

Module II**Section II: Comprehension of God****i. Being****ii. Attributes****Section II: Comprehension of God**

How can one comprehend and recognize God? Who is this being? What are His attributes? What are the laws and practices He has set for Himself? These are the questions which arise in the mind of a person for comprehending Allah. This comprehension is essential for faith. When the Qur'ān demanded from people to profess faith in God, it answered these questions. In the following pages, we will take a look at these answers.

i. Being

The Qur'ān has explicitly stated that no mind can comprehend the being of God. The reason for this is that the being who has created these means of comprehension can certainly comprehend human beings however these means can in no way be able to comprehend Him who comprehends these means. It must also remain in consideration that our comprehension of God is passive. The most important faculty of a human being is the faculty of sight. For this he has been given eyes; however, eyes too cannot see a thing unless they reflect light. The Qur'ān says:

لَا تَدْرِكُهُ الْاَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْاَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ. (١٠٣:٦)

No eyes can comprehend Him, though He comprehends all eyes. He is subtle and all-knowing. (6:103)

The account of Moses (sws) in which he audaciously requested the Almighty to show Himself to him has been related by the Qur'ān so that man should always remain aware of his limits and limitations and should always remember that even if the messenger with whom the Almighty spoke was not able to see Him, what to speak of others. The Qur'ān says:

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَىٰ لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ ۖ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي ۖ أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ ۖ قَالَ لَنْ تَرَانِي وَلَكِنْ انْظُرْ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَانِي ۚ فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّىٰ رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَىٰ صَعِقًا ۚ فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَنَكَ تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ. (١٢٣:٤)

And when Moses came at the appointed time and His Lord communicated with him, he [gaining confidence as a result] said: “Lord, reveal Yourself to me that I may see You.” He replied: “You shall never see Me; but look upon the mountain in front of you; if it remains intact in its place, then only shall you see Me.” And when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He razed it to dust and Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said: “Glory be to You! I turn to You, and I am the first of the believers.” (7:143)

No doubt, believers would be able to see the Almighty on the Day of Judgement. This is evident from the verse: *لَا إِلَهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّحُجُوبُونَ* (Certainly not! On that Day, they shall certainly be held away from their Lord, (83:15)).¹ However, there are various levels of seeing the Almighty, and this seeing the Almighty is not tantamount to fully comprehending him. Probably, the nature of this seeing would be that all barriers and impediments shall be withdrawn and people would be able to see the Almighty the way they see the sun, the moon and the stars and in reality this seeing is nothing but observing light reflected from these heavenly bodies. This is the example the Prophet (sws) gave people when they inquired from him about the nature of this observation² and said: “You will see Your God in a manner that there will be no obstruction between Him and you except His cloak of greatness.”³

After this, what remains is observing God through similes and parables. The Qur’ān has used these literary devices to describe Paradise and Hell. However, in case of God’s being, even this means is not possible. The reason is that this means can only be employed if the thing which is compared and likened to is found in some form or the other in a person’s imagination or in the world around him. Man has no such data within or outside him regarding God’s being. Thus, this means too can be of no use in this regard. Consequently, the Qur’ān says:

فَلَا تَصْرِبُوا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا مِثَالُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ. (٤٢:١٦)

Thus do not compare God because God knows [Himself] and you know not. (16:74)

1. The Qur’ān has stated this regarding the rejecters of the truth. It is evident that the believers will not be deprived of this observation and all obstacles and hindrances to see the Almighty will be withdrawn there.

2. *Bukhārī*, No: 7437; *Muslim*, No: 451.

3. *Bukhārī*, No: 4878; *Muslim*, No: 448.

ii. Attributes

Contrary to the person of God, His attributes can be comprehended to some extent by a human being. The reason is that man himself finds some of these attributes within him, though at a very small scale. God has granted man some portion of His knowledge, power, providence, wisdom and mercy. Man can thus analogously have some idea of the attributes of God.

It is very important that in understanding the attributes of God, the aspect of finesse in them however should always remain in consideration because power is praiseworthy only when it is complemented by mercy, affection and justice. If anger, revenge, rage and fury manifest against oppression and injustice then it is commendable too. Mercy, forgiveness and generosity are laudable in their right context. The mention of the attribute of *ḥamīd* (praiseworthy) with *ghanī* (self-sufficient), *ḥakīm* (wise) with *‘alīm* (knowledgeable) and *ghafūr* (merciful) with *‘azīz* (powerful) in the Qur’ān guides us to this very aspect of finesse and poise:

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا ۖ وَذُرُوا الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي أَسْمَائِهِ سَيُجْزَوْنَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ. (١٨٠:٤)

And for God are only good names; call on Him by these names and keep away from those who distort them. And whatever they are doing, they shall soon receive its reward. (7:180)

Among the attributes of perfection, the attribute of *tawḥīd* occupies the most importance. It is this attribute of *tawḥīd* which is the most explained and emphasized upon by the Qur’ān. So much so, the *sūrah* on which the last group of the Qur’ān effectively ends directs the Prophet (sws) to declare the concept of *tawḥīd* openly before the people:

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ. اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ. لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ. وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ. (١١٢:١-٤)

Say: That God is alone. He is with every one. He is neither anyone’s father nor anyone’s son; and there is none like Him. (112:1-4)

All the efforts of the Prophets of God revolve around establishing *tawḥīd* in the society. Every single word of its history narrated by the Almighty in the Qur’ān testifies to this reality. It is this importance of *tawḥīd* on account of which the Qur’ān has explicitly stated that without adhering to it no deed of a person is acceptable and if a person adheres to it then there is hope that every sin may be forgiven. The Qur’ān says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا. (٣٨:٣)

God will not forgive those who [deliberately] set up partners with Him; lesser than this [sin] however, He will forgive any sin for anyone He [according to His law] wants to. And [in reality], He who associates partners

with Him is guilty of a heinous sin. (4:48)

The reason for this is that a person cannot remain persistent on his sin if he professes faith in *tawhīd*, and if he happens to sin, he will find that the grace and blessing of God will induce him to repent and to seek God's forgiveness. Such a person will surely turn to God and as such become entitled to be forgiven before the Day of Judgement. For this very reason, the Prophet (sws) is reported to have said that a person shall surely be granted Paradise if he adheres to *tawhīd*. The Almighty will not cast such a person in the fire of Hell.⁴

The argument which nullifies polytheism is that no one has any basis of associating partners with God. At more than one place, the Qur'ān has demanded from its addressees to present if they can any grounds for polytheism whether based on intellect or on divine sources. Only God Himself could have informed us if He had any associates or not and the only way to have knowledge of God's will in this regard were the Divine books He revealed or the traditions and narratives which have been transferred generation after generation from his prophets and messengers. None of these contain anything which substantiates polytheism in any way:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ ۚ إِيْتُونِي بِكِتَابٍ مِّنْ قَبْلِ هَذَا أَوْ أَثَرَةٍ مِّنْ عِلْمٍ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ. (٢:٢١٦)

Ask them: "Have you reflected on those whom you worship besides God? Show me what have they created on this earth or do they have a share in the heavens? Bring me a scripture revealed before this, or some other vestige of divine knowledge, if what you say is true." (46:4)

4. *Bukhārī*, No: 5967; *Muslim*, Nos: 136, 138, 139.