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Taken from: The Early Imamiyah Shi'ite Thinkers
Syed Waheed Akhtar
Ashsih Publishing House
New Delhi, India

Kitab al Kafi

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Languages: An Incomplete set of 13 vols. in English is available from the above distributors

The Kitab al Kafi consists of three parts, Usul, Furu' and Rawdah.

Usul Al Kafi

Usul al Kafi II volumes
Kitab Firushi Islamiyyah, Tehran 1388 A.H

First volume

A brief introduction of 6 pages beginning with the praise of God and the description of the attributes of His beauty and power, deals with the purpose of creation, particularly of man; after the mission of God's messengers ending with the last Prophet (S) and the significance of the Quran and Amir al muminin (A) is discussed and the need for a continuous chain of infallible Imams (A) is substantiated with the support of the traditions.

In the following paragraphs the importance and necessity of the knowledge of Divine Laws is emphasized, and al Kulayni wonders how people of his age are satisfied with their ignorance and rely upon the current customs and their ancestors' traditions without bothering about the real teachings of Islam.

He also complains against the people's complacency with regard to the capacity of human intellect. It seems that an over–confident rationalism was predominant in those days, which ignored the guidance provided by the tradition. Al–Kulayni took up the work of compilation of the traditions for the sake of arming the believers with sufficient body of hadith that could serve as a guide.

He himself did not write any commentary on the traditions he compiled, but his preference for the traditions emphasizing the importance of reason and knowledge in placing them before all other traditions shows his own inclination towards rationalism. He was a muhaddith, and it is generally believed that mahaddithun were anti–rationalists but in the case of al–Kulayni this yard–stick is not applicable.

He tried to save the faith from the arrogance of rationalism, which refused to accept any other authority except intellect. He aimed to strike a balance between dogmatism and extreme type of rationalism.

We shall discuss his view of reason in a separate section of our article. Here it would suffice to mention that al–Kulayni's discourse on the duties and responsibilities of human beings prescribed by the law of Shariah is based on his rationalist approach to the problem, underlying the principle that God does not saddle human beings with impossible duties.

The lack of this realization has led Muslim Ummah to accept many ideas and beliefs that are alien to Islam. Even in his brief introduction he emphasized the significance of knowledge and– reason.

So far as the confusion created by different and sometimes contradictory traditions is concerned al–Kulayni adopts a balanced view. He writes:

You have brought to my notice that the meaning of the traditions were difficult for you to understand due to the conflicting records in various books, and it was even more difficult to ascertain whether differences arose because of difference in the reasons and motives; you also complained of having no access to a reliable scholar (of Islamic sciences with whom through dialogue and discussion you could arrive at a conclusion, neither you had any book that could cover all the branches of 'ilm ad–Din to save a seeker of truth from the labour of referring to many books and which could suffice as a guide and source of spiritual light in the matters of theology and the traditions of the rightly guided true Imams (A).

You expressed urgent need of such a book, and I hope that the present book would serve this purpose ... Nobody is able to distinguish between one and the other tradition received from the Imams (A) except with the guidance of an Imam (or the rule laid down by an Imam). There are three ways to do this:

(1) Compare a tradition with the Quran. if it is contrary to the Quran, reject it.

(2) A tradition that is reported on the basis of a popular belief, do away with it.

(3) A tradition that is generally accepted, select it, for unanimity is undisputable. According to this rule, only a few traditions can be specified (as authentic). In the matter of traditions that are conciliating, the

easiest way is suggested by the Imam (A), i.e. any one of the two you are free to choose.

Besides the introduction, the first volume consists of four books in the following order:

The first book is kitab al-'aql wa al-jahl, which has one chapter consisting of thirty-four traditions. Among them one tradition deals with the accompanying forces of reason ('uql) and ignorance (jahl).

The second book kitab fadl al-'ilm is divided into thirty-two chapters and contains 176 traditions on the whole. Some of the chapters deal with the following issues: significance of knowledge and distinguishing features of wise men; three meanings of 'ilm; three types of useful knowledge; types of human beings; characteristics of scholars; reward for scholars and students; the place and rights of a scholar; death of a scholar; forbiddance from speaking without knowledge; devotion to knowledge; distributors and guardians of knowledge; heresies and opinions; virtues and importance of writing; reference to the Quran and hadith; the problem of differences in the traditions; four types of the narrators of tradition; how to derive truth from the sayings of the Prophet (S); four meanings of the word sunnah.

The third book kitab al-tawhid consists of thirty-six chapters and 212 traditions. This book deals with the problems that form the main body of 'ilm al-kalam. Some of the basic issues are as follows:

Contingent nature of the world; nature of Divine Essence and Personality; God's Knowledge of Himself; stages of the realization of God; existence and space; refutation of the visibility of God; forbiddance from defining God; absence of plurality in God; Divine Attributes; Attributes of Essence and Attributes of Divine Action;

Divine Will is an Attribute of Divine Action; Divine Names and their nature; motion and transference; Seat of God ('arsh wa kursi); soul; origin (mabda') and its meaning; intention and will; examination and test; contraction (qabd) and expansion (bast) in relation to God; felicity and vice; good and evil; free will and determinism (qadar wa jabr) and intermediate stage ('amr bayna al-'amrayn); belief in determinism, freedom and delegated freedom (tafwid); meaning of Divine permission; grace (lutf); Divine proofs; Divine guidance.

The fourth book consists of two parts, the first part having 110 chapters, and the second part having histories of the lives of the Prophet (S) and Fatima al-Zahra' (A) and the twelve infallible Imams (A), at the end of which four discourses are included that sum up the general issues related to the role and place of the Imams. This book is entitled kitab al-hujjah, i.e., 'Arguments or proofs of God'.

This is the longest and the most detailed book of the first volume of Usul al-Kafi, and deals with man's need for Divine guidance in the form of prophets and Imams. Some chapters deal with the nature of the prophets' guidance and their role in human society, describing their specific characteristics and virtues.

The first part of this book contains arguments for the presence of a Divinely guided prophet or Imam in the earth, which can never remain without such guidance. The later chapters describe the signs of the

Imam and necessity of following him.

The topics that are emphasized are: explanation of the Quranic verse "...wa uli al-'amr min Qum"; Imams are trustees of Divine Command, His vicegerents, His Light, they are signs of God and they are embodiment of all the virtues and excellences; the Quran and the Imams are inseparable; the Quran leads us to know the Imams; Divine origin of 'Ali's wilayah (trusteeship); comprehensive nature of the Imam's knowledge. The second part, as mentioned above, gives brief account of the lives of the fourteen Infallibles (ma'sumun).

This book consists of 1015 traditions.

Second Volume

It also consists of four books. The first book is kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr (the book of belief and unbelief), and is the most exhaustive and the lengthiest book of the whole compendium, which covets two-third part of the second volume. It contains 209 chapters, in which a total number of 1609 traditions are recorded. The issues discussed in this book can be summarized under the following general headings:

Nature of belief (iman) and unbelief (kufr), meaning of tawhid (Divine Unity) and shirk (dualism or polytheism), nature of Islam (faith) and nifaq (hypocrisy), yaqin (firm conviction), the problem of individual and collective belief and unbelief and unity and disunity, praiseworthy or desirable and cursed or undesirable qualities and habits etc.

The last topics are dealt with in details. In short it may be justifiably said that no issue related with various forms and signs of belief and unbelief is left undiscussed in length.

The second book is kitab al-du'a' (book of invocations), consisting of four chapters and covering 409 traditions.

The third book is kitab 'aqamat al-Qur'an (the book concerning the virtues and greatness of the Quran), which consists of fourteen chapters and covers 124 traditions. This book deals with different aspects of the Quran and serves as a key to the understanding of the Holy Book.

The fourth book, that is the last part of Usul al-Kafi, concerns with social issues, and is entitled as Kitab al-mu'arharah. It deals with the most profound problems of the Islamic ethics and social philosophy. The issues paid special attention are: an individual's responsibilities towards others, Muslims in particular and non-Muslims in general; obligations and rights of Muslims in relation to each other and to the enemies of Islam.

The discussion about these issues covers all major aspects of a Muslim's individual and social life. This book consists of thirty chapters and 464 traditions in all. The total number of ahadith of the second

volume is 2346. If we add to this 1437 hadith of the first volume, total number of the traditions recorded in Usul al-Kafi is 3783.

Furu' Al-Kafi

The second part of al-Kafi is Furu' al-Kafi. It is compiled after the pattern of Usul. While Usul deals with the fundamentals of Islamic belief concerning various tenets of the faith, Furu' serves as a guide to Islamic jurisprudence, covering all aspects of life from tahdrah (cleansing) to diyat (blood-money).

Al-Kulayni has arranged the traditions according to the main issues concerning fiqh, and classification also is in conformity with the natural order of the problems of fiqh. He has neither expressed his own views nor reported others' judgements in order to preserve impartiality of the book, so that a scholar should remain free to form his own opinions. He did not want to prejudice others' minds with a biased explanation of ahadith. This approach is aimed at preserving the purity of the traditions and is a clear sign of his objectivity. A brief resume of the contents of all the five volumes of Furu' al-Kafi is given below:

First Volume

1. Kitab al-taharah deals with all general and particular issues concerning the prescribed process of cleansing one's body, the basic rules and their derivations, in three parts.

(A) Taharan wa najasah and related issues in 64 chapters covering 360 traditions.

(B) Uayd (menstruation) in 24 chapters covering 93 traditions.

(C) Mayyit (dead body) in 95 chapters covering 412 traditions.

2. Kitab al-salat is a detailed discussion of legal (fiqhi) issues concerning salat (prayer). It consists of 103 chapters and covers 927 traditions.

3. Kitab al-zakat is the third and last part of the first volume and contains only a part of the traditions regarding the laws of alms-giving or poor-due. This part of the book consists of 47 chapters and 277 traditions.

Second Volume

This volume begins with the second part of

1. Kitab al-zakat, consisting of 43 chapters and 251 traditions. On the whole this book contains 528 traditions.

2. Kitab al-sawm is the second book of this volume dealing with Al-Kulayni and His Works the issues

concerning fasting and consists of 452 traditions divided into 83 chapters.

3. Kitab al-hajj consists of 1485 traditions divided into 236 chapters.

The second volume of the Furu' contains total number of 2188 hadith.

Third Volume

This volume contains three books that deal with the issues concerning jihad (struggle in the way of God), trade and commerce, and marriage.

1. Kitab al-jihad: The word jihad is usually translated as holy war, but no English word can communicate the true sense of the term, for jihad covers very wide range of connotations. The term can be roughly defined as covering all the acts that promote the Divine cause as well as welfare of human individual and society.

It embraces in its fold another principle of Islam, i.e. al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar, which in itself embraces almost all the areas of human activity, both physical and intellectual or spiritual. Jihad and the other principle 'enjoining good and forbidding evil', if elaborated in details and stretched to their logical corollaries, cover the whole socio-political system of Islam. Kitab al jihad consists of 149 traditions divided into 23 chapters.

Al-Kulayni has taken great care in compiling the relevant traditions in such an order that the fundamental rules governing Islamic state and society are laid down in unambiguous terms.

2. Kitab al-tijarah provides the key to understanding and following the rules laid down by Islam with regard to economics. All the issues of jurisprudential significance compiled under ma'ishah (economy) concern with different aspects of economic activity at individual and social levels, such as, means of livelihood, just earning, forbidden earnings (makdsib muharramah), contracts, dealing in money matters, loan (dayn), mortgage (rahn), farming, trade, renting (ijarah), something found by chance (luqtah), right of pre-emption (shuf'ah), surety or guaranty (daman), etc. This book consists of 1061 traditions divided into 159 chapters.

3. Kitab al-nikah deals with the permissible forms and conditions of marriage and marital relations, covering all the aspects of man- woman relationship: social, economic, psychological, dower, legal rights of husband and wife etc. This book consists of 1191 chapters and 990 traditions.

The third volume contains a total number of 2200 hadith.

Fourth Volume

1. Kitab al-'aqiqah deals with the issues related to child-birth, education and upbringing of children, and the rights of sons and daughters. It covers 223 traditions and 38 chapters.

2. Kitab al-talaq, divided into 82 chapters, deals with the issues concerning ila' a form of divorce in which a man vows not to have connections with his wife for more than four months; zihar, a kind of divorce which results from likening one's wife to the husband's mother or other immediate female kins with whom one is not permitted to marry; li'an, mutual cursing, in which a man accuses his wife of adultery and the wife swears for her chastity. These issues are usually discussed under separate headings by fuqaha', but al-Kulayni has brought them under one topic. This book consists of 499 traditions.

3. This book deals with the rules of 'itq, manumission (freeing) of slave, tadbir, management (of individual affairs), and Kitabah (writing), and consists of 114 traditions divided into 19 chapters.

4 & 5. Kitab al-sayd and kitab al-dhabh: These are two separate books which deal with the issues related to hunting and slaughter or sacrifice of animals. Kitab al-sayd covers 119 traditions under 17 headings, and Kitab al-dhabh contains 74 traditions under 15 different headings.

6. Kitab al-'at'imah, dealing with the rules of eating, consists of 503 hadith under 290 chapters.

7. Kitab al-'ashribah, dealing with the issues related to drinking (permissible and prohibited), covers 62 traditions under 11 sections. As an appendix to this book abwab al-nabd'idhah (wines and alcoholic drinks) is added, which consists of 24 chapters, of which the last two chapters are devoted to the issues dealing with ghina' (music), nard (gambling with dice) and shatrani (chess). The total number of traditions of this book is 268.

8. Kitab al-libas wa al-tajammul wa al-zinah: This book covers the traditions concerning the matters related to dress, make-up, ornament and decorations under three heads, libas, tajammul and zinah. It covers 553 traditions divided into 69 chapters.

9. Kitab al-dawajin deals with issues pertaining to the domesticated and pet animals, under 13 chapters and records 104 traditions,

The total number of traditions of this volume is 2655.

Fifth Volume

1. Kitab al-wasaya deals with various forms of bequest, testament, last will and legacy. It consists of 240 traditions under 42 chapters.

2. Kitab al-'irth deals with the issues of inheritance. It is the most detailed book of this volume, and covers 310 traditions under 72 headings.

3. Kitab al-hudud deals with the punishments prescribed by the Quran and Sunnah. It covers a long range of crimes and sins which invite the prescribed punishments. It consists of 448 traditions divided into 66 chapters.

4. Kitab al-diyat, a natural sequel of kitab al-hudud, deals with the prescribed amount of cash or kind payable to the victim or the victim's heirs as compensation for the atrocity committed against a person. This book contains 369 traditions under 67 heads.

5. Kitab al-shahadah deals with the laws and rules of making witness or testimony in the matters of legal importance. It consists of 119 traditions under 23 sections.

6. Kitab al-qada' wa al-hukumah deals with the most important aspect of jurisprudence, for it deals with the problems of social and political justice and lays down the fundamental principles of governance and implementation of the Islamic laws. This subject has various dimensions and multiple facets, and is dealt with in 19 chapters consisting of 78 traditions.

7. The last book of the Furu' is Kitab al-qasam (oath or swearing), wa al-nadhr (offering or vow) wa al-kaffarat (atonement or expiation). These issues are usually treated as separate issues by most of the Islamic jurisprudents, but al-Kulayni has put them together in this book, and divided the book into 18 chapters covering 140 traditions. With this book the Furu' ends.

The total number of traditions recorded in this volume is 1704.

The total number of ahadith of the Furu' is 11156 (first volume: 2409, second vol. 2188, third vol. 2200, fourth vol. 2655, and fifth vol. 1704).

Added to this number 3783 traditions (first vol. 1437, and second vol. 2346) of the Usul, both the books have together 14939 hadith, all ref which are properly authenticated and meticulously checked and scrutinized.

Rawdat Al-Kafi

This is the last of the series of al-Kafi, a book that contains the khutab (sermons or speeches) and the letters of- the Infallibles.

As the Usul and the Furu' were meant to be compendium of the fundamental principles and rules of Islamic jurisprudence, morality and socio-political laws, many letters, sermons, wasaya and sunan of the Imams could not find place in them for they could not have been placed under any of the above-mentioned heads or sub-heads.

Al-Kulayni compiled them under the name of the Rawdah, a garden embracing a variety of flowers and fruits picked up and gathered from the fields cultivated by the Imams. In all, 636 issues are covered, which range from the tenets of belief to the highly sophisticated and complex problems of ethics and sciences. This volume contains also the utterances, sermons and letters of the Prophet (S).

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