

The Names of God

(part 1 of 3): Who is Allah?

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

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

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

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

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

The differences and confusions arise because the word “God” can be made plural as in gods, or change gender, as in goddess. This is not the case in Arabic. The word Allah stands alone, there is no plural or gender. The use of the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Muslim is encouraged to remember God and be grateful to Him at all times and one easy, yet beneficial way of doing this, is to contemplate and understand His Beautiful Names. Through these names, we are able to know our Creator and

learn how to praise and worship Him, and to call on Him by the Names that are indicative of our needs.

When making supplication, the Prophet Muhammad is known to have said, "O God, I ask you of you by every name that You have named yourself, or that You have revealed in Your book, or that You have taught any of Your creation or that You have kept hidden in the unseen knowledge with Yourself." (*Ahmad*) Thus, His Names are not limited to what He has revealed in the Quran or to the traditions of Prophet Muhammad.

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

Footnotes:

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

(part 2 of 3): The Most Merciful

In the name of God (Allah), the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

This article begins in the same way Muslims begin with many undertakings. Before commencing even the most mundane tasks of life, eating, drinking, dressing, or bathing, a Muslim will turn his efforts into worship by mentioning the name of God. He (God) is the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, His mercy encompasses all things, and is the source of all the compassion and mercy that exist. God says to us in the Quran, **"My Mercy embraces all things..." (Quran 7:156)**

From the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, we know that when God decreed the creation He said, **"...and My Mercy overcomes My Wrath."** (*Saheeh Bukhari and Muslim*) What exactly is mercy? The dictionary defines it as disposition to be kind and forgiving, and the feeling that motivates compassion.[1] The Arabic term for mercy is *rahmah* and two of the most important names of God derive from this root word. *Ar Rahman* – the Most Gracious and *Ar Raheem* – the Most Merciful. The Mercy of God is that ethereal quality that embodies gentleness, piety, care, consideration, love and forgiveness. When these qualities are observable in this world, they are a mere reflection of God's mercy towards his creation.

Prophet Muhammad informed us that God is more merciful to His creatures than a mother is to her child, (*Saheeh Bukhari and Muslim*) and in fact, the Arabic word for womb, *raheem*, is derived from the same root word as mercy - *rahmah*. It is significant that there is a unique connection between God's mercy and the womb. God nurtures and shelters us, just as the womb nurtures and shelters the unborn child.

Prophet Muhammad explained the quality of mercy to his companions, telling them God has one hundred parts of mercy, and has sent down one part to be shared amongst the creation. This is why people are compassionate and kind towards one another and wild animals treat their offspring with gentleness. However, God withheld the other 99 parts to be bestowed upon the believers on the Day of Judgement. (*Saheeh Muslim*)

All of creation shows love and compassion towards one another with just this one portion of mercy. Humans give willingly to the poor and needy, families support and love one another, and animals protect their young. Mercy and compassion generally take into account the need to alleviate suffering and to spread kindness and joy. Even though this world sometimes appears to be a dark and gloomy place, the Mercy of God can be seen and felt by those who ponder and reflect. The rain falls, the sun shines, a child reaches for her father's hand and the kitten snuggles into the protective warmth of its mother. God's mercy is strong and visible all around us, yet on the Day of Judgement He will complete this mercy by adding the final 99 parts and bestowing mercy, love and compassion upon those believers who did righteous deeds and tried to please God in all their affairs. This concept is awe inspiring; the mercy of God knows no bounds.

As a sign of God's infinite mercy towards mankind, He sent Prophets and Messengers to guide us and help us to remain on His straight path leading to eternal Paradise. God said He did not send Prophet Muhammad to the whole of mankind, except as a mercy.

“And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the all that exists.” (Quran 21:107)

Prophet Muhammad was the embodiment of mercy; he showed compassion to those around him, his family, orphans, friends and strangers. God spoke to him saying:

“And by the Mercy of God, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (God's) Forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs.” (Quran 3:159)

Prophet Muhammad could often be heard invoking God's Mercy on the believers, and Muslims greet each other by saying *Assalamu alaikum wa Rahmatullah* (May God's Peace and Mercy be upon you.) Mercy and all it involves is a very important concept in Islam because from it stem generosity, respect, tolerance and forgiveness, all qualities that a Muslim is expected to cultivate in this life.

As frail human beings we often feel lost and alone in a world that seems bereft of mercy and it is in those times that we need to turn to God and seek His Mercy and Forgiveness. When we turn to Him in true submission His tranquillity descends upon us and we are able to feel the quality of His mercy and see it manifest in the world around us.

The hand that reaches out to you in the darkness is a reflection of God's mercy, so too is the kind word from a stranger, the rain that falls on parched earth and the laughter in the eyes of a child. God's mercy is the source of all that is good, gentle, or pious. God has enabled us to understand some measure of His Magnificence by revealing His Most Beautiful Names to us, He has several that indicate His Mercy and we are encouraged to call upon Him by these names.

Al-Rahman (the Most Gracious), *al-Raheem* (the Most Merciful), *al-Barr* (the Source of Goodness), *al-Kareem* (the Most Generous), *al-Jawaad* (the Generous), *al-Ra'oof* (the Compassionate), *al-Wahhaab* (the Bestower).

“And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to God so call on Him by them...” (Quran 7:180)

We can call upon Him by these names when we feel the need to give thanks for the countless blessings God has bestowed upon us, or in our hour of need. We crave for the Mercy of God most keenly when we are in need of comfort and security. When the transience of this world appears to have rendered us powerless, the Most Powerful (God) will always, and forever cover us with His Mercy and He asks in return, only that we believe in Him and worship Him alone.

Footnotes:

[1] Princeton Wordnet.