

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

Home > The Emendation of A Shi'ite Creed > 7. The Attributes of Allah (Sifat Allah)

7. The Attributes of Allah (Sifat Allah)

Abu Ja'far says: "Whenever we describe Allah, the Blessed, the Sublime, by the attributes of His essence, 1 Abu 'Abdillah, may Allah have mercy upon him, adds that the attributes of Allah are of two categories: the first are those relating to His essence and called, for this reason, the Attributes of Essence (sifatu 'dh-dhat); the second category are those relating to His acts and called the Attributes of Action (sifatu 'l- fi'l).

The Attributes of Essence are those inherent in it, those of which the essence must necessarily be possessed, and hence cannot be separated from His essence. As for the Attributes of Action, they apply to Allah only at the time of the action and not before it. Moreover, the Attributes of Essence involve the description of Allah by epithets such as the Ever living (hayy), the Powerful (qadir), the Omniscient ('alim), which Allah possesses eternally and forever, while the Attributes of Action, such as the Creator (khaliq), the Sustainer (raziq), the Giver of new life (muhyi, Revivifier), the Annihilator (mumit), the Originator (mubdi), the resurrector (muʻid), are applicable only after the action and not before it.

The (second) distinction between the Attributes of Essence and those of Action is that, in the case of the Attributes of Essence, the opposite cannot be predicted of the One Who is in possession of them, and cannot be separated from them (i.e., these attributes), whilst in the case of the Attributes of Action, their opposites can be predicted to the Possessor, and He can be separated from them. You cannot say, for example, that He dies or is weak, or is ignorant, and you cannot describe Him as being anything other than Living, Knowing and Powerful, whilst you can say that Allah is not a Creator today, He is not the Giver of sustenance to Zayd, or that He is not the Giver of new life (Revivifier), or that He is not the Originator of something at this particular time, or He is not the Restorer of it.

Furthermore, Allah can be described by such antonyms as He gives and withholds, causes to live and causes to die, He originates and resurrects, He brings into existence and annihilates. This is the salient point2 which should be considered concerning the Attributes of Essence and Action; and the distinction between them.

- 1. N reads only: Faslun fi sifati 'dh-dhat wa sifati 'l-af'al.
- 2. T, fathabatati 'l-'ibrah: N, fathabatati 'l-ghayriyyah.

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/emendation-shiite-creed-shaykh-al-mufid/7-attributes-allah-sifat-allah#comment-0