

208868 - Is gesturing with the hand when quoting hadiths that speak of the divine attributes tantamount to likening divine attributes to human attributes?

the question

It was narrated that Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

It was narrated from Ibn 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) recited this verse one day on the minbar (interpretation of the meaning): "They made not a just estimate of Allah such as is due to Him. And on the Day of Resurrection the whole of the earth will be grasped by His Hand and the heavens will be rolled up in His Right Hand. Glorified is He, and High is He above all that they associate as partners with Him!" [az-Zumar 39:67]. And the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was gesturing like this with his hand, moving it back and forth. "The Lord will praise Himself, (saying): 'I am the Compeller, I am the Almighty, I am the Sovereign, I am the Supreme, I am the Most Generous.'" And the minbar shook with the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) until we thought it would fall with him.

My question is: Isn't gesturing with the hand in this case tantamount to likening the hand of Allah to human hands, when Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer" [ash-Shoora 42:11]?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Muslim (2788)

narrated from 'Ubaydullah ibn Muqsim that he watched 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) to see how he narrated that

the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:
“Allah, may He be glorified and elated, will take His heavens and His earths
in His hands and will say: I am Allah – clenching and unclenching his fist
– I am the Sovereign,” and I looked at the minbar and saw it shaking at the
bottom, and I thought that it would fall with the Messenger of Allah
(blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

And Imam Ahmad

(5414) narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that the
Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)
recited this verse one day on
the minbar (interpretation of the meaning): “They made not a just
estimate of Allah such as is due to Him. And on the Day of Resurrection the
whole of the earth will be grasped by His Hand and the heavens will be
rolled up in His Right Hand. Glorified is He, and High is He above all that
they associate as partners with Him!” [az-Zumar 39:67]. And the
Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was gesturing
like this with his hand, moving it back and forth. “The Lord will praise
Himself, (saying): ‘I am the Compeller, I am the Almighty, I am the
Sovereign, I am the Supreme, I am the Most Generous.’” And the minbar shook
with the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) until
we thought it would fall with him.

Classed as

saheeh by Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) in as-Silsilah
as-Saheehah (7/596).

Such hadiths

that mention gesturing with the hand when mentioning an attribute of Allah,
may He be exalted, is not intended to liken Allah’s attribute to that of
human beings. How can such a thing be thought of the Messenger of Allah
(blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)? Rather such gestures are only

intended to affirm the divine attribute and to confirm that it is to be interpreted in the true sense of the word, and to rule out any interpretation of it as being metaphorical. So when seeing that gesture, and bearing in mind the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer” [ash-Shoora 42:11], the listener will understand that the attribute is to be interpreted according to the apparent meaning and is not metaphorical. It is not to be understood that the intended meaning is to liken divine attributes to human attributes, because it is well-known that there is nothing like Allah.

Abu Dawood

(4728) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) recited this verse (interpretation of the meaning): “Verily, Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily, how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah) gives you! Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer” [al-Nisa’ 5:58]. He said: I saw the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) place his thumb on his ear and his forefinger on his eye. Abu Hurayrah said: I saw the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) reciting it and placing his fingers thus. Ibn Yoonus said: al-Muqri’ [one of the narrators of the hadith] said: Meaning that Allah is All-Hearer, All-Seer, i.e., Allah has hearing and sight. Abu Dawood said: This is a refutation of the Jahamiyyah.

The hadith is

saheeh; it was classed as saheeh by al-Albaani and others.

Al-Bayhaqi

narrated it in al-Asma’ wa’s-Sifaat (1/462) via Abu Dawood, then he

said:

What is meant by

the gesture mentioned in the hadith is to affirm the divine attributes of hearing and seeing. So he pointed to the locations of those attributes in humans, in order to affirm the divine attributes of Allah, may He be exalted. This is like when we say: So and so seized the wealth of So and so, accompanied by a gesture of the hand to indicate that he took control of his wealth. This report highlights the fact that Allah is All Hearing, All Seeing, and that He has hearing and sight, but the verse is not to be interpreted as referring to His having knowledge, because if it was intended to refer to His knowledge, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would have pointed to his heart, because the heart is the seat of knowledge in us (humans). But there is nothing in the report to indicate that Allah has physical faculties – exalted be Allah far above being likened to created beings. End quote.

Ibn al-Qayyim

(may Allah have mercy on him) said:

In the words

“Allah will grasp His heavens in His hand and the earth in the other hand, then He will shake them, then He will say: I am the Sovereign”, we see mention of shaking and grasping and two hands, and when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told them that, he started to clasp and unclasp his hands, to affirm this attribute, not to liken it to human attributes. Similarly, when he recited the words “Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer” [al-Nisa’ 5:58], and put his hands on his eyes and ears, this was an affirmation of the divine attributes of hearing and seeing in a real and not metaphorical sense.

End quote from

Mukhtasar as-Sawaa'iq al-Mursalah (p. 391)

Secondly:

If a person

wants to do what the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did of these gestures, he should think of his audience. If they may understand the gestures as likening divine attributes to human attributes, then he should not do that, so as to avoid this misunderstanding.

Shaykh Ibn

'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: There is a teacher who teaches the people, and when discussing the divine attributes as part of a course on 'aqeedah, he makes physical gestures to help them understand. For example, if he narrates a hadith about the Lord appearing to Moosa, he holds up his pinky finger, and points with his pinky or another finger when discussing the meaning of hadiths that speak of divine attributes. Is this acceptable? If it is acceptable, then how can we understand the statements of some of the earlier generations that prohibited that, such as the view of ash-Shaafa'i and others? May Allah reward you with good.

He replied:

This is a

serious matter. We cannot be more keen than the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in explaining to the ummah. It was not his usual habit to gesture with his hands when discussing the divine attributes. He told his ummah that the Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, descends to the lowest heaven during the last third of the night and says: Who will call upon Me so that I may answer him?

Did the

Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) step down so as to show the people how Allah descends? Never!

And he said:

“[Allah] will come to judge between His slaves on the Day of Resurrection,” but he did not make any kind of gesture. Similarly, Allah rose above the Throne, but the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not say, As I am sitting on this couch, or try to define how that happened.

Undoubtedly if

the one who preaches to the common folk uses gestures in order to explain the meaning of the divine attributes, that will make them think that what is meant is likening divine attributes to human attributes, because the ordinary Muslim may not understand or think properly. So we say to the one who wants to explain to people or convey something about Allah and His Messenger what Allah has said about Himself of names and attributes – we say to him: the way in which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explained these matters is sufficient for you.

Moreover, anyone

could argue with us that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) recited the words “Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer” [al-Nisa’ 5:58], and put one finger on his eye and another on his ear. In that case we say that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) intended to affirm these divine attributes. Moreover, he was talking to people who had proper understanding. As for the ordinary Muslims, especially nowadays, if every divine attribute were to be explained to them with a physical gesture, that would cause confusion to some of them. Ibn Mas’ood (may Allah be pleased with him) said: You can never tell people something that is beyond their comprehension but it will become a source of confusion

for them. And 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Tell the people what they can understand; do you want Allah and His Messenger to be disbelieved?

If someone quotes to us something like this hadith which says that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gestured when speaking of the divine attributes of hearing and seeing, or when speaking about Allah grasping the heavens on the Day of Resurrection, then we would say to him that for every situation there is an appropriate approach. Moreover we should limit ourselves to what is mentioned in the text of the hadith only, and not use gestures with regard to anything else, because there is no text to that effect.

End quote from
Liqā' al-Baab al-Maftūh (32/18)

And he (may
Allah have mercy on him) said:

We should not tell the common folk anything that is beyond their comprehension, so that there will not be any confusion or negative impact on their beliefs and deeds.

For example, some students ask a great deal about the fact that it is proven from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that when he recited the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning), "Verily, Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily, how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah)

gives you! Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer” [al-Nisa’ 4:58], he put his thumb and his forefinger on his ear and on his eye. And the students ask: is it permissible for me to do the same?

Our answer to

this is: do not do it in front of the common folk, because they may think of these divine attributes as resembling those of human beings. This is in contrast to seekers of knowledge. Moreover, this is something that the Messenger did (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and it is not a command. He did not say: Put your fingers on your eyes and ears, such we might say that we have to follow the command of the Messenger. Rather the aim was to affirm the divine attributes of seeing and hearing, not to make it a must to use this gesture. So why should we make it binding upon ourselves and keep asking this question, so that we may say it in front of the common folk?

Conclusion: if

the seeker of knowledge is an educator and a teacher, and the matter in question is something that may lead to confusion and it is not binding upon us to discuss it, we should avoid it completely.

More serious

than that is what some people do when quoting the hadith: “Verily the hearts of the sons of Adam are between two of the fingers of the Most Merciful,” and they make a gesture by holding up two fingers together to explain the idea of the heart being between two of the fingers of Allah. This is grave audacity and a fabrication against the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), because he did not gesture like that. How could this poor man who is gesturing know that the hearts are between two of the fingers of Allah in the manner that he is showing in his gesture? He should

fear Allah his Lord, and not go beyond what is mentioned in the Quran and hadith.

End quote from
ash-Sharh al-Mumti' (3/83-84)

Shaykh Saalih
al-Fawzaan (may Allah preserve him) was asked:

Is it
permissible to gesture with the hand when explaining hadiths that speak of
the attributes of Allah, such as the hadith, "Hearts are between two of the
fingers of the Most Merciful"?

He replied: No.

What is not narrated in the hadith is not to be said. The divine attributes
are a matter of tawqeef [i.e., they can only be known through divine
Revelation and sound texts of hadeeth, with no room for ijtihad] and it is
not permissible to introduce anything from one's own mind and say "This is
to explain it." Rather they should be narrated as they are. As for the
hadith in which the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)
referred to Allah being All-Hearing, All-Seeing, and he pointed to his ears
and eyes, this is something that is unique to this hadith, so it is to be
quoted as it was narrated. As for adding something from your own mind, that
should not be done. End quote.

<http://www.alfawzan.af.org.sa/sites/default/files/1318.mp3>

And Allah knows
best.