

Studies in Contemporary 'Ash'arī Polemics

Vol.2

Shaykh Mashhoor Hasan Āl Salmān

(*hafidhahullāh*)

**THE 'AQEEDAH OF IMĀM ABŪ ZAKARIYYAH YAHYĀ AN-NAWAWĪ
(*rahimahullāh*)¹**

Indeed, all praise is due to Allāh, we praise Him, we seek His aid, and we ask for His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allāh from the evil of our actions and from the evil consequences of our actions. Whomever Allāh guides, there is none to misguide and whoever Allāh misguides there is none to guide. I bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship except Allāh and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allāh.

In regards to al-Qādī 'Iyyād's *ta'weel* of Allāh's *'Uluww* when Imām an-Nawawī (*rahimahullāh*) transmitted from him, I wanted to eulogize and compile what has been mentioned in regards to the *'aqeedah* of Imām an-Nawawī (*rahimahullāh*). There are some people who go to excess with regards to an-Nawawī (*rahimahullāh*) to the extent that some extremists have obligated that his *Sharh* of Saheeh Muslim should be burnt. Nawawī (*rahimahullāh*), in more than one instance, as I indicated in the last lesson, views that the *'aqeedah* of the Salaf revolves between *tafweeḍh* (of the meaning) or *ta'weel*. In this he traversed the way of those 'Ulama who preceded him and from whom he transmitted, like those whose books he transmitted from, and as you have seen with Imām an-Nawawī's statements regarding *istiwā'* he merely depended upon what was stated by al-Qādī 'Iyyād in *Ikmal ul-Mu'lim*. And I have mentioned to you that whenever al-Qādī 'Iyyād himself states: **"The Imām said..."** he intends by that al-Māzarī. Al-Māzarī was a pure 'Ash'arī as opposed to al-Qādī 'Iyyād who was in-between, yet the context and position prevented him from taking the Attributes upon their apparent meaning. I have stated in a number of instances that an-Nawawī (*rahimahullāh*) transmits from al-Qādī 'Iyyād's *Ikmal ul-Mu'lim* and attributes that to him and we have already seen that whenever al-Qādī 'Iyyād has been preceded in anything he will state: "the Imām said..." referring to al-Māzarī. I repeat again and say that an-Nawawī (*rahimahullāh*) at times in his books fell into *ta'weel* of some of Allāh's Attributes and this can particularly be seen in his *Sharh* of Saheeh Muslim. This did not please some copyists of his *Sharh* of Saheeh Muslim who were close to his time. As a result, some copyists who had a *Salafī 'aqeedah* copied an-Nawawī's *Sharh* and left out from their copies the places where an-Nawawī makes

¹ From Shaykh Mashhoor's Saheeh Muslim class dated Thursday 20 April 2006 CE, refer to: www.mashhoor.net

ta'weel of Allāh's Attributes. Ibn as-Subkī became angered at this and had some stern words for those copyists, he stated in *Tabaqāt ush-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, vol.2, p.19:

Some of the Mujassimah of our time² have gone to the extent that they have copied out the Sharh of Saheeh Muslim by Shaykh Muhiyuddeen an-Nawawī and omitted an-Nawawī's words wherein he mentions the ahādeeth of Allāh's Attributes. For indeed an-Nawawī was 'Ash'arī in 'aqeedah yet the copyist could not handle writing what the classifier of the work (i.e. an-Nawawī) had mentioned.

Ibn us-Subkī was of the main enemies of Shaykh ul-Islām (Ibn Taymiyyah) and he was the one who incited his imprisonment, he was a judge, may Allāh forgive him. Then Ibn us-Subkī appended to this, in regards to the copyist who left out sections of an-Nawawī's words in regards to *ahādeeth* in his *Sharh* of Saheeh Muslim:

With me this is of the major sins, for indeed this is tahreef of the Sharee'ah and opening up a door which is not safe to people's books and the classifications that they possess. May Allāh disgrace the one who does this, he was in no need of this Sharh and the Sharh was in no need of him.

Then I also found these same words of his within his book *Qā'idah fi'l-Jarb wa't-Ta'deel*, p.48 except that the editor and commentator of the book, despite being a Hanafī in madhhab and 'Ash'arī in creed, states in regards to what Ibn us-Subkī stated above:

Yes, this would be correct if he (the copyist) did not bring attention to this in the book or in the introduction of the book. As for when he does bring attention to his method in an abridged manner within the book in a way which can be understood then there is nothing on him (i.e. the copyist). The author (i.e. Ibn us-Subkī) went to excess in this matter, may Allāh forgive me and him.

Yes, as-Subkī went overboard in his critique of the copyist and the copyist, may Allāh increase him in goodness, did not want the people of bātil to assume power via referral to the words of an-Nawawī (*rahimabullāh*). An-Nawawī (*rahimabullāh*) has been described by some Shāfi'ī 'Ulama, such as as-Suyūti in his treatise *al-Minhāj us-Sawī fī Tarjamat in-Nawawī*. An-Nawawī instructed his main student "Ibn 'Attār" 'Aluddeen Ibrāheem bin 'Ali to erase a large body of his books. He stated:

I did as he instructed and within myself I was regretful about what I did, to the extent that he instructed me to blot out Minhāj ut-Tālibeen so I took him up on this and stated to him

² **Translator's note:** Ibn as-Subkī, was motivated by polemics in much of his writings about those who emphasised the 'aqeedah of the *Salaf* hence the use of slurs such as "Mujassim" towards those who have not actually committed *tajseem*, and with neither evidence of the existence of such *tajseem* nor a detailed assessment of the beliefs of the alleged proponents of *tajseem*.

that ‘the book has become widespread among students so what is the benefit of erasing it?’

Then Imām an-Nawawī remained silent.

Ibn 'Attār was named the “Mukhtasar of an-Nawawī” and he is the brother of Imām adh-Dhahabī by suckling. He was also a contemporary of Shaykh ul-Islām (Ibn Taymiyyah) as opposed to an-Nawawī. An-Nawawī was a contemporary of Majuddeen, the grandfather of Shaykh ul-Islām, as for Ahmad bin 'AbdulHaleem Abu'Abbās Ibn Taymiyyah then he was not a contemporary of an-Nawawī. On this note, there is a book available in the markets entitled *Mawāqif Butooliyyah min Sun'at il-Islām* wherein the author claims that an-Nawawī met Ibn Taymiyyah and praised him etc. Yet upon inspection this holds no weight, this is imagination.

Let's return, what did Ibn us-Subkī say about an-Nawawī? That he was 'Ash'arī. This is common to find from as-Subkī for he transmitted in the first volume of *Tabaqāt ush-Shāfi'iyyah*, p.132 statements of an-Nawawī in regards to *īmān* and then states that an-Nawawī was 'Ash'arī in '*aqeedah*. As for adh-Dhahabī, who was of the more trustworthy Shaykhs of the historians, then he gave a biography of an-Nawawī in *as-Siyar* which has been printed yet the biography, along with the biography of Ibn Taymiyyah, have been lost. *As-Siyar* is incomplete from the end of it and there are no two manuscript copies of it. As-Sakhāwī within his biography of an-Nawawī transmits adh-Dhahabī's statements from *as-Siyar* yet when we refer back to *as-Siyar* we do not find the biography of an-Nawawī. The copyist of *al-Awāsīm* by Ibn Wazeer transmits within the marginal notes from *Siyar A'lam un-Nubalā* that: **“I found the biography of Shaykh ul-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah in as-Siyar and this is it here...”** and then he relays it letter for letter and word for word. So may Allāh reward the copyist of *al-Awāsīm* by Ibn Wazeer with good for he relayed the biography of Ibn Taymiyyah from *as-Siyar* and this book has been printed and published. As for the biography of an-Nawawī from *as-Siyar* then we only have parts of it that have been relayed by as-Sakhāwī. However, when Dr Bashhār 'Awād printed *Tāreekh ul-Islām*, and he managed to obtain a manuscript copy of it, a biography of Imām an-Nawawī is found within *Tāreekh ul-Islām*, and there are also words from adh-Dhahabī in regards to the '*aqeedah* of an-Nawawī. In *Tāreekh ul-Islām* (Dār ul-Gharb print), vol.15, p.332 adh-Dhahabī states about an-Nawawī:

His madhhab in regards to the Attributes was to remain silent and accept them as they have arrived, and perhaps he may have made some slight ta'weel within his Sharh of Saheeh Muslim.

These words can be applied to the reality, correct? This totally agrees with the reality of the matter. There are also some words which are found within the manuscript of *Tāreekh ul-Islām*:

So an-Nawawī was a man who was 'Ash'arī in 'aqeedah and well known for this, he made tabdī' of those who opposed him and was stern against them.

The editor and checker of *Tāreekh ul-Islām*, our friend Bashhār states with regards to the expression: **“an-Nawawī was a man who was 'Ash'arī in 'aqeedah”** that: **“This sentence was written by the classifier/copyist in the marginal notes”**, and I say: this expression is not from adh-Dhahabī because there is a clash, and rather a contradiction, between the two sentences! Also, an-Nawawī was calm in his nature, he safeguarded what his tongue said and he was not harsh in his words. Therefore, to say:

So an-Nawawī was a man who was 'Ash'arī in 'aqeedah and well known for this, he made tabdī' of those who opposed him and was stern against them.

Is not correct, for it opposes what is in his books. My Lord facilitated it for me to obtain a piece of the end of the manuscript of *Tāreekh ul-Islām* from *Khuda Baksh Library* in India³ which contains a biography of an-Nawawī and the sentence (which claims that an-Nawawī was 'Ash'arī) is not found therein and all praise is due to Allāh. Then I referred to the biography of an-Nawawee by as-Sakhāwee and he relayed his *madhhab* and abridged what adh-Dhahabī stated when he said: **“and perhaps he may have made some slight ta'weel within his Sharh of Saheeh Muslim.”** Therefore, an-Nawawī (*rahimabullāh*) was influenced (by the 'Ash'arīs) in some matters and in some instances he fell into *ta'weel*. Dar ul-Kutub ul-Misriyyah in Cairo recently printed a book entitled *Juz'un fihi Dhikr I'tiqād us-Salaf fi-Huroof wa'l-Aswāt* which is of the works of Imām an-Nawawī. In the end of the section it is mentioned: “We finished copying the book on Thursday 3 Rabī' ul-Awwal 677 AH (CE).” Ibn 'Attār mentions, and he stayed with an-Nawawī for six years and I forgot to mention to you that when Ibn 'Attār met Shaykh ul-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah he retracted from what he had picked up from an-Nawawī and he authored a good work entitled *al-I'tiqād fi Najfi Shakk wa Irtiyāb* wherein he firmly establishes and acknowledges the 'aqeedah of Ahl us-Sunnah, the 'aqeedah of the Salaf and refutes the 'Ashā'irah. This has been published the *tabqeeq* of our brother, the respected Shaykh 'Ali al-Halabī.⁴

Let's return, this portion copied from an-Nawawī was completed on Thursday 2 Rabī' al-Awwal 677 AH and Ibn 'Attār has a huge biography of Imām an-Nawawī entitled *Tuhfat it-Tālibeen fi Tarjamatil-Imām il-Muhyiddeen*. It was facilitated for me to obtain a copy of this from the Awqaf of Halab (Aleppo) which was written in the handwriting of his brother. All praise is due

³ **Translator's note:** Located in Patna (in Bihar state in Eastern India) it is one of the national libraries in India and it holds a very rare collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts and folios. It was opened in October 1891 CE by Bihar Khan Khuda Baksh with 4000 manuscripts, 1400 of these were inherited from his father Muhammad Baksh. Currently the repository holds some 21,000 manuscripts. In 1969 the Indian government declared the library an 'Institution of National Importance', the library is now fully funded by the Indian Ministry of Culture. Refer to: <http://kblibrary.bih.nic.in/default.htm>

⁴ **Translator's note:** The book is also referred to by the title *I'tiqād ul-Khālis*.

to Allāh this has been printed and published and I completed this about ten years ago.⁵ Ibn 'Attār states in *Tubfat ut-Tālibeen*: “An-Nawawī died in the last third of the night of Wednesday 24 Rajab 676 AH in Nawaw.” So an-Nawawī completed the aforementioned book on the third of Muharram 676 AH and an-Nawawī died in 676 AH so this work is of the last works that Imām an-Nawawī authored. So the gap between his death and this work is only that of seven months, as Muharram is the first month and Rajab is the seventh month. We do not know of a work that he authored after this. Listen to what is mentioned in this book, I will read a section of it unto you, an-Nawawī states after noting what the 'Ash'arīs say about Allāh's Speech:

It is amazing that the books of the 'Ashā'irah state the Speech of Allāh was revealed upon the Prophet, is written in the masāhif, recited upon the tongues in a real sense and then they still say: 'that which has been revealed is an expression; that which is written is not the writing (of the Qur'ān); that which is recited is not the recitation (of the Qur'ān)' – thus explaining the matter with apparent contradictions and weak and discreet commentaries. It is sufficient in refuting these beliefs that they are unable to clearly state such beliefs, rather they are in a type of dispute (over the beliefs themselves).

The 'Ash'arīs say that Allāh's Speech is *Nafsi* (Internal) and that the Qur'ān which is within our hands is Created, however they do not come out openly and clearly with this (belief). Yet some of their contemporary scholars have openly stated this, a proof for this is in the fact that one of their later scholars al-Bayjūrī stated in *Sharh ul-Jawharah*⁶, p.94, mentions: “is the Qur'ān better or Sayyidina Muhammad (*sallallāhu 'alayhi wassallam*)?” he then indicates the difference of opinion in this matter according to them (i.e. the 'Ash'arīs) and then says: “The truth is that Muhammad (*sallallāhu 'alayhi wassallam*) is better because he is the best of all creation.” What does this mean? This means that the Qur'ān is created. Shaykh ul-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol.12, pp.424-425 has some amazing words wherein he refutes the 'Ash'arīs and explains that the Qur'ān according to them (i.e. the 'Ash'arīs) is but ink and paper and their own predecessors stated this. Ibn Taymiyyah stated:

Then some followers of the 'Ash'arīs came along and said that the Qur'ān is only established in Allāh's Essence (i.e. 'internal') and that the Letters are not from Allāh's Speech, rather Allāh created them in the air or they were compiled by Jibreel or Muhammad. They thus added to this that the Mus-haf contains nothing but ink and paper and that based on what their predecessors had stated is just an evidence of Allāh's Speech which has to be respected. Yet when they began to view that the Mus-haf is an 'evidence'

⁵ Riyadh: Dār us-Sumay'ī, 1414 AH/1993 CE

⁶ **Translator's note:** This is a well-known 'Ash'arī didactical text on 'tawheed' which contains neither an *ayah* nor a hadeeth! See: <http://marifah.net/articles/JawharatalTawhid.pdf>

(of Allāh's Speech) if therefore does not obligate any respect as all things in existence are a proof of Allāh yet do not necessitate respect. As a result, these 'Ash'arīs began to belittle the Mus-haf to the extent that they would kick it with their feet and some of them would even write Allāh's Names with filth all in order to belittle the honour of Allāh's Names and His Verses that are written in the Masāhif and on paper. The Muslims have agreed that whoever belittles the Mus-haf by throwing it into filth or kicks it – is a disbeliever whom it is permissible to execute. An innovation begins slowly by a hand-span and then it increases till it grows.

So what can be observed is that an-Nawawī was surprised at what the 'Ash'arīs stated about Allāh's Attribute of Speech as he stated on page 53 (of *al-I'tiqād*) after discussing the Attribute of Speech. He then states on page 62 after transmitting from Imam Ahmad who said “may Allāh curse the Mushabbihah and the Mu'attilah”:

So it was said to him: “who are the Mushabbihah?” He said: “Those who say, ‘Hand like my hand, seeing like my seeing.’”

Then he transmitted from Ahmad that he said: “Whoever resembles Allāh with His creation is a disbeliever in Allāh”, then he said:

Our madhhab is between the two madhhabs, guidance between the two forms of misguidance, affirmation of the Names and Attributes along with negating tashbeeh and bodily forms. We do not go to excess with the Attributes and make them like a body in doing so resembling Allāh to His creation, exalted is Allāh over this. Likewise, we are not deficient in regards to the Attributes by negating what Allāh affirmed for Himself, rather we say what we have heard and we testify to what we know.

He then said on page 63 after relaying Allāh's statement “There is nothing like unto Him and He is the Hearing, the Seeing”:

We describe and do not resemble, we affirm and not ascribe bodily forms, we know and we do not ask “how?” Our madhhab is between the two madhhabs, guidance between the two forms of misguidance, a Sunnah between two innovations, Allāh is Unique in His Attributes. We believe in them, we have certainty in their realities and we are ignorant as to the knowledge of “how” the Attributes are.

How beautiful are these words! This is the *'aqeedah* of the *Salaf*! Then he stated on page 67:

From our deen we hold firm to the Book of Allāh, Mighty and Majestic, and to the Sunnah of our Prophet (sallallāhu 'alayhi wassallam) and what has been reported from the Companions and the Tābi'een, and the famous Imāms of hadeeth; and we believe in all of the ahadeeth of Allāh's Attributes. We neither add anything at all to that nor decrease anything from that. Like the hadeeth regarding the Dajjāl wherein it is stated: “And indeed your Lord is not one-eyed”; and like the hadeeth of Nuzool to the heavens of the Dunya; and like the hadeeth of Istiwā over the 'Arsh; and that the hearts are between His Two

Fingers; and that He will place the Heavens on His Finger and the two earths on His Finger; and we affirm the ahādeeth of the Mi'rāj.

Then he stated:

We believe that Allāh is over His 'Arsh, as He informed in His Mighty Book and we do not say that "He is everywhere", rather He is above the Heavens and His Knowledge is everywhere. No place conceals Him as He said: "Do you feel safe from He who is above the Heavens..." and as He said: "To Him ascends good speech..."; and as is mentioned in the hadeeth of Isrā' that he (sallallāhu 'alayhi wassallam) went up to the seven heavens to his Lord and then came down; and as is found in the hadeeth of the black lady who wanted to be freed and the Prophet (sallallāhu 'alayhi wassallam) said to her: "Where is your Lord?" And she replied: "In (i.e. above) the heavens" and then the Prophet (sallallāhu 'alayhi wassallam) said: "Free her for indeed she is a believer." The examples of this are many within the Book and the Sunnah. We believe in that and we do not reject any of that. The thiqāt have narrated from Mālik bin Anas that someone asked him about the Saying of Allāh: 'ar-Rahmān established Himself over the 'Arsh' and then replied: 'al-Istiwā' is not majhool (unknown) and the 'how' is not ma'qool (comprehended), believing in it is obligatory and asking about it is an innovation.'

This is the first evidence, the second evidence is what I found within *Majmoo' al-Fatāwā*, vol.3, p.224 of Shaykh ul-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (*rahimabullāh*), for he debated, defended, authored and held gatherings on *tawbeed* and especially on Allāh's Names and Attributes. Speaking about himself he says:

When we gathered in Damascus and the books of Abu'l-Hasan al-'Ash'arī were presented such as al-Maqalāt and al-Ibānah, and likewise the books of his companions such as al-Qādī Abū Bakr (al-Bāqilānī), Ibn Fawrak, al-Bayhaqī and others, and his book al-Ibānah was presented as was what was mentioned by Ibn Asākir in his book *Tabyeen Kadhib al-Muftarī fimā Nusiba ila'l-'Ash'arī*, and this was transmitted from him (Abu'l-Hasan al-'Ash'arī) in Aboo Zakariyya an-Nawawī's own handwriting. Abu'l-Hasan al-'Ash'arī said within it (i.e. al-Ibānah): 'So if it is said: 'If you have rejected the sayings of the Mu'tazilah, Qadariyyah, Jahmiyyah, Harooriyyah, Rāfidah, Murji'ah then let us know about the view which you say.' Say to him: 'Our saying is: holding firm to the Book of Allāh and the Sunnah of His Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wassallam) and what was related from the Companions, Successors and the Imāms of hadeeth. We adhere firmly to this and what was stated by Ahmad bin Hanbal, may Allāh enlighten his face and may Allāh raise his station and increase his reward and we stay away from opposing his view because he is a virtuous Imām with whom Allāh clarified the truth when misguidance emerged, made the minhāj clear and suppressed the innovators, deviants and doubters.'

Then he (Abu'l-Hasan al-'Ash'arī) stated:

‘Chapter: In Regards to Istiwā’

So if someone says: ‘What do you say about istiwā?’ Say to him: ‘Allāh is Established (Mustawī) over His Throne as Allāh has said

ä Ô

“The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established.”

{*Tā Hā* (20): 5}

And Allāh says,

ä ää

“To Him ascends good speech...”

{*Fātir* (35): 10}⁷

And Allāh says,

ää

“Rather, Allāh raised him to Himself.”

{*an-Nisā* (4): 158}⁸

This is all transmitted by an-Nawawī in his own handwriting from Abu’l-Hasan al-’Ash’arī, this is a second proof. The third evidence is the admiration and adoration that Imām an-Nawawī had of al-Khattābī. There is a book entitled *Tabaqāt ul-Fuqahā ush-Shāfi’iyyah* authored by Ibn us-Salāh which was commented upon, arranged and distributed by an-Nawawī. An-Nawawī stated in his commentary on it, vol.1, p.470 under the biography of al-Khattābī:

⁷ **Translator’s note:** Ibn Kathēer mentioned in his *tafseer*: means, words of remembrance, recitation of Qur’ān, and supplications. This was the view of more than one of the *Salaf*. Ibn Jareer recorded that Al-Mukhāriq bin Sulaym said that “‘Abdullāh bin Mas’ood, may Allāh be pleased with him, said to them, “If we tell you a hadeeth, we will bring you proof of it from the Book of Allāh. When the Muslim servants says, ‘Glory and praise be to Allāh, there is no god worthy of worship except Allāh, Allāh is Most Great and blessed be Allāh,’ an angel takes these words and puts them under his wing, then he ascends with them to the heaven. He does not take them past any group of angels but they seek forgiveness for the one who said them, until he brings them before Allāh, may He be glorified.” Refer to Online version of *tafseer*:

http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1912&Itemid=91

⁸ **Translator’s note:** related to this are the many *ahādeeth* which states that Īsā (*alayhis-salām*) will “descend” and be “sent down” from whence Allāh raised him to. So this also indicates the *fawqiyyah* of Allāh.

Al-Khattābī mentioned clearly that Allāh is above the heavens and some of them say that *istiwā* here is 'isteela' and they argue the case with an unknown line of poetry which is not correct to use.⁹

9 Translator's note: The false interpretation of "isteela" (i.e. "He *conquered* the Throne") was initially asserted by Qādī 'Abdul-Jabbār the founder of Mu'tazilī thought and then taken on board by the 'Ash'arīs. Yet this interpretation is invalid from a number of aspects:

The Arabic language does not allow that the meaning of "Istawā" is "isteelā", and this meaning is not quoted from any of the trusted Imāms of Arabic linguistics, rather it has been authentically transmitted from them that they totally rejected this meaning. Take for example, Abū 'Abdullāh Muhammad bin Ziyād Ibn al-A'rābī (d. 231 AH/845 CE), who was the son of a Sindi slave and the foster-child of the famous Kufan philologist, al-Mufaddal bin Muhammad ad-Dabbī. His prodigious memory was a storehouse of Arabic philology, folklore and poetry. He was an Imām in Arabic linguistics and philology who questioned al-Asma'ī and Abū 'Ubaydah Ma'mar bin al-Muthanna. Some fragments of his works are present in the collection of manuscripts collected by the *Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam*, refer to its inventory here: <http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/inventories/amsterdam/inventory-academy-collection.pdf>

He is not to be confused with Abū Sa'eed Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ziyād ibn Bishr ibn al-A'rābī (d. 341 AH/952 CE) from Basra and then Makkah, who was the student of Abū Dāwūd as-Sijistānī and author of *Kitāb ul-Mu'jam*, Ibn Abī Zayd narrated from.

Ibn al-A'rābī said (as reported in Khateeb al-Baghdādī, *Tāreekh Baghdād*, vol.5, p.283 and al-Lālikā'ī, *Sharh Usul I'tiqād*, vol.3, p.399 with a saheeh sanad): "Ibn Abī Dāwood wished that I seek out some of the phrases of the Arabs and their meanings. (So he said): **“the Most Merciful Istawā upon the Throne” {Tā Hā (20): 5} “Istawā” meaning “Istawlā”?** I said to him, **“by Allāh this does not mean this and I have never seen this.”** Al-Khaleel ibn Ahmad was asked: **“Have you seen in the language “Istawā” taken to mean “Istawlā”?**” To which he replied, **“This is neither known to the Arab nor possible in the language.”**

This is why Ibn al-Jawzī says in *Zād al-Maseer*, vol.3, p.213: **“This meaning is rejected according to the linguists.”** Ibn Abdul Barr said in *at-Tamheed*, vol.7, p.131: **“Their saying in explanation of Istiwā that it means Isteelā is not correct in the language.”**

This false meaning was mentioned by the later grammarians who inherited this understanding from the Mu'tazilah and the Jahmiyyah. They did not rely upon narrations for this view; rather they relied on the alleged saying of the poet, **“istawā Bishrun 'ala'l-'Irāq”**. This was utilised by GF Haddād in *Islamic Belief and Doctrine According to Ahl al-Sunna, Vol.1: A Repudiation of “Salafi” Innovations* (Mountain View, CA: ASFA, 1996), p.106 – **the book has Hisham Kabbāni's name on the cover yet was more than likely penned by GF Haddād whose name appears inside as 'editor'!** The following have to be taken into account:

- ✓ This line of poetry is not classed as being an authentic Arabic poem because it has not been transmitted via a credible route. It is neither referred to nor found in any collections of Arabic poetry, and cannot be traced.
- ✓ There is no known origin in history for this line, and neither is there any indication in this line that would show that the poet meant *istawā* with the meaning of *istawlā* such that it could be depended upon.
- ✓ (It is possible that) this poem is distorted and its correct phraseology is, **“Bishrun qad istawlā 'ala'l-'Irāq”**.
- ✓ Even if this poem is authentic and it is not distorted then it still is not a proof for them, rather it is against them because Bishr was the brother of the Khaleefah al-Umawī (the Umayyad Caliph) 'AbdulMalik bin Marwān, and he (Bishr) was the Ameer of 'Irāq and he made *Istawā* upon it as was the

He also mentioned that al-Khattābī had a treatise entitled *ar-Risālah an-Nāsibah fīmā yu'taqidu fī's-Sifāt*. Therefore, an-Nawawī transmitted the words of al-Khattābī regarding Allāh being over the heavens and that Allāh is Established over His Throne and these references were in relation to praising al-Khattābī. So if an-Nawawī did not accept these words of al-Khattābī then he would have either distorted them or he would have commented upon them and refuted them. This is the third proof (of an-Nawawī's 'aqeedah). The fourth evidence: an-Nawawī stated in his book *Rawdat ut-Tālbeen*, which is a *fiqh* book and is of the most famous Shāfi'ī books of *fiqh*. An-Nawawī said in vol.10, p.85 (al-Maktabah al-Islami Print):

If it is said (by a disbeliever): 'There is no god worthy of worship except Allāh, the King who is above the heavens' or if he says: 'There is no god worthy of worship except the King of the heavens' then such a person who says this is a believer. Allāh says,

ä ä ä

"Do you feel secure that He who [holds authority] in the heaven..."

{*al-Mulk* (67): 16}

And if he (i.e. the disbeliever) says: 'There is none worthy of worship except the Dweller of the heavens' then he will not be a believer because dwelling is impossible for Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic.

This is correct and this is what Shaykh ul-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah states in *Bayān Talbees ul-Jahmiyyah*, vol.1, p.146. This is also what is stated by Abū Nasr 'Ubaydillāh as-Sijzī al-Wā'ilī (d. 444 AH) in his treatise to the people of Zabeed entitled *Radd 'alā Man Ankara Harf wa's-Sawt* wherein he stated:

It is not from our saying that when we say Allāh is above His Throne that we intend a restricted limit for Him, because limits are only for invented things. From the 'Arsh to what is beneath it is that which is restricted and Allāh, Mighty and Majestic, is above that, which is not a 'place' or limit. This is with our agreement that Allāh was there without a

habit of the leaders that they sit above the throne of the kingdom, and this conforms to the meaning of this word as mentioned in His, the Exalted, saying, **"...that you may mount upon their backs (li tastawū alā dhuhoorihī)"** {*Zukhruf* (43):14}

- ✓ Ibn al-A'rābī said: "He is on His Throne as He has told us. He said, O Abu 'Abdullāh, does it not mean istawlā (possess, take control)? Ibn al-A'rābī said: How can you know that? The Arabs do not say istawlā unless there are two people competing for a throne, then whichever of them prevails, they describe as istawlā." Refer to *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol.2, p.249.

Refer to Online paper by Aboo Rumaysah entitled *A Comparison of the Ta'weels of the Mu'tazilah to the Ta'weels of the Later Ash'arees*.

place, then he created 'places' and He was as He was before 'places' were created. The only ones who say there is a limited restriction are those who claim that Allāh is in a place, yet it is known that 'places' are restricted, so their claim would mean that Allāh is restricted and according to us Allāh is distinct from 'places' and their limits. Rather, Allāh is above all things that have been brought into existence and according to our saying His Essence has no restriction.

This all agrees with what an-Nawawī stated when he said:

If he (i.e. the disbeliever) says: 'There is none worthy of worship except the Dweller of the heavens' then he will not be a believer but if he says: 'There is no god worthy of worship except Allāh, the King who is above the heavens' or if he says: 'There is no god worthy of worship except the King of the heavens' then such a person who says this is a believer.

Which indicates that an-Nawawī affirms Allāh's *'Ulm*. These are the four proofs (about Nawawī's true *'aqeedah*) so memorise them and know that the final statements of an-Nawawī before his death by a few months demonstrate a return to the Salaf's creed and that he stated what the *Salaf* viewed. So we can affirm that Imām an-Nawawī returned to the *'aqeedah* of the *Salaf us-Sālih* and also from what we have read is not from an-Nawawī's own view but rather from what he transmitted from al-Qādī 'Iyyād, yet an-Nawawī himself affirmed what was contrary.

And all praise is due to Allāh