

## Chapter 112: AL-IKHLAS (Sincerity of Faith)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

*“Say: He is Allah, the One and only God, (1) the Eternal, the Absolute. (2) He begets none, nor is He begotten, (3) and there is nothing that could be compared to Him. (4)”*

### Overview:

The surah is given the name al-Ikhlās in view of its meaning and subject matter. The period of revelation is disputed. There are various reports supporting both views; that it was revealed in Makkah and in Madinah. For explanations that reconcile these seemingly conflicting views, see the commentary on surah al-Falaq.

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, held this surah in great esteem and pointed out its significance on different occasions. Anas, for example, said a man from among the ansar led prayers in the Quba mosque. His practice was that in every unit he first recited this surah and then would join other verses to it. The congregation objected saying “don't you think the surah is by itself enough? You should either recite only this surah, or should leave it and recite some other. He said: “I cannot leave it, I would rather give up leading prayers if you so desired.” They brought the matter before Rasulullah and he asked the man about it. The man replied that he had a great love for it. Rasulullah said “Your love for this surah would earn you entry into Paradise.” In another occasion, he said the man that Allah loves him for his love to praise Him.

This surah firmly establishes personal attributes of Allah and the essential tenets of pure monotheism. In Islamic terminology, this aspect of monotheism is sometimes called ‘tawhid-i rububiyah.’ Similarly, surah al-Kafiroon (the Unbelievers) establishes the Islamic concept of worship and denounces any similarity to associating partners to Him in worship. This aspect of monotheism is sometimes called ‘tawhid-i ubudiyah.’ Since the belief in Oneness of the Divine Being necessitates the devotion of worship sincerely to Him alone, the strong connection between the two surahs is evident. That is why these two chapters together are sometimes called ‘Ikhlāsayn’. It should also be noted in this regard that Rasulullah used to start off his day reciting these two chapters in the sunnah (voluntary prayer) before the obligatory dawn prayer.

We also recall that Allah’s messenger used to recite the last three surahs of the Qur’an (Ikhlās, Falaq, and Nas) when getting into bed three times every night. The personal attributes of the Divine Being who has power to grant a refuge and a shelter against all evils that are mentioned in Falaq and Nas (‘muawwizatayn’, the twin shelters) are described in this surah. Due to this connection, surah Ikhlās together with Falaq and Nas are called ‘muawwizat,’ the shelters.

### Reason of Revelation:

Traditions show that different people on different occasions had questioned Rasulullah about the essence and nature of Allah. First of all, the pagans of Quraish asked him this question in Makkah, and thereupon this surah was sent down. Later in Madinah, people from among Jewish

and Christian communities and other people asked him questions of this nature, and he responded by this very surah. Therefore the stronger view is that the surah was revealed in Makkah probably at an earlier period when people hearing the invitation to Islam wanted to know the attributes of Allah.

Ibn Masud, for example, reported that the Quraish asked Rasulullah, peace and blessings be upon him, "Tell us of the ancestry of your Lord." Thereupon this surah was sent down. Ikrimah related a tradition from Ibn Abbas saying that a group of the Jews came before Rasulullah and said: "O Muhammad, tell us of the attributes of your Lord who has sent you as a Prophet." Thereupon Allah sent down this surah. Ibn Abbas reported that a deputation of the Christians of Najran along with seven priests visited Allah's messenger. They said: "O Muhammad, tell us what is your Lord like and of what substance He is made." He replied: "My Lord is not made from any substance. He is unique and exalted above everything." Thereupon Allah sent down this surah.

#### Main Themes:

The idolatrous polytheists were worshiping gods made of wood, stone, gold, silver and other substances. These gods had a form, shape and body. They also believed that angels are daughters of Allah. Although the Christians believed in One God, yet they also believed in trinity of Godhead. The Jews believed in One God, yet they associated with him certain physical, material and other human qualities and characteristics. (For example, He went for a stroll, appeared in human form, wrestled with a servant of His, and was father of a son, Ezra.) Besides these religious communities, the Zoroastrians were fire worshipers, and the Sabians worshipped stars. When Rasulullah started preaching Islam, it was inevitable that questions arose in the minds about the qualities of Allah. This surah in a few words answered such questions.

The messenger of Allah is reported to have said that this surah is equivalent to one third the Quran. Hamdi Yazir classified the themes of the Qur'an into three broad categories, namely, monotheism, the laws and virtues. Rasulullah's comment probably points to such a classification. Another explanation is given by Badiuzzaman regarding the merits of reciting this surah. He says that for every letter of the Qur'an is a merit. Each is a good deed. Out of Divine grace the merits of those letters sprout and yield sometimes ten, sometimes seventy, and sometimes seven hundred merits, like the letters of ayat al-kursi. Sometimes they yield one thousand five hundred, like the letters of sura al-Ikhlās. To better understand this, suppose there is a field planted with maize, one thousand plants of it. If some seeds produce seven shoots, and from each shoot a hundred grains, then a single seed becomes the equivalent of two thirds of the whole field. For example, if one seed produces ten shoots, and each yields two hundred grains, then a single seed is the equivalent of twice the original field. You can make further analogies in the same way.

#### Style:

The verses of the surah rhyme beautifully as each verse ends in the same sound of 'd' which is one of the 'qalqala' letters noted for their forceful pronunciation.

The words 'yalid' and 'yoolad' that occur in verse 3 are derived from the same root 'w-l-d' (to give birth) which is an example of so-called derivational rhyme. In addition, that these two words occur in the same verse is a beautiful example of what is called an internal rhyme.

This surah establishes in few short sentences the basic tenets of the shrine of pure monotheism that forms the main structure of the religion of Islam. This brevity of its wording in contrast with the amazingly rich, deep and multiple layers of meanings is at the level of a miracle, and cannot be imitated. Due to its matchless style, the surah is immediately committed to memory and can be read and recited with great ease.

#### Noble Meaning:

1. (قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ) “Say, He is Allah, [who is] One,”

The first addressee of this command ‘qul’ or say is Rasulullah himself for it was he who was asked the question. Through him every believer is an addressee as well.

The immediate answer to the questions is ‘huwa Allah’, that it is the Divine Being you know by the name of Allah. The name ‘Allah’ was not an unfamiliar for the Arabs. They had been using this name for the Creator of the universe since the earliest times, and they did not apply this word to any of their other gods. For other gods they used the name ‘ilah’, that is god. They called the Ka’bah the house of Allah for example. In several verses elsewhere Qur’an points this polytheistic Arabian belief about Allah.

This name ‘Allah’ comprehends all the perfect and excellent attributes of the Divine Being. He is the Creator of the universe, its Administrator and Disposer of its affairs, Sustainer of all creatures, and the Helper of the servants in times of hardship. He is the All-Living, All-Hearing, All-Seeing, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Wise, All-Merciful and the All-Kind Sovereign.

This would be a good time to listen to recitation of a compilation of Divine names of Allah:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aosKhl\\_AIGg&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aosKhl_AIGg&feature=related)

The exceptional use of the name ‘Ahad’ (the One and Only, the Unique) should be noted in this verse. There is no precedence in pre-Qur’anic Arabic that the mere word ‘ahad’ was used as an adjective for a person or thing. After the revelation of the Qur’an this word has been used only for the Being of Allah, and for no one else. The name occurred in the Qur’an just once in this surah. This extraordinary use by itself shows that being single, unique and matchless is a fundamental attribute of Allah; no one else is qualified with this quality.

In the sentence ‘huwa Allahu Ahad’, the word ‘huwa’ is the subject and the names Allah and Ahad are first and second predicates, or Allah is the predicate and Ahad is an adjective. According to these parsing, the sentence means that the One about whom you are questioning me is Allah who -- and who alone -- possesses all these Divine names and attributes. He alone is the Deity, no one else is His associate in divinity. He alone is the Creator of the universe: no one else is His associate in this work of creation. He alone is the Sustainer, no one else has any share or part in providence. He alone is the Helper and Rescuer in times of hardship. Other Divine names may be mentioned in the same way. These statements stresses different aspects of the pure monotheism that are given special names in Islamic literature such as tawhid-i shuhud, tawhid-i uluhiyyah, tawhid-i asma was-sifat, tawhid-i rububiyah, tawhid-i ubudiyyah, etc. From the totality of these affirmations shines the pure Islamic monotheism.

The difference between the words 'ahad' (Oneness) and 'wahid' (Unity) should also be mentioned. The name al-Ahad refers to the particular manifestations of His names on individual things or beings, whereas the name al-Wahid refers to comprehensive manifestations of His names and attributes. Badiuzzaman uses the following analogy to explain this difference: The sun encompasses innumerable things in its light. This can serve to understand His Unity. But to hold the totality of its light in our minds, we would need a vast conceptual and perceptual power. So lest the sun be forgotten, each shining object reflects its properties as best it can and so manifests the sun. This is an analogy for His being the Unique One of Absolute Oneness. Indeed, the whole universe is a mirror to Allah in general, as every single being is a mirror in particular.

## 2. (اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ) “Allah, the Eternal Refuge”

Allah, the eternally Besought of all! The Master whose glory is at its peak and for whom all created beings are in need. It is also said that al-Samad means He who does not eat or drink, the Everlasting, the Sufficient, He who has no superior, He who is independent of all and all others are dependent upon him, He who neither eats nor drinks, He who did not inherit and will not be inherited, He who is perfect in all his attributes and works, He who is faultless. All such meanings are possible from the derivation of the name 'as-Samad' from the root 's-m-d' and are reported by various scholars. This divine name is also used just once in the whole Qur'an in this verse only.

## 3. (لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ) “He begets not, nor is He begotten.”

The question 'what is His ancestry?' is already answered by the previous verses by citing the names Ahad and al-Samad for Allah. This verse emphasized this truth in a way of negation due to its significance, so that there remains no room for any ambiguity in this regard. Indeed, one who begets children or is himself begotten is not One, and cannot be free of needs, and cannot be a deity.

## 4. (وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا حَدًّا) “nor is there to Him any equivalent.”

There is none comparable unto Him. The word 'kufuw' means an example, a similar thing, the one equal in rank and position. The verse therefore stresses that there is no one, nor ever was, nor ever can be, who is similar to Allah, or equal in rank with Him, or resembling Him in His Being, attributes, works and powers in any degree whatever. He does not have an opposite either.

### Notes:

Badiuzzaman notes that this short surah has six sentences (three positive and three negative) which prove or establish six aspects of divine unity, and reject or negate six types of associating partners with Allah. Each sentence has two meanings: one a priori (functioning as a cause or proof), and the other a posteriori (functioning as an effect or result). That means that the surah actually contains 36 surahs, each made up of a combination of six sentences and each having many aspects. One is either a premise or a proposition, and the others are arguments supporting it, as detailed below:

-Say: He is God because He is the One of Absolute Unity, because He is the Eternally-Besought-of-All, because He begets not, because He is not begotten, and because comparable to Him there is none.

-Say: Comparable to Him there is none because He begets not, because He is not begotten, because He is the Eternally-Besought-of-All, because He is the One of Absolute Unity, and because He is God.

-Say: He is God so He is the One of Absolute Unity, so He is the Eternally- Besought-of-All, so He begets not, so He is not begotten, and so comparable to Him there is none. And so on..

Badiuzzaman also states that faith in God's Unity has two degrees: believing superficially that God has no partners, and that the universe belongs only to Him (such believers may be susceptible to deviation and confusion); and firm conviction that God is One, that everything belongs to Him exclusively, and that only He creates, maintains, provides, causes to die, etc. Such believers see His seal and observe His stamp on all things. Free from doubt, they feel themselves always and everywhere in His Presence. Their conviction cannot be diluted by deviation or doubt. This surah preaches to reach such a level of faith.

It is written in sufi books that one who continues the recitation of this surah will be given the flag of tawhid, he will be a bearer of the standard of pure monotheism. Many other merits of its recitation (3, 12, 100, 1000 times) are mentioned; such as one will be forgiven his sins, will be saved from the fire, etc. One who recites it due to his love for praising Allah may certainly hope for Allah's love for him/her in return. Following Rasulullah's comment that it is equivalent of one third of Qur'an, muslims read one Fatihah and three Ikhlas and hope that Allah will accept it as a complete 'khatim' (one full recitation of the entire Qur'an). It is a common practice to recite these surahs and send them as a gift/prayer to the souls of the loved ones who passed away, and all deceased Muslims in general.

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May Allah help us attaining the level of perfect tawhid, the pure monotheism in our faith so that we see His signs in every event, in everything and in every being. May Allah protect us from associating partners to Him in any form and shape, knowingly and unknowingly, in our creeds and in our deeds. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon His messenger, on his pure family and companions, and on all his noble brothers in messengership.

A different interpretation of Divine names of Allah:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhwdEtO5fJE&feature=relmfu>