

The criterion for the distinction between Monotheism from polytheism

To find out the distinction between monotheism and polytheism is the most important matter, and as long as this distinction is not clarified, the true beliefs in this regard are not extracted. Due to this fact, it sounds necessary to study the different aspects of monotheism and polytheism and draw an obvious distinction between them in brief:

1. Monotheism in Essence:

Monotheism in essence is of two kinds:

A. God or according to the theologians' terminology 'the Self-Existent' is One and has no likeness. This is the real concept of monotheism, which has been clearly specified in the holy Quran in various forms such as,

ليس كمثلہ شیئیء

(There is no likeness of Him.)¹

And somewhere else, it says,

ولم يكن له كفوا احداً²

(And there is no equal, and none is like Him.)

Of course, this kind of monotheism is sometimes interpreted as the numerical monotheism, i.e., God is the One and not two, and it is quite plain that this kind of monotheism (numerical) is not appropriate for the Divine position.

B. God's essence is not compound but simple, because when something is composed of different elements, it needs all its elements to live on, and need is the sign of possibility, and possibility requires the cause, and they are all in contradiction to the 'Self-Existence' position.

2. Monotheism in Creation:

Monotheism in the creation is another kind of monotheism, highlighted in both the word of logic and Islamic traditions.

1- Shura Sura, verse no.11

2- Ekhlas Sura, verse no.4

According to logic, there exists a system, which lacks perfection apart from God, and whatever is in it, originates from the Source of the 'Self- Existent'. Thus, whatever of beauty and perfection is seen in the universe belongs only and only to Him.

There are an abundant number of verses in the holy Quran with regard to the monotheism in creation, such as,

قل الله خالق كل شئ و هو الواحد القهار³

(Say, "Allah is the Creator of all things and beings, and Allah is the One yet the Dominant over all things".)

The theologians all agree on the concept of the monotheism in creation; however, there exist two interpretations in this regard as follows,

A. Any sort of the Reason-Cause systems or relations, which exist among the beings, originate from the Cause of all causes or Reason of all reasons, and God, indeed, is the Absolute Independent Creator, and the will of none-God in causing everything takes root from His will.

This theory specifies the existence of the Reason-Cause system in the universe, the truthfulness of which has been admitted by the human sciences, too. It is He, who has created this system, and this system takes its effect, reason, and cause from Him.

B. There is only one Creator in the universe, and it is God. In the system of existence, there is no effect and cause relation among the objects, and God is the only Self- Existent Creator of all the natural phenomena, and even the human power has no effect on His will.

Therefore, there exists only one Cause in the universe, and He stands for what the science identifies as the natural causes.

It is noteworthy to mention that the Asharites thinkers have presented this idea, too, but some of their nobilities, such as Imam Ul-Harmin, and then Sheikh Mohammed Abdoh in his treatise on Monotheism have rejected this theory and adopted the former.

3- Rad Sura, verse no.16

3. Monotheism in Governance:

Since creation solely belongs to Allah, the governance of the system of existence is within His power, and it is He, who governs the whole universe. Besides, the logical reason, which proves the monotheism in creation, proves the monotheism in the governance.

The holy Quran also in various verses introduces God as the solely prudent Manager of the universe:

قل اغير الله ابغي ربا و هو رب كل شيء

(Say, "Shall I seek a god other than Allah while Allah is the Creator of all creatures?")⁴

Of course, the same comments, which were presented for the monotheism in creation, are true about the monotheism in governance, which signifies the Divine Self-Governance. Accordingly, it is the Divine Will that brings about all the systems of governance, which exist among the beings in the system of existence. The holy Quran also refers to this fact as saying,

فالمديرات امراً

(By the angels who make plans and regulate the affairs of the world.)⁵

4. Monotheism in Sovereignty:

Monotheism in the sovereignty signifies that the sovereignty is the particular right only for God, and it is only He, who rules over the mankind. As the holy Quran states,

ان الحكم الا لله

(The Divine command is for Allah only.)⁶

4- Anam, Sura, verse no.164

5- Nazeat Sura, verse no. 5

6-Yusof Sura, verse no.40

7- Sad Sura, verse no.26

Hence, the others' sovereignty recurs with the Divine Will so that the true men take the reins of government in the society and guide the people to the way of prosperity. The holy Quran also highlights this fact as saying,

يا داوود انا جعلناك خليفه في الارض فاحكم بين الناس بالحق

(O David! We did indeed appoint you as a Divine governor in the land, so judge among men according to the word of justice.)⁷

1. Monotheism in Obedience:

Monotheism in obedience signifies that the obedience of God, the Almighty, is absolutely necessary for mankind. Therefore, the Divine Will ordains the obedience of other ones, such as the prophets, Imams, the religious leader, parents, etc.

6. Monotheism in Legislation:

Monotheism in legislation signifies that the sole right of legislation belongs to God, the Almighty. Due to this fact, our heavenly Book considers any decree that is not in the framework of the Divine Law as transgression. According to the holy Quran,

و من لم يحكم بما انزل الله فاولئك هم الكافرون⁸

(And whosoever does not judge by Allah's Words of Decree, such are the disbelievers)

و من لم يحكم بما انزل الله فاولئك هم الفاسقون⁹

(And whosoever does not judge by Allah's Words of Decree, such are indeed considered the disobedient.)

و من لم يحكم بما انزل الله فاولئك هم الظالمون¹⁰

(And whosoever does not judge by Allah's Words of Decree, such are the transgressors.)

8- Maedeh Sura, verse no. 44

9-Ibid, verse no. 47

10- Ibid, verse no. 45

7. Monotheism in Worship:

The most important topic with regard to monotheism in worship is the definition of the term of worship; because the whole Muslims unanimously agree that worship only and only belongs to God, and no one deserves to be worshipped. As the holy Quran says,

اياك نعبد و اياك نستعين

(You alone do we worship, and your aid alone de we seek.)¹¹

From this holy verse, it is deduced that this issue has always been a common syllabus in the missions of the whole Divine prophets and the philosophy of their prophetic mission. According to the holy Quran,

و لقد بعثنا في كل امه رسولا ان اعبدوا الله و اجتنبوا الطاغوت

(We did send among every people a Messenger to proclaim: “Worship Allah and keep away from the Devil”.)¹²

Thus, it is beyond doubt that worship belongs only to God, and no one else, and he who has got this belief is a Monotheist.

But what is the real concept of worship? Is kissing the hand of the teacher, parents, etc. accounted as worship? Is homage and submission equivalent to the act of worship?

It is noteworthy to mention that there is an element, until when it does not occur, the act, even prostration, is not accounted as worship. But what is that element that colors our homage and submission as worship?

The misconception of Worship:

A number of writers have defined the act of worship as submission or extreme humility, but they have not managed to conform their idea to the presented concept in a number of the holy Quran verses. The holy Quran explicitly asserts:

و اذ قلنا للملائكه اسجدوا لادم

(And we stated to the angels, “Bow down to Adam”.)¹³

11- Hamd Sura, verse no. 4

12- Nahl Sura, verse no. 36

The angels performed the act of prostration exactly in the same form that they always did it to the Divinity, but the former was with the intention of humility, and the latter meant for worship. With regard to this fact, the holy Quran also asserts:

و رفع ابويه علي العرش و خروا له سجدا و قال يا ابت هذا تاويل رويي من قبل قد جعلها ربي حقا¹⁴

(Joseph placed his father and mother on the throne and they all thankfully prostrated before him (Joseph) and he said, “O, my father! This is the interpretation of my dream in the past. My Creator has indeed fulfilled it true”.)

It should be noted that Joseph had dreamed that eleven stars along with the sun and the moon were prostrating before him. The holy Quran narrates:

اني رايت احد عشر كوكبا و الشمس و القمر رايتهم لي ساجدين

*“I saw in my dream there were eleven stars and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating to me”.*¹⁵

The eleven stars in this verse stand for Joseph’s brothers, the sun symbolizes his father, and the moon is the symbol of his mother. Besides, this verse specifies that not only the brothers, but also Jacob, his father, prostrated to Joseph. But why this prostration is not regarded as the act of worship?

The lame excuse!

In response to this question, the mentioned group of writers specifies, “Because God, the Almighty, ordered them [the angels and the Joseph’s kings] to such acts, it is not polytheism”. But this answer does not make sense, because God never orders the mankind to an action while it is polytheism in essence. The holy Quran says,

قل ان الله لا يامركم بالفحشاء اتقولون علي الله ما لا تعلمون

*(Say, “Verily, Allah does not enjoin indecency; do you say against Allah such things that you have no knowledge”?)*¹⁶

13- Baqara Sura, verse no. 34

14- Yusof Sura, verse no. 100

15- Ibid, verse no. 4

16- Araf Sura, verse no. 28

In fact, God's command does not make any alteration in the essence of the deeds. If one pays homage to the other with the intention of worship, and God orders to it, it is actually the act of worship.

The real concept of worship:

The whole monotheists all over the world unanimously agree on 'the prohibition of worshipping none-God'. On the other side, it is comprehended that the angels' prostration to Adam and Jacob and his sons' prostration to Joseph is not considered as the act of worship.

Now, let us see what is the element, which once colors an act as worship and once as humility?

When referring to the verses of the holy Quran, it is clarified that worship is the submission to the being while we regard him as God or ascribe Godly attributes to him. The belief in God and His Omnipotence is the element, which gives the color of worship to our deed when accompanied by it.

The pagans throughout the world, especially in the Arabic Peninsula, had a deep sense of humility to some of the beings, but they knew them as God's creatures. They believed that God had bestowed some of the Divine attributes, such as the forgiveness of the sins and intercession, upon them.

Some of the Babylon pagans worshipped the celestial bodies and called them as the Lord but not their Creator; the ones, who have been appointed to run the affairs in the world. The story of Prophet Abraham is based on this fact that they conceived these beings not as God, but the strong creatures, who had been ascertained to manage the world.

The holy Quran highlights the term رب that means the manager or authority in its verses¹⁷. The landlord in Arabic is called رب البيت (Rabul Beit) and the owner of the farm is entitled as رب الضيعة (Rabul Dhiah), because it is he who runs the affairs in the house or the farm.

On the contrary, the holy Quran through introducing God, the Almighty, as the sole Manager and Creator of the world stands firmly against the pagans' claim and invites the people to worship God, the One. It says,

17- Anam Sura, verses no. 76-78

ان الله ربي و ربكم فاعبدوه هذا صراط مستقيم

*(Verily, Allah is my Creator and your Creator, so worship Him: this is the straight way.)*¹⁸

And elsewhere, it says,

ذلكم الله ربكم لا اله الا هو خالق كل شيء فاعبدوه

*(That is Allah, your Creator; there is no god but He, the Creator of all things; so worship Him alone.)*¹⁹

In Dokhan Sura, it also specifies as saying,

لا اله الا هو يحيي و يميت ربكم و رب آبائكم الاولين

*(There is no god but Allah, and He is the One, who gives life and causes death, and He is the Creator of you as well as your ancestors.)*²⁰

The holy Quran also quotes Jesus Christ as saying,

و قال المسيح يا بني اسرائيل اعبدوا الله ربي و ربكم

*(Jesus said, “O, Children of Israel! worship Allah, my Creator and your Creator”.)*²¹

These verses certify that any kind of submission, when it is devoid of belief in the Divinity and Divine attributes, is not accounted as the act of worship, even it is in the highest level of humility. As a result, the child’s submission to the parents and that of the nation to the Prophet is not to worship them.

Accordingly, invoking the Divine guardians and kissing the gates and walls of their shrines, holding ceremonies on the occasions of their birthday and martyrdom, etc., that the ignorant persons color it as the worship of other than God, is away from polytheism

18- Ale-Imran Sura, verse no. 51

19- Anam Sura, verse no. 102

20- Anam Sura, verse no. 102

21- Maedeh Sura, verse no. 32