
QUESTION: What is *takyeef*?

ANSWER: The Arabic word for 'how' is '*kayf*' and from this root comes the word '*takyeef*'.

It means to ask the details about something, sometimes with the word 'how' and sometimes with other words such as 'where', 'what', etc. For example, how tall is that building? How does the heart beat? What colour is that person's hair?

We have been talking about what Islam teaches about Allah, in particular, about His Names and His Attributes. In this context, *takyeef* is a serious error that it is important to understand so as to avoid it. ¹

Takyeef occurs when a person thinks he can acquire an understanding of the specific details of Allah's Attributes - such that he says the Attributes must be like this or that. He asks, for example, 'What is Allah's Face like?'

It is important to note that this person is not claiming that the Attributes are like anything from the Creation – to put it another way, (if you recall from last time) this person is not falling into *tashbeeh*. So the person is not saying 'Allah's face is like mine' or like anyone or anything else's.

But rather the person thinks that he can understand and encompass how Allah is, so he asks the question. We shall see that even asking this question is a great error.

The Quran states:

And they cannot encompass His Knowledge.

Surah TaHa (the 20th chapter) verse 110

¹ Refer to *al qawaa'id ul muthlaa* p65 of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al 'Uthaymeen for more information

And do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart, (you) will be questioned (about each of them).

Surah al Israa (the 17th chapter) verse 36

Islam teaches that man can only know about Allah, that which he has been told by Allah Himself. But there is no way that we can fully encompass the nature of the Creator.

Even the greatest scientists and thinkers have a limited understanding of the world around them. None of us know everything there is to know, even in a field in which they have specialised. How, then, can a person begin to understand the details of how the Creator of all of this is?

Islam teaches that no matter how great a person estimates Allah to be, then Allah will be greater than that.

So, therefore, a person must stay away from guessing (for that is all it will be - mere guesswork) about the specific details of Allah. For Islam also teaches that the Quran and the Sunnah contain everything that a person needs to know about Allah.

So to summarise: Islam teaches that a person should not delve into how the details of Allah's Attributes are, if information on this detail is not provided anywhere in the Quran or the authentic hadeeths.

=====

NEXT TIME: We will discuss the error of tahreef – which means trying to change the meanings of Allah's Attributes.