

1.3 Forms of Shirk

How does Islam look at polytheism and what is the verdict that Islam has on polytheism?

The verdict is similar to the previous two negations. The Qur'an makes a very clear tie between the unity in the order of the universe (ecological balance) and the cosmic order of the universe at large, on one hand and between the oneness of the creator on the other. In other words, it is clearly made that this coordinated universe cannot really emanate from more than one will, one designer, and one creator. This is the first logical basis to start from as is clarified through the Qur'an.

It follows from this that any assumption of more than one God, or more than one ultimate authority in the universe is contrary to what you see as a balanced order in nature. An example from the Qur'an, "If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both! but glory to Allah, the Lord of the Throne: (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!" (21:22)

Furthermore, the Qur'an also indicates that the assumption of more than one deity or god, each with independent will, automatically results in the possibility and likelihood of conflict between those independent wills or authorities. The Qur'an says, concerning the presence of more than one god, "Behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him." (23:91) In other words, if there were more than one creator, then each can take away what he has created and just claim absolute will and power over his own creation, which is unattainable.

Now lets move from polytheism, which is the belief of several gods, to the belief of two Gods: God of good and God of evil. How does Islam view the dichotomy between good and evil and the worshiping of two Gods?

The belief of two gods is viewed as a form of polytheism. The number may be two but it is still the multiplicity of God. Any recognition of rival authority to that of the one and absolute Lord of the universe is one form of polytheism. All the arguments and discussions we have had on the previous question on polytheism would be applicable here as well.

We can add a few more points as well. When you assume the presence of two Gods then you have one of two possibilities and no more: either that these two Gods have equal power or that one of them is superior to the other.

Lets begin with the second assumption. If we assume that one God is more powerful than the other then it means the other God is really a weaker God or an inferior God compared to the first. When we talk about deity, the question on inferiority and weakness is totally irrelevant and completely inapplicable. So that's a logical contradiction.

The other assumption is that both Gods have equal power. The questions that may be interesting to focus on here are 1) to assume two equal powers is contrary to the cosmic order and to the unity that we see in the structure of the universe and 2) what happens when there is a decision that's controversial and they have a disagreement? For example, the god of good wants to give life to someone while the God of evil wants him to die. Now who will prevail? How do you reconcile a controversial question like that? It's impossible.

Some may argue that these two Gods could compromise, but when you talk about compromise it means that one would have to give a little here and then the other would do the same at another time. That means ones will and the others will could not be absolute or final and that again is a contradiction because we already said that to talk about God we're talking about a type of authority as absolute, final and uncompromising.

On these grounds the question of duality, or having two Gods, is totally unattainable and illogical as far as Islam is concerned. This leads us to conclude that there must be one creator, one will, and one authority. As far as the paradox of the existence of good and evil we can seek a better explanation than assuming that there are two Gods and in fact we address this issue in a future series.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Take not (for worship) two gods: for He is just one Allah. Then fear Me (and Me alone)." (16:51) Another verse says, "If Allah touches you with hurt, there is none can remove it but He: if He designs some benefit for you, there is none can keep back His favor: He causes it to reach whomsoever of His servants He pleases. And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (10:107) In conclusion, taking two Gods is only another form of polytheism, which is unacceptable to the Muslim.

Thus far we've talked about the association of other deities with Allah, whether they are in the form of idols or in the form of natural phenomena like the wind, the sun, the moon etc, or are bonnedified deities. Let's discuss the worship of other orders of creation such as spiritual beings, Satan worshippers, sorcery, magic, and people making a whole faith, a whole religion, a whole belief, or cult out of them. How does Islam view the association of God with others that are not exactly deities?

You raised three issues that I'll deal with separately. The first issue is whether or not a Muslim believes in other orders of creation. The second issue is whether those creatures or orders of creation have independent or separate authority or power than Allah/God. And the third issue is that of invoking and communicating with those spirits for purposes like magic, sorcery, exorcism etc.

On the first issue, Muslims do believe in other orders of creation and unseen creatures. For example, the Qur'an talks about the angels as one creation of Allah. I believe that Jews and Christians also believe in this same basic concept. There is no problem in admitting their existence

even though we can't see them. Secondly, the Qur'an also discusses devils, Satan and jinn in general and that's another set of creations, which are also unseen. Thirdly, the Qur'an talks about the survival of the soul after death. After the physical bodily death, the soul keeps on living for eternity. The main point is the belief that the souls of the humans who die, even if their bodies have dissipated, still lingers and survives until the Day of Judgment and thereafter. As far as this issue is concerned, yes there are orders of unseen creations that you cannot physically touch or see.

The second issue is whether Muslims believe that these creatures have powers. The answer is most definitely no. Again, Islam is quite strict on this purity of monotheism and relating all power to where it belongs: to God, to Allah. It follows from this that these spirits or other levels of creation have no power, whatsoever, that are independent from God's power. They have no knowledge of the unseen or the future more or less control over them. All that is said concerning their abilities to have these is considered superstition. God is the one who controls everything.

The third point is concerning whether one can evoke those spirits, utilize them, or communicate with them. We find, again, that the position of this in Islam is very clear. It condemns in no ambiguous terms any form of magic, sorcery, exorcism or any similar type of witchcraft. In fact, the Qur'an clarifies that one of the dangers is that people may end up worshipping Satan. So when we talk about the church of Satan or Satan worshipers, it is something that the Qur'an warns about over 1400 years ago. In the words of God Himself it says, "Did I not enjoin on you, O ye Children of Adam, that ye should not worship Satan; for that he was to you an enemy avowed?" (36:60)

There is a very clear position taken here. In fact, this is all supplemented by the saying of prophet Mohammed in which he equated the use of magic or belief in it with becoming a disbeliever. In other words, the resort to magic, especially black magic, can amount to disbelief in Allah. In fact, many people sometimes resort to superstition or sorcery because somehow they feel they can seek refuge in those spirits or in their protection.

Again the Qur'an is very clear: protection comes only from Allah. Seeking refuge should be only directed towards Allah. An ayah that clarifies this says, "Say (O Mohammed): "No one can deliver me from Allah (if I were to disobey Him), nor should I find refuge except in Him.'" (72:22) In fact, to conclude, from our own human experience, we hear about people who slip into cults, especially in sorcery and magic, and end up going crazy because it has dangerous psychological effect on them and it's a dangerous area to get into so one should really direct himself to the creator and seek refuge and protection only from him.

Moving away from associations with Allah of other deities and orders of creation to associating Allah with other humans? In other terms, what about the worshiping of humans?

This is, again, part of the category of negation (negating the oneness of God) that we mentioned earlier. It is rejected and not acceptable in Islam. Again, this negation is not ambiguous whatsoever. The Qur'an is very clear and decisive on this issue.

The worshiping of others may take a variety of forms. To start with, one of the practices of worshiping other human beings is the worshiping of ancestors. I believe it still exists until today. People believe in the spirits of their predecessors who come back to oversee what their descendants are doing. At times they are actually worshipped. The Qur'an puts this attitude in a very logical form. It simply says that since it is He (God) who created us and created our predecessors, then only God should be worshipped and not our predecessors.

To quote from the Qur'an: "The Lord of the heavens and the earth and all between them, if ye (but) have an assured faith. There is no god but He: It is He Who gives life and gives death, - The Lord and Cherisher to you and your earliest ancestors." (44:7-8) The Qur'an also talks about the confrontation that took place between Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) and the pharos, magicians, and others around him. He addressed

them, according to the Qur'an, by saying, "Your lord and the lord of your fathers from the beginning!"(26:26)

Why worship other creatures that Allah has created? In a more affirmative tone, we find in the second chapter of the Qur'an verses 2122, "O mankind! Adore your Guardian-Lord, who created you and those who came before you, that you may attain righteousness; Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith Fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when you know the truth."

It follows from this that the worship of human beings is totally rejected not only as it relates to ancestors but in any other form. In fact, we find throughout history, that some of the deviation from the true path of pure monotheism has taken the form of worshiping other holy men or holy people. A righteous man may have died, for example, and his grave is worshiped and ultimately the person himself is deified or regarded as a deity (as god).

Even the Qur'an rejects the worship of great prophets and messengers of God because even those people, great as they might have been, are still creatures of Allah. We know, for example, from history, that this idea has lingered in the past among even the older civilizations, even before the advent of prophet Jesus (peace be upon him). The Egyptians believed in Horace as the Son of God. The Persians believed in Mithra as the Son of God. It's quite fascinating to note that in both cases and others Mithra and Horace were regarded as Sons of God who came to expiate the sins of humanity and reconcile man to God by sacrificing their own lives. Like I said, this is quite interesting and fascinating if we know that this idea did actually exist before the mission of prophet Jesus (peace be upon him).

You just brought up a very important point. How is Jesus viewed in the Qur'an? Is he viewed as half way between human and divine? Is he viewed as divine or totally human? Where does he stand?

In Islam there is nothing that is half divine and half human. There is no order of existence or creation between divinity and humanity or in general between creator and created. A person would have to be either the creator (which is only one Allah and He is not human) or created. There is no half way. There is no compromise. He has to be either not both.

The position of Islam is very clear on this point. Instead of using my own words let's turn to the Qur'an. Chapter 112 is comprised of four verses: "Say (o Mohammed to the people): He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, the Absolute; He begetteth not and nor is he begotten; and there is none like (unto) Him." The position is very simply put in this short chapter.

Also, we find in chapter 6 verses 101-102, "To Him (Allah) is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: How can He have a son when He hath no consort? He created all things, and He has full knowledge of all things. This is Allah, your Lord! There is no deity but He, the Creator of all things: then worship you Him: and He has power to dispose of all affairs." There is no mediating authority. There is no in-between type of existence.

Since you are asking particularly about prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), we find that his name is mentioned in the Qur'an frequently. In the fifth chapter verse 75, in the Qur'an, it says, "Christ the son of Mary was no more than a messenger, a prophet; many messengers passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how Allah doth make His signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth!"

Another citation to clarify it further is, "Yet have they taken, besides him, gods that can create nothing but are themselves created; that have no control of hurt or good to themselves; nor can they control death nor life nor resurrection." This passage can be found in chapter 25 verse 3. This

clearly shows that all of those human beings, including Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) and all other great prophets and messengers are creatures of Allah. They are people who cannot control life, they cannot defend themselves against death. They cannot resurrect themselves without the permission of Allah, which confirms again the point that there is one authority in the whole universe.

A last citation to make sure this question is answered clearly, the Qur'an says, "It is not (possible) that a man, to whom is given the Book (revelation), and Wisdom, and the prophetic office, should say to people: "Be you my worshipers rather than Allah's": on the contrary (He would say) "Be you worshipers of Him Who is truly the Cherish-er of all: For you have taught the Book and you have studied it earnestly." Nor would he instruct you to take angels and prophets for Lords and patrons. Would he bid you unbelief after you have bowed your will to Allah in submission in Islam?" This passage can be found in chapter 3 verses 79-80.

Notice here the emphasis is being made on the fact that the prophets viewed themselves as servants of God. And this is not really a demotion. The biggest pride for any human being, including all those great messengers of God, including Mohammed, Jesus, and Abraham, is to say that they are true servants of Allah. In fact, if you go back to the New Testament (of the Bible), you'll find lots of passages that would support this position of their basic humanity and humility.

So being the servant of God is really actually an honor.?

Exactly.