

Shirk and its types (part 1 of 3)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Introduction

The Arabic word shirk¹ is the opposite of Tawheed, Allaah's oneness and uniqueness, and is more inclusive than polytheism and idolatry. Shirk contradicts the very purpose of creation as expressed in the Qur'aan:

["I have not created jinn or mankind except to worship Me."]²

Prophets were sent with the mission to eradicate shirk and to invite humanity to single out Allaah in worship.

What is shirk?

Shirk is to associate someone other than Allaah in those aspects which are unique to Allaah and His exclusive right. Shirk is to worship created beings like Allaah is worshipped, to venerate created beings like Allaah must be venerated, and to assign a portion of His divinity to someone else.

Severity of Shirk

There is no issue upon which Islaam is so strict as the one of Tawheed (monotheism). Therefore, shirk is considered the greatest violation with which the Lord of the heavens and the earth is defied. The severity of shirk can be summarised in the following points:

- Shirk makes the Creator like His creation, in that matters that are exclusive to Allaah are associated with others who have no right to it. Therefore, Allaah declares shirk to be the greatest wrong,

["Indeed to ascribe partners (unto Him) is a tremendous wrong."]³

- Allaah has declared that He will not forgive the sin of shirk unless the person repents from it,

["Surely Allaah forgives not that a partner should be set up with Him, and forgives all besides that to whom He pleases."]⁴

¹ The "I" is pronounced like the "I" in the word "dip"

² Qur'aan [51:56]

³ Qur'aan [31:13]

Shirk and its types (part 1 of 3)

- Allaah has forbidden Paradise to those who do not repent from committing shirk, condemning him to Hell for eternity,
[**“Surely whoever associates (others) with Allaah, Allaah has forbidden to him Paradise and his abode is the Fire.”**]⁵
- All the good works a person may have done are lost, become worthless, and are rendered vain if a person dies unrepentant of shirk,
[**“And certainly, it has been revealed to you and to those before you: if you should associate (anything) with Allaah, your work would surely become worthless, and you would surely be among the losers.”**]⁶
- Shirk is the deadliest of all major sins. On one occasion, the Prophet, may Allaah praise him, asked his companions if they knew what was greatest of all major sins. He then explained to them,
“The major sins are: shirk, not being kind to one’s parents...”⁷

Types of Shirk

- (1) Greater Shirk (Shirk Akbar)
- (2) Lesser Shirk (Shirk Asghar)

Definition of Greater Shirk

Greater Shirk is associating others with Allaah in those aspects which are unique to Allaah in his person taking a rival or associate unto Allaah and making it an equal to Allaah.

Shirk in Allaah Being the Lord

This category includes:

- **Atheism (the belief that human beings have no Lord).**
Pharaoh denied the existence of Allaah and claimed his own self to be the Lord over Moses and the people of Egypt. He announced to people:

⁴ Qur’aan [4:48]

⁵ Qur’aan [5:72]

⁶ Qur’aan [39:65]

⁷ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree, Saheeh Muslim

Shirk and its types (part 1 of 3)

["I am your Lord, Most High."]⁸

Modern day philosophers that deny the existence of Allaah or scientists who consider the universe created itself or has no beginning or end fall under this category. Also, the idea that nature itself is God, or that God dwells within His creation is also shirk.

- **The belief that Allaah shares His rule and control over the creation.**

People who fall into this category are those who may believe in Allaah's powers and abilities, but also believe that Allaah is several "persons," that He is somehow "split" into different beings. An example is Christians who believe that Allaah is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, all at the same time. Also, Hindus believe in One God who takes the forms of Brahma – the creator-god, Vishnu – the preserver-god, and Shiva – the destroyer-god. Islaam teaches that Allaah is One in every sense: perfect, indivisible, and complete.

Another example of this shirk is held by people who pray to the dead. They believe the souls of the saints and other people can meddle in the affairs of mortal men, that somehow the departed souls can cause change in the life of men and women by answering their prayers or in other ways. The truth is that the dead have no power over the lives of the living; they cannot answer anyone's prayers, nor protect them, nor grant their wishes.

Greater Shirk: Shirk In Allaah's Names and Attributes

Making Allaah like the creation or making the creation like Allaah is the essence of shirk on Allaah's Names and Attributes. It can be further classified into two types:

- Humanizing Allaah by giving Him attributes similar to humans is shirk. Depictions of God in paintings and sculpture are of this type. Christianity, the major religion of the West, views God in human terms, as Jesus is considered God incarnate by them, so it naturally produced the likes of Michelangelo who depicted the Face and Hand of 'God' in paintings. Hindus worship countless idols as forms of God. On the contrary, the Muslim tradition has been clear on this point because of the Qur'aan's clear teachings,

["There is nothing like Him, and He sees and hears all things."]⁹

⁸ Qur'aan [79:24]

⁹ Qur'aan [42:11]

Shirk and its types (part 1 of 3)

- Another form of this type of shirk is when human beings are deified by giving them divine names or qualities. For example, the Christians raise Mary, the mother of Jesus, to a divine status by giving her some of Allaah's attributes, such as the Merciful. They also call Mary the mother of God, 'God' being a reference to her son Jesus. The latter they have called the Living God, the First and the Last – Names reserved for God alone. The Messenger of Allaah, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

“Allaah Almighty has said: ‘The son of Aadam... reviled Me and he had no right to do so... As for his reviling Me, it is his saying: Allaah has taken to Himself a son, while I am the One, the Everlasting Refuge. I beget not nor was I begotten, and there is none comparable to Me.’”¹⁰

¹⁰ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree and An-Nasaa'ee