

Fast 6: Hadith collections

- The most famous and the first of those collections which are organized by subject is known, for short, as *Sahih Bukhari*. It is named after its compiler Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (died in 256 Islamic year, or 870 C.E.). There are five others, all being collectively called the 'six reliable collections'.
- What did Bukhari do? He found that there were a huge number of reports attributed to the Holy Prophet in circulation. He tried to trace each report back to a Companion of the Holy Prophet through the sequence of reporters who had passed it down to Bukhari's time. If he found something wrong with the line of reporters involved in a report he did not include it in his collection. For example, there might not be a continuous line of reporters, or some reporter along the line may be an unreliable person, or one person may be reporting from another but the two of them could never have met one another.
- *Sahih Bukhari* is divided into nearly 100 'books', each dealing with a different subject, for example, Beliefs, Prayer, Fasting, Hajj, Wars, Marriage, Divorce, Food and Drink, Good behavior. It contains around 2500 distinctly different reports, and another 4500 reports which are variations of the distinctly different reports.
- Other compilers of hadith were not as strict as Bukhari in checking the authenticity of reports which they included. *Sahih Bukhari* is known as "the most reliable of books after the Book of Allah". It occupies a position second to the Holy Quran in determining the teachings of Islam.
- A non-Muslim, Western scholar of Islam wrote as follows about the work of these compilers of Hadith in checking the reporters:

"Inquiries were made as to the character of the guarantors, whether they were morally and religiously satisfactory, whether they were tainted with heretical doctrines, whether they had a reputation for truthfulness, and had the ability to transmit what they had themselves heard. Finally, it was necessary that they should be competent witnesses whose testimony would be accepted in a court of civil law." (Alfred Guillame in *The Traditions of Islam*)
- The compilers of Hadith tried their best to find out whether each report was actually traceable back to the Holy Prophet through the various necessary stages. They also checked the subject-matter to determine if the report was sound or not. For example, if a report made it compulsory for Muslims to act on a certain teaching, but it was reported by only one individual from the Holy Prophet's time, it was not accepted.

- There is another very important test whereby the trustworthiness of Hadith may be judged, and this is a test that can be applied at any time. *If there is anything in Hadith which conflicts with the Quran, it could not have proceeded from the Holy Prophet, and must, therefore, be rejected.* The Holy Prophet himself said:

“There will be narrators after me reporting sayings from me, so judge the sayings by the Quran; if it agrees with the Quran, accept it; otherwise, do not accept it.”

“My sayings do not abrogate the word of Allah, but the word of Allah can abrogate my sayings.”

- The great Imam Bukhari himself many times quotes verses of the Quran before citing a saying of the Holy Prophet, showing that his sayings are only a further explanation of the Quran and cannot contradict the Quran. As Hadith is only an explanation of the Quran, the Quran must have precedence.
- Moreover, both Muslim and non-Muslim historians are agreed that the Quran has been handed down intact, every word and every letter of it, while Hadith cannot claim that purity.
- Since the Quran deals with the principles of the Islamic law while Hadith deals with its details, it is just and reasonable that only such details should be accepted as are in line with the principles.
- Again, the Holy Prophet is plainly represented in the Quran as following “only what is revealed” to him and as not disobeying a word of what was revealed to him:

“I follow only what is revealed to me.” — 6:50

“I follow only what is revealed to me. Indeed I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a terrible day.” — 10:15

Therefore, if anything in Hadith clashes with the Quran, it cannot be accepted as a teaching of the Holy Prophet.