

Aisha's Critique of 'Authentic' Hadith Content via Quranic Universals

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This paper approaches the relationship between the Quran and Sunnah from the angle of using the Quranic universals to critique the content (*matn*) of hadith narrations. Aisha Bint Abi Bakr, the Mother of the Believers, gave us a strong example and a clear illustration for applying this method. This article will present a number of illustrative examples of hadith, in which Aisha confidently rejected other companions' narrations, despite being 'authentic' according to the *sanad* verification criteria that we will survey. Aisha's rejection was based on the contradiction of these narrations with the clear universals of the Quran that revealed the higher principles (*usul*) and purposes (*maqasid*) of Islam. This paper will also prove that Aisha's method is coherent with the classic 'verification of the content' (*tahqeeq al-matn*) method, despite the fact that, historically, this verification was not a common practice.

Aisha's Amendments of the Companions Narrations

Aisha Bint Abu Bakr (the Mother of the Believers) was a strong, highly learned, and independent woman. Her character showed on a number of her *fatāwā* and opinions, in which she advocated women's independence and rights, notably against some of the other companions' direct narrations. Badruddin al-Zarkashi wrote a book dedicated to Aisha's critiques to the other companions' narrations, which he called, '*Ayn al-Iṣābah Fī Istidrāk Ā'ishah alā al-Ṣaḥābah*' (*The Accurate Account on Aisha's Amendments to the Companions' Narrations*).¹

The following are texts that show examples of these narrations. We will quote and discuss them in order.

1. في مسند أحمد أن رجلين دخلا على عائشة فقالا إن أبا هريرة يحدث أن نبي الله صلى الله عليه وسلم كان يقول: إنما الطيرة في المرأة والدابة والدار، ... قالت: والذي أنزل القرآن على أبي القاسم ما هكذا كان يقول الطيرة في المرأة والدابة والدار، ثم قرأت عائشة: (ما أصاب من مصيبة قبيحة إلا في الأرض ولا في أنفسكم إلا في كتاب من قبل أن نبرأها).

Abu Hurairah narrated, according to Bukhari: 'Bad omens are in women, animals, and houses.'² However, (also according to Bukhari) Aisha narrated that the Prophet (pbuh)

¹ Badredin al-Zarkashi, *Al-Ijabah Li'irad Ma Istadrakathu Aisha Ala Al-Sahabah*, ed. Saeed Al-Afghani, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1970).

² al-Bukhari, *Al-Sahih* p69.

had said: 'People during the Days of Ignorance (*jāhiliyah*) used to say that bad omens are in women, animals, and houses.'³ These two 'authentic' narrations are at odds and one of them should be rejected. It is telling that most commentators rejected Aisha's narration, even though other 'authentic' narrations support it.⁴ Ibn al-Arabi, for example, commented on Aisha's rejection of the above hadith as follows: 'This is nonsense (*qawlun sāqit*). This is rejection of a clear and authentic narration that is narrated through trusted narrators.'⁵

2. أخرج الترمذي: قال ابن عباس: رأى محمد ربه، فقالت عائشة: أليس الله يقول (لا تدركه الأبصار وهو يدرك الأبصار). وفي الصحيحين من حديث مسروق: قلت يا أمتاه هل رأى محمد ربه؟ فقالت: لقد قف شعري مما قلت، من حدثك أن محمدا صلى الله عليه وسلم رأى ربه فقد كذب، ثم قرأت: (لا تدركه الأبصار وهو يدرك الأبصار وهو اللطيف الخبير). وفي رواية قالت عائشة: أو لم تسمع أن الله عز وجل يقول: (وما كان لبشر أن يكلمه الله إلا وحيا أو من وراء حجاب أو يرسل رسولا فيوحي بإذنه ما يشاء إنه علي حكيم)؟

3. أخرج البخاري عن ابن عمر قال: وقف النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم على قليب بدر فقال: (هل وجدتم ما وعد ربكم حقا)، ثم قال: إنهم الآن يسمعون ما أقول. فذكرت لعائشة فقالت: إنما قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم إنهم ليعلمون الآن أن ما كنت أقول لهم حق ... وروي أن عائشة احتجت بقوله تعالى (وما أنت بمسمع من في القبور).

4. في مستدرک الحاكم عن الزهري عن عروة قال بلغ عائشة أن أبا هريرة يقول إن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: ... ولد الزنى شر الثلاثة وأن الميت يعذب ببكاء الحي، فقالت عائشة: رحم الله أبا هريرة أساء سمعا فأساء إجابة ... أما قوله ولد الزنى شر الثلاثة فلم يكن الحديث على هذا إنما كان رجل من المنافقين يؤذي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال من يعذرني من فلان قيل: يا رسول الله إنه مع ما به ولد زنى فقال: هو شر الثلاثة، والله تعالى يقول: (لا تزر وازرة وزر أخرى)، وأما قوله إن الميت يعذب ببكاء الحي فلم يكن الحديث على هذا ولكن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم مر بدار رجل من اليهود قد مات وأهله يكون عليه فقال: إنهم ليبكون عليه وإنه ليعذب، والله يقول: (لا يكلف الله نفسا إلا وسعها). وفي رواية: قالت عائشة: حسبكم القرآن (لا تزر وازرة وزر أخرى).

5. قال الحاكم في مستدرکه: سئلت عائشة عن متعة النساء فقالت: بيني وبينكم كتاب الله، وقرأت هذه الآية: (والذين هم لفروجهم حافظون إلا إلى أزواجهم أو ما ملكت أيمانهم فإنهم غير ملومين)، فمن ابتغى وراء ما زوجة الله أو ملكه فقد عدا.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Auda, *Fiqh Al-Maqasid* p106.

⁵ Abu Bakr al-Maliki Ibn al-Arabi, *Aridat Al-Ahwadhi* (Cairo: Dar al-Wahy al-Mohammadi, without date) vol.10, p.264.

Sunnah in Relation to the Quran

Sunnah (literally, tradition) is what is narrated at the authority of the companions about the Prophet's (pbuh) sayings, actions, or approvals. The Prophet's (pbuh) witnessing of certain actions without objection is considered an approval from him, by definition. The Sunnah, in relation to the Quran (refer to Chart 4.3), implies a meaning that is (1) identical to the Quran's, (2) an explanation or elaboration on a general meaning mentioned in the Quran, (3) a specification of certain conditions for rulings implied in the Quran, (4) an addition of certain constraints to the general expressions of the Quran, or finally, (5) an initiation of independent legislation. Schools of law approve the first three of the above five relations and differ over the last two, as follows.

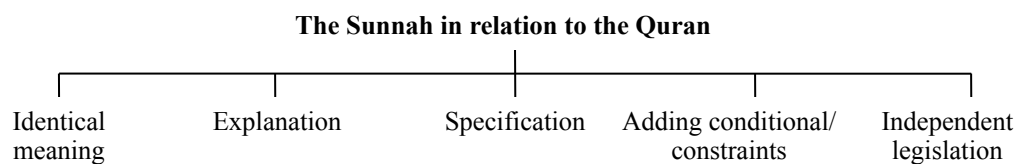


Chart 1. A classification of the possible relationships between the Sunnah and the Quranic verses.

If the Quranic expression is 'general' and the Sunnah expression is 'specific' regarding the same topic, Shafies, Hanfis, Zahiris, Zaidis and Jafaris consider the (single-chained) Sunnah to be 'specifying' the general expression of the Quran and, thus, restricting its general expression. Hanafis consider this 'specification' to be a sort of invalidation of the 'confirmed and absolute' general expression of the Quran and, therefore, reject the single-chained narration that place constraints on the Quran's general expressions.

Malik's opinion on this issue is to look for supportive evidence to the single-chained hadith that specifies the general meaning of the verse before rejecting it. His

additional supportive evidence should be some *amal* (tradition) of the people of Medina (an evidence which is invalid to all other schools), or a supporting analogy (*qiyās*). Otherwise, Malik applies weighed preference (*tarjīh*) and invalidates the single-chained narration.

If the hadith implies a ruling that has no relation with the Quran, all schools of law accept it as legislation on condition that it does not fall under actions that are specific to the Prophet (pbuh). Actions specific to the Prophet (pbuh) could be actions exclusive to him out of prophethood considerations or actions that he did out of custom (*ādah*) of a ‘man living in seventh century’s Arabia.’ Chart 4.4 shows this classification.

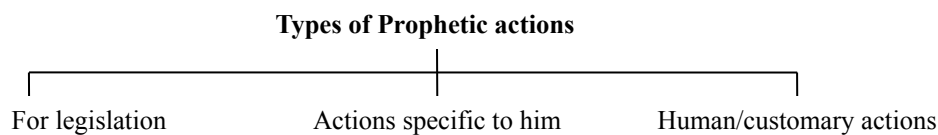


Chart 2. Types of Prophetic actions according to their implications on ‘legislation.’

Some Malikis and Hanbalis had added two other types to the Prophet’s (pbuh) actions that do not fall under generally abiding ‘legislation,’ namely, actions ‘out of being a leader’ and actions ‘out of being a judge.’ Al-Qarafi, for example, included all of the Prophetic actions during wars in his ‘leadership actions’, as well as governance-related decisions, as explained in Chapter One. He said that identifying the type of the Prophet’s (pbuh) action according to his classification has ‘implications for the law.’ For example, he considered the Prophet’s (pbuh) actions ‘out of being a judge’ to be valid legislations ‘only for judges’ when they assume their role in courts, rather than for every Muslim. Recently, following al-Qarafi’s example, al-Tahir Ibn Ashur (also from the Maliki school) added other types of actions for ‘specific intents,’ which are meant to imply general and ‘abiding’ legislation, such as, advice, conciliation,

discipline, and ‘teaching high ideals’ to specific people (Chapter Six explains in detail).

Ibadis include ‘acts of worship’ in actions ‘specific to the Prophet’ (pbuh). These are actions that he (pbuh) did not practice regularly. Other schools of law consider such actions ‘recommended.’ A few Mutazilis differentiated between the Prophet’s (pbuh) ‘acts of worship’ (*ibādāt*), which they considered the only type that is ‘abiding to all Muslims,’ versus all of his other actions, which they considered matters of ‘worldly judgements’ (*mu.āmalāt*). The question of how to differentiate *ibādāt* from *mu.āmalāt* remains an open question, even in the Mutazili theory.

The scope of the Prophet’s (pbuh) ‘independant judgements’ (*ijtihād*) is a topic of difference of opinion, and in my view, an open question. Literalists/Zahiris, and a few scholars from other schools of law, disagreed with the majority opinion that confirms the Prophet’s (pbuh) *ijtihād* is possible.⁶ Ibn Hazm based his disagreement on the ‘uncertainty’ of human reasoning, as opposed to the ‘certainty’ of the revelation which was available to the Prophet (pbuh) any time.⁷ Al-Ghazali’s counter-argument is that, ‘the Prophet’s description of the revelation entails that it did not occur based on his requests but rather as an occasional contact initiated by The Angel.’⁸

The other basis of disagreement with the principle of the Prophet’s (pbuh) *ijtihād* is the scope of *wahī* (revelation) mentioned in the Quran.⁹ Some exegetes interpreted the verses to mean that, ‘whatever speech the Prophet utters is a revelation.’¹⁰ This interpretation was rejected by the majority of schools, which defined a class of ‘worldly affairs’ and ‘specificities’ in the Prophet’s (pbuh) hadith, as explained above.

⁶ Mohammed ibn ‘ali al-Shawkani, *Irshad Al-Fuhooh Ila Tahqeeq Ilm Al-Usul*, ed. Mohammed Saeed al-Badri, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1992) vol.1, p. 426.

⁷ Ali Ibn Hazm, *Al-Ihkam Fi Usul Al-Ahkam*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1983) vol.5, p. 124.

⁸ al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa* vol.1, p. 346. The Authentic Collection of Bukhari, Hadith No. 2.

⁹ “He does not speak from some whim; it is merely inspiration that is revealed to him” (Quran al-Najm, 53:3-4), “SAY: It is not up to me to change it of my own accord” (Quran Surat Yunus, 10:15), and “If he had mouthed some false statements about Us, We would have seised him by the right hand” (Quran Surat al-Hāqqah, 69:44). (Irving’s translations).

¹⁰ Abdul-Khaliq, Hujjiat Al-Sunnah, p. 166, Dar Al-Wafa, Cairo, 1981; Conference of Islamic Jurisprudence held by Imam Mohammad Bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Al-Ijtihad fi Al-Shari.ah Al-Islamiyah wa Buhuth Ukhra – Ijtihad in the Islamic law and other subjects, p. 34, Department of Culture and Publications, Riyadh, 1984.

There is related debate among jurists, who agreed to the principle of prophetic *ijtihād* on whether or not this *ijtihād* was subject to error. Although the Quran mentioned that God did correct the Prophet (pbuh) on a number of occasions,¹¹ a number of jurists rejected the possibility of erring in the independent prophetic judgements based on the concept of infallibility (*iṣmah*).¹² Most schools, however, acknowledged the possibility of error in the prophetic deliberation on the condition that, ‘it would be immediately corrected by a revelation.’¹³ However, the following error of judgement in the hadith of the pollenating of palm trees is interpreted as an error, again, in the realm of ‘day to day affairs’ (*shu'ūn al-dunyā*) rather than in a matter ‘related to revelation.’¹⁴

Muslim’s narration states: Talha narrates: I was walking with the Prophet peace be upon him when he passed by some people at the tops of their palm trees. He asked: ‘What are they doing?’ They answered: ‘Pollenating the male into the female.’ He replied: ‘I do not think that this will be of benefit.’ When they were told about what the Prophet (pbuh) said, they stopped what they were doing. Later, when the trees shed down their fruits prematurely, the Prophet (pbuh) was told about that. He said: ‘If it is good for them they should do it. I was just speculating. So, pardon me. But if I tell you something about God, then take it because I would never lie about God.’ Another narrator added: ‘You know your worldly affairs better than me.’

Another hadith that adds to the dilemma of defining the sphere of ‘worldly affairs’ is the hadith of ‘*al-ghīlah*.’¹⁵ Muslim and Malik report that the Prophet (pbuh) said: ‘I had almost intended to forbid *ghīlah*. Then, I noticed that the Byzantines and Persians do that without it causing any harm to their children.’¹⁶ These hadiths, in my view, keep the question of ‘what is to be considered a worldly affair’ an open question.

¹¹ For example, Quran verses: Surat al-Anfal, 8:67, Surat al-Tawbah, 9:43, and Surat Abas, 80:1-3.

¹² al-Amidi, Ali. *Al-Ihkam Fi Usul Al-Ahkam*. Edited by Sayid al-Jumaili. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Alkitab Al-Arabi, 1404AH, vol.4, p. 99.

¹³ Hujjiat Al-Sunnah, p. 231; Al-Ijtihad fi Al-Shari'ah Al-Islamiyah wa Buhuth Ukhra – Ijtihad in the Islamic law and other subjects, p. 44.

¹⁴ Several narrations. Refer to Abdul-Jalil Issa, *Ijtihad Al-Rasul*, p. 132, Dar Al-Bayan, Kuwait, 1948.

¹⁵ *Ghīlah* is intercourse during the period of nursing a child. Arabs, before Islam, used to think that it was harmful for the nursing baby if his mother were to be pregnant.

¹⁶ Malik, *Al-Muwata'*, p 418, and Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* p 542.

Degrees of Fame (Shuhrah) of Hadith

Valid hadiths are classified into most famous, famous, and single-chained. Most famous narrations are as absolute as the Quran, according to all schools, since they are narrated after a large number of companions (there are various estimates of the number 'large'), who could not possibly and logically agree to lie. Hadith included in this category are related to Islam's most famous acts of worship (basic actions of prayers, pilgrimage, and fasting). However, it does not include hadith in the form of sayings. The absoluteness of these narrations, according to all schools, imply an obligation on every Muslim to believe in them, in addition to practice them. The most famous narrations are very few. Estimates range from a dozen to eighty narrations.

There comprises a category of 'famous narrations' narrated by a number of narrators not numerous enough to define it as 'logically impossible' for them to agree on lying. This category includes a small number of the hadith available in traditional sources (less than one hundred hadith according to all accounts), which makes its impact on the law limited, from a practical point of view.

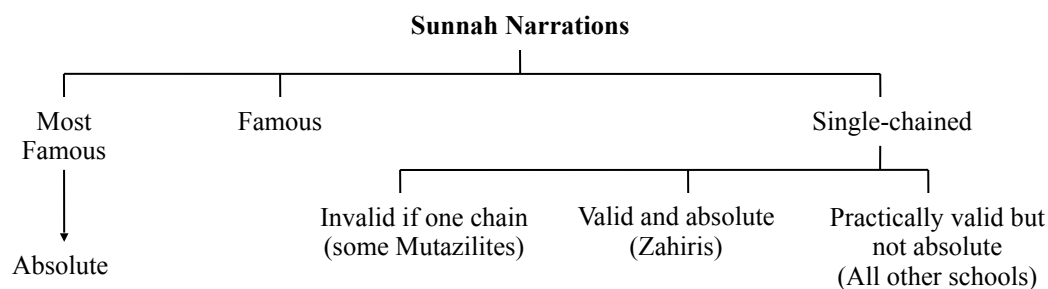


Chart 3. Types of Prophetic narrations in terms of their number of narrators.

The category of hadith which includes the vast majority of narrations is the *āḥād* (single-chained) category. All schools of Islamic law, except for some Mutazilis, relied on this type in their derivation of their *fiqh*. These are narrations conveyed via one or a few ‘chains of narrations,’ usually with slightly different wordings.

Verification procedures of hadith narrators and narrations are detailed extensively in the Sciences of Hadith.¹⁷ The narration has to be valid in terms of its chain of narrators (*al-sanad*) and its content (*al-matn*). Trusting a narration’s *sanad* entails a group of conditions for bearing (*ḥaml*) or learning the hadith and another group for conveying or narrating (*riwayat*) the hadith, which all schools agreed upon in principle. For being accepted as a bearer of a hadith, a narrator has to be mature and known to have a reliable memory (*al-dabt*). For narrating a hadith, a narrator has to be mature, Muslim, pious, has a reliable memory, and has a connected (*muttasil*) chain of narrators between him/her and the Prophet (pbuh). The exact specifications of each of these conditions are subject to many differences of opinion amongst scholars of hadith.

The verification procedures of the narrators and narrations are detailed extensively in the Sciences of Hadith.¹⁸ The narration has to be valid in terms of its chain of narrators (*al-sanad*) and its content (*al-matn*). For the content of a hadith to be acceptable, the main criteria is to be linguistically correct and not to be in ‘opposition’ with another hadith, ‘reason,’ or ‘analogy,’ in a way that cannot be reconciled.¹⁹ However, practically speaking, authenticity of hadith (*al-ṣiḥḥah*) was judged based on the chain of narrators (*al-sanad*). Differences of opinion in judging the *sanad* had implications on the law. Chart 4.6 summarises basic criteria for accepting *sanad* and *matn*.

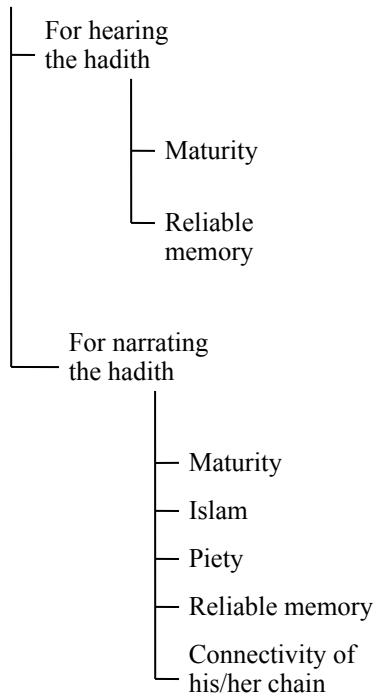
¹⁷ Abu Amr Ibn al-Salah, *Al-Muqaddimah Fi Ulum Al-Hadith* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1977).

¹⁸ Abu Amr Ibn al-Salah, *Al-Muqaddimah Fi Ulum Al-Hadith* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1977).

¹⁹ al-Khoshoui A. M. al-Khoshoui, *Ghayat Al-Idaah Fi Ulum Al-Istilah* (Cairo: al-Azhar University, 1992) p. 74.

Valid Single-chained hadith

Conditions for trusting narrators
(*thiqah*) of the chain (*al-sanad*)



Conditions for authenticating
the content (*ṣiḥḥat al-matn*)

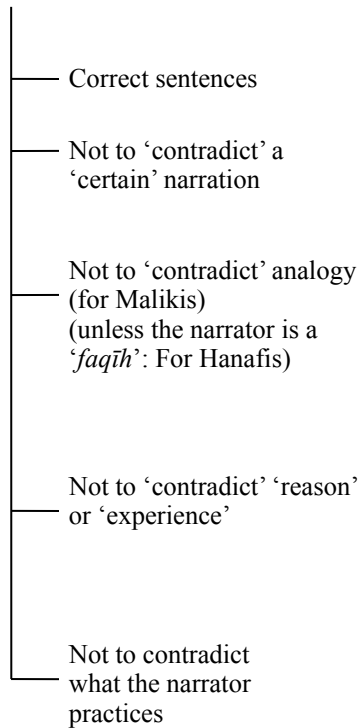


Chart 4.6. Conditions for validating single-chains narrations in traditional Sciences of Hadith.

Acceptable narrations by the Zahiris are ‘certain’ and ‘absolute,’ i.e., ‘valid for juridical derivation’ and ‘required for correct belief,’ even if they were single-chained. All other schools consider single-chained narrations to be juridically valid but not part of the Islamic creed. Some Mutazilis differentiate between sayings and actions (including approvals) narrated in hadith. They do not consider actions to be valid evidences of legislation (that are abiding to every Muslim), except in the area of acts of worship (*ibādāt*). On the other hand, they consider ‘sayings’ to be valid evidences of legislation in *ibādāt* as well as *mu‘āmalāt* (worldly transactions). The question of how to differentiate *ibādāt* from *mu‘āmalāt* is another open question. Most schools believed that *ibādāt* are the issues that ‘cannot be rationalised,’²⁰ which also keeps the question open.

²⁰ I had previously carried out a survey on related opinions in: Auda, *Fiqh Al-Maqasid* p 64-67.

Trusting a narration entails a group of conditions for bearing (*ḥaml*) or learning the hadith and another group for conveying or narrating the hadith, which all schools agreed upon, in principle. For being accepted as a bearer of a hadith, a narrator has to be mature (most estimates for his/her age is seven years old) and known to have a reliable memory (*al-ḍabt*). For narrating a hadith, a narrator has to be mature, Muslim, pious, has a reliable memory, and has a connected (*muttaṣil*) chain of narrators/teachers between him/her and the Prophet (pbuh). The exact specifications of each of these conditions are subject to many differences of opinion amongst scholars of hadith, even within each school. Moreover, there are clear divisions in terms of trusted narrators between the Sunni schools (Malikis, Shafies, Hanafis, Hanbalis, and Zahiris), and the Shia schools (Jafaris and Zaidis). Ibadis have their own group of trusted narrators as well. Sunni schools accepted all companions and their students, including the ‘Shia’ imams and the ‘Ibadi’ students of the companions (who were much later labelled as Shia and Ibadi after the establishment of these parties, as explained before). For Sunnis, however, later generations of Shia, Ibadis, and Mutazilis are not generally acceptable as trustworthy narrators of hadith because of their alleged ‘innovations’ (*bid‘ah*). On the other hand, Jafaris and Zaidis do not accept the companions’ narrations (except for the companions who were considered part of the Prophet’s (pbuh) household or *āl al-baīt*). This is largely due to the conflict between Ali on one side and Muawiyah and Aisha on the other, which became the civil war and Battle of the Camel (*Mawqī‘at al-Jamal*) in 37AH/ 657CE. Nevertheless, narrations from the Shia sources produced juridical rulings that are quite similar to other Sunni rulings (except for some minor differences in *fiqh*, which are as much as the differences between any other two Sunni schools). In my view, differences between Sunni and Shia schools were and remain to be in the area of *kalām* and politics, that is, political positions over the companions’ post-Othman civil war.²¹ Ibadis also ended up with a *fiqh* that is quite similar to the rest of the schools, despite the historic political differences between them and the rest of the schools.

The last condition for accepting a narrator, which is the ability to relate a connected chain of narrators/teachers up to the Prophet (pbuh), is a matter of significant

²¹ El-Awa, *Al-Alaqaḥ Bayn Al-Sunnah Wal Shia* pp 34-48.

differences amongst schools of Islamic law. A chain with missing narrators from the beginning, the middle, or the end of the chain has various levels of credibility and different terminologies in the Sciences of Hadith, and has contributed to many differences of opinion. For example, the *mursal* hadith (which is a narration related directly to the Prophet (pbuh) without mentioning intermediate narrators/companions) had a significant impact on differences in *fiqhi* opinions. Schools of law took different positions on *mursal* hadith (refer to Chart 4.7). Malikis and Hanafis accept it from the students of the companions only. Al-Shafie did not accept such hadith except when there was supporting evidence, such as other narrations of the same hadith (even if they were also *mursal* narrations). Jafaris and Zaidis accept it from the Imams on their authority. Ahmad Ibn Hanbal considers the *mursal* narration to be ‘weak,’ in terms of authenticity, and therefore, would not use it unless no other narration was available. However, he gives the *mursal* hadith priority over other secondary evidences (such as analogy).

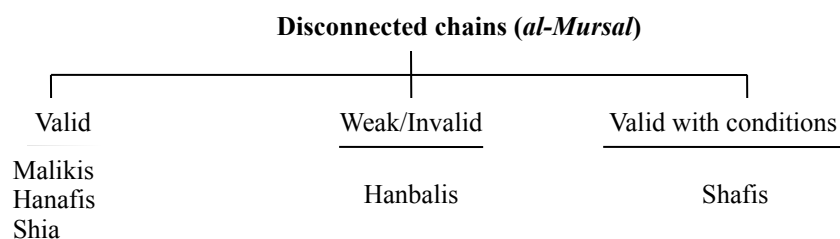


Chart 4. Positions of some schools of law regarding the *mursal* hadith.

The Authentication of the Hadith Content (Al-Matn)

Regarding the narrations themselves (of the degree *aḥād*), they have to be (1) conveyed in complete and sound sentences. Moreover, they (2) cannot contradict with other ‘certain’ narrations or analogy (according to Malikis, and unless the narrator is

considered a *'faqīh'*, according to Hanafis). Nor can they contradict the (3) narrator's practices or (4) 'reason'.²²

Despite the above theories, authenticity of hadith, in practice and especially in today's scholarship, was judged merely based on the chain of narrators (*al-sanad*) and not on the *matn*/content, which are problematic, in any case. This imbalance of the application of both criteria resulted in a large number of fatwas that contradict with the general principle and common sense of the Quran.

Moreover, the condition that 'reason' should not contradict with narrations is problematic, since al-Ghazali, amongst other jurists, included in their definition of reason, 'what is acceptable according to common sense and experience.'²³

Finally, the article will apply the same criteria that Aisha utilised to a number of hadiths that have contemporary significance.

²² Mohammad al-Basri, *Al-Muṣṭamad Fi Usul Al-Fiqh*, ed. Khalil al-Mees, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿilmiya, 1983) vol. 2, p. 153.

²³ al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa* vol. 1, p. 142.