



An Annotated Excerpt of al-‘Uthaymīn’s Explanation on the Creed of al-Saffārīnī

Nasir Abdussalam

Indeed all praise is for Allah, and may blessings and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah, his family, and all of his Companions.

Many Muslims, especially converts and born Muslims desiring to understand and practice their religion free from cultural traditions and the accretions of ignorant Sufis, are attracted to the call of following the Predecessors (*Salaf*) and being counted among the People of the Sunnah and the Group (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*). Implementing the Qur’an and the Sunnah with correct understanding should be the concern of every Muslim. Unfortunately, those most vocal in calling to and ascribing themselves to this path do not represent the beliefs of the *Salaf*, and are in fact outside the fold of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*. This becomes evident when their claims and supposed proofs are scrutinized.

Those seeking to learn about the religion are liable to fall into confusion regarding how they should identify themselves and with whom they should affiliate upon confronting all of the material out there. The beliefs being presented as the “Salafi” creed today are in reality the beliefs of the *Mujassimah* (the sect that ascribes physicality [*tajsīm*] to Allah ﷻ), in particular, as they were articulated by the philosophical champion of *tajsīm*, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH ﷺ), who, unlike the

Mujassimah of previous centuries, was relatively well-versed in the theological and philosophical arguments of his time. His innovations in creed include:

1. The reality of existence is physicality.<sup>1</sup>
2. Occurrences (*ḥawādith*) inhere in the essence of Allah ﷻ
3. Infinite regress (*tasalsul*) is possible, and there is a generic eternality (*qidam an-nawʿ*) of created things.<sup>2</sup>
4. The essence of Allah ﷻ has limits (from all six directions) and a direction (up).
5. The Face, the Eyes, and the Hands of Allah ﷻ are “attributes of substance” (*ṣifāt aʿyān*)<sup>3</sup> that occupy distinct spaces (as opposed to attributes of meaning [*ṣifāt maʿānī*] inherent to His essence).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> He said in *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Taʿsīs Bidaʿihim al-Kalāmiyyah*: “There is no existent thing except that it is a body or inherent in a body.” He said later in more detail:

It is known that the Originator not being a body is not from that which natural predisposition (*fiṭrah*) knows self-evidently. Nor is it known through premises close to natural predisposition, or premises that are clear to natural predisposition; rather, through premises wherein there is obscurity and length. They are not clear premises, nor do rational people unanimously accept them. To the contrary, a group of rational people have clarified that among the premises that negate the opposing view is that which is fallacious, and whose fallaciousness is known necessarily upon reflection and abandonment of blind following. Many groups of theologians rebuke all of this and say that, rather, decisive rational proofs are established for the opposite of this claim, *that self-subsistent being is not anything but a body, and whatever is not a body is not anything but nonexistent. It is known that this is closer to natural predisposition and reason than the first.*

<sup>2</sup> He said in *Darʿ at-Taʿāruḍ* (among numerous quotes with the same meaning):

If one were to say: “If a cause that necessitated the preponderance of the genus of action occurred, it would entail this infinite regress,” he would be truthful. However, this results in the nonoccurrence of a preponderating factor that necessitates the preponderance of action. Rather, the *genus of action does not cease to exist. The imams of the Muslims concede this.* However, this does not necessitate the correctness of their statement concerning the eternity of anything from the world. Rather, this necessitates the occurrence of everything besides Allah, for if the *genus of action never ceased*, it entails that the *objects of action do not cease to occur one thing after another...*

Scholars and advanced students of knowledge who have access to the Arabic works (in particular his magnum opus, *Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa an-Naql*, and especially his supposed refutation of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs at-Taqdīs, Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Ta'sīs Bida'ihim al-Kalāmiyyah*) know these aberrations. Unfortunately, there is very little available in English demonstrating this, and many Muslims—even if they have some awareness of the differences between Ahl al-Sunnah versus “Salafis”—are unaware of the specific details of the deviant beliefs that are claimed, without evidence, to be the creed of the Salaf. I have chosen to translate a representative sample of these beliefs, expounded by one of the most preeminent “Salafi” scholars of the last few decades, who is regarded by “Salafis” as being a master of creed, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn, from his commentary on the famous poem of the great Ḥanbalī scholar, Imam al-Saffārīnī, *al-Ḍurrah al-Muḍiyyah fī 'Aqd al-Firqah al-Marḍiyyah*. These few pages are meant to provide a glimpse into what is in their works, and empower the reader to make a fair comparison based on knowledge (all emphases are mine).

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<sup>3</sup>A substance (‘ayn, pl. a‘yān; also called a *jawhar*) is that which has a surface area (*ḥayyiz*)/occupies space (*mutaḥayyiz*). It is the opposite of a meaning (*ma'nā*, pl. *ma'ānī*).

<sup>4</sup> He said in *Bayān at-Talbīs*:

...Among these affirmers of the attributes are those who make these revelatory attributes also attributes of meaning, inherent in the described like those...As for the Salaf, the Imams, the People of Hadith, the imams of the jurists and the Sufis, and factions among the people of theology, then *they do not say that these are from the genus of those*.

Upon both opinions—the same whether they are attributes of *substance* or meaning—it is said: it is known that existent things in reference to us are either bodies—like the face and hands—or qualities—like knowledge and power. When the people of affirmation are in agreement that knowledge and power are established for Allah in a manner contrary to what is established for the created thing—there being no negation of its reality in that and no equating of it to a created thing—then, likewise when they say about these attributes that we affirm them in a manner contrary to what is established for the creation, or that *there is no difference between the establishment of that which is a quality in reference to us while being unlike qualities, and that which is a body in reference to us while being unlike bodies*.

## 1. Affirming Similarities Between Allah ﷻ and the Creation

Imam al-Saffārīnī ﷺ said in line 23:

“So, they affirm the texts while asserting transcendence (*tanzīh*), without nullifying nor ascribing similarity (*tashbīh*).”

Shaykh al-‘Uthaymīn explained:

He said: “nor ascribing similarity,” i.e., they do not ascribe similarity to Allah with His creation. The intent of the author ﷺ with “ascribing similarity” is “equating” (*tamthīl*), and for this reason, if he had used that expression it would have been more appropriate. If he had used the expression: “nor equating” instead of: “nor ascribing similarity” it would have been more appropriate from three facets:

The first facet: that which the Qur’an and the Sunnah came with is the negation of equating, not the negation of ascribing similarity. *Neither in the Qur’an nor in the Sunnah is there a negation of ascribing similarity.* All that is related is the negation of equating, as Allah ﷻ said: “Do you know of an equal to Him?” (19: 65), and His ﷻ saying: “There is absolutely nothing like Him, and He is Hearing, Seeing” (42: 11). He said: “So do not strike similitudes for Allah” (16: 74). It is known that preserving the wording of the text, especially concerning these delicate matters, is more appropriate than coming with another wording, even if the one who came with it claimed that it is synonymous with the wording that the text came with.

The second facet: there is obfuscation in the negation of ascribing similarity, because if he intended to negate the ascription of similarity from every facet, then this is wrong. If he intended to negate the ascription of similarity in regards to all of the

attributes, then this is a negation of equating. *The meaning of this is that if he intended to negate ascribing similarity from every facet (i.e., that He is dissimilar to the creation in anything whatsoever or in any facet whatsoever) then this is a mistake.* If he intended to negate ascribing similarity (i.e., negating that He is similar to the creation from every facet and in every meaning), then the negation of equating is sufficient for this, because this is the negation of equating, and it is sufficient for it.

As for the first: him having intended to negate similarity from every facet, (i.e., He is dissimilar to them in any facet whatsoever) *then this is false, because there are no two existent things except that there is similarity between them from some facets and commonality in some meanings.*<sup>5</sup> For example, the Creator and the created are described with life, thus between them is similarity insofar as the fundamental attribute, which is life. *If not for this similarity shared between the attributes of Allah and the attributes of the creation, we would not know the meanings of the attributes of Allah. So, it is inevitable that there be commonality and similarity from some facets.*

Likewise, Allah has knowledge and the creation has knowledge, *and there is similarity between the knowledge of Allah and the knowledge of the creation insofar as the fundamental meaning.*<sup>6</sup> Thus, the creation knows what he perceives, and likewise the Creator ﷻ. So, there is commonality in the fundamental meaning (*aṣl al-maʿnā*).

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<sup>5</sup> Compare this statement with the statement of Imam al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321 AH) ﷺ in his creed: “Whoever describes Allah with a *meaning* among human meanings has disbelieved.”

<sup>6</sup> The commonality between the attributes of Allah ﷻ and the attributes of the creation is *strictly verbal*, and there is no similarity whatsoever between the fundamental meanings as Imam al-Safārīnī rightly indicates and al-ʿUthaymīn repudiates. The shaykh does raise an important issue however, which is: how are we to understand the attributes of Allah ﷻ in light of His transcendence when He speaks to us in human terms? Sunni theologians affirm that there is a commonality to be noted here, yet it is not in regards to the fundamental meanings or

Likewise the creation has sight and the Creator has sight, and the sight of the Creator and the sight of the creation both *share in the fundamental meaning of sight*. So, *there is similarity between them from this facet*. However, they are not equal, for equality is to be the same from every facet, while similarity is commonality, even if from some facets.

## 2. Obligating Literalism in Understanding the Attributes of Allah ﷻ and Ascribing that Position to the Companions ﷺ

Imam al-Saffārīnī ﷺ said:

“So everything that came from the verses or was authenticated in reports from the trustworthy/of hadiths, we let them pass as they have come, so listen to my poem and know.”

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realities. Rather, the attributes of Allah ﷻ are understood in view of an inseparable judgment (*ḥukm lāzim*) entailed by the reality.

A typical example that the scholars mention is the meaning of the benevolence (*raḥmah*) of Allah ﷻ. The lexical meaning of *raḥmah* is: “softness in the heart that entails kind and gracious treatment.” So, the reality and fundamental meaning of *raḥmah* in respect to human beings is an *emotional* (i.e., non-volitional) response *derived from an external cause*. This is inconceivable for Allah ﷻ. The *ḥukm lāzim* of this reality is benevolent acts such as giving or helping the needy. It is this *ḥukm lāzim* wherein we see the *raḥmah* of Allah ﷻ manifest that we make note of the commonality. However, this does not in anyway go back to a similarity between the fundamental meanings of divine *raḥmah* and human *raḥmah*.

Likewise is an attribute such as knowledge. The reality of human knowledge fundamentally refers to the neural functions of sensory and rational perception. The *ḥukm lāzim* of this reality is the incontrovertible distinction made between objects of perception. Just as with benevolence, there is no way for us to say that this fundamental meaning of knowledge in respect to humans is similar to the knowledge of Allah ﷻ. Rather, when Allah mentions His knowledge, we understand the term in view of this *ḥukm lāzim*, not the reality that it fundamentally refers to, for there is no human meaning that applies to Allah ﷻ. This is the precise approach of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*.

Shaykh al-‘Uthaymīn explained:

This is a principle that the author ﷺ has mentioned: that everything that came in the Book of Allah or authenticated hadiths from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, we let them pass (*imrār*) as they have come. This is narrated from the Predecessors: they say in regards to the verses and hadiths of the attributes: “let them pass as they have come, without any modality (*amirrūhā kamā jāʿat bilā kayf*).”<sup>7</sup>

Thus it is obligatory for us to let them pass as they have come, and this letting pass is not a letting pass of the word only, rather, it is for word and *meaning*. As for letting them pass by word only, then this is a false school.<sup>8</sup> It is called, “the school of the people of entrusting,” or “those who entrust” (*al-Mufawwiḍah*, from the verb *tafwīḍ*).<sup>9</sup> It

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<sup>7</sup> Modality (*kayf* or *kayfiyyah*) is the embodiment (*jismiyyah*) of a thing or the individual way that it takes form (*tashakhkhus*).

<sup>8</sup> Compare this to the statement of Imam al-Nawawī ﷺ in his explanation of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*:

This hadith is from the hadiths of the attributes, and the scholars have two *famous* approaches concerning them whose clarification has preceded in “The Book of Faith.” In summary: One of them—the *approach of the vast majority of the Salaf* and some of the theologians—is that it is believed that they are true according to what befits Allah ﷻ and that *their usual, apparent sense in reference to us is not the intent. Their interpretation is not spoken about*, while believing in the transcendence of Allah ﷻ above the attributes of created beings and above movement, motion, and all other characteristics of the creation.

The very fact that the scholars referred to the face, eye, hand, etc. as attributes (*ṣifāt*, s. *ṣifah*) is a clear indication that the literal meanings of these terms are not the intent. This is so because these terms literally signify body parts, which are distinct from *ṣifāt* from a lexical standpoint. A *ṣifah* is an abstract meaning (*maʿnā*) that inheres in the thing described (*mawṣūf*).

<sup>9</sup> *Tafwīḍ* is to entrust knowledge of the full signification of a text to Allah. It does not mean, as mistakenly asserted above, that we do not know the meaning of an expression *when read in context*. For example, “The hand of Allah is over their hands” (48: 10) is a figure of speech expressing the pleasure of Allah with and His support of those who pledged allegiance to the Prophet ﷺ. *No one familiar with Arabic would deny this or say that, “I do not know what this phrase means.”* After understanding this, the *mufawwiḍ* allows for the probable signification of an attribute (as is immediately understood from the genitive case of a term annexed to Allah) in

is, as the Shaykh of Islam Ibn Taymiyyah رحمته الله said: “among the worst opinions of the people of innovation and denial,” because through this they commit a grave error, wherein they make the Muslims ignorant of the meanings of the verses and hadiths of the attributes. This is a grave danger. If we worship with the wordings of legal rulings (like salat, ablution, *tayammum*, zakat, and Hajj), then how can we not worship with the verses of the attributes, until we understand their meaning?

So the important thing is that we let them pass as they have come, and it is known that it is a word that came for a meaning, thus affirming this word and its intended meaning is obligatory.

If someone says: “Is the intended meaning the apparent sense (*zāhir*)<sup>10</sup>, or a less probable sense?”

The answer is: “indeed it is the apparent sense,” because diverting the word from its apparent sense to a less probable sense requires evidence,<sup>11</sup> and this evidence, if it was never known to us, then claiming it is to follow whim and arbitrarily judge Allah ﷻ.

So, according to this we let the verses of the active, revelatory, and essential attributes pass. We let them pass according to their meanings. Thus life, knowledge, power, hearing, sight, might, force, and whatever is similar to these among the essential attributes; we let them pass as they have come. We say: indeed Allah has life,

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addition to the figurative sense, due to the fact that the perfections of Allah are not limited to what we know of Him. Accordingly, the meaning of the presumed attribute—*when considered as an isolated term extracted from its context*—is unknown, due to the impossibility of the literal meaning (viz., physicality) being applied to Him.

<sup>10</sup> The meaning that is immediately understood (*al-mutabādir ilā al-fahm*)

<sup>11</sup> According to al-ʿUthaymīn, the verse: “There is absolutely nothing like Him” (42: 11), is *not* evidence for these words being used in other than their literal sense.



knowledge, power, hearing, sight, might, force, etc., and it is impermissible for us to divert them from their apparent sense, because diverting them from their apparent sense is to remove them from what is intended by them.

Likewise we let the active attributes pass as they have come; like coming, arriving, anger, wrath, pleasure, joy, wonder, and other than these among the active attributes. *We say: the intent of “pleasure” is the literal meaning, the intent of “wrath” is the literal meaning, the intent of “joy” is the literal meaning, the intent of “dislike” is the literal meaning, and so on;*<sup>12</sup> because they are words that came for their meanings, so if we divert them from their apparent meanings, it would be from the standpoint of following whim, not guidance.

The revelatory attributes are those that signify things called “pieces” and “parts” to us; like face, hand, foot, fingers, and eye. All of these words signify things that are called “pieces” and “parts” in relation to us. As for in relation to Allah, then we do not say that they are pieces and parts, *because the piece and the part are that for which detachment from one another is possible.* This is impossible in relation to Allah ﷻ. For this reason, we do not see anyone saying: “indeed the Hand of Allah is a piece or part of Him,” or “indeed the Face of Allah is a part or piece of Him.” This is not said in reference to Allah ﷻ, because the piece and the part are that for which detachment

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<sup>12</sup> According to this claim, Allah ﷻ literally goes through emotional states. The literal meaning of emotion is a mental state deriving from one’s circumstances or relationships with others. In other words, Allah experiences changes in His essence brought about through the actions of His creation. So, when Zayd becomes legally responsible and fulfills all of his obligations, Allah derives emotional pleasure from this, which He did not feel while Zayd was a child. If Zayd thereafter is disobedient, this pleasure ceases and is replaced with a state of anger. Could there be anything more deficient than divine attributes deriving from the actions of created things?

from the whole is correct, and this is an impossible matter in relation to Allah.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, we call them “hand”, “face”, “eye”, “finger”, “foot”, and whatever is similar to that, however we do not call them ‘piece’ or ‘part’.

Shaykh al-‘Uthaymīn goes on to say:

If someone says: “How can you assert decisively that He intended it? Is it not possible that His intent is that which they changed it to?”

The answer is: Allah ﷻ addressed us by what our intellects dictate, the speech of Allah ﷻ is directed to us, and the Prophet ﷺ did not leave anything except that he clarified it. So, if the intent were other than its apparent sense, the Prophet ﷺ would have clarified it. Therefore, we assert *decisively* that its apparent sense is the intent, because its opposite was never related from the Prophet ﷺ, and if the intent were its opposite, the Messenger ﷺ would surely have clarified it. For this reason it is correct for us to say that the Companions ﷺ unanimously agreed that Allah comes with His essence.

If someone says: “Give us a single letter from Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn ‘Abbās, or other than them saying that Allah comes with His essence,” we say: if the intent were contrary to this, it would have been transmitted from them, since they used to recite this morning and evening, and what is contrary to this was never related from them. This indicates that this was their opinion.

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<sup>13</sup> According to this claim, the main difference between the face, hands, foot, fingers, and eyes of Allah and the body parts of created things is that the former are not detachable. Notice how al-‘Uthaymīn *did not negate the reality of body parts*, which is the occupation of distinct space (*taḥayyuz*) and dimensionality (*al-imtīdād fil ab‘ād*).

So, *there is no need for us to come with a statement from the statements of the Companions* for every attribute among the attributes. This is not necessary, because the Companions used to recite the Qur’an and know its meaning, and it never came from anyone of them that he said contrary to it. So their *silence* in regards to stating the contrary, or the *lack of transmission* from them stating the contrary, is a *proof* that this was their opinion.<sup>14</sup> For this reason it is correct for you to say that *the Companions unanimously agreed that Allah literally ascended His Throne, literally descends to the lowest heaven, and so forth*, and that the intent is not “dominated the Throne” or “His command descends.”<sup>15</sup>

If someone says: “where’s the consensus?” we say: indeed, the *lack of transmission* from them of what is contrary to the apparent sense is a *proof* that they let it pass according to its apparent sense.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Here, al-‘Uthaymīn plainly admits that the Companions ﷺ were silent about this and that nothing has been transmitted from them (which is true), yet he considers the lack of any proof of the Companions affirming these meanings to *be* the proof of their affirmation.

<sup>15</sup> Compare this to the statement of Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī ﷺ in *Fath al-Bārī*:

Those who affirm direction adduce this and say that it is the direction of up, whereas the overwhelming majority denied that because saying so leads to spatiality—Allah is exalted above that! There are different sayings about the meaning of descent. Among them are those who understood it according to its apparent, literal sense, *and these are those who ascribe similarity to Allah (al-Mushabbihah)—Allah is exalted above their statement...*and among them are those who let it pass according to what has been related, believing in it *in a general manner* and asserting transcendence for Allah ﷻ above modality and ascribing similarity, *and these are the overwhelming majority of the Salaf*; Bayhaqī and others transmitted this from the Four Imams, the Two Sufyāns, the Two Ḥammāds, Awzā‘ī, Layth, and others. Among them are those who interpreted it in a suitable manner used in Arabic speech.

<sup>16</sup> It is amazing that such a statement could come from one regarded as a major scholar, who would presumably have studied the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) to an advanced level, and thus not make such a rudimentary mistake about how scholarly consensus operates. Silent consensus (*ijmā‘ sukūṭī*) according to legal theorists is for a jurist to *state* an opinion (based on textual evidence or analogy), then knowledge of that opinion reaches all other

### 3. Implicitly Affirming *Tajsīm*

Imam al-Saffārīnī ﷺ said:

“Our belief is affirmation my dear friend, without nullifying or equating.”

Shaykh al-‘Uthaymīn explained:

His saying: “our belief is affirmation,” i.e., whatever Allah affirmed for Himself.

There is no doubt a shortcoming in the expression, because our belief is affirming whatever Allah affirmed for Himself, negating whatever Allah negated from Himself, and stopping at whatever’s affirmation or negation has not been related so long as it does not entail deficiency. If it entails a pure deficiency, then it is negated from Allah ﷻ. So, our belief is according to the following:

First, affirming whatever Allah affirmed for Himself—like life, knowledge, power, hearing, sight, face, eye, hand, foot, finger, and other than these. So we affirm these because Allah affirmed them for Himself.

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jurists, and then that opinion is not censured or refuted by anyone. This is clearly not the same as an issue *never being discussed in the first place*. Is it not possible that the Companions were silent about these texts because the fact that they are not literal goes without saying to anyone who knows Arabic well, and the need for discussing them only arose when innovators of later generations began insisting upon literalism? A few examples unrelated to the attributes of Allah should make this clear. “Are people amazed that we have revealed to a man among them to warn people and give good news to those who believe that they have a foot of truthfulness with their Lord” (10: 2), “So Allah made them taste the clothing of hunger and fear” (16: 112), “Lower the wing of humility for them out of mercy” (17: 24). Who would seriously claim that the *silence* of the Companions about these texts is a *proof of their consensus* that truthfulness literally has a foot, that hunger and fear literally have clothes that a village literally tasted, and that humility literally has a wing? Is there any doubt that their silence is due to the fact that there is simply no need to spell out for anyone with even a basic proficiency in Arabic that these expressions are figurative? That al-‘Uthaymīn confused *plain* silence with a silent *consensus* is alarming.

Second, negating whatever Allah negated from Himself—like oppression, ignorance, heedlessness, forgetfulness, having one eye, and other than these. We negate whatever Allah negated from Himself.

Third, stopping at whatever’s affirmation or negation has never been related, so long as it does not entail a pure deficiency. *If it entails a pure deficiency, then we negate it from Allah, even if its negation has not been related.* Concerning that for which neither affirmation or negation has been related, an example of it is “body”. So if someone says to us: “do you say that: ‘indeed Allah is a body?’”

The answer is: we do not say that indeed He is a body. Ponder the expression—“we do not say that: ‘indeed He is a body’.” This expression is other than us saying: “indeed He is *not* a body.” The correct thing to say is: “we do not say that: ‘indeed He is a body’.” Thus, we have negated *saying* that He is a body.

There is a difference between the two negations, because the first (saying: “indeed He is *not* a body”) is a judgment negating physicality from Allah, and we have no knowledge about this. The second (saying: “we do not say indeed He is a body”) is a negation of *saying* that, and we negate saying that because we do not know.

*Thus, we neither affirm nor negate a body, because Allah never negated it from Himself and never affirmed it. If He never negated it from Himself and never affirmed it, then we have no business concerning this, and stop where the text stopped.*<sup>17</sup> However, we ask about the intended meaning of ‘body’: if you intended by ‘body’ a thing that is self-subsistent and described with attributes it possesses, then this meaning is correct, for Allah ﷻ is a

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<sup>17</sup> Ponder the gravity of this statement when considered in relation to his previous statement that: “*If it entails a pure deficiency, then we negate it from Allah, even if its negation has not been related.*” According to al-‘Uthaymīn, being a body (i.e., jismiyyah) does not entail a pure deficiency, and thus must not be explicitly negated from Allah ﷻ.

self-subsistent thing described with befitting attributes—He ascends, arrives, descends, laughs, is happy, is angry, and is pleased—we believe in that. If you intended by ‘body’ a thing composed of parts that are in need of one another and detachment of one from another is permissible as in created bodies, then this is false.<sup>18</sup>

Imam al-Saffārīnī ﷺ said in line 43:

“Our Lord is not a substance, nor a property, nor a body. He is exalted, possessor of sublimity!”

Shaykh al-‘Uthaymīn explained:

This speech of the author has two possible facets<sup>19</sup>:

The first is: “we do not say that our Lord is a substance, property, or body,” i.e., we do not say that, rather we are silent. This facet is correct (i.e., it is not permissible for us to negate that Allah is a substance, property, or body, just as it is not permissible for us to affirm that) because affirming or negating that was never related in the Qur’an

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<sup>18</sup> Pay careful attention to the point the shaykh is making here: there is no concern with whether or not the *meaning* of physicality is applicable to Allah or not, but only the permissibility or impermissibility of using the *term* as per its specific mention in the revealed texts (or lack thereof). This is contrary to a famous scholarly principle: consideration is for the meanings, not the terms and the structures (*al-‘ibratu fil-ma‘ānī, lā fil-alfāz wal-mabānī*). If al-‘Uthaymīn knew the meaning of “body”, then how could he not negate it from Allah ﷻ? Because there is no specific text to that effect, or because he does not regard it as a deficiency, as mentioned above? Here we see him implying that Allah is in fact a body, yet His “parts” must not be labeled as such, due to their detachment from Him being impossible.

<sup>19</sup> Amazingly, here al-‘Uthaymīn interpreted an unambiguous statement (*naṣṣ*).

or the Sunnah<sup>20</sup>, and what is relied upon in regards to the attributes of Allah is the Qur'an and the Sunnah. If neither affirmation nor negation is ever related about them, then it is obligatory for us to not say either affirmation or negation.

The second facet of the author's speech: negating substance, not negating to say it. According to this facet, its meaning is to say the negation of substance: i.e., we say that "indeed He is *not* a substance." The difference between the two facets is obvious.

The saying of the author: "our Lord is not a substance" possibly means, "we do not say that indeed our Lord is not a substance or that indeed He is a substance" (i.e., we do not say this or that). This meaning is correct, because that was never related in the Book or the Sunnah. It is possible for his speech to mean: "Indeed Allah is not a substance," thereby affirming his statement, which is negating substance (i.e., Allah is *not* a substance).

As for the first facet, which is negating the *statement* that "He is a substance", then this is correct, because it is not for us to say: "indeed He is a substance" or "indeed He is not a substance."

As for the second facet, which is saying that He is *not* a substance, then this is not correct, and it is the *prima facie* sense of the author's speech. So, the author ﷺ is of the opinion that the creed of the People of the Sunnah and the Group is that they say: "indeed Allah is not a substance, nor a property, nor a body." There is no doubt that this negation is incorrect. The People of the Sunnah never said this. This is not their school, because they do not decisively assert the negation or affirmation of anything except with evidence, and *this has no evidence*, whether for affirming or negating.

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<sup>20</sup> According to this claim, the statement of Allah: "There is absolutely nothing like Him" (a decisive textual proof negating any similarity to the creation) does not include the very *constituents* of the creation.

A substance is whatever is self-subsistent, a property is whatever inheres in something else, and a body is whatever has form. The author رحمته is of the opinion that negating these three from Allah ﷻ is from our creed, however this is not correct and not from the school of the People of the Sunnah and the Group. That is because these terms are innovated terms, never known to the Predecessors.<sup>21</sup> There is no statement saying that indeed Allah is a body or that He is not a body in the statements of the Predecessors, nor that Allah is a property or that He is not a property, nor that Allah is a substance or that He is not a substance—not in the Qur’an, the Sunnah, or the speech of the Predecessors.<sup>22</sup>

However, when the tribulation of the theologians occurred, they began mentioning these words in order to arrive through their negation to the negation of attributes from Allah. So for example they say: “there is no descending except with a body. Allah ﷻ is not a body, so if the entailed is negated, the entailer is negated. Therefore, Allah does not descend to the lowest heaven. Likewise, literally ascending the Throne entails that Allah is a body. Allah ﷻ is not a body, therefore we negate the ascension of Allah over the Throne,” and so on. The theologians came with the like of these expressions to arrive through them to the negation of the attributes of Allah ﷻ. Otherwise, they have no purpose for negating this or affirming it, except for this issue.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Again, this is merely a disapproval of the terms, without addressing the meanings. Why are the *meanings* of these terms not negated, given the gravity of describing Allah with a human meaning?

<sup>22</sup> Imam Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150 AH, رحمته), a Follower, said in *Fiqh Akbar*: “He is a thing unlike things. The meaning of ‘thing’ is His establishment—without body, substance, or property.”

<sup>23</sup> Rather, these things are negated from Allah in order to provide detail to His saying: “There is absolutely nothing like Him,” (42: 11) which is a decisive proof for negating any likeness (*mumāthalah*) to occurrences. Likeness is for two things to have all of the same essential attributes. For example, ‘Amr is a human like Zayd, because they are the same regarding all of



Since these words are not to be found in the Qur'an, the Sunnah, or the speech of the Companions—neither negating nor affirming—it is obligatory for us to stop. We do not negate that Allah is a body, nor do we affirm it; we do not negate that Allah is an accident, nor do we affirm it; we do not negate that Allah is a substance, nor do we affirm it. Rather, we are silent, and seek detail regarding the meaning. So we say to whoever negates that Allah is a body: if you intend by 'body' that which is an occurrence and composed of parts and organs, then we are with you in your negation, for Allah is not an occurrence, nor composed of parts and organs *in a manner whereby it is permissible for anything among them to be detached*. However, we do not negate "body", rather we say that verily Allah transcends ﷻ having parts like the parts of created

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the essential attributes of humanness, viz. being rational animals. In other words, Zayd, 'Amr, and all other human beings are essentially the same. This is contrary to having *some* of the same essential attributes. For example, a horse is not a human like Zayd, because horses lack an essential attribute of humanness, viz. reason. It is also contrary to having some of the same *nonessential* attributes (e.g., both Zayd and the horse having black hair). However, a horse is an animal like Zayd, because they are the same regarding all of the essential attributes of animality, viz. being bodies with a capacity for voluntary movement.

So, when we observe the universe, we see that it consists of material objects (substances and bodies) and their properties. The essential attributes of material objects are: volume, the embodiment of accidents, directionality, locality, temporality, and dimensionality. The essential attributes of properties are: inherence within material objects and impermanence. All of the creation—humans, horses, stars, chipmunks, Jupiter, high-heeled shoes, the Pacific ocean, stones, oak trees, frogs, spaceships, chocolate chip cookies, or anything else you can think of—are essentially the same, because each one of them (despite the myriad differences between their nonessential attributes and modalities) possesses all of the same essential attributes of physicality. So, when Allah ﷻ says: "There is absolutely nothing like Him," it means that all of those qualities that make everything in the universe alike are negated from Him. This is the decisive signification of the verse.

things, in a manner whereby He is a body composed of them, that some may be detached while the whole remains, and whatever is similar to that.<sup>24</sup>

If you intend by “body” an entity described with attributes befitting for it, then this is a truth that we affirm, and it is not permissible for us to negate it. However, we do not say that indeed Allah is a body, even if we intend this meaning, because the term “body” was never related in the Qur’an or the Sunnah, neither for affirming or negating.

#### 4. Affirming a *Kayfiyyah* for the Attributes of Allah ﷻ

Imam al-Saffārīnī ﷺ said in line 50:

“However, without any modality or ascription of equality.”

Shaykh al-‘Uthaymīn explained:

His saying: “however, without any modality,” means that they (the attributes) are eternal and established for Allah, however, without any modality. The intent of his saying: “without any modality” is: without any *ascription* of modality to them *from us*. It is not the intent that they do not have a modality, and *that is because there is no established thing except that it inescapably has a modality*.<sup>25</sup> So the Hand has a modality, the

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<sup>24</sup> Again, *essential* attributes possessed by all body parts, such as occupation of space and dimensionality are not negated. Only the *nonessential* attribute of being subject to detachment is negated.

<sup>25</sup> Compare this to the similar statement of Ibn Taymiyyah quoted in the first footnote: “whatever is not a body is not anything but nonexistent.” This judgment about the nature of existence is based neither on reason or revelation, but is rather a misleading impression (*wahm*) derived from an incomplete inspection (*istiqrā’ nāqīṣ*) of existent things. The human being is incapable of a comprehensive inspection (*istiqrā’ tāmm*) of existence due to the very clear and very simple fact that human perception is limited, and thus is not in a position to make a

*Face has a modality, and the Eye has a modality.*<sup>26</sup> However, we do not *ascribe* a modality to it, for us ascribing a modality to it is prohibited. Furthermore, asking about the modality is an innovation, as Imam Mālik رحمته الله explicitly stated and the people of knowledge agreed with him on, so we do not ask about the modality nor do we ascribe a modality.

He goes on to say:

*So, modality is affirmed, yet ascribing a modality is precluded. If you were to negate modality absolutely, you would have negated existence.* When the Predecessors said about the verses and hadiths on the attributes: ‘let them pass as they have come without any modality,’ their statement is understood according to this: i.e., without ascribing a modality.

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universal proposition about something that, rationally-speaking, may be far more than whatever he can naturally or mechanically perceive.

<sup>26</sup> Remember that the meaning of modality is the embodiment (*jismiyyah*) of a thing or the individual way that it takes form (*tashakhkhuṣ*). For example, if I were to say, “Zayd is sitting” and you asked, “How is Zayd sitting (*kayf*)?” and I responded, “cross-legged,” you initially understood that there was a *kayfiyyah* to Zayd’s sitting, yet were unaware of and thus unable to ascribe a particular *kayfiyyah* to it prior to me answering the question.