

بررسی فقه الحدیثی و سندی حدیث «اختلاف اُمّتی رحمة» از دیدگاه فریقین و نقد آن

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چکیده

اطلاعات مقاله

حدیث معتبر قول محکی از سنت قطعی پیامبر (ص) و رکن اساسی در بیان مخصص و مقید، اجمال و اطلاق‌های قرآن و دومین منبع تشریح احکام در اسلام است. به دلالت ثبت و ضبط دیر هنگام سنت، نقل به معنا، وضع و منفعت طلبی صاحبان سلطه، بعضاً احادیثی در کتب حدیث آمد که از انطباق با قرآن و سنت و انتساب به معصوم (ع) و اساس عقل برخوردار نیستند. اما مسلمانان به جهت صدق گفتار و ایمان و کسب ثواب به مصداق آیه (حشر/۷) در مقام عمل و اعتبار مطلق بخشی به چنین احادیثی برآمده‌اند.

روایت «اختلاف اُمّتی رحمة» یا «اختلاف علماء اُمّتی رحمة» و یا «اختلاف اصحابی لکم رحمة» از آن دست احادیثی است که در کتب حدیثی اقدمین و صحاح سته و کتب معتبر حدیثی اهل سنت و کتب اربعه امامیه از اصالت سند برخوردار نیست و بررسی فقه الحدیثی آن با آیات و احادیث در تناقض است. اینکه منظور از اختلاف معنای آمد و شد امت اسلامی باشد که کارکرد اجتماعی، همگرایی و تقریب مذاهب اسلامی دارد یا اختلاف به معنای واقعی آن در فروع دین و فتوهای مجتهدان و عالمان مذاهب است که موجب پویایی و نشاط امت اسلامی است، رویکردی از حدیث اختلاف است که در این پژوهش با روش تحلیلی-توصیفی و مطالعه اسنادکتابخانه‌ای به بررسی آن پرداخته می‌شود.

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۱. مقدمه

معارف اسلامی، اعم از عقاید، احکام و اخلاق، از طریق دو منبع کتاب و سنت دریافت می‌شود. در حالی که قرآن کریم به دلیل پشتوانه الهی و اهتمام پیامبر (ص) و اصحاب، از تحریف و جعل مصون مانده، حدیث به عنوان قول محکی از سنت و دومین منبع تشریح، به دلیل نقل با واسطه، وجود انگیزه‌های مختلف و تدوین دیر هنگام، در معرض آفاتی چون وضع و جعل قرار گرفته است. از این رو، نقد حدیث اعم از سندی (بیرونی) و متنی (درونی) برای تشخیص احادیث معتبر امری ضروری است. حدیث «اِخْتِلَافُ أُمَّتِي رَحْمَةٌ» (یا «اِخْتِلَافُ أَصْحَابِي» و «اِخْتِلَافُ عُلَمَاءِ أُمَّتِي») از جمله احادیث مشهوری است که در باور عمومی به پیامبر (ص) نسبت داده می‌شود و اختلاف نظر فقها و مذاهب اسلامی را نشانه رحمت الهی می‌داند. اما این شهرت، جایگاه سندی و محتوایی آن را در حاله‌ای از ابهام قرار داده است. این پژوهش با هدف بررسی اصالت سندی و تحلیل محتوایی (فقه الحدیثی) این روایت از دیدگاه فریقین (شیعه و اهل سنت) و نقد آن، و همچنین واکاوی معنای قابل قبول «اختلاف» در صورت پذیرش حدیث، انجام شده است.

۲. روش تحقیق

این پژوهش با روش تحلیلی-توصیفی و با مطالعه کتابخانه‌ای منابع معتبر حدیثی، رجالی و تفسیری فریقین انجام شده است. در بخش سندی، اسناد روایت در منابع اصلی اهل سنت (مانند صحاح سته) و شیعه (مانند کتب اربعه و دیگر منابع متقدم و متأخر) به دقت مورد باز examination- قرار گرفته و روابیان آن از نظر وثاقت و اعتبار بررسی شده‌اند. در بخش محتوایی (فقه الحدیثی)، با استناد به آیات قرآن کریم و احادیث متعارض هم‌عرض، سازگاری یا عدم سازگاری محتوای حدیث با آموزه‌های قطعی دینی تحلیل شده است. همچنین، با رجوع به کتب لغت و تفاسیر، معانی مختلف واژه «اختلاف» استخراج و فرضیه‌های معنایی مختلف برای توجیه حدیث مورد نقد و ارزیابی قرار گرفته است.

۳. یافته‌های تحقیق

الف) یافته‌های سندی

در منابع اهل سنت: بررسی گسترده در منابع معتبر و متقدم اهل سنت به ویژه صحاح سته (بخاری، مسلم و دیگران) نشان می‌دهد که این حدیث فاقد سند معتبر و صحیح است. این روایت در این کتب نیامده و تنها در منابع متأخرتر (مانند آثار بیهقی در «المدخل» و «الرسالة الأشعرية»، حلیمی، امام الحرمین و سیوطی در «الجامع الصغیر») با اسنادی ضعیف، منقطع، مرسل و یا حتی بدون سند نقل شده است. محققان بزرگی مانند شیخ البانی (در «سلسلة الأحادیث الضعيفة

والموضوعة»)، تقی الدین سبکی (در «المقاصد السنیه»)، حافظ عراقی، ابن تیمیه و ابن حزم به صراحت بر ضعیف، باطل و یا حتی موضوع بودن این حدیث حکم کرده‌اند. مهم‌ترین راویان مجروح در سند این حدیث نزد اهل سنت، عمرو بن بحر جاحظ (متهم به دروغ‌پردازی و سهل‌انگاری) و اسحاق بن ابراهیم موصلی (موسیقیدان و خواننده، متهم به وضع حدیث) هستند. حتی در سندی که به ابن عباس منتهی می‌شود، اشکالات جدی از جمله انقطاع وجود دارد.

در منابع شیعه: این حدیث در کتب اربعه حدیثی شیعه (کافی، من لا یحضره الفقیه، تهذیب و استبصار) نقل نشده است. با این حال، در منابع دیگر مانند «علل الشرائع» و «معانی الأخبار» شیخ صدوق، با سندی خاص روایت شده است. در این نقل، عبدالمؤمن بن قاسم انصاری از امام صادق (ع) در مورد صحت حدیث سؤال می‌کند و حضرت در پاسخ، معنای «اختلاف» را نه به معنای تفرقه در دین، بلکه به معنای «آمد و شد» امت برای یادگیری علوم دینی از پیامبر (ص) و سپس بازگشت به سوی قوم خود برای آموزش آنها، مطابق آیه ۱۲۲ سوره توبه تفسیر می‌کنند. با این حال، خود سند این روایت در منابع شیعه نیز از نظر برخی رجالیون، به دلیل وجود راویان توثیق‌نشده یا ضعیف (مانند احمد بن هلال)، ضعیف ارزیابی شده است.

(ب) یافته‌های محتوایی (فقه الحدیثی)

تعارض با قرآن: محتوای ظاهری حدیث که اختلاف را رحمت می‌خواند، با آیات متعددی از قرآن کریم که بر وجوب وحدت، پرهیز از تفرقه و نکوهش اختلاف تأکید دارند، در تعارض آشکار است. آیاتی مانند ﴿وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾ (آل عمران/۱۰۳)، ﴿وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا﴾ (انفال/۴۶) و ﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيعًا لَسْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ﴾ (انعام/۱۵۹) به وضوح نشان می‌دهند که نفس اختلاف و تفرقه، مذموم و موجب هلاکت است.

تعارض با احادیث نبوی: روایات فراوانی از پیامبر (ص) در منابع فریقین وجود دارد که بر مذمت اختلاف و ترغیب به جماعت و وحدت تأکید می‌کنند. احادیثی مانند «إِنَّمَا هَلَكَ مَنْ قَبْلَكُمْ بِالِاخْتِلَافِ» (اختلاف، باعث هلاکت امت‌های پیشین شد)، «عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْجَمَاعَةِ وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَالْفُرْقَةَ» (بر شما باد به جماعت و بپرهیزید از تفرقه) و «لَا تَحْتَلِفُوا فَتَحْتَلِفَ قُلُوبُكُمْ» (اختلاف نکنید که دل‌های شما پراکنده می‌شود) همگی در تضاد جدی با مفهوم ظاهری حدیث «اختلاف اُمتی رحمة» قرار دارند.

فرضیه‌های معنایی و توجیهات: برای حل این تعارض، برخی از عالمان سعی کرده‌اند با تأویل معنای «اختلاف» در این حدیث، آن را با شرع سازگار کنند. مهم‌ترین این تأویلات عبارتند از:

اختلاف به معنای «آمد و شد» و رفت‌وآمد: منظور، رفت‌وآمد امت برای کسب علم و معارف دینی نزد پیامبر(ص) و عالمان است که خود مایه رحمت و برکت است. این معنا مستند به روایت امام صادق(ع) و آیه ﴿فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ﴾ (توبه/۱۲۲) می‌باشد. اختلاف به معنای «تنوع و تکثر»: منظور، تنوع طبیعی در استعدادها، مشاغل و مناصب اجتماعی (مانند عالم، جاهل، حاکم، محکوم) است که برای اداره جامعه ضروری و مایه رحمت است.

اختلاف مجتهدان در فروع غیرمنصوص: منظور، اختلاف نظر فقها و مجتهدان در مسائل فرعی و اجتهادی است که نص قطعی از کتاب و سنت در آن وجود ندارد. این اختلاف، باعث پویایی، توسعه و غنای فقه اسلامی می‌شود و برای امت رحمت و گشایش است. این دیدگاه مورد تأکید عالمانی مانند قرضوی قرار گرفته است.

نقد فرضیه‌ها: اگرچه این تأویلات از نظر علمی قابل طرح هستند، اما منتقدان استدلال می‌کنند که اولاً، این معانی با ظاهر روایت که بر «اختلاف» تأکید دارد، فاصله دارد. ثانیاً، با توجه به ضعف سندی شدید حدیث، اساساً نیازی به این حجم از تأویل و توجیه نیست و حکم به ضعف یا جعل آن راه حل منطقی‌تری به نظر می‌رسد. به عبارت دیگر، حدیثی که سند معتبری ندارد و محتوای آن نیز با نصوص قطعی در تعارض است، قابل استناد نیست.

۴. نتیجه‌گیری

بر پایه بررسی‌های سندی و محتوایی انجام شده در این پژوهش، می‌توان نتیجه گرفت که حدیث «اختلاف اُمّتی رحمة» از جهت سندی، فاقد اعتبار لازم است. در منابع اهل سنت، این حدیث در کتب معتبر و متقدم نیامده و سند آن در منابع متأخر، نزد محدثان بزرگ، ضعیف، مرسل یا موضوع دانسته شده است. در منابع شیعه نیز اگرچه با تأویل خاصی از امام صادق(ع) نقل شده، اما سند آن از نظر رجالی، قوی ارزیابی نمی‌شود. از جهت محتوایی نیز مفهوم ظاهری آن (رحمت بودن نفس اختلاف و تفرقه) به وضوح با آیات متعدد قرآن و احادیث صحیح نبوی که بر حرمت اختلاف و وجوب وحدت تأکید دارند، در تعارض جدی قرار می‌گیرد. تلاش‌های صورت گرفته برای تأویل حدیث به معانی دیگری مانند «آمد و شد» یا «اختلاف در فروع غیرمنصوص»، اگرچه از نظر علمی قابل پیگیری است، اما نتوانسته بر مشکل اصلی یعنی ضعف سندی و تعارض محتوایی آن به طور کامل غلبه کند. بنابراین، این حدیث را نمی‌توان به عنوان یک حدیث معتبر و قابل استناد به پیامبر اکرم(ص) پذیرفت و استدلال به آن در توجیه هرگونه اختلاف و تفرقه‌ای در امت اسلامی، فاقد پشتوانه محکم روایی است. صحیح‌ترین دیدگاه این است که این حدیث، صحیح‌المعنی (از جهت برخی تأویلات) اما ضعیف‌السند و در نهایت فاقد شرایط لازم برای اثبات انتساب به معصوم(ع) می‌باشد.

A Jurisprudential and Isnādīc Analysis of the Ḥadīth “Ikhtilāf Ummatī Raḥma” from the Perspectives of Both Schools: A Critical Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

In Islamic scholarship, an authentic ḥadīth represents a transmitted statement of the definitive Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and serves as a foundational source for specifying or restricting, generalizing or clarifying Qur’ānic injunctions. As the second principal source of Islamic legislation, ḥadīth plays a pivotal role in the formulation of jurisprudence. Nevertheless, due to the delayed compilation of the Sunnah, the prevalence of meaning-based transmission, the phenomenon of fabrication, and the politicization of religious transmission by ruling authorities, a number of narrations have entered the canonical collections that neither conform to the Qur’an and Sunnah nor meet the rational or isnādīc criteria required for attribution to the infallible authorities (peace be upon him). Despite this, many Muslims, motivated by sincerity of faith, the pursuit of divine reward, and in compliance with the Qur’ānic directive (al-Ḥaṣhr 59:7), have historically accorded such reports uncritical acceptance in belief and practice.

Among these is the narration transmitted in various forms as “Ikhtilāf Ummatī Raḥma” (“The disagreement within my community is a mercy”), “Ikhtilāf ‘Ulamā’ Ummatī Raḥma” (“The disagreement of my scholars is a mercy”), or “Ikhtilāf Ashābī Lakum Raḥma” (“The disagreement of my Companions is a mercy for you”). This ḥadīth lacks authentic isnād in the earliest compilations, including the *Al-Sihāh al-Sittah*, other authoritative Sunni collections, and the *Shī’ī Kutub al-Arbā’*. Furthermore, a jurisprudential and textual analysis reveals significant contradictions between the implications of this report and both the Qur’an and other established Prophetic traditions.

The interpretive debate surrounding this narration largely centers on whether ikhtilāf should be understood as “interaction and exchange” among Muslims—emphasizing its social function in fostering cohesion and rapprochement among Islamic schools—or as actual disagreement in matters of jurisprudential reasoning and subsidiary rulings, viewed as a factor contributing to intellectual dynamism within the Muslim community. Adopting a descriptive-analytical methodology and relying on library-based sources, this study critically examines the isnād and maṭn of this ḥadīth in light of both Sunni and Shī’ī perspectives, offering an evaluative conclusion regarding its authenticity and interpretive implications.

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Problem Statement

A group of scholars has regarded the narration “*Ikhtilāf Ummatī Raḥma*” (“The disagreement within my community is a mercy”) as a prophetic ḥadīth, interpreting the **divergence among the imams of the Islamic schools** as a source of mercy for the Muslim community. Accordingly, they considered the differing juristic opinions on subsidiary rulings to be valid, granting the followers (*muqallidūn*) freedom of choice in practice. However, this narration is not authenticated in major Sunni sources, including the *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sittah*. From a jurisprudential-ḥadīth (*fiqh al-ḥadīth*) perspective, **it conflicts with the parallel Qur’ānic verses** and sound traditions, and thus cannot be taken to mean that juristic disagreements or communal divergences are inherently a form of divine mercy. Moreover, its transmitters are not deemed trustworthy. Although the report has attained widespread circulation and popularity, critical scholarship has generally concluded that it is weak, though some have argued that it may be accepted only through interpretive (*ta’wīlī*) readings.

Literature Review

A review of the existing scholarship on the ḥadīth of *ikhtilāf* shows that no comprehensive, analytical, and comparative study **has yet to be conducted** that systematically examines both *isnād* and *matn* across Sunni and Shī’ī sources. Previous treatments have been brief, scattered, and largely confined to Imāmī scholarship, **a fact that distinguishes the present study**, which adopts a cross-sectarian and more detailed analytical approach.

Introduction

Islamic knowledge-including doctrine, law, and ethics-is derived from two primary sources: the Qur’an and the Sunnah. The Qur’an, by divine guarantee and through the Prophet’s efforts in recitation and writing, has remained safeguarded against distortion, fabrication, or false attribution. The ḥadīth, however, being transmitted through intermediaries and not formally codified until after the Prophet’s passing, became subject to fabrication and falsification. **From the**

earliest stages of ḥadīth transmission, both isnād (chain of transmission) and matn (content) were recognized as indispensable criteria for establishing authenticity.

Contemporary ḥadīth scholarship employs both external (isnād-based) and internal (matn-based) criticism to evaluate reports. Some scholars, however, have privileged isnād over matn, assuming that the reliability of transmitters ensures the authenticity of the report, a stance which others critique as insufficient. Indeed, a ḥadīth without a sound chain, no matter how lofty its content, cannot be granted full authority. As a'bd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak observed: “*The isnād is part of the religion.*” Conversely, even the strongest chain cannot guarantee authenticity if the content conflicts with fundamental Qur'ānic principles or established Sunnah, since fabricators were known to forge both isnād and matn. Importantly, the declaration that a ḥadīth is fabricated must not be made hastily or based on partial evidence, but through rigorous, fair, and comprehensive examination of all relevant sources.

The Qur'an itself condemns discord, factionalism, and sectarianism. As stated: “We gave them clear proofs of the matter, but they did not differ until knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves. Indeed, your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they used to differ” (al-Jāthiyah 45:17). Thus, when differences emerge out of self-assertion, envy, or factionalism, they are censured as destructive to unity, brotherhood, and communal harmony.

The ḥadīth “*Ikhtilāf Ummatī Raḥma*” is not authenticated in the early canonical Sunni compilations, including the *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sittah*. Its widespread circulation appears to have overshadowed critical scrutiny of its isnād, as the idea that discord itself is a mercy contradicts Qur'ānic and prophetic teachings. Were disagreement truly a mercy, then consensus would paradoxically become a source of punishment, an outcome that is theologically incoherent.

Differences among jurists and imams can be considered a mercy only when based on explicit texts or clear principles, producing diverse legal derivations that enrich Islamic jurisprudence and stimulate

intellectual vitality. Such legitimate diversity strengthens unity rather than undermining it. However, disagreements arising in areas without textual basis, when driven by personal opinion, self-assertion, or factional rivalry, lead to discord condemned by both God and His Messenger (peace be upon him).

Thus, while condemnable division (*ikhtilāf madhmūm*) fragments the community, juristic diversity (*ikhtilāf fī al-furūʿ*) within the framework of clear textual foundations can be viewed as a source of vitality, mercy, and intellectual flourishing.

Interpretive Possibilities of the Ḥadīth of *ikhtilāf*

Scholars have suggested that the narration “*Ikhtilāf Ummatī Raḥma*” may be interpreted in one of four ways:

1. *Ikhtilāf* as interaction and social exchange among the general public and the learned: fostering bonds of affection and communal solidarity.
2. *Ikhtilāf* as scholarly engagement: the comings and goings of scholars for purposes of teaching and learning.
3. *Ikhtilāf* as natural diversity in human dispositions and temperaments: which yields variety of thought and enriches life through intellectual and cultural pluralism.
4. *Ikhtilāf* as juristic differences among imams and scholars in matters of subsidiary rulings grounded in authoritative texts: which stimulate the development of jurisprudence and promote intellectual dynamism within the Muslim community.

If accepted, these interpretive possibilities allow the narration to be read metaphorically-as affirming constructive diversity rather than destructive discord-thus reconciling it with the broader framework of Qurʾānic and Prophetic teachings.

1. Lexical and Conceptual Background of *Ikhtilāf*

The Qurʾān employs the word *ikhtilāf* and its derivatives in fifty-two verses, with meanings such as alternation and succession, contradiction, divergence, substitution, and disagreement. Among these usages, the most frequent denotes alternation or succession, i.e., ‘coming and going’ (aʿbd al-Bāqī, 1999: 247).

In classical lexicons, *ikhtilāf* is derived from *khalf*, meaning “lack of agreement.” Ibn Manẓūr defines it as corruption, citing *khalāfa fulān* (“so-and-so became corrupt”) (Ibn Manẓūr, 1411 AH, s.v. *khalf*). Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī explains: *al-ikhtilāf wa al-mukhālafah* occur when each party takes a path different from the other, whether in speech or action. He notes that *khilāf* is broader than *ḍidd*, since things that are opposites are necessarily different, but not all different things are opposites (al-Rāghib, 1412 AH, vol. 2, 294). Other definitions include: *ikhtilāf* as the opposite of agreement (al-Ṭurayḥī, vol. 5, 59), or as succession and variation, which inherently involve change (Muṣṭafawī, 1368 Sh, vol. 3, 112).

In scholarly terminology, a widely cited definition states: “*Ikhtilāf* is when one scholar adopts a view contrary to that of another in a given situation” (al-a’lwānī, 1408 AH, 21). This definition encompasses both blameworthy and praiseworthy forms, as well as disputes that escalate into polemics. The Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited contentious disputation, declaring: “*I guarantee a house in the outskirts of Paradise for the one who abandons argument, even when right*” (Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, ḥadīth no. 4800; al-Tirmidhī, Sunan, ḥadīth no. 1993).

Thus, *ikhtilāf* in matters of religion refers to divergence in belief or practice that may lead to enmity and discord. Yet when qualified with the pursuit of truth — “*an yadhhaba kull ‘ālim ilā khilāf mā dhahaba ilayhi al-ākhar baghyata al-wuṣūl ilā al-ḥaqq*”— the definition emphasizes scholarly disagreement rather than ignorance (al-a’lwānī, 23).

Scholars have also distinguished *ikhtilāf* from *khilāf*: the former denotes differing paths toward a shared goal, whereas the latter involves divergence in both path and goal. Hence, *ikhtilāf* is grounded in evidence and is regarded as a sign of mercy, while *khilāf* lacks evidential basis and is deemed an innovation (ibid., 55).

2. Lexical Background of *Ummah* and *Raḥma*

The Qur’an mentions the word *ummaḥ* more than sixty times independently, and about twenty times in construct forms, with diverse meanings depending on context (Anṣārī, 1365 Sh, vol. 10, entry 3931). Ibn Manẓūr defines *ummaḥ* as: a specified time, a community of people,

a religion or creed, a leader, a way of life, a blessing, a teacher, or a tradition. It also designates a people sharing common ethnicity, language, or religion (Ibn Manẓūr, vol. 1, 213–215). Beyond its religious dimension, *ummah* conveys social, linguistic, cultural, and natural solidarity. In Arabic usage, a learned man may even be called an *ummah* (Anṣārī, *ibid.*).

Exegetes interpret *ummah* as a community bound by a shared aim—whether of lineage, homeland, or faith—specified by its annex (e.g., *ummah aʿrabiyya*, *ummah naṣrāniyya*). For example: “Whenever a nation enters [Hell], it curses its sister” (al-Aʿrāf 7:38) (Ibn ʿĀshūr, n.d., vol. 3, 175). Thus, *ummah* signifies *ahl al-milla al-wāḥida*—the people of a single faith—such as the communities of Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad (peace be upon him) (al-Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 1, 477).

As for *raḥma*, in verses such as “Lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy” (al-Isrāʾ 17:24) and “He placed between you affection and mercy” (al-Rūm 30:21), it denotes compassion. Al-Rāghib defines it as kindness that entails benevolence toward the other, at times signifying compassion, and at times beneficence. When attributed to God, it denotes bestowal of grace, as in “*Raḥima Allāhu fulānan*” (“God bestowed His grace upon so-and-so”) (al-Rāghib, 347).

According to *Qāmūs al-Qurʾān*, when applied to God, *raḥma* means beneficence and generosity, not softness of heart. Thus, God’s *raḥma* is divine favor, whereas human *raḥma* denotes empathy and tenderness (Qurashī Banāʾī, 1386 Sh, vol. 3, 70). A *ḥadīth* reports that: “When God created the womb (*raḥim*), He said: I am al-Raḥmān and you are al-raḥim; I derived your name from Mine. Whoever maintains you, I will maintain him, and whoever severs you, I will cut him off” (Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, *ḥadīth* no. 1694). Thus, *raḥma* encompasses divine beneficence toward God’s servants, compassion for the weak, and exhortations to mutual mercy among humankind (Khalīl b. Aḥmad, 1409 AH, vol. 3, 224).

3. Conceptualization of the *Ḥadīth of ikhtilāf*

Al-Khaṭṭābī, in his commentary on the narration, distinguishes three categories of disagreement within the *ummah*:

1. Disagreement concerning the existence and oneness of God—denial of which constitutes unbelief.

2. Disagreement concerning God’s attributes—denial of which is innovation.

3. Disagreement concerning legal rulings and subsidiary matters—where multiple interpretations are possible—this, he argues, is a mercy and honor for the scholars of the ummah (al-Shuḥūd, 2010, vol. 1, 29).

Yet the question remains: does the ḥadīth “*Ikhtilāf Ummatī Rahma*” possess authentic textual authority within reliable Sunni ḥadīth sources, such that its meaning may legitimately be interpreted? Independent of debates over its isnād, the answer is negative. Even if granted hypothetical authenticity, its plain meaning cannot reasonably be construed as endorsing discord or division as inherently desirable. This interpretation conflicts with reason, as well as with numerous Qur’ānic verses and authentic traditions emphasizing the prohibition of disunity.

At best, and only through interpretive latitude, the narration may be classified as *sound in meaning though weak in isnād*. In this sense, while not establishing an independent legal proof, it can be reconciled with Qur’ānic and prophetic emphases on legitimate scholarly diversity, rather than sectarian strife, as a source of mercy for the Muslim community.

A Jurisprudential Examination of the Hadith of “Ikhtilāf” (Disagreement) from the Viewpoint of the Two Schools

The hadith of *ikhtilāf* (disagreement) exists in three different verbal transmissions and presents two conflicts in meaning. In jurisprudential and hadith-critical examinations of this report and of parallel reports found in both legal schools (al-firaqayn), scholars have treated the word “*ikhtilāf*”—as it occurs in the Prophet’s utterance—as meaning disagreement in subsidiary juristic matters (*furū‘ al-ijtihād*), i.e. disagreement between schools of jurisprudence in the contemporary technical sense; or, following the exegesis of Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) they have taken it to mean differences of movement and return (i.e., geographical or social dispersion). On either of these readings the apparent contradiction is resolved and an interpretation

appropriate for understanding the hadith is provided, thereby resolving the difficulty for both parties. The opposite reading—namely, that the hadith intends blameworthy disagreement—does not represent the intention of the hadith or of its transmitters, as will be shown below. Although the assessment of the transmitters (rijāl) of the hadith of disagreement within both schools faces matters of reliability and weakness, that difficulty is likewise resolved by the foregoing interpretation. In Shīʿī sources the hadith of disagreement is accepted with respect to the authenticity of its wording and sense, its definite attribution (qatʿī al-ṣudūr) to the Infallible (maʿṣūmaʿ), and its being recorded in certain sources other than the Four Books.

In the canonical Sunni collections — notably in the *Sihāh Sitta*, where the two Sahīhayn of Bukhārī and Muslim are regarded by Sunnis as the most authoritative sources after the Book of God (Qurʾān) (first tier), and where more than seventy other collections are treated as a second tier — mention of this hadith is scarce. In fact, in some of these works a fragmentary wording of the hadith (short, discontinuous segments) is transmitted and, when presented in raised (marfūʿ) form, it is cited in a way that made it widely known as the “hadith of disagreement.” The prevailing explanation given for its omission from many Sunni sources is either explicit opposition between the hadith’s apparent meaning (if read as endorsing blameworthy disagreement) and Qurʾān and Sunnah, or the weakness of its chain of transmitters (e.g., aʿmr ibn Baḥr, Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī). In one instance it is judged weak due to its being *mursal* or *munqaṭiʿ* (discontinuous), or because it is attributed as *marfūʿ* to Ibn aʿbbās — a distinguished Companion of the Prophet — and thus its chain has been critically doubted. (See: Aʿzamī, 1413 AH; Hāshim Maʿrūf Ḥusaynī, 2001, pp. 75.)

Shaykh Ṣaduq records in *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿiʿ* from Imam al-Ṣādiq ((peace be upon him)): On the authority of aʿbd al-Muʿmin al-Anṣārī, I said to Imam al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him): “Some people have narrated that the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said: ‘The disagreement of my community is a mercy.’” He replied: “They spoke the truth.” I asked: “If their disagreement is a mercy, is their agreement then a punishment?” He said: “Not in the way

you mean. What is intended is the meaning of God's utterance: 'And it is not for the believers to go forth all at once. Of every group among them, there should be a party remaining to obtain understanding in religion and to warn their people when they return to them' (Q. 9:122). He commanded them to send delegations to the Messenger of God so that they might learn, disagree [i.e., return separately to teach] to him, study, and then return to their people and teach them. What is meant is their dispersion among the lands, not disagreement in God's religion; the religion is one." (Ṣaduq, *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi* 185; *Maʿānī al-Akḥbār* 158; Ṭabarāsī, *Iḥtijāj*, 2:355; Ḥurr ʿĀmili, *Wasāʾil al-Shīa* 235; Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 1:227.)

Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī writes in *al-Maqāṣid*: al-Bayhaqī transmitted it in *al-Madkhal* with a discontinuous chain from Ibn (peace be upon him)abbās under the wording: The Messenger of God (peace and blessings) said, "Whatever you are given of the Book, you must act upon it; there is no excuse for anyone to leave it; if it is not in the Book of God then it is a sunnah of mine; if it is not a sunnah of mine then from what my Companions said — my Companions are like the stars in the sky; whichever of them you follow you will be guided, and the disagreement of my Companions is a mercy for you." Al-Bayhaqī recorded this in *al-Madkhal* to the *Sunan* and al-Daylamī also in *Musnad al-Firdaws* (al-Bayhaqī, *al-Madkhal* 162, no. 152). He added: its text is well known but its chains are weak — no sound isnād is established for it. Al-Irāqī in his tracing of the hadiths of *al-Iḥyāʾ* judged its isnād weak. Abū Zarʿah, a son of the hafiz al-Irāqī, said: it was narrated by Ādam ibn Ayyās in his *Kitāb al-ʿIlm wa-l-Ḥilm* in the wording "The disagreement of my Companions for my community is a mercy," likewise by al-Ṭabarānī, al-Daylamī, and al-Ḍaḥḥāk from Ibn ʿabbās as munqaṭiʿ. It is mursal and weak; both are without a continuous chain or reliable tracing. Al-Subkī concluded that it is not known among the hadith scholars; he did not find any sound or weak chain, and he regarded it as a fabricated hadith. (Subkī, *al-Maqāṣid al-Sunniyya*, 1:55.)

Naṣr al-Maqdisī in *al-Hujja* and al-Bayhaqī in *al-Rasāʾil al-Ashaʾriyya* transmitted it without chain in a formula "it was narrated" with the wording "the disagreement of my Ummah is a mercy." It was

also recorded by al-Ḥalīmī, al-Qāḍī Ḥusayn, Imam al-Ḥaramayn, al-Subkī, and his son al-Tāj; perhaps it appears in some now-lost preservations of the muhaddithūn. In *Sunan al-Daramī* (chapter 51 in the introduction) the phrase equivalent to “there is no harm in disagreement among jurists” appears. Ibn Sa‘d in *al-Ṭabaqāt*, citing al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, judged it weak. In *Musnad al-Firdaws* from Ibn a‘bbās in raised form: “The disagreement of my Companions was a mercy for you.” Ibn Sa‘d noted through al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad that “the disagreement of the Companions of Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was a mercy for the people,” and Abū Nua‘ym records it as “The disagreement of the Companions of the Messenger of God was a mercy for these people.” (Reported in *Jam‘ al-Jawāmi‘ / Al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr* by Suyūṭī, chap. hamzah, 1:1164, no. 822.)

Imam al-Ḥaramayn and al-Ḥalīmī argued that the report should be read as referring to diversity in offices, ranks, and positions within the community — that among the Ummah there are those who command and those commanded, scholars and learners, leaders and followers — each occupying a different office from others; by this difference mercy came to the Ummah. Were there no differentiation in ranks, mutual coexistence would be impossible. The majority of muhaddithīn stated that the hadith refers to differences among mujtahids in the rulings of subordinate matters where ijtihād is permissible. Al-Bayhaqī in *al-Madkhal* records that ‘Umar ibn ‘abd al-Azīz said: “I would not be pleased if the Companions of Muḥammad had not differed, for if they had not differed mercy would not have occurred.” Ibn Qudāmah al-Ḥanbalī also remarked: “The disagreement of the imams is a mercy and their consensus is a proof (ḥujjah).” This hadith is well known among the Sunnis and Ibn al-Ḥājjib cited it in his summary on analogical reasoning (qiyās), and it has been frequently requested. (Subkī, *al-Maqāṣid al-Sunniyya*, 1:57.).

Assessment of the Hadith of Disagreement from the Sunni Perspective (Isnād Criticism)

A survey of many Sunni hadith works — from the earliest to contemporary compilers, across musnads and muṣannafāt — shows that, except for a few instances where the report is transmitted without

isnād, the hadith of disagreement is not found in a continuous authentic chain. Because it lacks an established isnād, many Sunni scholars do not consider it admissible as evidence; they have judged it fabricated or inauthentic. They argue that it cannot be relied upon given that, read in the sense of praise for disagreement, it would directly contradict explicit Qur'ānic and Prophetic statements that warn against dispute and enjoin unity. Thus, they either dismiss it as weak (da'īf) on the basis of its transmitters (e.g., 'amr ibn Baḥr, Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī) or as mursal/munqaṭī' in other instances. (See Albānī's treatment in *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Da'īfa wa-l-Mawḍū'* (peace be upon him).)

Shaykh al-Albānī declared the hadith fabricated and wrote: "It has no origin" and noted that hadith scholars strove to find a chain and failed. He branded the hadith void: "Fabricated and yet widespread among the Sunnis; it was only narrated by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr* from Ibn 'Umar in marfū' form." He judged it false partly because, despite its weak chain, it conflicts with established saḥīḥ hadiths. (Al-Albānī, 2000, 1:142.) Accordingly, such reports require no exegetical reconciliation (ta'wīl); the hadith is devoid of authenticity and loses any justificatory force.

Al-Munāwī cites Imam Subkī: "Among the muḥaddithīn this report is not known; neither a sound nor a weak nor a fabricated chain has been found that would authenticate it." (Al-Munāwī, after Subkī.) Al-'ajlūnī, quoting *al-Mawḍū'āt* and al-Qārī from al-Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī, records that Naṣr al-Maqdisī and al-Bayhaqī transmitted it without chain. (Al-'ajlūnī, undated, 1:67.) Ibn al-Dabī' holds that the report lacks an isnād in primary Sunni sources. Ibn Taymiyya also judged it weak (Ibn Taymiyya, d. 728/1400 AH, 4:238). Ḥāfiẓ al-Irāqī judged it mursal and weak because its chain contains transmitters ('amr ibn Baḥr and Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī) who were criticized for unreliability. (Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, 5:550–563.) Al-Bayhaqī in *al-Rasā'il al-Ash'ariyya* treats the wording in *al-Madkhal* as munqaṭī' and weak. (Ibn Taymiyya, idem, pp. 55–60.)

Al-Subkī in *al-Maqāṣid* repeats the report from al-Bayhaqī and adduces its refutation by numerous Qur'ānic verses and saḥīḥ hadiths that indicate that mercy would not be grounded in disagreement; he

points to Prophetic statements such as “The Children of Israel were destroyed by their excessive questioning and by their disputes with their prophets” and “Do not disagree lest your hearts differ.” (Al-Alūsī, 1415 AH, 2:39; Jassās, 1994, 2:37.)

Suyūṭī in *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḡhīr* transmits the hadith without chain and notes that Naṣr al-Maqdisī and al-Bayhaqī have cited it without isnād, and that it is cited by al-Ḥalīmī, Qāḍī Ḥusayn, Imam al-Ḥaramayn, and others. An-Nawawī records that Imam al-Khaṭṭābī narrated it in the form of ta-mriyḍ (a softened form). (An-Nawawī, 1392 AH, 11:91.)

Al-Subkī summarizes: “The hadith ‘Ikhtilāf Ummatī raḥma’ is not known among the muhaddithīn; I found no authentic, weak, or fabricated chain; I do not suppose it has any origin except as a saying of people that some mistakenly took as prophetic speech.” He therefore maintains that it has no basis. He supports his rejection by appeal to Qur’ānic verses and sound hadiths to the effect that mercy requires lack of dispute - and there are many such authorities. (Al-Alūsī, *idem*.)

Ibn al-Mulqīn stated that he found no report that raised the hadith to the Prophet after searching thoroughly. Ibn Ḥazm observed that if disagreement were mercy, then agreement would be punishment and wrath - a meaning that seems absurd and which Muslim would not accept. (Ibn Ḥazm, 1405 AH, 5:64.) In later sources the report is not counted among authentic hadiths. (Sakhāwī, 1993; Zarqashī, 1985; al-Maqdisī, 1379 AH/90.)

Al-Shāṭibī remarks that whoever says “Their disagreement is a mercy” aligns with the earlier view that the reason is that the door of ijtihād was opened: the sharī’ah contains no contradiction and is decisive among disputants; the law condemns ungrounded differences. Thus, where ambiguous matters arise, disagreement occurred not because contradiction is willed by the Lawgiver, but because of the opening of space for juristic effort (ijtihād). If the Companions had not examined subsidiary doubts and applied effort for the objective purposes of the sharī’ah, then later generations would not have the breadth of resources to resolve such cases. By their ijtihād and the disagreements that followed, later generations were eased in finding the correct path. Hence, ‘Umar ibn ‘abd al-Azīz said: “I am not pleased that the Companions did not differ,” and “I would not wish that the Companions of the Messenger had not differed.” (Ibn Ḥazm, *ibid*.)

Isnād Examination of the Ḥadīth of ikhtilāf from the Viewpoint of the Two Parties

In the isnād assessment of the ḥadīth of ikhtilāf from the viewpoint of the two parties, it appears that the only rijāliyy (related to transmission and narrators) aspect that is acceptable is the marfū‘ ḥadīth attributed to Ibn ‘abbās in later Sunni sources, and in Imāmī Shi‘ī sources, the narration of ‘abd Allāh ‘abd al-Mu‘min al-Anṣārī who reports the ḥadīth from Imām al-Ṣādiq ((peace be upon him)). The two other narrators, namely ‘amr ibn Baḥr and Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, have been categorically subjected to jarḥ and ta‘n (critical disparagement) and are therefore discredited.

The narrators of the ḥadīth of ikhtilāf in Sunni sources

In later Sunni works the ḥadīth of ikhtilāf — although sometimes transmitted with the wording “*ikhtilāf ‘ulamā’ Ummatī raḥma*” — has its isnād-based standing dependent on the marfū‘ narration attributed to Ibn ‘abbās. Conversely, the presence of two discredited narrators renders such chains unacceptable.

1. Ibn ‘abbās (d. 68 AH)

The first transmitter, ‘abd Allāh ibn ‘abbās, a venerable Companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him), is treated in both Shi‘ī and Sunni rijāl works as beyond doubt in ‘adl and thiqa (justice and reliability). Among the Companions he **was** the first to possess a comprehensive body of knowledge (including the Prophetic sunna, philology, and fiqhi method). By combining linguistic analysis, transmitted reports, and legal reasoning, he laid the foundations of Qur’ānic exegesis that inspired later exegetes. The Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have given him the epithets *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān* and *Hibr al-Umma*. He excelled not only among his contemporaries but also was unmatched afterwards in these fields; he also excelled in other sciences e.g., jurisprudence and knowledge of poetry. His traditions — especially his exegetical narrations — occupy a privileged position. Shaykh Ṭūsī counts him among the Companions of three Imams of Ahl al-Bayt ‘alī b. al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad b. ‘alī, and Ja‘far b. Muḥammad, (peace be upon them) and regards him as one of Kūfa’s exegetes. Shaykh Ṭūsī frequently relies upon his statements in *al-*

Tibyān. Ibn Shahrāshūb likewise lists him among the Companions of Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. Al-Māmaqānī writes that the aggregate of what is reported about him shows he was among the virtuous. Except for al-Kashshī, rijāl scholars have named him as just and trustworthy and praised him. Al-Wāhid in his gloss says that describing him as an exegete is itself praise. Al-Wāhid attributes Ibn ‘abbās’s genius to several factors: his proximity to the Prophet, the Prophet’s prayers for him, his ample aptitude, his tireless effort and eagerness for knowledge, and his being a disciple of Imām ‘alī (peace be upon him) (*Mu‘jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, Khū‘ī, 1:229; *Ta’sīs al-Shī‘a*, Sayyid Ḥasan Ṣadr, p.322; *al-Dharī‘a*, 4:285 citing Shaykh Ṭūsī; al-‘allāma al-Ḥillī, *al-Khulāṣa*, p.49; *Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl fī ‘Ilm al-Rijāl*, Māmaqānī, p.59; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, 115; Shaykh Ṭūsī, *al-Rijāl* 1:89; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:413; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-Mufasssīrūn*, 1:82; Ibn (peace be upon him)dī, *al-Kāmil*, 2:77; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba*, 1:125; Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī, *Tuḥfat al-Muḥtāj*, 1:155; al-Albānī, *al-Silsila al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, 5:57; Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, p.149.)

Students such as ‘Ikrima, Karīb, Mujāhid b. Jabr, Abū Ma‘bad, ‘aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ, ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, and Ṭāwūs b. Kaysān al-Yamanī recorded many of his narrations for posterity. This contributed to consolidating Ibn ‘abbās’s scholarly legacy. In sum, roughly two hundred transmitters reported from him.

2. ‘amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255 AH)

The second transmitter criticized in the chains is Abū ‘Uthmān ‘amr b. Baḥr, known as al-Jāḥiẓ — a Mu‘tazilī litterateur, rhetorician, witty speaker, calligrapher, and a member of the House of Wisdom from Basra. His renown rests chiefly on his literary skill; he has been called “the king of prose.” It is said that he authored some 350 books, most of which have been lost over time; extant works include *al-Bukhalā’* (on ethics), *al-Ḥayawān* (on animals), and *al-Bayān wa-l-Tabayīn* (on rhetoric). (‘alavī-Moqaddam, 1367 Š./p.115.)

He was also known for jocularity and laxity in scholarly matters. lexicographers such as Al-Tha‘labī in *al-Faṣīḥ* rejected him (stating *mā huwa bi-thiqa*, “he is not trustworthy”) and did not place confidence in

his transmission (cf. Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Faṣīḥ*/215). He was reputed to fabricate and to ridicule ḥadīths; his nephew Yamūt b. Muzarra‘ reportedly called him irreligious. (Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *Lisān al-Mīzān*/251; Ibn Qutayba, *Ta‘wīl Mukhtaliḥ al-Ḥadīth*/249.) In biographical entries that discuss his life and literary works, he is principally known as a poet and literary author; he is not noted there as a reputable muḥaddith. (References: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā‘*, 22:139; Bakr Abū Zayd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Nassābīn*, 1:11; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A‘yān*, 3:470.)

3. *Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 235 AH)*

The third transmitter, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d.235 AH), was a jurist, muḥaddith, man of letters, poet, musician, vocalist and instrumentalist in the Abbasid period; he served in the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Born into a renowned musical family, he is credited as the first Arabic poet to perfect delicate songs and ghazals of amorous encounter. He innovated modes of composing melodic pieces and introduced a comprehensive classification of songs and maqāmāt. He would begin the melody with a loud voice; for this he was nicknamed *malsū‘* (“snake- or scorpion-struck”). He is said to have been both a faqīh and a singer. (‘alavī-Moqaddam, 1367 Š./p.120.)

Many of the classical imams have held that the narration has no basis. Al-Khattābī mentioned it and remarked that two men objected to the ḥadīth, one a *mājin* (libertine) and the other a *mulḥid* (atheist/denier), referring to Ishāq al-Mawṣilī and al-Jāḥiẓ. It is not *ma‘rūf* (well-known/accepted) among the muḥaddithīn. Al-Dāraquṭnī in *Musnad al-Zubayr* from *Kitāb al-‘Ilal* judged it weak and called it *munkar*. Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn labeled him a fabricator of ḥadīths (*kadhḥāb, yaḍ‘u al-ḥadīth*). Abū Ḥātim called his ḥadīth weak. Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā called it flimsy. Al-Nasa‘ī described him as a Basran who should be abandoned (*Basrī matrūk*). Ibn ‘adī said he has some ḥadīths but that they tend toward weakness. (Ibn ‘adī, *al-Kāmil*, 1:127; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, jīm/45.)

Al-Dūrī wrote that in the view of Ibn Ma‘īn his narrations are of no account; Hafṣ b. Ghayāth used to weaken him. I have written on his

father Nūḥ and elsewhere recorded that Nūḥ was not trustworthy (weak), though his father was reliable. Ibn Abī Khaythama said of Yaḥyā that he was not to be trusted; when asked about Jābir b. Nūḥ he weakened him and said he had seen Hafṣ b. Ghayāth mock him; then he added that he was of no account. Al-Ājrūnī reported that Abū Dāwūd rejected his ḥadīth. Al-Nasa'ī said "not strong," Abū Ḥātim said "weak," and Ibn 'adī observed that he does not have many chains of transmission; the ḥadīth you mention is known only through this isnād and I have not seen it reported otherwise. At-Tirmidhī transmitted only a single ḥadīth from him concerning the vision of the Lord. (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, 1:283; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, 2:77; Yāqūt al-Hamawī, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, 6:17; al-Isfahānī, Abū al-Faraj, *al-Aghānī*, 1:20.)

Narrators of the Hadīth in Imāmī Shī'ī Sources

The report that supports the interpretation of the ḥadīth and clarifies the meaning intended by the Infallible (peace be upon him) of "coming-and-going" (the Persian phrase آمدوشد) in the narration «اِخْتِلَافٌ أُمَّتِي رَحْمَةً» is the narration of 'abd al-Mu'min al-Anṣārī, which Shaykh Ṣaduq records from Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ((peace be upon him)). (Ṣaduq, *Ilal al-Sharā'i* /185; *Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār*/158; Ṭabarasi, *Ihtijāj*, 2:355; Ḥurr 'Āmili, *Wasa'il al-Shī'a* / 235; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 1:227).

The transmitters of the ḥadīth of disagreement are the following:

1. 'alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Imrān al-Daḡdaq.
2. From Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Ja'far al-Asadī.
3. From Ṣāliḥ ibn Abī Ḥammād.
4. From Aḥmad ibn Hilāl.
5. From Muḥammad ibn Abī 'Umayr.
6. From 'abd Allāh al-Mu'min al-Anṣārī.

A noteworthy point is that in all cited sources the formula is transmitted by a single person ('alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Imrān al-Daḡdaq); and - apart from the chain reported via Ibn Abī 'Umayr - the chains of transmission for these reports are not authenticated but rather have been weakened and subjected to criticism by the rijāl specialists.

Abu ‘abdallāh (peace be upon him)bd al-Mu’min ibn al-Qāsim ibn Qays al-Anṣārī al-Kūfī (d. 147 AH)

Abu ‘abdallāh ‘abd al-Mu’min ibn al-Qāsim ibn Qays al-Anṣārī al-Kūfī (d. 147 AH) is listed among the trusted narrators in Shī‘ī works. He is reported to have narrated from Imam al-Sajjad, Imam al-Bāqir, Imam al-Ṣādiq and Imam al-Kāzīm (peace be upon them). He also transmitted ḥadīths from figures such as Ḥukm ibn ‘Uṭayba. (Note: his reported sighting and narration from Imam al-Kāzīm must be understood as having occurred prior to that Imam’s formal imamate, since ‘abd al-Mu’min died one year before the start of that imamate). Many transmitters relate from him, for example Ibrāhīm ibn Sulaymān al-Khazzāz, ‘abd Allāh ibn Mughirah, Abū Kahmas, and Ismā‘īl ibn Abān. Ibn al-Nadīm in *al-Fihrist* records that al-Anṣārī was among the prominent Shī‘ī jurists who transmitted fiqh from the Imāms. (References in original sources as cited above.)

According to al-Rawḍa and al-Kāfī, he narrated from Abū Ja‘far (one of the Imāms), and several later transmitters cite him. For example: Abū Ayyūb is recorded as narrating from him (al-Rawḍa: ḥadīth 310); ‘alī ibn ‘aṭīyya is recorded as narrating from him (al-Rawḍa: ḥadīth 102); al-Jurayrī appears citing him in *al-Kāfī* (vol. 6, *Kitāb al-Aṭ‘ima*, ch. “Zayt wa al-Zaytūn”, no. 80, ḥadīth 6). He is also cited in *al-Kāfī* (vol. 1, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ch. “al-Khayr wa al-Shar”, no. 29, ḥadīth 3) where Bakkār ibn Kurdam transmits from him. (‘amilī, *al-Rawḍa al-Bahiyya*, 2:277; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, 3:57)

Al-‘Urdā al-Barqī is reported to have counted him sometimes among the Companions of al-Bāqir (peace be upon him) and sometimes among the Companions of al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) saying that he narrated via Sa‘d from Jābir, and that ‘abd Allāh ibn al-Mughīra transmitted from him. (Al-Kāfī, Ibid)

The Chain(s) to Shaykh Ṣaduq

Shaykh Ṣaduq’s reported chain to ‘abd al-Mu’min runs as follows: his father (may God have mercy on him) from Sa‘d ibn ‘abd Allāh, from Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Abī al-Khaṭṭāb, from al-Ḥakam ibn Miskīn, from Abū Kahmas, from ‘abd al-Mu’min ibn al-Qāsim al-

Anṣārī al-Kūfī. ‘abd al-Mu’min was an Arab and the brother of Abū Maryam ‘abd al-Ghaffār ibn al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī. The chain is weak on account of al-Ḥakam ibn Miskīn and Abū Kahmas; this is the condition of the route in the Shaykh’s transmission. (Al-Jawāhirī, *al-Muḥīd min Ma’jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, 355.)

Najāshī records: “‘abd al-Mu’min ibn al-Qāsim ibn Qays ibn Qays ibn Fahd al-Anṣārī — (he) is among the Companions of al-Sajjād, al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon them); he narrated from Abū Ja‘far and Abū ‘abd Allāh (i.e., the Imāms); he is trustworthy (thiqaḥ), as is his brother, and he is the brother of Abū Maryam ‘abd al-Ghaffār ibn al-Qāsim; Qays ibn Fahd was a Companion. Najāshī records his entry in the addenda and notes that his kunya is Abū ‘abd Allāh, he is Kūfī and died in the year 147 AH at the age of eighty-one. He possessed a book that was narrated by a group including Sufyān ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Mazīd al-Ḥārithī.” (*Rijāl Najāshī*, p.249.)

Najāshī and other compilers note that a narration of his appears in *al-Kāfī* — however the route by which Shaykh Ṣaduq reaches him is weak. Some manuscript traditions present the route in a weak form; scholars have discussed variant readings and weaknesses in the chain. (Allama Ḥillī, *al-Khulāṣa*, ch. 18; *Rijāl ibn Dāwūd*, etc.; cf. *Tafsīr Tasnīm*, ed. Javādi, vol. 1/81.)

Critical Remarks from Rijāl Scholars

Some rijāl critics — including certain Sunni specialists — did not accept many of his narrations. They have stated that although he is a Shī‘ī transmitter, many of the ḥadīths reported from him cannot be relied upon and are weak. (See reporting traditions and criticism in Daraquṭnī, *Sunan*, vol. 2/77 — as cited in the sources above.)

Variant manuscript notes indicate that the scholar compiling the entries sometimes placed ‘abd al-Mu’min in the list of the Companions of al-Sajjād, sometimes among the Companions of al-Bāqir, and sometimes among the Companions of al-Ṣādiq; he was repeatedly noted as the brother of Abū Maryam ‘abd al-Ghaffār. Several copies state that ‘abd al-Mu’min had a book narrated by Ḥumayd ibn Ziyād and ‘Imāra ibn Ziyād via Ibrāhīm ibn Sulaymān al-Khazzāz. One critical remark in

Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist* observes that in the printed catalogue the name appears as ‘abd al-Mun’im al-Mu’min ibn al-Qāsim; if that reading were correct it would indicate a different person; otherwise, the route to him is certainly mursal (broken), since Ḥumayd ibn Ziyād (d. 310 AH) could not have narrated directly from one who died in 147 AH without intermediaries. (Ṭūsī, *Ṭūsī, al-Fihrist*, 231.)

Khwā’ī also records the entry for ‘abd al-Mu’min ibn Abī al-Qāsim Qays ibn Qays ibn Fahd al-Anṣārī and affirms the trustworthiness of him and his brother Abū Maryam (peace be upon him)bd al-Ghaffār. (Khwā’ī, *Abū al-Qāsim: Mu’jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, 11:9.)

To summarize: Imāmī Shī’ī sources treat the narration of ‘abd al-Mu’min al-Anṣārī as the principal corroborating report that supports the reading of the Prophet’s (or Imām’s) intended meaning of “*coming-and-going*” in the formula “*Ikhtilāf Ummatī raḥma.*” While several chains and narrators are cited in the tradition, many of those chains are weak or subject to rijāl criticism; ‘abd al-Mu’min himself is variously attested as trustworthy in Shī’ī biographical works, yet his routes — particularly as employed by later compilers — have been judged weak by some critics and therefore require careful isnād-level scrutiny.

The Contradiction of the Ḥadīth of ikhtilāf with Qur’ānic Verses

The ḥadīth of ikhtilāf stands in contradiction with several Qur’ānic verses that call upon the believers to hold fast to the rope of God and to avoid division and discord. The Qur’ān declares:

“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you, when you were enemies, and He brought your hearts together, so you became by His grace brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His signs that you may be guided. Let there be among you a group inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and it is they who will prosper. And do not be like those who became divided and differed after clear proofs had come to them; it is they who will have a great punishment.” (Āl ‘Imrān 3:103–105).

With reflection on the context of numerous Qur'ānic verses, it is impossible to accept the claim that discord could be a source of mercy for the community. On the contrary, both the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunnah emphasize the necessity of unity and the consolidation of the word of the believers, while the Qur'ān calls explicitly for casting aside division, schism, conflict, and strife. The divine command warns believers not to emulate the Jews and Christians who, by succumbing to their desires and jealousy, fragmented their religion, such that each faction or sect claimed the truth for itself and considered the others to be in falsehood. Consequently, they turned toward hostility and disunity—even though manifest signs had come to them, clarifying the truth and establishing the obligation of unity and agreement upon the word of tawhīd. (al-Qāsimī, 1421 AH, p. 424).

In another verse, discord, strife, and conflict are presented as causes of decline and fragmentation, for preoccupation with them prevents the community from attaining coherence and instead leads to weakness and humiliation:

“And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute, lest you lose courage and your strength depart; and be patient. Surely Allah is with the patient.” (al-Anfāl 8:46).

Furthermore, the Qur'ān states: *“And We gave Moses the Book, but it was disputed.”* (Hūd 11:110). This indicates that the failure of the people of Moses (peace be upon him) in their divine test was caused by corruption, discord, and the false ideas and fabricated beliefs of the Jews, who fell into doubt regarding the truth and engaged in its suppression and distortion. In this way, tribal, political, cultural, partisan, and other motives all became causes leading to division. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1412 AH, vol. 11, pp. 44–77).

The Contradiction of Ikhtilāf with Parallel Aḥādīth

Ibn 'abbās narrates in a ḥadīth: “Allah has commanded the believers to unity and forbidden them from discord and division. He informed them that those before them were destroyed only because of disputation and quarrels regarding the religion of Allah, the Exalted.” (al-Ājurri, 2003, vol. 1, p. 116).

In another ḥadīth it is reported: “*It was only ikhtilāf that destroyed those before you.*” (Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, ḥadīth no. 3981).

Given the importance of unity and the removal of division within the nascent Islamic society, the Noble Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) made his very first initiative upon arriving in Madīnah the establishment of the pact of brotherhood (*mu’ākhāt*) between the two major groups of the *Anṣār* and the *Muhājirūn*, immediately after constructing the Mosque of Qubā’.

History records that when the Companions fell into disagreement over the matter of the Qur’ān’s revelation upon seven dialects (*aḥruf*), the noble countenance of the Prophet changed, and he struck the chest of Ubayy b. Ka’b. (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ḥadīth no. 1883).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also commanded unity and forbade discord and division, exhorting all to remain in solidarity: “Hold fast to the community (al-jamā’ah), and beware of division, for Satan is with the one who is alone... Whoever desires the spaciousness of Paradise must adhere to the community.” (al-Tirmidhī, al-Jāmi’, ḥadīth no. 2254).

Al-Ṭabarī transmits a ḥadīth from the Prophet condemning division: “*Whenever there is no leader among the people, they fall into division through parties, until matters reach the point that no one follows another, not even in discord. All people then withdraw, fearing that they may fall into the evil of division.*” (al-Mubārakfūrī, 1425 AH, vol. 6, p. 321).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also warned of discord and hostility arising among his community after his passing: “*The Prophet awoke with his face red, saying: ‘There is no god but Allah; woe to the Arabs from an evil that has drawn near.’*” (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth no. 7059). This is a reference to the events that took place among Muslims due to divisions that emerged after his demise.

Ibn Mas’ūd narrates: “*Ikhtilāf is evil.*” (al-Shāfi’ī, 1403 AH, vol. 1, p. 208).

Similarly, it is reported from Imām ‘alī (peace be upon him) that he said: “*Indeed, I detest discord.*” (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1378 Sh, p. 355).

In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Imām ‘alī (peace be upon him) describes division as the destroyer of thought, stating: “*Al-ikhtilāf yahdim al-ra’y – discord destroys reason.*” He considered the root of discord to be falsehood, and held that at least one of the two contending parties must be in error, as he said: “*No two calls to discord ever occur except that one of them is misguidance.*” He emphasized that the most important means of eradicating division is recourse to the Qur’ān. (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *ibid.*, pp. 183–215).

The Imāmī tradition attributes the origin of division within the Muslim community to the issue of the caliphate and the prevention of the writing of the Prophet’s will during his final illness, citing historical sources and transmitted reports in this regard. (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 202; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2, p. 126).

Critical Evaluation of the First View

From the narrations, it becomes evident that were discord among the community a source of mercy, unity itself would then have to be an error or misguidance—a conclusion no Muslim could accept. For there is no discord or unity except that it entails either punishment or mercy. (Ibn Ḥazm, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 61). Therefore, the method of the Prophet of Islam was one of avoidance and rejection of division, which is condemned and which tears apart the cohesion and solidarity of the Muslim ummah.

Critique of the Second View

If *ikhtilāf* (disagreement) is understood as the type of diversity and distinction that God Himself has willed in order that human beings, through their free will, may distinguish truth from falsehood, then such a form of difference is commendable and praiseworthy. It is intrinsic, innate, and marked by plurality and variation. The Qur’an states:

“*And had your Lord willed, He would have made all mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ—except those upon whom your Lord has mercy; and for that He created them. And the word of your Lord shall be fulfilled: I will surely fill Hell with jinn and mankind all together*” (Q 11:118–119).

Al-Suyūṭī comments: “This type of difference is beneficial in understanding meaning and enriching it, as in the case of the variant readings of the Qur’an.” (Suyūṭī, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 31). Yet, disagreement that arises **after the truth has been made manifest**, and once the consensus of the scholars of the umma has established its authenticity, is reprehensible, divisive, and contrary to guidance, for it entails that “one position calls to what contradicts the other” (Suyūṭī, *ibid.*, p. 38).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) condemned disputation, declaring: “*I guarantee a house in the surroundings of Paradise for one who abandons argument, even if he is in the right*” (Sunan Abī Dāwūd, no. 4800; Sunan al-Tirmidhī, no. 1993). Thus, disagreement undertaken for the sake of attaining truth is praiseworthy.

The Necessity of Returning to the Qur’an and Sunna in Cases of Disagreement

The Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunna have outlined the methodology for resolving disagreements within the Muslim community by referring disputes to divine sources. The Qur’an commands:

“O you who believe! Obey Allah, obey the Messenger, and those in authority among you. Then if you dispute over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and yields the best outcome.” (Q 4:59).

Disagreement among the imams of jurisprudence is not in itself a “mercy” unless it pertains to **secondary and subsidiary rulings** for which explicit, definitive texts exist in the Qur’an and Sunna. In such cases, the jurist, after thorough investigation of the revealed sources and employing the methods of analogy and reasoning, may arrive at different rulings. This variety does not undermine religion but reflects mercy, flexibility, and accommodation for the community (Abū Zahra, 2005, p. 12). Accordingly, when such disagreement arises, the ultimate point of return must remain the Qur’an and the Sunna, without fanatic attachment to any particular school. Otherwise, multiplicity of rulings may emerge in cases where the divine texts already exist (al-Albānī, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 143).

An Example of Juridical Difference

A notable case is the difference among the jurists regarding someone entering the mosque on Friday while the imam is on the pulpit delivering the sermon. Should he perform the *taḥiyyat al-masjid* prayer or not?

- Abū Ḥanīfah and Mālik ruled that he should not perform prayer while the imam is preaching, since the worshipper should not be distracted from attentively listening to the sermon. They relied on a report from Ibn ‘Umar: “*When one of you enters the mosque and the imam is preaching, let there be no prayer and no speech until the imam concludes.*” (al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 87).

- By contrast, the Shāfi‘ī school held that it is recommended (*sunnah*) for the one entering the mosque at that time to perform two cycles (*rak(peace be upon him)hs*) of *taḥiyyat al-masjid*. Their position is based on the report: “*A man entered on Friday while the Prophet (peace be upon him) was preaching. He asked him: ‘Have you prayed?’ He replied: ‘No.’ The Prophet said: ‘Pray two rak(peace be upon him)hs.*” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, ḥadīth no. 930). And in another narration: “*When one of you comes on Friday while the imam is delivering the sermon, let him pray two rak(peace be upon him)hs, but let him shorten them.*” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, ḥadīth no. 1987).

Thus, two schools prohibited the prayer based on one set of narrations, while another school affirmed it based on a different set of authentic narrations. When one examines the reasoning of the imams, the disagreement is not a contradiction, since each relied on a valid report.

Imām Mālik himself remarked: “I am but a human; I err and I am correct. Therefore, look into my opinion: whatever conforms with the Book and the Sunnah, accept it; whatever contradicts them, reject it.” (Ibn Ḥazm, vol. 2, p. 229).

Similarly, Abū Ḥanīfah and Abū Yūsuf stated: “*It is not permissible for anyone to report our opinions without knowing the context in which we said them.*” (Ibn al-Jawzī, vol. 2, p. 211).

Al-Shāfi‘ī declared: “*If an authentic ḥadīth is found, that is my madhhab.*” And Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal stated: “*Do not blindly follow me, Mālik, al-Shāfi‘ī, al-Awzā‘ī, or al-Thawrī. Rather, take from where they took—from the authentic ḥadīth.*”

Upon investigation, it has been established that the ḥadīth “no prayer and no speech until the imam concludes” is weak (al-Rāzī, 1421, p. 259), due to the presence of Ayyūb b. Nihīm in its chain, who was considered weak or unreliable by several scholars. (al-Rāzī, *ibid.*). Al-Haythamī also said: “He is abandoned; a group of scholars declared him weak.” (al-‘Umarī al-Tabrīzī, vol. 4, p. 931).

Semantic Hypotheses Regarding the Word *Ikhtilāf*

The term *ikhtilāf* in Arabic lexicography allows for several semantic interpretations. With reflection upon Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic traditions, different possible meanings of *ikhtilāf* can be discerned.

a. Interpretive Hypothesis: Ikhtilāf as “alternation/rotation” (coming and going), not as division or antagonism.

In this sense, the ḥadīth would align with verses and reports that emphasize strengthening bonds among believers, where such “alternation” serves as a source of benefit and a sign for people of intellect. As God says:

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail in the sea with what benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the sky of water—giving life thereby to the earth after its death and dispersing therein every creature—and the directing of the winds and the clouds subjugated between heaven and earth are surely signs for a people who use reason.” (al-Baqarah 2:164).

Shaykh Ṣadūq interprets the ḥadīth as referring to the “coming and going” of scholars between cities for the acquisition of religious knowledge, not as division in the religion of God, since the religion is one. (Ṣadūq, *‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’*, vol. 1, p. 125; *Ma‘ānī al-Akhhbār*, vol. 1, p. 190; Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah* (peace be upon him), vol. 27, p. 141).

b. Interpretive Hypothesis: Ikhtilāf as “travel/movement” for religious learning.

Here, the hadith would harmonize with Qur’ānic injunctions emphasizing the importance of scholarly pursuit and the flourishing of jurisprudence among the schools. As the Qur’ān says:

“It is not for all the believers to go forth [to battle]. For why should not a group from every faction of them go forth to gain understanding in the religion and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware?” (al-Tawbah 9:122).

Nāyif al-Shuḥūd supports this interpretation, stating: *“This is a sound interpretation, since difference here means allowance (rukhsah), and allowance is mercy. The meaning is that we have inferred from their differing that ijtihād in such matters is permissible. This provides an opening for later generations: had they not engaged in ijtihād, no one would have dared to interpret the sacred texts, and scholars would have stopped where they stopped. This openness is the mercy intended.”* (al-Shuḥūd, vol. 1, p. 29).

c. Interpretive Hypothesis: Ikhtilāf as “diversity and plurality” in humanity.

This interpretation views difference as a natural manifestation of God’s will in creating people with varied dispositions, leading to intellectual schools and sects—not as division or hostility. The Qur’ān affirms: *“And had your Lord willed, He would have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ.”* (Hūd 11:118).

In this sense, difference leads to mutual acquaintance (*ta’āruf*), humility through piety, and the pursuit of the soundest path to knowing and worshipping God, while fostering the selection of the most valid jurisprudential opinions. Al-Ghazālī comments: *“Some people have interpreted the Prophet’s saying ‘The difference of my community is mercy’ as referring to their differences in crafts and trades.”* (al-Ghazālī, 1401 AH, vol. 2, p. 83).

d. Interpretive Hypothesis: Ikhtilāf as juridical plurality in subsidiary rulings (furū).

In this case, difference among jurists and imams in subsidiary rulings refers to a form of mercy, since it spurred the flourishing of Islamic jurisprudence. Such difference is not due to any deficiency in the religion itself, but rather serves as a manifestation of divine mercy, flexibility, and facilitation for the community. It is therefore a legitimate and praiseworthy difference confined to secondary issues, not principles.

Public perception of this meaning was common, with people often using the hadith to justify practical religious needs, even without verifying its authenticity. Indeed, many narrations exist whose textual content is profound but whose chains of transmission are weak. At times, narrations lacking sound isnād nevertheless contain noble ethical teachings promoting communal mercy.

Mūsā b. ‘abd Allāh al-Juhanī was asked about this hadith, and he said: “Do not say ‘ikhtilāf’; rather say ‘expansion (s’ah).’” (al-‘alwānī, p. 77).

Al-Shātibī considered difference in subsidiary rulings as a cause for the continuation of ijtihād. (al-Shuḥūd, ibid., p. 29). Al-Jaṣṣāṣ held that only difference in the fundamentals of religion is blameworthy, stating: “The import of the verse indicates that what is meant is difference and division in the fundamentals of religion, not in its branches.” (al-Jaṣṣāṣ, vol. 2, p. 37).

Al-Qaradawī’s View

Shaykh al-Qaradawī, in his book *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*, did not overlook the subject of the ḥadīth and devoted attention to interpreting and justifying it. He states:

“The truth is that *difference (ikhtilāf)* in itself is not a danger, particularly with respect to matters of the subsidiary rulings of religion (*furū’ al-dīn*) and certain non-essential principles. The real danger lies in division (*tafarqu*) and enmity, from which God and His Messenger have warned. Indeed, during the era of the Companions, the Followers, and the rightly-guided Imams, scholarly disagreement never inflicted harm upon the foundation of the Islamic community. Rather, it is we who, due to trivial issues or sometimes for no reason at all, and out of ignorance, fall into hostility toward one another.” (al-Qaradāwī, 1996: 15–25).

Critique of the Hypotheses

In examining the semantic hypotheses concerning the ḥadīth of *ikhtilāf*, one possible meaning is *division and discord*, which is certainly condemned in Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic traditions. The main reason for the opposition of critics, from a substantive perspective, lies in the explicit contradiction between such an interpretation and the Qur’ān and Sunnah. However, in the Prophetic report under discussion, contrary to what might appear at first glance, this is not the intended meaning. Rather, what is meant is the “coming and going” of eager seekers to the Prophet (peace be upon him) in order to acquire divine knowledge and religious sciences—a responsibility that, after his demise, fell upon the community in their “coming and going” to the Imams and those in authority.

Through this process of seeking knowledge, the flourishing and vitality of Islamic jurisprudence were preserved. At times, with the emergence of new rulings and subsidiary issues, differences of opinion arose among leading scholars. Such differences, since they aimed at distinguishing truth from falsehood, the genuine from the spurious, and engaging in *ijtihād* concerning particulars rather than fundamentals, were not only free of censure but were praiseworthy and acceptable to God, His Messenger, and the Muslim community.

It is evident, however, that discord, dispute, and hostility lead the community toward disunity, weakness, and the erosion of their brotherhood. The causes of *ikhtilāf* are numerous and varied, yet they can be traced back to three roots: the nature and intellect of accountable human beings, the very texts of Qur’ān and ḥadīth themselves, and the semantic range of the Arabic language, which accommodates such meanings (al-‘alwānī, *ibid.*, p. 87).

Some Sunni scholars, adopting a hasty and less than impartial approach, denied the Prophetic origin of the *ḥadīth of ikhtilāf* on the grounds of its absence from the most authoritative sources and the weakness of its chain of transmission, thereby focusing solely on the apparent content of the term “*ikhtilāf*.” Consequently, they dismissed the interpretive hypotheses as meaningless or unbeneficial.

Conclusion

Despite the debates over both chain and content, the ḥadīth in question is regarded by the Imāmiyya Shīʿa (peace be upon him) as possessing authenticity in both respects. Among the Sunnī scholars, however, whether transmitted *marfūʿ* or with weak narrators, the report has generally been deemed weak and unacceptable. This indicates that the narration enjoys at best a minimal degree of authenticity. One version, “*ikhtilāf aṣḥābī lakum raḥma*,” is attributed to Ibn ʿabbās (may God be pleased with him), while another version, “*ikhtilāf ʿulamāʾ ummatī raḥma*,” has been judged weak on account of two narrators—ʿamr ibn Baḥr and Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī—who were subject to criticism.

In Shīʿī sources beyond the Four Books, however, the narration “*ikhtilāf ummatī raḥma*” is transmitted with both authentic chain and text, narrated from ʿabd Allāh al-Anṣārī from Imām al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him). Thus, positing multiple interpretive possibilities for this ḥadīth represents a scholarly effort to compensate for its weak chain and to preserve its meaning. Some have accepted it as *ṣaḥīḥ al-maʿnā* (authentic in meaning), granting it interpretive credibility despite its lack of strong isnād.

Within Sunnī scholarship, two approaches can be discerned:

1. A **critical approach** that rejects the ḥadīth entirely on the grounds of its absence from the *Ṣiḥāḥ Sitta* and other major ḥadīth collections, and its apparent contradiction with Qurʾānic verses and parallel reports (*fiqh al-ḥadīth*).

2. A **lenient approach** that, while acknowledging its weakness in chain, nonetheless accepts it as *ṣaḥīḥ al-maʿnā* in a limited number of later ḥadīth compilations.

The Shīʿa, however, consider the narration authentic in both meaning and chain, albeit not found in the Four Books.

Sunnī scholars, by contrast, argue that its absence from the authoritative compilations of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Mālik’s *Muwattaʾa*, or the *Ṣiḥāḥ Sitta*, coupled with its apparent contradiction with Qurʾān and Sunnah, deprives it of any valid standing. For them, it is inconceivable that communal discord could ever be a mercy, while unity is deemed a calamity.

Nevertheless, some scholars maintained that even without a strong chain, the semantic breadth of “ikhtilāf” in Qur’ān and Sunnah allows for readings consistent with sound meanings. In this light, “ikhtilāf” in the ḥadīth cannot mean *division and discord*, since reason, religion, and textual evidence unanimously reject such a notion as mercy. Rather, legitimate differences—consistent with Qur’ān and Sunnah, confined to subsidiary matters, and fostering the dynamism of jurisprudence in adapting to secondary rulings and temporal circumstances—can indeed be considered praiseworthy.

Thus, while one possible meaning of *ikhtilāf* is *discord and opposition*, this was not the intent of the Prophetic ḥadīth in question. Instead, it should be understood within one of the four interpretive frameworks already identified, thereby affirming the report as *ṣaḥīḥ al-ma‘nā* (authentic in meaning) though weak in isnād, and thus a report of limited yet not negligible scholarly value.

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