



# The Indivisible Element<sup>1</sup>

Shaykh Abū Adam al-Narūjī

Released by [www.marifah.net](http://www.marifah.net) 1429 H

Ahl al-Sunnah are currently under the accusation that they founded their belief on the existence of the indivisible elements of bodies (*anything with a bulk - i.e. all physical things, material structures, organisms - anything that fills space*). The accusers say that the Sunnis took this idea from Greek philosophy, and that the affirmation of such elements' existence has been shown to be ridiculous by science. None of these claims have been backed by proof, and they are a poorly disguised attempt to baselessly attack the people of the truth. Widespread intoxication from the heavily financed wines of anthropomorphism and bigoted literalist sophistry, has made many engage in assaults on the people of *tanzīh*<sup>2</sup>, Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah. No punches against sound reason are spared these days, regardless how low the blow, and all of this is done in the name of Allāh's religion. As has been narrated in a ḥadīth about the last days before the coming of Al-Dajjāl:

وَيَتَكَلَّمُ فِيهَا الرُّوَيْبِضَةُ

---

<sup>1</sup> A response to "[The Role of Atomism in the Groups of Kalam](#)" by Yasir Qadhi.

<sup>2</sup> Tanzīh is the Sunni belief that Allāh does not resemble His creation, that He is not in a place or in time, because He existed before He created them and He did not change. Al-Ṭahāwī stated (in {brackets}): {Allāh is above} the status of {having limits, extremes, corners, limbs or instruments.} {The six directions} up, down, front, back, left and right {do not contain Him} because that would make Him {like all created things}. The opposite of tanzīh is anthropomorphism, which is the belief that Allāh has attributes similar to that of creation. The most prominent of such beliefs today is the belief that Allāh is above the 'Arsh (throne) in the literal sense. They promote this idea to the general public by adding "but we don't know how." This does not help, because having this belief entails believing that Allāh is something adjacent to the throne, and that He therefore has a limit. This belief is blasphemous by the consensus of the Salaf, and all reasonable human beings.

*“And in those days the silly people speak about matters of public importance.”<sup>3</sup>*

### **The basis for knowing that there is an indivisible element is from the Qur’ān, not Greek Philosophy**

It is important to hold that the elements of this world are finite, and not infinite in number. This is the case whether it be moments of time, bodies or their attributes (*such as movement, stillness and colour*), because the Qur’ān unequivocally implies that created things are finite:

وَمَا مِنْ غَائِبَةٍ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

*Meaning: “there is nothing hidden of creation in the Skies or the Earth that is not in a clear book.”<sup>4</sup>*

Clearly, the book is not infinite in size. Therefore, the created things in the Skies and the Earth are limited in number, and not infinitely many, otherwise there would be no room to record them all in a finite book.

Another āyah:

لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

*Meaning: “Nothing is hidden from Him, not what has the size of the smallest ant in the Skies or Earth, and nothing smaller or larger than that, and it is all recorded in a clear book.”<sup>5</sup>*

This āyah states clearly that everything smaller than the smallest ant is recorded. If everything was infinitely divisible, then the elements that are smaller than the ant would not be a finite number. They would therefore not fit in a finite book. Further to this is another āyah:

وَأَحْصَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا

*Meaning: “Allāh knows the number of all things.”<sup>6</sup>*

---

<sup>3</sup> Fath al-Bārī, 13/84

<sup>4</sup> Sūrat al-Naml, 75

<sup>5</sup> Sūrat Saba’, 3

<sup>6</sup> Al-Jinn, 28

This āyah states that things have a number. This means that they are not infinitely divisible, because that would make all the numbers infinity, and not different from one another.

Yet another āyah that affirms the finite existence of creation is:

وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا

*Meaning: "the count of everything has been recorded in a book."*<sup>7</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī stated regarding the meaning of this āyah that all things have been counted and recorded in a book, that is, "its total number, amount, and value"<sup>8</sup>. Clearly then, they are not infinite, because that would make all the numbers infinity, and not real numbers.

The indivisible element of bodies is called 'Al-Jawhar Al-Fard' (lit. the unique essence) in Arabic jargon, but that is just a name. This 'Jawhar' is not the same as the atom (because it has electrons as parts), or even necessarily the quark (as some scientists already suggest that it has parts.)

#### **The existence of the indivisible element is affirmed by scholarly ijma' consensus.**

The existence of the indivisible element of bodies, call it a 'Jawhar' or whatever you like, is affirmed by scholarly ijma' consensus. Abū Maṣṣūr 'AbdulQāhir Al-Baghdādī (429 H) said in his book Uṣūl al-Dīn<sup>9</sup>:

"Ahl al-Sunnah agreed by consensus that any jawhar is a part that is indivisible, and they declared as a blasphemous Al-Nazzām (a mu'tazilite leader) and the philosophers who said that all parts are divisible into infinitely many parts. This is because it leads to saying that their parts are not known as a limited count by Allāh, and this contradicts the saying of Allāh:

وَأَحْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا

*Meaning: "He knows the number of all things"*<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> Al-Naba', 29

<sup>8</sup> *Jāmi' al-Bayān Fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*

<sup>9</sup> *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 36

<sup>10</sup> Al-Naba', 29

In his book *Al-Farqu Bayna Al-Firāq*, Abū Maṣṣūr said:

“As for affirming the existence of the jawhar, the indivisible part (of anything with bulk): this is the saying of most (of those who claim to be) Muslims, except Al-Nazzām, for verily he claimed that there is no end to the parts of a single body, and this is the saying of most of the philosophers. If this was true, then the mountain would not be bigger than the mustard seed... because what does not have a finite existence, is not larger than something else that does not have finite existence (*i.e. infinity=infinity, note that we are speaking of real existence, not potential existence, such as what is to be in the future*)....

... As for Al-Nazzām, it is said to him: If you believe in the Qur’ān, then there is the saying of Allāh:

وَأَحْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا

{*Meaning:*} *He knows the number of all things.*<sup>11</sup>, so if the parts of all the kinds of creation were not limited (*at all times*), then they would not be known as a number.”<sup>12</sup>

This narration of ijma’ must be taken seriously, because its proof is clear, and the narrator, ‘AbdulQāhir ibn Ṭāhir Al-Baghdādī Al-Tamīmī, Abū Maṣṣūr, (429 AH/ 1037 AD) was the head of the scholars of his time. The historian Al-Dhahabī (673-748 AH/ 1274-1348 AD) described him in his book *Siyar ‘A’lām Al-Nubalā’*<sup>13</sup> as: “the great, outstanding, and encyclopedic scholar”... “He used to teach 17 different subjects and his brilliance became the source for proverbs.” Al-Dhahabī said that he would have liked to write a separate, more complete article about him. He quoted Abū ‘Uthmān Al-Ṣābūnī<sup>14</sup> (373-449 AH/ 983-1057

---

<sup>11</sup> Al-Naba’, 29

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Farqu Bayna Al-Firāq*, 354

<sup>13</sup> 17/572

<sup>14</sup> Abū ‘Uthmān Al-Ṣābūnī, who said this, is one of the greatest scholars of Islām and among Sunnis he is known as ‘Shaykh Al-Islām’ - the Shaykh of Islām. Al-Subkī, in his “The Levels of the Shāfi’ī Scholars,” quotes a number of scholars praising Al-Ṣābūnī. He stated that Al-Bayhaqī said, “Verily Al-Ṣābūnī is in reality the Imām of the Muslims and in truth the Shaykh of Islām. All the people of his time are humbled by his state of religion, leadership, sound beliefs, amount of knowledge, and his commitment to the way of the Salaf generation (the first three generations, or first three centuries of Muslims) (1/223-224).”

AD) saying: “Abū Manṣūr is by scholarly consensus counted among the heads of the scholars of belief and the methodology of jurisprudence, as well as a front figure of Islām.”

From the above we can safely assume that the idea of the indivisible element, the Jawhar, is from the Qur’ān and is affirmed by ‘ijmā’ consensus. Therefore, it is not taken from Greek Philosophy.

### **The importance of the indivisible element**

As stated by Al-Taftāzānī and others, the knowledge about the indivisible part is important when fighting those who believe that there is something other than Allāh that is without a beginning. He said:

“If someone asks: ‘Is there any particular benefit to this disagreement (proving the existence of the Jawhar, and refuting those who deny it)?’ Our answer: ‘in proving the existence of the Jawhar, there is salvation from a lot of the darkness of the philosophers, like the affirmation of their concepts of eternal matter, and of forms, which lead to the belief that the world is eternal and beginningless<sup>15</sup>.’”

### **The real nature of the indivisible element is unknown to us**

Note that what is mentioned in scholarly works about the nature of the indivisible element, is not essential with regards to the Islamic belief. In fact, its nature is unknown. *Some* scholars back in the middle ages, such as Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, felt confident enough to talk about it, and did. Back in those times, even the hardcore science of physics was not yet a science, but merely a branch of philosophy and mathematics. This is in stark contrast from today, where even sociologists are attempting to upgrade their field to be labelled as “science,” due to the astonishing success of the hard core experimental sciences of physics, chemistry and biology.

Needless to say, the scholars of old differed widely in their views, with the limited mathematics and instruments they had. Many Ash’arīs, such as Al-Zarakshī, contended that to speak of its nature is a mistake, because everything we observe is divisible. Others

---

<sup>15</sup> *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id Al-Nasafiyah*, 36

ventured to do it. Their purpose was to attack the philosophers on their own premises in geometry and other fields. It is from the “I ain’t givin’ you even an atom of my fingernail” approach; they wanted to attack every argument that the philosophers presented. They did not do this with the intention of making these arguments the core of the Islamic belief, they merely wanted to show that even based upon their own premises the philosophers were wrong. Many of these proofs are not of the unequivocal type, unlike the proofs for the jawhar’s existence, though they can be helpful in developing one’s imagination and finding out just how limited we are. Today, needless to say, many of these arguments are no longer needed, as they are no longer used by the opponent. In fact, trying to understand the indivisible element through the geometry of divisible things, is a bit like trying to understand satellites by watching a cockfight on the basis that movement is a shared characteristics; one thing has next to nothing to do with the other.

It is very important to understand then, that the weakness of some of the proofs based on geometry are not evidence for doubt in the indivisible element. This is because the proof of its existence, not its nature, is firmly established by the Qur’ān, scholarly ijma’ consensus, and sound reasoning.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, to say that the idea of the indivisible element is ridiculous is to contradict with what the āyahs mentioned above necessarily imply. It is also a claim that contradicts scholarly ijma’ consensus. Moreover, it is an opinion that is not backed by scientific findings. It is finally a failure to think logically, for how would a scientific experiment show with certainty that an element is infinitely divisible, when dividing it in such a case would never end? Clearly then, science has not shown the idea of the Jawhar to be ridiculous.

I hope that the attack on the belief in the indivisible element was not a sign for the coming of something far worse. I hope it is not a prelude to spreading the ancient kufr of believing that something other than Allāh is eternal, while demagogically sloganising ‘Al-Kitāb Wa al-Sunnah,’ and ‘Shaykh Al-Islām says’ to dupe the ignorant.