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Section 1: Knowing Allah

Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, has said, "One among you who knows Allah best is the one who fears Him most, and I fear Him even more than him." Ibn `Abbas¹ says that a bedouin once came to the Messenger of Allah and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Teach me of the most unusual of knowledge!" He asked him, "What have you done with the peak of knowledge so that you now ask about its most unusual things?!"

The man asked him, "O Messenger of Allah! What is this peak of knowledge?!" He said, "It is knowing Allah as He deserves to be known." The bedouin then said, "And how can He be known as He ought to be?" The Messenger of Allah answered, "It is that you know Him as having no model, no peer, no antithesis, and that He is One and only: He is the One Who is Apparent yet Hidden, the First and the Last, having no peer nor a similitude; this is the true knowledge about Him."

Accurately knowing Allah is the pillar whereupon Islam in its entirety hinges. Without such knowledge, any action in Islam does not have any real value whatsoever: it has neither essence nor value. The Question is: "How can we get to know Allah, and what is the venue for attaining such knowledge?"

The answer is crucially conditional: If we do not know the right course, we can never reach our destination. Any erroneous approach to knowing Allah is a major contributor to distancing a large number of people from accurately getting to believe in Allah. The Holy Qur'an narrates to us stories about those who disbelieved in Allah in every age and time, depicting for us how they insisted, in order to believe in Him, on hearing or seeing Him, relying on their senses. Following are only a few examples: Allah Almighty has said,

And those who have no knowledge say: Why does not Allah speak to us or a sign come to us? Even thus did those before them say; (they said) the like of what such people say; their hearts are all alike. Indeed, We have made the signs (leading to belief in Him) clear for people who are sure. (2:118)

And those who do not hope for Our meeting say: Why have no angels been sent down upon us,

or (why) do we not see our Lord? Certainly they themselves are too proud and have revolted in great revolt. On the day they see the angels, there shall be no joy on that day for the guilty... (25:21–22)

Pharaoh said: O Haman! Build me a tower so that I may attain the means of access, the means of access to the heavens, then (I may be able to) reach the God of Moses, and I surely think he is a liar. And thus was the evil of his deed made fair-seeming to Pharaoh, and he was turned away from the (right) course. (40:36–37)

"Turned away from the (right) course" refers to the course that ends with acquiring a sound and accurate knowledge of the Almighty. Such a goal should be our first and foremost concern. Without properly knowing Allah, how can we properly worship Him?

The Messenger of Allah Muhammad has said in a *qudsi* tradition, "For everything there is a path, and the path to Paradise is knowledge." This is a humble attempt to search for such sound and accurate knowledge, the one that brings us closer to our Lord and leads us to the path of salvation, to happiness both in this life and in the eternal life to come.

Muslims Start Everything in the Name of Allah

In one *hadith*, the Messenger of Allah is quoted saying, "Anything which does not start with the Name of Allah is cut-off (from Allah's blessing)." It is customary for Muslims to invoke the Name of Allah whenever they do anything important, or whenever they seek His protection against His arch-enemy and ours Satan the Accursed. Examples are:

When they stand up or sit down, when they eat or drink, when they enter their homes, when they open the door of their cars or bathrooms or any room in the house, when they start the engines of their cars, when they put on or take off their clothes, when they ascend or descend a ladder, when they start writing something important, when they slaughter an animal decreed by Allah as lawful for their food..., and even when they cohabit with their wives in the hope Allah will bless them with righteous progeny.

Such are the manners of good Muslims. So let us start in the Name of Allah Who created and determined everything from nothing, the ever-Living, the Eternal Who is never affected by time, nor space, nor anything else, Who never initiated a place for His being, nor did He attain His might after having created everything, nor was He weak before then. In the Name of Allah Who never needed company before creating everything.

In the Name of Allah the like of Whom there is none at all, nor was He without His domain before the latter's creation. In the Name of Allah Who hears without a hearing faculty, Who sees without vision. In the Name of Allah Who is Mighty without having to derive His might from His creation. In the Name of Allah the eyes of Whose creatures can never see Him, the Most Exalted One, the all-Knowing. I testify

that Allah is the One and Only God; there is no partner with Him, the One and only

One upon Whom all things and beings depend. He does not beget, nor is He begotten, nor is there anything like Him. I further testify that our master Muhammad is His Servant and Messenger, bearer of His Message and of the glad tidings, the one whom He trusted for His revelation; blessings of Allah be upon him and his righteous and pure progeny.

How Prophet Muhammad Praised His Lord

Our master Muhammad has said,

All Praise is due to Allah, the One and only God. His being Eternal is compounded by His being Divine. He is Proud in His own right and in His Greatness. He creates whatever He wills and initiates the creation without having to have a model for any of what He creates! Our Lord is the One Who has always been beyond time as such; through His knowledge has He split the seed; through His Might has He created all creation; through the light of the morning has He started the dawn; there is none that can alter what He has created, nor is there any that can change what He has made, nor is there any that can revoke His decree or repeal His command or be exempted from His call!

There is no extinction to His domain, nor is there a term for His Divinity. He is the first to create, the One Who is eternal even beyond eternity itself, the One Who has obscured Himself from His creation in the horizon of ambition, in the lofty Exaltation, in the abundant domain, higher than anything that is high. Yet He is close to everything, so He manifests Himself to His creatures even without being seen, while He is the most Sublime! By His Light He veiled Himself and ascended the height, obscuring Himself from His creation.

He sent them messengers so that He would have the clear argument against them, and so that His messengers would testify against His creation. He sent prophets to them to bring them glad tidings and to warn them, so that He would guide whomsoever He pleases after providing them with His clear signs and bringing to life whomsoever He pleases with the same, hence the creation will know about their Lord that which they did not know, and they will know Him as their God after having rejected Him. They will believe in His Unity after having persisted in denying it.

Commonly Asked Questions About "Allah"

Let us now try to answer a number of basic questions about the Almighty:

1. How can you describe Him?

Numerous verses of the Holy Qur'an point out to His existence. Consider the argument of His Friend Ibrahim (Abraham, as) who said:

"My Lord is the One Who brings life and Who causes death" (Qur'an, 2:258),

and the argument of Moses who said,

"[He is] your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old" (Qur'an, 26:26).

Also consider these verses:

***Our Lord is the One Who gave everything its creation, then He guided it (to its destination).
(20:50)***

***The Lord of the East and the West: there is no god but He; therefore, take Him for a protector.
(73:9)***

2. Can you define Him?

The Exalted One says that He defies definition:

"... nothing at all is like Him" (Qur'an, 42:11).

3. Can one ask: "What is He?"

Pharaoh asked Moses, "And what is the Lord of the worlds?" (Qur'an, 26:23).

Moses answered by saying that He is "Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old" (Qur'an, 26:26).

There is no way to know Him by defining "what" He is; rather, one can get to know the proofs of His Existence, Might, Knowledge, Wisdom, Mercy and His being the Creator of everything. "Do not think about Allah," said Imam `Ali, "rather, think about what Allah has created, for thinking about Allah only increases one's bewilderment."

4. Is He one or more?

The Glorified One has required the Muslims to

Say: He, Allah, is One. (112:1)

And your God is One God! (2:163)

Had there been in them any gods besides Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder. (21:22)

5. Is He confined to any place?

The Holy Qur'an tells us that:

He is the Supreme (watching) over His worshippers. (6:61)

They revere their Lord High above them. (16:50)

The Beneficent God is firmly established on the throne (of authority). (20:5)

"Above them" in 16:50 refers to the Almighty being above His servants in His Might, Power, Loftiness, not to being above them in place, space, area, elevation, or physical location; these do not apply to Him.

The Messenger of Allah called upon His Lord during his ascension to heavens pleading to Him thus, "You are as You have praised Your own Self," and Prophet Yunus (Jonah) son of Matti, while being in the bottom of the sea, called upon his Lord saying,

"There is no god but You! Glory to You! Surely I have become one of those who commit injustice against their own souls!" (Qur'an, 21:87).

The Messenger of Allah has said, "Do not exalt me over him [over Yunus] in nearness to Allah just because I reached the High Throne while he was in the bottom of the sea, for the Adored One is above being confined to a space or a direction." He has also addressed Him saying, "You and he in the strata of the heavens;" the believers call upon Him saying,

"You and them on earth." Had He been in a particular area or place, all these persons could not have differed from one another in His regard at any given time. He is above being confined to place or direction:

"All those in the heavens and the earth glorify Allah" (Qur'an, 57:1).

6. When did He begin to exist?

The Praised One has said, He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent, and He has full knowledge of all things. (57:3)

Everything is to perish except He. (28:88)

Anyone who asks when His existence came to be implies that there was a time when He did not exist, i.e. that void preceded Him. He is not "preceded" by anyone, nor is He "succeeded" by anyone. His continuation is above being tied to time. His existence is too holy to be dependent on time; such are characteristics of things or persons who come to be then perish, or of those whose being is possible in the future, but they do not apply to Him.

Another verse which similarly describes His eternity and perpetuity is this one:

"Everyone on earth will perish but will abide (forever) the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour" (Qur'an, 55:26-27),

and also this:

"Blessed is He in Whose hands is the dominion" (Qur'an, 67: 1).

"Blessed," that is, *tabaraka*, is derived from *baraka*, blessing, which connotes constancy and lack of acceptance to change. His existence is everlasting, eternal, perpetual.

7. Over what does He rule?

The Almighty says,

"Say: O Allah! Master of authority! You give authority to whomsoever You please and take it away from whomsoever You please" (Qur'an, 3:26).

He, and only He, is the King of kings; He grants others authority:

"Blessed is the One in Whose hand is the kingdom" (Qur'an, 67: 1).

Vanities and possessions owned by others will all disappear on the Day of Judgment:

"Whose will be the dominion that Day? It is Allah's, the One, the Subduer (of all)" (Qur'an, 40: 16).

8. What is [the extent of] His knowledge?

He has said,

[He is] the One Who knows the unseen and the seen. (6:73)

And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures: none knows them except He. (6:59)

Slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep. (2:255)

And your Lord is not forgetful. (19:64)

And you are not (engaged) in any affair, nor do you recite concerning it any portion of the Qur'an, nor do you do anything, except that We are witnesses over you when you enter into it. (10:61)

9. What is His speech?

The Most Glorified and Exalted has said,

Were every tree on earth (made into) pens and the sea (to supply it with ink), with seven more seas to add thereto, the words of Allah would not have been exhausted; surely Allah is Mighty,

Wise. (31:27)

Say: Were the sea (turned into) ink for the (recording of the) words of my Lord, the sea would surely be consumed before the words of my Lord are exhausted though We were to bring the like of that (sea) to add thereto. (18: 109)

10. How is He?

The Exalted One says,

Allah's is the command before (now) and thereafter. (30:4)

The day on which no soul shall control anything for (another) soul, and the command on that Day shall be entirely Allah's. (82: 19)

11. Why is He the Praised One?

The Almighty has said that He is "... **the Apparent and the Hidden**" (*Qur'an, 57:3*), that is, His Existence, Might and Wisdom are all evident if one observes the indications thereto, yet His reality is obscured from all intellects.

12. What is His will?

The answer to this verse is provided by verses such as these:

And you do not please except if Allah [so] pleases. (76:30)

Allah chooses whomsoever He pleases especially for His mercy, and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace. (2: 105)

Allah grants His authority to whomsoever He pleases, and Allah cares for all, and He knows all things. (2:247)

Allah sets on the right path whomsoever He pleases. (2:272)

He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. (3:6)

If He pleases, He may take you off and make whomsoever He pleases successors after you. (6: 133)

13. Why is He the all-Knowing, the Omnipotent?

He has responded to those who raised such a question by saying, He cannot be questioned concerning what He does while they shall be questioned. (21:23)

All things are destined in the end to the One Who has facilitated their being what they are, the One Who cannot be explained; therefore, the attempt to analyze Him, His Attributes, and His actions, is simply impossible.

14. Does He have sons, daughters, parents, or any family members or relatives?!

The God of Islam and of all mankind has said,

"Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom everyone [and everything] depends. He does not beget, nor is He begotten, and none is like Him" (Qur'an, 112:1-4).

15. Does He forgive?

He has said, ***"Inform My servants that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful" (Qur'an, 15:49).***

16. What about His creation?

He has said,

O man! What has beguiled you from your Lord, the Gracious One Who created you then made you complete, then He made you symmetrical? Into whatever form He pleased did He shape you. (82:6-8)

Have they not considered that Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth and was not tired by their creation...? (46:33)

This is Allah's creation, so show Me what those besides Him have created. (31:11)

17. Can He be seen?

He, the Most Exalted, the Most High, has told that

When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him, he said: "Lord! Show (Yourself) to me so that I may look upon You." Allah said: "By no means can you see Me; but look at the mountain; if it abides in its place, then shall you see Me." When his Lord manifested His glory to the mountain, He made it like dust, and Moses fell in a swoon. When he recovered his senses, he said: "Glory to You! To You do I turn in repentance, and I am the first to believe." (Qur'an, 7:143).

Sunnis, however, believe, as the reader will find out in a later part of this book, that the believers will be able on the Day of Judgment to see Allah. Shi`as disagree with them as you will read later in this book, *Insha-Allah*.

18. How does He command?

He has said, His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, and it is. (36:82)

When He decrees an affair, He only says to it: Be, and it is. (40:68) His creatures have always wondered about His Attributes, Praise and Glory to Him, so He provided them with the following verses wherein they can find the clear answer: And Allah's are the most Beautiful Names (Attributes), so call upon Him thereby. (7: 180)

Allah: there is no god but He; His are the very Best Names. (20:8)

Say: Call upon Allah or upon al-Raman; whichever you call upon, He has the Great Names... (17: 110).

He is Allah, besides Whom there is no other god; the King, the Holy, the One Who grants peace, the One Who gives security, the Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of greatness; Glory to Allah from what they set up (with Him). He is Allah the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most beautiful Attributes; whatever in the heavens and the earth declares His glory, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (59:21-24)

1. Ibn `Abbas was one of Prophet Muhammad's cousins: he was Abdullah ibn `Abbas ibn Abd al-Muattalib, of Banu Hashim, of Quraysh. Referred to as the Islamic nation's scribe, he was a highly respected sahabi whose hadith are classified by al-Bukhari and Muslim as "sahih" accurate, authentic. He was born in Mecca, and he kept the Messenger of Allah company and narrated his traditions. He fought on the side of Imam `Ali during the Battle of the Camel (which started on Friday, Jumada I 16, 36 A.H./November 10, 656 A.H.) against `Ayesha and her supporters, and also during the Battle of Siffin (which started in Thul-Hijjah 36 A.H./May 657 A.D.). During his later years, he became blind, so he retired to 'if where he died in 68 A.H./687 A.D. In both al-Bukhari's and Muslim's Sahih books, there are 1160 hadith transmitted through Ibn `Abbas alone.

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