

Introduction to `Awl

Consider the following scenario:

A man dies leaving behind:

- 1 Wife
- Mother
- Father
- 2 Daughters

All of them inherit, no one is excluded. Upon adding up the shares, we find something seemingly strange. Take a look:

$$1/8 + 1/6 + 1/6 + 2/3 = 1.125 = 9/8$$

The shares add up to greater than 1. Has there been a mistake? No, not at all. In fact, there are numerous scenarios in which the shares of the heirs add up to greater than 1. Consequently, in these types of problems, when we calculate the base number and the portions given to each heir, we find that the sum of all portions is actually greater than the base number. In such scenarios, we apply the principle of `awl.

The principle of `awl plays an extremely important role in *`ilm-ul-Faraa'idh*. It involves reducing the shares of the heirs proportionally so they add up to exactly 1 and, as a result, so the sum of the portions equals the base number.

It has been narrated that this doctrine was applied by Hadhrat `Umar and Hadhrat `Ali (may Allah be pleased with them both) and all the sahaabah accepted it. The principle of `awl was deduced through *qiyas* (shar`i analogy) from the decrease applied to the shares of creditors in cases where the total assets of a bankrupt person cannot pay off all entitlements.

Whats being done in `awl (simply put) is that the prescribed shares in the Qur'an are being treated like ratio's, hence every one's share is being decreased in proportion to this ratio. This way, everyone gets a share and no one gets left out.

Insha'Allah, the details of how `awl is applied will be expounded upon in the next post when we actually work out some example problems.