

The Divine Attributes: Ahlus Sunnah vs. Mujassimah

The Belief of Ahlus Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah

In the view of Ahlus Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah, Allāh (subhānuhū wa ta'ālā) is totally unlike His creation. There is nothing in His essence (*dhāt*), attributes (*ṣifāt*) or actions (*af'āl*) that resembles **in any way** anything found in creation. This is the clear position of Ahlus Sunnah, and is the decisive and definitive verdict given by the Qur'ān, Sunnah, sayings of the Salaf and the Ahlus Sunnah who followed.

Allāh (subhānuhū wa ta'ālā) says in the Qur'ān:

ليس كمثله شيء

“No *thing* is as His likeness.” (42:11)

This verse, which is the foundation for Sunnī doctrine concerning the oneness and uniqueness of Allāh (subhānuhū wa ta'ālā), expressly negates any and all similarity between Creator and creation. There are a few points to note about the verse:

1. The form of the sentence is “*nafy* (negation) in the context of *nakirah* (an indefinite noun).” *Shay'* (thing) is an indefinite noun and it has been negated using the word *laysa*. It is an established principle of Nahw (Arabic grammar) that a *nafy* in the context of *nakirah* connotes total negation. In other words, the form of the sentence grammatically entails that there is absolutely nothing whatsoever that resembles Allāh (subhānuhū wa ta'ālā).
2. The terms used for resemblance in this verse are two: one particle (*harf*), *ka* (like), and one noun (*ism*), *mithl* (likeness). This compounding of terms used for resemblance negates the minutest possible similarity. For instance, if one were to say, “Zayd is not a lion” (*laysa Zaydun asadan*), this would negate only a gross resemblance. If one were to say, “Zayd is not like a lion” (*laysa Zaydun ka asadin*), this would negate similarity with a lion to a greater degree. And if one were to say, “Zayd is not as the likeness of a lion,” (*laysa Zaydun ka mithli asadin*) it would be to negate any similarity between Zayd and a lion.

Imām al-Bayhaqī (384 – 458 H)¹ said:

¹ His full name is Abū Bakr Ahmad ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Alī. He was born in Sha'bān of the year 384 H in Khusrawjird in present-day Īrān. This is where he grew up. He first began studying under scholars in 399 H, and travelled throughout the Muslim world taking from the learned men of the various towns of Khurāsān, Īrāq and Hijāz. He took fiqh from Nāsir al-'Umarī al-Marwazī (d. 444) and hadīth from many hadīth-authorities including Hāfiz Abū 'Abdillāh al-Hākīm, author of the *Mustadrak*. He was pious and scrupulous and took little from the dunyā. In terms of his academic persuasion, he was a vocal defender of the Shāfi'ī legal school, and was greatly inclined to hadīth preservation and criticism. Hence, these are the two primary fields for which he is known, though he has contributions in aqīdah, history and other subjects. Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwaynī said: “There is

“When Allāh intended to negate tashbīh (making a resemblance between Allāh and His creation) in the most emphatic way that a negation can [possibly] be made, He put together in our recitation the particles of similitude (i.e. *ka*) with the noun of resemblance (i.e. *mithl*), so that the negation is emphasised to the utmost.” (*Al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, 2:34)²

3. The word *mithl* (likeness) is the broadest term of equation. It incorporates similarity in every possible dimension, whether in appearance, qualities or actions. Other words of equation, like *shakl*, *nidd* and *musāwī* are narrower than *mithl*. Hence, this entails a negation of similarity in all respects, as it means, “no thing is as His likeness in any respect.”

Imām al-Rāghib al-Asbahānī said in *Mufradāt al-Qur’ān*:

“*Mithl* is an expression about resemblance with something in any property from its properties, whatever property it may be. It is broader than other words designated for resemblance. That is, *nidd* is said about something that shares in essence only, *shibh* is said about something that shares in quality only, *musāwī* is said about something that shares in quantity only, *shakl* is said about something that shares in measure and distance only. *Mithl* is broader than all of that. This is why when Allāh (Exalted is He) wished to negate tashbīh from every dimension, He mentioned this specifically, so He said: *laysa ka mithlīhī shay’*.” (*al-Mufradāt*, p. 597)³

Hence, the verse is absolutely categorical in its indication that Allāh (*subhānuhū wa ta‘ālā*) is totally unlike His creation.

As for rational proof, if we were to assert that there was any similarity between Allāh and His creation, it would entail that the beginningless entity, Allāh, has within Him some attributes of temporal or originated entities. This would entail that the beginningless is originated, at least in some aspects, and that is absurd, as “beginningless” is the opposite of “originated” and they cannot come together. Imām al-Bayhaqī expressed this in the following words:

no Shāfi‘ī but al-Shāfi‘ī holds a favour over him, besides Ahmad al-Bayhaqī, for verily he holds a favour over al-Shāfi‘ī due to his writings in support of his madhhab and his views.” Imām al-Bayhaqī passed away in the year 458 H in Naysābūr and was buried in his hometown of Bayhaq. Some of the works he left behind are: *al-Sunan al-Kabīr* a very comprehensive collection of hadīths pertaining to juristic rulings, *Ma‘rifat al-Sunan wa l-Āthār* on the hadīths narrated by Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Mabsūt* on the rulings of al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt* a unique work on the names and attributes of Allāh, *al-I’tiqād*, *Dalā’il al-Nubumwah*, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān*, *Manāqib al-Shāfi‘ī*, *al-Da‘awāt al-Kabīr*, *al-Madkhal ilā Kitāb al-Sunan*, *al-Khilāfiyyāt*, *al-Ba‘th wa l-Nushūr*, *al-Zubd* and *al-Ādāb*.

² لما أراد الله سبحانه أن ينفي التشبيه على أكد ما يكون النفي، جمع في قراءتنا بين حروف التشبيه واسم التشبيه حتى يكون النفي مؤكدا على المبالغة (مكتبة السوادى للتوزيع، ج ٢ ص ٣٤)

³ [المثل] عبارة عن المشابة لغيره في معنى من المعاني، أي معنى كان، وهو أعم الألفاظ الموضوعية للمشابة، وذلك أن الند يقال فيما يشارك في الجوهر فقط، والشبه يقال فيما يشارك في الكيفية فقط، والمساوي يقال فيما يشارك في الكمية فقط، والشكل يقال فيما يشاركه في القدر والمساحة فقط، والمثل أعم من جميع ذلك، ولهذا لما أراد الله تعالى نفي التشبيه من كل وجه خصه بالذكر فقال: ليس كمثل شيء (المفردات في غريب القرآن، مكتبة نزار مصطفى الباز، ص ٥٩٧)

“Further, it is known that the Creator of creation does not resemble anything of the creation, because if He resembled any originated thing in any way, He would resemble it in origination from that aspect, and it is impossible for the beginningless to be temporal, or beginningless from one angle and temporal from another.” (*al-I'tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, p. 37)⁴

Furthermore, if any aspect or quality of temporality were to exist in the necessary and beginningless existence of Allāh (*subhānuhū wa ta'ālā*), the same laws that apply to temporal entities would apply to Him. For temporal entities, their being and attributes are only *possible*, whereas for Allah they are *necessary*. And it is not possible for something to be *possible* and *necessary* simultaneously.

As for the recorded view of the Salaf, Imām Abū Ja'far al-Tahāwī (239 – 321 H)⁵ transmitted from the founders of the Hanafī school, Imām Abū Hanīfah (80 – 150 H), Imām Abū Yūsuf (113 – 182 H) and Imām Muhammad al-Shaybānī (132 – 189 H):

“Whoever describes Allāh with a meaning (or property) from the meanings (or properties) of man, he has disbelieved.”⁶

⁴ ثم يعلم أن صانع العالم لا يشبه شيئا من العالم لأنه لو أشبه شيئا من المحدثات بجهة من الجهات لأشبهه في الحدوث من تلك الجهة، ومحال أن يكون القدم محدثا أو يكون قديما من جهة حديثا من جهة (الإعتقاد والهداية إلى سبيل الرشاد، دار الفضيلة، ص ٣٧)

⁵ His full name is Abū Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Salāmah ibn Salamah al-Azdī al-Hajrī. He was born in Egypt in the year 239 H. His mother was a student of Imām al-Shāfi'ī and the sister of Imām Ismā'īl ibn Yahyā al-Muzanī (d. 264 H) the famous companion of Imām al-Shāfi'ī (150 – 204 H). In his childhood he studied with his father, mother and maternal uncle, Ismā'īl ibn Yahyā al-Muzanī, under whom he studied fiqh and hadīth and heard the *Mukhtasar*. He memorised the Qur'ān under Yahyā ibn Muhammad ibn 'Amrūs at the masjid of 'Amr ibn al-'Ās. He also took hadīth from the senior hadīth authorities of that time like Yūnus ibn 'Abd al-A'lā (d. 264 H), Hārūn ibn Sa'īd al-Aylī (d. 254 H), Muhammad ibn 'Abdillāh ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (d. 268 H) and Bahr ibn Nasr (d. 267 H). He shared some teachers with the authors of the six books of hadīth, and he narrated from Imām al-Nasā'ī (d. 303 H), his contemporary, when he settled in Egypt. At about the age of 20, he left the madhhab of Imām al-Shāfi'ī for the madhhab of Imām Abū Hanīfah because he found his uncle al-Muzanī frequently looking in the books of the Hanafīs, and as a result of the influence of the Hanafī judges in Egypt over him, namely: Bakkār ibn Qutaybah (182 – 270 H) and Ahmad ibn Abī 'Imrān (d. 280). In his late twenties, he visited Shām and benefitted from its scholars including the Hanafī Qādī, Abū Khāzīm (d. 292 H). He learnt the recitation of 'Āsim word for word from Rawh ibn al-Faraj (d. 282), an eminent Mālikī jurist, who narrated from Yahyā ibn Sulaymān from Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh (Shu'bah) from 'Āsim, the imām of recitation.

Imām al-Tahāwī was a mujtahid jurist, an unparalleled authority in the Hanafī madhhab, knowledgeable of Qur'ān, its different readings, derived rulings, its meanings and language; a hāfīz and transmitter of hadīth, narrator-critic, and one of the most well-versed in the disagreements of the earlier jurists. He is the author of many works including *Sharh Ma'ānī al-Āthār*, *Sharh Mushkīl al-Āthār* and *Sunan al-Shāfi'ī* on hadīth, *Abkām al-Qur'ān* on rulings derived from the Qur'ān, *Iktilāf al-Fuqahā'* on the disagreements between earlier jurists, *Kitāb al-Shurūt* on a particular subject of jurisprudence related to conditions, contracts and agreements, *Mukhtasar* a condensed compilation of the rulings of the Hanafī madhhab, *al-Radd 'ala l-Karābīsī* on hadīth-transmitters who practise *tadlīs*, *al-'Aqīdah* a famous short text on the creed of Ahlus Sunnah and *al-Taswīyah bayna Haddatbanā wa Akhbāranā* on a particular issue with regards to terminology used in hadīth transmission. He died in 321 H. Hāfīz Ibn 'Adī and Hāfīz al-Tabrānī are counted amongst his many students.

من وصف الله بمعنى من معاني البشر فقد كفر (العقيدة الطحاوية)⁶

Here, Imām al-Tahāwī is clear that it is not the wording or outward expressions that matter, but the meaning and substance. If any actual or ontological reality of a created being is believed to exist in Allāh, that is comparing Him to creation and is disbelief.

As for the later Ahlus Sunnah, the books of ‘aqīdah have clearly incorporated this fundamental doctrine into the very foundation of Islāmīc belief, Tawhīd. In defining Tawhīd, Shaykh Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Laḡānī al-Mālīkī (d. 1041 H) and many others said:

“It is to single out the Deity for worship, along with believing in His oneness, in essence, attributes and actions.” (*Hidāyat al-Murīd li Jawharat al-Tawhīd*, 1:83)⁷

The commentators of *Jawharat al-Tawhīd* and other ‘aqīdah texts explain that oneness in essence means: Allāh has only one being and there is nothing else akin to His being; oneness in attributes means: He has only one of each attribute, like power, knowledge, hearing, seeing and will, and no other being has an attribute akin to it in any way; and oneness in actions means: He alone is the true active agent in the created realm, bringing things into being from nonbeing and taking things out of existence after existence, and no other being has any real action.

Hāfīz Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqālānī (d. 852 H) states in *Fath al-Bārī* on the meaning of Tawhīd according to Ahlus Sunnah:

“As for the Ahlus Sunnah, they explain Tawhīd as negating similarity [with Allāh] and [negating] nullification [of His attributes]. Thus, al-Junayd [al-Baghdādī] said in that which Abu l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī related: “Tawhīd is to single out the Beginningless from the temporal.” (*Fath al-Bārī*, 13:421)⁸

The Attributes of Allāh

Once the above has been settled, the question arises: what of the established attributes and names of Allāh which have counterparts within creation, like knowledge, hearing, seeing, life, speech, power, will and so on? Do they not suggest that there is indeed some degree of similarity between Creator and creation?

In answer to this, it must firstly be understood that true similarity or resemblance between two entities occurs only in their actual external realities, meaning, in things that have actual existence or an ontological reality in the beings of those entities. Based on this, the following aspects will not be considered true resemblance as they do not entail any similarity in the external realities of the entities:

1. The consequences or relations of attributes. For example, the consequence of “hearing” is to perceive sounds. However, this is not the reality of hearing as it subsists in the being of the entity that hears. The reality of hearing as we know it is “to perceive sounds with the two ears.” This reality is restricted to creation. As for the reality of the hearing of Allāh, there is absolutely no similarity of it with creation, and we are not aware of it. We do know the consequence of it, however, which is “to perceive sounds.” This degree

هو أفراد المعبود بالعبادة مع اعتقاد وحدته ذاتا وصفاتا وأفعالا (هداية المرید لجوهرة التوحيد، دار البصائر، ج ١ ص ٨٣)⁷

وأما أهل السنة ففسروا التوحيد بنفي التشبيه والتعطيل، ومن ثم قال الجنيد فيما حكاه أبو القاسم القشيري: التوحيد أفراد القدم من المحدث، وقال أبو القاسم التميمي في⁸ كتاب الحجة: التوحيد مصدر وحد يوحده، ومعنى وحدت الله: اعتقده منفردا بذاته وصفاته لا نظير له ولا شبيهه (فتح الباري، دار السلام ج ١٣ ص ٤٢١)

of similarity in the consequences of the attributes entails no similarity in the actual realities of the entities themselves. In other words, by stating that sounds are not hidden to Allāh, or that they are disclosed to Him by virtue of a particular attribute He possesses called *sam'*, says nothing about a description of the external reality of this attribute in the being of Allāh. Similarly, Allāh's attributes of knowledge, power, seeing, will and life are understood according to the dictates or relations of these attributes and not on how they subsist in the being of Allāh. These attributes according to the Ahlus Sunnah (as opposed to the Mu'tazilah and Jahmiyyah) do enjoy a real, unchanging and non-temporal ontological existence within the essence of Allāh. That reality however is beyond the human mind and is absolutely incomprehensible, as Imām al-Tahāwī mentioned in his *'Aqīdah*:

“Imaginations do not reach Him, comprehensions do not grasp Him.”⁹

This is applicable to many other attributes, like mercy, love, anger, pleasure and so on. The famous early Ash'arī scholar, Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak (d. 406 H)¹⁰, said about the mercy of Allāh as it comes in one particular hadīth:

“The mercy itself [as it subsists in the essence of Allāh] may not retreat or proceed with a limit or end, because it is, according to us, an attribute from the attributes of His essence that He has borne in eternity. What is intended here is an indication to the mercy which you attain from Allāh, because that which comes about from something and is connected to it is often given its name, just as something that appears from the power of Allāh (Glorified is He) from His actions is called ‘the power of Allāh.’ The meaning of this is that it came about from His power. Similarly, that which appears

لا تبلغه الأوهام، ولا تدركه الأفهام (العقيدة الطحاوية)⁹

¹⁰ Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Fūrak was a pious, ascetic and learned scholar born around the year 330 H. He resided in 'Irāq where he studied the theological school of al-Ash'arī under one of Imām Abu l-Hasan al-Ash'arī's (260 – 324 H) foremost disciples, Abu l-Hasan al-Bāhilī. He was sent to teach in Naysābūr at the Khānqāh of Abu l-Hasan al-Būshanjī (d. 348 H), where according to Hāfiz Abū 'Abdillāh al-Hākīm (d. 405 H), “Allāh revived through him various shades of knowledge in our land when he settled there, and his blessing became apparent to many students of fiqh and they graduated under him.” He heard hadīth from the hadīth transmitter (*musnid*) of Asfahān, 'Abdullāh ibn Ja'far ibn Ahmad ibn Fāris (248 – 346 H) from whom he took the entire *Musnad al-Tayālīsī* via the chain of Yūnus ibn Habīb al-'Ijlī (d. 267 H) from the author, Abū Dāwūd al-Tayālīsī (133 – 204 H). He also heard hadīth from Qādī Abū Bakr Ahmad ibn Mahmūd ibn Kharzād (d. 356 H), one of the teachers of al-Dāraqutnī mentioned in his *Sunan*. His most famous student, Imām al-Bayhaqī, narrates many hadīths from him in his works, including *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, *Ma'rifat al-Sunan wa l-Athār* and *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, mostly from his transmission of *Musnad al-Tayālīsī*. Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak was a prolific author, his works on beliefs, juristic theory and the commentary of the Qur'ān having reached almost one hundred. The famous Sūfī, Abu l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, was also amongst his students. He suffered trials as a result of refuting the followers of Abū 'Abdillāh ibn Karrām (d. 255) who believed that Allāh is a physical body. They invented lies about his beliefs, until eventually he was poisoned and died a martyr in the year 406 H. His body was carried to Naysābūr and he was buried in Hīrah. It is said that supplications made at his grave are readily accepted.

from one with pre-eternal mercy may be called mercy by way of flexibility in speech.”
(*Mushkil al-Hadith*, p. 112)¹¹

In other words, when we describe attributes like hearing, seeing, power, knowledge, will, life, mercy, love, anger, pleasure and so on, we are not describing them as they subsist in the essence of Allāh, as that can never be comprehended. Rather, we describe their connections, relations, outcomes and so on. However, this does not mean we negate that they have a beginningless, unchanging and intangible reality in the essence of Allāh as the Mu‘tazilah do.

This also applies to divine actions. If we say a worldly ruler “honours” or “debases” one of his subjects, the reality of this action would be to, for example, write a decree and send it to a governor to exalt or lessen his rank. The consequence of this action is for the subject to have a higher or lower position. When we say Allāh “honours” or He “debases,” the reality of this action bears absolutely no resemblance to the reality of the action of man. However, its relation, in terms of the effect the action produces, may bear some resemblance. This is not similarity in the external realities of these attributes but in a relational or consequential property.

Another example is “existence” itself. Existence is a relational attribute that merely conveys the reality that there is an entity that enjoys an ontological presence outside of the human mind. It does not say anything descriptive about the reality itself.

2. The absence of attributes. For example, if we say, “angels do not sleep,” and we say, “Allāh does not sleep,” this is a resemblance in the absence of attributes, and not a resemblance in any true reality that subsists in either of them. Hence, this is not an actual resemblance. When we say Allāh is self-subsisting, dissimilar to creation, one, transcendent, beginningless, without end and so on, we are not affirming any positive external realities subsisting in Allāh’s being. Rather, we are saying what He is *not*. Hence, there is no question of anthropomorphism or regarding Allāh similar to His creation in this.

Thus, the divine attributes in the Qur’ān and Sunnah which outwardly and nominally bear resemblance with creation do not give the indication of any real similarity. The similarity is only in consequences and connections or in the absence of something, which does not represent any external reality of the beings themselves. This is how many names and attributes of Allāh can easily be understood. Hence, these attributes are readily affirmed and one will notice that these are the more frequently mentioned attributes of Allāh in the Qur’ān and Sunnah e.g. the oneness of Allāh, His absolute power, hearing, seeing, knowledge, life, mercy, love, generosity, transcendence, self-subsistence and so on.

نفس الرحمة لا يصح فيها تأخر وتقدم بحد ونهاية، لأجل أنها عندنا صفة من صفات ذاته لم يزل بما موصوفا، وإنما أراد ههنا ما هو دلالة على الرحمة التي تناله¹¹ من قبل الله جل ذكره، لأن الكائن عن الشيء والمتعلق به قد يسمى باسمه، كما يقال لما يظهر عن قدرة الله سبحانه من أفعاله إنها قدرة الله وتحقيق ذلك أنه هو الكائن عن قدرته، كذلك ما يبدو من النعم عن سابق الرحمة قد يسمى رحمة على التوسع في الكلام (مشكل الحديث، المعهد الفرنسي، ص ١١٢)

The *Sifāt Khabariyyah*

However, there are certain attributes and actions known as *sifāt khabariyyah* (characteristics which outwardly suggest physical/bodily parts), like hand, foot, eye, laughter, and ascension (*istimā*), for which even a relational meaning or negative meaning is often difficult to decipher. For these, two views have emerged from the early scholars:

1. One is the way of the Salaf, which is to consign their realities to Allāh, while having surety that the literal meaning is not intended, e.g. eye is not a physical organ of sight.
2. The second is to interpret them according to the context in where they appear, which is the methodology of many of the later scholars.

On the first view, these ascriptions are affirmed as actual intangible attributes in the being of Allāh just like power and will, or as attributes of action like honouring and debasing, but like other attributes that are affirmed, their reality is consigned to the knowledge of Allāh. However, their connections and relations may be described, expanded upon and comprehended. On the second view, these “attributes” or ascriptions do not have any reality in the essence of Allāh but are reducible to other attributes or to particular aspects of other attributes, like will, power and knowledge.

Imām al-Bayhaqī (384 – 458 H) explicitly mentions these two methodologies of the early scholars in his work on Islāmic beliefs called *al-I‘tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*. He says:

“[Some] amongst them accepted it, believed in it and did not interpret it but consigned its knowledge to Allāh, while negating *kayfiyyah* (modality) and similarity [with creation] from Him. [Some] amongst them accepted it, believed in it and interpreted it in a manner whose usage is valid linguistically, and does not contradict the oneness [of Allāh]. We have mentioned these two approaches in the book *Kitāb al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*.” (*al-I‘tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, p. 120)¹²

The first view, known as *tafwīd* (consignment), is the preferred methodology, related from the earlier Salaf, as will be shown below.

The second methodology was that of many of the later scholars. For example, the great commentator of hadīth from the fourth Hijrī century, Abū Sulaymān al-Khattābī (319 – 388 H)¹³, says under the commentary of a hadīth from *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* which ascribes a “foot” to Allāh:

منهم من قبله وآمن به ولم يؤوله، ووكّل علمه إلى الله، ونفى الكيفية والتشبيه عنه.¹²

ومنهم من قبله وآمن به وحمله على وجه يصح استعماله في اللغة، ولا يناقض التوحيد، وقد ذكرنا هاتين الطريقتين في كتاب الأسماء والصفات في المسائل التي تكلموا فيها من هذا الباب (الإعتقاد والهداية إلى سبيل الرشاد، ص ١٢٠)

¹³ His full name is Abū Sulaymān Hamd (or Ahmad) ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khattābī. He was born in the year 319 H in the city of Bust (in present-day Afghānistān). He travelled to ‘Irāq, receiving knowledge from the scholars of Baghdād and Basrah, and he visited Hijāz, and settled in Makkah for some time, before returning to Khurāsān and settling in Naysābūr and finally in his hometown of Bust. He studied fiqh from the great Shāfi‘ī imām, Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl (291 – 336 H), who is said to have studied Kalām directly under Imām Abu l-Hasan al-Ash‘arī. He also studied fiqh under Ibn Abī Hurayrah (d. 345 H), another major Shāfi‘ī jurist in those regions.

“Abū ‘Ubayd [al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224 H)] – who was one of the imāms from the people of knowledge – would say: We narrate these hadīths and we do not search for meanings for them.”¹⁴

Then he says:

“We are more worthy of not advancing into that which those with more knowledge and more senior in era and age retreated from.”¹⁵

He then says:

“However, the time that which we are in, its people have evolved into two camps: the denier of what has been narrated of these hadīths entirely and a believer of them completely and in this is [entailed] accusing the scholars who narrated these hadīths of lying, while they are the imāms of religion, the transmitters of the sunnahs and the intermediaries between us and the Messenger of Allāh (Allāh bless him and grant him peace); and the second group accept the narration of them, adopting a path in actualising the outward of them which almost leads them to tashbīh. We are averse to both approaches, and we are not pleased with either of them as a methodology. Thus, it is necessary for us to search – with respect to the hadīths that have been transmitted when authentic in terms of transmission and chain – for an interpretation that emerges on the basis of the principles of the foundations of religion and the views of the scholars, and we do not nullify their narration completely when their routes are accepted and their transmitters righteous.” (*A‘lām al-Hadīth*, p. 1907)¹⁶

Al-Bayhaqī quotes this statement of al-Khattābī in his *al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt* (2:192-3).

Hence, al-Khattābī accepts figuratively interpreting the *sifāt khabariyyah* mentioned in the hadīths, but only in the context in which he was living, where people were adopting a path of

He took hadīth in Makkah from Abū Sa‘īd ibn al-A‘rābī (246 – 340 H), a Sūfī muhaddīth, and transmitter of *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* directly from Imām Abū Dāwūd; and in Basrah from Abū Bakr ibn Dāsah (d. 346 H), another transmitter of the *Sunan* from Imām Abū Dāwūd; and in Naysābūr from Abu l-‘Abbās ibn al-Asamm (247 – 346 H), one of the famous teachers of al-Hākim. He was known for his knowledge, piety, abstention, scrupulousness, poetry, prose, teaching and writing. Abu l-Muzaffar ibn al-Sam‘ānī (426 – 489 H), a major Shāfi‘ī scholar of Usūl, said in *Qawātib al-Adillab*: “He held a great position in knowledge, and he is an imām from the imāms of Sunnah, suitable to be followed.” He authored *Ma‘ālim al-Sunan* a commentary on *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *Gharīb al-Hadīth* on the uncommon words found in hadīth, *A‘lām al-Hadīth* a commentary on *Sabīh al-Bukhārī* which he wrote after *Ma‘ālim*, *Islāb Ghalat al-Muhaddīthīn* in which he mentioned about 150 hadīths which many muhaddīthīn narrated incorrectly and other works. He died in Rabī‘ al Thānī of the year 388 H in his hometown of Bust. Imām al-Hākim, author of the *Mustadrak*, and Imām Abū Dharr al-Harawī, transmitter of *Sabīh al-Bukhārī*, were amongst his many students.

¹⁴ وكان أبو عبيد وهو أحد أئمة أهل العلم يقول: نحن نروي هذه الأحاديث ولا نريغ لها المعاني (أعلام الحديث، مركز إحياء التراث الإسلامي، ص ١٩٠٧) ¹⁴

ونحن أحرىء بأن لا نتقدم فيما تأخر عنه من هو أكثر علما وأقدم زمانا وسنا (المصدر السابق) ¹⁵

ولكن الزمان الذي نحن فيه قد صار أهله حزبين: منكر لما يروى من نوع هذه الأحاديث رأسا ومكذب به أصلا وفي ذلك تكذيب العلماء الذين رويوا هذه الأحاديث وهم ¹⁶ أئمة الدين ونقله السنن والواسطة بيننا وبين رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، والطائفة الأخرى مسلمة للرواية فيها ذاهبة في تحقيق الظاهر منها مذهبها يكاد يفضي بهم إلى القول بالتشبيه ونحن نرغب عن الأمرين معا، ولا نرضى بواحد منهما مذهباً، فيحق علينا أن نطلب لما يرد من الأحاديث إذا صحت من طريق النقل والسند تأويلاً يخرج على معاني أصول الدين ومذاهب العلماء ولا نبطل الرواية فيها أصلاً إذا كانت طرقها مرضية ونقلتها عدولاً (المصدر السابق)

affirmation which took them close to anthropomorphism. In the same passage, he offers an interpretation of the “foot” of Allāh as that which Allāh has sent forth into the fire.

However, al-Khattābī says he only takes this approach with attributes that appear infrequently in some hadīths. With regards to frequently mentioned *sifāt khabariyyah*, he adopts the approach of tafwīd. He says:

“If it is said: Why do you not interpret hand and face in this manner of interpretation, and consider these terms metaphors likewise? It will be said: These attributes are mentioned in the Book of Allāh (Exalted is He) with their names, and they are attributes of praise, and the default is that every attribute mentioned in the Book and are authentic by reports of continuous transmission or narrated through the route of solitary reporters but has a basis in the Book or emerges from some of its principles, then we profess it and we let it proceed on its outward, without giving it a modality. And that which does not have any mention in the Book, nor a basis in continuous transmission and has no connection to the principles of the Book, and were we to let it proceed on its outward, it would lead [some people] to tashbīh, we will interpret it with a meaning which the speech accommodates and by which the meaning of tashbīh will be eliminated. This is the difference between what has been transmitted of the mention of foot, leg and shin [on the one hand] and hand, face and eye [on the other].” (*ʿĀlam al-Hadīth*, 1911)¹⁷

By the statement “we let it proceed on its outward,” al-Khattābī means leave it as it has come in the narrations without delving into its interpretation or meaning. He negates “modality” or *kaʿayf*, which is to negate, as a starting principle, the literal meanings of these attributes, as Allāh is free of these meanings. As he says elsewhere in the same book:

“The meaning of *yad* (hand) according to us is not a physical appendage [as is its literal meaning]. Rather, it is an attribute brought forth by restraint [at the text]. Thus, we let it proceed as it has come, and we do not give it a modality, and we hold back to where the Book and the authentically transmitted reports kept us. This is the way of Ahlus Sunnah wa l-Jamā‘ah.” (*ʿĀlam al-Hadīth*, p 2347)¹⁸

The Position of the Salaf: Negating Physical Descriptions of Allāh

It is famously transmitted from the imām of the people of Madīnah, Mālik ibn Anas (93 – 179 H), that he was asked about the *istimā’* (ascension) of Allāh as mentioned in the Qur’ān (20:5 and other verses). Imām Mālik replied, as reported by al-Bayhaqī with his chain:

فإن قيل: فهلا تأولت اليد والوجه على هذا النوع من التأويل وجعلت الأسماء فيها أمثالا كذلك؟ قيل: إن هذه الصفات المذكورة في كتاب الله عز وجل بأسمائها وهي¹⁷ صفات مدح والأصل أن كل صفة جاء بها الكتاب أو صحت بأخبار التواتر أو رويت من طريق الأحاد وكان لها أصل في الكتاب، أو خرجت على بعض معانيه، فإننا نقول بما ونجربها على ظاهرها من غير تكليف. وما لم يكن له منها في الكتاب ذكر ولا في التواتر أصل ولا له بمعاني الكتاب تعلق، وكان مجيئه من طريق الأحاد وأفضى بنا القول إذا أجريناه على ظاهره إلى التشبيه فإننا نتأوله على معنى يحتمله الكلام، ويزول معه معنى التشبيه وهذا هو الفرق بين ما جاء من ذكر القدم والرجل والساق وبين اليد والوجه والعين وبالله العصمة (أعلام الحديث، ص ١٩١١)

وليس معنى اليد عندنا الجارحة، إنما هو صفة جاء بها التوقيف، فنحن نطلقها على ما جاءت ولا يكيفها وننتهي إلى حيث انتهى بنا الكتاب وأخبار المأثورة الصحيحة،¹⁸ وهو مذهب أهل السنة والجماعة (أعلام الحديث، ص ٢٣٤٧)

“The *istiwā*’ is known, *ḵayf* is incomprehensible, belief in it is necessary and asking about it is innovation.” (*al-I’tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, p. 119)¹⁹

This is authentic from Imām Mālik. It has also been reported by Abū Nu‘aym in *Hīyat al-Anlīyā*’, al-Bayhaqī in *al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, al-Lālakā’ī in *Sharḥ Usūl I’tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah*, Qādī ‘Tyād in *Tartīb al-Madārik* and others. By, “*istiwā*’ is known” and “belief in it is necessary,” Imām Mālik conveys the truth of what the Qur’ān says. In other words, the Qur’ān certainly affirms the *istiwā*’ of Allāh and we confirm the reality of *istiwā*’ as the Qur’ān intends it. What is the reality of that *istiwā*’? Imām Mālik says: “Asking about it is innovation!” Moreover, Imām Mālik says there is something positive we can say about the *istiwā*’, which is: *ḵayf* is incomprehensible for it. *Ḵayf* means “how”. How is an *istiwā*’, how is a hand, how is an eye? An *istiwā*’ may be quick, slow, from a short distance, a long distance and so on. A hand can be big or small, an eye can be round or thin, blue or brown, and so on. These all fall under *ḵayf*. This *ḵayf* is incomprehensible for Allāh, as Allāh is free of all these physical qualities of creation. In another version, Imām Mālik said: “*Ḵayf* is removed (*marfū*’) from Allāh.” (See below for reference and authentication) As in, *ḵayf* does not pertain to or relate to Allāh. Hence, the literal meanings of these words are not what is meant. In fact, the literal meaning which incorporates, by necessity, some of what falls under *ḵayf*, is explicitly negated. Instead, *istiwā*’ is affirmed for Allāh with a meaning that is known to Him, and which to ask about is innovation. This, in a nutshell, is the methodology of the Salaf: a) to negate bodily attributes, b) to affirm the *sifāt ḵabariyya* with a meaning known to Allāh and c) to admit ignorance of that meaning.

Imām al-Bayhaqī transmits this position from the early scholars, declaring it the correct methodology. He says:

“Further, the correct methodology in all this is sufficing with what brings with it restraint [at the text], without giving it a modality. This is what the earlier ones from our scholars adopted as well as those who followed them from the later ones, and they said: The *istiwā*’ on the throne has been stated in the Book in various verses and have been transmitted in the reports.” (*al-I’tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, p. 118)²⁰

In another version of the statement from Imām Mālik which al-Bayhaqī narrates with a chain graded excellent (*jayyid*) by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, he says:

“The Most Merciful ascended the Throne as He described Himself. It is not said ‘how?’ and ‘how’ is removed from Him.” (*Al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, 2:304-5)²¹

In *al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, Imām al-Bayhaqī shows the Salaf would negate physical descriptions, while affirming what has been transmitted of the *sifāt ḵabariyyah*. He says:

“We have related [the position of] leaving discussion on the likes of this from the early ones of our companions. This is along with their belief in the negation of limit, tashbīh and tamthīl

¹⁹ الإستواء غير مجهول، والكيف غير معقول، والإيمان به واجب، والسؤال عنه بدعة (الإعتقاد والهداية إلى سبيل الرشاد، ص ١١٩)

²⁰ ثم المذهب الصحيح في جميع ذلك الإقتصار على ما ورد به التوقيف دون التكييف، وإلى هذا ذهب المتقدمون من أصحابنا ومن تبعهم من المتأخرين، وقالوا: الإستواء على العرش قد نطق به الكتاب في غير آية ووردت به الأخبار (المصدر السابق، ص ١١٨)

الرحمن على العرش استوى كما وصف نفسه، ولا يقال كيف وكيف عنه مرفوع (الأسماء والصفات، ج ٢ ص ٣٠٤-٣٠٥)²¹

from Allāh, Glorified and Exalted is He. Faqīh Abū Bakr Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hārith al-Asbahānī reported to us: Abū Muhammad ibn Hayyān reported to us: Ishāq ibn Ahmad al-Fārisī narrated to us: Hafṣ ibn ‘Umar al-Mahraqānī narrated to us: Abū Dāwūd [al-Tayālīsī] narrated to us: He said: ‘Sufyān al-Thawrī (97 – 161 H), Shu‘bah (82 – 160 H), Hammād ibn Zayd (98 – 179 H), Hammād ibn Salamah (91 – 167 H), Sharīk (95 – 177 H) and [al-Waddāh ibn ‘Abdillāh] Abū ‘Awānah (c. 95 – 176 H) would not ascribe a limit, nor make resemblance nor similarity. They narrate the hadīth without saying *kaḥf*. When asked, they would answer with narration.’ Abū Dāwūd said: ‘This is our view.’ I say: And our elders remained on this.’ (*al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt* 2:334)²²

The report to Abū Dāwūd al-Tayālīsī (133 – 204 H)²³ is sound.²⁴ The position of these great imāms of the atbā‘ al-tābi‘īn (third generation of Muslims) is that whatever has been transmitted in authentic reports are accepted as they were intended without taking any physical meanings from them like limit and *kaḥf*.

²² وحكيثنا عن المتقدمين من أصحابنا ترك الكلام في أمثال ذلك، هذا مع اعتقادهم نفي الحد والتشبيه والتمثيل عن الله سبحانه وتعالى. أخبرنا الفقيه أبو بكر أحمد بن محمد بن الحارث الأصبهاني: أنا أبو محمد بن حيان: ثنا إسحاق بن أحمد الفارسي: ثنا حفص بن عمر المهرقاني: ثنا أبو داود قال: كان سفیان الثوري وشعبة وحماد بن سلمة وشريك وأبو عوانة لا يحدون ولا يشبهون ولا يمتثلون، يروون الحديث لا يقولون كيف، وإذا سئلوا أجابوا بالأثر. قال أبو داود: وهو قولنا. قلت: وعلى هذا مضى أكابرنا

²³ He is Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd ibn al-Jārūd, known as Abū Dāwūd al-Tayālīsī, born in the year 133 probably in Basrah. He began listening to hadīth at a very young age, having heard from Hishām al-Dastawā‘ī (d. 152 H) and many others in Basrah. He travelled to Baghdād in his twenties and heard from the muhaddithīn there. He also travelled to Kūfāh and heard from Sufyān al-Thawrī, Isrā‘īl ibn Yūnus and others. He travelled to Madīnah and heard from Imām Mālik and others. He devoted himself to the collection and preservation of hadith. He said of himself that he wrote from one thousand teachers. He narrated one hundred thousand hadīths in Khurāsān from his memory. His most famous teacher and the one from whom he narrated most frequently is Shu‘bah ibn al-Hajjāj (82 – 160 H). He also accompanied Hammād ibn Salamah (d. 167 H). His narrations are found in all six collections of hadīth besides *Sabīh al-Bukhārī*, and he is regarded as a leading transmitter of hadīth. He is the author of a well-known *Musnad* collection. Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164 – 241 H) is counted amongst his many students.

²⁴ All the narrators in the chain have been graded trustworthy by the scholars of narrator-criticism besides the third century transmitter, Abū Ya‘qūb Ishāq ibn Ahmad ibn Zayrak al-Yazdī al-Asbahānī al-Fārisī, author of a *Musnad* (*al-Ikmāl*, 1:456, *al-Ansāb*, Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, 12:399). A number of hadīth scholars took from him, including: Abū Bakr Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-‘Anbarī (d. 324 H), Hāfiz Abu l-Shaykh (d. 369 H) who narrates from him frequently in his *Azāmah* and other works, Abū Ja‘far Ahmad ibn Ya‘qūb al-Asfahānī and Mansūr ibn Muhammad al-Asbahānī. Al-Dhahabī includes a brief biography of him in *Tārīkh al-Islām* (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 7:142). Ibn Hajar includes him in *Hady al-Sarī* amongst the contemporaries of Imām al-Bukhārī who narrated from him. Hāfiz al-Mizzī refers to those Ishāq ibn Ahmad narrated from in several places of his *Tabdhīb al-Kamāl*. He is an example of mastūr (one who is known and apparently a person of integrity, while there is no praise or criticism of his strength in transmission). On accepting the narration of a mastūr, al-Nawawī says: ‘‘It appears the practice (of the scholars of hadīth) is on this in many books of hadīths...’’ And al-Nawawī said this is the correct view in his *Sharh al-Muhaddhab* (*Tadrib al-Rāwī*, Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1:479) Ibn al-Salāh also felt this is the correct view. Ibn Hajar said: ‘‘When there is no criticism or praise of a narrator whose grading is unknown, and when both his teacher and the narrator from him are trustworthy, and he did not produce any outright rejected hadīth, he is trustworthy according to him [i.e. Hāfiz Ibn Hibbān].’’ This is the case here, as Hafṣ ibn ‘Umar al-Mahraqānī, Ishāq’s teacher, is trustworthy according to al-Dhahabī and Maslamah ibn Qāsim, while Abu l-Shaykh the narrator from him is an imām who is undoubtedly trustworthy as stated by Ibn al-‘Imād, al-Dhahabī, al-Sam‘ānī and others. Hence, according to this understanding, the narration is sound.

This was the way of all the major scholars of the Salaf. Imām al-Bayhaqī related with a sound chain²⁵ from al-Walīd ibn Muslim:

“Al-Awzā’ī, Mālik, Sufyān al-Thawrī and al-Layth ibn Sa’d were asked about these hadīths [on the *sifāt khabariyyah*], and they said: ‘Let them pass as they have come without *kayfiyyah*.’” (*al-I’tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, p. 123)²⁶

In other words, convey them, read them and believe in them as they were intended, but while holding firmly that *kayf* is negated.

Imām al-Bayhaqī also related from Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah with an authentic chain²⁷:

“All that Allāh has described of Himself, its interpretation is its recitation and silence over it.” (*al-I’tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, p. 123)²⁸

In the same report from his *al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, there is the addition:

“No one may explain it, neither in Arabic nor in Fārsī.” (*al-Asmā’ wal-Sifāt*, 2:117)²⁹

In the same report from *Sharh Usūl I’tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah*, al-Lālakā’ī (d. 418) narrates it as follows:

“Everything Allāh has described Himself with in the Qur’ān, its recitation is its explanation. There is no *kayf* and no likeness.” (*Sharh Usūl I’tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah*, p. 431)³⁰

This is a reference to the *sifāt khabariyyah* like ascension, hand, eye and so on, the literal meaning of which is specific to created beings. Hence, the intent of these attributes as they appear in the revealed sources is consigned to Allāh. Other attributes like knowledge, power, hearing, seeing, mercy, self-subsistence, oneness etc. can be explained and expanded upon, in terms of their connections and in terms of what they negate, as explained earlier. Thus, Imām al-Bayhaqī explained Ibn ‘Uyaynah’s words as follows:

“He only intended thereby – and Allāh knows best – that which the explanation of which leads to ascribing *kayf*. And ascribing *kayf* necessitates considering Him like His creation in the qualities of temporality.” (*al-I’tiqād wa l-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, p. 123)³¹

After mentioning the report in *al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, he says:

²⁵ As stated by the editor

²⁶ سئل الأوزاعي ومالك وسفيان الثوري والليث بن سعد عن هذه الأحاديث فقالوا: أمرها كما جاءت بلا كيفية (الإعتقاد والهداية إلى سبيل الرشاد، ص ١٢٣)²⁶

²⁷ As stated by the editor

كل ما وصف الله من نفسه فتفسيره تلاوته والسكوت عليه (المصدر السابق)²⁸

ليس لأحد أن يفسره بالعربية ولا بالفارسية (الأسماء والصفات، ج ٢ ص ١١٧)²⁹

كل شيء وصف الله به نفسه في القرآن فقرأته تفسير لا كيف ولا مثل (شرح أصول اعتقاد أهل السنة، ص ٤٣١)³⁰

وإنما أراد به والله أعلم فيما تفسيره يؤدي إلى التكييف يتكيفه يقتضي تشبيها له بخلقه في أوصاف الحدث (الإعتقاد والهداية إلى سبيل الرشاد، ص ١٢٣)³¹

“I say: And he only intended – and Allāh knows best – the *sifāt khabariyyah*.” (*al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, 2:159)³²

However, it is possible that even these attributes like *yad* and *‘ayn* are understood relationally, in terms of what they connect to, while their reality as they subsist in Allāh’s essence is understood to be unfathomable. Thus, al-Bayhaqī said after this:

“Some of the people of insight amongst them adopted the view that by the right hand is meant the hand, and the hand of Allāh (Exalted is He) is an expression about an attribute that is not a physical appendage. Thus, wherever it is mentioned in the Book and the authentic Sunnah, the intent of its mention is its connection to what came about in that which is mentioned along with it, of folding up and grasping, contracting and spreading out, eliminating and accepting, spending and other than that; a connection of an intrinsic attribute with its consequence without direct physical contact or mutual touching. There is no tashbīh in this at all.” (*Al-Asmā’ wa l-Sifāt*, 2:159)³³

Imām al-Tahāwī said in his famous text on ‘aqīdah encapsulating the beliefs transmitted from Imām Abū Hanīfah and his two students:

“The vision [of Allāh] is true for the inhabitants of Paradise, without encompassing, nor *kayfiyyah*.”³⁴

Here *kayfiyyah* is categorically negated for the vision of Allāh in Paradise. *Kayfiyyah* with regards to vision refers to distance, opposition, direction and so on, which are necessary concomitants of vision in the phenomenal world. However, the vision of Allāh in the afterlife will be without these modalities that we are accustomed to. It will be a beholding of Allāh with the eyes bestowed to true believers after resurrection.

The mujassimah (corporealists) and crypto-mujassimah refuse to make the explicit negations of *kayf* and physical descriptions for Allāh in the way the Salaf did. Imām al-Tahāwī narrates from the imāms of the Hanafī school:

“Our Lord bears the attributes of oneness and holds the characteristics of singularity. Not one of creation is in His meaning. He is transcendent beyond limits and boundaries, parts, limbs and instruments.”³⁵

Imām al-Tahāwī did not merely say that we are not permitted to *say* that He does not have these attributes. Rather, he categorically states that Allāh is far-removed from them due to His

وإنما أراد والله أعلم الأوصاف الخبرية (الأسماء والصفات، ج ٢ ص ١٥٩)³²

وذهب بعض أهل النظر منهم إلى أن اليمين يراد به اليد والكف عبارة عن اليد واليد لله تعالى صفة بلا جارحة، فكل موضع ذكرت فيه من كتاب وسنة صحيحة فالمراد³³ بذكرها تعلقها بالكائن المذكور معها، من الطي والأخذ، والقبض والبسط، والمسح والقبول والإنفاق وغير ذلك تعلق الصفة الذاتية بمقتضاها من غير مباشرة ولا مماسة وليس في ذلك تشبيه بحال (المصدر السابق)

والرؤية حق لأهل الجنة بغير إحاطة ولا كيفية (العقيدة الطحاوية)³⁴

فإن ربنا جل وعلا موصوف بصفات الوحدانية ممنوعة بنعوت الفردانية، ليس في معناه أحد من البرية، تعالى عن الحدود والغايات، والأركان والأعضاء والأدوات (العقيدة³⁵ الطحاوية)

absolute transcendence. Similarly, Hāfiz Abū Bakr al-Ismāʿīlī (277 – 371 H)³⁶ narrated from the imāms of hadīth that Allāh is free of limbs and a physical body:

“Limbs and appendages, nor length and breadth, thickness and thinness and the like of this, of which the equivalent is found in creation, are not believed about Him. And that there is nothing as His likeness.” (*Iʿtiqād Aʿimmat al-Hadīth*, p 36)³⁷

Describing the vision of Allāh, he says:

“And that is without belief in corporealism with respect to Allāh – Great and Glorious is He – nor assigning limits. But they will see Him – Great and Glorious is He – with their eyes just as He pleases, without *kayf*.” (*Iʿtiqād Aʿimmat al-Hadīth* p. 43)³⁸

The Salaf would often say Allāh is “above the creation” (*fawq al-khalq*) or above the Throne (*fawq al-ʿarsh*) which is the highest point of creation. The reason for this statement was to refute the Jahmī belief that Allāh dwells within creation. Hence, this is not a *positive* description of Allāh, but a way of expressing the *negative* detail of Allāh not being within His creation, but being far removed and different from creation. This is why the Salaf would also say He is “*baʿin*” (separate) from His creation. This also is not a physical “separation”, but a way of expressing that the creation does not contain the Creator. Abū Sulaymān al-Khattābī said:

“The meaning of the statement of the Muslims that Allāh is over the throne is not that He is touching it or settled on it or bounded by one of its directions, but that He is different/separate from all His creation.” (*Aʿlām al-Hadīth*, p. 1474)³⁹

Ibn Hamdān al-Hanbalī (603 – 695 H)⁴⁰ said:

³⁶ Hāfiz Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ismāʿīl ibn al-ʿAbbās Abū Bakr al-Ismāʿīlī was born in 277 and began writing hadīth as a child. He took hadīth from many hadīth authorities including Abū Yaʿlā al-Mawṣilī (210 – 303 H), author of the *Musnad*, and Ibn Khuzaymah (223 – 311 H), author of the *Sahīh*. He travelled throughout Khurāsān, ʿIrāq and Hijāz in search of hadīth. He compiled a number of works which bear testimony to his mastery in hadīth and fiqh, the most famous of them being his *Mustakbraj* on the *Sahīh* of Imām al-Bukhārī. He was an unparalleled hāfiz of his time. Al-Hākīm and Abū Bakr al-Barqānī are amongst his famous students. Al-Hākīm said: “Al-Ismāʿīlī was unique in his era, the *shaykh* of the muhaddithīn and jurists, and the most prominent of them in leadership, honour and generosity, and there is no disagreement amongst the scholars of the two groups and the intelligent of them about [the stature of] Abū Bakr.” He died in the year 371 H.

³⁷ ولا يعتقد فيه الأعضاء والجوارح، ولا الطول والعرض والغلظ والدقة ونحو هذا مما يكون مثله في الخلق، وأنه ليس كمثل شيء (اعتقاد أئمة أهل الحديث، دار الفتح، ص ٣٦)

وذلك من غير اعتقاد التجسيم في الله عز وجل ولا التحديد له ولكن يروونه عز وجل بأعينهم على ما يشاء هو بلا كيف (المصدر السابق، ص ٤٣)

وليس معنى قول المسلمين إن الله على العرش هو أنه مماس له أو متمكن في أو متحيز في جهة من جهاته، لكنه بائن من جميع خلقه (أعلام الحديث، ص ١٤٧)

⁴⁰ He is Ahmad ibn Hamdān ibn Shabīb al-Nimarī an inhabitant of Cairo. He was born in the year 603 in Syria and his most senior teacher was ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Rahāwī (d. 612). He also studied under al-Fakhr Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 622) and al-Hasan ibn Ahmad al-Awqī. Amongst his many students were the famous al-Mizzī, al-Birzālī, Ibn Sayyid al-Nās and al-Dimyātī. He taught and issued fatwā and worked as Qādī in Cairo. Amongst his works are *al-Riʾāyat al-Sughrā* and *al-Riʾāyat al-Kubrā* on Hanbalī fiqh, *Sifat al-Muftī wa l-Mustaftī* on the principles of issuing fatwā, *al-Waḥfī* on juristic theory and *Nihāyat al-Mubtadīʿin* on the fundamentals of religion. He died in the year 695 H. Ibn Rajab al-Hanbalī said of him: “He excelled in fiqh. Knowledge of the [Hanbalī] madhhab, its intricacies and its subtleties, reached their peak in him. He was knowledgeable of the two foundational sciences (usūl al-fiqh

“He is separate from His creation. Allāh is above the throne, without [physical] limitation. [Physical] limitation is of the throne and all that is beneath it. And Allāh is above that with no place and no limit. [This is] because He existed when there was no place, and then He created place, and He is as He was before He created place.”⁴¹

The above encapsulates the belief of the Salaf. Hence, the Salaf, unlike the present-day “Salafīs” who claim to follow the Salaf, would explicitly negate boundaries, parts, limbs, directions, physicality and *kayfiyyāt* in general for Allāh (*subhānahū wa ta‘ālā*).

Allāh is Unchanging and Timeless

Moreover, if Allāh possesses *kayfiyyāt* like movement, physical descent and ascent, laughter, emotions and so on, it would entail changing from one state to another which is a feature of temporal things and not of the beginningless unchanging Creator.⁴² This has also been expressed by one of the imāms of the Salaf. Abu l-Shaykh relates in his *‘Aẓamah* with an authentic chain from Imām ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn al-Mājjishūn (d 164 H), a narrator of hadīth found in the six collections and a prominent jurist of Madīnah, that he said:

“...He is the Last that will not end and the First that will not perish, the beginningless (*qadīm*) Who has no beginning. He did not come into being as [other] things came into being. He was not small and then became large, nor was He weak and then became strong, nor deficient and then became complete, nor ignorant and then He knew. He was always strong, lofty, great and transcendent. The blink of an eye did not pass but He was Allāh, without ceasing to be Rabb. He will remain so unceasingly in what has passed and likewise in what remains to come. And thus He is now. He did not gain new knowledge after not having known, nor strength after a strength that was not in Him. He did not alternate from one state to another state with increase or decrease, because there remains no [aspect] of sovereignty and magnitude but He occupies it. He will never increase beyond something that He was upon...”⁴³

The above is the clear view of Ahlus Sunnah as transmitted from the Salaf and the imāms of ‘aqīdah, and subsequently from the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī theologians, as well as major Hanbalī

and usūl al-dīn) as well as disagreement and literature. He compiled many works.” Al-Dhahabī referred to him as “the shaykh of the Hanbalīs.”

⁴¹ هو بائن من خلقه، الله على العرش لا بتحديد وإنما التحديد للعرش وما دونه، والله فوق ذلك لا مكان ولا حد، لأنه كان ولا مكان ثم خلق المكان وهو كما كان قبل خلق المكان (نهایة المبتدئين، مكتبة الرشد، ص ۳۰-۳۱)

نقل الحافظ الذهبي بإسناده عن فقيه المدينة عبد العزيز ابن الماجشون: وإنما يقال: كيف؟ لمن لم يكن مرة ثم كان. أما من لا يجول ولم يزل، وليس له مثل فإنه لا يعلم كيف هو (أي حقيقته) إلا هو (سير أعلام النبلاء، مؤسسة الرسالة، ج ۷ ص ۳۱۲)

إعلم أن الله تعالى أولا لم يزل أولا... وهو الآخر الذي لا يفنى والأول الذي لا يبدي، التقدم الذي لا بداية له، لم يحدث كما حدثت الأشياء، لم يكن صغيرا فكبر ولا ضعيفا فقوي ولا ناقصا فتم ولا جاهلا فعلم، لم يزل قويا عاليا كبيرا متعاليا، لم تأت طرفه عين قط إلا وهو الله لم يزل ربا، ولا يزال أبدا كذلك فيما كان وكذلك فيما بقي يكون، وكذلك هو الآن لم يستحدث علما بعد أن لم يكن يعلم، ولا قوة بعد قوة لم تكن فيه، ولم يتغير عن حال إلى حال بزيادة ولا نقصان لأنه لم يبق من الملك والعظمة شيء إلا وهو فيه، ولن يزيد أبدا عن شيء كان عليه... (العظمة، دار العاصمة، ص ۳۸۷)

authorities like Abu l-Fadl al-Tamīmī (342 – 410 H)^{44,45}, Ibn ‘Aqīl (431 – 513 H)^{46,47}, Ibn al-Jawzī (510 – 597 H)⁴⁸ and Ibn Hamdān (603 – 695 H)^{49,50}.

⁴⁴ He was a leading Hanbalī jurist of his time, Abu l-Fadl ‘Abd al-Wāhid ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Tamīmī al-Baghdādī, born in Baghdād in the year 342 H. He narrated from his father, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn al-Hārith al-Tamīmī (317 – 371 H), Ahmad ibn Kāmil al-Qādī, ‘Abdullāh ibn Ishāq al-Khurāsānī and others. Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī narrated from him and included a biography of him in his *Tārīkh* (12:265), referring to him as “reliable” (sadūq). His nephew Rizqullāh al-Tamīmī and others also narrated from him. He remained in Baghdād for a time, teaching, lecturing and issuing fatwā, and eventually settled in Khurāsān. He was a friend of Qādī Abū Bakr Ibn al-Bāqillānī, the great Ash‘arī Mālikī theologian and judge. He died in 410 H and was buried next to Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

قال أبو الفضل التميمي: وليس معنى وجه معنى جسم عنده ولا صورة ولا تحطيط، ومن قال ذلك فقد ابتدع... إن الله تعالى يدين وهما صفة في ذاته ليستا بجارحتين ولا بمركبتين ولا جسم ولا جنس من الأجسام ولا من جنس الحدود والتركيب والأبعاد والجوارح، ولا يقاس على ذلك... فامتدح الله بأنه على العرش استوى أي عليه علا ولا يجوز أن يقال: استوى بمماسة ولا بملافاة، تعالى الله عن ذلك علوا كبيرا، والله تعالى لم يلحقه تغير ولا تبدل ولا يلحقه الحدود قبل خلق العرش ولا بعد خلق العرش... وأنكر على من يقول بالجسم وقال: إن الأسماء مأخوذة بالشرعية واللغة وأهل اللغة وضعوا هذا الاسم على كل ذي طول وعرض وسمك وتركيب مصورة وتأليف، والله تعالى خارج عن ذلك كله، فلم يجوز أن يسمى جسما لخروجه عن معنى الجسمية (إعتقاد الإمام المجلد، دار الكتب العلمية)

⁴⁶ His full name is Abu l-Wafā’ ‘Alī ibn ‘Aqīl ibn Ahmad. He was born in Baghdād in the year 431 H and also died in Baghdād in the year 513 H. He is widely recognised as one of the foremost intellectuals in Islāmīc history. He was a polymath, excelling in many sciences including Qur’ānic recitation, Nahw and literature, Tasawwuf, poetry, inheritance laws, oration, juristic theory (usūl al-fiqh), jurisprudence – which he studied under Qādī Abū Ya’lā –, debate and polemics and theology. He enjoyed the company of many prominent teachers, including al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī. He was appointed to issue fatwā at a young age in the year 458 H. He initially had some inclination to the Mu’tazilah but in the year 465 openly declared his departure from them. He had interactions with Imām al-Haramayn, al-Ghazālī and Ilkiyā al-Harrāsī. He left behind many works, the most famous of them the encyclopaedic *al-Funūn*.

قال ابن عقيل: الصورة على الحقيقة تقع على التخاطيط والأشكال وذلك من صفات الأجسام، والذي صرفنا عن كونه جسما من الأدلة القطعية قوله تعالى: ليس كمثله شيء، ومن الأدلة العقلية أنه لو كان جسما كانت صورته عرضا ولو كان حامل الأعراس جاز عليه ما يجوز على الأجسام وافقر إلى صانع (دفع شبه التشبيه، المكتبة الأزهرية، ص ٣٦)

قال ابن عقيل: تعالى الله أن يكون له صفة تشغل الأمكنة، وليس الحق تعالى بذي أجزاء وأبعاد فيعالج بها (المصدر السابق، ص ٤٣)

⁴⁸ He is Jamāl al-Dīn Abu l-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Alī ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Jawzī, a descendent of Abū Bakr (may Allāh be pleased with him), born in the year 510 H in Baghdād. He was a man of great piety, knowledge and influence. He was a leading Hanbalī jurist, having studied fiqh under Abu l-Hasan Ibn al-Zāghūnī. Al-Dhahabī said of him: “He had a share of every science.” He died in the year 597 H, leaving behind a huge legacy in books and commentaries.

⁴⁹ See: footnote 37 for his biography

⁵⁰ الله تعالى ليس بجوهر ولا عرض ولا جسم ولا تحله الحوادث ولا يحل في حادث ولا ينحصر فيه بل هو بائن من خلقه، الله على العرش لا بتحديد وإنما التحديد للعرش وما دونه، والله فوق ذلك لا مكان ولا حد، لأنه كان ولا مكان ثم خلق المكان وهو كما كان قبل خلق المكان... ونجزم بأنه سبحانه وتعالى في السماء وأنه يستوي على العرش بلا كيف بل على ما يليق به في ذلك كله ولا تتأول ذلك ولا نفسر ولا نكيهه ولا نتوهمه ولا نعنيه ولا نعطله ولا نكذبه بل نكل علمه إلى الله تعالى، ونجزم بنفي التشبيه والتجسيم (نهایة المبتدئين، مكتبة الرشد، ص ٣٠-٣١)

The Beliefs of the Mujassimah

On the other hand, there was a small group historically, and a sizeable group in recent times, of a people who believe that the *sifāt khabariyyah* must be accepted literally. They believe that Allāh is literally in the upward direction, with physical parts like a face, two hands, fingers, shape, two eyes and so on. They believe He moves up and down. This is the position of *tashbīh* and *tajsīm*. While Ahlus Sunnah deny completely any and all resemblance between Allāh and creation in their descriptive and ontological realities, some modern “Salafī” authors do not shy away from saying they accept a degree of resemblance between Allāh and His creation. For example, one of the leaders of the contemporary Salafī movement, Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, said:

“To negate *tashbīh* completely between the attributes of Creator and of creation is not correct because there are no two established attributes except they have commonality in the basic meaning, and this commonality is a kind of similarity.” (*Fatāwā Ibn ‘Uthaymīn*, 1:181)⁵¹

He also said:

“If you ask: what is the shape which Allāh has that Ādam was upon? We say: Allāh has a face, eye, hand and leg, but it is not necessary that these things are equivalent to man’s. Thus, there is a degree of similarity but it is not by way of equivalence.” (*Sharh ‘Aqīdat al-Wasatiyyah*, p. 110)⁵²

Clarifying further, he said:

“The one who believes that the attributes of the Creator are equivalent to the attributes of creation is misguided. That is, the attributes of the Creator are not equal to the attributes of creation by the clear text of the Qur’ān... And it is not necessary from the equivalence of two entities in name or attribute that they are equal in reality. This is a known principle. Does man not have a face and a camel a face? They are common in name but do not conform in reality. The camel has a hand and the ant a hand – are the two hands equal? The answer is no. Then, why do you not say that Allāh has a face that is not equivalent to the faces of creation and Allāh has a hand that is not equivalent to the hands of creation? Allāh (Exalted is He) said: ‘And they esteem not Allah as He has the right to be esteemed, when the whole earth is His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens are rolled in His right hand.’ (39:67) Is there a hand from the hands of creation that is like this hand? No... This is why it is never permissible for you to imagine how a quality from the qualities of Allāh is or that you believe that the attributes of Allāh are the same as the attributes of creation.” (*Fatāwā Ibn ‘Uthaymīn*, 1:177)⁵³

ولا يقال في صفاته: تحت ولا فوق ولا قدام ولا خلف ولا كيفية، فلا يقال: ما هو ولا من أي شيء هو ولا أي شيء هو ولا متى كان ولا لما كان (المصدر السابق، ص ٣٤)

نفي التشبيه على الإطلاق بين صفات الخالق وصفات المخلوق لا يصح لأنه ما من صفتين ثابنتين إلا وبينهما اشتراك في أصل المعنى، وهذا الإشتراك نوع من المشابهة (مجموع فتاوى ورسائل فضيلة الشيخ محمد بن صالح العثيمين، ج ١ ص ١٨١)

فإذا قلت: ما هي الصورة التي تكون لله يكون آدم عليها؟ قلنا: إن الله عز وجل له وجه وله عين وله يد وله رجل عز وجل، لكن لا يلزم من أن تكون هذه الأشياء مماثلة للإنسان، فهناك شيء من الشبه، لكنه ليس على سبيل المماثلة (شرح العقيدة الوسطية، دار ابن الجوزي ص ١١٠)

الذي يعتقد أن صفات الخالق مثل صفات المخلوق ضال، ذلك أن صفات الخالق لا تماثل صفات المخلوقين بنص القرآن... ولا يلزم من تماثل الشيعيين في الاسم أو الصفة أن يتماثلا في الحقيقة، هذه قاعدة معلومة. أليس للآدمي وجه وللبعير وجه؟ اتفقا في الاسم لكن لم يتفقا في الحقيقة. وللجمل يد وللذرة يد، فهل اليدان متماثلان؟ الجواب: لا. إذن لماذا لا تقول لله عز وجل وجه لا بماثل أوجه المخلوقين والله يد ولا تماثل أيدي المخلوقين؟ قال الله تعالى: وما قدروا الله حق قدره، والأرض جميعا قبضته يوم القيامة

It is clear from these statements that he believes the “attributes” of hand, face, eye and so on are physical parts but with distinctive features that put them apart from creation. This becomes more apparent from many of his other statements. What the contemporary Salafiyyah do not realise, however, is that by affirming a likeness in the base meaning of the attributes of Creator and creation, they are affirming a general resemblance between the two, and by negating similarity in *kayfiyyāt* (physical descriptions), they are negating similarity in only minor details. Hence, what they affirm in resemblance is far greater than what they negate.

This belief has its roots in an early time. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān an early mufassir from the atbā‘ al-tābi‘īn overemphasised the attributes of Allāh in opposition to the Jahmiyyah who negated it, resulting in affirming a similarity between Allāh and His creation, as al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī narrated with an authentic chain from Imām Abū Hanīfah (80 – 150 H):

“Two groups of the worst of people are from Khurāsān: the Jahmiyyah and the Mushabbihah” or he said, “Muqātiliyyah.” (*Tarikh Baghdad* 15:514)⁵⁴

Hāfiz Ibn Hajar said in *Tabdhīb al-Tabdhīb*: “Muhammad ibn Samā‘ah (130 – 233 H) narrated from Abū Yūsuf from Abū Hanīfah that he said: ‘Jahm went overboard in negation until he said: He [i.e. Allah] is nothing, and Muqātil went overboard in affirmation until He deemed Allah to be like His creation.’”⁵⁵

Hāfiz Ibn Hajar also quotes him saying: “Two repulsive opinions came to us from the east: Jahm the negator [of Allah's attributes] and Muqātil, the anthropomorphist.”⁵⁶

Hence, the Salaf did not turn a blind eye to the anthropomorphism that found its way into some groups of Muslims.

The belief-system of tashbīh, though in existence before, was popularised and defended fiercely by the Damascene Hanbalī scholar, Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halīm Ibn Taymiyyah (661 – 728 H), an undisputed authority of the contemporary Salafiyyah. He, for example, explicitly supported the notion that the attributes of Allāh, including the *sifāt khabariyyah* like eye, hand, face, descent and ascension, must be understood by analogising them to creation.⁵⁷ He supported the idea

والسماوات مطويات بيمينه... هل هناك يد من أيدى المخلوقين تكون كهذا اليد؟ لا... ولذلك لا يجوز أبدا أن تتخيل كيفية صفة من صفات الله أو أن تظن أن صفات الله كمثل صفات المخلوق (مجموع فتاوى ورسائل فضيلة الشيخ محمد بن صالح العثيمين، ج ١ ص ١٨١)

صنفان من شر الناس بخراسان: الجهمية والمشبّهة وربما قال: والمقاتلية (تاريخ مدينة السلام، دار الغرب الإسلامي، ج ١٥ ص ٥١٤)⁵⁴

وقال محمد بن سماعة عن أبي يوسف عن أبي حنيفة: أفرط جهم في النفي حتى قال إنه ليس بشيء وأفرط مقاتل في الإثبات حتى جعل الله تعالى مثل خلقه (تهذيب⁵⁵ التهذيب، مجلس دائرة المعارف، ج ١٠ ص ٢٨١)

وقال إسحاق بن إبراهيم: قال أبو حنيفة: أتانا من المشرق رأيان خبيثان: جهم معطل ومقاتل مشبه (المصدر السابق)⁵⁶

والإخبار عن الغائب لا يفهم إن لم يعبر عنه بالأسماء المعلومة معانيها في الشاهد، ويعلم بما في الغائب بواسطة العلم بما في الشاهد، مع العلم بالفارق المميز، وأن ما⁵⁷ أخبر الله به من الغيب أعظم مما يعلم في الشاهد (رسالة التدمرية، ص ٩٧)

that these attributes have a *meaning* that is shared between creation and Creator.⁵⁸ He differentiates between “intangible” attributes like knowledge and power and “tangible” attributes like hand and face for Allāh.⁵⁹ He defended the view that Allāh has boundaries from all six physical directions, up, down, left, right, front and back,⁶⁰ leaving no room for doubt that he believed in a physical body for Allāh. His claim to avoiding tashbīh, tajsīm and tamthīl, however, is on the grounds that Allāh is not *exactly like* His creation. He is vastly bigger, with unknown dimensions, and He is indivisible as His parts cannot be separated one from the other, and He doesn’t have a digestive system, nor are His limbs made of blood and flesh like human beings. Instead, His features that have a counterpart in creation only bear a generic resemblance with those of creatures, while their physical descriptions and modalities (*kayfiyyāt*) are vastly different.

Conclusion

Hence, while this group with Ibn Taymiyyah at its head, affirm *kayfiyyāt* (physical descriptions) for Allāh while negating knowledge of them, the Salaf and Ahlus Sunnah negate the very existence of *kayfiyyāt* for Allāh. These innovated ascriptions of physical parts to Allāh, delving into the ambiguous attributes of Allāh by designating their literal meanings as their intent, and affirming a basic meaning or ontological reality of these attributes that are similar to the

⁵⁸ فمن أثبت لله سبحانه وتعالى أمرا من الصفات فإنما أثبتته بعد أن فهم نظير ذلك من الموجودات، وأثبت به القدر المطلق مع وصفه له بخاصة تمتنع فيها الشركة (بيان تلبيس الجهمية، مجمع الملك فهد، ج ٤ ص ١١١)

ولا بد من هذا في جميع أسماء الله وصفاته، يفهم منها ما دل عليه الإسم بالمواطأة والإتفاق، وما دل عليه بالإضافة والإختصاص المانعة من مشاركة المخلوق للخالق في شيء من خصائصه سبحانه وتعالى (رسالة التدمرية، ص ٢٢)

يلزم وجود موجود في الخارج يشترك فيه الرب والعبد، وأن يكون ذلك الموجود بعينه في العبد والرب، بل: وفي كل موجود، ولا بد أن يكون للرب ما يميزه عن المخلوق، فيكون فيه جزآن: أحدهما لكل مخلوق وهو القدر المشترك بينه وبين سائر الموجودات، والثاني: يختص به وهو المميز له عن سائر الموجودات (شرح حديث النزول، دار العاصمة، ص ٨٠)

هذه صفات (أي اليد والوجه ونحوهما) قائمة بنفسها كما هي قائمة بنفسها في الشاهد، كما أن العلم والقدرة قائم بغيره في الغائب والشاهد لكن لا تقبل التفريق⁵⁹ والإنفصال، كما أن علمه وقدرته لا تقبل الزوال عن ذاته، وإن كان المخلوق يمكن مفارقة ما هو قائم به وما هو منه يمكن مفارقة بعض ذلك بعضا، فجاوز ذلك على المخلوق لا يقتضي جوازه على الخالق، وقد علم أن الخالق ليس مماثلا للمخلوق، وأن هذه الصفات وإن كانت أعيانا فليست لحما ولا عصبيا ولا دما ولا نحو ذلك ولا هي من جنس شيء من المخلوقات (بيان تلبيس الجهمية، ج ١ ص ٣٥٦)

وبيان هذا أن صفاتنا منها ما هي أعيان وأجسام، وهي أبعاد لنا، كالوجه واليد، ومنها ما هي معان وأعراض، وهي قائمة بنا، كالسمع والبصر والكلام والعلم والقدرة. ثم إن من المعلوم أن الرب لما وصف نفسه بأنه حي عليم قدير لم يقل المسلمون إن ظاهر هذا غير مراد لأن مفهوم ذلك في حقه مثل مفهومه في حقنا، فكذلك لما وصف نفسه بأنه خلق آدم بيديه لم يوجب ذلك أن يكون ظاهره غير مراد لأن مفهوم ذلك في حقه كمفهومه في حقنا (رسالة التدمرية، ص ٧٧-٨)

فقال (أبو يعلى) هنا: ويجب أن يحمل اختلاف كلام أحمد في إثبات الحد على اختلاف الحالين، فالموضع الذي قال إنه على العرش بحد معناه أن ما حاذى العرش من ذاته⁶⁰ فهو حد له وجهة له، والموضع الذي قال هو على العرش بغير حد معناه ما عدا الجهة المحاذية للعرش وهي الفوق والخلف والأمام والميمنة والميسرة... قلت: هذا الذي ذكره في تفسير كلام أحمد ليس بصواب، بل كلام أحمد كما قال أولا حيث نفاه نفي تحديد الحد له وعلمه بحد حث أثبتته في نفسه... وأما ما ذكره القاضي من إثبات الحد من ناحية العرش فقط فهذا قد اختلف فيه كلامه، وهو قول طائفة من أهل السنة، والجمهور على خلافه وهو الصواب (بيان تلبيس الجهمية، ج ٣ ص ٧٣٥-٧)

qualities of creation, are extreme violations of core Islāmic beliefs on the oneness of Allāh and His absolute dissimilarity to creation.⁶¹

⁶¹ Acknowledgements: This article is based on an online work of ‘Uthmān Muhammad al-Nāblusī titled: *al-Sifāt al-‘Ilāhiyyah bayna Abl al-Tanzīh wa Abl al-Tashbīh*