

8) Hadith Al-Khalifatayn: The Messenger Named His Successors (Part 1)

Imam al-Fasawi (d. 277 H) records:

حدثنا عبيد الله قال: أخبرنا شريك عن الركين عن قاسم بن حسان عن زيد بن ثابت قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: إني تارك فيكم خليفتي كتاب الله عز وجل وعترتي أهل بيتي وإنهما لن يتفرقا حتى يردا علي الحوض.

‘Ubayd Allah – Sharik – al-Rukayn – Qasim b. Hassan – Zayd b. Thabit:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “I am leaving behind over you MY KHALIFAH: the Book of Allah the Almighty and my offspring, my Ahl al-Bayt. Verily, both shall never separate from each other until they meet me at the Lake-Fount.”¹

Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) states about the first narrator:

عبيد الله بن موسى بن أبي المختار باذام العبسي الكوفي أبو محمد ثقة كان يتشيع

‘Ubayd Allah b. Musa b. Abi al-Mukhtar al-‘Ubsi al-Kufi, Abu Muhammad: Thiqah (trustworthy), he was a Shi’i.²

Concerning the second narrator, Sharik, Imam al-Mizzi (d. 742 H) submits:

استشهد به البخاري في "الجامع" وروى له في "رفع اليدين في الصلاة" وغيره. وروى له مسلم في "المتابعات"، واحتج به الباقر.

Al-Bukhari uses him as a witness in al-Jami’ (i.e. Sahih al-Bukhari), and narrates from him under the Chapter “Raising both Hands in Salat” and others. Muslim too narrates from him in mutaba’at

(supporting narrations), and others rely upon him as a hujjah.[3](#)

Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) makes a similar statement about him:

قلت: استشهد به البخاري، وخرج له مسلم متابعة، واحتج به النسائي، وغيره.

I (al-Dhahabi) say: Al-Bukhari uses him as a witness, and Muslim narrates from him in mutaba'at. Al-Nasai and others rely upon him as a hujjah.[4](#)

So, the overwhelming majority of classical Sunni hadith scientists considered him a hujjah in his own right. Meanwhile, Imam al-Hakim (d. 403 H) has a completely different view of Imam Muslim's (d. 261 H) treatment of Sharik. For instance, he states about a riwayat:

وله شاهد على شرط مسلم فقد احتج بشريك بن عبد الله النخعي

It has a shahid (witness), which is upon the standard of Muslim, for he (Muslim) has relied upon Sharik b. 'Abd Allah al-Nakha'i as a hujjah.[5](#)

He repeats elsewhere:

وقد احتج مسلم بشريك بن عبد الله وهو أن يحتج به

(Imam) Muslim has relied upon Sharik b. 'Abd Allah as a hujjah, and he is to be relied upon as a hujjah.[6](#)

And, again:

وهو غريب صحيح فإن مسلما قد احتج بشريك بن عبد الله

It is gharib sahih, for Muslim has relied upon Sharik b. 'Abd Allah as a hujjah.[7](#)

In simpler terms, the ahadith of Sharik are sahih upon the standard of Imam Muslim, according to al-Hakim!

Al-Hafiz, on his part, gives us some additional information about Sharik, which may explain the reluctance of al-Bukhari (d. 256 H) – and possibly Imam Muslim too – concerning his reports:

شريك بن عبد الله النخعي الكوفي القاضي بواسط ثم الكوفة أبو عبد الله صدوق يخطئ كثيرا تغير حفظه منذ ولي القضاء بالكوفة وكان عادلا فاضلا عابدا وشديدا على أهل البدع

Sharik b. ‘Abd Allah al-Nakha’i al-Kufi al-Qadi, (resided) first at Wasit and then Kufah, Abu ‘Abd Allah: Saduq (very truthful), made a lot of mistakes. His memory deteriorated since he became the judge in Kufah. He was just, excellent, a great worshipper of Allah, and he was severe against the people of bid’ah.⁸

He developed a memory problem when he became the judge of Kufah. Before this period, he was a completely accurate narrator. However, Imam Ibn ‘Adi (d. 365 H) makes an important observation about him in this regard, which must be taken into consideration:

والغالب على حديثه الصحة والاستواء والذي يقع في حديثه من النكرة إنما أتى فيه من سوء حفظه

The overwhelming majority of his ahadith are sahih and accurate (from his shuyukh). As for the repugnancy in his ahadith, that occurred only due to his poor memory.⁹

This puts things into their proper perspective. Despite his memory problems, most of his ahadith are still sahih and accurate. So, when it is said that he made “a lot” of mistakes, this was relative. His many mistakes affected only a small minority of his ahadith. To get a clearer picture, this is what Imam al-‘Ijli (d. 261 H) states:

شريك بن عبد الله النخعي القاضي كوفي ثقة وكان حسن الحديث وكان أروى الناس عنه إسحاق بن يوسف الأزرق الواسطي سمع منه تسعة آلاف حديث

Sharik b. ‘Abd Allah al-Nakha’i, the judge, Kufi: Thiqah (trustworthy), and he was hasan al-hadith (i.e. his ahadith are hasan). The one who narrated most from him was Ishaq b. Yusuf al-Azraq al-Wasiti. He heard 9000 (nine thousand) ahadith from him.¹⁰

Apparently, Sharik was indeed a very prolific narrator. He narrated 9000 ahadith to Ishaq alone! How many more then did he transmit to others? Obviously, there were more! Meanwhile, let us assume – for the sake of argument – that Sharik narrated only those 9000 throughout his lifetime. So, in what percentage of them did he make mistakes due to his poor memory? Imam Ibn ‘Adi records the answer:

حدثنا عمر بن سنان سمعت إبراهيم بن سعيد الجوهري يقول أخطأ شريك في أربع مائة حديث

‘Umar b. Sinan narrated to us that he heard Ibrahim b. Sa’d al-Jawhari saying: “Sharik made mistakes in 400 (four hundred) ahadith.”¹¹

In other words, Sharik made mistakes – due to his poor memory – in 4 out of every 90 ahadith; and he authentically and accurately transmitted 86 out of every 90 ahadith from his shuyukh. For Allah’s sake, is this enough to call for his head and abandon all his ahadith as some from the Ahl al-Sunnah have

done? What are all these bloated statements about him then?

This revelation obviously lays the exaggerations and the exaggerated positions concerning him to rest. His case was not as serious as some make it out to be. No wonder, most of the classical Sunni hadith collectors relied upon him as a hujjah in their books. Imam al-Dhahabi too concludes about him:

قلت: كان شريك حسن الحديث إماما فقيها ومحدثا مكثرا ليس هو في الاتقان كحماد بن زيد. وقد استشهد به البخاري وخرج له مسلم متابعة. ووثقه يحيى بن معين ... وحديثه من أقسام الحسن

I (al-Dhahabi) say: Sharik was hasan al-hadith (i.e. his ahadith are hasan). He was an Imam, a jurist, a prolific hadith narrator. He was not as precise as Hammad b. Zayd. Al-Bukhari has used him as a witness, Muslim has narrated mutaba'at reports from him, and Yahya b. Ma'in declared him thiqah (trustworthy) ... His ahadith are in the hasan categories. [12](#)

Imam al-'Ijli has a similar submission:

شريك بن عبد الله النخعي القاضي كوفي ثقة وكان حسن الحديث

Sharik b. 'Abd Allah al-Nakha'i, the judge, Kufi: Thiqah (trustworthy), and he was hasan al-hadith (i.e. his ahadith are hasan). [13](#)

Imam al-Haythami (d. 807 H) also says:

رواه كله أحمد ورجال الروایتين رجال الصحيح غير شريك بن عبد الله النخعي وهو حسن الحديث

It is entirely recorded by Ahmad, and the narrators of the two reports are narrators of the Sahih, except Sharik b. 'Abd Allah al-Nakha'i who is hasan al-hadith (i.e. his ahadith are hasan). [14](#)

So, Sharik was a thiqah (trustworthy) narrator who made many mistakes in 4 out of every 90 of his ahadith. He was taken as a hujjah by most of the classical Sunni hadith collectors, including possibly Imam Muslim. However, due to his errors, his ahadith are only of the hasan grading, according to some top Sunni hadith scientists. In our humble view, making mistakes in 4 out of every 90 ahadith is not enough to degrade his ahadith from the level of sahih reports or to reject them altogether as some Sunnis do!

The third narrator, al-Rukayn (previously mistakenly mis-transliterated as al-Rakin), is thiqah (trustworthy), as quoted by Imam Ibn Shahin (d. 385 H):

الركين بن الربيع ثقة قاله أحمد

Al-Rukayn b. al-Rabi': Thiqah (trustworthy). Ahmad said so. [15](#)

Imam Ibn Hibban (d. 354 H) has also included his name among the thiqah (trustworthy) narrators. [16](#) More interestingly, al-Rukayn is relied upon as a hujjah by Imam Muslim in his Sahih. [17](#) This, apparently, is also why Shaykh al-Arnaut has graded the chain of an independent report by al-Rukayn as being "sahih upon the standard of (Imam) Muslim". [18](#)

Lastly, the fourth narrator is al-Qasim. He too is thiqah (trustworthy). Imam Ibn Shahin again states:

القاسم بن حسان الذي روى عن زيد بن ثابت ثقة قاله أحمد بن صالح

Al-Qasim b. Hassan [19](#) who narrated from Zayd b. Thabit is thiqah (trustworthy). Ahmad b. Salih said so. [20](#)

He is equally mentioned by Imam Ibn Hibban among the thiqah (trustworthy) narrators. [21](#) Besides, Imam al-Ijli further submits:

القاسم بن حسان كوفي تابعي ثقة

Al-Qasim b. Hassan, a Kufi Tabi'i: Thiqah (trustworthy). [22](#)

Imam al-Dhahabi also says:

القاسم بن حسان العامري، عن زيد بن ثابت، وجماعة، وعنه الركين بن الربيع، والوليد بن قيس، وثق.

Al-Qasim b. Hasan al-'Amiri: He narrated from Zayd b. Thabit and some others, and al-Rukayn b. al-Rabi' and al-Walid b. Qays narrated from him. He was declared thiqah (trustworthy). [23](#)

In addition, both al-Hakim and al-Dhahabi have declared a sanad containing the name of al-Rukayn b. al-Rabi' narrating independently from al-Qasim b. Hassan – who, in turn, also narrated independently from his shaykh – to be sahih. [24](#) Imam Ibn Khuzaymah (d. 311 H), as well, has relied upon this chain in his Sahih:

وحدثني الركين بن الربيع عن القاسم بن حسان عن زيد بن ثابت عن النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم

Al-Rukayn b. al-Rabi' – al-Qasim b. Hassan – Zayd b. Thabit – the Prophet, peace be upon him. [25](#)

Obviously, Ibn Khuzaymah considers them both to be thiqah (trustworthy) or, at least, saduq (very truthful). Shaykh Dr. al-A'zami, in his tahqiq of the above chain, comments:

Its chain is sahih²⁶

So, all the narrators are thiqah (trustworthy), and the chain is fully connected. Therefore, the sanad of Hadith al-Khalifatayn is sahih, or at least hasan.

In the hadith, the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi, explicitly identified the Qur’an and his offspring to be “my khalifah.” This means that they are his khalifahs. The word “khalifah” – though singular – may be used to refer to a single individual, or to a group, as Imam al-Raghib al-Isfahani (d. 501 H) explains:

والخليفة يقال للواحد والجمع ، وهاهنا [هو] جمع ، فإن الخليفة لم يرد به آدم عليه السلام فقط ، بل أريد هو وصالحو أولاده ، فهم خلفاؤه

The word khalifah is used to refer to a single person or to a group. Here (under Qur’an 2:30), it is plural. This is because the word Khalifah (there) does not refer to Adam, peace be upon him, alone. Rather, it refers to him and the righteous ones among his offspring. So, they are His (i.e. Allah’s) Khalifahs.²⁷

Of course, the implication is the same – whether “khalifah” (singular) is used, or “khulafa” (plural).

Besides, the khalifah is the one who takes the place of another one, who is physically absent for one reason or another. Imam Ibn al-Athir (d. 606 H), the grand Sunni hadith lexicographer, submits:

الخليفة من يقوم مقام الذاهب ويسد مسده

The khalifah is whoever stands in the position of the one who is physically absent and substitutes for him.²⁸

So, it is the Qur’an and the Prophet’s offspring that have been “left behind” by him to stand in his position, and to substitute for him, over his Ummah after him.

1. Abu Yusuf Ya’qub b. Sufyan al-Fasawi, al-Ma’rifah wa al-Tarikh (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah) [annotator: Khalil al-Mansur], vol. 1, p. 294
2. 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. 640, # 4361
3. Jamal al-Din Abu al-Hajjaj Yusuf al-Mizzi, Tahdhib al-Kamal fi Asma al-Rijal (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah; 2nd edition, 1413 H), vol. 12, p. 475, # 2736
4. Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Uthman al-Dhahabi, Tarikh al-Islam wa Wafiyat al-Mashahir wa al-A’lam (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi; 1st edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salam Tadmuri], vol. 11, p. 169
5. Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Ata], vol. 1, p. 65, # 45
6. Ibid, vol. 1, p. 193, # 377

- [7.](#) Ibid, vol. 1, p. 539, # 1412
- [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. 417, # 2795
- [9.](#) Abu Ahmad ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Adi al-Jirjani, al-Kamil fi Dhu’afa al-Rijal (Dar al-Fikr li al-Taba’at wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’; 3rd edition, 1409 H), vol. 4, p. 22, # 888/8
- [10.](#) Abu al-Hasan Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allah b. Salih al-‘Ijli al-Kufi, Ma’rifat al-Thiqat (Madinah: Maktabah al-Dar; 1st edition, 1405 H), vol. 1, p. 453, # 727
- [11.](#) Abu Ahmad ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Adi al-Jirjani, al-Kamil fi Dhu’afa al-Rijal (Dar al-Fikr li al-Taba’at wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’; 3rd edition, 1409 H), vol. 4, p. 8, # 888/8
- [12.](#) Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Uthman al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-Huffaz (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1419 H) [annotator: Zakariyyah ‘Umayrat], vol. 1, p. 170
- [13.](#) Abu al-Hasan Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allah b. Salih al-‘Ijli al-Kufi, Ma’rifat al-Thiqat (Madinah: Maktabah al-Dar; 1st edition, 1405 H), vol. 1, p. 453, # 727
- [14.](#) Nur al-Din ‘Ali b. Abi Bakr al-Haythami, Majma’ al-Zawaid (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1412 H), vol. 9, p. 164, # 14712
- [15.](#) Abu Hafis ‘Umar b. Shahin, Tarikh Asma al-Thiqat (Dar al-Salafiyyah; 1st edition, 1404 H), p. 88, # 369
- [16.](#) Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad al-Tamimi al-Busti, Kitab al-Thiqat (Hyderabad: Majlis Dairat al-Ma’arif al-‘Uthmaniyyah; 1st edition, 1398 H), vol. 4, p. 243
- [17.](#) See Abu al-Husayn Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi, Sahih Muslim (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-‘Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Fuad ‘Abd al-Baqi], vol. 3, p. 1685, # 2136 (11)
- [18.](#) Abu ‘Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muassasat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu’ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 4, p. 69, # 16696
- [19.](#) Previously mistakenly mis-transliterated as al-Qasim b. Hisan.
- [20.](#) Abu Hafis ‘Umar b. Shahin, Tarikh Asma al-Thiqat (Dar al-Salafiyyah; 1st edition, 1404 H), p. 189, # 1148
- [21.](#) Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad al-Tamimi al-Busti, Kitab al-Thiqat (Hyderabad: Majlis Dairat al-Ma’arif al-‘Uthmaniyyah; 1st edition, 1398 H), vol. 7, p. 335
- [22.](#) Abu al-Hasan Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allah b. Salih al-‘Ijli al-Kufi, Ma’rifat al-Thiqat (Madinah: Maktabah al-Dar; 1st edition, 1405 H), vol. 2, p. 210, # 1495
- [23.](#) 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. 2, p. 127, # 4506
- [24.](#) Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Ata], vol. 4, p. 216, # 7418
- [25.](#) Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Ishaq b. Khuzaymah al-Sulami al-Naysaburi, Sahih (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami; 1390 H) [annotators: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Dr. Muhammad Mustafa al-A’zami], vol. 2, p. 294, # 1345
- [26.](#) Ibid
- [27.](#) Abu al-Qasim al-Husayn b. Muhammad b. al-Mufadhhal al-Raghib al-Isfahani, Tafsir al-Raghib al-Isfahani wa Muqadimmatuh (Kulliyat al-Adab, Jami’ah Tanta; 1st edition, 1412 H) [annotator: Dr. Muhammad ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Basyuni], vol. 1, p. 139
- [28.](#) Ibn al-Athir, Abu Sa’adat al-Mubarak b. Muhammad al-Jazari, al-Nihayah fi Gharib al-Hadith wa al-Athar (Qum: Muassasat Isma’iliyyan) [annotator: Mahmud Muhammad al-Tanahi and Tahir Ahmad al-Zawi], vol. 2, p. 69

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/hadith-al-thaqalayn-deposed-will-last-prophet-humanity-toyib-olawuyi/8-hadith-al-khalifatayn#comment-0>