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(1703–1792 C.E., 1115–1206 A.H.) May Allah have mercy on him.

The Four Foundations is a short matn. A matn is a short Islamic text that teaches important lessons in an organized way. This matn teaches four foundations about Tawheed and Shirk. Tawheed means believing that Allah alone is our Lord and that only He deserves worship. Shirk means giving worship to someone or something besides Allah. We study these foundations to worship Allah correctly and stay away from Shirk. These lessons are taught upon The Qur'aan & Sunnah as Understood by the Salaf (Pious Predecessors) of this Ummah.

Part One: Understanding Tawheed

The Meaning of Tawheed

Allah created people and jinn to worship Him alone. This is why Tawheed is so important. It helps us seek Allah's pleasure and Jannah. The Arabic letters of Tawheed are و ح د. The word وَحْدَ means to make one or choose one alone. Tawheed means believing Allah alone is our Lord, worshipping Him alone and believing His perfect Names and Attributes. (Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51:56)

The Three Categories of Tawheed

1. Lordship (Tawheed ar-Ruboobiyyah): Allah alone creates everything, gives us what we need, gives life and death, and controls all things. For example, Allah created the sky and earth.
2. Worship (Tawheed al-Uloohiyyah): Only Allah deserves worship. We pray to Allah and make Dua to Him alone.
3. Names and Attributes (Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat): We believe Allah's Names and Attributes taught in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Allah is Ar-Rahman, the Most Merciful, and As-Samee', the All-Hearing. Scholars organized these three categories to help us learn Tawheed.

Tawheed in the Qur'an

Ibn al-Qayyim explained five kinds of Qur'anic teaching: (1) knowledge about Allah's Names, Attributes and actions; (2) commands to worship Him alone; (3) commands to obey Allah and avoid what He forbids; (4) rewards for the people of Tawheed; and (5) warnings about Shirk and its punishment. (Madaarij as-Saalikeen, vol. 3, p. 450) Words such as اَحَدٌ and وَاحِدٌ teach us that Allah is One. Prophet Ya'qub's sons spoke of worshipping one God. (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:133) Allah said not to take two gods. (Surah An-Nahl 16:51) Allah rejected the claim that He is one of three. (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:73) Ibn Katheer explained "one God" as worshipping Allah alone. At-Tabari explained Allah's oneness in Lordship and worship. (Jami' al-Bayaan fi Ta'weel al-Qur'an)

Tawheed in the Sunnah

The Sunnah includes what Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, did, approved of and his personal qualities. When he sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal to Yemen, he told him to teach people Tawheed first. Tawheed must come first in our worship. (Bukhari)

The Prophet ﷺ taught that Islam has five pillars: the testimony of faith, Salah, Zakah, fasting Ramadan and Hajj. The first pillar teaches us to worship Allah alone and reject everything worshipped besides Him. (Muslim; Bukhari and Muslim)



Tawheed According to the Salaf

The Salaf are the Companions and the early generations of Muslims after them. The Prophet ﷺ said the best generations were his generation and the next two generations. (Bukhari) Jaabir described the Prophet's Talbiyah during Hajj as declaring Tawheed: "Labbayk Allahumma labbayk, labbayka laa shareeka laka labbayk, innal-hamda wan-ni'mata laka wal-mulk, laa shareeka lak." It means that Allah has no partner and all praise, blessings and control belong to Him. (Muslim) The Prophet ﷺ told the delegation of Abdul Qays that belief in Allah alone includes saying that none deserves worship except Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger. (Bukhari)

The Importance of Tawheed

Allah created us to worship Him alone. Worship must be sincere and free from Shirk. Tawheed is a cause of entering Jannah, gaining rewards, receiving forgiveness, finding guidance and safety, and having peace in our hearts. Allah may also allow sincere believers to receive the Prophet's intercession.

Two Conditions for Correct Worship

1. Sincerity (Ikhlâas): We worship Allah alone. We make Dua to Allah alone, not to the dead.
2. Following the Messenger (Mutaaba'ah): We worship Allah as Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us. We must not invent new acts of worship. The Prophet ﷺ taught that acts of worship not taught by the religion are rejected. Both sincerity and following the Sunnah are needed. (Muslim 1718)

The Meaning and Types of Shirk

Shirk is giving someone or something a share of worship that belongs only to Allah. We learn about it to avoid it. Major Shirk directs worship to another and takes a person out of Islam. Examples include making Dua to the dead for things only Allah can do or sacrificing as worship for someone besides Him. Dying without repentance from Major Shirk is extremely serious. Minor Shirk is a serious sin that does not itself take a person out of Islam. Examples include showing off in worship and swearing by someone besides Allah. Showing off may also be Hidden Shirk because the intention is inside the heart. We should fear Shirk without losing hope in Allah's mercy. Ibrahim asked Allah to protect him and his children from idol worship. (Surah Ibrahim 14:35) The Prophet ﷺ taught a Dua asking Allah for protection from knowingly associating partners with Him and forgiveness for what we do not know. (Ahmad)



Part Two: The Four Foundations

Bismillah

Bismillah means "In the Name of Allah." We begin with Bismillah to follow the Qur'an, follow the Prophets, follow the scholars and seek Allah's blessings. Prophet Sulayman began his letter with Allah's Name. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ began letters to kings with Bismillah. (Surah An-Naml 27:30; Bukhari) When we say Bismillah before drinking, the meaning is "In Allah's Name, I drink." The full Basmalah contains three Names: Allah, the only One worthy of worship; Ar-Rahman, whose mercy reaches all creation; and Ar-Raheem, who gives special mercy to the believers. Food, water and rain are among Allah's blessings.

The Opening Dua

The author asks Allah to protect students in this life and the Hereafter and bless them wherever they go. He asks Allah to make them thankful for blessings, patient during hard times and ready to ask forgiveness after sinning. Dua is worship. Allah hears us when we call upon Him. The Prophet ﷺ taught us to ask Allah for help. (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:186; Tirmidhi 2516) Allah protects His servants by guiding them to faith, useful knowledge and good deeds. In the Hereafter, believers hope for His mercy and Jannah. Allah guides believers from darkness into light. The Awliya of Allah are people who believe in Him and do good deeds. Barakah means blessings from Allah that bring goodness. Allah can bless our time, knowledge and good deeds. We cannot say that an object or place has special blessings without proof from the Qur'an or Sunnah. The sacred Mosques in Makkah and Madinah have special virtues.

The Three Signs of Happiness

1. Thankfulness: We know our blessings come from Allah, thank Him with our words and use His gifts to obey Him.
2. Patience: Life has tests, such as fear, hunger and loss. We must not become angry at Allah's decree. We must be patient. Being pleased with Allah's decree and thanking Him even during hardship are higher levels. Feeling sad does not mean we have lost patience. (Surah Al-Ankabut 29:2)
3. Seeking forgiveness: When we sin, we turn back to Allah, ask Him to forgive us and try to do better. We must never lose hope in Allah's mercy. (Tirmidhi 2499; Surah Az-Zumar 39:53)

Haneefiyyah: The Religion of Ibrahim

Haneefiyyah means turning away from Shirk and turning to Tawheed with sincere worship. Ibrahim was a leader and example of obedience. All Prophets called people to worship Allah alone even when some laws given to their nations differed. Allah created jinn and people to worship Him; He does not need us, but we need Him. (Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51:56)



First Foundation: Knowing the Creator Is Not Enough

The Mushrikeen of the Prophet's time knew Allah was the Creator, Provider, Giver of life and death and Controller of everything. (Surah Yunus 10:31) Yet they worshipped others with Allah. This shows that knowing Allah is the Lord is not enough. We must worship Allah alone too. Example: If Allah alone gives us life and food, then Dua and Salah belong to Him alone.

Second Foundation: Wrong Reasons for Worshipping Others

The Mushrikeen offered two excuses. First, they worshipped others to get closer to Allah. (Surah Az-Zumar 39:3) Second, they called them intercessors who could speak for them before Allah. (Surah Yunus 10:18) They used Prophets and righteous people as go-betweens, sometimes making vows and sacrifices to them. Neither excuse makes Shirk correct.

Intercession (Shafa'ah)

Intercession means speaking for someone to bring good or keep away harm. Forbidden intercession includes asking the dead for things only Allah can do or believing someone can intercede without Allah's permission. (Surah Ash-Shu'ara 26:100) Allowed intercession has two conditions. First, Allah must give the person permission to intercede. Second, Allah must be pleased with the person receiving the intercession. All intercession belongs to Allah. (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:255; Surah Al-Anbiya 21:28; Surah Az-Zumar 39:44)

The Prophet ﷺ has several kinds of intercession, including his great intercession for Judgement to begin, intercession about his uncle Abu Talib, and intercession for Paradise's gates to open. They also mention intercession that raises believers in Jannah, protects some from the Fire or removes some from it, all by Allah's permission. Asking someone who is alive and able to help with an ordinary task is different from worship. For example, a person may help you carry something. You may also ask a living Muslim to make Dua for you. Only Allah decides what happens.

Waseelah: Ways of Seeking Nearness to Allah

Correct Waseelah means seeking Allah's nearness through ways He permits: (1) asking Him by His beautiful Names and Attributes, such as "O Ar-Rahman, have mercy on me"; (2) mentioning sincere deeds in Dua; (3) obeying Him through prayer, fasting, Qur'an and charity; and (4) asking a living Muslim to make Dua for you. Incorrect Waseelah means using a method Allah did not allow, such as making Dua, sacrifice or vows to someone at a grave, thinking that this will bring you closer to Allah. Worship must be directed to Allah alone.

Third Foundation: Worship Is Only for Allah

People worshipped many different things: angels, Prophets, righteous people, jinn, stones, trees, the sun and the moon. The rule is the same for all of them: none deserves worship except Allah. (Surah Al-Anfal 8:39) The Qur'an forbids bowing to the sun or moon. (Surah Fussilat 41:37) It forbids taking angels or Prophets as lords. (Surah Aal Imran 3:80) Isa did not teach people to worship him or his mother. (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:116) Righteous people themselves hope for Allah's mercy. (Surah Al-Isra 17:56-57) Some people worshipped jinn; others worshipped trees, stones and idols called Al-Lat, Al-Uzza and Manat. A Prophet is better than a stone, but neither deserves worship. Only the Creator does.



The Story of Dhat Anwat

Some new Muslims saw that the Mushrikeen used a tree called Dhat Anwat to hang weapons for blessings. They asked the Prophet ﷺ for a tree like it. He strongly corrected them and compared the request to the people of Musa asking for a false god. They accepted the correction. Lesson: Do not invent blessed objects or copy Shirk. (Surah Al-A'raf 7:138; Tirmidhi 2180, graded Hasan Sahih by at-Tirmidhi)

Fourth Foundation: Calling Upon Allah During Ease and Hardship

The early Mushrikeen committed Shirk during easy times, but when severe danger came, such as being on a ship in a storm, they called upon Allah alone. Once safe, they returned to Shirk. (Surah Al-Ankabut 29:65) The later Mushrikeen described in the notes called upon others besides Allah during both ease and hardship. Allah warns about calling upon those who cannot answer until the Day of Resurrection. (Surah Al-Ahqaf 46:5) The lesson is to make Dua to Allah alone at all times, whether we are safe, afraid, healthy or sick.