

The Names of God (part 1 of 3): Who is Allah?

Description: The Islamic concept of God, the meanings of the word "Allah", as well as an introduction to the various names of God.

By Aisha Stacey (© 2008 IslamReligion.com)

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

In any discussion about the Names of God, it is important to understand that Muslims believe in One True God, the only Creator, the One Who has Dominion over all that exists, has ever existed or will come to exist. A Muslim worships the same One God whom all the Prophets worshipped.

"...were you witnesses when death approached Jacob? When he said unto his sons, 'What will you worship after me?' They said, 'We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, One God, and to Him we submit (in Islam).'" (Quran 2:133)

The Prophets of Islam include the same Prophets present in Jewish and Christian traditions; they all came to their people with the same message - to recognize and to worship the One God. Judaism and Christianity in their original form and also Islam as we know it today, together are all from this One True God. However, Islam revealed to the Prophet Muhammad is the completion of God's revelations to all of mankind. After realising this, it becomes equally important to understand that Islam totally rejects any notion that God has partners or associates, or that He in some way combines with men or animals to form a deity of any sort. God is God, the One, the Only. **"...there is nothing like Him." (Quran 42:11)**

Muslims believe in the One Unique, Merciful God, the sole Creator and Sustainer of the Universe and they call him by His revealed Name - Allah. In this age of mass communication and unfettered technological advancement, there is scarcely a single human being who has not heard this word and understood that it forms part of the belief system that is Islam. However perhaps some confusion arises, and people may wonder who Allah is.

In Arabic, Allah means the One True God worthy of all submission and devotion. Jewish and Christian Arabs refer to God as Allah, and He is the same One True God referred to in the Biblical passage **"Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is One". (Deuteronomy 6.4 & Mark 12.29)** The word God is spelled and pronounced differently in many languages: the French call him Dieu, the Spanish, Dios and the Chinese refer to the One God as Shangdi; nevertheless, the God of the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are the same.

The differences and confusions arise because the word "God" can be made plural as in gods, or change gender, as in goddess. This is not the case in Arabic. The word Allah

stands alone, there is no plural or gender. The use of the words He or Him are grammatical only and in no way indicate that Allah has any form of gender that is comprehensible to us. Allah is unique and He does not share His name with what can describe idols. His name is unchangeable. Allah describes Himself to us in the Quran:

"Say (O Muhammad): He is Allah, (the Unique) One. Allah, the Eternal (Foundation).[1] He begets not, nor was He begotten; and there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him." (Quran 112)

A Muslim is one who has surrendered to God and is in no doubt that, He is the One and Only Creator. A Muslim is grateful for all the bounties and blessings bestowed upon him by God, he looks around and observes the wonders of the universe. A Muslim marvels at the depth of the oceans and the delicate petals of a flower. However, this belief is not the only thing required by a Muslim, he must also know with certainty it is God alone that deserves to be worshipped. He has no partners, no equals, and no sons or daughters.

He is God - Allah. The entire universe bears witness to His Oneness. Indeed when contemplating the universe, from the lowliest grain of sand to the mighty and majestic mountains, one can see the Magnificence of God. This vast universe is running according to a precise system, everything in its correct place, created in the right proportions. The sun rises and casts its glow upon us, the flowers bloom and life springs from tiny inanimate seeds. God has given every part of creation what it needs, and He has guided it to what is most suitable. All of creation is in need of Him, yet He is in need of none. Every creation has a purpose and fulfilling that purpose acknowledges the rights of the Creator. God said in the Quran that He did not create us except that we should worship Him **(Quran 51:56)** and that is His right over us.

The first principle and focal point of Islam is this belief in God, and the whole of the Quran is dedicated to this. It speaks directly about God and His Essence, Names, Attributes and Actions. God is mentioned in the Quran, by one or another of His Names or Attributes, 10,062 times. The greatest of God's names is Allah.

"Allah! (None has the right to be worshipped but He)! To Him belong the Best Names." (Quran 20:8)

"And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah, so call on Him by them, and leave the company of those who belie or deny (or utter impious speech against) His Names." (Quran 7:180)

A Muslim is encouraged to remember God and be grateful to Him at all times and one easy, yet beneficial way of doing this, is to contemplate and understand His Beautiful Names. Through these names, we are able to know our Creator and learn how to praise and worship Him, and to call on Him by the Names that are indicative of our needs.

When making supplication, the Prophet Muhammad is known to have said, "O God, I ask you of you by every name that You have named yourself, or that You have revealed in Your book, or that You have taught any of Your creation or that You have kept hidden in

the unseen knowledge with Yourself." (**Ahmad**) Thus, His Names are not limited to what He has revealed in the Quran or to the traditions of Prophet Muhammad.

God says in the Quran: "**Verily! I am Allah! None has the right to be worshipped but I, so worship Me...**" (**Quran 20:14**). To worship God one must know God. We gain real and everlasting benefit from this knowledge. It increases faith and allows ones heart to become attached to the Most Powerful, the Most Wise, the Most Merciful and the Most Just, Allah.

Endnotes:

[1] In Arabic "*Samad*" (The Self-Sufficient Master, Whom all creatures need, He neither eats nor drinks)

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