

MLU-5.2: The introduction to Hadith

Meaning of Hadith

Hadith is an Arabic word which literally means "speech", "report" or "account" and is generally understood to specifically mean The Saying, Actions and the silent approvals of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The word hadith is derived from the Arabic root ḥ-d-th—signifying “to happen,” “to occur,” or “to come to pass”—and encompasses a range of literal meanings, including “conversation,” “discussion,” “speech,” and “small talk.” In English the term is translated variously as “report,” “saying,” or “tradition.”

Sunnah and Hadith are Synonyms:

- i) Sunnah is always an act of the Prophet (PBUH) while a hadith is a report of his statement, act, silent approval or an incident that took place in his life.
- ii) Sunnah has come down to us from generation to generation while hadith has been reported, in most cases, by one individual to another.

1. Why is the Sunnah Necessary?

People who doubt the hadith and Sunnah are of different levels and types. This first section will respond to the beliefs of each of these different types. The following are six facts to prove to dispel all hadith-skepticism and quranism:

1. Allah commands us to obey the Prophet (PBUH) in the Quran
2. The Prophet (PBUH) did receive revelation outside the Quran
3. The sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) are needed
4. The hadith sciences being „manmade... does not make it especially unreliable
5. Most hadith being non-definitive does not mean we are not required to follow them
6. There is wisdom for Allah not putting everything in the Quran.

1.1 Allah Commands Obedience to the Prophet (PBUH)

Some people claim we do not need to obey anyone except Allah, and they claim the Prophet (PBUH) is only a human who brought the Quran like a postman.

This belief is proven wrong in the Quran itself, which repeatedly teaches obeying and following the Prophet (PBUH).

First of all, Allah says in the Quran, Obey Allah and obey the Messenger at least five times in the Quran (4:59, 5:92, 24:54, 47:33, 64:12).

Note how Allah repeats the word “obey” for the Messenger. It is not one command, but two separate commands: 1) obey Allah (through the Quran) and 2) obey the Messenger (through

his Sunnah). This goes against anyone who claims obeying the Messenger is only by following the Quran.

Secondly, Allah says Say, [O Muhammad], “If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins.” (3:31)

Allah links His love to following the Messenger (PBUH).

Thirdly, Allah says “O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and the leaders among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result”. (4:59)

In this verse, Allah explicitly says the final judges are always Allah and His Messenger. He does not say the final judge is Allah alone, so no one can claim that the final judge is always just the Quran because it is Allah...s speech.

Fourthly, Allah says But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you, [O Muhammad], judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in [full, willing] submission. (4:65)

In this verse, Allah obligates everyone to take the Prophet (PBUH) as the judge in all disputes. Today, we can only do so by referring back to his actions and sayings.

Fifthly, Allah says “There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern” (33:21)

In this verse, Allah praises the pattern of the Prophet (PBUH), calling it “excellent” (hasanah), and invites us to follow it.

1.2 Prophet Received Other Revelation

Some people dispute the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) received revelation in addition to the Quran, saying the Quran was the only revelation the Prophet (PBUH) was given. This is plainly false according to the Quran itself.

Firstly, Allah says Your companion [Muhammad] has not strayed, nor has he erred, Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed, (53:2-4)

These verses indicate that the Prophet (PBUH) did not speak simply from his desires in any part of his life. If he ever made a mistake, Allah would quickly correct him. So, if he says something and there is no correction, it is necessary to follow him.

Secondly, there are many instances in the Quran of Allah referencing revelation the Prophet received not in the Quran.

For example, Allah says And [remember] when the Prophet confided to one of his wives a statement; and when she informed [another] of it and Allah showed it to him, he made known part of it and ignored a part. And when he informed her about it, she said, “Who told you this?” He said, “I was informed by the Knowing, the Acquainted.”(66:3)

Here, Allah says the Prophet (PBUH) was informed through revelation about something one of his wives said secretly to another. Obviously, nothing of this sort exists in the Quran itself. Rather, he was informed outside the Quran.

At this point, some people try to claim he may have received other revelation but it was only about personal or worldly matters, not about the religion. But, the Quran also alludes to instances of revelation outside the Quran about the religion, not just the world.

An example is when Allah says about the old direction of prayer to Jerusalem And We did not make the qiblah which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels.(2:143)

Here, Allah says He legislated the qiblah to Jerusalem, but no such verse exists in the Quran. So, it was something given to the Prophet (PBUH) outside the Quran.

Another example is when Allah says And if you fear [an enemy, then pray] on foot or riding. But when you are secure, then remember Allah [in prayer], like He has taught you that which you did not [previously] know. (2:239)

Here, Allah says the way of prayer was taught by Allah. However, no verses in the Quran clearly teach the method of prayer. At most, some verses reference parts of prayer without ever teaching how to pray. So, this refers to the teachings given to the Prophet (PBUH) outside the Quran.

In addition to this, Allah gives detailed instructions of how to perform wudhu in the Quran, and wudhu is only the preparation for prayer! It is impossible to imagine Allah wanted people to prepare for prayer in an extremely specific way but did not care about their way of prayer itself.

Another example is when Allah says about obligatory charity And those within whose wealth is a known right for the beggars and the deprived (70:24-25), referring to some known share of charity which is never mentioned in the Quran.

Another example is Allah saying about Hajj. Hajj is [during] well-known months (2:197) without saying what months it is in.

1.3 Importance of the Sayings of the Prophet (PBUH)

Some people claim we only need the practices of the Prophet (PBUH) and they were transmitted by the practice of the Muslims, generation to generation, like how to pray and when to do Hajj. They claim we do not need individual or solitary narrations from the Prophet (PBUH).

This claim is wrong because Allah never qualifies what type of transmission we are required to obey. Allah says Obey Allah and obey the Messenger without saying “only when it is proven through generational practice.” Additionally, the word obey itself is about sayings and commands, not actions. Actions are followed, not obeyed.

So, as long as the transmission is authentic and it is likely to be true, we are required to obey it. It is not possible to limit it to practices passed on generation to generation, but it is possible to say those practices are more strongly proven.

One question that arises when only relying on Muslim practice is what to do when their practice does not agree, like what dua to make before reciting Fatihah or whether to raise hands when doing ruku. Which practice will one follow?

The only way to know which one is correct is by investigating the hadith evidence of different views.

2. What is a Hadith? And Other Terminology

A hadith (pl. ahadith) or khabr refers to one narration about a saying, action, or approval of (usually) the Prophet (PBUH).

Sometimes “hadith” can refer to the concept of narrations, not an individual hadith or all ahadith.

A single hadith is made up of two parts:

1. the sanad (chain), and
2. the matan (content).

Today, a person will mostly get a hadith from a hadith collection, which is a collection of ahadith by a scholar.

An example of a full hadith taken from the collection Sahih Bukhari:

Musaddad narrated to us, saying: Yahya narrated to us from Shubah from Qatadah from Anas from the Prophet (PBUH) [...]: “None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” Sahih Bukhari 13

2.1 Sanad (Chain)

The early hadith scholars were concerned about verifying the narrations of the Prophet (PBUH), so they were not satisfied if Qatadah (who is a generation after the Prophet (PBUH)) said, “The Prophet (PBUH) said XYZ.”

They would ask, “Who told you that?”

So, Qatadah would instead say, “According to Anas (a companion of the Prophet), the Prophet said XYZ”

This became common practice. Then, Qatadah...s student Shubah would say, “According to Qatadah: According to Anas, the Prophet (PBUH) said XYZ.”

Then, in the next generation, more names were added.

This creates a chain of narrators for the hadith back to the Prophet (PBUH).

In the hadith quoted above, the chain of narrators is, “Musaddad narrated to us, saying: Yahya narrated to us from Shubah from Qatadah from Anas.”

The speaker in “Musaddad narrated to us” is the collector of the collection the hadith is taken from, Bukhari.

So, the chain is the following: Bukhari ← Musaddad ← Yahya ← Shubah ← Qatadah ← Anas ← Prophet (PBUH). In this particular chain, there are five people between Bukhari and the Prophet (PBUH).

The significance of the chain is that it is used when determining the authenticity of a narration, as will be elaborated later.

2.2 Matan (Content)

The matan of a hadith refers to the actual content it conveys, which is either a saying, action, or approval of the Prophet (PBUH).

In the above example, the matan is, “None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”

2.3 Related Subjects

Usul al-Hadith is the subject of studying what ahadith are and how to classify them. The following section on hadith classification will heavily draw from Usul al-Hadith.

Ilm ur-Rijaal is the subject of narrator biographies and gradings. Books of ilm ur-rijal often contain brief explanations about when a narrator lived, which teachers he narrated from, which students narrated from him, and what the hadith scholars thought about their reliability.

Ilal (إلّال) is a genre of books that study the subtle problems in some ahadith.

Sunan and Musnad are common names for hadith collections. Musannaf is also an important collection name, but they often contain the statements of companions and tabi...een.

Shuruh al-Hadith is the genre of books that explain the meanings of the ahadith in a hadith collection. Sharh means “explanation” or “elaboration.”

3. Classification of Hadith

This section is basically a brief overview of Usul al-Hadith, which is the subject concerned with how ahadith are classified.

Hadith are classified in four ways that this article will discuss:

1. How definite its transmission is
2. Who is at the end of the chain
3. Is the chain connected
4. How authentic is the hadith

3.1 Mutawatir and Ahaad

The scholars divided narrations in terms of how definite their transmission is into two:

1. Mutawatir: There are so many different routes of transmission and so many different narrators who narrate it in every generation that it is impossible for them to have made the same mistake or lied the same lie.
2. Ahaad: Any hadith that is not mutawatir. It has one or more chains of transmission, but not enough to reach the level of mutawatir.

Mutawatir ahadith are definitive and true without doubt. An example is the Prophet (PBUH) saying, “Whoever lies about me, let him take his seat in the fire.”

Another example of mutawatir is the attribution of many hadith collections to their authors, like Sahih Bukhari to Imam Bukhari. It is mutawatir up to Imam Bukhari because many students narrated and wrote from him and many students narrated from them and so on until today.

The sciences of hadith are less concerned with mutawatir than they are with ahaad because mutawatir does not need classification.

Ahaad hadith need classification from authentic to inauthentic. However, acting on authentic ahaad hadith is still necessary because it is knowledge, even if non-definitive, as mentioned in the first section of this article.

3.2 End of the Chain

The first thing to identify in any report is whether the report is from the Prophet (PBUH) or someone else. As a result, the scholars of hadith divided a hadith according to the end of its chain into three:

1. Marfū...: The doer or speaker at the end of the chain is the Prophet (PBUH).
2. Mawqūf: The doer or speaker at the end of the chain is a companion, and he does not attribute it to the Prophet (PBUH) explicitly.
3. Maqtū...: The doer or speaker at the end of the chain is someone lower than a companion.

When we say the word “hadith,” we usually mean marfū... hadith. Marfu... reports are what affect the beliefs and laws of the religion of Islam.

As for the opinions or statements of the companions, different scholars used them in different ways, but that is a topic for Usul al-Fiqh (Legal Theory). They are, however, not essential evidence in the religion by themselves.

3.3 Connectedness of the Chain

The most obvious way of determining the authenticity of a hadith is to determine whether there is a direct line of people back to the Prophet (PBUH) without breaks in that chain. When there is a break that means we do not know the source of the report at that point of the chain. Thus, we cannot easily declare it to be authentic.

As a result, the scholars then divided a hadith according to the connectedness of its chain into some types:

1. Mawsūl or Muttasil: The chain is connected with no breaks in it.
2. Munqati...: The chain is broken, with some people missing in the middle.
3. Mursal (a subcategory of Munqati...): When someone from the second generation (that did not meet the Prophet (PBUH) but met his companions) reports something about the Prophet (PBUH) without mentioning a source.

The extent to which mursal and munqati... reports can be used in law is a topic the scholars of legal theory discussed. As for the scholars of hadith, they did not consider any disconnected report authentic.

The reason some of the legal scholars allowed the use of mural reports is how close the second generation was to the time of the Prophet (PBUH) and how they could have been narrating from the companions of the Prophet (PBUH).

The reason the hadith scholars did not consider these reports authentic is because someone from the second generation could have narrated the report from an unreliable person also from the second generation instead of from a companion. So, this doubt makes the hadith inauthentic.

3.4 Authenticity

The hadith scholars divided a hadith in terms of its authenticity into three overarching categories: sahih (authentic), hasan (fair), and da'eef (weak).

A sahih hadith (also called “sahih in itself”) is a hadith that fulfills five conditions:

1. The chain is muttasil (connected)
2. Every narrator in the chain has „adalah (moral uprightness and honesty)
3. Every narrator in the chain has dabt (reliability and accuracy in transmission)
4. The hadith is not shaaz (anomalous). Meaning, it does not contradict the narration of someone more authentic.
5. The hadith has no ilal (singular: illah) i.e. subtle defects in the above four conditions. An illah is something which requires analysis and research to identify.

Understanding these conditions is the essence of the hadith sciences. These conditions will be explained further in the coming sections.

Sahih can have multiple levels. For example, a narration through multiple narrators would be higher in level than through one narrator, even if both are reliable.

The term **sahih al-isnad** (meaning: Sahih in chain) is used by some scholars to describe a hadith fulfilling the conditions of sahih related to chain (the first, second, and third conditions) without saying anything about whether it is completely sahih by fulfilling the last two conditions.

A **hasan** hadith (or “hasan in itself”) is a report that does not reach the level of sahih for some reason without falling to the level of being inauthentic or weak. It may have a slight problem in the first, third, fourth, or fifth conditions. A common reason for a report being hasan is that one narrator in the chain has slightly deficient memory. There are other definitions for hasan as well.

Hasan sahih is a term used by Tirmidhi in his collection, and the most correct explanation is that it is synonymous with sahih. There are other views.

Sahih li-ghairihi (meaning: sahih but not in itself) is when there are multiple hasan chains for a narration that add up to making the narration sahih.

A **da'eef** hadith is a hadith that is below the level of hasan. Usually, this means that there is some disconnect in the chain, one of the narrators has heavy problems in memory, one of the narrators has doubts in his honesty, or the hadith contradicts stronger narrations. In short, it has a strong problem in one of the five conditions of sahih.

Hasan li-ghairihi (meaning: hasan but not in itself) is when there are multiple da'eef chains for a narration that add up to making it hasan.

An **extremely da'eef** (or matrūh) hadith is when a hadith is even lower than normal da'eef with major problems in the five conditions. A hadith becomes extremely da'eef when it contradicts the Quran or Sunnah very strongly, when it has no chain or large disconnects in its chain, when it has suspected liars in its chain, when it is solely narrated by someone with terrible memory. All of these are examples of major problems which inform us the hadith is almost certainly not from the Prophet (PBUH).

A **mawdhū'** hadith is a hadith that is considered fabricated. This would be when a hadith has a known liar in the chain along with being unique and contradicting the other sources of Islam. There are other ways people defined it.

3.5 Detailed Discussions in Classification

3.5.1 Narrators

The second and third conditions of Sahih are that the narrators are honest and reliable. To understand that further, we will discuss narrators and their division.

What are the types of narrators?

The narrators of hadith are divided into different levels according to their strength and reliability:

- 1) Narrators who are used as proof in themselves,
- 2) Narrators who can be used in corroboration, and
- 3) Narrators who are abandoned.

In the first type, some narrators are **Thiqah Hafiz**, meaning they have the gold standard of reliability and trustworthiness. Some are a bit below that but are still **Thiqah**, meaning they are strongly honest and reliable. The narrators in Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim mostly meet one of these two categories. Some narrators are **Saduq**, meaning honest and reliable but make mistakes, so their narrations are only to the level of hasan.

Then, narrators that are unknown or make more mistakes would fall into the second level, so they can only be used when corroborated.

Then, narrators that are known for too many mistakes or for lying in hadith fall into the third category. They mostly cannot be used for anything.

How do we classify narrators?

The way we know the reliability and honesty of narrators can be divided into primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.

The **primary way** the scholars found the reliability and honesty of narrators is:

1. Their reputation among their people. This would be for major narrators like Malik ibn Anas and Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaj.

2. Reports about their life and times. This is common for many narrators.
3. Comparing their narrations to the narrations of other (stronger or well-known) narrators. This would be used for most narrators.

Do they usually match other narrators? That indicates they have good memory. Do they usually have slight mistakes? That indicates deficiency in memory. Do they have huge deviations? That indicates large deficiency in memory or problems in honesty. Are they rarely corroborated? That places doubt in their honesty or shows huge problems in memory. All of these are used to decide the reliability of that narrator.

4. Testing them directly and seeing if they have good memory in hadith. This is rare.

The early scholars of narrator classification (Jarh wat-Ta'deel i.e. "praise and criticism") studied the narrators and made judgements about them. The judgements of these major scholars like Imam Ahmad, Yahya ibn Ma'een, Bukhari, and Abu Hatim ar-Razi are the secondary source of determining the reliability of a narrator.

Then, tertiary sources like the book Tahzeeb ul-Kamal by al-Mizzi collect the views of the early scholars along with primary sources about their lives and qualities. Tahzeeb ul-Kamal and books like it are what we would first refer to when determining the strength of a narrator.

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.

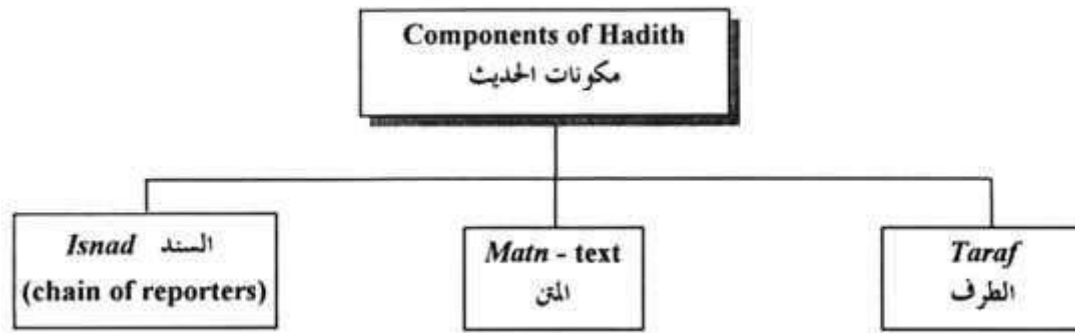
Allah^(SWT) preserved the **Sunnah** by enabling the Companions and those after them to memorize, write down and pass on the statements of the Prophet^(PBUH), and the descriptions of his way, as well as to continue the blessings of practicing the **Sunnah**.

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, for 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

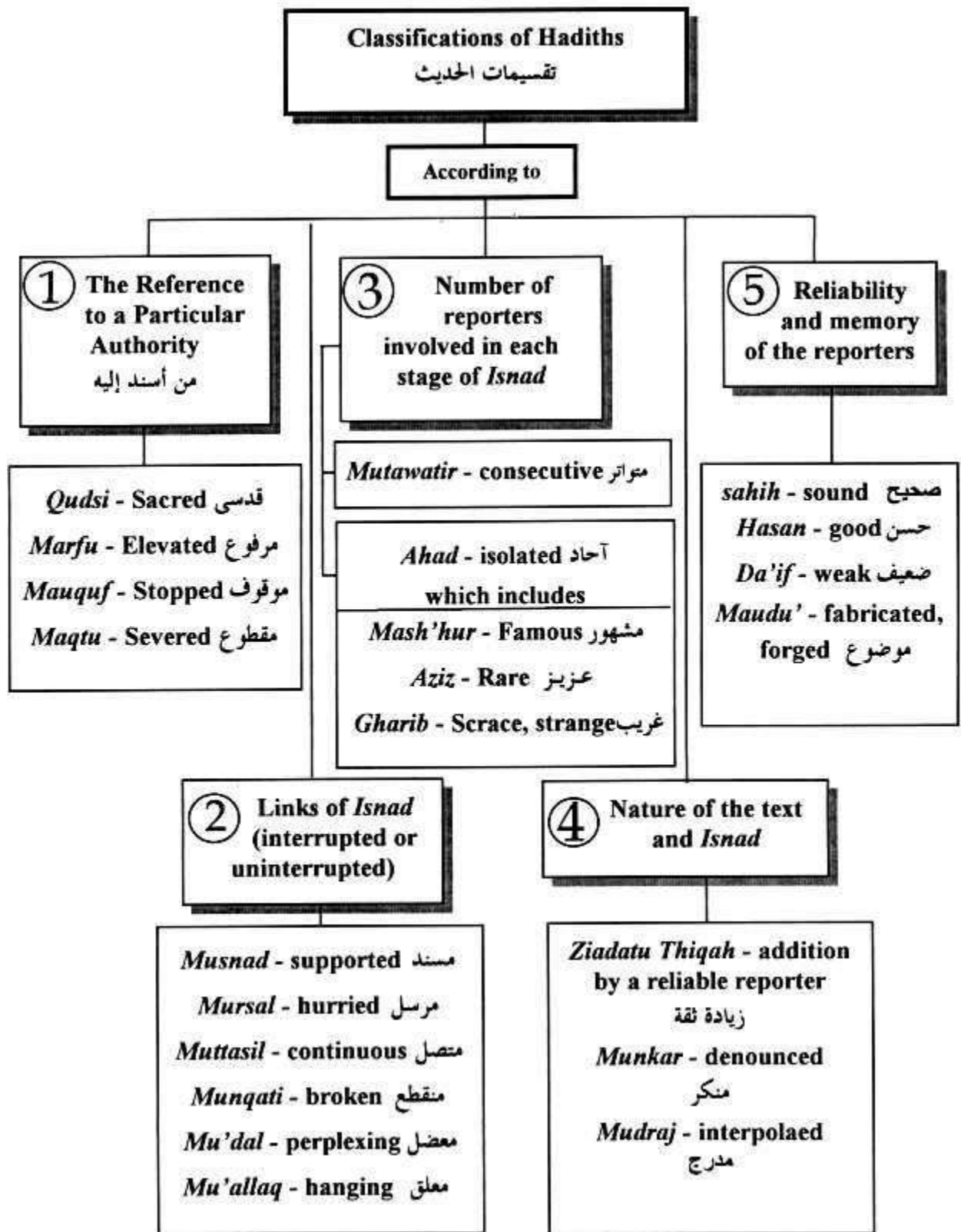
A hadith is composed of three parts (see the figure [below]):



Matan (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^(P), 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

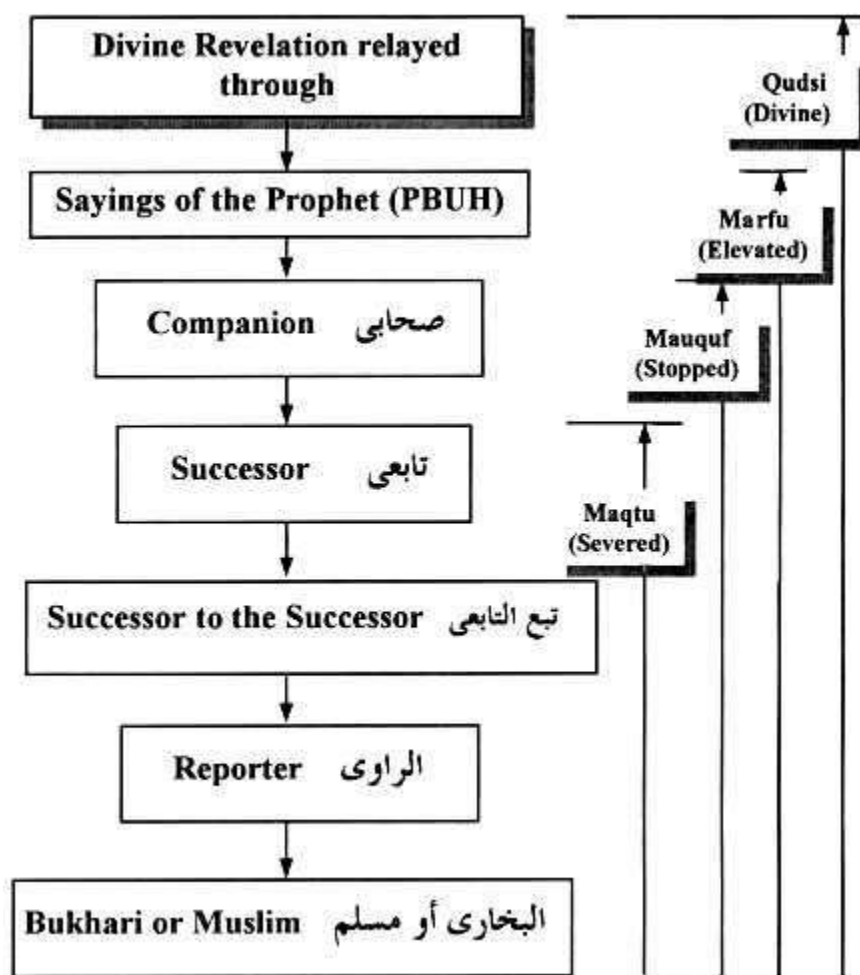
A number of classifications of hadith have been made. Five of these classifications are shown in the figure [below], and are briefly described subsequently.



1. According to the reference to a particular authority

Four types of hadith can be identified.

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



2. According to the links of isnad - interrupted or uninterrupted

Six categories can be identified.

1. **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).
2. **Muttasil** - continuous: a hadith with an uninterrupted **isnad** which goes back only to a companion or successor.
3. **Mursal** - hurried: if the link between the successor and the Prophet ^(PBUH) is missing, e.g., when a successor says "The Prophet said...".
4. **Munqati`** - broken: is a hadith whose link anywhere before the successor (i.e., closer to the traditionalist recording the hadith) is missing.
5. **Mu`adal** - perplexing: is a hadith whose reporter omits two or more consecutive reporters in the **isnad**.
6. **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).

3. According to the number of reporters involved in each stage of isnad

Five categories of hadith can be identified:

1. **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.
2. **Ahad** - isolated: is a hadith which is narrated by people whose number does not reach that of the mutawatir.

It is further classified into:

3. **Mash'hur** - famous: hadith reported by more than two reporters.
4. **Aziz** - rare, strong: at any stage in the **isnad**, only two reporters are found to narrate the hadith.
5. **Gharib** - strange: At some stage of the **isnad**, only one reporter is found relating it.