

The Science of Hadith

Lesson 6



Why Shia and Sunni Hadith Differ

- One of the major topics in Islamic legal theory (Usul al-Fiqh) is the problem of إختلاف الحديث (differences between Hadith)
- The origins of differences in hadith can be traced back to prophetic period because the speech of the prophet was understood differently by different companions depending on their levels of comprehension, apart from other factors such as abrogation of hadith by the prophet himself.

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- The solution to this variance in hadith was to be found in referring back to Imam Ali, who was favoured by the Prophet with special access to his knowledge.
- This was physically manifested in the document known as the "*Sahifa*", the existence of which is attested to by all sides.
- The fact that the Sunni tradition gave equal credibility to all the companions out there as exponents of the prophetic *way* while the Shia had a single arbiter is considered to be a major reason for the divergence found in the corpus of the two groups.

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- When the successors to Imam Ali, the two Imams al-Baqir and al-Sadiq began widely disseminating religious rulings based on this special knowledge in the beginning of the second century, their companions and students were bound to find differences between this and the rulings issued by other authorities in the Islamic world.

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- As mentioned earlier, the beginnings of an awareness about the existence of the problem of the differences between hadith goes all the way back to the earliest period of Islam.
- This is when we discover that the companions as well as the second-generation Muslims experienced this problem and were affected by it the same way we are affected by it today.

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- For the hadiths that the Prophet conveyed to them included, at the very least, those which were *Muḥkam* (unambiguous) and *Mutashabih* (ambiguous), *Nasikh* (abrogating) and *Mansukh* (abrogated), and this on its part led to the manifestation of differences between the *hadith*.
- To clarify this point, we will look briefly at the two phases that the promulgation and spread of Islamic rulings went through:

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- The prophet elucidated the religious rulings on two different levels:
 1. Ordinary: This is when he elucidated the religious rulings for the companions as a whole who received it from him. It is represented by the general body of prophetic hadith.
 2. Extraordinary: This is distinguished (from the above) by being what Imam Ali received from the prophet of instruction since he (the Prophet) used to dictate them to him in an exclusive manner.

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- The end-result of this (process) was his (Imam Ali's) authorship of a number of books already in the life-time of the prophet. A fact that has been agreed-upon in the statements of both the non- Shia and the Shia.
- Non-Shia scholars have also acknowledged that Imam Ali was singled out among the companions in receiving from the prophet the rulings that pertain to dealing with the *Bughat* (rebels) and the Khawarij.

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- The difference between these two levels of reception of rulings is obvious, for the companions would (many a time) fall short in understanding the hadiths of the prophet and in paying due attention to his speech.
- It was therefore incumbent on them to refer back to the one who could interpret it for them so as to obtain a correct understanding of it. Such a one was none other than Imam Ali but they did not do that.

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- This multi-level reception of rulings should be considered to be among the primary causes for the differences between the hadith of the two groups, that is, the Shia and Sunnis, which in turn led them to differ in Fiqh.
- Because the source for Shia Fiqh is the Şuḥuf (pl. Sahifa) of Imam Ali which he wrote with his hand following the dictation of the Prophet together with the hadith of the Ahl al-Bayt.

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- While the source for Sunni *Fiqh* is the hadiths which the companions received from the prophet with what is in them of defective aspects as a result of different factors.
- Thus, the non-Shia faced the problem of differences in hadith that they received from the Prophet and from the very beginning of Islam. Because in them (i.e. the hadiths) there were the *abrogators* and *abrogated*, the *general* and *the specific*, the *decisive* and *ambiguous*.
- At the same time they did not possess the intellectual capacity to resolve it, because they did not hold on to the guidance of the Imam Ali nor did they rely upon the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt.

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- Imam Ali was questioned about the reason for differences in the hadiths that are transmitted by the companions of the Prophet.

عن سليمان بن قيس الهلالي، قال: قلت لأمير المؤمنين عليه السلام: إني سمعت من سلمان والمقداد وأبي ذر شيئاً من تفسير القرآن وأحاديث عن نبي الله صلى الله عليه وآله غير ما في أيدي الناس، ثم سمعت منك تصديق ما سمعت منهم ورأيت في أيدي الناس أشياء كثيرة من تفسير القرآن ومن الأحاديث عن نبي الله صلى الله عليه وآله أنتم تخالفونهم فيها، وتزعمون أن ذلك كله باطل

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- On the authority of Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilali who said:

“I said to the Commander of the Faithful: I heard from Salman, Miqdad and Abu Dhar things to do with the Tafsir (commentary) of the Quran and traditions of the prophet which are different from that which is in the hands of the people, then I heard from you a confirmation of what I had heard from them. I also found in the hands of the people a lot of things to do with the Tafsir of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet of Allah which you oppose them in and assert all that to be false....”

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أفتري الناس يكذبون على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله متعمدين، ويفسرون القرآن بأرائهم؟
قال: فأقبل علي فقال: قد سألت فافهم الجواب.

Do you believe that the people are lying about the messenger of Allah deliberately and are commenting on the Quran by their personal opinions? He (Sulaym) said: So he (i.e. Imam Ali) turned towards me and said: You have asked so understand the answer.

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إن في أيدي الناس حقا وباطلا، وصدقا وكذبا، وناسخا ومنسوخا، وعاما وخاصا، ومحكما ومتشابها، وحفظا ووهما،

What is in the hands of the people includes both truth and falsehood, veracity and lies, abrogating and abrogated, general and specific, unambiguous and ambiguous, correctly preserved (memorized) and mistaken.

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وقد كذب على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله على عهده حتى قام خطيبا فقال: أيها الناس قد كثرت علي الكذابة فمن كذب علي متعمدا فليتبوء مقعده من النار، ثم كذب عليه من بعده، وإنما أتاكم الحديث من أربعة ليس لهم خامس:

Lies were attributed to the messenger of Allah in his own life-time, until he stood to give a speech and said 'O people! Liars about me have increased, so the one who lies about me deliberately should occupy his seat in the fire'. Then lies were said about him after him (i.e. his death). Verily the hadith has come to you from four (types of people) – there is no fifth:

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رجل منافق يظهر الإيمان، متصنع بالإسلام ويتأثم ولا يتحرج أن يكذب على رسول الله صلى
الله عليه وآله متعمدا

A hypocritical man, who makes a show of faith and acts out Islam. He does not restrain himself nor find it burdensome to lie about the messenger of Allah deliberately.

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فلو علم الناس أنه منافق كذاب، لم يقبلوا منه ولم يصدقوه، ولكنهم قالوا هذا قد صحب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله ورآه وسمع منه، وأخذوا عنه، وهم لا يعرفون حاله،

So if the people knew that he was a lying hypocrite they would not accept from him, nor would they consider him truthful, but they said instead 'this one was a companion of the messenger of Allah, he saw him and heard from him' so they took from him without knowing his (true) condition.

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وقد أخبره الله عن المنافقين بما أخبره ووصفهم بما وصفهم فقال عز وجل: " وإذا رأيتهم
تعجبك أجسامهم وإن يقولوا تسمع لقولهم

Allah had informed him (i.e. the prophet) of the hypocrites with what he informed, and described them with what he described – so He Mighty and Majestic said “and if you see them their outward form impresses you, and if they speak you listen to their speech”

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" ثم بقوا بعده فتقربوا إلى أئمة الضلالة والدعاة إلى النار بالزور والكذب والبهتان فولوهم الأعمال ، وحملوهم على رقاب الناس، وأكلوا بهم الدنيا، وإنما الناس مع الملوك والدنيا إلا من عصم الله، فهذا أحد الأربعة.

These remained after him (i.e. the prophet's death) and drew near to the Imams (leaders) of misguidance and callers to the Fire by their falsities, lies and slander. So they (the leaders) appointed them to be governors over provinces, imposed them over people's necks, and consumed through them the world. Indeed the people are with their kings and (with) the world, except one whom Allah has protected. So this is one of the four.

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ورجل سمع من رسول الله شيئاً لم يحمله على وجهه ووهم فيه، ولم يتعمد كذباً فهو في يده، يقول به ويعمل به ويرويه فيقول: أنا سمعته من رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله فلو علم المسلمون أنه وهم لم يقبلوه ولو علم هو أنه وهم لرفضه.

(The second is) A man who heard something from the messenger of Allah, but he did not bear (memorize) it in an accurate form, and made a mistake in it, though he did not intend to lie. It is in his hands, he believes in it, acts upon it, and transmits it saying 'I heard it from the messenger of Allah', but if the Muslims knew that he was mistaken they would not have accepted it, and if he himself knew that he was mistaken he would have rejected it.

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ورجل ثالث سمع من رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله شيئاً أمر به ثم نهى عنه وهو لا يعلم، أو سمعه ينهى عن شيء ثم أمر به وهو لا يعلم، فحفظ منسوخه ولم يحفظ الناسخ، ولو علم أنه منسوخ لرفضه، ولم علم المسلمون إذ سمعوه منه أنه منسوخ لرفضوه.

A third man heard something ordered by the messenger of Allah and then he (the messenger) forbade it while he (the man) did not know, or he (the man) heard him (the messenger) forbidding something then he (the messenger) permitted it (later) while he (the man) does not know, so he (the man) preserved the abrogated and did not preserve the abrogating. If he knew that it is abrogated he would have rejected it, and if the Muslims knew that it is abrogated when they heard it from him they would have rejected it.

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وآخر رابع لم يكذب على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله، مبغض للكذب خوفا من الله و
تعظيما لرسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله، لم ينسه، بل حفظ ما سمع على وجهه فجاء به كما
سمع لم يزد فيه ولم ينقص منه

The last and fourth one is he who does not lie about the messenger of Allah. He detests lying out of fear of Allah and in reverence of the messenger of Allah. He did not forget it (the hadith) rather he memorized what he heard in its original form, so he came with it as he had heard it, and did not add anything to it nor reduce from it.

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وعلم الناسخ من المنسوخ، فعمل بالناسخ ورفض المنسوخ فإن أمر النبي صلى الله عليه وآله مثل القرآن ناسخ ومنسوخ [وخاص و عام] ومحكم ومتشابه

He can tell the abrogating among it from the abrogated. Because the commands of the prophet are like those of the Quran, (they include) the abrogating and abrogated, specific and general, unambiguous and ambiguous.

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قد كان يكون من رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله الكلام له وجهان: كلام عام وكلام خاص مثل القرآن وقال الله عز وجل في كتابه: " ما آتاكم الرسول فخذوه، وما نهاكم عنه فانتهوا " فيشتبه على من لم يعرف ولم يدر ما عنى الله به ورسوله صلى الله عليه وآله

There used to issue from the messenger of Allah speech which has more than one interpretation, a general speech and a particular speech, just like the Quran. Allah Mighty and Majestic said in His book "and whatever the Messenger gives you then take it, and whatever he forbids you from then leave it" but it becomes confused for one who does not know and does not comprehend what Allah and his messenger meant by it.

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وليس كل أصحاب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله كان يسأله عن الشيء فيفهم وكان منهم من يسأله ولا يستفهمه حتى أن كانوا ليحبون أن يجيء الأعرابي والطارى فيسأل رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله حتى يسمعوا.

Not every companion of the messenger of Allah was someone who could ask him about something and go on to understand (the reply). There was (also) among them one who would ask him and not inquire further, to the extent that they would desire that a Bedouin or visitor would come and ask the messenger of Allah so that they could hear (the reply).

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وقد كنت أدخل على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله كل يوم دخلة وكل ليلة دخلة

While I (on the other hand) would enter upon the messenger of Allah every day for a private session and every night for a private session

Source: al-Kafi, v. 1, p. 50,