

THE AHLE HADITH SOCIETY OF CANADA



THE NOBILITY AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PEOPLE OF HADITH



LECTURE 3: SIGNPOSTS AND DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
AHLUL HADITH

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PART I

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THE FIRST AND SECOND SIGNPOSTS

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The Fundamental Foundations: Calling to Tawheed and Subduing the Intellect to the Text

In this noble gathering, we resume the discussion on the methodology of the Hadith, addressing some of the distinguishing signposts and characteristics of the Ahlul Hadith. This is in line with the statement of the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) that a person will be with the one whom he loves on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, it is imperative for a Muslim to know these signs and characteristics, so that he may take company with these noble people and be included along with them on the Day of Judgment.

"The first of these signposts and characteristics of the Ahlul Hadith is that they call to Tawheed—the Oneness of Allah, singling Him out in worship. This is that call that is the call of all of the Prophets and Messengers, as Allah says in the Quran: 'And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], "Worship Allah and avoid Taghut." Any group or people who do not call to the Tawheed of Allah, singling Him out in worship, then they are not upon the call and the methodology of the Prophets and The Messengers; rather they are in direct opposition to them."

When the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal to the region of Yemen as his governor, he guided him to call the people first and foremost to that which would single out Allah in worship. The Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) also said: 'I have been sent close to the establishment of the Hour, with the sword, until Allah is worshipped alone without partners.' Abdullah ibn Abbas said that the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) was not raised, nor did he depart this world, except that he had firmly established the straight, pure religion of Tawheed, opening blind eyes, deaf ears, and closed hearts. The Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) said: 'I have been given names: I am Muhammad, I am Ahmad, and I am Al-Mahi (the Eradicator) by way of whom Allah eradicates disbelief, shirk, and all that is associated with Him.'

The Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam), from the very beginning of his mission until his last breaths, called towards the Oneness of Allah. If one wishes to look at his final departing advice, let him look to the statement of Allah in Surah Al-An'am: 'Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him...' Five days before the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam passed away, Jundub said he heard the Messenger of Allah (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) saying: 'Indeed, those who were before you took the graves of their Prophets as places of worship (Masajid). So do not take graves as places of worship, for indeed I forbid you from it.' This proves that until his last breaths, the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) was advising the Muslims with this call of Tawheed. Our teacher, the great scholar Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, mentioned that all deviant groups and sects do not give any attention or care to this methodology of calling first to the Tawheed of Allah, which is why there is no goodness or blessings in their calls, and they remain people of division, trials, and tribulations.

The second major signpost and characteristic of the Ahlul Hadith is that they begin with the text of the Quran and the Sunnah, subduing their intellects completely to the Shariah. Allah says in the Quran: 'O you who have believed, do not put [yourselves] before Allah and His Messenger...' Ibn Abbas explained that this means: 'Do not speak in opposition to the Book and the Sunnah.' Imam Mujahid said: 'Do not give a ruling in opposition to the ruling of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam.' It is necessary for every believer not to speak in any matter of the religion except upon the authority of the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam). A

Muslim must look into the Hadith and follow it in speech and action, subduing the intellect to the clear, divine revelation.

PART II

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EVIDENCE BEFORE ACTION

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The Meticulous Specialization: Finding the Proof First and the Sacrifices of the Scholars

A distinguishing signpost of the Ahlul Hadith from their fundamental principles is that they say: 'First find the proof, and then base your belief and action upon it.' This is the opposite of the deviant methodology, which is to first adopt a belief or hold a position, and then go searching for proofs, twisting and distorting them to support that pre-determined stance. The people of truth first find the authentic text and then follow it. Imam Abul Qasim al-Asbahani stated in his book: 'There is no way to know that which the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) called the people to from the straight, clear religion except by following the methodology of the Ashab al-Hadith. As for the remaining groups, sects, and factions, they sought the religion by other than this methodology; they returned back to their intellects, personal opinions, and whims.'

If the remaining sects hear something from the Quran and Sunnah, they subject it to their pre-determined intellect and position. If it agrees with their intellect, they accept it; if it is in opposition, they give precedence to their personal opinion and reject the text. Imam Al-Asbahani continues: 'I reflected and pondered over all of the groups and factions in existence, and I found that the Companions of Hadith are the closest of the people to following the Quran and the Sunnah, and they have the most zeal in searching for and applying their teachings. They are indeed the most deserving of being called the people of the Quran and the Sunnah.'

"The Imam gives a real-life, tangible example of this specialization: If you see a person with wood and nails in his hands, carving and joining the wood, you would say he is a carpenter (Najjar). No one would say he is a date-seller (Tamar) or a greengrocer, because you call him by the name of his specialization. Similarly, the Ahlul Hadith are the most deserving of this blessed name because they have the most knowledge and the closest adherence to the Hadith and the Sunnah. The other sects, however, are far from the Hadith and Sunnah, basing their positions on the fatwas of men and their own intellects."

From the earliest of times, the scholars of Hadith have sacrificed their comfort, traveling across horizons in pursuit of the Sunnah. They memorized, preserved, implemented, and collected the narrations, protecting them from all additions, subtractions, alterations, and distortions. Just as a perfume seller (Attar) is known by his perfumes and a date seller (Tamar) by his dates, the Ahlul Hadith are known by their great diligence and efforts in acting upon and preserving the Hadith of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam. Those who did not travel in the pursuit of the Sunnah or base their religion upon it are completely removed from this blessed name and title. There is no proof greater than this that the people of desires and misguidance are the farthest from being allocated this name, due to their shunning of the Sunnah.

From the well-known principles of the great imams and scholars of Islam is that if a Hadith has come that is established and authentic (Sahih), there is no choice or leave for anyone to use personal opinion or intellect in that matter. The foundational principles are clear: there is no personal opinion when there is a text (Nass) from the Quran and Sunnah, there is no deductive analogy (Qiyas) in the presence of authentic proof, and a sound, correct intellect will never oppose an authentic, clear text.

PART III

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UNCONDITIONAL FOLLOWING & WASATIYYAH

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The Third and Fourth Signposts: Following Only the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) and the Middle Path of Ahlul Hadith

The third distinguishing signpost and characteristic of the Ahlul Hadith is that they do not have any Imam, scholar, or sheikh whom they revere and respect to the level that they take all of his speech and statements in totality without opposition, except the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam). Allah says in the Quran that it is upon the believers to believe in Allah and His Messenger, and to revere, honor, and respect him. The Ahlul Hadith are the greatest of people in having the utmost reverence and honor for the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) and his statements, giving them absolute precedence over the statements of everyone else.

Abdullah ibn Abbas said that it is obligatory to follow the text of the Hadith even if some of the scholars and imams give a ruling in opposition to it. When people tried to oppose a Prophetic text by quoting the rulings of Abu Bakr and Umar, Ibn Abbas famously responded: 'I fear that stones and rocks will fall upon you from the sky! I say that the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) said such-and-such, and you are telling me that Abu Bakr and Umar say such-and-such?' This is the methodology of the Ahlul Hadith in giving the utmost reverence to the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) in all his statements and actions, refusing unconditional follow (Taqlid) for any other individual.

"The scholars have mentioned that there are two types of Oneness (Tawheed) that will save a person from the punishment of the Hellfire, and there is no salvation except through believing and acting upon both: The first is the Tawheed of Allah (Tawheed al-Ibadah), singling Him out in worship. The second is the Tawheed of following (Tawheed al-Mutaba'ah), which is the singling out of the Messenger of Allah Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam for unconditional following. This means that every statement, ruling, and position must be compared against his Sunnah, and one must completely stop at and be pleased with his ruling, giving no precedence to any opinion, dream, sheikh, or leader of a group over the statement of Allah and His Messenger."

The fourth distinguishing signpost and characteristic of the Ahlul Hadith is that their methodology represents the Middle Path (Wasatiyyah). It stands in the exact center between all of the various factions, groups, and deviant sects, just as the religion of Islam stands in the middle between all other religions. Allah says in the Quran: 'And thus We have made you a middle nation...' Because Allah has made this Ummah a middle nation, they possess the most complete and perfect of legislations, and their way is the most clear, free from both extremism to the right (Ghuluw) and neglect/leniency to the left (Jafa).

This balanced position is visible in all core issues of creed (Aqidah):

1. **Names and Attributes of Allah:** They are in the middle between the *Mu'attilah* (who negate the names and attributes of Allah in totality) and the *Mushabbihah* (who resemble the attributes of Allah to those of the creation).
2. **Divine Predestree (Al-Qadar):** They are in the middle between the *Qadariyyah* (who negate Al-Qadar) and the *Jabriyyah* (who claim humans have no choice or free will).
3. **Faith (Iman):** They are in the middle between the *Khawarij* (who expel Muslims from Islam and condemn them to Hellfire eternally due to major sins) and the *Murji'ah* (who claim that actions are not part of Iman and major sins do not harm faith).

PART IV

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TAZKIYAH, UNITY AND PATIENCE

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Signposts Five to Ten: Protecting from Division, Purifying the Soul via Sunnah, and Steadfastness Under Trial

The fifth distinguishing characteristic of the Ahlul Hadith is that Allah has preserved and protected them from making takfeer of one another, or ruling upon one another to be disbelievers (Kuffar), or declaring each other to have exited the straight path. The sixth signpost is their deep love for the imams and scholars of Islam who aid the Sunnah, and their rejection and shunning of the imams of innovation and misguidance who call towards the Hellfire and destruction. The seventh signpost is their complete rejection and shunning of false interpretation (Ta'weel)—the distortion of the texts of the Quran and Sunnah, which negates their apparent meanings.

Allah describes those with sickness in their hearts as those who follow allegorical texts to cause fitnah. The great imams have explained that the splitting of the previous nations (the Jews into 71 sects and the Christians into 72) and this Ummah into 73 sects was primarily caused by Ta'weel—the distortion and false interpretation of the texts. Allah was never disobeyed by a matter greater than Ta'weel. Even the blood spilled in the great historical battles between the Muslims (including the Companions) occurred due to false interpretation. There is indeed no trial greater upon Islam and its people than the trial of Ta'weel.

"The eighth distinguishing signpost of the Ahlul Hadith is that they purify their souls (Tazkiyah) strictly through the Quran and the Sunnah, completely free from the extremist, innovated practices of the people of deviation. Allah says in the Quran: 'He has succeeded who purifies it.' The Ahlul Hadith purify their souls by way of that which the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) used to purify his Companions. The foremost matter of Tazkiyah is correcting one's Creed (Aqidah) and Tawheed. They then purify their souls by performing the obligatory acts (Wajibat) and avoiding the forbidden (Muharramat). This stands in direct opposition to the Sufis who have innovated deviant practices, naming falsehood as 'purification,' which is far from the true Tazkiyah of the Sunnah."

The ninth major signpost is that they hold steadfastly to the Quran and the Sunnah, staying far away from division in the religion. Allah says: 'And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided.' Imam Al-Bukhari authored a complete, monumental chapter in his Sahih titled 'Holding Steadfast to the Quran and the Sunnah.' The great scholar Abu al-Muzaffar al-Sam'ani stated that one of the greatest proofs that the Ahlul Hadith are upon the truth is that if you read their books from the first of them to the last, across different countries, eras, and localities (from the East to the West, with centuries between them), you will find that their creed, belief, and methodology is one single speech. It is as if these books were written by a single heart, authored by a single person. This is because the truth is one, as Allah says: 'Do they not then reflect upon the Quran? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much contradiction.'

The tenth signpost is that they are the greatest of people in having patience upon their beliefs, methodology, and remaining steadfast. Despite being the most tested of people with various trials by the people of deviation, they are the most steadfast. The great Imam Abu Ismail al-Harawi said: 'I was presented to the sword five times. In none of these times did they say to me: "Leave your madhhab or your methodology." Rather, they said to me: "Remain quiet and silent about the people of innovation, do not expose their deviancy." And I would reply every single time: "I will not remain silent!"' This is the patience of the Ahlul

Hadith under trial. Likewise, when Heraclius asked Abu Sufyan if anyone who accepted Islam went back on his religion out of hatred for it, Abu Sufyan replied: 'No.' Heraclius remarked: 'This is the way of the faith when its sweetness mixes with the hearts: no one returns from it.'

PART V

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Clarifying the Rulings: Blind Following, Modern Hanafis, and Tawheed al-Mutaba'ah

Questioner: *Are all of the blind followers of the madhhab today, those who have extremism and fanaticism towards their legal schools, considered outside the fold of the Ahlus Sunnah wal-Jama'ah?*

Sheikh Walid: These people are of various levels. The least worst of them is the one who is generally considered to be from the Sunnah, but has a distortion in his methodology. This is the one who studied a madhhab and based his learning upon it, but whenever an authentic text from the Quran or Sunnah reaches him, he immediately leaves the position of his madhhab for that text. He has good in him for leaving his madhhab for the authentic text, though his restriction of study to one school carries some evil. The worst of them are those who blindly follow a madhhab, restrict themselves to it, and actively call towards it, claiming that following a madhhab is obligatory (Wajib) and that exiting it is prohibited. These are without a doubt not from the Ahlul Hadith, and they traverse a path in direct opposition to the Sunnah. If you look at the state of these fanatical followers, you will find that the majority of them have deviations in their Aqidah (Creed)—either they are from the Ash'aris/Maturidis, or they are Sufis who worship the dead and devote worship to other than Allah. It is not strange that if they have deviation in their Aqidah, they will have deviation in their methodology and actions.

Questioner: *You mentioned in your lecture the 'Tawheed of following the Messenger' (Tawheed al-Mutaba'ah) unconditionally. Why do we not frequently hear or read about this particular type among the types of Tawheed?*

Sheikh Walid: This unconditional following of the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) in all his speech and actions is sometimes mentioned under the name "Tawheed al-Ittiba" (Tawheed of Adherence), and sometimes it is mentioned as the second condition of actions being accepted. As Allah says in the last verse of Surah Al-Kahf: '...so whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord - let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone.' Righteous work is that which is in accordance with the Sunnah (Mutaba'ah), and not associating anyone is sincerity (Ikhlas). We found our great scholars, such as Al-Albani and others, explicitly mentioning this as the fourth type of Tawheed. While the first three are related to Allah (Lordship, Worship, Names/Attributes), the fourth is connected directly to the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam), which is the necessary implication of the second half of the Shahaadah: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' As for why it is not mentioned frequently, it is due to one of two reasons: either it is omitted without an underlying reason by some scholars who did not devote their attention to it, or it is omitted deliberately by others to open the doors of blind following, fanaticism, and restricting the Muslims to the legal schools, which is a path of grave danger.

Questioner: *Is blindly following a specific Imam or restricting oneself strictly to a madhhab considered from the principles of the innovators?*

Sheikh Walid: Without a doubt, it is from their principles. In *Jawharat al-Tawheed*—which is a fundamental text in the Creed of the innovators—the author explicitly states in poetry that it is an obligation upon the believer to blindly follow a scholar from the four Imams. The scholars of Sunnah have stated that the one who claims it is obligatory upon the Muslims to unconditionally follow a single scholar in every ruling and position, prohibiting him from exiting his statements, should be disciplined by the Muslim rulers, and some went as far as to say he should be executed to protect the Muslims from his deviance and misguidance.

Questioner: We see today people who claim to be upon the methodology of the Salaf in Aqidah, but in the subsidiary matters of Fiqh, they blindly follow a madhhab with fanaticism—specifically the modern Hanafis. What should be our position regarding them?

Sheikh Walid: We must present the truth to them and mention the statements of the Salaf regarding this matter of following the Sunnah unconditionally and going with the evidence. Today, the Hanafis who claim to have correct Creed are of two types: The first are the new Hanafis who are extreme, fanatical followers of the madhhab in subsidiary matters, but their Aqidah is actually Ash'ari/Maturidi; these are people of deviance. The second are those who are truly upon the Creed of the Salaf, but because of their locality or their teachers, they studied the Hanafi madhhab. If an authentic, clear Hadith reaches them, they leave the madhhab and the statement of the Imam to follow the proof. These are upon goodness and we do not declare them innovators, though we do not prefer this method of learning because it was not the way of the Sahabah or Tabi'un. Fanaticism and blind attachment to a madhhab is rejected by all scholars of the Salaf. We must remain on the clear path of following the authentic Sunnah.

The translator: May Allah reward you with good, our noble Sheikh, and elevate your status. We will meet you in the next gathering, if Allah willing.

Sheikh Walid: May Allah grant us success. Peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you.