

Making Sense of Allah

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SAFA COMMUNITY CENTER
DAWAH SERIES



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In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

All praise is due to Allah. We praise him, we seek His help, we seek His forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and our evil deeds. Whoever Allah guides, there is none to misguide him. Whoever Allah leads astray, there is none to guide him. I testify there is no God but Allah alone, without any partners, and that Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is His servant and His messenger.

Allah Almighty said, **“O you who have faith, fear Allah as it is His right to be feared and do not die unless you are Muslims,” (3:102)**

And Allah Almighty said, **“Fear Allah, from whom you ask each other, and in your family ties, for Allah is ever watchful over you,” (4:1)**

And Allah Almighty said, **“Fear Allah and speak words as befitting. He will amend your deeds for you and forgive your sins. Whoever obeys Allah and His messenger has achieved a great triumph.” (33:70-71)**

The truest word is the Book of Allah and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The most evil matters are those that are newly invented, for every newly invented matter is an innovation. Every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Hellfire.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يَضِلَّ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ
وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

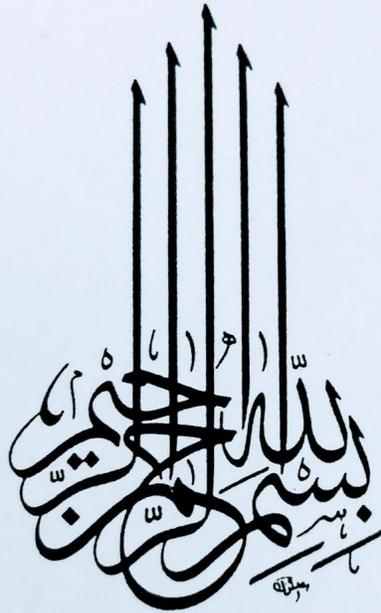
قال الله تعالى يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

وقال الله وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

وقال الله اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا

إِنَّ أَصْدَقَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ وَأَحْسَنُ الْهَدْيِ هَدْيُ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَشَرُّ الْأُمُورِ مُحَدَّثَاتُهَا وَكُلُّ مُحَدَّثَةٍ بِدْعَةٌ وَكُلُّ بِدْعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ
وَكُلُّ ضَلَالَةٍ فِي النَّارِ

أَمَّا بَعْدُ ...



In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Making Sense of Allah

Concept of God

The Natural State

Creation of the Universe

The Designed Universe

The God Conclusion

Without Any Doubt God's name in Arabic, 'Allah,' occurs in the Qur'an 2698 times

Some people refuse to accept that the question of God is even important, while others maintain it is central to every moment of their existence. Some doubt if God exists. Others are as sure of God's existence as they are of their own existence.

Why does it even matter?

There are so many reasons why people hold back from belief in God.

If you reflect deeply about your own life and mortality, the issue of God's existence is immediately important. That is not to say that someone should believe in God simply because they are scared of death; rather it makes knowing the answer to the question of whether God truly exists more urgent. If there is a God then we need to take notice and understand what we are created for. Everything that we as humans do has a purpose. Likewise, the parts of our bodies have certain purposes. Our eyes are to see, our ears to hear, our hearts exist to pump blood. So it makes sense that we too are created for a purpose.

Did you think that We had created you in play (without any purpose), and that you would not be brought back to Us?

The Qur'an, Chapter 23, Verse 11

Concept of God

:Once we have the answer to that, we go another step to “what created that created thing which created that created thing...” and so on. We could go on with this ‘step up’ of creators indefinitely. This is something called the ‘infinite regress of causes’. It keeps asking us to peel back the layers at every stage with “and then?” “and then?” and “and then?” as our answer, no matter how many times it was answered.

The universe—which is a created thing—could not, by necessity, be created by something that was itself created, ad infinitum. Another way of thinking about this is illustrated in the following example. Imagine you want to walk into an office building.

The security guard says you can’t enter as he needs to get permission from his manager, the manager says he needs to get permission from his wife, the wife says she needs to check with her cousin and so on forever, you will never enter the building in that case. There has to be someone that gives you permission to enter without depending on anyone else. In other words there has to be a first cause which is uncaused. Likewise the universe must have had a first cause.

**Say, ‘He is God the One, God the Eternal.
He begot not nor was He begotten.
No one is comparable to Him.
The Qur’an, Chapter 112, Verses 1 to 4**

The Natural State

The religion of Islam teaches that every human being already has a type of essential and instinctive knowledge of God deep within themselves, and that the external world can bury that insight or grow it.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) explained that each child is born in a natural state; however, it is parenting and social effects that spoil it.

The Qur’an invites to uncover the belief in God by providing triggers for reflection, by presenting ‘signs’ and inviting critical engagement of the mind and heart.

And your god is one God. There is no deity [worthy of worship] except Him, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful. Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby

to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason. The Qur'an, Chapter 2 Verses 163 to 164

It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favouring wind, a storm arrives: waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape. Then they pray to God, professing sincere devotion to Him, 'If You save us from this we shall be truly thankful.' Yet no sooner does He save them than, back on land, they behave outrageously against all that is right. People! Your outrageous behaviour only works against yourselves. Take your little enjoyment in this present life; in the end you will return to Us and We shall confront you with everything you have done.

The Qur'an, Chapter 10, Verses 22 to 23

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, those who believe and do righteous deeds: joy awaits these, and their final homecoming will be excellent. The Qur'an, Chapter 13, Verses 28 to 29

Creation of the Universe

Within the Qur'an, God addresses the question of belief directly to us. Through a series of questions appealing to our rational thought, we are asked to ponder on the origins of our lives; not as scientists or philosophers (though they are, of course, welcome also!), but as people who have faculties of reason and critical thinking. To engage us intellectually, God presents a number of reasonable explanations for how everything came into existence:

Or were they created by nothing? Or were they the creators [of themselves]? Or did they create the heavens and Earth? Rather, they are not certain. The Qur'an, Chapter 52, Verses 35 to 36

Each of these possible explanations can be broken down into the following options:

- We were created by nothing;
- We are self-created;
- We are created by something self-created;
- We are created by something uncreated.

Although these explanations refer to the human being, they can also be applied to anything that began to exist, or anything that emerged. The universe was not always in existence, it once began to exist. There are many arguments to support this notion. For instance there is philosophical, mathematical and empirical evidence to support the universe once having a beginning. It is not in the scope of this booklet to go into detail about proving the beginning of the universe; however, you will find the following reference useful.² Since the universe had a beginning, the possible explanations mentioned above can be adapted into the following options:

- The universe was created by nothing;
- The universe was self-created;
- The universe was created by something created;
- The universe was created by something uncreated.

The universe was created by nothing

This is the first option. To define our terms, “nothing” is the absence of all things—be that matter, energy, material or non-material objects or any causal condition. To look at the universe and ourselves as something that came to be from no potential, no matter, nothing at all—is quite a tricky idea to wrap our heads around. Basic logic would dictate that from nothing, nothing comes. From something, something comes. Can something arise when there were no causal conditions to bring it into being? The mere suggestion of it borders on the absurd, let alone holding it as a belief. This would be akin to saying that anything can happen with no causal condition preceding it. A building could randomly disappear and we would think nothing of it; a bunch of rabbits could appear in your garden and you would think it completely reasonable to just assume that they just popped into existence. It is not a scenario any one of us would accept as logical. Some might argue: if something cannot come from nothing, then how did God create from nothing?

Even though Islamic scholars refer to God creating from nothing, this act of creation means that there was no material stuff. However, it does not assume that there were no causal conditions or potential. God’s will and power were the causal conditions to bring the universe into existence.

The universe was self-created

To 'self-create' means that the universe did not exist before it emerged. How can something create itself when it was once not even in existence? Would a woman be capable of giving birth to her own self?

It also stands to reason, if something once did not exist, could it have the power to create anything, let alone itself? This is why the attribute of God as "The Eternal" (and therefore uncreated) becomes so important to consider.

The universe was created by something created

Once we have the answer to that, we go another step to "what created that created thing which created that created thing..." and so on. We could go on with this 'step up' of creators indefinitely. This is something called the 'infinite regress of causes'. It keeps asking us to peel back the layers at every stage with "and then?" "and then?" and "and then?" as our answer, no matter how many times it was answered. The Universe—which is a created thing—could not, by necessity, be created by something that was itself created, ad infinitum. Another way of thinking about this is illustrated in the following example. Imagine you want to walk into an office building. The security guard says you can't enter as he needs to get permission from his manager, the manager says he needs to get permission from his wife, the wife says she needs to check with her cousin and so on forever, you will never enter the building in that case. There has to be someone that gives you permission to enter without depending on anyone else. In other words there has to be a first cause which is uncaused. Likewise the universe must have had a first cause.

The universe was created by something uncreated

By a process of elimination, we come to the final option: the universe was created by something uncreated. Considering the previous option (that there cannot be an endless chain of temporary causes) then we conclude rationally that the beginning of existence started with something independent and uncreated itself. If finite things exist, then they came to be by something which always existed. As one of His most defining attributes, God tells us that He is not created, nor is He similar to His creation in any way. He is "The First" with no beginning and "The Last" without end, as well as being "The Eternal". Therefore the question 'who created God?' is nonsensical, because it is like saying 'who created the uncreated creator?'

He is the First and the Last; the Outer and the Inner; He has knowledge of all things. The Qur'an, Chapter 57, Verse 3

The Designed Universe

In the Qur'an, God asks you to look outwards as well as look inwards.

All of the physical phenomena we observe around us (from celestial objects, humans, animals, vegetation, alternation of night and day) are referenced as proof of divine precision in the Qur'an. God focuses particularly on the balance and harmony in which all things have been created:

**It is the Lord of Mercy who taught the Qur'an. He created man and taught him to communicate. The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses; the plants and the trees submit to His designs; He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance: weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance. He set down the Earth for His creatures, with its fruits, its palm trees with sheathed clusters, its husked grain, its fragrant plants. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?
The Qur'an, Chapter 55, Verses 1 to 13**

We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.

The Qur'an, Chapter 41, Verse 5

The God Conclusion

Since God has created everything, He continually sustains the entire cosmos and provides for us out of His bounty. The Qur'an continually repeats this concept in various ways. This, in turn, evokes a sense of gratitude and awe in the heart of the listener or reader:

It was He who created all that is on the Earth for you.

The Qur'an, Chapter 2, Verse 29

God is far above the partners they set up alongside Him! How can they set up with Him these partners that create nothing and are themselves created? The Qur'an, Chapter 7, Verses 190 to 191

O mankind, remember God's grace towards you. Is there any creator other than God to give you sustenance from the heavens and earth? There is no god but Him. How can you be so deluded?

The Qur'an, Chapter 35, Verse 3

But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient.

The Qur'an, Chapter 96, Verses 6 to 7

Belief in God allows us to explore answers that make sense rationally as well as intuitively. This is because convincing answers to these questions can only reasonably come from the Creator of all things whose wisdom, insight and knowledge encompasses what ours never can.

The life of this world is like this: rain that We send down from the sky is absorbed by the plants of the earth, from which humans and animals eat. But when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, and adorns itself, and its people think they have power over it, then the fate We commanded comes to it, by night or by day, and We reduce it to stubble, as if it had not flourished just the day before. This is the way We explain the revelations for those who reflect. But God invites [everyone] to the Home of Peace, and guides whoever He will to a straight path. Those who did well will have the best reward and more besides. Neither darkness nor shame will cover their faces: these are the companions in Paradise, and there they will remain. As for those who did evil, each evil deed will be required by its equal and humiliation will cover them – no one will protect them against God – as though their faces were covered with veils cut from the darkness of the night. These are the inmates of the Fire, and there they shall remain.**The Qur'an, Chapter 10, Verses 24 to 27**

Accounts of Deeds

Sahih Muslim

Chapter 54 : WOULD (PEOPLE) BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEEDS COMMITTED DURING THE STATE OF IGNORANCE?

Book 1, Number 0217:

It is narrated on the authority of Abdullah b. Mas'ud that some people said to the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him): Messenger of Allah, would we be held responsible for our deeds committed in the state of ignorance (before embracing Islam)? Upon his he (the Holy Prophet) remarked: He who amongst you performed good deeds in Islam , He would not be held responsible for them (misdeeds which he committed in ignorance) and he who committed evil (even after embracing Islam) would be held responsible or his misdeeds that he committed in the state of ignorance as well as in that of Islam.

Book 1, Number 0218:

It is narrated on the authority of Abdullah b. Mas'ud: We once said: Messenger of Allah, would we be held responsible for our deeds committed in the state of ignorance? He (the Holy Prophet) observed: He who did good deeds in Islam would not be held responsible for what he did in the state of ignorance, but he who committed evil (after having come within the fold of Islam) would be held responsible for his previous and later deeds.

Book 1, Number 0219:

This hadith has been transmitted by Minjab b. al-Harith Tamimi with the same chain of transmitters.

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