of all the skies and the earth bespeaks that belief in a son and partner for Allah is a perversion.

#### **Tenth verse**

"Ask them, 'Are daughters to be for your Lord while sons are to be for them? Did We create the angels female while they were present?'45 Look! It is indeed out of their mendacity that they say, 'Allah has begotten,' And they indeed speak a falsehood. Has he preferred daughters to sons? What is the matter with you? How do you judge? Will you not then take admonition? Do you have a manifest authority?46 Then produce your scripture, should you be truthful. And they have set up a kinship between Him and the jinn, while the jinn certainly know that they will indeed be presented [before Him]. Clear is Allah of what they allege [about Him]—[all] except Allah's exclusive servants."47

These verses have clarified a lot of issues. In these verses, Allah initially orders the Noble Prophet (s) to ask polytheists how they choose sons for themselves and ascribe daughters to Allah despite the fact that

they themselves prefer sons to daughters.

Then, He clarifies the absurdity of their words by asking them why they allege that angels are female when they were not witness to their creation. After that He shuns their allegation that Allah has begotten a son as sheer mendacity and baseless speech, so null and void that a rational man would not ordinarily utter such words and those who say this evidently do so as a result of inattentiveness. In continuation, He asks them to produce manifest proof for their beliefs if indeed they are truthful.

#### "What is the matter with you? How do you judge? Will you not then take admonition?"

These sentences express surprise at what idolaters think with respect to Allah. The god that you depict is [merely a fruit of] your fantasies. That imaginative being is not the real God. Search and look for the real God. The real God cannot have an offspring.

#### "What is their idea about the Lord of the worlds?"48

In simple words, these are absurdities and idle talk that they forge with respect to Allah. Strange is their judgment about Allah. How can the Absolute Self-sufficient [Allah] have a son? "Do you have a manifest authority?"49 If you speak the truth, produce evident proof.

"And they have set up a kinship between Him and the jinn, while the jinn certainly know that they will indeed be presented [before Him]": there are two possibilities of what the jinn means:

- 1. The verse hints at Zoroastrian beliefs in Yazd®n50 and Ahr®man51. They used to believe that Ahr®man was the brother of Yazd®n and because the Devil belongs to the jinn, God should also belong to the jinn and these two have family ties. They used to believe that Yazd®n was the creator of good and Ahr®man was the creator of bad.
- 2. The second possibility is that *the jinn* mean the angels because they are invisible beings.

Those who set up a kinship between Allah and the jinn did so because they used to believe that the angels were Allah's daughters and thus there existed between them and Allah the relationship of father and daughter.

This proves that the God whom the polytheists used to imagine was not the real God. If they had known the real God, they would not have uttered such nonsensical words and would not have adopted such delusive beliefs. These verses show how deeply rooted these incorrect beliefs were among polytheists, which necessitated an outspoken encounter with them in the hope that they may perhaps wake up from their inattentive slumber.

#### **Eleventh verse**

"Have you considered L⁵t and 'Uzz⁵ and Man⊡t, the third one? Are you to have males and He

females? That, then, will be an unfair division! These are but names you have coined—you and your fathers—for which Allah has not sent down any authority. They follow nothing but conjectures and the desires of the [lower] soul, while there has already come to them the guidance from their Lord. Shall man have whatever he yearns for?

Yet to Allah belong this world and the Hereafter. How many an angel there is in the heavens whose intercession is of no avail in any way except after Allah grants permission to whomever He wishes and approves of! Indeed those who do not believe in the Hereafter give female names to the angels.

They do not have any knowledge of that. They follow nothing but conjectures, and indeed conjecture is no substitute for the truth. So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world. That is the ultimate reach of their knowledge. Indeed your Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are [rightly] guided."52

Let, 'Uzze and Manet are names of the three most important idols worshipped by idolaters. According to [the exegesis in] "A/-Mezen", it is for this reason that out of the many idols that existed, Allah has only named these three.

- 1) Man t is also the third of those idols and is different from the [first] two.
- 2) The status and position of Man®t is below the rank of L®t and 'Uzz®.53

"These are but names which you have coined": These partners and daughters which you ascribe to Allah are nothing but a series of delusions which you and your fathers have invented in your minds; they are nothing but names which you have coined and have no external existence. You are pursuing conjectures and carnal desires, not logic and decisive proof.

#### "Yet to Allah belong this world and the Hereafter":

This sentence makes it clear that idols play no role in the cosmic system. Intercession is not in the hands of idols, but in the hands of Allah and the intercession of real intercessors depends on the permission of Allah. Idolaters were wrong to imagine that idols had the power of intercession.

"Indeed those who do not believe in the Hereafter give female names to the angels": They had chosen female names for the angels because they believed that the angels were daughters of Allah in spite of not having any proof for this choice and belief, but based on mere conjecture and supposition. Belief cannot be based on sheer guesses, but on certainty.

"So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world": Remembrance [dhikr] has been interpreted as monotheism [tawh d]; that is to say, avoid every person who has turned away from monotheism.

"That is the ultimate reach of their knowledge": This means that the utmost limit of their understanding and cognition is adoption of such baseless beliefs and turning away from monotheism [tawh d]. This verse intends to say that if polytheists possessed high discernment, they would not have blindly followed their conjectures.

They would have gone after certain knowledge and certitude and would not have allowed themselves to believe in a partner and child for Allah. It ought not to be left unsaid that the majority of interpreters have construed *that* [*dh*] as indicating that idolaters chose the world over the hereafter.

#### **Twelfth verse**

"Say, 'He is Allah, the One. Allah is the All-embracing. He neither begat, nor was begotten, nor has He any equal'." 54

'Al-samad' means the All-rich, One who is Needless and All-embracing.

'Kufuwan' means equal, the same, equivalent and a peer.

The recommendations to recite S rat al-Tawh rd in the ritual prayers bespeak that polytheistic beliefs were very firmly rooted [among people] and Allah wished to uproot these warped notions with such emphases. By means of this S rah, Allah would like to cleanse their minds of these delusions.

There are many more verses in the Holy Qur'an which indicate that this belief was held by idolaters. For further research, refer to the following verses:

Serat al-Isre' (or Bane Isre'el) 17:111, Serat Maryam 19:34–35, Serat Yenus 10:68, Serat al-An'em 6:101, Serat al-Zukhruf 43:81, Serat al-Zumar 39:4 and Serat al-Jinn 72:3.

# Belief that Allah has a spouse

One of the despicable polytheistic beliefs was their conviction that Allah had a spouse. Even if this belief cannot be explicitly deduced from verses of the Holy Qur'an, it can still be inferred from verses in which Allah refutes taking a spouse that such a belief existed [among idolaters].

Consider this verse:

"Exalted be the majesty of our Lord, He has taken neither a spouse nor a son. Indeed the foolish ones among us used to utter atrocious lies concerning Allah." 55

# **Aversion to Monotheism**

One of the despicable polytheistic beliefs was their extreme aversion to the oneness of Allah (monotheism) and reciprocally, their joy at the mention of their idols. A number of verses indicate that

they used to behave in an abominable and disgusting manner when they heard the name of the One God being remembered and used to evade discussions about monotheism. They were never at all willing to hear [the word] monotheism and reciprocally, they used to get very elated at the remembrance of their idols.

We will quote Qur'anic verses in this regard:

#### **First verse**

"And We cast veils on their hearts, lest they should understand it, and a deafness into their ears. When you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an, they turn their backs in aversion." 56

#### **Second verse**

"When Allah is mentioned alone, [thereat] shrink away the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter, but when others are mentioned besides Him, behold, they rejoice!"57

#### **Third verse**

"Hard on the polytheists is that to which you summon them." 58

#### **Fourth verse**

"Has he reduced the gods to one god? This is indeed an odd thing! Their elite go about [urging others]: 'Go and stand by your gods! This is indeed the desirable thing [to do]. We did not hear of this in the latter-day creed.59 This is nothing but a fabrication'."60

It is necessary to mention that the verses which come before and after the above quoted verses concern negation of the Noble Prophet's (s) Divine Mission [nub@wwat]. Polytheists were amazed at how one man could have been delegated the prophetic mission, and what is more, that one man was Muhammad (s), the orphan brought up by Ab® T®lib and one who had no financial status in society. They were surprised why none of their rich and powerful leaders had been appointed to prophethood and why revelation had not been revealed to them.

In "Majma' al-Bay n", it has been written that the reason of revelation of the aforementioned verses is that twenty five people among the leaders of the Quraysh, among them Mughayrah, Ab Jahl, Ubayy ibn Khalaf, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, 'Utbah ibn Rab f'ah, went to see His Holiness Ab Tilib. They said to him, "You are our leader. Your nephew curses our idols.

You judge between us and him." Ab! Telib called the Noble Prophet (s) and said to him, "These people have a request from you." The Noble Prophet (s) asked, "What is their request?" The leaders of the Quraysh said, "Leave us and our idols alone and we too will leave you alone." The Noble Prophet (s) responded, "Just pronounce one phrase and you will become the leaders of both the Arabs and non-

Arabs. That one phrase is 'There is no god but Allah [/ land il/ all all land]'." Upon hearing this, they got up and left the meeting, saying, "He has made all gods become One God." It was then that this verse was revealed.

A number of points can be inferred from the above quoted verses:

The first point is that belief in monotheism and renouncing idols was very surprising to polytheists; it is for this reason that the Qur'an states, "Has he reduced the gods to one god? This is indeed an odd thing!" Evidently, accepting monotheism and forsaking idols was inconceivable and unacceptable. Bear this point in mind that they used to conceive them as independent of Allah because they would not have thought it inconceivable and unacceptable to renounce idols and accept monotheism if their idols were dependent on Allah.

**The second point** is that the leaders of Quraysh did not give any rational response to the Noble Prophet's (*s*) suggestion and only expressed surprise.

**The third point** is that they urged one another to stand by their gods, saying, "Go and stand by your gods!"

**The fourth point** is that in the book of exegesis called "Kish®f", the verse "This is indeed the desirable thing [to do]" has been interpreted as idolatry and its defense being Allah's wish, as He has endorsed it. Therefore, He will help them bear the hardships of defending idolatry and defeat Muhammad.

If the verse means the same as has been written in "Kish®f", then it ought to be said that idolaters not only believed that idolatry was pleasing to Allah, but that He ordered and encouraged mankind to worship idols. It is possible to confirm and infer the existence of such beliefs among idolaters from verses which say that they have no manifest reason and proof from Allah [to practice idolatry]. But the verse probably means that the aim and goal of polytheists is [to practice] idolatry. Idols are their gods and respected by them; therefore, they ought to stand by them and defend them, as well as bear the hardships that befall them on this course.

The fifth point is that idolaters said, "We did not hear of this in the latter-day creed. 61 This is nothing but a fabrication." This shows their stubborn belief in idolatry. They used to perceive anything contradictory to their beliefs as false.

- 1. Serat Yenus 10:31–32. (All Qur'anic verses are quoted from the translation of 'Ale Qule Qare'e.)
- 2. Srat al-Anbiy 21:57-68.
- 3. Srat al-Anbiy 21:57-68.
- 4. Srat al-'Ankabrt 29:65.
- 5. Or 'How are you being misled', or 'How are you being rendered blind'.
- 6. Srat al-Mu'minn 23:84-89.
- 7. Majma' al-Bayn, footnote of this same verse.
- 8. Serat al-'Ankabet 29:61-63.
- 9. Or 'That is because Allah is the Truth.'

- 10. Or 'What they invoke besides Him is falsehood.'
- 11. That is, Satan, or anything that diverts a human being from the path of Allah.
- 12. Srat Lugmrn 31:25-34.
- 13. Sirat al-Kahf 18:109.
- 14. Nahj al-Balghah, short saying no. 466.
- 15. Bih r al-Anw r, vol. 102, p. 165.
- 16. Ibid., vol. 22, p. 461.
- 17. Or 'That is because Allah is the Truth.'
- 18. That is, the idolaters, who threatened the Prophet with the vengeance of their gods.
- 19. Serat al-Zumar 39:36-37.
- 20. Strat Htd 11:54.
- 21. Srat al-Zumar 39:38.
- 22. STrat YTsuf 12:106.
- 23. Majma' al-Bayn, vol. 5, p. 462.
- 24. Nahj al-Balghah, sermon [khutbah] no. 1.
- 25. Sirat al-Zukhruf 43:9.
- 26. Srat al-Zukhruf 43:85-87.
- 27. Tafser 'Kanz al-Daqeniq', vol. 9, p. 380.
- 28. Tafs r Qurtub r, vol. 16, p. 123.
- 29. Sirat al-Bagarah 2:116-117.
- 30. Nahj al-Bal ghah, sermon [khutbah] no. 90.
- 31. Srat al-Ikhlrs 112:1.
- 32. Al-KIfi, vol. 1, p. 91, section [bIb] nisbah.
- 33. Serat al-An'em 6: 100-101.
- 34. S@rat al-Jinn 72:6.
- 35. Lit.: 'They ascribe to Him a portion from among His servants.'
- 36. That is, when he is brought the news of the birth of a daughter.
- 37. S@rat al-Zukhruf 43:15-19.
- 38. Lit.: 'They ascribe to Him a portion from among His servants.'
- 39. Strat al-Isrt' (or Bant Isrt'tl) 17:40.
- 40. Sirat al-Kahf 18:4-5.
- 41. Srat Maryam 19:88-93.
- 42. Strat al-Anbiyt' 21:26-29.
- 43. S⊡rat al-Mu'min⊡n 23:91.
- 44. Serat al-Furgen 25:1-2.
- 45. Or 'while they were witnesses'.
- 46. That is, in support of what they assert.
- 47. Serat al-Seffet 37: 149-160.
- 48. Strat al-Stfft 37:87.
- 49. That is, in support of what they assert.
- 50. God: or name of the principle or originator of good.
- 51. Satan: or the fiend.
- 52. Srat al-Najm 53: 19-30.
- 53. Tafser 'Illeyyen, p. 526.
- 54. Serat al-Ikhles 112:1-4. This Serah—also called "Serat al-Tawhed"—is a statement of Islamic monotheism which negates any kind of anthropomorphism that may compromise pure monotheism or tawhed. It is called 'Serah al-Ikhles', as it purges tawhed of deviant ideas and posits it in its exclusive purity.
- 55. Srat al-Jinn 72:3-4.

- 56. Strat al-Isrt' (or Bant Isrt'tl) 17:46.
- 57. S rat al-Zumar 39:45.
- 58. STrat al-Shawr 42:13.
- 59. That is, in the polytheistic creed prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia.
- 60. Strat Std 38:5-7.
- 61. That is, in the polytheistic creed prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia.

#### Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/study-polytheism-and-idolatry-quran-sayyid-abbas-sayyid-karimi-husayni/chapter-1-polytheistic#comment-0