

Was al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadee an Ash'ariyy? The Creed of the *Haafidh*, Abu Bakr al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadee (d. 463H)

An Issue Pertaining to the Attributes of *Allaab*

A Word about this Creed

The creed of al-Baghdaadee is found in a single preserved manuscript in adh-Dhaahiriyyah Book House in Damascus, collection no. 16.

This treatise 'An Issue Pertaining to the Attributes of *Allaab*' contains the quotation of two matters:

The first: A report of the *Haafidh*, al-Khateeb about one of the issues from the *Masaa'il* of *Imaam* Abu Abdullaah Ahmad bin Hanbal regarding the belief in the Speech of *Allaab* - the Mighty and Majestic - and a rejection of the saying of the *Jahmiyyah*.

The second: A *fatwaa* of al-Khateeb regarding the issue of the Attributes. He mentions a summary of the creed of the *Salaf* regarding the Attributes of *Allaab* - the Mighty and Majestic. He affirmed in this *fatwaa* that the way of the *Salaf* is the middle way - just as he affirmed the *Salafi* principle: “**Speaking about the Attributes is a branch of speaking about the Essence (*Dhaat*)**” - so he affirmed the Attributes whilst negating *tashbeeh* (resembling them to the creation) and he destroyed *ta'neel* (figurative interpolation).

He also rejected from the People of Innovation their reviling of the *Ahl us-Sunnah wal-Athar* due to their narrating the *abaadeeth* pertaining to the Attributes and he made clear the obligation of referring the unclear verses (*mutashaabihaat*) to the precise and clear (*muhkam*) ones and having faith in all of that and submitting to that.

Then he divided the *abaadeeth* which have been reported about the Attributes into three types - from the perspective of acceptance and rejection and he made clear that whatever *abaadeeth* are established then they are treated in the same way as what has come in the *Qur'aan* with respect to affirming (the Attributes) and negating *tashbeeh* (resemblance).

And this quality establishes the fact that the *Haafidh*, al-Khateeb was upon the creed of the *Salaf*, *Ahl us-Sunnah wal-Hadeeth* and not as some of them claim and associate him with the companions of al-Ash'aree - even if his saying about affirming the Attributes in general agrees with the saying of al-Ash'aree in 'al-Ibaanah' (al-Ash'aree's last book) - in which (al-Ash'aree) followed the (way of the *Salaf*). This cannot be correct as a proof for associating him with al-Ash'aree - since affirming the Attributes was the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* before al-Ash'aree even existed and al-Khateeb was the *Imaam* of the *Ahl ul-Hadeeth* in his time. Therefore associating him with them is an obligation besides which there is no other option.

In fact, you will see in the first issue contained in this creed that which will declare al-Khateeb to be totally innocent and free from his being upon the *madhhab* of al-Ash'aree. This due to the fact that the issue of al-*Lafidh* (the utterance of the *Qur'aan*)¹ is one of major things that take the Ash'arees away from the creed of the *Salaf*, *Ahl us-Sunnah wal-Hadeeth*.

¹ This is explained in the treatise itself, below.

The Creed

[1]. *Al-Haafidh* Abul-Fadl Muhammad bin Naasir bin Muhammad bin Alee al-Baghdaadee² informed us, saying: Abul-Hussain al-Mubaarak bin Abd ul-Jabbaar bin Ahmad as-Sairafee³ informed us, reading it out while I was listening - in the month of Shawwaal of the year 494H - that Abu Bakr Ahmad bin Alee bin Thaabit al-Khateeb informed us, saying: Abu Mansoor Muhammad bin Eesaa al-Bazzaar⁴ - of al-Hamadhaan - informed us, saying: Saalih bin Ahmad al-*Haafidh*⁵ narrated to us, saying: I heard Abdullaah bin Ishaq bin Sayaamard⁶ saying: I met al-Marwadhee⁷ at Turtoos and said to him: O Abu Bakr, how did you hear Abu Abdullaah⁸ speaking about the *Qur'aan*?

He said: I heard Abu Abdullaah saying: "The *Qur'aan* is the Speech of *Allaab*, it is not created. Whoever says it is created is a disbeliever.

I said: How did you hear him speaking about the one who withholds (his stance - not making his belief clear)?⁹

He said: This is an evil man, and I fear that he will call to the (belief) of the *Qur'aan*'s creation.

I said to him: O Abu Bakr, how did you hear Abu Abdullaah speaking about *al-Lafidh*?¹⁰

² He is known as 'as-Salaamee' (467-550H). He is trustworthy, a *Haafidh* (preserver), precise in his memorisation, a person of the *Sunnah* and abstemious. He used to be an Ash'aree initially and then came to the *madhbab* of *Ahl us-Sunnah wal-Hadeeth*. Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (20/265)

³ He is known as 'Ibn at-Tayyooree' (411-500H) from Baghdaad. He is trustworthy and reliable, correct in his foundations (*Usool*), having firmness in his religion and good manners. Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (19/213)

⁴ Known as 'al-Hamadhaanee' (345-431H). Very truthful and reliable, a righteous man. Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (17/563)

⁵ Known as 'at-Tameemee al-Hamadhaanee' (303-384H). Reliable, a firm memoriser, an author. Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (16/518).

⁶ Known as 'an-Nuhaawandee, Abu Abdur-Rahmaan'. *Al-Haafidh* Saalih bin Ahmad said: "I heard from him with my father and he was trustworthy, venerable, a person of the *Sunnah*. He would memorise and recall. He came to us in the year 380H." Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (15/247).

⁷ He is Ahmad bin Muhammad al-*Hajjaaj*, Abu Bakr (d. 275H) from Baghdaad. An *Imaam*, an exemplar, one of the heads in defense of the *Sunnah* and calling to it. He is the most specific of the companions of *Imaam* Ahmad in this, and the head of them. Ahmad did not put anyone else ahead of him. Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (13/173).

⁸ Meaning Ahmad bin Hanbal.

⁹ He means by 'the one who withholds' the one who merely says: "The *Qur'aan* is the Speech of *Allaab*" and then remains silent, neither saying "It is created" or "It is not created" thereafter. And before the appearance of the innovated speech of the creation of the *Qur'aan*, (just saying this) used to free someone from it. After its appearance and its spreading, then it is not permissible to remain silent (not clarifying oneself), due to the obligation of refuting and rejecting innovation, and promoting the *Sunnah*, since the one who remains silent perhaps he is concealing the belief of the *Jahmiyyah* who say "The *Qur'aan* is the Speech of *Allaab*". But their innovation is due to their saying "It is created", so if they do deny it (verbally and openly), then what distinguishes them?

¹⁰ '*Al-Lafidh*' refers to the practice of the Innovators of saying that their recitation of the *Qur'aan* is created. *Imaam* Ahmad declared the one who spoke with this to be a *Jahmee*. This is because after *Allaab* had exposed the falsehood of the People of Misguidance, they fled from saying "The *Qur'aan* is created" and began to say "My recitation of the *Qur'aan* is created",

He said: Whoever says his recitation of the *Qur'aan* is created is a *Jahme*.

I said to him: And who is the *Jahme*?¹¹

He said: He doubted in *Allaah* for forty days¹².

I said: The one who doubts in *Allaah*, is a disbeliever?

He said: Yes.¹³

[2]. The *Shaiikh* Abu Taalib al-Mubaarak bin Alee as-Sairafee¹⁴ informed us - granting us permission (to convey it) - saying: Abul-Hasan Muhammad bin Marzooq bin Abdur-Razzaq az-Za'faraanee¹⁵ informed us - reading it while I was listening in the month of Rabe' ul-Awwal of the year 506H - saying: The *Haafidh*, al-Khateeb Abu Bakr Ahmad bin Alee al-Baghdaadee informed us, saying:

“A person from Damasacus wrote to me asking me about some matters” - and he mentioned them - “so I replied to them.” Then he read to us the reply to what he had been questioned about saying:

“I comprehended what the esteemed *Shaiikh* wrote - may *Allaah* make his support to perpetuate and may He make excellent his success and his guidance (to the right way) - and I relied upon what had been acquired by me of knowledge regarding him, which I pursue [---]¹⁶ upon his tracks, and that I respond to him with what I hope will be in agreement with his inclination. And I ask *Allaah* to protect me from erring and to grant me - from His Bounty and Mercy - success in arriving at the correct word and deed.

desiring by it, this *Qur'aan*. And this is the belief to which the *Ash'ariyyah* incline towards, when they fled from a clear innovation of the *Mu'tazilah* to (another) unclear innovation - in opposition to them. This is because the *Ash'ariyyah* agree with the *Mu'tazilah* in that the Arabic *Qur'aan* which is known by the general people and the specific (notables) amongst them, and which is composed of words, which opens with Surah al-Faatihah and ends with Surah an-Naas is created, and this is what they intend by their saying “My recitation of the *Qur'aan* is created” - and as for the *Qur'aan* that is “not created”, in their view that is the meaning which is extant with *Allaah* and is not composed of letters and verses.

As you can see, *Imaam* Ahmad - may *Allaah* have mercy upon them - rejected this innovation, and this was when it was still in its infancy - before the time of al-Ash'aree.

¹¹ Meaning: Who is the *Jahme* to whom this saying has been attributed.

¹² Abdullaah bin Ahmad reports in *as-Sunnab* (no. 189) with an authentic chain of narration from Yazeed bin Haaron that he said: “May *Allaah* curse Jahm and the one who speaks with his saying, he was a denying disbeliever. He abandoned prayer for forty days, thinking he apostated from the religion - and that is because he doubted in *Islam*”.

Jahm is Jahm bin Safwaan, the Chief of Innovation and the Head of Misguidance, may *Allaah* disfigure him.

¹³ The chain of narration of this text is authentic to *Imaam* Ahmad.

¹⁴ Known as ‘Ibn Khudair’ (483-562H), from Baghdaad. Very truthful and a righteous man. Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (20/487).

¹⁵ Known as ‘al-Jallaab’ (442-517H) from Baghdaad, a faqeeh, a muhaddith and steadfast. Refer to *Siyar A'laam un-Nubulaa* (19/471).

¹⁶ A word undecipherable by the verifier of the treatise [Translators’ note].

Was al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadee an Ash'ariyy?

As for Speech Regarding the Attributes:

Then what has been reported of such Attributes in the Authentic Compilations (*as-Sunan as-Sibaah*) - the *madhbab* of the *Salaf* - may *Allaah* be pleased with them all - is to affirm them, and to carry them upon their apparent meanings (*alaa dhawaahirihaa*)¹⁷ and to deny [knowledge of]¹⁸ how they are (*kaifiyah*) and to negate *tashbeeh* (resemblance) for them.

¹⁷ Al-Khattaabee (d. 388H) said: “The *madhbab* of the *Salaf* (the Pious Predecessors) with regard to the *Sifaat* (Attributes of *Allaah*) is to affirm them as they are *alaa dhaahir* (with their apparent meaning), negating any *tashbeeh* (resemblance) to them, nor *takyeef* (asking how they are).” Al-Ghuniyah an *Kalaam* wa Ahlihi - as quoted in Mukhtasir al-Uluww (no.137).

Qaadee Abu Ya'laa (d. 458H) said: “It is not permissible to repel these narrations - as is the way of the group from the *Mu'tazilah*. Nor to become preoccupied with *ta'weel* - as is the way of the *Ash'ariyyah*. It is obligatory to carry them upon their *dhaahir* (apparent) meaning; and that the Attributes of *Allaah* do not resemble any one of His creation, nor do we have an *aqeedah* (belief) that there is any *tashbeeh* (resemblance) to them. Rather [we believe] in what has been reported from our *Shaikh* and our *Imaam*, Abu Abdullaah, Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal, and others from the Scholars of *Ashaabul-Hadeeth*.” Ibtal ut-Ta'weelaat (p.4)

Shaikh Abdul-Qaadir al-Jeelaanee (d. 561H) said: “It is essential to carry the attribute of *Allaah al-Istimaa* (*Allaah's* Ascending) upon its apparent sense - without *ta'weel*, and that He ascended by His *Dhaat* (self) over the Throne. *Istimaa* does not mean sitting or touching - as the *Mujassimah* and *Karraamiyyah* say. Nor does it mean *uluww* (grandeur and highness) - as the *Ash'ariyyah* say; nor does it mean *isteelaa* (conquering and dominating over) - as the *Mu'tazilah* say. None of this is related in the *Sharee'ah*. Neither has this been related by any one of the *Salaf us-Saalih* (Pious Predecessors) from the *Sabaabah* and the *Taabieen*, nor from the *Ashaabul-Hadeeth* (Scholars of *Hadeeth*). Rather, it is related from them that they carried the meaning of *Istimaa* with its apparent (*dhaahir*) meaning.” Al-Ghuniyah ut-Ta'alibeen (1/50) of Abdul Qaadir al-Jeelaanee.

¹⁸ The *Ash'ariyyah* have tried to find fault with the explanation of the *Salaf* in regard to the attributes that what is being negated is “knowledge” of the reality of the attributes and not “knowledge” of the meaning, and they claim that the insertion of the explanatory words “knowledge of” in the translations of the words of the *Salaf* is a fabrication and tampering of their words. And this is futile and will be covered in detail elsewhere on www.Asharis.Com inshaa'Allaah, however for now we say:

That the way of the *Salaf* – as is manifestly clear when the sum total of what has been transmitted from them and what is found in their books is put together – is: To affirm the words that *Allaah* used in affirming attributes for Himself, and to affirm that they represent meanings, according to the language of the people to whom these words were revealed, and that it is obligatory to affirm these attributes, and to leave them and pass them on as they are – intact, without distortion or interpretation – upon their apparent meanings in the language – and to affirm such meanings and to affirm that such indicated attributes have true realities, but that these realities are impossible for us to know and that such knowledge has not been revealed to us – thus we deny knowledge of the reality and true nature of these attributes, even though we know their meanings – and we negate any likeness between the reality of these attributes with those of the creation.

Further, there occurred from some of the people of knowledge *ta'weel* of attributes in greater or smaller amounts but that does not signify that they were *Ash'ariyyah* for they never ascribed to the *Ash'ariyyah* and they never propounded the usool of the *Ash'ariyyah* – such as 1) the first obligation upon the servant is to reflect and investigate (instead of simply declaring the *shahaadatayn*) 2) the rejection of *khbaar ul-aahaad* in matters of *aqeedah*, 3) Speaking with the belief of the *Jabariyyah*, clothed with the phrase “al-kasb” 4) considering *eemaan* to be mere *tasdeeq* in the heart 5) expelling actions from *eemaan* 6) negating the *ta'theer* (effects) of the *asbaab* (ways and means) 7) which is an extension of their belief of *al-jabr* (clothed with the phrase “al-kasb”) 8) negating or making *ta'weel* of all the attributes except for seven ... and so on.

So many of those whom they claim to be *Ash'ariyyah* are not in fact *Ash'ariyyah* in their usool – they simply fell into something of *ta'weel* with respect to some attributes, but they did not take it as an adopted and consistent methodology with all the attributes, and they were free from the false usool of the *Ash'ariyyah*.

But a people have denied these Attributes and so they nullified what *Allaab* - free from all imperfection - affirmed for Himself and another people amongst those who affirmed them made [excessive] determination of them and thus fell into something of *tashbeeh* (resemblance) and *takyeeef* (designating their true nature).

And what is correct is treading upon the course which is middle and balanced amidst all the affairs - and the religion of *Allaab* [lies] between the excessive person and the negligent one.

And the Principle in this Matter is:

That speaking about the Attributes is a branch of speaking about the Essence (*Dbaat*) and thus follows it exactly and takes its example¹⁹.

So when it is known that affirming the Lord of all the Worlds - the Mighty and Majestic - that it is an affirmation of existence, not an affirmation of the “howness” (*kaijyyah*), then it is exactly the same for affirming His Attributes. Indeed, it is an affirmation of their existence, not an affirmation of defining (their reality) and giving them a “howness” (*takyeeef*).

So when we say: *Allaab* has a hand, hearing and seeing, then these are Attributes which *Allaab* the Exalted has affirmed for Himself and we do not say: The meaning of hand is ‘power’²⁰ and nor do we say: The meaning of hearing and seeing is ‘knowledge’. And nor do we say: Indeed, they are limbs. And we do not resemble them with the hands, hearing and sight (of the creation) which are limbs and which are the instruments of action.

And we say: Affirming them is obligatory because *at-Tanqeef* (the texts of the *Qur’aan* and the *Sunnah*) have reported them and it is obligatory to negate *tashbeeh* (resemblance) from them, due to the saying of the Blessed and Exalted:

There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer. ²¹

and His saying - the Mighty and Majestic -:

And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him. ²²

And when the People of Innovation say about the People of (Authentic) Narrations - due to their reporting of such *abaadeeth* - that they report what does not benefit *Tawbeed* and which is not authentic - meaning by that to rebuke them and to confuse those whose knowledge is weak - and they accuse them with the disbelief of the people guilty of *tashbeeh* and the ignorance of the people of *ta’teel* (denial of the Attributes) - then they (the People of the Narration) reply to them that: In the Book of *Allaab* there are clear, decisive verses, the intent behind them is understood by their apparent meanings (*dhaabirihaa*) and there are unclear verses the meanings of which cannot be grasped except by referring them to the clear and decisive (verses). But it is obligatory to believe in all

¹⁹ This is the sound and coherent principle that is agreed upon by the Salaf, past and present – and which is opposed and contradicted by the opposers, the most contradictory of them in their stances and positions being the Ash’ariyyah.

²⁰ Abu Haneefah - may *Allaab* have mercy upon him - said in *Fiqh ul-Akbar*: “It is not to be said that ‘His Hand means His power’ because that is a nullification of the Attribute.”

²¹ Shoorah 42:11

²² Ikhlaas 112:4

of them (*tasdeeq*) and to have faith in them all (*eemaan*). Similarly, the narrations of the Messenger (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) are carried upon the same principle, they are revealed (just) like this Revelation - the unclear amongst them are referred to the clear and decisive amongst them - but all of them are to be accepted²³.

So the *Hadeeth* Reported About the Attributes are of Three Types:

²³ The author of *Ta'weel*, Khutooratuhi wa Athaaruhu said: "Al-Haqq (*Allaah*) - the Blessed and Exalted established in *Soorah Aali Imraan* [3:7] that He revealed the Book "...In it are Verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundations of the Book and others not entirely clear..." and He also established that "...those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth) they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking al-Fitnah (trial and mischief) and seeking for its hidden meanings (*ta'weel*), but none knows its hidden meanings (*ta'weel*) except *Allaah* - and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge - they say: "We believe in it; the whole of it (clear and unclear Verses) are from our Lord..."

And *Allaah* established in this text that the People of Deviation abandon the clear and precise (*mubkam*) texts and go to the unclear, ambiguous texts (*mutashaabih*), desiring by that to cause mischief, confusing the hearts and the intellects and dividing the *Ummah*. As for those firmly grounded in knowledge, then they judge to the precise and clear verses (*mubkam*) and have faith (*eemaan*) in the unclear verses (*mutashaabih*).

Then if it is said: "Do those firmly grounded in knowledge know the interpretation (*ta'weel*) of the unclear verses (*mutashaabih*)?"

The answer is: "The People of Knowledge differ about where the text of this verse stops. Do we stop at the saying of *Allaah* "...except *Allaah*..." so that the interpretation (*ta'weel*) of the unclear verses is amongst the knowledge that *Allaah* kept to Himself, or do we stop at "...and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge..." so that those firmly grounded in knowledge are amongst those who know the interpretation (*ta'weel*) of the unclear verses? And in light of what we have established in the previous section, the answer is known. When the intent behind interpretation (*ta'weel*) is the reality and true nature of what *Allaah* has informed us of His Attributes then the verse stops at "...except *Allaah*." And the interpretation is something *Allaah* has kept to Himself.

And if the intent behind interpretation (*ta'weel*) is knowing the meaning (*ma'naa*) of what *Allaah* has informed about Himself - and that is but its explanation (*tajseer*) - then in general, those firmly grounded in knowledge know it, even if there is some amongst them from whom the meaning is hidden. However, there are certainly some amongst them who know the intent of *Allaah* from His Speech and who know the meaning which He intended and meant. For the *Qur'aan* was revealed in the language of the Arabs and those firmly grounded in knowledge are certainly differentiated from the ignorant and the common people with respect to the knowledge of the meanings of what their Lord revealed upon them. And the fact that the *Qur'aan* was revealed in the language of the Arabs is an indication of the correctness of this, for *Allaah* has ordered us to understand it and to reflect upon it. So how can there be that in the *Qur'aan* that whose meaning cannot be understood?!" *Ta'weel*, Khutooratuhi wa Athaaruhu (p.20-22)

And he also said: "Those who make *ta'weel* of the Attributes which *Allaah* affirmed for Himself to be necessary and who take them away from their apparent meanings also hold that the *ta'weel* of those texts is not known by anybody except *Allaah* the Blessed and Exalted. And in this they make a manifest and clear contradiction. For when they do not know the meanings of the texts of the Attributes, then how can they call for the performance of *ta'weel*? Sound logic requires from them that they do not investigate for them, a *ta'weel* which agrees with their apparent meanings or which opposes them, because they do not know of a meaning for it, or it may have a meaning but which is unknown to them. Therefore it is obligatory upon them that they say: "We are content with being ignorant of these texts as a way (for us to follow) and we do not affirm their apparent meanings, nor do we deny them and nor do we perform *ta'weel*." (p.23).

Ibn Hajr al-Asqalaanee said: "The one who takes the path of the *khalaf* cannot be sure that that which he makes *ta'weel* of is the intended meaning, and it is not possible to be certain of the correctness of the *ta'weel*." Fath al-Baaree of Ibn Hajr (13/436).

Ibn Attar, the famous student of an-Nawawi said: "And the meaning of what they make *ta'weel* of is not established." Al-Ptiqaad al-Khaalīs of Ibn Attar.

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The Origins, History and Development of the Ash'arite Creed and Methodology

Amongst them: The affirmed reports about whose authenticity the Scholars of the narrations are agreed upon - due to their abundance and the integrity found in their transmission - therefore accepting them and having faith in them is obligatory along with protecting the heart from a belief that would overcome it and which would necessitate resembling *Allaab* to His creation., and describing Him with what does not befit Him such as limbs, instruments, change and movements.

The second type: Reports which are disreputable and with unfounded chains of narration and repulsive wordings. The people of the knowledge of transmission are agreed upon their falsity and it is not permissible to be occupied with such narrations and nor to stop over them (to consider them).

The third: Reports about which the people of knowledge are in disagreement regarding status of their transmission - so some of them, as opposed to all of them - accept them. In this situation, it is obligatory to strive in finding the truth regarding them and to inspect them closely - so that they are either associated with the people of acceptance (*Ahl ul-Qubool*) - or that they are placed in the confines of falsehood and corruption.

And as for specifying such *abaadeeth*, then I have not occupied myself with them and a collection of them has not proceeded from me - but perhaps that will occur afterwards - if *Allaab* wills.²⁴

End of the Treatise

²⁴ The chain of narration of this text is authentic to al-*Haafidh* al-Khateeb.