Usul al-Kafi is the first part of al-Kulayni's al-Kafi that deals with themes of doctrinal and ethical significance in a systematic manner.

Preface

The hadith literature can broadly be divided into at least four categories depending on the themes dealt with in traditions.

Firstly, there is the part which is concerned with matters of doctrinal significance (usul al-Din).

Secondly, there are traditions which deal with spiritual and ethical themes (Irfan and akhlaq).

Thirdly, there is the great mass of traditions concerned with law and legal issues (fiqh).
Fourthly, there are the traditions which deal mainly with history and historical incidents.

Of the four major collections of Shi‘i hadith, namely al–Kafi, al Tahdhib, al–’Istibsar, and Man layahduruhu al–faqih, only a part of al–Kafi deals with doctrinal and ethical themes. The rest of al–Kafi as well as the whole of the three other collections, deal mainly with legal matters. This part of al–Kafi dealing with doctrinal, ethical and historical themes consists of the books constituting Usul al–Kafi and Rawdat al Kafi.

Usul al–Kafi is the first part of al–Kulayni’s al–Kafi that deals with themes of doctrinal and ethical significance in a systematic manner. Rawdat al–Kafi, which deals with miscellaneous themes, is a record mostly of the sermons, letters, polemics, episodes, etc. of the Prophet (S) and the Imams (A). Usul al–Kafi contains eight books in the following order:

1. Kitab al–‘aql wa al jahl (The Book of Intellect and Ignorance, contains 34 traditions),
2. Kitab fadl al–ilm (The Book of the Merits of Knowledge, contains 176 traditions),
3. Kitab al–tawhid (The Book of Divine Unity, contains 212 traditions,
4. Kitab al–hujjah (The Book of God’s Proofs, contains 1015 traditions),
5. Kitab al– iman wa al–kufr (The Book of Belief and Unbelief, contains 1609 traditions),
6. Kitab al–du’a’ (The Book of Invocation, contains 409 traditions),
7. Kitab ‘azamat al–Qur’an (The Book of the Greatness of the Quran, contains 124 traditions), and

Thus the eight books of Usul al–Kafi, which consists of two volumes, contain 3783 traditions. The entire al–Kafi is said to contain 16,199 traditions, including 11,156 traditions of the Furu’ al–Kafi. Not all traditions of al–Kafi are of equal reliability. According to the great Imam scholar Zayn al–Din al–`Amili, known as al–Shahid al–Thani (911–966/1505–1559), who examined the asnads or the chains of transmission of al–Kafi’s traditions, it consists of 5072 sahih, 144 hasan, 1118 muwaththaq, 302 qawi and 9485 traditions which are categorized as daif.

Traditions fall into two basic categories: mutawatir and ahad. A hadith is said to be mutawatir when it, has been narrated by so many different chains of narrators belonging to various periods and different regions of the Islamic world, and in so many different wordings as to preclude any doubt about its authenticity. Traditions which are not mutawatir are termed as ahad or wahi.

The ahad traditions in turn are classified into various categories by Shi‘i scholars, according to the qualities of their asnads and the repute of narrators in a chain. These categories, in a decreasing order of reliability are: sahih, hasan, muwaththaq and daif. A sahih tradition is one which is free from any kind of
defect in its unbroken chain of transmission and is narrated by transmitters of well-known veracity (thiqah).

This selection from Usul al-Kafi is based on the selection published by Muhammad Baqir Mahmudi, in Arabic under the title Sahih al-Kafi and with Persian translation with the title Guzideh-ye Kafi (vol.1, Markaze Intisharat-e `Ilmi wa –Farhangi: Tehran, 1363 H. Sh) All the ahadith selected here fall, according to his estimation, in the category of sahih traditions from the viewpoint of asnad.

The main sources of information about the reliability of Shi`i narrators are:


3. Fihrist al–Tusi, also by Shaykh al–Ta'ifah al–Tusi, referred to here as Tf.


The traditions selected here have been numbered, and the serial number of each tradition in Usul al–Kafi is also mentioned after its serial number in this selection. The part of hadith pertaining to sanad has been typeset separately in smaller characters so that the reader not interested in sanad can turn to the text of a hadith directly. For those readers interested in information about the standing of narrators, some details about the sources affirming their reliability have been given in the notes at the end. Al–Kulayni is usually placed in the 9th tabaqh (generation) of narrators.

The tabaqah of each narrator is indicated after his name in the notes. For instance, 5/VI, indicates that the narrator belongs to the 5th tabaqah and has met and narrated from the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al–Sadiq (A). A zero instead of a Roman numeral indicates that he has not narrated directly from any of the Imams. 'N353' means, for instance, page 353 of Rijal al Najashi. Other symbols pertaining to books of rijal have been explained in the bibliography.

For information about al–Kulayni's life and works, refer to the article "Introduction to Imamiyyah Scholars: Al–Kulayni and His works," by Dr. Wahid Akhtar in al–Tawhid, vol.II, No. 3.

At times at the beginning of a sanad, al–Kulayni cites his immediate sources with the phrase ﻏَنْ عَدَدٍ مِّن اعْمَلَؤُنا (from a group of our companions), indicating that he received the tradition from a group of his teachers, who are identifiable from the teacher from whom they narrate. Thus when al–Kulayni says, "A group of our companions, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ` Isa," one or more of the following five pupils of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ` Isa are meant:
1. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Yahya al-'Attar al-Qummi.
3. Abu Sulayman Dawud ibn Kawrah al-Qummi.

When al-Kulayni says, "A group of our companions, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid al–Barqi," the following four pupils of al Barqi are meant:

2. Muhammad ibn `Abd Allah ibn Udhaynah.
3. Ahmad ibn `Abd Allah ibn Umayyah.

When al–Kulayni says, "A group of our companions, from Sahl ibn Ziyad," he means the following four of Sahl's pupils:


When al–Kulayni says, "A group of our companions from Ja'far ibn Muhammad, from al–Hasan ibn `Ali ibn Faddal", one of them is Abu `Abd Allah al–Husayn ibn Muhammad ibn `Imran ibn Abi Bakr al 'Ash'ari al–Qummi.

I. The Book of Intellect and Ignorance (Kitab Al–`Aql Wa Al–Jahl)
al-`Aql, He examined it. Thereupon He said to it: `Come forward!' It came forward. Then He said: `Go back!' It went back. Thereupon He said: `By My power and majesty, I didn't create any creature dearer to me than thee! I will not make thee perfect except in one whom I love. Indeed, to thee are My orders and prohibitions addressed. And for you are My rewards and retributions reserved.'

محمّد بن يحيى، عن أحمد بن محمّد، عن ابن حبيب، عن عبد الله بن سنان قال: ذكرت لأبي عبد الله عليه السلام رجلاً مبتلٌ بالنضوء والصلاة وقالت: هو رجل عاقل، فقال: أبو عبد الله وأيّ عقل له وهو يطيع الشيطان؟ فقلت له: وكيف يطيع الشيطان؟ فقال سله هذا الذي يأتيه من أيّ شئ هو؟ فإنه يقول لك من عمل الشيطان.

2/10: (Al-Kulayni from) Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad, from (al-Hasan) ibn Mahbub, from `Abd Allah ibn Sinan⁶, who said:

I mentioned to Abu `Abd Allah (al-`Imam al-Sadiq) (A) about a man afflicted with (doubts about) wudu' (ritual ablutions) and salat; remarking that he was a man of intellect (`aqili). Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: `What kind of intellect has he when he obeys Satan?' I said: `How does he obey Satan?' He said: `Ask him about its cause and he will tell you that it is the work of Satan.'

3/27: A group of our companions, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad, from al-Haytham ibn Abi Masruq al-Nahdi⁷; from al-Husayn ibn Khalid, from Ishaq ibn `Ammar⁸, who said:
I asked Abu `Abd Allah (A): `How is it that certain people understand everything on being told a little (about some matter) and some people are such that they hear the whole thing and respond to it; but there are some others who on being told (about a matter) ask one to repeat it again?'

The Imam (A) said: `O Ishaq, do you know why that is so? The man who understands the whole (matter) on hearing a little is one whose intellect was kneaded with his (substance) at the spermatic stage. The one who hears the whole thing and responds in accordance with what you had told him, is one whose intellect developed in his mother’s womb. And the man who requests you to repeat is one whose intellect developed after he grew up.'
II. The Book of The Merit of Knowledge (Kitab Fadl Al-'Ilm)

The Duty to Seek Knowledge

محمد بن يحيى، عن محمد بن الحسين، عن محمد بن عبد الله، عن عيسى عبد الله بن العمري، عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: طلب العلم فربضة.

4/38: Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Muhammad ibn al-Husayn, 1 from Muhammad ibn `Abd Allah, from `Isa ibn `Abd Allah al-Umari:

محمد بن إسماعيل، عن الفضل بن شاذان، عن ابن أبي عمر، عن جميل بن درّاج، عن أبان بن تغلب، عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: لوددت أن أصحابي ضربت رؤوسهم بالسياط حتّى يتفقهوا.

Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: `It is a duty to acquire knowledge'.
Abu `Abd Allah said: `It will be to my liking if the heads of my companions (followers) are struck with lashes until they become learned (in religion)'.

**The Merits of Scholars**

I said to Abu `Abd Allah (A): `Between a man who narrates your traditions and establishes them among the people, (as if) inscribing them in the hearts of your followers, and a devout person from among your followers who does not narrate these traditions–which of them is better?' The Imam (A) replied: `He who narrates our traditions and thereby makes firm the hearts of our followers is better than a thousand devotees'.

**The Reward of the Teacher and the Student**
Attributes of The Learned

Muhammad ibn Yahya al-`Attar, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn `Isa, from al-Hasan ibn Mahbub; from Mu`awiyah ibn Wahb who said:

I heard Abu `Abd Allah (al-`Imam al-Sadiq) (A) say: `Seek Knowledge and adorn it with forbearance and dignity. Be humble to those whom you teach and to those from whom you learn. Don't be tyrannical in your teaching conduct, for you will forfeit that to which you are entitled on account of it.'
Abu al-Hasan al-Rida (A) said: 'Forbearance and silence are among the signs of learnedness.'

**On the Death of an `Alim**

Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: `Of the believers that die, the death of none of them is so much lovable to Iblis as the death of a scholar (learned in the Din).'

**On Questioning Scholars**

محمَّد بن يحيى، عن أحمد بن محمد بن عيسى، عن حمَّاد بن عيسى، عن حبَّي
عن زرارة و محمد بن مسلم و يزيد العجلِّي قالوا: قال أبو عبد الله عليه السلام
لحمران بن أمين في شئ سأله: إنَّما يهلك النَّاس لأنهم لا يسألون.
Abu `Abd Allah (A), in reply to Humran ibn A`yan, who had asked him about something, said: `Indeed (many) people perish for not having asked questions.'

On Not Speaking Without Knowledge

Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: `I forbid you from two qualities which destroy men: don't worship God with false (doctrines) and don't give fatwas (legal verdicts) to people about something you know not.'
Abu Ja'far (A) said: "One who gives fatwas to people without knowledge and guidance is cursed by the angels of (Divine) mercy and (Divine) chastisement, and on him rests the burden (of the sins) of those who act upon his verdicts.'

Abu Jafar (A) said: "Tell (the people) what you know, and when you don't know say; `God knows best.' (It happens that) someone singles out a verse from the Quran (interpreting it in isolation from the rest of the Book) deviating in it (from the truth) to an extent greater than the distance between the heaven and the earth.

Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: "When a learned man is asked about something he doesn't know, he should say, `God knows best.' But it is not for someone who is not learned to say that."
Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: "God has specified (the limits of the duty of) His creatures by two verses from His Book: That they speak not until they know and that they reject not what they don't know. The Almighty has said:

`Has not the compact of the Book been taken touching them, that they should say concerning God nothing but the truth?' (7:169)

And He has said:

`No; but they belied that which they encompassed not in knowledge, and whose interpretation has not yet come to them."' (10:39)

Explaining the words of the Almighty, `So they shall be pitched into it (hell), they and the perverse' (26:94), Abu Ja'far (A) said, `They are a people who praised justice with their tongues and violated it (with their deeds)'.

محمّد بن يحيى, عن أحمد بن محمد بن عيسى, عن الحسين بن سعيد, عن النضر بن سويد, عن يحيى الحلبي, عن أبي سعيد المكاري, عن أبي بصير, عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام في قول الله عزّ وجلّ: "فَكَبَّرْبُوا فِيهَا هُمْ وَالْغَاوِنُونَ" قال: هم قوم وصفوا عدلًا بألستهم ثم خالفوه إلى غيره.
Abu Ja'far (A) said: To halt when in doubt is better than dashing into ruin. To abstain from (narrating) a tradition which is obscure to you is better than narrating something of which you are not sure.'
On Narration of Hadith

20/142: Muhammad ibn Yahya from Muhammad ibn al–Husayn, from Ibn Abi `Umayr, from Ibn Udhaynah46, from Muhammad ibn Muslim:

Muhammad ibn Muslim says, "I said to Abu `Abd Allah (A), "Can I add to or omit some (words) from a hadith that I hear from you (while narrating it)?" He replied, `It does not matter if your purpose is to convey its meaning."

21/150: Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn `Isa, from alHasan ibn `Ali ibn Faddal, from Ibn Bukayr, from `Ubayd ibn Zurarah47:

Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: Take good care of your books (written records of traditions), for you will stand in need of them in the future.'
22/153: Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Isa, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Nasr, 48 from Jamil ibn Darraj:

Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: `Arabicize our traditions (i.e. narrate them in accordance with the grammatical, literary and phonetic criteria), for we
(Ahl al-Bayt) are an eloquent people.'

2. Muhammad ibn `Abd Allah ibn Hilal; 6/0; he is one of the thiqah narrators of Ja`far ibn Muhammad ibn Qulawayh; see his Kamil al-ziyarat, p.23.
3. Isa ibn `Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn `Umar ibn `Ali ibn Al-Talib (A), 51VI; among thethiqat of Ibn Qulawayh; see Kamil al-ziyarat, p.47.
6. Abu Ahmad Muhammad ibn Abd al-`Aziz al-Ghadi (d.217/832), 6/VII, VHI; N326: jalil al-qadr `azim al-manzilah fina wa ina al-mukhalifin ... ashabuna yaskunana ila marasilihi; Tf142: kana min awkhal al–nas ina al-khassah wa al–ammah, wa ansakahum nusukan, wa awra`ahum wa a‘badahum; K556: he is among the narrators considered trustworthy by consensus of Shi`i scholars.
11. Sa’dan ibn Muslim al-`Amri; 5–6/V, VI; VII; one of the narrators of Safwan ibn Yahya; see Tff99 & N193: lived a long life.
13. Ibrahim ibn Isa (or `Uthman), Abu Ayyub al-Khazzaz al-Kufi; 5/V, VI; VII; N 20/A5: thiqah, kabir al-manzilah; Tff: thiqah.
19. Hammad ibn 'Isa, Abu Muhammad al–Juhani (d.208 or 209/823 or 824); 5/VI,VII,VIII; N142: kana thiqah, fi hadithihi saduq; Tr 346/Tf61/A66: thiqah.
21. Zurarah ibn A’yan (d.150/767); 4/V,VI; Tr350/A76: thiqah;N175: qad itama’at fihi khisal al–fadii wa al–din, sadiqan fi ana yarwih; K238: the most learned of early Shi’i fuqaha’ and one of those considered reliable by consensus.
22. Buraydi Mu’awiyah al liji (d.150/767); 4/V,VI; N12: wajh min wujuh ashabina; A27:thiqah; K238: he is one of the early Shi’i fuqaha’ and one of those considered reliable by consensus.
27. Mufaddal ibn Mazyad; 5/VI; of the rijal of Ibn Abi ‘Umayr, see al–Kulayni Rawdata–Kafi, hadith 257.
34. Abu Sa‘id al–Zuhri; 4/V,VI sources of tawthiq untraced.
Bibliography and Key to References


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