

AUTHENTICATION  
*of* HADITH  
REDEFINING  
*the* CRITERIA

Israr Ahmad Khan

Abridged by Alison Lake

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The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)  
P.O. Box 669  
Herndon, VA 20172, USA  
[www.iiit.org](http://www.iiit.org)

IIIT London Office  
P.O. Box 126  
Richmond, Surrey  
TW9 2UD, UK  
[www.iiituk.com](http://www.iiituk.com)

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**Series Editors**

Dr. Anas S. al-Shaikh-Ali  
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*Typesetting by Sideek Ali*

*Cover design by Shiraz Khan*

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Dr. Israr Ahmad Khan's **Authentication of Hadith: Redefining the Criteria** was published in complete form in 2010. In the work he addresses the sensitive topic of Hadith authentication, focusing on the criteria adopted by compilers of the major collections to argue that concentration on the continuity and accuracy of the chain of narrators, rather than the textual content of Hadith, has led to certain hadiths (*aḥādīth*) being included which either contradict other hadiths directly, project the Prophet in an uncharacteristic light, or do not reflect and/or conflict with the teachings of the Qur'an. Furthermore, he maintains, given the great mass of traditions which circulated soon after the Prophet passed away, it would be unwise to ignore the fact that many contained targeted forgeries. These not only intended to corrupt the essential message of the Faith but also to bolster political, sectarian, economic, and even theological support. Political as well as religious differences, motivated largely by rivalry towards the fledgling Faith, led to a sustained and well-known campaign of disinformation using the vehicle of Hadith.

Although the misuse and abuse of Hadith is nothing new, in today's complex and volatile world the consequences of relying on fraudulent and counterfeit Hadith to legitimise extremist behavior, justify blatant abuse, particularly of women, and issue disturbing fatwas calling for violent acts, is not only far too easy but in fact very dangerous. In addition, given the widespread anti-Islamic sentiment currently dominating mainstream

discourse, it is imperative that the issue of fabricated hadiths, extensively publicised and ruthlessly exploited to support the thesis of Islamic violence and backwardness, is addressed. It is the responsibility of Muslim scholars well versed in the Islamic sciences, to root out with honesty and courage those hadiths which have clearly been fabricated, and which not only invite spurious interpretation but also perpetuate ignorance betraying both the Qur'an and the Prophet.

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**Abridged Edition of Israr Ahmad Khan's Original**

*AUTHENTICATION OF HADITH: REDEFINING THE CRITERIA*

Israr Ahmad Khan

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## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an and Hadith govern all aspects of Islam's belief system and its manifestation in human life. The Qur'an represents the precisely revealed words of Allah (SWT)\* and the Hadith constitute the practical and methodological dimensions of the Qur'anic commands and instructions. Allah tasked the Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS)\*\* to do the following: rehearse the Qur'an's messages to people; unfold the truth revealed in the Qur'an; and teach his followers. The *bayān* of the Qur'an is known as the Hadith and Sunnah.

To that end, the following aspects are true and stated in the Qur'an: Allah's blessings will cover those who obey Him and His Prophet;<sup>1</sup> obedience is required<sup>2</sup> and deliberate indifference is a serious offense;<sup>3</sup> the Prophet is a judge in all disputes of life;<sup>4</sup> and avoiding and disregarding the instructions of Allah and the Prophet leads ultimately to failure in life<sup>5</sup> and causes man's deeds to lose all meaning.<sup>6</sup>

In contemporary times, Muslims comprise four categories in their approach to Hadith: those who totally reject its relevance in Muslim life; those who blindly accept all apparent *aḥādīth* regardless of their authenticity; those who indiscriminately select Hadith for practical purposes; and those who believe in the sanctity of Prophetic traditions but who carefully approach them regarding their logical and practical relevance to Islamic life and civilization.

Today, Muslims suffer less from rigid adherence to old traditions of the Prophet than from having strayed far from the Qur'an and the

\* (SWT) – *Subḥānahu wa Ta'ālā*: May He be praised and may His transcendence be affirmed. Said when referring to God.

\*\* (ṢAAS) – *Ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*. 'May the peace and blessings of God be upon him.' Said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

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Sunnah in their thoughts and practices. For example, semi-literate Muslims with unconditional love for the Hadith and Sunnah can be misguided as to their meaning, and then misguide others, blindly adhering to anything labeled a Prophetic tradition regardless of authenticity. This situation is one of the main factors behind Muslim backwardness and decline in virtually every field of life, including the religious and spiritual.

In the Muslim world today we see a tendency to select only those Qur'anic *ayāt* and Prophetic traditions that benefit people's vested interests and covert agenda. On the other hand, a balanced approach to the Sunnah and Hadith denotes a belief in and practice of only those Prophetic traditions that are highly authentic.

Hadith compilations are commonly classified into four categories according to the rank of their authenticity: the most authentic works, such as those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim; collections with only a few dubious reports such as al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, and Abū Dāwūd; collections with many problematic traditions such as those of Ibn Mājah and Aḥmad; and collections with many weak and fabricated traditions such as those of al-Ṭabarānī.

Authentication of Hadith as claimed by Hadith authorities entirely depends on the authenticity of the chain of narrators reporting Hadith. Hardly any serious attention is paid to the authenticity of Hadith by the authentication of the text of Hadith. Muslim scholars believe that if the chain of narrators of a hadith fulfils five criteria, the hadith is to be accepted as authentic: continuity in the chain of narrators; integrity of character; infallible retention; freedom from any hidden defect; and safety from any aberrance. Although the last two criteria also apply to the examination of the text of a hadith, scholars of Hadith have rarely accommodated them in their examination of Hadith text.

Nonetheless, many reasons justify the added examination of Hadith from a textual angle including controversy over the position of a particular narrator and the inability of some narrators to maintain the preciseness of the report, wherein most Hadith scholars believe that Prophetic traditions were not narrated in the words of the Prophet but in terms of the meaning of the message, which can cause confusion.

In addition, textual conflicts among reports arise when certain reports concerning the same matter vary in words and meaning. Scholars

generally suggest that such differences in reporting result not from narrating errors but because the Prophet made the statements differently on different occasions. Another reason is the claim of ‘delusion’ of reliable narrators: at times the chain of narrators is extremely authentic but there is an obvious problem in the text of the narration. Rather than examine the text as a possible source of defect, Hadith commentators blame a narrator. Instead, there should be some criteria to identify defect in the text.

The process of practical correction of narrations also justifies Hadith examination. Even during the Companions’ time, serious attention was given to the reporting of Prophetic traditions, particularly regarding their preciseness. Some statements of the Prophet that were reported incorrectly and were then corrected by experts nonetheless led to confusion at times.

Hadith examination is crucial when identifying the contemporary relevance of Hadith: the Qur’an and Hadith encapsulate the teachings of the Prophet and are intended for practical application in our daily lives. Therefore, interpretations of the Qur’an and Hadith should be carefully examined and the text reinterpreted.

Another reason for examination is understanding the methodological dimension of Hadith: the Prophetic traditions may be classified into legislative and non-legislative categories, some binding and some not. Binding traditions are viewed vis-à-vis the Qur’an, human reason, and Sunnah with historical continuity (*mutawātir*). When the Hadith and Qur’an contrast each other, scholars should affect a compromise among them. If this is not possible, traditions lose their eminent status as authentic. Only the authentic text of a tradition can be used as a source of guidance, both methodological and practical.

Regarding the probability of fabrication in some Hadith texts, their actual number runs into untold thousands. Hadith scholars undoubtedly did their best to identify the genuine from the false but despite great care and effort they could not ensure one hundred percent accuracy. Therefore it is likely that some fabricated traditions are still considered genuine due to the authentic chain of narrators behind them. We have no other way to check for fabricated traditions in the most popular sources except to examine the text of the particular traditions.

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Many controversies exist among Muslim jurists concerning certain issues related to Muslim life, wherein certain texts of a particular tradition are preferred to other texts. Finally, the responsibility and task of scholars is not yet concluded regarding Hadith examination. The Hadith hold a very sacred position in Islamic life, but this sanctity is exclusively for the genuine traditions of the Prophet and should not be accorded to inauthentic ones.

The idea of an apparent conflict between various texts of recorded Prophetic traditions is discomfoting for any concerned Muslim. In reading and analyzing traditions recorded in al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the following is apparent: the Hadith commentators had not used any well-established and universally defined principles of Hadith commentary, and were not justly balanced in their approach to Hadith, placing their main focus on the chain of narrators, not on the text of the traditions.

## Chapter One

### **Fabrication in Prophetic Traditions: Causal Factors and Remedial Measures**

In the established approach to Hadith, if the chain of narrators (*sanad*) is authentic, the hadith is considered authentic regardless of the problem(s) its text may contain. Any apparent discrepancies in the texts of traditions can be interpreted but to declare any report from these two sources as unreliable is considered an almost unacceptable stance and a virtual offense.

Literal and technical fabrication in Prophetic traditions signifies false attribution of a statement or practice to the Prophet, with or without intention. This chapter focuses on fabrication in the Prophetic traditions from a historical perspective, tracing factors that led to this and the remedial measures taken by distinguished Muslim authorities. Hadith scholars have identified various statements used in the traditions that are apocryphal, some of which indicate fabrication. When authorities refer to some transmitters in a *sanad* who used superlative or exaggerated expressions or single-degree adjectives, these constitute obvious terms signaling fabrication. Hadith authorities use several terms (in Arabic) to declare a tradition unacceptable, including “fabricated,” “false,” and “baseless.”



Fabrication of Prophetic traditions began sometime during the middle of ʿUthmān’s reign, the Third Caliphate, climaxed during the ruling periods of ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah, and continued in later years of Muslim history until the Abbasid period. Those intentional fabrications seem to have been invented in the Prophet’s name by those who wanted to influence popular opinion on the Caliphate and its succession, smear the originality of Islamic teachings, or promote their respective interests. Political opposition within the expanding Muslim empire to the third Caliph ʿUthmān led to his assassination. ʿAlī’s installation as fourth Caliph incited further opposition among leading personalities, dividing the community into three major political camps and creating military conflict and an atmosphere of mistrust.

Political factions wanted to win the majority of Muslims to their own sides, and did so in part by coining traditions in the Prophet’s name to support their respective positions. Traditions fabricated during this heightened state of affairs either condemned prominent leaders or commended them. For example, one can trace how the position of Caliph Muʿāwiyah became elevated through fabricated relevant traditions, and also how he was condemned in other fabricated reports. Traditions were also fabricated both in favor of and against ʿĀʾishah, a renowned wife of the Prophet, regarding the circumstances of her marriage to the Prophet, and in the following statement: “The Prophet stated that people who are led by a woman cannot achieve success.”<sup>7</sup> Further, a great number of traditions attributed to the Prophet surfaced praising Caliph ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, such as stating that looking at ʿAlī’s face is an act of devotion. In contrast, against ʿAlī is the fabricated statement that the Prophet told him, “Leadership is not for you, nor for any of your descendants.”<sup>8</sup>

In inimical missions against Islam and Muslims, a group known in Islamic history as “hypocrites” feigned Islam outwardly but harbored enmity within, spreading heretical beliefs. They fabricated traditions in most areas of Islamic life. One such heretic claimed before death to have fabricated 4,000 traditions in the name of the Prophet in a bid to declare the lawful as unlawful and the unlawful as lawful.<sup>9</sup> In addition, some resentful factions in Madinah focused on sabotaging fundamental teachings of Islam through fabrication of *ahādīth*, all to create a rift in the unity of Muslims. Ibn Sabaʾ, a Jew who embraced Islam, fabricated a number of Prophetic traditions and circulated them among Muslim society. Opponents of Islam produced many spectacular examples of fabricated traditions, including ones that aimed to discourage payment

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of zakah, alter Islamic inheritance laws, and discourage marriage among Muslims.

The eventual expansion of Muslim territory to include new realms created new debates among scholars and conflicting views concerning the position of the Qur'an, the concept of preordination of man's destiny, the freedom of man, the nature of sin, and other topics. Debaters and supporters of particular views, such as members of theological groups, aimed to convince the public by fabricating traditions in the name of the Prophet on subjects such as the nature of faith.

Jurisprudential rivalry was another area that produced a trend of *ahādīth* fabrication in the early period of Islamic history. Although differences of opinion existed among the most prominent jurists, they interpreted Islamic law and guided people based on their own *ijtihād*. Unfortunately, followers of these great imams and scholars considered their minor differences to be major and began to fabricate traditions to support their respective schools of jurisprudence. One such fabrication stated that the Prophet said that if one raised his hands in *salah*, his *salah* would not be accepted.<sup>10</sup>

Other root causes of *ahādīth* fabrication included commercial propaganda, ambition, or avarice for state patronage in the various Islamic state dynasties. In the first three centuries of Islam when Islamic rule spread across a major area of the world, businessmen resorted to using Prophetic traditions for commercial publicity. Numerous traditions were fabricated in praise of commercial items such as pomegranates, dates, almonds, and more. Other people promoted themselves as storytellers by reciting fabricated traditions in mosques in order to attract followers, or as religious people who did so to influence the public.

In the tradition of the Prophet, Muslim scholars did the following to address this problem of fabrication: they developed the *sanad* system in the Prophetic traditions; investigated Hadith reporters and used only reliable sources; compiled biographies of reporters; compiled works on genuine traditions of the Prophet; and gathered works with unreliable and fabricated traditions. In the early days of Islam, a trend arose where people narrated countless sayings in the Prophet's name, prompting great leaders in the Muslim Ummah to propose a viable solution. They stated that each hadith should be prefaced by a chain of narrators along with the text of the narration,<sup>11</sup> and that Hadith narration should come only from reliable sources.<sup>12</sup>

Investigating the life of innumerable hadith narrators was a delicate task, as was the issue of declaring if they were authentic, weak, unreliable, or fabricators. A considerable number of prominent scholars were engaged in this task of investigating the position of the narrators of Hadith. Rigorous investigations into narrators' identity demonstrated who was trustworthy and who was not. Hadith narrators were placed into four categories: those whose authenticity was unanimous; those whose weakness was non-controversial; those causing controversy among scholars; and those unanimously declared as liars.

Traditions fabricated in the name of the Prophet would likely have been discarded centuries ago. Despite labeling them as fabricated, Hadith scholars memorized and transferred them to the next generation with a clear message they were fabricated traditions. Later generations of scholars preserved them to remind future scholars what had been fabricated. Each work contains detailed and solid evidence to prove the fabrication, paying special attention to the chain of narrators cited in each recorded tradition, and how fabricators used the names of reliable sources in their chains.

## Chapter Two

### **The Contribution of Muslim Scholars to the Authentication of Hadith**

This chapter identifies the contributions of scholars from two perspectives: the chain of narrators and the text. Each hadith is composed of a chain of narrators (*sanad*) and content/text (*matn*). The *sanad*, long or short, refers to the names of the sources through whom the sayings or practices of the Prophet were reported. The *matn* is the words of the report, which communicate what the Prophet said or did. During the Prophet's time and three decades after, the chain of narrators was not questioned. During this period the entire focus was placed on the Hadith text.

Hadith verification can be traced to the time of the first Muslim Caliph, Abū Bakr. As a way to safeguard against errors, he refused to accept any hadith narrated by one single Companion unless another Companion confirmed it. Scholars from the generation of the Companions hesitated in accepting a hadith without further verification.<sup>13</sup> Scholars from later generations categorized a hadith as authentic only

when they had established that all its narrators were highly authentic.<sup>14</sup> From the second half of the first century of Islam the chain of narrators and their associated biographic dictionaries assumed a significant place in Hadith authentication. This knowledge of Hadith narrators was then extensively used to check the authenticity of a chain. If a chain was found reliable then the text reported through that chain was identified as authentic. Any problem in the chain would lead to the classification of the report as weak or unreliable.

Hadith authentication remained in verbal form for around the first century and a half of Islam. By the era of al-Bukhārī, numerous written compilations existed but these works were full of problems. Al-Bukhārī's mammoth task was to produce a work comprising the most authentic *ahādīth* available. In doing so he had to select traditions from 600,000 *ahādīth*.<sup>15</sup> Muslim selected *ahādīth* from around 300,000 reports.<sup>16</sup> These and other Hadith works that followed were authenticated through their chain of reporters. However, one cannot identify any work of Hadith in which reports have been recorded based on both verification of text and chain authentication. Scattered comments and observations on certain *ahādīth*, from a textual perspective, can be attributed to some scholars, but serious efforts are missing from the scholastic legacy.

Hadith experts developed five universally acceptable criteria to determine the credibility and authenticity of Hadith: chain continuity;<sup>17</sup> integrity of narrators' character;<sup>18</sup> report precision;<sup>19</sup> non-deficiency;<sup>20</sup> and non-aberrance.<sup>21</sup> If a hadith fulfills all these five criteria, it is declared authentic. A weak hadith is short of fulfilling the conditions of the authentic one.<sup>22</sup> The chain of transmitters must be unbroken for the hadith to be acceptable; none of the transmitters can be missing from the chain of narrators. Each transmitter must have heard the hadith directly from the transmitter before him. Each chain must link directly back to the Prophet or any of his Companions. The narrator in a chain must be a believer in Islam and of sound character. He would be disqualified by disbelief, hypocrisy, insanity, or biological immaturity. Finally, the narrator should have a strong and sound memory.

Al-Bukhārī and Muslim are ranked as the most eminent and respected Hadith scholars of all time. Their method of classification and examination, based on well-defined criteria, laid the foundation of Hadith authentication and methodology known today. They hold the status of teachers and pioneers in the field of Hadith authentication.

Imam Al-Bukhārī, native to today's Uzbekistan, subjected every Prophetic tradition to strict scrutiny in terms of its chain of narrators before including it in his work, considered the most authentic compilation. Imam Muslim, of Iran, followed the same methodology as al-Bukhārī, who, however, believed Muslim's chains of narration were problematic. The beauty of Muslim's work lies in its particular arrangement of traditions, recording all authentic reports on the same subject in the same place, and not scattering them as al-Bukhārī did.

Hadith authorities did not examine *aḥādīth* against universal criteria. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim were convinced that establishing the authenticity of a hadith's chain of narrators ensured authenticity of its text, and therefore rigorously examined the chain of narrators. Even when they criticized Hadith works, particularly those believed authentic, it was from the perspective and analysis of the chain only. A few other scholars made serious contributions to the authentication of Hadith through examination of text and attempted to establish criteria for doing so.

Scholar Misfir Gurm Allah al-Dumayni advanced concrete examples to illustrate the Companions' practice of examining Hadith with reference to the Qur'an. He arrived at these examples by tracing the method used by other Hadith scholars to identify any problems in *aḥādīth*, noting that traditions were verified by the Qur'an, and by comparison among solitary traditions, relatively authentic traditions, established history, freedom from unsound words and meanings, fundamental rules and principles of Islamic law, and freedom from abomination and impossibility.

When exploring the approach of Muslim jurists to Hadith texts, al-Dumayni identified as criteria the Qur'an, the Sunnah, consensus of the Ummah, practice of the Companions, logical analogy, general principles, and the impact of solitary tradition. Overall, since the time of the Companions, Muslim scholars have paid special attention to the preservation and authentication of the Prophet's traditions. *Aḥādīth* were first examined from both the angles of their chain of narrators and the Hadith text. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries when great Hadith works were compiled, scholars developed some criteria wherein chain examination was the focal point. Scholars of *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* spoke in principle about textual examination of Hadith. The most prominent such works are those of Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn al-Qayyim, and al-Dumayni.

## Chapter Three

### The Qur'an and Authentication of Hadith

This chapter examines the Hadith in light of the Qur'anic principles and instructions. Muslim scholars are unanimous concerning the position of the Qur'an in relation to the Hadith, stating that in an uncompromising conflict between a recorded Prophetic tradition and the Qur'an, the tradition is to be rejected as unacceptable. Thus, as the Prophet's utterances and practice symbolize the *bayān*, both the Qur'an and *bayān* should complement each other.

*Sūrah al-Nisā'* 59 exhorts believers to make Allah and His Prophet the judge in any dispute. Muslims frequently consulted the Prophet's wife 'A'ishah, on Qur'anic revelations, the statements and practices of the Prophet, and Islamic law. Her approach to Hadith in relation to the Qur'an was that it should not contradict the Qur'an or contradict what the Prophet had said, though she is reported to have rejected fabricated traditions attributed to the Prophet. Many examples of fabrication focus on statements made by the Prophet, as well as statements attributed to prophet Abraham and statements regarding: predetermination of human destiny; man's deeds being irrelevant for entry into Paradise; coercion in conversion to Islam; Moses' power to delay his death; reference to Eve as the root cause of women's infidelity to their husbands, and others.

## Chapter Four

### Authentication of Hadith Through Rationally Authentic Traditions

This chapter is devoted to a textual Hadith examination using highly authentic traditions of the Prophet. The position of the Prophet for believers is that of a judge (4:65) whose verdicts are final (33:36). The Prophet carried out his mission for over two decades before its eventual accomplishment, by explaining the Qur'an, translating Allah's commands into daily life, helping and judging his followers, and living his life according to Islamic principles. This Islamic legacy was meant to continue after his death but was betrayed by those who sought only personal gain. Consequently, people's own desires and whims began to circulate in the name of the Prophet. In this situation, the Qur'an,

with well-known Hadith and Sunnah, could be used to determine the nature of other traditions attributed to the Prophet. The Prophet said, “If an act done by someone is not approved by us, it is to be rejected as unacceptable.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, what appears in stark contrast with highly authentic Sunnah and Hadith should be rejected as non-Hadith.

To compare various *ahādīth* that contain the same subject matter but that also contradict each other is difficult and delicate, and requires reason. If a hadith is rejected as unreliable for containing content that contradicts another tradition, there must be strong reasons for doing so. In general, in case of a conflict between a hadith and a Sunnah, the latter is to be preferred.

For example, one tradition from Muslim states that nothing will occur but in accordance with a pre-ordained plan; therefore, according to this tradition, there is no way to increase the amount of one’s sustenance and the number of days of one’s life. This is why the Prophet is reported to have advised not to pray for longevity of life and increase in income. This report contrasts with another hadith on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik, stating that the Prophet prayed his servant would experience increased wealth and a number of children.<sup>24</sup> A compromise between the two traditions seems impossible; however, the first was a mere statement (Hadith) attributed to the Prophet, while the second narration is the Prophet’s own practice (Sunnah).

## Chapter Five

### **Authentication of Hadith Through Sound Reasoning**

Reason plays a vital role in man’s existence.<sup>25</sup> This power elevates mankind to the highest position on earth and through proper application helps maintain his humanity.<sup>26</sup> The Qur’an lays great emphasis on the intellectual power of man, such that true faith and good deeds seem impossible without the guidance of reason. Every one of God’s prophets invited his respective people to the divine message, appealing to their faculty of reason. If intellectual reasoning is a means to understand the Qur’an, it should also be an apparatus to understand the substance of Hadith literature.

In this context, the criterion of reason cannot be defined as simple

intellectual capacity but also a ‘sound mind’ or ‘sound reason,’ which is the ability to speculate governed by the Islamic principles of God-consciousness, justice, honesty, truthfulness, moderation, and sincerity. This principle applies in consideration of a well-known hadith recorded by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and others, stating that only Prophet Muhammad will have the power and honor to intercede on behalf of mankind on the Day of Judgment. But in the hadith, four prominent prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses) are described as not daring to beseech Allah for help due to their having committed sins in the past. The tradition also deprives Jesus of the right to help people, stating that only the Prophet Muhammad has the privileged role of intercession.

In this tradition, Adam refers to his sin of eating the forbidden fruit, but he should not have done so because he repented and Allah forgave him. Noah mentions the mistake of having prayed against his own people, but this was not in fact a sin. In reality he tried to save humanity by praying that Allah help him to establish peace and justice on earth, the first step of which was the annihilation of the anti-social elements in society. His prayer in fact saved humanity. Regarding Abraham, Allah Himself describes him as a “man of truth.” Moses referred to his sin of manslaughter, committed before his apostleship, but Moses killed the person concerned accidentally, not intentionally, and was no longer to be blamed for it after being appointed a prophet. All the prophets carry the great honor of having been forgiven by Allah. This tradition concerning intercession is a clear example of extolling the Prophet at the expense of the honor accorded to the other great prophets of Allah.

Another tradition, recorded by Muslim and al-Bukhārī, declares the intellectual and religious deficiency of women compared with men, but reason and application of principles from the Qur’an and the Prophet’s practices definitively reject this tradition as inauthentic. This chapter minutely checks 11 *aḥādīth*, using human reason and force of logic. The text of a hadith indicates its nature and whether it is acceptable. The Qur’an declares often that human reason is a reliable criterion to judge the truth from the false. Therefore, scholars and students from any background should use their reason to discover the truth in Hadith literature.



## Chapter Six

### Authentication of Hadith Through Established History

In this chapter the criterion of established history has been highlighted to authenticate the historical dimensions available in Hadith texts. The study of history is essential and one of its more primary purposes is educative. History should ideally be a guide to help humanity correct earlier mistakes and to draw inspiration from the very best it may have achieved. The Qur'an presents history in the guise of a teacher. Hadith literature contains many historical accounts including subject matter that often deals with history. The reports at times corroborate history or contradict it. Where a report contradicts established history, the tradition, regardless of its authenticity in terms of the chain, is to be considered dubious.

To check for historical authenticity, traditions can be compared with established history pertaining to famous battles, historical records, dates of birth and death, time consistency, and so forth. Conversely, authentic Hadiths can be approached as valid sources of historical information to, in turn, correct established history. Authentic *aḥādīth* are often sources of historical record.

For example, Muslim recorded two different traditions each of which stated a different age of the Prophet at his death (65<sup>27</sup> and 63<sup>28</sup> years old). His decision appears based on the apparent authenticity of the chain of narrators in these traditions. If he had checked the text against well-known historical facts, however, he would have certainly quoted only one of them in his work. Other scholars consider 63 years to be the most authentic age of the Prophet at his death.<sup>29</sup>

In another example, Muslim recorded that the Prophet stayed in Makkah 15 years after his prophethood, and 10 years in Madinah after hijrah.<sup>30</sup> Muslim records another version of this report wherein the Prophet stayed in Makkah for 13 years and in Madinah for 10 years.<sup>31</sup> Muslim's report counters established history while that of al-Bukhārī does not. In fact, the Prophet lived 13 years in Makkah after he was appointed God's Messenger, and 10 years in Madinah after hijrah.<sup>32</sup>

## Chapter Seven

### Moderation in Relation to Authentication of Hadith

This chapter traces the acceptability of Hadith in line with another criterion: moderation. Islam was revealed as a balanced way of life. Its rules and regulations therefore reflect the principle of balance in all things, wherein anything attributed to Islam that appears exaggerated or extreme is not an original part of the faith. Followers of the Prophet are expected to abandon excessive materialism and excessive spiritual deprivation. Imbalance in one aspect of life will cause a resulting extremity in another.

The Qur'an invites man to take the middle path in every situation, The Prophet avoided extremism and advised his followers to be just and balanced in life. All his teachings, actions, and sayings represent moderation.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, any extreme behavior or saying attributed to the Prophet should be rejected as false or fabricated.

For example, the Prophet taught a very balanced method of praying the obligatory and supererogatory prayers (salah) in terms of time and energy involved. Therefore, traditions that require more time and energy from the performer would then be suspect, and the ones noted here in this book are weak in their narration chains. Overall, the traditions would be rejected based on the disproportionate nature of their content.

Like the Qur'an, *ahādīth* also teach man about the rewards for doing good deeds and the punishment for doing evil. The Qur'an provides such information in a general manner, stating that denial of truth will lead to grievous suffering and humiliation, and obedience to Allah will be rewarded graciously on the Day of Judgment. Hadith literature, on the other hand, contains minute details about reward and punishment, some of them in exaggeration. For example, Hadith scholars have determined the following traditions to be fabricated, based on text alone: He who reads a particular *du'ā'* before bed will be glorified by 700,000 angels; He who reads words of praise for Allah before bed will become as innocent as on the day of his birth; One hour pondering is better than 60 years of devotion; and so forth. All these examples demonstrate that exaggerations are not in line with the Prophet's teachings.

## Chapter Eight

### Al-Bukhari's Chapter on Predetermination: An Evaluation and Interpretation

This chapter is based on discussion and reinterpretation of a particular chapter of al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Qadar* (Chapter on Predestination/Predetermination). These 27 traditions cannot be easily evaluated under certain particular criteria only, and need to be treated separately from several angles and psychological perspectives due to the chapter's subject and its deep impact on Muslims' psyche.

Al-Bukhārī's work *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is considered the most famous and respected collection of *aḥādīth*, and is considered by many as the most authentic book after the Qur'an.<sup>34</sup> This book has exerted great influence on the Muslim mind, and is widely read and referenced throughout the Muslim world as a source of Islamic law. Its chapter on predestination concerns the concept of a fore-written destiny for man, wherein human life, including man's final destination, has been predetermined, even before a person is born. These traditions are very significant for Muslim understanding of human responsibility, and need careful examination. Following is a sampling.

Debate over a fore-written destiny has existed in the Muslim world since the first Islamic century. The main arguments advanced in favor of the theory are based on certain Qur'anic *āyāt* as well as certain traditions, particularly those recorded by al-Bukhārī in *Kitāb al-Qadar*. He is believed to have been scrupulous in determining the reliability of the *sanad* of his selected traditions. According to this criterion, the traditions mentioned in *Kitāb al-Qadar* are conceivably sound. However, there is cause for questioning the 27 traditions from the standpoint of textual content.

Generally, five methodological components are available in Hadith commentaries: chain of narrators; the message of the tradition; reports from other sources to develop a complete picture of the tradition; the hadith's particular background; and the scholar's own view either favoring or rejecting the views of others.

Scholars define the subject of this chapter – *al-qadar* – in various ways, including: power; man's ability; Allah's infinite power; Allah's command; determination; and divine judgment. Scholar Hamzah

Muhammad Qasim considers it Allah's knowledge of things before their occurrence,<sup>35</sup> and Ibn Taymiyyah identifies it in two dimensions: Allah's eternal knowledge about creation's future deeds and about everything concerning man; and Allah's willpower over everything, including man's acts.<sup>36</sup> The Qur'an uses the word *al-qadar* with all its variant forms 132 times, and the meaning varies with context and appears with around 14 shades. Some meanings belong to both the human and divine aspects (power, empowerment) while some are exclusively associated with man (estimation, balance, capacity), and others attributed to God alone (determination, final judgment, etc.).

The Qur'an does not mention the determination of God or His final judgment in the sense of a predetermination of the details of human life. Logically, the concept of predetermination hardly fits into the Qur'anic framework. The Qur'an places moral responsibility on humans and jinn, and as such man's moral thoughts and acts may not be predetermined. Man's physical and intellectual features may on the other hand be considered fully predetermined.

Scholars advance the idea of predetermined human life with the Qur'anic statement: "It is Allah Who created you and all that you do" (37:96). Ibn Hajar claims, in light of a tradition recorded by Muslim, that this *āyah* suggests human life is predetermined with all its details.<sup>37</sup> However, this *āyah* does not speak about the creation of human acts but is actually part of prophet Abraham's statements to his people who worshipped idols made of stone and wood. Reading an *āyah* in isolation of its context is wrong and leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

### **Prefixing of Man's Destiny in the Mother's Womb**

The first hadith in *Kitāb al-Qadar* is evaluated here. 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd quotes the Prophet as having said that while a child is in the womb, an angel comes from Allah to write his deeds, time of death, means of livelihood, and whether he will be blessed or "wretched" in religion.<sup>38</sup> This tradition's chain is authentic and perfectly meets the three main criteria of continuity, integrity, and retentive memory. These criteria apply to the chain, and the last two (non-anomaly and non-deficiency) apply to the text. In this case, the tradition (in its full text) suggests that the human embryonic period lasts 17 weeks, not two weeks as is known scientifically. It may be that the terms used in the report represent the fetal period and not the embryonic period.

The Qur'anic statement (23:13–14) conforms exactly to modern biology regarding this matter – incredible, given the lack of microscopes or other tools during the Prophet's time. Regarding this particular al-Bukhārī tradition, it is most probable that one of the reporters erred in reporting the duration of human embryonic development. Apparently the mention of the embryonic period as spreading over 17 weeks is a later insertion in the hadith, which therefore is a defect (*'illah*) in the report, in which case the report is deemed defective.

Muslim records an authentic tradition on the same subject, yet while al-Bukhārī's report puts the point of human destiny at 17 weeks, Muslim's report puts this only after six weeks.<sup>39</sup> Muslim's tradition indeed coincides with scientific fact. In such cases of conflict between two equally reliable traditions, only one of them is to be accepted. Rationally speaking, Muslim's report emerges stronger than al-Bukhārī's. Muslim's does not have any internal defect and agrees with modern findings in the field of genetic engineering. Al-Bukhārī's report appears peculiar (*shadhdh*) because it conflicts with the comparatively more reliable report of Muslim.

Based on mention of additional details within the tradition that refer to man's actions in life, al-Bukhārī's report does not represent the predetermination of man's destiny, but does reflect Allah's omniscience. The report contradicts ahl al-Sunnah and Qadarite opinion but supports those with a fatalistic approach to life. Yet rather than reject the al-Bukhārī report completely, it seems appropriate to identify the errors in the report and rectify them according to other available versions. A careful scrutiny may help scholars recast the report, which could state that destiny begins 42 days after conception, and that Allah determines lifespan, deeds, means of sustenance, and disposition. Shortly before the end of man's life, destiny (*al-kitāb*) overtakes him and he begins to do all that ultimately leads to Paradise. This approach conforms to scientific knowledge wherein the first six weeks of development are crucial.

The last part of the report speaks of the domination of destiny over man, due to which he will deserve either Paradise or Hell. Most probably, destiny (*al-kitāb*) signifies the general rules of guidance and misguidance, and reward and punishment in man's life. The guidance and misguidance depend, to the extent of necessity, upon man. It is the will of man to accept or reject God's message. The Qur'an says, "By it He causes many to stray and many He leads into the right path; but

He causes not to stray but the iniquitous” (2:26). The dominance of destiny over man means that human life is governed by the eternal divine rule of righteousness and evildoing.

### **Prohibition on Snatching Others' Rights**

Another al-Bukhārī tradition teaches Muslim women to place their trust in Allah and seek His help in marriage; one is not allowed to snatch away what others have but should make a concerted effort in the right direction to find a suitable husband: “The Prophet said: ‘No woman should seek her sister’s divorce so as to find the bowl empty and arrange her own marriage, as she will get what has been determined for her.’”<sup>40</sup> This tradition is applicable through history and today due to the shortage of suitable husbands for women in modern society, leading to the problem of jealousy arising between unmarried and married women. When free mixing in society leads to a tenuous relationship, divorce becomes the ultimate outcome with the waiting woman seizing a new opportunity. This tradition is equally applicable to a man who may ask his brother to divorce his wife so as to marry her. Therefore, the tradition is authentic.

### **Allah is the Sole Owner of Everything**

This tradition of al-Bukhārī and other highly authentic narrators states that everything happens at its scheduled time and that “what Allah gives is His and what He takes back is His.”<sup>41</sup> In this tradition, a daughter of the Prophet sent him a message that their son was breathing his last breath and requested the Prophet visit her. When the dying child was put in his lap, the Prophet’s eyes filled with tears and he said, “This is compassion which Allah has put in the hearts of His servants. Allah showers His merciful servants with mercy.” This tradition conveys the following ideas: death is certain; man’s life belongs to Allah; death occurs at a time scheduled by Allah; relatives of the dying person should be patient and hope for something good from Allah; visiting the dying person is a nice tradition; Allah made man soft-hearted; and Allah is with those who show compassion to others.

### **The Prophet’s Prophecies**

The following defective tradition states that the Prophet gave a speech describing exactly what would happen in the future until doomsday.<sup>42</sup> The chain of narrators is weak and distorted, and although the tradition was recorded by al-Bukhārī, it may not be considered authentic.<sup>43</sup> Also, if the Prophet did deliver such a speech, its duration would last weeks, maybe months, in order to cover such immense detail

that would be required of this prophecy. This tradition is no doubt an exaggeration. In the known history of the Prophet there is no reference to such a speech. Hadith sources are replete with such predictions of the Prophet, giving further doubt to the report.

### **Adam and Moses Debate**

An objectionable report recorded by al-Bukhārī states that Adam and Moses had an argument wherein Moses said Adam, his father, caused our expulsion from Paradise.<sup>44</sup> The tradition states that during this argument, Moses addressed Adam by name. Yet it is not befitting for a prophet to address his father by his name. Second, a son is not supposed to condemn his father for his error. He should apply the principle of *ihsān* (excellent treatment). Moses' words are harsh and unbecoming of a pious son towards a pious father. Also, why did Moses condemn Adam for something for which Allah had forgiven him? Since Moses received revelation, he must have been informed of Satan's role in Adam's expulsion from the Garden. According to Allah, Satan is to be blamed for this, not Adam. Yet, according to the report, Moses blamed Adam. This is strange and rather unbelievable.

Regarding the father-son relationship, Allah must have revealed the principles of this relationship to all His prophets. Furthermore, the concept of *ihsān* already existed in Moses' law and governed such a relationship. In a bid to justify Moses' questioning of Adam, one may refer to 19:41–48 in which prophet Abraham also argued with his father. However, Moses condemned Adam for a fault for which he had already been forgiven, while Abraham did not condemn his pagan father for his idol worship but implored him persuasively to abandon his undesirable act of idol worship. Condemnation and persuasion are two different things. Condemning elders is not desirable but persuading elders to eschew wrong is a highly commendable act.

### **The Exclusive Rights of Allah**

A report from al-Bukhārī states that the Prophet said after prayer, "There is no God except Allah alone, there is no partner with Him; O Allah! None can intercept what You grant; none can give back what You withhold; none's endeavor can be of any help to him against You."<sup>45</sup> The chain of al-Bukhārī's versions of this tradition is highly reliable. The Prophet's quoted recitation and utterance immediately following the prayer is a serious reminder that Allah's position in relation to man is always to be remembered. Unlike other faiths, Islam makes Allah's attributes crystal-clear. Where in other scriptures He is

at times challenged by man, Islam teaches Muslims never to challenge Allah; He is All-Powerful and everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and is His dominion. This tradition emphasizes that Allah can release as well as withhold His blessings. Therefore, it is deemed authentic.

### **Tragic Death Caused by an Epidemic**

The Prophet's wife ʿĀ'ishah asked him about the plague. This tradition reports the Prophet said: "It was a cause of suffering Allah used to send to whom He willed. But Allah has now made it a source of mercy for the believers. Anyone who is in a town afflicted with the plague and does not leave it out of patience and hoping for Allah's reward; he knows that nothing will befall him except what Allah has destined for him, and he also knows that one who dies of the plague will be rewarded like the martyr."<sup>46</sup> All reporters of this chain are highly authentic, and its text is in accordance with Islamic principles.

Islam advises its adherents to be patient in all situations. A town afflicted with an epidemic is often cut off from the outside world and under quarantine so no one may enter or leave it. People live in fear of the fatal disease, but only Allah can save people from the scourge. Muslims believe death is bound to overtake them, so escape from a diseased town does not guarantee escape from death. This tradition of the Prophet advises followers to trust Allah and invites them to remember that Allah is the sole source of life and death. One who dies of plague while waiting patiently and hoping for Allah's blessing for his suffering will be rewarded on the Day of Judgment. However, this hadith does not fit into a theme proposed by al-Bukhārī and even great commentators failed to justify its inclusion in the Chapter.

### **Allah's Will**

This tradition states that the Prophet said, "By God, if it were not the will of Allah we would not be guided to the right path, nor would we be able to pray or fast. Oh Allah! Send down to us peace of mind and make us strong in the unwanted battle imposed by the pagans who have oppressed us."<sup>47</sup> These poetic lines represent the true spirit of the Qur'an, as well as the concern of the Prophet and his earnest entreaty to Allah. The tradition teaches us how to appeal to Allah. Invocations to Allah speak not only of one's wishes but also form a practical approach to life. One has to do one's best to remain firmly on the true path and must also be aware that guidance is not earned by man but is exclusively Allah's gift and a great privilege.



When Allah sent down the Qur'an, He already provided the whole of humanity with what it needed for guidance. Man's role then and now has been to read, understand, and apply it, for indeed Allah has equipped humanity with the capacity, ability, and prowess to do so.

### The Author

ISRAR KHAN has a PhD in Theology from Aligarh Muslim University, India. He is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Qur'an and Sunnah Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). His main fields of study, teaching, and research are Qur'anic Studies and Hadith Studies. He has translated several Islamic Studies titles from Arabic into Urdu, English, and Hindi and has authored several works in English: *Qur'anic Studies: An Introduction* (2000), *The Theory of Abrogation: A Critical Evaluation* (2006), and *Understanding the Qur'an: A Reflection* (2006).

On the Editorial Board of several international academic journals, including *Intellectual Discourse* (by IIUM), he has also published a number of articles in international refereed journals and presented many papers at international conferences and seminars.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Qur'an 3:132.

<sup>2</sup> Qur'an 4:59.

<sup>3</sup> Qur'an 8:12–25.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an 4:65.

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an 8:46.

<sup>6</sup> Qur'an 47:33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī, "*Kitāb al-Mawḍū'āt*" (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), vol.1, p.325.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., vol.2, p.290.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., vol.2, p.22.

<sup>11</sup> Muslim, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2000), "Muqaddimah," report no. 1–4, p.51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Fallatah, Umar ibn Hasan Uthman, *Al-Waḍ' fi al-Ḥadīth* (Damascus: Maktabah al-Ghazāly, 1981), vol.1, p.180.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Kamil Muhammad, Muhammad Uwaydah, *A'lām al-Fuqahā' wa al-Muḥaddithīn: Al-Imām al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992), p.9.

<sup>16</sup> Kamil Muhammad, *A'lām al-Fuqahā' wa al-Muḥaddithīn: Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), p.14.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā Ismā'īl, *Al-Bā'ith al-Ḥathīth*, 4th edn. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994), p.20.

<sup>18</sup> Tahan, Mahmud, *Taysīr Muṣṭalah al-Ḥadīth* (Kuwait: Maktabah Dār al-Turāth, 1984), p.146.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1989), vol.1, p.252. Al-Khair Abadi, Muhammad Abul Laith, *Takhrīj al-Ḥadīth: Nash'atuhu wa Manhajuhu* (Kuala Lumpur: Dār al-Shākir, 1999), pp.268–274.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā Ismā'īl, *Al-Bā'ith al-Ḥathīth*, 4th edn. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994), p.19.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1400 AH), vol.4, "Kitāb al-I'tisām bi al-Sunnah," *Bāb* no. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Muslim, vol.8, "Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah," hadith nos. 6322–6326; al-Bukhārī, vol.4, "Kitāb al-Da'awāt," hadith no. 6344.

- <sup>25</sup> Qur'an 2:170.
- <sup>26</sup> Qur'an 2:30–38, 21:10.
- <sup>27</sup> Muslim, vol.8, “Kitāb al-Faḍā'il,” hadith no. 6055.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., hadith nos. 6049–6052.
- <sup>29</sup> Al-Nawawī, Muḥy al-Dīn, *Al-Minhāj: Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1997), vol.8, p.102. Ibn Sa'īd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1996), vol.2, part 2, p.404.
- <sup>30</sup> Muslim, vol.8, “Kitāb al-Faḍā'il,” hadith no. 6053.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., hadith no. 6050.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Yūsuf ibn 'Abd Allah, *Al-Istī'āb fī Ma'rifat al-Aṣḥāb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), vol.1, p.143, 147.
- <sup>33</sup> Qur'an 25:63–74.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Hadiyy al-Sārī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, n.d.), pp.12–14.
- <sup>35</sup> Hamzah Muhammad Qasim, *Manār al-Qārī* (Damascus: Maktabah Dār al-Bayān, 1990), part 5, p.307.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2000), vol.11, p.582.
- <sup>38</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol.4, Book 55, hadith no. 549.
- <sup>39</sup> Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: with al-Nawawī's commentary, Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1997), vol.8, “Kitāb al-Qadar,” p.409, hadith no. 6668.
- <sup>40</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol.4, “Kitāb al-Qadar,” p.209, hadith no. 6601.
- <sup>41</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol.1, “Kitāb al-Janā'iz,” p.396, hadith no. 1284; vol.4, “Kitāb al-Marḍā,” p.26, hadith no. 5655; vol.4, “Kitāb al-Aymān wa al-Nudhūr,” p.220, hadith no. 6655; vol.4, “Kitāb al-Tawḥīd,” p.379, hadith no. 7377, and p.394, hadith no. 7448.
- <sup>42</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, “Kitāb al-Qadar,” p.210, hadith no. 6604.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol.5, pp.561–562.
- <sup>44</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol.4, “Kitāb al-Qadar,” p.212, hadith no. 6614.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.212, hadith no. 6615.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.213, hadith no.6619.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol.11, p.640. Vol.4, “Kitāb al-Qadar,” p.213, hadith no. 6620.