

Shirk 101

Compiled by Chris Caras based off of his studies

The Antithesis of Tawheed

{حُنَفَاءَ لِلَّهِ غَيْرَ مُشْرِكِينَ بِهِ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَكَأَنَّمَا خَرَّ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتَخَطَفَهُ الطَّيْرُ أَوْ تَهْوَى بِهِ
الرَّيْحُ فِي مَكَانٍ سَحِيقٍ (31) {سورة الحج

“Turning away from all else, towards Allah, not associating partners with Him; and whoever assigns partners to Allah, it is as if he had fallen from the sky, and the birds had snatched him, or the wind had thrown him to a far off place.” [22:31]

{فَكُبِّبُوا فِيهَا هُمْ وَالْغَاوُونَ (94) وَجُنُودُ إِبْلِيسَ أَجْمَعُونَ (95) قَالُوا وَهُمْ فِيهَا يَخْتَصِمُونَ
(96) تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كُنَّا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (97) إِذْ نُسَوِّيكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (98) وَمَا أَضَلَّنَا إِلَّا
الْمُجْرِمُونَ (99) فَمَا لَنَا مِنْ شَافِعِينَ (100) وَلَا صَدِيقٍ حَمِيمٍ (101) فَلَوْ أَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةً فَنَكُونُ
مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (102) إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (103) وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُو الْعَزِيزُ
الرَّحِيمُ (104) {سورة الشعراء

“Then they will be thrown on their faces into it (the Fire), they and those who were in error, and the whole army of Iblees all together. They will say while disputing therein, ‘By Allah, we were truly in a manifest error, when we equated you (false gods) with the Lord of the worlds; And none has brought us into error except the criminals; now we have no intercessors, nor any close friend (to help us). If we only had a chance to return (to the world), we shall truly be among the believers!’ Truly, in this is indeed a sign, yet most of them are not believers. And verily your Lord, He is truly the All-Mighty, the Most Merciful.” [26:94-104]

The Arabic root, sh-r-k [ش ر ك] sheen raa' kaaf, merely means “to associate”. Thus *an association* or partnership, as in business, is called sharikah in Arabic. And the common word for “participation” is musharakah. Those words have no negative connotation, unlike *shirk*.

After learning about the proper relationship between Allah and His creation, we can summarize *shirk* by saying it is proportioning or equating to the creation any of Allah’s exclusive characteristics or rights. This can occur in matters of creed regarding Allah’s attributes and sovereignty as well as worship of the heart or body if directed to other than Allah.

Scholars generally divide *shirk*¹ into two or three categories:

- **Major shirk**, which is apostatic, so whoever does it has committed an act of apostasy
- **Minor shirk**, which is a major sin, but does not remove its perpetrator from faith.
- **Hidden shirk**, as some scholars add a third category, to refer to shirk of the feelings of the heart.

We will look to all these meanings *insha’Allah*.

What came first in human history? Tawheed or Shirk?

Allah tells us that the first human was Adam, and that He taught Adam language. After Adam and Eve’s disobedience and fall from Paradise, they repented and Allah forgave them. Ibn ‘Abbaas says that ten generations existed between Adam and Noah², and that people during this era were all monotheistic, even if they had other sins.

Scholars of tafseer told the story of how shirk began, commenting on Allah’s statement,

{وَقَالُوا لَا تَذَرُنَّ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَلَا تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا وَلَا سُوَاعًا وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا (23)} سورة نوح

¹ I’ve chosen to leave “shirk” as it is. Its closest *linguistic* translation would be “association”. This suits the purpose but the word doesn’t carry with it the same gravity as “idolatry” and “polytheism”. However, these two words are also inadequate. Idolatry is typically used for the worship of tangible pictures and objects within close range, but shirk is much broader than that. As for polytheism, the belief in multiple gods, then it falls short because people believe “gods” to mean multiple creators, regardless of where the worship is directed. Also, it doesn’t cover the idea of assigning some divine characteristics to the creation. Thus, shirk is the best word for shirk.

² It is possible that he heard this from the Jews, since this number is also found in the Bible. Ten centuries or generations. Even if it is generations, a generation in their time could have lasted centuries, depending on how long a woman remains fertile. But unless our knowledge come from a Prophetic hadeeth, it’s okay to be a little skeptical. Carbon dating the alleged Noah’s ark in Turkey say that it is 100,000 years old. As for Adam, Allah knows best. If the black stone could be tested, it might reveal when Adam fell to earth, wallaahu a’lam.

“And they have said: ‘You shall not leave your gods, nor shall you leave Wadd, nor Suwaa', nor Yaghooth, nor Ya'ooq, nor Nasr.’ [71:23]

They said, “*They were righteous people between the time of Adam and Nuh, and they had followers who used to adhere to their guidance. Then, when they died, their companions who used to follow them said, 'If we make images of them, it will increase our desire to perform worship when we remember them.'* So they made images of them. Then, when those people died and other people came after them, Iblees approached them and said, ‘*They (your predecessors) used to worship these statues and they were granted rain by their worship of them.'* Thus, they (the latter people) worshipped them.”³

Contrarily, modern Western academics, after embracing atheism, believe that humans evolved from apes and then, as they were fearful of the world around them⁴, sought the help of supernatural powers behind the forces of nature to protect them. So, according to *today's*⁵ academics, they deified the sun, the moon, clouds and rain, fertility gods and goddesses, etc. Later, they decided to simplify things, or because they grew a little skeptical, and believed in **one God**. And now, they think the most advanced human understanding is to disbelieve in supernatural forces all together.

In response to these claims, we must first realize that monotheists leave no artifacts of their faith, and thus, archaeologists will not recognize the remains of a monotheistic settlement, and the earlier humanoid settlements they discovered have no traces of idolatry. It could also be because monotheistic settlements carried on and continued humanity. Whereas the polytheistic ones were the doomed.

{قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُشْرِكِينَ (42)}

سورة الروم

“Say: travel in the land and see what was the end of those before. Most were **idolaters/associationists**.”

[30:42]

³ See Tafseer ibn Katheer, quoting Muhammad ibn Qais from al-Tabaree concerning the aayah.

⁴ They really envision a very violent place. Take one step and a lightning bolt drops, and take another and a volcano sprouts up, etc. And envisioning as if humans showed up out of nowhere, but that's precisely what they are trying to deny. Strange.

⁵ Western academia, like science and history, etc. are constantly evolving. Since they do not have a divine scripture to serve as a foundation for their studies, they are frequently forced to revise and question long-held beliefs of theirs because it was originally proposed with only a scattered sampling and biased interpretation. As more evidences become clear, the former interpretation seems less viable and a new paradigm must be formed, if they're willing to accept that and overturn the “progress” of the last several decades or even centuries, depending on the field and topic. Most science prior to the 19th century was developed with a Christian worldview for better or worse.

{ فَلَوْلَا نَصْرُهُمُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قُرْبَانًا آلِهَةً بَلْ ضَلُّوا عَنْهُمْ وَذَلِكَ إِفْكُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ } (28) سورة الأحقاف

“Then why did those whom they had taken for gods besides Allah, as a way of approach (to Allah) not help them? Nay, but they vanished completely from them (when there came the torment). And that was their lie, and their inventions which they used to concoct.” [46:28]

Second, most of the communities that atheists recollect, such as the Romans and Greeks, were in fact pre-dated by the monotheistic communities of Israel. Even the “patriarchal period”—the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, pre-dated the polytheism of the Egyptians. Also, monotheism was known by other communities even earlier than this, as [many historians and archaeologists](#), for example, assert that before Hindu and Buddhist influence, their peoples were pure monotheists. The fact that human beings are *wired* by their *fitrah* to worship Allah Alone also strongly suggests that even if a community of peoples were without the influence of a prophet or Messenger in their history, they would still be inclined towards monotheism. However, because of Iblees’ influence on man, the vast majority turned away from *tawheed*.

Finally, the idea that if something can be “scientifically explained”, God doesn’t “exist therein”. Or if something remains mysterious, then there’s possibility for God to exist therein. This is called the “god of the gaps” theory which demonstrates the insincerity of atheists to understand God and religion. Going back to the famous “watchmaker analogy” it would be like finding a watch, and discovering that since it has gears, a battery, etc, then it must not have had a maker. Monotheists throughout time have always believed that God created a complex natural physical system of causes and affects, and does not *personally* touch any of it or show Himself in this lifetime.

Major Shirk

{إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا

بَعِيدًا (116) سورة النساء

“Verily, Allah forgives not (the sin of) **associating** [partners] with Him, but He forgives whom He wills, sins other than that, and whoever **associates** [anyone] with Allah, has indeed strayed far away.” [4:116]

Returning to our definition of *shirk*, it can be in Allah’s **characteristics** (creedal), or **rights** (word and action).

Examples of creedal include **believing** that someone else shares Allah’s exclusive abilities or attributes, like knowledge of all things, the ability to create, cause life and death, rule the universe, etc. This is not only in saying that another human has these abilities *in addition* to Allah—which is rarely claimed—but also includes saying that a person *shares* in Allah’s abilities or is *part of* the Godhead, like Jesus, or *is* God, like the Baha’is regarding Bahaa’ullah.

{لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ (72) لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (73) سورة المائدة

“Surely, they have disbelieved who say: ‘Allah is the Messiah, son of Maryam.’ But the Messiah said: ‘O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.’ Verily, whosoever sets up partners with Allah, then Allah has forbidden Paradise to him, and the Fire will be his abode. And for the wrong doers there are no helpers. Surely, disbelievers are those who said: ‘Allah is the third of the three.’ But there is no ilaah but One ilaah. And if they cease not from what they say, verily, a painful torment will befall on the disbelievers among them.” [5:72-73]

As for the claim that there are several *creators* or multiple *controllers* of the universe (even with only one creator), this is also *shirk*, even though the subjects are invented and never existed,

{ يَا صَاحِبِي السِّجْنِ أَرَبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ (39) مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا
 أَسْمَاءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِنْ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا
 إِلَيْهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (40) } سورة يوسف

“[Joseph said] O my two companions of the prison! Are many different **lords** better or Allah, the One, the Irresistible? You do not worship besides Him but only names which you have named (forged) – you and your fathers – for which Allah has sent down no authority. The command is for none but Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him; that is the straight religion, but most men know not.” [12:39–40] This is one of the four times in the Quran when the word “arbaab” (lord sovereigns) is used to refer to “gods” instead of the plural of *ilaaah* which is *aalihah*. The difference is that *ilaaah* means subject of devotion. *Rabb* (pl. *arbaab*) means sovereign master, owner, and dispenser of affairs. This would be more applicable to the ancient Egyptians, whom Yusuf was preaching to, as well as the ancient Greeks, and then the Hindus.

With regard to denying Allah’s Names or Attributes, as some sects have done, while this is a creedal deviance and heresy, it is not shirk because these attributes were not given to anyone else, but rather, it is a kind of *kufri*, disbelief.

As for shirk in Allah’s rights, then that could be in His **Legislative right**, such as,

{... وَلَا يُشْرِكُ فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدًا (26) } سورة الكهف

“Nor does **He share His Rule** with anyone.” [18:26]

And,

{ اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَابَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا
 وَاحِدًا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (31) } سورة التوبة

“They took their rabbis and their monks as **lords** besides Allah, and Messiah, son of Maryam (Mary), while they were commanded to **worship** none but One **God** none has the right to be worshipped but He. Glorified is He from what **they associate**.” [9:31] – Here we see the word “arbaab” the plural of *rabb* again. However, this time, it doesn’t mean the “sovereign” aspect of *rabb* but rather, the “dispenser of affairs” aspect. By according them that legislative right, Allah calls it a form of association and worship, and affirms His exclusive right to being the *ilaaah*, and calls their actions shirk.

The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said, “... when they made something lawful for them, the people considered it lawful, and when they made something unlawful for them, the people considered it unlawful.” They disregarded Allah’s **right** to legislation, given it to the church councils and patriarchs. Hence, marriage was forbidden for some of them while pork was permitted for all, etc.

Apart from all this, the most common type of major shirk which is generally referred to in the Quran over and over is **devoting any act of worship to other than Allah**,

{وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ هَؤُلَاءِ شُفَعَاؤُنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ قُلْ أَتَنْبِئُونَ اللَّهَ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (18) سورة يونس

“And **they worship** besides Allah things that harm them not, nor profit them, and they say: ‘*These are our intercessors with Allah.*’ Say: ‘Do you inform Allah of that which He knows not in the heavens and on the earth?’ Glorified and Exalted is He above all that which **they associate!**” [10:18]

This includes all acts of worship, they all belong to Allah, including and especially invocation, which is the universal form of worship in all societies across history:

{وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا (18) سورة الجن

“And that the places of prostration are for Allah, so do not invoke anyone along with Allah.” [72:18]

Further, linking invocation and worship:

{قُلْ إِنِّي نُهَيْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قُلْ لَا أَتَّبِعُ أَهْوَاءَكُمْ قَدْ ضَلَلْتُ إِذًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ (56) سورة الأنعام

“Say: ‘I have been forbidden to *worship* those whom you *invoke* besides Allah.’ Say: ‘I will not follow your desires, I would have gone astray had I done so and I would not be of the guided.’” [6:56]

{ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تُشْرِكُونَ (73) مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا بَلْ لَمْ نَكُنْ نَدْعُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ شَيْئًا كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ الْكَافِرِينَ (74) سورة الزمر

“Then it was said to them *where are those you used to associate? Other than Allah?* They will say *they’ve vanished from us—No, we were not invoking, before, anything* and thus is Allah misleading the disbelievers.”

And a type of du'aa is known as *isti'aathah* (الاستعاذة) which is seeking refuge or protection with someone from something.

{وَأَنَّهُ كَانَ رِجَالٌ مِنَ الْإِنْسِ يَعُوذُونَ بِرِجَالٍ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَزَادُوهُمْ رَهَقًا (6)} سورة الجن

“And verily, there were men among mankind who used to **seek refuge with** the men among the jinn, so they (the jinn) **increased them in sin and transgression.**” [72:6]

The preceding verse refers to seeking the protection of “powerful spirits” against “demons”.

{إِن تَدْعُوهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دَعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكْفُرُونَ بِشِرْكِكُمْ
وَلَا يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثْلُ خَبِيرٍ (14)} سورة فاطر

“If you **invoke** (or call upon) **them**, they hear not **your call**; and if they were to hear, they could not **grant it** (your request) **to you**. And on the Day of Resurrection, they will disown **your association of them**. And none can inform you like Him Who is Well-Acquainted.” [35:14] – proving once again that invoking others is shirk.

And all other acts of worship devoted to other than Allah are shirk, like sacrificing to spirits or saints, making oaths to them, circumambulating (performing *tawaaf* around) their graves, etc. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “Allah has cursed whoever sacrificed to other than Allah.”

In fact, most of the Quran is about this, and the evidences from the Quran and Sunnah are *numerous*. Especially in the Mekkan surahs, like chapters 6, the end of 7, chapters 10, 11, 13, 16, 22, 23, 24, 25, till the end of the Quran. Yet in spite of that, this kind of shirk has become widespread throughout the Muslim world due to the disappearance of knowledge, spread of ignorance and superstition, and centuries whenever Shee'ah ruled any portion of the Muslim world. And there is hardly a spot of the Muslim world that wasn't governed by them at some point or other. They would build domes over graves and pray to their inhabitants instead of Allah. This practice spread among some Sufis and thus, much of the Muslim world, especially among the illiterate who relied on superstitions of powerful saints they could invoke to cure their ailments. That's in addition to the influence that came to the Muslims from the Hindus to the East, and other shamanistic mystical religions of Africa. Those factors helped grave worship spread far and wide in the Muslim world, finding quick acceptance. This is what makes shirk a controversial subject, ironically, even though much of the Quran is about it. Ignorance of Arabic does not help. And the few scholars of Islam who defend those actions instead twist the Arabic to redefine the words or add conditions to them so that shirk is no longer shirk but instead merely something unfavorable.

Even though this kind of shirk is, more or less, what the whole Quran and Islam is about and what it came to eradicate, there are other reasons that the Muslims didn't catch on and prevent this alarming trend from spreading. Although some scholars spoke against these practices, they were mere individuals and academics who had only

minimal sway with the common folk. Many other scholars disapproved of the practices in their writings or busied themselves with teaching, judicial affairs, writing commentaries, glosses or summaries of larger works, etc. Many other scholars refused to say anything because they did not think it was shirk, and some scholars even promoted it.

Then, the proud Islamic intellectual tradition came to a miserable standstill as a group of amateur scholars tried to quell an alarming trend of crazy opinions being put forth by the unqualified. So this small group of scholars then declared that *ijtihaad* (exercising analogy or knowledge-based opinion to find a ruling for new matters never before addressed) was now forbidden since, as they thought, they had already come up with rulings for every possible scenario that could ever show up. They then forbade non-mujtahids from quoting from the Quran or Sunnah for fear that they would give a false interpretation. Thus, the Quran and Sunnah became symbolic, mystical, something beyond the reach of the common Muslim and even the student of knowledge. They were just quoted or read from for blessing and little else. It was considered a gross audacity to study the Quran and Sunnah directly.

It was not until the 1700's when one scholar who lived in an area untouched by any organized government decided to preach against this madness and take it upon himself to earn the hatred of the whole Muslim world for Allah's sake. Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was fortunate to create a political alliance with a small but respected tribal leader named Muhammad ibn Su'ood. Together they preached tawheed throughout the Arabian Peninsula. When the Saudi state occupied Mecca, briefly, pilgrims from all over the world were given da'wah to tawheed and they took it back to their countries and were thus inspired to start similar political anti-shirk movements. The rest is history.

{وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكذِّبِينَ (36) سورة النحل

“And verily, We have sent among every Ummah a Messenger (proclaiming): ‘**Worship** Allah and avoid all false deities.’ Then of them were some whom Allah guided and of them were some upon whom the straying was justified. So travel through the land and see what was the end of those who denied.”

[16:36]

This also supports the idea that it was the polytheistic societies that were destroyed and whose remains and idols would be found in archaeological excavations.

{أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ أَلِيمٍ (26) سورة هود

“That **you worship** none but Allah; surely, I fear for you the torment of a painful Day.” [11:26]

So here it is as if he's saying "laa ilaaha illaLLaah" but with a slightly different wording, yet preserving the meaning by saying, "no worship except for Allah." This further clarifies that worshipping other than Allah, even while recognizing Allah's sole dominion over all creation, is the greatest act of shirk. These words are from Noah. The point here is that all mankind knows who Allah is. So they were not commanded to merely recognize their creator but to worship Him. Lip service recognition was already given.

To understand *why* Allah considers shirk to be such an offense, consider that in many ayaat throughout the Quran and many ahaadeeth of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, tawheed and shirk is often placed side by side with being good to one's parents.

{وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ (13) وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ (14) وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ عَلَى أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا وَصَاحِبُهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا وَاتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَيَّ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (15) يَا بُنَيَّ إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ (16) } سورة لقمان

“When Luqmaan said to his son by way of advice and instruction: ‘My dear son! Do not **associate** partners with God. Surely associating partners with God is indeed a tremendous wrong.’

We have enjoined on humanity in respect with his parents: his mother bore him in strain upon strain, and his weaning was in two years. (so, O human listener,) be thankful to Me and to your parents. To Me is the final homecoming. But if they strive with you to make you associate with Me something of which you certainly have no knowledge (and which is absolutely contrary to the Knowledge), do not obey them. But even then, treat them with kindness as is customary in this world.” [31:13-15]

{لَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ فَتَقْعُدَ مَذْمُومًا مَخْدُومًا (22) وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبُلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرُهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا (23) وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا (24) } سورة الإسراء

“Set not up with Allah any other ilaah, or you will sit down reprov'd, forsaken (in the Hell-fire). And your Lord has decreed that **you worship** none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor. And lower to them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say: ‘My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was **young.**’” [17:22-24]

And from the Sunnah, the Prophet ﷺ [said](#), “*The greatest of the major sins are: To join others in worship with Allah, to be undutiful to one's parents, and to present false testimony.*”

Is this just a coincidence? The connection is very evident. Allah brought humanity into existence and made their provision of air, water, foods of every kind and means of shelter when we could not bring ourselves into existence nor provide these things for ourselves after birth had we done so. Parents provide almost the exact same benefit to humans, even if they are abusive or offer poor advice, they bring us into living and provide our food and shelter until we leave them. So comparing the sacrifice made and enjoyed by parents to rear a child, to not have that child recognize or ever thank them would be an insult of the highest magnitude. When someone lives as Allah's creation without recognizing or thanking Allah by acknowledging Him alone, it is also, an insult of the greatest degree and bars a person from ever entering the Paradise that Allah prepared for His grateful creatures. And since Allah is not a human, we cannot thank Him the way we would thank each other. Thanking Allah comes through His terms which He has detailed in His revelation to His Messengers from among us.

Dictionary Polytheism – belief in multiple powerful gods

As for the idea of their being multiple “Allahs” or similarly multiple demigods each with their own sphere of influence, this is an uncommon belief. Most religions, if not all, have one chief God, the God of the skies (الذي في السماء) whether that God's name is Allah, or Thor or Brahman or Zeus or Jupiter, who is thus above the rest. Thus, even the pagan Arabs of the Prophet's time acknowledged, just as the Prophet [tested](#) one of them, “how many do you worship? And which do you pray to in times of anxiety?” The man said he worshiped so many on earth but One in the heavens, and that was the One Who he turned to in difficult times. But it is Allah's right to be invoked when we are desperate. And as a “jealous God”, to quote the Bible, Allah does not like anyone else to be invoked with such fervor or when there is no one else to turn to. Nonetheless, Allah addresses the possibility of multiple gods on par with each other here:

{قُلْ لِمَنِ الْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (84) سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ (85) قُلْ مَنْ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ السَّبْعِ وَرَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ (86) سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ (87) قُلْ

مَنْ بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ يُحْيِيهِ وَلَا يُجَارُ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (88) سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ قُلْ
فَأَنِّي تُسْحَرُونَ (89) بَلْ أَتَيْنَاهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ (90) مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُ
مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِذَا لَذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَّ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ (91)
عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (92) {سورة المؤمنون

“Say: ‘Whose is the earth and whosoever is therein? If you know!’ They will say: ‘It is Allah’s!’ Say: ‘Will you not then remember?’ Say: ‘Who is the Lord of the seven heavens, and the Lord of the Great Throne?’ They will say: Allah. Say: ‘Will you not then fear?’ Say: ‘In Whose Hand is the sovereignty of everything? And He protects all, while against Whom there is no protector, if you know?’ They will say: ‘(All that belongs) to Allah.’ Say: ‘How then are you deceived and turn away from the truth?’ Nay, but We have brought them the truth, and verily, they are liars. No son did Allah beget, nor is there any deity along with Him. Then each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have tried to overcome others! Glorified is Allah above all that they attribute to Him! All-Knower of the unseen and the seen! Exalted is He over all that they associate as partners to Him!” [23:84-92]

Multiple subjects of worship, each receiving prayers, answering prayers of their devotees would inevitably have led to conflicts. One would not be worshiped if they did not have power to love, hope for and potentially fear. And that kind the devotion exclusively belongs to Allah. Thus, the previous passage calls that shirk. We have the rebuke strengthened here:

{أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا آلِهَةً مِنَ الْأَرْضِ هُمْ يُنْشِرُونَ (21) لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ
رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ (22)} {سورة الأنبياء

“Or have they taken gods from the earth, they are resurrecting [the dead]? Had there been in them twain [heavens and earth] deities instead of Allah then both [the heavens and the earth] would have been corrupted. So glory be to Allah, Rabb of the Throne, above what they attribute!” [21:21-22]

And like the first passage shows, giving Allah family members of His type, is a shirk which Allah has repeatedly negated in the Quran, in 2:116, 6:101 (how can He have a child when He has no wife), 10:68, 17:111 (Allah has no need for children, 18:4-5 (claimants have no proof), 19:88-93 (it’s inappropriate), 21:26 (being a great worshiper of Allah is great enough, but calling them a child is extreme), 25:2, 39:4 (if Allah wanted to take a child He would have elevated and chosen whomever He willed from His creation), 43:16 (daughters), 43:81 (if Allah has children or equals, then Muhammad would be the first to worship those children or call to that belief), 72:3 (negates a wife and child). And most well-known:

{قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (1) اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ (2) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (3) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (4)} سورة

الإخلاص

“Say: Allah is One [Indivisible]. Allah is *al-Samad*. He has not begotten nor is He begotten. And there is no individual comparable to Him.” [112”1-4]

And because this type of association has been repeated so much throughout history, in the Quran, Allah’s final revealed book to humanity, He even forbids any metaphorical relationship to Him, so that there is no possible confusion or bridge to the forbidden polytheism:

{وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ وَالنَّصَارَى نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ قُلْ فَلِمَ يُعَذِّبُكُمْ بِذُنُوبِكُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ بَشَرٌ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقَ يَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَإِلَيْهِ

الْمَصِيرُ (18) سورة المائدة

“And the Jews and Christians say *We are the Children of God and His loved ones*. Say *Why then does Allah punish you for your sins?* Rather, you are humans whom He has created, He forgives whom He wills and He punishes whom He wills. And to Allah belong the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, and to Him is the return.” [5:18]

What is Idolatry?

Idolatry is generally understood as the deification of idols, whether made of wood or stone. While people do pray to other beings *through* those idols (known as *asnaam* in Arabic الأَصْنَام), no one in the history of humanity actually believes that the totem or figurine itself created the world or is the god itself. All followers of such religions, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or other, will testify that they recognize and believe that the stone, wood or paint is manmade and possesses no power to create, benefit, harm, give life, cause death, or resurrect. On the other hand, they use these objects as “focal points” for their worship of the beings that those icons represent. It is also believed by many or even all of them, that the distant subject of their worship may enter that object during the moment of their prayer or sacrifice.

{وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتَوْا عَلَى قَوْمٍ يَعْكُفُونَ عَلَى أَصْنَامٍ لَهُمْ قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى اجْعَلْ لَنَا
 إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ (138) إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ مَتَّبِعُوا مَا هُمْ فِيهِ وَبَاطِلٌ مَا كَانُوا
 يَعْمَلُونَ (139) قَالَ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ أَبْغِيكُمْ إِلَهًا وَهُوَ فَضَّلَكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (140) {سورة

الأعراف

“And We took the Children of Israel across the sea; then they came upon a people intent in devotion to [some] idols of theirs. They said, *O Moses, make for us a god just as they have gods.* He said, *Indeed, you are a people behaving ignorantly. Indeed, those [worshippers] – destroyed is that in which they are [engaged], and worthless is whatever they were doing.* He said, *Is it other than Allah I should desire for you as a god while He has preferred you over the worlds?*” [7:138:140]

Later on, as detailed in Surahs 7 and 20, the Children of Israel fashioned an idol in the form of a calf, from their gold and jewelry, and they worshiped it, and called it an *ilaah* (20:88). Prophet Ibrahim also warred against bowing down to idols among his people, and his father was an idol maker.

{وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ آزَرَ أَتَتَّخِذُ أَصْنَامًا آلِهَةً إِنِّي أَرَاكَ وَقَوْمَكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (74) {سورة

الأنعام

“And when Ibrahim said to his father Azar *do you take idols (asnaam) as gods? I see you and your people in manifest error.*” [6:74]

{وَآتَلْ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (69) إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (70) قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ أَصْنَامًا فَنَنْظِلُ
 لَهَا عَافِيْنَ (71) قَالَ هَلْ يَسْمَعُونَكُمْ إِذْ تَدْعُونَ (72) أَوْ يَنْفَعُونَكُمْ أَوْ يَضُرُّونَ (73) قَالُوا
 بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ (74) {سورة الشعراء

“And recite to them the story of Ibrahim, when he said to his father and people *what do you worship?* They said *we worship idols, and we remain to them devoted.* He said *do*

they hear you when you invoke? Or benefit you or bring harm? They said no we found our ancestors doing like that.” [26:69–74]

But do you need an idol to be an idolater or polytheist? While many pagan cultures worshipped multiple deities for various purposes, not all worshiped those deities through objects. Or they did not believe the objects were *required* for worshiping those deities at all times, even if that was preferable. Whether it is Krishna for Hindus or St Anthony for Catholics or Uzzaa for the pagans of Quraish or Baal for the ancient Babylonians or Wadd for the people of Nuh or even Badawi for some ignorant “Muslims”, priests of those religious orders would be unanimous that a statue is just a statue and one could worship the deity without the statue but with love, devotion and word instead. Just like the worshiper of Allah, many of those traditions may even have methods to better get one’s prayers answered, like making pilgrimage to the sites of the saint’s “miracles” or giving an “offering” or sacrifice to their temple or in front of their statue. Such acts of worship are undoubtedly major shirk, even if they do not believe that their subject of invocation and devotion is not God Almighty,

{أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ فِي مَا هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ كَفَّارٌ (3)} سورة الزمر

“To Allah is the entire religion. And those who take *awliyaa* (saints) besides Him *we do not worship them except to bring us ever closer to Allah*. Truly Allah will judge between them in that which they differ. Allah does not guide he who is a persistently disbelieving liar.” [39:3]

Instead of using the word *shurakaa*’ (partners, associates) Allah used the word *awliyaa*, often translated as saints, as He was using a word they were familiar with, and is still used today by people for the same purpose, just as Allah does in chapter 7, verse 3.

At this point, it is important to distinguish between an idol and the ka`bah, since that is a common misconception. Muslims *face* that ka`bah with their bodies, as an act of submission and unification, not deification. Meanwhile, their eyes are fixated to where they will prostrate, and the focus of their heart is not on the Ka`bah, but on Allah, unseen above them. And when a Muslim is not directly in front of the Ka`bah, they are not even intending the Ka`bah, but rather

intending the *qiblah* which seems is the prayer direction, and nothing more. With so many dissimilarities, it is hard to take seriously any attempt to claim Muslims worship the Ka`bah.

But other pagans and philosophers believe that all the universe, creation and creator, are a single entity, or existing in the mind of God, and so anything and everything is a part of God, or God itself, and worthy of worship and celebration of its “divinity”. The beliefs of Islam are that the Creator is distinct from the creation. This is just as Allah says:

{وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ لَا تَسْجُدُوا لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ وَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي
خَلَقَهُنَّ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ (37) سورة فصلت

“And from His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not **prostrate** to the sun nor the moon, but prostrate to Allah who created them, if you are, **Him, worshipping.**” [41:37]

Minor Shirk

Anything that can be described as shirk with Allah but does not remove a person from Islam is “lesser” or “minor” shirk. Since it is still a form of shirk, it remains a major sin and should be avoided at all costs. And because it rarely if ever encroaches on the rights of others, there is no worldly penalty for the one guilty of it.

Categories of minor shirk include misguided statements about Allah’s Lordship; ignorantly exaggerating the role of the creation in world events; deeming something as being causative, but Allah nor empirical sciences allow; and anything which resembles major shirk or is a gateway to it.

Examples:

Saying, “Whatever Allah and you will.” AND swearing by other than Allah ﷻ

A “will” or *mashee’ah* (مشيئة) is something all intellectual beings possess. Allah refers to His own Will throughout the Quran, whether to guide or misguide, forgive or punish, or decree, etc. Muslims are supposed to recognize Allah’s Will and have respect for it and observe verbal etiquette when discussing anything that is connected with Allah’s Will. Allah “teaches a lesson” to people who should know better when they neglect that,

{إِنَّا بَلَوْنَاهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ (17) وَلَا يَسْتَثْنُونَ

(18) فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَائِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ (19) } سورة القلم

“Verily, We have tried them as We tried the People of the Garden, when they swore to pluck its fruits in the morning, **without making exception** [by saying ‘if Allah wills’]. Then there passed by it a visitation (of fire) **from your Lord while they were asleep.**” [68:17-19]

However, sometimes a person might say “whatever Allah and you will” or “whatever Allah and he/she wills” if they deem a matter suspended upon the choice or action of another person. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [clarified](#) that this is a kind of equating between the two possessors of will: Allah and the other person. To avoid that disrespect to Allah, we are instructed to instead say, “Whatever Allah wills **and then** you will.”

One of the Prophet’s companions [said](#), “A Jew came to the Prophet and said, ‘You are setting up rivals (to Allah) and associating others (with Him). Your people say: ‘Whatever Allah wills and you will,’ and you all say: ‘By the Ka’bah.’” So the Prophet commanded them, *if they wanted to swear an oath, to say: ‘By the Lord of the Ka’bah;’ and to say: ‘Whatever Allah wills, then what you will.’*” Here, Allah decreed to teach the Muslims a lesson through another follower of monotheism.

This hadeeth duly points to the despicable practice of swearing by other than Allah, like the saying of some people, “I swear by my mother’s grave.” Thus, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “whoever swears by other than Allah has disbelieved or done shirk.”

Thinking Allah gave some supernatural influence to constellations; “luck charms”, amulets, or talismans; numbers; days, months or years; stones; trees; individuals; places; graves; etc.

At the time the Quran was revealed, and for nearly a millennium afterward, it was widely believed that the universe was connected like several layers one on top of the other, and if something moved at the top, it would signal a chain reaction all the way down just as one gear turns another. The Quran indicated that the universe was not like this at all⁶, but due to slow progression in the fields of physics and astronomy, the prevailing philosophies of the time still held a seat in the hearts of the educated and uneducated alike. Thus, it was commonplace to attribute rain or other events to the movement of the planets and stars above. This is also why some of the earliest scholars disliked that people should study astronomy. Allah points to the two main purposes of stars and constellations,

{وَلَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا لِلنَّاظِرِينَ (16) سورة الحجر}

“And indeed, We have put the big stars in the heaven and We beautified it for the beholders.” [15:16]

{وَعَلَامَاتٍ وَبِالنَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ (16) سورة النحل}

“And by the stars they are guided” [16:16] Allah recounts His Favors to humankind. From among them is making the constellations in a manner that provides trekkers and seafarers a method of finding their way in darkness. Muslim navigators then became the most broadly traveled around the world before the fall of Granada.

And as for comets and “shooting star” meteorites,

⁶ See 21: 33 and 36:40.

{وَحَفِظْنَاهَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ (17) إِلَّا مَنْ اسْتَرَقَ السَّمْعَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ مُبِينٌ (18)}

سورة الحجر

“**And We have guarded it** (near heaven) **from every outcast devil. Except him** (devil) **who steals the listening⁷ then he is pursued by a clear flaming fire.**” [15:17-18]

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once [said](#), after a morning’s rain, that whoever awoke saying “we received rain by the Mercy of Allah,” awoke as a believer, and whoever said, “we received rain by such-and-such star or constellation” awoke as a disbeliever—meaning, ungrateful to Allah.⁸

Good and Bad Fortune from circumstances or from objects

As for things taken as symbolic of good luck or as omens of bad luck, then this is all a kind of shirk, whether it be an **act**, such as walking under a ladder or knocking on wood; a **number**, like 4 or 13; or a **time** of year thought to be lucky or unlucky; or a **vision** like seeing birds fly a certain way or a black cat cross your path; etc. Generally speaking, this is all representative of people’s weakness in trusting in Allah and feeling assured of His governance over the world’s affairs according to the physical laws He designed. Likewise, amulets and talismans, worn in belief that evil spirits would keep away from their bearers or that by wearing them, they would cause their crushes to fall in love with them or that they would bear children by their presence, or good fortune would befall them and ills kept at bay, then this is also shirk as many ahaadeeth [mention](#).

Mistaking Allah’s tests for bad luck

{الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ تَفَاوُتٍ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِنْ فُطُورٍ (3) ثُمَّ ارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيْنِ يَنْقَلِبْ إِلَيْكَ الْبَصَرُ خَاسِئًا وَهُوَ حَسِيرٌ (4)} سورة الملك

“**You can see no fault in the creation of the *al-Rahmaan*** (the One Whose Mercy encompasses all). **Then look again, can you see any discrepancy? Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you in a state of humiliation, and worn out.**” [67:3-4]

However, Allah may test a person and their trust in Him versus their trust in some objects by Decreeing good or bad qadr for them in coincidence with it. If someone feels their faith might be weakened and that they might

⁷ The meaning of this verse will be discussed *inshaa’Allah* when learning about the world of the jinn and devils.

⁸ See Muslim [English ref. book 1 no. 135; Arabic book 1 no. 140 and 73] from ibn ‘Abbaas.

attach some providence to an object, person or place, it may be best to leave the object, according to the Prophet's guidance, so that they can continue their lives without giving it consideration.

Yet on the other hand, it is important to recognize everything as a test, so as not to falsely blame something good for our seeming "misfortune".

{قَالُوا اطَّيَّرْنَا بِكَ وَبِمَنْ مَعَكَ قَالَ طَائِرُكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ تُفْتَنُونَ (47) سورة النمل}

"They [disbelievers] said [to the Messenger Allah sent to them]: 'We perceive ill omen from you and those with you.' He said: 'Your ill omen is with Allah; nay, but you are a people that are being tested.'"

[27:47] – i.e. everything is with Allah Alone, but He is testing you through us.

Similarly, when we start practicing Islam or if we increase our practice of Islam, we will be tested and tried, and that is a way of expiating the sins of our previous laziness or sinfulness. It is not Allah or any other forces pushing us away, but a cleanse and test before upping our game.

{فَإِذَا جَاءَهُمُ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ وَإِنْ تُصِبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَى وَمَنْ مَعَهُ أَلَا إِنَّمَا طَائِرُهُمْ

عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (131) سورة الأعراف

"But whenever good came to them, they said: 'This is ours.' And if evil afflicted them, they ascribed it to evil omens connected with Musa and those with him. Truly, is it not that their evil omens are with Allah? But most of them know not." [7:131]

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Following omens is shirk! Following omens is shirk! Everyone is bothered by it, but they remove it through reliance upon Allah." In other words, it is human nature to feel a sense of pessimism about an endeavor and desire to quit when it starts on the wrong foot. To avoid shirk, the believer should ask Allah for His Aid and continue anyway if practical.

Seeking blessings as tabarruk التبرُّك

Related to this is rubbing against objects, like stones or trees, or even people or places with the belief that blessings (*barakah*) pour from it and attach to whomever makes contact with it. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was known to be blessed being throughout his life and his companions took advantage of that.⁹ However, after his death, that ability was no longer present in anyone, and nearly all artifacts that the Prophet owned, used or touched have been lost. The companions also forbade excessiveness in this concept. Umar ibn al-Khattaab ordered that the tree under

⁹ The table (*maa'idah*) of Isa's dinner with his disciples was also declared such an object, but when some of them disbelieved and tried to betray him, the blessings ceased immediately.

which the Prophet and his companions took pledge be chopped down. He said, “Truly, only that which destroyed those who came before you is the pursuit of the remnants of their prophets’.”

A similar note-worthy incident happened [during the Prophet’s lifetime](#) when a group of the newly converted recalled that Quraish and other idolatrous tribes used to pick a tree and hang their weapons and armory on it with the belief that it would be a source of blessing. They called this tree “*thaat anwaat*” meaning “the one with things hanging from it”. So after missing this practice, they approached the Prophet ﷺ and said, “make for us a *thaat anwaat* just as they have one.” When the Prophet ﷺ heard this, he extolled Allah’s greatness, and said, “*This is exactly like what the people of Musa said, ‘Make for us an ilaah just as they have idols’ [7:138] and you shall surely follow the ill patterns of those before you.*”

Of all these examples in the “minor shirk” category, the one thing that could make them become *major shirk* is if the individual saying or doing these acts believes their subject to share in Allah’s sovereignty like a god along with Allah. Most people believe that these things may simply be a part of Islam or something containing a “well known benefit” although a placebo for sure.

There are many other examples that could be mentioned here and are found in *Kitaab al-Tawheed* that may not be shirk but have more to do with having good etiquette with Allah and recognizing Allah’s greatness. Since they are prohibited or discouraged, one should still abstain from it. For the sake of completing the benefit for the reader, we will mention them here. Examples include,

- Calling humanity the “children of God”.
- Refusing someone who asks for the sake of Allah, like “please could you do this for me, I’m asking you for Allah’s sake.” If someone refuses this request, it is highly disliked, because when the asker asks by Allah, it should be taken seriously. But on the other hand, the asker should not make such requests lightly, especially with things they could do themselves, with Allah’s Help.
- Denying someone who swore by Allah, like “I swear by Allah, I was not involved.” Even if known to be a lie, making such an oath may indicate their inclination towards repentance if it was in regard to a sin. However, swearing by Allah over the quality of something you’re trying to sell, if lying, is a major sin.
- Asking “by Allah’s Face” for anything less than Paradise, like “Oh Allah, I ask You by Your Face, that you decree this job promotion for me,” since the Face of Allah is something the believers will see in Paradise and it is the greatest gift they will ever receive—to directly sense Allah with their visions.
- Cursing the passing of time since Allah controls the passing of time.
- Calling anyone “my ‘abd [slave, worshiper]” or “my *rabb* [lord, master]”. But instead, the Prophet directed people to say “boy” *ghulaam* or “girl” *jaariyah*, “chief” or “boss” *sayyid*.
- Saying “so-and-so guided that person to Islam,” since it is Allah alone who guides and confers iman to others.
- Cursing the wind.

- Giving, taking or keeping a name that has a sacrilegious meaning, like Abdul-Husain or Abdul-Rasool, or Al-Rahmaan.
- Forgetting that contagious diseases only begin and spread by the Will of Allah.
- Invoking Allah “by the honor of...” someone, called *waseelah* (الوسيلة), rather than sanctioned methods of *waseelah* aka *tawassul*, seeking nearness to Allah. This may otherwise lead ultimately to praying to that person, so it is considered by some to be a reprehensible innovation in du’aa. Allah and His Messenger sanctioned:
 - o Speaking to a person face-to-face (or using modern methods of communication) and asking them to pray for you.
 - o Asking Allah *by* some of His Names and Attributes. For example, saying “*Oh Allah, I ask you by your Love to forgive that you Forgive me, and You are the Most Forgiving.*”
 - o Asking Allah by virtue of your own acts of worship. For example, saying, “*Oh Allah, if I performed this hajj solely for Your Pleasure, then grant me righteous children.*”
 - o However, some early scholars did Allah asking Allah “by virtue/right/station of the Prophet” or “by the right of those who ask”.
- Neglecting to say “Inshaa’Allaah” for whatever you claim will happen or that you’ll do in the future.
- Saying “insha’Allah” during du’aa. This has unfortunately become extremely common among the Muslims, to say “may Allah bless you insha’Allah” or “may Allah grant you righteous children/spouse insha’Allah” or “may Allah forgive them insha’Allah” etc. The Prophet ﷺ [said](#), “*None of you should say to Allah (like this): ‘O Allah, grant me mercy, if you will.’ The supplication should be said with determination, for Allah is the Doer of whatever He likes to do, and there is none to force Him.*” Another reason why this is deplorable is because it is as if the supplicant feels they need to be extra kind to Allah to avoid earning Allah’s anger. This could lead to them wanting to approach others instead of approaching Allah, asking others to pray for them, and perhaps even invoking the deceased to intercede with Allah, and that of course is major shirk. Rather, with invocations, Allah is very approachable even though there is etiquette, but this is not from it. The etiquette of a good supplication is beginning by praising Allah, and then making salaah and salaam upon the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, then asking Allah for what you want, and then praising Him again using His Names and Attributes and finally sending more salaah and salaam upon the Prophet ﷺ. So the best invocation is “sandwiched” between praises of Allah and salaah and salaam.

Hidden Shirk of the heart,

Concerning tainted intention, this is the most common type of *minor* shirk that even the most righteous of worshipers and scholars on earth feel no security from, but may even be in full paranoia over. The Prophet ﷺ once came to his companions and [said](#), “*Shall I not inform you of what I fear for you more than the anti-Christ?*” They said, “of course O Messenger of Allah.” He said, “**Hidden shirk.** *It is when a man stands up to pray, and he beautifies his prayer because he sees another man looking.*”

This shirk has also been described as being more hidden than a tiny black ant crawling on a black rock on a moonless night. When the companions asked how to protect themselves against shirk like that, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught them a du'a that every Muslim should recite daily if not during every prayer. “*Oh Allah, I seek protection in You from committing shirk knowingly and I ask You to forgive me for what I do unknowingly.*” [Recorded by Abu Ya'laa al-Mosili [no. 60] from Abu Bakr.]

Allaahumma innee a'oothu bika an ushrika bika wa ana a'lamu; wa astaghfiruka mimmaa laa a'lam.

To demonstrate how terrible this sin truly is, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#),

The first of people whose case will be decided on the Day of Judgment will be a man who died as a martyr. He shall be brought (before the Judgment Seat). Allah will make him recount His blessings and he will recount them. Then, Allah will say: What did you do (to compensate for these blessings)? He will say: I fought for You until I died as a martyr. Allah will say: You have told a lie. You fought so that you might be called a 'brave warrior'. And you were called so. Then, orders will be passed against him and he will be dragged on his face and cast into Hell.

Then a man will be brought forward who acquired knowledge and imparted it to others and recited the Qur'an. He will be brought and Allah will make him recount His blessings and he will recount them. Then will Allah ask: What did you do (to reimburse these blessings)? He will say: I acquired knowledge and disseminated it and recited the Qur'an seeking Your pleasure. Allah will say: You have lied. You acquired knowledge so that you might be called 'a scholar,' and you recited the Qur'an so that it might be said: 'He is a Qaari' and such has been said. Then orders will be passed against him and he shall be dragged on his face and cast into the Fire.

Then a man will be brought whom Allah had made abundantly rich and had granted every kind of wealth. He will be brought and Allah will make him recount His blessings and he will recount them. Allah will (then) ask: What have you done (to suit these blessings)? He will say: I spent money in every cause in which You wished that it should be spent. Allah will say: You are lying. You did so that it might be said about You: 'He is generous' and so it was said. Then will Allah pass orders and he will be dragged with his face downward and thrown into Hell.

Showing off is called *riyaa'* and *sum'ah*. *Riyaa'* is desiring to be seen (*ra'aa*) and *sum'ah* is desiring that people hear (*sam'*) and talk about you.

All such deeds which contain a hint of these intentions are rejected by Allah. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “Allah said: ‘I am the most independent/rich of all the partners from needing association, so whoever associates something else in the worship of Me, I leave them with their *shirk*.’” This means, if someone does a deed for less than 100.00% for Allah’s sake, then Allah has no need for it, but whatever else was desired by the deed has more need for it if it is worthy of gaining any portion of worship.

As a note, showing off *in worship* is certainly a reprehensible act, but leaving off certain acts of worship, or making *all* of one’s worship secretive is also blameworthy. Sure, Allah condemns those who show off,

{ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَبْطُلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِثَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ (264) } سورة البقرة

“O you who believe! Do not render your Sadaqah (charity) in vain by reminders of your generosity or by injury, like him who spends his wealth **to be seen by people**, and he does not believe in Allah, nor in the Last Day. His likeness is the likeness of a smooth rock on which is a little dust; on it falls heavy rain which leaves it bare. They are not able to do anything with what they have earned. And Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.” [2:264]

Yet, Allah also praises those who mix between doing good deeds publicly *and* privately,

{ وَالَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنْفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً وَيَدْرءُونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ (22) } سورة الرعد

“And those who remain patient, seeking their Lord's Countenance, perform the *salaah*, and spend out of that which We have bestowed on them, **secretly and openly**, and repel evil with good, for such there is a good end.” [13:22]

It is very important for people to worship Allah in public just as they do in private. The reason being, if everyone left off public worship for fear of showing off, then it would seem like *no one* is worshipping Allah at all, and if someone did so, they would immediately be accused of poor intention. So it is important to make worship, whether it be charity, recitation of the Quran, learning and teaching, and being courageous all highly visible acts in the Muslim world to serve as an inspiration to the rest. Some people start a day fasting but when asked to enjoy a bite of food, they break their fast out of fear of showing off by admitting that they’re fasting. Had they instead

continued fasting, they might unknowingly inspire others to fast more often and gain lots of good deeds for resurrecting a Sunnah. So instead, it seems like Muslim only fast during Ramadhan, which is not true, nor should it be.

What if you *do* feel that part of yourself desires others to see or hear about you and be impressed with your worship, knowledge and contributions as a Muslim? Quite simply, continue praying to Allah, before, during and after any act where you suspect that part of you is desiring any kind of recognition. But never put off an action due to this suspicion you have, but rather confront it and seek Allah's Help to make you among His sincere worshipers only desiring what He has.

That is the most famous kind of unapparent shirk. There are other kinds which may straddle in between being major shirk and minor shirk, depending on what that disease could lead a person to do. So these are mostly feelings of the heart which should be directed *primarily* or *entirely* towards Allah.

Examples include:

Love (*hubb* or *mahabbah*) of others more than Allah

{وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِذْ يَرُونَ الْعَذَابَ أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ (165)} سورة

البقرة

“And of mankind are some who take others besides Allah as rivals (to Allah): they love them as they love Allah. But those who believe, love Allah more (than anything else). If only, those who do wrong could see, when they will see the torment, that all power belongs to Allah and that Allah is Severe in punishment.” [2:165]

There is natural love we may have for people we share commonality with. There is faith-based love which should be higher than that, for the faith itself and its practitioners. Then there is love of Allah which should be the only unconditional love on earth. If one's love for someone else or something else competes with their love for Allah or even eclipses, then it is a kind of shirk. This is the case from Christians who love Jesus as much as or even more than “the Father”.

Fear of others more than Allah

{ إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُونِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (175) } سورة آل

عمران

“It is only Shaytaan that suggests to you the fear of his friends; so fear them not, but fear Me, if you are believers.” [3:175]

Fear is one of, if not the most *influential* of human emotions. People may even believe in Islam, realize the consequences of rejecting it, yet due to fear of society or what a few people whom they don't even like might say or think, and will thus continue their lives without true faith. Allah calls such individuals “the weak” while those who set social trends and did all the fear mongering and hate-stirring against Allah's religion were called “the arrogant”,

{ وَبَرَزُوا لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا فَقَالَ الضُّعَفَاءُ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا لَكُمْ تَبَعًا فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُغْنُونَ عَنَّا مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ قَالُوا لَوْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ لَهَدَيْنَاكُمْ سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْنَا أَجْرَعْنَا أَمْ صَبَرْنَا مَا لَنَا مِنْ مَحِيصٍ (21) }

“And they all shall appear before Allah (on the Day of Resurrection); then the weak will say to those who were arrogant: ‘Truly, we were following you; can you avail us anything against Allah's torment?’ They will say: ‘Had Allah guided us, we would have guided you. It makes no difference to us now whether we rage, or bear this with patience; there is no place of refuge for us.’” [14:21] – both will abide in Hell forever.

Blameworthy fear also includes the fear of the supernatural and non-existing. Recent converts to Islam who experience difficulty in life are often told that “Jesus is punishing them” by their relatives. If they were to begin to fear “Jesus” so much then that it made them subservient and turning away from Islam, then that fear would be the crux of their shirk. The polytheists of Hud's community did the same,

{ إِنْ نَقُولُ إِلَّا اعْتَرَاكَ بَعْضُ آلِهَتِنَا بِسُوءٍ قَالَ إِنِّي أُشْهِدُ اللَّهَ وَاشْهَدُوا أَنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ (54) } سورة هود

“We only say that some of our gods have possessed you with evil. He said, I call Allah to witness, and I am a witness, that I am innocent of what you **associate!**” [11:54]

Feeling secure from ever being reckoned by Allah

{أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ (99) سورة الأعراف

“Did they then feel secure against the Plot of Allah? None feels secure from the Plot of Allah except the people who are the losers.” [7:99]

Most people believe they *will* enter heaven when they die. Consider also the story of the man with the two gardens (see 18:32–43) and how this man felt secure, in spite of his unsurety about the resurrection. This is the mentality of most people today, “I don’t expect any life after death, but if there is, it’ll be even better.”

Despair of Allah’s Mercy or Capacity to compassion

{قَالَ وَمَنْ يَقْنَطُ مِنْ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّهِ إِلَّا الضَّالُّونَ (56) سورة الحجر

“He [Ibrahim] said: ‘And who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord except those who are astray?’” [15:56]

Some Muslims, rather than recognize that Allah loves to forgive, have a misconceived notion that Allah hates to forgive and that Allah is even *stingy* or limited with forgiveness. Sure, those who never seek Allah’s forgiveness nor want it will not be forgiven for sure, but as for those who seek it, Allah loves it. Thus, despair is frequently a consequence of the following...

Ill suspicion about Allah, the opposite of tawakkul,

Nearly every time Allah incites the believers towards tawakkul (reliance and trust in Allah) He addresses their faith,

{...وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (23) سورة المائدة

“And put your trust in Allah if you are believers indeed.” [5:23]

But when someone lacks that trust and fears that Allah is “out to get them” or would never help or forgive them, then they have ill suspicion about Allah.

{وَيُعَذِّبُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ الظَّالِمِينَ بِاللَّهِ ظَنَّ السَّوْءِ عَلَيْهِمْ دَائِرَةُ السَّوْءِ وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَنَهُمْ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا (6)} سورة الفتح

“And that He may punish the hypocrites men and women, and also the polytheists men and women, who think evil thoughts about Allah; for them is a disgraceful torment, and the Anger of Allah is upon them, and He has cursed them and prepared Hell for them – and worst indeed is that destination.”

[48:6]

Letting other pursuits, goals or desires, like greed, hunger for power and lust become you

{أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا (43)} سورة الفرقان

“Have you seen him who has taken as his ilaah his own vain desire? Would you then be a representative over *him*?” [25:43]

Lust and greed are of the most powerful desires. Most people though, if left for several hours alone and *entrusted* with a sack of money could leave it untouched. However, if they were entrusted with an attractive and impressionable member of the opposite gender in a room alone for several hours; that, only the truly saved by Allah would survive unblemished. Lust is a very powerful entity.

{يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُخَفِّفَ عَنْكُمْ وَخُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ ضَعِيفًا (28)} سورة النساء

“And humanity was created weak.” [4:28] – in reference primarily to the oft-repeated need for sexual fulfilment.

Yet it is important to understand that the classic sins which lust, greed, substance addiction or other diseases might drive a person to commit of theft and fornication are not disbelief, nor may those “heart diseases” themselves be shirk. This is another point where Christianity and Islam take separate roads. Paul said that lust was idolatry of the heart, and similar “sins of the flesh” and sinfulness in general was *loving the sin more than God*, even if only for the moment of the sin. Such a preference was akin to idolatry, and therefore, humanity needed a savior. Many of the khawaarij also followed that line of thought, and so they declared sinful Muslims as apostates. Allah says different. Lust and other diseases of the heart *only reach the level of shirk if they would propel a person to commit shirk*. For example, if a man’s lust for a woman reached the point that if she said, “I’m yours if you leave Islam for a day,” and if he accepted that offer, then he has apostated from Islam even before the day began.

Similarly, if someone's greed for a promotion took him to the level that if the director said, "the big corner office and all that comes with it is yours if you prostrate to me." As soon as he *begins* to say "yes", he has left Islam even before he moves a joint of his body. A true Muslim, even if plagued by lust and greed would hold back before reaching this stage. They would say something like, "I may have a lot of problems and be a poor representative of my faith, but this is where I have to stop and remind myself of who I am and want to be."

Taaghoot

Everything worshiped besides Allah or made to share in His attributes of people, objects or concepts is called a *Taaghoot* (طاغوت). A similar word is *wathan* (أوثان plural وثن), to refer to those worshiped falsely in addition to Allah. The word *sanam* (أصنام plural صنم) means idol.

{ لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (256) } سورة البقرة

"There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in *Taaghoot* and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower." [2:256]

Some of the scholars have said that there are four *heads* or classifications of Taaghoot. So here, to better understand tawheed and shirk, we study the same concepts again, but from a new angle.

1 – Led by *Shaytaan* (Iblees)

{ وَقَالَ الشَّيْطَانُ لَمَّا قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَعَدَكُمْ وَعَدَ الْحَقِّ وَوَعَدْتُكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُكُمْ وَمَا كَانَ لِي عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَنْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِي فَلَا تَلُمُونِي وَلُومُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ مَا أَنَا بِمُصْرِخِكُمْ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُصْرِخِيَّ إِنِّي كَفَرْتُ بِمَا أَشْرَكْتُمُونِ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (22) } سورة

إبراهيم

“And Shaytaan will say when the matter has been decided: ‘Truly, Allah promised you a promise of truth. And I too promised you, but I betrayed you. I had no authority over you except that I called you, and you responded to me. So blame me not, but blame your own selves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I deny **your former associating me** as a partner with Allah. Truly, there is a painful torment for the wrong doers.’” [14:22] – these are the words of Iblees, the cursed one, when he meets all the people of Hell as they start to bear their punishment together.

The story of Iblees’ fall from grace is repeated several times throughout the Quran. The most detail is given in soorah’s 7, 15, and 17.

2 – Anyone *desiring* to be worshiped or *called* to their worship, even if they were rejected, or called to the worship of other than Allah,

{وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِّنْ دُونِهِ فَذَلِكْ نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ (29) سورة
الأنبياء

“And if any of them should say: ‘Verily, I am **a god** besides Him,’ such a one We should recompense with Hell. Thus We recompense the wrong-doers.” [21:29]

The end for people like this and their followers...

{إِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ حَصَبُ جَهَنَّمَ أَنْتُمْ لَهَا وَارِدُونَ (98) سورة الأنبياء

“Certainly you (disbelievers) and that which **you are worshipping** besides Allah, are fuel for Hell! (Surely) you will enter it.” [21:98]

3 – Whoever judges by other than what Allah revealed,

{أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّهُمْ آمَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا نُزِّلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَحَاكَمُوا
إِلَى الطَّاغُوتِ وَقَدْ أُمِرُوا أَنْ يَكْفُرُوا بِهِ وَيُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُمْ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا (60) وَإِذَا قِيلَ
لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَإِلَى الرَّسُولِ رَأَيْتَ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنْكَ صُدُودًا (61) فَكَيْفَ

إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ جَاءُوكَ يَخْلِفُونَ بِاللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَدْنَا إِلَّا إِحْسَانًا وَتَوْفِيقًا
 (62) أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَعِظْهُمْ وَقُلْ لَهُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ قَوْلًا
 بَلِيغًا (63) وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ
 فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا (64) فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّى
 يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِي مَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا (65)

سورة النساء

“Have you not seen those (hypocrites) who claim that they believe in that which has been sent down to you, and that which was sent down before you, and they wish to go for judgment (in their disputes) to the **Taaghoot** (false judges) while they have been ordered to reject them? But Satan wishes to lead them far astray.

And when it is said to them: ‘Come to what Allah has sent down and to the Messenger,’ you see the hypocrites turn away from you with aversion.

How then, when a catastrophe befalls them because of what their hands have sent forth, they come to you swearing by Allah, ‘We meant no more than goodwill and conciliation!’

They (hypocrites) are those of whom Allah knows what is in their hearts; so turn aside from them (do not punish them) but admonish them, and speak to them an effective word to reach their inner selves.

We sent no Messenger, but to be obeyed by Allah’s Leave. If they, when they had been unjust to themselves, had come to you (Muhammad) and begged Allah’s forgiveness, and the Messenger had begged forgiveness for them, indeed, they would have found Allah All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission.” [4:60-65]

Also, return to verse 9:31 that we read earlier about the Jewish Rabbis and Christian priests legislating things against the teachings of their prophets, and then the people’s obedience of that. Following someone like that, knowing their deviation from the truth, is recognizing them as a Taaghoot and taking them as an ilaah besides Allah.

4 – Whoever claims to possess knowledge of the *ghaib*/unseen, e.g. future, past, present, whether through jinns or lying

{عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَى غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا (26) إِلَّا مَنِ ارْتَضَىٰ مِنْ رَسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْلُكُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَدًا (27)} سورة الجن

“The All-Knower of the Unseen, and He reveals to none His Hidden Knowledge; except to a Messenger (from mankind) whom He has chosen (He informs him of the Unseen as much as He likes), and then He makes a band of watching guards (angels) to march before him and behind him.” [72:26-27]

Some people claim that Muhammad ﷺ knew all of the unseen. Some sects give “knowledge of the unseen” to their imams. Some “saints” are alleged to have all the knowledge of the unseen or some of it. If this knowledge is denied from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, then it is safe to say no one else could ever be truthful in their claim after him,

{قُلْ لَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ إِن أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ (50)} سورة الأنعام

“Say (O Muhammad): ‘I don't tell you that with me are the treasures of Allah, nor (that) I know the Unseen; nor do I tell you that I am an angel. I but follow what is revealed to me.’ Say: ‘Are the blind and the one who sees equal? Will you not then take thought?’” [6:50]

{قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ لَاسْتَكْثَرْتُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ إِنْ أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ (188)} سورة الأعراف

“Say (O Muhammad): ‘I possess no power over benefit or harm to myself except as Allah wills. If I had the knowledge of the Ghaib (Unseen), I should have secured for myself an abundance of wealth, and no evil should have touched me. I am but a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to a people who believe.’” [7:188]

{قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبْعَثُونَ (65)} سورة النمل

“Say: ‘None in the heavens and the earth knows the *Ghaib* (Unseen) except Allah, nor can they perceive when they will be resurrected.’” [27:65]

Thus, fortune-tellers, astrologists, palm readers, tarot card and globe readers and similar individuals all fall into this category. While warning against visiting them and risk being seduced by their claims, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “Whoever visits a fortune teller or diviner and asks about anything will not have their prayers accepted for forty days.” In another narration, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever visits a psychic or fortune-teller, asks and believes them, then they have disbelieved in the revelation sent down to Muhammad.” [Mustadrak al-Haakim, no. 14 from Abu Hurairah]

Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ [said](#), “If anyone acquires knowledge of astrology, he acquired a branch of magic, and the more he learns, the more he has obtained.” This is a bad thing, by the way. Sometimes even studying something to prove it wrong may lead to doubts creeping in one’s heart, as shaytaan learns it with them.

Blocking the avenues to shirk

Keeping away from any evil always begins by asking Allah for protection from that evil. Allah says,

{وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ (35) رَبِّ إِنَّهُنَّ أَضَلُّنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنْ النَّاسِ فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي وَمَنْ عَصَانِي فَإِنَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (36)} سورة إبراهيم

“And (remember) when Ibrahim said: ‘O my Lord! Make this city (Makkah) one of peace and security, and keep me and my sons away from **worshipping idols**. O my Lord! They have indeed led astray many among mankind. But whoso follows me, he verily, is of me. And whoso disobeys me, still You are indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” [14:35–36]

Understanding how shirk infiltrated the Ummah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ can save a person from falling prey to it. There are several “entry points” which, when combined have proven disastrous for humans, including ignorant Muslims.

- Exaggeration of the righteous. This hasn’t necessarily been of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, nor hardly any scholars of Islam, but almost always, “saints” who were pious worshipers.
- Obeying deviant scholars and “holy men”.
- Giving “lip service” to words and acts of other religions that imply shirk or are related to it in some way. This includes even non-existent religions, like saying to someone, “May the Force be with you,” or acting out being a magician from the Harry Potter fantasy world. It also includes participation in any rites or holidays stemming from Wicca, the occult, etc., including Halloween. However, if of course someone *believes in their heart* in the ideology behind those rites, whether it be “the Force” or any Wicca practices, using the jinn as protection against evil jinn, then this is major shirk. Similarly, praying with Christians and agreeing with their prayers that include “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” or “in Jesus name amen”. Likewise, saying “namaste” which means, “I bow to *the divine* in you.”
- Bowing or prostrating to other than Allah. Bowing to them in worship of them is shirk. But bowing to them for any other reason, such as respect, is still forbidden because it **resembles** the actions of the polytheist. Before Muhammadan Islam, Allah allowed this, and it became common for children to prostrate before their parents, or for subjects to prostrate in front of a king, etc. However, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ forbade this. Muslims in martial arts should seek a religious exemption, like raising a hand to their heart, rather than bowing to their sensei or opponent.
- Opening pathways to shirk, such as building over graves, keeping statues and paintings symbolic of the deceased. Ali ibn Abi Taalib once [said](#) to a man, “Shall I not send you on the same mission as the Messenger of Allah sent me? Do not leave any raised grave without leveling it or any image in a house without erasing it.” The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#) to his wives when they spoke about shrines and pictures they saw in Ethiopia, “*If a righteous person among them died, they would build a prayer place above their grave and create those pictures. They are the worst of Allah’s creation on the Day of Judgment.*” [And](#) “Allah’s Curse is

upon the Jews and the Christians: they took the graves of their prophets and righteous as objects of worship and prayer.” [And](#), “The people tormented most severely on the Day of Judgment are the image-makers.” He also [said](#), “All painters of portraits will be in the Fire; and for every portrait they painted, a soul will be given to it that punishes them in the Fire.” The narrator of this hadeeth, ibn ‘Abbaas, added, talking to a painter: if you *must* do it, then illustrate trees and lifeless things. From other injunctions, we know that the main thing an artist should avoid is the face, and specifically the eyes. Thus, Muslim artists frequently draw people with sunglasses on or with their eyes closed or obscured.

- Ignorance of Allah’s greatness, His Favors upon humanity and His accessibility. By comparing Allah to an unapproachable tyrannical despot, some of them claimed that it is from proper etiquette to pray to other than Allah.
- Avoiding letting someone be spooked by the jinn, like using Ouija boards or “calling on the dead” since that is all a type of invocation of other than Allah and putting your faith to trial.
- Resembling the rituals performed by polytheists. This could be by worshiping Allah at the specific *places* where they worship, or in the specific *form* that they worship, or specific *time* of their worship, or being *present* during their worship. These are all settings where the shaytaan is more likely to tempt the believers to deviate to greater resemblance in manner, intention, etc.
- Forgetting to seek Allah’s Help by invocation, like Ibrahim’s and [Muhammad’s](#) “*Oh Allah, do not make my grave a worshiped idol.*”
- Blindly following the customs of one’s ancestors and their superstitions. Just like everyone alive, even Muslims should look to their own customs and folktales that they may have grown up with and investigate whether that is approved by Allah or not,

{وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْلَوْكَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ (170)} سورة البقرة

“When it is said to them: ‘Follow what Allah has sent down.’ They say: ‘Nay! We shall follow what we found our fathers following.’ Even though their fathers did not understand a thing nor were they guided?” [2:170]

{إِنَّهُمْ أَلَفُوا آبَاءَهُمْ ضَالِّينَ (69)} سورة الصافات

“Truly, they found their ancestors on the wrong path.” [37:69]

References:

Kitaab-al-Tawheed by Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab and multiple commentaries of it, such as those by al-Fawzaan, ibn al-Uthaymeen, al-Sa'dee, ibn Baaz, Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Hasan and Sulaymaan ibn Abdullah.

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