

Lesson 09

Summary Notes

The Vision of Allāh

1. The Vision of Allāh

"The Vision is true for the people of Heaven, without encompassment or specification, as pronounced by the Book of our Lord, (translated) '*That day, faces will be resplendent, looking at their Lord.*' Q[75:23] Its interpretation is as Allāh intended and knew, and all that has appeared concerning that in the authentic ḥadīth from the Messenger (ﷺ) is as he said, and the meaning of it is as he intended. We do not indulge in that, interpreting with our opinions, or imagining with our fancies, for none is safe in his religion except for he who has submitted to Allāh, the Mighty, the Majestic, and to His Messenger (ﷺ), and who has deferred the knowledge of that which is ambiguous for him to the One who knows it.." [35]

"The belief in the **Vision** for the people of the *Abode of Peace* is not correct if one considers it according to his imagination, or interprets it according to understanding, for the interpretation of the Vision, and of every aspect pertaining to Lordship, is by abandoning interpretation and adhering to **unreserved assentment**; the religion of the Muslims is in accordance with this. The one who does not guard himself against **negation** and **anthropomorphism** has made a mistake, and has not attained [the correct notion] of transcendence [That is because] our Lord, the Mighty, the Majestic, is identified by attributes of unicity, described by characteristics of uniqueness, in such aspect as no creatures share." [37]

"(Some) faces, on that day, shall be **resplendent**, looking at their Lord." Q[75:23]

"Vision encompasses Him not." Q[6:103]

"Nay, they (the disbelievers), shall, on that day, be veiled from their Lord." Q[83:15]

"You shall see your Lord, just as you see this moon. You will not be harmed by seeing Him. Therefore, if you are able not to miss Ṣalāt before the rising of the sun and before its setting, then do that (i.e. do not miss them)." [Bukhārī, Muslim]

Seeing Allāh is a *reality for the believers* in the Hereafter. The majority of scholars maintain that the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) saw Allāh on the night of the Ascent (Mi'rāj). It is impossible for any ordinary human being to see Allāh in this world while awake.

The Allegorical Texts (1)

The Allegorical Texts (Mutashābihāt) - (1)

2. The Allegorical Texts

2.1 The Position of the Salafu's-Ṣāliḥīn

The **Salafu's-Ṣāliḥīn** (i.e. the first three generations of Muslims: Ṣaḥābah, Tābi'īn and Tabai Tābi'īn) took what has appeared in the Qur'ān and the well-authenticated ḥadīth, and professed faith in it, at the same time denying all resemblance of Allāh to His creatures. They neither probed into the meanings, nor added to what has been explicitly reported in these sources, nor replaced what has appeared with different words. They deferred its meaning to Allāh, and this is what we refer to as **tafwīd**.

"... for the interpretation of the Vision, and of every aspect pertaining to Lordship, is by abandoning interpretation and adhering to **unreserved assentment**; the religion of the Muslims is in accordance with this. ." [37]

"And we do not say that His Hand is Power or Favour, for that entails negation of the attribute, and it is the opinion of the Deniers of Destiny (Qadariyyah, Jabariyyah) and the People of Isolation (Mu'tazilah). " [Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*]

"We believe in them and affirm them, without any specification or meaning" [Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Sunnah* by al-Khallāl]

"The approach of the people of knowledge from among the Imāms, such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, Mālik ibn Anas, Ibn al-Mubārak, Ibn 'Uyaynah, Waki' and others, is that they related these things, and then said, 'These aḥādīth are related, and we believe in them, and one may not ask 'How?' '. This is the way preferred by the scholars of ḥadīth, that these things should be related, as they have appeared, they should be believed in and should not be interpreted, one should not exercise one's imagination over them, nor ask 'how?' " [Ḥāfiẓ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*]

2.2 The Way of the Khalaf

The **Khalaf** (i.e., the latter generations of Muslim scholars), interpreted these verses and aḥādīth in a consistent way, bearing in mind the non-resemblance of Allāh to His creatures. These interpretations were based on the Arabic language and context of the verses, and was initially in **an effort to curb the waves of anthropomorphism** which were raging in their age. They merely suggested possible meanings, and anything which was not abundantly clear, they deferred to Allāh.

Those to be admonished are the ones who:

- Take these verses and aḥādīth literally, and interpret the words according to their common usage.

- Replace the words which appear in them by other words which they think are synonyms for it.
- Take support from weak, strange and fabricated aḥādith.
- Take an *attribute of action* and make it into an attribute of self.

The Allegorical Texts -1 (Further discussion)

“He (Allāh) it is who has sent down upon you the Book, part of which (comprises) decisive (*muḥkamāt*) verses - they are the essence of the Book, and others which are allegorical (*mutashābihāt*). As for those in whose hearts is a disease, they follow that of it which is allegorical, seeking discord and seeking to interpret them, although none knows their interpretation except Allāh. And those firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord.’ And none reflect except those with perception.” Qur’ān [3:7]

It has been explained (by Imām al-Nawawī in *Sharh Saḥīḥ Muslim* as well as by others) that the people of knowledge have **two** main **approaches** regarding such allegorical texts.

The **first** is the approach of most of the salaf, or [even] all of them, and involves leaving the texts as they are, affirming them with a meaning appropriate for Allāh, without any specification or resemblance to creatures. Imām al-Tirmidhī said, in his ‘*Jāmi*’,

“The approach of the people of knowledge from among the Imāms, such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, Mālik ibn Anas, Ibn al-Mubārak, Ibn ‘Uyaynah, Waki` and others, is that they related these things, and then said, ‘These aḥādīth are related, and we believe in them, and one **may not ask ‘How?’**’. This is the way preferred by the scholars of ḥadīth, that these things should be related, as they have appeared, they should be believed in and should not be interpreted, one should not exercise one’s imagination over them, nor ask ‘how?’ “

The **second** position is that adopted by some latter scholars of the Ash’arī school, and involves suggesting a suitable figurative meaning for the texts based on the Arabic language and context. Some scholars took a position which combines the two approaches, while others allowed figurative interpretation only in cases of necessity, to dispel incorrect notions from the minds of people, and this seems most reasonable, although Allāh knows best.

It is worth noting that the **approach of the salaf** is **not anthropomorphism** (*tashbīh*), for it involves negation of any connotations of resemblance to creatures. The words used for the attributes may be the same as those used to describe creatures, but it is merely the same word, with no resemblance in the meaning. “**There is none like unto Him.**” [Qur’ān, 42:11] **Anthropomorphism** is to affirm the attributes

in a sense which includes some resemblance to creatures, such as saying that Allāh has a hand with fingers which open and close, or that He sees with an eye, or that He sat on the throne and crossed one leg over the other. (Allāh forbid.)

By the same token, the approach of the latter Ash'arīs is not a negation or denial (**ta'til**) of the attributes, for that can only be claimed if there is denial of the words themselves, or denial of a particular meaning which is known with certainty. As for affirmation of the words accompanied by suggestion of possible lexical meanings, it cannot be considered denial, although it is not the optimal approach. Nor is it a cause for excessive censure, especially when we consider that a number of distinguished scholars, who are universally respected and acclaimed, have taken this approach. An illustration of actual denial was the position of **al-Ja'd ibn Dirham** and the **Jahmiyyah**, who denied that Allāh took Abraham as an intimate friend, in spite of the clear statement in the Qur'ān, "Allāh took Abraham as an intimate friend," [Qur'ān,4:125] and according to some reports, this led to the execution of al-Ja'd for heresy.

The Approach of the Salaf

— abridged from "*Iljam al-'Awamm 'an Ilm al-Kalām*" by Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

Ḥujjatu'l-Islām Imām Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī says, in "*Iljam al-'Awamm 'an 'Ilmi al-Kalām*" (Bridling of the Laity from Theological Philosophy), p.4, "You should know that the explicit truth, regarding which there is no dispute among the people of enlightenment, is the madhhab of the salaf, by which I mean the madhhab of the Ṣaḥābah and Tabi'īn. I will now present here its explanation and proof, and therefore I say,

'The madhhab of the Salafu 'ṣ-Ṣāliḥīn - which is the truth according to us - is that anybody from among the common people to whom one of these aḥādith comes, is obliged to do seven things:

1. **Taqdis** [to believe Allāh free from corporeality and the like]
2. **Taṣḍiq** [to believe that the Prophet (ﷺ) was true in speaking these words, but in the manner in which he meant them],
3. **I'tirāf bil-'ajz** [recognising that its understanding is beyond his capability],
4. **Sukūt** [remaining silent and not asking questions about it, nor discussing it, knowing that it poses a danger to his faith, and that he may unwittingly commit kufr by discussing it.]
5. **Imsāk** [restraining himself - not replacing the words which have appeared in the texts with any grammatical derivatives, nor translating them into another language.]
6. **Kuff** [holding himself back from pondering and thinking over it.]
7. **Taslīm li-Ahlihī** [deferring it to those who are qualified to deal with it].'