

Chapter 46

The Appellation ‘Judge of Judges’ and the likes

The Ṣaḥīḥ records the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet ﷺ said, “The most ignoble name with Allāh is a man called ‘King of Kings’ for there is no king save Allāh.”¹

Sufyān said, ‘An example of which is Shāhānshāh.’²

Another narration has, “The person subject to the most wrath from Allāh on the Day of Judgment and the most despicable of them...”³

The meaning of ‘ignoble,’ *akhna`*, is ‘meanest,’ *awḍa`*.⁴

Issues

1. The proscription of being called ‘King of Kings.’
2. The same applies to similar types of names as stated by Sufyān.
3. To understand the severity with which this, and its like, has been mentioned despite the fact that (the person) did not intend the meaning of the name (for himself) in his heart.
4. To understand that this is so as to magnify Allāh, Glorious is He.

Commentary

The author, may Allāh have mercy on him, mentions this chapter alluding to the proscription of the appellation, ‘Judge of Judges,’ by drawing analogy to the ḥadīth mentioned therein. This is because the meaning is of the same type and therefore it should be forbidden.⁵

The Ṣaḥīḥ records the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet ﷺ said, “The most ignoble name with Allāh is a man called ‘King of Kings’ for there is no king save Allāh.”

This is because this wording can only hold true for Allāh, Most High: He is the king of kings and there is no king greater or mightier than He. He is the owner of sovereignty and possessor of majesty and nobility. Every aspect of sovereignty is granted by Allāh to whoever He wills of his servants. As such it is a loan which will soon be returned to the loaner: Allāh, Most High. Sometimes He removes the king from his kingdom and at other times He removes the kingdom from the king such that he becomes a person with an empty title, divested of any sovereignty. As regards the Lord of the worlds, His sovereignty is unceasing, complete, perfect, and without end. In His hand is the Just Balance which He lowers or raises.⁶ He, Glorious is He, safeguards the deeds of His servants through His knowledge and through the recording of the angels appointed over them. He requites every doer for what he did: good for good and evil for evil. The ḥadīth states, “O Allāh, to You belongs praise in its entirety, to You belongs the dominion in its entirety, in Your hand lies all good, and to You do all affairs return; I ask you for goodness in its entirety and I take refuge with you from evil in its entirety.”⁷

Sufyān said, ‘An example of which is Shāhānshāh.’

i.e. Sufyan ibn `Uyaynah. Shāhānshāh means ‘king of kings,’⁸ in Persian and this is why he quoted it as an example because it is stating the same thing but in a different language.⁹

Another narration has, “The person subject to the most wrath from Allāh on the Day of Judgment and the most despicable of them...”

The meaning of ‘treacherous,’ *akhna*, is ‘meanest,’ *awḍa*’.

“*most wrath*,” i.e. anger and hatred. As such this person is hateful to Allāh and subject to His anger. Allāh knows best. The statement “*the most despicable*,” proves that this person is contemptible with Allāh.

This person has incurred the above because of his conceit, self-adulation, and the regard given him by people through his using these titles which express the greatest forms of reverence. Therefore it is his undeserving self-adulation, his acting lordly over the creation of Allāh because of the blessings Allāh has bestowed him, and the undeserving regard directed towards him that demeaned him and made him contemptible with Allāh on the Day of Rising. As such he became the most despicable, hated, and mean creation with Allāh. This is because one who is contemptible and hateful to Allāh will be, on the Day of Rising, the most despicable and mean creation.

“*The meaning of ‘ignoble,’ akhna, is ‘meanest,’ awḍa’.*” and as such it carries the same implications that the words ‘subject to the most wrath’ do as we have just mentioned: this person is mean and hateful to Allāh.¹⁰

As such the ḥadīth warns from falling into anything that would contain self-adulation; an example of which can be seen in the ḥadīth recorded by Abū Dāwūd on the authority of Abū Mijliz, ‘Mu`āwiyah (RA) came out to ibn al-Zubayr and ibn `Āmir. Ibn `Āmir stood and ibn al-Zubayr sat. Mu`āwiyah said to ibn `Āmir, ‘Sit for I heard the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ saying, “Whoever wants to have a man stand for him, let him take his seat in the Fire.”’ The ḥadīth was also recorded by Tirmidhī and he said it was ḥasan.¹¹

Abū Umāmah (RA) reports that, ‘the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ came out to us, leaning on his stick, so we stood for him. He said, “Do not stand as the Persians stand, some of them venerating others.”’¹²

“*subject to the most wrath*,” this is one of the Attributes that should be passed on as they came. It is obligatory to follow the Book and the Sunnah in everything that is mentioned therein, and to affirm it in a way that befits the majesty and greatness of Allāh, Most High. They should be affirmed without likening to creation, and He should be absolved of deficiency without nullification as has been explained previously. The principle is the same for all (Names and Attributes). This is the view of *Ahlu’l-Sunnah wa’l-Jamā`ah* comprising the Companions, the Successors, and those who came after them: the one saved sect amongst the seventy-three. The splitting into sects occurred towards the end of the third generation and onwards as is clearly known by any conversant with the history of heresy, differing, and leaving the Straight Path that occurred amongst this nation. It is the aid of Allāh that is sought.

¹ Muslim #2143 and Bukhārī #6205-6206 with the words, “The most ignoble of names with Allāh on the Day of Rising is a man calling himself ‘king of kings.’”

² Bukhārī under #6206 and Muslim #2143

³ Muslim #2143 and Aḥmad #7329-8176 on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

Aḥmad #10384 records on the authority of Abū Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “Allāh’s anger is severe against a man called ‘the King of Kings.’ There is no king save Allah, Mighty and Magnificent.”

⁴ This is the explanation given by Imām Aḥmad and mentioned by Muslim under #2143 and is found in the Musnad #7329.

⁵ Shaykh Sulaymān, *Taysīr al-`Azīz*, said, ‘Ibn Abī Jamrah said, “In the same category as the term ‘King of Kings’ is the term ‘Judge of Judges,’ *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*, even though it has gained currency in the lands of the east since times of old. They would use this term to refer to their most senior judge. The people of the west, however, were saved from this and called their most senior judge, *Qāḍī al-Jamā`ah*.” One of the later scholars was of the view that it was permissible to use the term *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt* and other such terms. He adduced the ḥadīth, “The best judge amongst you, *aqḍākum*, is `Alī,”* as proof, saying, “This shows that there is no harm in applying the term *Aqḍā al-Quḍāt* to a judge who is the most just and knowledgeable of his time, or continent, or country.” al-`Alam al-`Irāqī, however, criticised him and stated that the correct position was that this was not allowed. Concerning the ḥadīth, he said that the comparison and statement of superiority was stated with regards to the addressees and those of the same category, it is not the same as using an unrestricted term with the definite article prefix, *al*. He went on to say, “The daring and poor manner of one who uses this term is obvious. No consideration should be given to those who, when given the position of judge, hear this term, take delight in it, and are beguiled into allowing it. The truth is more deserving of being followed.”

* Bukhārī #4481 on the authority of `Umar.

Shaykh Sa`dī, *al-Qawl al-Sadīd*, said, ‘All of this is by way of preserving and safeguarding *Tawḥīd* and the Names and Attributes of Allāh, and to suppress all routes leading to *shirk* even such words as would admit the fear that someone think that a person shares with Allāh in something of His rights and specificities.’

Ibn Ḥajr *Fath*, vol. 10, pg. 721, said, ‘Does the term *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*, judge of judges, or *Hākīm al-Hukkām*, ruler of rulers, fall under this prohibition? The scholars have differed...’ He then quotes Zamakhsharī stating that it is prohibited and follows this up with ibn Munayyir’s critique based on the ḥadīth, “The best judge amongst you, *aqḍākum*, is `Alī”: “This shows that there is no harm in applying the term *Aqḍā al-Quḍāt* to a judge who is the most just and knowledgeable of his time, or continent, or country.” He then discussed the difference between the terms *Aqḍā al-Quḍāt* and *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*, that the first is a higher level than the second, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this one. However, al-`Alam al-Dīn al-`Irāqī criticised the words of ibn al-Munayyir, stating that Zamakhsharī’s view was correct. He responded to the ḥadīth concerning `Alī by stating that the superiority mentioned therein was with respect to the addressees and those of the same category, it is not the same as using an unrestricted term denoting superiority with the definite article prefix, *al*. He went on to say, “The daring and poor manner of one who uses this term is obvious. No consideration should be given to those who, when given the position of judge, hear this term, take delight in it, and are beguiled into allowing it. The truth is more deserving of being followed.” An extraordinary story lies in Qāḍī `Izz al-Dīn ibn Jamā`ah’s dream wherein he saw his father and asked after his condition. He replied, “I found this title to be the most harmful thing to me!” So he ordered the scribes to write *Qāḍī al-Muslimīn* in place of *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*. Hence, he understood his fathers mention of this title to refer to this name as opposed to the actual station of judge, and it is this latter case that seems more likely to me. This is because the title *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt* has been used since times of old, since the time of Abū Yūsuf, the colleague of Abū Ḥanīfah. Moreover, Māwardī disallowed calling the king of his time, ‘King of Kings,’ despite the fact that he himself was referred to with the title *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*. It seems that the difference between the two is that one has a direct text relating to it, whereas the other suggests the intent of constraint to the time period (in which the judge lives). Ibn Abī Jamrah said, “In the same category as the term ‘King of Kings’ is the term, *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*, even though it has gained currency in the lands of the east since times of old. They would use this term to refer to their most senior judge. The people of the west, however, were saved from this and called their most senior judge, *Qāḍī al-Jamā`ah*.” He also said, “The ḥadīth shows that fine conduct is legislated in everything because the warning against this term, King of Kings, dictates an unrestricted prohibition regardless if the one who is called that intends that he is the King of the earthly kings, or the king of some of them, and regardless of whether he is deserving the title or not.”

`Ainī, *Umdatul-Qārī*, vol. 15, pg. 326, arguing the case that it is legitimate to use this title, said, ‘The first to be called *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt* was Abū Yūsuf, one of the companions of Abū Ḥanīfah, he lived at the time of the masters amongst the legal jurists, the scholars, and the ḥadīth experts, yet it is not related that a single one of them objected to it. Yes it is prohibited to say *Aqḍā al-Quḍāt* because this has the meaning of “most just of judges” and Allāh is the most just of judges. This is more emphatic than *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt* because it is in the superlative form.’

⁶ The author, *Qurratu'l-'Uyūn*, pg. 214, said, 'He is the King of Kings because He is the king in reality, to Him belongs the sovereignty, to Him belongs all praise, and He has power over all things. He directs and controls kings and others in accordance to His will and desire. Allāh, Most High, says, "Say, 'O Allāh! Master of the Kingdom! You give sovereignty to whoever You will and You take sovereignty from whoever you will. You exalt whoever You will and You abase whoever You will. All good is in Your hands and You have power over all things. You merge the night into the day and You merge the day into the night. You bring out the living from the dead and You bring out the dead from the living. You provide for whoever You will without any reckoning.'"" Therefore it is not permissible to venerate an object of creation in a way which resembles the veneration due to the Creator. Anything that is like this is to be prohibited; an example of which lies in the chapter heading chosen by the author because the meaning expressed therein only holds true for Allāh and as such it is not correct to apply the title to a created being. This is because every word that dictates the meaning of veneration and perfection can only be directed to Allāh, Most High, and not to any other.'

* *Āli 'Imrān* (3): 26-27

⁷ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Dhikr* on the authority of Anas.

Albānī, *Da'if al-Targhib* #963 ruled it to be *ḍa'if*

Similar *aḥādīth* are recorded by al-Bayhaqī #4399-4400, on the authority of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqās and Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī; Aḥmad #23355, on the authority of Hudhayfah with a *ḍa'if isnād*; al-Marwazī, *Kitāb al-Ṣalah*, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah. Albānī, *Da'if al-Targhib* #964 ruled the *ḥādīth* of Abū Sa'īd to be *mawḍū'* and the *ḥādīth* of Sa'd which has the words, "O Allāh, to You belongs praise in its entirety and to You do all affairs return" as *ḥasan* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhib* #1576.

⁸ King of Kings is a lofty title that has been used by several monarchies (usually empires in the informal sense of great powers) throughout history, and in many cases the literal title meaning 'King of Kings,' i.e. Monarch elevated above other royal rulers in a vassal, tributary or protectorate position, especially in the case of Semitic languages, is conventionally (usually inaccurately) rendered as 'Emperor.'

The first written records of its usage dates to Iranian Kings of the Persian Empire (pronounced *Shāhanshāh*) with an implicit notion of relation to God, and later with an overt spiritual connotation in the latter Persian empire of the Priest-Kings of the Sassanian Persian Empire. The well known story of the Iranian Magi that traveled to Holy Lands to hail the heralded new King of Kings further establishes the Royal Priest connotations of the title, King of Kings.

(Source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_of_Kings)

Shaykh Sulaymān, *Taysīr al-'Azīzi'l-Ḥāmid*, said, 'Ibn al-Qayyim said, "Because the kingdom belongs to Allāh Alone and there is no king in reality save Him, the name 'Shāhānshāh' i.e. *Malik al-Mulūk* or *Sulṭān al-Salāṭīn* is the most ignoble, mean, and hateful name with Him. This is because this holds true for none save Allāh, as such calling another by this name is from the greatest expressions of falsehood and Allāh loves not falsehood. The people of knowledge have added to this prohibition the title, *Qāḍī al-Qudāt*, reasoning that such a one can only be the One who always judges in accordance to the truth, is the best of judges, the One who, when He decrees a thing to be, He says to it, "Be!" and it is. Coming after this name in terms of contemptibility, abhorrence, and untruth is the name, *Sayyid al-Nās*, and, *Sayyid al-Kull*. This only holds true for the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ specifically as he said, "I am the master of the children of Ādam."* Therefore it is not permissible at all for someone to say that a certain person other than the Messenger ﷺ is *Sayyid al-Nās* just as it is not permissible for a person to say, 'I am the master of the children of Ādam (AS).'"**

* Recorded by ibn Ḥibbān #6478 on the authority of `Abdullāh bin Sallām (RA) with the wording, "I am the master of the children of Ādam without boasting, the first one whom the earth will give up, the first intercessor and in my hands will be the Banner of Praise under which will stand Ādam and all those who came after him."

Similar *aḥādīth* were reported on the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (RA) by at-Tirmidhī #3148; ibn `Abbās by Aḥmad #2546-2692; Anas by Aḥmad #12569; Abū Hurayrah by Bukhārī #3340-3361-4712 and Muslim #2278; Abū Bakr by Aḥmad #15; Wāthilah ibn al-Asqa' by ibn Ḥibbān #6242-6475; and `Ubādah ibn al-Sāmit by Ḥākim #92.

** Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma`ād*, vol. 2, pp. 340-341

⁹ Ibn Ḥajr, *Fathḥ*, vol. 10, pg. 721, said, 'Some of the commentators expressed puzzlement at Sufyān ibn `Uyaynah's explaining an Arabic word with a Persian word, and some commentators rejected it outright.

However they missed the point he was making which was that the word Shāhānshāh was frequently used at that time, as such he pointed out that the wording that is prohibited in the narration is not specific to those actual words but applies to any words that lend the same meaning regardless of which language they are in, as such the censure applies to them as well.’

He continues by saying, ‘The ḥadīth is used to prove the proscription of calling oneself by this name due to its being accompanied by a severe threat. Also falling under the prohibition would be names carrying the same sense such as *Khāliq al-Khalq*, *Aḥkamū’l-Ḥākimīn*, *Sulṭān al-Salāṭīn*, and *Amīr al-Umarā’*. It is also said that calling oneself by the Names of Allāh that are specific to Him such as al-Raḥmān, al-Quddūs, and al-Jabbār, also falls under this prohibition.’”

Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, vol. 12, pg. 337, said, ‘Some understood the phrase ‘King of Kings’ to be a reference to calling oneself after the Names of Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, such as al-Raḥmān, al-Jabbār, and al-‘Azīz. However what Sufyān said is more likely and both opinions have their own basis and reasoning.’

¹⁰ Shaykh Sulaymān, *Taysīr al-‘Azīz*, said, ‘The author mentioned that the meaning of ignobility was meanest, and this explanation has been recorded by Muslim on the authority of Imām Aḥmad on the authority of Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī. ‘Iyād said, “The meaning is that it is the most wretched of names and it was in a similar vein that Abū ‘Ubayd explained this word saying that ignoble, *khānī*’, meant despicable, *dhatīl*.”* Ibn Baṭṭāl said, “If the name is the most wretched of names, the one who is called by it is even more wretched!”** Khalīl explained the word most ignoble, *akhnā*’, to mean the most iniquitous, *afjar*, stating that *al-khun*’ meant inequity, *fujūr*.† Another narration has, “The most obscene name,”‡ using the word *akhnā*. Another narration recorded by Ṭabarānī has, “The anger of Allāh is severe against one who presumes that he is the king of kings.”[‡]”

* ‘Iyād, *Mashāriq al-Anwār*, vol. 1, pg. 241. cf. Abū ‘Ubayd, *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 2, pg. 18

** Ibn Baṭṭāl, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Buhārī*, vol. 9, pg. 354

† ‘Iyād, *Mashāriq al-Anwār*, vol. 1, pg. 242

‡‡ Bukhārī #5852

‡ Aḥmad #10384, Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ* #8043. Ḥākim #7724 said it was ṣaḥīḥ with Dhahabī agreeing, and it was declared ṣaḥīḥ by Arna‘ūṭ et. al.

¹¹ Abū Dāwūd #5229 and Tirmidhī #2754.

It was declared ṣaḥīḥ by Albānī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥah* #357

¹² Abū Dāwūd #5230.

It was declared ḍa‘īf by Albānī, *al-Ḍa‘īfah* #346