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Chapter 6: Descriptive Attributes

Some logicians have classified the attributes of the most Praised One into entitative and descriptive. The first implies His well known descriptions: knowledge, power, life, etc. The second indicates what obvious verses and traditions have confirmed, such as loftiness, countenance, hands, etc. The logicians' theory has differed in explaining this part of attributes:

Confirming with "How" and "Like"

There are those who claim that Allah, the most Praised One, has physical things such as two eyes and hands similarly to what humans have. Al–Shahristani says, "As for the anthropomorphists (those who attribute human characteristics to nonhuman objects), who are Hashwis (those who prattle about things which they themselves do not understand, i.e. sophistries), these have permitted the concept that their Lord is touched and is hand–shaken, that sincere Muslims embrace Him, Praise belongs to Him, in the life of this world and in the hereafter if they reach a degree of self–discipline and struggle to the extent of sincerity." 1

Since likening and personifying the Almighty is false according to reason and reliable texts, we do not want to waste our time discussing this theory.

Confirming without "How" and "Like"

The Ashari mentor and those who follow him apply these characteristics to Allah, Glory to Him, in the meaning with which we all are familiar. But in order to run away from likening Him to humans, they say "without like", "without how".

In his book titled Al-Ibana, al-Ashari says, "Allah, Glory to Him, has a face without a likeness as He has said,

'But the Face of your Lord shall abide (forever) full of majesty, bounty and honor" (Qur'an, 55:27).

He has hands without a likeness as He has said,

"... one whom I have created with My hands' (Qur'an, 38:75)."2

This theory is not exclusively advocated by al-Ashari. Abu Hanifah is quoted as having said, "References in the Holy Quran to Allah Almighty having a face, a hand, a self, are His characteristics without a likeness."

Ibn Kathir has said, "We follow the path of the righteous ancestors which is: believing in them as they have come without how or like."3

This theory's summary is that these facts belong to Him, the most Praised One that He is, but they are not similar to what exist in humans. He has a hand and an eye but not similarly to our hands and eyes. Thus, they, according to their own claim, combined the apparent meanings of these verses with the requirement of raising the status of the Almighty above that of humans.

Theory Analyzed

Undoubtedly, everyone must believe in what Allah has described Himself, and nobody knows Him better than Himself. The most Praised One says,

"Do you know better than Allah?" (Qur'an, 2:140).

Also, nobody has the right to speak about the statements of the most Praised One in any topic superficially without definitive evidence that requires it. What is said by those who interpret Quranic verses, who try to explain what appears to them to be the meanings embedded in the Quran and Sunnah in the pretext their apparent meanings do not agree with reason is rejected, rebutted.

What the Quran and authentic Sunnah contain does not contradict reason. What they imagine superficially and make it look irrational is not the apparent meaning of the Quran but what they themselves imagine it to be, as will be clarified.

The statements made by the Asharis in this theory, their saying that Allah has a real hand without how, for example, is not based on a sound meaning. This is so because the Islamic faith is characterized by precision and discretion and, at the same time, by being free of complexity and ambiguity. It seems to be clear, in agreement with nature and sound reason.

Thereupon, portraying it in a likening and personifying way that is known to belong to Judaism and Christianity, as is the case in the first theory, or in a way similarly to ambiguity and riddles, as in this case, does not agree with the stance of Islam and with that of the Quran in presenting the beliefs to the Islamic society.

To say that Allah has a hand that is not similar to ours, or a face that is not like our faces, and so on with the rest of descriptive characteristics, is similar to uttering riddles. Their repeating that these attributes are applied to Allah, the most Praised One, in their same real meanings, but the method is unknown, is akin to a farce. Had they been applied to Allah Almighty in their same real meanings, the method should have been known, so the application would have been real. This is so because the one who used these expressions applied the same method to their "how". So, using them in the same meanings, fixing their meanings to Allah, the most Praised One, without "how", is similar to an animal which is a real lion but without a tail, claws, fangs, etc., etc.

Briefly, their saying that Allah has a real hand but not similar to (human) hands is a statement the front of which contradicts the rear. A true hand is an organ that has the well known "how". Eliminating the "how" is eliminating its reality; they cannot be combined.

Add to the above the fact that there are no texts in the Quran or Sunnah like this "without how" at all. Rather, this is something invented by ideologies to shield themselves in the stance for deterring an opponent from attacking them, accusing them of the charge of personification. For this reason, allama al–Zamakhshari has composed this verse of poetry:

They likened Him to His creation, then they were apprehensive Of people, so they hid themselves behind this "without how".

I wonder, had this phrase sufficed to rebut the charge of personifying and likening, if it suffices in other fields as well such as He, the most Praised One, is said to have a body but not like all other bodies, blood but not like other blood, flesh but not like other flesh, etc. Even one of those who dared to liken Him has said, "I am too shy to confirm that He has sexual organs and a beard, so excuse me from having to do so and ask what is beyond that."4

Thus, it is quite clear that the Ashari's belief in the area of descriptive attributes is not out of the framework of one of two following matters:

- 1. Personifying and likening if applied to Allah, Glory to Him, in their common meanings in minds while preserving their reality,
- 2. Complication and ambiguity if applied to Allah, Glory to Him, in the common meanings without interpretation and explanation. People either liken or complicate, personify or blabber!

In conclusion, we say that the "proving without how", though widely spread during, before and after al-Ashari's time, was later deserted until Ibn Taymiyyah al-Harrani came. He brought it back to life, revived and called it the doctrine of the ancestry, making their faith one of idling and likening.

In a statement he said, "They do not represent the attributes of Allah Almighty similarly to His creation, nor do they deny what He has described Himself or His Messenger described Him lest they should nullify His Beautiful Names and Supreme Attributes." He goes on to say, "Nobody from among the nation's ancestors, from among the *sahaba* and *tabiin*, ever said that Allah is not in the heavens, nor is He not on the *Arsh*, or that He is not everywhere, nor that all places with Him are the same, nor is He

inside or outside the world, connected with or separated from it, nor that it is not permissible to point at Him with fingers and the like."5

Thereupon, Abu Zuhrah says, "Ibn Taymiyyah determines that the creed of the ancestors is to confirm whatever the Quran contains, what is high and what is low, the Almighty firming Himself on the Throne, His face, hand, love and hate and whatever the Sunnah contains of the same without interpretation and with literal appearance. Is this truly the creed of the ancestors?!

We answer by saying: The Hanbalis of the fourth Hijri century, as we explained, had preceded him in saying so. Scholars of the time debated with them and proved that the likening and personifying to which they were leading were impossible. So, how can they not lead to Him while it is permissible to point at him with the senses?! For this reason, the Hanbali faqih and imam, al-Khatib ibn al-Jawzi, confronted them and denied that this had anything to do with the ancestors' creed."6

Ibn al–Jawzi has made a detailed statement criticizing this theory, attacking one of the Hanbalis who propagated it, namely Abu Yali, the famous judge who died in 457 A.H./1065 A.D. He said, "Abu Yali attached a stigma to the Hanbalis which cannot be washed away by sea water." For this reason, this sect went underground till it was made public by Ibn Taymiyyah in his own special daring way.

Contemporary Abu Zuhrah moved to what we stated about criticizing that theory saying, "We have to cast another look from the linguistic standpoint. The most Praised One has said, 'Allah's hand is above their hands.' He also said, 'Everything perishes save His face.' Do these statements convey physical meanings, or do they convey to us the sense that there are other matters that appropriately fit Allah Almighty? It is right to interpret the hand as meaning power (literally or metaphorically), and it is right to say that reference to the face connotes the Self.

"It is right to interpret His descent to the lower heavens as meaning that His account is approaching, that He, the most Praised and Exalted One, is close to His servants. Language makes room for such interpretations; pronouncements accept such meanings. This undoubtedly is better than interpreting them through their literal apparent meanings while being ignorant of how, such as saying, 'Allah has a hand but we do not know it,' or 'Allah descends but not as we descend,' etc.

These refer to the unknown; we do not understand their ultimate end or goal. But if we interpret them with meanings which language accepts and they are not strange to language, we will arrive at matters that are close to them and which contain elevation of His status rather than misleading."7

Al-Ghazali has strongly criticized this theory. Summed up, he says the following:

"These expressions in the Quranic statements and Prophet's traditions have apparent meanings which are related to the senses we know, and they are impossible to apply to Allah Almighty. They have other metaphoric meanings known by an Arab without interpretation or an attempt to interpret them.

If he hears a reference to the hand in a statement by the Prophet, peace and blessings with him and his progeny, that 'Allah outfitted Adam with His hand' and 'A believer's heart is between two of the Merciful One's fingers,' he should know that these expressions convey two meanings. One of them is the original condition: an organ comprised of flesh, bone and nerves.

This expression, the hand, may be used metaphorically for another meaning that differs from this physical meaning such as someone saying that 'The town is in the hand of the governor.' This conveys an understanding even if the governor's hand is cut off. A commoner and anyone else must make sure that the Messenger of Allah (S) did not mean a physical body, which this is impossible to apply to Allah. If he imagines that Allah is a body comprised of parts, he will be worshipping an idol, for every body is created, and one who worships a created thing commits apostasy. Idol worship was apostasy because idols are created things."8

Al-Ghazali did well when he interpreted the hand in a verse such as this: "Allah's hand is above their hands" to mean ability, a meaning for the verse without interpreting it, an explanation for it without attempting to explain it. This will be our focus after we discuss the faith of those who interpret.

We say that what must be done is to follow the appearance of the verse and of the Sunnah without deviating from it, whether or not it agrees with literal meanings or with individual meanings, and this is the great slippage of the Hanbalis and of Imam al-Ashari himself. They claimed that their literal meanings must be adopted whether they agree with what is apparent or not.

Rendering

A group of Asharis and others applied these characteristics to Allah, Glory to Him, while rendering their meanings to Him.

Al-Shahristani has said,

"A large group from among the ancestors confirm descriptive attributes, such as the hands and face, without interpreting them. They say, 'We do not know the meaning of the expression such as in the verse saying: The most Merciful One is firmly seated on the *Arsh*, and like: ... to what I have created with My hand. We are not obligated to know the explanation of these verses, but we have already been required to believe that He has no partner, something which we have already proven." 9

To this viewpoint did ar-Razi incline when he said,

"These similarities must definitely be seen as having meanings other than what they apparently convey (on the surface). We must also render their meaning to Allah Almighty, and their interpretation must not be discussed." 10

Analyzing Rendering Theory

Rendering is the slogan of one who does not want to undertake the hardship of conducting serious researches and who sees that suffices him to attain salvation is the statement of the Messenger of Allah (Allah's peace and blessings with him and his progeny) in which he said, 'Islam is based on five things: The testimony that: There is no god save Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the upholding of the (daily) prayers, the paying of zakat, the performing of the hajj and the fasting of the month of Ramadan."11

Because he sees rendering as safer than confirming, which may end up at either making a similitude or a personification, both being false, or to complication and ambiguity which both do not agree with the attribute of the ease of the faith.

But the folks of confirmation, I mean those who advocate the two previous theories, have criticized the rendering theory saying that its goal is mere belief in the expressions of the Quran and hadith without an in-depth research or the comprehending of what Allah and His Messenger mean by them.

To believe in pronouncements while rendering their meanings to Allah, the most Glorified One, is the same as saying that Allah Almighty addressed us arbitrarily because He addressed us with things which we do not understand. But Allah says,

"We did not send a Messenger except (to teach) in the language of his own people" (Qur'an, 14:4)."12

I say that those who advocate such rendering have a clear excuse in this regard. They imagine that the verses containing descriptive attributes are among the "like" verses the interpretation of which is prohibited by the most Praised One Who commanded His servants to just believe in them. He says,

"But those with perversity in their hearts follow its allegorical parts, seeking discord and searching for their hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. Say, 'We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord'." None will grasp the message except men of understanding" (Qur'an, 3:7).

They are not to be blamed when they refuse to interpret them, so they rendered their meanings to Him, the most Praised One. Yes, there is confusion about these verses actually not being allegorical. They are not meant to be allegorical. If one who is free of any prior notion discerns them, he will find them non-allegorical, as you will come to know later.

What is strange is that their criticism of those who advocate rendering applies also to them. Firming the descriptive attributes in their literal meanings that come to one's mind when he reads them individually, while still believing that the Almighty is above being physical, empties their words of clear meanings. This is so because the impression these attributes give makes up the basis for their meanings.

Trying to firm their literal meanings, while robbing them of their ways, is like confirming something by negating it. Then, the verses that convey the best and greatest meanings turn into incomprehensible and illogical ones, as if Allah Almighty addressed them while they are illiterate knowing nothing of the Book other than their wishful thinking.

Interpretation

The Mutazilites are the ones who are famous for this theory. They interpret the "hand" as blessing and power, and they interpret His seating Himself firmly on the *Arsh* (Throne) as taking control and demonstrating ability. The truth about interpreting this verse will become clear when we quote statements in Al–Kashaf exegesis which was written in a Mutazilite style.

One may resign in their regard by saying that interpreting the verses' texts and apparent meanings, while not looking into the sources of the descriptive attributes, is no less dangerous than the confirmation theory, for interpretation may reach the extent of atheism and a denial of the Sharia. 13

How ugly it is to say that "The apparent meaning of the Quran violates sound reason, so quotation must be abandoned for the sake of clear reason"!

Or one may say, "Upholding the principles of beliefs through mere superficial meanings of the Quran and Sunnah without applying discretion is the root of misguidance, so they advocated likening, personifying and the like, acting on the superficial meaning of the verse that says 'The most Merciful One is firmly seated on the *Arsh*'."14

This is so because there is no verse in the Holy Quran the apparent meaning of which contradicts sound reason. What they imagine to be apparent is not so. Rather, the verse conveys a meaning that differs from what they imagined. They mixed the literal apparent meaning with the meaning of the verse as a whole.

The hand is obvious in the special part, but it is not so when evidences are attached to it, making it appear in another meaning. One may praise someone by saying, "He is open-handed", or he may speak ill of him by saying that he withholds his hand. Apparently, it is not a reference to the hand, the bodily part, which we literally call as such. Rather, it obviously connotes giving, generosity, or the opposite: miserliness and stinginess even if one's hand may actually be lopped off. If the sentence is given a meaning differently from this, it will be giving it a different connotation.

Thereupon, what those who interpret say must be examined. If their interpretations are similar to what we have already stated, that is, making a distinction between the meaning conveyed by the entire sentence and the individual meaning, these do not interpret. Rather, they follow the appearance of the Quran and Sunnah.

It is not right to name the explanation of the Holy Quran, in the light of the evidences that exist in it, as

interpretation. Rather, it is following the texts and the appearances. But if their interpreting is done by inventing meanings for the verses without such verses containing evidences connected and leading to them, they indeed interpret. Interpreting is no less serious in firming conclusions by either personifying or complicating or confusing.

Briefly, what must be emphasized is that on the whole (adherence to the Quran and Sunnah) is taken for granted. So, everyone must follow the Holy Quran without making any adjustments or alterations, without behaving on his own or interpreting. As regarding the smaller issue, that is, identifying what is apparent and what is not, all bad consequences are removed through it.

Had the leaders of the Islamic sects and intellectuals abandoned their advance views and inherited ideologies and instead focused on diagnosing what is apparent and what is not according to sound criteria, an end would have been put to people's arguments and to debates about the attributes which went on for hundreds of years. Those debates originated from nothing other than preferring inclinations to the truth.

Procedure According to the Testifying Concept

The truth about this theory is a verse's meaning, objective and testifying (not depicting) gist then describing the most Praised One through the overall concept that we understand without firming the literal meaning of attributes or their interpretation.

Explanation: Vocabulary words are judged and used by individuals. Words in sentences have another appearance. Both appearances may unite with or contrast each other. Undoubtedly, if you say "lion", it will be understood as a reference to a beast. Also, if you say, "I saw a lion in the woods," the same meaning will come to mind as that from the single word.

But if you say, "I saw a lion shooting (darts)," your statement will convey a different literal and individual meaning from the word, which is the predatory beast. Rather, it will be understood contrarily to the outer appearance. Conveying it's meaning and interpreting it as a hero shooting (arrows) during a fighting is explaining the appearance of the sentence without interpretation.

If a genuine Arab hears this verse of poetry spoken by a poet:

... With a lion toting its weapon, experienced, having pads, its nails unclipped...

He will not doubt that by "lion" a valiant hero is meant who forces himself through the fighting fronts, not the predatory beast. The same happens if he hears someone saying,

A lion against me, while in the wars he is an ostrich that is easy to scare, it jumps out of fear if it hears a while.

He will not hesitate to think that the sought meaning of the above verse is a man who pretends to be brave before the weak, who is scared and who turns on his heels on meeting heroes. We are not right if we accuse one who interprets both verses as referring to a brave one or one who pretends to be brave that he interprets. Rather, he confirms the meaning without interpretation or alteration.

We have to be acquainted with confirming the meaning and fixing it for Allah, Glory belongs to Him, rather than sticking to the literal imagined meaning, confirming or denying it as having anything to do with Allah, Praise belongs to Him. Had these folks looked for the meaning of the verses stripped of prior notions, they would have come to know the confirming appearance and fixed it for Allah, Praise belongs to Him, without any stigma of interpretation or mishandling or the dire consequence of personifying and likening Him.

In order to show you an example of this type of research, we will focus on the sources of whatever falls in the field of discussion between those who firm and those who interpret. We will keep doing so until it becomes clear that confirming the meaning adopted by those who confirm, and interpreting and dealing with this norm that the interpreters have committed, is neither sound nor complete. Rather, there is only confirmation that He cannot be personified, seen as ambiguous or interpreted.

His Arsh, Praise Belongs to Him, and How He firmly Seats Himself on It

One of His Attributes, Praise belongs to Him, is that He firmly seats Himself on His *Arsh* (Throne). This description occurs in many verses. It is repeated in the Holy Quran twenty–two times. The word "*Arsh*" exists once, and the rest of verses refer (indirectly) to His *Arsh*, Praise belongs to Him, save in two verses:

"... (She is) provided with every requisite, and she has a magnificent throne" (Qur'an, 27:23)

and:

"He raised his parents high on the throne" (Qur'an, 12:100).

His being "firmly seated" occurs twelve times. With the exception of three verses, they all refer to the most Praised One firmly seating Himself on the *Arsh*.

People of hadith, supported by al-Ashari, have claimed that the verses are clear in their indication that the most Praised One has a Throne and that He firmly seats Himself on it but it is not known how. Those who advocate anthropomorphism endorsed the theory of the hadith folks of accepting the superficial meaning without saying that the "how" is unknown.

This matter stirred in Islamic circles a great deal of fuss and a dispute between the attributers and the interpreters. We say: Had the researchers carefully discerned these verses stripped of their inherited

beliefs, they would have understood their implications. They do not support those who describe His attributes and who say that He, Praise belongs to Him, has a throne, a seat having legs placed in the heavens on which Allah sits, while "how" is either known or unknown.

And they would not have supported the interpreters who explain the verse as meaning that it needs another verse to prove that it means something else other than its apparent meaning. Rather, the evidences that exist in some of these verses vest on the verse an appearance that conveys the desired meaning without violating the dignity of the revelation, nor does it refer to or employ interpretation. The verses do not need interpretation, that is, understanding them as having meanings that the appearances of the verses do not convey.

There is no doubt that the literal meaning of the *Arsh* is known to everyone without any confusion.

Ibn Faris has said, "The *Arsh* is one term that indicates the loftiness of something built, then it is used metaphorically. Al-Khalil (ibn Ahmed al-Farahidi, the renown linguist) has used the term 'the king's seat' which is correct. Allah Almighty has said,

"... He raised his parents high on the throne" (Qur'an, 12:100).

Then it was used metaphorically: One's command and caretaking is labeled as an *arsh*. If he is deposed, it is said that his *arsh* collapsed. Zuhair has composed this verse of poetry:

You went to the rescue of the coalitions whose arsh collapsed,

And did so to Thubyan whose feet slipped away from the sandal."15

"Firmly seating" is known in the language; it is empowering and enabling. Al-Raghib has said the following in his Mufradat: "Firmly seated is seen in two ways: One of them is rendered to two doers and more such as: Zaid and Amr are equal in such-and-such a thing. The Almighty has said, 'They are not equal with Allah'. The second is that a thing being straight by itself, as in the verse:

"Endowed with wisdom, he appeared (in a stately form)" (Qur'an, 53:6),

'When you are seated stately...', '... so you may seat yourselves on their backs' and '... when it is firm on its stem...' All convey the meaning of control such as in this verse:

"(Allah) the Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne (of authority)" (Qur'an, 20:5)."16

Our focus is that the firm establishment in the verse cited above does not indicate an apparent sense of sitting, on depending on something. Rather, it means control, full ability, a connotation for the expanse of His ability and management. The establishment is used in this sense in many verses of poetry. Al-Akhtal said the following verses in praise of Bishr, brother of Abdul-Malik ibn Marwan, when the latter took charge of Iraq:

Then Bishr seized control of Iraq
Without a sword or blood to shed. 17

Another poet said,

When we rose and took control of them, We left them prey to eagles and to beasts.

What is meant by the first verse is Bishr taking control of Iraq, and in the second verse there is a reference to vanquishing the foe. Height here is not physical; it is an abstract.

If all this is known, we say that if we adopt the literal meaning of the *Arsh*, as one would have done when he reads this verse by the most Praised One:

"... and she has a magnificent throne" (Qur'an, 27:23),

we must say that Allah, Praise is due to Him, has a throne like that of kings and sultans. It is then that the meaning of His seating Himself on it becomes possible.

But if we abandon this meaning and say that the apparent meaning is truly believing in the verse literally, which comes to mind from the verse as a whole after discerning the evidences that surround the sentence, the verse will connote His taking control of His domain in the life of this world and in the Hereafter and His management without help from anyone at all.

The sentences that occur in many verses talking about His firming Himself on the *Arsh* indicate that the sought meaning is the second, not the first. They confirm that the objective is His management in a way which overwhelms everything, be it minutely small or magnanimous, and that the most Praised One is the Creator and also the Administrator.

In order to explain the extent of His administration, the truth of which nobody can grasp, He made a comparison between what is conceived and what is felt. This is the management of kings and sultans of their kingdoms as they recline on their thrones surrounded by their ministers. But their management is legislated, canonized, whereas His management is creative.

Two matters provide evidence to the above:

First: The most Praised One refers in many verses to management after stating His seating Himself on the *Arsh*. He once provides the word "management" and once His testimony and another reality. As regarding the reference to managing per se, the most Praised One says,

"Truly your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and is firmly established on the throne (of authority), regulating and governing all things. No intercessor (can plead with Him) except with His leave. This is Allah your Lord; therefore, worship Him: Will you

not celebrate His praises?" (Qur'an, 10:3)

"Allah is He Who raised the heavens with no pillars that you can see; He is firmly established on the throne (of authority); He has subjected the sun and the moon (to His law)! Each runs (its course) for an appointed term. He regulates affairs, explaining the Signs in detail, so that you may believe with certainty in the meeting with your Lord" (Qur'an, 13:2).

It is Allah Who has created the heavens and the earth, and all between them, in six days, and He is firmly established on the throne (of authority): You have none, besides Him, to protect or intercede (for you): will you then not receive admonishment? He regulates (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth" (Qur'an, 32:4-5).

In the first verse, the most Praised One arranges His phrase "firmly established on the throne" so the meaning may be "established (Himself) on the throne of management." In the second verse, after mentioning some (aspects) of management, getting the sun and the moon to do as He instructs them..., He provides a total command for His management when He says "regulating and governing all things", similarly to the case with the third verse.

As regarding reference to the truth of His management without naming it, it is like this statement of the most Praised One:

"Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days and is firmly established on the throne (of authority): He draws the night over the day like a veil, each seeking the other in a rapid succession: He created the sun, the moon and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His command. Is it not His to create and to govern? Blessed be Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds!" (Qur'an, 7:54).

He says, "He draws the night over the day like a veil" to refer to the reality of His management, to provide us with examples for it, then He explains for us a total principle when He says: "Is it not His to create and to govern?", that is, it is to Him that both creating and governing are rendered.

You may measure on both of these groups the rest of verses. In all of them, there is a hint to the management matter either with a word or a testimony to it, even His saying, the most Praised One that He is,

"Then, when one blast is sounded on the trumpet, the earth is moved, and its mountains are crushed to powder in one stroke. On that Day, the (great) event shall come to pass, and the sky will be rent asunder, for it will be flimsy that Day, and the angels will be on its sides, and that Day, eight [angels] will bear your Lord's throne above them all. That Day you will be brought to Judgment: Not a single one of your acts that you hide will remain concealed" (Qur'an, 69: 13–18).

The Arsh in this verse is one of management, of administering the affairs of the domain on a Day when

none judges save He. The most Exalted One has said,

"... Whose dominion will it be that Day? God's, the One, the Supreme!" (Qur'an, 40: 16).

The most Praised One has also said,

"(On) the Day the trumpet is blown, the dominion will be His" (Qur'an, 6:73).

These verses indicate one meaning: depicting the control of the Almighty's judge on that horrific day. The most Praised One has said,

"Is not the command His? And He is the swiftest in taking account" (Qur'an, 6:62),

and

"There, the (only) protection comes from Allah, the True One. He is the best to reward, and the best to grant success" (Qur'an, 18:44).

One who ponders on these verses will find out that they aim at one fact: The creation of the heavens and earth did not render their Creator too weak to administer and manage the affairs. As for His "seating" Himself on the throne, in its literal sense, it is not what these verses mean at all.

Second: The expression of firm sitting on the throne occurs in seven verses jointly with the mention of one of His deeds, which is the raising of the heavens without pillars, or the creating of the heavens and earth and what is in-between them in six days, or the like. This proves that what is meant by it is not a place to sit but seizing and controlling the whole world. Just as there is no partner with Him in creating and bringing into being, there is also no partner with Him in ruling and controlling. For this reason, He restricts management to His own self just as creating exclusively belongs to Him:

"Indeed, it is He Who creates and Who governs. Blessed be Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds!" (Qur'an, 7:54).

Remaining stagnant at the meanings of individual words, abandoning contemplating and delving deeply into their meanings, is an innovation that leads to obvious apostasy. Even one who interprets this verse, falls into the dire consequence of *shirk* and its traps:

"There is nothing whatever like Him" (Qur'an, 42:11).

Relying on the traditions narrated by Ibn Khuzaymah and those who follow him is relying on roots that are traced to the Jews and Christians. Ar–Razi has said the following about Ibn Khuzaymah and his book, which is known as *Tawhid*: "Be informed that Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Khuzaymah cited our fellows' argument through this verse: 'There is nothing whatever like Him' in the book which he called *Tawhid* which, in fact, is a book about *shirk*, objecting to them. I remember the gist of his statement after deleting the verbosity because he was a man who used to stumble in his speech, of a limited

comprehension and a feeble mind."18

Due to the countless references to likening and personifying, the discussions about fate and fatalism, which it contains, Dr. Ahmed Amin has said,

"In my opinion, had the teachings of the Mutazilites prevailed till this day, the Muslims would have had a different stance in history from their present one, and they would have been incapacitated by surrender; fatalism would have paralyzed them and complacency would have immobilized them." 19

In my opinion, had the freedom of thought prevailed among the Muslims, had the Muslims risen above any prior notion which they inherited from the hadith advocates, had they looked at the Almighty's Book and upheld the authentic Sunnah narrated about the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah with him and his progeny) through the venue of his Household (peace with them), whom the Messenger identified in his consecutively reported tradition known as hadith al-thaqalayn (hadith of the two weighty things, i.e. the Holy Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt)..., the Muslims would have had a status in history which is different from the present one.

In the light of the above determined criterion and balance can you interpret the text of the Holy Quran when it refers to the countenance, eye, hands, side (of the Almighty), when He comes and goes, ascends and descends and the like without violating its dignity and without arriving at cold, inaccurate and superficial interpretations of its verses. You will then follow the norm of believing in these verses but not literally or as some people imagine.

Countenance of the Most Praised One

You have already come to know that al-Ashari has said the following in his book titled Al-Ibana: "Allah has a face without how just as He has said,

'But the Face of your Lord shall abide (forever) full of majesty, bounty and honor' (Qur'an, 55:27)."

He means to prove that Allah, all Praise is due to Him, has a face in the literal meaning of the word. Running away from coining a similitude for it, he appends to his statement the phrase "without how".

Those who interpret believe that this verse must be interpreted. They say that it has to be interpreted through itself. But what those who interpret have said, though accurate in its outcome, the verse needs no interpretation. Rather, it needs it if we suppose that the face appears as the specific organ. If it appears, because of the evidence that we will mention, in the same thing, in its person, it does not need interpretation, and the apparent meaning will be applied.

The evidence for the above is that the face, as we will discuss, comes in the sense of a special physical part; it comes to mean the self. Ibn Faris has said, "One may be referred to by pointing out to his face as has been said (in poetry):

I seek Allah's forgiveness for sins beyond my count indeed, Lord of the servants, His is the face and the deed."20

Perhaps the face expression connotes the self. Man's face, or anything's "face", is his/its full reality in the eyes of the beholder. For this reason, if one sees someone else's face, he says that he saw him, as if by seeing the face he sees the whole self. Thereupon, the expression needs to be understood by one of the two meanings to its likeness because the second meaning, due to so much usage, has reached the extent of reality.

The evidence points to the second meaning: The Almighty has described the face as being "full of majesty, bounty and honor", attributes which belong to the Lord, that is, His own Self, not attributes of the face, I mean a portion of a whole. Had the face here meant the specific part, the "majesty, bounty and honor" should describe the Lord (to Whom they are added).

For this reason, we see that the most Praised One has made it descriptive of what is added to it, in this case the Lord. In another verse, the most Praised One says, "Blessed is the Name of your Lord, the One with majesty, bounty and honor". It is known that the "Name" is not the one to which this description applies but to the One to Whose Face the verse refers, that is, the same Lord. You will get an extensive explanation when the most Praised One is discussed and that He is not a body in the category of negative attributes.

There is a statement narrated about the greatest Messenger of Allah (S) which is: "Allah created Adam in his form." This is seen by some as proving through similitude that Allah, the most Praised One, has a form in the likeness of which He created Adam. But had these folks referred to the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (as), they would have found out that this hadith is chopped off. Al-Saduq, through his *isnad* to Imam Ali (as), has said that the Prophet (S) heard a man saying this to another man: "May Allah turn your face and that of anyone who looks like you ugly." The Prophet (S) said to the man, "Wait! Do not say it! Allah created Adam looking like this man."21

That is to say, the Prophet (S) meant to say to the man, "You are taunting this man as well as the man who looks like him: Adam (as)."

He has also quoted al-Hussain ibn Khalid as saying that he said the following to Imam al-Ridha (peace with him): "O son of the Messenger of Allah! People narrate saying that the Messenger of Allah said that Allah created Adam according to His own image." The Imam (as) said, "May Allah wage war on them! They chopped off the beginning of the hadith. The Messenger of Allah passed by two men taunting each other. He heard one of them saying to the other, 'May Allah turn your face and that of anyone who looks like you ugly', so he, peace and blessings of Allah with him and his progeny, said to him, 'O servant of Allah! Do not say this to your brother. Allah, the most Exalted One, the most Praised, created Adam similarly to his own creation.'"22

Hands of the Most Praised One

Imam al-Ashari has said, "Allah, Praise belongs to Him, has two hands without how as He has said:

"... whom I created with both My hands' (Qur'an, 38:75)."

He means to refer to the hand in its literal sense, individually, but in order to avoid making a similitude for it, he goes on to say "without how".

Undoubtedly, if the hand or hands is/are referred to individually, one will immediately conceive them as a physical body part. But this is an individual appearance, and it is not followed except if it appears in a way where it is correctly applied. But if both the term and what it describes disagree with each other, what is followed is the second option, for it may appear to be something else. Here is an explanation for you:

It may appear as connoting power. The most Praised One says,

"Remember Our servant David, the man of strength, for he always turned (to Allah)" (Qur'an, 38:17)

(where the original Arabic text of the phrase "the man of strength" literally reads: "the man with the hand"). Undoubtedly, it is not meant to refer to the particular body part but connotes strength. It is similar to saying, "So-and-so has a hand over such-and-such" or "What should I do with such a hand?" A poet has said.

For what would you do, when attempting to reach what is high One who has no hands at all to reach it by?!

With such a meaning, the poet regards time and the wind as having hands. It is said, "the hand of destiny". A poet refers to strength by saying, "In its left hand is its rein" due to its strength.

It may be obvious in the bliss such as one may say, "One has with me many hands," that is, favors and acts of benevolence. Or he may say, "He has with me a white hand," that is, a bliss. A poet has said, "He has with me a hand and a blessing." So, is it right to interpret the hand in both of these places as referring to this bodily part while charging those who interpret it as connoting strength in the first place and a bliss in the second of interpreting and distorting the verse? No, not at all.

Thus, the accuracy of what we have said becomes obvious, that is, what is followed is not the individual appearance but the connotation. Do you not see how the most Praised One attributes "trickery", "plotting" and "forgetfulness" to Himself, Praise belongs to Him, in many verses including this one:

وَيَمْكُرُونَ وَيَمْكُرُ اللَّهُ، وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكرينَ

They plot and plan, and Allah also plans, but Allah is the best of planners (Qur'an, 8:30)

The individual and literal meaning of this word, i.e. مكر, is trickery. It is known that tricking is the method of the incapacitated person, Allah is High above it. But the obvious connotation prevents the individual meaning because the verse and its likes serve the function of describing causing problems, something which the Arabs and non-Arabs use in their language a good deal.

We cannot apply the literal meaning in the pretext it must bear Allah's speech as it shows and we must not interpret or alter it. We also say that we must understand what appears to be the meaning of what Allah says, but what they claim to be the appearance is not that of the verse but of one word in the verse. What is followed is the connotation, the meaning within the sentence, which is strength in the first place and blessing in the second.

If you absorb what we have stated, this (phrase in the) verse must be discerned: "... to what I have created in my own hands" since the scholars of exegesis have opinions about it:

- a) The hand as meaning ability
- b) The hand as meaning a blessing

He gave them the meaning that Allah's power is one. So, what is the need to follow it with the phrase "with My own hand", especially since the blessings of Allah, Praise belongs to Him, are countless, so why did He refer to His hand?

c) The hands as connoting ability and bliss; through this meaning does the previous confusion disappear.

I say that had evidences indicated that the verse shows that its apparent meaning must be taken, it would have been so, and you would not have come to know that the appearance is the connotation, rather than the individual meaning. But such evidences are not there according to us.

d) Accepting the linguistic meaning, but it indicates that the most Praised One, rather than anyone else, is the Master of His creatures. Most actions done by those who have two hands are thus done, so doing things with the hands has prevailed on all other actions that are done through other ways, so much so that even what the heart does is referred to as "It is what your hands have done". If someone reviles someone else, so he is dealt with accordingly, it will be said to him: "This is what your hands have offered." Even one who has lost his hands is told that his hands have committed harm and his mouth had blown (into ashes to spark fire). An example is this verse by the most Praised One:

"Do they not see that it is We Who have created with Our hands for them cattle which We have placed under their command?" (Qur'an, 36:71).

If you come to know all of this, the verse's objective becomes clear which is: The most Praised One

denounces Satan saying: "Since you did not prostrate to Adam, although I created him and brought him into existence, and I know about his status and the reasons why I ordered you and the angels to prostrate to him, did you feel haughty before Me, or do you regard yourself to be among those whose status is higher than his?"

The proof that creating with the hands connotes the most Praised One undertaking the process of creation by Himself, not creating him and His other creatures through bodily organs called "hands", is that the reason behind Satan refusing to prostrate to what the most Praise One had made had nothing to do with His creating him (Adam) with the special bodily part, the hand, so as if He had created him by something else, Satan would not have objected and refused to prostrate to him.

The criterion is objection to prostrating to what the most Praised One created without paying attention to the "tool" with which He created him.

If it was said, "If He is the Initiator and the One Who creates all humans, why did He specify Adam by saying that He created him by Himself?", we would say this:

Adding and specifying are done to demonstrate his (Adam's) honor and distinction as well as how awful Satan's deed was. It is similar to what the most Praised One says in this verse:

"Once I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down in obeisance to him" (Qur'an, 29: 15).

Specifying the connection is to show how the most Praised One is honoring him. It is also like this verse:

"... sanctify My House for those who compass it around, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (in it in prayer)" (Qur'an, 2:125).

Similarly to what is stated above is the verse that says,

"Truly those who pledge their fealty to you do no less than pledging their fealty to Allah: God's hand is above their hands: Then anyone who violates his oath does so to the harm of his own soul, and anyone who fulfills what he has promised God, He will soon grant him a great reward" (Qur'an, 48:10).

So, when this sacred verse was revealed, did those "good ancestors" to whom Ibn Taymiyyah attributes the linguistic meaning understand that the Almighty was referring to His hand as being similar to that of His creatures and that it was above the hands of the sahaba? Or did they understand that He was referring to His power for the token of the threat it contains against anyone who reneges, that he will be facing dire consequences?

Had efforts collaborated to identify outer appearances, be they true meanings or metaphorical ones, there would have been no need for making any similitude or setting up any example, nor would have

been any confusing, interpreting or getting out of what is apparent. Rather, the appearances would have been adopted in the senses through which all linguists comprehend.

The same would have taken place had they only pondered on this sacred verse of the most Praised One:

"The Jews say, 'God's hands are tied.' Let their hands be tied up and let them be cursed for the (blasphemy) they utter. Nay! His hands are widely outstretched: He gives and spends (of His bounty) as He pleases" (Qur'an, 5:67).

They would have admitted that the purpose behind Allah spreading His hands is not in the physical sense but as a reference to His generosity and open-handedness. They would also have admitted the same if they ponder on this verse of the most Praised One:

"Do not (like a stingy person) make your hand tied to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that you become blameworthy and destitute" (Qur'an, 17:29).

It is then that we would wonder: What difference is there between both verses so that those who assert the attributes understand the first verse as ordinary individuals would readily do then, in order to run away from personifying Him, they follow their statements by saying "without how"? At the same time, do these folks not doubt that the meaning of the second verse is generosity and outgiving versus stinginess and miserliness?

Up to here, it appears that the views held by the Hanbalis and Asharis, in the field of fixing the descriptive attributes of Allah, the most Praised One, are based on sticking to literal appearances and individual meanings, being unaware of the fact that one who discerns the dialogues will understand the confirming appearance through paying attention to the evidences connected to the speech as understood by the Arabs, whether they agree with individual meanings or not.

Had they followed this restriction, they would have held the most Praised One as being above these bodily parts and these meanings that they attribute to Him. We have contended ourselves in this regard to explaining the three expressions: the *Arsh* (throne) and His seating Himself firmly on it, the countenance (face) and the "hand". In the light of what we have explained about the restriction, we can explain all other expressions in the Holy Quran and authentic Sunnah.

- 1. Al-Shahristani, Al-Milal wal Nihal, Vol. 1, p. 105. Notice the rest of his statement in this regard, for it will familiarize you with the extent of "awareness" of these anthropomorphists (who set up a similitude with the Almighty).
- 2. Al-Ashari, Al-Ibana, p. 18.
- <u>3.</u> Notice our quotation about Abu Hanifah, al-Shafii and Ibn Kathir in the chapter on "the connection of confirming and rendering", pp. 46–49 [of the reference cited above].
- 4. Al-Shahristani, Al-Milal wal Nihal, Vol. 1, p. 105.
- 5. Ibn Taymiyyah, Largest collection of major dissertations المجموعة الكبرى في مجموعة الرسائل الكبرى, p. 489.
- 6. Abu Zuhrah, Tarikh al-Madhahib al-Islamiyya (history of Islamic sects), Vol. 1, p. 218.
- 7. Ibid., pp. 219–220.

- 8. Iljaa al-Awamm.
- 9. Al-Shahristani, Al-Milal wal Nihal, Vol. 1, pp. 92-93; this an abridged text.
- 10. Ar-Razi, Asas at-Tagdis, p. 223.
- 11. Al-bukhari, Sahih, Vol. 1, p. 7, in a chapter about iman (conviction).
- 12. Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya, Vol. 4, p. 928. He is followed by Ibn Taymiyyah in making such a critique as he transmitted it while discussing the relationship between confirming and rendering, p. 60.
- 13. The mentor professor, may his shade prolong, has accomplished the task when he discussed interpretation in the Introduction to the 5th Volume of his Quranic encyclopedia titled Mafahim al–Quran, pp. 12–16.
- 14. Sharh Umm al-Barahin, p. 82. Similarly is p. 68 of Alaqat al-Ithbat wal Tafwidh (the relationship between confirming and rendering).
- 15. Ibn Faris, Mujam Maqayees al-Lugha, Vol. 4, p. 264.
- 16. Al-Raghib, Mufradat, while discussing the "sawa" word.
- 17. Al-Bidaya wal Niyaha, Vol. 9, p. 7.
- 18. Imam ar-Razi, Tafsir, Vol. 27, p. 150.
- 19. Ahmed Amin, Dhuha al-Islam, Vol. 3, p. 70.
- 20. Ibn Faris, Al-Maqayees, Vol. 6, p. 88, in discussing the "face" item.
- 21. Al-Saduq, Al-Tawhid, Chapter 12, hadith 10, p. 152.
- 22. Ibid., Chapter 12, hadith 11, p. 153.

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