# Why can't we see God?

God is absolutely other than His creation, for the Creator cannot have the same kind of being as His creation. Although this is self-evident, some people still ask why we cannot see God directly.

Direct vision is very limited. Consider the following: A tooth contains innumerable bacteria. No bacteria is aware of the tooth in which it lives, for that would mean that it has removed itself from the tooth and used some artificial means (e.g., telescopes and microscopes) to obtain an approximate idea of the tooth's surroundings and its relationship to the human body. Even if this were possible, such awareness does not mean understanding.

Our senses are in a similar situation. We know a great deal about our environment, but all of our knowledge is just a minute fragment of the whole. However, our knowledge is conditioned by understanding. We need to have a general idea about what we see in order to understand it. For example, how could we make sense of a tree without some prior idea, no matter how vague, of it? Given such limitations, how can we know or see the Creator of everything?

As created and finite beings, our potential and capacity are limited. Our Creator, on the other hand, is Infinite. We live and die within His creation, strive for understanding and virtue, and seek our salvation by His Mercy. Prophet Muhammad[[1]](#footnote-1) said: *“Compared with the Seat of Honor, the whole universe is as small as a ring thrown upon a desert. Similarly, compared with the Throne, the Seat of Honor is as small as a ring thrown upon the desert.”* [[2]](#footnote-2)These statements show just how far His Infinitude exceeds our power of apprehending it. If we cannot conceive of the reality of the Seat of Honor and the Throne, how can we even begin to conceive of Him?

In the Qur'an, we read that:

*Vision comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all vision (6:103).*

After the Prophet's ascent to the heavens, his Companions asked him if he had seen God. [[3]](#footnote-3)Abu Dharr reported that, on one occasion, he answered: *“What I saw was the Light. How could I see Him?”* [[4]](#footnote-4)On another occasion he answered: *“I saw a Light.”* [[5]](#footnote-5)These statements clarify the well-known saying: *“The light is the limit or veil of God*.” [[6]](#footnote-6)This light, which He created, stands between us and God. We can only see by within that light, which makes limited sight possible, and also shields or veils us from God. Just as we see only a part of it, we also see only a part of what veils Him.

Consider the matter from another angle. Ibrahim Haqqi says: *“In all of creation, there is nothing like, equal, or contrary to God. God is above all form. Indeed, He is immune to and free of form.”* We can distinguish different things only because they have a like, an equal, or a contrary thing. For example, we know *“long”* by comparing it to “short.” In the absence of such means of comparison, as in the case of God, we have no way to compare or distinguish. This is the meaning of *“God is above all form.”*

Those who ask to see God directly seek to think of or know His Being directly. Just as we cannot see Him, we cannot think of or know His Being, for He is beyond all form, quality, quantity, and human conception or reasoning. In the words of Muslim theologians: *“Whatever conception of God we form in our minds, He is other than it.”* And the Sufis say: *“God is beyond all our conceptions, and we are surrounded by thousands of veils.”*

Men and women of wisdom have said that God exists but cannot be comprehended by human reason or perceived by human senses. The only way to acquire knowledge of Him is through the Prophets, whom He appointed as bearers of His Revelation. Given this, we must accept the guidance of Revelation if we want to know about Him.

Consider the following analogy. Imagine that you are in a closed room. When someone knocks on the door, you might be able to form some vague impressions about who is knocking. However, you can only guess at his or her attributes. All that you know for certain is that someone is knocking. You can open the door and ask the person knocking to make himself or herself known to you. In this way, you can acquire more accurate knowledge of his or her true attributes.

This analogy helps us approach the question of how to seek God. Look at creation. Its sheer immensity, unity of form, beauty and harmony, usefulness and demands upon our labor and understanding make us aware of the Creator's existence. When we see a wide range of diverse fabrics produced from a single material, we know that someone has produced it, for we understand that it could not have produced itself. Similarly, we can deduce from what we can see of this creation that someone—the Creator—has made it.

But this is where the similarity ends. While we can find those who made the fabric and persuade them to make themselves known to us, we cannot do so with the Creator. This would be like the pieces of fabric demanding that their producers reveal themselves. Clearly, such a thing is impossible. Without assistance from the Creator, all we can do is speculate about who is knocking.

What opens this door for us is Revelation. Through God's Revelation to the Prophets and their teaching, we can respond to creation as signs manifesting the Creator's Existence and Attributes. [[7]](#footnote-7)Through the Prophets, we learn to contemplate and call upon His Attributes. A true understanding of them requires that we follow the way of the Prophets: inner experience and contemplation, which can be achieved only by our sincere and total observance of the Divine decrees, objective study, and profound meditation. If our inner faculties are not developed, we cannot grasp the meaning of creation and so cannot contemplate the Divine Attributes manifested within creation.

Even then, it is not possible for just anyone to comprehend the Divine Essence. That is why it is said: *“His Names are known, His Attributes are comprehended, and His Essence exists.”* In the words of Abu Bakr: *“To comprehend His Essence means to confess that His Essence cannot be comprehended.”*

Our duty is to remain committed to our covenant with God, and to beseech Him as follows:

O You alone who are worshipped. We cannot attain to true knowledge of You, yet we believe that You are nearer to us than our jugular veins. We feel Your existence and nearness in the depths of our hearts through the universe, which You created and opened to us like a book, and through the wonderful harmony of form between all parts of Your creation. We come to perceive that we are integrated into the whole realm of Your theophany, and thus our souls are rested and consoled, and our hearts find serenity.

# Who created God?

People with no inner spiritual life sometimes ask: If God created everything, who created God? The Prophet said that some people would ask this very question: *“A day will certainly come when some people will sit with their legs crossed and ask: 'If God created everything, who created God?'“*[[8]](#footnote-8)

At best, the question is based on perceived *“cause and effect”* relationships. Everything can be thought of as an effect and attributed to a prior cause that, in turn, is attributed to a prior cause, and so on. However, we must remember that cause is only a hypothesis, for it has no objective existence. All that objectively exists is a particular sequence of circumstances that is often (but not always) repeated. If such a hypothesis is applied to existence, we cannot find a creator of the first cause, because each creator must have had a prior creator. The end result is a never-ending chain of creators.[[[9]](#footnote-9)](http://en.fgulen.com/_fg2)

The Creator must be Self-Subsistent and One, without like or equal. If any created being *“causes”* anything that capacity was created within that being, for only the Creator is Self-Existent and Self-Subsistent. Only the Creator truly creates and determines possible causes and effects for His creation. Therefore, we speak of God as the Sustainer, who holds and gives life to all of His Creation. All causes begin in Him, and all effects end in Him. In truth, created things are “0”s that will never add up to anything, unless God bestows real value or existence by placing a positive “1” before the “0”.

In the sphere of existence, what we call causes and effects have no direct or independent influence. We may have to use such words to understand how a part of creation is made intelligible to us and available for our use. But even this confirms our dependence upon God and our answerability before Him. God does not need causes and effects to create; rather, we need them to understand what He has created.

1. In traditional Islamic literature, every mention of the Prophet is followed by a phrase of blessing, usually “upon him be peace and blessings.” In the case of the Companions and other pious Muslims, the phrase “may God be pleased with him (or her)” is used. Both of these are religious obligations. We have not followed this practice in this book, as it is foreign to American literary style. This is not meant as a sign of disrespect, for they are assumed to be there. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tabari, Tafsir, 3:77. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Companions of the Prophet are those who gathered around him to receive instruction and follow his example as closely as possible. They are considered the elite and vanguard of the Muslim nation, and are accorded the highest respect and admiration. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Muslim, Iman, 291; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 5:147. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Muslim, Iman, 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Muslim, Iman, 293; Ibn Maja, Muqaddima, 13; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 4:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For example, the One, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate, the All-Knowing, and the All-Powerful. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bukhari, I'tisam, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The futile notion of a never-ending chain of creators was one of the arguments used by Muslim theologians to explain the necessity of believing in God. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)