

Human Mind ('aql) is Incapable to Comprehend the Essence of Allah (swt)

Islam demands the use of mind (عقل) to embrace its Aqeedah. The only Aqeedah which is built on mind (عقل) and agrees with man's innate nature (فطرة) is Islamic Aqeedah. It is not permissible to leave the matter of belief in Allah (swt), for the emotions (وَجْدَان) only, but proof of existence of the creator, Allah (swt) must be based on rational evidence, because emotions may lead the person astray and they may lead him to worship other than Allah (swt); associate other gods with Allah (swt); or attribute qualities not worthy to Allah (swt). However, despite the obligation to use the mind to arrive at the correct belief in Allah (swt), Man is unable to comprehend the essence and attributes of Allah (swt). This subject of Attributes of Allah and Human Mind's incapacity to discuss and comprehend the Essence of Allah is a very important subject, that the lack of clarity about it among many people causes serious problems, if not understood properly! For instance, if a person is capable to prove the existence of Allah (swt) rationally, then the mind is able to prove the existence of the creator. Thus, does the mind, that realized the existence of the creator, also able to recognize the essence and attributes of Allah Azza Wa Jal? Or is the knowledge of the attributes of Allah (swt) or some of these attributes dependent on the method of transmission (نقل) that comes from Allah?

It is worth mentioning here, the great text by the famous Ibn Khaldoun (Rh) in his Muqaddimah regarding the mind (عقل), its importance, and its limits. He (Rh) says, العقل ميزان صحيح فأحكامه يقينية لا كذب فيها. غير أنك لا تطمع أن تزن به أمور التوحيد والآخره وحقيقة النبوة وحقائق الصفات الإلهية وكل ما وراء طوره فإن ذلك طمع في محال. ومثال ذلك مثال رجل رأى الميزان الذي يوزن به الذهب فطمع أن يزن به الجبال وهذا لا يدرك. على أن الميزان في أحكامه غير صادق لكن العقل قد يقف عنده ولا يتعدى طوره حتى يكون له أن يحيط بالله ويصفاته فإنة ذرة من ذرات الوجود الحاصل منه. وتفتن في هذا الغلط ومن يقدم العقل على السمع في أمثال هذه القضايا وقصور فهمه "The intellect (mind), indeed, is a correct scale. Its indications are completely certain and in no way wrong. However, the intellect should not be used to weigh such matters as the oneness of God, the other world, the truth of prophecy, **the real character of the divine attributes, or anything else that lies beyond the level of the intellect.** That would mean to desire the impossible. One might compare it with a man who sees a scale in which gold is being weighed, and wants to weigh mountains in it. The (fact that this is impossible) does not prove that the indications of the scale are not true (when it is used for its proper purpose). However, there is a limit at which the intellect must stop. It cannot go beyond its own level. **Thus, it cannot comprehend God and His attributes.** It is but one of the atoms of the world of existence which results from (God). This shows that those who give the intellect preference over (traditional) information in such matters are wrong, deficient in understanding, and faulty in reasoning. This, then, explains the true situation in this respect" [The Muqaddimah, Abdurrahman bin Muhammad Ibn Khaldoun, Chapter 14, The Science of Speculative Theology], pg.593 (Eng)].

Ibn Khaldoun (Rh), explains the importance of mind and says that mind's judgments are categorical and unquestioned. The judgment of mind is in its scope of work which is within its abilities. But if the mind is to be allowed to judge beyond the sensation, then its judgments are not really rational judgments, but are mere fantasies and illusions. This is what many philosophers fell into, those who are impressed with the mind and saw that they have discovered in the mind, the fact of things that are sensed and the effect of sensed things. They thought that mind is capable of making judgment on everything, even those beyond the sensed which is called in the Quranic expression "the unseen (غيب) وَيُقِيمُونَ" ﴿الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ﴾ "Who believe in the unseen, establish prayer and spend out of what We have provided for them," [Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:3].

The belief in the unseen is essential, and it includes a fundamental part of the Islamic creed. We believe in things that Allah has commanded us to believe in without seeing them, without realizing them with our minds, without feeling their effects, but we believe in them because news reached us through ‘certainty (يقين) i.e. from an undoubted source, that is the revelation of Allah (swt), and It is through this source, we believe in the attributes (صفات) of Allah (swt).

It is not possible for a person to use his mind as a reference for the attributes of Allah (swt), because the mind is simply a mental faculty in man, dependent on material elements. **Shiekh Taqiuddin An-Nabhani defines the mind (عقل), or thought (فكر), or comprehension (إدراك) as “transferring the sensation (iHsas) of the reality (waaq’i) by the senses to the brain (dimagh) in the presence of previous information (al-ma’loomat us-saabiqah), by which this reality is understood [Kitab At-Tafkeer (Thinking), pg 14].** Sheikh Taqiuddin An-Nabhani explains that the mind is, when the sensation of things is transferred to the brain using the five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste) that are created in man by Allah (swt) and the process of linking the sensation with the previous information found in the brain. This linking process is the mind (عقل). The word mind (عقل) in the language is the ‘connection’ ‘to link something’. Thus the mind will pass the judgement on the reality that it sensed, and therefore the mind has limited perception of limited human sensations. When a person perceives i.e. what he sees, what he hears, what he tastes, and what he touches...etc., through these senses, he will achieve the process of perception and thinking.

Hence, the belief in the existence of the Creator, Allah (swt), is not because that the mind is capable of understanding the essence of Allah (swt), of course not. The belief in the Creator, Allah (swt) is the result of sensing the things that surrounds us from matter of Universe, Man and Life. The reality depicts us that all the matters of Universe, man and life are limited (محدود), they are weak (عاجز), imperfect (ناقص), cannot exist on their own (محتاجة) and there is nothing in them that makes us judge them as eternal (أزلى). Rather, by passing the judgment that they are limited, we judge that they have a beginning. Therefore, there is a creator of their existence (the universe, man and life). Thus, the realization of the existence of the creator is from the realization of the effect, and the sensation of the effect of this creator, which is the creation. There is no creation without creator. And since the mind has proven certainly that the things that surrounds us are created, this is the evidence of the existence of the creator. Here stops the ability of the mind; to believe in the creator, Allah (swt). The sensation felt the effect of creation and realized the existence of creator, Allah (swt). And of course, in the things that we sense that refer to some of the qualities of the Creator (swt), for Example, Allah is Capable (قدير), this is a rational judgement because it is not possible for the one who do not have the ability to create can create these creatures; and that He (swt) is Great (عظيم) and Wise (حكيم), the effect of His Wisdom is seen all around us. So, we realize these attributes of Allah (swt) from the effects that we sense. But, it is not permissible for man to delve far in his imagination, and to imagine or to think that we can comprehend and be aware of the attributes of Allah (swt). The attributes of the Creator are beyond the mind and beyond the sensation. For example, man cannot, with his mind, prove, assert and conclude that Allah (swt) gives sustenance, that He is the Provider (الرزاق), that He is All-Hearing (السميع) and All-Seeing (البصير) and that He (swt) is the only Granter of victory (الناصر) etc. These qualities cannot be realized by mind. But, we became sure of the attributes of Allah (swt) from what He told us in the Revelation that came down on the Messenger of Allah (saw), in the Quran and Sunnah. They contain the attributes of Allah. To believe in them is a belief in the Revelation that came down on the Messenger of Allah (saw) and also it is a completion of the belief in Allah (swt), because belief in the attributes of Allah (swt) is a part of our belief in Allah (swt).

We believe in Allah as a Creator and Manager, and believe in all that He described Himself in His Glorious Book, or in the Sunnah of His Prophet (saw) which came to us in a definite way (of transmission). It cannot be said here that this is weakness in the belief in Allah (swt). No! it isn't, because, when man sanctifies false gods and worship false gods that he can sense, and are of limited size, of finite dimensions contained in the universe, contained in the earth, and the sky, etc..., this is a blatant evidence that he is worshipping what is not worthy of worship. He worships things that are sensed by humans in this limited finite world. As for Allah (swt), He is the Creator of all these things who made the human senses in this life limited by the limitations of the universe, man and life. Belief in the attributes of Allah (swt), the lack of being aware of them by himself with his senses and his mind, this inability of man to realize the essence of Allah (swt) strengthen the belief of the believer because, he believes in a greater creator than this creation, and he is not part of them. Thus, we believe in the creator, who created Heavens, Earth, Universe, Man and Life. We believe in Allah (swt) who gave us the capability of perception, so we can understand the matter of the Universe, Man and Life and things that are tangible and sensed. Therefore, it is natural that the believer is reassured when he is a worshipper of the creator, a greater creator who is not being sighted in a Universe, not in a life of limited senses and perception of man. Thus, the only way to believe in the attributes of Allah (swt) is through "Definite Transmitted Evidences" i.e. Quran and Ahadeeth Mutawattur that introduces us to his attributes. However, some philosophers went on imagining who the creator was? What is the creator? What is the nature of the creator? Some of them gave God, the expression: "the first soul (الروح الأولى)", "the whole soul (الروح كلي)" and others called him as the "total mind (كلي عقل)" and so on. All this is from the lies and delusions! It would have been enough for them to say: we have realized the existence of the creator of the Universe, Man and Life, but we don't know His attributes. This is the mistakes of those who gave some authority to their minds to expand in the understanding of the attributes of Allah (swt) mentioned in the Book and Sunnah or in the Book alone, or in the Sunnah alone.

What should be our limit towards the attributes of Allah (swt) mentioned in definite evidences?

In the Quran and Sunnah, when Allah (swt) tells us about Himself that He is All-Seeing (البصير), we should just take that and stop at this and do not add to it, and do not ask how does Allah (swt) see? When He tells us that He is the All-Hearing (السميع), and that He knows that which deceives the eyes and what is concealed in the breasts and about all his attributes, we limit ourselves to understand what our mind can understand in this area in relation to our behavior (سلوك). We should not delve in to explaining the essence of Allah (swt) and his attributes. When we believe, Allah is All-Seeing (البصير), the definite meaning which has a relation to our behavior is sufficient for us that Allah can see us and see all what we do and that is manifested in the fear of Allah and that we do not carry out any actions which angers Him. Similarly, when we believe, Allah is All-Hearing (السميع), we limit our understanding on this definite attribute of Allah (swt) as, He can hear every word we utter, this leads us to fear Allah and to being careful of everything we say and we do not want to get the anger of Allah (swt).

Thus, the purpose of the belief in the attributes of Allah (swt) is not to build in our mind, a picture about the essence of Allah (swt), which man has no capacity with his limited mind. Allah is above all and greater than what we ascribe to Him. The purpose of the belief in the attributes of Allah (swt) is not to imagine the essence of Allah (swt), but belief in the attributes of Allah (swt) should impact the actions of man and his mind to become more fearful of Azza Wa Jal and more hopeful of His (swt) Mercy. Likewise, when we know that Allah is All-Forgiving (الغفور), Most Merciful (الرحيم), and that He accepts repentance from His slave, Allah says, **﴿قُلْ يٰٓعِبَادِىَ الَّذِيْنَ اَسْرَفُوْا عَلٰۤى اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوْا مِنْ رَّحْمَةِ اللّٰهِ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَغْفِرُ الذَّنُوْبَ جَمِيْعًا اِنَّهٗ هُوَ الْغَفُوْرُ الرَّحِيْمُ﴾**

“Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.” [Surah Az-Zumar, 39:53].

How is this belief that Allah is forgiving for all sins reflected on the person? It is not reflected here to imagine the image of Allah (swt), but it is reflected on the life of the slave by accepting to obey Allah, to repent him and to ask for forgiveness if he sinned and disobeyed Allah. If man is lost, even if he spent all his life in disbelief and misguidance, still Allah (swt) keeps a door open, an opportunity before he dies, as long as he is alive, this person has an open door of repentance. So belief in the attributes of Allah (swt) will drive him to have more piety and submission to Allah (swt) and to fear disobeying Allah (swt). Similarly, when we know that Allah is the One who gives victory (الناصر) to the believers, and that victory is from none except Allah Azza Wa Jal, this is reflected in asking the victory of Allah (swt), by abiding His orders and abstaining from His prohibitions and in not looking for factors of victory in other than the obedience of Allah (swt) as many people do today, for Allah is the One who gives victory (الناصر). Also, when we believe that Allah is the Provider or Sustainer (الرَّزَّاقُ) with mighty power, the purpose is not to think how He gives people the livelihoods. Allah (swt) is capable to sustain all people. Allah (swt) says, ﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ مَا أُرِيدُ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ رِزْقٍ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ يُطْعَمُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِينُ﴾ **“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship me. I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed me. Indeed, it is Allah who is the [continual] Provider, the firm possessor of strength.” [Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:56-58].**

If man believes that Allah is the one who is the provider (الرَّزَّاقُ), He should not seek the sustenance from that which disobeys Allah (swt). He does not ask for sustenance from the path of Haram. Also, if you know that Allah is the provider (الرَّزَّاقُ), that He manages the provision, this makes us calm when we see others being given more Rizq than us, because the Rizq is in the hand of Allah (swt). We should not be afraid, if He (swt) tests us in our livelihood, but we say "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return", "To Allah belongs what He takes, and to Him belongs what He gives". **Thus, Belief in the attributes of Allah (swt) that He addresses us by, is not for the purpose of building an image from all the attributes of His essence, of course not, Allah forbid! And Allah (swt) is greater than what we imagine of him.**

There are some, who went on to interpret the unclear (متشابه) in the Qur'an or in the Sunnah, separated the verses from their context, their purpose and their meanings. They have mistaken. This is the dispute that occurred in the case of what is mentioned in the Quran from the word 'hand' (يد) or 'face' (وجه). But these words cannot be taken out of the context they were put in, and the vocabulary are not separated from each other, for example, Allah says ﴿وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ يَدُ اللَّهِ مَغْلُولَةٌ غُلَّتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَلُعِنُوا بِمَا قَالُوا بَلْ يَدَاهُ مَبْسُوطَتَانِ يُنفِقُ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ﴾ **“And the Jews say, "The hand of Allah is chained". Chained are their hands, and cursed are they for what they say. Rather, both His hands are extended; He spends however He wills.” [Surah Al-Ma'idah, 5:64].**

This verse clearly indicates, that the subject discussed is Sustenance (رِزْق). Jews have been cursed for what they say about Allah (swt). When they said, that Allah's hand is chained, they meant that Allah is miserly, and He does not provide with what they deserve. So, Allah answered them in the Glorious Quran, He (swt) says, **“Rather, both His hands are extended; He spends however He wills.”** So the subject of the verse is about Allah's spending on his slaves. However, some uses their mind to extract meanings that are beyond the limits of mind and tries to know what is meant by the term 'hand'. Is it hand (يد)? Or two hands (يدين)? Or hands (أيادي)? And took it out of the context of this verse. Some others

say, we should deny the attribute of hand. Others say we must prove the attribute of the hand, so they take out from this surah out of its context, and its meanings and engaged in what the Prophet (saw) and his beloved companions of the Messenger of Allah (saw) [أصحاب رسول الله ﷺ] did not engage in. Thus, they use the mind in the areas that are out of its bounds. Hence, we should not cross the limits of mind and tries to explain the attributes of Allah (swt), rather we believe in the attributes of Allah (swt) that are mentioned in the definite evidences in a way that reflects positively on man's behavior.

Let's, look at the issues in which the Mutakallimin, people of Ilm ul-kalam (عِلْمُ الْكَلَامِ) engaged in. we find that those discussions did not reflect on the man's behavior at all. If man believe that Allah is All-Seeing (البصير), this is enough to increase in man, the fear of Allah (swt) and He will refrain from what disobeys Him (swt), because He observes him and see him. But what will he get, if he asks the following questions, Does Allah see with an eye? Or without an eye? Does Allah see with pupil? Or without pupil? This actually is showing audacity against Allah (swt). And it does not show an effect on the action of the slave if he believes or denies Allah (swt) and His attributes. If man believes that Allah is All-Hearing (السميع), this makes him reluctant to speak words that displease Allah (swt), but what will benefit him in asking the question, how does Allah hear? Does He hear with an ear? Or without an ear?! This is what some of Al-Mutakallimin, people of Ilm ul-kalam (عِلْمُ الْكَلَامِ) or many of them engaged in. Instead of increasing the purity of belief, and the clarity of the mind of the person, it has increased the confusion on their minds and divided between one understanding and another, which unfortunately led some of them to accuse the others of disbelief (كفر).

In conclusion, what we should be our concern is to increase and improve our obedience and fear of Allah (swt). The Prophet (saw) was asked by Jibreel (as), «أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ» Jibreel (as) asked the Prophet (saw), **“What is Ihsan (perfection)?” Allah's Messenger (saw) replied, “To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you.”** [Sahih Al-Bukhari]

Here, Prophet (saw) says, that we should worship Allah as though we see Him (swt), and of course we cannot see Him in this dunya, we are limited and He (swt) is eternal and nothing is like Him, but He (swt) sees us. He (swt) surrounds us from every side. He is watching us whatever we do and wherever we go, with His (swt) knowledge, with His hearing, with His sight, with His management and help (if we deserve it), with His punishment (if we deserve it). He tests us, if His wisdom requires that we should be tested; this Ihsan (إحسان) in worship is the result of the belief in the greater creator whose existence is recognized, but we do not sense His essence.

We ask Allah to teach us what benefits us and to benefits us with what we know, and to make our knowledge and action purely for His pleasure alone. We ask Allah (swt) to forgive us all.

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