

Book Introduction

Al-Kafi

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The book Al-Kafi written by Abu Jafar Muhammad Ibn Ya'qub Ibn Ishaq al-Kulayni al-Razi is translated by World Organization For Islamic Services. Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services (WOFIS), 1401 = 1981.

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About The Author

Al-Kafi is a collection of the words taught by the Prophet and the Imams, handed down to the Muslim community by the disciples of the Imams. It is regarded as one of the four major works of Shia traditions. It authored by thiqat al-Islam, Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ya'qub b. Ishaq Al-Kulayni al-Razi, who was the foremost Shia compiler of hadith following into the footsteps and the traditions of Imams of Ahl al-Bayt . He belonged to the period of minor occultation of Imam Mahdi (p.b.u.h.). It is said that he greatly benefitted from the living source of Divine knowledge, by interacting through living Imam's deputies and emissaries. For this reason he has highly exalted status among the scholars of successive generations.

Al-Kulayni has written a preface to his book. There he has provided certain explanatory notes, in chapters, which show his skill and proficiency in writing and in Arabic literature.

He is accredited with several invaluable works. Among them are tafsir ar-ru'ya, al-rijal, al-radd 'ala 'l-qaramata, ar-rasa'il al-imamah, ma qila fi al-a'immah mina'l shi'r.

About Al-Kafi

Al-Kafi is one of the most important reference books recognized by the Shia. It contains the ahadith (traditions) of the holy Imams (Peace be upon them) and the holy prophet (peace be upon him). Such books constitute the secondary sources - the holy Qur'an being the first- whereby one may obtain a better understanding of Islamic beliefs, jurisprudence, history, biographies, morals and behavior, the kinds of worship, business, considerations for the individual, family and society, etc.

The word Al-Kafi means “that which is sufficient”; that is, the book was intended to be a comprehensive collection of Imami-Shi'i traditions. This is explained by al- Kulayni in his introduction to the work:

“...You wanted to have a book which would be sufficient (for your religious needs), which would include all kinds of knowledge ('ilm) of religion, which would be adequate for the student, and to which the teacher might refer. Thus it could be used by anyone who wanted knowledge of religion and of legal practice according to sound traditions and words from the truthful ones (the Imams) ...”

It is claimed that it took Al-Kulayni twenty years to complete Al-Kafi.

General Structure Of The Book

The present book consists of English translation and Arabic text. It was translated and published by World Organization for Islamic Services (WOFIS) in 1978.

The design of the book for its translation, indexes, revisions, explanatory remarks and other related work had been done by Al-Shaykh Muhammad Riza Al-Ja'fari.

Al-Kafi is a high status source of religious knowledge, and so respected in the Shia circles, and its author is considered highly honest and reliable. So the comprehensive introduction of the book takes care of the introducing Al-Kafi, its distinctive features and commentaries as well as its author along with words in Shia appreciation and his compilations which show Al-Kafi's significance and its status in our heritage, namely the heritage transmitted to us through Ahl al-Bayt of the holy Prophet.

The compiler, in his esteemed Al-Kafi collection, from the three parts of his own book, part one and two are divided into several books, and every book in its own turn, has been divided into several chapters. Now, to these translated sections, a successive number hasn't been given, instead, for every section of this translation, the successive number of the translated book and the title of that book is registered. Everytime a book specializes in more than one part of the translation, another number is given under the title of the book so it distinguishes the small translated parts of that book. For example, the second translated section of the book of divine unity is the third book of Usul Al-Kafi, taking note that in the issue of “dar al-ketab al-Islam” press, this translation is arranged according to this issue, the section of usual in itself two volumes, the first and second volumes of the eight volume collection of Al-Kafi, and is distinguished thus:

Volume One

AL-USUL- Part One

3) THE BOOK OF DIVINE UNITY

Note that the page numbers of this small section, which will be published gradually, even though they are singular they are in sequence and is in such a way that after the completion of the work you can bind every single part into one ordinary volume. In situations where one book, for example, (the book of hojat) occupies two ordinary volumes and the page numbers begin once again from one, on the back cover, after the title (book) the number two is placed, and the number of small sections under the book title starts, once again, from one, like this:

4) THE BOOK OF DIVINE PROOF

The book is included along with the English translation, the complete original Arabic version being placed at the top of each page with the corresponding English translation below.

However, neither the ahadith are equal in value and significance, nor are the supporting evidence for the narrations (the persons relating the ahadith equal in terms of reliability and credibility and in no way can one give them same appraisal). So, because of this, the original Arabic text has been used and even any of the links in a narration chain has not been omitted.

In translation, the Islamic format and the Arabic pronunciation of the names and proper names, encountered in various ahadith, have been retained.

There is a table at the beginning of each section giving general particulars and information in tabular form about the holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), Fatima al-Zahra (P.B.U.H) and the twelve Imams. A number assigned to each of them according to their sequence. This table will help the reader to understand some important expressions encountered in the process of the narration of hadith.

At the end of each section there are four indexes included:

1. The first index lists the originators of the ahadith to be found in the section-the holy Prophet and the Imams.
2. An index containing symbols for terminology commonly encountered in the process of narration of hadith.
3. Index of the names of key personalities
4. Index of key places, names of tribes, families, and sects

The Number Of Traditions And Three Subdivisions Of The Book

The number of traditions in Al-Kafi is 15,181; according to another reckoning 15,176. If the traditions reported in different sections are counted, the number is over 1,000 more. Of the basic traditions, 5,072 are considered sound (sahih) by scholars, i.e. first category; 144 are regarded as good (hasan), second category; 178 are held to be trustworthy (muwaththaq), third category; 302 are adjudged to be strong (qawi), fourth category; and 9,484 are considered weak (da'if), fifth category.

The book has been subdivided into three parts. each part is divided into some books (or chapters) and most of them are divided into sections.

Part 1. Al-Usul

It consists of the traditions on the principles of faith and the explanation concerning the belief. The subject matters dealt in this part are under the following titles:

1. The book of reason and ignorance (kitab al-aql wal-jahl) which has only 1 chapter consisting 34 traditions

2. The book of excellence of knowledge (kitab fadlu l-ilm). It has numerous chapters of which are: the necessity of science and its search; how is science and its superiority, the superiority of its intellects; socializing and companionship with the intellects; the distribution of science, and on those whose action are without scientific back-up; the intellect being inexcusable for treading on the wrong path, and the severity of the law concerning him etc.

3. The book of divine unity or Oneness of God (kitab al-tawhid)

Some examples of titles in this book:

Interpreting the word object about God; negation from talking about the quality of the creator's essence, abolishing the possibility of eyes seeing Him, negation from relating a body or form to the Creator, recently created names of the exalted Lord.

4. The book of proof (kitab al-hujjah)

The largest book contained in the Usul of Al-Kafi talks about the beliefs and teachings of Shia Islam, is the book of Divine Proof, for it is in this book that the question of the Imamate, the Imams and their attributes and specific characteristics is dealt with. There can be no doubt that the subject of Imamate is the most important one, which distinguishes the Imamate Shia from other sects of Islam, and thus the subject is of special importance both to those who believe in it, and those who disagree with it.

The titles of some of chapters of this book are; the need (necessity) for proof and an Imam; the ranks of Prophets, messengers, and Imams; the difference between interpretations of Messenger; Prophet; relater of traditions; no proof, for the servants of God, stands, other than with an Imam.

5. The book of belief and disbelief (kitab al-Iman wal-kufr) is the most comprehensive book in Usul Al-Kafi

6. The book of invocation (kitab ad-du'a)

7. The book of preferences of Qur'an (kitab fadlu l-Qur'an)

8. The book of social relations (kitab al-ishrah)

This part includes 2 volumes of the present book.

Part 2. Al-Furu

In this part the author has quoted traditions on Islamic jurisprudence, and has explained the order and the commands about the acts of worship, transactions, judgment, etc.

It consists the following:

1. The book of cleanliness (kitab at-taharah)
2. The book of menstruation (kitab al-hayd)
3. The book of burial ceremonies (kitab al-jana'iz)
4. The book of prayer (kitab as-salat)
5. The book of Alms tax (kitab az-zakat)
6. The book of fasting (kitab as-siyam)
7. The book of pilgrimage (kitab al-hajj)
8. The book of holy war (kitab al-jihad)
9. The book of livelihood (kitab al-ma'ishah)
10. The book of marriage (kitab an-nikah)
11. The book of acts of children (kitab al-aqiqah)
12. The book of divorce (kitab at-talaq)
13. The book of regulations on the Emancipation of slaves (kitab al-itq wa't-tadbir wa l-mukatabah)
14. The book of hunting (kitab as-sayd)
15. The book of animal slaughtering (kitab adh-dhaba'ih)
16. The book of foods (kitab al-at'imah)
17. The book of beverages (kitab al-ashrabah)
18. The book of dresses, beautifying and the ideal of manhood (kitab az-zay wa't-tajammul wa'l-muru'ah)
19. The book of tame animals (kitab ad-dawajin)
20. The book of wills (kitab al-wasaya)
21. The book of inheritances (kitab al-mawarith)
22. The book of Islamic punishments (kitab al-hudud)
23. The book of idemnity of bodily injuries (kitab ad-diyat)
24. The book of evidences (kitab ash-shahadat)
25. The book of judgment and decisions (kitab al-qada wa'l ahkam)
26. The book of oaths, vows and expiations (kitab al-ayman wa'n-nudhur wa'l-kaffarat)

The second part included in the book is in five volumes.

Part 3. Ar-rawdah

In the Rawdah of Al-Kafi, Al-Kulayni does not follow the systematic method he had used in the “usul” and the “furu”.

The traditions follow one another in what appears to be a fairly inconsistent order. It certainly lacks the detailed systematic approach that is so obviously present in the other two parts of the book.

One volume of the present book is devoted to this part of Al-Kafi.

Al-Kafi's Distinctive Features

1. The compiler of Al-Kafi, al-Kulayni was contemporary to the four successive special representatives of Imam Mahdi. As al-Sayyid ibn Tawus has pointed out, "All the works and the collections (of hadith) of al-Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni had been completed during the life time of the special representatives of Imam Mahdi (p.b.u.h.). It is a ground to believe the veracity of his collection of hadith.

2. The compiler, except in the case of a few hadith, has named the whole chain of narrators up to the infallible Imam. In certain cases he deletes the first narrator probably because he quotes from the original book that narrates directly from the Imam.

3. According to great scholars, Al-Kulayni's method of collecting and grading Ahadith in a chapter is by the order of the authenticity and the clarity of their meaning. It is, therefore, the last hadith of every chapter is probably general, unclear, or problematic.

4. The compiler generally has avoided the Ahadith that are contradictory. Under the heading of a chapter he has recorded those Ahadith that relate best.