

Ahlu-Sunnah Wal-Jamā'ah Categorised the Attributes of Allāh in Order to Aid Understanding and to Refute the Deviated Sects

As stated previously *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah* believe in whatever Allāh has described Himself with. Upon examination of the Revealed Texts, we see that the Attributes of Allāh come under two headings: Attributes which affirm (*Thubūtiyyah*) and those which negate (*Salbiyyah*):

ONE: *Ath-Thubūtiyyah* (the Affirmed Attributes) are those Attributes which Allāh has affirmed for Himself such as Life (*al-Hayāt*), Knowledge (*al-ʿilm*), Ability (*al-Qudrah*) and so on. It is necessary to affirm these for Allāh in a manner that befits His Majesty since it is He who has affirmed them for Himself in the Texts—and He is the Most Knowledgeable concerning His Attributes.

TWO: *As-Salbiyyah* (the negating attributes) are those attributes which Allāh has negated from Himself such as injustice (*ẓulm*), slumber, sleep, etc., so one must negate these attributes from Him just as He (*سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَتَعَالَى*) has negated them from Himself. However, it is necessary to affirm belief in the opposite of these negated attributes in a most complete and perfect manner. That is because negation of a weak or deficient attribute is not considered as perfection until it includes an affirmation of its opposite. For example, the saying of

Allāh, “**and your Lord oppresses no one.**”³⁸ So it obligatory to negate from Allāh oppression (*zulm*) alongside believing in the affirmation of the utmost perfect justice (‘*Adl*) for Him.³⁹

The Affirmed Attributes (*Ath-Thubūtiyyah*) are Further Divided

It is obligatory to affirm the Attributes for Allāh just as He has affirmed them for Himself whether they are *aṣ-Ṣifāt aḏ-Zātiyyah* (also known as *al-Lāzimah*)⁴⁰ or *aṣ-Ṣifāt al-Fi‘liyyah* (also known as *al-Ikhtiyāriyyah*)⁴¹. So, when we investigate the texts of the Book and Sunnah, we find that the Affirmed Attributes (*aṣ-Ṣifāt*) are not outside of the following two categories:⁴²

FIRSTLY: *Aṣ-Ṣifāt aḏ-Zātiyyah*: These are the Eternal Attributes that Allāh never ceases to be described with eternally, constantly, unceasing, and forever. For example, Life, Ability, Knowledge, Highness, His Face, His Two Hands, etc.

SECOND: *As-Ṣifāt al-Fi‘liyyah*: These are the Discretionary Attributes that are connected to the Will of Allāh (*al-Mashī‘ah*) and His Intent

³⁸ *Sūrah al-Kahf*: 49.

³⁹ See introduction of *Lum‘at al-Itiqād al-Hādī ilā Sabīl al-Rashād* of Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī with the explanation of Ibn ‘Uthaimīn, pp. 20-27.

⁴⁰ These are the Eternal Attributes, Allāh does not cease to be described with them.

⁴¹ These are the Discretionary Attributes and the Chosen Actions of Allāh as explained previously.

⁴² See *al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyyah al-Kubrā* of *Shaykh al-Islām* Ibn Taymiyyah—edited, verified, and annotated by *Shaykh Ḥamad ibn ‘Abdul-Muhsin al-Tuwajjirī*, pp. 155.

(*al-Irādah*) such as His Creating, Providing, Coming, Ascending, and so on. So, it is said, for example, “Allāh created the Pen fifty thousand years before the creation of the Heavens and earth,” and, “He created the Heavens and the earth in six days, then He Ascended over the Throne,” and, “He Descends to the nearest Heaven in the last third of the night.” So, these are from the Chosen Actions of Allāh according to His Will (in other words, *as-Şifāt al-Fi‘liyyah*).

Additionally, each Attribute whether *az-Zātiyyah* or *al-Fi‘liyyah* can be divided into *Khabariyyah* (textual affirmation) and *‘Aqliyyah* (intellectual affirmation).

So, there are *aş-Şifāt az-Zātiyyah*⁴³ **that can only be affirmed from the textual proofs** such as the Face, Two Hands, Foot, etc. And there are *aş-Şifāt al-Zātiyyah* **that can be affirmed through both the textual proofs and by the intellect** such as Knowledge (*al-‘Ilm*), Intent (*al-Irādah*), Life (*al-Hayāt*), Highness (*al-‘Uluww*), etc.

Likewise, there are *aş-Şifāt al-Fi‘liyyah* (or *al-Ikhtiyāriyyah*)⁴⁴ **that are affirmed only from the textual proofs** such as the Attribute of Ascending over the Throne (*al-Istiwā*), Coming (*al-Majī*) on the Day of Judgement, Descending (*an-Nuzūl*) in the last third of the night, etc. Then there are *aş-Şifāt al-Fi‘liyyah* **that are affirmed both through the textual proofs and by the intellect** such as Creating, Providing, Giving Life, etc.

Then there are **some Attributes that both *az-Zātiyyah* (Eternal) and *al-Fi‘liyyah* (Discretionary)** such as the Attribute of

⁴³ i.e., the Eternal Unceasing Attributes.

⁴⁴ i.e., the Discretionary Attributes (or Allāh’s Chosen Actions).

Speech (*al-Kalām*).⁴⁵ So the Speech of Allāh is an Attribute of Allāh that is both *Zātiyyah* and *Fi‘liyyah*—meaning, He never ceases to speak and He has always spoken (Eternal), and He speaks when He Wills to whom He Wills (Discretionary).

⁴⁵ See *al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyyah al-Kubrā* of Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah—edited, verified and annotated by Shaykh Ḥamad ibn ‘Abdul-Muhsin al-Tuwayjirī, p. 156 where the verifier cited *al-Fatāwā* of Ibn Taymiyyah 6/219, *Sharh al-Ṭahāwīyyah* 1/96-97, *al-Tamhīd* of al-Bāqillānī pp. 298-299, *al-I‘tiqād* of al-Bayhaqī pp. 21-22, *al-Asmā’ wa al-Ṣifāt* of al-Bayhaqī 1/188-189, *al-Milāl wa al-Niḥāl* of al-Shaharastānī 1/104, *Sharh al-Fiqh al-Akbar* of Mullā ‘Alī Qārī pp. 25-36, the annotations of ‘Abdullāh Abā Buṭayn on *Lawāmi‘ al-Anwār* 1/112, and *Sharh al-Wasiṭiyyah* of al-Harrās pp. 105-106.