



Texts That Imply That Allah is Seemingly Qualified by Instruments¹

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Know that whoever does not refrain from denying [the transcendent attributes of Allah], and does not refrain from ascribing to Him attributes which resemble [the attributes of created things as do the anthropomorphists (*al-mujassimah*)] deviates, and fails to comprehend the meaning of transcendence (*tanzīh*). Verily, our Lord, Who is great and exalted [that is, surpasses all that does not befit Him], is characterized by the attributes of uniqueness (*al-wahdaniyyah*), and described by the traits of singularity (*al-fardaniyyah*).

Nothing He has created resembles Him. He is far above [and untouched by all originated characteristics including] limits (*al-hudūd*), bounds (*al-ghayāt*), props (*arkān*), and instruments (*al-adawāt*).

Instruments, or tools, refer to limbs equipped with devices. Texts that imply that Allah is seemingly qualified by instruments that are limbs or organs are abound in the Qur’ān and hadith; for example, the mention of the hand, finger, foot, soul, and face. Consider the following phrases from the speech of Allah, the Exalted, in the Qur’ān:

- *Allah’s “hand” is above their hands*³.
- *What prevented you from prostrating to what I created with “my two hands”?*⁴
- *There is the “face” of Allah.*⁵

¹ Translated from *Sharh al-‘Aqīdah al-Tahawīyyah* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2nd Ed. 1992) pgs 72-73.

² Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Ghunaymī al-Maydānī al-Hanafī (d. 1298H), a student of Imām Ibn ‘Abidīn and the author of a number of famous books in the Islamic religious sciences.

³ al-Fath: 10

⁴ Sād:75

⁵ al-Baqarah: 115

□ *...and the “face” of your Lord abides*⁶

□ *You know what is in my soul, but I don’t know what is in Your “soul”*⁷ ⁸

Further, consider the following phrases from the speech of the Prophet ﷺ:

□ *You are as you described Your “soul”*⁹

□ *The hearts of the children of Adam are all between “the two fingers” of the Merciful as a single heart. He turns them however he wishes. Verily, Allah stretches forth His “hand” at night that those who have committed offences in the day might repent, and He stretches forth His “hand” in the day that those who have committed offences during the night might repent. So He shall do till the sun rises from the west.*¹⁰

□ *Hell does not stop saying, “Is there any more?” until the Lord of Glory puts down His “foot.”*¹¹

It is incumbent on us to convey these texts as they are, consigning the meaning of them to their respective speaker [that is, Allah or His Prophet], while maintaining that the Originator is far above having limbs or organs, or being qualified by any originated quality (*al-sifāt al-muhdathah*).

Imam Fakhr al-Islam al-Bazdāwī¹² remarked in his work on the principles of fiqh:

⁶ al-Rahmān: 27

⁷ Allah is One; He is not compounded of body, soul, and spirit, as are human beings. In respect of Allah *soul* refers to His Transcendent Essence (*dhāt*).

⁸ al-Mā'idah:115

⁹ Reported by Muslim, Abū Dawūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nisā'ī, Ibn Mājah, and others as mentioned in *Fath al-Qadīr*, p.140, vol. 2.

¹⁰ Reported by Ahmad and Muslim, as mentioned in *Fath al-Kabīr*, p. 352, vol. 1. *Hadīth* teach us that near the end of time Allah will order the sun to rise in the west. From that time onwards repentance will not be possible, and whoever has not yet believed will never believe.

¹¹ Reported by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nisā'ī, as mentioned in *al-Fath al-Kabīr*, p. 352, vol. 1.

¹² He is 'Alī ibn Muhammad al-Bazdāwī (d. 482H). He is a *Hanafī imām* – a *faqīh*, *muhaddīth*, and *'usūlī* (that is, a master in the sciences of Islamic law, prophetic tradition, and the principles of law). His books are still studied as texts in the religious schools (*madāris*) of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The book alluded to above is generally referred to as *'Usūl al-Bazdāwī*. It has a

“We [the Hanafī *ulamā*] recognise that the “hand” and the “face” are established texts [of the holy law (Sharī’ah)], but we recognize that their signification is obscure. Nonetheless, it is not permissible to reject these texts on account of our inability to understand their signification. Rejection is what caused the Mu’tazilah to deviate.

The Imam [that is, Abū Hanīfah] remarked in his *al-Wāsiyyah*:

We declare that Allah took control¹³ (*istiwā*) without having any need of it. He not only maintains the Throne but all other things as well. Indeed, if He had experienced any need, He would have been incapable of originating the world and managing it, sharing such incapability with all originated things. If He was in need of sitting down (*julūs*), or of a resting-place, or of fixity (*qarār*), then where was He, Exalted is He, before He originated the Throne? Indeed, He transcends all that, and is far, far beyond it [that is, beyond physically sitting on the Throne, and all such anthropomorphic absurdities].¹⁴”

commentary by ‘Alā al-Ḍīn al-Bukhārī which is considered by many *ulama* to be the ultimate in *Hanafī ‘usūl al-ḥiqh* (that is, the principles of the holy law.)

¹³ The Arabic verb *istiwā* in the present context is virtually impossible to translate adequately because it is one of those words which has several meanings – it is what the *ulamā* call in Arabic *kalimah mushtarikah*. The question here is precisely which meaning applies. Abu Hanīfah merely mentions the word in the context above without committing himself to *any* of its recognised meanings except that he precludes the meaning *istiqrār* (which we can translate in English as *to sit down, take up position, or ascend*), since this word implies a physical act; whereas, Allah is far above change and movement, and beyond space and time, as we have discussed throughout this treatise. The anthropomorphists—who represent a heretical “Muslim” sect, referred to by the orthodox *ulamā* as the *Hashawīyyah* or by their generic name *mujassimah* or *mushabbihah*—ever insist that we have to understand the physical meaning here in order “to avoid interpretation.” *Ulamā*, who are experts in the principles of Islamic law (*‘usūl al-ḥiqh*), have explained in their works that the designation of *any* of its meanings is an act of interpretation. al-Rāghib al-Ḥafahānī explained in his authoritative text on the meaning of the words of the Koran, *Mufradāt al-Qur’ān*, the word *istiwā* comprehends a multiplicity of literal meanings in addition to allegorical ones. The designation of a meaning that ascribes physical movement and change to the Lord of Glory is absolutely impermissible because such interpretation defies precepts established by definitive and explicit texts of the Qur’ān and the *sunnah* (that is, the teachings of the Prophet, on whom be peace). In order to make the matter somewhat intelligible to readers who know no Arabic, I am compelled to translate *istiwā* by something or other, and since the meaning *took control of* is consonant with the interpretation advanced by Asharite *imāms* like Abu Bakr al-Baqillānī, al-Juwaynī, Imām al-Ghazālī, and Izz al-Ḍīn Abd al-Salām, I have rendered it thus.

¹⁴ Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwaynī, formulated the matter thus; “Allah was and there was nought with Him. Then He created the Throne, and He is now as He was.” Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 505H / 1111 AD), one of Islam’s most illustrious spokesmen and an *imām* in the field of beliefs, alluded to Allah’s holy transcendence in a formula which was to become celebrated: “Neither is He in this world, nor outside of it;

Observe how Abū Hanīfah conveys the express text of the revelation (*zāhir al-tanzīl*) without interpreting it, while at the same time maintaining the requirement of transcendence (*tanzīh*), disavowing Him of all that does not befit His Magnificent Essence.

This is the way of the early predecessors¹⁵ (*al-salaf*), and it is a safer (*aslām*) way; whereas, the way of the later ulamā (*al-khalaf*) is to interpret (*ta'wīl*) – some say that the way of interpretation is wiser (*ahkam*).

Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd (d. 625 H) took a middle course¹⁶, for he said:

“We accept *ta'wīl* if the interpretation is feasible and compatible with the usage of the Arabs¹⁷; whereas, we refrain from *ta'wīl* if the interpretation is far-fetched.”

Ibn Humām also advocated a middle course, wherein he permitted *ta'wīl* (interpretation) when there was any necessity to compensate for the inability of the common people to understand *tafwīd* (entrusting the meaning to Allah while maintaining divine transcendence) and consequently were in the danger of falling into anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*).¹⁸ However, he discouraged *ta'wīl* when there was no such need for it. Knowing the temperament and intellectual level of the common people would assess that.



and neither is He contiguous with the world, nor separate from it.” (al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtsād fī al-ʿItiqād*, Cairo: Subaiʿī, 1390H), p.28.

¹⁵ The Arabic term is *al-salaf* technically speaking refers to the first three generations of Muslims. The Prophet, (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) said: “The best generation is my generation, then the one that follows it, then the one that follows it.” It is a *hadīth* which is beyond any doubt or at least its meaning is, since it has come to us through numerous sources, and through multiple chains of narration (*turūq*), that is, it affords us what the *ulamā* call *al-tawātur al-ma'nawī* (recurrent meaning) which is a conclusive source of knowledge.

¹⁶ He meant *middle course* with respect to *tafwīd* (entrusting the meaning of obscure texts—*al-mutashabihāt*— to Allah) and *ta'wīl* (interpretation consonant with the principles of the holy law, and acceptable to the scholars of the Arabic language).

¹⁷ He means by *the Arabs* the Arabs who spoke pure Arabic – they are restricted to the pre-Islamic, or early Islamic period]

¹⁸ Ibn Humām points this out in his book, *al-Musayarah*.