

# Identifying Entity and Attributes of God: An Islamic Perspective

## Mengenal pasti Entiti dan Sifat-Sifat Allah: Satu Perspektif Islam

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### Abstract

Concept of Supreme Being is as old as the human history itself. But the idea of entity and attributes of that Being varies from culture to culture and religion to religion. Islam gives very vivid image of God, namely Allah in terms of His entity, attributes, and nature of relationships with the creature, including man. The Arabic word Allah denotes in English “The God”. He is Only One without any partner. He is totally unseen. He is the Creator, Sustainer, Provider, Controller of the entire universe. All that is in the earth and heavens belong to Him. Nothing is unto like Him. His power is infinite. He is as close to man as his jugular vein. He is the Most-Merciful, the Most-Beneficent. He is eternal with no beginning and end. He interacts with man and communicates to him every moment. He is Just and loves those who subscribe to justice. He has forbidden injustice for Himself as well as for man. He is Generous and commands man to interact with others generously. In order to be close to Him man has to be as kind to others as to his own self. The qualities Allah wants to see in man include sincerity, honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, generosity, altruism, tolerance, forbearance, and fortitude. This paper deals with all these dimensions of “The God” from Islamic perspective as available in the Qur’an and the Prophetic traditions.

**Keywords:** God, Allah, Entity, Attribute, the Qur’an, Islam.

### Abstrak

Konsep Yang Maha Esa setua sejarah manusia itu sendiri. Tetapi idea entiti dan sifat-sifat-Nya berbeza dari budaya ke budaya dan agama ke agama. Islam memberikan

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imej yang sangat jelas mengenai tuhan, yaitu Allah dari segi entiti-Nya, sifat-sifat-Nya, dan perhubungan-Nya dengan makhluk, termasuk manusia. Perkataan Bahasa Arab yaitu Allah, dalam bahasa Inggerisnya menandakan "Tuhan". Yang Hanya Satu tanpa penolong. Yang benar-benar Tersembunyi. Yang Maha Pencipta, Pemelihara, Pembekal, Pengawal seluruh alam semesta. Segala yang ada di bumi, dan langit adalah kepunyaan-Nya. Tidak ada yang sama seperti-Nya. Kuasa-Nya adalah tidak terbatas. Yang lebih dekat dengan manusia daripada urat lehernya. Yang Maha Pemurah, Yang Maha Pengasihani. Yang kekal tanpa awal dan akhir. Yang berinteraksi dengan manusia pada setiap masa. Yang adil dan mengasihi orang-orang yang menegapkan keadilan. Yang mengharamkan kezaliman atas diri-Nya dan juga untuk manusia. Yang Maha Mulia dan memerintah hamba-Nya untuk berinteraksi dengan orang lain dengan sebaik-baiknya. Dalam usaha untuk rapatkan diri kepada-Nya, manusia mesti berbuat baik kepada yang lain seperti keatas dirinya. Sifat-sifat yang Allah mahu melihat dalam manusia adalah keikhlasan, kejujuran, kebenaran, amanah, keadilan, kemuliaan, pemurah, toleransi, kesabaran, dan ketabahan. Kajian ini berurusan dengan segala dimensi "Tuhan" dari perspektif Islam seperti yang terdapat di dalam Al-Quran dan Hadis.

**Kata Kunci:** Tuhan, Allah, Entiti, Sifat-sifat, al-Quran, Islam.

### **Introduction**

Sun, moon, stars, galaxies, nebulae, water, plants, wind, mountains, valleys, flowers, animals, and humans etc. represent altogether excellently marvellous phenomena in the immense universe. These heavenly and earthly sights speak volumes of their Originator. Who is He? What is His form? Is He Singular or plural? Does He have any partner/s? Is He Active or Passive? Where does He exist? What are His attributes? What is the nature of His relationship with the universe, including man? How can man manage to see Him, talk to Him, and please Him? Does man really need Him? What is the impact of ignoring Him on human life? Is His Creativity meaningful? These questions have been answered variously by world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam and philosophies like Greek and modern. This paper attempts to respond to these questions from Islamic perspective. The author does not intend to make a comparative study of the theme as available in world religions. It is rather to elaborate ideas concerning God in the light of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions.

### **Man's Cognition of GOD**

It seems quite pertinent to deliberate over the question whether man recognizes Supreme Being before other dimensions of the issue are taken care of. The answer to this question may be derived from human psychology as well as from the Qur'anic statements. As it appears, man is too weak to handle all the challenges in his life; he cannot see beyond certain limit; he cannot fulfil all of his desires on his own; he does not control his birth, life, and death; he suffers from so many incurable physical problems; and he finds himself a tiny creature in front of colossal world phenomena. This individual imperfection of man calls for help from other human/s. Since the nature of all humans is one and the same, even the collectiveness cannot be of much advantage. Individually, he is incapable to solve all of his problems and collectively too he is inept to surmount all the difficulties he faces or may face. This deficiency in man demands for the existence of SOMEONE, who must be all-powerful, and to whom he can resort to everywhere for anything whatsoever. When he or anyone of his loved ones falls sick, suffering from some fatal disease, his inner self advises him to seek help from the Supreme Being who is almighty. When he faces economic crises, he generally has two options: (1) he has to out of so much depression commit suicide, or (2) he has to out of strong instinctive urge prostrate before the unseen controller of the creation. Large majority of the people opt for the second option. Despite the number of those who kill themselves being statistically very alarming in the world, their ratio may not be accounted for more than 3-4 %. He has innumerable desires, wishes, and needs of physical, psychological, emotional, social, political, economic, cultural, and intellectual nature. He knows very well that he alone or in collaboration with others around him can in no way fulfil all that he craves for. In a situation of non-fulfilment of his needs, he bows down before the most powerful, not from among human being but someone supernatural. The existence of millions of centres of worship on the surface of the earth in the name of *mandir*, *masjid*, synagogue, cathedral, *gurdwara*, and church etc. declares that man is in need of God. This phenomenon cannot just be described as a mere exploitation of the general masses by priests. Religious leaders cannot deceive the people for long. Human desire to worship the

Lord of the worlds has as old history as the human existence itself. Historical continuity of a feature serves as strongly valid evidence that man has always been in need of God hence worship to Him.

The Qur'an says in a categorical manner that man is conscious of God right from his birth. Verse 7:172 reads: "*When your Lord brought forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He called upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?"—to which they answered: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto"....*" This is a metaphoric statement which puts forward the fact God himself has placed as his Creator in his nature the recognition of His Existence. Muhammad Asad comments over this verse in these words: "According to the Qur'an, the ability to perceive the existence of the Supreme Power is inborn in human nature (*fitrah*); and it is this instinctive cognition—which may or may not be subsequently blurred by self-indulgence or adverse environmental influences—that makes every sane human being "bear witness about himself" before God. As so often in the Qur'an, God's "speaking" and man's "answering" is a metonym for the creative act of God and of man's existential response to it".<sup>1</sup>

One of the Companions of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.), namely Ubayy bin Ka'b interprets the above Qur'anic verse as an event; and he says: Allah gathered all humans in their respective groups and took covenant from them. And asked them, making themselves bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?" They all answered: "You are for sure our Lord". Thereupon Allah said: "I make heavens, earth as well as your father Adam bear witness about you all for that so that you might not advance on the Day of Judgment an excuse that you were not aware of that; behold, none is worthy of worship except Me, as there is no Lord except Me; do not associate with Me anyone as partner; I will raise Apostles among yourselves to remind you of this covenant you are making today; and I will also send down from on high Revelations". In response to this all humans said: "We all bear witness that You are our Lord and Object

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Asad, *THE MESSAGE OF THE QUR'AN* (Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, 1980), p. 230, note 139.

of worship; there is none as Lord other than you; and there is none worthy of worship other than you”.<sup>2</sup>

Syed Mawdūdī does not consider the Qur’anic statement (7:172) as metaphoric. In his view it was a physical event like any other happening in the world externally. To him it was an oath of allegiance by the entire humanity to pledge their loyalty to Allah. He claims that occurrence of such event is not surprising at all; and that its non-occurrence would rather be astonishing.<sup>3</sup>

Here arises a question whether man still remembers the event of covenant in the eternity. Experiences demonstrate that man does not actually remember that event. In that case, it may be claimed that man would never have forgotten that event, had it really occurred. Syed Mawdūdī responds to this reasoning. He says that if that event remained today fresh in man’s memory, the concept of human life as examination would become meaningless. He maintains that the original covenant is certainly preserved in the sub-conscious mind and intuition of man, which proceeds to conscious state of mind after reminder or due to any other external factor.<sup>4</sup>

Man knows very well without any doubt that he himself is not his creator; that no other human, no matter how powerful he/she might be, is his creator; and that there is SOMEONE other than the creation who has created him as well as the entire universe. Who is then the creator? The Qur’an describes, at three places (31:25; 39:38; 43:9), man’s cognition of God metaphorically in the form of anticipated question and answer. 31:25, for instance, reads: *“If you ask them, who it is that created the heavens and the earth. They will certainly say: “Allah”...”* This anticipated dialogue indicates to the fact that man recognizes the Supreme Being.

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<sup>2</sup> Syed Mawdūdī, *TAFHIM AL-QUR’AN* (Markazi Maktabah Islami, Delhi, 1983), vol. 2, p. 96, note 134.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 96-97.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 97-99.

Likewise, the Qur'an metaphorically refers to the man's innate ability to recognize Allah as the Sole Controller of the universe. 10:31 reads: "*Say: Who is it that provides sustenance from the sky and the earth? And who is it that controls the hearing and the seeing? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead, and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs? They will say: "Allah". Say: "Will you not then be constantly conscious of Him?"*"

### **The Universe as Manifestation of God**

Logically, a design speaks volumes of the nature of its designer; and a system refers to its originator and controller. Similarly, the present universe with all its majestic bodies announces that there is SOMEONE unseen behind it as its Creator and Controller. The Qur'an claims that its verses constitute *āyāt* (signs of the God's power): "*We have sent down to you manifest signs; and none reject them but those who are perverse*" (2:99). The Qur'an in the same way claims that the creations as seen in the sky and on the earth are also *āyāt* (signs of God). The verse 10:6 reads: "*Verily, in the alternation of the night and the day, and in all that Allah has created in the heavens and the earth are signs for those who are conscious of Him*". These two categories of *āyāt* manifest to those who are endowed with discerning power such as scientists, philosophers, psychologists, intellectuals, academicians, and thinkers the clear signs of THE GOD. The Qur'an says that deliberation over its revelation and the entire creation will surely lead to the message that its origin is none other than God: "*Do they not ponder on the Qur'an? Had it been from any other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy*" (4:82). And "*It is Allah who alternates the night and the day: verily, in this phenomenon is lesson for those who have vision*" (24:44).

Albert Einstein is reported to have said in an interview: "I have nothing but awe when I observe the laws of nature. There are not laws without a lawgiver".<sup>5</sup> Studying science is to go deeper into the natural phenomena. As Einstein puts, the process of investigation into the natural

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<sup>5</sup> Hermanns, William, *EINSTEIN AND THE POET IN SEARCH OF COSMIC MAN* (Branden Books, Brookline Village MA, 1983), P. 60.

forces leads the scientists and experts to the recognition of God. It may here be challenged that Einstein denied the concept of God. This is a misreading of Einstein's ideas. He denied God as conceived by society, but he never subscribed to the idea of non-existence of God. The essential difference between Einstein's abstract conception of God and Islamic concept of God is that the former stops at his discovery of God through his study of the nature and the latter goes beyond that abstraction and makes complete introduction to God.

#### **Nomenclature of God**

Different cultures have named the Supreme Being differently. Some call Him God, some Yahweh, some Īshwar, some Yazdān, and Islam Allah. Christian God, Jewish Yahweh, Sanātan Īshwar, and Zorostarianist Yazdan may not withstand intellectual scrutiny as to their genuineness. The reason is very simple. Christian Gospels, Jewish Torah, Sanātan Vedas, and Zoroastrian Avesta, as they are currently available may not be deemed totally free from interpolations, concoctions, and modifications. As for the Qur'an, it is still as pure and original today as it was during the time of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). Its availability in one single version throughout fifteen centuries, and historical continuity of the process of its preservation through memorization, documentation, recitation and implementation bear testimony to the authentic preservation of the Qur'an. Munich University, Germany at the turn of the last century embarked upon a project concerning authenticity of the Qur'an. The research finding of this project is on record. It says that the Qur'an has never undergone any changes of any kind whatsoever; and there is no difference at all between the oldest copy of the Qur'an and the currently used copies of the Qur'an.<sup>6</sup>

If the Qur'an is authentic, its statements must be considered authentic. The Qur'an introduces the Supreme Being as Allah. The opening phrase of the first Qur'anic chapter, *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* makes stunning and heart touching introduction to Allah: "*Al-Ḥamdu li Allah Rabb al-*

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<sup>6</sup> Khan, Israr Ahmad, *Qur'anic Studies: An Introduction* (Zaman Islam Media, Kuala Lumpur, 2000), p. 14.

*‘Ālamīn*” (“*All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the entire universe*”). The root word for Allah is *ilāh* (deity/god), which originally signifies someone with whom relationship could be established, and who could be believed in as the Supreme Being. When the Arabic letters *alif* and *lām* (which means in English “the”) are prefixed to the word *ilāh*, it becomes Allah, “the God”.

The Qur’an also uses many other names for Allah such as *al-Raḥmān*. But these are all His attributive names, denoting His various qualities. It is highly praiseworthy to call Allah by His attributes. The Qur’an says: “*Allah! There is no God but Him, to Him belong the most excellent names (al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā)*” (20:8). The most Excellent names are actually His attributive names, which shall be discussed below under the head “Known Attributes of God”. The Qur’an advises man to supplicate Allah by referring to His excellent names: “*And to Allah belong the most excellent names; so call upon Him with them*” (7:180).

#### **Nature of God’s Entity**

Allah is Only One; He is not two, as in Zoroastrianism, not three, as in Christianity, and not multitude, as in Hinduism. The Qur’an has devoted one short but complete chapter to this issue: “*Say: He is Allah, the Only One; Allah is the Eternal, the Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him*” (112:1-4). Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali elaborates this introduction to Allah further: “The first thing we have to note is that His nature is so sublime, so far beyond our limited perceptions, that the best way in which we can realize Him is to feel that He is a personality, “He”, and not a mere abstract conception of philosophy. He is near us; He cares for us; we owe our existence to Him. Secondly, He is the One and the Only God, the Only One to whom worship is due; all other things or beings that we can think of are His creations and are in no way comparable to Him. Thirdly, He is eternal, without beginning or end, Absolute, not limited by time and place or circumstance, the Reality. Fourthly, we must not think of Him as having a son or a father, for that would be to import animal qualities into our conception of Him. Fifthly, He is not like any other person or thing that we know or can imagine: His



qualities and nature are unique”.<sup>7</sup> He further comments on the last verse in the above Qur’anic statement: “This sums up the whole argument and warns us especially against anthropomorphism, the tendency to conceive of Allah after our own pattern, an insidious tendency that creeps in at all times and among all people”.<sup>8</sup>

Anthropomorphic tendency or pattern has nothing to do with Islam. It is rather alien to Islam. If the concept of God is patterned after human ideas and material perceptions, God no longer deserves to be called God. He is totally unseen, invisible to human eyes. In another verse the Qur’an reiterates this idea of Allah as Unique Being: “*He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing*” (42:11).

One may then wonder why the Qur’an uses both singular and plural terms for Allah, if He is Alone. It is true that the Qur’an uses both singular “I” and “Me” and plural “We” and “Us” for Allah. For example, for the first person in singular form: “*I have not created Jinns and men but to serve Me*” (51:56); and for the first person in plural form: “*We created man from sounding clay, from mud moulded into shape; and Jinn We had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind*” (15:26-27). Generally, two explanations are advanced in this respect. First, the plural “We” and “Us” are to demonstrate majesty of and honour to Allah. It is human style of speech, as it is customary for kings and rulers to refer to themselves with the first person in plural form, we and us. Second, when Allah applies plural “We” and “Us”, it is to actually refer to the entire system comprising angels who are not the partners with Allah but His servants. This approach rather shows the generosity of Allah in which He appreciates the services of His subordinates. Another example may suffice to

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<sup>7</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *THE HOLY QUR’AN: ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE MEANINGS AND COMMENTARY* (King Fahd Holy Qur’an Complex, Madinah, 1410 A.H.), P. 2028.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

bring the idea home. The Qur'an reads: "*O Prophet! Indeed it is We who have sent down the Qur'an to you in a succession of revelations*" (76:23). The term "We" is justified as the process of revelation of the Qur'an to the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) involved Archangel Gabriel and other angels. Allah recognizes contribution of Archangel in the revelation: "*Say: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel—for he brings down revelations to your heart (O Muhammad!) by Allah's will...*" (2:97).

### **Known Attributes of God**

Islam seeks to invite man to submit to Allah: "*O mankind! Submit totally to your Lord who created you and those before you so that you may be conscious of Him*" (2:21). In order to make full submission to Allah man needs to know more about Him; a mere concept of Him as the Only One will not suffice for man to submit to Him. For that purpose the Qur'an has mentioned a number of attributes of Allah. With these attributive names man can really feel the "Personality" of Allah to the extent of necessity. It is never possible for man to imagine various dimensions of God's entity. Imagination enables man to come up with his own sketch of the things that may not necessarily be in consonance with the reality. Likewise, mere independent imagination of God in detail cannot be the substitute of the Reality. That is why Allah Himself has described in the Qur'an as He is.

The Qur'an has used attributive names of Allah in various contexts, particularly two. First, His attributive names serve as a general introduction to Him. For example: "*Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god: Who knows all things both secret and open; He is the Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god—the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace, the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the Proud. Glory to Allah! High is He above the partners they attribute to Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner. To him belong the Most Beautiful Names: whatever is in the heavens and on the earth does declare His Praises and Glory; and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise*" (59:22-24).

In these verses one can count seventeen (17) attributes of Allah; and one may also mark that between these attributes there is no "wa"

(and). What does it signify? This style of portrayal of Allah's attributes stresses the fact that His attributes have the quality of continuity and eternity. It actually denotes that Allah could never be conceived of without all the attributes together; and none of His attributes ever exists in isolation of the other. These are all intrinsically one.

Secondly, whenever Allah prescribes rules for the humanity or issues commands, He mentions some of His attributes. These attributes should not be considered a mere decorative. These are rather very much relevant to the preceding commands and prescriptions. This category of attributive names of Allah can be read almost on all pages of the Qur'an. Few examples may suffice to bring the idea home.

- 1) *“And do not make Allah's (name) an excuse in your oaths against doing good, or acting rightly, or making peace among people: for Allah is **All-Hearing, All-Knowing**. Allah will not call you to account for frivolity in your oaths, but for the intention in your hearts He will call you to account. And He is **Oft-Forgiving, Most Forbearing**. For those who take an oath for abstention from their wives, a waiting for four months is ordained; if they then return, Allah is **Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful**. But if their intention is firm for divorce, behold, Allah is indeed **All-Hearing, All-Knowing**. Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods. And it is not lawful for them to hide what Allah has created in their wombs, if they have faith in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; and men have an edge over them; and Allah is **Exalted in Power, All-Wise**” (2:224-228).*
- 2) *“And Allah makes the Signs crystal clear to you; and Allah is **All-knowing, All-Wise**” (24:18).*
- 3) *“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will ensure greater purity for them: And Allah is indeed **Well-Acquainted** with all that they do” (24:30).*

One could see that in these *āyāt* as quoted above the highlighted and the underlined attributes of Allah are not mere decoration pieces in the statements. In the first quotation (2:224-228) there have been given some regulations concerning marriage and divorce. In all the five *āyāt* there are commands and prescriptions for believers, each of which ends with two attributes of Allah—All-Hearing, All-Knowing; Oft-Forgiving, Most Forbearing; Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful; All-Hearing, All-Knowing; Exalted in Power, All-Wise. Each pair of these attributes is deeply connected with the preceding message. For example, the last pair of attributes—Exalted in Power, All-Wise—signifies that men and women should never have the impression that Allah will never call them to account, if they infringe upon the divorce-related rulings; and that these regulations are based on wisdom of Allah, which if implemented will bring happiness in life.

Attributive names of Allah in the second quotation (24:18)—All-Knowing, All-Wise—convey the message that whatever Allah prescribes for the humanity is extraordinarily beneficial that will certainly lead to peace and development. The reason for that is that Allah's prescriptions are all based on perfect knowledge and perfect wisdom; Allah is never deficient in His knowledge and wisdom; and that man himself is incapable to develop rules for his life that could be free from defects, as his knowledge is limited and defective, and his wisdom is more often than not stained with prejudice and bias. In the third quotation (24:30) the attribute mentioned—Well-Acquainted—is to remind man that Allah is well-aware of their doings while looking at the opposite sex. The moral and then social corruption register their penetration in the hearts and minds of men and women, if they just ignore the divine command of lowering the gaze.

The very objective of attributive names of Allah as mentioned in the Qur'an is to let the man grasp true image and concept of Him. Simply correct idea of Allah is not enough because these names have practical implications on human life. It is noteworthy that man being conscious of Allah in the light of His attributes ensures not merely blissful life in the hereafter but also prosperity and happiness in the present life. Today millions of people are suffering from depression which at times leads to sui-

cide, or at least causes mental and physical diseases. The governments, agencies, organizations, scholars, physicians, experts, researchers, and societies have failed to come up with true solution/s to these mental and physical sufferings. If the man is conscious of God in the light of His attributes, he can easily and successfully overcome his problems. Surveys can prove that those who remain conscious of Allah hardly suffer from any depression, the root cause of major fatal afflictions.

Man should know that the ultimate source of everything, wealth, health, honour, life, satisfaction of needs, happiness, cure for diseases, solution to problems. Attributive names of Allah invite man to have true conception of Allah and interact with Him in the most appropriate manner. Allah is Ever-Living; and He is not inactive, as 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> century Western Rationalistic Religio-Philosophical Movement suggests that God after act of creation withdrew and refrained from interfering in the processes of natural and human affairs has become inactive (*Deus Otiosus*).<sup>9</sup> The Qur'an declares that Allah every moment interacts with His creation: "*All who are in the heavens and the earth ask Him for every need. Each and every day it is He alone who executes every affair in the universe*". (55:29).

#### **God's Demands of Man (Society Free from Corruption)**

Allah seeks to see man live in peace, which necessitates the earth to be free from all kinds of chaos and mischief. He says: "*Do good as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek mischief in the land: verily, Allah does not love those who do mischief*" (28:77). It is mischief (*fasād*) that causes peace to disappear from human life, individual as well social. It is not simply the abstract instruction of Allah for man to keep away from creating mischief on earth He also suggests positive principles to be applied in daily life of man. The Qur'an outlines the principle of social interaction: "*Submit to Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and interact excellently (iḥsān) with parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the needy, neighbours who are of kin, neighbours who are strangers, the companion*

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<sup>9</sup> Merriam Webster's Encyclopaedia of World Religions, p. 288, under the heading "Deus Otiosus".

by your side, the wayfarer, and your subordinates: Allah indeed does not love the arrogant, the vainglorious” (4:36). *Ihsān* (excellence) is an underlying principle in one’s interaction with others. It has been made clear in the end of above *āyah* that arrogance and vainglory do not allow application of excellence in behaviour. Arrogance and excellence are both antonym to each other.

Allah wants His servants to uphold justice: “Allah does command you to return the trusts to the rightful owners; and when you judge between people, judge with justice: verily, how excellent is the teaching He gives you! Allah is indeed All-Hearing, All-Seeing” (4:58).

Allah forbids homicide and declares it the most heinous crime (after *shirk*): “On that account, We ordained for the children of Israel that if anyone killed a person—unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land—it would be as if he killed the entire humanity; and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of whole of mankind...” (5:32).

The Last Prophet (s.a.w.) says: “The men are of two categories: (1) man who is virtuous and pious is honourable in the eyes of Allah, and (2) man who is wicked and criminal is worthless in the eyes of Allah”.<sup>10</sup> It is very clear from here that Allah loves those who fall in the first category, that is, who are virtuous and pious. Allah’s demand of man is that he should be virtuous and pious in his life. Allah also condemns those who are wicked and criminals. The above tradition of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) serves as a reminder to the people that wickedness and criminality are undesirable traits which cause displeasure of Allah. Islamic concept of *khilāfah* as referred to in the Qur’anic story of creation of Adam<sup>11</sup> signifies that Man is in-charge of the earth to construct and make it worthwhile for the society.

### Relationship between Man and God

<sup>10</sup> Al-Tirmidhī, Muhammad bin ‘Īsā, *SUNAN* (Dar Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, Beirut, 1995), vol. 5, kitāb Tafsīr al-Qur’an, p. 389, Ḥadīth No. 3273 under the interpretation of *Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt* (49).

<sup>11</sup> 2:30.

Relationship entails communication. The more the communication the stronger the relationship; the less the communication the weaker the relationship; and absence of communication causes relationship to collapse. If this is a basic principle of relationship between man and man, it is also applicable to the relationship between Man and God. Man communicates to God through invocation, prayer, prostration, remembrance, meditation, and praise. But how does God communicate to man? His mode of communication to man is unlike that between man and man. His communication to man is of two kinds: (1) He has already communicated to the entire humanity through His revelations to His Apostles in which He explained how man could please Him and what might cause His displeasure; and (2) He still every moment communicates to each and every single human on the earth concerning his/her problems and needs whatsoever.

As for the first category of communication of Allah to man, it was in the name of Torah, Gospel, and most probably Vedas, but now it is the Qur'an revealed to the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). The Qur'an claims: "*We have indeed revealed to you a Book (the Qur'an) in which is your description. Do you not then apply your reason?*" (21:10). The continuous communication of Allah to man is in the form of His response to man's invocation to Him. The Qur'an stresses: "*And when My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed very close to them: I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calls on Me...*" (2:186).

Man has a very special kind of close relationship with Allah, with the exclusion of other creations. The very essence of his life carries some element of Allah's own Spirit. It is the inclusion of this Divine-Spirit that makes man rise above animal. It seems that intellectual power of man is the representative of that extraordinarily superior link between man and Allah. The Qur'an has reiterated three times this fact (15:29; 32:9; 38:72). The verses 15:29 and 38:72 are exactly similar: "*When I fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit (I then addressed angels), bow down before him*". The verse 32:9 refers to the stages of creation of man: "*He then fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him of*

*His Spirit*". Thus man is not merely Allah's creation but also special one equipped with intellectual faculty.

It is this reason that man is in a position to call Him for help or praise Him anytime and anywhere without any medium. Yes, it is true that man to man contact at times requires some medium through whom he could communicate to the person concerned. But man does not need anyone else in his contact with Allah, as He is as close to him as his jugular vein: "*And We indeed created man, and We know what his-self whispers to him: for We are nearer to him than his jugular vein*" (50:16). One of the attributes of Allah is *Samī'* (All-Hearing). It has occurred in Qur'an forty seven (47) times. This form of word in Arabic denotes perfection. It means Allah's hearing is perfect; and there is no defect therein at all. Most of the time the word *Samī'* is accompanied by another attribute of Allah, i.e. *'alīm* (All-Knowing). The message given through these two attributes is that Allah hears and knows all that man communicates to Him either secretly or openly.

One may ask here a question why man suffers from various curable and also incurable problems, particularly economic, social, mental, and physical, if he is very special to Allah. The Qur'an makes it very clear that all that happens on the earth concerning human life, whether happiness or sorrow, health or ailment, poverty or prosperity is due to the fact that man is undergoing period of examination in which he has to prove his worth. Several verses announce that particular pattern of life.

- 1) "*He alone is the One Who has made you successors in the land, and He has raised some of you above others by degrees, to test you in all that He has given you. Indeed your Lord is swift in punishment. Yet, indeed, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful*". (6:165)
- 2) "*We have indeed made all that is on the earth as its adornment only to test them to see which of them is best in deed*". (18:7)
- 3) "*He is the One Who created death and life to test you to see which of you is best in deeds*". (67:2)

In one of the Prophetic traditions it is mentioned that Allah identifies Himself with those who are unfortunate. On the Day of Judgment Allah will address someone, attracting his attention to various occasions



when He himself was hungry, thirsty, and sick but he did not care for Him. Thereupon the person will express his astonishment over Allah Himself having been hungry and thirsty as He was the source of all that sustains. Allah will then explain that certain particular person with hunger, thirst and illness on certain occasions approached him but he despite his ability as rich to fulfil his needs ignored; had you fed the hungry, quenched the thirst of the thirsty, and visited the sick, you would have deserved reward from Him.<sup>12</sup> This future dialogue elaborates that the wealth of the wealthy and poverty of the poor are both conditions of test. This test is surely for man to be rewarded, if he emerged victorious in the test, or to be punished, if he miserably failed in the test.

### Conclusion

Islamic term for God is Allah. He is One and the Only One. He does not have any partner. In the entire universe there are two orders, the Creator and the creation. Allah is the Creator and the rest constitutes creation. Allah is Unseen. He has countless of eternal attributes. Some of them have been mentioned in the Qur'an: the Just, the Generous, the Kind, Most Merciful, All-Knowing, All-Wise, All-Seeing, All-Hearing, All-Powerful etc. He has forbidden all that leads to chaos, corruption, and mischief. Cognition and recognition of God are embedded in human nature. The entire universe and the human existence manifest that there is God, Allah Who controls them every moment. He is the source of peace and loves to see peace to prevail in human life. The differences in human conditions are not because Allah is, God forbid, unjust, but because man has been placed by Allah in a situation of test. The victorious in the test deserve the lofty reward from Allah, and the unsuccessful might be subjected to grievous suffering. Conscious relationship of man with Allah has always proved, still proves, and will continue proving boon for the entire humanity.

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<sup>12</sup> Muslim bin al-Ḥajjāj, *ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM MA' SHARH LI AL-NAWAWĪ* (Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1997), vol. 8, kitāb al-Birr wa al-Ṣilah wa al-Ādāb, Section: Fadhl 'Iyādah al-Marīd, P. 340, Ḥadīth No. 6232.