

## Moosa alaihis-salaam and the Angel of Death

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

### The impermissibility of speaking without knowledge

The questioner says, “From Aboo Hurairah (رضي الله عنه)<sup>1</sup> who said, ‘The Prophet of Allaah (صلى الله عليه وسلم)<sup>2</sup> said, ‘Moosa (عليه السلام)<sup>3</sup> struck out the eye of the Angel of Death.’ I have heard one of the scholars declaring the hadeeth to be weak, saying, ‘This hadeeth exudes the scent of Israaeeliyat narrations.’ So how do we answer them? And is it permissible for us to call the Angel of Death Izraaeel? Is there an authentic narration naming him as Izraaeel? And how is it permissible for a Messenger to hit an angel, bearing in mind that the Angel of Death is powerful? And did Allaah, the One free and far removed from all defects and the Most High, permit Moosa (عليه السلام) to do that?

Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)<sup>4</sup>: “This question has two parts, the first being connected to the hadeeth of Moosa (عليه السلام) striking the angel until he knocked his eye out. And the second is whether the Angel of Death is called Izraaeel as is widespread among the people. We will answer this second part [first] since its answer is short so that we can turn to answering the first part.

Nothing has been authentically reported from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) whatsoever naming the Angel of Death as Izraaeel. The names Jibreel, Meekaa’eel and Israafeel have come in many hadeeths, this is established, but naming the Angel of Death as Izraaeel has no basis in the Sunnah let alone the Noble Qur’aan.

We return to the first part of the question about the hadeeth of the Angel of Death and the declaration of whoever declared it to be weak from the scholars.

Before answering the question I want to remind you of a principle accepted by those who are not Muslims too: that it is not permissible for someone who is ignorant of [a particular field of] knowledge to speak about it, because doing so goes against texts from the Book and the Sunnah, from them is the saying of our Lord, the Blessed and Most High, “**And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart—about all those [one] will be questioned.**”<sup>5</sup>

So for example it is not permissible for the one who wants to speak about medicine to do so if he is a scholar of Qur’aanic exegesis [*mufasssir*], since medicine is not his field. Just as it is not permissible for a doctor who is a specialist in his field to speak about Qur’aanic exegesis or Islaamic jurisprudence or other than that, because if both of these people talk about fields which are not their expertise then they have pursued that of which they have no knowledge, and would thus have opposed the previously quoted Qur’aanic text.

<sup>1</sup> (رضي الله عنه) (rad iyallaahu `anhu) May Allaah be pleased with him

<sup>2</sup> (صلى الله عليه وسلم) May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him

<sup>3</sup> (عليه السلام) (alaihis-salaam) Peace be upon him

<sup>4</sup> (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) (rahimahullaah) May Allaah have mercy on him

<sup>5</sup> Soorah Israa [17:36]

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I think this is a matter concerning which it is correct to quote the old Arabic parable: this is something about which no two will differ and over which no two rams will clash horns, i.e., it is not permissible for anyone to speak about a certain [field of] knowledge except for the specialists in it.

So when [it is agreed that] this is something accepted we can turn back to the hadeeth [in question] and other [such hadeeth]. Who can speak about them? The doctor, for example? The answer, naturally, is no. Can the chemist? [Again] the answer is no. Many, many questions bringing us closer to the reality. Can the *mufasssir*? No. The scholar of Islamic jurisprudence [*faqeeh*]? The answer is no.

So, who is the one who can speak [about hadeeth like this]? Indeed it is only the scholar of hadeeth. And as was said the scholars of hadeeth, "... were few when counted ... so today they have become the fewest of the few."

So for this reason it is not permissible for the students of knowledge to embroil themselves in something reported from a scholar who does not know what this knowledge entails or its intricacies when he says, "Such and such a hadeeth is weak." This is a principle which we must always stick to.

And one of the amazing things about the calamities which have befallen the ummah in terms of their heedlessness of these knowledge-based, established principles in the Book and the Sunnah is that they are very far removed from [understanding/implementing] it. [But] when the turn comes for something which is connected to themselves [personally] you will [indeed] find them implementing that Qur'aanic text which obligates the Muslims to refer back to the specialists [in each field].

For example, when we or someone who concerns us is taken ill, he will not [just] go to any doctor, but rather before everything else he will inquire about a specialist in that [particular] illness, then he will follow up by asking, researching and verifying [details] about a skilled, specialist doctor, [only] then will he go and present himself or his loved ones to him.

As for what is connected to the religion, then the affair has become anarchic without any order. And that is because today every time the people see a person talking about some matters of fiqh or some Qur'aanic verses or prophetic sayings they assume that such a person is the scholar of the age and so they turn [to him] in asking questions and thus fall into that which has been warned against and mentioned in the hadeeth, "**May Allaah kill them! Couldn't they have asked**—i.e., the people of knowledge—**for the cure to ignorance is to ask.**"

After this I come back to saying that it is not permissible for any person to speak about that which is not his specialism—particularly when it is clear that his speech in the field about which he has spoken without knowledge opposes that of those who are specialists in it ..."

### **Is the Hadeeth about Moosa (عليه السلام) knocking out the eye of the Angel of Death authentic?**

The hadeeth about Moosa's (عليه السلام) striking the Angel of Death has been reported by Imaam Bukhaaree and Muslim in their Saheehs from Aboo Hurairah (رضي الله عنه), that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, "**The Angel of Death came to Moosa (عليه الصلاة والسلام) and said, 'Answer your Lord ...'**" i.e., give me yourself and your soul. **So Moosa's (عليه السلام) response was nothing but to strike him with that hit which took his eye out. The Angel returned, returned to his Lord and said, "O Lord! You sent me to a servant who hates death." Allaah said to him, "Go back to him and say, 'Indeed your Lord says to you, 'Place your hand on the skin of a bull, and you will have as many years [to live] as come under your fingers.'"** The Angel of Death went back to Moosa (عليه السلام) and said what he had been ordered to say by his Lord. **So Moosa said, 'And what is there after that?' He replied, 'Death.'** Thus he said, **'So let it be now then.'** At that time the Angel of Death took Moosa's soul (عليه السلام). Our Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, "**If I were there ...**" i.e., the

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place where the Angel of Death took the soul of Moosa, “I would have shown you his grave near the red sandhill.” This is the text of the hadeeth in the two Saheehs.

Now the answer requires that I speak about more than one matter. The first is that it is [now] clear after having related this hadeeth [and seeing that it is] in the two Saheehs that the one who declared it to be weak is [in fact] weak [himself].

That is because he has spoken without knowledge and is from those numerous people who give authority to their intellects, if not their desires, in passing judgement over authentic hadeeths [declaring them] to be weak, maybe even saying they are fabricated.

What is their proof for the weakness or fabrication which they have alleged exists? It is the fact that they have set up their intellects as judge, and followed their desires.

**“But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined.”<sup>6</sup>**

And that is because faith is weak in the breasts of many people even if they be from those who associate themselves with knowledge. This is from one angle.

From another angle [we can say] that they have not studied the Sunnah in a conscious manner which takes the paths of narration of the hadeeth into consideration and which removes some of the difficulties that may occur with some people.

So we have clarified that the one who said the hadeeth is weak is in fact [himself] the one who is weak because he, firstly, opposed the two Imaams who produced the two books which they called The Saheehs and which are, by the unanimous agreement of the Imaams of the Sunnah, the most authentic books after the Book of Allaah, the Blessed and Most High: Saheeh Bukhaaree and Saheeh Muslim.

And not only that, but the Ummah also met them with acceptance, and for this reason no one from the scholars of hadeeth who were from the ranks of Bukhaaree and Muslim spoke with any criticism of the hadeeths which have come in the two Saheehs. So all of these hadeeth are established with certainty from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), thus, we do not give any weight to whoever declares a hadeeth such as this to be weak whatever his status may be or whatever the people may think of his knowledge.

**How was it possible for Moosa (عليه السلام) to hit an angel? And the Angel of Death at that? And knock his eye out too?**

“As for the difficulty described in the question asking how Moosa (عليه السلام) could hit the Angel of Death, then the answer is—and in this is an indication of what I had said earlier about these people not studying the Sunnah—the answer is found in a narration present in the *Musnad* of Imaam Ahmad (رحمته الله) with an authentic chain of narration that, “**The Angel of Death used to come to people in the form of a man.**”

So when the Angel of Death came to Moosa (عليه السلام) and said to him, “**Answer your Lord,**” he didn’t come with a sign which made Moosa (عليه السلام) note the fact that this person who just told him to submit his soul to Allaah was sent by Allaah, for he came in the form of a man.

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<sup>6</sup> Mu’minoos 23:71

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And if someone were to come to any one of us and say to him, "Give me your soul." What would ones stance be towards him? It would be just like that of Moosa (عليه السلام), because he would have transgressed into the [area of] duty of a noble angel which no other angels share in with him.

So how can a man go to another like him and say, 'Submit your soul.' So his reaction was but to strike him and knock his eye out, this is something natural. Thus every aspect of doubt disappears when we remember this other narration [which states] that the Angel of Death used to come to people in plain view and in the form of a man.

For this reason you can see that at the end of the hadeeth when the Angel of Death complained about his situation to Allaah saying, "You sent me to a servant who hates death." Allaah gave him a sign, saying, "Go back to Moosa and say to him, 'Indeed your Lord orders you to place your hand on ...' to the end of the hadeeth, "... on the back of a bull and you will have life for every hair under your hand ...'" when the Angel went back to Moosa (عليه السلام) with this clear proof he said, "And what is after that?" He said, "Death." He replied, "So then let it be now," and so he took his soul at that time.

Why did he submit the second time and not the first? The answer is now clear. The first thing is that the request was from one man to another ... and Moosa (عليه السلام) did not know that he was an angel sent from Allaah and so he hit him. So when the angel came back with a sign from Allaah the Mighty and Majestic he said, "Then let it be now."

Thus, Moosa (عليه السلام) didn't hate death but he struck that man's eye out based on his assumption that he was a man.

When we look at the hadeeth in light of the explanation of the narration of Imaam Ahmad (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in his *Musnad*, the doubt disappears and the saying of those people that this hadeeth is possibly from the Israaelee narrations is nullified—which is a futile statement.

For when it is said that a certain narration or hadeeth is from the Israaeeliyat it means that it is something which the People of the Book, the Jews and the Christians, used to speak about which they received from their predecessors. Some contain truth and others falsehood, for this reason he (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, "When the People of the Book narrate to you do not believe or reject them." This is what something being from the Israaeeliyat means.

But there is some detail which must be mentioned due to the fact that I know that this explanation is very rarely read in the books of the scholars. Israaeeliyat are [called Israaeeliyat due to them being] attributed to the narrating of stories connected to the Children of Israa'eel.

And they are of two categories: the first category and it is the one which is narrated more and is more common, is that which is reported, as we have just mentioned, from the People of the Book.

And these narrations are very many in number. Like the story, for example, of [the two angels] Haroot and Maroot and that they were two who were brought close to Allaah the Blessed and Most High, and that when Allaah (عز وجل)<sup>7</sup> said to the angels, "And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" He said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> (عز وجل) (Azza wa Jaal) Mighty and Majestic is He

<sup>8</sup> [Surah al-Baqarah 2:30]

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He said: Allaah wanted to test these angels who said, **“Will You place upon it ...”** He said: Choose two angels from among you who I will send down to earth to test them. So He chose Haroot and Maroot ... a long story the summary of which is: that Allaah the Mighty and Majestic clothed them in the garments of human beings and they were put to trial by a woman so they seduced her but she resisted saying she would not do anything until they killed a boy. But they did not since they knew it was forbidden.

So she presented alcohol to them and they drank it, became drunk, killed the boy and committed fornication with the woman. So Allaah the Blessed and Most High punished them in this world by casting them into a well, upside down, their heads at the bottom and their legs towards the top, and smoke was coming out from the bottom of the well and entered their nostrils and came out from their posterior.

This story is reported in the exegesis of this aayah, and it is from the Israaeeliyat and is something which negates the saying of Allaah the Mighty and Majestic about the angels where He said, **“...over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey Allaah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.”**<sup>9</sup>

So the above story contradicts aayahs like this which openly state that the angels are free from sin and that it is not possible to [even] imagine that they would fornicate or kill a soul without just reason [or do any of the other sins that have] been reported in those Israaeeliyat narrations.

There is another type [of Israaeeliyat narrations] even if it is less common but it cannot be treated in the same way as the first. This other type is that which the Prophet of Allaah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) spoke about concerning the Children of Israaeel, such Israaeeliyat are correct—because the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) spoke about them and [so] it is not from the type reported by the People of the Book.

The examples of this are many and there is no problem in reminding [ourselves] by making mention of one hadeeth which he (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said.

**That there was a man from the people before you walking in the desert when he heard a voice from the clouds saying, “Water the land of so and so.” The man was amazed and so turned towards the cloud, following it until he saw it emptying its load of water on a [particular] garden.**

**He approached the garden until he saw its owner who was working there. He gave the greeting of salaam to him and it is as though he called him with the name that he had heard from the sky, so the owner was astounded and said, ‘How do you know?’**

**He related the story to him, that he heard an angel mention it, ordering the cloud to move to this piece of land which you are working in, so why is that? [He said] I do not know of anything for which I deserve this honour from Allaah except for the fact that I own this land and when I sow the seeds and harvest the crop I divide it into three. I return a third of it to the earth, another third is for me and my family and I give the last third in charity to the poor people around me. So the man said to him, ‘It is because of this,’ i.e., by performing these obligatory duties you deserved this divine care where the cloud was made subservient for you.**<sup>10</sup>

This is a hadeeth speaking about the Children of Israa’eel but who is the one who said it? The Prophet of Allaah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) who has been described in the Qur’aan as the one who does not speak out of desire, **“It is only a Revelation revealed.”**<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Soorah Tahreem [66:6]

<sup>10</sup> Saheeh Muslim no.7664

<sup>11</sup> Soorah Najm [53:4]

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So since this hadeeth has been reported in the two Saheehs and is from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) it is not permissible for us to say, 'It is from the Israaeeliyat in meaning,' and if it must be said that it is then the answer is that it is from the Israaeeliyat which the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said ...”