

## The Basis of Self-Building

"Salvation" is in fact an epitome of all the human virtues and perfection and the way to attain it, from the Qur'anic viewpoint is through self-building and purification of the soul. Following numerous swearing, the Exalted Allah asserts:

(قد أفلح من زكّاهَا)

(Truly he succeeds (attains salvation) that purifies it,) (al-Shams: 9)

All that the Divine Messengers have brought from the Almighty God for guiding man, are preliminary steps to "Salvation" and actualization of human potentials. The significant issue in purification of the soul for mankind is to find out how to begin self-building and what its basis is from the viewpoints of Divine Messengers. The basis of self-building and the first step in purification of soul is "monotheism". Thereupon, the first message of all Divine messengers was, "*La ilaha illa Allah*—there is no god—but Allah":

(وما أرسلنا من قبلك من رسول الا نوحي اليه انه لا اله الا انا فاعبدون)

(Not a messenger did we send before you without this inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I; therefore worship and serve Me.) (al-Anbiya: 25)

The first sayings of the Holy Prophet (s) addressed to the people was:

"يا ايها الناس! قولوا: لا إله الا الله، تفلحوا"

O people! Say 'There is no god but Allah', so that you attain Salvation."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, mere utterance of "*La ilaha illa Allah*" is not sufficient by itself, as what forms the basis of

self –building and leads to Salvation and actualization of human perfection, is the truth of monotheism and turning into a true monotheist.

The sign indicating that man has attained true monotheism—in the perfect and real sense of the word—is that he can like Divine angels and through Divine Essence witness the oneness of the Exalted God Almighty:

(شهد الله أنه لا إله إلا هو والملائكة وأولوا العلم)

(There is no god but He: that is the witness of Allah, His angels, and those endowed with knowledge...)  
(Ale 'Imran: 18)

One of the Shaykh's disciples said about him: 'May God bless his soul! All his endeavors were toward attaining *la ilaha illa Allah*, and all his words were dedicated to reach the reality of this pure phrase. '

Another of his disciples said: 'The Shaykh was an expert in this discipline. He did his best to transmit to others what he had attained himself and to enhance his disciples to the rank of intuitive monotheism.

The Shaykh said: "Monotheism is the basis of self–building. Anyone who wants to construct a building, they must first lay the foundation firm enough, otherwise that building will not be well grounded. The spiritual seeker must begin his journey from monotheism, as the first utterance of all the prophets has been *la ilaha illa Allah*. Man will fail attaining human perfection, unless he appreciates the truth of monotheism and believe that there is nothing in existence except God's Pure Essence. Having grasped the reality of monotheism, man will whole–heartedly attend the Creator."

He also said: "If you wish that God call<sup>2</sup> you, (try to) gain a little divine knowledge and (enter into a) deal with Him."

"When we say *la ilaha illa Allah*, we should tell the truth (be honest). Until a man does not leave aside the false deities, he cannot be a monotheist and be truthful in uttering *la ilaha illa Allah*. *Ilah* (god = false deity) is something that captivates human heart, and whatever that captivates his heart is his god<sup>3</sup> When we say, *la ilaha illa Allah* we should be astounded by Him."

"The entire Qur'an refers to the statement, *la ilaha illa Allah*. Man must reach to the point that there remains nothing engraved in his heart except this statement, and whatever other than Him depart from his heart: (Say: ' Allah (sent it down)": then leave them.) (al–An'am: 19)

"Man is the tree of monotheism, the fruit of which is the emergence of Divine attributes; it (the tree) will not be perfect until it yields such fruit. Man's peak of perfection is reaching (nearness to) Allah, that is, to become a manifestation of God's attributes. Try to bring to life Divine attributes in you. He is Gracious; you be gracious too. He is Merciful; you be merciful too. He is Concealer (of defects); you be concealer

too."

"What is beneficial to man is the Divine attributes, nothing else is as influential on man, even the Greatest Name of God!"

"If you are engrossed in monotheism, you will enjoy the Exalted God's special bounties at any moment that you had not enjoyed prior to that moment. God's bounties and blessings are novel at any moment."

## Cleansing of Polytheism

Cleansing polytheism off your soul and heart is the first step toward attaining the truth of monotheism. Hence, in its main motto, i.e., *la illaha illa Allah*, denying false gods is considered prior to proving the One Real God.

Now, it must be noted what polytheism is. Who is a polytheist? Is polytheism merely believing in deity of objects? Are polytheists the only people who have faith in inanimate idols? Or something else is the case.

Polytheism vs. monotheism is the belief in illusory forces and their efficacy in the world of being and their worship against the Real Efficient, i. e., the One Sustainer.

The monotheist does not view anything effective in the world except the One God and does not worship anything, neither the inanimate idols nor the animate ones, except Him.

The polytheists are the ones that view as effective other than God and obey other than Him; sometimes they worship objects, sometimes they obey the powerful, sometimes they are slaves to their own carnal desires and whims, and sometimes they are in the service of all three.<sup>4</sup>

From the Islamic viewpoint, all three types of polytheism are blameworthy, and to attain the reality of monotheism there is no other way than wiping of polytheism in the strict sense of the word.

The remarkable point here is that the most dangerous type of polytheism is the third type, i. e., following the whims of carnal soul (vain desires). This type of polytheism is the source of obstacles to intellectual and emotional cognition, and the beginning of polytheism in the first and the second sense:

أفاريث من اتخذ إليه هواه وأضله الله على علم وختم على سمعه وقلبه وجعل على بصره غشاوة فمن يهديه من بعد  
(الله أفلا تنكرون)

(Then seest thou such a one as takes as his god his own vain desire? Allah has, knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart (and understanding), and put a cover on his sight. Who, then, will guide him after Allah (has withdrawn guidance)? Will ye not then receive admonition?)

(al-Jathiyah: 23)

Accordingly, the reverend Shaykh viewed the idol of *nafs* as extremely detrimental to monotheism and would say:

"All troubles are regarding that grand idol that lies within yourself."<sup>5</sup>

Imam Khomeini (ra), the great ascetic and man of vision has also said:

"The mother of all idols is the idol of your own *nafs* (carnal desires); unless this grand idol and powerful Satan is not shattered, there will be no way to Him—the High and the Most Exalted. Lo and behold! This idol can hardly be shattered and this Satan can barely be tamed!"<sup>6</sup>

If man triumphs over such a grand idol, he has achieved the highest victories.

### **Wrestle with your *Nafs* (Vain Desires)!**

One of the famous wrestlers of the time of Shaykh called "Aghar Agha Pahlavan" narrated: 'Once I was taken to the reverend Shaykh, he patted on my upper arm and said:

"If you are a real champion, wrestle with your own *nafs*!"

In fact, shattering the idol of *nafs* in the first and the last step in obliterating polytheism and achieving the reality of monotheism.

'Step on your own self, embrace the Beloved One (instead),

Up to his Ka'bah of union with him, you are just one step away.

If you get rid of your self, you will join the Beloved; Otherwise, keep burning eternally, your state of affairs being unripe.'

And maybe this is what is meant by nearness of the way to reach God, which Abu Hamza Thumali has quoted Sayyid al-Sajidin (Ali ibn al-Husayn) (a) as saying:

"وَأَنْ الرَّاحِلَ إِلَيْكَ قَرِيبُ الْمَسَافَةِ"

"For the one who is faring the path toward You, the distance is short."<sup>7</sup>

And as Hafiz of Shiraz has put it:

'As long as you see erudition and knowledge, you are deprived of Divine knowledge; I tell you only one point: do not mind yourself, and you will be free.'

Apparently, the reverend Shaykh was appointed to go on a mission to Kennanshah to tell the above point to such a great personality as Sardar Kabuli:

## Traveling for the Purpose of Telling a Point

Ayatollah Fahri quoted the late Ghulam Qudsi as saying: 'In one year the reverend Shaykh came to Kennanshah. He said to me one day to go to Sardar Kabuli's house with him and we did so. I introduced the Shaykh to the late Sardar Kabuli. A while passed by in silence and then the latter said: "Reverend Shaykh! Say something to benefit us!"

The Shaykh responded:

"What should I say to the one whose trust in his own learning and acquired knowledge is more than his trust in God's Grace."

The late Sardar Kabuli was sitting silently. Some moments later; he took off his turban, put it down on the ground, and began hitting his head on the wall so harshly that I felt pity for him and proceeded to stop him but the Shaykh did not let me and said:

"...I have come here only to say this to him and return."

## "Ask Allah's Forgiveness a Thousand Times!"

One of the Shaykh's sons related: 'A person from India called "Haj Muammad" used to come to stay in Iran for one month every year. Once on his way to Mashhad he got off the train to say his prayer in a corner. When the train was about to depart, his friend called at him to get on or he would be left behind. Haj Muammad did not pay any heed to his friend's calling, and with his psychic power stranded the train for half an hour. When he returned from Mashhad and visited the Shaykh, the latter told him: "Ask forgiveness from God a thousand times!"

"What for?" He asked. "You did something wrong!" Replied the Shaykh. He asked again: 'What wrong? I made a pilgrimage to Imam al-Reza (a) and prayed for you too.'

The Shaykh said: "You stranded the train there, wishing to demonstrate it was you who...! You see, the Satan deceived you. You were not entitled to do that!"

## Personality Cult and Polytheism

The border between monotheism and polytheism is so narrow, subtle, and unnoticeable that no eyes can see it. The Holy Prophet (s) said in a *hadith*:

"وإن الشرك أخفى من دبيب النمل على صفاة سوداء في ليلة ظلماء"

"Verily, polytheism is more imperceptible than an ant moving on a black stone at a dark night."<sup>8</sup>

Only upright and insightful human beings can see the borderlines of hidden polytheism and warn against them.

Personality cult is one type of various hidden and subtle kinds of polytheism in which many people are entangled. If attention and obedience to personality, however divine and great, is not for the sake of God, it is regarded as polytheism. Thus the reverend Shaykh would say:

"If you come to me for my sake, you have much to lose!"

## **"Your Father should not turn into an Idol for you!"**

Hujjat al-Islam Sayyid Muhammad Ali Milani, the son of the eminent jurist and *marja'* the late Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hadi Milani (ra) gave an account of the meeting between the reverend Shaykh and his noble father as follows:

The late Rajab Ali Khayyat, whom God had bestowed on with insight due to his self-restraint and abandonment of sins, managed to train a group of devoted people in sincerity and love of God.

He was interested in my father. I personally visited him frequently because of our old friendship and sometimes even enjoyed his sessions, in which he would generally preach for the spiritual seekers with reciting of Qur'anic verses and the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (a).

One year he found the honor to pay a visit to Mashhad for pilgrimage of the holy Imam al-Reza (a) and settled in a hotel nearby the Holy Shrine. My late father invited him for lunch. The Shaykh came to our house and my father was very pleased to meet him and they talked to each other until evening. In the same meeting the late Shaykh faced me and said:

"Be careful your father should not turn into an idol for you!"

And said to my father:

"Watch out your son does not get you in trouble!"

It crossed my mind whether one could have both this world and the Hereafter. The reverend Shaykh turned to me and said unprecedentedly:

"Recite this supplication a lot:

"ربنا آتنا في الدنيا حسنة وفي الآخرة حسنة"

(O God! Grant me benefit in this world and benefit in the Hereafter)."

I accompanied him back to his hotel, where Heydar Agha Mu'jiza (author of a poetry collection) came to

the reverend Shaykh and invited him to lunch for the following day. The Shaykh did not accept his invitation first, but finally accepted at his insistence. Then, Heydar Agha went to my late father and invited him, too. At last, along with my late father we went to his house and found that the reverend Shaykh Rajab Ali and two of his co-travelers were already there. That day our session lasted until early evening.

## How to Reach the Reality of Monotheism

Now the basic question is this: 'How can one cleanse themselves of polytheism, and by shattering the idol of *nafs*, uproot the covert and overt polytheism in themselves and achieve the lucidity of pure monotheism?

The reverend Shaykh replied the question as follows:

"To my humble opinion if one seeks a way to be delivered and wishes to attain real perfection and to enjoy the meanings of monotheism, they should resort to four things: first, perpetual presence; second, to rely on to the Ahl al-Bayt (a); third, begging at night (i. e., whispering prayers and supererogation during night time); and fourth, benevolence to people."

Elucidation of the above cases from the viewpoint of the Shaykh will be given in the coming chapters.

[1.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, II XX, 202.

[2.](#) We read in Munajat-i Sha'baniyya:

"الهي واجعلني ممن ناديتهم فأجابك ولاحظته فصعك لجلالك فناجيتهم سراً وعمل لك جهراً"

"O Lord! Make me one of those people whom You call and they answer You; You look at them, they fall unconscious at Your Majesty; and You talk to them secretly and they act openly."

[3.](#) (أفرأيت من اتخذ الهه هواه وأظله الله على علم.) (Then you see such a one as his god is his own vain desire? Allah has, knowing (him as such), left him astray...) (al-Jathiyah: 23).

[4.](#) The first group is referred to in the noble verse: وقالوا لاتذرن الهتكم ولاتذرن ودأ ولا سواعاً ولا يغوث ويعوق ونسرا (And they have said (to each other), abandon not your gods: abandon neither Wadd nor Suwa, neither Yaghuth nor Ya'uq, nor Nasr.) (Nuh: 23).

The second group is referred to in: أن اعبدوا الله واجتنبوا الطاغوت (Serve Allah, eschew Evil) (al-Nahl: 36).

And the third group is referred to in: أفرأيت من اتخذ الهه هواه (Seest thou such a one as taken for his god his own passion (or impulse)?) (al-Furqan: 43).

[5.](#) See: "A penny in Response to Ya Allah!". Chapter Six. Part 3.

[6.](#) Sahifah-i Nur. XXII, 348.

[7.](#) Mafatih al-Jinan, the supplication of Abu Hamza Thumali.

[8.](#) Mizan al-Hikmah, VI, 2724: 9316.

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