

Rules Pertaining To Understanding Allaah's Names And Attributes

Call To Islam Research

There are certain rules that we must adhere to with regards to Allaah's Names and Attributes which if followed will prevent us from falling into shirk (polytheism) or kufr (disbelief). They are as follows:

- a) We must not name or qualify Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) except with what He or His Messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) have named or qualified Him with.
- b) None deserves to be named or qualified with the definitive Names or Attributes of Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala); eg. *Al-Karim* (The Most Generous), *Al Wahhab* (The Giver).
- c) We must affirm all of Allaah's Qualities/Attributes which Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) has stated in the Qur'an or mentioned through His Messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam).
- i) We affirm the apparent (*dhaahir*) meanings of Allaah's Attributes:

Al-Khattaabee (d.388H) (Rahimahu 'Llah) said:

"The madhhab of the Salaf (way of the Pious Predecessors) with regard to the Sifaat (Attributes of Allaah) is to affirm them as they are 'alaa dhaahir' (with their apparent meaning)...." ¹

- ii) without denying them (*ta'teel*), as Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says:

"And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allaah, so call on Him by them, and leave the company of those who belie or deny (or utter impious speech against) His Names. They will be requited for what they used to do" ²

- iii) without asking how the Attributes are (*takyeef*) as Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says:

"And follow not (ie, say not, or do not or witness not) that of which you have no knowledge." ³

- iv) without giving resemblance (*tashbeeh*) or making a likeness (*tamtheel*) to created things:

"There is nothing like Him; and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer." ⁴

The above verse confirms the Quality of Perfect Hearing and the Quality of Perfect Sight of Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala): "...**He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.**" without any resemblance to others: **"There is nothing like Him..."**

Likewise Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) also said:

¹ *Al-Ghuniyah an Kalaam wa Ahlihi* - as quoted in *Mukhtasir al-Uluww* (no.137)

² Surah al-A'raaf (7):180

³ Surah al- Israa (17):36

⁴ Surah ash-Shura (42):11

"....to one whom I have created with Both My Hands." ⁵

This confirms Two (Right) Hands for Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala), but there is no resemblance to them.

v) without (*tahreef*) distorting the texts or giving a figurative interpretation (*ta'weel*)

An example of *tahreef* (distorting the texts) would be to change Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala)'s Attribute of Istawa (Ascending or Rising Over) to Istawla (Conquering).

An example of *ta'weel* would be to say Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala)'s Attribute "Yad" (which means Hand), actually means His Power.

Al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadee (d.463H) (Rahimahu `Llah) said:

"As for speech about the Attributes of Allaah, that which is authentically related about them in the Sunnah, then the way of the Salaf – (Radiya `Llahu `anhum) - was to affirm them as they are, alaa dhaahir (upon their apparent meaning); negating any tashbeeh (resemblance) to Allaah and not asking how they are (takyeef). We do not say that al-Yad (the Hand of Allaah) means His Power nor that as-Sama' (Allaah's Hearing) and al-Basr (Allaah's Seeing) means His Knowledge, nor do we say that He has jawaarih (limbs)" ⁶

Imaam Abu Hanifah (d.150H) (Rahimahu `Llah) said:

"It is not to be said that His Hand [means] His Power, since in that is a nullification of the Attribute." ⁷

vi) without submitting the meanings of the Attributes to Allaah (*tafweedh*) (ie saying we don't know the meanings of Allaah's Attributes only Allaah knows them.)

Rabee'ah ibn Abee 'Abdur-Rahmaan (d.136) (Rahimahu `Llah) said:

"Al-Istawaa (Allaah's Ascending) IS NOT UNKNOWN, and HOW is not comprehensible, and from Allaah is the Message, upon the Messenger is to clearly convey it, and upon us is to affirm it" ⁸

Imaam Maalik (Rahimahu `Llah) -said:

"Al-Istawaa IS KNOWN, and how is unknown, to have eemaan in it is obligatory and to question it is an innovation." Then he said to the questioner: "I do not think except that you are an evil man". So he ordered him to be expelled. ⁹

⁵ Surah Sad (38):75

⁶ *Al-Kalaam alas-Sifaat* of al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadee (p.19-20)

⁷ *Fiqh al-Akbar*

⁸ Related by al-Bayhaqee in *al-Asmaa was-Sifaat* (no.516) and al-Laalikaaee in *Sharh Usool Itiqaad Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamaah* (no.665). Ibn Taymiyyah (Rahimahu `Llah) said in *Majmoo'al-Fatawaa* (5/365): "It is established from Rabee'ah". He also said in *al-Hamawiyyah* (p.80): "Al-Khallal narrated it with an isnaad all of whom are thiqaat (precise and reliable)"

⁹ Related by al-Bayhaqee in *al-Asmaa was-Sifaat* (p.516) with the wording: "Al-Istiwaah is not unknown and how is unknown, to have eemaan in it is obligatory and to question it is

d) We negate what Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) has negated from Himself in His Book or on the tongue of His Messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam), whilst firmly believing that its fully-perfect opposite is confirmed for Allaah. Allaah, (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says:

“And Allaah is not unaware of what you do.” ¹⁰

So in this ayah we negate what Allaah has negated from Himself: **“unawareness”** whilst firmly believing that its fully-perfect opposite is confirmed for Allaah: **“complete awareness.”**

e) With regard to that where there is neither negation nor affirmation reported, and about which the people disagree - such as body (*jism*), extent (*heiz*), direction (*jihah*), and the like - then the way in regards to this is to withhold with respect to it's wording, there is neither affirmation or negation since nothing is reported about that. With regards to the meaning, further clarification is to be sought about what is meant. So if what is intended by such wording is false, something Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) is to be declared free from, then it is to be rejected. However, if something true is intended by it; something which is not incorrect for Allaah; then it is accepted (and the correct *Shari'ah* terminology, which is to be found in the text, is to be made clear; and one should call for it's usage in place of the vague and newly-introduced wordings). ¹¹

published: 05-09-07

an innovation". Al-Bayhaqee also relates (p.516), as does ad-Daarimee in *ar-Radd'alal-Jahmiyyah* (p.55)-with a jayyid isnaad, as Ibn Hajr says in *Fathul-Baaree* (13/406) that Imaam Maalik said: "The Most Merciful Ascended as He Himself described, and it is not to be asked: How? Since how is unknown".

¹⁰ Surah al-Baqarah (2):74

¹¹ Shaykh Muhammad ibn Sâlih al-'Uthaymeen (Rahimahu 'Llah) *Fathu Rabbal-Bariyyah bi Talkhîsil-Hamawiyyah* (pp.7-37)