Selections from Usul al Kafi

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Al-Tawhid General (Al Tawhid)
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.

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 Imami scholar Zayn al-Din al-`Amili, known as al-Shahid al-Thani (911-966/1505-1559), who examined the *asnad* 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 wahid.

The ahad traditions in turn are classified into various categories by Shi’i scholars, according to the qualities of their *asnad* 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:

4. Ikhtiyar maʾrifat al-rijal, known as Rijal al-Kashshi, edited by Shaykh al-Taʿifah al-Tusi, referred to in the notes as K.

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 tabaqah (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, Jaʿfar 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 عَنْ عدّةٍ مَنْ اسْتَحْبَابِه (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 Ḥasān (A)," one or more of the following five pupils of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ḥasān are meant:

2. ʿAli ibn Musa ibn Jaʿfar al-Kamandani.
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 ʿAbd Allah ibn Udhaynah.
3. Ahmad ibn ʿAbd 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.

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When God created the Intellect (a/-`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.'
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.'


2. By ʿAhmad ibn Muhammad’ here is meant one of the following two: Ahmad ibn Abī ʿAbd Allah Muhammad ibn al–Khalid al–Barqi, 7/0, N76/kana thiqah fi nafsah, yarwi ʿan al–duʿafaʾ,wa ʿitamada al–marasil; Tf20/A14: thiqah, qhayr annahu akthara al–riwayah ʿan al–duʿafaʾ wa ʿitamada al–marasil.

3. Abu Jafar Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ʿIsa ibn ʿAbd Allah ibn Saʿd al–Qummi, 7/0, N82: metam (IX) and (X), shaykh al–Qummiyyin, wa wajhuhum wa faqihuhum, ghayr mudafi`. Tr366 mentions him among companions of (VIII) and (IX), and says: thiqah, A13: metam (VIII) (IX) & (X), kana thiqah.

4. Al–Hasan ibn Mahbub al–Sarrad (or al–Zarrad) al–Kufi (d.224/839), 6/VIII, Tr 347 Tf 46: thiqah; K556: he is one of the Shiʿi narrators about whose authenticity there is consensus among Shiʿi scholars.

5. ʿAla ibn Razin al–Qallaʾ, 5/VI, N298: thiqah; Tf483: thiqah jalil al–qadr; Sh84: thiqah; A123: thiqah.

6. Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn Riyah al–`Awqas al–Tahhan al–Kufi (d.150/767), 4/V, VI; N324, A149: wajh ashabina bi al–Kufah, warī faqih, ......kana min awthaq al–nas; K238: he is one of the Shiʿi narrators about whose veracity (tasdiq) there is consensus among Shiʿi scholars. He, was one of the six most learned companions of V and VI, the others being Zurarah, Maʿraf ibn Khabudh, Burayd, Abu Baqir and al–Fudayl ibn Yasar.


Ishaq ibn Amman, there are two narrators of this name, both of them thiqah: Abu Yaʿqub Ishaq ibn Amman ibn Hayyam al–Sayrafi, 5/VI, VII;N71: thiqah, shaykh min ashabina Ishaq ibn Amman al–Sabati, 5/VI, VII;Tf15: kana Fathiyyanilla annahu thiqa.
Abu `Abd Allah (A) said: `It is a duty to acquire knowledge'.

5/44: Muhammad ibn Isma`il, from al-Fad`j ibn Shadhan5, from Ibn Abi `Umayr6, from Jamil ibn Darraj7 from Aban ibn Taghlib8:

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

الحسين بن محمد, عن أحمد بن إسحاق, عن سعدان بن مسلم, عن معاوية ابن عمّار قال: قلت لأبي عبد الله عليه السلام: رجل راوية لحديثكم يثبتّ ذلك في الناس و يشدّده في قلوبهم و قلوب شيعتكم و لعلّ عابداً من شيعتكم ليست له هذه الرواية أيهما أفضل؟ قال: الرواية لحديثنا يشّدّ به قلوب شيعتنا أفضل من ألف عابد.

6/54: Al-Husayn ibn Muhammad9, from Ahmad ibn Ishaq10, from Sa'dan ibn Muslim11, from Mu`awiyah ibn `Ammar12, who said:

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

Abu Ja'far (al-'Imam al-Baqir) (A) said: ‘The teacher of Knowledge among you receives the reward of the student and has a merit over the latter. So seek Knowledge from its possessors and teach it to your brothers in the same way as the learned taught you.’

Attributes of The Learned
I heard Abu ʿAbd Allah (al-ʿImam al-Sadiq) (A) say: ʿSeek 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: ʿForbearance and silence are among the signs of learnedness.'

**On the Death of an ʿAlîm**

ʿOf 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

محمّد بن يحيى، عن أحمد بن محمد بن عيسى، عن حماد بن عيسى، عن حريز
عن زرارة و محمد بن مسلم و بريد العجلي قالوا: قال أبو عبد الله عليه السلام
لحمران بن أعين في شيء سأله: إنّما يهلك الناس لأنّهم لا يسألون.

11/85 Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn `Isa from Hammad ibn `Isa,19 from Hariz,20 from Zurarah,21 Muhammad ibn Muslim and Burayd (ibn Mu`awiyah) al `Ijii,22 who (all the three) said:

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

محمّد بن يحيى، عن أحمد وعبد الله ابني محمّد بن عيسى، عن عليّ بن الحكم،
عن سيف بن عميرة، عن فضّل بن يزيد قال: قال [ لي ] أبو عبد الله عليه السلام: أنهماك عن خصائصهما هلاك الرجال: أنهماك أن تدين الله بالباطل،
وتفتي الناس بما لا علم.

12/97 Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad and `Abd Allah, the sons of Muhammad ibn `Isa, from `Ali ibn al-Hakam23, from Sayf ibn `Umayrah24, from Mufaddal ibn Mazyad.25

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)'.

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.'
Hamzah ibn al Tayyar was reproducing some of the speeches of the father of Abu `Abd Allah (i.e. al-`Imam al-Baqir [A]) in his presence. When he reached a point the Imam (A) said: "Stop and be silent." Then he added, "When something comes to you that you don't know, your duty in such a case is nothing but to halt, to verify it and refer it to the Imam of guidance (a`immah al-huda), who will lead you to what is right, clarify that which was obscure for you and acquaint you with the truth therein. God Almighty has said:

`Question the Ahl al-Dhikr, if you know not."' (16:43)

On Narration of Hadith

Muhammad ibn Yahya from Muhammad ibn al-Husayn, from Ibn Abi `Umayr, Prom 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.'"

Muhammad ibn Yahya from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn `Isa, from al-Hasan 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.'

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 Abu Naasr from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Qulawayh; see his Kamil al-ziyarat, p.23.
3. 'Isa ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn `Umar ibn Abi Talib (A), 51VI; among thethiqat of Ibn Qulawayh; see Kamil al-ziyarat; p.47.
15. Safwan ibn Yahya. Abu Muhammad al-Bajali al-Kufi (d. 210/825); 6/VII; N197: thiqah, thiqah, `ayn: TF18: awthaq al zamanhi ina ashab al-hadith wa abaduhum; K556: he is one of the ruwat whose authenticity is accepted by consensus by Shi’i scholars.
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/A56: thiqah.
21. Zurarah ibn A’yan (d.150/767); 4/V, VI; Tr350/A76: thiqah; N175: qad ijtama`at fihi khisal al-fadl 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. Burayd ibn Mu‘awiya al-Liili (d.150/767); 4/V, VI; N12: wajh min wjuh ashabina; A27:thiqah; K238: he is one of the early Shi’i fuqaha’ and one of those considered reliable by consensus.
25. Mufaddal ibn Mazyad; 5/VI; of the rijal of Ibn Abi `Umayr, see al-Kulayni Rawdata-Kafi, hadith 257.
30. ‘Abd Allah ibn Bukayr ibn A’yan al-Shaybini; 5/VI; TFl06/Sh77: thiqah; K375: he is one of the six pupils of VI considered reliable by consensus.
34. Abu Ya`qub, Ishaq ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Madani, 5/VI; Ibn Abi `Umayr has narrated from him in this tradition; he is considered reliable.
36. Al-Husayn ibn Said ibn Hammad ibn Mihran al-’Ahwazi; 7/VII,IX,X; Tr372/TFl58/A49:thiqah
40. Abu Basir is the kunyah of five narrators from among the pupils of the Imams (A). As argued by al-Tabrizi (Mu’jam al-thiqat, Qumm, 1404, pp. 136-138), in chains of transmission of traditions narrated from V, VI and VII by Abu Basir is meant either of the following two:
   (a) Abu Muhammad Layth ibn al-Bakhtari; 4/V, VI; K238: considered reliable by consensus of Shi’i scholars according to some.
   (b) Yahya ibn al-Qasim al-Asadi (d. 150/767); 4/V, VI, V]; N441: thiqah wajih; K238: considered reliable by consensus.
42. Abu Said al-Zuhri; 4/V, VI; sources of tawthiq untraced.
44. Abu Ya`qub, Ishaq ibn `Abd Allah ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Madani, 5/VI; Ibn Abi `Umayr has narrated from him in this tradition; he is considered reliable.
46. Al-Husayn ibn Said ibn Hammad ibn Mihran al-’Ahwazi; 7/VII,IX,X; Tr372/TFl58/A49:thiqah
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45. Hamzah ibn al-Tayyir; 5/VI; Safwan ibn Yahyi narrates from him in K348, hadith 649, which is, however, weak from the viewpoint of sanad.
46. Umar ibn Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman ibn Udhaynah al-Basri; 5/VI; among the rijal of Ibn Abi `Umayr; N283: shaykh ashabina al Basriyin wa wajhuhum.
47. Ubayd ibn Zurarah ibn A`yan al-Shaybini; 5/VI; N233/A127: thiqah thiqah, ayn la labs fihi wa la shakk.

10. Ibn Qulawayb, Kamil al ziyarAt, al Matba`ah al–Haydariyyah: Najaf, 1356
11. Al–Mamaqani, Tanqih al–maqal, al Matba`ah al–Murtadawiyyah: Najaf

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