

Fast 18: The attributes of God — other names of God

- As discussed in the last study, the four names *Rabb*, *Rahmān*, *Rahīm* and *Mālik* are the chief attributive names of God, and all His other attributes are only offshoots of these four essential attributes.
- In a Hadith report, which is regarded as weak, ninety-nine names of God are generally mentioned, the hundredth being Allah; but while some of them occur in the Quran, others are only inferred from some act of God mentioned in the Holy Book.
- There is, however, no authority whatsoever for the practice of repeating these names on a rosary or otherwise. Neither the Holy Prophet, nor any of his Companions ever used a rosary. In the Holy Quran, it is said:

“And Allah’s are the best names, so call on Him thereby, and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of His names.” — 7:180

(‘Best’ can also be translated as the most excellent or the most beautiful.)

Calling on God by His excellent names only means that nothing derogatory to His dignity should be attributed to Him. The violation of the sanctity of the Divine names has been clearly explained to mean either ascribing to God such attributes which do not befit His high dignity, or ascribing Divine attributes to others.

- Among the names of God mentioned in the Holy Quran are the following:

al-Wāḥid (the One), *al-Ḥaqq* (the Truth), *al-Ḥayy* (the Ever-living), *al-Khāliq* (the Creator), *al-Tawwāb* (the Oft-returning to mercy), *al-Ḥalīm* (the Forbearing), *al-‘Afuww* (the Pardoner), *al-‘Azīm* (the Grand), *al-‘Azīz* (the Mighty), *al-‘Aliyy* (the Exalted or the High), *al-Kabīr* (the Great), *al-Ḥamīd* (the Praiseworthy), *al-‘Alīm* (the Knowing), *al-Ḥakīm* (the Wise), *al-Sam‘ī* (the Hearing), *al-Baṣīr* (the Seeing), *al-Qādir* or *Qadīr* (the Powerful), *al-Waliyy* (the Guardian), and *al-Ḥāsib* or *al-Ḥasīb* (the One Who takes account).

- **Predominance of love and mercy in Divine nature:** It will be seen that the attributes of God given in the Quran have nothing to do with the **autocracy, harshness, vengeance and cruelty** which critics of Islam have generally associated with the picture of Him as drawn in the Holy Quran. On the contrary, the qualities of **love and mercy** in God are emphasized in the Quran more than in any other sacred book. Not only does every chapter open with the two names *Rahmān* and *Rahīm*, thus showing that the qualities of love and mercy are predominant in Divine nature, but the Holy Book goes further and lays the greatest stress in explicit words on the immeasurable vastness of the Divine mercy. The following are some examples:

“He (Allah) has ordained it on Himself to show mercy.” — 6:12, 6:54

The above verse states that Allah has made it a law or rule by which He works, that He shows mercy.

“Your Lord is the Lord of all-encompassing mercy...” — 6:147

“And My mercy encompasses all things.” — 7:156

“Except those on whom your Lord has mercy, and for this did He create them.”
— 11:119

“O My servants who have been reckless against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives sins altogether.” — 39:53

“Our Lord! You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge...” — 40:7

- So great is the Divine mercy that it encompasses believers and unbelievers alike as the above verses show. Even the enemies of the Holy Prophet are spoken of as having mercy shown to them:

“And when We make people taste of mercy after an affliction touches them, lo! they devise plans against Our messages.” — 10:21

- The picture of the attributes of God portrayed in the Quran is, first and last, a picture of love and mercy, and while these are mentioned under many different names and repeated hundreds of times, His attribute of punishment — Exactor of retribution — occurs only four times in the whole of the Quran (in 3:3, 5:95, 14:47, 39:37).
- It is true that the punishment of evil is a subject on which the Quran is most emphatic, but its purpose in this case is simply to impress upon man that evil is a most hateful thing which ought to be shunned.
- Punishment itself, as described in the Holy Quran, is of a remedial nature, and has in it nothing of vengeance — it is the treatment of a disease which a person has brought upon himself. It is still love, for its object is still to set a person on the road to spiritual progress by healing the disease. God does bring about distress, but this is only in the limited sense that it is a punishment for wrong-doing with the underlying object of reformation:

“We seized them with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves.” — 6:42, 7: 94.