40865 - Allah is above His creation and He is in front of the one who prays

the question

I read a hadeeth which says that Allah is in front of the worshipper. What does that mean? Does it contradict the fact that Allah is above the heavens?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

We have already mentioned in questions no. 992 and 11035 the evidence that Allah has risen above His Throne and is exalted above His creation.

According to the hadeeth narrated by al-Bukhaari (406) and Muslim (547) from ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Umar, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saw some spittle on the wall of the mosque in the direction of the qiblah, so he scratched it off then turned to the people and said: “If any one of you is praying, let him not spit in front of him, for Allah is in front of him when he prays.”

There is no contradiction between this is the fact that Allah is high above His creation.

Shaykh al-Islam [Ibn Taymiyah] said in Majmoo’ al-Fatawa, 5/101:

The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “When any one of you stands to pray, Allah is in front of him so let him not spit in front of him,” mean what they appear to mean. Allah is above the Throne and He is in front of the worshipper. This description may even apply to created things: when a man looks at the sky and the sun and the moon, the sky, sun and moon are above him and they are also in front of him.

He also said (5/672):

It is well known that whoever turns to face the moon and addresses it – if he were able to address it – is turning to face it even though it is above him … Similarly when a person stands to pray he is turning to face his Lord even though He is above him, and he addresses Him on the basis of Him being in front of him not to his right or left, and he calls upon Him on the basis that He is above not below.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen said:

The evidence that Allah is in front of the worshipper is:

The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “When any one of you stands to pray, Allah is in front of him so let him not spit in front of him.”

This being in front is ascribed to Allah in a manner that befits Him and does not contradict His exalted state. The two may be reconciled in two ways:

1 – It is possible to reconcile between them with regard to created things, such as when the sun is rising, it is in front of the one who faces the east, even though it is in the sky. So if they may be reconciled with regard to a created thing then it is more apt that they be reconciled with regard to the Creator.

2 – Even if it were not possible to reconcile them with regard to created things, that does not mean that they cannot be reconciled with regard to the Creator, because there is nothing like unto Allah.

Fatawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, 4/287.