Tawhid Uluhiyyah (Oneness of Worship) and Veneration of Saints Tradition

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Abstract

This study examines the arguments of saints veneration according to Ayatollah Ja'far al-Subhani's as one of the Shia Muslim scholars. This is qualitative study using literary research methods to obtain and analyze data with descriptive analysis techniques. Its primary source is the book *buhuth qur'aniyyah fi al-tawhid wa al-shirk* written by Ja'far al-Subhani himself. On the one hand, some Muslim scholars argue that the veneration of saints tradition including *tabarruk* (seeking blessings), *tawassul* (mediation), and *tashaffu'* (seeking help) is an act of *shirk* as it suggests to worship other than Allah, and therefore violates the principle of *tawhid uluhiyyah* (oneness of worship) stating that Muslims must only worship Allah. On the other hand, Al-Subhani sees the tradition differently. Referring to his definition of worship (*'ibadah*), he says that the veneration of saints does not violate the concept of *tawhid uluhiyyah*, but it is in line with *tawhid*. He sees it as an act of *taqarrub* (seeking proximity) which leads a Muslim to get closer to Allah, considering the saints are basically people having a special relationship with Allah.

Keywords: KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, Nationalism, Islam, Hijaz Committee.

INTRODUCTION

Veneration of saints is a tradition that has deep roots in Muslim societies. The figures and graves of saints are important agents and sites in the religious life of Muslims throughout the world. The roots of this tradition are inseparable from the influence of Sufism. In addition, it is also related to the veneration of prophetic figures and positions at the time of their *risalah*. These are the reasons for the veneration of saints seen as spiritual leaders. Such veneration takes in different forms including gravesite visitation, commemorating the death day of the saints,[1] and reciting prayers for the deceased saints. Such activities are taken due to the belief that the saints have

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[1] Commemorating the death day of the saints resembles the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's Birthday (*mawlid*). Such commemoration is conducted because their death is a symbol of rebirth in the heavenly realm. M. Geijbels, "Aspects of the Veneration of Saints in Islam, with Special Reference to Pakistan," *The Muslim World* 68, no. 3 (1978): 176–86, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1978.tb03352.x.

owned a special position in Allah's side and are believed to have the wishes and prayers answered.

Some circles of Muslim scholars, including Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, think that this tradition, reciting prayers for the deceased saints in particular, has violated the *tawhid uluhiyyah*. Al-Wahhab's concept of this *tawhid uluhiyyah* is constructed under *fi'ly* (action) dimension. For this reason, a Muslim is considered to have violated *tawhid* due to his/her *zahir* (external) action. Reciting prayers for them means that he/she worships them and it is certainly an act of *shirk*. This understanding has also led to the destruction of saints' gravesites or shrines in Saudi Arabia. In the end, this has brought a wave of criticism from both Sunni and Shia circles of Muslim scholars.[2] Likewise, in Indonesian context, the veneration of saints carried out by traditionalist Muslim has been accused of Salafi Wahabi group as being shirk. This accusation can be seen clearly from the widespread of the writings of Indonesian Salafi Wahabi scholars and their speeches available in the Internet. Therefore, this paper is significant particularly to look at the argument of the Salafi Wahabi group on the concept of tauhid uluhiyaah and the tradition of saints veneration and how another scholar from Shiite tradition responds to this issues with his theological argument based on the teaching of Islam.

This study aims at examining the work of Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani entitled *Buhuts Quraniyyah fi al-Tawhid wa al-Shirk*. After the destruction of *Qubab al-Baqi'* in 1806,[3] some works about the tradition of saints veneration began to appear among Shia Muslim scholars. The *Baqi'* itself is the most important gravesite for Muslims in general and Shia in particular as it accommodates the tombs of the Imams and the *Ahlulbait*. In addition, the study also focuses on the concept of Al-Subhani's *tawhid uluhiyyah* as the argument on the validity of this tradition. The argument is elaborated with two key concepts related to the *tawhid uluhiyyah*; worship and *shirk*.

Veneration of saints is basically a common phenomenon in Indonesia. However, such an area of study rarely explores the theological arguments outside of the Sunni circle. Some studies conducted by Nurdin Zuhdi (2011), Ahmad Shidqi (2013), and Ahmad Jauhar Fuad (2015)[4] focus on exploring the socio-cultural and institutional responses to those who reject veneration of saints tradition or any other related issues

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[2] Abdullah Muhammad Ali, "Turotsuna," *Muassasah Ahl Al-Bayt Li Ihya al-Turats*, H 1409, 146–78.

[3] Jakfar al-Subhani, *Buhus Fi Al-Milal Wa al-Nihal*, vol. 4 (Qom: Maktabah al-Tauhid, 1437), 576.

[4] Ahmad Shidqi, "Respon Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Terhadap Wahabisme dan Implikasinya Bagi Deradikalisasi Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* II (June 2013): 109–30; A. Jauhar Fuad, "Infiltrasi Salafi Wahabi pada Buku Teks di Madrasah dan Respons Warga Nahdliyin," *Marâji`: Jurnal Ilmu Keislaman* 1, no. 2 (March 2, 2015): 361–92; M. Nurdin Zuhdi, "Kritik Terhadap Pemikiran Gerakan Keagamaan Kaum Revivalis Di Indonesia," *AKADEMIKA: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, Memperkuat Citra Islam sebagai Agama Perdamaian, V. 12, No. 2 (Oktober 2011): 171–92.

including the implementation of Sharia in contemporary political systems. To that end, this study will further elaborate the discourse of *tawhid uluhiyyah* and its relationship with the veneration of saints tradition according to Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani's perspective as a Shia Muslim scholar in the Ja'fari school of thought.

METHOD

This study is qualitative research using literary research methods and descriptive analysis techniques. This means that the study produces qualitative, descriptive, analytical, and concept-elaborated data. The primary source of this research is the work of Ja'far al-Subhani. The implementation process of this research includes describing Ja'far al-Subhani's theory of *tawhid uluhiyyah* by referring to the primary literature, analyzing the theory, and finding its implications on veneration of saints tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Ja'far al-Subhani

Ayatollah al-'Uzma Ja'far bin Muhammad Husayn al-Subhani al-Khayabani al-Tabrizi or famously known as Ja'far al-Subhani was born in 1929 AD/1347 AH in Tabriz city of Iran.[5] He comes from a family with a strong scientific tradition. His father is Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn al-Subhani al-Khayabani (d. 1972 AD / 1392 AH), a well-known Muslim scholar in Tabriz. Ja'far Al-Subhani spent almost all of his education at Hawzah Ilmiyyah[6]. He finished his primary and secondary levels at Tabriz and moved to Qom to continue his study and obtained the scholar license.[7]

Qom is a city with a strong and traditional religious style. It is also one of the learning centers for the Imami school of thought. Here, he met well-known Muslim scholars including Husayn al-Barujardy (d. 1961 AD) and al-Khumayni (d. 1989 AD) as

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[5] Ayatollah is a scholarly/ulema license (*ijazah al-ijtihad*) obtained after completing religious studies at Hawzah. The licence indicates two qualifications: intellectual and spiritual qualifications. When supplemented with the large capacity in scientific and socio-religious expertise, the license changes into *Ayatollah uzma*. The highest license is *imam*, which is limited to *Ahlulbait* (People of the House) that is considered *maksum* (infallible), and symbolically given to Sayyid Ruhullah Musawi Khumayni (d. 1410 AH/1989 AD). See Muhsin Labib Assegaf, "Hierarki Dan Jenjang Keulamaan Dalam Tradisi Syiah | Ahlulbait Indonesia," accessed on March 17, 2020, https://www.ahlulbaitindonesia.or.id/berita/index.php/s13-berita/c98-dunia-islam/hierarki-dan-jenjang-keulamaan-dalam-tradisi-syiah/

[6] Hawzah is an educational institution for cadres in the Ja'fari school of thought. The most prominent Hawzah institutions are based in Najaf, Qom, Karbala, Mashhad, and Damascus. Hawzah used to stand independently and became the opposition to the Government. However, after the Iranian revolution, it has become part of the Government and the country's bureaucratic system. See Frida A. Nome and Kari Vogt, "Islamic Education in Qom:," *Acta Orientalia* 69 (2008): 36; *Lamhah 'an Hayat Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani* (Qom: Muassasah Imam al-Shadiq, 2014), 8; Ahmad Rofi' Usmani, *Jejak-Jejak Islam: Kamus Sejarah Dan Peradaban Islam Dari Masa Ke Masa* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 2015), 155.

[7] *Lamhah 'an Hayat Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani*, 8.

the founders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Basically, he is a Shia Muslim scholar who calls for Sunni-Shia harmony. His standing is inseparable from the influence of his teacher, Husayn al-Barujardy, who always promotes the importance of tracing the opinions of previous Muslim scholars, both from Shia and Sunni circles. His idea of harmony is also influenced by his teacher, al-Khumayni, who opposes the conflict between Sunni and Shia and based the country's ideology on Muslim unity (*tawhid al-ummah*).[8]

Since his arrival at Hawzah in Qom, he has been actively teaching at the institution. He has also produced different works across disciplines which are divided into four categories: 1) *tafsir* (exegesis); some of his works include *Mafahim al-Qur'an* and *Al-Bayan al-Khalid*, 2) *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *ushul fiqh* (Principles of Islamic jurisprudence); his works are *Al-Mujaz fi Ushul al-Fiqh, al-Wasit fi ilm al-Ushul,* and *al-Mahsul fi 'Ilm al-Usul*, 3) Hadith; his works in this area are *Kulliyyat fi Ilm al-Rijal* and *Ushul al-Hadith wa Ahkamuhu*, and 4) the science of kalam and theology; his works include *Muhadarat fi al-Ilahiyyat, Iqsa 'al-'Aql an Sahat al-Aqaid wa al-Ma'arif al-Ilahiyyah Khasarah Fadihah, al-Falsafah ba'da ibn Rushd,* and *Ilm al-Kalam wa al-Tahaddiyat al-Mu'asirah*.

Al-Subhani is a Muslim scholar who has always taken a part in solving different socio-religious issues arising in his surroundings. When the secular-oriented Iran modernization took place, the idea of the rise of women in the West which became the standard of morality for the Iranian women representation swarmed magazines and newspapers. He initiated the *durus min maktab al-Islam* magazine with contemporary religious contents aimed at teenagers. It is intended to bring teenagers to get closer to religious teachings.[9]

When the 1970 revolution broke out in Iran, al-Subhani joined the ranks of Muslim scholars to bring down the Iranian monarchy system. After the revolution ended, he was appointed as the senate for Tabriz region and became a member of Assembly of Experts for Constitution in the Islamic Republic of Iran. His involvement in politics is inseparable from al-Khumayni's encouragement that taking a part in politics is the Sharia duty of a Muslim scholar. Al-Khumayni adds that Muslim scholars

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[8] Al-Khumayni's thought of reconciliation has an impact on Ja'far. The passion to keep the harmony between Shia and Sunni is seen in Ja'far and his works. See, Dr Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami* (Routledge, 2003), 11–12; *Lamhah 'an Hayat Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani*, 11.

[9] Modernization has changed various aspects of women in Iran including boundaries in marriage, rights, and positions before the law, self-conceptions, and so on. Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30; Manata Hashemi, *Coming of Age in Iran: Poverty and the Struggle for Dignity* (NYU Press, 2020), 10; *Lamhah 'an Hayat Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani*, 17.

are an important foundation to transform a country. They have become the actors behind the revolution and the determining force in Iran's political system.[10]

The success of the Iranian revolution raised fears of a revolutionary wave setting foot in the internal politics of Saudi Arabia. Its anti-instability political style strived to repress the Iranian revolution influences in many ways, one of which was disinformation on Shia religious discourses. As a result, Al-Subhani founded the *muassasah al-Imam al-Sadiq* in 1980, which aims at answering such issue and responding to old Islamic thought which is full of divisive messages and new issues on religious theology and philosophy in the Muslim world and the West world.[11] One of the implementations is through the book used as the object in this study.

Ja'far al-Subhani's Concept of *Tawhid Uluhiyyah*

In interpreting *tawhid uluhiyyah,* al-Subhani highlights that upholding *tawhid* (the indivisible oneness concept of monotheism in Islam) and eradicating *shirk* is the core of Islamic teachings. The meaning of *tawhid* is inseparable from the principle of *tawhid al-kalimat*, which is uniting the people and keeping them away from disunity. It is a command mentioned on surah Ali Imran 3: 103 in the Qur'an, and the main principle of Prophet Muhammad's *da'wah*.[12] This is al-Subhani's foundation in elaborating the concept of *tawhid uluhiyyah* and a form of antithesis for anyone who regards the concept of *tawhid uluhiyyah* as a means of disbelieving fellow Muslims, especially those who carry out veneration of saints tradition.[13]

Al-Subhani argues that the disbelief in the issue of veneration of saints is due to the fact that the tradition is considered as an act of worship. This in turn raises an assumption that the veneration is an act of worship to others than Allah. To this end, al-Subhani attempts to describe the existing issues through his conception of *tawhid uluhiyyah* with its two elements, worship and *shirk*.

Tawhid uluhiyyah or *al-tawhid fi al-'ibadah* is an aspect of *tawhid* which concerns with worshipping and performing *ibadah* for Allah. The antithesis of this concept is *shirk*. Al-Subhani sees *ibadah*, performed either by a Muslim or a Mushrik, has two elements: *zahir* (external) action and the belief that underlies the actions. This

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[10] *Lamhah 'an Hayat Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani*, 17; Agah Hazır, "Beyond Religion: Ulama and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Iran," *The Journal of Iranian Studies* Vol. 1, No:2 (2018): 41.

[11] See Luíza Gimenez Cerioli, "Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi–Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain's and Yemen's Arab Spring," *Contexto Internacional* 40, no. 2 (August 2018): 295–316, https://doi.org/10.1590/s0102-8529.2018400200010; *Lamhah 'an Hayat Ayatullah Ja'far al-Subhani*, 22.

[12] Prophet Muhammad reconciled a dispute between Aus and Khazraj tribes, and any other disputes that occurred within the Muslim community and interfaith communities. al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 7–8.

[13] Al-Subhani sees it as destroying the unity of the people considering that the issue lies in the difference in *furu' al-din*, not *ushul al-din*. al-Subha ni, 6.

latter element is the key differentiator of the two groups. The *ibadah* performed by a Muslim naturally refers to the belief of *Tawhid* declaring that the God he/she worships is the only creator and ruler of the universe. In contrast, the *ibadah* performed by a mushrik comes from the belief that violates the *tawhid*.[14]

According to al-Subhani, *shirk* relies on the belief that the nature of *al-rububiyyah* belongs to Allah and others. The Quraish people, for instance, believe in *arbab*, the regulating gods besides Allah, who independently rule various issues including as *al-izzah* (honor and dignity) mentioned in Surah Maryam 19:81, *al-nasr* (victory) in Surah Yasin 36:74, forgiveness of sins in Surah Ghafir 40: 3, *syafaat* (help or assistance) in Surah Maryam 19:87, worldly and hereafter fate in Surah Al-Shu'ara' 26: 78-81, equal love devoted to Allah and other gods in Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 165, servitude and worship in Surah Al-Shu'ara' 26: 97-98, and *tashri'* issue in Surah Al-Taubah 9:31.[15]

Al-Subhani underlines that *shirk* in worship is rooted in the understanding of rububiyyah, as perceived by the Quraish community and the ones living before them. The power of the gods in *rububiyyah* is understood at different levels. In a broader sense, for example, it means ruling the universe as believed by the people of Prophet Abraham regarding the objects in the sky (QS al-An'am 6: 75-80). Some are limited to human issues including *syafa'at* (help), forgiveness, glory, and victory in war.[16] The *Arbab* (objects in the sky) are believed to rule independently although their power is under Allah's power.[17]

After describing the concept of *shirk* committed by the Quraish people, al-Subhani further elaborates the element of faith as the core of his argument in the issue concerning the relationship between *tawhid* and veneration of saints. He thinks that the concept of worship is centered on the element of belief that underlies actions. Without

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[14] Al-Subhani considers the inner aspect is the most important thing that matters in *ibadah* (worship) as physical *ibadah* may suggest similarities in the way a Muslim or a Musyrik performs it. al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 35–36; al-Subhani, *Al-Wahhabiyyah Bayna al-Mabani al-Fikriyyah Wa al-Nataij al-'Amaliyyah*, 84.

[15] Muslims depends everything only on Allah as mentioned in the Qur'an (وَمَا), (فلله العزة جميعا واتخذوا من دون الله الهة لعلهم)). This is different from the one believed by the mushriks: ((النَّصْرُ إلا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ), (واتخذوا من دون الله الهة ليكونوا لهم عزا ينصرون). See al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 37–38.

[16] Rishwan sees the key factor of shirk committed by Quraish people lies in their belief in the independence of power to rule the universe, (الإله المستقل بالتدبير و التصرف). See al-Subhani, 41; Rishwan Abu Zayd Mahdud, *Tawhid Al-Rububiyyah Wa al-Uluhiyyah Tahrir al-Ma'ani Wa Dabt al-Qawa'id* (Kairo: Maktabah al-Mujallad al-'Arabi, 2014), 25.

[17] They believe in entities, other than Allah, who have power over their lives. Some gods are local or tribal and some are universal and recognizable by other tribes. See Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi al-Baghdadi, *Bulugh Al-Arb Fi Ma'rifati Ahwal al-'Arab* (Kairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, t.t.), 249–50; al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 42.

involving a certain belief, an act is not considered as worship.[18] Like the issue of the Quraish people, al-Subhani mentions the main issue concerning the faith lies in the belief in the nature of *rububiyyah*.

The *ibadah* (worship) as the focus of study here is not in the sense of *fiqh*, but rather in the belief as the parameter of worship. In other words, *al-ibadah al-sahihah* is performed by a Muslim, while *al-'ibadah al-batilah* is practiced by a Mushrik. This happens because those who prohibit the veneration of saints' tradition argue that it is similar to the *shirk* tradition committed by the Quraish people.[19]

The Essence of *Ibadah* (Worship)

Al-Subhani classifies worship into two categories: true worship (*al-'ibadat al-sahihah*) and false worship (*al-'ibadat al-batilah*). Such classification is marked by two elements. The first is an attitude of submission to the worshiped entity, regardless of whether the worshiped is an entity worthy of being exalted like Allah, or an unworthy one such as an idol, a spirit, a star and others. The second is the submission which is internally based and lies in the inner heart. This is a certain belief in the entity being worshiped or exalted.[20] After determining the two elements, al-Subhani offers three definitions that can serve as parameters between the two categories.

In his first definition, worship is a submission based on the belief that the entity being worshiped is omnipotent, *al-I'tiqad bi al-uluhiyyah*. For this reason, all forms of words and actions performed without such belief are not considered worship.[21] Al-Subhani mentions that *al-uluhiyyah* here does not mean *al-ma'budiyyah*, the state of being the entity or object of worship. However, it means the belief that the entity becoming the object of worship is God as the creator and the ruler of all or some of the events in the universe. The entity believed to have such characteristics, universally or partially, as professed by the mushrik, is called *ilah*.[22]

Al-Subhani uses the word *ilah* in terms of *juz'i* (partial) and *kulli* (universal). Universally, the word *ilah* includes entities worthy and unworthy of worship (Surah al-A'raf 7:59).[23] Partially, the *ilah* who has the right to be worshiped is only Allah as any designation embedded to other than Him is essentially imaginary. Therefore, the Qur'an

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[18] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 44.

[19] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 35

[20] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 35-36.

[21] Al-Subhani defines it as العبادة هي الخضوع عن إعتقاد بألوهية المخضوع له،فما لم يكن القول و العمل ناشئين من الإعتقاد بالألوهية، لا يكون الخضوع و التعظيم و التكريم عبادة. See al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 47.

[22] (المراد من الألوهية ليست المعبودية وإنما الإعتقاد بكونه إله العالم وخالقه و مدبره وأن أزمة الأمور كلها أو بعضها بيده) See al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 47.

[23] The word *ilah* is a *nakirah* (indefinite), which means non-specific and general in nature. al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 48.

denies the entity worshipped by the mushriks and calls him a pseudo god considering that the worship is an inseparable part of the divine aspect (*uluhiyyah*), which arises from an Almighty entity and essentially only belongs to Allah.[24]

As for the second definition, worship is a submission to the presence of an entity believed to be *Rab*, *al-malik li shu'un al-shayi'* as the owner of all matters and needs in a servant's life, starting from the planning to the execution stages and from the creation process to the preservation process in this world and the hereafter.[25] The worldly affairs include material aspects such as victory (al-*nasr*), honour (al-'*izzah*), and immaterial aspects (*ma'nawi*) consisting of forgiveness of sins and *syafaat* (help). For this reason, the obligation to worship for humans is essentially a form of reciprocity for the existence of *al-rububiyyah*. This is mentioned on Q.S. al-Maidah 5:72; Q.S. al-Anbiya> '21: 92; Q.S. Ali 'Imran 2:51; Q.S. Jonah 10: 3; Q.S. al-Hijr 15:99; Q.S. Maryam 19: 36,65; Q.S. al-Zukhruf 43:64 in the Qur'an which justifies the command to worship Allah due to His *rububiyyah*.[26]

In the third definition, worship is a submission to the presence of an entity believed to be the Lord of the universe or an entity that represents His power, both in *kawniyyah* which includes creation, reviving, deadening and blessing, and *tasyri'iyyah* which consists of *tasyri'* or legislation, forgiveness, and *syafa'at* (help).[27] Al-Subhani says that a Muslim believes only Allah owns all these powers, without any interference from His creatures. On the contrary, a mushrik believes the worshipped entities other than Allah have the power to carry out *takwiniyyah* and *tasyri'iyyah*, either partially or universally. Hence, they address their requests to them, assuming that they have the power to grant them.[28]

Referring to the three definitions, al-Subhani highlights that the boundary between *tawhid* and *shirk* in terms of worship lies in the belief that underlies an act. A submission can mean an *ibadah* (worship) if it arises from a certain belief in the entity of the submission, regardless if the entity owns *uluhiyyah* and *rububiyyah* or represents power over *takwiniyyah* and *tasyri'iyyah*. The certain belief is either true as in believing

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[24] The verses in the Qur'an related to *ilah* which essentially belongs to Allah mostly use the *ithbat wa nafy*, such as in (لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَٱعْبُدُونِ) and (ٱعْبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُۥ) on Q.S. al-A'raf 7:65, 73, 85; Q.S. Hud 11:50, 61, 84; Q.S. al-Anbiya' 21:25; Q.S. al-Mu'minun 23:2332; Q.S. Taha 20:14. See al-Subhani, 48.

[25] (العبادة هي الخضوع أمام من يعتقد انه رب يملك شأنا من شئون وجوده و حياته وشؤونه في اجله و عاجله). al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 48.

[26] These verses use *fi'il amr* (imperative sentences) to worship Allah which is then related to His *rububiyah*, (انَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ رَبِّى وَرَبُّكُمْ فَٱعْبُدُوهُ), for example. The verses declare that only Allah the Almighty has the true nature of *rububiyyah*. See al-Subhani, 48.

[27] العبادة هي الخضوع أمام من يعتقد انه إله العالم، أو من فوض إليه أعماله كالخلق و الرزق و الإحياء و الإماتة التي تعد) (من أفعال الكونية أو التتقنين و التشريع و حق الشفاعة و المغفرة التي تعد من الأفعال التشريعية. al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 49.

[28] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 50.

in Allah or just an illusion as in believing in idols by the mushriks. In contrast, without such belief, an act is not considered as *ibadah* (worship), but rather an act of glorification and respect (*ta'zim wa takrim*) as in the veneration of saints tradition. This means the doers are not said to be a mushrik and the act is not regarded as *shirk*.[29]

The Context of al-Subhani's Thought on Veneration of Saints Tradition

According to al-Subhani's illustration regarding the worship above, the veneration of saints tradition is not associated with *shirk*. In addition, such veneration is not said to be an act of worship to a being. This is because such activity does not include a certain belief which underlies the concept of worship. To give a bigger picture of how this tradition works, the study will present some examples in the following points.

The Gravesite Visitation

Gravesite visitation is a matter that raises two sides of opinion. On the one side, all Muslim scholars agree on the idea that gravesite visitation is allowed as long as it is aimed at *iktibar* (taking a lesson), reminder of death and sending kindness to the deceased in terms of greetings, prayers, or *istighfar* (seeking for forgiveness). On the other side, some Muslim scholars do not allow gravesite visitation besides the aforementioned objectives. *Tabarruk* (seeking blessings), *istighathah* (seeking help), and *tawassul* (mediation), for example, are forbidden due to the fact that they are considered to suggest some actions which are directed at other than Allah.[30] Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab points out that reciting prayers or asking for help is an act of worship. When it is addressed to the deceased, it is nothing different from worshiping the deceased.[31]

Al-Subhani classifies two categories of gravesite visitation: 1) gravesite visitation to the deceased Muslims in general and 2) a special gravesite visitation in the form of visiting the graves of saints, pious people, or prophets which is intended to recite prayers, *tawassul* (to meditate) and *tabarruk* (to seek blessings). For the latter, Al-Subhani has a different opinion. To him, such visitation is highly recommended

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[29] If the glorification occurs outside of the Sharia boundaries, and is not bound by the belief that the object of the glorification has one of the divine characteristics or elements, such act can only be regarded under the Sharia framework (halal or haram), not the *aqeedah* (belief and disbelief). See al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 50-51.

[30] Q.S. Fatir 35: 14. See (إن تدعوهم لا يسمعوا دعائكم و لوسمعوا ما استجابوا لكم ويوم القيامة يكفرون بشرككم) 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abdullah Ibn Baz, *Majmu' Fatawa Wa Maqalat Mutanawwi'ah*, 13:314.

[31] 'Abd al-Rahman bin Nasr al-Sa'diy, *Al-Qawl al-Sadid Sharh Kitab al-Tawhid*, ed. S}abry bin Salamah Shahin (Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Thabat li al-Nashr wa al-tawzi', 2004), 159–61; Muhammad Ibn Nasir Ibn 'Uthman, *Al-Rad 'ala al-Quburiyyin*, Majmu'at al-Rasail wa al-Masail al-Najdiyyah (Saudi Arabia: Maktabah al-Su'udiyyah, 1976), 594.

compared to the former - visiting the gravesite of ordinary Muslims. He sees great benefits from such visitation as mentioned in the hadith narration regarding the benefit of visiting the grave of Prophet Muhammad, including getting *syafaat* (help) on the Day of Judgment.[32] Visiting his grave is like visiting him when he was alive,[33] an act of *taqarrub* (getting closer) to Allah.[34]

Al-Subhani says that a special gravesite visitation is not only related to seeking blessings, but also a high moral and educational dimension. Such visitation is intended to appreciate and show gratitude for what they have sacrificed in defending and protecting Islam and fighting on Allah's name. In addition, it aims at fostering the passion of the younger generation in fighting for Islam on Allah's name. Basically, it is Allah's way of moving His creatures to commemorate those who have served in His way.[35]

His rejection on the assumption stating that gravesite visitation is an act of worship is based on two reasons. First, the veneration or respect here is human in nature, expressing gratitude for the sacrifices they have made during their lifetime. This view is basically in line with Al-Subky's view which says that the respect shown for a special person like Prophet Muhammad could be a *tawassul* (mediation) to meet him.[36] Additionally, he sees the Prophet and the saints to have a special relationship, both with Allah and Muslims. This relationship is immaterial and eternal and is in effect in this world and the hereafter. Their state after death is different from that of ordinary humans. To that end, the Muslims can communicate with them and benefit from it.[37]

Second, this special gravesite visitation is not under the worship dimension, which requires an element of belief in the one and only entity. This is in line with al-Subhani's concept of worship which claims that an act of glorification, prayer or any action aimed at a creature is not necessarily considered as worship, as long as it does not involve belief that the object or entity to which the action is addressed is omnipotent to rule human affairs and to grant requests. Furthermore, such visitation has also become a

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[32] Narrated by Ibnu Umar (من زار قبري وجبت له شفاعتي) no. 3122 on Muhammad bin Yazid al-Qazwini's book, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, ed. Muhammad Fuad 'Abd al-Baqi, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 1039.

[33] Hadith no. 10573 (مَنْ حَجَّ فَزَارَ قَبْرِى بَعْدَ مَوْتِى كَانَ كَمَنْ زَارَنِى فِى حَيَاتِى). Abu Bakr Ahmad Ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi, *Al-Sunan al-Kubra Li al-Bayhaqi*, vol. 2 (Hyderabad: Dairat al-Ma'arif al-Nizamiyyah, 1344), 246.

[34] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 58.

[35] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 57.

[36] al-Subhani, 58; Taqy al-Din al-Subki, *Shifa' al-Saqam Fi Ziyarat Khayr al-Anam*, ed. Husayn Muhammad Ali Shukry, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2008), 5.

[37] Some narrations even describe that the Prophet's state or condition is no different, both during his life and after he died. Among the narrations is the one narrated by Abi Hurairah (من صلى علي من قريب سمعته), the hadith no. 4616, see Diya' al-Din al-Maqdisi Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Hamid, *Al-Sunan Wa al-Ahkam 'an al-Mustafa*, ed. Abi 'Abdillah Husayn Ibn 'Ukashah, vol. 4 (Saudi Arabia: Dar Majid 'Ayri, 2004), 301; Ja'far al-Subhani, *Al-Wahhabiyyah Fi al-Mizan* (Beirut: Dar al-Muntazar, 1988), 12.

tradition for Muslims since the time of the Companions, and is permissible by the majority of Muslim scholars. Even sacred religious texts mention it.

Tawassul with the Prophets and the Pious People

Tawassul (mediation) is a procedure of reciting prayers in which the reciting person includes someone within the prayers as an act of *tawassul*. This is taken to bring it to have more values and be easily answered by Allah. Many things are commonly used as *tawassul* (*al-mutawassal bih*) including good deeds, living and dead people, Allah's names, and inanimate objects. However, Muslim scholars disagree about the inclusion of several objects in the *tawassul*, including the one with the deceased. This is because the inclusion is considered contrary to the principle of *tawhid*.[38]

Those who reject the *tawassul* with dead people argue that it is an act of *shirk*. This is like asking the deceased for help. It is also regarded as an act of *shirk* committed by the pre-Islamic Arab who asked other than Allah for help. For this reason, the doers are justified to have worshipped other than Allah as mentioned on Q.S. Yunus 10:18 and Q.S. Az-Zumar 39: 3.[39]

Al-Subhani does not see the difference between *tawassul* with the living and the dead. In understanding the Hadith about *tawassul* with the Prophet's prayer, he thinks that the source of the *tawassul* is the Prophet himself and his position, not the circumstances of his life.[40] The greatness in the Prophet's prayer came from his nobility before Allah. The virtue of prayer before Allah lies in the transcendent value of the person who recites the prayer, his/her piety and self-purity which is the key to the prayer to be answered. To this end, the *tawassul* is likely to be made during or after his/her life, and apply to anyone with a high degree of piety including the Prophets, the Saints or other creatures.[41]

Al-Subhani constructs his argument on the narrations regarding the *istisqa'* prayer which uses the *tawassul* with the *al-mutawassil bih* (the one addressed in the

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[38] The phrase used in the *tawassul* is "*as'aluka bijahi Nabiyyika*", I ask You through the Prophet's position at Your side, or "*As'Aluka binabiyyika*", I ask You through Your Prophet. Taqiy al-Din Ahmad Ibn 'Abd al-Salam Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Istighathah Fi al-Rad 'ala al-Bukary* (Riyadh: Dar al-Wat}an, 1997), 57.

[39] Ibn Baz, "Al-Tawassul al-Mashru' wa al-Mamnu'," accessed July 12, 2020, https://binbaz.org.sa/fatwas/17976; Ibn Baz, *Majmu' Fatawa Wa Maqalat Mutanawwi'ah*, 13:318.

[40] The hadith is (اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ وَأَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ مُحَمَّدٍ نَبِيِّ الرَّحْمَةِ). The word *nabiyyika* here underlies the possibility to perform *tawassul* with the Prophet. The Hadith no. 17241 on Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut, *Musnad Al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, vol. 28 (Riyadh: Muassasah al-Risalah, 1999), 480.

[41] This is like the *tawassul* performed by Umar addressing the Prophet's uncle, "*bi'ammi nabiyyika*". See the hadith no. 59 on Muhammad bin al-Futuh al-Hamidi, *Al-Jam' Bayn al-Sahihayn al-Bukhari Wa Muslim*, ed. Ali Husayn al-Bawwab, vol. 3 (Lebanon: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002), 54; al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 94–96.

tawassul). The story about Abdul Mutallib and Abu Talib who addressed the *tawassul* with the Prophet when he was a kid,[42] the *istisqa* prayer conducted by Umar Ibn Khattab,[43] and the al-Shafi'i opinion regarding the sacredness of involving children and the elderly in the *istisqa'* prayer procedure are few examples.[44] For this reason, Al-Subhani draws a conclusion that *tawassul* is closely related to self-purity. It can be a child or a pious person. This is also the key to Allah's blessings, the benefits of which can be experienced by those who have pure hearts or those who do not.[45]

Al-Subhani disagrees with the opinion stating that the *tawassul* with those who have died is an act of worshipping the *al-mutawassil bih* for two reasons. First, *tawassul* is a means of getting close to Allah (*tahsil asbab al-taqarrub*). This is no different from jihad as the two are mentioned in al-Maidah 5:35. If the *tawassul* with the Prophet is considered an act of *shirk*, this also applies to any act of involving other people in daily life including asking for their help. All forms of request or supplication are part of *al-tawassul bi al-asbab*, both *'adiyyah* and *ghair 'adiyyah*, natural and supernatural.[46] Second, the concept of *tawassul* is closely related to the definition of *ibadah* (worship). Al-Subhani claims the *tawassul* here does not suggest any act of *shirk* because it comes from a special position or privilege of a creature before Allah, and is an effort to knock on His door for His mercy and compassion. It clearly does not involve a belief that the object of *tawassul* has *rububiyyah* power as committed by the Quraish people. These two reasons lead al-Subhani to claim that the *tawassul* with the Prophet or pious people is not considered as an act of *shirk*.[47]

Seeking *Syafaat* (Help) from the Prophet and the Pious People

Another debatable issue regarding the veneration of Saints tradition is *tasyaffu'* (seeking help). Two aspects of *syafaat* (help) causing debate among Muslim scholars are, first, the possibility of *tasyaffu* or asking help to other than Allah, to the Prophet or pious people, for example, and second, the possibility of *tasyaffu'* to people who have died. Such practice is like reciting prayers during a gravesite visitation, (اِشْفَعْ اللهِ لَنا عِنْدَ اللهِ) يا وَجِيهاً عِنْدَ) which literally indicates asking for help to the deceased.

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[42] The Hadith no. 1008 on Muhammad Ibn Isma'il Ibn Ibrahim Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, ed. Muhammad Zuhair Ibn Nasir, vol. 2 (Amiriyyah: Dar Tauq al-Najah, 1422), 27.

[43] Umar's prayer (اَللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّنَا فَتَسْقِينَا وَإِنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِعَمِّ نَبِيِّنَا فَاسْقِنَا), the hadith no. 1010 on Al-Bukhari, 2:27.

[44] Muhammad Ibn Idris al-Shafi'i, *Al-Umm*, ed. Rif'at Fauzi 'Abd al-Latif, vol. 2 (Mansurah: Dar al-Wafa li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 2001), 541.

[45] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 99–100.

[46] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 104.

[47] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 105.

Those who have absolutely rejected *tasyaffu'* (seeking help) underlies their opinion on the following reasons. First, it is a serious act of *shirk*. Essentially, only Allah has the right to address for *syafaat* (help) considering it is His prerogative right as mentioned in Surah Az-Zumar 39:44.[48] If it is addressed to an entity other than Him, it includes an act of worshipping creatures such as the one committed by the Arab, in which they ask for help from their idols.[49] The second is the concept of death, which is understood as a dimension separated from the worldly dimension. Death ends a person from his deeds and efforts.[50] For these reasons, they deny the existence of two issues of *syafaat* which have attracted al-Subhani's attention.

Al-Subhani allows *tassaffu'* addressed to pious people, both the living and the deceased ones. He defines *syafaat* as (دعاء النبي أو الولي إلى حق المذنب), a prayer from the Prophet or a pious person for the sinner. This means *tasyaffu'* is *talab al-du'a*, asking a pious person for a prayer, so that Allah will give him forgiveness. When a person performs *tasyaffu'*, he is actually asking the pious person to pray for him before Allah.[51] Al-Subhani creates an analogy on *tasyaffu'* which is like asking for help from the living. If the second type is allowed, the first one, indeed, has the same possibility.

Al-Subhani bases his opinion about the *tasyaffu'* with the living on two hadith narrations. The *tasyaffu'* to the living, for example, refers to the narration mentioned by Ibn Abbas, stating that a prayer for forgiveness from a Muslim for the fellow Muslim is *syafa'at*.[52] The *tasyaffu'* to the deceased is based on Anas Ibn Malik's narration regarding the Prophet's *syafa'at* in the hereafter,[53] and Caliph Ali's words after bathing the Prophet's body, (أذكرنا عند ربك).[54] Both of these narrations indicate a *tasyaffu'* to the dead.

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[48] Like prayers and worship, *syafaat* is only addressed to Allah (قُل لِّلَّهِ الشَّفَاعَةُ جَمِيعًا). Ahmad Mustafa Mutawalli, *Al-Jami' al-Mumtaz Fi Fiqh Wa Fatawa al-Haj Wa al-'Umrah Li al-'Allamah Ibn Baz* (Makatabah Shayd al-Fawa>id, 2000), 206.

[49] *Tasyaffu* (seeking help) to creatures or the deceased is considered as a request beyond the ability (*talab ma la yuqdar 'alaih*), and only Allah owns that right. See 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Baz, "Talab al-Shafa'ah min al-Naby aw Mayyit Akhar," accessed on July 16, 2020, https://binbaz.org.sa/fatwas/28817.

[50] The best of what a man leaves behind are three: a righteous child who supplicates for him, ongoing charity the reward of which reaches him, and knowledge that is acted upon after him. The hadith no.3016 on Muhammad Ibn Hibban Ibn Ahmad, *Sahih Ibn Hibban*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnut, vol. 7 (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risalah, 1993), 286.

[51] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 117.

[52] The following is the hadith (مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ مُسْلِمٍ يَمُوتُ فَيَقُومُ عَلَى جَنَازَتِهِ أَرْبَعُونَ رَجُلاً لاَ يُشْرِكُونَ بِاللهِ شَيْئًا إِلاَّ شَفَّعَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِيهِ). Al-Subhani defines *syafa'at* as *al-du'a' bi al-ghufran*. The hadith no. 2242 on Muslim bin al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi, *S}ahih Muslim*, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadidah, 1997), 53; al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 117–18.

[53] Anas Ibn Malik asked the Prophet (اين تطلبك) regarding how he will ask his *syafa'at* on the Day of Judgment. See, the hadith no 2433 on Abu' Isa Muhammad Ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Al-Jami' al-Kabir*, ed. Bashar 'Awwad Ma'ruf, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Jayl, 1998), 228.

[54] al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 199.

On the other hand, al-Subhani underlines the fundamental issue on shirk, which is the belief in *rububiyyah*. According to him, the *tasyaffu'* to pious people happens due to the presence of such belief. This is certainly different from the practice of the Quraish people, who believed that the entity they were asking for help owned *rububiyyah* and *uluhiyyah* characteristics. He does not deny the similarity between the two physically. However, he emphasizes that the principle that applies in the *shirk* is the belief and intention that underlies an action.

Tabarruk (Seeking Blessings) from the Prophets and the Pious People

Blessings are believed to be a spiritual power that belongs to special circles including prophets, saints, relics, and places they have visited. This is an emanation and a continuation of the holiness of the figures which is a gift from God.[55] Some Muslims believe there are several ways to get the blessings such as direct meeting with the saints, rubbing or touching their tomb, and keeping their legacy or objects.[56]

The *tabarruk* (seeking blessings) here is an attempt to get a saint's blessings after his death through his gravesite and legacies.[57] The Muslim scholars agree that all blessings come from Allah. However, they have different opinions on the *tabarruk*.[58] Those who disagree argue that the *tabarruk* from the deceased only means *tabarruk ma'nawi,* such as taking advice and getting knowledge, or in the context of the Prophet, believing in and implementing his teachings. The *tabarruk hissi*, which is physical, including a relic or legacy, only applies specifically to the Prophet. The *tabarruk* addressed to the gravesite is forbidden and the tomb of the Prophet is no exception. This is considered to resemble the act of *shirk* committed by the Quraish people, believing that benefits and dangers come from other than Allah, and the attitude of *al-ghuluww fi al-ṣāliḥin*.[59]

In contrast, Al-Subhani allows the *tabarruk hissi* due to the fact that blessing is part of *sunnatullah*, which is Allah's will and power in the universe and may occur through the law of natural casualty (*asbab 'adiyyah*) and the law of supernatural

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[55] See Erica Ferg, "Islamic Saint Veneration in Iran" (Colorado, University of Denver, 2008), 8.

[56] Ferg, "Islamic Saint Veneration in Iran," 103.

[57] Shawqi Dayf, "Tabarraka - al-Mu'jam al-Wasit," accessed on July 18, 2020, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar.

[58] Ibn Abd al-Wahhab limits the *tabarruk* to legacies of Prophet Muhammad. al-Subhani, *Buhuth Qur'aniyyah Fi al-Tawhid Wa al-Shirk*, 129; Sa'id Ibn 'Ali Ibn Wahf, *Nur Al-Sunnah Wa Zulumat al-Bid'ah Fi Daw'i al-Kitab Wa al-Sunnah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Malik fahd al-Wataniyyah, 1419), 118–19.

[59] *Ghuluw* here is an undue respect as it is accompanied by an act of praying and asking the saints. To that end, it is considered an act of worship other than Allah. Gravesites and relics are included in *al-muharramat al-syirkiyyah* due to their nature which leads to a serious shirk. Ibn Wahf, *Nur Al-Sunnah Wa Zulumat al-Bid'ah Fi Daw'i al-Kitab Wa al-Sunnah*, 131.

casualty (*asbab ghayr 'adiyyah or khariqah li al-'adah*). He adds that such blessing is included in this supernatural aspect, aimed at *al-i'jaz*, defining a prophecy or *takrim* (showing respect) to pious people. This supernatural blessing can affect the law of causality in the universe under Allah's will. Therefore, *tabarruk* itself is part of human effort in undergoing the existing *sunnatullah*. This concept is, according to him, the logical basis of the *tabarruk* tradition addressed to saints and pious people.[60]

People who perform *tabarruk* believe that all the things are in Allah's hands and will, without suggesting that the saints have an independent power over the *rububiyyah* aspect. This is what al-Subhani says as the reason why the *tabarruk* addressed to the saints and their legacy is legal and is not related to the act of *shirk* or violating *tawhid*.

Conclusion

Referring to the above analysis and descriptions, understanding *tauhid uluhiyyah* plays a very influential role in seeing the concept of worship and *shirk* that can denote excommunication (*takfir*) from Islam. Those who view the veneration of saints as an act of shirk rely on the understanding of *tawhid uluhiyyah* which focuses more on the *fi'ly* (action) aspect. This has an impact on the concept of worship that they understand. An action may be considered as *ibadah* (worship) even without including the intention to do.

On the contrary, al-Subhani's concept of *tawhid* emphasizes the dimension of *i'tiqady* (belief). For this reason, the dimensions of *shirk* and worship have become more localized and limited. According to him, acts of *shirk* and worship are closely related to their underlying belief. This means an act of *shirk* cannot be justified through its *zahir* (external) aspect. In the same way, an act of worship only happens if it is based on the belief in the independence of the Omnipotent. On this basis, he rejects the allegation claiming that veneration of saints tradition including *tawassul* (mediation), *tasyaffu'* (seeking help), and *tabarruk* (seeking blessings) means worshipping the saints.

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[60] This form of *takrim* is often mentioned in the Qur'an. Among the examples are the story of Maryam who was served with meals by Allah (QS Ali-Imran 3:37; QS Maryam 19:25) and the story of Yusuf (Q.S. Yusuf 12: 93-96) who was healed from blindness by rubbing his eyes with a cloth.

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