



# Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism

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## *Tawhīd*

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## Synonyms

*Al-tawhīd* ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100209](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100209)); Islamic monotheism ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100210](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100210)); Oneness of God ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100211](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100211)); Oneness ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100212](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100212)); Shahādah ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100213](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100213)); Tauhid ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100214](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100214)); Tawheed ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100215](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100215)); Unity of God ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100216](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100216))

## Definition

*Tawhīd* or *al-tawhīd* (also spelled *touhīd* or *tawheed*) is an Arabic word, which literally means “unification” or “asserting oneness.” At the heart of Islam lies this cardinal principle based on *shahādah* (witness), *lā ‘ilāha ‘ill’Allāh*, meaning “there is no god, but God.” *Tawhīd*, grounded in absolute monotheism, refers to the most salient principle of Islam, that is, the unity of God, that God is One, Unique, Absolute – a belief system that markedly distinguishes Islam from other monotheistic religions. In Arabic, God is called “*Allāh*” who has 99 Divine Names (*Asma’ al-Husna*) – the most Beautiful Names (Q. VII:180) delineating His attributes. The Qur’ānic expression “*nothing like unto Him*” (Q. XLII:11) clearly shows God’s Oneness and His Uniqueness, the antithesis of which is in Arabic called *shirk* (polytheism), which implies associating someone or something with Allāh, or partnering Him with any gods, or deities, or idols. For in all cases of social and spiritual life, associating or

comparing anyone or anything with the designated attributes of God in prayer, worship, supplication, or broadly speaking belief is repugnant to the true spirit of *tawhīd* (Q. IV:48).

## Historical Development of the Concept of Tawhīd

The term *tawhīd* is noun derived from the root Arabic verb *waḥḥada*, which means “to unite,” “unify,” or “consolidate” [11]. Other derivatives such as *waḥdah* (unity), *waḥīd*, or *waḥeed* (unique, singular, matchless, etc.) are also drawn from *waḥḥada*. In pre-Islamic Arabic literature, the word *tawhīd* and its morphological forms (*al-taṣrīf*) were used almost equivalently. For instance, Waraka ibn Nawfal (d. 610), an Ebonite priest of Mecca in the pre-Islamic period, used the word *tawhīd* in the sense of “asserting oneness.” In his poem, he said, “What I asked you to understand the religion is not to forget to make your God *tawhīd*” [6]. Even though the term *tawhīd* is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth [3], various terms constituted from its Arabic root, *waḥada*, are alluded to in some Qur’ānic verses. Most recited in prayer, the word *aḥad* manifests the “Oneness of God” in the *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* (CXII:1–5) following the Arabic lexicon which allows to interchange the first letter *waw* (و) of the Arabic word *waḥad* (واحد) with *alif* (أ).

Similarly, the simple form of the verb *yuwaḥḥidūn* has been used in the story of the companions of the Prophet, Mu’ādh ibn Jabal, who was sent to Yemen as governor in the ninth A.H. Explaining his mission in Yemen, the Prophet Muḥammad is believed to have said to Mu’ādh ibn Jabal, “You will be going to the people who were given the books (*ahl al-kitāb*), so the first thing you have do is to invite them towards *tawhīd* (*yuwaḥḥidun Allāh*)” ([4], Ḥadīth No. 469; [9], Ḥadīth No. 27).

However, the term *tawhīd* developed as a complex theological concept during the Abbasid period in the discourse of *dhāt* (essence of God) and *ṣifāt* (attribute of God). Not only was it the central issue for the Muslim philosophers during the eighth-tenth centuries, it was also the cornerstone for the rise of theologico-philosophical movements such as the Qadariyyah and the Jabariyyah as well as of philosophical schools such as the Mu’tazilah. These *falsafa* (philosophical) schools placed an emphasis on the primacy of reason over revelation in their exposition of *dhāt* (essence) and *ṣifāt* (attribute), while the Ashariyyah and the Maturidiyyah, schools that incorporated philosophical methods in developing their theologies, seem to have reconciled between reason and revelation in this respect, as a result of which a new branch of science emerged called ‘*ilm al-tawhīd* (science of *tawhīd*), or ‘*ilm al-kalām* (scholastic theology of Islam). In addition, ‘*ilm al-‘aqīdah* (science of creed) and *uṣūl al-dīn* (foundations of religion) are two other branches used interchangeably for the science of *tawhīd*. However, since the 1980s, the specialization in the science of *tawhīd* has been used to mean what is academically known as the faculty of *Uṣūl al-Dīn* in the Islamic world.

In the Islamic mystical tradition (Sūfism), the metaphysical doctrine of *tawhīd* is often misunderstood, or misinterpreted in such a way that it prompts some orientalist to accuse Sūfism of pantheism, whereas the Sūfi doctrine of metaphysics does not assert that God is the world [10]. In contrast to those who hold the doctrine of “Unity of

Existence” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240), though he himself did not use the term, Al-Ghazali (1058–1111) said, “There is none in existence save God, his attributes and his acts” [5]. It is worthy to note that piecemeal understanding of the underlying meaning of *tawhīd* or overemphasizing it has led to the rise of some radical movements like *tawhīdist* or *salāfist* in the Muslim society in the beginning of the twentieth century.

## Category of *Tawhīd*

As stated above, the critical examination of the concept of *tawhīd* has contributed to its development as an Islamic worldview, on which scholars and theologians have differed, to some extent, though neither the Prophet nor his close companions ventured to elaborate upon it. However, over the time, this sacred doctrine has been split into three categories: *tawhīd al-dhāt* (*tawhīd* in essence of God), *tawhīd al-ṣifāt* (*tawhīd* in attributes of God), and *tawhīd al-afa’āl* (*tawhīd* in act of God) [2]. However, Ibn Taymīyyah (1263–1328) categorized *tawhīd* differently, also into three ways: *tawhīd al-rubūbiyyah* (*tawhīd* in Godship creator, savior, sustainer, and so on), *tawhīd al-ulūhiyyah* (*tawhīd* in worship and ruler), and *tawhīd al-’asmā’ wa-al-ṣifāt* (*tawhīd* in essence and attributes) [7].

## Importance of *Tawhīd*

The doctrine of *tawhīd* – the central tenet of Islamic faith – is rooted to the primordial pillar of Islam expressed as *lā ‘ilāha ‘illa Allāh, Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, meaning “there is no god but Allah and Muḥammad is His messenger.” The Qur’ān enjoins the Muslims, who are called servants (*‘abd*) in relation to God (*Rabb*), to worship only to Allāh as the necessary means for bringing them nearer to Him (XXXIX:3) and He responds to their call (II:186). The key to differentiating between *īmān* (belief in God) and *kufr* (disbelief) is to testify *tawhīd* that Allāh is the One and only God and the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb ul-‘ālamīn*), signifying the entire universe. In the Islamic tradition, *tawhīd* offers the basis for sacred, relational, and illuminative metaphysics [8]. Thus, key Islamic scholars like Abu Hanifa (699–767 C.E. /80–148 A.H.) consider the knowledge of *tawhīd* and beliefs as superior to the knowledge of practice of Islam or Islamic law [1]. The Islamic concept of *tawhīd* is known as a unique “doctrine of Unity” (*al-tawhīd wāḥid*), or “doctrine of Divine Unity” that permeates the whole universe including humanity and this world, of which God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Savior. It also pervades all forms of knowledge from the perspective of Islamic science [10].

## Implication of *Tawhīd*

The notion of *tawhīd* unites all humankind under the umbrella of One God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. That God is Self-caused (*causa-sui*), the First Cause – the Cause of all causes in the sense of the peripatetic tradition – is precisely laid down in the Qur’ān, “Allah is Eternal, the Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten” (CXII:2–3). Furthermore, He creates everything, but *there is none comparable unto Him* (CXII:4). On the moral level, the doctrine of *tawhīd* urges

humankind to offer worship to the Lord, who also created human beings before the Prophet Muḥammad in order that they be guided properly in light of the Divine principles (Q. II:21). Not only that, He also creates in measure and proportion the sky, the stars, the water, the food, to name but a few, for the survival of created beings in a peaceful and harmonious way and for their knowledge that He has no partner (Q. II:22).

The harmonious relationship that exists between the various creations in the cosmos is not to be considered an act of accidental arrangement, but has been made possible only because there is a Divine design behind all these, manifesting diversity within unity. Polytheism, logically speaking, defies the principle of the Unity and the Oneness of God based on which Islam claims to be an absolute monotheistic belief system. If there had been more than one God, one would argue that the conflict of interests would have led the world to perish, as stated in the Qur'ān, *“If there were therein gods beside Allāh, then verily both (the heavens and the earth) had been disordered. Glorified be Allāh, the Lord of the Throne, from all that they ascribe (unto Him)”* (Q. XXI:22). The principle of *tawḥīd* signifying the necessity of one God can also be traced in another verse of the Qur'ān, [...] *“If there were any other gods beside Him, as they claim, they would have tried to overthrow the Possessor of the throne”* (XVII:42).

The Islamic view of *tawḥīd* is not merely a metaphysical concept defining the nature of God and His relation with His creation; rather, it discerns the value of the equality of man and woman on the spiritual level (Q. III:195) and simultaneously provides a universal urge toward humankind to live according to the Divine Will of God, as stated in the Qur'ān, *“Cling firmly together by means of God’s rope, and do not be divided. Remember God’s favor towards you when you were enemies; He united your hearts so that you became brothers because of His grace”* (III:103). Furthermore, it is through the principle of *tawḥīd* that Muslims determine the purpose of their life in this world, for man is created as His vicegerent (*khalīfa*) against the consent of the angels (Q. II:30).

Finally, from the sociological perspective, *tawḥīd* provides a new social order to enhance a comprehensive human development and progress, which, in fact, is the secret of influence and growth of Islam confronting modernity. It is due to the unity of the Divine principle *tawḥīd* that the interrelated things in nature and the diverse faith communities – not just within Muslims, but the entire humankind of the world – may find a meaningful purpose of living in harmony on various levels of existence with others and with the “Other” – the Reality.

## Cross-References

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