

# **A Repudiation of The Blasphemy That Allah is in the Sky and that He Ascends the Throne**

Being A Learned Discussion  
About the Meaning of the  
Verse of *Istiwa* and the  
Hadith of the Slave Girl

By Muhammad William Charles al-Hanafi

## Imam Malik's Response to a Question Addressed to Him on the Meaning of Allah's *Istiwa* on the Throne

Imam al-Baihaqā (d. 458 h. / 1066; Niāapur) a great *muāaddith*, and the student of Abā 'Abd Allāh al-Āakim (d. 405 h. / 1014) in his book called *al-Asmā' wa 'l-Āifāt* reported three accounts of an incident that transpired with Imam Mālik (93-179 H. = 712-795 C.E.). The first report which al-Baihaqā reported with a chain of narration (which I will omit here and in subsequent reports) is the account transmitted by his student, the famous *muāaddith* 'Abd Allah ibn Wahb ibn Muslim al-Fihri of Egypt (125-197 H. = 743-813 C.E.):

كنا عند مالك بن أنس، فدخل رجل، فقال: يا أبا عبد الله: الرحمن على العرش استوى. كيف استوى؟ قال: فأطرق مالك وأخذته الرخصاء، ثم رفع رأسه فقال: الرحمن على العرش استوى كما وصف نفسه، ولا يقال كيف، وكيف عنه مرفوع، وأنت رجل سوء، صاحب بدعة، أخرجوه. قال: فأخرج الرجل.<sup>1</sup>

We were with Mālik ibn Anas when a man came in and said: "O Abā 'Abd Allah, al-Raāmān made *istiwa* on the throne. How did he make *istiwa*?" Mālik bowed his head [in thought] and sweat appeared on him. He said: "Al-Raāmān did make *istiwa* on the Throne as He said about himself, but we do not ask how, for *how* does not apply to him [since He is not a body having physical properties]. Moreover, you are a bad person, the perpetrator of a deviation (*bid'ah*). Put him out!" And the man was put out.

I have avoided translating the word *istiwa* here, because the point in this account is that the word is ambiguous; it has a literal meanings and a figurative ones; if I were to translate it I would have to choose one or the other and the ambiguity would not be apparent. The phrase *istiwa 'ala'l-'arsh* is that type of speech which the '*ulamā*' call *mutashābihātu 'l-āifāt*, which refers to ambivalent terms which describe, or predicate Allah, the Exalted; their literal meaning implies a physical property, or an originated quality, and in that they are problematic; yet, they have figurative meanings which express attributes of perfection, and befit the transcendent majesty of the Creator. The inalienable and basic Islamic principle of *tauāad*, which provides that Allah is unique in his being, attributes, and acts requires that He should not have attributes of anything in creation. Thus He must be beyond space and time and limit and direction and movement and change, for were He to possess any of these originated qualities, He would be in need of one to originate them in Him and whatever has any need could not be the transcendent, all-powerful creator of this universe.

Therefore, we are bound to refrain from imagining that the literal meaning is implied, and either we should consign to Allah the determination of some other suitable meaning, which method is called *tafwīḥ*, or we should accept what the competent and recognized authorities have ventured as an acceptable interpretation, for they advance only such interpretations as are acceptable to the recognized experts of the Arabic language and as are appropriate as far as the transcendence and perfection of Allah is concerned; this latter method is called *ta'wāl*. The first was the usual method of the Companions, and the Followers, and the Followers of the Followers, and the early Muslims, while the second is the usual method of later '*ulamā*' who felt that the method of *ta'wāl* was better suited to keep the common people and those who had little initiation in the sciences of the *sharā'ah* from interpreting the *mutashābihāt* literally. Interpreting literally the allegorical texts that outwardly imply human or originated attributes is called *tajsām* or *tashbāh* in Arabic, and it is called anthropomorphism in English. Interpreting it literally is blasphemy; it constitutes unbelief for it implies that Allah has imperfect, originated attributes that He shares with His creation.

<sup>1</sup> الأسماء والصفات للبيهقي، باب ما جاء في قول الله عز وجل {الرحمن على العرش استوى}، ص 515، دار الكتب العلمية، بيروت.

The literal interpretation of *istiwa* is “ascended,” or “sat on.” The anthropomorphists insist that the *ayats* that mention *istiwa* are a proof that Allah is above His creation and above the Throne and that He occupies place and has a limit and direction. What prevailed upon them to utter such blasphemy is their belief that the Qur’an and the speech of the Prophet ﷺ do not contain any figures of speech, or metaphor (*majāz*). Their denial of the figurative and idiomatic use of language in the Qur’an and *sunnah* is preposterous and betrays their neglect of the fact that the Qur’an is Arabic and that the Prophet ﷺ was an Arab and that the Arabic language in a most preeminent way is a language of imagery (*tamthāl*) and metaphor (*isti’ārah*).

Those who foolishly insist that everything in the Qur’an is literal get stuck with the problem of contradiction. Consider that Allah ﷻ says in many places that He will forget the unbelievers after He puts them in Hell. An example of that is *Surah al-Sajdah*:

(قَدْوُفُوا بِمَا نَسِيْتُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَذَا إِنَّا نَسِينَاكُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْخُلْدِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ) (السجدة:14)

Taste because you forgot about this day of your meeting; We will forget you. Taste eternal punishment because of what you used to do! (33:14)

As you see, the literal meaning of the *ayah* is that Allah will forget, that is, He will cease to have knowledge about them. That meaning is highly problematic because first of all Allah reports in another place in the Qur’an that the angels declare that He never forgets anything: “And your Lord is not forgetful” (19:64). Secondly, Allah is the one who creates and sustains everything including all that is in Hell. If He did not have the knowledge of them there, how does He create their punishment? Furthermore, if He were to become ignorant of a thing after having had knowledge of it, it would mean that He would have undergone, yet first principles require that Allah, the creator of the universe, is eternal and beyond change. Therefore, we have to interpret this phrase figuratively and hold that it expresses the fact that He will deprive them of His mercy and care. Thus we can construe the above-mentioned *ayah* like this:

Taste [s: the punishment] because you forgot [s, n: that is, you disbelieved] about this day of your meeting [with Us]; We will forget you [n: that is, We will abandon you in Hell like a thing forgotten about]. Taste eternal punishment because of what you used to do!

Consider that Allah says in *Surah al-Azāb*:

(إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا) (الأحزاب:57)

Those who hurt Allah and His messenger, Allah has cursed them in this world and the next and prepared for them a humiliating punishment. (33:57)

The literal meaning implies that Allah can suffer harm, but that is highly problematic because it means that a state of adverse change overcomes Him with the further implication that that is against his will and that He does not have the power to stop it. However, first principles require that He is eternal and beyond change and that He not be described by any of the attributes of His creatures. The Qur’an declares: “Nothing is like Him.” If He suffered harm as we do, He would resemble us in this liability. However, He is utterly dissimilar with His creatures as the *ayah* I just quoted and first principles require, for none of His attributes are originated or subject to change; He is the transcendent, ineffable and incomparable, the eternal God and Lord of Creation. Thus, we have to interpret these words in a figurative way. The commentators, including al-Alāsá al-Kabár (d. 1270 / 1854), the author of the celebrated and authoritative commentary of the Qur’an, *Rāhu ‘l-Ma’ānā*, says it refers to those who displease Allah and His Messenger by committing unbelief and disobedience. Moreover, the experts in the science of belief, or creed (*al-‘aqādah*) (NB: these experts are properly and traditionally referred to as *al-mutakallimān*, and the science of belief as *al-kalām*), ex-

plain Allah's displeasure as His will to deprive and punish. Those who insist that there are no figures of speech (*majāz*) have to break their rule and indulge in idiomatic interpretation. Why do they not then admit that some phrases in the Qur'an may not be interpreted literally and join the rest of the *ummah* instead of denouncing them as heretics and unbelievers and dividing the *ummah* into quarreling factions at a time that they desperately need to be united to stop the mischief of the real enemies of Islam; namely, the unbelievers?

Indeed, another good example of phrases which cannot but be interpreted figuratively is one of the *ayats* which mention *istiwa*: I refer to the 4<sup>th</sup> *ayah* of *Surah al-Ādād*:

(هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلْجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ) (الحديد: 4)

It is He who created the skies and the earth in six days and then made *istiwa* on the Throne. He knows what enters the earth [n: seeds, rain, treasure and the dead] and what comes out of it [n: plants and so on], and what comes down from the sky [n: angels and the rain] and what goes up to it [n: deeds and prayers || the angels ascend with them to the Throne] and He is with you wherever you are [n: with His knowledge and power in all cases and with His grace and mercy in some cases], and Allah sees what you are doing [n: and He will requite you according to your deeds]. (57:4)

The above translation is according to the interpretation of a competent and illustrious commentator of the Qur'an, the Āanafā imam, Abā 'I-Barakāt al-Nasafā (d. 710 / 1310; Baghdad), who wrote the distinguished and popular commentary called *Mudārik al-Tanzāl* which is more popularly referred to as *Tafsīr al-Nasafā*. This commentary has been on the curriculum of al-Azhar University for centuries and it is studied today all over the Muslim world from Afghanistan to Mauritania. I have indicated that the interpolations I have made are his by the initial "n". Those who foolishly hold that we have to interpret everything in the Qur'an literally insist that *istiwa* 'alā'l-'arsh in the above-cited *ayah* means "to ascend the Throne," or "to sit down on the Throne," or "to hover above the Throne" or that it means that Allah is literally *fauq*, that is, "up," or above, have got a real problem here because if we take the whole *ayah* literally we clearly have a contradiction. For while at the beginning of the *ayah* they assert that He is on the Throne, they must assert at the end of it that He is with us wherever we are. Now which is it? Is He on the Throne or with us? In order to get out of their dilemma, they are forced to interpret the words "with you wherever you are," and thus they say, as do the rest of us, that it means He is with us with His knowledge, His solicitude, His hearing, His sight, His creating and so on. However, in resorting to interpretation they broke their rule. Either they have to admit that some phrases of the Qur'an are figurative and let everybody else interpret when it is necessary, or they have to stick with their ridiculous rule that everything in the Qur'an is literal and live with all the absurdity and blasphemy that that entails.

Consider that Allah says:

(وَاللَّهُ أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ نَبَاتًا) (نوح: 17)

And Allah will grow you [n: the expression is a metaphor for "produce you"] from the earth. (71:17)

(إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زُلْزَالَهَا وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا) (الزلزلة: 1-2)

When the earth is quaked fiercely, and when the earth throws forth her burdens. (99:1-2)

Notice that in the first *surah*, Allah says that He will produce mankind, while in the second He ascribes the production of mankind to the earth. In the first *surah* the act is attributed to Allah liter-

ally, whereas, in the second it is attributed to the earth figuratively. Since Allah empowers the earth, and since it acts by His permission and is the locus of the action it is permissible to ascribe the act to it, yet every believer knows that it is Allah who actually creates the act and empowers the earth. Almost every textbook of *'ilm al-ma'ānā* (a branch of Arabic rhetoric), including *Talkhāā al-Miftāā* and its commentaries, gives the example of "The spring produced grass" in the section dealing with figurative speech (*majāz*). They discuss that whether or not this statement is to be taken literally depends on the circumstances. We have to see who the speaker is; thus, if the speaker is an unbeliever, we will understand that he means it literally, that is, the spring acted independently with its own inherent power to produce the grass. On the other hand, if the speaker were a believer, we would understand that he meant that in a manner of speaking, and figuratively since we know that the believer knows that nothing Allah alone has power. In the same way, if a believer says the doctor cured me, or the penicillin cured me we will not accuse him of *shirk* if he is a believer, rather, we will appreciate that he is speaking figuratively. Similarly if a person says, the food made my sick, we will judge his meaning according to the circumstances. Thus, if he is a believer, we will take it metaphorically, and if he is not, literally. Although, this matter is quite straightforward, and a routine practice among believers, a growing cadre of blockheads has spread confusion far and wide. No wonder, Imam Fakhr al-Dān al-Rāzā (d. 606 h. / 1210; Herat) proclaimed that what has caused the *Āshawayah* to deviate in respect of the allegorical texts (*al-mutashābihāt*) is there ignorance of the usage of Arabic language (*al-balāghah*).

Having shown that the Qur'an because it is Arabic contains the idioms of the Arabs, let us return to our discussion of *istiwā*. Amongst the figurative interpretations of *istiwā* is "subdued" or "took control of"; indeed, it has been in common use in this sense among the Arabs until this day, for they routinely say *istiwā 'alā 'arsh al-mamlukah* meaning literally that he sat on, or ascended the Throne, and figuratively that he assumed the rule of the kingdom. The authoritative Arabic dictionary called *Miābāh al-Munār* says under the discussion of *sawā / سوى*:

*Wa istawā 'alā sarāri 'l-mulk; that is "He ascended the throne of the kingdom" is a metaphor (or metonym) for the assumption of sovereignty even if he [the ruler] did not actually sit on it.*

Thus, one could use this term to refer to a person who assumed the rule of a kingdom even if he never sat on the Throne, or even if there actually was no throne. Such use of the term is demonstrated in a famous *ayah* of classical Arabic poetry which the supreme spokesman of Islamic orthodoxy, Abā'l-Āsan al-Ash'arā (d. 324 / 936; Baghdad), quoted in explaining the meaning of *istiwā* in this *ayah* as the Shafi imam and *muāddith* al-Baihaqā (d.458 / 1066) reported in his *al-Asmā wa'l-Āifāt* in the chapter on *al-Istiwā* (p. 519; Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmāyah):

قد استوى بشر على العراق      من غير سيف ولا دم مهراق

*Qad istawā Bishr 'alā'l-'Irāq min ghair saifin wa là damin muhrāq; that is "Bishr subjugated [or took control of] Iraq without using a sword, and without spilling any blood."*

Conversely, the Arabs say *thalla 'arshahā*, which literally means "he tore down his throne," or "removed him from the throne"; but the phrase is used figuratively for "he deposed him," or "put him out of power" without any suggestion that he actually went up to the king while he was sitting on this throne and dragged him off it in front of his courtiers; indeed this term like its opposite, *istiwā*, may be used for rulers who do not even have a throne, like the presidents in our world today. Knowing this keep in mind that Allah, the Exalted, addressed the Arabs in the language that they knew and used, they the people that the Prophet ﷺ praised as "a nation of orators," they the people that dazzled the world with their eloquence and metaphor and earned for their language a reputation among the community of nations as a language unrivalled in its colorful and imaginative idiom, and its rich, eloquent metaphor.

No doubt, the sect of anthropomorphists, which the *'ulamà* call *al-Āshawāyah*, which plague the field of Islam today, object that "subjugation" or "taking control" implies that Allah was not previously in control, which of course is a defect. The answer is that indeed Allah was in control previously, but He controlled it directly without acting through any agent; after the act of *istiwā* He governed His universe through the Throne, for that is the court where the angels receive their instructions about the management of the universe. In this interpretation, *istiwā* is a term referring to the divine act just as *irzāq* (provision) and *imātah* (causing to die) and *iāyā* (giving life) are divine acts; rather than divine attributes according to the view of the Māturādiyāh, and (they represent the great majority of the *mutakallimān* who ascribe to the Hanafi Madhhab) or as *içāfāt*, which we can translate as "ascriptions" for lack of a better term, according to the Ash'irah (who represent the vast majority of the *mutakallimān* who ascribe to the Mālikā, Shāfi'ā Madhhabs and many of illustrious *'ulamā'* of the Ānbalā Madhhab).

At this point I should explain what the *'ulamā'* mean by the term attribute, for it is imperative that we understand the term correctly. Failure to understand the term correctly, was what caused the Christians to deviate before Islam, and it has caused the Āshawāyah to deviate in Islam. An attribute (*āifah*) in non-technical usage refers to the characteristic of a thing that subsists in that thing's being and it makes the thing known in the same way that the sound of a word makes the word known. However, technically a divine attribute refers to what is necessary for Allah, by force of reason and the holy law of meanings which are intuited as ideas that subsist in the divine being and which are appropriate for Him and commensurate with His exalted majesty and perfection, and yet they are neither identical with the divine being nor other than Him.

Having discussed the meaning of attribute, we can now proceed to explain that the difference between an attribute of divine being (*āifātu 'l-dhāt*) and an attribute of divine act is that an attribute of being is preeternal and subsists in the divine reality; whereas, while Allah's the attribute of divine act also subsists in Him and is therefore preeternal, yet the effect of his act, which the Māturādiyāh call *al-ta'alluq*, unfolds in time and appears in space. According to them. His eternal act has effects that manifest in time and space according to His will by His power and according to His wisdom. They hold that the effect of His act (*al-ta'alluq*) is originated, and it manifests in time and in place. Furthermore, as Abā Bakr Ibn al-'Arabā (d. 543 / 1148; Fez), the Mālikā *muāaddith*, commentator, and *faqih* pointed out, the effects of Allah's eternal act manifests in other than Himself. This is a vital point and is not properly appreciated by most people. Keeping this in mind, one should be able to appreciate why it is of great significance that the word *thumma* is used in this *ayah*; for *thumma* means "then," and the Arab grammarians point out that it generally refers to something that transpires after a while. Now since the attributes are those perfect qualities that subsist in the divine being (*al-dhāt*) since preeternity, they are *not* something that came into existence after they were not. Since the word *thumma* qualifies *istiwā*, it is known that it happened after it was not, thus *istiwā* cannot possibly refer to a divine attribute, for the attributes are eternal and like the divine reality in which they subsist, they are beyond change. Therefore, *istiwā* can only refer to the effect (*al-ta'alluq*) of the divine act. This point was emphasized by al-Baihaqā who said that *thumma* relates to what is acted upon (*al-mustawin 'alaihā*) not the act, or *istiwā* (p. 517). This is the position of the supreme champion of Islamic orthodoxy, Abā'l-Āsan al-Ash'arā, as al-Baihaqā reported (p. 517-519), and as Imam Muāammad Zāhid al-Kautharā (d. 1371 / 1952; Cairo) mentioned in a footnote to the same book (p. 516). Furthermore, this interpretation is suggested by the wording of some of the *ayats* which mention *al-istiwā* on the Throne, or the wording of *ayats* which follow it:

(إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مَا مِنْ شَيْعٍ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ إِذْنِهِ ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ) (يونس: 3)

Verily, your Lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days [that is, the effect of His act unfolded at the hands of His angels His agents in six days; otherwise, Allah's act in preeternity was a single act not a successive one] then made *istiwā* on the Throne ad-

ministering His affair. [The last phrase “administering His affair” is translated with the view that the clause is what is called *jumlatun äälâyah*; however, if we take the view that it is another predicate of the subject of the sentence “your Lord,” we should translate it thus: “and He administers His affair,” and if we view it as a new and separate sentence then we should translate it thus: “He administers His affair.”] There is no one who intercedes except after His permission. That [the creator, the administrator] is your Lord. So worship Him. Will you not reflect [over this remonstrance and worship Him alone]? (10:3)

(إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ)  
(لأعراف: 54)

Verily, your Lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days [n: in view of the work of the angels which was gradual and successive], then he made *istiwa* on the Throne making the night cover the day [or making the night catch up to the day—al-Nasafâ]; seeking it in haste. [He created] the sun and the moon and the stars each one is in subjection to His command. [n: alternately, the last clause can be construed thus: The sun and the moon and the stars are subjected to His command.] Behold, *His* is the creation, and *His* is the command! Ever blessed is He, the Lord of all things! (7:54)

(اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يَعْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ) (السجدة: 4-5)

Allah is the one who created the skies and the earth and all that is between them in six days, then he made *istiwa* on the Throne. He administers His affair from the sky to the earth. Other than Him you have neither helper nor intercessor. Do you not reflect [so you believe in this]? He administers His affair from the sky to the earth [s: while the world lasts], then [s: the administration of affairs] returns to Him on a day [n: the Day of Judgment] the length of which is one thousand years according to how you count. (32:4-5)

In the preceding translations “s” indicates interpolations taken from the commentary of al-Suyuti and al-Maäallâ called *al-Jalälain*, while “n” indicates al-Nasafâ as mentioned previously. In these two *ayats* of *Suratu 'l-Sajdah*, Allah Y informs us that while the world lasts He will govern it through an intermediary; that is, the agent of the Throne “from the sky to the earth,” but that on the Day of Judgement He will administer His affair directly. That is to say that while the world lasts, it is Allah’s usual way that He acts through the agent of the Throne, but that after that He will act directly, as indeed, He acted before He created the Throne and took control of it.

Let us make this matter very clear lest anyone fall prey to misconceptions. Know that Allah I may act through a usual agent that we can call the outward cause, as for example when He makes the pasture grow through rain, and He may act through what is not usually His agent, and in this case we have what we call miracles, or He may act without any agent, or any cause whatsoever. We do not say that water is wet due to any innate power it has, or because that is its nature, just as we do not say that fire burns because of its innate power, or because that is its nature, and just as we do not say the sky is blue because of its innate power or because that is its nature. No, we insist that they do not have any power to be wet, to burn, or to be blue, nor is that their nature; rather, we say that if Allah, the Lord of power, empowers them to be wet, to burn, or to be blue they are so, others not. Indeed, He has made fire cool for Ibrâhâm, and on the Day of Doom He will make the seas ignite and the sky red like rose as the Qur’an informs us. We the Ashâ’irah and the Maturâdiyah, who truly represent the main and orthodox community of Islam, insist that not an atom moves except according to His will and knowledge, at His command and upon being empowered by Him.

In his commentary on the 54<sup>th</sup> *ayah* of *Surah al-A'râf*, cited above, Imam al-Nasafâ opted to interpret *istiwa* as *istaulâ* which means "took control." He answered the objections of some that this interpretation is not appropriate because Allah controls all things by pointing out that since the Throne is the greatest and most exalted thing in creation, His taking control of the rest of the creation is understood by His taking control of the Throne. He also rejected the interpretation of the anthropomorphists that *istiwa* means *istiqrâr*, which means "ascended," since Allah existed before the creation of the Throne when place did not exist; therefore, He must be know as He was then because [He does not undergo any change, for] change is an attribute of created things. Then he referred to what is reported of Imam Mâlik (the report we are in the process of discussing in this article) attributing the same report (similar in meaning though with a different wording) to Abu Ānāfah, al-Āsan al-Baārā.

*Al-istiwa* on the Throne is mentioned in six places in the Qur'an: (7:54), (10:3), (20:5), (25:59), (32:4), and (57:4). We have mentioned four of these texts. It is highly significant that Allah always mentioned that he made *istiwa* after mentioning that He created the heavens and the earth. As we saw in the at the end of the 54<sup>th</sup> *ayah* of *Surah al-A'râf* that I cited above, and this *ayah* is the first place where Allah Ȳ mentions *istiwa* in the Qur'an, Allah says:

(أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ)

Verily, His alone is the creation and its administration. Ever blessed is Allah, the Lord of All Things.

Allah Ȳ is emphasizing that not only did He create the universe, but that He and He alone governs it. If one recalls that most of the Arabs at the outset of the mission of the Prophet   were idol-worshippers, polytheists (*mushrikân*) who believed that Allah had associates on earth who managed independently many affairs on earth, one can better see the appropriateness of Allah's addressing them in the imagery of imperial majesty which depicted an all-powerful sovereign administering every affair in creation from a throne on high wider than the heavens and the earth (as the *ayah* of the Throne declares), for such imagery was preeminently effective in driving home the fact that Allah, the Lord of Might and Glory, was the sole administrator of affairs in heaven and on earth. How strange it is that people have appeared who, while they consider themselves Arabs and vaunt that the profound understanding of the Arabic language is their birthright, they have interpreted the metaphors of majesty in terms that demean the almighty sovereign and imply that He is predicated by limit and imperfection. High, high and hallowed is He beyond the blasphemous things they ascribe to Him!

Another thing that should we kept in mind is that when the '*ulamâ*' advance this interpretation, or some other suitable interpretation, they do so tentatively not insisting definitely, for they advance interpretations in the understanding that ultimately the real meaning of this and all *mutashâbihât* is known only to Allah Ȳ. Thus even in *ta'wâl* we have *tafwâç*; and in *tafwâç* we also have *ta'wâl* because in the first case we leave the final decision to Allah and in the second we avert the term from its literal meaning. This very important point was first brought to my attention by Isa Abd Allah Mani', Director of Islamic Trusts in Dubai, who was ever wont to emphasize it.

Much of the foregoing discussion has been gleaned from the book *al-Barâhân al-Sâti'ah* by Salâmah al-Azzâmâ (d. 1376 / 1956) of Egypt as quoted in *al-Qaul al-Wajâh fâ Tanzâhi Allah 'an'l-Tashbâh* (pp. 56-59). The theological explanations of points that came up are according to Mâturadâ school of Theology in which I received my first initiation in 1992 when I was taught the commentary of *Fiqh al-Akbar* by Abâ'l-Muntahâ, and then *Sharâ al-Aqâ'idah* of Sa'd al-Dân al-Taftâzânâ by '*ulamâ* from Afghanistan who resided in Pakistan.

Having expounded the foregoing essential principles, let us return to examine the statement of Imam Mâlik that al-Baihaqâ reported from Mâlik's disciple Wahb ibn Abd Allah that I quoted at the outset. Notice that Imam Mâlik affirmed that what Allah said about himself in the Qur'an in the 5<sup>th</sup> *ayah* of *Surah Āh Hâ*, namely, *al-raãmân 'alâ'l-'arshi istiwâ*, is true; however, he implicitly denied that the literal meaning was implied when he said that one does not ask how because *how* does

not apply to him since He the creator of time and space is beyond time and space and limit and direction and movement and change. While we affirm that He exists; or rather we insist that His existence is necessary, and that His non-existence is impossible, yet we maintain that we cannot imagine the nature of His existence, for He is beyond all comparison as the Qur'an declares: *laysa ka mithlihā shay'un*; that is, "Nothing is like Him." His dissimilarity with His creation is absolute. Consider that while we might say that red and blue, for example, are dissimilar, they are not dissimilar in an absolute sense, for both are colours, both are accidents which occur in substances, and most importantly both are contingent and originated phenomena. There are no two things in this world or the next that are not similar in some respect; Allah, however, is not similar to anything in any way.

Since the question revealed that the one who was asking it imagined some literal meaning and some physical attribute for Allah, Imam Mālik was taken aback and bowed his head thinking about how best to answer this person who had come with a hitherto unheard of deviation and he was visibly perturbed for sweat poured out of him. When he raised his head and uttered his immortal formula, he succinctly denied all anthropomorphic implications of the verse and denounced the person as an evil deviant innovator. While this is all quite obvious, the present-day *Āshawāyah* misrepresent the account pretending that the questioner meant to deny that Allah made *istiwa* literally, that is, that he physically ascended on the Throne, or in others words sat down on it, or hovered over it. However, this is clearly a misinterpretation, and it is against the sense and wording of the account. Don't you see that if the questioner meant to deny that Allah made *istiwa* literally and physically, and that Imam Mālik maintained that the literal meaning was implied, he would have answered him by saying that *istiwa* means that He ascended literally on or over the Throne, or sat down on it, or over it. However, we see that he emphasized that while what Allah says about Himself is true whatever it might mean, and that the question *how* does not apply to Him since He does not share with His creatures any of those *their* qualities about which one may and does ask *how, where, when, and why*. He was in effect exemplifying the *madhhab* called *tafwāḥ* that involves first of all recognizing that the literal meaning of the *mutashābihāt* cannot possibly be implied and secondly consigning its interpretation to Allah. It is most ironic that such a transparently transcendent text from Imam Mālik has become the slogan of the goons of anthropomorphism in the belief that his statement illustrates their unholy and deviant persuasion.

Next al-Baihaqā reported another account of this incident with a full chain of narration by way of Yāyā ibn Yaāyā ibn Bakār al-Nisābārā (142-227 = 759-840), who was an imam in hadith:

كُنَّا عِنْدَ مَالِكِ بْنِ أَنَسٍ، فَجَاءَ رَجُلٌ، فَقَالَ: يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى، فَكَيْفَ اسْتَوَى؟ قَالَ: فَاطْرُقَ مَالِكُ رَأْسَهُ حَتَّى عَلَاهُ الرَّحْضَاءُ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: الْإِسْتَوَاءُ غَيْرُ مَجْهُولٍ، وَالْكَيْفُ غَيْرُ مَعْقُولٍ، وَالْإِيمَانُ بِهِ وَاجِبٌ، السُّؤَالُ عَنْهُ بَدْعَةٌ، وَمَا أَرَأَيْكَ إِلَّا مُبْتَدِعًا. فَأَمَرَ بِهِ أَنْ يَخْرُجَ.

We were with Mālik ibn Anas when a man came and said: "O Abā 'Abd Allah, al-Raāmān made *istiwa* on the throne. How did he make *istiwa*?" Mālik bowed his head [in thought] and sweat appeared on him, then he said: "*Istiwā* is not unknown [that is, it is known to be a fact whatever it means because it was mentioned in the Qur'an], but *how* [in respect of Allah] is not something we can conceive [since He is other than whatever we imagine Him to be<sup>2</sup>]. Moreover, it is obligatory for us to believe in it [whatever it might mean] and asking about its meaning is a deviant innovation (*bid'ah*), and I think that you are a deviant innovator." Then he ordered him to be put out.

After reporting the above, al-Baihaqā added that a similar answer was reported from the distinguished teacher of Mālik, al-Rabā'ah ibn Abā 'Abd al-Raāmān (d. 136 h. / 753), who earned the nickname al-Rabā'ah al-Ra'y for his prowess in making inferences on existing texts when no

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the truth which I have already discussed: namely, while we can comprehend what is necessary, possible, or impossible for Allah, we cannot imagine the nature of His reality and existence.

texts existed on some issue. Al-Baihaqá reported with a chain of narration up to Āliä ibn Muslim that he said:

سئل الربيعة عن قول الله تبارك وتعالى (الرمز على الأرض استوى) كيف استوى؟ قال كيف مجهول والاستوى غير معقول ويجب علىّ وعليك الإيمان بذلك كله.

Al-Rabá'ah was asked about His word, blessed and exalted is He, "The Merciful made *istiwà*," how did he make *istiwà*? He said, "How He did is unknown, and the *istiwà* is inconceivable, while belief in it is mandatory for me and you.

Notice I-Rabá'ah states that the "how" of *istiwà* is unknown; it is unknown just as the nature of Allah's existence is unknown, and just as how Allah creates is unknown because it is transcendent attribute either of being or act. But since al-Rabá'ah also says that *istiwà* is inconceivable, we understand that he means that the literal meanings of *istiwà* that imply the concomitants of bodies are inconceivable, otherwise, he contradicts himself. As for his insistence on the obligation to believe it, while knowing that the literal meanings are inconceivable, that is nothing but *tafwáç* (that is, consigning the meaning to Allah while rejecting the anthropomorphic literal meanings).

Thereafter al-Baihaqá reported what is attributed to Sufyàn ibn 'Uyainah (d. 198 h. / 814; Makkah), an illustrious *muäaddith* from Kâfah who settled in Makkah. Ibn Äjir al-'Asqalâná calls him *thiqah, ääfiæ, faqâh, imam* which is about as high a grading as a *muäaddith* can get. In fact one who is accorded such a rank is one about whom we don't even ask, rather, he is the one whom we ask about the others. He was one of the important shaikhs of Imam Shäfi'á, and his hadiths figure in the six standard collections of hadith. Here follows his famous statement which al-Baihaqá reports with chain of narration:

كل ما وصف الله تعالى من نفسه في كتابه, فتفسيره تلاوته والسكوت عليه.

However Allah, the Exalted, describes Himself, the interpretation of that is [simply] to read it and be quiet.

Here again we have clear-cut *tafwáç*. Don't you see that if the meaning was clear there was no need to be silent? For example, if Allah says He is the creator, that is one, that He will resurrect the dead and so on, we take that literally and we can say what that means. What are those texts that we have to be quiet about and why? Obviously, they are the *mutashäbihät* (ambivalent texts) that outwardly imply that Allah shares some originated, contingent and imperfect attribute with His creatures. We have to be silent about them because we know that their literal meaning is not implied here, but since we must believe whatever Allah, the Lord of Truth, and His truthful prophet say about Him, we read it and accept it consigning its meaning to He who knows all things. While this is quite clear and straightforward, the Äashawáyah have always pretended what this and similar statements attributed to the early Muslims (*al-salaf*) means is that we acknowledge that the outward, literal, and physical meaning is implied and we don't dispute that. Obviously, that cannot be the case; otherwise there was no need to treat these ambivalent texts in any special way by simply reading them and remaining silent about them.

Next al-Baihaqá cited the saying attributed to Ibn Khuzaimah that Allah made *istiwà* without any "how" being implied which idea in Arabic is expressed as *bälä kaif*. He said that many similar statements have been attributed to the *salaf* including Imam al-Shäfi'á and Aämad ibn Änbal. Although the half-educated immediately jump to the conclusion that what he meant is that Allah literally ascended in some way, the particulars of which are unclear. However, the term is actually another way of expressing *tafwáç* because it means that the question "how" just as the questions "why," "where," "when," and "what" do not apply to His *istiwà* because these are questions that are asked of bodies, and since the Qur'an and first principles require that Allah is neither a body nor

does He have any of the attributes of body, such questions cannot be asked of Him nor do they apply to Him.

Imam al-Kautharā (d. 1371 / 1952; Cairo), who annotated the first edition of al-Baihaqā's *al-Asmā' wa 'l-Āifāt*, and who was one of the greatest *'ulamā'* to have lived in the fourteenth century of Islam, and a fearless defender of traditional Islamic beliefs, made an annotation to Sufyān al-'Uyainah's statement that we quoted above. In this annotation he quoted several extremely perspicuous and precious statement of Ibn Āzm (d. 456 /1064; Andalusia). The *'ulamā'* recognize one thing about Ibn Āzm and that is that when he says there is consensus on a question, there *is* consensus because he was very stingy in conceding consensus for he would not accept any consensus but the consensus of the Companions. Furthermore, as al-Kautharā intimated, Ibn Āzm is one of those who claimed to speak in the name of the *salaf*, and those who nowadays always harangue about following the *salaf* give Ibn Āzm's opinions great credence; therefore, since in this instance at least he certainly does speak on behalf of the *salaf*, I thought it most instructive to quote him in full:

قال ابن حزم (وهو ممن يتكلم باسم السلف) قول تعالى يجب حمله على ظاهره ما لم يمنع من حمله على ظاهره نصّ آخر أو إجماع أو ضرورة حس, وقد علمنا أن كل ما كان في مكان, فإنه شاغل لذلك المكان ومالئ له ومتشكل بشكله, ولا بدّ من أحد الأمرين ضرورة, وعلمنا أن ما كان في مكان فإنه متناه بتناهي مكانه وهو ذو جهات ست أو خمس متناهية في مكانه وهذه صفات الجسم اهـ ثم قال: إن الأمة أجمعت على أنه لا يدعو أحد فيقول يا مستو ارحمني, ولا يسمى ابنه عبد المستوي اهـ ثم قال إن معنى قوله تعالى على العرش استوى أنه فعل فعله في العرش وهو انتهاء خلقه إليه, فليس بعد العرش شيء, والعرش نهاية جرم المخلوقات الذي ليس خلفه خلاء ولا ملاء, ومن أنكر أن يكون للعالم نهاية من المساحة والزمان والمكان لحق بقول الدهرية, وفارق الإسلام اهـ ثم ردّ على القائلين بالمكان وختم كلامه بقوله فإنه لا يكون في مكان إلا ما كان جسماً أو عرضاً في جسم, هذا الذي لا يجوز سواه, ولا يتشكل في العقل والوهن غيره أليّة, وإذا انتهى أن يكون الله عز وجل جسماً أو عرضاً, فقد انتهى أن يكون في مكان أصلاً وبالله نتأيد اهـ فليعتبر بقول ابن حزم هذا أدياء السلف من مشبهة العصر.<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Āzm (who was a person wont to speak in the name of the *salaf* said: "One is required to take Allah's word, exalted is He, literally as long as there is no text, or consensus, or empirical necessity, stops us from doing that. We know that everything that is in a place occupies that space and fills it and assumes its shape. One of the two things has to be. We know that whatever is in a place has to be limited by the limits of that place, as it has to be in limited by a finite limit in the six or five directions in its space, and these are the attributes of bodies." Then he said: "The *ummah* is agreed that no one should say 'O, He who has ascended, have mercy on me'! just as no one should name his son 'Slave of the One Who Ascended.'" Then he said: "Truly, the meaning of His saying, exalted is He, 'He made *istiwa* on the Throne' is that He acted in some way on the Throne; namely, He ended His creation with it, for there is nothing after the Throne which is the end of creation; there is nothing after it, neither space, nor void. Anybody who denies that the creation has a finite limit in distance and time and space joins the materialists and leaves Islam." Then he refuted those who insist that Allah occupies space and he ended his discourse saying: "Nothing can be in space except what is a body or an accident [what occurs in a substance like heat, color and so on] in a body; there is no other possibility, for neither reason nor imagination can conceive of another possibility at all. Since it is concluded that Allah is neither a body nor an accident, it is concluded that He cannot occupy space absolutely. And Allah is our help." So let those *claim* to follow the *salaf* [he refers here sarcastically to those who now call themselves Salafis] in our times likening Allah to His creatures [that is, the anthropomorphists] consider carefully this proclamation of Ibn Āzm.

<sup>3</sup> الأسماء والصفات, ص 516, تعليق رقم (1).

Lastly, I would like to quote what al-Baihaqá reported about the supreme imam of the Muslims in the field of belief (*al-'aqádah*), Abâ 'I-Äasan al-Ash'ará (d. 324 / 936; Baghdad), concerning the meaning of *istiwà* on the Throne:

وذهب أبو الحسن علي بن إسماعيل الأشعري إلى أن الله تعالى جلّ ثناؤه فعل فعله في العرش فعلا سمّاه استواء كما فعل في غيره فعلا سمّاه رزقا ونعمة أو غيرهما من أفعاله. ثم لم يكيف الاستواء إلا أنه جعل من صفات الفعل لقوله (ثم استوى على العرش) وثم للتراخي، والتراخي إنما يكون في الأفعال، وأفعال الله تعالى توجد بلا مباشرة منه إياها ولا حركة.<sup>4</sup>

Abâ 'I-Äasan 'Alá ibn Ismà'ál al-Ash'ará opined that Allah, great is His praise, executed an act on His Throne which he called *istiwà* just as He executed other acts on other things which He called provision, beneficence and other acts other than them. So al-Ash'ará did not make the *istiwà* a physical attribute (*takyáf*), rather, he made it an attribute of divine act (*áifât al-fi'l*) because of His word "Then he made *istiwà* on the Throne," and the word *thumma* (then) indicates that that act happened afterwards, and being afterwards is something that involves the divine act [not the attributes of being, and more precisely the effects of His eternal act], and the acts [that is, the effects of the eternal act] of Allah occur without His undertaking them directly and without any movement [on the part of Allah].

What al-Ash'ará is getting at here is what I already explained above [\[Cross-Reference\]](#) where I discussed the nature of the divine act and the difference between the divine act and the divine attributes. I explained that Allah acts in eternity, and while His preeternal act is one and indivisible, the effects of His preeternal act are numerous, and successive. That is what al-Ash'ará referred to when he said that He does not undertake His acts directly by which he meant the effects of His eternal act because as I mentioned, quoting the Málíká *mu'áaddith* and *faqáh*, Ibn al-'Arabá (d. 543 / 1148; Fez), that the effects of Allah eternal act manifest in other than Him. Although He is neither subject to motion, nor even stillness, He moves all things. Al-Ash'ará's argument is that since the *istiwà* took place in time as the use of the word "then" indicates, it is known that *istiwà* is an effect of Allah's eternal act. And Allah, who is beyond all imperfection, knows best.

## Imam Abâ Äanáfeh Declares Allah Free from Physically Sitting on the Throne

Al-Ghunaimá quoted a statement of Abâ Äanáfeh in Abâ Äanáfeh's extant booklet *al-Waáyah*:

We declare [Abâ Äanáfeh says] that Alláh *made istawà* without having any need of 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 (*Julás / جلوس*), or of a resting-place, or of fixity (*qaràr / قرار*), 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>5</sup>

Al-Ghunaimá commented on the above passage of Abâ Äanáfeh saying:

Observe how Abâ Äanáfeh conveys the express text of the revelation (*æàhir al-tanzál / ظاهر التنزيل*) without interpreting it, while at the same time maintaining the requirement of

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ghunaimá, p. 74

<sup>4</sup> الأسماء والصفات, ص 517.

transcendence (*tanzāh* / تنزيه), and repudiating all attribution to Him of what does not befit His Magnificent Essence. This is the way of the early predecessors (*al-salaf* / السلف), and it is a safer (*aslam* / أسلم) way; whereas, the way of the later *ulamā'* (*al-khalaf* / الخلف) is to interpret (*ta'wāl* / التأويل)--some say that the way of interpretation is wiser (*aakam* / أحكم).<sup>6</sup>

## **Fatwà of Abâ Äanáfah in Regards to the Unbelief of Those Who Maintain That Allàh is on the Throne**

In another article called *Khuûârah al-Qaul bá 'I-Jihati Façlan 'an al-Qaul bá 'I-Tajsám al-Äarää*, Imàm al-Kautharâ quoted al-Baiyâçâ (d. 1098 / 1687; Istanbâl) in his *Ishàràt al-Maràm'*:

Abâ Äanáfah said: Whoever says: "I do not know if my Lord is in the sky or on the earth;" he is an unbeliever; likewise, whoever said: "He is on the Throne, but I do not know if the Throne is in the sky or on the earth."<sup>8</sup>

Then al-Baiyâçâ explained the reason for holding him to be an unbeliever (*kâfir*):

That is because he holds that the Originator, hallowed is He, is qualified by location and direction; whereas, whatever is predicated by direction or location necessarily requires an originator [to originate for it that characteristic which it did not have previously]. Then to maintain that He requires an originator is to maintain outright that He is deficient, hallowed is He beyond what they ascribe to Him! Moreover, whoever maintains the materiality (*jismâyah*) of the Divinity, or predicates direction to Him, he denies the existence of everything except what one can point to physically; thus he denies the divine reality which transcends all materiality, and that denial necessarily signifies unbelief.<sup>9</sup>

## **Fatwà of Imàm al-Mutawallâ and Imàm al-Nawawâ Concerning the Unbelief of Those Who Maintain that Allàh is Contiguous With His Creation or Separate From It**

Imàm al-Nawawâ (d. 676 / 1277; Nawà, Syria) and Imàm al-Mutawallâ (d. 478 / 1087; Baghdad) both condemned anthropomorphism (*tajsám*, or *tashbâh*) as unbelief (*kufir*). Al-Nawawâ in his book *Rauçah al-Äàlibân* quotes a *fatwà* [that is, a decision of law pronounced by a mufti] of al-Mutawallâ:

Whoever believes that the world is eternal, or that the Maker is originated, or [that He] has an originated attribute (*äudâth al-Äâni'* / حدوث الصانع), or denies any attribute of the Eternal God about which attribute the *ulamâ'* are agreed [that is, on which there is consensus--*ijmâ'* / إجماع], or believes that He is contiguous with, or separate from His creation, or anything in it (*al-ittiâal wa 'I-infiâal* / الاتصال والانفصال), he is an unbeliever (*kâfir*).<sup>10</sup>

It should be clear to the reader that the notion that God has an originated attribute, or that He is contiguous with, or separate from His creation which is condemned as unbelief in the *fatwà* above is

<sup>6</sup> Al-Ghunaimâ, p. 74

<sup>7</sup> Khair al-Dân al-Ziriklá (1396 / 1976; Cairo), who is the author of the biographical dictionary *al-A'lâm* mentioned that al-Baiyâçâ, who was a Hanafi *Qaçi* under the Ottoman Sultanate, wrote several books among them *Ishàràt al-Maràm 'an Ibarât al-Imâm*, a work in Hanafi *fiqh*. Al-Ziriklá mentioned that a manuscript copy of the work exists in the al-Azharâyah Library in Cairo under the name *Irshâd al-Maràm*. Judging from the title of the work which al-Ziriklá mentioned in the first instance, it is a work dealing specifically with the sayings of Abâ Äanáfah. He mentioned that the name of al-Baiyâçâ is Aâmad ibn Äasan ibn Sinân al-Dân, and that he studied under the *ulamâ'* of Istanbul, and served as a *qaçî* in Aleppo, then Brâsah, then Makkah, then Istanbul.

<sup>8</sup> *Maqâlât al-Kautharâ*, p. 322

<sup>9</sup> *Maqâlât al-Kautharâ*, Karachi ed., p. 291

<sup>10</sup> Al-Nawawâ, *Rauçah al-Äàlibân* (Damascus, al-Maktab al-Islâmâ, n.d.), p. 64, vol. 10

typical of anthropomorphism (*tajsám*, or *tashbáh*). Thus the judgement that that doctrine is unbelief necessarily implies that anthropomorphism is unbelief. The reason that the doctrine of contiguity or separation is unbelief is that if we maintain that Allàh is contiguous with His creation, or separate from it, we necessarily imply that He has a limit and therefore a body. Both limit and body require a creator and someone to give it its particularity.

### **Ibn al-Jauzá the Hanbali Denounces Those Hanbalis Who Insist That Allàh is Separate From His Creation**

The fact that the notion that Allàh is contiguous with His creation or separate from it necessarily and essentially implies the notion that He is possessed of body and substance was emphasised by Abâ 'I-Faraj ibn al-Jauzá (d. 597 /1201; Baghdad), a Hanbali Imàm in his book *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbáh* when he remonstrated with Ibn al-Zaghâná (d. 520 / 1126), one of the teachers of Ibn al-Jauzá and one of the anthropomorphist **Hanbali's**, for insisting that Allàh "has to be separate" and for insisting that Allàh physically ascended the Throne:

I declare [Ibn al-Jauzá says]: This talk is nonsense and sheer anthropomorphism (*tashbáh*)! 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 (*jawáhir*) 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 science of *Kalâm*] that the proof that atoms (*jawáhir*) 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 [namely, God], and another requiring space and location [namely, bodies], then we may neither declare the two to be contiguous nor separate since contiguity and separateness are among the consequences of occupying space.

It has already been established that coming together and becoming separate are among the inseparable attributes of whatever occupies space. However, the Real (*al-Áqq*), high and exalted is He, may not be described by the occupation of space because, if He did occupy space, He would either have 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 or 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-Zaghâná claims above [Ibn al-Jauzá had quoted from one of his books] that He did not create things in His Essence (*dhât*); therefore, he presumes it is established that they are separate from Him. [In refutation of this claim] we declare [that is, Ibn al-Jauzá] that the Essence of the Transcendent God (*dhâtuhâ al-muqaddasah*) is beyond

having things created in it, or that things should occur in it.<sup>11</sup> Now, material separation in relation to Him requires of Him what it requires of substances [namely, that He be defined by finite limits]. Indeed, the definition of location (*āaiz*) 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 anthropomorphists] 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 [that is, to commit *tashbāh*]. Indeed, the bewilderment of some of them reached such a degree that they declared: "The reason God mentioned His *ascension* (*istiwāʿ*) on the Throne is that it is the nearest thing to him." Obviously, this is preposterous because nearness in terms of distance can only be conceived of in relation to bodies [whereas, in relation to the Transcendent God who is not a body, it is inconceivable]. Others declared that the Throne is opposite what confronts it of the Divine Essence (*dhāt*), but not opposite the entire *dhāt*. This, of course, is explicit in saying that God is like a body (*tajsām*), 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 our school of law [that is, the Hanbali *madhhab*]<sup>12</sup>

Sa'd al-Dān al-Taftāzānā (d. 793 / 1390; Samarkand), in his *Sharā al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafāyah* made the same point as Ibn al-Jauzī:

The adversaries cling to the outward sense of the [ambiguous texts] in order to predicate direction, corporeality, form, and limbs of the divinity. Moreover, they argued that whenever we suppose two things to be present, it is inevitable that either one of them is in contact with the other touching it, or that it is separate from it away from it in some direction. Now, [they argue] since Allāh is neither in the world, nor is the world in Him, it stands that He is separate from it and away from it in some direction, located in some place (*mutaāyyiz*). Thus, He has to be a body<sup>13</sup>, or part of a body, having a form, and an extreme limit.

The answer to them is that what they say is sheer delusion: the judging of what is supersensible according to the criteria of what is sensible. Conclusive proofs (*al-adillat al-qaā'āyah*) are established which determine the absolute and imperative necessity of maintaining the pure transcendence of God. Therefore, it is necessary that either we leave the knowledge of the meaning of the ambiguous texts to Allāh, exalted is He, as was the custom of the *Salaf* [the first three generations of Islām] preferring the safer way (*al-āraq al-aslam*); or we interpret them in a correct way as is the custom of the later '*ulamā*' in order to refute the propaganda of the ignorant [an allusion to the *Āshawāyah*] and take simpleminded souls by the arm in a way which is safer (*al-āraq al-aākam*) [for the simpleminded].<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> As I mentioned previously **Cross-reference**, God acts in other than Himself; whereas, all creatures act in themselves. This point was stressed by Ibn al-'Arabā (d. 543 / 1148; Fez) in his *al-'Ariḥah* (**REFERENCE**)

<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-Jauzī, *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbāh* (Cairo, Maktabah Kullāyat al-Azharāyah, 1991), pp. 21-22

<sup>13</sup> (**REFERENCE**) an explanation is required to show that the anthropomorphists of today decline to use the word body but they assert all the requirements of body. Ibn Taimāyah declined to use the word because as he says it was not used in the Qur'an and Sunnah which implies that that is the only reason he refrained from using the term. Ibn 'Adb al-Salām explained that the *Āshawāyah* are of two types: one that comes right out with it and the other which is circumspect. The *Āshawāyah* have become cautious after centuries of dispute with the *Ashā'irah*. Nowadays they do not dare to use the term *body* for fear of the anathema that they will bring upon themselves from sane quarters of this nation.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in the supercommentary of *Sharā al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafāyah* by Ramaḥān Efendā known as *Āshiyah Ramaḥān Efendā* (Multan, Pakistan; Maktabah Imdādayah, n.d.), pp.112-113. See also Sa'd al-Dān al-Taftāzānā, *Sharā al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafāyah*, (Syrian edition with no name of publisher or date edited by Muāammad 'Adnān Darwāsh, and checked by Professor Adāb al-Kallās of Aleppo), pp. 96-97. *Sharā al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafāyah* is a required text of study in the religious schools (*madāris*) of Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and Turkey, and also in Azhar University, Cairo. An English translation of *Sharā al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafāyah* exists. See Earl Edgar Elder, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islām*. (Books for Libraries, reprint ed., 1980).

## Fatwà of Imàm al-Quràubá to the Effect That Anthropomorphists are Idol-Worshippers

Imàm al-Quràubá (d. 671 / 1273; Egypt), the famous commentator of the Qur'ân, stated in his *al-Tadhkirah*<sup>15</sup> concerning the anthropomorphists (*al-mujassimah*): "The correct opinion is that they are unbelievers since there is no difference between them, and between the worshippers of idols and pictures." Once I mentioned to one of my teachers that some people insist that we must believe that Allàh ascends His Throne in person (*bá dhàtihà*). He replied with utmost disgust: "They worship an idol in the sky!"

---

<sup>15</sup> (p. 208) (REFERENCE)

## Concerning the Hadith of the Slave Girl “Where is Allah”

The latter-day sect of the *Āshawayyah*, who call themselves presumptuously *Salafi's* (*salafāyah*), are ever haranguing about the *ādadāth* which is called *Ādadāth al-Jāriyah* (the *Ādadāth* of the Slave Girl), for according to their perverted understanding it is a clear proof that Allāh, who infinitely transcends the unholy things they ascribe to Him, is physically located in the sky and describable by direction. The *ādadāth* was reported by the Companion Mu'āwiyah ibn al-Ākam al-Sulamā and transmitted by Imām Muslim and many other *mu'addithān* (authoritative transmitters of *ādadāth*) with variant wording. In the version which was reported by Muslim, Mu'āwiyah ibn al-Ākam mentioned that he had a slave girl whom he became angry with and slapped on the face. When he told that to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, he took it very seriously; whereupon, Mu'āwiyah ibn al-Ākam suggested that he free the girl. The Prophet ﷺ told him to bring him the girl, for as can be judged by the context of the *ādadāth*, he wanted to see if she was a believer or not. When she appeared before the Prophet ﷺ, he asked her: “Where is Allāh?” She replied: “In the sky.” He asked her: “Who am I?” She replied: “You are the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ.” He said: “Free her for she is a believer.”<sup>16</sup> The orthodox *ulamā'*; that is, the *ulamā'* of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah*, insisted unanimously that the literal meaning of this *ādadāth* is definitely not implied. Some of them consigned the meaning of it to Allāh, while denying the literal, material meaning (that is, they adopted *tafwāṣṣ*). Others resorted to legitimate interpretations (*ta'wāl*); whereas; only the *Āshawayyah* insisted on the literal meaning.

In his commentary on *Āāāā Muslim*, the Shafi imam, Sharaf al-Dān al-Nawawā (d. 676 / 1277; Nawā, Syria) discussed the implications of the above *ādadāth*:

This is one of the *ādadāth* which concerns the attributes [of Allāh]. There are two schools of thought (*madhhab*) in regards to such *ādadāth*<sup>17</sup> both of which I have discussed repeatedly in

<sup>16</sup> Muslim reported it in *Kitāb al-Masājid wa Mawāṣi' al-Salāh*. See *Sharā Āāāā Muslim* (Damascus, Dār al-Khair, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1418), pp.190-194; vol. 5.

<sup>17</sup> That is, the ambiguous, or allegorical texts which are called *al-muhashābihāt* / المتشابهات in Arabic. They are ambiguous because as far as language is concerned there are two or more possible meanings to an ambiguous text, and at the outset it is not known which meaning is implied; for example, the text of the verse in *Surah Fatā*: “Allāh's 'Hand' is above their hands.” The word has a literal meaning, which is a physical limb, and it has several figurative meanings. Mu'ammad ibn Abā Bakr al-Rāzī (d. after 666 / 1268), a specialist in language and commentary (*tafsīr*), mentioned in his authoritative dictionary of Arabic *Mukhtār al-Āāāā* that among the figurative meanings of *yad* / يد (hand) are strength, blessing, kindness. Abā 'l-Abbās al-Faiyāmā (d. 770 / 1368; Hamāh) mentioned in his dictionary *al-Miābaā al-Munār* that *yad* / يد (hand) sometimes means power, and sometimes possession, or authority. He said that sometimes it is an idiom which means that a thing is in somebody's disposal, and in the construction '*an yadin* / عن يد it means in subjection and submission. So the question arises: “Is the literal meaning implied or a figurative one?” That is why such texts are called *ambiguous* (*al-muhashābihāt*). However, any person who has proficiency in Arabic and its modes of speech, and is imbued with the light of the divine uniqueness (*al-tauāād* / التوحيد) immediately understands that the literal meaning, which is the limb of a body, is categorically not implied for Allāh does not have limbs, nor is He compounded, nor does He have a body nor any of the attributes of bodies which are originated phenomena. That is known both by reason and by the definitive texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah like Allāh's word: “Nothing is like Him and He is the One Who hears [all things that can be heard without any ear – al-Nasafā], the One Who sees [all things that can be seen without any eye – al-Nasafā].” Since the literal meaning is precluded by reason and the *Sharā'ah*, we are compelled to understand an idiomatic meaning (*majāz* / مجاز) which we either commend to Allāh, or determine according to the rules of language and with the transcendent majesty of Allāh in view. In fact, there is a basic rule of in the science of commentary that those verses which are ambiguous (*al-muhashābihāt*) in that they permit more than one interpretation, have to be referred to those verses which are conclusive and unequivocal (*al-muākamah*) in that they only have one meaning. If we do not do this, we will be faced with all kinds of glaring contradictions. The words “Allāh's 'Hand' is above their hands” belong to the class of ambiguous verses, while the words “nothing is like Him,” and “your Lord, the Lord of Glory, transcends all that they ascribe to Him,” and the words “Is He who creates like Him who does not create?” belong to the class of conclusive, unequivocal verses (*al-muākamah*). The first has to be interpreted in a way which is consonant with the second; otherwise, we have a contradiction for so many of Allāh's creatures have hands. In this context when we say *interpret*, we do not usually mean giving the word or phrase a new meaning; rather, it is usually only a question of choosing another meaning of the word or phrase. Al-Nasafā says that it means that those who took oath from Prophet ﷺ by taking his hand, it was as if they took oath from Allāh Himself. Al-Suyātā says it means that Allāh was cognizant of their oath, and that He will redeem them for taking it. Ibn Juzai al-Kilbā says it is an imaginary picture (*takhyāl wa tamthāl* / تخييل و تمثيل) the implication of

the chapter *Kitāb al-Āmān*. The first *madhhab* is to believe in it without concerning oneself with its meaning, while maintaining categorically that Allāh, hallowed is He, does not resemble anything, and maintaining that He transcends the attributes of created things [which *madhhab* is called *tafwīḥ*]. The second *madhhab* is to interpret (*ta'wāl*) the *āādāth* in a way which is commensurate with His greatness. Those who prefer to interpret said that in the present *āādāth* the Prophet ﷺ meant to examine her to see whether or not she was one of those who worships idols on the earth, or one of those who maintain the uniqueness of Allāh (*muwaā'idān*) and believe that the creator, the disposer, and the one who effects [all things] is Allāh, no one else. For when [those who maintain the uniqueness of Allāh (*muwaā'idān*)] supplicate [the Transcendent God], they turn [their attention, or their hands<sup>18</sup>] to the sky just as when they pray [the ritual prayer] they face the *Ka'bah*; yet, that does not mean that Allāh is located in the sky just as it does not mean that He is located in the direction of the *Ka'bah*. Rather, they turn [their attention, or their hands] to the sky because the sky is the prescribed direction of orientation (*al-Qiblah* / القبله), just as the *Ka'bah* is the prescribed direction of orientation (*al-Qiblah*) for the ritual prayer (*al-āalāh*). So when she said that He is in the sky, it was known that she was one of those who maintain the uniqueness of Allāh (*muwaā'id*), and not a worshipper of idols.

After saying this al-Nawawā quoted another great authority of Islām, the Maliki *muāaddith* and imam al-Qaḥā 'Iyāḥ (544 / 1149; Marākish), the author of many important works in the science of *āādāth*, including a commentary on *Āāāā Muslim*:

There is no disagreement whatsoever among any of the Muslims—their *fuqahā'* (experts on the rules of the *Sharā'ah*), their *muhaddithān* (experts in the science of *āādāth* transmission, and criticism), their *mutakallimān* (*ulamā'* of *Kalām*; that is, dialectic theology), their polemicists (*naẓẓār* / نظر)<sup>19</sup> and their ordinary followers (*muqallid*)—that the outward meaning of those texts [from either the Sunnah or the Qur'ān] in which it is mentioned that Allāh is in the sky is not meant [literally]; for example, the words of the Exalted: "Are you assured that He who is in the sky will not cause the earth to swallow you up?"<sup>20</sup> These and

---

picture (*takhyaal wa tamthāl* / تخييل و تمثيل) the implication of which is that the hand of the Prophet ﷺ which is over the hands of those who took oath from him is the *Hand* of Allāh in meaning, not literally, and what that means is that by taking oath from the Prophet ﷺ it were as if they were taking oath from Allāh

<sup>18</sup> The literal wording here is *they turn to the sky*, or *they face the sky*. However, since it is reported that the Prophet ﷺ forbade the Muslims to look at the sky, and taught them to raise the palm of their hands towards the sky, the phrase should be interpreted accordingly.

<sup>19</sup> *Naẓẓār* / نظر literally means *polemicists*, or *debators*, in the technical usage of the *ulamā'* it refers to those who are specialists at defending Islām from the attacks of heretics and unbelievers whether they do that in writing or in public debate.

<sup>20</sup> *Surah al-Mulk*, 67:16. Imām al-Suyāti (d. 911 / 1505; Cairo) in his celebrated commentary on the Qur'ān interpreted the words *He who is in the sky* to mean *He whose sovereignty and power is in the sky*. Abā 'I-Barakāt al-Nasafā (d. 710 / 1310; Baghdad), the Hanafi imam mentioned in his commentary on the Qur'ān, *Mudārik al-Tanzāl* that the words *He who is in the sky* means *He whose sovereignty is in the sky* because the sky in the dwelling place of the angels, and from the sky His decrees descend, and His [revealed] books, and His commands, and His prohibitions. Al-Nasafā continued: "It were as if Allāh said: 'Do you feel secure from the Creator of the sky and His sovereignty?' It is also possible that it [means *He whose sovereignty is in the sky*] because the mercy and punishment [of Allāh] descends from the sky, or because those [whom Allāh is addressing in this verse; namely, the polytheists and unbelievers] had an anthropomorphic perspective (*tashbāh*) and believed that He was in the sky, so Allāh spoke to them according to their belief: "Do you feel secure from Him whom you imagine is in the sky, whereas, He far transcends all place..." Ibn Āyyān mentioned in his commentary *al-Baār al-Muāat* that the words *He who is in the sky* are figurative (*majāz* / مجاز) since rational proof demonstrates that Allāh is not located in any place (*laisa bimutahayyiz* / ليس بمتهيز), or direction. He said the figurative meaning is that His sovereignty is in the sky. The actual wording is: "Do you feel secure from Him whose sovereignty is in the sky?" However, the words "whose sovereignty" were omitted leaving: "Do you feel secure from Him who is in the sky?" He admitted that indeed His sovereignty is in all things, but His sovereignty in the sky was especially mentioned because it is the home of the angels; furthermore, His Throne is there, and so is His Chair (*al-kursā*), and the Tablet (*al-lawā*) [on which the provision and fate of all His creatures is written]. He mentioned that from the sky the decrees of Allāh descend, and His books, and his commands and prohibitions. He mentioned the other possibility which al-Nasafā mentioned; namely, that since they were anthropomorphists (*ya'taqidāna al-tashbāh*), Allāh asked them: "Do you feel secure from Him whom you imagine is in the sky, whereas, He far transcends all place..." He mentioned that some have

similar texts [which mention that Allāh is in the sky or seem to imply that] are not to be taken literally (*'alā ʾaḥirihā* / على ظاهره); rather, according to them all [that is, all the Muslims and the experts of every field of the *Sharā'ah* as mentioned above], they are to be taken idiomatically (*mu'awwalan* / مؤولة). So whoever from among the *mu'addithān*, and the *fuqahā'*, and the *mutakallimān* permitted using the term of *the direction up* (*jihat al-fauq* / جهة الفوق) [in relation to Allāh] without presuming any limit, or without conceiving how [He might be in the *direction up*] interpreted *in the sky* to mean *over the sky* [that is, He whose authority, or power is over the sky]. Whereas, whoever from among the great majority of polemicists (*naẓẓār*), and *mutakallimān*, and the people of transcendence (*āāāb al-tanzāh* / أصحاب التنزيه) denied that He had any limit, and maintained the impossibility of ascribing any direction to Him, hallowed is He, they interpreted the texts in a variety of ways according to the requirement of the context. They mentioned interpretations similar to what we mentioned previously [that is, in his commentary which, however, al-Nawawā did not cite]. I wish I knew what exactly it is that has united the People of the Sunnah and the Truth, all of them, on the necessity of refraining from thinking about the reality (*al-dhāt*) [of Allāh], as they were ordered [by the Lawgiver], and the necessity to keep silent about what perplexes their intelligences (*al-'aql* / العقل), and to prohibit explaining how (*al-takyāf*) [is the divine reality], and in what form (*al-tashkāl*) [is it]. They kept silent and refrained from [thinking or speaking about the divine reality (*al-dhāt*)] not because they had any doubt about the Existent, or about His existence [but because they recognized that His reality is beyond comprehension]. Their silence does not impair their belief in His uniqueness (*al-tauāād*); rather, it is the essence of *al-tauāād* [for the recognition that He is other than whatever we imagine Him to be is a requirement of the transcendent perspective of *al-tauāād*]. Some of the *ulamā'* overlooked [some of the strict requirements of the divine transcendence] and indulged in using the term *direction* (*al-jihah*) [in relation to Allāh] fearing to take unwarranted liberties [in interpreting the revealed texts of the *Sharā'ah*]. But it raises the question of whether or not there is any difference between explaining how (*al-takyāf*) [is the divine reality] and between ascribing directions to Him.<sup>21</sup> No doubt, the course which offers salvation from deviation for those

---

also suggested that the actual wording is: "Do you feel secure from the Creator of what is in the sky?" Then the words "the Creator" were omitted leaving: "Do you feel secure from Him who is in the sky?"

The omission of words is known in English rhetoric and is called *ellipsis*. However, whereas in English an apostrophe or three dots indicates the omission of a word, or words; there is nothing but the context or meaning to indicate that words have been left out in Arabic. Moreover, whereas ellipsis is not common in English and serves a limited number of purposes, in Arabic ellipsis (*āadhḥ* / حذف) is quite common and serves numerous purposes—brevity is only one of them. When used discreetly, ellipsis (*āadhḥ*) is a mark of eloquence in Arabic. "Omission and mention" (*al-āadhḥ wa 'l-dhikr*), is an important field of study in the science called *'ilm al-ma'ānā*. One learns from this science when it is permissible to omit the different parts of a sentence and when it is not permissible. The different purposes for omitting the different parts of sentences is delineated with abundant examples from the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the ancient poetry of the Arabs. Familiarity with this subject is vital for those who wish to understand the Arabic language, or the *Sharā'ah*. As Fakhr al-Dān al-Rāzā (606 / 1210; Herat) pointed out, the mistaken perspective of the anthropomorphists is all due to their ignorance of the modes and manners of speech in Arabic. Since the subject of *'ilm al-ma'ānā* is virtually unknown as a science in English, there is no way to translate it; *rhetoric* is a dud.

<sup>21</sup> The point here seems to be that there is no warrant for attributing direction to Allāh because the texts of the *Sharā'ah* are silent about that. Although the literal wording of some of the texts seems to imply that He is on the Throne, or over the Throne, or in the sky, there are no texts which state expressly that He has such and such *direction*. There is a world of difference between the words of the Qur'ān "and He enforces His will over (*fauqa*) His slaves," or the words "then He subdued [or took control; *istawā*] of the Throne" and the claims of some *ulamā'* that He has an attribute called "aboveness / *'ulāw*," or "direction / *al-jihah*," or an attribute called "ascension / *istiwā'*," since the first are the express terms in which Allāh has described himself, while the second are derivative terms which men have taken out of context and changed the form according to their understanding of the terms of the Lawgiver. The Qur'ān declares that Allāh enforces His will *fauqa 'ibādihā* (over His slaves); this is an idiomatic construction. It does not declare that Allāh has an attribute called "direction / *al-jihah*," or "aboveness / *'ulāw*." Similarly, it declares *thumma istawā 'alā 'l-'arsh*, it does not declare that He has an attribute called *istawā* (ascension), nor does it describe Allāh as *mustawwin* (ascended). Ibn al-Jauzā (d. 597 / 1201; Baghdad) emphasised this point in the introduction to his *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbāh*. He mentioned that the likes of the idioms we mentioned above are called *iḥāfāt* (idiomatic constructions) which are true in the context of the speech of the Lawgiver, but untrue when taken out of that context. He deplored the habit of many Hanbalis of taking these *iḥāfāt* (idiomatic

for whom Allāh has ordained success is to restrict oneself to using such terms as the Law (*al-Shar'* / الشرع) itself has used like "and He enforces His will over (*fauqa*) His slaves," or the words "then He subdued [or took control; *istawā*] of the Throne," while understanding such terms with reference to the verse which comprehends the universal principle of transcendence (*tanzāh*); namely, His word: "Nothing is like Him." For reason can not accept anything which contravenes this universal principle of the Law.

Mulla 'Alā al-Qārā (d. 1014 h. / 1606; Makkah) was a Hanafi *faqāh*, a *muāaddith*, an expert in language, a *mutakallim*, and a prolific author of important Islamic texts including the commentary on Abā Ānāfah's *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, which is a work on belief, and a ten-volume commentary on the *āadāth* compilation *Mishkāt al-Maābāā*. Commenting on the words reported from the Prophet ﷺ "Where is Allāh?" in the *Āadāth al-Jāriyah*, (see page 17 above), he wrote:

In another version of the same *āadāth* there is the wording: "Where is your Lord?" It means that where is His place of decision, and His order, and the place where His dominion and power are manifested. {She said: "In the sky."} Al-Qāçā ['Iyāç] said: "The meaning is that His command and His prohibition comes from the direction of the sky. The Prophet ﷺ did not mean to ask her about the whereabouts of Allāh, since He transcends such an attribute as place, just as He transcends the attribute of time. Rather, the Prophet ﷺ intended to find out by his question to her whether she was a monotheist declaring the uniqueness of Allāh (*muwaā'idah*), or whether she was a polytheist (*mushrikah*) because the Arabs were worshipping idols. Each clan amongst them had its special idol, which it worshipped and revered. Perhaps some of their ignorant and stupid people did not recognize any god whatsoever; therefore, the Prophet ﷺ wanted to ascertain what she worshipped. So when she said "in the sky," or, as in another version, she pointed to the sky, he understood that she was a monotheist declaring the uniqueness of Allāh. In other words, he wanted to preclude the gods on earth; that is, the idols. He did not mean to imply that He occupies a place in the sky, far-removed is Allāh from what the transgressors ascribe to Him in their insolence. Moreover, the Prophet ﷺ had been ordered to speak to the people according to the extent of their intelligence, and to guide them to the truth in way which was appropriate to their understanding. So when the Prophet ﷺ found that she believed that the one who deserves to be worshipped is the God who implements His purpose from the sky to the earth, not the gods which the pagans worshipped, he was satisfied with that much from her, and he did not charge her with sheer unity (*āirf al-tauāad* / صرف التوحيد)–the principle of transcendence (*āaqāqat al-tanzāh* / حقيقة التنزيه). Some [of the *ulamā'*] have said that the meaning is that His order and prohibition, His mercy and revelation comes from the sky. In that case, this *āadāth* is similar [in its implications] to His word ﷺ: "Do you feel secure from Him who is in the sky...?"<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in some other [authentic] versions of this *āadāth* it comes that this girl was dumb, and for that reason [Imām] al-Shāfi'ā [d. 204 / 820; Cairo] permitted the freeing of a slave even if he is dumb.<sup>23</sup> In such case, the words in the *āadāth* "She said, 'In the sky.'"

---

constructions) and calling them attributes (*āifāf*). Indeed, he denounced that practice as heresy (*bid'ah*). See *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbāh*, pp. 8-9. Al-Qāçā 'Iyāç seems to be making the same point because he mentions next that safety is to be found in believing in the exact words of the ambiguous texts some examples of which he mentions.

Furthermore, his rhetorical question suggests that those who take these idioms out of context and ascribe derivative terms to Allāh like "aboveness," and "direction," and "ascension," and "ascended," have actually indulged in explaining how (*al-takyāf*). This much indulgence is something al-Qāçā 'Iyāç questions, yet it is understood that in spite of ascribing such terms to Allāh those *ulamā'* do not outwardly insist on ascribing physical, originated attributes to Allāh. That is clear-cut anthropomorphism which al-Qāçā 'Iyāç has already dismissed at the outset of the citation we presented above by declaring that all Muslims are agreed that the literal meaning of the ambiguous texts are not to be taken literally.

<sup>22</sup> For the exegesis of this verse see footnote 20.

<sup>23</sup> Keep in mind that when an imam like al-Shāfi'ā acts on a particular *āadāth*, it means that the *āadāth* is authentic as far as he is concerned. Since he is a *mujtahid* imam, which presupposes that he knows all the different chains of narration by which a *āadāth* might be transmitted, and knows the narrators and their merits and weaknesses, and the

mean that she pointed to the sky [since she could not speak, obviously; and this is just what has come expressly in another version of the *ādadāth*: "She pointed to the sky."] <sup>24</sup>

Notice that so far we have quoted a Shafi'i imam, a Maliki imam, and a Hanafi imam all who were renowned *muāaddithān*, in addition to being high authorities of the *Sharā'ah* and celebrated authors of works which the *ulamā'* and the common people have poured over for centuries. They all agree that it is not permissible to adopt the literal, outward meaning of the ambiguous texts if the literal meaning prejudices the transcendence of Allāh, or prejudices what is established conclusively by definitive verses of the Qur'ān or the definitive (*mutawātir*) Sunnah. Keep in mind that what they have expressed are no maverick ideas; rather, they are quite representative of the unanimous opinion of the *ulamā'* of their *madhhab*. Recall that Tāj al-Dān al-Subkā confirmed what is not any secret to the *ulamā'*; namely, that the followers of these three *madhhabs* are all *Ash'arīyah* (or *Ashā'irah*; that is, Asharites) with few exceptions, and that the early, and great men of the Hanbali *madhhab* are also *Ash'arīyah*. <sup>25</sup>

Abā 'l-Faraj Ibn al-Jauzī (d. 597 / 1201; Baghdad) was both a Hanbali and *Ash'arā'* (an Asharite). He was a high authority of the Hanbali *madhhab*, and a veritable polymath, a historian of encyclopedic stature, a renowned *muāaddith*, a commentator of the Qur'ān, and one of the most prolific authors of Islām—according to the contemporary expert of historical biography Khair al-Dān al-Ziriklā (1396 / 1976; Cairo), who is the author of the biographical dictionary *al-A'lām*, Ibn al-Jauzī wrote about three hundred books. Ibn Rajab al-Ānbalā (795 / 1393; Damascus) in his *Dhail Ābaqāt al-Ānābalah*, in which he documented the histories and assessed the importance of the Hanbali *ulamā'*, proclaimed Ibn al-Jauzī to be "the master (*shaikh*) of his time, the imam of his age." <sup>26</sup> Imām Shams al-Dān al-Dhahabī (d. 748 / 1348; Damascus) lavished praise on him in his encyclopaedia of biography, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'* declaring him "the Shaikh, the Imam, the Scholar (*al-'alāmah*), the *Āfiā'* <sup>27</sup>, the Commentator of the Qur'ān (*al-mufassir*), the Shaikh of Islām, the Pride of Iraq." <sup>28</sup>

Ibn al-Jauzī also interpreted the *Ādadāth al-Jāriyah* in an idiomatic way. In his *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbāh* he wrote: "The *ulamā'* have realised that the sky and the earth do not contain Allāh, hallowed is He; nor does space reach Him. [As for the *ādadāth*] the Prophet ﷺ understood from her sign that she revered the Creator." <sup>29</sup> Ibn Ājir al-'Asqalānā (**REFERENCE**), Abā Bakr Ibn al'Arabā, (**REFERENCE**) and 'Alāmah Muāammad Zāhid al-Kautharā and others pointed out that the question "where" in Arabic can refer to place in the sense of position, rank or prestige (*makānah* / مكانة) as it can refer to physical place (*makān* / مكان). They mentioned that the Arabs say "the place of so and so is in the sky" meaning that he has great esteem. He quoted a verse of the master poet, the Companion Nābighah al-Ja'dā <sup>30</sup> in attestation to that usage: "We, our glory, and our fortune rose to the sky, but we desire a height [*manāar*] above even that." <sup>31</sup>

---

rules and principles of the science of *ādadāth*; rather, he establishes the principles of the science, or what is more important, he establishes himself from the primary sources of the *Sharā'ah* the rules which govern when and when not a *ādadāth* may be adduced in an issue of law or belief, so it is rightly presumed that he knows all that better than anybody else or at least just as well as anybody else. The opinion of any other *muāaddith* about the status of a *ādadāth* and whether or not it is admissible as a proof on any given issue does not prejudice the opinion of the *mujtahid*.

<sup>24</sup> Mulla 'Alā al-Qārā, *Mirqāt al-Mafātā'* (Beirut, ), p. 454; vol. 6

<sup>25</sup> See above page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Rajab, *Dhail Tabaqāt al-Ānābalah*, (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1417 h.), p. 337; vol. 1

<sup>27</sup> A title reserved for those elect scholars who memorised vast numbers of *ādadāth*, and had proficiency in the science of *ādadāth* whereby they knew the narrators and what the authorities said about them and could distinguish the different grades of *ādadāth* and whether and by which chains of narration a *ādadāth* could be established as a *ādadāth*. See Āfār Aāmad al-'Uthmānā, *Qawā'id fi 'Ulām al-Ādadāth* (Riyadh, Al-'Ubaikān, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 1404), p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'* (Beirut, Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1409 h.), p. 365; vol 21

<sup>29</sup> *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbāh*, p. 43

<sup>30</sup> Nābighah al-Ja'dā (d. about 50 / 670; Isfahan) τ attained fame prior to Islām on account of his exquisite poetry. He did not use to recite poetry; then suddenly when he was about thirty years old, he started to gush forth extemporaneously, poetry of exquisite beauty—that is why he was called *Nābighah*, the root of which means *to emerge from obscurity as a poet*. He lived to be over one hundred years old, and fought the Battle of Siffān with the Caliph 'Alā

Keep in mind that one of the important ways in which the *ulamà'* verified the precise meanings of the Arabic words and idioms used in the Qur'ân and the Sunnah was through the evidence of ancient Arabic poetry. The Followers used to ask the Scholar of the Arabs (*äibr al-'arab*)<sup>32</sup>, Ibn 'Abbàs, the nephew of the Prophet ﷺ, about the meaning of words and idioms in the Qur'ân. When he would answer, they would ask him for some proof of what he claimed, and he would recite some verses of ancient poetry in testimony. In fact, he taught the Followers to seek the meanings of the words of revelation in the legacy of poetry, which was alive in the collective memory of the Arabs. Jalàl al-Dàn al-Suyâtà (d. 911 / 1505; Cairo) devoted a whole chapter in his *al-Itqàn fà 'Ulâm al-Qur'ân*, a textbook on the sciences of the Qur'ân, to the importance of ancient poetry as a means to verify the meanings of obscure phrases (*al-gharà'ib*) in the Qur'ân. He quoted Abâ Bakr ibn al-Anbàrà (328 / 940; Baghdad)<sup>33</sup> as saying that much has been reported from the Companions and the Followers concerning their establishing the meanings of the difficult and obscure phrases of the Qur'ân through the evidence of poetry. He quoted Ibn 'Abbàs: "Poetry is the archives (*dáwàn*) of the Arabs, so if some word in the Qur'ân, which Allàh revealed in the language of the Arabs, is unknown to us, we should have recourse to those archives, and seek its meaning there."<sup>34</sup>

---

†. Prior to accepting Islàm, he used to shun idols and prohibit wine. When he came with a deputation of his tribe to visit the Prophet ﷺ, he accepted Islàm, and recited for him some poetry including the above-mentioned verse in which he said: "...but we desire a height above even that." When he recited it the Prophet ﷺ asked him: "Where will you go?" He replied: "Paradise." The Prophet ﷺ affirmed: "Yes, [you shall have paradise] if Allàh wills." Ibn 'Ajr al-'Asqalànà reported it as a *äadàth* with its chain of narration (*sanad*) in his *al-Maàlib al-'Aliyah*, (Cairo, Mu'assasah Quràubah, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1418), p. 322; vol. 9.

<sup>31</sup> The original verse is: 'Alunà al-samà'a majdunà wa judàdunà; wa innà lanab'ghà fauqa dhàlika maàharà / علونا السماء مجدنا وجدودنا / وإنا لنبغى فوق ذلك منظرًا الإعراب / *al-i'ràb*). If sky (*al-samà'*) is taken to be the object of the verb *rose* (*'alaunà*) making the verb transitive, then glory is in apposition (*badl*) to the subject of the verb *rose*; namely, the pronoun *we*. Thus it can be translated literally: "We, our glory, and fortune rose to the sky." However, if we take sky to be the subject (*mubtada'*) of a new sentence, then *rose* would be taken to be intransitive, and the verse may be translated: "We rose; the sky is our glory and fortune."

<sup>32</sup> This title was conferred on him by the Prophet ﷺ who also prayed that Allàh should give him the understanding of religion and the knowledge of the interpretation (*ta'wàl*) [of the Qur'ân]. In another report he prayed: "O Allàh, teach him wisdom, and the interpretation (*ta'wàl*) of the Book." Several similar reports were mentioned by Ibn 'Ajr al-'Asqalànà in his *al-làbah fà Tamyàz al-Àääàbah*, which an encyclopaedia of the biographies of all persons who are known to be Companions. See Ibn 'Ajr al-'Asqalànà, *al-làbah fà Tamyàz al-Àääàbah* (Beirut, Dàr al-Jàl, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1412), pp. 133-134.

<sup>33</sup> Khair al-Dàn al-Ziriklà mentioned in his *al-A'làm* (p. 334; vol. 6) said that Abâ Bakr ibn al-Anbàrà was the most knowledgeable person of his time in the field of literature and language. He said that some say he memorised three hundred thousand verses of poetry which testify to the meanings of the words and idioms of the Qur'ân. He wrote a book on the obscure words in *äadàth* that contains forty-five thousand pages.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Suyâtà, *al-Itqàn fà 'Ulâm al-Qur'ân*, (Beirut, 'Àlâm al-Kutub, n.d.) p. 119; vol. 1

