

The Science of Hadith

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ (سورة الحجر - آية ٩)

*In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate the Most Merciful
We have, Without doubt, sent down the message: and we will assuredly guard it (from corruption). (Qur'an 15:9)*

The promise made by Allah (SWT) in Qur'an 15:9 is obviously fulfilled in the undisputed purity of the Qur'anic text throughout the fourteen centuries since its revelation. However, what is often forgotten by many Muslims is that the divine promise also includes, by necessity, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (PBUH), because the *Sunnah* is the practical example of the implementation of the Qur'anic guidance, the wisdom taught to the Prophet (PBUH) along with the scripture, and neither the Qur'an nor the *Sunnah* can be understood correctly without the other.

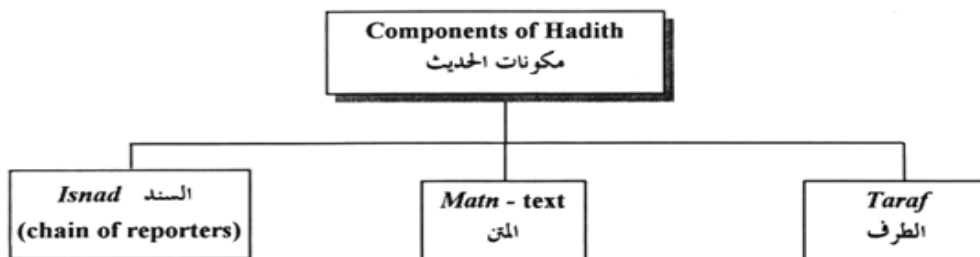
Allah (SWT) preserved the *Sunnah* by enabling the companions and those after them to memorize, write down and pass on the statements of the Prophet (PBUH), and the descriptions of his way, as well as to continue the blessings of practicing the *Sunnah*.

Later, as the purity of the knowledge of the *Sunnah* became threatened, Allah (SWT) caused the Muslim *Ummah* to produce individuals with exceptional memory skills and analytical expertise, who travelled tirelessly to collect thousands of narrations and distinguish the true words of prophetic wisdom from those corrupted by weak memories, from forgeries by unscrupulous liars, and from the statements of the large number of *Ulama* (scholars), the companions and those who followed their way. All of this was achieved through precise attention to the words narrated, and detailed familiarity with the biographies of the thousands of reporters of *hadith*.

The methodology of the expert scholars of *hadith* in assessing the narrations and sorting out the genuine from the mistaken and fabricated, forms the subject matter of the science of *hadith*. In this article a brief discussion is given of the terminology and classifications of *hadith*.

Components of Hadith

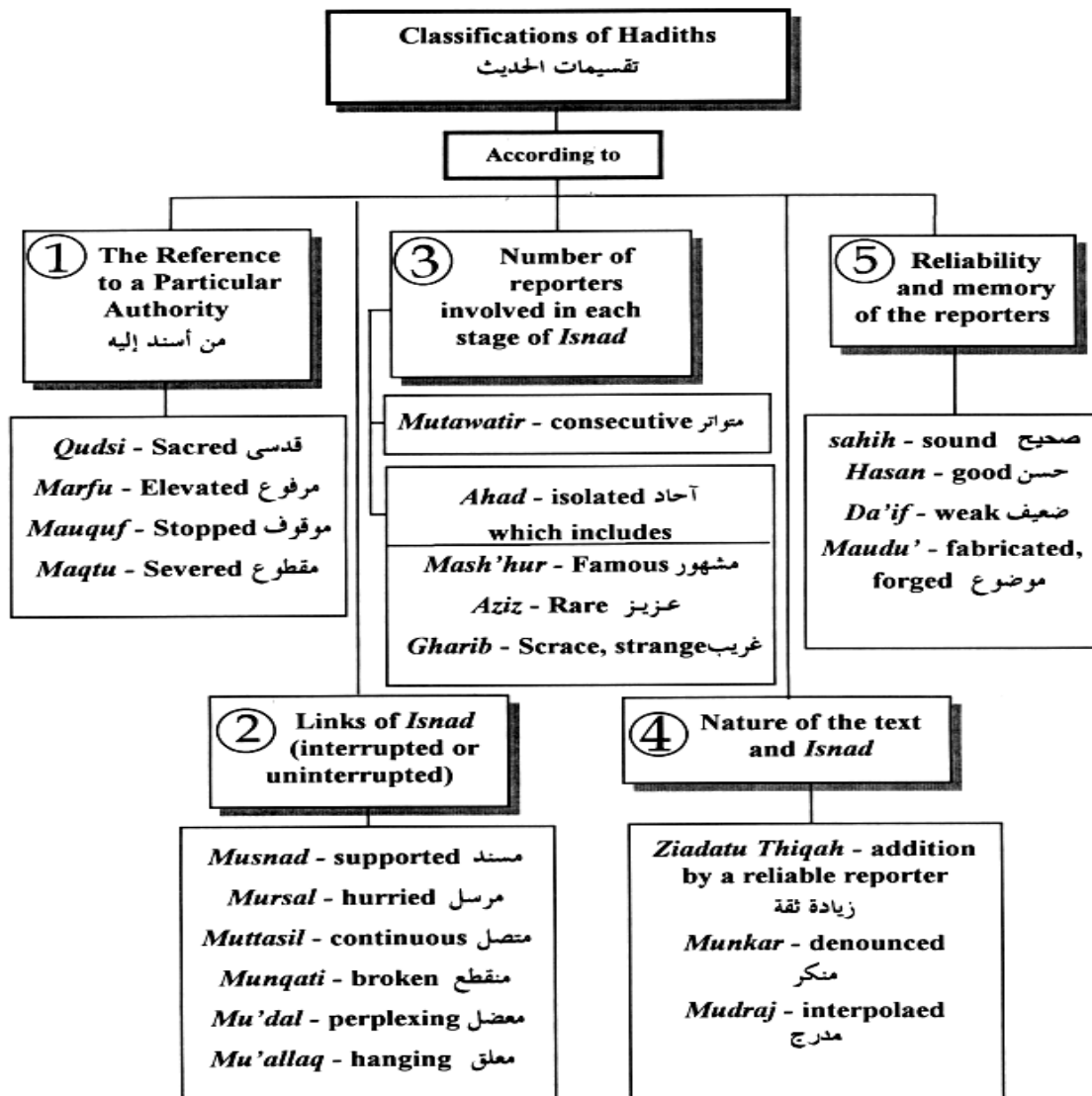
A *hadith* is composed of three parts (see the figure [below]):



Matn (text), *isnad* (chain of reporters), and *taraf* (the part, or the beginning sentence, of the text which refers to the sayings, actions or characteristics of the Prophet (PBUH), or his concurrence with others action). The authenticity of the *hadith* depends on the reliability of its reporters, and the linkage among them.

Classifications of Hadith

A number of classifications of *hadith* have been made. Five of these classifications are shown in the figure [below], and are briefly described subsequently.

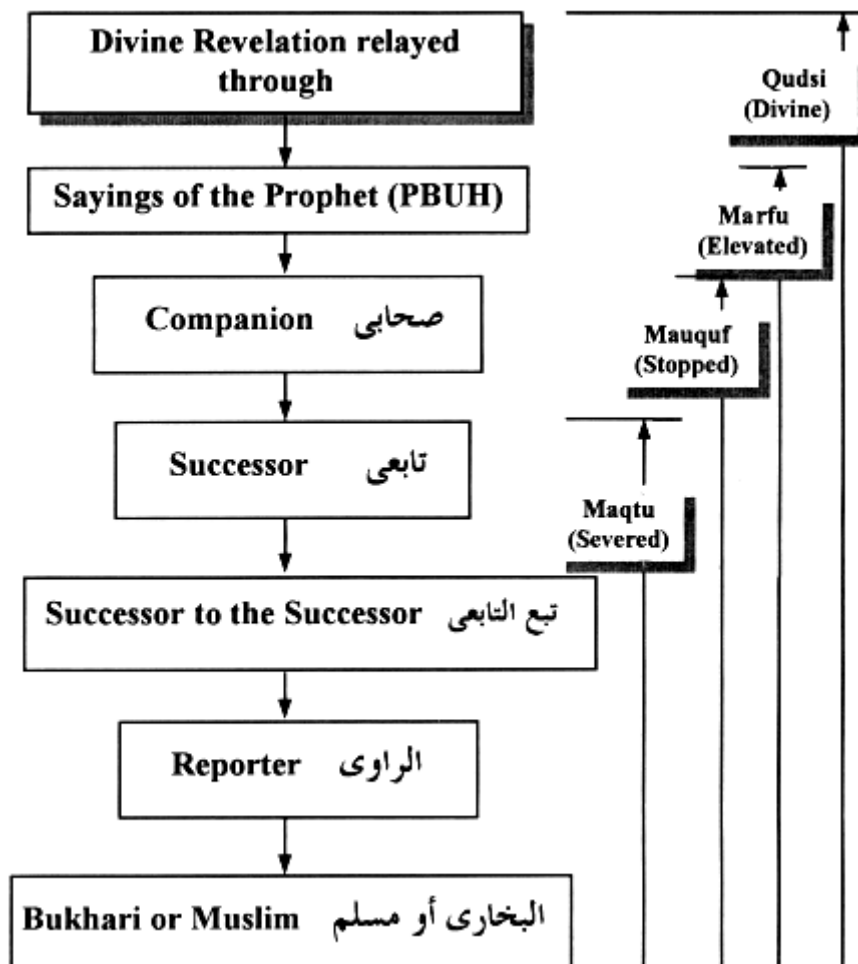


1. According to the reference to a particular authority

2.

Four types of *hadith* can be identified.

- *Qudsi* - Divine; a revelation from Allah (SWT); relayed with the words of the Prophet (PBUH).
- *Marfu* - elevated; a narration from the Prophet (PBUH), e.g. I heard the Prophet (PBUH) saying ...
- *Mauquf*- stopped: a narration from a companion only, e.g., we were commanded to ...
- *Maqtu'* - severed: a narration from a successor.



3. According to the links of *Isnad* - interrupted or uninterrupted

Six categories can be identified.

- *Musnad* - supported: a *hadith* which is reported by a traditionalist, based on what he learned from his teacher at a time of life suitable for learning; similarly - in turn - for each teacher until the *isnad* reaches a well known companion, who in turn, reports from the Prophet (PBUH).
- *Mutassil* - continuous: a *hadith* with an uninterrupted *isnad* which goes back only to a companion or successor.
- *Mursal* - hurried: if the link between the successor and the Prophet (PBUH) is missing, e.g. when a successor says "The Prophet said...".
- *Munqati* - broken: is a *hadith* whose link anywhere before the successor (i.e., closer to the traditionalist recording the *hadith*) is missing.
- *Mu'adal* - perplexing: is a *hadith* whose reporter omits two or more consecutive reporters in the *isnad*.
- *Mu'allaq* - hanging: is a *hadith* whose reporter omits the whole *isnad* and quotes the Prophet (PBUH) directly (i.e., the link is missing at the beginning).

4. According to the number of reporters involved in each stage of *Isnad*

Five categories of *hadith* can be identified:

- *Mutawatir* - Consecutive: is a *hadith* which is reported by such a large number of people that they cannot be expected to agree upon a lie, all of them together.
- *Ahad* - isolated: is a *hadith* which is narrated by people whose number does not reach that of the *mutawatir*.
It is further classified into:
 - *Mash'hur* - famous: *hadith* reported by more than two reporters.
 - *Aziz* - rare, strong: at any stage in the *isnad*, only two reporters are found to narrate the *hadith*.
 - *Gharib* - strange: At some stage of the *Isnad*, only one reporter is found relating it.

5. According to the nature of the text and *isnad*

- *Munkar* - denounced: is a *hadith* which is reported by a weak narrator, and whose narration goes against another authentic *hadith*.
- *Mudraj* - interpolated: an addition by a reporter to the text of the *hadith* being narrated.

6. According to the reliability and memory of the reporters

This provides the final verdict on a *hadith* - four categories can be identified:

- *Sahih* - sound. Imam Al-shafi'i states the following requirements for a *hadith*, which is not *mutawatir*, to be acceptable "each reporter should be trustworthy in his religion; he should be known to be truthful in his narrating, to understand what he narrates, to know how a different expression can alter the meaning, and to report the wording of the *hadith* verbatim, not only its meaning".
- *Hasan* - good: is the one where its source is known and its reporters are unambiguous.
- *Da'if* - weak: a *hadith* which fails to reach the status of *hasan*. Usually, the weakness is: a) one of discontinuity in the *isnad*, in which case the *hadith* could be - according to the nature of the discontinuity - *munqati* (broken), *mu'allaq* (hanging), *mu'dal* (perplexing), or *mursal* (hurried), or b) one of the reporters having a disparaged character, such as due to his telling lies, excessive mistakes, opposition to the narration of more reliable sources, involvement in innovation, or ambiguity surrounding his person.
- *Maudu'* - fabricated or forged: is a *hadith* whose text goes against the established norms of the Prophet's sayings, or its reporters include a liar. Fabricated *hadith* are also recognized by external evidence related to a discrepancy found in the dates or times of a particular incident.