

What is Shirk?

Shirk is to affirm the special attributes of Allāh Ta'ālā for those besides Him, such as:

1. Affirming absolute disposal (*al-Tasarruf al-Mutlaq*) in the cosmos (*kawn*) by an absolute will (*al-Iradah al-Mutlaqah*), which is expressed as "*kun fayakun*" (Be! And it is)
2. Or affirming intrinsic knowledge (*al-'Ilm al-Dhāti*) which has not been obtained through acquisition (*Iktisāb*) by means of the senses, rational proof, dreams (*Manam*), inspiration (*Ilhām*) and their likes from both material and spiritual means
3. Or affirming the act of existentialising (*ijad*) the healing of a sick person
4. Or affirming a curse on an individual or displeasure upon him such that the object of this curse becomes penniless, sick or wretched; or affirming mercy and satisfaction with an individual, such that he becomes by means of this mercy and pleasure, rich, healthy, fit and happy.

These pre-Islamic *Mushrikīn* did not recognise a partner (*Shārik*) besides Allāh (Exalted is He) in the creation of substances (*Jawāhir*), i.e. the foundations of matter, and administration of cosmic affairs. They recognised that none had the power, when Allāh (Exalted is He) had established and decreed a thing, to impede or stop Him.

Their association (*Ishrāk*) was only in specific matters with respect to some servants of Allāh. They believed that just as a king dispatches his servants and his close companions to one of the corners of his kingdom to take charge of his affairs and he grants them full authority and power, similarly the Absolute King of Kings, Allāh Ta'ālā has indeed conferred the robe of divine power to some of His close servants, and He made their displeasure and pleasure effective for His other servants.

Because of this, they would believe it necessary to acquire the proximity of these servants until this became a means of the validity of being accepted in the presence of the True King. Hence, they believed that the intercession of these false deities would obtain privilege and acceptance from Allāh when deeds are recompensed and accounted.

Due to this misguided perception which was firmly rooted in their minds, they were incited them to prostrate before them and slaughter on their behalf, and take oaths upon their names and seek help (*Isti'ānah*). They carved their statues from stone, brass, copper etc. and made them a Qiblah (direction of worship) in order to turn to their spirits; and the ignorant gradually advanced in this manner until they began to worship these images and statues and

believed them to be gods (*Ālihah*) themselves, and confusion, doubt and great corruption occurred in their beliefs. - (*Al-Fawz al-Kabir fi Usul al-Tafsir*)

Shah Waliyullah Muḥaddith Dehlawi (Raḥimahullah) wrote on this issue: "All who go to the land of Ajmer or to the grave of some saint in order to request to fulfill a need, it is indeed a sin more grievous than murder and adultery. Its likeness is not but the likeness of those who worship the creation or like those who call on Al-Lāt and Al-'Uzza.

In the same work, he writes, "The definition of associating partners with Allāh in worship is glorifying (*Ta'zīm*) other than Allāh, intending thereby to come closer to Allāh (Exalted is He) and salvation in the Final Abode. One of the greatest diseases in this age of ours is their worship of their *shuyukh* when they are alive or worship of their graves when they are dead. The ignorant Muslims imitate the disbelievers of India [i.e. Hindus] in worshipping their idols that is amongst their ritual acts.

The definition of associating partners with Allāh in seeking help (*Isti'annah*) is to seek one's need from another while believing he has the power to accomplish it by applying his powerful will (*Sarf al-Iradah al-Nafidhah*), like curing the sick, giving life and death, giving provision and granting a child, and other things that are contained in the Names of Allāh. The definition of associating partners with Allāh in supplication (*Du'ā*) is to mention other than Allāh (Glorified is He) while believing this action of his will benefit him in his afterlife or in coming closer to Allāh, just as they mention their *shuyukh* when waking up in the morning." (*Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah*, 2:64)

He also discusses *Isti'annah* in relation to *shirk* in his masterpiece, *Hujjat Allāh al-Balighah*: "This concept [i.e. *shirk*] has various embodiments and forms, and the divine law only discusses embodiments and forms of it which the people practice with the intention of *shirk*, so that they become anticipated sources of *shirk* and customarily inseparable from it. This is similar to the practice of the divine law in establishing the causes that entail good or evil actions as being tantamount to those acts themselves. We want to alert you to those things, which Allāh has made anticipated sources (*Mazinnat*) of, *shirk* in the divine law brought by Nabi Muḥammad +, so that he forbade them.

Among them is that they used to request assistance with their needs such as in curing the sick and meeting the needs of the poor, from other than Allāh. They would make vows to them expecting the accomplishment of their purposes through these vows, and they would recite their names, hoping for their blessing.

Therefore, Allāh Ta'ālā made incumbent upon them that they say during their prayers: 'Thee alone do we worship, Thee alone do we seek for help' (Qur'an, 1:4). Moreover, He said, 'Call upon no one except God' (Qur'an, 72:18). The meaning of 'calling upon' is not worship as certain of the interpreters of the Qur'an said, it rather means 'seeking help' (*Isti'anaḥ*) according to the Qurān, 'No, but you call upon Him and He removes the thing because of which you call upon Him' (Qur'an, 6:41)." (*Hujjat Allāh al-Balighah*)

1. After explaining the condition of the *Mushrikīn*, Shah Waliyullah compares them with some Muslims of his time. He writes, "If you are hesitant in accepting the accuracy of what was said about the beliefs of the *Mushrikīn* and their deeds look at the superstition of this age, especially regarding the concepts of 'sainthood' (*Wilāyah*).

They believe the existence of saints in this age is impossible, and they attend the graves and holy places [of the early saints] and are afflicted by all kinds of *shirk*, *Bid'ah* and superstitions and distortion (*Tahrīf*) and assimilation (*Tashbīh*)- (*Al-Fawz al-Kabir*, p.26)

He wrote elsewhere: "Nabi + said, 'You will surely follow the ways of those who went before you, hand span for hand span, arm's length for arm's length, until if they were to enter the hole of a lizard, you would follow them.' We said, 'O Rasūl of Allāh! The Jews and Christians?' He said, 'Then who?'

Rasūlullah + spoke the truth for indeed we have seen men amongst the feeble of the Muslims taking the pious as lords besides Allāh and adopting their graves as mosques just as the Jews and Christians would do." (*Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah*, 2:134-5)