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Lesson 6: Tawhīd & Sifāt

1. Tawhīd: Monotheism

The corner-stone of Islamic beliefs is tawhīd, the belief in Unity or Oneness of God which is also known as monotheism. Tawhīd is the first part of the kalimah—the formula of faith in Islam. It says:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

There is no god but Allāh.

“Allāh” is the proper name of God in Islam. The word “Allāh” means “One who deserves to be loved” and “in Whom everyone seeks refuge.” This word, grammatically speaking is unique. It has no plural and no feminine. So this name itself reflects light upon the fact that God is one and only one; He has neither any partner nor any equal. The name cannot be adequately translated by the word “God” because God can be transformed into “gods” and “goddess”.

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The Message of Tawhīd:

The first part of the *kalimah* consists of two statements: A negative statement (“There is no god”) and a positive (“but Allāh”).

The negative statement leads a Muslim throughout his life not only in religious matters but also in social affairs. “There is no god” shows a Muslim that nothing in the universe is superior to him. It is observed in the Qur’ān that **He is the One who created for you all that is in the earth**. So a Muslim knows that nothing in this world is to be worshipped. Neither stone nor trees, neither animals nor human beings, neither the Sun, the Moon, nor the stars can be worshipped, because everything is created for his benefit.

When a Muslim thus rejects every falsehood and every idea of nature-worship, idol-worship and

human-worship, he is ready to believe in the positive truth of *tawhīd*. Believing in a Supreme Being gives an aim to our life and provides a purpose for our actions. Had man been left with the wrong impression that there was no God at all, his life would have been aimless, and an aimless life is dangerous. So it is added that there is no god “but Allāh”.

The *kalimah* of *tawhīd* has a negative and a positive aspect. Both are instrumental in creating the belief that every person is equal to every other person. When nobody is superior, nobody is inferior. Thus, the belief in *tawhīd* promotes the sense of brotherhood and equality and equity which is another feature of Islam.

2. Sifāt: the Attributes of God

In the preceding lessons, we have learnt about most of the important attributes of God. There are many attributes which are a must for God, while there are others which are beneath His dignity and, therefore, cannot be found in Him.

The attributes of God, therefore, have been grouped into “positive” and “negative”: the former reflects the attributes that exist in Him, where as the latter reflect the attributes that cannot be found in Him. The positive attributes of God are known as *as-sifāt ath-thubutiyyah*; whereas the attributes that cannot be found in God are known as *as-sifāt as-salbiyyah*.

(A) The Positive Attributes (As-Sifāt Ath-Thubutiyyah)

There are many attributes which are befitting Allāh, but only eight are usually mentioned because of their importance. The eight *as-sifāt ath-thubutiyyah* are as follows:

1. Eternal (*al-Qadīm*): God has neither a beginning nor an end.
2. Omnipotent (*al-Qādir*): God is Omnipotent; He has power over every thing and every affair.
3. Omniscient (*al-ʿAlīm*): God is Omniscient; He knows every thing. Even our unspoken intentions and unexpressed desires are not hidden from Him.
4. Living (*al-Hayy*): God is always Alive and will remain Alive for ever.
5. Will Power (*al-Murīd*): God has His own will and discretion in all affairs. He does not do anything under compulsion.
6. All-Perceiving (*al-Mudrik*): God is All-Hearing and All-Seeing; He can see and hear everything without any need of eyes and ears.
7. Master of Speech (*al-Mutakallim*): God can create speech in anything, as He did in a tree for Prophet Musa (a.s.) and in the curtain of light for our holy Prophet (a.s.).

8. Truthful (*as-Sadiq*): God is always true in His words and promises.

It is impossible to fix any limit to the attributes of God. This list is not exhaustive but is essential to understand the glory of Allah. These attributes are not acquired but are inherent in the concept of Divinity.

(B) The Negative Attributes (As-Sifat As-Salbiyyah)

The term “negative attributes” means those attributes which cannot be found in God because they are incompatible with the concept of Divinity. Similar to the positive attributes, the negative attributes are also many but only eight are normally listed because of their importance. The eight *as-sifat as-salbiyyah* are as follows:

1. Partner (*as-Sharik*): God has no partner or colleague.
2. Compound (*al-Murakkab*): God is neither made nor composed of any material. He cannot be divided even in imagination.
3. Place (*al-Makān*): God has neither a center nor a place because He has no body; and He is everywhere because His power and knowledge is magnificently apparent everywhere.
4. Incarnation (*al-Hulūl*): God does not enter into anything or any person, nor does anything enter Him. Therefore, the belief in incarnation is incompatible with the concept of Divinity.
5. Change (*Mahall-e Hawādith*): God is not subject to change.
6. Visible (*al-Marʾi*): God is not visible; He has not been seen, is not seen, and will never be seen.
7. Need (*Ihtiyāj*): God is not deficient in any virtue, so He does not need anything. He is free from want.
8. `Acquired Attribute' (*Sifat-e Zāʿid*): The attributes of Allah are not separate from His person. When we say that God is Omnipotent and Merciful, we do not mean that his power and mercy are something different from His person.

To understand the concept of `additional quality' or `acquired attribute' more clearly, read the following two sentences: “Tea is sweet” and “Sugar is sweet”. In the first example, sweetness is an additional quality for tea; the tea was not sweet when it was made, it became sweet after sugar was added to it. But in the second example, sweetness is an essential quality not an added quality for sugar; the sugar was sweet from the day it became a sugar; a “sugar” which is not sweet is not sugar at all. The positive attributes of God are like sweetness is to sugar; they are not additional to the person of God. Power, mercy, knowledge, justice, virtue, truth, etc. were never separate from His person.

This lesson is entirely based on chapter 26 & 27 of Syed Sa'eed Akhtar *Rizvi's God of Islam*, Dar-es-salaam, 1970. It has been compiled and edited to suit this course by S.M. Rizvi.

Question Paper on Lesson 6

Question 1: [10 points]

What is the uniqueness of the word "Allāh"?

Question 2: [10 points]

(a) Which part of the kalimah tells a Muslim that it is humiliating for him to worship inanimate objects?

(b) Describe in your own words how the kalimah instills a sense of dignity, equality, justice and brotherhood among Muslims.

Question 3: [24 points]

From the attributes of God listed below, circle those that cannot be found in God.

1. Gracious.
2. Resident.
3. Incarnation.
4. Almighty.
5. Creator.
6. Just.
7. Visible.
8. Divisible.
9. Partner.
10. Overwhelming.
11. Inventor.
12. Compound.
13. Subject to change.
14. Eternal.
15. Forgiving.

16. Merciful.

17. Vengeful.

18. Protector.

19. Everlasting.

20. All-Knowing.

Question 4: [6 points]

Explain in your own words the concept of “additional quality” and why this attribute is incompatible with the concept of Divinity.

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