

ALI 572: 'Ilm al-Ghayb Knowledge of the Unseen (2)

Academy for Learning Islam

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13 Rabi al-Awwal 1442 | 28 Oct 2020



Outline

- Review of Previous Session
- Introduction to Study of Hadith
- Supporting Traditions
- Opposing Traditions
- Reconciling Between Contradictory Traditions
- A Glance at the View of Shaykh al-Mufīd (r)
- Conclusion and Questions

Review of Previous Session

- ghayb is what is not visible to the physical senses.
 - Iman in the ghayb refers to faith in Allah (S), the angels, revelation etc.
 - 'Ilm of the ghayb refers to knowledge of the past, future, thoughts etc.
- There are three main questions pertaining to 'ilm al-ghayb:
 - Independent or dependent
 - Complete or partial
 - Actual or potential
- The verses of the Qur'an are of three categories.
- Conclusion: Some knowledge of the unseen is possible for some people by the permission of Allah (S).

Introduction to Study of Hadith

- Important to consider hadith in the study of a religious subject.
- When studying ahadith, the following points should be considered:
 - The authenticity of the hadith: scholars determine the authenticity of the hadith through its sanad (chain of narrators).
 - The meaning of the hadith: scholars determine the dalalat of the hadith by studying the words, and the verbal and environmental context.
 - The totality of the corpus of traditions about the subject: both supporting and opposing traditions must be discussed.
- There are two main accusations with respect to 'ilm al-ghayb of the Imam: ghulluw (exaggeration) and taqsir (diminution).

Supporting Traditions

The Imam (a) said, “Then have you recited from what you have found in the book of Allah (azwj), the one who had knowledge of the Book said, “ *I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.*” (27:40)

Sudayr responded, “May I be sacrificed for you. I have recited it.” The Imam (a) said, “Do you know the individual, and are you aware of the extent of his knowledge of the book?”

Sudayr said, “Inform me of it.”

Imam (a) said, “It was the extent of a drop in the ocean. How much is such knowledge in relation to knowledge of the book?” Sudayr said, “May I be sacrificed for you. How little that is!”

Imam (a) then said, “O Sudayr, however this small amount may be a lot of knowledge for one who has not been given the abundant knowledge – of which I shall inform you – by Allah (S). O Sudayr, have you recited the following verse, say, “ *Allah suffices as a witness between me and you, and he who possesses the knowledge of the Book.* (13:43)

Reflections upon the Tradition

- Source: Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, chapter of unusual traditions which mention the unseen, hadith no. 3.
- This hadith belongs to traditions that prove 'ilm al-ghayb by referencing verses of the Qur'an.
- The first part of the hadith negates 'ilm al-ghayb for the Imam.
- The second part of the hadith establishes the following:
 - The Imams did not make certain claims in public.
 - The Imam explained their knowledge in relation to scholars of the book.
 - The hadith is not explicit on whether this refers to knowledge of the unseen or knowledge of the religion.

Other Supporting Traditions

- Other supporting traditions are of the following categories:
 - Traditions that support 'ilm al-ghayb through rational arguments.
 - Traditions that give specific examples of knowledge of the unseen conveyed by the Imam.

Opposing Traditions

Yahya ibn Abdillah ibn al-Hasan (a) said, “May I be sacrificed for you. They think that you know the ghayb.”

Imam al-Kazim (a) said, “Immaculate is Allah! Put your hand on my head, for by Allah, there is not a single hair on my body or my head but that it is left standing.” Then he (a) said, “No by Allah, it is nothing but narration from the Prophet of Allah (s).”

Reflections upon the Tradition

- Source: the Rijal of al-Kishiyy, Encyclopedia of the Transmitters of Hadith by Sayyid al-Khui, Bihar al-Anwar of Allamah Majlisiyy.
- The narrator is asking the Imam about the beliefs of a group of the Shia.
- The Imam is expressing shock at the knowledge of the unseen being attributed to him.
- The Imam does however inform that he informs about some of the unseen through prophetic traditions that are with him.

Other Opposing Traditions

- Other opposing traditions are of the following categories:
 - Negation of actual knowledge of the unseen: whenever the Imam wishes to know, the Almighty (S) informs him.
 - Negation of specific knowledge of the unseen: ex. The identity of the hypocrites, the location of certain people or items.
 - Increase in the knowledge of the Imam: their knowledge increases every week, or every day.

If there ever comes a day in my life wherein I do not increase in knowledge that draws me closer to Allah (S), then may Allah (S) not bless me in the rising of its sun.
Prophet Muhammad (s)

Reconciling the Contradictory Traditions

	Supporting Narrations	Opposing Narrations
1	Mentioned in private gatherings amongst close students.	Mentioned in public gatherings where the laity were present.
2	Affirm that they receive such knowledge from Allah (S) through the prophet.	Negate direct and independent knowledge of the unseen.
3	Affirm knowledge of what is required to guide mankind.	Negate knowledge of all of the unseen.
4	Affirm potential knowledge of the unseen	Negate actual (bil fi'l) knowledge of the unseen.

The View of Shaykh al-Mufīd (r)

Surely the Imams from Aali Muhammad (s) knew the hidden thoughts of some of the servants of Allah, and would know what would occur before it occurs. This is not necessary in their attributes, nor a condition for their imamate. It is rather Allah, the most High, who has ennobled them through it and taught it to them to guide us to their obedience and to hold on to their leadership. This is not rationally necessary, rather it is established for them owing to the narrations.

The View of Shaykh al-Mufid (r)

Saying that they (Prophet and Imams) possess the knowledge of 'the unseen' 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 Allāh, 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).

Conclusion

- The Prophets, Imams and some human beings can have knowledge of the unseen.
- This knowledge is granted to them by Allah (S) for the purpose of guiding the ummah.
- The scope of the knowledge is debated within various Shia groups.
- Our belief in their imamate should be based in sound reasoning.