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The Hadith of Jibril ﷺ

Shaykh Mohammed Amin Kholwadia

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The Hadith of Jibril

Shaykh Mohammed Amin Kholwadia

The word *tabi'i* literally means someone who follows. Muslims reserve the use of this word for those who met and followed the Companions رضي الله عنهم of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The word *sahabi* literally means someone who is a companion. Muslims reserve the use of this word for someone who met and followed the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم.

Alqamah was a great scholar from amongst the *Tabi'i* group of Muslims. Abdullah ibn Umar رضي الله عنهما was a great scholar from amongst the *Sahabi* group of Muslims. 'Alqamah appears frequently as a narrator in the hadith chain of Abu Hanifa. While comparing the juristic acumen (*fiqh*) of Alqamah and Ibn Umar رضي الله عنهما, Abu Hanifa – who was a *Tabi'i* jurist himself – made the following remark:

“If it had not been for the merit of companionship (with the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم), I would have said that 'Alqamah is more juristically perceptive (*afqah*) than Ibn Umar.”

For Abu Hanifa – and other Sunni scholars – companionship (*suhba*) has a ranking that is above that of any acquired academic merit. This merit of companionship which Abu Hanifa spoke of was not merely based on a simple romantic allegiance to the Companions رضي الله عنهم. Nor was it a reaction to the socio-political factors of early Muslim history. It was based on a pristine understanding of popular Islamic facts. The parameters of Muslim theology were well-known by the time Abu Hanifa came into learning Islam formally. Sunni principles were rooted in popular Islam. The principles of *wahi* (revelation) were amongst those that were commonly accepted in the Muslim mind. What follows is a discussion about a Sunni principle in popular Islam.

A *hadith* is a narration – of any sort - from the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. One of the most popular and prized *hadith* amongst all Muslims is known as the “Hadith of Jibril”¹. Muslims who adhere to the rules of *taqlid* – following a particular school of legal thought – and those who do not; and those Muslims who wish to be known as progressive minded in the war-plagued modern world, they all love this hadith very dearly. Some quote the hadith because it calls Muslims to adopt a sense of *ihsan* (excellence in worship); others quote the hadith on the pulpit during their Friday sermons. There are even those who use the hadith as a summary of Islam itself. Scholars of hadith have written volumes on the commentary of this beautiful hadith. No Muslim dare doubt the veracity of this hadith as it speaks to the mind and soul of his religious intelligence. Even non-Muslim admirers of Islam hold this hadith in high esteem. Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه, a companion of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, had accepted Islam only three years prior to the Prophet's leaving this world. Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه is one of several companions who have reported this hadith. It follows that many of the earlier Companions must have witnessed the event of this hadith. Hence, this hadith is part of popular Islam.

Sunni Muslims believe that only a *nabi* (a prophet) can be a recipient of communicable *wahi* (revelation)². Sunni Muslims also believe that Allah سبحانه وتعالى uses angels as agents who communicate the Divine Word and message. A non-*nabi* is not at all privy to communicable *wahi* since he does not have the faculty to actually receive that level of rational communication. A non-*nabi* does not have the tools to receive *wahi* that has to be communicated to other human beings for the sake of procuring their salvation. Hence, *tabligh* (conveying *wahi*) is primarily a function of prophets and not of non-prophets. In order for a non-prophet to qualify for the function of *tabligh*, he/she would have to be prepped to at least potentially receive communicable *wahi*.

¹ A translation of the text of this *hadith* is cited at the end of this article

² In the case of the Mother of Musa عليه السلام and Maryam عليها السلام, their *wahi* was not at all communicated to others. In fact, their *wahi* was meant to be kept hidden from people.

Hadith of Jibril (Continued)

Wahi comes from the Almighty Allah ﷻ Who sends it down to the world of angels who then act as agents or transmitters of *wahi*. These angels are not visible to any human being – that is other than prophets. Jibril ﷺ is the angel who is designated to bring *wahi* to all prophets. The un-lettered Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had coached the spiritual psyche of his companions with such great dexterity that they became equipped to carry the burden of *tabligh* (conveying the message to others). As a favor to the Companions, Allah sent Jibril ﷺ to visit them while the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was still amongst them. The Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ saw Jibril with their own eyes and heard him with their own ears. The Prophet ﷺ asked Umar, who went out looking for this person when he left the gathering, “Do you know who that was Umar?” When Umar responded in the negative, the Prophet stated, “This was Jibril ﷺ. He came to teach you your *Din* (religion).”

The *suhba* of the Prophet ﷺ was so intense that it brought down Allah’s providence which came in the form of Jibril ﷺ coming to teach them what he taught the Prophet ﷺ. The companionship with the Prophet ﷺ had now converted ordinary human beings into special human beings who were blessed with the witnessing of the arch angel Jibril ﷺ. A couple of years later, in his address at the Farewell Hajj, the Prophet ﷺ ordained every companion to carry the burden of *tabligh* when he said, “Convey from me – even though it might even be one ayah³ (that you convey).” Through *suhba*, the *Sahaba* were now equipped – actually – to carry the burden of *tabligh* to other human beings.

Even though a *hadith* is a narration from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Muslim scholars showed their unique juristic (*fiqhi*) acumen by naming this *hadith* the Hadith of Jibril. This is because this *hadith* is not about what the *Sahaba* narrated from the Prophet ﷺ. It is about what the *Sahaba* narrated from Jibril ﷺ. The miracle of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was that he stamped his spiritual legacy on the hearts of his companions so that they inherited some of his prophetic abilities also. So it is no wonder that Abu Hanifa -- and other heirs of the Companions – gave the Companions ﷺ an academic ranking above the degree of juristic acumen (*fiqh*). We should follow suit if we love the Hadith of Jibril ﷺ.

The Hadith of Jibril

One day when we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, there came to us a man whose clothes were of exceeding whiteness and whose hair was of exceeding blackness. There were no signs of travel upon him although none of us knew him. He sat down knee to knee opposite the Prophet ﷺ, upon whose thighs he placed the palms of his hands saying, “O Muhammad, tell me what is Islam (Submission)?” The Messenger ﷺ answered him saying, “Islam is to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah’s Messenger, to perform the prayer, pay (the charity of) Zakat, fast (the month of) Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the Holy House (Ka’ba) - if you can.” He said, “You have spoken truthfully.”

We were amazed that, having questioned him ﷺ, he should corroborate him. Then he said, “Tell me what is Faith (Iman)?” He ﷺ answered, “To believe in Allah, His Angels, His books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and to believe that no good or evil comes but by His Providence.” “You have spoken truthfully,” he said, and then, “Tell me what is Excellence (Ihsan)?” He ﷺ answered, “To worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, yet He sees you.” “You have spoken truthfully,” he said, and then, “Tell me of the Hour.” He ﷺ answered, “The one questioned about it knows no better than the questioner.” He said, “Then tell me of its signs.” He ﷺ answered, “That the slave-girl shall give birth to her mistress, and

those who were but barefoot, naked, needy herdsmen shall build buildings ever higher and higher.”

Then the stranger went away, and I stayed a while after he had gone, and the Prophet ﷺ said to me, “O Umar, do you know the questioner, who he was?” I said, “God and His Messenger ﷺ know best.” He ﷺ said, “It was Jibril ﷺ (Gabriel). He came to teach you your religion.”

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“The companionship with the Prophet ﷺ had now converted ordinary human beings into special human beings who were blessed with the witnessing of the arch angel Jibril ﷺ.”

³ The word *ayah* in this *hadith* refers not only to any of the Quran, but also a *hadith*.

Bioethics Seminar

On January 30 and January 31, 2010, Darul Qasim hosted a meeting to discuss the issue of brain death in the context of Islamic medical bioethics. The meeting was attended by Dr. Ahsan Arozullah (Darul Qasim student and Internist), Dr. Tanvir Syed (Darul Qasim student and Neurologist), Dr. Omar Hussain (Darul Qasim student and Pulmonologist/Critical Care specialist), Mohammed Tayash (Darul Qasim student and Islamic Studies teacher), Dr. Aasim Padela (Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar at the University of Michigan), and Dr. Hasan Shanawani (Pulmonologist/Critical Care specialist). The meeting was led by Shaykh Amin Kholwadia who outlined an Islamic understanding of the beginning and end of life. The discussion focused on issues related to defining the moment of death as separation of the soul from the body. The discussion will serve as a foundation for a paper to be presented at an International Islamic Bioethics Conference in Turkey later this year, inshaAllah.

Arabic 101

Starting in March 2010

Darul-Qasim is considering offering an Arabic 101 course in March 2010 depending on open interest. If you are interested please send a note to courses@darulqasim.org indicating so.

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To read more on course prerequisites, visit www.darulqasim.org and choose Courses / Curriculum.

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:: Friday Hadith Sessions – Yawm al-Hashr (Audio available online)

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