

The Knowledge of The Unseen & The Knowledge of The Book

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

This article aims at clarifying two concepts namely "Ilm al-Ghayb" (the Knowledge of the Unseen) and "Ilm al-Kitab" (the knowledge of the Book) which both seem to be confusing in many people's mind. The article provides references to Qur'an and both Shi'ite and Sunnite collections of traditions.

The Knowledge Of The Unseen

The original meaning of "Ghayb" in Arabic is "that which has been concealed", and it is with this meaning which has appeared in the Holy Qur'an (4:34, 12:52, etc.) It signifies a meaning opposite to "Hadhira" which means "present to the senses", and thus denotes with things to the external world (i.e., Ma'lumat; known things). This opposition of Ghayb/Hadhira (unseen/present) should not be confused with the opposition of Ilm/Jahl (knowledge/ignorance) in which the latter pair is concerned with the internal act of knowing. So it may happen that something is "Ghayb" in the dimension of time which does not exist now but it will be or it was; or in the dimension of place that is the knowledge of something which is located elsewhere but not here.

Thus we can divide our knowledge into two parts:

- A) The knowledge of something which is present to us right here and right now (Ilm bil Hadhira),
- B) The knowledge of something which we know but is not here now (Ilm bil Ghayb/Gha'ib; the knowledge of what is concealed from the senses).

It should be noted however that the above division is according to general/original linguistic meaning of

the term. The knowledge of Ghayb itself can be divided in two kinds:

1)The knowledge that comes to us through our senses, but indirectly. Examples are our knowledge of history which comes either through narration from one person to another, by speech or in writing or through examining the relics and remainings of the past, and then deducing certain historical facts from them.

2)The type of the knowledge of Ghayb which does not come through our senses.

It should be observed that the first type can be by means of ordinary senses (the five normal senses) or may be by a special sense which has been given to a person like telepathic sense (if there is such a thing). It is, however, only to the second type (the non-sensory one), that the technical/special meaning of "The Knowledge of Ghayb/Gha'ib" is denoted. The historical events mentioned in Qur'an has been named by Qur'an as "the tidings/news of Ghayb" (11:49, 12:102, 25:4-6) which are all the second kind which did not come via senses.

The Holy Qur'an is quite specific about the fact that Allah alone has the knowledge of Ghayb (what is concealed) in the heavens and the earth. Qur'an tells us that there are keys to the Ghayb which are with Allah:

"With Him are the Keys of the Ghayb; non knows them but He."(Qur'an 6:59)

and that no one knows anything of Allah's knowledge except if He will. Qur'an tells about the knowledge and the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad and his twelve successors that:

"Who can intercede with Him except the cases He permits? He knows what is in front of them (the Prophet and the Imams) and what is behind them, and they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He will."(Qur'an 2:255)

This shows that the core/keys of the Knowledge of Ghayb is with Allah, but He may release "a news of Ghayb" to the one He wills.

According to the Qur'an, things which are special property of Allah, such as creation, giving life, curing without medicine, the knowledge of what has happened and what will happen, may either be momentarily given by Him at the moment they are required, or else the power and ability to do them may be given so that they can be used when necessary, by the permission of Allah. An example of the latter comes in the story of Prophet Jesus (as) who, according to Qur'an, said:

"I have come to you with a sign from your Lord; I will create for you out of clay a figure of a bird, then I will breath into it, and it will be a bird by leave of Allah; I will also heal the blind and the leper, and bring to life the dead, by leave of Allah. I will also inform you of what things you eat and what you treasure up in your houses. Surely, in that is a sign for you, if you are believers."(Qur'an 3:49; see also 5:110)

To give a simple example, consider a person who looks at a monitor which displays some part of a database located in the hard drive of a computer. The user can retrieve any part of this database and see it on the monitor. But the whole database is always in the computer and not in the user's head. Furthermore, the user is unaware of any real-time modifications that may happen to this data base and the formulas behind the modifications.

Allah let the Prophet and Imams know whatever they needed to know. However, they don't have the whole knowledge within themselves. But Allah would give them whatever they needed any time. It is important to understand that what the prophets or the Imams wish to know is exactly what Allah wished to release to them. They do not wish to know anything that Allah do not want to release to them (among which is the keys to the knowledge of unseen).

Based on Qur'an and the transmitted traditions by Ahlul-Bayt, Allah has two types of knowledge:

1-The knowledge that is withheld (i.e., Ghayb). As I mentioned Nobody has control over this type of knowledge except Allah. Allah may inform "a news from Ghayb" to some of His servants, but this is different than "possessing Ghayb". In fact, there is a whole chapter in Usul al-Kafi which discusses this type of knowledge where it is clearly mentioned that neither the Imams nor the prophets possess the knowledge Ghayb. "The Will (Mashiyyah) of Allah operates on this knowledge. If He wishes He decrees it. And If He wishes He modifies it and does not carry it out." (See Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Tradition #664)

2-The knowledge that is granted. "This is the knowledge that Allah fore-ordained (Qadar, Taqdeer), He decrees it, and carries it out (with no modification). And this is the knowledge that has been passed down to the Prophet Muhammad, and then to the Imams." (See Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Tradition #664)

If the Prophet or Imams possessed any knowledge about the future, it is this second type of knowledge (the knowledge of what has been foreordained), and NOT the first type of knowledge (the Knowledge of the Unseen).

For the First type of knowledge, Qur'an states:

"Allah removes what He wills, and confirms what He wills, and with Him is the Essence of the Book." (Qur'an 13:39).

يَمْحُو اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيُثَبِّتُ وَعِنْدَهُ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ

The Essence of the Book is the withheld knowledge (Ghayb) which is only possessed by Allah, and nobody possesses this database but Him. Also see the following verses:

He said: "The knowledge of that is with my Lord in a Record. My Lord neither errs nor forgets."(Qur'an 20:52)

Now, let us look at the following verse:

"He possesses the Ghayb and He does not disclose His Ghayb to anyone **except to such a Messenger as He is well-pleased with.**"(Qur'an 72:26-27).

عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَىٰ غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٦﴾ إِلَّا مَن ارْتَضَىٰ مِن رَّسُولٍ...

From the above verse, it is evident that although Allah alone possesses the withheld knowledge (Ghayb), but He may disclose a news from it to Prophet Muhammad (S). On the other hand, Prophet Muhammad transferred whatever he was reached from the news of "Ghayb" to those who qualified, as the following verse testifies:

"And he (Muhammad) is not niggardly the Knowledge of the Unseen."(Qur'an 81:24).

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَىٰ الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

Therefore, if the news of Ghayb reached to the Prophet Muhammad (and consequently the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt), it is only because it was given to him by Allah. It is for this reason that according to Qur'an the messengers are all instructed to tell people that they do not possess the Knowledge of Ghayb of their own, for it is reached to them by Allah only as He wishes.

In Usul a-Kafi, it is narrated that:

Ammar al-Sabati said: I asked Abu Abdillah (Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq) concerning if Imam knows al-Ghayb (Unseen). He replied: "No, but when he wishes to know something, Allah causes him to know that."(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Tradition #666)

Shaikh al-Mufeed (d. 413/1022) who was one the outstanding Shi'a scholars said:

"... Saying that they (Prophet and Imams) possess the knowledge of Ghayb should be refuted as being something clearly incorrect, because the attribute of this can only be for someone who possesses the knowledge of (all) things within himself, not the knowledge obtained from another. And this can only be for Allah, to whom belong Might and Majesty. All Imamis agree on this except those who deviated from them and are called Mufawwidah and extremists (al-Ghulat)."(Awa'il al-Maqalaat, p38).

in fact, neither the prophets nor Imams ever claimed that they have all the knowledge within themselves.

Obviously they did not know those of information which was "hidden" to them. However, this does not mean that whatever they knew is "visible" to us as well. The information which is considered to be "hidden" to us may be "visible" to them. Thus the visibility of knowledge is relative to the person.

The Knowledge Of The Book

Qur'an mentions the second type of knowledge, explained above, which has been released to the prophets and the Imams. This is the knowledge of what has been foreordained and the knowledge of the rules governing the universe. This type of knowledge is known as "the knowledge of the Book". Qur'an testifies that some prophets and non-prophets had this type of knowledge by which they could perform many extraordinary things with the permission of Allah. We read in Qur'an that:

So We did show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth that he might (with understanding) have certitude. (Qur'an 6:75)

Also earlier, we quoted a verse of Qur'an related to Prophet Jesus who said: "I will also INFORM you of what things you eat and what you treasure up in your houses." (Qur'an 3:49; see also 5:110). References can also be made in this respect to the power of the interpretation of the tales given to Prophet Joseph (as) (see Qur'an 12:6,15,21,37), to the language of the birds given to Prophet David (as) and Solomon (Sulayman) (as) (see Qur'an 21:79). We also read:

We gave knowledge to David and Solomon, and they both said: "Praise be to Allah Who has favored us above many of His servants who believe!" And Solomon was David's heir. He said: "O People! we have been taught the speech of Birds and we have been given (some knowledge) from all things. This is indeed manifest favor." (Qur'an 27:15-16)

Having "the Knowledge of the Book", one can do many extraordinary things with the permission of Allah. For example Qur'an mentions that at the time of Prophet Solomon (Sulayman), a person in the name of Asaf, who was the Minister of Solomon and had only a very small part of "the Knowledge of the Book", was able to bring the throne of Queen Bilqis from another place of the world within the twinkling of an eye:

"The One with whom was just a part of the Knowledge of the Book said: 'I shall bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye!' Then when (Solomon) saw (the throne) set in his presence, he said: 'This is by the grace of my Lord! to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful!'" (Qur'an 27:40).

The source of this Divine Knowledge is God. He gave part of it to Prophet Adam (2:31), Jesus (5:110/113)... and some people who were not prophets like Taloot (2:247), and Asaf (see the above verse). According to Qur'an, "The knowledge of the Book" is for those who are immersed in Knowledge (3:7, 4:162), who are given authority by Allah (4:83), who are assigned by Allah as referee (16:43, 21:7), who are the stars of Guidance (6:97).

According to some traditions, the Knowledge of The Book is a part of the Greatest Name of Allah. The Greatest Name of Allah consists of seventy three units. These are not letters, but they are rather the knowledge of governing the universe. In one of the traditions in Usul al-Kafi, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as) explained this issue as well as the mystery of the action of Asaf, the Minister of Solomon:

Abu Ja'far (as) said: "Verily, the Greatest Name of Allah consists of seventy three units (Harf). Asaf possessed only one unit of it, and when he spoke it (i.e., used it) the ground between him and the throne of Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba/Saba) folded/subsided so that he could take the throne with his hands, and then the ground opened out and returned to what it was originally in less than the twinkling of an eye.

We (Ahlul-Bayt) have seventy two units of the Greatest Name, and one unit remained with Allah which is kept exclusively in His knowledge of Unseen (Ilm al-Ghayb); and there is no efficacy or power except by Allah, the High, the Great."(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Tradition #613)

As stated in Verse 27:40 of Qur'an, the one who possessed a small part of "the Knowledge of the Book", was able to bring the throne of King Bilqis from another place of the world within the twinkling of an eye. So those who have the whole "Knowledge of the Book" should be able to do more! The whole knowledge of the Book was with Prophet Muhammad and his twelve successors. Allah, Exalted, said in Qur'an:

"(O' Prophet) say: Enough for witness between me and you is Allah and he who possesses the Knowledge of the Book."(Qur'an 13:43)

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَمَنْ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْكِتَابِ

From the verse, it is clear that in the phrase "he who possesses the Knowledge of the Book", Qur'an is specifically referring to a person other than Allah and Prophet Muhammad. Of course, the source of this knowledge is Allah and He possesses it and He also granted it to Prophet Muhammad (S) in full.

However, the choice words in the above verse shows that "he who possesses the Knowledge of the Book" referred specifically in the above verse, is a person (or persons) other than Allah and His Prophet (S). It refers to Imam 'Ali (as) and the Imams after him (see below for details).

Also notice that in the above verse, Allah does NOT say "a part of the knowledge of the Book" while Allah used the phrase "a part of" for the case of minister of Solomon.

Some Sunnis have mentioned that the above verse refers to Abdullah Ibn Sallam, the Jewish Rabbi who converted to Islam. some other Sunnis said that it refers to all scholars of the Jews and the Christians who found the attributes of the incoming Prophet in their ancient scriptures.

The above interpretation does not seem to be correct. "The knowledge of the Book" as Qur'an mentions in one more place, is not as simple as recognition of the attributes of the incoming Prophet in the scripture. "The knowledge of the Book" includes the knowledge of governing rules in the Universe. As Qur'an stated, Asaf had only a very small part of "the Knowledge of the Book", and was able to do that extraordinary thing.

Thus this type of power has no connection with just knowing the name of an incoming prophet from a book. Furthermore, if the Sunni interpretation is correct, then it means whenever Muslims have a question, they should refer to Christians and Jews, because they have the whole knowledge of the Book while Muslims do not!

Some may argue that if the above verse is referring to Imam 'Ali and the rest of the twelve Imams, then what sort of evidence will this be for the unbelievers who would not accept the words of Muslims by saying the above verse to them?

The answer is that the verse starts with the phrase: "And the Kuffar (unbelievers) say: You are not a messenger. Say: Sufficient as witness is..." As such, the verse is about Kuffar (unbelievers). They don't believe in Allah either. Therefore, the same question may rise again: If the Kuffar do not believe in Allah, then what sort of evidence will be for them to say "Allah is the witness"?

The above verse is, in fact, just a threat by the Prophet (S) to unbelievers, that that will be accounted on the day of judgment for their blasphemy, and he (the Prophet) has enough two witness for that: One is, Allah, the Creator, and the other one is Imam 'Ali, the Prince of Believers. In general, it refers to all the twelve Imams. But at that time of the Prophet he was just Imam 'Ali (as).

Witness to the fact that "he who possesses the Knowledge of the Book" in verse 13:43 refers to Imam 'Ali (as) and no other companions of the Prophet, is the numerous traditions reported by both Shi'a and Sunni.

It is confirmed in the authentic Sunni books that Imam 'Ali was the MOST knowledgeable man in the Muslim community after the Prophet (S). Those who testified this fact include: The Prophet (S), Imam 'Ali himself, Abu Bakr, Umar, Aisha, and many other companions.

The Holy Prophet (S) informed his followers of the very existence of a man who was the treasurer of Knowledge of the Holy Prophet (S), and he had declared to them that if they want to reach the Knowledge of the Holy Prophet, they should take that Knowledge from the treasurer:

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "I am the City of Knowledge, and 'Ali is its Gate. So whoever intends to enter the City and the Wisdom, he should enter from its Gate."

إِنَّا مَدِينَةُ الْعِلْمِ وَ عَلِيٌّ بَابُهَا، فَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْمَدِينَةَ وَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَلْيَأْتِهَا مِنْ بَابِهَا.

Sunni references:

1. Sahih al-Tirmidhi, v5, pp 201,637
2. al-Mustadrak, by al-Hakim, v3, pp 126–127,226, Chapter of the Virtues of ‘Ali, narrated on the authority of two reliable reporters: one, Ibn Abbas, whose report has been transmitted through two different but chain of authorities, and the other, Jabir Ibn Abdullah al-Ansari. He said this tradition is Authentic (Sahih).
3. Fadha’il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v2, p635, Tradition #1081
4. Jami’ al-Saghir, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, v1, pp 107,374; Also in Jami’ al-Jawami’; Also in Tarikh al-Khulafaa, p171. He said this tradition is accepted (Hasan).
5. al-Kabir, by al-Tabarani (d. 360); Also in al-Awsat
6. Ma’rifah al-Sahaba, by al-Hafidh Abu Nu’aym al-Isbahani
7. Ihyaa al-Ulum, by al-Ghazzali
8. History of Ibn Kathir, v7, p358
9. History of Ibn Asakir
10. Tarikh, by al-Khateeb al-Baghdadi, v2, p337; v4, p348; v7, p173; v11, pp 48–50; v13, p204
11. al-Isti’ab, by Ibn Abd al-Barr, v3, p38; v2, p461
12. Usdul Ghabah, by Ibn al-Athir, v4, p22
13. Tahdhib al-Athar, by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari
14. Majma’ al-Zawa’id, by al-Haythami, v9, p114
15. Bahr al-Asateed, by al-Hafidh Abu Muhammad Hassan Samarghandi (d. 491)
16. Siraj al-Muneer, by al-Hafidh ‘Ali Ibn Ahmad Azizi Shafi’i (d.1070), v2, p63
17. Manaqib, by ‘Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Tayyib al-Jalaabi Ibn Maghaazi (d. 483)
18. Firdaws al-Akhbar, by Abu Shuja’a Shirwayh Hamadani al-Daylami (d. 509)
19. Maqatal al-Husayn, by Khateeb Kharazmi (d. 568), v1, p43
20. Manaqib, by Khateeb Kharazmi (d. 568), p49

21. Alif Ba'a, by Abul Hajjaaj Yusuf Ibn Muhammad Andulesi (d.605), v1, p222
 22. Matalib al-Su'ul, by Abu Salim Muhammad Ibn Talhah Shafi'i (d. 652), p22
 23. Jawahi al-Aghdi'in, by Noor al-Din al-Shafi'i (d. 911)
 24. Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, by al-Qundoozi al-Hanafi, in Chapter 14
 25. Tadhkirat al-Khawas al-Ummah, by Sibte Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 654), p29
 26. Kunz al-Baraheen, by Shaikh Khathri
 27. Kifayat al-Talib, by Yusuf al-Ganji al-Shafi'i (d. 658), Chapter 58
 28. Kanz al-Ummal, by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, part 15, p13, Traditions #348-379
 29. al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Ch. 9, section 2, p189
 30. Hafidh Salah al-Din al-Ulai, after copying the weakening arguments by al-Dhahabi, has remarked "There are in this only mean attempts to oppose for the sake of opposition, and not a single valid argument."
 31. Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Siddeeq al-Hasani al-Maghribi, from Cairo, has compiled a magnificent book named "Fat'h al-Mulk al-'Ali bi Sihah Hadith-e-Bab-e-Madinat al-Ilm" to prove the genuineness of the very above tradition. This book was printed in the year 1354 AH in Matba' al-Islamiyyah, Egypt.
 32. Also reported by Ibn Adi on the authority of Ibn Umar, and by al-Bazzar on the authority of Jabir Ibn Abdillah al-Ansari
- ... and more ...

In the Arabic form of this Hadith, the word "The Knowledge" comes as "al-Ilm" which has the article "al" which makes the word universal. This means that in the city of knowledge of the Prophet (S), all kind of the knowledge (which could possibly be attained by human being) existed.

Remark: The above tradition also supports the infallibility of Imam 'Ali (beside what is conveyed by Qur'an 33:33 on the issue of infallibility of Ahlul-Bayt). The reason behind the non-intentional mistakes is lack of knowledge, i.e., not to know what is right to do at the time. Therefore, if Imam 'Ali (as) contained all the knowledge of the Prophet (S), it reasons that if the Prophet was infallible, so is Imam 'Ali (as).

In addition to that, al-Tirmidhi also recorded that:

The Messenger of Allah said: "I am the House of Wisdom and 'Ali is its door."

Sunni references:

- Sahih al-Tirmidhi, v5, pp 201,637
- Ibn Jarir al-Tabari recorder this tradition and wrote: "We believe this tradition to be genuine and authentic."(as quoted by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi in Kanz al-Ummal, v6, p401)
- Jami' al-Saghir, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, v1, p170; Also in Jami' al-Jawami'
- al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar Haythami, Ch. 9, section 2, p189

Moreover:

The Messenger said to his daughter Fatimah al-Zahra (sa): "Would it not please you that I have married you to the first Muslim in my nation, **their most knowledgeable**, and their greatest in Wisdom."

Sunni reference: Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v3, p136; v5, p26

Similarly, Barida narrated:

The messenger of Allah (S) said to Fatimah (sa) that: "I gave you in marriage to the best in my Ummah, the most knowledgeable in them, the best in patience in them, and the first Muslim among them."

Sunni reference: Kanz al-Ummal, by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, v6, p398

Abu Bakr said: "May Allah never put me in a situation where I can not have access to Abul Hasan (i.e., 'Ali) to solve a problem." Similarly, Sa'id al-Musayyib said: "Umar Ibn al-Khattab used to beg God to preserve him from a perplexing case which the father of al-Hasan was not present to decide." Furthermore Umar said: "If there was not 'Ali, Umar would have perished."

Sunni references:

- Fadha'il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v2, p647, Tradition #1100
- al-Isti'ab, by Ibn Abd al-Barr, v3, p39
- Manaqib, by al-Khawarizmi, p48
- al-Tabaqat, by Ibn Sa'd, v2, p338
- al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, v2, p194
- Tarikh al-Khulafaa, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p171

Aisha once said: "He ('Ali) was the most knowledgeable person among those who remained on the Sunnah (of the Prophet)."

Sunni References:

- al-Tabaqat, by Ibn Sa'd
- Tarikh al-Khulafaa, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p171
- al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar Haythami, Ch. 9, section 3, p196
- Ibn Asakir

Ibn Abbas (ra) said: "There was 18 exclusive virtues for 'Ali which was not for any other person in the Muslim community."

Sunni Reference: al-Awsat, by al-Tabarani

Ibn Mas'ud said: "We were talking that the most trustful referee/Judge in Medina to solve the problems was 'Ali."

Sunni References:

- Tarikh al-Kabir, by al-Bukhari (the author of Sahih), v1, part 2, p6
- Fadha'il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v2, p646, Tradition #1097
- al-Mustadrak, by al-Hakim, v2, p352
- Tarikh al-Khulafaa, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p171
- al-Isti'ab, by Ibn Abd al-Barr, section of word "Ain", v2, p462; v3, p39
- al-Tabaqat, by Ibn Sa'd, v2, p338, He also reported that Umar said: "Ali was our Judge."
- Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v1, p84
- Majma' al-Zawa'id, by al-Haythami, v9, p116
- al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, v3, p213

Furthermore:

Ibn Mas'ud said: "The Holy Qur'an has outward and inward meanings, and 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib has the knowledge of both."

Sunni references: Hilyatul Awliyaa, by Abu Nu'aym, v1, p65

Much of the knowledge of the Prophet was transferred to Imam 'Ali (as) when the Prophet was taking his

last breath:

Imam 'Ali said: "The Messenger of Allah at that time (before his last breath) taught me a thousand chapters of knowledge, every one of which opened for me one thousand other chapters."

Sunni references:

- Kanz al-Ummal, by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, v1, p392
- Hilyatul Awliyaa, by al-Hafidh Abu Nu'aym
- Nuskhatah, by Abu Ahmad al-Faradi

Furthermore, Imam 'Ali (as) once said:

"By Allah, I am the Brother of the Messenger of Allah and his friend and his cousin and the inheritor of his knowledge. Who has a better title for succeeding him than me?"

Sunni references:

- al-Khasa'is al-Alawiyah, al-Nisa'i
- al-Mustadrak, by al-Hakim v3, p112
- al-Dhahabi in his Talkhis of al-Mustadrak has admitted the above words to be genuine.
- Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v5, p40

Also Imam 'Ali (as) himself frequently stated in his sermons:

"Ask me before you lose me. By Allah, if you ask me about anything that could happen up to the Day of Judgment, I will tell you about it. Ask me, for, by Allah, you will not be able to ask me a question about anything without my informing you. Ask me about the Book of Allah, for by Allah, there is no verse about which I do not know whether it was sent down at night or during the day, or whether it was revealed on a plain or in a mountain."

Sunni References:

- al-Isabah, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v4, p568
- Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v7, pp 337-338
- Fat'hul Bari, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v8, p485
- Tarikh al-Khulafaa, by al-Suyuti, p124

- al-Itqan, by al-Suyuti, v2, p319
- al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, v2, p198
- at-Tabaqat, by Ibn Sa'd, v2, Part 2, p101
- al-Isti'ab, by Ibn Abd al-Barr, v3, p1107

Sa'id Ibn Musayyib as well as Umar Ibn al-Khattab said:

"No companion of the Prophet ever said 'Ask me' except 'Ali."

Sunni References:

- Fadha'il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v2, p647, Tradition #1098
- al-Isabah, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v2, p509
- al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar Haythami, Ch. 9, section 3, p196
- al-Faqih wal Mutafaqih, by al-Khateeb al-Baghdadi, v2, p167
- Tarikh al-Khulafaa, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p171
- al-Tabaqat, by Ibn Sa'd, v2, p338
- al-Isti'ab, by Ibn Abd al-Barr, v3, p40
- al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, v3, p212
- al-Dhakha'ir al-Uqba, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, p83

The conclusion is that "he who possesses the Knowledge of the Book" in verse 13:43 refers to Imam 'Ali (as) and no other companions. And if "a part of Knowledge of the Book", provided a supernatural power for Asaf, then it is clear that those who have the whole knowledge of the Book, have more ability of this type by leave of Allah.

Also according to the above tradition written in Sihah Sittah, in which the Prophet (S) said "I am the City of Knowledge, and 'Ali is its Gate. So whoever intends to enter the City and the Wisdom, he should enter from its Gate", it is clear that the only source of knowledge after Prophet Muhammad (S) was Imam 'Ali (as), and those who seek other sources do not gain the genuine Sunnah of the Prophet because nobody can enter this City from a direction other than its door.

Concluding Remarks

It should be emphasized that The Twelver Shi'a Scholars believe that neither the Prophet nor the Imams possess the Knowledge of Ghayb with the special meaning used in Qur'an, since this type of knowledge is something which belongs to Allah only. However, as Qur'an mentions "news of Ghayb" have been transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad, and from that channel, it has been transmitted to the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt. What they fully possess is the Knowledge of the Book described above.

It should also be noted that the prophets and Imams share with the rest of humanity the means for obtaining knowledge which Allah has given: the senses, the intellect, etc. They also possess special powers and means which other people do not have.

In carrying out the commands of Allah in which people have also responsibility, and likewise in ordinary behavior, the prophets and Imams only make use of the first way of knowing, that is the commonly available means. The second means (extraordinary means) is only used by them in duties and works which are connected with their position of prophethood and Imamah.

Thus in matters such as knowing the beginning of the month, passing judgment, finding out if something is unclean or pure, etc., they make use of ordinary means such as sighting of the moon, and so forth, which anyone else employs. The extraordinary means of knowledge can not be the basis for their action, and what they volitionally do must be determined by the means available to everyone. Thus, such knowledge has spiritual aspect as being the Representative of Allah (Khalifatullah), and the reason for it must be sought on this level, and it is not for the purpose of influencing and controlling the events on the level of ordinary understanding.

And Allah knows best.

Side Comments

A contributor mentioned that there exists another version of the tradition of "The City of Knowledge" where the Prophet states: "I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate, and Abu Bakr is its foundation, Umar its walls and Uthman its roof."

To answer this, I would like to first mention this weak tradition is not reported in any of the six sound collections of the Sunnis, whereas the correct version of the tradition provided in our article is, in fact, in the Sihah Sittah of the Sunnis.

Adding the words to the genuine traditions of the Prophet, was another trick which the falsifiers of tradition narrators resorted to during the time of the Umayyad. When they found that a tradition was so widespread amongst the people that there was no way to deny or refute it, they decided to add a paragraph or words, or to change some phrases so as to dampen the impact of the tradition or to make

it lose its intended meaning.

This trick is not hidden to the objective researchers who refute these additions which, most of the time, indicate the lack of intelligence of the falsifiers and their lack of wisdom in contrast to the light of the Prophetic traditions. Even some well known Sunni scholars were aware of such forgeries and have rated many of such traditions as forged or weak due to the discrepancy in the Isnad as well as the contents.

For instance, in the above forged tradition, we can observe the saying "Abu Bakr is it's foundation" means the knowledge of the Prophet (S) is derived from the knowledge of Abu Bakr and this is disbelief (Kufr). Likewise, the statement "Umar is its walls" means Umar prevents people from entering the city, i.e., prevents them from getting to the knowledge. Also the saying "Uthman is its roof" is undoubtedly absurd since there is no city which has a roof!!!

All praise is due to the Lord of the Worlds, who has given us intelligence through which we will be able to differentiate between the truth and falsehood, and He has made clear to us the Right Path and then tests us by many things so that they can bear witness on the day of judgment.

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