

# The Science of Hadith

## Lesson 7



# Contradictions in Shia Hadith

- The presence of contradictions between hadith attributed to the Imams within the Shia corpus is an undeniable reality. A simple perusal of the 4 canonical hadith collections will reveal these seemingly conflicting reports.
- Unfortunately, such reports have been weaponized by detractors to negate the infallibility of the Imams and undermine the legitimacy of the Shia hadith tradition.

# Contradictions in Shia Hadith

- Some contradictions are caused by narrators of hadith while others can be sourced to the Imams themselves, however there is a third category which will be the focus of our discussion.
- It should be known that a number of instances where one presumes the presence of a real contradiction between hadith are, in actuality, cases of mistaken presumption. That is to say, there seems to be a contradiction but that is not so. This comes about because of several reasons:

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- 1. Personal vs. Universal:
- The Imam's reply may sometimes be given in consideration of the questioner's circumstances and personal condition which the Imam would normally come to know of.
- Consider the following narration:

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عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ عَمَّارٍ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) أَقْضِي صَلَاةَ النَّهَارِ بِاللَّيْلِ - فِي السَّفَرِ فَقَالَ نَعَمْ فَقَالَ لَهُ إِسْمَاعِيلُ بْنُ جَابِرٍ أَقْضِي صَلَاةَ النَّهَارِ بِاللَّيْلِ فِي السَّفَرِ فَقَالَ لَا - فَقَالَ إِنَّكَ قُلْتَ نَعَمْ فَقَالَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ يُطِيقُ وَأَنْتَ لَا تُطِيقُ.

- I said to Abū ‘Abdillāh: Do I make up a (lapsed) day-time prayer by night whilst on a journey? He said: Yes. Ismā‘īl b. Jābir said to him: Do I make up a (lapsed) day-time prayer by night whilst on a journey? He said: No (i.e. you have to make it up by day). So he (Mu‘āwiya) said: But you had said ‘Yes’ (to me)! He (the Imam) said: **That one (i.e. Ismā‘īl) has the strength for it while you do not**
- **Source:** *Wasā’il al-Shī‘a*, v. 4, p. 84

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- In another narration we read:

عَنْ أَبِي أَيُّوبَ قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي سَلَمَةُ بْنُ مُحْرِزٍ أَنَّهُ كَانَ تَمَتَّعَ - حَتَّى إِذَا كَانَ يَوْمُ النَّحْرِ طَافَ بِالْبَيْتِ وَ  
بِالصَّفَا وَ الْمَرْوَةِ - ثُمَّ رَجَعَ إِلَى مَنَى وَ لَمْ يَطْفِطِ طَوَافَ النِّسَاءِ - فَوَقَعَ عَلَى أَهْلِهِ فَذَكَرَهُ لِأَصْحَابِهِ - فَقَالُوا  
فُلَانٌ قَدْ فَعَلَ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ - فَسَأَلَ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) فَأَمَرَهُ أَنْ يَنْحَرَ بَدَنَةً - قَالَ سَلَمَةُ فَذَهَبْتُ إِلَى أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ  
(ع) فَسَأَلْتُهُ فَقَالَ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ شَيْءٌ -

“He (Abī Ayyūb) said: Salama b. Muḥriz narrated to me that he was performing the Tamattu‘ (one form of Hajj), until it was the Day of Sacrifice (i.e. when pilgrims slaughter) so he made the Ṭawāf around the House and between Safa and Marwa before returning to Mina without performing the Ṭawāf āl-Nisā’, then he went on to have intercourse with his wife. He mentioned this (mistake) to his companions who said: So-and-so had done like that and asked Abā ‘Abdillāh (what to do) so he (the Imam) ordered him to sacrifice a camel (as expiation). Salama said: I went to Abī ‘Abdillāh and asked him. He said: There is nothing upon you.”

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فَرَجَعْتُ إِلَى أَصْحَابِي فَأَخْبَرْتُهُمْ بِمَا قَالَ لِي - قَالَ فَقَالُوا اتَّقَاكَ وَ أَعْطَاكَ مِنْ عَيْنِ كَدِرَةٍ -  
فَرَجَعْتُ إِلَى أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) فَقُلْتُ إِنِّي لَقِيتُ أَصْحَابِي - فَقَالُوا اتَّقَاكَ - وَ قَدْ فَعَلَ فُلَانٌ مِثْلَ مَا  
فَعَلْتَ فَأَمَرَهُ أَنْ يَنْحَرَ

I returned to my companions and informed them of what he had said to me. They said: He has done Taqiyya with you and given you (a reply) from a contaminated spring. So I returned to Abī ‘Abdillāh and said: I met my companions and they said ‘He has done Taqiyya with you, so-and-so had done like what you did and he ordered him to sacrifice a camel’?

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فَقَالَ صَدَقُوا مَا اتَّقَيْتُكَ- وَ لَكِنْ فُلَانٌ فَعَلَهُ مُتَعَمِّدًا وَ هُوَ يَعْلَمُ- وَ أَنْتَ فَعَلْتَهُ وَ أَنْتَ لَا تَعْلَمُ فَهَلْ  
كَانَ بَلَّغَكَ ذَلِكَ- قَالَ قُلْتُ: لَا وَ اللَّهُ مَا كَانَ بَلَّغَنِي فَقَالَ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ شَيْءٌ.

He (the Imam) said: They speak the truth. (However) I did not do Taqiyya with you, rather so-and-so had done that deliberately in spite of knowing, while you did it without knowing. Had that (requirement of performing Ṭawāf āl-Nisā') reached you? He (Salama) said: I said: No by Allah, it had not been conveyed to me. So he said (again): There is nothing upon you."

Source: *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*: Vol. 13, Pgs. 124-125



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عَنْ خَالِدِ بْنِ بِيَّاعِ الْقَلَانِسِيِّ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) عَنْ رَجُلٍ أَتَى أَهْلَهُ- وَ عَلَيْهِ طَوَافُ النِّسَاءِ قَالَ عَلَيْهِ بَدَنَةٌ- ثُمَّ جَاءَهُ آخَرُ فَقَالَ عَلَيْكَ بَقْرَةٌ- ثُمَّ جَاءَهُ آخَرُ فَقَالَ عَلَيْكَ شَاةٌ فَقُلْتُ بَعْدَ مَا قَامُوا- أَصْلَحَكَ اللَّهُ كَيْفَ قُلْتَ عَلَيْهِ بَدَنَةٌ- فَقَالَ أَنْتَ مُوسِرٌ وَ عَلَيْكَ بَدَنَةٌ- وَ عَلَى الْوَسْطِ بَقْرَةٌ وَ عَلَى الْفَقِيرِ شَاةٌ

“He (Khālid) said: I asked Abā ‘Abdillāh about a man who has intercourse with his wife while he still has to perform Ṭawāf āl-Nisā’? He (the Imam) said: Upon him is a camel. Then another came to him (with the same question) so he said: Upon you is a cow. Yet another came to him so he said: Upon you is a sheep. I (Khālid) said to him after they had left: May Allah set you aright, how did you say (at first) ‘upon him is a camel’? So he said: You are wealthy and upon you is a camel, and upon the middling (of average wealth) a cow and upon the poor a sheep.”

Source: *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*: Vol. 13, Pg. 123

# Contradictions in Shia Hadith

- 2. Time-bound vs. Timeless
- A statement of the Imam may have been issued in light of the historical circumstances specific to that time (and then mistakenly applied to all time).

عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ عَمَّارٍ قَالَ: قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) لَا تُخْرِجَنَّ شَيْئاً مِنْ لَحْمِ الْهَدْيِ.

“Do not remove anything of the meat of the sacrifice (from Mina).”

Source: *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*: Vol. 14, Pg. 171

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عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مُسْلِمٍ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: سَأَلْتُهُ عَنْ إِخْرَاجِ لُحُومِ الْأَضَاحِيِّ مِنْ مَنَى فَقَالَ-  
كُنَّا نَقُولُ لَا يُخْرَجُ مِنْهَا شَيْءٌ لِحَاجَةِ النَّاسِ إِلَيْهِ- فَأَمَّا الْيَوْمَ فَقَدْ كَثُرَ النَّاسُ فَلَا بَأْسَ بِإِخْرَاجِهِ.

“He (Muhammad) said: I asked him about taking the meat of the Adhā sacrifice out of Mina (i.e. leaving with it so as to be eaten later)? He (the Imam) said: We used to say no one leaves it (i.e. Mina) with anything (of meat), because of the (prevailing) need of the people for it (i.e. to encourage its immediate distribution to the many in need of it), as for today then the people (with wealth) have increased so there is no harm in taking it out.”

Source: *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*: Vol. 14, Pg. 172

# Contradictions in Shia Hadith

- 3. Conditional vs. Absolute (Importance of Context)

عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ (ع) وَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) أَنَّهُمَا قَالَا لَا بَأْسَ بِأَنْ يُصَلِّيَ الرَّجُلُ فِي الثَّوْبِ - وَ فِيهِ الدَّمُ مُتَفَرِّقًا شِبْهَ النَّضْحِ - وَ إِنْ كَانَ قَدْ رَأَهُ صَاحِبُهُ قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ فَلَا بَأْسَ بِهِ - مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ مُجْتَمِعًا قَدْرَ الدِّرْهِمِ.

They (i.e. al-Bāqir and al-Şādiq) said: There is no problem for a man to pray in clothes in which blood is dispersed like the effusion of sweat, even if the man had seen it before that (i.e. starting to pray), there is no problem in that as long as it is not collected together the size of a *Dirham* (coin).

Source: *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*: Vol. 3, Pg. 430

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- Now a jurist who considers this report to be absolute in nature will presume it to be contradictory with other reports which specify that even the tiniest amount of blood of *Ḥayḍ* (menstruation), or animal who is *Najis al-‘Ayn* (like the pig and the dog), or an animal who is not eaten makes the *Ṣalāt* void.
- But this mistaken assumption arises from overlooking the context of the Imam’s reply. That is, the Imams in the report above were not in the context of detailing the different types of blood and the distinction between them as far as *Ṣalāt* in them is concerned, rather, they were concerned with determining the amount of (permitted) blood which should not be exceeded

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- 4. Loss of Contextual Clues

عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ عَمَّارٍ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) عَنِ الْمَيِّتِ - فَقَالَ اسْتَقْبِلْ بِبَاطِنِ قَدَمَيْهِ الْقِبْلَةَ.

He (Mu'āwiya) said: I asked Abā 'Abdillāh about the *Mayyit*? He said: Direct him with the bottom of his feet facing the *Qibla*."

Source: Wasā'il al-Shī'a: Vol. 2, Pg. 453

# Contradictions in Shia Hadith

- 5. Changing Terminology:
- The conventional usage of certain terms changes with the passage of time such that a hadith conveys a different meaning when read today than the meaning it conveyed in the earlier era of legislation.
- Take the word “haram” as an example.

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عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مُسْلِمٍ عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ (ع) أَنَّهُ سُئِلَ عَنْ سِبَاعِ الطَّيْرِ وَ الْوَحْشِ - حَتَّى ذُكِرَ لَهُ الْقَنَافِدُ وَ الْوَطُوطُ - وَ الْحَمِيرُ وَ الْبِغَالُ وَ الْخَيْلُ - فَقَالَ لَيْسَ الْحَرَامُ إِلَّا مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ - وَ قَدْ نَهَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص) يَوْمَ خَيْبَرَ عَنْهَا وَ إِنَّمَا نَهَاهُمْ مِنْ أَجْلِ ظُهُورِهِمْ أَنْ يُفْنَوْهَا - وَ لَيْسَ الْحُمْرُ بِحَرَامٍ

“He (the Imam) was asked about predatory birds and wild beasts until the hedgehog, bat, donkey, mule and horse were mentioned to him – so he said: *Harām* is not but that which Allah made *Harām* in His Book. The messenger of Allah *Nahā* (prohibited) the eating of the meat of the donkey on the day of Khaybar. *Nahāhum* (He prohibited them) (i.e. to eat) because of their (i.e. donkey’s) backs (i.e. they were a means of transport) lest they finish them all. But donkeys are not *Harām*.”

Source: *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*: Vol. 24, Pg. 123



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عَنْ أَبِي الْحَسَنِ اللَّيْثِيِّ عَنْ جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ (ع) قَالَ: سُئِلَ أَبِي عَنْ لُحُومِ الْحُمُرِ الْأَهْلِيَّةِ- فَقَالَ  
نَهَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص عَنْ أَكْلِهَا- لِأَنَّهَا كَانَتْ حَمُولَةَ النَّاسِ يَوْمَئِذٍ- وَ إِنَّمَا الْحَرَامُ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ فِي  
الْقُرْآنِ

“My father was asked about the meat of domestic donkeys so he said: The messenger of Allah *Nahā* (prohibited) from eating it because it was a carrier of people in those days. Indeed the *Harām* is that which Allah made *Harām* in the Quran.”

Source: *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*: Vol. 24, Pgs. 119-120

# Contradictions in Shia Hadith

- 6. Influence of Dialect
- The Imam may speak in the vernacular of his direct interlocutor which differs from the vernacular of others listening in. Each one will understand the Imam's words to mean what is common among them.
- For instance, if a Meccan comes to the Imam and asks him about the quantity of *Kurr* then the Imam may answer him according to his vernacular that the *Kurr* is 600 *Raṭl* (a unit of volume) but when an Iraqi asks him the same question he answers that the *Kurr* is 1200 *Raṭl*. The Imam refers in the former answer to the Meccan *Raṭl* which is half of the Iraqi *Raṭl*.