

Some Ideas from The Sacred Hadith Project of Ahmed Shafaat

Only few selected portions have been taken from:
www.islamicperspectives.com/HadithProject.htm

Note: The ideas of the author of this book are only being presented to have a look at them and take his useful suggestions seriously. I don't accept everything I quote here but I am quoting here just for broadening the ideas on the issue.

(pbuh) = (Peace be upon him)

i. The Plan by Mr. Ahmed Shafaat:

The Sacred Hadith Project

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Introduction

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ii. The status of his book now:

For a long time the author has not moved beyond chapter 4 and it appears, it will remain till chapter 4 and not move forward. The author raises some interesting point although one can't agree with everything he says in this book.

iii. These selections:

These selections will Insha'ALLAH! Quote some ideas by him.

1. Muslim views on the issue and the author's view:

Today Muslim views vary between the position that the Qur'an is the only source of Islamic guidance/law and the position that the ahadith found in the recognized books are authentic and constitute an independent and binding source of Islamic guidance/law along with the Qur'an. When a position somewhere between these positions is held, it is usually not formulated in a clear way, which is probably the reason why the tendency of Muslims is to move towards one or the other of the two extreme positions, usually the second one.

There are four views with various possible shades of opinion in each:

1. The Qur'an is the only source of Islamic guidance/law; the *hadith* has no revelatory value (this will be referred to as the Only-only position).
2. **The Hadith is a secondary but revelatory source of Islamic guidance/law and the question of authenticity of *ahadith* will forever remain open although with research more and more probable results can be obtained. This is the view argued in this book.**
3. The Hadith is an independent source of Islamic guidance/law but the question of authenticity is open.
4. The Hadith is an independent source of Islamic guidance/law and the question of authenticity was settled with high degree of reliability by the classical *muhaddithun* (this will be referred to as the traditionalist position).

Consequently, it is necessary to:

1. Re-examine the relationship between the Qur'an and the Hadith;
2. To revive hadith criticism and to re-evaluate the degree of authenticity of *ahadith*.
This second task is the sacred hadith project referred to in the title.

2. Difference between Sahih Hadith and Authentic Hadith and 3 categories of Hadith:

Also, we will not assume that the "authentic *hadith*" is the same as "*sahih hadith*".

By ***sahih hadith*** we mean simply a *hadith* which meets certain criteria set by the scholar who describes it as *sahih*.

This means, in particular, that authentic *ahadith* are not identical with those found in any known collections of *ahadith* such as one or all of the six "canonical" *sunni* books of

Hadith. ... **the work of the classical *muhaddithun* should be regarded as no more than a stage in the ongoing project of determining the authentic *ahadith*.**

For our subsequent considerations, it would be convenient to divide *ahadith* into three main categories:

1. Those which record sayings or actions of the Prophet (pbuh) that regulated the life of the Muslim community. They may consist of his orders to the community or to individuals in charge of certain affairs in the community. Or, they may consist of approval of decisions that other people took in regulating community life. We shall refer to such a hadith as a **regulatory hadith**. The regulatory hadith is essentially the sunnah as we have defined above. By its very nature a regulatory hadith must have been widely known.
2. Those which record words and actions of the Prophet (pbuh) that were spoken/done in the presence of individuals or small groups and were aimed at their religious, spiritual and/or moral education. We shall refer to such a hadith as a teaching hadith. A **teaching hadith** might not have been widely known when the Prophet (pbuh) left this world. Note also that a regulatory *hadith* can be considered a teaching *hadith* but not necessarily vice versa.
3. Those sayings and actions of the Prophet (pbuh) that he spoke/did in the capacity of an individual living in a certain time, place, and culture, e.g., his riding a camel. We would refer to such a hadith as a **circumstantial hadith**.

3. Sunnah:

Another term that needs to be clarified is *sunnah* (plural: *sunan*). In Islamic literature this term has been used in a variety of senses including: a non-compulsory religious practice, conduct of the Prophet (pbuh), the practice in the Muslim community during the days of the companions or a practice in the community at any period having continuity with the past. We will, however, use it to mean **a prevalent practice that was established on the basis of actions done, ordered or approved by the Prophet (pbuh)**; the approval could be explicit or implicit. The term can refer to a single practice or to practices collectively.

4. Riwayah:

In addition to the Sunnah and the Hadith, we also need to deal with historical reports that are not directly about the Prophet (pbuh) but about the companions after him and subsequent generations of Muslims. This is because some important questions about the authenticity of *ahadith* are related with these historical reports. For example, the question whether the first *khulafa* prepared official collections of the Hadith or the question how far they used the Hadith to make legal decisions has a bearing on the question of the reliability of the extant *ahadith* and of the role of the Hadith in Islam. For this reason discussions

about the Hadith often have to refer to such historical reports. We will use the term *riwayah* (plural *riwayat*) or tradition to cover both the *hadith* and other reports about early Islamic community and personalities.

5. Mountain Climbing Approach:

In climbing a mountain a hiker first finds a secure place to put his foot; then from that point he searches or constructs another secure place to climb to, and so on. Similarly, we will first work with the Qur'an, the first and the most secure place to develop Islamic thought, and derive from it answers to the questions raised above with some reasonable certainty.

Another way to look at the role of the Qur'an is that it is a *muhaymin* over all revelatory knowledge (book):

And unto you (O Muhammad) We have sent down the book in truth confirming whatever of the book is before it, and as a watcher (*muhayminan*) over it. So judge between them by what God has sent down ... (5:48)

In 59:23 *al-muhaymin* is one of the names of God. The word means one who watches over something and thus exercises control over it.

6. More work on Hadith obviously required:

The Hadith provides a revelatory context for the interpretation of the Qur'an. **Hence authentic *ahadith* are sacred and a source of Islamic guidance/law.** However, even many of the *ahadith* that are classified as *sahih* are subject to much greater doubt than is generally believed. This obviously raises the question: if the Hadith is part and parcel of the revelatory and prophetic work of the Prophet Muhammad, then why was it not preserved more reliably than is the case? **The answer given in this book is that the Hadith is like the revelation given to the earlier prophets that was not preserved in purity.** The main message of Islam was stated and preserved in the form of a relatively small book, the Qur'an, while the transmission of the much more voluminous Hadith was left, like the earlier revelations, to normal human processes of transmission with all their faults.

The fact that the Hadith was not preserved in a completely reliable way would not have been too problematic if the Muslims had given the Qur'an its due and continued and improved upon the work of the classical *muhaddithun* (traditionists); for, a great deal of guidance can be found by interpreting the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an and some guidance from the Hadith has come down to us in a very dependable way, almost like the Qur'an itself. However, contrary to fact the classical Hadith collections, almost in their entirety, have come to be regarded as reliable historical records of what the Prophet said and did. *Ahadith* in these collections can sometimes effectively override even the Qur'an in the mind of many Muslims

just as one verse of the Qur'an can abrogate another. As a result some erroneous views and practices have been sanctified and firmly established and this has been slowly harming the mission of Islam.

7. The secondary character of the Hadith:

Some traditionalists use the Hadith as if there is no difference between the Qur'an and the Hadith. A statement from the Qur'an is reconciled with a statement with the Hadith in the same way that one statement from the Qur'an is reconciled with another. This would have made some sense if the Hadith would have been preserved like the Qur'an. Think of the analogy used earlier, the Hadith as a huge book and the Qur'an as a shorter but comprehensive summary of it. It would be very logical to clarify or elaborate statements in the summary by the statements in the main book and vice versa if both were preserved with equal integrity. But suppose that while the summary is well preserved, the big book itself has suffered alterations, e.g., some passages have been lost, some have been added by later scribes, while others have been modified. In that case, we would have to focus on the summary and use the main book with caution. Whatever can be established on the basis of the summary must be given much greater weight than what requires proof from the main book. Also, whenever we use any parts of the main book we should duly deal with the question of its authenticity. The case with the relationship between the Qur'an and the Hadith is similar. We must give much greater priority to the Qur'an and whenever the Hadith is used as authority the question of authenticity must be in the forefront.

But the Hadith is secondary to the Qur'an not only because it is not preserved with the same degree of authenticity as the Qur'an. It is secondary in another way. When the author of a book knows, as God evidently did, that it is only the summary that would be preserved with complete reliability, he would make this summary as self-sufficient as possible (16:89), including in it every basic and important idea or commandment. Hence this summary would be more important than the rest of the book.

Finally, the Hadith is secondary to the Qur'an because it is of a different, lower type of revelation than the Qur'an. For Hadith cannot be described as the word of God in the same way that the Qur'an can be described although it is revelatory.

An analogy, by no means perfect, can explain the difference between the revelation in the form of the Qur'an and in the form of the Hadith. Experts in various fields can make two types of statements: those that are made after thorough and careful considerations and presented in technical journals or text books and those made in a much less rigorous manner in popular lectures or casual conversations or during the process of research. Both type of statements are based on knowledge and experience but the first type has clearly primacy over the second. The case with the Qur'an and the Hadith is similar. Both proceed from *ilham*, *nur*, and *hikmah* but the former is of a different level and has primacy over the latter.

8. The Hadith not an independent source of guidance/law:

We earlier argued that the Hadith is secondary to the Qur'an. In relation to the question of how far the Hadith is binding this means that the Hadith is not an independent source of guidance/law. That is, if it becomes clear that the Qur'an is pointing in one direction while some ahadith point in another, then the Qur'an will be followed and the ahadith will be considered as unauthentic. And of course, the application of both the Qur'an and the Hadith has to take into account the circumstances under which they are being applied.

One way to clarify the question of independence of the Hadith is to consider the question whether the statements in the Qur'an and the Hadith can abrogate each other. There are four possibilities:

1. The Qur'an can abrogate the Hadith and the Hadith can abrogate the Qur'an.
2. Neither the Qur'an can abrogate the Hadith nor the Hadith can abrogate the Qur'an.
3. The Hadith can abrogate the Qur'an but the Qur'an cannot abrogate the Hadith.

4. The Qur'an can abrogate the Hadith but the Hadith cannot abrogate the Qur'an.

To say that the Hadith is an independent source is to choose one of the first three possibilities. To say that that the Hadith is not an independent source is to choose the fourth possibility.

9. Why was the Hadith not preserved like the Qur'an?

An assumption that has misled both the Qur'an-only people and the traditionalists is that if the Hadith is revelatory, it must have been preserved just as the Qur'an with complete reliability. From very early times some Qur'an-only people have argued on the basis of this assumption, saying that since the Hadith is not preserved with complete reliability, it could not be revelatory. And from equally early times some traditionalists have argued on the basis of the same assumption that since the Hadith is revelatory it must have been preserved with complete reliability. The assumption prevents both parties to combine a respect for the Hadith, which is due to a sacred and revelatory tradition, with a critical approach to the question of its authenticity.

10. Glass of Water Analogy for Hadith:

Almost every glass of water has some impurities. Up to a certain level of impurities it is a life-giving drink while beyond that level it can become a source of sickness or even death.

In like manner the Hadith is based on divine revelation and even though it has been changed and corrupted by men, as we shall see in some detail in Part III of this book, yet it still contains light and is effective for human salvation.

11. In: A Study of Ahadith about the determination of Islamic Dates, he gives this idea:

1. The Science of Hadith developed by our great early *muḥaddithun*, though very impressive, has not yet reached its full potential and growth. Much further work still can be and should be done.
2. Even the ahadith found in several well reputed Hadith collections with complete *isnad* judged to be sound are not as reliable as is generally assumed.
3. There is also no basis for the view of some orientalist that the whole Hadith literature is the result of Muslim creative activity. ... Starting from the *ṣaḥābah* there were people in every generation of Muslims who took care in remembering what the Holy Prophet taught and in passing it on to the next generation. Their work is engulfed by the distorting activity of some other much less responsible people who either fabricated words for the Prophet or changed his received words to reflect their interpretations of them. But by careful application of the rational method to the very extensive data that the past scholars have left for us – may God bless them for this – we can in many cases recover with high confidence the actual words of the Prophet. This rational method is not radically different from the one applied by earlier *muḥaddithun*. It simply consists of a more consistent and comprehensive application of common-sense principles often cited and applied by those *muḥaddithun*.
4. Further development of the Science of Hadith to recover more reliably the words of the Prophet is not just a curiosity. It is an important part of the reforms that we need for the Muslim Ummah to come closer to what God and his Messenger have taught us and thus move forward to assume our role as leaders and guide of humanity, assigned to us by God Most High.