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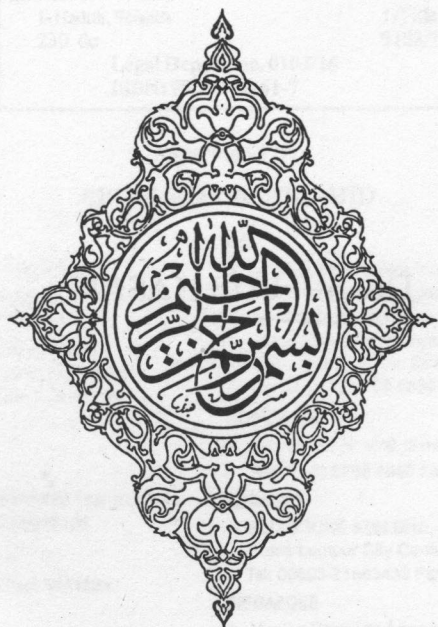
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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCE OF HADITH

DR. SUHAIB HASAN



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In the name of Allah, the Most
Gracious, the Most Merciful.

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Publisher's Note

The Muslims in general believe that the Qur'an has been preserved intact and pure by Allâh Himself. But what is often forgotten by many is that this preservation necessarily includes the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), the practical example of the implementation of the Qur'an.

Hadith is *Sunnah* in record. How the immense wealth of Hadith literature has been left to us by the *Muhaddiths* (scholars of Hadith) is an extremely wide, complex study.

We publish this short treatise on "the science of Hadith" by the learned Suhaib Hasan with English readers in mind. It is part of our scheme to introduce various aspects of Islam to English readers.

May Allâh accept it as a good work.

Abdul Malik Mujahid
General Manager

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

FOREWORD

All Praise be to Allâh, Lord of the Worlds. Peace and blessings of Allâh be upon our Prophet Muhammad, and on his family and companions.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴿١﴾

We have undoubtedly sent down the Reminder, and We will truly preserve it. (Al-Qur'ân, Surah al-Hijr, 15:9)

The above promise made by Allâh is obviously fulfilled in the undisputed purity of the Qur'anic text throughout the fourteen centuries since its revelation. However, what is often forgotten by many Muslims is that the above divine promise also includes, by necessity, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), for it is the practical example of the implementation of the Qur'anic guidance, the Wisdom taught to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) along with Scripture, and neither the Qur'an nor the *Sunnah* can be understood correctly without recourse to the other.

Hence, Allâh preserved the Qur'an from being initially lost by the martyrdom of its memorisers, by guiding the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, endorsed by the consensus of the Messenger's Companions (رضي الله عنهم), to compile the *ayat* (signs, miracles, "Verses") of the Qur'an into one volume, after these had been scattered in writing on various materials and in memory amongst many faithful hearts. He safeguarded it from corruption by its enemies: disbelievers, heretics, and false prophets, by enabling millions of believers to commit it to memory with ease. He protected its teachings by causing thousands of people of knowledge to learn from its deep treasures and convey them to the masses, and by sending renewers of His *Deen* at the beginning of every century.

23. "Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim."
24. "Seek knowledge, even if you have to go to China."
25. "The ink of the scholar is holier than the blood of the martyr."
26. "We have returned from the lesser *Jihad* to the greater *Jihad* (i.e., the struggle against the evil of one's soul)."

The methodology of the expert scholars of Hadith in assessing such narrations and sorting out the genuine from the mistaken/fabricated etc., forms the subject-matter of a wealth of material left to us by the *muhaddithun* (scholars of Hadith, "traditionists"). This short treatise is a humble effort to introduce this extremely wide subject to English readers. The author has derived great benefit from the outstanding scholarly work in this field, *Muqaddimah Ibn al-Salah*.

A brief explanation of the verdicts from the experts in this field on the above *ahadith* is given in the Appendix.

We ask Allâh to accept this work, and make it beneficial to its readers.

SECTION A

INTRODUCTION

The Muslims are agreed that the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the second of the two revealed fundamental sources of Islam, after the Glorious Qur'an. The authentic *Sunnah* is contained within the vast body of Hadith literature.¹

A *hadith* (pl. *ahadith*) is composed of two parts: the *matn* (text) and the *isnad* (chain of reporters). A text may seem to be logical and reasonable but it needs an authentic *isnad* with reliable reporters to be acceptable; 'Abdullah bin Al-Mubarak (d. 181 AH), one of the illustrious teachers of Imam al-Bukhari, said,

الإِسْنَادُ مِنَ الدِّينِ ، وَلَوْ الْإِسْنَادُ لَقَالَ مَنْ شَاءَ مَا شَاءَ

"The *isnad* is part of the religion: had it not been for the *isnad*, whoever wished to would have said whatever he liked."²

During the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ) and after his death, his Companions (*Sahabah*) used to refer to him directly, when quoting his saying. The Successors (*Tabi'un*) followed suit; some of them used to quote the Prophet (ﷺ) through the Companions while others would omit the intermediate authority — such a *hadith* was later known as *mursal*. It was found that the missing link between the Successor and the Prophet (ﷺ) might be one person, i.e. a Companion, or two people, the extra person being an older Successor who heard the *hadith* from the Companion. This is an example of how the need for the verification of each *isnad* arose. Imam Malik (d. 179) said, "The first one to utilise the *isnad* was

¹Ar. *Sunnah*: Way. Path. Tradition. Example. See *An introduction to the Sunnah* by Suhaib Hasan (Understanding Islam Series no. 5. published by Al-Qur'an Society). For Qur'anic proofs of revelation besides the Qur'an. The importance of the *Sunnah* and a brief history of the collections of Hadith. See also Imam Al-Shafi's *al-Risalah* for the authoritative position of the *Sunnah* (Engl. Trans. pp. 109-116)

²Related by Imam Muslim in the Introduction to his *Sahih* — see *Sahih Muslim* (ed. M.F. 'Abdul Baqi. 5 vols. Cairo. 1374/1955). 1:15 & *Sahih Muslim bi Sharah an-Nawawi* (18 vols. in 6. Cairo. 1349). 1:87. the existing English translation of *Sahih Muslim*. by Abdul Hamid Siddiqi. Does not contain this extremely valuable introduction.

- **According to a hidden defect found in the isnad or text of a hadith.** Although this could be included in some of the previous categories, a *hadith mu'allal* (defective hadith) is worthy to be explained separately. The defect can be caused in many ways; e.g. two types of *hadith mu'allal* are known as *maqlub* (overturned) and *mudtraib* (shaky).
- **According to the reliability and memory of the reporters;** the final judgement on a hadith depends crucially on this factor: verdicts such as *sahih* (sound), *hasan* (good), *da'if* (weak) and *maudu'* (fabricated, forged) rest mainly upon the nature of the reporters in the isnad.

Rijal al-Hadith

Mustalah al-Hadith is strongly associated with *Rijal al-hadith* (the study of the reporters of hadith). In scrutinising the reporters of a hadith, authenticating or disparaging remarks made by recognised experts, from amongst the Successors and those after them, were found to be of great help. Examples of such remarks, in descending order of authentication, are:

- "Imam (leader), *Hafiz* (preserver)."
- "Reliable, trustworthy."
- "Makes mistakes."
- "Weak."
- "Abandoned (by the traditionists)."
- "Liar, used to fabricate ahadith."⁵

Reporters who have been unanimously described by statements such as the first two may contribute to a *sahih* ("sound", see later) isnad. An isnad containing a reporter who is described by the last two statements is likely to be *da'if jiddan* (very weak) or *maudu'* (fabricated). Reporters who are the subject of statements

such as the middle two above will cause the isnad to be *da'if* (weak), although several of them relating the same hadith independently will often increase the rank of the hadith to the level of *hasan* (good). If the remarks about a particular reporter conflict, a careful verdict has to be arrived at after in-depth analysis of e.g. the reason given for any disparagement, the weight of each type of criticism, the relative strictness or leniency of each critic, etc.

The earliest remarks cited in the books of *Rijal* go back to a host of Successors, followed by those after them until the period of the six canonical traditionists, a period covering the first three centuries of Islam. A list of such names is provided by the author in his thesis, *Criticism of Hadith among Muslims with reference to Sunan Ibn Majah*, at the end of chapters IV, V and VI.

Among the earliest available works in this field are *Tarikh* of Ibn Ma'in (d. 233), *Tabaqat* of Khalifa bin Khayyat (d. 240), *Tarikh* of al-Bukhari (d. 256), *Kitab al-Jarh wa'l-Ta'dil* of Ibn Abi Hatim (d. 327) and *Tabaqat* of Muhammad bin Sa'd (d. 320).

A number of traditionists made efforts specifically for the gathering of information about the reporters of the five famous collections of hadith, those of al-Bukhari (d. 256), Muslim (d. 261), Abu Dawud (d. 275), al-Tirmidhi (d. 279) and al-Nasa'i (d. 303), giving authenticating and disparaging remarks in detail. The first major such work to include also the reporters of Ibn Majah (d. 273) is the ten-volume collection of al-Hafiz 'Abd al-Ghani al-Maqdisi (d. 600), known as *Al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal*. Later, Jamal al-Din Abu 'I-Hajjaj Yusuf bin 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mizzi (d. 742) prepared an edited and abridged version of this work, punctuated by places and countries of origin of the reporters; he named it *Tahdhib al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal* and produced it in twelve volumes. Further, one of al-Mizzi's gifted pupils, Shams al-Din Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad bin Ahmad bin 'Uthman bin Qa'imaz al-Dhahabi (d. 748), summarised his shaikh's work and produced two abridgements: a longer one

⁵ Remarks like these are exceptions from the basic Islamic prohibition of backbiting (*ghibah*) another Muslim. Even if the statement is true. Such exceptions are allowed. Even obligatory in some cases. Where general benefit to the Muslim public is at stake. Such as knowing which ahadith are authentic. See e.g. *Riyad al-salihin* of al-Nawawi. Chapter on Backbiting. For the justification for certain types of backbiting from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

called *Tadhib al-Tahdhib* and a shorter one called *Al-Kashif fi Asma' Rijal al-Kutub al-Sittah*.

A similar effort with the work of al-Mizzi was made by Ibn Hajar (d. 852), who prepared a lengthy but abridged version, with about one-third of the original omitted, entitled *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* in twelve shorter volumes. Later, he abridged this further to a relatively-humble two-volume work called *Taqrib al-Tahdhib*.

The work of al-Dhahabi was not left unedited; al-Khazraji (Safi al-Din Ahmad bin 'Abdullah, (d. after 923) summarised it and also made valuable additions, producing his *Khulasah*.

A number of similar works deal with either trustworthy reporters only, e.g. *Kitab al-Thiqat* by al-'Ijli (d. 261) and *Tadhkirah al-Huffaz* by al-Dhahabi, or with disparaged authorities only, e.g. *Kitab al-Du'afa' wa al-Matrukin* by al-Nasa'i and *Kitab al-Majruhin* by Muhammad bin Hibban al-Busti (d. 354).

Two more works in this field which include a large number of reporters, both authenticated and disparaged, are *Mizan al-I'tidal* of al-Dhahabi and *Lisan al-Mizan* of Ibn Hajar.

SECTION B

THE CLASSIFICATION OF HADITH

1) ACCORDING TO THE REFERENCE TO A PARTICULAR AUTHORITY

The following principal types of hadith are important:

Marfu' (مرفوع) - "elevated": A narration from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), e.g. a reporter (whether a Companion, Successor or other) says, "The Messenger of Allâh said..." For example, the very first hadith in *Sahih al-Bukhari* is as follows: *Al-Bukhari* == *Al-Humaidi* 'Abdullah bin al-Zubair == *Sufyan* == *Yahaya bin Sa'id al-Ansari* == *Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Taymi* == *'Alqamah bin Waqqas al-Laithi*, who said: *I heard 'Umar bin al-Khattab saying, while on the pulpit, "I heard Allâh's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) saying: The reward of deeds depends on the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended; so whoever emigrated for wordly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he migrated."*

Mauquf (موقوف) - "sotpped": A narration from a Companion only, i.e. his own statement; e.g. al-Bukhari reports in his *Sahih*, in *Kitab al-Fara'id* (Book of the Laws of Inheritance), that Abu Bakr, Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn al-Zubair said, "The grandfather is (treated like) a father."

It should be noted that certain expressions used by a Companion generally render a hadith to be considered as being effectively *marfu'* although it is *mauquf* on the face of it, e.g. the following:

- "We were commanded to..."
- "We were forbidden from..."
- "We used to do..."
- "We used to say/do ... while the Messenger of Allâh was amongst us."
- "We did not use to mind such-and-such..."
- "It used to be said..."
- "It is from the Sunnah to..."