

The PRESERVATION
of ḤADĪTH

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عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ

مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

Whosoever follows the Blessed Prophet ﷺ has followed Allah ﷻ.

وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا

Whatever the Prophet ﷺ gives you, accept it; and whatever he disapproves of, abstain from it.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	xi
Introduction to the Study of Ḥadīth	1
Preservation of Ḥadīth	1
Two Types of Revelation: The Spoken and the Unspoken	3
Upholding the Meaning of the Qur'an	7
The Methodologies of Preservation of Ḥadīth	7
The Sharp Memory of Ibn Rāhwai	10
The Sharp Memory of Abū Zur'a	11
Waḥshī's ﷺ Memory	13
Love For Knowledge	14
The Principle of Practice	17
Documentation	18
The Collection of Abū Huraira ﷺ	20
The Book of Anas ﷺ	21
The Different Types of Ḥadīth Books	22
The Saḥīḥ and Ḍa'īf Ḥadīth	24
Branches of Aḥadīth According to the Chain	26

The Definition of a Saḥīḥ Ḥadīth	26
Do Bukhārī and Muslim Contain All the Authentic Aḥadīth?	29
Is A Ḥadīth Given Preference Because it is in Bukhārī or Muslim?	30
The Six Books of Ḥadīth and the Objectives of the Imams	31
Brief Biographies of the Great Ḥadīth Masters	34



INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ḤADĪTH

The way our love for our parents is understood by realization of the sacrifices they made for us, likewise our realization of how ḥadīth were preserved, their authority in Islam, and the work and sacrifices of the ḥadīth masters in the science of ḥadīth, helps increase our love and adoration for our predecessors. In addition, we will appreciate the true value of ḥadīth and be more scrupulous before judging a hadith as weak.

PRESERVATION OF ḤADĪTH

Allah ﷻ states in the Qur'an:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يُتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ
وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

Indeed Allah ﷻ has already done a favor to the believers, when He raised amongst them a messenger from themselves to recite to them His verses, purify them and teach them the book and the wisdom.¹

This aya explains one of the most important responsibilities of the beloved Blessed Prophet ﷺ: to teach the Book. This responsibility consists of not just teaching the pronunciation and reading of

¹ 3:164

The Preservation of Ḥadīth

the Book [as that is already covered in the first responsibility, i.e. *‘to recite to them His verses’*], but more importantly, the meaning of the Qur’an. It would be meaningless for a Muslim to try to understand the meaning and message of the Qur’an without the Blessed Prophet ﷺ as a teacher to explain it to us.

Proficiency in the Arabic language alone cannot help us grasp the meaning of the Qur’an. Remember, the Ṣaḥāba ؓ, who spoke fluent Arabic, always turned to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ to understand the deeper meanings of the Qur’an. The Qur’an’s words and its meanings were explained both verbally and practically by the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. These sayings and explanations of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ are called ḥadīth and provide us with the the most authentic commentary of the Qur’an. Therefore, Allah’s ﷻ promise to preserve the Qur’an meant preservation of the aḥādīth as well.

However the preservation of words alone serves little purpose. For example, if the Qur’an commands Muslims to establish ṣalāt, but we are unable to understand what this command entails [such as how to perform it], then what benefit is there in preserving the words “establish the ṣalāt?” This proves that the preservation of the Qur’an, by necessity, includes preservation of the ḥadīth. Without ḥadīth, the īmān of a Muslim is incomplete. After all, how do we know that the Qur’an is the book of Allah ﷻ?

If we know the Qur’an and its place, it is only because the Blessed Prophet ﷺ said, “This is the Qur’an; it is the word of Allah ﷻ.” If we were to reject this ḥadīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ then the whole foundation of Islam collapses. We would not know that the Qur’an is what it claims to be.

Allah ﷻ says to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ in the Qur'an:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

*And We have sent unto you the message, that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought.*²

This aya proves that the fundamental role of ḥadīth is to reveal the meaning of the Qur'an, which means that the Qur'an cannot be understood without the aḥādīth.

TWO TYPES OF REVELATION: THE SPOKEN AND THE UNSPOKEN

The Blessed Prophet ﷺ received two types of divine revelations. One is the spoken [*matluww*] and the second, the unspoken [*ghair-matluww*]. The spoken revelation is that which is recited [i.e., the Qur'an]; the unspoken revelation is that which is not recited [i.e., the aḥādīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ]. An indication of the roots of the unspoken revelation can be found in the aayas of the Qur'an. Allah ﷻ says in the Holy Qur'an:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلٰى عَقْبَيْهِ

*And We appointed the qibla to which you were used only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels.*³

To gain a broader understanding of this aya, it is important that we look into its historical background.

² 16:44

³ 2:143

The Preservation of Ḥadīth

Shortly after the migration to Madina, the Blessed Prophet ﷺ and the Ṣaḥāba ؓ were told to pray towards Masjid al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem. Masjid al-Aqṣā became the *qibla* of the Muslims for seventeen months. After seventeen months, the order to pray towards Masjid al-Aqṣā was abrogated and Muslims were ordered to pray towards Makka. This order was established through the following aya:

قَوْلٍ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ

*Turn your faces towards al-Masjid al-Ḥarām.*⁴

This order broke the sanctimonious silence of the hypocrites. They criticized the changing of the *qibla* and argued, “Why did the Qur’an need to make ‘amends’ regarding the direction of prayer for the Muslims?” The above aya explains that the purpose behind the change of the *qibla* was to test the *īmān* of the Muslims and see whether they would obey or disobey the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. Read this aya carefully once again:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْتَلِبُ عَلَيَّ عَمِيهِ

*And We appointed the qibla to which you were used only to test those who followed the messenger from those who would turn on their heels.*⁵

In this aya, Allah ﷻ mentions the first order, which was to face towards Jerusalem, as His own order. This impresses upon the reader the fact that Allah ﷻ himself was behind the order to face Masjid

⁴ 2:143

⁵ Ibid

al-Aqsā. But when we read the Qur'an we do not find any such aya in which Allah ﷻ ordered the Muslims to pray towards Jerusalem.

The fact is that this order came from the Blessed Prophet ﷺ and not from any aya of the Qur'an. The aya does NOT say, "*The Blessed Prophet ﷺ enacted the order...*" rather it says, "*We appointed the qibla...*" This brings us to the understanding that the order of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ is no different from the order of Allah ﷻ.

The proof is so self-evident it does not require any further clarification. This clear statement from the Qur'an regarding the order given by the Blessed Prophet ﷺ demonstrates a fundamental belief about the aḥādīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ: that they are a form of revelation. And this is what is known as the unspoken or unrecited revelation.

The aya mentioned above also reveals some other important points:

1. A special type of revelation was sent to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ which was not a part of the Qur'an.
2. These revelations were from Allah ﷻ.
3. Similarly, the rulings that derived from the unspoken revelations were also the rulings of Allah ﷻ.

All the Ṣaḥāba ؓ were obligated to fulfill the orders of the unspoken revelations in the same manner as they were the spoken revelation [Qur'an]. Some orders were revealed to test the īmān of the Muslims, particularly those orders that were revealed through the unspoken revelation, to see whether they obeyed the orders. Many other examples could be cited, but they have not been mentioned for the sake of brevity.

While this aforementioned proof highlights the importance of the aḥādīth and their validity as an authority in Islam, it

The Preservation of Ḥadīth

also establishes that the preservation of the Qur'an includes preservation of the ḥādīth. The Qur'an itself is the essence of Islamic thought and is the final word in this matter. The Qur'an states:

مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

*Whosoever follows the Blessed Prophet ﷺ has followed Allah ﷻ.*⁶

In this aya the Qur'an orders us to adhere to the way of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ, as adherence to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ is adherence to Allah ﷻ. Once, a woman came to the famous Ṣaḥābī ᷺, 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd ᷺. She said, "I have heard you stop people from doing certain things even though I have read the Qur'an from cover to cover and I have never read the Qur'an ordering us to abstain from these things." 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd ᷺ replied, "Had you read the Qur'an you would have found it. Have you not read this aya of the Qur'an:

وَمَا آتَاكُمْ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا

*Whatever the Prophet ﷺ gives you, accept it; and whatever he disapproves of, abstain from it.*⁷

From this incident we learn that this aya incorporates the aḥādīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ and establishes the authority of the aḥādīth in Islam.

⁶ 4:80

⁷ 59:7

UPHOLDING THE MEANING OF THE QUR'AN

If Allah ﷻ himself has taken the responsibility to preserve ḥādīth, as indeed He has, then who can question their validity and authority? A closer look at the unique methods by which the aḥādīth have been preserved reveal them to be simply awe-inspiring and a miracle in their own right. These methods are briefly outlined below.

THE METHODOLOGIES OF PRESERVATION OF HADĪTH

Generally, three methods were used to preserve ḥādīth:

The first method was memorization. The Arabs were renowned for their memories, particularly their ability to memorize long poems along with the biographies of their authors. They could recollect long lists of the names of poets' forefathers and their lineages. Not only that, the Arabs also memorized the lineage of their horses, even the horse's gaits. Thus, thousands of names were at the tip of their tongues, and through the blessings of the aḥādīth Allah ﷻ added to their proficiency in the art of memorization.

This simple method of preserving ḥādīth cannot be ignored, especially when eminent personalities like Imam Bukhārī have recorded incidents such as that of Marwān, which illustrate the extraordinary memory of the Arabs. Marwān was the first governor of Damascus and also the first emir of the Umayyad Dynasty.

His secretary, Abū al-Za'za, narrates that once Marwān called the eminent Ṣaḥābī ﷺ, Abū Huraira ﷺ, to his court. It is said that the reason behind this rare invitation of a Ṣaḥābī ﷺ to Marwān's court was that Marwān doubted the large number of aḥādīth Abū

INTRODUCTION

It is not possible in this day and age to comprehend the great sacrifices that were made by the hadith masters [*muḥaddithīn*] or the difficulties and barriers they struggled to overcome for the preservation of hadith. It is a result of these sacrifices that today each word, in fact each letter of the aḥādīth are fully preserved. The rules the hadith masters established to preserve the hadith and by which this branch of knowledge became a distinct science are necessary for one to learn and make headway into both the knowledge of hadith and principles of hadith [*uṣūl al-ḥadīth*].

This short booklet is written to introduce the reader to the knowledge of hadith. It discusses important issues such as how the hadith were compiled, the preservation of hadith, principles regarding the authenticity and weakness in a hadith, the importance of hadith and the various types of hadith books. It ends with short biographies of some of the famous hadith masters. This booklet may be looked upon as a first step in acquiring the insight that is necessary for advancing in this science. After reading this booklet, if one feels a renewed connection with the hadith, it is hoped that it will be a way of salvation for its author. The readers are requested to pray for the author, his parents and his family and that Allah bless them in this world and the Hereafter.

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LOVE FOR KNOWLEDGE

These scholars possessed a type of motivation that is almost beyond belief. Indeed, their efforts to preserve aḥādīth were like odysseys that were full of hardships and tribulations that are inconceivable today.

Abū Huraira رضي الله عنه once said:

You people think that Abū Huraira رضي الله عنه narrates too many aḥādīth from the Blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, but I swear by Allah عز وجل that I was a poor man who stayed with the Blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم night and day while the *Muhājirīn* [emigrants] did business in the markets and the *Anṣār* [helpers] were busy cultivating their fields.¹⁶

On another occasion he explained how he spent his time with the Blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم:

I came to the Blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم at Khaibar. I was then over thirty years old and stayed with the Blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم until he died. I was always by his side; I was with him when he went to meet his wives. I always helped him and stayed with him during his journeys on haj and in the path of Allah عز وجل.

Thus, he relished those “student years” of his life. He would say:

I swear by Allah عز وجل that sometimes I would be starving. I would hold my stomach, lean on the ground and tie stones to it.¹⁷ Sometimes I felt dizzy and would fall between ‘Āisha’s رضي الله عنها home and the pulpit of the Blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. People thought I had become insane, but what do I have to do with insanity? It was from hunger.¹⁸

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه also narrates the story of his “student days.”

¹⁶ Bukhārī, *mā Jā’ fi al-Gharas*

¹⁷ Ibid 7/435

¹⁸ Bukhārī, *mā Dhakar al-Nabiyy wa Ḥaḍḍa*

He said:

I had thirst for the knowledge of aḥādīth. Whenever I found out someone had heard something from the Blessed Prophet ﷺ about some matter, I went to his house. If I found that he was taking a nap in the afternoon, I lay down at the threshold of the door, wrapped my shawl into a roll and used it as a pillow. The wind would blow sand into my face as I lay waiting. I would bear this condition until the person came to the door.

When he saw me there he would say, “What brings you here, O nephew of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ?”

I would reply that, “I have heard you narrate a certain ḥadīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. I just want to hear that ḥadīth.”

The Ṣaḥābī ﷺ would say, “You could have sent somebody or I would have come myself.”

I would say, “I am obligated to come to your house.”¹⁹

Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī ﷺ also heard thousands of aḥādīth from the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. Once, he was unsure of a particular ḥadīth which he himself had heard from the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. At the time of hearing this ḥadīth another Ṣaḥābī ﷺ, ‘Uqba ibn ‘Āmir ﷺ was also present. Although ‘Uqba ﷺ had settled in Egypt by this time, Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī ﷺ traveled to Egypt to verify one ḥadīth. After arriving at ‘Uqba’s ﷺ house, Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī ﷺ said, “Narrate the ḥadīth to me which you heard from the Blessed Prophet ﷺ about finding faults in other Muslim brethren. Now none is left except you and I who have heard this ḥadīth from the Blessed Prophet ﷺ.” ‘Uqba ﷺ narrated the ḥadīth to Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī ﷺ. The actual ḥadīth says:

من ستر مؤمناً في الدنيا على عورة ستره الله يوم القيامة

¹⁹ Sunan al-Dārimī, *al-Riḥla fī Ṭalab al-‘Ilm*

The Preservation of Ḥadīth

Allah ﷻ will cover the fault in the Hereafter of one who covers the fault of his Muslim brother.²⁰

What happened after he heard this ḥadīth is even more astonishing. Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī ؓ listened to the ḥadīth, saddled his horse, mounted it and immediately set back for Madina. He did not even open his baggage in Egypt.²¹

Obviously if so much effort was made for a single ḥadīth, one can only imagine the dedication and perseverance that was called for in order to preserve all the aḥādīth. These words have been repeated by ‘Ubaida, the ḥadīth master, who used to say, “We should learn the aḥādīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ the way we memorize the Qur’an.”²²

Abū ‘Alī al-Naishābūrī said the following about the famous memorizer of ḥadīth [*ḥāfiẓ al-ḥadīth*] Ibn Khuzaima, “Ibn Khuzaima memorized the aḥādīth of Shari‘a rulings like reciters [*qurrā*] memorize the Qur’an.”²³

Imam Dhahabī quoted in the biography of Isrā‘il ibn Yūnus that he used to say, “I used to memorize the aḥādīth narrated by my grandfather, Abū Ishāq, as I would memorize the suras of Qur’an.”²⁴

It is mentioned in the biography of Ismā‘il ibn Rajā’, “He used to gather the children who studied in centers for memorization of Qur’an and recited aḥādīth to them so he would not forget the aḥādīth.”²⁵

²⁰ Musnad Aḥmad, 28/658|Muṣannaf ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Satr al-Muslim*

²¹ Jāmi‘u Bayān al-‘Ilm, pg.94

²² Tārikh Damishq, 8/436

²³ Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz 2/723

²⁴ Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz 199

²⁵ Jāmi‘u Bayān al-‘Ilm, pg.102

Similarly, the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ also stressed this point upon their students by saying, “The Blessed Prophet ﷺ narrated the ḥadīth to us and we memorized it; therefore, you should also memorize the aḥādīth as we did.”²⁶

Once ‘Alī ﷺ was advising his students, “Always repeat the aḥādīth over and over again. If you do not, then your knowledge will diminish.”²⁷

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd ﷺ also advised his students when he said, “Repeat the aḥādīth regularly because this is the way to keep them alive.”²⁸

THE PRINCIPLE OF PRACTICE

The second method of preservation is called the “principle of practice.” This is the most powerful system of preservation of aḥādīth, and it is both unprecedented and unrivaled in the annals of history. A non-Muslim could never even imagine how the practices of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ nurtured each and every Sunna of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. In fact, even most of the Muslims of today cannot understand the love of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ for the Blessed Prophet ﷺ, their adherence to his personal habits or the unique relationship between them and the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. Never in history has mankind seen an example as great as the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ.

‘Urwa ibn Masūd Thaqaḥī ﷺ had not yet embraced Islam. In the treaty of Ḥudaiḇiya he closely observed the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ and finally said:

Oh people! I have visited the courts of kings on many occasions.
I have come face to face with the emperor of Rome, the king of

²⁶ Ibid, pg. 64

²⁷ Ibid, pg. 101

²⁸ Ma‘rifat ‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth, pg.141

The Preservation of Ḥadīth

Persia and Negus of Abyssinia, but by Allah ﷻ I have not seen a people revere their king the way I saw the Companions ﷺ of Muḥammad ﷺ revere him. By Allah ﷻ, if he as much as spits, it is rubbed on the hands, face and body of one of the Companions ﷺ before it hits the ground. He does not order but they run to fulfill it. He performs ablution and the Companions ﷺ compete with each other to take the dripping water. When he talks, they quell their voices. They cannot look at him fully out of awe for him.²⁹

Anas ﷺ relates, “I saw the Blessed Prophet ﷺ searching for pieces of squash in a bowl of curry. From that day on, I loved squash.”³⁰

Anas ﷺ was a Ṣaḥābī ﷺ of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ; his love for the Blessed Prophet ﷺ compelled him to also love squash. If he did not love squash after knowing that the Blessed Prophet ﷺ liked it, then some difference would remain between the Ṣaḥābī ﷺ and the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. But there was no question for the Companions ﷺ, of their own likes or dislikes once a Sunna was established in any matter.

Because of their deep love for the Blessed Prophet ﷺ, the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ preserved every aspect of the Blessed Prophet’s ﷺ life; his worship, the way he ate, slept, worked, etc. In the time of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ, there was no other way of doing anything except the way of the Sunna. Thousands of such examples of the devotion of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ for the Sunna of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ are narrated in aḥādīth. In fact, all aḥādīth are a manifestation of the love of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ for the Blessed Prophet ﷺ.

DOCUMENTATION

The third method of preservation is the written documentation of the aḥādīth. Some people believe that aḥādīth were first documented

²⁹ Bukhārī, *al-Shurūt fi al-Jihād*

³⁰ Bukhārī, *al-Sahūla wa al-Samāḥa fi al-Sharā’*

Sharḥ al-Āthār: A book of ḥadīth that narrates apparently conflicting aḥādīth and offers an explanation that eliminates the contradiction. If the contradiction between the aḥādīth cannot be removed, then it provides the proofs and reasons for giving preference to one ḥadīth over another.

al-Jam‘a: The ḥadīth book that abridges a collection of aḥādīth from different books and eliminates repetition of aḥādīth.

al-Adhkār: The book of ḥadīth that compiles the ḥadīth that narrate different *du‘ās* [supplications] and forms of *dhikr* [uttered devotions].

al-Mauḍū‘āt: The book of ḥadīth that collects fabricated aḥādīth that are scattered in various ḥadīth books.

There are many other types of ḥadīth books which are not being mentioned here, both for the sake of brevity and because understanding the various other types of compilations requires an expertise in the field of ḥadīth.

THE SAḤĪḤ AND ḌA‘ĪF ḤADĪTH

In many books of aḥādīth, we read the words authentic [*ṣaḥīḥ*] and weak [*ḍa‘īf*]. Many people understand authentic to be the opposite of weak, and when this word does not appear after a ḥadīth, they misinterpret it as weak. This is a common mistake because the words authentic and weak are actually nomenclatures of the ḥadīth masters. Over fifty terms are used by the ḥadīth masters [to define a ḥadīth], authentic being only one of them. When a ḥadīth is not identified as authentic, it may fall under the category of any of the other forty-nine types of ḥadīth and may not necessarily be weak.

Many times, a ḥadīth is authentic, but the ḥadīth masters reject it while another ḥadīth may be weak but the ḥadīth masters say it is okay to act upon. There are many reasons behind this. For example, it is possible that the authentic ḥadīth is abrogated and the weak ḥadīth supported by the practice of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ.

Below, we will briefly examine some of these different types of ḥadīth:

Marfū’: Any ḥadīth that is attributed to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. Such a ḥadīth is identified by the words of the narrator when he says, “the Blessed Prophet ﷺ said,” “the Blessed Prophet ﷺ did this,” “the Blessed Prophet ﷺ remained quiet on this occasion,” “when such and such thing was said,” or that “this ḥadīth is attributed to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ” or that “Ibn ‘Abbās ﷺ attributed this ḥadīth to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ.” Thus, any ḥadīth attributed to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ is a *marfū’* ḥadīth.

Mauqūf: A narration attributed to a Ṣaḥābī ﷺ. A *mauqūf* narration is recognized by the words of the narrator when he says, “Ibn ‘Abbās ﷺ said” or “Ibn ‘Abbās ﷺ did such and such thing” or “it is said that this ḥadīth is narrated as *mauqūf*.”

Maqtū’: Any narration that is attributed to the first successors of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ [*tābi’in*]. Some ḥadīth masters also call a *maqtū’* narration *athar* [trace]. The term *athar* makes it easy to distinguish ḥadīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ from the narrations of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ and the first successors. Thus ḥadīth of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ are known as ḥadīth, while the narrations of the Ṣaḥāba ﷺ and the first successors are called *āthār* [plural of *athar*], though the word *athar* is frequently used for the *aḥādīth* of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ also.

Ibn Māja

Sunan Ibn Māja follows the same pattern as *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* except that the arrangement of aḥādīth in *Sunan Ibn Māja* surpasses *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*. *Ibn Māja* contains the most number of weak aḥādīth in the *al-Ṣiḥḥ al-Sitta*.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF THE GREAT ḤADĪTH MASTERS

In our times, the dearth of Islamic knowledge is so severe that even the imams of our communities are not familiar with the different ḥadīth masters who reigned in the field of aḥādīth, let alone common Muslims. Many self-proclaimed “ḥadīth masters” and others who call themselves the “people of ḥadīth” [*abl al-ḥadīth*] are completely ignorant of the names of most of the ḥadīth books and the biographies of the great ḥadīth masters who compiled them. Below is a brief introduction to some of the greatest ḥadīth masters.

Imam Bukhārī

He was Muḥammad ibn Ismā’īl and was born in Bukhara on the 13th or 16th of Shawwāl, 194/c810⁴³ on Friday after ‘Aṣr. His father died before he was born. Imam Bukhārī became blind in childhood but his mothers ardent prayers and *du‘ās* bore their fruit, and his eyesight was returned. After this, he sought knowledge until the end of his life.

Imam Bukhārī wrote many books including the renowned collection *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. The original name given to *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* was, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Musnad al-Mukhtaṣar min Umūr Rasūl Allāh Ṣalla Allāhu ‘alaihi wa Sallam*.

⁴³ The first date is the Hijri date and the second Gregorian. The “c” is an abbreviation of circa.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī is regarded as the most authentic book after the Qur'an, academically and historically. Imam Bukhārī was known to bathe and perform *istikhāra*⁴⁴ before recording any ḥadīth into his book. If he felt positively after the *istikhāra*, he admitted the ḥadīth into his book; otherwise, he rejected it. The compilation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* was the fruit of sixteen years of meticulous research.

What praise can we bestow on Imam Bukhārī when Allah ﷻ Himself has immortalized his name for past, present and future generations. So without mentioning another word, we lay the subject of his excellence and piety to rest.

Unfortunately, one of the saddest facts in the history of Islam is that the true scholars of Islam and sincere servants of Allah ﷻ always suffered at the hands of their foes. The foes of Imam Bukhārī harassed him until he was forced to pray, "O Allah ﷻ, this earth has become narrow for me despite its vastness. Take me to your abode." Imam Bukhārī died in Samarqand on the eve of *Eid al-Fiṭr* in 256/c870 at the age of sixty two.

Imam Muslim

He was Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj, but was known by his agnomen, Abū al-Ḥasan. Imam Muslim was born in Naishābūr, Iran, in either 204/c820 or 206/c822. Though he authored many books, he is most recognized for his *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim*. It is said that Imam Muslim would never backbite, nor did he speak ill of anyone throughout his life. *Muslim* became so popular amongst the ḥadīth masters that some scholars actually put it above *Bukhārī*; however, most ḥadīth masters rank *Muslim* below *Bukhārī*. It is worth mentioning that the headings of the

⁴⁴ A two-unit voluntary ṣalāt in which one seeks guidance from Allah ﷻ in a particular matter.