



The One Who Always Listens: Allah's Name al-Samī'

TAHIR WYATT

JINAN YOUSEF

YAQeen™
INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Author Biography

Dr. Tahir Wyatt is a researcher and instructor of Islamic studies and comparative religion. During his twenty-one years of studying and teaching in the Middle East, he procured several degrees, including a doctorate in theology. He was also the only American ever to be appointed to teach in the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, the second holiest site in the Muslim world. Dr. Wyatt currently serves as the Executive Director of the United Muslim Masjid, Programs Manager of the Philadelphia Masjid, and sits on the board of several non-profits dedicated to community development and social services. In addition to his role as the Director of the Systematic Theology department, Dr. Wyatt also serves as an Associate Editor on Yaqeen's Editorial Review Board.

Dr. Jinan Yousef has been an author for over a decade, and most recently published the book, *Reflecting on the Names of Allah* (Al-Buruj Press, 2020). She has been a student of Sheikh Akram Nadwi for many years, and currently studies *tafsir* and hadith at Al-Salam Institute. Dr. Yousef also teaches classes on the names of Allah for SWISS online. She is passionate about helping Muslims connect to Allah through knowing Him by His names.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

We all have the need and desire to be heard. We feel close to those who truly listen to us. We know that they care. Conversely, when even the people who are supposed to be close to us, like siblings or parents, do not take the time to hear us, we feel distant from them. It can feel isolating to have no one to listen to us. But Allah, who tells us who He is and establishes the nature of our relationship with Him, invites us to talk to Him. He tells us that He is *al-Samī‘* (the All-Hearing)—this name of His lets you know that He hears what is on your tongue and what is in your heart. That Allah listens to us is very reassuring. When Prophets Mūsā and Hārūn عليهما السلام were told to speak to the Pharaoh, they were understandably afraid. They said, “Our Lord, indeed we are afraid that he will hasten [punishment] against us or that he will transgress” (Qur’an 20:45). And Allah reassured them, “Fear not. Indeed, I am with you both; I hear and I see” (Qur’an 20:46).

Just as Allah has taught us in the Qur’an that He is *al-Samī‘*, the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم also made sure to inculcate this teaching in his Companions. One day, they were with the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم during a journey when people began to exalt Allah loudly. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, “O people, be gentle with yourselves. You are not calling upon One who is deaf or absent; rather, you are calling upon One who hears, sees, and is very near.”¹ We do not have to shout in order for Allah to hear us. When you talk to God, it is a one-on-one conversation, even if you are in a crowded room full of people.

¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7386; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2704.

The meaning of *al-Samī‘*

The Arabic root of *al-Samī‘*, *sīn-mīm-‘ayn*, means ‘to hear, to listen, to pay attention to, and to accept.’ There are two main meanings to His name *al-Samī‘*: the first is that He listens, and the second is that He responds to what He hears.² We will examine both.

He hears and listens

Allah hears everything, even those things which are well beyond our ability to hear.³ More importantly, He hears our whispers and our silent pleas. For Allah, secret utterances are no different than those made publicly, and what is in the heart is the same as what is on the tongue. In discussing this name, al-Ghazālī explains that *al-Samī‘* hears even that which is subtler than whispers or secrets.⁴ Allah even hears the thoughts that remain trapped in your mind, those which you have not even articulated. He says, “Surely Allah knows best what is hidden in the heart” (Qur’an 5:7).

Ibn Al-Qayyim explains that Allah hears every single person, and one voice does not distract Him from another, nor does He get confused between them, and He hears and understands all languages and all needs.⁵ This is reassurance for those who worry whether Allah understands them and their struggles, or whether He only listens to the most pious. Moreover, Allah pairs His name *al-Samī‘* with His Name *al-‘Alīm* (The All-Knowing) in the Qur’an, again comforting us that He both hears and knows what we are going through. Truly, there is no greater therapeutic relationship that can ever be established than a servant who realizes the Lord of the Heavens hears, knows and understands their plight.

² Along with these two primary meanings, Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that the trilateral root *sin-mim-ayn* has additional meanings, closely related to these two. See *Badā‘i al-Fawā‘id* (Makkah: Dār ‘Ālim al-Fawā'id, 1425H), 2:507.

³ For example, we once assumed that giraffes could not make sounds, but later discovered that they murmur at a pitch humans cannot hear. “Animals Communicate in Frequencies that We Cannot Hear,” *Yliopisto*, August 2020, <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/life-sciences/animals-communicate-frequencies-we-cannot-hear>.

⁴ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God: Al-Maqṣad Al-Asnā Fi Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh Al-Ḥusnā*, trans. David Burrell and Nazih Daher, The Ghazālī Series (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 83–84. See also Abu Sulayman al-Khattabi, *Sh‘an ad-du‘a*, 3rd ed. (Damascus: Dar al-Thaqafa al-Arabiyya, 1992), 59.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Tarīq al-ḥijratayn* (Makkah: Dār ‘Ālim al-Fawā'id, 1429 AH), 1:270.

He responds

Within the meaning of His name *al-Samī‘* is also acceptance and response. The Prophet Zakarīyā عليه السلام knew that Allah heard his quiet and seemingly impossible prayer when “he called to his Lord [with] a private supplication” (Qur’an 19:3). After expressing to Allah his worries of not having an heir who could continue to guide his people, His Lord responded, “O Zakarīyā, indeed We give you good tidings of a boy whose name will be Yaḥyā—a name We have not given to anyone before” (Qur’an 19:7). Allah both hears and responds to those who call upon Him.

When we stand from *rukū‘* (bowing) in prayer, we say,

سَمِعَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ حَمِدَهُ

Allah hears those who praise Him.

This does not mean that God does not hear those who do not praise Him. But ‘hearing’ in this context implies both awareness and action: He listens and responds. What is even more beautiful is that we are being *alerted* to the fact that Allah listens and responds to those who praise Him. Immediately after “Allah hears those who praise Him” we say, “Our Lord, to You is all praise.” We have entered into the realm of those who praise Him and, if our hearts are present, naturally want to ask Allah for our needs here. We are given the opportunity to do so immediately afterward when we prostrate to Him. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, “The servant is closest to his Lord during prostration, so increase your supplications therein.”⁶ It is as though we are being taught, through the physical act of prayer, that to have a Lord who hears and responds to us directly (encapsulated in the term ‘*samī‘a*’) should lead to praising Him (how could it not?) and then supplicating to Him when we are closest to Him. We also raise our hands to ask Him in *qunūt* directly after we say, “Our Lord, to You is all praise.” The natural reaction to internalizing that He is *al-Samī‘* is praising Him and asking Him from our hearts.

⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 482.

The great scholar of hadith, Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388 AH), has also mentioned that hearing (*samā*) could signify acceptance and response, as in the statement of the Prophet ﷺ:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ قَلْبٍ لَا يَخْشَعُ، وَمِنْ دُعَاءٍ لَا يُسْمَعُ، وَمِنْ نَفْسٍ لَا تَتَّبِعُ، وَمِنْ عِلْمٍ لَا يَنْفَعُ

O Allah, I seek refuge in You from a heart that is not humble, from a prayer (*duʿā*) that is not heard, from a soul that is never satisfied, and from knowledge that does not benefit.⁷

The Prophet ﷺ did not mean that he feared Allah would not hear the prayer itself, but rather that Allah would leave the prayer unanswered.⁸

To emphasize this point, Allah's name *al-Samīʿ* is also paired in the Qur'an with His name *al-Qarīb* (the Near One). In the hadith cited earlier, the Prophet ﷺ reminded the Companions that they did not need to be loud when they called upon Allah because He is *al-Samīʿ* and *al-Qarīb*. Allah also tells us in the Qur'an,

Say, "If I should err, I would only err against myself. But if I am guided, it is by what my Lord reveals to me. Indeed, He is Hearing (*Samīʿ*) and Near (*Qarīb*)" (34:50).

Moreover, the Prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام said, "Praise to Allah, who has granted to me in old age Ismāʿīl and Ishāq. Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplication" (Qur'an 14:39).

Sometimes, people may hear your words and not understand what you need, or be unable to help you. This is never the case with *al-Samīʿ*. When Prophet Yūnus عليه السلام was in the belly of the whale, "he cried out in the deep darkness, 'There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong'" (Qur'an 21:87). Allah heard him. Not only did He hear, but He also responded to what was never uttered:⁹ He saved him.

⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3482. Another version of this hadith with similar wording is found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2722.

⁸ See: al-Khattabi, *Shʿan ad-duʿa*, 59.

⁹ Some may mistakenly reduce *duʿā* to mere incantations or wish lists, but it is much more profound than that. In fact, many of the most powerful *duʿās* in the Qur'an do not even contain an explicit request to God. In the most trying circumstances, when there was nowhere to turn to, the prophets—Ibrahim, Yunus, Ayyub, and others (may peace be upon them)—all uttered humbling expressions of truth in response to trial and tribulation. See: Zohair

We are told, “We answered him and saved him from distress: this is how We save the faithful” (Qur’an 21:88).

This is because Allah is also *al-Karīm* (the Most Generous). When He hears the thoughts and hopes that remain trapped in our hearts, unable to find expression on our tongues, He still responds, without us even asking. How many of us have had unexpected gifts given to us—the exact gifts we were hoping for without asking for them—knowing that no one ever heard our hopes except Allah?

So speak to Allah and tell Him what you feel—your troubles and worries, your hopes and dreams. This does not necessarily mean that you have to ask for something, even though that is also beloved to Him and an essential act of worship. You can just talk to Him, knowing that He hears and listens to you.

If He hears what is unspoken and responds anyway, why should I ask?

Some people mistakenly refrain from asking Allah since He already knows what is in their hearts. This, of course, is contrary to the way of the prophets we seek to emulate, and contrary to what Allah wants from us, as He explicitly says, “Call upon Me, I will respond to you” (Qur’an 40:60). The Prophet ﷺ said, “*Du‘ā*’ is the essence of worship.”¹⁰

Supplication to Allah is an expression of need and certainty that He is the true *Rabb*—the Lord, Sustainer, and Nurturer of the universe—and part of our worship of Him. Asking Him is also an acknowledgment of His other names and attributes. When you explicitly ask, you are recognizing that He is the All-Hearing, that He is the Most Merciful, that He responds, that He is the All-Powerful, and that He is the All-Aware.

You are also allowing yourself to be vulnerable by verbalizing your needs to the only One who can truly grant you solace. The Prophet ﷺ told us, “Whoever is afflicted by a pressing need and complains to people, his need will never be

Abdul-Rahman, “Islamic Spirituality and Mental Well-Being,” *Yaqeen*, March 2017, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/islamic-spirituality-and-mental-well-being>.

¹⁰ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 1479; *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2969, who graded it authentic.

satisfied. But whoever is afflicted by a pressing need and complains to Allah, Allah will provide for him sooner or later.”¹¹ This reminds us to take our troubles to the One who will truly hear us and can actually help us.

Convincing us that there is no need to ask is a trick of Satan, so that we never express our need to and for Allah, and never experience the sweetness of an answered supplication. It can also denote pride, where one does not want to ask Allah or show their weakness. Furthermore, when we are given without asking, we can take the blessings for granted, and perhaps attribute them to someone other than Allah. But when we ask, and Allah responds, we know exactly who the response is from. We are also investing in our Hereafter, as the responses to some supplications are deferred to Paradise.¹²

Pairing of Allah’s name *al-Samī‘* with other divine names

Allah’s name *al-Samī‘* is mentioned 45 times in the Qur’an; it is paired with the divine name *al-‘Alīm* 32 times and with *al-Baṣīr* 10 times.¹³ These pairings give us a more holistic understanding of who Allah is, illustrating His perfection and the comprehensiveness of His names and attributes. Pairing also helps to overcome some of the limitations of language that may restrict our understanding of God.

Al-Samī‘ and *al-Baṣīr* (paired ten times in the Qur’an)

The names *al-Samī‘* and *al-Baṣīr* (the All-Seeing) together indicate the comprehensiveness of Allah’s awareness, and that nothing escapes Him: Allah is *the* All-Hearing and All-Seeing. When Mūsā and Hārūn عليهما السلام were told to speak to Pharaoh, Allah emphasized the attributes that would be most reassuring to them, “I am with you both, hearing and seeing everything” (Qur’an 20:46).

¹¹ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 1645; *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2326; *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 3969, graded authentic by Shaykh Aḥmad Shākir.

¹² The Prophet ﷺ said, “There is no Muslim who calls upon Allah, without sin or cutting family ties, but that Allah will give him one of three answers: He will quickly fulfill his supplication, He will store it for him in the Hereafter, or He will divert an evil from him similar to it.” *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 11133, graded authentic by al-Albani in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Adab al-Mufrad*, no. 547.

¹³ Mājid Āl Abdul-Jabbār, *al-Asmā al-Husnā* (Riyadh: 2018), p. 183.

Imagine going to face the worst tyrant and knowing that Allah will witness and hear everything. Imagine the strength that comes from that knowledge. It does not mean that the task will be easy, nor that it will require little effort. It means having conviction that Allah is with you, and a heightened sense of reliance (*tawakkul*) upon Him. Indeed, it was this complete reliance and trust in Him that led Mūsā عليه السلام, when the Children of Israel thought they would be overtaken by Pharoah and his army, to say, “No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me” (Qur’an 26:62). These are the ultimate effects of knowing that Allah is with us, hearing and seeing: reassurance, strength, and conviction.

God’s hearing is juxtaposed against the idols that were worshiped by people before Islam. Prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام asked his father, “O my father, why do you worship that which does not hear and does not see and will not benefit you at all?” (Qur’an 19:42). Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was incredulous; worship is the ultimate form of submission to the worshiped and the clearest method of exaltation. Why would anyone worship something that cannot even hear or see him or her? The prerequisite to responding is the ability to hear and know what a person needs. So how could this idol bring benefit in any way?

Secondly, knowing that Allah is All-Hearing and All-Seeing should make *us* aware. There are certain things we would not say or do in front of someone we love and respect. Knowing that God hears and sees everything, at all times, should make us vigilant over our speech and actions. It should increase our sincerity and consistency in character so that our behavior behind closed doors and in public show the same reverence for God, simply because we are aware of *al-Samī‘ al-Baṣīr*.

Al-Samī‘ al-‘Alīm (paired 32 times in the Qur’an)

When the wife of the minister and the women of the city plotted to commit indecent acts against Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام, he said, “My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant” (Qur’an 12:33).

And this was the response from Allah, “So his Lord responded to him and averted from him their plan. Indeed, He is the Hearing (*al-Samī‘*), the Knowing (*al-‘Alīm*)” Qur’an 12:34).

Allah heard Yūsuf’s عليه السلام plea, and He tells us in the following verse that He averted their plan. God listens—He is *al-Samī‘*—and responds. He is also *al-‘Alīm*. He knew of Yūsuf’s عليه السلام desire to stay away from the women as well as their true intentions.

But there is another meaning here that highlights the wisdom of pairing His names *al-Samī‘* and *al-‘Alīm*. Allah does not say, ‘We sent him to prison’—even though that is what happened—but rather He points out that He averted the plan of the women, focusing on the deeper purpose of Yūsuf’s عليه السلام imprisonment rather than its outward circumstances. Even so, one might wonder, ‘Was there no better way to keep the women away from him? Did he have to go to prison?’ One might be forgiven for thinking this way. Though Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام had done nothing wrong (in fact he behaved in the most dignified manner befitting a prophet of God), he was still imprisoned, and this cast doubt upon his character in the eyes of his society (sometimes there *is* smoke without fire!). But had he not been sent to prison, he would not have interpreted the dream of his cellmates, which eventually led to his release, his exoneration, his attainment of authority, and finally his reunion with his family. Being sent to prison paved the way for all of this, even though it was not obvious as it was happening, and indeed appeared to be completely unfair.

Thus, we need to know that Allah is *al-Samī‘*, so He hears and responds, but He *also* knows what is best. You might be expressing your pain to Allah, and still face difficulty. Satan may try to make you doubt: ‘Is Allah really listening to me? Will He actually respond?’ But when you know that He is *al-Samī‘ al-‘Alīm*, you can take comfort in knowing that this difficulty you are going through has a purpose, just like the difficulties Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام went through eventually led to an opening.¹⁴ In fact, sometimes it is better for a person’s *du‘ā* not to be answered immediately, or exactly as they wanted.

¹⁴ Allah says, “...And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon Allah - then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent.” [65:2-3]

A delayed answer to your *du‘ā* does *not* mean that it is not answered. We often seek an immediate answer to our prayers—we want them answered now, on our terms. However, we do not always know what is best for us because we do not know the unseen. Imagine if you got exactly what you asked for as opposed to what Allah knew was best for you! Allah *al-‘Alīm* knows that what He grants you is best for your future, both in this life and the next. He hears you, and gives what you did not know you needed. This is why the Prophet ﷺ encouraged us to believe that our *du‘ā*’s will be answered, saying, “Call upon Allah while being certain that He will answer.”¹⁵

Consider the mother of Maryam عليها السلام: for much of her life she desired a pious son who would be able to serve Allah, yet she ultimately received something quite different. We are told, “Remember when the wife of ‘Imrān said, ‘My Lord! I dedicate what is in my womb entirely to Your service, so accept it from me. You are truly the All-Hearing (*al-Samī‘*), All-Knowing (*al-‘Alīm*).’ But when she delivered Maryam, she said, ‘My Lord, I have delivered a female.’ And Allah was most knowing of what she delivered, and the male is not like the female. ‘And I have named her Maryam, and I seek refuge in You for her and her offspring from Satan, the expelled [from Allah’s mercy]’” (Qur’an 3:35-36).

Aside from demonstrating that sometimes what we want is not what we need, this scene describes a person who is close to Allah, who talks to Him and expresses her desires, her hopes, her worries, and her fears to Him. She spoke to Allah because she knew that He was listening, and sometimes *that* is the point, and part of the reason why He informs us of this name: so that we know we always have Allah to listen to us. We should emulate this beautiful practice.

The distinguished hearing of *al-Samī‘*

Allah tells us, “There is nothing like Him: He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing” (Qur’an 42:11). In other words, right after He teaches us that there is nothing like Him, He affirms His attributes of hearing and seeing—attributes that we ourselves possess. This is deliberate. Of all the names that Allah could have used here, He

¹⁵ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 6655, graded authentic by Shaykh Aḥmad Shākir. A corroborating hadith is found in *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3479, and graded fair (*hasan*) by al-Albani.

chose two that we appear to share in common. But in reality, the statement, “There is nothing like Him,” emphasizes that our hearing and seeing cannot be compared to His hearing and seeing.

The great Shāfi‘ī scholar, Abū al-Qāsim al-Isfahānī (d. 535 AH), said: “At the onset of creation, man does not hear. When he begins to hear, he does not understand what he hears, and only as he grows is he able to distinguish between good and evil speech. Man’s hearing is limited; beyond that limit, he fails to hear. If a number of people speak to him at one time, he is unable to hear, listen, and respond to them all at the same time. However, Allah is the All-Hearing (*al-Samī‘*) of His creation’s invocation and of their utterances when they call unto Him, individually or all together in their different languages... The hearing of the created one ceases to exist once he dies, while Allah is eternal and infinite.”¹⁶

Allah’s hearing is distinguished by its comprehensiveness. Allah revealed the following verse when a woman named Khawlah bint Tha‘labah went to the Prophet ﷺ to complain about her husband: “Allah has heard the words of the woman who disputed with you [Prophet] about her husband and complained to Allah: Allah has heard what you both had to say. Truly Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing” (Qur’an 58:1).

When this verse was revealed, ‘Ā’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, was shocked and proclaimed, “Blessed is the One whose hearing encompasses all things! Khawlah came to Allah’s Messenger ﷺ complaining about her husband; I was in the house but I could not hear what she said. Then Allah revealed [these verses]!”¹⁷

Though ‘Ā’ishah (rA) was in the same space—houses were not large at all, and were not made of concrete or materials that provide sound insulation—she did not hear what was being said. Yet Allah heard everything.

The companion ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd (rA) narrated that some men were gathered by the Kaaba discussing whether or not Allah heard them. One said, “He hears us

¹⁶ Abul-Qasim Ismail ibn Muhammad al-Isfahani, *al-Hujjah fi bayān al-mahajjah*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāyah, 1999), 1:138.

¹⁷ *Sunan an-Nasā’i*, no. 3460; *Sunan Ibn Majah*, no. 1691, graded authentic by Ibn ‘Asākir in Mu‘jam as-Shuyūkh (Damascus: Dār al-Bashā’ir, 2000), 1:163 and al-Albani.

if we are loud but does not hear us if we are quiet.” Another responded, “If Allah hears us when we are loud, then He also hears us when we are quiet.”¹⁸ Then, Allah Almighty revealed the verse, “You were not covering yourselves, lest your hearing, your sight, and your skins testify against you. Rather, you assumed that Allah does not know much of what you are doing” (Qur’an 41:22).

Allah hears everyone. He hears the plotters, the slanderers, the gossip-mongers, and the foul-mouthed. Allah said with regard to those plotting against the Muslims, “Do they think We cannot hear their secret talk and their private counsel? Yes, we can: Our messengers are at their sides, recording everything” (Qur’an 43:80).

Indeed, He hears what people say about Him and what they ascribe to Him. He says, “Allah has certainly heard the words of those who sneer, ‘So God is poor, while we are rich.’ We shall record everything they say” (Qur’an 3:180).

Allah warns that He is not oblivious and hears all. Indeed, this should remind us that just because we do not immediately see the consequence of wrongful speech—speech that Allah condemns in the Qur’an—it does not mean that it will not be accounted for. Everything that is said is recorded and will testify on the Day of Judgment. Allah says, “When they reach it, their ears, eyes, and skins will testify against them for their misdeeds. They will say to their skins, ‘Why did you testify against us?’ and their skins will reply, ‘Allah, who gave speech to everything, has given us speech—it was He who created you the first time and to Him you have been returned—yet you did not try to hide yourselves from your ears, eyes, and skin to prevent them from testifying against you. You thought that Allah did not know about much of what you were doing’” (Qur’an 41:20-22).

This should cause us to reflect on what we say, and ask ourselves whether we would be happy for our words to be repeated on the Day of Judgment. It should also reassure us that if we were verbally wronged by others, Allah heard it, and knows of our pain. The Mother of the Believers, ‘Ā’ishah (rA), asked the Prophet ﷺ if he had encountered a day more difficult than the day of the Battle of Uhud. The Prophet ﷺ replied in the affirmative, and mentioned that his most difficult day was when he went to invite Ibn ‘Abd Yālīl ibn ‘Abd Kulāl, one of the chiefs of

¹⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4539; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2775.

Ṭā'if, to Islam. When Ibn 'Abd Yālīl did not respond to his call, the Prophet ﷺ departed in deep distress.

He ﷺ said, “I did not recover until I arrived at Qarn ath-Tha‘ālib. There, I raised my head and saw a cloud which had cast its shadow on me. I saw in it Jibrīl عليه السلام who called me and said, ‘Indeed, Allah, the Exalted, heard what your people said to you and the response they made to you. And He has sent you the angel in charge of the mountains to order him to do to them what you wish.’ Then the angel of the mountains called me, greeted me, and said, ‘O Muḥammad ﷺ, Allah listened to what your people said to you. I am the angel of the mountains, and my Lord has sent me to you so that you may give me your orders. If you wish, I will bring together the two mountains and crush them.’ But Allah’s Messenger ﷺ said, ‘I rather hope that Allah will raise from among their descendants people who will worship Allah alone, and not ascribe any partners to Him.’”¹⁹ At a time when the Prophet ﷺ felt so unheard, when he was rejected, and when people actively tried to silence him, *al-Samī‘* heard, responded to, and comforted him.

Similarly, ‘Ā’ishah herself and the companion Ṣafwān bin al-Mu‘aṭṭal al-Sulamī (may Allah be pleased with them both) were subject to a horrible smear campaign in the incident known as *al-ifk*. Ṣafwān had helped ‘Ā’ishah (rA) to return home safely after she was accidentally left behind at the end of a military expedition. When they returned to Madinah, some of the hypocrites spread a slanderous rumor about them. It circulated for almost a month, with the community—including many of the righteous among them—listening to, speaking about, and spreading allegations so detestable and untrue.

The All-Hearing heard everything that was said. This ordeal taught the Muslim community the implications of how we use our hearing and our speech. Allah, who is also the Most Kind, spared ‘Ā’ishah (rA) the pain of hearing what was said about her for most of that time. She stated that, “After we returned to Madinah, I became ill for a month. The people were propagating the forged statements of the slanderers while I was unaware of that.”²⁰ She only learned of this slander a few days before Allah revealed the verses in *Sūrah al-Nūr* vindicating her and admonishing the believers. Allah said,

¹⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3231; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1795.

²⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4141.

Recall receiving it with your tongues and saying with your mouths what you had no knowledge of, and considering it trivial while with Allah it is extremely serious. (Qur'an 24:15)

If you are the object of slander, relief from Allah may come immediately, or it may come at a later stage due to His wisdom, but *al-Samī'* is surely aware. While a person might diminish your pain, or be unaware of the words that were said to you, *al-Samī'* hears all, and you can turn to Him for comfort. And if you are one of those people spreading gossip and hearsay, diminishing its gravity, then take heed of the lessons contained in this trial.

Al-Samī' and our speech

Allah hears everything, so train yourself to say what He loves: reciting the Qur'an, remembering Him, praising Him, and supplicating to Him. Guard yourself against evil speech. *Al-Samī'* tells us, "Not a word does he (or she) utter, but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it)" (Qur'an 50:18).

Forgetting that Allah hears, and failing to cultivate good speech, leads to misuse of the tongue, and the Prophet ﷺ said, "The majority of man's sins emanate from his tongue."²¹ He ﷺ also instructed us to guard our speech and said, "Are the people tossed into the Fire upon their faces, or upon their noses, except because of what their tongues have wrought?"²²

Allah has warned us in the Qur'an, "O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion, indeed some suspicions are sins. And spy not neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear God; verily, God is the one who accepts repentance, Most Merciful" (Qur'an 49:12).

Notice that the first prohibition in this *āyah* is against suspicion. Our suspicion often leads us to spy on others because we want to validate our assumptions and

²¹ At-Tabarani in *al-Mu'jam al-kabeer* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, 1994), 10:24; al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-iman* (Riyadh: Maktabah Ibn Rushd, 2003), 4:240. Graded authentic by al-Albani in *Ṣaḥīḥ at-targhīb* no. 2872.

²² *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2616, who graded it authentic; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3973.

prove that we were right. Once we pry into people's business, we may find something that we can use (or misuse) to validate our suspicion. We then discuss it with others or post it on social media, which are forms of backbiting and gossiping. So not only should we guard our tongues from speech that is displeasing to Allah, but we should close the doors that lead to such speech. About the incident of *al-ifk*, Allah said, "If only the believing men and women had thought well of one another, when you heard this rumor, and said, 'This is clearly an outrageous slander!'" (Qur'an 24:12), Wrongful speech does not come from nowhere. It is cultivated through suspicion in the mind first, and then expressed as gossip or backbiting on the tongue.

This harmful speech, whether expressed verbally or written in texts or posts, is often uttered without much thought, but that does not lessen the severity of its danger. A person's failure to give his speech serious consideration does not negate how seriously displeasing it may be to *al-Samī'*. The Prophet ﷺ said, "A person may utter a word (carelessly) which displeases Allah without thinking of its gravity and because of that he will be thrown into the Hell-Fire."²³

This is why it is important to think before speaking. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should say that which is good or keep silent."²⁴ Saying what is good is better than being silent, but what if you do not know if what you are saying is good or not? In this case, remain silent. Embrace the 'awkward silence' and do not feel compelled to say something that would displease *al-Samī'*. Staying silent is often a virtue. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever remains silent has been saved."²⁵

This advice is ever so important in this era of hyperconnectivity, where the name of the game is staying relevant by posting frequently, commenting on others' posts, and addressing the latest news. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever acts to be heard, Allah will make him heard. Whoever acts to show off, Allah will show him off."²⁶ Al-Nawawi said, "The scholars said it means whoever is ostentatious in his deeds and he publicizes it to people so that they honor him, aggrandize him, and believe

²³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6478.

²⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6136; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 47.

²⁵ *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2501, Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī said that its narrators are reliable; *Faṭḥ al-Bārī* (n.p.: al-Maktabah as-Salafiyyah, n.d.), 11:315, and al-Albani graded it authentic.

²⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6134; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2987.

he is virtuous, Allah will publicize it to people on the Day of Resurrection and disgrace him.”²⁷

This is a nod to the sincerity (*ikhhlās*) that comes along with knowing that Allah is *al-Samī‘*. In other words, do not speak to be famous, do not speak to be heard of, and do not speak seeking the pleasure of anyone other than Allah at the expense of His pleasure. Consider whether what you are saying will benefit people, or whether you are simply speaking to distract yourself or fill an emptiness by being heard. If you wish to be heard, then speak to *al-Samī‘*.

Al-Samī‘ and our hearing

Al-Samī‘ has blessed us with the ability to hear. One of the ways to show gratitude to the All-Hearing is by using His gift in ways that are most pleasing to Him. Ibn al-Qayyim stated,

God loves His Names and Attributes, and He loves the consequences of His Attributes and their manifestations upon His servants. Just as He is beautiful, He loves beauty; as He is Most Forgiving, He loves forgiveness; as He is Most Generous, He loves generosity; as He is All-Knowing, he loves the people of knowledge ... Since God loves those who emulate His Attributes, He is with them according to how much of these qualities they reflect, and this is a special and unique type of companionship.²⁸

In the context of Allah being *al-Samī‘*, Allah loves that we listen to that which is beneficial. Conversely, accustoming ourselves to seeing or listening to what is disliked by God affects our hearts on a subconscious level. Watching sexually explicit scenes in a movie without switching it off or at least turning away increases illicit desires and normalizes these types of relationships. Similarly, listening to improper speech slowly leads us to speak in the same way, if we are not conscious of it.

²⁷ *Sharḥ al-Nawawī ‘alá Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2986.

²⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim, *‘Uddat al-Sābirīn*, (Makkah: Dār ‘Ālim al-Fawāid, 7th ed.), p.85

Listening to backbiting and slander, for example, is prohibited, as the act of listening can signify tacit approval of what is said.²⁹ In the Qur'an, Allah speaks about the famous incident of slander (*al-ifk*) mentioned previously, when people were gossiping falsely about 'Ā'ishah (rA), "And why did you not, when you heard it, say, 'We should not repeat this—God forbid!—it is a monstrous slander'?" (Qur'an 24:16). Imam al-Nawawī concluded that, "It is an obligation for a person who hears someone backbiting another to prohibit him from doing so, as long as he doesn't fear obvious harm."³⁰ Allah also describes the successful believers as "...they who turn away from ill speech" (Qur'an 23:3).

One of the ways to be grateful for the gift of hearing is by using this gift in positive ways. We should listen to speech that brings us close to Allah, that develops our mind, increases us in beneficial knowledge, and makes us see the best in people. Indeed, the Prophet ﷺ prohibited gossip and did not want to hear negative things about others. He ﷺ said, "None of my Companions should tell me anything about another, for I like to come out to you with no ill-feelings."³¹

Take a moment to ask yourself: What do you regularly listen to? Is it the type of speech that distracts you from God and your purpose, or is it enlightening and beneficial? Do you listen to backbiting (*ghībah*) and hearsay (*namīmah*), or other things that are impermissible? Do you hear people's pleas to you for help and respond within your ability? Allah reminds us, "... indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart—about all those [one] will be questioned" (Qur'an 17:36).

The servants of *al-Samī'*

The deeper one's internalization of Allah's name *al-Samī'*, the greater its impact on one's interaction with Allah and with His creation. The following are but a few

²⁹ Al-Nawawī, *al-Adhkār* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994), 339.

³⁰ Al-Nawawī. Imam al-Nawawī stated, "Just as backbiting is impermissible for the one speaking, it is also prohibited to listen to and approve it. Hence, it is an obligation for a person who hears someone backbiting another to prohibit him from doing so, as long as he doesn't fear obvious harm. If he does fear harm, it is an obligation for him to hate that speech in his heart and for him to leave the company of that person, if at all possible. If he can speak out against it or change the subject, he must do so or he will be sinful."

³¹ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4860; *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3896. There is some weakness in the chain of narrators due to al-Waleed ibn Abi Hisham (who is considered *majhool* by many scholars of hadith). However, the meaning is correct according to many scholars. See: Muhammad ibn Salih al-Uthaymeen, *Sharh Riyadh as-Saliheen* (n.p.: Dar al-Watan Riyadh, 1426 AH), 6:151.

qualities that will necessarily manifest in a believer once this blessed divine name has crystallized in his or her heart.

Hear and obey

“O believers! Do not put yourselves ahead of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. And fear Allah. Surely Allah is All-Hearing (*Samī‘*), All-Knowing (*‘Alīm*)” (Qur’an 49:1). Allah reminds us of His name *al-Samī‘* immediately after instructing us to give precedence to revelation over our opinions and desires. Ibn ‘Abbās, the great scholar of *tafsīr* and cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, said that this *āyah* means “do not say anything that is contrary to the Book and the Sunnah.”³²

Allah also says of the believers, “They say, ‘We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!’” (Qur’an 2:285). True believers listen to the commandments of Allah and try to obey them as much as they can, although we may slip up. This is precisely one of the reasons we ask for “forgiveness, our Lord” immediately after saying “we hear and obey.”

Allah warns us against being like the hypocrites when He says, “Believers, obey Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and do not disregard him after having heard [his commands]. Do not be like those who say, ‘We heard,’ though in fact they were not listening—the worst creatures in the sight of Allah are those who are [wilfully] deaf and dumb, who do not reason” (Qur’an 8:20-22).

Indeed, the worst of traits is to hear and then *choose* to disobey. Allah tells us about some of the Children of Israel in the following verse, “Remember when We took your pledge, making the mountain tower above you, and said, ‘Hold on firmly to what We have given you, and listen to [what We say].’ They said, ‘We hear and we disobey,’ and through their disbelief they were made to drink [the love of] the calf deep into their hearts” (Qur’an 2:93). One of the consequences of willful disobedience is that our hearts become enamored with worldly ornaments, to the extent that one may become subjugated to them. The Children of Israel chose to turn away from being servants of Allah, and ended up being the servants of a calf.

³² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003), 9:184.

Of course, we will all make mistakes, and these verses do not deny that. But as long as we are sincerely *trying* to obey, we can, *inshā' Allāh*, be of those who say ‘we listen and we obey.’ Even if we have found ourselves in a period of willful disobedience, and now wish to return, we can still be of those who listen and obey, by observing Allah’s commandment: “Ask forgiveness from your Lord, and return to Him” (Qur’an 11:52).

Be a good listener

Just as we love to be listened to and understood, we should afford that to those around us. Allah is infinitely more generous than we are, and He appreciates the smallest of good deeds that we do, so imagine how Allah will be there for you when you are there for someone else, hearing them out. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The most beloved deed to Allah is to make a Muslim happy, or remove one of his troubles, or forgive his debt, or relieve his hunger.”³³ All of this requires us to know what people need, and the primary way to assess their needs is by listening to them. Lend an ear to a friend going through a rough time. The burden that can be lifted from someone by just listening without necessarily even providing any solutions is not to be underestimated. Just as we wish for Allah to accompany His hearing of us with His response, we should be quick to respond to those who ask for our help. The Prophet ﷺ was described as never saying no when someone asked him for anything.³⁴

Supplicate with Allah’s name *al-Samī‘*

The Prophet ﷺ would invoke Allah by His beautiful name *al-Samī‘* frequently—multiple times a day, in fact. The great *khalīfah*, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (may Allah be pleased with him), mentioned that he heard Allah’s Messenger ﷺ say,

Whoever repeats,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَضُرُّ مَعَ اسْمِهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ (ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ)

³³ Al-Tabarani, *al-Mu‘jam al-awsaṭ*, no. 6026, graded authentic by al-Albani in *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-saḥīḥah*, no. 906.

³⁴ *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhari*, no. 6034.

“In the Name of Allah, with Whose Name nothing is harmed on earth nor in heaven, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing” three times [in the evening] will not be stricken with a sudden affliction until he reaches the morning. And whoever repeats this three times in the morning will not be stricken with a sudden affliction until he reaches the evening.³⁵

Another frequent *du‘ā* with the divine name *al-Samī‘* is said in prayer before reciting the Qur’an:

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ السَّمِيعِ الْعَلِيمِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

I seek refuge in Allah, *al-Samī‘ al-‘Alīm*, from the cursed Shayṭān.³⁶

Just as we invoke Allah’s name *al-Samī‘* at the beginning of our prayers, we should also remember this divine name when rising from the bowing (*rukū‘*) position, saying ‘Allah hears those who praise Him’ (*sami‘a Allāhu liman ḥamidah*). We shouldn’t just say these words mechanically—we should feel them in our *ṣalāh*. Every time we utter this phrase, we are reminded that Allah responds to those who praise and seek Him in prayer. Make the intention that He only hears good from you.

Another example of invoking Allah by his name *al-Samī‘* is in His mandating that we seek refuge in Him when the devils of humans and Jinns whisper evil suggestions. He said:

وَمَا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

And if an evil whisper comes to you from Satan then seek refuge with Allah. Verily, He is All-Hearer, All-Knower. (Qur’an 7:200)

We are also told, “And if there comes to you from Satan an evil suggestion, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing” (Qur’an 41:36). We do not “hear” Satan’s suggestions, nor do we know the form that they take, but Allah does. So whenever we find ourselves tempted towards what is impermissible, we should seek refuge with Allah, *al-Samī‘*.

³⁵ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 5088; *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3388; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3869, graded authentic by Ibn al-Qayyim in *Zād al-ma‘ād* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1994), 2:338. See <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/duas-for-relief-and-protection> for further explanation.

³⁶ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 775; *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 242. It was graded authentic by al-Shawkānī in *ad-Darārī al-muḍīyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1987), 1:87–88.

Choose the best words

Allah warns us about the many tricks of Shayṭān, one of which is to use his whispers to sow discord between believers. When we are careless with our speech, we may offend people, hurt their feelings, or otherwise say something that damages relationships. Allah says, “Tell My servants to say what is best. Satan sows discord among them. Satan is to man an open enemy” (Qur’an 17:53).

Not only should we say what is good, we should “say what is best.” This means that taking the time to figure out the best way to construct your words is actually an act of obedience that will be rewarded by Allah. In his explanation of this *āyah*, Shaykh ‘Abdur-Raḥmān al-Sa’dī (d. 1373 AH) says, “Speaking good words leads to developing good manners and doing righteous deeds, for the one who controls his tongue will be in control of all his affairs.”³⁷

Conclusion

We are instructed to worship Allah with love, fear, and hope. These three are often called the “essentials (*arkān*) of worship.”³⁸ The divine name *al-Samī‘* inspires each of these actions of the heart. Love, because listening shows a genuine concern, so we love those who listen to us; fear, because we do not want to say anything that displeases *al-Samī‘*, and nothing we say escapes His hearing; and hope, because Allah will hear and accept our prayers.

You may be in your room alone right now, or reading this article in a café. Wherever you are, take a few seconds right now to talk to Allah. Tell Him that you want to know Him better, that you want to be happy and successful in this life and the next. Ask Him to settle whatever troubles you may have, to ease whatever difficulty or pain you might be dealing with. Whisper in your lowest voice what is going through your mind. It is certain that no one around you will hear you, but Allah will. He is *al-Samī‘*.

³⁷ Abdur Rahman as-Sa’di, *Tafsir as-Sa’di* (Riyadh: IIPH, 2018), 5:295.

³⁸ See: Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū‘ al-fatawā* (Medina: King Fahd Complex, 1995), 10:81.

So, when you are feeling lonely or in difficulty, call out to the One who hears everything. Talk to the One who revealed this attribute to you, so that you will know that He is there for you. He is The Close One who listens to your words when they are spoken and when they are trapped in your heart. Rest assured that whatever difficulty you are going through has not gone unnoticed.