

Disadvantage Of Narrating Hadith Through Meaning

While the Prophet's traditions – as previously referred to – were transmitted according to their denotations, and their narrators were permitted to increase or decrease in them, with advancing and delaying their words – accepting the solecist ones – all this caused a great loss and disadvantage to *hadith*.

In his book *Tawjih al-nazar*, [1](#)al-Allamah al-Jaza'iri says:

After researching and investigation, it was found out that many among those narrating by meaning have fallen short of conveying the full denotation of *hadith*. This fact led some of them (Companions) to declare: It is necessary to close the door of narration through meaning so as not to empower those incompetent from among those believing themselves to be doing well, as occurred for a large number of narrators in the past and recently.

The loss caused by narration through meaning was so tremendous that it was considered one of factors of disunity among the *Ummah*. One of the authors [2](#) said in the introduction to his book in this regard: Disagreement occurred to the *Ummah* in eight aspects, from which all aspects of difference are produced and ramified.

First: Commonness of words and their liability to numerous interpolations. Second: Real meaning and metaphor. Third: Singularity and combination. Fourth: Specification and generality. Fifth: *Riwayah* (narration) and *naql* (transmission). Sixth: Practicing *ijtihad* in regard of any issue for which no text (nass) was revealed. Seventh: *Nasikh* (abrogating) and *mansukh* (abrogated). Eighth: Permissibility and extensiveness.

And under bab “Momentary disagreement in respect of narration and transmission,” he said: The benefit intended to be got from this bab can never be attained but only through recognizing the defects inflicting the *hadith* and altering its meaning. These defects may delude people to think of presence of

contradiction in *hadith*, or may even create an ambiguity compelling the scholars to seeking the remote interpretation. We are going to mention number of these defects, and cite an example or examples for each one that can be inferred for other ones, God-willing³.

Al-Batliyosi is reported to have said: Know that the *hadith* transmitted from the Messenger of Allah (S) and from his Companions and their followers, is inflicted with eight defects: First: Corruption in *isnad* (chain). Second: In respect of narration of *hadith* according to its meaning with ignoring its wording. Third: Ignorance of grammatical syntax. Fourth: In respect of *tashif* (misconstruction). Fifth: Deleting something from the *hadith* without which the meaning can never be perfect. Sixth: The narrator's reporting the *hadith* with neglecting to convey the reason necessitating it, or explain the case entailing its citation. Seventh: The narrator hearing a part of the *hadith* and missing some other part. Eighth: Reporting the *hadith* from books without mentioning names of the *shaykhs* (authors).⁴

First Defect

It is corruption in *isnad* (chain of narrators). This being the most widely-known defect among people, to the extent that some of them may imagine⁵ that when *isnad* be correct, the *hadith* be veracious! But the truth is not so, since it may happen that the *hadith* narrators be known of reliability and true faith and honesty, without being liable to any defamation or suspicion in regard of their transmission.

Despite all this, their traditions may be indeliberately inflicted with miscellaneous accidents. And the *isnad* may be afflicted with corruption in several aspects, of which are: *Irsal* and absence of succession. Or that some of the *hadith* narrators being among heretics, or accused of falsity and dishonesty, or known of being idiot and negligent, or be fanatic to some of the Companions, averse to others. So in case of being widely-known of being fanatic, reporting then a *hadith* regarding preference of those whom he was siding, without being reported through any other chain, he should be viewed with suspicion and doubt.

Because extravagance in one's fanaticism toward that of whom he is taking the part, and extremity in lovingness would lead him to invent and fabricate the *hadith*, or if not fabricating he may alter it and change some of its words. That which prompts one to doubt the transmission of the narrator is being sure of his covetousness to the world and rushing into attaining favoritism near the kings. Anyone being on this condition, shall never be immune against changing, alteration, fabrication of *hadith* and falsity covetting for gaining some (worldly) profit⁶.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has drawn the attention toward what we referred to by saying: "You will be confronted with a multiplying number of traditions after me. Therefore, when a *hadith* is narrated to you, compare it with the Book of Allah; accept that which agrees with it and reject that which contradicts it.

It is reported that a group of Persians and Jews⁷ and others, when noticing emergence of Islam and its spread everywhere, with vanquishing and subduing all nations, realizing their inability to challenge or

oppose it, resorted to trickery and intrigue, showing off, unwillingly, Islam and faith, engaging themselves in devotion and abstemiousness. When their conduct and practices found way among people, being approved by them, they embarked on fabricating traditions and reports, causing thus people to be divided into several groups and parties.

When Umar ibn Al-Khattab be so strict in approving the *hadith*, threatening to punish whoever abundantly narrating it during his time, with presence of many Companions, before the appearance of the heresies, at a time praised by the Messenger of Allah (S), so how would be the case with the times censured by him (!) with multiplication of heresies and scarcity of trusteeship and honesty.

Second Defect

Which is reporting the *hadith* on the basis of its meaning without caring for the very words uttered by the Prophet, in which a great number of errors are found. Out of this practice horrible seditions were originated, as most of the narrators used to disregard the words uttered by the Prophet (S) with conveying to their successors the meaning intended by him through other words and expressions. Hence we may notice the same *hadith*, having the same meaning, reported with miscellaneous words and different expressions, with some of them having additional words.

But divergence of the *hadith* words may emerge due to the Prophet's reiterating it in several various occasions. Such kind of *hadith* is out of scope of our discussion, but that which matters here is the divergence among the words used in transmitting the *hadith* according to its meaning. The faulty aspect in this regard lies in the fact that people differ in their shapes and complexions and other aspects and conditions.

It may happen that the narrator hearing the *hadith* from the Prophet (S) or from other than him, may portray its meaning in his mind in a way contrary to that intended by the Prophet. And when expressing that meaning imagined in his mind by other words (of his own), he would be thus narrating the opposite of what he had heard without intending this on purpose. Because the same utterance may bear two or three meanings, and may contain a common word having one denotation and its opposite, like his (S) saying: "Cut the moustache and let alone the beard." In such case, the Prophet may intend some specific meaning while the narrator may conceive and express some other meaning.

If he is giving the very meaning of what he heard without using the original wording, this would mean his narrating from him (S) is the contrary of what he intended indeliberately. But if he conveys it with the original words, the latter hearer might comprehend from him that which was not conceived by the former. The Prophet (S) came to be aware of this to happen after him, so he warned against it by saying: "May Allah bless whoever hearing my speech, and conveying it then as he heard it. The propagator might be more conscious than the hearer."

Third Defect

Which is ignorance of syntax and principles and metaphors of Arab speech as many of *hadith* narrators were unaware of the Arabic language, making no difference between names in the nominative case and object (*mansub*) and lowered case. Had the Arabs determined for every meaning a specific word denoting it distinctively, they would have been excused in not learning the rules of syntax, being needless to recognize the wrong from the right. But the Arabs may differentiate between any two opposite meanings by marks only, though the word be one, as the *raf'* and *nasb* distinguish between subject and object. The narrator might report a *hadith*, making a word in nominative case as a subject, and the other as an object. Then the hearer would convey the *hadith* from him with making the opposite, exchanging the subject with the object, unknowingly, in a way changing the meaning to the contrary of what was intended by the first narrator.

Fourth Defect

It is *tashif* 8 (mispronunciation), which causes tremendous corruption and distortion to the *hadith*. It is originated from the fact that numerous narrators can never observe exactitude in the letters (*huruf*), but transmit them without any constraint or revision, depending only on their memorization. When the narrator neglects what he wrote for some time, being in need then for reading what he committed to writing, or some other one reading it, it may happen that he confusing the vowel points (*harakat*), reversing thus the meanings into their opposites, or the letter might be misplaced by another one due to absence of exactitude, giving the contrary meaning of that one intended of it.

All this is due to the fact that the Arabic script being highly suspicious, as sometimes only the vowel point or dot may distinguish between two opposite meanings, like their saying: *mukrim* – with *kasrah* under *ra'* – for the subject, and *mukram* – with fathah on *ra'* – for the object. And also using the word *afra'* with *fa'* for the thick-haired man, while using the word *aqra'* (bald) with *qaf* for that whose head being without hair. It is reported in a *hadith* that the Messenger of Allah (S) was *afra'*. There are witty sayings in this regard reported by traditionists, like what is reported by Yazid ibn Harun as saying: “We were sitting around Bishr ibn Mu’awiyah”, while his name being Bishr ibn Mu’awiyah. Also Abd al-Razzaq is reported to have said: They fight Khor Kirman, while it is Khoz (with the dotted zay). There are too many examples for such kind of *tashif*, on which al-Daraqutni compiled a famous book, under the title. Tashif al-Hafiz.

A tender example for this can be found in Sahih Muslim, thus: On the Doomsday we will be over so and so – see, which has no clear meaning. It was reported in this way in many copies, while the correct form be: “On the Doomsday we will be over heaps, which is the plural of a heap, meaning a commanding place. It was perverted by some narrators, when recording it thus: On the Doomsday we will be over so and so (*kadha*). When being read by someone, who could not get its true meaning! he wrote on the top of the book: Look! asking the reader to consider about its meaning, drawing his attention to it. When this

marginal note was read by another narrator, he counted it to be of the book, annexing it then to the text of the book.

Fifth Defect

Which is dropping something from the *hadith* without which it can never give full meaning or be perfect. Numerous examples of such defect are reported in the traditions, like the one reported about Ibn Mas'ud, that when asked about the night of *jinn*, he said: No one of us attended it. Through another chain (*tariq*), it is reported that he saw some people of the Zitt, when he exclaimed: These are the most resembling people to the *jinn* whom I saw at the night of *jinn*. This second *hadith* indicates his attending it, while the former one indicating his non-attending it.

As is obviously seen, the two traditions are contradictory to each other. The reason behind this contradiction lies in the fact that the narrator reporting the former *hadith* has dropped from it a word reported by another one, while the original text of the *hadith*: (he said): "No one of us attended it except me".

Sixth Defect

It is caused by the narrator's reporting the *hadith* with neglecting to cite the reason necessitating it, creating thus an ambiguity in the *hadith* or contradiction to another one.

It is reported by some narrators, that the Aranites who apostatized from Islam and invaded (tribe of) Luqahah, were brought to him. He gave his orders to mutilate their hands and feet, and scoop out their eyes, with leaving them alone at the region of Hurrah, seeking a drink but never given it till they died. This, while many traditions are reported through various chains and ways confirming his forbidding the mayhem and disfiguring of the body of human being. Such contradiction has befallen the *hadith* because that who narrated the first *hadith* forgot or neglected to convey the reason obligating its citation, and pushing the Prophet to do so. The same *hadith* was reported by another narrator, who revealed that he (the Prophet) has punished them in this way since they disfigured his herdsmen, so he retaliated by punishing them with the same thing done by them.

Seventh Defect

It occurs by the narrator's hearing a part of the *hadith* but missing some other part, like what is reported that 'A'ishah told that Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (S) said: "If evil omen is really there it should be in three (things): the house, woman and horse".⁹ This *hadith* contradicts his (S) saying: "There are neither infections, nor vermin, nor yellow things nor ghouls". Further many traditions are reported from him forbidding from drawing evil omen.

Thereat 'A'ishah became angry saying: By God the Messenger of Allah never said this at all, but he

said: “People of the pre-Islamic era (*jahiliyyah*) say that if evil omen is really there, it should be in three things: The house, woman and horse”...and when Abu Hurayrah entered, he heard the second part of the *hadith* not hearing its first part. No one can deny the occurrence of this, since the Prophet (S) used to state, in his meeting, the reports in a relating way, telling about that practice unwanted by him with a commanding form not a forbidding one, never making it a principle in religion or a rule to be followed. And such conduct was obviously observed through his acts and well-known in his utterances.

Eighth Defect

Which is reporting the traditions from the *hadith* books, without meeting the *shaykhs* (scholars of *hadith*) or hearing from the *Imams* (leaders of schools). This kind of defect is verily a great misfortune afflicting the *Din* and causing it severe detriment. Because so many people show much indulgence toward it, with most of them depending mainly on the *shaykh*'s permission without trying to meet him, and correcting the traditions under his hands, referring then to drafted suhuf and books, to take from them, without being aware of their veracity.

It may happen sometimes that the traditions he reports contradict those narrated by his *shaykh*, by perverting the letters and changing the words, and unjustly ascribing everything to his *shaykh*.

This characteristic became nowadays the main distinguishing feature of the knowledge of most people, in a way rendering them devoid of nothing except names of books. [10](#)

This point constitutes the end of the excerpt we quoted from al-Batliyosi's book about the accidental disagreement among Muslims, in respect of *riwayah*. We have to refer again to al-Allamah al-Jaza'iri, who kept on awaiting us to tell us what is left of his talk concerning the detriment of narrating the *hadith* on the basis of its meaning, by saying:

Know that a large number of scholars, in various fields of knowledge, realized and complained against the detriment of *riwayah* (narration) by meaning, the severest of which being in *hadith* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) due to their high significance. Unsound utterances were ascribed to many eminent scholars, and were used by their opponents as a pretext to vilify and ridicule them with. But after long investigation and verification, it was proved that these sayings were never uttered by them but only attributed to them through traditions reported from them on basis of meaning by a narrator who fell short of expressing exactly what they said, entailing thus the emergence of such confusion.

Al-Allamah Najm al-Din Ahmad ibn Hamdan al-Harrani al-Hanbali has also suffered a great loss in his creed (*madhhab*) because of narration through meaning.

So he said at the end of his book *Sifat al-mufti* under a chapter he dedicated for exposing the defects of compilation and other than it, so as the mufti (one who issues verdicts) would know how to deal with the reported narrations, and conceive what the discloser intending to say, so that his reporting of the

madhhab rules and ascribing to the *Imam* or others be correct.

“Know that the biggest perils in the traditional compilation being to neglect the transmission of the very original words, and be content with conveying the meanings with the narrator’s failure in duly conveying the intention of the first speaker through its very words. The other reasons may be ramified from this reason, since to determine fulfilment of what the first speaker intended through very wording, or the writer by his book with the narrators’ authenticity, depends negation of concealment, dedication, abrogation, advancement and delaying (of words), commonness, permission–giving, estimation, transmission and rational contradiction.

It is unsafe for every transmission to be afflicted with some of the reasons, that neither we nor the reporter can assert confidently their non–existence, nor can we suspect their absence, nor there be any evidence denying them, nor can we determine through it the speaker’s intention, but we only suppose or imagine it. Whereas when his very wording reported by itself with its reading, date and causes, [11](#)this peril or most of it would vanish in general. Thereat suspicion in it would be only in the transmission of the truth–seeker, who may be excused once due to the claim of necessity of inflection for apparent reasons, the practice that is sufficient in the suppositive questions and most of the minor issues. [12](#)

I introduce herewith some valuable words on narration of *hadith*, with which I conclude this important chapter of my book:

Al–Khitabi said: It is impermissible to substitute any word with a more expository one, since the lawmaker may intent to express his intention through explicit words once, or through implicit ones another time, and reversely too.

Ibn Hazm is reported to have said: The rule to be followed in reporting any *hadith* from the Prophet (S) is to cite it with its original wording, without any change or alteration, but only in one case – when the narrator investigating and verifying the *hadith*, recognizing its denotation with certainty. Only then when he be questioned he would give verdict (*fatwa*) on the basis of its meaning and obligation saying: The Messenger of Allah (S) judged to do so and so, permitted so and so (act), forbade from (doing) so and so, and prohibited so and so... and what is obligatory in this issue being that which is reported from the Prophet (S), which is so and so. The same is true in respect of the rules stated in the Qur’an with no difference.

There is unanimity among all Muslims that it is permissible for everyone to tell of something in accordance with the Qur’anic verse, and cite it (verse) with other than its wording. But for that narrating and ascribing the *hadith* to the Prophet (S), intending to propagate what is reported to him from the Prophet (S), it is unlawful for him but to investigate and use the very words he heard, without substituting even one letter with the other, though being of the same meaning. Nor is he allowed to advance forward a letter, nor to delay another, the fact that is true also in case of one intending to recite or learn a Qur’anic verse, with no difference.

As a proof for this, it is reported that the Prophet (S) taught al-Bara' ibn 'Azib a supplication containing an expression: and You Prophet whom You sent. When al-Bara' wanted to read it before the Prophet, he said: "and by Your messenger whom You sent. The Prophet said: "No (it is not so), but: and your Prophet whom You sent," [13](#) ordering him not to use the word messenger (*rasul*) instead of 'Prophet' (*nabi*), so as not to change the meaning, while he being a messenger of religion. So how it would be permissible for some foolish ignorant people to claim that he (S) used to permit the use of "Forgiving, Merciful" or Hearer, Knower" instead of "Mighty, Wise" in the holy Qur'an, while forbidding from doing so in a supplication other than the Qur'an, despite the fact that Allah says informing for His Prophet:

قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أُبَدِّلَهُ مِنْ تَلَقَاءِ نَفْسِي

"Say (O Muhammad): It is not for me to change it of my own accord." (10: 15)

And no change is there greater than inserting a word instead of another. [14](#)

I Am Delegated With the Universal Speech

In his exposition of the Messenger's saying: "I delegated with universal words", Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in Fath al-Bari [15](#) says: No prophet is there but only that who was given beside the signs the like of them in which people can trust, but what I am given was but a revelation Allah revealed to me. So I hope to have more followers than they have on the Doomsday.

The restriction in his saying: "But what I am given was but..." indicates that the Qur'an being the greatest, most beneficial and everlasting of the miracles, due to its including the invitation (*da'wah*) and *hujjah* (authority) and perpetual utilization for ever. So since nothing is there to be resembling it, not to say be equal to it, and every book other than it be nothing when compared to it, it is said: From al-Bukhari's citation of this *hadith* in the wake of the precedent one – i.e. I am delegated with the universal speech – it is conceived that in his view what is intended by the 'universal speech' is the Qur'an, which is not necessary as there is no doubt in the Qur'an being implied in his statement: "I am delegated with the universal speech."

But the dispute is verily whether this includes other than the Qur'an, from the Prophet's utterance or not? The examples cited for the universal speech (*jawami' al-kalim*) can be found in the holy Qur'anic verses:

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

"And for you there is (security of) life in (the law of) retaliation O. ye men of understanding, so that ye may guard yourself (against evil)"(2: 179)

And

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَخْشَ اللَّهَ وَيَتَّقْهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ

“And whoever obeyeth God and His apostle, and feareth God, and keepeth duty (unto) Him, these! they are the victorious”... (24:52)

beside other verses. And from among the Prophetic traditions, we can refer to *hadith* of ‘A’ishah: “Every act not related to our affair is rejected”. And the *hadith*: “Every condition not stated in the Book of Allah is verily void,” beside the *hadith*: “When I give you any order, you should fulfill of it that which is in your capacity.” Also we can refer to al-Miqdam’s *hadith*:” Son of Adam has never filled a receptacle worse than his abdomen,” beside other traditions whose mention is out of scope here.

The only authentic traditions being those with whose words the narrators can never dispose. The only method to recognize this is when the chains of transmission of the *hadith* being lessened and its words be in agreement, since when the former be multiple, the latter will be rarely in agreement. Because most of the narrators used to report *hadith* on the basis of its meaning in the way seeming as duly fulfilled to any of them. This is resulted from the fact that most of them never used to write down (*hadith*), and after elapse of long time with the meaning being portrayed in mind without remembering the very words (of the *hadith*). In that case the narrator would convey the *hadith* on the basis of meaning for the sake of propagation after which, and through the context of that better memorizing it, it would be realized that he (the former) has never conveyed the full meaning intended of the *hadith*.

For strengthening certainty in the extreme detriment caused by not committing the *hadith* to writing during lifetime of the Prophet (S), and that many words used in his traditions were changed with many of them being lost, I cite, in the conclusion of this chapter, the strongest evidence that can confirm veracity of my claim. This evidence is taken from the distortion caused by narration in the farewell sermon, given by the Prophet at the end of his life, after twenty–three years of his mission in which he summed up his great recommendations and valuable instructions.

This sermon was addressed on a day in which all the Companions gathered, numbering about a hundred and fifty thousand. So it was more than logical and certain that this sermon (*khutbah*) be all–inclusive, preserved intact with its original words and meanings exactly as uttered by the Prophet (S), beside the Companions’ extreme care to safeguard it and conveying it to their successors as they heard it. But despite all this, they abandoned it without committing it to writing or memorizing, to be like a play–thing toyed by the narrators.

When going through the scattered portions of the sermon published in the famous *hadith* books and voluminous sirah books, with examining them in an unprejudiced way, we will see so much dissimilarity among its words and difference among its denotations, with its expressions being incongruous, in a way

exciting astonishment and causing wonder!

What is wonderful regarding those obstinately arguing that *hadith* used to be narrated on the basis of meaning, the words resounding in their ears uttered by all mosques orators on Fridays throughout long years after finishing recitation of the sermon *hadith* “or as he said”, till this clause turned to be as an original part of the *hadith*. So what for is all that obligatory precaution?

- [1.](#) See p. 337 and the following pages.
- [2.](#) I kept on searching for this author till coming to know him to be Abu Muhammad Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Sayyid al-Batliyosi al-Andalusi (d. 521 H.). And these words appeared in his book al-Insaf fi al-tanbih ala al-asbab al-lati awjabat al-ikhtilaf bayna al-Muslimin fi ara'ihim (exposing the reasons that caused disagreement in opinions among Muslims) which was published in Egypt in 1319 H., revised by al-Shaykh Umar al-Mahmasani al-Azhari.
- [3.](#) I quote these ilal (causes) briefly from the original copy of the book al-Batliyosi.
- [4.](#) It may be not right to count this among the causes of hadith, as all the fuqaha' were of the opinion that to act according to the hadith can never depend on hearing it. Abu Ishaq al-Isfara'ini says: Unanimity is on permission of quoting from the dependable books (of hadith). Al-Tabari says: Whoever finds a hadith in an authentic book, is permitted to narrate it, and use it in dispute as a hujjah. The same view is held by al-'Izz ibn Abd al-Salam.
- [5.](#) Among them the contemporary Hashwiyyah, who disguise themselves under the garb of ulama'.
- [6.](#) As the case with some of the people in the present time.
- [7.](#) Like Ka'b al-Ahbar, Wahd ibn Munabbih abd Abd Allah ibn Salam.
- [8.](#) In his Muqaddimah, Ibn al-Salah about perversion says: To recognize the perverted among the asanid and texts of the traditions, is a magnificent skill that can only be undertaken by acute huffaz, among whom we can refer to al-Daraqutni, who has a valuable compilation in this regard. Ahmad ibn Hanbal is reported to have said: Is there anyone who can be immune against error and perversion? Ibn al-Salah cited an example for tashif (misconstruction) in the sunan, by referring to what Ibn Luhay'ah quoted from the book of Musa ibn Aqabah, on his authority, from Zayd ibn Thabit, that the Messenger of Allah ihtajama (cupping) in the mosque, while the original word is with ra', i.e. ihtajara in the mosque with a booth or (straw) mat, making a chamber (hujrah) for performing his prayers, but Ibn Luhay'ah mispronounced it (p. 114).
- [9.](#) See the detailed discussion on hadith and alike things in my book Shaykh al-mudirah.
- [10.](#) See p. 100 and following pages.
- [11.](#) I wish all that had come true!
- [12.](#) For al-Harrani's speech there is a useful accurate elaboration, to which the reader can refer in his book, or in al-Jaza'iri's Tawjih al-nazar, p. 340 and following pages.
- [13.](#) Refer to p. 77.
- [14.](#) Abu Muhammad Ali al-Andalusi al-Zahiri, al-Ihkam fi usul al-ahkam, vol. II, pp. 86, 87.
- [15.](#) See vol. XIII, pp. 210, 211.

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