11277 - Meaning of al-Baatin and al-Zaahir

the question

Could you please explain to us the meaning of Allaah's names al-Baatin (the Most Near or the Hidden) and al-Zaahir (the Most High or the Manifest)?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The meaning of these two names is explained in the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "You are al-Zaahir, and there is nothing above You, and You are al-Baatin and there is nothing beneath You." (Narrated by Muslim).

Al-Zaahir is interpreted as referring to highness, for Allaah is High and Exalted above all things. Some scholars interpreted it as meaning being manifest: He is the One Who is manifest to people by means of their reason through the proof of His existence and the evidence for His Oneness. So He is manifest by the evidence which points to Him and His actions which lead to knowledge of Him. So He is manifest and is known by means of reason and evidence, and He is Hidden because He is not seen, unlike all the things that are visible in this world – glorified and exalted be He far above such a thing.

Allaah is al-Zaahir by virtue of His Wisdom, power of creation, actions and all the blessings which He bestows. No one is to be seen in that regard except Him. Al-Baatin is the One Whose essential nature and attributes are veiled from men of understanding.

It was reported that some scholars interpreted al-Baatin as meaning Close, so they said that al-Baatin is closer than anything by His Knowledge and Power, but He is above His Throne.

Al-Baatin was also interpreted as meaning the one who knows the innermost matters (bawaatin al-umoor), just as He knows the outward appearance of all things.

Al-Bukhaari said: Yahyaa – i.e., al-Farraa' – said: "He is al-Zaahir over all things by His knowledge and He is al-Baatin over all things by His knowledge."

Some scholars interpreted it as meaning that He cannot be known through the physical faculties or senses, unlike the created things that can be known in this manner.

And it was said that He is veiled from His creatures' sight and imagination, so they cannot see Him or encompass Him with their minds.

Although all of these meanings are correct, it is best to adhere to the Prophet's interpretation, which is the best because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) knows Allaah better than anyone else in creation. Ibn Jareer said: "Al-Zaahir (is) above everything else, He is the Most High, above all things, and there is nothing higher than Him. And He is close (al-Baatin) to all things, and there is nothing closer to anything than Him."

Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned that whoever denies that Allaah is above all things rejects the implications of His name al-Zaahir. It is not correct to say that al-Zaahir refers only to highness of status, as gold is described as being higher (of a higher status) than silver, because the one which is described as being lower may be placed in a higher location. It is not correct to think of it only in terms of power and dominion, even though Allaah is higher in power and dominion, for He is high in every sense, in His Essence, His status and His dominion.

His name al-Baatin does not imply being low, for being low is a shortcoming, and He is far above any such imperfection. He is the Most High and cannot be anything but High.

The names al-Zaahir and al-Baatin are connected. Al-Zaahir is connected to the idea of highness, because the higher a thing is, the more manifest it is. The idea of being high implies being manifest, and vice versa. Hence the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "There is nothing above You" – he did not say "There is nothing more manifest than You", because

being manifest implies being high.

(These names also indicate) that Allaah encompasses all things by His knowledge and greatness, and that all things are as nothing before His greatness. And He is al-Baatin which indicates that He knows what is secret and hidden, down to the smallest detail.