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Detriment of Narration Through Meaning Linguistically and Rhetorically

These were some of their sayings in regard of the detriment of reporting *hadith* through meaning, concerning the religious affairs. Whereas the linguistic and rhetoric detriment is elucidated through brief statement by the eminent Islamic litterateur al–Sayyid Mustafa Sadiq al–Rafi'i (may God's mercy be upon him), when discussing the Prophetic rhetoric in his precious book I'jaz al–Qur'an, 1 saying: The words of Prophethood are inhabiting a heart connected to the Glory of its Creator, and burnished by a tongue upon which the Qur'an was revealed with the realities it contains.

If they not being revealed (by God), however they came to be through way of revelation, and if they having no proof in it but they were verily among its evidences. That which of affirmed chapters has no even one separated handle, and in which meddling is absent has no even one preferred word. It is, in its brevity and indication, like a speaking heart pulse, and in its sublimation and efficiency is verily a manifestation of his (S) recollections" ... etc. 2

In his comment on the arrangement of the Prephetic rhetoric, he said: "It is not necessary that whatever reported as a *hadith*, should be taken as an utterance of the Prophet (S) with its very words and expressions. Because many traditions have been reported on the basis of their meaning, the case in which most or some of their words be uttered by the one to whom they were ascribed in transmission.

Due to permission of narrating through meaning, Sibawayh and other Imams of the two Cities (Basrah and Kufah) have never quoted any *hadith* when compiling their books on grammar and linguistics, but they depended mainly on the Qur'an and authentic traditions reported from the Arabs. Had *tadwin* (writing down) been prevalent during the early stage (of Islam), with the possibility of recording all the traditions they (Companions) used to hear from the Prophet (S) with their original words and expressions and eloquence, this language would have been in an extremely different state".

The procedure common among them was that the narrator's being accurate in realizing the meaning of the *hadith*, with using words some of which being in agreement with the original texts, as in the case of

his short traditions and aphorisms and proverbs, and some others disagreeing whereat the narrator inserting into them some of his own words. This fact led Sufyan al-Thawri to exclaim: If I tell you that I am narrating to you exactly as I heard (from the Prophet), never believe me, as it is no more than the meaning of it. 3

I have expatiated on discussing this section of the book due to its high significance.

Solecism and Mistake in Hadith

The narrators were not satisfied with narrating the *hadith* according to meaning, but allowed themselves to cite *hadith* in a perverted way, finding no harm then in correcting its solecism and rectifying its error.

The Moroccan scholar Ibn Abd al-Barr, n his book Jami' bayan al-'ilm wa fadlih,4 says:

Al-Walid ibn Muslim related to us saying: I heard al-Awza'i saying: No harm is there in rectifying solecism and error in *hadith*. He also said: I heard al-Awza'i saying: Arabicize the *hadith* as the people (addressed by it) were Arabs.

It is reported that Jabir said: I asked 'Amir i.e. al-Shi'bi, and Abu Ja'far (i.e. Muhammad ibn Ali) and al-Qasim (i.e. Ibn Muhammad), and 'Ata' (i.e. Ibn Abi Rabah) about that relating *hadith* and perpetrating solecism... shall I relate it as I heard or should I Arabicize it? They replied: No, you have to Arabicize it.

Yahya ibn Mu'in said: No objection is there to anyone rectifying his *hadith* according to the Arabic Language.

Al-Nadr ibn Shummayl is reported to have said: Hushaym was a solecist, so I clothed for you his *hadith* with a nice garment – i.e. Arabicization. Ali ibn al-Hasan related saying: I said to Ibn al-Mubarak: When noticing any solecism in the *hadith* should I rectify it? He replied: Yes, since the people (Arabs) were never committing grammatical mistakes! But solecism is only on our part.

This matter was broached by al-Imam Ibn Faris in a treatise calling it *Ma'khadh al-'ilm*, when he said: 5 "Some people claim that if any narrator committing a grammatical mistake when relating any *hadith*, it would be impermissible for the hearer to report from him but only in the same way he heard from him. Some others said: Rather, the hearer should relate it, if being aware of the Arabic Language grammar, in an Arabicized, correct, rectified manner, on the basis of evidence accepted by us. That is, the fact that the Messenger of Allah (S) was verily the most eloquent of all the Arabs with the best Arabic tongue...besides being protected by Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, against error.

Thus being the case, so it would be more proper to relate his *hadith* as rectified and free from any solecism or grammatical mistake.

Our Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qattan used to record the hadith with its mistakes exactly

as he heard it, with writing a note on the margin of his book: "he said so", indicating that it is narrated in this way, with saying: And the correct *hadith* is so and so. This is verily the best of whatever I heard in this respect. Beside many other examples.

Advancing, Putting Off, Addition and Omission in Hadith

Furthermore, the narrators found no trouble in misplacing the *hadith* words, bring some forwards and some backwards.

Abu Bakr ibn Abi Shaybah is reported to have said: Hafs related to us on the authority of Ash'ath, as saying that al-Hasan and al-Shi'bi were disdaining from bringing forwards and backwards the expressions of the *hadith*. 6

Jabir ibn Abd Allah quoted Abd Allah ibn Hudhayfah as saying: We are Arab people,...we cite the *hadith* with bringing forwards and backwards (its words)7.

They exaggerated in doing a bad turn to the narration of *hadith* to the extent that one of the narrators daring to add some words to the *hadith* that can't be found in another's narration. They (narrators) even laid down a rule for this calling it: "addition from the memorizer is accepted."

To Narrate Part of Hadith and Shortening It

Among other practices permitted by the narrators being to shorten the *hadith* and relate a part of it.

In Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Mujahid is reported to have said: Delete whatever you like from the *hadith* but never add to it8.

Ibn Hajar, in Sharh al-Nukhbah, said: In regard of shortening the *hadith*, the majority of traditionists permit it, provided that epitomizing it should be a learned man (*'alim*).

In Sharh Muslim, al–Nawawi says: The correct notion held by the multitude and investigators among scholars of *hadith*, being permission of narrating a portion of the *hadith* on the authority of a gnostic. He adds: Concerning classification of *hadith* into sections by the compilers, it is more proper for permission, or rather negating dispute in it is excluded. This practice was continuously followed by most of the memorizers among *'ulama'* and traditionists (*muhaddithun*), and others among classes of scholars.

Muslim was among those permitting abridgement of *hadith*, referring to this fact in his introduction.

Abu Shamah, in his book Mukhtasar Kitab al-Mu'ammal9, is reported to have said:

'That which is usually practised by pundits of *fiqh* in relation to the Prophetic traditions and narrated reports, being their abundant inferences from the weak (unauthentic) traditions to confirm their claims, and support their sayings, deleting some of the *hadith* words once, and adding to them another time.

There are numerous examples for this practice in the books of Abu al–Ma'ali and his companion Abu Hamid. The most abominable act execised by some of them, being to argue with a weak report (*khabar*) which in fact be the proof used by his opponent against him. So they would introduce it, turning away from that which they have weakened before.

Their Leniency toward Narrations on Virtues and Their Detriment

Ibn Mahdi is reported to have said: "Whenever narrating any *hadith* about *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (unlawful) rules, we would be very strict in the *asanid* (chains of transmission) with scrutinizing the *rijal*. And when relating anything on virtues, reward and punishment, we would show leniency in the *asanid* and indulgence in respect of rijal". (Reported by al-Bayhagi in al-Madkhal).

Among those permitting leniency in narrating the *hadith* when being concerned with the good deeds, it can be referred to the names of Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Abd Allah ibn al–Mubarak. Al–Hakim said: I heard Abu Zakariyya al–Anbari say: When the report (*khabar*) is neither forbidding what is lawful nor legalizing what is unlawful, nor obligating a rule related to temptation or intimidation, it should be overlooked with being negligent regarding its narration. And Ahmad has another opinion in this regard, that will be exposed later on.

Ibn Abd al-Barr says: The traditions on virtues need not any argument or proof... and the scholars in the past never showed that strictness in respect of reporting them from whomsoever of the narrators, without investigating deeply as they used to do with traditions on ahkam (rules). 10

In his commentary on the statement of the author of al–Adab al–Shar'iyyah (Ibn Muflih 11), that it is reported on the authority of al–Imam Ahmad what is indicating that it is unnecessary to adhere to the weak *hadith* on virtues and recommendable acts (*mustahabbat*), al–Sayyid Rashid Ridha' says: "May God be pleased with Ahmad, what vast knowledge and accurate comprehension has he!... Verily to believe in acting in accordance with the weak *hadith* in the cases he referred to and calling to showing leniency in narrating it, opened for the *Ummah* a door for *ghuluww* (extravagance) in religion and multiplying the trouble–seeking rituals (*'ibadat*), that are incongruous with the easy teachings of Islam, beside even making some of them among the rites of the *Din*.

All this, beside incompetence of many people in establishing the obligatory prayers and abiding by and fulfilling the duties, the fact leading consequently to accept and believe in the Israeliyyat, superstitions and dreams, as reported by a latter compiler on the authority of Ibn Taymiyyah who said: The 'ibadat (rituals) and virtues decisively confirmed in the Book (Qur'an) and Sunnah are quite sufficient for the Ummah. And I wish there were a large number of people falling not short of fulfilling them."

Really true is the utterance of these religious leaders and what they manifested regarding the disadvantages caused by narration of the weak and unauthentic traditions to the *Ummah*, due to the practice followed by some of these leaders (imams) in respect of virtues.

Therefore, al-Qadi Abu Bakr ibn al-Arabi al-Maliki said: "It is absolutely impermissible to act according to the weak traditions." 12

The notable fluent Islamic writer Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i (may God's mercy be upon him) has dedicated a long interesting chapter for narration (*riwayah*) in his valuable book Ta'rikh Adab al-Arab, of which we quote the following:

Narration in Islam

The Companions used to learn under the Messenger of Allah (S) in a scientific way so as to be acquainted with the religious teachings and rules. Thus the meetings held by him (S) were the first knowledge circles that were ever widely known throughout Arabian history, with his being the first man to teach people.

When he (S) passed away, the science of riwayah emerged on the scene, since no any way or option for inference (*istidlal*) and determination was there but only through it. Abu Bakr was never accepting any *hadith* from anyone unless be confirmed by a witness that it was heard from the Messenger (S), 13 the job that could be easily done due to nearness of the Prophet's lifetime to that period, availability of the Companions and the material (of *hadith*) was still not abrogated.

Also Umar used to verify and investigate the authenticity of transmission, as hypocrisy prevailed among people, with the need becoming more urgent to the *riwayah*. Besides, Umar, Uthman and 'A'ishah with majority of the Companions used to scrutinize the narrations cited to them, refuting and returning them to their transmitters. Then Umar feared that people expatiate upon narration abundantly, where blemish would find way into it with imposture and falsification be made by the hypocrite and libertine and the bedouin. So he kept on commanding them to lessen the number of narrations, with being so strict toward those narrating abundantly or reporting a *hadith* on (religious) rules without introducing a witness confirming it.

Because the prolific narrator, though reporting some correct traditions, cannot be immune against *tahrif* (misconstruction) or addition or omission in the narrations. It is reported that the Prophet (S) said: Whoever falsily ascribes any saying to me, his abode shall be Fire. 14 Due to this precaution and abstaining from *riwayah*, many of the eminent Companions and the favourites near the Messenger (S), like Abu Bakr, al–Zubayr, Abu Ubaydah, and al–Abbas ibn Abd al–Muttalib used to narrate less traditions than others or rather some of them would even narrate nothing, such as Sa'id ibn Zayd who was one among the ten men promised with paradise.

The most prolific in narration among the Companions was Abu Hurayrah, who kept company of the Prophet for three years, 15 surviving after him for about fifty years. 16 For this reason Umar, Uthman and A'ishah were all the time disapproving his narrations with accusing him (of falsification), rendering him to be the first narrator ever accused throughout Islam. A'ishah was the severest in disapproving his

traditions, due to the too long period she and he lived contemporaneously, as her death came to be one year before his.

Thereafter erupted the insurrection during the days of Uthman, after which there was uproar and so much talk regarding the caliphate, with people indulging in sorts of suspicion, perplexity and anxiety. Consequently there were many narrators who would neither take precaution nor verify or investigate (the traditions), the fact that became so common and familiar among people, who never cared for inquiring the veracity of traditions, or referring the *riwayah* to a decisive testimony or an establishing proof. But all the errors that occurred in the *hadith* previously were only due to inadvertence and ignorance on the part of the narrator.

The Companion 17 (of the Prophet) Imran ibn Husayn is reported to have said: By God, had I found it necessary, I would have reported from the Messenger of Allah (S) as much as I willed, for two consecutive days, but I abstained from so doing when noticing a number of the Companions of the Messenger, though having heard what I heard and witnessed what I witnessed, relating traditions whose original wording and expressions be far from what they were narrating. So I feared of falling into imagination and misconception as happened to them. But the fact I want to disclose being that their practice was only out of mistake on their part and was never done by them on purpose 18.

The fact to be observed here is that this procedure was followed at a time when all the standards were still standing and branches were still there (i.e. material of *hadith* was still extant and undestroyed), with the situation reaching not the exacerbated degree yet. But after the revolt of the Kharijites and people's tending to form sects and communities (*firaq*), dividing the society into schisms, some of the Companions embarked on making of the *hadith* as a trade (for earning living), composing and fabricating false traditions.

Then appeared on the scene, the relators and Zanadiqah, and people of too ancient *akhbar* (reports) 19 that were similar to superstitious traditions, causing so much distortion and corruption to the *hadith* out of all these practices, throughout different ages and times.

Concerning the relators, they used to gain the hearts of the dignitaries among people, extracting from what they owned (of wealth) through disapproved, strange and falsified traditions. Common people were of the habit of gathering around the relator whenever his *hadith* being supersensible and irrationally amazing, or being a heart–saddening touching one exciting the emotions and extracting tears from eyes, the arts in which those people had good experience, big lies and extremely abundant reports.

In regard of the Zanadiqah, they tried their best, by trickery means, to distort and blemish Islam, through foisting in it some abominably ugly and unbelievable traditions resembling the superstitions of the Greeks and Romans, and legends of the Indians and Persians. Their only aim behind these practices was to vilify *Ahl al–Sunnah* and pervert their narrations through inserting false traditions that no reason could accept or sight could imagine. And concerning the people of ancient *akhbar*, they intended out of

this to confirm and prove the superstitions that were prevalent in the Pre-Islamic era (*Jahiliyyah*), with imparting veracity upon them so as to use them in interpretation (*tafsir*) and alike purposes, the cases for which ample examples are there.

Stage of Committing Hadith to Writing

After the class of traditionists, among whom were the minor Companions and senior *Tabi'un* (Followers) – lie the class of Ibn Abbas – *hadith* continued to be inflicted with symptoms of inadvertence, negligence and foisted suspicions and interpolations. But there might have been some trustworthy narrators who used to report *hadith* from unreliable ones, till the caliphate time of Umar ibn Abd al–Aziz20

Fearing the bad consequences of people's additions to *hadith* and spreading of falsity when correct *hadith* be rare, as his time witnessed circulation of traditions, in which falsity was made on purpose for no interpretative convenience, like the ones falsified by Ikrimah the slave of Ibn Abbas, 21 and in which the slave (*mawla*) of Sa'id ibn al–Musayyab was refuted 22 and others, Umar sent a letter to his deputy in administration and judgement on al–Madinah, 23 giving him the order: Collect all the traditions of the Messenger of Allah and write them down, as I am quite afraid about the extinction of knowledge and loss of '*ulama*'.

This was the outset of writing down and collecting of the *hadith*, as it was never being written in the past24 ... etc.

We conclude this discussion by referring to a critical defect of *riwayah*.

A Critical Defect of Narration How Were Their Narrations

Many defects were there for narrating *hadith* after being forbidden by the Messenger of Allah (S), among which its being not narrated at the time of hearing it, the fact necessitating the narrators to report (*hadith*) according to the meaning. The other defect is that they used to practise fraud in narration, in a way that a Companion reporting the Messenger's *hadith* from another one without referring to the name of that from whom he reported.

This fact was stated by Ibn Qutaybah in his book, Ta'wil mukhtalif al-hadith,25 when talking about Hurayrah's narration which he never heard from the Prophet (S), that he used to say: "The Messenger of Allah said *kadha* (so and so)", but in fact he heard it (hadith) from a trustworthy (in his view) narrator, relating it then. And the same was practised by Ibn Abbas and other Companions. Such kind of *riwayah* was called by the scholars of hadith by the term tadlis (fraudulence). In his reference to biography of Abu Hurayrah, al-Dhahabi said: Abu Hurayrah used to practise tadlis, and the tadlis of the Sahabah was so much and faultless.26

I have exposed these defects and indicated their bad effects in a previous chapter of this book, and in

my book Shaykh al-mudirah which I published separately; but there is a quite dangerous defect I haven't referred to before, which was disclosed by the eminent Companion Imran ibn Husayn,27in his statement in which he swore saying: "By God had I found it necessary, I would have reported from the Messenger of Allah (S) as much as I willed, for two consecutive days, but I abstained from so doing when noticing a number of the Companions of the Messenger, though having heard what I heard and witnessed what I witnessed, relating traditions whose original wording and expressions be far from what they were narrating. So I feared of falling into imagination and misconception as happened to them. But the fact I want to disclose being that their practice was only out of mistake on their part, and was never done by them on purpose.28

In his book Shubhat al–tashbih29, Ibn al–Jawzi is reported to have said: Al–Zubayr ibn al–Awwam heard a man relating a *hadith*. He waited till the man finished his speech, when he said to him: Did you hear this from the Messenger of Allah? The man replied: Yes!! Al–Zubayr said then: This *hadith* and its likes are preventing me from relating from the Prophet! By my life, I heard this *hadith* from the Messenger of Allah, and I was there when he (S) started to recite it. Then we talked to him about a man from among the people of the Book (*Ahl al–Kitab*), when you came after the fore part of the *hadith* was over. When he referred to the man of *Ahl al–Kitab*, you thought that part to be included in the *hadith* of the Messenger of Allah!

Bisr ibn Sa'id is reported to have said: Observe your duty to Allah and take precaution in the *hadith*. By God, we used to sit with Abu Hurayrah, who would relate to us *hadith* of the Messenger of Allah (S) and report (*hadith*) from Ka'b. Then as soon as he left us, I would hear someone from among us reporting the Messenger's *hadith* from Ka'b, with ascribing *hadith* of Ka'b to the Messenger of Allah.30

This report was mentioned by Imran ibn Husayn, al–Zubayr ibn al–Awwam and Bisr ibn Sa'id, and every open–minded thoughtful Muslim is asked to ponder upon and attentively contemplate over it.

As the Companion Imran ibn Husayn swears by God, that if he intended he would report *hadith* from the Messenger of Allah for two consecutive days, but he abstained since he saw some of the Messenger's Companions relating traditions whose original be different from what they narrate, only out of error or misconception. So if such be the case of those unintentional among the truthful Companions, how would it be the condition of the intentional ones, and hypocrites and enemies of religion? It is by God, in *riwayah*, one of the major sins! And whoever trying to enlighten people to this fact would be charged with impiety.

Another defect was described by al–Zubayr, which is: some of the Companions hearing a portion of the *hadith* from the Prophet, without its fore part, going out then and narrating what he heard to be a complete *hadith*.

After that comes the turn of Bisr ibn Sa'id, to appeal to people to observe their duty to Allah in (narrating) the *hadith*, as some of them used to compose the Messenger's *hadith* from Ka'b al-Ahbar and make

Ka'b's *hadith* as if uttered by the Messenger of Allah. All that and others than it were recorded in the books, and continued to be extant, reported by successors from the ancestors till the Day of Resurrection. And there is neither might nor power but in God.

There is much more discussion and elaboration on taking precaution in narrating the *hadith*, recorded in our book Shaykh al–mudirah, to which the dear reader can refer.

- 1. I'jaz al-Qur'an, p. 364, refer to the complement of this eloquent speech, in the following pages till p. 422.
- 2. Ibid., p. 364.
- 3. Ibid., p. 422.
- 4. See vol. I, pp. 78-81.
- 5. Tawjih al-nazar, pp. 308, 309.
- 6. Jami' bayan al-'ilm, vol. I, p. 80.
- 7. This khabar is recorded also in Uyun al-akhbar, vol. III, p. 136.
- 8. India Edition, p. 237.
- 9. See p. 21, 22.
- 10. Jami' bayan al-'ilm, vol. I, p. 45.
- 11. Al-Adab al-Shar'iyyah, vol. II, pp. 313, 314. Another narration is scribed to Ahmad ibn Hanbal, in which he held that it can be acted according to the weak hadith in virtuous deeds.
- 12. Al-Manar, vol. XXXI, p. 129
- 13. Al-Imam Ali (A) said: If I heard a hadith from the Messenger of Allah (S), God verily makes me benefit from it as much as He wills, and if anyone relating to me his hadith, I would exact an oath from him, when he swearing I would believe him.
- 14. This is verily the correct narration.
- 15. To be exact, he accompanied the Prophet for one year and nine months as I verified and stated in my book Shaykh almudirah, to which the reader can refer.
- 16. Abu Hurayrah died in 59 H.
- 17. Imran ibn Husayn died in 52 H.
- 18. See the discussion of the speech of 'Imran ibn Husayn after this statement.
- 19. Like the reports of the Jews and their likes.
- 20. He was acknowledged (as a caliph) in 99 H. and died in 101 H.
- 21. Ikrimah died in 105 H.
- 22. Sa'id died in 94 H.
- 23. Abu Bakr died in 120 H.
- 24. Ta'rikh adab al-Arab, published in 1329 H., 1911 AD., vol. I, pp. 276-281.
- 25. See p. 50.
- 26. Siyar a'lam al-nubala', vol. II, pp. 437, 438. Refer also to Shaykh al-mudirah.
- 27. Imran ibn Husayn ibn Ubayd ibn Khalaf and his father embraced Islam together with Abu Hurayrah in 7 H. He took part in some battles beside the Prophet. He became governor of Basrah, when Umar nelegted him to make its people comprehend their religion, and al-Hasan took oath that they were never visited by anyone better than 'Imran ibn Husayn. He died in 52 H. His Musnad contained 180 traditions, four of which on al-Bukhari, and nine of on Muslim (Siyar a'lam alnubala', vol. II, pp. 363–366).
- 28. Ibn Qutaybah, Ta'wil mukhtalif al-hadith, pp. 49, 50.
- 29. See p. 38.
- 30. Al-Dhahabi, Siyar a'lam al-nubala', vol. II, p. 436.

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