70455 - What should the Muslim do with regard to scholarly differences of opinion as to whether a hadeeth is sound or weak?

the question

What should we do if the scholars of hadeeth differ as to whether a hadeeth that has to do with worship is saheeh (sound) or da’eef (weak)?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

There is no difference among the scholars between scholarly differences of opinion as to whether a hadeeth is saheeh or da’eef, and their differences concerning matters of fiqh. That is because the classification of hadeeth as saheeh or da’eef is subject to ijtihaad and the scholars vary in their knowledge of narrators and isnaads of hadeeth. What one of them knows about the circumstances of a narrator may be unknown to others, and what another finds of corroborating reports may not be available to another. So their rulings on a particular hadeeth may differ for these reasons. Sometimes all of them found the biography of a narrator and the isnaads of a hadeeth, but they varied in the rulings as to whether it was saheeh or da’eef according to their own ijtihaad with regard to evaluating the narrator and according to their view as to whether the hadeeth is free of any problems.

Imam al-Tirmidhi said:

The imams differed in classing men (narrators) as da’eef (weak), as they differed in other aspects of knowledge.

Sunan al-Tirmidhi (5/756), Kitaab al-‘Ilal at the end of al-Sunan.

Explaining the reasons for differences of opinion among the scholars, Shaykh al-Islam Ibn

Taymiyah said:

The third reason: Belief that a hadeeth is weak on the basis of ijtihaad, but others disagreed with him, regardless of other isnaads, and regardless of whether he or someone else was correct, or both of them were correct according to those who said that every mujtahid is correct. That is for several reasons, including: the one who narrated the hadeeth thought that one of them was da'eef and the other thought that he was trustworthy. Knowledge of narrators is a vast science, and the one who is correct may be the one who thought it was da'eef, because he had come across a reason to make him think so, or the other one may have been correct because he knew that this reason may not be enough to regard him as da'eef, either because that reason in and of itself is not a problem or because he had an excuse which meant that he could not be classified as da'eef.

This is a broad topic for scholars who study narrators and their circumstances, and there may be consensus and differences just as there are among other scholars in their own fields.

(Another reason is) that he did not believe that the muhaddith heard the hadeeth from the one from whom he narrated it, but someone else believed that he did hear it for reasons which imply that.

(Another reason is) that the muhaddith may have been through two phases, one when he was sound and credible and another when there was confusion about his narrations, such as he got mixed up and his books were burned or lost, so what he narrated when he was sound and credible is saheeh and what he narrated when he was confused is da'eef. So he (the scholar) may not have known which of the two scenarios applied to this hadeeth, but someone else knows that he narrated this particular hadeeth when he was sound and credible.

(Another reason is) that the muhaddith forgot that hadeeth and did not remember it afterwards, or he denied having narrated it because he thought that there was a problem which meant that he should leave this hadeeth alone, but another scholar may think that it is something that is valid and may be quoted as evidence. This issue is well known … and there are other reasons too.

Majmoo’ al-Fataawa (20/240-242).

Secondly:

With regard to the Muslim’s attitude towards these differences which occur among scholars with regard to whether a hadeeth is saheeh of da’eef, it is the same attitude as that towards their differences of opinion in fiqh. If he is qualified to distinguish between their opinions, he may decide which of the two rulings concerning one hadeeth he thinks is correct; if he is not qualified to do so, then he should follow the opinion of a scholar (taqleed) and he should accept the verdict of the one who he thinks is more religiously committed and has greater knowledge concerning this matter. He should not be deceived by the fact that he is a faqeeh or scholar of usool or mufassir, rather the one whose verdict of saheeh or da’eef is followed should be prominent in the science of hadeeth, and there is no sin on him if he follows a prominent scholar. If the hadeeth is saheeh according to that scholar and he follows him in that, and it contains a fiqhi ruling, then he must act upon it, but there is no sin on him for not acting upon it if the hadeeth is da’eef.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

If the scholars differed concerning it in their fatwas or what is heard in their exhortations and advice, for example, then he should follow the one who he thinks is closer to the truth in his knowledge and religious commitment.

Liqa’ al-Baab il-Maftooh (no. 46, question no. 1136)

See also the answer to question no. 22652 for a discussion of the correct attitude towards scholarly differences .

And Allaah knows best.