

Tahrif and Sunnah

The third proof is from the traditions of *thaqalayn*, two invaluable things left behind by the Prophet (‘s), wherein he said that they would hold together till they arrive near him at the *Hawdh* (the pool of *Kawthar*) and he asked his followers to remain adhered and attached to them. These two things are the Qur’an and the *Ahl ul-Bayt* (‘a) (his true progeny). These traditions have been overwhelmingly reported by the accepted chains of narration from both the sects of Islam¹.

This tradition helps us establish the purity of the Qur’an from *Tahrif* in two ways. First, the adherence would not be practical nor conceivable if parts of the Qur’an were lost by way of interpolation or change. But as the tradition clearly sets out, the adherence is required of the ummah for ever, till the Day of Judgement. Therefore, *Tahrif* cannot be accepted to have occurred.

Further, these traditions show that the *Ahl ul-Bayt* (‘a) and the Qur’an will remain together, present among men till the Day of Judgement. It is therefore absolutely imperative that a person should exist whom Qur’an accompanies, and also, the Qur’an must exist to be in company with the *Ahl ul-Bayt* (‘a), till they reach the Prophet together at the *Hawdh*. And as the Prophet (‘s) has said in this tradition, adherence to both of them would guard the Ummah from going astray.

Obviously, the adherence to *Ahl ul-Bayt* (‘a) is brought about by affinity to them, by following what they enjoin and refraining from what they forbid, and by walking on their guided path. It does not at all need a direct contact with the Imam or talking to him personally. In fact, such a contact is not possible for all Muslims even when an Imam is visibly present, to say nothing of the days of concealment. Those who insist on a contact of this nature do so without any reasonable argument. The Shi’as, for example, are adherents of their Imam in concealment (‘a) by way of love for him, and by following his behests, which include following the *Ulama*’ who carry their traditions, to guide in matters which are contingent or incidental.

As for adherence to the Qur’an, it is not possible without direct access to it, and therefore it is absolutely essential for it to be present among the Ummah for guidance and prevention from going astray. This explains why it is unnecessary to discuss about the guarded Qur’an being in possession of the Imam (‘a) in concealment, because mere existence of the Qur’an is not enough for Ummah to be able to follow; it

has got to be available.

It may be argued that the traditions of *Thaqalayn* indicate that only those verses of the Qur'an have remained unaltered which deal with the divine rules and laws, for they are the ones to be followed. They do not necessarily cover other parts which do not enunciate any laws.

They forget that the Qur'an is a book of guidance to men, as a whole, with all its verses, conducive to perfection in all aspects of life. Thus there is no difference between the parts which contain the laws and the others. In the foregoing chapter on excellence of the Qur'an, we have explained how even those verses which apparently deal with the past history have morale and admonition in them. The basic issue of controversy has been the claim by some who say that the verse of *wilayah* and related subjects have been omitted. The answer is that if those had been proved to be parts of the Qur'an, then it would have been obligatory upon the Ummah to adhere to them as well.

The benefit of this tradition is that if interpolation, distortions, deformations, alteration or omissions are allowed in the Qur'an, then its authority lapses, and it would not be incumbent to follow the outward or literal texts of the Qur'an. In such circumstances, the believers *Tahrif* have no choice but to refer to *Ahl ul-Bayt ('a)* for getting the Qur'an certified as an authentic book, worthy of reference by the people, in spite of the tampering having occurred.

This means that the authority of the Qur'an primarily depends upon the sanction by *Ahl ul-Bayt ('a)*, or upon any one having two authorities for which the Prophet ('s) ordered adherence. But of these two, the Qur'an is greater and therefore its authority cannot be subservient to the ratification of a lesser authority, i.e. *Ahl ul-Bayt ('a)*. The reason why we say that the authority of the Qur'an would lapse if *Tahrif* is allowed is that because of such changes, there is every possibility that the postulations of the Qur'an had some contextual link with other qualifying parts which are lost.

An argument running counter to this maintains that it is not rational to anticipate a contradictory or qualifying part if it does not readily exist. One has to rely upon the literal text which is manifest and existing. We have ourselves explained in our discussions of the principles of jurisprudence that it is not rational to anticipate any context which is not syntactic or which does not appear immediately in the construction of a sentence. In fact, even those contexts, which are in the syntax, can be ignored if they have been caused by the carelessness of the speaker or negligence of the listeners.

But in this case, we maintain that this principle does not apply. Here, there are the believers in *Tahrif*, who say that something is lost, and therefore, reason will guide us to restrain from relying solely upon the existing literal text of the Qur'an. Let us say, for example, a scripture is found which instructs its followers to buy a house. Now if a follower found out that certain parts of the scripture have been ruined or missing, suspecting that those missing parts may have further specifications with regard to the size of a house to be bought, or its value or location, it would be quite rational for him to refrain from purchasing a house. He cannot take the existing text as complete, and if he bought a house he would not be sure

that he has carried out the intended instruction of his Lord.

The reader may think that with this analogy, the whole foundation of *fiqh*, together with the system of deductions and inferences of the divine laws would collapse; because they depend chiefly on the traditions reported from the *masumin* ('a) (the Prophet ('s) and his pure progeny). And in these, there is a possibility that their saying may not have been reported with the qualifying contexts. But with little extra effort, this doubt can be allayed. In the case of the traditions, what is to be followed is the report of a narrator in its complete form. If there was any contextual evidence, he would include it in the narration. The absence of any contextual qualifications or contradictions in the tradition would simply mean that they did not exist.

It is now an established fact that belief in *Tahrif* necessarily means that the text of the Qur'an cannot be taken as an authority. Some people say that, before accepting this conclusion, one must at least have a comprehensive knowledge about those *ayahs* in which any deficiency may have occurred. I maintain that this does not apply in the case of *Tahrif*, because comprehensive knowledge becomes credible only when its effect is seen in practice. Most of the verses of the Qur'an in which *Tahrif* is believed to have occurred do not deal with any laws, and therefore they would not be requiring this consideration.

There might be a claim that since the Imams of *Ahl ul-Bayt* ('a) have based their guidance on the text of the Qur'an, and since their followers and companions have acquiesced to their directive, therefore the authority of the text of the Qur'an has been reinstated, even though it may have lapsed before due to *Tahrif*. This claim has no substance because the Imams of *Ahl ul-Bayt* ('a) did not initiate the authority of the Qur'an. What they did was to confirm the authority of the Qur'an by instructing their followers to adhere to the scriptural text, giving full recognition to the Qur'an as an independent, autonomous authority.

1. Musnad, Hanbal, v3, p14,17,26,59 reported from Abu Saeed al-Khudri;v4, p.366,371 from Zaid b. Arqam.; v5, p. 182, 189from Zaid b. Thabit.) Jalal-ud-din Suyuti in his *Jama'us Saghira* reported from Tabrani by Zaid b. Thabit, declaring it as authentic. Allamah al-Manawi in his commentary: v3, p15 wherein he reports al-Haythami having said: 'All the narrators are trustworthy'. Abu Ya'la reported it with an unblemished chain of reporters, and Hafiz Abdul Aziz b. al-Akhdhar quoted this with an addition: This was said by the Prophet ('s) at the time of the last Hajj. He also castigated those like Ibn Jawzi who have classified this tradition as false. As-Samhudi says: This is among those chapters wherein more than twenty companions of the Prophet ('s) have reported. al-Hakim has reported in *al-Mustadrak* v3, p.109 from Zaid b. Arqam and has authenticated it. al-Dhahabi has not criticized it. The words in the actual traditions vary, but the meaning conveyed is constant.

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