153227 - How can I start to seek knowledge of hadeeth?

the question

What do you say about the one who wants to seek knowledge of hadeeth? How should I start? Please note that I have studied ‘aqeedah (beliefs) in depth, praise be to Allah, and now I find myself inclining a great deal towards studying hadeeth. I want to start and I need your advice.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

We may sum up our advice concerning the methodology of seeking knowledge of hadeeth as follows:

Firstly:

Paying a great deal of attention to memorising the texts of the Prophet’s Sunnah, because this is the aim and purpose for which the scholars established all the sciences of hadeeth. So it is not permissible for the seeker of knowledge to be distracted from the aim by the means.

Memorising the texts of the Prophet’s Sunnah begins with memorising the hadeeths on which there is agreement between the two Saheehs (al-Bukhaari and Muslim), then by memorising those which were narrated only by al-Bukhaari, then by memorising those that were narrated only by Muslim. This will lead to accomplishing the first and most important stage in forming the hadeeth mentality in the one who is seeking knowledge of hadeeth.

After that, he moves on to memorising hadeeths that are extra to those of the two Saheehs, which are to be found in the six books and the well-known Musnads. He may seek help in doing so by means of many books in which these extra reports (zawaa’id) are compiled and classified.

The best ways of memorising include repeating the text to be memorised for a few days after the

day on which he memorises it. This method was recommended by az-Zarnooshi (may Allah have mercy on him) when he said:

The seeker of knowledge should recite the text repeatedly because he will not be able to memorise properly until he does that. He should repeat what he memorised on the previous day five times, and repeat what he memorised the day before that four times, and repeat what he memorised on the day before that three times, and what he memorised on the day before that two times, and what he memorised before that one time. This will help him to memorise and repeat. End quote.

Ta'leem at-Ta'allum, p. 60

If the student is not able to memorise completely, then he should do no less than reading these hadeeths often, so that he will be able to call them to mind and have a full comprehension of them.

This topic has been discussed in detail previously in the answer to question no. 113469

Secondly:

It is essential for the seeker of hadeeth knowledge to memorise different types of isnaads and whatever he can memorise of the names and biographies of narrators. The isnaads of the Prophet's Sunnah can be divided – in terms of how well known they are – into three categories:

1.

Well known isnaads, through any of which hundreds of hadeeths were narrated and they are regarded as one of the main channels through which the Prophet's Sunnah came to us. Indeed there is no book among the six books that did not rely on them and narrate from many of them. Examples include:

The isnaad of al-A'mash from Dhakwaan Abu Saalih al-Sammaan, from Abu Hurayrah

The isnaad of az-Zuhri from Abu Salamah ibn 'Abd ar-Rahmaan from Abu Hurayrah.

The isnaad of Hammaad ibn Salamah, from Thaabit ibn Aslam, from Anas.

The isnaad of ‘Ubaydullah ibn ‘Umar al-‘Umari, from Naafi‘, from Ibn ‘Umar.

It is possible to find out about these chains of narration, through which hundreds of reports were narrated, from the book Tuhfat al-Ashraaf by Imam al-Mazzi.

The student may also seek help in memorising the narrators of these isnaads from the book Tabaqaat al-Mukthireena min Riwaayat al-Hadeeth by Shaykh ‘Aadil az-Zarqi, with a introduction by ‘Abdullah as-Sa‘d (published by Dar Tuwayq).

If the seeker of hadeeth knowledge pays attention to these isnaads and memorises them, then start to connect these isnaads to the texts that he has previously memorised from the books of Sunnah, he will thus have instilled in his mind hundreds of hadeeths with their isnaads. In this way he will have started a new stage of acquiring deep knowledge of this noble science.

2.

The second category is isnaads that are less well-known, through which dozens of reports were narrated, but they include some well-known issues such as interruptions in the chain of narration, ambiguity, omission of the name of the Sahaabi (mursal report) and so on. The student may study some of these isnaads in the book Tuhfat al-Tahseel by al-‘Alaa’i.

If the seeker of knowledge pays attention to these isnaads too, and learns the problems associated with these types of isnaads, then he will achieved a great deal in this branch of knowledge.

3.

The third category is the isnaads of mawdoo‘ (fabricated) and da‘eef (weak) isnaads, through which many hadeeths were also narrated, and which the seeker of knowledge must pay attention to, because it is not appropriate for the specialist to be unaware of reports that are well known among the scholars of hadeeth to be weak, faulty or fabricated. To achieve this, it is essential to persist in reading the books Meezan al-I‘tidaal by Imam adh-Dhahabi, al-Kaamil fi Du‘afa’ ar-Rijaal

by Ibn ‘Adiyy, and al-Mawdoo‘aat by Ibn al-Jawzi.

Thirdly:

When the seeker of knowledge of the Prophet’s Sunnah has memorised a great deal of Sunnah texts, after that he may start to examine these texts more closely, finding out about ambiguous or difficult texts (ghareeb al-hadeeth) and the different ways in which they are interpreted. Al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Knowledge is understanding and cognizance, not memorizing and narrating a great deal.

End quote from al-Jaami‘ li Akhlaaq ar-Raawi, p. 174

But the seeker of knowledge must be aware of the necessity of limiting himself – at the beginning of his pursuit of knowledge – to the abridged commentaries that will explain the difficult texts, and not engage in lengthy study of fiqhi and other issues, which may be too difficult and too time-consuming for the student. He would do well to read an abridged commentary such as al-Mufhim lima Ashkila min Talkhees Saheeh Muslim by Imam al-Qurtubi, al-Minhaaj Sharh Saheeh Muslim ibn al-Hajjaaj by Imam an-Nawawi. He can sum up the meaning of the hadeeth and explanations of its vocabulary from these books in notes written in his own copy from which he is memorising the hadeeth, so that when he reviews what he has memorised of the Prophet’s Sunnah, he will also be able to read this summarised explanation of the hadeeth, thus attaining two benefits at the same time.

With regard to studying fiqhi issues that are derived from the hadeeths, that is another matter altogether which he should not seek to learn from the commentaries on hadeeth; rather he should learn that from the books of fiqh which organise fiqhi issues into basic essentials and minor issues, according to one of the four madhhabs.

Fourthly:

With regard to sciences of hadeeth terminology (mustalah al-hadeeth), we advise the seeker of knowledge to obtain a copy of the book Tahreer ‘Uloom al-Hadeeth by Shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Juday‘

and read it, study it and memorise its contents, because it is a pioneering book in its field which is distinguished by its highlighting the principles of the hadeeth sciences through examination of the different ways of hadeeth critics and through examination of all the principles that are mentioned in the books of biography. This is in addition to other books of mustalah al-hadeeth.

If the book is too difficult for the student or he is a beginner, he should limit himself to Nuzhat an-Nazr Sharh Tuhfat al-Fikr by al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar, or write a summary of the book of Shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Juday‘ and study his summary, so that when he understands it properly, he may move on to study of other books to increase his knowledge, the most important of which are an-Nukat ‘ala Ibn as-Salaah by al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar and Fath al-Mugheeth by al-Haafiz as-Sakhaawi.

Fifthly:

It is essential to give sufficient time to reading two other types of books too:

1.

Books on ‘ilal wa takhreej, which represent the practical application of hadeeth sciences, from which the student may examine many examples of the rulings on and evaluation of hadeeths and isnaads; this will open up to him more areas of research and study.

2.

Contemporary studies by specialists in the area of hadeeth, such as the books of al-‘Allaamah ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan al-Mu‘allimi (may Allah have mercy on him) and specialist academic essays. We are living in a time – praise be to Allah – when there is a revival of interest in hadeeth sciences the like of which you can hardly find in later periods of the history of Islamic knowledge. Many of these studies include academic debates and important research on essential topics, which the seeker of hadeeth knowledge should not ignore or fail to pay attention to. By reading these contemporary studies he will find that he will increase in knowledge and understanding, and new ideas will come to his mind that require further research and examination, and perhaps he will play a part in achieving that.

Over and above all that, he has to remind himself to fear Allah, may He be exalted, for this is the purpose of all knowledge, and the one who is distracted by the pursuit of knowledge from acting has gone astray and is doomed. Rather the effect of acquiring knowledge has to be seen in the humility of the student and his good manners and attitude towards people.

It was narrated that al-Hasan al-Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

A man would seek knowledge, and soon that would be seen in his humility, his conduct, and the way he spoke and acted. End quote.

Az-Zuhd by ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mubaarak, no. 79

Ibn al-Salaah (may Allah have mercy on him) says:

If a person wants to start seeking knowledge of hadeeth or to learn any of the hadeeth sciences, let him first ensure that his intention is correct and sincere and purify his heart of any worldly aims, and let him beware of the trial of love of leadership. End quote.

‘Uloom al-Hadeeth, p. 213

And Allah knows best.