

U N D E R S T A N D I N G

The Names and Attributes of Allāh

**Salafiyyah is to follow the Qur'ān
and Sunnah upon the understanding
of the Prophet's Companions
(رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ). A Salafi is one who truly
adheres to this Path.**

Abu Khadeejah 'Abdul-Wāhid

Understanding The Names & Attributes of Allāh

The Imām, Ibn ‘Abdul-Barr Al-Andulūsī Al-Mālikī (d. 463H) stated: **“Ahlus-Sunnah agree in acknowledging, affirming and believing in all of the Attributes mentioned in the Qur’ān and Sunnah: that they are accepted upon their apparent meaning and not metaphorically.** And Ahlus-Sunnah do not state “how” the Attributes of Allāh are, at all. As for Ahlul-Bid’ah: the Jahmiyyah, the Mu’tazilah and the Khawārij, then all of them reject this. They do not accept any of the Attributes upon their apparent and real meanings. They claim that whoever affirms the Attributes has likened Allāh to the created beings. Whilst with those who affirm the Attributes, these Ahlul-Bid’ah have negated from the One who is worshipped [His Attributes]. The truth is what is stated by those who speak with the Book of Allāh and with the Sunnah of His Messenger (ﷺ), and they are the Scholars of the Jamā’ah (Ahlus-Sunnah), and all praise is due to Allāh.”¹

¹ *At-Tamhīd* 7/145

'Alī Ibn Hasan Ibn Shaqīq (d. 215H) said: I said to Abdullāh Ibn Al-Mubārak (d.181H), **"How are we to know our Lord?"** He said: **"He is above the Seventh Heaven, over His Throne. And it is not to be said as the Jahmiyyah say: Allāh is right here on earth."**²

² *Sahīh*: Al-Bukhārī: *Khalq Af'āl Al-'Ibād*, p.6, Adh-Dhahabī: *Al-Arba'īn fī Sifāt Rabbil-Ālamīn*, no. 10, Ad-Dārimī: *Ar-Radd 'alal-Marīsī*, p. 103, Ibn Battah: *Ibānah*, p. 232, Ibnul-Qayyim: *Ijtīmā' Al-Juyūsh al-Islāmiyyah*, p. 44, 83.

“The Day Allāh will place all the Heavens on a Finger, the Earths on a Finger, the Trees on a Finger...”

The People of Sunnah and the Jamā'ah affirm for Allāh His Names and Attributes as He has affirmed them for Himself and as the Messenger (ﷺ) affirmed them for Him, without negating them or denying them, and without explaining them away with metaphorical meanings. And the People of Sunnah never liken Allāh's Attributes to His creation. Instead, we narrate them as they have been revealed in the Book and Sunnah, and we affirm the truthfulness of them.

From the earliest sects who rejected and refused to affirm the Attributes of Allāh were the Jahmiyyah, founded by Jahm Ibn Safwān (executed 128AH). And the People of the Qur'ān and Sunnah have refuted them throughout the centuries. Then from the Jahmiyyah arose other sects who explained the Attributes of Allāh to mean other than what is apparent from the wording of the Qur'ān and

Sunnah claiming they were fleeing from resembling Allāh with the creation! So they spoke about Allāh upon conjecture and without knowledge. So the People of Sunnah refuted these negators on two grounds. Firstly, for rejecting the actual Attribute of Allāh which is stated explicitly in the Quranic wording (such as the Face of Allāh, Hand of Allāh, the Ascending of Allāh, etc.) Secondly, for inventing a metaphor that they know is based on innovated opinions and conjecture (such as claiming the Hand of Allāh means His power).

At-Tirmidhī stated, **"It has been said by more than one scholar from the People of Knowledge about this narration and similar reports regarding the Attributes of Allāh - and that our Lord (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى) descends to the nearest heaven every night. So the scholars said: 'Affirm these narrations, have faith in them, do not imagine them, nor ask how.' The likes of this have been narrated from Mālik Ibn Anas (d. 179H), Sufyān Ath-Thawrī (d. 161H), Sufyān Ibn 'Uyainah (d. 198H) and Abdullāh Ibn Al-Mubārak (d. 181H). All who stated about such narrations, 'Leave them as they are, without asking how.' Such is the saying of the People of Knowledge**

from Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah. However, the Jahmiyyah oppose these narrations and say, 'This is resemblance (*tashbīh*)!' However, Allāh the Most High, has mentioned in various places in His Book, His Attribute of Hand, Hearing and Seeing but the Jahmiyyah falsely interpret these verses, explaining them in a way other than how they are explained by the People of Knowledge. They say, 'Allāh did not create Adam with His own Hand.' They say that Hand means power. Ishāq Ibn Ibrāhīm Ar-Rāhūyah (d. 238H) said, 'Resemblance is when it is said: 'Hand like my hand, or similar to my hand.' Or it is said, 'Hearing like my hearing, or similar to my hearing.' Then this would be a resemblance. But if what is being said is what Allāh Himself has said, 'Hand, Hearing and Seeing' and it is not asked how, nor is it said, 'Like my hearing or similar to my hearing.' Then it is not a resemblance. Allāh, the Most Blessed and Most High, said in His Book, 'There is none like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing.'"³

³ See *As-Sunan* of At-Tirmidhī no. 662

Abu Hafs Ibn Shāhīn (d. 385H) said: Abdullāh Ibn Sulaimān Ibn Ash'ath As-Sijistānī narrated to us saying: My father related to me from Sulaimān Ibn Harb, who said: Hammād ibn Zaid (died 179H) said: "The example of the Jahmiyyah is like a man to whom it is said: **'Do you have a date palm tree in your gardens?'** So he says: **'Yes.'** Then it is said to him: **'Does it have fresh green branches?'** He responds: **'No.'** Then it is said to him: **'Does it have dried up branches?'** He responds: **'No.'** Then it is said to him: **'Does it have low or fallen branches on the ground?'** He responds: **'No.'** Then it is said to him: **'Does it have a trunk?'** He responds: **'No.'** Then it is said to him: **'Does it have roots?'** He responds: **'No.'** So it is said to him: **'Then you have no date palm tree in your grounds!'** It is said to the Jahmiyyah: **'Do you have a Lord?'** They say: **'Yes.'** Then it is said to them: **'Does He speak?'** They respond: **'No.'** Then it is said to them: **'Does He have a Hand?'** They respond: **'No.'** Then it is said to them: **'Does He have a foot?'** They respond: **'No.'** Then it is said to them: **'Does He have a finger?'** They respond: **'No.'** Then it is said to them: **'Does He become pleased and does He**

get angry?’ They respond: **‘No.’** So it is said to them: **‘You have no Lord!’**⁴

Abdullāh Ibn Mas’ūd (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) said, **“A Jewish Rabbi came to Allāh’s Messenger and said, ‘O Muhammad, we learn that Allāh will place all the Heavens on a Finger, the earths on a finger, the trees on a Finger, the water on a Finger, the soil on a Finger and the rest of the creation on a Finger. Then He will say, ‘I am the King.’ So the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) laughed till his pre-molar teeth became visible in affirmation of the truthfulness of the speech of the Rabbi. Then the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) recited,**

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

‘They made not a just estimate of Allāh as is due to Him. And on the Day of Resurrection, the

⁴ *Al-Kitāb Al-Latīf li-Sharh Madhāhib Ahlus-Sunnah*, no. 35.
The narration is authentic, reported by Abdullāh Ibn Ahmad in *As-Sunnah*, no. 9-10

whole of the earth will be grasped by His Hand, and the heavens will be rolled up in His Right Hand. Exalted is He, free of all imperfections, High above all that they associate as partners with Him.⁵⁶ In a wording, he (ﷺ) said, **"Allāh will roll up the heavens on the Day of Resurrection and take them in His Right Hand and say, 'I am the King! Where are the tyrants and where are the haughty ones?'"**⁷

So our Lord is as He has described Himself and as the Messenger (ﷺ) has described Him without any resemblance to the creation, **"There is none like unto Him, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing."**⁸ This is the saying of the early Muslim scholars.

BENEFITS:

⁵ Surah Az-Zumar:67

⁶ Reported by Al-Bukhārī no. 4711, Muslim no. 2786

⁷ Muslim no. 2788

⁸ Ash-Shūrā 42:11

1. Look how the Messenger (ﷺ) confirmed the statement of the Jewish Rabbi regarding the Attribute of Fingers for Allāh. Furthermore, the Prophet (ﷺ) recited from the Book of Allāh regarding the Attribute of Hands for Allāh, and that He, the Perfect and Most High, will grasp the earth by His Hand and the heavens will be rolled up in His right Hand.

2. This tremendous narration exposes the falsehood of the Ash'arī and Māturīdī sects who claim that whenever the Attributes of Allāh such as these are mentioned, it is obligatory to explain them away with metaphorical explanations such that the Fingers and Hands of Allāh are not taken upon their apparent meanings because these Attributes (as they claim) cannot be affirmed for Allāh because "they resemble" the attributes of the creation. If this doctrine of the Ash'arīs were correct, then it would necessitate that the Messenger (ﷺ) be obligated to explain to the Jewish Rabbi that these Attributes are to be understood metaphorically, so that the Rabbi does not walk away thinking that indeed Allāh has REAL fingers or REAL hands. Instead, the Messenger (ﷺ) smiled at the saying of the Rabbi, and agreed with it, such that

the Prophet's **"molar teeth were visible"** as occurs in the narration of Sahīh Muslim. After that, the Prophet (ﷺ) himself recited from the Book of Allāh a verse that further confirmed what would take place on the Day of Resurrection, **"The whole of the earth will be grasped by His Hand, and the heavens will be rolled up in His Right Hand."** Abu Hanīfah (d. 150H) stated in *Al-Fiqhul-Akbar*, **"Allāh has a Hand, a Face and a Self just as Allāh, the Most High, has said in the Qur'ān when He mentioned the Hand, Face and Self. He has attributes without saying 'how'. It is not to be said: 'His Hand means His power and His bounty' because by doing so entails rejection of the Attribute."**⁹

3. This narration shows the understanding of the narrator Ibn Mas'ūd (رضي الله عنه) and the Companions in general that they took the narrations that mention the Attributes of Allāh upon their apparent meanings while freeing Him (تبارك وتعالى) from any resemblance to the creation, due to their reciting and understanding the statement of Allāh,

⁹ See *Sharh 'Aqīdah At-Tahāwīyyah* of Ibn Abil-'Izz Al-Hanafī (d. 792H), p. 137

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

“There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.”¹⁰ So they would affirm Fingers and Hands for Allāh upon their true and apparent meanings without making a resemblance or likeness to the creation. And that is the *madhhab* and belief of *Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā’ah* and the early *Salaf* of this *Ummah*, the great *imāms* of the first three centuries, and those who followed their path precisely without deviating to the sects of denial and distortion such as the *Ash’arīs*.

¹⁰ Ash-Shūrā 42:11

“Between the Kursī and the water is the distance of 500 years, and the Throne is above the water, and Allāh is above the Throne...”

So our Lord is as He has described Himself without likeness. He is the Most High above the seven heavens over His Throne. Ibn Jarīr At-Tabarī reports¹¹ with his chain of narration to the Companion Ibn Mas’ūd (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) who said: “When I narrate to you a *hadīth* I will bring to you its truthfulness from the Book of Allāh. The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said, **“When a person says: *subhānallāh wabi hamdihi, alhamdulillāh, lā ilāha illallāh, wallāhu akbar tabārakallāh* - an angel takes these words and places them under his wing, then he ascends with them into the sky. The angel does not pass any of the gatherings of the angels [during his ascent]**

¹¹ *Tafsīr* 22/120.

except that those angels seek forgiveness for the one who uttered those words until he greets (or comes to) the Face of the Most Merciful with them." Then Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd recited:

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ

"To Him ascends good speech, and righteous deeds exalt the good speech."^{12 13}

Abu Ja'far At-Tahāwī (d. 321H) stated in his 'Aqīdah, **"And He (Allāh) has no need of the Throne or whatever is beneath it. He encompasses everything and is above it (وفوقه).**

¹² Fātir: 10.

¹³ Al-Mundhirī cited this very same wording in *At-Targhīb wat-Tarhīb* (2/432-433, hadīth no. 36). He said: "It was reported by Al-Hākim who said: 'It has an authentic chain of narration.' So this narration affirms the Face of Allāh as well as the fact that Allāh is above, as stated by Abu Ismā'īl Al-Harawee (d. 481H) in his *Kitāb Al-Arba'īn Fī Dalā'il it-Tawhīd* (no. 17).

And He has made His creation incapable of encompassing.”¹⁴

Ibn ‘Uthaimīn said, “There appears in some books of the people of theological rhetoric (*Ahlul-kalām*) where they say: ‘It is not allowed to describe Allāh with being in a particular direction at all.’ They reject the highness of Allāh and that He is above, thinking that affirming this direction for Allāh necessitates placing limits upon Him. But this is not the case because we know that above the Throne there is nothing from the creation, there is none over it except Allāh, and there is absolutely nothing of His creation that encompasses or confines Him. So we say: Allāh is in the direction of above because Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) said to the slave-girl, **‘Where is Allāh?’** The term ‘where’ is seeking to know the place. So she replied: **‘Above the sky.’** So she affirmed that Allāh is above, and the Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed that and said: **‘Free her, for she is a believer.’** (Sahīh Muslim no. 33) So the direction affirmed for Allāh is not lowly – and Highness for Allāh is affirmed by the *Fitrah* (innate nature), sound intellect and the revealed text. The

¹⁴ Nos. 50-51

affirmation of direction for Allāh is not encompassment of Him because of the fact that His Footstool (*Al-Kursī*) extends over the Heavens and Earth, and it is the place of His two Feet, so how can anything from His creations confine him!? So He is in the direction of above without any confinement, and it is not permitted to say: 'There is something that confines Him or encompasses Him.' We say: **There is over the 'Arsh (the Throne) nothing besides Allāh, the Most Perfect, free of all imperfections.**"¹⁵

To prove this point, we have a narration wherein Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) said, **"When Allāh completed the creation, He wrote in His Book that is with Him above the Throne (فوق العرش): 'My mercy has prevailed over My anger'."**¹⁶

So the Sunni believes with certainty that Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) is over His Throne. Furthermore, the Throne is above water, which is above the Footstool, which is above the seven heavens, which are above this earth. Ibn Mas'ūd (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) narrated

¹⁵ See *Majmū' Fatāwā war-Rasā'il Al-'Uthaimīn* 10/1131

¹⁶ Muslim no. 2751, Bukhārī no. 7404

from Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ), **"The distance between the sky of this world and the next heaven is five hundred years, and between every heaven and the next is five hundred years. And between the seventh heaven and the Footstool (*Kursī*) is a distance of five hundred years, and between the *Kursī* and water, there is a distance of five hundred years. And the Throne (*'Arsh*) is above the water, and Allāh is above the Throne— nothing is hidden to Him of your deeds."** This *hadīth* is reported by Ibn Mahdī (d. 198H) from Hammād Ibn Salamah (d. 167H) from 'Āsim (d. 127H) from Zirr (d. 127H) from 'Abdullāh, and is ascribed to the Prophet (ﷺ).¹⁷

¹⁷ Collected by Ibn Khuzaimah in *At-Tawhīd* (139-140), Ad-Dārimī in *Ar-Radd 'Alal-Jahmiyyah* (no. 81), and in his *Ar-Radd 'Alal-Mirāsī* (no. 98), At-Tabrānī in *Al-Kabīr* (9/202), Abush-Shaikh in *Al-'Udhmah* (no. 279), Adh-Dhahabī in *Al-Uluww* (1/417, 616), Al-Bayhaqī in *Al-Asmā was-Sifāt* (no. 851). Adh-Dhahabi stated, **"Its chain of narration is authentic."** (*Al-'Uluww* no. 177). Ibn Al-Qayyim declared it authentic in *Ijtīmā' Al-Juyūsh Al-Islāmiyyah* (p.254). Al-Haythamī likewise in *Al-Majma'* (1/86). Al-Albānī likewise ruled it to be authentic in *Mukhtasar Al-'Uluww* (no. 104).

Imām Mālik (d. 179H) said, **“Allāh is above the Heavens and His Knowledge is in every place. Ahlus-Sunnah agree by *ijmā’* that the meaning of Allāh’s saying, ‘He is with you wherever you are,’ refers to His Knowledge and Allāh Himself (bi-Dhātihi) is above the Heavens.”**¹⁸

Ibn Taymiyyah (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ d. 728H) said, “Allāh, the Most High, said:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى عَلَى
الْعَرْشِ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ
السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

‘It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then ascended over the Throne. He knows what goes into the earth and what comes forth from it, what descends from the heaven and what ascends thereto. And He is with you wheresoever you may be.’¹⁹ So Allāh, the Most Perfect, has stated that alongside His Highness over His Throne, He knows everything. So His Highness does not prevent Him from having

¹⁸ *Al-Fatāwā* 3/219, *Ijtimā’ Al-Juyūsh* 76.

¹⁹ *Al-Hadīd*: 4

knowledge of all the affairs..."²⁰ Allāh, the Most High, said:

وَسِعَ رَبِّي كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

"My Lord comprehends in His Knowledge all things." (Al-An'ām: 80)

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

"The Most Merciful ascended over the Throne." (Taha: 5)

وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ

"And He is the Irresistible above His slaves..." (Al-An'ām: 18, 61)

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ

"To Him ascend all the goodly words." (Fātir: 10)

²⁰ See *Majmū' Al-Fatāwā* 5/498-499.

إِنِّي مُتَوَقِّعٌ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ

"O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself..." (Āli 'Imrān: 55)

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ

"The angels and the Ruh [Jibreel] ascend to Him..." (Al-Ma'ārij: 4)

يَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُمْ مِّنْ فَوْقِهِمْ

"They fear their Lord above them." (An-Nahl: 50)

All of these verses establish that Allāh is High above in His *Dhāt* (Self). Abdullāh Ibn Al-Mubārak (d. 181H) said: "We know our Lord, the Mighty and Majestic, is above the Seven Heavens, over His Throne, separate (*bā'in*) from the creation. We do not say as the Jahmiyyah say, that He is here - and then Ibn Al-Mubārak pointed to the earth." Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) stated,

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسُّوْسُ بِهِ نَفْسَهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ
مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

"And indeed We have created man, and We know what his ownself whispers to him. And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein [in knowing him]." (Qāf: 16) And this is in complete agreement with the saying of the Prophet (ﷺ) in the *hadīth* of Ibn Mas'ūd (رضي الله عنه), **"Allāh is above the Throne— nothing is hidden from Him of your deeds."** Though He is the Most High, nothing is hidden from Him. From these narrations, we see that the Throne of Allāh is an immense creation. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: **"The Seven Heavens as compared to the Footstool are nothing except like a ring thrown out into an open desert. And the greatness of the Throne over the Footstool is like that desert over that ring."**²¹ The Throne of Allāh is above the heavens, and Allāh is above the Throne just as the Prophet (ﷺ) stated, **"Paradise is one hundred levels. Between each level is the distance like that between the heaven and earth, and Firdaws is the highest level, and is at it's most middle. Above it is the Throne ('Arsh) of the Most Merciful and from it gush forth the rivers of**

²¹ Authenticated by *Al-Albānī in As-Silsilatus-Sahīhah*
1/174

Paradise. So when you ask of Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), ask Him for Firdaws.”²² So Allāh ascended over His Throne just as He (تَبَارَكَوَتَعَالَى) has stated in a manner that befits His Majesty without saying “how” and without resemblance to the creation. As for the Kursī (Footstool), the Companion Ibn ‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) said, **“Indeed the Kursī (Footstool) is the place of the two Feet [of Allāh], and no one can estimate the greatness of the Throne with its true estimation.”**²³ This narration establishes the belief in the Attribute of the two Feet of Allāh in a manner that befits His Majesty without resemblance. Ibn ‘Uthaimīn (رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ) stated: “Though this is a statement of Ibn ‘Abbās, it is nevertheless ascribed to the

²² At-Tirmidhī no. 2531, 1530

²³ Reported by Ibn Khuzaimah in *At-Tawhīd*, p. 107-118; Al-Hākim in *Al-Mustadrak: At-Tafseer* 2/282, and he said: **“This *hadīth* is *sahīh* upon the conditions of Bukhārī and Muslim, though it was not reported by them.”** Adh-Dhahabī agreed, and Al-Albānī authenticated it in *Mukhtasar Al-‘Uluww*, p.102. The wording is from Wakī’, and it has been reported from Abu Mūsā, Abu Hurairah, ‘Ikrimah and Abu Mālīk.

Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), because this is an affair where *ijtihād* (deduction) has no place."

Conclusion

In these few short pages, you as the reader have seen narration after authentic narration concerning the Attributes of Allāh and the correct methodology employed by Ahlus-Sunnah in understanding them. It is the late-comers, the innovators who deny, distort and explain away these verses, *ahādīth* and sayings of the Salaf. They use conjecture invented in their minds (without proof) and the sayings of some of the late-comers who erred from the path of the Companions (and the two generations after them) to cause you to doubt the textual proofs. So beware of them and cling to the Sunnah.

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