



Fatwa of the scholars of al-Azhar regarding the one who believes that Allāh settles in created things or that He has a direction ¹

Shaykh Abū Muhammad Mahmūd Khattāb al-Subkī al-Azharī

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[Introduction]

The Imām and great scholar, the *muhaddith*, the renewer of the religion, Abū Muhammad, Mahmūd Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Khattāb, al-Subkī, al-Azharī, the founder of the Association of Islamic Law in Egypt, the author of *al-manhal al-'athb al-mawrūd abarh sunan Abī Dāwūd*, who died 1352 H, رحمته, said in his book *ithaf al-kā'ināt bi-bayān madhhab al-salaf wal khalaf fī al-mutashābihāt*, page 2:

Praise to the Lord of the Worlds, Who is clear of the attributes of creation, like direction and body and place and physical highness, and may God raise the rank of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who wiped out shirk and blasphemy and ordered us to believe that Allāh is clear of created attributes and revealed to him in the Qur'ān that Allāh is one, doesn't have a partner or parts, that He does not need anything or anyone, does not beget and was not begotten and that He has no equal, and also revealed to him that Allāh does not resemble anything and that He hears and sees everything. May Allāh also raise the rank of the Prophet's companions and all those who imitated his ways.

After that, Mahmūd Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Khattāb, al-Subkī says:

¹ This fatwa was translated from the text posted by Shaykh al-Azharī at <http://cb.rayaheen.net/showthread.php?threadid=1211>. Please note that the title headings have been added by the translator, and that sometimes words have been added in brackets in translated texts to make them more understandable to the reader.

[The question asked]

Some of those who desire knowledge about the beliefs of the religion and to stand firm in the school of the *Salaf* and *Khalaf* ² with regard to the Hadiths and Ayāt that do not have a clear or well known meaning (*mutashābihāt*) asked the following:

What is the saying of the scholars, may Allāh protect them, regarding the one who believes that God has a physical direction, and that He sits on the throne in a special place and says, “this is the belief of the *salaf*” promotes this idea, and accuses those who deny this of blasphemy. All this while pointing to the 2 Ayahs:

“*al-Rahmān `alā-l-`arsh istawā*”³

and

“*a`amintum man fī-l-samā*”⁴

Is this a valid or an invalid belief? If invalid, does the one who says so commit blasphemy so that all his previous works are annulled, such as prayer, fasting and other religious activities? Is his marriage contract invalidated? If he dies in this state, before repenting, is

² The *salaf* are the scholars of the first three centuries after the Hijra, while the *khalaf* are those after that.

³ Sūrat Tāhā, 5; its pronunciation is: *al-Rahmān `alā-l-`arsh istawā*. If someone translated this statement literally, he would say: *al-Rahmān* (The Merciful) *`alā* (on) *al-`arsh* (The Throne) *istawā* (established Himself); “*The Merciful established Himself on the throne*”. This is not the meaning of the statement, however, and the Arabic Language is not limited to this meaning. Rather, the verb “*istawā*” in the Arabic language has some 14 different meanings. Moreover, the word *al-`arsh* does not necessarily mean “throne”, it could also mean “dominion”, and some of the *salaf* said that. Abu Mansūr al-Baghdādī said in his book *usūl al-dīn*, in summary: “Our colleagues differed regarding this Ayah. Some said that it is among the Ayahs that are *Mutashābihāt* whose meaning is not known by other than Allāh, and this is the saying of Mālik. Others said that *istawā* is something that Allāh did to the *`arsh* that He called *istawā*, and this is the saying of Abū Hasan al-Ash`arī. Others again said that *istawā* means that He is attributed with aboveness over the *`arsh* without contact (i.e. in status, not physical aboveness). The correct saying in our view, is that *al-`arsh* in this Ayah means the Dominion and *istawā* is its action, meaning that the Dominion did not settle in equilibrium for anyone but Him.”

In case anyone is wondering who Abū Mansūr is, al-Dhahabī described him in his book *sīyar a`lām al-nubalā'* as: “the great, outstanding, and encyclopedic scholar.... He used to teach 17 different subjects and his brilliance became the source for proverbs.” al-Dhahabī said further that he would have liked to write a separate, more complete article about him, and quoted Abū `Uthmān al-Sābūnī saying: “Abū Mansūr is by scholarly consensus counted among the heads of the scholars of belief and the methodology of jurisprudence, as well as a front figure of Islām.”

⁴ Sūrat al-Mulk, 16; its pronunciation is: *`a`amintum man fī-s-samā'*. If someone translated it literally, he would say: *`a`amintum* (Do you feel safe from) *man* (who) *fī* (is in) *al-samā'* (the sky); “Do you feel safe from who is in the sky?” This second Ayah can be dealt simply with by saying that the pronoun “who” refers to the angels. After all, the sky is their abode, and they bring winds and other tribulations to Earth by Allāh’s orders. In other words, there is nothing which says that this Ayah must be taken literally, or that it refers to Allāh.

he not washed and prayed for and buried in the graveyards of the Muslims? Is the one who believed that what this one is saying is true, also a non-Muslim, like him? What is your saying about what some people say that denying that Allāh is attributed with the six directions (i.e. up, down, front, back and the two sides) is wrong, and that it entails denying His existence? Let us benefit from your showing of what the *madhhab* of the *salaf* and the *kbhalaf* is in these two Ayahs, and other Ayahs, such as,

“*ilayhi yas’ad al-Kalim al-Tayib*”⁵

and the Hadīth,

“*yanzil Rabbunā ilā-l-samā’ al-dunyā*”⁶

with a complete and satisfactory explanation.

(Please) include the sayings of the scholars of Hadīth, Qur’ān-exegesis, *fiqh* and *tambīd*, and clarify completely, so that the tongues of those who speak thoughtlessly are silenced - those who liken Allāh to His creation and believe that what the *kbhalaf* scholars did in terms of *ta`mil* (interpreting figuratively) is blasphemy, while claiming that this is the way of the Jahmiyya, the blasphemous sect, and spread this rumor among the common people. May Allāh reward you!

⁵ Its pronunciation is: *ilayhi yas’adu-l-kalimu-t-tayyib*. If translated literally, it would say: *ilayhi* (to Him) *yas’adu* (ascends) *al-kalim al-tayyib* (the good words). al-Imām al-Nasafī said in his *tafsīr*, explaining this Ayah: “to Him” means “to the status of acceptance and reward”, not that Allāh is in the direction up. All things that are characterised by acceptance are described with highness and ascendancy. Source: *Tafsīr al-Nasafī*.

⁶ Its pronunciation is: *yanzīlu Rabbunā ilā-ssamā’i-d-dunyā*. If someone translated it literally, he would say: *yanzil* (descends) *Rabbunā* (Our Lord) *ilā* (to) *al-samā’* (the sky) *al-dunyā* ((of) the world); “Our Lord descends to the sky of the world.” Ibn al-Jawzī said, in summary, regarding this Hadīth: “I have mentioned earlier, in things like this, that it is an obligation upon us to know what it is possible to be an attribute of Allāh, and what is impossible to be an attribute of His. Among the things that it is impossible that Allāh should be attributed with is movement, transport and change. The scholars have two approaches to the remaining meanings: one is to remain silent without assigning a specific meaning. They said, “Narrate it on, without saying it has a modality”. This was the approach of the *Salaf* in general. The second approach is to assign an acceptable meaning, knowing that movement cannot be an attribute of Allāh. The Imām Ahmad said “*wa-jā’ Rabbuka*” means: “His orders came”” (P. 3/379, *Kashf al-Mushkil*).

Ed. This is what this great Hanbalī scholar said. Note that “*wa-jā’ Rabbuka*” if literally translated, would state: *wa* (and) *jā’* (He came) *Rabbuka* (your Lord). In other words, al-Imām Ahmad is one of those among the *Salaf* that sometimes would interpret figuratively to protect people from misunderstanding in dangerous ways. Source: P. 3/379, Abū Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī. *Kashf al-Mushkil*. 4 vols. Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1997.

[The Answer of the Imām Abū Muhammad Mahmūd Khattāb al-Subkī]

So I answered, by Allāh's help, and said: In the name of Allāh, the one who is merciful to Muslims and non-Muslims in this life, but only to Muslims in the next. Praise be to Allāh, the Creator of true guidance, and may Allāh raise the rank of the one who was given wisdom and clear speech, and of those who support him and his companions, whom Allāh guided and gave success and steadfastness. After saying that, the judgment is that this belief is invalid, and the one who believes it is a non-Muslim by the consensus of those who count among the scholars.⁷

⁷ Ibn al-Mu'allim al-Qurashī, in his book *najmu-l-mubtadi* on page 588 narrates from `Alī ibn Abī Tālib, the fourth Caliph: "A people of this Nation (of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) shall return to being blasphemers when the Day of Judgment is near." A man asked, "O Prince of the Believers! What is their blasphemy for? Is it for inventing something, or for denying something?" `Alī ﷺ replied: "It is for denial. They deny their Creator; they say that He is attributed with a body and limbs." Ed. What we observe today testifies to the soundness of the meaning of this narration.

To understand why this is denial of Allāh's existence, it is useful to mention what the great and encyclopedic scholar of the 6th century after the Hijrah, al-Fakhr al-Rāzī said when explaining the statement "*qātīlu-l-ladhīna lā yu'minūna bi-llāh*" in the Qur'ān (al-Tawbah, 29): "The evidence shows that the one who says that Allāh is a body has denied Allāh's existence. The reason is that the God of the World exists, and is not a body or positioned in a body. Therefore, if the one who says that Allāh is a body denies this existence (without a body) then he has denied Allāh's existence. It is correct to say then, that the one who says that Allāh is a body does not believe in Allāh." (*Mafātih al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī).

The famous Shāfi'ī scholar, al-Suyūfī, said in *al-asbbāh wal nathā'ir* P. 488: "al-Shāfi'ī said: I do not say that the people that have *somewhat* deviant ideas (*ablul abwā*) are non-Muslims," but he exempted those who say that Allāh has a body and those who say that Allāh does not know all details of things." Ed. In other words, those who have deviance to the extent of blasphemy. Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī, in his book *usūlu al-dīn*, states about those who say that Allāh has a body, or that events happen in Him or His attributes (such as hearing or seeing one thing after another as they happen to creation) : "All those who disagreed with them say that they are blasphemers, so in this respect they are the worst of all the deviant sects." (P. 338) He also commented: "By claiming that Allāh has events happen to Him, they ruined for themselves the proof of the monotheists which holds that bodies are creations since they have events in them. Based on this principle of theirs, they cannot prove that the world has a beginning, and thus they have no way of knowing the Creator of the world. Consequently, they are like all others who do not know Him." (P. 337-338). That is, they are idolaters.

al-Qurtubī in his commentary in the Qur'ān narrates from his Shaykh Ibn al-'Arabī regarding the those who say Allāh has a body: "The sound verdict is that they are blasphemers, because there is no difference between them and those that worship idols and pictures. Thus they are requested to repent from this belief, and if they refuse they are killed." (4/14).

The encyclopedic scholar Abu Ja'far al-Tahāwī said in his famous text on the Islamic Belief: "This is a detailed remembrance of the belief of the People of (*adherence to*) the Sunnah (*what was narrated of sayings, deeds and confirmations from the Prophet ﷺ*) and (*following*) the Jamā'ah (*the companions of the Prophet*)."

That is: the belief of the Sunnis, and all the scholars agreed with him on this. Then later on, he mentions as one of the beliefs of the Sunnis that: “Whoever attributed to Allāh a meaning that is of the meanings that apply to human beings has committed blasphemy.”

Note, in light of the above, that what has been mentioned in some scholarly books in terms of not claiming *al-mujassimah* non-Muslims needs careful explanation. Its explanation is that the word *mujassim* is used for the person that says Allāh is a *jism*. The word *jism* means body in English, but that does not mean that it understood in exactly the same way always, or that it has the same connotations. For this reason I have not translated *mujassim* as “those that believe Allāh is a body” to explain this particular point; what applies to the use of the word *jism* in Arabic does not necessarily apply to using the word “body” in English. With this in mind; the scholars that mention a difference of opinion regarding saying that Allāh is a *jism* mean a particular group among these perpetrators, not all of them. They mean those among the foolish and uneducated commoners that say this, but do not understand from this the usual linguistic meaning of size, shape or direction. They simply mean by *jism* Allāh’s existence, and not any of the meanings that apply to human beings, such as direction or size. The remaining perpetration then, is the use of a this word regarding Allāh. In this there is a difference of opinion, but only regarding people who are uneducated who say this, not scholars. Those who said that this is blasphemy even so, argued that this person was willing to use this word about Allāh, without it having been narrated in any revealed text, and knowing what this word usually refers to. He has therefore shown disrespect to the Creator, like a person who said that Allāh has a son, but meant by it only that he is highly accepted by Allāh; he is still unquestionably a blasphemer by the explicit verdict of the Qur’ān regarding even uttering this word.

The view that it is blasphemy to merely use the word *jism*, even if one only meant existence, was considered weightiest by Ibn Amīr al-Hājj, the student of the great Hanafī Imām Ibn al-Humām and the Prince of Believers in Hadīth, Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī in his book *al-taqrīr w l tabbīr* (3/319), narrating from Ibn al-Humām’s book “*al-musayarab*”. Along the same lines it is stated in *al-fatāwā al-hindiyyah*, which is a reliable book for Fatwā in the Hanafī school: “If someone said: “*Allāh fil samā*,” (literally “in the sky”) then: if he intended simply to imitate what is mentioned in apparent scriptures, then he has not blasphemed; if he meant by it the (*sky as a*) place then he has blasphemed; and if (*he said to the judge in court that*) he did not intend any particular meaning, then he has blasphemed according to most, and this is the soundest opinion, and it is the chosen Fatwā.” (2/259).

In summary, the difference of opinion is regarding what appears to be the case about someone else’s belief according to what he utters with his tongue, and not regarding someone who believes that Allāh has a limit, shape or size. This is because such a person believes that Allāh has attributes with the meaning of creation, and then the belief of the Sunnis applies, as stated by al-Tahāwī: “Whoever attributed to Allāh a meaning that is of the meanings that apply to human beings has committed blasphemy.”

Note finally the subtle eloquence of al-Tahāwī’s choice of the words “ a meaning that is of the meanings”, because this provides the general rule that the meaning is the main concern. So for example, the person who says that Allāh moves, or has a limit or a size, or a limb; he is a *kāfir*, even if says, “not like His creation”, because these are all meanings that apply to human beings. Saying: “not like His creation” will not help him, because the aspect of physical dimension remains in the meaning. One can further understand from this that if a person uses an expression about Allāh that has a single known meaning in his language, and this meaning applies to human beings, then he has committed *kufūr*. If it has non-blasphemous meanings as well, then it needs to be established that he meant the blasphemous meaning before he is considered a blasphemer.

The difference of opinion can sometimes also refer to whether every member of a sect is considered a blasphemer for merely belonging to their group. So for example, those sects that went completely overboard and made it their basic distinguishing characteristic that they worship

[The proof in terms of reasoning]

The proof of reasoning for this is that Allāh's existence is eternal without a beginning, and therefore does not resemble anything that has a beginning.⁸

[The proof in terms of Qur'an and Hadith]

In terms of what has been related, the proof is:

“He does not resemble anything, and He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”⁹

[The consequence of these proofs for the one who believes something contradictory to them]

Accordingly, anyone that believes that Allāh settled in a place, or was in contact with it or anything else that has a beginning, such as the *ʿArsh*¹⁰ or the *Kursī*¹¹, or the sky, or the earth, or anything else - he is a blasphemer absolutely and without a doubt. All his religious works are invalid, such as prayer, fasting and Hajj, and his wife is separated, and he must repent (by returning to Islam) immediately. If he dies with this belief, then he is not washed, not prayed for, and he is not buried in the graveyard of the Muslims. In addition, all those who believed that his belief is the truth take this same judgment. May Allāh protect us from the evils of our selves and the liability of our bad deeds.

ʿAlī, or something of that nature, all members of such sects are considered blasphemers without further inquiry. In other cases, like people associated with the Muʿtazilites or Khawārij; in these cases it is not clear that a person actually accepts and believes all the beliefs associated with them. The scholars will thus sometimes disagree whether a person associated with a particular sect is automatically considered a blasphemer, or that he will only be considered a sinful Muslim as long as he has not made it clear that he has one of their blasphemous beliefs.

⁸ All aspects of creation, be it physical things or their attributes, has a beginning. There is nothing about Allāh's attributes, however, that has a beginning. It is therefore impossible that He should resemble anything created in any of its aspects, because whatever the aspect of creation might be, it is going to be something with a beginning. Having a beginning necessitates having a creator to bring it into existence. Likening Allāh to His creation then, is equivalent to saying that He has a creator or is partially created, and that is identical to the blasphemy of the Christians.

⁹ The meaning of al-Shurā, 11; what al-Subkī has mentioned is enough for the sound minded, because Islam does not teach something contradictory - all its teachings are harmonious in meaning. However, in order to bring Hadīths as well as Qur'an and logical reasoning, he might have added that al-Bayhaqī, Muslim and others, related the Hadīth of the Messenger of Allāh, ﷺ: *“You are al-Dhabir, hence there is nothing above You, and You are al-Batin, hence there is nothing underneath You.”* al-Bayhaqī said (*in his book “al-asmā' wal sifāt”*): *“If there is nothing above Him and nothing underneath Him, then He is not in a place.”*

¹⁰ Sometimes translated as “throne” - it is a creation with 4 legs, and is like the Ka'bah for the Angels

¹¹ Sometimes translated as “chair”.

As for such a person's encouragement of others to have such blasphemous beliefs, and his telling them that the one who does not have it is a blasphemer; this (activity of his) is (another) blasphemy and an abhorrent lie with the intent to spread deviance. As for him taking as evidence, according to his invalid claim, the two Ayahs mentioned, and their likes, to show that Allāh settles on the *`Arsh*, or sits on it, or descends in the sky or the like, as this group of people claims... They do this despite the fact that Allāh's attribute of speech ¹² is not created, and it is one of the eternal attributes of Allāh that existed before the *`Arsh* or the sky. That is, Allāh is attributed with "*`ala-l-`arsh istawā*" before the *`Arsh* existed¹³. Moreover, was He sitting, according to them, on the non existing *`Arsh* before it existed???!! Was He (according to them) in the sky before it existed???!!

These (sorts of claims) are something a rational being does not even hesitate about. Does sound reason accept that something eternal settles in something that has a beginning ¹⁴?

Verily we are Allāh's creation and we will return to be judged by Him!

In summary, this careless person and his likes have claimed something that cannot be verified; neither by reason, nor by what has been related. ¹⁵

¹² The revealed book of the Qur'ān refers to Allāh's attribute of speech (which does not have a beginning, or an end, and does not change - as is true for all of His attributes), just as the word "Allāh" refers to the Creator and is not Him Himself. Words, languages, letters and sounds are all obviously created things – if someone is in doubt, let them say "*bismi-llāh-ir-Rahmān-ir-Rahīm*" without a beginning or an end! The fact that uttering it necessitates a beginning means that it is created, because anything with a beginning must have been brought into existence, and this is the definition of creating; to bring into existence. That is, when someone utters a word, it means that Allāh has created in him/her this utterance, and that he/she committed it by His will. The word "Qur'ān" in Arabic may refer to Allāh's eternal attribute of speech or to the book. It is blasphemy to say that the Qur'ān is created if one means Allāh's attribute. It is a sin (but not blasphemy) to say so if one is referring to the book, because it is inappropriate and a *bid'ah*. Some said, however, that it may be said for teaching purposes, if one feels it is necessary in order to avoid misunderstandings.

¹³ i.e. Because Allāh attributed to Himself eternally "*`ala-l-`arsh istawā*", and since the *`Arsh* is a creation with a beginning, the meaning of *istawā* cannot be a physical relationship, such as establishment, sitting or hovering. After all, such a physical relationship would have to have a beginning.

¹⁴ Something eternal cannot be changing, because change itself has a beginning. The thing that changes must therefore be something that has a beginning, because it is clear that its existence is not a necessity; not a must. This is clear because its changing from one state to another shows that none of its states are necessary; they are mere possibilities. That is, one cannot say that this thing in any of its state must exist. If the thing's existence is not a necessity, then something must have brought it into existence, and therefore it must have a beginning.

¹⁵ Subkī's saying that this belief "cannot be verified neither by reason, nor by what has been related" needs some explanation. In terms of reason it is clear, because Allāh is eternal, and directions are not, as al-Subkī has already pointed out. With regard to what has been related; the scholars all agreed that all Hadīth and Qur'ān sayings must be understood by their apparent meaning, with two exceptions only:

The first exception is if taking it literally would lead to the absurd, i.e. it is self contradictory, such as saying "a square circle" or "the part is larger than the whole." Saying that Allāh is actually in a geographical direction leads to saying either that directions are eternal or that Allāh changed from

They have committed blasphemy, and they think they have done something good! And the greatest calamity that they are struck by is that they claim to be salafīs, while they are deviants from the true path, and disgracing the best among the Muslims.

Verily, there is no power or ability other than what Allāh creates!

[The Salaf's way of dealing with Mutashābihāt]

Concerning the way of the *salaf* (the scholars of the first 3 centuries) and *kehalaf* (scholars after the *salaf*) in dealing with the Ayahs and Hadīths that do not have only one possible or well-known meaning: they all agreed that Allāh is clear of and above the attributes of whatever has a beginning. Therefore, He does not have a place for Him on the *`Arsh* or the sky or anywhere else. He is also not attributed with settling in or on anything that has a beginning, and not with transformation or movement or the like. Rather, He is as He was before the existence of the *`Arsh* or the *Kursī* or the skies and other things that have a beginning. The Hāfiz (ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani) said in *al-Fath* ¹⁶: “the *fuqahā*’ (fiqh scholars) all agreed, from east to west, upon the belief in the Qur’ān and the Hadīths that trustworthy people related from the Prophet ﷺ about the attributes of Allāh, without likening them to creation or explanation.”

They only disagreed on the matter of explaining the meaning of these Ayahs, so the salaf (i.e. most of them) believe in them as they were related and that they are not literally meant, because of the saying of Allāh which means, “**He does not resemble anything and He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing**”, and leave the meaning be, due to the saying of Allāh that means: “**and no one knows their meaning except Allāh**”¹⁷

Accordingly, they say regarding the Āyah “**al-Rahman `alā-l-`arsh istawā**” ¹⁸, that He “*istawā*” in a sense that befits Him, and only He knows it, and regarding the Ayah “**`a`amintum man fī al-samā**” ¹⁹ that we believe in it and the meaning that Allāh gave it, while clearing Him of the attributes of whatever has a beginning and of settling (in a place.) They also say about the Āyah “**yad ullāhi fawqa aydihim**” ²⁰ that He has a “*yad*”

being without direction to having a direction. This cannot be, because direction is an attribute of space, and space is attributed with change, therefore it must be a creation. Moreover, it cannot be that Allāh changes, because that would mean He needs a creator.

The second exception is if there are other Hadīths and Qur’ānic sayings that contradict the literal meaning. In this case there are many texts that contradicts the claim that Allāh is in a direction, among them: “*He does not resemble anything*,” as al-Subkī mentioned. This latter text is taken literally in the absolute sense, because sound reasoning tells us that this must be so, as explained in footnote #8.

¹⁶ Fath al-Bārī - the explanation of al-Bukhārī.

¹⁷ Sūrah 3, 5 – more details later.

¹⁸ See footnote # 3

¹⁹ See footnote # 4

²⁰ Sūrat al-Fath, 10; its pronunciation is: “*yadu-llābi fawqa aydihim*”. If someone translated it literally, he would say: *yadu* (the hand) *Allābi* (of Allāh) *fawqa* (is above) *aydihim* (their

not like our *yad*, and only Allāh knows it. This was their way in dealing with these Ayahs that do not have only a single possible meaning or only one famous meaning.

[A saying of Ibn Kathīr and Nu’aym Ibn Hammād about Mutashābihāt]

The great *salafī*²¹ Imām Ibn Kathīr said: “As for the saying of Allāh “*thumma istawā ‘alā-l-‘arsh*”²², there are so very many sayings about this that this is not the place to mention them all, and we will rather take the way of the pious *salaf*, Mālik, al-Awzā’ī, al-Thawrī, al-Layth ibn Sa’d, al-Shāfi’ī, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ishāq in Rāhwayh and other Imāms, new and old, which is to pass by them without assigning to them a how, or a likeness, or deny them. As for the apparent literal meanings that come to the minds of those who liken Allāh to His creation; those are rejected, because He does not resemble anything, and there is nothing like Him, and He is All-Seeing, All-Hearing.

Rather, it is like what the imāms said, among them Nu’aym Ibn Hammād al-Khuzā’ī, the Shaykh of al-Bukhārī: “The one who likens Allāh to His creation has committed blasphemy, and the one who denies what Allāh has attributed to Himself has also committed blasphemy. There is no (meaning of) likening (to the creation) in any of what Allāh has attributed to Himself or what the Prophet attributed to Him. So the one who affirms what has been related in plain Ayahs and authentic Hadīths in a way that is befitting with Allāh’s greatness, and denies that Allāh has any flaws; he has taken the path of guidance.” The like of the above is to be found in all *tafsīr* books of the great Imāms.

[Examples of how the Salaf dealt with Mutashābihāt]

They say about the Hadīth “*yanẓil Rabbunā ilā-l-samā’ al-dunyā*,”²³ that this has a meaning that befits Allāh, and that only Allāh knows it. Then there is another Hadīth, the Hadīth of the Slave Girl related by Muslim and Abu Dāwūd where it is mentioned that the Prophet said to her: “*ayna Allāh?*” and she said “*fī as-samā’*”²⁴ and that he said “who am I?” and she answered “you are the Messenger of Allāh.”

hands). The word *yad* in Arabic can mean power, among other things. Ibn al-Jawzī in his commentary on the Qur’ān states regarding this Ayah: “the fourth view (*regarding its explanation*) is : “His power and support is above theirs. This was stated by Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Kaysān.”

²¹ i.e. that he was like the *salaf* in his ways, not that this is a Madhhab. Ibn Kathīr was a Shāfi’ī scholar.

²² See footnote # 3

²³ Its pronunciation is: “*yanẓilu Rabbunā ilās-samā’i-d-dunyā*”. If someone translated it literally, he would say: *yanẓil* (descends) *Rabbunā* (Our Lord) *ilā* (to) *al-samā’* (the Sky) *al-sunyā* ((of) the World); “Our Lord descends to the sky of the world.” It is a figure of speech for acceptance, and does not mean movement, or it refers to the angel that descends at that time; i.e. His angel descends. See details in footnotes above.

²⁴ If someone translated it literally, he would say that “*ayna Allāh?*” means: “where is Allāh?” and that her saying “*fīl samā’*” (pronounced *fī-s-samā’*) means: *fī* (in) *al-samā’* (the sky).

Then he said “free her, for she is a believer.”²⁵ This Hadīth is handled with the same approach as the Ayah “*‘a ‘amintum man fil samā’*”²⁶ and likewise all other such Hadīths and Ayahs. They took this approach because of the Ayah that means:

The meaning is not literal, because it is impossible that Allāh should be in a place. Rather, it is a question about status, not place or direction, as shown in the below footnote.

²⁵ This Hadīth, also called “the Hadīth of the slave girl” cannot be taken literally and adopted as a belief for the following reasons:

First, because this Hadīth is singularly transmitted so it does not give certainty and the obligation of believing something about Allāh can only be established by proofs that provide certainty.

Second, this narration is weak according to some scholars, because there are other narrations which use different wording. For example, the authenticated and sound narration in the Hadīth collection *musannaf` Abdul Razzāq*, which reads, “Do you testify that ‘la ilāha ill-Allāh’ (there is none worthy of worship except Allāh)?” In addition, although some narrations of this Hadīth states that the Prophet called her a “believer”, not all of them state that.

Third, the apparent meaning that Allāh is in a direction with regards to His creation is rejected by the sound intellect as absurd.

Fourth, the disputed text in the singular Hadīth which literally states “Where is Allāh?” does not fit with the well-known principles set forth to determine if someone is Muslim. The principle is that one asks them to testify that there is no god but Allāh, and that Muhammad is His prophet and Messenger.

Fifth, it contradicts sound Hadīths in the same collection (Muslim) that clearly show that Allāh is neither above nor below any created thing, namely, “You are *al-Dhāhir* so there is nothing above You. And You are *al-Bātin*, so there is nothing below you.”

Sixth, it contradicts the statement in the Qur’ān that means, “Absolutely nothing resembles Him in any way at all, and He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.” This statement is what the Muslims have taken as their basic guide in their belief in absolute terms, and any other statements in Hadīth or Qur’ān are understood accordingly.

Seventh, it contradicts the geographical reality that what is up in Saudi Arabia is down in the Fiji Islands. It also conflicts with the fact that the earth turns, so that what is up at one point in time is another direction at another time.

For these reasons, the Hadīth of the slave girl is given an acceptable figurative interpretation. Such an interpretation is to say that the word “*ayna*” (where) in Arabic is commonly used as a question about status, not only about place, such as in, “*Ayna anta wa-`Uthmān*”, literally: “Where are you and `Uthmān?” meaning: “Where is your status compared to `Uthmān?” Her answer, literally translated as “in the sky,” means “very high”, just as one in English might use the expression “sky high”, without this meaning place, direction or distance. In other words, what she meant to say was that Allāh’s status is very high, unlike those worshiped idols on the ground.

“Allāh revealed to you (O Prophet) some Ayahs –called muhkamāt (with a clear meaning²⁷) and other Ayahs – called mutashābihāt (that do not have a clear meaning²⁸). Those with deviance in their hearts will emphasize the latter kind of aayahs in order to spread deviance (i.e. by contradicting the meaning of the muhkamāt) and explain the meaning (in a way that agrees with their sick hearts.) Only Allāh knows their meaning. And the steadfast in knowledge, they say: “we believe in them, they are all from Our Lord.” (and there is no contradiction between them). Only the sound minded take heed and ponder this.”

The salaf²⁹ said there is a full stop in the Ayah after, ***“only Allāh knows their meaning.”*** As for the ***“steadfast in knowledge”*** mentioned after this in the Qur’ān; this is the beginning of a new sentence (i.e. they do not know the meaning) to show that the great scholars believe in these Ayahs, (i.e. without assigning a particular meaning.)³⁰

[The Khalaf’s way of dealing with mutashābihāt]

As for the Khalaf³¹; they say³² that these Ayahs and Hadīths have a known meaning, so the meaning of “*istawā*”³³ is “control”, and the meaning of “*man fī-l-samā*”³⁴ is that it is a figure of speech referring to His punishment, authority and orders, or it is simply a figurative way of praising Allāh by attributing to Him aboveness and greatness, and clearing him of lowliness or belowness, not that He settles in it. This is because settlement is an attribute of bodies and signifies having a beginning, and Allāh is clear of that.³⁵

²⁷ Ayahs that have only one meaning according to the Arabic language or only one famous meaning, such as those prescribing *halāl* and *harām*.

²⁸ The opposite of *muhkamāt*; they do not have a clear or well known meaning.

²⁹ i.e. the Salaf in general, not all of them. See footnote above regarding the meaning of the Hadīth “*yanzīlu Rabbunā...etc.*”

³⁰ Note, however, that the prophet and at least some of the companions definitely knew the exact meaning of all statements ascribing attributes to Allāh - it is just that some of them became ambiguous to later generations and thus became *mutashābihāt*.

³¹ Scholars after the 3rd century.

³² i.e. it is more prevalent among them to say, not that they all say that.

³³ See footnote # 3

³⁴ See footnote # 4

³⁵ Also, understanding it literally contradicts Ayah 93 of the Sūrat Maryam, which means: “*All those in the heavens and earth must come to Allāh as a slave.*” It is possible also that the word “*who*” is referring to the angels, because the sky is their abode. Finally, the sky is below the *ʿArsh* (Throne) ...

The meaning of *nuzūl* (literally translated “descending”) in the Hadīth is that His Messenger or His Mercy descends.³⁶ As for the Prophet’s approval of the slave-girl’s hint towards the sky; this was a concise way from her of showing that she was not associating partners with Allāh, because it was thereby known that she did not worship the idols on earth.³⁷

This is the way of the *khalaf* in all Ayahs and Hadīths of this kind, based on their saying that the full stop in the Ayah about the Ayahs that do not have a single possible, or well known, meaning comes after **“only Allāh knows their meaning and those steadfast in knowledge,”** i.e. the steadfast in knowledge knows their meaning.³⁸ Their proof is that the Qur’ān is in Arabic, and Arabic uses these expressions. However, the weightiest opinion is that of the *salaf*.³⁹

The one who attributes to the *salaf* or *khalaf* other than this is a deviant and a deviator.

[The Jahmiyya are very different from the Khalaf]

The one who claims that the way of the *khalaf* is the way of the Jahmiyya is a transgressor and a liar, because the Jahmiyya are the followers of Jahm Ibn Safwān, who said that humans are forced to do what they do and denied all ability to humans, and claimed that Paradise and Hell will end. He also claimed that belief is only knowledge of Allāh,

³⁶ The original Hadīth text attributes the “*nuzūl*” to the last 3rd of the night, and since it is always the last 3rd of the night somewhere on earth, we know that the meaning is not at all that Allāh is moving from one place to the sky at that time, because it is always that time somewhere.

³⁷ Also, some scholars said the Hadīth has weaknesses in its text, because `AbdurRazzāq related it without any mention of the words “*ayna?*” or “*fil samā*”.

³⁸ He is referring to the last part of the āyah rendered in interpretation earlier as: “Only Allāh knows their meaning. And he steadfast in knowledge say: ‘we believe in them, they are all from Our Lord...?’” This rendering is according to the way of the Salaf in general; avoiding figurative interpretation of statements that do not have a clear or well known meaning. Note, however, that what is not clear or well known depends on the generation. There is no doubt that what some of the later salaf considered ambiguous was clear to at least some of their predecessors. Definitely the Prophet himself and companions like Ibn ‘Abbās knew the meanings of all ayahs referring to the attributes of Allah, even if some of them were later considered ambiguous. The way of the Khalaf that Al-Subkīy is referring to is to render the interpretation differently through changing the place of the full stop as follows from: Only Allāh knows their meaning. And the steadfast in knowledge, they say: “we believe in them, they are all from Our Lord.” to: Only Allāh knows their meaning and the steadfast in knowledge. They say: “we believe in them, they are all from Our Lord.”

³⁹ Note: he means of course that the majority of the Salaf take this approach to this āyah, not absolutely all, since that would be consensus (‘ijmā’), and ‘ijmā’ cannot be contradicted once it has been established on an issue. It has already been mentioned in previous footnotes that the scholar of the Salaf, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, affirmed a figurative explanation of “*wa jā’ Rabbuka*” as meaning “His orders came”. I.e. There is no ‘ijmā’, except on a few mutashābihāt, like those that refer to the timing of the Day of Judgment. The mutashābihāt that refer to the attributes of Allah were definitely known in meaning to the Prophet, and at least some of the companions.

whereas blasphemy is not knowing Him. ⁴⁰ He said that no one does anything except Allāh, and that humans are said to have actions only as a figure of speech, in the same way one says that “the sun passed its zenith” or the “mill turned,” without any actual real action or ability from them. He also claimed that Allāh’s knowledge has a beginning, and prevented people from saying that Allāh is attributed with life, knowledge or will. He said “I don’t attribute to Him an adjective that can be used for others, such as existing, alive, willing and such,” and accepted to say that He has power, brings into existence, acts, creates, gives life and death, because only He has these attributes. He also claimed that Allāh’s attribute of speech has a beginning, as the Qadariyya sect did, and refused to say that Allāh speaks. Our companions said he was a blasphemer for all his deviances, and the Qadariyya said he was an infidel for his claim that Allāh creates the acts of humans, so all those who claim to be following the call of Prophet Muhammad said that he was a Kāfir. Here ends the quote (i.e. the above description of the Jahmiyya) from the book “*al-farq bayna al-firāq*”, written by the Imām Abū Mansūr `Abdul Qādir Ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, page 199. From this you know that the scholars of the khalaf are clear of any association with this sect and its claims.

[An answer to those that claim that denial of direction is denial of existence]

As for the idea that denying that Allāh is attributed with any of the six directions is a denial of His existence, this is obviously invalid since Allāh existed before they existed, namely up, down, front, back, left and right. Rather, He existed before the world as a whole by consensus of ancient and later scholars. How then does someone that has even a tiny mind picture that clearing Him of being attributed with these 6 directions is the same as denying His existence??!! How can it be imagined that the Eternal Allāh’s existence depends on some things that have a beginning, or all of those that He created??!!

You (Oh Allāh) are clear of all imperfection!

This is a great lie! How (could it not be a lie), when a number of the *salaf* and the *khalaf* have plainly stated that the one who believes that Allāh is in a direction (i.e. up) is a blasphemer, as was stated by al-Baghdadī. This was also the saying of Abu Hanīfa, Mālik, al-Shāfi`ī, Abū Hasan al-Ash`arī and al-Bāqillānī, as mentioned by the great scholar Mullā Alī Qārī in “*sharh al-mishkāt*” in the second volume on page 137. ⁴¹ Allāh said what means that “**real blindness is not that of the eyes, but that of the heart**” (al-Hajj, 46.) and that “**if Allāh has not created the light of guidance in someone’s heart, then he will never be guided**” (al-Nūr, 40).

⁴⁰ This is lunacy, because Iblīs definitely knows Allāh and is despite of that, a blasphemer.

⁴¹ A number of scholarly sayings have already been mentioned in previous footnotes, but it is worth adding here that Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī said in *al-minhaj al-qawim sharh al-muqaddimat al-hadramiyya*: “Know that al-Qarāfi and others narrated from al-Shāfi`ī, Mālik, Ahmad and Abū Hanīfa ؓ that those who say that Allāh is in a direction, or has a body, have committed blasphemy -- and they deserve this verdict.”

We ask Allāh to guide us all on the straight path and block the misguidance of the cursed Satan, and to raise the rank of the Last of the Prophets ﷺ, and whoever follows him in his works.

[Scholars that signed this Fatwā]

After writing this, I have shown this answer to a number of honorable scholars of al-Azhar University, and they have agreed and signed it, and they are the following distinguished companions of ours:

Shaykh Muhammad Najdī, the Shaykh of the Shāfi`ī followers.

Shaykh Muhammad Sabīr al-Dhahabī, the Shaykh of the Hanbalī followers.

Shaykh Muhammad al-`Izbī Rizq, the lecturer in the higher section.

Shaykh Abdul-Hamīd `Ammār, the lecturer in the higher section.

Shaykh Ali al-Nahrāwī, the lecturer in the higher section.

Shaykh Dusūqī Abdullah al-`Arabī, from the Council of the Great Scholars.

Shaykh Ali Mahfūth, the lecturer in specialization section of Azhar.

Shaykh Ibrahim `Ayārah al-Daljamūnī, lecturer in specialization section of Azhar.

Shaykh Muhammad `Alyān, from great scholars of Azhar.

Shaykh Ahmad Makkī, the lecturer in specialization section of Azhar.

Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Hamdān.

