

The Hadith: Whoever Dies Without An Imam

The Hadith: Man Mata - Whoever Dies Without An Imam



**& Responding To Reformists Who
Deny This Hadith - Sayyid
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The Hadith: Whoever Dies Without An Imam – Man Mata...

Discussing the Hadith of “Whoever dies without an Imam...man mata...” & Responding to Reformists who Deny this hadith

Transcript of a part of a Lecture by Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, recited on December 30, 2021 at Jaffari Community Centre, Toronto, Canada.

Watch the full lecture:

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بسم الله تعالى

و صلى الله على محمد و آله الطاهرين

1. What Is Bay'ah?

When we talk about Bay'ah (e.g., when we hear in the context of 'Ashura', where Imam Husayn ('a) was asked to do Bay'ah to Yazid), what that means basically is acknowledging the Imam of the time and pledging our loyalty and support for him. It simply means the pledge of allegiance.

I talked about this issue from the perspective of the Sunni hadith two years ago in a majlis. I would like to return to this issue with elaboration from the Shi'a f and also connect to a different angle as far as the Sunni Ahadith are concerned. This basic concept of the Bay'ah, whether you say it refers to the Imam (of the Shi'a) or the Caliph (of the Sunni), is accepted by both sects.

2. Hadith Of "Man Mata" In Shi'a Sources

Amongst the Shi'as, I would like to present to you one of the earliest compilation of hadith from Al-Kafi of Shaykh Kulayni, compiled during the era of al-Ghaybat as-Qughra. He took 20 years to compile the book known as Al-Kafi and he died in the year 329 AH.

Kulayni, through his chain of narrators goes all the way to 'Isa Ibn al-Sariyy Abu al-Yasa', who asked the Sixth Imam ('a), "Can you explain to me what are the indispensable Da'aim Al-Islam, the fundamentals of Islam? The fundamentals whose ignorance can lead to corruption of one's faith and whose deeds would not be accepted by Allah?..."

The Sixth Imam responds to him by describing the Da'aim Al-Islam (the fundamentals of Islam): number one is tawhid – there is no God but Allah; second, you can't have Islam without believing that Muhammad (S) is the Messenger of Allah; third, to acknowledge whatever he has brought from Allah; fourth, to affirm that right in one's wealth known as alms. Then the Imam ends with Wilayah as a fundamental pillar: this wilayat which Allah has made obligatory upon us, and that is the wilayat of the family of Prophet Muhammad (S).

So then, 'Isa the narrator, asks the Imam a follow up question, "How would you explain the importance of this wilayat?"

The Imam responds by reciting of Holy Qur'an:

إِيَّاهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ مِنْكُمْ

"O believers, obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and the 'Ul al-'Amr among you [i.e., those among you who possess Divine Authority]." (4:59)

The 'Ul al-'Amr in the verse refers to those who have the authority in place of Rasul Allah (S).

Then the Sixth Imam says that: “The Messenger of Allah said:

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَا يَعْرِفُ إِمَامَهُ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً

“Whoever dies without knowing his Imam, he dies the death of Jahiliyyah”.

Jahiliyyah is term used for pre-Islamic era and non-Islamic values. “Death of Jahiliyyah” means that that person’s death is death of kufr, infidelity.

Then the Imam applies this hadith to the Prophet Muhammad (S) and the Imams of Ahl Al-Bayt (‘a). He said: “There was the Messenger of Allah (S) and after Rasul is ‘Ali (‘a). Some say Mu’awiyah. Then Hasan (‘a), then Husayn (‘a). And yet others says Yazid Ibn Mu’awiyah. Yazid and Husayn Ibn ‘Ali (‘a) are not same nor can you compare [Mu’awiyah with ‘Ali (‘a)]!”

The Imam was then silent for a moment until someone from the audience asked him to elaborate more. Then Imam said, “Then you have ‘Ali Ibn al-Husayn (‘a) then Muhammad Ibn ‘Ali, Abu Ja’far (‘a) ...” (Then he describes the role of the Fifth Imam in educating the Shi’a about their faith and rituals).

Then the Imam says: “This is how the reality will be, and the earth does not remain without an Imam ever:

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَا يَعْرِفُ إِمَامَهُ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً

“and whoever dies without knowing his Imam, he dies the death of infidelity”.

The time when you need this belief [and ma’rifat] most is the time when death comes – then you will realize what is the benefit of believing in the Imam of the time.”

This same narration has been written by Shaykh al-Kulayni from another chain of narrators. In the first narration quoted above, Kulayni’s chain starts to from Muhammad Ibn Yahya and ends with ‘Isa Ibn as-Sariyy; and the second narration in which he quotes this same hadith from another chain of narrators starting with Abu ‘Ali al-Ash’ari and ends with ‘Isa Ibn as-Sariyy. So, we have two chains of narrations quoted from Shaykh Kulayni in Al-Kafi.

Another example of this hadith is from a scholar of the same era as Shaykh Kulayni. ‘Ali Ibn Muhammad al-Khazzaz al-Razi. He has a book called Kifayatul Athar fi ’n-Nass ’ala ’l-A’immati ’l-Ithna ‘Ashar. There, through his own chain of narrators, he says that Abu Hamam heard from Muhammad Ibn ‘Uthman al-‘Amri (one of the four na’ibs of the Imam in the ghaybat as-sughra). This narration is of the days of the Eleventh Imam, and Muhammad al-‘Amri said: “I heard my father asking a question to the Eleventh Imam and I was there.”

Then he continues: My father ('Uthman al-'Amri) asked the Eleventh Imam about a statement that has been narrated from the Imam's forefathers. The narration that he wanted to verify with the Imam is the following:

"The earth will never be devoid of the hujjat/representative of Allah till the Day of Qiyamat.

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْ إِمَامَ زَمَانِهِ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً

"And whoever dies and doesn't know the Imam of his time, he dies the death of infidelity".

When the 11th Imam heard that narration, he said: "Inna hadha haqqun kama anna an-nahara haqqun – this is truth as the daylight (around us right now) is the truth."

And so, somebody asked him, "O the son of the Messenger! So who will be the Hujjah and Imam after you?" The Imam ('a) replied:

"My son Muhammad, he will be the Imam and Hujjah after me.

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْهُ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً

Whoever dies and doesn't know him, his death will be death of Jahiliyyah/infidelity."

Then the Imam goes on to talk about the state of the people after ghaybah.

So, we have one hadith from the Sixth Imam, with two different Asnad/chains quoted by Shaykh Kulayni, and another hadith from the Eleventh Imam quoted by Shaykh Razi. All three Asnad are authentic and correct. Shaykh aduq has also quoted it in Kamalu 'd-Din but I am not mentioning it because his narration is based on the book of Shaykh ar-Razi.

This is the Shi'a perspective, and there is no doubt about it.

3. Hadith Of "Man Mata" In Sunni Sources

The Sunni scholars are also unanimous in quoting the hadith of "man mata...". It has been quoted in ahih Muslim, ahih Ibn Habban, Majma'u 'z-Zawa'id of al-Haythami, al-Mu'jam al-Awsat of at-Tabarani, Musnad of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, al-Mustadrak of al-Hakim Nishapuri and others.

These are all famous Sunni compilers of hadith and they have quoted this hadith in slightly different wordings. In all, there are four versions:

The first version:

من مات و ليس في عنقه بيعة، مات ميته جاهلية

“Whoever dies and doesn’t have the bay’at on his neck, then dies the death of infidelity.”

The second version:

من مات و لم يعرف امام زمانه، مات ميته جاهلية

“Whoever dies and doesn’t know the Imam of his own time, then he dies the death of infidelity.”

This version of hadith has the same wordings as the second narration of the Shi‘as quoted earlier.

The third version:

من مات و ليس عليه إمام، مات ميته جاهلية

“Whoever dies and there is no Imam on him (he doesn’t believe in an Imam), then he dies the death of infidelity.”

And the fourth version:

من مات و ليس له إمام، مات ميته جاهلية

“Whoever dies and doesn’t have an Imam, then he dies the death of infidelity.”

So, when you look at this, you will realize that, at least, when it comes to this concept of Bay’ah (the pledge of allegiance and knowing the Imam of the time) there is no dispute between Shia and Sunni.

4. Objections Against The Hadith “Man Mata...”

There has been an attempt in the last few months to “reform” our ‘Aqida and weaken the fundamentals of our Shi‘a faith. One of the attacks was on this belief in the Bay’ah of the Imam. Whenever you present a hadith, they brush it aside by using the labels as “weak” or “fabrications of the Ghulat (extremists)”. Let me respond to this.

(A) The Authenticity Of The Hadith In The Shi‘a Sources

We presented one hadith from Shaykh Kulayni with two Asnads/chains of narrators. And one narration from Ar-Razi. If you look at those Asnads of narrators, according to the experts of the science of hadith

and ‘Ilm al-Rijal, these three chains are absolutely authentic and Sahih.

What About Shaykh Muhsini's Methodology?

Examining The Ahadith of Bayah – Fatimahs Bayah To Abu Bakr?

Then we will be told we have a scholar in our time called Shaykh Asif Muhsini who has critically reviewed the narrations in Bihar Al-Anwar and he has said that a very small percentage of the narrations in Bihar Al-Anwar are authentic and the majority are to be discarded; therefore, if you bring any hadith that goes against their belief, they will say it is fabrication. Unfortunately, the name of the late Shaykh Muhsini is being thrown into these discussions without much thought regarding the methodology he has adopted. He was a Shi'a Ithna 'Ashari and did not intend his methodology to be used this way. I have doubt that the people who throw around Shaykh Muhsini's name have even read his book.

Shaykh Muhsini looked at Bihar Al-Anwar and then came up with the index in three volumes of the Ahadith that he considers to be authentic from Bihar and named the index as Mashra'atu Bihar Al-Anwar. Three remarks in his own words, from the preface of his own book, are very important.

- The first point: In the preface of his work, Shaykh Muhsini writes: "Sometimes I have considered a narration to be unreliable not because I have been able to ascertain the unreliability of some of the narrators or their ignorance. Rather because of my ignorance of their situation since they have not been mentioned in the books of Rijal." In other words, I don't know much about them so I discarded them.

Let me elaborate on this: If you are able to ascertain that the narrator is a liar, a fabricator, or an enemy of the Ahl Al-Bayt, then you easily say that this hadith is Dhaif/weak because this person comes from a dubious background, that is one thing. But if there is someone you don't know anything about him because they have not been mentioned in the books of Rijal, that's a completely different thing. This is a very important disclaimer from Shaykh Muhsini. He is basically saying, you cannot take my judgments in a blanket form.

- The second point Shaykh Muhsini makes is also important: "Some narrations mentioned in Bihar Al-Anwar have the Asnad (the chains of narrators) which are unreliable and so we classified them as unreliable; but those same Ahadith might have reliable Asnad in the earlier four books [of hadith] which the writer, 'Allamah al-Majlisi, doesn't mention them because of their fame [among the scholars]...and they may also have a reliable Asnad in other sources...So our judgements about those narrations being unreliable is a relative judgement regarding only the Ahadith in Bihar Al-Anwar in that particular chapter, and that we don't think of them as being unreliable in general."

[Meaning, there might be a hadith in Bihar Al-Anwar that Shaykh Muhsini looked at and found the narrators to be unreliable – that doesn't mean if you see that same or similar hadith with another chain of narrators in another book of hadith (like al-Kafi for example), that also is unreliable.]

He then concludes that his remarks with a caution: “so don’t forget this point.” This statement of caution is for my young brothers and sisters who are getting caught up with this wrong understanding of hadith scrutiny and give hasty judgements about them.

- The third point from Shaykh Muhsini: “If a single hadith has three chains of narrators (Asnad)...then [that itself is sufficient and] it is not difficult to rely on that since it is far-fetched to think that all these three sets of narrators got together and conspired to fabricate this same hadith.”

This also has also been confirmed by one of the scholars of Qum, Shaykh Hubbullah, who promotes the methodology of Shaykh Muhsini, and has popularized his work in *Al-Mu’tabar min Bihar Al-Anwar*. In the preface to that work, Shaykh Hubbullah writes: “[That according to the methodology of Shaykh Muhsini,] if the Asnad [of a hadith] reach to three or more, then it is possible to consider it to be authentic even if each chain by itself is Dhaif/weak.”

What do these two individuals mean? Example: If I have never been to Mecca and that we lived in a time when there was no photography, and five individuals come from hajj and they describe the Ka’aba to me. One says the height of the Kaaba is a three-storey building. One fellow is a good person but he is not good in measurement, so I doubt what he says, perhaps he is exaggerating. The second fellow says the same thing about the height but I know he is a liar. The third fellow says the same thing about the height of the Ka’aba. He is a righteous person but simple minded and his judgement does not carry that much weight. Then two righteous, smart people also come and say the same thing. In this case, I wouldn’t say: I accept the last two reports and reject the first three. Because the last two were reliable and smart people, then I will collectively accept all five reports. Individually, I have a problem with the report because of the first three, but because of the last two reports, I accept all five reports including the one of the known liar.

So, we have two groups narrating from the 6th Imam and then there is another group, narrating from the 11th Imam. And all three chains are authentic. However, if you have problem with their Asnad, then, even on criterion of Shaykh Muhsini, you would still accept them as there are three different chains for it.

Finally, and interestingly, even Shaykh Muhsini has included the narration of *al-Kafi* on “man mata...” in his selection of the authentic Ahadith from *Bihar Al-Anwar*!

So, there is no basis to brush away these authentic Ahadith aside by using the broad brush of “fabrications by the Ghulat.”

(B) The Authenticity Of Hadith In The Sunni Sources

We are also told that the Sunni Ahadith of “man mata...” are weak, especially that of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal’s chain. This, however, is a hasty judgement without proper study of the Sunni hadith literature since Ahmad Ibn Hanbal is not the only source for this hadith. There are the other sources which are accepted by the Sunni standards of hadith.

From the four versions of the hadith from the Sunni sources that I quoted earlier, the first version has been verified by the topmost Sunni scholar of hadith criticism of this century, namely Shaykh Muhammad Nasir Ad-Din Al-Albani (d. 1991). He was a Salafi and one of the Salafi Muftis used to call him “Bukhariyu ’l-‘asr – i.e., the Bukhari of our time.” Shaykh Al-Albani has many books in which he classifies Ahadith of the earlier scholars. He has compiled books of Sahih Ahadith. One of them is *Silsilatu ’l-Ahadith as-Sahihah*, i.e. “The Series of the Authentic Ahadith”. In Volume 2, he quotes the first of the four versions of the Sunni hadith of “Man mata ...” hadith and includes it in his series of authentic Ahadith.

The third version, which is “Man mata wa laysa ‘aliyihi Imam, mata mitatan Jahiliyyah,” has been narrated even before Imam Bukhari (and before Shaykh Kulayni). It has been narrated by Shaykh Ibn Abi ‘Asim (d. 287 AH) in his *Kitabu ’s-Sunnah*. A new version of his book has been printed with annotations of Shaykh Albani. Under the hadith under discussion, Shaykh Albani writes that the Sanad of this hadith is good/Hasan and the narrators are reliable/Thiqat.

So, two of these four versions of this hadith from Sunni sources are considered Sahih, authentic according to Albani. And so, the statement of the “reformers” that the Sunni versions of this hadith are not authentic is an arbitrary statement, not based on facts.

(C) Who Is The “Imam” Referred To In This “Man Mata” Hadith?

A final point: The “reformers” also say that even if the Sunnis accept this hadith, they say that it refers to the Bay’ah of the Prophet (S) only.

Interestingly, even the Sunnis would not accept this explanation. Shaykh Albani says it refers to “khalifatu ’l-Muslimin – the Khalifa of the Muslims.” Moreover, Sa’du ’d-Din at-Taftazani (d. 692), a Mu’tazili Sunni theologian, relates this hadith to “Ul al-’Amr” (in verse 4:59) who are different from the Prophet (S).

On a practical level, this hadith was used for the Bay’ah of the khulafa and not of Rasulullah. Yes, the sahabah did Bay’ah in Hudaybiya and Fath-e Mecca, in different situations, for Rasulullah; but this hadith of “man mata...” is referring to the leader of the time. Sunnis say it refers to the khalifa, we say it refers to the Imam appointed by Allah through the Prophet.

This is where we have to realize that amongst the narrators of this hadith from the Sunni books, we have Abu Hurayrah, Mu’awiyah and ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar and many others. ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar is interesting, the son of second khalifah who is known as a reliable source of knowledge among the Sunnis. See how he has implemented this hadith in his life.

After the events of Kerbala, there was a change in the Umayyad dynasty. Al-e Abu Sufyan came to an end due to Karbala. After Yazid, his son didn’t even survive for six months and then he abdicated, and thereafter Marwan Ibn Hakam became the khalifa. When Marwan died, his son, ‘Abdul Malik Ibn Marwan

became the khalifa.

The news of ‘Abdul Malik’s khilafat reached Madina at night time. When ‘Abdullah Ibn Umar heard this, he goes at night time to the house of Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf, the brutal governor who was known for his high level of hatred for Imam ‘Ali (‘a) and his Shi‘as. ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar tells him:

هات يدك أبايعك لأمير المؤمنين عبد الملك، فإني سمعت رسول الله ص يقول: من مات و ليس عليه بيعة إمام فموته جاهلية ..

“Give me your hand so I may pledge allegiance on your hand for ‘Abdul Malik.”

He is asked what is the urgency that you couldn’t wait till morning. ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar says that he was worried what if he died by morning and had not pledged allegiance; and so, he says: “I heard from the Messenger of Allah that ‘whoever dies without pledge of allegiance of the Imam, then his death is of infidelity.’” So, ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar applies this hadith on Marwan not on Rasulullah (S). This hadith is authentic and has power in it and people were worried about its application. So, don’t tell me that it is a fabrication by the Ghulat.

What does Hajjaj do? He says, I am busy; both my hands are occupied. And so, I will not extend my hand for Bay’ah. He then extended his feet and ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar did Bay’ah on Hajjaj’s feet for ‘Abdul Malik Ibn Marwan!

(The irony is that this same ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar was one of the few who refused to do Bay’ah on Imam ‘Ali (‘a) when the people appointed him. In Jamal and Siffin, he remained his neutrality and didn’t take part, until the day ‘Ammar Ibn Yasir was killed and people remembered the hadith of Prophet (S) about ‘Ammar Ibn Yasir being killed by a rebellious group while he will be calling people to Jannah and they will be calling him to Jahannam. That’s when ‘Abdullah decided to do Bay’ah of Imam Ali, a few months after he was appointed. What if he had died before then?!)

5. Why Is This Hadith Crucial? How Would You Classify The Death Of Sayyida Fatimah (‘A)?

This hadith is also very crucial for us in the Shi‘a–Sunni dispute. When Shi‘a argue from Qur’an, Sunnis may say this verse doesn’t mean this; about Ghadir, they say the word mawla has a different meaning. But what would they say about this hadith in which both Shi‘a and Sunni believe?

Look at a narration in Ḥahih al-Bukhari from ‘A’isha in which it clearly states:

فغضبت فاطمة بنت رسول الله (ص) فهجرت أبا بكر فلم تزل مهاجرته حتى توفيت. وعاشت بعد رسول الله (ص) ستة أشهر

“Fatimah, the daughter of Allah’s Apostle got angry and stopped speaking to Abu Bakr, and continued assuming that attitude till she died. Fatimah remained alive for six months after the death of Allah’s Apostle.”

It says that after the death of the Prophet, Sayyida Fatimah (‘a) goes to Abu Bakr to ask for her right. He doesn’t agree based on a concocted hadith. ‘A’isha says that Fatimah (‘a) got angry with Abu Bakr and stopped talking to him till her death. And that her death was 6 months after the death of Fatimah according the Sunnis.

My question to the Muslims is: If a person dies without knowing the Imam of their time, then he/she dies the death of infidelity; then please tell me that when Sayyida Fatimah (‘a) died, how do you classify her death? Because according to [Sahih Bukhari](#), Sayyida Fatimah (‘a) refused to do Bay’ah to Abu Bakr. Not just Sayyida Fatimah (‘a), but Sunni historians say even Imam Ali (‘a) did not do Bay’ah while Sayyida Fatimah (‘a) remained alive.

So, did she die a death of kufr? If you say this, even your status as a Muslim would be a problem as Fatimah (‘a) is in ayah Mubahila, Ayat At-Tathir and Surah Al- Kawthar. Fatimah (‘a) is the one about whom Prophet says who hurts her, hurts me. So, if that is your answer, then you are in trouble.

So, you are left with the only other answer: her death was based on Iman and not kufr. And the logical conclusion of that is that Abu Bakr’s khilafat is invalid. This hadith of “man mata,” thus, has far-reaching conclusions.

Sources

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