163948 - The Salafi way of interpreting the divine attributes and refuting the pantheistic interpretation of the hadith “I will be his hearing”

the question

Allah, may He be exalted, says in the hadith qudsi: “So when I love him I will be his hearing with which he hears, his vision with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks.” How can we avoid falling into the pantheistic interpretation of the hadith, and what is the way of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah in dealing with the verses that speak of the divine attributes? I hope that you will explain, because some of those who deny the divine attributes have tried to cast aspersions on the Salafi way of interpreting the divine names and attributes, based on the claim that taking the text literally will cause us to fall into the false belief of incarnation (hulool).

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The way of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah with regard to understanding the divine attributes is that every attribute of their Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, that they affirm, they affirm it on the basis of a text from the Book of Allah or the Sunnah of His Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), whilst confirming that Allah, may He be exalted, is not like His creation in any way, because He, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “There is nothing like unto Him” [ash-Shoora 42:11]. This verse contains a refutation of the idea of likening Allah to His creation, and the following words (interpretation of the meaning), “and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing” form a refutation of those who deny the divine attributes and believe that sharing a description or attribute means that the divine and the human are alike.

In the answer to question no. 155206 , we discussed some useful principles with regard to the names and attributes of Allah. In the answer to question no. 34630 you will find a detailed discussion of the meaning of belief in the divine names and attributes, and four points to avoid, namely distorting, denying, likening Allah to His creation, and discussing how the divine attributes are. If anyone falls into one of these, he is not believing in the divine names and attributes as he should.

In his book al-Qawaa'id al-Muthla fi Sifaat Allah wa Asmaa'ihi al-Husna, Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) discussed some useful guidelines concerning the attributes of Allah, may He be exalted. You can find his book via the following link:

Shaykh al-'Alawi ibn 'Abd al-Qaadir al-Saqqaaf (may Allah preserve him) mentioned twenty-one guidelines for understanding the attributes of Allah, may He be exalted, in his book Sifaat Allah 'azza wa jall al-Waaridah fi'l-Kitaab wa's-Sunnah.

The hadith mentioned by the questioner is part of a hadith that was narrated by Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Verily Allah, may He be exalted, says: 'Whosoever shows enmity to a close friend of Mine, I shall declare war on him. My slave draws not close to Me with anything more loved by Me than the obligatory religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My slave continues to draw close to Me with supererogatory works so that I will love him. So when I love him I will be his hearing with which he hears, his vision 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 seek refuge in Me, I would surely grant him it.'' Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6137).

We should point out that it is the pantheists (al-ittihaadiyyah) who quote this hadith as evidence for their false belief, and not those who believe in incarnation (al-hulooliyyah). For information on the difference between pantheism and incarnation, please see the answer to question no. 147639. They said that this hadith is indicative of the union between the Creator and the created being, if the latter draws close to Allah, may He be exalted, by doing obligatory religious duties, whereupon the slave – we seek refuge with Allah from such notions – becomes part of the essence of God, and

hears with the hearing of Allah and sees with His vision! In other words, the Creator becomes one with the created being, and they become one and the same! Undoubtedly this is kufr (disbelief) that puts one beyond the pale of Islam. The hadith that they quoted as evidence is in fact evidence against them, because it affirms that there are two separate entities, namely the Creator and the created being, and highlights the difference between them; it affirms that there is a worshipper and an object of his worship, and highlights the difference between them; it affirms that there is a lover and a beloved, one who asks and One who responds. There is nothing in it to indicate that the two become one.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The heretics and pantheists quote it as evidence for their belief, because Allah says (in this hadith qudsi): “I will his hearing, his vision, his hand and his foot.” But the hadith constitutes evidence against them in numerous ways, including the following:

·Allah says: “Whoever shows enmity to a close friend of Mine is declaring war on Me.” Thus it affirms that there is someone who is challenging Allah, and a close friend of Allah who is someone other than the challenger, and in it Allah, may He be glorified, affirms for Himself that He has one who is close to Him and one who is challenging Him.

·He says: “My slave draws not close to Me with anything more loved by Me than the obligatory religious duties I have enjoined upon him.” This affirms that there is a slave who seeks to draw close to his Lord, and there is a Lord Who enjoined those obligatory religious duties.

·He says: “and My slave continues to draw close to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him”. Thus He affirms that there is one who seeks to draw close and one to Whom closeness is sought; there is one who loves and a beloved who is distinct from him. All of this contradicts their view that all existence is one.

·He says: “So when I love him I will be his hearing with which he hears, his vision with which he sees…” Allah grants these things to His slave after He loves him, but in the view of the pantheists this is the case both before and after He loves him.

End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (2/371, 372)

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

Then Allah says: “Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to seek refuge in Me, I would surely grant him it.” Thus He differentiated between the one who asks and the One who is asked, between the one who seeks refuge and the One who grants him it. He describes the slave as asking of his Lord and seeking refuge with Him.

This hadith combines many sublime meanings.

End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (17/134)

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said, in his commentary on the hadith, explaining its meaning in different ways:

Whatever the case, the argument of the pantheists cannot be based on it, and neither can that of those who believe that everything that exists is one, because in the latter part of the hadith, Allah says: “Were he to ask [something] of Me,… were he to seek refuge in Me”. It is as if this is a clear refutation of them.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (11/345)

Imam ash-Shawkaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said, after quoting the words of Ibn Hajar:

With regard to what Ibn Hajar pointed out of this hadith being a refutation of some misguided people regarding the meaning of the words “Were he to ask [something] of Me,… and were he to seek refuge in Me”, this means that there is one who asks and one who is asked, one who seeks refuge and One in whom refuge is sought.

Perhaps Ibn Hajar did not examine this hadith and ponder its meaning as he should have. If he had pondered its meaning, he would not have limited his argument to what he mentioned about asking and seeking refuge; rather the entire hadith is a refutation of their view. The words “Whoever shows enmity to a close friend of Mine” are a refutation of their view, because they imply the

existence of one who shows enmity and one to whom enmity is shown and one for whose sake that believer was taken as an enemy. The meaning implies the existence of someone who is declaring war and someone against whom war is declared, the existence of someone who seeks to draw close and One to whom closeness is sought; a worshipper and One who is worshipped, a lover and One who is loved – and so on until the end of the hadith.

All of it is a refutation of the pantheists who base their argument on it, without realising that the entire hadith is a refutation of their argument. In fact, the issue becomes even clearer when we examine the words of Allah in this hadith: “I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about (taking in death) the soul of the believer.” This implies the existence of One who hesitates and one concerning whom there is hesitation; one who does an action and one to whom the action is done. It implies the existence of a soul concerning whom there is hesitation, which is the soul of the believing slave, and the existence of One who is hesitant, namely the One who will take his soul; the existence of one who dislikes death, who is the believer, and One who hates to upset him, who is the Lord, may He be glorified.

In conclusion, any rational person would realise that the view of the pantheists is false, and there is no need to look hard for evidence that they are wrong. The reason for their confusion is the influence of those who believed in dualism. They believed that there were two gods, a god of good and a god of evil; the god of good was light and the god of evil was darkness, and they regarded them as the original of all existing beings. If the light prevails, a person will be enlightened, but if the darkness prevails, then a person sinks in darkness.

They did not realise that this view that is based on kufr (disbelief) would refute their argument from the outset, for darkness is not light.

End quote from Qitr al-Waliy ‘ala Hadith al-Waliy by ash-Shawkaani (419-421)

For the text of the hadith and further discussion of its meanings, please see the answers to questions no. 21371 and 14397

And Allah knows best.