

Is to swear by other than Allah regarded as a kind of polytheism?

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Reply: The interpretation of the words “monotheism” {tawhid} and “polytheism” {shirk} must be in consistency with the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (S) because the Glorious Qur’an and the conduct of the Messenger of Allah (S) are the most valuable criteria for distinguishing the truth from falsehood as well as monotheism from polytheism.

Given this, every thought and behavior approved by the awakened and unbiased conscience should be assessed according to the touchstone of the logic of revelation and conduct of the Holy Prophet (S).

The following are solid proofs which the Qur’an and the Sunnah introduced about the permissibility of swearing by other than God:

1. In the eternal verses of the Glorious Qur’an we find examples of swearing by prolific creatures such as the “life of the Prophet”, “soul of man”, “pen” which are manifestations of writing, “sun”, “moon”, “star”, “day and night”, “heaven and earth”, “time”, and “mountains and sea”. We shall cite some of these verses:

a.

﴿يَعْمَهُونَ سَكَرَتِهِمْ لَفِي إِنْهُمْ لَعَمْرُكَ﴾

“By your life, they were bewildered in their drunkenness.”[4][216]

b.

﴿وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا * وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَاها * وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَاها * وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاها * وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاها * وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاها * وَنَفْسٍ * وَمَا سَوَاها * فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا﴾

“By the sun and her forenoon splendor, by the moon when he follows her, by the day when it reveals her, by the night when it covers her, by the sky and Him who built it, by the earth and Him who spread it, by the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it with {discernment between} its virtues and vices.”[5][217]

c.

﴿هَوَىٰ إِذَا وَالنَّجْمِ﴾

“By the star when it sets.”[6][218]

d.

﴿يَسْطُرُونَ وَمَا وَالْقَلَمِ نَج﴾

“Nun. By the Pen and what they write.”[7][219]

e.

﴿خُسْرٍ لَفِي الْإِنْسَانِ إِنَّ * وَالْعَصْرِ﴾

“By Time! Indeed man is at a loss.”[8][220]

f.

﴿عَشْرِ لَيْلٍ * وَالْفَجْرِ﴾

“By the Dawn, by the ten nights.”[9][221]

g.

﴿وَالطُّورِ * وَكِتَابٍ مَّسْطُورٍ * فِي رَقٍّ مَّنشُورٍ * وَالْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ * وَالسَّكْفِ الْمَرْفُوعِ * وَالْبَحْرِ الْمَسْجُورِ﴾

“By the Mount {Sinai}, by the Book inscribed on an unrolled parchment; by the House greatly frequented; by the vault raised high, by the surging sea.”[10][222]

Similarly, swearing by the manifestations of the world of creation can also be noticed in Surahs Mursalat (77), an-Nazi‘at (79), al-Buruj (85), at-Tariq (86), al-Balad (90), ad-Duha (93), and at-Tin (95).

There is no doubt that if swearing by other than God is tantamount to polytheism and associating partners to God, the Holy Qur’an which is the charter of monotheism and unity of God would not have resorted to it, and if such a way of swearing is exclusive to God, the verses of the Qur’an would have warned people from doing so lest they should commit mistakes.

2. All Muslims of the world regard the Holy Prophet (S) as their model and consider his conduct and behavior as the criterion for distinguishing right from wrong.

Muslim scholars and compilers of Sahihs and Musnads have mentioned so many instances of the Holy Prophet’s (S) swearing by other than God.

In his Musnad, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the chief of the Hanbalis, thus narrates from the Messenger of Allah (S):

﴿تسكت أن من خيرٍ منكٍ عن تنهَى و بمعروفٍ تتكلم لأن فلعمري﴾

“By my life! If you would enjoin good and forbid evil, it will be better than keeping silent.”

[11][223]

In his Sahih, which the Ahl as-Sunnah consider one of the six authentic compilations of hadith, Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj states:

«وسلم {واله} عليه الله صلى - النبي إلى رجل جاء -
أبيك و أما فقال أجراً؟ أعظم الصدقة أتى الله رسول يا فقال
البقاء تأمل و الفقر تخشى شحيح صحيح أنت و تصدق أن لتبأنه.»

There came a person to the Prophet (S) and asked the Messenger of Allah: “Which charity is the most rewarding?” He said: “By your father, it is the charity which you give in a state when you are healthy and close-fisted, haunted by fear of poverty, and hoping to live (as rich).”[12][224]

How can those who consider a great part of global Muslims as polytheists because they believe that it is permissible to swear by other than God justify this explicit act of the Prophet (S) (i.e., swearing by a person’s father)?

3. Apart from the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Prophet (S), the conduct of the close Companions of the Messenger of Allah (S) also proves the permissibility of swearing by other than God.

In many parts of his sublime speeches, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) swear by his life when he says:

«أضعافاً بعدي من التيه لكم ليضعفن ولعمري»

“By my life! After me your wandering about shall be multiplied.”[13][225]

In another place, he (‘a) says:

«يطلبونك قليل عن لتعرفنهم شقاقك و غيك عن تنزع لم إن ولعمري»

“By my life, if you do not refrain from hypocrisy, avarice and your rebellious activities, they will soon be known to you.”[14][226]

All these traditions and reports show clearly that no ijthad or exigency can be valid, and no other argument can denigrate the position of God in the Glorious Qur’an, the conduct of the Holy Prophet (S) or the conduct his close companions like the Commander of the Faithful (‘Ali) (‘a) if it accuses them of polytheism and associating partners with God.

Conclusion

From the aggregate of the stated proofs, it is evident that from the perspective of the Book of God, the Sunnah of the Prophet (‘a) and conduct of the believers the legitimacy of swearing by other than God is an indisputable principle, and it has no contradiction with monotheism and the unity of God.

Therefore, if the outward meaning of the traditions opposes that which has been confirmed by decisive proofs, it must be justified and interpreted according to this indisputable principle which is derived from the Qur’an and traditions.

Some people cite an ambiguous tradition which is as follows:

«ينهاكم الله إن فقال أبي و يقول هو و عمر سمع الله رسول إن
يسكت أو بالله فليحلف حالاً كان من و بأبانكم تحلفوا أن.»

Verily, the Messenger of Allah (S) heard ‘Umar swearing by his father. Upon hearing this he said: “Verily, God has prohibited you from swearing by your father, and when one wants to swear one should either swear to God or keep silent.”[15][227]

Although this hadith cannot challenge the Qur’anic verses and explicit traditions that consider swearing by other than God as permissible, it must, for the sake of reconciling it and the mentioned verses and tradition, be said that the Prophet’s prohibition of ‘Umar’s swearing by his father and forbidding similar people from swearing by their fathers is attributed to the fact that their fathers were idolaters and polytheists. And an infidel or idol-worshipping person is too unworthy to be an object of swearing.

Is to resort to the divine saints {awliya’} for mediation {tawassul} regarded as polytheism {shirk} and tantamount to innovation in religion {bid’ah}?

Reply: Tawassul means to resort to a sacred being for mediation with God.

Ibn Manzur thus says in Lisan al-‘Arab:

«عليه تعطفه أصرة بحرمة إليه تقرب بكذا إليه توسل»

“If you resort to others for mediation; that is, respect and honor them, they will treat you tenderly.”[16][228]

The Glorious Qur’an states:

«يا أيها الذين آمنوا اتقوا الله وابتغوا إليه الوسيلة وجاهدوا في سبيله لتكنم تفلحون»

“O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah, and seek the means of recourse to Him, and wage jihad in His way, so that you may be felicitous.”[17][229]

In his Sihah al-Lughah, Jawhari describes “wasilah” {means} in this manner:

«الغير إلى به يتقرب ما الوسيلة»

“Wasilah {means} is something through which one seeks nearness to another.”

Therefore, a valuable being to which we resort for mediation may be meritorious deeds and sincere worship of God which bring us near to the Lord of the worlds, or a prolific person who enjoys a special station and esteem in the sight of God, the Exalted.

Types of tawassul

Tawassul can be divided into three types:

1. Tawassul by performing righteous deeds, as stated by Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti who expounds on the noble verse,

﴿الْوَسِيلَةَ إِلَيْهِ وَابْتَغُوا﴾

“And seek the means of recourse to Him”:

تعالى: قوله في فتادة عن

يرضيه بما العمل و بطاعته الله إلى تقربوا: قال الْوَسِيلَةَ إِلَيْهِ وَابْتَغُوا

“Qatadah said concerning the verse, “And seek the means of recourse to Him”: Seeking nearness to God by obeying Him and doing that which pleases Him.”[18][230]

2. Tawassul through the supplication of meritorious servants (of God), as the Holy Qur’an recounts in the tongue of the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) (‘a):

﴿قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَعْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ * قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

“They said, ‘Father! Plead {with Allah} for forgiveness of our sins! We have indeed been erring’. He said, ‘I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you; indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.’”[19][231]

It is evident from the quoted verse that the sons of Ya‘qub (Jacob) (‘a) had sought the means of recourse to Him through supplication, regarding this act as means of attaining forgiveness. Besides, Hadrat Ya‘qub (‘a) did not refuse their offer but promised to pray for the forgiveness of their sins.

3. Tawassul through spiritually dignified personages who enjoy special station and honor in the sight of God with the aim of seeking divine proximity.

Now, we shall review the proofs of hadiths and behavior of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (S) and great figures of Islam:

1. Ahmad ibn Hanbal thus narrates in his Musnad on the authority of ‘Uthman ibn Hunayf:

«وسلم {واله} عليه الله صلى – النبي أتى البصر ضرير رجلا إن –

إن و لك دعوت شنت إن: قال يعافيني، أن الله ادع فقال

يتوضأ أن فأمره .أدعه: فقال خير، فهو ذاك أخرجت شنت

إني اللهم الدعاء: بهذا يدعو و ركعتين فيصلني وضونه فيحسن

إني محمد يا الرحمة نبي محمد بنبيك إليك واتوجه أسنلك

فبي شفعه اللهم لي فتقضى هذه، حاجتي في ربي إلى بك توجهت»

A blind man came to the Prophet (S) and said: “Pray for me and ask God to cure me.” Upon hearing this he said: “I will pray for you if you want and if you like I will postpone it and the latter is better.” The blind man said: “Will you?” The Holy Prophet commanded him to perform ablution as perfectly as possible, to say two rak‘ahs {cycles} of prayer and then supplicate with these words: “O God! I beseech You and turn to You through Muhammad the Prophet of Mercy. O Muhammad! I turn to my Lord through you to grant this request. O God! Let him be my intercessor.”[20][232]

Indeed, this hadith is considered acceptable by all muhaddithun so much so that after narrating the quoted hadith Hakim al-Nayshaburi describes it in his Mustadrak as an authentic {sahih} hadith while Ibn Majah who narrates it on the authority of Abu Ishaq says: “This tradition is authentic.” In the book, Abwab al-Ad’iyyah, Tirmidhi confirms the authenticity of this tradition. Also Muhammad Nasib ar-Rafa’i says in At-Tawassul ila Haqiqah at-Tawassul:

«لاريب و بلاشك فيه ثبت قد و ...مشهور و صحيح الحديث هذا أن لاشك

له – وسلم {واله} عليه الله صلى – الله رسول بدعاء الأعمى بصر ارتداد»

“There is no doubt that this hadith is authentic and known... and it proves that through the supplication of the Messenger of Allah (S) the blind man has regained his sight.”[21][233]

This tradition clearly shows that tawassul through the Holy Prophet (S), with the aim of fulfilling one’s need, is permissible. In fact, the Messenger of Allah (S) commanded the blind man to pray in such manner and to supplicate the Lord of the worlds by seeking mediation to God through the Prophet (S). This is the same type of tawassul as that of divine people and those who have proximity to God.

2. Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Bukhari thus says in his Sahih:

«استسقى قحطوا إذا كان عنه الله رضى الخطاب بن عمر إن

بنينا إليك نتوسل كنا إننا اللهم: فقال المطلب عبد بن بالعباس

فيسقون قال: فاسقنا نبينا بعم إليك نتوسل إنا وفتسقينا ﴿﴾.

Every time there was draught, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab would pray for rain seeking mediation through ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib (uncle of the Prophet) and say: “O God! We used to seek access to You through our Prophet and You would shower us and now, we seek access to You through the uncle of our Prophet to shower us. And they would be granted their need.” [22][234]

3. The issue of tawassul through the saints of God was such common and prevalent that the Muslims of the early period of Islam used to refer to the Prophet (S) as the mediator between them and God.

Sawad ibn Qarib recited a poem before the Holy Prophet (S) and he thus said:

﴿﴾ عَيْرُهُ رَبِّ لَا إِنْ أَشْهَدُ وَ
غَالِبِي كُلِّ عَلَى مَأْمُونٍ أَنْتَ وَ
وَسِيْلَةُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ أَدْنَى وَأَنْتَ

﴿﴾ الْأَطْنَابِ الْأَكْرَمِينَ بِنِ يَا اللَّهُ إِلَى

And I bear witness that there is no god but Him and that you are indeed entrusted with all the hidden,

And (I bear witness) that among the messengers, you—O son of the honorable and pure ones—are the nearest means {wasilah} to God.[23][235]

Albeit the Holy Prophet (S) heard this poem from Suwad ibn Qarib, he neither stopped him from reciting it nor accused him of polytheism {shirk} and innovation in religious beliefs {bid‘ah}.

In the two lines we quote below, Imam ash-Shafi‘i also points to this fact:

﴿﴾ ذُرَيْعَتِي النَّبِيِّ آلَ
وَسِيْلَتِي إِلَيْهِ هُمْ
غَدًا أُعْطِي أَرْجُوهُمْ

﴿﴾ صَحِيفَتِي الْيَمِينِ بِيَدِي

The progeny of the Prophet are my means {wasilah} to God.

I hope that I will for their sake be given my account-book in my right hand.[24][236]

Although the transmitted traditions regarding the permissibility of tawassul through divine people are plenty, the traditions which we have mentioned testify to the permissibility of tawassul and its consistency with the Sunnah of the Prophet (S), and the conduct of the Companions and great Muslim scholars, and they need no further comment.

What have been stated proves the groundlessness of the claim of those who say that tawassul through the nearest ones to God is an act of polytheism and innovation in religion.