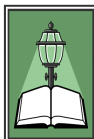


بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



What Ibn Khaldun¹ Says About The *Mutashabihat*

In section 16 of Ibn Khaldun's 'Al-Muqaddima' he says the following:

Section Sixteen: Concerns removing the lid from the *Mutashabih* of the *Kitab* and the *Sunna*, and the doctrines resulting from that amongst the Sunnis and the Innovators

Know that Allah – Glory be to Him – sent to us our Prophet Muhammad – may Allah bless and grant him peace – calling to salvation and the achievement of bliss. He revealed to him the Noble Qur'an in the clear Arabic tongue while addressing us in it to carry out the burdens that will lead us to that [bliss].

And in light of this address and amongst its inescapable characteristics was the mention of His attributes and His names – Glory be to Him – in order to acquaint us with His essence, along with mention of the soul that clings to us, and the mention of the angels who are intermediaries between His messengers and us.

He mentioned to us the Day of Resurrection and His warnings without specifying to us the [appointed] time in any of it. He also established in this Noble Qur'an letters of the alphabet severed at the beginnings of some of its chapters (*suwar*), from which there is no way to understand their intent.

He named all of these categories from the book *Mutashabih*, and He condemned following them. He said, *“He is the one who revealed to you the Book. From it are verses that are clear (muhkamat). They are the foundation of the Book while others are allegorical (mutashabihat). So as for those in whose hearts is perversion, they follow what is ambiguous of it, while seeking discord and seeking its meaning. And none know its meaning except Allah. And those firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it. All is from our Lord.’ And none take admonition except those possessing inner core.”*{*Ali-Imran: 6*}

The scholars of the Salaf amongst the Sahaba and the Tabi'un construed this verse to mean that the clear verses (*al-muhkamat*) are those that are clarified and have firmly established rulings (*al-mubayyanat al-thabitat al-ahkam*).

For this reason, the Fuqaha said in their technical definition, “The Muhkam is what is clear in meaning.” As for the *Mutashabihat*, they have a number of ways of that they express it.

It has been said that they are: ‘those [verses] that require reflection and an explanation (tafsir) that validates their meanings due to their contradiction of another verse or reason.’ So their indications are subtle and confusing. And in accordance with this [definition], Ibn ‘Abbas said, “The *mutashabih* is believed in and not acted upon.”

Mujahid and ‘Ikrima said, “Everything other than the verses dealing with legal judgments (al-ahkam) and the narratives (al-qasas) are *mutashabih*.” And Qadi Abu Bakr [Al-Baqillani] and Imam Al-Haramayn [Al-Juwayni] are in agreement with it.

Thawri, Sha’bi, and a group of the scholars of the Salaf said, “The *mutashabih* is what has no way of being known, like the signs of the hour, the arrival of the chastisements, and the letters of the alphabet at the beginnings of the *surahs*.” And His statement in the verse “*These are the foundation of the Book*” means: ‘most of it and the majority of it’ [is the foundation] while the *mutashabih* is the least of it, while it can be referred back to the *muhkam*.

Then He condemned those who follow the *mutashabih* through figurative interpretation (*ta’wil*) or by construing them according to meanings that are not understood from them in the tongue of the Arabs with which we were addressed. And He called them ‘*The People of Perversion*’ (*Ahl al-Zaygh*), that is, [the people] inclining (*mayl*) away from the truth from the unbelievers, the heretics (*zanadiqa*), and the ignorant amongst the innovators, and [He said] that that action of theirs is the pursuit of discord (*fitna*), such as idolatry (*shirk*) or [to cause] confusion (*lubs*) to the believers, or seeking to interpret them according to what they fancy, so that they (i.e. the believers) would emulate them in their innovation.

Then He – Glory be to Him – reported that He monopolizes their [true] meaning (ta’wiliha) and that none knows it except Him. He said, “*And none knows its meaning except Allah.*” Then he commended the learned for believing in them only. He said, “*And those firmly grounded in knowledge say: We believe in it.*”

Therefore, [the clause concerning] *the Salaf and those firmly grounded* is taken as a newly introduced clause (مستأنف). And they considered it stronger than the [understanding taken from declaring ‘and’ to be a] conjunction of continuation (العطف), since faith in the indiscernible is more eloquent in praise; while by [understanding ‘and’ it to be] a conjunction of continuation, it would mean believing in *the discernible*, since they would know the meaning (*ta’wil*) in that case. So, it would not be something indiscernible (*ghayb*). And His statement “*All is from our Lord*” supports that [understanding].

What also indicates that their meaning is unknown to mortals is the fact that in linguistic expressions, only the meanings that the Arabs designated for them can be understood from them. So when it proves impossible to attribute the report to the one the report is about, we are ignorant of what is indicated by the comment at that time. If it comes to us from Allah, we entrust its knowledge to Him, and we do not preoccupy ourselves with an indication that we desire. So there’s no way for us to [achieve] that.

‘Aisha said, “When you see those who dispute about the Qur’an, they are those who Allah meant. So beware of them!” This is the approach of the Salaf (*Madhhab al-Salaf*) regarding the allegorical verses (*al-ayat al-mutashabihat*). And expressions similar to that have come in the Sunna as well. The way that they

are to be construed - according to them - in the same way that the [normal] *verses* are construed, since the source [of both types of verses] is one. Now, after the various types of *mutashabihat* have been acknowledged in accord with what we've stated, let us now return to the peoples' difference of opinion about them.

As for what refers to what they mentioned concerning the Hour and its signs, the times appointed for the chastisements, the number of the *Zabaniya* (Angels of Hell), etc., none of this – and Allah knows best – is from the *mutashabih*, because no obscure expression or other has appeared in it. Rather, they are the times designated to occurrences - the knowledge of which Allah has appropriated solely to Himself through His explicit declaration in His book and on the tongue of His messenger. He said, “*Verily, the knowledge of it is only with Allah.*” And I'm astonished at he who considered it amongst the *mutashabih*.

As for the severed letters at the beginning of the *surahs*, their literal indication (*haqiqatuha*) is [a reference to] the letters of the alphabet. And it isn't farfetched that they be the intent. *Zamakhshari* said, “In them is an allusion to the utmost limit of inimitability (*al-'ijaz*), since the Qur'an that has been revealed is composed of them (i.e. letters). While mortals are equal [in understanding] with respect to them, while disparity is found in what they indicate after being put together. If there was a departure from this approach, which takes into account the literal meaning (*al-haqiqa*), it could only be through a sound transmission (*naql sahih*) as in their statement regarding ‘TaHa’ (طه), ‘Verily, it is a summons from one who is pure (طاهر) and a guide (هادي)’, and the like of that. But, the sound transmission [of this interpretation of the two letters] is non-existent (*muta'adhdhir*).” So the *mutashabih* occurs from this regard with respect to them.

As for revelation (*wahy*), the angels, the soul, and the Jinn, their ambiguity is due to the subtlety of their literal indications, since they are unacknowledged [in the language of the Pre-Islamic Arabs]. So ambiguity with respect to them has appeared as a result of that.

And some people have included among them all that is within their meaning such as the circumstances related to the Resurrection, Paradise, Hell, the Anti-Christ (*Dajjal*), the Crises (*al-fitān*), the Signs, as well as what happens contrary to familiar customs. And *such* [an understanding] isn't farfetched, only that the overwhelming majority does not concur with them in that, especially the *Mutakallimīn*² (Speculative-Theologians). They determined them to be as they construed them in their books, whereas nothing remains part of the *mutashabih* except for the qualities (*sifat*) by which Allah described Himself in His book and on the tongue of His messenger of whose apparent meaning gives the impression of imperfection or impotence.

People after the Salaf - whose approach we have already acknowledged - have differed about the apparent meanings of these [texts]. They disputed with one another, and innovations found their way into the points of creed. So let us guide to a presentation of their views while preferring the correct one of them to the incorrect one.

So we say – while my success comes only by Allah: Know that Allah – Glory be to Him – described Himself in His book as being Knowing (*'Alim*), Capable (*Qadir*), Willful (*Murid*), Living (*Hayy*), Hearing

(*Sami'*), Seeing (*Basir*), Speaking (*Mutakallim*), Majestic (*Jalil*), Noble (*Karim*), Generous (*Jawad*), A Grantor of Blessings (*Mun'im*), Mighty (*'Aziz*), and Magnificent (*'Azim*). Likewise, He established for His self the two hands (*al-yadayn*), the two eyes (*al-'aynayn*), the face (*al-wajh*), the foot (*al-qadam*), the tongue³ and other qualities of the like.

Some of them necessitate *true divinity* such as knowledge, power, will, and life, which is a condition for all of them. Some of them are *attributes of perfection* such as hearing, sight, and speech. And some of them *give the impression of imperfection* such as establishment (*istiwa*)⁴, descending (*nuzul*)⁵, and coming (*maji*)⁶. Others are like the face, the hands, and the eyes all of which are the characteristics of created things.⁷ Then the Lawgiver (i.e. the Messenger) reported that we will see our Lord on the Day of Resurrection like [we see] the moon on its fullest night while none of us will crowd one another [trying] to see Him - as has been confirmed in the *Sahih* [of *Bukhari*].

As for the Salaf - the *Sahaba* and the *Tabi'un* - they confirmed for Him the attributes of divinity and perfection, and they consigned [solely] to *Him* [the knowledge of] what gives the impression of imperfection while remaining silent about their indications.⁸ So the people after them differed.

Then the *Mu'tazila*⁹ came and acknowledged these attributes as mere mental judgments, while they didn't acknowledge any quality existing with His essence. They called that *tawhid*.

They also made man a creator of his [own] actions whereas Allah's power has no connection to them especially with respect to their vices and sins, since committing them is impossible with respect to The All-Wise (*Al-Hakim*).

They also made observing what is most beneficial (*al-aslah*) for the creation to be compulsory for Him [to do].¹⁰ And they called that *Justice* (*Al-'Adl*) despite having - prior to that - believed in the negation of the divine decree [altogether], and [they believed] that the subsistence of existence revolves around a forward movement [of events] with [Allah's] *renewed* acquaintance, force, and discretion [with relation to those happenings]¹¹ - as may be found [negated] in the *Sahih* [of *Bukhari*]¹², and [it is also reported there] that '*Abd Allah ibn 'Umar* declared his innocence from *Ma'bad Al-Juhani*¹³ and his companions who held that view.

The negation of *qadar* - from them - reached *Wasil ibn 'Ata Al-Ghazzali*, the pupil of *Al-Hasan Al-Basari*, during the reign of '*Abd Al-Malik ibn Mirwan*, and then lastly to *Ma'mar Al-Sulami*. But they retracted their acceptance of it.

And from them came *Abu al-Hudhayl Al-'Allaf* - a Shaykh of the *Mu'tazila* - who took the approach from '*Uthman ibn Khalid Al-Tawil* [who took it] from *Wasil*. He was amongst the deniers of *qadr*, and he followed the opinion of the Philosophers with respect to the negation of the existing attributes (*sifaat wujdiyya*) due to the pervasiveness of their views at that time.

Then *Ibrahim Al-Nazzam* came and affirmed *qadr*, and they followed him. He reviewed the books of the Philosophers, emphatically expressed the negation of the attributes, and established the foundations of secession (*al-'itizal*).¹⁴

Then *Al-Jahiz*, *Al-Ka'bi*, and *Al-Jubba'i* came, and their approach was called *Al-Kalam* either because of the disputation and argumentation that it contained or because the origin of their approach was the negation of the quality of speech (*al-kalam*). Because of this, Shafi'i used to say: "It is a right due [for such a person] to be hit with the stripped-off palm bough (*al-jarid*) and to be made a public display."

These established their approach, established [things] from it, and were rebutted until *Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Al-Ash'aei*¹⁵ appeared and debated with some of their shaykhs about the matters of *The Beneficial and The Most Beneficial (al-salah wa al-aslah)*, and then he rejected their approach. He was of the opinion of 'Abd Allah ibn Sa'id ibn Kilab, *Abu al-'Abbas Al-Qalanisi*, and *Al-Harith ibn Asad Al-Muhasibi*, some of the followers of the Salaf who were upon the approach of the Sunna. So he supported their views with Speculative-theological arguments, and he confirmed the attributes that exist with Allah's essence – High is He – like knowledge, power, and will by which the proof of mutual obstruction (*dalil al-tamanu'*)¹⁶ is completed and by which the miracles of the Prophets are proven true.

And part of their *madhhab*¹⁷ was to confirm the speech, hearing, and sight, since – even though in appearance they give the impression of imperfection due to the sound and the letter that are characteristic of those who possess bodies – another indication for speech (*kalam*) is found amongst the Arabs other than the [meaning indicating] letters and sounds. And it is *what turns about in the mind (khalad)*. And speech (*kalam*) is literally a reference to *it*, not to the first [meaning].

So they confirmed them for Allah – High is He. Thereafter, the impression of imperfection was removed. And they confirmed this attribute as being without beginning (*qadimatan*)¹⁸ and of all-encompassing pertinence to all of the other attributes¹⁹.

So the *Qur'an* became a name shared between *the eternal with Allah's essence* – High is He – which is the *Speech of the Self (al-kalam al-nafsi)*²⁰, and *the created (al-muhdath)*, which are the letters composed and recited with sounds. So when it is said: *[it is] beginningless (qadim)*, the intent is the first [application]. And when it is said: *[it is] recited and heard*, it is due to the fact that the recitation and the writing point to it (i.e. the eternal quality).

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal refrained from applying the term '*createdness*' (*huduth*) to it, because it wasn't heard from the Salaf before him, not because he said that *the written scriptures are eternal*, and not that *the recitation flowing on tongues is eternal* even though he witnessed it being brought into existence (*muhdatha*). It was merely the scrupulousness (*al-wara'*) he possessed that kept him from that. Beyond that, it would be a denial of unquestionable realities (*al-daruriyyat*). So may he be cleared of such [a thing]!

As for hearing and sight – even though it impresses upon one the perception of the bodily limb (*al-jariha*) – it also indicates linguistically the perception of *something heard* and *something seen*. So the impression of imperfection is removed at that time, because it is a linguistic fact with relation to both of them.

As for the words – *al-istiwa* (establishment), *al-maji* (coming), *al-nuzul* (descending), *al-wajh* (the face), *al-yadayn* (the hands), *al-'aynayn* (the eyes), and the like of that – they turned away from their literal meanings to their figurative meanings in the language - due to what they contain that give the impression of

imperfection as a result of striking a resemblance [between Allah and His creatures] - according to the approach of the Arabs wherever the literal meanings of the expressions are not plausible, they return to the figurative as in His saying [about the wall] – High is He – “*wanting to fall*”²¹, and the likes of it. It is a well-known approach of theirs, which is neither objectionable nor innovated.

And construing them according to this interpretation (*ta'wil*) – even though it is contrary to the madhhab of the Salaf, which was consignment (*tafwid*) – was because a group of the followers of the *Tabi'in* – the proponents of *hadith (al-muhaddithin)* and the later *Hanbalis* – committed a violation in the interpretation of these descriptions, and construed them to be attributes confirmed for Allah that were of unknown condition (*majhulat al-kaifiyya*).

So they say regarding “ثم استوى على العرش” {Then, He became established on the Throne}: “Establishment is confirmed for Him in view of what the wording indicates - in flight from rendering it unemployed (*ta'tilihi*), while we don't mention its condition/howness - in flight from drawing [to Him] the likeness (*tashbih*) that the verses of negation deny such as His saying “*There is nothing like unto Him,*” “*Gloried be Allah beyond what they describe,*” “*High be Allah above what the wrongdoers say,*” and “*He did not beget. And He was not begotten.*”

But they don't realize that, despite that, they entered the door of *tashbih* (drawing a resemblance to Allah) by their acknowledging the confirmation of the establishment (*al-istiwa*), while *al-istiwa* according to the scholars of language, its originally designated meaning was for ‘*being at rest*’ (*al-istiqrar*) and for ‘*having firm footing in a place*’ (*al-tamakkun*). And it is characteristic of a body (*jismani*).

As for the *ta'til* (i.e. the stripping of attributes) that they charge of being a necessary result [of not acknowledging the literal meanings] – which is [really] the *ta'til* (non-employment) of the expression – there is nothing forbidden in it. Rather, the forbidden is negating the existence of the tool [if Allah did indeed have one].

Likewise, they launch the charge that the necessary result [of not confirming the literal meaning] is burdening [people] with what they can't bear. And it is a distortion [of reality], since allegory (*tashabuh*) hasn't occurred in the [religious] burdens [Allah has demanded from us].

Then they claim that this is the madhhab of the Salaf. And may Allah be clear of that! Rather, the madhhab of the Salaf is what we have determined beforehand, which is entrusting the intent of such things to Allah (*tafwid*), and remaining silent about their understanding.

And they many times use as proof for the confirmation of the *istiwa* (i.e. the establishment) Malik's statement, “The establishment is of known confirmation to Allah” (الاستواء معلوم الثبوت لله). And may he be cleared of that, since he knows the indication of *al-istiwa*! What he really meant was that *al-istiwa* is known from the language. And it is characteristic of a body. And ‘*its condition*’ (*kayfiyyatuhu*) – that is, ‘*its reality*’ since the reality of all the attributes are conditions (*kaifiyyat*) – is of unknown confirmation to Allah.

Likewise, they use, as proof for the confirmation of place, the hadith of the black [slave] woman that when the Prophet – may Allah bless and grant him peace – said, “Where is Allah?” She said, “In the sky.” Then he said, “Free her, because she is a believer.”

And the Prophet – may Allah bless and grant him peace – didn't confirm faith for her by her acknowledgement of the place for Allah. Rather, [he did] because she believed in the outward meanings [of the verses] with which he came [that indicate] that Allah is in the sky. So, she was included amongst the sum total of the firmly grounded [in knowledge] who believe in the *mutashabih* (allegorical) without discovering its [precise] meaning.

And certainty about the absence of place occurs through the proof of reason that negates [His] dependency [on things]. And amongst the proofs of negation that indicate [His] innocence [from such things] is like “*There is nothing like unto Him*” and the likes of it. Another is [taken] from His saying, “*And He is Allah in the Heavens and on Earth,*” since the existent thing doesn't exist in two [different] places. So they are not in this respect decisively [a proof] for place. So the intent is something else.²²

Then they followed that interpretation that they innovated about the literal meanings of the face, the eyes, the hands, the descent, and the speech with letter and sound assigning to them indications more general than those characteristics of the body, while declaring Him to be innocent of the bodily description of them, while this is something that isn't known in the language [of the Arabs].

The first and the last of them adopted that. And Ahl al-Sunna – [i.e.] the Asha'ri and Hanafi Theologians - shunned them and rejected their beliefs in that regard. And there occurred between the Hanafi theologians in *Bukhara* and Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il Al-Bukhari what is well known.

As for the *Mujassima* (i.e. those who say that Allah is a body), they did the like of that in confirming the bodily characteristics [attributed to Allah], and [they said] that they are not like [other] bodies, while the word ‘body’ isn't confirmed in what is conveyed in the matters related to the sacred law (*shar'iyat*). Rather, what emboldened them to do it was the confirmation of the literal meanings (*al-zawahir*). But they didn't restrict themselves to it. Rather, they delved deep and confirmed the bodily nature [to Allah] claiming about it the like of that, while exonerating Him with a sophisticated [but] contradictory statement. It is their saying [that He is], ‘a body unlike bodies’ (*جسم لا كالأجسام*)²³, even though the *جسم* (body) in the language of the Arabs is - *العميق المحدود* - ‘a thing with depth with limits set to it’. And the other definitions of it like - *لل قائم بالذات* - ‘that which exists by its essence’, *المركب من الجواهر* - ‘what is composed of indivisible parts’, or others are specialized definitions of the Speculative-theologians (*al-mutakallimin*). They mean [something] other than the [original] linguistic indication.

Therefore, the *Mujassima* went deep into innovation – or rather, [they went deep] into unbelief (*kufr*), since they confirmed a description to Allah giving the impression of imperfection that has come neither in His speech nor the speech of His prophet.

So the difference between the *madhahib* of the Salaf, the Sunni *Mutakallimin*, the *Muhaddithin*, and the Innovators amongst the *Mu'tazila* and the *Mujassima* has become clear to you due to what I have acquainted you with.

And amongst the *Muhaddithin* are extremists who are called ‘*al-mushabbihah*’ due to their explicit utterance of *tashbih* (resemblance given to Allah) to the point that it is related about one of them that he said, “Don't bother me about the beard and the penis. But ask about what appears to you other than

that.”²⁴ And if that isn’t interpreted for them – [to mean] that they [simply] mean to encompass [all of] what is found of these literal expressions that arouse the imagination and to construe them according to that interpretation as of their Imams, it would be clear unbelief – may God forbid!

And the books of *Ahl al-Sunna* are filled with the arguments against these innovations, a detailed presentation of the refutation against them with sound proofs, while we have merely made a small allusion to that by which the details of the [various] opinions and their sum totals can be distinguished. And all praise belongs to Allah who has guided us to this, while we would have not been guided if Allah had not given us guidance.

¹ Ibn Khaldun, who died in the year 808 after the Hijra, has been considered one of the greatest authorities on Islamic History, Theology, and other sciences. He was from Muslim Spain and resided in North Africa for a time, and is also known to Westerners to be ‘*The Father of Sociology*’. His most famous work is his *Al-Muqaddima*, which deals with the science of sociology, glances at certain aspects of Islamic history, and other things. This translation is an excerpt from his book.

² The *Mutakallimun* is the name given those Muslim scholars of *Tauhid* who also used the rules of logic to determine the signs of Allah’s existence and many of his attributes. The first to be characterized by this title were the *Mu’tazila*. Then the name clung to others afterwards who indulged in the science of *Tauhid* in a similar fashion, even if they did so as a refutation of the *Mu’tazila* and *Mujassima*.

³ In the 1413/1993 publication of *Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya* in my possession it reads ‘...the tongue (al-lisan).’ I’m not sure if this is a misprint.

⁴ Deeming it compulsory to accept the literal acknowledgement of Allah being established on the Throne would necessitate that Allah is resting upon one of His creation and is carried by it. This gives the impression that Allah is imperfect, since it would imply that Allah is in need of place to exist, while we know from Allah’s clear verses (*al-muhkamah*) that He is independent and free of all needs. The claim made by some that He is over the Throne but not in contact with it or carried by it is an understanding that doesn’t originate from the language of the Arabs as understood by the Arabs of the time of the revelation of the Quran. When the verb استوى is combined with the preposition على it means that the doer of the action (فاعل) is resting on top of something else as in Allah’s statement in *surat al-Zukhruf: 13* ((لنستويوا على ظهوره ثم تذكروا نعمة ربكم إنا نستويتم عليه)): “*In order that you may mount on their backs, and then may remember the Favor of your Lord when you mount thereon...*” And since that would imply that Allah is also resting upon top of the Throne as one rests on top of a horse or chair, we know that this verse cannot be taken literally since Allah is free of Allah needs and it is impossible for His creation to carry Him. As for its true meaning, that is only known to Allah. And the madhhab of the Salaf was to pass over such verses and not to stop upon them to ponder their intent, since it is *mutashabih*. To stop upon an allegorical verse and use it to say that Allah has a place and that that place is over the Throne would be equivalent to *following* the *mutashabih* verses of the Qur’an. And Allah condemned those who follow the *mutashabih* verses of the Qur’an.

⁵ If we accepted that Allah descends in a literal sense, it would mean that Allah changes from one state to another, and that He can exist inside of His creation. If He can change from one state to another he would not be eternal, since it would mean that He is affected by time and limited by space, since change can only occur within the realm of time and time only applies to created beings. If He existed inside His creation it would mean that He has limits set to Him and that His creation is greater than He is in size. However, the finite creation cannot contain the infinite Creator. And the statement *الله أكبر* (Allah is greater or larger) clearly indicates that nothing is greater than Allah in size or status. And if limits were set to Him it would mean that someone or something would have had to set limits to Him. If this is so, it would mean that Allah has a creator, which is absolutely impossible.

Even if we said that Allah's descent doesn't occur in a place inside of His creation, it would mean that He descends in a place outside of His creation, which would still mean that He remains inside of His creation, since He is the Creator of place.

The truth is that Allah doesn't require space or a place to exist as the creation does. Allah created both time and space, and before the creation of anything there was only Him as indicated by the Prophet's statement in the Sahih of Bukhari, (كلن الله و لم يكن شيء غيره), "Allah was. And there was nothing other than Him." And he says in another narration, (كلن الله و لم يكن شيء معه), "Allah was. And there was nothing with Him." So if there was nothing with Him, there was no time or places either. This is why we find statements like the one attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib – may Allah be pleased with him, (كان الله و لا يمكن و هو الآن على ما عليه كلن), "Allah was while there was no space. And He is now upon what He was upon." That is, He continues to be without space.

Add to those proofs that support this understanding, the statement of the Prophet – peace be on him,

أنت الأول فليس قبلك شيء و أنت الآخر فليس بعدك شيء و أنت الظاهر فليس فوقك شيء و أنت الباطن فليس دونك شيء

"You are The First. So, there is nothing before You. You are The Last. So, there is nothing after You. You are The Apparent. So, there is nothing above You. You are The Hidden. So, there is nothing below You."

Imam Muslim reported it in *The Book of Supplications*. So if there is nothing below Him, the Throne isn't below Him. Another thing is that, were we to accept the hadiths relating to Allah's descent at face value, it would mean that Allah is constantly in the lowest Heaven and is never above His Throne. The reason for this is that the Earth is a rotating sphere. And it is always the last-third of the night somewhere on Earth. Thus, Allah would always be in the Lowest Heaven, and not above the Throne.

As for all the verses of the Qur'an and hadiths that give the impression that Allah is in a place, they are not to be taken literally, because of the reasons that have been mentioned, and because they are from the *mutashabihat*.

As for the madhhab of the Salaf, they read these verses and hadiths as they came without changing their apparent meanings and without making any specific judgment about them. Their focus was on the clear verses (*al-muhkamat*), and those that they could apply in their lives.

⁵ The reason that 'coming' or 'arriving' is considered to be a sign of imperfection with respect to Allah is that *it also* would indicate motion and a transformation in His being, which are characteristic of creation. It would also mean that He exists within the parameters of space and has limits set to Him. In reality, Allah's mentioning that He will come on the Day of Judgment is a metaphor similar to other metaphors employed by the Arabs. Since none of us has ever seen Allah, when we actually see Him it is as if He has come to us as when one of us finally sees someone whose arrival we've been long waiting for. Or it is what Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal said about it, "Allah's *command* will come." And

since Allah's command to begin the resurrection and judgment is such a serious thing, instead, He said that He would *come* in order to show the importance and gravity that we should give to that day.

⁷Hands, feet, eyes, and a face are considered to be signs of imperfection, because they are tools. And Allah doesn't need a tool to do anything. He doesn't need eyes to see, ears to hear, or hands to operate. If we were to consider any of these things necessary, it would mean that He isn't perfect without them just as it would mean that He is not self-sufficient and free of need. For this reason, we know that those verses and *hadiths* making mention of these things are not to be taken literally.

As for the approach of the Salaf, they would simply read these texts as they were without stopping on them or making any specific comment unless it was totally necessary as in the case of Imam Ahmad above. Although they made no comment most of the time, they still didn't take them literally, which would mean to give Allah distinctly human attributes. They didn't assume that just because Allah annexed His name or pronoun to a thing that it meant that the thing annexed was an attribute of His essence as many erroneously did and continue to do today. Otherwise, they would have said that Allah has a soul from His statement about Adam, "و نفخت فيه من روحي": "*And (when) I've blown into him from My spirit.*" But no one says that Allah has a spirit.

The literal meaning of any word in Arabic is the first meaning in which that word was used. The literal meanings of hands and feet are those that specifically apply to human beings or other animals like them such as apes. When someone says that Allah has hands and that those hands are real hands in their literal sense but not as you can imagine, this is a play with words and not the way the Arabs during the time of the revelation understood those words in their literal sense. So, if the words aren't being used in their literal sense as understood by those Arabs, none have the right to assign to them a different meaning of which those Arabs didn't understand. Any other meaning expressed for those words would be figurative meanings. Thus, it would mean that the hands or feet are not real hands or feet, since real hands or feet are characteristic of creation alone.

As for most of the Salaf, they would merely describe Allah as He described Himself without adding anything else to what He said about His self. This is why we find the statement of Shaf'i'i,

أُمننت بالله وبما جاء عن الله على مراد الله: "I believe in Allah and in what has come about Allah upon the intent of Allah." And this is clearly what is known as *tafwid*, or entrusting the knowledge of the allegorical verses and *hadiths* to Allah. That is, they didn't take them to be literal, but at the same time they didn't say what the intent might be, especially since there's no obligation to give an alternative meaning to such texts. The Salaf focused on the context of those verses, and pursued those parts of them that could be implemented in their lives.

⁸ That is, they clearly expressed their belief that knowledge, power, will, life, hearing, sight, and speech were attributes of His being. As for the face, hands, feet, the establishment, the coming and descent, they didn't say that they were attributes nor did they say they weren't. Rather, they acknowledged their inability to know for sure what was intended by such expressions in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and then entrusted their proper understanding to Allah.

⁹ *Al-Mu'tazila* literally means 'Those who secede' or 'Those who withdraw themselves'. The origin of this name is taken from when *Al-Hasan*, The Grandson [of the Prophet], yielded the caliphate to *Mu'awiya*. After that a group withdrew from the two [opposing] factions and clung to their *masajid* busying themselves with knowledge and devotion. Before that they were with *Ali* wherever he was. Those who withdrew were the roots of the later Mu'tazili School that was founded by a student of the Tabi'i, Hasan Al-Basari, by the name of Wasil ibn 'Ata who learned some of the first principles of Mu'tazili doctrine from the grandson of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, *Abu Hashim 'Abd Allah*, the son of

Muhammad ibn Hanafiyya, the wife of Ali. The proper name of the Mu'tazila of which they gave to themselves is 'Ahl Al-Tauhid wa al-'Adl': 'The people of Tauhid and Divine Justice.' *Al-Mu'tazila* is the name given to them by *Ahl al-Sunna*.

¹⁰ Allah is not obliged to do anything. That includes creating, giving life or death, providing, etc. If He had been obliged to do any of these things, it would mean that He has no will or choice of His own. As a result, He would be forced to do what He doesn't want to do. Allah says in *Surat al-Buruj*, "*The Glorious Possessor of the Throne. A doer of what He pleases*" (فَعَالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ).

¹¹ What he means here is that the *Mu'tazila* held the view that Allah's knowledge has no connection with the occurrence of events. Or in plainer terms, He doesn't know what His creation will do before they do it, since that would mean – as they erroneously assumed – that people have no choice. But they didn't understand that knowing something doesn't necessitate the negation of choice. The attribute of knowledge is – as termed by the scholars of *Tauhid* – an attribute of exposure or a revealing attribute (صفة كاشفة). So, as a light reveals to the eye what exists in a dark room, the faculty of knowledge reveals to its possessor what is known even if it is still in the realm of non-existence. The fact that I know I exist doesn't mean that it was my knowledge that created me. So, the fact that Allah knows what we will do before we do it doesn't mean that we don't have a choice, since knowledge has no influence upon the outside world or upon the existence or non-existence of things as Allah's power and will do.

¹² This doesn't mean that Imam Bukhari mentions a hadith that negates the existence of *qadr*. God forbid! Despite the fact that we are certain of this, we are uncertain of what Ibn Khaldun's intent is when he says, "...as is found in the *Sahih*." Maybe, he means that Bukhari mentioned the opinion of the Mu'tazila in one of the chapters of his *Sahih*. Allah knows best.

¹³ Ma'bad ibn Khalid Al-Juhani is considered to be the founder of the sect referred to as the *Qadariyya*, or *Those who deny Qadr*. *Ma'bad* had heard someone using the divine decree as a justification for sin. So he stood up to refute him, while negating the divine decree as being a depriver of choice in relationship to the actions of human beings. His aim was to defend the legitimacy of religious burdens, but his explanation was unclear, so he said, "There is no *qadr* and the [divine] affair (al-amr) is a future commencement [of things]." And once that reached *Ibn 'Umar* he declared his innocence from him.

¹⁴ That is, he codified the fundamental principles of the Mu'tazili sect.

¹⁵ *Al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir* says in describing *Abu al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari*: "Ali ibn Isma'il ibn Abi Bishr Ishaq ibn Salim ibn Isma'il ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Musa ibn Hilal ibn Abi Bakr ibn Abi Musa 'Abd Allah ibn Qays Al-Ash'ari. He arrived in Baghdad and learned hadith from Zakariyya ibn Yahya Al-Saji, and learned Fiqh from Ibn Surayj. And we've already mentioned his biography in *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya*.

Ibn Khalikhan mentioned in *Al-Wafayat* that he used to sit in the circle of *Shaykh Abu Ishaq Al-Maruzi*. And *Al-Ash'ari* was a *Mu'tazili* prior to that, and then he repented from it in *Basra* on the pulpit. Then he revealed the shameful deeds of the *Mu'tazila* and their atrocities. Mentioned amongst his works are *Al-Mujiz* and others.

It has been related from *Ibn Hazm* that he said, "*Al-Ash'ari* has fifty-five (55) works." And it was mentioned that his yearly income was 17,000 *dirhams*, that he was the most joking of people, and that he was born in the year 270. It has also been said: '260.' And he died in this year (i.e. 324). It has also been said: 'in 330.' And it has been said: 'between 330 and 339 (bid'in wa thalathin wa thalathi mi'atin).' So Allah knows best." {*Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya*: 7/581.}

Al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir also says about *Al-Ash'ari*: "Ibn al-Jawzi mentioned in *Al-Muntazam* the demise of *Al-Ash'ari* in this year (i.e. 331). He spoke about him, and he detracted from him as was the custom of the *Hanabila* to speak about the *Ash'aris* in the past and present. And he mentioned that he was born in the year 260, that he died in the year 331,

that he accompanied *Al-Juba'i* for 40 years then left him, and that he is buried in *Baghdad* in the thoroughfare of *Al-Rawaya*.” { *ibid*: 7/602-603 }

¹⁶ What is meant by the proof of mutual obstruction is the rule established by the Qur'an that if the Heavens and Earth possessed more than one god they would be in utter confusion and disarray. The fact that they are not in disarray is proof they accord to the plan of one single designer. This proof also implies that if there had been more than one god, each god would have appropriated to itself what it owns and would have given His particular creation His own design. Add to all of this, if one god desired to bring a thing into existence and another's desire is for it not to come into existence, the will of both of them could not be enforced, especially if we presume that the two gods are equal in capacity. If one of them could not create a thing, then the other could not create it, since they are equal. And if one of them could not prevent a thing from coming into existence, neither could the other do so for the same reason. But if the will of each god moves to do two opposite things – like if one wants something to exist and the other doesn't want it to exist, divinity is established for the one whose will has been enforced, since it would prove that He is the All-Powerful.

¹⁷ He means the madhhab of Ash'ari and those he agreed with previously mentioned.

¹⁸ He means the attribute of speech (*kalam*).

¹⁹ This means that Allah's speech pertains to what is possible, impossible, and what necessarily must be, contrary to other attributes that only pertain to certain matters like Allah's power, which only pertains to what's possible, and His life that doesn't pertain to anything of the aforementioned categories of things.

²⁰ The proof that the Arabs acknowledged the Speech of the Self (or internal speech), which is uncharacterized by sounds and letters is Allah's saying, “*And they say in themselves: Why doesn't Allah punish us for what we say?*” {*Al-Mujadila: 8*} Another example is His saying, “*So Yusuf concealed it in his self and didn't reveal it to them*” {*Yusuf: 77*}. And 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, “*Verily, I have forged a statement in my self.*” {*Tarikh Al-Tabari: 3/219*} And finally the pre-Islamic poet, Al-Akhtal, said:

جعل اللسان على الفؤاد نليلا

إنما للكلام لمفي الفؤاد وإنما

“*Verily, speech is in the heart. However, the tongue has been made over the heart an indicator.*”

²¹ What he means is that the statement about the wall wanting to fall is a metaphor, since we know through reason and custom that walls and other lifeless beings do not have will. And this was the approach of the Arabs in that they would take things literally unless there was some unequivocal indication that made it impossible to be taken literally. Then, they would adopt the figurative indications of the word or phrase. And certainly Allah could create will inside the wall. But according to custom walls don't have will, just as there is no proof from the Qur'an and Sunna that Allah gave will to the wall.

²² That is, one text cannot be given preference over another. The madhhab of the Salaf as mentioned before was to simply say what Allah says about His self without any addition. This is what they meant by their saying: بلا كيف (without How?). So if someone were to ask, “Where is Allah?” to say, “In the sky” wouldn't be incorrect necessarily. However, were someone to answer, “In the Heavens and Earth” they would also not be incorrect, since following the approach of the Salaf means to simply say what Allah said about His self without any additional comments. If one were to also answer, “He is near”, “He is closer to me than my jugular vein”, “Wherever I turn there is His face”, or “He is with me wherever I am”, this would also be in accord with the madhhab of the Salaf.

If someone objects to one saying “He is with me wherever I am” by saying, “Do you mean that Allah is everywhere?” one should reply by saying, “The Salaf didn’t ask How. I simply say about Allah what He said about His self without asking how.” And the same can be said for “He is near”, “He is closer to me than my jugular vein”, and “Wherever I turn there is His face.” “I say it and I don’t ask How.” Or, “He is as He said in a way that befits His majesty.”

As for those who insist on saying that it’s compulsory to believe that His direction is up and His place is above the Throne, they have no evidence from the Qur’an and Sunna to give preference to those verses and hadiths over any of the aforementioned. One side of an empty scale will not outweigh the other unless there’s pressure applied to that side. This is exactly what these people do.

²³ The point being made here by Ibn Khaldun is that those who say “Allah has hands, feet, eyes, and a face but not as we imagine them to be”, are really not much different than those who say “Allah is a body but unlike other bodies”, since they have forged a meaning about Allah in the language of the Arabs that is unacknowledged by the Arabs themselves.

²⁴ Apparently, he means “Ask me about any of Allah’s attributes except for His beard and His penis.” We seek refuge with Allah from ascribing such abominations to Him!