

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Al-Istiwaaw (الاستواء) & Al-‘Uluww (العلو)

(By: Imam al-Qurtubee, Imam adh-Dhahabee and Shaykh al-Albaanee)

Imam adh-Dhahabee said in the final lines of his most exceptional work, ‘al-Uluww lil-‘Aliyyil-Ghaffaar’¹ "Imam al-Qurtubee said regarding the saying of Allaah, the Most High, "Then he ascended (istawaa) the Throne", that "We have



explained the sayings of the Scholars regarding this issue in the book ‘al-Asnaa fee Sharh al-Asmaa al-Husnaa’ and we mentioned fourteen different sayings therein" up until he said, "And the Salaf of the very first times - may Allaah be pleased with them all - never used to negate direction (al-jihah) for Allaah and nor did they used to express this (negation).

Rather, they, and all of the others, used to speak with its affirmation for Allaah, the Most High just as His Book has spoken about it and just as His Messengers (may Allah be pleased with all of them) informed of it. And not a single one of the Salaf denied that his ascending (istawaa) the Throne was real and true (haqeeqah) (as opposed to metaphorical, majaaaz). And Allaah specified the Throne with istawaa because that is the greatest of all His creation. However, they assumed ignorance only of the exact nature (kaifiyyah) of istiwaaw, for the true nature of that is not known. Imaam Maalik (rahimahullaah) said, Istiwaaw is known...’, meaning in the language, ‘...its true nature is unknown and asking about it is an innovation."

¹ pp.286-287

And **al-Qurtubee** also said in ‘al-Asnaa’,

"Many of the past and contemporary philosophers said, ‘When it is necessary to purify the Creator (al-Baaree) - whose Magnificence is great - from having direction (**jihah**) and demarcation (**tamayyuz**), then from the requirements and necessary consequences of this, in the view of most of the past scholars and their leading contemporaries, is the purify the Creator (al-Baaree) from having direction (**jihah**). In their view, direction does not have the aspect of ‘above’ to it. This is because to them, when Allaah is designated with direction, this would necessitate that He is restricted to a place (**makaan**) and a confine (**hayyiz**). (Subsequently), a place and a confine necessitate (for Him) (such) movement and stillness that is related to distinction (**tamayyuz**), transformation (**taghayyur**) and new occurrences (**hudooth**). This is the saying of the philosophers.

I (**adh-Dhahabee**) say, "Yes, this is what the deniers of the ‘uluww (highness) of the Lord, Mighty and Majestic, have depended upon. And they turned away from the requirement of the Book, the Sunnah, the sayings of the Salaf and the innate dispositions of the whole of creation. What they claim to be necessitated (from affirming Allaah’s highness) is only applicable to created bodies. Yet there is nothing like Allaah and the necessities arising from the clear and evident texts (of the Book and the Sunnah) are also true.

However, we do not make use of any explanation except one that comes through a narration. In addition to this we say, ‘We do not accept that the Creator’s being upon His Throne and above the heavens, necessitates that He is confined and in spatial direction, since whatever is below the Throne is said to be confined and in spatial direction. However, what is above the Throne is not like that. And Allaah is above the Throne as the very first generation are unanimously agreed upon and as the Imaams after them have quoted from them.

They said this in refutation of the Jahmiyyah, those who said that He is in every place seeking as a proof His saying, ‘And He is with you...’. So these two sayings were the very two sayings which were present in the time of the Tabi’een and their successors who came after them. And they are the two sayings that can be understood in this statement (i.e. of the philosophers). As for the third saying which came around after this which is that ‘Allaah the Most High is not in any place, nor is His Holy Essence (**Dhaat**) confined,

nor is He separate and distinct from His creation, nor is he in any spatial direction, nor is outside of any spatial directions, and nor this and nor that...' then this is something that cannot be comprehended nor understood.²

...Along with the fact that within it is opposition to the verses (of the Book) and the narrations (from the Salaf). Therefore, flee with your religion and beware of the opinions of the philosophers. Believe in Allaah and what has come from Him upon the desired intent of Allaah, then submit your affair to Him and there is no power nor movement except by Allaah." The book is completed and all praise is to Allaah alone..." End of quote from adh-Dhahabee.

² **The Shaikh, Muhaddith and Imaam of the era, Naasir ud-Deen al-Albaabee** (may Allaah have mercy upon him) said, commenting upon the words of adh-Dhahabee,

"I say: Yes, only those who speak with **Wahdatul-Wujood** (the Unity of Existence) understand this, and that the Creator and the created are one and the same thing, rather, nothing exists which is called 'Creator' or 'creation', everything you see with your eye is Allaah! Exalted is Allaah from what the oppressors say.

And perhaps Jahm (ibn Safwaan) and his likes from the very first callers (to this misguidance) used to intend to implant the aqeedah of the **Wahdatul-Wujood**, that which necessitates the denial of the existence of the Creator, the Blessed and Exalted, by their saying Allaah is in every place and that He is not upon the Throne. However, (they would do this) in a hidden and repugnant way.

This is why the Salaf's rejection of him and his followers was very severe and some of them made it very clear - as has preceded in the biography of the Imaam Ibn al-Mubaarak and others - that the Jahmiyyah claim that Allaah is not an entity (i.e. not in existence). So, what then would the righteous Salaf say if they were to hear on this day, the excessive Soofees saying while upon the pulpits (of the mosques), "Allaah is not above, nor below, nor to the right, nor to the left, nor in front, nor behind, nor inside the creation, nor outside of it!"

Extra Benefit:

How the Jahmiyyah Denied Istiwaa & ‘Uluww

1. They rejected Allah’s Highness (‘Uluww)

- They claimed that Allah is not above the heavens or distinct from creation, arguing that affirming His Highness would mean He is confined to a place (makaan) like created beings.
- Instead, they said, “Allah is everywhere by His essence.”

2. They reinterpreted Istiwaa metaphorically

- Instead of affirming that Allah rose over the Throne in a manner befitting Him, they claimed istiwaa means: Isteelaa (استيلاء) – meaning “conquering” or “taking control,” not an actual rising.
- Other philosophical explanations to avoid affirming Allah’s Highness.

3. They opposed the clear Quranic texts and the belief of the Salaf

- The Quran affirms istiwaa in multiple places (e.g., Surah Taha 20:5, Surah Al-A’raf 7:54), and the Salaf unanimously agreed that it is real but without asking how (bi la kayf).
- The Jahmiyyah rejected this understanding, leading to severe opposition from the Salaf, including **Imam Ahmad** and others.

Why the Salaf Strongly Opposed the Jahmiyyah

- Their denial led to extreme deviations like Wahdatul-Wujood (Unity of Existence), where some later sects claimed that there is no distinction between the Creator and creation.
- The Salaf declared them deviants because their belief ultimately led to denying the existence of Allah as a real, separate being.
- Imam Ibn Al-Mubarak, Imam Ahmad, and others refuted them severely, warning that their ideas would destroy the correct Islamic creed.

Conclusion:

The Jahmiyyah denied that Allah's Istiwaa is real and tried to explain it away with metaphorical interpretations. This was completely rejected by the Salaf, who affirmed Allah's Highness and Istiwaa as true while leaving its exact nature to Allah.

Definitions Explained:

1. Ascended (Istawaa) – In this context, "istawaa" refers to Allah's rising or ascending over the Throne in a manner befitting His Majesty. The term is affirmed in the Quran, but its exact nature (kaifiyyah) is unknown.

This term is affirmed in the Quran, as in the verse: "The Most Merciful ascended (istawā) over the Throne."³

Key Points:

- The Salaf affirmed istiwa as real and true (haqeeqah) while leaving its exact nature (kaifiyyah) unknown.
- It does **not** mean that Allah is confined or limited like creation.
- It is not metaphorical (majaaz) but an actual attribute of Allah.
- The famous response of Imam Malik regarding istiwa:
- "Istiwa is known (in meaning), its modality is unknown, believing in it is obligatory, and questioning it is an innovation."

2. Highness & Transcendence (Al-'Uluww) – Refers to Allah being above His creation in a manner that befits His Majesty. It has three aspects:

- 'Uluww adh-Dhaat (Highness in Essence) – Allah is above His creation, distinct from it, and not within it.
- 'Uluww as-Sifaat (Highness in Attributes) – Allah's attributes are perfect and superior to all.
- 'Uluww al-Qahr (Highness in Power and Authority) – Allah has absolute dominion and control over everything.

Key Points:

- Affirmed by the Quran, Sunnah, Ijma' (consensus) of the Salaf, and fitrah (natural disposition of humans).

³ Surah Taha 20:5

- Opposed by Jahmiyyah and the philosophers, who denied Allah's highness, claiming He is "everywhere" in essence.
- Allah's 'Uluww does not mean He is confined to space or a place like created beings.

3. Direction (Al-Jihah) – This refers to spatial orientation or directionality. Some theological groups denied that Allah has a "direction," while the Salaf affirmed what is stated in the Quran and Sunnah without delving into how.

4. Real & True (Haqeeqah) – This term indicates that Allah's ascension over the Throne is a reality, not a metaphor (majaaz). The Salaf affirmed the reality of istiwa while leaving its exact nature (kaifiyyah) to Allah.

5. Exact Nature (Kaifiyyah) – This refers to the precise manner in which Allah's istiwa occurs. The Salaf affirmed that istiwa is known in its linguistic meaning but that its modality (how it happens) is unknown.

6. The Creator (Al-Baaree) – One of Allah's names, meaning "The Creator" or "The Evolver," emphasizing His role as the one who brings creation into existence without prior example.

7. Demarcation (Tamayyuz) – This term refers to differentiation or separation. Philosophers argued that attributing a direction to Allah would imply limitation and distinction like created beings.

8. Place (Makaan) – Refers to a specific location or spatial position. Philosophers argued that if Allah were in a direction, He would be confined to a place, which the Salaf rejected as an incorrect conclusion.

9. Confine (Hayyiz) – Refers to spatial limitation or being contained within a boundary. The philosophers claimed that affirming Allah's highness would necessitate spatial restriction, which the Salaf denied.

10. Distinction (Tamayyuz) – In this context, it refers to differentiation that applies to created beings but not to Allah. Philosophers argued that affirming Allah's highness would lead to making Him subject to created attributes like movement.

11. Transformation (Taghayyur) – Refers to change or alteration. The philosophers argued that if Allah were in a direction or place, He would be subject to change, which contradicts His eternal nature.

12. New occurrences (Hudooth) – Refers to things coming into existence after not existing. The philosophers argued that attributing spatial direction to Allah would imply that He undergoes change or has new attributes, which the Salaf rejected.

13. Holy Essence (Dhaat) – Refers to Allah’s actual being or essence, completely distinct and unique from creation.

14. Wahdatul-Wujood (Unity of Existence) – A belief found in some Sufi teachings that claims everything in existence is one with Allah, effectively negating the distinction between the Creator and creation. The Salaf strongly opposed this idea.

Other Phrases Explained:

15. Necessities arising from the clear and evident texts – This phrase means that the meanings derived from the Quran and Sunnah should be accepted as they are, without introducing speculative philosophical interpretations.

16. Separate and distinct from His creation – This phrase refutes the idea that Allah is identical to creation, affirming that He is unique and not mixed with His creation.

17. Spatial direction – This refers to whether Allah is in a specific place or orientation. Some groups denied that Allah is above, while the Salaf affirmed His highness without likening Him to creation.

18. Denial of the existence of the Creator – This phrase refers to how some theological positions, such as those of the Jahmiyyah and proponents of Wahdatul-Wujood, ultimately lead to negating Allah’s independent existence.

19. Not an entity – The Jahmiyyah were accused of denying that Allah is a real being with actual existence, as their interpretations reduced Allah to something abstract rather than affirming His real existence.

20. Excessive Soofees – This refers to certain extreme Sufis who engage in speculative theological claims, particularly about Allah’s nature, which contradict the clear teachings of the Quran and Sunnah.

