

Tawhid from the Shi`ah and Wahhabi Points of View

The negation of reasoning {ta`aqqul} in the Wahhabi school and its consequence

A kind of intellectual negation can be observed in the school of Wahhabism. Although Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab regarded himself an enlightened person, criticizing the four Suuni schools of thought, some Shi`ah beliefs, and reproaching them for speculatively interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, he used to resort to secondary issues concerning the teachings about God, the Exalted. He believed in a sort of anthropomorphism for God and in this regard he used to content himself with the outward purport of the verses.

His supporters also reject reflection and reasoning about the verses of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, negating the rational sciences, philosophy and mysticism {*irfan*}. They are afflicted with a close-mindedness and intellectual frigidity to the extent that they are incapable of applying the precepts of the school {*madrasah*}, the Qur'anic verses and the traditions to the demands of time. It was for this reason that they initially declared the telephone, mass communication devices and others as religiously unlawful, and strongly resisted them, but later they finally relented.

Since they are incapable of applying the concepts such as intercession {*shafa'ah*}, *tawassul* and infallibility {*ismah*} of the Prophet (s) in the light of contemporary thinking their viewpoint concerning the prophets, the Holy Prophet (s) in particular, and the saints is narrow. They treat the spiritual station of the prophets and the saints as identical with the rest of people, thinking them as being annihilated and nonexistent after death, while the Shi`ah and other Islamic schools of thought consider them to be present and watching over us. In a result, the Wahhabis consider *tawassul* to the prophets and *awliya'*, entreating them and asking for their *shafa'ah* an innovation in religion {*bid'ah*} and polytheism.

A few words from Martyr Professor Murtadha Mutahhari

Martyr Professor Murtadha Mutahhari says:

The Wahhabis believe that God has two realms. One is related to His Essence and no one has the right to enter into this realm. Worship {*ibadah*} and *tawassul* pertain to God and are exclusive to this axis. The other realm is related to the natural affairs of the world in which the will and discretion of man have a role and it has nothing to do with God.^{[1](#)}

He also says:

According to us, however, conceiving of two realms for the creation; thinking of God as belonging to one realm and the creatures, man in particular, to be in the other realm; and considering these two as distinctly separated is unacceptable and itself as a kind of polytheism. We should not separate God from His acts and His creatures; for, we believe that:

﴿أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا﴾

That power, altogether, belongs to Allah,^{[2](#)}

And:

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ.

“There is no might and power except from Allah, the Exalted and Great.”^{[3](#)}

Then, he says:

Contrary to common notions, Wahhabism is not only an anti-Imamate theory but rather, before being anti-Imamate, it is anti-*tawhid* and anti-human. It is anti-*tawhid* because it advocates the division of work between the Creator {*khaliq*} and the creature {*makhluq*}. In addition, it upholds a sort of hidden polytheism in Essence {*shirk-e dhati*}. It is anti-human because it fails to comprehend the talent of man that makes him superior to the angels, and according to the text of the Qur'an, elevates him to the status of vicegerency of Allah {*khilafat Allah*} who ordered the angels to prostrate before him. It reduces him into a mere natural animal.”^{[4](#)}¹⁸

Tawhid according to the Shi`ah philosophers and scholastic theologians {mutakallimun}

In the light of the blessed *Surah at-Tawhid* (or *al-Ikhlās*), the following headings about the cognition of the Essence and Attributes of God can be deduced:), the following headings about the cognition of the

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Tawhid of Essence {Tawhid-e dhati}

God has a Perfect Essence and the Attributes of Perfection and Beauty. Thus, this Essence must be regarded as One and Unique. That is, whatever we say concerning His Oneness and Unity, we have to believe also with respect to His Essence. Those who acknowledge such Essence also believe in the *Tawhid* of Essence.

Shirk {polytheism} in Essence

This means that we believe in two or more essences for God, the Exalted. This type of polytheism is called “polytheism in Essence”. God is One in Essence and has no partner. So, those who maintain that God has a son or equal, or that He has been begotten profess polytheism in Essence. The Holy Qur'an strongly condemns this type of belief.

Tawhid in Attributes

The Essence of God has Attributes which we can understand through Their effects, such as the Knowledgeable {*al-'Alim*}, the Living {*al-Hayy*}, the Wise {*al-Hakim*}, and the Ever-Living {*al-Qayyum*}. We relate these Attributes to the Essence, saying that God, the Blessed and Exalted, is One in Essence and Attributes. Since all these Attributes relate back to the Essence, there is no multiplicity in the Attributes and all Attributes are one. Every Attribute is identical with the other Attribute. For example, His Knowledge {*'Ilm*} is His Power {*Qudrah*}. Therefore, the plurality of Attributes according to our understanding is related to the effects of the Single Essence. As such, His Attributes and Essence are One and not that He has One Essence and many Attributes.}. Therefore, the plurality of Attributes according to our understanding is related to the effects of the Single Essence. As such, His Attributes and Essence are One and not that He has One Essence and many Attributes.}. Therefore, the plurality of Attributes according to our understanding is related to the effects of the Single Essence. As such, His Attributes and Essence are One and not that He has One Essence and many Attributes.

Tawhid in Actions

Tawhid in Actions is also like *Tawhid* in Essence in the sense that the origin of every action in the world of being is the Divine Sacred Essence, and will finally relate to Him. We should know that every Action that we ascribe to Him will be the same as His other Action, and there is no difference and distinction among the Actions of God, and the apparent duplicity in the Actions of God is caused by our perception:

﴿وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَادْكُرْ رَبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ﴾

Do not say about anything, 'I will indeed do it tomorrow,' without {adding}, 'if Allah wishes.' And when you forget, remember your Lord. [5](#)

So, all our wishes are within the domain of His will and all the actions of God are one:

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ

“There is no might and power except from Allah, the Exalted and Great.”

Those who have such belief, attributing all actions to God have the belief in *Tawhid* in Action.

Polytheism in Action {shirk-e af'ali}

Polytheism in Action {*shirk-e af'ali*} means to believe that a creature has a divine will independent of the will of God in the sense that whatever the said creature does is outside the domain of God's will. This is contrary to what God has attributed to Himself as stated in the Holy Qur'an, thus:

﴿وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى﴾

And you did not throw when you threw, rather it was Allah who threw. [6](#)

While we all know that the Prophet (s) threw earth and stones toward the enemy during the Battle of Badr.

Tawhid in worship

Having attributed the *Tawhid* of Essence, Attributes and actions to God, *Tawhid* in worship is confirmed for Him in the sense that only His Essence is worthy of worship, and if we consider anyone as His partner in worship, as the idol-worshipers and others do, it means that we are afflicted with polytheism in worship. The following verses of the Qur'an express this *Tawhid* in worship:

﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ﴾

You {alone} do we worship, and to You {alone} do we turn for help. [7](#)

And along this line, another verse states:

﴿قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

Say, 'Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are all for the sake of Allah, the Lord of all the worlds'.⁸

Tawhid in worship is understood from the phrase, “indeed my prayer and my worship” while *Tawhid* in Lordship {*rububiyyahi*} is discerned from the phrase, “my life and my death”.

The foundations of Tawhid according to the Wahhabis

The Wahhabis regard *Tawhid* as having three parts: (1) *Tawhid* in Lordship {*rububi*}, (2) *Tawhid* in Divinity {*uluhi*}, and (3) *Tawhid* in the Names and Attributes {*asma' wa sifat*}.

Tawhid in Lordship {rububi}

It means that only the Essence of God has all the absolute and perfect Attributes. In other words, *Tawhid* in Lordship is the *Tawhid* in recognizing and proving God whose proofs are the verses of *Surah al-Kafirun*,⁹ the verse,

﴿...قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ﴾

Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common...¹⁰

and other verses.

Tawhid in Divinity {uluhi or uluhiyyah}

It is the belief in the fact that only God is worthy of worship and praise, and there is not other that god worshipped being beside Him. It is the belief in the fact that only God is worthy of worship and praise, and there is not other that god worshipped being beside Him. It is the belief in the fact that only God is worthy of worship and praise, and there is not other that god worshipped being beside Him.

Tawhid in the Names and Attributes

The Attributes and Names of God are pre-eternal {*qadim*}.¹¹ The Wahhabis consider this aspect of *Tawhid* in the place of the *Tawhid* in Attributes, worship and actions. This belief is traceable from the belief of the Ash'arites {*asha'irah*}, a group of scholastic theologians {*mutakallimun*} during the 2nd century AH. The Ash'arites also believed in the “pre-eternality” {*qidmah*} of the Divine Names and Attributes. Anchored on this belief, the Wahhabis reckon the Qur'an as pre-eternal and the attribute of an act of God. They also consider the dotted Arabic letters {*huruf al-mu'jam*} as pre-eternal.

They regard as Attributes of the Essence those attributes such the Eye {*'ayn*}; Soul {*nafs*}; Knowledge {*'ilm*}; Life {*hayah*}; Hearer {*sami'*}; Seer {*basir*}; Face {*wajh*}; Speech or Word {*kalam*}; Pre-existence

{*qidam*}; Hand {*yad*}; Foot {*rijl*} (The Wahhabis believe that God—God forbid—has hands and feet!), Dominion {*mulk*}; Grandeur {*'azamah*}; Greatness {*kibriya'*}; Eminence {*'uluww*}; Richness {*ghina*}; Mercy {*rahmah*}; Power {*qudrah*}; Wisdom {*hikmah*}; etc.

They consider as Attributes of Act the attributes such as surprise {*ta'ajjub*}; laughing {*dahik*}; satisfaction {*rida*}; anger {*ghadab*}; aversion {*karahah*}; equality {*istiwa'*}; coming {*maji'*} (the alleged appearance of God on the Day of Resurrection); coming down {*nuzul*} (it refers to the belief of the Wahhabis that God is sitting on the Throne and He descends from heaven at the dawn!); disagreement; and gladness. [12](#)

After stating the parts and examples of *Tawhid* from the point of view of Wahhabism, it is now proper to examine polytheism {*shirk*} according to this sect. Thereafter, we shall compare it with Shi`ah monotheistic thought.} according to this sect. Thereafter, we shall compare it with Shi`ah monotheistic thought.} according to this sect. Thereafter, we shall compare it with Shi`ah monotheistic thought.

Shirk {polytheism} and its limits according to the Wahhabis

Shirk {polytheism} from the viewpoint of Wahhabism means associating partner with God and considering other beings as independent from Him. Wahhabism also regards turning for help to the prophets and seeking the intermediation {*tawassul*} of the saints as acts of polytheism.

According to this viewpoint, kissing and visiting the graves of the infallible Imams (*'a*) and the Prophet (s) are all acts of polytheism, unlawful and religious innovation {*bid'ah*}. According to the Wahhabis, the Shi`ah are polytheists or at least their beliefs have elements of polytheism.

The socio-political consequences of Tawhid and shirk {polytheism} according to the Wahhabis

The late Muhammad Jawad Mughniyyah thus writes:

Based on the Wahhabi creed, mere utterance of "*La ilaha illallah wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah*" {There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah} is not enough for the acceptance of Islam. After uttering it, one should rather not seek the inter mediation of other than God; not have the intention of paying homage to the Prophet (s); not touch and kiss his grave; not swear by the Prophet (s); and not call on him and addressing him, thus: "O the Messenger of Allah!" and "O my master!"

During his control of Mecca, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud (one of the rulers of Saudi Arabia) had said in his speech that with the exception of the Wahhabis, all Muslims are polytheists and must be reformed at the point of the sword so as to embrace Wahhabism. Contrary to his statement, however, King Faisal, the king of the Wahhabis, in his message issued in 1342 AH, says while addressing the Wahhabis: "And all Muslims, from Egypt, India, etc. are your brothers."

This means that, “You should not be pessimistic with respect to the Muslims and you are not supposed to act according to this creed of Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab.”

Maintaining this belief by the Wahhabis would have such socio-political consequences as considering all Muslims as polytheists and spreading sedition *{fitnah}* and chaos, for such a belief is an imperialist and anti-Islamic one.

The Wahhabi-Shi`ah difference of perspective on Tawhid

As stated earlier, there are qualitative and quantitative differences between the Wahhabis and the Shi`ah about *Tawhid*.

We shall find out later on that this classification from the perspective of Wahhabism has significant political implications.

It can probably be argued that there is no problem with the classification of the Wahhabis. In addition, this issue is only an intellectual limitation, and difference of opinion between Muslim philosophers and mystics *{urafa}* concerning this issue can also be observed. But that which cannot be ignored is the difference in understanding.

Shi`ah *'ulama'* have divided *Tawhid* into (*Tawhid* in) Essence, Attributes, acts and worship while the Wahhabi *'ulama'* have divided it into (*Tawhid* in) Lordship, Divinity and the Names and Attributes.¹³ If we compare them, and pair *Tawhid* in Essence with that of Lordship and *Tawhid* in Divinity with that of *Tawhid* in acts and worship, nothing remains to compare with *Tawhid* in the Names and Attributes. Meanwhile, to believe in the pre-eternity *{qidmah}* of the Names and Attributes demands the acceptance of “the multiplicity of pre-eternals”, and this is an Ash'arite belief which is false.

Shi`ah *'ulama'* believe that the Names of God can be divided into two: particular and general. The particular aspect pertains specifically to the Essence of God, the Exalted, such as “Allah”. The general aspect relates to the Attributes of God which can also be applied to His servants such as *rahman* {All-beneficent}, *rahim* {All-merciful} and *karim* {All-kind}. The intellect of man has separated this aspect of Attributes and ascribed it to God.

If this difference merely had an ideological dimension, it would not then be so acute and sensitive, but since they are utilizing it for a political end, it ought to be analyzed.

The Wahhabis have taken this way of dividing the levels of *Tawhid* from Ibn Taymiyyah who, in turn, had adopted it from Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

Similarly, by dividing the Attributes into Acts and Essence, the Wahhabis have ended up believing that God has an actual hand and foot and that He can physically come and have an appearance. They have contented with the literal meaning of the verses in this regard while rejecting rational understanding and

analysis. They reject as "mu'awwilun" {allegorical interpreters} those who oppose this creed, particularly the Shi'ah who, by taking inspiration from the lofty teachings of the Prophet (s) and the infallible Imams (a), interpret the verses related to God's seeing, hearing, His having a hand, foot and His coming on the Day of Resurrection as allegorical. For instance, the Shi'ah regard the verse,

﴿الرَّحْمَانُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى﴾

The All-beneficent settled on the Throne, [1428](#)

to mean the sovereignty and authority of God on the Throne and not in the sense of God's actual sitting on the Throne.

- [1.](#) Murtadha Mutahhari, Jahan Bini-ye Tawhidi [Monotheistic Worldview], vol. 2, p. 116.
- [2.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2: 165.
- [3.](#) Jahan Bini-ye Tawhidi, ibid.
- [4.](#) Ibid.
- [5.](#) Surat al-Kahf 18:23–24.
- [6.](#) Surat al-Anfal 8: 17.
- [7.](#) Surat al-Fatihah 1:5.
- [8.](#) Surat al-An'am 6: 162.
- [9.](#) Surat al-Kafirun 109: 1–6: "O faithless ones! I do not worship what you worship, not do you worship what I worship; nor will I worship what you have worshipped nor will you worship what I worship. To you your religion, and to me my religion."
- [10.](#) Surat Al 'Imran 3:64: "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'."
- [11.](#) Here, the word "pre-eternal" [qadim] is not in contrast to the notion of "new" [jadid]. It is rather the opposite of "created" [hadith]; that is, to have existed from the very beginning and not to have come into being sometime in the past.
- [12.](#) Fath al-Majid, pp. 33, 41, 57.
- [13.](#) Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, At-Tawhid wa'l-Qawl as-Sadid fi Maqasid at-Tawhid, p. 13.
- [14.](#) Surat Ta Ha 20:5.

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