

## ALLAH MOST HIGH

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions and Usage; ii. Etymology; iii. Belief in Allah Most High is Obligatory (*wājib*); iv. Gnosis of Allah Most High (*maʿrifat Allāh taʿala*); I. The Qurʾān and the Existence of Allah (*wujūd Allāh*): The Qurʾān itself is a Proof of Allah Most High, Knowledge of the Existence of Allah Most High is Innate, Proofs of His Existence from Divine Acts, Proofs for His Existence in Intellectual Works, Position of the Philosophers about His Existence, The Path of the Sufis; II. His Attributes (*ṣifāt*), His Transcendence (*tanzih*), He is the First and the Last, His Self-Subsistence, Speech of Allah Most High (*kalām Allāh taʿala*); III. Seeing Allah Most High (*ruʾyat Allāh taʿala*); IV. Table of Selected Texts and Commentaries; V. Bibliography.

Say, “Were all the sea ink for [writing] the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like thereof to replenish it.” (Q 18:109)

And if all the trees on the earth were pens, and the seas [were ink]—replenished with seven more seas—the Words of Allah would not be exhausted. Indeed, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise. (Q 31:27)

Commentaries on these verses observe that humans’ limited capacities preclude the possibility of full comprehension of an Infinite God Who is unlike anything that exists. The exegetes elaborate that forests of pens and replenished seas of ink would all be insufficient to expound the wonders He has created, the blessings He has bestowed, or His Inexhaustible Knowledge (cf. *Tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī, Tustarī, Qushayrī, Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, sub Q 18:109 and Q 31:27). Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) comments that, since His Book is part of His knowledge, even if one of His bondmen were given a thousand ways of understanding each letter of the Qurʾān he would not be able to fathom the knowledge within it. This, he writes, is because the Qurʾān is His pre-eternal Speech (*kalāmuh al-qadīm*), and His Speech is one of His Attributes; there is no end to any of His Attributes, just as He has no end. All that can be comprehended of His Speech is whatsoever He opens to the hearts of His friends (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 18:109). Nor can human beings fully praise Him. ʿĀʾisha, Allah be pleased with her, reported that one night she found the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, uttering while prostrating: “O Allah, I seek refuge in Your pleasure from Your anger and in Your forgiveness from Your punishment, and I seek refuge in You from You; I

cannot fully praise You, for You are as You have praised Yourself” (Muslim, Ṣalāt, mā yuqāl fī-l-rukūʿ wal-sujūd).

What follows here is a selective summary of what has been said in Muslim sources about the Supreme Name and the Qurʾānic descriptions of His Existence, Attributes, and the possibility of a paradisiacal vision of Him. Other topics related to the Divine are covered in other entries as cross-referenced in the text below.

### Definitions and Usage

The Divine Name *Allāh*, referred to as the “Name of Majesty” (*ism al-jalāla*) and “the Name of the [Divine] Essence” (*ism al-dhāt*) in commentary literature, occurs in the Qurʾān 2697 times in 85 of its 114 suras, aside from its presence in the theonymic invocation which occurs at the head of every sura except Q 9 (see BASMALA) (ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *Muʿjam* p. 49-93). “*Allāh* is the proper name of the Essence (*al-dhāt*) of the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), combining all attributes of perfection (*al-mustajmiʿ li-jamīʿ ṣifāt al-kamāl*); He is free from [all] deficiency and from being non-existent (*al-munazzah ʿan al-naqṣ wal-zawāl*); to Him is referred the existence of all else; and all that is said about His Essence, Attributes and Acts is a commentary on this statement” (Zabīdī, *Tāj*, sub ʿ-l-h; Ibn Abī Sharīf, *Kitāb al-Musāmara* p. 21; al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ* 3:917).

*Allāh* is considered “the Supreme Name” (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*) by Abū Ḥanīfa (80-148/699-767) (Māwardī, *Nukat*, sub Q 1:1); a majority of Muslim scholars concur with this assessment (cf. Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 1:1; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 59:24; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām*, sub Q 7:180; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, sub *fī mabāḥiṭh al-ism*; Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, *al-Qaṣd al-mujarrad* p. 103; Ibn Mandah, *Tawḥīd* p. 268-270; al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* p. 27; al-Shirbīnī, *al-Sirāj*, sub Q 3:2; al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ* 1:6). The Hadith master Ibn Mandah (310-395/922-1005) gives an expressive title to the discussion on the Supreme Name in his credal encyclopedia, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*: “Recalling the Gnosis of the Greatest Name of Allah by which He has Named Himself and which He has Honored above all Other Forms of Remembrance” (*Dhikr maʿrifat Ism Allāh al-akbar al-ladhī tusammā bihi wa-sharrafahu ʿalā al-adhkār kullihā*). He cites Q 29:45 (and surely the remembrance of Allāh is the greatest) as a proof for this position, and writes: “His Name *Allāh* is [key to the] gnosis of His Essence (*maʿrifati dhātihi*); Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, has denied its usage to anyone else from His creation, none can be named by it, and none [deemed] worthy of being worshipped can be called by this Name; He has

made it the beginning of faith, the central pillar of Islam (*‘umūd al-islām*), the statement of truth and sincerity, the very opposite of contradictions and associations... With it begin all obligatory acts and by it faith is established. One seeks refuge from Satan by this Name and by it begin and end all things. Blessed be His Name—there is no god except Him” (*Tawhīd* p. 268).

The word *Allāh* is pronounced with magnification (*tafkhīm*) of its double *lām* and unwritten *alif* when preceded by a *fatha* or *ḍamma*, and with attenuation (*tarqīq*) when preceded by a *kasra* (see SCIENCE OF QUR’ĀNIC RECITATION). If one mispronounces it by suppressing its unwritten *alif*, that is, vocalizing *Allah* instead of *Allāh*, such a solecism (*lahn*) invalidates ritual prayer (*q.v.*) and legal oath (*q.v.*), although poetic license may allow it if required by the exigencies of rhythm and meter (Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 1:1).

### **Etymology**

According to the vast majority of scholars (*al-jumhūr*), *Allāh* is originally a proper and underived noun (al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-awṭār* 1:18). Other exegetes list names of scholars who hold this view; these include Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Shāfi‘ī (150-204/767-819), al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111), al-Zamakhsharī (467-538/ca.1074-1143), al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), and al-Suyūṭī (849-911/1445-ca.1505), but, according to al-Rāzī (543-606/1148-1209), the majority of Mu‘tazilis and most of the littérateurs (*al-udabā’*) consider it a derived word (al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi‘* p. 80). The master-grammarian Sibawayh (d. 180/796) denoted it “the most definite of all definites” (*a’raf al-ma‘ārif*), a description for which he is said to have received great benefit after death, as was revealed to someone in a dream vision (see DREAMS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION) (al-Zarkashī, *Ma‘nā* p. 106; Samīn, *Durr*, sub Q 1:1). This name is exclusively reserved for the Creator Most High (*al-Bārī ta‘ālā*) (Māwardī, *Nukat*, sub Q 1:1; Rāghib, *Mufradāt*, sub ʿ-l-h; Rāzī, *Lawāmi‘* p. 79-81). The Qur’ān rhetorically asks: *Do you know any who could be His namesake (lahu samiyyan)?* (Q 19:65) (see THE NAME, THE NAMING, THE NAMED).

Extensive discussions of the etymology of the word “Allāh” are found both in commentary literature as well as in specialized works on the Divine Names. For instance, al-Rāzī discusses it in his *Tafsīr* as well as in his *Lawāmi‘ al-bayyināt*, an important treatise on Divine Names and Attributes (see BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH), as does al-Bayḍāwī in his *Tafsīr* (sub Q 1:1). Al-Suyūṭī in his commentary on al-Bayḍāwī’s exegesis, titled *Nawāhid*

*al-abkār wa shawārid al-afkār*, lists “around thirty opinions” on the etymology of Allah—including the following: (i) that the word is of Syriac (*suryānī*) origin (meaning the Syriac considered to be the primordial angelic language; see LANGUAGE AND SPEECH); (ii) that it is Arabic (*q.v.*) but underived; and (iii) that it is derived but its root is known to Allah alone (*Nawāhid* 1:126-144). Al-Suyūṭī quotes, among others, the polymath Sa‘d al-Dīn Mas‘ūd b. ‘Umar al-Taftāzānī (722-792/1322-1390), who said, “Just as the speculations are bewildered (*taḥayyarat al-awḥām*) in [regard to] His essence and His attributes, so they are confounded [regarding] the word signifying Him (*al-laḥz al-dāll ‘alayh*), as to whether it is a noun or an adjective, derived or underived, a proper name (*‘alam*) or not a proper name, and so on” (*Nawāhid* 1:127). According to al-Bayḍāwī himself,

The origin of the word “Allāh” is *ilāh* (“deity”), from which the [opening] *hamza* was elided and replaced with *alif* and *lām* (*al-*). That is why one says *yā Allāh* (“O Allāh”) disjunctively [rather than *yallāh*]. [*Allāh*] is used solely for the One Who has the true right to be worshipped (*mukhtaṣṣ bil-ma‘būd bil-ḥaqq*). At its root, *ilāh* refers to any object of worship (*li-kull ma‘būd*); but its predominant usage has become specific to the One Who is worshipped in truth. Its derivation is from *alaha*—[infinitives] *alahatan*, *ulūhatan*, and *ulūhiyyatan*—in the sense of *‘abada* (“he worshipped”), and from it [the verbs] *ta’allaha* and *ista’laha*, “he devoted himself to worship” are derived. It is also said [to derive] from *aliha*, when one is perplexed, because intellects are confounded in His gnosis; or from *alihtu ilā fulān* (“I took refuge with so-and-so”), that is, I was at rest with him (*ṣakantu ilayh*), for hearts become tranquil (*taṭma’in*) in His remembrance and souls (*al-arwāḥ*) rest assured (*taskun*) with knowledge of Him; or from *aliha*, when one is distressed by something that befalls him. *Ālahah ghayruh* (*ajārah*, meaning “someone protected him”) means to rush in panic to another who then gives him protection, whether actually or merely as perceived by the refuge-seeker. Again, it [is said to derive] from *aliha*, the craving of a newborn calf for its mother, as creatures yearn for Him, earnestly imploring, when in difficulties. Another [proposed] derivation is *waliha*, which is when one’s intellect is confounded and bewildered—in which case its root is *wilāh*, the *wāw* becoming a *hamza* because of the difficulty [in vocalizing] the *kasra* (...). It is [also] said that its root is *lāh*, infinitive noun (*maṣdar*) of the verb *lāha*—aorist *yaliḥu*, infinitives *layhan* and *lāhan*—meaning to be veiled (*iḥtajaba*) and elevated

(*irtafa'a*); for [Allah]—may He be glorified and exalted—is veiled (*mahjūb*) from visual perception and is elevated (*murtafi'*) above all things...

It is said that [*Allāh*] is a proper name (*'alam*) for His specific essence, because (i) He describes things, but He Himself cannot be described; (ii) it is necessary that He have a name (*ism*) to which His Attributes (*ṣifātuh*) relate—but there is no [word], among those applied to Him, that is appropriate to Him apart from [the word *Allāh*]; and (iii) were [*Allāh*] an adjective (*wasf*), the statement “There is no god but Allah” would not constitute monotheism (*tawḥīd*), just as [the statement] “There is no god but the all-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)” does not preclude partnership (*shirka*).

It is more likely (*al-aẓhar*) that [the word *Allāh*] was originally an adjective (*wasf*) but through predominant usage—in that it was not used for any other entity—it came to refer to Him like a proper name (*'alam*), as [happened] with al-Thurayyā (the Pleiades, *lit.* “multitudinous”) and with al-Ṣa'iq (*lit.* “thunderbolt”, which became the surname of Khuwaylid b. Nufayl). [The word *Allāh*] came to act in this way (*ujriya majrāh*) in that adjectives are applied to it, it never served as an adjective, and any hint of possible partnership was precluded. For His Essence, He being as He is (*min ḥayth Huwa*), without considering any other factor—intrinsic or otherwise—is inconceivable to human beings and therefore cannot be signified (*yadull*) with a word. Also, if [the word *Allāh*] signified nothing but His specified identity (*mujarrad dhātih al-makhṣūṣa*), then a sound meaning would not obtain from the manifest [level] of His saying—glorified and exalted be He—*And He is Allāh in the heavens and the earth* (Q 6:3). Furthermore, what derivation means is that one of two terms has meaning (*ma'nā*) and form (*tarkīb*) in common with the other, and this is precisely the case between it (the word *Allāh*) and the etymons (*al-uṣūl*) mentioned.

*Tafsīr, sub Q 1:1*

A Prophetic hadith links mention of the Supreme Name to the very survival of the world itself: “The Hour will not come so long as [even a single] person on earth calls out ‘Allah! Allah!’” (Muslim, *Īmān*, *dhahāb al-īmān ākhir al-zamān*; Tirmidhī, *Fitan*, *mā jā' fi ash-rā' al-sā'a*). He also said: “A house in which Allah is mentioned compared with one in which He is not mentioned is like the living compared with the dead” (Muslim, *Ṣalāt al-musāfirīn*, *istihbāb ṣalāt al-nāfila fi baytiḥ*) (see REMEMBRANCE AND REMINDER OF ALLAH).

The Qur'an clearly establishes the incommensurable



Q 4:48. *Inna Llāha lā yaghfir an yushraka bihi wa yaghfiru mā dūna dhālika liman yashā'u wa man yushrik bi-Llāhi fa-qad iftarā iḥman 'azīman. Ṣadaqa Rabb al-'ālamīn.*

*Indeed, Allah does not forgive that a partner be ascribed to Him. He forgives—other than that—what He wills. And whosoever ascribes partners to Allah, has certainly invented a heinous sin.*

(Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Abd Allāh)

hiatus separating Allah Most High from all else. He is as He has described Himself: *No sight can perceive Him while He encompasses all sights; He is Subtle, All-Aware* (Q 6:103); *Indeed, I am Allah—there is no divinity save Me* (Q 20:14); *He is the Lord of the East and the West; there is no divinity but Him (Huwa)* (Q 73:9); *He is the Real (al-Ḥaqq)* (Q 20:114); *the Eternally Self-Sufficient (al-Ṣamad); He begets not and He is not begotten and none is like unto Him* (Q 112:2-4).

Allah is Absolutely Unique, One, and incomparable (Q 2:163; 4:171; 5:73; 6:19; 16:22; 18:110; 21:107; 41:6; 42:11; 112:4). He has no partner, no helper (Q 2:22; 2:165; 14:30; 34:33; 39:8; 41:9) and like Him there is nothing

(Q 42:11). To Him belong the most Beautiful Names (*q.v.*) (Q 59:24). He has no opponent or rival (Q 6:19; 15:96; 17:22, 39, 42; 21:22; 23:91, 117; 51:51). He possesses all the attributes of perfection (Q 59:23; 62:1). He begot neither a son (Q 2:116; 4:171; 6:100-101; 9:30-31; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 21:26; 25:1) nor a daughter (Q 6:100; 16:57; 37:149; 43:16; 52:39); He has no mate (Q 6:101; 72:3); He is beyond duality (Q 16:51) or trinity (Q 4:171; 5:73). He has always existed and He will be when there is nothing else—*He is the First and the Last, the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden, and He has knowledge of all things* (Q 57:3). He is changeless (Q 2:255; 3:2; 20:111; 112:2); He is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and all that is between them, and He alone deserves to be worshipped (Q 1:2; 5:28; 7:54; 13:16; 19:65; 37:4-5; 38:65-66).

### Belief in Allah Most High is Obligatory (*wājib*)

Even though Allah Most High remains inaccessible to all creation in His Being (*dhāt*), belief in Him is imperative (*wājib*), and all other obligations are based upon this belief (al-Khalīlī, *Fatāwā* 1:71). It is the first of the “six articles of faith” (*arkān al-īmān*), the others being belief in the angels (*q.v.*), the Books (*q.v.*) of Allah, the Messengers (*q.v.*), the Last Day (*q.v.*), and the Divine Decree (*q.v.*) (see BELIEF; BELIEVERS). Belief in Allah entails attestation to the existence of Allah Most High, the Creator of all that exists, along with testimony that He is Absolutely One and has no partner. According to al-Rāzī, belief in Allah is essential for the survival of the heart, even more than is breathing for life in this world. For if one stops breathing, one dies, but that death is only a single death, whereas if one loses belief in Allah from one’s heart, even for a moment, the heart dies—and the pangs of that death abide forever (*Tafsīr*, *sub* Muqaddima 1:150). *The believers are only those whose hearts quiver when Allah is mentioned* (Q 8:2; 22:35). According to al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 378/988), Ibn ‘Abbās (3BH-68/619-688) glossed the phrase *except to worship Me* in Q 51:56 (*I did not create the Jinn and mankind except to worship Me*) as “except to know Me” (*yaʿrifūni*) (*al-Laumaʿ* p. 63; cf. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, and Thaʿlabī, *Kashf*—the latter attributes this gloss to Mujāhid).

### Gnosis of Allah Most High (*maʿrifat Allāh taʿālā*)

Belief in Allah, however, does not mean that the believer has knowledge of His Essence, for the Divine ipseity remains beyond the reach of all created beings. “No one but Allah knows Allah,” writes al-Rāzī. Knowledge that He exists is one thing, knowledge of His Being another, he explains. The contingent knowledge (*maʿrifat*

*ʿarāḍiyya*) gained by inferring the existence of a builder from observing a building does not itself constitute knowledge of the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of the builder. Likewise, we can gain only contingent knowledge of God, not essential knowledge (*maʿrifat dhātiyya*), by understanding the utter dependence of contingent beings (*al-muḥdathāt*) on their Originator (*muḥdith*) and Creator (*Khāliq*). This subtle distinction must be understood to avoid falling into error (Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, *sub* fī mabāḥith al-ism, 1:109-110).

Arguing from the Qurʾānic descriptions of the inexhaustible knowledge of Allah Most High—*He knows all that lies open before them and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot encompass His knowledge* (Q 20:110)—al-Māturīdī (d. 333/ca.945) says human beings can only know of God as much as He discloses Himself through His act of creation; that is the only path to knowledge about Him that humans have (*Taʾwīlāt*, *sub* Q 20:110).

Gnosis of Allah remained a central concern for the Sufis, who are unanimous in the assertion—as al-Kalābādhi (d. 380/990) contends in his *al-Taʿarruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (p. 69)—that “Allah alone is the Guide to Himself.” This position reverberates throughout the genres of Sufi literature, from the sayings of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to the early doctrinal and methodological treatises on *taṣawwuf*, such as those of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/ca.857), al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. ca.296/908), al-Sulamī (325-412/936-1031), Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), al-Qushayrī (376-465/ca.986-ca.1073), and al-Hijwīrī (d. ca.465/1072). Al-Junayd said, “Gnosis is of two kinds: *maʿrifat taʿarruf* and *maʿrifat taʾrif*. [The former] means that Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, makes Himself known [to the gnostics] and makes things known to them through Him—as when Ibrāhīm, upon him peace, said, *I do not love those that set* (Q 6:76) (uttering this after Allah had granted him gnosis, so that he knew the reality of things). The meaning of [*maʿrifat*] *al-taʾrif* is that Allah Most High shows them signs of His Power (*āthār qudratih*) in the cosmos and within themselves, and then He grants them the subtle ability (*luṭfan*) by which things guide them to [the knowledge] that they have a Maker (*ṣāmiʿ*). This is the gnosis of the common folk of believers, whereas the former is the gnosis of the elect. In reality, none has gnosis of Him except by Him” (al-Kalābādhi, *al-Taʿarruf* p. 64). Ibn ‘Aṭā (d. 309/921), likewise, said: “[Allah] makes Himself known (*taʿarruf*) to the common folk through His created things—as He said, *Do they, then, not look at the camel, how it was created...?* (Q 88:17); to the elect through His speech and attributes—as He said,



*Do they not, then, reflect on the Qurʾān?* (Q 4:82; 47:24)...; and to the Prophets directly (*bi-naḥsih*)—as He said, *And likewise have We Ourselves revealed to you an essence of Our command* (Q 42:52)” (al-Kalābādhi, *al-Taʿarruf* p. 64).

The Egyptian Sufi master Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) further differentiates the two categories of seekers, as his Andalusian commentator Ibn ʿAbbād al-Rundī (733-792/1333-1390) elucidates: “What a difference between one who finds proof *in* Him and one who seeks proof *of* Him! The one finding proof in Him knows the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) in the One deserving of it, and affirms existence of all other [created beings] through their root. The one who finds proof for Him through created things draws an inference to Him from the unknown to the known, from the non-existent to the existent, and from the concealed to the apparent. This is so because of the presence of the veil, and because such a person stops [short] at the [immediate] causes, and has not attained closeness [to the Divine]” (*Sharḥ Ibn ʿAbbād, sub hikma* 29).

Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī outlines two modes of gnosis: gnosis of Truth (*maʿrifat al-Ḥaqq*) and gnosis of Reality (*maʿrifat al-Ḥaqīqa*). The former is gnosis of Divine Oneness (*maʿrifat waḥdāniyya*), which Allah has disclosed to creatures through His Names and Attributes; but there is no means of access (*lā sabīl ilayhā*) to gnosis of Reality, because His eternal and inaccessible Self-Sufficiency (*Ṣamadiyya*) and Lordship (*Rubūbiyya*) prevent it; as He says, *they cannot encompass Him with their knowledge* (Q 20:110). Al-Sarrāj proceeds to explain why gnosis of even an iota of His Reality is inaccessible: “All that is in the cosmos vanishes as soon as the first traces [of self-manifestation] appear from the valley of His Grandeur and Majesty. Who would be capable of receiving such gnosis except one imbued with these attributes, which none besides [Allah] possesses? That is why it is said that no one has ever known Him except Him, and no one has ever desired Him except Him, because His inaccessible Self-Sufficiency (*Ṣamadiyya*) has prevented cognition (*al-idrāk*) or His being encompassed. Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, has said, *they cannot attain to aught of His knowledge save that which He wills* (Q 2:255). That is also the purport of the saying of Abū Bakr, Allah be well-pleased with him: ‘Glory be to Him who has taught His servants no way to [attain] gnosis of Him, beyond their recognizing it through their inability to know Him’” (al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, *al-Lumaʿ* p. 56-57).

## I. The Qurʾān and the Existence of Allah (*wujūd Allāh*)

While maintaining the inaccessibility of the Divine ipseity, the Qurʾān employs a number of arguments for the existence of Allah Most High.

### The Qurʾān Itself is a Proof of Allah Most High

In a number of self-referential verses, the Qurʾān declares that it has been revealed by Allah, variously described as *the Lord and Cherisher of the Universe* (*Rabb al-ʿālamīn*) (Q 32:2; 56:80; 69:43); *the Mighty, the Most Merciful* (*al-ʿAzīz al-Raḥīm*) (Q 36:5); *the Mighty, the Most Wise* (*al-ʿAzīz al-Ḥakīm*) (Q 39:1); *the Mighty, the Omniscient* (*al-ʿAzīz al-ʿAlīm*) (Q 40:2); and *the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful* (*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*) (Q 41:2). It indicates its own coherence, asking: *Do they not reflect on the Qurʾān? Had it been from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many an inner contradiction* (Q 4:82). Al-Ṭabarī comments that the Book of Allah is His conclusive proof (*ḥujja*) against the disbelievers: its meanings are in harmony, its rulings accord with one another, and one part (*baʿd*) of it strengthens, confirms, and testifies to the truth of another. Were the Qurʾān sent from any other source, he continues, its text would be replete with internal inconsistencies (*Tafsīr, sub* Q 4:82). Furthermore, the Qurʾān indirectly asserts that it is from Allah Most High because *even if all mankind and Jinns were to gather to bring a Qurʾān like this, they could not produce the like of it, even if they were helping one another* (Q 17:88); and likewise, *And if you are in doubt as to what We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a sura like this, and call upon your witnesses other than God if you are telling the truth* (Q 2:23). The challenge is repeated elsewhere, demanding, *then produce ten invented suras the like of it, and call on whoever you can other than God if you are telling the truth* (Q 11:13). All of this affirms that the Book is itself a proof of the existence of Allah Most High, sent to guide mankind. The Qurʾān further calls as witness the heart (*q.v.*) to which it was revealed (Q 2:97; 26:194) (that of the Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace) through the intermediary of an Envoy (*Rasūl*)—Jibrīl (*q.v.*), the *Trusted Spirit* (*al-Rūḥ al-Amin*) (Q 26:193). It invokes the unanimity of the message thus transmitted over the generations and to numerous Prophets, all of whom called humanity to the One and Only God: *Allah, save Whom there is no deity, the Ever-Living, the Eternal. He sent down to you the Book with truth, confirming what was [sent] before; and He sent down the Torah (q.v.) and the Injil (q.v.) aforetime, as guidance unto mankind; and He has revealed the Criterion (q.v.)...* (Q 3:2-4). He is the One and Only

true God Who sent Revelation to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, as He sent Revelation to Messengers before him (Q 5:48; 17:18). Those prior Revelations too are proofs and signs of Allah: *We have revealed to you as We revealed to Nūḥ and the Prophets after him, and We sent Revelation to Ibrāhīm, Ismāʿīl, Ishāq, Yaʿqūb, and their descendants, and to ʿIsā and Ayyūb and Yūnus and Hārūn and Sulaymān; and We gave Dāwūd the Zabūr. And Envoys whom We have mentioned to you ere this, as well as Envoys whom We have not mentioned to you; and Allah spoke directly to Mūsā. [All were sent as] Messengers, bearers of glad tidings, and warners, so that mankind should have no plea against Allah after [receiving] the Messengers. And Allah is ever All-Mighty, Wise* (Q 4:163-165).

### Knowledge of the Existence of Allah Most High is Innate

According to most Muslim scholars, human recognition of the existence of Allah Most High is axiomatic, imprinted onto the innate nature (*fiṭra*) (*q.v.*) with which human beings have been created, and so requires no external proof (Samʿānī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 30:30; al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām* p. 124; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā* 6:73; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 14:12). “Sound innate nature (*al-fiṭra al-salīma*) testifies to the existence of an All-Wise Maker (*Ṣāniʿ Ḥakīm*)” (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām* p. 124). Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1605) explains:

Inam [Abū Ḥanīfā] did not expound in detail the question of the existence (*wujūd*) [of Allah in *al-Fiqh al-akbar*], but confined himself to what is manifestly evident (*zāhir fī maqām al-shuhūd*). [It is said] in Revelation (*al-Tanzīl*), *Their Messengers said: “Is there any doubt regarding Allah, Originator of the heavens and the earth?”* (Q 14:10); and *And if you ask them “Who created the heavens and the earth?” They will say “Allah”* (Q 31:25). So, [recognition of] the existence of the Truth (*wujūd al-Ḥaqq*) is affixed (*thābit*) in the innate nature of [all] creation (*fī fiṭrat al-khalq*), as referred to by His saying—glorified and exalted is He—the innate nature with which Allah has created human beings... (Q 30:30) and alluded to by the hadith, “Every child born (*kull mawlūd*) is born with the *fiṭra* of Islam” (alluding to the hadith, “There is no child but is born with *fiṭra*: it is the parents who make [their child] a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian, much as beasts bring forth [their young] hale (*bahīmatan jamʿā*); can you perceive any deficiency in them?” (Bukhārī, Janāʿiz, idhā aslam al-ṣabī fa-māt hal yuṣallā ʿalayh; Muslim, Qadar, maʿnā kull mawlūd yūlad ʿalā al-fiṭra)). And all the Prophets,

upon them blessings and peace, came specifically to expound the unity (*tawḥīd*) and to explicate the absolute unicity (*tafrīd*) [of Allah]. That is why they unequivocally preached (*aṭbaqat kalimatuhum*) and unanimously proved (*ajmaʿat ḥujjatuhum*) the credo (*kalima*), “There is no deity but Allah.” They were not charged with merely enjoining their people (*ahl millatihim*) to say “Allah exists.” Rather, they aimed to make it clear that nothing besides Him is worthy of worship, refuting what [their people] fancied and imagined—as [when] they said, “these [idols] are our intercessors with Allah!” (Q 10:18) and “we serve them only that they bring us nearer to God in rank” (Q 39:3). [Affirming God’s] oneness (*tawḥīd*) inescapably entails [His] existence, and with greater emphasis.

*Minah al-rawḍ al-azhar* p. 49-50

Likewise, al-Samʿānī (d. 489/1095) writes in his commentary on Q 30:30:

*Fiṭra* is that by virtue of which, if one could ask any [newly] born human, “Who created you?” he would say, “Allah created me.” This is the gnosis (*maʿrifat*) lodged at the root of creation (*taqaʿ fī aṣl al-khalāqa*). According to Abū ʿUbayd al-Harawī (d. 224/839), “It is innate and natural knowledge (*maʿrifat al-gharīza wal-ṭabīʿa*)”. It is alluded to in His saying, *And if you ask them “who created you?” they will say “Allah”* (Q 43:87). Although this knowledge does not [necessarily] lead to faith, human beings are nonetheless created with this innate nature (*fiṭra*). (...) There is none who searches his own soul (*yarjiʿ ilā nafsih*) without discovering that he has a God and a Creator. A second opinion on the verse, related from al-Awzāʿī and Ḥammād b. Salama, is that “the *fiṭra* of Allah” here means “the *dīn* (“religion”) of Allah”—in which case, “the *fiṭra* of Allah” is [a reference to the fact] that creation is born [affirming] the Pact (*ʿahd*) taken with [mankind] on the Day of the Covenant.

*Tafsīr*

The metahistorical covenant mentioned here refers to Q 7:172: *And [recall] when thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Ādam—from their loins—their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, [asking] “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Indeed so! We testify.” [This was] lest you should say on the Day of Judgment: “We were never aware of this”* (Q 7:172) (see ĀDAM, UPON HIM PEACE; COVENANT).

Both al-Rāzī and al-Shahrastānī (479-548/1086-1153) explain ways in which the innate testimony of *fiṭra* is manifested. For instance, even though human beings are prone to forget—or even willfully deny—this innate knowledge of God, yet when faced with grave difficulty

they call upon God alone. *He it is Who carries you on land and sea. When you are aboard ships and We drive them with a goodly wind, they rejoice thereat, until there comes upon them a tempest and waves surge toward them from every side, and they believe themselves engulfed—[then] they call unto God, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone: “If You save us from this, we shall certainly be among the thankful!”* (Q 10:22; cf. Q 29:65 and 31:32). This tendency is proof both of humans’ innate acknowledgement of God and of their total dependence (*iftiqār*) on Him (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām* p. 124; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 14:10). Al-Rāzī expands this explanation by developing aspects of the *fiṭra* as arguments for the innate recognition of the Divine. These include arguments for an Originator, from the natural tendency to seek out first causes, and for a (Divine) Requirer, from the innate sense of justice found even in a child who cries out when unjustly slapped. He adds: “Note that affirmation of the existence of the Maker is intuitive. Human nature testifies that the existence of a wondrously inlaid and intricately designed building conforming to the demands of both wisdom and practicality, is simply not possible without a knowledgeable designer and wise builder. It is well known that the signs of wisdom plainly visible in the skies and the earth far exceed those seen in a simple house. Hence if innate nature has testified that a design requires a designer and a building requires a builder, its testimony that this entire universe requires a volitional and wise Agent (*al-fā’il al-mukhtār al-ḥakīm*) must be all the stronger (*awlā*)” (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 14:10).

### Proofs of His Existence from Divine Acts

In addition to itself and innate nature (*fiṭra*), the Qur’ān also refers to the Acts of Allah (*af’āl Allāh*), including Divine creation and guidance, as proofs for His existence.

#### Creation

Al-Rāzī comments that among the unfailing (*al-mu’tamad*) Qur’ānic arguments for the existence of the Maker (*al-Ṣāni‘*) is the creation of human beings. Citing Q 2:21 and 258, 26:78, 20:50, and 96:1-2, he writes: “These six verses show that the Most High has offered the creation of the human being as a proof for the existence of the Maker, Exalted is He. When you reflect on the Qur’ān, you discover this type of proof is extensively present” (*Tafsīr*, Muqaddima, faṣl 3, al-kalām fī majmū‘ tafsīr hadhih al-sūra). Likewise, al-Qushayrī (376-465/*ca.*986-*ca.*1073) comments that Q 56:58-59 (*Have you ever considered that [semen] which you emit? Do you create it, or are We its Creator?*) comprises a fundamental

Qur’ānic argument for the existence of the Maker, because human creation—precipitated by two drops gathered together in the womb (see *Body*), where they undergo various stages of division and regeneration and unite in a specific form—occurs neither through the work of the parents (who lack the requisite knowledge and capability), nor spontaneously through the sperm and ovum on their own (these being lifeless liquids without knowledge or power). This, al-Qushayrī contends, cannot but establish the existence of the Pre-Eternal Maker (*al-Ṣāni‘ al-Qadīm*), the Omniscient King, Who is the Creator (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 56:58-59).

Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) points out that Allah Most High combines evidence from creation with the injunction to reflect. For instance, the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, is instructed to tell disbelievers: “Ponder on whatever there is in the heavens and on earth!” (Q 10:101). The Qur’ān further asks, *Have they not looked at the dominion of the heavens and the earth? (Q 7:185)—meaning the signs present in His dominion—and likewise, and within yourselves; do they not see? (Q 51:21)—meaning, “Why do they not reflect and contemplate, and so recognize that creation and change cannot be but due to a Maker?”* (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 2:164). Al-Qurṭubī, echoing the earlier articulation of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (260-324?/874-936?) (cf. *al-I‘lām* p. 17-19, see below), then reasons that, were human beings to reflect, using the intellect granted them, they would find it impossible for a human being to transform himself from a mere drop to a fully developed child, from a state of weakness to strength. Even when a man is in full health and vigor, possessing the highest degree of intellect, he cannot create even an organ for himself, or halt the aging of youth; nor can he return from his senility. Reflection on these facts, al-Qurṭubī adds, would lead one to believe in another, who produced all these changes. He then cites a maxim, that “everything that exists in the macrocosm has a parallel in the microcosm (that is, in the human body),” and the Qur’ānic verse, *Verily, We created man in the finest conformation (Q 95:4)* (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 2:164). In Q 29:61, the argument from creation encompasses the heavens and the earth, as the disbelievers are rhetorically challenged: *And were you to ask them: Who created the heavens and the earth, and constrained the sun and the moon [in their paths]? They would surely say: Allah. How, then, are they turned away?*

The insistent Qurʾānic exhortation to reflect on the creations of Allah directs the intellect (*q.v.*) to ponder in order to attain certain knowledge of Allah Most High. Citing Q 3:191 (*And who reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth*) and Q 88:17 (*Have they not considered camels, how they have been created?*), Abū Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012) observes that the Qurʾānic verses enjoin reflection on creation, not on the Creator, for examination (*naẓar*), consideration (*tafakkur*), and delineation (*takayyuf*) are all efforts directed toward created beings (*makhluqāt*), not the Creator (*al-Khālīq*). He then cites an aphorism (the editor, al-Kawtharī (d. 1371/1951), notes that it is not a Prophetic hadith) comparing direct consideration of Allah to gazing into the eye of the sun—the ensuing bewilderment (*ḥayra*) intensifying with each repeated glance (*al-Inṣāf* p. 28). Proximate Prophetic guidance is, however, found in a hadith: “Reflect on the creations of Allah (*fī khalq Allāh*) and not on Allah, the Exalted and Majestic (*fī Allāh ‘azza wa jall*)” (Ibn Baṭṭa, *al-Ibānat al-kubrā* 6:86; al-Aṣḥabānī, *al-ʿAzama* 1:214; Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam al-awsaṭ* 6:250; Haythamī, *Majmaʿ* 1:81 §260; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmāʾ* 2:46 §618; al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ*, al-iʿtiṣām bil-Kitāb wal-Sunna; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāsid al-ḥasana* 1:261). The meaning of this report is also confirmed by the following rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*) hadith: “People will not stop asking questions until they say, ‘This is Allah, Who created creation—but who created Allah?’ Whoever finds himself in that state should [simply] say: ‘I believe in Allah’” (Muslim, *Īmān*, bayān al-waswasa fī-l-īmān wa mā yaqūluḥ man wajadahā).

That creation offers an argument for the existence of Allah is also attested in the two questions Pharaoh asked about Allah: “Who, now, is the Sustainer of you two?” (Q 20:49) (addressed to the Prophets Mūsā and Hārūn (*q.v.*), upon them peace) and “What is the Lord of the worlds?” (Q 26:23) (asked of Mūsā, upon him peace). To both questions the Prophet Mūsā responds (among other arguments) by drawing Pharaoh’s attention to the creations of Allah: He is “the One Who made the earth a cradle for you, and threaded out in it paths for you, and sent down water from the sky” (Q 20:53). Al-Qurṭubī explains that these answers comprise arguments for the existence of the Maker (*al-Sāniʿ*), because in this world proofs of His existence can only be deduced from His actions (*Tafsīr*). Al-Zamakhsharī likewise says that Pharaoh’s

intent was either to construe Allah Most High in the form of visible things or to enquire about His specific Reality (*‘an ḥaqīqatīḥ al-khāṣṣa*). If the former, then the response of Mūsā, upon him peace, worked to direct his attention to the fact that *there is nothing like unto Him* (Q 42:11) and thus that He is incomparable to anything that human beings know. If the latter, then it should be known that the Essence (*dhāt*) of Allah is beyond the scope of the intellect (*ḥawq fiṭr al-‘uqūl*) and is altogether inaccessible (*lā sabīl lah*), and anyone who pursues it is not a seeker of truth (*Kashshāf*, sub Q 26:23). Al-Rāzī distinguishes the two questions, holding that the first question (Q 20:49, asking “who” (*man*)) concerned the Divine modality (*kayfiyya*) and the second question (Q 26:23, asking “what” (*mā*)) concerned the Divine quiddity (*māhiyya*) (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 20:49). Al-Rāzī further observes that this mode of argument is similar to that earlier used by Ibrāhīm, upon him peace, in his response to Nimrūd (*cf.* Q 2:258): each Prophet first argued that Allah Most High is the One who gives life and death and then mentioned the sun and the moon, the east and the west—implicitly directing their interlocutors’ attention to creation (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 26:23–31).

The first people to be addressed by the Qurʾān included (i) those who denied the existence of Allah Most High, some of whom took Time or Fate (*dahr*) to be the sole cause of change, including life and death; (ii) those who acknowledged His existence, but denied or doubted the Resurrection; and (iii) those who acknowledged His existence, but denied the Prophets (Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt*, sub Q 35:13; Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 45:24). The pre-Islamic Arabs, according to Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Nujayrimī (d. ca.355/965), included those who followed the vestiges of the monotheistic Abrahamic religion (performing the Hajj (*q.v.*) and respecting the sanctity of the Sacred Precinct (*q.v.*) and the sacred months (*al-ashhur al-ḥurum*) (*q.v.*)) as well as idolaters, whether they considered their idols as gods in their own right or merely intercessors before Allah. The Qurʾānic response to notions of such idolatrous intercession is given in Q 39:3: *Is it not to Allah alone that all sincere faith (al-dīn al-khālīs) is due? Yet, they who take for their protectors aught beside Him [are wont to say], “we worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah.” Truly Allah will judge between them with regard to all wherein they differ; for Allah does not grace with His guidance any who is bent on lying, stubbornly ingrate*



(*kadhīb kuffār*). In addition, there were those who denied religion as such, but believed that oaths by their idols determined what would befall them by way of good and evil (*Imān al-ʿArab* p. 12-13). Al-Rāzī, whose exegesis contains elaborate discussions on proofs for the existence of God, divides the disbelievers whom the Qurʾān addresses (see *DISBELIEF AND DOUBT; DISBELIEVERS*) into six categories, and explains how the Qurʾān challenges each of these with proofs for the Oneness of God (see *TAWHĪD*), Prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*) (*q.v.*), and Resurrection (*al-maʿād*) (*q.v.*) (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 2:21-22).

### Guidance (*hidāya*)

Al-Rāzī notes that the arguments most often adduced by the major Prophets are based upon creation and guidance. For instance, Ibrāhīm, upon him peace, proclaimed Allah as “the One Who created me; He is the One Who guides me” (Q 26:78); and Mūsā, upon him peace, replied to Pharaoh’s question (addressed to him and Hārūn, upon them peace) “Who is your Lord?” with: “Our Lord is the One Who gave everything its created form (*aʿtā kulla shayʾin khalqah*), then guided (*thumma hadā*)” (Q 20:50). Likewise, the first Revelation sent to Muḥammad, upon him peace, alluded to creation (*Recite! in the name of thy Lord Who created, created man from a germ-cell!*), and was immediately followed by mention of guidance (*Recite! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who taught by the pen*) (Q 96:3-4). A similar sequence occurs in Q 87:2-3: *He Who creates and thereupon forms; Who determines [the nature of what exists] (qaddara) and thereupon guides [il] (fa-hadā)*. Al-Rāzī glosses creation (*khalq*) as the creation of bodies and guidance (*hidāya*) as bestowing on them the powers of motion and perception. Hence their sequence in the verses above, and hence His words, *When I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit* (Q 15:29)—“for forming (*taswīyya*) refers to the [bodily] frame (*al-qālib*) and the breathing of the spirit refers to the creation of [its] abilities and strengths (*ibdāʿ al-quwā*).... To embark on explaining the marvels (*ʿajāʾib*) of the Wisdom of Allah Most High in [the matters of] creation and guidance is to embark upon a sea without shore.”

After rebutting certain claims of natural determinists (*al-ṭabīʿiyya*) drawn from theories of the natural elements, al-Rāzī provides examples of the wonders of creation and guidance, including the hexagonal construction of the honeycomb and the



*Allahu khayr al-ḥāfizīm.*

*Allah is the best of protectors.*

(Alḥmad Kāmil Āffendī)

guidance given to bugs and flies, by which they look out for themselves. His bountiful care of His creatures is not limited to creating the means upon which their survival depends, whether by way of food, drink, protective garb, or spouses, for He then guides them to the very process of benefiting from His blessings. Thus humans are guided to mine iron from mountains, draw pearls from the oceans, and concoct beneficial medicines and antidotes. This guidance is not restricted to humanity, for it is true of all mammals that they are given spouses for propagation and infants are guided to the mother’s breast. Nor indeed is this guidance restricted to mammals, for it applies even to individual organs: He created the hand with a specific anatomy (*tarkīb khāṣṣ*) and then imbued it with the power to grasp; created the leg to a certain anatomy and then imbued it with the power to walk; and likewise with the eye, the ear, and all other organs. Al-Rāzī then employs a logical argument against infinite regress (*tasalsul*) and circular causation (*dawr*), framing all this as a proof for the existence of Allah Most High, because the combining of physical anatomy (*tarkīb*), power (*quwwa*), and guidance (*hidāya*) is proof for the existence of a Maker: being a contingent possibility, it requires a capable Causer in order to be effected (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 20:50). Elsewhere, al-Rāzī explains that the Qurʾān employs this type of argument frequently, because its many wonders and singularities are also humanly observable, sufficient for the purpose, and the most cogent proofs (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 87:2-3).

### Proofs for His Existence in Intellectual Works

Further arguments for the existence of God, deployed in works dealing with intellectual sciences (*al-kutub al-‘aqliyya*), are premised on creation (*ḥudūth*) and contingency (*imkān*). The former take the existence of a generated cosmos as proof for the existence of a Creator, for whatever is generated must have a creator; the latter yields the well-known argument from infinite regress, according to which every created thing is contingent (*mumkin*) and requires a Being necessarily existent in Himself.

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī was one of the first to use the Qur’ānic description of the stages of birth (see BIRTH; ‘ALAQA) to formulate intellectual arguments for the existence of the Creator:

If it be asked: What is the proof that there is a Maker of creation who has made them and a Disposer (*mudabbir*) who has managed [their affairs]? The reply is: The proof is that you see a human being, now in his perfect and complete form (*ghāyat al-kamāl wal-tamām*), once a drop of sperm (*nutfā*), then congealed blood (‘*alāqa*), which then [became] flesh, blood, and bones. We are certain that he has not transported *himself* (*lam yanqul nafsah*) from one state to another (*min ḥāl ilā ḥāl*), for we observe that even in his most powerful state, [when in] full possession of intellect, he is incapable of generating for himself [the powers of] hearing or sight; nor can he create an organ for himself. This indicates that he was even less capable of doing so in his weak and incomplete form [in the womb]. (...) Furthermore, we observe him as a child, then a youth, then a middle-aged man, and finally an old man—and we know that he did not change *himself* from the state of youth to that of age and senility. However much a human being might strive he cannot rid himself of age and senility and return to a state of youthfulness. What we have described indicates that it is not he who moves himself through these states; rather, there is another Mover (*nāqil*) who transports him from one state to another and arranges the state he is in. (...) In the same way, it is impossible for cotton to become spun and plied, and then woven cloth, without [the work of] a weaver (*nāsij*), an artisan (*ṣānī‘*), or a designer (*mudabbir*). Anyone who takes cotton and waits for it to become spun and plied, and then woven cloth, without [the work of] an artisan nor a weaver, would be considered bereft of intelligence and full of stupidity. Likewise, if a man went to the wilderness where there is no built house and waited for the clay to become brick, and for [the bricks] to arrange them-

selves one atop the other without [the work of] an artisan or a builder, he would be considered an ignoramus. Now, since the transformation of a drop of sperm into congealed blood, then into an embryonic lump, then into flesh, blood, and bones is even more wondrous than these (*a‘zam fī-l-a‘jūba*), it follows that [these changes] are guided by a Maker who made the sperm and then transformed it from one state to another. Allāh Most High has said: Have you considered that [semen] which you emit? Is it you who create it, or are We its Creator? (Q 56:58-59).

*al-Luma‘* p. 17-19

Over the course of centuries, intellectual arguments for the existence of Allāh Most High crystallized into styles of argument and method that could be paradigmatically attributed to three distinct groups: dialectical theologians (*mutakallimūn*), philosophers (*al-falāsifa*), and Sufis. Ibn Rushd’s (450-520/1058-1126) systematic (if occasionally unrepresentative) formulation of these approaches in the first chapter of his *al-Kashf ‘an manāḥij al-adilla fī ‘aqā’id al-milla* (“Revealing the Methods of Reasoning in the Doctrines of the Sects”) mentions five different approaches to the question, associated with five different groups: (i) the literalists (*al-ḥashwiyya*), who held that the only means to ascertain the existence of God is transmitted knowledge (*al-sam‘*), not intellection (*al-‘aql*)—Ibn Rushd labels them “the misguided group” (*al-firqa al-dālla*), for, he says, the Qur’ān invites its readers to reflect and use their intellect; (ii) most of the Ash‘arīs, who admit rational proofs for the existence of God on the basis of creation or contingency; (iii) Imam al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (419-478/1028-1085), singled out among the Ash‘arīs; (iv) the Sufis (*ṭarīqat al-Ṣūfiyya*), who claim that we gain gnosis of God immediately, but whose path, even if one admits its validity, is not for the common folk (*‘ammat al-nās*); and (v) the Mu‘tazilis (*ṭarīqat al-Mu‘tazila*), whose ways can be said to resemble those of the Ash‘arīs (*wa yushabbih an takūn ṭuruquhum min jins ṭuruq al-Ash‘ariyya*) (*al-Kashf* p. 103-117).

Substantively, however, the Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī positions are not identical, as Abū al-Manṣūr ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1038) had explained in his *Uṣūl al-dīn* before Ibn Rushd and as al-Shahrastānī (479-548/1086-1153) would in his *Milal* after him. Like the Mu‘tazilis and Māturīdīs, the Ash‘arīs contend that the intellect (*‘aql*) can prove the contingency of the world, the oneness of its Maker, His Eternity, as well as His Eternal Attributes, the possibility of prophethood, and the general obligation (*taklīf*) inherent in the cosmic

order. But in contradistinction to the Mu'tazilis and Māturīdīs, the Ash'arīs hold that intellect is incapable of guiding one by itself to the specific religious obligations and prohibitions (*taklīf*) arising from such knowledge, for these can only be known by way of revelation. Thus, they consider that even were a person to reason out the above principles and affirm them, "such a person will be [merely] a believing monotheist (*muwahhīdan mu'minan*). That will not make him deserving of any reward (*thawāb*) from Allah Most High; were Allah to reward him with Paradise and its bounties, it would be [an act of supernumerary] Divine grace (*faḍl*). Were he to deny [this principled monotheism] and be misguided before Revelation reached him, he would be a disbeliever (*kāfir*) and atheist (*mulhīd*), but not deserving of Divine retribution (*'iqāb*). Were Allah, Mighty and Majestic, to punish him with eternal Fire, he would receive it, but not as a retribution (*laysa bi-'iqāb*): rather, the pain inflicted would be like the pain that befalls beasts and children in this world without them deserving it" (al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl* p. 24-25). (For the Ash'arīs, reward and punishment proper are entailed only by respectively obeying and transgressing Divine commands, which have not reached the reasoner in question.) Al-Baghdādī includes a list of those holding this opinion: "This is the position (*madhhab*) on the matter of our Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, concurred with by Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī, al-Awzā'ī, al-Thawrī, Abū Thawr, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Dāwūd, the Zāhirīs, the Ḍirāriyya, all of the Najāriyya; and likewise narrated by Bishr b. Ghayāth from Abū Ḥanīfa and his two students, Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan. The Mu'tazila and the Barāhima (Hindu Brahmins), on the other hand, assert that intellection is the path to cognition (*ṭarīq ilā ma'rifa*) of [what is] obligatory (*wājib*) and prohibited (*maḥẓūr*)" (*Uṣūl* p. 26).

As explained above, the primary argument for the existence of God in *Kalām* discourse is premised on the contingency of the world (*ḥudūth al-'ālam*). "The world"—defined as every existent other than Allah Most High (*kull mawjūd siwā Allāh ta'ālā*) (al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf* p. 29; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'aqā'id* p. 23; al-Juwaynī, *Irshād* p. 57)—consists of substances (*a'yān*), which subsist in themselves, and accidents (*a'rād*), which do not. All substances and accidents are subject to generation and decay and so are contingent (*ḥādith*), for they undergo change from one state to another. Ibrāhīm, upon him peace, proclaimed a star to be his Lord, but when it set (changing from one state to another) he recognized it too was created (Q 6:76-79). The argument from

contingency proceeds by positing that every contingent being (*muḥdath*) must have an originator (*muḥdith*); the world being contingent, it follows that the world must have an originator. That the world is contingent means that its two possibilities—existence and non-existence—are equal in probability unless a preponderance is determined, tipping the balance one way or the other. That the world persists demonstrates that there is an originator, namely Allah Most High, the Necessary Being (*al-wājib al-wujūd*) (al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id* p. 23-28; al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf* p. 29; al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd* p. 23).

Al-Bāqillānī (338-403/950-1013), the master theologian credited with giving definite shape to arguments for a Creator from contingency, also presents two other arguments: (i) the antecedence (*laqaddum*) and anteriority (*ta'akhkḥur*) of certain things over others requires an agent (God) who established them so, being logically incommensurable on their own; (ii) existing things are endowed with determined forms which they cannot grant to themselves, and so require a determinant (God) ensuring that they receive these forms and no other (*al-Inṣāf* p. 30). These arguments against the necessity of the world as it is, and hence against the eternity of the world, together offer an alternative argument for the contingency of the world, its mere possibility. They also extend the scope of the *Kalām* discourse beyond the standard argument from contingency by positing that since the universe was not by any a priori necessity arranged as it is, it must have a preexistent and independent cause.

Further building on this discursive tradition, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) advanced five logically "compelling proofs" (*barāhīn ḍarūriyya*) of the temporality of the world in his *al-Fiṣaḥ fī-l-mūlā wal-ahwā' wal-nihāl* ("Critical Examination of Religions, Heresies, and Sects") (1:57-65): (i) every substance (*shakhṣ*) in the world, every accident in every substance, and all Time (*kull zamān*)—conceived as comprised of transient moments—is finite. The finitude of substances is evident from the limits of the area they occupy and the duration of their existence; that of accidents from the finitude of the substances in which they inhere; and that of time from the transience of the moments composing it; (ii) every existent in actuality (*bil-fi'l*) is numerically determinate, and therefore finite; (iii) since a non-finite world would imply temporal eternity, and since infinity cannot be extended by adding anything to it, any elapsed time would not add anything to the time already elapsed. The time elapsed from the beginning of time (*al-abad*) down to our age (*zamāninā*), for instance, would thus be equal to the time

elapsed down to the Hijra of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace; the revolutions of a planet such as Saturn, which revolves once every thirty years, would be equal to the those of the Upper Heavens (*dār al-falak al-akbar*), amounting to some 11,000 revolutions during the same period of time. Temporal finitude is necessary (*fa-wajabat al-nihāya fī-l-zamān*), Ibn Hazm argues (among other reasons), to avoid mutually exclusive eternal moments, and to maintain the intuitive logical necessity of the whole being greater than the part; (iv) were the world without beginning and end, it would be impossible to determine in number and in nature (being an undifferentiated mass); and (v) likewise, were there no beginning and no end, we would not be able to enumerate one thing after another—whereas in our reality (*fī wujūdīnā*), the things of the world can be so enumerated. Hence the necessity of a beginning to the universe. Allah Most High has drawn our attention to this and the preceding proof, he concludes, in His saying *and He takes count of all things* (Q 72:28).

Despite such additional proofs and arguments, the argument from the temporality of the world remained the bedrock of *Kalām*-based proofs for the existence of a Creator. That explains in part why the *Mutakallimūn* were in general averse to the philosophers' notion of the eternity of the world (see below). It should be noted that the *Kalām* argument had already been well articulated by the time of al-Ghazālī's sweeping refutation of the eternity of the world (cf. Discussions 1 and 2 of *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*), his teacher al-Juwaynī (419-478/1028-1085) even giving it a popular form. After establishing the temporality of the world and arguing against its eternity in the third chapter of his *al-Irshād* (p. 17-27), he opens the fourth chapter by saying, "Now that the temporality of the world (*ḥudūth al-ʿālam*) has been established, it is clear that there is a beginning to its existence (*muftataḥ al-wujūd*); and since it is equally possible for a temporal being (*ḥādith*) to exist or not to exist...reason demands that the world must have a Determinant (*mukhaṣṣis*) who determined its actual existence" (*al-Irshād* p. 28). Al-Ghazālī's sophisticated rearticulation of the *Kalām* arguments, as well as his forceful rejection of certain positions echoing the Aristotelian concept of an eternal, self-perpetuating world, were decisive in shifting the balance of the discourse (see the fourth introduction to his *al-Iqtisād*, a work dealing with generally the same topics as al-Juwaynī's *Irshād* but making full use of Aristotelian logic, including the syllogism).

Finally, al-Rāzī provides perhaps the most nuanced and comprehensive exposition of the *Kalām* tradition on the subject. He develops a Qurʾānically-suffused typology of ways in which the rational proofs for the existence of a Creator can be understood. These arguments are based on either temporality (*ḥudūth*), contingency (*imkān*), or a combination of both, whether with regard to substances (*jawāhir*) or accidents (*aʿrāḍ*).

- Arguments from the contingency of essences (*istidlāl bi-imkān al-dhawāt*), alluded to in Qurʾānic verses such as *Allah is indeed free of want, whereas you stand impoverished* (Q 47:38); the words of Ibrāhīm, "*For surely they (the false deities) are my enemies, [and none is my helper] save the Sustainer of all the worlds*" (Q 26:77); *and that with thy Sustainer is the beginning and the end [of all that exists]* (Q 53:42); *say "Allah!" and then leave them toying in their folly* (Q 6:91); *So flee unto Allah* (Q 51:50); and *indeed, hearts grow tranquil in the remembrance of Allah* (Q 13:28);
- Arguments from the contingency of attributes (*istidlāl bi-imkān al-ṣifāt*), alluded to in Qurʾānic verses such as *He has created the heavens and the earth* (Q 16:3) and *the One Who made the earth a resting-bed for you, and the heavens a canopy* (Q 2:22) (see the "cosmic arguments" below);
- Arguments from the temporality of bodies (*istidlāl bi-ḥudūth al-aṣām*), alluded to in Qurʾānic verses such as the saying of Ibrāhīm, upon him peace: "*I do not love what sets*" (Q 6:76);
- Arguments from the temporality of accidents (*istidlāl bi-ḥudūth al-aʿrāḍ*), this being the mode of argument easiest for people to comprehend (*aqrab...ilā afḥām al-khalq*). These comprise proofs (*dalāʾil*) of two kinds. First, those based on the human self (*al-anfus*): everyone necessarily knows that whatever has come into existence after non-existence (*al-ʿadam*) must have a creator (*mūjid*). This creator cannot be man himself, or his parents, or the rest of humanity, but must be different from these existents (*yukhālif hādhih al-mawjūdāt*) so as to bring these persons (*al-ashkhās*) into existence. Second, those based on the cosmos (*al-afāq*), including all its mutable states, whether thunder, lightning, winds, clouds, or the interchanging seasons. Such proofs lead to the conclusion that heavenly and elemental bodies are alike in their corporeality (*mushtarika fī-l-jismiyya*), it being impossible to principally distinguish one from another on the basis of characteristics such as their proportion,



shape, or location. (...) This proves that all bodies depend on a Capable Cause (*Mu'aththir Qādir*) with neither body nor corporeality (*laysa bi-jism wa lā jismāniyya*) (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 2:21).

#### Position of the Philosophers about His Existence

Many (al-Ghazālī claims a majority) of the Muslim philosophers believed in the eternity of the world, claiming that it “has never ceased to exist with Allah, Exalted be He, being an effect (*ma'lūl*) of His, existing along with Him, not posterior to Him in time—[as] an effect coexists along with the cause, and light along with the sun—and that the Creator’s priority to [the world] is like the priority of the cause to the effect, which is a priority of essence and rank, not of time (*taqaddum bil-dhāt wal-rutba lā bil-zamān*)” (al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, First Discussion, p. 88). This position is based on the premise that what is eternal does not admit change. Had the world a temporal beginning, there must have been something determining its existence at the moment it was created, for otherwise it would have remained in the state of pure potentiality it was in before its existentiatio. However, if there were something determining its existence, that determinant must have been determined by another, ad infinitum. There cannot be any new determinations in an eternal God, for that would contravene the axiom that anything eternal does not admit change. Therefore, according to this philosophical argument, the world must have existed alongside God through pre-eternity.

Ibn Rushd writes that the Qur’ān presents two kinds of demonstrative proof for the existence of Allah Most High. Some verses indicate proofs for teleological arguments (*dalīl al-‘ināya*) (including Q 25:61; 78:6-16; 80:24...); others indicate proofs for cosmological arguments (*dalīl al-ikhtirā’*) (Q 6:79; 22:73; 86:5; 88:17...); and others yet (the most frequent type) combine both kinds of proofs (Q 2:21; 3:192; 33:33...). Q 17:44 provides a good example of how both kinds of proofs are articulated: *The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, as do the earth and all that they contain. And there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [mankind] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! Verily, He is forbearing, much-forgiving.* Ibn Rushd says that this means of reaching knowledge of His existence has been disclosed to humans by God, Who indeed lodged it in their innate primordial nature (*al-fīṭrat al-ūlā al-maghrūza*) (cf. Q 7:172) (*al-Kashf* p. 120).

Furthermore, Ibn Rushd states that teleological and cosmological proofs each rest on two principles, which humans are born with the ability to recognize. Both also

relate to the axiom that everything that exists is related to the ultimate purpose of creation of human beings, which is worship (*‘ibāda*) of Allah Most High (cf. Q 21:107). Teleological proofs show that every existing thing in the world accords with and supports the existence of human beings (including the alternation of night and day, seasons, the harmony of animals, plants, minerals, and that of the proportions of bodies human and animal...). This harmony could not have emerged accidentally, but required an active agent to will it. Cosmological evidence, encompassing animals, plants, and the heavens, shows that they are all created. With animals and plants, since we observe that bodies are first lifeless and that life then appears, we can know with certainty that there is a Being Who gives life. The Most High says, *O Mankind, a parable is set forth, so hearken to it. Truly those beings whom you invoke instead of Allah could not create [as much as] a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end! And if a fly robs them of anything, they cannot [even] rescue it from it. Weak indeed is the seeker, and [weak] the sought!* (Q 22:73). As for the heavens, Ibn Rushd continues, we know from their unceasing movement that they were commissioned for our benefit; something made subservient must come into existence through a Creator (*al-Kashf* p. 118-119).

#### The Path of the Sufis

Without denying the validity or utility of demonstrative proofs, the Sufis consider the path of inner illumination (*ilhām*) and purification of the self a superior method of gaining certitude regarding the existence of Allah Most High. The former approaches, by the Sufi typology, lead only to cognitional (*‘ilmī*) knowledge, whereas the latter is immediate, experiential (*ḥālī*) knowledge (al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf* p. 161; al-Nafrāwī, *al-Fawākih al-dawānī* 1:44). While cognitional knowledge is the source of “all good, in this and the next world”, it is experiential knowledge which creates the correct state (*siḥḥat-i ḥāl*) toward Allah, and it is the correct state that leads to gnosis (*ma‘rifā*). One can have cognitional knowledge without a correct state, but not vice versa (al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf* p. 161). Rejecting the Mu‘tazilī claim that it is the intellect by which we gain knowledge of God, al-Hujwīrī argues that were intellect (*‘aql*) the criterion of knowledge of Allah, then everyone endowed with reason would have knowledge of Allah; likewise, all who lack reason—such as madmen—would be deemed ignorant of Allah, which is manifestly absurd. Others say that demonstrative knowledge (*istidlāl*) is the cause of knowledge of Allah and that such knowledge is not gained except by those who can deduce it through this method. “According to the People of the

Prophetic Path and Consensus (*ahl al-sunna wal-jamāʿa*) (i.e., the orthodox community),” he continues:

Soundness of intellect and regard to evidence are [only] a means to gnosis, not the cause thereof. The sole cause is the will and favor of Allah Most High. For without His favor, intellect is blind; it does not even know itself, so how can it know another? Heretics of all kinds use the demonstrative method, but most of them do not know Allah. On the other hand, when one enjoys the favor of Allah Most High, all his actions become so many tokens of gnosis... When the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī, Allah be well-pleased with him, was asked a question concerning gnosis, he said: “I know Allah by Allah, and I know that which is not Allah by the light of Allah.” Allah created the body and committed its life force to the soul (*wa ḥawālat-i zindagānī-i ān ba-jān kard*) and He created the heart and committed its life force to Himself.

Hence inasmuch as intellect, human faculties, and demonstrative proofs have no power to give life to the body, they cannot bring the heart to life (*muḥāl bāshad kih dīl-rā zinda kunad*). As He has said, *Is one who was dead and to whom We gave life, and for whom We made a light to walk by among mankind, like one who is as it were in darkness from which he cannot escape?* (Q 6:122). In other words, He has attributed life to Himself, saying, “I am the Creator of the light by which believers are illumined.” Allah is the One who opens and seals the hearts of men (Q 2:6; 39:23), and so He alone can guide them. Everything except Him is a mere cause or means, and causes and means cannot possibly indicate the right way without the favor of the Causer: (...) Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī says: “There is none to indicate the way to Allah but Allah Himself; knowledge is sought only for due performance of His worship.”

*al-Kashf* p. 162

## II. His Attributes (*Ṣifāt*)

Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (Q 112) enjoins the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, to proclaim: *Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah, the Eternally Self-Sufficient (al-Ṣamad). He begets not, nor is begotten. And none is like Him.* The sura expounds, in condensed form and chiefly by negation, the transcendence of Divine unity, “refuting in its four verses all [forms of] disbelief (*kufīr*) and fancies (*ahwāʾ*). It is named Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (“the Sura of Sincerity”) because it sweeps away all impurities foreign to the transcendence (*tanẓīh*) of Allah, Exalted is He, above all that is not fitting for Him” (Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 112). Commentators record

the occasion of revelation (*q.v.*) of Q 112 to have been a demand made to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace: “Describe your Lord to us.” (According to ‘Ikrima, Ubayy b. Kaʿb, Abū al-ʿĀliya, and Jabir, this demand came from the polytheists; according to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Qatāda, and Muqātil, from the Jews.) Thereupon Jibrīl (*q.v.*) descended with this sura (see *Tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Samarqandī, Thaʿlabī, Qushayrī, Wāḥidī, Baghawī, Ibn ʿAṭiyya).

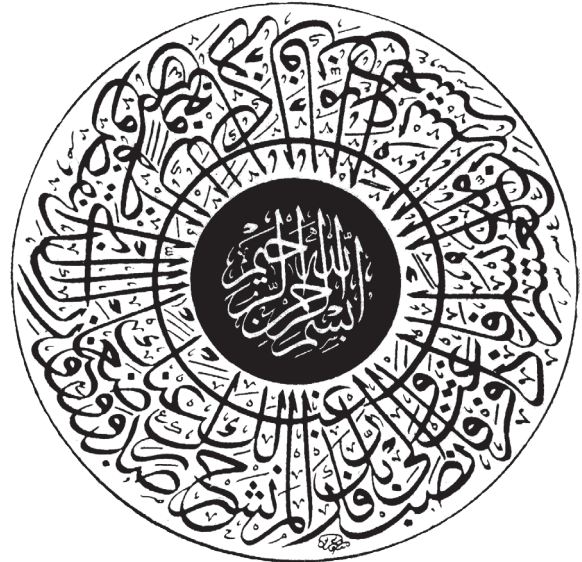
The attributes of Allah mentioned in Q 112 and elsewhere in the Qurʾān were understood by the Companions without delving into their modalities (*bi-lā kayf*). This attitude of the early generations was characteristically expressed by Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (107-198/725-813), the eminent third generation (*tābiʿ al-tābiʿī*) Hadīth master: “Interpretation of all the attributes by which Allah Most High has described Himself in His Book consists of the recitation [of such verses] and [then] silence about them (*fa-tafsīruh tilāwatuh wal-sukūt ʿalayh*)” (al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmāʾ wal-ṣifāt* 2:158). Such acknowledgement of the limitations of human understanding is reflected in the interpretive stances of the Companions, Successors, and Followers. When asked about the phrase *istiwāʾ ʿalā al-ʿarsh* (“elevation or establishment upon the Throne”), a formulation which, being susceptible to interpretation in spatial terms, became a major subject of controversy in subsequent centuries (see *THRONE*), the wife of the Prophet Umm Salama (d. 62/681), Allah be well-pleased with her, responded: “The *istiwāʾ* is not inconceivable (*ghayr majhūl*), but its modality (*al-kayf*) is inaccessible to reason (*ghayr maʿqūl*). It is for Allah to send Messengers; it is for the Messenger to convey the message (*al-balāgh*); and it is for us to submit (*taslīm*)” (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, Fitān, qawḥūh bāb wa kān ʿarshuh ʿalā l-māʾ wa Huwa Rabb al-ʿarsh al-ʿazīm). When Imam Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) was asked about *al-istiwāʾ*, he replied: “*Al-istiwāʾ* is known (*maʿlūm*); its modality is unknown (*al-kayf majhūl*); faith in it is obligatory (*al-īmān bih wājib*); and to ask about it is innovation (*al-suʿāl ʿanh bidʿa*)” (cf. Samarqandī, *Baḥr*, sub Q 2:29; Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *Muḥarrar*, sub Q 20:5; Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 7:54; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 3:7; Ghazālī, *Ihyāʾ*, Book 2, “Qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid”, faṣl ii, 1:378).

The understanding of Divine attributes in the light of Prophecy, as exemplified by the first three generations—described by the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, as “the best of my Community” (Bukhārī, Aṣḥāb al-Nabī, faḍāʾil aṣḥāb al-Nabī)—was increasingly overtaken by major controversies. These first emerged in an epistemological context, concerning the respective

roles of transmitted and acquired knowledge, and then gained credal salience. Jalūn b. Ṣafwān (d. ca.128/745) was one of the first to perform a dialectical analysis of the Divine attributes, perhaps under the influence of his formerly Manichaean teacher al-Ja'd b. Dirham (executed by order of Caliph Hishām (r. 105-125/723-742): cf. al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 9:71), who himself held a doctrine of extreme *ta'tīl* (disassociating Allah Most High from attributes, see below). After him, the doctrine of *ta'tīl* was widely taught by Bishr b. Ghayāth al-Marīsī (d. 218/833). By the end of the second century of Islam, the Mu'tazilis had taken it up in their own way, rendering the Divine attributes a didactic exposition of the results of a rigorous application of *tanzīh*, repudiating any similarity between the Creator and His creation (*nafy al-tashbīh*).

The epistemological bases for interpretation gained fundamental importance in the discourse, given that the problem of interpreting the Divine attributes was not only semantic but also ontological. Those who gave excessive weight to the letter of the Scripture were disparaged as *mujassima* and *hashwiyya*, the anthropomorphists characterized by Bahā' al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 719-772/1319-1370) as “the misguided sect (*al-firqat al-dālla*) who interpret Qur'ānic verses in the most literal sense (*yujrūna āyāt Allāh 'alā zahīrihā*)” (al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf* 1:678), to the extent of likening Allah Most High to created things. At the other end of the spectrum were the Mu'tazilis, who called themselves “The Folk of [Divine] Unicity and Justice” (*ahl al-tawhīd wal-'adl*) after their key theological doctrines, and who in their concern to transcendentalize the human understanding of Divine attributes disassociated them from all traces of created things. They believed the Divine attributes to be identical with His Essence, in order to maintain His absolute singularity (as against what they saw as a doctrine resulting in a plurality of eternals). This overriding concern with asserting Allah's absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*) was severely criticized by their opponents, who saw this as a non-Qur'ānic conception of an abstract God removed from His creation and devoid of all attributes.

Over the course of the first three centuries of Islam, this contested interpretive discourse produced a number of positions associated with distinct schools, despite their internal differences. From the fideism of the early generations and in a polemical context, Ash'aris developed the doctrinal principle of *tafwīd*, which required that the reality of the Divine Attributes be affirmed *bi-lā kayf wa lā tashbīh* (“without [specifying] how and without likening [to the created]”). They understood



Q 94: *alam nashraḥ laka ṣadrak. wa-waḍa'nā 'an-ka wizrak. al-ladhī anqaḍa ḡhrak. wa-rafa'nā-laka dhikrak. fa-inna ma'a l-'usri yusra. inna ma'a l-'usri yusra. fa-idhā faraghta fa-nṣab. wa ilā Rabbika fa-rghab.*

*Have We not expanded your breast for you, [O Muḥammad]? And lifted from you the burden that had weighed heavy upon your back and raised high your renown? But verily, with hardship [comes] ease. Verily, with hardship [comes] ease. So, when you are relieved [your work completed], then stand fast, and long then for your Lord.*

(ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Rafāʿī)

the Attributes as being distinct from the Divine Essence (*dhāt*). Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī argued forcefully that were His Attributes not distinct from His Essence, then all Attributes would have the same meaning, for His Essence is a simple and indivisible unity (*Maqālāt* p. 484). The Ashʿaris affirmed a distinct reality to Divine Attributes while rejecting any correspondence between them and created things, charting what they saw as a middle course between the Mu'tazilis and the literalists. They maintained God's absolute dissimilarity to creation (*mukhālaḥa lil-ḥawādith*), while affirming that His Attributes inhere eternally in Him (al-Ashʿarī, *al-Ibāna* p. 47).

While agreeing with most points of Ashʿarī doctrine, the Māturīdī school (named after Muḥammad Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī) differed regarding Divine attributes of agency (*al-ṣifāt al-fiʿliyya*) such as creation, giving life and death, and resurrecting the dead. While the Ashʿaris believed such actions to be temporal, the Māturīdis believed them to be manifestations of existence (*ṭawwīn*), a single eternal Attribute distinct

from His power (*qudra*). Both the Māturīdis and Ash‘arīs affirm that (i) those attributes appearing to indicate some similitude between the Creator and creation must be affirmed to the extent articulated by Allah Most High in the Qur’ān, no more and no less; (ii) it is obligatory to negate any similitude whatsoever between the Creator and creation, in accordance with the Qur’ānic verse *There is nothing like unto Him* (Q 42:11); and (iii) one must consign all knowledge of the specific modalities and details of such Attributes to Allah Most High, following the principle of *tafwīd* (al-Bājūrī, *Tuhfat al-murīd* p. 39-40; al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrāt al-adilla* 1:353-423; al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-rawḍ* p. 82-83; al-Mayḍānī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdat al-Ṭahāwīyya* p. 57).

Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (728-771/1327-1369) articulated only six fundamental differences between the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī creeds, terminological or semantic differences aside: (i) Ash‘arīs believe that Allah Most High could in principle punish the obedient and reward the disobedient, although His Revelation promises to reward the former and punish the latter; Māturīdis believe that He must in principle reward the obedient and punish the disobedient, since to do otherwise would be absurd; (ii) Ash‘arīs believe that the obligation upon mankind to believe in Allah Most High proceeds from their having been reached by Revelation, not merely from their rational capacities; Māturīdis believe that humans are obliged to believe in Allah by virtue of their being endowed with intellect, that is, even before Revelation reaches them; (iii) as stated above, Ash‘arīs believe that Divine Attributes of agency (such as creation) are temporal; Māturīdis believe they are all manifestations of a single eternal Attribute, termed “existentiality” (*takwīm*); (iv) Ash‘arīs believe that God’s own eternal speech may be heard by human beings, as did Prophet Mūsā, upon him peace (*q.v.*); Māturīdis believe it may not be heard; (v) most Ash‘arīs believe that in principle God may impose moral obligations that man cannot bear; Māturīdis believe this impossible, though both agree that in practice He never does so; and (vi) Ash‘arīs variously hold that Prophets may absentmindedly commit lesser sins or that this is impossible; Māturīdis hold it to be impossible (see INFALLIBILITY OF PROPHETS), Prophets being divinely protected from both enormities and lesser sins (*Ṭabaqāt* 3:386-388).

In his classic manual of doctrine, Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933) declared, “Anyone who ascribes any human qualities to Allah Most High thereby commits disbelief. So whoever perceives this takes heed

and refrains from saying things such as the disbelievers say, and knows that Allah Most High, in all of His attributes, is utterly unlike humanity” (§38). Resorting to the principle of *tafwīd*, al-Ṭahāwī writes: “One’s footing in Islam is not firm unless it be on the ground of submission and surrender. Whosoever covets knowledge that is forbidden to him, not content with the limits of his own understanding, his covetousness veils him from [attaining an understanding of] pure Oneness, unadulterated gnosis, and sound faith, and he then wavers between belief and disbelief, affirmation and negation, resolution and denial. Obsessive, aimless, skeptical, and deviant, he is neither an assertive believer nor a staunch denier” (§42-43). The correct understanding of Divine attributes, al-Ṭahāwī continues, lies between the two doctrinal extremes of *tashbīh* and *ta‘ṭīl*: “Whoever slips does not guard against negating [His attributes] and anthropomorphism, and has failed to understand His transcendence (*tanzīh*). Verily our Lord, Sublime and Exalted is He, can only be described with the attributes of Oneness (*waḥdāniyya*) and absolute uniqueness (*fardāniyya*). None from the creation is in any way like Him. Allah is transcendent beyond limits, restrictions, supports, components, and instruments. The six directions (i.e., three dimensions) do not encompass Him as they do created things” (§46-47).

The hadith master and eminent theologian Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī (384-458/994-1066) articulated a rigorous method for formulating points of doctrine: “The basic rule (*al-aṣl*) is that [we affirm] every Attribute mentioned in the Book, authentically conveyed in mass-narrated reports (*bi-akḥbār al-tawātur*), or reported in those lone-narrated (*āḥād*) reports which have their origin in the Book, as well as [Attributes] that are inferable from one of its meanings: we affirm such an Attribute in its apparent meaning (*‘alā ṣāḥirihā*), without [speculating on] its modality (*ghayr takayyuf*).” With regard to attributes found in singly narrated reports and whose apparent meaning yields a certain similarity with creation (*tashbīh*), al-Bayhaqī urges interpreting (*nata’awwal*) the language of the report against the possibility of imputing anthropomorphism (*al-Asmā’ wal-ṣifāt* p. 332). The editor of al-Bayhaqī’s text, Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (d. 1371/1951), an eminent Ḥanafī jurist and associate of the last Ottoman *Shaykh al-Islam*, Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī (d. 1373/1954), notes that this method proves a middle course “between the *tafwīd* (the relegation to Allah of the precise meaning of Divine Attributes) of the early generations (*salaf*), and the *ta’wīl* (rational



or speculative interpretation) of the later generations (*khalaf*)."

In the course of the centuries following the early debates, the Divine Attributes—initially mentioned (for instance, in al-Ash'arī's *Ibāna*) without any particular sequence—came to be systematized and ordered in Ash'arī and Māturīdī credal texts. (For some representative treatises, commentaries, and super-commentaries, see the table before the bibliography.) In Ash'arī *Kalām*, the attributes deemed rationally necessary came to be organized into four categories: (i) essential attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-naḥsiyya* or *ṣifāt al-dhāt*), comprising the single attribute of existence (*wujūd*); (ii) transcendental attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-salbiyya*), comprising the five attributes of eternity (*qidam*), permanence (*baqā'*), dissimilarity from creation (*mukhālaḥa lil-ḥawādīth*), self-subsistence (*qiyām bil-naḥs*), and oneness (*waḥdāniyya*); (iii) conceptual attributes (*ṣifāt al-ma'ānī*), comprising the seven attributes of life (*ḥayāt*), knowledge (*'ilm*), will (*irāda*), power (*qudra*), hearing (*sam'*), sight (*baṣar*), and speech (*kalām*); and (iv) attributes of qualification (*al-ṣifāt al-ma'naviyya*), being the active participles of the seven corresponding conceptual attributes—that is, Allah Most High's being living (*ḥayy*), knowing (*'ālim*), volitional (*murīd*), powerful (*qādir*), hearing (*samī'*), seeing (*baṣīr*), and speaking (*mutakallim*). The opposites of these twenty necessary attributes were deemed logically impossible for Allah: (i) non-existence (*'adam*); (ii) temporality (*ḥudūth*); (iii) evanescence (*fanā'*, *ṭurūṭ al-'adam*); (iv) similarity to creation (*mumāthalat al-ḥawādīth*); (v) dependence (*lā yakūn qā'iman bi-naḥsih*); (vi) multiplicity (*murakkab*); (vii) death (*marwt*); (viii) ignorance (*jahl*); (ix) lack of will (*'adam al-irāda*); (x) incapacity (*'ajz*); (xi) deafness (*ṣamam*); (xii) blindness (*'amā*); (xiii) speechlessness (*bakam*); and the corresponding seven opposites of the attributes of qualification.

How to understand the Divine Attributes correctly has remained a field of scholarly dispute ever since its emergence in the first quarter of the second century of Islam down to the present day, with the debate shifting at the emergence of each new facet of discourse. The heated modern controversies, centered largely on the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya (661-728/1263-1328) in so-called 'Salafi' and 'anti-Salafi' debates, even now recall the classic confrontations between Mu'tazilis and Ash'arīs. Against the controversies of his own time, the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (766-845/1365-1441) offered a wordy but eloquent counterpoint, worth quoting at length for the way he frames an ideal-type of piety in the context of such debates:

Know that when Allah Most High commissioned from the Arabs His Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, as an Emissary to all humankind, and he described to them their Lord, Glorified and Exalted be He, [with the Attributes] by which He had described His Noble Self in His Mighty Book, the one the Trusted Spirit carried down to his heart, peace and blessings be upon him, and what was revealed to him by His Lord Most High—none of the contemporary Arabs, neither city-dwellers nor Bedouins, ever asked him about the meaning of any of them (*'an ma'nā shay' min dhālik*) as they would ask him, upon him blessings and peace, about matters pertaining to prayer (*ṣalāt*), alms (*zakāt*), fasting, Hajj, and other subjects regarding which Allah the Glorified enjoined and forbade; and likewise as they asked him, upon him blessings and peace, about the states of Resurrection, Paradise, and Hell.

Had any of them asked him anything about the Divine Attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-ilāhiyya*) it would have been transmitted, as were the hadiths originating (*al-wārida*) from the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, on rulings regarding the lawful and unlawful, persuasion and deterrence, and the states of Resurrection, slaughter, and tribulations, and such [other] matters as fill the books of Hadith... Whosoever ponders over these voluminous books of Prophetic hadiths, and is well acquainted with the traditions of the [righteous] predecessors (*al-āthār al-salafiyya*), will know that not a single sound or unsound report, from any of the Companions—Allah be well-pleased with them—for all their diverse ranks and great number, [narrates that a Companion] ever asked the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, the meaning of anything by which the Lord—Glorified be He—described His Noble Self in the Noble Qur'an or on the tongue of His Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace. Rather, all of them understood its meaning and refrained from discussion of the Attributes (*sakātū 'an al-kalām fī-l-ṣifāt*). Nor, indeed, did any of them differentiate between an Attribute of essence (*ṣifa dhāt*) or an Attribute of action (*ṣifa fi'l*).

They also, may Allah be well-pleased with them, affirmed His Eternal Attributes (*ṣifāt azaliyya*), Exalted be He, of Knowledge, Power, Life, Will, Hearing, Sight, Speech, Majesty, Nobility, Munificence, Bountifulness, Might, and Greatness—maintaining a uniform attitude toward all Attributes (*wa sāqū al-kalām sūqan wāhida*). Likewise, Allah be well-pleased with them, they affirmed what Allah, Glorified be He, attributed to His Noble Self, such as His Face, His Hand, and the

like, at the same time denying that these have any similarity to those of created beings (*mumāthalat al-makhlūqīn*). Thus they, Allah be well-pleased with them, affirmed [the Attributes] without anthropomorphism (*bi-lā tashbih*); they declared [Allah] free of imperfection (*wa nazzahū*) without divesting [attributes] (*bi-lā taʿīl*); none of them attempted (*yataʿarrad*) a [rational] interpretation (*taʿwīl*) of any of these. They all held the opinion that the attributes must be understood as they were mentioned. None of them had anything to argue for the Oneness of Allah Most High, or confirmation (*ithbāt*) of the prophethood of Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, except the Book of Allah; and none of them knew anything about the methods of *Kalām* and the problems of philosophy.

*al-Mawāʿiz wal-iʿtibār* 4:188

### His Transcendence (*Tanzīh*)

Another aspect of the Qurʾānic affirmation of a singular, Omnipotent, and Merciful God, *closer to him* (every human) *than his own jugular vein* (Q 50:16; see ARTERIES AND VEINS), is mentioned in verses which refer to His transcendence (*tanzīh*), classically defined as “declaring Allah Most High free of all that is not worthy of Him” (Ghazālī/Zabīdī, *Ihyāʾ/Itḥāf* 2:135).

Numerous verses mention the transcendence of His Being (*dhāt*). For instance: *And thy Lord alone is Self-Sufficient, Possessor of Mercy* (Q 47:38); *Allah is indeed Self-Sufficient, whereas you stand in need [of Him]* (Q 6:133); *He begets not nor was He begotten* (Q 112:3). Others are related to His unwaning Power and Ability: *...neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep* (Q 2:255); *...while He feeds and is not fed* (Q 6:14); *whenever We Will anything to be, We but say unto it Our word ‘Be’—and it is* (Q 16:40); *...and never does thy Sustainer forget* (Q 19:64); *...and He protects while there is no protector against Him* (Q 23:88); *And We have created the heavens and the Earth and what is between them in six days, and no fatigue touched Us* (Q 50:38).

Still others refer to His Absolute Knowledge of everything and His transcendence of temporal bounds: *...Not even an atom’s weight, nor less than that nor greater, is hidden from Him* (Q 34:3); *and the matter of the Hour is like the blink of the eye or nearer* (Q 16:77). Other verses negate the attribution to Allah of certain kinds of actions:

- He does not create in vain: *We have not created heaven and earth and all that is between them without meaning and purpose: such is the surmise of those who disbelieve;* (Q 38:27); *the believers ponder over the creation of the*

*heavens and the Earth [and proclaim]: ‘Our Lord, You have not created this without purpose’* (Q 3:191); *We have not created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in mere idle play; none of this have We created without truth* (Q 44:38-39); *Did you suppose, then, that We had created you without purpose, and that you would not return to Us?* (Q 23:115-116);

- He is not pleased with ingratitude (Q 39:7);
- He does not wish injustice (Q 49:31);
- He does not like corruption (Q 2:205);
- He does not do injustice: *What concern has Allah for your punishment if you are thankful and believe (in Him)? Allah is ever Responsive, Aware* (Q 4:147);
- He does not benefit from obedience, nor is He harmed by disobedience or sins: *If you do good, it is for your own good; and if you commit evil, it is to your own detriment* (Q 17:7);
- He is not answerable to anyone: *He cannot be called to account for whatever He does, whereas [mankind] shall be called to account* (Q 21:23); *[He is] Sovereign Doer of whatever He wills* (Q 85:16);
- He does not contravene His Promise and Threat: *The judgment passed by Me shall not be altered; but never do I the least wrong unto My servants* (Q 50:29).

The possible forms of negation being virtually limitless, scholars used a methodological approach to broadly categorize attributes pertaining to various aspects of Divine Transcendence. Al-Rāzī states the principal rule used for this purpose: “The method ensuring exactness (*taṭīq al-dabt*) in [categorization of attributes] is to say that a negation (*al-salb*) refers (*ʿaʿid*) to the [Divine] Essence (*dhāt*), Attributes (*ṣifāt*), or Actions (*afʿāl*)” (*Tafsīr*, fī mabāḥith Bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm, 1:128).

Over the centuries, the *Kalām* discourse developed five broad categories by which to understand the transcendental Attributes: (i) pre-eternity (*qidam*); (ii) permanence (*baqāʾ*); (iii) dissimilarity to created things (*mukhālafa lil-ḥawādith*); (iv) self-subsistence (*qiyāmuh bil-nafs*); and (v) uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*) (al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī ʿalā Jawharat al-tawḥīd* p. 148-158).

### He is the First and the Last

Commenting on Q 57:3 (*He is the First (al-Awwal) and the Last (al-Akhir), the Manifest (al-Zāhir) and the Inward (al-Bāṭin), and He has complete knowledge of everything*), al-Qurṭubī observes that its Prophetic explanation (*sharḥ*) suffices, and nothing more need be said (*yughnī ʿan qawl kull qāʿil*) (*Tafsīr*). The reference here is to a sound hadith,

reported by Abū Hurayra, Allah be well-pleased with him: “O Allah, Thou art the First, there is naught before You; Thou art the Last, and there is naught after You; Thou art the Manifest (*al-Zāhir*, glossed by al-Qurṭubī as “the Prevailer” (*al-Ghālib*)), and there is naught above You; and Thou art the Inward (*al-Bāṭin*, glossed by al-Qurṭubī as “the Knower”, *al-ʿĀlim*)), and there is naught beyond You. Remove the burden of debt from us, and relieve us from want” (Muslim, *al-Dhikr wal-dhūʿaʿ wal-tawba wal-istighfār*, mā yaqūl ‘ind al-nawm wa akhdh al-maḍjaʿ). Al-Qārī cites an opinion that the latter phrases in each section of this supplication reaffirm the meaning of the former (*qūl hadhā taqrīr lil-maʿnā al-sābiq*), such that “there is naught before You” expounds “Thou art the First”, the definite article making the ascription of “firstness” (*awwaliyya*) and “lastness” (*ākhirīyya*) exclusive (*Mirqāt* 4:1671). Al-Bayhaqī and al-Bāqillānī likewise cite in this regard the Prophetic hadith: “There was Allah, and naught besides Him (*lam yakun shayʿ ghayruh*), and His Throne was over the water; He then created the Heavens and the Earth and wrote everything in the Book” (Bukhārī, *Badʿ al-Khalq*, mā jāʿ fī qawl Allāh taʿālā, wa-Huwa alladhī yabdaʿ al-khalqa thumma yuʿiduh wa huwa ahwan ʿalayh).

While the belief that there was nothing before Allah Most High is relatively straightforward, commentators felt some clarification was necessary in reconciling the Divine Name “the Last” (*al-Ākhir*) with beliefs in the everlasting nature of Paradise and Hell, spirits (*arwāh*), and the bone at the end of the coccyx (*ʿajb al-dhanab*) from which bodies will be recreated at the Resurrection, as per sound Prophetic hadiths (Bukhārī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, yawm yunfakhu fī-l-ṣūri fa-taʿtūna afwājā; Muslim, *Fitan*, mā bayn al-nafkhatayn). Among other explanations, they offered the following reconciliations: (i) all but Allah Most High will perish, making Him the Last; and then He will recreate what He wishes; (ii) the exclusivity of God being the Last (Q 57:3) means that there is no inherent reality to the subsistence (*baqāʿ*) of anything but Him, in that the existence of all else is dependent on Him; (iii) since “the First” and “the Last” are Names with opposing meanings, they must therefore be understood from different aspects (*jihāt*); since the former attribute pertains to the existence of existents, the latter must pertain to the perishing of all existents (*cf.* Q 19:40: *Verily We alone shall inherit the earth and all that is upon it, and to Us they will return*; and Q 28:88: *Everything is perishing save His Face*); (iv) the Divine Attribute of being “the First” has itself the quality of permanence (*baqāʿ*) (see



*Huwa-l-Ḥayy al-Qayyūm.*

*He is the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting.*

(Aḥmad Kāmil ʿĀfendī)

*Tafsīrs* of Rāzī, Bayḍāwī, and Ibn ʿĀshūr, *sub* Q 57:3 and 28:88; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, fī-l-baḥṭh ʿan al-asmāʾ al-dālla ʿalā al-ṣifāt al-ḥaqīqiyya, 1:120; al-Khafājī, *Ḥaṣhiya al-Shihāb* 8:152).

### His Self-Subsistence

The two Divine Names (see BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH) *al-Qayyūm* and *al-Ghanī* directly indicate absolute Self-Subsistence and Self-Sufficiency. The name *al-Qayyūm* occurs three times in the Qurʾān paired with *al-Ḥayy* (“the Ever-Living”) (Q 2:255, 3:2, 20:111). *Al-Ghanī* (“the Self-Sufficient”, *lit.* “the Rich”) occurs by itself five times (Q 3:97; 10:68; 29:6; 39:7; 47:38); paired with *al-Ḥamīd* (“the Praiseworthy”) ten times (Q 2:267; 4:31; 14:8; 22:64; 31:12, 26; 35:15; 57:24; 60:6; 64:6), and once each as *Ghanī Ḥalīm* (“Infinitely Rich, that is, free of all need, Most Forbearing”) (Q 2:263), *al-Ghanī dhū al-rahma* (“Infinitely Rich, Possessor of Mercy”) (Q 6:133), and *Ghanī Karīm* (“Infinitely Rich, Most Generous”) (Q 39:7).

According to Ibn ʿAṭiyya, Self-Sufficiency is an attribute of the Being (*dhāt*) of Allah, meaning that He is absolutely independent of all persons and things in His very Existence (*wujūd*) and Perfection (*kamāl*), and above any flaw or deficiency (*Muḥarrar*, *sub* Q 6:133, 10:68, and 31:26). Other commentators explain His Self-Sufficiency by pointing out that He derives no benefit or harm from any belief or disbelief, obedience or transgression, even though He has made human beings responsible for their actions; hence it is only out of Mercy that He recompenses them for good and ill (*cf.* Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 6:133 and 57:24; and *Tafsīrs* of Muqātil, Bayḍāwī, and al-Shīrbīnī, *Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 6:133).

The absolute Divine Self-sufficiency and the utter dependence of creation are eloquently enunciated in the following well-known *Ḥadīth Qudsī*.

O My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another. O My servants, all of you are astray except those I have guided, so seek guidance from Me and I shall guide you. O My servants, all of you are hungry except for those I have fed, so seek provision from Me and I shall feed you. O My servants, all of you are naked except for those I have clothed, so seek clothing from Me and I shall clothe you. O My servants, you sin by night and by day, and I forgive all sins, so seek forgiveness from Me and I shall forgive you. O My servants, you will not attain [any success in] harming Me so as to harm Me, and you will not attain [any success in] benefiting Me so as to benefit Me. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the humans among you and the jinn among you, to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man from among you, that would not increase My dominion in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human among you and the jinn among you, to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man from among you, that would not decrease My dominion in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human among you and the jinn among you, to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to grant everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I possess, any more than a needle decreases the sea if put into it [and then removed with whatever clings to it]. O My servants, it is but your deeds that I reckon up for you and then recompense you for. So, let him who finds good praise Allah, and let him who finds anything else blame none but himself.

Muslim, *Birr wal-ṣila wal-ādāb, taḥrīm al-ẓulm*

Al-Māturīdī comments that Q 6:133 (*And thy Lord alone is Self-Sufficient, limitless in His Mercy (al-Ghanī dhū al-raḥma). If He so wills, He may put an end to you and then cause whom He wills to succeed you, even as He brought you into being from the seed of others*) refutes the creed of the dualists (*al-ṭhanawīyya*) who hold that God made creation for His own benefit, whereas “He, Majestic and Exalted is He, informs [us] that He is Self-Sufficient in His Essence (*Ghanī bi-dhātih*).” All wise actors (*ḥakīm*) other than Allah act so as to receive some benefit, being in need—whereas Allah, Glorified and Exalted, created all creatures for their own benefit (*Taʿwīlāt*).

Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/ca.652), Allah be well-pleased with him, said, “Whenever the Prophet was faced with a major difficulty, he would say, ‘O Ever-Living, O Eternally Self-Subsistent, by Your mercy I seek succor!’ (*yā Ḥayy yā Qayyūm, bi-rahmatik astaghūth*)” (Ḥākim, *Mustadrak* 1:689 §1875; also reported by another chain in Tirmidhī, *Daʿawāt, bāb*).

### Speech of Allah Most High (*Kalām Allāh taʿālā*)

Reference to the Speech of Allah occurs in the Qurʾān as a noun in three verses (*kalām Allāh*, “Speech of Allah”) (Q 2:75; 9:6; 48:15) and otherwise in verbal form. Among the Messengers there were some to whom He spoke (*man kallama-llāh*) (Q 2:253); He spoke directly to Mūsā, upon him peace (Q 4:164: *wa kallama llāhu Mūsā taklīmā*; 7:143: *wa kallamahu Rabbuh*); and it has not been [vouchsafed] to any mortal that Allah should speak to him (an *yukallimahu Allāh*) unless by Revelation or from behind a veil, or [that] He sends a Messenger... (Q 42:51); on the Day of Resurrection (*q.v.*), Allah will not speak to those (*lā yukallimuhum Allāh*) who conceal revelation and exchange it and their covenants for paltry gain (Q 2:174; 3:77); and, specified as a “call” (*nidaʾ*), He called to Ādam (*q.v.*) and his wife (*wa nādāhumā Rabbuhumā*) in the Garden (Q 7:22) and to Mūsā from the right slope of Mount Sinai (in passive construction (*nūḍīya*), when he arrived at the burning bush: Q 20:11; 27:8; 28:30), sending him to the iniquitous Pharaoh (Q 19:52: *wa nādaynāhu*; 26:10: *idh nādā Rabbuka Mūsā*; 28:46: *idh nādaynā*; 79:16: *idh nādāhu Rabbuh*). His speech is also alluded to in numerous verses (e.g., Q 36:58: *Peace, a word from the Merciful Lord*).

The Qurʾān in its entirety is the Speech of Allah (*kalām Allāh*). The majority credal position on Divine Speech is that it is His pre-eternal Attribute ascribed to His Essence, uncreated and indeed unvocative (i.e., not comprised of letters or sounds). Rather, it is an indivisible, non-composite attribute free of grammatical inflection, beginningless, unchanged, and immediate (i.e., not successive in sequence). This majority belief was opposed by the Muʿtazilī school, which considered the Divine Speech to be a contingent Divine attribute—hence their belief in the “created Qurʾān”, formally adopted as state doctrine by the seventh ʿAbbāsīd Caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 198-218/813-833) four months before his sudden death, resulting in the only instance of Inquisition (*miḥna*) in Muslim history. The *miḥna* lasted for the next fifteen years through the reign of al-Maʾmūn’s two immediate successors, al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 218-227/833-842) and al-Wāthiq (r. 227-232/842-847), before unraveling during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232-247/847-861). In 234/849,



al-Mutawakkil forbade public disputations about the Qurʾān, and later in the same year he summoned several hadith scholars to his capital, Sāmarrā (in present-day Iraq) to publicly declaim hadiths refuting Jahmite and Muʿtazilite doctrines (Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh* 2:344). The Inquisition informally came to an end in 237/851, when al-Mutawakkil dismissed his chief judge, the Muʿtazilī Ibn Abī Duʿād, who had been the chief prosecutor, as well as his son Muḥammad, then a judge in Samarra (Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt* 1:90; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 2:54). Although the Inquisition then dissolved under the changed political circumstances, intense debate on the metaphysical priority of the Qurʾān continued long after the political power and doctrinal ascendancy of the Muʿtazilī school had ended.

Jahm b. Safwān, after whom the Jahmiyya school is named, and the Muʿtazilīs, who emerged shortly thereafter, argued that the Qurʾān must be included among created things. After all, they contended, it is characterised by “corporeal form and sound, admits composition and rhythm, abscission and cesura (*tawqīʿ wa taqṭīʿ*), is created as a self-existing substance, independent of [all] besides (*mustaghniʿ an ghayrih*), is heard in air, visible on paper, divisible and capable of being bound together again, liable to grow and to shrink, to perish and to endure. Now, all of these properties are characteristic of, and attributable to, bodies (*ajrām*), and whatever shares [these properties] is created—in reality, not figuratively” (al-Jāhiz, *Rasāʾil* 2:123–126). Articulating the Muʿtazilite position, Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) said, “There is no difference of opinion among the Folk of Justice (*ahl al-ʿadl*, a name the Muʿtazilīs gave themselves, derived from one of their key doctrines) that the Qurʾān is created, brought into existence by undergoing an act (*muhdath mafʿūl*); that it was not [existent], then it became so; that it is distinct from Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He; and that He has brought it into existence for the benefit of His servants (*maṣāliḥ al-ʿibād*)” (Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, part vii: Khalq al-Qurʾān p. 3). He further denies that the Divine speech could subsist internally (*qāʾim fī-l-naḥs*), and calls this “the consensus position of the Imams”, meaning Muʿtazilī authorities (p. 14–20).

The methodological implications of this position were such that even Imam Mālik (93–179/712–795), who did not engage in *Kalām* discourse, once observed, in terms redolent of that idiom: “The Qurʾān is the Speech of Allah; the Speech of Allah comes from Him; and nothing created comes from Allah Most High” (al-Dhahabī, *Ṣīyar* 7:416). ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿīd Ibn Kullāb al-Qaṭṭān (d.



Q 12:21. *wa-Llāhu ghālibu ʿalā amrih*  
And Allah prevails over His affairs.  
(Ismaʿīl Ḥaqqī Āffendī)

ca.241/855), an anti-Jahmite and anti-Muʿtazilite theologian from Basra, addressed some of the conceptual objections raised by the Bāṭiniyya (as expressed by their founder Maymūn al-Qaddāh: for instance, “Did Allah never speak before creating the Qurʾān?” and provided the foundational text on which al-Ashʿarī and Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) later built the Ashʿarī doctrinal position:

Indeed, Allah, glorified be He, has never ceased to be a speaker (*lam yazal mutakalliman*). Speech is one of His attributes, subsisting in Him; Allah is coeternal with His speech; speech subsists in Him just as Knowledge subsists in Him and Power subsists in Him. His speech is not comprised of letters (*ḥurūf*), nor is it a voice (*ṣawt*); it is neither divisible nor partible, neither dissectible nor alterable. It is a single quality of Allah (*maʿnā wāḥida bi-l-lāh*), the Mighty and Majestic; and its vestige (*rasm*) is the various consonants and readings (*qirāʾāt*) of the Qurʾān. Whosoever holds that the Speech of Allah is identical to Him, or to a part of Him (*baʿḍuh*), or other than Him, has committed error. The expressions (*ʿibārāt*) of the Speech of Allah, glorified be He, differ and vary, but the Speech of Allah, glorified is He, is never differentiated nor varied—just as our remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah, the Exalted and Majestic, varies and differs, whereas the One remembered (*Madhkūr*) is neither differentiated nor varied.

The Speech of Allah is called “Arabic” only because the vestige expressing it is a recitation thereof in Arabic, and so it is called “Arabic” for a reason; in the same way that it (i.e., the Speech of Allah in the Torah) is called “Hebrew” for a reason, because the vestige thereof is in Hebrew. Likewise, it is called “command” (*amr*) for a reason, and “prohibition” (*nahy*) for a reason, and “narration” (*khbar*) for a reason. Allah never ceased speaking even before His word was ever called “command”, or before the existence of the

reason which caused His word to be called “command”; the same holds true for the designations “prohibition” and “narration”. And I declare that the Creator (*al-Bārī*) has never ceased “informing” and never ceased “prohibiting”.

[Al-Ash‘arī adds: Ibn Kullāb] said: “Indeed, Allah does not create a thing without saying to it, ‘*kun*’ (“Be!”); and it is impossible for this, His saying ‘*kun*’, to be created.” ‘Abd Allāh b. Kullāb was of the opinion that what we hear recited by reciters (i.e., the recited Qur‘ān) is an expression used as a substitute for the Speech of Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He (‘*ibāra ‘an kalām Allāh ‘azz wa jall*’), though Mūsā, upon him peace, did indeed hear Allah speaking His Word [directly to him]. As for the meaning of the verse, *If an infidel asks for hospitality, receive him so that he may listen to the Speech of Allah* (Q 9:6), it is “so that he may understand the Speech of Allah,” or, according to [Ibn Kullāb’s] doctrine (*madhhabuh*), “that he may hear reciters recite it”.

al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt* p. 584-585

Elsewhere al-Ash‘arī records that Ibn Kullāb said: “The recitation [of the Qur‘ān, being the impression of the Speech of Allah,] is different from the thing recited (*al-maqrū‘*) which subsists in Allah—just as He, Glorified be He, is without beginning or end, where the glorification is originated (*muḥdath*), so also with regard to the thing recited. Allah is eternally speaking, but the recitation itself is originated and created, and is a human acquisition (*kasb al-insān*) (see ACQUISITION)” (*Maqālāt* p. 601-602).

As mentioned above, the Ash‘arī position is that the Divine Speech is an eternal attribute, uncreated and without beginning, subsisting in the Divine Essence, and so is not an attribute of action (*ṣifat al-af‘āl*) as are His creation and decree. Al-Ghazālī writes:

He—the Most High—speaks, commanding, forbidding, promising, and threatening, with His speech, which is eternal (*azalī, qadīm*), self-subsisting (*qā‘im bi-dhāt*), unlike the speech of any creation; it is neither a sound caused by the passage of air or the friction of bodies, nor a letter enunciated through the opening and closing of lips and the movement of the tongue. As for the Qur‘ān, the Tawrah (Torah), the Injil (Gospel), the Zabūr (the Psalms sent to Dāwūd), and all the Books revealed to His Messengers, upon them all peace: The Qur‘ān is recited by the tongues, written in books, and remembered in the heart, yet it is, nevertheless, pre-eternal, subsisting in the Essence of Allah, not subject to division or separation in its

transmission to the heart or to paper. Mūsā, the blessings and peace of Allah upon him, heard the Speech of Allah without sounds or letters, just as the righteous (*al-abrār*) shall see Allah Most High (*dhāt Allāh ta‘āla*) in the Hereafter, without substance or accident (*wa lā jawhar wa lā ‘araḍ*).

*Iḥyā’* 1:336

For a more detailed discussion, see SPEECH OF ALLAH; AL-QUR‘ĀN; see also a list of selected works on Asha‘rī-Māturīdī creed at the end of this article.

### III. Seeing Allah Most High (*ru’yat Allāh*)

The possibility and modality of seeing Allah Most High (*ru’yat Allāh*) has remained a credal controversy; major positions are briefly summarized in this section. Mu‘tazilis denied it altogether, arguing that “seeing” God imputes a direction (*jihat*) to Him (Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, Part iv, *ru’ya*; for some refutations see al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt* 1:171; al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād* p. 47; al-Qārī, *Ḍaw’ al-ma‘ālī* p. 47). Shī‘is deny that God can be seen with the eyes. Instead, they regard the heart the locus of “seeing Allah” in a particular sense: His Essence is not disclosed to us in any way, but Allah can be “seen” through signs such as His Mercy, Sovereignty, and Glory (al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, mā jā’ ‘an Ja‘far b. Muḥammad; al-Majlisī, *Bihār* 4:26-61). Anthropomorphist sects such as the Karrāmiyya, Mujassima, and Hashwiyya affirmed vision with the eyes, in keeping with their attribution of corporeality, extension, and other spatial qualities to Allah Most High.

The *ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamā‘a* (“the Folk of the Prophetic Way and Congregation,” meaning Ash‘arīs, Māturīdīs, and cognate schools) affirm the reality of vision with the eyes in Paradise that does not “encompass” Allah Most High, without further specifying its modality (*kayfiyya*). Although the detailed arguments of this position emerged through centuries of contestation and debate, they were initially formulated by al-Ash‘arī (*al-Ibāna* 1:51). Asha‘rīs understand “seeing Allah” as a category of knowledge not implying spatiality in any way. As al-Ghazālī writes:

The anthropomorphists (*hashwiyya*), unable to fathom an existent being without direction (*jihā*), affirmed [for Allah Most High] a direction, which necessarily entails corporeality (*jismiyya*) and measure (*taqdīr*), as well as [other] attributes specific to created bodies. The Mu‘tazilis denied direction, but could not conceive of vision without it. In so doing, they contravened the conclusive proofs of Revelation (*qarwāṭi‘ al-shar‘*). They

supposed that affirming [vision of Allah] would [entail] affirming direction; so in order to save themselves from likening Him to created beings, they exaggerated transcendence (*tanzīh*), whereas the anthropomorphists exaggerated in denying Attributes (*taʿīl*) and ended up likening Him to created beings (*tashbīh*). Allah, glorified be He, granted the ‘Folk of the [Prophetic] Sunna and Congregation’ the succor to maintain the Truth, and they understood the correct middle way. They recognized that spatial direction is [to be] denied, being a consequence of corporeality; and that seeing [Allah] (*al-ruʿya*) is [to be] affirmed, for it falls under the category of knowledge and its types (*radīf al-ʿilm wa farīqih*), and represents a completion of it (*wa hiya takmilah*). Nor does [seeing Allah] entail any change in the object of vision (*dhāt al-marʿi*); rather, it connects with it as it is (*bal tataʿallaq bih ʿalā mā huwa ʿalayh*), as does knowledge.

*al-Iqtisād* p. 47

Al-Nawawī concurs: “It is [established] through clear proofs that [belief in] seeing Allah does not entail attributing spatial direction [to Him]—Exalted is He above that! Rather, the Believers will see Him without a direction, just as they know Him without direction; and Allah knows best” (*Sharḥ Muslim*, Īmān, bāb ithbāt ruʿyat al-muʾminīn fī-l-ākhirah li-Rabbihim subḥānah wa taʿālā).

Al-Ghazālī’s *al-Iqtisād fī-l-ʿitqād*, composed when such debates were at their height, offers a systematic approach similar to al-Ashʿarī’s methodology in *al-Ibāna*. Both first establish rational proofs for the *possibility* of seeing God, then present proofs from the Qurʾān and Prophetic reports for the actualization of this possibility in the Hereafter, and finally refute opposing opinions. Among the Qurʾānic verses cited is Q 7:143: *And when Mūsā came to Our appointed tryst and his Lord had spoken unto him, he said: My Lord, show me [Thy Self], that I may gaze upon Thee. He said: Thou shalt not see Me, but behold the mountain: if it stays firm in its place, then shalt thou see Me. And when his Lord manifested His glory unto the mountain, He made it crumble and Mūsā fell unconscious. When he recovered, he said: “Glory unto Thee! I turn unto Thee repentant, and I am the first of the believers.”* “It is impossible,” writes al-Ashʿarī, “that Mūsā, upon him blessings of Allah and peace—whom Allah had clad in the raiment of Prophets and protected with the infallibility which He grants the Messengers—could have asked his Lord for something that was impossible for him” (*al-Ibāna* 1:41). Several exegetes likewise point out that the request of Prophet

Mūsā, upon him peace, could not have been impossible, for he was neither rebuked nor corrected for ignorance (*jahl*) in asking—as was Nūḥ, upon him peace, when he asked Him to save his son from Hell (*cf.* Q 11:45) (*cf. Tafṣīr* of Ibn ʿAtiyya, Samʿānī, Rāzī, *sub* Q 11:46).

Other Qurʾānic verses adduced to support belief in *ruʿya* include the following four:

- Q 10:26: *For those who do good is the best [reward] and even more*, where *even more* (*ziyāda*) is glossed as seeing Allah, as per multiple authentic reports: “Beyond [other Paradisiacal favors] in excellence (*afḍal*) and more exalted than them (*aʿlāh*) is gazing (*al-naẓar*) at His Noble Face, for it is increase (*ziyāda*) greater than all that is given to the people of Paradise. They have not deserved it by their deeds; rather, they [are granted it] by His grace and mercy” (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafṣīr*). Ibn Kathīr notes that this interpretation (*tafṣīr*) is reported in numerous hadiths, and lists over a dozen eminent Companions, Successors, and Followers who narrated it—including the Successor ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā (d. 83/702), who explained *the best [reward]* in the above verse to be Paradise and *even more* to be looking at the Face of Allah. “Neither darkness nor dust, nor any humiliating disgrace shall befall them after seeing Him” (al-Dārimī, *al-Radd ʿalā al-jahmiyya* p. 100; ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad, *al-Sunna* 1:244);
- Q 33:44: *Their salutation on the day when they meet Him shall be: ‘Peace!’ And He has prepared for them a goodly recompense.* “When [the word] *liqāʾ* (‘meeting’) is coupled with *taḥiyya* (‘salutation’), it [involves] seeing with the eyes” (Qushayrī, *Tafṣīr*). Ibn Baṭṭa (304-387/917-997) cites the “consensus of the lexicographers (*ahl al-lughah*) that ‘meeting’ here is nothing other than seeing with the eyes” (*al-Ibāna* 7:63);
- Q 50:35: *There they have all that they desire, and there is more with Us*, where *mazīd* (‘more’) is interpreted as seeing Allah Most High, according to the Companions Anas and Jābir, without specifying the modality of this vision (*bi-lā kayf*) (Qurṭubī, *Tafṣīr*; *cf.* Qushayrī, *Tafṣīr*, who cites exegetical consensus to this effect);
- Q 75:22-23: *That day [some] faces will be resplendent (nāḍira); looking toward their Lord (ilā Rabbihā nāẓira).* These two verses are considered by *ahl al-Sunna* to comprise one of the strongest proofs for ocular vision of God, although the Muʿtazilis interpret them as meaning that believers will be looking forward to the reward of their Lord (*cf. Tafṣīr* of Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAtiyya, Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr). Of the early commentators,

only Mujaḥid (d. ca.104/722) held to the latter interpretation; al-Qurṭubī cites Abū ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) as saying that although Mujaḥid was one of the foremost exegetes, the learned do not adopt his interpretations of this verse or of Q 17:79 (Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 75:23 and 17:79). Moreover, al-Qurṭubī cites al-Tha‘labī, in the course of a detailed linguistic argument, as saying that conjoining the word *nazar* with the preposition *ilā* (‘to’) and the word *wajh* (‘face’) can yield no other meaning in Arabic than direct ocular vision (*al-ru’ya wal-‘iyān*). “[The lexicographer] al-Azharī held that Mujaḥid’s opinion, that [the verse means] they anticipate the reward of their Lord, is mistaken: one cannot say ‘he looked to such-and-such’ (*naẓara ilā kadhā*) with the meaning of ‘anticipate’ (*al-intiẓār*)” (Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 75:23). Al-Ṭabarī holds that of the two opinions on the matter the ocular interpretation is more correct, for it is also supported by Traditions from the Prophet (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 75:23). Ibn Mandah cites a consensus of “the specialists in interpretation” (*ahl al-ta’wīl*) among the Companions and Successors that the verse means believers will gaze at the Face of their Lord, Mujaḥid’s anomalous (*shādhdh*) opinion notwithstanding (al-Dārimī, *al-Radd ‘alā al-jahmiyya* 1:54).

Ibn ‘Abbās (3BH-68/619-688), Allah be well-pleased with him and his father, says: “*Looking towards their Lord* [means] they shall behold the Countenance of their Lord and not be veiled from Him,” in contrast to the faces of disbelievers and hypocrites described in Q 75:24 as despondent in gloom and veiled from seeing their Lord (*Tanwīr al-miqbās*). Al-Tustarī writes, “The reward for [sincere good] works is Paradise, and the reward for [realizing] the Oneness of Allah Most High (*al-tawḥīd*) is the vision of God, Mighty and Majestic is He” (*Tafsīr*). He also quotes the Companion Abū al-Dardā’ (d. 32/652), Allah be well-pleased with him: “Travel for the sake of trial (*balā’*); get ready for death (*fanā’*); and prepare for the Meeting (*liqā’*)!” and the early Sufi Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 185/801): “My Lord, I love this world only that I may remember You in it, and I love the Hereafter only that I may behold You there. Every moment that passes by while my tongue is not quickened with Your remembrance is accursed. My Lord, do not inflict upon me these two things I will not be able to bear: burning in Hell, and separation from You” (Tustarī, *Tafsīr*).

Ibn Kathīr says:

*Nāḍira* (‘resplendent’) comes from *al-naḍāra*, meaning splendid (*ḥasana*), radiant (*bahīyya*), glowing (*mushriqa*), delighted (*masrūra*). *Looking at their Lord* means that they shall see Him with their very eyes (*‘iyānan*)—as al-Bukhārī, Allah have mercy on him, narrated in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*: [the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said:] “Certainly you shall see (*sa-tarawna*) your Lord with your very eyes” (Bukhārī, *Tawḥīd*, bāb qawl Allāh ta‘ālā *wujūhun yawma’idhin nāḍira ilā Rabbiḥā nāẓira*). The believers’ seeing Allah, Majestic and Exalted is He, in the World Hereafter is firmly established in sound hadiths, reported through mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) chains according to the Hadith imams; and it is not possible to simply wish them away or deny them.

*Tafsīr*

Ibn Kathīr then adduces several hadiths in support of this position. A number of relevant hadiths are further examined in treatises devoted to the topic, including two entitled *Ru’yat Allāh* by al-Dāraqutnī (306-385/918-995) and Ibn al-Naḥḥās (323-416/935-1025), Ibn al-Jawzī’s (510-597/ca.1116-1201) *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ*, al-Lālakā’ī’s (d. 418/1027) *Sharḥ uṣūl i’tiqād ahl al-sunna*, and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s (773-852/1371-1449) *al-Ghunya fī mas’alat al-ru’ya*. Al-Lālakā’ī lists twenty-three Companions who narrated reports to this effect, citing the hadith master Yahyā b. Ma‘īn (158-233/775-847) who himself claimed to have received seventeen sound hadiths on seeing Allah (*Sharḥ uṣūl i’tiqād ahl al-Sunna* 3:548).

While indicating the possibility of seeing Allah in the Hereafter, the Qur’ān denounces those who asked the Prophets to show them their God in this world. These include certain Jews who declared, “*O Mūsā, we will not believe in you until we see Allah plainly (ḥattā narā Allāh jahratan)*” (Q 2:55, 4:153); the Quraysh (*q.v.*), who likewise demanded, “[*Why*] can we not see our Lord?” (Q 25:21); and Fir‘awn (Pharaoh) (*q.v.*), who asked his vizier Hāmān (*q.v.*) to erect a tower so that he might look upon the God of Mūsā (*fa-aṭṭali‘a ilā ilāhi Mūsā*) (Q 40:37).

#### **Did the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, see Allah Most High?**

Al-Nawawī (631-676/1234-1277) registers the “well-known difference of opinion among the Companions, Successors, and Imams” regarding whether the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, saw Allah Most High during the Night Journey (*laylat al-isrā’*) (see NIGHT JOURNEY AND ASCENSION) (*Sharḥ Muslim* 18:56). Ibn Ḥajar examines the issue in detail, noting the various opinions of



the Companions: ʿĀisha (d. 58/678) and Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/ca.652) both denied such a vision; two reports are recorded from Ibn ʿAbbās, one affirming that he saw Him without specifying how, while the other specifies that he “saw” Him with his heart; both affirmation and denial of such vision are reported from Abū Dharr. Ibn Hajar then cites al-Qurṭubī’s counsel against committing to any position in this matter, for as a credal issue it requires conclusive proof that is not available (Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-bārī*, qawluh Sūrat wal-Najm *Bi-smi-llāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*). Ibn Taymiyya summarizes the matter: “The authorities (*aʿimma*) of the Muslims have agreed that no believer is able to see Allah with his eyes in this world. They did not disagree about this, except in the case of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, [regarding which] the majority of scholars agree that the Prophet did not see Him with his eyes in this world. Authentic narrations reported by the Companions and the leading authorities of the Muslims confirm this opinion” (*Majmūʿat fatāwa* 2:335).

#### Seeing Allah Most High in this World

Muslims are in agreement about the impossibility of seeing Allah Most High with one’s mortal eyes during this worldly life. At the same time, the vast majority of Sunni scholars also agree that “seeing” Him in dream-visions is possible. This position is based on hadith texts—including the famous one of “the debate of the Higher Council” (*ikhtisām al-malaʾ al-aʿlā*)—that mention the Prophet having such a dream, as related in several sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) narrations from Ibn ʿAbbās, Jābir b. ʿAbd Allah, Muʿadh b. Jabal, Jābir b. Samura, Abū Umāma, and other Companions, Allah be well-pleased with them all (Tirmidhī, *Abwāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, wa min sūrat Ṣād; Aḥmad, *Musnad ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, 4:350 §2580; al-Dāraquṭnī, *Kitāb al-ruʾya* p. 331 §245; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmāʾ wal-ṣifāt* 2:363 §938; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 53:11). Hadith scholars also understand such dream-visions to be generally possible, and not restricted to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace. Imam Nawawī reports a “consensus of scholars” on the possibility of such dream-visions, quoting al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ: “The people of knowledge have not differed regarding the possibility of seeing Allah Most High in dreams” (Nawawī, *Sharḥ Muslim* 15:25; al-Farghānī, *Fatāwā Qāḍijān* 3:260). Al-Zarkashī, while mentioning the general agreement, indicates that a small minority of Sunni scholars deny such dream-visions; these include the Ḥanafī jurist al-Ṣābūnī, the Ḥanbalī judge Abū Yaʿlā, and the Hadith master Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, the last-named being the most vehement. Those who deny

the possibility argue that dream-visions arise from the imagination (*khayāl*) and *mithāl* (see below for explanation of the term *mithāl*), and both are impossible in respect to the Almighty (al-Bannānī, *Hāshiya* 2:466-467; al-Farghānī, *Fatāwā Qāḍijān* 3:260; al-Zarkashī, *Tashmīf al-masāmiʿ* 2:291-292).

In response to this objection, scholars of the majority view, while underscoring the need for caution in interpreting such dreams, emphasize the difference between a *mathal* and a *mithāl*. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, expounds in his *al-Maḍnūn* a highly deliberative explanatory categorization of such dream-visions (for more on this topic, see DREAMS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION). One must fully comprehend the essence of dreams in general, al-Ghazālī writes, in order to grasp the true nature of the various kinds of dream. Likewise, one must first understand the reality of seeing the Prophet Muḥammad, other Prophets, upon them all blessings and peace, or any of the deceased in a dream in order to comprehend having such visions of Allah Most High. The unconverted (*al-ʿammī*) would assume that someone who has dreamt of the Prophet has seen his physical person, but his physical body is confined to his grave in Madina; the grave has not been opened, nor has he left it for anywhere to be seen. Furthermore, on any given night, a thousand people may see him in their dreams in a thousand different places and conditions, which is logically incompatible with the conditions of physical existence. Citing the sound hadith “Whoever sees me in a dream has without doubt seen me, for verily Satan cannot appear in my form” (Bukhārī, *Taʿbīr*, man raʾ al-Nabī ṣallā Allāh ʿalayh wa sallam fi-l-manām; Muslim, *Ruʾyā*, qawl al-Nabī ʿalayh al-ṣalāt wal-salām Man raʾānī fi-l-manām fa-qad raʾānī), al-Ghazālī explains that what the person having the vision actually sees is a representation, or symbol (*mithāl*), of a link (*wāsiṭa*) between themselves and the Prophet—a link introduced by the Almighty Himself. The substance (*jawhar*) of the Prophet’s blessed spirit (*rūḥ*), like the essence of his prophethood itself, is without color or shape, yet it is introduced to his followers in the medium of a truthful symbolic representation (*mithāl ṣādiq*) bearing the physical attributes. Al-Ghazālī then posits that it is possible for the Essence of Allah Most High, which transcends shape and form, to be introduced to a servant of His in the medium of a perceivable symbol (*mithāl maḥsūs*) such as light or some other quality of inherent beauty (*al-jamāl al-maʿnawī*). He then gives several other examples of this type of symbolism in Prophetic dreams, such as a brick representing Islam, or a rope representing the Qurʾān,

though there is no formal similarity (*mumāthala*) between the two. Seeing Allah in a dream, therefore, does not imply actually seeing His Being (*dhāt*), but refers to a vision occurring in the imaginal world as a symbol, or *mithāl*—distinct from a *mathal*, for the latter is a figure of comparison likening one thing to another when all their qualities are similar, while the former requires only that at least a single attribute be similar. For example, the sun is a symbol (*mithāl*, pl. *amthāl*) for the intellect, in whose “light” perception of the noumena (*ma‘qūlāt*) takes place. Similarly a *mithāl* describes a thing, whereas a *mathal* likens it. The former is appropriate for Allah Most High, while the latter is not. Thus the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, can be said to have employed a *mithāl* in saying, “I saw my Lord in a most excellent form (*fī aḥsan ṣūra*),” or when he said, “Truly Allah created Ādam in His form” (according to one interpretation of the hadith; see ĀDAM), or when Jibrīl took the form of the Companion Dihya al-Kalbī (*tamaththal Jibrīl fī ṣūrat Dihya al-Kalbī*). None of these, al-Ghazālī writes, refer to the “real form” (*ṣūrat al-ḥaqīqa*), being rather *amthāl* (Q 19:17) (*Rasā‘il*, “al-Maḍnūn bih ‘alā ghayr ahlih,” p. 337-339).

### Objections

The Mu‘tazilīs and other groups argued against what al-Rāzī called the “consensus of *ahl al-Sunna*” affirming the possibility of seeing Allah Most High in the Hereafter (*al-Ma‘ālim* 1:76). One Mu‘tazilī argument against ocular vision of Allah, in this world or the next, is based on Q 6:103: *Sight (al-abṣār) perceives Him (tudrikuh) not, but He perceives [all] sight. He is the Subtle, the Aware*. Al-Māwardī provides five responses to this argument, among them that “this does not negate vision, for ‘perception’ (*idrāk*) here may refer either to seeing (*ru‘ya*) or to comprehension (*al-idrāk*); if the former, then it must be specified either that eyes cannot see Him in this world or that this denial refers to the eyes of the unjust (*abṣār al-zālimīn*)” (*Nukat*).

Ibn Kathīr observes that, according to Imam al-Shāfi‘ī, the Mu‘tazilī opinion also contradicts the apparent meaning of Q 75:22-23 (*That day [some] faces will be resplendent, looking toward their Lord*) as well as that of Q 83:15, which describes the state of the disbelievers: *Nay! most surely they shall on that Day be veiled from their Lord*—implying by contrast that believers will not be veiled from Him. Ibn Kathīr adds that there is no contradiction between affirming vision and denying visual perception (*idrāk*) (as expressed in Q 6:103), for the latter is more specific and the former is general (*‘amm*). Some hold that the “perception” (*idrāk*) mentioned means gnosis of His

reality (*ma‘rifat al-ḥaqīqa*), which none knows beside Him. That is to say, although believers may see Him, His reality is something else and lies beyond their apprehension, like one who sees the moon but does not comprehend its reality, *fiat* (*kun*), or quiddity (*māhiyya*). Others take the “perception” to mean “encompassment” (*iḥāṭa*). That the believers’ vision does not encompass Him obviously does not mean they do not see Him at all (*‘adam al-ru‘ya*), just as the lack of comprehensive knowledge does not imply a lack of any knowledge (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 6:103).

Another Mu‘tazilite argument against ocular vision is based on the phrase *You shall not see Me (lan tarānī)* in Q 7:143, in which they hold the word *lan* indicates an all-inclusive “confirmation” (*ta’yīd*) that such vision is denied both in this world or the next. The *ahl al-Sunna* reply that this Divine formulation, by denying its possibility in this world, actually affirms the possibility of seeing God in the Hereafter, in that it does not simply say “I cannot be seen” (*innī lā urā*) (Sam‘ānī and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīrs*; al-Rāzī, *al-Ma‘ālim* 1:76).

### Encouragements for Seeking a Vision of Allah

Exegetes and Hadith masters record in this connection supplications of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, asking Allah Most High to increase his longing to see Him. “The Companions also used to beseech Allah Most High to grant them vision of Him, and they used to supplicate for this in their ritual prayers” (Nasā‘ī, *Sahw*, naw‘ al-ākhar; al-Dāraquṭnī, *Ru‘yat Allāh* p. 257; al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād* p. 146). One such Prophetic supplication is reported in several collections:

O Allah, by Your knowledge of the Unseen and Your power over creation, keep me alive so long as You know life is good for me, and grant me death if You know death is better for me. O Allah, grant me awe of You both secretly and openly, and sincerity in speech in [times of] pleasure and anger. I ask You for inexhaustible bounty, and for uninterrupted delight (*qurrat ‘ayn lā tanqatī*). I ask You for contentment with [Your] decree and for a pleasant life (*ḥayāt al-aysh*) after death; for the pleasure (*ladhdha*) of gazing upon Your Countenance, and for the longing to meet You. I seek refuge in You from befalling harm and misleading trials. O Allah, beautify us with the adornment of faith, and make us of those who guide and are rightly guided.

Nasā‘ī, *Sahw*, naw‘ al-ākhar; Ibn Abi Shayba, *Musnad*, mā rawāh ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, 1:294 §442; Aḥmad, *ḥadīth* ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, 30:264 §18325; Ḥakīm, *Mustadrak* 1:705 §1923

## SELECTED TEXTS AND COMMENTARIES OF AŞH'ARİ-MĀTURĪDĪ CREED

AUTHOR	TITLE	COMMENTATOR	COMMENTARY
Abū Ḥanifa (d. 150/767)	<i>al-Fiqh al-akbar</i>	Abū-l-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983)	<i>Sharḥ Fiqh al-akbar</i>
		Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1001/1592)	<i>Sharḥ Fiqh al-akbar</i>
		Abū-l-Muntahā Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maghnişāwī (d. 1090/1679)	<i>Sharḥ Abū-l-Muntahā Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maghnişāwī</i>
Abū-l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'il al-Aşh'arī (d. 324/935)	<i>al-İbāna 'an uşūl al-diyāna</i>	Ibn Baṭṭa al-'Ukbarī (d. 387/997)	<i>al-Sharḥ wal-ibāna 'an uşūl al-sunna wal-diyāna</i>
Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Abū Maş'ūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)	<i>al-Tawḥīd</i>		
Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013)	<i>al-İnşāf fī-mā yajib i'tiqāduh wa-lā yajūz al-jahl bih</i>		
Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013)	<i>Kitāb al-Tamhīd (Tamhīd al-awā'il wa talkhīş al-dalā'il)</i>		
Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fūrak (Ibn Fūrak) al-Anşarī al-Aşbahānī (d. 406/1015)	<i>Maqālāt al-shaykh Abī-l-Ḥasan al-Aşh'arī</i>		
Abū Maş'ūr 'Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037)	<i>Uşūl al-dīn</i>		
Rukn al-Dīn Abū-l-Ma'ālī 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf (Imam al-Ḥaramayn) al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085)	<i>al-İrşād ilā qawā'iḥ al-adilla fī uşūl al-i'tiqād</i>	Taqī al-Dīn al-Muqtariḥ (d. 612/1215)	<i>Sharḥ al-İrşād</i>
Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)	<i>al-Iqtisād fī-l-i'tiqād</i>		
Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)	<i>Qarwā'id al-'aqā'id</i>	(i) Murtaḍā Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Zabidī (d. 1205/1790) (ii) Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493)	(i) <i>İthāf al-sādat al-muttaqīn</i> (ii) <i>Sharḥ 'Aqīdat al-imām al-Ghazālī</i>
Abū-l-Mu'in Maymūn b. Muḥammad al-Nasafī (d. 504/1114)	<i>Tabşirat al-adilla fī uşūl al-dīn</i>		
Abū Ḥafş 'Umar Najm al-Dīn b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 537/1145)	<i>al-'Aqā'id al-nasafiyya</i>	Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd b. 'Umar b. 'Abd Allāh al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390)	<i>Sharḥ al-'aqā'id al-nasafiyya</i>

Abū-l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153)	<i>Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ‘ilm al-kalām</i>		
Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn b. ‘Umar b. al-Ḥasan al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210)	<i>Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wal-muta’akhhirīn</i>		
Abū-l-Faṭḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Iḍad al-Dīn b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ghaḥfār al-Ījī (d. 756/1355)	<i>al-Mawāqif</i>	‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413)	<i>Sharḥ al-Mawāqif</i>
Sa’d al-Dīn Mas‘ūd b. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390)	<i>Maqāṣid al-tālibīn</i>	Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī	<i>Sharḥ Maqāṣid al-tālibīn</i>
Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Humām al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Ibn al-Humam (d. 861/1456)	<i>al-Musāyara fī-l-‘aqā’id al-munjiyya fī-l-ākhirā</i>	Kamāl al-Dīn Abū-l-Ma‘ālī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn Abī Sharīf al-Maqdisī (d. 906/1501)	<i>al-Musāmara</i>
Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1489)	<i>Sharḥ Umm al-barāhīn</i>	Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Arafa al-Dasūqī (d. 1230/1815)	<i>Ḥāshiya al-Dasūqī ‘alā sharḥ Umm al-barāhīn</i>
Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī (d. 1041/1631)	<i>Jawharat al-tawḥīd</i>	Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bājūrī (d. 1276/1859)	<i>Tuḥfat al-murīd</i>
Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ḥasan b. Sinān al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1097)	<i>Ishārāt al-marām min ‘ibārāt al-imām</i>		

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**See also:** ACQUISITION; ĀDAM, UPON HIM PEACE; ‘ĀLAQA; ARTERIES AND VEINS; BASMALA; BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH; BELIEF; BELIEVERS; BIRTH; BODY; COVENANT; DISBELIEF AND DOUBT; DISBELIEVERS; DREAMS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION; LANGUAGE AND SPEECH; THE NAME, THE NAMING, THE NAMED; NIGHT JOURNEY AND ASCENSION; AL-QUR’ĀN; REMEMBRANCE AND REMINDER OF ALLAH; SCIENCE OF QUR’ĀNIC RECITATION; SPEECH OF ALLAH; TAWḤID; THRONE.

**MUZAFFAR IQBAL  
NASEER AHMAD**

## AHMAD

### UPON HIM BLESSINGS AND PEACE

The second of the Prophet’s two proper names in the Qur’ān and, like “Muḥammad,” little used by the Arabs before him, “Aḥmad” is a comparative of superiority—the emphatic *af‘al* form of (i) the participial adjective *ḥamid*, “praiser,” and (ii) the verb *ḥamida*, “he praises/is praiseworthy,” aorist *yahmadu*, infinitive nouns *ḥamd*, *maḥmada*, and *taḥmūd*—mentioned only once in Sūrat al-Ṣaff, which is also called Sūrat al-Ḥawāriyyīn (cf. al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, Type 17), in the prophecy of Prophet ‘Īsā (q.v.) that *there would come a Prophet after me whose name is worthier of praise* (Q 61:6, *ismuhu Aḥmad*), such a Prophet being more praiseworthy than all Prophets, upon them blessings and peace, all of whom were eminent (*maḥmūdūn*) and intense praisers (*ḥammādūn*) (Baghawī and Qurṭubī, *Tafsīrs*, sub Q 61:6; Rāghib, *Mufradāt*, sub ḥ-m-d). The verse is usually translated along the following lines: *And when ‘Īsā son of Maryam said: Children of Isrā’īl! Behold, I am the Messenger of Allah*