2

HADITH

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Introduction

Once a person approached the Prophet Muhammad for medical advice for his brother who was suffering from abdominal pain. The Prophet replied, 'Feed him some honey'. The man returned and informed the Prophet that the advice did not work and requested further assistance. The Prophet again instructed him to give his brother some honey. The incident was repeated a third time upon which the Prophet forcefully expressed, 'God has spoken the truth and your brother's abdomen is lying. Feed him honey'. The person fed his brother honey a third time upon which he was cured (Al-Bukhari 2001, 7:123).

Several questions arise from the foregoing story: (a) how do we know this conversation took place; (b) presuming it did, what medical expertise did the Prophet have; (c) what are the limits and horizons of Prophetic jurisdiction and advice; and (d) what is the relationship between the Prophet's teaching and the Qur'an (God has spoken the truth)? These questions relate to epistemology (how we know), hermeneutics (rules of knowing), the authority of the Prophet and the authenticity of teachings attributed to him.

I address the above questions in this chapter through a narrow focus on rituals and practices and the impact that hadith has on them. Thus, I discuss the question of Prophetic authority and its relationship with the authenticity of teachings attributed to him. I investigate the different methods used by medieval Muslim scholars to extrapolate the Prophetic teachings. The hadith did not have an uncontested history. Some scholars were skeptical of its authenticity, while others took umbrage to the claim that it is the sole depository for distilling the Prophet's teachings. This is followed by a brief history of the documentation of hadith including its codification and its modes of verification. Subsequently, I discuss the reception history of hadith in contemporary Islam. I categorize contemporary scholars into four groups and explore their relationship with hadith. I conclude the chapter by alluding to new developments in hadith studies and its application. The chapter focuses on developments in hadith in Sunni Islam only. For a discussion on Shi'a hadith studies one can refer to Brown (2009, 123), Newman (2010), Kohlberg (1983) and Buckley (1998). Finally, the chapter explores hadith primarily from a phenomenological point of view, although I do make references to critical hadith studies.

What Is Hadith?

The anecdote mentioned in the opening of this chapter is a typical example of a hadith (literally a report), which is the orally transmitted written record of the sayings, practices and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. The words of the Prophet are couched within a narrative frame (the incident of the person seeking the Prophet's advice for his brother), which also constitutes a part of the hadith. The hadith is deemed by many Muslims as complementary revelation to the Qur'an, although all concede that it is extra-Qur'anic. The distinction is sometimes made by whether it can form a part of the ritual prayer (*salah*) or not. Thus, the Qur'an is *wahy matlu* (revelation which is recited in prayer), and hadith is categorized as *wahy ghayr matlu* (revelation which cannot be recited in the prayer). The word 'hadith' is a singular Arabic noun. It can refer to a single hadith report, an entire corpus of hadith literature or to the concept of hadith. Its plural in Arabic is '*ahadith*'. However, in English, the plural is constructed by appending an 's' to the word 'hadith'. Since the word has found its way into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is no longer necessary to italicize and add diacritics and macrons to the word. When used in a sentence, it can mean several things. Outside the narrow field of hadith studies, it refers to the written record of the Prophet's words and actions, his interactions with people around him and his unsaid approvals of their deeds and pronouncements. At times the word is attributed to the Companion who reported witnessing the Prophet saying something or observed him acting in a certain way. The opening narrative of this chapter was first reported by the Prophet's Companion Abu Sa'id al-Khudri. Thus, it will not be incorrect to refer to it as the 'hadith of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri'.

Within specialist hadith studies, the word 'hadith' refers to the sum aggregate of its content known as the *matn* (text) in Arabic, as well as its supporting reference known as the *isnad*. The *isnad* is a list of names of people (sometimes called 'chain of narrators') prefixed to the *matn*. It includes all those people who were responsible for transmitting the *matn* from one generation to another. In the opening anecdote, the *isnad* has been omitted to facilitate quick access to the text. However, if the *isnad* had to be written out in its entirety, it would look like the following:

> [Al-Bukhari said]: Ayyash ibn al-Walid reported to us (*haddathana*); [who said], 'Abd al-A'la reported to us; [who said], Sa'id reported to us; [who said], from ('an) Qatada, from Abu al-Mutawakkil, from Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, that a person approached the Prophet […]
>
> *(Al-Bukhari 2001, 7:123)*

Furthermore, in technical hadith studies, the word is sometimes attributed to a common narrator from whom multiple *isnad*-strands bloom (Reinhart 2010, 440). Conceptually related to the word 'hadith' is the word 'sunna', which literally means the well-trodden path (Rahman 2000). A discussion on the relationship between these two concepts will follow shortly after some brief excurses on the function and importance of hadith.

Hadith performs a multitude of functions. Primarily it serves to impart religious advice and guidance to Muslims through the Prophet Muhammad. These range from pure rituals to civic transactions and criminal laws. 'The two ears are a part of the head' (al-Tirmidhi 1996, 1:86) is a hadith reported from the Prophet guiding Muslims on the proper etiquette of ritual ablution. Furthermore, it includes details of the lifestyle choices made by the Prophet, descriptions of his physical features as well as an account of his personality and characteristics. A Bedouin female Companion named Umm Ma'bad saw the Prophet during his historic emigration to Medina.

Her description of him became enshrined in the books of hadith and has been used in calli‐graphic eulogy of the Prophet. This is how she described him:

> I saw a man, pure and clean, with a handsome face and a fine figure. He was not marred by a skinny body, nor was he overly small in the head and neck. He was graceful and elegant, with intensely black eyes and thick eyelashes. There was a huskiness in his voice, and his neck was long. His beard was thick, and his eyebrows were finely arched and joined together. When silent, he was grave and dignified, and when he spoke, glory rose up and overcame him. He was from afar the most beautiful of men and the most glorious, and close up he was the sweetest and the loveliest. He was sweet of speech and articulate, but not petty or trifling. His speech was a string of cascading pearls, measured so that none despaired of its length, and no eye challenged him because of brevity.
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> *(The* hilya *cited in Ernst 2003, 76–77)*

The hadith also includes chronicles of events from the life of the Prophet, and therefore it is used as one of the primary sources for the Prophet's biography. In relation to the Qur'an, hadith functions as an interpretive tool. This includes expanding or limiting the connotation of a verse; clarifying or abrogating a point of law or describing the background and occasion when a verse or a cluster of verses were revealed. Thus, for a sizeable number of Muslims throughout the world, the importance of hadith cannot be underestimated. For it is in the hadith that such Muslims find the fine and intricate details of their religion. Recognizing the importance of the hadith for an accurate understanding of the Qur'an, ʿAbd al‐Rahman al‐Awzaʿi (d. 773–774), a hadith scholar from Beirut, hyperbolically proclaims, 'The Book is in more need of the sunna than the sunna needs the Book' (Ibn ʿAbd al‐Barr 1994). By the word 'sunna', al‐Awzaʿi meant hadith.

The Qur'an is a spiritual book primarily concerned with developing a moral society. Its teaching is principally doctrinal and hortatory. There is very little guidance in it related to how to perform rituals and other practices. By way of example, there are approximately 80 verses in the Qur'an commanding Muslims to pray, but no guidelines are provided on how and when to offer the prayer: guidance regarding the length of prayer, its frequency as well as how to rectify any mistakes are conspicuous by their absence from the Qur'an. Detailed accounts of these are extrapolated from observations made about the Prophet's actions by his Companions documented in the hadith literature. The following passage from the hadith demonstrates how the Prophet rectified a lapse of judgment while offering the afternoon prayer:

> The Companion Abu Hurayra reported that once the Prophet completed the (four‐unit) prayer by offering only two units (*rakʿa*). Dhu al‐Yadayn inquired, 'Has the prayer been shortened, Prophet of God, or have you forgotten?' The Prophet asked his Companions, 'Is it true what Dhu al‐Yadayn is saying?' They replied, 'Yes.' The Prophet stood up and completed the final two units. He then recited the *salam* and *takbir* (to say *Allahu Akbar*) and then offered a prostration, the length of which is similar or longer to his normal prostration. He then rose, recited the *takbir*, and fell into prostration again. After which he rose.
>
> *(Al‐Bukhari 2001, 1:144)*

This anecdote came to form the basis of Islamic law related to the proper manner of offering the 'prostration of forgetfulness' (*sajda sahw*).

I will revisit the discussion on the function of hadith later in the chapter. The perspective on hadith discussed here is from an emic point of view. Western scholars of Islamic studies have a

rich plethora of scholarship on hadith studies (primarily historical) and have offered interesting insights into the formation of early Islam (see Goldziher 1971; Schacht 1967; Juynboll 1983; Motzki 2005; Shah 2010). However, their research has hardly found any practical use outside the ivory towers of academia. Thus, they are wholly absent from internal Muslim discussions on rituals and practices. Nevertheless, an up-to-date discussion on the state of Western hadith studies can be found in Reinhart (2010), Jonathan Brown (2017), Abu-Alabbas, Dann and Melchert (2020) and Daniel Brown (2020b).

The study of hadith, its documentation, content and authentication are conceptually related to the role and authority of the Prophet. Without a proper understanding of the above it will be difficult to comprehend why so many Muslims resort to extra-Qur'anic sources to work out the minute details of their religion. So, what role does the Prophet play vis-à-vis the Qur'an, and how is his authority understood by Muslims?

The Role of the Prophet

Muslims believe the Qur'an to be the inimitable, unchanged literal Word of God communicated to the Prophet Muhammad through the medium of the angel Gabriel. Most believe it to be an attribute of God, which is eternal and ahistorical. The Prophet was its first audience and its first recipient. He needed to be convinced of the truth of its message, its authenticity and its authority. Up to this point most Muslims will agree on this general sketch of revelation. Beyond this however, Muslims have divergent opinions regarding the role of the Prophet vis-à-vis the Qur'an. For the many Muslims who accept the hadith as a complementary revelation to the Qur'an, they believe that the Prophet was not a mere postman or a tape-recorder who would receive the Message from God and pass it on to people verbatim. For them, in addition to relaying the Qur'an word-for-word, he was tasked by God to teach Muslims the message, bring about transformation in them through it and make them wiser. The Qur'an reads:

> God has been truly gracious to the believers in sending them a Messenger from among their own, to recite His revelations to them, to make them grow in purity, and to teach them the Scripture and wisdom before that they were clearly astray.
>
> *(Q. 3:164)*

The same idea is iterated in another verse of the Qur'an.

> The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often.
>
> *(Q. 33:21)*

For the advocates of hadith, such verses are indicative that the first commentary of the Qur'an was through the lived experience of the Prophet Muhammad. In addition to accurately trans-mitting the Qur'an, he was also a role model who taught his followers through his deeds and words. These embodied teachings came to be known as the sunna of the Prophet.

Prophetic Authority and the 'Well-Trodden Way' (sunna)

Ancient Arabs used the word 'sunna' to refer to their tradition, the 'way' they did things (Rahman 2000, 129). The relationship between its linguistic meaning and usage is obvious; tradition by definition has the weight of the experiences of the ancestors behind it. As Islam

displaced Arab paganism, and the 'ways' of the Prophet took root in the hearts and minds of the nascent Muslim community, a new sunna supplanted its pre-Islamic counterpart. This new sunna crystallized around the teaching of the Prophet. The sunna, now, became the 'way' to live one's life according to the teachings of the Prophet. Its importance was announced in the Qur'an next to that of God's, 'Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys God' (Q. 4:80). The Prophet is reported to have advised his Companions, 'I have left you with two things, you will never go astray if you hold on to them fast, The book of God and my sunna' (Malik ibn Anas 2004, 5:1323). Henceforth, one was no longer able to claim to love God without following the Prophet's sunna, 'Say, If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins' (Q. 3:31). Absolute deference to the Prophet and his sunna became the hallmark of a true believer. The Qur'an reads:

> By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute, and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them totally.
>
> *(Q. 4:65)*

Harking back to the initial hadith of Abu Saʿid al-Khudri and the questions it raises, given the authority of the Prophet and the paramount importance placed on following his ways, it is not surprising that the person approached the Prophet for advice for his brother. Muhammad, believed by Muslims, the final Prophet of God, was not only a repository and transmitter of the Qur'an, but he was also its living commentary, a walking Qur'an and a role model for the believers. They believe to have been commanded by God that fidelity to Him is through obeying the Prophet; to emulate him is to love God; and to truly believe is to involve the Prophet in their decision-making and conflict resolution processes.

While the 'authority' question can easily be answered from the Qur'an, the question of 'authenticity' still lingers. If the sunna of the Prophet is extra-Qur'anic, how do Muslims access it, and more importantly how do they know it is authentic? In the absence of the Prophet, how should the Muslim community access the Prophet's sunna? Here the community fragmented into several groups. On one end of the spectrum were the *ashab al-hadith* (followers of hadith) who believed the Prophetic sunna can only be traced back to the Prophet through a text-based medium (i.e. hadith). The *ashab al-hadith* become epitomized in two of the four sunni schools of law: the Shafiʿi and the Hanbali schools. For the *ashab al-hadith*, the hadith as a concept, if not individual hadiths in particular, is on the same level of the Qur'an as far as it being a source of the shariʿa. In fact, some of the *ashab al-hadith* viewed the hadith as an independent source of the shariʿa separate from the Qur'an. It was al-Shafiʿi (d. 820) who argued for the primacy of the hadith against other modes of tracing back to the sunna. He argued:

> If a hadith is authenticated as coming from the Prophet, we have to resign ourselves to it, and your talk and the talk of others about why and how is a mistake… The question of how can only be applied to human opinions which are derivative and devoid of authority; if obligatory orders, by asking why, could be subjected to analogy or to the scrutiny of reason, there would be no end to arguing, and analogy itself would break down.
>
> *(Al-Shafiʿi,* Ikhtilaf al-Hadith*, cited in Schacht 1967, p. 13)*

On the other end of the spectrum were the *ashab al-ra'y* (followers of opinion). This opinion was to be based on rational considerations. Advocates of the primacy of reason, known as the

Mu'tazilites argued that hadith criticism was too focused on the chain of transmitters (*isnad*) rather than an exploration of its text. Analyzing the *isnad* at best did not yield epistemological certainty, and therefore cannot be relied upon for religious matters. They rejected hadith and opted to second-guess what the Prophet would have wanted in any given situation based on a reasonable understanding of the Qur'an and the Prophet's life. Next to the Mu'tazilites were moderate *ashab al-ra'y* thought championed by the founder of the Hanafi school of thought Abu Hanifa Nu'man ibn Thabit (d. 767). While Abu Hanifa accepted hadith as a legitimate source of the Shari'a, he opted for the primacy of the Qur'an, and hadith had to conform to the Qur'an or they would be rejected (see al-Khatib 2020 for more details). Finally, between these two extremes were those scholars who, in addition to accepting the hadith as a source of the Shari'a, only accepted hadith if it was known to have been practiced in their locality. In other words, it was the practice of the community which authenticated the hadith. Foremost among them was Malik ibn Anas (d. 796), the founder of the Maliki school of thought. For Malik, a hadith is only accepted if it was acted upon by the scholars of Medina during his time. This 'living sunna' was called *'amal ahl al-madina'* (the practice of the scholars [lit. people] of Medina) by Malik (see Dutton 2002). Similar to Malik, Abu Hanifa also felt that the 'living sunna' was preserved through the practices of the scholars of Kufa, Iraq. The Hanafis called this living tradition, *al-hadith al-mashhur* (Abu al-Haj 2020; Hanif 2019).

The different attitudes of the scholars vis-à-vis the sunna can be observed in their treatment of a divorce practice in the following example. A woman by the name of Fatima bint Qays was irrevocably divorced by her husband Abu 'Amr ibn Hafs al-Makhzumi during the time of the Prophet. Islamic law requires that a woman needs to wait for the duration of three months (primarily for the purpose of ensuring that she is not pregnant) before she can remarry – known as the *'iddah*-period. During this time, since the woman is not completely free from the shackles of the marriage, who is to be responsible for providing accommodation and living expenses for her? Fatima bint Qays disputed the arrangement that her husband made and took her case to the Prophet. The Prophet judged in favor of her husband and did not force him to provide accommodation or living expenses for her. Since this was Fatima's first-hand experience of the Prophet's judgment, she used to quote him saying, 'My husband irrevocably divorced me during the time of the Prophet, and the Prophet said, "You are neither eligible for accommodation nor living expenses"' (al-Tirmidhi 1996, 2:475).

Years later when some hadith scholars were discussing this issue, one of the narrators, Ibrahim, told his colleagues about the opinion of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644), the second caliph. 'Umar disputed Fatima's version of the story by retorting, 'we will not leave the Book of God and the sunna of the Prophet for the words of a woman regarding whom we are not sure if she remembers properly or has forgotten' (al-Tirmidhi 1996, 2:475). The narrator adds that during his Caliphate, 'Umar used to force husbands to pay for accommodation and living expenses for their divorced wives during the latter's *'iddah*-period.

What did 'Umar mean when he said, 'We do not leave the Book of God or the sunna of the Prophet'? Why would he disparage Fatima bint Qays in such condescending manner especially when she was relating her own experiences of how the Prophet judged in her case? What is the relationship of this hadith to the Qur'an, at least in 'Umar's mind? According to 'Umar, if the words of an individual (even if they were reporting from the Prophet) contradicted a verse of the Qur'an or the general spirit of the Prophetic teaching, and no one else was available to corroborate this report, the Qur'an and Prophetic sunna are to be privileged over this individual hadith report. By the 'Book of God' 'Umar was referring to the verse of the Qur'an, '[The divorced women] let them live where you live, according to your means. Do not put pressure on them so as to harass them' (Q. 64:6). According to 'Umar, this verse is crystal clear

in its injunction ordering men to provide for their recently divorced wives during their *ʿiddah*-period. ʿUmar must have observed the Prophet judging between recently divorced couples in accordance with this verse to have deemed it a sunna of the Prophet. Since Fatima's experience was at loggerheads with the teachings of this verse and his understanding of the sunna, ʿUmar was compelled to reject it.

The hadith collector Abu ʿIsa al-Tirmidhi (d. 892) included this discussion in his collection. He followed up the discussion by including the divergent opinions of scholars on this issue. It is here that the attitude of the scholars towards the sunna can be observed in microcosm. Al-Tirmidhi wrote:

> Al-Hasan al-Basri, Ata' ibn Abi Rabah, al-Shaʿbi, Aḥmad [ibn Hanbal], and Ishaq are of the opinion that the triply divorced woman is not entitled to accommodation or living expenses.
>
> Some of the people of knowledge from the Companions of the Prophet such as ʿUmar and ʿAbd Allah (ibn Masʿud) are of the opinion that she will receive both accommodation and living expenses. This is also the opinion of al-Thawri and the people of Kufa.
>
> Some of the people of knowledge say that she will only receive accommodation but not maintenance. This is the opinion of Malik ibn Anas, al-Layth ibn Saʿd and al-Shafiʿi.
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> Al-Shafiʿi said, "our opinion on the accommodation is based on the Book of God. God says, 'Do not evict them from their homes nor should they leave, unless they commit an outright indecency. (Q: 65:1)'".
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> *(al-Tirmidhi 1996, 2:476)*

The hadith of Fatima bint Qays is an interesting case study to understand the scholars' attitude towards the sunna. Abu Hanifa and the scholars of Kufa reject this hadith on the basis that it went against the Qur'an (Q. 64:6) and the sunna of the Prophet as understood by his senior Companions such as ʿUmar and Ibn Masʿud. According to Abu Hanifa, accommodation is clearly mentioned in the verse whereas living expenses is implied. Thus, for him, the primacy of the Qur'an cannot be sacrificed for an uncorroborated and lone hadith.

Both Malik and al-Shafiʿi favored accommodation only but not living expenses. However, Malik's evidence for not allowing living expenses was not the silence of the Qur'an, as one can argue that it is implied, but that allocating living expenses to divorced women was not a practice which was known in Medina. Thus, Malik wrote in his *Muwatta*, 'This is the practice of the scholars of Medina' (Malik ibn Anas 2004, 4:837).

While Abu Hanifa and Malik did not pay attention to this hadith in formulating their views, al-Shafiʿi had a bigger problem. Al- Shafiʿi did not reject this hadith, and yet he, like Malik, based his opinion for the woman to receive accommodation on the verse of the Qur'an (Q. 64:6). Since in this hadith, Fatima was not given anything, al-Shafiʿi had some explanation to do. He argues that Fatima bint Qays' situation was an exception to the rule based on guidance found in another verse of the Qur'an, 'Do not evict them from their homes nor should they leave, unless they commit an outright indecency (Q. 65:1).' Al- Shafiʿi interpreted the Qur'anic phrase 'Outright indecency' to mean 'foul-mouthed' (*al-badha*). Through an investigation of different versions of Fatima bint Qays' story, al-Shafiʿi arrived at the conclusion that Fatima bint Qays had a razor-sharp tongue which got her into trouble in the first place ending with a divorce. It would not have been prudent for her to live in the same household of her former

husband, with whom she could not live amicably while they were married. This interpretive gesture allowed al-Shafiʻi to accept both the Qurʼanic injunction and the Fatima Bint Qays' narrative without having to reject one or another.

Finally, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), a true *ashab al-hadith*, saw no reason to doubt Bint Qays' narrative. For Ibn Hanbal, if all the narrators of the incident in all subsequent generation were upright, there was no reason to doubt that the incident was incorrect or that Fatima was not accurately reporting from the Prophet. For Ibn Hanbal, verse 64:6 has to be read in light of Bint Qays' story. Thus, if the Prophet did not allocate housing or living allowance for Bint Qays, it is because of his deep understanding of the Qurʼanic verse and not because she contradicted the Book of God or the sunna of the Prophet. Ibn Hanbal followed the legacy of previous hadith scholars who believed that an accurate reading of the Qurʼan as well as the safest method for accessing the Prophetic sunna is through the hadith: its *isnad* as well as the *matn*.

Hadith: The Documentation of the Prophetic *sunna*

For the followers of hadith (*ashab al-hadith),* the Prophetic sunna was transmitted to posterity through orally transmitted reports (hadith), depicting the Prophet saying something or doing something. These reports also included chronicles from his life as well as descriptions of his physical appearance and his emotional and psychological state. The system that was used to ensure that these reports (hadith) were accurately transmitted was already well known to the Arabs since they used it to pass down their traditions, stories, heroic tales and genealogies. The following is a short history of how the hadith came to be collected and compiled. The approach to this history is what Kevin Reinhart calls 'the big bang theory' of hadith collection as opposed to a theory of 'gradualism' (Reinhart 2010). The 'big bang' theory suggests that from the Prophet's time there has been a concerted effort to collect and document the teachings of the Prophet. This process carried on in all subsequent generations. This is in line with the common narrative found in Muslim scholarship (Abu Ghudda 1984; Al-Khatib 1988; Al-Awni 1996; Al-Sibai 2003; Abdul-Jabbar 2020). Western critical hadith scholarship (which is a loose categorization because it includes Muslims like Fazlur Rahman in this category) disagrees with this scheme of history (see (Reinhart 2010; J.A. Brown 2009, 197).

The biographies of the Prophet's Companions reveal that they were not mere followers but also his disciples. They made it their life mission to embody his teachings and exude the same to others. Their daily chores were punctuated with sayings of the Prophet or descriptions of what they saw him do. Their casual talks and serious reminiscences were sprinkled with fond stories from his life. The Prophet's exhortation rings loud and clear in their minds, 'May God have mercy on the person who listens to my words and passes it on in the manner he had heard it' (Abu Dawud 1998, 4:244; al-Tirmidhi 1996, 4:330).

Given the authority of the Prophet and his Companions' zeal to emulate him, it is not sur-prising that the Muslim narrative of the history of hadith would suggest that attempts to collate his teachings started during his lifetime (Reinhart's big bang theory). There are anecdotes of this found in Muslim sources. It is reported that ʻUmar bin al-Khattab would take turns with his neighbor to attend the Prophet's gathering, while the other was busy working. They would later exchange with one another what they had learnt from the Prophet (Al-Bukhari 2001, 1:29). While there was a general prohibition against writing anything beyond the Qurʼan, some Companions were permitted by the Prophet to make notes of his teachings for private use. It is reported that ʻAbd Allah bin ʻAmr bin al-ʻAs said:

I used to write everything that I hear from the Prophet intending to commit it to memory. On some people taking objection to this, I spoke about it to the Prophet who said, 'Write down, for I only speak the Truth'.

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(Abu Dawud 1998, 4:239)

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Thus, some Companions were better known than others for making it their mission to gather all the teachings of the Prophet they were able to find, be they directly from the Prophet, or from other Companions who either recited from memory or cited from their private notes. These were mainly younger Companions (J.A. Brown 2009, 18). Abu Hurayra, a late comer to Islam, is credited with narrating the most hadiths from the Prophet (5,374). He was a poor man; he remained a guest of the Prophet in the mosque during the three years that he was graced with the Prophet's presence. To make up for the time he lost, he made it his sole mission to spend the rest of his time learning from the Prophet and his senior Companions. The Prophet's younger cousin, Ibn 'Abbas is credited with narrating 1,700 hadiths. Similarly, the Prophet's widow 'Aisha is also included in the list of high-frequent narrators. Her narrations reach around 2,200 hadiths. They are primarily concerned with the private life of the Prophet, and her guidance was sought out by Companions on issues pertaining to personal hygiene and the Prophet's lifestyle.

The Companions passed on these teachings to their successors (*tabi'i*) orally as well as shared their private notes. These successors, like enthusiastic grandchildren reminiscing over a loving grandparent whom they never met, eager to learn everything about the grandparent, relished those narratives, memorized them, embodied them, made copious notes of them and passed them on to posterity. Thus, Sa'id ibn Jubayr (d. 714) writes that once he was taking notes in a hadith session held by the Prophet's younger cousin 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas. So extensive was his note taking that upon using up all his writing material, he carried on taking notes on the sole of his leather sandals until they were also full (Al-Khatib 1988, 325).

The transmission of hadith takes on a more public characteristic by the beginning of the 8th century with state support from the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (d. 720). Scholars like Abu Bakr ibn Hazm and Muhammad ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 742) were commissioned to develop a database of hadiths. Abu Bakr Ibn Hazm, the Umayyad governor of Medina and presiding judge of the city, was given the responsibility to collect all hadiths related to administration and taxations (J.A. Brown 2009, 23). In particular, he was to collect the hadiths narrated by his aunt 'Amra bint 'Abd al-Rahman, a student of 'Aisha. The hadith collector Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (d. 870) mentions 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's conversation with Ibn Hazm.

See whatever saying of the holy Prophet can be found, and write it down, for I fear the loss of knowledge and the disappearance of scholars. Do not accept anything but the hadith of the holy Prophet. People should make 'knowledge' public and should sit in companies, so that he who does not know should come to know, for knowledge does not disappear until it is concealed from the public.

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(Al-Bukhari 2001, 1: 31)

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The word 'knowledge' or *'ilm* in the old nomenclature of hadith scholars was synonymous with the word 'hadith' as opposed to the word '*fiqh*' which was reserved for Islamic law. 'Ajjaj Al-Khatib mentions that 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz was personally involved in sifting the hadiths after they were collected (Al-Khatib 1988, 330).

It is not clear what exactly happened to these collections leading to some Western scholars rejecting the above incident as a fable – calling it a hagiographic expression of the good opinion

that people had of the pious caliph and his love for the sunna (Goldziher 1971, 196). However, it is possible that these early collections were completely subsumed within larger collections produced by scholars who came after this period. The German scholar Harald Motzki (d. 2019), using a technique of source reconstruction which he called *isnad-cum-matn* analysis, demonstrated this point. He argued that a collection by the 8th century scholar ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Jurayj (d. 767) was completely subsumed within the larger collection of his student ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Sanʿani (d. 826) (Motzki 2005). While a physical copy of Ibn Jurayj's *Musnad* no longer exists, Motzki, argued that it can be reconstructed in its entirety from the *Musannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzaq.

Towards the end of the 8th century, the first proper compilations of hadith began to appear (J.A. Brown 2009, 25). These were topically arranged and included legal discussions of scholars interlaced with Prophetic hadiths. They came to be known as the *musannaf* collections, or topically arranged collections. Some famous *musannaf* collections in this period included the *Muwatta* compiled by Malik ibn Anas, and the *Musannaf* by ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Sanʿani. The authors of these collections neither cared for a strict appraisal of the *isnad* nor did they labor in including hadiths with complete unbroken *isnad*s to the Prophet.

I have already made reference to al-Shafiʿi's argument. Al-Shafiʿi was not happy with how people sought out the sunna in the practices of the living tradition and their use of free thinking (*raʾy*) to arrive at an understanding of the religion. He wanted to reduce the divergent opinions on religious matters and unite the Muslims under one umbrella. He believed that if consistency could be imposed in formulating doctrines, then uniformity in doctrines would follow (Dickinson 2001, 1). Al-Shafiʿi believed that this uniformity can only be achieved if everyone referred back to the Prophet through a scientific method of checking and corroborating the information going back to the Prophet. The effect of the illocutionary force of al-Shafiʿi's argument led to the creation of a different genre of hadith collection, the *musnad*. A common feature of the *musnad* genre was that the number of sayings and opinions attributed to others besides the Prophet were curtailed and only hadiths of the Prophet were included. Famous in the genre was the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal a student of al-Shafiʿi. The hadiths in the *musnad* genre were arranged according to the names of the Companions, and therefore were more difficult to maneuver than the *musannaf* genre without a proper index. The purpose of such a genre was to function as an encyclopedia of the different hadiths narrated by a narrator. Thus, only specialists are able to benefit from collections in this genre. Despite the focus on including only hadiths attributed to the Prophet, authors of the *musnad* genre did not view it necessary to include only hadiths that can be authentically traced back to the Prophet. The sifting of authentic hadiths from weak ones was taken up by the next generation of hadith scholars, and the foremost of them all was Muhammad ibn Ismaʿil al-Bukhari, a student of Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

Hailing from the hinterlands of Transoxiana, al-Bukhari is celebrated as the greatest hadith scholar in Sunni Islam. His collection entitled 'A Comprehensive, authentic, concise book of hadith proper about the affairs, practices and days of the Prophet' (*al-Jamiʿ al-musnad al-sahih al-mukhtasar min umur Rasulillah wa sunanih wa ayyamih*), shortly and famously known as the *Sahih al-Bukhari* or *al-Jamiʿ al-Sahih*, is only second after the Qur'an in the list of sacred and venerated books in Sunni Islam. Legend has it that in a dream Al-Bukhari saw himself warding off mosquitoes buzzing around the Prophet with a fan. A dream interpreter inferred from this that al-Bukhari will defend the Prophet's integrity by warding off dubious hadiths in circulation from being attributed to him (Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani 1958, Introduction: 7). At the behest of his teacher Ishaq ibn Rahawayh (d. 853), al-Bukhari sifted through over 100,000 hadiths and compiled a collection which only comprised Prophetic hadiths of the highest degree of authenticity deduced from a very stringent analysis of the *isnad* and hadith narrators. Al-Bukhari's

student Muslim bin al-Hajjaj (d. 875) followed him in compiling a similar collection of hadith famously known as *Sahih Muslim*. Bracketed together, both collections famously came to be known as the *Sahihayn* or the two authentic collections (J.A. Brown 2007). Four more collections also gained popularity among sunni Muslims for the range of hadiths they include. They are the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud al-Sijistani (d. 889), the *Sunan* of Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, the *Sunan* of al-Nasa'i (d. 303) and the *Sunan* of Ibn Majah al-Qazwini (d. 887). Collectively they are known as the 'four *sunans*' (*sunan arba'a*) and with the *Sahihayn* they are recognized as a part of a 'canon' of hadith known as the *kutub al-sitta* (the six books) or sometimes loosely called the *sihah sitta* (the six authentic books) (al-Maqdisi 2005; J.A. Brown 2011a). The bulk of the hadiths related to Islamic law are sourced from these four collections due to their methodology for including a hadith in their compilation is slightly less stringent than that of the authors of the *Sahihayn* (Ibn al-Salah 1986).

In addition to functioning as a source reference for Islamic law, the six books also include hadiths related to other areas of Islam. Scholars have identified eight broad topics which these hadith collections include. They are (1) legal issues (*ahkam*), (2) chronicles from the life of the Prophet and his battles (*sira wa maghazi*), (3) virtues and blemishes of people (*manaqib wa mathalib*), (4) eschatology and prophecies related to the end of time (*fitan wa ashrat al-sa'a*), (5) exegesis of the Qur'an (*tafsir*), (6) articles of faith (*iman wa aqida*), (7) etiquette (*adab*) and (8) heart softening and hortatory hadiths (*riqaq, targhib wa tarhib*).

Somewhere between the 9th and 11th century, nearly all hadiths have been collected and compiled (Davidson 2020, 22). The six books as well as other collections were read in public gatherings where students eager to hear them would copy them while their authors dictated. The copies were then checked by authors who certified its accuracy. In this manner, these collections were made available for public consumption and with it the knowledge of the Prophet's teachings (sunna). In other words, the sunna of the Prophet was captured in hadith reports, which were orally transmitted with the assistance of written notes, from one generation to another, until they were compiled into books. From there, they became publicly available for all to read and access. Both Muslim and Western critical hadith history of the compilation of hadith stops with the canonical collections. It is only recently that the scholarship on hadith history has moved beyond the canonical collections (Blecher 2018; Davidson 2020). What criteria did the scholars use to decide whether to include a hadith or not into their collections? How did they go about sifting through authentic and weak hadiths? The above-mentioned authors of the six books were not mere compilers, but they were also hadith critics. They were involved in verifying and sifting through the individual hadiths in order to ascertain its status. This system of checking and verification, according to the 'big bang theory', grew symbiotically with the hadith collections.

Hadith Verification

The study of hadith mainly took two broad trajectories. Some scholars were occupied with investigating attribution of hadiths to the Prophet. This trajectory became known as the 'discipline of ascertaining correct transmission' ('*ilm al-riwaya*). Scholars working in this discipline can be compared to critical historians or investigative journalists who are engaged in source criticism and credibility of their sources. A second trajectory dealt mainly with the content and meaning of hadiths. This became known as the 'discipline of correct understanding of hadith' ('*ilm al-diraya*). Scholars engaged in this task are akin to lawyers or ethicists who draw out legal and ethical implications from the text that they are working on. While some scholars were known for their expertise in '*ilm al-riwaya*, others were famous for their contributions in the area of '*ilm al-diraya*. There were some who straddled both disciplines and have accumulated

mastery in both, such as Malik ibn Anas and al-Bukhari. This section of the chapter will focus on *'ilm al-riwaya*. In the next section we will see how contemporary scholars engage *'ilm al-diraya* to ascertain what a normative practice should be.

The primary concern of scholars working in the area of *'ilm al-riwaya* is to ascertain whether a hadith purported to be from the Prophet is actually from him. In order to arrive at this conclusion, a hadith critic takes on the role of a critical historian or an investigative journalist. When a narrator says, 'The Prophet said' or 'The Prophet did' or 'I saw the Prophet doing', how are we to know that the Prophet said or did this? Hadith critics, like the historian or journalist, employ a simple rational method to verify this: check the reliability of their sources. Depending on the accuracy and reliability of his sources, the hadith critic will judge the attribution of the hadith to the Prophet in five ways. The attribution of the hadith is either certain which is called (1) *mutawatir* hadith (widely dispersed) or not certain which is known as *ahad* (non-*mutawatir*). The *ahad* hadith is further divided into three types depending on how accurately and confidently the attribution can be traced back: (2) *sahih* (authentic), (3) *hasan* (good) and (4) *dai'f* (weak). The fifth is the falsely attributed hadith (*mawdu*) which is a forgery, and is rejected.

The *sahih* hadith instils a high probable confidence in its attribution to the Prophet, whereas the *hasan* hadith instils probable confidence. The attribution to the Prophet in a *da'if* hadith is tenuous although not completely missing, and the fabricated hadith is falsely attributed to the Prophet. Within each category there are also degrees of strength and are employed differently. The *mutawatir* and the rigorously authentic hadiths are used mainly to establish creedal points related to faith and belief. Most hadiths related to Islamic law come from the *hasan* category (Ibn al-Salah 1986, 30). The weak hadiths are used primarily as corroboration for the *sahih* and *hasan* hadith. They are also tolerated in the genre of exhortation and advice (*fada'il*) where the purpose is to instil a higher level of spirituality (J.A. Brown 2011b). The fabricated hadith is not a hadith in the technical sense of the word. It is only mentioned so that people can be aware of it and refrain from it. There are some books dedicated to including *mutwatir* hadiths only such as *Qatf Azhar al-Mutanathira* by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) (al-Suyuti 1985). Books like the *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sahih Ibn Hibban* and *Al-Mustadrak* by al-Hakim al-Naysaburi (d. 1014) are famous for including *sahih* hadiths. Others such as the 'four *sunans*' are known to be the primary sources of the *hasan* hadith. Collections recognized for their inclusion of weak hadiths include the *Musnad al-Firdaws* of al-Daylami (d. 1163). Finally, specific books were written to make people aware of the fabricated hadiths in circulation, such as Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzi's (d. 1201) *Kitab al-Mawdu'at* and al-'Ajluni's (d. 1748) *Kashf al-khafa wa muzil al-Ilbas*.

The designation of a hadith into one of the above five gradings is the end product in a long process of investigation (see Abdul-Jabbar 2020 for a detailed description in English or Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani 2011 for Arabic). It requires investigating the lives of all the narrators involved in transmitting a hadith up to an author who included the hadith in his collection. Biographical dictionaries were penned to facilitate ease of investigation. They included entries on thousands of hadith narrators including the names of their teachers as well as their students. This became known as *'ilm al-rijal* (the science of men) and *'ilm al-jarh wa ta'dil* (the science of hadith criticism). An array of terminologies was also developed to facilitate investigation. This took on the moniker *"ulum al-hadith*' (sciences of hadith) or '*mustalah al-hadith*' (hadith terminologies) (Al-Awni 1996). Three aspects related to a narrator were mainly scrutinized: (1) relationship between narrators, (2) their character and (3) their scholarly ability.

The relationship between two narrators was checked to confirm that a student–teacher relationship existed. A break in the *isnad* rendered the hadith attribution weak as it was not possible to ascertain the accuracy of transmission due to the missing link. Similarly, if a person of morally dubious character fared in the *isnad*, the entire hadith was viewed with suspicion.

The rationale for this was that a person who is not morally upright in his worldly affairs does not exude confidence in truthfully transmitting the words of the Prophet. Finally, the scholarly ability of a narrator was checked by corroborating their narration with the narrations of those who also transmitted the same hadith in all subsequent stages in the *isnad*. While it is not true that pre-modern hadith scholarship solely focused on *isnad* analysis for hadith verification (Al-Khatib 2020; Ansari 2020), it is, however, difficult to find examples where hadith critics rejected hadiths on the basis of its *matn* being problematic (J.A. Brown 2008; 2012, 366–369). It is only in the modern period where we find that *matn* analysis for accepting or rejecting hadiths has been given equal importance if not more than *isnad* verification.

Attitude of Contemporary Muslims vis-à-vis Hadith

The watershed date demarcating modern Islam from pre-modern Islam has loosely been recognized by scholars as 1798, the year Napoléon Bonaparte invaded Egypt. It is a pivotal date in the collective Muslim psychology as it was the year when Muslims lost their former glory permanently never to regain it again. The psychological blow to Muslims in this year was worse than the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258 as the invaders became Muslims within a few years of their invasion. Turning inwards to introspect what went wrong, some scholars identified the cause of Muslim degeneration to slavish adherence to traditions, which are cultural accretions rather than religious prescriptions. They believed that in order for Muslims to progress, they need to break free of the shackles of past authority and influence by returning to the unadulterated teachings of the Qur'an and sunna. Others felt that similar to how the *isnad* creates an unbroken link back to the Prophet, holding onto the collective scholarship produced by scholars of the past provides a moral anchor to hold onto in a society which is progressively becoming permissive and licentious. Grasping onto the ways of the ancient provides a sense of religious security in a fast-changing world.

Thus, Sunni Muslims displayed four types of attitude towards tradition (especially hadith) in their response to modernity. These attitudes can be understood as different points on a spectrum rather than a strict demarcation between them. They bleed into each other and osmosis of thoughts occurs between them. Consequently, it is difficult to neatly pigeonhole some modern hadith scholars like the Azhar-trained, sufi/salafi/maliki/sunni-with-shi'i tendencies Moroccan brothers, Shaykh Abu al-Fayd Ahmad al-Siddiq al-Ghumari (d. 1961) and Shaykh Abu Al-Fadl 'Abd Allah al-Siddiq al-Ghumari (d. 1993) into any of the four categories. On one end of the spectrum is tradition and on the other end is modernity. There are different layers to the tradition. The top layer is the ur-tradition of the Qur'an, the legitimacy of which no Muslim will disagree with. Following the Qur'an is the second layer of tradition embodied in the sunna of the Prophet (some view sunna and hadith as synonymous). The hadith as written documentation of the sunna, Islamic law schools, scholastic theology, Qur'anic exegetical traditions and Sufi guilds form a third layer of tradition. The closer one is on the tradition side of the spectrum, the more accepting they are of all traditions. Those further away progressively reject different layers of the tradition, with the Qur'an being the only point on the spectrum all agree on. Thus, the four attitudes can be categorized as Late-Sunni Traditionalists, Traditional Salafis, Modernist Salafis and Qur'anists (J.A. Brown 2014b).[1]

Late-Sunni Traditionalists

The Late-Sunni Traditionalists are those who accept all three layers of Islamic scholarship (see Hamid 2016). They argue that a true understanding of the religion is preserved through

an unbroken chain of scholarship. The Qur'an and hadith, according to them, are filtered through the interpretative methodologies of medieval scholars; and religious security is found in the collective scholarship of past scholars (J.A. Brown 2014b, 30). One example will suffice to demonstrate the above point. All six authors of the canonical hadith collections include a report on the authority of the Companion ʿAbd Allah Ibn ʿUmar who is reported to have said, 'The Prophet made the paying of *zakat al-fitr* (gift to the poor at the end of Ramadan) – a bucket of date or a bucket of barley – obligatory on the slave, the freeperson, the man, the woman, the young and the elderly Muslim' (Al-Bukhari 2001, 2:130). Based on the words of this hadith, most scholars are of the opinion that actual dates or barley must be given. Abu Hanifa was of the opinion that the amount in money can be paid instead of the actual products (Sabiq 2004, 278). Modern 'traditional scholars' opt for the Hanafi position as it is more favorable to poor people in this day and age. Thus, the former grand-mufti of Egypt, Ali Gomaa Mohammed, argues that:

The opinion that we base our fatwa on 'in this day and age, and we believe it to be most aligned with the broader objectives of the Shariʿa and most sensitive to peoples' needs, is the permissibility to dispense the *zakat al-fitr* using the monetary value in all cases. This is the opinion of the Hanafi School as is their practice in dispensing obligatory financial worship (*zakat*), financial penalty (*kaffara*), breaking of oaths (*nadhr*) and land tax (*khiraj*). Furthermore, it is also the opinion of a sizeable number of followers (*tabiʿi*) as we have already mentioned' (Mohammed 2011).

Some prominent Late-Sunni Traditionalist hadith scholars include: Muhammad Zahid Al-Kawthari (d. 1952), ʿAbd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda (d. 1997), Nur al-Din al-ʿItr (d. 2020), Muhammad Zakariyyah al-Kandhalawi (d. 1982) and Muhammad Yusuf Banuri (d. 1977).

Traditional Salafis

Carrying on with our discussion on the four different attitudes to tradition, next to the Late-Sunni Traditionalists are the Salafis. The latter group believes in a methodology known as *Salafiyya* (following the ways of the predecessors) for its understanding of Islam. The methodology is intimately related to the question of salvation. The term has a 'family resemblance' with Saudi Wahhabism, and to a certain extent is intimately linked with the official religious position of Saudi Arabia (Lauzière 2010, 370). For the Salafi, salvation can only be attained through following the *salafiyya* methodology, which is loosely defined as following the Qur'an and sunna, and the first three generations of Muslims after the Prophet (al-Fawzan 2007a; Qadhi 2014). They advocate for a democratization of religious knowledge which is accessible to all and not only confined to a coterie of elitist scholars. The ease of access to translations of the Qur'an and the hadith literature makes Salafism appealing to converts as well as newly practicing Muslims. Further appeal to Salafism is its insistence that the entirety of the knowledge of Islam is found within the Qur'an and hadith and one is no longer required to go outside of the scripture for religious instruction. On this basis, Salafis dismiss esoteric and sufi teachings which they believe to be extra-scriptural. Up to this point, all Salafis loosely adhere to the above narrative. Beyond this, Brown distinguishes between the Traditional Salafis and Modernist Salafis (J.A. Brown 2014b).

Traditional Salafis argue that salvation lies only in the first three generation of Islam. A true Islamic society must mimic the first three generations literally. This group is famous for its use of literal understanding of the Qur'an and sunna, which to them is synonymous with hadith (thus, in the second layer of Islamic traditions). They seek to follow the way of the ancient *ashab al-hadith* and the Hanbali school in particular filtered through the writings of the 14th century

veritable scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). They are opposed to using reason (*ra'y* and *ijtihad*) and will be happy to follow a weakly transmitted hadith over rational thought. Furthermore, they are critical of the rational excesses found in the law schools, in particular the Hanafi School which is the most rationalist of the schools.

An example of Salafi attitude to hadith can be observed in their discussion on the above-mentioned hadith of *zakat al-fitr*. As opposed to the Hanafis, the Saudi Salafi Scholar Salih al-Fawzan deems it impermissible to give the monetary value of the food products mentioned in the *zakat al-fitr* hadith. Fawzan reasoned that despite money being available during the Prophet's time, the Prophet did not include it in the list of things that can be given in *zakat al-fitr* (al-Fawzan 2007b).

A similar literal reading of scripture can be found in the writings of the former grand-mufti of Saudi Arabia, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ibn Baz's (d. 1999) understanding of cosmography. His approach is purely literal. Upon being asked whether it is possible for people to fly into space and land on the moon, his answer was not based on factual information derived from the experiences of scientists and astronauts who have been to the moon and back, but rather whether the Qur'an and sunna had a view on it or not. His response was based on the silence of scripture. In other words, he argued that it is possible for humans to land on the moon because there is nothing in the Qur'an and sunna which goes against this view (Ibn Baz 1999, 1:245–265). However, the same methodology led him to denounce the heliocentric view of the world as un-Islamic. Despite that he did not declare anyone who did not agree with his geocentric world view to be outside the fold of Islam. Contrary to the above fatwa, and in line with his literalist reading, he declared as an apostate anyone who denied the sun having an orbit (Ibn Baz 1999, 9:228). This fatwa was the result of a literal reading of Qur'an (Q. 36:38) and a hadith in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, where the Prophet is reported to have said that after a long day's rising and setting, the sun eventually takes rest under the Throne of God (Al-Bukhari 2001, 6:123). Some prominent Salafi scholars in the modern period include shaykh Nasir al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999) (Lecroix 2008) and Abul Aʿla Maududi (d. 1979).

Modernist Salafis

While the Modernist Salafis are similar to Traditional Salafis insofar as their insistence on bypassing tradition and resorting directly to the Qur'an and sunna, their similarities stop here. First of all, attributing the word '*Salafiyya*' to them is a bit of an anomaly since there is a heavy emphasis on rational and Muʿtazilite thought among Modernist Salafis. In fact, al-Qaradawi, a leading Modernist Salafi, disparages the traditional Salafis by calling them 'the new Zahirites' (*zahriyya al-judud)* (Al-Qaradawi 2008, 45), referring to the historical school of law which emphasized the plain meaning of the Shariʿa and advocated literalism (Jackson 2006). The traditional Salafis in response disparage al-Qaradawi by calling him a ration-alist (Muʿtazili). Similarly, al-Qaradawi's teacher, Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996), mocks Traditional Salafi teaching as 'Bedouin law' (*al-fiqh al-badawi*) (Ghazali 2001). Thus, the term *Salafiyya*, which was first used by the modernists, was a moniker for an open, flexible and rational approach to the Shariʿa founded by leading Islamic Modernist activists of the 19th century like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935), and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) of British India (Lauzière 2010, 370; al-Buti 1998).

For the Modernist Salafis, looking back to the period of the *salaf* and then translating that teaching into a modern context is what marks them out from their traditional counterpart. They were one of the first to map out a detailed theory of the sunna where Prophetic practices

were divided into legislative and personal. They argued that the legislative aspect of the Prophet's teaching, enshrined in the hadith, is the sunna that is to be followed (*sunan al-huda*). As for habits and practices of the Prophet related to human nature and instincts are not technically sunna (*sunan al-zawa'id*), therefore Muslims are not required to emulate them. Mahmud Shaltut (d. 1963), a Modernist Salafi and a former rector of Al-Azhar University, argues that not understanding the proper role of the sunna, and not knowing that there is a hierarchy of practice and acceptance within the sunna, is what leads people to reject the hadith altogether (Shaltut 2001, 502).

One of the main textual bases dividing the sunna into two categories is a hadith reported from the Prophet on artificial pollination of date-palms. It is reported that when the Prophet immigrated to Medina, he found the owners of date farms practicing artificial pollination to increase the date yield. This was an ancient practice in Medina. Upon the advice of the Prophet, the newly converted farmers desisted artificial pollination. That particular year the date yield was poor. When the farmers informed the Prophet about this, he responded, 'You are more knowledgeable about your worldly affairs than me' (Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj [N.D.], 1836).

Shaltut devised a theory of sunna where he divided the Prophetic practices into six categories. Three of these relate to the Prophet's habits and three relate to his mission. The first is 'the human Prophet'.[2] They are practices that relate to the Prophet's natural human needs, such as eating, drinking and other natural habits. The second is the 'cultural Prophet'. They include habits of the Prophet which are cultural practices such as the type of clothes he wore or the choice of medicine he used. Al-Qaradawi argues that the Prophetic medicine found in the hadith literature was not divinely inspired, and is not anything more than the medical tradition of Arabia where the Prophet happened to be, unless that antidote was specifically mentioned in the Qur'an like honey (al-Qaradawi 2002a, 66–67). Finally, the third is the 'strategic Prophet'. They relate to those personal practices which are strategic decisions, for example, war strategies and the intricacies of deploying troops. Shaltut argues that all of the above three types of sunnas are non-legislative and one is not required to act upon them (Shaltut 2001, 500).

The latter three types of Prophetic practice, in Shaltut's scheme, relate to his Prophetic mission, and those are the ones that Muslims must endeavor to follow. The fourth (the Messenger Prophet) are those practices and advises which the Prophet mentioned in his capacity as a Messenger of God. This includes explaining or clarifying a verse of the Qur'an or discussing a legal issue or an issue related to the articles of faith. Shaltut maintains that this type of sunna is general and is for everyone to practice. It will remain in effect for ever and a Muslim has to act upon it without trying to rationalize it (Shaltut 2001, 504). The fifth type of sunna (the Prophet as statesman) are those practices and pronouncements which were made in his capacity as the leader of the community, its imam and its head, such as declaring jihad, spending money from the public purse, collecting *zakat*, choosing judges and governors. Shaltut opines that although this relates directly to the prophet's mission, it is not a general sunna to be practiced by everyone. These roles are to be enacted by the leadership of the Muslim community only. Finally, there is the prophet's role as a legislator and a judge (the legislative Prophet), for not only was he a Prophet with a mission, he was also a leader of a community and its judge. Shaltut argues that these practices of the Prophet like his role as a leader are also not for general consumption. They should be followed only when the conditions are met.

By categorizing the sunna in this way, Shaltut believes that many confusions can be avoided. Not knowing the difference between the legislative and habitual practices of the Prophet leads to incorrect practices. The Prophet forbade eating garlic and attending the congregational prayer. This is clearly legislative. However, should one stop eating garlic due to this, given that the Prophet did not like eating garlic himself? Similarly, some hadiths mention that the penalty

for someone who apostates is death. Although this issue is disputed, even if one was to act upon this hadith, according to Shaltut's scheme, this sunna will be from the Prophet's legislative capacity, which is a restricted sunna. Not understanding this point will and does lead to extra-judicial killing of those who leave Islam.

As previously mentioned, Jonathan Brown argued that classical hadith scholars investigated the *matn* as well as the *isnad*, they just were not as conspicuous. He argues that all later medieval scholars accepted that a hadith can be declared weak or rejected on the basis of its content (*matn*) even though it possessed a perfectly fine *isnad*. Despite this, no one dared to declare a hadith weak or rejected using the *matn* criteria only (J.A. Brown 2008). This principle was applied by the Modernist Salafis to hadith. Thus, Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996) rejects many hadiths on the basis that their content is weak, contradictory to the spirit of the Shari'a or fantastical such as that women's intellect is half of men's, music is forbidden in Islam, the existence of demonic possession and the hadith describing Moses slapping the angel of death (al-Ghazali 2001). For al-Ghazali, it is possible for an otherwise authentic *isnad* to have a weak *matn* (Ghazali 2001, 19). Al-Ghazali's student Yusuf al-Qaradawi provided a framework for understanding and accepting hadiths based on their content. These include understanding the hadith in light of the Qur'an, understanding a hadith based on its intended audience and context and/or how the Companions understood particular words (al-Qaradawi 2002b).

An example of using the context to provide a proper reading of hadith can be observed in al-Qaradawi's discussion of women traveling on their own without a male guardian (*mahram*). There are numerous hadiths traced back to the Prophet saying that a woman is not allowed to travel on her own without a *mahram* (al-Qaradawi 2002b, 149). Acting upon the dictates of this hadith will make life extremely difficult for modern Muslim women who are at times required to travel long distances for work and study. Al-Qaradawi is aware of the restrictive nature of this hadith and the serious impediment it can cause to women's mobility and progress. By contextualizing the hadith, al-Qaradawi argues that the legal rationale (*'illa*) for disallowing women to travel on their own is the 'fear for their own safety'. Once the legal rationale has been identified, then through a process of reasoning it is easy to ascertain whether the same legal rationale exists today or not. This is subjective, and for al-Qaradawi, it no longer exists. He provides rational, scriptural and legal justification for his position. He argues that a close reading of the different hadiths on this topic makes clear that the reason why women's travelling on their own was forbidden was due to fear for their own safety. In an era where traveling was done using camels or other animals, and traversing a vast area of desert, a woman would have either felt scared for her physical safety, and if not that then fear of slander. With modern transportation facilities, this fear no longer remains. Al-Qaradawi's basis for this contextualization is another hadith not directly related to women traveling, but makes a reference to them. The Companion 'Adi ibn Hatim is reported to have said:

> While I was in the city of the Prophet, a man came and complained to him of poverty. Then another man came and complained of robbery by highwaymen. The Prophet said, 'Adi! Have you been to Al-Hira?'[3] I said, 'I have never been, but the city was mentioned to me. The Prophet said, 'If you should live for a long time, you will certainly see that a lady in a howdah-carriage traveling from Al-Hira will (safely reach Mecca and) perform the Tawaf of the Ka'ba, fearing none but Allah'.
>
> *(Al-Bukhari 2001, 4:197)*

Al-Qaradawi argues that the Prophet mentioned this hadith in the context of praise and the serenity to come. The safety will be such that a woman can travel from Iraq to Mecca on her

own. Had women traveling on their own been forbidden, the Prophet would not have used her example in such situation, since the Prophet does not lie even when telling a joke let alone in praising. Al-Qaradawi then draws on the legal literature to further prove his point. He argues that some Shafi'i scholars allow a woman to travel on her own if it is safe to do so. Others allow her to travel if she is in the company of other women without a *mahram* being present. This was also the practice of 'Aisha and the other wives of the Prophet during the reign of 'Umar. They went to hajj in their group led by 'Uthman ibn 'Affan and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf, none of whom were their *mahram*. A third group of scholars extend the permissibility to all forms of traveling and not only to pilgrimage. Through rational, scriptural and legal justifications, al-Qaradawi was able to restrict the ramification of an otherwise *sahih* hadith to a narrowly confined situation: the presence of fear. What the above discussion reveals is that al-Qaradawi uses the entirety of the Islamic intellectual tradition (scriptural as well as rational) to prove his point without seeing the need to stick to one school of thought. This is in line with the Salafi methodology whose practitioners do not restrict themselves to a single school of thought.

Qur'anist

The fourth response to modernity is the Qur'an only attitude. Advocates of this response call themselves Qur'anist, translated as 'Scripturalists' by Daniel Brown (D. Brown 2018). They are Islam's version of the Protestant (D. Brown 2016).[4] Like the latter, they also uphold a *sola scriptura* understanding of religion. For Qur'anists, Islam is nothing more than the Qu'ran itself. The Qur'an is the eternal message of God; the Prophet's sunna is temporal and was binding on his Companions but does not go beyond their time. For them, the Prophet's role is nothing more than a postman (D. Brown 1999, 67). Daniel Brown writes:

> In this way, the ahl-i-Quran [Qur'anist] account for the authority of the hadith. The sunna was the authoritative application of divine law for particular circumstance, but when circumstances change the details of the law must also change.
>
> *(D. Brown 1999, 67)*

The Qur'anist movement was a direct result of the seismic shift in the Muslim psychology launched by the onset of colonization of Muslim countries. They appeared primarily in two of the major intellectual fortresses in the Muslim world: Egypt and India, roughly during the same time. One of the first to have rejected the hadith wholesale was an imam in an ahl-i-hadith mosque in Lahore in 1900 (D.W. Brown 2020a, 322). Abdullah Chakralawi felt that the hadith was redundant and details of Islam can be extrapolated exclusively from the Qur'an. He was infatuated with mining the rules of prayer from the Qur'an – a cause for other Qur'anists blaming him to be still swayed by the attention to details of the hadith approach. Chakralawi's disciple, Mistri Muhammad Ramadan, who managed to find references to only three prayers in the Qur'an, reduced all prayers to two rakats and eliminated all recitations in prayers (D.W. Brown 2020a, 324). Other notables involved in the South Asian scene include Khawaja Ahmad al-Din Amritsari, a civil servant and self-taught who lost faith in hadith when he read that Moses slapped and blinded the Angel of Death. Aslam Jaypuri and Ghulam Ahmad Parewz were also prominent names in this movement. In fact, the latter's Qur'an only views became politically important for the dictatorial regime of Ayyub Khan's Pakistan (D.W. Brown 2020a, 327).

Around the same time as the South Asian movement, Muhammad Tawfiq Sidqi (d. 1920), a young Egyptian doctor and a disciple of Rashid Rida, wrote an article for Rida's journal *al-Manar* in 1906 entitled, 'Islam is the Qur'an only' (Sidqi 1906a). Sidqi mentioned that he

is presenting his views to be scrutinized by all those scholars who have an inquisitive mind (*muhaqqiq*) and not for those who blindly follow (*muqallid*). In his discussion on Qur'an 4:59, Sidqi writes:

> The followers of the sunna (*sunniyun*) present the following verse as their evidence, 'You who believe, obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you.' (Q, 4:59) We, the Qur'anists (*qur'aniyyun*) say that there is no dispute in following the Prophet. Our dispute is on another topic. Did the Prophet legislate something obligatory independent of the Qur'an? If this is correct, then can 'those in authority' obligate seven prayers on us rather than five? Can they obligate two months of fasting rather than one since we are obligated to follow them like we are to follow the Prophet?
>
> *(Sidqi 1906a)*

Sidqi, a devout Muslim and doctor was unable to reconcile seemingly fantastical and absurd hadiths with his understanding of the Qur'an and Prophet's personality. For example, he could not fathom in his right-state of mind that the Prophet would offer repulsive and unhygienic advice like drowning a fly, which has fallen in a glass of water, and throwing it out and then drinking the water, and yet a hadith reported from the Prophet advises just that (Al-Bukhari 2001, 4:130). Sidqi's article elicited caustic and visceral responses by contributors to the journal, including the editor of *al-Manar*, Rashid Rida, who also came under attack for including the article in his journal. One author entitled his rejoinder as 'Religion is everything that the Prophet brought' (Baz 1906). Rida allowed Sidqi to defend himself (Sidqi 1906b), after which Rida summarized the debate and closed the discussion by aptly titling his article, 'Islam is the Qur'an and Sunna' (*al-Islam huwa al-Qur'an wa al-Sunna*) (Rida 1906).

Another protégé of Rida, Mahmud Abu Rayyah (d. 1970), had similar problems with the wordings of certain hadiths. His approach was more abrasive and sarcastic. Abu Rayyah could not fathom that the Prophet will use such a vulgar word like 'farting' in the hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra that the Prophet said, 'When the call for the prayer (*adhan*) is pronounced, Satan takes to his heels passing wind so that he may not hear the Adhan' (Al–Bukhari 2001, 1:125; Abu Rayyah 1994, 199; J.A. Brown 2014a, 69). Followers of the hadith camp respond that 'breaking wind' (*durat*) need not be seen as vulgar as it is natural. Here the reference is metaphorical, alluding to Arabian horses letting out wind during charging in the battlefield. The reference was to the speed that the devil flees from the mosque, and the metaphor conjured up a vivid picture of charging steeds in the minds of the Prophet's Companions (J.A. Brown 2014a, 70). Abu Rayyah developed a number of arguments for rejecting hadith. Firstly, he argues, there are many verses in the Qur'an where God instructs the Prophet to only follow revelation, that is, the Qur'an (Q, 6:153, 6:38, 7:3) (Abu Rayyah 1994, 376). Secondly, there are hadiths reported from the Prophet forbidding writing down anything other than the Qur'an. More importantly, in Abu Rayyah's view, the first major collections of hadith were written nearly two centuries after the demise of the Prophet. Finally, Abu Rayyah blames the Companion Abu Hurayra for fabricating hadiths. Abu Rayyah found it suspicious that Abu Hurayra spent minimal time with the Prophet, and yet tops the list of those who have narrated the most hadiths. To this end, Abu Rayyah wrote a separate monograph attacking Abu Hurayra and blaming him for the proliferation of hadith, entitled 'Abu Hurayra the lover of sweetmeat' (*Abu Hurayra Shaykh al-Madira*), alluding to a fable mentioned by some exegetes that Abu Hurayra used to consume sweetmeat with Mu'awiya and offer the prayer behind 'Ali. Upon being questioned, he replied that Mu'awiya's sweetmeat was delicious while 'Ali's prayer is accurate.

Both Sidqi and Abu Rayya did not go unchallenged. The founder of the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mustafa al-Siba'i (d.1964), wrote a defense of hadith where he responded to Goldziher as well as Abu Rayyah and Sidqi (Al-Sibai 2003). Similarly, Abu Shuhba (d. 1983), an Azhari scholar, wrote a similar defense to Abu Rayyah's sarcastic and scathing attack on hadith and Abu Hurayra (Abu Shuhba [N.D.]).

These highly charged hadith wars were not fought in a vacuum. They were responses to the spiritual, interpretative, epistemological challenges and crisis of religious leadership that modern Muslims felt, first and foremost from being chronologically distant from the 'golden times' and secondly due to feeling a sense of despondency brought on by colonialism after a long history of being trailblazers. Some, however, saw in this crisis a boon. Modernity with its emancipation from the claws of communitarianism and its emphasis on individual liberty enabled them to develop a vision of Islam which is emancipatory (from tradition and patriarchy). Thus, in their endeavor to develop a gender-equal, 'progressive' and non-clerical understanding of Islam, western trained female scholars of Islam reject hadith, arguing that it is one of the major causes as to why patriarchy and misogyny exist in the Muslim community. Asma Barlas writes:

> It was the Ahādith that introduced into Islam images of women as "morally and religiously defective," "evil temptresses, the greatest Fitna [temptation] for men," "unclean over and above menstruation," "the larger part of the inhabitants of Hell, because of their unfaithfulness and ingratitude toward their husbands," and as having "weaker intellectual powers," therefore being unfit for political rule. Ironically, the legacy of the Prophet, a man renowned for his gentleness to women, was evoked by those who claimed to follow him most closely, the Ahl-i-Sunnah (followers of the Prophet's praxis), on behalf of themes that cannot be inferred either from the Qur'ān's teachings or from the Prophet's treatment of women.
>
> *(Barlas 2002, 45)*

In similar suit, Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle throws hadith to the gallows in trying to represent a sexually divergent and tolerant Muslim community. He writes:

> At a certain point in history, hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad began to circulate which addressed the issue of punishing men for having anal sex. This is just one specific case of a very general problem for Muslims ever since: the existence of reports, on a whole range of subjects, that circulate in the name of the Prophet without being reliably or verifiably known to represent the Prophet's actual actions and teachings. [...] It is probable that such hadith came into being long after the Prophet had died, and were attributed to him in order to give them the force of association with the Prophet's respected and revered personality.
>
> *(Kugle 2008, 222)*

Conclusion

Coming around full circle to the questions I posed at the beginning of this chapter, the answer to those will be, 'It depends from whose point of view'. For folks who are sympathetic to traditional understanding of hadith, the fact that the hadith about the brother who complains to the Prophet about his brother's stomach ache appears in the *Sahih Al-Bukhari* instills enough confidence that the hadith is an accurate rendition of what really transpired. Nevertheless, even if it is true, so what? The *ashab al-hadith* and the Traditional Salafis may view honey as a cure because

it was clearly mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith. For al-Qaradawi, the Qur'an and hadith are only describing some of the benefits of traditional Arab medicine. In his view there is nothing holy or sanctified about this treatment. According to Shaltut's system, it has no bearing on the Prophetic mission, and therefore falls outside the scope of the sunna. At rock-bottom, whether one accepts a hadith or not depends on (a) what confidence they place on the *isnad* system and (b) how much charity they are willing to extend to reading seemingly problematic hadiths (J.A. Brown 2014a, 72). Finally, hadith studies is an ever-expanding discipline where people are dabbling with new ways in approaching the sunna, and little attention has been paid to them in the academic study of hadith. Some of them include *maddhab* distinct approach to hadith verification as opposed to the dominant method (Shukurov and Ahmed 2015; Ali 2013). Others involve a complete overhaul of the *'ulum al-hadith* system developed by late hadith scholars like Ibn al-Salah (d. 1245) and Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani (d. 1449) and a return to the methods of the ancient hadith scholars (Judai 2003; Mallibari 2003. See Snober 2020 for an overview). Some have opted for a quantitative analyses of hadith using mathematical probability (Hawramani 2019) and statistical analysis (Yanagihashi 2019). Also missing from the literature, with a few exceptions (Qureshi 2020), are anthropological studies on hadith circles and classes. Good open software and databases such as the Al-Shamela library are available to facilitate further research on this topic (Verkinderen 2020).

Notes

1 This is a slight variation of Brown's model.
2 These titles are mine and not Shaltut's.
3 An ancient Mesopotamian town located south of Kufa, Iraq.
4 Although Daniel Brown disagrees with this point.

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