

G.F. Haddād on Imām al-Dhahabī and the Phrase *Bi Dhātihī*

Also from the talbīs of the Jahmiyyah is their twisting the words of Imām al-Dhahabī in relation to the phrase *bi dhātihī* (with His essence).

One of the *ru'ūs* (heads) of the contemporary Jahmiyyah called Gibril F. Haddād¹³³⁹ in attempting to peddle the doctrine of the Jahmiyyah of old wrote a short tract called "*The Innovated Phrase 'In Person'*", regarding the use of the words "*bi nafsihī*" and "*bi dhātihī*". From the talbīs of this Jahmite is that he rendered these phrases into English as "in person", so that when he quoted the usage of this phrase from the statements of the Scholars of Ahl us-Sunnah it would enable him to force the minds of the dumb-witted and ignoramuses amongst his own audience to think of the worst possible meaning. The word *dhāt* refers to *essence* and *nafs* refers to *self*, however he did not use these appropriate translations, and this type of conniving is found in much of this Jahmite's polemics and writings. Although Ibn Taymiyyah was his target, in reality, he intends the Imāms of the Salaf from the first four centuries of Islām, since it is not the actual usage of these words *per se* which is the issue as much as what is intended by them by the Scholars in relation to *al-'Uluww*.

We have already cited from the early Kullābiyyah, their affirmation of *al-'uluww* for Allāh the Most High, and they also explicitly used the phrases *dhātuhu* and *nafsihī*, and this is found from al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī, as was quoted from him earlier:

As for His saying, "**He ascended over the Throne...**" and "**He is al-Qahir, above His servants...**", and "**Do you feel secure that He who is over the heaven...**", and "**...then they would certainly have sought out a way to the Lord of the Throne...**" then these and other verses like, "**To him does the goodly word ascend...**", and His saying, "**Then it (the affair) will go up (*yar'uju*) to Him...**", then this is definitive, it necessitates that He is above the Throne, above all things, purified and absolved of entering into His creation, there is nothing from His creation hidden to Him at all. [This is] because He

¹³³⁹ Gibrīl F. Haddād has a long history of mistranslation, distortion, clipping, twisting which would take volumes to document, however, the reader should take note of the nature in which G.F. Haddād puts out his poison through the example illustrated here, for all the rest of his polemical writings against Ahl al-Sunnah take on the same form.

explained in these verses that His essence (*dhātahu*), with His self (*bi nafsihī*) is above His servants, because He said, "**Do you feel secure that He, Who is over (fi) the heaven, will not cause the earth to sink with you...**", meaning, [He who is] above the Throne, and the Throne is over the heaven, because whoever is above something, over the heaven, then he is [said to be] "*fis-samā*", [meaning] over the heaven.¹³⁴⁰

And the other Kullābiyyah Ash'ariyyah, even if the usage of *bi dhātihī* and *bi nafsihī* has not reached us in what is preserved from them, they were upon the belief that Allāh Himself is exalted above the Throne, above the heavens, in addition to the exaltedness of status, rank, and power. Imām al-Dhahabī quotes¹³⁴¹ from Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī al-Mālikī:

And that He, the Exalted is above His Glorious Throne, with His essence (*bi dhātihī*) and that He is in every place with His knowledge.

And then comments upon this:

And the likes of this phrase has preceded from Abu Ja'far Ibn Abī Shaybah and Uthmān bin Sa'īd ad-Dārimī, and likewise Yahyā bin 'Ammār, the preacher of Sijistān, used it in his *Risālah*, and also the Hāfidh, Abu Nasr al-Wā'ilī al-Sijzī in his book *al-Ibānah*¹³⁴², for he said, "Our Imāms like Sufyān ath-Thawrī (d. 157H), Mālik (d. 179H), Hammād bin Salamah (d. 167H), Hammād bin Zayd (d. 179H), Sufyān bin Uyainah (d. 197H), al-Fudayl (bin 'iyād) (d. 187H), Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181H), Ahmad (d. 241H), and Ishāq (d. 238H) are agreed that Allāh is above the Throne *bi dhātihī* (with His essence) and His knowledge is in every place." And likewise Ibn 'Abd al-Barr as will follow, and likewise the phrase of Shaikh al-Islām Abu Ismā'il al-Ansārī who said, "And in many diverse reports [there occurs] that Allāh is above the seventh heaven, above the Throne with His self (*bi nafsihī*)". And likewise al-Hasan al-Kurjī ash-Shāfi'ī who said in this poem, "Their belief is that Allāh is over the Throne with His Essence (*bi dhātihī*), with His knowledge of [all] the unseen". And upon this poem is written, in the handwriting of al-Allāmah Taqī ad-Dīn bin al-Salāh, "This is the belief of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah". And likewise this phrase was used by Ahmad bin Thābit

¹³⁴⁰ See *Fahm al-Qur'ān* of al-Muhāsibī (pp. 346-355).

¹³⁴¹ Refer to *Mukhtasar al-'Uluww* (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1991), pp. 255-256.

¹³⁴² Referring to what has been quoted above.

at-Turkee, the hāfidh. And Shaykh Abdul Qādir al-Jīlī (or Jīlānī), and the muftī 'Abd al-Azīz al-Qahītī and a group (of scholars)... And what Ibn Abī Zayd and the others meant (by this) was to distinguish between His being with us and His Being above the Throne. So He , as He said, is with us in knowledge, and that He is over the Throne, as he informed us when He said, "**The Most-Merficul ascended (istawā') over the Throne.**" And a group of the People of Knowledge spoke the aforementioned word (*bi dhātihi*), as has preceded, but without doubt, to leave superfluous speech is from the better part of Islām.

And the intent of al-Dhahabī is that as the revealed texts are so apparent, manifest and clear in their meaning, that it is Allāh himself who is above the Throne, above the heavens, and this being immediately understood to anyone who understands the language of the Qur'ān and of the Arabs, without their being any doubt whatsoever in this, then the use of the phrase *bi dhātihi* is superfluous and not needed. And the Jahmiyyah already know the position of al-Dhahabī in that he affirms that Allāh is above the Throne, above the heavens, for he would not have compiled the book *al-'Uluww* if he did not hold this as his belief.

Al-Dhahabī also comments upon the statement of Yahyā bin 'Ammār (d. 422H) who also used the phrase *bi dhātihi*:

We do not say as the Jahmiyyah say that Allāh is inside places and is merged with everything and that we do not know where He is. Rather, we say: He is, with His essence (*bi dhātihi*) above the Throne, and His knowledge encompasses everything.¹³⁴³

With the following remark:

I say: Your saying *bi dhātihi* is from your *kays* (subtlety, intelligence), and it has a good interpretation (*mahmal hasan*), but there is no requirement for it because the one who interprets *istawā'* says that He subdued (*qahara*) with His essence (*bi dhātihi*) and that He conquered (*istatwā bi dhātihi*) without any aider or assistance.

The Jahmite Gibril F. Haddād translated this word *kays* (intelligence, shrewdness) as "bag" (which is *kīs*), and implied that al-Dhahabī was addressing Yahyā bin 'Ammār in a derogatory way, stating, "This

¹³⁴³ *Mukhtasar al-'Uluww* (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1991), p. 263.

(meaning the use of the phrase *bi dhātihi*) is from your own bag", in other words you've pulled it out of your own bag, from your own invention. But al-Dhahabī is saying that whilst this is from your perspicacity in using this phrase in order to distinguish truth from falsehood, it is redundant and not necessary. In the above statement al-Dhahabī goes on to explain that those whom you (Yahyā bin 'Ammār) are refuting by saying *bi dhātihi*, they themselves used the word *bi dhātihi* when making their false *ta'wīl* (figurative explanation) of *istawā'* (ascended) to *istawlā'* (conquered) and *qahara* (subdued), hence your usage of it is redundant. This is what al-Dhahabī means and this is proven further, when al-Dhahabī makes a similar remark upon the saying of Abu Nasr al-Sijzī a little later in the book¹³⁴⁴:

Our Imāms like Sufyān ath-Thawrī (d. 157H), Mālik (d. 179H), Hammād bin Salamah (d. 167H), Hammād bin Zayd (d. 179H), Sufyān bin Uyaynah (d. 197H), al-Fudayl (bin 'Iyād) (d. 187H), Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181H), Ahmad (d. 241H), and Ishāq (d. 238H) are agreed that Allāh is above the Throne *bi dhātihi* (with His essence) and His knowledge is in every place. And that He descends to the lowest heaven, that He becomes angry, and becomes pleased and speaks with whatever He wills.

So al-Dhahabi remarked on this:

I say: This which he has quoted from them is well-known and preserved, except for the phrase *bi dhātihi*, **for this is from his subtlety, intelligence (*kaysihi*)**, he attributed it to them in terms of meaning in order to distinguish between the Throne and what is besides it of the [various] places.¹³⁴⁵

¹³⁴⁴ Refer to *Mukhtasar al-'Uluww* (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1991), p. 267.

¹³⁴⁵ Here, al-Dhahabī explains the purpose and reason for using this phrase which is to rebut the arguments of the Jahmiyyah and Mu'tazilah who fabricated sayings such as the Throne is just a metaphor for the creation, and it means Allāh is loftier than the creation in rank, status and the likes of these *ta'wīls* by which they sought to obliterate the belief of Allāh's 'uluww (with His essence) from the hearts of the people, and the reason for this is because they believe that if it is said about something in the creation that it is *above* that it is in direction, which necessitates place (*makān*) which necessitates it being a body (*jismiyyah*). And these necessities that apply to the creation also apply to speech regarding the creator - and upon this false analogy - they denied that it can be said that Allāh is above His creation. And they need for this rejection was because this belief in all the revealed Books and in the speech of all the sent Messengers clashes with their false and corrupt proof for demonstrating

Al-Dhahabī is alluding to the intent of al-Sijzī in invalidating the ta'wīl of the Jahmiyyah and Mu'tazilah in their saying that Allāh conquered, dominated the creation, so he specified the Throne with al-istiwā, by saying bi *dhātihī*. It is clear that al-Dhahabī is explaining why the Salaf used this word and explains this to be from their perspicacity, given the context, in order to preserve the meaning of truth, even if he himself disapproves of the word and considers it redundant. Indeed al-Dhahabī commented upon the statement of Hammād bin Zayd, "They (the Jahmiyyah) are circulating around [the issue of] wanting to say that there is no deity above the heaven" with the following words:

I say: the saying of the Salaf and the Imāms of the Sunnah, indeed, that of the Companions, and of Allāh, His Messenger and the Believers is that Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic is above the heaven, and that Allāh is over the Throne, and that Allāh is above His seven heavens, and that He descends to the lowest heaven, and their proof for that (lies in) the texts and the narrations. And the saying of the Jahmites: That Allāh, the Blessed and Exalted, is in all places, lofty and exalted is Allāh from their saying. Rather, he is with us wherever we may be with His knowledge [and not with His essence]. And the saying of the later Mutakallimūn (theologians): That Allāh is not above the heaven, and nor over His Throne, and nor over the heavens, and nor on the earth, and nor inside the universe and nor outside the universe and nor is He separate and distinct from His creation and nor connected to them. They said: All of these things are the attributes of bodies (ajsām), and Allāh is far above [being a] body. So Ahl us-Sunnah wal-Athar said to them: We do not delve into that, and we say what we have mentioned [of Allāh being above the Throne] following the (revealed) texts (in that), and even if you claim [what you claim]... we do not speak with your saying. For these attributes of negation [you use] are [but] the qualities of the non-existent. Exalted is Allāh, the Mighty

the universe is created which they took from the Sabean star and idol-worshipping pagan disbelievers who used the language of ajsām (bodies) and a'rād (incidental attributes) to devise such a proof and it was taken from them by al-Ja'd bin Dirham, then the Jahmiyyah, then the Mu'tazilah, and the Ash'arites are in reality following the uṣūl of the Jahmiyyah and Mu'tazilah in this regard, and it is why they are united with the Jahmiyyah, Mu'tazilah, and disbelievers like Ibn Sīnā, to whom they are supposed to be enemies, in opposing Ahl al-Sunnah in this and other issues pertaining to belief in Allāh, the Exalted.

and Majestic from non-existence. Rather, He exists, distinguished from His creation, described with whatever He described Himself with, [namely] that He is above the Throne, without how (*kayf*). Hammād bin Zayd was to the Iraqis the same as what Imām Mālik was to the Hijāzīs in loftiness and knowledge.¹³⁴⁶

Thus, it is established that the Jahmites do not take al-Dhahabī's disapproval of the phrase *bi dhātihī* and use it except out of the greatest of conniving, treachery and dishonesty. Al-Dhahabī continued to write, after his comment on the phrase *bi dhātihī*:¹³⁴⁷

Ibn Abī Zayd and others intended to distinguish between Allāh, the Exalted being with us, and between His, the Exalted, being above the Throne. And so it just as he said, that Allāh is with us in knowledge, and that He is above the Throne where He says, "**The Most Merciful ascended over the Throne**" (20:5). And a group from the Scholars have spoken with this verse as we have already [mentioned] previously, and without doubt, leaving superfluous speech is from the good part of Islām. And Ibn Abī Zayd was from the Scholars residing in al-Maghrib (Morocco), and he was titled, *Mālik al-Saghīr* (the Small Mālik), and he was skilled in the knowledge of the usūl (foundations). Al-Hāfidh Ibn 'Asākīr mentioned him in the book *Tabyīn Kadhīb al-Muftarī Fīma Nusiba ilā al-Ash'arī*, but he did not mention his death (date). He died in 386H and it has been said 389H. And they showed hostility to him for his saying *bi dhātihī*, so if only he had left it.

And the intent of al-Dhahabī is that had Ibn Abī Zayd not used this expression, he would not have been subject to hostility. In another place, al-Dhahabī says:¹³⁴⁸

We have mentioned that there is no need for the phrase *bi dhātihī* (with His essence) and it disturbs the souls, to leave it is more befitting and Allāh knows best.

Al-Dhahabī considers it is better to leave off using this word, not that the underlying meaning intended by this phrase is false and rejected as has been imagined by the Jahmiyyah. And this will become even more clear when we address another of the doubts of the Jahmites regarding al-Dhahabī's authoring of this book in particular.

¹³⁴⁶ *Mukhtasar al-'Uluww* (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1991), p. 146.

¹³⁴⁷ *Mukhtasar al-'Uluww* (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1991), p. 255-256.

¹³⁴⁸ *Al-Siyar* (19/607).

Regarding al-Dhahabi's Authoring of the Book *al-'Uluww*

Also from the talbīs of the contemporary Jahmiyyah is their attempt to cast doubt upon al-Dhahabī's authorship of his book *al-'Uluww lil-'Aliyy il-Ghaffār*. They have sought to discredit this book of al-Dhahabī by claiming he disavowed the book at the end of his life. They depend on a quote from Ibn Nāsir ad-Dīn ad-Dimashqī, who was one of the scribes for one of the available manuscripts. Ad-Dimashqī writes:

The author - رحمه الله - said, in what I found with his own handwriting in the margin to the draft copy (*al-muswaddah*): "Completed in the year 698H, although there are ahādīth within it whose weakness has become apparent to me, and sayings of various factions who took liberties in expression. I neither agree with them regarding those expressions, nor do I blindly follow them, and may Allāh forgive them. I do not hold fast to any matter except what the masses have united upon, and this do I take as my religion, and know that Allāh, there is nothing which is a likeness unto Him."

Compare this translation with that of one of the neo-Jahmites, Gibril F. Haddād, who tried to cast doubt upon the work of al-Dhahabī¹³⁴⁹ through this speech. And the answer to this is as follows:

Firstly, there is nothing in the speech, from near or far, which indicates al-Dhahabī's recantation, remorse or regret for compiling the book, and this insinuation is from the lies and slanders of the contemporary Jahmiyyah against this noble Imām.

Secondly, this Jahmite should not pretend to have not read the very first page of *al-'Uluww*, wherein al-Dhahabī writes, after praising and

¹³⁴⁹ Gibril F. Haddād, and he is from the ru'ūs (heads) of the contemporary Jahmiyyah, wrote, under a heading "Tampering of the Salafis", under the sub-heading "al-Dhahabi", the following:

Now, if it was a "most excellent work" then why did al-Dhahabi disclaim it later in his adult career (he wrote the book as a young man)? He wrote on its manuscript with his own hand: "I have realized it [this book] contains baseless narrations and statements by many people that spoke loosely, and so I neither subscribe to those expressions nor follow those people in them - may Allah forgive them - nor do I consider them binding upon me as long as I live, and this is my firm conviction, and I know that Allah - there is nothing whatsoever like Him."

extolling Allāh, the Most High, and sending prayers and salutations upon the Prophet (ﷺ), the following explanation:

To proceed: In the year 698H I compiled ahādīth (Prophetic narrations) and āthār (reports) regarding the issue of *al-'Uluww*, I missed the opportunity to comment upon some of them, and I did not cover fully what was reported regarding that... So now (in this work), I will organize all of it and clarify it here ...

This shows that al-Dhahabī wrote a draft of the book in the early part of his life (at the age of twenty-five), and did not give full attention to the veracity of the *ahādīth* and *āthār* and some expressions in the speech of those whom he quoted. Thus, he may have changed his views on the authenticity of some of the ahādīth and āthār when composing that early draft - not that he regretted compiling such as work, otherwise he would not be writing the above lines!

Thirdly, in the 1420H, Dar al-Watan, print of *al-'Uluww*, the verifier, Shaykh 'Abd Allāh bin Sālih al-Barrāk depended upon a total of nine manuscripts in publishing his edition. In his introduction he explains that seven of these manuscripts all agree indicating they are derived from a single issuance (of the original), with one of them being an abridged version (*mukhtasar*). And the remaining two agree upon a separate issuance. He explains that al-Dhahabī had two stages in authoring *al-'Uluww*. The first in his earlier years, when he compiled a draft copy which he may have titled *Kitāb al-'Arsh* or *al-'Arshiyah*. This was at the age of twenty-five years, in 698H. Then after a period, he returned to this draft, inspected it, added to it, organized the statements according to the *tabaqāt* of the Scholars, and re-issued it and spread it with the name *al-'Uluww*. Al-Barrāk proceeds to strengthen this explanation by demonstrating al-Dhahabī's weakening of certain ahādīth and āthār which he authenticated in the earlier draft. And al-Barrāk explains that Ibn Nāsir ad-Dīn ad-Dimashqī came across both versions, the draft copy and the later complete version, and thus made mention of what al-Dhahabī wrote on the draft copy without relying upon it in his own manuscript, rather he depended upon the later, complete version.

Fourthly, and finally, it is clear that al-Dhahabī did not show remorse for writing the book, rather he merely indicated that in its earlier draft form it was lacking. Thus, he came back to complete the book,

indicating his great concern for this subject, and the best way this can be demonstrated is by quoting his final words in the book:

I (al-Dhahabī) say: Yes, this is what the deniers of the '*Uluww* (highness) of the Lord, Mighty and Majestic, have depended upon. And they turned away from the requirement of the Book, the Sunnah, the sayings of the Salaf and the innate dispositions of the whole of creation. What they claim to be necessitated (from affirming Allāh's highness) is only applicable to created bodies. Yet there is nothing like Allāh and the necessities arising from the clear and evident texts (of the Book and the Sunnah) are also true. However, we do not make use of any expression except one that comes through a narration.

In addition to this we say: We do not accept that the Creator's being upon His Throne and above the heavens, necessitates that He is confined (in space) and in a direction, since whatever is below the Throne is said to be confined (in space) and in direction. However, what is above the Throne is not like that. And Allāh is above the Throne as the very first generation are unanimously agreed upon and as the Imāms after them have quoted from them. They said this in refutation of the Jahmiyyah, those who said that He is in every place seeking as a proof His saying, '**And He is with you...**' So these are the two sayings which were present in the time of the Tābī'īn and their successors who came after them. And they are the two sayings that can be understood in the statement.

As for the third saying which arose later which is that "Allāh the Most High is not in any of the places, nor outside of them, nor above His Throne, not attached (merged) with His creation, nor separate from it, nor is His essence (*dhāt*) confined in space, nor is He separate and distinct from His creation, nor is He in any of the directions, nor is He exempt from of any of the directions, and nor this and nor that", then this is something that cannot be comprehended nor understood, along with the fact that within it is opposition to the verses (of the Book) and the narrations (from the Salaf). Therefore flee with your religion and beware of the opinions of the Mutakallimūn (Theologians). Believe in Allāh and what has come from Him upon the desired intent of Allāh, then submit your affair to Him and there is no power nor movement except by Allāh. The book is completed and all praise is to Allāh alone.

Thus, is the way of Ahl ul-Bid'ah exposed, they are not able to establish their doctrines through revealed texts upon the understanding of the Righteous Salaf or of the Imāms of the Muslims in the first four

centuries after hirah (before 400H), and have to resort to twisting the sayings of the Scholars, lying upon them and trying to deceive the people at large.