

Hifz al-Iman
(Answer to Question 3)
&
Bast al-Banan
FULL TRANSLATION

**Mawlana Ashraf ‘Ali
Thanawi**

Translation of the full question and answer in *Hifz al-Iman* (authored in 1901), based on which Barelwis allege Mawlana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi equated prophetic knowledge to the knowledge of madmen and animals.

Followed by a full translation of Mawlana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi’s *Bast al-Banan* (authored in 1911), a defence of what he wrote in *Hifz al-Iman* in response to the ugly allegation of Ahmad Rida Khan Barelwi.

See also: *The Decisive Debate*, pp. 68-80; *A Critique of Husam al-Haramayn*, pp. 62-69; *al-Muhannad ‘ala ‘l-Mufannad*, pp. 22-23.

Hifz al-Iman

Third Question: Zayd says: “There are two types of ‘ilm al-ghayb: intrinsic, with this meaning no one besides Allah Ta‘ala is ‘Alim al-Ghayb; and extrinsic, with this meaning Rasulullah ﷺ was ‘Alim al-Ghayb.” What is the reality of this contention, belief and practice of Zayd? Clarify and be rewarded.

Answer to the Third Question: In the usages of Shari‘ah, what is meant by the “ghayb” that is said without qualification is: the unseen for which there is no evidence and there is no means or way to acquire it. On this basis: لا يعلم من في السموات والأرض الغيب إلا الله (there is none that knows the ghayb apart from Allah, neither in the heavens nor the earth) & لو كنت أعلم الغيب & (had I [the Messenger] known the ghayb...) and other [such verses] have been stated [in the Qur’an].

The usage of “ghayb” for the knowledge acquired via an intermediary requires an indication. Without an indication, using the term “‘ilm al-ghayb” for creation is suggestive of *shirk* and hence forbidden and impermissible. The prohibition of the word “ra‘ina” in the Qur’an Majid, and the prohibition of saying “‘abdi” and “‘amati” and “‘rabbi” in hadith have occurred for the same reason [of being suggestive of something incorrect]. Hence, it is not permissible to use “‘ilm al-ghayb” without qualification for the Prophet, the leader of the world ﷺ.

If it was permissible to use such words with such interpretations, it would have been permissible to use “Khaliq” and “Raziq” with the interpretation of an attribution to the means because the Prophet ﷺ is the means of the world coming

into existence and remaining in existence. In fact, it would even be correct to say “Khuda” in the sense of “owner” and “Ma‘bud” in the sense of “authority”.

In the same manner that it would be permissible to use “Alim al-Ghayb” for him with this specific interpretation, it would likewise be permitted to negate this quality from Allah based on a different interpretation! That is, ‘ilm al-ghayb in the second meaning – via an intermediary – is not established for Allah. So, if keeping this second meaning in mind someone says that Rasulullah ﷺ is “Alim al-Ghayb” & Allah Ta‘ala is not “Alim al-Ghayb” (we seek Allah’s protection from this), can any sane religious person allow this statement to emerge from his mouth? On this basis, all the senseless calls of Banu Afqir would not be opposed to the Shari‘ah. What then has become of Shari‘ah besides a toy for children, to make when they want and destroy when they want?

Furthermore, to make the judgement (i.e. unqualified usage) of “ilm al-ghayb” for his blessed person, if deemed sound according to Zayd, further inquiry is required [from him]: “Is what is meant by this “ghayb”: partial ghayb or all ghayb?”

If partial knowledge of ghayb is meant [by Zayd], then [we ask him]: what is the exclusivity in this to the Prophet ﷺ? Such knowledge of ghayb has been acquired by Zayd & ‘Amr, in fact every child and madman, and in fact all animals and beasts, because every individual knows some thing or another that is hidden to someone else; so, then everyone ought to be called “Alim al-Ghayb”! If Zayd accepts this implication, that he will indeed call everyone “Alim al-Ghayb”, then why is “ghayb” included amongst the perfections of prophethood? How can something not specific to believers, in fact not even human beings, be something from the perfections of prophethood?

And if he does not accept this implication, he must explain the difference between a prophet and non-prophet.

If all knowledge of ghayb is meant, in the manner that not even one item is excluded, evidences of revelation and reason disprove this. Evidences of revelation are countless. In the Qur'an Majid itself, the verse negating 'ilm al-ghayb from him (ولو كنت أعلم الغيب لاستكثرت من الخير وما مسني السوء "had I known the ghayb, I would have acquired an abundance of good and no harm would have touched me") and the negation of the specification of the final hour and the negation of many knowledges, are clearly stated. In thousands of hadiths it is recorded that he discovered hidden news via informants that sent letters and via spies.

If it is said that all unseen knowledges were acquired by him but their recollection is dependent on his focusing on them, and since he did not focus fully on some matters, certain incidents did not come to mind, the answer is: in many matters, it is established that he focussed with special attention, and in fact became concerned and worried, but despite this they remained hidden. His investigation in the story of slander in the most complete manner is recorded in the authentic collections, but by turning his attention, the matter did not become clear. After one month, via revelation, he became satisfied.

The rational proof is that knowledges are infinite. And it is established that it is impossible for the infinite to unite with the finite.

If someone falls into doubt from such words that are recorded in the statements of the Prophet ﷺ in *Mishkat* via *Darimi*: فعلمت ما في السموات والأرض (so I came to know what is in the heavens and the

earth), it ought to be understood that here literal totality and encompassment is not meant, because its impossibility has been established above from evidences of reason and revelation. Rather, relative totality and encompassment is meant. Meaning, in relation to certain knowledges, which are the necessary knowledges related to prophethood, he was granted them in total.

Hence, the outcome of it is only that: the knowledges that are necessary and required for prophethood, he acquired them in their totality.

General words being used relatively occurs in the vernacular of all languages. The Qur'an Majid itself states with regard to Bilqis: وأوتيت من كل شيء (She was given of all things). It is obvious that at that time she did not have trains, telegram, light-bulbs, gas, photography etc. Here too, what is meant is the totality of things required and necessary for sovereignty. Hence, such generalities do not support the claim of Zayd.

It is clear from the aforementioned answers that the belief and speech of Zayd are totally incorrect and against the texts of Shari'ah. It is not at all permissible for anyone to accept them. Zayd should repent and adopt adherence to the Sunnah. Success and guidance is from Allah. The beginning is from Him and to Him is the end.

Written by the lowly one Muhammad Ashraf 'Ali (may he be pardoned),

8 Muharram al-Haram, 1319 (April, 1901)

Bast al-Banan

Question: In the holy audience of Hazrat Mawlana Mawlawi Hafiz Hajj Shah Ashraf ‘Ali Sahib *muddat fuyuzuhum al-‘aliyah*

After the Sunnah Salam, I submit:

Mawlawi Ahmad Rida Khan Sahib says, and writes about you in *Husam al-Haramayn*, that you have stated clearly in *Hifz al-Iman* that the very same knowledge of unseen things that Janab Rasulullah ﷺ has, every child and madman, in fact every animal and quadruped has it.

So, we seek answers to the following:

1. Did you say this clearly in *Hifz al-Iman* or any other book?
2. Even if you did not say this clearly, does this meaning emerge from any passage as a concomitant?
3. Is this meaning your intent?
4. If you neither stated this meaning clearly, nor is it implied by any passage, nor your intent, then do you regard a person who holds this belief or says it explicitly or by indication a Muslim or Kafir?

Clarify and be rewarded.

The slave, Muhammad Murtada Hasan (may he be pardoned)

Answer:

Noble friend, Allah keep you safe. Assalamu ‘alaykum. In response to your letter, I state:

1. I neither wrote this revolting content in any book. Let alone writing it, even the thought of this content never crossed my heart.
2. This meaning is not a concomitant of any passage of mine as I will explain.
3. Since I regard this content to be revolting and it never crossed my heart, as I have submitted above, how can it be my intent?
4. Whoever maintains such a belief or says it clearly or by indication without believing it, I regard him to have left Islam. He has denied definitive scriptural texts and has demeaned the Prophet, the Master of the World, the Pride of Banu Adam ﷺ.

This was the answer to your questions. To complete the answer, I think it suitable to clarify further the passage of *Hifz al-Iman* based on which the allegation against me was made, even though it is clear in itself.

Firstly, I made the claim that the ‘ilm al-ghayb that is without intermediary is specific to Allah Ta‘ala. Creation can have the ‘ilm al-ghayb that is via an intermediary but to call the creation ‘Alim al-Ghayb based on this is not permissible. I presented two evidences for this claim.

The passage in question is from the second evidence, which begins with: “Furthermore, to make the judgement (i.e. unqualified usage) of “‘ilm al-ghayb” for his blessed person.” (*Hifz al-Iman*)

Meaning, based on the fact that he had acquired unseen knowledges via an intermediary, if it was correct to call him ‘Alim al-Ghayb, then if the intent of this is complete and infinite ghayb, that is impossible based on revelation and

reason. If partial knowledges is intended, even if knowledge of just one thing, and even if that one thing is something of low value, then what is the exclusivity in this of the Prophet ﷺ? Zayd, ‘Amr etc have this type of (*eysa*) knowledge of ghayb.

The word *eysa* doesn’t mean the same knowledge which the Prophet ﷺ actually had, we seek protection in Allah from that. Rather, what is meant by the term *eysa* is the very thing stated above: a mere possession of partial knowledge (of ghayb), even if it be a single thing and even if that single thing be of the lowest value. It was stated above that what is meant by “partial” is general. The sentence that comes immediately after is proof of this, namely: “because every individual knows some thing or another that is hidden to someone else.” (*Hifz al-Iman*) Hence, if Zayd regards it to be a valid reason to use the term ‘Alim al-Ghayb based on possessing every minor hidden knowledge, then Zayd should call everyone ‘Alim al-Ghayb because they too know some hidden things.

The meaning is clear from this passage itself from a cursory look. In another sentence a few lines after this passage, it states clearly that the knowledges that are necessary and required for prophethood were acquired by the Prophet ﷺ in their totality. (*Hifz al-Iman*) Fairness is required. Someone who says the Prophet ﷺ has amassed all the lofty, noble knowledges related to prophethood, will he say, Allah forbid, that the knowledge of Zayd and ‘Amr, children and madman, and animals, is the same as the Prophet’s ﷺ?! Do Zayd, ‘Amr etc. have these knowledges? Even other prophets and angels do not have these knowledges to the same degree as the Prophet ﷺ.

From this breakdown it is established that the knowledge of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, Allah forbid, was not compared to the knowledge of Zayd, ‘Amr etc.

The word *eysa* doesn't always come for comparison. The eloquent amongst the speakers of this language, in their eloquent words, say: *Allah Ta'ala eysa qadir hey* (Allah is so powerful), for example. Is the intent here to compare Allah being powerful to others being powerful? Clearly, not at all.

In fact, if the possibility [i.e. using 'Alim al-Ghayb for having any little knowledge of ghayb] from which a bad consequence [of having to use 'Alim al-Ghayb for all and sundry] was established is considered carefully, it will be realised that there is a negation of any comparison. The bad consequence that was described for the intent of "partial knowledge of ghayb" is: "what is the exclusivity in this of the Prophet ﷺ?" (*Hifz al-Iman*) That is, in this case, the Prophet's ﷺ exclusivity will not remain. Rather, Zayd, 'Amr etc. will in that case share with him in this attribute [of being designated "'Alim al-Ghayb"]; yet no one shares in his attributes of perfection. Hence, this possibility is void.

Even if the objector claims *eysa* is for comparison, the comparison was not made between the knowledge of Zayd and 'Amr and the knowledge of the Messenger ﷺ. Rather, the comparison was made in mere possession of partial knowledges, as stated above.

In fact, if we assume the impossible and say a comparison was made with the knowledge of the Messenger ﷺ, even then the comparison was not in all dimensions, but only in one issue. Just as mere possession of partial unseen knowledges is the cause of using 'Alim al-Ghayb for the Prophet ﷺ, it will be a cause for others too, even if the "partial knowledge" varies between the two. Such comparison from certain dimensions is found in the text of the Qur'an:

“Say, I am only a man like you.” (18:110)

إن تكونوا تألمون فإنهم يألمون كما تألمون

“If you [the Prophet’s companions] are hurting, they [the disbelievers] are hurting as you are.” (4:104)

In the first, a state of the accepted servant has been compared to a state of the unaccepted ones, and in the second, a state of the unaccepted ones has been compared to a state of the accepted servants.

However, if someone limits themselves only to this comparison, and does not explain the reasons for variation and superiority of one over the other, then no doubt it is repugnant. However, when alongside this there is clarification, like in the Qur’an after *مثلكم* there is *يوحى إلي* (revelation comes to me) and after *تألمون* there is *ترجون من الله ما لا يرجون* (you hope from Allah what they do not hope), and just as in the abovementioned discussion there is the adjacent discussion stating that he has amassed all the knowledges necessary for prophethood, or the style of speech indicates the variation, then there is no repugnance. And since there is no comparison, there is no grounds for doubt.

Another possibility here was conceivable: to call the Prophet ﷺ ‘Alim al-Ghayb but neither based on all infinite knowledges nor based on mere possession of some knowledges such that it necessitates having to share the attribute, but rather based on vast exalted knowledges which have not been acquired by others. This possibility has not been stated explicitly here. But there is an indication along with a response to this in the statement: “And if he does not accept this implication, he must

explain the difference between a prophet and non-prophet.”
(*Hifz al-Iman*)

That is, if he takes the stance of calling the Prophet ﷺ ‘Alim al-Ghayb and not calling others ‘Alim al-Ghayb, for example by creating a nomenclature of calling the one who knows vast elevated knowledges ‘Alim al-Ghayb and not calling the one who knows low despicable knowledges ‘Alim al-Ghayb, he must present an evidence for this distinction being recognised in the Shari‘ah. That is, he must prove that the Shari‘ah has allowed unqualified usage of ‘Alim al-Ghayb for the knower of vast elevated knowledges and not lowly knowledges.

Hence, in the possibility that is mentioned explicitly, which includes the disputed sentence, what is meant by “partial knowledges” is “a mere partial knowledge”, regardless of it being elevated, little, or great. Hence, there, the individual who makes acquisition of mere partial knowledges a cause for unqualified usage of ‘Alim al-Ghayb is being addressed. It is obvious that the bad consequence which has been implicated there [of having to use the term for all and sundry] will definitely apply to this individual.

The possibility that has been stated by indication, the individual who makes acquisition of some specific knowledges a cause of unqualified usage of ‘Alim al-Ghayb is being addressed there. The bad consequence of the possibility that was stated explicitly [of having to use the term for all and sundry] was not applied to the possibility that was stated as an indication, such that there was scope for the discussion that unqualified usage of ‘Alim al-Ghayb of vast elevated knowledges does not necessitate its unqualified usage for lowly knowledges. Rather, the bad consequence of the possibility mentioned as an indication is something different, which was just explained: it is necessary to

produce evidence of this distinction being recognised in the Shari‘ah.

Understand well that in my capacity as the *mujib* (respondent), I did not have an obligation to explain as much as I have explained. It is only for the purpose of removing some causes of confusion that these additions were made. To no degree does my obligation exceed this.

But, as goodwill, I will explain three further points regarding this:

The First Matter

The proof of revelation for the actual issue [of the Prophet ﷺ not possessing total knowledge of creation until Qiyamah], regardless of it being permissible or otherwise to call him ‘Alim al-Ghayb – which was the subject of discussion above. The objective of the question was not to ask about the actual issue but about the unqualified usage of ‘Alim al-Ghayb. This has been answered. Now I will write on the actual issue.

In the Qur’an Majid, [the Prophet ﷺ is told] to say:

ولو كنت أعلم الغيب لاستكثرت من الخير وما مسني السوء

“Had I known the ghayb, I would have acquired an abundance of good and no harm would have touched me.” (7:188)

It is understood from this that knowledge of all unseen things up until Yawm al-Qiyamah necessitates always having protection and not being touched by harm. It is evident that at the very moment of death, there was certainly harm. Thus, the illness [before death] is itself a part of [this harm]. Hence, not being touched [at all] by harm was absent all the way until the

end of life. Hence, the abovementioned knowledge of all unseen things is also absent until the end of life.

If it is argued that what is negated is intrinsic knowledge, the answer is: the consequent that has been made consequential upon this antecedent is evidence of the antecedent being general. Acquiring an abundance of good and not being touched by harm are concomitants of general knowledge, not intrinsic knowledge. It is completely contrary to obvious reasoning that if future knowledge is known intrinsically then no harm will occur and if it is known via the informing of God Almighty, harm will occur!

It is in hadith sharif that the Holy Prophet ﷺ will be told with respect to some members of the Ummah:

إنك لا تدري ما أحدثوا بعدك

“Indeed you do not know what they invented after you!”

It is known from this that even up until some point of Qiyamah, which is well after the end of life, he did not know of the information of some people, neither intrinsically nor extrinsically. Had he attained the knowledge extrinsically, he would not have called out to them [saying “my Ummah”]. After being clearly informed, he said to them: suhqan, suhqan “shoo, shoo”. [*Bukhari, Muslim*]

Although there are many evidences, I will suffice with these two. Hence it is realised from the verse and the hadith that even till the end of his life, some information unrelated to the position of prophethood was hidden to him. [1] Hence, our claim is proven, and the claim of the opponent that no knowledge at all of all events till the Yawm al-Akhirah was hidden [to him] at the end of life is disproven.

What remains is, what is the degree of the invalidity of this belief? There isn't scope here to go into detail on this. The summary is that there are different scenarios of this belief. Some reach the degree of bid'ah and sin, when there is no denial of definitive evidences, and some reach the degree of kufr, when there is denial of definitive evidences.

The Second Matter

I will cite passages from the words of some of the elders of the religion and accepted 'Ulama' of the Ummah, which resembles my statement. A counterpart has a distinctive quality in removing the perceived wrong.

In response to the philosophers, [we find] in Maqsad Awwal of Marsad Awwal of the Mawqif Sadis of *Sharh Mawaqif*:

قلنا: ما ذكرتم مردود بوجه: الإطلاع على جميع المغيبات لا يجب للنبي اتفاقا منا ومنكم، ولهذا قال سيد الأنام: ولو كنت أعلم الغيب لاستكثرت من الخير و ما مسني السوء، والبعض أي الإطلاع على البعض لا يختص به أي النبي

“We say: What you mentioned [i.e. that cognizance of ghayb is a defining characteristic of being a prophet] is rejected for various reasons: [firstly], because cognizance of all ghayb is not necessary for the prophet by agreement between us and you, hence the Master of Creation said: ‘Had I known the ghayb, I would have acquired an abundance of good and no harm would have touched me’; and a part, i.e. cognizance of part [of the *ghayb*], is not specific to him, i.e. to the prophet.” [2]

Fairness is required. Does لا يختص not have the same meaning that the sentence of *Hifz al-Iman* does?

The Third Matter

I have heard that a counter (*naqd*) has been brought against the premises of my argument, namely, that based on this, it ought to be that he not even be called ‘Alim, because these premises will apply to this too. But I am shocked that such a clear difference did not come to the mind of the objector. This counter will only apply when he is called ‘Alim based on merely some knowledges.

He is called ‘Alim based on special, exclusive, grand knowledges. Those premises do not apply to this. If the same answer is given for the unqualified usage of ‘Alim al-Ghayb, the invalidity of this answer has preceded above in the possibility mentioned as an indication. This unqualified usage of ‘Alim occurs in the Shari‘ah, whereas the unqualified usage of ‘Alim al-Ghayb for this does not occur. Hence, they differ.

Secondly, even if this response is overlooked, the most that can be said is that an academic question remains, which is nothing surprising to people of knowledge. It is the ongoing practice of the people of knowledge to have academic discussions. But what is sad is the ignorant and vulgar insults and attacks and hurling accusations of kufr and committing slander by forcing [a false meaning]. Here, the objective was to repel this which with praise to Allah has been achieved in the best way.

If the tongue and pen [of opponents] prefer to not stop at this too, then I will hand over the reprisal to Allah and say that which Allah ordered Janab Rasulullah ﷺ to say to such ignorant and stubborn argumentation:

وإن جادلوك فقل: الله أعلم بما تعملون، الله يحكم بينكم يوم القيامة فيما كنتم فيه تختلفون

“Allah knows best of what you do. Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection about what you would differ over.” (22:68-69)

And I will say (Farsi verse):

The matter is with God, not creation.

Hence, up to now, I did not pay attention to answering such futile talk. I believed it to be a waste of time because, based on experience, it had no worthwhile benefit. Now that you have asked me in the proper manner, I have expressed my views. From this, the doubt cannot occur: “Why has he not written till now, perhaps he has now retracted?” The reason for not writing was this very thing: no one asked in a cordial manner.

Finally, “retraction” means to have held a view or belief earlier, which is now discarded and another belief or view is adopted. By the grace of Allah, in the matter of the Prophet ﷺ being the best of creation in all perfections of knowledge and deeds, my belief and that of my elders has always been (Farsi verse):

The short version is: after God, you are the most supreme.

Now, I end this write-up, and will give it the title:

Bast al-Banan li Kaff al-Lisan min Katib Hifz al-Iman
(Spreading the Fingers to Hold Back the Tongue from
[Maligning] the Writer of *Hifz al-Iman*)

Peace be upon those that follow guidance.

Ashraf ‘Ali

Sha‘ban, 1329 (August, 1911)

[1] It is not hidden that here a doubt arises: “It is established from some verses, hadiths and statements of the pious personalities of din that the Noble Prophet ﷺ had knowledge of

ma kana wa ma yakun (what happened and will happen).” Hence, this writer [Mawlana Maqsud Hasan] wrote this doubt in a letter seeking an answer, to which Mawlana [Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi] offered the following answer.

For the attention of Mawlana Maqsud Hasan Sahib, Assalamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuh. The answer to this is found adequately in *Hifz al-Iman* itself, which for one of understanding is inshaAllah sufficient. I will reproduce the beginning and end of the passage: “If someone falls into doubt from such words...Hence, such generalities do not support the claim of Zayd.” (*Hifz al-Iman*)

I feel it suitable to add the following to this: the aforementioned response is required for those passages that are an authoritative proof based on the principles of Shari‘ah. The passages that are not an authoritative proof [e.g. statements of late scholars/Sufis] are themselves not in opposition to the texts negating encompassing knowledge given that one of the conditions of opposition is that they have the same evidential strength. Thus, it is sufficient as a response that the weak statement falls before the strong texts and is discarded. It is good etiquette to make some suitable interpretation of the weak statement. Everyone is equal in this responsibility, not just me.

Muhammad Ashraf ‘Ali

[2] The following passage from *Matali ‘al-Anzar Sharh Tawali ‘al-Anwar li ‘l-Baydawi* p415 is clearer and has greater resemblance than this passage:

ذهب الحكماء إلى أن النبي من كان مختصا بثلاث: الأولى أن يكون مطلعاً على الغيب بصفاء جوهر نفسه وشدة اتصاله بالمبادي العالية من غير سابقة كسب وتعليم وتعلم، إلى قوله: وقد أورد على هذا بأنهم إن أرادوا بالإطلاع الإطلاع على جميع الغائبات فهو ليس بشرط في كون الشخص نبياً بالإتفاق،

وإن أرادوا به الإطلاع على بعضها فلا يكون ذلك خاصة للنبي إذ ما من أحد إلا ويجوز أن يطلع على بعض الغائبات من دون سابقة تعليم وتعلم، وأيضاً النفوس البشرية كلها متحدة بالنوع فلا يختلف حقيقتها بالصفاء والكدر، فما جاز لبعض جاز أن يكون لبعض آخر، فلا يكون الإطلاع خاصة للنبي

“According to the philosophers, the prophet is distinguished by three things, the first that he is cognizant of the ghayb... The objection brought against this is that, if they mean by cognizance a cognizance of all hidden things, this is not a condition for a person to be a prophet by agreement; and if they mean by this cognizance of some hidden things, this is not exclusive to the prophet, as cognizance of some hidden things is possible for everyone.”

Ashraf ‘Ali
Sha‘ban, 1329