

THE AHLE HADITH SOCIETY OF CANADA

• • •

THE NOBILITY AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PEOPLE OF HADITH

• • •

LECTURE 3: SIGNPOSTS AND DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
COMPANIONS OF HADITH

Delivered by:

Sheikh Walid Saif-un-Nasr

Published and Compiled by:

The Ahle Hadith Society of Canada

FIRST EDITION — 1447 AH / 2025 CE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

• • •

The First Signpost: Calling to Tawhid <i>Singling Out Allah in Worship</i>	PAGE 3
The Second Signpost: Prioritizing Revelation Over Intellect <i>Subduing Reason to Divine Text</i>	PAGE 6
The Third Signpost: Complete Adherence to the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam <i>Venerating Prophetic Directives</i>	PAGE 9
The Fourth Signpost: Standing Firm Upon the Middle Path <i>Moderation and Balance in Creed</i>	PAGE 11
The Fifth Signpost: Preservation from Sectarian Takfir <i>Unity and Mutual Protection</i>	PAGE 13
The Sixth Signpost: Loving the Imams of the Sunnah <i>Honoring the Scholars of Sunnah</i>	PAGE 15
The Seventh Signpost: Rejecting False Interpretation (Ta'weel) <i>Averting Distortions of Scripture</i>	PAGE 17
The Eighth Signpost: True Purification of the Soul (Tazkiyah) <i>Purifying via Quran and Sunnah</i>	PAGE 19
The Ninth Signpost: Holding Steadfast to the Unified Path <i>Avoiding Sectarian Division</i>	PAGE 21
The Tenth Signpost: Great Patience Under Trials <i>Steadfastness and Endurance</i>	PAGE 23
The Eleventh Signpost: Small in Number, Greatest in Benefit <i>The Guiding Cohort on Earth</i>	PAGE 25
Questions and Answers on the Signposts <i>Legal Analogy and Fiqh Fanaticism</i>	PAGE 27

THE FIRST SIGNPOST

• • •

CALLING TO TAWHID

• • •

Singling Out Allah in Worship as the Primary Call of the Prophets

Sheikh Walid Saif-un-Nasr began by sending praise upon Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and peace and salutations upon Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam. He welcomed the listeners back to the series of lectures on the methodology of the People of Hadith, introducing this session, titled: "Signposts and Distinguishing Characteristics of the Companions of Hadith".

This lecture outlines the essential signposts that distinguish the People of Hadith from other groups in the Ummah. This is in line with the statement of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam: "A person will be with the one whom he loves." For it is imperative for every Muslim to know these signs and characteristics, so that he is in knowledge of this path, takes company of these people, and is resurrected among them on the Day of Judgment.

The Sheikh explained that the first and most critical of these signposts and characteristics is that they call to Tawhid—the Oneness of Allah—singling Him out in worship. This is the primary call of all 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.'"

— Surah An-Nahl: 36

Any group or people who do not call to the Tawhid of Allah, or do not prioritize it, are not upon the call and methodology of the Prophets and Messengers; rather, they are in opposition to it.

Just as the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam, when he sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal to the region of Yemen as his governor, guided him to call the people first and foremost to the testimony of faith:

"Let the first thing you call them to be that they single out Allah in worship."

— The Messenger of Allah (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam)

Furthermore, the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam said:

"I have been sent close to the establishment of the Hour, with the sword, until Allah is worshipped alone without partners."

— The Messenger of Allah (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam)

As the Sahabi 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar said, the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam was not raised and did not depart this world except that he established this straight, pure religion of Tawhid. By way of this call, the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam opened the eyes that were blind, the ears that were deaf, and the hearts that were closed. He also said:

"I have 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 along with Allah in His worship."

— The Messenger of Allah (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam)

From the proofs that the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam called to Tawhid until his very last breaths is the Hadith of Jundub ibn 'Abdullah, who said:

"I heard the Messenger of Allah Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam before he passed away by five days saying: 'Verily, those before you took the graves of their prophets as places of worship. Beware! Do not take the graves as places of worship, for indeed I forbid you from doing so.'"

— Jundub ibn 'Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him)

This Hadith proves that even in his final days, the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam was protecting the purity of Tawhid and advising the Muslims against any means leading to Shirk.

Sheikh Walid noted that his sheikh, the great scholar Sheikh Al-Albaani, mentioned:

"All of the deviant groups and sects do not give any attention and do not give any care to this methodology of calling first to the Tawhid of Allah. This is why there is no goodness and there is no blessing in their calls, and this is why they remain people of division, trials, and tribulations. The Oneness of Allah is the foundation upon which everything else is built, and upon which the remaining matters of the religion are established."

— Sheikh Al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him)

THE SECOND SIGNPOST

• • •

PRIORITIZING REVELATION OVER INTELLECT

• • •

Subduing Reason and Philosophical Whims to the Divine Texts

The second major signpost and characteristic of the People of Hadith is that they begin with the divine text of the Quran and the Sunnah, and then they make their intellects fall in line with it. They make their intellects subdued and subservient to the Shariah and the revelation, rather than letting human reason judge or oppose the scripture.

Allah says in the Quran: "O you who believe, do not put [yourselves] before Allah and His Messenger..." (Surah Al-Hujurat: 1). Explaining this verse, the classical Imams stated:

"Do not say anything in opposition to the Book and the Sunnah."

— 'Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him)

"Do not give a ruling in opposition to the ruling of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam and that which he has established in his guidance."

— Imam Mujahid ibn Jabr (may Allah have mercy on him)

Regarding the absolute obligation of adhering strictly to the divine texts of revelation, Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) stated:

"It is necessary for every believer that he does not speak in any matter of the religion except with that which has come upon the authority of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam, and that he does not surpass the Hadith and the authentic Sunnah. Rather, a Muslim must look into the Hadith of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam and follow him in speech and action. This was the methodology and the way of the Sahabah, and those who followed them from the Tabi'un, and the great Imams of this religion. None of the great Imams would oppose the text of the Quran and the Sunnah by way of his intellect, nor would they establish any ruling or act upon any matter in opposition to a Hadith of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam."

— Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him)

From their fundamental principles is the rule: "First know the proof, then believe and act upon it"—not the opposite, which is to first believe a position and then go searching for proofs, twisting and distorting them to support that pre-determined belief. Rather, they first find the authentic proof, and then they base their belief and position upon it.

Describing how the People of Hadith uniquely excel in following revelation over human opinion, Imam Abul Qasim al-Asbahani (may Allah have mercy on him) delivered five monumental declarations:

"There is no way to know that which the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam called the people to except by way of following the methodology of the Companions of Hadith. As for the remaining groups and sects, they sought the religion by way of other than this methodology, returning back either to their intellects, their whims and desires, or the personal opinions of men. Even if they were to use or hear something from the Quran and Sunnah, they returned it to their own intellects, accepting it if it matched their positions, and rejecting or distorting it if it opposed their personal opinions."

— Imam Abul Qasim al-Asbahani (may Allah have mercy on him)

"I pondered and reflected upon all of the groups and factions, and I found that the Companions of Hadith are the closest of people in following the Quran and the Sunnah, and they have the most zeal in searching for and applying their teachings. They are, in reality, those deserving of being called the People of the Quran and Sunnah."

— Imam Abul Qasim al-Asbahani (may Allah have mercy on him)

"If you were to see a person with wood and nails in his hands, carving wood, you would say he is a carpenter (Najjar). No one would say he is a date-seller (Tamar) or a perfumer. Rather, you give him the name that fits his specialization. Similarly, the People of Hadith are the most deserving of this name because they have the most knowledge and the closest following of the Hadith and Sunnah. Other groups are far from it, basing their religion upon the opinions and fatwas of men, or their own intellects."

— Imam Abul Qasim al-Asbahani — The Carpenter Analogy

"From the earliest of times, the People of Hadith have been those who sacrificed and traveled across horizons in search of the narrations of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam. They memorized them, preserved them, implemented them, and protected them from all types of additions, subtractions, alterations, and distortions. They are like a date-seller who is known by his dates, or a perfumer who is known by his perfume. They are known as the People of Hadith due to their great diligence in acting upon and preserving the Sunnah."

— Imam Abul Qasim al-Asbahani — Sacrifices of the Scholars

"In this lies the greatest of signs and proofs that the Companions of Hadith are those most deserving of this blessed name, and that the people of desires and misguidance are the farthest of people from it, due to their shunning, rejecting, and not implementing the Hadith and Sunnah of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam."

— Imam Abul Qasim al-Asbahani (may Allah have mercy on him)

From the well-known principles of the great Imams of Islam are:

1. If a Hadith has come that is established and authentic, there is no room for anyone to give his personal opinion or judgment.
2. There is no personal opinion when there is a text (Nass).
3. There is no deductive analogy (Qiyas) if there is authentic proof from the Quran and Sunnah.
4. Sound, correct intellect never opposes authentic, clear revelation.

THE THIRD SIGNPOST

• • •

COMPLETE ADHERENCE TO THE PROPHET

• • •

Venerating Prophetic Directives Above the Opinions of Men

The third distinguishing signpost and characteristic of the People of Hadith is that they do not have any Imam or scholar whom they revere and respect to the extent that they accept all of his speech and statements in totality without opposition, except the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam. Allah says in the Quran: "Believe in Allah and His Messenger and the light which We have sent down..." (Surah At-Taghabun: 8). The People of Hadith are the foremost of people in having the utmost reverence, respect, and honor for the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam, giving his statements precedence over everyone else.

"It is obligatory to follow the text of the Hadith of the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam, even if some of the scholars and Imams were to give a ruling in opposition to it."

— **The Scholar 'Abdullah (may Allah have mercy on him)**

"I fear that stones and rocks will fall upon you from the sky! I say to you: 'The Messenger of Allah Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam said,' and you say to me: 'Abu Bakr and Umar said?'"

— **'Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him)**

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned that there are two types of Tawhid that will save a person from the Hellfire:

First: **Al-Tawhid al-Khaliq**, which is the Oneness of Allah in His worship.

Second: **Al-Tawhid al-Muttaba'**, which is the Oneness of following the Messenger Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam unconditionally, accepting no ruling or position except his, stopping at his command, and being pleased with his judgment, without giving precedence to any personal opinion, dream, or statement of a sheikh or madhhab founder over his words.

THE FOURTH SIGNPOST

• • •

STANDING FIRM UPON THE MIDDLE PATH

• • •

Moderation and Balance in Creed, Actions, and Judgment

The fourth distinguishing signpost and characteristic of the People of Hadith is that their methodology represents the middle path (Wasatiyyah). It stands in the exact middle between all of the various factions and deviant sects, just as the religion of Islam stands in the middle between all other religions. Allah says: "And perhaps We have made you a middle nation..." (Surah Al-Baqarah: 143).

Just as the Muslim Ummah is on the middle path, having the most perfect legislation, the methodology of the People of Hadith is the clearest and most perfect. There is no extremism to the right or to the left, neither transgressing the bounds nor neglecting them:

1. **In the names and attributes of Allah:** They are in the middle between the Mu'attilah (who negate Allah's names and attributes entirely) and the Mushabbihah (who resemble Allah's attributes to the creation).
2. **In Al-Qadar (Divine Decree):** They are in the middle between the Qadariyyah (who negate the decree) and the Jabriyyah (who claim human beings have no choice or freewill).
3. **In Faith (Iman):** They are in the middle between the Khawarij (who declare Muslims to be disbelievers over major sins) and the Murji'ah (who claim actions are not part of faith and do not affect it).

THE FIFTH SIGNPOST

• • •

PRESERVATION FROM SECTARIAN TAKFIR

• • •

Unity and Mutual Protection Against Declaring One Another Disbelievers

The fifth distinguishing characteristic of the People of Hadith is that Allah the Almighty has preserved and protected them from making takfir of one another, unlike the deviant sects who declare each other to be disbelievers and argue constantly among themselves.

THE SIXTH SIGNPOST

• • •

LOVING THE IMAMS OF THE SUNNAH

• • •

Honoring the Scholars of Sunnah and Shunning the Innovators

The sixth signpost of the People of Hadith is that they love the Imams and scholars of Islam who aid and act upon the Sunnah.

"One of the clear signs of the People of Hadith is that they love the Imams of the Sunnah, and they despise, reject, and shun the Imams of innovation who call towards the Hellfire and destruction."

— Imam Abu 'Uthman al-Sabuni (may Allah have mercy on him)

THE SEVENTH SIGNPOST

• • •

REJECTING FALSE INTERPRETATION

• • •

Averting the Distortions of Ta'weel and Preserving Scriptural Meanings

The seventh signpost is that they reject and shun Ta'weel—which is the false, distorted interpretation of the texts of the Quran and Sunnah, and the negation of their apparent meanings. Allah says of those who have a disease in their hearts: "[They] follow what is obscure thereof, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation..." (Surah Ali 'Imran: 7).

"The root cause of division in the previous nations (the Jews into 71 sects and the Christians into 72) and this Ummah into 73 sects is Ta'weel (distortion and false interpretation). Allah was never disobeyed by a matter greater than Ta'weel. Even the blood spilled in the great battles between the Muslims in the early generations was due to false interpretations. There is no greater trial upon Islam than the trial of Ta'weel."

— **Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him)**

THE EIGHTH SIGNPOST

• • •

TRUE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL

• • •

Purifying the Soul Strictly via the Quran and Sunnah, Free from Extremism

The eighth signpost is that they busy themselves with true purification of the soul (Tazkiyah) without any extremism. Allah says: "He has succeeded who purifies it..." (Surah Ash-Shams: 9). The People of Hadith purify their souls strictly by way of the Quran and Sunnah:

First: Through correct Creed (Aqidah) and Tawhid, which is the absolute foundation of purification.

Second: By performing the obligatory acts (Wajibat) and leaving forbidden acts (Muharramat).

Third: Through non-obligatory acts (Nawafil). This is in direct opposition to the methodology of the Sufis, who have innovated false rituals and misguidance in the name of Tazkiyah.

THE NINTH SIGNPOST

• • •

HOLDING STEADFAST TO THE UNIFIED PATH

• • •

Avoiding Sectarian Division and Clinging to the Methodology of the Salaf

The ninth signpost is that they hold steadfast to the Quran and Sunnah, and stay far away from sectarian division. Allah says: "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided..." (Surah Ali 'Imran: 103). Imam Al-Bukhari authored an entire book in his Sahih titled 'Holding Steadfast to the Quran and Sunnah'.

"From the greatest of proofs that they are upon the truth is that if you read the books of the scholars of Hadith from the first of them to the last of them, across different lands and centuries, you will find their belief and speech is one, as if written by a single person, whereas the people of innovation are in constant division and differing."

— **Imam Al-Laalikaa'ee (may Allah have mercy on him)**

THE TENTH SIGNPOST

• • •

GREAT PATIENCE UNDER TRIALS

• • •

Steadfastness and Endurance When Facing Defamation, Boycotts, or Harm

The tenth signpost is that they have great patience under trials and tribulations, holding firm to the Sunnah, even if they are boycotted, defamed, or harmed. This is the way of the Prophets and their followers.

"I was presented to the sword by the people of innovation five times. They never asked me to leave my methodology; they only asked me to remain silent and not expose their innovations. Every single time, I replied: I will not remain silent, I will not remain silent."

— **Abu Al-A'liyah (may Allah have mercy on him)**

"Do any of his followers leave the religion out of anger after entering it? Abu Sufyan replied: No. Heraclius remarked: This is the way of faith when its sweetness mixes with the hearts."

— **Dialogue between Heraclius and Abu Sufyan (Sahih Al-Bukhari)**

THE ELEVENTH SIGNPOST

• • •

SMALL IN NUMBER, GREATEST IN BENEFIT

• • •

Being the Guiding Cohort and the Saved Sect on Earth

The eleventh signpost is that they are the smallest in number but the greatest in benefit, goodness, and blessings.

"My Ummah will split into 73 sects, all of them in the Hellfire except one. This group is the least in number, but they are the guardians of the earth."

— The Messenger of Allah (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

• • •

ON SIGNPOSTS AND METHODOLOGY

• • •

Legal Analogy, Sectarian Fanaticism, and the Path of Salafiyyah

Question: *Are the blind followers of the madhhab today considered to be outside the realm of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah?*

Answer: These people are of various levels. The least worst of them is the one who studied a madhhab, but whenever an authentic text from the Quran or Sunnah reaches him, he leaves the position of his madhhab for that text. There is goodness in him, but his blind following of the madhhab in other issues still contains elements of harm.

The worst of them are those who declare that blindly following a madhhab is an obligation (Wajib), calling upon people to restrict themselves to it and not exit it. These are not from the methodology of Ahl al-Hadith. Furthermore, the majority of these extreme blind followers have critical deviations in their Creed (Aqidah)—they are either from the Ash'aris, Maturidis, or Sufis who worship the graves and dedicate worship to other than Allah. It is not strange that since they have deviation in Aqidah, they have deviation in Fiqh.

Question: *You mentioned the Oneness of following the Messenger (Tawhid al-Ittiba') unconditionally. We do not hear frequently of this type from the types of Tawhid in books. What is the reason behind this?*

Answer: This unconditionally following the Prophet Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam in all speech and actions is sometimes mentioned under the name Tawhid al-Ittiba', and sometimes under the conditions for the acceptance of actions (Sincerity for Allah, and Adherence to the Sunnah). Our modern scholars, such as Al-Albani and others, mentioned this as the fourth type of Tawhid. It is necessitated by the second part of the testimony of faith (that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah).

As for why it is omitted in some books, it is either because some scholars did not give much attention to naming it as such, or it is deliberate on the part of some who want to open the doors of blind following, fanaticism, and sectarianism to their madhhab.

Question: *Is the blind following of a specific scholar or madhhab from the principles of the Ash'aris or Maturidis?*

Answer: Yes, without a doubt. In their fundamental text of Creed, Jawharat al-Tawhid, it states: 'And the obligation of blindly following a scholar from among them... is a foundation.' This is a foundational principle of their creed. The scholars of Sunnah said that the one who claims it is obligatory to follow a specific scholar in every single position he holds, and never exit his statements, is a person whom the Muslim rulers should discipline, or even execute, to protect the Muslims from his dangerous deviance.

Question: *How do we deal with those who claim to be Hanafis today?*

Answer: We must tell them the truth and show them the statements of the Salaf regarding following the Sunnah wherever it leads. Today, those who claim to be Hanafis are of two types:

First: The new Hanafis who have extreme fanaticism in Fiqh and are upon the incorrect creed of the Ash'aris/Maturidis or Sufis. These are people of deviance.

Second: Those who have the correct Aqidah of the Salaf, but due to their locality or teachers, they studied the Hanafi madhhab. If an authentic Hadith reaches them, they leave the madhhab to follow it. These are upon goodness and we do not call them innovators, though we do not prefer this method of learning because it was not known among the Sahabah and Tabi'un. We do not agree with Fiqh fanaticism. The clear path is to follow the Sunnah and reject all forms of madhhab fanaticism.