



## Unveiling the Attributes of the Divine: A Scholarly Analysis of Qazi Bayzāwī's Tafsīr Bayzāwī

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### Abstract:

This study highlights Qadi al-Baydawi's allegiance to the Ash'arite theological tradition while analyzing his interpretive approach to the divine attributes found in the Qur'an. To avoid any anthropomorphic undertones, Qadi al-Baydawi commonly uses ta'wīl (metaphorical interpretation) to explain Qur'anic terminology like al-ityān (coming), al-majī' (arrival), al-istiwa (establishment), and others. Instead, he views these qualities as symbols of Allah's activities, including manifesting His will, using His authority, or controlling the universe. This method guarantees Allah's transcendence while adhering to logical and linguistic norms. The commentary by Qadi al-Baydawi highlights the need to balance preserving the Qur'anic textual purity and adhering to theological precepts highlighting Allah's supreme glory and uniqueness. He avoids anthropomorphism by keeping the meaning of the Qur'an through metaphorical explanations, and he backs up his arguments with evidence from both the Qur'anic text and the larger Islamic theological discourse. His writings continue to contribute substantially to the understanding of divine qualities by guiding how to balance textual interpretation with the requirements of theological orthodoxy.

**Keywords:** attributes, anthropomorphism, orthodoxy, logical Norms, theological norms,

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## Introduction

The understanding of Tawheed (the Oneness of Allah) and His characteristics is the most excellent of all the disciplines of knowledge. This is because all human behavior stems from their ideas. The soundness of one's beliefs determines one's advancement, but intellectual and ideological deterioration causes one's decline. Any country that has attempted to subdue and undermine Muslims has primarily targeted their ideals and beliefs.

Intellectual departure is also a significant contributor to many mistakes and conflicts in the modern world. Adopting accurate views about Allah Almighty and the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is hence their solution. The Quran and Hadith are the primary sources of reliable and precise beliefs. Since Tafsir al-Baydawi is taught in most Pakistan and South Asian seminaries, it occupies a unique place among the Quranic commentators. As a result, Qadi al-Baydawi's theories regarding Allah's qualities are generally acknowledged. This article briefly examines Qadi al-Baydawi's viewpoints regarding Allah's divine attributes. It is crucial to comprehend the categories of qualities before delving into the discussion of Allah's traits in this article.

### Types of Divine Attributes:

There are two primary types of Allah's attributes: Essential Attributes (Şifāt Dhātiyyah) and Active Attributes (Şifāt Fi'liyyah). These are further divided into two subcategories: Textual (Khabari) and Rational ('Aqli).

- **Essential Attributes (Şifāt Dhātiyyah):**

These qualities—life (Ḥayāt), power (Qudrah), hearing (Sam'), sight (Başar), will (Irādah), knowledge ('Ilm), and speech (Kalām)—are inseparable from Allah's essence.

- **Active Attributes (Şifāt Fi'liyyah):**

These qualities, which include creation (Khalq), sustenance (Rizq), life (İhyā'), and death (Imātah), are associated with Allah's will and deeds.

- **Rational Attributes ('Aqli):**

Both textual and logical evidence support these qualities. Among the examples are: Life (Ḥayāt), power (Qudrah), hearing (Sam'), sight (Başar), will (Irādah), knowledge ('Ilm), and speech (Kalām) are the fundamental rational qualities. The following are examples of active, rational attributes: creating (Khalq), giving life (İhyā'), causing death (Imātah), and providing sustenance (Rizq).

- **Textual Attributes (Khabari):**

These characteristics can only be shown by textual evidence, such as the Quran and Hadith. As an example, consider:

- **Essential Textual Attributes:** The three primary textual characteristics are the eye ('Ayn), hand (Yad), and face (Wajh).
- **Active Textual Attributes:** Arriving (Majī'), falling (Nuzūl), rising above the Throne (Istiwā'), and coming (İtyān) are characteristics of active text.<sup>3</sup>

### Views on Divine Attributes:

Regarding the divine characteristics (Şifāt), there are three prominent schools of thought:

#### First School of Thought: Tafwīd - Deferment Interpretation

The majority of the early scholars (mutaqaddimīn) took this stance. This viewpoint holds that:

- The qualities of Allah that are expressly confirmed in the Quran or by the Prophet (ﷺ) in Hadith are unquestionably qualities of perfection and divinity without any suggestion of anthropomorphism (tajsīm) or resemblance (tashbīh).
- The apparent phrasing is confirmed for Allah for those traits whose meanings would imply anthropomorphism or similarity. Still, the deeper meanings are deferred to Allah without interpretation, avoiding any connotations of resemblance or embodiment.

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<sup>3</sup> Ahmad bin Al-Husayn Al-Bayhaqi, *Al Asm ā' wal Şifāt*, (Jeddah: Maktabah Al-Sawādī), 1: 276

Tafwīd is the name of this school. One way to sum up its tenets is:

1. Confirming every quality listed in the sacred writings.
2. Offering insight into the significance of characteristics that might suggest a likeness to Allah.
3. Rejecting literal interpretations that imply creation-like qualities or anthropomorphism.

Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybānī explained this stance, saying:

*"Whoever interprets any of these attributes today has departed from the way of the Prophet (ﷺ) and has abandoned the consensus of the community."*<sup>4</sup>

Imam al-Nawawī similarly stated:

*"This was the approach of most of the early scholars, if not all of them—that they did not delve into the meanings of these attributes but instead entrusted their knowledge to Allah."*<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn elaborated on this methodology:

*"The early generations of Companions and Successors affirmed the attributes of divinity and perfection for Allah while deferring to Him the knowledge of attributes that might suggest deficiency, refraining from interpreting their meanings."*<sup>6</sup>

### **Second School of Thought: Ta'wil - Figurative Interpretation**

The majority of later scholars (*muta'akhhirīn*) held the view that for the attributes of Allah whose apparent or literal meanings might suggest anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*) or resemblance (*tashbīh*), or where their literal meanings imply any form of deficiency, these attributes are interpreted figuratively. Such interpretations are based on context and supported by the rules of the Arabic language.

### **Third School of Thought: Tajsīm – Anthropomorphism**

One group believes that the literal and linguistic meanings of Allah's attributes are intended, although the specific details (*kayfiyyah*) are unknown to us. This group affirms both the wording and meanings of the attributes for Allah.

Ibn al-Qayyim explains:

*"The meanings of the verses related to rulings are understood only by the elite, but the meanings of the verses concerning attributes are understood by both the elite and the common people. By this, I mean the essence of the meaning, not its full reality or modality."*<sup>7</sup>

From this clarification by Ibn al-Qayyim, it becomes evident that there is no ambiguity in the core meanings of the attributes. For this reason, this group does not consider the verses about Allah's attributes (*Āyāt al-Ṣifāt*) as part of the ambiguous verses (*Mutashābihāt*).

Ibn Taymiyyah supports this view, stating:

*"Those who claim that these attributes are among the ambiguous verses (Mutashābihāt) and that their meanings cannot be understood are mistaken. The evidence against this claim is that I have found no one among the early generations, the righteous predecessors (Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn), or the imams—neither Ahmad ibn Hanbal nor anyone else—who classified these attributes as ambiguous verses."*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Abu al-Qasim Hibatullah Al-Razi, *Sharḥ Uṣūl I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jamā'ah*, (KSA: Dār al Ṭayyibah), 3: 480

<sup>5</sup> Yahya bin Sharf Al-Nawawi, *Al-Minhāj*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al Turāth al 'Arabī), 3: 19

<sup>6</sup> Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad Ibn Khaldun, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, (Beirut: Dār al Fikr), 1: 603

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad bin Abi Bakr Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, *Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣawā'iq*, (Cairo: Dār al Ḥadīth), p: 28

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad bin Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, (KSA: Majma' al-Malik Fahad), 13: 294

Since Qadi al-Baydawi adopted the *Ta'wil* (figurative interpretation) approach concerning ambiguous attributes, the linguistic and technical definitions of *Ta'wil* will be discussed here.

### **Linguistic Meaning of *Ta'wil***

The linguistic meaning of *Ta'wil* is "to return to the original." Imam Raghīb explains:

"*Ta'wil* comes from the root 'awwal,' meaning to return to the origin."<sup>9</sup>

Allah says in the Quran:

"*Are they waiting for its fulfillment (Ta'wil)? The Day its fulfillment comes...*"

(*Surah Al-A'raf*, 7:53)

This refers to the clarification or explanation that achieves the intended purpose.<sup>10</sup>

Al-Jawhari states:

"*Ta'wil* means the explanation to which the meaning of a word is referred back."<sup>11</sup>

Imam Ibn Jarir explains:

"*Ta'wil* in the language of the Arabs means interpretation, explanation, and outcome."<sup>12</sup>

From all these references, it is clear that the linguistic meaning of *Ta'wil* encompasses explanation, interpretation, and the intended meaning of a word.

### **Technical Meaning of *Ta'wil***

Scholars of theology (*Ilm al-Kalām*) have provided various definitions for *Ta'wil*:

Imam Al-Ghazali states:

"*Ta'wil* refers to a possible meaning supported by evidence, making it more likely than the apparent meaning."<sup>13</sup>

Allama Al-Amidi defines it as:

"To interpret a word in a way other than its apparent meaning, provided it is a plausible meaning supported by evidence."<sup>14</sup>

### **Qadi al-Baydawi's Stance on Divine Attributes**

Qadi al-Baydawi adopted an interpretive (*ta'wil*) approach for specific divine attributes in his commentary (*Tafsir*), such as *al-Yad* (the Hand), *al-Wajh* (the Face), *al-Istiwa* (the Rising/Establishment), *al-Nuzul* (the Descent), and *al-Majī'* (the Coming). He followed the methodology of the Ash'arites and considered these attributes part of the ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*). Regarding such verses, Allah states:

"*It is He who has sent down to you the Book. In it are precise verses—the foundation of the Book—and others unspecific. As for those whose hearts are deviation, they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation (ta'wil). And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firms in knowledge say, 'We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord.' And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.*" (*Surah Aal-e-Imran*, 3:7)

Below are examples of Qadi al-Baydawi's interpretive approach as seen in his *Tafsir*:

### **Qadi al-Baydawi's View on *Al-Yad***

Allah says:

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<sup>9</sup> Husayn bin Muhammad Raghīb Al-Asphani, *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al Qur'ān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam), p: 99

<sup>10</sup> Raghīb Al-Asphani, *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al Qur'ān*, p: 99

<sup>11</sup> Ismail bin Hammad Al-Jawahari, *Al-Ṣiḥāh Tāj al-Lughah*, (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil Malāyīn), 4: 312

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al Qur'ān*, (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah), 6: 204

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustaṣfa*, (Beirut: Dār al Kutub al 'Ilmiyyah), p: 196

<sup>14</sup> Ali bin Abi Ali Al-Aamadi, *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl Al-Aḥkām*, (Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islāmī), 3: 53

"He [Allah] said, 'O Iblis, what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My Hands (yadayya)? Were you arrogant [then], or were you [already] among the haughty?'" (Surah Sad, 38:75)

Qadi al-Baydawi interprets *yadayya* in this verse as:

"I created him Myself, without an intermediary like a father or mother. The dual form (yadayya) indicates the exercise of extraordinary power in his creation."<sup>15</sup>

Here, Qadi al-Baydawi explains *yad* (Hand) as signifying power (*qudrah*), aligning with the Ash'arite methodology.

### **Imam al-Razi's Explanation of Al-Yad**

Imam al-Razi provides three interpretations of *al-Yad*:

#### **1. Literal Interpretation (Anthropomorphism):**

"The anthropomorphists (*mujassimah*) interpret Allah's Hand as a physical limb, similar to human hands."<sup>16</sup>

#### **2. Literal Affirmation with Deference (Salaf's Approach):**

"When the Quran affirms *al-Yad* for Allah, we affirm it. However, since reason dictates that Allah cannot possess a specific body or a composite organ, we affirm the attribute while entrusting its true nature to Allah. This is the methodology of the righteous predecessors (*Salaf*)."<sup>17</sup>

#### **3. Figurative Interpretation (Theologians' Approach):**

Imam al-Razi outlines the linguistic meanings of *al-Yad*:

- *Yad* as a physical organ (not applicable to Allah).
- *Yad* as a metaphor for blessings (*ni'mah*).
- *Yad* as a metaphor for power (*quwwah*).<sup>18</sup>

He concludes:

"*Al-Yad* concerning Allah cannot mean a physical limb, but other meanings, such as blessing or power, are acceptable."<sup>19</sup>

### **Imam al-Qurtubi's Explanation of Al-Yad**

Imam al-Qurtubi interprets *al-Yad* in the context of Allah's blessings:

"It refers to Allah's abundant blessings, so *al-Yad* here signifies blessings."<sup>20</sup>

### **Summary**

Qadi al-Baydawi follows the Ash'arite methodology, interpreting attributes like *al-Yad* figuratively to avoid implications of anthropomorphism. He views such attributes as part of the *mutashābihāt* and, consistent with the Ash'arite school, understands *al-Yad* as referring to Allah's power or blessings, not as a physical attribute.

### **Qadi al-Baydawi's Stance on Al-Wajh**

In the Interpretation of "*And the Face of your Lord, full of majesty and honor, will remain.*" (Surah al-Rahmān: 27), Qadi al-Baydawi explains:

"The Face of your Lord refers to His Essence (*dhāt*)."<sup>21</sup>

In the Interpretation of the verse "*Everything will perish except His Face.*" (Surah Al-Qaṣaṣ: 88), Qadi al-Baydawi says:

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<sup>15</sup> Abdullah bin Umar Al-Baydawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al Turāth al 'Arabī), 5: 34

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad bin Umar Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al Turāth al 'Arabī), 12: 30

<sup>17</sup> Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr*, 12:30

<sup>18</sup> Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr*, 12:30

<sup>19</sup> Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr*, 12:30

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Qurtabi, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: Daar al-Kutub Al-Miṣriyyah), 6: 239

<sup>21</sup> Al-Baydawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, 5: 172

*"Except for His Essence, as everything besides Him is contingent and, in its nature, destined to perish."*<sup>22</sup>

In both cases, Qadi al-Baydawi interprets *al-Wajh* (the Face) as a reference to Allah's Essence (*dhāt*), consistent with the Ash'arite approach of figurative interpretation (*ta'wil*).

### Supporting Views

- **Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti:**

He also interprets "*Al-Wajh*" as referring to Allah's Essence:

*"And the Face of your Lord means His Essence."*<sup>23</sup>

- **'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi:**

He elaborates on the interpretation of *al-Wajh*:

*"The correct position, according to us, is that His Face (al-Wajh) refers to His Essence (dhāt), and His Eye ('ayn\*) refers to His seeing of things. The verse 'And the Face of your Lord will remain' means 'Your Lord will remain.' This is why the phrase 'full of majesty and honor' is in the nominative case (raf') as an attribute of 'Face.' It would have been in the genitive case if it had been meant as an addition (khafd)."*<sup>24</sup>

This linguistic observation further reinforces that *al-Wajh* symbolizes Allah's Essence, not a physical attribute.

### Summary

Qadi al-Baydawi adopts a symbolic approach to interpreting *al-Wajh*, aligning with the methodology of the Ash'arites. By understanding *al-Wajh* as Allah's Essence, he avoids any anthropomorphic implications and emphasizes Allah's transcendence. This interpretation is consistent with the broader scholarly consensus within classical Islamic theology.

### Qadi al-Baydawi's Stance on *Al-Istiwa'*

Allah states:

*"Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He rose over the Throne."* (Surah Al-A'raf: 54)

In his commentary, Qadi al-Baydawi explains:

*"Then He rose over the Throne, meaning His command took control, or He gained dominion (istawlā)."*<sup>25</sup>

Here, Qadi al-Baydawi interprets *istiwa'* figuratively as *istiwlā'* (domination or sovereignty), consistent with the Ash'arite theological approach, which avoids anthropomorphic connotations.

### Supporting Views

1. **Imam Al-Bayhaqi:**

He states:

*"Many of our later scholars hold that istiwa' means overpowering and dominion (qahr wa ghalaba), implying that the Most Merciful gained dominion over the Throne and subdued it."*<sup>26</sup>

2. **Imam Al-Razi:**

While interpreting this verse, Al-Razi emphasizes:

*"It is impossible for this verse to mean physical settlement on the Throne, as logical and textual evidence refutes such an interpretation."*<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Al-Baydawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, 4: 127

<sup>23</sup> Abd Al-Rahman bin Abi Bakr Al-Sayuti, *Tafsīr al-Jalālyn*, (Cairo: Dār al Ḥadīth), 1: 710

<sup>24</sup> Abd Al-Rahman bin Salih, *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min Al-Ashā'irah*, (Riyadh: Maktabah Al-Rushd), 2: 134

<sup>25</sup> Al-Baydawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, 3: 16

<sup>26</sup> Al-Bayhaqi, *Al Asm ā' wal Şifāt*, 2: 307

<sup>27</sup> Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr*, 14: 258

After presenting rational and scriptural arguments against a literal understanding, he concludes: "*The meaning is that Allah rose above sovereignty (mulk) and gained mastery over it.*"<sup>28</sup>

### Summary

Qadi al-Baydawi's interpretation of *istiwā'* as *istiwlā'* (dominion or mastery) aligns with the Ash'arite approach, which seeks to affirm Allah's transcendence and avoid anthropomorphic implications. This interpretation, supported by scholars like Imam Al-Bayhaqi and Al-Razi, underscores that Allah's relationship to the Throne signifies His absolute control and authority, not a physical presence.

### Qadi al-Baydawi's Stance on *Al-Itiyān* and *Al-Majī'*

Allah states:

"*Do they await except that Allah should come to them in covers of clouds, along with the angels, and the matter is [then] decided? And to Allah [all] matters are returned.*" (Surah Al-Baqarah: 210)

While interpreting this verse, Qadi al-Baydawi explains:

"*The coming of Allah (ityān Allāh) refers to the arrival of His command or punishment, as in the verse: 'And the command of your Lord comes.'*"<sup>29</sup>

Qadi al-Baydawi thus interprets *ityān* (coming) metaphorically as referring to Allah's command (*amr*) or punishment (*ba's*), aligning with the Ash'arite approach of avoiding anthropomorphism.

### Supporting Views

#### 1. Al-Zamakhshari:

In his interpretation of the same verse, he states:

"*The coming of Allah refers to the arrival of His command and punishment, as in the verse: 'And the command of your Lord comes.'*"<sup>30</sup>

#### 2. Ibn 'Atiyyah:

He elaborates:

"*The meaning is that Allah's judgment, command, prohibition, and punishment will reach them.*"<sup>31</sup>

#### 3. Ibn al-Jawzi:

This renowned Hanbali scholar quotes Qadi Abu Ya'la regarding Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal's view:

"*Imam Ahmad said: 'What is meant here is Allah's power (qudrah) and command (amr).'*"<sup>32</sup>

### Other Examples of Qadi al-Baydawi's Interpretations

In other cases, Qadi al-Baydawi also adopts metaphorical interpretations (*ta'wīl*) for divine attributes. For example, he interprets "*Shyness (ḥayā')* to abstention that stems from hesitation."<sup>33</sup> He defines mercy (*rahmah*) as the act of bestowing blessings and anger (*ghaḍab*) as the intent to exact retribution.<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion

Qadi al-Baydawi's interpretative approach to divine attributes in the Qur'an reflects a careful and deliberate alignment with the Ash'arite theological framework. By employing metaphorical interpretations (*ta'wīl*) for terms such as *al-ityān* (coming), *al-majī'* (arrival), *al-*

<sup>28</sup> Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr*, 14: 270

<sup>29</sup> Al-Baydawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, 1: 134

<sup>30</sup> Mahmud bin Amar Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshāf*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī), 1: 253

<sup>31</sup> Abdul Haq bin Ghalib Ibn Attiyyah, *Al-Jāmi' al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Azīz*, (Beirut: Dār al Kutub al 'Ilmiyyah), 1: 283

<sup>32</sup> Abd al-Rahman bin Ali Al-Jawzi, *Zād al-Masīr*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī), 1: 174

<sup>33</sup> Al-Baydawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, 1: 62

<sup>34</sup> Al-Baydawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, 1: 27

*istiwa* (establishment), and others, he avoids any anthropomorphic implications that might compromise the transcendence of Allah. Instead, Qadi al-Baydawi explains these attributes as referring to Allah's actions, commands, or effects, such as the arrival of His judgment, the manifestation of His power, or His control over the universe. His approach underscores a clear distinction between Allah's essence and His created realm, emphasizing that the divine attributes must be understood in a manner befitting Allah's supreme and unparalleled nature. Through this methodology, Qadi al-Baydawi not only preserves the majesty and uniqueness of Allah but also adheres to rational and linguistic principles supported by the Qur'an and Sunnah. His interpretations, such as rendering *istiwa* as "supremacy" or *ityān* as "the coming of Allah's command," illustrate his effort to uphold the belief in Allah's transcendence without rejecting the literal text of the Qur'an. By reconciling textual fidelity with theological soundness, Qadi al-Baydawi's commentary serves as a critical resource for scholars navigating the balance between scriptural interpretation and theological abstraction, ensuring that the Qur'anic message remains accessible yet firmly rooted in orthodox Islamic beliefs.