

Title: In the Company of Allah: Confirming that Allah is with His Creation

Original Title: شرح العقيدة الواسطية

Author: Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn

I N T H E
Company of Allah

CONFIRMING ALLAH IS WITH HIS CREATION

WITH APPENDIX:

Our Lord's Descent

BY:

Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn¹

¹ The topics of this translation were taken from Ibn al-'Uthaymīn's explanation of *al-'Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah* by Ibn Taymiyyah.

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The First Verse

Ibn Taymiyyah mentions in *al-'Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah* the first verse confirming Allah is with his creation is his statement:

﴿ هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۚ
يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۖ
وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴾

It is he who created the heavens and earth in six days then he rose over the throne. He knows what goes into the earth and what comes out of it, what descends from the sky and what ascends therein, and he is with you wherever you are. And Allah sees whatever you do.²

Ibn al-'Uthaymīn explains:

The author (Ibn Taymiyyah) begins by mentioning the evidence of *المَعِيَّة* (*Ma'iyyah*) or “withness,” which refers to the concept of Allah (تعالى) being with his creation. It makes sense that he mentions it in his book immediately after writing about the concept of Allah being high above creation. This is because to some, it may seem there is a contradiction between Allah being above everything and his being with his worshippers. So, it is very appropriate to cite the verses of Allah being with his creation right after those of his being high above.

² The Quran, Sūrah al-Ḥadīd, 57:4

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Yet regarding Allah being with his creation, there are several topics that must be considered...



TOPIC 1

The Categories of Allah Being with His Creation

This concept of Allah being with his creation is of two types: a general type and a specific type. The specific type is further broken down into two types: a type specific to particular characteristics and a type specific to particular individuals.

The General Type

As for the general type of Allah being with his creation, it includes everyone, believers and disbelievers, the righteous and the wicked. A proof and example for this type of “withness” is the statement of Allah (تعالى):

﴿ وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ﴾

And he is with you wherever you are.³

The Specific Type

The specific type, again, is broken into two categories: specific to particular characteristics and a specific to particular individuals. As for Allah’s being with someone due to his or her particular characteristics, an example is the verse:

³ Sūrah al-Ḥadīd, 57:4

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ ﴾

**Certainly, Allah is with those who are conscientious and fearful (of him)
and those who do good.⁴**

As for the specific type of Allah being with particular individuals, an example is his statement about his prophet:

﴿ فَقَدْ نَصَرَهُ اللَّهُ إِذْ أَخْرَجَهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ثَانِيَ اثْنَيْنِ إِذْ هُمَا فِي الْغَارِ إِذْ يَقُولُ لِصَاحِبِهِ لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا ﴾

Allah surely helped him (Muhammad) when those who disbelieved had driven him out as one of two (he and his companion, Abū Bakr) and when they were both in the cave and he said to his companion, “Do not grieve, Allah is certainly with us.”⁵

Allah also said to Mūsá and Hārūn (the prophets Moses and his brother, Aaron):

﴿ لَا تَخَافَا ۗ إِنِّي مَعَكُمَا أَسْمَعُ وَأَرَى ﴾

Fear not, I am certainly with both of you; I hear and see (all).⁶

This category (specific to particular individuals) is even more specialized than the type that is specific to certain characteristics.

⁴ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:128

⁵ Sūrah al-Tawbah, 9:40

⁶ Sūrah Ṭā-Hā, 20:46

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So the concept of Allah being with his creatures is of varying levels: a general type, a type specific to certain characteristics, and a type specific to certain people. The most special and exclusive type is that which is specific to certain people. Then the type specific to certain characteristics is more general, and finally, the general type of Allah's being with his creation is the most comprehensive.

The general type includes Allah encompassing the creation with his knowledge, his capability over them, his hearing and seeing, his control over them, and other meanings of Allah's lordship. In addition to those qualities, the specific type, with both its categories, also includes Allah's support and assistance.



T O P I C 2

Is Allah Actually with Creation or Metaphorically?

Is the concept of Allah being with his creation actual or metaphorical? Does Allah being with creation mean only the knowledge of Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ), his hearing and seeing, capability, control, and other aspects of his lordship?

Most of the *Salaf* (the righteous predecessors, reputable scholars) used to say that Allah being with the creation means he encompasses them with his knowledge, hearing, sight, power and similar qualities. So they understood his statement, ﴿**And he is with you**﴾ to mean he knows everything about you, he hears your statements, sees your actions, and he is in control over you, judging between you, etc. In other words, they explained it only in terms of the qualities it necessitates or includes.

However, the famous scholar of Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah, in this book and others, chose to accept this concept (of Allah being with his creation) upon its actual, real meaning in that he is actually with us in a real manner. But this concept of Allah being “with” creation is in no way like a person’s being “with” another person in that it is possible for two people to be together, occupying the same place. This is because even though the idea of Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) being with his creation is confirmed, he is still high above the creation (also confirmed). He is with us, yet still high on his throne above everything. And under no circumstances is he with us, occupying the same places we occupy.

Based on this, it must be understood also in accordance with the concept of Allah being above creation. The author has even devoted a separate section dealing with this point – that there is no contradiction in combining between Allah being with his creation and being high above it. This explanation will come soon if Allah wills. There is no contradiction between the two because there is nothing like Allah in all of his qualities and characteristics. So he is high above in his nearness, and he is close in his highness.

Ibn Taymiyyah illustrates an example of this with the moon. He says people often say, “We continued traveling while the moon was with us (all night long),” all the while, the moon is actually in the sky. And the moon is even one of the smallest (universal) creations of Allah. So why could the creator (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) not be with his creatures and still be above the heavens when they are nothing compared to him?

In what he (the author) says is a refutation of the people who deny that Allah can be named with actual names or described with real characteristics. It is a refutation of what they accuse the people of the Sunnah (the mainstream Muslims who closely follow the prophet’s teachings) of doing. They say, “You people say you forbid baseless changing of the meanings of Allah’s characteristics, yet you do this very thing with regards to Allah being with His creation! You say it is figurative and really means his knowledge, hearing, sight, power, control, and other things.”

We say that Allah’s being with his creation is real in an actual way, but it is not understood as some people who twist and change the meanings understand it in that Allah is with people everywhere, in all places. And as for some of the Salaf explaining it

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to mean knowledge and other qualities, this is an explanation in terms of what it necessitates and includes.

We mentioned that some of the Salaf explained Allah being with creation only in terms of what it includes (characteristics of Allah's lordship), and it is as if people consider this to be the only legitimate explanation. But some of them also said it is taken to be a real, actual concept but understood in a manner that befits Allah, specific to him alone. The latter is the explicit position of Ibn Taymiyyah in this book and others. However, it should be preserved from any incorrect assumptions such as assuming Allah is with us on earth or similar false ideas; this is incorrect and a ridiculous understanding.



T O P I C 3

Is it a Personal Characteristic of Allah or an Action?

Is the concept of Allah being with his creation a personal characteristic or one of his attributes of action?⁷ There are some specific details relating to this.

As for the general type of Allah being with creation, it is a permanent, personal attribute because he always has and always will encompass all creation by his knowledge, power, control and other qualities of lordship.

But as for the specific types, they are attributes of action because they happen only in accordance with Allah's will and decision. Any attribute or characteristic connected with a particular reason or cause is one of Allah's attributes of action. For example, when Allah is pleased or satisfied with someone, this is one of his action attributes because it is connected with a certain reason – if that reason or trait is there (in a person), Allah is pleased with him, otherwise he may not be. Similarly is the concept of Allah being with people – if a person conscientiously fears Allah or has other similar traits, Allah is with him.



⁷ Ibn al-'Uthaymīn is referring here to the two types of confirmed attributes of Allah: *Dhātīyyah* (ذَاتِيَّة) or "personal" characteristics and *F'iliyyah* (فِعْلِيَّة) or "action" characteristics. Personal attributes are Allah's permanent characteristics that he is always described with and always will be. Examples are his hearing and sight.

Action attributes are those that are in accordance with Allah's will: if he wants he does them, otherwise he does not. Examples of this type are his rising over the throne or his approach toward creation on the Day of Judgment.

(Taken from Ibn al-'Uthaymīn's notes on Ibn Qudāmah's book, *Lum'ah al-'Itiqād*.)

T O P I C 4

Does it Contradict Allah Being Above His Creation?

Does the fact that Allah is with his creation in any way contradict him being above it?

There is no contradiction, and this is based on three different perspectives.

1. Allah himself combines between the two concepts in how he describes himself. If they were contradictory, he would not have described himself with both.
2. There is no real contradiction or incompatibility initially between something being above and still being with something else. It is possible for something to be high above yet still with you. An example is the common phrase of the Arabs, “The moon was with us as we traveled” or “The sun was with us as we traveled” or “The North Star remained with us during our journey.” They say this while the moon, sun, and stars are all in the sky. So if it is possible to combine between something being high and still being with the creation, then such a combination with regards to the creator is even more so.

Also, If a person such as a commander was stationed on a high mountain and says to his soldiers, “Advance to a certain place far beyond the battlefield, I am with you,” there is no contradiction. He says this while watching them from behind binoculars far away, yet he is still considered “with” them because he sees them as if they are right in front of him. So this concept is completely possible with respect to the creation, so why could it not be possible with respect to the creator?

3. Even if the two were impossible and contradictory with regards to the creation, that does not necessarily mean it is something impossible for the creator because Allah is greater and exalted. The creator's characteristics are not to be measured in accordance with those of the creation due to the huge distinction between the creator and creation.

The prophet, Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), used to say when traveling:

«اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ الصَّاحِبُ فِي السَّفَرِ وَالْخَلِيفَةُ فِي الْأَهْلِ»

Oh Allah, you are the companion during the journey and the protector among the family (left behind).⁸

In this prayer, the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) combined between Allah being a companion with him on his journey and at the same time a protector among his family while this would be impossible with respect to the creation. It is impossible for a person to accompany you on a journey and at the same time remain behind with your family to protect and look after them. Yet for Allah, this is not impossible.

It is also reported in an authentic ḥadīth⁹ that when someone recites Sūrah al-Fātiḥah during prayer, saying:

«الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ»

⁸ Recorded by Muslim (no. 1342), al-Tirmidhī (no. 3438), al-Nasāī (no. 5501), Abū Dāwūd (no. 2598), and others

⁹ Recorded by Muslim (no. 395)

All praise and thanks are for Allah.¹⁰

Allah responds saying:

« حَمْدَنِي عَبْدِي »

My servant has praised me.

How many countless people recite this in their prayers at a single time? And how many people recite that verse while others, at the same time, may be reciting:

« إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ »

You alone we worship, and from your alone we seek help.¹¹

To each and every one of them, Allah responds. Whoever recites, «**All praise and thanks are for Allah**», Allah replies, “My servant has praised me,” and when another recites, «**You alone we worship, and from you alone we seek help**», he replies, “This is (an agreement) between myself and my worshipper.”

Therefore, it is certainly possible for Allah to actually be with us in a real manner (that befits him) while at the same time he is actually high on his throne above the sky in a real manner. No one should assume the two are contradictory except someone who considers Allah to be just like his creation and his concept of being with someone just like the creation is with others of creation.

¹⁰ Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, 1:1

¹¹ Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, 1:4

We have clarified the possibility of combining between the texts confirming that Allah is high above and the texts of his being with creation. So either it is clear by now, or if not, a worshipper should still at least say, “I believe in Allah and his messenger, and I believe as truth what Allah says of himself and what his messenger says of him.” An individual should not be of the position: “How is that possible? That is unreasonable; it makes no sense.”

If someone asks, “How is this possible?” we reply by telling him his asking about “how” in itself is a religious innovation. The companions (of Allah’s messenger) did not ask about it and yet they were better than you. Their responsibility for knowing and fully understanding these concepts was greater than yours. They were more trustworthy and more sincere. You should instead believe and trust (the texts) and should not focus solely on “how” and “why” but should submit with complete, sincere submission.

A Note about the Verse

When we consider the first verse mentioned:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۗ
يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۗ
وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ﴾

It is he who created the heavens and earth in six days then he rose over the throne. He knows what goes into the earth and what comes out of it, what

descends from the sky and what ascends therein, and he is with you wherever you are. And Allah sees whatever you do.¹²

We see that every pronoun refers to Allah. ﴿It is he who created the heavens and earth in six days then he rose over the throne. He knows what goes into the earth...﴾ Similarly, ﴿and he is with you.﴾ We should accept this great verse based on its apparent meaning. And we should know for certain that this concept of Allah being with us does not mean he is with us on earth. Rather, he is with us while still being high above on the throne; this is the correct understanding of Allah's "withness."

If we believe and accept this, we should try to remain in a constant state of awe, respect, and fear of Allah. For this, it has been reported in a ḥadīth: The best form of belief is to know that Allah is with you wherever you are.¹³

A detailed discussion on combining these two concepts – Allah being high above creation yet still with them – will be come later along with Ibn Taymiyyah's words on the subject.



¹² Sūrah al-Ḥadīd, 57:4

¹³ Recorded by Abū Naṭīm (vol. 6, 124) and al-Haythumī in *al-Mujamma'* (vol. 1, 60). However, al-Albānī said it is a weak narration in *al-Silsilah al-Ḍa'īfah* (no. 1002).

T O P I C 5

The Error of Those Who Say Allah is Physically with Us

As for those who believe in Allah's incarnation or his being "within" creation, they say that Allah is physically and personally with us, occupying the same places we do. (Based on this deviant idea,) when you are in the mosque, he is with you in the mosque. The people in the market, Allah is with them in the market! When people are in restrooms, Allah is with them in the restroom! People who believe like this do not even have the decency to exalt Allah above being in foul places of filth or places of amusement and obscenity.

These people claim that such an understanding is based on the apparent meaning of the verse, ﴿**He is with you**﴾ because, as we mentioned, every pronoun used in the verse ("he") refers back to Allah. So if he is in fact with us, they claim, then the only way to understand this is that he must be physically in unison with us, among us in the same place!

They are refuted in several ways:

1. The verse's apparent meaning is not like you say. If it were, then in that case there would in fact be a contradiction in the verse in that Allah is high above on the throne and at the same time physically and personally with every human being in every place. But it is not possible for the speech of Allah (تعالی) to contain any contradiction.

2. Your statement, “The only way to understand this is that he is physically in unison with us, among us in the same place,” is completely wrong. The word, *المَعِيَّة* (*Ma'iyyah*) or “withness,” in the Arabic language is simply a general, unconditional noun meaning companionship or accompaniment. It is more comprehensive in meaning than you claim. Yes, it *could* indicate something in unison with something else, mixed with it, occupying the same place. But it could also generally mean two or more separate things in companionship or accompaniment even though their locations may differ. These are just three of its meanings:

An example of it meaning two things mixed or in unison would be saying for example, “Pour for me milk *with* water,” meaning, mixed with the water.

An example of “with” meaning two separate things occupying the same place: “I saw so-and-so *with* so-and-so, both walking together.”

An example of “with” meaning neither mixed in unison, nor sharing the same place: “So-and-so is with his soldiers.” Though he may physically be in a control room, he is guiding them; he is with them. In this way, there is no mixing or sharing of the same place.

It is even said, “That man’s wife is still with him,” even though she may physically be somewhere in the East while he may be in the West.

In short, this “withness,” as Ibn Taymiyyah says and as is known from the Arabic language, is a general word that indicates companionship or accompaniment. It is then understood within the context of what is associated with it. So for example, when the verse says:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ﴾

Certainly, Allah is with those are conscientious and fearful (of him) and those who do good.¹⁴

Then it does not mean Allah has merged with them or shares the same place as them. Instead, it is a sense of being with them that befits only Allah and indicates his support and assistance to them.

3. We also say in refutation of those who allege that Allah is physically incarnate within creation: You actually describe Allah like this? It is one of the most incorrect and extremely belittling descriptions with which you could describe Allah, the Mighty and Majestic. Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) says he is with creation only as a way of praising (himself and those he is with). Although he is high on his throne, he is still with the creation while they are lower than him. So by saying he is really on earth, this is belittling and dispraising him.

By believing Allah is personally with you everywhere, even when you go to the restroom, this is the greatest form of dispraise and insult to Allah. You would not

¹⁴ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:128

even say to a king of this world, “You are always in the bathroom,” so how could you say it about Allah (عز وجلّ)? Is not this one of the greatest forms or criticism?

4. This statement of yours, that Allah is physically mixed with creation, means only one of two things, both of which are still completely wrong: either Allah is one but made up of separate parts with a part being in every place, or Allah is numerous, a separate god in every place.
5. This statement of yours explicitly means that Allah is incarnate within all creation; every place and every aspect of creation, Allah (تعالى) is embodied within it. This leads to the false belief of incarnation.

So you see this statement is incorrect and its meanings amount to disbelief. Because of this, it is our position that whoever knowingly believes and says that Allah is with us on earth, he is not a believer. He should be asked to repent, the truth explained and clarified to him. Otherwise authorities would have the right to carry out capital punishment against him.¹⁵

Again the verse is:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۗ
يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۗ
وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ﴾

¹⁵ Of course, this would be a decision made and carried out only by the authorities and governments, not individuals, and all its detailed conditions must be fulfilled.

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The evidence here is ﴿**He is with you wherever you are.**﴾ This is the general type of Allah being with creation because it indicates that he encompasses them with knowledge, power, control, hearing, sight, and all other qualities of lordship.



¹⁶ Sūrah al-Ḥadīd, 57:4

The Second Verse

﴿ مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَا
أَدْنَى مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْثَرَ إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا ۖ ثُمَّ يَنْبِئُهُمْ بِمَا عَمِلُوا يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴾

There is no secret counsel of three, but he is their fourth, nor of five but he is their sixth, nor of less than that or more, but he is with them wherever they may be. Then on the Day of Resurrection, he will inform them of what they did. Certainly Allah knows everything.¹⁷

﴿secret counsel﴾ here means any people conversing privately.

As for His statement, ﴿but He is their fourth﴾, he did not say, “He is their third,” because he is not one of them, physically in them. And since he is not one of them, the following number is used. If they were considered the same, then the same number could be used. For example, look at his statement (تعالى) about the Christians:

﴿ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ ﴾

They have surely disbelieved – those who say Allah is the third of three (in the trinity).¹⁸

¹⁷ Sūrah al-Mujādilah, 58:7

¹⁸ Sūrah al-Māidah, 5:73

They did not say Allah is the third of two because, to them, he and the other two are one and the same divine entity (i.e. the trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). To them, each of the three is a god, and since they are all the same as they claim, they said about Allah, ﴿**the third of three**﴾.

As for his statement, ﴿**nor of five but he is their sixth**﴾, he explicitly mentioned some odd numbers: three, five, but didn't mention even numbers. But they are also included in his general statement, ﴿**nor of less than that**﴾, meaning two, ﴿**or more**﴾, meaning sixth or more.

So there are no two people talking quietly anywhere on earth at any time except that Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) is with them.

This is also of the general type because it includes everyone: the believer, nonbeliever, the righteous, and the wicked. It shows that he encompasses them in knowledge, power, hearing, sight, control, planning of affairs, and other qualities.

As for, ﴿**Then on the Day of Resurrection, he will inform them of what they did**﴾, it means that this type of being with them also includes recording what they do. On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will inform them of their actions. He will tell them all about what they did and take them to account for it. The words ﴿**inform them**﴾ here suggests a reckoning. In other words, He will make them confess and account for what they did. If they were good believers (yet their actions bad), Allah will tell them:

« سَتَرْتُهَا عَلَيْكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَأَنَا أَعْفِرُهَا الْيَوْمَ »

I concealed them for you during the worldly life, and today I forgive them.¹⁹

Allah's statement, ﴿**Certainly Allah knows everything**﴾ means he knows everything in existence and everything nonexistent, everything possible, inevitable, and impossible. Anything and everything, Allah knows about it.



¹⁹ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 2441) and Muslim (no. 2768). The full text of this ḥadīth describing the private counsel to be held between a true believer and his Lord is:

« إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْنِي الْمُؤْمِنَ فَيَضَعُ عَلَيْهِ كَنَفَهُ وَيَسْتَرُّهُ، فَيَقُولُ: أَتَعْرِفُ ذَنْبَ كَذَا أَتَعْرِفُ ذَنْبَ كَذَا؟ فَيَقُولُ: نَعَمْ أَيُّ رَبِّ، حَتَّى إِذَا قَرَّرَهُ بِذُنُوبِهِ وَرَأَى فِي نَفْسِهِ أَنَّهُ هَلَكَ قَالَ: سَتَرْتُهَا عَلَيْكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَأَنَا أَعْفِرُهَا لَكَ الْيَوْمَ وَأَمَّا الْكُفَّارُ وَالْمُنَافِقُونَ فَيُنَادَى بِهِمْ عَلَى رُءُوسِ الْخَلَائِقِ: هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ »

Allah will draw a believer close, placing him under his care and screening him. Allah will say to him, "Do you remember this sin and that sin?" The person will answer, "Yes, my Lord." After he is made to confess all of his sins and he sincerely believes he is ruined, Allah will say, "I concealed them for you in life and I forgive you for them today. But as for the disbelievers and hypocrites, they will be publicly called out in front of all creation and it will be announced, "These are the ones who lied against Allah."

The Third Verse

﴿ لَا تَحْزَنُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا ﴾

“Do not grieve, Allah is certainly with us.”²⁰

Here, the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) is speaking to Abū Bakr (رضي الله عنه). Before this, Allah says (in the same verse):

﴿ إِلَّا تَنْصُرُوهُ فَقَدْ نَصَرَهُ اللَّهُ إِذْ أَخْرَجَهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ثَانِي اثْنَيْنِ إِذْ هُمَا فِي الْغَارِ إِذْ يَقُولُ لِصَاحِبِهِ لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا ﴾

If you do not help him (Muhammad), Allah has surely helped him when those who disbelieved had driven him out as one of two (he and his companion, Abū Bakr) and when they were both in the cave and he said to his companion, “Do not grieve, Allah is certainly with us.”

First, Allah helped the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) when he was expelled and driven out from his home: ﴿when those who disbelieved had driven him out.﴾

Second, he helped them when they both stayed in the cave: ﴿and when they were both in the cave.﴾

²⁰ Sūrah al-Tawbah, 9:40

Third, he helped them during their distress when the idol-worshippers stood right at the opening of their cave (searching for them): ﴿and when he said to his companion, “Do not grieve, Allah is certainly with us.”﴾

These are three situations that Allah (تعالى) made it clear he helped his prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

The third time was when the idol-worshippers (who were pursuing Muhammad and Abū Bakr) stopped and stood right above them. Abū Bakr said, “Oh messenger of Allah, if anyone of them just looked down at his feet, he would see us!”²¹ In other words, we are in serious danger, just like the companions of Mūsá said to him when they reached the sea (while pursued by the Pharaoh):

﴿إِنَّا لَمُدْرَكُونَ﴾

“We are surely defeated!”²²

Mūsá responded to his companions by saying:

﴿قَالَ كَلَّا ۗ إِنَّ مَعِيَ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ﴾

“No. My Lord is with me, he will guide me.”²³

²¹ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 3653) and Muslim (no. 2381)

²² Sūrah al-Shu'arā, 26:61

²³ Sūrah al-Shu'arā, 26:62

Similarly, the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said to Abū Bakr, ﴿“Do not grieve...”﴾ He calmed and reassured him, making him feel safe and confirmed it with the statement, ﴿“Allah is certainly with us.”﴾²⁴

As for the meaning of ﴿“Do not grieve...”﴾, it means do not worry about what happened in the past or what is going to happen; it includes (along with the present) the past and future. And this word “grief” in Arabic indicates an inner pain of extreme concern or worry.

﴿“Allah is certainly with us.”﴾ This is the specific type of Allah being with his creation, specific to particular individuals: the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and Abū Bakr. Along with the meanings of the general type, it also indicates Allah’s support and assistance. Because of this, the Quraysh tribe stood right over the cave, yet still did not see them; Allah did not allow them to see them.

As for what some people say that a spider came and made a web in front of the cave and a pigeon made a nest over it so that when the idol-worshippers saw a web and nest in front of the cave entrance, they realized no one could have come that way (or they would have broken the web, knocked down the nest) – this story is not true. Rather, the protection and support was divine, and the amazing sign is that the cave entrance was in fact wide open and clear; there were no natural obstructions. Still, they did not see the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and Abū Bakr inside – this is the miraculous part! As for a

²⁴ In the ḥadīth of al-Bukhārī (no. 3653) and Muslim (no. 2381), the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also said:

« مَا ظَنُّكَ يَا أَبَا بَكْرٍ يَا ثَلَاثِينَ اللَّهُ تَالِهُمَا »

“What do you think, Abū Bakr, about two, the third of whom is Allah?”

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pigeon and spider coming along, this is way off and even conflicts with Abū Bakr's statement, "If anyone of them just looked down at his feet, he would see us."

The point is that some historians, may Allah forgive them, come up with all kinds of strange, irrational stories not accepted by the intellect and not supported by any authentic narrations.



The Fourth Verse

﴿إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ أَسْمَعُ وَأَرَى﴾

I am certainly with both of you; I hear and see (all).²⁵

Here, Allah is speaking to the prophets Mūsá and Hārūn when he instructed them to go to the Pharaoh, saying:

﴿اذهبَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى ﴿۱﴾ فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى ﴿۲﴾ قَالَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا نَخَافُ أَنْ يَفْرُطَ عَلَيْنَا أَوْ أَنْ يَطْغَى ﴿۳﴾ قَالَ لَا تَخَافَا ۗ إِنَّنِي مَعَكُمْ أَسْمَعُ وَأَرَى ﴿۴﴾﴾

Go, both of you, to the Pharaoh. Indeed he has transgressed. And speak to him with gentle words, perhaps he may be reminded or fear (Allah). They said, “Our Lord, surely we fear he will hasten (punishment) against us or transgress (even more).” (Allah) said, “Do not be afraid. I am certainly with you both; I hear and see (all).”²⁶

His statement, ﴿I hear and see﴾ shows that this specific type of Allah being with them includes his qualities of hearing and sight. These qualities are special in that they also indicate Allah’s support, assistance, and protection from the Pharaoh, about whom they said, ﴿Surely we fear he will hasten (punishment) against us or transgress.﴾



²⁵ Sūrah Ṭā-Hā, 20:46

²⁶ Sūrah Ṭā-Hā, 20:43-46

The Fifth Verse

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ﴾

Certainly, Allah is with those are conscientious and fearful (of him) and those who do good.²⁷

This verse comes after Allah says:

﴿وَإِنْ عَاقَبْتُمْ فَعَاقِبُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبْتُمْ بِهِ ۖ وَلَئِنْ صَبَرْتُمْ لَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لِلصَّابِرِينَ
وَاصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ ۚ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَيْقٍ مِّمَّا
يَمْكُرُونَ﴾

And if you seek retribution, then seek it only in accordance with what you were afflicted. But if you endure patiently, it is better for the patient ones. So be patient, your patience is only from Allah. And do not grieve over them or be distressed with what they plot.²⁸

Seeking retribution against a criminal must only be done in accordance with what the victim was afflicted and this is a part of righteousness and justice. Otherwise, anything more would be transgression and oppression. But forgiving and being patient is better, and because of this Allah says, **﴿Certainly, Allah is with the righteous and those who are good-doers.﴾**

²⁷ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:128

²⁸ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:126-127

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This type of Allah being with his creation is the specific type, specific to particular characteristics – anyone who is righteous and does good, Allah is with him.

Pertaining to moral conduct, this encourages us to do good and be conscientious and fearful of Allah because everyone would like Allah to be with them, and this is the condition for achieving that.



The Sixth Verse

﴿وَأَصْبِرُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ﴾

Be patient. Allah is surely with the patient ones.²⁹

We have explained before that patience includes preventing oneself from believing, doing, or saying something disliked by Allah. One could be patient with doing acts of obedience to Allah or patient with leaving sins. Patience is that one does not become displeased or angry with what Allah decrees. So patience can be with the tongue, heart, or limbs.

The best types of patience are to remain patient in obeying Allah and then patience in not disobeying him. This is because both of these types are choices a person makes: if he wants, he does what he is asked, otherwise he chooses not to, and he either decides to leave a sin or not. The next and lowest level is patience with what Allah decrees. The decree of Allah is going to happen whether you like it or not. So you could either bear it with a dignified patience or just accept it and deal with it as animals do.

Patience is a noble quality that cannot actually be realized except by something upon which to be patient. Even for someone who has the earth spread out for him at will and people waiting on him, he is still bound to encounter some kind of physical or mental stress.

²⁹ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:46

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For this, Allah combined the qualities of gratitude and patience in his prophet, Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

As for his gratitude (for the blessings Allah gave him), he used to stand in prayer so much that his feet would become swollen, and when asked why he prays so much when his past and future sins have already been forgiven, he replied:

« أَفَلَا أَكُونُ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا ؟ »

Should I not then be a thankful worshipper?³⁰

As for his patience, he remained steadfast and patient with everything he was afflicted with. He was harmed by his own people and others like the Jews and the hypocrites who only outwardly professed Islam. Still, in face of all the harm he suffered, he remained patient.



³⁰ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1130) and Muslim (no. 2819)

The Seventh Verse

﴿ كَم مِّن فِئْتَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ فِئْتَةً كَثِيرَةً بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴾

How often has a small group overcome a mighty host by Allah's permission? And Allah is with the patient ones.³¹

﴿**How often**﴾ here is used more to inform rather than ask. In other words, a small group has overcome and defeated a larger, stronger group many times, or many smaller groups have overcome many larger ones, but not by their own strength and power. Instead, they only did so ﴿**by Allah's permission**﴾, by his decision and control.

An example was when Ṭālūt (King Saul) and his few companions defeated their enemies (Jālūt, Goliath) when they were many.

Another example was when the Muslims at the Battle of Badr defeated the Quraysh Tribe when they were many; the Quraysh were about three times the number of Muslims.

As for the verse, ﴿**How often has a small group overcome a mighty host by Allah's permission? And Allah is with the patient ones**﴾, the small groups referred to here were the patient ones. They practiced all types of patience: patience in obeying Allah, patience in not disobeying him, and they remained patient and steadfast in face of what

³¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:249

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afflicted them of having to fight, fatigue, and the distress and hardship that comes with the pains of battle. But **Allah is with the patient ones.**



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The Advantages of Allah Being with Us

What are the virtues by which creation benefits when Allah is with them?

First, knowing this strengthens our faith that Allah (عزَّ وجلَّ) encompasses everything and everyone. Even while he is high above, he is still with his creation. Nothing at all of their circumstances or needs ever escapes him.

Second, if we know Allah is with us with certainty and believe firmly in it, a complete sense of companionship with Allah and concern for him is produced within us. We would then strive to obey him and avoid sinning against him. He would not find us absent when he commands us and he would not find us present doing things he forbids us from. This is one of the greatest advantages for whoever believes Allah is with his creation.



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Combining between Allah Being with Creation & Above Creation on His Throne

Ibn Taymiyyah says:

It is part of believing in Allah to believe in everything Allah informs of in his book, whatever is reported from his messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), and what the Salaf of this nation agreed upon in that Allah (سبحانه) is above the heavens on his throne, high above his creation, and he (سبحانه) is also with them wherever they are; he knows everything they do.

We have mentioned before that believing in Allah and having faith in him includes accepting and believing in all his names and characteristics. From them is to believe in Allah's attributes of being high above creation on his throne as well as believing he is with his creation. In this section, the author explains how to combine between these two beliefs: that Allah is above his creation and also with them.

Here, he mentions three evidences confirming Allah's highness: the Quran, the Sunnah (the prophet's guidance), and the consensus of the Salaf. We have also discussed before a fourth and fifth proof: the intellect and the natural disposition upon which every person is created.

Confirming Allah is above the Heavens, High above Creation

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This “highness” of Allah (عزّ وجلّ) is of two types: a type of highness and exaltedness in his characteristics and a personal highness. The personal highness, just like the exaltedness in characteristics, is confirmed by the Book, Sunnah, consensus, the intellect, and by people’s natural inclination.

As for the Book, the Quran is full of verses, sometimes explicitly stating Allah is above creation, other times mentioning his highness, that he is above the heavens, or by stating that things descend from him or rise up to him, and similar contexts.

As for the Sunnah, many ḥadīth have come confirming Allah is high above by way of the prophet’s explicit statements, his actions, and his acceptance (of others confirming this belief). These evidences were previously mentioned (in other places of Ibn Taymiyyah’s book, *al-‘Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah*).

As for the consensus, the Salaf and reputable scholars were in unanimous agreement that Allah is high above creation. This is known because nothing has ever been reported from any of them that would indicate anything else that contradicts the Quran and Sunnah. In other words, they have read the Quran and reported the narrations (ḥadīth) knowing full well their meanings, yet since nothing has ever come from any of them opposing the texts’ apparent meanings, it is therefore known that these scholars did not believe anything else but the apparent meanings. They were in unanimous agreement on this position. And this is really an excellent principle in determining the scholars’ unanimous position on any issue (i.e. the lack of reports that any of them believed anything but the texts’ apparent meanings), so hold on to this principle and it will help you with many issues of belief.

As for the intellect, it confirms Allah's highness from two perspectives. First, highness and exaltedness are characteristics of perfection and Allah's attributes are all perfect. So the intellect suggests this particular characteristic of Allah being high above creation.

Second, were he not high above creation then it could be understood that he is either below or within it. But these could be considered deficient characteristics because that would mean some things are higher than Allah or similar to him. Again the attributes of highness and exaltedness are therefore indicated by one's intellect.

Finally, the natural inclination of people is that no one really denies that Allah is high above creation except someone whose own disposition and natural beliefs have become distorted. For example, anyone who prays, "Oh God!" his heart is naturally directed up towards the sky, not to the right or left, because it is understood that Allah is above the skies.

Confirming Allah is with Creation

This belief is also included in believing in Allah – accepting and believing that he is with his creation. We mentioned that this concept is of two types: a general "withness" and a special type that is further broken down into specific to particular individuals and specific to particular qualities people may possess.

Just to review, the general type is the type that includes everyone: believers, disbelievers, the righteous and the sinners. An example of this type is the verse:

﴿ وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ﴾

And he is with you wherever you are.³²

And an example of the specific type that is specific to particular qualities:

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ ﴾

Certainly, Allah is with those are conscientious and fearful (of him) and those who do good.³³

As for examples of the specific type that is specific to particular individuals, Allah says to Mūsá and Hārūn:

﴿ لَا تَخَافَا ۖ إِنِّي مَعَكُمَا أَسْمَعُ وَأَرَى ﴾

Fear not, I am certainly with both of you; I hear and see (all).³⁴

And his statement, quoting his messenger, Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

﴿ لَا تَحْزَنُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا ﴾

“Do not grieve, Allah is certainly with us.”³⁵

³² Sūrah al-Ḥadīd, 57:4

³³ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:128

³⁴ Sūrah Ṭā-Hā, 20:46

³⁵ Sūrah al-Tawbah, 9:40

We also said that this concept of Allah being with his creation is real and actual, and that the general type includes Allah's characteristics of knowledge, hearing, sight, power, control, etc., and the specialized type includes all of those characteristics as well as Allah's support and assistance.

The Combination between Both Concepts

Ibn Taymiyyah says that Allah himself has combined between these two concepts when he said:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۗ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۗ وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ﴾

It is he who created the heavens and earth in six days then he rose over the throne. He knows what goes into the earth and what comes out of it, what descends from the sky and what ascends therein, and he is with you wherever you are. And Allah sees whatever you do.³⁶

Here, Allah confirms he is both high above creation yet with them. His statement, **﴿then he rose over the throne﴾** in the verse proves his highness, and **﴿And he is with you wherever you are﴾** proves he is with his creation. Since Allah himself combines between the two concepts in a single verse, there is then no contradiction between them as we have said and we will further clarify.

³⁶ Sūrah al-Ḥadīd, 57:4

We can understand this combination between both concepts from three different perspectives:

1. Allah mentions that he is established on the throne, then said in the same verse, ﴿**And he is with you wherever you are**﴾ So if Allah describes himself with both characteristics, we should know with certainty there is no contradiction between the two. If one contradicted the other, then it would be impossible to combine between both descriptions; if one occurred, the other would have to end. If there was a contradiction, that would also mean that the first part of the verse opposes the latter part, or vice versa.
2. The idea of something being above and still with something is possible even for created beings as the author will soon mention about the familiar (Arabic) phrase, "We continued travelling with the moon."
3. Even if the two concepts did contradict one another with respect to created beings, that does not necessarily mean it is the same case for the creator, because nothing is similar or comparable to Allah.

Ibn Taymiyyah continues (in *al-'Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah*):

And the meaning of ﴿**And he is with you**﴾ is not that he is merged within creation. Even the (Arabic) language does not necessarily mean that. It also goes against what this nation's Salaf were unanimously agreed upon as well as against the natural

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inclination with which Allah created people. Rather, the moon is one of Allah's signs and one of the smallest of his (universal) creations. It is placed in the sky, yet it is still considered to be with a traveler as well as a non-traveler wherever they both may be.

The author clarifies that combining the two concepts does not mean Allah is merged within creation, because this would be a description of deficiency. We have already mentioned that if this were the case, that would mean only two things: either that the creator is numerous (many gods), or that he is made up of separate parts. It would also mean that something actually contains and encompasses him (creation). Rather Allah encompasses everything.

Also, if the language itself (the word "with" in Arabic) does not necessarily mean that Allah is merged within creation, then "merged" is not the only meaning of "with." This is one proof used to refute the people who believe in incarnation like the *Jahmiyyah* (notorious misguided sect) and others, those who say Allah is personally embodied within creation. The author here did not say, "Even the language does not mean that," because the word "with" in Arabic very well could mean merged or mixed, like saying, "Water with milk," to mean water mixed with milk.

As Ibn Taymiyyah indicated, people are born with the natural disposition and understanding that the creator is separate from creation. No one naturally says, "Oh God!" except that he considers God (تعالی) to be separate from creation. People do not have some inborn inclination to consider Allah united with or within his creatures. So claiming he is merged within creation is opposed by Islamic legislation, the intellect, and people's natural inclination.

The author then points to a well-known phrase among the Arabs: “We continued to travel with the moon,” while a resident may also say the moon is with him. This is an example to show that the word “with” could correctly be used to describe something that is actually considered to be with people despite the great distance between them. The moon in the sky, one of the smallest of universal creations, is with both a traveler and resident wherever they are.

If this is the case with created things, even one of the smallest of astral creations, and we can say it is with us while still in the sky without meaning we merge together with it and with no contradiction, then why can we not accept the verses of Allah being with creation upon their apparent meanings? Why can we not say he is actually with us even though he is above the sky, high above everything?

Still, like we have said, even if this were impossible regarding created beings, it does not mean it is impossible for the creator. The Lord (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) is actually high above the heavens, and he is actually with us; there is no incompatibility with that. Even if he is far away in his highness and exaltedness, Allah could still be considered close without negating his highness and exaltedness.

This is exactly what Ibn Taymiyyah confirms in his books, and he says there is no need to twist the meaning and change the verse. Instead, it is taken and understood on its apparent meaning, yet with our belief that Allah (تعالى) is high above the heavens on his throne. So he is actually with us just as he is actually high on his throne.

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We say the same thing about his descent. He actually descends to the worldly sky (the lowest heaven) even though he is still high above; no people of the Sunnah have ever denied this. All of them have said that Allah really descends, believing full well that he is still high above. The creator's characteristics and actions are not like those of creation.

I came across a statement in which the famous (contemporary) scholar, Muhammad Ibn Ibrāhīm, explains this exact meaning – that the concept of Allah being with his creation is real even though it does not mean he is merged within them or that he is on earth. He said this while answering a question about why some of the Salaf say, "Allah is with people in knowledge." The scholar says:

When this statement comes, it is an explanation of what the *Ma'iyyah* or "withness" necessitates, not what the word actually means. And those who take it or restrict it to this meaning alone, they only did so debating with the innovators who say, "Allah is personally merged within us." So some of the Salaf responded with what the Arabic word "with" includes according to the context – the perfection of Allah's knowledge. They did not mean that the word "with" itself means "knows everything." Rather, in addition to other possible meanings, it includes the added quality of knowledge. So it increases in meaning, but the actual meaning (of such texts) is still "he is with the creation." Explaining the concept with what it includes and necessitates (of qualities) does not mean that explanation is wrong; each has its own place...

For this reason, the famous scholar of Islam (Ibn Taymiyyah) in his short yet beneficial book of belief (*al-'Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah*) clarifies that when Allah says he is with creation, he is really with them in an actual way. And when scholars explain it in terms of what it

includes, then that is only because the situation called for that. They did so to refute people who believe in incarnation like the *Jahmiyyah* who deny that Allah is high above (anything). The Quran could be explained by other verses, by apparent meanings, and by what it includes and necessitates of other meanings. As for the scholars from whom it is reported they explained the concept in terms of what it includes (e.g. Allah's knowledge), it is not that they denied a real meaning of the "withness," but instead, it was as clear to them as the sun.³⁷

Question: Is it correct to say that Allah is "personally" with us?

Answer: This particular wording should be avoided because it may suggest an incorrect meaning that the people of incarnation (who say Allah is embodied within everything) may then use as evidence to support them. There is really no need to add "personally" because anything (name, description, action) that Allah associates with himself, it is already understood to personally refer to him. For example, look at the verse:

﴿ وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ ﴾

And your Lord will come...³⁸

Do we really need to say: He will "personally" come? Similarly, when the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) says:

« يَنْزِلُ رَبُّنَا تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا »

³⁷ Taken from *Majmū' Fatāwā wa Rasāil* of Muhammad Ibn Ibrāhīm (vol. 1, 212).

³⁸ Sūrah al-Fajr, 89:22

Our Lord, blessed and most high, descends every night to the worldly sky...³⁹

Must we now say he “personally” descends? No, we do not need to say that unless perhaps if we were debating with those who claim that it is instead Allah’s “decision” that comes or his “decision” that descends. In that case, maybe it could be said to refute their twisted, distorted interpretations.

Ibn Taymiyyah continues:

Allah (سبحانه) is above the throne, watching over creation, in control of them, well-informed about them, and other qualities of his lordship. All of these statements Allah mentions in that he is above the throne and with us, they are actual characteristics in a real manner. There is no need to twist and distort them with misinterpretations. Yet they are preserved from any false assumptions...

Again, even though Allah is with creation, he is still above his throne. He guards creation and records everything they do: their statements, actions, when they move and when they are still. He also maintains control over them, judging and ruling his servants. Any decision belongs to Allah alone and all matters refer back to him. When he wants anything to happen, he only says, “Be,” and it is. As for the author’s statement, “and other qualities of his lordship,” this includes any meaning of Allah’s lordship such as owning, controlling, arranging affairs, etc. Many meanings fall under lordship. Allah is

³⁹ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1145) and Muslim (no. 758)

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the owner, controller, arranger of all affairs and even these three things themselves include many other qualities.

The author's statements reaffirm what was already mentioned because of the importance of the issue. He (Ibn Taymiyyah) repeats his clarification that what Allah says of his being above the throne is understood to be real in an actual manner. Similarly, what he says of being with us is also actual and real. There is no reason to distort or misinterpret these characteristics. In other words, we do not need to say that the description of Allah being above creation is really just a figurative concept of his exaltedness as some people who twist the meanings claim. No, it is a personal characteristic of Allah being high as well as a concept of his exaltedness.

Likewise, there is no need to interpret his characteristic of being with creation to mean anything other than its apparent meaning. We say it is a real description in a real manner. And anyone who interprets it to mean anything but its apparent meaning is distorting the meaning. However, reports that explain the description in terms of what qualities it includes and necessitates were only reported from the Salaf because of particular circumstances that called for that. They do not mean there is no real and actual meaning of the description. Whatever the truth includes and necessitates is also considered truth.

The author then defends his position (the real description of Allah being with creation) by saying, "Yet they are preserved from any false assumptions..." False assumptions here are any baseless theories or beliefs not supported by any correct evidence. The

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statements of Allah (تعالی) and his messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) must always be preserved from any baseless distortion of meanings or false assumptions.

To conclude, we believe Allah's is actually high above creation on his throne and yet he is still actually with creation, both in a manner that befits his majesty, and there is no contradiction between the two.



A P P E N D I X :

Our Lord's Descent

The prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said in an authentic ḥadīth:

« يَنْزِلُ رَبُّنَا تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا حِينَ يَبْقَى ثُلُثُ اللَّيْلِ
الْآخِرِ، يَقُولُ: مَنْ يَدْعُونِي فَأَسْتَجِيبَ لَهُ؟ مَنْ يَسْأَلُنِي فَأُعْطِيَهُ؟ مَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُنِي
فَأَغْفِرَ لَهُ؟ »

Our Lord, the blessed and exalted, descends every night to the sky of this world when the last third of the night remains. He asks, “Who is calling on me so I can answer him? Who is asking me (for anything) so I can give (it to) him? Who is asking for my forgiveness so I can forgive him?”⁴⁰

This ḥadīth is a proof confirming the descent of Allah to the lowest heaven, the sky of this world.

Some people of knowledge said this ḥadīth has come with many different chains of narration, and the scholars have always agreed that it is one of the famous ḥadīth often mentioned by the scholars of the Sunnah.

The prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) says, « Our Lord descends every night to the sky of this world. » Allah's descent is real and actual because, as we have mentioned before,

⁴⁰ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1145) and Muslim (no. 758)

anything mentioned with a pronoun that refers back to Allah, it must be attributed to him in a real, actual manner.

So we should believe in it and accept it as truth, saying just as the ḥadīth says, “Our Lord descends to the sky of this world,” to the lowest heaven closest to the earth. There are seven heavens, and Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) descends at this time during the night to be near his worshippers just as he does during the afternoon on the Day of ‘Arafah (during the pilgrimage), praising and boasting to the angels about his worshippers.⁴¹

As for « every night » it is general to include every single night of the year.

« when the last third of the night remains » In Islamic legislation, the night begins at sunset and this is unanimously agreed upon. The difference (among scholars) however comes with regards to when the night ends. Does it end with the appearance of first light or the actual rising of the sun? Apparently, the night, according to legislation, ends with the appearance of first light, and the common, “astral” night ends with sunrise.

Allah asks, « “Who is calling on me...” » This is a question yet really intended as an encouragement and motivation rather than expecting an actual answer. It is like his statement (in the Quran):

⁴¹ The ḥadīth about this is recorded by Muslim (no. 1348). The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« مَا مِنْ يَوْمٍ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ أَنْ يُعْتِقَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ عَبْدًا مِنَ النَّارِ مِنْ يَوْمِ عَرَفَةَ وَإِنَّهُ لَيَدْنُو ثُمَّ يُبَاهِي بِهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ ، فَيَقُولُ : مَا أَرَادَ هَؤُلَاءِ ؟ »

There is no day on which Allah frees more servants from the fire than the Day of ‘Arafah. He comes near (them) and praises and boasts about them to the angels, saying, “What do these want?” (or “Anything they want!”)

﴿ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ تِجَارَةٍ تُنْجِيكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴾

Shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment?⁴²

« "...calling on me..." » saying, "Oh Lord..."

« "...so I can answer him?" » This is the result and reward for doing the first part – calling on Allah.

« "Who is asking me (for anything) so I can give (it to) him?" » such as saying, "I ask You for Paradise," or similar things.

« "Who is asking for my forgiveness..." » saying, "Oh Allah, forgive me," or "I seek your forgiveness, Allah."

« "...so I can forgive him?" » Forgiveness means to conceal one's sins and overlook them.

With this, it should be clear to every person who reads this ḥadīth that what is meant by "descends" here is that Allah himself descends. We do not even need to say he descends "personally" because as long as the verb is associated with him, then he himself does it. Still, some scholars did say, "He personally descends." They resorted to saying that, compelled to adding "personally" only because there are those people who

⁴² Sūrah al-Ṣaf, 61:10

twist the meaning of ḥadīth, claiming that what really descends is the decision and decree of Allah. Others say it is Allah's mercy that descends, and even others say it is one of his angels that descends.

All of these are incorrect. For one thing, Allah's decision and decree are constantly descending, and not only during the last third of night as he (تعالی) says generally:

﴿ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يَعْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ ﴾

He arranges each matter from the heaven to the earth then it will ascend to him.⁴³

And he says:

﴿ وَإِلَيْهِ يَرْجِعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ ﴾

And to him the matter will return, all of it.⁴⁴

As for their statement that it is really only the mercy of Allah that descends to the worldly sky when the last third of night remains, Allah is above such deficiencies and insults! Mercy does not descend except at that time?! Allah (تعالی) says:

﴿ وَمَا يَكُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ فَمِنْ اللَّهِ ﴾

And whatever you have of blessing, it is from Allah.⁴⁵

⁴³ Sūrah al-Sajdah, 32:5

⁴⁴ Sūrah Hūd, 11:123

⁴⁵ Sūrah al-Naḥl, 16:53

Every blessing and favor is from Allah, and they are the results of his mercy; they can be witnessed at all times.

We could then ask: What good does it do for us if mercy descends only down to the sky (and no further)?

As for those who say it is really only an angel that descends, we ask: Does it make sense that an angel would say, "Who is calling on me so I can answer him? Who is asking me for anything..."?!

So it is clear that these claims are distorted meanings, they are incorrect and proven so by the ḥadīth itself.

By Allah, such people who claim these things do not know more about Allah than Allah's messenger, they are certainly not more sincere in advising the servants of Allah than his messenger, and they are not more precise and eloquent in speech than the messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

Some people also ask: How can you say Allah descends? If he does so, then what about his being high above everything? What about his being over the throne? If he descends, this would involve movement and relocation. Also, if he descends, this would be an action that happens and anything that happens must have a cause.

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To this we say: This is baseless and pointless arguing. There is no reason not to say that Allah's descent is real. Do you know what Allah deserves (of characteristics and descriptions) more than the companions of the messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم)?

The companions never made any of these false assumptions and conjectures. Instead they listened, they believed, they accepted, and they trusted it as absolute truth. Yet now, you people come and challenge the meanings, arguing for the sake of falsehood, asking, "How? Why?"

We say Allah descends, and we do not delve into asking, "What about his throne? Does this mean he leaves it or not?"

As for his being above, we say he descends and yet he is still high above his creation because "descent" here does not necessarily mean that he is surrounded by the lowest heaven to which he descends while the other heavens are above him. Rather, he is not contained within anything of his creation.

So Allah actually descends in a real manner while he is actually high above in a real manner, and nothing is similar to him.

Rising over the throne is an action, not a permanent, personal characteristic. We should not, as far as I am concerned, begin asking whether he leaves the throne or not. Instead, we should keep silent about it just as the companions did, may Allah be pleased with them all.

However, the scholars of those who follow the Sunnah take one of three positions regarding the issue of whether Allah leaves his throne during his descent. Some say he leaves the throne, others say he does not leave it, and others say we should remain silent and not delve into the issue.

Ibn Taymiyyah says in his *al-Risālah al-'Arshiyyah* that Allah does not leave the throne (during his descent) because the evidence confirming he is on the throne is strong and explicit just as this ḥadīth is also a strong, explicit proof of his descent. The actions and characteristics of Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) are not to be measured by those of creation. So we should leave the texts of his being on the throne confirmed as they are just as we leave the text of his descent confirmed as it is. We say he is established on his throne and yet he still descends to the sky of this world; Allah alone knows the “how” of it. Our minds are too deficient and incomplete to know everything about Allah, the Most High.

The second position is that Allah leaves the throne during his descent and the third position is to remain silent – in other words, not to say whether he does or does not leave his throne.

Some people more recently bring up yet another point of confusion. Since the earth is round and revolves around the sun, they ask how Allah can descend during the last third of the night when the last third is a constant time. For example, when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia leaves this time, Europe and surrounding countries enter it. So is Allah constantly and forever descending?

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In reply, we say: First and foremost, you should simply believe and accept that Allah descends during this specific time. If you do believe in it, then there is nothing else required from you. Do not go into asking, “How?” Instead, accept that when the last third of night remains in Saudi Arabia, then Allah descends, and when it remains in America, Allah also descends. And His descent finishes when the light of morning appears in any place, respective to it.

To conclude, our position is that we believe and accept everything that has come to us from Allah’s messenger, Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) in that Allah comes down to the sky of this world, the lowest heaven, when the last third of night remains and he asks, « “Who is calling on me so I can answer him? Who is asking me (for anything) so I can give (it to) him? Who is asking for my forgiveness so I can forgive him?” »

Beneficial Points We Learn from This Ḥadīth

This amazing ḥadīth:

- confirms that Allah is high above creation based on the words, « Our Lord descends »
- confirms that Allah does actions by his choice and will—these are known as “action” characteristics (see footnote no. 7 of the main article)—based on the statement, « Our Lord descends...when the last third of the night remains. »
- confirms that Allah speaks based on the statement, « He asks... »

- confirms Allah's kindness and generosity based on his questions, (« "Who is calling on me...? Who is asking me...? Who is asking for my forgiveness...?" »)

People should take advantage of this part of the night, asking for whatever they need from Allah, calling upon him, and asking his forgiveness as he asks, (« "Who is calling on me...? Who is asking me...? Who is asking for my forgiveness...?" ») And again, the word "Who" here is presented in the form of a question but is actually intended to motivate rather than ask.

So we should take advantage of this chance because nothing that has passed of your life is in your favor except the times you spent in obedience to Allah. Perhaps more days may pass you by, but when death comes it will be as if you were only born that minute. At that time, everything of one's past life will mean nothing to him.

