



Allāh exists without place or direction ¹

Mufti `Alī Jumū`ab

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Released by www.marifah.net 1428 H

The Question:

“I am a student at the college of Sharī`ah and I have learned and studied in the Science of Belief that Allāh exists without being in a place, and that He is not placed in any direction. So please give me a *fatwa* on this, because there are some people that attack the belief of Al-Azhar.”

The Answer:

It is one of the established matters of the belief of the Muslims that Allāh (He is clear of and above all flaws) is not contained in a place and not limited by time, because place and time are both creations. Allāh is clear of and above being surrounded by any creation of His. Rather, He is the Creator of everything, and He (has complete knowledge and control of his creation, so in this sense, not the sense of place or direction, it is said in Arabic that He) “surrounds” His creation. This belief is agreed upon among the Muslims, no one denies this among them.

The scholars of the religion have expressed this by saying:

“Allāh existed and there was no place, and He is now as He was before the creation of place; He has not changed from what He was.”

Among the expressions of the Pious *salaf* on this topic is the saying of Abū Ja`far al-Sādiq ؑ:

“Whoever claims that Allāh is in something, or from something, or on something has associated a partner with Allāh ², because if He was in something, then He would be confined; and if He was on something, then He would be carried; and if He was from something, then He would be something that has a beginning.”

¹ Translation adapted from Fatwa Serial No. 4307: <http://www.dar-alfata.org/ViewFatwa.aspx?id=4307>

² “Associated a partner with Allāh” is a translation of the Arabic word *shirk*, i.e. Blasphemy.

It was said to Yahyā ibn Mu'ādh al-Rāzī ؓ: “Tell us about Allāh!” He said: “One god.” Then someone said: “How is He?” He said: “An absolute ruler with absolute power.” Then someone said: “Where is He?” He answered: “Seeing and Hearing³.” The person who asked said: “I was not asking about that.” He replied: “Other than that would be an attribute of a creation. As for the attribute of Allāh; it is as I told you.”

Dhul Nūn al-Misrī ؓ was asked about the saying of Allāh: “*al-Rahmān `alāl `arsh istawā*”⁴. He answered: “He affirmed His existence, and denied that He has a place. So He Himself exists independently, while other things exist by His Wisdom as He Wills.”

With regard to what has been narrated to us of texts from the Qur’ān and Hadīths that indicate the Highness of Allāh ؓ; over His creation; it means highness in the sense of status and prestige; and of dominance and power. This is because He is clear of any resemblance to created things; His attributes are not like their attributes; there is nothing in an attribute of the Creator that is related to the limits of the attributes of created things.

Rather, He is Great and High in Status, He has the attributes of complete perfection and the names that are beautiful. Anything that might enter your mind; Allāh is different from it - He is clear of and above imperfection. The inability to reach understanding is understanding,⁵

³ His answer in Arabic was “*bil mirsād*”, and it is a Qur’ānic expression which means that Allāh sees and hears all that His creatures do and will hold them accountable. It could also mean “watch post” or “ambush”. In other words, this answer was an eloquent play on words in the sense that it fit the answer for “where?” without giving the meaning of place.

⁴ Its pronunciation is: *ar-Rahmān `alāl `arsh-istawā*. If someone translated this statement literally, he would say: *al-Rahmān* (The Merciful) *`alā* (on) *al-`arsh* (The Throne) *istawā* (established Himself); “The Merciful established Himself on the throne”. This is not the meaning of the statement, however, and the Arabic Language is not limited to this meaning. Rather, the verb “*istawā*” in the Arabic language has some 14 different meanings. Moreover, the word *al-`arsh* does not necessarily mean “throne”, it could also mean “dominion”, and some of the Salaf said that.

Abu Mansūr al-Baghdādī said in his book *usūl al-dīn*, in summary: “Our colleagues differed regarding this Ayah. Some said that it is among the Ayahs that are *mutashābihāt* and its meaning is not known by other than Allāh, and this is the saying of Mālik. Others said that *istawā* is something that Allāh did to the *`arsh* that He called *istawā*, and this is the saying of Abū Hasan al-Ash`arī. Others again said that *istawā* means that He is attributed with aboveness over the *`arsh* without contact (i.e. in status, not physical aboveness). The correct saying in our view, is that *al-`arsh* in this Ayah means the Dominion and *istawā* is its action, meaning that the Dominion did not settle in equilibrium for anyone but Him.”

In case anyone is wondering who Abū Mansūr is, al-Dhahabī described him in his book *siyar A`lām al-nubalā`* as: “the great, outstanding, and encyclopedic scholar... He used to teach 17 different subjects and his brilliance became the source for proverbs.” Al-Dhahabī said further that he would have liked to write a separate, more complete article about him, and quoted Abū `Uthmān al-Sābūnī saying: “Abū Mansūr is by scholarly consensus counted among the heads of the scholars of belief and the methodology of jurisprudence, as well as a front figure of Islam.”

⁵ I.e. realizing that one cannot know Allāh as He knows Himself is to know Allāh.

and to search for the complete reality of what Allāh Himself is, is to commit blasphemy and associate partners with Him ⁶.

The belief of the Honorable Azhar University is the belief of the scholars of the Ash`arī school, which is the belief of the Sunnīs. The Ash`arī Masters, may Allāh reward and please them, are the majority of the scholars of those who are associated with the call of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They are the ones that stopped the spreading of doubts done by the blasphemers and other deviants.

They are the ones that clung to Allāh's book and the teachings and way of our master, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ throughout history. Whoever said that they are blasphemers or sinners; his religion is in danger. The Hadīth master Ibn `Asākir ؒ said in his book "*tabiyīn kadhib al-muftarī fī mā nusiba ilāl imām abīl hasan al-ash`ar*":

“Know - may Allāh grant you and me success by His reward, and make us among those who truly fears Him – that the flesh of the scholars is poisonous, and it is the well known norm of Allāh in His creation to expose those who insult them; the one that slanders them will be afflicted by Allāh before he dies with the death of his heart.”

The Honorable University of Al-Azhar is the lighthouse of knowledge and religion throughout the Islamic history. This lofty castle made the greatest heartland of knowledge that the Islamic nation has known after the first and best centuries. By it, Allāh protected His religion from all the wrong headed and those who spread doubts. The one who is haphazard about his belief is in grave danger. It is feared that he is one among the Khawārij ⁷ or Murji`a ⁸ sects. .

Allāh said concerning them (what may be rendered in meaning as):

“If the hypocrites, and those who have disease in the heart, and the alarmists in al-Madīnah do not cease, then Allāh will put you (O Muhammad) in control of them and let you finish them off, after that you will find very few of them as neighbors to you there”⁹

.... and Allāh knows best.

⁶ This is because such a search leads to draw analogies between Allāh and created things, and this is blasphemy.

⁷ A sect of many branches that share the love for killing and plundering Muslims on the basis of claiming them idolaters, and for claiming that committing sins is blasphemy, even if one believes that its commitment is sinful.

⁸ A sect that claimed that as long as one believes in Islam, then committing sins does not harm.

⁹ Al-Ahzāb, 60