

Takyeef

Based on the works of Shaykh Saalih al Fawzaan (حفظه الله)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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?

When talking about what Islam teaches about Allaah, in particular, about His Names and His Attributes, takyeef is a serious error. It is important to understand it so as to avoid it.¹

Takyeef occurs when a person thinks he can acquire an understanding of the specific details of Allaah's Attributes - such that he says the Attributes must be like this or that.

He asks, for example, 'What is Allaah'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, this person is not falling into tashbeeh.

So the person is not saying 'Allaah's face is like mine' or like anyone or anything else's.

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

The Qur'aan states:

And they cannot encompass His Knowledge.

[Soorah 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

Takyeef

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).

[Soorah al Israa (the 17th chapter) verse 36]

Islam teaches that man can only know about Allaah, that which he has been told by Allaah 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 Allaah to be, then Allaah 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 Allaah. For Islam also teaches that the Qur'aan and the Sunnah contain everything that a person needs to know about Allaah.

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