

# Shirk & its Types (part 1 of 3)

**Description:** The Islamic stance with regards to associating other deities with Allah and attributing to others certain aspects which are exclusive and unique to Him. Part 1: The definition of *Shirk* and its types. Forms of greater *shirk*.

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## Prerequisites

- Belief in Allah (2 parts).

## Objectives

- To learn the precise definition of *shirk*.
- To appreciate the severity of *shirk* from the Quran and *Sunnah*.
- To learn the types of *shirk*.
- To learn *shirk* in Allah's:
  - o Lordship.
  - o Names & Attributes.

## Arabic Terms

- *Shirk* - a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.
- *Tawheed* - The Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah with respect to His Lordship, His Names and Attributes and in His right to be worshipped.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.

## Introduction

The Arabic word *shirk* [\[1\]](#) is the opposite of *tawheed*, Allah's oneness and uniqueness, and is more inclusive than polytheism and idolatry. *Shirk* contradicts the very purpose of creation as expressed in the Quran:

## **“I have not created jinn or mankind except to worship Me.” (Quran 51:56)**

Prophets were sent with the mission to eradicate *shirk* and to invite humanity to single out Allah in worship.

## **What is *Shirk*?**

*Shirk* is to associate someone other than Allah in those aspects which are unique to Allah and His exclusive right. *Shirk* is to worship created beings like Allah is worshipped, to venerate created beings like Allah must be venerated, and to assign a portion of His divinity to someone else.

## **Severity of *Shirk***

There is no issue upon which Islam is so strict as the one of *tawheed* (monotheism). Therefore, *shirk* is considered the **greatest** violation with which the Lord of the heavens and the earth is defied. The severity of *shirk* can be summarized in the following points:

(1) *Shirk* makes the Creator like His creation, in that matters that are exclusive to Allah are associated with others who have no right to it. Therefore, Allah declares *shirk* to be the greatest wrong,

**“Indeed to ascribe partners (unto Him) is a tremendous wrong.” (Quran 31:13)**

(2) Allah has declared that He will not forgive the sin of *shirk* unless the person repents from it,

**“Surely Allah forgives not that a partner should be set up with Him, and forgives all besides that to whom He pleases.” (Quran 4:48)**

(3) Allah has forbidden Paradise to those who do not repent from committing *shirk*, condemning him to Hell for eternity,

**“Surely whoever associates (others) with Allah, Allah has forbidden to him Paradise and his abode is the Fire.” (Quran 5:72)**

(3) All the good works a person may have done are lost, become worthless, and are rendered vain if a person dies unrepentant of *shirk*,

**“And certainly, it has been revealed to you and to those before you: if you should associate (anything) with Allah, your work would surely become worthless, and you would surely be among the losers.” (Quran 39:65)**

(4) *Shirk* is the deadliest of all major sins. On one occasion, the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, asked his companions if they knew what was greatest of all major

sins. He then explained to them,

“The major sins are: *shirk*, not being kind to one’s parents...” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

## Types of Shirk

(1) Greater *Shirk* (*Shirk Akbar*)

(2) Lesser *Shirk* (*Shirk Asghar*)

## Definition of Greater *Shirk*

Greater *Shirk* is associating others with Allah in those aspects which are unique to Allah in his person taking a rival or associate unto Allah and making it an equal to Allah.

### ***Shirk* in Allah Being the Lord**

This category includes:

(i) Atheism (the belief that human beings have no Lord).

Pharaoh denied the existence of Allah and claimed his own self to be the Lord over Moses and the people of Egypt. He announced to people:

**“I am your Lord, Most High.” (Quran 79:24)**

Modern day philosophers that deny the existence of Allah or scientists who consider the universe created itself or has no beginning or end fall under this category. Also, the idea that nature itself is God, or that God dwells within His creation is also *shirk*.

(b) The belief that Allah shares His rule and control over the creation.

People who fall into this category are those who may believe in Allah’s powers and abilities, but also believe that Allah is several “persons,” that He is somehow “split” into different beings. An example is Christians who believe that Allah is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, all at the same time. Also, Hindus believe in One God who takes the forms of Brahma - the creator-god, Vishnu - the preserver-god, and Shiva - the destroyer-god. Islam teaches that Allah is One in every sense: perfect, indivisible, and complete.

Another example of this *shirk* is held by people who pray to the dead. They believe the souls of the saints and other people can meddle in the affairs of mortal men, that somehow the departed souls can cause change in the life of men and women by answering their prayers or in other ways. The truth is that the dead have no power over the lives of the living; they cannot answer anyone’s prayers, nor protect them, nor grant their wishes.

### **Greater *Shirk*: *Shirk* in Allah’s Names & Attributes**

Making Allah like the creation or making the creation like Allah is the essence of *shirk* on Allah's Names and Attributes. It can be further classified into two types:

(i) Humanizing Allah by giving Him attributes similar to humans is *shirk*. Depictions of God in paintings and sculpture are of this type. Christianity, the major religion of the West, views God in human terms, as Jesus is considered God incarnate by them, so it naturally produced the likes of Michelangelo who depicted the Face and Hand of 'God' in paintings. Hindus worship countless idols as forms of God. On the contrary, the Muslim tradition has been clear on this point because of the Quran's clear teachings,

**“There is nothing like Him, and He sees and hears all things.”  
(Quran 42:11)**

(ii) Another form of this type of *shirk* is when human beings are deified by giving them divine names or qualities. For example, the Christians raise Mary, the mother of Jesus, to a divine status by giving her some of Allah's attributes, such as the Merciful. They also call Mary the mother of God, 'God' being a reference to her son Jesus. The latter they have called the Living God, the First and the Last - Names reserved for God alone. The Messenger of Allah, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said:

“Allah Almighty has said: ‘The son of Adam... reviled Me and he had no right to do so... As for his reviling Me, it is his saying: Allah has taken to Himself a son, while I am the One, the Everlasting Refuge. I beget not nor was I begotten, and there is none comparable to Me.’” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari, An-Nasai*)

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Endnotes:

[1] The “l” is pronounced like the “l” in the word “dip”

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