

82349 - How can we respond to those who say that tawaaf is like worshipping idols?

the question

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Detailed answer

First of all it is essential to define the essence of the message to which Islamic sharee'ah calls, and how it differs from the idolatry of Jaahiliyyah. Then we will be able to understand whether tawaaf around the Ka'bah is a manifestation of idolatry or of Tawheed and Islam.

If we refer to the Book of Allaah, may He be exalted, we will see that the essence of the Islamic religion is submission to the commands of Allaah and taking Him as our only Lord and God, and rejecting all others who are worshipped unlawfully.

Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad ﷺ) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission”

[al-Nisa' 4:65]

“And whosoever submits his face (himself) to Allaah, while he is a Muhsin (good-doer, i.e. performs good deeds totally for Allaah's sake without any show-off or to gain praise or fame and does them in accordance with the Sunnah of Allaah's Messenger Muhammad ﷺ), then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold [Laa ilaaha illAllaah (none has the right to be worshipped but Allaah)]. And to Allaah return all matters for decision”

[Luqmaan 31:22]

“And turn in repentance and in obedience with true Faith (Islamic Monotheism) to your Lord and submit to Him (in Islam) before the torment comes upon you, (and) then you will not be helped”

[al-Zumar 39:54]

As for ignorant idol-worship, it means submitting to something other than Allaah, and turning to something other than Allaah, be it a rock, an idol or a “wali” (“saint”), as a weak and humble slave filled with hope and fear. These things – in Islam – can only be for Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“They (Jews and Christians) took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allaah (by obeying them in things which they made lawful or unlawful according to their own desires without being ordered by Allaah), and (they also took as their Lord) Messiah, son of Maryam (Mary), while they (Jews and Christians) were commanded [in the Tawraat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel)] to worship none but One Ilaah (God — Allaah) Laa ilaaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He). Praise and glory be to Him (far above is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him)”

[al-Tawbah 9:31]

“(It will be said): This is because, when Allaah Alone was invoked (in worship) you disbelieved (denied), but when partners were joined to Him, you believed! So the judgement is only with Allaah, the Most High, the Most Great!”

[Ghaafir 40:12]

“They have no Wali (Helper, Disposer of affairs, Protector) other than Him, and He makes none to share in His Decision and His Rule”

[al-Kahf 18:26]

Once this is established, we will be able to differentiate between the Muslim who affirms the Oneness of Allaah and the idolatrous mushrik in matters which may appear outwardly to be similar. For example:

The Muslim who affirms the Oneness of Allaah loves the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him); he venerates him, respects him, sacrifices himself and his wealth in support of him and obeys his commands, and all of that is in obedience to the command of Allaah in the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “So those who believe in him (Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم), honour him, help him, and follow the light (the Qur’aan) which has been sent down with him, it is they who will be successful” [al-A’raaf 7:157].

As for the idolatrous mushrik, you see him coming to the grave of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), asking him to meet his needs and seeking his aid to relieve his worries, and calling upon him with utter humility, regarding him as something divine. He may believe that in his hand are the stores of the heavens and earth, and that al-Lawh al-Mahfooz is part of his knowledge, and other things that are said or believed by some of the ignorant. In this case the mushrik is not following the command of Allaah and he is not submitting himself to Allaah, rather he is submitting to something other than Allaah and obeying the shaytaan in that.

Another example:

The Muslim who affirms the Oneness of Allaah obeys the commands of Allaah in submission to His greatness, may He be glorified and exalted. If He were to command him to prostrate to a human being, or to venerate a human being or a rock, then he would obey that as an act of worship to Allaah and in submission to His command and wisdom, as the angels did when Allaah commanded them to prostrate to Adam (peace be upon him), and they prostrated.

As for the idolatrous mushrik, he prostrates to a human being or a rock out of respect for the person or rock itself, and in submission to what he imagines they possess of the power to benefit or harm, turning to them with hope and fear and humility. In doing that he is not paying any attention to the command of Allaah, or to His rulings, rather he is directing his submission and worship to something other than Allaah on the basis of his own whims and desires.

Hence Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

As for submission, devotion of the heart and acknowledgement of divinity and Lordship, these can only be directed towards Allaah alone, and if directed towards anyone or anything else they are utterly false. As for prostration it is connected to the commands of Allaah, because Allaah has commanded us to prostrate to Him, and if He had commanded us to prostrate to any of His creation other than Him, we would have prostrated to that one in obedience to Allaah if He wanted us to venerate the one to whom we were prostrating. As He has not commanded us to prostrate, then we should not do it at all. The prostration of the angels to Adam was an act of worship to Allaah, obedience to Him and a means of drawing closer to Him, and it was a way of honouring and respecting Adam. And the prostration of Yoosuf's brothers to him was a greeting. End quote.

Majmoo' al-Fataawa (4/360, 361).

Thus we may differentiate between many cases in which actions may appear outwardly to be similar, but in fact one is Islam, Tawheed and faith, whereas the other is shirk, kufr and idolatry.

That includes tawaaf around the Ka'bah:

The Muslim who affirms the Oneness of Allaah obeys the command of Allaah in all matters, great and small. When he hears the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning), "and circumambulate the Ancient House (the Ka'bah at Makkah)" [al-Hajj 22:29], he cannot help but obey them, so he circumambulates the sacred House out of love for Allaah and in obedience to Him, hoping for mercy from Allaah and fearing His punishment. And he does not go beyond what he has been commanded to do of tawaaf, so he does not touch the stones of this House or think that it can bring benefit or cause harm.

As for the idolatrous mushrik, he is the one who circumambulates rocks or shrines, venerating them, hoping that they will relieve his distress and answer his prayers, weeping out of fear of them, beseeching them, and seeking to draw closer to them by means of different acts of worship such as prostration, sacrifices, circumambulation and supplication. In doing so he is

not obeying the command of Allaah or the laws of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), rather he is obeying his own whims and desires and the shaytaan.

So there is a great and clear difference between the actions of those who believe in Tawheed and Islam, and the manifestations of idolatry and shirk. The one who does not pay attention to this difference will become confused, and will no longer be able to differentiate between kufr and faith.

We hope that the difference between the two is now clear.

And Allaah knows best.