

THE DEBATES AROUND THE CREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'AN: IBN TAYMIYYAH'S APPROACH

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Abstract

This article explores the historical origins of the debate on the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'an in Islamic tradition, with a particular focus on Ibn Taymiyyah's (1263–1328) views. It presents translated excerpts from the author's works that are significant for understanding his position. Since the primary sources of the study are medieval works and texts written in medieval Arabic, it is crucial to accurately understand the precise meaning of the terms. Therefore, the method of terminological analysis has been widely applied. By combining terminological, historical, textual analysis, the article offers a comprehensive exploration of Ibn Taymiyyah's views on the createdness of the Qur'an, illustrating how his approach both challenges and refines the existing theological discourse within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. Our research revealed that Ibn Taymiyya refines and clarifies the Hanbali approach to the discussed issue, freeing it from ambiguity, explains and specifies the concept of eternity, attributing it solely to Allah's ability to speak and His Word. The research offers a novel perspective by providing a detailed examination of Ibn Taymiyyah's approach, distinguishing between the created aspects of the Qur'an (such as its written form and recitation) and the uncreated nature of divine speech. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of his role in shaping theological discourse within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Keywords: Hanbali Madhhab, Ibn Taymiyyah, Islam, Qur'an, Sunnah, monotheism, values, innovations, createdness, Mu'tazilism, 'ummah.

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Introduction

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, as Islam spread and the territories of the Caliphate expanded, Muslims came into contact with other civilizations and cultures. As a result of changing living conditions, questions arose within the Muslim community ('ummah), for which there were no answers in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, there was a need for a rational interpretation of Islamic religious provisions, which would provide an opportunity to answer the questions of non-Muslims, as well as to resolve the problems arising within the 'ummah. The fundamental values of Islam as a religious system, while undergoing substantive changes and reformulations over time, have retained their cornerstone significance. These substantive changes were expressed in the creation of values that contradicted the main directions of Islam or in changes of their position in the hierarchy of values, leading to the emergence of new directions, making it possible to adapt to the demands of the time, and ideologically justify political processes [19]. One of the first manifestations of the change in the position of fundamental values in the hierarchy was the struggle over the issue of Qur'anic createdness, within the framework of which the following question was at the core of the debates: is the Qur'an eternal and co-existent with Allah, or was it created by Allah, like other creatures? As a result of the clash with other cultures and religious systems, similar questions arose, the discussions of which formed the basis for the formation of *kalām*.¹

Scholars have offered various interpretations on the origin of the debate on the issue considered. Professor Peters from Radboud University in Nijmegen notes in his book "God's Created Speech" that "the very origins of the discussion remain wrapped in darkness, nor can we know for certain why exactly this question became so central a topic in later disputes". As a result of his research, he came to the conclusion that in the 3rd century AH, two opposing currents were forming among Muslims, professing the createdness and uncreatedness of the Qur'an [20: 1-3]. American professor Richard Martin argues that the debates over the Qur'an date back to approximately the last decade of the Umayyad Caliphate or the period of the Abbasid revolution [24: 468]. German author and scholar of Islamic history Wilferd

¹ This term in a broad sense includes any judgments on religious and philosophical topics, including the arguments of Jewish and Christian theologians. In the narrow sense, it provides interpretations of Islamic principles based on reason, not imitation (*taqlīd*) of religious authorities. For more information, see [16: 128-129].

Madelung argues that the debate over the Qur'an's createdness was not solely a theological or philosophical issue but was deeply intertwined with the political and sectarian dynamics of early Islam, particularly during the Abbasid period [17: 504-525]. Safrudin Ediwibowo explores the historical origins of the theological debate concerning the Qur'an's createdness. He notes that the controversy dates back to the early centuries of Islam, with significant developments during the Abbasid Caliphate. The author considers the origin of the debate within the context of theological encounters between Muslims and their Christian counterparts, particularly in efforts to define the status of the Qur'an in relation to Jesus Christ [7: 354-385] — an issue to which we will also return below.

Of particular significance are the views of Ibn Taymiyyah, a distinguished scholar of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence, regarding the createdness of the Qur'an. As one of the most authoritative figures of his time, he held a central position not only within the Hanbali tradition but also within the broader Sunni legal and theological discourse. Madelung writes that Ibn Taymiyyah denied the Hanbali doctrine of the eternity of the Qur'an [17: 513]. In his article "Perpetual creativity in the perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith commentary on God's creation of this world", Professor of Islamic Studies Jon Hoover briefly discusses Ibn Taymiyyah's views on the creation of the Qur'an in the context of Ibn Taymiyya's concept of God's perpetual creativity and the theological implications of God's continuous act of creation, rightly noting that, according to Ibn Taymiyyah: "God in His perfection has been speaking from eternity by His will and power when He wills and that God's speech subsists in His essence. The genus of God's speaking is eternal. However, what God says, that is, His concretized speech, is not eternal. Thus, the Qur'an is not eternal, but neither is it, as something subsisting in God's essence, created." [10: 296]. Jon Hoover's research is based on Ibn Taymiyya's theological treatise commonly referred to as *Sharḥ ḥadīth 'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn*.

Below, we will attempt to understand the history of the origin of the issue and, by examining examples drawn from primary sources, to clarify whether the views of Ibn Taymiyyah deny or clarify the teachings of the madhhab. In order to comprehensively present Ibn Taymiyyah's views on the discussed question, we have studied the following works of the faqīh: *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīh* (The correct answer to those who altered the religion of Christ), *Majmu'a al-Rasa'il wa al-Masa'il* (Collection of messages and issues), *Majmu' fatawa* (Collection of Fatwas).

On the Origin of the Question

The question of the createdness of the Qur'an originated within the context of Christian-Muslim theological polemics. The Islamic tradition criticizes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the existence of one God in three persons and one nature, and the eternal existence of Jesus Christ as one of the co-equal components of the Holy Trinity. In response to this criticism, the Arab Christian monk, apologist, and hymnographer John of Damascus (Yuhanna ad-Dimashqi), who lived and worked during the Umayyad Caliphate,² asks a question about the Qur'an with the same logic: if the Qur'an considers Isa (Jesus) to be the word of God (Q. 4:171), and Isa is also considered a creation of Allah, then what is the "nature" of the Qur'an as the word of Allah? Is it created or does it have an eternal existence [1: 120, 2: 11-93]? Muslims' responses to this question led to the formation of two main and contradictory opinions: some claimed that the Qur'an, as the word of God, is eternal and uncreated. This opinion was accepted by the majority of Muslims, especially those belonging to the Ahl al-Hadith.³ Some Muslims believed that the Qur'an was created. According to Muslim tradition, the view of Qur'anic createdness was first expressed by Al-Ja'd ibn Dirham, followed by his disciple Al-Jahm ibn Safwan [23: 64]. This belief was further developed by the Mu'tazilites, becoming the official ideology during the reign of Caliph Al Ma'mun. The statement of Qur'an's uncreatedness is found in Abu Hanifa's work "Al-Wasiyyah" (inheritance, will) (825 AD). In this work, the author states that the Qur'an is the word of God and is eternal, although the script, the letters used to write the Qur'an, were created [20: 2-3].

The Mu'tazilites rejected the idea of the eternity and uncreatedness of the Qur'an, justifying it as follows: If the Qur'an had not been created by Allah, but had existed eternally with Him, then the Qur'an would have had the attributes of eternity and uncreatedness, just as they are inherent in Allah. With these characteristics, the Qur'an would be like the Creator and become the second one like Him, in other

² John of Damascus was born and raised in Damascus in 675 or 676, to a prominent Damascene Assyrian Christian family. His father, Sarjun ibn Mansur, was an official of the Umayyad Caliphate. Before his ordination, John possibly had a career as a civil servant for the Caliph in Damascus. For more information, see [4: 307-309].

³ Ahl al-Hadith (people of hadith) is an Islamic school of Sunni Islam that emerged during the 8th century, as a movement of hadith scholars who rejected innovations in religious and legal matters and followed only the Qur'an and Sunnah. For more information, see [3: 25].

words, it would result in polytheism, which is unacceptable. According to the Mu'tazilites, only Allah is eternal and uncreated, there can be no second Allah, therefore the Qur'an is not eternal and was created by the Allah, the one and only true God [21: 206-207]. The claim of the Qur'anic createdness, which stemmed directly from the Mu'tazilite understanding of monotheism, in that and next centuries was harshly criticized by Muslim traditionalists, including Ibn Taymiyyah [6: 164-165].

During the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'mun and his successors (Al-Mu'tasim (833-842), Al-Wathiq (842-847)), Mu'tazilism became the official creed of the caliphate, as it was the most developed theological system of its time, and also a sophisticated philosophical system, capable of satisfying the spiritual needs of the educated layer of the feudal elite, capable of answering the religious and philosophical questions raised in debates, for which the simple ideas of Muslim jurists, who were busy collecting hadiths and debating unimportant details, were not sufficient. In addition, the ideas of free will and responsibility for one's actions took on a political connotation, namely, the growing popular uprisings in the Caliphate could not be justified as a manifestation of God's will. The decree to adopt the Mu'tazilite doctrine of monotheism (tawhīd), which specifically includes the principle of createdness, was issued in 827 AD, and consequently was followed by another order issued in 833 AD to punish the religious and legislative figures who did not accept the principles of Mu'tazilites with exile and other persecution. This period is known as the "mihna" (test, ordeal), the first Muslim inquisition [21: 210-211]. Many were forced to accept it out of fear, but there were also opponents. Among them was the famous traditionalist Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855 AD), who became a hero in the eyes of people as the embodiment of the struggle against "unacceptable innovations" for the purity of Islam. The death of Caliph Al-Ma'mun in 833 saved the persecuted Ahmad ibn Hanbal from execution [9: 84]. This is mentioned in Ibn Taymiyyah's work "Al-Jawab" (full title: "The correct reply to those who altered the Messiah's religion" (al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li Man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ)). Ibn Taymiyyah although does not mention the names of the caliphs, he describes the situation and mentions Ahmad ibn Hanbal: "When a group of rulers declared that the Qur'an was created and called upon people to follow it (that teaching), Allah girded the Imams of the Sunnah and the 'ummah, and they did not agree with them, and among the aforementioned Imams was Ahmad ibn Hanbal [12: 342]." Ahmad ibn Hanbal's viewpoint was clear: the Qur'an is the uncreated word

of God, and any deviation from this belief was considered a serious theological error. He considered any claim that the Qur'an is created as heretical, aligning such views with, for example, the Jahmiyya sect, which he deemed deviant [18: 914- 920]. It may be generally observed that the creeds of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal were rooted in a literalist interpretation of Islamic sources. Subsequent Hanbali scholars further articulated and defended these doctrines, including the belief that the Qur'an is God's uncreated word, as opposed to the schools which advocated a divergent view. Some prominent representatives of the Hanbali school of thought such as Al-Barbahari, Abu Ya'la, Ibn Qudamah engaged in polemical exchanges with Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, Jahmite, Shi'ite, Sufis, philosophers. These debates contributed to the development and increasingly sophisticated articulation of Hanbali theology [8: 20]. Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his discussions on the createdness of the Qur'an emphasized simple affirmation of scriptural texts without interpretation and delving into details. Ibn Taymiyyah both defended and significantly developed the Hanbali position on the uncreatedness of the Qur'an, following in the footsteps of Ahmad ibn Hanbal but addressing theological complexities that had emerged by his time and presenting his views in full detail. As is shown below, Ibn Taymiyyah did not avoid nuances, rather being more willing to engage with philosophical and logical analysis and clarify his approaches in detail.

Ibn Taymiyyah on the uncreated and eternal nature of the Qur'an

In "Al-Jawab", Ibn Taymiyyah addresses the issue of the Qur'an as the word of God in the context of a discussion of the Christian and Islamic understanding of Christ as the word of God [25: 35-51]. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, people have different opinions about the word of God, but the Christian view contradicts all existing opinions on the matter, and he divides the existing opinions into three parts: "The word of God is 1) an attribute existing in Him or 2) created and different from Him, 3) neither of the above two options, but what exists in the human soul [13: 311]." Ibn Taymiyyah states that the Mu'tazilites follow the second view, according to which: "...His speech is created, [and] created outside of himself. This is the view of the Mu'tazilites and others, as well as some of the Jahmis [13: 312]." Regarding the Jahmis, we should note that this was the name given to the followers of Jahm Ibn Safwan. Muslim authors sometimes classified them as Murjites, sometimes as Jabarites [22: 64]. Since there is no clear information about the emergence, followers, and tenets of Jahmiism, it is difficult to distinguish it from other schools

of thought. It is known, however, that the Hanbali school of thought used that name to refer to groups and their ideologies that were considered sectarian [26: 144-148]. Ibn Taymiyyah also did this. It is interesting that when speaking about any group, he did not describe these groups, but criticized their specific tenets, the conclusions derived from them, which could coincide with different schools of thought.

Ibn Taymiyyah does not accept the doctrinal position that the Qur'an is created, but he also rejects the claim that the Qur'an is eternal as a separate expression of God's word. In other words, the statement that the Qur'an is not created does not mean that it is eternal: "They all (Muhammad's companions) agree that the Qur'an was revealed, not created, that Allah sent Gibril, and Gibril revealed it to his prophet, and Muhammad conveyed it to the people. People recite it with their voices and actions. Nothing in the voices and actions of people is eternal or uncreated, but the word of Allah is uncreated. The Salaf⁴ did not say that the Qur'an was eternal. When the Jahmis, Mu'tazilites, and others introduced innovations that it (the Qur'an) was clearly created by Allah, the Salaf and Imams said: "It is the uncreated word of Allah." [12: 339]: This same idea is also found in the work "Collection of Messages and Questions" (Majmuat al-rasa'il wa al-masa'il) where he writes: "None of them (the Salaf - S. T.) have ever said that his recitation of the Qur'an is eternal or uncreated, especially that the voice in recitation is eternal or uncreated. They said what is stated in the Book and the Sunnah, that the Qur'an is the word of God, people recite it with their own voices and write it with their own ink [14: 353]."

Ibn Taymiyyah claimed that "the Salaf" directly or explicitly had never stated that the word of God is eternal, but only stated that it is uncreated. In the work "Collection of Fatwas" (Majmu' al-fatawa), he writes: "The Qur'an is the revealed and uncreated word of Allah, it began with Him and returns to Him, He is the One who speaks through the Qur'an, the Torah, the Gospel, and so on. It (the word) is not created and separate from itself. He, the Glorious, speaks by His will and power, His word exists by itself, it is not created and separate from Himself... The Salafs of the 'ummah have never said that the word of Allah is created and separate from Him, and none of them have ever said that the Qur'an, the Torah, the Gospel must be permanent and eternal in their essence, and that Allah does not speak by His will and ability... rather they said that Allah continues to speak if He wills, therefore His word

⁴ In Islam, the term "salaf" or "as-salaf al-ṣāliḥūn" (the righteous predecessors) refers to the first three generations of early Muslims [5:900].

is eternal in the sense that He continues to be speaker if He wills [15: 37-38].”

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, although man reproduces the uncreated word of Allah through recitation, the human voice and the ink with which that word is written in the form of the Qur‘an are created, while the divine word, as such, is not created: “Whoever means the voice and the ink and says: it is created, then he is right, just as whoever means the same voice and the writing and says: “This is not the word of Allah, rather, this is created,” he is right, but he must clarify what he means, without ambiguity. For this reason, the imams, such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal and others, condemned anyone who said that the Qur‘anic expressions are created or not created, and they said: “Whoever says: it is created, then he is a Jahmite, and whoever says: it is not created, then he is an innovator [12: 347-348].”

By developing this idea, Ibn Taymiyyah clearly reformulates the concept of the uncreated, eternal nature of God’s word, and attempts to clarify it and determine whether the two concepts are equivalent. He argues that “the Salaf “ believed that God continues to speak if He wills. It is in this sense that he believes that God’s word is eternal. Therefore, he claims that God’s words have no end: “The ancestors and imams of the ‘ummah are right in this matter, saying that the Almighty continues to be a speaker if He wishes, and that He speaks according to His will and ability, indeed, His words have no end [15: 598].”

Ibn Taymiyyah clarifies the meaning of the word “eternal”, contradicting all those who defined the eternal word of Allah as a single universal, complete meaning with an eternal nature (for example, this is what the Ash‘aris thought, but the author does not mention them in this discussion), from which, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, it could be assumed that Jibril revealed this eternal, complete “text” to Muhammad in an Arabic version, and the Qur‘an is a temporary version or expression of God’s eternal word, inseparable from his essence. Ibn Taymiyyah considers such an idea unacceptable. Moreover, his clarification of the eternity of the divine word is also directed against those who, within the framework of Hanbalism, identify the ink of the written text and the sounds of human reading with the eternal word of God. Ibn Taymiyyah rejects this: “None of the Salaf have ever said that Allah speaks without His will and power, nor that it is a single meaning existing in its essence, nor that the Qur‘an, the Torah, the Gospel are revealed with eternal letters and sounds. After that, there were people who said that it is eternal, and some of them said that the complete meaning, which exists independently, is eternal, and that is all the words of Allah (all the holy books) [12: 340].” Ibn Taymiyyah describes Allah as follows: “He has always been and is characterized by the attributes of perfection, He has

always been the One who speaks by His will and ability, if He willed, He has always been knowing and powerful, He has always been living, hearing, seeing and He has always wanted to be like that, because every perfection that has no flaws can characterize Him, and He has always been characterized by that, and He has always been and is characterized by the attributes of perfection and excellence. Glory be to the Almighty [11: 163-164].”

Conclusion

Based on the explorations above we have arrived at the following:

- The origin of the question of Qur'anic createdness is connected with the debates over the idea of Christ being the word of God, and the perceptions of Jesus Christ, the prophet Isa, in the Muslim tradition. Ibn Taymiyyah considers the question in this context.
- Ibn Taymiyyah not only defended the traditional Hanbali view regarding the uncreatedness of the Qur'an but also significantly developed it. While he remained firmly within the framework established by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, he responded to the changing theological environment by formulating the doctrine with greater depth and precision. What sets Ibn Taymiyyah apart is his willingness to engage critically with philosophical reasoning and logical argumentation, offering carefully nuanced distinctions and detailed explanations that go beyond earlier formulations.
- Ibn Taymiyyah, rejecting the createdness of the Qur'an, clarifies and specifies the idea of eternity, noting that the written text, the human voice, sounds, and ink when reciting it are not eternal, they are created. Only Allah's ability to speak is eternal without beginning and end. In this sense, Allah's word is unlimited, eternal. Ibn Taymiyyah does not contradict Hanbalism, but tries to supplement and clarify the approaches of the madhhab on the discussed issue, freeing them from ambiguity.
- Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the importance of formulating thoughts as clearly as possible in discussions on religious topics in order to avoid misunderstandings. Following this principle, he presents his thoughts quite simply and clearly, substantiates his interpretations with quotes from the Qur'an, the words of the Salaf, and also relies on logical thinking.
- When criticizing existing views on the issue of Qur'anic createdness, he mentions

only the Mu‘tazilites and Jahmis, considering them the authors of innovations in Islam on this issue.

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ՂՈՒՐԱՆԻ ԱՐԱՐՎԱԾՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՐՑԸ ԵՎ ԴՐԱ ՇՈՒՐՋ ԻՔՆ ԹԱՅՄԻԱՅԻ ՄՈՏԵՑՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ

Սեդա Տիգրանյան

Հիմնաբառեր - Հանքալիական մագիաբ, Իքն Թայմիա, իսլամ, Ղուրան, Սուննա, միաստվածություն, արժեքներ, նորարարություններ, արարվածություն, մութագիլիականություն, ումմա

Ամփոփում

Ղուրանի արարվածության հարցի ծագումը կապված է մուսուլման և քրիստոնյա աստվածաբանների, կրոնագետների միջև դավանաբանական վեճերի՝ հատկապես Քրիստոսի՝ Աստծո խոսքը լինելու գաղափարի վերաբերյալ բանավեճերի, մուսուլմանական ավանդույթում Հիսուս Քրիստոսի՝ մարգարե Իսայի վերաբերյալ ընկալումների հետ: Բանավեճերի սկիզբը դրել է արաբ քրիստոնյա վանական, աստվածաբան, իմաստասեր Հովհաննես Դամասկոսեցին, ով ապրել և ստեղծագործել է Օմմայան խալիֆայության ժամանակաշրջանում: Քրիստոնեական Սուրբ երրորդության ուսմունքի քննադատություններին ի պատասխան՝ Հովհաննես Դամասկոսեցին Ղուրանի վերաբերյալ նույն տրամաբանությամբ հարց է տալիս. եթե Ղուրանը Իսային՝ Հիսուսին, համարում է Աստծո խոսքը, և նաև Իսան համարվում է Ալլահի արարածը, այդ դեպքում ինչ «բնություն» ունի Ղուրանը՝ որպես Ալլահի խոսք, արդյո՞ք այն արարված է, թե հավերժական գոյություն ունի: Այս հարցին մուսուլմանների պատասխանները հանգեցրին երկու հիմնական և իրարամերժ կարծիքների ձևավորմանը. ոմանք պնդեցին, որ Ղուրանը՝ որպես Աստծո խոսք, հավերժական և չարարված է: Այս կարծիքն ընդունելի էր մուսուլմանների մեծամասնության կողմից: Մուսուլմանների մի մասն էլ գտնում էր, որ Ղուրանն արարված է: Այս համոզմունքը հետագայում զարգացվել և համակարգվել է մութագիլիների կողմից՝ Ալ-Մամուն

խալիֆայի օրոք դառնալով պաշտոնական գաղափարախոսություն: Վախի ազդեցությամբ շատերը ստիպված էին ընդունել, սակայն եղան նաև ընդդիմացողներ: Նրանցից էր հանքալիական մազհաբի հիմնադիր Ահմադ իբն Հանբալը (մահ. 855թ.), ում վերջնական հաշվեհարդարից փրկեց խալիֆ Ալ-Մամունի մահը 833թ.:

Հանքալիական կրոնափրավական դպրոցի ականավոր ներկայացուցիչ Իբն Թայմիան խալիֆայության ներսում տիրող իրավիճակի և կրոնական պոլեմիկայի համատեքստում է դիտարկում հարցը և իր աշխատություններում փորձում պարզաբանել ու հիմնավորել հանքալիական մազհաբի մոտեցումները: Իբն Թայմիան չի ընդունում Ղուրանի արարված լինելու մասին պատկերացումը, բայց և հերքում է Ղուրանի՝ որպես Աստծո խոսքի առանձին արտահայտության հավերժական լինելու մասին դրույթը: Այսինքն, Ղուրանի արարված չլինելու մասին դրույթից չի կարելի եզրակացնել, որ այն հավերժական է: Իբն Թայմիայի պնդմամբ, թեև մարդն ընթերցանությամբ վերարտադրում է Ալլահի չարարված խոսքը, սակայն մարդկային ծայնը, թանաքը, որով այդ խոսքը գրի է առնված Ղուրանի տեսքով, արարված են, իսկ աստվածային խոսքը, որպես այդպիսին, արարված չէ: Իբն Թայմիան, մերժելով Ղուրանի արարվածության դրույթը, պարզաբանում և որոշակիացնում է հավերժության գաղափարը, նշելով, որ գրի առնված տեքստը, այն արտասանելիս մարդկային ծայնը, հնչյունները, թանաքը հավերժական չեն, արարված են: Հավերժական և անսկիզբ ու անվերջ է միայն Ալլահի խոսելու կարողությունը, այդ առումով Ալլահի խոսքն անսահմանափակ, հավերժական է: Իբն Թայմիան ոչ թե հակասում է հանքալիականությանը, ինչպես պնդում են որոշ հետազոտողներ, այլ փորձում է լրացնել և հստակեցնել մազհաբի մոտեցումները քննարկվող հարցի շուրջ՝ ազատելով դրանք երկիմաստությունից: