

There Is No God But Allah

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All the letters of the *kalimah* (la ilaha illa Allah) are taken from the letters of the word Allah, and in this way the verbal composition of the *kalimah* alludes to its meaning. So, there is no letter in the *kalimah* but those of this blessed word, just as the meaning of the *kalimah* is a detailed expression of the meaning implicit in this word.

One of the most important collections of hadiths in the Shi'ite corpus is that of Shaikh Saduq's Tawhid. Here I would like to present in translation the first Hadith narrated in this collection together with the commentary on it by Qadi Sa'id al-Qummi.

It is reported through a chain of transmission that Abu Sa'id al-Khudri said: "The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him and his progeny) said: 'I have not said and no speaker before me has said the like of la ilaha illa Allah (there is no god but Allah).'"

Commentary

What is meant is that nothing has been said that more completely and effectively expresses the meaning of Tawhid. This saying (*kalimah*) provides an exhaustive statement of divine individuality, several aspects of whose elegance in composition are:

First, it combines the two Arabic terms of exclusion, la (no) and illa (but, except for), which express denial and exception, respectively.

Second, just as it refers to the unity (*Tawhid*) of the true object of worship, it also refers to the perishing of what is other than Him and its vanity, for everything obeyed other than Him and looked upon as having power and might is a god. As it is stated in the Qur'an,

"Have you seen him who takes his own desires as his god?" (25:43).

Thus, the *kalimah* denies all gods but Him.

Third, it indicates that all the worship produced by any worshiper is, in reality, for Allah, and it returns to Him, as all affairs return to Him, for whatever is imagined to be good is from Allah and ultimately praise returns to Him.

Fourth, all the letters of the *kalimah* [la ilaha illa Allah] are taken from the letters of the word Allah, and in this way the verbal composition of the *kalimah* alludes to its meaning. So, there is no letter in the *kalimah* but those of this blessed word, just as the meaning of the *kalimah* is a detailed expression of the meaning implicit in this word. Allah is the name of the essence that summarizes all of the attributes of perfection, the substantial to which are applied all the characteristics of lordship, whose sanctity admits no partner in existence or perfection, attribute or action.

The verbal composition of the *kalimah* from the letters of Allah is also a concise allusion to the fact that all existence and all perfections of existence radiate from His existence and overflow from His perfection. So the noble word beautifully signifies His singularity in true existence. Nothing else but Him is deserving in and of itself of existence and the perfections of existence.

Fifth, the *kalimah* contains the word Allah and none of His other Names, for this word is the most embracing of all the Names, and so, the remembrance (dhikr) of it is the remembrance of all the Names.

Sixth, the letters as written and pronounced in Arabic are fifteen, and the number of the gates to the garden and the fire also add up to fifteen. In this there is an allusion to the fact that the pronunciation of these letters with true belief by the unitarians opens the gates to the garden for them and locks the gates to the fire for them. It also alludes to the fact that hell is other than Allah, and that the garden is the vision of Allah.

Seventh, its letters come from the hollow of the mouth, so, it may be spoken overtly or covertly.

Eighth, the denial of others in the *kalimah* precedes the affirmation of the Almighty One. This alludes to the fact that until the wayfarer toward Allah does not cast off what is other than Him and does not judge all else as nothing, he will not reach nearness to Allah and His proximity.

Ninth, the first letter of the *kalimah* is lam and the last is ha, and their combination forms lahu (his), so ***“His is the kingdom” (39:6)*** in the beginning and the end, and ***“His is the creation and the command.” (7:54)***

Tenth, by Divine ordination, this composition [of letters or words] has magnificent benefits, in its influence and establishment of marvelous effects for the purification of the interior and the illumination of the heart, the perfection of human souls, and the attainment of nearness to the exalted kingdom (*malaket*) and to the holy angels, the witnessing of the lights, attachment to the righteous, purification from blameworthy attributes, purity from wicked traits, as is known by the people of remembrance.

“So ask the people of remembrance if you do not know.” (16:43)

Translator's Notes:

A difference should be mentioned between the concept of sanctity or holiness in Western culture and the concept of *muqaddis*. While the Western concept indicates veneration and taboo, the Arabic indicates purity and it may take the preposition 'an (from), so that a thing may be said to be holy from any pollution, in the sense that it is free of any pollution, pure from contamination, far above being polluted.

Remembrance (*dhikr*) is the repetition of a word or phrase, aloud or in one's heart, in remembrance of God. It is one of the two most important technical methods of tasawwuf, the other being interior visualization and contemplation (*fikr*).

The fifteen letters correspond to the following: LA ILAH(a) ILLA ALLAH. The Arabic letter alif is indicated here as 'A' and as 'I'. The word Allah has three letter types and is counted as having five letters, two alifs, two lams and one ha, although Ibn Arabi counts it as having six, because he counts the final vocalization, which is neither written as a letter nor pronounced: ALLAH(u). See Al-Futesat, Vol. 1, p. 103.

Since the lips need not move when one pronounces the *kalimah*, but only the tongue, one may utter the saying without others understanding that one is doing so.

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