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Silencing the crooks who claim that the pious predecessors did not allow *ta'wīl* at all

It is a widespread belief among the Wahhabi movement that the method of *ta'wīl*, i.e., interpretation, was absolutely not used by the pious predecessors with regard to the ambiguous religious texts. Nevertheless, *ta'wīl* is one of the two legitimate methods by which Islamic scholars have approached ambiguous religious texts. However, we will not delve into the explanation of these two legitimate approaches, but it is certainly noteworthy that the Wahhabis always give the impression of *tafwīd*, i.e., leaving the meaning of ambiguous attributes to Allah ﷻ, but in reality, this is a camouflage, because what they actually say is that these attributes should be taken literally and only their howness should be left to Allah ﷻ. We can illustrate this as follows: Allah ﷻ attributes the word “*wajh*” to Himself in the Quran. The literal meaning of this Arabic word is “face”. Therefore, they say, “Allah ﷻ has a face, but we do not know how His face is. He ﷻ has a face, but not like ours.” Exalted is Allah ﷻ from what the ignorant falsely attribute to Him! This is not *tafwīd*, it is literalism! They deceive the masses like this, and they use charming slogans such as: “Look, we do not deny anything from the Quran and Sunnah. We strictly follow the Quran and Sunnah!” May Allah ﷻ protect the Muslim nation from these demagogic traps. Another manipulation by the Wahhabis is that they present themselves as so-called hadith experts. This allows them to authorize themselves to judge which narration is authentic and which is not. They immediately apply this tactic when a narration comes along that refutes their false ideology. If you tell them that Imam Ahmad said so-and-so, they immediately dismiss the narration as weak. If you say that Imam al-Bukhari said such-and-such, they quickly resort to the terminology of hadith sciences, claiming that the narration is not authentic. However, the misconduct and scientific fraud that they commit do not save them from being labeled as ignorant and foolish, as there always are real hadith experts who dismantle their fallacies. Nevertheless, there are thousands of quotes that we can cite to demonstrate that the Wahhabi ideology is incorrect and is contrary to the spirit of Islam.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that there were indeed scholars among the pious predecessors who did make use of *ta'wīl* by assigning figurative meanings to certain ambiguous words in the Quran and Sunnah in a matter befitting Allah. Below is a list of the most well-known examples:

1. The great Imam and mufasssir, the blessed companion, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, interpreted the word “*sāq*” (literally: shin) that appears in Chapter 68, Verse 42 of the Quran as *harshness* and *severe matter*. Imam al-Tabari writes about this: “A group among the sahaba and tabi’in who engaged in *ta'wīl* has said (as an interpretation of the aforementioned Quranic verse): “A severe matter will appear.” This is transmitted from Ibn ‘Abbas, Mujahid, Sa’id ibn Jubayr, Qatada, and other imams from the salaf.”¹ The same is transmitted by Imam Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani where he says, “As for *sāq*, it has come from Ibn ‘Abbas about the Quranic verse that he said: (appearance) of a severe matter.”² Then Imam Ibn Hajar quotes Imam al-Khattabi, who affirms Ibn ‘Abbas’s interpretation and indicates that Imam al-Bayhaqi transmitted this interpretation from Ibn ‘Abbas with two chains of narrators, both of which are authentic.³

2. It is again narrated from Imam Ibn ‘Abbas that he interpreted the word “*‘aydin*” (literally: hands, plural of *yad*) mentioned in Chapter 51, Verse 47 of the Quran as *power*. This is narrated by Imam al-Tabari with an authentic chain of narrators.⁴ Furthermore, the same interpretation was made by other pious predecessors such as Imam Mujahid, Imam Qatada, Imam Mansur, Imam Ibn Zayd, and Imam Sufyan.⁵

3. Another interpretation narrated from Imam Ibn ‘Abbas is regarding the verb forms of the Arabic word “*nisyān*” (literally: forgetfulness) that appear in various verses, including Chapter 6, Verse 51 of the Quran. He interpreted it as *to leave*. Imam al-Tabari narrated this interpretation from Ibn ‘Abbas and Mujahid with an authentic chain of narrators.⁶ The Wahhabi

¹ Imam al-Tabari, *jāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-qur’ān*, vol. 23 pg. 554.

² Imam Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *fath al-bārī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-bukhārī*, vol. 13 pg. 428.

³ Imam Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *fath al-bārī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-bukhārī*, vol. 13 pg. 428.

⁴ Imam al-Tabari, *jāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-qur’ān*, vol. 22 pg. 438.

⁵ Refer to the tafsir of Imam Ibn Abi Hatim (10/3313), The tafsir of Ibn al-Jawzi (4/172), *al-aḥādīth al-mukhtāra* of Imam al-Maqdisi (12/109), The tafsir of Imam Ibn Kathir (7/395), *al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt* of Imam al-Bayhaqi (1/326).

⁶ Imam al-Tabari, *jāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-qur’ān*, vol. 12 pg. 475.



approach here is to affirm the literal meaning of *nisyān* as “to forget” for Allah ﷻ, but to disguise their fallacy, they say that the howness of forgetting should be left to Allah ﷻ. In this way, they have fallen victim to a very dangerous devilish scheme!

4. The same interpretation (i.e. *to leave*) of the word “*nisyān*” (literally: forgetfulness) is also made by a scholar of the tabi’in, Imam al-Suddi (d. 127 AH), in his tafsir.⁷

5. Another interpretation is found in the teachings of Imam Mujahid (d. 104 AH), the student of the blessed companion Imam Ibn ‘Abbas. Imam Mujahid interpreted the word “*wajh*” (literally: face) mentioned in Chapter 2, Verse 115 of the Quran as the direction of prayer. This interpretation is narrated by Imam al-Tirmidhi⁸ and Imam al-Tabari⁹ and has even been declared authentic by Ibn Taymiyya¹⁰ and al-Albani.

6. Another interpretation has been narrated from Imam Mujahid, regarding the word “*janb*” (literally: side) in Chapter 39, Verse 56 of the Quran. Imam Mujahid interprets the word *janb* as *the affair of Allah* ﷻ.¹¹ Imam al-Tabari narrates this with an authentic chain of narrators. The Wahhabis affirm a literal meaning of “side” for Allah ﷻ, but they say that you should not speculate about its nature. Free and exalted is Allah ﷻ from what the fools say about Him!

7. Another interpretation has been narrated from Imam Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161 AH). Imam al-Bayhaqi narrates that Imam Sufyan was asked about Chapter 57, Verse 4 of the Quran. The literal meaning of this verse is that Allah ﷻ is with us wherever we are. Imam Sufyan interprets this verse as *His knowledge* (being with us wherever we are).¹²

8. It is narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in his book *khalq af’āl al-‘ibād* that Imam ‘Abdullah ibn Mubarak (d. 181 AH) said about the Arabic word “*kanaf*” (literally: shoulder/side) that it means *covering*.¹³ According to Wahhabi ideology, Allah ﷻ has a shoulder, but they do not know the

⁷ Imam al-Suddi, *tafsīr al-suddi al-kabīr*, pg. 382.

⁸ In his *al-sunan*, vol. 5 pg. 206.

⁹ In his tafsir, vol. 2 pg. 534.

¹⁰ *Majmū’ al-fatāwā*, vol. 3 pg. 193.

¹¹ Imam al-Tabari, *jāmi’ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-qur’ān*, vol. 21 pg. 314-315

¹² Imam al-Bayhaqi, *al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt*, vol.2 pg. 341. The same narration has been transmitted by others.

¹³ Imam al-Bukhari, *khalq af’āl al-‘ibād*, pg. 78.



howness of this shoulder, and according to them, it does not resemble the shoulders of humans. Free and exalted is Allah ﷻ from what the fools say about Him!

9. Imam Malik (d. 179 AH) explained the hadith about *nūzūl* (literally: descending) as the descent of His command. This interpretation is narrated by Imam Ibn ‘Abdilbarr and Imam al-Dhahabi (with a different chain). Then, Imam al-Dhahabi narrates that Salih mentioned this interpretation of Imam Malik to Yahya ibn Bakir, and he said, “By Allah ﷻ, this interpretation is beautiful! I did not hear it from Malik.”¹⁴ Although there are Wahhabis who do not accept this interpretation of Imam Malik, the same interpretation has also been made by other prominent Maliki scholars such as Imam Abubakr ibn al- ‘Arabi, Imam al-Qurtubi, and Imam Abubakr ibn Furak. They are among the most important scholars of the Maliki school, which provides a strong indication that this interpretation was indeed made by Imam Malik. Imam Ibn ‘Abdilbarr writes: “Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Jabali (he belongs to the reliable transmitters of Qayrawan) narrated from Jami’ ibn Sawada in Egypt, from Mutarraf, from Imam Malik ibn Anas, that he was asked about the hadith: “Verily, Allah ﷻ does *nūzūl* to the lowest heaven during the night.” Imam Malik responded to this by saying, “His Command descends.” (Then Ibn ‘Abdilbarr adds): The meaning (of the hadith) can be as Malik stated, that His Mercy and His decision for forgiveness and acceptance descend.¹⁵ Imam Ibn Salah was also asked about the same hadith, and he said that the pious predecessors did not take this hadith literally and considered Allah ﷻ to be free from the literal meaning of such ambiguous words.¹⁶ Similarly, Imam Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali indicated that the pious predecessors did not take such ambiguous words literally and did not speculate about their meaning by taking their literal meaning. He also mentioned that Imam Ahmad was far from such practices, while some people who claimed to follow his school did take the literal meanings of these texts by following the path of Muqatil (which was anthropomorphism). According to Imam Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, none of the scholars, such as ‘Abdullah ibn Mubarak, Malik, al-Thawri, al-Awza’i, al-Shafi’i, Ahmad, Ishaq, and Abu ‘Ubayd, took such ambiguous words literally!¹⁷

¹⁴ Imam al-Dhahabi, *siyar a’lām al-nubalā’*, vol. 8 pg. 105.

¹⁵ In his *al-tamhīd*, vol. 5 pg. 155.

¹⁶ Ibn Salah, *fatāwā ibn ṣalāh*, pg. 168.

¹⁷ Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, *faḍl ‘ilm al-salaf ‘alā al-khalaf*, pg. 4.



10. Imam al-Nadr ibn Shumayl (d. 203 AH) interpreted the word “*qadam*” (literally: foot) as those who are destined to be inhabitants of Hellfire according to the Knowledge of Allah ﷻ.¹⁸

11. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH) also applied the method of *ta’wīl* (interpretation). Imam Ibn Kathir narrates from Imam al-Bayhaqi in his book *manāqib al-imām Aḥmad* that Imam Ahmad interpreted the verb “*jā’a*” (literally: came) in Chapter 89, Verse 22 of the Quran as “*His reward came.*” Then Imam al-Bayhaqi comments on this narration: “This is a chain about which are no doubts.”¹⁹

12. Imam al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH) also did *ta’wīl* multiple times. In his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, he interpreted the word “*wajh*” (literally: face) in Chapter 28, Verse 88 of the Quran as “*His Dominion.*”²⁰

13. Imam al-Bukhari interpreted the word “*ḍaḥk*” (literally: laughing) that appears in the hadith as “*the Mercy of Allah* ﷻ.” This interpretation of Imam al-Bukhari is reported by Imam al-Khattabi (d. 388 AH), who is one of the oldest commentators of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.²¹ Imam al-Khattabi states that Imam al-Bukhari made this interpretation. Furthermore, Imam Ibn Hajar, after mentioning this interpretation, indicated that “*ḍaḥk*” (literally: laughing) should be understood figuratively when it comes to Allah ﷻ.²² According to the Wahhabi ideology, Allah ﷻ literally laughs, but not in the same way as we do. Exalted is He ﷻ from what these crooks claim!

14. Imam al-Bukhari also interpreted verse 56 of Chapter 11 of the Quran as the *Dominion and Might of Allah* ﷻ.²³

15. Imam al-Tirmidhi in his famous *al-sunan* interpreted the word “*naḥs*” (literally: self/ego) that appears in the hadith as *the manifestation of Allah* ﷻ.²⁴

¹⁸ Imam al-Bayhaqi, *al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt*, vol. 2 pg. 190.

¹⁹ Imam Ibn Kathir, *al-bidāya wa al-nihāya*, vol. 10 pg. 327.

²⁰ Imam al-Bukhari, *al-jāmi’ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6 pg. 112.

²¹ In al-Khattabi’s *al-lām al-sunan*.

²² Imam Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *fath al-bārī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-bukhārī*, vol. 7 pg. 120.

²³ Imam al-Bukhari, *al-jāmi’ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6 pg. 73

²⁴ Imam al-Tirmidhi, *al-sunan*, vol. 4 pg. 692.



16. Imam al-Tirmidhi interpreted the word “*taqarrub*” (literally: drawing near) that appears in the hadith as the *Forgiveness and Mercy of Allah* ﷻ.²⁵ According to Wahhabi ideology, this should be taken literally, which would mean that Allah ﷻ truly runs and walks, comes and goes. This is also why the Wahhabi pseudo-scholar Ibn al- ‘Uthaymin said that Allah ﷻ literally walks and runs.²⁶ I seek refuge in Allah ﷻ from such idolatry!

17. There is a hadith²⁷ that states that you would also encounter Allah ﷻ even beneath the earth if you were to descend there. Imam al-Tirmidhi indicated that this should be interpreted as the *Knowledge and Power of Allah* ﷻ, so even if you were to go to the lowest depths of the earth, the Knowledge and Power of Allah ﷻ would also be there. This is how the scholars understood this hadith, and they did not take it literally at all.²⁸ Then comes some pseudo-scholar named Ibn al-Qayyim, and based on the teachings of his teacher Ibn Taymiyya, he condemns Imam al-Tirmidhi by associating him with the sectarian movement of al-Jahmiyya.²⁹ The anthropomorphists have always accused Imam al-Tirmidhi of adhering to al-Jahmiyya, because Imam al-Tirmidhi rejected the fabricated narration stating that Allah ﷻ will place the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ next to Himself on the ‘*arsh*, Free and Exalted is He ﷻ from what they falsely attribute to Him! This fabricated narration has been used by Ibn Taymiyya and many other anthropomorphists as an argument for their misguidance.

18. Imam Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 AH) also made use of *ta’wīl*. He interpreted the word “*istawā*” (literally: rose and established) that appears multiple times in the Quran as *the exaltedness of Dominion and Power*, not an exaltedness involving movement and disappearance.³⁰ According to the Wahhabi movement, Allah ﷻ literally sits on the ‘*arsh*. We seek forgiveness from Allah ﷻ!

19. Imam al-Tabari also interpreted the word “*yad*” (literally: hand) that appears in Chapter 5, Verse 64 of the Quran. He interpreted it with *the favor and gift of Allah* ﷻ.

²⁵ Imam al-Tirmidhi, *al-sunan*, vol. 5 pg. 581.

²⁶ Ibn ‘Uthaymin, *majmū‘ fatāwā wa rasā’il ibn al-‘uthaymīn*, vol. 1 pg. 184.

²⁷ The authenticity of this hadith is not the subject of discussion here.

²⁸ Imam al-Tirmidhi, *al-sunan*, vol. 5 pg. 403.

²⁹ Refer to *mukhtaṣar al-sawā’iq al-mursala ‘alā al-jahmiyya wa al-mu’atṭila li ibn al-qayyim* of Ibn al-Mawsili, pg. 485. Also refer to *majmū‘ al-fatāwā* of Ibn Taymiyya, vol. 6 pg. 547.

³⁰ Imam al-Tabari, *jāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-qur’ān*, vol. 1 pg. 430.



20. Imam al-Dahhak, a great scholar from the tabi'in (d. 102 AH), explained the Arabic word “*ayn*” (literally: eye) that appears in Chapter 11, Verse 37 of the Quran as *the command of Allah* ﷻ.³¹

21. Imam Ibn Hibban al-Busti (d. 354 AH) interpreted the word “*qadam*” (literally: foot) with a figurative meaning and stated that Allah ﷻ is Free and Exalted from the literal meaning of such ambiguous words.³²

22. Imam Ibn Hibban also interpreted the hadith about *nūzūl* (literally: descending) with a general interpretation, stating that it should not be taken literally, such that it implies displacement and movement.³³

23. We see that Ibn Qutayba also did *ta'wīl*, by interpreting the word “*wajh*” (literally: face) that appears in multiple verses with a figurative meaning.³⁴

24. Imam al-Bayhaqi (born in the year 384 AH) wrote several books on Islamic theology and the attributes of Allah ﷻ.³⁵ In these books, he frequently clarified that the literal meanings of ambiguous religious texts do not apply to Allah ﷻ. He also cited multiple quotes that include interpretations (*ta'wīlāt*) from the pious predecessors. In his book *faḍā'il al-'awqāt*³⁶, Imam al-Bayhaqi states that Allah ﷻ is free and exalted from the literal meanings of descending and coming, as they imply displacement and movement, which do not apply to Allah ﷻ. We then see that anthropomorphists like Ibn Baz fiercely lash out at Imam al-Bayhaqi for this and label him as deviant.³⁷

³¹ Refer to the tafsir of Imam al-Tabari, (21/605), The tafsir of Imam al-Qurtubi, (9/33), and the tafsir of Imam Ibn al-Jawzi, (4/101).

³² Imam Ibn Hibban, *al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1 pg. 502.

³³ Imam Ibn Hibban, *al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3 pg. 199.

³⁴ Ibn Qutayba, *ta'wīl mushkil al-qur'ān*, pg. 159.

³⁵ Such as his *al-asmā' wa al-ṣifāt*, and his *al-i'tiqād* and *dalā'il al-nubuwwa*.

³⁶ Refer to pg. 132

³⁷ Refer to the article by Ibn Baz where he strongly lashes out at Imam al-Bayhaqi.
<https://ar.islamway.net/article/35579/printable>

Conclusion:

It is possible to write a book about the interpretations (*ta'wīlāt*) of the early scholars. It should not be forgotten that Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324 AH) and Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) are among the pious predecessors. This is something that the ignorant fools cannot seem to grasp. They constantly call for following the pious predecessors, but if you say that you follow the methodology of Imam al-Ash'ari or Imam al-Maturidi, you see them looking at you as if they are about to drop dead. Woe to them!

Another thing that the Wahhabis often misuse is the Hanbali school. Imam Ahmad is far from the misconceptions they spread. The prominent Hanbali scholar Imam Abu al-Faraj 'Abdurrahman ibn al-Jawzi (born in the year 510 AH) wrote a whole book called *daf' shuba al-tashbīh* in which he completely leveled anthropomorphism to the ground.³⁸ In this book, he clearly stated that anthropomorphism is falsely attributed to Imam Ahmad and his school.³⁹

The Wahhabi ideology is a sinking ship; it is doomed to fail. Intellectual Muslims have long realized the falseness of this movement, and the average Muslim will also realize it sooner or later. In the near future, the Muslim world will completely free itself from this evil ideology!

³⁸ For more information on the stance of the four imams regarding anthropomorphism, refer to our article in Dutch "De vier imams, antropomorfisme en de ratio." Maybe it will also be translated to English in the future.

³⁹ Ibn al-Jawzi, *daf' shuba al-tashbīh*, pg. 131.