320575 - What is meant by the nature of the divine attributes that we do not know?

the question

I want to know what we mean by how Allah hears and sees. When we say that we do not know how, does that mean that the images we humans see around us are not the same as the image of the same thing that Allah (may He be glorified and exalted) sees, and that something similar may be said with regard to voices and sounds? Or is the “how” something else?

Summary of answer

The names of Allah (may He be exalted) include the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, and His attributes include hearing and sight. We believe in that with certainty, but we do not know “how” His hearing and His sight are, just as we do not know how His Essence is and how His other attributes are. In other words, we do not know how Allah hears all sounds and voices at the same time, even though they vary in languages, and we do not know how Allah sees the upper realm and the lower realm and all created things at the same time.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Allah (may He be exalted) is all-hearing, all-seeing; His hearing encompasses all voices and sounds, *“Not absent from Him is an atom's weight within the heavens or within the earth or [what is] smaller than that or greater, except that it is in a clear register” [Saba’ 34:3]*; *“He knows that which deceives the eyes and what the hearts conceal” [Ghaafir 40:19]*. His names include the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, and His attributes include hearing and sight. We believe in that with certainty, but we do not know “how” His hearing and His sight are, just as we do not know how His Essence is and how His other attributes are. In other words, we do not know how Allah hears all

sounds and voices at the same time, even though they vary in languages, and we do not know how Allah sees the upper realm and the lower realm and all created things at the same time.

We do not know either “how” His eye, His hand, His countenance and so on are. We cannot describe what they look like in the same manner as we know the appearance and shape of created things; we do not know anything that resembles them or any likeness of them, such that we could make an analogy with them or liken them to something. Exalted be Allah far above all of that. *“There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing” [ash-Shoora 42:11]*. Therefore some of the early generations described the one who discusses “how” as likening Allah to His creation.

Imam Ishaaq ibn Raahawayh (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Rather likening [Allah’s attributes to His creation] is saying: A hand like a [human] hand, or a hand that resembles a [human] hand, or hearing like [human] hearing, or hearing that resembles [human] hearing. This is likening Allah to His creation. But if one says as Allah (may He be exalted) says – a [divine] hand, or [divine] hearing, or [divine] sight, without discussing how it is and without saying that it resembles [human] hearing or is like [human] hearing, this is not likening Allah to His creation, and it is as Allah (may He be exalted) says in His Book: *“There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing” [ash-Shoora 42:11]*.

End quote. This was narrated from him by at-Tirmidhi in his *Sunan* (3/41 – Shaakir edn.).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Hence some of them said: If someone asks you: How does Allah descend, or how did He rose over the Throne, or how does He know, or how does He speak, decree and create? Then say to him: How is His Essence? If he says: I do not know how His essence is, then say to him: And I too do not know how His attributes are, for knowing how an attribute is comes after knowing how the essence is to which that attribute is ascribed.

End quote from *Sharh Hadith an-Nuzool*, p. 11.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Neither Allah (may He be glorified)

nor His Messenger have told us about how these attributes are. Therefore it is not possible for us to know how they are, because the means of knowing that are not available, and because the means are not available, we cannot attain that type of knowledge.

As this is the case, we say: we cannot describe how the attributes of Allah are, and it is not permissible to ask how they are. If anyone asks how they are, we tell him that he should not ask about that, for asking about how leads to doom, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Those who ask too many questions are doomed.” Asking how comes under the heading of asking too many questions, because if there were any benefit in knowing how, Allah and His Messenger would have explained that. Rather we say: Reaching a point where we understand the reality of the divine attributes and how they are is something impossible, because man is too limited to be able to comprehend how the divine attributes are.

End quote from Sharh al-‘Aqeedah as-Safaareeniyyah, p. 289.

With regard to whether Allah sees us as we appear to others, and whether He hears all voices as we hear one another, we cannot discuss this issue, for we cannot discuss something of which we have no knowledge. But when the scholars say that we do not have the knowledge of how, they are referring to what we discussed above, which is the reality and nature of the attributes.

To sum up, when it comes to matters of the unseen of which Allah has not told us about their reality and nature, we have no right to talk about them at all, especially that which has to do with His Essence, His names, and His attributes – may He be glorified.

Allah (may He be exalted) says:

“And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned”

[al-Isra’ 17:36]

“Say, ‘My Lord has only forbidden immoralities - what is apparent of them and what is concealed - and sin, and oppression without right, and that you associate with Allah that for which He has not

sent down authority, and that you say about Allah that which you do not know’”

[al-A‘raaf 7:33].

And Allah knows best.