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THE MEANING OF TAWHID AS THE FOUNDATION OF ISLAM | CIMS

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Belief in the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), is *the* central tenet of Islam and is part of the proclamation of faith (*shahāda*). Whilst there is agreement in the belief of one God, there are subtle theological differences in defining the scope of that oneness. The Centre for Intra-Muslim Studies (CIMS) held a discussion on this very topic, with Shaykh Muhammed Reza Tajri presenting a Shia perspective.

Quoting textual evidence, Shaykh Tajri presented the Shia theological understanding of *tawḥīd* in the essence of God (*tawḥīd fi al dhāt*) and the attributes of God (*fi as-ṣifāt*). He then went on to address some misconceptions about Shia belief through explaining the act of intermediation (*tawassul*) and the belief of *shafā'a* and their consistency with *tawḥīd*.

Tawḥīd in the essence of God as explained by the Shaykh is in reference to God being simple i.e., non-compound, and in being unique, based on the verse “*There is none like Him*”¹ which can also be substantiated by narrations². *Tawḥīd* in attributes is in reference to the non-divisibility between God and his attributes by considering them as two separate entities. For the Shaykh, the anthropomorphic verses in the Quran describing God having a face or a hand³ are not in contradiction to *tawḥīd* and are interpreted by Shia exegetes of the Quran metaphorically as alluding to God’s power or authority. The Shaykh then went on to explain *tawassul* as an active action of petitioning God via a means, which has a Qur’anic basis such as the verse “*and the Apostle had pleaded for them [to Allah] for forgiveness, they*

¹ Quran 42:11

² See Nahj al Balagha Sermon 1

³ See Quran 48:10, 2:115



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would have surely found Allah all-clement, all-merciful"⁴. The Shaykh was clear to distinguish between petitioning through someone and worshiping someone, which he evidences using the Quran⁵. *Shafā'a* on the other hand, has been mistranslated by the mainstream Shia as intercession according to Shaykh Tajri, however it is a theological belief not an action. His defined *shafā'a* based on the Quranic utilisation of the word to mean pairing or coupling⁶ which would then define *shafā'a* as being at one with Godly principles such as justice and being rewarded for that⁷.

Alluded to in the presentation and raised in the discussion, was questions around the act of asking the dead. Whilst *tawassul* has been accepted by mainstream Sunni scholars in reference to a living being, albeit not independent of God, a point of contention occurs regarding asking the dead. The mainstream Shia view on this would be that it is permitted and justified by the verse "*they are alive provided by their Lord*"⁸. Pointed out in the discussion were the actions of some Sufis and Shias that could be misconstrued as infringing on *tawhīd* such as the emphasis on symbolism, kissing of graves and calling out to the dead. However, as raised in the discussion, as long as it is being carried out as not being independent of God it would be considered fine, though it wouldn't be deemed recommended if it were to be misinterpreted by the lay people engaging in it, or by observers, as actions independent of God.

⁴ Quran 4:64 and 12:97-98

⁵ See Quran 39:3

⁶ See Quran 89:3

⁷ The establishment of *Shafā'a* can be made using the following verses Quran 20: 109, 2:255, 10:3, 19:87, 34:23 43:86

⁸ Quran 2:154