

The Concept of God in Islam (part 2 of 2): His Attributes and His Oneness

Description: More on some of the unique concept of God in Islam, with an emphasis on how this uniqueness effects the life of the Muslim.

By iiii.net (edited by IslamReligion.com)

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God's Attributes

If the Creator is Eternal and Everlasting, then His attributes must also be eternal and everlasting. If this is so, then his attributes are absolute. Can there be more than one Creator with such absolute attributes? Can there be, for example, two absolutely powerful Creators? A moment's thought shows that this is not feasible.

The Quran summarizes this argument in the following verses:

"God has not taken to Himself any son, nor is there any god with Him: for then each god would have taken of that which he created and some of them would have risen up over others." (Quran 23:91)

Also,

"And why, were there gods on earth and heaven other than God, they (heaven and earth) would surely go to ruin." (Quran 21:22)

The Oneness of God

The Quran reminds us of the falsity of all alleged gods. To the worshippers of man-made objects it asks:

"Do you worship what you have carved yourself?" (Quran 37:95)

Also,

"...Or have you taken unto yourself others beside Him to be your protectors, even such as have no power either for good or for harm to themselves?..." (Quran 13:16)

To the worshippers of heavenly bodies it cites the story of Abraham:

"When night outspread over him, he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I love not the setters.' When he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely be of the people gone astray.' When he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is

greater.' But when it set, he said, 'O my people, surely I quit that which you associate, I have turned my face to Him who originated the heavens and the earth; a man of pure faith, I am not one of the idolaters.'" (Quran 6:76-79)

The Believer's Attitude

In order to be a Muslim, that is, to surrender oneself to God, it is necessary to believe in the oneness of God, in the sense of His being the only Creator, Preserver, Nourisher, etc. But this belief is not enough. Many of the idolaters knew and believed that only the Supreme God could do all this. But this was not enough to make them Muslims. In addition to this belief, one must acknowledge the fact that it is God alone who deserves to be worshipped, and thus abstains from worshipping any other thing or being.

Having achieved this knowledge of the one true God, man should constantly have faith in Him, and should allow nothing to induce him to deny truth.

What this means is that, if one submits knowingly to God without reservations, and admits He is the only one worthy of your worship, one must consequently worship Him. That is, knowing we owe Him obedience means putting into practice what we acknowledge in our hearts. God asks, rhetorically:

"Did you think that We had created you in without purpose, and that you would not be brought back to Us?" (Quran 23:115)

He also states categorically:

"I did not create Mankind and Jinn except that they should worship me." (Quran 51:56)

Hence, when faith enters a person's heart, it causes certain mental states that result in certain actions. Taken together, these mental states and actions are the proof for the true faith. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said:

"Faith is that which resides firmly in the heart and which is proved by deeds."

Foremost among these mental states is the feeling of gratitude towards God, which could be said to be the essence of worship.

The feeling of gratitude is so important that a non-believer is called 'kafir', which means 'one who denies a truth' and also 'one who is ungrateful'.

A believer loves, and is grateful to God for the bounties He has bestowed upon him, but being aware of the fact that his good deeds, whether mental or physical, are far from being commensurate with Divine favors, he is always anxious lest God should punish him, here or in the Hereafter. He therefore fears Him, surrenders himself to Him and serves Him with great humility. One cannot be in such a mental state without being almost all the time mindful of God. Remembering God is thus the life force of faith, without which it fades and withers away.

The Quran tries to promote this feeling of gratitude by repeating the attributes of God very frequently. We find most of these attributes mentioned together in the following verses of the Quran:

"He is God; there is no god but He. He is the Knower of the unseen and the visible; He is the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate. He is God; there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-Holy, the All-Peace, the Guardian of the Faith, the All-Preserver, the All-Mighty, the All-Compeller, the All-Sublime. Glory be to God, above that they associate! He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful. All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies Him; He is the Almighty, the All-Wise." (Quran 59:22-24)

Also,

"There is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them, and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills. His footstool extends over the heavens and the earth. The preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-High, the All-Glorious." (Quran 2:255)

Also,

"People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, and say not as to God but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He laded on Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not "Three". Refrain; better it is for you. God is only one God. Glory be to Him - (He is) above having a son." (Quran 4:171)

Thus we have three parts to our acknowledgement of God as the Only True God. We must believe he is the ultimate Creator, Controller and Judge of the universe and everything in it; we must refrain from the worship of anything except Him, and then actually direct our Worship to Him; and we must know that He alone has all the divine attributes and names, and we cannot apply them to any other being, no matter who they are. If one merely acknowledges with one's lips these necessities, even should we refrain from applying them to other gods, it is not enough. They must be sincerely directed to the One you acknowledge as well.

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