

# **The Fallacies of Anti-Hadith Arguments**

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**Answered by Shaykh Shahidullah Faridi**

**Question:**

**What is a typical course of study for the Hanbali mathab? What books should I read?**

**Answer:**

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**7 THE □ALLACIES OF ANTI-HADITH ARGUMENTS**

**SHAH SHAHIDULLAH FARIDI**

**It has become the common practice in modern times for western educated people in Islamic countries to claim to be able to reinterpret Islam by reference to the Holy Qur'an only, disregarding entirely the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet on one pretext or another. Unwittingly or wittingly by this means they strike at the very foundation of Islam on which it has been □irmly based for the last fourteen centuries.**

**The aim of these attempts is to reduce Islam to a set of general principles, many of which are of their own conception, or derived from their study of western literature, and so enable them to live a life patterned on western Europe while fixing the label of Islam to it.**

**This practice has become so common in its various form that it is time that the position of the Sunnah of t□e Prophet be made clear to those Muslims, who, for lack of essential knowledge of the structure of the religion of Islam may be enticed into □his misguided way of thinking. The spread of**

**these so-called “modern” ideas would have incalculably disastrous effects on the thought and practice, and collective life of the world of Islam.**

**It should be well understood that the exponents of this newfangled theory (new-fangled with relation to the original authorities of Islam, though it has been tried out on various occasions in Islamic history) are themselves entirely devoid of the essential knowledge required for expressing any opinion about Islam. The Qur’an has been studied in translation without an solid grounding in the Arabic language, the books of Hadith and the earliest sources of.**

**Islamic Law have not been studied at all, even Islamic history is only known at third or fourth hand. How anyone, with such hopelessly inadequate preparation can have the affrontery to pontificate about such a deep subject as Islam, is one of the tragedies of the modern era. In previous, more enlightened times he would have been dismissed as a mischievous ignoramus but today even the flimsiest superficiality passes for learning, and mere mental aberrations for thought.**

**History is blatantly contradicted, logic is flouted, as if these two essentials of intelligent human thinking are of no value. Indeed, they are of no value to those who wish to put forward pure fictions of their imagination as truth, for history and logic are their worst enemies.**

**We intend to show here that the Sunnah of the Prophet is an integral part of Islam in addition to the Qur’an. No one denies or can deny, that the Qur’an is the foundation of Islam, being the direct word of God to man. All principles of thought and action, spirituality and morality, private and social life in Islam are ultimately derived from the Holy Book. But the Holy Book itself was sent through the Prophet in fact, the Prophet is the guarantee of the Holy Book.**

**It is necessary, in order to be a messenger of God, to be free from any possibility of error and deviation, for any possibility of error would affect the reliability of the Holy Book. This is why the profession of faith of a Muslim consists of two fundamentals only, belief in the Divinity of Allah and the truth of the Prophethood of Muhammad. The truth of the Qur’an follows from these two basic postulates, and so it is not mentioned separately.**

**But perhaps our present day “reformers” do not accept the “Good Word” (Kalimah Tayyibah) which has from the beginning been the mark distinguishing the believer from the unbeliever, for it is only referred to and not spelled out in the Qur’an. To what depths of absurdity the misused logic of man can sink!**

**A messenger of God, being necessarily free from error, receives continuous and permanent guidance from God.**

**This guidance has been described most meaningfully by God Himself in the Qur'an:**

**Thou art indeed of the envoys, on a straight path (36:3-4).**

**The Prophet cannot take any step but that it will be on the straight path; it is impossible for him to deviate from this path even an inch onto a crooked one. God had elucidated the meaning of this straight path on another occasion:**

**Indeed, my lord is on a straight path (11:56).**

**It is the path to God, the path of truth and guidance, and the Prophet has been assured by God that he is without question and without intermission on this path. Not only this, God also states of Himself that:**

**He guides whom He wills to a straight path (2:142).**

**And then again assures the Prophet that:**

**Thou indeed guidest (men) to a straight path (42:52),**

**i.e., not only the Prophet himself is on the Straight Path, but guidance too has been confirmed by God as leading to this path, and guidance is, as it were, God's guidance. The Prophet, like Muslims, used to pray "Guide us to the straight path", as in Surah al-Fatihah, since the continuous guidance he received was not of himself but of God, and as a servant of God he was continually in need of it, but God has in his case permanently granted this prayer in the Qur'an itself:**

**Thou art indeed of the envoys, on a straight path (36:3-4).**

**It is established by these verses of God's Word that the Prophet is guided permanently and absolutely by God, and this guidance is not merely confined to the receiving and transmitting of the Qur'an. God's assurance in this regard is without any provisions or limitations. But the "modernists" not only claim that the guidance given to the Prophet is confined to the Qur'an, but also that his function as a Prophet is confined to the delivering of that Qur'an, that the rest of his activities were only carried on in the capacity of the leader of the community, and consequently have no permanent significance.**

**But God has given us a book “in which there is no doubt” and the Prophet’s functions have been enumerated in detail:**

**Allah has indeed shown grace to the believers in sending them a messenger from among themselves who reciteth unto them His revelations, and purifieth them and teacheth them the Book and Wisdom (3:164).**

**Here God has told us of the four functions of the Prophet, of which only the first refers to the Qur’an, “reciting His revelations”; the other three are besides this, of “purifying”, “teaching the Book” and “teaching Wisdom”. These four functions have been described as the purpose for which God has sent the Messenger, and God’s guidance to man will be fulfilled and completed by all and not by one only.**

**All these functions are therefore part of God’s guidance through the person of the Prophet.**

**The purpose of sending the Messenger is, apart from “reciting His revelations,” firstly to “purify” them, for the proper understanding of the Book and “wisdom,” and the ability to put them into practice, is unattainable unless a purification of the heart, the centre of the will and intentions, has not been achieved. This purification consists of the spiritual influence of the Holy Prophet’s personality, and his continual exhortations to the believers by word and example in the light of the Qur’an to purify their thoughts and deeds.**

**The next stage after this purification is the “teaching of the Book,” that is, to explain and demonstrate the implications of the Book, and to apply it to the circumstances of human life in the most excellent way. Finally, the “teaching of wisdom” refers to the development into a science of certain subjects treated in general in the Qur’an, such as spiritual science, moral science, the science of the Shari’ah, of government etc., regarding all of which we can find valuable guidance both theoretical and practical from the Prophet.**

**These four main functions of the Prophet have been instituted and carried out by the command under the guidance of God Himself, and constitute an integral part of God’s message to mankind. To state that only the first function is of permanent significance is simply to flout the Word of God.**

**The Qur’an is not only “without any doubt” but it is also a Clear Book (Kitab al-Mubin) and the basic principles of the Islamic faith have been stated by God in the most unmistakable terms. The status and importance of the Sunnah have been decisively asserted in the following verse:**

**You have indeed in the Messenger of God as good example for him who looks forward to God and the Last Day and remembers God much (33:21)**

**By the use of this expression “a good example” (Uswatun Hasanah), Allah has given the Sunnah and the Hadith of the Prophet a permanent and vital position in the religion of Islam, and further has mentioned as the qualification of those who will appreciate and accept this position that they look forward to their meeting with God and to the Last Day, and as a result always remember Allah.**

**Following the Prophet’s example has been made a part of faith, an accompaniment to faith in Allah, and the Last Day, and anyone who does not accept and follow this example cannot claim, by the evidence of the Word of God itself, to be complete in faith. Here the word “example” has been used absolutely, not limited to any particular aspect of the Prophet’s life, and so covers his words, his deeds, his permissions and prohibitions, his private and public behaviour, his worship and his administration, his moral qualities and his manners.**

**The Prophet’s Sunnah is hereby elevated to the position of a divine institution in Islam, and his sayings a divinely authorised interpretation of God’s message. In the verse discussed previously, God stated Allah hath indeed shown grace to the believers in sending them a messenger among themselves who reciteth unto them the Book and wisdom.**

**The special grace shown to the believers in the Final Message of Allah to mankind is that Allah has not only sent an authoritative Book in which the principles of faith and practice are laid down, but in order to make the “straight path” more clearly distinguished and easier to travel, has also sent a living example to show the perfect expression of these principles in human life; in other words, Allah has granted us that special grace of sending both the principles and their application.**

**The Qur’an is the verbal message, and the Prophet is the human message – the projection of the verbal message into the sphere of human behaviour. Allah has stated that those who look forward to meeting Him and to the Last Day, and who remember Him much, will certainly accept this human message, and the more their faith and their remembrance become firmly established, the more they will be able to profit by it and to identify themselves with it.**

**Those Muslims from the Companions onwards who have always treated the following of the Sunnah as an article of faith were not merely acting on their personal opinion; they were obeying the clear injunctions of the Qur’an, and this explains the utmost care they took to preserve the Prophet’s practice and sayings and transmit them to those who came after.**

**We have seen that Allah has defined the functions of the Prophet, and set up his personality in all its aspects as a model on which Muslims should pattern their lives. It remains to discover exactly to what extent Muslims are obliged to follow this pattern; with what particular emphasis this duty has been laid upon them. The reply to this question is immediately forthcoming:**

**Obey Allah and obey the Prophet (5:92),**

**where we are told that just as Allah's orders in the Qur'an are worthy of obedience, so are the interpretations and applications of Allah's orders by the Prophet equally binding on the Muslim Community.**

**In fact, Allah's orders and the orders of the Prophet based on them are essentially one, for:**

**Whoever obeys the Prophet, he has obeyed Allah (4:80).**

**It is part of Allah's infinite wisdom and kindness towards mankind that the main principles of Islam have been stated clearly in the Qur'an, while the application of these principles has been left to the Prophet, but the Prophet's orders are authorised and confirmed by Allah, so that obedience to the Prophet's order is really obedience to Allah.**

**It is plain from the preceding examination of the Sunnah in Islam and of what Muslim's attitude should be towards it, that the whole life of the Prophet is inspired by Allah, that he is perfectly guided at every moment by divine revelation. It would be impossible otherwise for Allah to hold him up as an unflinching example to mankind, or to order implicit obedience to him.**

**But the highly illogical stand of the "modernists" is that revelation is confined only to the Qur'an and that the Prophet's words and deeds, apart from transmitting the Qur'an to mankind, are uninspired by Allah, and therefore not binding on succeeding generations. This stand, as has already been shown, is quite untenable in the light of Allah's commands to the Muslim Community regarding the personality of the Prophet, but it is untenable also for the reason that the Qur'an makes it quite clear that revelation (wahy) is not confined to Books of Allah, but is a continuous process in the lives of the Prophets. There are numerous incidents related in the Qur'an about Prophets receiving revelation as a process quite apart from the revelation of Books.**

**For instance, Allah said to Adam:**

**O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden (2:35),**

**and their Lord called them:**

**Did I not forbid you . . . (7:22).**

**In the case of Noah:**

**And it was inspired in Noah: No one of thy folk will believe save him who hath believed already (11:36); Load therein two of every kind (11:11); O Noah, he is not one of thy household (11:46).**

**Allah states of Abraham:**

**That is our argument, which we gave to Abraham against his folk (6:83); O Abraham, forsake this (11:26);**

**Jacob said:**

**I do indeed scent the presence of Joseph, and when he recovered his eyesight, he said:**

**Did I not say to you that I know from Allah that which you know not? (12:94 ff.).**

**In the case of Joseph:**

**We inspired in him: thou wilt tell them of this deed of theirs when they know not (12:15).**

**Allah called to Moses in the valley of Tuwa:**

**O Moses, verily I am thy Lord (20:12),**

**and then:**

**. . . hearken to what is inspired.**

**Again:**

**We inspired Moses saying: Take away my slaves by night (20:77).**

**These are only some of the many instances which can be given, in all of which reference is made to revelations from Allah to the Prophets on which have nothing to do with the revelations of Books.**

**We cannot stress too much the point that in order to be a “good example” to Muslims, it is necessary that the Prophet be at all times under the**

**inspiration of Allah. Matters connected with the preaching of Islam and spiritual training of the believers, are specifically stated by Allah to be under His auspices, but even in the details of worldly life without inspiration it would be impossible to be an example, and that too for all Muslims at all times.**

**No man by his own efforts or by dint only of his own natural qualities could personify Islam. It is no argument to bring forward the occasions when the Prophet stated that he was only speaking from personal opinion. These occasions were when the matter concerned did not involve any religious or moral question, such as methods of cultivation, or the placing of the troops in battle.**

**Another occasion was when deciding a case after hearing the evidence of both sides, for it is part of the Prophet's example, as inspired by Allah, that cases should be decided on the outward evidence, and anyone who falsifies evidence in such a way that his deceit is not outwardly apparent, may have the case decided in his favour but have to pay for his deceit before Allah.**

**The Prophet has been expressly ordered in the Qur'an to decide matters of worldly expediency after consulting with his followers:**

**Consult with them upon the conduct of affairs (3:159).**

**The exercise of human reason on the occasions which warrant it is also part of the Prophet's example, and is under the commands of Allah. Neither is it an argument to say that the Prophet used to draw conclusions from the Qur'an by the exercise of reason, for Allah has made it quite plain, as has already been shown, that the Prophet's application of Qur'anic principles is authorised by Himself and is to be taken as from Himself.**

**It therefore follows that the reasoning used by the Prophet for drawing conclusions from the Qur'an is itself inspired.**

**That Allah inspires Prophets with reasoning as well as conclusions is expressed in the Qur'an:**

**That is Our argument, which We gave to Abraham against his folk (6:83), where a whole process of reasoning is inspired to the Prophet Abraham.**

**To sum up, the Hadith and the Sunnah of the Prophet are demonstrated by the Qur'an to be divinely inspired and to form a permanent part of the message of Allah to man. The interpretation of the Qur'an by the Prophet is authoritative – the only difference between the injunctions of Allah in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet is that the direct injunctions of Allah are compulsory whereas the Sunnah, being an "example" is to be**



performed to the best of one's ability. But deliberate neglect or, as with some of the "modernists," complete denial of the Sunnah is nothing but open contravention of the Holy Book.

### **The truth about Hadith**

It is a sign of the influence of a great deal of loose talk in criticism of Hadith, which has become fashionable in some circles, that the heading given to the report in a newspaper recently was simply "Hadith should not be treated as a source of law." The heading, of course, is blatantly incorrect and misleading, and does not conform to the words reported below; but it is characteristic of a mentality which has been biased by sweeping and ill-informed remarks about the Hadith. The sayings and actions of the Prophet, which include what is known as the Sunnah, or his practice, are both as a matter of faith and as a matter of fact a source of Muslim law, and are so by Divine Command and by the very nature of things.

The Qur'an deals extensively with matters of faith and morality, the nature of Allah, the reality of Prophethood, the Day of Judgement, the life of the next world, the principles of worship, or human relationships and the inward attitude man must cultivate towards Allah and his fellowmen; it also lays down civil and criminal laws, but of necessity, since the Qur'an is intended to be easily read, understood and encompassed, detailed application of the law is not its subject, and it is part of Allah's providence that this should be demonstrated by His Prophet.

This element in God's message to man, that is to say, its practical application by the Prophet, was clearly asserted in the Qur'an, and understood as an indivisible and vital part of Islam both by the Prophet himself and his Companions. Under Allah's inspiration, the Prophet developed legal ordinances in the light of the Qur'an which were intended by him and accepted by his Companions to be of permanent validity.

The Khulafa' al-Rashidun and those Companions who survived them were insistent that after the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet had an obligatory nature in matters of law, and in this they took their authority from the frequent orders of Allah "obey Allah and obey the Messenger" in which Allah and His Messenger are indissolubly linked, as also in another, "he who obeys the Messenger obeys Allah". It has never been in question at any stage in Islamic history that the Sunnah as recorded in authoritative Hadith is, in development of the legal principles laid down in the Qur'an, an essential source for Islamic legislation.

The butt of criticism, mostly superficial and backed by no solid foundation of knowledge, of some over-enthusiastic purveyors of Ijtihad is the authoritative nature of the Hadith which we have in our possession. Very

**few of these critics, if any of them, have ever cared to make a deep and unbiased study of Hadith literature, much of which is only available in Arabic, especially the critical and analytical works.**

**From one aspect in particular this perfunctory attitude to Hadith is a matter of great sorrow, since the collection and sifting, grading and comparing of Hadith is one of the greatest achievements in scholarship not only of the Muslims but of the whole world. Precisely in order to remove any doubt of authenticity, generation after generation of traditionists subjected Hadith to the most rigorous scrutiny and came to very definite conclusions; what a pity that this wonderful monument of faith and brilliant scholarship should be dismissed in a few glib words by “modernists” who have not taken the trouble even to examine it.**

**No mass of historical material has ever been put to such tests, nor have such meticulous subsidiary sciences such as the biography of the Companions, their Followers and the Followers of their Followers and the other relaters of Hadith, ever been created by any other body of scholars.**

**The whole of Hadith literature is pervaded by a spirit of such fine exactitude that it would seem pedantic – if it were not for the unstained honesty of purpose of the Traditionists – to leave no avenue of research untraversed.**

**The first of the criticisms which are now commonly being directed against the Hadith is that they were not collected in the time of the Prophet or of the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, and that during the period between the utterance or occurrence of their contents and their being recorded in writing there was every chance of their being materially altered. Some have even gone so far as to say that they were not recorded because they were unreliable.**

**That in the earlier stages they were not fully recorded in writing, is true, though it is not true that they were not recorded at all even as regards the Prophet's lifetime, for there is good evidence to show that Abdullah b. Amr b. al-As for one, used to write down what he heard from his Master.**

**Other Companions too put their collections of Hadith into writing later in life, particularly Abu Hurayra and Abdullah b. `Abbas, two very important sources of Hadith. But in general it can be said that Hadiths were only partially and privately recorded in writing in the early stages.**

**The reasons for this are quite clear and there is nothing mysterious about them. The Arabs' antipathy to writing in this period is well-known, very few of them were literate. Huge stores of knowledge of genealogy and poetry preserved in their prodigious memories; some people being able to recite a hundred thousand verses. There were no books in currency among them;**

even during the Prophet's lifetime the Qur'an did not circulate in book form.

The fact that the Prophet's sayings, legal decisions and deeds, were not generally written down is therefore not surprising in the least. There is also evidence that the Prophet disapproved of the general writing of Hadith in his lifetime for fear that they would become mixed up with the Qur'an, which had not yet been fully revealed, and with which the Muslims had yet to become completely familiar. But this is not to say that he disapproved of memorising of, or acting upon Hadith; on the contrary, he insisted on it.

The more learned of the Companions, including the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, spent their time in absorbing thoroughly the explanations, applications, and developments of the Qur'an by the Prophet in addition to their study of the Qur'an itself.

When the Prophet had passed away from this world and the age of the Caliphs came, after some deliberation they also came to the conclusion that the written recording of Hadiths and publishing them in a book form was inexpedient at this stage, for the same reasons as in the Prophet's lifetime, that the Word of Allah must be learnt and studied and thoroughly absorbed first, while its practical application by the Prophet can be handed down by word of mouth and by personal example.

But if we look at the life and the decisions of the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, we find that in every case where any matter had not been dealt with explicitly by the Qur'an, they considered it obligatory to discover what was the practice of the Prophet in this situation and made their decisions according to their findings. To contravene the practice of the Prophet on any vital matter was in their eyes equivalent to contravening Islam itself.

The whole of the history of this period shows this valuation of the Prophet's practice, and on this point there is complete unanimity. It is a grave mis-statement to say that Umar al-Khattab was against the relating of Traditions; he was only against collecting them into book form, not that they should not be learnt and known.

He was certainly strict as regards accuracy of reporting and always demanded a supporting witness if any Companion recounted something of the Messenger of Allah; when that witness was forthcoming he accepted the Tradition with no further hesitation. In those cases which came up before him he continually had recourse to his own knowledge of the Prophet's rulings, and if he himself did not have this knowledge he appealed to the other Companions; on receiving the required information and after satisfying himself regarding its accuracy, he immediately acted upon it.

Indeed, the fact that Hadiths were completely recorded in writing during the lifetime of the Companions was no drawback; they themselves were living models of his practice and treasure-houses of his sayings. They spread over the huge areas which now constituted the Islamic empire, to Kufah and Basrah in Iraq, to Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Khurasan. Here they were surrounded by eager pupils both Arab and non-Arab, thirsting to hear about their revered Prophet from those who had seen and lived with him.

Some of these pupils, who are known as the Followers of the Companions (Tabiun), became renowned all over the Islamic world for their learning in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, for their correct reporting and understanding of Hadith, and for their piety and purity of life. Such were Hasan Basri, the associate of the companions Imran b. Husayn and Anas b. Malik in Basrah; Alqama and Aswad, the repositories of the vast learning of Abdullah b. Mas'ud in Kufah, who were also the pupils of Umar and A'ishah; Said b. Musaiyib, the pupil of Abu Hurayrah and Taus, Mujahid, Ata' b. AM Rabah and others; Nafi, the pupil of A'ishah, and many others whose honesty and trustworthiness are unquestioned.

Here it is important to note that A'ishah and Abu Hurayrah lived up to between 50 and 60 A.H., Abdullah b. Abbas and Abdullah b. Umar to around 70 A.H., Abu Said Khudri to between 70 and 80 A.H. and Anas b. Malik to 90 A.H. This is to say that in the second half of the first century of the Hijrah it was still possible to hear a great store of Hadith from those who had seen or heard them directly from the Messenger of Allah himself.

Nearly all the famous Tabiun we have mentioned just now, lived up to dates between 90 and 120 A.H., which means up to this time the collections of Hadith related by these perfectly reliable reporters were available to all who wished to take them. Before the first quarter of the second century (100-125 A.H.) collections in book form were still not current, and although many Tabiun had their private written collections, the main basis of teaching was verbal, as was the fashion during this era when knowledge even if written was always committed to memory.

It was at this time that the first large-scale collections in book form began to be made, those by Ibn Jurayj, Malik, Sufyan Thawri, Sa'ad b. Rashid and others, all pupils of the Tabiun. The idea that much time elapsed between the original hearing and final recording in book form of Hadith as would make them unreliable is found to be completely unfounded when their history as given above is attentively considered, particularly with regard to these early collections, almost all the contents of which found their way into the later collections of al-Bukhari etc., a century later.

But the principle is also established that those Hadiths recounted by the well-known and reliable Tabiun whether collected into book form or not were available from the recounters themselves up to the first quarter of the second century of the Hijrah, and it only requires two or three successive

trustworthy scholars of Hadith to convey them to al-Bukhari and his contemporaries.

It is also necessary to mention that between the earliest published compilations and al-Bukhari's time there were other large classified collections of great importance such as that of `Abdur Razaq (died shortly after 200 A.H.), the pupil of Ibn Jurayj, Sufyan Thawri, Ma'mar b. Rashid and Malik, the earlier collectors. The question arises as to what were these unreliable, wrong or concocted Hadith of which so much fuss is being made by ill-informed critics today?

It is not true to state that untrustworthy traditions regarding the Messenger of Allah existed to any noteworthy extent during the main portion of the era of the Khulafa' al-Rashidun. It was only when the Schismatics began to appear such as the Kharijites, and the dynastic clashes of the Banu Umayyah, Banu Abbas and Band Hashim convulsed the Ummah, and particularly after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his family at Karbala', that some partisans had recourse to distorting or inventing Hadith to justify their claims.

But it was never the real scholars of traditions who related these incorrect reports, nor had they any purpose in doing so; unreliable Traditions were surveyed by unreliable people, the partisans, popular preachers, story-tellers and so on, and have not escaped the eagle eyes of the very critical Muhaddithun.

The solid body of recognised Hadith which forms the basis of Muslim Law can be found in Malik as well as in the decisions of Abu Hanifah and the later Imams. If there are differences of opinion on any important point it is almost always where that difference already existed among the companions.

What is remarkable about Muslim law based on the Qur'an, and Sunnah as presented by Abu Hanifah and Malik, for instance, is not the differences in detail but the extraordinary agreement in its main structure, which proves that there was an agreed corpus of Sunnah which was common to both schools of thought.

It is a common fallacy to speak of the accepted books of traditions such as al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, etc., as if they themselves constitute the source of Islamic Fiqh. They are certainly adduced as authorities in later judicial controversy, but it is often forgotten that the whole fabric of Fiqh was erected before these traditionists were even born.

Abu Hanifah himself was born in 80 A.H. when some of the other Companions of the Prophet were still alive, and he was the pupil of some of the famous Tabiun we have mentioned above, particularly Ata' b. Abi Rabah in Makkah. The body of traditions used by Abu Hanifah and Malik were fresh from the Tabiun and unsullied by partisan politics and imaginative interpolations, which in any case affected traditions treating with law very little. These

**traditions are present in the later collections, but were used by Abu Hanifah one hundred years earlier.**

**The statement reported by the biographers of Imam al-Bukhari that he selected 7,000 Hadiths out of 600,000 is being put to much use by the detractors of Hadith to attempt to show that the majority are unreliable. This statement was made to extol his industry and discrimination, but from the point of view of the history of Hadith it is necessary to go more deeply into the matter and avoid rash conclusions which do not conform to reality.**

**□n citing this bare statement, the impression is given that in al-Bukhari's time there was a vast, unclassified mass of every kind of tradition, true and false, floating all over the then Islamic empire, and that he suddenly appeared on the scene, separated the true from the false, and was only able to find 7,000 out of 600,000.**

**The real facts are nothing resembling this at all. Criticism and scrutiny of Hadith was being done from the very beginning, even in the time of the Companions and their Followers, and there had always been a central core of unquestionable true Hadith with the earnest, sincere and pious scholars. For instance, the comments of Muhammad b. Hasan, the renowned pupil of Abu Hanifah, on Malik's book of Hadith, the Muwatta', show that out of more than a thousand traditions of the Messenger of Allah and the Companions quoted by Malik, Abu Hanifah only differed with about eighty and even then not regarding their authenticity, but preferring a different ruling.**

**Th□ mischief of fabricating or distorting Hadith was begun, during the time of the political dissension between the Banu Hashim and the Umayyads, and particularly after the massacre of Karbala', when unprecedented passions were roused. But these unreliable traditions circulated among the leading partisans of these two parties and were used to prospective supporters; the really learned were well aware of this and such □ishonest tampering with the true Sunnah was clearly denounced by them, and the relaters of such traditions singled out and condemned.**

**A stu□y of the comments of traditionists on such fabricators and the rejection of their claims to credibility show this plainly, for instance, al-Sha'bi, one of the leading Tabiun in knowledge of tradition and law, roundly condemns various people who related much partisan reports attributing them wrongly to Ali. This kind of fabrication had currency among the ignorant and those who had special interest, not among the scholars.**

**A second breeding-ground for incorrect and exaggerated traditions were the public preachers and story-tellers, who are prone to this weakness to the present day. The books of the biographies of the reporters of traditions**

are full of condemnations of people of this type, and their effusions, though gaining currency among the unlettered, were never accepted by the learned.

Apart from these two main sources of falsification, there were other unreliable Hadiths which were due to mere human weakness, such as forgetting, mixing-up, exaggeration, ascribing statements of the Companions to the Prophet himself and so on. The whole science of the traditionists was brought to bear on the elimination of such weak reports, and by an amazingly thorough system of analysis and comparison and minute checking, these defects have been brought to light and carefully classified.

The immense research which has gone into the study of Hadith cannot be imagined by simply reading the bare translation of one of the well-known compilations. To know something of what the Muslim traditionists have achieved, one has to go through such comparative studies of Hadith such as Asqalani's commentary on al Bukhari, where all the ramifications of the variants of a particular Hadith are traced meticulously.

After making such a study the only honest conclusion one can reach is that it is difficult if not impossible to arrive at anything but the same conclusions as these great Muslim religious scholars. With regard to the statement regarding al Bukhari's selection of Hadith, it is also necessary to understand that in the language of traditionists, all the variants of a single Hadith are counted as a separate Hadith, or an identical Hadith related by two or more different persons.

For instance, the famous Hadith reported by Umar, "actions are judged by intentions," is related from 700 different authorities. In the terminology of the traditionists, these are counted as 700 Hadiths. Thus the large number of Hadith mentioned are not actually all different, but contain many slight variations of a single Hadith.

In sum, this statement regarding al-Bukhari's discrimination only amounts to say that he took the trouble to study the whole of the Hadiths, both reliable and unreliable, which existed written or unwritten in his day. But it should not be imagined that he was the first to determine the true from the false; a generally agreed body of good and fair traditions was already in existence with the earlier traditionists.

Al-Bukhari added his own unparalleled acumen to make a final examination and compiled a definitive selection of those Hadiths which possessed the very best authority. Those who lightly challenge the authority of such compilations should be well aware of what they are doing; it requires a person of exceptional industry and intelligence even to reach to the level of a pupil of these great Muhaddithun. To surpass them

would require something more than the superficial and biased minds of today, which have not shown themselves capable of any constructive work in the religious field up to the present.

We come now to a very crucial matter. It is stated that the Hadith should be re-examined on a new basis and with a view to the changed environment. No one has yet given the least inkling of what this basis is to be, except perhaps that it will be the arbitrary fancies of the re-examiners. We have to learn what al-Bukhari's basis is, let alone working out a new one. But what constitutes exactly this changed environment?

We must be very clear about what has changed and what has not. The real change in the modern world has taken place in the physical realm through the inventions of machines and scientific apparatus, and has affected particularly communications, travel, the publication of books and disseminating of information, availability of mass-produced books and labour saving devices.

But the spiritual and moral nature of man has not changed, nor indeed, has his basic physical nature; he still has to eat, sleep, wash, relieve himself, marry and bring up children, find shelter, work for his bread and preserve a family and community life. The colours of the picture have changed but the outline is the same.

Any amendments in Muslim law which are necessitated by the inevitable changes of the machine age are perfectly justified. But there is another type of change which is always lurking consciously or subconsciously in the minds of some of the "modernists", and this is the change in habits due to foreign domination, not physical but cultural domination. Many of these habits, both of thought and action, are not inevitable at all, still less desirable, and are simply the result of blind conformity.

Much of the criticism and skepticism directed towards religion today is not in the least genuine but simply a western habit of thought. Most, if not all, of the modern critics of Hadith among Muslims have not exercised any constructive or original thought on the question, but borrow the criticism of western writers and use their arguments.

Western detractors of Hadith can be divided into two main categories: sceptic rationalists, and missionaries. All of them have the characteristics of one or both of these categories in various proportions. There is one attribute which is common to both of them; they are unable to conceive of a Revealed Law.

Christianity in its present form is based on the rejection of the Jewish Law, which was effected shortly after Jesus' removal from this world, in the time



of his disciples. This rejection has molded the mentality of the West so that they now have great difficulty in accepting even the possibility of a law laid down under Divine Inspiration. So the first reason for their criticism of Hadith is an inherent defect of mind.

As far as the sceptic rationalists are concerned they do not believe in revealed religion at all, and their criticism starts off with this basic prejudgement. With an inherited warped mentality and a disbelief in the honesty and good intentions of man, they naturally assume that what they cannot understand must have been invented, and use all kinds of specious and unscientific arguments to attempt to prove it.

Their attitude to Islam, in fact to all revealed religions, is that of a disbeliever; it is obvious that for a Muslim to adopt their attitude or make use of their very poorly founded arguments is absurd and self-contradictory.

The second category of critics are the missionaries or inspired by the missionary spirit; their intention from the beginning is to denigrate Islam by any method that comes to hand. All weapons, honest and dishonest, rational and irrational, virtuous and vicious are allowable in their view. To expect them to make a scholarly and impartial study of any branch of Islam would be sheer gullibility. Some of the books regarding Hadith published from European universities are written precisely in this spirit.

It can be imagined that any Muslim who bases his knowledge of Hadith on such works can know precisely nil, or rather a minus quantity, regarding the subject. If the basis of Hadith criticism or the criticism of any branch of Islam is to be an outlook based on the borrowed conceptions and way of life of the West then it has no validity at all and must be rejected outright.

Subservience to a civilization which happens to be passing through a temporary phase of material prosperity and power can have no place in the religion of Islam. Genuine research and reform which are not coloured by the spirit of mere imitation but based on the true faith and directed to the real progress of Islam are quite another thing.

To be a genuine Muslim reformer, a person should have a burning faith, the love of Allah and His Messenger, and intimate personal experience of the spiritual and devotional as well as the practical and institutional aspects of Islam.

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