

What do we believe about God?
(Including some of His Divine Names)

1. His Oneness, Exalted be He

“And God has said: Take not two gods. He is only one God: So, Me alone should you fear.

And whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His, and to Him is obedience due always. Will you then fear other than God?

And whatever good you have, it is from God; then, when distress afflicts you, to Him do you cry for aid. Yet when He removes the evil from you, lo! Some of you ascribe partners to your Lord.”

(Qur’an 16:51-53)

2. God is not an originated Being

There is nothing like Him – He is not like anything we can see

“Say: ‘He is God, the One and Only (*Ahad*), He on Whom all depend (*Al-Samad*). He has no offspring, nor is He born from anything. And there is none like Him.”

(Qur’an 112: 1-4)

“[He is] Creator of the heavens and the earth. He has made for you from yourselves, mates, and among the cattle, mates; He multiplies you thereby. **There is nothing like unto Him**, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.”

(Qur’an 42:11)

That is why God cannot become a man – then He would look like His creation – and nothing is like Him. He is *Al Badee’* – the Unique - in His being, as well as Unique in how He does things.

3. The Ever-Living, His Eternity and Permanence

“God! There is no god but He,-the Living (*Al Hayy*), the Self-subsisting, Eternal (*Al Qayyum*). No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth.” (Qur’an 2: 255)

God, exalted be He says:

“He is the First (*Al-Awwal*) and the Last (*Al Aakhir*) the Evident (*Al Dhaahir*) and the Hidden (*Al Baatin*): and He has full knowledge of all things.”

(Qur’an 57:3)

Scholars explain that as God is Eternal, He has always remained as He is – He does not change. Imam Tahawi explains:

He has existed with His timeless Attributes before creation, which added nothing to His essence that was not already among His Attributes. As His Attributes were before creation, so will they continue forever.

God is free of needs, so He did not need the Creation in order to be the Creator. He did not need sinners, in order to be the Most Forgiving. These attributes have always been with Him – who He is.

4. God is Majestic (*Al Jaleel*) and Self-Sufficient (*Al Ghani*)

“O mankind! It is you that have need of God: but God is the One Free of all wants (*Al Ghani*), worthy of all praise (*Al Hameed*).” (Qur’an 35:15)

“And only the presence of your Lord will remain, full of Majesty and Splendour (*Dhul Jalaali wal Ikram*)”. (Qur’an 55:27)

He is *Al Jaleel*, the Majestic. It is part of God’s majesty that many things are not compatible with His greatness.

It is not becoming His majesty that He should become needy, to depend on another, e.g. to become a son or a child; that He should have partners or equals.

It is not consistent with His majesty that He should limit Himself by appearing as a created thing, such as a human, that has so many needs. For instance, if He were to stand on the ground, He would depend on the ground to stand. It is not keeping with his majesty that He should depend on the ground.

It is not compatible with His majesty that he should become weak.

Furthermore, some things sound reasonable, but when you think deeper, you realise they are a logical fallacy – a combination of words that make no sense, such as a square circle. So how can the First, the Original Creator become a created thing, something that is born?

God is *Al Hameed* – the Ever-Praised. He has no need of our charity, no need of our worship. He is already praised. Even when there was no creation, he was the Praiseworthy; but after creation, the rest of the universe praises and worships Him anyway – in their own particular ways. It is us that need the tranquillity and blessings that come from charity and remembrance of God.

“And the stars and the trees-both (alike) bow in adoration.” (Qur’an 55:6)

“Do you not see that to God bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals; and a great number among mankind?” (Qur’an 22:18)

“Those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of God- truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace.” (Qur’an 13:28)

“Take from their wealth O Prophet charity to purify and bless them, and pray for them—surely your prayer is a source of comfort for them. And God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.” (Qur’an 9:103)

“The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allāh] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving.”
(Qur’an 17:44)

5. His Vastness (*Al Waasi*) and Exaltedness (*Al A'laa*)

“Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High (*Al A'laa*).” (Qur’an 87:1)

And:

“His throne extends over the heavens and the Earth, and He is never weary of preserving them.” (Qur’an 2:255)

During the final sermon, The Prophet (S) was asking for witnesses to what he had said:

“Have I not conveyed the message?” He asked a third time; and they said “Yes!”

Each time, he said: “O God, bear witness!” at the same time pointing up to the sky and then at the people.

(Al-Bukhari, Muslim)

So God is ‘above’ His creation, i.e. beyond it. It feels natural to point upward, although if a person in Britain and another in Australia, both point up, they are actually pointing in opposite directions!

God created everything, so He cannot be part of His creation; He is too vast to be limited by the confines of what He has created. So, He isn’t inside His creation: He cannot be at a point in space.

He created everything including time, so He is actually outside everything, including time. He isn’t at a point in time.

He is *Al Awwal*, the First and *Al Aakhir*, the Last, He created the beginning and end of time, so to God, all times are the same. To Him, yesterday, today, and tomorrow are basically the same. It is because of this that in the Qur’an, He uses past tense verbs to talk about future events because, to Him, tenses have no meaning.

Scholars explain that God cannot be limited by a place, and He does not move as that would imply a location in space, within His creation, and that something is behind Him and in front of Him, that He has dimensions. He is too vast for that!

Imam Fakhruddin Ibn `Asakir said:

“God existed before the creation. He does not have a before or an after, an above or a below, a right or a left, an ahead or a behind, a whole or a part.”

“God exists without a place. He created the universe and willed for the existence of time. He is not bound by time or designated with place.”

As well as the Most Vast *Al Waasi`*, He is also the Most Tremendous *Al `Adheem*, meaning that He is awe-inspiring and too great to imagine. The names and attributes we have been given as just there to give us a small insight into who He is, to the limits of what our minds can grasp. We know that God has many, many more names and qualities that other creations know Him by, and yet other names that are only known to Him.

6. God is the Creator (*Al Khaliq*), the Originator (*Al Mubdi`*) and Returner (*Al Mu`eed*)

“All it takes, when He wills something `to be`, is simply to say to it: “Be!” And it is!” (Qur’an 36:82)

“Indeed, it is He who originates [creation] and repeats.” (Qur’an 85:13)

It might seem like millions of years to us, but for God, He creates things in a time that seems like an instant to Him.

Also, He didn’t just create the big bang, and leave the universe to just get on with it. He keeps it running, turning things over, again and again.

We know that there are cycles, the carbon cycle, the nitrogen cycle, the water cycle, the life cycle, etc. Even the matter in solar systems gets recycled so the iron in our planets actually came from far-off stars as they exploded into supernovas, billions of years ago.

7. His Omniscience - Knowledge

“He knows what is in the heavens and on earth; and He knows what you conceal and what you reveal: yea, God knows well the (secrets) of (all) hearts.” (Qur’an 64:4)

God (SWT) says, in the course of narrating the advice given by Luqman to his son:

“O my son!” (said Luqman), ‘If there be (but) the weight of a mustard-seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, God will bring it forth: for God understands the finest mysteries (*Al Latif*), (and) is well-acquainted (with them) (*Khabeer*).” (Qur’an 31:16)

Not only is God aware of the finest details of His creation, but He was also aware of all the actions of every bit of creation before the creation came into existence. God does not learn, He already knows.

8. The Power and Will of God

God is *Al Qadir*, the Omnipotent, the Most Capable, the Determiner, He Measures Out plans for everything, He is the Accomplisher of all He Intends. So, He can do anything and does everything that He intends. He is *Malik ul Mulk* – ultimate Master of the Dominion.

“Whatever is in the heavens and on earth, declares the Praises and Glory of God: to Him belongs dominion, and to Him belongs praise: and He has power over all things.” (Qur’an 85:16)

Every colossal undertaking is easy for Him. He does not tire:

“We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in six days (stages), nor did any sense of weariness touch Us.” (Qur’an 50:38)

“Doer of whatever He wills.” (Qur’an 85:16)

Although individuals have a degree of free will, the ultimate control is with God. People have an inbuilt sense of right and wrong and He can withhold guidance from those with stubborn hearts, out of His justice, or open paths for those who are sincere, out of His mercy. So, in the end, everything that happens is determined, within God’s control.

“As for those who persist in disbelief, it is the same whether you warn them or not—they will never believe. God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and their sight is covered. They will suffer a tremendous punishment.” (Qur’an 2:6-7)

“If God had willed, He would have made you one community; but He leads astray whom He will, and guides whom He will; and you will surely be questioned about the things you did.” (Qur’an 16:93)

And although each person can decide to do or not do something, as God controls everything else, no one has power to change His greater plan.

“And remember, O Prophet, when the disbelievers conspired to capture, kill, or exile you. They planned, but God also planned. And God is the best of planners.” (Qur’an 8:30)

Imam Tahawi says:

He created the creation with His knowledge. He decreed destinies for them. He set for them life spans. Nothing was hidden from Him before He created them. He knew what they would do before He created them.

9. His Love, Nearness, Mercy and Forgiveness

He is *Al-Rahman*, meaning that He created everything out of love and kept pouring out love until we have the universe as it is today, with a tiny planet in it, that is just the right distance from the sun and with just the right atmosphere that life can be supported, in all its beauty and splendour and the marvel of human beings with their speech and intelligence and opportunity for guidance.

“*Al-Rahman* (The Most Beneficent). It is He Who has taught the Qur'an. He has created man: He has taught him speech (and intelligence). The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed; And the herbs and the trees - both (alike) prostrate in adoration. And He raised the heavens high and set up everything in balance, (He explains this to you) that you should not violate the (law of) harmony and balance.” (Qur’an 55:1-8)

Further God shows His love, by being ever close to us, ever-ready to listen to us.

“And He is the Most-Forgiving (*Al Ghafoor*), Most-Loving (*Al Wadood*).” (Qur’an 85:14)

“And indeed We have created man, and We know whatever thoughts his inner self develops, and We are closer to him than (his) jugular vein.” (Qur’an 50:16)

“When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close to them (*Qareeb*): I listen to the prayer of every (humble) caller when he calls Me: Let them also, listen to My call and believe in Me, that they may be led to the right way.” (Qur’an 2:166)

For us, God always feels close by. Even though we know He is outside time and space. Because He listens and cares and responds to our prayers and requests.

His names include *Al-Samee'* the all Hearing, *Al Mujeeb* – The Most Responsive
And *Al Shakoor* - the Most Grateful, and *Al Lateef* – Aware of the most Subtle things

God does not need others to tell Him what is happening. He does not need us to pray to intermediaries, so that they can ask on our behalf. He is near to us; He wants to hear from us directly and He is ready to respond. He is even grateful when we remember Him and talk to Him!

He wants us to turn back to Him, beseech Him, asking Him alone for forgiveness, because only He can respond, and He does, because He loves us!

“That is because God is the Truth (*Al Haqq*), and that which they call upon other than Him is falsehood, and because God is the Most High (*Al ‘Aliyy*), the Grand (*Al Kabeer*).” (Qur’an 31:30)

“Say (on My behalf), “O My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God’s mercy. Surely, God will forgive all sins. Surely, He is the One who is the Most-Forgiving (*Al Ghafoor*), the Most-Merciful (*Al Raheem*).” (Qur’an 39:53)

10. God’s wisdom and fairness

God is *Al-Barr*, the Great Benefactor, The Ultimately Good, the Source of all Goodness, the Most Kind.

“God desires ease for you; He does not wish difficulty for you.” (Qur’an 2:185)

“Is God not the wisest and fairest of judges?” – (Qur’an 95:8)

We see what people do, but we don’t understand the complexities of each situation, or the background that drives people towards their actions. But God is aware of all these fine details. So, even when God judges it will be more fair, but also, more merciful than any human could imagine.

God is *Al Hakeem* (the Most Wise). God’s greater plan is an expression of His wisdom, even if we cannot always understand it, we can hope and we believe that some good will eventually come from everything, even when it seems bad to us at the time.

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and crops, but give good news to the patient. Who, when disaster strikes them, say: “Truly! To God we belong and truly, to Him we shall return. Such are they on whom are blessings from their Lord, and mercy. Such are the rightly guided.” (Qur’an 2:155-157)

Even when things don’t seem fair, we know that life is made of ups and downs and that we are all inching towards our meeting with God, and that He will even things out in the next life.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “The happiest man in the world among the people of Hell, on the Day of Judgment will be dipped in the Fire once. Then he will be asked, “Son of Adam, did you ever see any good? Did you ever experience any blessing?” He will say, “No, by God, my Lord!””

Then, the most miserable person in the world among the people of Paradise, on the Day of Resurrection to be dipped into Paradise. Then he will be asked, “O son of Adam, did you see any hardship? Did you have any distress? He will say: No, by God, my Lord! I did not once see hardship or distress.” (Sahih Muslim)

Case discussion

1. Your friend says, "Believing in God doesn't make sense. If God can do anything, why can't He make a stone that's too heavy for Him to lift? So He can't do everything and still be all-powerful, right?"

2. You are discussing your beliefs with a friend from another religion. They say, "God is all-powerful, He can do anything. So we believe that he became a man, so that people could know Him better and follow His example." How would you respond?

3. Your friend's religion believes in many gods. You ask your friend if they believe in one God. They check and come back to you saying, "We believe in many gods but ultimately there is only One God. The other gods are just different ways that the One God expresses Himself. Each god performs certain functions of God, as angels do in Muslim beliefs. By having gods that we can see and turn to, it makes it easier for us to pray to them, still knowing that in the end, we are praying to the One God.

What would you say?

Suggested responses

Question 1

The question is not even logical. Like asking if God can create a square circle.

[4] Becoming weak or dependent is not consistent with God's majesty.

Question 2

[2] God cannot have a physical likeness.

[4] Being dependent is not consistent with God's majesty. Humans are dependent in multiple ways – for food, for their mothers, for sleep, for the need to visit the bathroom, for the ground, to stand upon, air to breathe.

[9] God does not need a visual representation in order for people to pray to Him or for their prayers to be answered – He is always near and listening and responsive.

God is fair and just and loving and forgiving, without the need for any intercessor or for another individual to die for our sins.

Question 3

Important not to insult other beliefs or gods.

All the above points hold true in this discussion.

Also, if there were many gods with independent will, they would disagree with one another, sometimes even fight one another. This is what is told in the stories of many pagan religions. They cannot each be the ultimately powerful. Also most such religions make the gods out as having limits in their knowledge, so they can't be the One, All-Knowing God.

Had there been within the heavens and earth gods besides God, they both would have been ruined. So exalted is God, Lord of the Throne, above what they describe. (Qur'an 21:22)

Invite with wisdom

Most importantly, such discussions should not turn into arguments. The Qur'an teaches us to not insult: in case people get upset and return with an insult against God.

And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides God, lest exceeding the limits they should abuse God out of ignorance. Thus have We made fair seeming to every people their deeds; then to their Lord shall be their return, so He will inform them of what they did. (Qur'an 6:108)

We are also advised to start with finding commonality. Therefore, if the friend says they believe in one God, then agree and just share your beliefs about what qualities One God must have, e.g., incomparable, with no equals or likenesses, not dependent on anything, all-powerful, all-knowing, as the Creator, He is not part of His creation, i.e., outside of time and space and dimensions.

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Qur'an 3:64)