

Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī’s Shift Away from Ibn Kullāb in the Third Stage of His Life and the Authenticity of his Work, *Al-Ibānah*

Imām Adh-Dhahabī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) stated,

It reached us that Abul-Hasan repented—he ascended the pulpit in Basrah and said, **‘I used to say that the Qurān is created, that people will not see Allāh with their eyes and that evil is solely my action and not from the Pre-Decree. So, I repent and believe in refuting the *Mu‘tazilah*.’**¹⁶

It is apparent that in the final stage of his life, Abul-Hasan distanced himself from the *‘aqidah* (creed) of Ibn Kullāb and adopted the creed propounded by *Imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ). He made that clear in his final writings such as *Al-Ibānah*, *Risālah ilā Ahl Ath-Thaghar* and *Maqālāt Al-Islāmiyyīn*. Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) himself wrote concerning his final stances in *Al-Ibānah ‘an Usūl Ad-Diyānah* saying:

The speech with which we speak, and our belief that we take as our Religion, is to hold fast to the Book of our Lord, to the *Sunnah* of our Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), and what has been reported from the best of people among the Companions, the *Tābi‘īn* and the *Imāms* of *Hadīth*. That is what we cling to—and to what was said by Abu Abdullāh Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Hanbal (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ), may Allāh illuminate his face, elevate his rank, and grant him a

¹⁶ *As-Siyar* (15/89).

huge reward. This is what we hold [to be true], and those who contradict his sayings are to be opposed because he was the virtuous *Imām*, the complete leader through whom Allāh clarified the truth when misguidance became manifest—and through whom He (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) repelled misguidance, made clear the *Minhāj*¹⁷, extinguished the innovations of the innovators, the deviations of the deviants and the doubts of the doubters. So, may Allāh's mercy be upon him, for he is a foremost, eminent, and dignified *Imām*—and, also upon all the great scholars of the Muslims.

However, there is an important question that the scholars of *Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Hadīth* have posed many times in their writings, and that is, 'Was Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī's return to the *Madhhab* of the *Salaf* in creed a complete return? Or did there remain with him some of the ideas of Ibn Kullāb even though he made clear in *Al-Ibānah* his staunch adherence to the creed of *Imām* Ahmad and the *Salaf As-Sālih*?' *Al-Hāfidh* Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH) said:

They (the scholars) have said regarding the *Shaikh*, Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī that he had three stages:

The first stage: When he was a *Mu'tazilī* from which he recanted—and concerning this, there is no doubt.

The second stage: Wherein he affirmed the seven Attributes of Allāh that 'conform' to the intellect, and they are: Life (*Al-Hayāt*), Knowledge (*Al-ʿIlm*), Ability (*Al-Qudrah*), Will (*Al-Irādah*), Hearing (*As-Samaʿ*), Seeing (*Al-Basr*) and Speech (*Al-Kalām*). As for the Attributes of His Self (*Adh-Dhāt*), then they

¹⁷ The Methodology of the *Sunnah*.

would make metaphorical interpretations (*ta'wīl*) for them such His Face (*Al-Wajh*), His two Hands (*Al-Yadayn*), His Foot (*Al-Qadam*), His Shin (*As-Sāq*), etc.

The third stage: He affirmed all the Allāh's Attributes without questioning how they are (*takyīf*) and without resemblance with the creation (*tashbīh*) adopting in that regard the methodology of the *Salaf*. And this is his methodology in *Al-Ibānah* which is the last book he authored.¹⁸

Imām Adh-Dhahabī (رحمته الله) concurred saying:

Al-Ash'arī was born in the year 260 AH, and he died in 324 AH in Basra, may Allāh have mercy upon him. He used to be a *Mu'tazilī*, then he repented—and agreed with the *People of Hadīth* (*Ashāb al-Hadīth*) in matters wherein the *Mu'tazilah* opposed them. Thereafter, he came to agree with most of the views of the *People of Hadīth*, and that is what we have mentioned about him, that he would report their *ijmā'* (consensus) regarding the creed (*'aqīdah*)—and he agreed with them in all of that. **Therefore, he went through three stages:** (1) the stage when he was a *Mu'tazilī*, (1) the stage when he was a *Sunnī* in some things to the exclusion of others, and (3) the stage where in most of his creed, he was a *Sunnī*—and this is what we have come to know about his condition.¹⁹

It is true to say, and without doubt, that *Al-Ibānah* from all his works is the most plentiful in affirming and calling to the way of

¹⁸ *Tabaqāt Al-Fuqahā Ash-Shāfi'īn* (1/210), and Al-Murtadā Az-Zubaydī cited it from Ibn Kathīr in *Ithāf As-Sādah Al-Muttaqīn* (2/4).

¹⁹ *Kitāb Al-'Arsh* of Adh-Dhahabī (pp. 302-302).

Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah in creed, and in refuting of the sayings of *Ahlul-Bid'ah*²⁰—and especially his refutations against the *Mu'tazilah* who believed that the Qur'ān is created, and against the *Karrāmiyyah* who said that Allāh did not speak, and then He started speaking.

Shaikh Al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah concluded that even though the authorship of *Al-Ibānah* brought Al-Ash'arī very close to the creed of *Ahlus-Sunnah*, nevertheless there remained with him some remnants of the ideas of Ibn Kullāb, and Allāh knows best.²¹

The later chapters of this work have been translated directly from the book of Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī (رحمہ اللہ) entitled *Al-Ibānah 'an Usūl ad-Diyānah*, published by Dārul-Furqān (1431 AH/2010 CE) with a biography of Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī by Al-'Allāmah Hammād Ibn Muhammad Al-Ansārī (رحمہ اللہ). The book was praised and recommended by *Al-Imām* 'Abdul-'Azīz Ibn Bāz and *Shaikh* Ismā'īl Ibn Muhammad Al-Ansārī, may Allāh's mercy be upon them all.

Al-Ibānah clarifies the belief of Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī as it was at the end of his life, after he abandoned the deviations of the *Mu'tazilah* and the *Kullābiyyah*. So, every sincere Muslim who has been confused or misled regarding Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī (رحمہ اللہ) and his belief should read his book, *Al-Ibānah*.

Some of the greatest scholars (and verifiers) of the *Ummah* through the ages have verified and attested that *Al-Ibānah 'an Usūl*

²⁰ Ibn Al-Imād said regarding *Al-Ibānah*, "It is the last of the books that he wrote, and it is what his companions rely on when defending him from those who attack him." See *Shadharāt Adh-Dhahab* (2/303).

²¹ See *Minhāj As-Sunnah* of Ibn Taymiyyah (2/227-229). For a detailed discussion on the topic, see *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ash'arīyah* of Dr Abdur-Rahmān Al-Mahmūd (1/362-409).

ad-Diyānah is the authorship of *Imām* Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ). The following is a list of just some of those scholars:

1. **Ibn ‘Asākir** (d. 571 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Tabyīn Kadhīb al-Mufatri* (pp. 128-136, 28, 152, 171).

2. **Abu Bakr Al-Bayhaqī Ash-Shāfi‘ī** (d. 458 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Al-‘Itiqād wal-Hidāyah ilā Sabeel ar-Rashād* (pp. 31, 32, 26).

3. **Al-Imām Adh-Dhahabī** (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Al-‘Uluww lil-‘Aliyyil-Ghaffār* (p. 160), and he states that its ascription was also confirmed by Ibn ‘Asākir and Abul-‘Abbās Ahmad Ibn Thābit at-Tarqī.

4. **Ibn Farhūn Al-Mālikī** (d. 799 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Ad-Dībāj* (pp. 193-194).

5. **Abul-Falāh Abdul-Hayy Ibn Al-‘Imād Al-Hanbalī** (d. 1089 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Shadharāt adh-Dhahab fi Akhbārī min Dhahab* (p. 303).

6. **As-Sayyid Murtaḍā Az-Zubaydī** (d. 1205 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *It-hāf As-Sādah Al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharh Asrār Ihyā ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn* (2/2).

7. **Ibn Kathīr** (d. 774 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihāyah* (11/187) where he affirmed that *Al-Ibānah* was the final book of Abul-Hasan.

8. **Abul-Qāsim ‘Abdul-Malik Ibn ‘Īsā Ibn Dirbās Ash-Shāfi‘ī** (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Adh-Dhab ‘an Abil-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī* where he powerfully and convincingly affirms the authorship of *Al-Ibānah* to Abul-Hasan while refuting the opposers. He also cites others who ascribed the work to Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī such as **Abu ‘Uthmān Ismā‘īl As-Sābūni** (d. 449 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ), Abu ‘Ali Al-Hasan Al-Fārisī, the *Faqīh* Abul-Ma‘ālī Ash-Shāfi‘ī, the author of *Adh-Dhakhā’ir*, and others.

9. **Ibn Taymiyyah** (d. 728 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Al-Fatāwa Al-Hamawiyyah Al-Kubrā* (p. 70).

10. **Ibn Al-Qayyim** (d. 751 AH رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *Ijtimā‘ Al-Juyūsh Al-Islāmiyyah ‘ala Ghazwil-Mu‘attilah wal-Jahmiyyah* (pp. 68, 111).