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Chapter 2: Polytheistic Beliefs with respect to Idols

A very important discussion that needs to be treated is whether idolaters believed that their idols were *longitudinal* to God, that is, dependent on God or whether they conceived them as *latitudinal* to God, that is to say, they were rivals of God. In order to explain this issue, it ought to be said that two kinds of polytheistic beliefs are conceivable:

The first kind is that idolaters believed that the One God ruled over the whole cosmos and there was no other god save the One God, and idols were only intermediaries of grace and holy creatures through whom Allah delivered His graces to other creatures.

The second kind is that idolaters believed that idols were latitudinal to Allah and were equal to Him, and that their dominion and power was independent of Allah. They conceived that idols had the power to harm and reward, and they possessed lordship and governorship over the cosmos, equal to the power and governorship of Allah. In other words, Allah was one of the many gods; for instance, the first god was Allah, the second one was Hubal, the third one was Let, the fourth one was 'Uzze, etc.

Of course, it is clear that a true monotheist would never hold such beliefs. A true monotheist believes that Allah is essentially One; none is the creator and governor of the world save Allah, who is infinite and rules over the whole cosmos.

After positive clarification of the discussion that two kinds of polytheistic beliefs are conceivable, we have to examine which one of the two conceivable beliefs is supported by proof, the belief that idols are latitudinal or longitudinal to Allah?

Equating idols with Allah

Our assertion is that rational proofs and Qur'anic verses bespeak that idolaters used to conceive idols as being *latitudinal* to Allah. We will present a number of proofs in this regard:

The first proof: polytheists' avowal of equality on the Day of Resurrection

First verse:

"And they shall be told: 'Where is that which you used to worship besides Allah? Do they help you, or do they help each other?' Then they will be cast into it on their faces—they and the perverse, and the hosts of Ibl®s, all together. They will say, as they wrangle in it [together], 'By Allah, we had indeed been in manifest error, when we equated you with the Lord of all worlds! And no one led us astray except the guilty. Now we have no intercessors, nor do we have any sympathetic friend'."1

'They' refers to idols and 'the perverse' means idolaters.

The assertion that idols are equal with Allah is only correct once they believe that idols independently have the power to rule and govern in the same way that Allah independently rules and governs the cosmos. It does not make any difference whether this equality exists in all affairs or only in some issues. In whatever aspect this equality may be conceived, it leads to the belief that idols are Allah's rivals and equals in that facet; for instance, they used to believe that idols could harm and reward man.

"And no one led us astray except the guilty" has two meanings; the first means past generations whom they followed or imitated, and the second means the devils.

"Now we have no intercessors": "Intercessors' in this verse mean supporters who could plead on their behalf.

"Nor do we have any sympathetic friend": "Sympathetic friend' in this verse means friends with whom they have family ties and relations, especially those who love them and whom they love.

The conclusion of these verses is that on the Day of Resurrection, idolaters will say that they lived in sheer delusion and fantasy; imagined that idols were equal with Allah, and now they can help neither themselves nor them. Finally, the reason why idols will be burnt in Hell is to show polytheists that idols could not even defend themselves.

Second verse:

"... Yet the faithless equate [others] with their Lord."2

They equated idols with Allah. This verse is similar to the verse "What! Is there a god besides Allah?" and the verse

"And do not follow the desires of those who deny Our signs, and those who do not believe in the

Hereafter, and equate [others] with their Lord."4

The conclusion is that 'equating' means 'being exactly the same as', and it can be inferred that polytheists believed that idols were latitudinal to Allah.

In regard to polytheistic beliefs that idols are equal to Allah, "Nahj al-Bal ghah" states:

"They are wrong who equate Thee to their idols, and dress Thee with the apparel of the creatures of their imagination, attribute to Thee parts of body of their own thinking and consider Thee after the creatures of various types, through the working of their intelligence. I stand witness that whoever equated Thee with anything out of Thy creation took a match for Thee, and whoever takes a match for Thee is an unbeliever, according to what is stated in

Thy unambiguous verses and indicated by the evidence of Thy clear arguments. (I stand witness that)
Thou art that Allah who cannot be confined in the fetters of intelligence so as to admit change of
condition by entering its imagination nor in the shackles of mind so as to become limited and an object of
alterations."5

The word 'equate' clearly indicates that polytheists believed that Allah and idols were in the same category and latitudinal with each other. Taking the aforementioned issues into consideration, all the Qur'anic verses which have the word 'nidd' (like, the same as, image) and 'ind d' (rivals) demonstrate polytheistic beliefs that conceived idols as being equal with Allah.

Third verse:

"He who made the earth a place of repose for you, and the sky a canopy, and He sends down water from the sky, and with it He brings forth crops for your sustenance. So do not set up equals to Allah, while you know."

This verse explains and refutes the beliefs of idolaters, and states that polytheists believed that Allah had an equal and partner, that idols were latitudinal and equal with Allah.

The second proof: applying the word 'god' to idols

The second reason for asserting that polytheists held that idols were latitudinal to Allah is that Qur'anic verses [state that idolaters used to] apply the word 'i/E/h' (god) to idols. Ascribing the word god to idols indicates that this word was employed in the same sense that it is used with respect to Allah, and it shows that they believed in the multiplicity of gods, the first of whom is Allah and the rest are idols. Consider the following verses:

First verse:

"Your god [il\[]h] is the One God [il\[]hun w\[]hidun]; there is no god except Him, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful."

In this verse, all gods have been confined in the One God and Allah has been described as the All-beneficent, the All-merciful. Evidently, this verse explains that idolaters imagined that the world had a number of gods. Therefore, this verse bespeaks that polytheists used to call their gods 'i/Ish' (god) in the same sense it is applied to Allah. It is for this reason that the existence of other gods is repudiated.

Second verse:

"This is indeed the true account, for sure. There is no god but Allah, and indeed Allah is the All-mighty, the All-wise."7

Verses which precede and follow the above quoted one concern Christian claims that Jesus Christ ('a) is the son of God and that it is not possible for a child to have no father. Therefore, Jesus' father is God and the son of God also has to be a god. The Holy Qur'an thus refutes their claims:

"These that We recite to you are from the signs and the Wise Reminder: indeed the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam: He created Him from dust, then said to him, 'Be,' and he was. This is the truth from your Lord, so do be among the skeptics. Should anyone argue with you concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to you, say, 'Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our souls and your souls, then let us pray earnestly and call down Allah's curse upon the liars.' This is indeed the true account, for sure. There is no god but Allah, and indeed Allah is the All-mighty, All-wise. But if they turn away, indeed Allah best knows the agents of corruption. Say, 'O people of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah,' But if they turn away, Say, 'Be witness that we are Muslims'."8

The Holy Qur'an declares that Jesus Christ ('a) came into being on Allah's orders without a father in the same way that Adam ('a) was created from clay without a father and mother. Then the Noble Prophet (s) was ordered to invite Christians to a mutual invocation of cursing the liars. The Christians feared to take part in it and instead agreed to pay <code>jizyah9</code>. In this verse Allah states that the story of Jesus Christ ('a) is as He has stated; there is no god save Allah.

Third verse:

"O People of the Book! Do not exceed the bounds in your religion, and do not attribute anything to Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only an apostle of Allah, and His word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him. So have faith in Allah and His apostles, and

do not say, '[God is] is a trinity.' Relinquish [such a creed]! That is better for you. Allah is but the One God. He is far too immaculate to have any son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, and Allah suffices as a trustee. The Messiah would never disdain being a servant of Allah, nor would the angels brought near [to Him], and whoever disdains His worship and is arrogant, He will gather them all toward Him."10

"The Messiah would never disdain being a servant of Allah": It has been recounted that a number of Christians from Najr®n went to meet the Noble Prophet (s) and said, "Why do you ascribe fault to our master?" The Noble Prophet (s) asked, "Who is your master?" They responded, "Jesus Christ." The Noble Prophet (s) asked, "What have I said against him that would be construed as ascribing fault to him?" The Christians said, "You have said that he is a servant and messenger of Allah." It was at this that the above quoted verse was revealed.11

Christians believe in three gods; god the father, god the son and god the Holy Spirit. Allah has repudiated this belief, stating that there is only One God and that is Allah. Jesus Christ ('a) himself, whom you the Christians call god and the son of Allah, and the angels whom idolaters consider as daughters of Allah and to whom they apply the word, all admit that they are servants of Allah.

Since the Qur'an states that Jesus Christ ('a) and the angels do not deny being servants of Allah, it is enough to clearly prove that Christians and idolaters believed that Jesus ('a) and the angels are not servants of Allah but are independent and latitudinal, not longitudinal, to Allah.

Their being longitudinal to Allah is compatible with servitude and there was no need for Allah to state that Jesus Christ ('a) and the angels themselves admit being His servants. The Holy Qur'an's assertion only holds true in the case that Christians and idolaters believed in the independence of their objects of worship vis–à–vis Allah.

"And His word that He cast toward Mary": This means Jesus Christ ('a), who came into being when Allah said, 'Be.'

"And a spirit from Him": A number of statements have been made with respect to the meaning of this verse:

- 1. Jesus Christ ('a), just like the spirit, is a means of granting life because he guides [mankind].
- 2. He is a mercy from Allah.
- 3. Hints at verse 91 of Sirat al-Anbiyi, which says, "And her who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her Our Spirit, and made her and her son a sign for all the nations."

Fourth verse:

"They are certainly faithless who say, 'Allah is the third [person] of a trinity,' while there is no god

except the One God. If they do not relinquish what they say, there shall befall the faithless among them a painful punishment."12

This verse also indicates that Christians had applied the word 'god' to Jesus Christ ('a) and that they believed in his divinity. The Holy Qur'an refutes this belief and states that there is no god except the One God.

Fifth verse:

"Say, 'What thing is greatest as witness?' Say, 'Allah! [He is] witness between me and you, and this Qur'an has been revealed to me that I may warn thereby you and whomever it may reach.' 'Do you indeed bear witness that there are other gods besides Allah?' Say, 'I do not bear witness [to any such thing].' Say, 'Indeed He is the One God, and indeed I disown what you associate [with Him]'."13

This verse also clearly explains that they used to apply the word 'god' to other than Allah, and that they used to believe in multiple gods.

"Do you indeed bear witness that there are other gods besides Allah?"

It is clear that 'besides Allah' bespeaks their belief that their gods were latitudinal, not longitudinal, to Allah.

Sixth verse:

"Certainly We sent Noah to his people. He said, 'O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day'."14

Noah ('a) being charged with the responsibility of telling his people not to worship other gods besides the One God clearly proves that during Noah's era, people used to believe in the existence of other gods besides Allah, the One, who were latitudinal not longitudinal with Allah. If they believed that their gods were longitudinal to Allah and dependent on Him, there was no reason for them to raise objections against Noah for calling on them to worship the One God. The likes of this verse are the verses:

"And to [the people] of 'd, Hd, their brother, he said, 'O my people, worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him'." 15

"And to [the people of] Tham d, Selih, their brother, he said, 'O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him'." 16

"And to [the people of Midian], Shu'ayb, their brother, he said, 'O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord'."17

Seventh verse:

"And Allah has said, 'Do not worship two gods. Indeed, He is the One God, so be in awe of Me [alone]'."18

It can be inferred from the above quoted verse that polytheists used to fear their idols lest they harm them and/or be a hindrance to good coming their way. This shows that they used to believe that besides Allah, their idols were either benevolent or malevolent, and that their idols were independent in controlling cosmic affairs. "Do not worship two gods" means do not believe in more than One God, certainly not that two gods are forbidden but more than two gods are permissible!

The third proof: simultaneity

The third proof for the assertion that polytheists used to conceive their idols as being latitudinal to Allah and independent of Him is the word 'ma'a' (besides, or simultaneous with) in the phrase 'ma'all®h' (besides Allah). 'Ma'all®h', which has been employed sixteen times in the Holy Qur'an, means that idols were construed as being equal and the same as Allah.

We will hereunder study some of these verses:

"Say, 'All praise belongs to Allah, and peace be to His servants whom He has chosen.' Is Allah better, or the partners they ascribe [to Him]? Is not He who created the heavens and the earth, and sends down for you water from the sky, whereby He grows delightful gardens, whose trees you could never cause to grow...?19

What! Is there a god besides Allah? Rather, they are a lot who equate [others with Allah]. Is not He who made the earth an abode [for you], and made rivers flowing through it, and set firm mountains for it, and set a barrier between the two seas...? What! Is there a god besides Allah? Rather, most of them do not know. Is not He who answers the call of the distressed [person] when he invokes Him and removes his distress, and makes you the earth's successors...? What! Is there a god besides Allah? Little is the admonition that you take. Is not He who guides you in the darkness of land and sea, and who sends the winds as harbingers of His mercy...? What! Is there a god besides Allah? Exalted is Allah above [having] any partners they ascribe [to Him]. Is not He who originated the creation, then He will bring it back, and who provides for you from the sky and the earth...? What! Is there a god besides Allah? Say, 'Produce your evidence, if you are truthful'."20

The word 'besides' in the verses which says "Is there a god besides Allah" means 'equal to'. That is to say, is there a god equal to Allah? Do you conceive idols as being equal to Allah?

The fourth proof: incompatibility

It is one of the most important proofs in this discourse. The conclusion which is drawn from this demonstration is that [successful] managing of everything is contingent on unified management, not on polarized supervision. Polarized management leads to disarray in the system. Unity of the cosmic system leads us to the conclusion that there is one unified administrator.

First verse:

"Have they taken gods from the earth who raise [the dead]? Had there been gods in them21 other than Allah, they would surely have fallen apart. Clear is Allah, the Lord of the Throne, of what they allege [concerning Him]."22

Second 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 up against others. Clear is Allah of what they allege!"23

These two verses mean that the existence of two gods gives rise to disarray in the cosmic system. Disarray arises in instances where a number of independent administrators, each with the power to make independent decisions, exist.

If gods are latitudinal with Allah and independent of Him, they will have separate power, as well as think about rising up against other gods. But if we believe that they are longitudinal with Allah, all the gods would be under the control of only one power, and no creature besides Allah would have the power to reign over another. In our opinion, this is the strongest demonstration for proving idolatrous beliefs, and it is very clear.

Fifth proof: 'besides Allah'

"Among the people are those who set up compeers besides Allah, loving them as if loving Allah—but the faithful have a more ardent love for Allah—though the wrongdoers will see, when they sight the punishment, that power, altogether, belongs to Allah, and that Allah is severe in punishment."24

The phrase 'besides Allah' is equivalent to duality, that is to say there is polarity between the idols and Allah, in such a way that idols are on one side and Allah is on the opposite end. Jesus Christ ('a) raised the dead to life and cured the sick on the permission of Allah [bi idhnill h], not besides Allah [min d nill h]; that is to say, Jesus Christ ('a) did not have any kind of independence in curing the sick and raising the dead [back to life]. Jesus' deeds are Allah's deeds, and there is no duality in their deeds.

It is to be concluded that whatever activities creatures other than Allah do in the cosmic system are done with the permission of Allah, not besides Him.

Sixth proof: belittlement if idols

Allah has belittled idols as not being a source of any effect. He states that whatever is in the cosmic system belongs to Allah; it is Allah who sends down the rains, who manages the sky and the earth, and then asks idolaters to show what their idols have done.

First verse:

"Say, 'Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?' Say, 'Allah!' Say, 'Have you then taken others besides Him for guardians, who have no control over their own benefit or harm?' Say, 'Are the blind one and the seer equal? Or are darkness and light equal?' Have they set up for Allah partners who have created something like Allah's creation which causes them to be confused? Say, 'Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the All-paramount'."25

Second verse:

"He created the heavens without any pillars that you may see, and cast firm mountains in the earth lest it should shake with you, and He has scattered in it every kind of animal. And He sent down water from the sky and caused every splendid kind [of plant] to grow in it. This is the creation of Allah. Now, show Me what others besides Him have created. Rather, the wrongdoers are in manifest error!"26

"He created the heavens without any pillars that you may see" has been construed as having two meanings:

- 1. He created the heavens without any pillars, as you too can see that there are no pillars holding the heavens.
- 2. He created the heavens without any *visible* pillars, but it has invisible pillars.

Seventh proof: polytheism is a great injustice

"When Luqm™n said to his son, as he advised him: 'O my son! Do not ascribe any partners to Allah. Polytheism is indeed a great injustice'."27

In the book of Qur'anic exegesis entitled "Kish of", this verse has been thus interpreted, "Polytheism is a great injustice because it equates Allah, the Owner of all graces and blessings, with idols, which are absolutely in need."

Eighth proof: the terms 'partner' and 'idolatry'

More than twenty verses in the Holy Qur'an have employed the terms partner [shar k] and idolatry [shirk]. Likewise, we Muslims repeatedly say, "I bear witness that there is no god except Allah the One; there is no partner for Him."

Allah's prohibition that idols ought not to be taken as His partners indicates that idolaters used to conceive their idols as Allah's equals. Partner assumes equality.

The Wahhibis' error

If the Wahh the shad paid heed to the meanings of these terms, they would never have accused the She ahs of being polytheists because the She ahs do not at all believe that the Noble Prophet (s) and Imems (a) are Allah's equals in a latitudinal manner. They hold that whatever the Noble Prophet (s) and Imems (a) do, such as interceding and alleviating the problems of believers, are all done with the permission of Allah and the powers which He has entrusted to them. These holy people (a) can perform miracles whenever Allah wills and they would not be able to do so without His will. They are Allah's worthy and noble servants. They take pride in being Allah's servants, and a servant cannot be equal to his master.

Ninth proof: lack of ownership

"Say, 'Invoke them whom you claim [to be gods] besides Allah! They do not control [even] an atom's weight in the heavens or the earth, nor have they any share in [either of] them, nor is any of them28 His supporter: "29

This verse refutes idolatrous delusions that idols have a share of ownership in the heavens and the earth. It can be inferred from this refutation that idolaters imagined that idols have a share in the heavens and the earth.

Support and help are only applicable where the power of the giver of support and help is other than the power of the receiver of support and help. For instance, when one man cannot manage to lift a weighty thing, another man comes to help him and as a result of these two powers, the weight is lifted. These two powers are independent of each other and are latitudinal with each other.

If two individuals were longitudinal in such a way that all the powers of the second individual were derived from the first one, it would not be true to call the second one a helper. It can be deduced from the above quoted verse that idolaters believed their idols had powers independent of Allah's powers and helped Allah to manage cosmic affairs. The following verse also proves this same issue:

"Say, 'Tell me about your partners [you ascribe to Allah] whom you invoke besides Allah? Show

me what [part] of the earth they have created. Do they have any share in the heavens?' Have We given them a scripture so that they stand on a manifest proof thereof? Rather the wrongdoers do not promise one another [anything] except delusion. Indeed Allah sustains the heavens and the earth lest they should fall apart, and if they were to fall apart there is none who can sustain them except Him. Indeed, He is All-forbearing, All-forgiving."30

Verses 4–16 of Strat al-Ahqtf also prove the above.

Tenth proof: independence in affecting cosmic affairs

"Whatever mercy Allah unfolds for the people, no one can withhold it; and whatever He withholds, no one can release it after Him,31 and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise."32

Idolaters used to believe that besides Allah, someone was effective in either granting or withholding graces. It is for this reason that Allah refutes this belief in the above quoted verse.

Eleventh proof: invitation to monotheism

"Indeed it was they who, when they were told, 'There is no god except Allah,' used to be disdainful, and [they would] say, 'Shall we abandon our gods for a crazy poet?" 33

It is clear from this invitation extended to idolaters to worship the One God and from their disdainful refusal to submit to monotheism and abandon their gods that they used to consider their gods as equals of Allah. They would have easily forsaken their gods if they had believed that their gods were longitudinal with Allah and dependent on Him.

Twelfth proof: the Noble Prophet's invitation to monotheism

"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. 34 This is nothing but a fabrication'."35

In other words, the Noble Prophet's (*s*) invitation to monotheism and the Oneness of God is itself a proof that polytheists used to conceive their gods as independent of Allah. There was no reason to invite them to monotheism if they had held that their gods were dependent on Allah and merely His agents, and the polytheists themselves would not have turned down the invitation.

Thirteenth proof: sincere devotion in religion

"Say, "[Only] Allah do I worship, putting exclusive faith in Him'."36

Sincerity in religion is set against hypocrisy in religion. Insincere devotion and hypocrisy in religion occur

once other creatures are believed to be equal with Allah and independently effective in the cosmic system. When man humbly submits to these creatures his worship for Allah intermixes with his worship for other creatures, and his faith is no longer exclusive for Allah.

Fourteenth proof: reference to primordial nature

"Allah draws an example: a man jointly owned by several contending masters and a man belonging entirely to one man: are the two equal in comparison? All praise belongs to Allah! But most of them do not know." 38

'Mutash®kas®n' (contending masters) means bad mannered individuals each of whom has peculiar manners and opinions and every one of them gives their jointly owned slave an order different from the order of the other master.

'A man belonging entirely to one man' means the monotheist who is sincerely devoted only to the One Master.

In this verse, a parable has been recounted in order to convince man's conscience that belief in multiple gods is unreasonable. The worshipper of multiple deities is likened to a slave trying to please several masters. If creatures obeyed the commands of multiple gods, and every god commanded these creatures according to his own personal inclination, creatures would be confused as to which god they ought to obey.

It is very clear that this parable would only hold true once the masters (gods) are independent in decision-making and every one of them is an owner. It is in this case that this slave will be confused as to whom he should obey. If these masters were longitudinal with each other and all of them were under the command of one master who issued all the orders, the slave would not be confused.

This parable compares the polytheist with the monotheist; a man jointly owned by several contending masters refers to the polytheist and a man belonging entirely to one man alludes to the monotheist. Of course, it can be said that this parable is a clarification of the already discussed fourth proof called 'incompatibility'.

Fifteenth proof: detestation of monotheism

"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!"39

Aversion and detestation of monotheism are only conceivable once idols are believed to be Allah's equals. It is only in this case that refutation of multiple gods annoys polytheists and mentioning the oneness of God leads to their aversion.

Sixteenth proof: Sirat al-Tawhid

Sixteenth proof: Strat al-Tawhtd40

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

This *S***!** *rah*, which is a motto of monotheists, establishes the oneness of Allah, His Self–sufficiency, and negates any procreation from Him. At the end, it refutes His having any partner.

"Nor has He any equal": Repudiation of an equal proves that idolaters used to conceive their idols as Allah's equals.

Seventeenth proof: belief in the ownership of idols

Idolaters considered their idols as being latitudinal with Allah and having ownership. Of course, ownership bespeaks the equality of idols with Allah who would then be considered as the real owners and all creatures would be dependent on them.

Consider the following verse which proves that idolaters used to believe that their idols possessed ownership:

"Say, 'Shall I take for a guardian [anyone] other than Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds and is not fed?' Say, 'I have been commanded to be the first of those who submit [to Allah], and never be one of the polytheists'."41

"Shall I take for a guardian [anyone] other than Allah": in the book of Qur'anic exegesis entitled, "Majma' al-Bay\text{\text{\text{B}}}n", guardian has been interpreted as owner; that is to say, shall I take for an owner anyone except Allah? It asks whether I should take idols as my guardians and owners? It can be understood thereof that polytheists considered their idols as their owners, and thus believed in their ownership.

Eighteenth proof: using the word lord for idols

"Say, 'Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah, while He is the Lord of all things?' No soul does evil except against itself, and no bearer shall bear another's burden; then to your Lord will be your return, whereat He will inform you concerning that about which you used to differ."42

Lord [rabb] means manager, and managing and lordship occur under the auspices of independence. That is to say, idols, just like Allah, possess management. So far eighteen proofs have been presented to demonstrate that idolaters used to believe that their idols were independent of Allah and latitudinal with Him.

Now, we will embark on examining and critiquing the demonstrations of people who assert that idolaters used to believe that their idols were longitudinal with Allah and that they did not conceive them as being independent of Him.

Reasons for asserting that idolaters used to believe that idols were longitudinal with Allah and dependent on Him and critiquing those reasons

What is meant by idols being longitudinal with Allah is that polytheists used to believe that their idols were merely an intermediary devoid of any independence.

One reason why some eminent scholars have asserted that idolaters used to believe that their idols and that their management of affairs was dependent on Allah is Qur'anic verses which apply the word intercessor [shafe] to idols. The most explicit verse which bespeaks this belief is:

"They worship besides Allah that which neither causes them any harm, nor brings them any benefit, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allah.' Say, 'Will you inform Allah about something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?' Immaculate is He and exalted above [having] any partners that they ascribe [to Him]."43

Al-Mizin's statement regarding idolatrous beliefs

Two kinds of arguments have been put forward to explain that idols had no independence [and were not equated with Allah by idolaters]. We will first quote what has been said in "Al-Mezen":

"Idolaters used to worship idols with the intention of gaining nearness to the Lord of idols and thus get close to Allah, the High. Polytheists used to say, 'We have no access to the Lord of lords on account of being contaminated with sin and being entrapped in the material world; His threshold is holier than can be attained by us, and there is not the least affinity between Him and us. Therefore, it is necessary for us to seek nearness to Him through someone who is more beloved and nearer to Him, and to whom He has entrusted the management of creatures, namely the Lord of idols. Further, it is not feasible to find access to the Lord of idols except through subordinate idols and talismans. We worship idols so that their lord may intercede with Allah on our behalf and thus earn goodness and repel evil. Therefore, they truly used to worship idols so that they and the Lord of idols may intercede with Allah on their behalf.44

This indicates that idolaters used to consider their idols as being dependant upon, not independent of Allah."

The meaning of idols' intercession

What is meant by idols' intercession? Is it intercession in the Hereafter or in the world?

There are two different views in this regard: "Majma' al-Bay®n" 45 and "Kish®f" 46 hold it as eschatological intercession, but the author of "Al-M®z®n" maintains that it means worldly intercession. The author of "Al-M®z®n" asserts that idolaters wanted their idols, or the lord of their idols, to intercede with Allah on their behalf so that He may shower goodness on them, solve their worldly problems and repel evil from them. Idolaters did not believe in the Resurrection, that is why eschatological intercession is refuted and worldly intercession is affirmed. I also hold that polytheists did not believe in the existence of the Hereafter. This, however, calls for explanation, which will be offered later.

Another explanation asserting that idols lacked independence

The terms 'intercession' and 'intercessor' also indicate that idols were longitudinal, not latitudinal, with Allah.

Idolaters used to say that only the lord of idols can ask Allah to solve their problems. If they were independently effective, they would have directly solved their worshippers' problems without Allah's help. If idolaters used to consider their idols as independently effective and capable of solving their problems, they would have directly asked the idols to solve their problems without the need for mediation.

Idolaters used to say, "These are our intercessors with Allah". This itself indicates that idolaters did not believe that their idols were as equally effective as Allah, but that their power was gotten from Allah, which bespeaks belief that idols were conceived as being dependant on Allah. Intercession implicitly means that the one who asks for intercession has a problem which the intercessor is not capable of solving but can intercede with the one who is able to solve that merely on account of the honor and respect that he has.

The following are the verses similar to the above quoted verse:

"Look! [Only] exclusive faith is worthy of Allah, and those who take guardians besides Him [claiming,] We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah, Allah will judge between them concerning that about which they differ. Indeed, Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate. Had Allah intended to take a son, He could have chosen from those He has created whatever He wished. Immaculate is He! He is Allah, the One, the All-paramount."47

"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? And his 48 pliant: 'My Lord! Indeed these are a people who will not have faith!' So disregard them, and say, 'Peace!' Soon they will know."49

"Shall I take gods besides Him? If the All-beneficent desired to cause me any distress, their intercession will not avail me in any way, nor will they rescue me."50

Two assertions that idolaters used to believe that their idols were longitudinal with Allah

- 1. In this regard, "Majma' al-Bay®n" says, "Idolaters used to imagine that worshipping idols is more important than worshipping Allah himself. Worshipping Allah was considered better once it was done through worshipping idols, not directly."
- 2. What idolaters mean by "These are our intercessors with Allah" should be that they intercede with Allah's permission because they do not possess anything, yet Allah reprimands them that he has not given idols the permission to intercede with Him on behalf of anyone.

Critique of Al-Mizin's statement

Firstly, the author of "A/-MIZIN" has not provided Qur'anic proof for his assertion and has merely contented himself with recounting historical events, which lack authoritativeness and cannot be adduced as proof. Secondly, the above quoted statement contradicts some other statements in "A/-MIZIN"; for instance, the exegesis of verses 68 to 86 of Sirat al-Milah says:

"Belief that the cosmos has one creator is one of the perennial issues held by thinkers and its roots lie in man's primordial nature. If we properly meditate about idolatry, we will see that they initially used to believe that their idols were their intercessors with Allah on the basis of monotheism, and used to say that they worshipped idols so that they may gain nearness to Allah. They later abandoned this belief and came to believe that idols were independent of Allah and had fundamentality vis-à-vis Allah."51

A number of issues can be inferred from this statement:

The first is that monotheism [tawh detailed] is innate. Every man's primordial nature is monotheistic, and according to their natural disposition all human beings believe that Allah is one.

The second is that idolaters initially used to believe that idols were dependent on Allah, but with the passage of time, their beliefs changed and they came to believe idols were independent of Allah. The first part is not acceptable to us, but the second part indicates that the author of "Al-MIZIN" also held that idolaters finally came to believe that their idols were equal and latitudinal with Allah. This agrees

with what we hold concerning idolatrous beliefs.

Also, $AI-M \ z \ n$'s exegesis of verses 36–49 of $S \ rat \ H \ d$ further explains what has been said above regarding idolatrous beliefs that idols are dependent on Allah. The following is a summary of what " $AI-M \ z \ n$ " says:

"It has often been imagined that asking the Noble Prophet (s) and the Im ms ('a) for intercession and to alleviate one's problems, going on pilgrimage to their mausoleums, as well as honoring and kissing their holy shrines is idolatry, and that Allah has forbidden these practices because they entail considering someone other than Allah as being effective, a belief similar to what was held by idolaters, who used to say, 'We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah.'

"Worshipping any being other than Allah is polytheism, whether that being is a prophet ('a) or an im make mean imake mean and/or an oppressor.

"Certainly, whoever implores the help of the Noble Prophet (s) and the Infallible Im ms (a) does not worship them nor believe that they are independent of Allah in assisting, but he makes them intermediaries between him and Allah because they are His beloved servants and earns Allah's graces under the auspices of their intercession. This does not mean independence in conveyance [of graces].

"Allah censures polytheists because they used to believe in the independence of idols and used to conceive them as independent effectors; but when the She ahs make implorations for assistance, they never at all worship or consider the Noble Prophet (s) and the Imems ('a) as being independent [of Allah].

"The ones who raise objections and quibbles against the Shi ahs have to tell us what difference there is between kissing the Black Stone [hajar al-aswad] and the Ka bah and kissing holy shrines of the Noble Prophet (s) and Imims ('a); they consider the former as unobjectionable and the latter as polytheism.

If they respond that kissing the Kaʻbah is an exception, the invalidity of the response is clear because polytheism is proved by rational evidence, and rational rules are without any exception. If kissing the Black Stone [hajar al-aswad] and the Kaʻbah are the same as worship, then kissing holy shrines and imploring the help of the Noble Prophet (s) and the Infallible Im®ms ('a) is also the same as worship and is not polytheism."52

Even if good points appear in $AI-M \ z \ n$'s statement, but still this objection remains that there is a contradiction between its assertion that idolaters used to believe that their idols were independent of Allah and the earlier statement that they used to consider their idols as intermediaries between them and Allah.

Summary of Al-Mizin's statements

It is possible to strike a balance between the contradictory statements of "A/-MIZIN" by saying that the report which indicates that idolaters used to consider their idols as being dependent on Allah refers to their original beliefs; that is to say, in the beginning, idolaters held that the universe has only one creator and idols are holy beings which mediate between Allah and His servants.

And those statements which say that idolaters used to believe that idols were independent of Allah indicate their later beliefs; convictions which they later came to hold after being deviated from their earlier beliefs. Therefore, those Qur'anic verses in which the word 'intercession' has been used such as "We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah" bespeak their initial beliefs and those verses which indicate that they considered their idols as independent refer to their later beliefs. But this differentiating between initial and later idolatrous beliefs is itself a historical account which is not based on any Qur'anic verse and is not authoritative.

An independent summary

It may be said that man possesses two faculties, the faculty of the intellect and the faculty of the imagination. When idolaters examined idolatry with their intellect, they used to admit that the cosmos has only One Creator and Governor, as many Qur'anic verses say that if idolaters were asked who the creator of the heavens and the earth was, they would respond that it was Allah. According to this perspective, they used to consider their idols as intercessors which are dependent on Allah. But once they got deluded by their imagination and blind following of their ancestors, their primordial nature was suppressed and their illusions used to lead them into imagining that their idols were equal and independent of Allah.

Permitted and forbidden intercession

The intercession of an intercessor if considered as independent is prohibited in the Holy Qur'an, but the intercession of a dependent intercessor is permitted. The author of "AI-MIZIN" has comprehensively discussed this under the verse:

"Beware of the Day when no soul shall compensate for another, neither any intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any ransom shall be received from it, nor will they be helped."53

The author of "AI-MIZIN" explains that intercession with Allah's authorization is permitted, but intercession without Allah's authorization, where the intercessor is considered as independent, is forbidden.

We have presented these two beliefs and clarified that intercession does not need to be longitudinal, but can be latitudinal as well. Idolaters used to believe that their idols can intercede with Allah on their behalf

despite being independent. This is in fact our assertion.

In order for this assertion to become clear, we will adduce a summary of what "AI-M®z®n", under the title "Kal®m f® Ma'n® aI-Tawh®d f® Qur'®n" (The Meaning of Tawh®d in the Qur'an)54, says in this regard:

"The monism of idolaters was numerical monism and the monotheism of monotheists is absolute Oneness of Allah; that is to say, monotheism which does not have a second. Whoever delves deeper into Islamic sciences will doubtless understand that monotheistic problems are among the most difficult and complex Islamic propositions from the viewpoint of conception and cognition.

Of course, intellectuals will have varying deductions and affirmations of such a problem because human beings are not the same; some people are intelligent, some are dull and others are average and this is what causes differences in understanding. This matter has been emphasized by the Holy Qur'an, when it states:

"Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only those who possess intellect take admonition." 55

In spite of being innate for all, everyone's concept of monotheism is different. Idolaters came to a stage where they believed that the idols they were making from wood or stone were Allah's equals and partners and used to worship and submit to them in the same way that they worshipped Allah. They even went so far as to leave Allah for idols, and imagined that idols had overcome and subdued Allah.

It is for this reason that they opted for idols and completely turned their backs on Allah. And the idolater came to ascribe the attribute of oneness and unity, which was a prerogative of Allah, to idols and said that God is one in the same way that an idol is one. Of course, numerical unity means that Allah is one god and an idol is one god, and idols are [countable] gods. They used to fantasize that every one of the idols is a god and that is why they asked with surprise, when the multiplicity of gods was negated:

"Has he reduced the gods to one god? This is indeed an odd thing!"56

The Holy Qur'an used to invite them to real and absolute monotheism. The Holy Qur'an used to invite them to Divine Unity which is unique and matchless, namely the Unlimited God, who has subdued all existents and is absolutely Self-sufficient. The rest of existents are needy and they are a shadow of that Real Being. Such a being can never be numerical. It is equal to one. Every other being which can be pointed at is related to it as an attachment which exists under its auspices. He has no equal, and therefore no second or third.

The monotheism which the Holy Qur'an presents is above numerical monotheism. Among the *had* ths, only in "*Nahj al-Bal ghah*" has Im \('a') explained absolute monotheism in the best way. His Holiness ('a) has refuted all kinds of unity which denote multiplicity of the Divine Essence of Allah."57

A point worth paying heed to in "AI-MEZEN" is that it has clearly explained that idolaters not only used to believe that their idols were latitudinal with Allah and independent of Him, but went so far as to leave Allah for idols, whom they conceived as being the real managers of the universe. This statement of "AI-MEZEN" has correctly explained idolatrous beliefs.

Conclusion

With regard to the aforementioned issues, belief that idols were intercessors does not denote negating their independence, but that idols could either solve the problems of idolaters themselves or ask Allah to solve them. Considering that idolaters believed that Allah had been subdued by idols, it is likely that they conjectured that idols could force Him to solve their problems.

It can also be said that idolaters used to believe that both Allah and idols used to jointly solve their problems, even if Allah's power was more than theirs. This also denotes independence for idols, no matter how limited. Independence did not mean that idols had all the powers which Allah possessed, but did have the power to solve some of the problems without Allah's permission.

Therefore, it is possible to strike a compromise between independence and intercession.

1yatull®h Zanj®n®'s assertion

"Polytheism is of two kinds; latitudinal polytheism which conceives idols as being equal with Allah, and longitudinal polytheism. Idolaters held the second kind of polytheism. A number of deviated groups believed in the first kind of polytheism; such groups as the Zoroastrians, who conceived that Yazd®n was the manifestation of goodness and Ahr®man was the manifestation of badness; as well as the Christians who believed in the Trinity, which consists of god the father, god the son (Jesus Christ) and god the holy spirit.

But the idolaters who had stood up against the prophets ('a) and were called *mushrik* (polytheist or idolater) used to believe that their idols were dependent on Allah. Idolaters did not believe in a partner as regards creation. Their only doctrinal fault was that they believed that Allah had a partner in lordship, in the sense that they had fixed idols as intermediaries and believed that their idols held a lofty position before Allah.

Belief that idols are longitudinal with Allah is of two kinds:

One kind is permitted by Allah and the other kind is not permitted by Allah. In the case of being permitted, Allah has granted his servants authorization to turn to those intermediaries for help and ask these mediators to alleviate their problems. This is contrary to the second kind, where Allah has not granted such permission, but is based on blind imitation of their forefathers.

The fault of idolatrous beliefs was that they belonged to the second kind, which has not been permitted by Allah. That is to say, their belief that idols are longitudinal with Allah and that they are go-betweens between Allah and created beings was not based on any rational proof and demonstrative reasoning. It is for this reason that they were reproached by Allah. This verse bespeaks this issue:

"The polytheists will say, 'Had Allah wished, we would not have ascribed any partner [to Him], nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything.' Those who were before them had denied sell-likewise until they tasted Our punishment. Say, 'Do you have any [revealed] knowledge that you can produce before us? You follow nothing but conjectures, and you do nothing but surmise'."59

Idolaters used to accuse Allah of giving them permission to take idols as their mediators with Allah.

The following verse also denotes this issue:

"How could I fear what you ascribe [to Him] as [His] partners, when you do not fear ascribing to Allah partners for which He has not sent down any authority to you? So [tell me,] which of the two sides has a greater right to safety, if you know?"60

The key word in these verses is that Allah tells idolaters that they hold a belief for which they cannot produce any demonstrative reasoning and logic, and that Allah has not given them the permission to take idols as their mediators with Him. Yes, polytheists of the Arabian Peninsula used to believe that idols are dependent on Allah and that there is only one creator for the cosmos, as the following verse explicitly states:

"If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth, and disposed the sun and the moon?' They 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."61

Therefore, these verses indicate that idolaters used to consider their idols as intercessors and did not believe in their independence vis-à-vis Allah, and Allah censured them because they had conceived this belief out of conjecture, without having any proof and demonstrative reasoning, and without any permission from Allah.

The difference between idolaters and us, the Shī 'ahs, who believe that the Noble Prophet (s) and the Imī (a) are intercessors, is that we have Allah's permission to take the Infallibles (a) as our mediators with Him while idolaters did not have such permission.

If their belief had been based on proof and demonstrative reasoning, there would not have been any objection against it, in the same way that there is no objection against Muslims imploring help from the

Black Stone [hajar al-aswad], itself a stone, because they have proof and demonstrative reasoning for its permissibility.

Idolaters never considered their idols as independent gods to worship, but as their mediators with Allah, as this verse indicates:

"Look! [Only] exclusive faith is worthy of Allah, and those who take guardians besides Him [claiming,] 'We only worship them so that they may bring us nearer to Allah,' Allah will indeed judge between them concerning that about which they differ. Indeed, Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate."62

Their religious rites, such as animal sacrifices and others, were done with the intention of gaining nearness to idols so that they may mediate between Allah and them (i.e., idolaters)."63

A study and critique of gyatuligh Zanjgng's assertion

It ought not to be left unsaid that his assertion is very different from the statements of his mentor, 'All®mah Tab®tab®'®. As has already been explained, in "Al-M®Z®n", 'All®mah Tab®tab®'® has stated that idolaters initially used to believe that idols are longitudinal with Allah, but later deviated from this belief and came to hold that idols are independent of Allah. 'All®mah Tab®tab®'® states that idolaters went so far as to leave Allah for idols, believing that He had been subdued by them. They called their idols gods and considered Allah as numerically one.

It appears that <code>[yatull]</code> Zanj<code>[n]</code> did not thoroughly examine Qur'anic verses about idolatry and only focused on his opinion when interpreting these verses. Previous to this, we comprehensively examined verses which indicate that idolaters used to believe that their idols were independent of Allah and presented eighteen proofs for this assertion.

We advise readers of this book to refer to previous discussions. Saying that idolaters used to believe that idols are longitudinal with Allah but that their belief was not sanctioned by Allah cannot by itself solve the problem, but calls for a detailed discussion, a part of which has already passed and the rest of the discussion will come later.

We concur with <code>[]</code> yatull <code>[]</code> h Zanj <code>[]</code> assertion that idolaters used to believe that the cosmos has only one creator, and we thoroughly discussed this under the title "Praiseworthy Idolatrous Beliefs". But this admission by idolaters that the cosmos has only one creator does not necessitate the belief that idols are longitudinal with Allah, but is also compatible with the belief that they are latitudinal with Him.

The author of "AI-MIZIN", 'Allimah Tabitabi'i, has interpreted those verses which indicate idolatrous beliefs that idols are longitudinal with Allah as bespeaking initial idolatrous beliefs, and he has interpreted those verses which indicate that idolaters held that idols are latitudinal with Allah as bespeaking later idolatrous beliefs.

We, however, have interpreted these two sets of verses differently. We have interpreted those verses which indicate idolatrous beliefs that idols are longitudinal with Allah as meaning that idolaters used to rationally conceive the oneness of Allah by means of their reason, but were misled and deluded into believing that idols were latitudinal with Allah and independent of Him in their actions. We have also explained that sometimes idolaters used to believe that their idols were intermediaries between them and Allah.

The author of this work is of the belief that idolaters used to believe that their idols were latitudinal with Allah right from the beginning, and this has been clearly demonstrated by previously adduced proofs.

A thorough response and critique of certain parts of syatulish Zanjsns's assertion

Permissible intercession is longitudinal and forbidden intercession is latitudinal.

In various verses, forbidden intercession has been enumerated and also, permissible intercession has been mentioned. In brief, it ought to be known that verses which forbid intercession are related to circumstances where the intercessor is deemed as independent in alleviating problems, and permissible intercession is related to circumstances where the intercessor is dependent on Allah and longitudinal with Him. For more explanation, we will initially adduce verses that are related to this subject:

First verse:

"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 due to their fear of Him." 64

Second verse:

"Intercession will not avail that Day except from him whose word the All-beneficent allows and approves."65

Third verse:

"Intercession is of no avail with Him except for those whom He permits."66

Fourth verse:

"Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission?"67

There are in the Holy Qur'an other verses similar to the aforementioned ones. The purport of all of them is that one type of intercession is permissible and another type is forbidden. In other words, one kind of intercession has external existence and another kind does not have external existence.

Our assertion is that idolaters used to believe in forbidden intercession or independent intercession, duly rejected by the Qur'an. If polytheists had believed in intercession contingent upon Allah's permission, there was no need for the revelation of verses to disapprove of them because their belief would have been the same as that of monotheists.

The meaning of intercession with Allah's permission

The phrase 'with Allah's permission' in Qur'anic verses has been interpreted in several ways; for instance, in some verses the criterion has been Allah's pleasure. "Al-M®Z®n" states that different expressions indicate different meanings, but it can be gathered from "Majma' al-Bay®n" that different expressions denote one and the same meaning. The author of this book68 also believes that different expressions mean one and the same thing. What is important is that the actual meaning of 'intercession with Allah's permission' should be clarified.

Allah's pleasure with the intercession of intercessors means that there in no polarization or opposition between Allah's pleasure and the pleasure of intercessors. In reality, Allah's pleasure manifests itself in the pleasure of intercessors.

In other words, Allah's pleasure is fulfilled through the pleasure of intercessors. On the contrary, the pleasure of intercessors is dependent upon Allah's pleasure. The choice of Allah is loved by intercessors, and reciprocally the choice of intercessors is loved by Allah; it is for this reason the He has entrusted the examination of His servants' deeds to them.

One of the ways to attain Allah's mercy is to get in touch with His worthy servants; that is to say, these interceding servants are so high that every one who gets in touch with them gains access to a higher level of existence. The Imms ('a) are the loftiest level of Allah's grace. Imm al-Sidiq ('a) interpreted the verse,

"To Allah belong the best of names, so supplicate Him by them"69

as "Verily, we are Allah's best names; the [good] deeds of a servant who does not know us are not acceptable." 70

Every person who enquires into the erudition of 'Als ibn Abs Tslib ('a) will discern that it is not a kind of acquired knowledge, that it has a fountainhead, and that fountainhead is Allah. One will be led from power and miracles of the Imsms ('a) to its source, Allah. Likewise, the rest of the beautiful attributes of the Imsms ('a) all guide us to Allah."71

Whoever gets attached to an Infallible Im®m ('a) gets connected to a sea of perfection. Our Infallible Im®ms ('a) are like rivers which flow into an endless ocean (Allah), and we are like tributaries which get connected to the ocean by means of these rivers, and there is no separation between these three. We get connected to the boundless ocean by getting attached to the rivers. Whoever gets attached to Im®m al–Husayn ('a) gets attached to the Noble Prophet (s), and whoever gets connected to the Noble Prophet (s) gets connected to Allah because the pleasure of Im®m al–Husayn ('a) is the pleasure of the Noble Prophet (s), and the pleasure of the Noble Prophet (s) is the pleasure of Allah. The Noble Prophet (s) and the Im®ms ('a) are a series and levels of existence.

But idolatrous beliefs with respect to intercession were not like this; they believed that idols are independent of Allah and have autonomous powers by which they alleviate man's problems. Idolaters were living in an environment where ignorance held sway. In order to make this assertion clear, we will cite an example from "Al-Mezen" to show how superficial and illusory their outlook was, and how they used to imagine that Allah, just like idols, can be bought and sold.

Idolatrous beliefs described in Al-Mizin

It has thus been written in the Qur'anic exegesis of "AI-MIZIN", "People of the world have gotten used to living on the basis of mutual social cooperation. A baker helps a doctor, and a doctor reciprocally assists a baker. The whole society is run on the basis of mutual cooperation. Sometimes, man is faced with a problem which compels him to ask other people to help him. In every society, there is a government presided over by a ruler. Sometimes, the ruler punishes an offender.

Whenever the offender wants to go unpunished, he looks for an intermediary whose support and influence over the ruler can be used to escape punishment. In former nations, there existed idolaters who believed that the hereafter is exactly like this world, and the kind of relationships which govern the Hereafter are exactly like the relations which govern worldly social relations. They used to imagine that in the Hereafter, just like in this world, problems can be solved through intermediaries.

They used to offer sacrifices and gifts to their idols so that they may be forgiven by idols if idols themselves got angry with them, and act as their intermediaries before Allah in the event that He is displeased with them.

They used to think that they could thus escape Allah's retribution. Sometimes, they even used to bury their dead with weapons so that they may be able to defend themselves in the other world, and at times they used to bury a man together with a slave girl so that she may be his spouse in the Hereafter, and/or with a strong and well-built fighter so that he may defend the dead man from other people's attacks in the Afterworld. Their conception of the Hereafter was exactly like their perception of this world. The Holy Qur'an thus dismisses their beliefs:

"Certainly, you have come to Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and left behind

whatever We had bestowed on you. We do not see your intercessors with you, who you claimed to be [Our] partners in deciding you[r] [fate]. Certainly, all links between you have been cut, and what you used to claim has forsaken you!"72

Here, it is advisable to adduce verses which indicate that idolaters used to believe in independent not dependent intercession, so that the invalidity of <code>[yatull]</code> Zanj<code>[n]</code> assertion can be clearly shown.

Polytheistic beliefs that idols intercede independently

There are a number of verses in the Holy Qur'an which denote that idolaters used to believe that the intercession of idols is independent, not longitudinal.

First verse:

"Have they taken intercessors besides Allah? Say, 'What! Even though they have no control over anything and cannot apply reason?' Say, 'All intercession rests with Allah. To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; then you will be brought back to Him'."73

There are a number of clues in this verse which indicate that idolaters used to believe that their idols used to intercede independently.

First Clue: what the above quoted verses mean is that all help rests with Allah. This is a clue that the meaning of intercession in the sentence "Have they taken intercessors besides Allah?" is help and assistance. That is to say, have you taken idols as your helpers and supporters despite that all assistance is in the hands of Allah? That aid that you are seeking from idols belongs to Allah.

This clue makes it clear that idolaters construed the intercession of idols as assistance to them, and they used to believe that their idols were capable of helping them independently, and solve whatever problem they were faced with. That Allah has differentiated between His intercession and that of idols clarifies that idolaters used to believe that the intercession of their idols was independent [of Allah's intercession].

But according to the belief that the intercession of idols is longitudinal, there is no incompatibility between their intercession and that of Allah, because the source of this intercession is the same. For instance, we, the Sherahs, who believe that the Infallible Imems ('a) render assistance to us, maintain that the help which the Infallible Imems ('a) give to us is longitudinal with Allah, and there is no incompatibility between the assistance rendered to us by the Infallible Imems ('a) and that it is given to us by Allah.

Second Clue: If idolaters used to conceive their idols as being longitudinal with Allah in intercession, there was no need to for Allah to refute their ownership by saying, "Have they taken intercessors besides Allah? Say, 'What! Even though they have no control over anything and cannot apply reason?!"

This verse means that idols own nothing, and this refutation only makes sense once idols are considered as being latitudinal with Allah.

Third Clue: Verse 45 of *S*[®]*rat al–Zumar*, which is a continuation of the above quoted verses, states:

"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!"

This verse indicates that their idols were more important for them and that they used to rejoice once their idols were mentioned, but mentioning Allah alone used to make their hearts shrink with sadness. This by itself shows that they used to believe that their idols were latitudinal with Allah and independent of Him

If idols are considered as being longitudinal with Allah, their belief would be like that of the She ahs with respect to the Imems (a). In the same way that remembrance of the Imems (a) does not give rise to disgust at Allah, so also will the remembrance of Imems (a) not cause aversion to Allah because it will be exactly the same as remembrance of Him. Disgust arises from polarity and separation.

Fourth Clue: The fourth clue is the phrase 'besides Allah' in the verse "...but when others are mentioned besides Him, behold, they rejoice!" This phrase denotes disagreement and contradiction between the intercession of idols and that of Allah, and this is compatible with the belief that the intercession of idols is independent of Allah and latitudinal with it; that is to say, the idolaters used to imagine that the intercession of their idols is besides that of Allah.

Second verse:

"Certainly, you have come to us alone, just as We created you the first time, and left behind whatever We had bestowed on you. We do not see your intercessors with you—those whom you claimed to be [Our] partners in [deciding] you[r] [fate]. Certainly, all links between you have been cut, and what you used to claim has forsaken you!"74

In "Majma' al-Bay n", the verse "...those whom you claimed to be [Our] partners in [deciding] you[r] [fate]" has thus been interpreted, "You used to imagine that your idols are our partners." In this verse, the word 'partners' has been applied to 'intercessors'. The above quoted verse means that idolaters used to imagine that their intercessors were Allah's partners and thus independent of Him in affecting cosmic affairs.

Third verse:

"Shall I take gods besides Him? If the All-beneficent desired to cause me any distress their intercession will not avail me in any way, nor will they rescue me." 76

This verse also indicates that idolaters used to believe that their idols intercede independently, and there are clues in this regard.

First Clue: The first clue is the phrase 'besides Him' in the verse "Shall I take gods besides Him?"

Second Clue: The word 'gods' in the verse, "Shall I take gods besides Him?"

Third Clue: The third clue is the verse "... their intercession will not avail me in any way, nor will they rescue me." This indicates that idolaters used to believe that idols could avail them in some way. They would only be able to help if they were independent of Him, because according to the belief that idols are longitudinal with Allah, there is no need to refute the intercession of idols because it would be exactly like that of Allah. Truly, if idolaters had held that idols are longitudinal with Allah in affecting cosmic affairs, there would have been no need to say, "If the All-beneficent desired to cause me any distress their intercession will not avail me in any way, nor will they rescue me", because according to the belief that idols are longitudinal with Allah, the distress they would cause would considered as having been caused by Allah and the benefit they would grant would be conceived as having been granted by Allah.

It can be inferred from these verses that idolaters used to believe that the intercession of idols is independent intercession, not longitudinal and dependent, and thus the incorrectness of <code>[]yatull_h</code> Zanj_n_s assertion that idolaters used to believe in dependent intercession becomes apparent.

A critique of another part of syatullsh Zanjsns's assertion

∎yatull®h Zanj®n® has said that the idolatrous belief that idols are longitudinal with Allah was of the forbidden kind.

We would like to prove that this division is not justifiable at all and being longitudinal is equal with being permitted. The assertion that belief can both be longitudinal with Allah and both forbidden is a baseless and invalid argument.

It ought to be explained that permission refers to existential, not legislative, authorization. Existential authorization denotes affiliating a mediator with the category of causes and effects. If we assert that the Noble Prophet (s) and the Infallible Imems (a) are permitted to intercede and alleviate the problems of those who entreat them, we mean that they are affiliated with the series of causes in connecting human beings with Allah.

For instance, water is wet because Allah has permitted it to be wet. If water was not existentially wet, it means that Allah had not permitted it to be wet. But the fact that it is wet indicates that Allah has given it the permission to be wet. It does not make sense to say that being wet is of two kinds, permitted and forbidden, because the very fact that it is wet means that it is permitted to be wet, and not being wet means that it is not permitted to be wet.

The effectiveness of [the intercession of] idols or any other mediator is also the same [as the above mentioned example]. If their intercession is effective, then it means that Allah has granted permission for it. If it is not effective, then He has not given authorization for it. In short, this discourse is existential, not mentally posited and relative. When it is asserted that the Infallible Imem ('a) is authorized to intercede, it means that Allah has granted him an existential level which connects to Allah whoever is in touch with him ('a). This is a stable matter, whether one likes it or not.

If idols are not permitted to intercede for anyone with Allah, it means that Allah has not placed them in the domain of causes and effects. This means that they are fundamentally not longitudinal with Him. They maybe believed as being longitudinal with Him but have not been given permission to intercede for anyone.

We assert that the necessity of being longitudinal with Allah is being permitted to intercede with Him. The two cannot be separated. Being longitudinal with Allah means existing in the series of causes and effects and being effective in the existing cosmos because Allah has created them in this way. If Allah has not placed them in the series of causes and effects, then it means that they are not longitudinal with Him at all, and this is what not being permitted to intercede for anyone with Him.

We, therefore, conclude that dividing intercession into permitted and forbidden intercession is null and void.

A defense of syatulish Zanjsns's assertion and a response to it

Tyatull The Zanj Tn Temperature may justify his assertion in this way, "What we mean by saying that idolaters used to believe that their idols are longitudinal with Allah is that they are used to believe that their idols are placed in the series of causes and effects, and are effective in cosmic affairs due to the existential level granted to them by Allah.

And what we mean by saying that their belief was not permitted by Allah is that He refutes having placed them in the series of causes and effects and having granted them the power to be effective in cosmic affairs. We also mean to say that Allah has stated that this belief is devoid of proof and demonstrative reasoning; that is to say, Allah has not placed idols in the series of causes and effects. This is what being longitudinal without permission means.

The response is that the basis of such a belief is incompatible with monotheism from the viewpoint of affirmation or existence; that is to say, the belief of someone who holds that another being is a mediator between him and Allah, and that the mediator derives whatever it has from Allah is not incompatible with monotheism because nothing contradicting the oneness of Allah can be witnessed in his belief.

Of course, a belief that does not correspond with reality and existence is a false belief. But there is a difference between a belief that does not correspond with reality and that which does not correspond

with monotheism. For instance, the belief of a person who maintains that water is not wet is contrary to reality, but not contrary to monotheism.

The one who believes that water is not wet ought to be censured for asserting something that is contrary to reality, but cannot be accused of holding a belief contrary to monotheism, and hence cannot be censured for his belief. Therefore, this can be the belief that was held by idolaters.

I feel that in the Holy Qur'an, Allah has censured the People of the Book [ahl al-kitɪb] 77 for changing divine injunctions and attributing lies to Him, but He has not driven them out of the realm of monotheism. Instead, He has called them liars.

- 1. S@rat al-Shu'ar@' 26:92-101.
- 2. Srat al-An'm 6:1.
- 3. Srat al-Naml 27:60.
- 4. Srat al-An'm 6:150.
- 5. Nahj al-Balghah, sermon [khutbah] no. 90.
- 6. Sirat al-Bagarah 2:163.
- 7. STrat Il 'ImrIn 3:62.
- 8. Strat tl 'Imrtn 3:58-64.
- 9. Head tax imposed on all non-Muslims living under the protection of an Islamic government.
- 10. Sgrat al-Nisg' 4:171-172.
- 11. Tafser 'Illeyyen, p. 105, footnote of this very verse.
- 12. Serat al-Me'idah 5:73.
- 13. Strat al-An'tm 6:19.
- 14. Serat al-A'ref 7:59.
- 15. Serat al-A'ref 7:65.
- 16. Srat al-A'rf 7:73.
- 17. Srat al-A'rrf 7:85.
- 18. Serat al-Nahl 16:51.
- 19. Ellipsis: the omitted phrase here and in the following verses (61-64) is 'better or the partners they ascribe to Him'.
- 20. Srat al-Naml 27:59-64.
- 21. That is, in the heavens and the earth.
- 22. Srat al-Anbiy 21:91.
- 23. Sாat al-Mu'min 23:91.
- 24. Srat al-Baqarah 2:165.
- 25. Srat al-Ra'd 13:16.
- 26. Serat Luqmen 31:10-11.
- 27. Sirat Luqmin 31:13.
- 28. That is, the gods worshipped by the polytheists.
- 29. Srat Saba' 34:22.
- 30. Strat Ftir 35:40-41.
- 31. That is, after His withholding it. Or 'no one can release it except Him.'
- 32. Serat Fetir 35:2.
- 33. Serat al-Seffet 37:35-36.

- 34. That is, in the polytheistic creed prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia.
- 35. STrat STd 38:5-7.
- 36. Sirat al-Zumar 39:14.
- <u>37.</u> The parable compares the polytheist with the monotheist. The worshipper of multiple deities is likened to a slave trying to please several masters.
- 38. Srat al-Zumar 39:29.
- 39. S rat al-Zumar 39:45.
- 40. The Serah—also called Serat al-Ikhles—is a statement of Islamic monotheism which negates any kind of anthropomorphism that may compromise pure monotheism or tawhed. It is called 'Serat al-Ikhles' as it purges tawhed of deviant ideas and posits it in its exclusive purity.
- 41. Srat al-An'm 6:14.
- 42. S@rat al-An'@m 6: 164.
- 43. S@rat Y@nus 10:18.
- 44. Al-M®z®n, vol. 10, p. 27, exegesis of the above quoted verse.
- 45. Majma' al-Bayen, vol. 5, p. 167, exegesis of the above quoted verse.
- 46. Kish f, vol. 2, p. 185, exeges is of the above quoted verse.
- 47. Srat al-Zumar 39:3-4.
- 48. That is, of the Apostle of Allah (s).
- 49. Srat al-Zukhruf 43:85-89.
- 50. Strat Yt Stn 36:23.
- 51. Al-Mrzn, vol. 6, p. 109.
- 52. Al-M@z@n, vol. 10, p. 305; exegesis of S@rat H@d 11:36-49.
- 53. Srat al-Bagarah 2:48.
- 54. Al-M®z®n, vol. 1, p. 167, exegesis of the above quoted verse.
- 55. Sirat al-Zumar 39:9.
- 56. STrat STd 38:5-7.
- 57. Al-Mezen, vol. 6, p. 90, exegesis of verses 68-86 of Serat al-Medidah.
- 58. Or 'those who were before them had lied likewise', in accordance with an alternate reading. (See al-Zamakhshar®, al-R®z®, and al-T®abris®).
- 59. Sgrat al-An'gm 6: 148.
- 60. S@rat al-An'@m 6:81.
- 61. S rat al-'Ankab t 29:61-63.
- 62. Serat al-Zumar 39:3.
- 63. Mi'yer al-Shirk fe al-Qur'en, pp. 33-41.
- 64. Srat al-Anbiy 21:28.
- 65. Strat Ttt Ht 20:109.
- 66. Srat Saba' 34:23.
- 67. Serat al-Baqarah 2:255.
- 68. A Study of Polytheism and Idolatry in the Qur'an.
- 69. Srat al-A'rf 7: 180.
- 70. Tafs T NT al-Thaqalayn, vol. 2, p. 103, exeges is of the above quoted verse from UsT al-KTT.
- 71. Remarked in an academic session on ethics which the author of this book attended in person.
- 72. Serat al-Me'idah 5:94. Refer to "Al-Mezen", exegesis of verse 48 of Serat al-Baqarah, which says, "Beware of the Day when soul shall compensate for another, neither any intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any ransom shall be received from it, nor will they be helped."
- 73. Sirat al-Zumar 39:43-44.
- 74. Srat al-An'm 6:94.
- 75. Majma' al-Bayn, vol. 4, p. 116.

- 76. Strat Yt Stn 36:23.
- 77. Jews and Christians.

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