



" ALLAH IS ONE, WHY DOES HE USE THE PRONOUN 'WE'"

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Question: When Allah is ONE, Why Does He Use the Pronoun 'WE' for Himself in the Holy Quran?

A British teacher in U.K., in acknowledging the receipt of literature on Islam, from our Imam in London, has asked the following question:

I wonder whether you might be able to clear up one point that has been bothering me for some time concerning the nature of God, which at present, my students and I are engaged in studying. We have found, that in a number of places God appears to speak through the Holy Quran as "We." For example, in Sura 25:32: "We may establish thy heart by it." This raised (the question) within my own mind, how God, Who is seen as one Person, can speak in the plural? As this use of the plural pronoun appears a number of times in your Scriptures, can you advise me as to the understanding of that which this verse (and others) teaches?

Answer:

1. We welcome this inquiry and intelligent interest in the study of the Holy Quran. The same question has arisen in a number of minds in other countries, too. And, we, therefore, welcome this opportunity to explain the point raised, through this paper.
2. I would first like to emphasise that the Unity and Oneness of God is so clearly established by the Holy Quran, that no Muslim has ever, throughout the fourteen centuries of Islam, entertained any doubt about it. Even non-Muslim readers and orientalists have recognised the absolutely unadulterated monotheism taught by the Holy Quran. According to it, God is Unique not only in His Person, but also in His Attributes, as well as in His Works.
3. The Holy Quran opens with the verse, with which all chapters (except one) open, namely, "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful". Please note that the name and the attributes are all in the singular. Later on, mentioning the display of Divine attributes in Allah's creation, the question is asked again and again, "Is there (then) a god with Allah?" (27:60, 64).
4. So far as the Person of God is concerned, can there be any doubt left after going through the following verses of the Holy Quran:

"And your God is one God; there is no god but He! He is the Beneficent, the Merciful." (2:163).

Or, can there be a clearer statement than the following:

"Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten; And none is like Him". (Chapter 112).

Here, not only is the Person of Allah stated most clearly to be One, but the association of any other god with Him is refuted on all other possible grounds. Everything in Nature depends on Him (now proved by modern science, - see the closing chapters of "The Mysterious Universe" by Sir James Jeans). He does not depend for His own existence on being begotten; nor does He beget a son or sons, or daughters, as some religions preach, to complete His Being or to carry on His Works after His death, for all those who beget or are begotten, die. No wonder, that it was published a few years ago throughout USA and Europe, that if there was a God, He has now presumably died. Lastly, it is stated in the chapter quoted above, that there is no one like Allah. There is no association with Him even by resemblance or equality in attributes or work. A god who depends on others in any way, is incomplete or imperfect, or is transient (begotten or begetting), or has equals or partners in any way, is not God. The highest creation is undoubtedly man, and he cannot submit himself, body and soul, to a god like himself or less than himself (such as an idol or a Ghost).

5. The emphatic denial and refutation of there being any god except Allah, and the equally emphatic affirmation of Unity, Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah, is contained in so many other places in the Holy Quran, that they cannot all be quoted here without prolonging this article, which is, after all, only a reply to a simple question: Why then does the Holy Quran use the first person plural "We" for Allah in certain places?

6. I had to give the arguments, made in paragraphs 2-5 above, to establish the point, that the Unity of God being beyond any doubt, as established by the Holy Quran, we should not read any plurality of godhead in the use of the word 'We' in some places in the Holy Quran. Let me now answer the question put forward. For Allah, according to the context, the Holy Quran uses all the three pronouns of the first person, the second person and third person. Please note, that so far as the second or third persons are concerned, the Holy Quran uses the singular pronoun only, i.e., Thee or He, and that these are the only pronouns that man can possibly use to address Allah, or to speak of Him. To quote examples: "Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help" (1:4) and "Say: He, Allah, is One"(112:1).

7. So far as the first person pronoun is concerned, and that is the pronoun that can be used by Allah Alone, in the majority of places, the singular "I" is used. Thus "I, Allah, am the best Knower" (2:1) or "Surely, I am Allah, there is no god but I, so serve Me and keep up prayer for My remembrance" (20:14). But it is quite true that in a number of places the plural "We" is also used. The reason varies from place to place. Sometimes it is used to express the Might and Majesty of Allah; sometimes for His absolute supremacy over men, their affairs and their destinies; sometimes for His supremacy and control over things over which men have no control, such as things supernatural, including Divine revelation, etc.

8. Perhaps an analogy will help to understand the point that the use of the pronoun "We" implies no plurality when the person for whom it is used is one. For instance, even earthly kings and queens use this pronoun to express their majesty and supremacy. If Queen Elizabeth II uses "We" for herself, nobody misunderstands that she is more than one. Allah is much more justified in using this honorific for Himself, as He is the Real Sovereign.