

MONOTHEISM

by

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Edited by

Anthony Green



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PREFACE

This content for this small book is taken from a series of talks delivered by Dr Jamal A. Badawi at Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore (MCAS) some years ago. Originally published as direct transcripts of the 'Question and Answer' format of the talks, the books have been edited by permission of Dr Jamal Badawi to provide what we hope is a more readable flow of text.

This is the first book in a series of three. The second book in the series is on Prophethood, and the third is on Muslim Belief.

One small point to note. In the title 'Monotheism' it was made clear that 'Allah' is the proper name of the One God. There can be no plural form of 'Allah.' In that sense the English word 'God' is not the same. Nevertheless, we recognise that readers may pick up these books in any order and that people coming to Islam will likely be more familiar with the word 'God.' For that reason alone the word 'God' is used extensively in this book.

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ISLAM: THE BASIC TERMS

Clearing misconceptions that Muslims must be Arabs. . . and that Arabs must be Muslims

Before we begin to speak about Islam and what it teaches we should perhaps dispel a few notions – in particular the association that’s often made between Islam and Muslims and Arabs.

The whole notion of a Muslim being an Arab in long flowing robes, riding a camel or a horse, is a stereotype that has been repeated for a long time. Even some of the more respectable writings seem somehow to imply this kind of image.

According to a study published by the Washington D.C. based Pew Research Center in December 2015¹ there were estimated to be 1.6 billion Muslims in the world in 2010,

¹ “Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world” by Michael Lipka, (Pew Research Center, 7 December 2015)

this number representing approximately 23% of the global population.

And whilst many countries in the Middle East – North Africa region are (in the words of the Pew study) ‘heavily Muslim,’ this region accounts for only about 20% of the world’s Muslims.

And if we focus on Arabs, the reverse is also true: not every Arab is Muslim. There are many Arabs who are Christians or Jews, and have been so for centuries.

Islam is, in every sense of the word, a universal religion rather than something necessarily connected with the Arabs. To support that claim there are many examples of places where it seems like no one even realised that Islam existed until a war broke out. A good example of that is Bosnia.

Indonesia is currently the country with the world’s largest Muslim population, but the Pew Research Center projects that India will have that distinction by the year 2050 (while remaining a majority Hindu country), with more than 300 million Muslims.

Using the right terms

Can Islam be called a ‘religion’ – like Christianity?

For most people in the West, when you mention the word religion, there’s an automatic association with the ritualistic or the spiritual aspects of life. There seems to be an implication that life is compartmentalized into two major components – one component is sacred and spiritual, the other is secular and materialistic. But the whole notion of the spiritual versus the secular is something that stems largely from western thinking. In this way of thinking the spiritual part is mainly concerned with the religious and moral aspects of life. It

is also concerned with the personal relationship between the individual and the Creator, while the secular aspect is everything else that does not fall within the boundaries of this limited definition of what religion is. In this way, religion does not really play a very significant role as a regulatory force in the social-economic or political life of the individual.

Muslims find that kind of division unacceptable. It's quite inconsistent with the nature of Islam as they understand it and there are a number of reasons for that.

'Religion' or 'deen'?

Firstly, on the level of meaning, the Arabic equivalent of the word religion is the word millah, which stands for something that is limited and ritualistic. The actual Arabic word for Islam is a broader term – deen, which means a “way of life.”

What is the exact word in English?

It is very important for students of Islam, especially if they do not have an Islamic background that they should not try to interpret Islam through the Western frame of reference or world-view.

For a start there is not one single English word that can really convey such a meaning as 'deen.' That is why we prefer not to use the term religion.

But, if it can be put in more than one word – as a way of life, or a total guidance in life – then it follows that there is no compartmentalization or separation between the sacred and secular because you can worship God by following His Commands and by following the Islamic way of life in your social-economic and political life. You can also conduct your

so-called secular activities according to the injunctions and broad guidance that is provided by Qur'anic revelation.

The second major area that reflects this dichotomy and distinction is that, historically speaking, the development of Muslim civilization has been quite different from what happened in the West.

For example, in the case of Islam, the more that people were sincere in the application of their faith in the various facets of their lives, the more material progress and prosperity they enjoyed in their civilization.

Likewise, the more they deviated from the pristine teachings of their faith, the more they became backward.

There was a direct, harmonious correspondence between following the precepts of their faith and achievement and progress in civilization. The reverse is also true and this, of course, stands in contrast to what happened in Europe where the trend was actually opposite to that in Islam.

If Christians worship Jesus do Muslims worship Muhammad?

One scholar has said that a misunderstanding of Islam starts with its very name. Western references to Islam used to speak about 'Muhammadanism' and to refer to Muslims as 'Muhammadens.' But this is regarded as a title that's offensive and improper and there are a number of reasons for that.

First of all, there is no basis whatsoever for the term Muhammadanism. It is not derived from the scriptures of Islam or the sayings of the Prophet. They never referred to that, so the title is baseless from the point of view of Islamic history and sources.

The second reason is that Muhammadanism tends to replace the more authentic title. By 'authentic' we mean a title which is derived directly from the Qur'an and that was used by the Prophet of Islam and throughout the 1400 years of the history of Muslims. That title is 'Islam.'

A third reason is that, when anyone uses the term Muhammadanism, they are interpreting this as a faith derived from the person, Muhammad. If you compare this, for example, with the name Christianity, which comes from Christ, it also gives a false impression: that Muhammad, as a person, is worshipped by Muslims.

In fact, in some of the historical references there is this tendency to talk about Muhammad having 'founded' Islam in such and such a year, so you may read: 'Islam was founded in the seventh century by a man called Muhammad.'

This, to Muslims is inaccurate and, once again, it is offensive. It depicts the Prophet as an impostor, whereas he indicated that the teachings and revelations came not from himself but directly from God. Saying that he founded Islam is like saying that he sat down and concocted some scriptures and came and told the people 'Here I am. I am a Prophet of God.'

For Muslims the founder of Islam is God Himself. Islam is a direct revelation just as God has given His Word and revelations to previous prophets before Muhammad.

The fourth and final reason, is that when anyone uses the term Muhammadanism, they tend to undermine the universality of Islam. Earlier in this book we talked about where the populations of Muslims are to be found – from Morocco to Malaysia, from Europe to South Africa – and said that 'Islam is, in every sense of the word, a universal religion.'

If you relate Islam specifically to one person – in this case the Prophet Muhammad p.b.uh. – that will lend support to the stereotype thinking that only Arabs are supposed to be Muslims whereas, to Muslims, Islam is the same basic doctrine preached by all prophets throughout history. Muhammad is only the last Prophet and Messenger of God with the same universal message to all humanity.

The word ‘Islam.’ Where does it come from; what does it mean?

Islam is a term that connotes two meanings. One is the root Arabic word salaam, which means peace. The other is its meaning in terms of the deen: that is, submission. In this case a conscious and willing submission to the Will of God.

In fact, the two meanings are not really different because when we put both meanings together, it follows that Islam is the attainment of peace through the willing and voluntary submission to the Will of God. In that sense then, when we talk about peace, we are talking both about inner peace within the individual and peace from without among the people of the world.

Submitting to God is not just lip-service

It is also important to indicate here that when we talk about willing submission, we are talking about submission which is not just ‘lip-service,’ but rather a submission that manifests itself in the actual life and deeds of the individual.

In other words, it manifests itself in the love of God and in following the commandments and the injunctions that have been given by Him. In that sense, you could say that Islam, among all other faiths is the only one that really has a clearly attributive title – that is, a title that summarizes its nature.

In the case of Islam you can sum up the whole faith in one word. You cannot do this with the names of many faiths when those names are derived either from the name of a person who was believed to be the preacher or from a particular locality. The nature of Islam, however, is universal as the clear and complete message to the entire world. For that reason, the name Islam is the only proper and accurate one to use.

How do we define a Muslim?

If we ask the question 'Who is a Muslim?' the definition can be from two angles. In one sense, if you take the exact term 'Islam' in the sense of submission, it follows also that there are many other creatures who are regarded as Muslims in the sense that they also submit themselves to the Will of God.

In one sense everything that submits is a Muslim

In many ways, even a person who is actually defying the law and teachings of God still submits to God, at least as far as the biological functions or various aspects of his life which are beyond his or her control.

In other words, in terms of the origin of the word, you can say that the sun, the moon, the oceans, and vegetation are Muslim in that they submit to the laws which are devised by God in nature. In that sense, you can say that the whole universe willingly or unwillingly submits to the laws of God.

Submission must be willing

But on the second level, perhaps the more important one, the submission has to be a willing submission, a commitment that

the person makes. This means there are also aspects in our lives over which we have some conscious control. We have some free will in choosing what to do, or not to do.

Regarding the moral laws – for example, the obedience to the Commands and Guidance of the Creator – if the person willingly submits in this sphere of life where he has a choice, then there will be total harmony between compulsory submission and voluntary submission. In a sense, you can say that any person who has, to the best of his ability, submitted his will to the Will of God and has done so voluntarily, can be regarded as a Muslim.

But, of course from the point of view of a kind of ‘legal definition,’ if you talk about the modern definition of a Muslim, within these two limitations, we can say that a Muslim is one who believes in all the prophets and messengers that were sent by God throughout history, including the last of them, Prophet Muhammad, and who accepts the last revealed scripture, the Qur’an, as the basic guidance in the life of a person.

Accepting other prophets before Muhammad

This is important. I think many people might not realize how Islam regards other faiths: that is as developments or stages in the same faith. A Muslim does not resort to the plural use of the term: religions.

In fact, the Qur’an indicates that the true faith throughout history, even before Muhammad was born, has been Islam – submission to the Will of God as we define it.

There may have been differences in the legislative aspects, the rules, of the specific detailed teachings of previous prophets in history. But the Qur’an indicates that the true faith from the very beginning – from Adam down to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and finally Muhammad – is basically Islam. In fact, to quote

from the Qur'an, there is one verse that says the true faith in the sight of God is Islam. In another verse it says that:

“Whoever seeks any path other than Islam, of submission to the Will of God, it will not be accepted from Him, and he will be a loser on the Day of Judgement.”

(Chapter 3: verse 85)

In the Qur'an, we read also the passage instructing Prophet Muhammad to tell the people:

“Say (O Muhammad) to people: I am not an innovator of a new concocted doctrine among the messengers.”

This then links the same basic truth that God has revealed to previous prophets: the truth that has culminated in the most complete form in the message of Prophet Muhammad.

So, on the basis of that it is not a surprise that the Qur'an uses the exact term, Muslim to refer not only to the previous prophets, but to whosoever sincerely follows their path.

To make this point we can turn to some quotations from the Qur'an.

For example, in the case of Prophet Noah where he said to his people in Chapter 10: verse 72:

“I have been commanded to be of those who are Muslims.”

The exact word here is Muslim, that is, of those who submit to God's Will.

With regard to Prophet Abraham, in Chapter 2: verse 128, quoting both Abraham and Ismail, we read in the Qur'an:

“O Our Lord! Make us Muslims bowing to Your Will and also of our progeny, a people who are Muslims to Your Will.”

In Chapter 12: verse 101, Prophet Joseph is also quoted as saying:

“Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are my protector in this world and in the life to come, let me die as a Muslim and make me one with the righteous!”

Prophet Moses, in Chapter 10: verse 84, is quoted as saying:

“O my people! If you do really believe in God, then in Him put your trust, if you are Muslims.”

Finally, in Chapter 5: verse 111, we read:

“And (remember the time) when I inspired the disciple of Jesus to have faith in Me and My apostle, they said, ‘We have faith and you bear witness that we are Muslims (surrender ourselves unto You).’”

In other words, the great weight of evidence that you can find in the Qur’an makes it quite clear that the title Muslim is something that goes back a long way before Prophet Muhammad and that he is simply a part of the total message of Islam that has been given to previous prophets and has now finally come to its fullest form.

Islam is not a new idea

This point is important. It relates to one very common misconception: when some people say, “O look! Some of the teachings of the Qur’an are similar to the Bible, Ah!

Muhammad must have copied them from the Bible.” We cannot forget that the Bible, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and other revealed scriptures also come from the same source.

The implications for problems in the contemporary world

This realisation that the Qur’an is not a new teaching that came into existence at a certain historical moment and in a certain place has implications.

First of all, by developing this more universal approach or universal brotherhood, if you will, we can demolish the walls of prejudice, fanaticism and intolerance and, particularly, the mind-set about Islam which exists in the minds of many people, especially in the Western world. Too often, Islam is presented as something strange and alien, a kind of personality cult, whereas it is right in the heart of the history of divine revelation.

Secondly, believing that all prophets are Muslims, establishes the fact that prophets throughout history – Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad – are brothers.

They are not competing with each other for the influence of people, but are all conveying the same essential message of God and His Commandments.

Too often Islam is presented as something that is strange and alien

From this it follows that those who claim to be sincere followers of these prophets must realize that, in order to follow them sincerely they too must also be brothers. They must break this wall even though they might have differences, just like the Qur’an says:

“If God Wills, He could have made all people one.”

Within this level of tolerance and universal brotherhood, people can talk and have dialogue about the particular differences that they might have in the interpretation of divine revelations. But it boils down again to the basic human brotherhood, and the brotherhood of all prophets and their followers.



ABOUT ALLAH

How do we know God (Allah)?

A question that may often be asked of believers is about what faculties are used in the realization and what sources are used to gain full knowledge of Allah in Islam? In a sense, how do we know God?

To start with, sometimes you do not really have to go too far to get basic and insightful knowledge about God.

As an example, when we talk about our human nature, we find that human beings are created with a natural, pure disposition to seek, and to realize, the Creator.

We need not talk about science and prophets and revelations even on the very fundamental level. We find that throughout history there is a special phenomenon where people of different backgrounds, living in many different parts of the

world at different points of time, have strong desires within themselves to look for the Creator.

They feel that there is some powerful entity which is omnipotent, merciful and transcendent. The weaker ones will mistakenly materialize God into a form or object, but the basic yearning has always existed, even in places where they have no recorded history of a particular prophet.

Our fitrah – our innate nature

That is what has been referred to as an innate nature and the Arabic term which uniquely describes this is fitrah.

What fitrah means is literally some pattern that one is created with or created in accordance with.

A verse in the Qur'an speaks of this when it says:

“So set your faith steadily and truly to the natural faith established by God. God’s handiwork according to the pattern He has made mankind. No change in the creation of Allah, that is the standard faith but most among mankind understand not.”

If you really think about God . . .

You will find in the Qur'an, the story of the Prophet Abraham. When his people deviated from the worship of the One God, he simply addressed them with the question recorded in the Qur'an, as *afillah hi shaq*, meaning:

“Is there any doubt about God?”

In other words, he is not arguing or providing equations of a

type which can be proven. He is merely saying, 'If you really think about it sincerely in your heart, is there any doubt about the existence or presence of God?'

There is another point which has been observed over and over again. Even those who are atheists, those who reject God at some time or other, when they face real difficulties, in desperation they tend to remember God.

In times of difficulty we remember; in times of ease we forget

There are many anecdotes about extreme situations such as when somebody jumped out of a plane with a parachute which did not open, and that person cries out: "O my God!" Why does he remember God at that point?

In our own human experience we sometimes come across a person who is very sick, or who is really suffering, or in pain and who at that moment says: 'OK, if I am cured, I will try to be better, I will be good,' but of course, once he gets better, he forgets. That is why the Qur'an also recognises this weakness of human nature.

There is a verse in the Qur'an that speaks about this tendency:

"When people go to sea, and there is a problem and the ship is about to sink, all of a sudden they remember and they beseech God to save them, but once they get safely to shore, they forget!"

The fundamental knowledge of right and wrong

There is something else that seems very relevant here and this, too, is derived from the Qur'an. The Qur'an tells that beyond this basic knowledge of the existence of the Creator, a person is inspired with the knowledge of discriminating right from wrong. Here's the verse which says,

“Allah has fashioned this soul and He inspired into it, the fundamental knowledge of right and wrong.”

We know that this knowledge, of course, could be perverted due to the influence of either personal or external social pressures.

So, a human being, by this nature, in his or her pure innocence, recognizes this, and this seems a very legitimate source of that knowledge. It may not sound scientific in the sense that you can't put it into a test tube to observe directly. But it is so common-sense that one cannot really overlook it and say, “I close my eyes because this does not sound scientific.” You shouldn't take it for granted.

The instinctive way of knowing Allah and the intellectual way – a difference between humans and the other creatures

Sometimes, you hear people say that the intellect is the enemy of faith, or that it challenges faith. Some believe that faith requires that one close one's mind because of not being capable of fully understanding it.

However, there is no contradiction between intellect and any of the other human faculties. The intellect is part and parcel of the whole process of seeking the truth. In fact, we could say, even more positively, that from Islam's point of view, one of the main things that makes the human being distinct – one of the basic blessings that is given by God – is the fact that he has been made different from animals. Animals also can think but they do not think in terms of questions. In that case how could you interpret this God-given blessing as contrary to faith? We can also say that the use of intellect and the human faculties in general, indeed could be in itself, a source of

The intellect is part and parcel of the whole process of seeking the truth

knowledge, a source of re-enforcing the faith and making sure that the person really is on the right track.

So, even in the area of belief, which most people would say is not something that you can apply to normal human reasoning, it is not useless, not at all.

We must use our minds

In fact, the Qur'an condemns people who do not use their minds, and in many of the passages in the Qur'an, the appeal is made for us to utilize our intellect. If we use it in the right way, trying to get into our basic innate, pure nature, we shall be able to discover the Truth.

The Qur'an condemns people who do not use their minds.

Thus the matter of faith is not a kind of dogmatic matter that you should not look at or not think about but just accept blindly, because intellect also could be a strong foundation for a firmer type of faith. In this case though, if we look at some specific examples, we will ensure that we do not just talk in generalities.

If you check the Qur'an, for example, it implores the human being to search for Truth, to search for knowledge of God and these can be seen on three, basic, inter-related levels.

Look . . . into yourself, the environment, the universe

First, by looking into oneself. Secondly, by looking into the environment in which one is living. And thirdly, by looking into the universe as a whole.

On the personal or individual level, one does not have to go too far to realize that God does exist. Just look at yourself.

You do not have to be a scientist to appreciate how the body is made out of cells. One cell becomes a cell for sight, one is programmed for hearing . . . it is amazing. How does our small brain operate and regulate the circulatory system, the digestive system and the nervous system? Such a beautiful and harmonious coordination to make us feel comfortable in our bodies shows that we were not simply created in a haphazard way. There must have been a deliberate design for it.

So, if you want to find out about God, look into yourself, and that is why, to quote the Qur'an:

“By looking into yourselves even you will find evidence that is, to the presence and the powers of God.”

In another verse it says:

“Did not they think or reflect in their own minds or in their selves.”

When looking at the body, you do not have to look at the whole body – just start by analysing one single organ and you'll be overwhelmed. Some scientists will tell you that in order to duplicate the digestive system, you would need a huge laboratory and still it would not operate as efficiently as your stomach. You have acids in your stomach that erode metals but they do not hurt you. You still digest the food properly without pain.

Was this creation all haphazard?

So, did all this come about haphazardly? If any one thing was developed by chance, would everything else have fallen in line or the pieces come together in such a perfect fashion? This is not logical. If you want to go beyond yourself, to find further evidence, the Qur'an also implores people to consider and

think. Take a topic that has become a topic of considerable discussion – the ecological balance. Many people take this as an indication that there is a complete and perfectly balanced design in this universe. The flora and fauna are inter-linked to human life; the atmospheric layers and earthly conditions that exist are put together to sustain human life.

Now this looks like a fashionable modern concern but if you look into the Qur'an you find that this has already been mentioned.

In one verse, the Qur'an says:

“God created everything in exact proportions.”

This is a very important phrase: exact proportions. It is not just that He created! It is that there is also a deliberate design to put all of these things together.

One verse in the Qur'an for example, says:

“Glory to God who created everything in pairs – all things that are on earth, those known to mankind and other things which they have no knowledge of.”

In another verse the Qur'an appeals to people to look into the whole scheme of creation. It says:

“Were they created from nothing or are they creators?”

Nobody claims that he is created from nothing nor can he claim that he is the creator of himself.

Then the verse continues:

“... Or did they create the Heavens? ...”

. . . and as nobody can lay a claim to that it again continues with the words:

“Nay! But they see not.”

So, the human sight is there, but whether we apply it in the right place and in the proper way or not, that is what makes the difference.

Looking into the whole cosmic order, there is an awesome, unimaginable but scientifically observable design.

Finally, if you move into what we can call the third circle – not just looking into ourselves or the environment around us, but looking into the whole cosmic order – again there is an awesome, unimaginable but scientifically observable design. Take for instance the solar system, the way everything is coordinated – for example, the distance between the sun and the earth. If the sun were a bit nearer, it would burn everything. If it were too far away, everything would freeze. The exposure to the sun is also moderated by the succession of day and night.

A design, with a designer behind it

The change of seasons also has a very important relevance to the lives of people, to vegetation and to animal life. It definitely shows that there is a design with a designer behind it.

One verse in the Qur’an directs us particularly in this area:

“Have they not reflected on the domain of the Heavens and Earth and what Allah created therein?”

In another verse it also says:

“Truly! In the Creations of the Heavens and Earth, and in the succession of day and night, there are certainly signs for those who reflect.”

In yet another verse we read:

“Those who remember God standing, sitting and reclining and reflect on the Creation of the Heavens and Earth saying:

‘Our Lord! You have not created these in vain, Glory be to You, and save us from the Hell Fire.’”

The Qur’an is full of examples of methodologies of truth, for example, the utilization of human senses. The Qur’an refers to the senses when it asks questions like “do they not see, do they not hear, do they not think, do they not reflect?”

The senses are valuable sources of knowledge and belief, provided they are used in the proper framework

All of these are integrated and regarded as valuable sources of knowledge and belief, provided they are used in the proper framework.

Qur’anic revelation, or using one’s own intellect to arrive at the knowledge of truth – is there a contradiction?

The two – Qur’anic revelation and one’s own intellect – are definitely commensurate. As we said, the innate human nature is a source of information on the universe; a source of knowledge which is useful but not perfect.

The fact that it is not perfect does not make it useless. There are a number of reasons for this. As humans, we are given additional guidance through direct revelations. We talk, for example, about the pure human natural disposition or fitrah as it is called.

As we have said earlier this human feeling or natural disposition could also be perverted under pressure

We know that our perceptions are limited and can be deceived

or indoctrination which might cause it to not operate in the proper direction. That is why you find people following so many cults. They say: “O that is great! I have found the way! How do I know? Well, because it makes me feel so good.”

Feeling good is one criterion, but it is not the whole measure: a person could be feeling perfectly good but for the wrong reason or from being on the wrong path. There are shortcomings in this. In talking about the senses, intellect or knowledge, anyone, even a person who does not believe in God, must readily admit that our senses and perceptions are limited. Our sight and hearing are limited – we know that. Also, we know that our perceptions can be deceived. For example, if you put a pen in a glass of water, it will appear to be crooked or even broken due to the refraction of light. And there is the well-known phenomenon for people travelling in the desert, where you see a pool of water – a mirage – but you know that it does not exist.

But to the eyes that see it, it is a reality. So, our perception is very useful.

There are many aspects in the lives of people . . . that are beyond science

However, it still falls short in getting to know everything.

On the other hand, science is fine. Science can resolve many issues and problems that are purely scientific, or purely technical. Science can tell us how to use technology, for

example, how to communicate through sounds and pictures. This can be determined fully by science.

However, there are many aspects in the lives of people – such as the emotional and moral aspects – that are beyond science. There are also ethical standards in the application of the fundamental principles of good and bad that are instinctive but that still need some modifications and interpretations.

God as the higher authority of ethics and morality
 Since ancient history, people have always had differences as to what exactly can be defined as the proper ethical or moral standards. In order to resolve that problem, there must be a higher authority. God Himself, provides us with stable standards of ethics or morality within which we can interpret various details.

Finally, and most importantly, we know that knowledge is not limited to books or perceptions. We know that there are certain aspects of knowledge, legitimate knowledge, which do not lend themselves to any of these schools. For example, take the knowledge of the unseen, or of what happened in the past. If you want to get any information about that it is difficult. There may be no other recorded history, or there may be a dispute about such recorded history.

Knowledge of the unseen, and of God Himself

Revelation can tell you, for example, the story of previous prophets; what they said and what happened at that time, but these are details that are not recorded elsewhere. Concerning issues such as this, no matter how much you use your mind you will not be able to arrive at the final conclusion, unless some external data is provided.

Another example of that would be knowledge about God Himself. You can feel the presence of God, you can feel some of the attributes of God, but you cannot have full knowledge without having a prophet or messenger receiving that revelation from God and passing it on to us. So, in that sense then, there cannot be any contradictions. Actually, the intellect and Qur'anic revelation supplement each other. They simply have to be used in the proper context.

***We do not just say
'there is One God'
– Allah means the
One and Only God***

The proper name for God in Islam

The proper terminology in Islam for God is Allah and there are a number of reasons for this. First of all, the term Allah in Arabic means the ONE and ONLY universal God or Creator, the Sustainer of the Universe. Notice here, the emphasis is on the one and only.

So, a Muslim would not simply say that there is One God. That would not be as accurate and as strong an expression as the One and Only God.

The main point to be emphasized here is that unfortunately many of the writings that you find in various libraries in the West, which are from an orientalist and not from an Islamic viewpoint, depict Allah as if He is something like a tribal Arabian God or just the God of Muslims. They attempt to remove His universality.

They say, for example, that Muhammad worships his Allah or a Muslim worships Allah. Even if they say that Allah also means God, they put it in such way that it leaves the reader with the impression that maybe it is not exactly the same thing for a Christian or a Jew. What are we really talking about? To

answer that claim, just as we have said earlier, the term Allah has to be considered more accurately.

First, Allah is not just a meaning for the word God. It is also a personal name of Allah. It is both the reference to God and His personal name and this is beautiful, in a sense, because you can also say Lord.

Allah is His name – the accurate term for the One and Only God

But when you say Allah you are invoking the exact personal name of God, and establishing some kind of personal touch and rapport between the individual and the Creator. The second thing that is relevant, is that the term Allah in Arabic is not subject to plurality. In English, you could say “God,” and you could also say “gods,” plural. In Arabic, there is nothing that is equivalent to “gods” whatsoever. In other words, there are no ‘Allahs’ and that emphasizes the purity of Islamic monotheism.

When you say Allah you are invoking the exact personal name of God

No female or male gender for Allah

A third, very interesting, reason is that the term Allah does not lend itself to any gender. In other words, there is no female or male gender for the term Allah. For example, in English you can have god or goddess. In Arabic, this does not exist. This shows that the Arabic term is a lot more accurate than the term God, even if you use a capital “G.”

And that it is more accurate in conveying the true nature of the supreme Creator. So this prompts the question of why we use the term God? Up to now we’ve used the term at least for

the purpose of communication because of the unfamiliarity over the name 'Allah.' But from here on we will endeavour to use the term Allah, since this is more accurate for the One and Only God.



THE DECLARATION OF FAITH

The God of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims – and the role of Prophet Abraham

When Muslims refer to God as ‘Allah’ people sometimes ask if they are referring to the same deity as the Christians and the Jews.

The result is that non-Muslims might conclude that we can speak of ‘your God’ and ‘our God’ and that Allah is just ‘the god of the Muslims.’ We can’t talk in that way; we have to talk about ‘the God of the entire humanity.’

There is this misconception that still persists and it’s not easy to remove such a thing. For example, when a Frenchman says, Dieu, which is the French word for God, we never hear anyone say that Dieu is the God of the French people. We also don’t hear Americans using the word God as the exclusive

God of the Americans.
This is a very simple and
logical rule.

However, it's a rule that is
often violated when writers
who are not Muslim write
about Islam. They leave the
readers with the distinct
impression that Allah is
"the God of the Muslims"
and that He has nothing to
do with anybody else.

So when people ask if the
deity of the Christians and
the Jews is the same as the
one to whom Muslims pray
the answer, fundamentally,
is 'Yes.'

Are there differences?

Of course, a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim may have
differences about specific interpretations or definitions of the
divine attributes of God.

They have differences in accepting or rejecting certain
doctrines: for example, the idea of the Jews being "the
chosen people" or the Christian idea of the Trinity. There are
differences that take the form of doctrines but on the whole,
on the fundamental level, they are really talking about the
same thing. They are talking about the One and Only, All
Powerful, All Merciful, Creator and Provider of the universe.

What of Arabic- speaking Christians and Jews?

***Arabic-speaking
Christians and Jews use
exactly the same term
as Muslims do: Allah
– simply because that
is the Arabic term for
"God." If you go, for
example, to Lebanon,
which is half Muslim and
half Christian, a Christian
would be saying Allah and
a Muslim would also say
Allah and they both mean
and refer to the same
thing.***

What about those who say that Allah is not an Islamic term?

We must be aware that there are some writers on Islamic studies who claim that ‘Allah’ is not an Islamic term and that ‘Allah’ existed as the name of a deity in the Arabian Peninsula years before Islam appeared on the scene. They imply that Islam is not original but borrows from ideas that existed and that were outside it.

We have already explained that the word Allah in the Arabic language means the One and Only Creator – our God and if any term has been perverted or used in a mistaken or erroneous way, that does not change the reality of it. In fact, the name has to be restored to its original use.

But there is a common error or assumption, even a criticism, behind this and similar statements. This is that the pre-Islamic Arabs did not know anything about monotheism – that all they knew was idol worship. This, too, is wrong because monotheism had been known to the Arabs for a long time.

Monotheism was introduced by Prophet Abraham

Monotheism – the belief in there being just One God – was introduced by Prophet Abraham and his son, Ishmael (Peace be upon them). Prophet Abraham took Ishmael to what is today known as Mecca and Prophet Ishmael settled there becoming “the father” of the Arabs. This is related in both the Bible and the Qur’an.

But the Bible’s version only reaches the point where Ishmael and his mother were helped by Angel Gabriel (Jibrail) in the desert after they were sent there by Prophet Abraham who was following God’s command to avoid his jealous wife, Sarah. The Qur’an explains the history of the exact spot which gave rise to Mecca and the Ka’aba – the House of God. The other

son of Abraham, from Sarah, is Isaac who became the father of the Jews.

The faiths of both of these brothers come from the heavens and were revealed directly by God. However, the Jews were very arrogant towards God's Word, regarding the title Children of God as being theirs forever and thus later, as we learn through the Qur'an, they fell from God's grace.

Now, with this type of understanding we can say that the Arabs did have some notion and concept of monotheism. Possibly at one time, they used the term Allah in the proper sense, as the Lord of the universe. However, as has happened to many nations, they perverted their practise and in their case forgot the true teaching of Abraham and Ishmael.

Prophet Abraham and the Ka'aba – the first house for the worship of the One God

After a prophet dies, people start deviating from his basic teachings and introduce their own ideas. This does not necessarily mean that the term Allah does not refer to what it actually is intended to refer to. With the advent of every prophet until the final prophet, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), this term was restored to its original meaning. To be more accurate the original meaning of monotheism was constantly restored, just as in the case of the Ka'aba.

The Ka'aba was built initially by Prophet Abraham and his son, Ishmael, as a house for monotheism in the worship of the One God. Actually, it was the first house ever to be built on earth as a temple for monotheistic practise. But, with the advent of time and a considerably long absence by any God-sent prophet, the descendants of Abraham and Ishmael slipped into paganism.

Now, the fact that the pre-Islamic Arabs had perverted the use of the Ka'aba and put idols inside does not change its historical origin. That is why when the final prophet, Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and the Muslims achieved victory over idolatry, they destroyed the idols and cleansed the Ka'aba, recognizing its original function. This is why the Ka'aba was not destroyed by Muhammad but taken for its true original worth.

The profession of faith in Islam – a statement in two parts

The Islamic profession of faith – the creed, known as the Shahadah – is very simple but profound. It says in Arabic:

“Ash hadu Alaa ilaaha illallaah, wa-ash hadu anna Muhammadar Rasulullah.”

. . . which means in English:

“I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger.”

You can say that this creedal form or confession of faith is composed basically of two points that reflect two important beliefs for the Muslim.

The first part, “I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah” is a reference to the concept of pure monotheism: the oneness and uniqueness of Allah.

The second part “and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Messenger” is actually the reflection of another concept that needs discussion elsewhere. It is the concept of prophethood in Islam. That might prompt a question as to why we speak of “prophethood” and not just the belief in Muhammad.

The answer to that, which will be clarified later, is that once a person believes in Muhammad as a prophet, it follows that one also has to believe

Belief in Muhammad as a prophet means belief in all the previous prophets sent by God

in all the previous prophets sent by God. In the succession of prophets, Prophet Muhammad was sent by Allah as the last and the final one.

Now, if a person says this Shahadah with conviction and under no compulsion, this would be enough for him to have entered into the fold of Islam. In other words, there is no need for someone to officiate for there to be a kind of confirmation baptism from another authority. A person might make the declaration in front of someone else but actually to say that alone and with conviction and no human witnesses but in the understanding that you are in the presence of Allah is enough to be affirmed as a follower of Islam and known as a Muslim in all senses of the word. It is not a matter of ceremonies and rituals, but rather sincerity and deep appreciation of what it means.

Your statement of faith is not a matter of ceremonies and rituals, but rather sincerity and deep appreciation of what it means

The Shahadah starts with a negation, with rejection

It's important to recognise that the Shahadah begins with a negation. There are at least three basic reasons for this.

First, by definition, when a person admits the supremacy and unique oneness of Allah, then it follows also that one must reject any supreme notion other than Allah. In other words, it would be a contradiction of terms simply to say that there is Allah but somehow imply that there can also be other

gods or sources of reverence. Pure monotheism also means the rejection of any other false deity and the negation of any godhood attributed to any of the creatures of Allah.

The second main reason is that, even though pure monotheism – the belief in the One God – has been preached by all Prophets throughout history, according to the Qur'an, the concept has been perverted. People added their own ideas and philosophies which resulted in paganising or changing the purity of the name of monotheism.

So with Prophet Muhammad being the conclusion of this prophetic tradition, which extends throughout history, it was very essential to clarify the errors that had taken place prior to his mission. He carried out his duty faithfully in dismissing all the alien aspects. He brought to the attention of believers what kind of temptations and erroneous interpretations of God had taken place so they could avoid them and maintain the purity of faith.

Prophet Abraham challenges the idol worshippers. Idol worship was not only rampant among the pre-Islamic Arabs but also in many other nations. The Qur'an addresses this issue in many ways.

For example, the Qur'an talks about the dialogue between Prophet Abraham and his father in Chapter 19: verse 41-2:

“Mention, through this book the story of Abraham. He was a man of truth, a Prophet. Behold, he said to his father: ‘O my father! Why worship that which neither hears nor sees and can be of no profit to you?’”

There is a touching story in the Qur'an about Prophet Abraham and his people. The story says that the people of Abraham went out of the town for one of their festivals, and he refused to go with them. When everybody had gone, he

went inside the temple where they used to have their idols. He took an axe and smashed them to pieces. He only spared the biggest of the idols. Some interpreters of the Qur'an say that he then placed the axe in the hands of the idol.

When the people returned from their festival, they entered the temple and were outraged to find that their gods were all smashed to pieces. They suspected that it was probably the work of Abraham because he was the one constantly talking about the idea of monotheism, and rejection of idol worship. They brought him for questioning and asked him but his response was "No, the biggest idol did it. Ask him if he can speak intelligently." (Qur'an Chapter 21: verses 51-70)

He brought home the point that, 'There are so many gods here. Maybe those gods got into some quarrel and that big fellow, using his muscles, smashed them. Nobody could smash him. If you don't believe me, you ask him.' So he is challenging the pagans to prove that these objects can hear, or defend themselves against destruction. But suddenly they realised that this is not so. They knew in themselves that their gods were totally incapable of even defending themselves. They were angry with Abraham but by accusing him they were admitting that their gods were useless. Thus, Abraham effectively called their bluff.

Like many other nations the Arabs before Islam had their share of this kind of perversion. In fact, there were so many 'gods' worshipped by the pre-Islamic Arabs that there was one god for each particular tribe. When they travelled, they even used to carry some of their gods with them. Imagine a god being carried in your shirt or riding with you on a camel.

Some Arabs used to get dry dates, and press them to make them into a statue. Thus it became an idol to be worshipped. When they got hungry and really ran short of food, they ate it. They ate their gods! They also used to sacrifice animals at the

feet of their idols thinking that they were gaining favour with their gods. With the advent of Islam, as we have mentioned before, all of these forms of worship were annihilated and monotheism was restored.

Why do some human beings worship a piece of stone or a statue?

It is very rare that you find someone who would in their heart really believe that this is his or her god, though they seem earnest in worshipping them and attributing all sorts of beliefs to them. What they believe is very strange, ridiculous even, and they ought to be the first ones to know that their belief is not necessarily true.

There are other reasons behind this kind of perversion. When a pious man dies, for example, some people might make a shrine or a statue in memory of that dead person.

Ibn Abbas, one of the companions of the Prophet, explained, as is quoted in the hadith collection of Bukhari, that gradually people would forget the origin of the statue and actually turn it into an object of worship. This was probably one of the reasons.

It is a human weakness and tendency to try and materialize everything in a tangible and physical form.

Another reason is that many idol worshippers did not really believe that those idols were gods in themselves. They used them more or less

as intermediaries or intercessors between God and man. They thought that by appeasing those idols, by worshipping them, by sacrificing animals at their feet, they were gaining favour with God.

The third reason seems to be perhaps more common because it applies even to those who are not idol worshippers. It is a human weakness and tendency to try and materialize everything in a tangible and physical form.

This is a human inclination because that is how our perception works. We try to have something tangible. We do not want just to think of something that is great or transcendent.

It is really hard, especially with the early stages of human development, where the higher concept might be difficult to accept and where something tangible might be closer to the people's minds.

This is also a natural phenomenon with the weaker part of human nature, where people lack the self-esteem to communicate directly with God. They are ignorant of the fact that Allah is All-Compassionate and willing to accept a humble call from His servants.

With this kind of attitude, people started searching for God and in that search they try to have some kind of image for God that they could identify with or relate to. This does not necessarily mean that this attitude is correct because you cannot put all higher concepts into a physical form.

Allah is All-Compassionate and willing to accept a humble call from His servants

The worship of natural phenomena – the sun, the moon and the wind

This is one more example or another facet of man's error in his search for the truth. The motive for this search is good and commendable but along the way there are errors. That is why we need Divine revelation to become a guide for that search. In that search for the power behind the universe, the Creator, the Merciful Provider of the universe, people became

fascinated with the powers of nature, the powers that they felt could benefit them or the powers that were capable of doing harm to them.

For example, there are many superstitions about heavenly bodies or stars and the impact they are felt to have in determining the destiny of a human being. Astrology, for example, is a reflection of this kind of thinking.

People with this kind of thinking might gradually turn from just adoring or admiring these forces of nature into actually worshipping those forces or trying to appease them or seek benefit from them.

As far as the Islamic position is concerned, it totally rejects the worship of heavenly bodies. The Qur'an indicates that these are only creatures of Allah, not substitutes or having parallel power with Allah. Two citations from the Qur'an drive the point home. In one verse, it says:

“Among His signs, are the night and the day, the sun and the moon; adore not the sun and the moon but adore or prostrate to Allah who created them, if it is Him you wish to serve.”
(Chapter 41: verse 37)

This is a very simple explanation and a very powerful clarification that they are creatures. You should worship the One who created them. These astrological and other natural phenomena are part of nature's laws that Allah provides and should not be seen as more than that.

In another moving story, referring again to Prophet Abraham because he is a prophet common to all the monotheistic and Semitic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), the Qur'an tells us:

“Lo! Abraham said to his father, Azar: ‘Do you take idols for God? For I see you and your people in manifest error.’ So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws in the heavens and earth, that might have certitude. When the night covered him over, he saw a star. He said, ‘This is my Lord.’ But when it set, he said, ‘I love not things that set.’ When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said, ‘This is my Lord.’ But when the moon set, he said, ‘Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.’ When he saw the sun rising in splendour, he said, ‘This is my Lord, this is the greatest.’ But when the sun set, he said, ‘Oh my people, I am indeed free from your guilt of associating other deities with Allah. For me, I have set my face firmly and truly towards Him who created the heavens and the earth and never shall I associate other partners with Allah.”
(Chapter 6: verses 74-9)



ASSOCIATING OTHERS WITH ALLAH

Polytheism – the belief in many ‘specialised’ gods

History has shown many ideas to be in opposition to Islam, starting with polytheism. How, then, does Islam look at the belief in more than one divine source of power?

The Qur’an makes a very clear link between the unity and the order of the universe, whether you call it ecological balance or the cosmic order. To associate another divine source is to say that this coordinated universe originated from more than one order, one designer, or one Creator.

This is the logical basis to start from and the Qur’an itself tries to clarify this. It follows that any attempt to assume more than one ultimate authority or more than one God or sovereignty in the universe is contrary to what we see in nature. Just to give one example in the Qur’an, in Chapter 21: verse 22, it says:

“If there were in the Heavens and in the Earth, other gods beside Allah, both would have fallen into ruins! But glory to Allah, The Lord of the Throne! (High is He) above what they attribute to Him.”

Furthermore, the Qur’an also confronts the assumptions of more than one god. Each god would logically have an independent will. This kind of assumption, in fact, automatically results in the possibility of conflict between those independent wills. And the Qur’an argues against that in a way that is aptly expressed:

“Behold! Each God would have taken away what he has created and some would have more control of it over others. Glory to Allah, He is free from whatever they attribute to Him.”

So . . . if there were more than one creator . . .

Thus, if there were more than one creator, then each creator could take away whatever he had created and claim absolute will and power over his own creations. This is totally untenable.

Another view – one god for ‘good’ and one for ‘bad’?

To move from polytheism which believes in several gods or specialised gods, other experiences in history have seen people say: “Yes, many gods do represent unattainable ideas but it may be logical to think of two gods, one for good and the other for evil.” This view of dividing them between good and evil is most noticeable in Zoroastrianism, the fire-worship in ancient Persia.

Once again this is considered as one form of polytheism. Though the number is only two, this is still a belief in the multiplicity of gods.

It follows that the recognition of any rival authority to the One and Absolute Lord of the Universe is one form of polytheism and all the arguments that we have given to previous questions dealing with polytheism would be applicable here as well.

When you assume the presence of two gods then you'll have one of two possibilities. One assumption is that these two gods have equal power. The second assumption, if we assume that one god is more powerful than the other, is that the other god is weaker as compared to the first one. When we talk about deity, the question of inferiority and weakness is totally inapplicable. So, that is a logical contradiction by definition.

The question of having two gods is totally untenable as far as Islam is concerned

If we take the other assumption that both gods have equal power then this would, as we said, be contrary to the cosmic order in the structure of the universe.

For example, what may happen is this: a controversy might occur when there is disagreement between the so-called two gods. The good god wants to give life to someone but the evil god wants him to die.

Now, who is going to prevail? How do you reconcile a controversial question like that? It may be easy for somebody to say: "Maybe these two gods can compromise." But when you talk about compromise, it means that 'you have to give a little, and I have to give a little.' That will curtail absolute power and limit each other's options.

Finally, that causes great contradiction because when we talk about God, we're dealing with a being who is absolute, final and ultimate in authority. On these grounds, the question of having two gods is totally untenable as far as Islam is concerned. Islam concludes that there must be one creator, one will, one authority.

We are talking about something based on teachings through God's word from the Qur'an itself. In one verse it says:

“And Allah had said: Take not two gods. He is only One God. So, Me alone (Allah) should you fear.”

In another citation, in Chapter 10: verse 107, it says:

“If Allah should touch you with misfortune, there is none who can remove it but He. If He intends some benefit for you, none can keep back His favour.”

So, the conclusion is that this concept of two gods is another form of polytheism which is totally unacceptable to Muslims.

The Islamic view of things like sorcery, magic, witchcraft and Satan worship

There are three basic issues here. One issue is whether or not a Muslim believes in other orders

There is no problem for the Muslim to believe in unseen creatures

of creation, in special beings. The second question is whether those beings have independent or separate powers. The third question is the issue of trying to invoke or communicate with those spirits for some purpose as in séances or sorcery.

Now, on the first issue there is no problem for the Muslim to believe in unseen creatures. The Qur'an talks about the Angels

as one of the unseen creations of Allah and I believe that our Jewish and Christian friends also accept the same basic concept. Secondly, the Qur'an also talks about Satan or the devil, who is another unseen creature of Allah. Thirdly, the Qur'an also talks about the survival of the soul after death, that is, after physical bodily death. It says that the soul keeps living eternally.

There is also a belief that the soul of a human who dies, even though the body has already dissipated, still survives until the Day of Judgement and thereafter even.

Therefore, Islam accepts the existence of supernatural forms of creation.

On the second issue, as to whether Islam regards them as possessing absolute power, the answer is most definitely "No."

The spirits or unseen levels of creation have no powers or wills independent from God's power.

Islam is strict on the purity of monotheism. All power belongs to Allah. These spirits or unseen levels of creation have no powers or wills which are independent

from God's power and have no knowledge of the unseen or the future unless allowed by God. God is the one who controls everything.

Islam condemns invoking spirits

Concerning the third aspect, as to whether one can invoke spirits or utilize them and communicate with them, we find that the position of Islam on this is very clear. It condemns it in unambiguous terms.

There must be no form of sorcery or any similar type of witchcraft. In fact, the Qur'an clarifies that this is one of the dangers leading people into worshipping Satan.

So, when we talk about 'worshippers' at 'the Church of Satan' it is something that the Qur'an has mentioned 1400 years ago:

“Did I not warn you. Oh! Children of Adam, that you serve or worship not Satan. Clearly he is your avowed enemy.”

(Chapter 36: verse 6)

This is also supplemented by a saying of Prophet Muhammad, in which he equated sorcery with ignorance.

In fact, many people end up believing in this kind of superstition because somehow they feel they can see power in those spirits which could be for their protection.

The Qur'an again is very clear: protection comes only from Allah. Seeking refuge should be only directed towards the Creator. Just to recite one verse to clarify:

“Say (O! Muhammad) to people: No one can deliver me from Allah if I were to disobey Him. Nor should I find refuge except in Him.”

Cults and madness – safety is only with the One God

In fact, from our own human experience, we hear a lot about people who start getting into these cults, especially sorcery or magic, and end up going crazy.

It has very dangerous psychological effects and it is a very dangerous field to get into. So, one should direct oneself only to the Creator and seek refuge and protection from Him.

The ‘worship’ of saints, dictators, or prophets as equal to God.

Any time that humans are believed to have great powers that makes them seem like God this is not acceptable in Islam. It is negated in absolutely unambiguous terms. Islam is very clear and decisive on this.

Such practices might take a variety of forms. To start with, one form of worshipping other humans is the worship of ancestors. I think it still exists today with people believing that the spirits of their predecessors return to see how their descendants are getting along. Having such a belief, is a form of worship.

The Qur’an puts the answer to this behaviour in a logical form. It simply says that:

“Since it is He, Allah, who created us and created our predecessors, then only Allah should be worshipped, not our predecessors.”

Another clear example from the Qur’an comes in Chapter 44: verses 7-8, which says speaks about Allah in the following way, that He is:

“The Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and all in-between them, if you could but grasp it with inner certainty.

And it says of Him:

“There is no god but He: It is He who gives life and gives death – The Lord and Cherisher to you and your earliest ancestors.”

The Qur’an also talks about the confrontation between Prophet Moses and the Pharaoh with his magicians. He addressed them, saying:

“... and the Lord of your fathers from the beginning of creation, Why then worship creatures of Allah?”

In Chapter 2: verses 21-22 we read:

“Mankind! Worship your Sustainer, who created you and those who come before you, so that you might remain conscious of Him. Who has made the earth your resting place and the sky your canopy; and sent down the rain from the heavens. And brought forth fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals to Allah when you know [that He is One].”

The worship of another human being is totally rejected . . .

So, it follows that the worship of other human beings is totally rejected, be they ancestors or still living. In fact, we find in history that some of the deviations from the true path of pure monotheism have taken the form of worshipping holy men.

For example, a righteous man dies, his grave is worshipped and ultimately the person himself is regarded as a deity, able to grant wishes for those who ask.

The Qur’an even rejects the worship of great prophets and messengers of God because they are still creations of Allah. We know from history that these ideas have mingled in the past: the Egyptians, even before the advent of Prophet Jesus, believed in Horus as the son of god and The Persians saw their son of god in Mifrah.

Mifrah and Horus were regarded as sons of god who come for the sins of humanity and reconciled Man to God by sacrificing their own lives. It is quite interesting to know that this idea existed before the mission of Prophet Jesus.

How then is Jesus viewed in the Qur'an?

Since we are talking about the worship of people an important question comes up when we consider the status of Jesus. In Islam, there is nothing about a human God. There is no special creation comprising both divinity and humanity. A person has to be either the Creator or the created. There is no half of each. There is no compromise on this. The position of Islam is very clear. Indeed, in chapter 112, it reads,

“Say: He is Allah, The One and Only. Allah, the Eternal Absolute, He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like Him.”

Also, in Chapter 6: verses 101-102:

“To Him (Allah) is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth. How can He have a son when He has no consort? He created all things and He has full knowledge of all things.

That is Allah, your Lord! There is no god but He, The Creator of all things;

Then worship you Him, and He has power, to dispose of all affairs.”

So, there is no delegated authority, there is no in-between type of existence. Since you asked particularly about Prophet Jesus, we shall show that his name is mentioned in the Qur'an quite frequently. In the Chapter 5: verse 75 it reads:

“The Messiah, son of Mary was no more than a messenger: Many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They both eat food. Behold, how Allah does make His Signs clear to people; yet, see in what ways they are

deluded away from the truth.”

Another verse clarifies it further:

“And they have taken beside Him that created nothing but are themselves created. That has no control over bad or good to themselves. Nor can they control death, nor life, nor resurrection.”

Qur'an, Chapter 21

This shows clearly that all of those human beings, including great Prophets or messengers, are mere creatures of Allah. They are people who do not control life. They cannot defend themselves against death. They cannot bring themselves to resurrection without the permission of Allah. One more citation says:

“It is not possible that a man to whom is given the Book and Wisdom and the prophetic office should say to people: ‘Be you my worshipper rather than Allah.’ On the contrary, he would say, ‘Be you worshipper of Him, who is truly a Cherisher of all.’

“Nor would he instruct you to take angels and Prophets for Lord and Patrons. What! Would he bid you to disbelief after you have bowed your will [To Allah in Islam].”

Chapter 3: verse 79-80

Notice here that the emphasis is being made from the angle from which the Prophets themselves view the issue. They are regarded as servants of God and this is not a demotion. The biggest pride for every human being, including the great prophets (Muhammad, Jesus, Abraham), is to say that they are true servants of Allah and in fact in the New Testament of the Bible, you will find a lot of verses that will support this view.

SOME THOUGHTS ON WORSHIP

The worship of others

So far, when we've used the term "worship," it has been in the sense of "deification." We need to consider what meaning the terms "worship" or "worshipper" may have in the Islamic context.

Worshipping can refer to a whole range of things. Here though we'll examine the aspect relating to worship of other human beings. According to Islam, blind obedience to other human beings can be considered to be some form of worship of those individuals.

An illustration of this can come with what happened during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad. It concerns a passage that was revealed in the Qur'an, chapter 9 verse 31. That passage is about people who followed the religious elders that deviated before Islam.

"They have taken as Lords besides Allah from among their clergy and priests."

One of the companions of the Prophet – a named Ad'ay ibn Hatim who had some knowledge of Christianity – came to the Prophet and said,

“Oh! Messenger oh Allah, it is NOT true that people really worship their priests or clergy.’ So the Prophet asked him, ‘Did not some of those religious leaders make things UNLAWFUL that God made LAWFUL?’ he replied ‘Yes.’

“Did not they take authority by also making things lawful which God make unlawful?’ he again replied ‘Yes.’ ‘Well that is worship,’ replied the Prophet.”

Now this really conveyed the message that you do not have to physically bow down before another human being to be worshipping or deifying him. This blind unquestioning subservience without using our God-given capability of intelligence and thinking to search rationally, is one form of worshipping those individuals.

This story may have happened a long time ago, but it is very relevant to today's world and to our present situation.

Obedience to a dictator – a form of worship?

Indeed, if we look at the practice of obedience to a dictator this would still fall under the worship of other human beings. Some people misunderstand or misinterpret the various liberation movements that took place throughout Muslim history. Many times they might have considered something as social reform or political uprising when it was more of an uprising motivated by an Islamic understanding.

The fact of the matter, as far as Islam is concerned, is that obedience to a dictator is just like obedience to the clergy or

anybody else without thinking. It is a form of human worship and this type of obedience is an acceptance of the authority of the dictators above the authority of God. As we have indicated before, in Islam there is nothing compartmentalized in terms of commitment, i.e. in one compartment you should 'render unto Caesar' and in another compartment you should 'render unto God.' Everything should be rendered unto God (Allah) the Creator.

This is the kind of struggle that you find in the history of the Muslim people against dictatorships, past and present. It is a continuous and ongoing process which is based on Qur'anic injunctions. In the Qur'an, we read in chapter 5 verses 47 to 50, that those who do not rule in accordance with what Allah has revealed are regarded as unbelievers, oppressors and rebels.

It is interesting to note that this passage in the Qur'an addresses without specific reference or exemption, even to a Muslim. There may be a ruler who pays only lip service to faith, though he strongly claims himself to be truthful Muslim ruler of governor, who acts and behaves contrary to Islam and the revelations of Allah. That person, even though he might nominally be called a Muslim by others, he is not considered a Muslim by Allah and that is the case, quite frankly, with the majority of rulers in Muslim populated countries today whether that person has the title of king, sheikh or president. There are just titles to mislead people and indeed, in many cases, we see totalitarian regimes, or dictatorships, contrary to the Islamic nature of government.

What of ‘worshipping oneself in the sense of vanity and pride?’

In the comprehensive coverage of this aspect of monotheism in the Qur’an we have to say that even our selfish souls are not left out. Worship of other mortals might take a variety of forms. Here I will focus on just two of these.

In some cases such worship may even take the form of self-deification. The Qur’an narrates the story of the Pharaoh during the time of Prophet Moses (Peace be with him). When as the Qur’an says, in chapter 79 verses 23 through to 24, the Pharaoh gathered and called unto his people with a proclamation declaring,

“I am your Lord, most high!”

This is a classic demonstration of the utmost human arrogance: that a human being can claim to be the final and ultimate authority to determine what is and what is not to be.

But self-worship also takes another more subtle form that most of us would be guilty of in some form or other,

The Pharaoh is a classic demonstration of the utmost human arrogance

though perhaps to varying degrees. This is when we take our own desires or our own opinions and place them as the ultimate and final source of value to guide us in our life even though they often conflict with and contradict clear divine injunctions.

In fact, there is more than one verse in the Qur’an that deals particularly with this. In chapter 25: verse 43 and 44 it says,

“Have you ever considered the person who makes his own desires a god? Will you be held responsible over

him? Or do you think that most of them listen and use their reason? Nay, they are but like cattle – nay, they are even less conscious of the right way!”

Note that the term for god, as used in the Qur’an, is “Illaahahu” – his God or his Lord. So, instead of saying “Allah or God is my Lord,” if I say, “My desires, what I want, what I think is right is my ultimate source,” then I have put aside what the Qur’an says.

We might consider this form of self-worship as one of the most serious aberrations and spiritual diseases of our age. Many times we are tempted to say that material good is everything.

So we get the attitude that we should put aside spiritual, moral teachings, divine revelations – just for a while or only as far as it serves my objectives, when it’s convenient I use it; if not, I just put it aside. We can hear a statement like that made quite frequently: ‘I know what is good for me, I know what is best for me.’ In such cases we even go against the clear and decisive injunctions of Allah. We destroy ourselves by consuming intoxicants, drug abuse and all other aberrations, and while destroying ourselves, we still say, ‘I know what is good for me, what is best for me.’ Again, we place what we think is right as supreme, above what God Himself tells us.

One last concept – the concept of pantheism

To conclude this discussion of the ‘negative part of the creed’ we can turn to something that is a little esoteric: the concept of pantheism; the idea of God existing in everything and everywhere.

This kind of argument or philosophy mixes two different things. Firstly, we can see the power of God in a metaphoric

sense, allegorically “the hands” of God and His compassion, by looking into the creation which he has created. We can also argue that because God created everything and his power is manifested in everything then God must be inside or incarnated in everything. I think these two should not be mixed.

The Muslim point of view is that the Qur’an implores us, encourages us indeed to look into ourselves, our environment, and the universe at large. By finding the functioning and operation all of these things we are bound to find out that there must be a designer, must be a compassionate, all-powerful Creator behind all that. But this does not mean that He is ‘in the sun’ or He is ‘in the moon’ or in some human body. This kind of aberration is simply carrying the powers of God or carrying the argument too far, and is an unacceptable extreme.

The affirmative attributes of Allah from the Islamic standpoint: can we possibly “define” Allah?

When we look at the affirmative aspects of the Islamic declaration of faith there is a problem when we use the term “define,” because anything that is definable must be limited and finite. Since Allah (God) is infinite then He could not be subject to any definition, because definition is limiting.

To define something is to establish a certain limitation and God is beyond limitation.

***God is beyond limitation
– He could not be subject
to any definitio***

The problem perhaps could be addressed by making a distinction between two things: on the one hand the essence or nature of Allah or God, and on the other, the divine attributes of Allah.

This deserves an explanation. When we talk about the essence of Allah, the nature of Allah, we can say that His nature, His essence, is so sublime, so transcendent that our human minds, no matter how intelligent, are incapable of totally grasping that essence or that nature. However, as far as the attributes of Allah (God) are concerned, these are or could be within reasonable reach, within at least reasonable understanding as far as our human comprehension goes. We can say 'reasonable' or 'relatively' because when we talk about attributes of the infinite, you can't really separate the attributes from the essence.

Sometimes people would wonder how we could fail to understand the essence of God and only know about His attributes or manifestation of power. But what we forget when we make this argument is that even in physical, tangible things you are sometimes not really able to define the essence.

For example, a person can explain a great deal about electricity, how it works, etc; but can they really describe the essence of the stuff at the subatomic level?

You can describe a human being only superficially. He is that tall, that big, he weighs that much, his face resembles this or that. But can we, even with the best psychology and psychiatry, understand the essence of that human being? (Can you understand your own essence and self? Who I am? What am I really? Come to think of it – I didn't even ask to be here, to be born). What we are saying is that even with the physical tangible fundamentals in this universe, if we are not capable of fully penetrating and grasping the essence, how then can we even dream of understanding the essence of the Supreme or the Infinite?

Bridging the gap between Allah as infinite and ourselves as limited beings

It is a fact that even when we limit ourselves to using attributes to describe Allah rather than the essence, we find ourselves faced with

another problem. The problem

is, if we talk about Allah being infinite and ourselves as limited beings, we still have to use relative terms, terms that are understandable within our own vocabularies, so we start using terms that have human connotations.

No word can be totally accurate in conveying something such as the attributes of Allah

How do we reconcile those two when we say God sees, God hears? These are all terms that we understand much in our own human context or perceptions. How do we bridge that gap when we start using those terms in the reference to Allah the Most Glorious and High?

It is a fact that no word in any human language – Arabic, English or whatever – can be totally accurate in conveying something such as the attributes of Allah.

However in His infinite Mercy, Allah has communicated with us in a way that we can understand. So, using terms which might not have exactly the same human or material meaning, is still useful if these terms are used to give us some understanding or some protection about God Himself.

In His infinite Mercy, Allah has communicated with us in a way that we can understand

We also find that the Qur'an warns us with Allah's own words against taking these words very literally or in their physical context from the human beings' point of view. Perhaps to

make the point less abstract, let me give few citations from the Qur'an, the first one "Laisa kamithlihi shay" that is:

"There is nothing, whatever like unto Him (God). And He is the one that hears and sees all things."
(Chapter 42: verse 11)

In another profound passage – chapter 6: verse 103,

"No vision can encompass Him, but He encompasses vision itself. For He alone is above all comprehension yet He is aware with all things."

Here perhaps we can repeat some citations that have been made on other occasions. One is very crucial: the very famous chapter 112 of the Qur'an. Towards the end, it says,

"Say, He is Allah the One and Only. Allah the Eternal. The Absolute. He begets not. Nor is He begotten. And there is none like or unto Him, beyond compare."

Allah does not need eyes to see with or ears to hear with.

So, whenever we use an expression, for example, like when we say that God or Allah "hears and sees," it doesn't mean that He needs eyes to see with. He doesn't need ears to hear with.

Even we as human beings sometimes don't see all the time with our eyes. If you were to be asked to close your eyes for a second and just imagine the shape of the TV set or your couch you could see it even when your eyes were closed. You see it in your own imagination. Even as humans we don't see everything with our eyes. Of course when you talk about Allah, we are not really making a human comparison. We are simply saying that He does not need the known physical or biological organs to be able to see or hear.

The Muslim response to the Biblical statement of God as having created man in His own image

It is clear from the discussion that we are trying to emphasize the dissimilarity between Allah and His creatures. This brings us to a touchy question, but one that is very relevant and very important however, and that is how do Muslims reconcile themselves with, or view, the Biblical statement referring to God as having created man in His own image? How do we actually understand this?

This is referring to the first chapter of Genesis, which says that God said, "Let us created man in our image after our likeness." A Muslim sees two problems with this type of statement.

First of all, as we have indicated before, Allah (God) does not have any image. He is not physical or conceivable. And as was recited before, "Laisa kamithlihi shay" there is nothing whatsoever that you may conceive of, which is comparable to Allah because if it is comparable to anything that is physical or material, then He is limited or He is finite.

From the Muslim standpoint it is erroneous to reduce the infinite to any finite form or image. As a result of the way this kind of Biblical statement has been interpreted, throughout history people have tried to imagine or make a drawing of God in human form. Time Magazine once dealt with the new theological argument about God. The magazine reproduced four paintings of God such as the one by the Renaissance artist, Michelangelo. And in all of them, God is portrayed in the image of a man. Relatively all are older men with a beard that varies in shape but God is basically shown in the image of a man. Apparently, these people would read Genesis and decide that since God created man in His own likeness God must look physical. In fact, this kind of configuration of the deity of God raises a number of questions. When you look at

pictures such as those in 'Time' magazine for example, you are entitled to ask a number of questions.

Why a picture of a man not a woman? All of them had a beard. No way you could say it's a woman. So, is God sexually determined and does He favour the male gender?

Why a picture of a white man and not a black man? Is God racially determined?

Why are the features mostly Greek or Roman rather than Chinese, Japanese or African? Isn't God the God of all, the universal creator?

Fortunately for the Muslim, this problem never arises. If a Muslim were to be asked by their Christian friends what they think about Allah (God) and whether they have any mental picture of Him, something similar to this painting, they could answer quite simply, "No." That need to have such an image is not there. The spiritual image is much more valuable, much more important and more befitting, because it is unlimited. How could you have an image or a picture? It sometimes feels tempting to say, 'Why do I have to think of something abstract? Maybe when you reduce it to a physical form, you can readily identify with it.' But that again is a very serious error because you are limiting and destroying the whole notion of the dissimilarity of God to His creatures.

On the more specific divine attributes of Allah in the Qur'an...

Obviously, when we talk about the attributes of Allah, we are talking about the Creator. The Creative Act perhaps would come as one of the foremost attributes of Allah. This can be explained best by referring directly to the Qur'an.

For example, in chapter 6: verse 102 it says,

“That is Allah, your Lord. There is no God but He. The Creator of all things. No partner, no helper.”

In the Qur’an we also find that creation and sovereignty go hand in hand. God doesn’t just create beings and leave them. Some philosophers believe that God created the universe and then forgot about it, or He created it but couldn’t manage it and Satan ran amok and spoiled it. This is not the belief in Islam. In the Qur’an we read:

“Is it not His to create and to govern or command?”

Also in chapter 42: verse 12,

“To Him belong the keys of heavens and the earth. He grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, unto whomever He wills: for, behold, He has full knowledge of everything.”

This continuous creative and responsible power is one aspect of His fundamental attributes.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

God is pre-existent and eternal; creation is a continuous process

The concept of creation in itself is a continuous and on-going process. So, one would assume that hand in hand with the concept of creation, God is pre-existent and eternal, that He existed before everything and will remain so even after the end of time. We may well ask how does Islam view this?

He (Allah) is the First and the Last. The Outward as well as the Inward.

On this particular point the stand of Islam on this is not that much different from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

We hear our Christian and Jewish friends for example, saying God is the Alpha and Omega (first and last). This term is used in the Qur'an, for example in chapter 57: verse 3,

“He is the First and the Last. The Outward as well as the Inward. And He has full knowledge of all things.”

So in that sense, yes, He has to be First and the Last or else how could it be that the whole universe emanated from Him.

It is sometimes difficult for us, as humans to understand how any being can be infinite. It is difficult for us to imagine this infinity. But a very simple example can show that even for finite things in this universe, it can be dazzling for us to imagine. Astronomers may tell us that the distance between earth and the furthest star in our galaxy is two thousand million light years.

This is mind-boggling because if we mentally compare the distance that we have from here to the moon that distance is relatively very close. The light from the moon arrives in about 1.33 seconds. The light from the sun, which is much further, reaches us within a few minutes.

As we all know the speed of light is 186,000 miles per second. Which means, that if you travel at this fantastic speed, 186,000 miles per second, it would take you two thousand million years to travel from the earth to the furthest star.

It is an awesome concept – a distance that is extremely difficult to conceive in the human mind. And we are only talking about the known universe. What about further things that are beyond that, which we are not even able to see?

The example is to show that even in finite physical things, it is very difficult, even overwhelming, for us to imagine their extent. When we think about Allah, the Creator, we should then be more appreciative of the fact that He is the First and the Last even though we might not be able to comprehend that there is nothing before Him and there is nothing after Him.

Even in finit physical things, it is overwhelming, for us to imagine their extent

Here perhaps we should turn to the Qur'an for some clarification of this, firstly in chapter 25: verse 58,

“Hence, put your trust in the Living One who dies not...”

Because if God dies, he is then subject to death even for a temporary period. Who is capable of giving Him life? Because God controls life.

So, it is illogical to say that God would be subject to death like humans. And furthermore, if God dies, even on a temporary basis, who is going to run the universe in His absence? So, everything is related to the Will and the Eternal, Perpetual Life of God. The second quotation also gives a clarification in this respect in chapter 28: verse 88:

“And call not besides Allah, any other Lord. There is no God but He. Everything that exists will annihilate except His (eternal) Self. With Him rests all judgement; and to Him will you all be brought back.”

The divine attributes of Allah in Ayatul Kursi

“All that is on earth will be annihilated except for the presence of your Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour.” That is what we read in Qur'an chapter 55: verses 26-28.

At this point in the discussion perhaps the best quotation we can give is one very famous and widely quoted passage in the Qur'an known as Ayatul Kursi. In the second chapter of the Qur'an verse 255, we need to notice that there is a combination of a number of divine attributes. It reads in translation:

“Allah! There is no God but He. The Living, The Self-Sustaining, The Eternal. No slumber touches Him, nor

sleep. His is the dominion of all in the heavens and on earth. Who can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what is ahead of them, that is in the future and what is behind them. Neither can they pass out of His knowledge except as He wills. His Throne extends over the Heavens and the Earths. And He is not fatigued in guarding and preserving them. For He is The Most High The Supreme in Glory.”

Seven characteristics are emphasised in this passage: firstly, there is no deity but Him. Secondly, He is an Ever-living God, not just created and living. Thirdly, He is Eternal. Fourth, His knowledge is all comprehensive and includes everything. Fifth, He possesses a Throne which could also be a symbol of power of sovereignty, extending over everything on earth and heaven. There are no associates or assistants.

Sixth, that there is no intercession or intermediary except by His permission. This means that there is no one else who can act as a judge. He is the Ultimate Judge. Anyone interceding is only by permission of Allah (God) by His mandate. Finally, He is not subject to human weakness like feeling sleepy and needing rest.

‘No slumber touches Him’ – what of the Judeo-Christian ‘Day of Rest’?

If we are speaking about ‘rest’ how then does Islam view the concept of The Day of Rest for The Lord (The Sabbath), to use the Judeo-Christian term? How does Islam view the concept of God having the necessity of resting or requiring rest on the seventh day because of the fatigue that overcame Him after six days of work?

In order to make an intelligent and justified comparison we should turn to the Bible itself and quote what it says and then

give the Islamic perspective on that. In the book of Genesis, chapter 2: verse 2, in the King James Version of the Bible we read:

“And on the Seventh Day God ended His work which He has made and He rested on the Seventh Day from all His work which He has made.”

This is the text as it appears in the Bible. Now, as it is, there is no such parallel statement in Islam. In fact, there is an opposite statement in the Qur'an about this particular statement in the Bible. Four quotations from the Qur'an reflect a different kind of understanding of this divine attribute. First of all, in chapter 50: verse 38 we read:

“We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in six days. Nor did any sense of weariness touch Us.”

Furthermore to clarify the issues in chapter 35: verse 44, we have:

“Nor is God to be frustrated by anything whatever in the heavens and on earth. For He is All Knowing, All Powerful.”

And in chapter 16: verse 40 we read:

“For anything which We have willed, We but say to it BE and IT IS.”

In another sense, once Allah (God) decides on something it is enough for Him to will it. There is no tiring or fatigue involved. That's all. And in chapter 19: verse 35 we are asked to say:

“Glory be to Him. When He determines a matter, He only says to it be and it is.”

This is an important issue because although there are some fundamental similarities between Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition in some aspects, some writers unfortunately make a very superficial comparison. They find, for example, that the Qur'an also tells the story of Adam and Eve, so they conclude that everything that the Bible says also has a parallel in the Qur'an. In fact, this is quite different. And when we assume that God could get tired and need rest then we are really endowing Him with characteristics which are human instead of divine.

We can look to another citation that is very similar to this from the Bible. In Genesis, Chapter 3: verse 8, talking about Adam and Eve after they made their mistakes, we read:

“And they heard the voice of The Lord (God) walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

Now this, as well as other statements on God resting after creating the heavens and earth, depicts Him in a human form. That's what is called anthropomorphism, to think of God in some human term – that He walks, He gets tired and rests.

As far as the Qur'an is concerned there is no single parallel that shows this kind of anthropomorphic understanding of the deity. And that leads us to one more question if we consider the concept of Sabbath.

The mistake of speaking of Friday as 'the Muslim Sabbath'

A very common mistake that we find in the western media and books, even those written by so called scholars, is that they say that the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday, the Christian Sabbath is Sunday, and the Muslim Sabbath is Friday. This again is a very superficial comparison. It is true that on Friday Muslims are supposed to have their congregational prayer but the concept of Sabbath, which is derived from the Day

of the Lord, the day where the Lord rested, has no analogy whatsoever in Islam.

Allah as the all-knowing, the omniscient

It is interesting now to look at another aspect of the imitative attributes of God – the idea of attributes that ‘imitate’ – and they really come hand in hand again with the concept of Creation, the concept of eternal life and the concept of indefatigable nature of God. And here we should consider the knowledge and wisdom in several of the quotations that we have already extracted from the Qur’an.

In referring to Allah as being All-knowing we touched on the idea of omniscience so it seems valuable to elaborate a little on the knowledge, the omniscience and wisdom of God as viewed in Islam.

Perhaps the best way to do this is to refer directly to the Qur’an and give a few citations that depict this. These citations can be summarized simply by saying that the knowledge of Allah is absolute and complete, and it is not limited by time. First in chapter 2: verse 5 & 6 we learn:

“From Allah, verily nothing is hidden on earth or in heaven. He it is who shapes you in the womb as He pleases. There is no God but He, the Exalted in Might and All-Wise.”

Secondly, in chapter 31: verse 34:

“Verily, the knowledge of the hour, the Day of Judgement, the knowledge of the hour is with Allah alone. It is He who sends down rain and He who knows is in the womb. Nor does anyone know what it is that he will earn tomorrow. Nor does anyone know

in what land He or She is to die. Verily, with Allah is full knowledge. And He is acquainted with all things.”

The third reference, which is quite interesting, is in the sixth chapter in the Qur’an, verse 59:

“With Allah, with Him, are the keys of the unseen. The treasures that none knows but He. He knows whatever there is on earth and in the sea. Not a leaf does fall but with His Knowledge. There is not a grain in the darkness or depth of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry but is inscribed in a clear record.”

It is really difficult to add anything more to that. The expression used in the Qur’an is so powerful, so clear that even with the difficulty of translating the meaning into English, the feeling is that you can get an answer better than any human prose because that is the word of God Himself.

Omniscience and our innermost thoughts

There is one thing that maybe we should add here. A lot of people have the idea that although Allah is omniscient and is All-Knowing, He is only All-Knowing and omniscient of what is manifest and external; what can be seen and touched. That may prompt a question about our innermost thoughts? Somebody may say, ‘Well, I am thinking of something evil, but I am not going to do it, so God will never know about it.’

This is another form of anthropomorphism because in our understanding as human beings we can say that we cannot have any knowledge unless we have some source of that knowledge. But one person cannot tell what another person has in their mind. Again, as we have said, this does not apply to Allah when we talk about His absolute and perfect knowledge. And again we could refer to the Qur’an, covering

specifically two areas: Firstly, what happens when a few people conspire together in secret. Will Allah know about that? And secondly, what about the innermost thoughts in our minds? The first reference from the Qur'an is in chapter 58: verse 7:

“See you not that Allah does know all that is in the heavens and on earth. There is not a secret consultation between three but He makes the fourth among them. Nor between five but He makes the sixth. Nor between fewer or more but He is in the midst wherever they are. You hide here or there, He is there.”

The second one that speaks more directly to these inner thoughts that you might have is in chapter 67, verses 13 & 14 of the Qur'an:

“And whether you hide your word or publish it, He certainly has full knowledge of the secrets of all hearts. Should He not know that He created and He is the One that understands the finest mysteries and is well acquainted with them.”

So, it follows that, if He is the One who created us, who created our innermost thoughts, how come He does not really know what you think? The slightest thought that passes through our minds – definitely, He knows that.

The Omniscience of Allah – how this concept relates to the Judeo-Christian tradition

It has been correctly said on many occasions that the origins of all three monotheistic faiths and others have proceeded from Allah. Of course, philosophic and theological arguments have sometimes misinterpreted the pristine revelation. But even though one may say that the basic notion of the all-embracing knowledge of God is in the Qur'an, as it is in the Bible, you

will find that the Qur'an is more strict. There is no hint or implication of that kind whatsoever in any scripture that could be misinterpreted to mean anything less than full knowledge of God – of Allah.

Here it is useful to continue the discussion on an objective and clear basis and to refer again to the Bible in the King James Version. There are two verses that are worth considering. These are not the only ones but these two stand out as really not being totally consistent with the Qur'anic conceptions of the knowledge of God. In the book of Genesis in chapter 11 verses 5-7, describing the attempt of humans to build the tower of Babel, it reads, starting from verse 5:

“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men built. And the Lord say behold, the people is one and they have all one language. And this they began to do and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Let us go down and then confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech.”

Now, on reading this, the impression somehow comes across that God or Allah did not realize – and this seems a strange thing – that people would be smart or intelligent enough to build the tower of Babel, and that He just discovered that they did that! Besides that, it also carries the connotation that perhaps God was worried about the arrogance or the power of humans. This again would be contrary to the Islamic concept of God being All-Powerful and All-Knowledgeable, aloof or remote from human emotions.

The second verse is in the book of Exodus chapter 32 verse 14, and it reads:

“And the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people.”

Notice here the phrase that “the Lord repented of the evil.” Now again when we say repent, we as human beings can repent, because we are sinful, we are imperfect, and we don’t have full knowledge.

To attribute to the Creator the notion that He didn’t have full knowledge . . . does not have any parallel in the Qur’an

Sometimes, when you do something wrong, you might say, ‘I was ignorant, I was bad, I repent.’ But, to attribute to the Creator Himself the notion that He has to

repent also carries the meaning somehow of impulsiveness or that He miscalculated in His decision so He didn’t have full knowledge when He decided.

As we have indicated before, this notion does not have any parallel in the Qur’an, which insists that the knowledge of Allah is perfect, is complete, and that He does not have this human type of fault. In fact, this might relate to another interesting issue – one which also relates to knowledge.

It’s been suggested that the fact that Prophet Jesus came as a human being is a blessing because that shows God is sharing with man. In this description God ‘becomes man’ to see how man feels and even sacrifices and suffers like humans do. Those who have this kind of understanding do believe in Jesus as a Prophet; they believe in him as literally the son of God.

This kind of interpretation is like an analogy of a powerful human saying that, great as he may be, big as he may be, he cannot understand the ants. So you have to actually be an ant to really understand how the ant feels or behaves.

A Muslim cannot accept the need for such an analogy. For

Muslims the knowledge of God is so embracing that He does not need to become a man to understand man because He created man. He already KNOWS all the secrets. His knowledge is all embracing and complete. His full knowledge of the suffering, the feelings and the faults of human beings is there without necessarily having to be materialized in any physical form.

Continuing With Misconceptions:

The claim that ‘the God of Islam’ is remote, unapproachable Another misconception that is perpetuated in most Western literature about Islam is the notion that in Islam, ‘the God of Islam’ (Allah) is put on such a high pedestal, on such a high throne that He is untouchable, unapproachable, He is so remote, He is so far from His creatures and from His servants that nobody can relate to him.

This is again another example of jumping to conclusions. We have talked about many divine attributes: Allah having perfect knowledge, perfect will, perfect power. But none of this means that He is unapproachable and that’s the beauty of it. And the evidence of this can be documented directly from the Qur’an. When you open the Qur’an, the very first statement that you read is:

Bismillahir-Rahmaanir-Raheem. In the name of God
The Beneficent, The Merciful.

Every chapter of the Qur’an, except one, starts with the same formula: “In the name of Allah.” Muslims also, whenever they begin any act, should always invoke these names of God.

When you start to eat, when you go to sleep, when you wake up in the morning, when you leave your house, when you start your car, enter your house, start to do some work, start

to study, or start to play sports a true devoted Muslim would always start their actions with Bismillahir- Rahmaanir- Raheem. And which, as I have said, emphasises the attributes of Mercy of Allah. But there is something even more beautiful than that.

The original words used to convey “the Mercy of Allah” are both “Ar- Rahmaan” and “Ar-Raheem.” They are very difficult to translate fully in English. “Ar-Raheem” is translated simply as the Merciful. This is an attribute that could be shared also by humans. You can say, I am merciful, you are merciful, Allah is Merciful. So in that sense, the term is not unique.

But the beauty of the other term, “Ar-Rahmaan,” is that the meaning, according to one interpretation, is not just that Allah is Merciful but that all Mercy emanates from Him. He is the source of all Mercy which is much more beautiful. In fact, one whole chapter in the Qur’an – the chapter of The Merciful – bears the name “Ar- Rahmaan.” Not only this, but we also find many parts in the Qur’an have passages that deal with Mercy. Here we can quote just one. In chapter 7: verse 156, we read:

“But My Mercy extends to all things. That Mercy I shall ordain for those who do right and practise charity. And those who believe in Our signs.”



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THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD

The closeness of Allah

We should now move to the human level, and ask, “How does the closeness of Allah relate to me?” We see two dimensions of this relationship. The first is that I reach for Him when I am in need and the other dimension is that I reach for Him when I sin and I need forgiveness.

Let us examine each of these dimensions separately and talk about them. But first, the question we might ask is how close or personal is God to the human being?

The word close is very expressive because that is the term used in the Qur’an to refer to the relationship between Allah (God) and the person who is trying to reach for Him.

In Chapter 50, verse 16, we read the beautiful statement about this closeness:

“Verily, We created the human and We know what his soul whispers to him and We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”

And what can be closer than our jugular vein? There is no nobler way of expressing the closeness of Allah, the Creator to His beloved creatures; the crown of all His creatures – Man – than to describe it in the most positive terms.

There is another interesting thing, which deserves one more quotation. Before that, however, some background is necessary. A Bedouin came to Prophet Muhammad, in the simplicity and innocence of a desert man, and said,

“O Messenger of Allah, tell me is Allah so close that we might be able to have private discourse with him? Can we pray to Him even in secret or is He far away so that we have to call on Him and shout so that He listens to us?”

The Prophet actually did not know what to answer, but he received help. He immediately received the revelation from Allah, the passage of Chapter 2, verse 186:

“When My servants asked you (O Muhammad), concerning Me (Allah), I am indeed close to them, I listen to the prayer of every servant when he calls on Me. Let them also with the will listen to My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.”

That was the most tender, if you will, the most heart-felt type of answer that one could receive to that question about the closeness of Allah.

It is not only limited, by the way, to just one citation. There are many additional pieces of evidence from the Qur'an about the closeness of Allah to the pious, to the people who call on Him in sincerity.

Closeness to Allah and the form of the five daily prayers
It would be difficult to find any faith on the face of this earth that has a practise that parallels Islam in so far as manifesting and expressing this close and direct relationship to Allah that exists in Islam.

And here we are talking about the five daily prayers. By prayer we are not speaking in the limited sense of supplication, of praying to Allah. We are talking about the specific format that you follow in the five daily prayers by having ablution or washing or having certain movements bowing to Allah and thinking about Him reciting verses or passages of the Qur'an – the whole ritual itself.

***You direct your face towards
the Ka'abah . . . you start
entering into prayers . . .
virtually talking to Allah***

This direct relationship with God that the prayer provides is something you have to really experience

in order to fully appreciate it. You make your ablution, you stand, you direct your face towards the Ka'abah, the first house on earth for the Worship of One God, built by Prophet Abraham. You start entering into prayers in full devotion and humility reciting verses and talking, virtually talking to Allah. You do not see Him in front of you in a physical sense but, you see Him in your heart, you communicate with Him, you supplicate to Him.

No intermediary is needed . . .

No intermediary is needed, no person, not even the Prophet himself. Prophet Muhammad, as the last of God's prophets and messengers (Peace be upon them all), is not regarded as an intermediary between man and God, even though it is the most direct, the most noble type of relationship.

That is why you find for example in the history of Prophet Muhammad and his followers – and the same would apply to many saints in history – that the Prophet used to spend part of the night praying in earnest: a feeling so joyful that you would not feel the world around you. What else could be more close and more noble than the practice of a devout Muslim in this direct and close and personal relationship with Allah?

Forgiveness and the concept of original sin

In looking at the matter of forgiveness we should start with the idea of 'original sin' because that is a very significant concept in the West. For anyone considering the idea of original sin the question of how Islam views this may arise.

If you ask about sin, then as human beings we are sinful. We are tempted and we should find some way of retribution for that sin which I will describe later on. But, once anyone uses the term 'original sin,' then we must suppose they are referring perhaps to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Again, it is incumbent before we make any comparison, to find out what is the position that is held in the Judeo-Christian tradition and compare it with Islam.

The idea of original sin, as it is commonly understood, started with Adam and Eve when they committed that act of disobedience to Allah, by eating from the forbidden tree. That original sin was considered to be inherited by all their

descendants and they were in turn condemned. The only way for them to get out of that sin was to reconcile God's justice and mercy.

According to some, because God was merciful, he wanted to forgive Adam and Eve but, because He is also a just God, He also wanted to punish them.

In a way it seemed a kind of conflict with God between His Mercy and His Justice, and eventually the only resolution of that was to sacrifice blood and that blood must combine humanity and divinity. In this view Jesus is the only person who combined divinity and humanity and, as such, by believing in him, his blood atones for the sins of humanity.

Adam and Eve – the Biblical view and the Qur'anic

Now, again we find a superficial similarity in one aspect here between the Biblical presentation of this concept and the Qur'anic, but it stops right there. The fact that Adam and Eve committed the act of disobedience is similar. The Qur'an mentions that they committed that act. However, there are five basic reasons why in Islam there is no concept of original sin.

In Islam there is no concept of original sin

The first reason is that it is Allah who created Mankind. He created us, and when He created us, He knew that we are made of a material form and a spirit. He created us from clay – whether you take clay in a literal sense or in a sense of having the same element that you find in the clay or on earth. And, as such, He knows that we are partly material, partly spiritual. It is an intermingling of the components in our existence.

It follows from that, that God knows that as humans we are

fallible; we are capable of being sinful; we are imperfect. But, our fallibility, our sinfulness should not be equated with

criminality. It does not mean that we are criminals or that we are hopeless and there is no way for us really to make up for this mistake by ourselves. So, why then if Allah knows that, did He condemn the entire human race because of a weakness that was committed only by Adam and Eve, the father and mother of mankind.

God knows that as humans we are fallible . . . but our fallibility should not be created with criminality

A second basic reason why a Muslim would not accept the doctrine of original sin is that the Qur'an makes it very clear that Adam and Eve, after they committed that mistake, realized it and were sorry. And they actually prayed earnestly to Allah for forgiveness.

A specific documentation of this comes in Chapter 7 of the Qur'an, verse 22, talking about Adam and Eve, which says:

“Our Lord! We have wronged our souls. If you forgive us not and bestow not upon us Your mercy, we shall certainly be lost.”

So, both of them prayed for forgiveness.

It is interesting to notice that the terminology used in the Qur'an does not put the blame for that first sin solely on the woman. The fact is, the Qur'an uses the term in Arabic for two, both of them, Adam and Eve repented. Adam and Eve asked for forgiveness, and Adam and Eve were forgiven. In other words, it concerned both of them.

In fact, it is worth mentioning that in one verse in the Qur'an the blame is put on Adam. It does not mean that Eve did not have part of it but it shows that there is no theology in Islam

The Qur'an does not put the blame for that first sin solely on the woman . . . in one verse the blame is put on Adam

of blaming the woman for the fall of Adam as western tradition has it.

Indeed, we should realize that the sin or the mistake does

not necessarily deaden our heart or close the door for reform and moral growth.

The third reason for non-acceptance of this doctrine is that, according to Islam, Allah is both Just and Merciful. But, according to the Qur'an, the Mercy of Allah far exceeds His Justice. In Islam, mercy is of paramount importance. Muslims are taught that Allah says of Himself that:

“My Mercy encompasses everything.”

And from the Muslim point of view, how is it that Allah, knowing their weakness, listening to the supplication and the sincere prayer of Adam and Eve – the supplication, ‘O Allah, please forgive us. We were weak, we were sinful’ – still refuses to forgive them unless blood is shed and especially the blood of an innocent and a great man like Prophet Jesus (may peace be upon him). Why can't He forgive if He has the full authority and power to grant this forgiveness? Where can we find the meaning of forgiveness? When does it start if not for this?

The fourth reason is that we find that the Qur'an is explicit that Adam and Eve not only prayed for forgiveness, but they were forgiven actually before they were sent down to live on earth.

In Chapter 2, verse 37 we read:

“Then learn Adam from his Lord words of inspiration and his Lord turns towards him for He is Oft-returning, Most merciful.”

A similar verse also appears in Chapter 21, verse 22, but gives the same impression that God has already forgiven Adam and Eve because they were sincere and he knew their weakness.

Original sin, as a doctrine, assumes the inheritance of the sin

No one can carry the sin of another person

Finally, another important reason why a Muslim does not believe in original sin, is that original sin, as a doctrine, assumes the inheritance of the sin; that even though it was done by Adam and Eve, everybody from all of the succeeding entire generations until the Day of Judgement, carries the stigma of that sin. This is not the case according to the Qur'an. To cite again from the Qur'an, in Chapter 53, verse 38 we have the clear statement that:

“No person can bear the burden of another.”

This is the difficulty of translating the beauty of the Qur'an as it is in the original Arabic. But actually what is meant here is that sin does not really pass onto other people and nobody can carry the sin or pay for the sin of others. Everybody should stand on his or her own feet.

The verse continues:

“That the human can have nothing but what he or she strives for. That the fruits of his striving will soon

come inside, then will he be rewarded with a reward complete.”

To earn the Grace of God

This does not necessarily mean of course that we are saved only by our deeds. This would be human arrogance. We are also saved by the Grace of God but, according to the Qur'an, you have to earn that grace. That grace is given to people who sincerely turn towards Allah. In fact, this was also echoed by Prophet Muhammad, when he said in one of his sayings, that:

“Every child is born innocent and pure. Nobody is born with original sin.”

Actually he uses the term every child or infant is born pure and innocent “as the white cloth” – just completely pure. It is what he makes of himself or herself later on, what kind of indoctrination he gets that makes him good or bad. But, initially, there is no sin to be inherited.

If Adam and Eve were forgiven, why were they sent to earth?

It appears, superficially at least from the Biblical account, that we are here on earth and Adam and Eve were sent down to earth, simply because of that mistake, as a punishment. According to Islam, we are not living on earth here as a punishment for that sin. In fact, the Qur'an narrates that even before Allah created Adam and Eve, in His conversation or dialogue with the angels, it became apparent that the angels were worried about how this creature would behave, being partly material and partly spiritual.

The Qur'an quotes Allah as telling the angels:

“I am going to create a viceregent (a trustee) on Earth.”

Which means before even Adam and Eve were created, they were meant or destined to live on Earth.

Now, we might ask ourselves: 'But why were they kept in Paradise before they came to Earth?' One way to understand it as a Muslim is that this was a lesson to them before they came to Earth, to learn of the consequences of obedience and disobedience to Allah.

So, they learnt their lesson before coming. But, originally, they were coming anyhow. So, we are not here as punishment, far from that. We should not have this stigma of paying for that sin. We are here to accomplish a mission, a very noble mission, which the Qur'an describes as being the trustees of our Creator on Earth. That is quite different from the concept of punishment.

Repentance – the heart and soul of forgiveness.

Since we are considering forgiveness the question to ask at this point is how does a person repent in Islam and whether the concept of repentance exists in Islam? What is its dimension and how does one repent? Do we need confessions or absolution as is the practice in some other faiths?

This is a question that has been asked by Christians of Muslims – something in the form: "If there is no blood sacrifice, if you believe in Jesus as a Prophet and Messenger of Allah, and not as the son of God, whose blood saved us all, how do you make retribution for sins, if you admit that we are still capable of sins as humans?"

In response we need to be clear that the question of confession (as in the case of Catholicism – ie, confessing one's sins to another person,

Confessing one's sins to another person, the priest) does not exist in Islam whatsoever

the priest) does not exist in Islam whatsoever. A Muslim should not confess except to Him who controls the power to Forgive, and the Only One who controls the power to Forgive is God. No intermediaries, no priesthood, no Prophet or Messenger can grant this forgiveness. There are no priests in Islam.

How does a Muslim repent for sins?

But as to the concept of retribution, how do you make up or repent from sins? There are three basic conditions, to which we might add a fourth because in some cases the fourth condition may or may not be applicable for repentance.

The first condition is to stop doing something wrong or evil because that is an advance of good will: stop it first! Number two is to feel sorry for what you have done, because if you do not feel sorry for what you have done, then that means that a person might be too arrogant to admit his error. To admit an error is not bad. It is indicative of moral courage.

Thirdly, one should have the sincere intention not to repeat that particular offence or any other offence again. By saying 'sincere intention' this does however not mean that you can never fall. You have the sincere intention but as you go on, your human weakness might pull you back. However, at least at the time of making repentance, you have the determination not to repeat that sin or mistake again.

The fourth condition could be applicable to some cases, if your sin involves encroachment on the rights of others. Then your repentance cannot be accepted unless you also return the deprived rights that are due to the people concerned. For example, if one individual stole something from another person or took away some of their rights, they could not really say they were sincerely repenting unless they returned those

full rights to them. As with our earlier discussion of other divine attributes, direct reference to the Qur'an, may explain this.

The first quote is from Chapter 15: verses 49 and 50:

“Proclaim! (O Muhammad), to My Servants, that I am indeed the Oft-Forgiving, Most merciful, and that My Penalty will indeed be a grievous penalty.”

So, we have a choice between a grievous penalty or a wide-open door for repentance and correcting our path or life. The second, from Chapter 11, verse 11:

“For those who are patient and do righteous deeds; it is they whom forgiveness of sins awaits, and a great reward.”

In other words, good deeds atone for bad deeds. Even after you have done a lot of bad deeds, you will have to do good and that will take care of those past mistakes, God-willing.

In Chapter 39: verses 53 and 54:

“Say: (Thus speaks God:) O My Servants, who have transgressed against their souls, despair not of the Mercy of Allah, despair not. For Allah forgives all sins. He is Oft-Forgiving, most merciful. Turn you to your Lord in repentance and bow to His Will before the penalty comes on you, after that you shall not be helped...”

Also, in Chapter 3, verse 135, one of the characteristics of the true believers is given:

“And those who having done something to be ashamed or wronged their souls earnestly, bring Allah to mind

or remember Allah and ask for forgiveness for these sins. And who can forgive sins, except Allah, and they are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in this wrong they have done.”

Finally, Chapter 20, verse 82 we read:

“Yet withal, behold, I forgive all sins unto any who repents and attains to faith and does righteous deeds, and thereafter keeps to the right path.”

It is interesting to notice that the term in Arabic used for forgiveness in this particular passage is Ghaffar and that is different from Ghaffur. It simply means that He is not only one who forgives, but One who forgives again and again – the Ever-forgiving. Thus, this is the Qur’anic programme for atonement of sins without the question of original sin or of any blood sacrifice.



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THE ONENESS OF GOD

What of Orientalists and the labelling of Islam as 'simplistic'?

Before we move on to the implications of those attributes in our daily life, we should first clarify something we find in literature about Islam by orientalist researchers, and that is the idea of simplicity in the Islamic creed.

Sometimes they label the Islamic creed as being too simplistic and only for simple-minded nomadic people and they say that it does not aspire to compete, so to speak, or come up to the level; of the esoteric creeds that we see in other faiths or religions. And even when the term 'simplistic' is not used, it is still clearly insinuated. I have seen so many writings written by non-Muslims and so many films for example, or TV programmes produced that start with a statement like this:

'Oh, Islam is very simple. There is only One God.'
And then they talk about the five pillars of Islam. So, in just one quick sentence you are really insinuating, very obviously,

that somehow Islam is too simple, implying that it is just a superficial faith. By the same statement, people also tend to get the impression that the truth must be complicated, sophisticated or more profound whereas we know that the simplest fact of truth can be made very complex and include all kinds of philosophical and theological riddles. But it is originally really straight forward and making it complex will not necessarily mean that it is sophisticated or true.

So, this is the difficulty with the terminology that is being used. Yet

The most profound truth is one that combines both simplicity and profound depth

we can say that the most profound truth is one that combines both simplicity and profound depth. The most manifest example of this is our discussion over the previous pages on this aspect of monotheism or the absolute Oneness of the Creator or God.

We have seen that on one level, a very simple person can understand that there is only One Creator; that the whole universe is created by One God, One Authority. It is palatable, it is acceptable by a basic person, without modern education and sophistication.

But, on the other hand, we have seen also that we have talked at length on issues that deal specifically with that single concept of monotheism. And we have even gone into greater depth. We have given some examples from the Qur'an of what the real dimensions and meaning of this monotheism really represent.

We have seen that on one level, the discussion is appealing even to the most scientific mind especially when we discuss the various signs of God's Oneness in our creation – in the ecological balance, and in the total universe.

We can thus see that the very profound truth could be simple on one level and very deep also for those who care to deal more deeply into the dimensions and understanding of what it really means.

The insinuations made against Islam and Muslims
The kind of insinuation of Islamic as simplistic that is made normally from these writings is not only through words, but also by the way these messages are produced, be it in films, pictures or books. Judged from a Western perspective you get the typical image of a person in flowing robes, and judged therefore as uneducated and this is tied somehow to this understanding of monotheism.

What is even more tricky is that we really should be very careful about some non-Muslim scholars who fall into an error of saying:

‘Yes, monotheism in Islam is good, it is a better and very profound idea, but only relative to its time, that is, compared to the idol worship that was rampant at the time when Prophet Muhammad came. It is better; it is an improvement; it is necessary only for that time only.’

Whereas as we have seen even in the very brief scope of this book that the concept of monotheism in Islam clearly stands in a category by itself as you compare it with any explanation given by any other faith or even by any philosophy for the matter.

The relevance of monotheism in our daily life

On the surface it may sound just like a philosophical or theological type of argument. But, when you really delve into this, you will find that not only the concept of monotheism, but each of the basic divine attributes that we have discussed does have a practical relevance, practical implication in the day

to day life in each of us. It is manifest in the life of a believer, both on the individual as well as the collective level.

Oeness – removing all artificial barriers between people

What then are the implications of the different aspects? We begin with Oeness. Again this may sound like just another theological argument, when you really think about the Oeness of Allah. First of all, when you talk about The One Creator and Master of the whole universe, this in itself provides a base for humanity to unite. It carries with it a socio-political impact.

That is, you are talking about ONE common Lord of the universe. So, the whole issue of religious prejudice or racial prejudice or any other thing that stands or is typically expressed in terms of your God, my God and all that, would have no place because we are not talking about 'yours' or 'mine.'

We are only talking about the Single God of the whole of humanity. It follows from this that since you have One Creator of the universe, you also have only one created humanity.

The Oeness of Allah also leads to the oneness of humanity. This understanding of oneness of humanity is also a very profound basis to remove all the artificial barriers of racial superiority, tribal sectarianism, colour differences and other uncivilized methods that people have devised to discriminate between each other.

It also follows that when you have the Oeness of Allah, and the oneness of humanity, then you will also have the oneness of divine revelation. By that we mean that all the messages, the divine revelations that were received by all prophets

throughout history are like links in a constant and continuous chain or revelation. The prophets should be viewed by their followers not as competitors who are snatching people from each other. But rather they are carrying basically the same message of goodness, of submission to the will of God while at the same time, completing and complementing what each prophet before them has done and culminating finally in the message of Prophet Muhammad as the last of those prophets.

So, all of them are brothers. Their followers, if they are true followers, should truly affirm to be brothers. So, if we take these even as one concept in term of Oneness, we find that in the very practical realistic sense, it provides a very strong, and the only foundation to unify the entire humanity.

Sadly we have witnessed that as humans we fail to harness that potential. We do not benefit from that potential because of our various biases, prejudices and politics, and the brainwashing that we have because of various individual social or institutional pressures on us, but the potential is there in this single concept of Oneness.

The uniqueness of the Creator and the purpose of Creation

It certainly is. By believing that Allah or God is the sole Creator of everything that is in this universe, animate and inanimate, it follows also that a true believer does not feel that anything in this universe is totally strange to him. There are things that we may not understand but the universe does not sound like something that you should fear. A Muslim should never use the term “conquest” of nature. It appears that this terminology is very common in the West as if you are in a struggle with some unknown enemy out there in nature.

The Muslim says that nature is the creation of Allah. It isn't really meaningful to call it mother nature. God created

nature and He created it specifically, for our benefit, in order to harness its potential for the believer. We also find that once we realize that Allah or God is the

Creator, then we conclude also that there must be a specific purpose and wisdom behind creating us on this Earth. We are not just created here to live and then just die. That is not the purpose.

A Muslim should never use the term “conquest” of nature – as if you are in a struggle with some unknown enemy out there in nature.

There must be a more noble and meaningful mission and that is the basic distinction between human beings on one hand and other living organisms or other types of creation, on the other hand. This has been beautifully depicted in one passage in the Qur’an:

“While those who reject God, will enjoy this world and eat as cattle eat and the fire will be their abode.”(Chapter 47: verse 12)

Therefore, man is like a mere animal if he is here just to consume. That is the crux of the matter by knowing and realizing the attribute of creation of Allah then we try to ask ourselves:

‘Why have we been created and what mission are we supposed to fulfil on this earth?’

Knowledge and wisdom

We have said that Allah is All-Knowledgeable and All-Wise and this also has implications. Whether you look at it from the aspect of knowledge or wisdom they both have very practical implications.

First of all, when a believer realizes and believes that all his or her deeds, all their actions on this earth are being observed, that God is watching over what each individual is doing; and as we have said, that even your inner thoughts are known to the Creator, it follows from that, that this would bring the believer to inculcate in himself or herself the quality of taqwa – piety – or more correctly Allah-consciousness; to be ‘God-conscious’ in their activities.

It leads you to have automatic self-policing. You do not need someone to watch over you or to tell you what to do because you, after all, are in direct contact, under direct observation of the Creator. This quality is not a theoretical quality. It is a very essential quality to build any healthy community or society.

The other aspect that follows from that is the believers’ view of morality or moral standards would be much more lofty than what most people would think. That is to say, many people will accept moral values but they accept them only in a utilitarian sense. That is, I have to comply with this moral standard because it is good for me; it is good for my business; it is good to get social approval, or something of that sort.

Inculcating the quality of sincerity in deeds, thoughts and words

Well, that could be useful, but that is not all because a more lofty level of looking at morality is to tie it directly to the knowledge of God. To say, ‘I follow those standards because God knows me. If I cheat people, I use this pretence of morality just to acquire the admiration or applause of other people, I still cannot cheat God Himself.’ So, that inculcates the quality of sincerity in deeds, thoughts and words.

If you take the question of wisdom, as another important attribute of the Creator, we find that it also relates

to the acceptance of God's commands, directions and guidance as the ultimate source because a believer believes that God (Allah) is the ultimate infallible sovereign and source of knowledge, the ultimate law giver, if you will. Once we inculcate this in ourselves, then we take God and His Commands as the arbiter to judge on anything that we as human beings differ about.

Taking God and His commands as the arbiter . . . gives a kind of stability to the law

So, it gives a kind of stability to the law. This is in the same sense, with some differences of course, that a constitution provides stability within which various flexible laws can be devised. In that sense, you get also stability and a legal system which takes the absolute commands of God as the ultimate arbiter.

Forgiveness – and Allah as the all-Forgiving

This question of forgiveness is essential because even though the concept of sin might sound like a theological argument, it is not. It

relates to the whole psychology of the individual and how he or she understands the world around them.

Allah as the ultimate source of forgiveness liberates the human mind from the stigma of concepts like original sin

We can say first of all that this concept of Allah as the ultimate source of forgiveness liberates the human mind from the stigma, from the shackles, resulting from concepts like original sin, for example.

By accepting that the authority of forgiveness lies exclusively in the Hands of God of Allah the human mind is also liberated from any superstition or any strange ideas about how to remit for those sins.

And as we indicated, the Islamic way of remission is to sincerely stop what you are doing that is wrong and immoral and turn back to God in repentance and sincerity. It could also avoid the tendency in human beings to deify other human beings in the hope that those human beings might take care of their sins.

As we mentioned before, this tendency was not limited to just a few cases. There have been so many cases in history where people were believed to be a deity or the manifestation or incarnation of a deity.

It should be said that those individuals themselves have emphatically denied this; almost invariably they never claimed that they were anything more than sincere human beings.

The Islamic approach to forgiveness also removes or discourages the exploitation of people in the name of religion because once you start on a path of intermediary or intercession between man and God even when you are talking about the great Prophets as intercessors, then somebody else would claim:

'I am the intercessor to the intercessors.' A chain then begins and that would give rise to the exploitation of people in the name of religion. As we know from history, there have been cases where people even took the power unto themselves to grant forgiveness to others. For example, you pay so much money and get documents saying that your sins have been forgiven.

Islam: forgiveness only lies in the hands of Allah

Islam insists that forgiveness only lies in the hands of Allah, and that is why, in a way, Islam does not accept the concept of a priesthood as it is understood in the West. There can be religious scholars, but not priests as in the Christian sense.

And finally, we need to add that the belief in the forgiveness of Allah as the final authority leads the person to have a sense of responsibility and accountability. He does not depend on somebody else to take care of his sins.

No, we are all accountable individually before God and as such we have this sense of trying our best to follow His commands. One example of this comes from the Qur'an in Chapter 82, verse 19, where we learn:

“It will be the day (Day of Judgement) when no soul shall have power to do anything for another for the command that they will be wholly with God.”

All of these are very relevant issues in practice and they are all tied to this whole concept of God as the Forgiver alone, with no intercession or no intermediary.

The quality of Mercy

In a sense, as we have already discussed, we could say that Mercy relates to forgiveness. It also relates to inculcating the attitude of gratefulness to Allah, the Creator. That is, we do not take all the blessings or the bounties that Allah has given us for granted. We know that this is a manifestation of His Mercy. Even the glass of water that we drink, even the smell of fresh air that we have, we should always remember and think that this is the manifestation of the Mercy of Allah.

It also gives the person a feeling of assurance that there is One who cares for me. I could be sinful, I could be bad, but there is still One who cares and loves me and has Mercy for me. And it is not just anyone, it is the ONE, the final authority of this universe.

So that gives a warm feeling of identification with Allah; with the Creator. In case an individual faces any problem or difficulty in his life, they should never feel broken-hearted or suicidal. They should not despair because as the Qur'an says:

“One should never despair from the Mercy of Allah.”
In fact, in Chapter 39, verse 53, it says:

“Despair not of the Mercy of Allah.”

In another verse in Chapter 12, verse 87, that same reminder is repeated:

“No one despairs of God's soothing Mercy except those who have no faith.”

As the Prophet of Islam, Prophet Muhammad, (Peace be upon him) said before:

“I wonder about the affairs of a true believer. Whatever happens to him, it is good. If something good happened to him, he thanks God and he gets reward for that. If something difficult befalls him, he again thanks Allah or has perseverance and patience and for that he again gets a reward.”

Omnipotence – the absolute will and power of Allah.

When we consider omnipotence we might ask in what sense should this attribute affect us personally?

By realizing that all powers belong only in the hands of God, this would remove any servitude to any other human being, servitude that we have for other people like ourselves simply because we have some hope that they would benefit us in some form.

The Qur'an says, "No!" All benefit comes only from Allah, not from any other human being; these are only tools.

It also removes this servitude to other human beings in the sense of fear of them and that is why we find that Prophets and other deeply religious individuals throughout history have stood up to dictators, with great courage, and have spoken the truth, without fear nor favour, because this was a truth that should be said.

It also removes the excessive or undue anxiety that people might have about what is happening to them or will happen to them.

As the Qur'an says:

"Nothing will happen to us except what God has destined us to go through. Nobody would live for one moment more or less than the exact decided time."

It also calls on us to be more humble. Realizing that all the powers are in the hands of God, whatever we have by way of wealth, position or strength we should be humble because we know that God can take it away at anytime.

We then should not exploit other people. We should not use

this power or wealth or influence solely for our own benefit but should realize that we also have a purpose to serve with these gifts.

Even in the area of political life and government we realize again that the ultimate authority lies in the hands of God, and as such, all other humans should be really equal in His sight and their affairs should be by mutual, interactive consultations.

Closeness to Allah

Earlier we commented on a misconception in Western literature of the remoteness of Allah to Muslims. And we said that closeness to mankind is a very important attribute of Allah. What then are the implications of the closeness to Allah?

Firstly, there are the various passages from the Qur'an which we have already quoted that show that God – Allah – is closer to man than his own jugular vein; that God is close to anyone who prays to him, that in Islam there is no intermediary and that in the five daily prayers you pray and communicate directly with Him.

This is the most noble, direct, close and warm personal relationship that you could have with the Creator.

In addition, this kind of experience or concept gives the person a chance to have a spiritual experience of direct contact with Allah – one that would lead inevitably to the feeling of peace in the mind and peace in the heart, which are the most valuable things that anyone can attain in this life.

In this light we do not talk about big cars and big houses or lots of money in the bank or gold with whatever 'value' in terms of dollars per ounce. These are all superficial. The real

peace, the real value in life is to have inner peace in the heart and mind. Here then perhaps we should conclude by quoting a few passages in the Qur'an:

Who so believes in God, God will guide his heart alright."

Chapter 64: verse 11

In another part of the Qur'an, a second quotation:

"God is the protector of those who have faith. He will lead them from the depths of darkness into light. And those who reject faith, their patrons are the evil ones. They will lead them forth from light into the depths of darkness."

Finally, in the Qur'an, there is the term *sakinah*, or tranquillity of the heart and the soul. In chapter 48: verse 4, we read:

"It is He who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers,... that they may grow more firmer in their faith."

And finally:

"Those who believe and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of God. Truly in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction!"

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# NOTES



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Monotheism



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# MONOTHEISM ●

The matter of faith is not a kind of dogmatic matter that you should not look or not think about but just accept blindly, because the intellect could also be a strong foundation for a firmer type of faith.



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