

249293 - Belief in the Attributes of Allah

the question

My way of understanding the names and attributes of Allah is that everything that Allah, may He be exalted, has said about Himself in the Quran or on the lips of His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is expressed in a way that people can understand, otherwise {they do not encompass Him in knowledge} [Ta-Ha 20:110]. I do not care about [the views of] different parties, groups and sects.

Summary of answer

It is obligatory to believe in the names and attributes that Allah has affirmed for Himself and what His Messenger has affirmed of that, without asking how, likening Him to His creation, distorting the meaning or denying any of it.

Detailed answer

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Is belief in the attributes of Allah obligatory?

It is obligatory to believe in the [names and attributes that Allah](#) , may He be exalted, has affirmed for Himself and what His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) has affirmed of that, without asking how, likening Him to His creation, distorting the meaning or denying any of it.

That includes believing that He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the All-Knowing, the Most Wise; and that His attributes include hearing, seeing, knowledge, wisdom, rising above the

Throne, coming, rejoicing, smiling, being angry and being pleased; and that He has a Countenance and two Hands, as He said about Himself and as His infallible Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said concerning Him; and other divine names and attributes.

Believing in that is part of believing in Allah, may He be exalted, and this is the basis of faith and the most important pillar thereof.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Part of believing in Allah is believing in what He has ascribed to Himself in His Noble Book, and what His Messenger Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) has ascribed to him, without any distortion, denial, asking about how these attributes are or likening Him to His creation.

Rather they believe that there is nothing like unto Allah and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.

They do not deny what He has attributed to Himself, they do not misinterpret the meaning of His words, they do not distort the [meaning of the names and attributes of Allah](#) , and they do not ask how His attributes are or liken them to the attributes of His creation, because He, may He be glorified, has no equal, no peer and no rival, and He cannot be compared to His creation.

He knows best about Himself and others; He is the truest in speech and better in speech than His creation. Moreover, His messengers are truthful and are to be believed, unlike those who speak of Him without knowledge. Hence He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Exalted is your Lord, the Lord of might, above what they describe, And peace upon the messengers, And praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds.} [As-Saffat 37:180-182]

Thus He glorified Himself and declared Himself to be far above what those who opposed His messengers ascribed to Him and He sent peace upon the messengers, because what they

said was free of shortcomings and defects.

Thus He, may He be glorified, described Himself in terms of both negation (what He is not) and affirmation (what He is).

Ahl As-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah cannot turn away from what the messengers brought, for it is the straight path, the path of those upon whom Allah has bestowed favour, namely the prophets, the strong and true in faith (siddiqs), the martyrs and the righteous." (A/-Wasitiyyah ma'a Sharhiha by Shaykh Khalil Harras p. 65)

How to understand belief in the names and attributes of Allah

Salvation can only be attained by following the path of the Companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon them) and turning away from all other paths, the paths of those who follow whims and desires and those who introduce innovations.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "[My ummah will split into seventy-three groups](#) , all of whom will be in the Fire except one group." They said: Who are they, O Messenger of Allah? He said: "[Those who follow] my path and the path of my Companions" – as is narrated in the hadith of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr by At-Tirmidhi (2641), who classed it as hasan. It was also classed as hasan by Ibn Al-'Arabi in *Ahkam Al-Quran* (3/432); Al-'Iraqi in *Takhrij Al-Ihya'* (3/284); and Al-Albani in *Sahih At-Tirmidhi*.

If you want salvation, then follow the path of the Companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), for it is the path that was followed by the early generations who believed in all the divine names and attributes, and did not misinterpret them, distort them, ask how they were or liken Allah to His creation.

As for your saying that it is "[expressed in a way that people can understand](#) , otherwise {they do not encompass Him in knowledge} [Ta-Ha 20:110]", if you mean that we cannot know the nature of these attributes and how they are, and we cannot encompass Him in knowledge, this is true. For we know that Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing, and that hearing means grasping what may be heard and seeing means grasping what may be seen, but we

do not know how this divine hearing is, and we cannot encompass it in knowledge. For Allah, may He be exalted, hears all voices, despite the differences in their types, languages and dialects, at the same time: and He sees all things in the upper realm and lower realm at the same time. This is something that we do not know how it is, and we cannot comprehend it. And we may say something similar regarding all the [divine attributes](#) .

So we know the attributes in one way, but we do not know them in another way. We know them as far as they are affirmed, and we know what they mean, but we do not know how they are or what their real nature is.

This does not apply to the [names and attributes of Allah](#) only; rather it applies to all matters of the unseen that we cannot see, such as the bliss of Paradise, for example. We know that in Paradise there is wine and honey, and we know what that means according to what we see, but we are certain that the wine and honey of Paradise are not like the wine and honey of our own world.

Al-'Allamah Al-Wasiti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"The divine attributes are known in general terms and are affirmed, but they are incomprehensible in terms of how they are and defining them precisely. So the believer understands them in one way but does not understand them in another way. He is aware in terms of affirming and knowing that they exist, but he is not aware in terms of understanding how they are and their precise definition. Thus we may combine affirming what Allah has affirmed for Himself and rejecting any distortion, likening Him to His creation, or saying that we do not know what is meant. This is what Allah, may He be exalted, wants from us by telling us about His attributes, so that we may know Him through them and believe that they are real, and we may deny that they are like the attributes of any of His creation." (*An-Nasihah fi Sifat Ar-Rabb 'Azza wa Jall* p. 41-42)

But if you mean that these attributes are not real and that they are only mentioned by way of making it easy for people to imagine them and making them understandable to them, then this is wrong. This is the way of the philosophers, who suggest that the divine

attributes are imaginary and not real, which is intended to serve the interests of the public so that they can believe in God.

As-Safarini (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“As for those who have gone astray from their path [the path of the salaf], there are three groups: those who say that the divine attributes are imaginary, [those who misinterpret the divine attributes](#) , and those who say that we do not know what the divine attributes mean.

As for those who say that the divine attributes are imaginary, they are the philosophers and those who follow their path among the scholars of kalam and the Sufis. They say that what the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) mentioned about faith and the Last Day is imaginary and serves to help people understand and benefit, so that the public can benefit; it is not speaking of reality and is not something to guide people to the truth or explain facts. There is no disbelief greater than this.

Those who misinterpret the divine attributes are those who say that in the religious texts that speak of the divine attributes, the Messenger did not mean that people should believe in something false; rather he intended some meanings but did not explain what they are, and never indicated that to the people. Rather he wanted them to think and find out the truth by means of their reasoning, then strive to interpret these texts in a manner other than what the apparent meaning would indicate. Thus His aim was to test them and make them strive, think hard and use their reasoning in order to find an interpretation other than what the apparent meaning would indicate, and to learn about the truth through something other than these religious texts. This is the approach of the scholars of kalam, the Jahmis, the Mu'tazilis and their ilk. What their words imply of the intention to mislead people and their lack of sincerity towards them is very obvious, and their words are contrary to what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) brought and are contrary to what Allah ascribed to him of compassion and mercy. These people pretended to support the Sunnah, but in reality they did not support Islam, nor could they defeat the philosophers. Rather they opened the door to people of misguidance and encouraged the corrupt, esoteric Qarmatians to interpret the Quran and Sunnah in whatever way they wanted.

Those who say that we do not know what the divine attributes mean are those who say that the Messenger did not know the meanings of what was revealed to him of verses that speak of the divine attributes, and Jibril did not know the meaning of the verses, and neither did the first generations. That is like what they say about the hadiths that speak of the divine attributes, and they say that the Messenger spoke words of which he did not know the meaning. This is the view of many of those who claim to follow the Sunnah and the followers of the salaf. They say regarding the verses and hadiths that speak of the divine attributes: No one knows their meanings except Allah, and they quote as evidence for that the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): {And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah} [Al 'Imran 3:7]. And they say: These texts are to be understood in accordance with the apparent meaning, and for them what they appear to mean is that they have a meaning which only Allah knows." (*Lawami' Al-Anwar Al-Bahiyyah* 1/116).

For more information, please see the answer to question no. [20760](#) .

And Allah knows best.