

## Reason 5

## INTENTIONAL ACTION VS COINCIDENCE

*At times*, many groups of people witnessed the Messenger of Allah ﷺ doing something. Some of them considered it coincidental and treated it as a natural and habitual activity of his. Others considered it intentional and willful, thereby narrating it as a *sunna* or *mustahab* [preferable] action. There are many examples of this nature in the books of ḥadīth. For example, on the occasion of the farewell pilgrimage, it is an accepted fact that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ camped at a place called Abṭāḥ. According to Abū Hurayra and ʿAbdullāh Ibn ʿUmar ﷺ, this lodging was included in the devotions of *ḥajj* and it is *sunna* for a pilgrim to camp at Abṭāḥ. However, according to ʿĀʾisha and ʿAbbās ﷺ, this stay over at Abṭāḥ was coincidental and it had nothing to do with the devotions of *ḥajj*. The servants pitched his tent at that spot: that is why he camped there. Plus, it facilitated easy departure toward Madīna Munawwara.

This is where the services of a *mujtahid* or a jurist [*faqīh*] are required to sift through the various narrations and views of the Companions ﷺ and award preference to one opinion over the other. The Imams have done accordingly on the basis of the following ḥadīth: “We will camp at Khayf Banī Kināna where the polytheists had vowed to oppose Islam.” The Imams are of the view that this lodging was not coincidental but intentional. Allah’s Messenger ﷺ intended to demonstrate the magnificence of Islam at the very spot where the disbelievers displayed their rejection [*kufī*] of Islam. Together with this objective, if other reasons are found—for example, he camped there to facilitate easy departure—this does not mean that his stay at Abṭāḥ was not intentional.

## Reason 6

## UNDERLYING CAUSES

*At times*, contradictions appear due to the contradictory underlying causes found in the ḥadīths. For example, it is mentioned in a ḥadīth that Allah’s Messenger ﷺ was once seated when the bier [*janāza*] of a disbeliever passed by. He immediately stood up. According to some narrations, he got up in honor of the angels accompanying the bier. If this is the case, there is even more reason for the people to stand for the passing of a Muslim bier. The narrators who consider this to be the underlying principle of the ḥadīth do not even mention the word “disbeliever” in their narrations. They do not consider it necessary because it is immaterial whether the bier is that of a Muslim or a disbeliever, due to the presence of the angels.

However, we learn from other narrations that Allah’s Messenger ﷺ stood up so that the bier would not pass above the heads of the Muslims, as this is a form of humiliation to them. If this is the underlying reason for his standing up, then the practice of standing up for a *janāza* will be restricted to the bier of a disbeliever only. Hence, in this case, the word “disbeliever” must be mentioned in the ḥadīth by the narrator.

Similar is the case of another ḥadīth. Rā ʿ ibn Khadij ﷺ says, “We used to hire out our lands on the basis of temporary sharecropping [*muzāraʿa*]. This was very beneficial to us but Allah’s Messenger ﷺ prohibited us from it. Obedience to Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ precedes all benefits.” ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar ﷺ says, “We used to hire out our plots on a temporary sharecropping basis and regarded it as beneficial and permissible. However, since Rā ʿ ibn Khadij informed us that Allah’s Messenger ﷺ prohibited it, we abandoned this practice.”

In another narration, Rā ʿ ibn Khadij ﷺ says, “My uncle and other family members used to hire out their lands on a temporary sharecropping basis. The land owner and the farmer would agree that

the crop which will grow around the water supply drains or any other pre-specified area will belong to the land owner while the remainder will belong to the farmer. Allah's Messenger ﷺ prohibited them from this." Rā' ibn Khadīj ﷺ was then asked, "If the land owner lets his land on a specified rental?" He replied, "That is quite in order."

In contrast to these narrations, 'Amr ibn Dīnār relates, "I told Tāwūs to desist from hiring out his land on the basis of sharecropping because the Companions ﷺ prohibited people from doing this. Upon this Tāwūs replied, "The most learned of the Companions, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās ﷺ informed me that Allah's Messenger ﷺ did not actually prohibit this practice altogether. What he actually meant was that it is better for a person to lend his plot of land to his Muslim brother for purposes of cultivation instead of letting it to him in exchange of something."

So, according to Ibn 'Abbās ﷺ, the underlying cause for the prohibition was merely to ensure that people maintain good conduct with their fellow Muslim brothers. This prohibition was not a juridical injunction. However, according to Rā' ibn Khadīj ﷺ, the underlying cause of this ban was to demonstrate its prohibition and nothing else.

There are many other examples of this nature in the books of ḥadīth. We do not wish to encompass them all, nor is it our objective to do so.

In short, the narrators differ in the underlying cause for the injunction expressed in a particular ḥadīth. Each narrator will narrate the ḥadīth according to his own understanding of it. Hence, we consequently have two apparently conflicting ḥadīths.

Nevertheless, one who is confronted with both ḥadīths and is cognizant of the principles of ḥadīth, etc., is bound to grant preference to one of the narrations only and attempt to reinterpret the other. This can only be carried out by a person who knows many ḥadīths on a given subject and who also knows the actual texts of the various ḥadīths. On the other hand, a person who only knows the translation

of one ḥadīth on a particular topic, has no knowledge of a contrary ḥadīth, and is not aware of the principles of awarding preference to some ḥadīths over others: will he ever be able to understand which ḥadīth is awarded preference over the other and why?

### Reason 7

#### WORDS HAVE MULTIPLE MEANINGS

*One of the* other reasons for the apparent contradictions in the ḥadīths is that there are many words that are sometimes used in the literal sense and at other times in the technical or figurative sense. Allah's Messenger ﷺ used to say something using a particular word in one context, while some of the Companions ﷺ considered the usage in a different context. There are not a few, but thousands of instances of this nature.

To give one example, the word *wudū'* is quite common in its technical sense (of ablution before prayer). However, literally, the word *wudū'* means cleanliness, purity, and washing of the hands. In a narration of the *Shamā'il* of Imam Tirmidhī, Salmān ﷺ once told Allah's Messenger ﷺ that according to the Torah, *wudū'* after meals brings about blessings [*baraka*] in one's food. Allah's Messenger ﷺ added, "*Wudū'* before as well as after the meal is a source of blessing in one's food." In Salmān's statement as well as the statement of Allah's Messenger ﷺ, the word *wudū'* unanimously refers to the washing of the hands.

In addition, there is a lengthy ḥadīth narrated by 'Ikrāsh in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*. At the end of the ḥadīth he says, "After partaking of this meal, water was brought before Allah's Messenger ﷺ. He washed his hands and thereafter rubbed them over his face and arms. He thereafter addressed me, 'O 'Ikrāsh, the injunction