



# “THE HADITH”

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## **What is the Hadith?**

The term Hadith literature (or even just Hadith sometimes) refers to a number of historical books which contain reports of the sayings, actions and example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, by which he showed his followers how to put the teachings of the Holy Quran into practice.

## **What does the word Hadith mean?**

Hadith just means a saying. When used as a term in the religion of Islam, a hadith means a report of what the Holy Prophet Muhammad said or did on a certain occasion. In English books on Islam, the word tradition is also used to denote a hadith. The word Hadith is also applied to the books containing these reports.

## **Please name some books of Hadith.**

The two most famous works of Hadith are: Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Each of these is named after the person who compiled it, i.e., Bukhari and Muslim. The word Sahih in these titles refers to the fact that the compilers of these books sifted the genuine reports about the Holy Prophet from unfounded and unreliable stories, so far as they could, and included only those which were trust-worthy. There are many other books of Hadith, named after the compilers, such as Tirmizi, Abu Dawud, and the Musnad of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.

## **How did these books come to be compiled?**

There were many teachings of the Holy Quran which the Holy Prophet had to illustrate by his practice and actions (such as how to perform the salaah). His followers learnt from and copied what he did, and then by their example taught the next generation how to carry out these practices. Apart from this practical side, the Holy Prophet's sayings on various matters, and details of what he did on various occasions, were also remembered by those who saw and heard him. They then related all these things to other people. But, unlike the Holy Quran, these details were usually not written down.

So these traditions were passed down from one generation to the next by practical example (as in the case of prayer) and by word of mouth. About 150 years after the Holy Prophet's death, some scholars decided to try to trace all these traditions back to him, by following the chain of people who had passed down each report from the Holy Prophet's time to the then present time. From their great research, they compiled the books of Hadith that we now have.

110. So the compilers of Hadith did not just record everything which they heard people calling a Saying or action of the Holy Prophet?

No, they investigated each and every report of a saying or action of the Holy Prophet to check whether the names of all the persons involved in passing it down from his time were known. They also investigated the lives and character of all these people to find out if they could have had the opportunity of hearing and passing down the saying from one to another, and if they were trustworthy and had good memories. Bukhari and Muslim were more strict than other compilers in making these checks before accepting a report as being genuine. This is why these two books are regarded as the most reliable Hadith collections, Bukhari being ranked highest of all.

### **What are the subjects covered in Hadith literature?**

The reports in Hadith books are largely of the following kinds:

Sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad about the basic teachings and practices of Islam, such as beliefs, prayer, fasting, etc.

His Sayings on various practical aspects of life, such as family life, business dealings, the law, food and drink, moral qualities, etc.

Apart from Sayings, the actions and personal example of the Holy Prophet which illustrate his teachings and go to show how he put them into practice (e.g., reports of how he said his prayers, what he did during the days of fasting, how he gave in charity, etc.)

Reports about what sort of a person the Holy Prophet Muhammad was, his everyday life, his noble character, his dealings with friend and foe, the important events in his life, etc.

Prophecies of the Holy Prophet relating to the future of Islam, the Muslims, and mankind generally.

### **Are all the recorded reports in Hadith true and genuine?**

No, not every single one. The people who passed on these reports by word of mouth before they were compiled made mistakes in some cases. There are also some reported sayings written down in books of Hadith which the Holy Prophet may not have ever said at all. However, the bulk of the reports, especially those contained in Bukhari and Muslim, are genuine. The teachings which the Holy Prophet illustrated by his example (such as how to perform the prayers) were copied by such a large number of people that there cannot be any doubt at all about their genuineness. Similarly, many of his Sayings were memorized and passed down by a number of Companions in each case, not by just one person, and became well-known among the Muslims from the beginning.

### **Is it necessary for a Muslim to believe in and follow Hadith?**

Yes, especially the part relating to the observance of religion and to practical life. It must always be remembered, however, that Hadith is meant to be a further explanation of the teachings of the Holy Quran. Any report in Hadith books which appears to go against the Holy Quran must be examined carefully to see if it can be given a meaning not contradicting the Holy Book, and if not, it must be rejected.