



CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLE: DETAILED AFFIRMATION AND GENERAL NEGATION OF THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES¹

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Frequently, Ibn Taymiyya states (in his works) that the path of the Salaf when describing Allāh, is to affirm the (Divine) attributes in a detailed fashion, and when speaking on (Divine) transcendence, to suffice with a general negation. Here, we shall clarify that the reality is different from what Ibn Taymiyya asserted.

To the contrary of what he claimed, the Qur'ānic method employs detail in both areas (of negation and affirmation). There is detail when it is called for, and general expressions when called for. Based on this, it is not to be said that the Qur'ānic method as a whole, is detailed affirmation and general negation. On the contrary, (the Qur'ān) might negate that which does not benefit Allāh in a detailed fashion, just as it affirms for Him in a detailed fashion. The method that is employed (in the Qur'ānic texts) is based on the need. Here, we shall explain the reason and the purpose that caused Ibn Taymiyya to latch on to this claimed principle before we begin in deconstructing it and critiquing it.

We know that the school of Ibn Taymiyya is to assert corporeality for Allāh the Exalted, for he states that Allāh is in a direction, that He is settled upon the Throne with spatial contact, that He moves both in rising and descending, that emergent things subsist within His Divine essence, that He possess a hand, eye, face, and other things that he terms *Ṣifāt 'Ayniyya* (attributes of the self), and so on and so fourth. This is the detailed affirmation that Ibn Taymiyya intends.

As for our scholars from the people of the truth, they describe Allāh with the attributes of perfection, such as; Power, Knowledge, Life, etc. They declare Allāh to be far removed and exaltedly transcendent from every deficiency—so as a consequence, they negate (from Him) direction, limit, a corporeal body, and that emergent things are subsisting in His Exalted essence, and they say: “Nothing is like unto Him”.

When Ibn Taymiyya says that Qur'ānic method is one of detailed affirmation and general negation, by this he wishes to declare those scholars incorrect—those that negated deficiencies from Allāh in detail and completely as has proceeded. This is because he affirms some of this for Allāh the Exalted—even if he claims that what he affirms does not imply deficiency for Allāh the Exalted. His desire was that the scholars would suffice with the words of Allāh the Exalted: **“There is nothing like unto Him.”** and: **“There is nothing that resembles Him.”** This is because, according to him, these verses are general and carry the possibility of being specified, or are unspecified and in need of

¹ Taken from *Naqḍ al-Tadmuriyya* (Rebuttal of Ibn Taymiyya's al-'Aqīdat al-Tadmuriyya), Shaykh Sa'īd b. 'Abdul Laṭīf Foudah; Dār al-Rāzī.

specification. So according to Ibn Taymiyya, even though with regard to Him (Allāh): “There is nothing like unto Him”, He is still in a direction, in a place, touching the Throne, moving, and other such matters that are considered deficiencies according to the scholars of the Truth, while at the same time, considered perfections that are necessary for Allāh’s existence or (necessary) for His actions according to Ibn Taymiyya.

So in summary, Ibn Taymiyya only believes that the Qur’ānic method is one of detailed affirmation and general negation. He believes that it is with detailed affirmation because he wanted to open the door for himself to affirm what was mentioned previously. He believed that it was perfection for Allāh the Exalted. As for him believing that the (Qur’ānic method) was one of general negation, it is because he wanted to close the door in front of his opponents, thereby preventing them from negating these deficiencies from Allāh the Exalted.

Therefore, his principle was one motivated by reaching an objective, and not one based on knowledge, meaning that he developed this principle in order to reach his objective that he had within himself. He did not obtain this principle after copious reading of the verses of the Qur’ān or the Noble Sunnah. The Qur’ān declares Allāh’s (Divine transcendence) both in general (terms) and in specific, and it affirms Allāh’s attributes both in general (terms) and in specific. Therefore, there is nothing found in the Qur’ān that prevents a detailed negation when there is a need for that, just as there is nothing therein that prevents a general affirmation.

You are aware that Allāh the Exalted negated some deficiencies from His Noble Essence in detail, as He said:

“He was not begot, nor was He begotten.”

Likewise, He negated in general when He said:

“And there is nothing like unto Him.”

He affirmed complete and general perfection for Himself when He said:

***“Allāh, there is nothing worthy of worship besides Him,
He is the Living, the Self Sustaining.”***

Just as He negated in detail when He said:

“Neither sleep nor slumber overtake Him.”

When the Jews ascribed stinginess to Allāh the Exalted, He refuted them in detail by saying:

***“May their hands be tied up, and may they be cursed for what they said. Rather His two
Hands are outstretched, spending however He wills.”***

This principle that was innovated by Ibn Taymiyya was only in order to actualize his goal

and carry out his desires. The scholars, however, believed that detailed negation is correct, just as general negation is correct, because every imperfection that the human heart affirms for Allāh—out of his deviation—must be denied and explicitly negated as such when there is a need for that. What does it mean to negate a child and wife from Allāh the Exalted? Is that not a detailed negation employed to repel the claim of the one that claims it is affirmed for Him, the Exalted? The one who explained the Tadmuriyya essay (of Ibn Taymiyya) took notice of this from afar in his commentary on Ibn Taymiyya's citation of the verse to establish (the principle) of general negation: ***“He was not begot, nor was He begotten, and there is nothing like unto Him.”*** He said:

The point of evidence in this second verse, is that Allāh negated that He has any similitude—meaning likeness, equal or one similar to Him. He negated similitude and resemblance in general (here), hence it is a general negation. The point of evidence is in His statement: ***“And there is nothing like unto Him.”*** As for the statement of the Exalted: ***“He was not begot, nor was he begotten,”*** it is from the realm of detailed negation, because He negated a specific attribute. This verse is outside of the dominant principle, which is that the Qur'ānic method is one of general negation. There are two reasons for this. **One:** the Jews and Idol worshippers ascribed a child to Allāh, so Allāh rebuked them and specifically negated this attribute. **Two:** A child, or having children, is an attribute of perfection with respect to the creation, so it was negated in order that it might not be imagined that Allāh is described with it (as well). So, even though it is an attribute of perfection for the creation, it is still (an attribute) of perfection that is connected with imperfection. This is the reason why this verse is not included in this principle, and it has a few other similar (exceptions).

We have some observations on this;

One: Ibn Taymiyya says that the method of affirmation is one of detail, and in its outward apparent sense, there is no obscurity in that. However, we differ with him concerning what he wishes to affirm in detail, as we explained earlier. He wants to affirm a direction whereas we negate it. He wants to affirm a limit, whereas we negate it. He wants to affirm a locus, whereas we negate it. He wants to affirm movement and emergent things subsisting within the (Divine) Essence, whereas we negate that.

Two: His statement that the method of negation is one of general negation is not completely a given fact, as explained from two angles:

A: We could be in need of a detailed negation in order to repel the false notions of some of the innovators and heretics, such as those that imagine that Allāh is stingy, so as a consequence, we negate stinginess from Him in detail. Similar is the case of those that affirm a direction for Allāh—so we negate that from Him in detail just as Allāh negated having a wife or a child from Himself.

B: The word ‘ambiguous’ (*Mujmal*) is a technical legal term well known to the scholars of *Usūl*. In sum, it is not possible to act upon it due to its need for a specifying evidence. With Ibn Taymiyya however, he made the term ‘*Mujmal*’ an adjective of negation when he said: “General/ambiguous negation.” So in this, he made the negation itself to be

general/ambiguous, however the 'general/ambiguous is not the same thing as that which is clear/specific (*Mubīn*), and that which is not specific (*Mubīn*), then it can not be acted upon because of the lack of clarity concerning its intended meaning or what applies to it. So in reality, Ibn Taymiyya really believes that the negation cited in the Qur'ān, such as the words of the Exalted: “*There is nothing like unto Him*”, is not clear cut (*Muḥkam*) and that it needs clarification (from elsewhere). He takes the same view regarding the words of the Exalted: “*There is nothing comparable to Him.*” It is for this reason, he does not find any difficulty bringing details that negate these Noble verses—saying for example that: Allāh possesses a limit, He is in a direction and with spatial contact, and emergent things subsists within His Divine Essence, and other such things that in their apparent wording, contradict these verses. Yet, since according to Ibn Taymiyya, these verses are general, in reality, these verses can not be made the sturdy pillar that is relied upon in this area (of discussion), nor can they close all arguments. For this reason, he brings before it all of the detailed affirmations that he imagines, and this is why he says that the affirmation should be detailed—as we explained to you earlier.

The truth regarding this matter is that it should be said: the negation found in these verses are general or comprehensive (*Kullī*). This negation is decisively clear cut and it is obligatory that it be acted upon. It is not general/ambiguous, nor does it (remain inoperative) until there is clarification. The reason for this is that the general/ambiguous is clarified, and the comprehensive negation is clear cut in its area. In summary, these verses that Ibn Taymiyya says are general and unclear, our scholars—the scholars of the people of truth say that they are clear cut, explicit, and obvious, that are in no need of added clarification. These verses *are* the ruling according to us, whereas with Ibn Taymiyya, there are nothing more than general/ambiguous negations.

The truth regarding this matter is that, after what has proceeded, it must be said that (these verses) are a detailed negation and not a general/ambiguous negation. The detailed and encompassing negation—meaning the negation that is clarified—is not to be contradicted by the illusions that appear to some of the innovators due to their ignorance or vain desires. For this reason, our scholars did not see any mutual contradiction between the detailed negation and what has appeared in the Holy Qur'ān, rather, according to them, this was aided and in agreement with the Qur'ānic method—as opposed to Ibn Taymiyya and those that incline towards him.

The Summary of This Brief Analysis:

The method that Ibn Taymiyya claims is neither the Prophetic nor Qur'ānic method. Rather, it is the Ibn Taymiyyan method. As for the Qur'ānic method, it is to affirm in detail that which is clear-cut for Allāh the Exalted, and to negate in detail and comprehensiveness, every deficiency that does not befit Allāh the Exalted.

Three: ponder over the words of the one that explained the Tadmuriyya “This verse is outside of the dominant principle,” and his statement: “And it has a few other similar (exceptions).” Here, he has clearly admitted that this verse is outside of the realm of Ibn Taymiyya's principle, and he admitted that there are other (verses) similar to it. Whatever has similar (exceptions) to something else, then they both share in the

operative cause (*‘Illa*) and comprehensive ruling. The basic rule is that if this is the case, then the ruling is all encompassing and general. So with this being the case, why didn't Ibn Taymiyya say that? The statement (of the one that explained the Tadmuriyya) that: "...it has a few other similar (exceptions)" is not accepted. This is not the so, because what he and his Shaykh called general/ambiguous, is not really general/ambiguous at all, rather, it is comprehensive, detailed and clear—therefore, it is grouped among the other similar (verses) and becomes one of them. These similar verses are not irregular exceptions, lest it (be asserted) that they can not be used as evidence, rather, they are congruous with the principle of comprehensive negation.

