

Divine Transcendence in Islam

# التنزيه في الإسلام

(Being a treatise on the essence of al-tauhid; that is, the uniqueness of God and its antithesis, the heresy of anthropomorphism)

By Muhammad William Charles

## بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(I begin in the name of the Merciful, the Compassionate.)

Hallowed is He, Who created the worlds—from cells to galaxies—out of naught in order to declare the infinite majesty of His transcendence. I seek peace and blessings on the guide of mankind, Muhammad, the illustrious scion of Abraham, the pride of Adam, the last of the prophets, the destroyer of unbelief, idolatry and illusion, the proclaimer of the final word and message from the Lord of Creation, the revealer of miraculous wisdom, the describer of things that have been and things that will come, the warner to mankind of a judgement hard on the mongers of falsehood. There is no power and no ability except in Allah, and I ask His help to explain the meaning of His transcendence.

The basis of Islam and its essence is the truth of the transcendence of God which refers to the fact that the Being of God and His attributes are absolutely dissimilar with creation and created things; that is, He and His attributes are *beyond* creation. When we say that He is beyond creation it should not be imagined that He occupies some kind of *space* outside of the creation. Rather, it should be inferred that He, not being a body, simply does *not* occupy space, nor is He qualified by time, nor defined by any limit, nor described by any direction. He existed before He created time, space, and bodies; and He is now as He *was* in pre-eternity.

The existence of God is absolute and necessary, not contingent, or merely possible; whereas, the existence of everything else is, logically speaking, contingent, or merely possible: it may, or may not exist. The universe declares by the fact that it continually undergoes change that it is originated; every change of state represents an existence which has emerged from contingency and non-existence to the realm of determination and being. Now every origination posits an originator; it *has* to have an originator as surely as it exists. Now this originator has to be the self-sufficient cause of His own existence since what has any need could not possibly originate. Rather, *it* would share with that which is originated the need for an originator. More-over, this originator must transcend all taint of origination since whatever has an originated quality is itself originated and in need of an originator. This transcendent existent is what the Islamic religious scholars (*ulama*, ) called the *Necessary Existent* (*wajib al-wujud*, ); it is what Aristotle called *the Primal Cause*, or *the Unmoving Mover*.

Because the Necessary Existent differs in every way from the things whose existence is contingent,<sup>1</sup> He is incomparable and utterly transcends their comprehension; this is referred to as the inscrutability of the Creator. This transcendence, which in Arabic is called *tanẓih* ( ) or *taqdis* ( ) requires that He is one; neither compounded, nor susceptible to division. He does not undergo any change, and accidents do not occur to Him. Neither does He partake of form or appearance, nor is He subject to movement or stillness. He is without beginning and without end, and whatever we imagine Him to be, He is other than that. That is why the Koran<sup>2</sup> de-

---

<sup>1</sup> Contingency: (Lat. *Contingere*, to touch on all sides) In its broadest philosophical usage, a state of affairs is said to be contingent if, it may and also may not be. A certain event, for example, is contingent if, and only if, it may come to pass and also may not come to pass. For this reason contingency is not quite the equivalent in meaning to possibility, for while a possible state of affairs is one which may be, it may at the same time be necessary, and hence it would be false to say that it may not be....—*Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Dagobert Runes *et al.*, (Totowa, New Jersey, Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1967)

<sup>2</sup> The Koran (Arabic: *Qur`an*) is the proper name of the final revelation; that is, communication from the Author of the universe to mankind and *jinn* (genies). It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) bit by bit over a period of twenty-three years by the Archangel Gabriel (on whom be peace). The Koran is preserved by Allah from adulteration; it itself declares that it can not be corrupted. That declaration was made some 1400 years ago. Anyone who cares to compare copies of the Koran around the world today antique and modern will indeed find t h a t the Ko-

clares: “*Subhana rabbika rabbi l-izzati amma yasifun /*”; which we can translate as follows: “Hallow your Lord, the Lord of Glory [by holding Him above all defect and imperfection] and what they ascribe to Him [of meanings which do not befit Him.]”<sup>3</sup> –*al-Saffat*: 180.<sup>4</sup> In the above translation, I have employed the word *hallow* in its older, original sense that, according to *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 1933, means: “to honour as holy (esp. God or His name).” An instance of this usage is provided in The Lord’s Prayer of the Christians: “Our Father, hallowed be Thy name.” *Hallow* and *holy* are both derived from a common Old English root, the underlying idea being that which is pure and free of all imperfection and failing. We could equally well have translated *hallow* as *declare* or *acknowledge the transcendence of*.

The Koran declares:

ran has not changed in the least. Furthermore, the Koran is inimitable in point of view of its pure and lofty style which kaleidoscope-like changes from section to section; in point of view of its eerie beauty, its rapturous rhythm, its profundity, its matchless conciseness, its historical accuracy, its miraculous predictions, its formidable logic, its incontrovertible argumentation, and its flawless detail. The Arabs, who were a nation of orators, were challenged to produce three verses the likes of it if it were forged. Although in the beginning they wanted at all costs to disprove the Koran and the prophethood of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), they were unable to meet the challenge, nor has anyone been able to do so since. The recitation of the Koran is worship, and Muslims recite from it in their five daily prayers. Hundreds of thousands of them in every generation have memorised it completely. It is so well preserved in their collective memory, that were anyone to make a mistake in its exact wording, someone or other would invariably correct him on the spot. Misquoting the Koran is thus a mark of considerable embarrassment for a writer or speaker in a typical Muslim community even in the decadence of today.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the way I have translated *subhana rabbika/* in the above verse, a few remarks may be in order. In the abridgement of *al-Sihab/*, which Imam al-Suyuti declared to own the place amongst the books of lexicology that *al-Bukhari* owns among the books of *hadith*, Imam Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 660 hegira) mentions that the meaning of *tasbih/* (from which *subhana* is derived) is *tanzih/*; that is, to declare free of defect and imperfection. Then he explains that the meaning of *subhana Allah* is *tanzih Allah*; that is, the transcendence of Allah. In the phrase *subhana Allah*, *subhana* is the object of a verb that is omitted but understood, this object being derived from that verb. It is a well-known structure of Arabic grammar called *nash ala al-masdar*. As for ellipsis (*badhf*), or word-omission, it is a mark of good Arabic style when done discreetly. In the construction here at hand, we may suppose the omitted verb to be either imperative or affirmative. Thus the meaning of *subhana Allah* might be rendered by something like *I absolve Allah from all offence with complete absolving*. *Complete* is understood in view of the fact that this construction affords emphasis as the specialists in the Arabic rhetorical sciences (*al-balagha*) have ascertained.

Al-Zamakhshari, who is universally regarded to be a supreme *imam* of lexicology, explained in his commentary on the Koran that the word *tasbih* when applied to Him, the Glorious and Exalted, refers to purging Him of every meaning which is offensive to His majesty, such as compulsion or anthropomorphism and the likes. For example, *tasbih* requires that one should interpret the divine name *al-A`la* (the Highest) to mean *highness* in the sense of *overpowering* or *sublime* not in the physical sense of *place*, and likewise, *al-istina ala al-`arsh* is not to be interpreted literally as God’s physical *ascension* on the Throne. *Compulsion* in the sentence above (Arabic-*jabr*) refers to the heretical notion that God compels His creatures to act and deprives them of free will; whereas, *anthropomorphism* (Arabic-*tashbih*) refers to the literal attribution of human qualities and character to God, and in a broader sense, the attribution of any contingent or created quality to Him—it is an idolatrous notion obviously.

In another place, al-Zamakhshari mentioned that the past verb *sabbaha* (which is derived from *tasbih*) when it has a pronominal object of the third person singular means: *he removed him from evil*. It is derived in a predictable and organic manner from the root verb *sabaha* (to swim) which implies the act of going away and getting distant. All the above information from al-Zamakhshari was reiterated and corroborated by al-Nasafi in his celebrated commentary on the Koran: *Mudarik al-Tanzil*.

<sup>4</sup> When referring to Koranic verses I will transliterate the Arabic name of the *chapter*, which is properly referred to by its Arabic technical name, *surah*, and then give its *verse* number. The verses of the Koran are properly referred to by their Arabic technical name, *ayah*.

- ﴿ *Laysa kamithlibi shayan wa huwa al-sami al-basir.* (Nothing is like Him, and He is the Seeing, the Hearing.)—*al-Shura*: 11.
- ﴿ *Fala tadribu labu al-amthal.* (So do not coin examples of Him.—*al-Nahl*: 74.
- ﴿ *Afaman yakhlug kaman la yakhlug?* (Is the One Who creates like the one who does not create?)—*al-Nahl*: 17.

These verses are some of the verses that reveal that Allah transcends all likeness to created things in His being, attributes and acts. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), referred to the transcendence of Allah and His omnipotence in a heart-rending prayer which Mulla Ali al-Qari (d. 1014 hegira / 1606 AD),<sup>5</sup> a specialist in prophetic tradition (*hadith*),<sup>6</sup> recorded in his *Hizb al-A`zam*.

O You Whom eyes can not see, Whom thoughts can not fathom, and describers can not describe, and in Whom happenings bring no change, Who fears not the vicissitudes of time, Who knows the weight of the mountains and the volume of the seas, the number of the raindrops and the leaves of the trees; Who knows of everything over which the night casts its shadow and over which the day casts its light; from Whom no sky can conceal any other sky, and from Whom no earth can conceal any other earth; from Whom no mountain can hide what lies in its crags, nor any sea what rests in its depths, You I ask to make the last part of my life the best part, and the best of my deeds the concluding ones, and the best of my days, the day I meet You. O Guardian of Islam and those who profess it, keep me steadfast in it till I meet you!

In another prayer, which was reported by Imam<sup>7</sup> Muslim in his supremely authentic collec-

---

<sup>5</sup> In giving dates of decease, I will first give the date according to the Islamic era, and then follow it with the corresponding date in the Christian era. The Islamic era begins with the emigration (*hegira*) of Muhammad (on whom be peace) from the oppression of his tribes-men at Mecca to Medina, the city which offered him love and protection, and which became the centre from which he propagated Islam. The first year of *hegira* corresponds with the year . Since the Muslims follow the lunar calendar the Muslim calendar advances one year on the Christian calendar every...years.

<sup>6</sup> Prophetic tradition (*hadith*) refers to the reports of the speech or deed of the Prophet of Islam (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) which have been transmitted to us by a continuous *relay*, or chain of narrators, going back to the companion of the Prophet who was the eyewitness. The mention of this chain of narrators was called *sanad* by the early *ulama*. Not only did a *hadith* have to have a *sanad* in order to be accepted by the *ulama*, but the narrators in the *sanad* had to be of great integrity, and men of sound memory and acumen. Furthermore, the *sanad* had to be continuous, that is, every narrator had to mention the person from whom he was directly narrating. The early *ulama* studied the narrators: when they were born, when they died, where they lived, where they travelled, under whom they studied, whom they taught. They endeavoured to learn what was their reputation; whether or not they were they truthful; whether or not they had strong memories; whether or not they were accurate; whether or not they were alert; whether or not they mixed up *hadiths* or confused their narrators. Their efforts were prodigious; they compiled biographical dictionaries of some one million narrators! Thus, by the institution of *sanad*, and by the prodigious efforts of the *ulama*, the teachings of the Prophet were preserved from corruption.

<sup>7</sup> *Imam* in Arabic refers to any leader, but in the technical jargon of the *ulama*, that is, the learned, it refers to anyone who mastered one of the religious sciences to the degree that later, *ulama*, who were specialists in that science, regarded him such a supreme authority that they would resolve their differences of opinion by deferring to his opinion. Thus it was a status that depended on merit, and it was the consensus of posterity which determined it. A man's status as an *imam* in a particular field did not make him an *imam* in another field. For example, Imam Muslim is an *imam* in the science of *hadith* but not in the science of

tion of prophetic tradition (*hadith*) known as *Sahih Muslim*, Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) again referred to the divine transcendence:

O Allah, You are the first: there is nothing before You; and You are the last: there is nothing after You. You are the Manifest (*al-Zahir*): there is nothing above You. You are the Hidden (*al-Batin*): there is nothing below You.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Raghib al-Isfahani (d. 425 hegira)<sup>9</sup> in his *Mufradat al-Qur`an* explained that Allah is the Manifest because His existence is intuitively evident to us through everything we see in the creation, while He is the Hidden because we can not comprehend the nature of His existence.<sup>10</sup> Al-Baihaqi remarked in his *al-Asma wa al-Sifat*: “Some of our companions [that is, *ulama* of the *Shafi*<sup>11</sup> School] inferred from this *hadith* [above] that Allah, the Exalted, transcends place since, if there is neither anything above Him, nor anything below Him, He must be beyond place.”<sup>12</sup>

Having described somewhat the concept of divine transcendence (*tanzih*), it behooves us to make some allusion to the intellectual proofs that the scholars of Islam have adduced to establish it. These proofs should not be underestimated by people who are blessed with an unshakable belief in the sacred texts of Islam (that is, the Qur`an and the prophetic traditions) because, although these proofs may seem superfluous to them, there are many whose belief is shaky, or who are deprived of belief, and they stand to benefit from the light of a rational argument. Furthermore, these proofs are of utmost benefit in defending pure Islamic belief from being corrupted by sectarians (*al-mubtadi`ah*) who, as the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forewarned, constitute a plague in this the *Last Dark Age*.

The theologians of orthodox Islam (*al-mutakallimun*) deployed two standard arguments, which they refined and perfected, in order to prove the existence and transcendence of God: the first was the cosmological argument<sup>13</sup>, while the second was the argument of contingency. The

---

*fiqh* (the detailed rules of the holy law) although he was no doubt learned in that science too, yet not to the degree that posterity accorded him the rank of *imam*.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim* (Egypt, Dar al-Rayan, 1987), vol. 17, p.36.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Raghib al-Isfahani is especially famous for his authoritative glossary of the Koran.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Mufradat al-Qur`an*, (Damascus, Dar al-Qalam; and Beirut, Dar al-Shamiyyah, 1992), p.131.

<sup>11</sup> There are four schools of law (*fiqh*) in Islam. Just as the *Companions* of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) differed in what rules were to be inferred from the text of the Koran and the *sunnah* (the speech and practice of the Prophet), so did the generation after them, and the generation after them. These three generations were called the *best generations* by the Prophet himself (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They are referred to as *al-Salaf (the Predecessors)*. The founders of the four existing schools of law (*fiqh*) inherited the differences of opinion from the generation before them. These differences of opinions are due to known factors, like the ambiguity of language, for example, the exposition of which is not appropriate here since it is a topic in itself. One important point to understand is that these differences of opinion involved contingent issues (*al-furu*) like the details of the ritual prayer, or the rules of commerce, not the essentials of belief (*usul al-din*) that comprise the categorical precepts (*al-dururiyyat*) for the Muslims are necessarily united in that. The other important point to appreciate is that in the estimation of those whose opinion counts in Islam; namely the *imams*, this difference of opinion is a mercy for the people of Islam.

Imam Abu Hanifah founded the *Hanafi* School. Imam Shafi founded the *Shafi* School. Imam Malik founded the *Maliki* School, and Imam Ahmad founded the *Hanbali* School.

<sup>12</sup> al-Baihaqi, *al-Asma wa al-Sifat*, (Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi), p. 400.

<sup>13</sup> The cosmological argument proves that God's existence follows from the fact that things exist. It aims to prove that there is a God by showing that causes presuppose causes, no matter how far back we

typical arguments are represented; in the following works, for example:

- the various commentaries of *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, the earliest extant treatise on Islamic creed—it was written by Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 hegira)
- the commentaries of *al-Aqidah al-Tabawiyah*<sup>14</sup>
- the commentaries of *al-Aqa'id al-Nasafiyah* by Abu Hafs al-Nasafi (d. 537 hegira / 1142 AD)
- *Qawa'id al-Aqa'id* by al-Ghazali
- *Asas al-Taqdis* by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi
- *Sharh al-Maqasid* by Sad al-Din al-Taftazani (d. 793 hegira / 1390 AD),
- *Sharh al-Muwafiq* by Udud al-Din al-Iji

We will presently examine briefly the basic nature of these two arguments in what follows.

The *mutakallimun* first established that the existence of all things is real, contrary to the pretensions of the Sophists. Thereafter, they defined knowledge and demonstrated that it has three basic sources only: the senses, prophesy certified by heavenly miracles, and reason. Then they demonstrated that all that is in existence is originated, that is, brought out of non-existence into existence. They did this by means of a rigorous and elaborate argument the exposition of that is lengthy and inappropriate here.

(NB:Expand on last paragraph.)

Having shown that the universe is originated, the *mutakallimun* went on to show that it necessarily requires an originator to determine that it should come into existence. In the argument of contingency the *mutakallimun* established that since the existence of the universe is merely possible, it requires that which should choose or prefer its existence to its non-existence. However, the existence of that which prefers the existence of the universe to its non-existence must be necessary, and not merely possible, or contingent; otherwise, it itself would require that which chooses *its* existence over its non-existence. This existent the *mutakallimun* called the *Necessary Existent* (Arabic: *wajib al-wujud*); it is what Aristotle called the *Primal Cause* or *Unmoving Mover*. The existence of the Necessary Existent is self-dependent: He is the sufficient cause of His own existence.

NB: A discussion of the cosmological proof required here.

The Greek and Arabic philosophers tried to argue, as do the proponents of materialist<sup>15</sup>

---

go. The series of causes of causes can only come to an end in a cause that does not depend upon something else for its existence. Being the most basic proof of God's existence as it starts with the existence of anything, it was the favourite of most philosophers and theologians.—*Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Dagobert Runes *et al.*, (Totowa, New Jersey, Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1967)

<sup>14</sup> There are many commentaries on this work; the book *Kashf al-Zunun* mentions seven of them. However, we have to except from this concurrence of tradition the anthropomorphic commentary of Ibn Abi al-Izz who, because of his extreme literalist perspective, continually contradicts al-Tahawi, the author of the original, orthodox text. Mulla Ali al-Qari takes Ibn Abi al-Izz to task for his heretical literalism in the former's commentary on *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*. Ibn Abi al-Izz belongs to the deviant sect called *Hashawiyah* about which we will have much to say in the coming pages.

<sup>15</sup> We mean by *materialism* the notion that reality is confined to the world of matter, that consciousness and awareness are the result of purely material processes, that there is no absolute truth, and that there is no God. Frithjof Schuon succinctly answered the pretence of materialism and its illegitimate offspring existentialism in his book, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*: "We shall be told that only existence is absolutely certain. Now is not this certainty precisely something other than existence? The certainty

scientism<sup>16</sup> today, that the universe contains its own cause of existence, and they postulated a chain of cause and effect that goes back for ever. The *mutakallimun* answered them by pointing out that the supposed endless chain has to have a cause that is not itself, nor part of itself, since the impossibility of a thing being itself and the cause of itself at the same time is self-evident. This necessary external cause precludes the supposed endlessness of the chain.<sup>17</sup>

NB: Expand on the refutation of infinite regress.

The necessity for an originator of this universe is brought into stark relief by a modern parable quoted by the late Shaykh al-Azhar, Abd al-Halim Mahmud:

Imagine a house whose rooms are well provided with luxurious furniture, standing on a high mountain surrounded by a thick forest; suppose that a man came across this house, but could not find anybody nearby. Suppose that he thought that the rocks from the mountain had been scattered around, and then automatically collected together to take the shape of this splendid palace with its bedrooms, chambers, corridors, and fittings, that the trees in the wood had split of their own accord into boards, and formed themselves into doors and beds, seats and tables, each taking its place in the palace; that the fibres from the plants and wool and hair of the animals of their own accord had changed into embroidered cloth, and then were cut into carpets, pillows, and cushions, and dispersed about the rooms and settled onto sofas and chairs; that lamps and chandeliers by themselves had fallen into this palace from all directions and fixed themselves into the ceilings, singly and in groups—would you not conclude that this must be a dream or a legend, or the reasoning of someone disturbed in his mind?

What, then, do you think of a palace whose ceiling is the sky, whose floor is the earth, whose pillars are the mountains, whose ornamentation is the plants, and whose lamps are the stars, moon, and sun? In the correct judgement of the intellect, can it be of lesser importance than this house? Is it not more likely to direct the attention and mind to a Shaping Creator, Alive, Self-Subsistent, Who created and shaped, and Who determined and guided?

And do you think that if a man brought millions of printing letters and began to move them around day after day, week after week, year after year, that he would obtain from them by chance, a composition which is a book of literature, philosophy, or mathematics?

As the orientalist David Santillana said, even after moving them around for generations, after all his toil he would still be left with individual letters. If this is so, as Santillana continues, how can we imagine that this universe, with the perfection and harmony between its individual parts and their amazing compatibility with each other, could ever have come about through random movement in a limitless void, as the

---

exists and existence is certain...If existence is a content of certainty, then certainty has a priority over existence, or at any rate the matter can thus be envisioned and this is enough to invalidate the axiom in question.”

<sup>16</sup> We mean by *scientism* the illegitimate speculations about Absolute Reality made by a system that declares at the outset that it will *only* concern itself with the physical order of reality. Scientists have the right to restrict themselves to material investigations. Their folly is in addressing matters outside their jurisdiction. If higher realities are excluded at the outset, it is no wonder they do not appear at the conclusion.

<sup>17</sup> (NB: Footnote needed here to elaborate on the classic rebuttal to the theory of infinite regress.)

materialists imagine? There is no doubt that rational people would agree with Aristotle that 'Every order bespeaks the intelligence behind it.'

The above manner of demonstration [that is, the cosmological proof] is the method which Kant, the greatest philosopher of Germany<sup>18</sup>, declared to be the clearest and strongest proof of the existence of God.<sup>19</sup>

*Al-Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah*, which we had occasion to mention above, is by the consensus of the *ulama* (scholars) of Islam one of the most authoritative treatises on Islamic creed that exist. It is the transmission of the creed of Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 hegira), Imam Abu Yusuf (d. 182 hegira / 798 AD), and Imam Muhammad (d. 189 hegira). At the beginning of this treatise, Imam al-Tahawi reports:

The Imam [Abu Hanifah] said, as did the two above-mentioned *imams* [Abu Yusuf and Muhammad, the two foremost disciples of Abu Hanifah], may Allah show them mercy: "Concerning the *tauhid* (uniqueness) of Allah, exalted is He, we say and believe by enabling-ability from Allah, exalted is he,<sup>20</sup> that Allah is one; He has no partner..."

At this point it is necessary to discuss the meaning of another important word in the glossary of Islam: *ulama*. *Ulama* in its non-technical and popular usage refers to people who have completed formal religious studies under qualified persons, and then, if they have mastered the required sciences, are authorised to teach or give legal opinion (*fatwa*) concerning belief, law, Arabic language and grammar, recitation of the Qur'an, the meaning of texts from the Qur'an or *hadith*, etc. Merit is what made a person an *alim* (singular of *ulama*), not appointment. Any qualified teacher, usually called *shaykh*, could teach a person what he needs to know in order to become an *alim*—it did not depend on the decisions of a council, or graduation from specified institutions. As such, there is no priesthood in Islam, nor are there degrees; rather, permission is given by a *shaykh* to his pupil to teach what he has learned, or to give legal opinion (*fatwa*); this permission is called *ijazah*. No doubt, there was always disparity of rank amongst the *ulama*, but it was always based on knowledge, and it was the *ulama* that determined it, not any temporal or official authority. One can generally recognise in every Islamic science a hierarchy of authority that was delineated by generations of *ulama*. For example, in the *Shafi* School of *fiqh* Imam al-Nawawi and al-Rafi'i are regarded as supreme authorities, and it is incumbent on all who follow the *Shafi* School to defer to the opinion of these two *imams*. However, the *Shafi* *ulama* recognise Ibn Hajr al-Makki, and al-Ramli as the two *imams* of the later *ulama*, and it is to these two that one should turn to resolve differences that may have existed between the two former *imams*, or to learn the position of the former two on an issue, or for clarification of their position, and so on.

---

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Sabri Efendi, the Grand Mufti of the Ottoman Empire just before its collapse, in his masterly work on theology, *al-Fasl*, regarded Kant to be the greatest European philosopher after the Renaissance. (NB: Expand on the philosophy of Kant.)

<sup>19</sup> *The Creed of Islam*, by Abd al-Halim Mahmud, Shaykh al-Azhar (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981, reprint), pp. 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> A common epithet for Allah is *ta'ala* which I have translated here as *exalted is He*, and on other occasions as *the Exalted*. Actually there is more intended here than this facile translation may readily suggest, for it is one of the epithets of transcendence which could more completely, and correctly, be translated as: "Exalted is he beyond all defect and imperfection," or "Exalted is He beyond what the ignorant ascribe to him," or "the Exalted beyond all that does not become Him," or something like that. However, since these epithets are used so frequently, it may be better to abbreviate to avoid being cumbersome. The reader should try to keep this in mind.



The *ulama* have the exalted function of preserving the religion of Islam, and of transmitting it to posterity. Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) proclaimed: “The *ulama* are the heirs of the prophets.” He is also reported to have said: “Upright men in every generation will transmit this knowledge [that is, the knowledge of Islam], repudiating the distortions made by the heretics (*al-ghalim*), the false claims made by pretenders, and the changes made by the ignorant.”<sup>21</sup>

However, the Messenger of Allah (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also informed us that in the latter days there will appear evil *ulama*. A plethora of *hadith* has come down to us concerning them. We will mention one which al-Tirmidhi reported:

There will appear at the end of time men who fraudulently pawn off religion for worldly gain. Before the people they wear the skins of sheep [feigning] meekness. Their tongues are sweeter than sugar, while their hearts are the hearts of wolves. Allah says: “Are they trying to deceive Me, or are they being insolent towards Me? I swear by Me that I will visit them with such misfortune that even the forbearing among them will be distressed.”<sup>22</sup>

The question will be asked: “How are we to distinguish the upright *ulama* from the evil ones?” The answer is that first we have to follow those *ulama* who call us to the traditional, orthodox Islam—not a new, or *re-formed* Islam. The most obvious sign of orthodoxy is that it represents the main community, the main stream. The Messenger of Allah (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said:

“Verily, the Israelites divided into seventy-one sects. Seventy sects perished and one sect will be saved. Verily, my people will divide into seventy-two sects. Seventy-one sects will perish, and one sect will be saved.” He was asked which was that sect [which will be saved] and he replied, “It is the main community (*al-jama`ah*)! It is the main community!”<sup>23</sup>

Having said this, it is wise to point out that the *ulama* who are specialists in the principles of the holy law (*usul al-fiqh*) use the term *alim*, or the plural *ulama* to denote the one or ones who are capable of inferring the law from its primary sources, that is the *mujtabid* (plural: *mujtabidun*). Thus they say that the prerogative of inferring the rules of the holy law from their primary sources: the Qur`an and the prophetic traditions, belongs to the *ulama*.

Having explained the term *ulama*, we can turn to see what the *ulama* mean by the term *tauhid* used above. Let us have a look at the definition advanced by Ibn Hajr al-Asqalani<sup>24</sup> (d. 852 hegira), a universally recognised *imam* (expert) in the science of *hadith* (Prophetic tradition):

The orthodox *ulama* explained *tauhid*, (the uniqueness of God) to be the repudiation of the notion that Allah has any attribute which resembles the attributes of created things [which notion in Arabic is called *tashbih*], and of the notion that He does not possess those transcendent attributes which His perfection and majesty require

---

<sup>21</sup> Reported by al-Baihaqi in his *al-Madkhal*.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Tirmidhi reported it in his *Sunan*.....NB: to be completed

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed reported it from Anis as was mentioned in *Kanz al-Umal*.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Hajr is a supreme authority in the sciences of *hadith*, transmission, biography of narrators (*asma al-rijal*), and criticism. His book *Fath al-Bari* is perhaps the most highly regarded commentary ever written on the *hadith* collection of Imam al-Bukhari, which Muslims hold to be the most authentic book in existence after the Koran.

[which notion in Arabic is called *ta`til*]<sup>25</sup>. That is why al-Junayd (d. 297 hegira / 910 AD) in a report transmitted by al-Qushairi [in his *al-Risalah*] said: “*Al-Taubid* consists in maintaining the uniqueness of the Unoriginated [that is, the Eternal—Arabic: *qadim*] with respect to the originated [Arabic—*hadith*].”

Abu Qasim al-Tamimi said in his book *al-Hujjah*:

*Al-Taubid* is the verbal noun [Arabic —*masdar*] from which the past verb *wahhada*, and the present verb *yawahhidu* are derived. The meaning of the sentence *Wahbattu Allah* is *I taqtu Allah munfaridan* [that is, I declared (or maintained) categorically<sup>26</sup> that Allah is unique] in His person (*dhat*), and that in respect of His attributes (*sifat*) He has no likeness nor resemblance.]” However, it has also been said that it means: “I acknowledge that He is one”, and likewise, that it means: “I deny Him all quality and quantity; for He is one in His Essence, indivisible; and one in His attributes; there is nothing which is like Him. He has no associate in His divinity, dominion, and providence. There is no other Lord than He, and no other Creator.”

Ibn Battal said: “The title that al-Bukhari has given the chapter [in his *hadith* collection called *al-Sahih*] implies that Allah is not a body because bodies are compounded of parts put together.”<sup>27</sup> NB: Find out the title of the chapter!

Having digressed from al-Tahawi’s transmission of the creed of the illustrious predecessors (Arabic—*al-salaf*) to learn the definition of *taubid*, we can now return to it:

...and nothing is like Him, and nothing is too hard for Him. There is no god other than He. He is eternal (*qadim*) without beginning, and everlasting (*da`im*) without end. He does not cease to be, nor does He perish. Nothing can be except what He wills. No one can imagine Him, nor understand Him. Man does not resemble Him. He lives and does not die. He sustains [all things], and does not sleep. He is the Creator Who is beyond all need. He is the Provider Who Himself has no need for provision. He puts to death without any fear [of reprisal]. He is the Resurrector, [and He resurrects] without any toil. His attributes were eternal (*qadim*) [that is unoriginated and without any beginning] before He created [the universe]. After the existence of things, His attributes did not increase [or change] beyond what they were before the existence of those things. As He was with His attributes in pre-eternity, so He will not cease to be forevermore. (*Kama kana bisifatibi a`zaliyyan kadhalika la yazalu abadiyyan.*)

Abd al-Ghani al-Ghunaimi al-Maidani (d. 1298 hegira), the student of Ibn Abidin, and the author of a number of famous books in Islamic religious sciences, commented on al-Tahawi’s words, *and nothing is like Him*, in the latter’s commentary on *al-Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah*:

This is said emphasising the divine attribute of uniqueness (*al-wahdah*) since, if He had any like, He would not be unique, and that would imply of necessity the origination (*huduth*) of

---

<sup>25</sup> An example of *ta`til* is the heretical idea that Allah does not have knowledge of particulars, or that He is not qualified by life.

<sup>26</sup> *Al-i`tiqad* from which *i`taqtu* is derived refers to a categorical judgement that leaves no room for doubt.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Hajr, *Fath al-Bari*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma`rifah), p. 344, vol. 14.

the Eternal (*al-qadim*), or the pre-eternity (*al-qidam*) of what is originated (*al-badith*).<sup>28</sup>

A little later after discussing the transcendence of Allah's speech, al-Tahawi writes:

Whoever describes Allah, the Exalted, by any human characteristic has disbelieved. So whoever realises this takes heed, and refrains from saying [about God] what the unbelievers say, recognising that His attributes do not resemble those of human beings.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Tahwawi here proclaims that anthropomorphism is unbelief (*kufr*). Indeed anthropomorphism is the antithesis of transcendence, which is the foundation of correct belief. Whoever fails to comprehend the transcendence of God has no real knowledge of God. In this connection; that is, the unbelief (*kufr*) of anthropomorphism, Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari in an article called "Aqidah al-Tanzih" quoted Abd al-Qadir al-Baghdad, one of Islam's great authorities on belief, and a renowned specialist in *heresiology* (*al-firaq*); that is, the study of the heretical sects of Islam, their history, their beliefs, their polemics, their founders and their important spokesmen:

The Imam Abu Mansur Abd al-Qadir al-Baghdadi (d. 429 hegira) said in his book *Usul al-Din* which is generally known among the learned as *al-Tabsirah al-Baghdadiyyah* (p. 337) after proclaiming *those who liken any attribute of God to something in His creation (al-mushabbihah) to be idolaters (ibad al-anthan,* ) :

As for the anthropomorphists of *Kburasan* from among the *Karramiyyah*<sup>30</sup>, declaring them to be unbelievers is obligatory [for every Muslim] because they hold that Allah has a limit, and an extremity beneath Him by which He contacts His Throne, and because they hold that Allah is the site of occurrences, and that He sees things by an act of vision which occurs to Him, and likewise, He perceives what He hears by a perception which occurs to Him, and were it not for the occurrence of those perceptions He would not perceive sound or sight. Indeed, they deny themselves the proof of the unitarians (*al-muwahhidun*)<sup>31</sup> that bodies are originated, namely, the fact that occurrences take place in bodies. According to their fundamentals (*usul*), it can not be shown that the world is originated, and so they are left with no way to recognize the Maker of the world, and consequently remain ignorant of Him.

[Abd al-Qadir al-Baghdadi] mentioned in his book *al-Asma wa al-Sifat*:

Indeed, Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari [the supreme *imam* of orthodox Muslims in the field of beliefs and *al-tauhid*], and most *mutakallimun* [experts in orthodox belief and its proof and defence] insisted on the unbelief (*kufr*) of every sectarian (*mubtadi`*) whose heresy was in itself outright unbelief, or directly implied unbelief as,

<sup>28</sup> Abd al-Ghani al-Ghunaimi, *Sharh al-Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2nd Ed., 1992), p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Karramiyyah* was a heretical sect that advocated an extreme anthropomorphism. It originated in *Kburasan* which includes parts of modern Iran, Afghanistan, *Bukhara*, *Tajikistan*, and other domains of what was formerly called *Transoxiana*. The founder of this sect was Muhammad ibn Karram (d. 2 hegira). He is generally held to be the first to endorse anthropomorphism in Islam. See *al-Nihal wa al-Milal* and *al-Farq bain al-Firaq*.

<sup>31</sup> In the context of Islam *unitarians* are those who uphold the uniqueness and transcendence of God's Essence, attributes, and acts.

for example, whoever held that what he worshipped had an image (*surah*), or a limit (*hadd*), or extremity (*nihayah*), or that He might move or be still.... There is no difficulty for anybody who has a mind to comprehend the unbelief of the *Karramiyyah*, the anthropomorphists of *Khurasan*, for claiming that He, the Transcendent, is a body, and has a limit, and an extremity underneath Him, and that He contacts His throne, and that He is the site of occurrences, and that speech and will occur to Him anew, [whereas the truth of the matter is that His speech and His will are pre-eternal (*azal*)].<sup>32</sup>

Al-Kauthari remarks in another place also after quoting Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi:

The learned appreciate the exalted rank of Abu Mansur [Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi] in the science of beliefs (*usul al-din*). Indeed, he was a student of Abu Ishaq al-Isfarayini, the student of Abu al-Hasan al-Bahili, the disciple of Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari [the supreme *imam* of the Muslims in the field of *Belief*].<sup>33</sup>

In “*Aqidah al-Tanzih*,” al-Kauthari continues:

Similar denunciations of such anthropomorphic heresies are frequently met with in *al-Irshad* and *al-Shamil* by Imam al-Haramain [al-Juwaini], *al-Tambid* by {Qadi Abu Bakr} al-Baqillani, *al-Qawasim wa al-Awasim* by Abu Bakr ibn al-Arabi, *Daf'u Shubuh al-Tashbih* by [Abu al-Faraj] ibn al-Jauzi, and the works of other luminaries of Islam all of whose statements [in condemnation of anthropomorphism] I have had occasion to mention in my writings. All of the above literature is in circulation.<sup>34</sup>

Imam al-Nawawi and Imam al-Mutawalli both condemned anthropomorphism as unbelief (*kufr*). Al-Nawawi in his book *Raudah al-Talibin* quotes a *fatwa* (encyclical) of al-Mutawalli's:

“Whoever believes that the world is eternal, or that the Maker is originated, or has an originated attribute (*huduth al-Sani*), or denies any attribute of the Eternal which the *ulama* agree is an attribute (that is, on which there is consensus—*ijma*), or believes that He is in contact with or separate from His creation or anything in it (*al-ittisal wa al-infisal*), he is an unbeliever.”<sup>35</sup>

It should be understood that the notion mentioned above that God has an originated attribute, or that He is in contact with or separate from His creation is typical of anthropomorphism.

A little later, al-Tahawi discusses the vision of Allah that is promised to the believers in heaven. He explains the necessity of maintaining the transcendence of Allah with respect to the promised vision of Him,

NB: Discuss the vision here.

Thereafter al-Tahawi repudiates some anthropomorphic notions that many people wrongly hold about God. In the translation that follows, all interpolations into the text as indicated by square brackets are Abd al-Ghani al-Ghunaimi's:

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari, *al-Maqalat* (Saudi Arabia, Dar al-Ahnaaf, 1992) p.378.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>34</sup> The books mentioned here by al-Kauthari are presently available in Cairo for example.

<sup>35</sup> Imam al-Nawawi, *Raudah al-Talibin* (al-Maktab al-Islami), vol. 10, p. 64.

Know that whoever does not refrain from denying [the transcendent attributes of Allah], and does not refrain from ascribing to Him attributes which resemble [the attributes of created things as do the anthropomorphists (*al-mujassimah*)] deviates, and fails to comprehend the meaning of transcendence (*tanzih*). Verily, our Lord, Who is great and exalted [that is, surpasses all that does not befit Him], is characterised by the attributes of uniqueness (*al-wahdaniyyah*), and described by the traits of singularity (*al-fardaniyyah*). Nothing He has created resembles Him. He is far above [and untouched by all originated characteristics including] limits (*al-hudud*), bounds (*al-ghayat*), props (*arkan*), and instruments (*al-adawat*)<sup>36</sup>...

Al-Ghunaimi explains the meaning of *instruments (adawat)* at length mentioning a point that is of paramount importance in understanding the ambiguous texts of Islam:

*Instruments*, or tools, refer to limbs equipped with devices. Texts that imply that Allah is seemingly qualified by instruments that are limbs, or organs abound in the Qur'an and *hadith*; for example, the mention of *the hand, finger, foot, soul, and face*. Consider the following phrases from the speech of Allah, the Exalted, in the Qur'an:

- ❖ Allah's "hand" is above their hands.—*al-Fath*: 10
- ❖ What prevented you from prostrating to what I created with "my two hands"?—*Sad*: 75
- ❖ There is the "face" of Allah.—*al-Baqarah*: 115
- ❖ ...and the "face" of your Lord abides—*al-Rahman*: 27
- ❖ You know what is in my soul, but I don't know what is in Your "soul"<sup>37</sup>—*al-Ma'idah*: 115

Further, consider the following phrases from the speech of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him):

- ❖ You are as you described Your "soul"<sup>38</sup>
- ❖ The hearts of the children of Adam are all between "the two fingers" of the Merciful as a single heart. He turns them however he wishes.<sup>39</sup> Verily, Allah stretches forth His "hand" at night that those who have committed offences in the day might repent, and He stretches forth His "hand" in the day that those who have committed offences during the night might repent. So He shall do till the sun rises from the west<sup>40,41</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Abd al-Ghani al-Ghunaimi, pp. 72–73.

<sup>37</sup> Allah is One; He is not compounded of body, soul, and spirit, as are human beings. In respect of Allah *soul* refers to His Transcendent Essence (*dhāt*).

<sup>38</sup> Reported by Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nisa'i, Ibn Majah, and others as mentioned in *Fath al-Qadir*, p.140, vol. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Reported by Ahmed, and Muslim, as mentioned in *Fath al-Qadir*, p. 402, vol. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Reported by Ahmed and Muslim, as mentioned in *Fath al-Kabir*, p. 352, vol. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Hadith* teach us that near the end of time Allah will order the sun to rise in the west. From that time onwards repentance will not be possible, and whoever has not yet believed will never believe.

- ❖ Hell does not stop saying, “Is there any more?” until the Lord of Glory puts down His “foot.”<sup>42,43</sup>

Before we continue with al-Ghunaimi’s discussion, a few introductory remarks are in order here. Having quoted the ambiguous texts above, al-Ghunaimi proceeds in the passage that follows to exemplify the position of entrusting their meaning to Allah while maintaining the divine transcendence, which position in Arabic is called *tafwid*. This position is typical of most *Hanafi* scholars who follow in that the *imam* Abu Mansur al-Maturidi who followed Abu Hanifah. However, al-Ghunaimi points out that later many *ulama* resorted to interpretation (*tawil*). Al-Ghunaimi, far from condemning interpretation, points out that some *Hanafi imams*, like Ibn Humam, permit or even prefer interpretation “when there is a necessity to compensate for inability of the common people to understand *tafwid* and consequently were in the danger of falling into anthropomorphism (*tashbih*).” Al-Ghunaimi does not consider interpretation to be tantamount to rejecting the sacred texts. The present day sect of anthropomorphists, which has traditionally been referred to by the *ulama* as the sect of the *Hashawiyyah*,<sup>44</sup> misrepresent interpretation by pretending that it constitutes the rejection of the sacred texts. This emphatically is not the case. Historically, it was the sect called *Mu`taẓilab* which rejected many *hadith* which were authentic because those *hadith* conflicted with the false precepts they had established by philosophical arguments. It was Abu Hasan al-Ash`ari who made the most damaging criticism of the *Mu`taẓilab*. Sa`d al-Din al-Taftazani (d. 792 hegira) wrote in his commentary on the classic work of belief, *al-Aqa`id al-Nasafiyyah*:

[The *Mu`taẓilab*] was the first sect to establish principles of schism under which it deviated from the beliefs (*al-aqa`id*) that had been transmitted in the clear *sunnah* (that is, authentic *hadith*), and [the beliefs enshrined in] the collective practice of the *Companions*.<sup>45</sup> This deviation occurred when their founder, Wasil ibn Ata (d. 131 hegira) seceded from the assembly of al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 hegira) insisting that whoever committed a major sin was neither a believer nor an unbeliever;<sup>46</sup> rather, he assumed a status between the two. Al-Hasan replied: “He has seceded from us [that is, from *Ahl al-Sunnah*].” That is why they are called *the Mu`taẓilab (the Secessionists)*. They, however, called themselves *the Partisans of Justice and Uniqueness (Ashab al-Adl wa al-Taubid)* because they held that Allah, exalted is He, was compelled to reward

---

<sup>42</sup> Reported by al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nisa`i, as mentioned in *al-Fath al-Kabir*, p. 352, vol. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Ghunaimi, pp.73-74.

<sup>44</sup> NB: Note required on *Hashawiyyah*.

<sup>45</sup> The *Companions* refers to those blessed souls who lived at the time of the Prophet of Islam (the peace of Allah and his blessing be upon him), and who saw him and believed in him before he died, regardless of whether or not they reported anything from him. All Muslims revere them because it was the *Companions* who transmitted to them the teachings of the Prophet of Islam (the peace of Allah and His blessing be upon him). Moreover, the *consensus (ijma)* of the *Companions* is binding on all Muslims. In the absence of a text (*nasx*) from the Koran or *sunnah* on a given question, the opinion of a *Companion* or his practice is authority to which those who were qualified to infer the rules of law (*fiqh*) from its primary sources (that is, the *mujtahids*) had to defer.

<sup>46</sup> The Orthodox Community of Islam (*Ahl al-Sunnah*), to which the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ordered us to adhere, hold that a Muslim does not cease to be a believer if he commits a major sin although Allah may punish him in Hell for it in the hereafter.

the obedient and punish the disobedient [in order that He be just]<sup>47</sup>, and because they insisted that Allah did not have pre-eternal attributes (*siġat*) [insisting that His uniqueness required that nothing be pre-eternal but His Magnificent Essence.]<sup>48</sup> Apart from that, they played havoc with theology by clinging to many [illegitimate] philosophical precepts [of the Greeks] in the area of beliefs. Their school spread amongst the people until Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari (d. 324) confuted his teacher, [the leader of the *Mu`taẓilab`'s* in his day,] Abu Ali al-Jubba`i (d. 330). That circumstance arose when Abu al-Hasan asked his teacher, “What do you say concerning three brothers, one of whom died in obedience, one of whom died in disobedience, and the third who died in his infancy.” Al-Jubba`i replied, “The first will be rewarded in Paradise; the second will be punished in Hell; the third will neither be rewarded nor punished.” Abu al-Hasan asked him, “Suppose the third said, ‘O my Lord, why did you cause me to die young, rather than leave me till I had grown that I might believe in You and obey You and enter Paradise?’” Al-Jubba`i replied, “The Lord would say, ‘I knew that if you were to grow up, you would disobey Me, and so enter Hell. Thus, it was to your benefit that I cause you to die young.’” Abu al-Hasan said, “Suppose the second said, ‘O my Lord, why did You not cause me to die in infancy so that I did not disobey You and enter Hell?’ What will the Lord reply?” Al-Jubba`i was confounded.

Thereafter, Abu al-Hasan left the school of al-Jubba`i, and he and his followers dedicated themselves to the refutation of the *Mu`taẓilab School* and the defence of the precepts which were established with reference to the teachings of the Prophet (*sunnab*), and what the *Companions* took for granted. They called themselves *Ahl al-Sunnab wa al-Jama`ah* (*The People of the Sunnab and the Main Community*.) Thereafter, when Greek Philosophy was translated into Arabic and Muslims took great interest in it, the Asharites (*al-Asha`irah*) attempted to refute the philosophers in those matters in which they contradicted the *shari`ah* (Islamic law). In the process of refuting the philosophers, the Asharites mixed the science of *Beliefs* (*al-Kalam*) with Philosophy in order to achieve their purpose which was the refutation of philosophy [or at least to the extent that it was at variance with *shari`ah*.] Consequently, they mixed *Beliefs* with philosophical notions of theology, physics and mathematics to such an extent that, were it not that they continued to depend on *sam`iyyat* [that is, what they learned from the Book of Allah and the *sunnab* of His Prophet], one would not have been able to distinguish *Beliefs* (*al-Kalam*) from Philosophy. This is true of the *Kalam* of later *ulama*, at least. And in summary, it [*al-Kalam*] is the noblest of all sciences because it is the foundation of the *shari`ah*, and the head of the religious sciences, and because its content matter is the stuff of Islamic beliefs.<sup>49</sup>

Al-Taftazani has proclaimed what is well known to the *ulama*; namely, that it was the Asharite (*Asha`irah*) scholars who contended with the *Mu`taẓilab*, and contained

---

<sup>47</sup> Whereas, *Ahl al-Sunnab* maintain that Allah is not compelled to do anything. If he were to punish the obedient or reward the disobedient that would not be injustice on His part because He is the creator, sustainer, and owner of all that exists. However, He has promised to reward the obedient, and He, the Truth, does not break His promise.

<sup>48</sup> *Ahl al-Sunnab*, represented by the Asharites, maintained that Allah’s attributes were neither His Essence, nor other than it. Thus the pre-eternity of His attributes did not in any way prejudice the uniqueness of His Transcendent Essence. On the other hand, the *Mu`taẓilab`'s* rejection of His pre-eternal, and transcendent attributes, constituted the rejection of explicit texts from the Koran and *sunnab* (*hadith*).

<sup>49</sup> Sa`d al-Din al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-Aqa`id al-Nasfiyyah*. NB: Get reference from another edition of the book

them until their school virtually disappeared. Yet, the preferred method of the Asharites in countenancing ambiguous texts is to interpret them in a way which is consonant with the divine transcendence, and which is acceptable to the scholars of the Arabic language. So it is preposterous to pretend, as do the *Hashawiyyah* of the fifteenth century of Islam, that Asharites are reviving the patent deviation of the *Mu'tazilah* by insinuating that the interpretation of sacred texts means the rejection of those texts.

Having said this let us return to al-Ghunaimi's discussion recalling that he had just cited a repertoire of ambiguous texts from the Qur'an and the *sunnah* (see p. 19):

It is incumbent on us to convey these texts as they are, consigning the meaning of them to their respective speaker [that is, Allah or His Prophet], while maintaining that the Originator is far above having limbs or organs, or being qualified by any originated quality (*al-sifat al-muhdathah*). Imam Fakhr al-Islam al-Bazdawi<sup>50</sup> remarked in his work on the principles of *fiqh*<sup>51</sup>: "We [the *Hanafi ulama*] recognise that the "hand" and the "face" are established texts [of the holy law (*Shari'ah*)], but we recognize that their signification is obscure. Nonetheless, it is not permissible to reject these texts on account of our inability to understand their signification. Rejection is what caused the *Mu'tazilah* to deviate.

The Imam [that is, Abu Hanifah] remarked in his *al-Was'iyyah*<sup>52</sup>:

We declare that Allah *took control* (Arabic—*istima*)<sup>53</sup> without having any need of

---

<sup>50</sup> He is Ali ibn Muhammad al-Bazdawi (d. 482 hegira). He is a *Hanafi imam*—a *faqih*, *mubaddith*, and *usuli* (that is, a master in the sciences of Islamic law, prophetic tradition, and the principles of law). His books are still studied as texts in the religious schools (*madaris*) of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The book alluded to above is generally referred to as *Usul al-Bazdawi*. It has a commentary by Ala al-Din al-Bukhari which is considered by many *ulama* to be the ultimate in *Hanafi usul al-fiqh* (that is, the principles of the holy law.)

<sup>51</sup>

<sup>52</sup>

<sup>53</sup> The Arabic verb *istima* in the present context is virtually impossible to translate adequately because it is one of those words which has several meanings—it is what the *ulama* call in Arabic *kalimah mushtarikah*. The question here is precisely which meaning applies. Abu Hanifah merely mentions the word in the context above without committing himself to *any* of its recognised meanings except that he precludes the meaning *istiqrar* (which we can translate in English as *to sit down, take up position, or ascend*), since this word implies a physical act; whereas, Allah is far above change and movement, and beyond space and time, as we have discussed throughout this treatise. The anthropomorphists—who represent a heretical "Muslim" sect, referred to by the orthodox *ulama* as the *Hashawiyyah* or by their generic name *mujassimah* or *mushabbihah*—ever insist that we have to understand the physical meaning here in order "to avoid interpretation." *Ulama*, who are experts in the principles of Islamic law (*usul al-fiqh*), have explained in their works that the designation of *any* of its meanings is an act of interpretation. al-Raghib al-Isfahani explained in his authoritative text on the meaning of the words of the Koran, *Mufradat al-Qur'an*, the word *istima* comprehends a multiplicity of literal meanings in addition to allegorical ones. The designation of a meaning that ascribes physical movement and change to the Lord of Glory is absolutely impermissible because such interpretation defies precepts established by definitive and explicit texts of the Koran and the *sunnah* (that is, the teachings of the Prophet, on whom be peace).

In order to make the matter somewhat intelligible to readers who know no Arabic, I am compelled to translate *istima* by something or other, and since the meaning *took control of* is consonant with the interpretation advanced by Asharite *imams* like Abu Bakr al-Baqillani, al-Juwaini, Imam al-Ghazali, and Izz al-Din Abd al-Salam, I have rendered it thus.



it. He not only maintains the Throne but all other things as well. Indeed, if He had experienced any need, He would have been incapable of originating the world and managing it, sharing such incapability with all originated things. If He was in need of sitting down (*julus*), or of a resting-place, or of fixity (*qarar*), then where was He, Exalted is He, before He originated the Throne? Indeed, He transcends all that, and is far, far beyond it [that is, beyond physically sitting on the Throne, and all such anthropomorphic absurdities].<sup>54</sup>

Observe how Abu Hanifah conveys the express text of the revelation (*ẓahir al-tanzīh*) without interpreting it, while at the same time maintaining the requirement of transcendence (*tanzīh*), disavowing Him of all that does not befit His Magnificent Essence. This is the way of the early predecessors<sup>55</sup> (*al-salaf*), and it is a safer (*aslam*) way; whereas, the way of the later *ulama* (*al-khalaḥ*) is to interpret (*ta`wil*)—some say that the way of interpretation is wiser (*ahkam*).

Ibn Daqiq al-Id (d. 625 hegira) took a middle course<sup>56</sup> ], for he said: “We accept *ta`wil* if the interpretation is feasible and compatible with the usage of the Arabs<sup>57</sup>; whereas, we refrain from *ta`wil* if the interpretation is far-fetched.”

Ibn Human also advocated a middle course, wherein he permitted *ta`wil* (interpretation) when there was any necessity to compensate for the inability of the common people to understand *tafwid* (entrusting the meaning to Allah while maintaining divine transcendence) and consequently were in the danger of falling into anthropomorphism (*tashbih*)<sup>58</sup>. However, he discouraged *ta`wil* when there was no such need for it. Knowing the temperament and intellectual level of the common people would assess that.<sup>59</sup>

Returning again to the text of al-Tahawi (see p. 22), we find that he continues by declaring: “The six directions do not encompass Him (*La tabwibi al-jibatu al-sittu*), nor do any other originated qualities (*al-mubtada`at*) apply to Him.”<sup>60</sup> Here al-Ghunaimi comments that the six direc-

<sup>54</sup> Imam al-Haramain al-Juwaini, formulated the matter thus; “Allah was and there was nought with Him. Then He created the Throne, and He is now as He was.” Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505 hegira / 1111 AD), one of Islam’s most illustrious spokesmen and an *imam* in the field of beliefs, alluded to Allah’s holy transcendence in a formula which was to become celebrated: “Neither is He in this world, nor outside of it; and neither is He contiguous with the world, nor separate from it.” (al-Ghazali, *al-Iqtsad fi al-I`tiqad*, Cairo: Subai`i, 1390 hegira), p.28.

<sup>55</sup> The Arabic term is *al-salaf* technically speaking refers to the first three generations of Muslims. The Prophet, (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) said: “The best generation is my generation, then the one that follows it, then the one that follows it.” It is a *hadith* which is beyond any doubt or at least its meaning is, since it has come to us through numerous sources, and through multiple chains of narration (*turuq*), that is, it affords us what the *ulama* call *al-tawatur al-ma`nawi* (recurrent meaning—see p. 7) which is a conclusive source of knowledge.

<sup>56</sup> He meant *middle course* with respect to *tafwid* (entrusting the meaning of obscure texts—*al-mutashabihat*—to Allah) and *ta`wil* (interpretation consonant with the principles of the holy law, and acceptable to the scholars of the Arabic language).

<sup>57</sup> He means by *the Arabs* the Arabs who spoke pure Arabic—they are restricted to the pre-Islamic, or early Islamic period]

<sup>58</sup> Ibn Humam points this out in his book, *al-Musayarah*.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ghunaimi, pp.73–74.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

tions do not encompass Him “since He existed before He created the six directions, and He exists now as He existed then, in contradistinction with all that is other than Him, [for direction encompasses that]”<sup>61</sup>

The Prophet of Islam—may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him—is reported to have said: “You will follow the nations (*umam*) which preceded you handspan by handspan, and cubit by cubit [that is, meticulously], so that, were they to crawl into a lizard’s hole, you would crawl in behind them.” They asked him, “Do you mean the People of the Book [Arabic—*Ahl al-Kitab*—an epithet of the Christians and Jews]”? He replied, “Who else?”<sup>62</sup>

Al-Tirmidhi reported that when the Messenger of Allah (the peace and blessing Allah be upon him) set out for the Battle of Hunain he passed by a tree on which the idolaters used to hang their weapons. It was called *the Hanging Tree (Dhatu al-Anwat)*. Some of those who were with him said, “O Messenger of Allah, make for us a *Hanging Tree* just like theirs.” He replied, “Allah transcends what you imagine about Him [that such a tree might have power to benefit you independent of Allah.] You are just like the people of Moses who said to him make for us a god just like theirs. [I swear] by Him in whose ‘hand’ is my soul you will adopt the customs of those who preceded you.” Razin reported the same *hadith* with the following addition: “...you will adopt the customs of those who preceded you in a completely identical manner so that if one of them had intercourse with his mother one of you would do that too. I really don’t know whether or not you will worship the [golden] calf [that is, the idol that the Israelites made and worshipped when Moses went up on Mount Sinai.]”<sup>63</sup>

The Jewish and Christian notion of the Divinity is clearly anthropomorphic. The Jews believe in a God Who is much like a person: occupying space, undergoing changes of state, moving about, ever acquiring new knowledge about the decisions of the rabbis and the activities of the Jews and mankind, subject to human foibles like anger and jealousy. Their anthropomorphism is evidenced in the Qur’an which tells the story of the Jews challenging Moses—on whom be peace—when he came down from Mount Sinai after the communion with his Lord: “We will not believe in you until we *see* our Lord.” The Christians either imagine that Jesus is literally the son of God, or at least that the Divine became incarnate, that is originated in time and space. They also believe that God’s transcendent attribute of knowledge, which their scholars call *logos*, translated and became incarnate in the person of Jesus—on whom be peace—this is sheer anthropomorphism. In fulfilment of the prophecy of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) it is inevitable that a section of the nation of Islam will also crawl into *the lizard’s hole* of anthropomorphism. Indeed, we are witnessing in the last fifty years a worldwide and relentless onslaught of anthropomorphic propaganda, the propaganda of resurgent *Hashawiyah*. They have returned in the fourteenth and fifteenth century of Islam (the twentieth century of the West) to direct a fervent and insidious campaign to pervert Islam from within. The last citadel of transcendence is beleaguered.

It is time to explain in some depth the ideas of heresy, and unbelief in Islam because the *ulama* have a precise meaning in mind when they employ these terms, and it is important that we have it clear in our minds. Al-Raghib in his *Mufradat al-Qur’an* stated that *kufr*, lexically speaking, means to hide or cover something. Night is described as *kafir* (which is the active participle

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> NB: Find reference.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-Athir reported this *hadith* in his *Jami al-Usul*, vol.10, p.34. He remarked that the report of al-Tirmidhi is rigorously authentic (*sahih*).

of *kufr*) because it hides forms, and so is the sower because he hides seeds in the earth. Likewise, ingratitude is called *kufr*, or *kufran* (which is a more intensive form of *kufr*), because it involves hiding a benefit, or a blessing by failing to show gratitude for it. Then, al-Raghib declares that the greatest *kufr* involves the denial of the uniqueness of Allah, and the truth of the *shari`ah*, and the prophethood [of the Last of the Prophets.]<sup>64</sup> That is because it amounts to concealing the greatness of Him Who gave us existence and awareness; it amounts to concealing the message that He has sent us, the message for which to acknowledge and follow He created us, it amounts to concealing the evidence that He has provided for us to prove the truth, and for which recognition He gave us adequate intelligence.

In other words unbelief and heresy implies the refusal to admit the reality of things the knowledge about which is certain. So in order to understand what constitutes unbelief and heresy, we have to appreciate what is knowledge, what knowledge is certain, and what are its causes.

Abu Hafs al-Nasafi (d. 537 h.)<sup>65</sup> mentioned in his celebrated treatise on *Belief* that knowledge is defined as a quality (*sifah*) by which a thing that is mentioned becomes manifested (that is, revealed) in whomsoever the quality exists. Alternately, he defined it as a quality that engenders discernment that is not susceptible to contradiction. Abu al-Baqa al-Anbari mentioned in his *al-Kulliyat*, which is a famous book of definitions, that the idea of manifestation in the definition above implies a revelation that is complete, and so the word excludes from the definition of knowledge opinion, ignorance, and the belief a person holds by blindly following another even if that other happens to be right.

Al-Nasafi then proclaimed that the causes of knowledge are three: the sound senses, true information (*al-ḥabir al-sadiq*), and reason (*al-aql*). Al-Taftazani in his commentary on al-Nasafi's work explained that the fact that they are only three was ascertained by induction (*al-istiḡra*); however, he mentioned that the fact may be inferred from the following considerations: if the cause of knowledge is other than ourselves, it must be a true report; if the cause is other than that and does not have understanding, it must be the senses; if it has understanding it must be reason.

Al-Nasafi continued to explain that true information, which is defined as information about a thing as it is in reality, is of two types. The first is the recurrent report (*al-ḥabir al-mutawattir*)<sup>66</sup> which is defined as something which the people take for granted, and talk about so freely and so much that no one can conceive that they might have got together to lie. Recurrence (*al-tawatur*) provides us with knowledge that is certain (*al-dururiyy*). An example of it is our knowledge about kings of long ago, or about distant lands. Al-Taftazani points out that we find that we have knowledge about Mecca, or Baghdad [which he assumes we haven't visited], and yet this knowledge is furnished purely by report. He says that this type of knowledge is available even to children and those who don't have the capacity to deduce or speculate. However, when

---

<sup>64</sup> Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, p.714.

<sup>65</sup> Umar ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Nasafi (d. 537 h.) of Samarkand was a Hanafi *imam* in the science of *Belief*, and the author of an epitome on *Belief*, known as *al-Aqa'id al-Nasafiyah*, which received much attention by the *ulama* who wrote numerous commentaries and super-commentaries on it. Among the famous commentaries on it are the commentaries of Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani and al-Khayali. Al-Taftazani's commentary has been studied at al-Azhar University for centuries; indeed, in religious schools (*madrassahs*) throughout the Muslim World, and it is still studied widely today in Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.

<sup>66</sup> *Mutawattir* is derived from *tawatur* which means *to follow in uninterrupted succession*. *Mutawattir* is the adjective, while, *tawatur* is the *masdar*; that is, the verbal noun, or infinitive. Knowledge is called *mutawattir* when it is not attained all at once, but successively and progressively.

circumstances do exist which make collaboration, or fabrication conceivable, as in the circumstance of war, or when such collaboration results in the gratification of some collective worldly desire, then *tawatur* does not afford certitude. Ordinary *tawatur*, like that which affords us conclusive knowledge of former kings, dispenses with *sanad*,<sup>67</sup> that is, the investigation into the existence of a continuous chain of authorities going back to the eyewitness of the event being narrated and the appraisal of the proficiency and integrity of the narrators. However, with the existence of reliable *sanads tawatur* will be effected by the concurrence of far fewer narrations than ordinary *tawatur*.

Al-Nasafi explained that the second type of true information is the report of a messenger [that is, a prophet commissioned by God] whose report is certified by a miracle (*mu`jizah*)<sup>68</sup> Such a report is the source of deductive knowledge as we shall explain

First, consider that the performance of a miracle is something that is normally humanly impossible because it defies what the Creator of the universe has established as the normal order of things in His universe. It is not conceivable that any one could reverse, suspend, or violate that order except its Author. It is He Who created the moon and caused it to orbit and shine in the night according to the plan that He determined. Certainly, no one other than He has the power to cause it to split in two before the eyes of mankind. Thus, when the pagan Arabs challenged the Prophet Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to split the moon in two if he were really the Messenger of Allah, they knew as he did that he had no power to do such a work. Therefore, when he pointed at it, and it *did* split in two for all the Arabs to see, they had no choice but to recognise that this miracle was enacted by God for the explicit purpose of certifying that the one who was claiming to be His messenger was so indeed, or, in other words, to certify his authority. By this and other miracles the Arabs were able to deduce that the one whose truthfulness had been established in so remarkable a way was truthful in all other matters about which he spoke,<sup>69</sup> such as the ordinances of law, and the realities beyond our experience, like the end of the world, the Judgement, the Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell, and so on.<sup>70</sup> So what al-Nasafi means when he says that the report of a messenger certified by a miracle is a cause of knowledge that we obtain by deduction is that first we establish

<sup>67</sup> For more on *sanad* see footnote 6, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Mu`jizah*, which I translated above as *miracle*, is the active participle of a verb which means *to make helpless*, or *render powerless*. The idea in naming the miracle so is that it defies humans to produce the likes of it. Indeed, because they are helpless to do so, they know that it is an act, or an intervention of God whose purpose is to certify the authority of His messenger. The miracle has to be distinguished from such seemingly supernatural acts that on occasion sorcerers or *yogis*, may produce, and which, as *hadith* inform us, the Antichrist will perform. These acts, much of which are performed with the aid of *jinn*, are trials of deception by which God tests His servants, since the perpetrator of such acts invariably invites to the worship of himself or to falsehood and evil; whereas, the prophets call people to God, and to the truth, and to what is good. The miracles of Muslim saints (*karamat al-auliya*) are an established fact, as al-Nasafi points out, in his epitome on *Belief*, as does al-Taftazani. The miracle of the saint is an honour that Allah bestows on His servant because he believes in and follows and obeys His Prophet. Thus, it indirectly confirms the prophethood and veracity of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

<sup>69</sup> Concerning what aspects of the Prophet's (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) miraculousness present themselves to us in the fifteenth century of Islam (the twenty-first century of the West) see appendix A, p...?

<sup>70</sup> Such realities are logically speaking possible. The One Who originated the marvellous universe is logically capable of originating the eschatological realities (that is, the realities of the next world). It may seem improbable to creatures who base probability on experience, but that does not preclude that the improbable is logically possible. Ashraf Ali Thanwi pointed out that if one were to have told a Bedouin last century that there were caravans of iron which move on roads of iron faster than gazelles, he would have deemed that most improbable because he had never heard nor seen a railroad train.

that a prophet is a messenger by the evidence of miracles, which we do by either the testimony of the senses in the circumstance of being an eye-witness, or by hearing a recurrent (*mutawatir*) report. Then we deduce that any report which is the report of the Messenger of the Reality, the Lord of Truth, and Author of the Universe, must be true.

NB: Continue with al-Nasafi's discussion here.

Anwar Shah Kashmiri in his classic book on the definition and range of unbelief and heresy, *Ikfar al-Mulhidin*, (Pakistan), defined unbelief (*kufr*) as the denial of the *shari`ah* (the holy law) of the Prophet Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

He defined *shari`ah* as what is established necessarily and categorically (*dururiyyan*) to be the teaching of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Being established necessarily (*dururiyyan*) depends on two factors: firstly, that its proof be conclusive (*qat`iyyi*); that is, not admitting any doubt; secondly, that the matter be famous among the Muslims so that both the commoners and the *ulama* know it, and not just the *ulama*. Whatever is in the Qur`an is conclusive (*qat`iyyi*) as far as its text is concerned; however, the meaning of Qur`anic texts which are ambiguous may be inconclusive (*ẓanniyyi*). The meaning of *hadith* which have numerous chains of transmission (*туруq*) is conclusive when the number of chains reaches the level which the *ulama* call *tawatir*. *Tawatir* (recurrence) is a vital term in the glossary of Islam; it refers to any report which is narrated by such a plenitude of narrators who have no reason to get together to forge anything, that reason can not countenance the possibility that the report is false or mistaken. An example of every day *tawatir* is our knowledge of the existence of Mongolia, or of Napoleon. We are not referring here to *al-tawatir al-lafẓi*; that is, textual recurrence, which refers to a multiplicity of narrations from a single source with identical wording, and which is exceedingly rare. Rather, we are concerned with *al-tawatir al-ma`nawi*; that is, recurrence of meaning; that is, informational content independent of wording. An example of it are the reports of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from a large number of *Companions* with a variety of wording which teach the obligation to follow the main community (*al-jama`ah*).

Rational propositions that are axiomatic (*al-tawatir al-aqli*) are also conclusive. An example of it is our knowledge that the whole is greater than the part, that two is half of four, that origination requires an originator and so on.

It is these two elements then, *tawatir* (recurrence) and being famous (or universal) which constitutes being a necessary or categorical precept in Islam (*al-dururiyyi*). Examples of it (that is, *al-dururiyyi*) are the transcendence of Allah and His attributes, the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the prophethood of Jesus and Moses (on whom be peace), the adulteration of Christianity by those who advocated the trinity, the resurrection of both body and spirit in the hereafter, the reality of Heaven and Hell, the reality of angels, and of *jinn*<sup>71</sup> (genies), the prohibition of alcohol, the taking and giving of interest, and so on. Thus, whoever denies one of the above precepts, or any other necessary precept of Islam (*dururiyyat*), commits an act of unbelief (*kufr*), and ceases at that moment to be a Muslim. If death overtakes a person in the state of *kufr*, Allah will never forgive him, and will punish him forever and ever. The belief that Allah may forgive those who died in *kufr* is itself *kufr* since it is

---

<sup>71</sup> *Jinn* are creatures that Allah created from fire as the Koran testifies. Like human beings they have free will and are subject to the judgement of Allah in the hereafter. They are normally invisible to humans, but are able to assume forms, both human and animal. They are responsible for many phenomenons that are generally called *supernatural* as well as many mental disorders, especially those that involve hallucinations. Soothsayers and sorcerers depend on the co-operation of the *jinn* for much of their ill-omened activities. *Jinn* are able to *possess* human beings, as both the Koran and *hadith* testify. However, the Prophet of Islam (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught us how to cure the possessed by reciting the Koran over them.

a clear-cut denial of the explicit texts of the Q ur`an. If a Muslim who has committed an act of *kufr* repents before he dies, he dies as a believer, and can expect what is promised for all believers: either Allah will forgive him on the Day of Judgement and cause him to enter Paradise forevermore, or punish him for his sins as long as He chooses, and then cause him to enter Paradise.

As for heresy (*zandaqah*), Taqi al-Din al-Subki mentioned that the *ulama* define it as manifesting belief while concealing *kufr*. Thus a person may consider himself a Muslim, but because he harbours a belief that is in conflict with the categorical precepts (*duurriyyat*) of Islam, he is in actuality an unbeliever, or properly speaking a heretic (*zindiq*). A person will not be excused from the judgement of heresy (*zandaqah*) by the fact that he believes in the sacred texts (*nusus*) while interpreting them in a way that contradicts the categorical precepts (*duurriyyat*) which every Muslim is responsible to know. Precisely because they are categorical or necessary in Islam, neither ignorance nor interpretation is an excuse. However, he will be excused from the judgement of heresy in matters that are not categorical

Having understood the foregoing, the reader is in a position to appreciate that whoever believes that Allah, exalted is He, occupies space, or moves about, or has limits, or is defined by direction, has committed unbelief (*kufr*), and his claim to be following the Q ur`an and the *hadith* does not save him from the judgement of heresy (*zandaqah*). Throughout this treatise we will use the terms *sectarian* and *schismatic* synonymously with *heretic*.

Before leaving this topic there is one more point to clarify. A heretic is a person who thinks that he is a Muslim, but is not one in the sight of the holy law because he believes what contradicts the categorical precepts of Islam; whereas, a person who disbelieves in Islam, but pretends to believe is a hypocrite (*munafiq*), while a Muslim who disbelieves after believing is an apostate (*murtadd*).

Al-Kauthari mentioned in a note on *al-Saif al-Saqil* that the book *Ikfar al-Mulhidin*, mentioned above was indispensable for every researcher on the question of what constitutes unbelief and heresy. Another important book on the subject is al-Ghazali's *al-Faisal al-Tafriqah bain al-Islam wa al-Zandaqah* (*The Discerning Factor between Islam and Heresy*). Both books are extant in Arabic. Furthermore, the question is discussed routinely in the longer books of *fiqh* (rules of the holy law).

The *Hashawiyyah* are continually citing in their harangues texts which they claim testify to God's supposed anthropomorphic attributes, particularly His supposed ascension on the Throne, and His supposed confinement to the sky, and His supposed descent to the lower heaven during the last third of the night. Because they pretend to be calling to the true and pure Islam of the early Muslims (*al-salaf*), and give the semblance of being knowledgeable about the Q ur`an and the *sunnah* and the opinions of the *ulama*, they often succeed in foisting their heresy on the unwary. Therefore, it is well to return to some of these texts and discuss them in some detail showing what they mean or may mean, and emphasizing what they definitely do not mean.

As we had occasion to mention in a footnote above, the Arabic word *istiwa* encompasses a number of literal and allegorical meanings. It is what the experts in the principles of the holy law (*usul al-fiqh*) call *kalimah mushtarikah*. Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 666 hegira), a *Hanafi* imam, and an expert of Arabic language, mentioned in his authoritative dictionary of Ara-

bic, *Mukhtār al-Sibāh*<sup>72</sup>, in his section on *sawa* that *istawa* can mean the following:

- to straighten what is crooked (*i`tidāl*)
- to mount or get on the back of an animal (*istiqrār*)
- to turn to or purpose something (*qasd*) as in the words of the Qur`ān “He turned to the sky.”
- to conquer, overcome, or subdue (*istila*). In corroboration of this last meaning, al-Rāzi cited a famous piece of Arabic poetry that translates: “Bishr conquered (*istawa*) Iraq without the use of sword or spilling any blood.”
- to complete something; for example, *istawa al-rajul* means that a person has completed his youth.

The great *imam* of the *Hanbali* school, Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Jauzi (d. 596 hegira) mentioned all the above meanings in his book: *Daf`u Shubuh al-Tasbbih bi Akaffu al-Tanzih* [which title we can translate as *The Repulsion of Anthropomorphism by the Hands of Transcendence*]<sup>73</sup>, and he referred to another verse of poetry that corroborates that *istawa* sometimes has the meaning *overpower*, or *conquer*: “*Idha ma ghaḥa qauman abaha harimahum; Wa adha ala ma mala-kubu qad istawa.* (When he fights a people he makes their women lawful, and in the full of day he confiscates (*istawa*) what they used to own.)”

Thereafter, Ibn al-Jauzi continues to remonstrate with the anthropomorphists over their heretical interpretation of *istawa*:

I declare that the predecessors (*al-salaf*) concurred in conveying this verse [that is, the verse of *istawa*] as it is without explaining it or interpreting it [that is, they exercise *tafwid*.]

Abd Allah ibn Wahb reported:

We were with Malik ibn Anis when a person entered and said, “O Abu Abd Allah [the agnomen of Malik—that is, another of his names], ‘The Merciful ascended<sup>74</sup> (*istawa*) the Throne.’ How did He ascend?” Malik bowed his head and became seized with sweat. Then he raised his head and said, “The Merciful made *istawa*<sup>75</sup> on the Throne as He has described. However, one may not ask how. ‘How’ does not apply

<sup>72</sup> *Mukhtār al-Sibāh* is an abridgement of al-Jauhari’s *Sibāh al-Lughah*. Al-Suyuti mentioned in his book *al-Muzhīr*: “*Al-Sibāh* holds that place among the dictionaries of language that Arabic language which *al-Bukhārī* holds among the books of *hadīth*.”

<sup>73</sup> In this notable work, Ibn al-Jauzi denounces those *Hanbali ulama* who believed in and preached anthropomorphism. Then, one by one, he dealt with those obscure or ambiguous texts (*al-mutashabihāt*) which the *Hashawiyah* adduce to “prove” their heresy. He showed, in most cases, that they have failed to understand the texts. He showed that in some cases the texts of *hadīth* (prophetic tradition) that they adduce are forged (*maudu`ab*), suspect (*wahī*), or not even *hadīth*, but the sayings (*aqwāl*) of Companions (*Sahābah*) of the Prophet, or the Followers (*Tabi`un*) of the Companions.

<sup>74</sup> Here I have translated *istawa* as *ascended* because the questioner has a physical meaning in mind, as is learned from Malik’s denunciatory answer to him.

<sup>75</sup> Here I have not translated *istawa*, because Malik’s stance is noncommittal. He conveys the word without specifying a particular meaning for it.

to Him. Moreover, you are a bad person, a heretic<sup>76</sup> (*sahib bid`ah*).’ [Then he turned to the people and said,] Get him out of here,” and they put him out.

Some people later on construed the text *istawa ala al-arsh* in a way which complies with the understanding of the senses saying: “The Merciful ascended the Throne in person (*bidhatih*)”; whereas, *in person* is an addition which has not been transmitted [to us from the predecessors (*al-salaf*)]. It is something they inferred based on their perceptions, because whoever ascends a thing, ascends it in person.

Abu Hamid [one of the *Hashawiyyah* who claimed to follow the *Hanbali* School<sup>77</sup>] said:

*Istawa* implies coming into contact (*mumasah*)—it means *to sit down (qu`ud)*. Some of our colleagues [that is, the *Hanbali ulama*] held that Allah, high is He and exalted, fills His Throne, and that He sits in it, and that He will seat our Prophet—the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him—beside Him on the Throne on the Day of Resurrection.

Abu Hamid remarked, “The descent (*al-nuzul*)<sup>78</sup> implies a movement from one place to another (*intiqa*).”

I declare [Ibn al-Jauzi says]: According to what Abu Hamid says His person must be smaller than the Throne<sup>79</sup>! What a preposterous claim! We at least are not anthropomorphists (*mujassimah*)!

Ibn al-Zaghuni [another one of the *Hashawiyyah* who ascribed to the *Hanbali* School] was asked, “Have you given Him a new attribute after He created the Throne which He did not have prior to creating it?”

He replied:

No. Rather, He created the world by His attribute *below (taht)*, and so the world in respect to Him became below. Now, if one of two things acquires the attribute of below, the other necessarily acquires the attribute of above. It is evident that places

---

<sup>76</sup> He called him a *heretic* because he imagined that the Merciful, like bodies, is created and contingent, and thus one might ask about Him as one asks about bodies, “How did he do something or other?” Whereas, the truth of the matter is that one can not ask about God, Who is the Necessary Existent, *how, when or where* as we have amply discussed throughout this treatise.

<sup>77</sup> Abu Hamid is also the author of a book that is replete with the worst kind of *tajsim* (anthropomorphism). Ibn al-Jauzi refutes him throughout the book we are quoting from: *Daf`u Shubuh al-Tashbih*. Abu Hamid claimed to belong to the *Hanbali* School of law, and he pretended that the anthropomorphic notions that he advocated were the beliefs of Imam Ahmad, the founder of the school. Ibn al-Jauzi, who is one of the *Hanbali* School’s great *imams*, emphatically absolved Imam Ahmad of the blasphemy of *tajsim*, and observed that Abu Hamid had a lot of *audacity* in even claiming to be a *Hanbali*.

<sup>78</sup> *Descension* is a reference to a *hadith* which the *Hashawiyyah* construe to mean that Allah descends to the lowest heaven during the last third of the night. However, the orthodox *ulama*, construe it to mean that Allah’s mercy descends, or that He causes an angel, or a crier to descend. All of them interpret the text—and there are a good number of authentic versions of it—in a way which does not conflict with the definitive verses (*mubkamah*) of the Koran, nor the reports of the Prophet which are conclusive (*mutawatir*), nor the categorical precepts of Islam (*al-duruiyyat*).

<sup>79</sup> Someone aptly observed that the anthropomorphists, who consider that God is physically seated on the Throne, should renounce the sacred formula of Muslims *Allah is greater (Allahu akbar)*, and say “The Throne is greater.”



do not exist in His Essence (*dhatibi*), nor does His Essence exist in places; therefore, it follows that He is separate from places—indeed, in such a case, He *has* to be separate. Thus, because He said *then He ascended (thumma istawa)*, we learned that He is qualified by the direction *above*.

Then Ibn al-Zaghuni remarked, “It is necessary that His Essence (*dhatuhu*) have an end (*nihayah*), and a limit (*ghayah*) which He knows.”

I declare [Ibn al-Jauzi says]: The man doesn’t know what he’s saying. If he presumes that there is an extreme limit (*ghayah*), and a separation between the Creator and the created, he assigns limits to Him, and thereby imagines Him to be a body. [This is ironic] because al-Zaghuni himself admits that God is not a substance (*janbar*), since [as he argues] a substance is necessarily qualified by location, then he turns around and determines a location for Him to occupy!

I declare [Ibn al-Jauzi says]: This talk is nonsense and sheer anthropomorphism! This man doesn’t know what is necessary of the Creator, and what is impossible of Him. Indeed, His existence is not like the existence of atoms (*jawahir*) and bodies which must have a location. “Below” and “above” only apply to what can be faced and gotten opposite to. Now, what is gotten opposite to has of necessity to be bigger, smaller, or equal to what is opposite it—but this is what applies to bodies. Whatever faces bodies may be contacted, and whatever can be in contact with bodies, or be separate from them is originated since it is known [in theology] that the proof that atoms (*jawahir*) are originated is their capacity to be contacted or separate. Thus, whoever permits [contact and separation] for God makes Him originated. If they maintain that He may not be originated in spite of His being susceptible to contact and separation, we will not be left with any means to demonstrate that atoms are originated. Furthermore, if we conceive of a thing transcending space and location, and another requiring space and location, then we may neither declare the two to be contiguous nor separate.

Indeed, contiguity and separateness are among the consequences of occupying space, and it has already been established that union and separation are among the inseparable attributes of whatever occupies space. However, The Real, high and exalted is He, may not be described by the occupation of space because, if He did occupy space, He would either need to be at rest in the space He occupied, or moving from it; whereas, He may neither be described by movement nor stillness; nor union nor separation [since these are the attributes of things which are contingent and originated, not of that which is necessary and eternal]. Whatever is contiguous or separate must have a finite existence. Then, what is finite has to have dimensions, and what has dimensions needs that which particularises its dimensions [and whatever has a need can not be the God and Originator of the cosmos].

Furthermore, from another point of view, it can be pointed out that He is neither in this world nor outside it because entering and exiting are inseparable attributes of things which occupy space—entering and exiting are just like movement and stillness and all other accidents which apply to bodies only.

Notice that Ibn al-Zaghuni claims above that He did not create things in His Essence (*dhat*); therefore, he presumes it is established that they are separate from Him. [In refutation of this claim] we declare [that is, Ibn al-Jauzi]: The being of the Transcendent God is beyond having things created in it, or that things should occur in it. Now, material separation with respect to Him requires of Him what it requires of substances [namely, that He be defined by finite limits]. Indeed, the definition of location (*haiḥ*) is

that what occupies it prevents a similar thing from being found there; [whereas, nothing is similar to God in any way].

It is apparent that what [these antropomorphists] presume is based on sensory analogy. Their inability to conceive of a reality beyond material experience led them into bewilderment, and to liken the attributes of the Transcendent God to the attributes of originated things [which folly in Arabic is termed *tashbih*]. Indeed, the bewilderment of some of them reached such a degree that they declared: “The reason God mentioned His ascension (*istawa*) on the Throne is that it is the nearest thing to him.” Obviously, this is preposterous because nearness in terms of distance can not be conceived except in the case of bodies. Others declared that the Throne is opposite what confronts it of the Divine Essence (*dhat*), but that it is not opposite the entire *dhat*. This, of course, is explicit in saying that God is like a body (*tajsim*), and that He is susceptible to division. I am at a loss to understand how a person who believes such heretical nonsense has the audacity to ascribe to the *Hanbali* School of law!<sup>80</sup>

Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri refuted the antropomorphists in respect of their pretensions that the Transcendent occupies space and is described by direction in his well-known book, *al-Fasl bain al-Firaq*:

The word of the Transcendent, “Say [to the unbelievers, O Muhammad]: ‘To Whom belongs the heavens and the earth?’ Tell them: ‘It belongs to Allah.’”—*al-An`am*: 12, teaches us that space and all that is in it belongs to Allah. His words, “There is no one in the heavens and the earth except he will come to the Merciful [on the Day of Judgement] as a slave, [or worshipper,<sup>81</sup> that is acknowledging his slavehood to Allah.]”—*Maryam*: 93, provides that whatever dwells in the heavens and the earth are slaves of Allah. The words of the Transcendent, “And His are whatever lives in the night and the day.”—*al-An`am*: 13, indicates that time and all that is in it are the possessions of Allah, exalted is He. The foregoing Qur`anic texts show that He, Who is above all imperfection and inadequacy, transcends time and space, as was pointed out by Abu Muslim al-Isbahani, and al-Fahr al-Razi, and others; otherwise, He would have to be the possessor and the possessed, the worshipper and the worshipped.

He, the Transcendent says: “He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He subdued (*istawa*) the Throne. He knows what enters the earth and what come out of it, and what comes down from the sky and what goes up to it. He is with you wherever you are, and Allah sees what you do.”—*Hadid*: 4. The mention here in a single verse of both *istawa* [translated in the above verse as *subdued*<sup>82</sup>], and togetherness (*ma`iyyah*)—the reference is to the words *He is with you*—conclusively indicates that *istawa* does not have the meaning of *place ascension* (*al-istiqrar al-makam*); otherwise, it would preclude the togetherness [mentioned in the same verse.] Just as we have to interpret togetherness [to avoid an impermissible material implication], we have to interpret *istawa* [to avoid a material implication.]<sup>83</sup>

---

80

81 The Arabic word *abd* (عبد) has two connotations—one is a slave, the other is a worshipper as al-Nasafi mentioned in his commentary. In fact, the *ulama* define worship to be the ultimate in submission, a definition which one can easily see as derived from slavehood.

82 *Istila* (استلوا)—following the commentary *Mudarik al-Tanzil* by al-Nasafi who is following the orthodox *ulama* who advocate interpretation of the ambiguous texts, rather than entrusting its meaning to Allah (*tafwid*) while disallowing any antropomorphic implication.

83 NB: Give original reference here.

## Appendix A

Concerning those aspects of the Prophet's miraculousness which are verifiable in our times

One may ask what miracles are there in the fifteenth century of Islam (the twenty-first century of the West) that certify the veracity of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). I may affirm that one the greatest miracles of the Prophet Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is a standing miracle—the miracle of the Qur'an. The Qur'an challenged the Arabs, who were masters of oratory and poetry, to bring three verses (*ayah*) like it, if it were forged by other than God. They could not, and can not, because the Qur'an on account of its superhuman eloquence, its immaculate Arabic, its supernal beauty, its rapturous rhythm, its eerie cadence, its soul-piercing imagery, its profound wisdom, its peerless conciseness, its incontrovertible logic, its time-proved predictions, its perfect accuracy in factual matters of history and nature, its just decrees, and the equity of its detailed law is utterly and defiantly inimitable. The pagan Arabs, who at first opposed their Prophet, knew that the Qur'an was unearthly. That is why they tried to dissuade people from listening to it. For some time they posted men at the entrances to Mecca to intimidate visitors from listening to Muhammad by telling them that he was a powerful enchanter who separated father from son, and husband from wife. Sometimes they alleged that he had learned the Qur'an from the *jinn*; sometimes that he was a poet gone mad. However, all their efforts were of no avail, for the Qur'an can not be contained; it is the explosion of the infinite in the confines of the finite; the thunderbolt of eternity in the meadow of time. Its recitation on the sands of Arabia fourteen hundred years ago quickened hearts that were dead; in less than twenty years it transformed a nation sunk in paganism, idolatry, and depravity into a legion of saints and heroes, men whose holiness, ethics, and unworldliness inspired, and inspires, all who hear about them. The Qur'an breathed into heathen souls such knowledge of, and such love for the transcendent God, that they turned their backs on the world, and courted death for His good pleasure. The Qur'an itself eulogised them: "Among the believers there are men who honoured the pledge they had made to Allah [to stand beside His Prophet steadfastly.] Some of them have died [or been killed in the Path of Allah], while others still wait [for that], and they do not waver in the least."<sup>84</sup>—*al-Abzab*: 23. Within two or three decades after the death of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), men who had witnessed the revelation of the Qur'an recited it to eager throngs in Iraq, Persia, Egypt, North Africa, Abyssinia, and *Khurasan*. Overnight those territories blossomed with Islam. They surrendered not to the sword, but to the inimitable Qur'an.<sup>85</sup>

Another aspect of the Qur'an that is a standing miracle is its indelibility, its inalterability: its invulnerability to extinction, or change. The Qur'an proclaims that Allah will preserve it

---

<sup>84</sup> All interpolations into the translation of this verse (*ayah*) are taken from the commentary of al-Suyuti.

<sup>85</sup> Consider in corroboration of this fact the following testimony of non-Muslim writers and researchers:

- History makes it clear however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims, sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated.—De Lacy O'Leary, *Islam at the Crossroads*, (London, 1923), p. 8.
- No other religion in history spread so rapidly as Islam....The West has widely believed that this surge of religion was made possible by the sword. But no modern scholar accepts that idea, and the *Qur'an* is explicit in support of the freedom of conscience.—James A. Michener, *Islam—the Misunderstood Religion*.
- Incidentally these well-established facts dispose of the idea fostered in Christian writings that the Muslims wherever they went, forced people to accept Islam at the point of the sword.—Lawrence E. Brown, *The prospects of Islam* (London, 1944)

forever: “Verily, It is We Who have sent down this revelation, and, verily, it is We Who will preserve it [from being adulterated, or distorted, or having anything added to it, or removed from it.]<sup>86</sup>”—*al-Hijr*: 9. More than fourteen hundred years have passed since this proclamation was made; yet, the Q ur`an remains as it was revealed—not a word has been changed or lost. Whoever studies copies of the Q ur`an from around the world today or copies from different periods will find, indeed, that the Q ur`an is one.

A third aspect of its miraculousness is the ease with which it can be memorised. The Q ur`an refers to this providential facility in the following *ayah*: “Verily, we have made this Q ur`an easy to remember. Is there any who will remember it?”—*al-Qamar*: 18. Imam al-Suyuti explains in his commentary that *remember* (*al-dhikr*) in the context of this *ayah* means both *to memorise* and *to take a lesson or to take heed*. In every generation there have been hundreds of thousands of them who know the entire Q ur`an by heart, while millions of Muslims know considerable portions of it. Non-Arab children can learn the entire Q ur`an by heart word-perfect without understanding any Arabic. Indeed, the Q ur`an is so firmly registered in their collective memory that were any speaker or writer to misquote the Q ur`an in any typical gathering of Muslims, he would invariably be noticed, or corrected on the spot. Thus, misquoting the Q ur`an is a matter of considerable embarrassment even in the decadence of Muslim society today as I had occasion to point out in a previous footnote.

Apart from the Q ur`an there are other aspects of miraculousness which attest that Muhammad (the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) was commissioned by the Lord of Transcendence and Glory. One of these manifests itself to those who study his sayings; it is his inimitable eloquence, his incomparable conciseness, and his unparalleled lucidity that far transcends the abilities of the finest speakers the Arabs ever produced.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the *ulama* recognise two inimitabilities (*i`jaz*) among the proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): his inimitability, and the inimitability of the Q ur`an. They are considered two because the language of the Q ur`an is notably different from the language of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). That is because the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is not the author of the Q ur`an—it was only revealed to him. This disparity between the language of the Q ur`an and the language of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is another aspect of the Q ur`an that certifies that its author is God, the Lord of Glory, who taught men how to speak.

The true predictions that the Prophet (the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) made are another marvel that testifies to the reality of his divine commission. Some of these were fulfilled in his lifetime, some after his death, some were only fulfilled in the fourteenth century of Islam (the twentieth century of the West), and others will be fulfilled in this the fifteenth century of Islam (the twenty-first century of the West). Those that were fulfilled in his lifetime were legion. We will mention only two by way of example. On the eve of the Battle of Badr, which was the first confrontation between the pagan Arabs of Mecca from the tribe of *Quraysh* and the incipient Muslim community at Medina, the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) pointed to the spots where the dead bodies of some seventy luckless men of *Quraysh* would lie on the following day, and as he pointed to each spot he named the person

<sup>86</sup> Interpolations into the translation of this verse (*ayah*) are from the commentary of al-Suyuti.

<sup>87</sup> The Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said, “The Arabs are a nation of orators, and I am the most eloquent of the Arabs.” Indeed, eloquence is a quality that God ensures His messengers have so that they may speak in a way that will penetrate the hearts of mankind, and make clear what confuses them. The Prophet’s (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) inimitable eloquence is so proverbial amongst the Arabs that they have coined a special term for it: *jami`u al-kalimi*.

who would lie there dead, and so it came to pass.

After the battle, which the Muslims won, a number of prisoners fell to their hands. Among them was Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the two sons of Abbas. It was decided that the prisoners would be permitted to ransom themselves; thereupon, the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) set a high rate for his uncle Abbas and his two cousins. Abbas protested that he didn't have that kind of money; whereupon, the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) reminded him of a secret conversation Abbas had had with his wife Umm Fadl when he was taking leave of her to set out for the Battle of Badr. Abbas had consigned a large amount of money to her instructing her how to disburse it in the event of his being killed in battle. The Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told him what he had said to her and how much money he had entrusted to her and where she hid the money. When Abbas heard that he was astounded, for, as he himself declared, none knew about that money except himself and his wife. Recognising that to be a veritable sign of his prophethood, he jubilantly professed his belief in him and accepted Islam. Still, the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) required him to pay the ransom because he had fought against him as one of the unbelievers. The conversion of Abbas and the naming of the slain are events that occurred in the midst of a throng of *Companions*. The narration of these and other events by a number of *Companions* to the next generation; that is, the generation of the *Followers*,<sup>88</sup> took place during the lifetime of a great number of *Companions* who were eyewitnesses to the miracles. Yet, none of them contended with the narrators about the facts they narrated. Their acquiescence is a form of *tawatur*; it was as if all of the *Companions* had narrated the event. It should be borne in mind that both the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the Qur'an emphatically condemned lying. Indeed, one of the rare examples of verbatim *tawatur* is the *hadith* of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): "Whoever lies about me let him be prepared to take his seat in Hell." Those who study the lives and teachings of the *Companions* are deeply impressed by their scrupulosity and utter truthfulness. In addition to all of this, one should not forget that the narrations we are referring to are qualified by the exacting requirements of *sanad*.<sup>89</sup>

There exist in the records of *hadith* an abundance of predictions the fulfilment of which came after the death of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The miraculousness of these predictions is more stupendous for us than those that were fulfilled during his lifetime because the first involves the mention of a world and circumstances he could not know about; whereas, the second involves a world and circumstances about which he at least had an idea. An example of a prediction that was fulfilled long after his death is his prophecy about the battle with the sect of *Khawarij* at the River *Nabrwand* in Iraq. In the prophecy about the places of the slain which we mentioned above, the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was at least informed about the existence of the army of *Quraysh*; whereas in the case of the *Khawarij*, the very knowledge of their advent was miraculous, let alone the details and circumstances concerning them. The Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had described to Ali, whom he knew would fight the Battle of *Nabrwand*, the details and circumstances that would attend this battle. Indeed, the circumstances were such as would confound even the wisest of men. That is because the enemy comprised an army of seemingly pious men many of whom had memorised the entire Qur'an and spent long hours of the night reciting it. They declined to show allegiance to Ali, who had become the Caliph, because Ali had agreed to arbitrate with Muawiyah who had refused to honour the Caliphate of Ali. The *Khawarij* insisted that such arbitration was not lawful for a Caliph who was bound to follow only

<sup>88</sup> The *Followers* are defined as those Muslims who met a *Companion*. Most *ulama* do not require a person to narrate anything from the *Companion*, although some do.

<sup>89</sup> For more on *sanad* see footnote 6, p. 4.

the Qur'an (as if the Qur'an did not sanction arbitration). When Ali went out to face the *Khawarij*, who, according to accounts narrated by al-Tabarani, numbered eight or ten thousand men, he and his men heard at night an enormous sound like the buzzing of bees coming from the camp of the *Khawarij*; it was the sound of a legion of men reciting the Qur'an. The Companions of Ali were nonplussed; they asked themselves how they could fight against men who knew and loved the Qur'an. However, Ali stood firm because the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had counselled him thoroughly about these men and this battle at the river *Nahrwand*. Ali knew that they read the Qur'an, but the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had told him that it would not get past their collarbones because they had "shot out of Islam the way the arrow shoots through the quarry." That was because they had rejected the rightful Imam and had broken away from the main community. Ali knew that the *Khawarij* would not cross to his side of the river, and he knew that they would be destroyed almost to a man. Several times his men rushed in upon him to inform him that the *Khawarij* were coming across the river, but Ali flatly denied it telling them that they would never cross, and indeed the information turned out to be false. Furthermore, Ali knew that among the *Khawarij* was a great fiend, the man who had instigated them, the abominable *Dhu Huwaisarah*. The Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had mentioned a sign which distinguished him: his arm was deformed, for the lower arm was unformed, while the stump of the upper arm terminated in a formation which resembled a woman's breast. For this reason he was also nicknamed *Dhu Thadyay*. Ali knew that *Dhu Thadyay*, or *Dhu Huwaisarah*, would be amongst the slain after the battle, for both he and many other *Companions* had heard the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) declare that *Dhu Huwaisarah* would be on the side of the transgressors; whereas, those who opposed him would be in the right. The Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had emphasised that, and Ali knew that, although the sun didn't have to come up from the east, what the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said *had* to come true. Ali called the *Khawarij* to surrender, and offered that whoever chose to withdraw before the battle to Basra or Kufa could freely do so. Thousands of them in fact left. As they prepared for the battle, many of the *Companions* of Ali had grave doubts about the propriety, or even lawfulness, of what they were doing, and when they viewed the appalling carnage after the battle, their doubts were even more acute. Ali sent them to find the body of *Dhu Thadyay*, knowing that when his body was produced, the righteousness of their undertaking would be confirmed. Twice his men came back without finding *Dhu Thadyay*, but Ali was not dismayed; on the third time he told them not to leave a single body unturned. Sure enough they found him under a pile of bodies by a stinking bog. They brought the body back to Ali, and when he saw that it was *Dhu Thadyay*, he fell down in prostration to Allah in thankfulness, and his *Companions* did so too; their doubts and consternation had been removed by a miraculous confirmation, the fulfilment of a prophecy made some forty years previously by the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who obviously knew all about that critical and confusing episode.<sup>90</sup>

Another confirmation had been made previous to *Nahrwand*. It was on the occasion of the Battle of Siffin in which Ali, who was the Caliph, fought Muawiyah, who formerly was Umar and Uthman's governor in Syria. The Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had predicted that his *Companion*, Ammar ibn Yasir, would be killed by rebels (*al-fiat al-baghiyah*). This prophecy was famous among the *Companions*; the knowledge of it was *recurrent (mutawatir)*, so when they found Ammar slain on the side of Ali, they knew that Ali was right and Muawiyah was wrong. Some of them who had been on the side of Muawiyah left him on account of that.

---

<sup>90</sup> Most of the information upon which I have based this narration is gleaned from some ninety pages of *hadith* on the *Khawarij* which were reported by the author of the *hadith* collection *Kanz al-Umal*. *Kanz al-Umal* is based on three books of Imam al-Suyuti: *al-Jami'u al-Kabir*, *al-Jami'u al-Saghir*, *al-Ziyadat*. In fact, it is those very books united and arranged according to chapters with common subjects rather than according to alphabetical order as in al-Suyuti's originals. *Kanz al-Umal* comprises nearly fifty thousand *hadith*!

Another example of a prophecy that was fulfilled after his death was his prediction of the martyrdom of Uthman and Umar. Once when the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was on Mount Uhud, which overlooks Medina, with Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman, the mountain began to shake; whereupon, the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told it to be still for on it there were none other than a prophet, a saint (*sidiq*), and two martyrs. As is well known in Islamic history, Umar and Uthman were assassinated while they were Caliphs.

Suraqah ibn Malik was greedy to collect the bounty of one hundred camels which *Quraysh* had announced it would reward anyone who produced for them Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) dead or alive after he miraculously escaped from their clutches when they were about to assassinate him. Suraqah sighted Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and Abu Bakr on a lonely route towards the coast as they headed for Medina, and he galloped after them except that the front legs of his horse kept sinking mysteriously into the sand causing it to stumble throwing him to the ground. Blinded by greed, Suraqah would mount the horse and try again; that happened so many times Suraqah started to understand that God, the Lord of Mankind, was protecting Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). On the last occasion, he picked himself up from the dirt within earshot of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and called out promising that he would not harm him. He approached the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and professed his Islam; thereupon, the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked him what he would do when one day he would wear the bracelets of the *Khusrah*, the mighty ruler of Persia. Suraqah asked him if it would be so, and the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) assured him and gave him a memorandum to give to the Muslim leader that his word should be honoured. As it turned out, Umar was the Caliph at the time the Muslim forces took Madyan, the capital of Persia, and the treasures of the *Khusrah* fell into their hands. When Suraqah told Umar the story and showed him the memorandum, Umar had the bracelets given to him.

NB: Mention some of the predictions which were not fulfilled until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of Islam.

As for the life of the Prophet of Islam (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a profusion of reports about various aspects of his miraculousness has come down to us in a manner that fulfils the conditions of *tawatur* (*recurrence*) which I described above. One luminous facet of his miraculousness was his sublime character, his profound wisdom, his godly simplicity, his incessant otherworldliness, his unsurpassing goodness, his magnanimity, his mercy—qualities that were tested under persecution, in war, in wedlock, in destitution, in fabulous wealth, in weakness, in power, in humiliation and in triumph. The character of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) soared beyond the imagination, let alone the *reach* of the best of mankind. NB: Give some examples here.

Urwah ibn Mas`ud, the ambassador of *Quraysh* to Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on the field of *Hudaibiyyah*, returned to *Quraysh* and proclaimed: "I have seen the Chosroes [the king of Persia] and Caesar and Negus [the king of Abyssinia] in their kingdoms, but never have I seen a king among a people like Muhammad among his companions. If he performs his ablution, they would not let the water from it fall to the ground [for they catch it and wipe it on themselves]. If he spit, they would have the mucous to rub their faces with it. If he spoke, they would lower their voices. They would not abandon him for anything in any case. He now offers a reasonable plan so do what you want." When Urwah proclaimed this to *Quraysh*, he was not yet a Muslim. At *Hudaibiyyah* the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) shaved his head in token of Allah's acceptance of the minor

pilgrimage which he had intended to perform, but which *Quraysh* refused to let him do. Highly authentic *hadith* in the collection of *al-Bukhari*, and many other collections, describe how he had his hairs distributed among his eager *Companions* who contended with one another for the honour of being given a few of his treasured hairs since they kept them as holy relics and blessed keepsakes (*tabrrikan bibi*).<sup>91</sup> What the *Companions* witnessed of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explains in part why they venerated<sup>92</sup> him so intensely. Sometimes they saw him standing in the sun without any shadow, and they could tell when he had passed through any of the lanes or ways of Mecca and Medina because the way would become haunted with the fragrance of roses. They heard animals speak to him, and on one occasion some of them heard their plates of food praising the Lord of Glory. The roasted sheep that a Jewess had prepared for him and his *Companions* on their conquest of the Jewish settlement of *Khybar* spoke to him in front of them to tell him that it had been poisoned. He used to lean against a palm tree when he delivered the Friday sermon (*khutbah*); then, when the *Companions* brought him a *mimbar* (a podium-like construction consisting of three steps and a platform) and he neglected the palm tree, it started to whine plaintively until the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went to it and stroked it consoling it that it would be his *mimbar* in Paradise; thereupon, the palm tree became quiet. This transpired in the midst of a multitude of the *Companions*. Long after the death of the Prophet (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) the Muslims continued to love and reverence the palm and the stump of the palm when it died until it was destroyed by fire. He quenched his thirsty army with water that gushed from between his

---

<sup>91</sup> NB: Mention the Koranic story of the relics of Moses and Aaron that the Israelites carried in the Ark.

<sup>92</sup> According to the modern *Hashawiyyah* this would be worship of other than Allah because they pretend that the mere veneration of anything is worship. However, their definition of worship is absurd, obviously; otherwise, even a child's veneration of his teacher or grand parents would be polytheism (*shirk*); that is, the worship of other than Allah. According to the *ulama* of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama`ah* (*the People of Orthodoxy and the Main Community*), "worship" means showing the extreme of humility which none deserves except the one who shows us the extreme of beneficence (*ghayat al-ijdal*) as al-Raghib mentioned in his *Mufradat al-Qur`an*, p. 542. Al-Jurjani explains in his *al-Ta`rifat* that *the extreme of humility* means to recognise our utter helplessness in other than Allah; that is, to realise that neither we, nor anything in creation can harm us or benefit us except by the will and power of God.

On the other hand, *veneration* merely implies *the showing of humility*. When the veneration of other than God is in obedience to God, or in the knowledge that such veneration is pleasing to God it is, in fact, a form of worshipping God Himself. Al-Suyuti cited the following *hadith* in his *al-Jami`u al-Saghir*:

Five things are worship: [eating] little food, sitting in the mosque, looking at the Kaaba, looking at the Koran, and looking at the face of an *alim* (one who is learned in the sciences of religion).—reported in *Musnad al-Firdaus* from Abu Hurayrah. Al-Suyuti mentioned that its *sanad* is weak.

Five things are worship: looking at the Koran, looking at the *Kaaba*, looking at ones parents, looking at the water of *Zamzam* [from the holy well of Mecca], and looking in face of an *alim* [with love]; [such worship] causes sins to be shed.—*al-Daraqutni*

There are many *hadith* which teach us to venerate those who deserve it. In fact, the Koran tells us that when Allah created Adam, He commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam, and they did so, except Satan, who refused, and, consequently, was cursed and cast from heaven. Presumably, the modern *Hashawiyyah* consider Satan to be a monotheist (*muwabbid*) and the angels polytheists (*musbrikun*)! Obviously, the angels were commanded to prostrate to Adam in veneration of him, and their obedience to Allah in so doing was belief and worship; whereas, Satan's belief that it was right to disobey God was an act of sheer unbelief in the justice and majesty of God. Then again, the Koran tells us that when Jacob (peace be upon him) and his sons entered the court of Joseph (peace be upon him), they fell down to him in prostration. Jacob (peace be upon him) was a prophet of God; do the modern *Hashawiyyah* want us to believe that Jacob (peace be upon him) committed an act of unbelief (*kufri*) and polytheism (*shirk*)? God rescue us! Jacob (peace be upon him) was a perfect example to mankind.



fingers, and he filled to repletion troop after troop of his companions from a single vessel of food. He travelled to Jerusalem during a few moments of the night, and when scoffers in the morning challenged him to describe the city to which he had never been before, he described it there at the Holy Precinct of Mecca before a crowd of staunch unbelievers in such detail that it were as if he were looking at it from on high. Then he told them of the positions of their caravans that were returning from Palestine, and when they would arrive back in Mecca. Moreover, he told them that he had passed over so-and-so, who had lost his camel at such and such a place, and he sighted the camel in a *wadi* nearby. They waited for those caravans outside the city, lest any one should get the chance to prompt them to go along with Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)'s story. The caravan's arrived as he had predicted and the person who had lost his camel not only affirmed that he had lost it where Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had told them, but he informed them of a strange thing—that he had heard the voice of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saying that the camel is in such and such a *wadi*, and that when he went there he indeed found his camel there.

The pagans had been overjoyed when they first heard the proclamation of his night journey to Jerusalem because they thought that now they could catch him with a lie. But their joy turned to dismay when what they thought would be his undoing proved to be his crown of triumph, for he vindicated himself and the story travelled like the wind to every corner of Arabia. Those who had seen the clear signs of his authority and his truthfulness did not doubt the rest of the story; namely, that he ascended from Jerusalem in the company of Gabriel on a celestial mount to tour the high empyrean, to witness the angels, and Heaven and Hell, the Throne of Allah, and the wonders of unseen realities. Some reports describe it as an odyssey of fifty thousand years, yet he returned to his bed in Mecca the Blessed while the bed was still warm. The reports of this fabulous event rippled throughout Arabia because they were not the reports of a madman, nor of a poet, nor of an impostor whose motive was self-aggrandisement, or power, or wealth because Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the most truthful and the most selfless and ascetic of men. The people of Arabia soon learned that the utterances of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were not things to be taken lightly. He was too much the epitome of truth, too miraculous, too perfect, to be dismissed and ignored; and, as his enemies eventually learned, too miraculously invincible to be stopped or broken. The Celestial Journey (*al-Mi'raj*) was obviously something which was not witnessed by any of the *Companions*, yet they did not doubt it, because they had witnessed too many miracles at his hand to be able to believe that Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) could lie. The reports of many of the miracles that caused them to believe in his Celestial Journey have come down to us in a manner that satisfies the conditions of recurrent meaning (*al-tawatur al-ma'nawi*). We have mentioned some of them in what has preceded; the rest are enshrined in the authentic legacy of Islam for whoever cares to look. The legacy of Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) shines like a moon in the night of our existence. Happy are those who heed the signs of his prophethood and drink from the fountain of his wisdom, for he will crown them with a light that will banish all gloom on the night of the grave and all terror at the tryst of the hereafter. "...and Allah will save those who abstained [from believing that anything resembles Him] with this triumph: no evil shall touch them, neither shall they grieve."—Qur'an, *al-Zumr*: 61.