

CHAPTER AL-IKHLAS

Faqih Imani and a Group of Learned Scholars

Contents of the Sura:

This Sura, as its name indicates, is about the Unity of Allah, and His Oneness. In its four verses, the Sura describes monotheism completely.

Occasion of Revelation of the Sura:

On the occasion of revelation of this Sura, a tradition from Imam Sadiq (AS) says:

A Jew asked the holy Prophet (S) to describe the identity or to relate the genealogy of Allah. He remained silent and gave no answer for three days, then, the Messenger Angel brought (him) this Sura and he (S) gave them their answer.
Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 564

Some other narrations denote that the Jew who asked this question was Abdullah ibn Suriya, one of the known chiefs of the Jews. Another narration says that Abdullah ibn Salam asked this question from the holy Prophet (S) , in Mecca, and believed (in Islam) , but, he kept his faith concealed.

Another narration says that the pagans of Mecca asked such a question - Al-Mizan, vol. 20, p. 546

In some narrations it is also said that the Christians of Najran asked the question.

There is no contradiction in these narrations because the question may have been asked by all of them, separately, which is, itself, an evidence to the extraordinary importance of this Sura, which answers the questions of different persons from various groups.

The Virtue of studying this Sura:

On the virtue of reciting this Sura, numerous narrations from the holy Prophet and Ahlul-Bait (AS) are cited in Islamic sources which refer to the extraordinary greatness of the Sura. The author of Atyab-ul-Bayan Commentary, collected 25 of them. (Atyab-ul-Bayan, vol. 14, p. 259)

The holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said in a tradition: "Is there anyone of you unable to recite one third of the Qur'an in one night"? One of his listeners asked: "O Messenger of Allah! Who is able to do that"? The Prophet (S) said: "Recite 'Say: He, Allah, is One! (Sura Ikhlas) ".
Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10. p. 561 (and other commentary sources)

A tradition says that the recitation of this Sura, when arriving at a home, causes the increase of sustenance and removing poverty from the people therein. (Ibid)

There are ninety different traditions and narrations mentioned, with their approved references, on the virtue and commentary of this Sura in Tafsir-i-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn. (Nur-uth-Thaqalayn vol. 5 p. 699-715)

On the idea that reading this Sura is equal to one third of the whole Qur'an, some have said that it is for the reason that the Holy Qur'an contains ordinances, creeds, and history, and this Sura states the creed part in an intensive form.

Some others have said that the Qur'an is made up of three main themes; origin, end, and what is in the middle between these two, and this Sura is about the first theme.

This meaning, that about one third of the Qur'an is the description of monotheism, is also acceptable; the extract of which has come in this Sura.

In conclusion, of this statement, we cite a tradition on the splendor of the Sura.

Imam Ali-ibn al-Husain, az-Zain-ul-Abideen (AS) was asked about Sura Ikhlas (Monotheism) , and he said:

Verily Allah, the Almighty and Glorious, knew that at the end of time there will come some people who will be precise and careful (in affairs), then, He sent down the Sura (Ikhlas) , and the beginning verses of Sura Hadid up to 'And He has full knowledge of the secrets of (all) hearts'. Everyone who seeks beyond this will perish". (Usul-i-Kafi, vol. 1, Chapter Nesbat, tradition 3)

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

1. *Say: He, Allah, is One,*
2. *Allah, the Eternal,*
3. *He begets not, nor is He begotten,*
4. *And there is none like unto Him.*

Commentary:

The first verse, of this Sura, is an answer to the repeated question of many persons from different groups of people or tribes who asked about the attributes and identity of Allah. The command is:

Say: He, Allah, is One.

It begins with the Arabic term /huwa/ 'He' which is a pronoun-third-person-singular and refers to something known to all, but ambiguous and not identified with any, as against the usual reference in the term of first person singular 'I'. It is, indeed, a code referring to the fact that His Holy Being is extremely concealed and no human thought or imagination can touch it, though the signs of His Existence have filled the world, totally, and are more apparent and clear than all things, as Sura Fussilat, No. 41, verse 53 says: Soon will We show them Our Signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth) , and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth...

Then, it makes this unknown fact manifest by saying that 'Allah is One'.

By the way, the term /qul/, here, means 'express this fact and tell others'.

A tradition from Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS) says that after expressing this statement he has said: Pagans and idol worshippers used to point to their idols using demonstrative pronouns and say: 'O Muhammad, these are our gods that can be seen. You, too, describe your God so that we can see and understand'. Allah revealed these verses: 'Say: He, Allah, is One', and the /h/ in the word /huwa/ refers to the confirmation of the matter and takes it into consideration. And /w/ is a third person pronoun which refers to the meaning that it is concealed from the sight of the eyes and it is beyond the limits of the touch of the senses. (Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 3, p. 221, Tradition 12)

In another tradition, Imam Amir-ul-Mo'mineen Ali (AS) says: On the night before the battle of Badr I saw 'Khidr' in my dream. I asked him to tell me something with which I would defeat the enemies. He told me: 'Say: /ya hu ya man la huwa illa hu/, The next morning I told the Messenger of Allah (AS) what had happened, and he (AS) said: 'O Ali you have been taught the Greatest Name (of Allah) '. Thereafter, I repeatedly said the phrase in the battle of Badr. (*Ibid.*, p. 222)

When 'Ammar Yasir heard that Hazrat Ali (AS) was reciting this phrase, habitually, while he was fighting on the day of Siffin, he asked him what it was, and Hazrat Ali (AS) replied: It is the Greatest Name (of Allah) and the pillar of monotheism. (Ibid)

Allah is a proper name for God, and the meaning of the Imam's expression is that in this very word are gathered all His attributes of Bounty and Glory, and due to this it has been called 'The Greatest of Names'.

This proper name is used for nothing but God, while other names for Allah each of which usually refers to one of His qualities of Beauty and Glory, are often used for other than Him.

The root of the word is mentioned differently; /ilahat/, /alahah/, /alilahah/, /ilah/, /walih/; however, Allah, from whatever root it is, has been used as a proper noun, applied to 'the Being Who exists necessarily, by Himself; comprising all the attributes of perfection; a proper name denoting the true god, containing all the excellent, divine names; a unity having all the essence of existing things'.

This Sacred Name is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an almost one thousand times, which is more than any other name of His Holy Names. This name brings light in our heart, makes us firm and calm, and takes us into a world full of purity and serenity.

The term /ahad/ is derived from /wahdah/, and some believe that /ahad/ and /wahid/ are the same in many cases. In this case, /ahad/ is interchangeable with /wahid/ when it is used as an epithet applied for Allah, because /al-ahad/, as an epithet, is applied to Allah alone, and signifies 'the One'; the Soul; He Who has always been one and alone; or the Indivisible; or He Who has no second (to share) in His Lordship, nor in His Essence, nor in His attributes.

One can say /huwal wahid/ and /huwal ahad/ and, in like manner, /ahad/ without the article being used as an epithet, especially in relation to Allah. It is interchangeable, in this case, (but not in other cases) with /wahid/. In this verse /ahad/ is a substitute for Allah, just as an indeterminate noun is sometimes a substitute for a determinate noun.

But, some others believe that there is a vast difference between the two Arabic words /ahad/ and /wahid/ both commonly thought to mean 'Oneness'. To indicate the Unity of God, it is said, in this verse, that God is Allah, i.e. One; One in the sense of Absolute Oneness of His Essential Existence, not in the numerical sense of the word, which has its second and third, but, the One which has no second.

The expression 'One', is in the sense of being the 'ONLY' and, in conceiving Whose existence, all faculties of the human intellect are helpless. He is such a One that even His attributes are His Essence and are not and can never be separate from Him.

It is a death blow which Islam has rendered, about the All-Divine, to all imaginary concepts of any kind of polytheistic doctrines and the phenomena of plurality.

He is One with none comparable to Him, without any beginning or end, unlimited by time, space or circumstances. A reality before which all others have no existence. He is the Creator, One, and everything is His creation.

A tradition from Imam Mohammad Baqir (AS) says:

'Ahad' and 'wahid' both have one concept which is One with nothing comparable or similar to it, and monotheism is the confession to His Oneness.

Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 3, p. 222.

In the Qur'an /wahid/ and /ahad/, both, refer to Allah, the One, the Only.

In the next verse, another epithet of that Holy Essence is referred to:

Allah, The Eternal

Many meanings are mentioned for /samad/ in Islamic narrations, commentaries, and lexicons.

Raghib cites in Mufradat that 'Samad means a Lord; one to whom reference is made in matters of importance'. Some others have said that 'samad' means 'something whose inside is not hollow, but it is full'.

It also means 'a Lord', when applied for Allah, because affairs are dependent upon Him. 'Samad' signifies one who is high or elevated in the utmost highness, and a Lord to whom one resigns himself, has recourse to, or is in need of, or One above Whom there is no one, or One Who continues, after His creatures have perished.

Imam Husain ibn Ali (AS) , in a tradition, has stated five meanings for 'samad':

1. Samad is a Lord Whose Lordship has attained its utmost point or degree.
 2. Samad is an Essence and Being that continues or continues for ever or is everlasting.
 3. Samad is the Existence that has not a hollow inside.
 4. Samad is the One Who takes no nourishment, food or drink.
 5. Samad is One Who does not sleep.
- Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 3, p. 223

A tradition from Imam Ali-ibn-al Husain (AS) says: 'Samad' is One Who has no partner and it is not difficult for Him to protect things, and nothing is hidden from Him. (Ibid.)

Some others have said /samad/ means 'independent of anyone'-All perfect-the One to Whom recourse is made by everything: Eternal for its needs, both for existence and for perfection; the One Who needs no sustenance of any kind-Self-existing to understand, Whose existence, every mind is captured in marvel and wonder. Nothing is hidden from His all-enveloping knowledge-is not accommodatable in anything, not even in intellect: Infinite in all aspects of existence and attributes.

The term 'samad' has such a vast meaning that we cannot mention them, completely, or in other words, the names or the attributes, mentioned to describe its nature, cannot be translated to convey the exact sense to the fullest meaning of the terms.

A tradition denotes that the citizens of Basrah wrote a letter to Imam Husain (AS) and asked him the meaning of /samad/.

He replied:

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

Then do not plunge in vain talk about the Qur'an and do not dispute about it and do not speak about it when you do not know (it) . Verily, I heard from my grandfather, the Messenger of Allah, who said:

'The person who talks about the Qur'an without knowing (it) , his abode will be in fire'.

Allah, Himself, has rendered 'samad' to mean:

'He begets not, nor is He begotten', 'And there is none like unto Him'... . Yes, Allah is 'samad' Who is not from anything and is not in anything or on anything; He is the Creator of everything and all are from Him by His Power; what He has created to perish will perish at His Will, and what He has created to remain will remain in His Knowledge. This is Allah; al – Samad.
(Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 565)

In the next verse, it rejects the idea of the Christians, the Jews, and the pagan Arabs who declared that Allah had a child or is a father. It says:

He begets not, nor is He begotten

Different from this is the statement of those who believe in Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Christians know 'Jesus' as the son of God. The Jews believe 'Ezra' ('Uzair) was the son of God: The Jews call 'Uzair a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the Unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them, how they are deluded away from the Truth!, (Sura Taubah, No. 9, verse 30) .

The Arab pagans believed that angels were the daughters of Allah: ...And they falsely having no knowledge, attribute to Him sons and daughters..., (Sura An'am, No. 6, Verse 100) .

It is understood from some of the Islamic narrations that 'begets', in the verse under discussion, has a broader meaning. It negates any material and delicate things emerging from Him, or He, the Sacred Essence, emerging from any material and delicate thing.

In the above mentioned letter of Imam Husain (AS) , to the people of Basrah, about the commentary of the term /samad/, he commented on the current verse, saying: /lam yalid/, i.e. there emitted nothing from Him-neither material things nor a child, nor other things that emit from creatures, nor a delicate thing like a soul.

Nothing appears in Him, such as sleep, imagination, grief, sadness, happiness, laughter, tears, fear and hope, courage and discouragement, hunger and satiety.

Allah is more exalted than that something should emit from Him, or that He begets something material or delicate, nor is He begotten from something material or delicate...Similar to a living creature coming out from another one, or a plant from the earth, water from a spring, fruits from trees, nor the like, emitting delicate things from their sources, such as vision from the eye, hearing from the ears, smelling from the nose, tasting from the mouth, speech from the tongue, knowledge and understanding from the heart (insight and soul) , and particles of fire from stone.... (Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 3, p. 224, and Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 566)

According to this tradition, 'begets' conveys a vast meaning, so that it may envelop any emitting things of any kind from anything else, and this is, in fact, the second meaning of the verse whose first and apparent meaning was the meaning that was mentioned in the beginning. Besides, the second meaning, with the analogy of the first meaning, is quite adaptable and understandable; since, if Allah has no children, it is because He is aloof from the qualities of material. This meaning is also right for other qualities of matter.

And there is none like unto Him.

The term /kufw/ originally means 'equal from the point of position and rank', then, it is used for any similarity.

Considering this verse, the Holy Essence of Allah is free from all qualities or obstacles that creatures have, and free from all defects and limitations. This is 'Unity of Attributes' that corresponds with 'Unity of Number'.

Therefore, He is One in Essence, in attributes, and in deeds; and He is unique in every aspect.

Amir-al-Mu'mineen Ali (AS) has said:

...no change can take place in Him and no lessening, diminishing, dwindling, decay and dissipation of His Mighty and Glory is possible, that He is not begotten from anyone nor does He beget anyone...He has no peer and no equal. He can destroy things created by Himself in such a way that they will cease to exist and disappear into nothingness....(Nahj-ul-Balagha, Sermon 186 (Arabic version))

This is an interesting commentary because it discusses the narrowest points of Unity. It warns us not to ascribe our qualities and attributes to Allah and, thus, not to create our glorified image as a personal deity.

Explanation:

The Belief in the Oneness of Allah.

The belief in Allah, as the Creator of the great universe, is the basis of Islam, and the criterion of thought, education, behaviour and action of the Muslim. All the details of the doctrine, nature and life's philosophy, etc., are built on this foundation.

Belief in Allah, in Islam, is based on logical evidence. Islam disapproves of imitation. In this respect, Imam Ali-ibn-Abi-Talib (AS) is quoted to have said: *The first step of religion is to accept, understand and realize Him (Allah) and a perfection of understanding lies in conviction and the true way of conviction is to sincerely believe that there is no god but He....* (Nahj-ul-Balagha, Sermon 1)

Islamic doctrine is rooted in the pure belief in the Oneness of Allah, the Glorified, and that there is no one but Him, no one like Him, or opposite to Him, etc. Allah is, also, above human qualities as these are characteristic of mortals. Allah is the Absolute, the Independent, and the Sufficient.

Believing in the Oneness of Allah, can according to Islamic doctrine, be understood from four distinct points:

1. The Belief in the Oneness of Allah in Himself:

Allah, the Glorified, is one Unique in Himself; not one of His creatures is like Him And there is none like unto Him, (Sura Ikhlas, No. 112, verse 4) .

It is a fact dictated by sound intellect and scientific reasoning. It is logically accepted that the self of the cause is different from the effect.

It is worth mentioning that the Human intellect can only perceive that which has an image which Man invokes in his own mind. Allah, the Glorified, is far from being reducible to this, and that is why the mind cannot fathom His Essence. How can Man perceive the Essence of the Divine self while he is unable to discover the truth about the material of the universe, though he can see and feel it and can describe it and know its effects. He, still, cannot know its essence, even if he can break it down into its component parts.

How could he perceive the Essence of the Great Creator, while the Qur'an presents this fact: ...yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allah, with the strength of His power (supreme) ! (Sura Ra'd, No. 13, verse 13) .

2. The Belief in the Oneness of Allah in His Attributes:

He alone has the most glorious attributes. He has complete absoluteness in knowledge, power, will, wisdom, independence, etc. He is above all faults, and no one is like Him in His attributes. It is logical that the attributes follow the self, and so the qualities of the sun are different from that of the dust. Likewise, Allah's attributes are different from that of the creatures. This is the meaning of Allah's saying: The most beautiful names belong to Allah: So call on Him by them... (Sura A'raf, No. 7, verse 180) , or, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, (Sura Fatiha, No. 1, verse 2) . It clarifies that He, alone, possesses the praised attributes. This is the meaning of Allah's saying: Glory to thy Lord, the Lord of Honour and Power! (He is free) from what they ascribe (to Him) !, (Sura Saffat, No. 37, verse 180) .

That means that Allah is above any fault the polytheists attribute to Him. The belief in the Oneness of Allah in His attributes cannot be comprehended except after stating the attributes which are truly Allah's. They are called 'the attributes of perfection', like having power, knowledge, will, choice, life, eternity, perpetuity, and wisdom, etc. This entails denying whatever attributes that are not His, like that of imperfection and fault, the need for time and space, doing evil, incarnation, movement, having appendages like hands and legs, etc. These are called 'the attributes of greatness' or 'the negative attributes'.

3. Belief in the Oneness of Allah in His Actions:

It is a self-evident truth that actions are expressions of the self and of attributes. As the hand can by no means act like the mind, due to the natural difference between the two in essence and attributes, and as the wind cannot act like electrical current, so no one can act like Allah, the Glorified. The inventions of Man are merely a process of making good use of the natural laws set by Allah. It is done through the mind which is granted to Man by Allah. Man's role is confined to arranging the particulars according to natural laws.

Allah alone can create, provide Man's provisions, raise up from death, cause to die and resurrect. He can do whatever He wills, for He is the Lord Who can do anything.

None can, other than Allah, affect the creation. None can repeal Allah's Will or do what He does.

4. The Belief in the Oneness of Allah in Worship:

True belief in the Oneness of Allah is incomplete without worshipping Allah faithfully. He is the Creator and the Owner of His creatures. He grants them His grace. He is, for such consideration, entitled to be worshipped. All divine messages have called Man to submit and yield to Allah alone. The Most Exalted says: Verily, I am God (Allah) : There is no god but I: So serve thou Me (only) , and establish regular prayer for celebrating My praise . (Sura Ta-Ha, No. 20, verse 14) .

He taught Man to say: Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek (Sura Fatiha, No. 1, verse 5) .

Worship is the gratitude shown to the source of grace and blessing, and acknowledgement of His favor, and performance of the duties ordained by Allah. Simultaneously, it leaves its perfecting impact on the human spirit, by guiding the instinct of religiousness buried in the depths of the human soul to the right direction. Thus, Man does not go astray, or wind up in the grip of tyrants.

Being a slave to Allah propels Man, really, to break the shackles which servitude intensifies in Man. Moreover, being a slave to Allah means turning one's face to Him, the source of grace, and beauty and rightness. The soul yearns for such attributes and seeks to attain perfection and progresses towards them. They become the sublimest objective and the highest ideal of Man's thought and actions. The Muslim knows with certitude that his Creator owns the most glorious attributes. He is the Just, Merciful, Wise, Oft-returning to Mercy, Kind to His servants who sin, Truthful, etc.

Man works to reflect the coloring of these attributes on his life, and to build human society and relations on the basis of these attributes. Consequently, he objectifies justice, love, mercy and grace in his life.

Islamic rites of worship have, moreover, educational and reformatory effects on the life of the individual and the group.

Supplication:

O Lord! Make us firm in monotheism throughout our life.

O Lord! Polytheism, like monotheism, has many branches. Being saved from polytheism is not possible but by Your Grace; envelop us in Your Mercy and Your Grace.

O Lord! Keep us alive with monotheism, put us in death with monotheism, and unite us on the Resurrection Day with the reality of monotheism.

The End of Sura Ikhlas

(Monotheism)