

God's Being & the Limits of Human Imagination

Description: Human imagination is limited since it is based on what it observes and experiences, and this is why our imagination cannot fully grasp the concept that God is timeless and eternal, without beginning or end.

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Category: [Articles](#) > [Evidence Islam is Truth](#) > [Logical Proofs](#)

Category: [Articles](#) > [Evidence Islam is Truth](#) > [The Existence of God](#)

Category: [Articles](#) > [Beliefs of Islam](#) > [About God](#)

Everything in our limited experience must have a beginning and end. We ourselves are born and we ultimately die. This is the case with our parents and forefathers as well as with our children and descendants. Such relationships permeate creation.



Some people, due to intellectual weakness or simplicity, assume that everything must be comparable to their own past experience. They rely on the imagination, which is really only capable of visualizing that which has in one way or another already been experienced. This is why the imagination is incapable of grappling with absolutes and with universal concepts.

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was referring to the limits of human reason when he said:

"People will keep asking questions until they come to asking: 'God created the universe, but who created God?' Whoever has thoughts like this should simply declare: 'I believe in God.' Seek God's help and desist from such thoughts."[\[1\]](#)

The human mind has limitations, and our human perspective is deficient. Because of this, some people fall into misgivings with respect to God's pre-existence. We need to realize that we are dealing here with a matter of faith; in other words, a matter which transcends the limitations of human reason.

After making the statement quoted above, it is mentioned that Prophet Muhammad advised reciting the chapter of the Qur'an entitled "Purity of Faith" (Chapter al-Ikhlās):

**"Say: He is Allah (God), the One. Allah (God), the Self-Subsisting. He begets not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him."
(Quran 112:1-4)**

The crucial verse here is "He begets not, nor is He begotten". It shows that God's perfection and Self-Subsistence defy human experience and transcend the limits of the

human imagination.

So God says: "**Allah (God), the Self-Subsisting. He begets not, nor is He begotten**" and immediately follows it with: "**and there is none like unto Him.**" We cannot compare God with anything in our experience. Likewise, we find that God commands us: "**Do not give likenesses to God.**" (Quran 16:74) This is the way our faith in God should be.

Prophet Muhammad advised those who were plagued with doubts like "Who created God?" to: "Seek God's help and desist from such thoughts." Nothing can be gained from pursuing the line of thinking as to "Who created God?" God's nature cannot be compared to created existence, nor can it be compassed by the limitations of human reason. The human mind, however, can conceive of God's existence and acknowledge that He is the Creator of all things. In fact, the human mind resists any attempt to compel it to deny God's existence.

Communist regimes of the 20th century tried to compel their subjects to embrace atheism. They employed every forceful means at their disposal, but the people refused to deny God. They resisted the most authoritarian attempts to crush their belief in God's existence.

The human mind acknowledges the existence of a Creator. Reason cannot escape from such an acknowledgment. The mind, consequently brings us to seek guidance about God and gives us a natural inclination to worship Him. We are receptive to God's Messengers, and God would not leave His creatures without guiding them to the wisdom as to why they were created. Indeed, God says: "**I have only created humanity and the Jinn to worship Me.**" (Quran 51:56)

The intellect certainly recognizes God, but it is not capable of comprehending all of His attributes. The role of God's Prophets and Messengers is to teach people what they need to know about their Lord and how God wishes them to worship Him. This protects people from concocting all sorts of rituals and rites from their own imaginings that have no basis in revelation from God.

Prophet Muhammad said, addressing God in supplication: "You are the First, so nothing precedes You. You are the Last, so nothing comes after You. You are the Manifest, so nothing comes above You. You are the Hidden, so nothing comes below you. Fulfill our debts for us and enrich us so we will not be poor."[\[2\]](#)

God is the First who is not preceded by anything else. This is a concept that cannot be fully grasped by the imagination, but it can certainly be accepted by the mind and heart. Our awareness of the limitations that our minds have is a crucial awareness.

Likewise, God is the Last, whose existence persists without end. As such, God is truly the Inheritor: "**And remember Zechariah, when he cried unto his Lord: 'My Lord! Leave me not childless, though You are the Best of inheritors.'**" (Quran 21:89)

God is timeless and eternal, without beginning or end. By contrast, all created things have a beginning and end.

God says about the Sun: "**And the Sun runs its course to a point determined.**" (Quran 36:38) The Sun and other celestial bodies are far older than the living things on Earth. But just like the fleeting lives of terrestrial beings, the stars are born and they die. All things in the universe must come to an end.

God cannot be understood according to the terms of material existence. He is not bound by the laws of physics which are themselves part of the nature of what He created. It is no surprise that the mind cannot fully grasp the Creator, since the mind is itself created and subject to the limitations of its created nature. The mind can only fall into confusion and self-deception if it tries to rationalize that which is beyond its powers.

Rather, we should apply our mental efforts to matters our minds are capable of engaging with " the universe that God created and the vast horizons of knowledge that it presents. God has given us the rational ability and the imaginative power to uncover and conceptualize the physical laws of nature. We can harness such knowledge to benefit humanity in ways that please God.

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) *Sahih Muslim*

[\[2\]](#) *Sahih Muslim*

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