



A Detailed Explanation on the Ruling of Image-Making

(Excerpt from the Commentary on *Kitāb at-Tawhīd* for Visitors from Nigeria)



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allāh, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.

All praises be to Allāh, the Lord of the creation. And may peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, and his companions, and [may Allāh] grant [them] abundant peace until the Day of Recompense. As to what follows:

We are still on the commentary on *Kitāb at-Tawhīd* by the Shaykh al-Islām, the *Imām* and

reviver, Muḥammad bn ‘Abdil-Wahhāb, may Allāh have mercy on him.

He said, “**The Chapter on What Has Been Narrated Regarding Image-Makers**”

That is: (What has been narrated) regarding warnings and severe threats, and that some forms of image-making are associating partners (*Shirk*) with Allāh, the Exalted, disbelief (*Kufr*) in Him, and an exit from the fold of Islam. And some forms of it are considered major sins. Likewise, what is connected to that in terms of explaining the reasons for the prohibition of image-making.

His statement here, may Allāh have mercy on him, “**Chapter: What Has Been Narrated Regarding the Muṣawwirūn (Image-makers)**.”

Al-Muṣawwir (image-maker) is the singular form and the active participle (*ism fā‘il*) of *taṣwīr* (image-making). *At-Taṣwīr* is the act of image-formation, meaning to make something in a specific form.

Al-Muṣawwir (The Fashioner/The Bestower of forms) is one of the names of Allāh, the Exalted, as He said:

هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَلِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصْوِرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ

“He is Allāh, the Creator, the Inventor of all things, the Bestower of forms. To Him belong the Best Names.” [Al-Hashr: 24]

Likewise, *taṣwīr* (fashioning, bestowing forms) in the best and most perfect form is from His actions, as He, the Mighty and Exalted, said:

وَصَوَرَكُمْ فَأَحْسَنَ صَوْرَكُمْ

“And [He] has given you shape and made your shapes good (looking).” [Ghāfir: 64]

And as He said:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَرْنَاكُمْ

“And surely, We created you (your father Adam) and then gave you shape (the noble shape of a human being).” [Al-'Arāf: 11]

And He said:

فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا شَاءَ رَكِبَ

“In whatever form He willed has He assembled you.” [Al-Insitār: 8].

All these texts indicate that *taṣwīr* (fashioning, bestowing forms, image-making) is from the

actions of Allāh, the Exalted and the Most High. Accordingly, whoever tries to compete with Allāh, the Exalted and the Most High, or imitates Him in this action has committed a grave crime and, in the least of its cases, a major sin.

From this that we have mentioned, the chapter's relevance to *Kitāb at-Tawhīd* becomes clear to you. I mentioned to you a short while ago that some forms of *taṣwīr* (image-making) constitute shirk (associating partners with Allāh) and an exit from the fold of *Islam*. This can be limited to two scenarios, as mentioned by An-Nawawī and other scholars:

The First Scenario: To make images and sculpt statues so that they may be worshipped besides Allāh, the Exalted and the Most High. Whoever

makes images for this purpose — in addition to the sins and evils that stem from that — becomes a *Kāfir* (disbeliever) who has left the religion. This is because he only made them for them to be worshipped besides Allāh. It makes no difference whether he makes them to sell them, or to donate them for [use in] his religion or other religions. Making images for the purpose of being worshipped is an act of disbelief, regardless of the image's form or nature, if the intention is for it to be worshipped besides Allāh.

The Second Scenario from what is disbelief is to make these images in imitation of Allāh's creation while believing that what one has fashioned is more complete, better, and more beautiful than what Allāh has fashioned. This person also commits an

act of disbelief and exits from the fold of Islam. There is a consensus on these two scenarios; there is no difference among the scholars concerning their ruling, the *takfir* (declaring the one who does it as a disbeliever), and that they are *taṣwīr* [i.e., forbidden image-making].

It remains those that are of a lesser degree, and we will summarize the statements (rulings) and explanations regarding them, and also what is connected to them from the aspect of situations that scholars have unanimously agreed that they are permissible or not permissible.

They are unanimously agreed that image-making in the form of sculpture—meaning a three-dimensional statue that has a shadow and

depicts beings with a soul—is *ḥarām* (forbidden), a major sin, and it is impermissible according to all scholars.

The Second situation: That which is permissible by consensus. And it is when the image depicts what has no soul, such as making images of trees, stones, rivers, mountains, or skies. The criterion for this is that it must be something that does not possess a soul. If it is without a soul, then it is permissible by consensus, with the exception of what was (i.e., a view) narrated from Mujāhid, may Allāh have mercy on him, which the scholars did not adopt. And it has been explicitly narrated from his teacher, Ibn ‘Abbās, that when that man who was an image-maker asked him, he told him: "Make images of these trees, these stones, and the like."

Although, they are part of Allāh's creation, they are specifically excluded by consensus because they do not possess souls.

The Third Scenario from what is permissible by consensus, is what was agreed upon by contemporary scholars of this era, without any opposer or contender, is what nations require for documenting official papers with photographs, such as what is called passport, travelling passport, or what is called passport, an identity card, a residency permit, a proof of identity, or [an ID] card. A photograph must be placed in it, whether for a child or an adult, male or female, believer or disbeliever. This is a matter of consensus and has become one of the necessities that people cannot do without in order to prove their identities,

especially with the emergence of these [stringent regulations of] borders among the people.

And from what is close to this point, though the speech of scholars on it is little, but it also resembles a consensus because it falls under silent consensus considering the practice of *Muslims* and *fatāwá* (verdicts) of the scholars who have ruled on it (i.e., permitted it).

This scenario or situation is the photographing of suspects and repeat offenders, as is done by the police, detectives, and what are known as intelligence agencies. This is because these individuals' crimes are recurrent, and complaints against them are numerous. Police stations keep their photos so that if crimes similar to theirs are

committed, the victim—who may have been beaten, faced an attempted murder, or had some of his rights taken—is brought in. These photos are shown to him, and he is asked, "Is it this one? Is it this one?" If he recognizes him from them, he informs them, and they seek the person out to carry out punishment on him. This is also permissible; in fact, it is more deserving of permissibility than the aforementioned case of photographs for proof of identity, and the consensus on it should be more well-known than the consensus on the second scenario.

How many scenarios is that? Six, including the first two, which are also agreed upon by consensus, but their ruling is that of disbelief and exit from the fold of Islām. As for these [other scenarios], some

of them are sinful [while others are permissible], but what they share is the consensus [on their rulings]. However, some of them are permissible while some are not.

And we said that the first scenario — if they are sculpted statues — is forbidden by consensus. If they are of things without souls, it is permissible by consensus. If it is for proving identity, it is permissible by consensus. If it is for identifying criminals to facilitate their recognition and capture, it is also permissible and should be a matter of consensus.

The remaining scenarios or situations of images are those which — if it is conceded that difference of

opinion exists regarding them — are the ones that require research and scrutiny.

Not every difference of opinion is considered valid *** except for a difference of opinion that has a point to be regarded.

It is sufficient in this regard that those who make exceptions for these remaining images—namely drawings, photographs, or what is called video—must acknowledge that they are included in the general term ‘images (*suwar*)’ and their maker is included in the term ‘image-maker (*musawwir*).’ So, excluding some types of it (images) is an exclusion without proof or evidence, because they are called ‘images’ and their maker is called an ‘image-maker.’ To claim they are excluded

from the general evidence without providing specific proof requires evidence, as there is no specific excluding text.

As for the *Qiyās* (juristic analogy) to a mirror reflection, it is bringing an analogy when there is already a clear text. A mirror reflection is a known thing, and if an exception was intended, [the Prophet ﷺ] would have said, “except what is in a mirror.”

Based on this, image-making in all these forms is forbidden (*ḥarām*) and not permissible because it falls under the general meaning of the word ‘*at-taṣwīr* (image-making)’ and ‘*al-muṣawwir* (image-maker),’ and because the analogy is opposed by the text, and the exclusion [of these

forms] is without proof, so the ruling remains as it is. However, these two forms were only mentioned as exceptions in consideration of the existence of a difference of opinion from some scholars — that some scholars may have differing statements on these issues. Pay close attention with me.

And among the scholars are those who say this but do its opposite. When he rules on the affair while speaking in his lessons or verdicts, he rules according to what the evidence and the general meanings indicate. However, he himself may fall into image-making in practice. In such a case, we take his knowledge-based rulings and entrust his actions to Allah, the Exalted and the Most High

He may have an excuse regarding it. Some scholars have said, “Do not look at the action of a *Faqīh* (jurist), but ask him, and he will tell you the truth.” A trusted and close person told me that he asked one of the scholars who affirms what we have affirmed — that image-making is not permissible and that the texts are general in this aspect — and yet, this scholar himself was filmed/photographed. He replied, “Do you want me to fight them when they show up? Should I chase after them saying, ‘Don’t take pictures.’?” [This is] in consideration of the fact that some scholars do it.

One of the interesting things I witnessed when I first arrived, one of the scholars came to us, and we went to attend the lecture. It was a valuable lecture in a large mosque. When I saw the cameras, I hid in

a corner behind a pillar and did not raise my head until the lecture was over. When it ended, I was surprised that there was nothing there. Where are the cameras? Where are the videographers? And I had gone with another close person who told me, “The Shaykh sent them away and refused to be filmed.” This is despite the fact that he is filmed in other places. But here he was able to refuse, while there, he is not. So, pay attention to these affairs. As long as Allāh made the evidence reach you, you should act upon it.

One scenario remains, some scholars have issued a fatwá (that permits it), but also in a specific context. This is what is known as video recording or live broadcast of lectures and lessons specifically, and nothing else. We have elaborated at length on

this chapter due to the great need for it. Regarding this, some scholars have said it is not absolutely permissible, indicating that they view it as prohibited. However, if a caller (*dā'iyyah*), a student of knowledge, or a scholar sees that it serves a beneficial purpose (*maṣlahah*) in conveying the message, then it is permissible for him.

Despite this, we say: Knowledge has reached us over the course of fourteen centuries just as it is. In fact, the Prophet ﷺ said to the companions, as occurs in the hadith of Mālik bn Al-Huwayrith narrated by Al-Bukhārī and its origin in *Sahīh Muslim*, “Pray as you have seen me pray.” It is well known that we did not see him, and that no one saw him observing *Salāh* except the companions. And those who followed them until this day of

ours, and until Allāh inherits the earth and everyone on it, did not see his prayer, peace and blessings be upon him. However, due to the immense trust in those companions and their diligence in transmitting the details of his prayer and actions, we are considered to be in their position in seeing [him]. Thus, the entire Ummah was addressed with this statement, “Pray as you have seen me pray.” The address is not exclusively for the companions; no one says it is specific to them. Rather, it is general for the Ummah until Allāh inherits the earth and everyone on it.

Then someone comes, oblivious to these facts and this reality, and says, “*But we did not see him.*” **We say:** Yes, but due to Allāh’s preservation of His religion and the transmission by trustworthy and

reliable narrators of the details of his actions, we are considered to be in their position in seeing [him], and thus we received their ruling. He, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Pray as you have seen me pray.” He also said, “Whoever performs an ablution similar to this ablution of mine...” as occurs in the two *Sahīb* collections from the ḥadīth of ‘Uthmān. He also said, “Take your [*Hajj*] rites from me,” as occurs in *Sahīb Muslim* from the hadith of Jābir. All of these proofs and texts are very clear if you contemplate them.

And the fact that this individual is saying that this is for a beneficial purpose (*maslahah*), we have seen what corresponds to it from harm (*mafsadah*) upon those who appear in these so-called clips or videos: the desire for fame, the desire for followers

— although this may not apply to everyone — the preoccupation with appearance and adornment, and the fitnah (tribulation) that may occur through that, whether from men or women. And people now seek out lessons or clips that have images, turning away from the lessons of senior scholars and scholars who are not filmed.

The discussion on images is a long one, and many books have been written on it. I advise you to read two books:

The book by the great scholar, Shaykh ‘Abdul-‘Azīz bn Bāz, may Allāh have mercy on him, which he named, *‘Al-Mufid fī Hukm at-Taṣwir*.’ He gathered abundant evidence on this topic in it.

And the book by our Shaykh, the great scholar, Muqbil [Al-Wādi‘ī], may Allāh have mercy on him, which is a ḥadīth compilation, it is also well-researched and accurate, published under the name '*Hukm Taṣwīr Dhawāt al-Arwāḥ*.' Both of these books were published during the Shaykh's lifetime.

Allāh willing, if you grasp this chapter and what I have mentioned to you, we will then proceed with the commentary on the texts cited by the author, may Allāh have mercy on him, and extract the underlying reasons that are explicitly mentioned in explaining the rulings on image-making. Na'am.