

Concept of Tawhid (Unity of God) in Islam: A Study of Relevant Qur'anic Text

Samee-Ullah Bhat

*Ph.D Candidate, Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies
University of Kashmir Main Campus, Srinagar (India)*

ABSTRACT

The essence of Islam is Tawhid, the act of affirming Allah (SWT) to be the One, the absolute, transcendent Creator, the Lord and Master of everything in the universe. Belief in Tawhid is the most fundamental teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Believing in all the prophets of Islam is part of our Iman (faith) and 'Ibadah (worship). It determines the degree and status of a believer whether the person is a true Muslim or not. Tawhid also binds all races, colors and humanity in an integral organic body by birth, which indicates to believe in His oneness. This faith obliges a man to fulfill his obligation, to fulfill the purpose of his creation, to observe the commandments and prohibitions of Allah (SWT) in his everyday life. This research paper highlights the very concept of Tawhid in Islam. It also highlights the importance of Tawhid and its impact on human life.

Key-words: *Concept, Tawhid, Islam, Tawhid Ruboobiyyah, Tawhid Uloohiyyah and Tawhid Asmaa wa al-Sifaat*

INTRODUCTION

Tawhid is an important concept and a fundamental principle and basis for the Islamic faith. Traditionally and simply expressed, Tawhid is the conviction and witnessing that "There is no god but Allah (God)". This certainly is *al-Kalimah* (pronouncement) or al-Shahadah of Islam, *La ilaha ila Allah Muhammadur Rasul Allah*, (confession of Islamic faith; the witnessing that there is no god but God (Allah) and Muhammad is His messenger). The literal meaning of Tawhid is a relationship with the only one that excludes all similar relationships with anyone else. Its uniqueness negates the remotest possibility of admitting the existence of another being worthy of worship.

The oneness or tawhid is not only confined to number but it also implies oneness or uniqueness in all His qualities or attributes. All other beings have to be different from Allah (SWT) in every aspect. Any similarity is negated for otherwise it contradicts the very concept of tawhid itself. Such uniqueness in qualities not only makes Him different from all others but also easier for us to logically accept His complete independence from all others. This quality of being completely independent makes it logical to believe that He provides for all and that all His creations depend upon Him. Hence man is expected to worship Allah (SWT) alone who is the focus of all his reverence and gratitude. Every man has no other choice but to recognize that there is no other authority except His and that there is no other guidance except His.

Tawhid also means the emancipation and restoration of man's essential freedom from human and (man-made) super-human bondages before his commitment to Allah (SWT) can be genuine and positive. Any form of

bondage to other than Allah (SWT) is unacceptable. Man is not obliged ultimately to submit to any other authority since "he owes nothing to any being other than Allah (SWT) to whom he owes everything". He must be fully conscious of his freedom and independence vis-a-vis all beings other than Allah (SWT) before he can enter into the relationship with Allah (SWT) as required of him. Any deficiency in his consciousness will adversely affect his relationship with Allah (SWT). This paper discusses the concept of Tawhid in Islam and its significance. It also deals at a length with the effects of Tawhid on human life.

II. THE CONCEPT OF TAWHID (UNITY OF GOD) IN ISLAM: AN OVERVIEW

Literally *tawhid* means "unification" (making something one) or "asserting oneness," and it comes from the Arabic verb (*wahhada*) which itself means to unite, unify, or consolidate.¹ However, when the term *tawhid* is used in reference to Allah (i.e. *tawheedullah*)², it means realizing and affirming Allah's unity in all of man's actions which directly or indirectly relate to Him. It is the belief that Allah's One, without partner in His dominion (*ruboobeeyah*), One without similitude in His essence and attributes (*asmaa was sifaat*), and One without rival in His divinity and in worship (*uloheeyah/'Ibadah*). These three aspects form the basis for the categories into which the science of *tawhid* has been traditionally divided. The three overlap and are inseparable to such a degree that whoever omits any one aspect has failed to complete the requirements of *tawhid*. The omission of any of the above mentioned aspects of *tawhid* is referred to as *shirk* (which literally means "sharing" but here signifies) the association of partners with Allah. In Islamic terms this association is in fact idolatry. Because of this principle of *tawhid*, the Islamic belief in God is uniquely Unitarian and Islam is counted among the world's monotheistic religions along with Judaism and Christianity. However, according to the Islamic Unitarian concept (*tawhid*), Christianity is classified as polytheism and Judaism is considered to be a subtle form of idolatry.

Allah says in the Qur'an:

*And your Ilâh (God) is One Ilâh (God Allah) there is none who has the right to be worshipped but He, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*³

The word *Tawhid* is not a term from the Qur'an or Sunnah. However, it became the main term used to cover the aspects of belief in Allah; dating back to the time of Ibn Abbas (RA); having said that the entire Qur'an is about *Tawhid*, its consequences and the reward for it.

The term *Tawhid* is used quite often by many sects in Islam. Everyone claims to have *Tawhid*. The only true *Tawhid* is that which was taught by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to his companions and which came down from them later.

2.1 Classification of Tawhid (Unity of God): An Overview

In order to comprehend the fundamental Islamic concept of *Tawhid* fully, it is discussed here under the following sub-themes:

2.1.1 *Tawhid al-Ruboobiyyah* (the oneness of Allah in his Lordship)

2.1.2 *Tawhid al-Ulohiyyah* (the oneness of Allah in worship)

2.1.3 *Tawhid al-Asmaa wa al-Sifaat* (the oneness of Allah's Names and Attributes)

2.1.1 *Tawhid al-Ruboobiyyah*

Ruboobiyyah is a term denoting the absolute sovereignty and kingship of Allah over the Heavens and the Earth and whatever is between them. The verb “*rabba*” and the noun “*Rabb*” roughly and wrongly translated as “Lord”, is derived from it, meaning “to nurture, to bring to fruition, to create and to bring together all the elements necessary for the existence and well-being of something or someone”.

It has these aspects to it: *Al-Khalq* (creativity), *Al-Mulk* (possession) and *Al-Amr* (administration / command).

Allah says:

*“Indeed your Rabb is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days, and then He rose over the Throne (really in a manner that suits His Majesty). He brings the night as a cover over the day, seeking it rapidly, and (He created) the sun, the moon, the stars subjected to His Command. Surely, His is the Creation and Commandment. Blessed is Allah, the Rabb of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)”.*⁴

Tawhid al-Ruboobiyyah is the belief that Allah alone is the Rabb who creates, and handle the affairs of His creation, and that He revive the dead, causes death and extend benefits and wards off evil. Nothing happened in creation except what He allows to happen. The basis or Daleel (evidence / proof) for this category of Tawhid can be found in many Qur’anic verses. For example, Allah says:

*“Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the Wakeel (Trustee, Disposer of affairs, Guardian, etc.) over all things.”*⁵

*Such is Allah, your Rabb none has the right to be worshipped but He, the Creator of all things. So worship Him (Alone), and He is the Wakeel (Trustee, Disposer of affairs, Guardian, etc.) over all things”.*⁶

Allah controls all that happens, good or bad. When we want to avoid some misfortune or get some good fortune, we should only turn to Him and seek His help. Yet some people are destroying this section of Tawhid by depending on created things that they call good luck charms to bring in good or to ward off evil. Believing in good-luck charms and amulets such as rabbit’s feet, wishbones etc. or in omens of bad luck are a grave sin that contradicts Tawhid al-Ruboobiyyah.

2.1.2 Tawhid al-Uloohiyyah

Uloohiyyah is a term denoting that Allah is the only one to Whom all forms of worship should be directed in truth, weather action of the heart (feelings), words and statements and actions of the limbs. The word *Ilâh* is derived from it meaning: Something that is adored, worship turned to i.e. an object of worship, subservience and adoration. There is nothing besides Allah who is deserving of that whether it is an angel, a Messenger, a Prophet, a pious person, and this is the meaning of the testimony “*Laa ilaaha illallaha* (There is no *Ilâh* that is deserving of any form of worship in truth except Allah alone). With this Tawhid Allah has sent all the messengers, Allah says:

*“And verily, We have sent among every Ummah (community, nation) a Messenger (proclaiming): Worship Allah (Alone), and avoid (or keep away from) Tâghut (all false deities, etc. i.e. do not worship Tâghut besides Allah)”.*⁷

In spite of the wide implications of the other two categories of Tawhid, firm belief in them alone is not sufficient to fulfill the Islamic requirements of Tawhid. Tawhid al-Ruboobiyyah and Tawhid al-Asmaa wa al-Sifaat must be accompanied by their complement, Tawhid al-Uloohiyyah, in order for Tawhid to be considered complete according to Islam.

The pagans at the Prophet's time confirmed many aspects of the other two categories of Tawhid, yet they remained in the status of Kufr (disbelief) and out of the boundaries of Islam because of their denial of Tawhid al-Uloohiyyah. Allah says:

And if you ask them who created them, they will surely say: Allah. How then are they turned away (from the worship of Allah, Who created them)?⁸

If you were to ask them: Who sends down water (rain) from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death? They will surely reply: Allah. Say: All the praises and thanks be to Allah! Nay, most of them have no sense.⁹

The pagans refused to profess the testimony of faith, because unlike nowadays Muslims, they knew professing it meant denying all false gods that they were worshipping.

Worship in the Islamic view, includes more than the rituals like Siyam, Salah, etc. It includes emotions like love, trust, and fear, all, of which have degrees, which should only be directed to Allah. Allah has addressed these emotions and warned against excesses in them as follow:

And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allah as rivals (to Allah). They love them as they love Allah. But those who believe, love Allah more (than anything else). If only, those who do wrong could see, when they will see the torment; that all power belongs to Allah and that Allah is Severe in punishment.¹⁰

Will you not fight a people who have violated their oaths (pagans of Makkah) and intended to expel the Messenger while they did attack you first? Do you fear them? Allah has more right that you should fear Him if you are believers.¹¹

2.1.3 Tawhid al-Asmaa wa al-Sifaat

Because Allah is the greatest, His names and attributes are unique and are called al-Asmaa al-Husnaa (The most beautiful Names). Allah says:

None has the right to be worshipped but He to Him belongs the Most beautiful Names.¹²

Tawhid al-Asmaa wa al-Sifaat is to belief and affirm all the names and attributes that Allah Almighty has affirmed for Himself whether in the Qur'an or in the Sunnah, and to describe Him only by them without tahreef (distorting), ta'teel (denial), takyeef (saying how they are), nor tamztheel (making any resemblance with the creation).

For better understanding of this category of Tawhid the following guidelines must be observed:

1. For the unity of Allah's names and attributes to be maintained in the first aspect, Allah must be referred to according to how He and His Prophet (SAAS) have described Him without explaining away His names and attributes by giving them meaning other than obvious meanings (tahreef). Also Allah should not be given any new names and attributes. In explaining this let us look at this verse. Allah says:

Have you (O Muhammad) not seen those (hypocrites) who take as friends a people upon whom is the Anger of Allah (i.e. Jews)? They are neither of you (Muslims) nor of them (Jews) and they swear to a lie while they know.¹³

Thus, anger is one of Allah's attributes. Referring to the first guideline it is incorrect to say that His anger must mean His punishment since anger is a sign of weakness in man and, as such, not befitting of Allah. What Allah has stated should be accepted with the qualification that His anger is not like human anger, based on Allah's statement:

*There is nothing like Him; and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.*¹⁴

2. The fact is that similarity between Allah's attributes and that of mankind is only in name and not in degree and that Allah's attributes should be taken in the absolute sense, free from human deficiencies (tamztheel). Also Allah may not be given the name al-Gaadib (the Angry one), in spite of the fact that He has said that He gets angry, because neither Allah nor His messenger has used this name.

3. As it is not correct to deny (ta'teel) any Name or Attribute affirmed in either the Qur'an or the Sunnah, it is absolutely not correct to try to explain how Allah's Names or Attributes (takyeeef). Denial of anything that is affirmed in either the Qur'an or the Sunnah is a very serious matter because it would take the individual out of the boundary of Islam. Likewise trying to explain how are Allah's Names or Attributes or drawing a pictorial image of Him or any of His Attributes is meaningless act. Because, the finite man is in no position to define the infinite Rabb of the creation, and it is against Tawhid al-Asmaa wa al-Sifaat (the oneness of Allah's Names and Attributes).

4. The fourth guideline in maintaining the unity of Allah's names also means that Allah's names in the definite form cannot be given to His creation unless preceded by the prefix "Abd" meaning "slave of". Similarly, names like "Abdur-Rasool" (slave of the Messenger), "Abdun-Nabee" (slave of the Prophet), etc., where people name themselves slaves to other than Allah are also forbidden.

III.EFFECTS OF TAWHID ON THE HUMAN LIFE

The effects of Tawhid are on every aspect of man's life such as individual, family, social political and cultural life, which makes a failure or success in this worldly life as well as in the hereafter. Some examples of effects are as under:

3.1 Dignity and Self-Esteem

Tawhid signifies that a believer must believe in Allah (SWT) as the absolute authority of life, death, sustenance and the possessor of all power. None can benefit nor harm a person's life. This makes a person independent and highly dignified. The believer would not disgrace himself by bowing in reverence to any creature and not be suppliant to anyone else. His personality would not be overawed by any person's greatness. His determination, patience and perseverance encourage him in fulfilling all his obligations. Nothing can derail him from his duties. The believer relies on Allah and places his trust on Him. When such person makes up his mind and devotes to follow his Lord's commands, he has full confidence in the support of the most powerful Lord.

3.2 Humbleness and Humility

Tawhid makes a believer humble and dependent on Him. His Lord knows everything whatever happens in this world, big or small, good or evil, gain or loss, increase or decrease, life or death, richness or poverty, and health or sickness. Removing arrogance, egoistic and self-conceited perception in order to acknowledge his given merits and achievements, which are not due to one's own worth but gifts from the Almighty Allah.

3.3 Morality, Tolerance and Open-mindedness

Tawhid protects a believer's morality and makes him open minded, tolerant and caring. This also promotes him to be good in morals in order to construct an ideal society.

3.4 Ultimate Peace and Contentment

A believer attains peace of mind and body, which purge the mind of jealousy, envy, greed, resentment, spite and voracity, keeping him away from the temptation of resorting to base and unfair means for achieving success in

worldly life. His rank, honor, power, wealth, property, success and failure are in his Lord's hand. Man's duty is to struggle to achieve his goal and fulfill the trust of his Lord.

3.5 Wider Outlook

Tawhid makes a believer's outlook wider. His vision is enlarged, his intellectual horizon wider, and his outlook becomes boundless towards the Kingdom of Allah. His outlook realizes that all creation, animate and inanimate praises and celebrates His glory; animate with consciousness and inanimate with its manifested law furnish the unity and glory of Allah. All nature bears witness to His power, wisdom, and goodness.¹⁵

3.6 Modesty

The real servant of the Most Gracious walks on earth in humility and spends the night in adoration of his Lord prostrate and standing to be nearer to Him. He does not invoke any other gods with Him but say, O my Lord; avert from us the wrath of Hell, which is an affliction grievous. He is perfectly just balance in his everyday life. When he is admonished with His signs, he does not drop down his intellect, as he is a blind or a deaf. He never becomes proud, haughty and arrogant while an unbeliever becomes proud and arrogant with his worldly achievements and success. Tawhid with self-respect generates in man a sense of modesty, prosperity and unpretentiousness and rectifies his soul.¹⁶

3.7 Optimistic attitude towards His Lord

Tawhid imparts extraordinary consolation and solace to a man's heart and keeps his heart with chock-full satisfaction and hope from his Lord. Mushrik, kafir and atheists depend on limited powers and in times crisis they are soon overwhelmed by despair and frequently, they commit suicide. A believer, who has transgressed against his soul, never despairs the Mercy and forgiveness of his Lord while he repents and surrenders his selfishness to His will before the penalty comes on him.¹⁷

3.8 Bravery

The declaration of Kalimah inspires bravery in man. There are two things, which make a man coward: Fear of death and love of safety cheer a man to be disheartened and sudden, but Tawhid sluices and removes the above cowardly perceptions from man's mind. His life, property, and intelligence belong to his Lord. No weapon, no man or animal has the power of taking away his life and belongings. A time has been ordained for him, and all the forces of the world combined cannot take away anyone's life before his determined time.¹⁸

3.9 Total Submission to Allah's Commands

Tawhid implies that a believer must submit his physical and spiritual elements to the will of his Lord, manifested and measured by Him. It is the most important effect of Laila Hā illallah on a believer's personality and spirituality. Committing sin is known to Him either in hidden or open or in a secluded corner or the darkness of night. Thoughts and intentions be it bad or good, all are impossible to evade from His vision.

IV. CONCLUSION

Tawhid is a revolutionary concept and constitutes the essence of the teachings of Islam. It means that there is only one supreme Lord of the universe. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and the sustainer of the world and of mankind.

Now can one observe the inexhaustible creativity of nature, its purposefulness, its preservation of that which is morally useful and destruction of that which is socially injurious, and yet fail to draw the conclusion that behind nature there is an all-pervading mind of whose incessant creative activity the processes of nature are but

outward manifestations? The stars scattered through infinite space, the vast panorama of nature with its charm and beauty, the regular waxing and waning of the moon, the astonishing harmony of the seasons—all of these point towards one fact: there is a God. We witness a superbly flawless plan in the universe—can it be without a planner? We see great enchanting beauty and harmony in its working—can they be without a creator? We observe wonderful design in nature—can't be without a designer? We feel a lofty purpose in physical and human existence—can it be without a will working behind it? We find that the universe is like a superbly written, fascinating book—can it be without an author? Truly, God said:

*O, Mankind: worship your Lord, Who created you and those before you, so that you may ward off evil; Who has made the earth a resting place for you, the sky a canopy and Who causes water to pour down from the heavens, thereby producing fruits as food for you. So do not set up rivals to God, when you know better.*¹⁹

This is the basic tenet to which Muhammad (SAW) asked humanity to adhere. It is an important metaphysical concept and answers the riddles of the universe. It points to the supremacy of law in the cosmos and the all-pervading unity behind the manifest diversity. It presents a unified view of the world and offers the vision of an integrated universe. It is a mighty contrast to the piecemeal views of the scientists and the philosophers and unveils the truth before the human eye. After centuries of groping in the dark, man is now coming to realize the truth of this concept, and modern scientific thought is moving in this direction.

But it is not merely a metaphysical concept: it is a dynamic belief and a revolutionary doctrine. It means that all men are the creatures of one God and that they are therefore all equal. Any discrimination based on color, class, race, or territory is unfounded and illusory. It is a remnant of the days of ignorance that chained men down to servitude. Humanity is one single family under God, and there can be no sanction for those barriers.

Men are one—and not bourgeois or proletarian, white or black, Aryan or non-Aryan, westerner or easterner. Islam gives us a revolutionary concept of the unity of mankind. The Prophet (SAW) came to unite humanity on the word of God, which says:

*Cling firmly together by means of God's rope, and do not be divided. Remember God's favor towards you when you were enemies; He united your hearts so that you became brothers because of His favor.*²⁰

This concept also defines the true position of man in the universe. It says that God is the Creator and the sovereign, while man is His vicegerent on the earth. This exalts man to the noble and dignified position of being God's deputy on earth and endows his life with a lofty purpose: to fulfill the will of God on earth. This will solve all the perplexing problems of human society and establish a new order wherein equity and justice, as well as peace and prosperity, will reign supreme.

End-Notes and References:

¹ J.M. Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, New York, 3rd. ed., 1976), p.1055

² The word *tawhid* does not actually occur in either the Qur'an or in the statements (*Hadith*) of the Prophet (SAW). However, when the Prophet (SAW) sent Mu'aadh Ibn Jabal as governor of Yemen in 9AH, he told him, "You will be going to Christians and Jews (*ahl al-Kitaab*), so the first thing you should invite them to is the assertion of the oneness of Allah (*Yuwahhidoo Allah*)." (Narrated by Ibn 'Abbas and collected by al-Bukhari (Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), (Riyadh: Maktabah ar-Riyaad al-Hadeetha, 1981), vol.9, pp.348-9, no.469) and Muslim (Abdul Hamid Siddiq, *Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), (Lahore: Sh.

Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1987), vol.1, pp.14-15, no.27). In this *Hadith* the present tense of the verb from which the verbal noun *Tawhid* is derived was used by the Prophet (SAAS).

³ Al-Quran: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:163)

⁴ Al-Quran: Surah Al-A'raf (7:54)

⁵ Al-Quran: Surah Al-Zumar (39:62)

⁶ Al-Quran: Surah Al-An'am (6:102)

⁷ Al-Quran: Surah An-Nahl (16:36)

⁸ Al-Quran: Surah Al-Zukhruf (43:87)

⁹ Al-Quran: Surah Al-Ankaboot (29:63)

¹⁰ Al-Quran: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:165)

¹¹ Al-Quran: Surah At-Taubah (9:13)

¹² Al-Quran: Surah Ta-Ha (20:8)

¹³ Al-Quran: Surah Al-Mujadilah (58:14)

¹⁴ Al-Quran: Surah Ash-Shura (42:11)

¹⁵ The Qur'an says: "The seven heavens and the earth and all being therein declare His glory: There is not a thing but celebrates His praise and you do not understand how do they declare His glory." [Surah al-Isra', 17: 44]

¹⁶ Al-Furqan, 25: 63-75

¹⁷ The Qur'an says: "Say: O my servants who have transgressed against their souls, despair not of the Mercy of Allah SWT, for Him, He forgives all sins." [Surah al-Zumar, 39: 53]

¹⁸ The Qur'an says: "Say, the death from which you flee will truly overtake you: then will you be sent back to knower of things secret and open and He will tell you the truth of the things that you did." [Surah al-Jumu'ah, 62: 8]

¹⁹ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:21-22

²⁰ Al-Qur'an, Surah Ale-Imran, 23:103

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