102377 - Can Allaah be described as hesitating?

the question

What is the meaning of the words “I do not hesitate about anything …” in the hadeeth qudsi? Does our Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, hesitate? How can we answer those who say that it cannot be true that Allaah hesitates?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Al-Bukhaari (6502) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whosoever shows enmity to someone devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him. My slave draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My slave continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it. I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful slave: he hates death and I hate hurting him.”

The hesitation mentioned in the hadeeth is hesitation in taking the soul of the believer, out of mercy and compassion towards him, and out of love for him, because he hates death and his Lord, may He be exalted, hates hurting him.

This is not like the hesitation of created beings, which stems from doubt about one's ability or the rightness of the action.

Hence we must clearly define the way in which Allaah hesitates, which is that He hesitates to take the soul of the believer, which is what is mentioned in the text, but Allaah cannot be described as hesitating in general terms, which would include all kinds of hesitation due to inability and

imperfection, which cannot be attributed to Allaah.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked: In the hadeeth “Whosoever shows enmity to someone devoted to Me…”, at the end of the hadeeth Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, says “I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful slave”. Does this mean that Allaah may be described as hesitant? How can we understand this issue?

He replied: It is not permissible to describe Allaah as hesitant in general terms, because Allaah has mentioned hesitation with regard to this matter: “I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful slave”. This hesitation is not due to uncertainty as to whether this thing is right or not, or uncertainty as to whether He is able to do this thing; rather it is because of mercy and compassion towards this believing slave. Hence He says in the same hadeeth: “he hates death and I hate hurting him.” This does not mean that Allaah can be described as being hesitant about His power or His knowledge, unlike the human being who hesitates when he wants to do something, either because he is uncertain about the outcome or whether it is right, or because he is uncertain about his ability to do it. But this does not apply to the Lord, may He be glorified and exalted. End quote from Liqaa’aat al-Baab il-Maftooh (59/12).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about what is meant by Allaah hesitating in this hadeeth.

He replied: This hadeeth was narrated by al-Bukhaari from Abu Hurayrah, and it is one of the noblest hadeeth that has been narrated concerning the attributes of the awliya’ (close friends of Allaah). One group rejected this word and said that Allaah cannot be described as hesitating, and it is only the one who does not know the consequences who hesitates, and Allaah knows best about the consequences. And some of them said: It probably means that His action may be described as hesitant but He is not hesitant.

But in fact the words of His Messenger are true and no one knows Allaah better than His Messenger or was more sincere towards his ummah than him, or more eloquent or better at

explaining things. Once this is understood, we may say that those who try to be clever and who deny it are among those who have gone farthest astray, and they among the most ignorant of people and the most lacking in proper etiquette. Indeed, they should be rebuked and punished, and the words of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) should be protected from false interpretations and corrupt beliefs. But if one of us hesitates because he does not know what the consequences will be, then hesitation in the case of Allaah is different to this type of hesitation, because there is nothing like unto Allaah, either in His Essence or His attributes or His actions. Moreover, hesitation is not only because one does not know what the consequences will be, because one of us may hesitate because he is unsure of the consequences or because of weighing the pros and cons when choosing one of two options, so he may want to do something because of the interests it serves, but he may not want to do it because of its negative consequences, not because he is unaware of the pros and cons of a particular action.

This is like when a sick person wants to take his bitter medicine, and when the believer wants to do righteous deeds that one may dislike. In al-Saheeh it says: “Hell has been surrounded with desirable things, and Paradise has been surrounded with unpleasant things.” And Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “Jihaad(holy fighting in Allaah’s Cause) is ordained for you (Muslims) though you dislike it…” [al-Baqarah 2:216].

Thus we may understand the word hesitate that is mentioned in this hadeeth qudsi. Allaah says “My slave continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him.” Such a person becomes beloved to Allaah and loves Him, and he draws closer to Him first of all by doing obligatory deeds which Allaah loves, then he strives to do naafil deeds that Allaah loves and loves those who do them, so he does all that he can of what Allaah loves, therefore Allaah loves him.

The Lord does not like to harm His slave and beloved one. … But Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, has decreed death, and everything that He has decreed He wills and it must inevitably come to pass. So the Lord wills that he should die because of His decree, yet He still dislikes hurting His slave, which refers to the pain involved in death. So death becomes something which Allaah wants for one reason and dislikes for another reason, which is what is meant by hesitating,

when a thing is wanted for one reason and disliked for another. One of the two will inevitably prevail, just as the divine decree that death must occur will prevail, although Allaah dislikes hurting His slave, and His will that the believer whom He loves and dislikes hurting must die is not like His will that the kaafir whom He hates and wants to hurt must die. End quote from Majmoo' al-Fataawa (18/129).

And Allaah knows best.