

Islam—Part Two

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Beliefs of the Muslims—Continued

God as Absolute Ruler

In the words of the *Qur'an*,

God—there is no god but He—the Living, The Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things In the heavens and on the earth. Who is there that can intercede in His presence except As He permitteth? He knoweth What [appears to His creatures As] Before or After Or Behind them. Nor shall they compass Aught His knowledge Except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend Over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them For He is Most High, The Supreme (in glory). [sura 2:255]

God is self-sustaining and does not need anything but everything needs him. This attribute is known as aseity, or self-existence. God is The Mighty and The Almighty He is The Willer of existing things and the things which will exist; and nothing happens apart from his will. He is the Knower of all that can be known. His knowledge encompasses the whole universe which he has created and he alone sustains. God is completely sovereign over all his creation.

Many of God's ninety-nine Islamic names speak of his sovereignty. He is:

- *Al-Adl*, the Just, whose word is perfect in veracity and justice (6:115);
- *Al-Ali*, the High One, he who is high and mighty (2:225-26);
- *Al-Aziz*, the Sublime, mighty in his sublime sovereignty (59:23);
- *Al-Badi*, the Contriver, who contrived the whole art of creation (2:117);
- *Al-Hakim*, the Judge, who gives judgment among his servants (40:48-51);
- *Al-Hasib*, the Accounter, who is sufficient as a reckoner (4:6-7);
- *Al-Jabbar*, the Mighty One, whose might and power are absolute (59:23);
- *Al-Jalil*, the Majestic, mighty and majestic is he;
- *Al-Jami*, the Gatherer, who gathers all men to an appointed day (3:9);
- *Al-Malik*, the King, who is King of kings (59:23);
- *Al-Muizz*, the Honorer, who honors or abases whom he will (3:26);
- *Al-Muntaqim*, the Avenger, who wreaks vengeance on sinners and succors the believers (30:47);
- *Al-Muqsit*, the Observer of Justice, who will set up the balances with justice (21:47-48);
- *Al-Mutaali*, the Self-Exalted, who has set himself high above all (13:9-10);
- *Al-Qadir*, the Able, who has the power to do what he pleases (17:99-101);
- *Al-Quddus*, the Most Holy One, to whom all in heaven and on earth ascribe holiness (62:1);
- *Al-Wahid*, the One, unique in his divine sovereignty (13:16); the Unique, who alone has created (74:11);
- *Al-Wakil*, the Administrator, who has charge of everything (6:102);
- *Malik al-Mulk*, Possessor of the Kingdom, who grants sovereignty to whom he will (3:26).

God as Absolute Justice

Several of God's names bespeak his absolute justice: the Majestic, the Gatherer, the Accounter, the Judge, the Just, the Most Holy One, to whom all in heaven and on earth ascribe holiness, the Observer of Justice, and the Avenger.

God as Absolute Love

Contrary to a popular misunderstanding, Allah is a God of love. Indeed, some of God's names depict this very characteristic. For example, God is *Ar-Rahman*, the Merciful, the most merciful of those who show mercy (sura 1:3; 12:64), and *Al-Wadud*, the Loving, compassionate and loving to his servants (11:90, 92). He has imposed the law of mercy upon himself (sura 6:12). He says, "My mercy comprehends all" (7:156). Muhammad said in the *Qur'an*, "If you do love God, Follow me, and God will love you And forgive you your sins. For God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (sura 3:31).

God as Absolute Will

There is a certain mystery about God's names. Historian Kenneth Cragg affirms that these names "are to be understood as characteristics of the divine will, rather than laws of his nature. Action, that is arising from such descriptives, may be expected, but not as a matter of necessity." What gives unity to all God's actions is that he wills them all. As Willer he may be recognized by the descriptions given him, but he does not conform to any. The action of his will may be identified from its effects, but his will of itself is inscrutable. This accounts for the antithesis in certain of God's names (see below). For example, God is "the One Who leads astray," as well as "the One Who guides."

God as Absolutely Unknowable

Since everything is based in God's will and since his effects are sometimes contradictory and do not reflect any absolute essence, God's nature is utterly unknowable. Indeed, "the divine will is an ultimate beyond which neither reason nor revelation go. In the Unity of the single will, however; these descriptions co-exist with those that relate to mercy, compassion, and glory" (Cragg, 64) God is named from his effects, but he is not to be identified with any of them. The relation between the Ultimate Cause (God) and his creatures is extrinsic, not intrinsic. That is, God is called good because he causes good, but goodness is not part of his essence.

(To be continued)