

God

existence – oneness – attributes

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Essentials of the Islamic Faith

All Prophets came with the same essentials of faith, which are also essentials of the Islamic Faith:

- belief in God's Existence and Unity,
- the world's final destruction,
- Resurrection and Judgment,
- prophethood and all Prophets without distinction,
- all Divine Scriptures,
- angels, and
- Divine Destiny and Decree (including human free will).

God's Existence, Oneness, and Attributes

The existence of God is too evident to need any arguments. Some prominent scholars even have stated that God is more manifest than any other being, but that those who lack insight cannot see Him. Others have said that He is concealed from direct perception because of the intensity of His Self-manifestation.

Knowledge of God

God Almighty should be considered from the following perspectives.

1. His "Essence" as Divine Being (*Zat*), which only He can know. God's Messenger says: "Do not reflect upon God's 'Essence'; instead, reflect upon 'His creation'" (Abu Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-Awliya'*, 6:67). God has no partners, likes, or resemblance, as indicated in:

There is nothing like Him. (42:11)

2. His Essential, “Innate” Qualities as being God, which are the Attributes’ source.
3. His Attributes, which are of three kinds:
 - a. Essential Attributes (Existence, Having No Beginning, Eternal Permanence, Being Unlike the Created, Self-Subsistence, Absolute Oneness, Uniqueness);
 - b. Positive Attributes (Life, Knowledge, Power, Speech, Will, Hearing, Seeing, Creating);
 - c. “Negative” Attributes, which are innumerable but can be summed up as “God is absolutely free from any defect and shortcoming.”

God is more manifest than any other being concealed from direct perception because of the intensity of His Self-manifestation.

The Attributes are the sources of the Names: Life gives rise to the All-Living, Knowledge to the All-Knowing, and Power to the All-Powerful. The Names are the sources of the acts:

giving life has its source in the All-Living, and knowing everything down to the smallest thing originates in the All-Knowing. God is “known” by His acts, Names, and Attributes. Whatever exists in the universe, in the material and immaterial worlds, is the result of the Names’ and Attributes’ manifestations: Universal and individual provision points to His Name the All-Providing, and the All-Healing is the source of remedies and patient recovery. Philosophy has its source in Wisdom, and so on. The acts, Names, and Attributes are the “links” between God and the created, or the “reflectors” with which to have knowledge of God.

Although we try to know or recognize God by His acts, Names, and Attributes, we must not think of Him in terms of

God is the highest comparison.

associating likeness or comparison unto Him, for nothing resembles Him. He is absolutely One, Single, and totally different from all that exists or has the potential to exist. In this sense, His Oneness is not in terms of number. He also has Unity and relations with the created. To have some knowledge of Him through His acts, Names, and Attributes, some comparisons are permissible. This is pointed to in:

For God is the highest comparison. (16:60)

Some of God's Names

In order to make Himself known, God Almighty mentions Himself with some Names or Titles, some of which are as follows:

- *Al-Rahman*: The All-Merciful (One Who has mercy for all His creation and provides for them their sustenance).
- *Al-Rahim*: The All-Compassionate (especially toward His believing servants).
- *Al-Fard*: The Absolutely Independent One.
- *Al-Ahad*: The All-Unique, Peerless.
- *Al-Hayy*: The All-Living (One Who has no beginning and no end, Who lives and does not die).
- *Al-Qayyum*: The Self-Subsistent (Who takes care of and maintains His creation).
- *Al-Adl*: The All-Just.
- *Al-Samad*: The Self-Sufficient (Who needs no one and Whom everyone else needs).
- *Al-Quddus*: The All-Holy (and One Who keeps the universe clean).

- *Al-Haqq*: The Truth (One Who always says, does, and orders the truth and establishes it, and in Whose decrees and acts there is nothing false, meaningless, and useless).
- *Al-Hakim*: The All-Wise (having absolute wisdom in All His decrees and acts).
- *Al-'Alim*: The All-Knowing (One Who knows all that is hidden from us and all that is known to us).
- *Al-Sami'*: The All-Hearing.
- *Al-Basir*: The All-Seeing (One Who witnesses all things and events).
- *Al-Qadir*: The All-Powerful (Who has absolute power over all things).
- *Al-Razzaq*: The All-Providing.
- *Al-'Azim*: The All-Mighty.
- *Al-Kabir*: The All-Great.
- *Al-Khaliq*: The Creator.
- *Al-Mawla*: The Guardian (One Who owns, guards, and supports His creatures, and Who provides victory and protection to those who do what He has commanded and avoid what He has forbidden).
- *Al-'Aliy*: The All-High (One Who is High above everyone in His power and status).
- *Al-'Aziz*: The All-Honored and Triumphant with irresistible might.
- *Al-'Afuw*: The One Who overlooks and pardons His servants' sins and faults.
- *Al-Hafiz*: The All-Protecting.
- *Al-Halim*: The All-Clement (One Who is forbearing, mild, and gentle. He is patient and does not rush to punish His servants for their sins).
- *Al-Ghafur*: The One Who forgives the sins and mistakes of His servants.
- *Al-Karim*: The All-Generous (One Who is noble, generous, and gracious).
- *Al-Wadud*: The All-Loving.
- *Al-Wahhab*: The One Who bestows mercy and success upon His creation.

- *Al-Nasir*: The All-Helping (and One Who gives victory to His believing servants).
- *Al-Ra'uf*: The All-Pitying.
- *Al-Shakur*: The One Who rewards His servants for their good deeds much more than they deserve.
- *Al-Tawwab*: The One Who enables His servants to turn to Him in repentance and accepts their sincere repentance.

Tawhid (God's Oneness)

First, the most fundamental and important teaching of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is belief in the Oneness or Unity of God. This is expressed in the primary word (*kalima*) of Islam as: "There is no deity but God" (La ilaha illa'llah). This phrase is the bedrock of Islam, its foundation and its essence.

All religions revealed to the Prophets have the same essence. Over time, however, the original message was misinterpreted, mixed with superstition, and degenerated into magical practices and meaningless rituals. The conception of God, the very core of religion, was debased by anthropomorphism, deifying angels, associating others with God, and considering Prophets or godly people as incarnations.

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, rejected such theological trends and restored the conception of God as the only Creator, Sustainer, and Master of all creation to its pristine purity. Thus, as John Davenport puts it:

Among many excellencies of which the Qur'an may justly boast are two eminently conspicuous: the one being the tone of awe and reverence which it always observes when speaking of, or referring to, the Deity, to Whom it never attributes human frailties and passions; the other the total absence throughout it of all impure, immoral and indecent

ideas, expressions, narratives, etc., blemishes, which, it is much to be regretted, of too frequent occurrence in the Jewish scriptures. (Davenport, *An Apology for Muhammed and the Qur'an*, London, 1869)

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Tawhid is the highest conception of Godhead, the knowledge of which God has sent to humanity throughout history by means of His Prophets. This was the knowledge with which Adam

was sent down to Earth; the same knowledge that God revealed to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and which Muhammad brought to humanity, God's blessings be upon them all. It is knowledge, pure and absolute, without the least shade of ignorance. It dispels all the clouds of ignorance and illuminates the horizon with the light of reality.

But who can create and control this majestic universe? Only He can do so Who is Master of all; Who is Infinite and Eternal; Who is All-Powerful, All-Wise, Omnipotent and Omniscient; Who is All-Knowing and All-Seeing. He must have supreme authority over all that exists in the universe. He must possess limitless powers, must be Lord of the universe and all that it contains, must be free from every flaw and weakness, and none may have the power to interfere with His work. Only such a Being can be the Creator, the Controller and the Governor of the universe.

Moreover, it is essential that all of these Divine Attributes and powers must be vested in One Being. It is impossible for two or more personalities having

equal powers and attributes to coexist, for they would be bound to collide. Therefore, there must be one and only one Supreme Being having control over all others. You cannot think of two governors for the same province or two supreme commanders of the army!

Similarly, the distribution of these powers among different deities, so that, for instance, one of them is all-knowing, the other all-providing, and still another life-

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giver, and each having an independent domain, is also unthinkable. The universe is an indivisible whole, and each such deity would be dependent upon others in carrying out its task. A lack of coordination would be bound to occur. And if this happened, the world would fall to pieces. These attributes are also non-transferable. It is not possible that a certain attribute might be present in a certain deity at one time and at another time be found in another deity. A divine being who is incapable of remaining alive himself cannot give life to others. The one who cannot protect his own divine power cannot be suited to govern the vast limitless universe.

The Meaning of the Kalima al-Tawhid

In Arabic, *ilah* means “one who is worshipped,” in other words a being that, on account of its greatness and power, is considered worthy of worship, to be bowed to in humility and submission. The concept *ilah* also includes the possession of infinite power, conveys the sense that others are dependent upon it, and that it is not dependent upon anyone else. The word *ilah* also carries a sense of concealment and

mystery. The Persian word *khuda*, as well as *deva* in Hindi and god in English, have similar connotations. Other languages also contain words with a similar meaning.

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On the other hand, the word *Allah*, which we tend to render in English as *God*, is the essential personal name of God.

La ilaha illa'llah literally means: "There is no *ilah* other than the One Great Being known by the name Allah." It means that the universe contains no being worthy of worship other than Allah, that we should bow in submission and adoration only to Him, that He is the only Being possessing all power, that we are in need of His favor, and that we are all obliged to seek His help. He is concealed from our senses, and our intellect cannot perceive what He is.

The One true God is a reflection of Islam's unique concept of God. To a Muslim, God is the Almighty, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, Who is similar to nothing and nothing is comparable to Him. When the Prophet's contemporaries asked him about God, He revealed *Surat al-Ikhlās*, which is considered the essence of unity or the motto of monotheism, as follows:

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate. Say (O Muhammad): He is God, the One, Unique. God is the Self-Sufficient (Who needs no one and Whom everyone else needs). He has not begotten, nor has been begotten, and there is none equal to Him. (112:1-4)

The Creator must be of a different nature from the things created, because if He is of the same

nature as they are, He will be temporal and will therefore need a maker. It follows that nothing is like Him. If the Maker is not temporal, He must be eternal. But if He is

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eternal, He cannot be caused. If nothing apart from Him causes Him to continue to exist, He must be Self-Sufficient and Self-Subsistent. If He does not depend upon anything for the continuance of His own Existence, this Existence can have no end. The Creator is therefore eternal and everlasting: "He is the First and the Last."

He is Self-Sufficient and Self-Subsistent or, to use a Qur'anic term, *as-Samad* and *al-Qayyum*. The Creator does not create only in the sense of bringing things into being, for He also preserves them, takes them out of existence, and is the ultimate cause of whatever happens to them.

'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Prophet's son-in-law and fourth Caliph) is reported to have said:

He is Being but not through the phenomenon of coming into being. He exists but not from non-existence. He is with everything but not by physical nearness. He is different from everything but not by physical separation. He acts but without the accompaniment of movements and instruments. He is the One, only such that there is none with whom He keeps company or whom He misses in his absence.

Islam rejects characterizing God in any human form or depicting Him as favoring certain individuals or nations on the basis of wealth, power, or race. He created human beings as equals. They may dis-

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or whom He misses in his
absence.***

tinguish themselves and obtain His favor only through virtue and piety.

Literally,
tawhid means

“unification” (making something one) or “asserting oneness.” It comes from the Arabic verb *wahhada* (to unite, unify, or consolidate). However, when used in reference to God, it means realizing and maintaining God’s Unity in all of our actions that directly or indirectly relate to Him. It is the belief that God is One, without partner in His dominion and His actions, without similitude in His Essence and Attributes, and without rival in His Divinity and in worship. These three categories are commonly referred to by the following titles: *Tawhid ar-Rububiya* (“Maintaining the Unity of Lordship”), *Tawhid al-Asma wal-Sifat* (“Maintaining the Unity of God’s Names and Attributes”), and *Tawhid al-‘Ibada* (“Maintaining the Unity of God’s Worship”).

Tawhid al-Rububiya is based upon the fundamental concept that God alone caused all things to exist when there was nothing, He sustains and maintains creation without any need from it or for it, and He is the sole Lord of the universe and its inhabitants without any real challenge to His sovereignty. In Arabic, the word used to describe this quality is *Rububiya*, which is derived from the root *Rabb* (Lord). According to this category, since God is the only real power in existence, it is He Who has given all things the power to move and to change. Nothing happens in creation except what He allows to happen. In recognition of this reality, Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, often would repeat the exclamatory phrase *La hawla wa la*

quwwata illa bi'llah (There is neither strength, nor power, save with God).

Tawhid al-Asma wal-Sifat has four aspects. In order to maintain the unity of God's Names and Attributes in the first

God sustains and maintains creation without any need from it or for it.

aspect, God must be referred to according to how He and His Prophet have described Him and called Him. The second aspect involves referring to God as He has referred to Himself, without giving Him any new names or attributes. In the third aspect, God is referred to without giving Him the attributes of His creation. For example, He cannot be said to rest or sleep, for this would give Him some of the attributes belonging to His creation. Nor can He be portrayed as "repenting" for His "bad thoughts," for this is what people do after they realize their errors. The attributes of hearing and seeing are among human attributes, but are without comparison in their perfection when attributed to the Divine Being. In other words, God does not need eyes and ears to possess these attributes. The fourth aspect requires that no person can be given the attributes of God in their perfection.

In spite of the wide implications of the first two categories, firm belief in them alone is not sufficient to fulfill the Islamic requirements of *tawhid*. *Tawhid al-Rububiya* and *Tawhid al-Asma wal-Sifat* must be accompanied by their complement, *Tawhid al-'Ibada*, in order for *tawhid* to be considered complete according to Islam. It requires that all forms of worship must be directed only to God, because He alone deserves worship and can grant benefit to created beings as a result of His worship. Furthermore, there is no need for any intermediary between humanity and God. God emphasized the importance of direct-

ing worship to Him alone by pointing out that this was the main purpose for creating jinn and humanity, and the essence of the Message brought by all Prophets.

***“You alone do we worship
and from You alone do we
seek help.”***

Consequently, the gravest sin is *shirk* (the worship of others instead of God or along with God). In *Surat al-*

Fatiha, which every Muslim recites in his or her prayers at least 17 times daily, verse four reads: *You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help*, a clear statement that all forms of worship should be directed only to the One Who can respond: God.

The study of *tawhid* cannot be considered complete without a careful analysis of its opposite: *shirk*. *Shirk* literally means partnership, sharing, or associating. In Islamic terms, however, it refers to assigning partners to God in whatever form it may take.

Kinds of Associating Partners with God (Shirk)

One may associate partners with God in His Rububiya, Asma wal-Sifat, and ‘Ibada.

Shirk in al-Rububiya. This kind of *shirk* refers either to the belief that others share in God’s Lordship over creation as His equal or near equal, or that there exists no Lord over creation at all. In the first case, *shirk* by association, this means that a main God or Supreme Being over creation is recognized; however His dominion is shared by lesser deities, spirits, mortals, heavenly bodies, or earthly objects. According to Islam, all such systems are polytheistic. In the second case, *shirk* by negation, the various philosophies and ideologies almost amount to an explicit or implicit denial of God’s Existence. For

example, pantheism and monism fall into this category.

Shirk in al-Asma wal-Sifat. This includes both the common pagan practice of giving God the attributes of His creation as well as the act of giving created beings God's Names and Attributes in their

"Surely We have sent to every nation a Messenger ordering, worship God and avoid Taghut (false gods)."

absolute meaning particular to God. In the first case, *shirk* by humanization, God is given the form and qualities of human beings and animals. Due to humanity's superiority over animals, the human form is more commonly used by idolaters to represent God in creation. Consequently, the image of the Creator is often painted, molded, or carved in the shape of human beings possessing the physical features of those who worship them. In the second case, *shirk* by deification, created beings or things are given or claim God's Names or His Attributes in their absolute meaning particular to God.

Shirk in al-'Ibada. This means to direct acts of worship to other than God, and to seek the reward for worship from the creation instead of the Creator. This category also has two main aspects, as follows:

• ***Al-shirk al-akbar (major shirk).*** This occurs when any act of worship is directed to that which is not God. It represents the most obvious form of idolatry, which God sent all Prophets to call upon humanity to abandon. This concept is supported by:

Surely We have sent to every nation a Messenger ordering, worship God and avoid Taghut (false gods). (16:36)

Nature and humanity are two "books" written with different material but having the same meaning.

Taghut actually means anything that demands worship and is worshipped along with God or instead of God. Much emphasis has been placed on such evil, for it contradicts the very purpose of creation as expressed in God's statement:

I have not created jinn or humanity except to worship Me. (51:56)

Major *shirk* represents the greatest act of rebellion against the Lord of the Universe, and is thus the ultimate sin that virtually cancels all of a person's good deeds and guarantees its perpetrator eternal damnation in Hell. Consequently, false religion is based primarily upon this type of *shirk*. All human-made systems in one way or another invite their followers to the worship of creation.

•*Al-shirk al-asghar (minor shirk)*. God's Messenger said: "The thing I fear for you the most is *al-shirk al-asghar*." The Companions asked: "O Messenger of God, what is minor *shirk*?" He replied: "Showing off (*al-riya'*), for God will say on the Day of Resurrection when people are receiving their rewards: 'Go to those for whom you were showing off in the material world and see if you can find any reward from them.'" He also declared: "O people, beware of secret *shirk*!" The people asked: "O Messenger of God, what is secret *shirk*?" He replied: "When a person gets up to pray and

strives to beautify his prayer because people are looking at him, that is secret *shirk*.” (al-Daylami, *al-Firdaws*, 2:376)

Divine Love as the Reason behind Existence

There is an inseparable relation between God, nature, and humanity. Nature and humanity are two “books” written with different material but having the same meaning. The reason behind their existence is Divine Love.

The All-Merciful and Compassionate One has spread out a vast food-laden table on Earth’s face and causes Earth to travel in the space with all of its inhabitants.

Suppose a kind, compassionate, and generous person wills to feed some very poor, hungry, and destitute people. So, he prepares a banquet on his fine ship and watches them from above while they eat. You may understand how much of their grateful enjoyment and happiness they can express only by giving thanks and praising that noble and generous person so that he is pleased and exhilarated.

In the same way, the All-Merciful and Compassionate One has spread out a vast food-laden table on Earth’s face and causes Earth to travel in the space with all of its inhabitants. He feeds them from the food on this table and invites those of His servants who are infinitely hungry and destitute to Paradise’s everlasting gardens. He prepares each garden as if it were a magnificent table laid out with all kinds of food and drink, which are of pure pleasure and delight. Consider the pleasure and happiness that the above-mentioned person feels at his guests’ enjoyment, although he is not the true owner of what he offers, and then compare it with the indescribable sacred love and pleasure felt by the All-Merciful One.

Each Divine Name contains many sorts of beauty, grace, and perfection, as well as many levels of love, pride, honor, and grandeur.

Consider another example. If a skilful technician invents something that works as intended, he or she is pleased and says: "What wonders God has willed." The Majestic Maker invented the vast universe. He made Earth (in general) and each creature in it (in particular), especially our head, in such a way that science should be lost in admiration. Each creature displays the expected results to the utmost degree and in a very beautiful way. Their obedience to God's laws for the universe's creation and operation, which comprise their worship, glorification, and specific praise and exaltation of Him, as well as the attainment of Divine purposes for their lives, please Him to a degree beyond our comprehension.

Or, say a just judge receives great pleasure from doing and establishing justice, and becomes extremely happy when he or she can restore the rights of the oppressed against the oppressor. Compare with this the sacred meanings arising from the reality that the Absolutely Just Ruler, the Majestic Overwhelming One, gives all creatures the right of existence. He gives animate beings the right of life, protects and maintains their existence and lives against aggression, restores all rights in the universe, acts with absolute justice, and will judge humanity and jinn in the Hereafter and establish absolute justice.

As in the examples above, each Divine Name contains many sorts of beauty, grace, and perfection, as well as many levels of love, pride, honor, and grandeur. This is why some exacting scholars, who

manifest the Divine Name the All-Loving, have concluded: “The essence of the universe is love. All creatures move with the motive of love. All laws of attraction, rapture, and gravity originate in love.” One of them even said:

With love the spheres are intoxicated,
angels are intoxicated, and so are stars.
The heavens, the sun, the moon,
and Earth are intoxicated.
Intoxicated are the elements and plants
and trees and human beings.
All animate beings are intoxicated,
and so are all atoms of creation.

Every creature is intoxicated, according to its capacity, with the “wine” of Divine love. People love those who are kind to them, as well as true perfection and transcendent beauty. They also love those who are kind to those whom they love and for whom they have mercy. Given this, we can understand that the Majestic and Beautiful, the Most Beloved of Perfection, in each of Whose Names are innumerable treasuries of kindness, Who makes all those whom we love happy with His favors and is the source of countless perfections and levels of beauty and grace, is worthy of infinite love and the creation’s intoxication with His love. This is why some who have manifested the Divine Name the All-Loving have said: “We do not even want Paradise. A gleam of the Divine Love is eternally sufficient for us,” and why, as Prophet Muhammad said: “A single minute spent in beholding the Divine Beauty in Paradise excels all the bounties of Paradise.”

So, perfect love and all perfections attained through love are possible within the spheres of the universal manifestations of Divine Names upon beings as a whole (Unity) and the spheres of their par-

ticular manifestations upon individuals (Oneness or Uniqueness). Any perfections imagined outside of those spheres are false.

The Reason behind the Events in the Universe

If someone enthusiastically performs a natural or social duty, an observer may infer two reasons for doing so: the ultimate cause (what can be obtained from doing so) and the motive or necessary cause (one's yearning to do it and subsequent enjoyment in doing it). For example, eating when hungry gives some satisfaction [necessary cause], while food nourishes the body [ultimate cause].

***God's Beautiful Names
manifest themselves in
countless ways and
kinds.***

Likewise, the existence of the universe and the incessant, amazing activity in it are caused by two kinds of Divine Names and for two comprehensive purposes or results. The first purpose and cause is that God's Beautiful Names manifest themselves in countless ways and kinds. This causes multiplicity in creation. Further, the Divine Names manifest themselves incessantly and seek to display their works continuously. This causes the Book of the Universe, with all of its "sentences, words, and letters" to be renewed constantly. Each part of this Book, which is the manifestation of the Divine Names, is a sign or indication of the Sacred Divine Essence so that conscious living beings can know Him.

The second cause or purpose is that every creature is active because it yearns for and takes pleasure in activity. Activity itself is a pleasure. Likewise God, the Necessarily Existent Being and in conformity with His essential independence of creation and

absolute perfection, feels infinite sacred affection and love. Such affection and love cause an infinite sacred enthusiasm, which engenders a limitless sacred joy that, in turn, is the

God's compassion causes His creatures to attain their relative perfection by enabling them to realize their full potential.

source of infinite sacred pleasure. Due to this pleasure special to His Divine "Essence," God has infinite compassion. In turn, this compassion causes His creatures to attain their relative perfection by enabling them to realize their full potential. His creatures' perfection and the pleasure they find in attaining it pleases God so much that His infinite sacred pleasure requires the whirl of creation.

However, the followers of materialistic philosophy and secular natural sciences, unaware of this delicate Divine Wisdom, attribute such activity, which displays perfect knowledge, wisdom, and insight, to unconscious nature, blind coincidence, and causality. This causes them to fall into the dark pits of misguidance.