

Chapter 4: The Hadith

1. Preliminary Details & Definitions

Hadith (حديث) literally means 'talk'. Its plural is *ahadith* (أحاديث).

In Shi'a terminology '*hadith*' means the talk of a *ma'sum* and also that narration which describes the talk, action or '*taqrir*' of a *ma'sum*.

Talk of a *ma'sum* includes his writings and sign (Isharah) also. If a *ma'sum* abstains from a work or thing, then this abstaining also is counted as an 'action' (in the above definition).

'*Taqrir*' of a *ma'sum* means that if a follower of a *ma'sum* did a work in the presence of the presence of the *ma'sum* and the said *ma'sum* did not prohibit that work – even though he was in a position to forbid it is he so wished – then it is called '*taqrir*' of the *ma'sum*. We may translate this term as 'tacit approval' or 'silent approval.'

If a narration does not reach up to a *ma'sum*, it is not counted as '*hadith*' according to shi'a terminology. (Though sometimes a talk of a companion of a *ma'sum* or a disciple of such a companion is called '*hadith*' just as a figurative expression.)

According to the sunni terminology, talk, action and *taqrir* of the prophet, his companions and disciples of such companions is called '*hadith*'.

Hadith is also known as *khobar* (خبر) i.e. news and *athar* (آثر) i.e. trace or track.

Many terms will be used in the following chapters. It is, therefore, necessary to explain important ones beforehand. Here a complete tradition is given with its translation:

حماد بن سلمة عن محمد بن إسحاق عن عمرو بن شعيب عن أبيه عن جده قال: "قلت يا رسول الله اكتب كل ما أسمع منك؟ قال، نعم. قلت في الرضا والغضب؟ قال: نعم، فإني لا أقول في ذلك إلا الحق

Hammad ibn Salmah narrated from Muhammad ibn Ishaq who narrated from ‘Amr ibn Shu’ayb who narrated from his father who narrated from his father who said:

“I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, should I write everything which I hear from you?’ The Prophet said, ‘Yes’, I said, ‘In pleasure and displeasure’ (That is, Should I write everything said by you in every condition?) The Prophet said, ‘Yes! Because I do not say any condition but the truth.’”

The first part of the hadith contains the names of the narrators who had transmitted it one to the other. This chain of narrators is called *sanad* (سند) its plural is *asnad* (أسناد).

The second part is the actual narration beginning from “I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah’ up to the end of the hadith. It is called *matn* (متن) i.e. the text.

The narrator is called *rawi* (راوي). Its plural is *ruwat* (رواة)

The *sanad* and *matn* together are called one hadith. A scholar of hadith is called *muhaddith* (محدث). Its plural is muhaddithun or muhaddithin.

2. The Status of Hadith

After the Qur’an, the hadith of a Ma’sum is the most important binding authority (*hujjat* حجة) in Islam; and if anyone wants to succeed on the Day of Judgment, then he must follow the Qur’an and hadith together.

For example Allah says in the Qur’an;

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

“O You who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and those who are Masters of the Affairs among you.” (4:59).

In this ‘ayah Allah makes it obligatory for the believers to obey the Holy Prophet and the Masters of the Affairs, i.e. the Twelve Imams. Obviously nobody can follow the Holy Prophet and the Imams unless he knows what the Holy Prophet and Imams had said or done. And that brings us to *ahadith*.

Meaning of Obedience & Following:

To follow a *ma’sum* means to do the same work as has been done by the *ma’sum* with the same intention. For example, the Holy Prophet received some money from a Muslim by way of zakah; if now someone usurps some property or money from someone without any religious authority it will not be called following in the foot-steps of the Prophet.

It should be remembered that the *ahadith* of the twelve Imams (a.s.) and the Lady Fatimah az-Zahra

(a.s.) are the *ahadith* of the Holy Prophet himself.

The Imams themselves have made it quite clear many times. For example, Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) said, “When I narrate a hadith without mentioning any chain of narrators, then my *sanad* is from my father, who narrated it from my grandfather (Imam Husayn) from his father (Imam ‘Ali) from the Messenger of Allah who heard it from Jibra’il who was informed of it by Allah.¹ The same declaration was made by Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) about his own *ahadith*.²

A person who did not see a *Ma’sum* or did not hear from him, the only way for him to know the religion is through the *ahadith* of the Holy Prophet, the 12 Imams and the Lady Fatimah az-Zahra (peace be on them all).

It is, however, necessary to see that the hadith is authentic before acting upon it. In the following pages some details about the categories of *ahadith* will be given to help the readers in this task.

3. The Categories of Hadith

The value of a *hadith* depends very much on the probity and trustworthiness of its narrators, the *ruwat*.

The Ruwat

Some important qualifications of a *rawi* are as follows:

The *rawi* of a hadith must be an adult (*baligh*), sane, muslim, just (*‘adil*), and of good memory; according to the Shi’a Ithna ‘asheri sect, he should also be a Shi’a Ithna ‘asheri, though in some cases, the *ahadith* narrated by non-Ithna ‘asheri muslims are acceptable.

‘Adil means a person who does not commit any major sin (not intentionally) then he repents at once. Only an *‘adil* person can be relied upon. If he is not *‘adil*, he might forge *ahadith* and mislead people.

Good memory is necessary for a *rawi* if he is to be trusted; otherwise, he may forget something and thus change, add or omit some wordings from the hadith.

It is not necessary that a *rawi* should be a scholar or learned person.

The Four Types of Hadith

Allamah al-Hilli and the ‘ulama coming after him have divided the *ahadith* into four categories according to the qualifications of the *ruwat*:

1. Sahih (Correct; True): A *hadith* all of whose *ruwat* are Shi’a Ithna ‘asheris and all have been praised for their trustworthiness. For example, such wordings have been used for all of them: “انه ثقة) (he is trustworthy – thiqah)” “(انه صحيح الحديث) (His *ahadith* are correct – sahihu ‘l hadith)” and such other

words which show their trustworthiness.

2. Hasan (Good): a *hadith*, all of whose narrators are Shi'a Ithna asheris but not all of them have been praised for trustworthiness; instead some or all have been praised in such word:

“انه مستحسن) (He is virtuous – *mustahsan*)” or

“انه حافظ) (He is of good memory – *hafidh*)”

3. *Muwaththaq* (Reliable): a *hadith* not all of whose narrators are Shi'a Ithna asheri, but all have been praised for trustworthiness.

4. *Da'if* (Weak): a *hadith*, which is neither *Sahih*, *Hasan* nor *Muwaththaq*.

The first three categories are considered as genuine. *Da'if* has got no worth at all, unless it was accepted by all 'ulama of the early period, in which case it is called *maqbul* (مقبول) (acceptable) that is, accepted by early scholars.

As has been mentioned earlier, a *hadith* consists of a *sanad* (chain of narrators) and a *matn* (text). If a *hadith* is classified as *da'if* (weak), it means that that particular *sanad* is weak. But that same text might have been narrated somewhere else with *sahih*, *hasan* or *muwaththaq sanad*; and the value of *hadith* will change accordingly.

There are many sub-divisions of the *ahadith*; but it is not necessary to give all those details here.

Mutawatir & Wahid

Hadith is also classified into “mutawatir” and “wahid” categories based on the number of its *asnad*:

1. Mutawatir (متواتر): It means a *hadith* narrated at every stage by so many people that the very number of narrators is enough to create a conviction of its truth. A *hadith* is classified as *Mutawatir* only if it fulfils the following four conditions:

(a) There must be, in all stages of narration, so many people that common sense cannot accept their coming together to forge a lie. If the number is great, for example, in the beginning and the end but too small in the middle, such a *hadith* is not called *Mutawatir*.

For example, the number of the narrators of the *hadith* “Innama 'l-a'malu bi 'n-niyyat – (انما الاعمال) بالنيات) (Verily, the actions are valued by the intentions)” is too great in the middle and the later stages, but in the beginning its only narrator is 'Umar ibn al-Khattab. So, this *hadith* is not *Mutawatir*.

(b) The information conveyed should be about a thing which can be felt by one of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch).

(c) The hearers should not have prior knowledge of that matter.

(d) The hearers should not have a prior doubt about that information nor a preconceived belief opposed to that information.

If a hadith is classified as *mutawatir*, then there is no need to look at its individual *asnad*, or the credentials of its *ruwat*.

Mutawatir is of two kinds:

i. *Mutawatir* in words:

A *hadith*, which is narrated by all narrators with the same wording. For example, the hadith “Man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha ‘Aliyun mawlahu (من كنت مولاه فهذا علي مولاه) (He whose master am I, ‘Ali is his master)”, and also the hadith “Man kadhaba ‘alayyafal–yatabawwa’ maqadahu fi ‘n–nar (من كذب عليّ من النار متعمداً فليتبوأ مقعده من النار) (whoever tells a lie on me, should prepare his abode in the fire)”, are *mutawatir* in words.

ii. *Mutawatir* in meaning:

If the narrators use different wordings but there is a common factor in all narrations, then that common factor will be called *mutawatir* in meaning. For example, let us suppose that someone says that ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) killed 35 enemies in the battle of Badr; another says that he conquered the fortress of khaybar; a third one says that he stayed fighting in Uhud while others had fled away, and likewise. Now all such narrations have one common factor – that ‘Ali (a.s.) was extra–ordinarily brave person. Though each and every narration in itself may not be *mutawatir* but the bravery of Ali is *mutawatir*.

2. *Wahid*: The second main category of hadith based on the number of narrators is *wahid* (واحد). Every hadith, whose narrators are not so many as to make it *mutawatir*, is called *wahid*.

As the *mutawatir hadith* creates a sure knowledge of its truth, it is obligatory to follow it. But the *wahid hadith* creates not a sure knowledge but only a reasonable assumption of its truth. However, if the *wahid hadith* is substantiated by the context or association (*Qarinah* قرينة) which creates certainty of its truth, then it will be obligatory to accept and follow it like a *mutawatir hadith*. Here are a few examples of such contexts:

- Conformity with logical reasons;
- Conformity with the clear meaning of the Qur’an;
- Conformity with other authentic *ahadith*;
- Conformity with a unanimous belief of the Muslims and/or the Shi’a sect of Islam.

If a *wahid hadith* is associated with any of the above mentioned contexts, it must be accepted and followed. If it is not joined by any such context, then also according to many ‘ulama, it is allowed to follow

it, provided it is not against any accepted tenets of the religion.

4. Recording of the Ahadith

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) encouraged people to write down whatever they heard him saying.

Unfortunately, the first three Caliphs reversed this policy and forbade people to narrate or write any hadith of Prophet (s.a.w). The first caliph burned such writings and this policy was followed by the 2nd and the 3rd caliphs.

In contrast to this policy, Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) always emphasized the importance and essentiality of writing the *ahadith*. Many companions of the prophet like 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, Salman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Bilal and Abu Rafi' wrote down the traditions of the Holy prophet. Likewise many of their disciples, like Mithan Tammar, 'Ali ibn Abu Rafi', Rabi'ah ibn Sumay, Asbagh ibn Nubatah, 'Ubaydullah ibn al-Hur, and Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali also wrote the traditions heard from Imam 'Ali and other trustworthy companions.

Unfortunately almost all those books are now lost except the book of Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali.

The system established by the Prophet (s.a.w) and 'Ali (a.s.) was followed by the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt, and we find that thousands of famous companions of Imams (a.s) had collected all the ahadith they heard from them.

Some of those companions are so highly respected that a hadith narrated by any one of them is considered authentic by many Shi'a scholars. Such companions of the Imams are divided into three groups:

First group consists of six companions of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) as follows:

1. Zurarah ibn A'yan.
2. Ma'ruf ibn Kharabbudh.
3. Burayd ibn Mu'awiyah al-Bijilli.
4. Abu Basir al-Asadi.
5. Fudayl ibn Yasir.
6. Muhammd ibn Muslim ath-Thaqafi.

Some people count Abu Basir al-Muradi in place of Abu Basir al-Asadi.

Second group consists of six companions of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) as follows:

1. Jamil ibn Darraj.
2. 'Abdullah ibn Maskan.
3. 'Abdullah ibn Bukayr.
4. Hammad ibn 'Uthman.
5. Hammad ibn 'Isa.
6. Aban ibn 'Uthman al-Ahmar.

Third group consists of six companions of Imam Musa al-Kazim (a.s.) and Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha (a.s.) as follows:

1. Yunus ibn 'Abdu 'r-Rahman Yaqtini.
2. Safwan ibn Yahya al-Sabiri.
3. 'Abdullah ibn al-Mughirah.
4. Muhammad ibn Abi 'Umayr al-Azdi.
5. Al-Hasan ibn Mahbub.
6. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Nasr.

Some people count Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Faddal in place of Hasan ibn Mahbub; others add the name of Fadhal ibn Ayyub or 'Uthman ibn 'Isa in this list.

Some other famous names are Abu Hamzah ath-Thumali, Aban ibn Taghlib, Jabir ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi, Muhammad ibn Qays, Hisham ibn al-Hakam, Hisham ibn Salim, 'Abdullah ibn Yahya al-Kahili, 'Ali ibn Ri'ab al-Kufi, Mansur ibn Hazim, 'Ali ibn Yaqtin ibn Musa, 'Abdullah ibn Mughirah al-Bijilli, Mu'awiyah ibn Hukaym, Zakariyyah ibn 'Adam, Isma'il ibn Mihran, 'Abdu 'r-Rahman ibn Abi Najran at-Tamimi, Husayn ibn Sa'id ibn al-Hammad, 'Ali ibn Mahazyar al-Ahwazi, Fadhl ibn Shadhan, Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Isa, Ayyub ibn Nuh ibn Darraj, 'Ali ibn Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), Ahmad ibn Ishaq al-Qummi.

These are some of those highly respected companions of Imams (a.s) who collected traditions and wrote many other books, which are mentioned in their biographical details and in Shia bibliographical works.

In short, from the days of Imam 'Ali (a.s) up to the days of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), companions of Imams (a.s) wrote more than 6600 books, most of them containing the *ahadith* of the Holy Prophet

(s.a.w) and the Imams (a.s).

The Style of Ahadith Books

The recording of traditions varied in size and style as follows:

1. A narrator would record one long tradition on one subject. For example, Salman recorded the *hadith* of Jathaliq (Catholicos). The earliest form of *hadith* literature was of this type.
2. Others collected the *ahadith* of one subject in one booklet. During the period of Imams (a.s) thousands of such booklets were written. The collection was usually known by the subject; such as “Kitabu ‘s-Salah – the Book of Prayer”, “Kitabu ‘l-Hajj – the Book of Pilgrimage” etc.
3. Some narrators collected *ahadith* of different subjects in one volume. Such collections were called “*an-Nawadir* (النوادر)
4. Many companions noted down whatever *hadith* they heard from Imams, without any distinction of subject and without dividing them into chapters. Such collections were known as “*Asl* (اصل)” (pl. *Usul*), foundation. Four hundred such *Usul* were prevalent among the Shi’as at the time of the death of Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (a.s.).

These four hundred *Usul* were most popular of all collections and they formed the main source of the tenets, beliefs and laws of Shi’a Ithna ashari faith.

However, there were many difficulties in relation to the above-mentioned four styles of hadith collection:

Firstly, as there was no press in those days, those *Usul* and other hadith literature were not easily available everywhere. The persecution of the Shi’as compounded the problem by making the owners extraordinarily cautious: they did not give their copies except to those whom they fully trusted.

Secondly, none of those four hundred *Usul* contained *ahadith* concerning all aspects of religion in one place. Moreover, they were not divided according to subject. This resulted in great difficulty for anyone trying to find the relevant hadith.

Thirdly, there was a danger that these treasures of religious knowledge would be lost forever due to the persecution of the Shi’as and also because of the difficulty in obtaining and preserving the four hundred *Usul*.

The Four Books (Al-Kutubu’l-Arb’ah)

These problems warranted the need for a new style in recording in which the *ahadith* from all available sources be collected and arranged subject-wise, divided into chapters and sections. Such collections were called “*Kitab* Book.” However, the words *Asl* and *Kitab* are usually interchangeable.

The need for this type of hadith collection was felt by the Shi'a scholars after the death of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.). They believed that if the *ahadith* in those *Usul* were collected in one book and divided subject-wise into parts, chapters and sections, it would fulfill a great need of the time since handling one book would be much easier than four hundred booklets. This would also ensure the preservation of that vast treasure of knowledge.

It was, however, not an easy task: collecting the *Usul* from far and wide was an uphill task in itself; then editing and arranging them was another painstaking job. All eyes turned to Thiqatu'l-Islam Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni ar-Razi. When pressure mounted, he accepted the responsibility. This was during the Minor Occultation of our twelfth Imam who was accessible to the people only through his special deputies who resided in Baghdad.

Abu Ja'far al-Kulayni was the religious head of the Shi'a in Ray (near Tehran) and had moved to Baghdad just two years before his death. He spent twenty years of his life in collecting *ahadith*, several times traveling to other places and obtaining as many *usul* as he could. Thus, after twenty years of continuous backbreaking effort *al-Kafi* came into being.

Al-Kafi alone contains more *ahadith* than all the six books (*as-Sihahas-Sittah*) of the sunnis put together. It is divided into three parts: *al-Usul* (related to matters of belief) in 2 volumes; *al-Furu'* (related to shari'ah laws) in 5 volumes; and *ar-Rawdah*, one volume. Each volume is divided in sections, and in all there are thirty sections, containing 16199 traditions.

Al-Kulayni was born in 260 A.H. and died in 329 A.H/941 CE. In other words, his life began and ended with the Minor Occultation.

Other scholars also collected the *ahadith* from other books and *Usul*. The most famous among them are:

Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn Musa ibn Babuwayh al-Qummi, popularly known as Shaykh as-Saduq (born cir. 306 A.H; died 381 A.H/991 CE) wrote *Man la Yahduruhu 'l-Faqih*. This book contains 5963 *ahadith* divided into 666 chapters.

Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn 'Ali at-Tusi, popularly known as Shaykhu 't-Taifah and Shaykh at-Tusi (born 385 A.H; died 466 A.H/1067 CE) wrote *Tahdhibu 'l-Ahkam* and *al-Istibsar*. *Tahdhibu 'l-Ahkam* has 393 chapters with 13590 *ahadith*; and *al-Istibsar* has 925 (or 915) chapters containing 5511 *ahadith*.

The later two books opened the way of critical study of *ahadith*, and thus laid the foundation of *ijtihad*.

You may have noticed that all three authors of these four books were named "Muhammad" and all had the kunyah of "Abu Ja'far."

In 448 A.H, the sunnis of Baghdad attacked the Shi'as and burned the house of Shaykh at-Tusi and his library, which contained many unique manuscripts. Disheartened, he left Baghdad and went to Najaf. His

disciples and seekers of knowledge followed him: this was the beginning of the town and the religious university of Najaf.

Many other collections of *ahadith* were written in the period under review, but only these four became popular and famous. There was another collection, *Madinatu 'l-Ilm*, by Shaykh as-Saduq which would have formed, in view of Shi'a scholars, as the fifth of the "early books" if it would not have been lost.

A point, which students of *hadith* must bear in mind, is that if a *hadith* is found in any of the above-mentioned four books, it does not necessarily follow that that "hadith" is authentic. On the other hand, if a *hadith* is found in other collections and fulfils all the required conditions, then it will be accepted as authentic even if it is not found in the four books.

The Three Later Books

In later period the following collections of *ahadith* became very popular:

1. Muhammad ibn Murtada ibn Mahmud, popularly known as Mulla Muhsin Fayd al-Kashani (d. 1091 A.H/1680 CE) wrote *al-Wafi*.
2. Shaykh Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Hurr al-'Amili (d. 1104 A.H/1692 CE) wrote *Wasa'ilu'sh-Shi'a*. Its new edition has been printed in 20 volumes; and contains 35850 *ahadith*.
3. Muhammad Baqir ibn Muhammad Taqi, popularly known as 'Allamah Majlisi (d. 1111 A.H/1700 CE) wrote *Biharu 'l-Anwar* in 26 bulky volumes. Its new edition in typescript has been published in 110 volumes.

It is interesting to note that these three traditionalists were also named Muhammad. They are called "the later three Muhammads."

In the 14th century, Shaykh Husayn Nuri (1254-1320 A.H) wrote *Mustadraku 'l-Wasa'il* in 1319 A.H. It contains 23,000 *ahadith*.

With the exception of *al-Kafi* and *Biharu 'l-Anwar*, the other six collections are confined to the *ahadith* related to the shari'ah laws. Among them, *al-Wafi* is considered the best in style, classification and other distinctions.

In our times, a new collection, known as *Jami'u Ahadithi'shShi'ah*, is being prepared and published which is sure to eclipse all the above-mentioned six collections. This work began by order and under patronage of the late Ayatullah Sayyid Husayn al-Burujardi (d. 1380 A.H) in Qum. The project has continued under patronage of succeeding maraji and is nearing completion. So far 25 volumes have been published.³

The Sunni Collections

It will not be out of place to give here the names of some famous collections of *ahadith* written by the sunni scholars:

1. Imam Malik ibn Anas ibn Malik (d. 175 A.H/795 CE) wrote *al-Muwatta*.
2. Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (d. 256 A.H/870 CE) wrote *Sahih al-Bukhari*,
3. Imam Muslim ibn Hajjaj an-Nishapuri (d. 261 A.H/875 CE) wrote *Sahih Muslim*.
4. Hafiz Muhammad ibn Yazid ibn Majah al-Qazwini (d. 264 A.H/886 CE) wrote *as-Sunan*.
5. Hafiz Abu Dawud Sulayman ibn Ash'ath as-Sijistani (d. 275 A.H) wrote his *as-Sunan*.
6. Hafiz Abu 'Isa Muhammad ibn 'Isa ibn Sura atTirmidhi (d. 279 A.H/893 CE) wrote *al-Jami'*, known as *Sahih at-Tirmidhi*.
7. Imam Abu 'Abdi 'r-Rahman Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb an-Nasa'i (d. 303 A.H/915 CE) wrote his *as-Sunan*. He also wrote *al-Khasa'is*.

The books nos. 2 to 7 are jointly known as *as-Sihah as-Sitta* (the six authentic books) among Sunnis.

8. The son of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal collected his *ahadith*, which is known as *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. (Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal died in 241 A.H/855 CE). This book is thought by many Sunnis to be as authentic as *as-Sihah as-Sitta*.
9. Imam Abul Qasim Sulayman ibn Ahmad at-Tabarani (d. 360 A.H) wrote *al-Mu'jamu 'l-Kabir*.
10. Imam Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Hakim anNishapuri (d. 405 A.H) wrote *al-Mustadrak 'ala Sahihayn*.
11. Imam Abdu 'r-Rahman Jalalu 'd-Din as-Suyuti (d. 911 A.H) wrote *Jam'u 'l-Jawami*
12. Shaykh Mulla Ali ibn Husamu 'd-Din al-Muttaqi alHindi (d. 975 A.H) edited the book of as-Suyuti and named it *Kanzu 'l-Ummal*.

It should be noted again that being included in, or excluded from, these books has no effect upon the authenticity or otherwise of a given hadith. As the writer of *Mishkatu 'l-Masabih* says, "The books of *as-Sihah as-Sitta* contain all types of hadith: *sahih*, *hasan* and *da'if*: Not only that. A thorough study will show that there are even many forged and completely baseless "ahadith" in these books; therefore, every hadith has to be judged on its own merits.

5. The Problem of Fabrication & its Solution

Mawdu' (موضوع) literally means forged. In Islamic Terminology it is used for a "hadith" which is not from any *Ma'sum* but has been forged by someone and attributed to a *Ma'sum*. It is haram and strictly unlawful to narrate a *Mawdu'* "*hadith*" except when it is first declared to be forged.

It is an extremely painful tragedy of early Islamic period that a good number of the companions of the Holy Prophet and many of their disciples used to fabricate *ahadith* for material benefits or for the sake of sectarian polemics. It is not possible to give full details of this tragedy here. I will enumerate some of the causes, which prompted such unscrupulous persons to lie against the Holy Prophet and Imams:

1. Some people fabricated *ahadith* to please the rulers.
2. Others fabricated *ahadith* on the spur of the moment to fit it in their talks so that their popularity brings them worldly gains.
3. Many apparently pious people forged *ahadith* to exhort their audience to do good work. Such *ahadith* are found mostly on the subject of abstaining from worldly affairs and in sermons dealing with ethics.
4. Many people forged *ahadith* to support their own religious views. For examples, the atheists (Zanadiqa زنادقة) forged at least 12,000 *ahadith* and attributed them to the Holy Prophet. A kharijite said after repenting from his previous belief; "Be careful in listening to *ahadith*; because we used to forge hadith whenever we wanted to support an opinion." Also those people who believed that Imams were gods fabricated *ahadith* in support of their belief.
5. Mu'awiyah and his successor umayyad rulers started wholesale fabrication of *ahadith* in praise of the first three khalifas and in condemnation of Imam 'Ali and his family (a.s).

Muslim history records that in the beginning of the umayyad rule, those people who forged 'the saying of the Prophet' according to the wishes of the rulers, were greatly encouraged. They were given handsome presents and heavy monthly allowances and thus they were immensely enriched. And those who dared mention any true saying of the Prophet which happened to be against the desires and wishes of the rulers, were denied their basic rights and their names were removed from the roll of *baytu 'l-mal* (public treasury). Such a person was turned away from the courts of the rulers and his statements were treated as false and were rejected.⁴

It is clear that those sayings of the Prophet, which were against the policy of the government, had more chances of being genuine than those, which were in favor of the reigning group. Those who wrote against the government were always in danger of losing their lives, property and honor. On the other hand, those who wrote for the government had a strong worldly motive to coin stories and forge traditions. The political needs of those sovereigns gave rise to many things in the hadith corpus, which were totally against the Islamic tenets.

Some examples have been given in my other books. See for example, the comment of ‘Allamah Shibli on the belief of predestination of man’s actions (in *Justice of God*) and the controversy about *mi’raj*–Ascension of the Holy Prophet (in *The Holy Prophet*).

One more example may be given here of such “*ahadith*” which attribute sins to the previous Prophets and to the Holy Prophet of Islam. Most of the rulers who are regarded as caliphs according to the Sunni belief, were fallible (*nonma’sum*), and most of them (especially from the Umayyads and then, the Abbasids) were of very low moral standard; they were more depraved than even a common man. ‘Allamah Shibli has slightly hinted at it, in the statement quoted in *Justice of God*.

Under these circumstances, it was the easiest thing for saving their skins from various charges, to invent stories and coin *ahadith* to show that even the Holy Prophet himself was not free from sins; and, therefore, there was no harm if those caliphs were guilty of various sins and crimes.

These “traditions” were forged by some companions of the Holy Prophet like Abu Hurayrah and his ilk. It is interesting to note that Abu Hurayrah accepted Islam at the end of the 7th year of hijra and remained with the Holy Prophet for about 3 years only during which period he also went to Bahrain. And he claimed to hear in such a short period so many things from the Holy Prophet that exceed by far the total *ahadith* narrated in Sunni books from the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, ‘Ali), the lady Fatimah, all wives of the Holy Prophet (including ‘Aishah), and Hasan and Husayn.

Traditionalists have counted that there are 5374 *ahadith* narrated by Abu Hurayrah. Now look at the *ahadith* of some of the above mentioned personalities recorded in Sunni books:

Abu Bakr: 142 *ahadith*

Umar: 537 *ahadith*

Uthman: 146 *ahadith*

Ali (a.s): 586 *ahadith*

TOTAL 1411 *ahadith*

And these 4 khalifas had spent together a total of about 86 years with the Holy Prophet. Now compare 1411 *ahadith* in 86 years with 5374 *ahadith* in less than 3 years!!!

What is more tragic is that Abu Hurayrah is not alone. There are scores like him, and their “*ahadith*” have found place in all Sunni books because they were companions of the Holy Prophet! It is such *ahadith* which serve as the armory for the enemies of Islam, who use them to cast doubt on the character, sincerity, integrity and truth of the Holy Prophet on Islam.

How to Test a Hadith?

Ahadith have been collected by Sunnis and Shi’as alike in different books. But all those books are a

collection of every kind of traditions. It must be clearly understood that there never was in Islam any system of canonization of the books. There was never any system of authorization by state or church for the publication of books. It helped tremendously in the advancement of knowledge, because scholars were free to write whatever they liked. But so far as traditions were concerned it corrupted the authenticity of the traditions. Forgery and corruption of *hadith* became a common disease. Soon devices had to be developed to test the authenticity or otherwise of traditions.

The first device was provided by the Holy Prophet himself. He told the Muslims to test any tradition with the Qur'an. It has been mentioned earlier that every word of the Prophet was based upon revelation. And Qur'an also was revelation. And truth from the same source of knowledge cannot differ. Therefore, if a hadith was not against Qur'an, it was to be regarded as genuine one; if, on the other hand, it was against Qur'an, the Holy Prophet ordered the Muslims to reject it outright as fabrication.⁵

The *second device* was to check the character and life of those who narrated that tradition right from the person who claimed to have heard it from the prophet to the last man in the chain.

If the chain was broken or one or more links were weak or unreliable, then the hadith lost its value. The subject which deals with the categories of the narrators is named "*Ilmu 'r Rijal* – knowledge about men." It is an objective critique of every person in the field of tradition. As it has direct bearing on the value of *ahadith*, which is a part of revelation, this is one of the most important subjects of Islamic Theology. Thus, it will appear that though the books of *ahadith* have not been purged from fabricated narrations, still we have full records by which every tradition may be tested, and accordingly accepted or rejected.

The *third device* is of *ad-Dirayah* (درایة) it literally means "knowledge." In Islamic Terminology it means verifying a hadith with "known" factors. For example, if a hadith attributed to the Holy Prophet contains a word, which was not in use in his days, it will be a proof that that hadith was forged. Or if some *rawi* mentions an event, which he did not see himself, and then he does not mention the name of his source, it will be a proof of forgery.

These three devices are the most important for sifting the authentic *ahadith* from the mass collected in the books of traditions.

¹. Al-Mufid, Kitabu 'l-Irshad (Tehran, 1377) p.250; al-Majlisi, Biharu 'l-Anwar, vol.46, p.288.

². Kitabu 'l-Irshad, p.257; al-Kafi, vol. I, p.42. In Sunni sources, see ashSha'rani, at-Tabaqatu 'l Kubra , vol. I, p.28; Abu Nu'aym, Hilyatu 'l Awliya', vol.3, pp. 193, 197.

³. It will be of interest to note that the Shi'a 'ulama in Qum are keeping themselves up to date with the new technology in research. They have worked hard to put the hadith literature on data disks and CD Rom so as to make the work of scholars easier and faster. "Markazu 'l-Mu'jam al-Fiqhi" under the patronage of the late Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Rida al-Gulpaygani (d. 1414/1993), in Qum was established for this specific purpose. It has already produced a data bank program which contains all the Shi'a collections of ahadith, as well as the important books on fiqh and usulu 'l-fiqh on micro disks and CD Rom.

In addition to that, important books of Sunni ahadith, and Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali and Zaydi jurisprudence are also included in the program. As of October 1994, more than 500 books have been put in this data bank program. Another institution in Qum, "Markaz-e Tahqiqat-e Computari" under the patronage of the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has

put the Four Early Books, Biharul 'l-Anwar, Wasa'ilu 'sh-Shi'a and Mustadraku 'l-Wasa'il into a data bank program called "Nur."

[4.](#) Ibn Abi 'l-Hadid al-Mu'tazili, Sharh Nahji 'l-Balaghah vol. 11 (Cairo: Daru Ihya'i 'l-Kutubi 'l-'Arabiyyah) pp.44-46.

[5.](#) Al-Kulayni, al-Kafi , vol. I (Tehran: Daru 'l-Kutubi 'l-Islamiyya, 1388) p. 69.

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