

Reflections

NEO-SALAFI – WAHHÂBI THREAT

All praise is due to Allâh, the Exalted; and peace and blessings of Allâh be upon His beloved messenger Muhammad (SallAllâhu Alayhi Wasallam), his family and all his companions. Ameen!

Glory be to Allâh, the Exalted. Of knowledge we have none except what He has taught us. Indeed, it is Allâh Who is the Knowing, the Wise.

It has been for a long time now that the Orthodox Sunni Ulamâ of Ahl al Sunnah wal Jamâ'ah - particularly those of the Ash'ari and Mâturidi schools and their creedal/theological positions - have been under constant attack. It is, however, much easier to handle these attacks against the Orthodox Sunni Ulamâ when they come from people who are honest and make themselves clear as to who they are and what they believe in. But, when people who project themselves as "Sunnis" take charge of these attacks, then the situation becomes a bit more complex. A person who grows up in an Orthodox Sunni household, doing all things that Sunnis have traditionally done and believing everything that Sunnis believe in, is not likely to listen to anyone who is not an Orthodox Sunni. However, when some people who project themselves as "Sunnis" - while at the same time advocating their twisted interpretations of our Deen in an effort to gain followers of their corrupt beliefs and deeds - an unsuspecting Sunni is more likely to give in to such people. This is how the innocent Sunni Muslim masses (awaam) are being caught in their net of mischief and fitnah.

Summary of this article:

As far as matters that fall outside the realm of general public's knowledge like differences of understanding the sifât of Allâh between Asharis and Salafis etc., it was never an issue in the public domain during the times of our elders like it has become in our modern day and age. Internet has made access to such knowledge very easily obtainable and I would blame the Wahhabi/Salafis also for rekindling this controversy in the last decade or so. From a Fiqh point of view, a person may live his entire life without knowing such intricate matters and he won't be accountable on the Day of Judgement for such knowledge. But now that the Pandora's Box is open, it is the responsibility of those who know to clarify the matter.

This article describes - very briefly - the history and origin of Wahhâbism and its related "Salafi" movement. It also describes their deviant beliefs in aqaa'id and fiqh - based on the teachings of Allâmah ibn Taymiyyah (May Allah have mercy on him) - and their denial of the four established Schools of Fiqh viz. Hanafi, Shafi'ee, Maliki and Hanbali. This article also describes why the majority of the Orthodox Sunni Ulamâ - from the Ash'ari and Mâturidi Schools of Beliefs - accuse Allâmah ibn Taymiyyah of reprehensible bid'ah whilst some accusing him of kufr. It also deals - in some depth - on the question: Where is Allâh? - and Allâmah ibn Taymiyyah's interpretations of Allâh's saying in the Quran: "*istawâ alal arsh*" (He - Allâh - established Himself on the Throne).

What or who is an Ash'ari or Mâturidi? The Ash'ari school is not a movement; it is the School of the Orthodox Sunni Belief system. Its name comes from Imam Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari (rahmatullahi alayhi), not because he made up this school's belief system (aqâ'id), but because he defended, detailed and systematized the beliefs of Orthodox Sunnis to the extent that most Sunni scholars after him cannot but admit that he is their leader (imam). Also not forgetting Imam Abu Mansur Al-Mâturidi (rahmatullahi alayhi), who did the same thing as Imam Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari did, and at approximately the same time period, but in another location.

What or who is a "Wahhâbi"? The most extremist Pseudo-Sunni movement today is Wahhâbism (also known as Salafism). While many may think that Wahhâbi threat and terror is a recent phenomenon that has only targeted non-Muslims, it will surprise many to know that the Orthodox

Sunni Muslims were the first to be slaughtered in waves of Wahhâbi massacres in Arabia hundreds of years ago. One only has to read the historical evolution of Saudi Arabia to know the gruesome details of the tragedy - a tragedy in which thousands of Sunni Muslims perished at the hands of Wahhâbi militants.

The extremist interpretations of Wahhâbism - although previously confined to small groups of people in Saudi Arabia - have survived to this day under the protection, finance and support of the Saudi State religious organizations. This has transformed Wahhâbism - and its related "Salafi" groups worldwide - from a regional to a global threat to be reckoned with by the world Muslim community. Generally, to the Wahhâbi-Salafi group, all those who differ with them - including Sunni Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, Christians and Jews - are infidels who are their justified targets.

Because the Wahhâbis claim to be "the only true Sunnis", it is difficult for one who is unfamiliar with Wahhâbism, to distinguish it from Orthodox Sunni Islam. If Wahhâbis are asked if they are Sunnis, they will always reply in the affirmative. When asked if they are Wahhâbis, they will reply with an emphatic "NO" as they consider it an insult to what they believe and stand for i.e. "Purity of worship and reverence to Allâh alone - and that they alone are the authentic carriers of Islam from the time of the Prophet (SAW) until now." Calling them Wahhâbis implies that they learned ideas from a man - Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhâb - instead of the Qur'an and Sunnah - the two main sources of Islamic Law. Irrespective of what their claims might be, they definitely follow the revisions and wrong interpretations of the founder of the Wahhâbi movement who appeared in the 1700s viz. Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhâb of Najd. Sunnis and other Wahhâbi detractors have labelled them as Wahhâbis or Salafis to differentiate them from the Orthodox Sunnis.

What or who is a "Salafi"? Wahhâbis differentiate themselves from Orthodox Sunnis by labeling themselves as "Salafis", which refers to the word salaf - the time period in which the early Muslims lived in the first 300 years after the Hijrah (or emigration of Prophet Muhammad (Sallallâhu Alayhi Wasallam) from Makkah to Madina in 622). The Companions (Ashâb), those who followed the Companions (Tabi'oon), and those who followed the Tabi'oon (Taba al-Tabi'een) who lived in the time period of the Salaf are exemplars par excellence of what Muslims should be, as Prophet (SAW) had praised these periods of Muslims as being the best of Muslims. Therefore, absolutely correct in all aspects, it has been the aim of every Muslim since the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to adhere to and follow the footsteps of the adherents of the salaf. However, when a Wahhâbi calls himself a "Salafi", he claims to be a genuine follower of Pristine Pure Islam. This, however, is far from the truth. We must also note here that the word "salaf" indicates people who lived in a certain time. This "time period" is necessary in order for the word to have the correct usage. This time period is now gone. So a more proper term to be used is "Neo-Salafi".

Imam Al-Ghazzâli (rahmatullahi alayhi) said: ***"The Salaf of the ummah of Sayyiduna Muhammad (SAW) agreed to condemn people with deviant beliefs, and to abandon them and cut relations with them, and to be hard in rebuking them, but to be mild in disagreements of juristic details"***. (Mustasfa: Pg 350)

Now that we have such a situation with our "Neo-Salafi" brothers, it becomes necessary to do something about it. Our beloved Habeeb al Mustafa Sayyiduna Muhammad (Sallallâhu Alayhi Wasallam) said: ***"Whoever among you sees something disapproved of by Allâh, let him change it by his hand. If unable to do so, then let him do so by his tongue. If unable to do even that, let him reject it in his heart, and that is the weakest (act) of Imaan"*** (Muslim No. 49).

Under the pretext of the above Hadith, this "much summarized" article is written primarily to clarify the beliefs of the Ulamâ of Ahl al Sunnah wal Jamâ'ah and exonerate them from the many objections and doubts that exist about them. This is not only to benefit the readers in their knowledge, but also to make it easy for Orthodox Sunni Muslims to defend their beliefs when they engage in debates with these "Neo-Salafis". In particular, it will also face up to the heretical belief that Allâh is a Being with one or more limits, ***al 'iyâdhu billâh***.

Some will now say that we should stop this kind of "bitter" speech about the Neo-Salafis because the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) did not do such things. Yes, it is correct that there was always some kind of respect and tolerance amongst the Companions in having differing opinions. But, what we are

talking here is not an example of just “differing opinions”. It is much more on the issue of fundamentals that concerns how we take our knowledge from the Qur’an and Sunnah. As a layman who practises according to the Fiqh of Imam Malik (ra), it is certain that some of his practices will differ with the one who follows the Fiqh of Imam Abu Hanifah (ra). But they will have no problem with these differences, as they both see their decisions based upon sound methodologies that recognize one another.

Orthodox Sunni Muslims - **in reality** - are the true bearers of Pristine Pure Islam since the time period of the Salaf. Because there were time gaps between the noble period of the Salaf and centuries that followed, the authentic positions of the early Muslims were passed by scholars in those times and afterwards to later generations via meticulous, systematic and methodological means of preservation. The knowledge was passed from earlier generations of qualified scholars to other later qualified scholars throughout the centuries, who then eventually passed it to the Muslim masses. This uninterrupted chain of knowledge from the time of the Salaf until now has been authentically preserved by the Orthodox Sunnis. Orthodox Sunnis, therefore, have roots in the Salaf, and are represented today by the four surviving authentic Schools of Islamic jurisprudence i.e. Hanafi, Shâfi’i, Mâliki, and Hanbali schools (known as ‘madhâhib’ - plural of ‘madh-hab’). So, strictly speaking, Orthodox Sunni Muslims are therefore the true “Salafis”. Those who want to know more about the legal status of following a madh-hab may download and read the book by our contemporary Jurist Justice Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmâni (may Allâh protect and preserve him) at the following website: <http://archive.org/details/TheLegalStatusOfFollowingAMadhab>

The founder of Wahhâbism - Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhâb - was raised in Uyainah, an oasis in southern Najd in Saudi Arabia, and was from the Banu Tamim tribe. He did come from a very religious family and left Uyainah in pursuit of Islamic knowledge. He traveled to Makkah, Madinah, Iraq and Iran to acquire knowledge from different teachers. When he returned to his homeland of Uyainah, he preached what he personally believed to be Islam in its purity - which was, in fact, a vicious assault on Orthodox Sunni Islam. The orthodox Sunni Iraqi scholar Jamil Effendi al-Zahâwi - who was the son of the Mufti of Iraq and a descendant of Khalid bin Waleed (ra) - said that the teachers of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhâb, including two teachers he had studied under in Madinah Munawwarah- Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Sulayman al-Kurdi and Shaykh Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi - became aware of his anti-Sunni “Wahhâbi” creed and warned Muslims to stay away from him. His Shaikhs, including the two aforementioned shaikhs of Madinah Munawwarah, used to say: **“Allâh will allow him to be led astray; but even unhappier will be the lot of those misled by him.”** (The Doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah Versus the ‘Salafi’ Movement - Zahâwi, Jamal E (1996 edition)

***Badat fitnatun kal layli qad ghattatil aafaaqa
Wa sha’at fa kadat tublighul gharba wash sharaqa
(A confusion came about like nightfall covering the skies
And became widespread almost reaching the whole world)***

Moreover, Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhâb’s own father had warned Muslims to stay away from him, and so did his biological brother, *Sulayman Ibn Abdul-Wahhâb*, an Orthodox Sunni scholar who refuted him in a book entitled ***al-Sawâ’iq al-Ilâhiyyah fi al-radd ‘ala al-Wahhâbiyyah*** (“*Divine Lightnings in Refuting the Wahhâbis*”). Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhâb was refuted by the orthodox Sunni scholars for his many ugly innovations - in both creed and theology. His most famous book, *Kitab at-Tawheed* (Book of Unity of Allâh) is widely circulated amongst Wahhâbis worldwide. This book is popular amongst Wahhâbi and Neo-Salafi circles, although Orthodox Sunni scholars have said that there is nothing scholarly about it, both in terms of its content and its style.

It is now necessary to give an overview of a scholar named Ahmed Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) who lived a few hundred years before Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhâb. The Wahhâbi founder admired Ibn Taymiyyah as a role model and embraced many of his beliefs and teachings. Who exactly was Ibn Taymiyyah and what did Orthodox Sunni scholars say about him? Orthodox Sunni Muslim scholars had mixed opinions about him because of his ‘unique’ interpretation on various issues of Islamic creed and worship. His straying away from mainstream Orthodox Sunni Islam on particular issues of creed (aqeedah) and worship (ibaadah) made him an extremely controversial figure in the Muslim community.

Ibn Taymiyyah did win the reputation of being the “true bearer” of early pious Muslims - especially among reformist revolutionaries - while the majority of Orthodox Sunnis have accused him of reprehensible bid’ah (innovation) and some accusing him of kufr (unbelief).

One may now ask why Ibn Taymiyyah had received so much opposition from reputable Orthodox Sunni Scholars who were known for their asceticism, trustworthiness and piety. Some of Ibn Taymiyyah’s anti-Sunni and controversial positions include:

- 1) *His claim that Allāh’s Attributes are “literal”; thereby attributing Allāh with created beings and becoming an anthropomorphist (one who attributes human characteristics to God);*
- 2) *His claim that created things existed eternally with Allāh;*
- 3) *His opposition to the scholarly consensus on the divorce issue;*
- 4) *His opposition to the Orthodox Sunni practice of tawassul (asking Allāh for help using a deceased pious individual as an intermediary);*
- 5) *His saying that starting a journey to visit the Prophet Muhammad’s (SAW) sacred tomb invalidates the shortening of prayer;*
- 6) *His saying that the torture of the people of Hell stops and doesn’t last forever;*
- 7) *His saying that Allāh has a limit (hadd) that only He Knows;*
- 8) *His saying that Allāh literally sits on the Throne (al-Arsh) and has left space for Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to sit next to Him;*
- 9) *His claim that touching the tomb of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is polytheism (shirk);*
- 10) *His claim that making supplication at the Prophet Muhammad’s tomb to seek a better status from Allāh is a reprehensible innovation;*
- 11) *His claim that Allāh descends and comparing Allāh’s “descent” with his, as he stepped down from a minbar while giving a sermon (khutbah) to Muslims;*
- 12) *His classifying of oneness in worship of Allāh (tawheed) into two parts: Tawhid al-rububiyya and Tawhid al-uluhiyya, which had never been done by the pious adherents of the salaf.*

Allāmah Ibn Taymiyyah's beliefs regarding tashbeeh were not something that he had concealed or hidden. Rather, he himself was pretty much open about them. *As-Sayfus Saqeel* by Imam Subki (rahmatullahi alayhi) is a book which exposes the unorthodox beliefs (aqaa'id) - such as open statements of 'tashbeeh' - of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim. It is available and there is a very good review on it by Allāmah Zahid Kauthari (rahmatullahi alayhi). This book is a “must read” for all our ULAMĀ - especially in this age of intellectual fitnah. Also Ibn Taymiyyah in his book, *Naqdu-Asâsit-Taqdees*, has open and clear statements that are against the aqaa'id of the Ahlus-Sunnah. He clearly believes in *istiwâ alal-'Arsh bil-mumâsati wal-makân*. This is not a slander or enmity, rather it is a reality. His books - such as *Kitâbul Arsh* - and Ibn Qayyim's *al-Nuniyyah* is proof of Ibn Taymiyyah’s beliefs (aqaa-id). Al-Hafiz Waliud Deen al-Iraqi (rahmatullahi alayhi) mentions that he opposed the ijmaa of the Orthodox Sunni Ulamâ in more than 60 rulings (masaa'il). The worst of these being the one on divorce (talaag) and the other being on visiting (ziyaarah) of the sacred tomb of our beloved Prophet (SAW). It is absolutely essential for the Orthodox Sunni scholars of this time to be aware of these matters. When any scholar leaves a particular 'ilmi' legacy due to which other people are being misled and becomes arrogant and cheeky against the majority of the Ummah, then the ULAMĀ should have no choice but to address this issue. And this task should be handled by our learned and capable ULAMĀ only.

One of the great scholars of Hadith and Islamic Creed from the Indian Subcontinent, Allāmah Shaikh Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri (rahmatullahi alayhi) has refuted Ibn Taymiyyah in many of his works including his famous commentary of Sahih al-Bukhari, named Faydh al-Bari. In one of his works in the Urdu language, he states:

“Ibn Taymiyyah and others came close to anthropomorphism, (one who attributes human characteristics to God) in that they took the literal meaning of certain verses of the Qur’an.” (Malfuzât Muhaddith Kashmiri (Urdu), P: 242)

He further states that, *Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim (his student) at times rejected authentically proven Hadiths when they went against their own positions. There are many examples of this. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalaani (rahmatullahi alayhi) has also condemned Ibn Taymiyyah for rejecting authentic (Sahih) Hadiths when they went against his own position.*

Shaykh Abd al-Aziz al-Dehlawi (rahmatullahi alayhi) - after studying Ibn Taymiyyah's Minhaj al-Sunnah - was immensely distressed by his undermining of the Ahl al-Bayt (members of the Prophet's family) and the true and sincere Islamic Sufis.

Allâmah Shaikh Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri (RA) then **mentioned that his teacher Shaykh Mawlana Husayn Ahmad al-Madani (rahmatullahi alayhi) was quite unsympathetic towards Ibn Taymiyyah. He even disliked the title of "Shaykh al-Islam" being used for him, hence he became very upset when Shaykh-ul-Hadith Muhammad Zakariyya al-Kandhlawi (rahmatullahi alayhi) used this title for Ibn Taymiyyah in one his works.**

He then goes on to say that **the most balanced approach with regards to Ibn Taymiyyah is the approach of Imam Dhahabi, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and others, in that one may benefit from his great and extensive knowledge, but be wary of his isolated positions that number many in matters of Fundamental Creed (usul) and particulars of Islamic jurisprudence (furu'). This is the position of our (Deobandi) scholars.** (Malfuzât Muhaddith Kashmiri, P: 413-414)

Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allâh protect and preserve him) -our contemporary Jurist - has also mentioned a similar stance with regards to Ibn Taymiyyah. He states: **"As far as the opinions of Allama Ibn Hazm, Allama Ibn Taymiyyah and Allama Ibn al-Qayyim are concerned, with due respect to their lofty status and rank, they have chosen certain positions that go against the mainstream Orthodox Sunni scholars of this Ummah..."** (Fiqhi Maqâlât, 2/21)

Although Ibn Taymiyyah's unorthodox and Pseudo-Sunni positions were kept away from the public in Syria and Egypt due to the consensus of Orthodox Sunni scholars' opinion of his deviance, his teachings were nevertheless circulated in hiding. One may ask a question: How could this belief of Ibn Taymiyyah possibly be collaborated and mass-narrated from the salaf without the possibility of perversions by mistakes or otherwise, when it was hidden for four centuries? How can they claim to know for sure that a belief system that went into hiding has been absolutely reliably narrated from the Salaf? It had only been narrated by a handful of so-called "Hanbali" pretenders, and that too in hiding. So it is like the gospel of the Christians during their persecution by the Jews and the Romans. We all know what happened to their books.

Of course, after Ibn Taymiyyah's demise in jail for heresy, his teachings once again became a hidden sect. So much for those who say that Ibn Taymiyyah's books were "books that no one could oppose" and "no one could resist him". In fact, even Christians, who have one of the most irrational belief systems on earth, cannot be fended off based on Ibn Taymiyyah's belief principles. Why? Because his deity is a being with size, shaped by a border that can change, so why couldn't this deity be Jesus or anything else proposed? This is what some Christians asked. They are of course right. There seems to be no fundamental difference between them and Ibn Taymiyyah.

Ibn Al-Qayyim realized this, and that is why he put on an "Ash'ari" cap when arguing with the Christians in his book **"Hidâyatul-Hayârâ Fee Ajwibatul-Yahoodi wa-Nasârâ"** (The guidance of the confused regarding answering the Jews and Christians).

It is a fact that there is a difference between the personality of Ibn Taymiyyah and his legacy of knowledge. We agree that he was a great scholar and we hope that Allâh forgave him for his deviant beliefs. Yet at the same time, we cannot deny that there are serious issues with the legacy that Ibn Taymiyyah has left behind and this affects all of us in some way or the other. How many of us have been confronted with the question of 'Where is Allâh' and other issues. This is not something to just sweep under the carpet and carry on. This is a serious issue of Aqeedah and thousands of Muslims all over the world are in confusion with regards to these issues. The **Wahhâbi "Kitâb Al-Tawheed"** and its translations are distributed for free throughout the world. New Muslims are bombarded with these high-level issues from the outset without an understanding of basic issues. The legacy of Ibn Taymiyyah is at the core of all of this confusion.

We need to issue a general warning to the Muslim Ummah with regards to these deviations of Ibn Taymiyyah so that they can exercise caution in this regard. It is true that we do not follow Ibn Taymiyyah, but a good percentage of "Deobandis" DO follow his views in Aqeedah. We know that certain Deobandi Madaaris have taught **"Aqeedah Wāsitiyyah"** of Ibn Taymiyyah. We also read

Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's biography of Ibn Taymiyyah and note that it does not just contain all-encompassing praise of everything Ibn Taymiyyah said. Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi also mentioned some criticisms regarding Ibn Taymiyyah including his views with regards to visiting the grave of the Prophet Muhammad (SalAllâhu Alayhi Wasallam). It is an injustice to solely quote a scholar's praise of someone without mentioning his criticisms as well. Deobandi institutions do keep their students informed about some of these deviated views of Ibn Taymiyyah during the final year of the Alim course. In summary, the Neo-Salafi Movement is overemphasizing the issue of Aqeedah and creating great confusion amongst the masses by enforcing the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah. We have even heard of people who left the fold of Islam due to this confusion.

The Neo-Salafi movement has repackaged, reinvented and reworked sciences such as "aqeedah", in contrast to the "aqeedah" that has been established for centuries. Overnight, they have taken acts that have always been deemed permissible and even practiced by the great ULAMÂ themselves, and made them an issue of "aqeedah", accusing thousands of Muslims as "kaafir", "mushriks" and "apostates". Given that their beginnings were violent and aggressive, it should not be a surprise that this "Neo-Salafi" group creates feelings of resentment in the Muslim community worldwide.

It is their claim that the Neo-Salafi methodology places all of its jurisprudence on the Qur'an and Sunnah according to the interpretation of the Salaf (i.e. first three generations of Muslims) and rejects all Bid'ah and Shirk. This claim asserts something that is extremely insulting to the four established Schools of Thought i.e. Hanafi, Shâfi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali. Do the four established Schools not base its jurisprudence on the Quran and Sunnah? Of course they do. Do these four established Schools not reject Bid'ah and Shirk? Of course they do. This claim by the Neo-Salafis is a "red herring". What these Neo-Salafis do not tell us is that - after they have re-interpreted major concepts in jurisprudence - they have gone against established and proven concepts; and even gone as far as to tamper with classical works of "aqeedah" and "fiqh". They are now trying to superimpose their deviated creed and theology onto Orthodox Sunni Muslims. They have played a "shell game" - using catchy slogans and phrases - tricking innocent and unsuspecting Muslims into their net. For those interested in more detailed discussions on this subject, check out the internet website:

<http://sunnianswers.wordpress.com/contents/>

More details on this subject can be found - amongst others - in the following specific books:

Al-Hafiz Taqi al-Din Al-Subki (d. 756/1355) wrote:

- ***Al-durra al-mudiyya fi al-radd 'ala ibn Taymiyya***, edited by Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari ("The Luminous Pearl: A Refutation of Ibn Taymiyyah");
- ***Al-rasa'il al-subkiyya fi al-radd `ala Ibn Taymiyya wa tilmidhihi Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya***, edited by Kamal al-Hut ("Subki's treatises in Answer to Ibn Taymiyyah and his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya") (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1983);
- ***Al-sayf al-saqil fi al-radd `ala Ibn Zafil*** ("The Burnished Sword in Refuting Ibn Zafil" i.e. ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya) Cairo: Matba`at al-Sa`ada, 1937;
- ***Shifa' al-siqam fi ziyarat khayr al-anam*** ("The healing of the sick in visiting the Best of Creation").

The Syrian scholar Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti wrote two classic books

- ***al-Lamadhabiyya Akhtar al-Bid'atin Tuhaddidu al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah*** ("Not Following A Madh-hab (School of Jurisprudence) is the Most Dangerous Innovation Threatening Islamic Sacred Law"); and
- ***al-Salafiyya Marhalatun Zamaniyyatun Mubarakah La Madhhabun Islamiy*** ("The Salafiyya was a Blessed Historical Period, not an Islamic School of Thought")

The Iraqi Scholar Jamil Effendi Sidqi al-Zahawi al-Baghdadi, (d. 1355/1936) also wrote:

- ***al-Fajr al-Sadiq fi al-radd 'ala munkiri al-tawassul wa al-khawariq*** ("The True Dawn in Refuting Those Who Deny the Seeking of Intercession and the Miracles of Saints") Pub.1323/1905 in Egypt.

Nevertheless, from his book Majmoo Al-Fatawâ also, Ibn Taymiyyah proves that he did not just have anthropomorphist tendencies. He did believe that Allâh is a body with a shape that surrounds things. He saw no problem in claiming that the world could be inside the Creator and one could hypothetically bump into His claimed borders.

As it is well known, Ibn Taymiyyah taught that Allâh brings things into existence in Himself, such as changing location and movement. This is one of their main points of conflict with the Ash'aris, who are honest when they say and believe that Allâh, in His Essence (Dhaat), does not change.

In fact, Ibn Taymiyyah hid his beliefs to a great extent, and that is why some Orthodox Sunni scholars praised him - as they did not know about his deviant beliefs. For example, you find him in one book saying it is kufr to say Allâh is a body, then in another book that it is not allowed to forbid saying it, and in yet another that Allâh has six boundaries and a shrinkable size. Na'oozubillah!

So, historically, we note that the 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th centuries were established with widespread Orthodox Sunnism, until the rebellion of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhâb in the 12th century after the Hijrah. Since then the Wahhâbis have only grown stronger through support from imperialist powers. It was the British that first supplied them with weapons, and thereby helped to renew the call to the so called "Salafi" version of Islam. After that, the books of Ibn Taymiyyah were gradually brought out from their hiding places and began to be translated, published and distributed worldwide, mainly by the Saudi regime.

The question often asked is: What is then the view of the Orthodox Sunni scholars on Ibn Taymiyyah? The position held by the majority of the Orthodox Sunni scholars, both past and present, with regards to Ibn Taymiyyah is that they respect him as a scholar and acknowledge his works, but disagree with certain views of his wherein he chose to go against the mainstream beliefs (aqaa'id) of the scholars of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamâ'ah. This viewpoint is held by most of the contemporary scholars worldwide, including scholars from Arab countries as well.

Hafiz ibn Taymiyyah was a famous Hanbali scholar of Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith and Islamic Jurisprudence. He was endowed with a compelling writing style and a keen memory and was an eloquent writer whose works are numbered as many. His legal verdicts (Fatâwâ) are printed in many volumes and his works in refutation of the Shi'as and other subjects are second to none. Many Ulamâ such as Imam Dhahabi and others, have great words of praise for him. Despite this, Ibn Taymiyyah made grave errors in certain matters concerning tenets of faith (aqeedah) and jurisprudence (fiqh). He chose certain positions in Aqeedah and Fiqh that went against the mainstream understanding of the Ulamâ from the four Sunni Schools of Islamic law. He was mainly a follower of the Hanbali School, but he held certain opinions that went against the mainstream Hanbali position as well, hence their Ulamâ as well did not consider him to be the final authority in that Hanbali School of Thought.

Similarly, some of his positions with regards to the tenets of faith, mentioned in his works such as al-Aqeedah al-Waasitiyyah, were a cause of a lot of controversy and he was rightfully refuted by Scholars such as Imam Subki, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami and others. He differed with other Ulamâ on many issues such as the permissibility of Tawassul (Waseelah), travelling specifically to visit the sacred grave of the Messenger of Allâh (Allâh bless him & give him peace) and other such matters already mentioned above. His position with regards to the Attributes of Allâh, Most High, caused him to be imprisoned in Cairo and Damascus, and the Ulamâ - at that time - successfully pointed out his erroneous approach in this regard.

Let us again remind ourselves of what the Orthodox Sunni creed is regarding these beliefs of Ibn Taymiyyah. Imam Al-Tahaawi (rahmatullahi alayhi) stated (in brackets): ***(This is a detailed remembrance of the belief of the People of the Sunnah and following (the Jamaa'ah).*** Later he stated, as part of this remembrance: ***(Allâh is above)*** the status of ***(having limits, extremes, corners, limbs or instruments).*** ***(The six directions)*** up, down, front, back, left and right ***(do not contain Him)*** because that would make Him ***(like all created things)***. He also agreed that believing anything else is an insult to Islam, for he said in the same remembrance: ***(whoever attributed to Allâh an attribute that has a meaning among the meanings that apply to humans has committed blasphemy).*** Note that he said this after having already pointed out that the six directions apply to all created things, which includes humans. In other words, the Orthodox Sunni belief is that attributing a limit to Allâh makes one a kaafir.

How then should we understand the meaning of ***"istawâ"***? The best and safest position to hold then, is that one simply says ***"istawâ"*** to affirm the attribute and then ***"without a how"*** to comply with ***"He does not resemble anything"***. This way one is left with the various possible Arabic meanings of

“istawâ” that are not physical in meaning, and one has not contradicted these other very clear and specific texts (and a number of others). In other words, one has avoided restricting the literal meaning of “He does not resemble anything”. One has also avoided affirming a limit to Allâh which would also contradict this ayah, and many others as well. One also does not necessarily assign any specific one of those non-physical meanings to “istawâ”, because it is not clear in the Arabic language which one is meant, and the meaning is not well known. For this reason, most of the true Salaf left it at saying “istawâ - without a how (bilaa kaif),” and usually did not interpret the non-physical meaning left after saying “without a how” (bilaa kaif). This was for fear of speaking about Allâh without a proof, and ending up assigning a meaning that was not meant, thereby denying the one that was actually meant. (ta’teel, as is it called in Arabic). How truly our beloved Prophet (SAW) had warned his Ummah by saying:

Tafakkaroo fi khalqillah wala tafakkaroo fillah fa innakum lan taqdiru qadrahu

“Ponder upon the creation of Allâh and not in Allâh Himself, as you will never comprehend Him”.

Note also that whether the non-physical meaning of scripture texts that have apparent physical meanings are known or not, is sometimes a matter of disagreement. So, for example, many scholars interpreted the literally translated, ***“He is with you wherever you are,”*** as “in the sense of knowledge,” i.e. Allâh knows about you, and what you do, wherever you are. Clearly this ayah is also not meant to be literal.

The Quran and Hadith texts are full of such figurative expressions, and they are widely known. They did not cause confusion among the Companions (Sahâbas), simply because they knew that Allâh is not limited, as He does not have a Creator. They knew their Creator so well that literally physical meanings did not even enter their minds.

Some Neo-Salafis also say that it makes no sense to take the ayah about “Allâh not resembling His creation” “Laysaka mithlihi shay” at face value and NOT take the ayah about “Ar Rahmanu ‘alal ‘arsh istawâ” at face value. The difference between “He does not resemble anything,” and “istawâ” is that the first denies the resemblance of anything to Allâh. The latter, on the other hand affirms “istawâ”. To be consistent then, we need to affirm “istawâ” without affirming resemblance to something physical, because created things are physical, i.e. limited and quantitative, and therefore in need of Allâh to create them. That is why the Salaf said “istawâ bi-lâ kayf” (istawâ without a how), but they did not say “Laysaka mithlihi shay bi-laa kayf” “He does not resemble His creation - without a how”.

Other Neo-Salafis say that whatever has no limit is not separate and distinct from the creation and cannot be above the world because all of this is necessitated by the meaning of ‘hadd’ (limit). What they actually mean by this is that “whatever has no physical limit is not physically separate and distinct from the creation and cannot be physically above the world.” This statement is based on drawing an analogy between the Creator and His creation. It assumes that Allâh is a body (something with a size), and must therefore, as they say, have a physical boundary. This assumption is made, because they think of Allâh in terms of what is true for His creation.

Orthodox Sunni:

Imam Abu Mansoor Al-Mâturidi’s comment on the verse “Ar-Rahmanu alal Arsh Istawâ”

Abu Mansoor, may Allâh have mercy on him, said: ***“Our principle regarding this (understanding Allâh’s attributes) is that Allâh said that He does not resemble anything, so He denied that He has any resemblance to His creation. We have in this regard already clarified that He is in His Actions and Attributes greatly above having a like (such as being in a place or direction, as Abu Mansoor stated earlier in this book). For this reason one must say “Ar-Rahmanu alal Arsh Istawâ” as it came in the revelation, and deny that He has any resemblance to creation in what has been ascribed to Him. This is because it came in the revelation, and it was affirmed by the sound mind (i.e. “istawâ” without Him being in a place, direction or location is not judged by the mind as impossible). Then we do not assign any interpretation to it with certainty, because its actual meaning might be something else of the possibilities we have mentioned, or something different from what has reached us of meanings that do not involve ascribing to Allâh a resemblance to His creation. So we believe in the actual meaning of the ayah, and this is the way to deal with anything that has been***

confirmed as revelation, such as seeing Allâh, in which we must deny any resemblance to creation, and believe in the actual meaning, without authenticating a specific meaning over other (acceptable) meanings. And Allâh is the Creator of the ability to obey Him. (Abu Mansur Al-Mâturidi: Kitab-al-Tawhid: Pg 74)

In his Qur'anic commentary entitled *Latâ'if al-Ishârât* ("The Subtle Signs"), Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (RA) - together with Imam al-Haramayn Ibn al-Juwayni and al-Khatib al-Baghdadi the main figure in the fourth generation-layer of al-Ash'ari's students - sums up the position of Ahl al-Sunnah concerning 'istawâ' in Surah Sajdah: Chapter 32: Verse 4):

"He established Himself on the Throne". However, the One without beginning has no limit (al-qadeem laysa lahu hadd). "He established Himself over the Throne". However, it is impermissible to attribute to Him closeness with His Essence (Dhaat) or remoteness. "He established Himself over the Throne". However, the Throne would be the most needful of all things to an iota of connection (al-wisaal) with Him if it was only alive. But it is a lifeless solid, and when did solids ever possess volition? "He established Himself over the Throne". However, Allâh is the Everlasting Sovereign (al-Samad) without rival, the One Unique without limit.

Imam Sharaf al-Din al-Nawawi's (ra) commentary on the Hadith: "Where is Allâh?"

The Messenger of Allâh (SAW) asked her, "Where is Allâh?" and she said, "In the sky (Fi al-samaa)"; whereupon he asked her, "Who am I?" and she said, "You are the Messenger of Allâh"; at which he said: "Free her, for she is a believer". In his commentary of Sahih Muslim, he wrote:

"This is one of the Hadith which concerns the Attributes of Allâh.

There are two schools of thought in regards to such types of Hadith both of which I have discussed repeatedly in the chapter Kitab al-Iman.

The first school believes in it without concerning oneself with its meaning, while maintaining categorically that Allâh, Praised is He, does not resemble anything, and maintaining that He transcends the attributes of created things (and this school is called 'tafweed').

The second school interprets (makes 'ta'weel') the Hadith in a way which is commensurate with His Greatness. Those who preferred to interpret said that in the present Hadith the Prophet (SAW) meant to examine her to see whether or not she was one of those who worships idols on the earth, or one of those who maintain the uniqueness of Allâh (muwahhidoon) and believe that the Creator, the Disposer, and the One who effects (all things) is Allâh, no one else. For when those who maintain the uniqueness of Allâh (muwahhidoon) supplicate (the Transcendent God), they turn (their attention, or their hands) to the sky just as when they pray (the ritual prayers) they face the Ka'bah; yet, that does not mean that Allâh is located in the sky just as it does not mean that He is located in the direction of the Ka'bah. Rather, they turn (their attention, or their hands) to the sky because the sky is the prescribed direction of orientation (al-Qiblah) for supplication, just as the Ka'bah is the prescribed direction of orientation (al-Qiblah) for the ritual prayer (al-Salaah). So when she said that Allâh is in the sky, it was known that she was one of those who maintain the uniqueness of Allâh (muwahhid), and not a worshipper of idols."

(Sharh Sahih Muslim - Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi edition 5:24-25)

The Salaf's way of dealing with mutashaabihaat

Allâh, exalted be His Name, says:

"He is the One who has revealed to you the Book (the Qur'an). Of which, there are verses that are Muhkamaat (of established meaning), which are the principal verses of the Book, and some others are Mutashaabihaat (whose definite meanings are unknown). Now those who have perversity in their hearts go after such part of it as is 'mutashaabih', seeking (to create) discord, and searching for its interpretation (that meets their desires), while no one knows its interpretation except Allâh. And those well-grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe therein; all is from our Lord.' Only the men of understanding observe the advice." (Surah Ale Imraan: Chapter 3: Verse 7).

Definition of Muhkamaat and Mutashaabihaat:

For example:

The **Muhkam** Verse: A verse that has one clear meaning. Like **{Laysa Kamithlihi Shay'}**

The **Mutashaabih** Verse: A verse that can have many meanings. Like: **{Allâhu Nurus-Samawati wal-'Ard}**

Let it be clearly known that both the methodologies of two categories of scholars from the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* are correct and neither of them attributed anything to *Allâh* that does not befit Him.

In simple terms, **the first category believe that the correct way of explaining the mutashabihat ayat in the Qur'an is to say one believes in them according to the meaning that Allâh willed without saying what that meaning is; and without a 'how,' (Tafweed)** i.e., without attributing to Allâh sitting, standing, occupying places, sensuous attributes, or any of the meanings that apply to humans and other creations. Following this method, one would say: Allâh had an "istiwa" which befits Him - which is not sitting; and Allâh has a "yad" which befits Him - which is not a hand, and a "wajh" that befits Him - which is not a face. This was the way of the vast majority of the *Salaf*, accepting the attributes without "kayf" (how) without the manners of being, without likening Allâh to the creations in any way and with clearing Allâh from a body or bodily parts or organs.

The second category believes that the correct way of explaining the mutashabihat ayat in the Qur'an is to give specific meanings to them (Ta'weel) which is in accordance with the Religion and the Arabic Language. It is well known that some of the scholars of the *Salaf* did attribute specific meanings (Ta'weel) to the "mutashabihat" (allegorical) verses. In his *Sahih*, in the chapter *Tafsirul-Qur'an* (the explanation of the Qur'an), Imam al-Bukhari (ra) quoted scholars who attributed a specific meaning to the term "**illa wajhahu**" in Surat alQasas, ayah 88. Some said, "**illa mulkahu**" i.e., they said that the word "**wajh**" - which is an attribute of Allâh - means "**Mulk**" or "**Dominion.**" But this does not mean that Imam al-Bukhari (ra) and those he quoted disbelieved in the real attribute of Allâh pertaining to His Essence (Dhaat). Having said all this, whilst ta'weel was adopted by some of the *Salaf* as a defence mechanism, it does have some weaknesses and flaws, in that one has no idea as to whether the claimed ta'weel is intended by Allâh or not.

Both are accepted methods in Islam as long as the person clears Allâh from resembling the creations, or having a body or a form or an image, or attributing space or place or direction to Allâh. Ibn Hajar said that the belief of the scholars from the *Salaf* and *Khalaf* is that Allâh exists without being in a place or a direction, and the aboveness when attributed to Allâh refers to aboveness in status and not in place. Imam Abu Hanifah (ra) said: "**Allâh existed eternally without being in a place and without a direction**".

Commenting of the verse of the Noble Qur'an on mutashaabihaat, Imam al-Qurtubi in his famous *Tafsir* comments on Surah Ale-Imraan verse 7: Allâh, the Exalted said:

"But that in whose hearts is perversity follows the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings."

Our Shaykh, Abu al-Abbas (may Allâh's mercy be with him) said:

Furthermore, the followers of the allegorical verses (mutashaabihaat) are not free from:

1. Following it and collecting it, seeking to raise doubts in the Qur'an and (seeking to) misguide the laymen as done by the Zanaadiqah (deviants), the Qaraamitah (severely violent and misguided sect), and the refuters of the Qur'an.

2. Or, seeking to believe in the outward (zawaahir) meanings of the mutashaabihaat as done by the anthropomorphists (those who give physical traits to Allâh), those who collected from the Qur'an and Sunnah whatever gave a physical meaning when taken literally (zaahir). To the extent that they believed that the Creator is a physical body and a fashioned form, possessing a face and other things: hand, eye, side and finger. Exalted is Allâh from that, with the most Supreme Exaltation.

3. Or they sought out these (mutashaabihaat) with a view to manifest its interpretations and clarify its meanings.

4. Or (what they did) like Subaygh when he asked Umar about them (the mutashaabihaat) excessively.

So these are FOUR categories:

The First: There is no doubt about their disbelief (kufr) and that the judgment of Allâh concerning them is execution without even asking them to repent.

The Second: The most sound (opinion) is to make ‘takfeer’ on them (to consider them to be kaafirs), since there is no difference between them and worshippers of idols and images. And they should be asked to repent. Thereafter, either they’ll repent, or if not, they should be executed as is done to an apostate (murtad).

The Third: There is a difference of opinion concerning that (action) based upon the difference of opinion in the permissibility of (various) ta’weel (interpretations) of the mutashaabihaat. And it is known that the madhhab of the Salaf (our pious predecessors) was to leave the undertaking of interpreting them while being certain that the literal meaning (zawaahir) was impossible. So they would say, “Let it pass as it came”. And some of them (the Salaf) took the madhhab of manifesting its interpretations by interpreting it with meanings consistent with the (Arabic) tongue without definitively confirming a specific possible meaning.

The Fourth: The judgment for him is to be taught a profound lesson as Amir al-Mu’mineen Umar ibn al Khattab (may Allâh be pleased with him) did to Subaygh i.e. he took tree branches and beat him severely until he bled and told the Muslims not to talk to him or sit with him.

The first three Muslim generations whose righteousness the Messenger of Allâh (Sallallaahu Alayhi Wasallam) testified for, and whose merits surpassed the merits of all succeeding generation. They are the Companions of the Prophet (Sallallaahu Alayhi Wasallam) and the two generations that followed them. They all believed in the apparent meaning of the Qur’anic verses that deal with the Divine Attributes without giving them farfetched interpretations based on Greek philosophies.

A Mu’min (Believer) must believe that there is none like unto Allâh, the Exalted, in His essence, attributes and His actions. He must also believe that Allâh stands in need of none of His creatures. Neither a thing nor a place encompasses Him. He is above His Throne (Arsh), above the seventh heaven, and above all His creatures - essentially and realistically - not allegorically.

There is none of His creatures that touch Him. Based on this it is not permissible to say that Allâh is everywhere, or He is an integral part of His creatures, for Allâh was when there was nothing. He who asserts that Allâh is not outside the universe, not only denies the existence of Allâh, but is worshipping a non-existent god.

A very strong argument is presented by those who deny the fact that Allâh, the Exalted, is above His Arsh, by alleging that the following verse supports their argument.

“Have you not observed that Allâh knows everything in the heavens and everything in the earth? No secret consultation takes place between three, but He is fourth of them, nor between five, but He is sixth of them, nor between fewer than that or more, but He is with them wherever they may be. Then He will tell them on the Day of Judgment what they did. Surely Allâh is All-Knowing about every thing.” (Surah Al-Mujādilah: Chapter 58: Verse 7)

The above verse, they contend, signifies that Allâh is essentially everywhere. This argument is refuted by the prominent mufassir, Allâmah Ibn Katheer who says: “... ***there is a consensus among the scholars that this “with” refers to Allâh’s knowledge.***” i.e. this means that Allâh is well acquainted with their utterances, private talks and thoughts.

Al-Qurtubi commented on this verse saying: ***‘He knows and hears their private counsel. This is evidenced by the fact that the opening and concluding clauses of this verse confirm the knowledge of Allâh.’***

The Linguistic analysis of this verse proves the following points:

1. The opening words of the above verse speak of Allâh's knowledge, not His location.
2. Private counsel or secret talk, is the theme of this verse. Allâh says, ‘There is no secret counsel of three, but He is their fourth.’ He does not say, ‘There are not three, but He is their fourth’. Thus the meaning becomes quite clear that it is the knowledge of Allâh that encompasses all His creatures.
3. Allâh confirms that He will inform them of their secret talk on the Day of Resurrection.
4. The verse ends, again, confirming Allâh’s knowledge.

Allâh also says:

“And He is with you wheresoever you may be. And Allâh is the All-Seer of what you do.” (Surah Al-Hadeed: Chapter 57: Verse 7)

The prominent exegete, Ibn Katheer says: **“He is watching over you and witnessing your deeds wherever you may be, on land or at sea, during the night or the day, at home or in open areas or deserts. All of that is the same before His knowledge and all of it is under His sight and hearing. He hears your speech and sees where you are. He knows your secrets and your public statements. Abdullah ibn Abbas (RA) in his tafseer Tanweer ul-Miqbaas says: “and He is with you” means “He (Allâh) is Aware of you.”**

To summarize on the subject of “istawâ”, the vast majority of both the early and present day scholars hold the following view:

If it is obligatory to affirm the transcendence (**tanzih**) of the Originator from the limitations of direction (**jihah**) and spatial confinement (**tahayyuz**), then - according to the generality of early scholars and the foremost of the latter-day scholars - the need to affirm His transcendency (may He be blessed and exalted) of direction (**jihah**) necessarily follows as a corollary. Because, according to these scholars, He is not attributed with moving in an ‘upwards’ direction, since in their view specifying for Him a direction logically necessitates that He be situated in a place (**makân**) or within spatial confines (**hayyiz**), both of which logically necessitate that that which is spatially confined be capable of movement and stillness as well as change (**taghayyur**) and occurrence in time (**hudooth**). This is the opinion of the scholastic theologians (**al-mutakallimoon**). And the early Salaf (May Allâh be pleased with them all) did not speak in negation of a direction for Allâh nor did they affirm it (a direction). Rather, what they and the rest did was to affirm it (al-istiwa) in the manner that it was affirmed in Allâh’s Book and in the manner in which His Messengers informed us of it. Allâh specifically mentioned the Throne because of its stature as the greatest of his creations. Rather, they did not know the modality (**kayfiyyah**) of His establishment (**al-istiwa**), for its reality (**haqeeqah**) cannot be known. Imam Malik (may Allâh be merciful towards him) said: “The ‘establishment’ (**al-istiwa**) is known,” meaning, lexically, “and the ‘how’ (**kayfiyyah**) is unknown (majhool), and inquiring about it (istiwa) is a blameworthy innovation (bid’ah)”.

This amount of discussion - **which is by no means complete** - should suffice to give the reader some idea of the deviant beliefs on the subject of “**istawâ alal arsh**” (He - Allâh - established Himself on the Throne). Our Neo-Salafi brothers do not even consider us Muslims, or at the very least they would say we are Ahlul Bid’ah. However, we should refuse to take this to heart. Our ‘deen’ is what we have been taught by the true ‘Salaf-us-Saliheen’ and the Orthodox Sunni Ulamâ. We should care the less about how they view us. We should continue to accept them as our Muslim brothers and sisters, and we should reach out to them with what we believe is the true Islam. May Allâh (swt) protect us all! Ameen!

Bi hamdi waali al-hamdi la al-dhammi astabdi

Wa bil haqqi la bil khalqi lil haqqi astahdi

**(By the Glory of the Owner of Glory, not baseness, do I overcome
And by Allah, not by creatures, do I seek guidance to Allah)**

In conclusion, it must be said that it is essential for the Ulamâ of the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamâ’ah of our time to be aware of these deviant matters of Aqeedah and Fiqh. But at the same time, they should not go around causing fitnah; otherwise there is no difference between us and these Neo-Salafi mischief mongers. The stance that our Akabir Ulamâ had regarding Ibn Taymiyyah was a balanced opinion. A true Orthodox Sunni Alim never has any grudge against a particular individual.

We ask Allâh to keep us on the Straight Path of His Messenger Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) and his Companions; and to make us join their company on the Day when neither our wealth nor our offspring would come to help. And our guidance (tawfeeq) cannot come except from Allâh, in Him we trust and unto Him we shall return.

Requesting your humble duas!

Abdul Haq Abdul Kadir

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