

THE DANGERS OF SHIRK

ITS' TYPES & PUNISHMENTS

“VERILY, ALLĀH FORGIVES NOT THAT PARTNERS SHOULD BE SET UP WITH HIM IN WORSHIP, BUT HE FORGIVES EXCEPT THAT (ANYTHING ELSE) TO WHOM HE PLEASES, AND WHOEVER SETS UP PARTNERS WITH ALLĀH IN WORSHIP, HE HAS INDEED INVENTED A TREMENDOUS SIN.”

[QUR'ĀN 4:48]

WHAT IS SHIRK?

Shirk in the Arabic language means taking a partner, i.e., regarding someone as the partner of another. It is said in Arabic: “ashraka baynahumā” (he joined them together) when one regards two people as being of equal status; or “ashraka fī amrihi ghayrahu” (he introduced another into his affair) when one claims that two people are involved in a matter.

Shirk, according to the Sharī’ah (in terms of Islām), means ascribing a partner or rival to Allāh in Lordship (rubūbiyyah), worship (ulūhiyyah) or in His Names and Attributes (Asmā- wa-Şifāt).

A rival is a peer or counterpart. Hence, Allāh forbids setting up rivals with Him and he condemns those who take them (rivals) as gods instead of or besides Allāh in many verses of the Qur’ān.

Allāh, the Most High, said (interpretation of the meaning):

“Then do not set up rivals unto Allāh (in worship) while you know (that He Alone has the right to be worshiped).” [Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:22]

“And they set up rivals to Allāh, to mislead (men) from His path! Say: ‘Enjoy (your brief life)! But certainly, your destination is the (Hell) Fire!’” [Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:30]

In a ḥadīth, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

*“Whoever dies claiming that Allāh has a rival, will enter Hell.”
[Narrated by al-Bukhārī (4497) & Muslim (92)]*

THE HISTORY OF SHIRK

Ibn ‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said, “Between Nūḥ (Noah) and Ādam (Adam) (عَلَيْهِمَا السَّلَام) were ten generations, all of them were upon the shari’ah (law) of the truth, then they differed. So Allāh sent prophets as bringers of good news and as warners.” (Related by Ibn Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī in his tafsīr (4/275) and al-Ḥākim (2/546) who said, “It is authentic according to the criterion of al-Bukhārī” and adh-Dhahabī also agreed)

Concerning the saying of Allāh, the Most Perfect, about the people of Nūḥ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) (interpretation of the meaning):

“And they have said: ‘ You shall not forsake your gods, nor shall you forsake Wadd, nor Suwā’, nor Yaghūth, nor Ya’ūq, nor Nasr’.”

[Sūrah Nūḥ, 71:23]

(five names of deities worshiped during the time of Nūḥ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ))

It has been related by a group from the *Salaf* (Pious Predecessors), in many narrations, that these five deities were righteous worshipers. However, when they died, *Shayṭān* (Satan) whispered to their people to retreat and sit at their graves. Afterward, *Shayṭān* whispered to those who came after them that they should take them as idols, beautifying to them the idea that they will be reminded of them and thereby follow them in righteous conduct. Then, *Shayṭān* suggested to the third generation that they should worship these idols besides Allāh, the Most High, and he whispered to them that this is what their forefathers used to do!

Due to that, Allāh sent to them Nūḥ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) commanding them to worship Allāh alone. However, there were none who responded to his call except a few. Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, related this whole incident in Sūrah Nūḥ. Ibn ‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) relates, “Indeed, these are five names of righteous men from the people of Nūḥ. When they died, *Shayṭān* whispered to their people to make statues of them and to place these statues in their places of gathering as a reminder of them, so they did this. However, none from amongst them worshiped these statues, until they died and the purpose of the statues was forgotten. Then, the next generation began to worship them.” [Related by al-Bukhārī (8/534)]

The likes of this has also been related by *Ibn Jarīr at-Ṭabarī* and others from a number of the *Salaf* (Pious Predecessors) (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ). In *ad-Durr al-Manthūr* (6/269), ‘Abdullāh ibn Ḥumayd relates from *Abū Muṭahhar*, who said, “*Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab* was mentioned to *Abū Ja’far al-Bāqir* (d. 11H), so he said, ‘He was killed at the place where another besides Allāh was first worshiped.’ Then he mentioned *Wadd* and said, ‘*Wadd* was a Muslim man who was loved by his people. When he died, the people began to gather around his grave in the land of *Babel*, mourning and lamenting. So when *Iblīs* (Satan) saw them mourning and lamenting over

him, he took the form of a man and came to them saying ‘I see that you are mourning and lamenting over him. So why don’t you make a picture of him (i.e. a statue) and place it in your places of gatherings so that you may be reminded of him?’ So they said ‘yes!’, and they made a picture of him and put in their place of gathering; which reminded them of him. When *Iblis* saw how they were excessively remembering him, he said ‘why doesn’t every man amongst you make a similar picture to keep in your own houses, so that you can be constantly reminded of him?’ So they all said ‘yes!’. So each household made a picture of him, which they adored and venerated and which constantly reminded them of him.’ *Abū Ja’far* said, ‘Those from the later generation saw what the previous generation had done and considered that... to the extent that they took him as an *ilāh* (*deity*) to be *worshiped* besides *Allāh*.’ He then said, ‘This was the *first idol* worshiped other than *Allāh*, and they called this idol *Wadd*.’”

Thus, the wisdom of *Allāh*, the Blessed, the Most High, was fulfilled, when he sent Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) as the final prophet and made his *sharī’ah* the completion of all *Divinely Prescribed Laws*, in that He prohibited all means and avenues by which people may fall into *shirk*, which is the *greatest of sins*. For this reason, building shrines over graves and intending to travel specifically to them, taking them as places of festivity and gathering, and swearing an oath by the inmate of a grave have all been prohibited. All of these lead to excessiveness and the worship of other than *Allāh*, the Most High.

This being the case even more so in an age in which knowledge is diminishing, ignorance is increasing, sincere advisors to the truth are few and *Shayṭān* is cooperating with *men* and *Jinn* to misguide mankind by calling them away from the worship of *Allāh* alone, the Blessed, the Most High.

“Say: “I seek refuge with (Allāh) the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the Ilāh (God) of mankind, From the evil of the whisperer (devil who whispers evil in the hearts of men) who withdraws (from his whispering in one’s heart after one remembers Allāh), who whispers [evil] in the breasts of mankind, from among the jinn and mankind.”
[Sūrah an-Nās, 114:1-6]

SHIRK IS DIVIDED INTO TWO TYPES

The texts of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* indicate that *shirk* and *ascribing rivals to Allāh* can sometimes put a person beyond the pale of *Islām* and sometimes it might not. Hence, the scholars divided *shirk* into two types; *shirk akbar* (*greater shirk*) and *shirk aṣghar* (*lesser shirk*). There follows a brief description of each type:

THE FIRST: ASH-SHIRK AL-AKBAR (THE GREATER SHIRK)

This means *ascribing to someone other than Allāh something that belongs only to Him*, such as *Lordship* (*rubūbiyyah*), *Divinity* (*ulūhiyyah*) and the *divine Names and Attributes* (*al-asmā- wa-ṣ-ṣifāt*). This kind of *shirk* may sometimes be *outward*, like those who worship *idols and graves*, or the *dead or absent*. On the other hand, it may sometimes be *hidden*, such as those who *put their trust in other gods besides Allāh*, or the *shirk and kufr of the hypocrites*. The *shirk* of the *hypocrites* puts them beyond the pale of *Islām* and means that they will abide forever in Hell, but it is a *hidden shirk* because they make an *outward display of Islām* while *concealing their shirk*, so they are *inwardly mushriks*.

Greater shirk may sometimes take the form of beliefs such as:

- the belief that there is someone else who *creates, gives life and death, reigns or controls the affairs of the universe* along with *Allāh*.
- the belief that there is someone else who must be *obeyed absolutely* besides *Allāh*, so they follow him in *regarding as permissible or forbidden whatever he wants*, even if that goes *against the religion of the Messengers*.
- that people may associate others with *Allāh* in *love and veneration*, by *loving a created being as they love Allāh*. This is the kind of *shirk* that *Allāh* does not forgive, and it is the *shirk* about which *Allāh* says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allāh as rivals (to Allāh). They love them as they love Allāh.”

[Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:165]

- the belief that there are those who know the *Unseen* as well as *Allāh*. This is very common among some of the *deviant sects*

such as the *Rāfiḍīs* (*Shī'ah*), extreme *Ṣūfīs*, and *Bāṭinīs* (*esoteric sects*) in general. The *Rāfiḍīs* believe that their imāms have knowledge of the *Unseen*, the *Bāṭinīs* and *Ṣūfīs* believe similar things about their *awliyā-* (“*saints*”), and so on. It is also *shirk* to believe that there is someone who bestows *mercy* in a manner that is befitting only for *Allāh*, as no one can ever have the ability to show mercy or the authority to forgive sins as *Allāh* does. Such a person claims he shows *mercy* as *Allāh* does and *forgives sins* and overlooks the *bad deeds* of his *worshipers*.

Greater shirk may sometimes take the form of words such as:

- the words of those who make *du‘ā-* or *ṣalāh* (*prayer*) to someone other than *Allāh*, or seek his *help* or seek *refuge* with him with regard to matters over which no one has control except *Allāh*, whether the person called upon is a *Prophet*, a *walī* (“*saint*”), an *angel* or a *jinn*, or some other *created being*. This is a form of *greater shirk* which puts one beyond the pale of *Islām*.
- the words of those who make fun of *religion* or who *liken Allāh* to *His creation*, or say that there is *another creator, provider* or *controller* besides *Allāh*. All of these are *greater shirk* and a *grave sin* that is *not forgiven*.

Greater shirk may sometimes take the form of actions such as:

- the actions of one who *sacrifices, prays* or *prostrates* to something other than *Allāh*, or who *promulgates laws* to replace the *rulings of Allāh* and makes that the law to which people are obliged to refer for *judgment*; or one who supports the *kāfirs* and helps them against the *believers*, and other acts that go against the basic meaning of *īmān* (*faith*) and put the one who does them beyond the pale of *Islām*. We ask *Allāh* to keep us safe and sound.

“Say: “I seek refuge with (Allāh) the Lord of the daybreak; from the evil of what He has created. And from the evil of the darkening (night) as it comes with its darkness; (or the moon as it sets or goes away). And from the evil of the witchcrafts when they blow in the knots. And from the evil of the envier when he envies. ”

[Sūrah al-Falaq, 113:1-5]

THE SECOND: ASH-SHIRK AL-ASGHAR (THE LESSER SHIRK)

This includes everything that may lead to *greater shirk*, or which is described in the texts as being *shirk*, but does not reach the extent of being *greater shirk*.

This is usually of two types:

1. Being emotionally attached to some means which have no basis; for which *Allāh* has not given permission, such as *hanging up “hands”, turquoise beads, etc.*, on the grounds that they *offer protection* or that they *ward off the evil eye*. However, *Allāh* has not made them the means of such *protection*, either according to *sharī’ah* or according to the *laws of the universe*. [Translator’s note: the “*hands*” referred to are objects made of metal, pottery, etc., usually blue or turquoise in color, which some people hang up to ward off the *evil eye*, according to their mistaken belief]
2. Venerating some people or things in a way that does not go so far as ascribing *lordship* to them, such as swearing by something other than *Allāh*, or saying, “Were it not for *Allāh and So-and-So*,” etc.

The scholars have set guidelines to distinguish *greater shirk* from *lesser shirk* when ‘*shirk*’ is mentioned in the texts of *sharī’ah*. These guidelines include the following:

- (i) When the Prophet (ﷺ) states clearly that this action is *lesser shirk*, such as in al-Musnad (27742) where it is narrated that **Maḥmūd ibn Labīd said: The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said: “The thing that I fear most for you is lesser shirk.” They said: “O Messenger of Allāh, what is lesser shirk?” He said: “Showing off, for Allāh will say on the Day when people are recompensed for their actions: ‘Go to those for whom you were showing off with your deeds in the world, and see what reward you find with them.’”** [Classed as *ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Albānī in *as-Silsilah aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah*, 951]

“So woe unto those performers of Ṣalāh (prayers) (hypocrites); those who delay their Ṣalāh (prayer) from their stated fixed times; those who do good deeds only to be seen (by men i.e. to show off),”
[Sūrah al-Mā’ūn, 107:4-6]

- (ii) When the word *shirk* is used in the texts of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* in the *indefinite form* [without the definite article, *al-*]. This usually refers to *lesser shirk*, and there are many examples of this, such as when the **Prophet (ﷺ) said: “Incantations, amulets and love spells are shirk.”** Narrated by *Abū Dāwūd*, 3883 [Classed as *ṣaḥīḥ* by *al-Albānī* in *as-Silsilah aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah*, 331]. What is meant by *shirk* here is *lesser shirk*, not *greater shirk*. *Amulets* are things that some people hang on children such as *turquoise beads* and the like, which they claim will *protect them from the evil eye*. Some people also perform *love spells*, claiming that it will *make a woman beloved to her husband and a man beloved to his wife*.
- (iii) If the *Ṣaḥābah* understood from the texts of *sharī'ah* that what was meant by *shirk* here was *lesser shirk*, not *greater*. Undoubtedly the *understanding* of the *Ṣaḥābah* carries weight, because they are the *most knowledgeable* of the people concerning the *religion of Allāh*, and the *most knowledgeable* as to the *intent of the Lawgiver*. For example, *Abū Dāwūd* (3910) **narrated from Ibn Mas'ūd (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “Ṭiyarah (superstitious belief in omens) is shirk, ṭiyarah is shirk,” three times, and there is no one among us but (will have some of that) but Allāh will rid him of it by means of tawakkul (putting his trust in Allāh).**” The words “*there is no one among us...*” are the words of *Ibn Mas'ūd (رضي الله عنه)*, as was explained by the prominent *scholars of ḥadīth*. This indicates that *Ibn Mas'ūd (رضي الله عنه)* understood that this was *lesser shirk*, because he could not have said, “*There is no one among us...*” referring to *greater shirk*. Moreover, *greater shirk* cannot be eliminated by means of *tawakkul*, rather it is essential to *repent* therefrom.
- (iv) If the *Prophet (ﷺ)* interpreted the words, *shirk* or *kufr*, in a manner which indicates that what is meant is a *lesser form* thereof and not the *greater form*. For example, *al-Bukhārī* (1038) and *Muslim* (74) **narrated from Zayd ibn Khālīd al-Juhānī that he said: The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) led the morning prayer for us at al-Ḥudaybiyah following rainfall during the night. When the Prophet (ﷺ)**

finished, he turned to face the people and said to them: “Do you know what your Lord has said?” They said: “Allāh and his Messenger know best.” He said: “This morning one of My slaves became a believer in Me and one a disbeliever. As for him who said: ‘We have been given rain by the grace of Allāh and His mercy,’ that one is a believer in Me and a disbeliever in the stars; and as for him who said: ‘We have been given rain by such-and-such a star, that one is a disbeliever in Me and a believer in the stars.’”

The interpretation of the word *kufr* here is given in another report *narrated from Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) who said: The Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: “Do you not know what your Lord said? ‘I do not send any blessing upon My slaves but a group among them become kāfirs thereby because they refer to the stars and attribute things to the stars.* This explains that if a person attributes *rainfall* to the *stars* by believing that they caused it to fall – when in fact *Allāh* has not made the *stars* a *means of causing rainfall* – his *kufr* is a form of *ingratitude* for the *blessing of Allāh*. It is well known that *ingratitude* for the *blessing of Allāh* is *lesser kufr*. But if a person believes that the *stars* are *controlling the universe* and they are the ones that *cause the rain to fall*, then this is *greater shirk*.

Lesser shirk may sometimes take the form of *outward actions*, such as *wearing talismans, strings, amulets and the like*, as well as other *words and deeds*. It may sometimes it may be *hidden*, such as *showing off*.

Lesser shirk may sometimes take the form of beliefs such as:

- the belief that something may be a cause of bringing benefit or warding off harm, when *Allāh* has not made it so.
- the belief that there is *barakah (blessing)* in a *thing*, when *Allāh* has not made it so.

Lesser shirk may sometimes take the form of words such as:

- when they said, “*We have been given rain by such and such a star,*” without *believing* that that the *stars* could *independently* cause *rain* to fall.
- *swearing by something other than Allāh*, without *believing in it, venerating it* or regarding it as *equal with Allāh*.

- saying, “whatever Allāh wills and you will,” and so on.

Lesser shirk may sometimes take the form of actions such as:

- hanging up *amulets* or wearing a *talisman* or *string* to *dispel* or *ward off calamity*, because everyone who attributes powers to a *thing* when Allāh has not made it so, either according to *shari’ah* or according to the *laws of the universe*, has associated something with Allāh. This also applies to one who touches a *thing* seeking its’ *barakah* (blessing), when Allāh has not created any *barakah* in it, such as *kissing the doors of the mosques, touching their thresholds, seeking healing from their dust*, and other such actions. This is a brief look at the *division of shirk into greater and lesser*.

CONCLUSION

A Muslim must avoid shirk in both its lesser and greater forms. The greatest sin is shirk and transgression against the unique rights of Allāh, which are to be worshiped and obeyed Alone, with no partner or associate.

Hence, Allāh has decreed that the *mushrikīn* will abide forever in Hell and has told us that *He will not forgive them. He has forbidden Paradise to them*, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily! Allāh forgives not [the sin of] setting up partners in worship (Shirk) with Him, but He forgives sins other than that for whom He pleases, and whoever sets up partners in worship with Allāh, has indeed strayed far away.” [Sūrah an-Nisā-, 4:116]

“Verily, whosoever sets up partners (in worship) with Allāh, then Allāh has forbidden Paradise to him, and the Fire will be his abode. And for the *Zālimūn* (polytheists and wrongdoers) there are no helpers.”
[Sūrah al-Mā-idah, 5:72]

Every wise and religiously-committed person should *fear shirk* for himself and should *turn to his Lord*, asking Him to help him avoid *shirk*, as *al-Khalīl* [Ibrāhīm (ﷺ)] said (interpretation of the meaning):

“and keep me and my sons away from worshiping idols.”
[Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:35]

One of the *salaf* said: “**Who can claim to be safe from this after Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام)?**” So the sincere believer’s fear of *shirk* should increase as should his desire for his Lord to keep him away from it, and he should say the great *du‘ā*- which the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) taught to his companions when he said to them:

“Shirk among you will be more subtle than the footsteps of an ant, but I will teach you something which, if you do it, both lesser and greater shirk will be kept away from you. Say:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أَشْرِكَ بِكَ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

Allāhumma innī a‘ūdhu bika an ushrika bika wa-anā a‘lam wa-astaghfiruka limā lā a‘lam

(O Allāh, I seek refuge with You from associating anything with You knowingly, and I seek Your forgiveness for that of which I am unaware).”

[Classed as *ṣaḥīḥ* by *al-Albānī* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘*, 3731]

The above refers to the difference between *greater* and *lesser shirk*, defining each and describing its types. With regard to the difference between them as far as the ruling is concerned: *Greater shirk* puts a person beyond the pale of *Islām*. Therefore, the one who does that is judged to be *out of Islām* and to have *apostatized* therefrom, so he is a *kāfir* and an *apostate*. *Lesser shirk* does not put a person beyond the pale of *Islām*. Rather, it may be done by a *Muslim* but he still remains in *Islām*; but the one who does that is in *great danger* because *lesser shirk* is a *greater sin*. **Ibn Mas‘ūd (رضي الله عنه) said: “If I were to swear by Allāh falsely, that is better for me than if I were to swear by something other than Him sincerely.”** Meaning, he regarded *swearing by something other than Allāh* (which is *lesser shirk*) as being worse than *swearing by Allāh falsely*, and it is well known that *swearing by Allāh falsely* is a *major sin*.

We ask Allāh to make our hearts steadfast in adhering to His religion until we meet Him, and we seek refuge in His Might – may He be glorified – from going astray, for He is the Ever-Living Who never dies, but the jinn and mankind will die. And Allāh knows best and is most wise, and to Him is the final return of all.

الشرك

صَرَفُ شَيْءٍ مِنْ أَنْوَاعِ الْعِبَادَةِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ وَجِبِّكَ

ASH-SHIRK: AVERTING OF SOMETHING FROM THE TYPES OF WORSHIP TOWARDS OTHER THAN ALLĀH, THE ALMIGHTY

NARRATED BY ANAS BIN MĀLIK (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ)

THAT THE MESSENGER OF ALLĀH (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) SAID:

“ALLĀH, BLESSED IS HE AND MOST HIGH, SAID: ‘O SON OF ĀDAM! VERILY AS LONG AS YOU CALLED UPON ME AND HOPED IN ME, I FORGAVE YOU, DESPITE WHATEVER MAY HAVE OCCURRED FROM YOU, AND I DID NOT MIND. O SON OF ĀDAM! WERE YOUR SINS TO REACH THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY, THEN YOU SOUGHT FORGIVENESS FROM ME, I WOULD FORGIVE YOU, AND I WOULD NOT MIND. O SON OF ĀDAM! IF YOU CAME TO ME WITH SINS NEARLY AS GREAT AS THE EARTH, AND THEN YOU MET ME NOT ASSOCIATING ANYTHING WITH ME (IN WORSHIP), I WOULD COME TO YOU WITH FORGIVENESS NEARLY AS GREAT AS IT.’”

[AT-TIRMIDHI]



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