

Ulasan Buku/Book Review

Book Review: Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah) [Translation] by
Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi

Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah) [Translation] by Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi, Selangor: Karya PiS Sdn. Bhd., 2020. ISBN 9789671707487. 186 Pages.

The discussion of verses and hadiths related to Allah SWT's attributes is an important topic that is often debated and discussed in theological discourses of Kalam knowledge. The significance of this debate in shaping the identity of a large group of streams known as *Şifatiyah* can be traced back to the development of the Islamic faith in the past. The *Şifatiyah* group is comprised of individuals who affirm the attributes of Allah SWT as mentioned in Islamic texts (Al-Shahrastani, n.d., p. 1:92). This group includes several streams that are united in their adherence to the setting of Allah's attributes, despite differences in the details of their beliefs. The majority of the Salaf, members of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah, such as Ash'arites, Maturidites, and the Atharis, as well as other streams like Mushabbihah and Karrāmiyah, are included in the *Şifatiyah* group. On the other hand, streams like Mu'tazilah and Jahmiyah take opposing views to *Şifatiyah*, and they are known as Mu'aṭṭilah. These groups reject the idea of attributing any attributes to Allah SWT.

Within the *Şifatiyah* group, there exist contradictions and differences in the interpretation and understanding of the attributes attributed to Allah SWT by the Quranic verses and hadiths. For instance, Mushabbihah and Karrāmiyah consider these attributes to be comparable to those found in creatures. In contrast, another stream assigns these attributes to Allah SWT and interprets some of the allegorical attributes in a way that corresponds with the demands of Arabic usage. Amid these contradictions and differences, the book *Ithbat Al-Yad Lillah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala Sifat Min Sifatih* by Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi provides insights into the *Şifatiyah* group's divergent views on Allah SWT's attributes, particularly those categorized as allegorical. This book presents al-Dhahabi's interpretation of the verses and hadiths concerning the attribute called *Yad*, and it represents one of the streams of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah members, specifically the Atharis creed. The book was first printed in 1998, based on a manuscript, by Dār al-Waṭan, with a comment by Abdullah al-Barrāk. In 2020, the book was translated into Malay and published by Karya PiS Sdn. Bhd. under a new title, *Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah)*. This translation edition includes additional notes from the editor. However, in 2021, the translation edition sparked controversy when the Selangor Islamic Religious Department banned its use in mosques and surau throughout state of Selangor, Malaysia. It states that there is concern it could potentially confuse the public. Likely, the Malay translation of this book may present challenges in accurately conveying al-Dhahabi's intended meaning and theological perspective. This review is based on this Malay translation edition.

This review offers a critical, balanced, and precise assessment, focusing on the author's central arguments as grounded in the Atharis theological tradition to which the author adheres. The evaluation is based on a close reading of the text, considering the clarity and coherence of al-Dhahabi's analysis in his other works and those of prominent Atharis creedal figures, as well as the evidence presented to support his claims. Furthermore, this review considers the book's contribution to the field of Islamic theological doctrine and its significance across various differing theological schools of thought.

In any academic discussion of a text, it is important to examine the background of the author as it provides context to understand the meaning of the writing. Similarly, in the case of the *Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah)* by al-Dhahabi, it is important to consider his faith and beliefs concerning the verses and hadiths of Allah SWT's attributes.

Al-Dhahabi's strong inclination towards the Atharis creed is well documented, and it is acknowledged by scholars such as al-Subkī (1992, p. 9:103). Al-Subkī categorizes al-Dhahabi as a scholar of the Shāfi'i school of thought based on his jurisprudential opinions. However, in terms of his creed and methodology, al-Dhahabi adheres to the beliefs of the Hanbali school of thought as espoused by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. In fact, al-Subkī emphasized that al-Dhahabi's praise for Hanbalite scholars should not be taken as an endorsement of their theological views. The Hanbali school is frequently portrayed as embodying the Athari or Ahl al-Hadith tradition. This may be attributed to the Ahmad ibn Hanbal had developed a preference for the method

of Ahl al-Hadith (Shah 2007, p. 88) and the Hanbali school's stance of upholding all theological concepts contained within narrations, even including hadith and athar of questionable authenticity (Noor 2021, p. 5; Noor 2022). Notably, Imam al-Dhahabi often refers to Hanbalite scholars as Athari in his biographical works. Likewise, al-Safarini titled his book on Hanbali creed as *Lawāmi' al-Anwār al-Bahīyah Wa Sawāti' al-Asrār al-Atharīyah Li Syarḥ al-Durrah al-Muḍīyah Fī 'Aqd al-Firqah al-Marḍīyah*; employing the term Atharis in this context. The Atharis creed has its own principles and methods for understanding and interpreting the allegorical attributes of Allah SWT mentioned in the Quran and Hadith. These principles are based on the traditionalist beliefs of the Hadith scholars, particularly Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. Two significant principles of the Atharis creed in relation to allegorical attributes of Allah SWT are the rejection of *ta'wīl* (interpretation) and submission of its meaning to Allah (*tafwīd*). (See the Atharis creed of books as Al-Barbahari 2005, p. 1:68; Al-Karmi 1985, p. 1:67; Al-Safarini 1982, p. 1:97; Ibn Qudamah 1990, p. 1:59; Ibn Qudamah 2000, p. 1:6) In other words, Atharis scholars reject any attempts to interpret these attributes in a way that deviates from their apparent meaning, and instead submit to Allah's wisdom and knowledge regarding their true meaning. It is noteworthy that al-Dhahabi also affirmed these principles in several of his writings, reflecting his adherence to the Atharis creed. Therefore, when analyzing his interpretation of the allegorical attributes of Allah SWT in his book of *Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah)*, it is important to consider the influence of the Atharis creed and its principles on his approach. Al-Dhahabi said in his other books:

"Our stance on this matter, as well as other similar topics, is to acknowledge, mention, and submit to the meaning conveyed by those who are truthful and infallible" (1985, p. 8:105)

"This authentic hadith is narrated in the books of Bukhari and Muslim. Therefore, we have believed in it, submitted to it, and refrained from intervening in that which does not benefit us. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that Allah SWT is incomparable to anything and that He is the All-Hearing and All-Seeing" (1985, 5:450).

"The Salaf scholars have accepted this hadith and transmitted it without denying or disputing its chain of transmission. Who are we to reject and argue with? Indeed, we believe in it and surrender its knowledge to God." (2003, 2:156)

The book's title, *Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah)*, provides an overview of its contents. It deals with the determination of the attribute of *Yad* in relation to Allah, like any other divine attribute. However, the translated version employs a new title, *Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in the Hand of Allah)*, which omits part of the original title's meaning, namely "as an attribute among the attributes of Allah." The discarded meaning carries significant implications for understanding the Atharis creed. According to them, the *Yad* attribute is a meaningful attribute (*Ṣifāt Ma'ānī*) that resides within Allah's essence and is on the same level as other substantial attributes like knowledge and power (Al-Abdullah 2019, p. 1:252). *Yad* is not a component or part-shaped attribute (*Ṣifāt A'yān*) that differs in category from other meaningful attributes. Additionally, the original title suggests that the discussion of the *Yad* attribute is methodologically equivalent to that of other divine attributes. Therefore, translating the original title's meaning carries its own significance and should be preserved.

The book's specific title accurately reflects its comprehensive and focused content. As anticipated, the book largely compiles and organizes the Sharia evidence that establishes the *Yad* attribute as one of the attributes of Allah SWT. Initially, al-Dhahabi presents five verses from the Quran containing the pronunciation of the *Yad* attribute (p. 17-19). He then proceeds to provide hadiths of the Prophet PBUH, the words of the Companions and *Tābi'in*, which he encapsulates with the term *hadith* (p. 19-119). The first five hadiths are narrated with a complete chain of narrators (*sanad*), with the first four hadiths being classified as *sahih* and the fifth hadith as *hasan*. The remaining 47 hadiths are briefly stated without a complete chain of narrators. Subsequently, the author presents 18 quotes from Islamic scholars that serve as a guide for interacting and comprehending the verses and hadiths relating to Allah SWT's attributes in general (p. 123-149). However, the Malay translation of the book curiously includes the words of these scholars as *hadiths*. Finally, at the end of the book, al-Dhahabi provides his commentary regarding the setting of the *Yad* attribute (p. 149-167). This review includes additional submissions that address common concerns and oppositions that may arise from groups such as *Jahmiyah* and supporters of *ta'wīl* in allegorical attributes of Allah SWT.

One of the primary advantages of *Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah)*'s book is its thorough citation of evidence and the words of numerous comprehensive scholars regarding the attribution of *Yad*. The book includes approximately 52 hadiths from the sayings of the Prophet PBUH, the words of the

Companions and Tābi'in. These various citations and composites are traced from the books of hadith, books of faith, tafsir books, and hadith pamphlets (Juz Hadith). Some narrations cannot be traced by the original editor (p. 53, 55, 127, 141). These intensive citations reflect the author's intention to establish the attribution of Yad as one of the fundamental tenets of faith and to dispel any doubts. The author adds further value to these citations by indicating the status of the hadith in almost all of the citations. Al-Dhahabi's position as one of the latest hadith references reinforces the validity of the stated status. However, it is important to note that this status is not absolute and is subject to the *ijtihad* of scholars.

One of the book's strengths is its structured approach that is designed to facilitate phased learning. Rather than simply presenting a collection of Quranic verses and hadiths on Yad's attribute, the author provides guidance and advice from scholars on how to interact with and understand the evidence. After presenting the Sharia evidence on Yad, the author includes nearly 20 general guides from scholars that help guide the reader on how to contextualize and position the evidence. If any questions arise that threaten the purpose of establishing the Yad attribute, the author addresses them in the final section of the book through logical submissions and examples. The phased approach provides a clear and guided understanding of the material.

The book's primary strength lies in its final part, where al-Dhahabi elucidates the tenets of Atharis creed through a hypothetical dialogue between Athari and his opponent. The discourse of Atharis creed is conducted implicitly, without any explicit reference to the term Atharis or Hanbalis. Nevertheless, the content and meaning of this discourse can be traced back to the books of Atharis's theological discourse. However, these discussions are only implicit and confined to a few pages.

Al-Dhahabi highlights three essential points of the Atharis creed. Firstly, they reject *ta'wīl* (p. 161). Secondly, they consider Yad as a non-symbolic attribute and not equivalent to other elements such as power or favor (p. 151, 159, 163). According to al-Dhahabi, Atharis maintain the *ḥaqīqat* of the statement on the attribute, meaning that it is upheld in its place and not mentioned in other words or meanings (Ibn Rajab 2005, p. 3:37). If the meaning of the Yad attribute cannot be expressed in any other statement as a metaphor or figurative language, then the only option is to state that Yad's expression is a *ḥaqīqat*. There is no third alternative. At the same time, al-Dhahabi refutes the notion that the meaning of Yad encompasses elements of mass and limbs. He cites various examples of the use of Yad in different contexts, demonstrating that the meaning of mass and limb is not consistent in all situations (p. 153, 157). Such examples can also be found in the book of Atharis.

Thirdly, al-Dhahabi's work also includes a discussion of the use of the pronouncement Yad in reference to Allah SWT and creatures. According to al-Dhahabi, this use constitutes a form of partnership only in terms of the name itself, as the method of sharing pronouncements (homonym) is a common approach within the Atharis tradition when dealing with allegorical attributes of Allah. This approach emphasizes the complete difference between Allah's attributes and the attributes of creatures as they are understood (Al-Abdullah 1987, p. 1:561). Consequently, the meaning and reality of Allah's attributes are entirely entrusted (*tafwīd*) to Allah SWT.

Al-Dhahabi's engagement with the concept of Yad is distinct from the view held by some Atharis, which posits that names are used based on the sharing of meaning. This minority perspective posits that the seen (*shāhid*) and the unseen (*ghāib*) are essentially identical when considered from a specific interpretative standpoint (Ibn Taimiyah 1986, p. 2:587; Ibn Taimiyah 2005, p. 1:374). Thus, what is entrusted (*tafwīd*) to Allah SWT is only the modality (*kayf*) of things, while the meaning and reality of the unseen (*ghāib*) can be understood through the reality of things that are seen (*shāhid*). However, the editor and translator of the book appear to have not fully comprehended the intricate discussions, nuances, and distinctions presented in the text. The editor's conclusion that "Allah really has a hand in meaning and fact" (p. 2) is deeply misleading.

In summary, this book presents the theological perspectives and epistemology of the Atharis creed, a minority trend in the Muslim world today. Therefore, readers, editors, or interpreters without the necessary contextual background might arrive at different interpretations of the content. Engaging with Atharis viewpoints outside of the Ash'arite and Salafis traditions may offer a more accurate understanding of the real context. It is crucial to underscore the fundamental differences in how the Atharis, Ash'ari, and Salafi schools of thought conceptualize God's nature within this discourse. The Atharis accepted the verses in their literal form but nevertheless rejected that God is corporeal, possessing a body like humans. Meanwhile, the Ash'arites held a middle stance between accepting literal meaning while interpreting allegorically to

avoid transgressing His Divinity (Nurhanisah et al. 2022, p. 10). In contrast, the Salafis approach is largely characterized by the perspectives of influential Muslim thinkers and reformers such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Abdul Wahhab, rather than a direct adherence to Ahmad bin Hanbal, who generally forms the central axis of the Atharis school of thought (Tupek & Beránek 2025; Umar & Woodward 2020; Ali 2019, p. 126). Due to the potential negative interpretations, the Islamic Religious Department prohibits its recitation in surau and mosques. However, for researchers and readers who seek to increase their knowledge and expand their understanding, this book is like a highly nutritious meal.

The Malay translation edition of the book may not be appropriate as it does not accurately convey the author al-Dhahabi's will or creed. The comments and footnotes included in the translation lead the reader to understand the discussion of the book based on Salafis thinking rather than the Atharis stream, which can be confusing.

The saying goes that what is suitable for adults may not be suitable for children. Similarly, the high-level discussions at the end of the book may not be suitable for public reading. Citations of the *Yad* attribute at the beginning of the book, without proper explanation, can create a space for misunderstanding. Therefore, if the book is republished, footnotes and commentaries should celebrate the author's intended meaning and beliefs. Descriptions and footnotes based on the thoughts of Ash'arites or Salafis will distort the author's intended meaning and confuse the reader. Unless the descriptions are made in the form of a comparison with the Atharis creed. Additionally, the word *Yad* should be kept in its Arabic form in the translated edition. As stated before, al-Dhahabi himself mentioned that the true essence of the *Yad* attribute is only preserved in its original Arabic form and cannot be described in other words. Although the issue of translating allegorical attributes is a matter of scholarly debate, it is worth considering celebrating the author's intended meaning. If the translation must be done to target specific readers, it is recommended to include an enlightenment note about it.

In conclusion, the book *Mengimani Tangan Allah (Believing in The Hand of Allah)* presents informative and focused discussions. The information is presented in an orderly and purposeful manner. The book contains valuable treasures of civilization and theological discourse of the Atharis creed, which are suitable for further study by researchers of creed streams. Although it is highly beneficial and appropriate, it is not suitable for all readers.

Although its scope is confined to a particular text, this review indicates the importance of interpreting a work in alignment with the author's ideology, principles, and intended meaning. Cohesion within related scholarly output is essential, alongside respecting the ideological boundaries of the text and the reader's autonomy, thereby avoiding the imposition of the reader's perspective onto the author's intended understanding.

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