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Qualities of God

On the basis of the discussion so far, we have understood that this world is having a cause which has created and manages it. In this section, we would learn about the qualities of Almighty God, in order to recognize Him better. The qualities of God can be divided into two: Qualities of perfection and qualities of majesty.

Every quality that is from perfections and elevated ranks is the root of existence and which increases its value and existence. Without that it should necessitate defect and limitation, is named as the quality of perfection and beauty. Like: knowledge, power, life, hearing, sight, intention, speaking, beneficence, mercy and other such qualities.

For example knowledge, which can be defined as the presence, appearance and existence of a thing for the knower, is a perfection of existence. And there is no defect in its meaning and its evidence is not described as one necessitating defect and limitation.

Although it is possible that it may be true in some limited implications, but this implication has not appeared from the aspect of defect and limitation, on the contrary it is a rank from the ranks of existence and which comes into existence from the root. And in this way the quality of power and life is also included as the qualities of perfection.

The Almighty Allah is the possessor of all of them and is endowed with them. Qualities of perfection are also called as Positive Attributes (Sifaat-e-Thubutiyyah), as they are proved to belong to Allah.

Scholars have mentioned reasonings to prove the qualities of perfection for Almighty Allah and two of those reasonings are comparatively simple:

First evidence – These perfections exist outwardly, knowledge is in the outward and some existing beings possess knowledge, power also exists outwardly and some existing beings possess power and perform some actions. Life is also in the outward and some existing beings are alive and perform their functions with knowledge and intention.

Thus the qualities of perfection have an outward existence and are themselves a phenomenon and as

we stated previously, every phenomenon is in need of a cause and a doer that invents it, and that is the Almighty Allah, the creator of the world. Therefore since existent beings and phenomena of the world in fact are related to the being of the Almighty Allah, the qualities of being and perfection are also related to God and it is Him that has bestowed those qualities to them. On the other hand, the Bestower of perfection Himself possesses those perfections. On the contrary He is higher than those stages. God, who has given knowledge, power and life to the creatures, it is not possible for Him to lack those qualities. If He did not have them, He would not have been able to bestow others with them.

Second evidence is the proof of order – You discovered and understood the various aspects of the precise and amazing system by the creator of the world in the previous lessons, that how much precision and beauties He has employed in their creation and with what connection and precise coordination has He created and managed them although all phenomena of the beautiful world are inter-related. Through study of such an amazing and compatible system it can be easily concluded that their creator is also is all-knowing, powerful and living, and he has created this precise system through knowledge, power and plan and He has been aware and aimed in its creation.

Existence of such a precise and beautiful system is the best proof that their creator has knowledge, power and life. But can senseless matter create and manage such a precise and coordinated system? Or can a book of science or a beautiful work of art be produced from a senseless and weak being? Then how can it be imagined that this great world, with all the secrets and amazing things, with such system and coordination could have come into being from senseless and non-intentional nature?

Attributes Of Perfection

In the previous lessons, where the process and relationship of cause and effect was explained and proved, it became clear that: the effect no matter how much perfection and beauty it had, all of it is received from its cause and the cause is in possession of all these perfections and beauty at a higher scale. Therefore God Almighty, who is the creator and real cause of the heavens and earth and all that is present in them, He possesses all the perfections and beauties of the universe.

Knowledge, power and life are the attributes of perfection, which are present in some creatures: sight, hearing and speech are the attributes of perfection, which man is in possession of.

We consider the learned and aware man due to his learning and awareness to be superior and more perfect than one who is not in possession of this knowledge. We also consider the powerful and strong man due to his power and strength to be superior to one who does not have this power and strength. The seeing and the hearing man or one who has these two qualities is in possession of perfections, which a blind and deaf person does not have.

Therefore we say: Life, knowledge, power, insight are the attributes of perfection and values that some creatures possess them in a limited quantum. For example, the body of man possesses life, but this life

is limited in every aspect; if he does not eat, he would die; if he does not breathe, he would die. His life has a beginning and an end; it has limitations and conditions.

Man is seeing, but his sight is limited and conditional, and he cannot see beyond a distance and he cannot see the whole world in a single moment. He is also unable to see in the dark…and in this way every attribute of perfection present in the creatures is limited and conditional.

Seeing the perfections and beauties present in existing things we conclude that the God of the world, is the creator and the real creator cause of all creatures, and He possesses these attributes; because if He had not possessed them, He would not have been able to bestow them to the creatures. But the perfections that the Almighty Allah possesses do not have any condition and limitation and they do not have any decrease and are much higher.

Since we conclude that God is the possessor of all perfections that exist in the world, we describe the Almighty Allah with these qualities and say: God is living. God is all-knowing. God is all-powerful. God is seeing. God is hearing. God is speaking. God is merciful. God is beneficent, God is self-sufficient…but since all of us are concerned in a limited and restricted sense with these qualities, we use comparison in our descriptions and we say: God is living, but not like our life which is limited, deficient and which is to end, on the contrary He is much higher.

God is knowing, but not like our knowledge, which is limited and deficient and which can be separated from our being, that sometimes we are knowing and sometimes ignorant; therefore we always accompany our description with two sentences: 'Allah is the greatest' and 'Glory be to Allah' as both these sentences absolve the Almighty Allah of every kind of limitation, defect and shortcoming.

Can we imagine God and His Attributes?

This imagination implies whether we can see God and His attributes in our imagination? It is clear that we can imagine the scenes of the heavens and we can imagine the scene of sunset. We can imagine the face of parents and affection of parents. Can we imagine God and His attributes in the same way? If we see what we imagine, we would see that it is also limited and it has occupied our imagination. But that which is unlimited in every way, cannot be occupied in a limited mind. Therefore when we imagine the attributes of the perfection of Allah and for example, when we think about His power, we should say: Allah is the greatest and glory be to God; that is Allah is the most superior and is pure of every defect and deficiency.

Comparison: How will you describe the sea to one who has never seen it?

Just suppose one of your friends has never seen the sea; how will you describe it to him? You would have to help his intelligence and imagination. For example if he has seen a small pond or a small ditch filled with rain water, you will say: sea is also a water body, but not like these water bodies, on the

contrary it is much bigger and deeper; you would say: sea is also a pool of water like these pools, but much deeper, wider, but in spite of that some of those who have never seen the sea would not be able to imagine its wideness and depth and you will have to say that the sea is much wider and deeper than what you imagine.

Somewhat such is our condition with regard to the attributes of perfection of God; in every perfection we see a small pool having hundreds of limits, restrictions and defects; but we understand that Almighty Allah is having all these perfections and beauties in an unbounded and limitless manner and without any defect or shortcoming; therefore with imagination of every quality of perfection that we see in the creatures, we remove limit and restrictions from it and associate it to Allah and as much good the quality is, we believe in its better and higher form for the Almighty Allah and although the Almighty Allah is much higher than the description of one who does not recognize Him. (Glory be to God from what they attribute to Him except the sincere servants of Allah)

Can God be seen?

Eyes can see things, for example that tree which is in the garden of the school and that flower which grows under the tree will also be seen with the eye. Our eyes can see only some bodies among all the existing beings. Bodies which are in range of sight and sufficient light from them reaches to the eyes are only the ones visible to the eyes.

But the eyes are not able to see many things which are at a great distance or lie beyond the focus of the eyes. Can the eyes see all that which lies in the depths of the skies and seas? Moreover, there are many things which are present, but which are not visible to the human eye; for example, you possess knowledge, intellect and love; are they visible to your eyes; or it is that their effects are seen by the eyes.

If we had been able to see God with the eyes, He would indeed have had a body like other bodies and which occupy a space and which are present at one place and absent elsewhere, He would have been like a creature, like other creatures which are limited and which need space; and like other things which have a beginning and an end, and which go on changing from one state to another. If God had been a body, He would be present here and absent there. And He could not have been able to create and see the things which are there. If God had been a body like other bodies of creatures He would not have been their creator and superior to them. That is why since God is not a body He cannot be seen with the physical eyes, on the contrary He can be discovered by reason and insight of man through seeing existing things (which are in fact His signs and effects). Eyes cannot see Him but He sees all eyes and He is most knowing and is well informed in every aspect.

Some Attributes Of Perfection

1. Power

God is powerful; that is He can do anything that is logically possible. He performs all His acts from the aspect of knowledge, choice and intention and He is neither compelled to do anything or to leave it. His power is endless and without any limit. In the Holy Quran, He says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَىءٍ قَدِيرٌ

"...surely Allah has power over all things." (***2:20***)

2. Knowledge

That is He knows everything and encompasses all existing things and worldly phenomena; and nothing is hidden from Him; so much so that He is also cognizant of the intentions and thoughts of people. He says in Quran:

قُلْ إِنْ تُخْفُواْ مَا فِى صُدُورِكُمْ أَوْ تُبْدُوهُ يَعْلَمْهُ اللَّهُ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِى الْسَّمَوَ تِ وَمَا فِى الْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَىءٍ قَدِيرٌ

"Say: Whether you hide what is in your hearts or manifest it, Allah knows it, and He knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, and Allah has power over all things." (***3:29***)

3. Life

God is living. That is He is a being that acts according to knowledge and power. Life of God does not imply that He breathes and moves like human beings and that he eats and grows. On the contrary, it implies that His acts are based on intention and knowledge.

4. Intention

God is having intention; that is He performs His actions with intention. And He is not like fire, which had no intention of its own to burn and which does not have discretion. But He does whatever He wants. And if He does not make an intention, He does not do it. His intention and will is a perfection of the subject but God who is at the ultimate stage of perfection and existence, would not lack any of these perfections. In Quran also, intention is related to God. He says:

إِنَّمَا قَوْلُنَا لِشَىْءٍ إِذَآ أَرْدْنَهُ أَن نَّقُولَ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ

"Our word for a thing when We intend it, is only that We say to it, Be, and it is." (***16:40***)

And He says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعِمِلُواْ الصَّلِحَتِ جَنَّتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَرُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ

"Surely Allah will cause those who believe and do good deeds to enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, surely Allah does what He pleases." (***22:14***)

5. Hearing

God is hearing; that is He is aware of every sound and nothing is hidden from Him.

6. Seeing

God is seeing. That is He can see every event and phenomenon and He is the witness and seer of them all. In Quran also, in numerous places, hearing and seeing is related to God. For example the Almighty Allah says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَن تُؤَدُّواْ الأَمَنَتِ إِلَى أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَن تَحْكُمُواْ بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُم بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيَعاً بَصِيراً

"Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to their owners and that when you judge between people you judge with justice; surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent; surely Allah is Seeing, Hearing." (***4:58***)

7. Speech

God is speaking. That is He can express and explain His facts and aims to others…these are some of the qualities of perfection or positive attributes with which the Almighty Allah is described.

He possesses other attributes and names also, which are presently not mentioned here.

Important Reminder

Qualities of God are not deficient and limited like our qualities. Since we are deficient in attributes and being, we cannot do anything without senses and physical organs. Although we possess them, we cannot do anything without seeking limbs and organs. We possess the capacity to hear but we cannot hear without ears. We possess the capacity to see but we cannot hear without eyes.

But the being of the Almighty Allah, since it is at the ultimate level of perfection and His qualities also are perfected to the highest level, He sees without eyes, He hears without ears and performs acts without

limbs and organs and He understands without brain and nerves. Since the way of seeing and hearing is that they can only be performed through eyes, ears and nerves, on the contrary the reality of seeing and hearing is nothing except that they should be for a person who is apparent and clear, although it should be without the interference of senses.

We also, if we had not been defective, would have been able to see and hear without the interference of eyes and ears; indeed seeing and hearing would have been proved from them. But the Lord of the created world, since with regard to His being and qualities is at the ultimate level of perfection, His qualities and acts are also perfect and unrestricted and do not have needs like us.

In the same way, since we are deficient, we are compelled to use the tongue, mouth and outlets of pronunciation in explaining our aims, but Almighty Allah has no need of tongue and mouth in speaking and expressing Himself, but He expresses His aims in other ways and which is also speaking. Since speaking does not only mean that its aims should be expressed through the tongue and mouth, on the contrary if this same action can be performed without tongue and mouth, it would also be considered speaking.

Therefore the qualities of God are very much different from our qualities.

Negative Attributes

Every attribute that negates defect and limitation for the Almighty Allah is called as negative attribute. It is also called as Sifat Salbiya, because their meaning is negative. The being of the Almighty Allah is a perfect being without any limit and is having no defect and limitation. That is why He is having necessity of existence and absence cannot be imagined about Him. He possesses all perfections and no perfection can be taken away from Him.

On the contrary, He is pure of every kind of defect. Qualities that negate His defects are called as Negative attributes or Sifaat Salbiyah. They are too many, but here we mention only a few of them:

1. God is not Body

Body is something which possesses length and breath, depth and form, which occupies space according to its volume and it cannot remain without having a special space. And that is why God is not a body, because if He had been a body He would need space, so that He may occupy it. And such a needful being cannot be Necessary Being (Wajibul Wujud), because necessity of being is not compatible with needfulness and limitation. God is the creator of spaces, how can He be needful of space?

2. God is not visible to Physical Eyes

That is He cannot be seen with material eyes, because only bodies, effects and their specialties can be seen with eyes, while the fact is that we have proved above that God is not a body. Therefore He would

never be visible. Almighty Allah would neither be seen in this world nor in the world of the hereafter. He is an unlimited and abstract being without the effects and qualities of matter and body; how can He become visible to a material eye? Eyes can see a thing which is placed at a particular distance from it.

Since the being of God is neither limited nor occupies space, in that case it is possible that someone says: If God had existed He would have been visible to the eye or perceived through one of the senses. How can His being be accepted when none of the senses perceive Him? It would be said in reply: The scope of being is not confined to perceptions; in this world we are having hundreds and thousands of material things, which cannot be perceived through senses.

Can you not see the power of gravity of the earth and power of electricity in wires? Can you see electrons and protons present in an atom and their movement? Can you see life in a living thing? Can you see the human and animal soul? Can you see the affection of the mother for her children? Can you see and hear all the sounds in the atmosphere? Etc.

Even though all these things are material and physical, they are not perceived by any of the senses, but you accept their existence, since you see their effects.

Thus how can you expect to see the creator of the world when He is a being abstract of matter and materiality and much above time and space? Such unlimited being cannot occupy the limited vessel of perception, but you see the effects and signs of the creator of the world in the beauties and amazing aspects of the world and gain faith in His being.

In the Holy Quran also, it is mentioned clearly that the Almighty Allah would never be visible to the physical eyes:

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَرُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَرَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

"Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends (***all***) ***vision; and He is the Knower of subtleties, the Aware."*** (***6: 103***)

3. God is not Ignorant

In the discussion of Positive Attributes it was proved that knowledge is a perfection of being which the holy being of God possesses. Since the being of God is unlimited, His knowledge would also be unlimited and He is aware of everything in every condition and defect and ignorance is not present in His being. Therefore the Almighty Allah is not ignorant.

It is mentioned in the Holy Quran:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَى عَلَيْهِ شَىءٌ فِى الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِى السَّمَآءِ

"Allah – surely nothing is hidden from Him in the earth or in the heaven." (***3:5***)

4. God is not Helpless

Previously in the discussion of the Positive attributes, we proved that power is an excellence and the being of God is in possession of it. And since the Almighty Allah is an unlimited being, His power is also not having any limit, and He has power over every possible matter. That is why God is not helpless in anything.

5. He is not subject to Change

He does not age and is not susceptible to disease. He neither sleeps nor gets tired. He does not become regretful of consequences, because such qualities are only associated with materiality and physicality; and since we have already proved that God is not a physical body, such changes can never apply to Him. Therefore knowledge, hearing and seeing, intention and His other positive attributes are also such that they cannot change or be affected by anything.

It is said in the Holy Quran:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ

"Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Ever living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep…" (***2:255***)

6. God does not occupy Space

He can neither be confined to a place either in the earth or the heavens, because He is not a body that He should be in need of space. He is the creator of the spaces and He existed before them. God is a being abstract from matter and materiality and He encompasses all the beings and He does not occupy a particular vessel. His being is unlimited and unrestricted and He encompasses all the places. He is present and seeing everywhere and the terms of 'here' and 'there' are not used about Him.

But when we raise our hands to the sky in supplication it does not imply that we consider God to be in the heavens. On the contrary we express our humility and sincerity to Him and we visualize ourselves as a helpless and an anxious beggar.

Also if we label a mosque and the Kaaba as the House of Allah, it is so because we mean to say that the Almighty Allah is worshipped in them and that He had Himself honored them by mentioning them as His houses.

7. Allah is not Needful

Allah is a being that is unlimited and perfect from every aspect and no defect, limit or absence is present in His being. That is why He is a Necessary Being (Wajibul Wujud) and absence and deficiency cannot be imagined about Him. And since He is such, He is not in need of anything. All perfections are bestowed by Him and He Himself in the position of a unique being is in possession of all perfections. He does not lack anything that he should be in need of it. Therefore God is not needful of anyone or anything.

If He has fixed duties for the people and wants them to struggle in Jihad, it is not because He is in need of worship and Jihad. On the contrary, people themselves are in need of religion, Jihad and worship for perfection of selves and success of hereafter. And merciful God by sending the prophets and framing of laws and rules of religion has guaranteed their needs. People do not favor God by being religious, on the contrary the Almighty Allah is Kind that He has favored and guided them by sending prophets and framing laws for them.

If He has made Zakat and Khums obligatory, and asked people to help the needy and use funds in charitable and public welfare, it is not because He is in need of material help of the people; it is because such things are necessary to administer society and are there for the well-being of the people in general.

Moreover, the Almighty Allah favored human beings and the material help, which was for the well-being of human society, He labeled it as worship act. On the contrary He considered it to be the greatest worship act. Such that if it is performed with the intention of solely seeking the proximity of God, it will be a factor of perfection of self and will earn a hundred fold reward in the world of the hereafter.

8. God is not Unjust

God never commits any kind of injustice since He does not require anything that He should be unjust. More details on this matter will be mentioned in the discussion of divine justice.

9. God has no Partner

Neither has He a partner in creation nor in the administration of the world; nor has He permitted taking anyone or anything else as a deity. More details on this matter will be mentioned in the discussion of oneness of God.

It is mentioned in the Holy Quran:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ وَإِنْ تَكُ حَسَنَةً يُضَعِفْهَا وَيُؤْتِ مِنْ لَّدُنْهُ أَجْراً عَظِيماً

"Surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom, and if it is a good deed He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward." (***4:40***)

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