

Aqáid **(Beliefs)**

Lesson 1

History of the Qur'ān

In Book 7 we learnt about the differences between the Qur'ān, Hadith and Hadith al-Qudsi. We also looked at how the Qur'ān remains a living miracle to this day, one of its miracles being its preservation from *tahrif* (change).

Also, in Book 9 we studied some of the terminologies related to the Qur'ān such as Makki and Madani, Muhkam and Mutashābih, Nāsikh and Mansukh, Asbāb an-Nuzul, and so on.

In this lesson and the next two, we wish to look at the **history** of the Qur'ān and hadith. By this we mean *how and when* the Qur'ān was compiled and preserved, *how and when* hadith was recorded, the major sources of hadith for Muslims and other matters related to these subjects.

The Writing & Collection of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān was committed to writing from the very beginning. There are numerous āyāt in the Qur'ān that refer to the Qur'ān as “al-Kitāb” (the Book). Al-Kitāb literally means ‘that which is written down’.

In fact there was a time when Rasullāh (s) would repeat everything that Jibrāil (‘a) was reciting to him, even as the verses were being revealed and Allāh (s.w.t.) assured him not to worry about preserving the Qur'ān:

﴿لَا تُحْرِكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ. إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ﴾

Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it. Indeed it is up to Us to put it together and to recite it.

- Surah al-Qiyāmah, 75:16-17

In other words, Allāh (s.w.t) Himself guarantees that the Qur'ān would be collected and recited. In other āyah, Allāh (s.w.t.) says:

﴿لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ﴾

Falsehood cannot approach it (the Qur'ān), from before it nor from behind it, a [gradually] sent down [revelation] from One All-wise, All-Praiseworthy.

- Surah al-Fussilat, 41:42

The Scribes of the Qur'ān

Some of the companions (ashāb) of Rasulullāh (s) were specially entrusted with the task of writing down the suwar and āyāt revealed to Rasulullāh (s). These included:

1. Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a)
2. Ubay b. Ka'b
3. Abd Allāh b. Rawāha
4. Khālid b. Sa'id
5. In the later period Zayd b. Thābit and others.

As soon as āyāt were revealed, Rasulullāh (s) dictated them to anyone of the scribes mentioned above.

Placement of the Ayāt

At the time of dictation, Rasulullāh (s) himself would fix the position of the āyāt and tell the scribes where to place them, in which surah, and so on. The reason the placement was not in the order of revelation is because verses would be revealed depending on the relevance of the occasion but Rasulullāh (s) was aware of the original composition of the Qur'ān in the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawh al-Mahfudh*) where the Qur'ān first existed before revelation. So Rasulullāh (s) would re-create the surahs accordingly. That is why in some cases, there are Madani āyāt in Makki surahs and vice versa.

Memorization of the Qur'ān

Rasulullāh (s) used to stress the importance and reward of memorizing the Qur'ān. Hundreds of people did that even during the time of Rasulullāh (s).

The proof of this is that in the Battle of Yamāma, that was fought just six months after the wafāt of Rasulullāh (s), 500 (or according to some 700) huffādh (those who had memorized the Qur'ān) were killed in one day alone. This is not counting those who were killed later or survived the battle.

Rasulullāh (s) selected four individuals to teach the Qur'ān, who in turn then taught others to recite and memorize it. These four were:

1. Abd Allāh b. Mas'ud
2. Salim Mawla Abi Hudhaifa
3. Ma'ādh b. Jabal
4. Ubay b. Ka'b

Completion of Collection

Many orientalist like to say that the Qur'ān was never compiled until during the time of the 3rd Caliph Uthmān b. Affān and it was collected based on what people could remember and what they were able to find from parts of suwar written on palm leaves, animal skins and so on.

This however is not true. The Qur'ān was compiled in full before the passing away of Rasulullāh (s). Rasulullāh (s) himself said during his Farewell Hajj (Hijjat al-Widā) Sermon that the angel Jibrāil ('a) used to recite the entire Qur'ān to him every month of Ramadan but that year he had recited it twice and therefore he felt he was going to leave the world that year.

We also know that several companions of Rasulullāh (s) had a complete written Qur'ān in their possession before the wafāt of Rasulullāh (s) and these included Imām Ali ('a), Sa'd b. Ubayd b. Nu'mān, Abu Darda, Ma'ādh b. Jabal, Ubay b. Ka'b, Abd Allāh b. Mas'ud, Zayd b. Thābit and others.

There are also ahādith from Rasulullāh (s) that allude to the existence of the written Qur'ān. For example, the Hadith ath-Thaqalayn that says, '*I am leaving behind two important matters: the Book of Allāh and my family....*' Obviously Rasulullāh (s) would not say this if there was no Qur'ān accessible to people and if he did that then someone would have also asked, 'where is the Book of Allāh?'

Four days before Rasulullāh (s) passed away, he asked for a paper and pen to write a will for the Muslims so that they would never go astray. But Umar b. al-Khattāb shouted, 'The man (i.e. the Prophet) is delirious. The Book of Allāh is enough for us!' This also proves that the Qur'ān was known to exist and to be accessible to the Muslims at the time.

What did happen during the time of Uthmān however is that the arrangement of the suwar was altered and the order of the suwar today is not the same as the order in which Imām Ali ('a) had arranged his copy of the Qur'ān based on the instructions of Rasulullāh (s).

The Qur'ān is Complete

We know that the Qur'ān is complete and nothing is missing in it for various reasons. Firstly because Allāh Himself guarantees to preserve the Qur'ān:

﴿إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ﴾

Indeed We have sent down the Reminder (i.e. the Qur'ān), and indeed We will preserve it.

- Surah al-Hijr, 15:9

Secondly, there are many ahādith from Rasulullāh (s) and the Aimmah (‘a) on the merits of reciting each surah. If the suwar were incomplete, then the Ma’sumeen (‘a) could not have said, ‘whoever recites this surah will be rewarded....’ and so on.

Thirdly, in our salāh, we are required to recite a complete surah after Surah al-Hamd. If some of the suwar were incomplete than the Aimmah (‘a) would have forbidden us to recite those suwar in our salāh.

There are also ahādith that forbid us to recite the ‘whole Qur’ān’ in one night or in less than three days. The word ‘whole Qur’ān’ or ‘complete Qur’ān’ would not occur in such ahādith if it wasn’t complete.

Lastly, in many museums today (such as the Qur’ān museum in Mashhad in the Haram of Imām Ali ar-Rida (‘a)) there are copies of the Qur’ān that were handwritten by the Imāms. These include the Qur’ān handwritten by Imām Ali (‘a), Imām Zayn al-Abidin (‘a), Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) and Imām Ali ar-Rida (‘a). None of these copies of Qur’ān have any verses in them that are missing in our copies of the Qur’ān. This also proves that the Qur’ān we have is the complete Qur’ān even if it is not arranged exactly the way Imām Ali (‘a) had arranged it in accordance to the wishes of Rasulullāh (s).

The Shi’ah do not have their ‘own Qur’ān’

There is a common misconception amongst Muslims that the Shi’ah have a different Qur’ān or that the Shi’ah believe the present Qur’ān is incomplete or that Imām Ali (‘a) had written a more complete Qur’ān. These are all false notions.

What the Shi’ah believe is that Imām Ali (‘a) had written some notes on the margins of his copy of the Qur’ān to explain the verses according to the teachings of Rasulullāh (s). But these notes were not a part of the Qur’ān’s original revelation.

And in fact others also wrote notes in their copy of the Qur’ān. For example, consider the following verse of Qur’ān that was revealed at Ghadir Khum commanding Rasulullāh (s) to announce the wilāyah of Imām Ali (‘a) as his successor:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ...﴾

O Apostle! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord...

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:67

In the Qur’ān copy of Abd Allāh b. Mas’ud, it is written as follows:¹

*O Apostle! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord **that Ali is the leader of the faithful (mu’mineen)**...*

¹ Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi, *Qur’ān and Hadith*, p. 37

This doesn't mean that Ibn Mas'ud's Qur'ān was 'different'. He just wrote it like this to clarify and preserve why the verse had been revealed and for whom.

The Seven Readings

The Sunni Muslims believe that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven different 'readings' (qira'āt). These variations are mostly changes in how a word is read in a verse and they make a singular to be plural or an active word to be passive or a word in the second person to be in the third person. The Sunni Muslims further believe that Rasulullāh (s) approved all these seven 'recitations' with their variations in the Qur'ān but that the Caliph Uthmān put a stop to it out of fear of confusing new Muslims and therefore only one remained as the official recitation. Today all copies of the Qur'ān are based on what is called "the recitation of Asim reported from Hafṣ" (Qirā'ah 'Asim 'an Hafṣ).

The Shi'ah however do not believe that Rasulullāh (s) approved of seven recitations of the Qur'ān. Rather the original Qur'ān was written without any vowels or marks (i.e. without dots or signs for fatha, kasra, damma, shadda and sukun). And this may have led to some variations in reading in different parts of the Muslim world. But Allāh (s.w.t.), as per His promise to preserve the Qur'ān, has preserved the original recitation and with time, all variations have dropped off and the present version is the original revelation and recitation of the Qur'ān.

In the words of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), 'The Qur'ān is one and came down as one; the variation in the recitations came from the reciters, not from Allāh.'

It is therefore wrong to suggest that Rasulullāh (s) approved of or encouraged seven recitations, and so on. These were all later forgeries attributed to him.

Lesson 2

The History of Hadīth

The Definition of Hadith

The word 'hadith' literally means 'talk'. In Shi'ah understanding, the word 'hadith' refers to the words of a Ma'sum ('a) (i.e. one who is infallible). The plural of hadith is ahādith.

A lot of times people will argue in ignorance about something being halāl or harām by saying, 'where is it in the Qur'ān?' If a hadith is proven to be true and authentic, it is a hujjah (proof) and binding on a Muslim just like the Qur'ān.

This is proven by the Qur'ān:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ ...﴾

O you who have faith! Obey Allāh and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:59

Hadith is therefore the second *nass* or 'primary source' of proof in Islām, after the Qur'ān. Even an Imām's actions are a form of hadith and binding (i.e. a *hujjah*) if proven to be authentic. If a person does an action in the presence of a ma'sum and the ma'sum does not object, then it means that action is permissible. Such a tacit approval is called a 'Taqrir'. Sometimes the words and actions of Rasulullāh (s) are collectively referred to as his 'sunnah'.

If something is reported from a companion of a ma'sum but does not go all the way back to the ma'sum and stops at the companion, then the Shi'ah do not regard it as 'hadith'. For example, a saying by Abu Dharr or Abd Allāh b. al-Abbās may be related as what a companion said but it is not hadith and therefore not binding.

Amongst the Sunni however, the words of the *sahāba* are also treated as hadith. So they derive laws and act upon what is related from Abu Hurayra or Ibn Mas'ud or A'isha, the wife of Rasulullāh (s) even if that report does not quote Rasulullāh (s) himself.

Other names for hadith are "khabar" (news), "athar" (trace) and "riwāya" (report or narration).

Sanad and Matn

Every hadith has two parts to it. The first part is called the **sanad** and the second **matn**. *Sanad* refers to the “chain of narrators” or “chain of transmission”. It is usually a series of names that links the hadith text to a ma’sum via everyone who reported it from another right down to the last person who is actually recording it. And *matn* is the actual text of the hadith i.e. what the ma’sum said.

Here is an example:

Hammād b. Sulmah reported from Muhammad b. Ishāq who reported from Amr b. Shu’ayb who reported from his father who reported from his father who said:

I asked, ‘O Messenger of Allāh, should I write down everything that I hear from you?’ He (the Prophet (s)) said, ‘Yes.’ I asked again, ‘(even what you say) in pleasure or in anger?’ And he replied, ‘Yes. For I do not say (even) in that (state) except the truth (*haqq*)’.

In the hadith above, the first paragraph is the sanad (chain) of the hadith and the second paragraph is the matn (text) of the hadith. Together they form one hadith.

The sanad is extremely important to scholars. They study the lives of each of the individuals in every hadith to see if they were trustworthy or not and if we can rely on what they reported. This science of studying the reporters and narrators of hadith is called ‘Ilm ar-Rijāl (The Science of Men) and goes hand-in-hand with the study of hadith. Every mujtahid must be an expert in this science because the value of any hadith depends on how strong the sanad is i.e. the trustworthiness of the narrators.

Each narrator in the sanad is called a **Rāwi** and the plural is **Ruwwāt** (Narrators).

One of the reasons the Ulama don’t just trust anyone who reports a hadith is because it is a well known fact that during the reign of the Banu Umayya and Banu Abbās, thousands of ‘ahādith’ were forged to suit the convenience of the rulers, either to flatter themselves and their predecessors or to malign the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and so on.

Allāh has also told us in the Qur’ān not to trust a sinful person:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ﴾

O you who have faith! If a sinful (fāsiq) [person] should bring you some news, verify it, lest you should harm some people out of ignorance, and then become regretful for what you have done.

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:6

Qualifications of the Ruwwāt

As we have seen, the strength of a hadith greatly depends on its ruwwāt. Amongst the Shi'ah, a rāwi must be:

Bāligh (mature), sane, Shi'ah Ithna Ashari Muslim, 'ādil, and have good memory. In some cases, a rāwi who is not a Shi'ah Ithna Ashari is also accepted if his report supports and does not contradict other authentic ahādith.

'Adil means someone with integrity, who does not sin openly and is not known as a being sinful or a liar and whom we have no reason to doubt that he might have forged a hadith or sought to mislead others.

Categories and Types of Ahādith

The Ulama have divided and categorized ahādith into many different types. Allama Hilli and those who came after him divided ahādith into four major categories:

1. **Sahih (Correct, True)**. This is a hadith of the highest quality. All its narrators (ruwwāt) in its sanad are Shi'ah Ithna Ashari and have been praised for their trustworthiness by others, with words such as 'he is thiqah' (meaning very trustworthy).
2. **Hasan (Good)**. This is a hadith all of whose narrators are Shi'ah Ithna Ashari but not all of them have been praised with words like 'thiqah' (trustworthy). Instead some have been praised with words of lesser strength like 'he is mustahsin' (virtuous) or 'he is hāfidh' (one with good memory), and so on.
3. **Muwaththaq (Dependable)**. This is a hadith not all of whose narrators are Shi'ah Ithna Ashari but they have all being praised as being trustworthy.
4. **Da'if (Weak)**. This is a hadith that is neither Sahih, nor Hasan or Muwaththaq.

Of course with time, the Ulama and experts of hadith have created numerous other subcategories to these broad categories. A da'if hadith is not accepted as proof that is binding especially in matters of shari'ah and fiqh. As opposed to a dā'if hadith – whose sanad is weak – a forged hadith is called a *mawd'u* hadith.

Mutawātir and Wāhid

If a hadith has been quoted in many different sources, its sanad may be the same or it may have different asnād (pl. of sanad) in every original source. Depending on how many varieties of asnād (plural of sanad) exist for a particular hadith, a hadith is given weight and labelled as mutawātir or wāhid.

A mutawātir hadith is one that is narrated by so many people through so many different, unique chains of transmission (asnād) that the very number of narrators is enough to convince us of the truth of that hadith even without analyzing the matn (text of hadith).

Any hadith that is not mutawātir is called hadith wāhid. And sometimes a hadith that is authentic but has only one chain of narrators is called Hadith Ahad.

A sahih hadith that is also mutawātir is obviously a lot stronger and reliable than a sahih hadith that is not mutawātir.

The Hadith of Ghadir for example, (that Rasulullāh (s) said, '*whoever's master I am, this Ali is his master*' (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa hādha Aliyyun mawlāhu*)) is sahih **and** highly mutawātir. It is reported by 110 Sahāba (companions) of Rasulullāh (s) in both Sunni and Shi'ah books of hadith and 84 Tābi'un (the companions of the Sahāba). Thereafter over 360 Shi'ah and Sunni scholars have reported it throughout the centuries.

The Recording of Hadith & Reasons for Its Forgery

As we saw in the sample hadith earlier (when defining sanad and matn), Rasulullāh (s) always encouraged his companions to record and write down whatever he taught and all his sayings and actions. Many of the sahāba such as Abd Allāh b. Al-Abbās, Salmān al-Fārisi, Abu Dharr, Abu Rāf'i, Bilāl and others wrote down ahādith from Rasulullāh (s).

It is reported from Abd Allāh b. 'Amr b. al-As that he said, 'I was writing down everything that I heard Rasulullāh (s) saying but the Quraysh were forbidding me to do so, saying, "You are writing everything that the Prophet (s) is saying, while he is just a mortal who speaks in anger as well as in pleasure", so I stopped writing, and mentioned this incident to Rasulullāh (s) who pointed to his mouth with his finger, saying, "Write! For by the One who has power over my soul, nothing but the truth comes out of it."'”²

After the wafāt of Rasulullāh (s) the early caliphs prohibited people from writing hadith. The 2nd Caliph Umar b. al-Khattāb is particularly famous for banning the writing of hadith. His reason was that he didn't want people to 'forget the Qur'ān'. The real reason however was that a lot of the hadith were in praise of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and if they were promoted then Imām Ali ('a)'s right to the khilāfah would also become apparent. This was similar to why Umar also stopped Rasulullāh (s) from writing his last will and shouted, 'the Book of Allāh is enough for us!'

In one report we are told that after the Caliph Umar made his decision to prohibit the writing of hadith, he gathered all the written ahādith that the Sahāba (Companions) had in their possession for a month, then he burnt it all, saying,

² Abd al-Hādi Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, p. 68-9 (ICAS Press 1st Edition).

“*mishna like the mishna of the People of the Book*”.³ The *mishna* is a Jewish collection of oral traditions.

It is also reported that when Ubay b. Ka’b narrated about Jerusalem and its features, Umar b. al-Khattāb scolded him and was about to beat him, when Ubay called on a group of the Ansār to bear witness that they had heard the hadith from Rasulullāh (s). And when they bore witness, he left him. Then Ubay b. Ka’b said to Umar, ‘Are you accusing me with regard to the hadith of the Prophet of Allāh (s)?’ and Umar replied, ‘O Abu Mundhir (the epithet (kunya) of Ubay), by Allāh I was not accusing you, but I hated to think that the hadith of the Prophet was becoming manifest.’⁴

The banning of hadith in the early years after the wafāt of Rasulullāh (s) proved to be a disaster. A lot of authentic ahādith were lost or destroyed and by the time Uthmān became the 3rd Caliph, it was a scramble to preserve the original ahādith. Many of those who had been loyal to Rasulullāh (s) also changed their stance and attitude towards the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and were influenced by the ideas of the early Caliphs.

One such companion was Anas b. Mālik who later came to be known as the founder of the Maliki madhhab. When Imām Ali (‘a) became the Caliph, he asked the Sahāba to bear witness that they had heard the hadith of Rasulullāh (s) declaring him (Imām Ali (‘a)) as his successor at Ghadir Khumm and Anas b. Mālik was one of those who refused to bear witness and made excuses that he had grown old and was now forgetting. Imām Ali (‘a) cursed him and he was struck with a form of leprosy.⁵

Another one of such Rasulullāh (s)’s companions was Abd Allāh b. Mas’ud. After the wafāt of Rasulullāh (s) he turned away from Imām Ali (‘a) and was known to oppose him.

Abd ar-Rahmān b. al-Aswad reported on the authority of his father that Alqamah brought some books from Yemen or Makkah that included a collection of hadith on the virtues (fadāil) of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). So he went to the house of Abd Allāh b. Mas’ud and handed him the books. Abd Allāh b. Mas’ud called the servant girl and sent for a basin with water in it. Alqamah and those with him said to him, ‘O Abd Allāh, have a look at them as there are authentic ahādith among them’ but he did not pay attention, and started to dissipate them in the water, reciting, ‘*We narrate to you the best of narrations, by Our revealing to you this Qur’ān*’ (Qur’ān, 12:3). Then he (Ibn Mas’ud) said, ‘the hearts are vessels, so fill them up with the Qur’ān!’⁶

After the year 40 AH, when the Banu Umayya began to reign with full force under Mu’āwiya, the destruction to hadith was even more serious. Mu’āwiya was notorious and infamous for hiring people and paying them large sums to forge ahādith in his favour.

³ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴ Ibid., p. 71-2

⁵ Shaykh Mufid, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, p. 265-6.

⁶ Abd al-Hādi Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, p. 72

And of course once the idea of forging ahādith in the name of Rasulullāh (s) lost its seriousness, others began indulging in it. Those who held extremist views about the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and regarded them as incarnations of God (*wal 'iyādhū billāh!*) forged ahādith to give praise to them that was blasphemous. Those concerned that people were not reciting the Qur'ān enough forged ahādith about the virtues of reciting different surahs of the Qur'ān. Anyone who felt a need to promote a cause - good or bad – created hadith to help his cause.

Furthermore, as Jews and Christians converted to Islām, many of them brought stories from their traditions, especially regarding the early prophets like Nabi Musa ('a) and these stories captured the imagination of the story-tellers and forgers. Such forged ahādith that resemble Biblical narrations and often cast doubt on the *'ismah* (infallibility) of the past anbiyā (prophets) are called **Isrāiliyāt**.

One of those individuals infamous for forging ahādith was Abu Hurayra. Unfortunately however he is held in high regard by the Sunni Muslims and in comparison to all other companions of Rasulullāh (s), the Sunnis have quoted hadith from him the most. Abu Hurayra is said to have seen Rasulullāh (s) for less than 3 years but the Sunni books of hadith have reported 5,374 ahādith from him. In comparison, the ahādith reported from the first four caliphs all put together are only 1,411 even though they lived with Rasulullāh (s) all his life.

The Shi'ah regard Abu Hurayra to be unreliable and do not accept any traditions from him. He was known to even make up hadith for profit and on the spur of the moment. As an example, an onion seller from Akka (a seaport in Palestine) was once having a hard time selling his product and he asked Abu Hurayra for help. Abu Hurayra began telling people that the Prophet (s) had said, 'whoever eats the onions of Akka will have the reward of pilgrimage to Makkah!' When the Caliph Mu'āwiya quizzed Abu Hurayra and asked him when he heard Rasulullāh (s) saying this 'hadith', Abu Hurayra flattered him saying, 'At the same time when I heard him saying, "Mu'āwiya is the maternal uncle of the faithful (khāl al-mu'mineen)".'⁷

In another example of how unscrupulous individuals forged hadith in an instance, just to win favours from the ruler of the time, a man named Ghiyāth b. Ibrāhim was once visiting the Abbāsīd caliph al-Mansur and saw him playing with pigeons. Immediately, he fabricated a 'hadith' for the Caliph's good pleasure saying: The Prophet (s) said, "No racing is better than that of hoofs and feathers (i.e. horses and birds)!"⁸

As for the story-tellers, according to the famous Sunni scholar Ibn al-Jawzi, once Ahmad b. Hanbal (the founder of the Hanbali madhhab) and Yahya b. Ma'in were in the mosque of al-Rasifah (in Baghdad) for prayers. In the meanwhile, a story-teller gathered around himself some people and began to recite a 'hadith', citing as his sources Ahmad b. Hanbal and Yahya b. Ma'in, that the Prophet (s) said, 'whoever

⁷ Dr. Mustafa Awliyā'i, *Science of Hadith*, Al-Tawhid Journal, v. 1, No. 2.

⁸ Ibid.

says, “*La ilāha ilallāh*”, God will reward him with a bird whose beak is of gold and feathers of coral.’ Then he proceeded to describe the bird and the reward of the recipient in such a detail as cannot be contained even in twenty pages. On hearing him, Yahya and Ibn Hanbal looked at each other while the “*muhaddith*” started collecting tips from the people. Yahya approached the man and asked him as to who had told him this hadith. ‘Ahmad b. Hanbal and Yahya b. Ma`in,’ was his reply. ‘I am Yahya and this is Ahmad b. Hanbal’, said Yahya pointing to Ibn Hanbal, ‘we ourselves have never heard of such a hadith.’ The story-teller replied, ‘I had heard that Yahya b. Ma`in is an idiot I didn't believe it. You talk as if you two are the only Yahya and Ibn Hanbal in the whole world! I have written traditions from seventeen Yahya b. Ma`ins and Ahmad b. Hanbal's!’ Then he promptly slipped out of the mosque.⁹

To counter such forgeries and to preserve the ahādith of Rasulullāh (s) that are crucial to understanding Islām, the Shi`ah therefore insisted that they would not take hadith from anyone except the Ma`sumeen (‘a). Whereas the Sunni Muslims depend on the hadith of Rasulullāh (s) who passed away in 11 AH, the Shi`ah have the benefit of having the Imāms present to verify hadith as true or false until 260 AH when Imām Hasan al-Askari (‘a) was martyred and even thereafter for almost 70 years during the minor occultation (ghaybah al-sughra) of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs).

The Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) themselves wrote hadith as well and we shall study more about the most famous Shi`ah who reported hadith from them, in the next lesson inshā Allāh.

⁹ Ibid.

Lesson 3

The History of Hadīth (cont'd)

Major Sources of Shi'ah Hadith and their History

Phase 1 – The Usul Arba' Mi'a (400 Usul)

In the last lesson we concluded that the Shi'ah of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) did not allow themselves to be influenced by the ban on the writing of hadith by the Caliph Umar and that to counter the later forgeries by the Banu Umayya and Banu Abbās, they took all the hadith of Rasulullāh (s) from his Household, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) only.

Amongst the ashāb (companions) of Imām Ali b. Ali Tālib ('a), Maytham at-Tammār, Asbagh b. Nubāta and others were known to record hadith from the Imām. And from Imām Ali Zayn al-Abidin ('a)'s time, there were ashāb such as Abu Hamza ath-Thumālī and Jabir b. Abd Allāh al-Ansāri.

During the times of Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) the opportunity to teach was greater and therefore the Shi'ah wrote in greater number.

Famous amongst the ashāb of Imām al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām as-Sādiq ('a) were Zurārah b. A'yūn, Abu Basir al-Asadi, Fudayl b. Yasār, Hammād b. Uthmān and Hammād b. 'Isa. Others who reported hadith from them included Abān b. Taghlib, Muhammad b. Qays, Hishām b. al-Hakam, Ali b. Yaqteen, Ali b. Mahziyār, Fadhl b. Shādhān and very many others.

Imām al-Kādhim ('a) and Imām ar-Rida ('a) also had many ashāb who related ahādith from them including Safwān b. Yahya, Hasan b. Mahbub, Yunus b. Abd ar-Rahmān, and so on.

Some of the earliest books of hadith that we still have today were from the ashāb of the later Imāms such as the Kitāb al-Mu'min by Hasan b. Sa'id al-Kufi, a companion of Imām al-Jawād ('a) and Imām al-Hādī ('a). Or for example, the hadith collection Kitāb at-Tamhees by Muhammad b. Himām al-Iskāfi, a companion of the ambassadors (sufara) of Imām al-Hujjah ('atfs) during the Ghaybat as-Sughra.

It is believed that from the time of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) to the time of Imām Hasan al-Askari ('a), the Shi'ah wrote some 6600 books of hadith from Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) though many of these were lost in time.¹⁰ Some of these books were actually small booklets. By the time of the martyrdom of Imām Hasan al-Askari ('a), the most famous Shi'ah books of hadith were 400 books that came to be known as the **Usul Arba' Mi'a**. "Usul" is the plural of 'asl', which means 'foundation'. And "Arba' Mi'a" is Arabic for '400'. In other words these books – **The 400 Usul** -

¹⁰ Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi, *Qur'ān and Hadith*, p. 69.

were the primary and earliest books of hadith for the Shi'ah, many of which were written in the lifetime of the Aimmah ('a).

Phase 2 – The Compilation of Kutub al-Arba'a

With the martyrdom of Imām Hasan al-Askari ('a) and the ghaybah of the Imām of our time ('atfs), these 400 books became very precious. There were no printing presses in those days and these books could not be shared or given to others who were not trustworthy.

The Shi'ah Ulama decided that if all the ahādith in the Usul Arba' Mi'a were collected as one book and then divided subjectwise into chapters and subchapters, it would fulfil a great need at the time and would also ensure the wealth of knowledge is not lost because it would be easier to preserve one book rather than 400. This was not going to be easy however. Someone would have to collect all the books and then verify whether all the ahādith that exist in multiple versions are unique or duplicates, and so on.

The first scholar to take on this challenge and responsibility during the ghaybah of Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) was Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (260-329 AH). He lived in Baghdad and was held in high regard even by the ambassadors (sufara) of the twelve Imām ('atfs) [also in Baghdād].

After twenty years of hard work and research, Shaykh al-Kulayni produced **Al-Kāfi**. This book alone contains more ahādith than all the six authentic (sihāh sitta) books of the Sunnis.¹¹

Thereafter, another famous Shi'ah scholar Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ali b. Babwayh al-Qummi (well known as Shaykh as-Saduq) (d. 381 AH) compiled another collection of hadith and named it '**Man La Yahdhuru al-Faqih**'.

And much later, yet another famous Shi'ah scholar, Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Hasan b. Ali at-Tusi (well known as Shaykh at-Tusi or Shaykh at-Tāifa) (385-466 AH) compiled two more collections of hadith named '**Tahdhib al-Ahkām**' and '**Al-Istibsār**'.

These last two books opened the way for a critical study of hadith and therefore paved the way for the need for ijtihād. It is interesting that the compilers of all these four famous collections of hadith were named Muhammad and their title (kunya) was Abu Ja'far.

In the year 448 AH, the Sunnis of Baghdad attacked the Shi'ah and burnt down the library and home of Shaykh at-Tusi. Shaykh at-Tusi was then forced to migrate south

¹¹ Ibid., p. 71

to Najaf and he established the Hawza ‘Ilmiyya there that went to produce mujtahideen for 1000 years.

Let us summarize the facts regarding these four famous books of hadith that are used to this day by Shi’ah scholars to derive Islāmic laws:

1. **Al-Kāfi** compiled by Shaykh al-Kulayni (16,199 ahādith)
2. **Man La Yahdhuru al-Faqih** compiled by Shaykh as-Saduq (5,998 ahādith)
3. **At-Tahdhib** (or Tahdhib al-Ahkām) compiled by Shaykh at-Tusi (1,359 ahādith)
4. **Al-Istibsār** compiled by Shaykh at-Tusi (5,511 ahādith)

These four books are collectively known as ‘**Kutub al-Arba’a**’ (The Four Books).

It is important to note that many Sunnis assume that the Shi’ah regard every hadith in these four books (or at least in al-Kāfi) to be ‘sahih’ similar to how they regard some of their books of hadith to be completely authentic like the Sahih Bukhāri and Sahih Muslim.

For the Shi’ah however, every hadith is open to inspection at all times by the scholars of every generation. Just because a hadith exists in al-Kāfi does not mean it is sahih and unquestionable. Similarly, a hadith may exist in another Shi’ah book that is not as famous as these four collections and still be sahih if its sanad and matn are trustworthy and sound.

Phase 3 – Three Later Books

You should also be aware of the following three large collections of Shi’ah hadith that were compiled after the Kutub al-Arba’a:

1. **Bihār al-Anwār** compiled by Allamah Muhammad Majlisi (d. 1011 AH). It contains all the Kutub al-Arba’a as well as many other sources of hadith, all sorted subjectwise together. This is perhaps the most voluminous collection of Shi’ah hadith that is usually printed in 110 volumes.
2. **Kitāb al-Wāfi** compiled by Mulla Muhammad Muhsin Fayd al-Kāshāni (d. 1091 AH). It is a collection of 50,000 ahādith largely from the Kutub al-Arba’a but with explanations and better classification.
3. **Wasāil ash-Shi’ah** compiled by Shaykh Muhammad Hurr al-Amili (d. 1104 AH). This contains 35,850 ahādith. Like al-Kāfi, it also took 20 years to compile. It is the most comprehensive collection of hadith on legal (fiqh) matters. And its classification (which includes ahādith from the Kutub al-Arba’a) is said to be better than Bihar al-Anwar and Kitāb al-Wāfi. Shaykh Hurr al-Amili is buried in one of the courtyards (sahan) of Imām Ali ar-Rida (‘a) in Mashhad (Iran).

It is interesting that just like the compilers of the Kutub al-Arba'a, these three later compilers were also all named Muhammad.

We should also mention:

4. **Mustadrak al-Wasāil** compiled by Allama Husayn Nuri (d. 1320 AH). This was actually an amendment to the Wasāil as-Shi'ah and it contains 23,000 ahādith and is now also a classic resource that goes hand-in-hand with the Wasāil as-Shi'ah.

Major Sources of Sunni Hadith

Sunni Muslims rely on the following six books of hadith as primary sources to derive their laws and understanding of Islām. They regard these books as being 'sihāh' (pl. of sahih) meaning 'Authentic'.

1. **Sahih Bukhāri** of Muhammad b. Ismail Bukhāri (d. 256 AH)
2. **Sahih Muslim** of Muslim b. Hajjāj Nisāburi (d. 261 AH)
3. **Muwatta** of Malik b. Anas (the founder of the Maliki madhhab) (d. 175 AH)
4. **Sahih Tirmidhi** of Muhammad b. Isa Tirmidhi (d. 279 AH)
5. **Sunan Abu Dāwud** of Abu Dāwud as-Sijistāni (d. 275 AH)
6. **Sunan an-Nasāi** of Ibn Shu'ayb an-Nasāi (d. 303 AH)

Other books of hadith that are held in high regard among Sunni scholars are:

7. **Sunan Ibn Māja** by Ibn Māja Qāzwini (d. 264 AH). Some scholars regard this book as part of the Sihāh Sitta instead of the Muwatta of Malik b. Anas.
8. **Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal**. This was actually compiled by the son of Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241 AH), the founder of the Hanbali madhhab. Many Sunnis believe this to be as authentic as the Sihāh Sitta.
9. **Mu'jam al-Kabir** of Tabarani (d. 360 AH)
10. **Mustadrak 'ala as-Sahihayn** by al-Hākim an-Nisāburi (d. 405 AH)
11. **Jami' al-Jawām'i** of Suyuti (d. 911 AH)
12. **Kanz al-'Ummāl**. This is actually an edit of Suyuti's compilation by Shaykh Husamuddin al-Muttaqi al-Hindi (d. 975 AH). The Kanz al-'Ummāl contains many ahādith in praise of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Modern Sunni scholars today also acknowledge that the Sihāh Sitta have many ahādith that are da'if (weak) or even mawd'u (forged). The Shi'ah and Sunni scholars do not rely on each other's sources of hadith for legal (fiqh) matters but some

scholars do quote from each other in matters of history, tafsir, akhlāq, etc. if it does not contradict their own understanding of Qur'ān and hadith.

The Shi'ah have always expressed concern that the Sunni books of hadith show a strong bias towards the rulers of the time and against the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) because they (the books) seem to intentionally leave out the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) or even quoting ahādith from them. For example, the most famous collections of Sahih Bukhāri and Sahih Muslim do not quote ahādith from Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) at all despite their high rank amongst the Ulama of Madina but they quote traditions from the murderers of Imām Husayn ('a) like Umar b. Sa'd and Shimr Dhill Jawshan, (may Allāh curse them forever).

Lesson 4

Tawassul in Islām

In Book 8 we discussed Intercession (shafā'ah) and we said: "Shafā'ah is the Islāmic belief that on the Day of Judgment, Allāh will permit His special servants and the angels to intercede on behalf of sinful believers and ask Allāh to forgive their sins to save them from the fire of Hell." And this is not because Allāh cannot forgive people directly but because Allāh wishes to honour His chosen servants and to reveal their status before others.

We also proved the validity of shafā'ah in Islām from Qur'ān and hadith and discussed who will intercede on the Day of Judgment and for whom. In this lesson we wish to study a similar concept called Tawassul.

The Concept of Tawassul

Tawassul is to ask Allāh and pray to Him through His chosen servants instead of asking Allāh directly. The chosen servants through whom a person prays to Allāh must be authorized by Allāh as a 'wasila' (intermediary or 'means').

Muslims and Tawassul

All Shi'ah Muslims and most Sunni Muslims believe in Tawassul especially in asking Allāh through His Messenger Muhammad al-Mustafa (s). This, they believe, is not only permissible but highly recommended. The exception however are the Wahnābi Muslims who are found mostly in Saudi Arabia.

The Wahnābi follow the teachings of Ibn Taymiya (1263-1328), who was a Hanbali scholar with extremist views. He was very opposed to the belief in Shafā'ah, tawassul or even visiting the graves of Rasulullāh (s) or any Imām. When the Wahnābi looted Makkah and Madina and formed the Saudi government in 1925, they demolished all the shrines in Jannat al-Baqi (Madina) where Imām al-Hasan ('a), Imām Zayn al-Abidin ('a), Imām al-Bāqir ('a), Imām as-Sādiq ('a) as well as many members of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are buried. To this day, there are Wahnābi scholars who believe that the dome on the grave of Rasulullāh (s) should also be demolished and his grave should be 'taken out of Masjid an-Nabawi'; but they are prevented from doing this out of fear of their government being overthrown by the rest of the Muslim world.

Tawassul in Qur'ān

The Wahnābi believe that tawassul is a form of polytheism (*shirk*). To "prove" this, they quote āyāt of Qur'ān such as the following:

﴿وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ هَؤُلَاءِ شُفَعَاؤُنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ...﴾

They worship besides Allāh that which neither causes them any harm, nor brings them any benefit, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allāh' ...

- Surah Yunus, 10:18

﴿... وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِ مَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِن قِطْمِيرٍ. إِن تَدْعُهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دُعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ...﴾

...As for those whom you call besides Him, they do not control so much as the husk of a date stone. If you call them they will not hear your supplication, and even if they heard they cannot respond to you...

- Surah Fātir, 35:13-14

Does this then prove that tawassul is harām? Not at all.

Where is the problem then? The problem lies in the fact that the Wahhābi often read verses of Qur'ān in isolation and interpret them literally, trying to apply them in every situation without considering the context of the revelation (i.e. why the verses were revealed and for whom).

There are other verses of Qur'ān that support tawassul and if we read them together with the above verses, what will become very clear is that what is harām is to set up *one's own* wasila, such as an idol or even a saintly (Sufi) personality and then to pray to Allāh by bowing before the idol or asking through the saint who is not authorized by Allāh to be a wasila.

Allāh Himself has asked us to go to Him through a wasila **but only through those whom He has authorized.**

The verse where Allāh asks us to use a wasila is:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ...﴾

O you who have faith! Be conscious of Allāh, and seek a means of nearness to Him...

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:35

The Wahhābi argue that this 'wasila' is our faith and good deeds. But that is not what the verse is saying. It is specifically ordering, 'seek'. If it was our prayers and fasting then the āyah would not command in this manner.

Here is another verse of Qur'ān to prove tawassul:

﴿إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ. وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَإِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ. وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَإِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ﴾

Your guardian is only Allāh, His Messenger, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakāh while bowing down. Whoever takes for his guardians Allāh, His Messenger and the faithful [should know that] the party of Allāh are indeed the victorious.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:55-56

If asking help from anyone besides Allāh was *shirk*, then Allāh would not Himself tell us that along with Himself, 'His Messenger' and 'those who believe, those who keep up prayers and give alms in ruku' are also our guardians.

And all Muslim scholars agree that it was only Imām Ali ('a) who once gave alms to a beggar while he was in ruku' (by extending his fingers to the beggar and letting him pull his ring out) and it was regarding Imām Ali ('a) that this āyah of Qur'ān was revealed.¹²

Tawassul in Sunni Hadith and Tārikh (Islāmic History)

The Shi'ah Muslims believe in tawassul without exception. They even recite supplications such as the Dua at-Tawassul in which they ask Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to intercede for them before Allāh (s.w.t.) because of their lofty rank with Allāh.

Amongst the Sunni, because the Wahhābi reject tawassul, we therefore quote some hadith and historical narrations from Sunni sources to prove tawassul.

1. The Abbāsīd caliph, Mansur al-Dawāniqi, once asked Imām Malik ibn Anas (the founder of the Sunni Maliki School) whether he should turn towards the grave of the Prophet (s) or face the qibla for supplication (du'a)? Imām Malik replied him, 'why do you want to turn away from the Prophet (s) when he is the wasila (means) for you and for your father Adam, towards Allāh on the Day of Resurrection? Turn to him (the Prophet) and seek his intercession (shafā'ah)!'¹³
2. Tirmidhi¹⁴ relates a hadith from 'Uthmān b. Hunayf that a blind man came to Rasulullāh (s) said, 'I've been afflicted in my eyesight, so please pray to Allāh for me.' The Prophet (s) said to the blind man, 'Go and do wudu, pray 2 rak'ahs and

¹² Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 5, p. 38; Zamakhshari, *Tafsir al-Kashshāf*; Tabari, *Tafsir al-Bayān*.

¹³ *Al-Mughni Ma'al Sharh*, v. 3, p. 588; *al-Sharh al-Kabir ma' al-Mughni*, v. 3, p. 494; al-Qādi 'Iyād, *al-Shifa*, 2:92-93.

¹⁴ The *Sunan* of Tirmidhi is one of the six collections of hadith regarded by the Sunnis to be the Six Authentic Sources (as-sihāh as-sitta).

then say: “O’ Allāh, I ask You and turn to You through my Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of mercy; **O Muhammad, I seek your intercession** with my Lord for the return of my eyesight.””

The man did this and his eyesight was restored. The Prophet (s) then added, ‘and if there is some [other] need, do the same.’

This narration is widely quoted by Sunni scholars (besides the Wāḥḥābi) and Tirmidhi has said it is highly authentic. Other famous Sunni hadith masters (muhaddithun) like Hākīm, Bayhaqī, Ibn Mājāh, Bukhāri (in his *Tārikh al-Kabir*), Nasāi (in his *‘Amāl al-Yaum wa al-Layla*) have also said this a sahih hadith, absolutely beyond doubt. The most amazing fact is that Ibn Taymiya (whom the Wāḥḥābi take their teachings from) has also agreed this hadith is authentic.

3. Now some people may argue that tawassul was only valid when Rasūlullāh (s) was physically present. So Tabarāni and other Sunni scholars have narrated that during the caliphate of Uthmān b. Affān (the 3rd Caliph), long after Rasūlullāh (s) had passed away, a man repeatedly went to the Caliph Uthmān for something he needed, but the Caliph paid no attention to him or his need. The man met Uthmān b. Hunayf and complained to him about the matter so Uthmān b. Hunayf, who was one of the Companions who collected ahādith and was learned in the religion of Allāh, said: ‘Go do wudu, then come to the mosque, perform two rak’ah, and say: “O Allāh, I ask You and turn to You through our Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of mercy; **O Muhammad! I turn through you to my Lord**, that He may fulfill my need,” and mention your need.’

‘Then come to me,’ continued Ibn Hunayf, ‘so that I can go with you [to the Caliph Uthmān].’ So the man left and did as he had been told, then he went to the door of the Caliph Uthmān b. Affān, and the doorman came, took him by the hand, brought him to the Caliph who seated him next to him on a cushion. ‘What do you need?’ asked the Caliph and the man mentioned what he wanted, and the Caliph Uthmān accomplished it for him, then he said, ‘I hadn’t remembered your need until now,’ adding, ‘whenever you need something, just mention it.’

Then, the man departed, met Uthmān b. Hunayf, and said to him, ‘May Allāh reward you! He didn’t see to my need or pay any attention to me until you spoke with him.’ And Uthmān b. Hunayf replied, ‘By Allāh, I didn’t speak to him, but I have seen a blind man come to the Messenger of Allāh and complain to him of the loss of his eyesight...’ and he narrated the previous incident to him.

4. Imām Bukhāri in his ‘Kitāb al-Adāb al-Mufrad’ as well as other scholars have recorded that Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar (the son of the 2nd Caliph) once suffered from a cramp in his leg. Someone advised him to remember the person whom he

loved the most. The great companion then proclaimed loudly, “Yā Muhammadah” and it is recorded that he was immediately relieved.¹⁵

5. Another Sunni scholar of repute, Allama Shahāb Khafāji al-Misri writes in his work ‘Naseem ar-Riyād’ (a commentary of the “Shifa” by Imām Qādi Iyād) that it was an established practice of the people of Madina to call out “Yā Muhammadah” in times of difficulty and anxiety.
6. A famous companion Bilāl b. al-Hārith al-Muzani narrates that a terrible drought occurred during the caliphate of ‘Umar (the 2nd Caliph) and that year was known as ‘The Dry Year’ (Aam ar-Ramadah). The tribe of Bilāl b. al-Hārith (the Banu Muzaina) approached the Caliph and complained of starvation. Some sheep were slaughtered for them but they were only bones and hardly any meat on them. Seeing this, Bilāl called out loudly, “Yā Muhammadah,” in grief and concern. He was then blessed with seeing the Prophet (s) in his dream, who gave him the good news of the end of the drought very soon.

In a slightly different version related by Malik ad-Dār, the Caliph ‘Umar’s treasurer, when the people suffered the drought, a man (possibly Bilāl b. al-Hārith) came to the grave of the Prophet (s) and said: "O Messenger of Allāh, ask for rain for your Community, for indeed they have almost perished," after which the Prophet (s) appeared to him in a dream...¹⁶

The famous Sunni scholars Ibn Hajar and Ibn Kathir have also reported these incidents and said they are good (jayyid) and strong (qawwi) narrations in their authenticity. One Sunni scholar has commented on this and said, ‘Let the pseudo-Salafiyya (i.e. the Wahhābi) take note - that it is the ruling of Ibn Kathir in two places (that this narration is authentic), and he (Ibn Kathir) was associated with Ibn Taymiya.’

7. Shaykh Mansur as-Sabbagh in his book ‘The Perfections’ (ash-Shamā’il) narrates a well-known tradition from a man called ‘Utbi who said, ‘I was sitting by the grave of the Prophet (s) when a Bedouin came and said: “Peace be on you, O Prophet of Allāh! I have heard Allāh say (in the Qur’ān): *And if they had come to thee when they had wronged their souls, and asked forgiveness of Allāh, and if the Messenger had also asked forgiveness for them, they would have surely found Allāh All-forgiving, All-Merciful.*¹⁷ And so I have come to you asking forgiveness for my sin, taking you as intercessor to my Lord.”

Then he (the Bedouin) started reciting poetry in praise of the Prophet (s) saying, ‘O you best of those whose bones are buried in al-Qa’a from the sweet scents of those bones the whole area of al-Qa’a and Akamu became perfumed. I sacrifice myself to the grave that you live in – it is purity and in it is incredible generosity.’

¹⁵ Also reported by Imām an-Nawāwi in his commentary of Sahih Muslim.

¹⁶ Imām Bayhaqi with a sound (sahih) chain of transmission.

¹⁷ Surah an-Nisā, 4:64

Then the Bedouin departed and sleep overcame me (i.e. Utbi). And I saw the Prophet (s) in my sleep and he said: "O 'Utbi, follow the Bedouin and give him the glad tidings that Allāh has forgiven him."¹⁸

Reading the Qur'ān Holistically

Reading the Qur'ān 'holistically' means reading it as a whole and seeing how its different parts are interdependent. We said earlier that the reason why the Wahhābi reject many Islāmic concepts is because they read only one part of the Qur'ān and ignore other parts of it.

Let us look at some examples from the Qur'ān so that we understand the dangers of reading only some verses of the Qur'ān and assuming matters. [Your class teacher may read only one example and ask you to read the rest yourself as homework.]

1. Who Causes Death?

In one verse of the Qur'ān, Allāh (s.w.t.) says:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ...﴾

Indeed, those whom the angels cause to die...

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:97

Then in another verse He says:

﴿قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ...﴾

Say, 'You will be taken away by the angel of death...

- Surah as-Sajdah, 32:11

And yet in another He says:

﴿اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا...﴾

Allāh takes the souls at the time of their death...

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:42

Does that mean there is a contradiction in the Qur'ān? Not at all. The angels do not have their own independent power. They only carry out Allāh's orders. And because they are authorized by Allāh, it makes no difference when we say the angels cause death or the Angel of Death causes death, it is one and the same as saying Allāh causes death.

¹⁸ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:64.

2. Who is our Guardian?

In one verse Allāh says:

﴿... وَلَا يَجِدُ لَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا﴾

...and he will not find for himself any guardian or helper besides Allāh.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:123

And He also says:

﴿وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِأَعْدَائِكُمْ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ نَصِيرًا﴾

But Allāh knows your enemies better, and Allāh suffices as guardian, and Allāh suffices as helper.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:45

﴿قُلْ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَعْصِمُكُم مِّنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ سُوءًا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ رَحْمَةً وَلَا

يَجِدُونَ لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا﴾

Say, 'Who is it that can protect you from Allāh should He desire to cause you ill, or desire to grant you mercy?' **They will not find for themselves any protector or helper besides Allāh.**

- Surah al-Ahzāb, 33:17

Then in a verse we have looked at earlier, He says:

﴿إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ

رَاكِعُونَ. وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَإِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ﴾

Your guardian is only Allāh, **His Messenger, and the faithful** who maintain the prayer and give the zakāh while bowing down. **Whoever takes for his guardians Allāh, His Messenger and the faithful** [should know that] the party of Allāh are indeed the victorious.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:55-56

Is this a contradiction? Not at all. It simply means that Allāh is the only independent guardian and helper. No one has the power to help except Him. But those who are authorized by Him *can* help and their help is the same as Allāh's help. This is not polytheism (*shirk*).

In another verse, Allāh mentions others as helpers besides Himself and He says to the two disobedient wives of Rasullāh (s):

﴿... وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ﴾

...and if you¹⁹ back each other against him [the Prophet (s)], then [know that] **Allāh is indeed his guardian, and Jibrāil, and the righteous among the faithful, and, thereafter, the angels are his supporters.**

- Surah at-Tahrim, 66:4

3. Who Gives us Bounties and Blessings?

The following āyah of Qur'ān makes it clear that all grace (blessings) are in the hands of Allāh alone and He alone gives it to whomever He pleases:

﴿لَا يَلْمُكَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ الْإِلَهَ يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ...﴾

So that the People of the Book may know that **they have no power over anything of Allāh's grace, and that all grace is in Allāh's hand** which He grants to whomever He wishes...

- Surah al-Hadid, 57:29

Now look at the following two verses:

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ رَضُوا مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَقَالُوا حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ سَيُؤْتِينَا اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَرَسُولُهُ...﴾

[It would have been better] if they had been pleased with what Allāh **and His Messenger** gave them, and had said, 'Allāh is sufficient for us; Allāh will give to us out of His grace, **and His Messenger [will give us].'**...

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:59

﴿...إِلَّا أَنْ أَغْنَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ...﴾

... only because Allāh and His Messenger had enriched them out of His grace...

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:74

¹⁹ That is, Hafsa and 'Aisha, two of the Prophet's wives.

Does it mean it is *shirk* to believe that besides Allāh, one receives blessings from Rasullāh (s) as well? No it isn't. Why not? Because Rasullāh (s) and his successors are not independent givers of grace besides Allāh. They do not give out of their own accord. Rather they are a *means* (wasila) through which Allāh gives of His grace. In other words, there is no difference whether we say Allāh gives or the Messenger of Allāh gives or the Proof (Hujjah) of Allāh gives.

4. Can anyone intercede (i.e. do shafā'ah) for another?

In the following āyah, Allāh makes it clear that no one can intercede for another person:

﴿أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ شُفَعَاءَ قُلُوبَهُمْ أَوْ لَوْ كَانُوا لَا يَمْلِكُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ. قُلْ لِلَّهِ الشَّفَاعَةُ جَمِيعًا...﴾

Have they taken intercessors besides Allāh? Say, 'What! Even though they have no control over anything and cannot apply reason?!' Say, 'All intercession rests with Allāh.

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:43-44

But then Allāh (s.w.t.) also says elsewhere:

﴿وَلَا يَمْلِكُ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ الشَّفَاعَةَ إِلَّا مَنْ شَهِدَ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

*Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, **except those who are witness to the truth and who know [for whom to intercede].***

- Surah az-Zukhruf, 43:86

﴿لَا يَمْلِكُونَ الشَّفَاعَةَ إِلَّا مَنْ اتَّخَذَ عِنْدَ الرَّحْمَنِ عَهْدًا﴾

*No one will have the power to intercede [with Allāh], **except for him who has taken a pledge with the All-beneficent (Lord).***

- Surah Maryam, 19:87

There is no contradiction. If we understand the matter holistically, we realize that what the Qur'ān is trying to say is that those who believe they can set up their own helpers and intercessors, whether it is other rich and powerful people or imaginary powers and idols, are mistaken. No one can intercede before Allāh unless He permits it. But those whom *He authorizes* can intercede because they are simply acting on Allāh's behalf with His permission. The verses that oppose intercession were revealed when the idol worshippers used to say:

﴿... مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى...﴾

... 'We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allāh,'...

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:3

So the problem is not 'having an intercessor' but 'having an intercessor who is not appointed and authorized by Allāh'.

5. How does Allāh forgive sins?

In some verses of the Qur'ān, Allāh makes it clear that no one forgives sins except Him:

﴿... وَمَنْ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ...﴾

...and who forgives sins except Allāh?...

- Surah Aal-i Imrān, 3:135

So we would assume that we should only ask Allāh directly to forgive us our sins. But then in another verse, Allāh tells us:

﴿... وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ

لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا﴾

...Had they, when they wronged themselves, **come to you** and pleaded to Allāh for forgiveness, **and the Messenger had pleaded for forgiveness for them**, they would have surely found Allāh All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:64

Similarly, when the brothers of Nabi Yusuf ('a) realize they have been unjust to Nabi Yusuf ('a) and displeased Allāh (s.w.t.), instead of asking Allāh for the forgiveness of their sins directly, they asked their father, Nabi Ya'qub ('a):

﴿قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ. قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ هُوَ

الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

They said, 'Father! Plead [with Allāh] for forgiveness of our sins! We have indeed been at fault.' He said, 'I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you; indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.'

- Surah Yusuf, 12:97-98

The fact that Nabi Ya'qub ('a) responds and agrees to do so shows us that there is nothing wrong with asking Allāh's representatives to pray on our behalf to Allāh (s.w.t.) to forgive us.

The Wahhābi say that these are examples when Rasulullāh (s) and Nabi Ya'qub ('a) were alive but now that they are dead, it is wrong to pray for them.

But the Wahhābi are wrong. Rasulullāh (s) and the other Ma'sumeen ('a) are not dead. We have seen examples of people asking Rasulullāh (s) directly at his grave even during the times of the early Caliphs.

Allāh says about those ordinary Muslims who die during jihad:

﴿وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ﴾

And do not call those who were killed in Allāh's way 'dead.' Rather, they are living, but you are not aware.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:154

If Allāh tells us not to say or assume the ordinary martyrs are dead, how can we say that about Rasulullāh (s) just because he is not physically present with us, when he is the best of Allāh's creation and the leader of all the prophets and messengers and martyrs?

Also, all Muslims including the Wahhābi complete their daily salāh by saying "as-salāmu 'alaykum ayyuhan Nabiyyu wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh" (peace be on you, O Prophet and the mercy and blessings of Allāh). This salām is not in the 3rd person or referring to Rasulullāh (s) indirectly. It is addressing him directly. What meaning would it have if Rasulullāh (s) was simply 'dead'?

Therefore reciting duas like Dua at-Tawassul, in which we ask Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to intercede for us is not *shirk* or *harām*.

Conclusion:

In all the five examples we gave above: who causes death? Who is our guardian? Who gives us bounties and blessings? Can anyone besides Allāh intercede for us? And using Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) as a wasila for the forgiveness of our sins, we have seen that the Qur'ān is not opposed to tawassul – as long as the wasila is someone authorized and recognized by Allāh.

It is in fact the practice of Allāh to always use a wasila and that is why He tells us:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ...﴾

O you who have faith! Be conscious of Allāh, and seek a means of nearness to Him...

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:35

Allāh has created and used a wasila for everything. He could have created each one of us directly and fed us directly but He created us through the 'wasila' of our parents and He feeds us through the 'wasila' of another human being (an employer). From duas and hadith we know that Allāh uses angels for everything: to control the weather, to bring or remove blessings, to cause life and death and so on.

Allāh also sent us guidance through the 'wasila' of prophets and messengers and He preserves the truth and the Qur'ān through the 'wasila' of the Imāms. If Allāh had wished, He could have spoken to all of us directly like He did with Nabi Musa ('a). But in His own wisdom He uses a wasila.

It is not that we cannot ask Allāh directly. We certainly can. But Allāh has also shown us the more respectful and faster way to reach Him is through His wasila. By going through Rasulullāh (s) and the Imāms ('a) we also get to know Allāh better because they teach us how to pray to Allāh and how to call upon Him.

When Nabi Yusuf ('a) became the King of Egypt and he found out that his father Nabi Ya'qub ('a) had turned blind, he told his brothers:

﴿اذْهَبُوا بِقَمِيصِي هَذَا فَأَلْقُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِ أَبِي يَأْتِ بَصِيرًا وَأْتُونِي بِأَهْلِكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ﴾

Take this shirt of mine, and cast it upon my father's face; he will regain his sight...

- Surah Yusuf, 12:93

Both Nabi Ya'qub ('a) and Nabi Yusuf ('a) are Prophets of Allāh. Why didn't they pray to Allāh directly? Why did Nabi Yusuf ('a) use the wasila of his shirt to restore his father's eyesight?

Why do all Muslims believe their sins are forgiven when they touch the Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad) lodged in the side of the Ka'bah or when they hold on to the door of the Ka'bah and ask for forgiveness? It is because this is found in the ahādith of Rasulullāh (s). If non-living objects can become a means to Allāh then certainly the most eminent of Allāh's creation are the best means (wasila) of communicating with Allāh (s.w.t.)

Lesson 5

Tawassul in Islām (cont'd)

Only Muhammad and Aali Muhammad as Wasila

We have seen in the previous lesson that the Qur'ān orders us to seek a means of nearness to Allāh. We also know from the Hadith ath-Thaqalayn that the Prophet (s) left two things behind to keep us from going astray: the Qur'ān and his Household (Ahl al-Bayt).

It is therefore important to remember that our wasila can only be the Qur'ān, Rasulullāh (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt ('a). It is wrong for us to make our own wasila who are not authorized by Allāh.

Amongst the Sunni Muslims who do not follow the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) some mystics and saintly personalities are used as a wasila. In places like India and Pakistan it is common to see the Sunni Muslims and those who practice Sufism to visit the shrines of these Sufis and pray to Allāh through them as a wasila. But none of these are appointed by Allāh or His Messenger.

Rasulullāh (s) for example, said, 'my Ahl al-Bayt is like the Ark of Nuh. Whoever boards it will be saved and whoever turns away from them will perish.' Such authentic ahādith are enough proof for us that we shouldn't treat anyone as a wasila – regardless of how learned and knowledgeable they may be – when we have the Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Visiting (Ziyārah) of the Infallibles ('a)

As we have seen in the previous lesson from the examples in the section on Tawassul in Hadith, there is nothing wrong with visiting the graves of Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). In fact it is highly recommended and a duty upon us as a sign of our loyalty to them.

The ahādith of the Imāms tell us that in the Hereafter, they will visit and help us with Allāh's permission, especially if we visit them at their graves in this world and offer salām to them.

However we should follow the etiquette (ādāb) of ziyārah as taught to us by the Imāms themselves and we should be careful not to create our own innovative practices that can become *shirk*. Practices that are wrong include prostrating before the graves of the Imāms or praying salāh towards them instead of the qibla.

Marking Wilādāt & Shahādāt Events

The Wahhābi believe that celebrating the birth (milād) of Rasulullāh (s) or of anyone else is harām just as commemorating their martyrdom is harām because it is an innovation (bid'ah) in Islām that was not practised by Rasulullāh (s) or his early companions.

The problem is that the Wahhābi assume everything in religion is harām unless proven otherwise. Islām is not opposed to culture or the practice of something good unless it opposes something in the Qur'ān or the authentic ahādith. We know from the practice of the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) that they commemorated the shahādah of Imām Husayn ('a) every year by remembering him and weeping for him, especially on the Day of Ashura.

Authentic Sunni hadith also say that Rasulullāh (s) used to fast every Monday because that was the day he was born. In other words Rasulullāh (s) celebrated his birthday every week!

As long as we ensure that how we mark the birth and martyrdom of Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) do not involve any harām practices, it is not only permissible but highly recommended because it serves as an opportunity to be inspired from their lives and to remember their contributions to humanity and their teachings. The events of wilādāt and shahādāt are great opportunities of learning more about the teachings of Islām.

Some Common Misconceptions about Tawassul and the Shi'ah

Question: Some Muslims accuse the Shi'ah of 'worshipping' their Imāms and praying towards their graves and prostrating themselves before the graves of their Imāms. They even call the Shi'ah "grave-worshippers".

Answer: It is not true that the Shi'ah worship their Imāms or even believe the Imāms have any power independent of Allāh. The Shi'ah firmly believe in the Qur'ān's teaching:

﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ﴾

You [alone] do we worship, and to You [alone] do we turn for help.

- Surah al-Fātiha, 1:5

But seeking wasila is not worshipping. We the Shi'ah do not ask our Imāms with the thinking that they are the source of the blessing. We either ask Allāh "for the sake of Muhammad and Aali Muhammad", or we ask Rasulullāh (s) and his sacred Household (Ahl al-Bayt) to pray to Allāh on our behalf. When we do ask them directly, the intention is the same: that they should intercede for us before Allāh and not that they are a replacement or alternative to Allāh.

It is unfortunate that some ignorant Muslims prostrate before the graves of the Imāms and even pray salāh towards it (away from the qibla) but this is not permissible even in the Shi'ah faith. All respected marāji' agree that it is harām to do sajdah before an Imām or his grave or to pray in his direction instead of the qibla.

Question: The Shi'ah call out to their Imāms for help with words like "Yā Ali", "Yā Husayn" and so on. Is this not shirk?

Answer: No it isn't. Firstly because we have seen in the previous lesson that even the companions of Rasulullāh (s) used to call out 'Yā Muhammad' at the grave of Rasulullāh (s). Secondly, as we have said earlier, we are calling them to intercede for us, not as an alternative to Allāh. And thirdly, sometimes the call is only to boost our morale or give us courage. For example, a person moved by the suffering of Imām Husayn ('a) or visiting Karbala may shout 'Yā Husayn!' That is only an expression of how he feels. Similarly, because of the valour of Imām Ali ('a), a person fighting in battle might shout 'Yā Ali!' to boost his courage.

A person who is drowning may call out to a person on the shore, 'Help me!' It would be foolish to insist he should only ask Allāh while he is drowning or that it is *shirk* to ask anyone besides Allāh for help. This simple example teaches us that using a means to get help is not the same as believing the means to be the source of help.

We must therefore separate the idea of worship ('ibādah) and supplication (du'a) from tawassul. The Shi'ah do not call their Imāms partners to Allāh. They do not ask them for their sustenance or the forgiveness of their sins. They only ask Allāh. The Shi'ah believe that the Imāms are creatures of Allāh and His humble servants but they are chosen by Allāh to be teachers and guides for mankind and because of their status, their du'ās to Allāh are never rejected. Therefore the Shi'ah, with Allāh's pleasure and authorization, ask the Imāms to be intercede for them in this world just as every person entering Paradise on the Day of Judgement will be in need of the intercession (shafā'ah) of Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). No one will be able to enter Paradise on their own merit and deeds.

Question: Is there any more evidence that we can address those who have died and are not physically present with us?

Answer: Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, a very famous and well-known Sunni muhaddith, in his equally famous work, "Kanz al-'Ummal" narrates that when Rasulullāh (s) used to visit the Muslim cemetery, he would address the dead and say, 'Peace be on you, the house of the believing people, and indeed we, inshā Allāh, will join you.'²⁰ Peace be unto you, O people of the graves from the believers and Muslims, may Allāh forgive us and you.'²¹

²⁰ *Sahih Muslim*, Kitāb at-Tahārah, hadith 249.

²¹ *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, v. 15, hadith 42561.

This proves that the dead can hear us. It should not therefore be difficult to accept that Rasulullāh (s) and the Imāms ('a) can also respond and pray for us.

All Muslim historians narrate that after the Battle of Badr, Rasulullāh (s) addressed the dead bodies of the enemies and said to them, '...you called me a liar.. have you found it to be true what your Lord promised you? I have found it to be true what my Lord promised me.' Some of his companions heard Rasulullāh (s) speaking to these dead bodies and said to him, 'are you speaking to those who are dead?' and Rasulullāh (s) replied, 'they can hear me even better than you can, but they cannot answer me!'²²

How is it possible then that the dead polytheists can hear when they are talked to but Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) cannot?!

We also have many ahādith from Rasulullāh (s) that he said he will reply the salām of anyone who comes to visit him even after he has passed away.

When Rasulullāh (s) had passed away and before he was buried, Abu Bakr (the 1st Caliph of the Muslims) entered the room where the body of Rasulullāh (s) lay, he unveiled his face and kissed it and then addressing him he said, 'May my father and mother be your ransom; **You** were pleasant both when alive and now after your demise; **remember us near Your Lord.**'²³

This also proves that the early Muslims regarded Rasulullāh (s) to be aware and listening to their words, both when physically alive and even after his demise.

²² *Tārikh Ibn Ishāq*, p. 454; Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 155.

²³ Ash-Shāfi'i, *Kashf al-Irtiyāb*, p. 65.

Lesson 6

Tajassum al-A'amāl

The Arabic word 'tajassum' means 'physical embodiment' i.e. when something takes on a physical form. And the word A'amāl is the plural of 'Amal, which means 'action' or 'deed'. Tajassum al-A'amāl therefore refers to the belief in Islām that whatever actions we perform in this world – good or evil – will come to us in a physical form in the next world and in fact come into existence even now, as soon as we create them through our actions, though they are not visible to us until we die.²⁴

Actions (A'amāl) vs. Recompense (Jazā)

Muslim scholars have three opinions on the relationship between a human being's actions and the recompense for them.

The first opinion is that there is no relation whatsoever between what we do and how Allāh will repay us on the Day of Judgement. This is the opinion of the Ash'aris, who are the Sunni Muslims today. They believe we must obey Allāh and keep away from disobedience only because Allāh has said so. Whether He rewards us with Paradise or punishes us with Hellfire has nothing to do with our obedience or disobedience. They have even gone as far as saying that if Allāh wishes, He may cause all the evil doers like Fir'aun and Yazid to enter Jannah and all the righteous and virtuous like the prophets (anbiyā) and martyrs (shuhadā) to enter Hellfire.

The reason why the Ash'aris (Sunnis) believe this is because they say that Allāh cannot be 'forced' to do anything. He does not *have to* reward or punish anyone. And as proof, they quote the following verse in the Qur'ān:

﴿لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ﴾

He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned.

- Surah al-Anbiyā, 21:23

The Shi'ah scholars respond to this theory by saying: Of course Allāh can do as He pleases, but that does not mean He will do so even if it means acting unjustly. Furthermore, if we believe this, then it would not encourage anyone to do good or keep away from evil. It would also mean that Allāh was lying to His prophets and messengers when He promised to reward the good and punish the evil.

²⁴ Tajassum al-A'amāl is also called Tajassud al-A'amāl. It means the same thing though. Tajassum comes from the word al-Jism and Tajassud comes from al-Jasad. Both words (al-Jism and al-Jasad) mean 'physical body'.

And Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

﴿... إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ﴾

Indeed Allāh does not break His promise.

- Surah Aali Imrān, 3:9

﴿... إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ...﴾

Indeed Allāh does not wrong [anyone] [even to the extent of] an atom's weight.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:40

﴿... وَمَنْ أَوْفَى بِعَهْدِهِ مِنَ اللَّهِ...﴾

And who is truer to his promise than Allāh?

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:111

The second opinion amongst the Muslim scholars regarding deeds and their recompense (jazā) is that there *is* a relationship between action and recompense but they are not one and the same. Just like in this world where you work and you get paid but the payment is different from the work, similarly, the recompense on the Day of Judgement is different from the actions we perform in this world even if it is given in exchange for them. Another example they give is that of a judge in the court who passes a sentence of punishment for a crime but the crime and the punishment are not one and the same. Many Shi'ah Muslims believe this to be the relationship of our actions and the reward or punishment we will receive on the Day of Judgement. There is, however, a third opinion...

The third opinion is that, not only are actions and their recompense (reward or punishment) related to each other but they are in fact *one and the same*. As human beings act in this world, they are also creating a reality for themselves in the Real World (which is the Hereafter). We can therefore think of the Hereafter as a parallel world that exists even right now but in a different plane of existence. The inner forms of our actions in this world are the outer, physical realities in that World.

In other words, human beings do not get 'paid' for their good deeds or sins in the next world - they actually create their own paradise or hell. This concept of our actions transforming into a physical form is called Tajassum al-A'amāl or Tajassud al-A'amāl. The good that we create for ourselves in the next world can be multiplied and strengthened through persistence in good work here and the evil realities that we have created for ourselves in the next world can be neutralized or dissolved through repentance (istighfār and tawbah).

Muslim philosophers and mystics like Ibn 'Arabi have explained this phenomenon of actions taking a physical form in the Hereafter, as follows:

Everything that a human being does or says has an effect on his soul and he carves and sculpts his soul with it. When he repeats those actions or words again and again the carving and chiselling becomes a firm trait and disposition of his soul. But the human being is occupied with the whims of his self and his sensual desires and thoughts. He does not free himself of them until his soul leaves his body and there is nothing left to occupy himself with and to carve. Then he finds the result of his actions before him – good or evil. And if it is evil, then the soul will wish there were a far distance between it and itself because of how it will torment it. Those whims and desires will come to life and take a real form once they have become firm and solid (through repeated unrepentant actions). And if it is good, then the soul will find its rewards accordingly.

We must now prove the concept of Tajassum al-A'amāl from the Qur'ān and ahādith.

Evidence for Tajassum al-A'amāl from the Qur'ān

﴿يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُحْضَرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا
وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا بَعِيدًا وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ﴾

The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and as to whatever evil it has done it will wish there were a far distance between it and itself.

- Surah Aal-i Imrān, 3:30

According to the Qur'ān mufassir (exegete), Allamah Tabatabai:

The Arabic word in this verse for 'will find present' is **muhdaran**, which means 'brought in' or 'presented', instead of simply being present. And this suggests that good and evil already exist now and are preserved from extinction because only what already exists is 'brought in' and presented at judgement. And the words 'will find' (**tajidu**) also suggest finding something physical.

Again, look at the following verse:

﴿وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَا لِ هَذَا
الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ
رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا﴾

The Book will be set up. Then you will see the guilty apprehensive of what is in it. They will say, 'Woe to us! What a book is this! It omits nothing, big or small, without enumerating it.' They will find present whatever they had done, and your Lord does not wrong anyone.

- Surah al-Kahf, 18:49

We can see clearly from the above verse that it is not the recompense of what they had done that they will receive but rather 'they will find present whatever they had done'. And therefore Allāh will not be the one punishing people. Rather people punish their own selves because of their evil actions.

﴿يَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمُحِيطَةٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ يَوْمَ يَغْشَاهُمْ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِمْ وَيَقُولُ ذُوقُوا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

*On the Day when the punishment envelopes them, from above them and from under their feet, and He will say, 'Taste **what** you used to do!'*

- Surah al-Ankabut, 29:54-55

The verse above does not say 'Taste *in exchange* for what you used to do'. It says, 'Taste **what** you used to do.'

Here is another verse:

﴿وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى وَأَنْ سَعِيهِ سَوْفَ يُرَى﴾

*And that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and as for what he strove for, soon shall he **see** it.*

- Surah an-Najm, 53:39-40

Again, the verse above does not say that man shall see the reward of what he strove for. Rather it is says, 'what he strove for, soon shall he see it' means he will see the actions themselves.

And in the following verse, again we are told, whatever good or evil you do, even an atom's weight, you will 'see it':

﴿يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ﴾

*On that day, mankind will issue forth in separate groups **to be shown** their deeds. So whoever does an atom's weight of good **will see it**, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil **will see it**.*

- Surah az-Zilzāl, 99:6-8

The proof that Paradise and Hell already exist even today and that we are building our Jannah or lighting our own fire in Hell even today is given in the following verse:

﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ﴾

Nay! if you had known with a certain knowledge, You would most certainly have seen the hell.

- Surah at-Takāthur, 102:5-7

The above verse is telling us that with true conviction (yaqin), we could see Hellfire even now.

As an example of how our actions immediately transform into good or evil, Allāh tells us in the Qur'ān:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَشْتَرُونَ بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ مَا

يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ إِلَّا النَّارَ...﴾

Surely those who conceal any part of the Book that Allāh has revealed and take for it a small price, they eat nothing but fire into their bellies...

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:174

In other words, a person may think they are only doing this or that, but in fact they could be eating fire into their bellies and even burning in Hell right now but they are not aware of it.

To put this differently, we may think we are only praying or helping others or just disobeying Allāh with a 'small' sin but actually we are creating our rewards and our punishments with our own actions. As soon as we die, it is as if we wake up from a dream and we see the Real World and what we have actually produced for our eternal life. And then we realize that the whole of this world's life was just like a passing breeze but we wasted it in playing games and meaningless pursuits when we could have done so much to build our eternal abode.

If a person always keeps this in mind, it is very easy to perform good deeds and to keep away from sins.

Lesson 7

Tajassum al-A'amāl (cont'd)

Evidence for Tajassum al-A'amāl from Hadith

The number of *ahādith* that prove Tajassum al-A'amāl are too numerous to list as well. But here we quote a sample:

Rasulullāh (s) was once sitting with his companions when they heard a loud noise. The angel Jibrāil came to Rasulullāh (s) and said that a rock that had fallen into Hell 70 years ago had just landed at the bottom of Hell and hence the loud noise. Just then Rasulullāh (s) and his companions were informed that a hypocrite in Madina had died at the age of 70. And Rasulullāh (s) exclaimed, 'Allāhu Akbar!' This means the hypocrite was already going through hell but only 'landed' in there when he died.

Many hadith say that when a person is buried, his good deeds are buried with him. His prayers protect him from one side, his fasts from other, his hajj and zakāt and even his love for the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) come in the form of beings that protect him from the fire of Hell.

In one hadith Rasulullāh (s) is reported to have said, 'the world is the farmland of the hereafter'²⁵ which suggests that with action, a man plants seeds in his life in this world which will bear fruit in the Hereafter.

Rasulullāh (s) said to a man called Qays who asked him for advice: 'You have no escaping, O Qays, from a companion who will be buried with you whilst he will be alive and you will be buried with him whilst you will be dead. If he is noble, he will honour you and if he is cursed, he will betray you. He will only be resurrected with you and you only with him. You will not be questioned except about him nor will you be raised except with him. Therefore make sure he is no less than righteous. For if he is righteous, you will not find a comforter (necessary) besides him but if he is abominable, nothing will frighten you more than him. And "he" is your actions!'

Rasulullāh (s) also said, 'when I ascended to the heavens (for Mi'rāj), I entered paradise and saw in it an open plain and I saw angels constructing (mansions with) bricks of gold and bricks of silver; and sometimes they would stop. I said them, "why have you stopped (constructing)?" and they replied, "(we wait) until our payment comes to us". I asked, "And what is your payment?" They said, "The words of the faithful: glory be to Allāh (*subhānallāh*), and praise be to Allāh (*wa al-hamdulillāh*), and there is no god by Allāh (*wa lā ilāha illallāh*), and Allāh is the greatest (*wa Allāhu Akbar*). When he recites, we build. When he is quiet, we stop."

²⁵ *Awāli al-Laāli*, v. 1, p. 267 Hadith 66.

In another hadith, Rasūlullāh (s) is reported to have said, ‘One who says “*subhānallāh* (glory be to Allāh!)” Allāh plants a tree for him in paradise by it; and one who says “*al-hamdulillāh* (praise be to Allāh!)” Allāh plants a tree for him in paradise by it; and one who says “*lā ilāha illallāh*” (there is no god but Allāh!)” Allāh plants a tree for him in paradise by it; and one who says “*Allāhu Akbar* (Allāh is the greatest!)” Allāh plants a tree for him in paradise.’ So a man from the Quraysh said, ‘Messenger of Allāh! Our trees in paradise are plenty then?!’ He replied, ‘Yes. But beware of not setting them on fire lest you burn them all down. And that is because Allāh, the Mighty and Sublime, says

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ﴾

*O you who have faith! Obey Allāh and obey the Messenger **and do not make your actions void.***

- Surah Muhammad, 47:33

The following narration regard “The Inn of Sa’ālik” is another example of the proof of Tajassum al-A’amāl and proof that one who is virtuous is in Paradise-like gardens even if he appears to be suffering and in pitiful conditions and one who is evil is burning in a Hell-like fire even if he appears to be living in a palace and enjoy the pleasures and comforts of this world.

The Inn of Sa’ālik

When the Abbāsi Khalifa al-Mutawakkil felt threatened by our 10th Imām, Imām Ali b. Muhammad al-Hādi an-Naqi (‘a), he sent his commander Yahya b. Harthama to Madina to arrest the Imām and bring him to Samarra by force.

When the Imām (‘a) arrived in Samarra, al-Mutawakkil first had him put down at a rundown place called the Inn of Sa’ālik.

Sālih b. Sa’id reports:

I visited Abu al-Hasan (Imām al-Hādi) (‘a) on the day he arrived in Samarra. I said to him, ‘May I be sacrificed for you! In every matter, they are only concerned to extinguish your light and to diminish you so that they have put you to stay in this hideous inn – the Inn of Sa’ālik.’

‘Here you are Ibn Sa’id,’ said the Imām (‘a), and he indicated with his hand. Suddenly I was amid pleasant gardens and flowing rivers and gardens in which were perfumed plants and beautiful maidens like veiled pearls. My sight became confused and my amazement was great. He (the Imām (‘a)) said to me, ‘This is where we are. This belongs to us, Ibn Sa’id. We are not in the Inn of Sa’ālik!’²⁶

²⁶ Shaykh Mufid, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, chp. 9, p. 505-6.

Something to Think About:

What are the implications of Tajassum al-A'amāl? How does a person's life, goals, ambitions and aspirations change if they firmly believe in this concept?



