

NEGOTIATING MEANINGS

Engagement with Problematic
or Contradictory Ḥadīths in
Medieval and Modern Times

Foreword by

His Royal Highness Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra
Ibni Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Jamalullail

Editors

Khairil Husaini Bin Jamil
Muhammad Adli Bin Musa
Muhammad Fawwaz Muhammad Yusoff



21/12/2023



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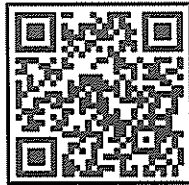
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Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭaḥāwī and the Methodology of Dealing with Contradictory (*Mukhtalif*) and Problematic (*Mushkil*) Ḥadīths

Mohamed Abullais al-Khayrabadi
International Islamic University Malaysia

Introduction

It is undisputed that the Prophetic tradition (*al-Sunnah*), as the secondary source of Islamic law after the Book of Allah, received tremendous care by scholars of Islam. They had diligently preserved, canonised, narrated, and studied it, as well as drawing up maxims to understand the Prophetic tradition in terms of distinguishing between the sound and the weak, the abrogating and the abrogated (*nāsikhihā min mansūkhihā*), the reliable and the unreliable (*rājiḥihā min marjūḥihā*), the clear and the ambiguous (*muḥkamihā min mutashābihā*), the coherent (*muttafiqihā*) and the contradictory (*mukhtalifihā*) and problematic prophetic tradition (*mushkilihā*). Among the most important works in preserving the Prophetic tradition, are studies carried out by the scholars of this *Ummah* on ḥadīths which are problematic due to its inexplicit meaning, apparent opposition against other ḥadīth, the Qur’an, reason, language, or other than the forementioned. It was undertaken to defend Islam and the secondary fundamental source which had been the target of assault by the enemies of Islam from among the disbelievers, atheists, and impudent individuals

(*sufahā'*) where they had found interest in posing scepticism and shaking the faith of the Muslims towards it.

Therefore, our scholars previously felt that this matter had emerged one time, and it happens that there are among the nation people who had malicious deviant intent towards it, thus, had gone astray and had led others astray. Hence, they wrote books to clarify problems from the *ḥadīths* which appear to them as such. They clarified the truth and argued that anything that is soundly derived from the Prophet ﷺ would not conflict with one another. They explained the right meanings which were initially inexplicit. Amongst those erudite scholars was Imām Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī, (died in 321H), may Allah bless him, who had carried out a holistic analytical thematic study on such *ḥadīths* in two of his books namely '*Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār*' and '*Bayān Mushkil al-Āthār*'. His prominence and efforts are the primary focus in this short chapter. We would firstly like to touch upon the biography of Imam Abū Ja'far. Later, we come to explication of the role played by al-Ṭaḥāwī in the study of contradictory and problematic *ḥadīths*.

A Brief Biography of Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī

He is Aḥmad ibn Salāmah, Abū Ja'far, who came from the Azdī Hajarī tribe, lived in Giza and was born in Taha village in Egypt.¹ He was born, according to the most reliable opinion, on 239H² in a noble, honourable, and intellectually and religiously fulfilled Arab family.³

Al-Ṭaḥāwī began his primary education with his father at their

¹ Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006), 1:424, biography no. 666.

² Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Abū Sulaymān Ibn Zabr al-Rab'ī, *Tārīkh Mawlid al-'ulamā' Wa Wafayātihim*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad al-Ḥamd (Riyadh: Dār al-'Āshimāh, 1989), 2:527.

³ 'Abd al-Majīd Maḥmūd, *Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī Wa Athruhu Fī al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Self-published, 1975), 55.

home. Soon after, he attended various classes in Fustat Mosque, one class after another, to supplement for technical sciences (*al-'ulūm al-āliyah*). He attended classes on the Islamic creed (*tawḥīd*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and its fundamental theories (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). He aspired to delve deeper hence had begun reading more and more, attending meetings of scholars specialising in Islamic jurisprudence and *ḥadīth* by the likes of his maternal uncle al-Muzanī al-Shāfi'ī, al-Rabī' al-Murādī, al-Qāḍī Bakkār ibn Qutaybah, al-Qāḍī Aḥmad ibn Abī 'Imrān whom had left the biggest impact in shaping al-Ṭaḥāwī's personality. Similarly, he audited *ḥadīths* from many scholars inside and outside of Egypt. Before he had reached thirty years of age, he had gained fame in knowledge, Islamic jurisprudence and *ḥadīth*. He received students of knowledge such as Abū Ja'far al-Nahḥās, Abū Bakr al-Dāmighānī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī the author of the famous three *Mu'jams*. Many scholars and *ḥadīth* experts had been trained by him. It is not the purpose of this short chapter to mention all his teachers and students.⁴

Al-Ṭaḥāwī was popular as a jurist and *ḥadīth* expert. Alongside his mastery of jurisprudence and *ḥadīth*, he had also excelled in other fields of knowledge such as the Islamic creed, Qur'anic exegesis, historiography, genealogical study as well as other sciences. He had works written on these sciences as witnessed by the scholars of *ḥadīth* and history. al-Maqrīzī stated:

“He initially adopted Shāfi'ī's method of jurisprudence, may Allah bless him. Eventually, he changed to the Abū Ḥanīfah School of jurisprudence, may Allah bless him. It was said that the reason for his transfer was that Abū Ibrāhīm Ismā'il al-Muzanī, the disciple of al-Shafi'ī who happened to be his maternal uncle, said to him one day during a lesson “By Allah, you are worth nothing!” He was angered by such a remark and

⁴ For a detailed study, please refer to my doctoral thesis. See: Mohammed Abullais al-Khayr'ābādī, 'Bayān Mushkil al-Āthār Li al-Ṭaḥāwī, al-Juz' al-Thāmin: Dirāsah Wa Ṭaḥqīq' (Umm al-Qura University, 1992), 35-49.

left. He transferred to Ibn Abi 'Imrān and became one of the distinguished leading jurists of the Ḥanafī school.”⁵

This brief presentation does not intend to discuss everything in detail. We would only focus here on the issue of contradictory and problematic *ḥadīths*, and the role of al-Ṭaḥāwī in both areas.

The Works of al-Ṭaḥāwī pertaining to the Subject

Here, we shall explicate the role played by al-Ṭaḥāwī in alleviating contradiction and problem from seemingly contradictory and problematic *ḥadīths* in the light of the following works.

1. *Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār* by al-Ṭaḥāwī

This work should be regarded as a work written in the field of contradictory *ḥadīth*. However, this was not highlighted by scholars before me despite the work being part and parcel of the field because it expounded on the contrary and conflicting juristic *ḥadīths* which had become a ground of slandering by atheists and impudent individuals among Muslims as being made clear by the author himself in his introduction. Every sect bases their argument upon these conflicting *ḥadīths* which they conformed to. Therefore, this work prevails to provide an answer against such defamation by the atheists and other slanderers towards *ḥadīth*. Similarly, it reflects a serious attempt by its author to minimize the gap of conflict among scholars.

There is another indirect reason for writing this book, which is to refute those who allegedly claimed that the Ḥanafīs give priority to reason and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) over *ḥadīth* because their works on *ḥadīth* were too few. While mentioning his objective of writing a commentary on the book, al-'Aynī said in the introduction of *Nukhab al-Afkār fī Tanqīḥ Mabānī al-Akḥbār fī*

⁵ al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*, 1:424, biography no. 666.

Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār:

“To clarify that the Ḥanafis are those who adhere to *ḥadīth* and reports, their school of thought is upon the Prophetic *ḥadīth* in everything related to it. How could it be otherwise? They have given priority for single-chained report (*khabr al-wāḥid*) over analogical reasoning and constructed the rulings upon sound foundation. Despite that, the opponents accused them of adhering to rational thought (*al-ra'y*) and abandoning narration (*manqūl*) which adversely reflect on themselves that they have no rational thinking on their own, neither on the report nor the rational thought. Those who have no opinion fail to understand the meanings of the report and render their inability to act in accordance with the substance of the reports. Be aware of their saying with regards to those who deserve to be said “of no opinion on his own” as it happened to mean: the person cannot comprehend what he says and is absent minded.”⁶

Al-Ṭaḥāwī had employed the following methodology in his book:

He arranged the book according to the topics and themes of jurisprudence where he termed them as ‘Books’ (*kutub*); the ‘books’ were then categorised into respective chapters. After that, he began by stating *ḥadīths* which he accepts despite seemingly conflicting with rational thought. Then, he proceeds by stating opposing *ḥadīths* that he viewed as indispensable for adherence and made informed preference amongst them. If the opponent had different evidence, he addressed and refuted them.

Sometimes it was necessary for him to state *ḥadīths* which are

⁶ See the introduction of al-'Ayni in: Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī, *Nukhab al-Aḥkār Fī Tanqīḥ Mabānī al-Akhbār Fī Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār* (Qatar: Ministry of Awaqāf and Islamic Affairs, 2008). The author named his introduction *Maghānī al-Akhyār Fī Rijāl Ma'ānī al-Āthār*. A picture of the manuscript is currently under my possession.

related to other issues, then argue for rational opinion which he deemed reliable by analysis (*al-naẓr*). He at times mentioned those who held this opinion from amongst the companions and the successors. Moreover, he almost did not leave out a chapter until he ensured that the opinion which he deemed reliable was of Abū Ḥanīfah, Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad al-Shaybānī, although they unanimously agreed on such opinion. He would mention those who conformed to such opinion amongst them if they disagreed on the issue. He rarely mentioned a single name of non-Ḥanafī scholars.

Occasionally, his study necessitates the discussion of narrators' reports. This is to impose its authority upon his opponent whilst taking precaution concerning its authenticity.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī creatively reasoned to reconcile between the contrary and contradictory *ḥadīth* by studying the meaning which would alleviate such conflict. If he could not find a way to reconcile the *ḥadīths*, he would elaborate if any abrogation was found, and his book can be considered an outstanding reference for the study of abrogation (*naskh*) in the Prophetic tradition.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī employed analogical reasoning as a fundamental factor in assessing the reliability of an opinion. It occurred when the chains of the opposing *ḥadīth* were equally balanced which poses a difficulty to weigh them, or when the dispute is due to a single *ḥadīth* which is subject to multiple interpretations where a group of scholars would champion one of the interpretations. In that regard, the *ḥadīth* alone does not qualify to support one of the two groups. Hence, al-Ṭaḥāwī embarked on discussing the general objectives of the Shari'ah, similar agreed upon rulings, focussing upon them, and assessing their reliability.

Here is a clear single example that mirrors his methodology:⁷

‘Chapter on lifting both hands in the opening of prayer, to what extent they should be raised’.

1157. On the authority of al-Rabī‘ ibn Sulaymān al-Jizī, he reported that: Asad ibn Mūsā reported that: Ibn Abī Dhi‘b reported from Sa‘īd ibn Sam‘ān, the servant of al-Zuraqīyyīn, both mentioned: Abū Hurayrah once came to us and said: “When the messenger of Allah stood to perform his prayer, he used to lift both of his hands extensively.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī commented:

“A group was on the opinion that a person lifts both of his hands during the opening of prayer extensively without stating the duration of such matter and argued based on this *ḥadīth*. Other scholars differed from them and said: Instead, he must lift both of his hands parallel to his shoulders and they argued for that.”

Then, al-Ṭaḥāwī mentioned their evidence by bringing forth several supporting traditions (*shawāhid*) from the reports of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib via a single chain, Ibn ‘Umar via multiple chains, and the reports of Jābir and Abū al-Sā‘idī. He wrote:

1158. al-Rabī‘ ibn Sulaymān al-Muadhhdhin reported that: ‘Abd Allah ibn Wahb reported saying: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Zinād reported to us from Mūsā ibn ‘Uqbah, from ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Faḍl, from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-A‘raj, from ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Abī Rāfi‘, from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ—that when he stood to perform the obligatory prayer, he made *takbīr* and lifted both of his hands parallel to both of his shoulders.

1159. Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā reported to us, saying that:

⁷ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Salāmah Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Ma‘ānī al-Āthār* (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1994), 1:195-196.

Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah reported to us from al-Zuhri, from Sālim, from his father (**Ibn 'Umar**), mentioning: "I once saw the Prophet ﷺ that whenever he commenced his Prayer, he lifted both of his hands up in parallel to both of his shoulders.

1160. It is also reported to us by Yūnus, he said: Ibn Wahb narrated that Mālik had reported to him from Ibn Shihāb (the letter *ḥā'* is mentioned here to indicate a beginning of a new *sanad* before the completion of the present).

1161. Ibn Marzūq reported saying, Bishr ibn 'Umar narrated to us, from Mālik, from Ibn Shihāb, and he mentioned the similar with the previous one (1159).

1162. It is reported to us by Fahd ibn Sulaymān saying: 'Alī ibn Ma'bad narrated to us that: 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Amru, from Zayd ibn Abī Unaysah, from **Jābir**, he said: I saw Sālim ibn 'Abd Allah when he was commencing his Prayer, he lifted both of his hands parallel to both of his shoulders. I asked about it. He replied: "I saw Ibn 'Umar (*as*) performed it". Ibn 'Umar (*as*) said: "I saw the messenger of Allah ﷺ performed it."

1163. It is reported to us by Abū Bakrah saying: Abū 'Āṣim narrated to us that: 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Ja'far narrated to us that, Muḥammad ibn 'Amru ibn 'Aṭā' narrated to us that: I heard **Abū Ḥumayd al-Sā'idī**, while he was sitting with ten companions of the Prophet ﷺ, one of them was Abū Qatādah, mentioning: "I am the most learned amongst you with regards to the Prayer of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ." They asked: "Why? By Allah, you did not follow as much as what we had, and you were not the most senior companion amongst us." He replied: "Indeed". They said: "Spill it out." He replied: "Whenever the Messenger of Allah was commencing his Prayer, he used to lift both of his hands up until they are parallel to both of his shoulders." They all replied: "You are right, such was how he used to pray."

Al-Ṭaḥāwī said: "Another group was on this opinion. They mentioned lifting the hands during *takbīr* while opening the prayer to the extent of both shoulders but not transgressing them. They argued based on these reports."

Next, al-Ṭaḥāwī proceeded to reconcile between the reports by saying:

"The *ḥadīth* of Abū Hurayrah (*as*) to us is not in conflict with this because it mentioned therein that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ when he stood to perform the Prayer, he used to lift both of his hands extensively. Nowhere in it is mentioned the highest extent, i.e., the position. It is probable that it reached up parallel to both of his shoulders. It is also probable that the hand-lift was done before the Prayer for invocation, then he made *takbīr* for prayer afterwards and lifted both of his hands parallel to both of his shoulders. Therefore, the *ḥadīth* of Abū Hurayrah (*as*) can be understood as lifting the hands to make invocation while standing for prayer, while the *ḥadīth* of Ibn 'Umar (*as*) can be understood as lifting after it during the opening of prayer so that these reports do not cancel out each other."

Then, al-Ṭaḥāwī mentioned another opinion on this matter and commented: "Others differed on that matter, saying: the hands are to be lifted during the opening of prayer until they are parallel to the ears. They based their arguments on:

1165. Abū Bakrah had reported to us that: Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'il narrated to us stating: Sufyān narrated to us, stating: Yazid ibn Abī Ziyād narrated to us, from Ibn Abī Laylā, from al-Barā' ibn 'Āzib, mentioning: "The prophet ﷺ, whenever he made *takbīr* to begin his prayer, he used to lift both of his hands up to the level that both of his thumbs were close to both of his earlobes."

1166. Abū Bakrah reportef: Mu'ammal narrated to us stating:

Sufyān narrated to us from ‘Āṣim ibn Kulayb from his father, from Wā’il ibn Ḥujr, saying: “I saw the prophet ﷺ, when he made *takbīr* for prayer, he lifted both of his hands near both of his ears.”

1167. It is reported to us by Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, he said: Yūsuf ibn ‘Adī narrated to us stating: Abū al-Aḥwaṣ narrated to us from ‘Āṣim ibn Kulayb; he mentioned the same *ḥadīth*, with the same chain as the previous one.

1168. Muḥammad ibn ‘Amr ibn Yūnus al-Sūsī al-Kūfī, reported: ‘Abd Allah ibn Numayr narrated to us from Sa‘īd ibn Abī ‘Arūbah, from Qatādah, from Naṣr ibn ‘Āṣim, from Mālik ibn al-Ḥuwayrith, that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ performed the same except that the narrator said: “until both of the hands are above the ears.”

1169. Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Makhlad al-Aṣbahānī reported: Hishām ibn ‘Ammār narrated to us stating: Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Ayyāsh narrated to us stating: ‘Utbaḥ ibn Abī Ḥakīm narrated to us stating, from ‘Isā ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Adawī, from al-‘Abbās ibn Sahl, from Abū Humayd al-Sā‘idī, that he once said to the companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “I am the most learned person with regards to the prayer of the messenger of Allah ﷺ: whenever he stood for prayer, he made *takbīr* and lifted both of his hands parallel to his face.

Al-Taḥawī commented:

“When these reports which came from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ differed from each other, and the lifting of the hand to a certain level was mentioned, the *ḥadīth* of Abū Hurayrah we had forementioned in the beginning appeared contradictory to these reports. We should analyse which of the meanings then is the most likely to be affirmed?”

Al-Taḥawī continued:

1170. And we found that Fahd ibn Sulaymān had reported to us, stating: Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd Ibn al-Aṣbahānī narrated to us mentioning: Sharīk reported to us, from ‘Āṣim ibn Kulayb, from his father, from Wā’il ibn Ḥujr, saying: I came to the Prophet ﷺ and I saw him lifting both of his hands parallel to both of his ears when he made *takbīr*, when he rose, when prostrated, etc. He said: Then, I came to him the next year, they were adorned with garments and burnouses. They had lifted their hands in them.” Sharīk indicated that it was to the level of the chest.

Then, he concluded:

Wā’il ibn Ḥujr reported in this narration of him, that they lifted their hands up to their shoulders because their hands during that time were inside their clothes. He argued that they will lift their hands paralleled to their ears when their hands were not in their clothes. We practiced all his narrations. We opine that hands should be lifted as highest as possible, that is to the shoulder, when they are prevented from a higher level by the clothes that were worn to avoid chilliness. When both hands are bare, they should be lifted to both ears like what has been done by the Prophet ﷺ. It is unacceptable to regard the *ḥadīth* of Ibn ‘Umar (*as*) and other similar *ḥadīths*, wherein the lifting of the hands up to the shoulders were mentioned, as referring to the state in which the hands are bare. Otherwise, it will yield unresolvable conflict between the narration of Ibn ‘Umar and the narration of Wā’il ibn Ḥujr.

However, we ought to reconcile both *ḥadīths*. Hence, we take the *ḥadīth* of Ibn ‘Umar (*as*) to mean that it was reported from the messenger of Allah whilst both of his hands were in his clothes, in line with a version of Wā’il’s narration. We take the *ḥadīth* of Wā’il, to refer to the action of the prophet ﷺ outside the time of chilliness i.e., lifting his hands up to his ears. This should be the preferred opinion and otherwise should be left.

As to what we had narrated from 'Alī (*as*) from the Prophet ﷺ on such matter, the narration was a flawed one. We will expound that in the chapter on lifting both hands during bowing (*rukū'*), Allah willing. Conclusively, after the authentication of the aforementioned reports, we can affirm all the narrations of Wā'il from the Prophet ﷺ regarding his action during the time of chilliness and outside it. And this was the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfah, Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad, may Allah bless them."

Such was the methodology of al-Ṭahāwī in his *Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār*. The method of reconciliation has given him a tool to resolve the apparent conflict between *ḥadīths* of the Prophet ﷺ.

Finally, the book is not limited to this special feature. Other important features of the book include:

1. The author dedicated the book for resolving various conflicting and contradictory *ḥadīths* on jurisprudence which had been one of the reasons of dispute by scholars in legal rulings.
2. He stated *ḥadīths* with their complete chains of narration from the beginning until the end.
3. The author covered most of the juristic *ḥadīth* which were contrary and contradictory.
4. The author provided the opinions of critics regarding the narrators mentioned in the chains of narration when there is a need.
5. The author applied analogical reasoning in every chapter for the opinion which he deemed reliable. Such is to ensure that the ruling which he had deemed reliable would be accepted by all who held other views.

2. *Bayān Mushkil al-Āthār* by al-Ṭaḥāwī

This book is the second work by al-Ṭaḥāwī in the subject of contradictory and problematic *ḥadīth*. If the nature of the former work (*Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār*) was on discussions of juristic and practical rulings alone, the latter work is crucial to cover *ḥadīths* which were problematic where their meaning is inexplicit, regardless of the cause of such problem, or the subject whether Islamic jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*, creed, exegesis, recitation (*qirā'ah*), virtues (*faḍā'il*), battles (*al-maghāzī*), expedition (*al-siyar*) and others. The author attempted to alleviate problems from the *ḥadīths* using every possible way. This book is considered an important encyclopaedia for contrary and problematic *ḥadīths*, and a great guide with regards to solving their problems and interpreting them.

a. *The Style of Presentation*

In presenting the issues of the book, al-Ṭaḥāwī employed the following methodology:

The author normally decided a title for the issue that indicates a form of problem by saying "Chapter on explaining the problem of what had been narrated from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ regarding such and such." Sometimes, he would say "Chapter on explaining the problem of what had been disputed by the people of knowledge regarding a form of trades carried by the people," or "Chapter on explaining the problem of the narration of Ibn 'Abbās," etc.⁸

Usually, he would begin a chapter by stating the *ḥadīth* where such problems were found. If the *ḥadīth* has numerous chains or is corroborated by other narrations (*shawāhid*), he would mention them while giving attention to the defects of the *ḥadīth* such as

⁸ See: al-Khayr'ābādī, 'Bayān Mushkil al-Āthār Li al-Ṭaḥāwī, al-Juz' al-Thāmin: Dirāsah Wa Taḥqīq', 446.

disconnection (*al-inqitā'*) in the chain, successor-Prophet link omission (*irsal*), or oddness (*shudhūdh*) in the texts. Similarly, he would not forget to evaluate certain narrators of *ḥadīth* if necessary, accrediting them as trustworthy (*tawthīq*) or discrediting them as not trustworthy (*taḍ'īf*). He sometimes commented on some of the odd wordings of the *ḥadīths* or offered the proper spelling, followed by mentioning the *ḥadīth* contradicting the former and addressing their authenticity and texts.

After completing all the above, he would proceed to deduce the issue of concern in the said chapter. Then, he mentioned the cause of the problem either due to contradiction between two *ḥadīths* in their apparent meanings, or the conflict between the apparent meaning of the *ḥadīth* and the Qur'an, the consensus (*al-ijmā'*), the analogical reasoning, the impression of logic, the historical fact, or its opposition against the practice of the Prophet ﷺ, the practice of the Companions, or its theoretical and practical impossibility, the various modes of Quranic recitation, the uncertainty regarding the exact wording of the *ḥadīth* (*iḍṭirāb*) or the oddness of its meaning, the deep connotation of the meaning, or the vagueness of one of the words of the *ḥadīth* which would imply two different meanings or more, etc.

After that, he alleviated these problems whether by reconciling between the two opposing *ḥadīths*, or by explaining the abrogation in both of them, or deeming one of them being more reliable than the other, or by providing a commentary which is in accordance with the Qur'an, the consensus, the analogical reasoning, the impression of logic, the historical fact, the mode of Quranic recitation, the language, the practice of the Prophet or the companions, or by weakening the narration that contributes to such a problem, or other suitable method.

He would seek help in his treatment from various Quranic verses, *ḥadīths*, reports and sayings of the scholars of language,

genealogy, and recitation. He did not leave out the issue until he felt assured that he had fulfilled its right from every perspective. We observe that he would not discard an issue except that he had already responded to the opposition raised towards the subject-matter. Additionally, he would also provide several opinions of the jurists and general lessons that can be learned from the *ḥadīth*, together with the mention of scholarly dispute pertaining to the subject.

b. An Example of al-Ṭaḥāwī's Treatment of a Problem

Let us now study an example that will better illustrate the methodology of al-Ṭaḥāwī in this book. He wrote in *Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār*:⁹

“Chapter on explaining the problem of the narration from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ regarding his order to the Jews when they brought to him a man and a woman who had committed adultery, accounting them to bring forth what had been said by the Torah with regards to stoning where it resulted in stoning both of them soon after.”

5862. Yūnus reported to us that ‘Abd Allah ibn Wahb narrated to us, that Mālik ibn Anas reported to him from Nāfi’,

5863. and al-Muzanī also reported to us that al-Shāfi’ī reported to us from Mālik, from Nāfi’, in both chains: from ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar, he said: “Verily the Jews came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and mentioned that a man and a woman amongst them committed adultery. The messenger of Allah said to them: What did you find in the Torah with regards to stoning?” They replied: “We make their wrong action be known and flog them.” ‘Abd Allah ibn Salām (a former Jew)

⁹ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Salāmah Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1994), 15:93-95.

said to them: "You lied, verily stoning was mentioned in it." They brought the Torah and spread it out. One of them put his finger on the verse of stoning and read the preceding and the following verses. 'Abd Allah ibn Salām said: "Lift your finger." The man lifted his finger. It turned out to be the verse of stoning. They said: "It is true, O' Muḥammad, the verse of stoning is mentioned in it." Thus, the Messenger of Allah ordered both to be stoned. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar said: I saw the man leaning over the woman to protect her from the stones."

5864. Yunus reported to us saying: 'Alī ibn Ma'bad reported to us, from 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Umar, from 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Mālik, from Nāfi', from Ibn 'Umar that "the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stoned both the Jewish man and woman when the Jews seek for his ruling."

After stating this *ḥadīth*, al-Ṭaḥāwī alluded to a problem that could be raised from the *ḥadīth*. He presented the problem in the words of an unknown enquirer who questioned the act of the Prophet in referring to the Torah which had been distorted by the Jews. al-Ṭaḥāwī said:

A person would say: How can you accept this to be derived from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ? He referred to the Torah which Allah ﷻ had told him that the people of Torah had transmitted it but included within it what was not originally from it. Allah says in the Qur'an:

﴿فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِءَ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ ۗ﴾ [البقرة: 79]

Translation: *Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands and then say, "This is from Allah," to purchase with it a little price! Woe to them for what their hands have written*

and woe to them for that they earn thereby. [al-Baqarah 2: 79].

Al-Ṭaĥāwī continues to provide his response:

“Our answer to him with regards to that matter: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ in fact had done so from what had been informed by Allah exclusively to him that stoning in the Torah was among the matters which were kept hidden by the Jews and they did not make clear of that. Therefore, when he commanded them to bring forth the Torah for that matter, it is to pose an argument against them and necessitate them to follow the ordainment by the Torah towards fornicators, because there was in Islam a ruling that is similar to the case which occurred among those who demanded ruling from him.

This is proven by what had been narrated to us by Aḥmad ibn Shu'ayb who said: Muḥammad ibn 'Aqīl had narrated to us, he said: 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn i.e. Ibn Wāqid had narrated to us, and via another *sanad* by Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yūnus, he said: Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥamzah had narrated to us, he said: 'Alī ibn al-Husayn had narrated to us, in both *sanad*: my father had reported to me, he said: Yazīd al-Naḥwī had reported to me, he said: 'Ikrimah had reported to me from Ibn 'Abbās that he said: “Those who defy stoning had obliviously defied the Qur'an. Such is the word of Allah, Mighty and Exalted He is:

﴿يَأْتِيَهُمْ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ
 مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ ١٥﴾
 [المائدة: 15]

Translation: O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians)! Now has come to you Our Messenger explaining to you much of that which you used to hide from the Scripture. [al-Mā'idah 5: 15]. Among the matters which they had kept hidden was stoning.”

The wording was by Aḥmad ibn Shu‘ayb. Therefore, we can conclude that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ referred to the Torah because he found that it contained stoning like what had been revealed by Allah ﷻ to him without being altered or changed. Therefore, the reason is clear, all praise due to Allah and His blessing, due to which the Messenger of Allah had ordered the Jews to bring forth the Torah to him. The real state is contrary to what was believed by this person who questioned this *ḥadīth*.”

c. Other Unique Features of the Book

The book has some unique important features which are rarely found in other books. They are as follows:

1. Presenting *ḥadīths* and reports with their chain of narration, to the extent that the author even provides the chain of narrations for the opinions of the jurists, the sayings of leading scholars of language and the teachings of the scholars of Quranic recitation. This elevates the merit of the book in the eyes of the scholars of *ḥadīth* and jurists. The path to determining the degrees of the *ḥadīths*, reports and quotes has been laid down in front of them and they can easily study the respective chains and the conditions of the narrators.
2. Cross-referencing the abridged *ḥadīths* (*mu‘allaq*) and reports to their respective positions in the book.
3. Collecting most of the paths of the *ḥadīth* and its corroborating traditions with their chains of narrations from the beginning until the end.
4. The book is exhaustive of most problematic *ḥadīths* regardless of the type of the problem.

5. The wide coverage of the subjects of a chapter from every relevant angle.
6. The great number of topics and types of problematic issues.
7. The evaluation of some of the narrations to authenticate, determine the defect and explain the conditions of its narrators.
8. Being moderate in the length of commentary according to what is considered adequate for the solution of an issue or a problem.
9. The author frequently concludes the chapter by saying: "Reconciliation is by Allah's will", "Allah the sole Reconciler", "Allah knows best" or "It is clear, all praise to Allah, that no contradiction" which indicate his belief that every conclusion he has arrived to with regards to solving the problem is a form of reconciliation by Allah the Most Sublime and Exalted.

d. The Position of the Book Compared to Other Books in the Same Field

Based on what has been discussed earlier, this book stands in a high glorious position among other books written in this field. Such can be viewed from three aspects:

1. The coverage aspect: The book is the most voluminous book in its field as it ranges over the largest possible number of contradictory and problematic *ḥadīths*, and in most subjects of jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*, creed, exegesis, and others.
2. The scientific aspect: The aspect is reflected in many angles. One of them is stating the *ḥadīths*, the reports of the companions and the successors with their chains of

narration from the very beginning until the end which provides an opportunity to those who are trained in the field of *ḥadīth* to know their degrees. Other than that, the author provides a discussion on *ḥadīth* defects and its narrators. Moreover, he supports his opinion with Quranic verses, *ḥadīths*, reports, poems excerpts, and sayings of the leading scholars of language.

3. The ethical aspect: Despite his erudition and the book containing a lot of benefits, and his ability to explain the subject, we can observe that he is very humble in presenting his criticism towards the narrators and the scholars. Similarly, he ends the book chapters by saying: 'And Allah is the sole reconciler' and other sayings which portrays his faith, courtesy, and humility. Such is rarely found in other books in this field.

Furthermore, the book *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth* by al-Shāfi'ī was not intended to cover all contradictory *ḥadīths*. In fact, he intended to put several conflicting or contradicting reports in jurisprudence to relieve of its conflict. He wished to provide guidance for those who encounter any forms of contradiction in *ḥadīths*. The juristic aspect dominates the book.

Similarly, Ibn Qutaybah did not cover contradictory and problematic *ḥadīths* as much as al-Ṭaḥāwī did. Ibn Qutaybah also did not provide the chains of narration for all *ḥadīths* in his work.

For this reason, the book *Bayān Mushkil al-Āthār* should be regarded as the most important source for the study of contradictory and problematic *ḥadīths*. The book also outlined the methodology that should be adopted by those who intend to reconcile between conflicting *ḥadīths* or those who intend to alleviate problems raised towards *ḥadīths*. The book also consists of an explanation of ways that would help to refute those who are against the blessed Prophetic tradition, claiming that it contains

conflict, contradiction, and impossible meaning.

As for Ibn Fūrak's book, since the book emphasizes refuting the atheists who used the *ḥadīths* of Allah's attributes which is confusedly tantamount to anthropomorphism to demean the religion and denigrate the scholars of *ḥadīth*, the author focused only on such *ḥadīths*. He refuted the opponent based on the *kalām* method of the Ash'arite School. His book, although it shares the same name with that of al-Ṭaḥāwī, was a bit distant from the core subject of problematic and contradictory *ḥadīths*. For this reason, we did not find al-Ṭaḥāwī addressing that kind of *ḥadīths* except in brief whenever necessary.¹⁰ Perhaps al-Ṭaḥāwī had intended to address the subject of anthropomorphism in a separate work but did not manage to pursue it. This was also the opinion of 'Abd al-Majīd Maḥmūd.¹¹

3. Typification of Problems Observed from the Issues Presented in the Book

With regards to the types of problem and its causes as observed from the issues and discussion in the book, I am happy to list them as the following:

1. Opposition between *ḥadīths*.
2. Contradiction between one *ḥadīth* and another.
3. The apparent meaning of the *ḥadīth* conflicts with the Qur'an.
4. The apparent meaning of the *ḥadīth* conflicts with scholarly consensus.
5. The apparent meaning of the *ḥadīth* conflicts with

¹⁰ For instance, see: al-Ṭaḥāwī, 1:373-374; Maḥmūd, *Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī Wa Athruhu Fī al-Ḥadīth*, 314-15.

¹¹ Maḥmūd, *Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī Wa Athruhu Fī al-Ḥadīth*, 307-9.

historical event.

6. The apparent meaning of the *ḥadīth* conflicts with reason.
7. The impossibility of the derived meaning of the *ḥadīth* from the perspective of the Shari'ah.
8. The impossibility of the derived meaning of the *ḥadīth* from the perspective of both the Shari'ah and human reasoning.
9. The impossibility of the derived meaning of the *ḥadīth* from the practical aspect.
10. Opposition to the practice of the Prophet ﷺ.
11. Opposition to the practice of a Companion.
12. Inexplicit meaning of the *ḥadīth* due to the oddness of its wording.
13. Inexplicit meaning of the *ḥadīth* due to its word sharing multiple connotations (*li-ishtirāk al-lafẓ fī ma'ān 'adīdah*).
14. Inexplicit meaning of the *ḥadīth* due to its unrestrictive wording (*li-iṭlāq al-lafẓ*)
15. Inexplicit meaning of the *ḥadīth* due to mere subtleness, not due to oddness, possessing multiple connotations, or unrestrictive wordings.
16. Dispute among scholars in their understanding of the *ḥadīth*.
17. Dispute among the scholars of Quranic recitation in reciting a word from the Qur'an.
18. Dispute among the scholars of exegesis in interpreting the verse.
19. Dispute among the scholars of language in commenting on the wordings of the *ḥadīth*.

20. Dispute among the scholars of *kalām* on theological issues.

A Conclusion with a Comment on Problematising *Ḥadīth* in Contemporary Times

The issue of problematic *ḥadīth* continued to be discussed until the arrival of the contemporary time which saw the fall of the Muslim state, the domination of colonialism and their eradication from history, the threat of atheism which had plagued the world, and the rise of scientific discoveries which had led to the enchantment of empirical science and regarding every view that stands in opposite as invalid, despite coming from the side of religion. In fact, Europe had eradicated religion and its authority in total due to its experience with its Judeo-Christian background conflicting with what had been affirmed by science. The Muslim world was not far from these influences. It has engaged with the Western world which was armed with science at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The Muslim world at that time was at its weakest point. The Muslim world was bedazzled by the scientific discoveries in the West and its advancement. Thus, the thinkers of the *Ummah* in facing this challenge were divided into three categories:

First category: They call to abandon the tradition (*turāth*) and adopt everything from the West. This approach seems to be reflected by Taha Hussein in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt* and other thinkers who were heavily influenced by the Western thought.¹²

Second category: They reject the West and their sciences altogether, are content with their own identity, become satisfied with slandering the West by exposing their wickedness, flaws, and

¹² See: Taha Husain, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, trans. Sidney Glazer (Washington: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954).

corruptions especially in terms of atheism in thought, and deterioration in ethics. This is widespread amongst sincere scholars, jurists, and thinkers of the *Ummah*.

Third category: They accept the challenge, hasten to reconcile between science and religion, firmly believe that there is no real contradiction between science and religion. However, this group, despite their sincerity, as per our view, fell into some methodological errors and presented numerous compromises in their attempt to reconcile between the ethics of the West and Islam. This approach seems to be reflected by the school of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in the Indian subcontinent, and the school of Muḥammad ‘Abduh in Egypt.¹³

It is crucial to mention that the above bedazzlement is not limited to discoveries of natural sciences alone but had extended towards amazement at what the West possessed of freedom and justice in the face of corruption and dictatorship which had been experienced in the Muslim world. Similarly, the glorification of the social status of Western women in terms of their education, culture, and rights in comparison to Muslim women who lived a despicable life; their education is considered a flaw, their religious and worldly culture are almost nothing, and their rights which had been predetermined by Allah had been repressed, starting from their inheritance up to their thought on the most important issues in life such as marriage. Let alone their political and social participation, it is a matter none would have been able to think of.

This circumstances resulted in scepticism of a new type where its very basis is the contemporary era consisting of new values such as reliance on pure reason in making decisions for everything, rejecting the unseen matters (*al-umūr al-ghaybiyyah*) if they contradict with reason, reliance on modern science, rejecting everything that contradicts it, even superficially, reliance on

¹³ Muzaffar Iqbal, *Science and Islam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 164.

Western social values such as freedom of women and their rights according to the Western standards, and eradicating everything that contradicts them despite it being a Shari'ah ruling.

Not only against *ḥadīths*, this has transgressed against Quranic verses pertaining to women inheritance, polygamy, and others. However, since the Qur'an is certain in its establishment (*thubutuḥu qaṭ'iyyan*) via mass transmission, they resort to reinterpretation and alteration. With regards to the Prophetic tradition, they had furiously assaulted it either by devaluing it despite being sound according to the criteria of *ḥadīth* experts, by rejecting it exploiting its probable establishment (*ẓaniyyat thubūtihā*), or by reinterpreting them to fit their desires.

Many scholars of the Islamic *Ummah* undertook the initiative to refute them. There are courses in Islamic universities which are dedicated to such initiatives. The pioneering university is the International Islamic University Malaysia where it preceded others in the same field in terms of effort. The university has outlined the subject "Contemporary Approaches in the Studies of Prophetic Tradition" at the undergraduate level, and "Contemporary Issues in Studies of Prophetic Tradition" for the Master level, and "Comparative Studies between *Ḥadīth* Commentaries" at the Doctorate level. We hope from Allah the Most High and Most Powerful to provide us the opportunity to perform servitude towards his Book, and the tradition of His Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him accordingly.

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