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Question 13: Is seeking help from someone other than God regarded as a kind of polytheism {shirk}?

Reply: From the viewpoint of reason and logic of revelation, just as all human beings, nay, all phenomena of the world, are in need of God in their creation, they are also in need of Him for their subsistence.

In this regard, the Holy Qur'an states:

"ياأيها الناس أنتم الفقراء إلى الله والله هو الغنيّ الحميد"

"O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah—He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable."¹

In another place, it attributes all victories to the Lord of the worlds, stating:

"وما النصر إلا من عند الله العزيز الحكيم"

"And victory comes only from Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise."²

Abiding by this principle confirmed by Islam, we, Muslims, recite this noble verse in every prayer:

"إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين"

"You {alone} do we worship, and to You {alone} do we turn for help."³

Now, let us clarify the abovementioned question:

Seeking help from someone other than God is viewed in two ways:

1. The first is that we seek assistance from another man or phenomenon by holding that he or it is independent in his or its power or action, and supposing him or it as needless of God in giving assistance.

Without any doubt, seeking assistance from someone other than God in this way is sheer polytheism. The Holy Qur'an points to its futility in the following verse:

﴿قُلْ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَعْصِمُكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ سُوءًا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ رَحْمَةً وَلَا يَجِدُونَ لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا﴾

“Say, ‘Who is it that can protect you from Allah should He desire to cause you ill, or desire to grant you mercy?’ They will not find for themselves any protector or helper besides Allah.”⁴

2. The second is that we seek help from another person by holding that that person is someone who is in need of God, as not independent and that his power comes from God, the Exalted, through which to solve some of the problems of the servants (of God).

On the basis of this mindset, the one from whom we seek is granted “mediation” by God, the Exalted, for fulfilling some of the needs. Seeking help in this way is, in reality, seeking assistance from God Who has endowed existence to these mediums and intermediaries, and granted power and effect to them for fulfilling others’ needs. In principle, the life of every human being is founded on seeking help from mediums and intermediaries without which man’s life will be chaotic.

Now, if we look at these mediums as the agents for fulfilling the assistance of God and hold that they have been originated and granted power by Him, in this case seeking help will by no means contradict monotheism.

If a devoted godly farmer seeks aid through such agents like land, water, air, and the sun to plant seeds and bring them up until they yield fruit, he has actually sought help from God because it is He Who has given power and activity to these agents.

It is clear that seeking assistance in the mentioned way is totally consistent with the spirit of monotheism. In fact, the Glorious Qur'an invites us to seek assistance through such things like patience and prayer as in the following verse:

واستعينوا بالصبر والصلوة.

“And take recourse in patience and prayer.”⁵

It is evident that constancy and patience is a human attribute, yet we are invited to seek assistance through it. The aforementioned way of seeking assistance is not inconsistent with turning for help to God as stated in the following verse:

"إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ"

“You {alone} do we worship, and to You {alone} do we turn for help.”⁶

1. Surah Fatir (or al-Mala'ikah) 35:15.

2. Surah Al 'Imran 3:126.

3. Surah al-Fatihah 1:5.

4. Surah al-Ahzab 33:17.

5. Surah al-Baqarah 2:45.

6. Surah al-Fatihah 1:5.

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