

The Science of Hadith

Lesson 2



Banning Hadith Records

- **Quranic verses that place great emphasis on the practice of writing.**
- The first verse revealed to the Holy Prophet (saw) is a command to “Read”.
- The Divine command to “read” implies that there is something recorded and written.

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يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ بِدَيْنٍ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ

“O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down...” Quran

2:282

وَلَا تَسَاءَمُوا أَن تَكْتُبُوهُ صَغِيرًا أَوْ كَبِيرًا

“And do not be [too] weary to write it, whether it is small or large...” Quran 2:282

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- When we approach the hadith corpus, we are confronted with some traditions which encourage the writing of hadith and others which prohibit the writing of hadith.
- Below are a few examples

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عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْخَدْرِيِّ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ : (لَا تَكْتُبُوا عَنِّي وَمَنْ كَتَبَ عَنِّي غَيْرَ الْقُرْآنِ فَلْيَمْحُهِ...)

“Do not write down anything from me!
Whoever has written anything from me other
than the Quran should erase it...”

Source: Sahih Muslim

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إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَمَرَنَا أَنْ لَا نَكْتُبَ شَيْئًا مِنْ
حَدِيثِهِ

“Verily, the Messenger of God prohibited us from writing anything from his words.”- Zayd ibn Thabit

Source: Sunan Abi Dawood

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عن أبي هريرة، قال : كنا قعودا نكتب ما نسمع من النبي ﷺ عليه وآله و سلم، فخرج علينا، فقال : ما هذا تكتبون ؟
فقلنا : ما نسمع .

فقال : اكتبوا كتاب الله، أمحضوا كتاب الله، أكتب مع كتاب الله،
أمحضوا كتاب الله أو خلصوه .

قال : فجمعنا ما كتبنا في صعيد واحد ، ثم أحرقناه بالنار

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"We were sitting writing what we had heard from the Prophet, when the Prophet arrived. He asked what we were writing. We said: What we have heard from you. He said: Are you (compiling) a book besides the Book of God? We said: (We write) what we hear from you.

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He said: "Write the Book of God. Write only the Book of God. Are you writing other than the Book of God? Write only the Book of God." Abu Hurayra said: Following the instruction of the Prophet, we collected our writings and burnt them in a fire."- Abu Hurayra

Source: Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal

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- There are also a plethora of traditions where the Holy Prophet (saw) encourages his followers to write down his words and instructions.
- How do we reconcile this traditions whereby some prohibit the recording of hadith and others encourage it?

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- Some scholars have discarded the traditions that prohibit the writing of hadith as fabrications.
- Other scholars offer the following solution to these seemingly contradictory reports.

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- The prominent Sunni scholar, al-Nawawi argues that the reports condemning the writing of hadith came from the earlier years of the Prophetic mission when he was concerned about his words being mistaken for the Quran.

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- According to al-Nawawi, permission to write down his teachings would have come later, when the Quran had become more established in the minds of the Muslims, and the Prophet's role as the leader of a functioning state required some written records
- Other scholars have understood the prohibitions to be special instructions for specific people.

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- Stages of Hadith Prohibition
- **1. During the time of the Holy Prophet**

عن عبد الله بن عمرو بن العاص قال : " كنت اكتب كل شيء اسمعه من رسول الله ، أريد حفظه ، فنهتني قريش وقالوا : تكتب كل شيء سمعته من رسول الله ورسول الله بشر يتكلم بال غضب والرضا ، فأمسكت عن الكتاب ، فذكرت ذلك لرسول الله ، فأوماً بإصبعه الى فيه ، وقال : اكتب فوالذي نفسي بيده لا يخرج منه إلا الحق " .

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“I used to write whatever I heard from the Messenger of God until the Quraysh prohibited me and said to me: Do you write anything you hear from the Prophet because he is also a human who has rage and pleasure? I then stopped writing the hadith until I informed the Prophet about what the Quraysh had told me. He pointed to his mouth with his finger and said: "Write. By the One whom my life is in His Mighty Hand, none other than truth has come out of this.”

Source: Sunan al-Daarimi and al-Mustadrak

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- 2. The Prophet's Deathbed

لَمَّا حَضَرَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَفِي الْبَيْتِ رَجَالٌ
فِيهِمْ عُمَرُ بْنُ الْخَطَّابِ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: هَلُمَّ
أَكْتُبْ لَكُمْ كِتَابًا لَا تَضِلُّونَ بَعْدَهُ، فَقَالَ عُمَرُ: إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ
صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَدْ غَلَبَ عَلَيْهِ الْوَجَعُ وَعِنْدَكُمْ الْقُرْآنُ
حَسْبُنَا كِتَابُ اللَّهِ

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“When the Prophet was on his deathbed there were some men around him, among them, Umar b. al-Khattab. The Messenger of God said to them: Bring me a pen and paper to write something for you that you may never go astray. Umar said: Surely the pain has inflicted the Messenger of God and the Book of God is with you. The Book of God suffices us!” – Ibn Abbas

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari

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- **3. During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr**

إِنَّكُمْ تَحَدِّثُونَ عَنِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص) أَحَادِيثَ تَخْتَلِفُونَ فِيهَا،
وَالنَّاسُ بَعْدَكُمْ أَشَدَّ اخْتِلَافًا، فَلَا تَحَدِّثُوا عَنِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا.
فَمَنْ سَأَلَكُمْ فَقُولُوا: بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ، فَاسْتَحْلُوا
حِلَالَهُ، وَحَرِّمُوا حَرَامَهُ

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Al-Thahabi under the biography of Abu Bakr narrated:

“After the demise of the Prophet, Abu Bakr called people and said: You have been narrating many traditions from the Prophet yet you dispute among yourselves about them. People who come after you will dispute more about them. Thus, from now, do not narrate any more traditions from the Prophet.

Whoever asked you anything, tell them: Between us and you is the Book of God, thus accept what it deems permissible to be permissible and what it prohibits to be prohibited.”

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أن رسول الله قال : يوشك الرجل متكى على أريكته ، يحدث بحديثي ، فيقول
بيننا وبينكم كتاب الله ، فما وجدناه فيه من حلال أحللناه ومن حرام حرّمناه

“I see coming very soon that a man from you will be leaning on a couch and as my Hadith is said to him, he will answer, ‘the Book of Allah is the decisive judge; I will deem lawful only what I find lawful in it and deem unlawful only what I find unlawful in it.’- The Holy Prophet (saw)

Sources: Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Majah, Abu Dawood

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عن عائشة أنها قالت : «جمع أبي الحديث عن رسول الله (ص) وكانت خمسمائة حديث ، فبات ليلته يتقلب كثيراً .

قالت : فغمني ، فقلت : أتقلب لشكوى أو لشيء بلغك ؟

فلما أصبح قال : أي بُنية ، هلمِّي الأحاديث التي عندك .

فجئته بها ، فدعا بنار فحرقها .

فقلت : لم أحرقتها ؟

قال : خشيت أن أموت وهي عندي فيكون فيها أحاديث عن رجل قد ائتمنته ووثقتُ [به] ، ولم يكن كما حدثني فأكون نقلت ذلك

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“My father has compiled 500 traditions from the Prophet. One night (during his caliphate) he was uneasy and did not sleep the whole night. In the morning he called me and said: My daughter bring me those traditions that I have with you. I brought them to him and he burnt them all.

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Aisha asks him: “Why did you burn them?”

He replied: “I am worried that I will die while there may have been traditions that I have narrated it from the Prophet through a person that I assumed him to be honest and trustworthy and transmitted those [false reports].”

Source: Tadhkiratul Huffadh

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- **4. During the Caliphate of Umar**

عن عروة بن الزبير : إنَّ عمر بن الخطَّاب أراد أن يكتب السنن فاستشار في ذلك أصحاب رسول الله (ص) ، فأشاروا عليه أن يكتبها ، فطفق عمر يستخير الله فيها شهراً ، ثمَّ أصبح يوماً ، وقد عزم الله له ، فقال :
إني كنت أردت أن أكتب السنن ، وإني ذكرت قوماً كانوا قبلكم كتبوا كتباً ، فأكبوا عليها ، فتركوا كتاب الله تعالى ، وإني والله لا ألبس كتاب الله بشيء أبداً

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It has been narrated on the authority of `Urwah ibn al-Zubayr that when `Umar had intended to record the Holy Sunnah, he consulted the companions of the Holy Prophet, and they advised him to record. For about a month, `Umar sought God's guidance in this regard. One morning, Umar said, 'I had intended to record the Holy Sunnah, but I remembered some past nations who applied themselves completely to the items they had written and, as a result, neglected the Book of God. By God, I swear! I will never allow anything to interfere with the Book of God

Source: Tabaqaat al-Kubra

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عن القاسم بن محمد بن أبي بكر : إنَّ عمر بن الخطَّاب بلغه أنَّه قد
ظهرت في أيدي الناس كتب ، فاستنكرها وكرهها ، وقال : أيُّها النَّاس !
إنَّه قد بلغني أنَّه قد ظهرت في أيديكم كتب فأحبُّها إلى الله أعدلها
وأقومها ، فلا يُبقين أحدٌ عنده كتاباً إلاَّ أتاني به ، فأرى فيه رأيي .
قال : فظنُّوا أنَّه يريد أن ينظر فيها ويقومها على أمرٍ لا يكون فيه
اختلاف ، فأتوه بكتبهم ، فأحرقها بالنار

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- It has been narrated on the authority of al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr that `Umar, after he had received news confirming that people started to hold (or write) books, denied and disliked the matter saying,
- ‘O people: I have been informed that you have started to hold books. God’s most beloved books must be the fairest and the straightest. Now, I order you all to bring me all the books that you hold so that I will decide about them.’

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- Thinking that `Umar wanted to correct and submit the books to a certain criterion, all people brought their books to him. Instead, he set them all to fire
- Source: al-Tabaqaat al-Kubra

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- **5. During the Caliphate of Uthman b. Affan**
- Abu Dhar is sent into exile by Uthman to Damascus for the crime of narrating Prophetic traditions.
- Muawiya, who was the governor of Damascus at the time, boycotted Abu Dhar and forbade anyone from communicating with him
- Eventually, Abu Dhar was banished by Uthman to die alone in the desert of al-Rabatha.

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- **6. During the Caliphate of Muawiya**
- Muawiya wrote an official letter with the same content to all his delegates announcing that whoever narrates anything in virtue of Abu-Torab (Imam Ali) or his family, he is not under the protection of the government.

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- **Motivations Behind the Prohibition of Hadith**
- The traditional Sunni position is that the early Caliphs prohibited the recording of hadith to prevent the hadith from being mistaken as part of the Quran.
- Some of the statements from the early Caliphs indicate they were afraid the Quran would lose prominence in the hearts of the believers.

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- Other narrations assert that Abu Bakr, for example, felt that the recording and transmission of hadith would create discord and disagreement among Muslims.
- Some Sunni scholars contend that in the early Islamic period, the Arabic alphabet was still primitive and many letters were written identically and could only be distinguished from one another by context.

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- Thus, the sahifas of Companions and Successors only served as memory aids, written skeletons of hadiths that would jog the author's memory when he or she heard them. If discovered, these "notes" could easily be misunderstood

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- **The Shia position** regarding the motivation behind the prohibition of hadith is that it relates to the issue of Caliphate and silencing dissent.
- It had less to do with religion and more to do with securing political power and concealing the virtues of political opponents
- Why do the Shia believe this?

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- As mentioned earlier it was Quraysh, not the Prophet, who forbade Abdullah son of 'Amr Ibn 'As to narrate the Prophetic traditions. The reason mentioned in the narration is interesting: "The Prophet is only a human and has rage and pleasure."
- This expression is used only when the speaker has spoken about the virtues or vices of someone else.

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- Surely, the Holy Prophet did not speak in favor of the Quraysh or else they would never prevent Abdullah from narrating it. Thus, it seems more likely that Abdullah had collected some traditions that could be used against the certain powerful companions from the tribe of Quraysh.

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- Umar had ordered the Companions of the Prophet to lessen the narrations from the Prophet except if it was about the practical laws of Islam. This again indicates Umar was concerned about the hadiths that dealt with the virtues of his opponents, i.e. Imam Ali
- This claim can be proven by studying the trend of the hadith prohibition at the time of Muawiya who –unlike Omar- explicitly abandoned any narration concerning the virtues of Imam Ali.

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- Abu Bakr and Umar, for example, did not impose the ban on hadith on their loyal friends nor did they apply them ban on themselves.
- Among those selected people on whom the hadith prohibition did not apply was Aisha, who is the daughter of the first Caliph and loyal supporter of both her father and Umar.