

Khabar Mutawaatir: The continuous narration (part 1)

By

Definition of Narration

Sensed information is of two kinds, what is directly perceived and what is heard from others: this is termed 'narration'. Narration is the transmission of information to yourself which others have sensed. In other words it is the communication to you of an event in the past by words. As such all knowledge of the past without exception is derived from 'narration' such as language, history and the like. If this is known it should be understood that narration is not merely an issue related to the deen but is a foundation of for all branches of human knowledge. Narration is a human event since it derives its existence through humans. As such there are two aspects to narration: the narrators and the numbers of narrators.

Definition of Mutawaatir

The mutawaatir narration is any narration where the narrators are so many that it is not possible for it to be conspired upon or any coincidental error to have been made. As a result these reports yield certainty. This concept is known to every soul since it is experienced that not every report one hears is believed in whereas others are upon hearing them. The mind recognises the disparity between the two kinds of reports and innately and immediately attaches certainty to one but only probability to the other. For example without much reflection the mind would attach certainty to the reports informing about the existence of the U.S.A. even if one had not seen it whereas would not do so with a single report about a small car accident in a local newspaper. Therefore there is a difference between the two, it can be said that the one benefiting certainty possesses something which the other does not, that is signs (ayaat) which surround it indicating definiteness. These indicators are the numbers of the narrators and those things connected to them.

Factors Indicating Mutawaatir

It would be incorrect to say the numbers of the narrators is merely the only indicator just as it would be incorrect to consider merely the issues connected to one narrator to indicate definiteness, rather it is both of them together that must be considered. This is the method the mind takes, for on hearing many reports the mind does not sum up the reports and count whether the number has reached a mutawaatir number nor looks at the narrators and their characters, places of residence, detail of the report and decide, but rather it innately combines them both (jam') until it recognises the impossibility of error. This is by knowing each report's separateness. A report can reach a hearer through many chains of narration however this would not mean that it had traveled through different channels since there is a difference between the two. Chain of narration is not synonymous with channel, that is it can be possible that many narrators (or chains of) could amount to be same in the channel due to their being not separate i.e. that they knew each other plus collaboration or coincidence could not be ruled out. This is since it must be certain that the narrators did not take it from each other, that is they did not meet or that they did not make a mistake, by coincidence. Assuring their separateness means the narrators could not have taken it from each other since, by definition, they could not have met. Furthermore assuring separateness also means they could not have coincidentally produce the same report since man's mind can only think depending on his/her reality and every reality is individual and particular and therefore there are limitations on how man can think and consequently what he can imagine. Therefore imagining is contingent and limited upon the realities he or she has access to. It is true that every reality has commonalties and generalities however these are limited rather everything is unique and particular in essence.

Mutawaatir being arbitrary

It is false to think that merely by the fact that there exists no universal criteria for every report, i.e. a set number, that such a concept is arbitrary. Rather this concept, that is a perception of the surrounding indications, is a means of rational thought for every human. For example the means of differentiation of a adult from a child or the night from the day are all thought the mind performs

with certainty. It is erroneous to conclude that merely because of the shady area that exists between each pair, i.e. night & day, child & adult, that none can be known with assurance. Rather, notwithstanding the transference of one to the other, each can be known through the indications that exist alongside each. And this is a blessing from Allaah (swt) the Guarantor of truth that He has given us this ability, All Glory and Praises be to He. For He (swt) created the reality and made every event and thing particular, individual and unique. So therefore making everything separate in different degrees. This is something known definitely through ratiō. The mind understands this and searches the reports it receives for separateness since this indicates impossibility of error, only then does it become certain, just as it would sense the separateness of the child from the adult or the night from the day. For it could be narrated that a mugging was carried out by a man by 10 witnesses who, we could be certain, did not meet. However the mind would not consider such a reports as mutawaatir, with respect to the event of the mugger being a man, since although the numbers of narrators is great the detail of the narration is not since the sex of the mugger has only two possibilities that is male or female. Hence such a report would not rule out coincidence. However if it was narrated that by the same number of narrators the event of a mugger being an albino, Chinese man wearing a polka dot track suit; such a report would be mutawaatir since the detail of the report here would sufficiently rule out the possibility of error. Here the mind comprehends that the detail of the report together with the number of narrators would indicate separateness of the reports. Similarly a report could be narrated by 2 liars living in the same house which would not rule out the possibility of conspiring but be narrated by 2 people who live in different parts of the world ho have never had any contact. The point that is being made is that each report is surrounded by various factors such as the number of narrators, detail of the report, geographical diversity of the narrators and the like are the factors, these are the reports' signs. When these signs (at) indicate the report has been received from different (separate) channels the report is mutawaatir.

Why Numbers Show Certainty and Refutation of Imagination and Coincidence

A large number precludes error since it is known from the reality that when a body of people is so large it is impossible for them to agree on anything. A sheer number makes it a physical impossibility to meet, agree and conclude. This number may vary due to the circumstances but nevertheless every reality has such a number. It is possible for example that this number say be a small number hundreds of years ago and be a far greater number now due to the introduction of telecommunications. It would be incorrect, as some sophists think, to say that it is possible in every single reality for a large number of people to conspire together since it is definite that ever reality is composed of particulars (things). And it is known that each particular (thing) is limited so there are constraints and restrictions on what is possible from the nature of the things themselves. The one who comprehends this will understand that each separate reality has limitations of what is possible and therefore has situations which are impossible. To say otherwise would be self-contradictory since (particulars) things are limited by definition i.e. limitation itself is what makes something a particular (thing). So denying there are limitations would be the same as denying there are things. Besides a large number of narrators that do not reach tawaatur in their number cannot agree without this itself becoming known to others. This is since keeping such a large communication and gathering a secret is an impossibility in the reality. Consequently huge agreement on error even with non-tawaatur numbers is not possible. It is also false to believe that it is possible for man's mind to imagine anything and consequently for any number of narrators, no matter how separated, to by coincidence produce the same report. This is since man's ability to think is constrained by the reality he is restricted to. As a ramification of this it would only be possible for his thought to be based on these particulars, hence man's thought is limited. The assertion that man can imagine anything in an unlimited manner would be contradictory to this and so this is void and is merely a convention of mere sophists who philosophise. Since man's thought is limited he would only be able to imagine certain thoughts and not others. It follows from this if the narrators' realities are very similar then it would be able for the mind to imagine similar thoughts however if the realities are separate and very different then it would not be possible to imagine certain things namely those things. This is why the mutawaatir method depends upon making sure a report travels through separate channels.

Refutation of Mutawaatir being Subjective

It is an error to claim that just because the number of narrators (making a report mutawaatir) is not fixed; that it is subjective. This is because just because something changes in different circumstances does not mean it is subjective. Subjectivity is the judgement of something with no criteria. It is incorrect to say this is the case here since a criteria does exist: namely the reality itself, and this is what is used to judge. Rather the criteria is objective and constant, that is the

reality and it is possibilities and impossibilities which is applied to each separate situation. The way the mind immediately knows error is impossible in a situation is merely by perceiving the context. In other words it is by sensation of the reality just as man would definitely sense the heat in a fire immediately or differentiate the adult from the child. It would be a wrong to further assume such knowledge is subjective due to it being immediate and non-demonstrable. Such an assumption limits definite knowledge to demonstrable facts, this simply has no basis. Furthermore demonstrable facts are definite but not everything definite is demonstrable since many facts are known through their being necessary and being necessarily known precludes them from being derived which in turn precludes them from being demonstrable. This is since a demonstrable fact is a fact which is demonstrated from something else or follows from another fact, for example it follows from the definition of 1 and 2 that 2 is greater than 1, that is the conclusion of the one being greater than the other is known from the premises of what 1 is and 2 is. Limiting decisive knowledge to such a form of reasoning is simply false. Rather the nobler form of reaching certainty is immediate or necessary knowledge. This is simply knowledge which is not derived but rather is self evident such as sensing the heat in a fire and the like. These facts are not derived or proven from other things but are known by themselves. Consequently they are not known from other premises but rather known to the seer or the hearer. However this does not necessitate these facts being subjective since they are not inner or merely personal but are still known from the reality i.e the external world. In other words they are still rational thought by their taking into account of the reality. This is since they are verified by corresponding the experience with previous ones so that the word corresponds to a specific reality. For instance the word 'heat' one feels in the flame is verified and consequently known through correspondence with similar previous experience. One can verify what is said to be 'hot' in a certain case by merely correspondence of the word to many other realities besides the one in question, in this manner it rests on objective grounds. This is the case with all words derived from sense perception such as heat, blue, soft and the like merely sounds man assigns to certain attributes he or she experiences. Therefore they are the names man gives to certain effects that are experienced, blue for example is the name man gives to the effect he experiences when he looks at the sky or the sea. However our point is here is not a full discussion but rather to show that some facts known and immediately without being demonstrated from other facts. Once this is grasped it will be known that just because a report being mutawaatir is immediate, that is it is not demonstrated nor extracted from a pre-proved rule, it does not necessitate it being subjective. Rather the mind concluding a report is mutawaatir is similar to any other perception, it is merely sensed from the particular situation or context and there is no subjectivity in this.

Refutation of Saying Mutawaatir Method has Transmitted False Reports

One could say that the concept of mutawaatir is false since many things are related by it's method which are false. For example the Christians are large in number and proclaim the crucifixion of 'Eesa ibn Maryam and the western world are large in number and proclaim that fornication is halaal therefore mutawaatir is not definite. This reasoning is simply fallacious on a number of counts. Firstly this reasoning is crude since it is a fundamental misunderstanding of mutawaatir. That is "a narration of a event with so many narrators at each stage that it is not possible for it to be conspired upon or mistakes to have been made". Hence the conditions are that from event the narrators must be large in number and be based upon sense perception of the event. Therefore it is not enough for a narration to be merely narrated by a large number rather it is imperative that the actual event is narrated from sense-perception. Therefore it is invalid to assert that such erroneous views such as the crucifixion of 'Eesa ibn Maryam, the western world's view of fornication being halaal and the like since none of these rest upon any sense perception. Consequently these are not termed mutawaatir, they are merely custom (urf) and custom is not mutawaatir. For example the Capitalist west's view of fornication is not a single event and has not been sensed so how can this be claimed as mutawaatir? Similarly the Christians assertion of the crucifixion of 'Eesa ibn Maryam may be held by many but how is this sensed? Rather they transmit it from the Gospels and not as an independently narrated fact, this is perceptible from any discussion with them. So it is not based on sense perception of the event but rather from the Gospels, hence it is merely 'mutawaatir' from the Gospels and this is not a proof. Furthermore the gospels are not mutawaatir and still do not even attain the standard of acceptable hadith ahad i.e., so there is no authority in them. As for the saying that it is impossible to differentiate custom from the mutawaatir it is flawed. The question is centered on how we know a fact held by a large number of people originates from sense perception or some other source. And this is clear for it is merely from the many narrators themselves, if a multitude narrate an event as a sense perception it will be mutawaatir whereas that which is not will merely be custom. It would not be possible to mistake one for the other since the indication of the origination being sense-perception or not is not separable from the report, that is the indication will be within the information that is reported.

And it will not be possible for all of them to fabricate the claim of it being sensually perceived since their number precludes this. If they were to do so then this would mean the possibility of them (the narrators) all being able to by chance, in isolation produce the same report, as well as attribute it to a witnessed event, which has already been refuted or intentionally group together to do so which is precluded by their number. Hence it would be known with great ease that the 'crucifixion of 'Eesa ibn Maryam' is not mutawaatir since each person or source which we may come across, i.e. a Christian, book, TV programme, do not narrate the event as witnessed by narrators but rather narrate it as a fact from the Gospel and this deserves no attention. Furthermore even if such rubbish was narrated as a sense perception then this would not be of any consequence. This is since a mutawaatir narration is that which is widespread or transmitted by a large in number in each (tier or generation) from the event to the hearer. The 'crucifixion of 'Eesa ibn Maryam' rather originates from the fourth or fifth century (Christian Era) from whence it was widespread amongst the Christians rather than the first century, wherein the event is attributed. And truly every claim needs a proof otherwise any claim could be made by anyone. To be continued ...