

Islam and the concept of a single God

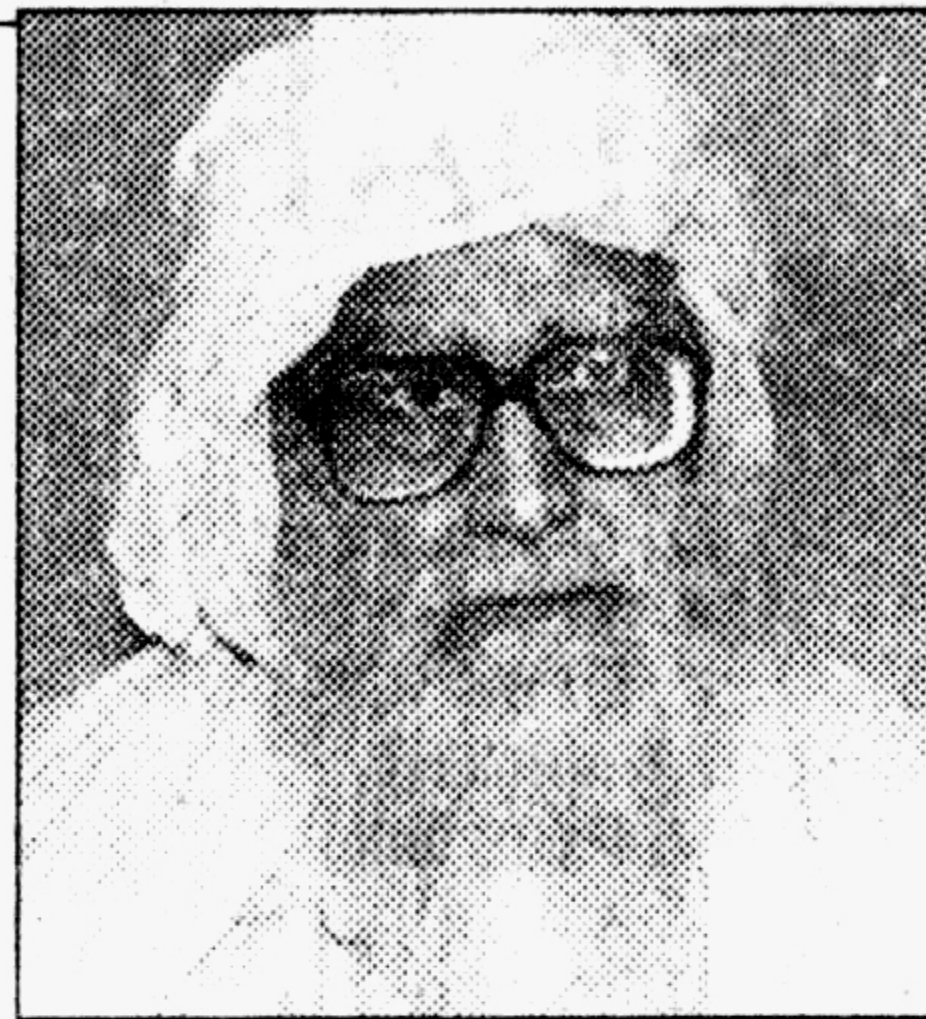
Fundamental to the religious structure of Islam is the concept of *tawheed*, or monotheism. As the seed is to tree, so is *tawheed* to Islam. Just as the tree is a wonderfully developed extension of the seed, so is the religious system of Islam a multi-faceted expression of a single basic concept. For monotheism in Islam does not mean simply belief in one God, but in God's oneness in all respects. No one shares in this oneness of God.

Anthropologists would have us believe that the concept of God in religion began with polytheism, that polytheism gradually developed into monotheism. That is, the concept of *tawheed* was an evolutionary feature of religion which emerged at a later stage. But according to Islamic belief, *tawheed* has existed since the beginning of human life. The first man, Adam, was the first messenger of God. It was this first messenger who taught human beings the religion of *tawheed*.

It was in later generations that this system began to change. This happened principally because people began to make the assumption that divinity was inherent in natural phenomena. They wondered at the loftiness of the mountains, the unceasing flow of the rivers and the extraordinary brilliance of the sun and moon, and took it to mean that things possessed of such awesome attributes must necessarily share in God's divinity. Men gifted with special talents, likewise, came to be included in the category of the divine; they were supposed to be incarnations of God Himself. It was in this manner that polytheism crept into the religion.

In consonance with the view that human religions began with *tawheed*, and polytheism developed later, the basic mission of all the Prophets who appeared at intervals in this world was to lead people away from the worship of many gods and back to the worship of the One God. In other words, to turn them away from the adulation of creatures and towards reverence for the Creator.

Horizons



Wahiduddin Khan

As proof of the Creator's existence, the Quran advances the fact of the very existence of the universe. All studies of the universe show it cannot be *sui genesis*: some other agent is essential for the universe to have come into existence. This means the choice is not between a universe with God or one without God, rather it is between a universe with God, or no universe at all. And so we are left with only the option of a universe with God — a condition also necessary for the existence of human beings.

God created man and settled him on the earth. After installing him here, He has kept an unceasing watch over him. Life and death are equally in His hands. Whatever man gains or loses, it is all a matter of the will of God. As the Quran expresses it: "God; there is no God but He the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him, unless by His leave? He is cognisant of men's affairs, now and in the future. Men can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One." (2:255)

While *tawheed* means the oneness of

God, it must be stressed that this concept differs radically from pantheistic or animist notions that all the forms of existence are diverse manifestations of one and the same reality. On the contrary, the oneness of God as defined in Islam means there is only one Being of the nature of God. All other things of the universe, physical or non-physical, are the creations of this One God: they are in no respect constituents of, or partners in the divine godhead.

However, in Islamic theology, *tawheed* does have two aspects to it: *tawheed fi az-Zat* and *tawheed fi as-Sifat*, that is, oneness of being and oneness of attributes. This means that in addition to the fact of there being only one Being who enjoys the status of divinity and possesses divine powers, there is also the fact that no one else can have a share in, or lay claim to God's attributes. These include the power of creating and sustaining the universe with all its countless bodies in motion, of sustaining and nourishing our world: in short, of governing all the happenings in the heavens and on earth; all of these are directly managed by God. No representative or deputy of God has any power — either independent or delegated — over the events of the universe: "He throws the veil of night over the day. Swiftly they follow one another. It was He who created the sun, the moon and the stars and made them subservient to His will. His is the creation, His the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all creatures." (7:54)

The divisibility of the divine attributes is totally alien to Islam. Just as God is alone in His being, so is He alone in His attributes. In recognition of His uniqueness, the Quran opens with the following invocation: "Praise be to God, lord of the universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Judgement. You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have favoured, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray." (1:1-7)