

Accepting a Hadith From a Single Narrator

By: Dr. Ahmad Shafaat (May, 2004)

Scholars from early times have discussed the question whether under some conditions it is obligatory to accept a *gharib* hadith, that is, a hadith that has been transmitted by only one narrator at some stage of its transmission^[1]. The purpose of this article is to re-examine answers given by scholars to this question.

To begin with, let us clarify important aspects of the question by the following observations:

^[1] Noting that the number of reported narrators of a hadith tend to increase or remain the same as generations pass, we may refine the term *gharib* as follows: if a hadith is said to be transmitted directly from the Prophet by only one narrator (Companion), but subsequently the number of narrators increases to two or more, we will call it *gharib* up to the first link. If a hadith is said to be transmitted directly from the Prophet by only one narrator, and from this one narrator again only one narrator is said to transmit it, but subsequently the number of narrators increases to two or more, we will call it *gharib* up to the second link and so on. For example, the following famous hadith is *gharib* up to the fourth link:

Al-Humaydi ‘Abd Allah bin al-Zubayr related to us saying: Sufyan related to us saying: Yahya bin Sa‘id al-Ansari related to us saying: Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Taymi informed me that he heard ‘Alqamah bin Waqqas al-Laythi as saying: I heard ‘Umar bin al-Khattab saying from the minbar: I heard the Messenger of God saying:

"The actions are based only on intentions and for every person there is only what he intended. So whoever did *hijrah* for benefit in this world or to marry a woman, his *hijrah* was for what he did *hijrah* for." (Bukhari 1)

Although this hadith has been narrated with *asanid* reaching other Companions such as Abu Sa‘id, scholars are almost unanimous in rejecting those *asanid*. They say that this hadith is narrated from the Holy Prophet only by ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (d. 23), from ‘Umar only by ‘Alqamah bin Waqqas al-Laythi (date of death unknown), from ‘Alqamah only by Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Taymi (d. 120), and from Muhammad only by Yahya bin Sa‘id al-Ansari (d. 144). Then from Yahya it is narrated by more than 200 narrators. Thus each of the earliest four narrators is the only one to transmit the hadith in his generation but afterwards the number of narrators increases. For this reason the hadith is *gharib* up to the fourth link.

It is interesting to ask why until the time of Yahya (d. 144) the hadith was transmitted by only one narrator at each stage while from Yahya the hadith is transmitted by more than two hundred narrators. There are two possible explanations of this fact:

a) The hadith was fabricated during the time of Yahya in the early decades of the second century. This explanation does not look correct because the example of *hijrah* given in the hadith suggests that the hadith belongs to a very early time.

b) The hadith is old but originally it had no legal connotations. However, in the time of Yahya, and possibly under his influence, the hadith acquired some legal interpretation, as we see from the following comment by Nawawi:

“And in [this hadith] there is *dalil* that *al-taharah*, that is, *al-wudu*, *al-ghusl*, and *al-tayammum* are valid only by intention and the same in case of prayers, *zakah*, fasting, hajj, *i’tikaf* and all other *‘ibadat*. But for removing *al-najasa* it is well-known among us that intention is not a condition because that is among the matters of leaving something and leaving something does not require intention. And they have reported *ijma’* on it. But some of our associates dissented from it and made (intention) necessary (even in this case). This is, however, wrong. But intention does enter divorce, *al-‘itq*, and *al-qadhf* ...”

Once the hadith found a legal interpretation of the sort mentioned by Nawawi it began to spread far and wide.

- 1) The content (*matn*) of a hadith can be accepted without accepting it as authentic word/action of the Prophet. For example, the content of the famous hadith, “Seek knowledge even if in China,” can be accepted, since it is quite consistent with the Islamic emphasis on seeking knowledge. But we need not accept it as the Prophet’s word. In fact, scholars have rejected its attribution to the Prophet (Ibn al-Jawzi, *Kitab al-Mawdu‘at* 1/154).
- 2) The acceptance of something can be binding and above challenge or it can be binding till it is challenged. For example, the acceptance of a Qur`anic verse or a hadith judged to be authentic beyond any reasonable doubt is binding and above challenge. But the interpretation of a Qur`anic verse or an authentic hadith by scholars is binding as long as one does not challenge its validity either by one’s own arguments or on the authority of other scholars. Likewise, an order of *ul al-`amr*, legitimately chosen by *shura*, is binding, as long as it is not successfully challenged in the light of the Qur`an and the authentic ahadith before an independent Islamic court (4:59).
- 3) The question of whether it is binding to accept the content of a hadith arises only if the hadith says something not found in the Qur`an. If a hadith simply restates belief(s) or command(s) found in the Qur`an, the acceptance of its *matn* is clearly binding, although it need not be accepted as an authentic word/action of the Prophet.

In what follows, unless otherwise specified, accepting a hadith means accepting not only its content but also its authenticity as the word/action of the Prophet. Also, “binding” will be understood in the sense of obligatory and above challenge. Thus, the question considered in this article can be stated more precisely as follows: Is it, under some conditions, binding and above challenge to accept the authenticity of a *gharib* hadith?

The answer given in this article is that it is not. Muslims individually or collectively may accept such a hadith and think/act according to it but under no conditions its acceptance is binding.

Our proof for this view consists of five parts:

- i) Evidence that *sahih isnad* (that is, an *isnad* that reaches the Prophet without interruption and that consists of trustworthy narrators) does not ensure the authenticity of a hadith.
- ii) Arguments showing that supplementing soundness of *isnad* by other conditions does not make the acceptance of a *gharib* hadith binding.
- iii) Argument from the Qur`anic requirement of at least two witnesses in important matters.
- iv) Argument from examples showing that the Prophet, Companions and Successors did not always accept a *khbar* (report) from a single trustworthy narrator.
- v) Argument that examples of acceptance by the Companions of a *khbar* from only one narrator prove only the permissibility and NOT the obligation of accepting such reports.

(I)

SAHIH ISNAD DOES NOT ENSURE THE AUTHENTICITY OF A *GHARIB* HADITH

Almost all scholars agree that for a hadith to be binding it must have a *sahih isnad*. Some scholars such as Ibn Hazm regard this condition sufficient, that is, they consider it binding to accept a hadith with *sahih isnad*. This position reflects a general tendency among scholars to show caution in rejecting a hadith rather than in accepting it. To explain this point further, suppose that a hadith is judged to be probably authentic but still there remains reasonable doubt about its authenticity. Should we accept it because it has some probability of being authentic or should we reject it because there is reasonable doubt about its authenticity? The tendency of the scholars would be to accept it as authentic and then to make its acceptance binding on all Muslims. But the following argument shows that in the presence of a reasonable doubt we should not accept a hadith as authentic or at least should not consider its acceptance binding:

Islam is the last of the revealed religions and is meant for all humanity and for all times. It was necessary for such a religion to communicate to us its binding teachings in such a way that there is no reasonable doubt that those teachings were given by God and his Messenger. Hence if a reasonable doubt exists about the authenticity of a hadith then it is either not authentic or was not intended by God and his Messenger to be binding.

It is easy to see that there exists a reasonable doubt about the authenticity of a *gharib* hadith even if its *isnad* is sound. For, there are very many possibilities of unconscious, subconscious, and conscious mistakes^{2[2]} during the long time when the transmission of traditions was primarily oral and not through well-preserved books. Requiring the narrators to be trustworthy can reduce consciously dishonest mistakes, but it cannot eliminate them. This is because trustworthiness of a narrator, at least if the narrator is not a Companion, is decided by human beings^{3[3]}, who cannot know for sure the real state of a person's heart. This is not only made clear by the Qur'an (4:25, 53:32, 60:10 etc), but also shown by many examples of persons who were trusted by the people but were later proved to be very dishonest. As for honest mistakes of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious types, they certainly remain possible for all human beings, even the prophets.

^{2[2]} Conscious mistakes can be the result of dishonest alteration or fabrication of a tradition or a part of it. Or, they may be the result of honest deductions from some honestly held assumptions. Subconscious mistakes are those committed under the influence of similarly good or bad motivations or assumptions, of which the narrator is not conscious. Unconscious mistakes are those in which the narrator's motivations and assumptions do not play any significant part. For example, a narrator receives an opinion from a Companion but convinced that the Companion did not express the opinion without being taught by the Prophet, he attributes the opinion to the Prophet. This is a conscious but honest mistake. If he does the same thing for the conscious purpose of deceiving people into accepting the opinion, then this would be a case of a conscious and dishonest mistake. If the same dishonest or honest processes work subconsciously, this would be an example of a subconscious mistake. An unconscious mistake would occur, for example, if a narrator received a tradition orally, misheard a word or phrase in it, and reported it as he heard it.

^{3[3]} Generally a narrator is considered trustworthy if the majority of comments recorded in books of Hadith and *Rijal* say he is trustworthy. But this judgment is also subject to error. A vast majority of comments say that Imam Abu Hanifah was weak in hadith that may not be accurate. On the other hand, a vast majority of comments say that Ibn Shihab was trustworthy, a judgment called into question if we look at the traditions he transmitted.

Books recording comments on narrators include: , *Tabaqat* of Muhammad bin Sa'd al-Zuhri (d. 230), *Al-Tarikh* of Ibn Ma'in (d. 233), *Tabaqat* of Khalifah bin Khayyat (d. 240), *al-Tarikh* of Bukhari (d. 256), *al-Kuna` wa al-Asma`* of Muslim (d. 261), *al-Du'afa`* of Nasa'i (d. 303), *al-Du'afa`* of al-'Uqayli (d.322), *Kitab al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* of Ibn Abi Hatim (d. 327), *al-Kamil fi Du'afa` al-Rijal* of Ibn 'Adi (d. 365) , *al-Majruhin* of Ibn Hibban (d. 354), *al-Sunan* of Daraqutni (d. 385), *Ma'arif 'Ulum al-Hadith* of al-Hakim (d. 405), *al-Ahkam al-Kubra* of 'Abd al-Haq al-Ishbili (d. 580), *al-Du'afa`* of al-Dhahabi (d. 748).

Hence if we make binding the acceptance of *gharib* ahadith, even if we require all the narrators to be known and trustworthy, many errors will enter Islam and get sanctified. It may be said that rejecting such ahadith will also result in errors, for we will reject some authentic ahadith. But we should remember that the Messenger was sent by God for the whole humankind and for all times and hence, as noted above, God would not communicate a binding teaching to us through a *gharib* hadith, which is subject to reasonable doubt. Therefore in rejecting a *gharib* hadith or accepting it without making its acceptance obligatory there is no danger of an error.

An example of a fabricated hadith with sahih isnad

That sahih isnad does not ensure the authenticity of a hadith is also proved by examples. Thus consider the following hadith:

Hisham bin ‘Ammar related to us: ‘Isa bin Yunus related to us: Yusuf bin Ishaq related to us from Muhammad bin al-Munkadir from Jabir bin ‘Abd Allah

that a man said: “O Messenger of God! I have some wealth and a child (*walad*). My father wants to take away (*yajtahā*) my wealth”. He said: “You and your wealth belong to your father”. (Ibn Majah 2282)

The *isnad* of this hadith is sahih⁴⁴⁴. Yet the hadith is a pure fabrication, as we can see from the discussion concerning it in *al-Risalah* of Shafi‘i.

The narration in Shafi‘i runs as follows:

Sufyan [bin ‘Uyaynah] told us from Muhammad bin al-Munkadir who said:

A man said to the Prophet: “O Messenger of God! I have my own family and wealth, and my father has his own family and wealth. Yet he wants to take my property and use it to feed his family.” The Prophet said: “You and your property belong to your father.”

Notice that Shafi‘i knows the hadith with a chain reaching Muhammad bin al-Munkadir that is different from the one in Ibn Majah. This means that there is some probability that the hadith was

⁴⁴⁴ The isnad is complete and every narrator in the isnad is considered trustworthy:

** Jabir bin ‘Abd Allah (d. 78) is a Companion and hence considered trustworthy.

** Muhammad bin al-Munkadir (d. 131) is described in the Hadith Encyclopedia as *thiqah*, *hafiz*, highly praised by some scholars. Bukhari has ahadith from him (e.g. #187).

** Yusuf bin Ishaq (d. 157) is described as *thiqah*, *hafiz*, *mustaqim al-hadith* and Bukhari 1656 is from him.

** ‘Isa bin Yunus (d. 187) is described as *thiqah*, *thiqah thabt*; Bukhari 804 is from him.

** -Hisham bin ‘Ammar (d. 245) is said to be *saduq*, *thiqah*, *ja‘iz al-hadith*; Bukhari 1936 is from him.

** The compiler Ibn Majah (209-273) has been criticized for including in his *Sunan* weak and rejected ahadith without adding a note about it like Tirmidhi and Abu Da‘ud do. But scholars are unanimous about his great learning and trustworthiness.

narrated by al-Munkadir [d. 131], a junior Successor considered highly reliable. Also notice in Shafi'i's narration al-Munkadir does not say that the hadith is from Jabir bin 'Abd Allah or any other Companion.

After the quotation of the hadith we find the following very enlightening discussion in *al-Risalah*:

He [the interlocutor] said: We do not accept this hadith, but some of your followers accept it.

Shafi'i said: No, for he who accepts it will give the rich father [the right to] take his son's wealth.

He said: That is correct. Nobody accepts it. But why do people not accept it?

Shafi'i said: Because it is not proved to be from the Prophet. For when God ruled that a father could inherit from his son like other (relatives), he put the father on the same basis as other heirs. Indeed, the father receives a smaller share than many other heirs, which indicates that the son owns his wealth independently of the father.

He said: Is Muhammad bin al-Munkadir very reliable in your opinion?

Shafi'i said: Yes, he is. For, he is distinguished in matters of religion and piety. But we do not know from whom he accepted this hadith.

Here Shafi'i gives a decisive argument showing that the hadith is in direct contradiction with the Qur'an and therefore must be rejected^{5[5]}. Moreover, the dialogue between him and the interlocutor also shows that not only Shafi'i but also almost all other scholars of his time rejected the hadith. Later scholars also rejected it as is shown by the fact that it is only found in Ibn Majah among the nine books covered in the Hadith Encyclopedia.

From this example we can draw some very important conclusions, which can be supported by many other examples:

- A complete fabrication can acquire a perfectly sound *isnad*.
- Even highly praised and trusted narrators like al-Munkadir can become careless and attribute falsehood to the Holy Prophet (may God honor and bless him evermore).

Contradictions among ahadith

Further proof that *sahih* *isnad* does not ensure the authenticity of a hadith is provided by the fact that we often find narrations of the same hadith, all with sound *asanid*, that contradict each other.

^{5[5]} In the face of a contradiction between the Qur'an and a hadith, rejecting the hadith is one option. Another option is to postulate abrogation of the hadith by the Qur'an or of the Qur'an by the hadith. For Shafi'i this option is not open since he explicitly states that a hadith cannot abrogate a part of the Qur'an just as the Qur'an cannot abrogate a hadith. Most other scholars allow the possibility of the Qur'an abrogating a hadith and a *mutawatir* hadith abrogating the Qur'an. Only a minority allows the possibility of an *ahad* hadith abrogating the Qur'an. Hence the majority view is that in case of a conflict between the Qur'an and an *ahad* hadith, the latter must be rejected.

(See the article “Facing Contradictions Among Ahadith”). Clearly, some of these contradictory narrations are unreliable despite the fact that they have sound *asanid*.

(II)

ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS DO NOT REMOVE REASONABLE DOUBT

Most scholars recognize that soundness of *isnad* is no guarantee of the authenticity of a hadith. So they impose further conditions before the acceptance of a *gharib* hadith becomes binding. However, these additional conditions either do not remove reasonable doubt in the authenticity of a *gharib* hadith or they become so stringent that hardly any *gharib* hadith fulfils them in a provable way.

Shafi‘i’s view

Thus Shafi‘i requires the following conditions before a *gharib* hadith becomes binding: Each narrator in the *isnad* must merit confidence in his religion, and be known to transmit reliably, must understand and pronounce correctly what he transmits, should memorize the tradition and must be capable of transmitting word for word, not merely transmitting the meaning^{6[6]}. He must not be a *mudallis*, attributing his narration to someone, from whom he did not hear the narration. His narration should not attribute to the Prophet something contrary to what other reliable authorities relate from him.

The problem with these conditions is that they are mostly theoretical and we have no way to verify them in particular cases. For example, the condition that the narrator must not be a *mudallis* is not fulfilled by many narrators of the first three generations who lived in times when the high standards of scholarship had not been fully established. As noted by Ibn Hajar in his *Tabaqat al-Mudallisin*, *tadlis* has been attributed to even such great early scholars of Hadith as Hasan al-Basri, ‘Amr bin Dinar, Qatadah, Ayyub al-Sakhtiyani, Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, Malik bin Anas, Sufyan al-Thawri, Sufyan bin ‘Uyaynah and Musa bin ‘Uqbah. In view of this it is difficult to say whether any narrator in the first few generations was really free of *tadlis*.

A similar uncertainty exists regarding the condition of word-for-word transmission or even a transmission preserving the meaning. In case of a *gharib* hadith we depend on a single narrator at some stage of its transmission and we have no way to know whether this single narrator transmitted the meaning of the tradition correctly much less whether he transmitted it word-for-word. The likelihood for any tradition to be transmitted accurately in regard to meaning or wording is in any case extremely small. For the narrations of an overwhelming majority of ahadith with sound *asanid*, including those that Shafi‘i uses, come to us with significant variations in both meaning and wording, which would not have been the case if they were transmitted in the manner required by Shafi‘i. By the time of Shafi‘i the practice of word-for-word transmission had become common. But in the crucial first three generations the narrators took considerable liberty with the wording and even with the meaning of what they transmitted. This can be illustrated by an example that Shafi‘i himself cites. This is the hadith reported from Abu Hurayrah that prohibits marrying a woman and

^{6[6]} Yet while discussing the ahadith about *tashahhud* in prayers Shafi‘i considers it permissible to change the wording of a hadith. He says: “So changes in the wording of any text except that of the divine communication is permissible if the meaning is not changed. A Successor said: ‘I have heard some of the Companions agreeing in meaning but disagreeing in wording [of traditions narrated by them]. I raised this subject with one of them, who said, It is permissible unless the meaning is changed.’”

her aunt at the same time. Here are some of the different words in which this hadith has been narrated:

- i) The Prophet prohibited that a man brings together (as his wives) a woman and her paternal aunt or a woman and her maternal aunt.
- ii) The Prophet prohibited four women from being brought together (in marriage): a woman and her paternal aunt or a woman and her maternal aunt.
- iii) I heard the Prophet saying: “The paternal aunt is not married along with the daughter of her brother nor the daughter of the sister along with her maternal aunt.”

Clearly, the above narrations do not fulfill the requirement that transmission be faithful to the words and not just to the meaning. But in this example even the meaning is not faithfully preserved. For there is a significant difference between:

“the Prophet prohibited that ...” (i and ii)

and

“I heard the Prophet say that ...” (iii).

In the second statement the Prophet is actually quoted while in the first statement the Prophet is not quoted so that what is being said may be only Abu Hurayrah’s interpretation of the Prophet’s words.

Shafi‘i admits that despite the conditions imposed by him there is the possibility of error in a hadith transmitted by a single narrator at some stage. But he insists that it must still be accepted just as one should accept in a court of law the testimony of witnesses of “just character”, even though the judgment about the justness of their character and their testimony are liable to err. But the number of witnesses in important cases is more than one and therefore the possibility of error is much less than in the case of accepting a narration transmitted at some stage only by one narrator. Moreover, one needs to be more cautious in establishing a law than in applying the law in particular cases, since error in the application in particular cases affects only a small number of people while an error in the very formulation of the law will affect the whole ummah for all times.

Albani’s view

Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albani⁷⁷¹ talks about *ahad* ahadith, that is, those ahadith that are narrated only by a relatively small number of narrators in each of the first few generations. Since a *gharib* hadith is a special case of an *ahad* hadith, what he says about *ahad* ahadith applies also to *gharib* ahadith.

Albani, like Shafi‘i, imposes some additional conditions before a *gharib* hadith with *ṣahih* *isnad* can be binding. Following the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim, he requires that it “is accepted and not disputed by the ummah” and has “no hidden defect”. By a “hidden defect” scholars mean a weakness in a hadith that becomes apparent when it is compared with other related narrations. For example, one narrator transmits a tradition from a Companion as a statement of the

⁷⁷¹ See his book, *Al-Hadith Hujjah bi Nafs hi fi al-‘Aqa`id wa al-Ahkam*.

Prophet while several other comparably trustworthy narrators transmit it as the statement of the Companion. In this case it is likely that the narrator has made a mistake in attributing the statement to the Prophet. For another example, one narrator transmits a hadith that is found to be in conflict with several other ahadith on a similar subject. Again, it is likely that the narrator has made a mistake.

As in case of the conditions imposed by Shafi'i, the fulfillment of the conditions required by Albani is also very difficult, if not impossible, to prove for *gharib* ahadith. First there is the difficulty of defining agreement of the ummah (*ijma'*) and then proving that such an agreement has taken place (see my article, "The Meaning of *Ijma'*"). Certainly, there is no way to prove *ijma'* of any kind on the authenticity of a *gharib* hadith in the first few generations. For proving such *ijma'* would require statements from many Companions and Successors referring to the hadith in question. But such statements would mean that the hadith was transmitted by several Companions and Successors, which is very unlikely for a *gharib* hadith, since a *gharib* hadith has usually only one narrator among the Companions.

For many scholars *ijma'* reached after the time of the Companions does not have a binding force. Moreover, we need to inquire whether this *ijma'* is based on historical knowledge or some other considerations. The question of authenticity of a hadith is a historical question and if *ijma'* on it is based on something other than a historical analysis or a very superficial historical analysis, then it has no value. It is like the agreement of humanity at one time that the earth is flat, which was based on very superficial impressions.

Now there seems to be no case in which the ummah agreed on the authenticity of a *gharib* hadith on the basis of historical knowledge or analysis. Albani mentions three examples of *ahad* ahadith fulfilling his conditions:

- I) "Actions are based on intentions ...".
- II) "If he lay between her four limbs and tired her, *ghusl* is *wajib*."
- III) "The Messenger of God obligated *sadaqah al-fitr* on everyone, young or old, male or female."

Of these three only the hadith, “Actions are based on intentions ...,” is *gharib*^{8[8]}. This hadith, according to almost all hadith experts is narrated from the Holy Prophet only by ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (d. 23), from ‘Umar only by ‘Alqamah bin Waqqas al-Laythi (date of death unknown),

^{8[8]} The other two ahadith are corroborated by narrations from other Companions with other sound *asanid* and therefore are not *gharib*. Thus the hadith of Abu Hurayrah concerning the obligation of *ghusl* after sex even if the sexual act is not completed, is corroborated by a hadith of ‘Aishah in *Sahih* of Muslim. I have discussed it in “Facing Contradictions Among Ahadith”, where three points are made about it: a) the hadith has hidden defects; b) it was not accepted with anything like a consensus in the days of the Companions and the Successors; c) its later acceptance was the result of the principle of *ihhtiyat* (cautiousness) and is not an endorsement of its authenticity.

Likewise, the hadith of Ibn ‘Umar concerning *zakah al-fitr* is corroborated by ahadith with sound *asanid* from other Companions such as Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri and Abu Hurayrah and is not *gharib*. Thus we have the following hadith from Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri:

Yahya bin Yahya related to us and said: I read to Malik from Zayd bin Aslam from ‘Iyad bin ‘Abd Allah bin Sa‘d bin Abi Sarh that he heard Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri saying:

We used to give (in the time of the Prophet) as *zakah al-fitr* one *ḡa‘* of meal (wheat) or one *ḡa‘* of barley or one *ḡa‘* of dates or one *ḡa‘* of cottage cheese or one *ḡa‘* of raisins. (Muslim)

This hadith does not tell us whether *zakah al-fitr* was customary (*sunnah*) or obligatory in the time of the Prophet, whereas the hadith of Ibn ‘Umar seems to make it obligatory. But it is interesting that the narrations of the hadith of Ibn ‘Umar do not quote the Prophet but simply say that he obligated or he commanded, which may be Ibn ‘Umar’s interpretation. Moreover, even Ibn ‘Umar’s hadith has been interpreted to mean that *zakah al-fitr* is *sunnah*, as we learn from the following comments by Nawawi:

People have differed concerning the meaning of *farada* (in this hadith). The majority among the earlier and later generations says that it means to make something obligatory. So in their view *zakah al-fitr* is obligatory and is included in the general word of the Most High: “give *al-zakah*”.

(The word *farada*) is primarily used in Shari‘ah with this meaning. Ishaq bin Rahawayah said that there is something like *ijma‘* on the *ijab* of *zakah al-fitr*. But some of the people of al-‘Iraq, some associates of Malik and some associates of Shafi‘i and finally Da‘ud said: It is *sunnah* and not *wajib*. They take *farada* to mean: to set an amount by way of assignment (*qadara ‘ala sabil al-nadb*). Abu Hanifah said that it is *wajib* not *farḍ*, based on the distinction between *farḍ* and *wajib* in his *madhhab*. According to al-Qadi some said that *al-fitr* was abrogated by the commandment to pay *al-zakah*. In my opinion this is wrong; the correct view is that it is *farḍ wajib*. (Nawawi)

That *zakah al-fitr* was a well-established *sunnah* or an obligation is also suggested by the following hadith from Abu Hurayrah:

Abu Tahir and Harun bin Sa‘id al-Ayli and Ahmad bin ‘Isa related to me saying: Ibn Wahb related to us: Makhramah informed me from his father from ‘Irak bin Malik who said:

I heard Abu Hurayrah relate from the Messenger of God that he said: For a slave there is no *sadaqah* except *sadaqah al-fitr*. (Muslim)

This implies that *sadaqah al-fitr* was obligatory or customary on behalf of some individuals under one’s care.

At the same time, the existence of *zakah al-fitr* in the time of the Prophet seems to be called into question by those ahadith in which the Prophet, after ‘Id prayers, exhorts people or specifically women, to make donations. These ahadith do not talk about a fixed amount to be paid. One hadith specifies that the donations for which the Prophet asked were different from *zakah al-fitr* but this could be a harmonization of the tradition of voluntary donations with no fixed amount and that of *zakah al-fitr* with a fixed amount.

from ‘Alqamah only by Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Taymi (d. 120), and from Muhammad only by Yahya bin Sa‘id al-Ansari (d. 144). Then from Yahya it is narrated by more than 200 narrators.

The hadith expresses an idea firmly established in the Qur`an^{9[9]} and therefore its contents must be accepted by Muslims. But there is no reason why we must also accept it as the authentic word of the Prophet. Even if we assume that the hadith was indeed related by ‘Umar, from him by ‘Alqamah, and from him by Muhammad bin Ibrahim, as Yahya reports, Yahya or anyone of the three earlier narrators could have made a mistake in its attribution to the Prophet. For example, the hadith could be a saying of ‘Umar that was by mistake turned into a prophetic hadith by ‘Alqamah or Muhammad or Yahya.

In the time of the Companions and the Successors there was no agreement of the ummah on the authenticity of this hadith. For, considering that in each of the first four generations only one narrator transmits the hadith, it is clear that a vast majority of Companions and Successors did not even know about the hadith much less agreed on its authenticity.

Albani and some earlier scholars^{10[10]} suggest that the ummah has accepted the authenticity of the hadith, but even if that is so, this acceptance is not based on any historical knowledge. Muslim scholars cannot possibly have any information about the history of the hadith before Yahya, since no such information is recorded or assumed any where. So on what basis have they agreed that the hadith is authentic? This agreement is simply based on the fact that the content of the hadith is acceptable and that Yahya reports it with sound *isnad*. But neither the acceptability of the content of a hadith nor the soundness of its *isnad* is sufficient to establish its authenticity as a prophetic hadith.

Other views

In addition to the views proposed by Shafi‘i and Albani, there are other suggestions as to which *ahad* or *gharib* ahadith are binding. Thus some scholars have suggested that *ahad* traditions found in Bukhari and Muslim are binding. This view is hardly superior to those of Shafi‘i and Albani. For,

^{9[9]} This is shown by verses such as the following:

3:145 -- “Whoever desires a reward in the world we shall give him of it; and whoever desires a reward in the hereafter, we shall give him of it” (see also 3:152, 4:134).

30:38 – “And what you give of the *zakah* seeking the countenance of God (*wajh Allah*), then those (who do so) shall have manifold growth.”

76:9 – (The righteous say:) “We feed you only for the sake of God’s countenance. We wish for no reward or thanks from you”.

We may also mention the Qur`anic references to the hypocrites. It is because man’s motivation determines the value of his actions that the hypocrites will not receive forgiveness and salvation even if they declare faith in the Prophet Muhammad (63:1, 6).

^{10[10]} For example, Nawawi says: “Muslims have agreed on the high position of this hadith and on its many benefits (*fawa'id*) and its soundness. Shafi‘i and others said: It is one-third of Islam. Shafi‘i also said: It is relevant to 70 subjects in *fiqh*. Others said: It is one-fourth of Islam. ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Mahdi and others said: It is desirable that any one who writes a book should start with this hadith as a reminder for the student to make his intentions right ...” . One may ask if the hadith was so important why did the ummah have to wait for about a hundred years before learning about it?

while it is true that Bukhari and Muslim are the most carefully compiled collections of ahadith, there is no reason to think that every hadith found in their collections is authentic whereas every hadith not found in them is inauthentic and may be ignored. Contradictory traditions are found within Bukhari and Muslim separately as well as within the material agreed upon by them both (see my article, "Facing Contradictions Among Ahadith"). This means that some ahadith in Bukhari and Muslim, even those on which both of them agree, are not authentic and we cannot make any collection of traditions binding knowing that some of them are falsely attributed to the Prophet.

Yet another suggestion is made by some scholars of *Ahl al-Kalam* who say that *ahad* ahadith with sound *asanid* are binding if they deal with laws but they are not binding if they deal with '*aqā'id*, that is, with beliefs concerning God and the unseen (*ghayb*). The assumption here is that '*aqā'id* require more certain basis than do laws. But this type of distinction between laws and '*aqā'id* is not found in the Qur'an and the authentic ahadith. In the two Islamic sources, laws and '*aqā'id* blend together in an harmonious whole. Laws proceed from certain beliefs about God and the unseen such as the belief that God has revealed those laws. Actions governed by the laws both express and support certain beliefs. For example, prayers express the belief in the existence of God and the unseen and the need to get connected with them and at the same time helps in maintaining and strengthening that belief. In Islam no beliefs are taught for the sake of satisfying our curiosity. All beliefs about God and the unseen are taught in order to help us conduct our lives in a righteous way that leads to success in this world and the hereafter. Moreover, the Qur'an condemns making things *halal* or *haram* without authority from divine revelation just as it condemns saying things about God (formulating '*aqā'id*) without such authority¹¹¹¹¹. This suggests no difference between the level of certainty of authenticity required for ahadith giving laws and ahadith teaching '*aqā'id*.

(III)

THE QUR`AN REQUIRES AT LEAST TWO WITNESSES FOR IMPORTANT MATTERS

The Holy Qur'an says:

¹¹¹¹¹ Thus we read in the Qur'an:

Those who associate partners with God in his divinity will say: "If God had willed we would not have associated partners nor our fathers and we would not have forbidden anything (without proper authority)." In the same way belied those who were before them, till they tasted our wrath. Say! Do you have some knowledge to produce for us? You follow nothing but guess and you do nothing but lie. (6:148)

Do not say, putting forth falsely with your tongues, "This is *halal* and this is *haram*" thus fabricating lies against God. Surely, those who fabricate lies against God do not prosper. (16:116)

In these passages, forbidding something or making something *halal* and *haram* (formulating laws) without certain knowledge is condemned.

Say! God has forbidden (not what you forbid without knowledge) but only indecency -- open and hidden -- sin, unjust aggression, associating partners with God in his divinity, and saying about God that of which you have no knowledge. (7:33)

In this verse saying something about God, which includes formulating '*aqā'id*, without due knowledge is forbidden.

“O you who believe! If an unrighteous person (*fasiq*) comes to you with a news, verify it, lest you harm some people in ignorance and then be regretful for what you did” (49:6)

Albani, following Ibn al-Qayyim, refers to the above verse and reaches the surprising conclusion: “This verse means that if a truthful Muslim brought a *khobar*, then the news must be received with complete confidence. Verifying in this case is not obligated on Muslims; rather, the news must be accepted at once. This is why Ibn al-Qayyim said: ‘This verse means that the *ahad khobar* is to be accepted without the necessity of verification. If this *khobar* is not certain, then verification would have been ordered ...’.” This deduction from the verse defies all logic. The necessity of verifying a news brought by a *fasiq* can only mean that a news brought by a *muttaqi* may be accepted without verification. No rule of logic can possibly justify the deduction that the news brought by a *muttaqi* must be accepted. Indeed, we can easily show from the Qur`an that this deduction is mistaken.

In cases in which the Qur`an specifies the number of witnesses – financial deals involving credit or establishing guilt for illegal sex -- it requires more than one witness. Starting from Shafi`i some scholars have made a distinction between being a witness in a court of law and being a narrator of a hadith, but in both cases it is important to establish facts. And if two or more witnesses are needed to establish facts in law, then it is all the more necessary to require multiple witnesses to establish facts about law, that is, facts such as the authenticity of a hadith that would determine what law is. Shafi`i notes that the Qur`an does not establish an absolute minimum for witnesses and therefore one witness can be enough. But this ignores the fact that the more important the facts to be established the more important it is to have multiple witnesses. Clearly it is more important to establish the authenticity of a hadith than to establish the terms of financial deal, since the acceptance of a false hadith can have far reaching negative consequences for billions of Muslims till the day of resurrection whereas a mistake in accepting false testimony in case of a particular financial deal will have very limited consequences.

The Qur`an does not regard the testimony of a single person reliable beyond a reasonable doubt even if the person himself is considered trustworthy. Thus in 24:6-9, it is said that if through *li`an* a husband accuses his wife of adultery, his accusation will not be accepted if his wife refutes him by similar oaths. This is so even if he can be proved to be trustworthy and his wife can be proved to be a liar and a flirt. The reason the character of the husband or the wife does not matter here is that the testimony of the husband alone is not sufficient to establish her guilt no matter how trustworthy he may be or how untrustworthy she may be. Her guilt is established only when the husband’s word is corroborated by her silence or her confession. This shows that the Qur`an admits reasonable doubt in the testimony of a single person even if the person is *muttaqi* and trustworthy and even when he testifies by four solemn oaths and one declaration that the curse of God be on him if he was lying.

Shafi`i also notes that in many nations God sent only one messenger and this proves that the report of a single trustworthy person must be accepted. But God often sends his Messengers with signs that act as additional witnesses to the truth of their message. Moreover, Messengers support and confirm each other’s message and thus form a series of witnesses to the religious truth. Finally, as Shafi`i himself notes, God sometimes did send more than one Messenger or Prophet at a time. This is especially the case at important stages in the history of revelation. Thus in the first stages of the Ibrahimite tradition, there were simultaneously two prophets – Ibrahim himself and Luṭ, then Isma`il and Ishaq, then Ya`qub and Yusuf. Then in the decisive organization of the Israeli religion God sent two Messengers – Musa and Harun. Later, in the final stage of the Israeli tradition he again sent two Messengers – Isa and Yahya.

(IV)

EXAMPLES SHOWING THAT THE PROPHET, THE COMPANIONS, AND THE SUCCESSORS DID NOT ALWAYS ACCEPT A *KHABAR* FROM A SINGLE TRUSTWORTHY NARRATOR

Let us now turn to the Hadith to see what it teaches about the acceptance of *gharib* ahadith. In the discussion that follows we will not concern ourselves with the question of the authenticity of the ahadith used, since our argument is addressed to those Muslims who accept most of these ahadith as authentic.

We find two types of ahadith relevant to the question of acceptance of *gharib* ahadith:

- 1) Ahadith in which some Successors, Companions, or the Prophet did not accept a *khavar* from a single trustworthy Companion but required corroboration from a second person.
- 2) Ahadith in which a *khavar* from a single narrator was accepted.

The first type of ahadith proves that the acceptance of a *gharib* hadith is not binding. This conclusion is not negated by the second category of ahadith, for, they simply prove that a *khavar* from a single trustworthy narrator can be accepted and not that it must be accepted.

We present four examples of the first type of ahadith.

i) Muslim records the following tradition about Shaqiq [d. 108], a Successor:

‘Abd Allah bin Shaqiq said: Ibn ‘Abbas one day addressed us after *al-‘asr* till the sun disappeared and the stars appeared, and (as the time for *maghrib* passed) the people began to say: Prayer, prayer! A person from Banu Tamim arrived and without slackening or stopping (continued saying): Prayer, prayer! Ibn ‘Abbas said: May you be deprived of your mother, do you teach me the Sunnah? And then he said: I saw the Messenger of God combining the noon and afternoon prayers and the sunset and night prayers. ‘Abd Allah bin Shaqiq said: Some doubt was created in my mind about it. So I came to Abu Hurayrah and asked him and he testified his assertion. (Muslim #1154)

Shaqiq clearly does not consider the report of Ibn ‘Abbas to be binding without further verification.

ii) In a hadith found in Muwatta (1520), Bukhari (1920, 5776, 6806), Muslim (4009), Abu Da‘ud (4509), and Ahmad (18689, 18786, 18840, 18915) we read that *Abu Musa* went to see ‘Umar and asked permission to enter thrice. But ‘Umar did not reply as he was busy. So *Abu Musa* went back. When ‘Umar finished his job he said, “Didn’t I hear the voice of ‘Abd Allah bin Qays (= *Abu Musa*)? Let him come in.” ‘Umar was told that he had left. So, he sent for him and on his arrival, *Abu Musa* said, “We were ordered to do so (i.e. to leave if not admitted after asking permission thrice). ‘Umar told him, “Bring a witness in proof of your statement.” In some narrations in Bukhari and Muslim ‘Umar threatened *Abu Musa* with some unspecified action if he did not bring a second witness. *Abu Musa* brought *Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri* who testified before ‘Umar. In the narration in Muwatta, ‘Umar says to *Abu Musa*:

“I did not suspect you. I was merely afraid that people might attribute something to the Messenger of God that he did not say.”

It is clear that ‘Umar does not consider the report of *Abu Musa* binding despite the fact that he considered him trustworthy^{12[12]}.

iii) Another hadith found in *Muwatta* (953), *Tirmidhi* (2026, 2027), *Abu Da`ud* (2507), *Ibn Majah* (2714) and *Darimi* (2810) tells us that a grandmother came to *Abu Bakr al-Siddiq* and asked him for her inheritance [when one of her grandchildren died]. *Abu Bakr* said to her, “You have nothing in the Book of God, and I do not know that you have anything in the Sunnah of the Messenger of God. Go away therefore, until I have questioned the people.” He questioned the people, and *al-Mughirah ibn Shu`bah* said, “I was present with the Messenger of God when he gave the grandmother a sixth.” *Abu Bakr* said: “Was there anybody else with you?” *Muhammad ibn Maslamah al-Ansari* stood up and said the like of what *al-Mughirah* said. *Abu Bakr al-Siddiq* gave the share to her.

There is no indication here that *Abu Bakr* considered the Companion *al-Mughirah* anything less than trustworthy and yet he did not act upon the hadith on the testimony of *al-Mughirah* alone but required corroboration from a second witness.

Thus neither *Abu Bakr* nor ‘Umar considered it binding to accept a hadith coming from a single trustworthy Companion.

In case of the Prophet, who was the source of ahadith rather than a recipient, we cannot speak of his accepting ahadith from a single narrator. But we can speak of whether he considered acceptance of a *khbar* from a single reliable person binding.

iv) In this connection we find the following hadith in *Muwatta* (195), *Bukhari* (6709), *Muslim* (896, 897), *Abu Da`ud* (856), *Tirmidhi* (365), *Nasa`i* (1209), *Ibn Majah* (1204), *Ahmad* (6903, 7342, 7486, 9099, 9545), and *Darimi* (1458):

Abu Hurayrah said: God’s Messenger finished his prayer after offering two *rak`at* only. *Dhu al-Yadayn* asked him: “Has the prayer been shortened, O Messenger of God, or you had forgotten?” The Prophet said: “Is *Dhu al-Yadayn* correct?” The people said, “Yes.” Then God’s Messenger stood up and performed another two *rak`at*

Here there is no indication that the Prophet considered *Dhu al-Yadayn* unreliable. Yet he confirms his word from others. Incidentally, this hadith also shows that even prophets can make mistakes.

(V)

^{12[12]} *Shafi`i* mentions this hadith and considers it authentic. He tries to explain the hadith by saying that ‘Umar wanted to be careful. This can be understood in one or both of the following two ways: a) ‘Umar wanted to be careful before accepting the hadith of *Abu Musa*. b) He himself accepted the hadith but he wanted to stress carefulness to others by demanding corroboration from a second narrator. In both cases it is clear that ‘Umar did not think that the acceptance of hadith from a single trustworthy person is binding.

EXAMPLES OF ACCEPTANCE OF A *KHABAR* FROM A SINGLE NARRATOR BY A COMPANION: THEY PROVE ONLY PERMISSIBILITY NOT NECESSITY

Scholars holding the opinion that under certain conditions a *gharib* hadith must be accepted also cite several traditions in their support. However, the traditions cited by them reflect special circumstances of the time of the Prophet and the Companions as follows:

- In the time of the Prophet and the Companions a chain of transmission consisted only of one transmitter (one of the Companions) who directly heard the words or saw the actions that he was reporting. But for later generations a chain consisted of more than one transmitter; and greater the number of links in the transmission the less reliable the report becomes, both in terms of its attribution to the Prophet and the accuracy of its contents.
- In the time of the Prophet, any mistakes in accepting ahadith are expected to be discovered by the Prophet and then corrected before they got widely accepted. Even in the time of the Companions mistakes in reports had a relatively high chance of being discovered and corrected because of greater knowledge among them of the words/actions of the Prophet. But in later times, mistakes made in accepting ahadith would be much more difficult to correct.

The above observations show that generations of Muslims after the Prophet and the Companions have to be much more careful in accepting a *gharib* hadith.

Even more importantly, the traditions in which a hadith or *khavar* transmitted by a single Companion is accepted by other Companions prove only that such a report can be accepted and not that it must be accepted, as we now show by examining many of the these traditions.

i) When people were at Quba` offering the morning prayer, suddenly a person came to them and said: "In the night a part of the Qur`an was revealed to the Messenger of God and he has been ordered to face the Ka`bah. So you turn your faces towards it." Their faces were towards Sham, so they turned around towards the Ka`bah. (Bukhari 9/357) ¹³¹

In this tradition, men praying in Quba` acted upon a teaching reported by a single person. But nothing in the tradition indicates that it was binding on them to do so. In his *al-Risalah*, Shafi`i says that the Companions would not have made an innovation in religion by turning towards the new *qiblah* "unless they had to do so". This comment is meant to show that accepting a *khavar* from a reliable narrator was considered obligatory by the Companions. But it should be noted that there was no danger at the time that an unauthorized innovation could be established in Islam, since if the report were wrong, its error would be known and corrected almost the same day. The situation is very different for later generations of Muslims. If we accept a *gharib* hadith as authentic, there is a reasonable chance that we may establish an error in Islam that may never be corrected. Moreover, a controversy about the *qiblah* was already going on between the Jews and the Muslims and it is quite

¹³¹ Our comments on this tradition will also apply to other similar traditions such as Bukhari 9/359, according to which some men broke the wine jars after hearing from a single person, Abu Talha, that wine had been forbidden.

possible that the Muslims were expecting a change in the *qiblah*, so that they found the report of the change completely acceptable.

It is interesting that *Shafi'i* himself later talks of permissibility and not necessity of accepting the report. He argues that if following a religious command reported by a single person were not "permissible", then the Prophet would have, upon learning of men's action, told them that they should have waited till they heard from him or from more than one person. This type of lack of clear distinction between "permissibility" and "necessity" is found throughout *Shafi'i's* and other scholars' treatment of the question of the acceptability of *gharib* ahadith.

ii) Malik (ibn al-Huwayrith) related: We came to the Prophet and we were young men nearly of equal ages and we stayed with him ... he said: "Go back to your families and stay with them and teach them and order them (to do good deeds)". The Prophet mentioned things some of which I remembered and some I did not. Then he said: "Pray as you have seen me praying, and when it is the time of prayer, one of you should pronounce the *adhan* for the prayer and the eldest of you should lead the prayer." (Bukhari 9/352)

This hadith is used by *Albani* to argue that *ahad* traditions are to be accepted because each individual is asked by the Prophet to teach Islam to his family. But the situation here is that some very recent converts to Islam visited the Prophet who teaches them basic things about Islam and then asks them to explain those things to their families. Education whether Islamic or otherwise cannot be completed in a single step. It has to start somewhere and then gradually reach a desirable level of comprehensiveness and accuracy. The Prophet was simply starting the process of Islamic education of the families of Malik and his associates. It was expected that the families would continue the process making it more exact and comprehensive with time. There is no indication in the hadith that the Prophet expected that what any of these young men taught to their families after returning home has to be accepted by all Muslims till the day of judgment, even if he is the only one to say it. Malik ibn al-Huwayrith himself says that he forgot some of the things the Prophet taught him and his associates. Note that forgetting not only can completely wipe out a piece of information from the memory; it can also result in a partial loss of information and in this way distort it or make it less accurate. Under this circumstance how can we accept what Malik ibn al-Huwayrith had to say, if it is not confirmed independently by another narrator? Indeed, scholars have not accepted his word in the matter of who should be the *imam* in the prayers. Malik ibn al-Huwayrith says that the Prophet told him that the eldest of the group should be the *imam*, but this is not accepted by most scholars!

iii) 'Umar said: There was a man from the *Anṣar* (who was a friend of mine). If he was not present in the company of God's Messenger I used to be present with God's Messenger and I would tell him what I heard from God's Messenger, and when I was absent from God's Messenger he used to be present with him, and he would tell me what he heard from God's Messenger. (Bukhari 9/362)

Here we have a picture of continuing education with plenty of opportunity for each of the two friends to discover and correct any mistakes committed by the other. Also, there is no indication that 'Umar and his friends always accepted each other's report without further questioning. To the contrary there is some indication that they did not. For in a longer version, 'Umar tells us:

My *Anṣari* companion, on a day of his turn, went (to the town) and returned to us at night ... He said: "... God's Messenger has divorced his wives."

‘Umar does not fully accept the report, although he gives considerable credibility to it, not because he thought that the report of a trustworthy witness about an action of the Prophet has to be accepted but because he “had already thought that this (divorce) will probably happen in the near future”. ‘Umar himself goes to visit the Prophet and first asks his daughter, Umm al-Mu`minin Hafṣah and then the Prophet himself whether he had divorced his wives. The Prophet told him that he had not. (Bukhari 7/119)^{14[14]}. This shows not only that ‘Umar did not always fully accept the reports of his companion but also that the report of even a trustworthy person can be wrong.

iv) From Anas: The people of Yaman came to God’s Messenger and said: Send with us a person who should teach us Sunnah and al-Islam, whereupon he caught hold of the hand of Abu ‘Ubaydah and said: This is a trustworthy man of this ummah. (Muslim 6/111)

But the Prophet is also reported to have sent ‘Ali, Mu‘adh, and Abu Musa to Yaman. These envoys also conveyed Islamic teachings to the people there, thus providing to them more than one witness. Bukhari in fact begins his ahadith on *khbar al-wahid* by giving to the first chapter a long title which includes the following interesting sentence:

How the Prophet sent his ‘umara` one after the other so that if any one of them forgot (something), the other would bring them back to the Sunnah.

This is in line with what we stated earlier that education is an ongoing process and we are confirmed in our knowledge usually by hearing several sources supporting one another, either simultaneously or over time.

It should also be noted that the Prophet did not always send one person to teach. In one case reported in many books including Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Sa‘d, Bukhari, and Muslim he sent 70 people:

Anas bin Malik said: Some people came to the Messenger of God and said to him: Send with us some men who may teach us the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Accordingly, he sent seventy men from the Anṣar (Muslim 20/4682)

v) From Abu Hurayrah: Then the Prophet said “You, O Unays!” addressing a man from Bani Aslam, "Go tomorrow morning to the wife of this (man) and if she confesses, then stone her." The next morning Unays went to the wife and she confessed, and he stoned. (Bukhari 9/365)

This hadith is examined in detail in Chapter 9 from the point of view of its historicity. Here we comment on the use of the hadith by scholars to support the view that under certain conditions it is binding to accept the word of a single person. The argument used is that one man, Unays, was considered sufficient to administer the confession and execute the punishment. But we do not know whether Unays was alone when he administered the confession and executed the punishment. The Qur’an clearly states that the punishment must be witnessed by a party of believers. This means that

^{14[14]} There are other traditions according to which ‘Umar accepted a hadith reported by a single Companion. But none of them provides any indication that ‘Umar felt obligated to do so. For example, when ‘Umar faced the question about whether a poll tax should be collected from the Magians, ‘Abd al-Rahman bin ‘Awf related the hadith: “Follow with regard to them what you follow with regard to the people of the book”. ‘Umar acted on this hadith without requiring any further corroboration. In this tradition there is no indication that ‘Umar felt obliged to accept ‘Abd al-Rahman’s report.

at least the punishment was witnessed by other believers, although it is not mentioned in the hadith. Similarly, it is quite possible that the confession was also administered in the presence of witnesses, even if the hadith does not mention it. Moreover, even if the confession was administered in complete privacy, public execution provided an adequate corroboration of the veracity of that confession. For, if the woman did not confess and was taken for punishment without her confession she could have protested at the time of punishment, in which case the punishment would be lifted. The fact that she was punished means that she did not protest and her silence became a public demonstration of her confession.

vi) Then [the Prophet] sent Abu Bakr in command of the hajj in the year 9 in order that he may establish (*yuqim*) for the Muslims their hajj while the *mushrikun* were at their hajj stations. So Abu Bakr set out with some Muslims with him .. (Ibn Ishaq as quoted by Ibn Hisham 831, 833)

Ibn Ishaq mentions another tradition stating that after Abu Bakr had left Surah 9 (*Bara`ah*) was revealed upon which the Prophet sent ‘Ali to deliver to the *mushrikun* the message contained in the Surah ^{15[15]}. This is supposed to prove that a single person’s religious instruction or religious message must be accepted. But the fact that Abu Bakr was in charge of the hajj does not mean that he was the only one who knew the hajj rites. What he taught to the pilgrims could therefore have been verified by others. ^{16[16]} Similarly, when it is said that the Prophet sent ‘Ali, it does not necessarily mean that ‘Ali traveled alone and he was the only one to know the message he was to deliver. Sometimes when the traditions say that the Prophet sent a Companion for a certain task it means that the Companion mentioned was in charge of the task and not that he was the only one involved in the performance of the task.

vii) Malik told us from Zayd bin Aslam from ‘Ata` bin Yasar that Mu‘awiyah bin Abi Sufyan once sold a gold or silver cup for more than the value of its weight. Abu al-Darda` said to him: “I heard the Messenger of God prohibit that”. Mu‘awiyah said: “I do not see any harm in it”. Abu Darda` said: “Who will support me against Mu‘awiyah? I relate to him from the Messenger of God and he gives me his own opinion. I cannot live in the same land

^{15[15]} In the following hadith quoted by Shafi‘i, ‘Ali brings a different message to the pilgrims than the one mentioned in Ibn Ishaq:

‘Abd al-‘Aziz [al-Darawardi] told us from Yazid bin al-Hadi from ‘Abd Allah bin Abi Salamah from ‘Amr bin Sulayman al-Zuraqi from his mother, who said: When we were at Mina, ‘Ali bin Abi Talib arrived on a camel and declared that the Messenger of God said: “These are days to eat and drink, so no one shall fast.” ‘Ali went around on his camel loudly promulgating this message to the people.

Shafi‘i also cites another similar hadith in which another Companion, Ibn Mirba‘ comes to hajj and announces a message from the Prophet concerning the rites. We are not told in these two ahadith to what extent the people accepted the message. Later generations of Muslims apparently did not accept it, since the two ahadith are absent from Muwatta, Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and several other books. Clearly, the two ahadith were not considered reliable by a large number of earlier hadith scholars.

^{16[16]} Similar comments apply to other examples mentioned by Shafi‘i of individuals appointed as leaders (*‘umara`*) of Muslims in various regions or leaders of groups of Muslims in travel. Any Islamic teachings delivered by these leaders are expected to be known to other Muslims in the group and subject to their verification. In case there were no knowledgeable people in the group the Islamic instruction delivered by the leaders is expected to be at a basic level and basic Islamic teachings have come down to us from many sources, so that we do not have to depend on a single Companion for them.

with you.” (*Al-Risalah*; also found in Muwatta 1147, which adds: “Abu al-Darda` went to ‘Umar and mentioned (Mu‘awiyah’s action) to him. ‘Umar wrote to Mu‘awiyah telling him to sell not like that, but only in the same quantity, weight for weight.” This part is missing in *Shafi‘i* and may be a later addition in the Muwatta.)

In this tradition, the basis for protest by Abu al-Darda` is not that Mu‘awiyah did not accept a hadith from a single narrator. Rather, Abu al-Darda` was upset because Mu‘awiyah simply ignored that a hadith is being quoted to him.

viii) Sa‘id bin Jubayr said: I said to Ibn Abbas that Nawf al-Bakkali opines that *Musa* connected with the Children of Isra`il was not the same who was connected with *Khadiir*. He said: The enemy of God has lied. I heard Ubayy bin Ka‘b say: I heard the Messenger of God say ... [a long tradition about *Musa* and al-*Khadiir*] (Muslim 4385, Bukhari 119, Abu Da`ud 4082, Tirmidhi 3074)

Here there is no indication that Ibn ‘Abbas accepted the hadith of Ubayy because he thought it was his obligation to do so. There is every possibility that he accepted it simply because he found it acceptable. Also, Ibn ‘Abbas might have felt that the hadith of Ubayy, despite being supported by no one else, was better source of guidance than the contrary opinion of al-Bakkali that apparently had no basis at all.

We have examined above many of the traditions in which Companions accept a report from the Prophet transmitted by one Companion only. Our examination shows that these traditions establish the permissibility of accepting such a report but not its necessity. This together with the ahadith in which the Prophet or Companions or Successors do not accept a report transmitted by a single Companion proves that in the light of the Hadith accepting a *gharib* hadith is not binding.

THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENT FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF A HADITH TO BE BINDING

Our conclusion that acceptance of a *gharib* hadith is not binding naturally raises the question: When is the acceptance of a hadith binding? In general terms, the answer is: when its authenticity is established beyond a reasonable doubt. But one would want to know when is the authenticity of a hadith established beyond a reasonable doubt? In view of the discussion in this article the minimum, though not sufficient, requirement for this is as follows: A hadith should be narrated by at least two Companions; from each of the Companions it should be narrated by at least two reliable Successors; from each of the Successors it should be narrated by at least two reliable narrators in the third generation; and so on. This condition is particularly important in the first three generations, since starting with the fourth generation preservation of traditions was done with much greater care.

Taken from: www.islamicperspectives.com/SingleNarrator.htm
