

ALLAH is Now as HE ever was

The saying "Allah existed eternally without a place, and He is now as He ever was" is related - without chain - from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib -- Allah be well-pleased with him. [1] Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Sakandari (d. 709) cites it as one of his Hikam (#34).

The Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- said: "Allah was when there was nothing else than Him, and His Throne was upon the water, and He wrote in the Reminder (al-dhikr) all things, and He created the heavens and the earth." [2]

Imam Abu Hanifa (d. 150) said: "Had He been in a place and needing to sit and rest before creating the Throne, then the question 'Where was Allah?' would have applied to Him, which is impossible."

The Ash'ari Imam Ibn 'Abd al-Salam said in his statement of doctrine:

He was before He brought place and time into existence, and He is now as He ever was. [4]

The position of Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari is similarly summed up by Abu al-Qasim ibn 'Asakir:

The Najjariyya said: 'The Creator is in every place without indwelling (hulûl) nor direction (jiha).' The Hashwiyya and mushabbiha said: 'The Creator took His place (hâllun) on the Throne, the Throne is His location (makân), and He is sitting on top of it.' Al-Ash'ari took a middle ground and said: 'Allah existed when there was no place; then He created the Throne and the Footstool (al-'arsh wa al-kursi) without ever being in need of place, and He is, after creating place, exactly as He was before creating it.' [5]

This is the position of al-Ash'ari also as given by Ibn Jahbal al-Kilabi (d. 733): "The words of the Shaykh [Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari] concerning direction are: 'Allah was when there was no place, then He created the Throne and the Footstool, without ever needing place, and He is, after creating place, exactly as He was before creating it.'" [6] Ibn Jahbal also says in his Refutation of Ibn Taymiyya:

22. We say: Our doctrine is that Allah is pre-eternal and pre-existent (qadîm azalî). He does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble Him. He has no direction nor place. He is not subject to time nor duration. Neither "where" (ayn) nor "at" (hayth) applies to Him. He shall be seen, but not as part of an encounter, nor in the sense of an encounter (yurâ lâ 'an muqâbala wa lâ 'alâ muqâbala). He was when there was no place, He created place and time, and He is now as He ever was. This is the madhhab of Ahl al-Sunna and the doctrine of the shaykhs of the [Sufi] Path - may Allah be well-pleased with them. [7]

30. Muhammad ibn Mahbub, Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi's servant, said: "Abu 'Uthman said to me one day: 'O Muhammad! If someone asked you: Where is the One you worship, what would you answer?' I said: 'I would answer: He is where He never ceased to be.' He said: 'What if he asked: Where was He in pre-eternity?' I said: 'I would answer: Where He is now. That is: He was when there was no place, and He is now as He ever was.' Abu 'Uthman was pleased with my answer. He took off his shirt and gave it to me." [8]

Al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi said in the chapter of Islamic doctrine in al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya:

[144] He has no conceivable likeness whatsoever (laysa lahu mithlun ma'qul), nor can minds represent Him. Time does not confine Him, nor place lift nor transport Him. Rather, He was when there was no place, and He is now as He ever was.

[145] He created fixity (al-mutamakkin) and place (al-makân), [9] brought time into existence, and said: "I am the One, the Ever-Living." [10] Preserving His creations in no way tires Him. Attributes which do not describe Him and are devised

Islamic Article: ALLAH is Now as HE ever was

by creatures do not apply to Him. [11]

[146] Exalted is He far above being indwelt by originated matters, or indwelling them, or that they be after Him or that He be before them. Rather, we say: 'He was and there was nothing with him.' [12] For the words 'before' and 'after' are among the locutions of Time, which He invented. [13]

Sulayman ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1817CE), the Wahhabi founder's grandson, said:

Whoever believes or says: Allah is in person (bi dhātihi) in every place, or in one place: he is a disbeliever. It is obligatory to declare that Allah is separate (bā'in) from His creation, established over His throne without modality or likeness or exemplarity. Allah was and there was no place, then He created place and He is exalted as He was before He created place. [14]

The Imams strongly refuted those who suggested that the Throne existed together with Allah. Among these refutations is al-Bayhaqi's section entitled "The Beginning of Creation" in al-Asma' wa al-Sifat, [15] and Ibn Hajar who wrote the following in his commentary on the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Tawhid in Sahih al-Bukhari:

Al-Bukhari named the Chapter on the Throne: "Chapter entitled: {And His Throne was upon the water} (11:7) {And He is Lord of the tremendous Throne} (9:129)." In this way he mentioned parts from two Qur'anic verses, and it is good to state this second part after the first one, to respond to those who misunderstood the hadith: "There was Allah, and there was nothing before Him; and His throne was upon the water," mistakenly thinking that it meant that the Throne was always alongside Allah [i.e. existing without beginning]. This is an incorrect position, as is the belief of some thinkers that the Throne is the Creator and the Maker! Perhaps those who held this, such as Abu Ishaq al-Harawi, used for evidence the hadith of ibn Abbas from Mujahid narrated through Sufyan al-Thawri: "Allah was on His throne before He created anything; the first thing He created was the pen," [16] and this "first" is interpreted as the creation of Heavens and Earth and their contents.

'Abd al-Razzaq mentioned in his commentary on Allah's saying: {And His Throne was upon the water} (11:7) that this (the Throne) was the beginning of His creation before He created the heaven, and that His Throne was made from a red emerald. Thus al-Bukhari's mention of "The Lord of the tremendous Throne" alludes to the fact that the Throne is a servant and that it is lorded over.

He ends his chapter with the hadith: "There, I saw Musa holding the leg of the Throne." [17] By confirming that the Throne has legs, the author proves that it is an object that was put together, possessing constituent parts. Any such object must have been created. End of Ibn Hajar's words. [18]

Al-Munawi quotes the following conclusion on the verse of the Throne upon the water:

Al-Tunisi said that the verse {And His Throne was upon the water} (11:7) contains a clear proof that direction is impossible for Allah -- may He be exalted -- because the Throne settled (istaqarra) upon the water, therefore, since natural custom was broken by the settlement of that huge mass (jirm) - the largest of all masses - upon the water, contrary to the habitual fact that such a mass - or, rather, much less than it! - does not usually settle upon the water: it becomes known with certitude that istiwa' over it is not an istiwa' of settledness nor fixity. [19]

NOTES

[1] As cited by 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi (d. 429) in his al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq (p. 256).

[2] Narrated from 'Imran ibn Husayn by al-Bukhari, Sahih, book of the Beginning of Creation. See above, n. 432 for other wordings of this hadith.

Islamic Article: ALLAH is Now as HE ever was

[3] Abu Hanifa, Wasiyya al-Imam al-A'zam Abu Hanifa, ed. Fu'ad 'Ali Rida (Beirut : Maktabat al-Jamahir, 1970) p. 10.

[4] Ibn 'Abd al-Salam, al-Mulha fi l`tiqad Ahl al-Haqq in his Rasa'il al-Tawhid (p. 11).

[5] In Tabyin Kadhif al-Muftari (Saqqa ed. p. 150).

[6] In Tabaqat al-Shafi`iyya al-Kubra (9:79).

[7] In Tabaqat al-Shafi`iyya (9:41).

[8] In Tabaqat al-Shafi`iyya (9:43).

[9] Or: "He created place and all that takes place."

[10] I.e. I am in no need of either of you.

[11] Lâ tarji'u ilayhi sifatun lam yakun 'alayhâ min sun'ati al-masnû'ât.

[12] The Prophet (said: "Allah was when there was nothing else than Him, and His Throne was upon the water, and He wrote in the Reminder (al-dhikr) all things, and He created the heavens and the earth." Narrated from 'Imran ibn Husayn by al-Bukhari, Sahih, book of the Beginning of Creation. There are other wordings of this hadith such as the wordings: kâna allâhu wa lâ shay'a ma'ahu / ghayruhu / qablahu - "Allah was and there was nothing other than Him /together with Him /before Him." Narrated from Burayda by al-Hakim in al-Mustadrak (2:341), who declared it sound (sahih) - al-Dhahabi concurred - and from 'Imran ibn Husayn by Bukhari, Ibn Hibban with two sound chains in his Sahih (14:7 #6140, 14:11 #6142), and Ibn Abi Shayba in his Musannaf.

[13] From 'Uthman Yahya's edition of al-Futuhât al-Makkiyya (1:164), Part Three of "The Meccan Conquest," chapter entitled "Attachment Comprising the Essential Creed of All, Which is the Doctrine of the People of Islam Agreed To Without Examining the Proof Nor the Presentation of Evidence."

[14] In his al-Tawdih 'an Tawhid al-Khallaq fi Jawab Ahl al-'Iraq (1319/1901, p. 34, and new ed. al-Riyad: Dar Tibah, 1984).

[15] Cf. Al-Bayhaqi, al-Asma' wa al-Sifat, chapter entitled "The Beginning of Creation": Allah (said: (He it is Who produces creation then reproduces it((30:27). 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As narrated that the Prophet (said: "Allah foreordained (qaddara) all the destinies (al-maqâdir) before creating the heavens and the earth by fifty thousand years." [Narrated from 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As by al-Tirmidhi (hasan sahih gharib) and Ahmad; also by Muslim with the following wording: "Allah inscribed (kataba) the destinies of all created things before creating the heavens and the earth by fifty thousand years, while His Throne stood upon the water (wa 'arshuhu 'alâ al-mâ')."] 'Imran ibn Husayn narrated ... that the Prophet said - Allah bless and greet him: "Allah was when there was nothing other than Him. His Throne stood upon the water..." His words "Allah was when nothing was other than Him" indicate that there was nothing else other than Him - neither water, nor the Throne, nor anything else, since all of that is "other than Him." His words: "His Throne stood upon the water" means that He then created water, and He created the Throne upon the water, after which He inscribed all things in the Remembrance, as we narrated in the hadith of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As.

[16] Narrated from Mujahid from Ibn 'Abbas by 'Abd ibn Humayd as mentioned by al-Suyuti in al-Durr al-Manthur for the verse {Lo! We have created every thing by measure} (54:49).

[17] Part of a longer hadith narrated from Abu Hurayra by al-Bukhari, Tirmidhi (hasan sahih), and Ibn Majah; and from Abu Sa'id al-Khudri by al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad.

[18] Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bari (1959 ed. 13:409f.). Ibn Hajar elsewhere (6:290 #3019) examines the different versions of the hadith "Allah was and there was nothing other than/ with/ before Him" to conclude that the evidence pointed to the creation of water first, then the Throne, then the Pen.

[19] In al-Munawi, Fayd al-Qadir, under the entry for the hadith: "Allah inscribed the destinies of all created things before creating the heavens and the earth by fifty thousand years, while His Throne stood upon the water." Narrated from 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As by al-Tirmidhi (hasan sahih gharib) and Ahmad; also by Muslim with the following wording: "Allah inscribed (kataba) the destinies of all created things before creating the heavens and the earth by fifty thousand years, while His Throne stood upon the water (wa 'arshuhu 'alâ al-mâ')."

Blessings and peace on the Prophet, his Family, and all his Companions.

Copyright (c) 1997 - 2005 by
NooreMadinah Network
<http://www.NooreMadinah.net>