



# The Lizard Hole

Examples of Judeo-Christian Influence  
in Muslim Belief and Practice

## **The Lizard Hole: Examples of Judeo-Christian Influence in Muslim Belief and Practice**

By  
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In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious the Most Merciful...

All praise is due to Allah, the Exalted and Majestic; the One who has no partners or associates; the One who provides the light of guidance to His slaves so that they may attain spiritual perfection and illumination by means of it. May Allah send His choicest blessings upon His slave and seal of the Messengers, Muhammad bin 'Abdullah. May Allah bless his pure Progeny, righteous Companions, and those that follow them in excellence until the Day of Judgment. As to what follows...

Ever since the emergence of Islam, the fledgling Muslim community had the cumbersome duty to distinguish itself from the other two Monotheist faiths on the Arabian Peninsula. Pre-Islamic Arabia had vestiges of Jewish and Christian communities amongst its population. There were numerous tribes who adhered to the Jewish or Christian faith. Various researches have been done regarding the presence of these two faith communities in Arabia.

When the revelation of the Qur'an reached the shepherd, Muhammad bin 'Abdullah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, the Divine message seemed akin to that of the pre-existing faiths. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, spoke of the Divine Oneness of Allah and preached to his people the obligation of wilful submission to this reality.

While in his hometown Mecca, he was met by opposition from the Qurayshi idolaters. They chided him that his new-fangled faith was the same as those People of the Book. They told him that he followed {"tales of the ancients"} (Q. 68:15). They also opted to remain upon their idolatry as the Exalted quotes their statement: {"Verily we found our forefathers upon a religion and we follow their footsteps"} (Q 43:23). The short-sighted Meccan idolaters were not about to exchange their pantheon of iconography for an unseen Deity.

They saw that the religion preached by their kinsman was a potential danger to the social hierarchical system they had in place. For example, their Black and Persian slaves declared their belief in the Oneness of Allah and saw themselves as equal to their Arab owners. This became a problem to the idolatrous Meccan aristocracy, so they ousted this Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and his early followers from their home city.

When the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and the nascent believers fled, they were welcomed by the tribes of Medina who rejoiced at the coming of a Prophet from amongst them with a message similar to that of their Christian and Jewish neighbours.

Upon arriving to Medina, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, began to

establish a state with him as its political, social, and religious leader. He had assumed the role of his brother-prophet Moses, upon him be peace, in that he was to take the group of scattered peoples and assemble them to form a community built upon common belief and practice. Laws were established, punitive measures were taken, and this new community of faith was to be the vanguard of the Divine Message to man. Indeed, this community consisted of Arabs, non-Arabs, Black Africans, Persians, Romans, Hebrews, and other groups.

This movement did not go unnoticed by the Jewish and Christian communities surrounding them. Indeed, many of these groups amongst the People of the Book saw this new religious community as a threat. Although the Prophet and the believers allowed these communities to maintain their own religious beliefs and practices under the agreement of a paid protection tax (*jizya*), the threat of the Muslim community was more so ideological than financial.

The Muslims represented everything that they were to be, an existent conduit through whom the call to Divine Oneness will be issued forth. The Christians were not successful in converting the masses of Bedouins and Arab city-dwellers to their religion. The Jews, although not a proselytizing faith, saw that their own identity could possibly be at threat. The call of Islam seemed to be an unstoppable juggernaut that would eventually encompass the Arabian Peninsula.

The Qur'ān is rife with examples of the attempts of the People of the Book to challenge the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. They felt that if they could outwit the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, they could easily demoralize him and stop the influence of this emerging faith. One example is instructive.

We relate an account narrated in the book *Tanbīh al-Ghāfilīn 'an Fadā'il at-Ṭalibiyīn*. In this book, Hākim al-Jashmi related the incident in which a delegation of Christians from Najrān agreed to meet the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. Al-Hākim al-Jashmi reported:

They came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and kneeled down in front of him. The bishop came in front of him and said: "O Abul-Qāsim, who was Moses' father?" He replied: ((Imrān)). He then asked: "Who was Joseph's father?" He replied: ((Jacob)). He then asked: "Who is your father?" He replied: ((Abdullah bin 'Abdul-Muttalib)). He then asked: "So, who was Jesus' father?" The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, became silent and waited upon the divine inspiration. Then Gabriel descended and revealed this verse: {Verily, the likeness of Jesus to Allah is like that of Adam. He created him from clay and said to him: "Be!" And he was. This is the truth from your Lord so do not be amongst the doubters} (Q. 3:59-60). He recited it to them. The bishop became agitated and looked down. He lifted his head and said: "You claim that Allah has inspired you to say that Jesus was created from dust. You may find that in what was inspired to you, but we do not find that in what was inspired to us. Neither do these Jews find that in what was inspired to them!" Then Gabriel descended and revealed this verse: {And if anyone should argue with thee about this [truth] after all the knowledge that has come to you, say: "Come! Let us summon our

sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves; and then let us pray [together] humbly and ardently, and let us invoke Allah’s curse upon the liars.”}

According to the import of this narration, the Christians of Najrān sought to challenge the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, by debate. They sought to defame him by having him admit that Jesus’ father must have been Allah since he affirmed the supernatural nature of his birth. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, met this challenge with help from above.

There are also examples of the Jews challenging the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. In the book *Yanābī’ an-Nasīha fil-Aqīdat as-Šahiha*, Amīr Badr ad-Dīn bin al-Hussein, upon him be peace, related an account on the authority of Imam ‘Ali bin Abi Ṭalib, may Allah ennoble his face. The report is as follows:

Some Jews came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and said: “Describe your Lord to us.” The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, became silent because he was amazed at what they said and because he wanted to wait until the command of Allah came. They then said: “We describe our Lord with greatness! Our Lord, Allah, holds the heavens on His Finger on the Day of Judgment, as well as the seas on one Finger, the rest of things on one Finger. His other Hand is free.” He [i.e. the Prophet] belied them and then Allah revealed the verse: {They have not made for Allah a just appraisal...} (i.e. they did not magnify Him in what He is deserving to be magnified). {...the whole earth will be in His Grasp on the Day of Judgment} (this means His Dominion). {The heavens will be folded in His Right Hand} (this refers to His Rule). {He is Glorified and Exalted above all of what they say} (i.e. this refers to describing Him with limbs and imagery) (Q. 39:67).

A similar report exists in *Šahih al-Bukhāri* with a slight variation. It is narrated on the authority of Abdullah bin Mas’ūd and it says:

A Jew [and in other narrations, “a rabbi from amongst the Jews” and “a man from the People of the Book”] came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and asked said: “O Muhammad, we find that Allah holds the heavens on one Finger, the earth on one Finger, the mountains on one Finger, the trees on one Finger, and the rest of creation on one Finger. I am the king!” The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, laughed until his molars showed—confirming what he said<sup>1</sup>. He then recited: (({They have not made for Allah a just appraisal...}))

In this example, the challengers [or challenger, depending on the narration] ascribed corporeality to Allah by his assertion. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, denied such and countered

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the commentator of *Šahih al-Bukhāri*, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalāni stated that the phrase “confirming what he said” is an addition of a sub-narrator and not originally part of the *hadīth* (See *Fat-hul Bāri Sharh Sahīh al-Bukhāri*).

with a verse of the Qur'ān revealed to him.

This in no way implies that world Jewry ascribes to the belief of Allah's corporeality. The Jewish religion denies the possibility that Allah has a body, as is evident in their books. Rather, this is an example of a person or group amongst the Jews in Arabia who held such belief.

There are many more examples of exchanges between the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and the People of the Book. One can see these examples in the Qur'ān and Prophetic *hadīths*. As long as the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was alive, the designs of those People of the Book who sought to undermine the Messenger of Allah and his community, was met by the Messenger of Allah himself.

Realizing the inefficacy of their engaging the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, into theological debate, some of the People of the Book sought military confrontation with him and the Muslims. For example, some of the Jews aligned themselves with the pagan Meccan opposition and desired to wipe this new faith out by means of physical force. However, they and their allies were defeated.

After suffering defeat at the hands of the Muslims, they decided to regroup their efforts. Some of them decided to join this new faith. Former rabbis and clergymen embraced the faith of Islam. Although some of them became Muslims out of sincerity and strong conviction, others of them pretended Islam to infiltrate this new faith from within. Many of them saw the opportunity to corrupt the faith of the people by introducing new ideas and practices to the fledging community.

However, there were others who might have been sincere but felt that their knowledge of the previous revealed scripture enabled them to direct the ideology of the Muslims. After all, the Arabs did not possess a Holy Book to refer to and did not have the luxury of belonging to the People of the Book. The former rabbis and priests became consulted regarding the affairs of the religion and matters of the Unseen especially. They believed that their previous knowledge of the Holy Scripture gave them the permission to answer the questions of the unlettered Muslims.

It is for this reason that the Israeli narrations (*Isrā'iliyyat*) and Christian narrations (*Masīhiyyat*) began to develop. Some of these narrations even found themselves being attributed to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny! Many of these narrations contained fantastic accounts and descriptions of the Unseen. No doubt, many of the Muslims were captivated by the expertise of the former rabbis and priests!

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was not unmindful of the influence of the People of Book upon the Muslims. It is even recorded that when he saw one of his Companions studying a book in Hebrew, he censured him from doing so. The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, probably realized the effect that the former People of the Book could have upon the Muslims. This is why he would take advantage of any opportunity to differentiate the practices and beliefs of the Muslims from that of the Jews and Christians.

### **Examples of the Prophet Distinguishing the Muslims from the People of the Book**

There are numerous examples in Islamic history in which Allah and His Prophet, peace and

blessings be upon him and his progeny, legislated matters to differentiate the Muslims from the People of the Book. One example of this is the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca. As we know, the *qibla*, or direction one faces to pray, is a central part of any religious faith. The *qibla* is a distinguishing factor that connects the believer geographically to the place considered most holy. The Jews face Jerusalem, the Muslims face Mecca, the Sikhs face the Punjab, and so forth. Originally, Christian churches in the Western world were built to face the east. This is the origin of the word “orientation.” The word “orient” means “east.” So many Christian churches in the Occident faced the *qibla* of Jerusalem, as well.

At an early stage of revelation, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and the Muslims faced Jerusalem to pray. This is an example of one of those actions in which the Prophet followed the People of the Book until he heard revelation commanding him otherwise. While the Muslims faced Jerusalem to pray, they enjoyed the feeling of solidarity with the People of the Book in their location. Of course, the Jews were enamoured by the fact that this community of Unitarians faced the location of their former Temple to address the Lord of the Worlds. Ideologically, this posited that the Muslims were to take direction from the People of the Book--those whom they shared a *qibla*.

However, in the verse {The fools among the people say: “What has turned them from the *qibla* that they used to [face]?!”} (Q. 2:142), the Muslims were told change their direction of *qibla* from Jerusalem to the Sanctified House in Mecca. Such action, as Allah says, was a test to determine where the Muslims’ allegiances lie. Some of the hypocrites who pretended Islam benefited greatly from the Jews whom they had established trade relations with. These Jews were happy with the Muslims while they prayed towards their *qibla*. However, once the direction came to change the *qibla*, these Jews sought to break trade relations with these hypocrites. The hypocrites, in turn, sought to salvage their economic interests by questioning the directives of Allah--thereby identifying themselves as hypocrites.

In addition to exposing hypocrisy, another thing that the changing of the *qibla* accomplished was that the Muslims were to now be considered a distinct community by their own *qibla*--one that was the original *qibla* for mankind. Symbolically, this meant that the Muslims were to be independent from the People of the Book. In this way, Allah was emphasizing to the Muslim that despite perceived financial and ideological setbacks, they were to adhere solely to the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, for direction and not the People of the Book.

Another example is the fast of ‘Ashūra. The fast of ‘Ashūra refers to fasting on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Muharram. It is narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* on the authority of Ibn al-‘Abbās:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, used to fast on the day of ‘Ashūra and commanded others to fast. They said to him: “O Messenger of Allah, it is this day that is held in high esteem by the Jews and the Christians!” The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((Next year, if Allah wills, we shall fast on the 9<sup>th</sup>)). The next year did not come except that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, had passed away.

In this example, the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was so keen to differentiate the Muslims from the People of the Book in that he designated a fast day other than

that of the Jews and Christians. Although Muslims still fast on the 10<sup>th</sup>, they are encouraged to fast on the 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> to be different from the People of the Book.

Indeed, the Prophet of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, knew that the majority of Muslims would eventually begin to adhere to the practices and beliefs of the People of the Book. The books of *hadīth* narrate a famous statement in which Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prophesied that his community would adapt Jewish and Christian practices. Imam Muslim records in his *Ṣaḥīh* on the authority of Abu Saʿīd al-Khudri:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((You will follow the ways (*sunan*) of those before you inch by inch and step by step. Inasmuch as if they were to enter a lizard hole, you would follow them!)) We said: “O Messenger of Allah, the Jews and Christians?” He replied: ((Who else?!))

### **The Source of Guidance after the Prophet**

During the lifetime of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, he was able to curtail the influence of Judeo-Christian communities upon the Muslims. However, after he passed from this world, some of the Muslims once again took advice and doctrine from the former Jewish and Christian sages. To some of the Muslims, the absence of the source of Divine Revelation in the form of the Prophet left a void that could only be filled by the remnants of Divine Revelation that still existed in the forms of Judeo-Christian scripture, as well as their apocrypha. Those versed in these Divine Mysteries were called upon to serve as theological and legal authorities upon the Qurʿān.

According to other Muslims, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, had left this world devoid of Divine Revelation; but, he did not leave without appointing a reliable source of Divine guidance and doctrine after him. That is to say that the Qurʿān and the *Sunnah* was not left to the opinions of those former People of the Book. Indeed, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, made it clear to the Muslims where the source of guidance was to come from. In a universally-authenticated statement of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, he is reported to have said:

((Verily, I leave you two weighty things (*ath-thaqalayn*) by which if you hold on to them, you will never go astray after me: the Book of Allah and my Descendants, the People of my House. Verily, the Subtle and Aware will not separate them until they meet me at the Basin)).

According to this view, the Muslims were to refer to the Purified Members of the Prophet’s Family, upon them be peace, for guidance in their affairs. No other source was designated as such.

The man who exemplified this second source of Divine Guidance after the death of the Messenger of Allah was Imam ‘Ali, may Allah ennoble his face. He was the one called the “gate” to the “city of knowledge” by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. He was the one who was said to be “with the Qurʿān” by the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. He was the one referred to as the {guide} by the Prophet in the holy verse {But you are truly a warner, and

to every people [there's] a guide} (Q. 13:7). No other person amongst the Prophet's Companions could claim these unique virtues.

Not surprisingly, Imam 'Ali, may Allah ennoble his face, was very wary of some of these former rabbis and priests who seemingly embraced Islam. For example, when some of the elaborate narrations of former-Rabbi, Ka'b al-Ahbar was related to him, he replied by saying: "Verily, Ka'b is a liar!"

Despite all of this, the general body of Muslims did not accept *Amīr al-Muminīn*, may Allah ennoble his face, or the other members of the Prophetic Household as their final source of teaching. Instead, they opted for the former People of the Book and others as their sources. As a result of this, the former rabbis, priests, and churchmen were able to have a long-lasting effect among the minds and actions of the Muslims. The Muslims began to resemble the People of the Book and beliefs and customs—something that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, worked so hard to prevent.

We will look at some examples of these infiltrations and critically assess them. Many of these examples are so deeply ingrained that the average believer assumes that it is a part of the faith. We will, with the help of Allah, set out to clearly prove that these beliefs and actions have their origins amongst the People of the Book and are not firmly established in the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny.

We will discuss the following examples: the belief of exiting the Hellfire and the practice of holding the arms in the prayer. We posit that this belief and practice were adopted by the main body of Muslims. We will utilize sources from the Generality, the imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and non-Muslims. By doing so, we hope to establish our hypothesis with firm proofs.

Our intention is not to offend but to inform. If one decides to reject our claims as false, we ask him/her to reject our proofs because of firmer proofs to the contrary and not because of emotional adherence to an idea or practice simply because they were taught such. They must assess the basis of both claims and take that which is stronger in proof. It is as the Exalted says: {Give good news to my slaves who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones that Allah has guided and those are the people of understanding} (Q. 39:17-18). And all success is with Allah!



## **1. Exiting From the Hellfire (*Khurūj min an-Nār*)**

### **Introduction**

One of the doctrines that was said to have entered into the Muslim belief system is the belief that the disobedient Muslims will be extracted from the Hellfire. This is the belief of the Generality of Muslims, and it is cited in their standard creedal texts, such as *Aqīdat an-Nasaḥī*. For example, it is narrated from this text:

The intercession for the major sinners by the Messengers and the chosen ones is confirmed in many reports. The major sinners among the believers do not stay in the Fire forever even if they die without repentance.

The Muslims are said to be released from the Hellfire and placed in Paradise after they have received some type of penance from their crimes on earth.

### **Our claim**

We say that this is a belief with Jewish origins.

### **Substantiation of Our Claim**

As for our proof from the Qur‘ān, Allah mentions that the Jews ascribed to the belief that the disobedient amongst them will temporarily abide in Hell. Allah quotes their statement: {They say: “The Fire will not touch us except for a number of days!”} (Q. 2:80). He also says regarding them: {This is because they said: “The Fire will not touch us except for a number of days!”} (Q. 3:24). In both of these verses, the belief of exiting the Fire is shown to be that of the Jews.

The classical exegetes made this very clear in their exegeses. Imam at-Ṭabari narrated:

The meaning of {They say} is “the Jews.” One can say: “The Jews say...”  
{“The Fire will not touch us...”} means “The Fire will not reach our skins and we will not enter it...” {except for a number of days!} It only says {a number of days} while not indicating the amount of time in the revelation. This is because, by that, Allah the Majestic and Praiseworthy is challenging them as to whether they know the number of days. It is an appointed time by which they will abide in the Hellfire. This is because He avoided mentioning a designated number of days. It is called {a number of days} to indicate that.

This verse was also said to be revealed to the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, to answer the claims of the Jews. Imam Ibn Abi Hātim narrated in his exegesis of this verse on the authority of ‘Abdullah bin Al-Abbās related:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, entered Medina and the Jews would say: “This world will only last for seven thousand years. Every thousand years, men are punished. Every thousand years in this world is equalled to one day in the Hellfire in the Hereafter. So, the punishment will cease after seven

days.” Then Allah, the Mighty and Powerful, revealed this verse to answer their claim:  
{They say: “The Fire will not touch us except for a number of days!”...}

Some narrations in the *hadīths* and exegeses exist in which the Jews said that they will only dwell in the Hellfire for forty nights and then be extracted from it. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, replied to them by saying that they will remain in Hell “forever and ever” (*khālidūn mukhalladūn*).

Other narrations mention different numbers, but this is immaterial. The general idea is that the Jews are said to affirm that the disobedient amongst their community will temporarily abide in the Hellfire and not permanently. All of that withstanding, according to the Islamic literature, the Jews are said to have invented this belief.

The Qur’ānic testimony is supported by Jewish sources as well. Some of these sources are canonical and others are apocryphal. Despite many modern Jews’ denial in the belief of Hellfire, this belief was current amongst the Jews of Antiquity, as noted by the Jewish Encyclopaedia. It says under its entry concerning “Purgatory”:

The view of purgatory is still more clearly expressed in rabbinical passages, as in the teaching of the Shammaites: "In the last judgment day there shall be three classes of souls: the righteous shall at once be written down for the life everlasting; the wicked, for Gehenna [i.e. Hell]; but those whose virtues and sins counterbalance one another shall go down to Gehenna and float up and down until they rise purified; for of them it is said: 'I will bring the third part into the fire and refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried' [Zechariah 13:9.]; also, 'He [the Lord] bringeth down to Sheol and bringeth up again'" (I Samuel 2: 6)...Regarding the time which purgatory lasts, the accepted opinion of Rabbi Akiba is twelve months; according to Rabbi Johanan bin Nuri, it is only forty-nine days.

The righteous, however, and, according to some, also the sinners among the people of Israel for whom Abraham intercedes because they bear the Abrahamic sign of the covenant are not harmed by the fire of Gehenna even when they are required to pass through the intermediate state of purgatory ('Er. 19b; Hag. 27a).

From this passage, we see that this purgatory experienced by the sinners will be a temporary period of time and afterwards, the denizens of Gehenna (or Hell), will be released. We also see a possible correlation with the report in the Qur’ānic exegesis that mentions the torture taking place for forty days and the view of Rabbi Johanan that says that it is to take place for forty-nine days.

Although the quotation mentions that some say that the Jews will not be touched by the Fire, this view as countered by another report in the Jewish Encyclopaedia under the entry “Kaddish”:

In *Otiyyot de-Rabbi 'Aḳiba*, a work of the Geonic time [i.e. the era of the pre-medieval, classical rabbinite], it is said, under the letter "zayin," that "...Zerubbabel shall rise and recite the *Kaddish* with a voice reaching from one end of the world to the other; to which

all mankind will respond 'Amen.' All souls of Jews and Gentiles in Gehenna will respond with 'Amen,' so that God's mercy will be awakened and He will give the keys of Gehenna to Michael and Gabriel, the archangels, saying: 'Open the gates, that a righteous nation which observeth the faith may enter' [Isaiah 26:2, *shomer emumim* being explained as "one that sayeth 'Amen'"]. Then the 40,000 gates of Gehenna shall open, and all the redeemed of Gehenna, the wicked ones of Israel, and the righteous of the Gentiles shall be ushered into paradise."

The following legend is later: Akiba met a spirit in the guise of a man carrying wood; the latter told Akiba that the wood was for the fire in Gehenna, in which he was burned daily in punishment for having maltreated the poor while tax-collector, and that he would be released from his awful torture if he had a son to recite the *Bareku* and the *Ḳaddish* before a worshipping assembly that would respond with the praise of God's name. On learning that the man had utterly neglected his son, Akiba cared for and educated the youth, so that one day he stood in the assembly and recited the *Bareku* and the *Ḳaddish* and released his father from Gehenna (Masseket Kallah, ed. Coronel, pp. 4b, 19b; Isaac of Vienna, "Or Zarua'," ed. Jitomir, ii. 11; Tanna debe Eliyahu Zuṭa xvi., where "R. Johanan bin Zakkai" occurs instead of "Rabbi Akiba"; "Menorat ha-Ma'or," i. 1, 1, 1; Manasseh ben Israel, "Nishmat Ḥayyim," ii. 27; Baḥya ben Asher, commentary on Shofeṭim, at end; comp. Testament of Abraham, A. xiv.).

As one can readily note, the Jews believed that they would be released from the Hellfire after paying some type of penance for their sins or having someone intercede for them. To them, the Hellfire was a place of works and not final payment. After they were tortured enough to the extent of their sins or someone recited the *Kaddish* for them, they will be released and will join their righteous brethren in Paradise.

### **Proof of its Prohibition**

Our opponents may say that just because the Qur'ān and Jewish sources identify the belief of exiting the Hellfire was held by the Jews, this in no way proves that the belief of the Generality of Muslims is based upon the Jews' belief. In other words, even though the Jewish belief predates that of the Muslims, this does not demonstrate that the Muslims adopted this belief from the Jews.

We reply by saying that the answer that Allah provides precludes that any Muslim ascribe to the Jewish belief. The Exalted says: {They say: "The Fire will not touch us except for a number of days!" Say: "Have you taken a contract from Allah? He never breaks His contracts! Do you say about Allah that which you do not know?" Certainly not! Whoever earns evil and is encompassed by his sin—they are the Companions of the Fire, they shall abide therein forever} (Q. 2:80-81). The Exalted questions the assertion by asking them if Allah has promised them this. He also cautions them to not say anything about Allah without proper knowledge. We ask our opponents: "Is this statement addressed to the Jews alone or the

general public?”

Furthermore, He makes a general statement that applies to all: {Whoever earns evil and is encompassed by his sin—they are the Companions of the Fire, they shall abide therein forever}. We say that since Allah addresses the general public that one’s deeds and misdeeds determine one’s place in the Hereafter, He is prohibiting the belief upon the Muslims as well. If he is prohibiting such statement and belief amongst the Muslims, it is evident that the Omniscient is cognizant that the Muslims would adopt such belief from the Jews in the future.

Similarly, the Exalted says in the second passage: {This is because they claim, “The Fire not touch us except for a number of days”: and thus, their deception regarding their religion have caused them to lie} (Q. 3:24). In this verse, Allah calls their claim a {lie} that is a result of {their deception regarding their religion}. It is evident from this verse that this belief is false and their invention.

In addition to that, the previous verse says: {Do you not see that those who were granted their portion of the revelation (*kitāb*) were called to the Book of Allah—to let it judge between them. Then they turned away from it in their obstinacy} (verse 23). The verse afterwards then states: {This is because they claim...}. That is to say that the false claim of the Jews--that they will exit the Hellfire--is because they turned away from their Book. This emphasizes that the doctrine of exiting the Hellfire was not found in any Book of revelation but rather a doctrine invented by them.

If it is proven that the belief in exiting the Hellfire was a doctrine invented by the Jews and not based upon any previous revelation, then anyone after them that holds to this belief is consequently influenced by this Jewish falsehood. This is coupled with the fact that there exists no authentic proof from the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* that the disobedient amongst the Muslims will be removed from the Hellfire.

### **Replies to the Claims of Our Opponents**

Although the People of the Book were unable to insert their ideas into the Book of Allah, they were nevertheless able to implement these views into the exegeses and narrations considered authentic by the Generality. As a result, our opponents assert that there exist Qur’ānic verses and authentic *hadīths* that establish the belief in the temporary stay of the disobedient in the Hellfire.

Regarding the verses that they quote, they say that the verse {Verily, Allah does not forgive the associating of partners with Him, yet He forgives everything other than that, to those whom He wills} (Q. 4:48) proves that the disobedient Muslims will be removed from the Hellfire because Allah is said to forgive everything other than associating partners with Him--which would include all other major sins. Therefore, if Allah will forgive all other major sins, the major sinners who had not associated partners with Allah will be forgiven and released from the Hellfire.

They also argue that the verse {They will dwell therein [i.e. the Hellfire] forever as long as the heavens and earth remain, except what your Lord wills. Verily your Lord does what He desires} (Q. 11:107) proves that the Hellfire will be temporary because their dwelling is said to be contingent upon the existence of the heavens and earth. If the heavens and earth are said to pass away, then the stay of the disobedient in Hell will also cease.

They also say that the verse {He will say: “The Fire shall be your dwelling, therein to abide forever, except what Allah wills”} (Q. 6:128) indicates that the stay of the disobedient in Hell will be temporary because Allah states the exception clause {except what Allah wills}. Such exception is said to be a possibility that Allah will discontinue the dwelling of the disobedient in the Fire.

Regarding their “proof” from the *hadīths*, they say that the following narrated statements of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, indicates the temporary stay of the disobedient in Hellfire: ((Whoever says: “There is no god but Allah” will enter Paradise)); ((The people of Paradise will enter Paradise and the people of the Fire will enter the Fire. Then Allah, the Exalted, will say: “Take out of the Fire those in whose hearts were faith the weight of a mustard seed!” Then they will be removed from there. They will be blackened and placed in the River of Life. They will sprout as seeds on the side of the stream. Do you not see it extracted; yellow and budding?)); and ((My intercession will be for the major sinners of my community)).

Concerning the verse that they quoted {Verily, Allah does not forgive the associating of partners with Him, yet He forgives everything other than that, to those whom He wills} (Q. 4:48), we say that this verse does not prove the temporary dwelling of the Muslim disobedient. This idea is not conveyed explicitly in the verse nor can it be said to be implied. The verse simply says that Allah, the Exalted, does not forgive the sin of associating partners to him. However, the one who was to ask for sincere forgiveness for one’s major sins, Allah will be quick to forgive him/her.

A precondition for forgiveness is sincere repentance. One is not forgiven for something that one did not ask forgiveness for. This is clear from the statements of the Exalted: {Verily, I am the Most-Forgiving to the one who repents, believes, and perform righteous deeds. Then I guide him/her} (Q. 20:82); {O you who believe, repent to Allah with sincere repentance. Your Lord may cover your sins and enter you into Gardens...} (Q. 66:8); and {Those who perform acts of immorality and sin against themselves--if they remember Allah, He will forgive them of their transgressions} (Q. 3:135). There are many more verses like these to suggest the idea that one will be forgiven only after sincere repentance.

It is also evident that repentance is only achieved in this world. One cannot be said to repent in the Hereafter. The Hereafter is the place of final judgment, not the place of earning or paying penance. The Day of Judgment is referred to as the Day of Retribution and Recompense. It is as the Exalted says: {They will burn therein on the Day of Payment} (Q. 82:13-16). Similarly, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, is narrated as having said: ((O humankind, repent to Allah **before you die!**)); which indicates that repentance and forgiveness occurs in this life, not the Hereafter.

All of that withstanding, we say that the import of the verse {Verily, Allah does not forgive the associating of partners with Him, yet He forgives everything other than that, to those whom He wills} is an injunction to those who engage in association with Allah to repent of their association and Allah will forgive them of their other sins. It is clear that the verse is addressing those People of the Book who associate others with Allah because the previous verse says: {O you who were given the Book aforetime, believe in what is revealed to you that confirms what is with you...} (Q. 4:47). This is confirmed by verses such as: {Say to those who disbelieve that if they cease [from their disbelief], all of their past sins will be

forgiven...} (Q. 8:38). Therefore, there is no proof in the statement of those that this verse refers to the release of the disobedient from the Hellfire.

Concerning the second verse that they quote as a proof for the temporary stay of the disobedient in the Hellfire {They will dwell therein [i.e. the Hellfire] forever as long as the heavens and earth remain, except what your Lord wills. Verily your Lord does what He desires} (Q. 11:107), we say that this verse does not prove that the disobedient Muslims will be released from Hell. This is because, according to the Arabic language, the phrase {as long as the heavens and earth remain} means “forever.” Imam at-Ṭabari said in his exegesis:

Regarding His statement: {They will dwell therein forever as long as the heavens and earth remain, except what your Lord wills. Verily your Lord does what He desires}, the Exalted means by His statement {They will dwell therein}: They will remain. The meaning of His statement {as long as the heavens and earth remain} is “forever.”

This is because the Arabs, when they intended to indicate something as being eternal, they would say: “This will last as long as the heavens and earth last.” The meaning of “last” is “to remain forever.” This is similar to the statements: “It remains as long as the day and night alternates”; “...as long as the vigil of the vigilant”; and “...as long as the Arabian gazelles wag their tails.” All of these statements mean “forever.”

The Majestic and Praiseworthy informs them that: {They will dwell therein forever as long as the heavens and earth remain}. By that He means that they will dwell therein forever and ever.

We also say that an additional proof for us is in the following verse: {Regarding those who are felicitous, they shall be in Paradise. They will dwell therein forever **as long as the heavens and earth remain**, except what your Lord wills—a gift without break} (verse 108). This verse similarly uses the phrase: {as long as the heavens and earth remain} as well as the phrase {except what your Lord wills}. If both phrases are used to imply temporariness of the disobedient in Hellfire, then the same could be said regarding the righteous in Paradise! If one holds that the stay in Paradise is permanent, one must similarly affirm that the stay of the wicked in Hell will be permanent.

Concerning the third verse that they use as a proof of the temporary stay of the disobedient in Hell {He will say: “The Fire shall be your dwelling, therein to abide forever, except what Allah wills”} (Q. 6:128), we say that the use of the phrase {except what Allah wills} does not indicate an alteration of Allah’s judgment. Rather it indicates that Allah’s Will will transpire and come to pass. Since it is Allah’s Will to punish the disobedient for eternity, as evident in verses such as {...those who do not invoke other gods with Allah; kill the soul that Allah has forbidden, except by right; and commit fornication. Whoever does such shall meet a punishment. The punishment shall be multiplied for him on the Day of Resurrection and he shall eternally abide therein, utterly debased} (Q. 25:68-69); {Verily, the criminals shall eternally abide in the punishment of Hell} (Q. 43:74); and {But they who have earned evil deeds, the recompense of an evil deed is its equal. Humiliation will cover them. They will have no protector from Allah. It will be as though their faces are covered by pieces of the night—dark. They will be the Companions of the Fire,

therein to abide forever} (Q. 10:27), it demonstrates that Allah's Will regarding His Judgment will be fulfilled. This is similar to the Exalted's statement {We will recite to you, and you will not forget, except what Allah wills} (Q. 87:6-7). This does not imply that Allah will; cause the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, to forget the revelation, rather it implies that it is Allah's Will that he doesn't forget.

Regarding the first of the *hadīths* that they quote to support their doctrine that the major sinners of the Muslims will abide temporarily in Hell ((Whoever says: "There is no god but Allah" will enter Paradise)), we say that this *hadīth* does not prove what our opponents opine. This is because this *hadīth* can be understood from multiple perspectives that do not contradict other explicit verses and *hadīths* to the contrary.

First, the *hadīth* could be referring to the early believers who died prior to the revelation of laws and punishments. This statement could be a reassurance to the later Muslims that despite the early community not abiding by the laws that were later revealed, they will still enter Paradise because they said: "There is no God but Allah." This opinion is narrated by Hāfiẓ Ibn Hajar in his *Fat-hul Bāri Sharh Šāhih al-Bukhāri*. He said:

There are those that employed the use of interpretation of the aforementioned *hadīths*. They interpreted ((Whoever testified that there is no god but Allah, will enter Paradise)) and in some reports: ((...the Fire will be prohibited for them)) to refer to the time before the revelation of the obligations, commands, and prohibitions. This is narrated from Sa'īd bin al-Musayyab and az-Zuhri.

Second, the *hadīth* could be an abbreviated version of the *hadīth*: ((**At the time of death**, whoever says: "There is no god but Allah" will enter Paradise)). This statement has several meanings: One, the one who says: "There is no god but Allah" with a repentant heart at the time of death, Allah will enter him/her in Paradise. Two, the disbeliever who says: "There is no god but Allah" (i.e. become a Muslim) at the time of death will enter Paradise. Third, the one who says: "There is no god but Allah" sincerely (i.e. by refraining from disobedience) at the time of death will enter Paradise. Therefore, this *hadīth* does not denote that the disobedient will be released from Hell.

Concerning the second of the "proofs" presented to demonstrate that the disobedient will temporarily abide in Hell ((...Then Allah, the Exalted, will say: "Take out of the Fire those in whose hearts were faith the weight of a mustard seed!" Then they will be removed from there...)), we deny the authenticity of this narration. This is because it is in contradiction to explicit verses of the Qur'ān like {...the wicked will be in the Hellfire. They will burn therein on the Day of Payment. **And never will they be removed from it**} (Q. 82:14-16) and *hadīths* like ((The people of Paradise will enter Paradise and the people of the Fire will enter the Fire. Then a caller will stand before them and say: "O people of the Fire, there's no death! O people of Paradise, there's no death! **Everyone remain where s/he is!**")).

Concerning the third of their proofs ((My intercession will be for the major sinners of my community)), we deny the authenticity of this narration. This is because it is in contradiction to explicit verses of the Qur'ān like {For the unjust there shall be no friend or intercessor obeyed} (Q. 40:18) and

*hadīths* like ((There are two types of people from my community that will not receive my intercession: a leader who oppresses and deceives, as well as every extremist renegade)).

It is therefore evident from the abovementioned “evidences” presented by our opponents and our replies to them that the belief in the release of the major sinners from the Hellfire is not based upon the Book of Allah and the authentic statements of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. It is an attempt to justify the doctrine of the Jews by using Revelation.

On the contrary, the sacred sources of Revelation testify to the opposite of this view. Since these verses are explicit in denoting that the major sinner will remain in the Hellfire forever, no commentary or explanation is required. Regarding the proofs from the Qu’rān, the Exalted says the following: {Whoever earns evil and is encompassed by his sin—they are the Companions of the Fire, **they shall abide therein forever**} (Q. 2:81); {Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger and exceed the limits [i.e. laws of inheritance]—He will place him into the Fire, **therein to abide forever!** He will have a contemptible punishment} (Q. 4:14); {Verily, the righteous will be in blessedness and the wicked will be in the Hellfire. They will burn therein on the Day of Payment. **And never will they be removed from it**} (Q. 82:13-16); {Those who falsely accuse innocent, oblivious, and believing women will be cursed in this world **and the Hereafter. They shall have a great punishment!**} (Q. 24:23); {O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve in battle, do not turn your backs and flee! Whosoever turn their backs from them on that day—except as a means of strategy of war or to join another company—has certainly returned with the Anger of Allah. His refuge will be Hell, and it is **a wretched destination!**} (Q. 8:15-16); {Whoever deliberately kills a believer, his payment will be Hell; **therein to abide forever.** The Anger and Curse of Allah will be upon them. He will prepare for them a great punishment} (Q. 4:93); {Those who consume the wealth of the orphan unjustly verily consumes fire into their bellies. **They will endure in a blazing flame**} (Q. 4:10); {Verily, the criminals shall **eternally abide in the punishment of Hell**} (Q. 43:74); {...those who do not invoke other gods with Allah; kill the soul that Allah has forbidden, except by right; and commit fornication. Whoever does such shall meet a punishment. The punishment shall be multiplied for him on the Day of Resurrection and **he shall eternally abide therein,** utterly debased} (Q. 25:68-69); {This is while Allah has made trade lawful and usury prohibited. Hence, whoever becomes aware of his Lord’s warning, and thereupon desists [from usury], may keep his past profits, and it will be for Allah to judge him. But as for those who return to it [i.e. usury]—they are Companions of the Fire, **therein to abide forever!**} (Q. 2:275); and {But they who have earned evil deeds, the recompense of an evil deed is its equal. Humiliation will cover them. They will have no protector from Allah. It will be as though their faces are covered by pieces of the night—dark. They will be the Companions of the Fire, **therein to abide forever**} (Q. 10:27) just to name a few.

Regarding the explicit statements of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, in which the major sinner is said to dwell in the Hellfire forever, they include the following: ((He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself on the Day of Resurrection and will **eternally abide in the fire of Hell forever and ever** (*khālidan mukhalladan fī ha abadan*) and he who commits suicide by stabbing himself shall keep on stabbing himself on the Day of Resurrection and will



**eternally abide in the fire of Hell forever and ever**); ((The people of Paradise will enter Paradise and the people of the Fire will enter the Fire. Then a caller will stand before them and say: “O people of the Fire, there’s no death! O people of Paradise, there’s no death! **Everyone remain where s/he is!**”)); and ((Allah intends to send one to Paradise or the Fire to  **dwell therein forever** and they will not die therein...)) just to name a few.

Our opponents respond to our Qur’anic proofs with various claims and statements. We will examine their rebuttals and answer them with the help of Allah.

Regarding the verse: {Whoever earns evil and is encompassed by his sin—they are the Companions of the Fire, they shall abide therein forever} (Q. 2:81), they say that this refers to disbelief because the Jews are being addressed. The previous verses say the following: {Woe unto those that write the Book with their hands and then say: “It is from Allah!” They have purchased it with a small price. Woe be upon that which they write with their hands! Woe be upon that which they have earned! (verse 79) They say: “The Fire will not touch us except for a number of days!” Say: “Have you taken a contract from Allah? He never breaks His contracts! Do you say about Allah that which you do not know?” Certainly not! (verse 80)}. Hence, they say, because of the apparent invention of the People of the Book in which they declared statements and attributed them to Allah, this amounts to disbelief. Since their disbelief--in the form of fabricating statements and attributing them to Allah--is meant by { earns evil } and { encompassed by his sin }, they are threatened with eternal Hellfire.

We reply by saying that such interpretation removes the apparent intent of the verse. The Exalted begins by stating that it was the practice of some of the People of the Book to write statements and attribute them to Allah, as indicated in verse 79. However, in verse 80, the Exalted says: { **They say**: “The Fire...”}. That withstanding, it is apparent that these two actions are different. One verse says { they write }, and the other verse says: { **They say** }. Therefore, the relation between these set of verses is general and not specific.

In other words, we cannot limit the punishment mentioned in verse 81 {Whoever earns evil and is encompassed by his sin—they are the Companions of the Fire, they shall abide therein forever} to the false ascription of the Jews mentioned in the previous verses. The statement is general and applies to all major sins. Our interpretation is in line with statements of the early exegetes amongst the *salaf*. Imam at-Ṭabari, in his exegesis, narrated various reports on their authorities that support our view that evil deeds and sins are meant by this verse. He narrated the following:

- Abu Kurayb related on the authority of Ibn Yaman—Sufyān—al-A`mash—Abu Rawq—ad-Ḍahhāk said regarding [the meaning of] { ...and is encompassed by his sin }:  
“He died with his sin.”
- Abu Kurayb related on the authority of Jābir bin Nuh—al-A`mash—Abu Razīn—Rabī bin Khuthaym said regarding [the meaning of] { ...and is encompassed by his sin }:  
“He died in it.”
- Ibn Humayd related on the authority of Salamah—Ibn Ishāq—Muhammad bin Abi Muhammad—Sa`īd bin Jubayr or ‘Ikrimah—Ibn al-‘Abbās said regarding [the meaning of] { ...and is encompassed by his sin }:  
“His *kufr* encompasses all his good deeds.”

- Muhammad bin `Amr related on the authority of Abu `Āsim—`Isa—Ibn Abi Najīh—Mujāhid said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “This refers to that upon which Allah has made the Fire obligatory.”
- Bishr related on the authority of Yazīd—Sa`īd—Qatāda said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “‘Sin’ refers to the major sin that makes [the Fire] obligatory.”
- Al-Hasan related on the authority of `Abdur-Razzāq—Qatāda said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “‘Sin’ refers to the major sins.”
- Muthanna related on the authority of Ishāq—Waki`—Yahya bin Adam—Sallām bin Miskīn said: “A man asked al-Hassan about His saying: {...and is encompassed by his sin}. Al-Hassan said: “Do you know what ‘sin’ is? O my son, recite the Qur`ān. Everything on which Allah has put the warning of the Fire is ‘sin’.”
- Ahmed bin Ishāq al-Ahwāzi related on the authority of Abu Ahmed al-Zubayri—Sufyān—Manšūr—Mujāhid said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “Every encompassing sin is that about which Allah has warned of regarding the Fire.”
- Ahmed bin Ishāq related on the authority of Abu Ahmed al-Zubayri—Sufyān—al-A`mash—Abu Razīn said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “He died with his sin.”
- Muthanna related on the authority of Abu Nu`aym—al-A`mash—Mas`ūd Abu Razīn—Rabī` bin Khuthaym said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “He died in his sin before repenting.”
- Al-Qāsim related on the authority of al-Hussein—Waki`—al-A`mash said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “He died with his sins.”
- `Ammār related on the authority of Ibn Abi Ja`far—his father—Rabī said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “[It refers to] the major sin that makes [the Fire] obligatory.”
- Musa related on the authority of `Amr bin Hammād—Asbāṭ—as-Suddi said regarding [the meaning of] {...and is encompassed by his sin}: “He died and did not repent.”

Although there exists Ibn al-`Abbās’ report that says: “His *kufr* encompasses all his good deeds”, we take *kufr* to mean “ingratitude,” not disbelief. This is because the performance of major sins without repentance is a form of ingratitude for the favours of Allah. Such interpretation is in line with the statement of the Exalted: {He is not pleased with *kufr* for His slaves. However if you show gratitude, He is pleased with you} (Q. 39:7).

Furthermore, there is an apparent relationship between the verse in question and the verse {But on their hearts is the stain from what they used to earn} (Q. 83:14). Imam al-Hākim narrated in his *Al-Mustadrak*, as well as *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, *Musnad Ahmed*, and *As-Sunan al-Kubra* of al-Bayhaqī that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said:

((Verily, when the slave commits a sin, a black dot stains his heart. If he turns away, repents, and asks forgiveness, his heart is cleansed. However, if he persists in the sin, the stain increases until it covers his heart. This is the stain that Allah refers to in the verse: {But on their hearts is the stain from what they used to earn})).

This verse and *hadīth* make it clear that that which is said to encompass the heart is sin and continued acts of disobedience, not disbelief.

Regarding some of our opponents other interpretations regarding these verses that explicit denote the eternality of the major sinners in the Hellfire, they say that those referred to in these verses are the disbelievers, and if the verses refer to the believers, the meaning of {forever} is “a long period of time”, and not eternity.

We say that this view is untenable and unfounded in both the Arabic language and revelation. The meaning of “forever” (*khālida*) is just that. The books of Arabic language and linguistics concur on this point. The *Lisān al-‘Arab* says regarding the meaning of *khuld*:

“The permanent stay in a place (*dawām al-baqā`i fi dār*); not coming out of it (*lā yakhrij min hā*).”

The *Tāj al-‘Urūs* says regarding the definition of *al-khuld*:

“the permanence and remaining in a place (*al-baqā`i wa dawām fi dār*) and not coming out of it, like permanence (*al-khulūd*).

‘Place of Perpetuity’ (*dār al-khuld*): the Hereafter and the permanence of its people.”

In the Lane’s Lexicon, it says regarding the meaning *khalada*:

- he remained, or continued, incessantly, always endlessly, or forever.
- (*fi dār*) in a house, or an abode, not going forth from it: he remained, stayed, dwelt, abode, forever, or perpetually, in Paradise **or in Hell**.
- advanced in years--as though he were created to continue forever.

It also says regarding the meaning of *akhladahū*:

He (God) caused him to remain, stay, dwell, or abide; or caused him to remain, stay, dwell, or abide, long, in a place; or caused him to remain, or continue, incessantly, always, endlessly, or forever, in a house, or an abode, not going forth from it; or caused him to remain, stay, dwell, or abide, forever, or perpetually, in Paradise **or in Hell**.

It says regarding the definition of *khuld*:

The abode of the state of perpetual existence; Paradise; or the Paradises; or the world to come.

Regarding the proof of this meaning in the Qur’ān, the Exalted says: {We have not made the men before you eternal (*khulda*). Do they hope that you die and they will live forever (*khālidūn*)?} (Q. 21:34).

This verse makes it clear that the meaning of *khuld* is eternality. Therefore, any attempt to convey a meaning other than that would be contrary to the language and revealed text.

## **Conclusion**

We therefore say that due to the evidence in the Qur'ān that the belief that the major sinners will exit the Hellfire is a delusion invented by the Jews, as well as the evidence in the sacred sources that the major sinners will dwell in the Hellfire forever, it is incumbent upon the Muslim to leave this belief. The lack of explicit proof in the Qur'ān that the disobedient will leave the Hellfire, testifies to the fact that this doctrine was formulated by the Jews and later adopted by the Muslims in imitation of them.

## Grasping the Arms in the Prayer

### Introduction

The practice of folding and crossing the arms during the ritual prayer is seen by many of the Generality to be a standard practice established by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. The three of the four Sunnite schools of jurisprudence hold the holding of the arms during the ritual prayer to be a praiseworthy action. Similarly, those that claim to not adhere to an established school of jurisprudence and call themselves “Salafis” hold to the legitimacy of crossing the arms. Those groups that hold to the illegitimacy of crossing the arms include all Shi’ite groups--I2ers, Ismā’ilites, and Zaydites; the Ibādites; as well as the most popular position amongst the Mālikites.

### Our Claim

We posit that the practice of folding the arms in the prayer is a Jewish practice that was carried over into Islam. The basis of our claim can be found in the books of jurisprudence amongst the Imams of the Prophetic Household, upon them be peace. The oldest of these texts, *Al-Jāmi’ al-Kāfi fī Fiqh az-Zaydiyya* (4<sup>th</sup> century AH), quotes Imam Muhammad bin Mansūr al-Murādi as saying [regarding laying the right arm on the left]: “It is the action of the Jews.”

### The Substantiation of Our Claim

We say that the proof that this practice was that of the Jews can be found in the *hadīth* literature as well as the literature of the Jews themselves. Regarding the proofs from the *hadīth* literature, we quote a narration reported by Ibn Abi Shayba in his *Musannaf*:

Waki’ related on the authority of Yūsuf bin Maymūn—al-Hasan al-Basri said: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((It is as I am looking at the rabbis of the Children of Israel placing their right hands over their left in the prayer)).

Mutaqqi al-Hindi also recorded this narration in his *Kanz al-Ummāl* as a *mursal* tradition, a tradition that is reported by a Follower with the Companion missing between him and the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. This report proves that the practice of placing the right arm over the left in the prayer is a practice of the Jews. It is noteworthy that the narrator of this report, al-Hasan al-Basri is recorded to pray with his arms by the sides and not crossed.

In addition to the evidences from Islamic sources, there also exist evidences from Jewish sources that the method of the standing prayer includes placing the right arm over the left. In the Jewish Encyclopaedia, it states under the heading of *Shemoneh 'Esreh*:

#### Mode of Prayer

The "*Shemoneh 'Esreh*" is first prayed silently by the congregation and then repeated by the reader aloud. In attitude of body and in the **holding of the hands** devotion is to be

expressed (see Shulḥan 'Aruk, Oraḥ Ḥayyim, 95 *et seq.*).

The book that the entry references, *Shulchan Aruch*, is a book of traditional Jewish jurisprudence. In it the rites of prayer are mentioned, specifically in the chapter entitled *Orach Chayyim*. In this chapter, the manner of prayer is described in detail. It says regarding the way that one should recite the prayer:

The one who recites it should stand with his feet together, eyes looking downward, and **placing his hands over his heart.**

Although the passage itself did not mention that the right hand is placed over the left, the author's commentary upon this text mentions: "The right hand is to be placed upon the left. This is to indicate humility." In another place, it says: "...one is to stand as if one is addressing a king."

As is evident from both Islamic and Jewish sources, the practice of placing the right arm over the left in the prayer is established as a Jewish practice that made its way into Muslim rite.

### **Proof of its Prohibition**

Our opponents may say that the Jewish origin of the practice or its similarity with Muslim practice does not prove that the practice is prohibited. It may be one of those actions of the People of the Book that is permissible or praiseworthy to mimic.

We reply by saying that there are both explicit and implicit proofs to suggest that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prohibited the Muslims from this action. We will begin by citing the explicit proofs are from the narrations on the authorities of the imams of the Prophetic Household, upon them be peace; a report on the authority of the imams of the Generality; as well as the actions of some of the *salaf*.

Regarding the reports on the authority of the imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, upon them be peace, there are many narrations in which the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was said to prohibit the placing of the right hand over the left. There is a *hadīth* narrated by Imam al-Qāsim bin Muhammad, upon him be peace, in the book *Kitāb al-I'tisām*. The report was narrated by Imam al-Qāsim bin Ibrāhīm ar-Rassi, upon him be peace, in a chain all of the way up until the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, who said:

((When you are in your prayer, do not place the right hand over the left or the left hand over the right. This is the action of the People of the Book. Lay both of them straight)).

A similar narration was reported by Imam Muhammad bin Yahya bin al-Hussein al-Murtaza, upon them be peace, in *Kitāb an-Nahi* in which he related that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, forbade a man from placing his right hand over his left in the prayer. Similar reports are narrated on the authority of other imams from the Prophetic Household, upon them be peace.

Regarding the reports on the authority of the Generality, there is an explicit report that is very similar to the report above. It is narrated on the authority of Abu Ma'shar in which he said that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, used to prohibit placing the hands on the chest during prayer. In one of the reports narrated by Ibn Abu Ya'la al-Hanbali in the *Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, he related:

'Abdullah bin Ahmed bin Hanbal related: "I asked my father about the *hadīth* on the

authority of Ismā'īl bin 'Aliya--Ayyūb--Abu Ma'shar: 'He [i.e. the Prophet] used to dislike *at-takfīr* in the prayer.'

My father said: '*At-takfīr* is when one places his right hand [over his left] on his chest.'

The same *hadīth* is narrated in the books such as *Lisān al-'Arab*, *Tāj al-Urūs*, and *An-Nihāya fī Gharīb al-Athar*. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzi mentioned it in his *Badā'iu' al-Fawā'id*. Shaykh Muhammad bin Yūsuf al-Māliki also cited the *hadīth* as a proof against crossing the arms in his *Nusrat al-Faqīh as-Sālik*.

Regarding the meaning of *at-takfīr*, the books of Arabic language are in agreement with the statement of Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal. The *Tahdhīb al-Lugha* says:

Abu Ubayd said regarding the meaning of *at-takfīr*: "It is when a man places his hands upon his chest."

In *Tāj al-Urūs*, it says regarding one of the meanings of *at-takfīr*:

It is said that it means to lay one's hand or hands upon one's chest. Jarīr related a poem from al-Akhtal in which those defeated in war by Qays did this action:

When you heard about the warfare of Qays after it

They put down their weapons and submitted (*kaffiru takfira*).

It means: "Place down your weapons, for you will not triumph in war with the forces of Qays because of your incapability to fight them." They humiliated themselves similar to a slave in front of his master or a subordinate in front of his superior by placing one's hand over one's chest, stooping, humbling oneself, and allowing themselves to be criticized.

As is evident from the *hadīth* of Abu Ma'shar and the meaning of *at-takfīr*, the practice of placing the right hand over the other upon the chest is said to have been disliked by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny.

In addition to the explicit narrations we mentioned, there is also evidence that some of the early *salaf* forbade the laying of the right hand over the left. It is narrated in the *Muṣannaḥ* of Ibn Abi Shayba, he narrated in the chapter entitled "Those Who Used to Pray With Their Arms by Their Sides":

Yahya bin Sa'īd narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah bin al-'Izār: "I used to make circumambulation [around the Ka'ba] with Sa'īd bin Jubayr. He saw a man praying while placing one hand over the other; this upon this and this upon this. He then went [to the man], separated them, and came back.

This is also recorded by Ibn Mundhir in his *Al-Awsat*.

It is evident from this report that that practice of placing the right hand on the left during the prayer was something considered detestable by the authorities of the early community. This is demonstrated by the action of a prominent Follower who physically separated the hands of a person praying. This action by Sa'īd bin Jubayr is a strong proof of the undesirability of grasping the arms in the prayer because it is only with the complete violation of a pillar of the prayer that someone is allowed to physically manoeuvre another while the latter is in prayer.

We also say that this action by Sa'īd bin Jubayr proves the authenticity of the Prophetic *hadīths* that forbid the grasping of the arms. This is because it would be improper and unlikely that a Follower of

such high standard would perform such an action unless there was a Prophetic statement or precedent concerning it. We, therefore, say that the separation of the arms of the person at Hajj by Sa'īd bin Jubayr strengthens the reports of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, in which he was said to dislike the practice and preferred laying the arms by the sides.

We have presented proofs of the explicit disapproval of placing the right hand over the left in the prayer. We also say that there exist various evidences that imply that this action is disliked or prohibited. The imams and jurists who disapprove of this practice have presented some of these proofs from the text of the Qur'ān as well as the *hadīths* of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. We will look at some of these proofs and examine their import, *insha-Allah*.

Regarding their proofs from the Qur'ān, the opponents of the placing of the right arm over the left cite the verse: {Successful are the believers--those who are lowly (*khāshi'ūn*) in their prayer} (Q. 23:1-2). They say that this verse implicitly proves the undesirability of crossing the arms during the prayer from various perspectives.

First, they say that since the term {lowly (*khāshi'ūn*)} is used, it indicates the lowering of the limbs of the body during the prayer. This is supported by the narrations in the Qur'ānic exegeses and statements of the exegetes. For example, Imam at-Ṭabari said in his *Tafsīr*:

The interpreters differ regarding the meaning of {lowly}. Some of them have said that it refers to the settling of the limbs in the prayer. Some of their statements are:

- Ibn Bashār related on the authority of Abdur-Rahmān--Sufyān--Mansūr--Mujāhid said regarding {those who are lowly in their prayer}: "They are settled in it."
- Ibn Abdul-'Ala related on the authority of Ibn Thawr--Mu'ammār--az-Zuhri said regarding {those who are lowly in their prayer}: "When one is settled in one's prayer."
- Al-Hasan related a similar report on the authority of Abdur-Razzāq--Mu'ammār--az-Zuhri.

Likewise, Imam as-Suyūti narrated in his *Ad-Durr al-Manthūr* similar reports that imply lowliness in the limbs:

- Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abi Hātim related on the authority of Ibn Abbās said regarding {those who are lowly in their prayer}: "They are in fear, and they are settled."
- Al-Hakīm at-Tirmidhi and al-Bayhaqī--in his *Shu'b al-Imān*--reported on the authority of Abu Bakr as-Siddīq: "The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((You should seek refuge in Allah from hypocritical lowliness (*khushū'an-nifāq*)).) They [i.e. the Companions] asked: 'O Messenger of Allah, what is hypocritical lowliness?' He replied: ((It is lowliness in the body but hypocrisy in the heart)).
- Ibn al-Mubārīk, Ibn Abi Shayba, and Ahmed--in his *Az-Zuhd*--narrated on the authority of Abu Dardā' who said: "I seek refuge in Allah from hypocritical lowliness." He was asked: "What is hypocritical lowliness?" He replied: "It's when you see lowliness on the body but no lowliness in the heart."



In these reports, it is shown that lowliness not only refers to the heart, but also the limbs.

Similar is expressed by the imams of the Prophetic Household, upon them be peace. For example, Imam al-Qāsim ar-Rassi, upon him be peace, mentioned in one of his didactic poems, *Kitāb Salāt al-Yawm wa Layla*:

It is as we said regarding the one who settles the limbs therein.

It is that Allah commands it by means of lowliness and concern.

It is as the Exalted says: {Successful are the believers, those who are lowly in their prayer} (Q. 23:1-2).

Who would doubt that lowliness in the prayer is settling the eyes' gaze?

Similar to that is the settling of the arms and their retention.

That would be lowliness in it [i.e. the prayer] and the mindful concern for it.

What we say concerning that and our proof of such,

Is what was mentioned by the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his progeny:

((Why do men raise their hands upward in prayer like the tails of intense horses?

If they do not cease, Allah will do to them what He will do to them)).

No one is ignorant of that amongst their narrators except the one made ignorant.

It is commanded that all of the prayer--All praise is due to Allah--

Be with stillness and lowliness towards Allah.

Imam al-Hādi Yahya bin al-Hussein, upon them be peace, also mentioned this in one of his texts *Al-Muntakhab*: "There cannot be lowliness in the heart without lowliness in the limbs; all must be lowly." It is also narrated in the text *Al-Intisār 'ala Ulama al-Amsār* regarding the placing of the right hand over the left:

The first opinion: It is considered disliked, and this is the opinion of the Imams of the Prophetic Descendants amongst the Qāsimites and Nāsirites.

The proof of its detestability is the statement of the Exalted: {Successful are the believers, those who are lowly in their prayer} (Q. 23:1-2). There is no doubt that lifting one hand upon the other negates lowliness.

This idea is also expressed by the jurists of the Mālikite school amongst the Sunnites. They believed that the placing of the right over the left did not demonstrate lowliness. In the standard text of Mālikite jurisprudence *Mukhtasar Khalīl*, it says:

Letting the arms hang: Crossing the arms is permissible in the voluntary prayers due to one standing for a long period of time. It is disliked in the obligatory prayer because it is a type of leaning upon something and because it is feared that one may [erroneously] believe that it [i.e. crossing the arms] is obligatory or that it demonstrates outward lowliness.

Similarly, crossing the arms was seen as contradicting lowliness according to them. This was expressed by the author of *Fath al-Ghafūr fī Wad'ā al-Aydi ala as-Sudūr* when he said:

The proof of the Mālikites for the laying of the arms straight is their statement: “Placing one arm over the other negates lowliness.”

The second implicit proof cited by the opponents of placing the right hand over the left is a report on the authority of Jābir bin Samūra in which he said:

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, entered the mosque while those inside were raising their hands in the prayer. He said: ((Why do I see you raising your hands like the tails of unruly horses?! Be settled in the prayer)).

This report appears in the books of *hadīth* amongst the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*, upon them be peace, as well as those of the Generality. Imam Muslim recorded it in his *Ṣaḥih*, Imam an-Nisā’i in his *Sunan*, Imam Abu Dāwūd in his *Sunan*, Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal in his *Musnad*, Imam Ibn al-Hibbān in his *Ṣaḥih*, and Imam al-Bayhaqī in his *As-Sunan al-Kubra*--just to name a few.

This narration is said to implicitly prove the illegitimacy of crossing the arms in the prayer from multiple perspectives. First, the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, stated it after witnessing the Companions raising their arms. Second, placing the right hand upon the left is a type of raising the arms, especially after returning to the standing position from the prostration. Third, it is a general command that applies to the whole prayer and not just a portion of it. Fourth, the question: ((Why do I see you raising your hands like the tails of unruly horses?!)) expresses disapproval of such action. Fifth, the explicit statement: ((Be settled in the prayer)) refers to the settling of the limbs, generally, and the arms, particularly.

In conclusion, we say that the Jewish practice of placing the right hand over the left in the prayer was explicitly and implicitly forbidden according to the primary sources of Divine Law. Such an action was viewed by many in Eastern societies to be a sign of reverence and respect. However, because this action was not directly commanded by the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, to the Muslim community and shown to be a Jewish practice, we are not obliged to practice it. Furthermore, since the Muslim community is prohibited from such action, it is necessary that we leave it.

### **Replies to the Claims of Our Opponents**

Our opponents respond by saying that there are proofs from the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* that establishes the practice of placing the right hand over the left in the prayer. Regarding their proof from the Qur’ān, they cite the verse: {[So pray to your Lord and sacrifice](#)} (Q. 108:2). They say that according to the reports related by Imam ad-Daraqutni, al-Bayhaqī, and al-Hākim on the authority of ‘Ali and Ibn al-‘Abbās, the exegesis of this verse is that one is to cross the hands upon the chest. For example, Imam al-Hākim narrated in his *Al-Mustadrak*:

Regarding the statement of the Mighty and Majestic {[So pray to your Lord and sacrifice](#)}, the Companions differed regarding its interpretation. The best one is what is narrated on the authority of *Amīr al-Muminīn*, ‘Ali bin Abi Ṭalib, may Allah be pleased with him, in two reports.

The first of which is narrated on the authority of ‘Ali bin Hamshādh-- Hishām bin ‘Ali--

Muhammad bin Ayūb--Mūsa bin Ismā'īl--Hammād bin Salama--‘Asim al-Jahdari--‘Uqba bin Sahbān--‘Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, said regarding {So pray to your Lord and sacrifice}: “It is the placing of the right hand over the left in the prayer.”

Regarding this report, we say that it is weak because **Muhammad bin Ayyūb** is in its chain. He was weakened by many of the scholars of *hadīth* criticism. Ibn Hibbān said that he fabricated *hadīths*, and “It is not permissible to take his narrations.”

Concerning the report of al-Bayhaqi, we similarly say that it is weak. The chain contains **Rawh bin al-Musayyab** and **Amr bin Mālik**. Ibn Udayy said regarding Rawh bin al-Musayyab : “He used to narrate *hadīths* that he didn’t memorize.” Ibn Hibbān said about him: “He narrated fabricated reports. It is not permissible to take his narrations.” Regarding Amr bin Mālik, Ibn Udayy said: “He is objectionable in *hadīths*.”

Concerning the report of ad-Daraqutni, we say that it is also weak because the chain contains **Muhammad bin Makhlad**. Ibn Udayy said that he related invalid *hadīths*.

In conclusion, we narrate the statement of Ibn Kathīr in his exegesis:

It is said that the intended meaning of {and sacrifice} is the placing of the right hand over the left under the neck. This is narrated on the authority of ‘Ali; however, **it is not authentic**.

Our opponents similarly quote numerous *hadīths* in which the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was said to place his right hand over his left in the prayer. Imam ash-Shawkāni said in his *Nayl al-Awtār*:

The majority uses 20 reports to prove the legitimacy of placing the right over the left: 18 of them are on the authorities of the Companions and the rest are on the authorities of the Followers.

It would be beyond the scope of this treatise to go through each one of these *hadīths* and identify the defects in them. It should suffice for the reader that scholars of jurisprudence and *hadīth* have scrutinized these reports and found them to be insufficient in proving the legitimacy of placing the right hand over the left in the prayer. Sheikh Muhammad A’bid, who was the Mālikite *mufti* of Mecca, wrote in his *Al-Qawl al-Fasl fī Adillat as-Sadl*:

The majority of the *hadīths* in favour of grasping [the hands] are not authentic, good (*hasan*), or free from weaknesses. All of them are either broken in their chain (*mawqūf*), conflicting, or weak.

The strongest of all of these reports is a narration on the authority of Sahl bin Sa’d. It is reported in *Šahih al-Bukhāri*, *Al-Muwatta* of Imam Mālik, and other books. It is narrated as follows:

Sahl said: “The people used to be given the order for one to place his right hand over his left in the prayer.” Abu Hāzim said: “I only know that he attributed that to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny.”

The proponents say that this report is explicit in denoting that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, ordered that the right hand be placed upon the other in the prayer.

We reply by saying that this report is not a proof for the grasping of the hands in the prayer for multiple reasons. First, this is not the statement of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. Second, it is not explicit from the narration of Sahl that the order was from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. Third, since Sahl is recorded as being the last Companion to die in Medina (91 AH), it is possible that the order was from one of the Umayyad caliphs during his time. Fourth, although the sub narrator, Abu Hāzim, attributes it to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, it is not a definitive proof because Sahl didn't attribute it to the Prophet. Fifth, the sub narrator who narrated it from Abu Hāzim--Ismā'īl—said that the statement “I only know that” is attributed to Abu Hāzim and cannot be said to be from him conclusively. Sixth, even if one was to assume that this order was from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, its weakness is evident by the fact that no jurists deem placing the right hand over the left to be obligatory, rather they hold it to be recommended. In conclusion, we say that the narration on the authority of Sahl bin Sa'd is not sufficient in proving the legitimacy of placing the right hand over the left in the prayer.

The second proof cited by our opponents is the report on the authority of Wā'il bin Hujr. Imam Muslim narrated it in his *Ṣaḥih* with the following wording:

Zuhayr bin Harb related on the authority of 'Affan--Hamam--Muhammad bin Juhāda--'Abd Al-Jabbār bin Wā'il--'Alqama bin Wā'il and their *mawla*--his father, Wā'il bin Hujr that he saw the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, raise his hands when he entered the prayer. He said ((*Allahu Akbar*)), wrapped himself in his garment, and then placed his right hand on the left...

They say that this report is explicit in proving that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayed while crossing his arms.

We say that this report is weak in both its chain of narrators, as well as its text. Regarding its chain of narrators, there are three defects. The first defect is that it is narrated on the authority of '**Alqama bin Wā'il**' from his father. However, the scholars of *ḥadīth* relate that 'Alqama did not hear *ḥadīths* from his father because he was born after the death of his father. Imam adh-Dhahabi narrated in his *Al-Mizān al-Itidāl* that 'Alqama never heard reports on the authority of his father. Imam at-Tirmidhi said in his *Al-Ilāl* that he asked Imam al-Bukhāri if Alqama heard any *ḥadīths* from his father, and he replied: “Alqama was born after his father's death by six months.” Therefore the chain between 'Alqama bin Wā'il and Wā'il bin Hujr is broken.

The second defect is that **Wā'il bin Hujr** was not considered a reliable authority on the prayer of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, because he only saw the Prophet pray for one day. This is the reason why authorities such as Ibrāhīm an-Nikha'i did not accept his narrations regarding the prayer. It is narrated in the *Nasb ar-Rāya fī Takhrīj Ahādīth al-Hidāya* that when someone mentioned the *ḥadīth* of Alqama on the authority of his father that proved the raising of the hands during the prayer, Ibrāhīm an-Nikha'i replied:

How can it be that his father saw the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, pray except for one day; yet he remembered that and Ibn Mas'ūd, who saw him

pray for 50 days did not remember that?! Verily, he only raised his hands in the beginning of the prayer.

Furthermore, the narrations of Wā`il bin Hujr were not accepted as authentic by the imams of the Prophetic Household, upon them be peace, primarily because he used to transmit the secrets of Imam `Ali bin Abi `Talib, may Allah ennoble his face, to Mu`awiya bin Abi Sufyān. This was hinted to by Imam al-Qāsim ar-Rassi, upon him be peace, in his statement in *Al-Jāmi` al-Kāfi fī Fiqh az-Zaydiyya* when he said:

The *hadīths* that have come concerning it [i.e. saying *Amīn* in the prayer] are narrated on the authority of Wā`il bin Hujr, and **Wā`il did what he did.**

Imam Ibrāhīm bin Huriyya narrated in his *Kitāb al-Masā`il al-Muhimma min Aqwal A`imma*: “Wā`il bin Hujr’s reliability is not established (*ghayr thābit*). His narrations cannot be used as evidence.” Similarly, Imam Ahmed bin Sulaymān weakened him in his *Usūl al-Ahkām*, as well as Imam Ahmed bin Yahya in his *Al-Bahr az-Zakhhār*, Imam al-Qāsim bin Muhammad in his *Al-I`tisām*, and Imam `Abdullah bin Hamza in his *Ash-Shāfi*, upon all of them be peace.

The third defect is the unknown *mawla* mentioned in the chain of the *hadīth*. Maybe this person was the intermediary between Wā`il and `Alqama; however, since this person’s identity is unknown, he cannot serve as a reliable narrator of the *hadīth*.

Regarding the weakness of the *hadīth* based upon its text, we say that the text of the *hadīth* mentions something that is implausible. If the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was said to have “wrapped himself in his garment (*iltahafa bi thawbihi*),” how did the narrator purportedly see him place his right hand over his left?! If the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, drew his over-garment over his upper body, there would be no way that the narrator saw him place his right arm over the left.

The third proof that our opponents cite is a *hadīth* on the authority of `Abdullah bin Mas`ūd. It was narrated by Abu Dāwūd in his *Sunan*, Ibn Māja in his *Sunan*, and an-Nisā`i in his *Sunan*. The narration in Abu Dāwūd is as follows:

Muhammad bin Bakkar bin ar-Rayyān--Hushaym bin Bashīr--Al-Hajjāj bin Abi Zaynab--Abu Abi `Uthmān an-Nahdi--Ibn Mas`ud: “I used to pray and place my left hand over my right. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, saw me, took my right hand, and placed it over my left.

They say that such an action by the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, proves that placing the right hand over the left is the *Sunnah*.

We respond by saying that the narrators of this *hadīth* were declared weak by the scholars of *hadīth* criticism. Regarding **Muhammad bin Bakkār**, adh-Dhahabi stated that he was unknown. Regarding **Hushaym bin Bashīr**, adh-Dhahabi accused him of being “abundant in hidden deficient narrations (*kathīr at-tadlīs al-khafī*).” Regarding **Al-Hajjāj bin Abi Zaynab**, he was weakened by al-Madīni, an-Nisā`i, ad-Daraqutni, and Ahmed--as was mentioned by adh-Dhahabi in his *Al-Mizān al-I`tidāl*.

We also say that there is an internal contradiction in the text of this *hadīth*. If the placing of the right hand over the left was an established practice of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his

progeny, how could ‘Abdullah bin Mas’ūd--who was a senior Companion and *Muhājir* who saw the Prophet pray five times a day--be ignorant of where to place his hands?!

These three aforementioned *hadīths* are said to be the strongest in proving the legitimacy of grasping the left hand with the right. If there are defects in these narrations, the remaining 17 reports from the Sunnite sources cannot be used as evidence.

The opponents reply by saying that the evidence of grasping the left hand with the right can also be found in the narrations of the imams of the Prophetic Household, upon them be peace. It is narrated in the *Musnad* of Imam Zayd, upon him be peace:

Zayd bin ‘Ali related to me on the authority of his father--his grandfather--‘Ali, upon them be peace, said: ((There are three things from the character of the Prophets, may Allah bless them and grant them peace: delaying the pre-fast meal, hastening the post-fast meal, and placing the palm upon the other under the chest)).

They say that this *hadīth* proves the legitimacy of placing the right hand over the left in the prayer and the chain contains reliable imams from the *Ahl al-Bayt*, upon them be peace.

We reply by saying that this *hadīth* does not prove the legitimacy of grasping the hands in the prayer for the six reasons. First, this *hadīth* was narrated in the chapter dealing with fasting, not the prayer. Second, it does not mention that the “...placing the palm upon the other under the chest” was done during the prayer--the word “prayer” does not appear in the *hadīth*. Third, the *hadīth* mentions that these actions are from “the **character** of the Prophets” and does not mention them as being “the *sunnah*” or the like. Fourth, it is known that al-Hassan al-Basri was a student of Imam ‘Ali, and he was reported to have prayed with his arms by his sides. Fifth, even if this referred to grasping the hands in the prayer, it would have been abrogated by the *hadīths* that negate the grasping. Sixth, it may also be possible that this was the practice of the Prophets specifically because of their standing a long time in the prayer.

Our opponents reply by saying that there are specific narrations in the *hadīth* literature of the Generality that correlates to the narration in *Musnad* of Imam Zayd but includes the wording “...placing the palm upon the other under the chest **in the prayer**.” Therefore, they say, the placing the hand on the other in the prayer is implied in the report in the *Musnad* of Imam Zayd, upon him be peace.

We reply by saying that the scholars of *hadīth* have criticized all of these narrations because of either weak narrators or breaks in their chains. Also, there is the problem of conflicting versions of the same narration. In some narrations, it says “...three things from the **character** of the Prophets...” Yet, in other narrations, it says “We, the Prophets, have been **commanded to**...” and “...three things from the ***sunnah* actions** of the Messengers...” We ask: “Are these three things obligations, *sunnah* actions, or actions of character?”

We propose yet another possibility and that is, if these narrations are indeed authentic, the grasping of the arms was a practice of the Prophets of the Children of Israel, upon them be peace. Then, the Jews adopted this practice from their Prophets and retained it in their law until today. When Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, arrived, he used to mimic the prayer of the Children of Israel until revelation abrogated it. Later, revelation came and the Archangel, Gabriel, upon

him be peace, taught the Prophet how to pray. After which, he, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, negated the practice of placing the right hand over the left. In this way, all of the reports that negate this practice and seemingly support it are reconciled. This view of ours was also articulated by contemporary Mālikite scholar, Sheikh Muhammad ash-Shinqiti in his *Ibrām an-Naqḍi li mā Qilamin Arjiyyat al-Qabḍ*.

We also negate the claims of our opponents by stating that there are narrations in their literature to prove that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayed without folding his arms. Some of these proofs are explicit in that they mention him praying with his arms by the sides. Others are implicit in that they do not mention him grasping his arms, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. Ibn Rushd said in his jurisprudential text, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*:

The reason of their [the scholars] disagreement lies in that there are established narrations in which the characteristics of his, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayer are described without mentioning that he used to place the right arm over the left. It is also in an established report that the people used to be ordered to do that.

The description of his, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayer was also related in the *hadīth* of Abu Humayd.

The strongest of the explicit proofs that the Prophet prayed with his arms by his sides, is the report of Abu Humayd as-Sā'idi that Sheikh Ibn Rushd mentioned. This report was related by Imam al-Bukhāri in his *Ṣaḥih*, Imam an-Nisā'i in his *Sunan*, Imam Abu Dāwūd in his *Sunan*, Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal in his *Musnad*, as well as other books of *hadīth*.

We will relate the narration as it appears in the *Sunan* of Abu Dāwūd. After mentioning the chain of narrators, Abu Dāwūd related on the authority of 'Umar bin 'Atā:

I heard Abu Humayd as-Sā'idi amongst ten of the Prophet's Companions—among them was Qatāda—say: "I am more knowledgeable than you concerning the prayer of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny." They said: "How is that? By Allah, you were not with him longer than us nor did you precede us in Companionship." He said: "Indeed." They then said: "Ok then, demonstrate." He replied: "While the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, stood up, he used to raise his hands to the level of his shoulders. He then declared *Allahu Akbar* until **his limbs would settle in their places** (*yaqirra kullu 'aẓmin fī mawḍi'ihī mu'tadilan*)..."

The *hadīth* continues with the description; after which, the Companions replied: "You have told the truth. This is how he, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayed."

We say that this narration is an explicit proof that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayed with his arms by his sides from various perspectives. First, this is evident from the statement: "...his limbs would settle in their places." There is no doubt that the place of the arms is to hang down along the sides of the body or on the thighs. There is no other statement that could be as explicit as that! It is not in the language to use this phrase to indicate placing the right hand over the left because the

natural place of the arms is not the crossed over the chest.

Second, this is further emphasized by the statement in the rest of the report in which Abu Humayd said: "...he would then sit upon them [i.e. his legs] until every limb returned to its place..." The same phrase is used to refer to the manner in which the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, sat in the prayer. No one could argue that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, placed his right hand over his left in the sitting position of the prayer. On the contrary, it is known that the place of the hands during the sitting is on the thighs.

Third, the narrator Abu Humayd challenged the ten Companions he met that he was the most knowledgeable concerning the Prophet's prayer, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. This challenge is significant because if one is confronted in this way, s/he would be keener to point out any defects or inconsistencies. However, instead of pointing out that Abu Humayd mistakenly mentioned the placing of the arms by the sides and forgot to mention the grasping of the arms, the Companions affirmed that he truthfully conveyed the prayer of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny.

Fourth, it is noteworthy that according to Imam Ahmed and Ibn Hajar, amongst the ten Companions that witnessed Abu Humayd's report were Sahl bin Sa'd and Abu Hurayra. We already mentioned the *hadīth* of Sahl: "The people used to be given the order for one to place his right hand over his left in the prayer." There are also reports on the authority of Abu Hurayra that seemingly support the practice of crossing the arms in the prayer. However, neither of them voiced an opposition against Abu Humayd when the latter mentioned that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayed with his arms by his sides. Furthermore, neither of them said to Abu Humayd that he forgot to mention the placing of the right hand over the left. Rather, they were amongst those who said: "You have told the truth. This is how he, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayed." This lends credence to the view that the practice of grasping the left arm with the right was abrogated.

Fifth, the only time that Abu Humayd's reports of the description of the prayer mentions the placing of the hands upon anything is the placing of the hands upon the knees during the bowing. The same report in the narration in *Musnad Ahmed* says: "...and he placed his hands upon his knees..." There is no other mention of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, placing his hand upon anything else but his knees. As mentioned by Ibn Rushd, the report of Abu Humayd as-Sā'idi serves as an explicit proof that not only did the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, not cross his arms in the prayer, but he also laid them straight.

Another report that serves as an explicit proof that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, prayed with his arms by the sides is the report on the authority of Mu'ādh bin Jabal. Imam at-Tabarāni related in his *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*:

"When the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, used to stand for the prayer, he would raise his hands in front of his ears. When he declared *Allahu Akbar*, **he laid both of them straight** (*arsalahumā*) and was silent..."

Our opponents respond by saying that this report is weak because its chain contains **al-Khaṣīb bin Jahdar** who was declared a liar by the imams of *hadīth* criticism. He was criticized by the likes of Imams



al-Bukhāri, Ahmed, and Yahya bin Mu'īn.

We respond by saying that despite his weakness, this report is sound due to its conformity to the authentic *hadīth* of Abu Humayd. According to the sciences of *hadīth*, it is possible that the text of the report be authentic even though the chain contains a weak narrator. If the text of the report conforms to the text of another authentic *hadīth*, the grade of the report is strengthened and can be relied upon.

Our opponents also state that in the report of Mu'ādh continues and says: "...perhaps (*rubbamā*) I saw him lay his right hand over the left..." They say that this is a proof that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, grasped his left hand with his right in the prayer.

We reply by saying that the presence of the phrase "perhaps" indicates uncertainty. A proof cannot be established upon uncertainty or doubt. What is established in this report is that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, laid his arms straight in the prayer. These two reports are explicit proofs that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, laid his arms straight in the prayer.

Regarding the implicit proofs that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, laid his arms straight, we say that those authenticated reports in which the prayer is described in detail without the mention of grasping the arms are evidences that he did not do so in the prayer. These are proofs because in these reports, various details and postures of the prayer are mentioned, yet the grasping of the arms is absent. This proves that he did not grasp his arms in the prayer because grasping of the arms is not a natural act while standing. Therefore, it cannot be implied from these reports that he did so.

As one example, we cite a report on the authority of Abu Hurayra narrated by Imam al-Bukhāri in his *Ṣaḥīh*. He narrated:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, entered the mosque while a man was praying. [After the prayer] he greeted the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and [the Prophet] returned the greeting. He then said to him: ((Return to the prayer, for you have not prayed)). [The man] then returned to the prayer and prayed like he did before. He came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and greeted him. He then said to him: ((Return to the prayer, for you have not prayed)). This happened three times.

[The man] said: "By the One who sent you with the Truth and there is nothing better, teach me." [The Prophet] then replied: ((When you stand for the prayer, declare *Allahu Akbar*. Then, recite what is easy for you from the Qur'ān. Afterwards, bow until your bowing is tranquil and then rise up from it until you stand straight up. Then, prostrate until your prostration is tranquil. Afterwards, rise up until your sitting is tranquil. Do similarly for the rest of your prayer)).

In this report, there is no reference or command to place the right hand over the left.

Our opponents reply by saying that the reports that do not mention the grasping cannot be used as a proof for negating the grasping because the description of the Prophet's prayer in detail only serves to demonstrate the obligations of the prayer. That is to say, only the essentials of the prayer were mentioned in

these *hadīths*.

We reply by saying that the report on the authority of Abu Humayd mentioned the raising of the hands, yet none of the jurists hold that to be obligatory. Instead, they only say that raising the hands is *sunnah*. There are other reports in which both the obligations and the *sunnah* actions of the prayer are mentioned yet none of them mention the grasping of the hands. Therefore, we say that the narrators of these reports did not hold the grasping to be obligatory or a *sunnah* action.

### **Conclusion**

In summation, we say that the practice of grasping the left arm with the right is a practice that originates with the Children of Israel. This is evident from both their books and our own. Furthermore, the weakness and incongruence of the reports that mention that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, practiced this, only serves to indicate the attempt on the part of those who wanted to insert this practice into the prayer ritual of the Muslims.

One need only compare the report by Abū Dawūd on the authority of Ibn az-Zubayr: “It is from the *sunnah* to **place the feet together** and **place one hand over the other**” to the aforementioned reference from the Jewish prayer manual in *Shulchan Aruch*: “The one who recites it should **stand with his feet together**, eyes looking downward, and **placing his hands over his heart**.” Such almost identical reports testify to the mimicry of those amongst the Muslims seeking to emulate the People of the Book in their rites.

We thank and praise Allah that the chosen inheritors of the Book and *Sunnah* from amongst the Muhammadan Descendants (*al-I'tra*) identified this attempt and endeavoured to discontinue this practice from their followers, in particular, and the Muslim community, in general!