# 239540 - The science of hadith is based on reason and shar‘i guidelines

**the question**

Do the principles of the sciences of Hadith have a basis in the Quran and Sunnah? For example, is there any evidence speaking of the legislated nature of using the isnaad, or guidelines about how to differentiate the saheeh from the daeef and the correct from the shaadhdh and is there evidence speaking about the legislated nature of Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel? Or is it that the Muhaddithoon made these themselves for the purpose of trying to preserve the sunnah, even if they did not find evidence for it from the Quran and the Sunnah?

**Detailed answer**

Praise be to Allah.

The science of hadith is basically and in principle founded on rational guidelines, with a methodology based on an accumulation of experience attained by the hadith scholars on the basis of many years’ experience of narrating reports and checking their authenticity and soundness. They attained the basis of this knowledge through lengthy involvement in checking reports, seeking them out, conveying them, examining them and determining whether there were any faults in them, thus gradually developing the general guidelines and framework of the science of hadith. Al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadi said: Distinguishing the soundness of hadith is a kind of knowledge that Allah, may He be exalted, creates in people’s hearts after they have spent a great deal of time in this field and have attained lengthy involvement therein.

Al-Jaami‘ (2/255).

But at the same time, these general guidelines – in their general philosophy, but not in their minor details – are derived from some shar‘i principles that are mentioned in the texts of the Quran and Sunnah. There are general shar‘i texts that outline to the scholars of hadith the basic principles of

the science of history and reports. As for the details, they were left to be developed through the accumulation of practice and experience, as referred to above.

Some of these general shar'i principles are as follows:

1. The stern prohibition on lying about hadiths (narration from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Lying about me is not like lying about anyone else. Whoever tells a lie about me deliberately, let him take his place in Hell." Narrated by al-Bukhaari (1295) and Muslim (4 – in the Introduction to his Saheeh).

2. Not accepting the report of an evildoer. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "O you who believe! If a Fasiq (liar — evil person) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful for what you have done" [al-Hujuraat 49:6].

3. Stipulation that the narrator should be of good character, by analogy with the requirement for a witness to be of good character. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "And take as witness two just persons from among you (Muslims). And establish the testimony for Allah" [at-Talaaq 65:2].

4. Constant verification and checking. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "And follow not (O man i.e., say not, or do not or witness not) that of which you have no knowledge. Verily! The hearing, and the sight, and the heart, of each of those one will be questioned (by Allah)" [al-Isra' 17:36].

5. Warning against odd and weird reports. It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "At the end of time there will be liars and charlatans who will bring ahaadeeth that neither you nor your forefathers ever heard. Beware of them and stay away from them, and do not let them mislead you or confuse you." Narrated by Muslim in the Introduction to his Saheeh (7).

6. Refraining from knowingly narrating a report that is a lie, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of

Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever narrates a hadith from me knowing that it is false is one of the liars.” Narrated by Muslim in the Introduction to his Saheeh.

7. Precise memorisation is the basis of trustworthiness. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “May Allah bless a man who hears a hadith from us and memorizes it so that he can convey it to others, for perhaps he is conveying it to one who will understand it better than him, and perhaps the one who conveys knowledge does not understand it himself.” Narrated by Abu Dawood in his Sunan (3660).

8. Warning against putting oneself under suspicion by narrating a lot of weird reports and not being selective in what one narrates. It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “It is sufficient lying for a man to speak of everything that he hears.” Narrated by Muslim in the Introduction to his Saheeh.

9. Seeking evidence and proof. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), ‘Produce your proof if you are truthful’” [al-Baqarah 2:111].

10.Seeking certain knowledge, far removed from speculation and illusion. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “But they have no knowledge thereof. They follow but conjecture, and verily, conjecture is no substitute for the truth” [an-Najm 53:28].

Some of these texts were quoted as evidence by Imam Muslim (may Allah have mercy on him) in the Introduction to his Saheeh (p. 7), where he said:

You should know, may Allah guide you, that it is obligatory for everyone who can distinguish between sound and unsound reports, and between trustworthy and dubious narrators, not to narrate any report unless he is sure of the soundness and honesty of their narrators, and to avoid those which are narrated by dubious narrators and those who stubbornly follow bid ah (innovation).

The evidence for what we are saying and that it should not be any other way is the words of Allah, may He be blessed and exalted:

“O you who believe! If a Faasiq (liar — evil person) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful for what you have done”

[al-Hujuraat 49:6]

“such as you agree for witnesses”

[al-Baqarah 2:282]

“And take as witness two just persons from among you (Muslims)”

[al-Talaaq 65:2].

The verses that we have quoted prove that the report of a faasiq (liar or evil person) is to be rejected and not accepted, and that the testimony of one who is not just is to be rejected.

Even though a report is not the same as testimony in some ways, they are fundamentally the same because the report of a faasiq is not acceptable according to the scholars, just as his testimony is rejected by all of them. The Sunnah indicates that munkar reports are to be rejected just as the Quran indicates that the report of a faasiq is to be rejected. End quote.

Dr. Humaam Sa‘eed says:

Thus it becomes clear to us that the methodology of the hadith scholars is a Quranic methodology that is derived from the Quran and Sunnah, and that it is a critical methodology that deals with historical reports; in other words, it does not accept a reported text without examining it critically, and it is not sufficient for this text to be narrated from a scholar or a person of respectable standing in order for it to be accepted. Rather it is essential that the attribution of the report to the one who said it should be proven, and it should be examined thoroughly and carefully to make sure that it is in harmony with the proven principles and general guidelines.

This critical methodology that deals with historical reports was absent in the case of the Torah and Gospel, and it was absent in the case of all historical narratives before Islam. Then Islam came to give the world this sound methodology that is based on research, thorough examination and sound thinking. Charles Guinevere contrasted this methodology of critically examining historical events with the Christian methodology that is based on faith, which accepted reports from earlier generations without any discussion or critical examination.

Many researchers overlooked this methodological connection between the Holy Quran and the sciences of hadith, to the extent that many people thought that the methodology of the hadith scholars was the result of a kind of unsurpassed brilliance, and that it developed because of need alone. But the truth that cannot be doubted is that the methodology of the hadith scholars is a Quranic methodology, and it is one of the manifestations of the miraculous nature of this religion. Just as Allah protected His holy Book from any changes or alterations, He also preserved the Sunnah as a whole and protected it from vanishing and being forgotten. End quote from al-Fikr al-Manhaji ‘inda al-Muhadditheen (p. 24).

All of the above – as will be clear to the reader – represents general methodological principles that were established by the Holy Quran and instilled by our Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in the souls of his Companions, so as to set out for them a general framework for the theory of the knowledge that they were seeking to acquire, on which they would found knowledge that was based on reason and on religious texts. So these principles led to a very precise and thorough examination (of the reports) and a critical sense that was well balanced and guided. The reason for that was fear of going against these principles and divine commands. Were it not for that, the Muslims would have indulged in illusions and speculation, and we would have seen myths, fables and contradictions that would have been the common language in the knowledge produced by the Muslims. But the religious deterrent contained in the ten guidelines mentioned above played a major role in the methodology of checking and examining that the hadith scholars developed.

As for precise details about hadith science, which is “learning the rules and regulations on the

basis of which scholars study the isnaad (chain of narrators) and matn (text of a hadith), and determine whether it is to be accepted or rejected" – such as their discussion about whether a narrator had a precise memory or not, whether the report is written in a precise manner, the methodology of dealing with reports narrated by those who engaged in tadlees [tadlees is when a narrator narrates a hadith that he did not hear directly from his shaykh, without mentioning the name of the third party from whom he heard it], giving precedence to a report that is narrated by one who is more authentic over one who is trustworthy, knowing how to classify the narrators from a particular shaykh, comparing between different reports and collecting hadith with similar texts but different isnaads, exercising deliberation when examining narrators, seeking corroborative reports, regarding a report as strong if there are many versions of it and many isnaads, and other guidelines and regulations that help scholars to determine whether a report is to be accepted or rejected – all of that, as you can see, is the product of detailed rational thinking that translates these general principles into practical methodological rules and regulations by means of which the hadith scholars came to a conclusion in judging whether a hadith was saheeh (sound) or da'eef (weak).

Al-'Allaamah al-Mu'allimi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

But have they paid attention to reason when accepting a hadith and regarding it as sound?

I say: Yes, they did pay attention to that at four points: when they heard the hadith, when they narrated it, when they passed judgement on the narrators, and when they passed judgement on the hadiths.

When the well-versed scholars in this field heard a report that could not be sound, or was very unlikely to be sound, they did not write it down or memorise it, and if they did memorise it, they did not narrate it to others.

If there is any interest that could be served by mentioning it, they would mention it and follow that by criticism of the report and of the narrator who was at fault. Imam ash-Shaafa'i said in ar-Risaalah (p. 399): What could be indicative of whether a narrator is telling the truth or lying is

when a narrator narrates a report that cannot be true, or that is contrary to another report that is more authentic, or has more evidence to prove it sound.

Al-Khateeb said in al-Kifaayah fi 'Ilm ar-Riwaayah (p. 429): Chapter on the obligation to eliminate odd reports and those that cannot possibly be sound.

There are among narrators a group who are very lenient with regard to what they hear and narrate, but the imams (leading scholars) are lying in wait for the narrators, so you hardly find any hadith that is clearly false, but you will find in its isnaad one or two narrators, or a group of narrators, whom the imams criticised. The imams very often criticise a narrator and regard him as flawed for narrating one munkar (odd) hadith, let alone two or more.

They describe the report that cannot possibly be sound, or is unlikely to be sound, as munkar (odd) or baatil (false). We find this a great deal in the biographies of weak narrators, or in books that speak of flawed and fabricated reports.

The scholars who examined the hadiths would not regard a narrator as credible until they examine his hadiths and check them one by one.

With regard to examining the soundness of hadiths, the scholars are very careful and cautious. Yes indeed, not everyone from whom it was narrated that he regarded a hadith as sound and credible was necessarily a man of deep knowledge, but the one who has knowledge and experience can distinguish between one thing and another.

The leading scholars who examined the hadiths realised that among them are some hadiths that may be difficult for some scholars of kalaam and their ilk to accept, but they found them to be in accordance with reason that is credible according to the religious texts, and that they fulfilled all the other conditions of soundness. Moreover, they found in the Quran many verses that are in harmony with it or that speak of the same idea. This is also difficult for the scholars of kalaam to accept, but the hadith scholars know that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) believed in and followed the Quran, so it is very possible that he would say things that carry similar meanings to what is in the Quran.

End quote from al-Anwaar al-Kaashifah (p. 6-7).

Dr. Khaldoon al-Ahdab said:

The development of usool al-hadith was on a rational basis. Were that not the case, it could never have had this huge impact in shaping the Muslim mind.

This rational development of usool al-hadith began from the methodological and rational principle that is stated in the Holy Quran and Sunnah with regard to examining the narrator and what he narrated, on which the science of usool al-hadith is based.

The development of this branch of knowledge may be represented in the fact that the hadith scholars paid attention to reason when examining a hadith to see how sound it is, in four stages, as the great scholar and critic ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan al-Mu‘allimi al-Yamaani said.

End quote from Athar ‘Ilm Usool al-Hadith fi Tashkeel al-‘Aql al-Muslim, (p. 19).

Dr. ‘Abdullah Dayfullah ar-Ruhayli said:

The academic guidelines on verifying reports, according to us Muslims – as in the case of the methodology of the hadith scholars – is not based on belief in the unseen, such that this mystical approach could be one of the guidelines for ascertaining whether a report is sound or not; rather they are rational guidelines that take into account reason, proven historical facts, comparison of reports, or other guidelines that the hadith scholars developed regarding the evidence or proof of the soundness of a report.

These guidelines, as we have described them, are rational and based on common sense, such that all people – or almost all people – will be able to understand and accept them, regardless of their religion or affiliation. A report with an interrupted chain of narrators, for example, is something that all people of sound mind would doubt and would not accept it because of that. That is because there is no continuous chain of narrators going all the way back to the source of the report, and if that is not available, then how can it be imagined that the report is sound?

Human minds can differentiate between a report being certain on the one hand, and it being likely or a mere possibility on the other hand. Therefore there is no room for the question which says, on what academic methodology is the approach of the hadith scholars in verifying a report based? Is it a scientifically-based methodology, or is it a mystical, faith-based methodology? That is because belief in the unseen plays no role in examining and verifying the report, then accepting it or rejecting it. However, this aspect of the hadith scholars' methodology has to do with verifying reports and is not based on personal opinion or belief in the unseen.

End quote from Hiwaar hawla Manhaj al-Muhadditheen fi Naqd ar-Riwaayaat Sanadan wa Matnan (p. 12-13).

And Allah knows best.