

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Series of Questions Addressed to Eminent Scholar Ata Bin Khalil Abu Al-Rashtah,
Ameer of Hizb ut Tahrir through his Facebook Page "Fikri"

Answer to Question

What is Meant by the Essence (dhat) of Allah?

To: Umm Saloum

(Translated)

Question:

Our Sheikh and our Amir, the eminent scholar, may Allah protect you, take care of you and bless you with health and wellness and bring the victory and empowerment by your hands,

The question: We have said in "The System of Islam" book on the chapter of the "Way of Belief" (that the essence of Allah is beyond the universe, man and life), what does this mean?! Does Allah (swt), have an essence (dhat), and what is the meaning of the word essence (dhat), and what is the ruling on one who denies its existence and suffices by saying I believe in Allah and His Attributes without believing that He has an essence (dhat).

Umm Salma Al-A'miri- Yemen

Answer:

Wa Alaikum Assalam Wa Rahmatullah wa Barakatuh,

First, Barak Allah Feeki for your kind supplication for me, and I am asking Allah to give you the good. Here is the answer:

I will quote the text from which the sentence in question was taken, from the book, *The System of Islam* (Arabic Book, p.10):

[Despite the obligation to use the mind to arrive at the correct belief in Allah, man is unable to comprehend things beyond the boundaries of his senses and mental faculty. This is because man's mind is limited within boundaries it cannot surpass regardless of how much it develops and grows; hence, its ability to comprehend is limited. Therefore, the mind will fall short of comprehending the essence of Allah, because He is beyond man, life and the universe and the human mind cannot comprehend what is beyond man. Thus the human mind is unable to comprehend the essence of Allah. It should not be said how does man believe in Allah with his mind while his mind cannot comprehend the essence of Allah. This is because belief (iman) entails iman in the existence of Allah, whose existence is comprehended through the existence of His creation, i.e. the universe, man and life. These creations are within the limits of what the mind can comprehend and thus man comprehended them; and from comprehending them, man comprehended the existence of a creator (for these things) who is Allah. Therefore, iman in the existence of Allah is rational and within the limits of man's mental capacity. This is in contrast to the essence of Allah, which is impossible since He is beyond man, life and the universe and hence He is beyond the capability of any mind. The mind is unable to comprehend what is beyond its bounds because of its inherent limitation to do so. This limitation should be one of the factors which strengthen the iman and not a source of suspicion and doubt.]

In order to clarify the meaning of Allah's essence, before answering, I will explain to you how to understand the meaning of the term:

First: When searching for the meaning of the term, the linguistic meaning is sought, i.e. the reality (the linguistic and then the customary, whether it is the common one among the Arabs or it is specific - the technical term). If the reality is not found then the metaphoric meaning is taken. So, following these meanings of the term essence (dhat) we can see the following:

1- The Linguistic meaning:

A - It was stated in Mukhtar Al-Sahah (p. 109) by its author, Muhammad bin Abi Bakr bin Abdul Qadir Al-Razi, who died 660 AH: [The word (Zu) means 'one in possession of', so it can

only be an additive. If it describes an unknown noun, it is added to an unknown noun, and if it describes a known noun it will be added to the letters (alif and lam). It cannot be added to a hidden subject (Mudhmar) or to common nouns like Zayd and the like. So, you can say: I passed by a man who has money (Zi Mal) and a woman who has money (Zat Mal) and two men who have money (Zawai Mal), the letter 'waw' has 'fatha'. Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَأَشْهَدُوا نَوِيَّ عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ﴾ **“And bring to witness two just men from among you”** [At-Talaq: 2]

As for their saying “Once upon a time (zat mara) and one morning (za sabah) then it is an adverb of time...] Thus, in the language, the word (Zat, (self/ entity/ essence) is not added to the common nouns, so it is not said, (Zat) Zaid, for example. But it can be said (Dhu Zaid) which means (this is Zaid) as it came in Lisan Al-Arab: [(His saying “and adding to it (zawai), like in the original. and the phrase of Al-Sahih, if it were attributed to him, you would have said (zuuwi like in Uswi). Ahmad bin Ibrahim, Ustadh Thalab narrated from ‘Al-Arab’ this is Zu-Zayd, meaning this is Zayd, i.e. this is the owner of this name, which is Zaid]

B- (Zat) comes with the meaning ‘for the sake of’: It is stated in Fath Al Bari in the explanation of Sahih Al-Bukhari: [Al-Bayhaqi translated in ‘Al-Asma’ Wa As-Sifat’ about the word (Zat): ...and the Hadith of Abu Ad-Darda’, do not find out everything people do so that you do not hate them for the sake of Allah (Zat Allah)... the narrators are trustworthy, it is interrupted (munqati’). The term (Zat) in the mentioned Hadiths means ‘for the sake of’ or a ‘right’ like the saying of Hassan: (And the brother of the people of Al Ahqaf, when he went struggled among them for the sake of Allah (Zat of Allah) and was just). In the words of Hassan, i.e., for the sake of Allah or it is for Allah.

C- It comes with the meaning of a direction or a side, as in the interpretations

Interpretation of At-Tabari, who died 310 AH, from his book (Jami al-Bayan A’an Ta’weel Aai Al-Qur’an)

[And His saying: ﴿وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ﴾ **“And We turned them to the right and to the left”** [Al-Kahf: 18]

All Worthy of Praise says: We turn these young men in their sleep once to the right side and once to the left side...]

- In the book of At-Tahrir Wa At-Tanwir, “ Tahrir Al-Ma’na As-Sadeed Wa Tanweer Al-A’ql Al-Jadeed Min Tafseer Al-Kitab Al-Majeed” by the author Author: Muhammad Al-Taher bin Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Taher bin Ashour Al-Tunisi (died: 1393 AH)

(it was added (mudhaf) to the directions and time and to others, it takes the rule of (jar) like a description (siffa) of something, and the example of this is the saying of Allah ta’ala: ﴿وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ﴾ **“And We turned them to the right and to the left”** [Al-Kahf: 18] It explains the direction...)

D- It comes with the meaning of obedience to Allah: Al-Hakim narrated in Al-Mustadrak: On the authority of Suleiman bin Muhammad bin Kaab bin Ujrah, on the authority of Zainab bint Abi Saeed, on the authority of Abu Saeed Al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, who said: Ali bin Abi Talib complained of people to the Messenger of Allah (saw), so he (saw) stood and spoke to us, and I heard him say: ﴿أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ لَا تَشْكُوا عَلَيَا فَوَاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَأَخْشَنُ فِي ذَاتِ اللَّهِ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ﴾ **(O people, do not complain about Ali, for by Allah, he is more fearful for the sake of Allah and in the cause of Allah)** This is a Hadith with a Sahih (authentic) chain of transmission and they did not narrate it... Commentary of al-Hafiz al-Dhahabi in ‘At-Talkhis’: it is Sahih.

It is clear from the linguistic meanings that it does not apply to the context mentioned in the text of the ‘System of Islam’ mentioned in the question, and the customary reality among the Arabs with respect to this word is hardly far from it. So, we resort to the special customary truth, the “technical” meaning.

2- The technical meaning: it becomes clear that by examining this matter, the technical meaning is applicable here. The term (Zat) means entity “the reality” in the technical term:

A- Al-Bukhari used it in this sense... Al-Bukhari wrote a chapter in his Sahih which he called: (Chapter of What is Mentioned in the Essence (Zat), Attributes and Names of Allah...) It was

reported from this chapter in Fath Al-Bari, the explanation of Sahih Al-Bukhari by Ibn Hajar, the following:

[Fatah al-Bari (his saying about: (Chapter of What is Mentioned in the Essence (Zat), Attributes and Names of Allah Azza Wa JAl...), what is mentioned about the essence (Zat) of Allah and His Attributes in terms of the permissibility of uttering this, like His names or prohibiting it for the lack of text to allow it. Regarding the essence (Zat), Al-Raghib said: (It is to make the word (Zu) feminine, which is a word that leads to the description with the names of the kind and species, and is added to the apparent not the hidden subject. It is added to become comparative (for two) or superlative (a group). It is only used in the addition (Mudhaf). The word (Zat) is used for describing the 'thing itself', and is used in the singular form and as an addition (Mudhaf). They added the (Alif and lam) and gave it the rule of 'the self' and 'the possession', and this is not from the speech of the Arabs) End quote

AYAD SAID **(THE THING ITSELF (ZAT) AND ITS REALITY**...the people of Kalam (speech) used the term (Zat) with (Alif and lam). Majority of the Arabic grammar scholars said they are wrong while others said it is correct, because it comes in the meaning of self and reality...al-Bukhari's use of the (Zat) indicates what is mentioned; that it means 'the same thing' in the same way the Mutakalimoon used it when they talk about Allah (swt)...

B- For information, what Ibn Hajar mentioned about the sayings of the jurists above: (Al-Ragheb, A'yadh) is what is mentioned in their books, it is as follows:

- (Al-Mufradat Fi Ghaeeb Al-Qur'an) by Abu al-Qasim al-Hussain ibn Muhammad, known as Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani (died: 502 AH)

(It has two aspects: one: it is used to describe the names of the kind and species, and it is added to the apparent not the implied subject. The semantics' scientists used (Zat) and used it to mean 'the thing itself', its essence or the surface. They used it as a singular and added (Alif and lam) to the hidden subject. They took to mean self or the possession. They said: (His essence, Himself, and what belongs to Him), and this is not from the speech of the Arabs... The second regarding the term (Zu): in the language of Tai', they use it to mean 'who' (Al-lathi), and they make the vocalization of raf', nasb. Jar, plural, making it feminine, the same word. Like in the Arabic: وبئري ذو حفرت وذو طويت أي: التي حفرت والتي طويت (Which means: My well is the one which I dug up and folded).

Here (zu) is in the meaning of (Al-lati (i.e., which).

(Mashreq Al-Anwar on Sahih al-Athar), by Judge Abu al-Fadl Al A'yadh ibn Musa ibn A'yadh al-Yahsabi al-Sabti al-Maliki, who died in 544 AH, and it states: (The letter (zal) and (ya) in the chapter of (Zi), (Za), (Zait), (Zat), (Zah) and (Zak). And the saying of Al-Bukhari, the chapter of what came about (Zat). In the Hadith; once upon a day (Zat), once upon a night (Zat), and to make up between them (Zat), the (Zat) of a thing is its self. And this is related to what was mentioned, i.e., which is so... the Jurists and Mutakalimoon used (Zat) with (Alif and lam), but any grammar scholars said this is incorrect and not acceptable that the (Alif and lam) is added to it, because it is from the "unknown" words. Some grammar scholars allowed using (Alif and lam) as in (Al Zat),

A metaphor for the self and the reality of a thing... As for al-Bukhari's use of it; it is based on the above interpretation that what is meant by it is the thing itself as what the Mutakalimoon used in the right of Allah ta'ala. Do you not see what he said about the Essence (Zat) and the attributes wanting the attributes, so he differentiated the phrase between them according to the method of the Mutakalimoon ...) **End quote.**

Second: From the above it is clear that the technical meaning of the word (Zat) is 'self', and this meaning is not from the linguistic reality, i.e., it is not from the speech of the Arabs as stated in the saying of Al-Raghib above, but it is in the special customary reality (technical (meaning)). **That is, (Zat), in the meaning of 'self' is a technical definition and not a linguistic definition. Addition (the self) to Allah (swt) is mentioned.**

In Tafsir At-Tabari regarding the noble verse: ﴿وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ﴾ **“And Allah warns you of Himself, and Allah is Kind to [His] servants.”** [Aal-i-Imran: 30].

It means: (Allah is making you fear Himself that you will embark on His disobedience). Attributing the 'self' to Allah is mentioned in the legal texts, so to use 'the essence of Allah (Zat)' to mean (the entity/self of Allah) is permissible.

Thus, the linguistic meaning does not apply to the meaning of "the Essence of Allah (Zat Allah) in the above-mentioned text in our book (The System of Islam), but rather it is used in the technical meaning; that is, to mean entity "reality" as stated in (Fath Al-Bari Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari) mentioned above.

Accordingly, the meaning of the phrase "The Essence of Allah" (Zat Allah) in the two places of our book "The System of Islam" is in the technical meaning (Allah's self is "His Reality"), and we do not comprehend the Essence of Allah in the sense of Himself "His Reality" Glory be to Him. "The Essence of Allah" (Zat Allah) in this meaning is beyond man, life and the Universe, i.e., that Allah (Himself) (swt) is outside of these three things that are tangible and perceptible, so He does not fall within the field of human rational thought; that is, He does not fall within the field of perception by our senses. ... ﴿لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ﴾. **"Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted"** [Al- An'am: 103].

Third: As for your question: (What is the ruling on someone who denies its existence and suffices with saying, "I believe in Allah and His attributes" without believing that He has Essence), then it seems that the person who says this is confused. Because the technical term of the essence of Allah (Zat Allah) means His entity and true existence, and there is nothing wrong with that. To deny that Allah has an entity in this meaning, i.e., has an entity and true existence, cannot be said by someone who understands the meaning correctly, especially since this meaning is present in Shariah texts like: ... ﴿وَيَحذَرُكُمْ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ﴾. **"And Allah warns you of Himself, and Allah is Kind to [His] servants."** [Al-i-Imran: 30]

But when discussing Shariah definitions, the definition must be adhered to without introducing other matters to it. For example, the Hadith of the Messenger (saw), which Al-Bukhari included in his Sahih on the authority of Abu Zura'a on the authority of Abu Hurayrah, who said: the Prophet (saw) was sitting with the people one day, Jibreel came to him and asked, what is Iman? He (saw) said «الإيمان أن تؤمن بالله وملائكته وكتبه ورسله وبقائه ورسله وتؤمن بالبعث...» **"Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection."** [Also narrated by Muslim]

Accordingly, if you are asked about Iman, you will say what is mentioned in the Hadith, and the same for what is narrated in terms of the Shariah meanings, such as the meaning of Islam in the previous Hadith of Gabriel, as well as Ihsan. This is the same regarding all the Shariah definitions.

I hope that this answer will suffice you, and Allah is All-Knowing and Most Wise.

Your Brother,

Ata Bin Khalil Abu Al-Rashtah

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The link to the answer from the Ameer's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/HT.AtaabuAlrashtah/posts/488642589489782>