

## God in Islamic Traditions: A Glance at *Al-Tahwid* by Shaykh al-Saduq

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After Kulayni, the second greatest Shi'ite scholar of hadith was Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ali b. Husayn b. Musa b. Babawayh Qummi, commonly known as Shaykh al-Saduq. His exact date of birth is not known, but what we learn from his own book *Ikmal al-Din* and Shaykh al-Tusi's *al-Ghaybah* and al-Najashi's *al-Fihrist* is that it is likely that he was born during the early years of the *safarah* (deputyship) of the third deputy (*nā'ib*) of the present Imam (*circa* 305/917-18) in the city of Qum.

Besides collecting and editing the books of hadith, al-Saduq trained a large number of pupils, who carried on preserving, collecting and narrating the traditions of the Shi'ite Imams throughout the Islamic world. He occupied a central place in the circle of the Shi'ite scholars and had a large number of followers.

Most of the researchers believe that al-Saduq wrote and compiled about three hundred books. The titles of two hundred and nineteen of these are given in the introduction of *Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih* (For him not in the Presence of a Jurisprudent), which is the most important of all the extant works of al-Shaykh al-Saduq and one of the most famous and authoritative collections of Shi'ite hadiths. It is regarded as the second most important hadith collection after al-Kulayni's *Al-Kafi fi 'Ilm al-Din* (the Sufficient in the Knowledge of Religion).

What follows is a translation of a number of traditions (hadiths) selected from *Al-Tawhid* (the Unity of God), another very important

work of Shaykh al-Saduq. It is taken from the edition edited by Sayyid Hashim Tehrani.

*Al-Tawhid* contains the most profound and delicate hadiths dealing with the issues pertaining to God, especially to the Unity of God from the perspective of the Shi'ite school of thought. The compiler has commented on some of the hadiths (traditions) contained in the book in the light of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Shi'ite Imams. Some Shi'ite scholars have written commentaries on this book and several of these have also been referred to by the editor in his introduction to the book.

*Al-Tawhid* contains 583 hadiths arranged in 67 chapters. In some manuscripts or editions, there are 66 chapters. This is due to either chapter 43 or chapter 49 being combined with its previous one. Every chapter deals with a specific issue, which is related to Divine Essence, Attributes or Acts.

#### **Titles of the Chapters of al-Tawhid**

1. Reward for the for the Monotheists and the Gnostics
2. Divine Unity and Negation of Anthropomorphism
3. The Meanings of the One, Divine Unity and the Monotheist
4. Commentary on "Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah is the All-everlasting. He neither begets nor was He begotten, nor has he any equal" (112).
5. The Meanings of Divine Unity and Justice
6. That He, the Majestic and Exalted, is not corporeal nor does He have a form.
7. That He, the Blessed and Exalted, is a Thing (*shay'*)
8. What has been said on the Vision [of God]

9. Divine Omnipotence
10. Divine Omniscience
11. Divine Essence, Attributes and Actions
12. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“Everything is perishable save His Face.” (28: 88)
13. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“O Iblis! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands?” (38:75)
14. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“That day when the catastrophe occurs, and they are summoned to prostrate themselves, and they will not be able [to do it].” (68:42)
15. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth....”(24:35)
16. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“They have forgotten God, so God has forgotten them.” (9:67)
17. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“...yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand.” (39:67)
18. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“No Indeed! They will be alienated from their Lord on that day.” (83:15)
19. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“... and your Lord and the angels arrive in ranks.” (89:22)
20. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic:  
“Do they await anything but that God [’s command] should come to them in the shades of the clouds, with the angels.” (2:210)

21. Commentary on the sayings of God, the Exalted and Majestic: “God shall put them to ridicule” (9:79); “Then they plotted [against Jesus] and God also devised, and God is the Best of devisers” (3:54); “The hypocrites indeed seek to deceive God, but it is He who outwits them” (4:142).

22. The Meaning of the Vicinity of God, the Exalted and Majestic

23. The Meaning of *al-bujzah* [originally, the place where the trousers or kilt is fastened; it is also used in the sense of trousers and kilts themselves].

24. The Meanings of the eye, the ear, and the tongue.

25. The Meaning of the Saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: “The Jews say, ‘God’s hand is tied up.’ Tied be their hands, and cursed be they for what they say! Rather, His hands are wide open.” (5:64)

26. The Meanings of Divine Approval (*ridā*) and Wrath (*sakhat*)

27. The Meaning of the Saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: “..and breathed into him of My spirit.” (15:29)

28. Negation of Space, Time, Rest, Motion, Descent, Ascent and Change of location of God, the Exalted and Majestic.

29. The Names of God and the Difference between their Meanings and Those of the Creatures

30. The Nature of the Qur’an

31. The Meaning of ‘In the Name of God, All-merciful, Most-merciful’

32. Commentary on the Letters of the Alphabet (*hurūf al-mu‘jam*)

33. Commentary on the Letters of Calculation (*hurūf al-jumal*)

34. The Meanings of the Words of the Call to Prayers and the Declaration of Standing for Prayer
35. Commentary on Right Guidance, Error, Success, and Being Forsaken by God
36. Refutation of Dualism and Atheism
37. Refutation of Those “who say, ‘God is the third [person] of a trinity’, while there is no except the One God.” (5:73)
38. Mentioning the Tremendousness of God, the Blessed and Majestic
39. The Gentleness of God, the Blessed and Exalted
40. The minimum necessary amount of the knowledge of Divine Unity
41. Surely He, the Exalted and the Majestic, cannot not be known except through Himself
42. Proof of the Temporality of the World
43. The Tradition of Dhi’lib
44. The Tradition of al-Sabkhat, the Jew
45. The Meaning of Glory be to God!
46. The Meaning of God is Greater.
47. The Meanings of the First and the Last
48. The Meaning of the Saying of God, “The All-merciful, settled on the Throne.” (20:5)
49. The Meaning of the Saying of God, “and His Throne was [then] upon the water.” (11:7)

50. The Throne and its Qualities
51. The Throne was the fourth thing to be created
52. His seat embraces the heavens and the earth (2:255).
53. God originated creation upon [innate knowledge of] His Oneness
54. Change of Destiny (*badāʾ*)
55. Divine Intention and Will
56. The Ability [of human beings]
57. Putting to the Test and Trial
58. Felicity and Misery
59. Refutation of Compulsion and Complete Freedom
60. Divine Decree (*qadāʾ*) and Measure (*qadar*), Sedition, Provisions, Prices, and the Appointed Times
61. Children and the Justice shown to them by God, the Exalted and Majestic, towards them
62. God, the Exalted, does not deal with His servants except based on that which is in their best interest
63. Command, Prohibition, Promise and Threat
64. Information, Explanation, Proof and Guidance
65. Imam Riḍā's meeting, peace be upon him, with the people of the different religions and the people of different beliefs, such as Jathiliq (Catholicos), Ra's al-Jālūt (Exilarch, lit. 'Head of the Exile'), the chiefs of the Sabaeans, Chief Hirbud, and what 'Imrān al-T'ābi'i said on Divine Unity in the presence of al-Ma'mun

66. Imam Ridā's Meeting, peace be upon him, with Sulayman al-Marwazi, the theologian of Khurasan on Divine Unity in the presence of al-Ma'mun

67. Prohibiting Disputing and Arguing about God, the Exalted and Majestic

### Selection of hadith

The Unity of God is the foundational principle of all the revealed religions. Hence, a follower of the Islamic religion must first accept the testimony of faith: 'There is no god but God'. It is this profession of God's Unity, which is Islam's first pillar and all else depends upon and is derived from it. In what follows, I will refer to three exemplar hadiths on divine attributes, narrated by Shaykh al-Saduq in *Al-Tawhid*. The following hadiths are all from the Chapter on "Divine Unity and Negation of Anthropomorphism".

1. Hadith number 27: Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Isam al-Kulayni, may God have mercy upon him, narrated to us from Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulaini that: Muhammad b. 'Ali b. 'Ātikah from al-Hasan b. Naār al-Fihri from 'Amr al-Awzā'i from 'Amr b. Shimr from Jabir b. Yazid al-Ju'fi from Abi Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Baqir from his father from his grandfather, peace be upon them, who said: The commander of the faithful said in a sermon that he delivered seven days after the death of the Prophet, when he had finished collecting the holy Qur'an:

All praise belongs to God, Who made it impossible for imaginations to comprehend His existence, and veiled their intellects from being able to imagine His essence, because it is impossible for His essence to have a like or form. His essence does not vary nor is it divided by numerical division in its [attributes of] perfection.

He is separated from things not in terms of distance, and within them not in terms of mixing, and knows [things] not by instruments [while others] cannot attain

knowledge except through them. There is no other knowledge than His between that which is known by Him and Him [so that He may need it to know things]. If it is said that 'He was', it should be interpreted as the pre-eternity of [His] existence. If 'still' is said of Him, it should be interpreted as the negation of non-existence [of His Essence].

Glory be to Him, and high is He exalted above what those who worship other than Him say and who take a god other than Him.

We praise Him with a praise that He accepted for His servants and with a praise that He made its acceptance obligatory upon them. I profess that there is no god but God, without any associate and profess that Muhammad is His servant and messenger. These two professions of faith elevate words and double [the weight of] deeds. The scale will become light when these two professions of faith are taken away from it, and it will be weighty if they are put in it. The attainment of Paradise, being saved from Hell, and crossing the path successfully are gained through these two professions of faith. You will enter Paradise by the two professions of faith and attain Divine mercy by prayer. Hence, invoke blessings on your Prophet and his Household frequently. "Indeed God and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who have faith! Invoke blessings on him and invoke Peace upon him in a worthy manner." (33:56)

O people, surely there is no honour higher than Islam, no generosity more precious than mindfulness of God, no stronghold more protective than piety, no intercessor more beneficial than repentance, no treasure more beneficial than knowledge; no glory higher than forbearance, no noble descent more lasting than good manners, no fatigue more exhausting than anger, no

beauty better than intelligence, no evil worse than falsehood, no guardian more protective than silence, no dress more beautiful than good health, and no absence closer than death.

O people, whoever walks on the surface of the earth will eventually go beneath it. Day and night make haste to bring to an end the life spans. Every possessor of the breath of life has provisions and every seed has an eater.

You are the food of death. He who realizes the [vicissitudes of] time will not neglect readiness [for the hereafter]. Neither the wealth of the rich nor the poverty of the poor will save them from death. O people, he who fears His Lord will stop his wrongdoing. Whoever is not pious in his speech is more manifest in remoteness [from his Lord]. He who cannot distinguish good from evil is the same as an animal. How scanty are worldly misfortunes compared with the huge neediness of tomorrow. Your enmity is but due to your committing sins and acts of disobedience to God. Rest is very close to fatigue, and misery is very close to change. Any evil that is followed by Paradise is not a true evil, and any welfare that is followed by Hell is not a true welfare. Every comfort other than Paradise is valueless. Every misfortune other than Hell is good health.

2. Hadith number 26: Abu'l-'Abbas Muhammad b. Ibrahim b. Ishaq al-Tāliqāni, may God be pleased with him, narrated to us this hadeeth, saying: "Abu Sa'īd al-Hasan b. Ali al-'Adawi said: "al-Haitham b. Abd al-Allah al-Rummani narrated to us: 'Ali b. Musa al-Ridā narrated to me, from his father, Musa b. Ja'far from his father, Ja'far b. Muhammad on the authority of his father Muhammad b. 'Ali from his father 'Ali b. al-Husain from his father al-Hasan b. 'Ali, peace be upon them, saying: 'The Commander of

the Faithful (peace be upon him) addressed the people in the mosque at Kufa and said:

All praise belongs to God, who does not exist because of anything and who did not bring that which exists into existence out of anything. He attests to His pre-eternity through the temporality (*budūth*) of things, to His power through the impotence with which He has branded them, and to His everlastingness through the 'annihilation (*fanā*) which He has forced upon them. No place is empty of Him so that He might be perceived through location, and nothing is like Him so that He might be described by quality, and He is not hidden from anything so that He might be known through comparison.

He is distinct in terms of attributes from all that He has originated, impossible of perception because of the changing essences which He has created, and transcends all changing states because of grandeur and tremendousness. His delimitation is forbidden to penetrating and surpassing sagacity, His description to the piercing depths of thought and His representation to the penetrating and insightful probes.

Because of His tremendousness, places do not encompass Him, because of His majesty measures cannot gauge Him, and because of His grandeur standards cannot judge Him. It is impossible for imaginations to fathom Him, understandings to comprehend Him or minds to imagine Him. High-aspiring powers of reason despair of contriving to comprehend Him, oceans of knowledge run dry without alluding to Him in depth, and the subtleties of disputants fall from loftiness to pettiness in describing His power.

He is One not in terms of number; Everlasting, without duration; Standing, without supports, He is not of a kind that [other] kinds should be on a par with Him, nor an object that objects should be similar to Him, nor like things that attributes should apply to Him. Powers of reason go astray in the waves of the current of perceiving Him, imaginations are bewildered at encompassing the mention of His pre-eternity, understandings are incapable of becoming conscious of the description of His power, and minds are drowned in the depths of the heavens of His kingdom (*malakūt*).

He possesses mastery over [giving] bounties, inaccessible through Grandeur, and Sovereign over all things. Time does not make Him old, nor does description encompass Him. The firmest of obstinacies in the limits of their constancy are humbled before Him, and the most unbreakable of the ropes in the extremity of their towering regions are submitted to Him.

The totality of the different kinds [of creatures] attests to His Lordship, their impotence to His Power, their creation to His eternity, and their extinction to His permanence. So they possess no place of refuge from His grasp of them, no exit from His encompassing them, no way of veiling themselves from His enumeration of them and no way of avoiding His power over them. Sufficient is the perfection of His making them, (creatures) as a sign [of His creation], His compounding of their (natural) constitutions as a proof, the temporal origin of their natures as (a reason for His) eternity, and the creation's laws governing them as a lesson. No limit is attributed to Him, no similitude struck for Him and nothing veiled from Him. Indeed He is far above the striking of similitude and above creaturely attributes.

And I testify that there is no god but He and have faith in His lordship and oppose whoever denies Him; and I testify that Muhammad is His servant and messenger, who resides in the best lodging-place and passed from the noblest of loins and immaculate wombs, extracted in lineage from the noblest of mines and in origin from the most excellent of plantations, and (derived) from the most inaccessible of peaks and the most glorious roots, from the tree from which God fashioned His prophets and chose His trusted ones: [a tree] of excellent wood, harmonious stature, lofty branches, flourishing limbs, ripe fruit, noble interior, and was implanted in generosity and cultivated in a sacred precinct. There it put forth branches and fruit, became strong and unassailable, and then made him (the prophet Muhammad) tall and eminent, until God, the Mighty and Majestic, honoured him with the Faithful Spirit, the Illuminating Light, and the Manifest Book. He subjected to him Buraq and the angels greeted him. By means of him He terrified the devils, overthrew the idols and the gods (who were) worshipped apart from Him. His prophet's way (*sunnah*) is integrity, his conduct is justice and his decision is truth. He complied with that which his Lord commanded and proclaimed that with which he was charged with until he made plain his mission through the profession of Unity and made manifest among the creatures that there is no god but God alone and that He has no associate; until His Oneness became pure and His lordship unmixed. God made manifest his argument through the profession of His Unity and He raised his degree with submission. And God, the Mighty and Majestic, chose for His prophet what was with Him of repose, degree and means and God bless him and his pure household.

3. Hadith number 2: Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Ahmad b. al-Walid, may God be pleased with him, narrated the following to us from Muhammad b. 'Amr al-Katib who narrated from Muhammad b. Abi

Ziyad al-Qulzumi from Muhammad b. Abi Ziyad al-Juddi, the leader of the prayer in Jaddah, who said that Muhammad b. Yahya b. 'Umar b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib related to him: 'I heard Aba'l-Hasan b. al-Rida talking in this way about Divine Unity (*tawhid*) in the presence of al-Ma'mun. Ibn Abi Ziyad said: Ibn Abd al-Allah al-'Alawi, their master and the uncle of some of them, also related it to me from al-Qasim b. Ayyub al-'Alawi: When al-Ma'mun desired to appoint al-Rida [as his successor] he gathered together Banu Hashim and said to them, "Surely, I wish to appoint al-Ridā in this affair after me."

'Banu Hashim envied al-Ridā and said, "You [wish to] appoint an ignorant man who does not possess the insight to direct the caliphate? Send for him. He will come to us and you will see how his ignorance proves to be against him." So he sent for him and he came. Banu Hashim said to him, "O Abu'l-Hasan! Ascend the pulpit and raise for us a banner by which we may worship God. So he ascended the pulpit and sat for a long time, his head bowed in silence. Then he trembled a great trembling and stood up straight, praised and lauded God, and asked His blessing for His prophet and his household. Then he said:

The first act of worship of God is knowledge of Him, the root of knowledge of Him is to profess His Unity, and the correct way to profess the Unity of God is to negate attributes from Him. For the powers of reason testify that every attribute and everything having an attribute is created. Everything that has an attribute testifies that it has a Creator, which is neither an attribute nor possesses an attribute. Every attribute and everything that has an attribute testifies to a connection between the attribute and that the thing to which it is attributed. Connection testifies to temporal origination, and temporal origination testifies that it does not accept pre-eternity, which refutes temporality.

So it is not God whose Essence is known through comparison. It is not His Unity that is professed by

someone who attempts to fathom Him. It is not His reality that is attained by someone who strikes a similitude for Him. It is not He who is confirmed by him who professes an end for Him. It is not He to whom someone who points to Him turns to. It is not He who is meant by him who compares Him [to something]. It is not to Him that he who divides Him into parts humbles himself. And it is not He who is desired by him who conceives of Him in his imagination.

Everything that can be known in itself is created. All that stands apart from Him is an effect. God is inferred from what He fashions, the knowledge of Him is made firm by the powers of reason, and the argument for Him is established by original human nature. God's creating of the creatures is a veil between Him and them. His separation from them is that He is disengaged from their localization. That He is their origin is proof for them that He has no origin, for whatever has an origin cannot originate others. That He has created them possessing the means needed for accomplishing things is proof that He has no means, for means are witness to the poverty of those who use them.

So His names are an expression, His acts are [a means of] making [Him] understood, and His Essence is Reality, His innermost centre separates Him from creation, and His otherness limits what is other than Him. Therefore, he who asks for Him to be described is ignorant of God! Transgressing against Him is he who seeks to encompass Him! He who imagines to have fathomed Him is mistaken!

Whoever says 'how?' has compared Him [to something]. Whoever says 'why?' has professed for Him a cause. Whoever says 'when?' has determined Him in time. Whoever says 'in what?' has enclosed Him.

Whoever says 'to what?' has professed for Him a limit. Whoever says 'until what?' has given Him an end. Whoever gives Him an end has associated an end with Him. 'Whosoever associates an end with Him has divided Him. Whoever divides Him has described Him. Whoever describes Him has deviated from the straight path concerning Him.

God does not change with the changes undergone by creation, just as He does not become limited by delimiting that which is limited. He is One, not according to the explanation offered by number; Outward, not according to the explanation of being immediate (to the senses); Manifest, not through the appearance of a vision [of Him]; Inward, not through separation; Apart, not through distance; Near, not through approach; Subtle, not through corporealization; Existent, not after non-existence; Active, not through coercion; Determining, not through the activity of thought; Directing not through movement; Desiring, not through resolution; Willing, not through directing attention; Grasping not through touch; Hearing, not through means; and Seeing, not through organs.

Times do not accompany Him, places do not enclose Him, slumber does not seize Him, attributes do not delimit Him, and instruments are of no use to Him. His being precedes time, His existence non-existence and His beginninglessness beginning.

By His giving sense to the sense organs it is known that He has no sense organs. By His giving substance to substances it is known that He has no substance. By His creating opposition among things it is known that He has no opposite. By His causing affiliation among affairs it is known that He has no affiliate. He opposed darkness to light, obscurity to clarity, moisture to solidity, and heat to cold. He joins together those things

that are hostile to one another and separates those that are near. They prove their Separator by their separation and their Joiner by their junction, that is [the meaning of] His words - He is the Mighty and Majestic – “And We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note.” (51:49).

So through them He separated ‘before’ and ‘after’ so that it might be known that He has no before and after. They testify with their temperaments that He who gave them temperaments has no temperament. They prove through their disparity that He who made them disparate has no disparity. They announce, through their being time-bound that He who subjected them to time is not subject to it Himself.

He veiled some of them from others so that it might be known that there is no veil between Him and them other than them. His is the meaning of lordship when there was nothing over whom He was Lord, the reality of godhood when there was nothing for whom He was God, the meaning of Creator when there was nothing created and Knower when there was nothing knowable, the meaning and the import of hearing when there was nothing audible. It is not because He created that He deserves the meaning (of the term) Creator and not because He brought the creatures into being that the meaning of nothing is derived.

How [should it not be so]? For *mudh* (ever since) does not conceal Him, *qad* (already) does not bring Him near, *la‘alla* (perhaps) does not veil Him, *matā* (when?) does not limit Him in time, *bin* (at the time of) does not contain Him, and *ma‘a* (with) does not bring Him into association.

Instruments (*adawāt*) limit only themselves and means (*ālah*) allude only unto their own like. Their activities are

found only in things. *Mudh* withholds things from being eternal, *qad* shields them from without beginning, and *law lā* (if only) wards off perfection. Things become separate and prove (the existence of) their Separator. They become distinguished and prove their Distinguisher. Through them their Maker manifests Himself to the powers of reason. Through (these powers) He becomes veiled to sight, to them imaginations appeal for a decision, in them is substantiated (only) other than Him, from them is suspended the proof and through them He makes known to them the acknowledgement.

Confirmation of God is made firm by the powers of reason and faith in Him. Perfection is reached through acknowledgment. There is no religiosity except after knowledge, no knowledge except through sincerity and no sincerity along with comparison. There is no negation of comparison if there is affirmation of attributes.

So nothing in creation is found in its Creator. All that is possible in it is impossible in its Maker. Movement and rest do not affect Him. How should that which He effects [in others] have effect upon Him, or 'that which He has originated recur for Him? Then His Essence would be disparate, His innermost centre divided, His significance prevented from eternity. How would the Creator have a meaning different from the created?

If something from behind limited Him, then something in front would limit Him. If perfection were seeking Him, imperfection would be upon Him. How should that which is impossible of temporality be worthy of pre-eternity? How should that which is not impossible of being produced produce things? Then there would have arisen in Him a sign of createdness and He would become a proof after having been the proven.

There is no argument in absurd opinions, no answer when it [absurdity] is asked about, no glorification of Him in its meaning. There is no harm in distinguishing Him from creation unless it is that the Eternal is impossible of [accepting] duality, nor does the Pre-eternal have a beginning.

There is no god but God, the All-high, the Tremendous. They have told lies who ascribe equals to God! They have gone into extreme error and incurred a manifest loss. And God bless Muhammad and his household, the pure.