

Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the All-compassionate, the All-merciful

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. Endless blessings and peace be upon Muhammad—seal of the Prophets and head of the Messengers (of Allah), and upon his immaculate family and choice companions.

All the Heavenly revealed religions are undoubtedly based upon intellectual grounds, legislative bases, and theoretically and practically positive principles for sake of the religion and humankind's goodness. Islam, too, has been at the top of the Heavenly revealed religions, and has been in contact with life more than any other religion.

Moreover, it has been the most successful in the field of applying the principles to the practical life since it has been the leader of many nations throughout many successive generations. It is thus logic that such a religion enjoys the largest amount of principles, grounds, and bases of thought. The Holy Qur'an and Sunnah have been the first and most fundamental sources of the Islamic statements and rulings. Another distinctive feature of Islam is that the Almighty has undertaken protecting the Holy Qur'an against extinction and distortion. In this regard, Almighty Allah says,

“Surely, We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian” (Holy Qur'an: 15:9)

As a result, the Holy Qur'an has not encountered the same fate of the Torah and the Gospel as well as the other distorted Heavenly revealed Books. Nevertheless, the second source of the Islamic legislation, namely the Holy Sunnah, has been unfortunately exposed to distortion and fabrication since the lifetime of the Holy Prophet who attracted attentions to this point by saying,

“Anyone who attributes false reports to me must certainly find himself a place in Hellfire.”^{[1](#)}

From this cause, as well as so many other causes, the Holy Sunnah is described as presumptive. Distortions and forgeries against the Holy Sunnah have influenced the other sources of legislation and, thus, each group has interpreted the Qur'anic texts –**آيـات**– according to its narrations of the Sunnah

claiming the objective.

Other groups have exceeded all limits when they argued that the individually codified principles and rulings dispense with the reported heritage and replace its contrasts. Thus, discrepancies have branched out to include most of the principles and secondary affairs of Islam.

In the same way, the ummah (i.e. Muslim community) has branched out forming various sects and schools, each claiming following the guidance of the Holy Qur'an and the course of the Holy Prophet as well as having the right to its side and the Sunnah in its purest form.

Is it then possible to believe that all the different Islamic sects and schools are true and receiving their genuineness from Almighty Allah and the Holy Prophet, although the right path is singly one and it is necessary to search for it? Likewise, should we believe all the accusations that all the Islamic sects and schools have charged with each other?

In this manner, disputations of the various sects and schools have revolved upon vicious circle of reciprocal accusations, while the one and only thing to be adopted by a sound reason with regard to such discrepancies is to give preference to a sect over the others since it is unreasonable to decide all of them as true or decide all of them as false.

This is because the right takes only one form, and the true sect is only one. On this account, it is inescapably obligatory upon all Muslims to take individual endeavors for hitting upon the genuine norm that takes to the reality of what the Holy Prophet had conveyed from Almighty Allah.

Because the issue of regarding the Sunnah as the second authoritative principle in Islam is unanimously acceptable by all Muslims, the study should be consecrated to identifying the methods of proving a saying's ascription to the Holy Prophet. In other words, which item of the heritage attributed to the Holy Prophet should be regarded as authoritative?

To answer, it is perhaps claimed that the true Hadiths are only those authenticated according to the rules of *'Ilm al-Rijal* (The study of the manners and history of the narrators of a Hadith in order to attain reliability), while those not authenticated must be thrown away and neglected.

At first blush, the previous claim may seem to be true; but the well-versed in the affairs of the Islamic law recognize that the reliability on a definite Hadith does not depend on the *isnad*² only; rather there are certain standards and regulations to be necessarily observed in this regard.

Nevertheless, some principles and criteria of the *'Ilm al-Rijal* have been submitted to certain regulations; and neither logic criteria nor have Qur'anic principles been set as the judges in such issues. Discrepancy and contrast are therefore obvious in the judgment of a certain narrator. Moreover, the founders of the major School of Sunnite Muslim jurisprudence have been also exposed to such campaigns of criticisms and vilifications.³

Thus, a researcher will inspect nothing but a huge pile and dense mist of criteria prevailed by political senses inclining to certain sects or schools. Therefore, many untrustworthy narrators have been decided as reliable and decent, and many trustworthy have been decided as weak and doubtful.

By the same token, the isnad of many narrations that are contradictory to the reality has been decided as sound, while the isnad of many others that are soundly applicable to the reality has been decided as doubtful or even ill.

For the previous reasons, it has become inevitable that we study the Sunnah as thoroughly as possible depending upon a more series method and founding on the invariable fundamentals of Shari`ah, history, reason, and nature through investigating all the aspects, circumstances, and aims associated with a Hadith.

On the other hand, we do not intend to cancel the role of the isnad in the evaluation of a Hadith rather to have recourse to other proofs and presumptions the purpose of which is to rectify the trends of some reports that have not been duly studied.

At any rate, the matter has winded up with the result that we, at present, see a great sect of Muslims devotionally follow definite reference books of Hadith that they call *al-Sihah al-Sittah* (the six most reliable reference books of Hadith) and, on the other hand, another, yet big, group follow other reference books of Hadith that they call *al-Kutub al-Arba`ah* (the four books) regarding them as the most authenticated and the furthest from distortion and fabrication.

Thus, the following questions should be necessarily answered, at least after exposing the roots of the studied issue through historical and reported texts:

Which is the most authenticated, and where can it be found?

Are all the Hadiths recorded in *al-Sihah al-Sittah* wholly authenticated, or there lie some weak, doubtful, or even false reports?

What about the narration on the authority of the Ahl al-Bayt⁴; is it wholly authenticated, or there lie some interpolated or forged statements?

The most important and noteworthy event that has left the greatest influence on the Sunnah, in both text and significance, was the prohibition of recording and narrating the Holy Prophet's heritage. The application of this decision, taken by the two Shaykhs (namely, Abu-Bakr ibn Abi-Quhafah and `Umar ibn al-Khattab), extended to the reigns of `Uthman ibn `Affan and Mu`awiyah ibn Abu-Sufyan up to the reign of `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz who canceled it and ordered people to record the Sunnah.

Nevertheless, a group of the grand Sahabah (the Holy Prophet's companions)⁵ and Tabi'un (the followers of the Sahabah—the generation that came after the Sahabah) considered the recordation of the Hadith the one and only method that they followed even during the reign of `Umar ibn al-Khattab

whose cruelty and severity with anyone who would oppose him were the distinctive features of his reign. `Ali ibn Abi-Talib, Mu`adh ibn Jabal, Ubayy ibn Ka`b, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud, Anas ibn Malik, Abu-Sa`id al-Khidriy, Lady Fatimah al-Zahra', and Abu-Dharr, as well as many others, were among those Sahabah who recorded the Hadith.

Such great Islamic figures recorded and spread the Hadith as they regarded the decision of the prohibition as baseless and neglected the personal opinions of Abu-Bakr and `Umar, as well as those who followed them, and emptied them of any sanctity due to which they might be indisputable.

Furthermore, those Sahabah did not fear what others did. This was the origin of the discrepancy between the two methods; one is recording and narrating the Sunnah, while the other prohibiting the reporting, recordation, and writing; or ordering to reduce it. Thus, each method has had its own intellectual principles.

On this account, it is inevitable to study carefully the two schools in order to make out which is the nearest to the reality and furthest from personal motives. Away from calumination and fabrication, this study must be dedicated to analyzing the prevalent circumstances at that time as well as the characters of the individuals involved on the different levels of their lives.

The study will also not be sufficed with a Hadith's being classified as authenticated (Sahih), trustworthy (muwaththaq), good (hasan), or weak (da'if); rather it will comprehend all the aspects involved.

This is because most of the Sahabah stated that they had no knowledge whether the contents of a report they themselves narrated had been repealed or not, or whether a text said by the Holy Prophet had been his own saying or quoted from the Holy Qur'an, or the ruling appearing in the Holy Prophet's saying had been general or dedicated to definite individuals.

Likewise, they affirmed on various occasions that the verdicts they issued had not been based upon any reference of legislation; if it therefore was true, this would be originated from Almighty Allah's guidance, but if it was not, it would be Satan's, as well as their, fault.

For the previous reasons, it has become necessary to make a wide-ranging study for shedding light on the general and the obscure matters that enclosed the Sunnah and its transmitted heritage in accordance with the new scientific methodology for the purpose of distinguishing the true for the false, since such study will surely bring forth many new facts.

In addition to too many affairs respecting the Islamic legislation, the knowledgeability of the Sahabah, the jurisprudential trends that prevailed in that age, and the motives of such various trends, the study will show the contrast between the reports of those who prohibited the recordation of the Hadith and those who challenged the decision and thus recorded and narrated it.

Additionally, the study will give a perfect idea about the way of deducing the authentic reports from the

sihah and the Four Books plus the other reliable reference books of Hadith.

Let us now begin our investigation in order to set eyes on the effect of the decision of prohibiting the recordation and narration of the Sunnah along with its numerous, yet negative, consequences that contributed in the formation of the past and present structures of the Islamic schools of law.

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1. Sahih al-Bukhariy 1:52, H. 107, 108; Sahih Muslim 1:10 H. 2,3,4.

2. Isnad is a list of authorities who have transmitted a Hadith of a statement, action, or approbation of the Holy Prophet; its reliability determines the validity of a Hadith. The isnad precedes the actual text (matn) and takes the form, "It has been related to me by A on the authority of B on the authority of C on the authority of D that the Holy Prophet said..."

3. Ibn Mu'in and Ahmad ibn Salih found fault with al-Shafi'i; the founder of an Islamic school of law that took his name. (See Tahdhib al-Kamal; the footnote 24:380.) Al-Khatib al-Baghdadiy has recorded the names of thirty-five men who found fault with Abu-Hanifah; the founder of an Islamic school of law that took his name. (See Tarikh Baghdad 13:370).

Al-Razi, in his thesis about the preference of al-Shafi'iyyah School of Sunnite Jurisprudence, recorded that al-Bukhariy placed Abu-Hanifah with the weak reporters (i.e. those whose narration is unreliable) at the same time as he did not refer to al-Shafi'i at all. Al-Sibkiy, in Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyah 1:251, recorded that Abu-'Ali al-Karabisiy used to vilify at Ahmad ibn Hanbal; the founder of an Islamic school of law that took his name. al-'Iraqiy, the mentor of Ibn Hajar, also doubted Ahmad ibn Hanbal and his famous book entitled al-Musnad. (see Fayd al-Qadir 1:26)

Al-Khatib al-Baghdadiy, in Tarikh Baghdad 1:224, has mentioned a number of scholars who criticized Malik ibn Anas; the founder of an Islamic school of law that took his name. (see Tahdhib al-Kamal 24:415 and Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyah 1:189). Al-Bukhariy, al-Nassa'i, and many other master scholars have been also the target of criticism and vilification.

4. The Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House) is a term dedicated to the family of the Holy Prophet. More precisely, it is dedicated to definite individuals; namely, Imam 'Ali ibn Abi-Talib, Fatimah al-Zahra' (the Holy Prophet's daughter and Imam 'Ali's wife), al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, and al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. The nine Immaculate Imams (namely, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Sajjad, Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Baqir, Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq, Musa ibn Ja'far al-Kadhim, 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida, Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Jawad, 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al-'Askariy, and al-Mahdi the Awaited) are also within the Ahl al-Bayt.

5. Although Sahabah terminologically refer to the Holy Prophet's companions, it has included other individuals with definite qualifications. To know more about Sahabah and their qualifications, see Ahmad Husayn Ya'qub: The Conception of the Sahabah's Ultimate Decency, translated by Badr Shahin, Ansariyan Publications, I. R. Iran – 1999.

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