

The Jahmites and the Ḥadīth Mentioning “Harwalah”

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The great Imām of the Salaf, ‘**Abd Allāh bin al-Mubārak** (d. 181H) said: “Whoever says to you so and so is a Mushabbih, then know that he is a Jahmite.”¹ And Imām al-Barbahārī (d. 329H) said: “If you hear a man say: ‘So and so is a mushabbih’ and ‘So and so speaks about tashbīh’, then know that he is a Jahmite.”² The Jahmites—operating upon the notion of divine perfection outlined by Aristotle and Plato which entered the theology of the Jews, Christians and later, that of the Muslims as “ilm al-kalām”—are always very keen on finding ways to accuse Ahl al-Sunnah of being Mushabbihah.

There occurs in the ḥadīth qudsī related by al-Bukhārī (no. 7405) and Muslim (2675), the statement of Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ): “I am [towards my servant] as my servant’s expectation of Me and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me in his self, I will remember Him in My self, and if he remembers me in a gathering, I will remember him in a better gathering. If he advances towards Me [in obedience] by a handspan, I

¹ As related by Ibn Mandah, refer to Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā (5/393).

² Refer to *Sharḥ al-Sunnah of al-Barbahārī*. Dār al-Minhāj (1426H), p. 115.

advance towards him [with acceptance and reward] by a forearm's length, and if he advances towards Me [in obedience] by a forearm's length, I advance towards Him [with acceptance and reward] by an extended arm's length. And if he comes to me [in obedience] walking, I come to him [with acceptance and reward] hurriedly. And whoever met me with an earth-full of sin, I would meet him with its like in forgiveness.”³

The Jahmites due to ignorance, desires and speciousness of intellect have tried to level the accusation of tashbīh against Ahl al-Sunnah with the claim that they believe this ḥadīth affirms “running” for Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) similar to how a man runs! This is despite the fact that the **tarkīb (composition)** and **siyāq (sequence, context)** of the ḥadīth is sufficiently clear, even at first glance, in indicating the apparent meaning (ẓāhir) of the text: Allāh hastily responds to His servant when His servant has good thoughts about Him, remembers Him and does deeds of piety. That Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) hastens to accept the servant's deed, grants reward and grants firmness to His servant in the path His servant has taken.

Given this, Salafī scholars such as Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān have made it clear that the adverb “(هرولةً) harwalatan” for “(أتيتته) ataytuhū” does not represent an attribute, based on the context of the ḥadīth.⁴ The Shaykh said regarding the last part of this ḥadīth:

³ Related by al-Bukhārī (no. 7405) and Muslim (2675), with his wording. This was related by al-Bukhārī in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd in the chapter of affirming a self (nafs) for Allāh and the chapter of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) narrating from his Lord.

⁴ Other Salafī scholars do hold that harwalah is an attribute. They apply to it the principle of “ithbāt bilā kayf” (affirmation without a how), and treat it like attributes such as ityān, majīr, nuzūl, istiwā’.

“With the meaning: Whoever hastens towards My pleasure and obedience, I will hasten to forgiveness of his sins and fulfilling his needs. Its meaning is not the harwalah that is known to us. Rather, it is explained by the end of the ḥadīth, with his saying: ‘If he was to ask Me, I would certainly give to him, and if he was to seek refuge in Me, I would certainly give him refuge.’ Hence, the meaning of harwalah here is hastening to fulfil the needs of His servant, just as the servant hastens to Allāh’s obedience. So does the servant run in reality (i.e. physically), or in meaning, conceptually? In this is a refutation against some of the hasty ones who affirm harwalah for Allāh. Rather, this [action of Allāh] is from the actions of [just] recompense, just as the Exalted said: **‘So they mock at them [the believers], Allāh will [in return] mock them...’** (9:79), ‘... **‘Indeed we were only mocking’. Allāh mocks them... ’** (2:14-15), **‘And then planned and Allāh too planned...’** (3:54).⁵ Thus, it is necessary to have knowledge of these mighty principles so that a person can be upon insight and know the doctrine of the Salaf therein, those who are more firm than him and more knowledgeable. He should not be independent with his own understanding and intellect.”⁶

In Lisān al-‘Arab of Ibn Manẓūr, one meaning of harwala is explained as “to hurry (إسراع)”. He said: “And in the ḥadīth, ‘Whoever comes to me walking, I will come to him in haste (harwalatan)’, and it is an expression for the hastiness of the response of Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) and [His] acceptance of the servant’s

⁵ These actions are from the angle of muqābalah, meaning reciprocation, returning an act with its like, so these are not turned into attributes.

⁶ Sharḥ al-Sunnah with al-Fawzān’s commentary (Maktabah al-Hudā al-Muḥammadī, 1429H), p. 139.

repentance, and His compassion and mercy.”⁷ As such, the haste and swiftness here is in relation to Allāh’s action of rewarding the servant and showing mercy to Him.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn explained in *Sharḥ al-Aqīdah al-Safārīniyyah* that when a person hears this part of the ḥadīth, it can enter into his mind that Allāh is hasty in rewarding His servant, and that Allāh the Exalted is swifter in rewarding than His servant is in acting in obedience.⁸

The Shaykh also pointed out the scholarly difference among Ahl al-Sunnah in this matter because the issue of *harwalah* being an attribute having an actual reality (similar to how *nuzūl* and *istiwā* have their realities) is not as certain as the indication of the texts of *nuzūl* and *istiwā* that these attributes have realities (which are of course unknown to us). Hence, the difference among Ahl al-Sunnah in interpretation of the ḥadīth. Those who affirm *harwalah* as an attribute do so in accordance with the general principles of Ahl al-Sunnah of negation of likeness in terms of its reality. The Shaykh also explained the two views when asked about *harwalah*, saying: “The scholars differed regarding His saying... so some of them said: The meaning is that the one who did good deeds in a slow manner, Allāh will reward him in a swift manner and that this is not an affirmation of ‘*harwalah*’... and among the scholars are those who say: We affirm it upon its apparentness and we say Allāh has *harwalah* which befits His majesty and grandeur.”⁹

⁷ *Lisān al-‘Arab* (p. 4657).

⁸ *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Safārīniyyah* (1/308). The Shaykh affirms this attribute for Allāh the Exalted as occurs in *Majmū‘ Fatawā wa Rasā’il* (1/182), treating it as an attribute of His actions (*ṣifāt af‘ālihi*).

⁹ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLx9SjNnMA8>

In this second view, just as affirming life and hearing for Allāh does not necessitate that His life and hearing have the same realities as that of His creatures, then affirming harwalah for Allāh does not necessitate that it has the likeness of that of His creatures, and this is for those who affirm this as an attribute from Ahl al-Sunnah. However, that which is correct in our view is that the context of the ḥadīth makes it clear that the haste and swiftness being referred to here is the haste in action, that Allāh is swifter in His action of rewarding than the servant is in his action of obeying His Lord. Shaykh al-Fawzān explains that this ḥadīth is from the angle of ikhbār (reporting) and not from the angle of tasmiyah (naming). In other words, it is not establishing an attribute for Allāh.¹⁰

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah also refuted the claim of al-Rāzī (d. 606H) who was attempting to justify false, unfounded, corrupt ta`wīl by claiming that in this ḥadīth, harwalah is not treated as an attribute by consensus, and thus must be an instance of ta`wīl. Ibn Taymiyyah's response to him was that the text does not relate to Allāh's attributes in the first place and that even though the notion of distance was used in the ḥadīth it is known that a servant becoming closer to his Lord is not in terms of distance but in terms of obedience and in terms of the soul's motion towards Allāh, towards compliance, submission and obedience, and that this is apparent from the text itself. So from the angle of muqābalah (reciprocation) Allāh hastens with acceptance, reward and mercy.¹¹

¹⁰ Refer to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ft8STcGcznw>.

¹¹ Refer to Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah (6/101-104), and this was also pointed out by Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh in al-Ajwibah wal-Buḥūth wal-Mudārasāt al-Mushtamalah 'alayhā al-Durūs al-'Ilmiyyah (2/ 304).

Finally, it should be noted that Ahl al-Sunnah make use of sound ta'wīl (interpretation) when the context justifies it, when it is warranted by the context. But the Jahmiyyah make use of false ta'wīl because they operate on the notion of divine perfection taken from Aristotle and Plato, and hence, whatever texts clash with this notion must be distorted.¹²

As such, a correct explanation of the word harwalah in this ḥadīth based upon its tarkīb and siyāq (composition, sequence and context) has been explained by Shaykh al-Fawzān. This is not an instance of that type of ta'wīl engaged in by the Jahmites which is in reality distortion and fabrication upon the text.

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14th Jumādā al-Ūlā 1441 / 9h January 2020 (1.11)

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¹² Thus, any attribute or action that comes under the Ten Categories (al-Maqūlāt al-'Ashar) of Aristotle, then it gives the presumption of tajsīm and tashbīh and must be interpolated (i.e. distorted). This is the principle they are operating upon, because to them, the language of divine perfection on the tongues of these star-worshipping idolators is clearer than the language of the Prophets and Messengers. Thus, the speech of the Prophets is evaluated and then interpolated in light of that. However, those who employed ta'wīl fell into inconsistencies in the actual ta'wīls they made for the texts of the attributes. For this reason, there appeared much difference among those who adopted ta'wīl as a mechanism to purify revealed texts from the presumed tajsīm and tashbīh. So another group, seeing the inconsistencies in the approach of ta'wīl, decided that tafwīd (denying the texts have any meanings that can be known) was a safer, more consistent approach.