Whom has the narrative of “Whosoever dies without recognizing the Imam of his time dies the death of the time of ignorance” been originally quoted from?

The Group of Mahdavism

The inquirer: Ma’sume Mishkati

Response:

This narrative is one of the Mutawatir (widely transmitted) and most popular narratives with Sunni and Shias. It has been quoted from the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) in the first place and can be seen in many books.

In Shia books:

In his Kamal al-Din wa Taman al-Ni’ma, late Sheikh Saduq has written,

سئل أبو محمد الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام وأنا عنده عن الخبر الذي روي عن آبائه عليهم السلام : " أن الأرض لا تخلو من حجة لله على خلقه إلي يوم القيامة وأن من مات ولم يعرف إمام زمانه مات ميتة جاهلية " فقال عليه السلام : إن هذا حق كما أن النهار حق ، فقيل له : يا ابن رسول الله فمن الحجة والامام بعدك ؟ فقال ابني محمد ، هو الامام والحجة بعدي ، من مات ولم يعرفه مات ميتة جاهلية.

(Just before my eyes) Imam Hassan ‘Askari (AS) was asked to explain this narrative which was quoted successively by his ancestors. “The earth will never remain without God’s Hujjat until the Day of Judgment. And whosoever dies without recognizing the Imam of his time dies the death of the time of ignorance.” Imam Hassan ‘Askari replied, “It is an undeniable

fact just like daylight which is undeniable." Then he was asked, "O son of the Prophet! Who will be the Imam after you?" "My son, Mohammad", he responded. "He will be the Imam and Hujjat after me. Whosoever dies without recognizing him dies the death of the time of ignorance."

Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'mat, al-Sheikh al-Saduq, p. 409-410; Kifayat al-Athar, al-Khazaz al-Qomi, p. 296; Wasail al-Shi'a (Al al-Bayt), al-Hurr al-'Amili, vol. 16, p. 246; Mustadrak al-Wasail, al-Mirza al-Nuri, vol. 18, p. 187, etc.

Separately, in al-Thaqib fi al-Manaqib, p. 495, Ibn Hamza Tusi (God Bless Him) has cited this narrative.

عن محمد بن العلاء الجرجاني ، قال : حججت فرأيت علي بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام يطوف بالبيت ، فقلت له : جعلت فداك ، هذا الحديث قد روي عن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله : " من مات ولم يعرف إمام زمانه مات ميتة جاهلية " . قال : فقال : " نعم ، حدثني أبي ، عن جدي ، عن الحسين بن علي بن أبي طالب عليهم السلام قال : قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله : " من مات ولم يعرف إمام زمانه مات ميتة جاهلية " . قال : فقلت له : جعلت فداك ، ومن مات ميتة جاهلية . قال : " مشرك

Mohammad Ibn 'Ula Jurjani said, "It was the Hajj pilgrimage season when I saw Imam Reza (AS) performing Tawaf (circumambulation of the Ka'ba). I asked him if the narrative of *whosoever dies without recognizing the Imam of his time dies the death of the time of ignorance* has been initially quoted from the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). He responded, 'Yes, my father quoted it from my grandfather quoting from Hussein Ibn 'Ali quoting 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib who initially had quoted it from the Holy Prophet of Islam as stating, *whosoever dies without recognizing the Imam of his time dies the death of the time of ignorance*.'" Mohammad Ibn 'Ula added, "I asked the Imam what really was meant by the death of the time of ignorance. He answered, 'It means that he dies as if he is a polytheist.'"

In Sunni books:

مَنْ مات وليس في عنقه بيعة مات ميتة جاهلية

He who dies without the oath of allegiance dies the death of the time of ignorance.

Sahih Muslim, Muslim al-Neisaburi, vol. 3, p. 1478; al-Sunan al-Kubra, al-Beihaqi, vol. 8, p. 156; Majma' al-Zawaid, vol. 5, p. 218; Mishkat al-Masabih, vol. 2, p. 1088; Silsilat al-Ahadith al-Sahiha, vol. 2, p. 715.

مَنْ مات بغير إمام مات ميتة جاهلية.

Whoever died without an Imam dies the death of the time of ignorance.

Masnad Ahmad, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, vol. 4, p. 96; Majma' al-Zawaid, al-Heithami, vol. 5, p. 218; Masnad al-Tiyalisi, al-Tiyalisi, p. 295; al-Ihsan Bi Tartib Sahih Ibn Haban, vol. 7, p. 49; Hilyat al-Awliya, vol. 3, p. 22.

مَنْ مات وليستْ عليه طاعة مات ميتة جاهلية

Whoever died without obeying an Imam dies the death of the time of ignorance.

Majma' al-Zawaid, al-Heithami, vol. 5, p. 224; Kitab al-Sunna, vol. 2, p. 489.

In follow-up to the narrative, al-Bani added,

إسناده حسن، ورجاله ثقات .

مَنْ مات وليس عليه إمام جماعة فإن موتته موتة جاهلية.

He who dies without the Imam of Jama'at (congregational) dies the death of the time of ignorance.

Al-Mustadrak ‘Ala al-Sahihayn, vol. 1, p. 150.

After the citation of the narrative, Hakim Neishaburi has said,

هذا حديث صحيح على شرط الشيخين

Thahabi has approved it in vol. 1, p. 204.

من مات ليس عليه إمام فميتته جاهلية

He who dies without an Imam dies the death of the time of ignorance.

Al-Mu’jam al-Kabir, al-Tabarani, vol. 10, p. 298; al-Mu’jam al-Awsat, vol. 2, p. 317; vol. 4, p. 232; Masnad Abi Ya’li, vol. 6, p. 251; Kitab al-Sunna, Ibn Abi ‘Asim, vol. 2, p. 289; Majma’ al-Zawaid, al-Heithami, vol. 5, pp. 224-225.

On the one hand, Sunnis widely cite this narrative and approve its authenticity but on the other hand, they have no Imam to unanimously follow. It is a paradox apparently hard to resolve.

Even though no other narrative were found for the annulment of Sunnism, this very narrative is quite enough.

Good Luck

The Group Responsible for Answers to Doubts

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