

## Concerning Two Divergent Traditions

Says the Shaykh, the mercy of Allah be upon him: Our belief concerning the authentic reports (*akhbar*) related from the Imams is that they accord with the Book of Allah, being in agreement with its meaning and not divergent from it, because they are the result of inspiration from Allah, Glory be to Him. If they were derived from (someone) other than Allah, they would surely have been divergent.

The outward form of the reports differ only on account of certain reasons. For instance, (in one report) the expiation for *zihar* is laid down as the manumission of a slave; in another report we have the performance of fasts for two consecutive months; and in a third report we have the feeding of sixty destitute persons. Now all these are correct.

Fasting is prescribed for him who has no slave to free; and feeding (the poor) is prescribed for him who is unable to fast. It has also been reported that he should give *sadaqa* (charity) to the extent that he can, and this applies to him who has not the means to feed (sixty persons).

And among (such traditions) are those in which one takes the place of the other. For instance, what has been related regarding the expiation of an oath:

***“. . . the feeding of ten of the needy ones with the average of that wherewith ye feed your own folk, or the clothing of them, or the liberation of a slave, and he who findeth not (the wherewithal to do so), he must fast for three days.” (Qur'an 5:89).***

Now when three traditions are reported concerning the expiation of an oath – firstly, feeding; secondly, clothing; and thirdly, the manumission of a slave – they are regarded by the ignorant as differing from one another. In fact they are not divergent, but each one of these is alternative to the other.

And among the reports handed down are some which are due to *taqiya*.

It is related on the authority of Sulaym bin Qays al-Hilali that he said to the Prince of Believers, peace be on him: Verily I have heard from Salman, Miqdad and Abu Dharr some explanations of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet different from what are generally known to the people.<sup>1</sup> And I have heard from you a corroboration of what I heard from them.

And I know that there are many things current among the people regarding the explanation of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, to which you (the Imams) are opposed, and you assert that all that is false. Is it possible that the people attribute a lie<sup>2</sup> to the Prophet of Allah deliberately, and give explanations according to their own opinions?

(The reporter) says: And 'Ali, on whom be peace, said: You have asked (a question), so now hearken to its reply. Verily the people at large possess the truth and the falsehood; the abrogating (*nasikh*) and the abrogated (*mansukh*) verses; the special and the general; the definite (*muhkam*) and the ambiguous (*mutashabih*); the well remembered (*hifz*) and the doubtful (*wahm*).

Even in the lifetime of the Prophet, on whom be peace, people attributed to the Prophet things which were not true, until (matters reached such a stage that) he rose to address the people and said: O people, the number of perjurers against me has increased; now he who speaks a falsehood against me intentionally, let him prepare<sup>3</sup> for himself a place in Hell. Thereafter falsehoods were told against him after his death.

All traditions have come to you from one of four sources, and there is not a fifth. First, the hypocrite (*munafiq*) professing the faith, simulating Islam,<sup>4</sup> who does not regard it as a sin, and does not care if he speaks an untruth against the Prophet intentionally. Now if people knew that he was a mendacious hypocrite, they would neither have accepted anything from him, nor would they have considered him truthful.

But they said: Here is a man who associated with the Messenger of Allah<sup>5</sup> and who saw and heard him. Therefore they accepted (traditions) from him, not knowing his real attitude. And Allah has given tidings regarding the hypocrites and described them with clarity. For He says, Great is He as a Speaker:

***“And when thou seest them, their figures please thee; and if they speak thou givest ear unto their speech. (They are) as though they were blocks of wood in striped cloaks” (Qur'an 63:4).<sup>6</sup>***

They (the hypocrites) then split up in factions after the Prophet, and found favor<sup>7</sup> with the leaders of destruction and inviters towards the Fire, by means of deception and falsehood and calumny. They assigned them offices,<sup>8</sup> enjoyed the wealth of the world through them and bore them (hypocrites) upon the necks of people. For people, generally – save those whom Allah has protected<sup>9</sup> – follow the kings and the worldly path. This is the first of the four types.

(The second is) the man who hears something from the Prophet but does not remember it precisely. He then falls into an error concerning it, without intentionally telling a lie. Now this (tradition) is with him; he professes it, acts according to it, and relates it to others and says: I heard it from the Messenger of Allah. If people knew that this was a mistake, they would not accept it, and if he himself knew that it was an error, he would certainly have cast it off.

The third is the man who hears the Prophet commanding a certain act, which, unknown to him, was later

forbidden. Or (he hears the Prophet) forbidding an act, which was later, unknown to him, permitted. Hence he remembers the abrogated, but not the abrogating (command). Now if he knew that it was abrogated, he would surely have rejected it; and similarly if the people knew that what was heard from the relator was an abrogated command, they too would surely have rejected it.

The fourth is the man who does not give the lie to Allah and His Prophet, because he hates falsehood and fears Allah the Mighty and Glorious, and honors the Messenger of Allah. He does not forget it, but commits to memory precisely what he hears. So he brings forward what he has heard, without any increase or decrease. If he knew the abrogating and the abrogated (command), he would act in accordance with the abrogating and would reject the abrogated (injunction).

Now the commands of the Prophet, like those of the Qur'an, are abrogating (*nasikh*) and abrogated (*mansukh*), special (*khass*) and general (*'am*), definite (*muhkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashabih*). And there may be words related from the Prophet bearing two meanings, a general and a particular one, exactly as in the case of the Qur'an. Allah the Mighty and Glorious says in His Book:

***“And whatsoever the Messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth, abstain (from it)” (Qur'an 59:7).***

Now what Allah and His Messenger mean [10](#) remained ambiguous to those who did not know. Not all the Companions of the Prophet questioned or tried to understand him, for among them were those who neither questioned, nor understood him; [11](#) for Allah forbade them from questioning when He said:

***“O ye who believe! Ask not of things which, if they were made known to you, would trouble you; but if ye ask of them when the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be made known unto you. Allah pardoneth this, for Allah is Forgiving, Clement. A folk before you asked (for such disclosures) and they disbelieved therein” (Qur'an 5: 101–102).***

So they were forbidden from questioning to such an extent that they were glad if a desert Arab would come and ask, and they would listen.

I ('Ali) used to visit the Messenger of Allah, habitually, [12](#) every night and every day in strict privacy, when he used to answer me concerning what I asked, and I used to go about him wherever he went. The companions of the Messenger of Allah knew (full well) that he did not act in this manner with anyone else. And this (private conversation) would often take place in my house.

And whenever I would visit him at some of his resting-places, he would arrange for being alone with me and ask his wives to leave, so that no one would remain except he and I. And when he would come to me in private, he would ask everyone to withdraw except Fatima or one of my two sons, and when questioned he would answer me. And when I would remain silent and my questions would be exhausted, he would begin himself.

So that nothing was revealed to the Prophet of the verses of the Qur'an, or taught to him by Allah, Exalted is He, concerning what was lawful and what was forbidden, command or prohibition, obedience or sin, things past or future but he would teach it to me and make me read it, or dictate it to me and I would write it down in my own hand. He would explain to me its true meaning (*ta'wil*), and its apparent and hidden significance (*zahir, batin*), and I would commit it to memory and would not forget even a letter of it.

Whenever the Messenger of Allah used to instruct me, he would place his hand on my chest and say: O Lord! Fill his mind (*qalb*) with knowledge, understanding, light, forbearance and belief (*iman*); teach him and do not let him remain ignorant; cause him to remember and not to forget. I said to him one day: May my father and mother be sacrificed for you, O Messenger of Allah!

Do you fear forgetfulness (on my part)? And he said: O my brother! I fear neither forgetfulness nor ignorance on your part. Allah the Mighty and Glorious has informed me that he has accepted (my prayers) concerning you ('Ali) and your associates, who will come after you.

And I said: O Messenger of Allah, who are my associates? And he said: Those, obedience to whom has been coupled by Allah, with obedience to Himself and obedience to me (Prophet). And I said: Who are they, O Messenger of Allah? And he said: They concerning whom Allah has said:

***“O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of you who are in authority”***  
***(Qur'an 4:59).***

And I said: O Messenger of Allah, who are they? He said: They are the *awsia'* (executors) who will be executors after me. They will not separate until they come to me at my Pond (*hawd*), rightly-guiding and rightly-guided. The deceit of those that deceive will not injure them, nor the desertion of those that desert them. [13](#)

They (the Imams) are with the Qur'an, and the Qur'an is with them; they will not forsake it (the Qur'an) and it will not forsake them. By them (Imams) will my community (*umma*) be guided, and by them will they be benefited, [14](#) and by them will calamity be averted, and through them will their prayers be heard.

And I ('Ali) said: O Messenger of Allah, name them to me He said: “You, O 'Ali, then this, my son” – and he put his hand on the head of Hasan. “And then this, my son” – and he put his hand on the head of Husayn. “Then your namesake, O brother, he is the leader of the devotees; then his son, named Muhammad, the Opener (*baqir*) of my knowledge, and the treasurer of the inspiration of Allah. O brother, 'Ali (Zaynu'l-Abidin) will be born in your lifetime, so give my greetings to him. And Muhammad (al-Baqir) will be born in your lifetime, O Husayn, so give my greetings to him.

And then Ja'far (as-Sadiq), then Musa (al-Kazim) bin Ja'far, then 'Ali (ar-Rida) bin Musa, then Muhammad (at-Taqi) bin 'Ali, then 'Ali (an-Naqi) bin Muhammad, then Hasan az-Zaki (al-'Askari) bin 'Ali, then he, whose name is my name and whose color is my color – the upholder of the Command of

Allah (*al-qa'im bi-amri'l-lah*) in the final era, the Righteous Guide, **who will fill the earth with justice and equity, just as now it is full of oppression and wrong.** [15](#)

I swear by Allah, O Sulaym, [16](#) that people will swear allegiance to him between the Pillar (*Rukn*) and the Place (*Maqam*), [17](#) and I know the names of the people who will support him and I know their tribes. [18](#)

Sulaym bin Qays said: Later on I met Hasan and Husayn at Medina after Mu'awiya began to reign, and I related them this story from their father. Both of them said: You speak the truth. The Prince of Believers had related this story to you, while we were sitting, and we remembered this from the Messenger of Allah as you relate it, and not a word has been added or subtracted. [19](#)

And Sulaym bin Qays said: I then met 'Ali bin al-Husayn (Zaynu'l-'Abidin), on whom be peace, and his son Muhammad al-Baqir was with him, and I related to him what I had heard from his father, and he ('Ali) said [20](#): I heard it from the Prince of Believers, who in turn had it from the Messenger of Allah, while he was ill and I was a boy. Then Abu Ja'far (Muhammad al-Baqir) said: And when my grandfather gave me the Prophet's greetings I was a boy.

Aban bin Abi 'Ayyash said: I related the whole of this story, as related by Sulaym bin al-Qays al-Hilali, to Imam 'Ali bin al-Husayn, and he said: He (Sulaym) spoke the truth. Jabir bin 'Abdullah al-Ansari happened to meet my son, Muhammad al-Baqir, while he was attending school, and he kissed him and gave him the greeting of the Messenger of Allah.

Abin bin Abi 'Ayyash said: I went to the Hajj after the death of Imam 'Ali bin al-Husayn (Zaynu'l-'Abidin), and I met Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, and I related to him the whole of this story, as related by Sulaym bin Qays, and his eyes filled with tears [21](#) and he said: Sulaym, may the mercy of Allah be upon him, spoke the truth.

Sulaym had come to my father after my grandfather al-Husayn was slain, and I was present when he related this story exactly in the same manner and my father said to him: By Allah, you have spoken the truth, O Sulaym. My father had related to me this story from the Prince of Believers.

(Says the Shaykh Abu Ja'far:) In the Book of Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, there are verses which the ignorant will find inconsistent with, and contrary to, one another. But in fact they are not so. For instance, His saying, Exalted is He:

***“So this day We have forgotten them even as they forgot the meeting of this (their) day” (Qur'an 7:51)*** and His saying: ***“They forgot Allah, so He hath forgotten them” (Qur'an 9:67).***

Thereafter He says: ***“And thy Lord is not forgetful” (Qur'an 19:64).*** [22](#)

And similarly His saying:

***“On the day when the Spirit and the angels will stand arrayed, they speak not, saving him whom***

***the Beneficent alloweth and who speaketh right “ (Qur'an 78:38).<sup>23</sup>***

And the like of His saying:

***“Then on the Day of Resurrection ye will deny each other and curse each other” (Qur'an 29:25),***  
and His saying:

***“Lo! that is the very truth; the wrangling of the dwellers in the Fire” (Qur'an 38:64).***

And then He will say:

***“Contend not in My presence, when I had already proffered unto you the warning” (Qur'an 50:28).***

And His saying, Exalted is He:

***“This day We seal up their mouths, and their hands shall speak out and their feet shall bear witness as to what they (their possessors) used to earn” (Qur'an 36:65).***

And the like of His saying:

***“That day will faces be resplendent, looking forward toward their Lord” (Qur'an 75:22-23).***

Then says the Glorious and Mighty:

***“The eyes see Him not, but He seeth the eyes<sup>24</sup>. He is the Subtle, the Aware” (Qur'an 6:103).***

And His saying:

***“And it is not (vouchsafed) to any mortal that Allah should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation or from behind a veil” (Qur'an 42:51).***

And then He says:

***“And Allah spoke directly unto Moses” (Qur'an 4:164).***

And He says:

***“And their Lord called them, (saying): Did I not forbid you from that tree . . .” (Qur'an 7:22).***

And the like of His saying, Exalted is He:

***“And not an atom's weight in the earth or in the sky escapeth your Lord, nor what is less than that or greater than that, but it is (written) in a clear book” (Qur'an 10:61).***

And then He says:

***“(And Allah) will not look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He assoil<sup>25</sup> them “ (Qur’an 3:77).***

And then He says:

***“Nay, but surely on that day they will be precluded<sup>26</sup> from (the mercy of) their Lord” (Qur’an 83: 15).***

And the like of His saying:

***“Have ye taken security from Him Who is in the Heaven that He will not cause the earth to swallow you when lo! it is convulsed” (Qur’an 67: 16).***

And His saying:

***“The Beneficent One, Who is established on the Throne” (Qur’an 20:5).***

Then He says:

***“He is Allah in the heavens and the earth. He knoweth both your secret and your utterance, and He knoweth what ye earn” (Qur’an 6:3).***

And He says:

***“There is no secret conference of three but He is their fourth, nor of five but He is their sixth, nor of less than that or more, but He is with them wheresoever they may be” (Qur’an 58:7).***

And He says, Exalted is He:

***“We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (Qur’an 50: 16).***

And Allah says:

***“Wait they, indeed, for nothing less than that the angels should come to them, or thy Lord should come, or that there should come one of the portents from thy Lord!” (Qur’an 6: 158).***

And the like of His saying:

***“Say: the angel of death, who hath charge concerning you, will gather you” (Qur’an 32: 11).***

And then He says:

***“Our messengers (i.e. angels) receive him and they neglect not”<sup>27</sup> (Qur’an 6:61).***

And He says:

**“Those whom the angels cause to die. (Qur'an 16:28,32); and says Allah, Exalted is He: “Allah receiveth (men's) souls at the time of their death” (Qur'an 39:42).**

And the likes of these verses abound in the Qur'an, concerning which one of the *zindiqs*<sup>28</sup> asked the Prince of Believers, on whom be peace and blessings, and he explained the consistency of their significations and elucidated to him their real meaning (*ta'wil*).

I have extracted the tradition (*khobar*) concerning this, supporting it by a commentary, in the *Kitabu't-Tawhid*,<sup>29</sup> and I shall write a book specially concerning it by His Will and Help, Exalted is He.

1. Lit. "which are not in the hands of the people".
2. Reading with D افترى الناس يكذبون الخ; and not as N أفترى يكذبون الخ.
3. Reading with N فليتبوءء; D err. فينبوه.
4. Reading with N متصنع not as in D متضع.
5. Reading with D هذا من صحب رسول الله ص.
6. *خُشِبُ مُسَدَّةً* is an expression which has been variously explained. Pickthall adds a variant to the above: "propped up blocks of wood", which is more literal. Rodwell has "Like timbers are they leaning against a wall". This verse was revealed in reference to `Abdu'l-lah and other hypocrites, who had fine strong bodies and eloquent tongues and sat reclining in the company of the Prophet.
7. Reading with D فَتَقَرَّبُوا.
8. Reading with D العَمَّال and not as in N الاعمال.
9. 326. N من عَصَمَةُ الله; D err. من عصمة الله.
10. N ما نهى الله; D ما عنى الله.
11. Reading with D لأن فيهم قوماً ما كانوا يستلونه الخ; N لأن فيهم قوما كانوا يستلونه.
12. Read دُخِلَتْ; not as in D دَخَلَتْ.
13. Reading with N خذلان من خذلهم.
14. Lit. "will receive rain".
15. N كما ملئت قبله ظلماً و جوراً الخ. BHA, no. 211, p.79. compare Fyzee, *Ismaili Law of Wills*, 67 – 68. See p. 86 above.
16. *Kashf, Rijal* (Bombay ed.), 68 – 69.
17. By rukn is meant the Black Stone and magam means the Maqam Ibrahim.
18. Here ends `Ali's long speech, beg. at p. 106.
19. D omits لم ينقص منه حرفاً.
20. Reading with D فقال سمعت عن أمير المؤمنين عن رسول الله و هو مريض الخ; N فقال سمعت عن أمير المؤمنين. There is some confusion in N; the dropping of the word فقال does not make the sense regular.
21. Reading fa ighrawragat, إفعوعل (xii) of غرق.
22. The Urdu translator explains that in the first two verses 7, 49 and 9, 68; the meaning of the word نسيان is جزاء نسيان that is "the punishment of forgetfulness" whereas in the last verse 19, 65; the word means "forgetfulness" – thus there is no inconsistency.
23. The Urdu translator adds a footnote: In this verse the words لا يتكلمون etc. (78, 38) means this, that no one will intercede except those who are permitted by Allah; and the words ثم يوم القيامة etc. (29, 24) mean that some will describe others as unbelievers and curse them. Therefore the inconsistency appears to be chat in one verse there is prohibition of speaking, whilst in the other, permission to do so is patent. Now in reality this is not so. From the first verse it is clear that generally every one is not allowed to intercede; and from the second it appears that people who are consigned to Hell will speak ill of one another. Hence there is no inconsistency in the two verses.
24. So Lane, which I have adopted; and not Pickthall who has: Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision.
25. So Rodwell. Pickthall has: Make them grow.

[26.](#) Lit. "covered from" (Pickthall) or "shut out as by a veil" ( Rodwell), which is even more literal.

[27.](#) This means that the angels, ordered to take the life of a man, carry out their instructions without fail.

[28.](#) Zindiq is a very interesting word; it may generally be rendered as a "dangerous heretic". Its derivation from Aram. Sadiq, "friend", as proposed by Prof. A. A. Bevan (Browne, Lit His Per i. 159 – 160; Nicholson, Lit. His. Arabia, 375, n. 2) is apparently not accepted by modern scholars like Prof. L. Massignon, s.v. Zindiq, EI, iv. 1228.

[29.](#) See Tawhid, p. 114 sqq.

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