

The Conditions of Reliability in Hadith

An authentic hadith consists of words, actions and tacit approvals of the Prophet and it is transmitted with reliable narrators.⁶⁸ The scholars put forward some conditions to verify the authenticity of a hadith;

- A hadith must have transmission chain of narrators which include all the narrators from the last person to the Prophet. Each narrator in the chain must clearly mention the name whom he narrated the hadith.
- Every narrator in the transmission chain must be upright person who did not commit major sins and not persist in minor ones.
- Every narrator must have retentive memory and be free from such weakness so their reports can be accepted.
- All the narrators must be away from any kind of political and sectarian movements as well as disputes in this regard, because this type of inclination may be the sign of forgery in hadith.
- The narrators must live in the same time frame with their teachers whom they learned the hadith.
- The textual body of a hadith must in the familiar eloquent and dignified style of the prophetic language. If it is an act of the Prophet it should be compromising with the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah.
- The text of the hadith must not contradict with the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah.
- A hadith must not contradict with historical facts.
- A hadith must not contradict with sound logic
- Both the text and isnad of the hadith must be clear of subtle and hidden defects, or clear concealments.⁶⁹

Understanding Hadith

The Sunnah is the record of the Messenger's (pbuh) every act, word and confirmation. It serves as the second source of evidence for Islamic legislation. Hadith discipline helps us to learn Sunnah in its authentic form. Understanding hadiths correctly is extremely important since they constitute the foundations of religion along with the Qur'ān. As explained earlier the scholars developed many branches within Hadith to verify the authenticity of hadiths and also their true meaning. Without knowing those sciences and the methodology of Hadith one may easily fall into error. Obviously, this error is not same with any other error for it directly involves every aspect of religion and therefore any misconception can cause serious problem for Muslims. To avoid such mistake laymen should learn hadiths in the light of explanations which are done by the experts in this field. To meet this need, hadith scholars produced explanatory works on hadith collections and they analyzed every hadith from many aspects to

⁶⁸ Ajajj al-Khatib, *Uṣūl al-Hadith*, p. 313.

⁶⁹ Azami, *Studies in Hadith*, p. 67.

Commentary on Unforgettable Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad

verify their authenticity and understand the meanings. Hence hadiths are the basis of Sunnah their importance are equal to the value of Sunnah in Islam.

The Prophet (pbuh) said; “I have left two sources with you. As long as you hold to them, you will not go the wrong way. They are the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet”⁷⁰

The Hadith literature is one of the most important sources which record the biography, history and the exemplary life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as well as his invaluable explanations of various issues of religion. Due to its great importance the Muslims never ignored it. They produced many valuable works to benefit from this valuable source. In order to understand the hadiths in their true concept and meaning some important criteria should always be kept in mind.

First of all, the Prophet was Arab and he spoke very eloquently. Thus, the hadiths constitute one of the best examples of Arabic literature. Although some of the hadiths are not preserved in their original forms yet the Companions transmitted them in the most authentic way for they understood the language of the Prophet best. In order to understand hadiths right it is important to know the Arabic which the Prophet and his Companions spoke for every language is subject to change in time. For this purpose, the scholars produced works to explain the unfamiliar expressions in the hadiths in spite they knew Arabic well.

In prophetic traditions there is high eloquence and hadith scholars acquire it by a continuous study of this language. With their expertise and skills, they were able to understand if a statement would belong to the Prophet at first place. With this capacity, they were able to understand the content and solve the difficulties posed by the syntax and morphology of the Arabic language. Thus, one cannot understand the hadiths just by knowing Arabic unless he/she is cognizant of the delicacies of the Arabic language and its various styles and constructions that were used by the Prophet and his Companions.

Besides the profound knowledge in Arabic one also should know the Qur’ān well before starting to interpret the hadiths. So, the hadiths should be interpreted in the light of the Qur’ān first for it is the primary source and the most authentic record of Islam. The hadiths often explain the content of the Qur’ān and therefore they should be understood together. The mistakes in the interpretations of hadiths often reveal the fact that the Qur’ān is not used as reference point. The narratives of intercession, the commands such as ‘I have been

⁷⁰ Imam Mālik, *Muwatta, the Decree*, hadith no: 46.1.3.

Commentary on Unforgettable Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad

commanded to wage war against these people⁷¹ and many other hadiths have been misunderstood by ignorant people, thus, caused a lot of confusion. Because they have not been understood in the light of the Qur'ān.

Another important point concerning hadiths is the occasions and historical conditions that the Prophet spoke, acted or approved. So, it is important to know the occasions, the person or persons whom the Prophet addressed and the historical background surrounding the hadiths. For example, once the Prophet said; “the rulers are from the Quraysh.”⁷² The Prophet predicted the conflicts which would appear after his death so he advised his followers to choose a first caliph from the Quraysh. If this fact is ignored there remains no difference between Islam and any other systems which recognize certain group higher than others.

The other important point to understand the hadiths correctly is that all the variant texts of a hadith must be studied together in order to form healthy opinion about it. For example, if one only knows the hadiths which prohibit the pictures he/she can conclude that this prohibition is absolute and every picture is prohibited in Islam. However, if all the hadiths, which are dealing with the rulings of pictures, are collected and analysed, it becomes evident that the prohibition is regarding only those pictures which have been made for worshipping. So, it is essential to know all other hadiths in the same topic and they all should be evaluated in order to form a healthy opinion on that matter.

Islam is established based on universal principles and therefore it never contradicts human intellect. Indeed, in Islamic thought human reason and revelation complete each other for both are coming from the same Divine Source. So, if a hadith is contradicting to the universal values and established facts either it is forged or misunderstood by a narrator. However, it is important to know that the intellect is shaped with the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah, not the one that is under the pressure of orientalist views.

In many cases when a hadith is analysed in true perspective and with healthy methods often no contradiction remains and the content becomes clear. For example, once the Prophet said; “When a fly falls into your bowl, dip it completely in the food before taking it out. There is disease in one of the fly's wings, and cure in the other.”⁷³ Orientalist scholars and some Muslims who are under their effect rejected this hadith claiming that this hadith contradicts to

⁷¹ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, 69:24.

⁷² Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, 20: 4480.

⁷³ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, Medicine, 7.

human intellect. However, the case is opposite to what they claimed, because no one at that time knew that flies carry microbes and when a fly drops into a bowl, it tries to hold one of its wings off the food so that it can take off again.⁷⁴ Thus, it leaves bacteria on the food, but when it is submerged with a slight touch, the tiny bag on the other wing bursts and scatters the anti-bacteria to kill the germs already left.⁷⁵

The understanding process in hadith texts can be conceptualized in the following ways. First of all, it should be known that the Prophet used different methods and techniques to convey his message according to the level of his audience. So, the first step in this regard should be related to sufficient background in hadith field so the readers can understand the content correctly. For this purpose, the introduction is given to meet such need for laymen.

A word or a statement can be understood within its own context as well as with the adequate knowledge concerning the characteristics of its language. Before knowing the Arabic and its characteristics one may fail to understand the content of the hadiths. More importantly the Arabic which the Prophet and his Companions used should be known well. Based on these premises a hadith should be analysed by considering the following relationships;

- The relationship between the words and statements of a hadith with its language
- The position of each word or statements within the context of a hadith
- The relationship of a hadith with other hadiths on the same topic
- The relationship of a hadith with entire Sunnah
- The relationship of a hadith with the Qur'ān
- The relationship of a hadith with the principles of Islam

Another step to understand the hadiths correctly is the knowledge of reason behind the utterance of a statement or doing a conduct by the Prophet. After that it is necessary to know how the first and the later addressee of that hadith understood it. If one cuts the relationship of a statement from its natural environment he/she more like to fails to understand the content right.

Next step to understand the hadiths is related to determination of their content concerning the legal rulings and their binding level. In other words, if a hadith brings any obligation upon Muslims and if it does what and how binding they are. The jurists explored this aspect of hadiths and extracted many rulings from them. In order to determine the proof value of a hadith it should be known that in what position the Prophet said, did or approved such thing.

⁷⁴ Gulen, *The Messenger of God*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ Gulen, *ibid.*

Commentary on Unforgettable Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad

In other words, if a hadith is related to the Prophet's human side or prophetic mission or his being a ruler.⁷⁶

In the last step a hadith should be evaluated according to the higher objectives and general principles of Islam. In this regard, the essentials and the higher objectives in Islam should be determined well and then they should be accepted as reference point. Sometimes the scholar may be confused by emphasizing on the methods instead of the essentials and higher objectives of Islam. Consequently, they misinterpret the hadiths and cause many problems among Muslims.

⁷⁶ Qarafi, *al-Furuq*, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, vol.1, p. 205.