

Chapter 1: Debates of Prophet Muhammad (S) with scholars and representatives of five different religions

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) says that his father Imam Baqir (as) reported to him, and he was reported by Imam Ali Ibn al-Husain Zayn al-Abedin (as), who reported from his grandfather, Imam Ali (as) that once, in the city of Medina, twenty five scholars and representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Atheism, Dualism and Polytheism [five from each religion] came to see Prophet Muhammad (S) and challenged him for debate... One by one they proclaimed their faith to Prophet Muhammad (S)...

The Jews described their belief as: “We believe that Prophet Uzair [Ezra] (as) is a son of God and we have come to you O’ Muhammad to see what you say about it. If you accept our belief then surely our religion is better than yours. And if you disagree, then we will have debate and discussion with you...”

The Christian Scholars made claim for the support of their belief as: ‘We believe that God united with Messiah [Prophet Isa (as), Jesus] and so Messiah is the son of God and we have come to you O’ Muhammad to see what you say about it. If you accept our belief then surely our religion is better than yours. And if you disagree, then we will have debate and discussion with you...’

The Atheists had made claim for the support of their belief as: ‘We say that there is no time limit of this Universe, it is *qadeem*¹ (eternally pre-existent) and will remain eternal. We have come to you to see what you say about our belief. If you accept our belief then surely our religion is better than yours. And if you disagree, then in that case we will have debate and discussion with you ...’

Dualists said: ‘Our belief is that Light and Darkness are the organizers of this Universe. We have come to you to see what you say about it. If you accept our belief then surely our religion is better than yours. And if you disagree then in that case we will have debate and discussion with you ...’

The polytheists of Arab made claim for the support of their belief as: ‘Our belief is that our idols are

our Gods. We have come to you to see what you say about our belief. If you accept our belief then surely our religion is better than yours. And if you disagree, then in that case we will have debate and discussion with you.’

When Prophet Muhammad (S) heard the beliefs of all the five groups, he said: “I believe in one God Who is without any partner and I reject any other god. God has sent me as a Warner and Bearer of glad tidings for all human beings. And I am His final proof over all Universes.”

Part 1: Debate with Jews

Then, the Prophet (S) turned towards the Jews and said: “Oh Jews! Have you come to me so that I would accept your claim without any proofs?”

The Jews replied: ‘No.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Then what is the reason behind your claim that Prophet Uzair [Ezra] (S) is the son of God?”

The Jews replied: ‘We say this because Uzair [Ezra] (as) vivified Torah for Jews [*Bani Israel*, the nation of Prophet Musa (as)] after its destruction and he was able to do this because he was the son of God.’

The Prophet (S) replied: “Now tell me why you consider Ezra [Prophet Uzair (as)] as the son of God, why not Moses (as) [Prophet Musa (as)] who brought Torah for Jews [*Bani Israel*] and displayed many miracles, which you are aware of. And if the only reason for you to consider Uzair (as) as the son of God is his miracles of vivifying Torah then Musa (as) is more worthy of being called the son of God. And if this minor miracle [vivifying of Torah] can make Uzair (as) the son of God, then the one who possesses much greater miracles should have a higher status than prophethood because if by being a son you mean that man and woman copulate and give birth to a son, then you are infidels because you have compared God to His creatures and attributed to Him the characteristics of a *haadith*² (that which comes into existence) and you do believe that what is *haadith* is a creature and a creature needs a Creator for its creation.”

The Jews said: ‘Yes, we do not think of Uzair (as) as the son of God in this meaning because that would mean infidelity, just like you mentioned. But we call him the son of God to show respect towards him in the same way as some of our scholars call a person ‘my son’ to respect him and appreciate his high status and that person is not related to the scholar by blood because quite often, a stranger who does not have any blood relationship is also called a son. Similarly, when God did what He did to Uzair (as), He made Uzair (as) His son for his respect and not by birth.’

The Prophet (S) said: “What you just said goes against you because if Uzair (as) is the son of God because of this reason then Musa (as) deserves a greater status near God. Undoubtedly, God humiliates those who deny Him instead of accepting Him and returns their argument over them. What

you just said about Uzair (as) being the son of God goes against you because just now, you said that a high-ranking person can call a stranger with whom he has no blood relationship his son and it is clear that he did not give birth to this person. So, you may also have seen people with high status calling a stranger their brother, or leader, or father, or master and all of these phrases are said out of respect and honour.

So, the more respect a person has for another, he may call him with a higher title of praise and respect. Now that this is proven and clear to you, it will be alright for you to call Musa (as) the brother of God, or His leader or father or master because it is proven that Musa (as) has a greater status than Uzair (as). So, if God made Uzair (as) His son out of honour, then Musa (as) who possesses a higher status should be given a higher position, like His leader or uncle or lord. So will it be correct in your opinion if Musa (as) is called as the brother of God or His leader or uncle or boss or master?"

Upon hearing this question from Prophet Muhammad (S), all the **Jewish scholars were baffled and worried and said:** 'Oh Muhammad, give us time to think over what you said.'

The Prophet (S) replied: "Yes, do think it over but think with an unbiased heart. May Allah show you the right path."

[Part 2: Debate with Christians](#)

Part 2: Debate with Christians³

The Prophet (S) then turned towards Christians and started debate...

The Prophet (S) said: "You say that the *qadeem* [eternally pre-existent] God united with His son Messiah [Jesus, Prophet Isa (as)]. So, in other words, you are implying that *qadeem* (God, eternally pre-existent) became *haadith* (something with a beginning) because of a *haadith* [Prophet Isa (as)] and so *haadith* [Prophet Isa (as)] became *qadeem*, just like God is. [means that an eternal being became contingent and the contingent became eternal].⁴

Or maybe what you mean by 'God united with His son' is that God specially blessed him and did not bless anyone with the same dignity and respect. So, if by this you meant that *qadeem* God became *haadith*, then you are completely wrong. This is because it is impossible for a *qadeem* [eternally pre-existent] to become *haadith* through some revolutionary means. And if you say that *haadith* became *qadeem* then this is also incorrect because, just like how a *qadeem* cannot become *haadith*, a *haadith* cannot become *qadeem*.

And if by 'unity' you mean that God specially chose him for Himself and from among all His servants only chose Prophet Isa (as) for this dignity, then this means that you have admitted on *hudooth*⁵ (coming into existence) of Prophet Isa (as) for which God united with him. Because when Prophet Isa (as) became *haadith* [came into existence] and then God united with him, it means that he acquired 'characteristics'

by which he became superior to all the creatures, then Prophet Isa (as) and the new 'characteristics' are both *haadith*. And this goes against all that you have said so far.”

The Christians replied: ‘Oh Muhammad! When God placed great miracles [which the whole world knows] on Prophet Isa’s (as) hands, then He made Jesus His son to dignify and glorify him.’

The Prophet (S) said: “You just heard what I said to the Jews on this topic.” [And then the Prophet (S) repeated his conversation with Jews].” [Please see debate of Prophet (S) with Jews]

After listening to Prophet’s arguments, everyone was silent. However, one person from among them came forward and said: ‘Oh Muhammad! Do you not say that Abraham [Prophet Ibrahim (as)] is the *Khalil* of God?’

The Prophet (S) replied: “Yes, we say that.”

The Christian man said: ‘If Ibrahim (as) can be the ‘*Khalil* of God’, then why do you stop us from saying that Jesus is the ‘son of God’?’

The Prophet (S) replied: “These two things are not similar, because when we say Ibrahim (as) is the *Khalil* of God, we mean something different. In reality, the word *Khalil* derives from *khillat* and *khillat* means ‘neediness and poverty’. So, he is called *Khalil* because he only needed God and he was totally cutoff from everything of the world, he only trusted God and only asked Him in time of need. And his story is that when his enemies decided to throw him in the fire and placed him on the catapult, God sent angel Gabriel [*Jibreel*] towards him and told Jibreel, “Go and help My servant.” Jibreel went to Ibrahim (as) and met him in air [while he was thrown towards fire] and told him, “Tell me what you want. God has sent me to help you.”

Ibrahim (as) answered by saying, “No, I do not need your help. God is enough for me and I trust only Him. I will never ask anyone but Him. If I need anything, I will only ask Him.” So, God called him *Khalil*, which means someone who is only needy of God, only depends on Him and is disconnected from everything other than Him and asking God only in time of his need. And if the meaning of *khillat* is taken as secrets then it means that he knew those secrets of God that no one else did, then *Khalil* would mean ‘Knowledgeable of God’ and ‘Knowledgeable of His divine affairs’ and on this basis, you cannot compare God to His creatures.

Can you not see that when there is no need towards Him, then he cannot be *Khalil* and similarly, if the knowledge of His secrets does not exist, then he is again not a *Khalil*? But if a person has a son and he insults him or rejects his son, even then he cannot take him out of his fatherhood because birth is a reality. In addition, if God’s said ‘Ibrahim (as) is My *Khalil*’ based on this, it is incumbent upon you to call Prophet Isa (as) His son, then it is also incumbent upon you to call Musa His son because he performed strange miracles that were different from those of Prophet Isa (as). Then, you will also have to say that Musa (as) is His son and just like I told the Jews, you can also call Musa (as) His leader, uncle, boss

and master.”

After hearing this, the Christians started saying to each other that it is written in the Holy Bible that Jesus said: ‘Go towards my and your Father.’

The Prophet (S) said: “If you practice what is written in this book [Bible, *Injeel*] and if it says, ‘Go towards my and your Father,’ then you will also have to say that all of those people to whom Prophet Isa (as) was speaking to when he said this [sentence] are also God’s sons and they were all God’s sons on the same basis as Prophet Isa (as) was God’s son. And this quote from this book [Bible] falsifies your claim because you consider Prophet Isa (as) as the son of God due to his special position and proximity to Him. Just now, you said that we call Prophet Isa (as) son of God because of his special status that God has exclusively given him and not anyone else.

And you are also aware of the fact that this special attribute was only possessed by Prophet Isa (as) and not the ones to whom Prophet Isa (as) said: ‘Go towards my and your Father.’ Thus, this claim of yours that God made Prophet Isa (as) His son because of his special attribute is falsified because ‘being a son of God’ is also proved for those who did not possess any special status. And is it not possible that you made a wrong interpretation and explanation of Prophet Isa’s (as) quote and made a mistake in understanding it? Because when he said: ‘Go towards my and your Father’ he might not have meant what you think. However, it is quite possible that he meant go towards your father [Adam or Noah (as)] and very soon, God will ascend me towards them and gather me with them and ‘Adam (as) is my father, as well as yours.’ Similarly, ‘Noah (as) is my father and also your father’ [Noah (as) is also called the second Adam (as)] and it is possible that there might be another meaning to what he said which you cannot comprehend.”

Upon hearing this, all the Christians were silent and said: ‘We have never seen anyone [like Prophet Muhammad (S)] who debates like this and we want to think over our matters.’

Part 3: Debate with Atheists

The Prophet (S) then turned towards the atheists and said: “Now, tell me what is the reason behind your claim that the objects [or whatever is] in this Universe have no beginning and they have been there forever and will exist forever.”

The atheists replied: ‘We are simply stating what we observe. We have not seen *hudooth* [contingency, coming into existence] in objects [or whatever exists] of the Universe so we say that this Universe has been there forever and when we did not observe destruction and annihilation, we postulated that whatever exists in this Universe is not transient [will never annihilate].’

The Prophet (S) said: “Did you find this Universe *qadeem* [eternally pre-existent, without a beginning] or did you find it eternal? If you say so, then explain if you yourself are in the same physical and

intellectual state as you are now and that you will remain like this forever. If you will answer positively, then undoubtedly, you will deny your own observation and reject the observation of the observers [in other words, you yourself were not in the same physical and intellectual state].”

Facing this question from the Prophet (S), the atheists replied: ‘No, we do not find this Universe pre-existent or everlasting.’

The Prophet (S) then said: “Then how come you said that the objects in this Universe are eternally pre-existent and eternal? And when you did not observe *hudooth* [contingency, coming into being] or *inqadha*⁶ (perishing, being transient) in this Universe, you called it pre-existent and eternal; while it was better for you, when you did not find eternal pre-existence and eternity in this Universe, to claim that this Universe is *haadith* [came into existence] and has *inqadha* (perishable). Alright, have you seen how the day and night come one after another?”

The atheists said: ‘Yes.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Do you think of the night and the day to be eternal?”

The atheists said: ‘Yes.’

The Prophet (S) said: “In your opinion, can the night and the day coexist?”

The atheists said: ‘No.’

The Prophet (S) continued: “Doesn’t one of them separate from the other and come forward and the other one follow it?”

The atheists said: ‘Yes, this is how it works.’

The Prophet (S) said: “So, through your affirmation, you have said that the night and the day that have passed display *hudooth* [coming into existence], while you have not observed it directly. Now, tell me you say that the Universe is eternally pre-existent and not *haadith* [something pre-existent]. Do you know what are the things that you will have to admit to and reject, based on your proposition?”

The atheists said: ‘Yes.’

The Prophet (S) said: “You have definitely observed that in this Universe, one thing is dependent over another because existence of anything in this Universe is impossible without its contact [or connection] with another thing. You may have seen how some parts of a building are dependent over others or else, the building would be unstable and not be able to stand as a unit [will fall] and this is true for everything [in this Universe]. The same is true for all other objects. So, when these objects, while being eternally pre-existent, require other objects for their strength and completeness, so now tell me, what would have been their situation and characteristics had they been *haadith* [having a beginning]?”

Imam Ali (as) says that after hearing this question from Prophet Muhammad (S), all the atheists were baffled and understood that it is impossible to acquire a new characteristic for a *haadith* object [something with a beginning] that is different from the characteristics of the objects which we call *qadeem* (eternally pre-existent).

The atheists stopped their discussion and said: ‘We wish to think over our matters for some time...’

Part 4: Debate with Dualists [Sanaviyas]

Prophet Muhammad (S) then turned towards the Sanaviyas [Dualists, believers of two Gods], who believe that light [or goodness] and darkness [or evil] control the matters of this Universe.

The Prophet (S) said: “Tell me what has forced you to claim that light and darkness control this Universe.”

The Dualists replied: ‘We have observed two discrete characteristics in this Universe, goodness and evil and we found out that these two are completely opposite of one another. So we could not accept that the one who does a good thing can also perform what is its opposite. Hence, we considered the performer of each one of these characteristics as a separate being. Can you not see that it is impossible for ice to be hot and fire to be cold? So we suggested two creators, the first one is light and the second one, darkness.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Have you not observed blackness, whiteness, redness, yellowness and greenness and isn’t each one of them opposite of the others? And that, just like how coldness and hotness cannot be together in one place, these colors can’t be gathered in one place?” [meaning that these colors cannot be one other at the same time, e.g. green cannot be blue at the same time]

The Dualists replied: ‘Yes.’

The Prophet (S) said: “So, just like you have suggested one creator for every separate characteristic, can the creators of each one of these colors be considered separate?”

Everyone was silent when they heard this argument from Prophet Muhammad (S).

The Prophet (S) continued: “Now tell me, you say that light and darkness decide the affairs of this Universe together. How can light and darkness mix when it is the nature of lightness to ascend and the nature of darkness to descend? Can you not see that when a person walks towards east and another person walks towards west, is it possible for them to meet?”

The Dualists replied: ‘No, it is impossible.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Thus it is proved that light and darkness cannot be combined because each one of them moves in opposition to the other. When they cannot be combined together, they cannot be

makers of Universe. So how do you think that the Universe is created by the combination of these two when combination of these elements is impossible? These two [light and darkness] are in fact the creatures of one God who intelligently prevails over them and wisely controls them.”

The Dualists replied: ‘Let us think about our views.’

Part 5: Debate with Polytheists

Then, the Prophet (S) turned towards the Arab polytheists and said: “Why do you worship idols instead of worshipping Allah?”

The polytheists replied: ‘We seek nearness to God through worshipping these idols.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Can these idols hear? Do they obey their lord? Do they worship God so that you would become close to God by paying homage to them and their worship?”

The polytheists said: ‘No, this is not so.’

The Prophet (S) said: “You made these idols with your own hands so if worship was possible for them, it was them who should have worshipped you and not the other way around. In addition, the One who knows your needs and your future and knows your affairs has not ordered any such respect and homage to these idols...”

Upon hearing this, there was a discord among the polytheists. Some of them started saying that ‘God incarnates himself in the bodies of few human beings and then we make the idols of these human beings and pay homage to them so that those statues in which our god was incarnated before will bring us closer to him.’

Others started saying that ‘these idols were the sculptures of great servants of god who were obedient towards him. We made their idols so that they would be worshipped and in this way we openly show respect towards god.’

The last group among them said that ‘when God created Adam (as), He ordered the angels to prostrate before him while we were more worthy of prostrating before Adam than the angels and since we did not get the chance to do this, we made an idol of Adam and bowed before it so that we would achieve the same nearness to god just like the angels did.

And in the same way that you ordered your followers to prostrate towards the *Kaaba* [Holy Kaaba] in Mecca and you built mosques in other places and prostrated in those mosques but your intention was *Kaaba* and not the *mehrab* [the physical place of worship in mosque].

And even when you were prostrating towards *Kaaba*, your intention is not to prostrate to the *Kaaba* itself but to prostrate to God. Our intentions too, are directed towards worship of God while seemingly we are

prostrating the idols.’

The Prophet (S) said: “You are on the wrong path and misguided. By saying this, you are attributing the characteristics of the creatures to the Creator because when your god will incarnate himself in an object [or body], then that object will surround him.

Then, if so, what difference will remain between this God who incarnates himself in an object and the things which mix [or combine] with other things [having characteristics] such as color, odor, softness, hardness, lightness and heaviness?

And why should these objects [in which God incarnates] be considered *haadith* [contingent, with a beginning] and God *qadeem* [eternally pre-existent]? [means that it is opposite and impossible as these objects are created and have a beginning while God is pre-existent, without a beginning]

Why don't we then call God *haadith* and take these bodies *qadeem*? And also, tell me how can God be in need of space when He was there before the creation of space itself and when you attributed the characteristic of *hulool*⁷ (incarnation) to God and added the characteristics of creatures to him. Then it is necessary for you to also place the characteristic of *zawaal*⁸ (transient, falling) in Him. After that, for the one who has the characteristic of *zawaal*, you must also add the characteristic of *fana*⁹ (destruction) to it.

This is because all of these characteristics are indispensable for those who incarnate and also for the objects in which others incarnate. And it is definite that all of these objects are variant [have tendency to change over time]. So if God does not change after *hulool*, it would mean that an invariant thing will be simultaneously moving and stationary, will be black and white, and red and yellow at the same time which is impossible.

And it is also proven that when something [such as an object] acquires the characteristics of a *haadith* [with a beginning], it itself transforms into a *haadith* object. And you have no choice but to admit that my God is superior to all of these *haadith* characteristics [of creatures]. And when the claim that ‘God incarnates in someone’ is itself proven false, then the entire belief system which rests upon it is also falsified.”

Upon hearing this, all of them were silent and said: ‘We would like to think upon their beliefs.’

Then, the Prophet (S) turned towards the second group and said: “Now tell me, when you worship the sculptures [statues] of those human beings who used to worship God and when you prostrate before them and put your pure foreheads on the ground, then tell me what ways of expressing servitude have you specifically reserved for the One who is the Lord of these statues and is the Lord of the Worlds you have discarded? Do you not know that you are not supposed to equate the One who is worthy of respect and worship with His servants and creatures?

Suppose you show same level of respect and glorification to a king or an important person as you show to his servant; would this not be considered as an insult and humiliation to the King or that important person?"

The polytheists replied: 'Yes, this would be so.'

The Prophet (S) said: "So are you not aware that by bowing, respecting and glorifying the sculptures of the obedient servants of God, you are in fact insulting God ?" [because then it seems that there is no better way of expressing servitude towards God]

Upon hearing this, they were silent and said: 'We would like to think over our beliefs.'

The Prophet (S) then turned towards the third group and said: "You gave my example and compared me to you while in reality we are not equal. We are God's servants, His creatures and nurtured by Him and we do as He says and avoid what He has forbidden and worship Him the way He wishes us to worship Him. When He orders us to do something, we do not go after something against that order which He has not permitted us to do because we do not know and it might be possible that He wishes us to do an action but not the other one which He has forbidden us.

He has forbidden us to transgress His order. So when God ordered us to worship Him while facing the *Kaaba*, we exactly followed His order. And when He ordered us to face *Kaaba* even when we were in other cities, we again did what He had ordered and we never tried to go beyond what He had asked us to do. So when God ordered the prostration before Adam, He did not order the prostration before Adam's (as) sculpture [which is separate and different from Adam].

It was obligatory upon you to obey this order of God and not compare it [using analogy] to Sculpture of Adam (as). How do you know that maybe God will not like this deed of yours when He has not ordered such a thing. You must be observing this in your daily life that a person invites you to his house. Is it possible then that you enter his house on another day without his permission or go to another one of his houses? Or suppose that a person provides you his clothes, food and animal for travel, will you take these things next time without his permission?"

The polytheists said: 'No.'

The Prophet (S) said: "Alright, if you don't take these things but take his other belongings which are of the same colour, shape etc., will that be right?"

The polytheists said: 'No, because he did not give us permission.'

The Prophet (S) said: "Alright, so tell me, is God more worthy of the fact that no one commits something against His orders in His kingdom or His servants [creatures]?"

The polytheists said: 'God is more worthy of the fact that no one acts against His orders in this world.'

The Prophet (S) said: “Then why do you do this [worship idols]? When did God ask you to worship these idols?”

After hearing this, they were all silent and said: ‘We would like to think over our beliefs.’

Imam al-Sadiq (as) says that Imam Ali (as) said: ‘By God not even three days had passed that all those 25 scholars who came for debate, and were 5 individuals from each sect, converted to Islam. They declared: ‘O Muhammad! Until today we never heard such solid arguments and proofs which you presented to us. And we declare that you are the Prophet of God.’”

These debates of Prophet Muhammad (S) were reported by Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (as) through his grandfather Imam Zayn al-Abedin (as) who reported from Imam Ali (as) who was with Prophet Muhammad (S) when the scholars of five religions [Christianity, Judaism, Atheism, Dualism and Polytheism] came to see him and challenged him.

Reference: *al-Ihtajaj*, vol. 1, p. 27-44 [written by al-Allama Abu Mansur Ahmed Ibn Ali al-Tabarsi. d. 599 A.H.

[1.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

[2.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

[3.](#) Prophet Muhammad (S) had another debate with Christian Scholars of Najran in the year 10 A.H. On the orders of God, both parties decided to have Mubahila [imprecation] next day. However the Christians were frightened and backed out of Mubahila and agreed to pay jizyah [Islamic tax]. The relevant Qur’anic verses are:

But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: "Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and ourselves and your selves, then let us pray earnestly and bring about the curse of Allah on the liars" (61). Most surely this is the true story, and there is no god but Allah,¹ and most surely Allah is the Mighty, the Wise (62). But if they turn back then surely Allah knows the mischief makers (63) [3: 61-63].

For Qur’anic exegesis of the event of Mubahila from Tafsir al-Mizan, kindly visit: <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> [1]
See under 3: 61-63.

[4.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

[5.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

[6.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

[7.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

[8.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

[9.](#) Please see glossary for more details.

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