
QUESTION: What is tahreef?

ANSWER: In the last two postings, we have mentioned tashbeeh (which means trying to liken Allah to the Creation) and takyeef (which is when a person asks 'how' Allah is).

In this posting, we will discuss another error – a serious error – which is sadly found in much of the Muslim and non Muslim world; the error of tahreef.

Tahreef occurs when a person tries to change the meaning of an Attribute of Allah away from its actual true meaning, and as such, is sometimes translated as 'distortion' of that Attribute.

Islam teaches that a person must understand the texts of the Quran and the hadeeths according to their apparent meaning as understood from the Arabic language.¹

There is no place for a person to say 'I think that this Attribute of Allah doesn't mean what it apparently says – I think that it means something else instead.'

The only exception to this is if there is a text somewhere else in the Quran or in the authentic hadeeths which says that the Attribute should be interpreted to mean something else – i.e. that it should not be taken on its literal meaning.

For example, when it is mentioned in the Quran that Allah has a Face, then we accept that Allah has a Face.

And the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Honour, will remain forever.

Surah Ar Rahman (the 55th chapter) verse 27

¹ Refer to *al qawaa'id ul muthlaa* p75 of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al 'Uthaymeen for more information

There is nothing in the Quran or the authentic hadeeths to say that this word 'Face' should be interpreted to mean something else. The person, therefore, avoids making tahreef (distortion) of this Attribute 'Face'.

The Quran mentions:

Indeed We have sent it down, an Arabic Quran, so that you might understand.

Surah Yusuf (the 12th chapter) verse 2

The trustworthy spirit (the angel Gabriel) came down with it (the Revelation) upon your heart so that you will be from those who warn, using a clear Arabic language.

Surah ash Shu'ara (the 26th chapter) verses 193 to 195

So the Quran is in straightforward, clear Arabic, albeit with a beautiful, inimitable style.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also used straightforward Arabic when speaking to his Companions.

So we understand these two sources according to the Arabic language in which they came.

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NEXT TIME: We will discuss ta'teel – negating and denying the Attributes of Allah. What exactly does this mistake involve?