

In this chapter, we will examine eleven matters to be particularly careful of with regard to Allāh and His Names and Attributes:¹

1. We cannot call Allāh by a Name, which He has not used to describe Himself.

Similarly, we cannot call Him by a name, which the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم has not told us about as being a Name of Allāh. For example, we cannot call upon Him with *Al Abad* (The Eternal), *Al ‘Amad* (Time), *Ath Thābit* (The Firm), *Al Balē* (The Heedful).



What is wrong in calling Him by other names if they are good names?

These names may sound nice, but if they were not mentioned by Allāh or His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم as being amongst His *asma wa as-sifāt*, then we cannot use them. Imagine the following scenario at the airport immigration desk:



- Officer: (Looking at passport) Mr Khalid Ahmed. Good afternoon. Can I ask where you have just arrived from?
- Passenger: Bucharest in Romania, and by the way, my name is Bilāl, Bilāl Ahmed.
- Officer: Er, no. I don't think so. Your name is Khalid.
- Passenger: Why are you saying that? It's not. You can see in my passport, it's Bilāl.
- Officer: That may be the case sir, but I say your name is Khalid.
- Passenger: That's strange. Bilāl is on my birth certificate. Bilāl is on all my official papers.
- Officer: Look Mr. Ahmed! I don't care what's written anywhere. Your name is Khalid. Now, any more lip from you and it's down to the station! Okay?
- Passenger: Now just a minute. Bilāl is my name! My parents named me Bilāl!
- Officer: Okay! That's it. I've had enough of this. It's a night in the cells for you mate!



What a strange, arrogant man?

Yes. If you think that man is strange and arrogant for changing the name of a human, how strange and arrogant are those who call *Allāh* سبحانه وتعالى by names and attributes that He has not sanctioned for Himself. We call Allāh by His Most Beautiful Names and it is absolutely not for us to question why he has chosen those Names and not others.

2. Do not attempt to explain or investigate Allāh's *asma wa as-sifāt*.

¹ This list comprises eleven items only of the most important things to be careful of with regard to *Al Asma Wa As-Sifāt*. This list is not exhaustive and there are other considerations that the *ulema* have noted but which are beyond the scope of this writing.

This is called *taykīf*. We must stick firmly to the obvious meanings of His Names and Attributes. We must not speculate or imagine the reality, or the *how*, of a particular name or attribute. We must stay with the obvious meaning. For example, Allāh is described in the Qur’ān as *As Samī’*, the All Hearing.

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

There is nothing like unto Him², and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

Sūrah ash Shūrā, 42:11

We know for sure is that Allāh ‘Hears’ because that’s how He has described Himself above. However, Allāh’s Hearing is not the same as human hearing because, as He mentions above, ‘*There is nothing like unto Him.*’ Allāh ‘Hears’, but it is not for us to speculate as to the ‘nature’ of that hearing.

3. Do not suppose that Allāh’s Attributes resemble those of His creations.



Can I ask a question? Does Allāh have hands?

Yes, He does. He tells us so in the Qur’ān

قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقْتُ بِإَيْدِيَّ اسْتَكَبَرْتَ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْعَالِينَ

[Allāh] said: "O Iblīs (Satan)! What prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My Hands? Were you arrogant (then), or were you (already) among the haughty?

Sūrah Sād, 38:75



Does He have eyes? Yes.

وَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ فَإِنَّكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ حِينَ تَقُومُ

And be patient [O Muhammad] for the Decision of your Lord, for indeed, you are in Our Eyes. And exalt [Allāh] with Praise of your Lord when you arise [from sleep].

Sūrah Tūr, 52:48



Does Allāh have a face or a foot?

Yes. These are mentioned in the Qur’ān and ahadīth.

وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honour.

Sūrah ar Rahmān, 55:27

Anas رضي الله عنه narrates that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "The people will be thrown into the (Hell) Fire and it will say: "Are there anymore (to come)?" (50.30) Till Allāh puts His Foot over it and it will say, '*Qati! Qati!* (Enough! Enough!)' "

Bukhāri



If we say He has all these things, aren't we guilty of comparing His Attributes to those of His creation?

² There is no similarity whatsoever between the Creator and His Creation in essence, attributes or indeed.

No. Remember, we accept that Allah سبحانه وتعالى has all the Attributes (Hearing, Seeing, Feet, Face, Hands) that you have mentioned.³ However, we do so:

1. Without knowing what form those Attributes take
- AND
2. Understanding that, whatever the nature of those attributes, they are not the same as human attributes.



Many religions make statues of their 'gods'. Is this an example of breaching *tawhīd al asma wa as-sifāt*?

Yes. This is *shirk*⁴. Exponents of certain religions manufacture idols in order to give a physical representation to god, as they perceive him to be. This is unacceptable in Islām with respect to Allāh.

Even Christians, who are themselves *ahlu'l-kitāb* (people of the Book), represent god in their icons and paintings. Either they draw or paint Him directly (for example as the classical artist Michael Angelo did) or they do carvings and pictures of Christ himself, whom they claim to be God.



When they mould these models and draw these pictures, how do they know what God looks like?

Yes. How *do* they know? They don't know and neither do Muslims. We cannot speculate about any Attribute of Allāh and we certainly cannot suppose that those Attributes are like human attributes. Allāh makes it clear,

وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

*Nor is there to Him any equivalent.
Sūrah al Iklās, 112:4*



The Christians say that Allāh made this world in six days and on the seventh day he rested. Is this a breach of *tawhīd al asma wa as-sifāt*?

Yes, it is. Sleep, hunger, fatigue, envy, jealousy and so on are all frailties and failings felt by humans. They are features of Allāh's *creation*, NOT of Allāh Himself.

4. Do not give man or any of Allāh's creations, the Sublime Attributes of Allāh.

It is not permissible, under any circumstances to say of any human that for example:

- he has control over destiny
- he is the creator of everything in the universe
- he has god like powers
- he is the Most Merciful
- he has knowledge of *Al Ghaib* (The Unseen)
- he can change past and future events etc.

³ In fact, we must accept them because we have been told about them.

⁴ The sin of associating partners with Allāh

5. 'Omnipresence' is not one of Allāh's Attributes.

'Omnipresence' means 'being everywhere.' Allāh is not 'everywhere,' as many people mistakenly comment. This is a false concept taken from other ideologies and philosophies. Tell me. Do you, by any chance, know the opening line to the Christian supplication, 'The Lord's Prayer?'



Yes, I think it goes, "Our, Father who art in heaven."

Notice those words, 'art in.' How can Allāh be 'in' anything, not least 'in' heaven. Nothing encompasses Allāh. He Himself informs us that He is above His Throne,

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ

*Indeed your Lord is Allāh, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then established Himself above the Throne.*⁵

Sūrah al A'rāf, 7:54

Tell me. What is in your right trouser pocket?



My keys, a few coins and a hanky.

Tell me. Do you think Allāh 'knows' the contents of your right trouser pocket?



Of course He does. He knows everything.

Tell me. Do you think He is actually 'in' your right trouser pocket, next to your keys, coins and hanky?



No way! Allāh is above such a situation.

That's absolutely right. Allāh's knowledge encompasses all things, but we cannot say that He is 'everywhere.' Sheikh Uthaymīn stated *"when you say that Allāh is everywhere, this will mean that he is in the toilet and dirty places, may Allāh be Exalted! Who would describe his lord like this? It is impossible for the believer to say this about his Lord"*⁶

Indeed, a number of classical and contemporary scholars have spoken clearly about the falsity of Allāh being everywhere:

- Sheikh Abdar Rahmān Al Barrāk comments, *"Saying that Allāh is with us, does not mean that He is mixed with (or dwells in) His creation; rather He is with His slaves by His Knowledge. He is above His Throne and nothing is hidden from Him of what they do"*⁷.
- Sheikh al Islam Ibn Taymīyyah stated that, *"the most perfect among the creatures and the most knowledgeable about their Lord, i.e. Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم, had put a question regarding Allāh with the phrase, "Where is He?" He asked a slave girl "Where is Allāh?" and he felt pleased with her answer when she said, "above the heaven." "*⁸

⁵ Really in a manner that suits His Majesty.

⁶ Recorded quotes of three *shayūkh*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9wWakZbf2E>

⁷ Islam-qa.com

⁸ Sharh al Aqeedaat il Wasitiyah

- Sheikh Munajjid comments on the same hadith above, “This young girl was uneducated, as many are, and she was a slave, but she knew that her Lord was above the heaven.” He asserts that it is incorrect to say that, “He is neither above or below us, neither to the left or the right. He is everywhere!”⁹
- Sheikh Bin Bāz said, “we are obliged to educate people about these things, the same as the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم did when he asked the slave girl ‘where is Allāh?’. It is mandatory to believe that Allāh is above His Throne and over His creation, and that He is over the heavens.”¹⁰
- Ad Dhābi confirms in his book, that *istawa*¹¹ (He rose above His Throne) was the agreed consensus of the *sahābah* (companions of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم) and others amongst the *salaf as sāleh* (our pious predecessors).¹²

6. Be careful of the use of the Word ‘abd’ with regard to the Attributes of Allāh.

The word ‘abd’ in Arabic means ‘slave’ or ‘servant.’ Where a person is named with one of the *asma wa as-sifāt*, this word must be placed before his name. So, for example, we are not permitted to call anybody simply “Ar *Rahmān*” (The Beneficent). He must be called ‘*Abdar Rahmān*’ (Slave of the Beneficent)¹³.

Tell me would you call somebody “Allāh?”



No! Never!

Of course, you wouldn’t. That would be strange, outrageous and a sin. However, you can call someone *Abdullāh* (Slave of Allāh).



I know someone called *Abd Ar Rasūl*. Is this acceptable?

This means ‘Slave of the Messenger’ and is therefore unacceptable. The word ‘abd’ can only be used alongside the Names and Attributes of Allāh. You cannot use it before names or titles of people. So, you could not say, for example, *Abd Al Muhammad*, *Abd Al Hussain*, *Abd Al Ali*, *Abd An-Nabi* and so on.

7. When calling upon Allāh by His Most Beautiful Names, we must not restrict ourselves to those *asma wa as-sifāt* mentioned in the Qur’ān alone.

There are many Names of Allāh mentioned in the ahādīth, but which do not appear in the Qur’ān. For example, we can call upon Him with *Al Hannān* (The Compassionate), *Al Mannān* (The Benefactor), *As Subuh* (The Perfect), *As Shāfi* (The One Who Cures), *Al Muhsin* (The Charitable).

8. We cannot call upon Allāh with made up Names based upon actions of His that we may read about in the Qur’ān.

It is true that He performs those actions or has certain other descriptions. However, if those actions or descriptions were not used by Allāh to be considered as one of His Attributes then we cannot accept them as Attributes of Allāh. For example:

⁹ Islam-qa.com;

¹⁰ Ibid 6 above. He further clarifies the expression ‘over the heavens’ (*fis sama*) saying “the word ‘fī’ in Arabic can mean **over**, **on** or **in**. As Allāh said ‘travel through the earth’ (*fasīrū fī al ardi*). Also, Allāh mentioned what pharaoh said, ‘I will crucify you on the trunks of palm trees’, here *fī* meant **on** not **in**.

¹¹ To rise above or establish Himself above His Throne

¹² Al ‘Aluw li’l Aliy al Ghaffar

¹³ The Canadian *da ʿī*, Abu Amīnah Bilāl Phillips comments that for certain of the Divine Names, where they are mentioned in their indefinite form (i.e. without ‘Al’ before them), then ‘Abd’ is not necessary. So, someone can be called *Rahīm* (Merciful) so long as he is not called *Ar Rahīm* (The Merciful), in which case ‘Abd’ would be required as a prefix.

1. The Qur'ān states: "Your Lord comes with the angels in rows¹⁴." However, we cannot call him *Al Ja'ī* (the One who Comes);
2. The Qur'ān mentions: "And it is He who nourishes me and gives me to drink¹⁵." However, we cannot refer to Him as *Al Mut'im* (the Nourisher) or *Al Maskī* (The One Who gives drink);
3. The Qur'ān states, "It was He who supported you with His Help¹⁶." However, we cannot call him *Al Mu'ayid* (The Supporter).

Neither should we include names that merely give 'information' about Allāh. Although these names help us know Allāh better, they cannot be included as being from His Most Beautiful Names. For example, *As Shay* (The Thing), *Al Mawjūd* (The Existent)

9. We cannot call upon Allāh with Names and Attributes that are blameworthy or reprehensible.

Neither can we call Him by Names that He and His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم had specifically rejected. For example, *Al Kha'in* (The treacherous), *Al Faqīr* (The poor), *Al Ajiz* (The unable), *Al Mākīr* (The plotter), *Al Fātin* (The tempter), *As Sakht* (The enraged).

10. Do not give idols the Attributes of Allāh.

The pagan tribes in Arabia before the arrival of Islam, did this. The Qur'aish, of Makkah, the very tribe of our Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم also did this. For example, they named one of their idols Al-Lat, a name derived from Allāh.

11. Do not deny any or all of the valid Names and Attributes of Allāh.

This is called *ta'tīl*. Again, the Qur'aish were amongst those guilty of this. They refused to acknowledge the Most Beautiful Names of Allāh being presented to them. This stubbornness is mentioned in the Qur'ān,

وَهُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ بِالرَّحْمَنِ

"yet do they reject (Him) the Most Gracious!"

Sūrah R'ad; 13:30

So, remember always,

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا ۖ وَذَرُوا الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي أَسْمَائِهِ سَيُجْزَوْنَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

And to Allāh belong the best Names so invoke Him by them. And leave (the company of) those who practice deviation concerning His Names.¹⁷ They will be recompensed for what they are doing.

Sūrah al A'rāf, 7:180

That concludes our discussion of the first Pillar of Islām, Belief in Allāh.

¹⁴ Sūrah al Fajr; 89:22

¹⁵ Sūrah Ash Shu'ara; 26:79

¹⁶ Sūrah Al Anfāl; 8:62

¹⁷ i.e., they use them improperly or deny them.

Allāh Most Beautiful Names and Attributes - Points of Caution

Questions

1. What is *tawhīd al asma wa as-sifāt*?
2. What is *taykīf*?
3. What do understand by the Qur'ānic word, "There is nothing like unto Him"?
4. Does Allāh have a hand? If, yes, what kind of hand?
5. What is *shirk*?
6. Where is Allāh?
7. What does the word 'abd' mean?
8. What is wrong with a person being called 'Abdal Omar'?
9. What is *ta'tīl* ?
10. According to the famous hadīth, what did the young girl know, that was so clever?
11. Whose are the Best Names?



Uyghur Muslim with his camel, Xinjiang, China