

THE VARIATIONS IN THE TRADITIONS ABOUT THE DURATION OF MAHDI'S GOVERNMENT, AND HIS SURVIVAL AFTER HIS REAPPEARANCE

Know that we have not recorded objectionable traditions in this book except to rely on their lexical senses in which all those traditions are unanimous. For, often there are contexts that lead to certainty in the source of some of them, or the merger of some of them with other traditions completes the conceptual consecutiveness (التواتر المعنوي) or general consecutiveness (التواتر الاجمالي).

As for the contradiction of some with others, we don't argue with the doubters in which the aim is belief, not action. Since one cannot rely on a singular tradition (الخبر الواحد) in such matters due to their non-causality for acquiring creed, even if no other tradition contradicts it. So, the proofs that are used to prove the validity of the traditions and the view of the reliable ones, in the laws of jurisprudence will not apply for it. For, relying on it in the laws of jurisprudence implies the necessity of acting upon it and to implement it in obligatory acts of worship. The emanation of this affair is permissible from the Legislator (Allah), as a basis or as an implementation, just as the necessity of acting with proof in its known instances has been agreed upon. But for matters of other than jurisprudence in which certainty and belief is essential – since a singular tradition cannot be the cause of belief – the cause of belief in its contents will not be correct because it is a matter that is not acquired except through its cause. In the terminology of traditions it is called as '*the tradition whose source has*

acquired certainty through consecutiveness or ‘*contexts that have led to certainty*’ or ‘*proofs that have made it certain*’. [Thus, ‘the cause’ in the above cases is consecutiveness or contexts or proofs – Translator]. Nevertheless, there is no need for the legislation of the Legislator to rely on it and the necessity of belief in it because belief in it will then lead to confirmation by itself.

But if the tradition is not so, and it is presumptive in emanation (ظني الصدور) or presumptive in argumentation (ظني الدلالة), then certainty will not arise from it for its contents. Also, it is not permissible for the Legislator to impose responsibility to believe in it because that would mean: Whatever was essentially the cause of assumption is made the cause of certainty, and the cause of certainty of an affair with whatever was essentially presumptive is impossible and does not befit the position of the Legislator.

To sum it up, in practical responsibilities (of acts of worship), the utility of proof for a singular tradition can be the cause of the necessity of action upon it and act according to it. This is possible as an act of devotion from the Legislator. But as for making it as a ground for creed, then it is certainly not permissible. In this regard, there is no difference – as we have indicated towards it– between the singular tradition free from objection, when its source or its proof is not certain, and the tradition that is confronted with objection, regardless of its objection being treated (reconciled) with the help of another tradition from any aspect whatsoever like the conventional method of reconciliation or giving preference to it through any of the preferences, or not (being treated).

It is worth mentioning that the variations or differences in traditions in the details of the matters does not affect or harm its correctness proved through consecutive traditions or reliable singular traditions, even if the reason of variation is not known to us and there is no cause for its treatment.

Moreover, mere objection does not necessarily prove in all

absoluteness that the doubter is knowledgeable about the reality, even in non-special instances in which the objection has been raised between the two and even if its validity is done away with. This is because the contradiction in the traditions is possible for any of the following reasons:

First: The lack of precision by some narrators, and the variation of their conditions in understanding the tradition and the conditions of the one who dictates the tradition are amongst the factors that often lead to the weakness or creating flaws in some of the formal and known stipulations for the understanding of the tradition.

Second: Conceptual narration, which is seldom free from the opinion of the narrator, and his reliability of the understanding of the word from whom he is narrating from various aspects like absoluteness or conditional, general and particular, reality and metaphor, etc.

Third: Narration of the traditions in the beginning of Islam, more often than not, was by heart, and not through writing. Moreover, the ban on the narration of traditions, by the majority sect of the Muslims, after the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) led to the termination of reporting of traditions and narrations - except for the Shias of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) – till the reign of Umar Ibn Abd al-Aziz, nay, till the end of the Umayyid reign, as there is a difference of opinion amongst the historians as to when the ban was lifted on reporting the traditions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

The first to disallow writing the traditions was Umar Ibn al-Khattaab, as he prohibited the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) from writing what would prevent the deviation of the Muslims after his (s.a.w.a.) demise. Umar said what he said. Ibn Abbas used to say: The greatest tragedy was what occurred between the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) and not allowing him (s.a.w.a.) to write on account of their differences and clamor; and (it is narrated) from Abu Bakr who said, “Don’t narrate anything from the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.). Whoever asks you, then say: Amongst our midst is Allah’s Book; seek the permissible and

the prohibited from it.¹ Umar was extremely ruthless in his ban on the narration of traditions.

The one who ponders will understand that whatever they did was for political reasons, that is, prohibition from the traditions vis-à-vis merits and virtues of the Ahle Bait (a.s.), especially those concerning Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.). For, such traditions would weaken their government, manifest their violation of the apparent divine texts and lead to the inclination of the hearts towards the Ahle Bait (a.s.).

Fourth: Non-narration of some of the conditional and local contexts plays a pivotal role in the understanding by the addressee of the intention of the speaker because dissociating the speech from these contexts or non-attentiveness of some of those present to them becomes the cause of deriving an altogether different meaning from the same words.

Fifth: Breaking down of the tradition into parts and narrating a part of it, particularly when the reporting is connected to the motive of the narrator like stating a judgment, proving a matter, etc. regardless of the breaking down being in the words of the tradition or its text or in the narration of its subject. Undoubtedly, such a step often leads to proving a speech in other than its real meaning or at least, some of its actual implications. Perhaps, breaking down of the tradition does not harm the meaning of what the one who is doing so from the speech but it certainly affects the overall meaning or what can be understood from the speech or proved through it in the absence of such breaking down.

Sixth: All the above factors did transpire while none had the intention in creating differences and confusion. But often, it was indeed intentional and on the basis of wrong intention and mischievous motives, especially political. Sometimes, this even led to the fabrication of the traditions or adding a part to it or dropping a sentence from it, which can easily be understood by the expert in traditions and chains of narrators.

¹ Tazkerah al-Huffaaz, vol. 1, p. 3

Seventh: Another source for variation in traditions is the aspect of source because the original conversation, the reason for which the speaker has spoken, could be on account of its customary and apparent meaning. Or, it could also be due to some other factors like light banter, cautioning from harm and mischief, dissimulation (تقية), etc. which would be in direct contradiction with some other tradition. For instance, on account of dissimulation, he would reply in the negative instead of affirmative, thereby leading to contradiction between two traditions. Thus, the one who is not aware of the conditions or the intentions of the speaker and his apparent opinions, will not know as to what is right in the two opinions and hence, consider it as a contradiction.

Now, after what is known that the differences occur on account of the aforementioned factors, in each instance when there is contradiction between two disparate narrations, it is necessary to implement the laws of the reconciliation of traditions (التعادل و التراجيح) in all the above cases by being attentive to the deciding factors (مرجحات) like the chain of narrators, aspects, reasoning, etc. For example, the tradition whose narrator is precise and having a good memory will be preferred to others, or in case of more than one, the one who was more precise and had a better memory than others. Or, a tradition which cannot be construed upon its sources for other than the aspect of explanation of the reality besides what is permissible in it and its sources can be construed as dissimulation or any other factor by paying attention to some of the testimonies and contexts. Or, the reported tradition can be taken as per its wordings or the one in which splitting of traditions has not taken place vis-à-vis its subject, or in which the splitting has taken place. Similarly, that tradition should be accepted which is consonance with the general principles of the Holy Quran or its absoluteness, not violating either of the two¹.

¹ If the tradition violates either of the two (i.e. the general principles of the Holy Quran or its absoluteness) and when it is not afflicted with contradiction, then it is a proof when all the stipulations are available in it, specified or limited with the general principles of the Quran or

And if two traditions are same and equal from all the deciding factors, that we have mentioned above, external as well as internal, then neither will be preferred over the other; both will be considered dropped and cannot be used as an argument.

It should be known to you that whatever we have mentioned about the procedure of deciding factors for traditions, and taking the aspect from the aspects of the deciding factors, whether customary or religious, - as we have explained earlier – will not apply except in the narrated traditions in the fundamentals of religion and in which only actions are intended, not beliefs. But in matters related to belief, a solely narrated tradition cannot be relied upon as a document even if it is free from any contradiction, let alone the presence of an incongruent tradition; except when its source and proof is certain like a consecutive tradition whose source is certain.

Therefore, one cannot rely upon a singular tradition with a suspect source, in the details of the signs of the Mahdi (a.s.), his attributes, his peculiarities and all other matters that demand faith, regardless of them being contradictory to other traditions or not.

If you have followed whatever we have read for you, then know: Often it is said concerning the traditions that have come concerning the duration of his (a.s.) kingdom and governance that the conflicting narrations determining the short period of his reign is inappropriate with the appearance that has been prophesied by the Prophets (a.s.) and form the core of the exegesis of numerous verses from the Holy Quran, **“Indeed, We have written in the Psalms...¹”, “And We intend to oblige those who have been rendered weak in the earth...²”**“Allah has promised those amongst you who believed and did good deeds that He will surely make them as caliphs in the earth...³”etc. The

its absoluteness. But if it is in clear contradiction with the Holy Quran, then it is not permissible to take it and accept it as proof.

¹ The Holy Quran 21: 105

² The Holy Quran 28: 5

³ The Holy Quran 24: 55