

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate

## **Fath al-Mulhim bi Sharh Sahih Muslim**

**Imām Shabīr Ahmad al-Uthmānī**

trans. Iman Badawi

### **Translator’s Introduction**

Hadīth. No matter what field a scholar specializes in, the field of hadīth — in its intimate connection to our Master Muhammad ﷺ — is loved by all.

How can the man behind the Message, the best of all creation, not be the most beloved of all. So, he is — in the heart of every believer, in the soul of every scholar. The haters of hadīth are the haters of the Prophet ﷺ.

Hanafīs love hadīth, to that I can personally attest, but I will let a giant of knowledge speak instead.

After mentioning an exhaustive list of the best commentaries on *Sahih Muslim*, Imām al-Kawtharī says in praise of the commentary “*Fath al-Mulhim bi Sharh Sahih Muslim*” by the great Indian scholar Shabīr Ahmad al-Uthmānī (1305-1369 H)

“...truth be told, none of these commentaries gave due right to the *Sahih* of *Muslim*, in clarifying its contents and expounding upon it from the multiple vantages of interest to researchers and those who crave the unearthing of its hidden treasures. Even if a commentary might have achieved excellence from the vantage of jurisprudence and creed upon a particular school of thought, you would find it falling short in extending such service to other scholarly orientations... You might also find some who neglect to commentate on its prolegomena despite it being of the earliest attempts at the codification of the science of hadīth... Others left aside speaking of the narrators entirely... Whereas you might find each commentator contributing from one vantage, you’d find him lax in another... So, in feeling this sore gap, such that led to ardent hope in a commentary that would fulfill the need, here we stand having found our sought desire.”

Imām al-Kawtharī’s words illustrate the continuum of scholarship which, beyond having gathered a vast expanse of knowledge, had such a massively comprehensive conception of the field so as to have theorized what was missing and, thereby, expand it through its exhaustive erudite genius. This can’t be done by one man or two, but by generations of scholars who tread the path of Tradition so humbly, so expertly, so sincerely, that centuries later, those of like mettle might pick up on their tracks.

This translator is meek as much, and not so foolish as such, to consider herself of such calibre, but it is another motive that drives.



In my earlier days of sacred study, the gatherings of knowledge accessible to me were sufficient for my underdeveloped ambition. The way of sacred knowledge, though, is that its sweetness satiates only so much as to increase one's thirst. Those who have tasted, know.

As a [female student](#), however, I found that the more knowledge I gained and the higher I aspired, the less accessible such gatherings became. The more sophisticated my questions, the less receptive teachers were. The more focus and dedication I exerted, the less attention was allotted. The more inspiration I was gifted by God, the more hostile they became. This, in stark contrast to the 'learning curve' of male students much junior to me. Without comment on the patently unmanly behavior and dishonorable conduct of more than a few, it was then that I realized that God was directing me to a different path.

Among all Islamic disciplines, perhaps hadīth can rightfully claim the [largest female contribution](#), but this was in a time in which transmission was still a prime scholarly imperative and chivalrous conduct with women was still the norm. Neither remain today.

In our times, and particularly in the West, Tradition has been traded for intellectual tyranny and *adab* has been replaced with chaos. In the digital age, the scholar 'ship' upon which the Ummah was saved from the flood of futility is no longer the ark it used to be. Consequently, not just the scholarly climate suffers, but the global community of Islam on the whole – in losing sight of so many of its foundational principles — becomes subject to the storms of mass confusion.

Thus, I write these words not only as a scholar, but as a mother concerned for her children, as a guardian of the prophetic household fearful for our flock. The need of every believer for their Messenger is greater than the need for air, for the very reason we breathe is to worship God. [Women](#) — like all others in this Ummah — have every right to their Prophet ﷺ.

Beyond that, Tradition must evolve, must grow, must flow for future generations. One day, before or after my death, my daughters will read these words, my students will take instruction from these writings, the women of the Ummah will look for their [female scholars](#). They will ask, "What did the women who loved the Messenger of God ﷺ contribute?" They will ask, "Why did male scholars ignore their work?" They will wonder about their place in Tradition, which — from their vantage — disappeared.

No — it has not disappeared. It is here to stay. There are [great woman](#) in this Ummah who continue to contribute traditional scholarly works in all fields, upon the footsteps of true prophetic inheritors.

So, here is the contribution of one who loves the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, a woman, a traditionalist, a Western-born Muslim.

The following is a selectively abridged translation of *Fath al-Mulhim* with the [first ever commentary of a female scholar](#), in footnotes. The intent behind this work is to introduce a mode of thinking in



extraction of the knowledge, *adab*, and spiritual underpinnings that were obvious in times past, to which ours is almost oblivious. When relevant, I've also made reference to the need for [female scholarship](#), as well as its proper contemporary role. As this is unprecedented in all the history of Islamic tradition, to my knowledge, such references are highlighted in [blue](#).

I dedicate this work to the [two little women](#)<sup>1</sup> more beloved to me than all the world and what it contains, my daughters. When they were children, I expended my youth in teaching them the Sunnah at home. Now, as they grow and enter a world so distant from the prophetic exemplar, I extend to them this rope, that they may hold fast to it if ever they get lost.

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ

Did He not find you lost and guide you?

Quran (ad-Duha 93:7)

I dedicate this work to every blessed woman of this Ummah who deeply loves the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, through her creed, through her deeds, through her life.

As for the quick critics, who would sooner rejoice at deficiencies than to acknowledge benefit, they will surely find their ego's desire, for perfection is God's alone. Let them know, though, that every shortcoming they see is but a reflection of their own doing. Those who couldn't see their own sister in faith when she was a student, I dare say, might now have further difficulty in seeing her as a scholar, but God always grants better. As for those whose short-sighted intellects breed enmity for all that exceeds them, I concede to having no cure. Finally, to those who attempt to shackle the scholarship of women by the chains of their own desire, I can only say, your rope can't bind our hope.

[The measure of knowledge is commensurate with one's ambition.](#) I learned that many years ago. For a transmitter, it is transmission. For a jurist, it is understanding. For an usūlī, it is hermeneutics. For a sūfī, it is God. For a reviver, it is life.

[Raise your ambition. The measure will change.](#)

May Allah's infinite peace & blessings be upon Rasūlullāh, his pure progeny & folk, along with his gleaming companions, illuminated inheritors, and all loyal followers until the Last Day.

Iman Badawi  
Friday, 20, Jumād II, 1444  
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<sup>1</sup>The inclusion of my beloved son in this statement is obvious, and from his beautiful example, of a boy and youth whose first teacher was a woman, many could benefit. May Allah bless and preserve him and his siblings ever more.



## On the Definition of Hadīth

Imām Suyūti said, “Its base meaning is the opposite of *qadīm* (timeless), its usage being general for any small or large amount of reports, in that [a narration] unfolds in stages.”

Further, *Shaykh-ul-Islām* Ibn Hajar said in his commentary on Bukhārī, “In the technical usage [of the sharīʿah], the meaning of the term “hadīth” is that which is attributed to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, as if meant in contradistinction to the Quran which is timeless in origin.”

What appears to this weak divine servant, however — and God certainly knows best — is that the usage of the term “hadīth” to mean that which is attributed to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is taken from God’s Words,

وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ

Proclaim the blessings of your Lord.

Quran (ad-Duhā 93:11)

For prior to that, in this chapter entitled “The Forenoon”, God enumerates the great Favors bestowed upon His Messenger ﷺ in granting divine guardianship after being orphaned, enrichment after dependency, and guidance after the absence of the sacred law - a knowledge otherwise unreachable by intellect alone. This latter blessing is in line with God’s Words,

مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ

So We have revealed a spirit to you [Prophet] by Our command:

you knew neither the Scripture nor the faith

Quran (ash-Shūrā 42:52)

So, [by the purport of this verse], God guided him ﷺ to the [underlying] methodology of His Book, with a [hidden] knowledge that exceeds the outward revelation of the Quran, by a massive exponential factor, thereby teaching him what he did not know.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These words of the shaykh are nothing short of genius, for they encapsulate the essence of the Sunnah as a prophetic knowledge, divinely inspired yet conveyed in human speech, proliferated from the Quran itself, but manifesting in greater multitude. The Sunnah is the greatest exegesis of the Quran. The Quran is an “apparent” revelation in that it is comprised of both Word and Meaning, in addition to being the “recited” revelation (i.e. that its recitation is a form of worship), while the Sunnah is the “hidden” revelation in that its ‘recitation’ can only be actualized through practice. His brilliant formulation of meaning here also points to God’s Words,



Then, God made three matters consequent to these three divine gifts — the prohibition of turning away the orphans and destitute and the command to proclaim the divine blessings.

So, it would seem by my inner sense,<sup>3</sup> that this sequencing is out of order, contrary to the view of others [in exegesis on the Quran]. Thus, the meaning should be rendered “You were of dire straits in guardianship, guidance, and wealth. So, God took you in, guided you, and enriched you. Thus, no matter what happens, do not forget the blessing of God upon you in these three matters and take God as your model in dealing with the orphan in empathy, and the destitute in compassion, for you have tasted these states yourself.”

Further, His saying, “Proclaim the blessings of your Lord” is to be understood as being reflective of His Words, “Did He not find you unaware of the way (of the Shari'ah), then He guided you?”, as if to say — the right of this massive magnanimity, of guidance after confusion, a gift so great that it

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وَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُن تَعْلَمُ ۚ وَكَانَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا

God has sent down the Scripture and Wisdom to you, and taught you what you did not know. God's bounty to you is great indeed.  
Quran (an-Nisā' 4:113)

Thereby further illustrating that the Quran and Sunnah must be understood in conjunction, and that any interpretation of Religion that attempts to sever the two is cut off from Divine Providence. It also indicates to the critical need for scholarship in every generation, as embodiment is the true transmission of the Sunnah.

While in previous times [female scholars](#) were few and less impactful in the course of Tradition, we now live in a time in which it is critically imperative for [erudite women](#) to take their place in the courtyard of the quranic *bikmah*, for when the practice of the Sunnah dwindles, even in the home, then quranic wisdom is, likewise, diminished outside of its sanctum. In a time when the people of misguidance instigate wars between the genders, what will bring rectification but the [cooperation of scholarly men and women among the people of the Quran and Sunnah](#). May God make us of them.

<sup>3</sup> Here, the shaykh employs a special form of argument known as *al-istidlāl bi-dhawq*, meaning conceptual formulation based on scholarly intuition. This is a beautiful example of scholarly creativity, a skill that is developed only by the most advanced in intelligence and sacred knowledge. There is no doubt that the shaykh is of such rare breed. What is particularly striking about this form of scholarly prowess, and distinct to the Islamic tradition, is that it arises from strict adherence and humble devotion, as opposed to independent thought and intellectual meandering. In contemporary times, when ties to Tradition continue to weaken and modern constructs of Religion distort its message, authentic expressions of scholarly creativity such as this are precisely what is needed, be it in the field of hadīth, fiqh, or tafsīr. In identifying such examples in our own heritage, we come one step closer to treading in theirs. Creativity comes from the Creator. [Women](#) have a special knack for creativity. I suppose it's a maternal thing. God's mercy be on the scholarly predecessors of this Ummah.



is incomparable to any other, the right of it upon you is to convey it to the servants of God, to spread it among them, and to make clear to them what has been revealed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In this exquisite culmination of quranic insight, the shaykh derives a deep lesson about the underlying intent behind the conveyance of the Religion, namely divine gratitude. The first verse of the Quran is “Praise be to the Lord of the Worlds.” The first words Adam uttered when God breathed a soul into him, and after which he sneezed, was “Praise be to the Lord of the Worlds”. In the Sunnah of our beloved Messenger Muhammad ﷺ, upon sneezing we are instructed to say, “Praise be to the Lord of the Worlds”. The chain of transmission of prophetic inheritance, from the beginning of man to the best of all of humanity, is a continuous repetition of divine gratitude. This is the essence of the Islamic tradition. True scholarship will always and forever be characterized by carrying the flag of *Hamd*, the banner of the Glory of God.

Abū Saʿīd (May Allah be well pleased with him) relates that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, **“I am the master of the progeny of Adam on the Day of Resurrection, and it is no boast. I will carry the flag of *hamd*, and it is no boast. There will be no Prophet, Adam or otherwise, except that he will be under my flag. I am the first for which the earth will part and it is no boast.”** [Tirmidhī]

In commentary, Mubārakfūrī states in his *Tuhfab*

[begin quote]

He ﷺ said “I am the master of the progeny of Adam” to inform of what God - Most High - favored him with of virtue and leadership, in proclamation of the divine blessings conferred upon him, and in announcement to his Ummah so that their faith in him would be commensurate with this status and its entailments. For this reason, he followed it up by saying “and it is no boast”, meaning, this Divine Favor which God conferred upon me isn’t by my agency or power. Thus, there is no basis for pride. al-Jazarī stated it.

Imam al-Nawawī said, “There are two interpretations regarding it. Either he said it in fulfillment of God’s Command — “Proclaim the blessings of your Lord”, or that it is of the matters inclusive within the command of prophetic conveyance [...]

[About] “the flag of *hamd*”, at-Tībī said, “It [represents] his singular station and rank ﷺ in divine praise above all of humanity, while also carrying the possibility of a real form [manifested] on the Day of Resurrection, bearing such distinction. at-Tūrbīshī said, “There is no station among the ranks of the righteous higher and loftier than the station of divine gratitude, all other ranks are beneath it. Thus, since our Messenger ﷺ is the master of all the Prophets, the most praised of all creation in this world and the next, he was given the flag of *hamd*, so that all of humanity would rush to his banner. This is indicated to in his words “Adam and all others will be under my flag”. I say that adopting the literal meaning is the correct position, for recourse to metaphor is only permitted when otherwise is untenable.

[end quote]



So, it is apparent that all his words and actions ﷺ, that we term “hadīth”, are, in fact, a commentary on the Guidance God granted him and an exposition of that which God bestowed upon him of the various colors of divine light and skills of sagacity — and, as always, God, Most High, certainly knows best.<sup>5</sup>

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In practicality, the shaykh is teaching us the proper intention behind the seeking and conveyance of sacred knowledge by students and scholars, which is gratitude to the Bestower of all blessings, the greatest of which is Revelation and Guidance. As such, in every generation, the true scholarly inheritors will bequeath this prophetic state, just as the transmitters of hadīth convey his prophetic words ﷺ. The ego can't be transmitted along with knowledge. In a time when this meaning is being lost, it's imperative to re-infuse all sacred teachings with the prophetic ethos that has been transmitted in the Islamic spiritual tradition, for without the spirit, how can knowledge be sacred.

<sup>5</sup> After this section, the shaykh proceeds into the topic at hand. In all my readings, I haven't come across a more resplendent introduction to the Science of Hadīth as this, an opening of both knowledge and *adab*, intelligence and insight. May God's choicest mercy be upon his soul and may He grant us from the treasures of his sincere chest.

