

# **Allaah is Above the Sky, The Hadeeth of Mu'awiyah ibn al-Hakam, Answering the Erroneous Claims of Nuh Haa Meem Keller**

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بِسْمِ اَلِه الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

## **Introduction:**

Nuh Ha Meem Keller, a neo-Jahmi claimed in an article, "Is it permissible for a Muslim to believe that Allah is in the sky in literal sense?", that:

"In this connection, a hadith has been related by Malik in his *Muwatta'* and by Muslim in his *Sahih*, that Muawiya ibn al-Hakam came to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and told him, "I am very newly from the Jahiliyya, and now Allah has brought Islam," and he proceeded to ask about various Jahiliyya practices, until at last he said that he had slapped his slave girl, and asked if he should free her, as was obligatory if she was a believer. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) requested that she be brought, and then asked her, "Where is Allah?" and she said, "In the sky (*Fi al-sama*)"; whereupon he asked her, "Who am I?" and she said, "You are the Messenger of Allah"; at which he said, Free her, "for she is a believer" (*Sahih Muslim*)"

This hadith is straight-forward proof that the Islamic belief ratified and taught by the Prophet **صلي الله عليه و سلم** is that Allah, our Lord is above the sky (Keller's translation "in the sky" is incorrect, as we will show, Insha'Allah). The Hadith which is authentic and deals a killing blow to Keller's belief that Allah is nowhere. So, instead he tried to weaken the hadith itself:

"This condition (authenticity) is not met by this particular hadith for a number of reasons. First, the story described in the hadith has come to us in a number of other well-authenticated versions that vary a great deal from the "Where is Allah?-In the sky" version. One of these is related by Ibn Hibban in

his Sahih with a well-authenticated (*hasan*) chain of transmission, in which the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) asked the slave girl, "Who is your Lord?" and she said, 'Allah'; whereupon he asked her, 'Who am I?' and she said, 'You are the Messenger of Allah'; at which he said, 'Free her, for she is a believer'" (*al-Ihsan fi taqrib Sahih Ibn Hibban*, 18 vols. Beirut: Muassasa al-Risala, 1408/1988, 1.419: 189).

In another version, related by Abd al-Razzaq with a rigorously authenticated (*sahih*) chain of transmission, the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said to her, "Do you testify that there is no god but Allah?" and she said yes. He said, "Do you testify that I am the Messenger of Allah?" and she said yes. He said, "Do you believe in resurrection after death?" and she said yes. He said, "Free her" (*al-Musannaf*, 11 vols. Beirut: al-Majlis al-Ilmi, 1390/1970, 9.175: 16814).

In other versions, the slave girl cannot speak, but merely points to the sky in answer. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani has said of the various versions of this hadith, "There is great contradiction in the wording" (*Talkhis al-habir*, 4 vols. in 2. Cairo: Maktaba al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyya, 1399/1979, 3.250). When a hadith has numerous conflicting versions, there is a strong possibility that it has been related merely in terms of what one or more narrators understood (*riwaya bi al-ma'na*), and hence one of the versions is not adequate to establish a point of *`aqida*."

We would make a surgery of this claim and Insha'Allah the viewers will see that this man, Keller is either a) a liar, b) ignorant or c) copying from some other works (which appears the case, as you will see, Insha'Allah). I will rely heavily on Sh. Badr Bin 'Ali Bin Tami Al-'Utaibi's essay against Ibn Hafeez's similar insinuations, with notes of my own as well.

### **Surgery of the Forgery:**

Keller has tried to deceive us by mixing up four narrations:

- a) The narration that the Prophet *صلي الله عليه وسلم* asked a slave-girl, "Where is Allah?" and she said, "Above the sky". (Muslim, Malik and others).
- b) He asked a slave girl, "Who is your Lord?" and she said, 'Allah'. (Ibn Hibban).
- c) He said to her, "Do you testify that there is no god but Allah?" and she said yes. (Abd al-Razzaq).
- d) The slave girl cannot speak, but merely points to the sky in answer. (Musnad Ahmed)

### a) The narrations containing “Where is Allah”

Firstly, the narration that contains the question, “Where is Allah, the answer “Above the sky” and the Prophet صلي الله عليه و سلم ratifying her faith, are narrated by the following scholars:

1. Imam Malik in his Muwatta.
2. Imam Muslim in his Sahih.
3. Imam Bukhari in his Juzz Qiraa’ah.
4. Imam Ahmed in his Musnad.
5. Imam Al-Shaafa’i in Al-Risaalah, Al-Sunan Al-Ma’thoor and Al-Umm.
6. Imam Abu Dawood Al-Tayalisi in his Musnad.
7. Imam Abu Dawood Al-Sijistani (the famous Abu Dawood) in his Sunan.
8. Imam Nasai’i in his Sunan and Al-Kubraa.
9. Imam Abu Nu’aim Al-Isbahaani in his Ma’rafa Al-Sahabah.
10. Imam Abu ‘Awanah in his Mustakhraj (a.k.a Sahih).
11. Imam Al-Tahawi in Sharah Mushkil Al-Aathaar.
12. Imam Ibn Khuzaimah in Kitaab Al-Tawheed.
13. Imam Ibn Mandah in his Al-Eeman.
14. Imam Al-Baihaqi in Al-Asmaa Wal Sifaat, Al-Sunan and Ma’rifah Al-Sunan.
15. Imam Ibn Abi ‘Aasim in Al-Sunnah and Al-Ahaad wal Mathaani.
16. Imam Ibn Hibban in his Sahih.
17. Imam Ibn Abi Shaybah in his Musannaf , Musnad and Al-Eeman.
18. Imam Ibn Al-Jaarood in his Al-Muntaqaa’.
19. Imam Uthman Al-Daarimi in his Al-Radd ‘Ala Al-Jahmiyyah.
20. Imam Al-Laalkai’ in his Sharah Al-‘Itiqaad Ahl Al-Sunnah wa Al-Jama’ah.
21. Imam Al-Tabarani in his Al-Mu’jam Al-Kabeer.
22. Imam Khateeb Al-Baghdadi in his Tarikh Al-Baghdad.

and others. Indeed Imam Al-Dhahbi in his Al-‘Uloo has counted it as being Mutawaatir (having numerous chains and narrators, which gives weightage to its authenticity). [See Mukhtasar Al-‘Uloo p75].

None of the Imams considered this hadith as in-authentic or as contradictory with other ahadith. The following explicitly considered it correct:

1. Imam Muslim by narrating it in his Sahih.
2. Imam Ibn Hibban narrated it in his Sahih.
3. Imam Ibn Qudaamah in his Al-‘Uloo said “This is a sahih (authentic) hadith.” (page 47).
4. Imam Al-Dahhabi in his Al-‘Uloo said “This is a sahih (authentic) hadith.” (more on this later).

5. All the Imams (like Al-Shaafa'i, Al-Bukhari, Al-Baihaqi etc.) used it as evidence without saying it has any problem in its authenticity.
6. The various commentators on early hadith works among the later scholars, like Ibn Hajar and Al-Nawawi never raised any objection as far as the authenticity of the hadith is concerned. (We will show how Keller grossly mis-represents Ibn Hajar when quoting him out of context from his Talkhees Al-Habeer). However due to being affected with 'Asha'ariism, which was rampant in their times, Al-Nawawi misinterpreted the texts.
7. Perhaps the first person to dispute the authenticity of the words "Where is Allah?" is Muhammad Zaahid Al-Kawthari, the famous Jahmi of the last century [See Irwaa Al-Ghaleel of Al-Albani]. He was followed in this by his spiritual students, like Habib Al-Rahmaan Al-A'adhami Al-Deobandi [see his research on Musannaf Abd Al-Razzaq] and Hasan Al-Saqaf [See his Tanqeeh Al-Mafhoom].

Having confirmed the authenticity of this narration, let us come to the narrations that Keller found contradicting this authentic hadith.

**b) The narration containing, "Who is your Lord?"**

This is a deception on Keller's part. This narration refers to a separate event than the narration of Mu'aawiya Bin Al-Hakam mentioned in part (a). This narration is of a different companion, may Allah be Pleased with them all, Al-Shareed Bin Suwaid Al-Thaqafi:

Al-Shareed Bin Suwaid Al-Thaqafi narrated that his mother had willed (in her death will) that a Muslim slave be set free on her behalf. He asked the Prophet صلي الله عليه و سلم about this and said: "I have a black Nubian slave-girl, so should I set her free on her (my mother's) behalf?" The Prophet صلي الله عليه و سلم said, "Bring her with you". So I called her and she came. The Prophet صلي الله عليه و سلم said to her, "Who is your Loed?" She replied "Allah". He asked her, "Who am I?" and she said, "You are the Messenger of Allah"; at which he said, Free her, for she is a believer" (Ahmed, Al-Daarimi and Al-Nasaa'i).

So, these are two separate incidences, which are different in the following aspects:

- a) In the first incident, the Sahabi (companion) is Mu'aawiya Bin Al-Hakam and in the second, the Sahabi is Al-Shareed Bin Suwaid Al-Thaqafi.

- b) In the first incidence, the reason for freeing the slave was compensation for hitting the slave. In the second, it is as fulfilling the will of the deceased parent.

Hence, we see that these are two separate incidences, which were deliberately made to seem one, to deceive the reader into believing they are contradictory.

**c) The narrations containing "Do you testify that there is no god but Allah?"**

This again is a deception by Keller and his impious predecessor, Al-Kawthari. The complete narration is as follows:

A person from the Ansaar came with a black slave-girl and said "O Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم*, I have upon myself (the obligation to) setting free of a Muslim slave (as a penance or *kaffarah*) , so if you think she is a believer, I will set her free". So, the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* said to her, "Do you testify that there is no god but Allah?" and she said yes. He said, "Do you testify that I am the Messenger of Allah?" and she said yes. He said, "Do you believe in resurrection after death?" and she said yes. He said, "Free her" (Musnad Ahmed No. 15183)

As in the previous hadith, we see that the complete text was deliberately concealed to deceive the unassuming readers. Once again, this narration relates to a different event than the hadith of Mu'aawiya Bin Al-Hakam in (a). This is because the reason for Mu'aawiya Bin Al-Hakam in (a) for freeing the slave was compensation for hitting the slave. Here, the companion, who is an un-named person from the Ansaar, is obliged to set free a Muslim slave as obligatory penance or *kaffarah*. Hence, once again a deliberate deception has been exercised to fool the Muslims away from the correct Islamic belief that Allah is above the sky.

**d) The narrations containing "She merely points to the sky in answer."**

For a narration to be weakened on the ground of contradiction or *idhtaraab*, they have to be of equal strength, so that no preference can be made for one over the other (See Muqaddimah Ibn Salaah page 46). This narration contains Mas'oodi, who had *ikhtilaat* (weakening of memory) later in life [See Tahdheeb Al-Tahdheeb vol 6 p.191]. Those who narrated from him in later years, then their narrations are not authentic. In this particular narration, the narrator from him is Yazeed Bin Haroon, who heard from him after *ikhtilaat*.

Whether or not this narration is authentic (even if it is understood to be *hasan* [authentic, but at a lower level of authenticity than *sahih* as in (a)], as Imam Al-

Dhahabi said in his *Al-Uloo*) is another matter. Let us look at the full text, which again has been concealed deliberately:

Abu Hurairah narrated that a person came to the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* with a black non-Arab slave-girl and said “O Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم*, I have upon myself (the obligation to) setting free of a Muslim slave (as a penance or *kaffarah*)”. So, the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* said to her, “Where is Allah?” She pointed with he fore-finger to the sky. Then he asked her “Who am I?” She pointed with her finger to the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* and to the sky (the narrator adds) meaning that you are the Prophet of Allah. So the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* said “Set her free”. (Musnad Ahmed No. 7565).

Firstly, as we said this narration does not match the authenticity of the narration in (a) of Mu’aawiya Bin Al-Hakam. Secondly, here she first points to the sky to tell where Allah is, since she cannot speak Arabic, and then again points to the sky to tell that you are the Messenger of the One above the sky. So, this again is against the belief espoused by and propagated by Keller. Also, the event that this narration refers to is of an unknown companion, which is different from the events in (a), (b) and (c). The reason for Mu’aawiya Bin Al-Hakam in (a) for freeing the slave was compensation for hitting the slave. Here, the companion, who is an un-named person, is obliged to set free a Muslim slave as obligatory penance or *kaffarah*.

### **Misrepresenting Ibn Hajar’s words: “There is great contradiction in the wording”**

These words are from *Talkhees Al-Habeer fi Ahadith Al-Rafa’i Al-Kabeer* of Hafidh Ibn Hajar, which is actually a research upon the *fiqh* work *Sharh Al-Wajeez* by Imam Abu Al-Qaasim Al-Rafa’i. In the beginning of *Kitaab Al-Kaffarat* (Book of Penance). Al-Rafa’I quotes the hadith as:

“It is narrated that a person came to the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* with a non-Arab or a dumb (mute) slave-girl. He said ‘O Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم*, I have upon myself (the obligation to) setting free of a slave (as a penance or *kaffarah*), will it (i.e. this slave-girl) suffice?’ So, the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* said to her, ‘Where is Allah?’ She pointed to the sky. Then he asked her “Who am I?” She pointed with to the Prophet of Allah *صلي الله عليه و سلم*. So the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم* said ‘Set her free, for she is a Muslim’ ”.

Like many later *fuqahaa* (jurists), Al-Raafa’i narrates without mentioning the source and also without narrating the exact words. So, Imam Ibn Hajar traces all narrations similar to Al-Rafa’i’s words [everyone from (a), (b), (c) and (d)] and says

وفي اللفظ مخالفة كثيرة وسياق أبي داود أقرب إلى ما ذكره المصنف إلا أنه ليس في شيء من طرقه أنها خرساء

“There is great contradiction in the wording, and the context of Abu Dawood’s narration [i.e. the hadith in (d)] is the closest to what the author Al-Rafa’i has mentioned, except that in none of the routes there is the word ‘dumb / mute’ [as mentioned by Al-Rafa’i above]” (Talkhees Al-Habeer, vol 3, p 213).

Hence all Ibn Hajar is saying is that there is a contradiction between the approximate wordings of Al-Rafa’i and the exact wording of the hadith. He is not implying that the hadith “Where is Allah” is contradicting other narrations. This is either deliberate deception by Keller or his ignorance in copying from people like Hasan Al-Saqqaq.

#### **Wrong translation of *Fi al-sama* (Above the sky):**

Imam Al-Baihaqi, one of the Imams who narrated this hadith “Where is Allah” said:

“Abu Abdullah Al-Haafidh said that Shaykh Abu Bakr Ahmad bin Ishaq Bin Ayoub Al-Faqih said ‘Sometimes the Arabs replace ‘Ala (above) with fi (in). (For example) Allah said ‘So travel freely in (fi) the land’ (9:2)...meaning ‘on (‘ala) the earth’ and similarly ‘I will surely crucify you in (fi) the trunks of date-palms’ (20:71) [meaning ‘on (‘ala) the trunks’]. Similar is the saying of Allah ‘*Fi al-sama*’ which means ‘on the throne, above (*fauq*) the sky’, as is proven in authentic narration ” (Al-Asmaa Wa Al-Sifaat by Al-Baihaqi vol 2, p 425).

So, the correct translation, in the context of various verses and the correct Hadith in (a), should be “Allah is above the sky”.

#### **Keller/Kawthari refute the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم***

About the Hadith in (a), Imam Al-Dhahabi said:

“This is an authentic (*sahih*) hadith. And likewise we observe that whoever is asked wher is Allah, says readily due to their nature (*fitrah*), ‘Above the sky’. There are two points in this hadith:

1. The legality of a Muslim saying ‘Where is Allah?’
2. The legality of the responder saying ‘Above the sky’.

So, whoever rejects these two points, in fact refutes the Prophet *صلي الله عليه و سلم*.  
[Al'Uloo vol 1, p 28]

### **Conclusions:**

1. The Hadith of Mu'aawiya Bin Al-Hakam in (a) is absolutely authentic. No one in the previous generation who is a scholar of repute has questioned its authenticity. The fact that it is narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih and used by Imams as evidence proves its authenticity.
2. Narrations in (a), (b), (c) and (d) relate to different events.
3. Keller has deliberately reproduced a statement from Ibn Hajar which has no relation to the authenticity of (a).
4. Scholars with 'Ash'ari leanings like Al-Baihaqi, Al-Nawawi and Ibn Hajar never raised objections as to the veracity of the hadith "Where is Allah" in (a), but accepted them to be authentic. Of course there is no basis for comparing these giants to scoundrels like Al-Kawthari, Al-A'dhami and Al-Saqqaf.
5. The only reason for trying to weaken the authenticity of the hadith was to destroy evidence against the corrupt beliefs of Kawthari and co. that Allah is nowhere.

We leave it to the readers to judge whether they should take knowledge from such a man. Surely, those blinded with bigotry cannot lead others to light!