



(Part No : 1, Page No: 744)

(Part No : 1, Page No: 745)

Major Shirk

(Part No : 1, Page No: 746)

The First Question from Fatwa no. 1653

Q: What is the difference between major Shirk and minor Shirk (major and minor forms of associating others in worship with Allah) in terms of their definitions and rulings?

A: Major Shirk is: (i) Regarding anything equal to Allah, in terms of their names or attributes, such as by calling them by the Names or the Attributes of Allah. Allah (may He be Exalted) says: [﴿ And \(all\) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allâh, so call on Him by them, and leave the company of those who belie or deny \(or utter impious speech against\) His Names. They will be requited for what they used to do. ﴾](#) The forms of heresy in relation to Allah's Names include naming others by His Personal Names and Attributes.

(ii) Regarding others as equal to Allah (may He be Exalted) in terms of `Ibadah (worship) and humbling oneself to other than Him, such as: the sun, the moon, a prophet, a king, or a pious person. Trying to get closer to them through performing Salah (Prayer), seeking succor in times of adversity or suffering, seeking help in bringing benefit; supplicating to the dead or absent beings for relief from distress or to meet requests, and other such acts that are the province of Allah (may He be Glorified). Practicing any of these acts or similar to them is worshipping other than Allah, and considered to be Shirk. Allah (may He be Exalted) says: [﴿ Say \(O Muhammad peace be upon him\): "I am only a man like you. It has been revealed to me that your Ilâh \(God\) is One Ilâh \(God - i.e. Allâh\). So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord." ﴾](#)

(Part No : 1, Page No: 747)

There are many similar Ayahs (Qur'anic verses) on Tawhid-ul-Ibadah (Oneness of Worship).

(iii) Regarding anything as being equal to Allah in terms of their legislation, accepting the laws and judgments of other than Allah, agreeing with their rulings on the lawful and prohibited out of reverence and veneration, and resorting to them in judging and resolving the disputes. Believing that a law other than that of Allah is effective in litigation or deeming what is permissible, even if it is not regarded as a religion. In this concern, Allah (may He be Exalted) talks about the Jews and the Christians: [﴿ They \(Jews and Christians\) took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allâh \(by obeying them in things which they made lawful or unlawful according to their own desires](#)

without being ordered by Allâh), and (they also took as their Lord) Messiah, son of Maryam (Mary), while they (Jews and Christians) were commanded [in the Taurât (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel)] to worship none but One Ilâh (God ? Allâh) Lâ ilâha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He). Glorified is He (far above is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him).)There are similar Ayahs and Hadith on the grave sin of agreeing with laws other than the Laws of Allah or abandoning the Law of Allah in favor of positive law or tribal customs, or similar. These are the three types of major Shirk and if anyone commits them, they will be an apostate who is taken outside the Din (religion) of Islam. If this happens, they will not be able to have the Funeral Prayer performed for them if they die, nor will they be buried in the Muslim graveyard, Muslims will not be able to inherit from them - instead their property will be given to Bayt-ul-Mal (Muslim public treasury) - nor will they be able to eat meat from animals they slaughter. The ruling on them is that they should be executed by the Muslim ruler, unless they perform Tawbah (repentance to Allah) before they are executed. If they do this their Tawbah will be accepted, they will not be executed, and they will be treated as a Muslim again.

(Part No : 1, Page No: 748)

As for minor Shirk, this refers to all that is prohibited by the Shari`ah to block the means that may lead to major Shirk and these are described as Shirk in the religious texts. This includes swearing by other than Allah, as this is seen as an inclination to major Shirk. Therefore, the Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade swearing by other than Allah. It was authentically reported that he (peace be upon him) said, ("Allah forbids you to swear by your fathers. Anyone who has to take an oath should swear by Allah or be silent.")In fact, the Prophet (peace be upon him) called it an act of Shirk. Ibn `Umar narrated (may Allah be pleased with them both) that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ("Anyone who swears by other than Allah has committed Shirk.") (Related by Ahmad, Al-Tirmidhy, and Al-Hakim with a good Sanad [chain of narration])Swearing by other than Allah involves exceeding the proper bounds in revering other than Allah, and the result of this could lead a person to major Shirk.

Other examples of minor Shirk include common expressions used by many Muslims, such as: "Ma sha' Allah wa shi'ta (What Allah wills and you will)," "Lawla anta wa Allah... (But for Allah and you...)," and the similar sayings. The Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited these sayings and guided those who say them to say instead: "Ma sha' Allah wahdahu (What Allah Alone wills)" or "Ma sha' Allah, thumma shi'ta (What Allah wills, and then you will)." This is a way to block the means to major Shirk, and the belief that other than Allah shares with Him the will to determine the occurrences and events of the universe. Other prohibited sayings are: "Tawakaltu `ala Allah wa `alayka (I rely on Allah and on you)" and "Lawla siyahu ad-dik or al-bat, la suriqa al-mata` (But for the crowing of the cock or the (quacking of the) duck, the property would have been stolen)." Another example is Riya' (showing-off), such as when performing acts of `Ibadah by elongating Salah sometimes so it will be seen

(Part No : 1, Page No: 749)

by people or raising the voice when reciting the Qur'an or performing Dhikr (Remembrance of Allah) to be heard and praised by people. It was related by Imam Ahmad, with a Sanad (chain of narrators) that is Hasan (it contains a narrator with weak exactitude, but is free from eccentricity or blemish) on the authority of Mahmud ibn Labid (may Allah be pleased with him) who narrated that Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, ("What I fear most for my Ummah (nation) is the minor Shirk of Riya'") If someone never performs acts of worship without Riya' and otherwise does not perform Salah, Sawm (Fasting), Dhikr, nor recite the Qur'an, they are committing major Shirk and are one of the hypocrites about whom Allah says: (Verily, the hypocrites seek to deceive Allâh, but it is He Who

deceives them. And when they stand up for As-Salât (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen of men, and they do not remember Allâh but little.)And:((They are) swaying between this and that, belonging neither to these nor to those.)And the Ayah in which he says:(Verily, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depth (grade) of the Fire; no helper will you find for them.)(Except those who repent (from hypocrisy), do righteous good deeds, hold fast to Allâh, and purify their religion for Allâh (by worshipping none but Allâh, and do good for Allâh's sake only, not to show off), then they will be with the believers. And Allâh will grant the believers a great reward.)He then confirmed this in a Hadith Qudsi (Revelation from Allah in the Prophet's words):("I am the One Who does not need a partner. Anyone who does something in which they associate another with Me, I shall leave them with one they associate with Me.")(Related by Muslim in his Sahih [Book of Authentic Hadith])

Committing an act of minor Shirk does not take person out of Islam, but it is regarded as the second most major sin, next to major Shirk. That is why `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said,

(Part No : 1, Page No: 750)

"Lying when swearing by Allah is better to me than someone honestly swearing by other than Him." Consequently, the ruling on someone who commits minor Shirk is that they are treated like a Muslim, their family inherits from them and they inherit from their family according to what is laid down in the Shari`ah, if they die Muslims will perform the Funeral Prayer for them and bury them in the Muslim graveyard, and they will also eat the meat from an animal they slaughter, and so on, according to the other Islamic rulings. They will not stay eternally in the Fire if they do go into it, just like any sinner who committed a major sin according to Ahl-ul-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah (those adhering to the Sunnah and the Muslim community) and contrary to the views of the Kawarij (a deviant Islamic sect claiming that those who commit major sins are disbelievers) and Mu`tazilah (a deviant Islamic sect claiming that those who commit major sins are in a state between belief and disbelief).

May Allah grant us success! May peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, and Companions!

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