

The Attributes of Allāh

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate

THE ATTRIBUTES OF ALLĀH

Mere profession of faith in one god is **not sufficient** for one to be a believer. In fact, a number of religions claim to profess such a belief, and yet **their conceptions** of the One God are often **strikingly different**. The prophets, and in particular Muḥammad (ﷺ), were sent to eradicate idolatry, and describing Allāh as having some resemblance to creatures is nothing but a manifestation of idolatry. Allāh is transcendent, **beyond our comprehension** and senses, and can be recognized only through His attributes.

فَانْظُرْ إِلَىٰ آثَارِ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ كَيْفَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ
بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمُعْجَىٰ الْمَوْقِفِ

“Look, then, at the traces of Allāh’s mercy;
how He revives the earth after its death.”

[Qur’ān, 30:50]

An important principle, which follows from Allāh’s transcendence, is that we may only describe Him by those names and attributes by which He describes Himself, or by which His Prophet (ﷺ) has described Him.

How many names?

Allāh has every attribute of perfection which is fitting for Him. An example of an inappropriate attribute is **humility**, for it implies an acknowledgement of limits and inferiority, which clearly does not apply to Allāh. Some people are under the misconception that Allāh has only **99 names**, based on the following Hadīth: Abū

Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, "Allāh has ninety-nine names - a hundred less one - whoever guards (or memorizes) them shall enter heaven." [Bukhārī and Muslim] Yet, this Hadīth does not restrict the names of Allāh to only 99, for in fact there are more than 99 names to be found in the Qur'ān and Hadīth. Another Hadīth clarifies that there are other names besides these. On the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd (رضي الله عنه): The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), "There is not a single individual who is afflicted with worry, or grief, and then says, 'O Allāh! I am Your bondsman, the son of Your bondsman, the son of Your bondswoman; my forelock is in Your Hand. Your command is in effect upon me, Your judgement is just concerning me. I ask You by **every name which You have**, by which You have named yourself, or which You have revealed in Your book, or which You have taught to any of your creation, or which You have kept with Yourself in the knowledge of the unseen, to make the Great Qur'ān the spring of my heart, the light of my breast, the elimination of my grief and the disappearance of my worry,' except that Allāh will eliminate his grief and replace it with happiness in its stead." [Aḥmad]

Benefits of knowing Allāh's names

Anyone who learns the important names and attributes of Allāh, and understands them, will have recognized his Lord. If he implements this knowledge, and observes his duties with regard to his Creator, he has assuredly attained great success. Another benefit of knowing Allāh's names is that they may be used to call upon Him. Allāh has said,:

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا

**"Allāh's are the Most Beautiful names,
so invoke Him by them."**

[Qur'ān, 7:180]

Thus, when asking Allāh for **mercy and forgiveness**, we call to Him using names such as **Al-Ghafūr** (the Oft-Forgiving), **Al-Raḥmān** (the Merciful to all creatures in this world), **Al-Raḥīm** (the Merciful to believers only in the Hereafter). We will not use, in such cases, names such as **Al-Jabbār** (the Irresistable), **Al-Qawiyy** (the Powerful), **Al-Qaḥḥār** (the Overcomer); instead these names may be used when asking Allāh to **punish** oppressors.

Some important attributes of Allāh

1. Oneness

On the authority of Ubayy ibn Ka'b (رضي الله عنه) : The pagans said to the Prophet (ﷺ), "O Muḥammad! Describe your Lord to us." Then, Allāh revealed, (translated) "**Say: He is Allāh, the One. Allāh, the eternally besought of all. He begets not, nor was He begotten, nor is there any comparable to Him.**" [Aḥmad, Tirmidhī, Ṭabarī] Allāh is One and indivisible. He has no partner, son, daughter, wife, father or mother. None share in His attributes and power.

2. Non-resemblance

This attribute is a major distinguishing factor between Islām and other religions. Everything we know or that we can imagine is confined to the realm of sensory experience, whereas Allāh is beyond the confines of space and time. He is nothing like any notion or idea anyone may have of Him in his mind. Allāh says,

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

"There is none like unto Him."

[Qur'ān, 42:11]

هَلْ تَعْلَمُ لَهُ سَمِيًّا

"Do you know any comparable to Him?"

[Qur'ān, 19:65]

فَلَا تَضْرِبُوا لِلَّهِ الْأَمْثَالَ

"Therefore, do not put forward examples for Allāh."

[Qur'ān, 16:74].

He is **free of all limitations and shortcomings**. Bayhaqī has reported that Talhah ibn 'Ubayd (رضي الله عنه) asked the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) about the explanation of "Subḥānallāh", and he replied, "It is to declare Allāh [exalted] above all evil."

Anyone who thinks of his god as an old man, or as someone sitting up in the sky, with a son sitting on his right, has **not** recognized his Lord. Islām appeals to the human being to use his rationality to affirm the non-resemblance of the creator, and warns of the terrible consequences for those who refuse to do so.

وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿١٠﴾

“And they shall say, ‘If only we had listened, or understood, we would not have been amidst the inmates of the blazing fire!’”

[Qur’ān, 67:10]

قَالُوا وَهُمْ فِيهَا يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

تَاللَّهِ إِن كُنَّا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٧﴾

إِذْ نُسَوِّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

“They say, while quarrelling in [Hell], ‘By Allāh! Indeed, we were in manifest error, when we equated you with the Lord of the Worlds.’”

[Qur’ān, 26:96-98]

Some attributes and names of Allāh are applied exclusively to Him; for example **Allāh** and **Al-Raḥmān**. Others use words which can also be applied to creatures. For example, one of Allāh’s names is “**Al-Raḥīm**”, meaning Merciful, and the Prophet is described as merciful using the same word (Raḥīm) in the Qur’ān,

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ
عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ
بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢٨﴾

“A Messenger was sent to you from amongst yourselves; it grieves him that you should suffer, Ardentlly anxious is he over you; to the believers is he most kind and merciful.”

[Qur’ān 9:128].

However, it is essential to note that although, in cases such as this, the same word may be used to describe both Creator and creation, the meaning of the word is

totally different when applied to Allāh, the Flawless, the Exalted, for He has told us quite clearly that

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

“there is nothing like unto Him.”

[Qur’ān, 42:11]

3. Eternality

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ
وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

“He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and he knows all things.”

[Qur’ān, 57:3]

Allāh has **no beginning** and **no end**. Only He has always existed. ‘Imran ibn Husayn (رضي الله عنه) has narrated that some people from Yemen came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and asked him about the universe. The Prophet (ﷺ) told them, “Allāh was, and there was not anything besides Him.” [Bukhārī] Doubtless, it is absurd to follow the temporal when one can abide by the Everlasting.

4. Power

قُلْ هُوَ الْقَادِرُ عَلَى أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابًا مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ
أَوْ مِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِكُمْ أَوْ يَلْبِسَكُمْ شِيْعًا وَيُذِيقَ بَعْضُكُمُ
بَأْسَ بَعْضٍ

“Say : He is the One Able to raise up over you punishment from above you, or from beneath your feet, or to engulf you with sectarian strife, making some of you taste the might of others.”

[Qur’ān, 6:65]

أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنْ نَجْمَعَ عِظَامَهُ، ﴿٣﴾

بَلَىٰ قَدَرِينَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُسَوَّىٰ بَنَانُهُ، ﴿٤﴾

“Does man think that We shall never gather his bones [and resurrect him] ? Nay, We are capable of restoring his [very] fingertips!”

[Qur’ān, 75:3-4]

وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

“Allāh has power over all things.”

[Qur’ān, 2:284]

He does not share His power with anyone. Satan is not in control of the evil.

5. Life

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ

“Allāh! There is no god but He, the Living, . . .”

[Qur’ān, 2:255]

Allāh is the Ever-Living Who never dies. He is not affected by fatigue, nor does He sleep.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا

فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَمَا مَسَّنَا مِنْ لُغُوبٍ ﴿٢٨﴾

“Verily, We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, and no weariness affected Us.”

[Qur’ān, 50:38]

“Allāh does not sleep, nor does it befit Him to sleep.” [Muslim] So, even in the darkness and solitude of the night, when people are asleep, Allāh is still available for us to call upon for our needs, and this in fact is an opportune time for supplication and prayer.

6. Self-Sustenance

وَاللَّهُ الْغَنِيُّ وَأَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ

**“Allāh is the One Independent [of all wants],
and it is you who are in need.”**

[Qur’ān, 47:38]

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

“Allāh, the one needed by all.

” [Qur’ān, 112:2]

Allāh needs neither us, nor our worship. We must worship Him for our own good. This concept is beautifully conveyed in part of a long **Hadīth Qudsī** narrated by way of Abū Dharr Ghifari (رضي الله عنه): “[Allāh says:] Oh My servants! If the first of you and the last of you, the humans of you and the jinns of you, were as pious as the most pious man among you, that would not add anything to My kingdom. And, if the first of you and the last of you, the humans of you and the jinns of you, were as wicked as the most wicked man among you, that would not decrease anything from My kingdom. And, if the first of you and the last of you, the humans of you and the jinns of you, were to stand [gathered] on a single plateau, and ask of Me [their needs], and I were to grant each one that which he asked, that would decrease, from that which I have, no more than the sea is decreased by a needle dipped into it.” [Muslim] **We are perpetually dependent upon Allāh for our very existence.** There is no freedom from need of Allāh for even the blinking of an eye, and whoever considers himself in no need of Allāh for even the shortest instant has disbelieved.

7. Hearing and Sight

وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

“And He is the Hearer, the Seer.”

[Qur’ān, 42:11]

Allāh hears all things, and His hearing is not limited by the intensity, distance or frequency of sound. This is movingly expressed in the following **Hadīth of the disputing woman**. Bear in mind, while reading this report, that the room of the Prophet (ﷺ) was so small that during his night prayers which he performed there, he had to move the legs of his sleeping wife out of the way in order to perform

prostration. Ā'ishah (may Allāh be pleased with her) said, "Praise be to Allāh whose hearing encompasses all voices! Indeed, **the disputing woman** came to the Prophet (ﷺ) to speak to him, and I was in the corner of the house and could not hear what she was saying, but Allāh, the Mighty, the Majestic, revealed, (translated) "Verily, Allāh has heard the one who disputes with you concerning her husband.'" [Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah.] Similarly, Allāh sees all things, irrespective of size or of the wavelength or intensity of light. Allāh sees and hears without sensory organs. We should be careful of what we say and do, for Allāh sees and hears everything.

8. Knowledge

وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾

"Allāh knows all things."

[Qur'ān, 49:16]

Allāh's knowledge is perfect and does not change with time. He knows what has happened in the past, what is currently happening and what will happen in the future. In addition, He knows how certain things, which will not happen, would proceed if they were to happen. For example, although the disbelievers will never return to the world after death, Allāh knows that

بَلْ بَدَأَهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يُخْفُونَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَوْ رُدُّوا لَعَادُوا
لِمَا نُهُوا عَنْهُ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

"if they were returned [to the world] they would go back to that from which they were forbidden, and surely, they are liars."

[Qur'ān, 6:28]

9. Speech

وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا ﴿١٦٤﴾

"Allāh spoke directly to Moses."

[Qur'ān, 4:164]

Allāh has the attribute of speech, but His speech is uncreated and does not resemble that of humans or any other creatures in any way at all.