

About Hadith

About “Hadith”

There are several myths or misperceptions about hadith, such as the following:

1. If a hadith quotes the Prophet, we know that's exactly what the Prophet said
2. *Sahih* collections contain hadith that are indisputable
3. There is no contradiction in any hadith
4. Hadith provides knowledge or information that is certain or definitive

For the discussion on hadith in this essay, myth-1 and -4 are particularly relevant. What is important to note here is that a hadith being *sahih* (authentic) does not necessarily mean that it provides definitive (or certainty of) knowledge. Only *mutawatir* type of hadith - a hadith which is reported by such a large number of people that they cannot be expected to agree upon a lie, all of them together - yields certainty of knowledge about a particular hadith. Even then, only *mutawatir bil lafz* (*mutawatir* hadiths that contain exact words in each chain) belongs to this category of hadith that yields certainty of knowledge. *Mutawatir bil ma'na* (*mutawatir* hadiths that contain only similar, but not exact words in each chain) does not carry the same weight. The first type, *mutawatir bil lafz*, is very few in number. Indeed, scholars have identified fewer than a dozen hadiths that belong to this category. Non-*mutawatir* hadiths are known as *ahad* (solitary). Since *mutawatir* hadiths are fewer than a dozen (out of hundreds of thousands of hadiths including the variations of chains), it can be said that virtually **all hadiths, including *sahih* hadiths, are *ahad* and yield only probabilistic knowledge.**

They can still be reasonably reliable for guidance, and Muslims should utilize them for guidance and solutions, if properly authenticated in terms of both chains and contents, as long as we (a) acknowledge the probabilistic nature of the source and **do not claim certainty** in regard to the issue in question, (b) **do not formulate laws, codes or dogmas** that are too rigid or harsh, especially pertaining to people's life, honor and property, and (c) **do not claim finality** in terms of authoritativeness of any laws, codes or dogmas that are arrived at using such probabilistic sources.

[\[Riba, Interest and Six Hadiths: Do We Have a Definition or a Conundrum? By Dr. Mohammad Omar Farooq. For electronic copy click & http://ssrn.com/abstract=1528770\]](http://ssrn.com/abstract=1528770)

In addition to the views proposed by Shafi'i and Albani, there are other suggestions as to which *ahad* or *gharib* ahadith are binding. Thus some scholars have suggested that *ahad* traditions found in Bukhari and Muslim are binding. This view is hardly superior to those of Shafi'i and Albani. For, while it is true that Bukhari and Muslim are the most carefully compiled collections of ahadith, there is no reason to think that every hadith found in their collections is authentic whereas every hadith not found in them is inauthentic and may be ignored. Contradictory traditions are found within Bukhari and Muslim separately as well as within the material agreed upon by them both (see my article, "Facing Contradictions Among Ahadith"). **This means that some ahadith in Bukhari and Muslim, even those on which both of them agree, are not authentic and we cannot make any collection of traditions binding** knowing that some of them are falsely attributed to the Prophet.

[\[Accepting a Hadith From a Single Narrator, By: Dr. Ahmad Shafaat \(May, 2004\). For electronic copy click & here\]](#)

Starting in the late 1000s, however, as the Mu'tazilite rationalist threat faded from view and **Sunni** Islam emerged triumphant, hadith critics began writing books that **rejected whole Prophetic traditions**, often because their meanings were unacceptable. These books were known as works of *mawdu'at*, which listed '*mawdu'*, or 'forged' hadiths. pg 99

We start finding a willingness **openly to reject hadiths because their meanings are unacceptable** in the early *mawdu'at* book of al-Jawzaqani (d. 543/1148-9), who states 'Every hadith that contradicts the Sunna is cast away and the person who says it is rejected as a transmitter'⁷⁷ This process reached a plateau with the *al-manar al-munif fi al-shahih wa al-da'if* ('The Lofty Lighthouse for Authentic and Weak Hadiths'), the *mawdu'at* book of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), who devoted a large section of the work to listing all the features of a hadith's contents that demonstrated it was forged.

Of course, freely engaging in content criticism was opening a Pandora's box. A critic might fall into exactly that trap that the early *ahl al-hadith* claimed they were avoiding: making man's flawed reason the arbiter of religious truth. Although later critics would maintain, as **Ibn al-Jawzi states, 'any hadith that you see contradicting reason or fundamental principles [of Islam], know that is it forged,'** they would insist that one should not be too hasty in such judgments. After all, the critic might not have grasped the proper way of reconciling such contradictions.⁷⁸ This tension between submitting one's reason to a transmitted text and using one's reason to evaluate the text's authenticity has furnished fertile ground for **debate among Muslim scholars until today.**

⁷⁷ -Al-Husayn b. Ibrahim al-Jawzaqani, *al-Abatil wa al-manakir wa al-sihah wa al-mashahir*, pp. 89-90.

⁷⁸ - Ibn al-Jawzi, *Kitab al-mawdu'a*, vol. 1, p. 106

(The methods and history of hadith criticism, pg 100)

[[Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World - By Jonathan A.C. Brown \(2009\)](#)]

Many Muslims might not know that while **Sahih al-Bukhari** is the most highly regarded collection of the Prophetic narrations (and deservedly so), he **did not specify what criteria he used to evaluate a narration** and select certain ones for his collection. Indeed, the compilers of the six major collections [*sihah al-sitta*][¹] generally have not specified or disclosed their criteria. Other scholars later have attempted to identify what might have been their criteria, in a manner of "reverse engineering."^[2]

"Most of the authors of **six principal books of hadith did not describe their criteria** in selecting the material, except for a sentence here and there, but it is possible to arrive at some conclusions from their writings. Hazimi and Maqdisi studied the subject. They studied the qualities of narrators whose ahadith have been recorded in those books and tried to find out a general rule. Hazimi says that those scholars had certain criteria in accepting a narrator whose hadith they were going to record in their books."^[3]

[¹] There are differences of opinions about which six exactly are those collections. Inclusion of Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim is not disputed. The others that are generally acknowledged are: Abu Dawood, Tirmizi, Nasai, and Ibn Majah.

[²] [Reverse engineering](#) means the process of determining how something was constructed by examining only the finished product. Maqdisi was a noted scholar of sixth century AH and contemporary of Ibn Salah.. He wrote *Risalat al-Hafiz Mohammad ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi fi Shurut Kutub al-a'imma al-Sitta*. Muhammad b 'Uthman al-Hazimi is another scholar (d.584/1188), who probed into determining the criteria used by hadith compilers. His book is *Shurut al-A'imma al-Khamsah* (ed. M.Z. al-Kauthari, Cairo, N.D.).

[³] Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature* [Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1977], p. 90.

[[Shariah, Law and Islam: Legalism vs. Value-Orientation, By Dr. Mohammad Omar Farooq, for electronic copy click !\[\]\(b792654f2cef9719eabeb6c5be00811e_img.jpg\) here](#)]

In its own words, the Qur'an is the God-given "criterion" (al-Furqan) that reveals what is right and what is wrong (2:185; 25:1). As the Qur'an tells us, Allah revealed two things to the Prophet (saw): the Qur'an and its bayan (interpretation) Qur'an 75:17-19. Since his hadiths and Sunnah interpret the Qur'an, his words and practices symbolize the interpretation. Given this, both the Qur'an and the interpretation should compliment, and be in perfect harmony with, each other. **If any component of the interpretation (i.e., hadith) conflicts with the Qur'an, it must be rejected as unacceptable, even if it is attributed to the Prophet (saw).** The Qur'an not only guides, but also mediates all disputes (4:59). Since the Qur'an represents Allah's authority, the hadith's contents can be checked against it. If there is no conflict,

the hadith should be declared authentic. If there is an insurmountable conflict, it should be declared unreliable. [Dr. Israr Ahmad Khan (not to be confused with Dr. Israr Ahmed of Pakistan) is a professor in the department of Quran and Sunnah studies, International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and has been on the faculty since 1991. Previously he has taught at Aligarh Muslim University, India. For electronic copy click [👉 here](#)]

In a book, *What is Riba?*, Allamah Iqbal Ahmad Khan Suhail explains this **fact about hadith** that is often not known and understood by common Muslims, because our scholars do not adequately and specifically educate us about this aspect.

"Most of the narrations are derivations [i.e., not quotes of actual words], that is, the **actual words of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) have not been quoted in the narration** and whatever the narrator understood to be the meaning of the Prophet's (pbuh) words, according to his capacity and capability, he narrated with the best of intention as the saying of the Holy Prophet (pbuh). Now, everyone knows that besides words even the slightest change of delivery can induce great difference in the meaning."¹

Of course, when variation in narrations exist (and such variations are all too common), it poses a serious problem as to what were the exact words used by the Prophet. This is important because in Arabic language, even a slight variation of words (and sometimes letters) can lead to divergent meanings.

[Shafi'i] replied: A word might be omitted from the tradition and thus alter its meaning; or a word might be pronounced differently from the way it was pronounced by the transmitter, thus altering the meaning of the tradition, even though he who pronounced it did not intend to do so. If he who transmits a tradition is ignorant of its meaning, he does not understand the tradition, and we do not accept it. [For] if he transmits what he does not understand, he is of those who do not transmit the tradition word for word; and he seeks to transmit the meaning of the tradition, but he does not understand the meaning at all.²

Should we conclude from the above statement of Imam Shafi'i that unless word for word, transmissions are not acceptable? Ironically, we can't, because he himself does not apply that standard in determining authentication of a hadith, the application of which would be binding from the viewpoint of Islamic *fiqh* (law).

In the following segments, the pertinent hadiths will be discussed in assessing the assertion that *riba* is defined by certain "authenticated" hadiths. It is important to keep in mind that even though Islamic scholars utilize and apply hadith rather broadly in formulating Islamic laws, **the scholars also generally agree and acknowledge that even authentic (sahih) hadiths yield only probabilistic knowledge.**

[Islamic Law and the Use and Abuse of Hadith, By Dr. Mohammad Omar Farooq, For electronic copy click [👉 here](#)]

Azmi and also in that of Abbott - to which I shall turn in a moment - is that they do not seem to realize that, even if a manuscript or a papyrus is unearthed with an allegedly ancient text, this

¹ Iqbal Ahmad Khan Suhail. *What is Riba?* [New Delhi, India: Pharos, 1999], p. 47.

² Al-Shafi'i. *Al-Shafi'i's Risala: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence* [translated by Majid Khadduri; Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 2nd Edition, 1987], p. 244, #374.

text could very easily have been forged by an authority who lived at a time later than the supposedly oldest authority given in its isnad. **Isnad fabrication occurred, as everybody is bound to agree, on just as vast a scale as matn fabrication.** And internal evidence gleaned from isnads should always be suspect because of this wide-scale forgery, exactly as each matn should be scrutinized as to historical feasibility and never be accepted on the basis of solely isnad criteria.

[For electronic copy click [☞ Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith](#), by **GHA Juynboll** (Pg 4)]

If a scholar of the *Shafi'i* or *Hanafi* school of law found a hadith in al-Bukhari or Muslim's collections that he disagreed with, he had no compunction about criticizing its authenticity. The *Sahihayn* were thus not immune to criticism. **Only in the early modern and modern periods has it become controversial to criticize the *Sahihayn*, but this is primarily due to Muslim scholars' eagerness to protect the status of two books that they see as symbols of an Islamic tradition under attack from modernity.**

[[The Canonization of Al-Bukhari and Muslim](#), pp. 255-260, **Jonathan A.C. Brown**]

In our discussion of *Mukhtaif al-hadith*, which is the subject of an earlier chapter, some examples are given of hadith, as some are also given in the following pages, which appear in *al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*, *Abu Dawud* and others. A careful reading of the text, in these examples, reveals a weakness so much so that the hadith in question could hardly be accepted as an authentic saying of the Prophet Muhammad. One would have expected in such instances that the compiler of such controversial materials would have rejected them and refused to document them in the category of *Sahih* hadith, or even any hadith for that matter. **Weak and even fabricated hadith are found in the hadith collections,** and although not extensive, the presence even on a limited scale, of such controversial hadith tends to **undermine confidence in the veracity of the larger corpus of hadith.**

[[A Textbook of Hadith Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadith](#), by M Hashim Kamali, [Conclusion and Reform Proposals, Pg. 195-6/206], for electronic copy [☞ here](#)]

Many *ahl-hadith* scholars during al-Bukhari and Muslim's time therefore criticized the compilation of the *Sahihayn*. A famous hadith scholar from Rayy in Iran, Abu Zur'a al-Razi (d. 264/878), said of the two authors, 'These are the people who wanted prominence before their time, so they did something of which they could boast; they wrote books the likes of which none had written before to gain for themselves precedence.' The *ahl-hadith* also worried if hadith scholars wrote books limited to authentic hadiths, their opponents from the *ahl al-ra'y* would use that as a weapon against them. Abu Zura described Muslim as 'making a path for the people of heresy against us, for they see that they can respond to a hadith that we use as proof against them by saying "That is not in the *Sahih!*"' Under fire from such critics, al-Bukhari and Muslim defended themselves by saying that their books did not include *all* the *sahih* hadiths in circulation. **al-Bukhari had only selected *sahih* hadiths useful for his legal discussions,** and Muslim had limited his book to hadiths whose authenticity he believed was agreed on by all. - Abu Zur'a al-Razi, *Abu Zur'a al-Razi wa juhuduhu fi al-sunna al-nabawiyya*, p. 2:674-676; Jonathan A.C. Brown, *The Canonization of Al-Bukhari and Muslim*, pp. 92-94

[[Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World](#) - By **Jonathan A.C. Brown** (2009), pg 38]

Let him who examines this book of mine know that I (**i.e., al-Tabari**) have relied, as regards everything I mention therein which I stipulate to be described by me, solely upon what has been transmitted to me by way of reports which I cite therein and traditions which I ascribe to their narrators, to the exclusion of what may be apprehended by rational argument or deduced by the human mind, except in very few cases.

This is because knowledge of the reports of men of the past and of contemporaneous views of men of the present do not reach the one who has not witnessed them nor lived in their times except through the accounts of reporters and the transmission of transmitters, to the exclusion of rational deduction and mental inference. **Hence, if I mention in this book a report about some men of the past, which the reader of listener finds objectionable or worthy of censure because he can see no aspect of truth nor any factual substance therein, let him know that this is not to be attributed to us but to those who transmitted it to us and we have merely passed this on as it has been passed on to us** [Abû Ja-far Muḥammad bin Jarîr al-Ṭabarî, *Târiḫ al-Ṭabarî: Târiḫ al-Umam wal-Mulûk*, 1997, Volume I, Dâr al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut (Lebanon), pp. 13.]

The Qur'ân categorically and unambiguously forbids ribâ in a special sense. However, as it is widely acknowledged, the Qur'ân does not define it. For that Muslims turn to Hadîth. Unfortunately, even with **all the Hadîth about ribâ combined, the definition is still not clear** and that is why in applying the categorical prohibition and determining its scope jurists and scholars have reached widely varied and often incongruous positions.

[[Qarḍ Ḥasan, Wadî'ah/Amānah and Bank Deposits: Applications and Misapplications of Some Concepts in Islamic Banking by Dr. Mohammad Omar Farooq](#). For electronic copy click <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1418202>]

It is clear that the Quran, being the last of God's scriptures to mankind, is the only infallible source of our guidance.

Other sources, including previous scriptures as well the hadith/sunna, are subject to Quranic criticism. What passes this criticism is acceptable; what fails is automatically rejected. This is plain, as the following verses state:

*Shall I seek other than God as a source of law, when He revealed to you this Book fully detailed? Even those who received previous scripture recognize that it came down from your Lord, truthfully. Therefore, you shall not harbor any doubt
Shall we treat the Muslims like criminals? What is wrong with you? How do you judge?
Do you have another book that you apply? One that gives you anything you want?*

So, do the hadith writers have another book that they apply? One that gives them everything? Is this why God revealed the earth-shaking verse that we have quoted several times?

The messenger will say, "My Lord, my people have deserted this Quran."

We cannot, therefore, use any other book other than the Quran to make our laws and punish the guilty, attributing these laws to God. But what do the hadith writers say? They say that anyone who does not accept the hadith books immediately become unbelievers. They insist that the hadith, although it is not the Quran, must be accepted. To them the hadith is "the other book that they apply, one that gives them anything they want," as the Quran puts it precisely and beautifully.

To place the hadith on an equivalent footing with revelation is to create another source of guidance – an idol. This is the major problem with the hadith. When we invite them to believe in God alone through the Quran, they hesitate, but when we throw in the false hadith and other false teachings, then they are happy!

However accurate the **methodology of the isnad**, the scholars first started talking about it and started writing it down only about 150 - 200 years after the deaths of the very last tabi`i tabi`in. This means that when the research to establish the isnad got started, none of the Companions, the succeeding generation or the generation coming after them were available to provide any kind of guidance, confirmation or rebuttal. Therefore, **the authenticity of the statements cannot be vouched for at all.**

[HADITH A RE-EVALUATION, By: **Kassim Ahmad** Translated from the Malay original by Syed Akbar Ali (1997). For electronic copy click [here](#)]

Fabricated and Forged reclassified as Authentic: (Case 1)

Although the early masters Ibn Ma'in, al-Bukhari, Abu' Zur'a al-Razi, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn 'Adi, al-Daraqutni, and al-Khatib al-Baghdadi all declared that various versions of the hadith **'I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its door'** were baseless, later critics such as al-'Ala'i, Ibn Hajar, and al-Suyuti all agreed that, when taken together, these narrations made the hadith *hasan*.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ - Al-Ajluni, Kashf al-khafa, vol. 1, pp. 236-237.

[The methods and history of hadith criticism, pg. 109, By **Jonathan A.C. Brown**]

Authentic reclassified as Fabricated and Forged: (Case 2)

Ahmad Al-Ghumari (d. 1960) concluded that the famous hadith in which the Prophet explained that the **greatest Jihad was the struggle against one's own soul** was **authentic**, while classical critics had considered it weak or forged.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ - Ahmad Al-Ghumari, Dar 'al-daf' 'an hadith man 'ashiq fa-'aff, p. 121.

[Prophetic Traditions in the modern Muslim world, pp. 259-260, By **Jonathan A.C. Brown**]

Laylatul Qadr knowledge (Case 3)

Narrated Mu'awiyah b. Abi Sufyan: The Prophet (ﷺ) as saying: Lailat al-qadr is the **twenty-seventh** night (of Ramadan) **Grade: Sahih (Al-Albani)**, for electronic copy click [Reference: Sunan Abi Dawud 1386](#)
English translation: [Book 6, Hadith 1381](#)

The historical facts of the science called “Science of Hadith” confirms that the **invention of “Attribution” was in the second century HC**. Many verbal narratives were embedded with lies. Muslim scholars made it a condition to link those narratives to narrators who died in between the middle of the second century HC and narrators from the era of the Prophet. The dead narrators with whom these links were made, however, had no knowledge of the Hadith attributed to them. Accordingly, in the more recent age of documentation, some scholars contested the names as they had been written down in the era of Caliph Al-Ma'moon. We concluded this through our specialized research.

Then the Hadith writers began to differ and fight among themselves in changing or slandering the narrator according to sectarian differences or personal mood. Here, Al-Zahaby says in his famous book about authentication and modification "Scale of Moderation": “The scholars of this topic were never unanimous in modifying a 'weak' rating or weakening a 'trustworthy' rating.” The science of “Hadith Authentication & Modification” was based on the doctrinal, theological and intellectual differences among Muslims in the Abbasid era and what

followed.

[For electronic copy click [🔗 Attribution/Ascription in Hadith \(Isnad\) vs. Belief in the Quran, A Study of Methodology](#), By [Dr. Ahmed Subhy Mansour](#)]

In short, **hadith**

- Is not actual and exact words of the Prophet^{SAS}
- Is meaning relayed by each narrator in the chain as per his comprehension capacity
- Passed down the generations in transmission merely as hearsay
- *Isnad* methodology and institution is a much later development, a century or even two according to some academics, after the Prophetic era
- *Isnad* fabrication occurred on just as vast scale as *Matan* fabrication
- *Raavi* (Narrator's) perceived strength or weakness is not unanimous and contention-free among Hadith scholars
- Contradicts with other hadith
- Gives only probabilistic knowledge
- Does not give certainty and finality
- *Mutawatir* and *Sahih*, even these are not binding
- Is rejected when the meaning is unacceptable
- Is declared forged when it contradicts reason and fundamental principle of Islam
- Is rejected when it contradicts the Quran
- Should never be accepted based on sole *isnad* criteria
- Within *Bukhari* and *Muslim* and even agreed upon by both also are not all authentic
- Cannot be used to formulate laws and codes
- Collectors mentioned no criteria for selection or rejection
- Grading is not permanent as classification process continues and flips hadith grading upside down, hadith considered fabricated for 1200+ years suddenly gets upgraded to authentic and vice versa (See Case 1 and Case2, above)
- Grading is unreliable by virtue of organic (live) classification process
- Grading has no use or purpose. For instance (as can be seen in Case 3, above) even ardent admirers of the grader (Albani) abandon his graded hadith and joins the majority in 14 century old tradition seeking and searching Laylatul Qadr in all odd nights
- Studies (origin and evolution research works on *Hadith* literature) is a never-ceasing enterprise, all but drawing practically the same conclusion as arrived by Ignaz Goldziher
- Science is not a science by definition as neither can it be experimented nor verified with falsification test process
- (Lastly and lethally) when place on an equivalent footing with the revelation without, or before, subjecting it to rigorous Quran litmus test is tantamount to setting up another book of guidance parallel to the Revealed Quran and undermining one of its key and great attribute (Furqan)!