

ESSENTIAL SCIENCES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING HADITH

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Abstract: This article analyzes important scholarly disciplines that are essential in the process of interpreting hadiths. In particular, it examines gharib al-hadith, which serves as a primary tool for the correct understanding of hadith texts; asbab wurud al-hadith (the circumstances and causes of a hadith's narration); mukhtalif al-hadith, which aims to reconcile narrations that outwardly appear contradictory in meaning; and the sciences of nasikh and mansukh, which determine the legal status and applicability of hadiths. Each of these scholarly disciplines serves as an important methodological foundation for achieving a deep and comprehensive understanding of hadiths. The article also discusses the theoretical foundations of these sciences, their interrelation with sharh al-hadith (hadith commentary), and their practical significance through illustrative examples.

Keywords: sharh al-hadith, gharib al-hadith, mukhtalif al-hadith, asbab wurud al-hadith, nasikh and mansukh.

The science of Hadith is regarded as one of the most important and noble disciplines within the Islamic sciences. Throughout history, various approaches have emerged regarding the understanding and interpretation of Hadiths. In some cases, interpreting Hadith texts solely according to their apparent meanings, while neglecting the circumstances of their utterance, the reasons behind them, and their intended objectives, has led to various misunderstandings. Therefore, the correct interpretation of Hadith requires reliance upon specific sciences and established scholarly principles. In particular, disciplines such as Arabic linguistic sciences, Usul al-Hadith (the principles of Hadith methodology), Usul al-Fiqh (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence), Asbab al-Wurud (the occasions and circumstances of Hadith narration), and Nasikh wa Mansukh (abrogating and abrogated texts) play a crucial role in uncovering the true meanings and intended implications of Hadiths.

1. The Relationship Between Hadith Interpretation and Gharib al-Hadith.

One of the sciences closely connected to the interpretation of Hadith is Gharib al-Hadith. This discipline deals with obscure and unfamiliar words that occur in Hadith texts and are difficult to understand due to their rare usage or ambiguity of meaning. Knowledge of Gharib al-Hadith is essential for correctly understanding and interpreting the Prophetic traditions, as the intended meaning of a Hadith may depend on the accurate explanation of such terms¹.

Knowledge of Gharib al-Hadith is of utmost importance in the interpretation of Hadith. This is because a correct understanding of the meanings of Hadiths is directly dependent upon this discipline. The hadith scholar Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH/1373 CE) stated: "This is one of the important sciences necessary for understanding Hadith and acting upon it. It serves primarily to

¹ Ibn al-Salah, Muqaddimat Ibn al-Salah. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2010, p. 160.

explain the text (matn) itself rather than matters related to the science of isnad or chains of transmission”².

Due to the significance of this discipline, scholars exercised great caution when discussing it. For example, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH/855 CE), despite his vast knowledge and scholarly expertise, was once asked about the meaning of a word occurring in a gharib Hadith. He replied: “Ask those who are specialists in Hadith about such unfamiliar words. I fear speaking about the words of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) based on conjecture and thereby falling into error”³.

Likewise, al-Asma’i (d. 216 AH/831 CE) was asked: “O Abu Sa’id, what is the meaning of the word saqab in the statement of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), “A neighbor has the strongest right due to his proximity” (al-jaru ahaqu bi-saqabihi)?⁴”. He responded: “I do not interpret the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). However, I can say that the Arabs use the word saqab to mean something that is near or adjacent”⁵.

2. The Relationship Between Hadith Interpretation and the Circumstances of Hadith Narration (Asbab al-Wurud).

One of the sciences closely related to the interpretation of Hadith is the knowledge of the circumstances and reasons behind the narration of Hadiths (Asbab al-Wurud). Regarding the importance of this discipline, Imam al-Sakhawi (d. 902 AH/1497 CE) stated: “At times, the intended meaning of a Hadith becomes clear only through knowledge of the reason for which it was uttered”⁶.

An example of this can be found in the following Hadith narrated by Ka’b ibn Aşim al-Ash’ari. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “Fasting while traveling is not an act of righteousness”⁷.

The scholars expressed several opinions regarding the ruling of fasting during travel. The majority of scholars (jumhur), including the Hanafis, Malikis, and Shafi’is, maintained that if fasting during travel does not cause hardship, then fasting is preferable. However, if it causes difficulty, then breaking the fast is preferable. The Hanbali scholars, on the other hand, held that breaking the fast while traveling is preferable, and a group among them even regarded fasting during travel as disliked (makruh). The Zahiris went further and argued that breaking the fast while traveling is obligatory, and that if a person fasts while traveling, his fast is invalid and unacceptable⁸.

Those who considered fasting during travel to be prohibited (haram) or disliked (makruh) cited this Hadith as evidence. They argued that since the Prophet (peace be upon him) explicitly stated that fasting during travel “is not an act of righteousness,” it cannot be considered an act of worship or obedience. Consequently, if it is not an act of righteousness, it must be sinful.

In response, those who regarded fasting during travel as preferable argued that this Hadith referred to a specific situation involving a man who had become severely exhausted due to fasting during a journey and had to be shaded because of his weakened condition. Therefore, the Hadith is not general in its application but rather pertains to circumstances similar to that particular case. The reason for the narration and its context clearly indicate this interpretation.

2 Ibn Kathir, *Ikhtisar Ulum al-Hadith*. Egypt: Maktabat al-Hijaz, 1987, p. 200.

3 Ibn al-Salah, *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Salah*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2010, p. 160.

4 Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*. Egypt: Dar al-Salam, 2002, vol. 6, p. 21.

5 Ibn al-Salah, *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Salah*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2010, p. 160.

6 Al-Sakhawi, *Fath al-Mughith*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003. Vol. 3, p. 429.

7 Ibn Majah. *Sunan Ibn Majah*. Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkar al-Dawliyyah, 2000. p. 182.

8 Al-Sarakhsi. *Al-Mabsut*. Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah, 1993. Vol. 3, p. 92.

The Companion Jabir ibn Abdallah narrated: “The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was on a journey when he saw a man around whom people had gathered and over whom shade had been provided. He asked, “What is the matter with him?” They replied, “He is fasting”. Thereupon, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “Fasting while traveling is not an act of righteousness”⁹.

This example demonstrates the significant role that knowledge of the circumstances of Hadith narration plays in understanding the intended meaning of Prophetic traditions. Without considering the context and cause of a Hadith, one may arrive at conclusions that differ from what was originally intended by the Prophet (peace be upon him).

3. The Relationship Between Hadith Interpretation and Apparent Contradictions Among Hadiths.

Another discipline closely related to the interpretation of Hadith is the study of apparent contradictions and conflicts among Hadith narrations. The first scholar reported to have included this subject among the sciences of Hadith was the eminent scholar al-Hakim al-Naysaburi. In his work *Ma'rifat Ulum al-Hadith*, while discussing the twenty-ninth category of Hadith sciences, he states: “One of these sciences is the knowledge of cases in which one of the Sunnahs of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) appears, on the surface, to contradict another”¹⁰.

An example of this issue can be found in the following narrations. Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “None of you should eat the meat of his sacrificial animal for more than three days”. However, another narration from the Prophet (peace be upon him) appears to convey the opposite meaning. It is reported from Qatadah that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “Eat from the sacrificial meat and store it” The scholar Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH/933 CE) reconciled these two narrations by explaining that the Prophet's prohibition against storing sacrificial meat occurred during a year in which people were experiencing hardship and hunger. For this reason, the Prophet (peace be upon him) encouraged the Muslims to distribute the meat as charity so that those in need could benefit from it. Since the prohibition was intended as an encouragement toward charity and benevolence rather than as a permanent legal ruling, there is no objection to storing and consuming sacrificial meat after three days¹¹.

This example illustrates the importance of understanding and reconciling apparently conflicting Hadiths in order to arrive at the intended meaning of the Prophetic Sunnah. A literal reading of individual narrations without considering related reports may lead to incorrect legal and interpretive conclusions.

4. The Relationship Between Hadith Interpretation and the Science of Naskh (Abrogation).

Another important discipline related to the interpretation of Hadith is the science of Naskh (abrogation) and Mansukh (that which has been abrogated). The scholar Ibn Khaldun (d. 808 AH/1406 CE), in his *Muqaddimah*, states: “The sciences of Hadith are numerous and diverse, among them is the knowledge of the abrogating (nasikh) and the abrogated (mansukh). This is connected to the permissibility and actual occurrence of abrogation in our Shariah. It was legislated by Allah as a mercy and a means of ease for His servants, taking their welfare and interests into consideration. Knowledge of the nasikh and mansukh is among the most important and most intricate branches of the Hadith sciences”¹².

⁹ Imam al-Bukhari. *Al-Jami' al-Sahih*. Tashkent: State Scientific Publishing House of the National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, 2008. Vol. 1, p. 320.

¹⁰ Al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003, p. 401.

¹¹ Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi, *Sharh Ma'ani al-Athar*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, vol. 8, pp. 290–303.

¹² Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*. Egypt: Matba'at al-Taqqaddum, 1904, vol. 1, p. 349.

Abrogating Hadiths are identified through a number of methods and contextual indicators. These indicators, which help determine the existence of abrogation, are commonly referred to as “indicators of abrogation” and may be classified into four categories:

1. An explicit statement of the Prophet (peace be upon him) indicating that a particular ruling has been abrogated.
2. A statement of a Companion demonstrating that a ruling was abrogated.
3. Chronological evidence, whereby the abrogated status of a Hadith is determined through knowledge of the time period or sequence in which the narrations were issued¹³.
4. Scholarly consensus (ijma), through which it becomes known that a particular Hadith has been abrogated¹⁴.

The science of Naskh plays a crucial role in the correct interpretation of Hadith, as it enables scholars to distinguish between rulings that remain operative and those that were superseded by later revelations or Prophetic directives. Without knowledge of abrogation, a jurist or interpreter may apply a ruling that is no longer legally effective, thereby arriving at inaccurate legal conclusions.

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¹³ Muhammad Awwamah. *The Role of Hadith in the Differences of Opinion Among the Imams of Fiqh*. Tashkent: Hilol Nashr, 2022. pp. 140–142.

¹⁴ Abdulmajid Juzjani. *Hadith Sciences from the Perspective of Hadith Scholars and Hanafi Jurists*. Tashkent: Hilol Nashr. p. 213.