The Doctrine of
Monotheism

A Theological and Historical Examination of the Original Doctrine of Monotheism from the Earliest Sources of Islam

التَّوحِيد

Abu Hamzah ibnu Musafir

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Doctrine of Monotheism

A Theological and Historical Examination of the Original Doctrine of Monotheism from the Earliest Sources of Islam

---

Written by[1]

Abu Hamzah ibnu Musafir

---

[1] **Note:** The English translated edition "The Doctrine of Monotheism - A Theological and Historical Examination of the Original Doctrine of Monotheism from the Earliest Sources of Islam" was translated in consultation with the author, but not by him personally.

Title: **The Doctrine of Monotheism** - A Theological and Historical Examination of the Original Doctrine of Monotheism from the Earliest Sources of Islam

Author: Abu Hamzah ibnu Musafir

Print edition: E-Book edition in colour

First published: 07/2025

Last minor revision: 04/2026

©2025 self-published

Page size: 6“ x 9“ / 181 pages

Website: www.ibnu-musafir.com

E-mail: info@ibnu-musafir.com

About this Book

It is well known that three religions are generally classified as monotheistic, namely, in chronological order, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three religions are also referred to as the Abrahamic religions because each of them traces its origin back to Abraham.

The present treatise aims to elaborate on the doctrine of monotheism as authentically as possible from the earliest textual sources of Islam. The primary focus is on the question of what constitutes the fundamental content of the Islamic understanding of monotheism and how this was defined in the textual sources of Islam.

This book is intended for both readers who adhere to Islam and for followers of other religions who seek to gain a deeper understanding of Islam and its core message, or of the early conception of monotheism in general.

In a comprehensive introduction, the essential role of narration in religions is examined in a broad sense, while also offering a comparative perspective on the Abrahamic religions. In this context, various perspectives are used to illustrate the unique position that Islamic narration sciences held in the field of historical narration.

About the Author

Abu Hamzah ibnu Musafir has been studying Islamic theology since the mid-nineties, spending several years in the Arab world for that purpose. He enrolled in various faculties in Cairo as well as in Damascus.

During his studies, he memorized the Qur'an and other Arabic foundational texts, as well as Arabic poems. He published numerous writings in Arabic and other languages on different disciplines of Islamic theology.

His studies specialize in the foundations of Islam, the analysis and comparative study of various religious movements, theoretical and applied *ḥadīth* studies, the fundamentals of narration and comparative religion studies.

Contents

Transcription Table 10

Introduction 12

Notes on this book 14

The Essential Role of Narration in All Religions 15

Judaism and Christianity in Regard to Authentic Narration – Textual Criticism, Bart D. Ehrman, and His Critics 15

Islam in This Regard 19

The Islamic Sources: Qur'an, Sunnah, and Consensus 25

The Narrators of the Islamic Source Texts and the Meaning of the Term ahlu s-sunnati wa-l-jamāʿah 29

The Emergence of Schisms – The Ḥadīth on the Firaq/Sects 30

The Increasing Alteration of Religious Doctrines in General 33

The True Message of Monotheism in Islam and the Widespread Misunderstanding About It 35

Monotheism in Worship as the Foundation of Islam 37

The Explanation of the Word Islam by the Prophet ﷺ 37

The Difference Between the Foundation of Islam and the Laws Built Upon It 38

The Possibility of Excuse Due to Ignorance 38

The Differences in Legal Rulings Among the Various Prophets ﷺ 39

The Fact that the Call is First Made to Tawḥīd and Only Thereafter to the Individual Rituals, Commandments, and Prohibitions 42

Tawḥīd/Monotheism is the Foundation of Islam 44

The Meaning of the Declaration of Faith in the Early Sources of Islam and the Misunderstanding About It 46

The Pre-Islamic Idolaters Believed in a Single Creator 47

The Qur'an Verse: "Has He Made the Worshipped Ones into a Single Worshipped One?" 48

The Call of the Prophets and the Response of Their Peoples 50
The Verse: "So do not Attribute to Allah Equals While You Know [Better]." 51
The Verse: "Make for Us a Worshipped One (Ilāh) Just as They Have Worshipped Ones (Ālihah)" 53
The Verse: If You Asked them, "Who Created the Heavens and Earth …" 54
The Claim That Polytheism Is Always Associated with the Idea of a Second Deity 56
The Meaning of the Two Terms Rabb and Ilāh 58
On the Further Division of Tawḥīd into ar-Rubūbiyyah, al-Ulūhiyyah, and al-Asmāʾu wa-ṣ-Ṣifāt 59

The Call to the Original Monotheism: Then and Now 62
The Call of the Prophets ﷺ and the Reaction of the People 62
The Time of Estrangement 63

The Meaning of the Word "Islam" 65
The Importance of Terms in Religion and the Word Islam in Particular 65
The Linguistic Meaning of the Word "Islam" and the Root Salima 65

The Application of the Root Salima in the Qur'an – The Parable of the Monotheist and the Polytheist 67
The Linguists on This Verse 67
Aṭ-Ṭabarī on This Verse 70
What Should Follow from the Previously Described Misunderstanding of This Verse 72

The Linguistic Meaning of the Word Islam and How It Derives from the Verb and the Root 75
The Meaning of the Verb aslama 75
The Connection Between the Root Salima and the Derived Verb Aslama 76

The Clear Explanation of the Word Islam in the Qur'an 78
The "Submission of the Face" is Ikhlāṣ 81
The Poem of Zayd ibnu ʿAmr ibnu Nufayl رضي الله عنه 83

Polytheism 85

The Meaning of the Terms "Lesser Shirk" and "Greater Shirk" 87

The Forms of Shirk According to the Classification of Tawḥīd 88

The Meaning of ʿIbādah/Worship 90

Major Shirk is the Equating of Allah and His Creations in Matters that are Unique to the Creator 93

The Shirk of the Arabs in Intercession (Shafāʿah) 95

The Unlawful Exclusion of a Muslim from Islam 99

The Meaning of the Word Takfīr 99

The Deviation of the Khawārij 100

The Condemnation of Unauthorized Takfīr by the Prophet ﷺ Himself 101

The Rulings of the Sharīʿah Apply Only to what is Outwardly Visible 102

The Principle of Excuse Due to Ignorance (al-ʿUdhru bi-l-Jahl) 103

Why and When Ignorance of Parts of the Revelation is Excusable 104

The Difference Between Polytheists and Monotheists in Islamic Theology 105

Islam Means Ikhlāṣ – No Polytheist Fulfils the Ikhlāṣ 105

Islam is the Ḥanīfiyyah – A Polytheist is not a Ḥanīf 107

Islam is the Religion of Abraham (Millatu Ibrāhīm) – The Polytheist Contradicts This Fundamentally 109

If Islam Were Merely a Verbal Declaration, the Arabian Idolaters Would Have Been Muslims 110

Islam Means Renunciation of the Ṭāghūt – The Polytheist Does Not Fulfil This Principle 110

Shirk as the Opposite of Islam 114

Allah Does Not Forgive the Sin of Shirk – Except Through Sincere Repentance 118

Only a Monotheistic Soul Enters Paradise 119

The Polytheist Does Not Fulfil the Purpose of Creation and Religion 120

The "Ignorant Polytheist" Does Not Know the Meaning of the Testimony of Faith 122

The Ḥadīths Regarding the Test of Certain People on the Day of Judgment 123

A Polytheist Can Only Enter Islam Through Tawbah from Shirk 126

Shirk Destroys All Good Deeds 128

The Contradiction with the Qur'an in This Regard 131

Contradictory Consequences 132

The Consequence of Treating All Ignorant Polytheists Equally 132

Whoever Ignores One Form of Shirk Must Also Ignore All Others 133

Many Polytheists Would Have to Be Considered Muslims Even More Than Those Who Profess Islam Today 134

A Contradiction to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Consensus in Many Aspects 135

The Majority of People Fall into Shirk Due to Ignorance 135

The Word Mushrikūn in the Qur'an Always Includes the Ignorant Polytheist 138

Faulty Methods of Evidence Derivation 143

Following Ambiguous Revelation Texts and Scholarly Statements 144

Scholarly Statements Are Not Independent Evidence 150

Examples of Faulty Argumentation with Source Texts or Scholarly Statements 152

The Ḥadīth About Dhātu Anwāṭ 152

Those Companions of the Prophet Requested an Action That Is Not Classified as Major Shirk 154

Why the Prophet Firmly Rejected This Request 154

Points That Clarify and Reinforce What Has Been Said 155

The Ḥadīth of Muʿādh ibnu Jabal ﷺ 158

The Correct Understanding of This Ḥadīth 159

Absurd Consequences of the Incorrect Interpretation of This Ḥadīth 160

Various Claims 163

"Mistakes Are Forgiven for Muslims" 163

A Contradictory Example 165

"Someone Who Commits Shirk Under Coercion Is Also Not a Mushrik" 167

"If Kufr Can Be Excused Due to Ignorance, Then the Same Must Apply to Shirk" 169

The Correct and Incorrect Understanding of the Hindrances to Takfīr (Mawāniʿu t-Takfīr) 169

Closing Remarks 172

Notes on the Transcription 174

Notes on the Formatting and Capitalization of Transcribed Words 175

Chronological Index of Early Islamic Authors 176

References 177

Transcription Table

Transcription	Arabic letter	Name	Pronunciation guide
ā	ا	Alif	long *a* (similar to British light *a* in ***a**sh*, but as a long *a*, and after some consonants dark like English *a* in *c**a**r*)
b	ب	Bā’	like English *b* in ***b**arn*
d	د	Dāl	like English *d* in ***d**ear*
ḍ	ض	Ḍād	no equivalent (similar to *d* in ***d**awn*, but emphatic or rather said pharyngealized)
dh	ذ	Dhāl	like English voiced *th* in ***th**at*
f	ف	Fā’	like English *f* in ***f**ar*
j	ج	Jīm	like English *j* in ***j**am*
gh	غ	Ghayn	no equivalent (similar to French *r*, but softer i.e. not uvular but velar)
h	ه	Hā’	like English *h* in ***h**at*
ḥ	ح	Ḥā’	no equivalent (voiceless pharyngeal *h*, as in Arabic *A**ḥ**mad*)
kh	خ	Khā’	like Scottish *ch* in *lo**ch***
k	ك	Kāf	like English *c* in ***c**ap*
l	ل	Lām	like English light *l* in ***l**amp*
ḷ	ل	Lām mufakhamah	like English dark *l* in *we**ll***
m	م	Mīm	like English *m* in ***m**e*
n	ن	Nūn	like English *n* in ***n**o*

Transcription	Arabic letter	Name	Pronunciation guide
q	ق	Qāf	no equivalent (similar to ***c**aught* but uvular, i.e. produced further back in the mouth)
r	ر	Rāʾ	no equivalent (Spanish *r* as in *pe**r**o*)
s	س	Sīn	like English *s* in ***s**ight*
sh	ش	Shīn	like English *sh* in ***sh**ine*
ṣ	ص	Ṣād	no equivalent (similar to *s* in ***s**auce*, but emphatic or rather said pharyngealized)
t	ت	Tāʾ	like English *t* in *s**t**ick*
ṭ	ط	Ṭāʾ	no equivalent (similar to *t* in *s**t**all*, but emphatic or rather said pharyngealized)
th	ث	Thāʾ	like English voiceless *th* in ***th**ink*
w / ū	و	Wāw	like English *w* in ***w**ater* / long *u* like English *oo* in *p**oo**l*
y / ī	ي	Yāʾ	like English *y* in ***y**es* / long *i* like English *ee* in *m**ee**t*
z	ز	Zāy	like English *z* in ***z**ebra*
ẓ	ظ	Ẓāʾ	no equivalent (similar *th* in *fa**th**er*, but emphatic or rather said pharyngealized)
ʾ	ء	Hamzah	glottal stop like the stop sound in English *uh-oh!*
ʿ	ع	ʿAyn	no equivalent (voiced pharyngeal fricative as the ʿ in Arabic *kaʿbah*)

- Short vowels: a, i, u; long vowels: ā, ī, ū; Diphthongs: aw, ay

Further information can be found at the end of this document.

Introduction

It is well known that three religions are generally classified as monotheistic, namely, in chronological order, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three religions are also referred to as the Abrahamic religions because each of them traces its origin back to Abraham[2] عليه السلام[3].

As indicated by the title, the present book serves the purpose of elaborating on the Islamic understanding of monotheism – in Arabic referred to as *tawḥīd*[4] – as authentically as possible from the earliest textual sources of Islam.

---

[2] In Arabic: Ibrāhīm, who is referred to by Muslims as the "Father of the Prophets."

[3] Arabic script symbol. This translates approximately as "Peace and blessings be upon him." Muslims show their respect to all prophets – such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and many others – by mentioning this or similar phrases.

[4] Generally, in translations, it is of course not possible to find a term in the other language that corresponds in every aspect. Therefore, it shall be clarified from the outset how the term monotheism is used and understood in this book.

The meaning of the English word monotheism is generally rendered as "belief in one god." The word consists of two originally Greek terms, with "*monos*" meaning "alone/unique" and "*theos*" meaning "god." In English, this term has been commonly used for several centuries to indicate that a religion is free from the worship of multiple different deities.

As with other terms, different definitions of the word monotheism exist. It is generally known, for example, that the Christian and Islamic conceptions regarding the Creator of the world and His attributes diverge in several aspects – yet both are referred to as "monotheism." The question, therefore, ultimately concerns how the term is defined when it is used.

The primary aim of this book is to elaborate on the Islamic understanding of monotheism from the earliest sources of Islam. When the term "monotheism" is mentioned in this book, it generally refers to Islamic monotheism, which corresponds to the Arabic word *tawḥīd*. The true meaning of this ...--

The primary target audience of this book consists of those who already possess a certain level of prior knowledge regarding the fundamental principles of Islam. On one hand this topic is particularly relevant for Muslims who seek to deepen their understanding of the foundation of Islam and to access an authentic doctrine derived from the early sources of Islam.

On the other hand, this book also provides the general reader, or the non-Muslim academic reader, with a better understanding of the doctrine of monotheism from the perspective of early Islamic theology.

According to Islamic doctrine, there exists only one true monotheism. It is embodied in the message with which all prophets ﷺ were sent. These very prophets are, in general, the same as those known in both Judaism and Christianity and are therefore mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, or in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

In contrast to the Jews, Jesus is recognized by Muslims as a prophet, but not as the son of God, as many Christians believe – though by no means all.

Furthermore, it is well known that Muslims also affirm the prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ. Islam thus honours Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac,

---

monotheism and how this meaning is derived from the Islamic textual sources is what this book seeks to examine. For this objective, it is therefore irrelevant which additional definitions may exist among some religious scholars and historians. The same applies to “polytheism” and the Arabic word *shirk*.

The same issue of translation arises, for example, with the term “religion” for the Arabic *dīn* or with the word “God” – as has already been shown in the differing conceptions between Islam and Christianity.

In this book, such words will always be used in the sense of their general concept, or their meaning will be clarified within a specific context. What Islamic “monotheism”, as described in the Qur’an, and the Islamic “religion” actually are and how they differ from other conceptions – this is precisely what will be explored throughout the course of this book.

Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad[5], or other figures not mentioned here by name, as prophets of the one Creator.

Notes on this book

The present book is intended both for readers who adhere to Islam and for followers of other religions who seek to learn more about Islam and its core message, or about the early understanding of monotheism in general.

To facilitate comprehension, Arabic technical terms are explained through annotations whenever they are mentioned for the first time if possible. In order to enhance readability for the English-speaking reader, such Arabic technical terms are consistently written in lowercase and italicized in this book. Certain exceptions to this rule are noted in the guidelines at the end of the book.

To facilitate the reader's comparison with the original texts, these have always been presented before their respective English translations. Throughout the entire book, the texts cited have been taken from the respective editions of the digital library *al-Maktabatu sh-shāmilah* to facilitate reference. It should be noted that the editions of *al-Maktabatu sh-shāmilah* have frequently been revised (e.g., through the complete vocalization of texts).

[5] In Arabic: Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Ismāʿīl, Isḥāq, Yaʿqūb, Yūsuf, Mūsā, ʿĪsā, and Muḥammad

The Essential Role of Narration in All Religions

Religion, in general, is sustained by narration. Without tradition, that is, the passing down of the original doctrine, its continued existence would be inconceivable. For this reason, narration plays an essential role in religions – a fact that many religious people today are not even aware of.

Many people, often from childhood, are convinced of a certain religious doctrine but make no effort to return to the source in order to verify the authenticity of that doctrine. The problem with this is that, in such a situation, one can essentially regard anything as his own religion simply because he has been told so, even though it may have little or nothing to do with the original doctrine.

It is also generally known that in all religions, as time distances them further from their original doctrine, a multitude of different orientations have emerged, differing significantly in fundamental aspects. Consequently, it is impossible for all these varying beliefs to reflect and align with the one original doctrine – neither in Judaism, nor in Christianity, nor in Islam.

In this regard as well, the pivotal role of narration in religion becomes evident. The authenticity of the sources is, therefore, an extremely important question that everyone must confront if he seeks to examine the foundations of his own religious beliefs.

Judaism and Christianity in Regard to Authentic Narration – Textual Criticism, Bart D. Ehrman, and His Critics

The historical fact that neither the Old nor the New Testament exists today in an authentically narrated form is something that no serious historian would dispute.

Bart D. Ehrman, who is unquestionably regarded as one of the most prominent experts on biblical manuscripts in academic circles worldwide[6], illustrated this issue in his book "*Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why.*"

---

[6] Ehrman's reputation and decades of experience in this field are, in themselves, indisputable. However, his statements regarding the lack of ...--

The aforementioned book focuses solely on this subject, and its core message becomes particularly clear in the following quote from the author (pp. 10):

> *"Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the originals. We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals.*
>
> *What we have are copies made later – much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places. As we will see later in this book, these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don't even know how many differences there are. Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament."*

Anyone with even a very basic understanding of Islamic narration sciences is astonished by this and many other similar statements made by the most renowned scholars regarding the ancient scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. They all clearly affirm that the issue concerning the authenticity of Jewish and Christian sources is an undeniable fact.

---

authenticity of the Bible are indeed vehemently contested by many Christians. Given such a fundamental critique, this is not unexpected. Nevertheless, these criticisms from some Christians cannot be regarded as substantial or, above all, decisive in refuting Ehrman's principal assertion.

In the next chapter, a brief additional explanation of this matter will be provided. However, the present book does not aim to delve into this discussion in detail.

Rather, a separate treatise would be required to thoroughly examine the foundations of narration sciences in general and their application to religious narrations in particular.

It must be clearly understood, however, that the lack of authenticity of the Bible is not a novel thesis proposed by Ehrman, but rather a long-established historical fact. This will soon be further demonstrated through another quote.

What is particularly interesting in this context is that Christian theologians themselves treat this fact as a completely normal and accepted reality, without raising any objections against it.

In personal discussions, distinguished and well-known Austrian theologians from both the Catholic and Protestant churches told me that it is an undisputed doctrinal position among them that the Bible can certainly not be regarded as the unaltered and directly conveyed word of God! Moreover, they explicitly assessed it as a fact that the Bible was undoubtedly compiled afterward and over a long period by many different authors.

For example, in the book *Bibelkunde*[7] throughout the entire work, when discussing the individual parts of the Bible, there is constant mention of numerous different authors of the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testament.

Regarding the Old Testament, the book further states, in a general sense, on page 35:

> *"The oldest Old Testament manuscripts date back to the 2nd century BCE (leather scrolls found in Qumran)."*

In the chronology of the *Luther Bible*[8]*,* it is stated that biblical scholarship dates the life of Moses and the actual revelation of the Torah to approximately 1200 to 1300 BCE.

---

[7] *Bibelkunde (translated: Bible Studies)*, Christa Zerbst and Christoph Weist, Evangelischer Presseverband in Austria, "With approval of the Evangelical Supreme Church Council A. and H. B. dated October 1, 1985", 1987 edition.

This book is used as a school textbook by the Evangelical Church in Austria and is therefore to be regarded as official doctrine.

[8] Zeittafel (translated: Timetable), Page 349.

Lutherbibel - Standardausgabe mit Apokryphen, Durchgesehene Ausgabe in neuer Rechtschreibung, 2006, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart.

In discussions with Christians, the Qumran scrolls are often cited as evidence for the supposed authenticity of the (Christian) Bible. However, these scrolls have nothing to do with the Christian Gospel. Furthermore, according to the aforementioned quote, these copies were produced approximately one thousand years (!) after the actual time of revelation to Moses – at least according to the general findings of biblical scholarship.

In contrast, in Islamic narration science, a narration is already classified as weak and therefore fundamentally not authentic if even a single narrator is missing in the chain of narration or if the narrator was not sufficiently known to the early biographers!

One should therefore be aware of the immense difference – although, as already mentioned, a detailed explanation of this subject requires a separate discussion.

Christian critics, such as James White and others who argue against Ehrman, naturally attempt to justify why Christians, by and large, could still trust the main message of the Bible. In doing so, White and his counterparts, for example, cite Ehrman's concession that the approximately 400,000 textual variations – i.e., differences in the text (!) – are 99 percent non-substantive and that the preservation of the text over the centuries still represents a remarkable achievement by many scribes.

The partially fundamental alteration of essential contents of the Torah and the Gospel is, from the perspective of Islamic theology, a fact that is also explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an.[9]

Even if one were to grant a certain validity to these two claims made by Christians, this does not change the fact that a profound alteration of the text over a period of hundreds or even a thousand years before its final recording could never be ruled out.

---

[9] As explained at the end of the present book in the notes on transcription and formatting, Arabic technical terms in this book are written in lowercase and italicized to enhance readability for the English-speaking reader.

For very well-known, Anglicized terms such as "Muslim, Islam, Zakat, Ramadan, …", the English usage and common spelling are preferred. Further details on this can be found in the aforementioned notes.

This is entirely aside from the fact that the biblical text itself clearly shows in countless places that its many individual parts were written by numerous, in some cases completely unknown, authors – as has been demonstrated in the preceding discussion.

As already noted, a comprehensive examination of the science of narration cannot be undertaken within this framework. However, based on what has been said – and even more so for anyone who delves deeper into such matters – there is no slightest doubt that no other historical narration can even remotely compare to the Islamic narration sciences.

In the next chapter, this realization will become even clearer, including through the statement of a leading British Orientalist of the past century.

Islam in This Regard

The previous chapter has already made it clear that Islam, in terms of the authenticity of its narration, undoubtedly stands out in comparison to all other religious or even general historical narrations.

Islam is the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions and, without doubt, also the most authentically preserved – a fact that no one with a reasonable approach to historical research would dispute.

The most evident features of this authenticity are:

1) the early documentation of the Qur'an

2) the widespread memorization of the texts

3) the narration of tens of thousands of prophetic narrations, scholarly consensus, and statements of early scholars through chains of narration from the very beginning.

Regarding the general public, it is currently evident that neither Muslims nor non-Muslims possess any well-founded understanding of how Islam has been narrated. This is even more apparent in the case of Judaism and Christianity.

People who identify as Muslims generally have at least some superficial awareness of the aforementioned key characteristics of Islamic narration, yet their knowledge remains entirely superficial.

Non-Muslims, on the other hand, generally do not even have the slightest idea about Islamic methods of narration – which is rather peculiar, considering that the tens of thousands of narration chains in the Muslim *ḥadīth* sciences[10] represent a remarkable historical achievement.

The following account of a personal conversation with a Nigerian Christian, who was engaged in missionary work among Muslims, makes it quite clear that most non-Muslims do not even possess a rudimentary understanding – let alone any concrete knowledge – of the Islamic narration methodology.

During the conversation, I asked this man at one point whether he truly believed that, for example, al-Bukhārī[11] had found the *ḥadīths* he narrated on some stones or parchments in the desert. He simply responded, "Yes. Certainly. It must be something like that."

Although there had been many discussions with people of differing opinions over the decades before this incident, I was astonished by this response. After all, this was someone who carried a few selected texts from

---

[10] A *ḥadīth* is a narration from or about the Prophet ﷺ. The entirety of such narrations is called Sunnah, and constitutes, alongside the Qur'an, the second primary legal source of Islam. (The plural of *ḥadīth* is *aḥādīth*, but it is often adapted to English usage, as is the case in this book, for example: "the *ḥadīths.")*

It should be noted that in the early period of Islam, it was common to refer to narrations from the first following generations as *ḥadīth* as well. The distinction between *ḥadīth* specifically for a narration from the Prophet and *athar* (pl. *āthār*) for other narrations only became established later, though not all scholars of *ḥadīth* adopted this differentiation.

In this sense, it is not incorrect to generally refer to the narrations of the first generations as *ḥadīth* narration, *ḥadīth* sciences, or *ḥadīth*-related scholarly works.

[11] The *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (194–256 AH / 810–870 CE) is the most well-known work of *ḥadīth* narration. Al-Bukhārī lived around 60 years. The narrations in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī are regarded by Muslims (Sunnis) as the most authentic *ḥadīth* narrations of all. Of similar rank is the *Ṣaḥīḥ* compilation of the *ḥadīth* scholar Muslim ibnu l-Ḥajjāj (204–261 AH / 820–875 CE). Muslim lived around 55 years.

the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī in his pocket for discussions with Muslims, ready to pull out one of the relatively well-known pseudo-arguments at an opportune moment.

When it comes to such purposes, al-Bukhārī is, therefore, a familiar name to some. However, there is complete ignorance regarding the actual nature of the narration.

The previously quoted assumption about early *ḥadīth* sciences – that it might have been based on some excavations in the desert – clearly demonstrates that the person in question had absolutely no understanding of this subject.

Especially since Christians have increasingly been exposed to textual criticism by scholars such as Bart Ehrman, they have – predictably – begun to search for possible weaknesses in the authenticity of Islamic narration in response, following the pattern: If one cannot solve the problem of a lack of authenticity in one's own scripture, then at least, one attempts to find the same problem, even if in a much weaker form, in the other.

In this process, Christians occasionally bring up the Qur'an itself. In doing so, certain claims are made that can already be identified as erroneous with even basic foundational knowledge.

Of course, it is evident that this approach from the Christian side does nothing to change the issue surrounding the lack of authenticity of the Bible.

This is in addition to the already mentioned fact that the difference between Islamic narration and other methods of narration is enormous. One must realize that the mere fact that no other tradition was passed down through chains of narration makes any comparison appear absurd.

Muslim narrators were so meticulous in preserving texts that they recorded even the slightest doubt regarding individual words or specific points in narration chains countless times – often without this having any impact on the overall meaning. Therefore, anyone who believes he can find a historical analogy for this is hereby required to provide the proof.

For this reason, even among non-Muslims, some scholars could not help but express their admiration for Islamic narration in a rather unbiased manner.

For example, David Samuel Margoliouth, a leading British Orientalist[12], who passed away in 1940, said in this regard:

> *But though the theory of the isnad has occasioned endless trouble, owing to the inquiries which have to be made into trustworthiness of each narrator [13], and the fabrication of traditions was a familiar and at times easily tolerated practise [14], its value in making for*

[12] David Samuel Margoliouth was born in London in 1858 and passed away in the same city in 1940. From 1889 to 1937, he taught Arabic as a professor at the University of Oxford.

For the quoted statement, see page 20 in *Lectures on Arabic Historians [Delivered before the University of Calcutta, February 1929]* by David Samuel Margoliouth.

[13] Margoliouth clearly highlights here, at the outset, the incredible efforts that had to be undertaken to analyse the vast number of narrated texts, narration chains, and biographies. In the first three centuries, thousands of scholars and narrators dedicated themselves to this work, often devoting their entire lives to it.

Given this vast amount of material, it is not surprising that many people find it overwhelming. However, even among Muslims themselves, it is, of course, not required that every individual to be a *ḥadīth* scholar. This makes it all the more important for the general Muslim community to have a solid understanding of the fundamentals of narration, even though most Muslims do not have the necessary awareness of this subject.

In any case, the achievements of the early *ḥadīth* scholars are virtually impossible to replicate. Fundamentally, this also is not necessary, as this work was completed to a sufficient extent by the scholars of the first centuries. From my perspective, the lack of understanding of this point should be regarded as a distortion within modern *ḥadīth* sciences.

The discrepancy between the methodology of the early and later *ḥadīth* scholars (*al-farqu bayna manhaji l-mutaqaddimīna wa-l-mutaʾakhirīna fī-l-ḥadīth*) is a crucial topic that is expected to receive significant attention in intra-Islamic discourse in the near future – and indeed must receive such attention.

[14] The phenomenon of the *waḍḍāʿīn* – those who fabricated narrations for their own purposes – was well known to Muslim *ḥadīth* scholars. They ...--

> *accuracy[15] cannot be questioned, and the Muslims are justified in taking pride in their science of tradition.*
>
> *In other ancient records we have to take what is told us on the author's assertion: It is rare that a Greek or Roman historian tells us the source of his information.*
>
> *German researchers especially have written "much on criticism of the sources", endeavouring to trace the narrative of Biblical writers and others to the materials whence they were obtained.*
>
> *Where those materials no longer exist, such endeavours can at best provide plausible hypotheses. In the works of Tabari, Baladhuri and Tanukhi the writers themselves spare us this trouble. […]*

---

examined each of these narrations individually, and due to their extensive knowledge and the obvious flaws in the fabricated chains, it was easy to recognize that these were falsified narrations.

It should not be forgotten that Margoliouth was a historian and not a *ḥadīth* scholar. The early Arabic works of historiography, such as the well-known work "*Tārīkhu l-Umami wa-l-Mulūk"* by aṭ-Ṭabarī, were in no way recognized as authentic by the *ḥadīth* scholars due to their exceptionally high standards. On the contrary, aṭ-Ṭabarī himself points out these deficiencies in the preface of the mentioned work.

Nevertheless, Margoliouth was evidently astonished by the Muslim tradition, particularly by the vast number of narration chains. Although he primarily engaged with historical works and did not have a deeper insight into the analysis of *asānīd* (chains of narration), he was very much aware of the significant difference compared to other historical narrations. Even these works of Islamic historiography are far more accurate, comprehensive, and detailed than any other historical chronicles, as Margoliouth explicitly states in this quotation!

This is to say nothing of the significant works of *ḥadīth* narration, in which no statement is narrated except with its corresponding chain of narration, and – depending on the objective of the work – weak narrators were filtered out from the outset.

[15] He apparently means here: … the value of *ḥadīth* sciences in developing methods for narration with the highest possible accuracy – *wa-ḷḷāhu aʿlam* / and Allah knows best.

Margoliouth then mentions that, despite the high standards of the Arab historians, there are also some points of criticism – an issue that would, however, need to be addressed in a separate work on *ḥadīth* sciences. Margoliouth, for example, refers to the previously mentioned problem of the so-called *waḍḍāʿīn*, those individuals who deliberately fabricated *ḥadīths* and even created chains of narration for them.

As previously stated, it must be noted here that no one was more familiar with this phenomenon, nor understood it more precisely, than the *ḥadīth* scholars themselves. Their expertise reached the extent that they could generally identify fabricated *ḥadīths* with ease, compile them in dedicated works, and even produce their own biographical collections on weak narrators and the *waḍḍāʿīn*, the fabricators of narrations!

In conclusion, Margoliouth reaffirmed his statement regarding the precision and high value of Islamic *ḥadīth* sciences when he said:

> *[…] Nevertheless the veracity of the most eminent among the Arab historians attains a high standard and renders their works of great service to humanity.*

The findings mentioned in this chapter regarding the topic of Islamic narration should suffice as an introduction within the framework of this book and should also contribute to a better understanding of the narrations referenced later on.

The early Muslim scholars pushed the accuracy of narration to the absolute extreme. For the conditions of that time, these methods were undoubtedly the utmost that was achievable[16].

Precisely due to this unique characteristic of Islam, which led to the preservation of its early sources, it is also much more feasible to extract the original doctrine of Islam and, consequently, the Islamic understanding of monotheism from these sources.

[16] This raises, for example, the question of how it is possible that this topic receives little to no serious mention in the study of history at universities worldwide, especially in Western institutions.

The Islamic Sources: Qur'an, Sunnah, and Consensus

The previously mentioned objective of this book – to derive the Islamic understanding of monotheism from the earliest sources – requires focusing on the primary sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

To these two main sources must then be added the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the early scholars, particularly that of the Companions of the Prophet (*ṣaḥābah*) رضي الله عنهم[17].

It is unthinkable that within the first centuries, a thousand or more experts in the narration of texts concerning a specific matter of faith could have unanimously agreed on something and all been mistaken. For this reason, early Islamic scholarship regarded such consensus opinions as undoubtedly indicative of the authentic Islamic doctrine of faith – especially given the already mentioned reliance on numerous chains of narration.

It is, of course, clear that any consensus must always be based on the primary sources of Islam, as consensus could only have emerged due to a clear statement from the Qur'an or the Prophet ﷺ. In this sense, consensus is not to be regarded as an independent legal source, since from the perspective of Islamic theology, and in agreement among Muslims, no one received direct revelation after the Prophet.[18]

As an example of the narration of consensus by the early *ḥadīth* scholars, the experts in Islamic narration, we shall consider the following

---

[17] Arabic script symbol. This translates approximately as "May Allah be pleased with them."

[18] The same applies to what is known as *qiyās*, analogical conclusion, which is also commonly listed as a legal source in Islam.

Without a doubt, *qiyās* is a source of Islamic jurisprudence. However, since analogical conclusion does not involve the narration of a distinct text but rather an attempt to understand the meaning of an existing text and apply it to another case in reality, *qiyās* has not been mentioned here as a fundamental source.

Furthermore, especially matters of faith have already been narrated and substantiated through numerous texts from the aforementioned sources, whereas analogical conclusion generally does not play a role in this regard.

statement from Muḥammad ibnu Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, who is probably the most well-known *ḥadīth* scholar of all time.

Thus, Abū l-Qāsim Hibatuḷḷāh al-Lālakāʾī narrates the following statement from al-Bukhārī in his book *Sharḥu Uṣūli ʿtiqādi Ahlissunnati wa-l-Jamāʿah*. It should be noted that al-Lālakāʾī himself was also a *ḥadīth* scholar and, following the established tradition of his field, narrated this statement from al-Bukhārī also with a chain of narration[19]:

أَخْبَرَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ حَفْصٍ الْهَرَوِيُّ , قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ سَلَمَةَ , قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو الْحُسَيْنِ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عِمْرَانَ بْنِ مُوسَى الْجُرْجَانِيُّ قَالَ:

سَمِعْتُ أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدَ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنَ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ الْبُخَارِيَّ بِالشَّاشِ يَقُولُ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ مُحَمَّدَ بْنَ إِسْمَاعِيلَ الْبُخَارِيَّ يَقُولُ: لَقِيتُ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ أَلْفِ رَجُلٍ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ أَهْلِ الْحِجَازِ وَمَكَّةَ وَالْمَدِينَةِ وَالْكُوفَةِ وَالْبَصْرَةِ وَوَاسِطَ وَبَغْدَادَ وَالشَّامِ وَمِصْرَ لَقِيتُهُمْ كَرَّاتٍ قَرْنًا بَعْدَ قَرْنٍ ثُمَّ قَرْنًا بَعْدَ قَرْنٍ , أَدْرَكْتُهُمْ وَهُمْ مُتَوَافِرُونَ مُنْذُ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ سِتٍّ وَأَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً , أَهْلَ الشَّامِ وَمِصْرَ وَالْجَزِيرَةِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَالْبَصْرَةِ أَرْبَعَ مَرَّاتٍ فِي سِنِينَ ذَوِي عَدَدٍ بِالْحِجَازِ سِتَّةَ أَعْوَامٍ , وَلَا أُحْصِي كَمْ دَخَلْتُ الْكُوفَةَ وَبَغْدَادَ مَعَ مُحَدِّثِي أَهْلِ خُرَاسَانَ , مِنْهُمُ الْمَكِّيُّ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ , وَيَحْيَى بْنُ يَحْيَى ...

> *I heard Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibnu Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī say: I have met more than a thousand men from among the people of knowledge, from the people of Ḥijāz, from Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra, Wāsiṭ, Baghdad, ash-Shām [20] and Egypt.*

[19] The chains of narration are generally not mentioned in full in this book for the sake of brevity. In this specific chain of narration, for example, there are four individuals between al-Lālakāʾī and al-Bukhārī.

[20] The Levant. In classical Arabic usage, this term refers to the lands north of the Arabian Peninsula. Nowadays, the word *ash-Shām* primarily refers to Syria.

> *I have met them repeatedly, from generation to generation, and then again from generation to generation. I encountered them in great numbers for more than 46 years*[21].
>
> *The people of ash-Shām, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula twice and (the people of) Basra four times over several years, and in Ḥijāz for six years.*
>
> *And I can hardly count how many times I entered Kufa and Baghdad together with the ḥadīth scholars from the people of Khurāsān*[22].
>
> *Among them (were) al-Makkiyy ibnu Ibrāhīm and Yaḥyā ibnu Yaḥyā …*

Now, al-Bukhārī mentions – according to my count – a total of 45 names of renowned scholars from various major cities and the leading centers of knowledge in the Islamic world until the narration finally states:

> … وَاكْتَفَيْنَا بِتَسْمِيَةِ هَؤُلَاءِ كَيْ يَكُونَ مُخْتَصَرًا وَأَنْ لَا يَطُولَ ذَلِكَ , فَمَا رَأَيْتُ وَاحِدًا مِنْهُمْ يَخْتَلِفُ فِي هَذِهِ الْأَشْيَاءِ: أَنَّ الدِّينَ قَوْلٌ وَعَمَلٌ؛ وَذَلِكَ لِقَوْلِ اللَّهِ: {وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ} [البينة: 5] وَأَنَّ الْقُرْآنَ كَلَامُ اللَّهِ غَيْرُ مَخْلُوقٍ

> *[…] We have sufficed with mentioning the names of these individuals to keep it concise and not make it lengthy. Among all these people, I did not see a single one who held a differing opinion (from the others) on the following matters:*

---

[21] Al-Bukhārī means by this that he encountered the various, numerous scholars over this period, met them during his travels, studied with them, and became familiar with their well-known views and statements. He then proceeds to list some of these journeys.

[22] Also known in English as Khorasan. This was a historically significant region in Central Asia, particularly important for Islamic history and especially for *ḥadīth* sciences. It encompassed vast areas of present-day Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. This region was also known as *Khurāsān al-kubrā*, meaning "Greater Khurāsān."

> • *That the dīn*[23] *consists of both statement and action. This is based on the statement of Allah: "And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give zakah*[24]*. And that is the correct religion." (al-bayyinah:5)*
>
> • *And that the Qur'an is the word of Allah and is not created. […]*

The individuals mentioned here by al-Bukhārī were not merely unknown people with whom he had personal connections. Rather, they were all well-known figures throughout the Islamic world – scholars and, in turn, narrators of *ḥadīth*. Apart from these exemplarily listed individuals, as previously stated, there were countless other well-known narrators and scholars who conveyed these fundamental beliefs in exactly the same manner.

Alongside these scholars of narration, many new opinions began to emerge in the first centuries of Islam, influenced in part by Greek philosophy. Those who were influenced by philosophy increasingly began to regard their own intellect as a source of religion. Eventually, on this path, they soon started to prioritize their own opinions over the textually narrated statements. Depending on how far these individuals went, they sometimes even rejected well-established narrations or even consensus opinions, contradicting the clear statements of Qur'anic verses to a significant extent.

Among the issues that were intensely debated in the early centuries was the question of whether actions are a part of *īmān* or not, or the question of whether the Qur'an is created or not.

However, as evident from the above quotation, there existed a narrated consensus among the scholars of that time regarding these matters,

---

[23] The word *dīn* is often described in English as religion or a comprehensive way of life. In this book, it is generally translated as religion. The general difficulty in translating such terms has already been discussed earlier.

[24] The original Arabic word is written as *zakāh* (or in contextual form *zakātun*).

which is why other opinions on these issues could not be considered legitimate.

In such matters of faith, these differing opinions were unanimously condemned by those very scholars as an unlawful innovation in religion (*bidʿah*, pl. *bidaʿ*).

The Narrators of the Islamic Source Texts and the Meaning of the Term ahlu s-sunnati wa-l-jamāʿah

As explained in the previous chapter, the narration of source texts plays a central role in all religions. However, from a historical perspective, Islam holds a particularly unique status in its practical implementation.

While continuously engaging with the texts, the thousands of early *ḥadīth* scholars were deeply committed to adhering to the original doctrine and textual evidence.

These scholars became known by various titles within the first centuries of Islam, such as "the scholars of *ḥadīth*", "the scholars of *athar*", and likewise, "The People of the Sunnah and the Community."

The word Sunnah originally means "path" and "method" in Arabic. As explained at the beginning, the Sunnah of the Prophet is the second source of Islamic jurisprudence. It is often defined as all statements, actions, and tacit approvals that have been narrated from the Prophet ﷺ.

In the broader sense of the "method of the Prophet" or his path, however, the Sunnah encompasses more than this – namely, the entire religion that was proclaimed by the Prophet.

The use of the word Sunnah in this sense appears in numerous statements of the Prophet ﷺ himself, which is why those who adhered to the original doctrine of Islam were also generally referred to as "the People of the Sunnah."

From this, it also quickly becomes clear what a crucial role these scholars played in the establishment of consensus opinions, as was already strongly evident in the previously mentioned quotation from the eminent *ḥadīth* scholar al-Bukhārī.

According to Islamic theology, differences of opinion can certainly exist in many legal matters and subfields of Islamic teachings. In contrast,

however, the fundamental doctrine of faith must be clear and unequivocal, as it originates from a single source and must not be subject to scholarly interpretation. The core questions of Islamic creed are therefore not matters in which legitimate differences of opinion are conceivable, a point that the early scholars repeatedly emphasized in their writings.

This singular doctrine of faith was upheld and narrated by a single, unified community throughout the first centuries, which is why the followers of this doctrine were also referred to as "the People of the Community."

From these circumstances arises the well-known designation "the People of the Sunnah and the Community", *ahlu s-sunnati wa-l-jamāʿah*.

Thus, it refers to a unified community that adhered to the texts and followed the original doctrine.

The Emergence of Schisms – The Ḥadīth on the Firaq/Sects

Opposing this unified community, countless groups and schisms soon emerged in the early period of Islam, gradually fragmenting further in their doctrines of faith. This fragmentation is referred to in Arabic by the term *firaq* (Arabic: group, schism, sect; singular: *firqah*), which also relates to a well-known *ḥadīth*, namely, the so-called "*ḥadīth* of the *firaq",* meaning the *ḥadīth* concerning the various sects and splinter groups.

This *ḥadīth* about schisms and sects has been narrated through numerous narrations in the works of Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibnu Mājah رَحِمَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ[25] and in many other fundamental and early works of *ḥadīth* narration and Islamic creed [26].

---

[25] Arabic script symbol. This translates approximately as "May Allah have mercy on them."

[26] As previously mentioned, the *ḥadīth* of the *firaq* was narrated extensively by the early scholars, and it is also evident that these scholars used the text as an argument, meaning they generally regarded it as authentic.

It should be noted here that not every single narration of this *ḥadīth* – or of a *ḥadīth* in general – must be classified as authentic *(ṣaḥīḥ)* for the narrations to be accepted in their entirety. In some cases, individual narration chains of a *ḥadīth* may have minor deficiencies, while the *ḥadīth* as a whole was still ...--

Thus, for example, the following wording can be found in the *Sunan* compilation of Ibnu Mājah:

عَنْ عَوْفِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: افْتَرَقَتْ الْيَهُودُ عَلَى إِحْدَى وَسَبْعِينَ فِرْقَةً، فَوَاحِدَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ، وَسَبْعُونَ فِي النَّارِ، وَافْتَرَقَتْ النَّصَارَى عَلَى ثِنْتَيْنِ وَسَبْعِينَ فِرْقَةً، فَإِحْدَى وَسَبْعُونَ فِي النَّارِ، وَوَاحِدَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ، وَالَّذِي نَفْسُ مُحَمَّدٍ بِيَدِهِ، لَتَفْتَرِقَنَّ أُمَّتِي عَلَى ثَلَاثٍ وَسَبْعِينَ فِرْقَةً، فوَاحِدَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ، وَثِنْتَانِ وَسَبْعُونَ فِي النَّارِ قِيلَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، مَنْ هُمْ؟ قَالَ: الْجَمَاعَةُ

> *The Jews split into seventy-one groups; one of them is in Paradise, and seventy of them are in the Fire.*
>
> *And the Christians split into seventy-two groups; one of them is in Paradise, and seventy-one of them are in the Fire.*
>
> *My community will split into seventy-three groups; one of them is in Paradise, and seventy-two of them are in the Fire.*
>
> *It was then said: "O Messenger of Allah! Who are they?" He replied: "The Community (al-jamāʿah)."*

According to this narrated statement of the Prophet ﷺ, the division into numerous groups and movements, which has been observed throughout history, took place.

---

considered authentic by early scholars. This is also one of the primary reasons why weak narrations were still narrated, as they could be strengthened by other supporting narrations.

Furthermore, the classification of a narration as "weak" *(ḍaʿīf)* does not necessarily mean that its wording is definitively deemed fabricated or false. Such a judgment would require a classification of "severely weak" *(shadīdu ḍ-ḍaʿf)*. Rather, the assessment of "weak" merely indicates that the statement cannot be attributed with certainty to the Prophet ﷺ or the respective person. However, it also cannot be definitively denied that the statement was indeed made as narrated. Thus, it was still considered possible that the narration itself corresponded to actual events.

It should also be noted here that this *ḥadīth* clearly states that among both the Jews and the Christians, there was a community that adhered to the original, unaltered doctrine – meaning a *jamāʿah*.

According to the quoted text, the Prophet ﷺ was also asked about the one group that would remain free from errors in faith and responded: "They are the Community *(al-jamāʿah)*."

Precisely because this *jamāʿah* adhered to the texts of the Sunnah, these texts increasingly became the target of attacks by those splinter groups, some of which ultimately led to the outright rejection of the Sunnah.

At that time, openly rejecting the Qur'an was a clear admission of disbelief and was therefore not easily possible. However, the partial rejection of the Sunnah was more feasible, which is why individual narrations became increasingly debated.

Various sects often even claimed that they were serving Islam and sought to protect the religion by rejecting certain texts. Despite their clear ignorance of narrations, narration chains, and the *ḥadīth* sciences, they rejected certain narrations under the pretext of new conditions they had invented, while others they dismissed without any justification.

Through this approach, movements such as the so-called *qurʾāniyyūn* and the Shia emerged, who fundamentally rejected the Sunnah and continue to do so to this day.

Other groups, such as the *khawārij, muʿtazilah, ashʿariyyah, māturīdiyyah*, and others, rejected those parts that were incompatible with their philosophical doctrines. Some texts they denied outright, while others they did not completely reject but attempted to weaken their meaning through theologically and/or linguistically impermissible interpretations.

The more evident these deviations became, the more the people of *ḥadīth* emphasized their adherence to the Sunnah. For this reason, many early books on matters of faith were titled "Book of the Sunnah" or had similar names. This can be seen in the works of well-known early scholars such as ʿAbduḷḷāh (d. 290 AH), the son of the esteemed scholar Aḥmad ibnu Ḥanbal, or Ibnu Abī ʿĀsim (d. 287 AH) and Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311 AH) رَحِمَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ, all of whom titled their works in this manner.

The Increasing Alteration of Religious Doctrines in General

The division into various groups, as described in the previous chapter, did not affect only the Islamic community as we have seen. As explicitly mentioned in the *ḥadīth* of the *firaq*, this is a general phenomenon that affects all narrated religious doctrines.

This fragmentation is also mentioned in the Qur'an – fundamentally in accordance with descriptions found in the Torah and the Gospel. After the death of their respective prophets عليهم السلام, the communities increasingly became divided in matters of religion.

According to Islamic understanding, the prophetic doctrine of monotheism has been present among humanity since the time of Adam عليه السلام, the father of mankind. However, in each prophetic community, due to the aforementioned disruption in religion, the doctrine of true monotheism gradually faded into oblivion – until the one Creator renewed it again and again through a new messenger.

Anyone who has studied the history of the Abrahamic religions inevitably knows that they suffered greatly from this severe fragmentation. Only someone unfamiliar with these religions and their history would dispute this fact.

An example of this is the history of Christianity, whose followers soon developed significant differences in fundamental religious matters in the early period of Christianity. These differences eventually led to enmity, violence, and exile.

For instance, Christians were divided on the question of whether Jesus was a prophet, God, the son of God, or a human being with a special divine spark. Naturally, these questions led to numerous other issues. Debates over whether the will of God and the will of Jesus were one and the same, or not, resulted in serious disagreements with correspondingly severe consequences.

As we have seen, the Islamic community was also not spared from severe disruption in matters of faith. However, since the Islamic source texts were narrated with great authenticity, this did not lead to a significant and fundamental alteration of the texts themselves. Rather, the actual content and true meaning of these texts gradually faded into oblivion for many followers of Islam.

As already demonstrated, this soon resulted in people who considered themselves members of Islam adopting beliefs that were in no way compatible with the general doctrine of the prophets ﷺ.

Over the centuries, this led many followers of Islam to gradually fall into acts of polytheistic association, which is the very opposite of pure monotheism. Many statements, practices, and ways of thinking that were classified as polytheism from the perspective of early Islamic theology can still frequently be found today among individuals or groups who believe themselves to be adherents of Islam.

Despite the alteration of doctrine, Islam considers its own original teaching, or the original teachings of Mūsā/Moses ﷺ and ʿĪsā/Jesus, to be the true doctrine of the one Creator. For a Muslim, there can fundamentally be no doubt that these two figures were highly honourable prophets who conveyed the true monotheism with absolute clarity.

The question that must therefore arise for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike is: *What was the actual, original doctrine of Moses ﷺ, Jesus ﷺ and Muḥammad ﷺ?*

For any adherent of these religions, the logical conclusion of this question can only be a return to the earliest sources.

This very return to the Islamic sources is therefore the core and objective of the present book.

The True Message of Monotheism in Islam and the Widespread Misunderstanding About It

When examining the Qur'an, it becomes clear that the true message of all prophets ﷺ – contrary to what many people who identify as Muslims might assume – was not the knowledge that there is only one Creator. The vast majority of the nations to whom the prophets ﷺ were sent were already well aware of this fact. Even those who attributed divine attributes to multiple beings generally believed in a single Creator who ultimately had power over all these entities.

From an Islamic perspective, the polytheism of these nations lay rather in the fact that, alongside the one Creator, they also revered other entities or individuals. They directed towards them various forms of worship, devotion, and veneration that belong exclusively to the one Creator.

As will be demonstrated in the following sections through early Islamic texts, the pre-Islamic Arabs were also undoubtedly well aware of this[27]. Today, the word idolater is generally associated with the idea of multiple "gods" or creators. However, if this alone constituted classical polytheism, then the Arabs of that time – or most other nations – would have to be considered monotheists. Thus, true monotheism must entail more than just this knowledge.

The contemporary understanding of many people regarding the actual meaning of the word Islam and the declaration of faith deviates significantly from the explanation mentioned above. They assume that the

[27] In light of what was mentioned earlier in the explanation of the term "monotheism", the following can be noted:

The knowledge or mere acknowledgment of the existence of one Creator may fulfil the definitions of monotheism used by some Western religious scholars and historians, but it does not by any means correspond to the definition of Islamic monotheism.

As previously stated, this is not about any arbitrary understanding or the question of varying definitions but rather about the concept of monotheism *(tawḥīd)* that the Qur'an calls for and the polytheism *(shirk)* that it condemns.

monotheism affirmed in the declaration of faith simply means that there is only one Creator.

The moment a person holds this belief, he is, according to this view, unquestionably classified as a Muslim, even if he simultaneously engages in various forms of polytheism in worship.

However, Islamic sources demonstrate that it is precisely this association in worship that makes a person a polytheist, which is why such association is condemned in the strongest terms in Islam.

For a person to truly be considered a Muslim from an Islamic perspective, far more is required than a mere verbal declaration. In this sense, it is inconceivable that a person could engage in polytheism yet still be regarded as a true monotheist merely due to his verbal testimony. A polytheistic Muslim or a polytheistic monotheist would ultimately be a contradictory concept[28].

Yet, this completely paradoxical notion is widespread today. For this reason, one of the central objectives of this book is to address and clarify this issue.

---

[28] The notion of a "polytheistic Muslim" is not only absurd for Muslims. A well-known Christian theologian from Austria, whom I personally know, agreed with me on this point in response to a treatise where I addressed exactly this issue. He stated: *"Statements […] without an understanding of their meaning (polytheistic Muslim) … are truly alarming."*

One should reflect on this: These are aspects of Islamic theology that are self-evident even to many non-Muslim theologians.

Monotheism in Worship as the Foundation of Islam

The Explanation of the Word Islam by the Prophet ﷺ

There are numerous narrations in which the Prophet ﷺ himself explicitly explained and defined the meaning of the word Islam and the most fundamental aspects of the religion.

An example of this is the following *ḥadīth*, narrated by al-Bukhārī from Abū Hurayrah ؓ. As in other narrations, the Prophet ﷺ was asked, *"What is Islam?"* and he replied:

> الْإِسْلَامُ أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَتُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةَ وَتُؤَدِّيَ الزَّكَاةَ الْمَفْرُوضَةَ وَتَصُومَ رَمَضَانَ

> *Islam is that you worship only Allah and do not associate anything with Him[29], that you establish prayer, pay the obligatory Zakat, and fast during Ramadan.[30]*

With this repeatedly stated declaration, the term Islam was clearly explained by the Prophet of Islam himself. As is evident from this, the essence of this religion lies in the worship of the one and only Creator of mankind.

Since this is the most central aspect of Islam, the question "What is Islam?" must be sufficiently clarified by the Islamic sources. Therefore, it should require nothing more than returning to the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. With the aforementioned definition given by the Prophet ﷺ, the first fundamental question of this religion is clearly answered without the need to resort to philosophy or engage in extensive intellectual reasoning.

---

[29] Among Muslims, the capitalization of personal pronouns referring to Allah has been recognized as appropriate and has accordingly become widespread in English writing.

[30] The original Arabic words for Zakat and Ramadan are written as *zakāh* and *ramaḍān.*

The elements mentioned in this *ḥadīth* following this fundamental principle are also central components of Islam. However, there is a clear distinction. Together, the things mentioned in the *ḥadīth* form the well-known five pillars of Islam.

However, for a person to fulfil the very foundation of Islam and enter this religion in the first place, he must first worship his Creator alone while simultaneously abstaining from worshiping anything else – without exception. This point constitutes the first of the five pillars of Islam mentioned in the *ḥadīth*. Only in this way can a person be a monotheist or become one.

If someone does not fulfil this central principle, then according to Islamic theology, he can undoubtedly not be considered a Muslim.

The Difference Between the Foundation of Islam and the Laws Built Upon It

The Arabic word for monotheism is *tawḥīd*, which linguistically means "to unify" or "to make one." In Islamic theology, the term *tawḥīd* means "to affirm the oneness of Allah" – in His names, attributes, and actions, or in worship and obedience to Him. *Tawḥīd* is therefore the foundation of the message of all prophets ﷺ, the pure monotheism. It is synonymous with the declaration of faith "*lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh*."

Without a doubt, prayer, Zakat, fasting in Ramadan, and the pilgrimage are also important and significant institutions of Islam. However, monotheism serves as the foundation upon which these acts are built.

The distinction between the foundation and the laws built upon it becomes particularly clear in the following points.

The Possibility of Excuse Due to Ignorance

According to the unanimous understanding of the early Muslim scholars who sought to preserve an authentic narrated creed, Islam upholds the principle of excuse due to ignorance – although, clearly, this cannot be applied to every conceivable situation, which will be further discussed later in this book.

Regarding prayer, Zakat, obligatory fasting, and pilgrimage, it must be noted in this context that a person can certainly be excused if his

ignorance is recognized and theologically justifiable. For instance, someone who does not know the source text that makes these religious obligations mandatory – because the text has never reached him or has not been conveyed in an understandable form – is considered excused.

In contrast, it is inconceivable how someone could be a Muslim while being entirely unaware of the fundamental meaning of the word Islam. This represents a major distinction from the other mentioned obligations.

Moreover, it is self-evident that the practice of Islam must be intentional and conscious. How could a person have the necessary intention and awareness if he does not even know the fundamental meaning of Islam itself?

The Differences in Legal Rulings Among the Various Prophets عليهم السلام

The rituals, laws, commandments, and prohibitions – the legal systems of the individual prophets عليهم السلام – differed in many aspects according to Islamic teachings. However, monotheism as the foundation remained always the same and did not differ in any way between the various prophets and their communities. This fundamental doctrine, also referred to as "the general Islam" *(al-islāmu l-ʿāmm)*, has always been unified from the very beginning.

This fact is highlighted in a *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet ﷺ in al-Bukhārī, as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «أَنَا أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ، وَالْأَنْبِيَاءُ إِخْوَةٌ لِعَلَّاتٍ، أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ شَتَّى وَدِينُهُمْ وَاحِدٌ»

> *The prophets are like the children of different mothers from the same father. Their mothers are different, but their dīn is one.*

The word *dīn* is often described in English as religion or a comprehensive way of life. In this statement, however, it refers to the foundation and essence – namely, monotheism.

Likewise, this point is emphasized in Qur'an verse[31] 5:48 (*sura al-Mā'idah*). In the Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*, pl. *tafāsīr*) of Ibnu Abī Ḥātim[32] and aṭ-Ṭabarī[33], it is explicitly narrated from the earliest scholars in their explanation of this verse that the legal systems and rulings differed, but the foundation of religion – monotheism – was always one.

Thus, Ibnu Abī Ḥātim, or aṭ-Ṭabarī, narrated from Qatādah:

> عَنْ قَتَادَةَ، قَوْلَهُ: {لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا} [المائدة: 48] قَالَ: الدِّينُ وَاحِدٌ وَالشَّرَائِعُ مُخْتَلِفَةٌ

> *It is narrated from Qatādah regarding the verse: "To each of you We prescribed a law and a method." He explained: "The dīn is one, and the legal systems are different."*

---

[31] The verses of the Qur'an are called *āyāt* (singular: *āyah*) in Arabic, a term that also carries the meaning of "sign" in Arabic. To enhance readability in English, this book uses the equivalent terms verse or Qur'an verse.

[32] Ibnu Abī Ḥātim ar-Rāzī (240–327 AH / 854–939 CE) was an outstanding *ḥadīth* scholar. His name holds great significance in the field of evaluating narrators *(al-jarḥu wa-t-taʿdīl)*. He passed away at the age of approximately 85 years (all age references follow the Gregorian calendar).

Also, he was particularly distinguished by his extensive work in Qur'anic exegesis (called in Arabic *tafsīr*), in which he relied exclusively on narrated narrations to explain the verses, without adding his own interpretations.

Along with the work of Ibnu Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, the exegesis of Ibnu Abī Ḥātim is among the earliest comprehensive *tafsīr* works that have been preserved in full or in large parts to this day.

[33] As mentioned, Abū Jaʿfar ibnu Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (224–310 AH / 839–922 CE) was also one of the early *tafsīr* scholars in Islamic history. He stands out for the fact that his extensive work in Qur'anic exegesis has been entirely preserved to this day.

Like Ibnu Abī Ḥātim, aṭ-Ṭabarī based his *tafsīr* primarily on narrated narrations, always tracing them back to their original source through their chain of narration. However, unlike Ibnu Abī Ḥātim, he often supplemented these narrations with his own explanations. Aṭ-Ṭabarī lived approximately 86 years.

After that, the following statement is also narrated from Qatādah as an explanation:

عَنْ قَتَادَةَ، قَوْلَهُ: {لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا} [المائدة: 48] يَقُولُ: سَبِيلًا وَسُنَّةً، وَالسُّنَنُ مُخْتَلِفَةٌ فِي التَّوْرَاةِ شَرِيعَةٌ، وَلِلْإِنْجِيلِ شَرِيعَةٌ، وَالْفُرْقَانُ شَرِيعَةٌ، يُحِلُّ اللَّهُ فِيهَا مَا شَاءَ وَيُحَرِّمُ مَا شَاءَ، لِيَعْلَمَ مَنْ يُطِيعُهُ مِمَّنْ يَعْصِيهِ، وَالدِّينُ الَّذِي لَا يُقْبَلُ غَيْرُهُ التَّوْحِيدُ وَالْإِخْلَاصُ الَّذِي جَاءَتْ بِهِ الرُّسُلُ

> *[…] and the dīn, apart from which no other will be accepted, is tawḥīd and ikhlāṣ, with which the messengers were sent.*

Here, he explicitly states that all prophets were united in *tawḥīd*, that is, in their understanding of monotheism.

Apart from this, this early *tafsīr* scholar mentioned another important point in the previously cited statement, which will be further clarified later in this book and should therefore already be consciously noted here.

Qatādah explains that monotheism consists of implementing what is known as *ikhlāṣ*, meaning the exclusive worship of Allah ﷻ[34]. This single statement from one of the earliest *tafsīr* scholars is in itself entirely sufficient to establish this point. However, due to the importance of this matter, further clarification will follow later.

It also becomes clear from the cited narration that the legal rulings of the various messengers were not immutable due to their differences. The commandments and prohibitions could vary in form and nature. Furthermore, a law that was valid for one messenger and his community could be completely abrogated. However, this does not apply to all rulings, as there were certainly matters that remained universally consistent by the consensus of all prophets – such as the clear injustice of harming another person in terms of his life, property, and honour, or adultery and other matters. Scholars of Islamic history have repeatedly pointed out this aspect of the immutability of certain fundamental principles.

---

[34] This Arabic script symbol means approximately: “Glorified and Most Exalted is He.” In this or a similar manner, Muslims express reverence for the Creator.

The Fact that the Call is First Made to Tawḥīd and Only Thereafter to the Individual Rituals, Commandments, and Prohibitions

Al-Bukhārī narrates from Ibnu ʿAbbās ﵄:

أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ بَعَثَ مُعَاذًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ إِلَى الْيَمَنِ فَقَالَ ادْعُهُمْ إِلَى شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ هُمْ أَطَاعُوا لِذَلِكَ فَأَعْلِمْهُمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ افْتَرَضَ عَلَيْهِمْ خَمْسَ صَلَوَاتٍ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ وَلَيْلَةٍ فَإِنْ هُمْ أَطَاعُوا لِذَلِكَ فَأَعْلِمْهُمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ افْتَرَضَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَدَقَةً فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ تُؤْخَذُ مِنْ أَغْنِيَائِهِمْ وَتُرَدُّ عَلَى فُقَرَائِهِمْ.

> *The Prophet ﷺ sent Muʿādh ﵁ to Yemen and said to him: "Call them to the testimony of lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh[35] and that I am the Messenger of Allah.*
>
> *<u>If they obey you in this, then teach them</u> that Allah has obligated upon them five prayers in the day and night. If they obey you in this, then teach them that Allah has made a monetary charity obligatory upon them, which is to be taken from their wealthy and returned to their poor."*

In another narration of the same *ḥadīth*, it is stated:

فَلْيَكُنْ أَوَّلَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ عِبَادَةُ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا عَرَفُوا اللَّهَ فَأَخْبِرْهُمْ ...

> *So let the first thing you call them to be the worship of Allah alone. If they then recognize Allah, then teach them ...*

And in another narration:

فَلْيَكُنْ أَوَّلَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى أَنْ يُوَحِّدُوا اللَّهَ تَعَالَى ...

> *So let the first thing you call them to be that they affirm the oneness of Allah[36]...*

---

[35] That is: "..., that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah."

[36] In Arabic: *"an yuwaḥḥidu-ḷḷāh"*, meaning that they make Allah the only one to be worshiped with their *ʿibādah* and do not associate anything with Him.

The command of *tawḥīd*/monotheism and the call to it precede prayer, Zakat, and everything else. Likewise, according to Islamic sources, *shirk*/polytheism is always the first thing that is prohibited.

This is evident in many places in the Qur'an:

﴿قُلْ تَعَالَوْا أَتْلُ مَا حَرَّمَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ أَلَّا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ﴾

Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children ...[37]

[sura al-Anʿām, 6:151]

It is also repeatedly explained in the Qur'an that every prophet first called his community to monotheism:

﴿اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ﴾

worship Allah; you have no one worthy of worship other than Him.

[sura al-Aʿrāf, 7:59]

In the Qur'an, the frequent repetition of this verse demonstrates that every prophet ﷺ conveyed this message to his people.

These aforementioned facts clearly illustrate the distinction between the foundation of Islam, *tawḥīd*, and the rituals, commandments, and prohibitions built upon it.

A fourth point can be added to this: the fact that laws, in general, were all revealed more or less at a later time. If it were essential in Islam for a

[37] **Note:** the translation of the Qur'an into English was compiled by the author but is mostly based on the Saheeh International translation.

person to know and implement all these matters, the delay in the revelation of individual laws would be inconceivable.

In summary, the following points can be mentioned:

1) The possibility of excuse due to ignorance

2) The differences in laws among the various prophets

3) The fact that the call to *tawḥīd* comes first, and only after that the individual rituals, commandments, and prohibitions

4) The fact that laws, in general, were all revealed more or less at a later time

Tawḥīd/Monotheism is the Foundation of Islam

In accordance with the previously mentioned *ḥadīth* about the five pillars of Islam, another well-known *ḥadīth* also states that Islam is built upon these five matters. Thus, al-Bukhārī narrates from ʿAbduḷḷāh ibnu ʿUmar that the Prophet ﷺ said:

عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ محمّدا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ وَالْحَجِّ وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ

> *Islam was built upon five (pillars):*
>
> • *The testimony that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah and that Muḥammad is His Messenger,*
>
> • *the establishment of prayer,*
>
> • *the giving of Zakat,*
>
> • *the pilgrimage, and*
>
> • *the fasting of Ramadan.*

Thus, it becomes clear once again that Islam is inconceivable without its foundation, as the entire religion is built upon this very foundation.

In another narration of this *ḥadīth* in al-Bukhārī, it is stated:

عَلَى خَمْسٍ إِيمَانٍ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْخَمْسِ

> *Islam was built upon five (pillars): Īmān in Allah and His Messenger, the five prayers...*

In yet another narration of the *ḥadīth* in Muslim[38], the following wording is recorded:

> عَلَى أَنْ يُوَحَّدَ اللَّهُ

> *..., that Allah is affirmed as One[39].*

> عَلَى أَنْ يُعْبَدَ اللَّهُ وَيُكْفَرَ بِمَا دُونَهُ

> *..., that one worships (only) Allah and rejects[40] everything else that is worshiped besides Him.*

This is, without a doubt, the foundation upon which Islam is built – a matter upon which there has been consensus among Muslims from the very beginning. As is often the case with different narrations, the wordings are identical in meaning and serve to clarify one another.

---

[38] Muslim ibnu l-Ḥajjāj (204–261 AH / 820–875 CE). As previously mentioned, the *ḥadīth* scholar Muslim was a student of al-Bukhārī and, along with him, one of the most significant scholars of *ḥadīth*.

[39] In Arabic, the verb *"yuwaḥḥadu"* is used here. It derives from the same root as the word *"wāḥid",* meaning "one." The word *tawḥīd* is the *maṣdar* (verbal noun) of this verb. As previously explained, *tawḥīd* means "to unify" or "to make one."

Thus, from this *ḥadīth* and its wording, it is evident that *tawḥīd* constitutes the foundation of Islam.

[40] Literally: *"to perform kufr against everything else."* Committing *kufr* against something means to completely reject it and disassociate oneself from it.

The Meaning of the Declaration of Faith in the Early Sources of Islam and the Misunderstanding About It

It has already been mentioned that the true meaning of the Islamic declaration of faith *lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh* is: *"There is no one worthy of worship except Allah."* Contrary to what many people today assume, the Arabic word *ilāh* does not primarily mean "Creator" or something similar. Rather, it can be translated into English as "One who is worthy of worship."

It was only among the philosophers – who began to regard their own intellect as a source of religion and often placed it above the actual sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah – that a misunderstanding regarding the declaration of faith gradually emerged. They believed that its meaning was: *"There is no Creator, Giver of life, or Sustainer … except Allah."*[41]

Since this belief is now also held by the majority of those who identify as Muslims, it is not surprising that translations of the declaration of faith often read: "There is no god but God" or "There is no god but Allah."

Such translations clearly reveal the assumption that the declaration of faith merely affirms the existence of a single Creator.

However, in this understanding and corresponding translation, the aspect of worship and obedience to this Creator is completely omitted.

---

[41] Of course, these and other fundamental meanings are undoubtedly also implicitly contained in the declaration of faith and are essential in Islamic core beliefs *(ʿaqīdah)*. That is, every Muslim must, without question, be fully convinced of the existence of Allah as the only Creator, Giver of life, and Sustainer.

However, the point here is that these aspects are not the primary meaning conveyed by the wording and core content of the declaration of faith. Likewise, it should be emphasized that the meaning of the declaration of faith must not be reduced to these beliefs alone.

The significant impact of this differing interpretation will become clearer in the course of this chapter.

Through this reasoning, the assumption also arose that the pre-Islamic idolaters of Mecca and other Arab tribes must have been entirely ignorant of the existence of this Creator, or that they must have believed in multiple creators alongside Him. Otherwise, it would not be explainable why these idolaters were considered idolaters in the first place. If they had known that there was only one Creator, they would have automatically fulfilled the declaration of faith and thus been monotheists.

Here, a fundamental problem becomes evident: The early Islamic sources clearly demonstrate that these very idolaters were firmly and explicitly convinced that Allah ﷻ is the Creator of all existence and that there is no other creator besides Him.

If this is the case – as the following texts will clearly show – then it reveals a widespread and serious lack of knowledge. Firstly, this ignorance concerns the early sources of Islam, especially the Qur'an and its early explanations, which convey this understanding in unanimous agreement. Secondly, it also pertains to the Islamic declaration of faith.

This, in turn, signifies a fundamental misunderstanding of the core message of the religion, and such a misunderstanding cannot remain without consequences. As has already been demonstrated, other views and concepts within this religion are built upon this very foundation.

The Pre-Islamic Idolaters Believed in a Single Creator

As previously mentioned, Islamic sources – starting, of course, with the Qur'an itself – clearly show that the pre-Islamic idolaters of the Arabs were convinced of the existence of Allah as the one and only Creator of all existence.

This chapter will provide multiple examples of such passages from the Qur'an. Additionally, the interpretations of the earliest Muslim scholars regarding these very Qur'anic verses will be presented to demonstrate that these texts were understood only in this manner by Muslims from the very beginning. For the early Muslims, it was self-evident that the Arab mushrikūn/idolaters were aware of the existence of a single Creator. They understood that the Qur'an specifically rebuked them for worshiping others alongside Him despite this knowledge.

The Qur'an Verse: "Has He Made the Worshipped Ones into a Single Worshipped One?"

In the Qur'an, it is stated in *sura Ṣād*:

﴿أَجَعَلَ الْآلِهَةَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عُجَابٌ﴾

Has he made the worshipped ones [42] into a single worshipped one? Indeed, this is a curious thing.
[sura Ṣād, 38:5]

Aṭ-Ṭabarī provides the following explanation regarding this verse:

يَقُولُ: وَقَالَ هَؤُلَاءِ الْكَافِرُونَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا: مُحَمَّدٌ سَاحِرٌ كَذَّابٌ: أَجْعَلَ مُحَمَّدٌ الْمَعْبُودَاتِ كُلَّهَا وَاحِدًا، يَسْمَعُ دُعَاءَنَا جَمِيعَنَا، وَيَعْلَمُ عِبَادَةَ كُلِّ عَابِدٍ عَبَدَهُ مِنَّا {إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عُجَابٌ} [ص: 5] أَيْ إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ ...

> *And so, those kāfirūn who claimed that Muḥammad was a sorcerer and a liar said: "Has Muḥammad made all the worshipped ones (al-maʿbūdāt) into a single one, who hears all our supplications and knows about the worship of everyone among us who worships Him?! Indeed, this is certainly a very strange thing." ...*

Regarding the word "objects of worship", aṭ-Ṭabarī did not use the word *ālihah* in his explanation, a term that, due to the prevailing ignorance today, has led to great confusion. Rather, he used the clear and unambiguous term *maʿbūdāt*.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī thus explained the meaning of this Qur'anic statement at the end of the 3rd century AH in exactly the previously mentioned sense. This unquestionably demonstrates that the word *ālihah* used in the Qur'an

[42] In Arabic, the word *ālihah*, the plural of *ilāh*, is used here. This is the same word that appears in the declaration of faith, and as recently explained, its misunderstanding has led to a misinterpretation of the declaration of faith.

In the declaration of faith, the existence of all (rightfully) worshiped beings is negated, except for the one who is rightfully worshiped. This is why the wording is: "There is no (rightful) ilāh except Allah", *lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh*.

must be understood in the meaning of "objects of worship" and not as "creator" or something similar.

Anyone who reads the Qur'an attentively should recognize that the term *ilāh* cannot be understood as "creator." Thus, it is very astonishing that for centuries, people who were regarded as great scholars and even engaged in Qur'anic exegesis persisted in a wrong understanding.

Regarding for example the aforementioned verse, one might wonder how such individuals could simply overlook the statement it contains. After all, it is clear that the idolaters meant: *"Does Muḥammad want to make our objects of worship into a single object of worship?"* It should be obvious to any reader of the Qur'an that this passage cannot possibly refer to Muḥammad supposedly reducing multiple creators to a single creator. This would make no sense.

Now, someone unfamiliar with the early Qur'anic exegeses might assume that this is just an isolated statement. However, this would be a grave misconception. Rather, it represents a consensus opinion, mentioned multiple times within this single work of aṭ-Ṭabarī alone and narrated from even earlier *tafsīr* scholars. Moreover, it is also found in numerous other early works of Islamic narration.

Therefore, in the following section, several additional texts will be cited as examples.

The Call of the Prophets and the Response of Their Peoples

In the Qur'an, the following statement of the prophets ﷺ to their peoples is repeatedly mentioned. It is repeated in the same wording in various places – often multiple times within the same sūrah, especially in *sura al-Aʿrāf*:

﴿يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ﴾

O my people, worship Allah; you have no one worthy of worship other than Him.

[sura al-Aʿrāf, 7:59, 65, 73, 85; sura Hūd, 11:50, 61, 84; sura al-Muʾminūn, 23:23, 32]

Here, the word *ilāh* is once again used. However, the response of those peoples to this call makes it exceedingly clear that they understood it as a call to the exclusive worship of the Creator, which is why they often rejected it.

For example, the response of the people of ʿĀd to their prophet Hūd ﷺ was:

﴿قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا لِنَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ وَنَذَرَ مَا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا﴾

They said, "Have you come to us that we should worship Allah alone and leave what our fathers have worshipped?

[sura al-Aʿrāf, 7:70]

They clearly and unmistakably understood that the call referred to monotheism in worship and that the word ilāh meant "object of worship" and not "creator." This is because they were already naturally aware of monotheism in matters of creation, provision, and similar aspects from birth.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī confirms this with the utmost clarity when he explains this verse as follows:

يَقُولُ تَعَالَى ذِكْرُهُ: قَالَتْ عَادٌ لِهُودٍ: أَجِئْتَنَا تَتَوَعَّدَنَا بِالْعِقَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ عَلَى مَا نَحْنُ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الدِّينِ كَيْ نَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ وَنَدِينَ لَهُ بِالطَّاعَةِ خَالِصًا وَنَهْجُرَ عِبَادَةَ الْآلِهَةِ وَالْأَصْنَامِ الَّتِي كَانَ آبَاؤُنَا يَعْبُدُونَهَا وَنَتَبَرَّأَ مِنْهَا؟

> *The Exalted says that the people of ʿĀd said to the Prophet Hūd: "Have you come to us, threatening us with Allah's punishment for our religion? So that we worship only Allah alone and are obedient only to Him, to no one else, in complete devotion?! And so that we abandon the worship of our ālihah and idols, which our forefathers worshiped? That we renounce them?!"*

Once again, aṭ-Ṭabarī, the *tafsīr* scholar, provides an exceptionally clear explanation that these idolaters of an earlier people mentioned in the Qur'an were indeed aware of Allah as the only Creator and also worshiped Him. However, they associated others with Him in worship and obedience.

The Verse: "So do not Attribute to Allah Equals While You Know [Better]."

As another example, the following verse from sura al-Baqarah can be cited. It states:

﴿الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

... So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know [better].
[sura al-Baqarah, 2:22]

Ibnu Abī Ḥātim – or aṭ-Ṭabarī – narrates the following statement of the Companion of the Prophet, Ibnu ʿAbbās ﵄, in his *tafsīr* regarding this verse:

عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ: {فَلا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ} [البقرة: 22] أَيْ لَا تُشْرِكُوا بِاللَّهِ غَيْرَهُ مِنَ الأَنْدَادِ الَّتِي لَا تَنْفَعُ وَلا تَضُرُّ، وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ لَا رَبَّ لَكُمْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ غَيْرُهُ، وَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الَّذِي يَدْعُوكُمْ إِلَيْهِ الرَّسُولُ مِنْ تَوْحِيدِهِ هُوَ الْحَقُّ لَا يُشَكُّ فِيهِ.

> *"So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know [that there is nothing similar to Him]." This means: Do not associate anything with Allah from among those (supposed) equals who can bring neither benefit nor harm, while you know that there is no Lord besides Him who provides for you. And while you know that what the Messenger calls you to – the tawḥīd of Allah – is the truth, about which there is no doubt.*

If one considers this statement alone, it is entirely sufficient to definitively refute the confused ideas about the meaning of the word *ilāh* and the Islamic declaration of faith that prevail worldwide today. It should also be taken into account that this is a narrated statement from a well-known Companion of the Prophet and, moreover, one of the most significant scholars in Islam.

The same applies to the following statement from Qatādah, which is narrated by Ibnu Abī Ḥātim in his *tafsīr* regarding the same Qur'anic verse:

عَنْ قَتَادَةَ: {فَلا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ} أَنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَكُمْ وَخَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ، ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ تَجْعَلُونَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا.

> *"So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know", that Allah has created you, or the heavens and the earth, and yet you associate equals with Him!*

Through the preceding quotations, it is clearly and indisputably established that the idolaters at the time of the revelation of Islam believed in a Creator, Giver of life, and Sustainer, but they associated others with Him in worship, devotion, and obedience.

The *mushrikūn* of Mecca believed in one Creator and did not associate anyone else with Him in terms of His attribute as the Creator and Giver of life.

Therefore, their issue with the declaration of faith could not have been about recognizing Allah ﷻ as the only Creator. Rather, they – unlike many people today who identify as Muslims (!) – understood very well the meaning of the declaration of faith and thus also the core message of Islam to which they were being called.

And precisely because they understood this meaning so clearly, they rejected Islam. They knew that the Prophet ﷺ was not primarily calling them to acknowledge a single Creator but rather to worship Him alone! This latter demand was one they were unwilling to accept. That exactly was their fundamental problem.

The Verse: "Make for Us a Worshipped One (Ilāh) Just as They Have Worshipped Ones (Ālihah)"

Another example of what has been stated is the story described in the Qur'an when Mūsā/Moses عليه السلام passed with his own people by a people of idolaters, and some among his people said:

﴿اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَٰهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ﴾

... make for us a worshipped one just as they have worshipped ones. [sura al-Aʿrāf, 7:138]

The word *ilāh* cannot possibly mean "Creator" in this context. If that were the case, the meaning of the verse would be: "Make for us a creator, just as they have multiple creators."

Instead, it must mean: "Make for us an object of worship, just as they have multiple objects of worship."

The Verse: If You Asked them, "Who Created the Heavens and Earth …"

Another important Qur'anic statement in this context is the following phrase, which is repeated several times in similar form in the Qur'an:

﴿وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ فَأَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ﴾

If you asked them, "Who created the heavens and earth and subjected the sun and the moon?" they would surely say, "Allah." Then how are they deluded? [sura al-ʿAnkabūt, 29:61]

In this and many other Qur'anic verses, as previously mentioned, the early Qur'anic exegeses provide a clear explanation of the word *ilāh* and thus of the Islamic declaration of faith.

According to these explanations by the early exegetes – such as aṭ-Ṭabarī and Ibnu Abī Ḥātim, or the even earlier scholars cited by two – the final statement in this verse can be described as follows: *"Why then do these idolaters turn away from Allah and from worshiping Him alone?"*

In the *tafsīr* of the nearly identical verse 43:87 by the early *mufassir*/Qur'an exegete Muqātil ibnu Sulaymān[43],

[43] Abū l-Ḥasan Muqātil ibnu Sulaymān al-Balkhī (d. 150 AH / 767 CE) is one of the earliest exegetes whose written *tafsīr* has been preserved to this day.

Much has been said about Muqātil ibnu Sulaymān himself, with some individuals vehemently criticizing him and accusing him of gross deviation in matters of faith. On the other hand, some other scholars denied these claims. Moreover, he was generally classified as weak in *ḥadīth* narration.

However, none of this changes the fact that he was universally recognized for his extensive knowledge of *tafsīr*. At the same time, the content of his *tafsīr* work itself was highly praised by notable scholars. For example, it is narrated from ʿAbdullāh ibnu l-Mubārak that he said: "What knowledge! If only it had a chain of narration" *(yā lahu min ʿilmin, law kāna lahu isnād)* [see especially: *Tārīkhu Baghdād*].

…--

who is counted among the so-called *atbāʿu t-tābiʿīn*[44], this is expressed with utmost clarity when he says:

> قال الله تعالى لنبيِّه ﷺ قل لهم: {فَأَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ} يقول مِن أين يكذبون بأنَّه واحد لا شريك له، وأنتم مقرّون أنّ الله خالق الأشياء وخلقكم، ولم يشاركه أحد في ملكه فيما خلق؟ فكيف تعبدون غيره؟

> *Allah, the Exalted, said to His Prophet ﷺ: "Say to them: 'Then how are they deluded?' meaning:*

Ibnu ʿAdiyy al-Jurjānī (d. 365 AH / 976 CE) narrates in his book *al-Kāmilu fī Ḍuʿafāʾi r-Rijāl*:

> ... قَال لِي نعيم بْن حَمَّاد رأيت عند سُفْيَان بْن عُيَينة كتابا لمقاتل بْن سُلَيْمَان فقلت لسفيان يَا أَبَا مُحَمد تروي لمقاتل فِي التفسير؟ قَال: لاَ ولكن أستدل بِهِ وأستعين بِهِ.

> *[Chain of narration] Nuʿaym ibnu Ḥammād said to me: "I saw a book by Muqātil ibnu Sulaymān with Sufyān ibnu ʿUyaynah, so I said to him: 'O Abū Muḥammad, do you transmit from Muqātil in tafsīr?' He replied: 'No, but I use it as evidence and seek assistance from it.'"*

Ibnu ʿAdiyy also mentions that Muqātil was well-versed in *tafsīr (kāna ḥāfiẓan li-t-tafsīr)*, but he did not have much understanding of chains of narration. As already mentioned, Muqātil's knowledge in the field of *tafsīr* was thus generally recognized by the scholarly community.

When a few selected texts from Muqātil ibnu Sulaymān are narrated in this book, it is not to narrate *ḥadīth* from him. Rather, the purpose is to demonstrate that even the earliest records of *tafsīr* fully confirm what is stated in this book and do not deviate from it in any way. It also shows that the early scholars did not reject these explanations narrated by Muqātil, but rather affirmed them.

[44] The *tābiʿūn* (the Followers) are the generation after the generation of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. The subsequent (second) generation is referred to as *atbāʿu t-tābiʿīn*.

These three generations – beginning with the generation of the Companions – hold special significance in Islamic theology and narration, as their excellence was affirmed in a statement by the Prophet ﷺ.

> *'Why do they deny that He is One with no partner' while you affirm that Allah is the Creator of all things, that He also created you, and that no one shares in His dominion over what He created?*
>
> *How then can you worship others besides Him?"*

From the previously mentioned examples, a comparative look at the already discussed reality of today clearly shows how far many people have been – and still are – removed from a correct understanding of various fundamental issues of Islam over centuries.

Anyone who reads the commentaries of some philosophy-influenced scholars will find that they made confusing and contradictory statements in their explanations of such source texts.

Nevertheless, the strong influence of philosophy continues to persist throughout the entire Islamic world, which is why such erroneous understandings of the foundation of faith are taught as the standard doctrine at most universities.

The Claim That Polytheism Is Always Associated with the Idea of a Second Deity

As already explained, many people today believe that the declaration of faith merely involves affirming belief in a single Creator. For this reason, individuals with such a view do not recognize any form of polytheism in worship. This raises the question of what the significance is of the idolaters' worship frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, or the objects of their worship, if worship itself is not considered problematic.

Some people explain this by claiming that actual "worship/*ʿibādah*" only occurs when a person attributes divine qualities to the "object of worship." According to this statement and the understanding of those who argue this way, the act of worship itself would not be the issue. Rather, the real problem would be the beliefs *(iʿtiqādāt, singular: iʿtiqād)* behind these actions and statements.

Some even go so far as to claim that, according to their understanding, a person only worships something if he believes that the object of worship possesses complete independence and self-sufficiency *(al-istiqlāl)*. For this reason, such individuals – often from the Sufi spectrum – frequently

use the supposed condition of istiqlāl to defend followers of various grave-worship practices.

According to this argument, people who engage in such forms of veneration of the dead would have to be considered Muslims since they do not claim that these deceased individuals perform their miraculous acts independently *(mustaqill)* from the Creator. Their supposedly miraculous acts are believed to be performed only with the permission of the Creator, which, according to this line of reasoning, would not be considered problematic in Islamic theology.

In the discussion regarding the word ilāh and the true meaning of the declaration of faith, the following must be kept in mind:

The most fundamental aspect of Islam is the exclusive worship of the Creator and the complete abandonment of worshiping any other thing or being. The term "worship/*ʿibādah*" is consistently used in the revealed texts to express this. Even when explaining the foundation of Islam – as has already been shown in the well-known *ḥadīth* about the five pillars and in numerous other texts – worship is explicitly mentioned. These texts clearly state that Islam requires refraining from worshiping anything other than the Creator, and that this is the central meaning of Islam.

How absurd, then, is the claim that worship itself is not the issue, but only the beliefs behind it – the so-called *iʿtiqād*. This would mean that the revelation repeatedly condemns the idolaters' worship literally countless times, while in reality, it supposedly is not about this worship at all, but only about the beliefs behind it! This raises the pressing question: Why would a term be used repeatedly if something entirely different is actually meant?

For example, why should Muslims recite *"Only You do we worship"* at least 17 times daily during their prayers in the opening *sura al-Fātiḥah,* if the decisive factor is allegedly the belief? Rather, it would have to say: *"Only in You alone do we believe*."

Even in the aforementioned explanation of Islam by the Prophet ﷺ himself, it is explicitly stated: *"Islam is that you <u>worship</u> only Allah and <u>do not associate anything</u> with Him."*

According to the distorted view described, this statement would more likely have to be: *"Islam is <u>that you do not believe</u> that Allah has a son or*

a mother, or that there is anyone who is completely independent (al-istiqlāl) from Him." Similarly, this would not prohibit associating others in worship but rather such beliefs.

Worship itself, the actions in and of themselves, would play no role at all. However, this does not align with the wording used in the Islamic revelation texts.

The Meaning of the Two Terms Rabb and Ilāh

It has now been shown multiple times that the word *ilāh* fundamentally means "object of worship." This can be clearly seen from dozens of Qur'anic verses.

However, since worthiness of worship is based on divine attributes, the word *ilāh*/ object of worship is closely connected to the word *rabb*/ Lord (plural: *arbāb*). The one who is truly worthy of worship deserves worship *because* He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Giver of life, or the All-Knowing and All-Powerful.

In other words: The *ilāh* who truly deserves worship due to His attributes – and not merely one who is claimed to be worthy of worship – is necessarily also the true *rabb*/Lord.

When two words have such closely related meanings, it is common in Arabic for both meanings to be combined into one word. More precisely, it is not unusual in the Arabic language that – due to the closeness in meaning – one term is used while also implying the meaning of the other term. Thus, one word is spoken, but both meanings are intended.

Islamic scholars have said regarding such words:

> إذا اجتمعا تفرَّقا، وإذا تفرَّقا اجتمعا
>
> *When the two words come together in one place, their meanings diverge. And when the two words are separated, their meanings come together.*

They meant by this that each word essentially has its own meaning. However, when one word stands alone – and the context does not clearly indicate otherwise – the meaning of the other word is included within the meaning of the first. But when both terms are explicitly mentioned

together in the same sentence, this context indicates that each specific meaning is intended separately.

The same applies, for example, to the words *īmān* and Islam. *Īmān* originally refers to what takes place internally, while Islam describes the external. As mentioned, this phenomenon is not uncommon in the Arabic language.

On the Further Division of Tawḥīd into ar-Rubūbiyyah, al-Ulūhiyyah, and al-Asmāʾu wa-ṣ-Ṣifāt

As has already become clear, the message of Islam is not primarily: "There is one Creator", since this was taken for granted at that time. For this reason, historical peoples – and even contemporary indigenous peoples – almost always hold this fundamental assumption.

The Qur'an, therefore, primarily addresses people who, although they believe in a Creator, grant His right to worship and obedience to others. This is why the Qur'an repeatedly argues against the idolaters by pointing out that they already acknowledge the one Creator.

The question that is repeatedly posed in the Qur'an is essentially as follows: ***If the idolaters know that Allah is their only Creator and that nothing is equal to Him, why do they treat Him and some of His creations equally in terms of worship and obedience?***

This is one of the central questions the Qur'an poses to the idolaters.

Nevertheless, the Islamic declaration of faith of course also implicitly requires the firm conviction of the oneness and uniqueness of the Creator and His absolute attributes.

From what has been said so far, we see that even in the verses of the Qur'an and in the statements of the earliest scholars – already during the time of the Companions of the Prophet – there is effectively a division of *tawḥīd*/monotheism, which can be described as follows:

1) The oneness of Allah in His essence and His attribute as the Creator, Giver of life, and Sustainer (Arabic: *ar-rubūbiyyah*)

2) The oneness of Allah in His names and attributes (Arabic: *al-asmāʾu wa-ṣ-ṣifāt*)

3) The oneness of Allah in terms of the worship that His creation offers exclusively to Him (Arabic: *al-ulūhiyyah*)

As we have already seen, many people in the Islamic world have, for centuries, held a misunderstanding regarding the actual meaning of the declaration of faith. They believed that it referred solely to the first part of *tawḥīd* described above. According to this view, anyone who fulfils this is considered a monotheist – something that does not align with the actual and authentic meaning of the declaration of faith.

Such people therefore vehemently reject the division of *tawḥīd* according to the pattern described above.

This rejection is based on the false assumption that one can prevent this division simply by questioning or rejecting the designation of its individual parts.

In this sense, one often hears the claim that the division of *tawḥīd* in this manner is not justified and constitutes an unlawful innovation, a so-called *bidʿah*, allegedly invented only after the eighth century of the Islamic calendar.

However, as has already been sufficiently demonstrated from the earliest sources of Islam, this is a naive misconception. The actual division of tawḥīd into these parts is inevitably found in the Qur'an and in the unanimous explanations of the earliest Muslim scholars. The idea that this division could be invalidated by questioning the naming of its individual parts is therefore absurd and stems from a clear ignorance of the Islamic source texts.

The naming of the three mentioned parts is thus not the core issue. It was introduced by later scholars merely to clarify the concept, not to invent new meanings.

Moreover, there is no single binding and exclusive designation for the individual forms of *tawḥīd*. The *tawḥīd* of worship is therefore referred to both as "*tawḥīd* of the *ulūhiyyah*" and "*tawḥīd* of the *ʿibādah*", as these terms are synonymous, as can be clearly understood, for example, from the explanation of the early exegete aṭ-Ṭabarī in his initial discussion of the verb *ʿabada* at the beginning of his *tafsīr* work.

Based on this explanation, the following summary can be formulated:

In the Qur'an, *tawḥīd* in the *rubūbiyyah*, which the idolaters fundamentally acknowledged, is used as an argument for *tawḥīd* in the *ulūhiyyah*.

Regarding the second form of the *tawḥīd* division mentioned above *(tawḥīdu l-asmāʾi wa-ṣ-ṣifāt)*, it should be noted that many early Islamic sects introduced novel concepts into Islam, particularly in the area of Allah's names and attributes. For this reason, the domain of names and attributes was treated as a separate category by the early scholars of Islam.

Thus, the division according to the pattern explained above is certainly not a *bidʿah* (an unlawful innovation in Islam) from this perspective as well, as this division was already made by the earliest scholars of Islam.

These designations merely served to provide better clarification and to address new erroneous beliefs separately. Therefore, as long as no false conclusions and principles are built upon such terms, there is essentially nothing objectionable about them.

The Call to the Original Monotheism: Then and Now

The Call of the Prophets ﷺ and the Reaction of the People

From the preceding explanations, it has become clear what the call of all prophets consisted of according to Islamic sources. They all called their peoples to the exclusive worship of Allah and to complete obedience to Him alone.

As a result, history witnessed a confrontation between monotheism and polytheism – a conflict between the prophets ﷺ and their opponents – which is repeatedly reflected in the texts of the Qur'an, or in the existing versions of the Torah and the Gospel.

The Qur'an recounts how those who rejected the message mocked and responded to their respective prophets ﷺ:

﴿مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَذَا فِي آبَائِنَا الْأَوَّلِينَ﴾

We have not heard of this among our forefathers.
[sura al-Muʾminūn, 23:24]

﴿مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَذَا فِي الْمِلَّةِ الْآخِرَةِ إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا اخْتِلَاقٌ﴾

We have not heard of this in the latest religion. This is not but a fabrication. *[sura Ṣād, 38:7]*

When one points out misunderstandings in certain patterns of thought within the Islamic community today, one is often reminded of these verses.

This described attitude of rejection is not only observed among the general population or lower social strata but is also frequently found among scholars. This phenomenon, too, is not new in itself.

The Qur'an describes how scholars and highly regarded individuals of high status would rally their followers against prophethood:

﴿وَانْطَلَقَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْهُمْ أَنِ امْشُوا وَاصْبِرُوا عَلَى آلِهَتِكُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ يُرَادُ﴾

Continue, and be patient over [the defense of] your worshipped ones. Indeed, this is a thing intended. [sura Ṣād, 38:6]

The reason for such rejecting attitudes is a growing awareness that the understanding many people have of the core message of Islam does not align with the teachings of the earliest sources. This realization understandably unsettles many followers of Islam; however, it will ultimately not change the historical and theological facts.

For an authentic representation of Islam and its foundation, it will be essential to clarify the unified message of the earliest sources and convey it to people without alteration. The idea that misunderstandings about these fundamental teachings of Islam can simply be left unaddressed and ignored is, from a theological perspective, both absurd and unrealistic.

The latter is especially true because there is currently a strong resurgence among Muslims towards the early Islamic sources, and a clear desire for clarity regarding the foundations of their own religion can be observed.

The idea that silently ignoring such misunderstandings is an expression of mercy or a relaxed approach to differences of opinion is also theologically untenable. According to Islamic teachings, the most merciful and compassionate individuals were precisely those prophets ﷺ who directly confronted their peoples with their misunderstandings. Furthermore, from an Islamic perspective, it cannot be considered good to deliberately withhold from people the original meaning of their religion for pragmatic reasons. Such arguments and ways of thinking are, therefore, theologically inconsistent.

The Time of Estrangement

As has been mentioned multiple times, the historical reality of the past centuries and millennia clearly shows that individual religious teachings were increasingly altered after the passing of their respective messengers, and much of their original message was forgotten.

From a historical perspective, this process is nothing unusual. Rather, it is a recurring phenomenon that has repeatedly taken place throughout

history. Whenever a prophet ﷺ passed away, the shared message of all prophets was gradually forgotten. From the stories of individual nations in the Qur'an, or in the Bible, it becomes clear that this state of neglect persisted and intensified until the Creator eventually sent a new prophet to renew the original message of monotheism *(tawḥīd)*. This renewal through a messenger always took place when ignorance within the respective people had reached its peak. As a result, each prophet found his people distant from *tawḥīd* and deeply immersed in polytheism.

Interestingly, this circumstance is also mentioned in early Islamic sources as a future development from the perspective of that time, specifically concerning Islam itself.

In this regard, Muslim رحمه الله narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* from Abū Hurayrah رضي الله عنه that the Prophet ﷺ said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «بَدَأَ الْإِسْلَامُ غَرِيبًا، وَسَيَعُودُ كَمَا بَدَأَ غَرِيبًا، فَطُوبَى لِلْغُرَبَاءِ»

> *Islam began as something strange, and it will return to being strange as it began. So all the best to the strangers*[45].

[45] This is a literal translation. What is meant is that those who experience this estrangement and still hold firmly to Islam will appear as strangers in the eyes of the people. The Messenger then praises them with the quoted words for their steadfastness in adhering to the uncorrupted religion during that time of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*).

The Meaning of the Word "Islam"

The Importance of Terms in Religion and the Word Islam in Particular

Anyone who reflects on the terminology of Islamic *sharīʿah* will quickly recognize that these terms were not chosen arbitrarily; there is always a clear connection between each term and the concept it represents.

If the entire religion has been named with a specific expression, there must necessarily be a profound meaning behind it. The fact that the religion of Islam is named using the Arabic term *islām* should, therefore, give one pause for reflection.

On the other hand, this also clearly demonstrates the importance and necessity of understanding this meaning in Islam. Thus, in order to grasp the core message of this religion, it is essential to explore this word and its meaning in greater detail.

The Linguistic Meaning of the Word "Islam" and the Root Salima

The Arabic word islām is the *maṣdar*[46] of the verb "*aslama.*" This verb, in turn, is derived from the root s-l-m *(salima)*.

In the Arabic dictionaries[47], the following meanings are associated with this root:

- سلِم مِن الآفاتِ والعيوبِ يَسْلَمُ سَلاماً وسَلامَةً، أي: بَرِئَ.

[46] The *maṣdar* is the verbal noun, meaning the noun derived from the verb. Arabic linguists say: "The *maṣdar* is the noun that carries the meaning of the verb without indicating a specific tense."

The verb *aslama* means "he has completely submitted." Thus, Islam refers to "complete submission."

[47] See, for reference, the early Arabic dictionaries from the second to the fourth century AH, such as *Kitāb al-ʿAyn, Tahdhību l-Lughah, aṣ-Ṣiḥāḥ,* and *Maqāyīsu l-Lughah.*

• والسَلامُ والسَلامَةُ: البَراءَةُ، والسَّلامُ في الأَصل: السَّلامةُ، ومنه قيل لِلجنَّةِ دارُ السَّلامِ، لأَنّها دارُ السَّلامةِ مِنَ الآفات.

• *Salima min: He/it is free/spared/unharmed from things like illnesses, faults, or defects.*

The words "as-salāmu" and "as-salāmatu" mean "freedom" or "unharmed state." These are the maṣdar [verbal noun] of salima. Therefore, Paradise is also referred to as "dāru s-salām", meaning "the House of Soundness", because it is defined as a place free from illnesses and harmful things.

• سَلِمَ له كذا أي خَلَصَ فهو سَالِمٌ وسَلِيمٌ.

• *Salima lahu: It is pure/exclusive for him.*

An object or a thing that belongs exclusively to a particular person is described with the attribute *sālim* or *salīm*.

In order to properly understand the content of the word Islam correctly, it is important to remember and internalize the basic meaning of the word Islam as explained here.

As the explanations above have shown, the word Islam revolves around being free from negative influences, such as illnesses, defects, and similar flaws. In the following chapters, it will become clear that a specific negative influence is particularly meant here – namely, polytheism, which in Arabic is referred to as *shirk*.

The Application of the Root *Salima* in the Qur'an – The Parable of the Monotheist and the Polytheist

In the following Qur'anic verse, the word "*salām*" is used, which carries the meaning of the root *salima*[48]:

﴿ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

Allah presents an example: a slave owned by quarrelling[49] *partners and a man who belongs exclusively to a single master - are they equal in comparison? Praise be to Allah! But most of them do not know.* [sura az-Zumar, 39:29]

The Linguists on This Verse

The scholars of the Arabic language[50] mentioned this verse and explained it. In *Lisānu l-ʿArab*[51], for example, this is summarized as follows:

---

[48] The following will also show aṭ-Ṭabarī's view that *salām* is likewise a *maṣdar* of *salima*, just like *salām* and *salāmah*. However, for our purposes, it is entirely irrelevant to which specific word category the scholars have assigned the word *salām*, since the meaning of the word – and thus of the verse – is clear in any case.

[49] In Arabic: *mutashākisūna*, which, in addition to mere disagreement, also expresses their bad nature. See, for example, *Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī* on this verse.

[50] Refer to the early Arabic dictionaries from the first centuries under the root s-l-m: *Tahdhību l-Lughah*. A similar text to the one cited below can be found there.

[51] Under the root s-l-m.

Lisānu l-ʿArab is perhaps the most well-known classical dictionary of the Arabic language. The North African author Ibnu Manẓūr (630–711 AH / 1232–1311 CE) attempted to compile all the important dictionaries that preceded him in this book.

﴿ورجلاً سَلَماً لرجل﴾: وقُرِئ ﴿ورجلاً سالِماً لرجل﴾ ... والمعنى أَنّ مَن وحَّدَ اللَّه مَثَلُه مَثَلُ السالم لرجلٍ لا يَشْرَكُه فيه غيرُه ومَثَلُ الذي أَشرَكَ اللَّهَ مَثَلُ صاحبِ الشُّرَكاءِ المتشاكسِينَ.

...and a man who belongs exclusively to a single master (wa-rajulan salaman li-rajul). It has also been read as[52]: (wa-rajulan sāliman li-rajul) ...

[52] There are different readings of this verse. These various readings of the Qur'an *(al-qirāʾāt)* are not different versions of the Qur'an, as might mistakenly be assumed. Some people intentionally present it this way in an attempt to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Qur'an. However, as already mentioned, serious historians are fully aware that such attempts are meaningless.

The fact that the Prophet ﷺ recited certain passages of the Qur'an in different ways and permitted this practice is explicitly mentioned in numerous narrations. These various *ḥadīths* are so numerous that they undoubtedly constitute completely authentic narrations (also referred to as *tawātur maʿnawī*).

In most cases, the different readings differ in terms of vowel markings. The meaning usually remains the same or very similar. When there are different meanings in the authentic readings, the verse encompasses all the meanings of these readings.

This verse serves as a good example to illustrate this concept. The widely known seven *mutawātir* readings became associated with the following individuals: Nāfiʿ, Ibnu Kathīr, Abū ʿAmr, Ibnu ʿĀmir, ʿĀṣim, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisāʾī. The most common reading is that of ʿĀṣim, which is also consistently used as the basis in this book.

The individuals mentioned are by no means the originators of these readings, nor the founders of schools. Nor are they individuals who narrated these readings through a single chain of narration. Rather, these readings were well known among the scholars and, depending on the region, also among the general population. However, because the other scholars of that time agreed that these individuals recited correctly, the readings spread under the names of these scholars as a means of identification.

...--

> *This means: The one who affirms the oneness of Allah is like someone who belongs exclusively to a single master. This owner has no partner.*
>
> *And the one who associates partners with Allah[53] is like someone who belongs to several quarrelsome masters.*

Ibnu Manẓūr is considered one of the most well-known linguists in Islamic history due to his comprehensive dictionary of the Arabic language. However, he lived relatively late and thus belonged to the later authors, known as the *mutaʾakhirīn*. Since he is familiar to most people, he has been mentioned here, but this should not be understood to mean that the creed followed by Ibnu Manẓūr fully aligned in every respect with the authentic teachings of the early generations.

Nevertheless, this very aspect reveals an interesting fact: the statement of Ibnu Manẓūr shows that the original linguistic meaning of the word Islam was still considered quite self-evident even for the later linguists.

Even though this understanding was still generally present at the time, numerous false concepts had already crept into the beliefs of people in the Islamic world over many centuries. The fact that the primary linguistic meaning of the word Islam was still generally conveyed in this way reinforces its original meaning.

It is entirely clear that Ibnu Manẓūr did not invent anything new on his own but merely conveyed the content of the narrated Arabic language. Therefore, if he mentioned this meaning, it can undoubtedly also be found in earlier dictionaries. For the sake of brevity, however, the statement of Ibnu Manẓūr will suffice here, along with the previously compiled explanations from various dictionaries regarding the relevant words and roots.

In our example, aside from the reading *"salaman"*, there is also *"sāliman."* This reading was narrated by Ibnu Kathīr and Abū ʿAmr.

From the previous explanations of these words, it is clear that both of these readings carry the same meaning.

[53] In the Arabic text, aṭ-Ṭabarī here uses the word *ashraka*.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī on This Verse

Aṭ-Ṭabarī explains the following in his *tafsīr* regarding the mentioned verse:

﴿وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ﴾، يَقُولُ: وَرَجُلًا خلُوصًا لِرَجُلٍ يَعْنِي الْمُؤْمِنَ الْمُوَحِّدَ الَّذِي أَخْلَصَ عِبَادَتَهُ لِلَّهِ، لَا يَعْبُدُ غَيْرَهُ ... وَذَلِكَ أَنَّ السَّلَمَ مَصْدَرٌ مِنْ قَوْلِ الْقَائِلِ: سَلِمَ فُلَانٌ لِلَّهِ سَلَمًا بِمَعْنَى: خَلَصَ لَهُ خُلُوصًا ...

> *"And the example of a man who is fully and completely devoted to a single master", Allah (thus) says: "And a man who belongs purely and exclusively to one master." He refers to the muʾmin muwaḥḥid[54], who purifies his ʿibādah solely for Allah and does not worship anyone else …*
>
> *The word salām is the maṣdar of salima. It is said: "salima li-llāhi salāman" meaning "khalaṣa lahu khulūṣan"[55].*

Aṭ-Ṭabarī explicitly mentions here that the person in this example is a Muslim and a *muwaḥḥid*, who performs all his actions solely for Allah ﷻ and purifies them from *shirk*/polytheism. For such a person, there is no other *ilāh* and no other *sharīk*/partner.

---

[54] The Arabic word *muwaḥḥid* is the *ismu l-fāʿil* (active participle) derived from the word *tawḥīd*. It refers to the person who practices *tawḥīd*, literally meaning "the one who unifies or makes one." Thus, the term refers to the monotheist who does not associate anything with his Creator, neither in worship nor in any other matters.

The fact that aṭ-Ṭabarī explicitly mentions this again here serves as further confirmation of this meaning. It also demonstrates that the terms tawḥīd and *muwaḥḥid* (plural: *muwaḥḥidūn*) were well-established words among the early Islamic scholars.

[55] It is thus clear that these two phrases are synonymous: *"salima salāman = khalaṣa khulūṣan."* Both mean: "He belongs purely (only) to Allah and submits only to Him."

In this Qur'anic verse, therefore, lies an example of these two opposites: the Muslim and the *mushrik*. It then clearly states again: *"Are these two equal?!"*

Apart from that, *ikhlāṣ* is again clearly mentioned here as the meaning of Islam. This significant connection has already been highlighted earlier. The two words *sālim* and *khāliṣ* linguistically and conceptually describe the same quality of a person: being free and untainted by polytheism. The same applies to the two words "Islam" and "*ikhlāṣ*", which are similarly derived from their respective corresponding word mentioned earlier.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī also narrates this explanation of this verse mentioned by him also from some of the *salaf*, meaning the prominent scholars of the first generations of Muslims.

Among them is the following statement from ʿAbdurraḥmān ibnu Zayd ibni Aslam رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ, who said regarding this verse:

> حَدَّثَنِي يُونُسُ، قَالَ: أَخْبَرَنَا ابْنُ وَهْبٍ، قَالَ: قَالَ ابْنُ زَيْدٍ، فِي قَوْلِهِ: {ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ} [الزمر: 29] ... فَإِنَّمَا هَذَا مَثَلٌ ضَرَبَهُ اللَّهُ لِهَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ يَعْبُدُونَ الْآلِهَةَ، وَجَعَلُوا لَهَا فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ حُقُوقًا، فَضَرَبَهُ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لَهُمْ، وَلِلَّذِي يَعْبُدُهُ وَحْدَهُ {هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ} [الزمر: 29]» وَفِي قَوْلِهِ: «وَرَجُلًا سَالِمًا لِرَجُلٍ» يَقُولُ: «لَيْسَ مَعَهُ شِرْكٌ»

> *This is a parable that Allah has set forth for those who worship the ālihah[56]. They believed that (these ālihah) had a rightful claim[57] over them… and for the one who worships Allah alone. "Are they equal in comparison? Praise be to Allah! But most of them do not know."*

[56] The important word *ālihah* or *ilāh* has already been discussed in relation to the meaning of the testimony of faith. It refers to the objects of worship or deities in this sense, which the *mushrikūn* took for veneration.

[57] Through their beliefs, they granted authority to these idols over themselves. The *mushrikūn* believed that they were obliged to fulfil these rights. All beliefs and acts associated with this are forms of worship, which belong exclusively to the one Lord.

> *(…and another belonging exclusively to one man) means: someone who commits no shirk (whatsoever).*

In the end, aṭ-Ṭabarī finally explains:

> ﴿بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ يَقُولُ جَلَّ ثَنَاؤُهُ: وَمَا يَسْتَوِي هَذَا الْمُشْتَرَكُ فِيهِ، وَالَّذِي هُوَ مُنْفَرِدٌ مُلْكُهُ لِوَاحِدٍ، بَلْ أَكْثَرُ هَؤُلَاءِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ بِاللَّهِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُمَا لَا يَسْتَوِيَانِ، فَهُمْ بِجَهْلِهِمْ بِذَلِكَ يَعْبُدُونَ آلِهَةً شَتَّى مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ.

> *"But most of them do not know", meaning: This one who is divided among several (masters) and the one who belongs exclusively to a single master are not equal.*
>
> *But most of these who associate partners with Allah[58] do not know that these two are not equal. In their ignorance of this, they worship various different ālihah alongside Allah.*

What Should Follow from the Previously Described Misunderstanding of This Verse

In the verse discussed above, the two opposites – Muslim and *mushrik* – are made exceedingly clear. The verse also explicitly mentions the reasons for this opposition: the actions of these two individuals.

One person commits polytheistic acts, while the other is completely free from them. Furthermore, the verse affirms that these two individuals are not equal. At the end, it is added that most *mushrikūn* are unaware of this fact, as aṭ-Ṭabarī clearly explained.

In contrast, it has already been mentioned that many people today believe Islamic monotheism is limited merely to acknowledging the existence of a single Creator.

---

[58] In Arabic, he uses the term *"al-mushrikūna bi-llāh."* As previously explained, the word *mushrik* is the *ismu l-fāʿil* (active participle) of the verb *ashraka*, meaning "the one who associates." It could hardly be stated more clearly that this refers to people who commit the act of *shirk* and therefore must be referred to as *mushrikūn*. This statement by aṭ-Ṭabarī will be discussed again later.

According to their understanding, a person could supposedly fulfil and implement the essence of Islam while simultaneously worshiping others alongside the one Creator or obeying them unconditionally.

It has already been sufficiently explained that this misconception fundamentally contradicts early Islamic theology. The concept of a polytheistic Muslim simply did not exist in the intellectual framework of the early Muslims. Even those scholars who were heavily influenced by philosophy in the early centuries generally did not conceive of such an idea.

However, since this distorted view is widely held by large masses today, this issue will be addressed here by referring back to the previously discussed verse about the parable of the Muslim and the *mushrik*.

The described idea of a "Muslim *mushrik*" – that is, a polytheistic monotheist – also directly conflicts with the mentioned Qur'anic verse in several ways, as follows[59]:

- With such an assumption, the "ignorant *mushrik*" could not possibly be part of this parable. However, in the verse, the Qur'an explicitly states that even the ignorant polytheist possesses the characteristic mentioned in the verse.

  A *mushrik*, whether he is aware of it or not, certainly does not worship Allah alone. Therefore, he has undoubtedly not fulfilled the basic requirement to be considered a Muslim.

- As aṭ-Ṭabarī clearly explained, most *mushrikūn* are unaware of this reality. According to this distorted view, however, they would paradoxically be considered Muslims precisely because of this ignorance.

- Furthermore, according to this view, the ignorant *mushrik* would have to be considered equal to the Muslim, as both would ultimately be

[59] This is not about the question of whether someone today actually accepts all these consequences and persists in the erroneous claim that a person who worships others alongside Allah could still be considered a Muslim according to Islamic teachings.

In fact, most people today are not even aware of these contradictory consequences *(al-lawāzimu l-bāṭilah)* – one of the reasons why they are being clarified here.

regarded as Muslims simply through their verbal declaration of Islam and acknowledgment of the one Creator.

This would, in turn, imply equal treatment for both in the Hereafter – something that is, by consensus, inconceivable in Islamic theology. This theological equality would undoubtedly also have consequences in this life, as becomes evident in matters such as ritual practices, including prayer.

According to the view described, a Muslim would have to grant a polytheist the designation of "Muslim" and consequently regard him as a Muslim in every respect, both in worldly and afterlife matters. As a result, that Muslim would have to be able to appoint this person as an Imām, meaning as the leader of the obligatory prayers, and so on.

Ultimately, one cannot escape these consequences if a person is considered a Muslim despite committing polytheistic acts. As already stated, however, this way of thinking clearly and directly contradicts the mentioned verse, or numerous other Islamic source texts.

- According to this flawed line of thinking, the early authors and Qur'anic exegetes, such as Ibnu Abī Ḥātim and aṭ-Ṭabarī – or the even earlier and most prominent scholars of Islam from whom these two narrated in their works – would all have to be accused of error. This assumption, of course, would be highly absurd.

  This contradiction, too, cannot be avoided, as the statements of all these early scholars cannot be interpreted otherwise. Their statements clearly show that they certainly did not consider the possibility that there could be some *mushrikūn* who, despite their polytheistic actions, could still be regarded as Muslims. It is abundantly clear that such an idea never even crossed the minds of these scholars.

  This circumstance once again demonstrates that the early figures of Islamic scholarship regarded such fundamental questions of *tawḥīd* as completely self-evident.

  As already mentioned, even the various sects of that time never considered labelling a polytheist as a Muslim, despite the fact that these groups and factions had undoubtedly deviated significantly in many other matters.

The Linguistic Meaning of the Word Islam and How It Derives from the Verb and the Root

The Meaning of the Verb aslama

The noun *islām* is derived from the verb *aslama*. In the Arabic dictionaries[60], the following meanings are given for the verb *aslama*:

- أسلَمَ أي انْقاد واستَسلَمَ
- ودخَل في السِلْم (بالفتح وبالكسر)
- أسلَمَ الشيءَ إليه أيْ دفَعَه
- أسلَمَ أمرَه له وإليه أيْ فوَّضَه
- أسلَمَ الشيءَ مِثْل (سلَّمَه له) بمعنى: خلَّصَه له أيْ جعَلَه سالِماً له وخالِصاً، فإذا أَسْلَمَه له وإليه جَعَلَه سالِماً له وخالِصاً

> *• To submit/surrender/yield to someone*
>
> *• To enter into peace. Therefore, the words derived from this root are also used in the context of warfare to mean "to surrender" or "to make peace."*
>
> *• To hand over/transfer something to someone. The linguistic connection to the root lies in the fact that the person receiving the item has full authority over it afterward.*
>
> *The meaning of the root is reflected here because, after the handover, only that person has full ownership of the matter. The fundamental meaning, therefore, is: The item now belongs purely and exclusively to that person.*
>
> *• To entrust/assign a matter to someone*
>
> *• To purify something completely. If one performs an action for someone other than oneself, it means that one has done this act*

[60] See the early Arabic dictionaries from the 2nd to 4th century Hijrah, such as: *Kitāb al-ʿAyn, Tahdhību l-Lughah, aṣ-Ṣiḥāḥ, Maqāyīsu l-Lughah.*

> *"exclusively for him / purely for his sake / dedicating the matter to him."*[61]

Through the explanations provided by the classical Arabic dictionaries mentioned above, it becomes very clear that the verb *aslama* revolves around the complete purification of something or the act of handing something over entirely to someone else, leaving it at his full disposal.

The word Islam is the verbal noun derived from this verb and therefore carries exactly the same meanings within it.

The Connection Between the Root Salima and the Derived Verb Aslama

In Arabic morphology[62], it is generally known that adding the letter *hamzah* at the beginning of a word derived from a triliteral root[63] leads to a transformation of meaning towards "to make" or "to cause."

For example, from the verb *jalasa* meaning "he sat down", one can form *ajlasa*, meaning "he made him sit" – or in the original sense, "he caused him to sit."

In this way, the verb *salima* is also connected to the verb *aslama*. *Salima* means "to be pure", while *aslama* means "he made it pure." The two

---

[61] The last three meanings are, of course, similar uses of the word. Moreover, it is generally the case that the various meanings and uses of an Arabic word can be traced back to a fundamental meaning. Depending on the context, the individual meanings then either resemble or overlap with one another to varying degrees.

[62] In Arabic linguistics, this is referred to as *aṣ-ṣarf* – the science of morphology, which deals with the form and transformation of words themselves, focusing on the internal structure of the word.

In contrast to proper grammar *(an-naḥw)*, the science of morphology does not concern itself with the endings of Arabic words or how these endings change depending on their position in the sentence structure.

[63] This refers to the root of the word, which is typically composed of three basic letters.

words *salima* and *aslama* correspond to each other in both meaning and word form, just like the two words *khalaṣa* and *akhlaṣa*.

Thus, *aslama* means "he made it *sālim*", and *akhlaṣa* means "he made it *khālis*." The corresponding nouns are Islam and *ikhlāṣ*.

For instance, if someone wants to purify contaminated water, this process in Arabic would be called *ikhlāṣ*. An Arab would say: *"yukhliṣu l-māʾa."*

Islam is, therefore, synonymous with *ikhlāṣ*! Thus, Islam is the religion of *ikhlāṣ*. Without *ikhlāṣ*, Islam cannot possibly exist. Any other claim would ultimately lead to the possibility of an "Islam without Islam" or a "Muslim without Islam."

As previously clarified, it is absolutely clear what this frequently mentioned purification refers to, as expressed by the words Islam and *ikhlāṣ*. It clearly refers to the purification of religion – specifically, the purification of a person's acts of worship and obedience from any polytheistic influences.

For this reason, the terms Islam and *tawḥīd* are often explained with the expression *"ikhlāṣu l-ʿibādati li-llāh"*, meaning "The purification of worship for Allah alone."

This is also why the *shahādah* (the Islamic declaration of faith) is referred to as both *"kalimatu t-tawḥīd"* and *"kalimatu l-ikhlāṣ"* – a designation that also goes back to narrations from the Prophet ﷺ.

The Clear Explanation of the Word Islam in the Qur'an

It has now become extremely clear that the two words Islam and *ikhlāṣ* are synonymous. The word Islam – and with it the entire religion – revolves around the purification of actions exclusively for Allah. In the Arabic words Islam and Muslim, this full meaning is already implicitly contained.

In principle, the more significant a concept is, the more frequently and clearly it will be explained. Since this is the foundation of the entire religion of Islam, it can be assumed that this concept is explained in numerous places in the Qur'an.

Anyone who knows and understands the Qur'an will find this explanation in many of the book's verses. These passages clearly mention what is to be purified. Comparing various passages further and further clarifies the meaning. Again and again, one can observe how one passage of the Qur'an explains another – an aspect that will be illustrated through various examples later on.

The meaning of the word Islam becomes particularly clear in the following verse:

﴿وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

And they[64] say, "None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian." That is [merely] their wishful thinking, Say, "Produce your proof, if you should be truthful."

[sura al-Baqarah, 2:111]

[64] This refers to people from among the Jews and Christians.

From this verse, the following points can be observed[65]:

- The Jews and Christians described here each claimed that Paradise was destined exclusively for their respective groups.
- By this, they meant that the only ones truly devoted to Allah – and thus deserving of Paradise[66] – could only come from within their own communities. According to the statements of these Jews and Christians, a truly devout monotheist could only originate from among them.
- Allah ﷻ immediately rejects this claim. Accordingly, this assertion is merely one of their wishful thoughts, of which other examples are mentioned in various places throughout the Qur'an.
- Then, Allah clarifies the only correct method for determining the truth. It is the method of truth and reason – the method of evidence.
- In such a case, the proof can only come through revelation from the Creator Himself, as such a claim cannot be substantiated through empirical means. After all, the claim revolves around the question of who will be granted Paradise and who will be denied it.

  Therefore, it is required that this claim be supported by the necessary evidence, which, as mentioned, can only come from the Creator Himself.

In contrast, the following verse explains who is truly considered a Muslim and thus a devout monotheist, thereby deserving of Paradise. This description is important for clarifying the original understanding of monotheism, as the Qur'an itself now demonstrates what this monotheism truly consists of.

The following verse states:

---

[65] See the *tafsīr* works of Ibnu Abī Ḥātim and aṭ-Ṭabarī for explanations of this verse and the following one, as they cite these meanings from the early scholars.

[66] That is, the "Muslim/Monotheist", for this is precisely the general meaning of the word "Muslim", as has already been demonstrated in various ways.

﴿بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ﴾

Yes [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah[67] *while being a doer of good*[68] *will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.*

[sura al-Baqarah, 2:112]

Explanation of This Verse:

- Here, the previously made claim is refuted. The meaning of the statement can be rendered as follows: *"Indeed! There is someone who will enter Paradise and receive his reward from his Lord."*
- This refers to the one who "submits his face to Allah." Allah thus informs that anyone who possesses this characteristic will attain His pleasure. Contrary to the earlier claim made by the mentioned Jews and Christians, such a monotheist will not be denied Paradise, regardless of the community to which this monotheist belongs.

  This provides a clear explanation of the word Islam.
- The reward mentioned here is, of course, Paradise, as this was the subject of the initial claim.
- These Muslims/monotheists will neither fear what awaits them in the Hereafter nor grieve over what occurred in this worldly life.

[67] In the Arabic text: *"man aslama wajhahu li-llāhi."* Thus, the word *aslama* is used. The meaning, therefore, is: "the one who submits/yields/surrenders his face to Allah."

The word Muslim is the so-called *ismu l-fāʿil* (active participle). It carries exactly the same meaning. A Muslim is "the one who submits." Thus, *"al-muslimu wajhahu li-llāhi"* means "the one who submits his face to Allah."

[68] Literally: Someone who performs his deeds well.

The "Submission of the Face" is Ikhlāṣ

In the previously examined verse of the Qur'an, it was mentioned that the "submission of the face" to the Creator of the worlds is the one essential factor that makes a person a monotheist and grants him entry into Paradise. Therefore, special attention should be given to this expression.

Through the explanations of the early scholars and Qur'anic exegetes, it becomes clear that the "submission of the face", which appears in multiple places in the Qur'an, refers to pure monotheism, which consists of exclusive worship and complete obedience to Allah alone.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī narrates the following regarding this verse[69]:

> كَمَا حَدَّثَنِي الْمُثَنَّى، قَالَ: ثَنَا إِسْحَاقُ، قَالَ: ثَنَا ابْنُ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنِ الرَّبِيعِ: {بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ} [البقرة: 112] يَقُولُ: «أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ»

> *Narrated from ar-Rabīʿ: ("...whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah") means: "akhlaṣa li-llāh."*

As previously explained, *akhlaṣa* means "to make pure" or "to purify." Thus, the expression used here means: "Whoever submits his face to Allah", that is, "Whoever practices *ikhlāṣ* for Allah", meaning "Whoever completely purifies his actions for Allah."

In all early works of *tafsīr*, similar explanations for this expression can be found. As previously clarified, the term *akhlaṣa li-llāh* implies that a person purifies his actions, his *ʿibādah*, his *dīn*, his obedience, and so on exclusively for Allah, ensuring that none of these are directed towards anyone else besides Him.

This refers to the frequently mentioned *ikhlāṣ*, that purification which essentially serves as another term for describing pure and true monotheism in the early Islamic sources.

Then aṭ-Ṭabarī says:

> وَكَمَا قَالَ زَيْدُ بْنُ عَمْرِو بْنِ نُفَيْلٍ:

[69] See *Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī* for the explanation of the two mentioned verses.

وَأَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِي لِمَنْ أَسْلَمَتْ ... لَهُ الْمُزْنُ تَحْمِلُ عَذْبًا زُلَالَا

يَعْنِي بِذَلِكَ: اسْتَسْلَمَتْ لِطَاعَةِ مَنِ اسْتَسْلَمَ لِطَاعَتِهِ الْمُزْنُ وَانْقَادَتْ لَهُ.

وَخَصَّ اللَّهُ جَلَّ ثَنَاؤُهُ بِالْخَبَرِ عَمَّنْ أَخْبَرَ عَنْهُ بِقَوْلِهِ: {بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ} [البقرة: 112] بِإِسْلَامِ وَجْهِهِ لَهُ دُونَ سَائِرِ جَوَارِحِهِ؛ لِأَنَّ أَكْرَمَ أَعْضَاءِ ابْنِ آدَمَ وَجَوَارِحِهِ وَجْهُهُ، وَهُوَ أَعْظَمُهَا عَلَيْهِ حُرْمَةً وَحَقًّا، فَإِذَا خَضَعَ لِشَيْءٍ وَجْهُهُ الَّذِي هُوَ أَكْرَمُ أَجْزَاءِ جَسَدِهِ عَلَيْهِ فَغَيْرُهُ مِنْ أَجْزَاءِ جَسَدِهِ أَحْرَى أَنْ يَكُونَ أَخْضَعَ لَهُ.

وَلِذَلِكَ تَذْكُرُ الْعَرَبُ فِي مَنْطِقِهَا الْخَبَرَ عَنِ الشَّيْءِ فَتُضِيفُهُ إِلَى وَجْهِهِ وَهِيَ تَعْنِي بِذَلِكَ نَفْسَ الشَّيْءِ وَعَيْنَهُ ...

وَتَأْوِيلُ الْكَلَامِ: بَلَى مَنْ أَخْلَصَ طَاعَتَهُ لِلَّهِ وَعِبَادَتَهُ لَهُ مُحْسِنًا فِي فِعْلِهِ ذَلِكَ.

Just as Zayd ibnu ʿAmr ibnu Nufayl said[70]:

"I have submitted my face to the One[71] to Whom even the rain-bearing clouds submit, carrying fresh, pure water."

By this, he meant: "I have submitted to the One to Whose obedience even the clouds submit and yield."

Allah, exalted be He, specifically mentions the face in this verse because it is the noblest, most important, and most worthy of protection part of the entire body.

Thus, when a person submits his face to someone [72], it is clear that the rest of his body will submit all the more. Therefore, it was

[70] In a poem, which will be discussed in more detail shortly.

[71] In the original Arabic text, the verb *aslama* is used both for the word "submit" and for "surrender." Thus, in the poem, the principle of Islam – the submission to the Creator – is explicitly mentioned.

[72] This can also be read as: "When the face submits to someone..."

In general, it should be noted that a literal translation of the texts by aṭ-Ṭabarī is essentially unfeasible. The language used is very old Arabic, and aṭ-...--

> *common in the language of the Arabs to refer to the entire body by mentioning the face specifically …*
>
> *The meaning of the verse is as follows: Indeed! The one who completely purifies his obedience and worship for Allah and does so in the best manner.*

The Poem of Zayd ibnu ʿAmr ibnu Nufayl ﵁

From the aforementioned poem by Zayd ibnu ʿAmr ﵁, the following verses can be found in some books of *sīrah* (biographies of the Prophet)[73]:

وَأَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِي لِمَنْ أَسْلَمَتْ ... لَهُ الْأَرْضُ تَحْمِلُ صَخْرًا ثِقَالًا

دَحَاهَا فَلَمَّا رَآهَا اسْتَوَتْ ... عَلَى الْمَاءِ أَرْسَى عَلَيْهَا الْجِبَالَا

وَأَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِي لِمَنْ أَسْلَمَتْ ... لَهُ الْمُزْنُ تَحْمِلُ عَذْبًا زُلَالًا

إِذَا هِيَ سِيقَتْ إِلَى بَلْدَةٍ ... أَطَاعَتْ فَصَبَّتْ عَلَيْهَا سِجَالًا

> *I have submitted my face to the One to Whom*
> *the earth, bearing heavy rocks, has submitted.*
> *He spread it out, and when it became level, He stabilized it*
> *as a whole and anchored the mountains within it.*
> *and I have submitted my face to the One to Whom*
> *the rain-bearing clouds have surrendered.*
> *When they are driven towards a land,*
> *They obey and pour down upon it torrents of water.*

In all these verses, Zayd ibnu ʿAmr consistently used the word aslama when he said "*aslamtu wajhiya*/I have submitted my face." What is

---

Ṭabarī in particular had the habit of constructing highly complex and nested sentences. This is aside from the fact that a truly literal translation between two languages is generally not feasible.

[73] See especially the *sīrah* of Ibnu Isḥāq and that of Ibnu Hishām.

particularly interesting about these poetic verses is that they belong to a pre-Islamic poem!

It is, therefore, a poem that originates from before the emergence of the specific message of Islam[74]. However, the general concept of Islam – *tawḥīd* – was already present, as it forms the message of all the Prophets ﷺ.

Although Zayd ibnu ʿAmr knew the Prophet ﷺ, it was before his mission as a Messenger. He passed away before the first revelation. Nevertheless, he belonged to the so-called *ḥunafāʾ*, a group of people who, even before the emergence of Islam, adhered to the pure monotheistic teachings of Abraham.

The *ḥunafāʾ* were, in this sense, already monotheists before the teachings of Muḥammad and thus Muslims in the general sense of the word, which is why they rejected idolatry. For this reason, the pure and uncorrupted monotheistic teachings of Abraham are also referred to in Arabic as *al-ḥanīfiyyah*.

These persons, therefore, knew Islam without having heard even a single verse of the Qur'an. As seen in the example above, they also expressed their beliefs through their poetry. The *ḥunafāʾ* rejected idolatry and were fully aware of its falsehood.

Furthermore, the mentioned poem clearly illustrates the linguistic meaning of the word Islam or *aslama*, since it is a poem from the period before the emergence of (specific) Islam.

At that time, the word could only have been used in its linguistic sense, making this text a suitable example for clarifying the original linguistic meaning of the term.

[74] That is, before the specific legislation *(sharīʿah)* that Muḥammad ﷺ proclaimed in addition to the general monotheism of all the Prophets.

Polytheism

The Arabic word *shirk* refers to association or polytheism in general. A person who commits *shirk* is referred to as a *mushrik*. However, the meaning of the term in the Arabic-Islamic context is broader than the common understanding of polytheism in ordinary English usage.

A person can offer worship to various things, people, or other beings through ritual acts or by invoking them in different ways. These forms of polytheism will be discussed in greater detail in this book.

Likewise, a person can also worship another human being by accepting laws from him that contradict the law of Allah.

Associating a son or a mother with the Creator or attributing Allah's qualities to a created being is also considered *shirk* in Islamic theology.

Most followers of Christianity today, for example, are regarded as committing polytheism from the Islamic perspective, even though they consider themselves monotheists.

In the Qur'an, polytheism is primarily indicated by the terms *nidd, ʿadl, naẓīr, mithl, kufʾ,* and *sharīk*. These words each describe the "associate" – that which is worshiped by the idolaters alongside the one true Creator.

Thus, in a *ḥadīth* narrated in both *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* – quoted here in the wording of al-Bukhārī – the Prophet ﷺ gives the following description of the meaning of *shirk*:

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: أَيُّ الذَّنْبِ أَعْظَمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: «أَنْ تَجْعَلَ لِلَّهِ نِدًّا وَهُوَ خَلَقَكَ». قُلْتُ: إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَعَظِيمٌ

> *Narrated from ʿAbduḷḷāh that he said: "I asked the Prophet ﷺ: 'Which sin is the gravest in the sight of Allah?' He replied: 'That you set up an equal to Allah, while He created you.' I then said: "Indeed, that is truly a tremendous sin.'"*

In this *ḥadīth*, the word *nidd* was used. The Arabic word *nidd* (plural: *andād)* means equal or equivalent. The act of associating others with Allah is therefore also referred to as *tandīd*.

In the Qur'an, the term *andād* frequently appears to express the meaning of *shirk*. One example can be found in the following passage at the beginning of the Qur'an, which is considered the first explicit command and prohibition in the Qur'an:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (21) الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الأَرْضَ فِرَاشاً وَالسَّمَاء بِنَاء وَأَنزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقاً لَّكُمْ فَلا تَجْعَلُواْ لِلّهِ أَندَاداً وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

O mankind, worship your Lord[75]*, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous. [He] who made for you the earth a bed [spread out]*[76] *and the sky a ceiling*[77] *and sent down from the sky, rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision for you. So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know [that there is nothing similar to Him].*

[sura al-Baqarah, 2:21-22]

Association is also expressed through the verb *yaʿdilūn*, as can be seen from the following Qur'anic verse:

﴿أَمَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنزَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاء فَأَنبَتْنَا بِهِ حَدَائِقَ ذَاتَ بَهْجَةٍ مَّا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَن تُنبِتُوا شَجَرَهَا أَإِلَهٌ مَّعَ اللَّهِ بَلْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ يَعْدِلُونَ﴾

[More precisely], is He [not best] who created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you rain from the sky, causing to grow thereby gardens of joyful beauty which you could not [otherwise] have grown the trees thereof?[78] *Is there a deity with Allah? [No],*

[75] or worship your Lord …

[76] also bed, resting place …

[77] or building

[78] The punctuation marks at this point refer to the previous question. The inserted sentence has been placed in dashes.

but they are a people who ascribe equals [to Him][79].
[sura an-Naml, 27:60]

The verb *yaʿdilu* means "to equate something" and *ʿadl* in this context has the same meaning as the word *nidd*, that is, the associate or the one being ascribed as equal.

The Meaning of the Terms "Lesser Shirk" and "Greater Shirk"

Following the previous explanation of the word *shirk*, it is important to clarify that the form of polytheism primarily addressed in this book is the so-called "greater *shirk*" *(shirkun akbar)*.

In the Islamic sources, however, the term *shirk* is also used with another meaning: the so-called "lesser *shirk*" *(shirkun aṣghar)*.

According to Islamic theology, this lesser *shirk* is indeed considered a sin but does not constitute actual polytheism since no act of worship is truly directed towards anything besides Allah ﷻ.

If a Muslim commits such an act of lesser *shirk*, he does not become a polytheist as a result. Just like with other sins, committing lesser *shirk* does not remove a person from the fold of Islam.

In the Islamic sources, the terms *kufr* or *shirk*[80] are sometimes used without referring to greater *kufr* or greater *shirk*. The actual meaning of these

---

[79] The word *yaʿdilu* also has the linguistic meaning of "to deviate." In this verse, it can also be understood in this sense, as the meaning is not specifically defined here. However, the word is frequently used in the sense of associating partners.

[80] The Arabic word *shirk* describes polytheism, while the word *kufr* refers to an action or statement that contradicts Islam so strongly that it invalidates a person's Islam – provided there is no valid excuse for the statement or action.

It should be noted that in Islamic theology, inner beliefs, feelings, and intentions are also regarded as "internal actions or statements."

The Arabic word *kufr* is commonly translated as "disbelief" in English. However, as mentioned earlier regarding the terms *īmān* and "faith", the concept ...--

terms in such cases becomes clear from the context. However, as long as it is not evident from the context that it refers to lesser *shirk*, the consensus of Muslim scholars dictates that the original meaning of these terms should not be dismissed.

An example of this can be found in the following *ḥadīth*, which Aḥmad narrated in his *Musnad* from Ibn ʿAbbās ﵄:

عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، أَنَّ رَجُلًا قَالَ لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَشِئْتَ، فَقَالَ لَهُ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «أَجَعَلْتَنِي وَاللَّهَ عَدْلًا بَلْ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ»

> *..., that a man said to the Prophet ﷺ: "What Allah and you (both together) will." Then the Prophet ﷺ said to him: "Have you made me equal to Allah?! (Rather, say) What Allah alone wills."*

In the incident cited here, the matter was not that the man actually intended to worship the Prophet. Rather, it was a stern reminder from the Prophet ﷺ that such expressions should be avoided, as they outwardly contradict monotheism.

From what has been explained, it becomes clear that in the texts of the *sharīʿah*, a distinction is made between actual greater polytheism and the so-called lesser *shirk*. As previously mentioned, whenever polytheism or *shirk* is referred to in this book, it generally refers to greater *shirk*.

The Forms of Shirk According to the Classification of Tawḥīd

As previously explained in a dedicated chapter, tawḥīd can be recognized in three forms or areas, namely affirming the oneness of Allah ﷻ in:

- His essence and His attribute as Creator, Giver of life, and similar attributes *(tawḥīdu r-rubūbiyyah)*
- His names and attributes *(tawḥīdu l-asmāʾi wa-ṣ-ṣifāt)*
- Worship directed towards Him alone *(tawḥīdu l-ulūhiyyah bzw. tawḥīdu l-ʿibādah)*

---

of *kufr* cannot be limited to mere "disbelief" or the simple ignorance of the truth. A person may fully recognize the truth of Islam for himself and yet rejects Islam entirely or parts of it.

It has already been explained that polytheism is the opposite of *tawḥīd*. *Shirk* is a violation of monotheism in its aforementioned forms. Accordingly, polytheism can occur in the three areas mentioned above. Each category of *tawḥīd* thus has corresponding categories of *shirk* that oppose it.

As previously mentioned, *shirk* had become particularly widespread among the Arabs in the realm of worship. For the Arabs of that time, it was common practice to invoke various idols to fulfil their needs. This created a deep attachment in their hearts to these idols, leading them to associate strong emotions with them – they loved and feared them.

The Qur'an clarifies in numerous places that this invocation, seeking help, acts of worship, and emotions of reverence are reserved exclusively for the Creator of mankind. For this reason, the message of all the Prophets عليهم السلام consistently focused on the field of worship.

However, this does not mean that the Arabs committed no *shirk* in the field of *rubūbiyyah*. On the contrary, the Qur'an repeatedly describes how *shirk* in *rubūbiyyah* was indeed present among the pre-Islamic Arabs, even though this was not true of all idolaters to the same extent or in the same manner.

What has just been stated also highlights the clear error in claiming that the Arabs fully understood "the entirety" of Allah's *rubūbiyyah* and did not violate it. This assertion does not align with historical facts nor with the numerous descriptions found in the Qur'an, and thus should be avoided – *wa-ḷḷāhu aʿlam*/and Allah knows best.

There were some Arabs who, for example, associated alleged daughters with Allah, but this was not the belief of all Arabs, only some of them. Likewise, the Arabs committed *shirk* in *tashrīʿ* (legislation) by establishing their own rituals without any basis in revelation and defining these practices as part of the religion of mankind or attributing them to the *dīn* of Allah. This latter form *of* shirk among the Arabs is mentioned frequently in the sixth chapter of the Qur'an, *sura al-Anʿām*.

As for this form of *shirk* in *rubūbiyyah*, it is relatively easy to recognize when it is expressed through clear statements and actions. The association of a created being with the Creator in such matters is usually quite evident through explicitly stated beliefs.

If one examines all the beliefs of the pre-Islamic Arabs in detail, it becomes apparent that almost all forms of *shirk* in *rubūbiyyah* could be found among them. However, as mentioned earlier, not every form of it was present among all Arabs.

The majority of the Arabs worshipped idols, but they did not believe that these idols could create anything from nothing, nor did they attribute any divine characteristics of that nature to them.

Nevertheless, it becomes quite clear from the Islamic sources that the idolaters of that time often held certain beliefs and various convictions regarding their idols – even though these beliefs generally fell far short of the previously mentioned level of attributing creative power or similar divine attributes to them.

The only Arabs who did not engage in this idol worship – apart from some Arabs who had converted to Judaism or Christianity – were the already mentioned *ḥunafāʾ*, the true followers of the monotheism taught by Ibrāhīm/Abraham ﷺ. Thus, the *ḥunafāʾ* were not *mushrikūn* but Muslims.

The Meaning of ʿIbādah/Worship

Since this book frequently discusses polytheism in worship *(ʿibādah)*, it is appropriate to briefly explain the Arabic term *ʿibādah* to provide a clearer understanding of what is meant by the word "worship" in this context. However, due to the concise nature of this treatise, it is not possible to delve into this topic in detail here; instead, this should be addressed in a separate and dedicated study of the subject.

The word *ʿibādah* is the *maṣdar* (verbal noun) of the verb *ʿabada yaʿbudu*. From this, the word *ʿabd* for "servant" is also directly derived. Linguistically, *ʿabada* means "to serve" in a broader sense, which is why a slave in Arabic is also called *ʿabd*.

In its linguistic meaning, the concept primarily revolves around submissiveness and humility or dependence towards someone else – in Arabic: *adh-dhullu wa-l-khuḍūʿ*.

The two terms, however, are not to be understood in the sense of misery and degradation as they are typically perceived by interhuman standards. In the context of worshiping the Creator, the meaning of the word *ʿibādah* carries an entirely positive connotation, as this position of the

creation towards its Creator is considered the most appropriate. In accordance with human nature, from an Islamic perspective, it is the purest and highest rank that a person can aspire to: being a righteous servant of His Creator.

This is because, no matter what a person undertakes or how far he develops, he will never come close to reaching the level of his Lord. Even the greatest human achievements remain utterly insignificant in relation to the Creator.

In contrast, arrogance and refusal do not elevate a person in virtue or status; rather, they cause him to fall. Aside from that, a person ultimately cannot refuse servitude to his Lord in any case. Whatever a person does or not, he will always remain a servant, and this is for the following two reasons:

1) On the one hand, he will always remain a creation, no matter what he does. Even if he refuses to worship his Creator, he cannot escape the decree of his Lord. Whether and how he is born and dies, whether he experiences illness or healing, and how he spends his life in the end – these are all conditions defined by the Creator, not by the creation.

In the end, creatures can do nothing unless the Creator permits it. No human being can free himself from this relationship, even if some might imagine otherwise. Whoever tries to do so does not elevate himself in the slightest – especially not in relation to his Lord, who will ultimately judge this creation.

The human being is as he is. According to prophetic teachings, a person can only continue to rise by drawing closer to his Lord. This is the greatest achievement a person can attain, and only through this path will he reach the highest possible degree of freedom.

2) On the other hand, it is in human nature to serve and submit to something. Whoever does not consciously serve his Creator ultimately ends up serving other people, his own desires, and inclinations – thus becoming, in the end, a slave to these very things and individuals.

This is also where the difference lies between a person who submits to his Creator and a person who refuses to do so out of arrogance. This also helps to understand why, according to Islamic teachings, arrogance fundamentally contradicts the fear of God.

The Arabs used the word *ʿibādah* (to serve/worship) in the same sense as the word *dhull* (to submit/be humble), and the word *taʿbīd* (to enslave or make someone a servant) in the same sense as *tadhlīl* (to cause someone to submit/make someone humble).

The *mufassir*/exegete aṭ-Ṭabarī therefore mentions, when explaining the word *ʿibādah*, some old poetic verses in which a path is described as *muʿabbad*, meaning "flattened or made low." The Arabs used this term for a path when it had been frequently travelled and was thus flattened by the feet of people.

In the *sharīʿah*, the legal meaning is more specific. Submissiveness and humility only become *ʿibādah* when they are accompanied by insight, devotion, and love. This is easy to understand since it is unimaginable for someone to worship Allah without showing any love towards Him or even being averse to Him. Such an attitude would not constitute submission in the sense of *ʿibādah* as required by Islam.

In Islamic teaching, *ʿibādah* is essentially a comprehensive term for everything – both outward and inward actions and statements – that Allah loves from His creatures.

This is because Allah ﷻ only commands what He loves. Every action carried out with the intention of drawing closer to Allah[81] is therefore considered *ʿibādah*. It is precisely this *taqarrub* (closeness) that must not be directed towards anyone except Allah.

The inner actions and statements are mentioned here because these hidden aspects are also forms of *ʿibādah*. Love, fear, reverence, and similar feelings are all described in Islamic theology as forms of *ʿibādah*. In fact, everything ultimately revolves around these actions of the heart – *aʿmālu l-qulūb* in Arabic.

[81] In Arabic, this conscious and intentional approximation is referred to as *taqarrub*.

Outward actions and statements are always a consequence of these inner actions and statements, as expressed in Islamic-Arabic terminology.

Major Shirk is the Equating of Allah and His Creations in Matters that are Unique to the Creator

Shirk thus refers to the equating of the Creator with His creations. This equivalence can occur with regard to His actions, attributes, and names, or – and above all – in worship and obedience.

This equating or making something equal means attributing to a created being something that belongs exclusively to the Creator. Therefore, *shirk* is also defined as ascribing to a creation any of the characteristics (*khaṣā'iṣ* in Arabic) unique to Allah.

This described equating, also known as *taswiyah* in Arabic, is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, for example, in the following verse:

﴿فَكُبْكِبُوا فِيهَا هُمْ وَالْغَاوُونَ (94) وَجُنُودُ إِبْلِيسَ أَجْمَعُونَ (95) قَالُوا وَهُمْ فِيهَا يَخْتَصِمُونَ (96) تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كُنَّا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (97) إِذْ نُسَوِّيكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

So they will be overturned into Hellfire, they and the deviators, And the soldiers of Iblīs, all together. They will say while they dispute therein: "By Allah, we were indeed in manifest error, when we equated you with the Lord of the worlds."

[sura ash-Shuʿarā', 26:94-98]

Through *taswiyah*/equating of this magnitude, major *shirk* differs from all other sins. However, the concept of equivalence is, to some extent, present in every sin. In every sin, Allah's right is violated to some degree, which is why the servant must seek forgiveness afterward.

Just as not every sin is considered polytheism, it is also clear that not every love or submission towards a created being constitutes polytheism in worship. For example, love for the prophets or the natural affection for other people and the like is not considered polytheistic association as long as this love remains within acceptable limits.

In the Qur'an, the following verse, for instance, discusses the fundamental behaviour towards one's parents:

﴿وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا﴾

And lower to them the wing of humility[82] *out of mercy and say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small."* [sura al-Isrāʾ, 17:24]

If a person's love for another human being goes so far that he rejects Islam, commit polytheism, or engage in similar acts for the sake of that person, then the boundary has undoubtedly been crossed. In such a case, this person has equated his love and obedience for another human being with that which is due only to the Creator.

In this sense, the fundamental principle of Islamic belief holds that a Muslim loves anything only for the sake of Allah. This love is therefore always subordinate to the love for the Creator.

Regarding major *shirk* in love, the Qur'an states, for example:

﴿وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللّهِ أَندَاداً يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ إِذْ يَرَوْنَ الْعَذَابَ أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلّهِ جَمِيعاً وَأَنَّ اللّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ﴾

And [yet], among the people are those who take other than Allah[83] *as equals [to Him]*[84]*. They love them as they love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah…*
[sura al-Baqarah, 2:165]

From what was previously stated about the division of *shirk*, it also becomes clear why the Prophet ﷺ used the terms *shirk* and *ʿadl* for minor *shirk*. This usage of the terms was already evident from the Prophet's

[82] In Arabic, the word *dhull* is used here, which was previously mentioned in the clarification of *ʿibādah*/worship.

[83] or in His place

[84] In Arabic, the word *andād* is used here, which was previously mentioned in the description of *shirk*/polytheism.

statement, "Have you made me equal to Allah?" since the Arabic text of this *ḥadīth* uses the word *ʿadl*.

In the following *ḥadīth*, where eye service *(riyāʾ)* is discussed and referred to as *shirk*, this division becomes even clearer. The word *shirk* is used, even though *riyāʾ* for a Muslim generally does not reach the level of major *shirk*.

In contrast to actual hypocrites/*munāfiqūn*, a Muslim would not perform an action solely for another human being. Therefore, it becomes quite obvious that the Prophet ﷺ in the following statement was referring to minor *shirk* when he said:

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ، قَالَ: خَرَجَ عَلَيْنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَنَحْنُ نَتَذَاكَرُ الْمَسِيحَ الدَّجَّالَ، فَقَالَ: «أَلَا أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِمَا هُوَ أَخْوَفُ عَلَيْكُمْ عِنْدِي مِنَ الْمَسِيحِ الدَّجَّالِ؟» قَالَ: قُلْنَا: بَلَى، فَقَالَ: «الشِّرْكُ الْخَفِيُّ، أَنْ يَقُومَ الرَّجُلُ يُصَلِّي، فَيُزَيِّنُ صَلَاتَهُ، لِمَا يَرَى مِنْ نَظَرِ رَجُلٍ»

> *From Abū Saʿīd, who said: The Prophet ﷺ came out to us while we remembered (together) al-Masīḥ ad-Dajjāl[85], and he said: "Shall I not tell you what I fear for you even more?" We said: "Yes."*
>
> *Then he said: "The hidden shirk – that a man stands to pray and beautifies his prayer because of the gaze of another person."[86]*

The Shirk of the Arabs in Intercession (Shafāʿah)

In particular, one form of polytheism in worship was widespread among the early Arabs, namely *shirk* in intercession. The Arabs worshipped their idols based on the belief that their objects of worship would intercede *(shafāʿah)* for them with Allah ﷻ in return. This idea of supposed

[85] The Dajjāl is the false prophet who, according to Islamic sources, will claim to be the returning Messiah. The remembrance here refers to them reflecting together on this Dajjāl and the prophetic words and warnings regarding him.

[86] Narrated by Aḥmad and Ibnu Mājah, where the term "the hidden *shirk*" is explicitly mentioned in their narration. The wording provided here is taken from the narration of Ibnu Mājah.

intercession by their worshipped beings with Allah lastly led the Arabs to polytheism in all areas of *'ibādah*.

The Arabs believed that the idols were representations of the souls of deceased noble people or other beings. This, at least, was the belief of the vast majority.

The theory of intercession among the Arabs was based on the belief that those whom they worshipped would enjoy extraordinary favor with their Creator due to their righteousness. From this belief arose the idea that these worshipped beings had particularly significant influence with Allah. According to their assumption, any intercession made by these beings would be accepted with absolute certainty.

This is mentioned in several places in the Qur'an, such as in the following verse, which conveys this statement from the Arabs themselves:

﴿بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ (1) إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ
مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ (2) أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ
إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ فِي مَا هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا
يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ كَفَّارٌ﴾

The revelation of the Qur'an is from Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Wise. Indeed, We have sent down to you the Book, [O Muhammad], in truth. So worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion. Unquestionably, for Allah is the pure religion. And those who take protectors[87] besides Him [say], "We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position." Indeed, Allah will judge between them concerning that over which they differ.

---

[87] The word *awliyā'* is the plural of *waliyy* and is used in various meanings that linguistically relate to "closeness." In English, the word is often translated as ally, protector, or guardian. As in this verse, the term also refers to idols.

Indeed, Allah does not guide he who is a liar and [confirmed] disbeliever[88]. *[sura az-Zumar, 39: 1-3]*

Intercession thus served as a false argument for the Arabs to justify their polytheism. While they believed that Allah is the Creator of all things, they also thought that the worshipped *ālihah* could either benefit or harm them through their intercession.

This central role of *shafāʿah* is ultimately the reason why it is mentioned so frequently in the Qur'an:

﴿وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ هَؤُلَاءِ شُفَعَاؤُنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ قُلْ أَتُنَبِّئُونَ اللَّهَ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ﴾

And they worship other than Allah that which neither harms them nor benefits them, and they say, "These are our intercessors with Allah" Say, "Do you inform Allah of something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?" Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him. [sura Yūnus, 10:18]

These Arabs had no foundation from revelation for this concept of *shafāʿah*/intercession. Furthermore, the Qur'an points out the Arabs' mistaken belief that some beings had a certain right to have their intercession accepted by the Creator.

The Qur'an describes this way of thinking as a central aspect of polytheism in the intercession theory of the pre-Islamic idolaters, as it implies a dependence of the Creator on His creation. The Arabs thus believed – as also discussed in the Qur'an – that their deities had a permanent right of intercession with their Creator.

In the Qur'an, we read, for example, the following:

[88] Sometimes also translated as: "a persistent disbeliever." It is important to consider what was previously mentioned regarding the term *kufr*, as it is more comprehensive than mere disbelief.

﴿اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ﴾

... Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? ... [sura al-Baqarah, 2:255]

The *mushrikūn* therefore sought to draw closer to their deities through inner and outer *ʿibādāt* – as it is expressed in Islamic terminology. They loved the idols in the same way they loved the Creator and likewise strove to gain their favour. They also feared the wrath of the *ālihah*. Because of all these acts of the heart *(aʿmālu l-qulūb)*, they eventually offered sacrifices to their idols, called upon them, and directed all their requests to them.

Through these circumstances explained here, the general understanding of the pagan Arabs can thus be illustrated, even though, in some cases, certain Arabs deviated even further from true monotheism.

The Unlawful Exclusion of a Muslim from Islam

The Meaning of the Word Takfīr

The Arabic word *takfīr* is the verbal noun (*maṣdar* in Arabic) of the verb *kaffara yukaffiru*. It is the corresponding noun that describes this action.

The verb *kaffara* means "to judge someone as a *kāfir.*" It is originally derived from the root letters k-f-r, that is, from the word *kufr*[89] and its verb *kafara - yakfuru*.

As explained in Arabic morphology *(ʿilmu ṣ-ṣarf)*, it is possible in the Arabic language to extend a triliteral verb like *kafara* by doubling the second letter, thus transforming it into *kaffara*. This process gives the verb the meaning of "causing" or "making"[90].

This method is very common and can generally be applied to verbs of this type. In Arabic linguistics, this method is referred to by a general pattern called *qiyās*.

Thus, from the verb *malaka* meaning "to possess", the word *mallaka* can be formed, meaning "to make possess" or "to let possess", implying that something is given to a person so that he owns it. Another example is *ʿalima* meaning "to know" and *ʿallama* meaning "to let know" or "to teach", and so on.

As can be seen from such examples, the idea of "making" or "letting" is often used in Arabic in a figurative sense.

Similarly, with *kafara* meaning "to commit *kufr*" and *kaffara* meaning "to make someone commit *kufr*." This verb is indeed used in this sense, describing the act of instigating another person to commit *kufr* and thereby

---

[89] It has already been pointed out several times that kufr is often translated as "disbelief" in English; however, in Islamic theology, the term is understood more comprehensively, and its meaning cannot be reduced to mere "non-belief."

[90] In the same way, this meaning is often conveyed by adding the *hamzah* mark at the beginning of the word. This was already mentioned in relation to the verb *aslama*, which, in the manner just described, is derived from the verb *salima*.

leading him to become a *kāfir*. Of course, it is not possible to force someone against his will to become a *kāfir*; thus, the primary meaning is that someone induces another person to commit *kufr*, working towards making him do so and thus become a *kāfir*.

More commonly, however, the word *kaffara* refers to the act of "making" someone a *kāfir* in one's own perception – that is, seeing or labelling someone as such. Arab scholars describe this as "he attributes him *kufr*" *(yansubuhu ilā l-kufr)*, which can occur either through an internal judgment or by openly accusing the other person. This is the frequent and well-known use of the term *takfīr*.

The word takfīr cannot fundamentally be equated with the concept of "excommunication." Even more absurd is the claim made by some political scientists that takfīr is always to be understood as a justification for killing.

The Deviation of the Khawārij

The unauthorized *takfīr* of a Muslim, that is, declaring him a non-Muslim without a legally valid reason according to Islamic law, is considered in Islamic doctrine a reprehensible and rejected innovation *(bidʿah,* pl. *bidaʿ)* introduced into Islam by consensus.

A well-known historical example of this can be found in the various factions of the so-called *khawārij* sect, who carried out *takfīr* on Muslims due to the commission of major sins *(kabāʾir,* sing. *kabīrah)*.

This erroneous idea of *takfīr* based on major sins *(at-takfīru bi-l-kabāʾir)* forms the fundamental principle of all splinter groups of the so-called *khawārij*. Today, the most well-known group adhering to this belief is the one that has been referred to in recent decades as *jamāʿatu t-takfīri wa-l-hijrah*. Another major religious group that adheres to this idea is the so-called *ʿibādiyyah*, which, for example, is practically the state religion in present-day Oman, although it treats this concept merely as a highly theoretical doctrinal belief.

The Condemnation of Unauthorized Takfīr by the Prophet ﷺ Himself

The rejection of unjustified takfīr against a Muslim is explicitly narrated from the Prophet ﷺ himself. Accordingly, this act is described as a grave sin.

Thus, al-Bukhārī reports in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection the following *ḥadīth* from Abū Hurayrah ؓ, from the Prophet ﷺ:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ قَالَ «إِذَا قَالَ الرَّجُلُ لِأَخِيهِ يَا كَافِرُ فَقَدْ بَاءَ بِهِ أَحَدُهُمَا»

> *If a person says to his brother in faith: "You kāfir!", then one of the two returns with it upon himself.*

Al-Bukhārī narrates this *ḥadīth* in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection in various narrations. Likewise, the *ḥadīth* is also found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. In the different narrations, it sometimes states, *"then one of them has returned with it (bihi)",* and in another wording, *"has returned with her (bihā)",* which led scholars to the question of what exactly the person *"returns with"* in this case. It is undisputed that the illegitimate accusation of a Muslim being a non-Muslim constitutes a major sin.

Clearly, this applies when *takfīr* is carried out without a legitimate justification in the *sharīʿah*. However, if a person were to, for example, profess Islam but then begin to worship cows, it would be an entirely different case.

In such a situation, the matter is so clear that not a single Muslim would be allowed to consider this person as a brother in faith. If one were to designate a person as a Muslim despite his evident polytheism, this would be an indication that one has not properly understood the core message of Islam itself. Otherwise, how could someone declare a person to be a Muslim despite idol worship or similar practices.

However, in reality, some Muslims practice *takfīr* merely by following their own inclinations. The point here is to highlight precisely this issue.

In another narration of the aforementioned *ḥadīth*, which al-Bukhārī mentions in his book *al-Adabu l-Mufrad*, it states:

عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ «مَنْ كَفَّرَ أَخَاهُ، فَقَدْ بَاءَ بِهَا أَحَدُهُمَا»

> *Whoever accuses his brother in faith of kufr, then one of them returns with it.*

Here, the verb *"kaffara"* is explicitly used, which all the more clearly demonstrates the connection of these narrations to the topic being discussed here.

The Rulings of the Sharīʿah Apply Only to what is Outwardly Visible

At this point, another aspect can be mentioned, which leads some Muslims to an excessive application of *takfīr*:

The lack of understanding that rulings in Islam naturally apply only to what is outwardly visible and demonstrable. No person can independently know what is in another's heart, which is why every Muslim is obligated to judge only based on external appearances. For this reason, the rulings of the *sharīʿah* are always based on perceptible actions and statements.

Thus, it is naturally possible that a person outwardly grows up as a Muslim in an Islamic society while, in reality, not having understood *tawḥīd* at all. Likewise, it is conceivable that such a person, due to his ignorance, eventually practices polytheism. However, as long as this remains unknown to others, the person can clearly only be regarded as a Muslim by other people.

On the other hand, it may be that the person has not inwardly accepted Islam, even if he does not outwardly display this. In this case, Islam is rejected internally, while externally, the pretence of being a Muslim is maintained. Such a person is referred to in Islamic terminology as a *munāfiq*/hypocrite. The phenomenon of the *munāfiq* is frequently addressed in Islamic sources and is well known, which is why the term appears numerous times in the Qur'an.

In some *ḥadīths*, it is also indicated that there are certain signs that warn the Muslim to be cautious of hypocrisy. However, according to Islamic teaching, it is not permissible to accuse someone of *kufr* unless a clear action or statement of *kufr* has been observed from this person.

Additionally, in certain cases, it may be that the person said something that contradicts Islam but is excused due to ignorance – some brief remarks on this will be given in the following.

The Principle of Excuse Due to Ignorance (al-ʿUdhru bi-l-Jahl)

The excuse due to ignorance is a well-known principle in Islamic theology, which was denied and entirely rejected only by some philosophical sects[91]. There are numerous Islamic source texts that clearly confirm this principle. The aforementioned sects distorted the meaning of such texts using illegitimate methods or – when they were unable to misinterpret them – simply rejected them outright because they did not align with their concept.

On the other hand, this principle cannot be extended to just any situation, which should likewise be self-evident. Any other assumption would lead to irrational conclusions.

That ignorance cannot turn a polytheist into a monotheist is thoroughly discussed and explained in this book. For numerous reasons, the principle of excuse due to ignorance cannot apply to major *shirk*. The mere fact that a person is ignorant of the foundation of Islam already makes his entry into Islam impossible.

This very circumstance shows that the principle of excuse due to ignorance cannot apply to just any situation. If it were so, a person who does not believe in the existence of a Creator could be considered a Muslim excused due to ignorance – a completely absurd notion.

Just as some philosophical groups had exaggerated and completely denied the excuse due to ignorance, other people fell into extending this

[91] Above all, from the so-called *muʿtazilah*, who are also referred to in English as "Rationalists" because they claimed to elevate reason (ratio) as the highest standard.

principle to every conceivable case, thereby falling into the opposite extreme in this matter.

Why and When Ignorance of Parts of the Revelation is Excusable

A specific case in which ignorance is a clear reason for excuse shall be examined here in more detail.

The explicit rejection of an authentic content of the Islamic revelation, for example, and especially the rejection of a part of the Qur'an, is considered *kufr* by consensus in Islamic theology.

Nevertheless, under certain circumstances, it may happen that someone explicitly denies the existence or the statement of a Qur'an verse because he was completely unaware of this verse or was unable to attain verified knowledge about its authenticity.

Such a person has, in reality, never rejected a revelation text that was definitively established for him as such. Rather, he has doubted something because he did not possess verified knowledge about it.

In such a situation, ignorance is therefore a clear impediment to *takfīr*. These impediments are referred to in Arabic as *mawāniʿu t-takfīr*.

From the previous explanation, it also becomes clear that actual *kufr* has never truly occurred in the aforementioned person. The rejection of a revelation text can only be classified as *kufr* when it is definitively established in relation to the specific person that it indeed constitutes *kufr*. The impediment – in this case, ignorance of the respective text – thus does not actually prevent *takfīr* in such a case; rather, it prevents *kufr* itself from occurring.

The same applies if someone, due to his acceptable ignorance of a text, acts contrary to that text.

For example, if a person was entirely unaware of the prohibition of alcohol consumption and then drank alcohol, he would be excused.

Clearly, this excuse for ignorance of revelation texts has a limit. In Islamic scholarship, no excuse was granted when it concerned generally known facts that every Muslim in an Islamic society would have been familiar with from childhood.

Other people, however, such as those who converted to Islam *(ḥadīthu ʿahdin bi-l-islām* or *bi-l-kufr)* or those who had come from a region where widespread ignorance prevailed, were exempted from this principle by the jurists.

The Difference Between Polytheists and Monotheists in Islamic Theology

From the previous explanations, it has already become clear that any truly polytheistic act makes a person's Islam impossible. Whoever does not purify his worship and obedience entirely and serves others alongside the one Creator cannot, for many reasons, be regarded as a Muslim.

In summary, it can be said that the polytheist does not fulfil the following fundamental theological principles and characteristics, which are essential for the realization of monotheism:

- He does not fulfil *ikhlāṣ*, the purification of deeds for Allah ﷻ.
- He is not a *ḥanīf* and does not follow the *ḥanīfiyyah*, which is used in Islamic sources to describe monotheism.
- He does not follow the original teaching of Abraham *(millatu Ibrāhīm)*, which is also mentioned and explained multiple times in the Qur'an.
- He does not fulfil the fundamental theological principle of *al-kufru bi-ṭ-ṭāghūt*, which describes renouncing idols, tyrants, and everything that is worshiped besides Allah.

These four points will be examined and clarified individually in the following chapters.

Islam Means Ikhlāṣ – No Polytheist Fulfils the Ikhlāṣ

Islam means, as has already been shown through several texts, the purification of deeds from polytheism, which is expressed in Arabic by the word *ikhlāṣ*.

How central the meaning of *ikhlāṣ* is in Islam is demonstrated by the statement of one of the earliest *mufassirīn*/Qur'an exegetes. This is the

following statement, which is narrated by Ibnu Abī Ḥātim ar-Rāzī in his *tafsīr*:

... عَنِ الرَّبِيعِ، عَنْ أَبِي الْعَالِيَةِ، قَوْلُهُ: {إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ} [يوسف: 40] قَالَ: «أُسِّسَ الدِّينُ عَلَى الْإِخْلَاصِ لِلَّهِ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ»

> *It is narrated from Abū l-ʿĀliyah, regarding the Qur'an verse: "Legislation is not but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him." that he said: "The entire religion (dīn) was founded upon ikhlāṣ towards Allah alone, without any partner."*

The exclusive worship of the Creator is therefore an essential condition for a person to be a Muslim. For this reason, a Muslim is always also a *mukhliṣ*[92]. Whoever does not fulfil this *ikhlāṣ* can in no way be considered a Muslim.

For this reason, Islamic scholarship has always understood *ikhlāṣ* as a condition of the testimony of faith *(shahādah)*. If this condition is not met, the *shahādah* cannot be valid.

A claim to the contrary would inevitably lead to the possibility of a "Muslim *mushrik"* or a *"mukhliṣ mushrik*", meaning a "polytheistic monotheist" – an obviously absurd concept.

Many people today, whether consciously or unconsciously, adhere precisely to this contradictory false belief. This is obviously because they lack the awareness that Islam consists specifically in worshiping Allah ﷻ alone and not merely in acknowledging the existence of a single Creator.

In fact, this led to the spread of the notion that true Islam consists merely in professing the religion. Whoever simply claims to be a Muslim is therefore truly a Muslim – something that strips Islam of its core meaning and reduces the declaration of faith to a mere verbal declaration.

An analogous example would be that of a blind person who claims to be able to see. Then, outsiders say: *"We know that this person is blind, yet we still believe that he can simultaneously see."*

---

[92] The active participle of the word *ikhlāṣ*, meaning "the one who purifies."

The conclusion from such a statement can only be that such a person either does not know the meaning of blindness or sight and therefore cannot distinguish between them – or that he deliberately insists on this contradiction.

As has become clear from what has been said so far, the word "Muslim" describes a specific meaning that includes actions and characteristics that a *mushrik* can never fulfil.

This is also entirely evident because *shirk* is the exact opposite of Islam, which is why these two things can never coexist within a single person.

"A person who worships only Allah" cannot at the same time be ***"a person who worships something else alongside Allah."***

Islam is the Ḥanīfiyyah – A Polytheist is not a Ḥanīf

As previously mentioned, those known as *ḥunafāʾ* adhered to the monotheistic teachings of Abraham, which is why Islam is also known as *al-ḥanīfiyyah.*

One of these *ḥunafāʾ* has already been mentioned: Zayd ibnu ʿAmr ibni Nufayl, who proclaimed his conviction on various occasions and through poetry.

Several narrations report how Zayd ibnu ʿAmr set out in search of the true religion and, on his journey, encountered a Jewish and a Christian priest. When he asked each of them about the true religion, both ultimately referred him to the *ḥanīfiyyah*, whereupon Zayd asked:

قَالَ زَيْدٌ وَمَا الْحَنِيفُ قَالَ دِينُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَمْ يَكُنْ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَا يَعْبُدُ إِلَّا اللَّهَ

> *Zayd said: "And what is a ḥanīf?" He [the Jewish or Christian priest] said: "The dīn of Ibrāhīm. He was neither Jewish nor Christian and worshiped none but Allah."*[93]

The *ḥanīf* is therefore someone who worships only Allah, in contrast to the *mushrik*. Just as there cannot be a *"ḥanīf mushrik"*, there likewise cannot be a "Muslim *mushrik"* or a *"mukhliṣ mushrik."*

[93] Narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥu l-Bukhārī* from ʿAbduḷḷāh ibnu ʿUmar ﵄.

In numerous verses in the Qur'an, it is clearly shown that Islam is *ḥanīfiyyah*, and that every Muslim is a *ḥanīf*:

﴿وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ﴾

And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, purifying their dīn for Him as ḥunafāʾ, and to establish prayer and to give zakah. And that is the correct religion.

[sura al-Bayyinah, 98:5]

Explanation of this Verse:

- This verse explicitly states that people were commanded nothing but to establish monotheism in worship.

  At the beginning of this book, it was already explained in a separate chapter that the acts of worship prescribed in Islam, such as prayer and zakāt, are built upon *tawḥīd* and cannot exist without it.

  If someone who does not fulfil *tawḥīd* were to perform a prayer solely for Allah, this prayer would not be accepted by Allah, according to the consensus of the Muslims. This is further clarified by the fact that the pre-Islamic idolaters outwardly identified with the religion of Abraham and even performed certain *ʿibādāt* exclusively for Allah, thus being *"mukhliṣīna"*[94] in these specific acts. However, this did not make them Muslims.

- After this, the same verse reaffirms once again what this means, namely: ***"To worship Allah"***, that is, ***"purifying their dīn for Him."*** Here, the word "*mukhliṣīna"* is used, which once again demonstrates that Islam is *ikhlāṣ*, and that every Muslim must be a *mukhliṣ*.

- Then follows another confirmation of this meaning: "***To worship Allah, purifying their dīn for Him"***, that is, ***"as ḥunafāʾ."***

[94] Plural of *mukhliṣ*. It is the word that was also used in the previously mentioned Qur'an verse in the phrase "*mukhliṣīna lahu d-dīn.*"

- Finally, it concludes with the statement that what has just been described is *"the straight and upright religion (dīn)."*

This Qur'an verse also contradicts multiple times the notion of a Muslim who, in a polytheistic manner, worships others alongside the one Creator.

In another verse, it is stated:

﴿مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَٰكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a ḥanīf, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the mushrikīn.
[sura Āli ʿImrān, 3:67]

This verse also reflects exactly what was stated above. Once again, three things are mentioned, with each term explaining and reinforcing the other. ***"Muslim", "ḥanīf",*** and ***"not from the mushrikīn"*** are three equivalent concepts.

Islam is the Religion of Abraham (Millatu Ibrāhīm) – The Polytheist Contradicts This Fundamentally

As has already become clear from the above verses, Islam is the religion of Abraham, which is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an with the term *millatu Ibrāhīm* and explained in various ways.

The religion of Ibrāhīm means worshiping only Allah. It is the universal Islam with which all prophets ﷺ were sent. Therefore, it is self-evident that the Prophet of Islam and likewise his followers were commanded to adhere to this religion. Nevertheless, this matter is explicitly mentioned and affirmed in the Qur'an. Regarding this, it is stated in the Qur'an:

﴿ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنِ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

Then We revealed to you, [O Muhammad], to follow the dīn of Abraham, as a ḥanīf; and he was not of the mushrikīn. [sura an-Naḥl, 16:123]

This also demonstrates that a polytheist cannot have fulfilled the religion of Ibrāhīm and, consequently, Islamic monotheism. As mentioned, this is evident in numerous places in the Qur'an. However, what has been stated so far shall suffice for us in light of the scope of this concise book.

If Islam Were Merely a Verbal Declaration, the Arabian Idolaters Would Have Been Muslims

If it were possible for a person to become a follower of Islam merely through verbal declaration while fundamentally contradicting this declaration through various actions, statements, and beliefs, then all pre-Islamic idolaters would undoubtedly have to be considered actual followers of the religion of Ibrāhīm.

There is no doubt that those idolaters themselves claimed to belong to the religion of Ibrāhīm. However, many of them were completely unaware that their idolatry contradicted the very foundation of that religion. They were ignorant of it.

Despite this ignorance, there has always been a consensus among Muslims not to refer to those idolaters as Muslims but rather as *mushrikūn*. None of the early scholars would have considered designating those idolaters as Muslims, *ḥunafā'*, or monotheists merely because of their verbal declaration. This matter is so clear that, to this day, hardly anyone makes such a claim.

A person who now associates himself with the Islam of Muḥammad ﷺ but contradicts its foundation just as the pre-Islamic idolaters did can, just as clearly, not be considered a monotheist. In this regard, it is entirely irrelevant whether the individual is aware of his own condition or not, because a person's awareness of his situation does not change the fundamental question of whether he is, in fact, worshiping someone other than Allah – thus committing polytheism – or worshiping only Allah and thereby realizing monotheism.

Islam Means Renunciation of the Ṭāghūt – The Polytheist Does Not Fulfil This Principle

It has already been mentioned that a Muslim must necessarily renounce everything that is worshiped besides Allah ﷻ or that is obeyed uncon-

ditionally alongside Allah. This principle is also explicitly mentioned multiple times in the Qur'an and has always been known in Islamic theology as *al-kufru bi-ṭ-ṭāghūt*, meaning the renunciation of the *ṭāghūt*.

For this reason, it is often seen that the fulfilment of this fundamental principle is stated as one of the essential conditions[95] for the validity of the *shahādah*, that is, the testimony of faith.

Since the polytheist definitely does not fulfil this condition, he cannot be regarded as a Muslim from the perspective of Islamic theology in this regard either. It would be absurd to claim that a person, on one hand, ***"worships the ṭāghūt",*** while at the same time, ***"has renounced everything that is worshiped besides Allah."***

Once again, this also makes it clear how irrelevant it is whether the person is aware of his own condition or not, because this knowledge or ignorance does not change the fundamental question of whether a person worships the *ṭāghūt* or rejects its worship. To assume both at the same time within the same person would be a clear contradiction.

In fact, someone who adheres to this obvious contradiction thereby provides further proof of the absurdity of this claim. Such people usually argue with two points that are supposed to make a polytheist a Muslim:

1) The outward declaration of the person to Islam

2) The ignorance and lack of awareness of the person regarding the fact that his own actions fundamentally contradict Islam

For those who argue in this way, however, another insoluble problem arises, namely the question: How can someone who is unaware of the reality of monotheism and polytheism, and the difference between these

---

[95] These conditions are not primarily about a precise definition. Whoever understands their content knows that the correctness and validity of the *shahādah* depend on these matters. However, it is irrelevant how these conditions are named or classified.

Clearly, the mentioned conditions often overlap. A person who does not fulfil *kufr* against the *ṭāghūt* has also, evidently, not achieved *ikhlāṣ*. The points presented by the scholars as conditions are therefore either equivalent in meaning or their meanings overlap. In any case, they are entirely dependent on one another.

two, be considered a Muslim, when he has not understood the core content of his testimony of faith?

As this book progresses, this contradiction will be further elaborated separately. For now, it should suffice to point out that knowledge of the fundamental meaning of the testimony of faith is undoubtedly a prerequisite for being a Muslim or entering Islam.

Returning to the principle of renouncing the *ṭāghūt* discussed here, it can be concluded that, from an Islamic theological perspective, it would be inconceivable to imagine a Muslim who worships something alongside Allah while simultaneously renouncing the worship of all other things.

At the beginning of this book, several narrations of the well-known *ḥadīth* about the five pillars of Islam were already mentioned. It became clear that Islam is built upon the principle of monotheism.

In some of these narrations from the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection of Muslim ibnu l-Ḥajjāj, the following was clearly evident:

عَلَى أَنْ يُوَحَّدَ اللَّهُ

In this narration, it is stated that Islam is built upon *"... that Allah is made One*[96]*."*

عَلَى أَنْ يُعْبَدَ اللَّهُ وَيُكْفَرَ بِمَا دُونَهُ

In another narration of the same *ḥadīth*, however, it is stated that Islam is built upon *"... that one worships only Allah and makes kufr against everything that is worshiped besides Him."*

Here, the principle of renouncing the *ṭāghūt* is explicitly formulated. Islam was established upon this principle, and the polytheist does not fulfil this foundation under any circumstances.

Likewise, this principle is described in other *ḥadīths*. The Prophet ﷺ said in the following *ḥadīth*, which is narrated by Muslim:

مَنْ قَالَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَكَفَرَ بِمَا يُعْبَدُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ حَرُمَ مَالُهُ وَدَمُهُ وَحِسَابُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ

[96] As previously explained, the verb *"yuwaḥḥadu"* is used here in Arabic.

> *Whoever says lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh and performs kufr against everything that is worshiped besides Him, their wealth and life are forbidden to us[97], and their reckoning is with Allah.*

In another narration recorded by Muslim, the following wording is found:

مَنْ وَحَّدَ اللَّهَ ثُمَّ ذَكَرَ بِمِثْلِهِ

> "Whoever makes Allah One[98]..."

In both *ḥadīths, tawḥīd* is therefore explicitly equated with *kufr* against the *ṭāghūt*.

Kufr against the *ṭāghūt* consists precisely in not worshiping it. Whoever, however, engages in polytheistic actions contradicts this and, from the perspective of Islamic theology, cannot be considered a Muslim.

Through the preceding chapters, it has been demonstrated that fulfilling the following principles is essential for a person's Islam:

- *Ikhlāṣ*, meaning the purification of one's actions from polytheistic worship
- The realization of *ḥanīfiyyah*, which consists of pure monotheism
- The adherence to the Abrahamic monotheism *(millatu Ibrāhīm)*
- The principle of renouncing the *ṭāghūt*

Whoever neglects these principles, which are required by Islamic theology by consensus, falls into numerous fundamental contradictions – not only concerning the aforementioned principles.

In the following, further Islamic source texts will be presented to reinforce what has been stated so far.

---

[97] Even if a non-Muslim accepts Islam during a battle, it is not permissible to continue fighting him, and any enmity is eradicated by his entry into Islam.

[98] Here, too, the word *waḥḥada* is used, meaning: "Whoever makes Allah One in worship."

Shirk as the Opposite of Islam

In some detail, the linguistic or the theological meaning of the words Islam and Muslim has already been examined in previous chapters, based on the source texts of Islam and the Arabic language. It became clear that these words can in no way refer to a polytheist or polytheism.

This can also be further clarified by examining the words *shirk* (polytheism) and *mushrik* (polytheist), as they represent the opposite of monotheism. As has already been made clear multiple times, *shirk* stands in direct opposition to the concepts of Islam, *ikhlāṣ, ḥanīfiyyah*, and the religion of Abraham *(millatu Ibrāhīm)* ﷺ.

Just like the word Islam, *shirk* also refers to a specific content and is not an empty word without any meaning. The words Islam, Muslim, *shirk*, and *mushrik* are terms and designations of the *sharīʿah (asmāʾun sharʿiyyah)*. Just as with the words "eating, drinking" and "the eating one, the drinking one", these are words that describe specific actions[99]. Just as in the case of Islam, *ikhlāṣ*, and similar concepts, it is evident here as well that whether or not a person is aware of the wrongdoing of an action has no effect on the action itself.

The same applies to a person who commits theft or adultery. By unlawfully taking someone else's property, a person becomes a thief, regardless of whether he knew that stealing is prohibited in Islam or not. Whether he is punished for it is an entirely different matter. However, in any case, it would be absurd to claim that such a person did not steal, just because the punishment does not apply due to the excuse of ignorance.

The same applies to an adulterer *(zānī)*. The moment he went to a woman to whom he had no right, he became an adulterer. It would be absurd to claim that he is not an adulterer simply because he did not know that adultery is a prohibited act in Islam.

[99] In Arabic, the previously mentioned negative terms such as *shirk*, etc., are often also referred to as *asmāʾu dhammi l-afʿāl*. This means that these terms each describe the negative action itself.

In the same way, someone who worships something other than Allah is a "worshiper of something other than Allah."[100] Whoever commits *shirk* must necessarily also be referred to as a *mushrik*. This is linguistic self-evidence.

However, when some people today are confronted with this, they oppose these fundamentals of the Arabic language and basic reason. For example, if one tells them, *"That person is an adulterer"*, they actually respond that the person should not be called an adulterer because he was unaware that this act is forbidden in Islam!

In the same way, such people can "imagine" – or at least claim to – that a Muslim can simultaneously commit *shirk*. According to their assertion, a "Muslim *mushrik*" could exist. When confronted with this contradiction, just as with the terms "adulterer, thief", etc., they respond in the same manner, saying that the person should not be called a *mushrik*. According to their argument, only the act should be referred to as *shirk*. It is evident that anyone who makes such a claim suffers from great confusion regarding the core message of his own religion.

As previously explained, the word *mushrik* is what is known as *ismu l-fāʿil*, meaning the active participle. This *ismu l-fāʿil* carries the meaning of the verb in Arabic, which is why it is also permissible to use it in place of the verb and allow it to assume its grammatical function.

The verb *ashraka* means "to associate (partners with Allah)", and the *mushrik* is "the associating one." In Arabic, the word "*mushrikūn"* can therefore be used instead of the verb "*ashraka"*, as follows:

"zaydun ashraka bi-llāhi shayʾan": ***"Zayd associated something with Allah."***

"zaydun mushrikun bi-llāhi shayʾan": ***"Zayd is associating something with Allah."***

It functions in the same way as the words *shariba* for "to drink" and *shārib* for "the/a drinking one."

---

[100] This phrasing has been used in some places here to help the reader better understand the correspondence of these words in their linguistic meaning in Arabic. Since this expression does not align with the English linguistic usage, it has therefore always been placed in quotation marks.

If someone drinks alcohol, it is said in Arabic, by the consensus of all Arabs, that he is "drinking alcohol."[101] Here, too, it would be absurd to say: *"He is/was not an alcohol-drinker because of his ignorance about the prohibition of alcohol."*

Instead, one would have to say: *"This man is/was an alcohol-drinker. However, due to his acknowledged ignorance, no punishment is applied."*

In the Arabic language, the active participle, *shārib*, can be used in the same way in this context.

This person is therefore, from a linguistic perspective, inevitably a *shārib*. However, the *ḥukm* of *shurb*, meaning the subsequent ruling in the Islamic legal system – in this case, the punishment – does not apply to him.

Now, if we say about a person ***"ashraka bi-llāh",*** meaning *"he associated something with Allah or worshiped something alongside Him*", no one would object. Even those who adhere to this false notion agree that this person worships something besides Allah.

However, in Arabic, this person is also, by consensus, described with the words *"mushrikun bi-llāh."* Whoever rejects this has clearly contradicted both language and reason. Someone who argues in this way would have no other choice than to call such a hypothetical person "***muslimun mushrikun bi-llāh"*** – a completely absurd designation.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī said in his previously quoted explanation of the verse in *sura az-Zumar* [39:29]:

> يَقُولُ جَلَّ ثَنَاؤُهُ: وَمَا يَسْتَوِي هَذَا الْمُشْتَرَكُ فِيهِ، وَالَّذِي هُوَ مُنْفَرِدٌ مُلْكُهُ لِوَاحِدٍ، بَلْ أَكْثَرُ هَؤُلَاءِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ بِاللَّهِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُمَا لَا يَسْتَوِيَانِ، فَهُمْ بِجَهْلِهِمْ بِذَلِكَ يَعْبُدُونَ آلِهَةً شَتَّى مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

> *But most of these "who associate something with Allah" do not know that the two are not equal. In their ignorance of this, they worship various different ālihah besides Allah.*

[101] Here, the primary reference is to the description at the moment of the action itself.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī used exactly this expression: *"al-mushrikūna bi-llāh."* According to the distorted viewpoint discussed here, however, Aṭ-Ṭabarī could just as well have meant ***"Muslims who associate partners with Allah!"***[102] Anyone who seeks a sincere and reasonable approach to the texts can certainly not accept such a contradictory meaning.

The adherents of this false belief must therefore ask themselves whether the following descriptions can truly apply to a Muslim:

- *mushrikun bi-llāhi ilāhan ākhar*: Associating another *ilāh* with Allah.
- *ʿābidun maʿa-ḷḷāhi ilāhan ākhar*: Worshiping another *ilāh* alongside Allah.
- *muttakhidhun maʿa-ḷḷāhi ilāhan ākhar*: Taking another *ilāh* alongside Allah.
- *ʿādilun bi-rabbihi ilāhan ākhar*: Equating another *ilāh* with his Lord.

Through a closer examination of the words Islam and *shirk*, or Muslim and *mushrik*, it has become very clear **that Islam and *shirk* are two complete opposites** that can never coexist in the same person at the same time.

However, it is certainly possible for a *mushrik* to enter Islam through sincere repentance and a complete abandonment of polytheism, thereby becoming a true monotheist.

[102] Meaning *"al-muslimūna l-mushrikūna bi-llāh"*

Allah Does Not Forgive the Sin of Shirk – Except Through Sincere Repentance

In the Qur'an, it is explicitly stated twice that – unlike all other sins – the sin of polytheism is not forgiven[103]:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ﴾

Indeed, Allah does not forgive association[104] with Him.
[sura an-Nisā', 4:116]

Whoever, on the other hand, believes that a person can worship something other than Allah and still be a Muslim, is stating the exact opposite of this verse. According to this distorted view, the verse must state exactly the opposite: *"Allah forgives that something is associated with Him."*

This claim is therefore a clear rejection of this Qur'anic statement. Even more remarkable, however, is that there are some people who actually accept and promote this consequence. When such individuals are confronted with this obvious contradiction, they respond by saying that the ignorant person's polytheistic actions are forgiven due to his ignorance. According to their claim, such a person is therefore, in every respect, a Muslim.

Some become so fixated on their position that they seriously claim a person could worship Jesus and even consider him the Son of God, yet still be a Muslim due to his ignorance.

[103] As mentioned, this refers to a person who does not repent, meaning he does not perform the *tawbah* (repentance). However, if a person completely turns away from this *shirk* before his death and sincerely repents for his previous association, then Allah forgives this sin also.

[104] In Arabic, the word *"yushraka"* is used here, which is the corresponding verb to the word *shirk*.

This real-world example illustrates the confusion that exists today regarding the Islamic understanding of monotheism and the absurd statements that arise in discussions as a result.

It should also be noted here that such claims can never be supported by Islamic source texts or by any statements from the scholars of the early centuries *(as-salaf)*. For anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of the early Islamic texts, this is self-evident.

Only a Monotheistic Soul Enters Paradise

The statement in the chapter title is a theological foundation in Islam. It means that only a soul that is fully submitted to its Lord can enter Paradise. As has already been made clear multiple times, this is precisely the meaning of the word "Muslim."

Only the monotheist, who worships nothing besides the one Lord, can attain his place in Paradise. In this context, Muslim and Islam refer to the previously mentioned "universal Islam." This is the message of all prophets ﷺ. For this reason, all previous prophets and their followers are referred to as Muslims in the Qur'an, as can be seen in many verses of the Qur'an.

What is stated in the text thus applies to all those who followed their respective prophet ﷺ and accepted his message, regardless of which prophet it was. For this reason, every Muslim must be convinced that among the followers of Moses and Jesus, meaning the Jews and Christians, there were undoubtedly true monotheists who will also enter Paradise – and they were not few in number. This is a theological certainty and rejecting it would be *kufr*.

Al-Bukhārī رحمه الله narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection from Abū Hurayrah رضي الله عنه, and in another *ḥadīth* from ʿAbduḷḷāh ibnu Masʿūd, an interesting statement of the Prophet ﷺ regarding this matter:

> لَا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا نَفْسٌ مُسْلِمَةٌ

> *Only and exclusively a Muslim soul enters Paradise.*

The word *"Muslimah"* is used here as a characteristic in the sense of "monotheistic" and "fully and completely submitted to Allah." Clearly, this description does not apply to the polytheist.

The Polytheist Does Not Fulfil the Purpose of Creation and Religion

This statement is also clearly expressed in the Qur'an. Thus, it is stated in *sura adh-Dhāriyāt*:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ (56) مَا أُرِيدُ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ رِزْقٍ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ يُطْعِمُونِ (57) إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِينُ﴾

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me[105]*. I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed Me. Indeed, it is Allah who is the [continual] Provider, the firm possessor of strength.* [sura adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56-58]

Al-Bukhārī himself explains this verse in one of the chapter headings of his *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection with the following words:

{وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الجِنَّ وَالإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ} [الذاريات: 56]: «مَا خَلَقْتُ أَهْلَ السَّعَادَةِ مِنْ أَهْلِ الفَرِيقَيْنِ إِلَّا لِيُوَحِّدُونِ»

> *... only to make Me One. (illā li-yuwaḥḥidūni)*

In this explanation, once again, the word *tawḥīd* or the verb *waḥḥada* was used, expressing that Allah ﷻ is to be made One in worship.

Al-Bukhārī mentioned this statement – following his general approach in formulating chapter headings – in accordance with personalities from the *salaf*, from whom the same explanation has been narrated.

[105] In Arabic, the word *yaʿbudūn* is used, meaning: *"so that they offer ʿibādah (worship) exclusively to Me."*

For example, Muqātil ibnu Sulaymān (d. 150 AH) narrates this exact wording from an even earlier scholar of the *salaf*:

حدَّثنا عبد اللَّهِ قَالَ: حَدَّثَنِي أَبِي عَنْ أَبِي صَالِحٍ، قال: «إلا لِيوحِّدون»

This is also the reason why Islamic scholarship emphasizes that every command in the Qur'an to worship Allah is a command to *tawḥīd*, meaning monotheism in worship.

This is entirely clear because the entire Qur'an explains what is meant by this call to worship. It would be impossible for it to mean that one should believe in the existence of a Creator and worship Him while also worshiping other things or beings alongside Him. This would be the exact opposite of the central message of Islamic monotheism.

The call to worship, directed at the idolaters, without the accompanying monotheism, would also be absurd, since the pre-Islamic idolaters already worshiped Allah. As has already been explained, this is an undeniable theological and historical fact.

If mere worship, without *tawḥīd* and regardless of the worship of others, were what was meant, then the idolaters would have already fulfilled this command, making the entire message meaningless.

Thus, the exclusive worship of Allah is what the creation is meant to fulfil. This raises the question: How can a polytheist be considered a Muslim who attains Allah's pleasure and enters Paradise in the end, while failing to fulfil this fundamental purpose?

In this context, one should also recall the previously discussed verse, in which it is stated:

﴿وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ
وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ﴾

And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, purifying their dīn for Him, as ḥunafāʾ and to establish prayer and to give zakah. And that is the correct dīn. [sura al-Bayyinah, 98:5]

The "Ignorant Polytheist" Does Not Know the Meaning of the Testimony of Faith

The Muslim scholars in general, and those of the early generations in particular, have always agreed that a person can only be a Muslim if he fulfils the condition of knowledge.

In this context, knowledge means that a Muslim must know the meaning of the testimony of faith. As previously explained, it is also essential to consciously accept and implement the understood content. Mere knowledge is therefore not sufficient, but it is a fundamental prerequisite. After all, acceptance and implementation of the testimony of faith would not even be conceivable without first understanding its meaning.

This is, in itself, a self-evident matter. For example, if a person who does not understand Arabic was to hear the phrase *lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh* and simply repeat it without knowing its meaning, this would not make him a Muslim, according to consensus.

Therefore, it is entirely clear that knowledge of this meaning is also a condition of the testimony of faith. Regarding this, the Qur'an states the following:

﴿فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ﴾

So know, [O Muhammad], that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah[106].

[sura Muḥammad, 47:19]

[106] In Arabic, therefore: "Know that *lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh*."

﴿إِلَّا مَنْ شَهِدَ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

... but only those who testify to the truth [can benefit], while they know. [sura az-Zukhruf, 43:86]

The statement "while they know" is to be understood here as meaning that the individuals described in this verse bear witness to the truth with knowledge of its actual meaning.

Furthermore, the Arabic word *"shahādah"*, meaning "testimony", implies that one knows exactly what they are testifying to. This is a prerequisite for the validity of a testimony; otherwise, it would be a lie. The *shahādah* of *lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh* is therefore inconceivable without the necessary knowledge and understanding of its content.

The *Ḥadīths* Regarding the Test of Certain People on the Day of Judgment

There exist certain narrations stating that some people who either did not receive the message of the prophets in this worldly life or were unable to adequately understand it will argue with their specific circumstances on the Day of Judgment. Consequently, Allah will subject them to a separate test.

This account is reported in various *ḥadīths* from several Companions of the Prophet, primarily al-Aswad ibnu Sarīʿ and Abū Hurayrah[107]. For example, Aḥmad narrates the following *ḥadīth* in his *Musnad* through his chain of narrators from al-Aswad ibnu Sarīʿ ﵁ from the Prophet ﷺ:

... عَنِ الْأَسْوَدِ بْنِ سَرِيعٍ أَنَّ نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ ﷺ قَالَ أَرْبَعَةٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ رَجُلٌ أَصَمُّ لَا يَسْمَعُ شَيْئًا وَرَجُلٌ أَحْمَقُ وَرَجُلٌ هَرِمٌ وَرَجُلٌ مَاتَ فِي فَتْرَةٍ فَأَمَّا الْأَصَمُّ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّ لَقَدْ جَاءَ الْإِسْلَامُ وَمَا

[107] The fact that this *ḥadīth* is transmitted through multiple sources indicates that this report has an authentic basis. For this reason, Muslim scholars have frequently narrated this *ḥadīth* in their books without rejecting it.

أَسْمَعُ شَيْئًا وَأَمَّا الْأَحْمَقُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّ لَقَدْ جَاءَ الْإِسْلَامُ وَالصِّبْيَانُ يَحْذِفُونِي بِالْبَعْرِ وَأَمَّا الْهَرِمُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي لَقَدْ جَاءَ الْإِسْلَامُ وَمَا أَعْقِلُ شَيْئًا وَأَمَّا الَّذِي مَاتَ فِي الْفَتْرَةِ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّ مَا أَتَانِي لَكَ رَسُولٌ فَيَأْخُذُ مَوَاثِيقَهُمْ لَيُطِيعُنَّهُ فَيُرْسِلُ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنِ ادْخُلُوا النَّارَ قَالَ فَوَالَّذِي نَفْسُ مُحَمَّدٍ بِيَدِهِ لَوْ دَخَلُوهَا لَكَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا

... عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ مِثْلَ هَذَا غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ فِي آخِرِهِ فَمَنْ دَخَلَهَا كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِ بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا وَمَنْ لَمْ يَدْخُلْهَا يُسْحَبُ إِلَيْهَا

> *Four [people will present their arguments[108]] on the Day of Resurrection (before their Lord): A deaf man who could not hear anything, a mentally disabled person, a senile elderly man, and a man who died during the period of fatrah[109].*
>
> *The deaf man will say: "My Lord, Islam came but I could hear nothing."*
>
> *The mentally disabled person will say: "My Lord, Islam came, and the youths threw filth at me."*

---

[108] The word "argue" (Arabic: *yaḥtajjūna*) is explicitly mentioned in some narrations.

[109] The term *fatrah* refers to the period between prophets ﷺ, during which the prophetic message was hardly spread. However, this is a relative term, as it was indeed possible for some people during such times to learn about *tawḥīd*.

For instance, it is historically beyond doubt that the pre-Islamic Meccans, despite mixing their practices with idol worship, identified themselves with the religion of Abraham and were aware of and practiced certain rituals accordingly. Occasionally, there existed the previously mentioned *ḥunafāʾ*, who explicitly rejected and condemned idolatry and followed the pure remnants of Abraham's religion.

Thus, depending on location and circumstances, it was possible even during that period for some people to learn the fundamentals of the prophetic message. The individuals mentioned in this particular *ḥadīth*, however, clearly refer to those who did not receive the prophets' message at all and therefore had no opportunity to learn anything about it.

> *The elderly senile man will say: "My Lord, Islam came, yet I understood nothing."*
>
> *And the one who died in the time of fatrah will say: "My Lord, Islam came, yet no Messenger from You came to me."*
>
> *Then He will take their covenants[110] that they will surely obey Him. After that, He will send to them (a messenger commanding): "Enter the fire!" By Him in whose Hand is the soul of Muḥammad, if they enter it, it will be cool and safe for them.*
>
> *[…] The same is narrated from Abū Hurayrah, but he added at the end: "Whoever enters it, for him it will be cool and safe, and whoever refuses will be dragged into it [the actual fire]."*

As can be seen from this *ḥadīth*, the individuals mentioned therein argue that during their worldly life the actual test, which all human beings must undergo, did not occur for them.

This issue deserves mentioning because some people nowadays misunderstand these *ḥadīths*. They argue that a polytheist who outwardly professes Islam could thus emerge from such a test as a Muslim and enter Paradise.

Hence, the idea they present is roughly as follows: A person who claims to be Muslim but commits polytheism due to ignorance about Islam's fundamental message would be tested on the Day of Judgment and thus could be regarded as an excused Muslim even in this worldly life.

The obvious misunderstanding here is that the people mentioned in the *ḥadīth* undoubtedly did not live nor die as Muslims, because there is a consensus among all Muslim scholars that a Muslim certainly will not undergo such a test.

Whoever understands this will clearly recognize that the *ḥadīths* mentioned here actually constitute another extremely strong proof against the mistaken notion that a polytheist could be judged as a Muslim merely

---

[110] This refers to the covenant between Allah and His creation, that they will worship none other than Him alone.

because he outwardly professes Islam. The fact that these people will be subjected to such a test – as mentioned in the *ḥadīths* – clearly demonstrates that they cannot be Muslims, for such a test would otherwise be superfluous.

The fundamental principle remains that all people undergo their actual test during their worldly life. Indeed, the primary purpose of this worldly life is to establish whether someone has lived as a person devoted solely to Allah or not. Thus, this test only makes sense for someone who was not Muslim in this worldly life. Had he been Muslim, there would be absolutely no necessity for such a test.

What has been mentioned here concerning this topic should suffice to highlight the relevant aspects of these *ḥadīths*. However, a detailed discussion of these narrations and the test mentioned therein would stray too far from the core topic of this book.

Therefore, it was already noted in the foreword at the beginning of this book that certain issues, even though connected to the Islamic concept of monotheism, must be discussed in separate works independent of the main theme – and one of these issues is the test mentioned in these *ḥadīths*.

A Polytheist Can Only Enter Islam Through Tawbah from Shirk

In the following verse of the Qur'an in *sura at-Tawbah*, it is described in what manner an idolater can enter Islam:

﴿فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ﴾

"But if they make tawbah …
then they are your brothers in dīn …" *[sura at-Tawbah, 9:11]*

Accordingly, *mushrikūn*, meaning idolaters, can only become brothers in faith to the Muslims "if they make *tawbah*."

The Arabic word *tawbah* describes the sincere repentance from a sin. This repentance requires the complete abandonment of that sin. The sin referred to here is polytheism.

This is also explicitly narrated by the early *tafsīr* scholars. For example, Ibnu Abī Ḥātim narrates in his *tafsīr* from Muqātil ibnu Ḥayyān and aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk the following explanation of this verse:

فَإِنْ تَابُوا مِنَ الشِّرْكِ ...

> *That is: "If they make tawbah from shirk ..."*

Worshiping only Allah ﷻ and abandoning the worship of others is the most fundamental essence of Islam. The Islamic testimony of faith carries precisely this meaning.

A person can only enter Islam if he is free from *shirk*. How could it then be possible that a person does not fulfil this prerequisite for Islam, yet is still considered a Muslim?

The same meaning can also be derived from the following verse:

﴿إِلاَّ الَّذِينَ تَابُواْ وَأَصْلَحُواْ وَاعْتَصَمُواْ بِاللّهِ وَأَخْلَصُواْ دِينَهُمْ لِلّهِ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَسَوْفَ يُؤْتِ اللّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَجْراً عَظِيماً﴾

Except for those who repent, correct themselves, hold fast to Allah, and purify their dīn for Allah[111], for those will be with the muʾminīn. And Allah is going to give the muʾminīn a great reward.
[sura an-Nisāʾ, 4:146]

If a *mushrik* testifies to the Islamic creed, prays, and fasts but does not abandon *shirk*, he cannot enter Islam, according to consensus.

[111] In Arabic, the previously explained verb *akhlaṣa* is used in the plural form, *akhlaṣū*. Here, once again, *ikhlāṣ* is set as a condition for entering Islam.

For example, if one of the pre-Islamic Arab idolaters at that time had testified to Islam but continued worshiping the well-known idols among them, such as al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt, it would have been unimaginable for the Muslims to consider such a person a Muslim.

According to the statement in the previously discussed verse, they knew that brotherhood in religion is conditional upon the abandonment of *shirk*: If they then make *tawbah* … they are your brothers in *dīn*.

Shirk Destroys All Good Deeds

Shirk causes the complete loss of all deeds, according to the consensus of Muslim scholars. Other sins, such as theft, lying, etc., may partially erase good deeds, but not all of them.

The claim that a person could practice *shirk* and still be a Muslim contradicts this inevitability.

Thus, Allah ﷻ addresses the Messenger in the Qur'an with the following words:

﴿وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ﴾

And it was already revealed to you and to those before you that if you would commit shirk, your work would surely[112] *become worthless, and you would surely be among the losers. [sura az-Zumar, 39:65]*

Here, the Messenger ﷺ is directly addressed, although he was, according to the consensus of Islamic scholarship, protected from *shirk*. In this verse, a scenario is presented for clarification, even though it is completely clear that it will never occur. The Arabic scholars referred to this as *farḍu l-mustaḥīl*. It is therefore evident that this message is not

[112] The statement in the verse is emphasized twice with the heavy *nūn* of emphasis *(nūnu t-tawkīdi th-thaqīlah)*, which has been rendered in English as "certainly."

primarily directed at him, but at those people who are being addressed through the message of the Qur'an[113].

The meaning, therefore, is: *"If even the Prophet ﷺ were to lose all his (good) deeds due to a single act of shirk and would thus certainly be among the losers, then this loss will undoubtedly affect all other people even more so."*

From the Islamic source texts, it is understood that the prophets عليهم السلام are considered the most severely tested of all people. Their actions are the best deeds ever performed by human beings.

Muḥammad ﷺ holds an even more special status among the prophets. He is the Seal of the Prophets. Only when one considers all of this does the magnitude of the statement in the verse become clear. The meaning of the entire life of the Seal of the Prophets would be extinguished void by a single act of polytheism – the endurance of the heavy revelation, his call to this religion, his steadfastness in the face of the hostility of the idolaters.

If all these deeds would be lost due to *shirk*, then will the less significant deeds of any polytheists remain and subsequently grant them entry into Paradise?

In another verse, this very thought is once again clearly expressed in the same manner regarding the other messengers عليهم السلام:

﴿وَتِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مَنْ نَشَاءُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ (83) وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُودَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (84) وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحْيَى وَعِيسَى وَإِلْيَاسَ كُلٌّ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (85) وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَالْيَسَعَ وَيُونُسَ وَلُوطًا وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (86) وَمِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَإِخْوَانِهِمْ وَاجْتَبَيْنَاهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (87) ذَلِكَ هُدَى اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ

---

[113] According to the statement of the Qur'an itself (see 7:158), the message of Islam has been directed to all of humanity since the sending of the Prophet ﷺ.

وَلَوْ أَشْرَكُوا لَحَبِطَ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (88) أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنُّبُوَّةَ فَإِنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهَا هَؤُلَاءِ فَقَدْ وَكَّلْنَا بِهَا قَوْمًا لَيْسُوا بِهَا بِكَافِرِينَ﴾

And that was Our [conclusive] argument which We gave Ibrāhīm against his people. We raise by degrees whom We will. Indeed, your Lord is Wise and Knowing.

And We gave to Ibrāhīm, Isḥāq and Yaʿqūb - all [of them] We guided. And Noah, We guided before; and among his descendants, Dawūd and Sulaymān and Ayyūb and Yūsuf and Mūsā and Hārūn. Thus do We reward the doers of good.

And Zakariyyā and Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā and Ilyās - and all were of the righteous. And Ismāʿīl and Alyasaʿ and Yūnus and Lūṭ - and all [of them] We preferred over the worlds. And [some] among their fathers and their descendants and their brothers - and We chose them and We guided them to a straight path.

That is the guidance of Allah by which He guides whomever He wills of His servants. But if they had associated others with Allah, then worthless for them would be whatever they were doing.

Those are the ones to whom We gave the Scripture and authority and prophethood. But if the disbelievers deny it, then We have entrusted it to a people who are not therein disbelievers.

[sura al-Anʿām, 6:83-89]

The Contradiction with the Qur'an in This Regard

Treating a polytheist as a Muslim and referring to him as such inevitably leads to conclusions that contradict the statement of the Qur'an.

Thus, following the previously quoted Qur'anic verses, the next verse clearly states that the path of the mentioned prophets عليهم السلام is the true guidance:

﴿أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهُدَاهُمُ اقْتَدِهْ قُل لَّا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَالَمِينَ﴾

Those are the ones whom Allah has guided, so from their guidance take an example. Say, "I ask of you for this message no payment. It is not but a reminder for the worlds." [sura al-Anʿām, 6:90]

These prophets are therefore the rightly guided, and their guidance should be taken as a model and a guiding principle.

However, as has already been demonstrated, this passage in the Qur'an clearly states that the guidance of these prophets consisted precisely in the abandonment of *shirk*.

If, on the other hand, they had committed even a single polytheistic act, all their good deeds would have been lost. In that case, they would have been completely misguided and by no means rightly guided.

This meaning is also found in other places in the Qur'an, such as:

﴿وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ﴾

And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], "Worship Allah and avoid ṭāghūt." And among them were those whom Allah guided, and among them were those upon whom error was [deservedly] decreed. So proceed through the earth and observe how was the end of the deniers. [sura an-Naḥl, 16:36]

This verse would also undergo a reversal of meaning. A polytheist has associated others with his Creator in worship, meaning he has worshiped the *ṭāghūt* and has not implemented the turning away from it. Those who followed and accepted the guidance of the prophets completely refrained from worshiping anything else.

Ultimately, this very matter was the guidance mentioned in the verse, which was granted to the people described therein.

Contradictory Consequences

The Consequence of Treating All Ignorant Polytheists Equally

As previously mentioned, a misinterpretation of the testimony of faith must inevitably lead to further erroneous consequences.

This was also demonstrated earlier with an example when discussing the religion of Ibrāhīm (millatu Ibrāhīm). The pre-Islamic Arab idolaters considered themselves to be part of the *dīn* of Ibrāhīm ﷺ and were even convinced that they held a particularly high status with Allah ﷻ because they were the guardians of the kaʿbah, the house built by Ibrāhīm ﷺ.

Those idolaters also believed in the existence of Allah, worshiped Him, and even performed some of their ritual acts *(ʿibādāt)* solely for Him. They thus affirmed the general Islam and considered themselves to be upon the dīn of Ibrāhīm ﷺ. However, despite all of this, they were not considered Muslims by consensus.

Therefore, whoever considers a polytheist to be a Muslim merely because he professes the specific Islam of Muḥammad ﷺ cannot avoid also calling those earlier polytheists Muslims as well.

The polytheists of that time would have had even more reason to be considered Muslims, as ignorance was far more widespread among them than in the period after the sending of the Prophet ﷺ up to the present day.

After all, at that time, there was no complete and unaltered book from Ibrāhīm ﷺ, like the Qur’an today. The people of that era, if anything, only knew remnants of the religion of Ibrāhīm ﷺ, without even possessing a single written verse from that prophet.

Whoever Ignores One Form of Shirk Must Also Ignore All Others

The adherents of this misguided belief would also have to claim that one could be a Muslim regardless of the type of polytheism practiced. Thus, if a person was to ascribe to the Creator a second creator, a child, or a mother, or if he was to attribute the divine quality of all-encompassing knowledge to someone else, he would, according to this view, still be considered a Muslim without any issue. Just as the proponents of this erroneous opinion argue regarding polytheism in worship, they would claim that only two conditions must be met:

1) That this *mushrik* considers himself a member of Islam – in this case, the general Islam, the religion of Ibrāhīm.

2) That he was unaware that the polytheism he practiced contradicts the core message of this general Islam.

The same would also have to apply to people who worship a prophet like ʿĪsā/Jesus ﷺ or the angels. According to this reasoning, they too would undoubtedly have to be considered Muslims, based on their declaration of faith and their simultaneous ignorance.

If a proponent of this false view now rejects these conclusions as completely absurd, he has only confirmed the contradiction, since it would not be permissible to differentiate between one polytheist and another without any proof.

Ultimately, such a person would have to claim that a polytheist who professes Islam could be a Muslim, whereas polytheists who adhere to other religions could not. This would be an arbitrary distinction that lacks any logical argumentation.

Rather, such unequal treatment would imply that Islam is a birthright or a privilege of a chosen people – an idea that is completely foreign to Islam. A Muslim is, by definition, a person who lives in pure monotheism, not a polytheist who can do as he pleases yet always remains a Muslim simply because he was born with this label.

Many Polytheists Would Have to Be Considered Muslims Even More Than Those Who Profess Islam Today

According to this view, a person who calls upon various prophets or angels would, in fact, have to be considered a Muslim even more than someone who implores any other deceased person. This is because the prophets ﷺ, according to the unanimous agreement of the Muslims, were certainly better than all other human beings.

Thus, if a person who worships a non-prophet can still be considered a Muslim, then someone who worships a prophet would have to be even more excusable. In reality, however, it makes no difference what or whom these people worship. From the perspective of authentic Islamic teachings, such individuals can never be considered Muslims.

Here too, it is quite possible that the proponents of this distorted opinion would refuse to accept such consequences. However, the question remains: How can the distinction between these polytheists can be defined, when all of them equally perform acts of worship for someone other than Allah?

The same would also have to apply to the various forms of worship. If a person's Islam could remain intact despite invoking the dead for things that only Allah ﷻ can grant, then it would have to remain intact with every other type of *shirk* as well.

Thus, according to this view, a person who prostrates before idols, kisses them, and glorifies them through both words and actions must still be considered a Muslim. The only conditions for this, according to this logic, would be a) that he's ignorant b) that he professes Islam.

If someone claims that, in the case of a specific type of shirk, *a* person cannot possibly be considered an excusable Muslim, but in another type it would be possible, then he must provide clear proof for this distinction. Otherwise, this would be an unequal treatment of two things that are essentially the same – a concept that Muslim scholars have classified under the term *at-tafrīqu bayna l-mutamāthilayn* and have completely rejected as irrational.

It was previously mentioned that some people actually, absurdly, accept all these consequences. For them, it is even possible that a person believes in a son of God or worships 'Īsā/Jesus and is still considered a

Muslim. There is no doubt that anyone who holds such a belief suffers from a fundamental misunderstanding of the core principles of Islam.

A Contradiction to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Consensus in Many Aspects

Considering all these polytheists, mentioned in previous examples, as Muslims would be a severe contradiction to the Islamic sources. Anyone who reads the Qur'an will see clearly that all prophets عليهم السلام regarded their people as *mushrikīn*. They addressed them as such and called upon them to abandon *shirk* and worship Allah alone.

For this reason, the scholars of *tafsīr*, history, language, and all other Islamic sciences were in unanimous agreement in referring to the Arabs before the sending of the Prophet as *"the mushrikūn of the Arabs."*

The same applies to other non-Muslims, such as Jews, Christians, and others. The Qur'an clearly refers to them as non-Muslims, which is why the scholars were also in consensus on this matter.

No one ever claimed that these non-Muslims become Muslims merely through their ignorance. On the contrary, the early scholars explicitly narrated consensus that merely holding an opposing opinion regarding idolaters, Jews, and Christians would itself constitute apostasy from Islam. According to their view, even someone who merely doubts whether idolaters or followers of Judaism or Christianity are non-Muslims is not a Muslim.

The Majority of People Fall into Shirk Due to Ignorance

Another issue lies in the belief that all or most polytheists from past nations or other religions rejected the message of the prophets with full awareness. In reality, the opposite is true.

As previously mentioned, the idolaters of pre-Islamic Arabia were exposed to great ignorance regarding monotheism. If it were possible to consider a polytheist as a Muslim, this would certainly apply more to those people, rather than to those who hold the Qur'an in their hands and perhaps have even memorized parts or the entire book.

However, among many people today, it seems that the more knowledge a polytheist has – or the more access he has to knowledge – the more excusable he becomes! A clear contradiction.

How could, for example, an idolater from two thousand years ago, who lived in the desert, was illiterate, and had not a single written verse in his possession, be less excusable than someone who reads Arabic and memorizes from the Qur'an?!

According to the proponents of this theological error, even many Jews and Christians today would have to be far more excusable, since their access to Islamic sources is undoubtedly much more difficult.

In contrast, Islamic sources mention that most people were led into shirk precisely through ignorance.

In this regard, the Qur'an – for example, in *sura Nūḥ* – mentions four individuals by name who were finally worshiped by their descendants.

In the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection of al-Bukhārī, it is narrated from the Companion of the Prophet, Ibnu ʿAbbās ﵄, that he explained this Qur'anic passage and clarified how the first polytheism emerged among the people of Nūḥ/Noah:

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا صَارَتْ الْأَوْثَانُ الَّتِي كَانَتْ فِي قَوْمِ نُوحٍ فِي الْعَرَبِ بَعْدُ أَمَّا وَدٌّ كَانَتْ لِكَلْبٍ بِدَوْمَةِ الْجَنْدَلِ وَأَمَّا سُوَاعٌ كَانَتْ لِهُذَيْلٍ وَأَمَّا يَغُوثُ فَكَانَتْ لِمُرَادٍ ثُمَّ لِبَنِي غُطَيْفٍ بِالْجَوْفِ عِنْدَ سَبَإٍ وَأَمَّا يَعُوقُ فَكَانَتْ لِهَمْدَانَ وَأَمَّا نَسْرٌ فَكَانَتْ لِحِمْيَرَ لِآلِ ذِي الْكَلَاعِ أَسْمَاءُ رِجَالٍ صَالِحِينَ مِنْ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ فَلَمَّا هَلَكُوا أَوْحَى الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَى قَوْمِهِمْ أَنْ انْصِبُوا إِلَى مَجَالِسِهِمْ الَّتِي كَانُوا يَجْلِسُونَ أَنْصَابًا وَسَمُّوهَا بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ فَفَعَلُوا فَلَمْ تُعْبَدْ حَتَّى إِذَا هَلَكَ أُولَئِكَ وَتَنَسَّخَ الْعِلْمُ عُبِدَتْ

> *(They are) the names of righteous men from the people of Nūḥ. When they died, Satan inspired their people to name statues after them and place them in their gatherings.*
>
> *Finally, they did so. <u>However, these statues were not worshiped until those people died and knowledge was lost. Only then were they worshiped.</u>*

Thus, Nūḥ ﷺ – like all other prophets ﷺ – was sent to a people of mushrikīn who, due to their ignorance, believed themselves to be Muslims and followers of the prophetic teaching.

Despite this prevailing ignorance, Nūḥ, just like all other prophets ﷺ, judged his people as mushrikīn. That is why he addressed his people as described in the following Qur'anic verse:

﴿لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَى قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ﴾

We had certainly sent Noah to his people, and he said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have nothing worthy of worship other than Him. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous Day." *[sura al-Aʿrāf, 7:59]*

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحاً إِلَى قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ﴾

And We had certainly sent Noah to his people, and he said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have nothing worthy of worship other than Him; then will you not fear Him?" *[sura al-Muʾminūn, 23:23]*

This one example shall suffice at this point. Anyone who carefully reads the Qur'an will undoubtedly recognize that monotheism is repeatedly emphasized in this manner as the core message of all prophets.

It is also worth recalling the statement of the early Qur'an exegete Ibnu Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī regarding the verse in *sura az-Zumar* [39:29], where he said:

﴿بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ يَقُولُ جَلَّ ثَنَاؤُهُ: وَمَا يَسْتَوِي هَذَا الْمُشْتَرَكُ فِيهِ، وَالَّذِي هُوَ مُنْفَرِدٌ مُلْكُهُ لِوَاحِدٍ، بَلْ أَكْثَرُ هَؤُلَاءِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ بِاللَّهِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُمَا لَا يَسْتَوِيَانِ، فَهُمْ بِجَهْلِهِمْ بِذَلِكَ يَعْبُدُونَ آلِهَةً شَتَّى مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ.

> *"But most of them do not know", meaning: This one, who is divided among multiple masters, and the one who belongs to only one master, are not equal.*
>
> *But most of these "who associate something with Allah" do not know that the two are not equal. In their ignorance of this, they worship various different ālihah besides Allah.*

The Word Mushrikūn in the Qur'an Always Includes the Ignorant Polytheist

Through several examples, it has already become evident how an incorrect assumption regarding the fundamental matters of Islamic belief leads to various further misinterpretations and contradictions.

Many analogous cases could be mentioned, as an error in the foundation will inevitably extend into numerous areas that are based on this foundation. The following are just a few examples to further illustrate this point:

﴿مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُوا لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَلَوْ كَانُوا أُولِي قُرْبَى مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ﴾

It is not for the Prophet and the muʾminīn[114] to ask forgiveness for the mushrikīn, even if they were relatives, after it has become clear to them that they are companions of Hellfire.

[sura at-Tawbah, 9:113]

The Qur'an states that a Muslim may not seek forgiveness[115] for a *mushrik*. In the explanations of the early scholars *(as-salaf)*, this is specified as referring to the prohibition of *istighfār* for a polytheist who has already passed away. Narrations on this matter are mentioned, for example, in

[114] Or "it is not right." This is a stylistic form in Arabic, which means: "he must not" or "it is impossible for him to do so."

[115] In Arabic: *istighfār*

the *tafsīr* works of Ibnu Abī Ḥātim and aṭ-Ṭabarī in their explanation of this Qur'anic verse.

As can be clearly seen, this verse establishes a general Islamic legal ruling. It uses the word *mushrikūn*, which unequivocally includes all polytheists. It would be a misinterpretation of this verse to assume that this prohibition applies only to those polytheists who were certainly aware of the message and had sufficient knowledge of its content.

For this reason, the early Muslim jurists derived a general prohibition from this verse. These jurists *(fuqahāʾ)* did not claim that a distinction should be made, nor did they state that one may seek forgiveness for some already deceased polytheists due to their ignorance.

Another example from the Qur'an is the following verse:

﴿وَكَذَٰلِكَ زَيَّنَ لِكَثِيرٍ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ قَتْلَ أَوْلَادِهِمْ شُرَكَاؤُهُمْ لِيُرْدُوهُمْ وَلِيَلْبِسُوا عَلَيْهِمْ دِينَهُمْ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا فَعَلُوهُ فَذَرْهُمْ وَمَا يَفْتَرُونَ﴾

And likewise, to many of the polytheists their partners have made [to seem] pleasing the killing of their children[116] *in order to bring about their destruction and to cover them with confusion in their religion. And if Allah had willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they invent.* [sura al-Anʿām, 6:137]

Here too, the general word *mushrikūn* certainly refers to every *mushrik*. Once again, this passage explicitly states the reason why these people are described as *mushrikūn*. The cause for this designation was that these people took *shurakāʾ* beside Allah, making them partners in worship alongside Him – regardless of whether these people were aware of their wrong actions and their consequences or not.

[116] This sentence can hardly or not at all be rendered into proper English while maintaining the original sentence structure, which is why it was formulated in the manner mentioned above. Its meaning can be clarified as follows:

"Likewise, those who were associated as partners – whom the idolaters worshiped – made the killing of their children seem pleasing to those idolaters."

Another example is the following verse:

﴿وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know. [sura at-Tawbah, 9:6]

Once again, these people are called *mushrikīn*. Additionally, it is explained that they are people who do not know.

It would therefore be somewhat absurd to claim that the "ignorant polytheist" *(al-mushriku l-jāhil)* was not even meant by the word *"mushrikūn"* in this verse.

One might argue that at that time, the revelation had already been proclaimed, meaning that these idolaters had knowledge of it. While this is generally true, assuming that this applied to every single idolater across the entire Arabian Peninsula would be absurd. Regardless of how widespread knowledge or ignorance about the religion may be in a given time period, such circumstances can never serve as a universal assumption for every single individual.

It may well be that many idolaters of the described time had already understood the core message of Islam but had not yet converted to Islam – something that is repeatedly referred to in the language of the Qur'an as a form of ignorance.

Nevertheless, the expression in this Qur'anic verse also refers to every polytheist who did not know or did not properly understand the core message of the prophetic revelation. Any opposing claim would need to be substantiated by clear textual evidence.

In another verse of the Qur'an, it is stated:

﴿فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلْكِ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ﴾

And when they board a ship, they supplicate Allah, sincere to Him in religion[117]*. But when He delivers them to the land, at once they commit shirk.* [sura al-ʿAnkabūt, 29:65]

This Qur'anic verse is also of utmost clarity. Moreover, instead of using the *ismu l-fāʿil* (active participle) *"mushrikūn",* the verb *"yushrikūn"* is used. There can therefore be no doubt that this refers in every case to people who practice *shirk*, as the act itself is explicitly mentioned here.

This fact also becomes apparent in the following passage:

﴿أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ﴾

Or [lest] you say, "It was only that our fathers committed shirk before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?" [sura al-Aʿrāf, 7:173]

In this verse and the following two verses, it is mentioned that the ancestors referred to therein practiced *shirk*. Here, once again, the verb is used, in this case, in the past tense as *ashraka*.

There is therefore no doubt that these people were considered *mushrikūn* due to their polytheistic actions. If those ancestors had not been *mushrikūn*, the argumentation of the descendants mentioned in the verse – and thus the entire verse itself – would lose its meaning.

Whoever practices polytheism is therefore a *mushrik*, regardless of his level of knowledge about the contents of the prophetic message.

[117] That is, they directed supplications to Allah and turned only to Him, thus committing no *shirk*. The Arabic text once again uses the word *mukhliṣīn*, which – as previously explained multiple times – indicates that one purifies his religion, rites, and acts of worship from polytheism.

The same applies to the following two verses:

﴿فَلَا تَكُ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِمَّا يَعْبُدُ هَؤُلَاءِ مَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُهُمْ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَإِنَّا لَمُوَفُّوهُمْ نَصِيبَهُمْ غَيْرَ مَنْقُوصٍ﴾

So do not be in doubt, [O Muhammad], as to what these [polytheists] are worshipping. They worship not except as their fathers worshipped before. And indeed, We will give them their share undiminished. [sura Hūd, 11:109]

In the following passage, the prophet Yūsuf/Joseph, after being unjustly imprisoned, addresses his two fellow prisoners with the following words:

﴿يَا صَاحِبَيِ السِّجْنِ أَأَرْبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ (39) مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءً سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

O [my] two companions of prison, are separate lords better or Allah, the One, the Prevailing? (39) You worship not besides Him except [mere] names you have named them, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. Legislation[118] *is not*

[118] In Arabic: *"ḥukm"*, meaning sovereignty, governance, decree, judgment, and decision-making. The term encompasses all these meanings, as Allah's right to rule and judge in Islamic understanding is not limited to the hereafter.

It is important to note that this expression, linguistically speaking, is of the same nature and strength as the Arabic testimony of faith because both use the exception particle *illā*. The shahādah states, *"No ʿibādah except for Allah*", while this expression reads, *"No ḥukm except for Allah."*

The *khawārij* exaggerated in their interpretation of this Qur'anic verse, using it to declare Muslims outside of Islam based on major sins. Conversely, many people today attempt to push this verse to the opposite extreme, distorting its apparent meaning to deflect consequences from various tyrannical rulers. ...--

but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know. [sura Yūsuf, 12:39-40]

Faulty Methods of Evidence Derivation

Based on the previously cited Islamic sources and scholarly statements, it should be entirely clear to any observer what the original core content of Islam is and that polytheism – regardless of its form – makes it impossible for a person to be considered a Muslim.

This entire matter is not purely theoretical but has a definite connection to reality. Today, in all parts of the world, there are indeed people who profess Islam but invoke the dead, ask them for things, or seek their aid in times of distress. This has reached such an extent that in some cases, pilgrimages with associated rites have been invented, which are annually performed by millions of people in countries like Egypt. According to the consensus of early Muslim scholars, this constitutes polytheism in worship – an act that undoubtedly invalidates a person's declaration of faith.

This is merely one example of the forms of polytheism widespread today, which various authors on this topic have also pointed out. Certainly, further examples could be provided. However, as previously mentioned, the primary objective of this book is not to discuss polytheism and its forms in comprehensive detail. A thorough treatment of this subject would require a separate work, which would also be of great importance – even though the topic discussed here takes priority for now, as one issue builds upon the other.

Even without having conducted a comprehensive study of polytheism, it should be clear enough that various forms of polytheism have been more or less widespread in the Islamic world of today and also for many centuries. Likewise, even without further analysis, it is quite evident – based on clear passages of the Qur'an and the consensual statements of the

However, a more detailed analysis of this issue would require a separate study.

salaf – that certain actions and statements are undoubtedly classified as major *shirk*.

When such actions and statements are present, the individuals involved cannot be regarded as Muslims, even if they consider themselves members of Islam.

This theological fact is difficult for some people today to accept, as it alters their worldview and their perception of their own religion in multiple ways. After all, according to this understanding, it could be their own relatives and ancestors who cannot be regarded as Muslims.

This uncomfortable reality has led some people to search for various explanations in an attempt to disprove the authentic statements of Islamic source texts – a futile endeavour given the abundance and clarity of these texts.

A major issue in this regard is the fundamentally flawed approach to Islamic sources. Many people seek to rely on ambiguous or even clearly incorrect statements from later scholars in an attempt to disprove the core message of Islamic monotheism, often by using interpretations that are only seemingly valid.

Others, on the other hand, deliberately cling to ambiguous statements, even if they come from the Qur'an itself, in order to counteract conclusions that they find uncomfortable.

For this reason, the following section will briefly address such methodological errors.

Following Ambiguous Revelation Texts and Scholarly Statements

As previously mentioned, a fundamental issue for many people lies in the misinterpretation of ambiguous texts *(mutashābihāt,* singular: *mutashābih)*. Such an interpretation inevitably brings the ambiguous text into conflict with other clear and explicit passages of revelation *(muḥkamāt,* singular: *muḥkam)*.

Interestingly, this very issue is explicitly addressed in the Qur'an itself. In the seventh verse of *sura Āli ʿImrān*, it is clearly stated that the Qur'an contains both *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt meaning clear and ambiguous verses*.

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ﴾

It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] clear - they are the foundation of the Book[119] *- and others ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific*[120]*, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]. [sura Āli ʿImrān, 3:7]*

The word *muḥkam* in Arabic means "firmly established", while *mutashābih* means "resembling", which in this context refers to something "unclear or ambiguous in the given matter and for the respective person."

The Arabs understood and used the word *mutashābih* in this way because similar things are difficult to distinguish from one another, making them prone to confusion. However, if someone possesses the relevant knowledge, he can accurately differentiate between these matters.

For this reason, scholars always emphasize that such ambiguity does not always exist for everyone and to the same extent. The more knowledge and understanding a person acquires, the more *mutashābihāt* become *muḥkamāt* for him – especially because he learns to interpret ambiguous texts correctly, as will be explained in more detail below.

If a revelation text has more than one possible meaning *(mutashābih)*, it must be interpreted in accordance with the clear texts *(muḥkam)* and in agreement with them.

For this reason, these *muḥkamāt*, meaning the firmly established and clear verses, are also referred to as *"ummu l-kitāb."* Literally translated,

[119] In Arabic, *"ummu l-kitāb",* which literally means "mother", or rather "source/foundation of the book."

[120] A more literal translation would be "resembling one another." Once again, the word *tashābaha* is used, which comes from the same root word as the previously described term *mutashābih*.

the Arabic word *umm* means “mother”, or more broadly “source”, “cause”, or “origin.”

This connection exists in the Arabic language because everything is ultimately traced back to its origin, just as a child is traced back to its mother. For this reason, scholars formulated the principle: *“The mutashābihāt must be referred back to the muḥkamāt.”*

Then, in the same verse, those who carry deviation in their hearts are described. These are the people who deliberately and with evil intent misinterpret ambiguous passages in contradiction to the many clear verses.

Al-Bukhārī narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection from the wife of the Prophet, ʿĀʾishah ﵂, that the Prophet ﷺ recited this verse and then said to her:

فَإِذَا رَأَيْتِ الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ فَأُولَئِكِ الَّذِينَ سَمَّى اللَّهُ فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ

> *If you see those (singular) who follow what is mutashābih from it, then they are the ones whom Allah has named, so beware of them.*

In another narration of this *ḥadīth* recorded by Muslim, the same wording is found, but the address is in the plural form:

إِذَا رَأَيْتم الَّذِينَ ...

> *If you see those (plural) …*

The Prophet ﷺ thus warned both his wife and his entire community against those who follow ambiguous texts. The instruction to beware of these people is clearly directed at all Muslims, which is why the address in the second narration is also formulated in the plural.

Furthermore, in connection with the previously mentioned verse from *sura Āli ʿImrān*, an incident has been narrated that clearly illustrates this entire issue.

Ibnu Hishām mentions the following account in his well-known prophetic biography/*sīrah* regarding a delegation of Christians from Najrān:

وَيَحْتَجّونَ فِي قَوْلِهِمْ (إنّهُ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ) بِقَوْلِ اللّهِ فَعَلْنَا ، وَأَمَرْنَا ، وَخَلَقْنَا ، وَقَضَيْنَا . فَيَقُولُونَ لَوْ كَانَ وَاحِدًا مَا قَالَ إلّا فَعَلْتُ وَقَضَيْت ، وَأَمَرْت ، وَخَلَقْت ؛ وَلَكِنّهُ هُوَ وَعِيسَى وَمَرْيَمُ.

> *... And they argued for their claim that "Allah is the third of three" with the words of Allah (in the Qur'an): "We made", "We commanded", "We created", "We decreed."*
>
> *They meant by this: "If He were one, He would have only said 'I' in all of these. But rather, it is Him, ʿĪsā (Jesus), and Maryam (Mary)."*

Ibnu Hishām explains here how those Christian envoys argued using ambiguous texts from the Qur'an. According to their reasoning, Allah ﷻ speaks of Himself in the plural, which they took as confirmation of the Trinity.

However, in Arabic, the word "We" *(naḥnu)* can have two meanings:

1) Someone who reports from a group of people to which he himself belongs – meaning a literal plurality of persons.

2) The so-called Majestic Plural, where a single person speaks of himself in the plural form. This usage is also common in English and was historically used for monarchs.

The word "We" is therefore *mutashābih*, meaning ambiguous. As can be clearly seen here, the word, when used in the Qur'an, is certainly not unclear, even for someone with basic knowledge of Islam, despite the fact that it carries two different meanings in the language itself.

The reader of the Qur'an is obligated to refer the ambiguous back to the clear[121]. If he doesn't do this, it will inevitably lead to strong contradictions and completely false conclusions.

---

[121] This approach is actually self-evident – also in relation to written works by authors in general. In every written text, there are statements that can potentially be taken out of context or misunderstood. It is actually a banality that such passages must always be understood within the context of all other statements made by the respective author.

...--

Regarding the previously mentioned case of the word "We", the Qur'an for example states in a verse that almost every Muslim is familiar with:

﴿قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ﴾

Say, "He is Allah, [who is] One, [sura al-Ikhlāṣ, 112:1]

Furthermore, there are countless verses in the Qur'an that express this meaning explicitly and unequivocally. The problem of those Christian envoys was not that they had no knowledge of these verses at all. It can be ruled out that they had never heard of the rejection of the Trinity in the Qur'an, nor that not a single text had been conveyed to them during discussions about Islam.

At the very latest, in the conversations described by Ibnu Hishām, they should have immediately conceded, given the clarity of the matter. However, they irrationally clung to their false interpretation in order to avoid abandoning their own argumentation. This exact approach was also adopted by many sects in early Islamic history.

The same faulty methodology can be observed in the question discussed in this book – whether a person can be called a Muslim despite practicing polytheism. The clear and numerous Islamic texts on this matter explicitly reject such a notion.

In Islamic scholarship, it has always been a theological principle that ambiguous passages must never be interpreted in a way that contradicts the firm and immutable fundamentals of the religion, known as *kulliyyāt*. How, then, could this principle not apply to the very foundation upon which the entire religion is built and around which all its laws and matters revolve?

A scientific approach and an honest engagement with texts would be inconceivable otherwise. The real problem, however, is that many people suddenly begin to consciously or unconsciously act contrary to these basic principles when the actual meaning of a text has uncomfortable consequences for them.

Whoever insists on isolating individual texts and taking them out of context will always find a way to do so – just like the Christian envoys or various early Islamic sects.

Among the thousands of narrations from the Prophet ﷺ, it is of course not uncommon to find ambiguous texts that can be misused for such purposes.

The early Muslim scholars were fully aware of the foundation of Islam and its core principles *(kulliyyāt)*. For this reason, it was self-evident to them that such texts must always be interpreted in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah. If an ambiguous text contained a statement that was unclear to them, Muslim scholars sought to interpret it in various ways – but deliberately avoided any interpretation that would contradict the foundation of faith. The various narrated interpretations of some of these texts clearly demonstrate this scholarly effort in Islamic scholarship.

As time progressed and ignorance about the original texts increased, confusion regarding the foundation and core principles of Islam became more common among its followers. For this reason, many people today struggle to interpret ambiguous texts correctly. It is difficult to interpret such texts in accordance with Islamic fundamental principles if one has not properly understood these principles in the first place.

In modern times, this situation has developed to the extent that even educated individuals now cite specific *ḥadīths* to support the false claim that an ignorant polytheist can still be considered a Muslim. Such people disregard thousands of clear *sharīʿah* texts, yet at the same time, they mislead the public into believing that this is a form of legitimate *ijtihād*, meaning a valid legal derivation or legal reasoning.

This, despite the fact that legitimate legal derivations can only exist in matters for which no clear text exists in the first place! Precisely for this reason, in actual cases of legitimate *ijtihād*, there have always been different outcomes, which led to differences of opinion among scholars in jurisprudence. In contrast to differences of opinion regarding consensual beliefs, such disagreements in *ijtihād* are not considered reprehensible or something to be rejected.

For this reason, scholars formulated the clear principle:

لا اجتهادَ مع النصّ

> *There is no ijtihād in the presence of a clear text*[122].

It is remarkable that some individuals who are regarded as scholars today invalidate this very rule when it comes to clear fundamental matters of faith, while at the same time, they teach and insist on its application in secondary issues of *ḥadīth* sciences and Islamic jurisprudence – a glaring contradiction.

Many uneducated people, on the other hand, readily accept such pseudo-arguments. For most of them, it seems entirely irrelevant how absurd a statement is, as long as it comes from one of their highly regarded scholars. For individuals with this mindset, the possibility of error in such scholars is practically ruled out altogether. This results in a personality cult, which has no place in Islam, as a Muslim is obligated to adhere to the clear text and is certainly not permitted to give precedence to a scholar's statement over a clear text.

To illustrate the practical relevance of this issue, the following section will present some ambiguous texts and claims as examples. From these, it will be easy to infer further similar cases. The goal is explicitly not to list and discuss all ambiguous texts or every conceivable pseudo-argument. This would not be possible anyway, as, among the numerous narrations, there will always be texts that can be taken out of context.

Scholarly Statements Are Not Independent Evidence

As previously explained regarding the flawed methodology, it is impermissible to interpret clear statements of the Qur'an using ambiguous statements from the same text.

An even greater violation of the above-mentioned rule is to interpret ambiguous scholarly statements in a way that contradicts the clear texts of the Qur'an – or, even more absurdly, opposes the fundamental principles of Islam.

---

[122] In Arabic, this is often referred to in scholarship as *"naṣṣ" or "an-naṣṣ."*

Scholarly statements can never be considered independent and binding Islamic evidence on their own. This means that, according to Islamic teachings, no scholar after the Prophet ﷺ has the authority to introduce a completely new concept about the religion and make it obligatory. This is because no one after the Prophet ﷺ receives direct revelation.

However, it is certainly possible that the statements of the *salaf*, meaning the early scholars of Islam, hold a certain evidentiary value in matters of faith or jurisprudence, as these statements were originally based on evidence from the Qur'an or Sunnah. This was already mentioned at the beginning of this book. Of particular importance in this regard is the explicitly narrated consensus of the *salaf*, or their collective approval of a known statement by a scholar among them[123].

This, however, has nothing to do with blindly following later scholars *(al-mutaʾakhirūn)* or contemporary scholars *(al-muʿāṣirūn)* merely on the basis that these individuals hold such a high status and are so excellent that any criticism of their statements must be rejected from the outset. As previously mentioned, such an approach would not even be permissible regarding the earliest and most renowned scholars of Islam, as they, too, were not protected from error in their individual opinions and juristic views. It is therefore even more unreasonable to theoretically or practically elevate a later or even a contemporary scholar to the level of infallibility.

In fact, the matter explained here is a matter of course in Islam. For this reason, scholars since the early generations of Islam have emphasized this principle. Thus, it is frequently narrated from well-known scholars

[123] In Islamic sciences, this is referred to as silent consensus *(al-ijmāʿu s-sukūtī)*.

such as Mālik[124], ash-Shāfiʿī[125], Aḥmad and many others رَحِمَهُمُ اللهُ that they prohibited people from following their statements if a clear contradiction to a text from the Qur'an or Sunnah was present.

Examples of Faulty Argumentation with Source Texts or Scholarly Statements

The Ḥadīth About Dhātu Anwāṭ

At-Tirmidhī reports the following *ḥadīth* from Abū Wāqid al-Laythī:

أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ لَمَّا خَرَجَ إِلَى حُنَيْنٍ مَرَّ بِشَجَرَةٍ لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ يُقَالُ لَهَا ذَاتُ أَنْوَاطٍ يُعَلِّقُونَ عَلَيْهَا أَسْلِحَتَهُمْ فَقَالُوا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ اجْعَلْ لَنَا ذَاتَ أَنْوَاطٍ كَمَا لَهُمْ ذَاتُ أَنْوَاطٍ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ هَذَا كَمَا قَالَ قَوْمُ مُوسَى اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ لَتَرْكَبُنَّ سُنَّةَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ قَالَ أَبُو عِيسَى هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ وَأَبُو وَاقِدٍ اللَّيْثِيُّ اسْمُهُ الْحَارِثُ بْنُ عَوْفٍ وَفِي الْبَاب عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ وَأَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ

> *When the Prophet ﷺ set out for Ḥunayn, he passed by a tree of the mushrikīn, which was called dhātu anwāṭ, upon which they would*

[124] Mālik ibnu Anas (93-179 AH / 712-796 CE) was the renowned scholar after whose teachings the Mālikī school of jurisprudence later developed. Mālik lived approximately 84 years.

His still-preserved work, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, is considered one of the earliest works on *ḥadīth* narration and therefore holds significant importance in the science of *ḥadīth*. Mālik was therefore not only a distinguished jurist but also made significant contributions to the field of *ḥadīth* narration.

[125] Muḥammad ibnu Idrīs ash-Shāfiʿī (150-204 AH / 767-820 CE) is also regarded as one of the most prominent scholars of Islam and its early period. Ash-Shāfiʿī was not only a renowned jurist but also a *ḥadīth* scholar. After his teachings, the Shāfiʿī school of jurisprudence later developed.

> *hang their weapons[126]. They said[127]: "O Messenger of Allah, make for us a dhātu anwāṭ, just as they have a dhātu anwāṭ."*
>
> *So the Messenger ﷺ said: "Subḥānaḷḷāh! This is like what the people of Mūsā said: 'Make for us an ilāh just as they have ālihah.'[128]*
>
> *By the One in whose hand my soul is, you will surely follow the way of those who came before you."*
>
> *Abū ʿĪsā (at-Tirmidhī) said: "This ḥadīth is ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ…"[129]*

According to the previous explanations regarding the foundation of Islam and the faulty method of understanding ambiguous statements, it is absolutely clear how this *ḥadīth* should not be understood.

It is inconceivable that the Prophet's companions ﷺ mentioned in this incident did not understand Islam and therefore requested clear *shirk*, yet at the same time remained Muslims.

Only someone who does not properly understand the foundation of Islam or deliberately wants to contradict it would make such a claim. Nevertheless, this *ḥadīth* is sometimes used as a counterargument by certain individuals. They attempt to argue: "A polytheist today can certainly still be a Muslim, because even among the Prophet's companions, there were those who worshiped something else, yet they remained Muslims."

According to this notion, any idolater could essentially be considered a Muslim, regardless of how much polytheism he practices or what kind of

---

[126] The *mushrikūn* did this believing that their swords would gain blessing through it.

[127] That is, those Muslims who set out with the Prophet to Ḥunayn. These were primarily Muslims who had entered Islam only very recently. This is because most of them had only accepted Islam during the peaceful conquest of Makkah, which took place before this expedition.

[128] *Sura al-Aʿrāf*, 7:138

[129] This last statement refers to the assessment of this *ḥadīth* by at-Tirmidhī, who narrated this *ḥadīth* in his work. The words *ḥasan* (good) and *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound) are technical terms from the science of *ḥadīth*, describing the quality and degree of authenticity of a *ḥadīth*.

polytheism he engages in. The only important condition would be that he identifies as a Muslim and is ignorant of his actions.

Such an absurd claim about this *ḥadīth* was, of course, never narrated by the early scholars.

Those Companions of the Prophet Requested an Action That Is Not Classified as Major Shirk

Based on what has already been stated, it is self-evident that this *ḥadīth* must only be interpreted in accordance with other revelation texts, especially with the fundamental principles of Islam.

In reality, it is highly implausible to claim that these companions of the Prophet ﷺ requested something that would be classified as major *shirk*. It is entirely possible to understand their request differently – as something that falls under what has already been explained as minor *shirk (shirkun aṣghar).*

Since this *ḥadīth* can, through this explanation, be harmonized with countless other source texts and the principles of Islam, it would be theologically absurd to simply dismiss this understanding. Only someone who deliberately intends to interpret this *ḥadīth* in a manner contrary to Islamic beliefs would do so.

In reality, those companions intended for the Prophet ﷺ to ask his Lord to bless a tree – similar to the tree they themselves knew from their pre-Islamic times. Through Allah's blessing, their weapons would also be blessed.

That Allah ﷻ grants blessings to a specific place or object is not something objectionable according to Islamic teachings. After all, there are well-known places such as the mosques of Makkah, Madinah, and Jerusalem, upon which this exact concept applies – so for Muslims, this matter is not unusual.

Why the Prophet Firmly Rejected This Request

Even though the blessings itself is a possible matter, this specific request made by the companions of the Prophet was erroneous for several reasons. For this reason, the Prophet ﷺ firmly rejected it. The reasons for this can be summarized as follows:

1. Their request was an imitation of the idolaters, and the theological principle states that such imitation *(at-tashabbuhu bi-l-kāfirīn)* is reprehensible and must be rejected.

2. Furthermore, this was an imitation of the *mushrikīn* in their polytheistic actions. Even though the *ṣaḥābah*/companions ﷺ did not actually intend or request to worship anything else, they still sought Allah's blessing in the same place and manner as the idolaters. However, it was inappropriate to ask Allah to be worshiped in the same way as the idolaters.

3. Due to the circumstances described and the external similarity of the actions, there was also the risk that this could easily lead to major *shirk (shirkun akbar) in the end*. This is because people – especially later generations – could very easily fall into the worship of the tree itself. The resulting situation strongly resembles the previously cited account of Ibnu ʿAbbās ﷺ regarding how the first polytheism emerged among the people of Nūḥ/Noah.

For these reasons, the Prophet ﷺ vehemently rejected this request and compared it to the request of the Israelites to Mūsā/Moses, which is mentioned in the Qur'an.

Points That Clarify and Reinforce What Has Been Said

That the *ṣaḥābah* ﷺ mentioned in the *ḥadīth* did not actually request polytheism can also be clarified by the following points:

- The comparison with *banū isrāʾīl* does not imply absolute equality in every aspect. This is because, in the Arabic language, a linguistic comparison made using the particle *"kāf" (kāfu t-tashbīh)* does not necessarily mean that the compared things are identical in all respects.

  The similarity in this style of speech may only apply to certain aspects. The purpose of this partial comparison made by the Prophet ﷺ was to demonstrate to those companions – who had only recently converted to Islam – the severity of their mistake and to dissuade them from the act.

- In the reason for the prohibition mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, there is no mention of *shirk akbar*. As previously explained, the Muslims wanted

to hang their weapons on the tree in imitation of the *mushrikīn*, but merely hanging something does not constitute worship of the tree, idols, or any other beings – even if it could eventually lead to that.

Therefore, it cannot be claimed that those *ṣaḥābah* intended to worship the tree, especially since their request can be understood differently, and *shirk akbar* is not mentioned at all in the *ḥadīth*.

- Even if these *ṣaḥābah* ﷺ were new to Islam, it is highly unlikely that they did not understand the foundation of Islam and the meaning of the testimony of faith.

  After all, even the *mushrikīn* of that time in general clearly understood what Muḥammad ﷺ was calling them to. They knew very well that the *shahādah* in Islam – "There is no one worthy of worship except Allah" – undoubtedly required the complete rejection of everything that was worshiped besides Allah. The idolaters of Quraysh were hostile to the Prophet ﷺ precisely because he condemned their worship of others alongside Allah.

  Thus, after the *daʿwah* (call) of the Prophet ﷺ became known, the majority of the Arabs certainly understood the meaning of Islam. For example, in the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad, it is narrated that the Prophet's companion Jābir ﷺ said:

مَكَثَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ بِمَكَّةَ عَشْرَ سِنِينَ يَتْبَعُ النَّاسَ فِي مَنَازِلِهِمْ بِعُكَاظٍ وَمَجَنَّةَ وَفِي الْمَوَاسِمِ بِمِنًى يَقُولُ: مَنْ يُؤْوِينِي مَنْ يَنْصُرُنِي حَتَّى أُبَلِّغَ رِسَالَةَ رَبِّي وَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ حَتَّى إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيَخْرُجُ مِنَ الْيَمَنِ أَوْ مِنْ مُضَرَ كَذَا قَالَ فَيَأْتِيهِ قَوْمُهُ فَيَقُولُونَ احْذَرْ غُلامَ قُرَيْشٍ لاَ يَفْتِنُكَ وَيَمْشِي بَيْنَ رِحَالِهِمْ وَهُمْ يُشِيرُونَ إِلَيْهِ بِالأَصَابِعِ

> *The Prophet ﷺ remained in Makkah for ten years, seeking out people in their homes, in ʿUkāẓ and Majannah*[130]*, and during the pilgrimage season in Minā. There, he would say (to the people): "Who will grant me refuge? Who will support me so that I can convey the message of my Lord, for which he shall be granted Paradise?"*

[130] Two locations. Due to the markets held there, these places were important centres for the Arabs of that time.

> *This continued until even those traveling from Yemen or Muḍar for pilgrimage were warned by their own tribes: "Beware of the young man from Quraysh, lest he lead you astray (from your religion)."*
>
> *And he would walk among their riding animals, while they pointed at him with their fingers.*

There is no doubt that people generally, even before entering Islam, clearly knew that monotheism in worship was the first and most important thing that Islam required of them.

Therefore, after entering Islam, this must have been even clearer to them. It is highly unlikely that those companions of the Prophet were unaware of this, especially since they were surrounded by other Muslims who had been in Islam for a longer time. Not to mention that, since their conversion to Islam, the Prophet ﷺ himself was among them.

From what has been stated, it has become clear that there is no reason to assume that these companions of the Prophet were requesting actual polytheism.

If one were to find statements from later authors claiming that this *ḥadīth* refers to a request for major *shirk*, the following must be considered:

1) The statement of a later scholar and his interpretation of a text are not an authoritative standard. Such statements have no binding evidentiary weight in the religion and must therefore always be examined and measured against the original source texts of the *sharīʿah*. In the end, the statement of such a scholar can always be a clear mistake.

2) Even if one were to assume that those companions of the Prophet had requested major *shirk*, this would in no way serve as an argument to invalidate the fundamental message of Islam.

In such a case, it would be evident that these individuals mentioned in the *ḥadīth* had not yet understood Islam internally at that time. Since this lack of understanding would not have been outwardly visible, no one would have known about their ignorance. As the *ḥadīth*

shows, they themselves were unaware of their own ignorance, which is why they formulated their request openly.

In such a case, there would have been no actual apostasy from Islam, as these individuals committed the mistake due to ignorance and, after being corrected, immediately acknowledged their error and repented from their request.

According to this understanding of the *ḥadīth*, these people identified as Muslims and were therefore legally considered Muslims before making the statement mentioned in the *ḥadīth*. Thus, they had not yet entered *īmān* internally, even though they were outwardly regarded as Muslims. They also had to be treated as such, since no one had ever seen them perform polytheistic acts before, nor had they previously made any statement that would indicate ignorance about Islam. Had such an incident occurred beforehand, the event described would never have taken place.

Regarding the *ḥadīth*, the following aspects are also noteworthy:

- The individuals mentioned in the *ḥadīth* who made this request were by no means all the Muslims who had set out with the Prophet ﷺ. It could only have been a minority among them.
- The individuals mentioned in the *ḥadīth* had previously accepted Islam and had set out with the Prophet ﷺ to defend the Muslim community. This clearly shows that their statement was not made out of disdain for Islam or hypocrisy. If they had been *munāfiqīn*/hypocrites, they certainly would not have made such a request publicly.

The Ḥadīth of Muʿādh ibnu Jabal رضي الله عنه

Ibnu Mājah narrates the following *ḥadīth* from ʿAbduḷḷāh ibnu Abī Awfā:

لَمَّا قَدِمَ مُعَاذٌ مِنْ الشَّامِ سَجَدَ لِلنَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ مَا هَذَا يَا مُعَاذُ قَالَ أَتَيْتُ الشَّامَ فَوَافَقْتُهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ لِأَسَاقِفَتِهِمْ وَبَطَارِقَتِهِمْ فَوَدِدْتُ فِي نَفْسِي أَنْ نَفْعَلَ ذَلِكَ بِكَ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ فَلَا تَفْعَلُوا فَإِنِّي لَوْ كُنْتُ آمِرًا أَحَدًا أَنْ يَسْجُدَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَأَمَرْتُ الْمَرْأَةَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِزَوْجِهَا

> *When Muʿādh returned from ash-Shām[131], he performed sujūd[132] before the Prophet ﷺ. He asked him: "Muʿādh, what is this (that you are doing)?"*
>
> *Muʿādh replied: "I saw in ash-Shām how the people there prostrated before their bishops and priests. So, I felt the desire to do the same for you."*
>
> *The Prophet ﷺ then explained to him: "Do not do this! If I were to command anyone to prostrate before someone other than Allah, I would command a woman to prostrate before her husband."*

This *ḥadīth* is also used by some people to support the previously mentioned faulty argument. Once again, it is claimed that a companion of the Prophet, in this case, Muʿādh ibnu Jabal ؓ, did not understand Islam at that time and that through this prostration, he was worshiping the Prophet ﷺ. The intended goal of this argument is, once again, to suggest that a person can still be a Muslim, even if he worships other things alongside Allah.

Anyone who has truly understood the meaning of *tawḥīd* must immediately reject this claim and be certain that there is another interpretation of this *ḥadīth*, even if he himself do not yet know what that interpretation is.

As with the previous *ḥadīth*, there is not a single well-known early scholar who has ever formulated the false conclusion that has been described.

The Correct Understanding of This Ḥadīth

In reality, Muʿādh ibnu Jabal did not intend to worship the Messenger ﷺ with this prostration, and the reason for this is as follows:

Sujūd is divided into two types: *sujūd* of worship and *sujūd* of greeting. This form of greeting was customary in some societies before Islam. It

---

[131] As previously mentioned: *ash-Shām*, referring to the lands north of the Arabian Peninsula.

[132] Thus, he prostrated before the Prophet ﷺ. The Arabic word *sujūd* means prostration. However, it is sometimes noted that this word, in its linguistic meanings, can also refer to similar gestures.

was of course also a gesture of respect, but not an act of worship or polytheism.

This type of *sujūd* is also found in the prostration of the angels before Adam ﷺ[133] and in the prostration of the family of Yūsuf/Joseph ﷺ before himself[134]. Both events are explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an.

In the *sharīʿah* of Muḥammad ﷺ, this form of greeting was completely prohibited. However, it is clear from the *ḥadīth* that the Prophet's companion, Muʿādh ﷺ, was not yet aware of this prohibition at that time.

Absurd Consequences of the Incorrect Interpretation of This Ḥadīth

According to the incorrect interpretation of this *ḥadīth* and the invalid method of argumentation used in its justification, one would have to come to the following conclusions:

- The family of Yūsuf/Joseph ﷺ would have, just as is falsely claimed about Muʿādh ibnu Jabal, worshiped the Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ. Among them was also Yaʿqūb/Jacob, the father of Yūsuf, who was himself a prophet.

  If a proponent of the incorrect interpretation of the mentioned *ḥadīth* were now to call this conclusion absurd and reject it, the question would arise: Why should a person be allowed to use this flawed method of argumentation regarding the *ḥadīth*, but it would be impermissible when applied to the family of Yūsuf/Joseph ﷺ?

  According to Islamic teachings, it would, of course, be an absurd claim and a grave misguidance to accuse a prophet of polytheism. Even more absurd would be the assumption that a prophet committed such an act due to ignorance about the religion.

  Since this assumption is so clearly false from an Islamic perspective, proponents of the misguided interpretation under discussion struggle to accept such a consequence. However, they fail to realize that their interpretation of the *ḥadīth* follows the exact same reasoning.

---

[133] See the first mention of this in the Qur'an: *Sura al-Baqarah*, 2:34.

[134] Mentioned in *sura Yūsuf*, 12:100

- The same could be said regarding the *sujūd* of the angels before Adam ﷺ. According to this reasoning, one would have to conclude that the angels worshiped Adam ﷺ.

  Even more grotesque, under such an interpretation, would be the fact that Allah ﷻ Himself commanded them to perform this prostration. A person who considers himself a member of Islam would hardly go so far as to claim that Allah commanded the angels to commit major *shirk*.

- And finally, this *ḥadīth* itself would also lead to an erroneous conclusion. When the Prophet ﷺ said, "If I were to command anyone to prostrate before something other than Allah, I would command a woman to prostrate before her husband", it is highly unlikely that he meant: *"If I were to command someone to worship something other than Allah, I would command a woman to worship her husband."*

  Anyone who misuses this *ḥadīth* in the previously described incorrect manner would logically have to accept this absurd interpretation as well.

This becomes even clearer when looking at the following narrations of the same *ḥadīth*. Aḥmad narrates in his *Musnad* from ʿAbduḷlāh ibnu Abī Awfā:

> عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ أَبِي أَوْفَى قَالَ قَدِمَ مُعَاذٌ الْيَمَنَ أَوْ قَالَ الشَّامَ فَرَأَى النَّصَارَى تَسْجُدُ لِبَطَارِقَتِهَا وَأَسَاقِفَتِهَا فَرَوَّأَ فِي نَفْسِهِ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ أَحَقُّ أَنْ يُعَظَّمَ فَلَمَّا قَدِمَ قَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ رَأَيْتُ النَّصَارَى تَسْجُدُ لِبَطَارِقَتِهَا وَأَسَاقِفَتِهَا فَرَوَّأْتُ فِي نَفْسِي أَنَّكَ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تُعَظَّمَ فَقَالَ لَوْ كُنْتُ آمِرًا أَحَدًا أَنْ يَسْجُدَ لِأَحَدٍ لَأَمَرْتُ الْمَرْأَةَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِزَوْجِهَا

> *Muʿādh traveled to Yemen – or he said: to ash-Shām*[135].

[135] This is a doubt from one of the narrators, which was also narrated to preserve the wording as authentically as possible.

This also demonstrates the great precision and honesty of these narrators. After all, error and forgetfulness remain human traits, even with the best memorization skills. However, only an extremely truthful person would ...--

There, he saw that the Christians would prostrate before their bishops and priests. This led him to reflect that the Prophet was more deserving of being honoured.

When he returned, he told the Prophet ﷺ about this and said to him: "So I wanted to do the same to you because I thought to myself that you have more right to be honoured."

The Prophet ﷺ replied to him: "If I were to command anyone to do this, I would command a woman to prostrate before her husband."

عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ أَبِي لَيْلَى عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ مُعَاذِ بْنِ جَبَلٍ قَالَ إِنَّهُ أَتَى الشَّامَ فَرَأَى النَّصَارَى فَذَكَرَ مَعْنَاهُ إِلَّا أَنَّهُ قَالَ فَقُلْتُ لِأَيِّ شَيْءٍ تَصْنَعُونَ هَذَا قَالُوا هَذَا كَانَ تَحِيَّةَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ قَبْلَنَا فَقُلْتُ نَحْنُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ نَصْنَعَ هَذَا بِنَبِيِّنَا فَقَالَ نَبِيُّ اللَّهِ ﷺ [...] إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَبْدَلَنَا خَيْرًا مِنْ ذَلِكَ السَّلَامَ تَحِيَّةَ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ.

It is narrated from ʿAbdurraḥmān ibnu Abī Laylā, from his father, from Muʿādh ibnu Jabal: [...] Then I said, "Why do you do this?" They replied, "This was the greeting of the prophets before us."

I said, "We have more right to do this for our Prophet."

Then the Prophet ﷺ said: "[...] Allah has given us something better – (namely,) the Salām, the greeting of the people of Paradise."

mention such details in a narration, out of God-consciousness and the concern of narrating something incorrectly.

Various Claims

"Mistakes Are Forgiven for Muslims"

Some people attempt to reinforce the false notion of a polytheistic Muslim by claiming that the community of Muḥammad ﷺ – that is, the Muslims – would have all their mistakes overlooked by Allah ﷻ, as long as they did not know better. To support this claim, they cite the following verse:

﴿وَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا أَخْطَأْتُمْ بِهِ وَلَٰكِن مَّا تَعَمَّدَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ﴾

And there is no blame upon you for that in which you have erred but [only for] what your hearts intended.
[sura al-Aḥzāb, 33:5]

Additionally, the following *ḥadīth* is also cited in this context:

It is narrated from Ibnu ʿAbbās that the Prophet ﷺ said:

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، عَنْ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَضَعَ عَنْ أُمَّتِي الْخَطَأَ وَالنِّسْيَانَ وَمَا اسْتُكْرِهُوا عَلَيْهِ»

> *Indeed, Allah has pardoned my ummah for mistakes, forgetfulness, and what they were coerced into.*[136]

The problem with someone who argues in this way is that he himself suffers from a misunderstanding of the fundamental principles of Islam. Such a person believes that the "*ummah* of Muḥammad ﷺ" – as mentioned in the Qur'anic verse and the cited *ḥadīth* – refers to all individuals who merely identify as part of this community. For him, it does not matter how much polytheism or what kind of polytheism these so-called "Muslims" commit.

[136] Narrated in *as-Sunan* by Ibnu Mājah and in numerous other works, with this or a similar wording.

From an Islamic perspective, the question arises: How can these people's *shirk* be forgiven, when the Qur'an explicitly states that this very *shirk* will not be forgiven?

Such ideas strongly resemble the concept of the chosen people in the Judaism of today. Whoever is born with the label "Muslim", or has it recorded in his passport, automatically enjoys the privilege of belonging to a chosen group. No matter what he does, he will enter Paradise in the end – whether as a better or worse member of this chosen group.

This peculiar idea is, of course, absurd and completely foreign to Islam. It is all the more telling of the widespread ignorance among people who consider themselves Muslims today that so many of them – consciously or unconsciously – adhere to this chosen people theory.

This is also why people with such a mindset make little effort to strive for Paradise. They believe his or her place in Paradise is already guaranteed. The only question, perhaps, is whether they will enter immediately or first have to atone for a few minor sins. From an Islamic perspective, this outlook on life has devastating consequences.

This pseudo-argument requires no further explanation, given the many pieces of evidence that have already been mentioned. Anyone with a basic understanding of Islam could never make such a claim. A polytheist is in no way a member of the "*ummah* of Muḥammad ﷺ", so these texts do not apply to such people in the first place.

Additionally, a Muslim does not commit polytheism simply out of forgetfulness or a simple mistake – such ideas are absurd. Likewise, a person who is forced into "disbelief" is not the same as someone who willingly engages in acts of polytheism. This is self-evident. The topic of coercion will be discussed in more detail in an upcoming chapter.

A Contradictory Example

Some people attempt to use a specific example to argue that some polytheists are actually ignorant Muslims. However, they fail to realize that the example they cite actually proves the exact opposite of their claim. For this reason, that example will be mentioned here for clarification and will be briefly discussed:

> *A man who lives isolated from civilization falls into grief. He has no means to travel and eventually turns to the only shaykh in the village. He has only heard good things about this shaykh, and all the people confirm that he is a learned man.*
>
> *However, this scholar himself is ignorant and instructs him to call upon the dead for help, claiming that they can remove the causes of his suffering. He justifies this by citing a statement falsely attributed to the Prophet ﷺ, which in reality is a fabrication.*
>
> *The man then acts upon this instruction, calling upon the dead, seeking from them salvation, healing, and relief from hardship. By doing so, he requests things that only Allah is capable of, thereby committing major shirk, believing that he is following the command of the Prophet ﷺ.*
>
> *It could thus be said that this man intended nothing other than to obey Allah and His Messenger.*

The following points must be considered:

- The person in this hypothetical example clearly does not understand the meaning of the Islamic testimony of faith. Since he does not fulfil the condition of knowledge, he cannot possibly be considered a Muslim.
- The man worships someone other than Allah. By doing so, he has taken this entity as an *ilāh*, meaning he cannot be regarded as someone who has fulfilled *lā ilāha illa-ḷḷāh*. He is not a Muslim, not a *mukhliṣ*, not a *ḥanīf*, does not follow the *millah* of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, and has not implemented the principle of rejecting the *ṭāghūt*.

- He also believed that the dead were worthy of worship and therefore requested things from them that only the Creator is capable of granting.
- The fact that this man identifies as a Muslim does not change any of the above-mentioned facts – just as it made no difference with the idolaters of the Arabs, who considered themselves followers of Ibrāhīm ﷺ and his *dīn*.
- The fact that he believed in this fabricated *ḥadīth* only confirms what has already been stated. Had he truly known the foundation of Islam, it would be unthinkable for him to reject it based on any completely contradictory claim.

  Otherwise, it would mean that a Muslim could believe any claim, without it having any consequences. An example would be someone trying to convince a Muslim of a *ḥadīth* that supposedly proves that Allah ﷻ has a son.

  Would it be possible for a Muslim to believe in such a *ḥadīth*? Would we still consider this person a Muslim simply because he identifies as one? Would we still say: *"This man is a Muslim because he only wanted to follow the Prophet ﷺ."*?

  Without a doubt, everyone would immediately object that such a person could not possibly have understood Islam. The same reaction should apply to the person in the previous example.
- All of this is aside from the fact that this example is far removed from today's reality. The real issue is that those who hold this misguided view are not actually concerned with such isolated, so-called exceptional cases, as presented in the given example. This reveals a certain dishonesty in their argument.

  These individuals do not limit their conclusions to such extreme cases but instead apply them broadly to all people. Even according to their own flawed reasoning, it would be invalid to equate the situation in the example with that of people who listen to and read the Qur'an daily, and sometimes even memorize it – people whose access to knowledge is much easier today in the age of communication and information.

"Someone Who Commits Shirk Under Coercion Is Also Not a Mushrik"

This claim relies on the state of *ikrāh* to support their argument. In Islamic sources, the principle of excuse due to coercion is mentioned, and it is indeed valid and justified. According to this principle, under certain circumstances, a Muslim is permitted to outwardly make polytheistic statements.

The argument presented here is as follows: *"If the mukrah/the coerced one does not become a mushrik despite committing polytheism, then this means that an ignorant mushrik can also be considered a Muslim."*

In reality, the situation is as follows: What is outwardly observable in a coerced person is that he is worshiping something other than Allah, renouncing Islam, or committing a similar act.

In the case of a *kufr* statement, the default ruling in Islamic law is to consider the person a non-Muslim. It would not be permissible to speculate: "This person made a clear statement of *kufr*, but perhaps he still maintain *īmān* internally."

For the early Muslims, the principle of the connection between the inner and outer *(at-talāzumu bayna ẓ-ẓāhiri wa-l-bāṭin)* was accepted by consensus. If this connection could be arbitrarily severed, then no ruling of the *sharīʿah* and no Islamic legal judgment would remain valid. Whenever someone makes a statement, it could always be dismissed with the argument that the person might believe something different in his heart.

Only a few early Islamic sects, particularly the *jahmiyyah*, arrived at such an absurd conclusion. It would go beyond the scope and focus of this book to examine this group in detail. However, it is important to note that even this misguided sect never went so far as to consider a polytheist a Muslim.

When observing historical developments, it becomes clear that the false principles established by these sects were rarely carried out to their final consequences. Even the *jahmiyyah* hesitated to accept certain conclusions, or perhaps some of these implications never even occurred to them.

Furthermore, the *jahmiyyah* would not excuse a person for his ignorance regarding the foundation of Islam, since for them, knowledge was precisely the determining factor that made someone a Muslim.

The connection between the inner and the outer is thus a firmly established principle in Islamic theology and jurisprudence. The suspension of this connection in specific cases requires explicit evidence from Islamic sources.

One such exceptional case is that of *ikrāh*. In this situation, a Muslim observer is instructed not to judge based on outward appearance.

Regarding this, the Qur'an states:

﴿مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ غَضَبٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ﴾

Whoever commits kufr against Allah after his īmān... except for one who is forced [to renounce his religion] while his heart is secure in īmān[137]*. But those who [willingly] open their breasts to kufr, upon them is wrath from Allah, and for them is a great punishment; [sura an-Naḥl, 16:106]*

If a person could be considered a Muslim despite making a clear statement of *kufr* or *shirk*, even without being coerced, then this verse would have no meaning. If that were the case, there would be no need to make an exception for the state of *ikrāh* in the first place.

Thus, this verse explicitly mentions both the exception of *ikrāh* and the connection between the outward and the inward.

[137] It is a stylistic feature of the Arabic language to omit an obvious part of a sentence. This occurs, for example – as in this case – within sentence structures like: "Whoever does this or that… (is such and such)."

"If Kufr Can Be Excused Due to Ignorance, Then the Same Must Apply to Shirk"

Another pseudo-argument is based on the fact that ignorance can indeed be a valid excuse in certain cases – for example, if a person rejects a Qur'anic verse simply because he had no knowledge of it.

This false reasoning has already been sufficiently addressed in a previous chapter. It is only being reiterated here because this claim is sometimes raised in an attempt to justify the idea of a "polytheistic Muslim."

As previously explained in detail, **in this case of rejecting a Qur'anic verse, actual kufr does not even occur**. If a person has no knowledge of a specific Qur'anic verse, then it cannot be said that he has rejected it. In reality, such a person denied the revelation only because he lacked certain knowledge as to whether it was actually a revealed text.

From this, the contradiction in the question becomes clear: *"If a person can be excused in kufr, why can he not also be excused in shirk?"*

If a person expresses or internally believes something that actually makes him a non-Muslim, then there is no hindrance to this ruling afterward. Only through *tawbah* – which means abandoning the matter and repenting sincerely – can a person invalidate such a state.

As previously demonstrated, *kufr* does not occur in the first place if a person, for example, denies a revelation text out of complete ignorance, utters a statement of disbelief while asleep, or similar situations.

Such cases cannot be used as an argument to claim that a polytheist could become a monotheist simply due to ignorance. As explained multiple times in this book, a person's mere ignorance of monotheism makes it impossible for Islam to be established in him. For this reason, a polytheist cannot be considered a monotheist simply because of his ignorance.

The Correct and Incorrect Understanding of the Hindrances to Takfīr (Mawāniʿu t-Takfīr)

Following the previous claim, this section will address the hindrances to *takfīr*, as there is great confusion about this topic among Muslims today.

From the chapter on unjustified takfīr, it was already made clear that the hindrances to takfīr actually prevent kufr from occurring in the first place. For example, due to ignorance of a text, actual rejection of that text does not even take place.

The same applies to cases where the act itself does not actually take place, because it was not carried out with the necessary awareness. This also explains why, in Islamic law, the following individuals are excused for such actions or statements:

- The mentally incompetent or intellectually disabled person
- The child
- The sleeping person
- Someone who misspeaks
- Someone who merely quotes a statement
- Someone who is completely unaware of the act itself

All of these individuals have one thing in common from an Islamic legal perspective: They are in no way responsible for their statements.

Such statements made by these individuals are considered, according to the *sharīʿah*, as if they never occurred. This is because the person:

- Either did not intend the statement or act at all – such as in the case of the sleeping person, someone who misspeaks, or similar situations,
- or their intention is not legally valid to the extent that they could be held accountable – such as in the case of a child or a mentally incompetent person.

It would be absurd to apply this situation to people who are fully responsible and fully aware while worshiping something other than Allah ﷻ. As already explained, the linguistic meaning of *shirk* is undeniably present in every polytheist.

The above argument means in the end drawing a comparison between a person who did not intend an act at all and another person who consciously commits the same act with full awareness!

It is as if one were to say: “A person who is awake is excused because a sleeping person is also excused.”, – this is a clearly absurd statement. This point can be further clarified by a *ḥadīth* that some people use to support this false argument.

... ثُمَّ قَالَ مِنْ شِدَّةِ الْفَرَحِ اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ عَبْدِي وَأَنَا رَبُّكَ، أَخْطَأَ مِنْ شِدَّةِ الْفَرَحِ

> *... Then, out of extreme joy, he said: “O Allah, You are my servant, and I am Your Lord.” He made a mistake due to his overwhelming joy.*[138]

It is clear that the person mentioned in this *ḥadīth* did not actually intend to make this statement.

Some people argue that since this person was excused for making a clear statement of *kufr*, the same excuse should apply to a polytheist.

As has already been demonstrated, this claim is highly absurd, because it essentially implies: “Since this person is excused for an unintentional statement, others should also be excused for their intentional statements.”

According to this claim, it would even be possible for a person to be excused for saying the exact same statement mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, even if he said it intentionally and with full conviction!

Just as absurd as the previously mentioned excuses is the case of merely reporting statements that contradict Islam. If a person only quotes such a statement, it cannot be attributed to him as his own belief. If this were not the case, no Muslim would be able to read the Qur’an, since it contains quotations of statements made by idolaters in several places.

Just as self-evident is the excuse of someone who does not know the reality of a matter and therefore misjudges it. For example, if a blind person performs *sujūd* without knowing that there is an idol in front of him, it is clear that this does not take him out of Islam.

One would have to be extremely confused to think:

---

[138] Narrated by Muslim from Anas Ibnu Mālik ﵁.

"This blind person worshiped an idol alongside Allah, yet he was excused. He committed shirk, but Allah still forgave this shirk."

Even more grotesque would be the following conclusion:

"Therefore, someone who actually worships an idol and openly acknowledges it is also an excused Muslim, as long as he did not know any better."

It becomes clear that serious misunderstandings and false conclusions arise when people fail to grasp the most basic foundations of these matters.

Closing Remarks

Through numerous Islamic source texts, the original understanding of monotheism among Muslims has been clarified in this book. It has become evident that the texts of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the statements of the early scholars are completely consistent in explaining the fundamental creed of Islam.

All these sources define the exclusive worship of the Creator and obedience to Him as the core message of Islam, without which a practically lived Islam is inconceivable.

A Muslim who worships anything besides Allah ﷻ, whether objects, beings, or people, or who obeys them unconditionally, is inconceivable according to Islamic sources.

Pseudo-arguments that are sometimes presented today to contradict these fundamental principles are based on a fundamentally flawed method of reasoning, which must be rejected both by Islamic sources and by clear rational thinking. Thus, also in natural sciences or other fields of life, such methods would be considered irrational.

This book aims to provide a scientific and objective discussion of theological sources, free from defending personal inclinations or subjective opinions. If this goal has been achieved, then all praise and gratitude, in the beginning and the end, belongs entirely to the Lord of the worlds.

To Him ﷻ I also extend my gratitude in general for all His blessings, and in particular for making the writing of this book possible. Furthermore, my thanks go to my family for their support, or to all those who

contributed to the completion of this book and whose efforts allowed it to be published in this refined form.

In conclusion, it is my hope that this book will serve as a valuable contribution to clarifying the original Islamic creed in the English-speaking world.

… and to everything, I have said I want to conclude:

… and Allāh knows best.

والله أعلم

ورحم الله علماء المسلمين

وصلّى الله على نبيّنا محمّد وآله وصحبه ومن والاه

والحمد لله ربّ العالمين

Notes on the Transcription

• *Hamzah* is only represented inside and at the end of an Arabic word, but is omitted at the beginning of a word (i.e. Ishāq, but Qurʾān, ʿulamāʾ).

• The emphasis (*shaddah*) of double consonants is usually illustrated by writing a consonant twice, as is the case in the word *shaddah* itself.

An exception to this rule are the digraphs dh, kh, sh and th, which are only written once rather than twice. Digraphs will instead be underlined strong (e.g. *shādh)* in order to avoid an accumulation of consonants (e.g. *shādhdh).*

Another exception is the masculine suffix *(nisbah* suffix) which is simplified with *-ī* in pausal form and only written as *-iyy* in full form.

• If two letters that do not form a digraph follow each other (like the th in *akramathā*) and could be mistaken for a digraph, they are separated from each other with an apostrophe (in this case: *akramat'hā*) in order to indicate the correct pronunciation. In common names, this is not used (e.g. Ishāq).

• The *Tāʾ marbūṭah* (bound tāʾ) is denoted by h in pausal form and by t in full form.

• Ẓāʾ (ظ), according to the established use, is transcribed with ẕ. However, a transcription with ḏ would be more correct and clearer from a linguistic point of view, because the ẓāʾ is the emphatic variant of the ḏāl and not the zāy.

• As far as it is possible, attempts are made to connect the words according to the Arabic flow of speech in order to approximate the correct Arabic pronunciation.

• Grammatical cases are only taken into account in exceptional cases - especially with frequently occurring words - in order to do justice to the flow of Arabic speech, e.g. “the tābiʿūn”, “from the tābiʿīn” and “he said to the tābiʿīn”.

• The dual is indicated by the word “both”, whereby the word that follows remains in plural, as it would in English (e.g. “the two *āyāt*”).

• Proper names conjoined with the name “Allah” are written together, such as ʿAbduḷḷāh. Other compositions are written separately, e.g. ʿAbdu r-Razzāq, ʿAbdu l-ʿAzīz.

• The word ibn “son” is capitalized at the beginning of a name and is lowercased between names, e.g. Ibnu Abī Shaybah, Mālik ibnu Anas.

Notes on the Formatting and Capitalization of Transcribed Words

This paper generally follows the formal guidelines for academic publications. The most important aspects are summarised below:

• Transcribed Arabic words are lowercased and italicized.

• This does not include proper names of people, places, institutions and the like. These are capitalized and not italicized. Literary works are capitalized and italicized in order to achieve a distinction and to contrast them from the author's names.

• Excluded are also terms which have been adopted into English language or by the English-speaking world. These terms are transcribed according to the transcription system but not italicized. E.g. ḥadīth, sharīʿah, jihād.

This is also the case with terms, which are not familiar to the English language but commonly used in Islamic and Islamic theologic parlance and are also used repeatedly in this treatise. These terms will also be transcribed but not italicized e.g. tābiʿūn, tafsīr.

With regard to readability, such terms are used sparingly and will always be defined upon first mention.

• Transcribed quotes in their language of origin are always written in lowercase and italics.

Chronological Index of Early Islamic Authors

- The names are organized by dates of death. The Common Era date is provided after the *hijri* date.
- First, the most famous appellation is stated, followed by other well-known names after the comma.

150/767	**Muqātil ibnu Sulaymān**, Abū l-Ḥasan
151/768	**Ibnu Isḥāq**, Muḥammad
204/820	**ash-Shāfiʿī**, Muḥammad ibnu Idrīs
213/828	**Ibnu Hishām**, Muḥammad
241/856	**Aḥmad ibnu Ḥanbal**, Abū ʿAbdillāh
256/870	**al-Bukhārī**, Muḥammad ibnu Ismāʿīl
261/875	**Muslim**, Ibnu l-Ḥajjāj an-Naysābūrī
273/887	**Ibnu Mājah**, Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad
275/889	**Abū Dāwūd as-Sijistānī**, Sulaymān ibnu l-Ashʿath
279/893	**at-Tirmidhī**, Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibnu ʿĪsā
310/923	**aṭ-Ṭabarī**, Muḥammad ibnu Jarīr
327/939	**Ibnu Abī Ḥātim ar-Rāzī**, ʿAbdu r-Raḥmān
365/976	**Ibnu ʿAdiyy**, Abū Aḥmad al-Jurjānī
418/1027	**al-Lālakāʾī**, Abū l-Qāsim Hibatuḷḷāh

References

- Throughout the book, for ease of reference, the texts of the respective editions from the digital library *al-Maktabatu sh-shāmilah* were used for citations. It should be noted that the editions of *al-Maktabatu sh-shāmilah* have been frequently revised, (for example, through the complete vocalization of texts).
- Since the sources used are Arabic works, and anyone who wishes to consult these sources must undoubtedly be proficient in the Arabic language, this bibliography provides the original titles and work details in Arabic.
- The information provided here regarding the works and their authors was also taken from *al-Maktabatu sh-shāmilah* and supplemented in some instances.
- The entries are arranged alphabetically within each section, with the most commonly known name used and written in small caps.
- For the death dates of the authors and the publication dates of the works, the *hijrah* date is listed first, followed by the Gregorian date.

The Qur'an

Original text in Arabic language. The translation into English was compiled by the author but is mostly based on the Saheeh International translation.

Ḥadīth-Scientific Works on Qur'an Exegesis:

IBNU ABĪ ḤĀTIM AR-RĀZĪ, ʿAbdu r-Raḥmān (gest. 327/939): *Tafsīru l-Qurʾāni l-ʿaẓīm*

الكتاب: تفسير القرآن العظيم لابن أبي حاتم
الناشر: مكتبة نزار مصطفى الباز - المملكة العربية السعودية،
المحقق: أسعد محمد الطيب، الطبعة: الثالثة، 1419 هـ - 1999 م

MUQĀTIL IBNU SULAYMĀN, Abū l-Ḥasan (gest. 150/767): *Tafsīru Muqātil ibni Sulaymān*

الكتاب: تفسير مقاتل بن سليمان
الناشر: دار إحياء التراث - بيروت، المحقق: عبد الله محمود شحاته،
الطبعة: الأولى - 1423 هـ - 2003م

AṬ-ṬABARĪ, Muḥammad ibnu Jarīr (gest. 310/923): *Jāmiʿu l-bayān ʿan taʾwīli āyi l-Qurʾān (= Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī)*

الكتاب: تفسير الطبري = جامع البيان عن تأويل آي القرآن
الناشر: دار هجر للطباعة والنشر والتوزيع والإعلان، المحقق:
الدكتور عبد الله التركي، الطبعة: الأولى، 1422 هـ - 2001 م، عدد
الأجزاء: 26

الكتاب: تفسير الطبري = جامع البيان عن تأويل آي القرآن
الناشر: مؤسسة الرسالة، المحقق: أحمد محمد شاكر، الطبعة:
الأولى، 1420 هـ - 2000 م، عدد الأجزاء: 24

Works of *Ḥadīth* Narration:

AḤMAD IBNU ḤANBAL, Abū ʿAbdillāh (gest. 241/856): *al-Musnad*

الكتاب: مسند الإمام أحمد بن حنبل
الناشر: مؤسسة الرسالة، المحقق: شعيب الأرنؤوط - عادل مرشد وآخرون، الطبعة: الأولى، 1421 هـ - 2001 م

الكتاب: مسند الإمام أحمد بن حنبل
الناشر: دار الحديث – القاهرة، المحقق: أحمد محمد شاكر، الطبعة: الأولى، 1416 هـ - 1995 م، عدد الأجزاء: 8

AL-BUKHĀRĪ, Muḥammad ibnu Ismāʿīl (gest. 256/870): *Ṣaḥīḥu l-Bukhārī*

الكتاب: الجامع المسند الصحيح المختصر من أمور رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم وسننه وأيامه = صحيح البخاري
الناشر: دار طوق النجاة، المحقق: محمد زهير بن ناصر الناصر، الطبعة: الأولى، 1422هـ - 2001 م، عدد الأجزاء: 9

AL-BUKHĀRĪ, Muḥammad ibnu Ismāʿīl (gest. 256/870): *al-Adabu l-mufrad*

الكتاب: الأدب المفرد
الناشر: دار البشائر الإسلامية - بيروت، المحقق: محمد فؤاد عبد الباقي، الطبعة: الثالثة، 1409 هـ - 1989 م، عدد الأجزاء: 1

IBNU MĀJAH, Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad (gest. 273/887): *as-Sunan*

الكتاب: سنن ابن ماجه
الناشر: دار إحياء الكتب العربية - فيصل عيسى البابي الحلبي، المحقق: محمد فؤاد عبد الباقي، عدد الأجزاء: 2

IBNU ʿADIYY, Abū Aḥmad al-Jurjānī (gest. 365/976): *al-Kāmilu fī ḍuʿafā'i r-rijāl*

الكتاب: الكامل في ضعفاء الرجال
الناشر: الكتب العلمية - بيروت-لبنان، تحقيق: عادل أحمد عبد الموجود - علي محمد معوض، الطبعة: الأولى، 1418هـ - 1997م

AL-LĀLAKĀ'Ī, Abū l-Qāsim Hibatuḷlāh (gest. 418/1027): *Sharḥu uṣūli ʿtiqādi ahli s-sunnati wa-l-jamāʿah*

الكتاب: شرح أصول اعتقاد أهل السنة والجماعة
الناشر: دار طيبة - السعودية، المحقق: أحمد بن سعد بن حمدان الغامدي، الطبعة: الثامنة، 1423هـ - 2003م، عدد الأجزاء: 9

MUSLIM, Ibnu l-Ḥajjāj an-Naysābūrī (gest. 261/875): *Ṣaḥīḥu Muslim*

الكتاب: المسند الصحيح المختصر بنقل العدل عن العدل إلى رسول الله
صلى الله عليه وسلم
الناشر: دار إحياء التراث العربي – بيروت، المحقق: محمد فؤاد عبد
الباقي ، الطبعة: الأولى، 1374 هـ - 1954، عدد الأجزاء: 5

AT-TIRMIDHĪ, Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibnu ʿĪsā (gest. 279/893): *as-Sunan*

الكتاب: سنن الترمذي
الناشر: شركة مكتبة ومطبعة مصطفى البابي الحلبي - مصر، المحقق:
أحمد محمد شاكر وآخرون، الطبعة: الثانية، 1395هـ - 1975 م،
عدد الأجزاء: 5

الكتاب: سنن الترمذي
الناشر: دار الغرب الإسلامي - بيروت ، المحقق: بشار عواد معروف،
الطبعة: 1419هـ - 1998م، عدد الأجزاء: 6

Other Arabic Sources:

IBNU ISḤĀQ, Muḥammad (gest. 151/768): *Sīratu bni Isḥāq*

الكتاب: سيرة ابن إسحاق (كتاب السير والمغازي)
الناشر: دار إحياء الكتب العربية - فيصل عيسى البابي الحلبي،
المحقق: محمد فؤاد عبد الباقي، عدد الأجزاء: 2

IBNU HISHĀM, Muḥammad (gest. 213/828): *Sīratu bni Hishām*

الكتاب: السيرة النبوية لابن هشام
الناشر: شركة مكتبة ومطبعة مصطفى البابي الحلبي وأولاده بمصر،
المحقق: مصطفى السقا وإبراهيم الأبياري وعبد الحفيظ الشلبي،
الطبعة: الثانية، 1375هـ - 1955 م، عدد الأجزاء: 2

AṬ-ṬABARĪ, Muḥammad ibnu Jarīr (gest. 310/923): *Tārīkhu l-umami wa-l-mulūk*

الكتاب: تاريخ الطبري = تاريخ الرسل والملوك، وصلة تاريخ الطبري
الناشر: دار التراث - بيروت، الطبعة: الثانية - 1387 هـ - 1967م،
عدد الأجزاء: 11

IBNU MANẒŪR, Muḥammad ibnu Mukarram (gest. 711/1311): *Lisānu l-ʿarab*

الكتاب: لسان العرب
الناشر: دار صادر - بيروت، الطبعة: الثالثة - 1414 هـ - 1993م،
عدد الأجزاء: 15

Other Sources:

DIE BIBEL, nach Martin Luther (Translated: The Bible, according to Martin Luther; German Edition)

Standardausgabe mit Apokryphen, Durchgesehene Ausgabe in neuer Rechtschreibung, 2006, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart.

MARGOLIOUTH, David Samuel: *Lectures on Arabic Historians [Delivered before the University of Calcutta, February 1929]*.

EHRMAN, Bart D.: *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*

2005, Harper Collins, First Edition.

ZERBST/WEIST, Christa/Christoph: *Bibelkunde* (Bible Science)

Evangelischer Presseverband in Österreich "Mit Bescheid des Evangelischen Oberkirchenrates A. u. H. B. vom 1. Oktober 1985", Ausgabe 1987.