

18. Hadith Al-‘Ilm, Establishing Its Authenticity

Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) claims:

قال الرافضي الثالث انه كان اعلم الناس بعد رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم

و الجواب أن اهل السنة يمنعون ذلك و يقولون ما اتفق عليه علماؤهم أن اعلم الناس بعد رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم أبو بكر ثم عمر و قد ذكر غير واحد الإجماع على أن أبا بكر اعلم الصحابة كلهم

The Rafidhi said: “The third (point) is that he (‘Ali) is the most knowledgeable of mankind after the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him.”

The answer is that the Ahl al-Sunnah reject that and say what their scholars unanimously agree upon that **the most knowledgeable of mankind after the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, was Abu Bakr, then ‘Umar**. Several people have mentioned the consensus upon the fact that Abu Bakr was the most knowledgeable of all the Sahabah altogether. [1](#)

It is one thing to make a claim. It is another for it to be valid. In exactly what way was Abu Bakr, for instance, more knowledgeable than Amir al-Muminin, *‘alaihi al-salam*? ‘Ali is the best judge of this entire *Ummah* – a far better judge than either Abu Bakr or ‘Umar. Justice dispensation, of course, requires very advanced knowledge of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Since Amir al-Muminin was a better judge than both Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, he definitely had better knowledge of the Book of Allah and the traditions of His Messenger, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*, than the duo.

Moreover, while ‘Ali had perfect knowledge of the Qur’an and Sunnah, as well as that of all previous Scriptures and Sunnahs, and issued public challenges to this effect, neither Abu Bakr nor ‘Umar even knew the meaning of “herbage” in the Book of Allah! ‘Umar, in particular, lacked knowledge of such topics in Islamic jurisprudence as *tayammum*, *kalalah*, *riba*, inheritance of the grandfather, and whether pregnancy could be only for six months or not! Yet, he was supposedly more knowledgeable than ‘Ali according to the weird logic of some folks.

Our dear Shaykh has cited a general Sunni clerical consensus about Abu Bakr's scientific superiority over the Ummah. The key question, however, is whether the Messenger of Allah was part of this consensus. If he was not, then such an agreement lacks *any* merit. Imam Ahmad (d. 241 H) records the Prophet's opinion on the matter:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا أبو أحمد ثنا خالد يعني بن طهمان عن نافع بن أبي نافع عن معقل بن يسار قال: وضأت النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم ذات يوم فقال هل لك في فاطمة رضي الله عنها تعودها فقلت نعم فقام متوكئا علي فقال أما انه سيحمل ثقلها غيرك ويكون أجرها لك قال فكأنه لم يكن على شيء حتى دخلنا على فاطمة عليها السلام فقال لها كيف تجدينك قالت والله لقد اشتد حزني واشتدت فاقتي وطال سقمي قال أبو عبد الرحمن وجدت في كتاب أبي بخط يده في هذا الحديث قال أو ما ترضين أني زوجتك أقدم أمتي سلما وأكثرهم علما وأعظمهم حلما

'Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – Abu Ahmad – Khalid b. Tahman – Nafi' b. Abi Nafi' – Ma'qil b. Yasar:

I was with the Prophet, peace be upon him, one day. Then he said, “Would you like to visit Faṭimah, may Allah be pleased with her?” I said, “Yes.” So, he stood up, leaning on me, and said, “But, someone else apart from you will soon bear its weight and its reward will be for you.” It was as though I was carrying nothing until we entered upon Faṭimah, peace be upon her. He (the Prophet) said to her, “How do you feel?” She answered, “By Allah, my grief has intensified, my want has worsened and my sickness has lasted long.” He said, “Are you not satisfied that I have married you to the one who was the first of my Ummah to accept Islam, **and the most knowledgeable of them**, and the most clement of them?”²

Imam al-Haythami (d. 807 H) states about this report:

رواه أحمد والطبراني برجال وثقوا

Ahmad and al-Tabarani recorded it **with narrators who have (all) been graded *thiqah* (trustworthy)**.³

At another place, al-Haythami again comments on the same *hadith* with the same chain:

رواه أحمد والطبراني وفيه خالد بن طهمان وثقه أبو حاتم وغيره وبقية رجاله ثقات

Ahmad and al-Tabarani narrated it. **In the chain is Khalid b. Tahman. Abu Hatim and others declared him *thiqah* (trustworthy)**. The remaining narrators are (all) *thiqah* (trustworthy).⁴

But Shaykh al-Arnau⁵ disagrees:

Its chain is *dha'if*.⁵

Strangely, al-Arnau⁵ gives no reason for his verdict, especially in the case of such a sensitive *hadith*! Meanwhile 'Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) seems to have noticed this omission. In his *al-DHa'ifah*, after quoting the exact report above, the 'Allamah states:

. (أخرجه أحمد (5/ 26) ، ومن طريقه ابن عساكر (12/ 89/ 1

قلت: وهذا إسناده ضعيف؛ رجاله ثقات؛ غير خالد بن طهمان؛ فضعه الأكترون. وقال ابن معين: "ضعيف خلط قبل موته بعشر سنين، وكان قبل ذلك ثقة".

Ahmad (5/26) recorded it, and from his route Ibn Asakir (12/89/1).

I say: **This chain is *dha'if*. Its narrators are *thiqah* (trustworthy), except Khalid b. Tahman for the majority declared him *dha'if*. Ib Ma'in said, "He is *dha'if*. He became confused ten years before his death. But, before that he was *thiqah* (trustworthy)."**⁶

So, both Imam al-Haythami and 'Allamah al-Albani agree that all the narrators except Khalid were *thiqah* (trustworthy). However, while al-Haythami maintains that even Khalid was graded unconditionally *thiqah* (trustworthy), al-Albani argues that the majority actually considered him *dha'if*. In a rather weird move, 'Allamah al-Albani makes no attempt to, at least, list out the names of some of these "majority". The best that he has offered is only one name: Yahya b. Ma'in! Interestingly, the same 'Allamah even goes ahead to refute himself elsewhere:

وأما أبو العلاء الخفاف واسمه خالد بن طهمان فهو صدوق، لكنه كان اختلط

As for Abu al-'Ala al-Khafaf, his name is Khalid b. Tahman, **and he is *saduq* (very truthful), although he became confused.**⁷

This is the correct view, according to al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) as well:

خالد بن طهمان الكوفي وهو خالد بن أبي خالد وهو أبو العلاء الخفاف مشهور بكنيته صدوق رمي بالتشيع ثم اختلط

Khalid b. Tahman al-Kufi, and he is Khalid b. Abi Khalid, and he is Abu al-'Ala al-Khafaf, well-known

with his *kunya* (nickname): **Saduq (very truthful)**, accused of Shi'ism. **He later became confused.**[8](#)

Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) has the same opinion:

خالد بن طهمان أبو العلاء الكوفي، الخفاف عن أنس، وعدة، وعنه الفريابي، وأحمد بن يونس، صدوق شيعي، ضعفه ابن معين.

Khalid b. Tahman Abu al-'Ala al-Kufi, al-Khafaf, he narrated from Anas and a number (of others) while al-Faryabi and Ahmad b. Yunus (also) narrated from him: **Saduq (very truthful)**, a Shi'i. Ibn Ma'in declared him *dha'if*.[9](#)

Apparently, Khalid was *thiqah* (trustworthy) or at least *saduq* (very truthful). However, ten years before his death, his memory faded. In line with the Sunni *hadith* principles, when a reliable narrator with a failed memory transmits a report, we first ask if the specific report under study was narrated by him before or during his illness. If there is clear evidence that he transmitted the *hadith* during his days with a sound memory, then it is accepted from him unconditionally. However, in all other cases, a further question is asked. Was his memory failure a serious one or not? The answer to that, as we will prove shortly, determines the final step. Meanwhile, 'Allamah al-Albani here gives explanations on the case of a narrator with a *serious* memory failure:

قلت: وهو ثقة لولا اختلاطه، ومثله من المختلطين له ثلاث حالات

1. أن يعرف أنه حدث بالحديث قبل الاختلاط - 1

2. أن يعرف أنه حدث به بعد الاختلاط - 2

3. أن لا يعرف عنه لا هذا ولا هذا - 3

ففي الحالة الأولى فقط يحتج به؛ دون الحاليتين الأخريين

I say: He is *thiqah* (trustworthy) despite his confusion. A confused narrator like him has three statuses:

1. To know that he narrated the *hadith* before the confusion.
3. To know that he narrated the *hadith* during the confusion.

5. Not knowing whether he narrated it before or after.

It is only in the first status that his *ahadith* are accepted as *hujjah* (authority), and not in the other two statuses.[10](#)

The first question then is: did Khalid narrate *Hadith al-‘Ilm* to Abu Ahmad before his confusion or otherwise?

There is a difference of opinion on this. For instance, Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505 H) states:

ولأحمد والطبراني من حديث معقل بن يسار وضأت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ذات يوم فقال هل لك في فاطمة
تعودها الحديث وفيه أما ترضين أن زوجتك أقدم أمتي سلما وأكثرهم علما وأعظمهم حلما وإسناده صحيح

Ahmad and al-Tabarani narrated from the *hadith* of Ma’qil b. Yasar: “I helped the Prophet, peace be upon him, to perform ablution one day. Then he said, ‘Would you like to visit Faṭimah?’” Part of the *hadith* is this: “Are you not satisfied that I have married you to the one who was the first of my Ummah to accept Islam, **and the most knowledgeable of them**, and the most clement of them?” **Its chain is *sahih*.**[11](#)

He apparently believes that Abu Ahmad heard the *hadith* from Khalid before the latter’s confusion. Meanwhile, ‘Allamah al-Albani and Shaykh al-Arnauṭ disagree. To them, he transmitted the report during the last ten years of his life. For the purpose of our research, we stick with the duo. Therefore, we will proceed in our investigation on the basis of an unproved assumption that Khalid narrated *Hadith al-‘Ilm* with a failed memory.

The next question then is: did Khalid have a serious memory problem? Imam Ibn Hibban says “no”:

خالد بن طهمان يخطئ ويهم

Khalid b. Tahman.... **He made mistakes and hallucinated.**[12](#)

That expression is used only in mild cases. Where the memory failure is serious, the *muhadithun* of the Ahl al-Sunnah employ terms like “he made mistakes *a lot*”[13](#) and “he hallucinated *a lot*”[14](#). Khalid did NOT make mistakes *a lot*, and never hallucinated *a lot*. Truly, his memory failure caused him to make mistakes, and to hallucinate. But, things were never serious. His mistakes and hallucinations were only occasional. Therefore, he still transmitted completely authentic *ahadith* during those last ten years of his lifetime. So, ‘Allamah al-Albani tells us about another narrator who was exactly like Khalid:

والجريري- واسمه سعيد بن إياس- محتج به في "الصحيحين"؛ وإن كان اختلط قبل موته بثلاث سنين، ولكن لم
يفحش اختلاطه، وكأنه لهذا احتج به ابن حبان في "صحيحه" تبعاً لـ "الصحيحين"، وأكثر هو عنه، فمثله ينبغي أن

يحتج به ما لم يظهر خطؤه، فإذا توبع أو كان له شواهد۔ كما هو الشأن في حديثه هذا۔؛ فلا يضر غرابته فيه إن شاء الله تعالى.

Al-Jurayri – and his name is Sa'id b. Iyas – IS RELIED UPON AS A *HUJJAH* IN THE TWO *SAHIHS*, despite he became confused three years before his death. HOWEVER, HIS CONFUSION WAS NOT SERIOUS. Perhaps, it was for this reason that Ibn Hibban has (also) relied upon him as a *hujjah* in his *Sahih*, copying the two *Sahihs*, and has narrated a lot from him. **In the case of a narrator like him, it is appropriate to take him as a *hujjah* where his mistake is not evident.** So, where he is supported by another narrator in narrating the same report from the same person, or there are corroborating reports – as in the case of this *hadith* – then his oddness does no harm to it *insha Allah Ta'ala*.[15](#)

Armed with this information, one can confidently say that *Hadith al-'Ilm*, as narrated by Khalid – even without support or corroboration – is at least *hasan* in itself. Imam al-Tirmidhi[16](#) and Shaykh Dr. Asad[17](#) also grade the chain of Khalid b. Tahman as *hasan*, while Imam al-Hakim maintains that his *sanad* is actually solidly *sahih*[18](#). As such, the verdicts of both 'Allamah al-Albani and Shaykh al-Arnauṭ concerning *Hadith al-'Ilm* are hasty and contrary to evidence. What is more? There also are a lot of corroborating reports testifying for the *hadith*!

'Allamah al-Hindi (d. 975 H) records one of such corroborating *ahadith*:

عن علي قال : خطب أبو بكر وعمر فاطمة إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فأبى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم عليهما فقال عمر : أنت لها يا علي قال : مالي من شيء إلا درعي وجملي وسيفي فتعرض علي ذات يوم لرسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فقال : يا علي هل لك من شيء ؟ قال : جملي ودرعي أرهنهما فزوجني رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فاطمة فلما بلغ فاطمة ذلك بكت فدخل عليها رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فقال : ما لك تبكين يا فاطمة والله أنكحتك أكثرهم علما وأفضلهم حلما وأقدمهم سلما وفي لفظ : أولهم سلما

Narrated 'Ali:

Abu Bakr and 'Umar sought the hand of Faṭimah in marriage from the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him. But, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, refused their proposals. So, 'Umar said, "You are for her, O 'Ali." He ('Ali) said, "What do I have apart from my armour, my camel and my sword?" So, 'Ali approached the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, one day and he (the Prophet) said, "O 'Ali! Do you have anything?" He replied, "My camel and my armour." I mortgaged both of them. So, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, married Faṭimah to me. When the news got to Faṭimah, she wept. As a result, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, went to her and said, "Why are you weeping, O Faṭimah? I swear by Allah, I have married you to **the most knowledgeable of them**, and the most clement of them, and the first of them to accept Islam."[19](#)

Al-Hindi comments:

ابن جرير وصححه والدولابي في الذرية الطاهرة

Ibn Jarir (al-Tabari) recorded it **AND DECLARED IT SAHIH**. Al-Dawlabi also recorded it in *al-Dhurriyah al-Tahirah*.[20](#)

Imam al-Tabarani (d. 360 H) records another:

حدثنا إسحاق بن إبراهيم الدبري عن عبد الرزاق عن وكيع بن الجراح قال أخبرني شريك عن أبي إسحاق: أن عليا رضي الله عنه لما تزوج فاطمة رضي الله عنها قالت للنبي صلى الله عليه و سلم : زوجتني أعيمش عظيم البطن فقال النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم : لقد زوجتكه وإنه لأول وإنه لأول أصحابي سلما وأكثرهم علما وأعظمهم حلما

Ishaq b. Ibrahim al-Dabri – ‘Abd al-Razzaq – Waki’ b. Al-Jarrah – Sharik – Abu Ishaq:

Verily, ‘Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, when he married Faṭimah, may Allah be pleased with her, she said to the Prophet, peace be upon him, “You married me to a bleary-eyed man with a big belly.” So, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, “I have married you to him because he was the first of my Sahabah to accept Islam, **and the most knowledgeable of them**, and the most clement of them.”[21](#)

Commenting on this report, Imam al-Haythami states:

رواه الطبراني وهو مرسل صحيح الإسناد

Al-Tabarani records it, and it is *mursal* **WITH A SAHIH CHAIN**.[22](#)

1. Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Halim b. Taymiyyah al-Harrani, Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah (Muasassat Qurtubah; 1st edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Dr. Muhammad Rashad Salim], vol. 7, p. 500
2. Abu ‘Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muasassat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu‘ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 5, p. 26, # 20322
3. Nur al-Din ‘Ali b. Abi Bakr al-Haythami, Majma’ al-Zawaid (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1412 H), vol. 9, pp. 147–148, # 14669
4. Ibid, vol. 9, p. 123, # 14595
5. Abu ‘Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muasassat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu‘ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 5, p. 26, # 20322
6. Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh al-Albani, Silsilah al-Ahadith al-ḥa’ifah wa al-Mawdu’ah wa Athariyah al-Sayyiah fi al-Ummah (Riyadh: Dar al-Ma’arif; 1st edition, 1412 H), vol. 10, p. 535, # 4898
7. Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. ‘Adam al-Ashqudri al-Albani, Silsilah al-Ahadith al-ḥa’ihah wa Shayhun min Fiqhiyah wa Fawaidihah (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma’arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’; 1st edition, 1415 H), vol. 4, p. 630, # 1979
8. Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Hajar al-‘Asqalani, Taqrib al-Tahdhib (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Ata], vol. 1, p. 259, # 1649
9. Shams al-Din Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. al-Dhahabi al-Dimashqi, al-Kashif fi Ma’rifat Man Lahu Riwayat fi al-Kutub al-Sittah (Jeddah: Dar al-Qiblah li al-Thaqafat al-Islamiyyah; 1st edition, 1413 H), vol. 1, p. 365, # 1330
10. Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh al-Albani, Silsilah al-Ahadith al-ḥa’ifah wa al-Mawdu’ah wa Athariyah al-Sayyiah fi al-Ummah (Riyadh: Dar al-Ma’arif; 1st edition, 1412 H), vol. 12, p. 991, # 5995

- [11.](#) Abu Hamid Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah), vol. 3, p. 273
- [12.](#) Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad al-Tamimi al-Busti, *Kitab al-Thiqat* (Hyderabad: Majlis Dairat al-Ma'arif al-Uthmaniyyah; 1st edition, 1393 H), vol. 6, p. 257
- [13.](#) See for instance the case of al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. Al-Aswad al-'Ijli, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Kufi in Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Taqrib al-Tahdhib* (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata], vol. 1, p. 216, # 1336
- [14.](#) See the case of 'Ata b. Abi Muslim, Abu 'Uthman al-Khurasani in Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Taqrib al-Tahdhib* (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata], vol. 1, p. 676, # 4616
- [15.](#) Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. 'Adam al-Ashqudri al-Albani, *Silsilah al-Ahadith al-'Ahihah wa Shayhun min Fiqihah wa Fawaidihah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'; 1st edition, 1415 H), vol. 7, p. 239, # 3089
- [16.](#) Abu 'Isa Muhammad b. 'Isa al-Sulami al-Tirmidhi, *al-Jami' al-'Ahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani], vol. 4, p. 651, # 2484
- [17.](#) Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Darimi, *Sunan* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi; 1st edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Husayn Salim Asad], vol. 2, p. 550, # 3425
- [18.](#) Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *al-Mustadrak 'ala al-'Ahihayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata], vol. 4, p. 217, # 7422
- [19.](#) 'Ali b. Husam al-Din al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal fi Sunan al-Aqwal wa Af'al* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah; 1989 H), vol. 13, p. 98, # 36370
- [20.](#) Ibid
- [21.](#) Abu al-Qasim Sulayman b. Ahmad b. Ayub al-'Abarani, *Mu'jam al-Kabir* (Mosul: Maktabah al-'Ulum wa al-Hukm; 2nd edition, 1404 H) [annotator: Hamadi b. 'Abd al-Majid al-Salafi], vol. 1, p. 94, # 156
- [22.](#) Nur al-Din 'Ali b. Abi Bakr al-Haythami, *Majma' al-Zawaid* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1412 H), vol. 9, p. 124, # 14596

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