

Human as the Representative of God on Earth

Is This Status for All?

Who Is the Representative of God on Earth, and Why Was Humanity Given This Role?

The statement “The Human being is representative of God on Earth” is one of the most frequently mentioned concepts in religious teachings. But what does this truly mean? What does it signify when we say that the human being is the representative of God? What does the term “representative” imply, and why has this role been assigned to humanity?

The word representative is defined as a deputy, successor, substitute, or manifestation. Based on this definition, the phrase “representative of God on Earth” refers to someone who acts as God’s deputy and manifestation. Thus, the literal meaning of “The Human being is representative of God on Earth” is that the human embodies and represents God and His authority on earth. But this raises an important question: Why would God need a representative? Has He gone somewhere?

Typically, a deputy or representative is appointed in the absence of the principal authority. However, when it comes to God, this notion seems perplexing since it is a core belief that the entire universe is under God’s presence, and wherever we turn, He is there ¹. This understanding suggests that the phrase “The Human being

¹. Holy Quran, 2:115

is representative of God on Earth” must have a deeper, more nuanced meaning beyond its literal interpretation.

To grasp the essence of the concept of the representative of God on Earth and understand its implications, we must seek answers to the following questions:

- Does Allah need a representative?
- How can the concept of a representative coexist with the belief in God’s self-sufficiency (As-Samad)?
- What does the status of the representative of God entail, and what are its characteristics?
- Is this status exclusive to certain individuals?
- Can all humans achieve the position of the representative of God?
- What responsibilities does this role entail?
- Does the status of the representative of God have various levels or degrees?
- What are the similarities and differences between God and His representative?
- Is attaining the status of the representative of God a matter of free will, or is it mandatory under any conditions?
- Does the role of representing and manifesting God relate to a specific dimension of human existence?

In this lesson, by discussing topics centered on the human being and the purpose of his creation, we will answer these questions and explore the characteristics of the status of the human as the representative of God on Earth.

Why Is the Presence of the Representative of God on Earth Necessary?

The Quran mentions Allah's declaration regarding His appointment of a representative or deputy: "Indeed, I will place a deputy on Earth"². At the same time, we believe that Allah is always present³ and closer to us than our jugular vein⁴. With such beliefs, it may seem difficult to reconcile the need for a representative for Allah. Why would Allah, who is present everywhere, require a deputy? To understand the necessity of the representative of God on Earth, it is crucial to consider the meaning and implications of the term representative and the roles assigned to him. Does the word deputy carry a special meaning in the divine address to the angels?

God is absolutely self-sufficient, and even the slightest suggestion of dependence would contradict His attribute of self-sufficiency (*As-Samad*). Previous discussions on Allah's self-sufficiency have firmly established this truth. Therefore, the idea that Allah requires a representative is invalid. Instead, we must examine this concept from the perspective of humanity's needs.

God is wise and does nothing without reason. Consequently, the appointment of a representative on Earth must fulfill a genuine, logical need. Given God's self-sufficiency, this role is not to address a divine need but to satisfy an intrinsic human necessity. Since everything God creates is, in some way, tied to human beings and their purpose of creation, the presence of the representative of God on Earth is connected to this goal. But what is the nature of this connection? Understanding

². Holy Quran, 2:30

³. Holy Quran, 57:4

⁴. Holy Quran, 50:16

the attributes of the representative of God and the status of deputyship can help us uncover the truth about this connection and its significance.

What Is the Reason Behind the Presence of the Representative of God on Earth?

As mentioned earlier, God does not need a deputy. One of the key reasons for appointing a deputy and establishing their presence on Earth is to fulfill human needs, guiding us toward achieving the purpose of our creation.

God is the Absolute Perfection and the Infinite Being, and without a visible and relatable manifestation of His attributes, it would be impossible for humanity to connect with Him. The role of the representative of God is so essential that there must always be a perfect embodiment of this position present among people. This is why God instructed Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family) to appoint a successor, declaring that failing to do so would render his mission incomplete ⁵.

The representative of God embodies all the divine attributes and perfections, serving as a tangible and accessible example for humanity. For those striving to attain this status and actualize their potentials, the deputy provides a living model of divine attributes. Ayatollah Jawadi Amoli sheds light on the wisdom behind appointing a deputy on Earth, explaining:

Although God is the eternal source of grace for all creation, earthly beings are incapable of receiving divine grace directly, comprehending divine laws directly, or acquire divine knowledge and wisdom directly. Humans require

⁵. Holy Quran, 5:67

someone familiar with their language and ways of communication, someone who can speak to them and guide them in a manner they can understand. Without a visible and relatable example, humans and other earthly beings cannot learn or follow. This inability to directly connect with God's grace makes the appointment of a deputy necessary.

What Is the Status of Humanity as the Representative of God on Earth Like?

In matters of deputyship and succession, the most perfect individual is typically chosen for this role. Similarly, the representative of God on Earth must be the most similar and the most perfect manifestation of God's names, attributes, and perfections.

The representative of God is the most comprehensive reflection and mirror of divine names and attributes. The sole distinction is that God's essence is self-sustaining, as He is the Absolute Existence, while His deputy depends entirely on God.

Allama Tabatabai elaborates on the characteristics and responsibilities of this role:

One of the essential aspects of deputyship is to reflect the attributes and actions of the one they represent. The deputy must embody the characteristics of the one they represent, perform his duties, and act in alignment with his will. Therefore, the representative of God on Earth must have divine virtues, will what God wills, and judge as God judges. Since God always judges with truth (And God judges with truth) the deputy must also judge with truth, follow God's path unwaveringly, and never deviate from it.

Another defining characteristic of the representative of God is his ability to grant life and vitality. They possess the power to inspire a higher and nobler form of life, beyond the physical or angelic existence, known as hayat al-tayyiba (the pure life). The closer we are to God's deputies, the greater our share in this elevated life becomes.

Since the role of deputyship is tied to acquiring divine names and attributes, those who embody more of these attributes and perfections become more similar to God. To achieve the status of the representative of God, humanity's presence and descent to Earth are necessary. Unlike Heaven, the Earth offers conditions of conflict and opposition, which are essential for growth and development.

In the face of these earthly challenges, humans must use their free will and power of choice to navigate between their divine, eternal self and their intellectual, imaginal, and estimative selves. This struggle allows them to acquire divine names, reach the status of the representative of God, and manifest His perfections and attributes. Consequently, the journey toward this role involves a constant battle between the different dimensions of one's existence. The purpose of human creation is for the supra-rational dimension of our existence to become similar to and be the manifestation of God, thereby attaining the status of the representative of God on Earth. All other aspects serve a supportive and preparatory role, and our humanity is defined by the extent to which we utilize these four dimensions in service of our supra-rational faculty. What truly matters on this path is how effectively we have drawn upon these four dimensions to acquire Allah's attributes and resemble Him.

Is the Status of the Representative of God Reserved for a Specific Group of People?

To answer whether the statement “The Human being is representative of God on Earth” encompasses all of humanity, and whether all humans can achieve this status, we must first examine its levels and degrees. Does this status have varying levels, or just a single level?

Based on the definition of the representative of God as one who manifests divine names and attributes, every individual can attain a degree of this status according to the extent to which they embody Allah’s attributes and perfections.

The most perfect exemplars of the representative of God are prophets and Infallible Imams (Peace be upon them). Beyond them, other individuals can achieve varying levels of deputyship based on their efforts and success in becoming similar to God and reflecting His attributes.

Allah has breathed His Spirit into all human beings ⁶, granting each of us infinite potentials. This divine Spirit enables us to embark on a path of spiritual perfection and ascend to a rank even higher than that of angels, the status of the Perfect Human, or the representative of God. This divine Spirit is present in everyone, and every human being inherently strives to become similar to God and attain the status of the representative of God. Through His spirit, Allah has made human beings eternal and filled them with love for Himself, making all humans inherently worthy of this status.

⁶. Holy Quran 38:72

The statement Allah breathed His Spirit into humanity signifies that the potential to achieve this rank was placed within every individual. However, it is up to us, through our decisions, relationships, actions, and mindset, to determine whether this latent potential manifests outwardly.

Allama Tabatabai, in his commentary on verses 30 and 31 of Surah Al-Baqarah, which discuss humanity's role as the representative of God on Earth and the teaching of divine names, explains the potentiality and actuality of this status in the human being:

The mentioned deputyship is not exclusive to Adam (Peace be upon him); rather, his descendants share this role with him. The teaching of names implies that God has entrusted this knowledge to humanity in such a way that its effects gradually and consistently emerge from this being whenever he follows the correct path and receives guidance. By doing so, this potential can be actualized.

Thus the status of the representative of God is not reserved for a specific group. Every human being can achieve this status, provided they align with the proper path and the purpose of human creation. The extent of our growth on this path determines the level we reach in manifesting God's deputyship. God created all of us to be the living manifestations of the statement "The Human being is representative of God on Earth." Yet, He granted us the freedom to choose this lofty goal, leaving it to us to act in accordance with our free will.