

Towards 'purifying' the understanding of Allah

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In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Say: He is Allah, the One and Only! Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him.

THE above is a translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, of an important *surah* (or chapter) 112 named *Al-Ikhlās* (Purification of the Unity of Allah), of the Quran.

It is recorded as one of the earliest revelations by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad aimed at "purifying" the understanding of Allah.

The word *ikhlas* is derived from the Arabic root which means to be purified or refined, re-emphasising the significance of the Oneness (Unity) of Allah as the central message in Islam.

After all, the Oneness of Allah or Tauhid is the very foundation of everything Islam.

At a tender age, Muslims will memorise this chapter as a testimony to the Essence named Allah, as an elaboration of the Muslim *shahadah* (article of faith): There is no god (ilah), but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

In other words, unlike "gods" (alihah), there can be no plural for Allah.

Allah (the stress is on the letter 'L') as a substantive Name is not shared by any other, and is inclusive of all His other attributes. In contrast to the word ilah, "god" in Arabic, Allah is not comparable to other objects or beings, nor in any way is associated with them.

In a verse (18:26) of the Quran, this is further reaffirmed: *He lets none associate with Him and shares His judgment.* Not even His works or obedience which is due to Him alone.

As explained by A.M. Omar, former editor of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Allah is a Personal Name (Ism al-Dhat), in contrast to other attributive and descriptive names such the Most Gracious, Most Merciful and so on.

These names however, in no way have primacy over the name Allah.

The Quran (7:180) mentions: *"To Allah alone belong all the fairest and most perfect names (Asma alHusna), so call on Him by those, and leave alone those who deviate from the right way with respect to His attributes and violate their sanctity."*

Indeed, the word Allah is not a construction of al-ilah as often claimed.

To quote Omar, the word Allah is a different and an independent word.

"The first two letters 'Al' in the word Allah are an integral, inseparable part of the word. They do not denote the definite article al of Arabic, which is equivalent to the English 'the'. In Arabic, the prefix *al* is added before the noun to emphasise the word in the sense of "most" or "all", for example *al-Rahman* - the Most Gracious, or *al-Alim* - The All-Knowing."

Omar cited one Sibwaih, the great grammarian, and Khalil, the great linguistic, as saying, "Since Al in the beginning of the word Allah is inseparable from it, so it is a simple substantive, not derived from any other word."

Being a Proper Name, it has, therefore, no parallel or equivalent in any other language of the world, nor can it be translated to be equated to another God, Lord or Creator in other beliefs or religions. Particularly so when the Name Allah is associated with other entities, be it a son, a father or any part of the so-called "godhead" or any other form of deities or symbols of therefore.

Such associations (in thoughts and deeds), known as *shirk*, not only violates the *shahadah* (therefore Islam) but it is starkly negated by Allah Himself as in *surah Al-Ikhlās*, in addition to many others that reinforced the notion of Oneness, one of the critical messages of the Quran.

For example: *Associate no partners with Allah, surely this (act of) associating partners (with Him) is a grievous wrong.(31:13).*

Again: *Indeed he who associates anything with Allah falls from a high place, and either the birds snatch him or*

the wind blow him off to some deep far away place (22:31).

Shirk is therefore is the gravest of all evils and ignorance.

Succinctly, Allah is one Name that can only be understood within the definition of the Tauhidic Reality of the One and Only Eternal and the Absolute, and not merely in conformance to a concept of monotheism.

Allah, The Reality, is beyond any conceptual notion. To do otherwise is to do commit a heinous injustice against Allah. As He said clearly in the Quran: *"Do you know any other name (which comprises all the Attributes of perfection), and don't you know that there is no one who is called the same. "(19:65).*

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