

Title: Explaining Tawhīd

Original Title: تعريف التوحيد ، فتاوى أركان الإسلام

Original Author: Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn

E X P L A I N I N G

Tawhīd

T H E B E L I E F T H A T A L L A H I S T R U L Y O N E

BY:

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¹ Adapted from Ibn al-'Uthaymīn's article "Ta'rīf al-Tawhīd" from his book "Fatāwá Arkān al-Islām."

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WHAT IS TAWḤĪD?

Tawḥīd is the special belief of Islam; no followers of any other religion truly believe in complete Tawḥīd except Muslims. It is the belief that Allah is truly one and unique in his lordship, his right to be worshipped, and in his names and descriptions.

Tawḥīd is an Arabic word (تَوْحِيدٌ), a noun that represents a belief that something is singular, that it is unique and one. This means believing two things together: believing something *is* true and believing something *is not* true. It means to believe that whatever or whoever you are making unique and one **is** the only unique one, and it means to believe that anything else **is not** like the unique one.

For example, people will only truly believe in Tawḥīd when they understand that nothing deserves to be worshipped except Allah alone. By this, we believe any form of worship **is not** supposed to be given to anyone or anything other than Allah, and we believe all worship **is** to be given to only one – Allah alone. So it is not enough to just believe Allah deserves for all people to worship him. We have to also believe that no one else deserves to be worshipped by people.

This is the true meaning of Tawḥīd – that Allah is the only one who should be worshipped and nothing else and no one else should be worshipped instead of Allah or along with Allah.

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Review

1. In your own words, what does Tawḥīd mean? (page 3)



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THE CATEGORIES OF TAWḤĪD

There are different categories of Tawḥīd but they are all included in the basic meaning of Tawḥīd: Believing in and worshipping Allah alone with whatever names, actions, and descriptions that he alone deserves.

Muslim scholars explain the categories of Tawḥīd as three:

1. Tawḥīd of Lordship
2. Tawḥīd of Worship
3. Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions

After studying the verses in the Quran and the ḥadīth², scholars agreed that all forms of belief in Allah and all parts of Tawḥīd are included in these three categories.

Review

1. What are the three categories of Tawḥīd? (page 5)



² Ḥadīth: Statements, actions, or approvals of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

THE CATEGORIES OF TAWḤĪD

Tawḥīd of Lordship

Tawḥīd of Lordship, or *تَوْحِيدُ الرَّبُّوبِيَّةِ* (*Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah*) in Arabic, is to understand and believe that Allah is the only one who ¹ creates, ² owns, and ³ controls everything.

Allah is the Only Creator

As for creating, Allah is the only one who creates anything. Everything other than him (and his actions and descriptions) is created. There is no creator but Allah. About this, Allah says in the Quran:

﴿ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ﴾

Is there a creator other than Allah that provides you with provisions (food, drink, etc.) from the heavens and earth? There is no (true) god except him.³

Still, some people worship others besides Allah. Allah asks about those other people who are worshipped:

﴿ أَفَمَنْ يَخْلُقُ كَمَنْ لَا يَخْلُقُ ۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴾

Is he who creates like someone who cannot create? Will you not then remember?⁴

³ The Quran, Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:3

⁴ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:17

So Allah alone is the only creator and believing this is a part of believing that Allah is our Lord. He created everything, planning their creation even before they were made. Allah's creation includes everything he made himself with his own actions and also includes what people make with their actions. People do not actually create things when they make them; they simply change things that Allah has already created. For example, think about a carpenter making a wooden chair. He does not actually create the wood (from a seed to a tree); he simply changes wood into a chair. So since people are created, their actions and what they make are also considered Allah's creation. It is part of our belief in destiny to believe that Allah is the creator of even people's actions. He says:

﴿ وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

Allah created you all and whatever you do.⁵

One way to understand this is that the actions someone does are part of who that person is; they are his choices and capabilities – what he decides to do and is able to do. Since the person is created by Allah, his choices and capabilities are also parts of Allah's creation. So the creator of the person is also the creator of the person's actions.

How do we understand that Allah is the only one who creates, but he also says in this verse:

⁵ Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt, 37:96

﴿فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ﴾

Blessed is Allah, the best of creators.⁶

Since Allah said he is ﴿the best of creators﴾, does this mean there are actually other creators besides him? Also, the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said about people who make pictures or statues (of people or animals):

«يُقَالُ لَهُمْ: أَحْيُوا مَا خَلَقْتُمْ»

It will be said to them (on the Day of Resurrection): “Bring to life what you have created!”⁷

Do these texts mean that people create things too? No, no one creates with the actual meaning of “create” like Allah does. In other words, no one can bring something into existence from nothing just like no one can bring something dead to life like Allah can. The “creation” of people is only their changing of things from one condition to another, but it is still Allah who originally created those things that people change. Remember the carpenter making the wooden chair? He did not create a chair; he only changed the condition of the wood that Allah created from a seed into a tree.

Similarly, a picture-maker or an artist who paints or makes sculptures, when he makes an image, he does not actually bring something into existence out of nothing. Instead, the only thing he can do is change something that Allah already created from one condition to another. For example, he can change clay (dirt, water that Allah created)

⁶ Sūrah al-Muminūn, 23:14

⁷ Recorded by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

into the form of a bird, or he can change a plain white piece of paper (which comes from trees created by Allah) into a colorful picture by painting it with what Allah already created (water, the pigments to make colors). So the things an artist may use still originally come from things that only Allah can create.

This is the difference between saying that Allah is the only creator and saying people “create” things—everyone other than Allah simply changes the condition of things Allah already created into different conditions.

Allah is the Only Owner

Part of Tawḥīd of Lordship is to believe that Allah is the only one who absolutely owns everything. About his ownership, Allah says:

﴿ تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴾

Blessed is the one in whose hand is the ownership (of all things), and he is capable of doing anything.⁸

And he also says:

﴿ قُلْ مَنْ بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ يُحْيِيهِمْ وَلَا يُجَارُ عَلَيْهِ ﴾

Say: In whose hand is the ownership of everything, while he protects (all), and no one can protect against him?⁹

⁸ Sūrah al-Mulk, 67:1

⁹ Sūrah al-Muminūn, 23:88

So the true and absolute owner and king is Allah alone. By saying someone other than Allah owns something, it is simply a way of associating or connecting those things with the people. Allah even confirms this type of ownership in his book:

﴿ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتُمْ مَفَاتِحَهُ ﴾

...or those (houses) for which you own the keys.¹⁰

There are other texts that show that others besides Allah have a sense of possession and ownership. However, the way people own something is not like the way Allah owns everything. People's ownership of things is *specific* to each person and it is *limited*. What this means is that if you own your house then no one else owns it – the ownership is *specific* to you. Also, if you own money, you cannot do anything you want with it – the ownership is *limited*. People cannot physically do whatever they want with what they have and they are also not allowed to do whatever they want from a religious point. For example, we can only do things with what we have that Allah has allowed us. For this reason, the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) forbid people from wasting money and Allah also says:

﴿ وَلَا تُؤْتُوا السُّفَهَاءَ أَمْوَالَكُمُ الَّتِي جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ قِيَامًا ﴾

And do not give to foolish people your wealth that Allah has made as a way to support yourself.¹¹

¹⁰ Sūrah al-Nūr, 24:61

¹¹ Sūrah al-Nisā, 4:5

So whatever people have, it is a specific and limited ownership. Allah's ownership, however, is absolute and complete. He can do whatever he wants with whatever and whoever he wants since he owns everything, and he cannot be questioned about what he does but we will be questioned.

Allah is the Only Controller

Part of Tawhīd of Lordship and believing that Allah is the only Lord is to believe that he alone controls and plans everything. He is the only one who controls and decides what happens with his creation since he owns it. He controls and decides everything in the heavens and the earth just as he says:

﴿أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ ۗ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

To him belong the creation and the command. So blessed is Allah, the Lord of all creations.¹²

Allah's control is a complete type of control and planning which means that when he decides something, no one can prevent it from happening. And when he commands something to happen, no one can change it. As for the type of control that people have – like someone controlling his money or his children – just like people's ownership, this type of control is limited and specific to the person.

From what we discussed, the meaning of Tawhīd of Lordship should be clear: It is to understand and believe that Allah is the only one who **1** creates, **2** owns, and **3** controls everything.

¹² Sūrah al-'Arāf, 7:54

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Review

1. In your own words, explain Tawḥīd of Lordship. *(pages 6-11)*
2. How do we understand the meaning of people “creating” things? *(pages 7-9)*
3. What is the difference between people owning things and Allah’s ownership?
(pages 10-11)



THE CATEGORIES OF TAWḤĪD

Tawḥīd of Worship

Tawḥīd of Worship, or *تَوْحِيدُ الْأُلُوهِيَّةِ* (*Tawḥīd al-Ulūhiyyah*) in Arabic, is to believe that Allah alone is the only one who deserves all worship. It is to worship Allah alone and worship nothing else. People should never worship anyone else instead of Allah or along with him, by doing any act of worship or seeking to get closer to them like they do with Allah. This is the type of Tawḥīd the disbelievers during Prophet Muhammad's time refused to accept. This is also the main type of Tawḥīd Allah sent the messengers with and the main type he revealed in the books. Although the other two types of Tawḥīd are found in the messenger's teachings and in all of Allah's books, Tawḥīd of Worship is the main focus the prophets and messengers focused on correcting.

Tawḥīd of Worship means that people do not show any form of worship to anyone but Allah alone – not an angel close to Allah, not a messenger sent by Allah, not a righteous worshipper of Allah, and not to anything else of Allah's creation. No one but Allah alone deserves worship.

Anyone who breaks this form of Tawḥīd (by worshipping others besides Allah), then he is not a true believer; he is a disbeliever even if he accepts Tawḥīd of Lordship and Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions. So, if someone truly believes that Allah is the only creator, owner, and controller of everything and that Allah alone deserves the highest names and descriptions yet he worships along with Allah something else, then his acceptance of the other two types of Tawḥīd would never benefit him. For example, if a

person completely believes in Tawḥīd of Lordship and Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions but he goes to the grave of some dead person—even if the person in the grave was a righteous Muslim—worshipping the dead person, praying to him, making vows to him, and trying to get close to him, such a person is then a disbeliever in Allah destined for the fire if he dies doing those things. This is because Allah says:

﴿ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ ۖ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ ﴾

Surely, whoever worships others with Allah, then Allah has forbidden Paradise for him, his final place is the fire, and there will never be any helper for the transgressors.¹³

Anyone who has read the book of Allah knows that the disbelievers who fought Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), they used to believe that Allah is the only Lord and creator (Tawḥīd of Lordship). Yet they used to worship others along with Allah and so they became disbelievers in Allah because they did not accept Tawḥīd of Worship. Think about this: if someone believes Allah is the only Lord and that he is the Most Merciful but that person worships other people by praying to someone other than Allah, then how could his belief that Allah is the Lord and the Most Merciful help him? If he believes Allah is the only Lord then why would he worship others? The prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said about the importance of Tawḥīd of Worship:

« مَنْ مَاتَ لَا يُشْرِكُ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ ، وَمَنْ مَاتَ يُشْرِكُ بِهِ شَيْئًا دَخَلَ النَّارَ »

¹³ Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:72

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Whoever dies without associating anything in worship with Allah will enter Paradise, and whoever dies associating anything in worship with Him will enter the fire.¹⁴

Review

1. In your own words, explain Tawḥīd of Worship. (pages 13-15)
2. Explain why believing only in Tawḥīd of Lordship is not enough to make someone a true believer in Allah. (pages 13-15)

¹⁴ Recorded by Muslim

THE CATEGORIES OF TAWḤĪD **Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions**

Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions, or *تَوْحِيدُ الْأَسْمَاءِ وَالصِّفَاتِ* (*Tawḥīd al-Asmā wal-Ṣifāt*) in Arabic, is to believe in and accept the perfect names and descriptions that Allah has described himself with in the Quran or that the prophet described Allah with in the ḥadīth. This type of Tawḥīd means we describe only Allah with these names and qualities and we never use them to describe others besides Allah.

To complete our belief in Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions, we accept whatever names and descriptions Allah uses to describe himself but with the following rules:

1. We believe Allah's descriptions are real and actual.
2. We do not change the clear meanings of Allah's names and descriptions.
3. We do not believe his descriptions are similar to descriptions of the creation.
4. We do not ask "how" exactly Allah's descriptions are because we cannot truly understand everything about Allah.

So for this type of Tawḥīd, we name Allah and describe him with whatever names and descriptions he has described himself with in the Quran or ḥadīth (through Prophet Muhammad). We accept and believe in these names and descriptions as being real and actual but in a way that suits Allah. We do not change their meanings, deny them altogether, and we do not question them or believe they are similar to the names and descriptions of the creation.

Let us take a real example. Allah describes himself as being the Ever-Living:

﴿هُوَ الْحَيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ﴾

He is the Ever-Living. There is no (true) god but him.¹⁵

We believe that the Ever-Living is one of Allah's names. We also believe in whatever description the name means – since Allah is the Ever-Living, we believe in his description of having life. The difference between his description of life and our lives is that Allah's descriptions are perfect so his life is perfect, ever-lasting and complete. He was always alive and his life will never end; Allah will never die like we will.

For another example, Allah names himself the All-Hearing:

﴿وَاللَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ﴾

And Allah is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.¹⁶

So we believe it is one of his names and we also believe in the description it means – that Allah has complete hearing. While people can only hear sounds close to us, Allah's hearing is not limited like this; he hears everything at all times. And since his name, the All-Hearing, also suggests an action (hearing, listening), we believe Allah also does the action of hearing his creation. Applying the rules above, we believe Allah really hears (rule 1), we do not change the clear meaning of hearing to mean something else like his

¹⁵ Sūrah Ghāfir 40:65

¹⁶ Sūrah al-Māidah, 5:76

knowledge (rule 2), and we do not believe Allah's hearing is like our limited hearing (rule 3). As for rule 4, we do not ask how Allah hears because there is no way we can truly know everything about Allah because our minds are limited. We know we hear with our ears, but Allah is not like us so we do not imagine or ask how Allah's descriptions are.

Let us study another example of one of Allah's descriptions in more detail. Allah says in the Quran:

﴿ وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ يَدُ اللَّهِ مَغْلُولَةٌ ۚ غُلَّتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَلُعِنُوا بِمَا قَالُوا ۗ بَلْ يَدَاهُ مَبْسُوطَتَانِ يُنْفِقُ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ ﴾

And the Jews said, “Allah’s hand is tied up (he is stingy)!” May their hands be tied up and may they be cursed for what they say. Rather, both his hands are widely outstretched. He spends (of his favors) as he wants.¹⁷

In this verse, Allah says ﴿ **both his hands are widely outstretched** ﴾ So since he says he has two hands and they are stretched, giving favors to his creation generously, we must believe that Allah does in fact have two real, actual hands (rule 1). We do not change the known meaning of “hand” and explain that Allah’s hand really means “power” as some people do (rule 2). This is completely wrong because if Allah meant “power,” he would say power, but he said “hands” so “hands” means hands.

We also do not try to imagine with our minds how Allah’s hands are, and we do not speak about how they may be with our tongues (rule 4). We believe Allah’s hands are

¹⁷ Sūrah al-Māidah, 5:64

special and different than our hands (rule 3). Allah's hands cannot be similar to the hands of the creation because Allah says:

﴿لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ﴾

There is nothing similar to him.¹⁸

And Allah has forbidden:

﴿وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

...that you say things about Allah that you do not know.¹⁹

So whoever believes or says that Allah's two hands are similar in any way to people's hands then he has denied and made a lie out of Allah's statement ﴿**There is nothing similar to him**﴾ Someone who believes or says that has also disobeyed Allah because he said:

﴿فَلَا تَضْرِبُوا لِلَّهِ الْأَمْثَالَ﴾

So do not put forth similarities with Allah.²⁰

As for someone who questions Allah's hands, asking "how" they are, he has then begun speaking about Allah things he has no knowledge.

¹⁸ Sūrah al-Shūrā, 42:11

¹⁹ Sūrah al-'Arāf, 7:33

²⁰ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:74

To summarize, regarding Tawhīd of Names and Descriptions, we must believe in whatever names and descriptions Allah describes himself with or his messenger describes him with and we believe Allah's descriptions are real. We do not change the meanings of them, we do not think Allah's descriptions are like the creation's descriptions, and we do not ask about how exactly Allah's descriptions are.

Review

1. In your own words, explain Tawhīd of Names and Descriptions. (pages 16-20)
2. What are the four main rules we follow when believing in Allah's descriptions? (page 16)
3. Allah mentions another description of his in the Quran:

﴿الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى﴾

The Most-Merciful rose over the throne.²¹

From what you know of the four rules, explain how we should believe in Allah's description (and action) of his rising over his throne.



²¹ Sūrah ṬāHā, 20:5

REVIEWING TAWḤĪD

1. What does Tawḥīd mean? *(page 3)*
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4. How do we understand the meaning of people “creating” things? *(pages 7-9)*
5. What is the difference between people owning things and Allah’s ownership?
(pages 10-11)
6. Explain Tawḥīd of Worship. *(pages 13-15)*
7. Explain why believing only in Tawḥīd of Lordship is not enough to make someone a true believer in Allah. *(pages 13-15)*
8. Explain Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions. *(pages 16-20)*
9. What are the four main rules we follow when believing in Allah’s descriptions?
(page 16)
10. Allah mentions his name, the All-Knowing, in the Quran:

﴿ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴾

And Allah is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.²²

From what you know of Tawḥīd of Names and Descriptions and the four rules, explain how we should believe in this name and its description (knowledge).



²² Sūrah al-Māidah, 5:76