

The Place of *Isnad* in Islamic Education: Demystifying “Tradition”

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During the last few decades of the twentieth century, Muslims in a number of English speaking countries witnessed both the resurgence of and introduction to what has been termed “traditional Islam.” Despite having more than one iteration, the traditional Islam movement as articulated by its main exponents in the West represented a renewed commitment to and revival of the four classical Sunni schools of law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, and Hanbali), the “orthodox” schools of theology (Ash’ari and Maturidi), as well as the appropriation of “Sufi” practices and/or induction into one of the law-based Sufi orders which often times entailed offering fealty to a *shaykh*.

Notably, “traditionalism” stood at odds with and in response to the reformist efforts of certain Salafi scholars who viewed uncritical imitation (taqlid) of the Four Schools, Ash’ari-Maturidi theology, and Sufism as major obstacles to reviving their ideas of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This was in addition to Salafi calls to eschew any hadith unworthy of the designations *sahih* (“authentic”) or *hasan* (“good”). One of the leading Salafi scholars, Muhammad Nasir al-Din Al-Albani (d. 1999), even carried out a radical reevaluation of the major hadith canon seemingly attempting to cleanse the canon of any heretical accretions.

In reaction to these challenges, “Traditional Muslims” reasserted their commitment to the classical schools of theology, jurisprudence, and virtue ethics. But, they also attempted to undermine the credibility of their Salafi opponents by underscoring that their educational credentials were insufficient for any valid claim of representing Muslim orthodoxy. In pursuit of this goal, “Traditional Muslims” highlighted the role and importance of “*isnad*” i.e. the chain of transmission. If a person was unable to prove that he/she possessed a written “*ijaza*” or authorization from a qualified teacher to teach the particular subject one was teaching, the person was declared unworthy of serious attention. These ideas ignited a race to amass as many *ijazas* as students had the capacity and opportunity to do so. This ‘*ijaza-craze*’ became so pervasive that even non-Salafis were not spared from “Traditional Muslim” scorn of those who studied Islam in western and western-styled universities in and outside the Muslim world.

In this essay, I assert that the focus on *ijaza* and *isnad* constitutes a preference of form over substance; that *isnad* has been decontextualized from its roots and misappropriated by its contemporary champions; and that many have confused the two ‘mediums’ of transmission with being genuine ‘methods’ of instruction. To verify these claims, we must speak about the classical meaning and purpose of *isnad* as a tool for establishing orthodoxy, the conditions that gave birth to this concern, the major factions vying for orthodoxy, whether or not *ijaza* was the criteria used by scholars to determine a person’s fitness to teach Islam, and conclude with a discussion of the role of the teacher in classical Islamic education.

Tradition, Traditionists, Traditionalists and the “Traditional”

To avoid confusion between terms, it is important to elucidate the following expressions utilized throughout this essay: “tradition,” “traditionists,” “traditionalists,” and the “traditional.” The first term is “tradition.” For the purposes of our discussion, we must distinguish between two very different connotations of this word. Tradition is most commonly used conterminously with the word “custom” or “the regular way of acting.” But, it also connotes a written or oral “account” of the particular acts of a person. In this case, those acts or utterances would be those of Prophet Muhammad—Allah’s blessing and peace on him, which have been collected in the corpus called ‘hadith.’ A hadith is a report which preserves the Prophet’s statements, actions, sanctions, and description. Oftentimes, to avoid confusion between this meaning of tradition and the former connotation, writers express it in terms of the “prophetic” tradition.

“Traditionist” is commonly utilized as a translation of the Arabic term ‘muhaddith’ or hadith scholar. The hadith scholar or specialist is one who has dedicated his/her life to amassing knowledge of the prophetic tradition, the biographies of transmitters, and the evaluation of the credibility of those transmitters.

As for the “traditionalist”, he/she is a member of the historical faction of Sunni Islam who champions the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad—Allah’s blessing and peace on him. Traditionalists are distinguished by their insistence upon deriving all Islamic teachings solely from transmitted knowledge, especially the Qur’an and Sunna of the Prophet. They are largely opposed to the rational epistemic, reasoning that if the intellect can independently determine truth and falsehood, right and wrong, then what need would we have for the Qur’an or prophetic tradition? This faction was historically known as *Ahl al-Hadith*. Their nemeses were the “Rationalists” or *Ahl al-Ra’y* with whom the former have been vying for orthodoxy since the earliest days of Islam.

“Traditional Muslim” applies to contemporary proponents of what has become normative Islam for the majority of its scholars i.e. adherence to Ashari/Maturidi theology, the adoption of one of the 4 schools of jurisprudence, and the acceptance of law-based Sufism. Traditional Muslims largely argue that the greatest proof for the orthodoxy of their views is that Muslims around the world have viewed and practiced Islam in the way they see it for more than a millennium. They pride themselves on following the opinions of the medieval experts (taqlid), and see the “isnad” and “ijaza” as signifiers of one’s fitness to teach and transmit Islam in its purest form. “Traditional Muslims” emphasize the customary connotation of “tradition,” while “Traditionists” and “Traditionalists” cling to the meaning of “tradition” as the “oral account” or “hadith.”

Traditional Muslims see no contradiction between reason and revelation.¹ Rather, both operate as sources of Islam and its proper understanding. God, after all, appeals to human reason throughout the Qur'an, and even uses the rejection of rational arguments as a basis for damnation and censure. Reason, therefore, is the only basis for common ground among the people of all faith traditions, especially since it is the means by which genuine faith in God is achieved. On the other hand, like Traditionalists, Rationalist Sunnis generally agree that no binding teaching of Islam can be determined by reason alone. Therefore, no Muslim can be obligated to believe in anything unless it originates from Allah and His Messenger. Where they differ, however, is in that Rationalists insist that the sources of the bedrock teachings be of unquestionable authenticity (qat'i al-wurud) and unequivocal in their wording (qat'i al-dalala), while Traditionalists allow for establishing a bedrock teaching from a report which has not been transmitted diffusely (mutawatir). For Traditionalists, as long as the transmitter is deemed to be trustworthy, the report can be a valid basis for determining a binding religious teaching even if only one or a few people transmit the information (ahadi).²

As was the case in the past, Traditionalists with their focus on scriptural content and Traditional Muslim "contextualists" today continue to each make exclusive claim to the Sunni orthodoxy (Ahl al-Sunna). The reality is, however, that Sunnism is incomplete without the contributions of both Traditionalists (Al-Hadith) and Rationalists³ (Ahl al-Ra'y). In this regard, the pioneer of hadith criticism, Al-Ramahurmuzi (c. 970), said, "They complete one another when they come together, and are incomplete when they are apart."⁴

¹ Traditionalists, likewise, do not see any essential contradiction between reason and revelation. They, however, afforded reason a much more limited conception and role alongside revealed knowledge.

² See a summary of scholarly views on the subject of non-diffuse reports (ahadi) in the work of Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Banani. *Hashiya al-Banani 'ala Sharh Al-Jalal Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Mahalli 'ala Matn Jam' al-Jawami' li al-Imam Taj al-Din 'Abd Al-Wahhab ibn al-Subki*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995, 2/131.

³ When using the moniker, "Rationalists", throughout this essay, by it I mean the rationalist theologians among the Ashar'is and Maturidis. This is an unorthodox use of the term, because it generally is used synonymously with "Hanafis." At times I further qualify these proponents to be "Sunni" Rationalists as a way of distinguishing them from the Mu'tazili "hyper-rationalists." Referring to the aforementioned Sunnis as Rationalists is not meant to imply that Traditionalists were anti-rational or crass literalists, nor was that the intent of Muslim scholars historically. Traditionalist epistemology, rather, was more limiting in the authority afforded to reason than those characterized as rationalists. One should also be careful not to make the error of thinking that "Rationalists" were and are inattentive to the centrality of scripture in determining what constitutes "true" Islam.

⁴ Al-Hasan ibn 'Abd Al-Rahman ibn Khallad Al-Ramahurmuzi. *Al-Muhaddith Al-Fasil bayn al-Rawi wa al-Wa'i*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1984, p. 161.

What is Isnad?

The Shafi'i scholar, Ibn 'Asakir (d. 1175), relates in his book *Tarikh Dimashq* (The History of Damascus) the following conversation between the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809) and an unnamed crypto-infidel (zindiq) summoned for execution:

INFIDEL: "Why are you going to execute me, O Commander of the faithful?"

RASHID: "To relieve people of you."

INFIDEL: "Then, what will you do about one thousands hadiths I fabricated against the Messenger of God—Allah's blessing and peace on him? There is not a single letter of them uttered by the Messenger of God—Allah's blessing and peace on him."

RASHID: "And what will you do, O enemy of God, about Abu Ishaq al-Fizari and 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak? They will sift through them and extract them letter by letter."⁵

Even if this report may not convey the precise details of this exchange, this story underscores that fabrication was a significant source of anxiety for early traditionists. The pioneer community had undergone great political upheaval beginning with the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet's companions disputed over his temporal successor. That was followed by the "wars of apostasy"; the assassination of the third caliph and the resultant civil war; and then the second civil war which ended with Umayyad hegemony. In the midst of this, each faction sought to bolster its authority by appeals to prophetic traditions putatively reinforcing the validity of each group's religio-political views. Consequently, a significant amount of apocryphal content found its way into the prophetic tradition.

According to Muhammad ibn Sirin (d. 733),

"The people did not ask for the *isnad* until political strife (fitna) erupted. After that the *isnad* of a hadith was demanded in order to discover who was a proponent of the prophetic way so that his hadith could be taken and who was a proponent of heresy so that his hadith could be eschewed."

In response to this phenomenon, a number of traditionists identifying themselves as 'Ahl al-Hadith' or "The Tradionalists" appeared with the aim of preserving the content of religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Inspired by

⁵ Abu al-Qasim ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madina Dimashq wa Dhikr Fadliha wa Tasmiya man Hallaha min al-Amathil aw Ijtaza bi Nawahiha min Waridiha wa Ahliha*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995, Volume 7/127.

Qur'anic stipulations for acceptable religious testimony (Q 49:6) and experiential suitability (Q 12:55), Traditionalists established what they believed to be objective criteria for ensuring that the teachings of Islam would be protected from heterodox accretions. The primary method for determining the difference between a genuine hadith and one which was spurious was the examination of the moral integrity ('adala) and retention capacity (dabt) of each transmitter at every stage in the chain of transmission, which they termed the "isnad."

It wouldn't be long before one would hear calls like the one made by the aforementioned, 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak (d. 797),

الإِسْنَادُ مِنَ الدِّينِ لَوْلَا الإِسْنَادُ لَقَالَ مَنْ شَاءَ مَا شَاءَ

"The *isnad* is part of the religion (din). Had it not been for the *isnad* anyone would say whatever he wants."⁶

His contemporary, Muhammad ibn Sirin, is similarly reported to have said,

إِنَّ هَذَا الْعِلْمَ دِينٌ فَانظُرُوا عَمَّن تَأْخُذُونَ دِينَكُمْ

"Verily, this knowledge is religion (din). So, consider well those from whom you take your religion."⁷

A legitimate question to ask about Ibn al-Mubarak's, "...anyone would say whatever he wants", is 'about what?' And about Ibn Sirin's, "...this knowledge...", is 'what knowledge?' Clearly, the former's intent is that anyone would say whatever he wanted to say about the Prophet of Islam and Islam by extension, since Muslims have universally acknowledged from the earliest times that the ultimate determiner of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy is the Prophet himself speaking as Allah's representative. As for the "knowledge" alluded to by Ibn Sirin, it is the knowledge of the prophetic tradition or what is known as the "hadith."

Qualifying the two aforementioned quotes in this way helps to protect them from being misappropriated by different Muslim factions. Traditional Muslims of today often misappropriate Ibn al-Mubarak's statement about *isnad* as proof for the requirement of any person held to be a religious authority to be able to list his "*shaykhs*", or highlight his "*ijazas*" (i.e. classical teaching licenses), or at least to bless the ears of the public with one's *isnad* for the popular hadith of "The merciful ones" (*al-rahimun*) to whom God shows mercy, known in the traditionist circles as "*al-hadith al-musalsal bi al-awwaliya*."

So, in light of anxiety over hadith fabrication and towards the goal of preserving Islam's authentic teachings, Traditionalists carved out *the* most important path to the knowledge of orthodoxy: the unbroken chain (*isnad*)

⁶ Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim bi Sharh al-Nawawi*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995, Volume 1, Section 1, p. 82.

⁷ Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim bi Sharh al-Nawawi*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995, Volume 1, Section 1, p. 79.

transmitted by people of unquestionable probity, generation to generation. For it was agreed that although most Islamic teachings conformed to common sense or reason, nothing could be made binding without being conveyed in the form of a report from either Allah or His messenger. Scholars seeking to disabuse the prophetic legacy of spurious accounts in order to facilitate a clear image of Islamic orthodoxy started to demand that traditionaries purporting to quote the Prophet list the names of the men and women on whose authority they report.

Both Traditionalists and Rationalists of the Sunni orthodoxy agreed that this was a reasonable demand to make of people. But, one way to understand what was essentially different about Traditionalists and Rationalists is that the former faction was oriented toward “content”, while the latter was oriented toward preserving both content and “context.” Rather, we could say that Traditionalists focused on “isnad” criticism, and Rationalists underscored the need for both “isnad” and “textual” criticism. For these reasons, we could, perhaps, view Traditionalists as “Scripturalists” and the Rationalists as “Contextualists.” Scripturalists were overly concerned with preserving the raw material or content of Islam, while Contextualists eventually elevated the preservation of context originating in a particular philosophical milieu to the level of scripture. The substance of this philosophical context constituted its own unique content which would be promoted as “the” foundation of Islamic orthodoxy.

What is an Ijaza?

There is no doubt that the *isnad* has been the basis for the preservation of our Islamic heritage. It, however, has operated as a ‘means’ to an end. The particular end the *isnad* seeks to realize is the preservation of sound Islamic content or the bases for determining orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In other words, *isnad* is not an end in itself. But, even the *isnad* has a number of mediating criteria which mitigate or extenuate its suitability as a means. In other words, before *isnad* becomes *isnad*, it must pass certain tests.

It has become commonplace to hear mention of the concept of the *ijaza* i.e. the authorization to teach or transmit knowledge. Unfortunately, many mistakenly see the *ijaza* and *isnad* as synonymous. The truth, however, is that they are not conterminous. If *isnad* is the chain of transmission by which the content of Islam is preserved, *ijaza* is merely a means for establishing *isnad*. This makes *ijaza* a ‘means’ to a ‘means’ toward the ultimate end of preserving the content of Islam, the latter of which is the function of the *isnad*. Rather, *ijaza* is merely one of a number of ‘means’ for establishing *isnad* which were developed and in use during the era when the prophetic tradition was being collected and codified. In truth there are eight ways of transmitting the hadith of the Prophet among traditionists.

- 1) Direct Transmission from Teacher to Student (Sama’): This is when the transmitter hears in person the report directly from the one on whose authority he/she is reporting as when one dictates to another.
- 2) Reading a Compiler’s Work to him While He/She Attentively Listens (‘Ard, Sard, or Qira’a): In this case, any errors in reading made by the reader are corrected by the compiler as he/she listens.

- 3) Surrendering a Copy of One's Compiled Hadiths to Another (Munawala): This may or may not be accompanied with permission to relate the contents of one's book to others.
- 4) Authorization (Ijaza): This is when the author of the book gives permission to the reader or student to transmit the book's contents to others. This may or may not be accompanied by a review of the book's contents with the receiver prior to the *ijaza*. For this reason, not all forms of *ijaza* were deemed to be valid. Some scholars even classified certain forms as blameworthy innovations (*bid'a*).⁸
- 5) Hand-Written Hadiths Given or Mailed to Another (Mukataba): Transmitters sometimes would write down hadiths which they mailed to others who may or may have not requested them. Those receiving the written hadiths were expected to recognize the handwriting of the source.
- 6) Notification (I'lam): Sometimes a student would discover a hadith written in a book attributed to a contemporary transmitter or hear one ascribed to him, and then would visit the person to confirm that the hadith had its origin with him/her.
- 7) Testament (Wasiya): It was also common for the owner of hadith manuscripts to bequeath his books to a certain person in his family or another upon his demise.
- 8) Discovery (Wijada): It was often the case for people to discover works attributed to scholars with whom they were familiar. Sometimes those scholars were contemporaries, but at other times they were those of a bygone era. This is like what happens with manuscripts ascribed to well-known scholars, which are later published as critical editions. According to Imam Nawawi and other Shafi'is, *wijada* is a valid and necessary way of preserving content.⁹

⁸ Imam Nawawi, after delineating the first and strongest of seven forms of *ijaza* and highlighting that the supermajority of scholars considers it to be a permissible mode of transmission, says,

“And groups among the various factions considered it invalid, which is one of two opposing views attributed to Shafi'i as well. The literalists (Zahiriya) and their followers say, “It is not to be acted upon, just like the hadith with a missing companion intermediary (*mursal*).” But this is invalid.”

Among the scholars who considered *ijaza* to be an invalid mode of transmitting knowledge as well are: Shu'ba, Ibrahim al-Harbi, Abu Nasr al-Wa'ili, Abu al-Shaykh Al-Asbahani, Al-Qadi Husayn, Al-Mawardi, Abu Bakr al-Khujandi al-Shafi'i, Abu Tahir al-Dabbas al-Hanafi, and others. (Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Tadrib al-Rawi fi Sharh Taqrib al-Nawawi*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), p. 250-251.

⁹ Imam Nawawi said,

“As for employing *wijada*, it has been conveyed that the majority of traditionists (*muhaddithin*), Malikis, and others held it to be impermissible. But its permissibility has been conveyed about Shafi'i and his judicious disciples. And some of the critical scrutinizers among the Shafi'is have explicitly declared its employment to be compulsory once confidence is established. And this is the correct view whose contrary in these times is indefensible.”

What we notice from the above is that *ijaza* is merely ‘a’ means among other means to establish *isnad* in the view of Muslim traditionists. As a part of the process of authenticating Islamic content, it served as a quality control mechanism. The subject of the content being preserved via *ijaza* was originally the prophetic tradition. However, once scholars abandoned the campaign to compile all the hadiths of the Prophet towards the close of the 11th century,¹⁰ the focus turned from the preservation of his words to the preservation of the books containing his words. Consequently, the same eight aforementioned means of preservation were employed, with *ijaza* being one of its most important means. This is why the *ijaza-isnad* tradition was also employed to preserve exegetical, mystical, and other non-hadith works.

Prior to the printing press all official copies of books were written by hand, and those who desired authentic versions of those books were generally expected to study their contents with their compilers or their successors who communicated the corresponding *isnads* back to the original authors. That is to say that neither *ijaza* nor any of the aforementioned seven means for establishing *isnad* or transmitting hadiths were looked upon as methods of instruction or pedagogical tools for determining one’s qualifications to teach. Rather, the use of the term *ijaza* to indicate one’s fitness to “teach” Islam was a much later convention, which many today have confused both with *isnad* and the *ijaza* for transmitting the contents of books thereby ensuring that those books were authentic copies of the originals. This misapprehension, unfortunately, has become very common today. In this regard, the 15th century polymath Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) had the following to say,

“Authorization (*ijaza*) from a shaykh is not a prerequisite for being allowed to impart knowledge and spread benefit. So, anyone who knows of his own qualification may do so even if no one authorizes him. This is the view of the early forbears and the pious ancestors. This, likewise, applies in every science, in imparting knowledge and issuing fatwa. This contravenes the view of the simpleminded (*aghbiya*) who imagine that to be a prerequisite. The only reason the *scholars* (*nas*) introduced authorization (*ijaza*) was that entry level learners and their like who desire to learn from another, in most cases, do not know the person’s qualifications in light of their own inadequacy. And searching for qualification before taking instruction is a prerequisite. So, authorization (*ijaza*) was treated like a testimony (*shahada*) of one’s qualification from an authorized shaykh.”¹¹

(Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Tadrib al-Rawi fi Sharh Taqrib al-Nawawi*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), p. 275.

¹⁰ Imam Bayhaqi who died in 1066 CE authored the last major hadith compilation entitled *Al-Sunan Al-Kubra*.

¹¹ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1996, Volume 2/273.

In other words, not having an *ijaza* did and does not mean that a person cannot become an expert on Islam or any other science for that matter by another means. That is, a degree in Islamic law or theology from a modern university in the Islamic world, while not constituting a “traditional” *ijaza* is still an *ijaza* in the sense of constituting a ‘valid’ authorization to teach Islam. This is contrary to what many contemporary Muslims understand. Neither the *isnad* nor *ijaza* are pedagogical tools for learning or methods intended to ensure that students have mastered the historical teachings of Islam. ‘*Ijaza*-based’ study of “texts” is not even necessarily superior to independent study in the western academy. Neither tradition necessarily guarantees depth of knowledge nor complete comprehension or mastery; Nor do either guarantee that learners will overcome the hubris and disdain toward non-initiates which Ghazali stated to be a natural outgrowth of being a scholar.¹²

What is Islamic Education?

In the foregoing, I have argued that neither *isnad* nor *ijaza* are methods of instruction, but are, rather, means of preserving religious content. I have also highlighted in the aforementioned quote by Imam Suyuti that receiving authorization from one’s shaykh to teach what one has confidently mastered is not absolutely essential. It was, however, the norm to make those who received formal training in the Islamic sciences more easily identifiable to the laity. With that aside, no one could deny the importance of knowing how and when a person becomes a legitimate authority on Islam. For if having an *isnad* and *ijaza* are not the ways of determining qualification, would this mean that Islam allows for any Muslim to have a perspective on the religion? If we insist that common Muslims have no considered opinion on orthodoxy and orthopraxy, then what components are essential to an Islamic education without which no person may speak authoritatively about the religion?

Perhaps what leads to dissonance in the minds of the proponents of *isnad* and *ijaza* is the fact that the Prophet Muhammad—Allah’s peace and blessing on him—received direct knowledge of God’s will via the archangel Gabriel. His companions in turn received that revealed knowledge directly from him, and then they passed it on to their successors, etc. But to repeat, there is a big difference between “revealed” knowledge and “speculative” knowledge. Revealed knowledge forms the content of all binding and bedrock Islamic teachings, not speculation.

Prophet Muhammad—Allah’s peace and blessing on him—said, “The scholars are the heirs of the prophets. And the prophets do not leave behind *dinars* and *dirhams* (gold and silver currency). Rather, what they leave behind is knowledge. So, whoever receives it, receives an abundant portion.”¹³ Imam Bukhari (d. 870) relates in “Kitab al-

¹² Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Arba’in fi Usul al-Din*. Beirut: Dar al-Minhaj, 2006, p. 190.

¹³ Abu ‘Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Jami’ al-Tirmidhi*. Damascus: Dar al-Fayha’, 1999, p. 609, Hadith #2682.

‘ilm” of his *Sahih* the following words attributed to the Prophet, “Knowledge is acquired only through informed instruction” (innama al-‘ilm bi al-ta’allum). The famed commentator on Imam Bukhari’s *Sahih*, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (d. 1449), says of this statement, “What it means is that the only considerable knowledge is what is taken from the prophets and their heirs via informed instruction.”¹⁴

In other words, the fundamental rule of Islamic learning is that one requires a teacher who possesses knowledge of what the Messenger was given by his Lord. This was especially the case with regard to the Qur’an and Hadith of the Prophet—Allah’s peace and blessing on him. For this reason, Sulayman ibn Musa (c. 737)¹⁵ said, “It used to be said, “Do not learn the Qur’an from those who learn it from written collections (mushafiyin), and do not carry knowledge from those who learn from books (suhufiyin).”¹⁶ Similarly, the Andalusian scholar Abu Hayyan (d. 1344) of Grenada composed the following poem to emphasize the importance of taking knowledge from living scholars and studying the major books of Islamic law with them instead of reading them in isolation,

أَخَافُهُمْ لِإِدْرَاكِ الْعُلُومِ	يُظُنُّ الْعُمَرُ أَنَّ الْكُتُبَ تَهْتَدِي
عَوَامِضَ حَيْرَتِ عَقْلِ الْفَهِيمِ	وَمَا يُدْرِي الْجُهُولَ بِأَنَّ فِيهَا
صَلَّكَتِ عَنِ الصِّرَاطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ	إِذَا زُمْتَ الْعُلُومَ بِغَيْرِ شَيْخٍ
تَصْبِرَ أَصْلًا مِنْ تَوْمَاتِ الْحَكِيمِ	وَتَلْتَبِسُ الْأُمُورَ عَلَيْكَ حَتَّى

The inexperienced one thinks that books give guidance/I fear them for the comprehension of science/But what will inform the ignorant that therein/Are obscure matters which have confused the most intelligent of men/When you pursue knowledge of science without a learned man/You will

¹⁴ Hadith scholars like Ibn Hajar grade this prophetic tradition as *hasan* (fair). Ahmad ibn ‘Ali ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Muhammad Abi ‘Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Isma’il al-Bukhari*. Riyadh: Al-Maktaba Al-Salafiya, 1960, Volume 1/161.

¹⁵ He is Sulayman ibn Musa al-Umawi, the preeminent jurist of the Levant and one of the senior disciples of the junior successor, Makhul (d. 731). (Ahmad ibn ‘Ali ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), Volume 3/509-511.

¹⁶ Al-Hasan ibn ‘Abd Al-Rahman ibn Khallad al-Rahmahurmuzi, *Al-Muhaddith Al-Fasil bayn al-Rawi wa al-Wa’i*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1984, p. 211.

deviate from the direct plan/And matters will become so confusing for you until/you're more lost than Tawma, the Curer of Ills.¹⁷

Tawma is said to have been a Muslim interested in the study of prophetic medicine. He spent his time combing through the prophetic tradition for medical treatments. On one occasion, he stumbled upon the hadith, “The black seed is a cure for every ailment.”¹⁸ Unfortunately for Tawma, the copy he found contained a letter missing a dot which led him to read it as, “The black viper is a cure for every ailment.” Tawma wanted to improve his vision. So, his conviction that Muhammad—Allah’s peace and blessing on him—was indeed God’s messenger led him to locate a black viper, not knowing it was poisonous. He, then, proceeded to apply it to his eyes, but was left blinded for the rest of his life. He was, consequently, ridiculed in memorandum as “Tawma, the Doctor.”

What this teaches us is that for Muslim scholars historically in order to acquire qualification and authority as a learned member of the community, one must study with living scholars the perennial works of the earlier period, especially the works related to the Qur’an and Hadith. It is, perhaps, for this very reason that *ijaza* (authorization) in Qur’an and Hadith studies remain the most important today. This is, precisely, because there is no “knowing” Islam if one does not have some level of mastery of the Qur’an and Hadith, the sources of all Islamic content.

This is not to imply that Islam and Muslim understanding is limited to scripture, for scripture more times than less is very ambiguous and requires interpretation. The point, however, is that when it comes to the knowledge of the foundational Islamic content, Muslim scholars agree that one must study that information with a scholar of the exponential sciences. It is this understanding of the importance of the living scholars which led some to declare that “Knowledge is the hearts of men, not in the lines of paper” (al-‘ilm fi al-sudur la fi al-sutur) and that “Knowledge is taken from the mouths of men” (al-‘ilm yu’khadu min aqwal al-rijal).

¹⁷ Muhammad al-Talib ibn Sidi Hamdun says in his supercommentary on Sidi Mayyara’s commentary on *Al-Murshid Al-Mu’in* prior to quoting Abu Hayyan’s aforementioned poem,

“Shaykh Sidi ‘Abd Al-Rahman al-Fasi says verbatim in his *Nawazil*: “The leaders of the school, like Al-Qabisi, Al-Lakhmi, and Ibn Rushd have issued fatwa that it is not permitted for anyone to issue fatwa from the standard [law] books (al-kutub al-mashhura) without reading them with the experts (shaykhs), and even more serious when it is issued from those that are non-standard (ghariba).”

Muhammad al-Talib ibn Hamdun. *Hashiya Abi ‘Abd Allah Muhammad al-Talib ibn Sidi Hamdun ibn al-Haj ‘ala Sharh Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Fasi al-Shahir bi Mayyara ‘ala al-Manzuma al-Musamma bi al-Murshid al-Mu’in ‘ala al-Daruri min ‘Ulum al-Din*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, (no date), p. 3.

¹⁸ Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim bi Sharh al-Nawawi*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995, Volume 7, Section 2, p. 166, Hadith #2215.

It was this same understanding which led ‘Umar b. al-Khattab to beg the first caliph, Abu Bakr, to gather the pages of the Qur’an into one place, fearing the loss of knowledge because of the death of the scholars. He was certainly guided to his understanding by the Prophet’s saying—Allah’s peace and blessing on him,

“Verily, Allah does not contract knowledge by snatching it away from the people. He, rather, contracts knowledge by seizing the lives of the scholars until He has not left a single scholar whereupon people take ignorant leaders who when asked issue fatwa without knowledge, going astray and leading others astray.”¹⁹

Again, this applies to exponential knowledge i.e. knowledge of the content of Islam (ta’lim), although it can also apply to the scholars of experiential knowledge i.e. knowledge of spiritual formation (tarbiya). Scholars are not in agreement that all Muslims require a teacher for experiential teachings. But many of them still recommend that one have a teacher in spiritual formation as well, while others consider it compulsory.²⁰

Conclusion

عن علي بن أبي طالب قال صلى الله عليه و سلم: اللهم ارحم خلفائي! قيل يا رسول الله و من خلفاؤك؟ قال الذين يروون أحاديثي و سنتي و يعلمونها الناس

On the authority of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib—Allah be pleased with him, “The Messenger of Allah—Allah’s peace and blessing on him—said, “O Allah! Show mercy on my successors!” It was said, “O Allah’s Messenger! And who are your successors?” He said, “Those who relate my accounts and my customs, and teach them to people.”²¹

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنها قال صلى الله عليه و سلم: تسمعون و يسمع منكم و يسمع من يسمع منكم

¹⁹ Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim bi Sharh al-Nawawi*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995, Volume 8, Section 2, p. 192, Hadith #2673.

²⁰ See Shaykh ‘Abd Al-Fattah Abu Ghudda’s view on this topic in his gloss of Al-Muhasibi’s *Risala*. Al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, *Risala al-Mustarshidin*. Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 1988, pp. 39-41.

²¹ Al-Rahmahurmuzi, *Al-Muhaddith Al-Fasil*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1984, p. 163.

According to the Prophet's cousin Ibn 'Abbas—Allah be pleased with him, the Prophet—Allah's peace and blessing on him—said, “You will hear things. Things will be heard from you. And things will be heard from those who hear from you.”²²

As stated before, *isnad* and *ijaza* are not the same. The *isnad* became the means by which early Muslim scholars were able to verify the authenticity of the prophetic tradition i.e. hadith. The *ijaza* was primarily a means for establishing *isnad*, while it was later used as a term to signify a person's qualification to speak as an Islamic authority. Authorization to teach Islam was often times issued verbally or in writing by scholars to their students. It, however, was a mere convention developed to make it easy for commoners to distinguish between those who were formerly educated from those who were not. Having formal education did not necessarily mean that a person could or did not err in his understanding of what he had learned. And, since mastery could be achieved without an *ijaza*, scholars did not consider it to be an absolute necessity as underscored in the quote from Imam Suyuti above.

What we are absolutely certain of is that when it comes to “Islamic” education our “tradition” is to study with qualified teachers proficient in their areas of expertise. This is the same whether or not teachers authorize their students to teach the information imparted to them or even if those same teachers have not been authorized by their teachers. What is important is “qualification” to teach. And there is no single method—and definitely not one that God revealed—that must be followed in order to determine a given person's qualification. Yes! It is safer to consult with people who have undergone formal training in some form of institution, but we must be clear that mastery only happens after years or decades of teaching and scholarship. Neither graduation from an institution nor completion of an ifta program necessarily determines how well a student has processed and synthesized the information they learned during their schooling.

Therefore, our “tradition” is to study Islam with qualified instructors, nothing more. The methods of instruction may at times be just as diverse as the methods of assessing proficiency. Furthermore, there is no “knowing” Islam without knowing the content of scripture i.e. the Qur'an and Hadith. Having a sound chain of transmission for what one quotes from the prophetic tradition is what identified the early members of the community as the upholders of orthodoxy. The *isnad* served as a means of preserving the substance and quality of the Islamic teachings. It was also utilized to preserve both the hadith canon and the exegetical works which provide us with context for the many things about which Muslims still today continue to debate.

STATEMENT BY SHAYKH SHARIF MUHAMMAD BIN YAHYA AL-NINOWY

²² Al-Rahmahurmuzi, *Al-Muhaddith Al-Fasil*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1984, p. 207.

Below is a partial translation of Shaykh Ninony's statement on the role of Isnad and Ijaza. The full original Arabic statement can read below.

With the name of Allah, All-Compassionate, All-Merciful

Praise be to Allah as is fitting His majesty and perfection. And may blessing and peace be upon our master, Muhammad and his family.

The virtuous and beloved teacher, Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamid Ali—may Allah preserve and watch over him—asked of me during a recent phone call to summarize in writing what I mentioned to him regarding the matter of “isnad” and “ijaza.” In response to that request, I offered the following brief comments:

The chain of transmission (isnad) is not a goal in itself. It is merely a means to uncovering the soundness of the content established via the isnad. So the place where the isnad ends is the goal, since the end of the isnad of a prophetic tradition is our master, Allah's messenger—Allah's blessing and peace upon him and his family. And when the place where the isnad ends is sound, the text constitutes a religious teaching (din). That's because whatever our master, Allah's messenger—Allah's blessing and peace upon him and his family—has said is a religious teaching. No two Muslims differ about that. For that reason, the knowledge of the noble hadith is the most dignified of all forms of knowledge after knowledge of the benevolent Qur'an...

So, the isnad and its soundness are what distinguish between what has been related about the Messenger of the All-Merciful and what the allies of Satan have concocted against him. In that way, Allah, the Exalted, has guarded the Sunna of our Prophet and the perfection of our religion (din) until the Resurrection Day.

As for beyond the era of codification and narration i.e. after the 5th century AH approximately, all that “ijazas” remind of is the elevation of the chain (isnad) to one of the works composed during the era of codification and narration, and then from them, with their respective isnads, to the Prophet—Allah's blessing and peace upon him and his family. This is during the times after the era of narration. As for our own degenerative times, the majority of these ijazas are for taking blessing (tabarruk) from their isnads. The most that they remind of is the elevation of the isnad to the authority of Al-Amir, Al-Shawkani, Al-Dihlawi, and their likes---Allah show them mercy. This work and its abandonment have practically the same value. And the one who boasts of such isnads thinking that they are equal to the isnads and collections of Ahmad, Al-Tabarani, Al-Bazzar, and their likes is misled. There is no benefit beyond taking blessing (tabarruk) from the shortness ('uluw) of the isnad during these times. Rather, some Sufis say that the lengthiness (nuzul) of the isnad has greater blessing due to the numerousness of the scholars and traditionalists in it. So the more people therein, the more blessing there is; in addition to the experience of mercy by their mention, because when the righteous are mentioned mercies descend.

And not an inconsiderable number of our and their teachers (mashayikh)—Allah show them mercy—have given ijaza to all the people of their times. If such an ijaza is valid, then the blessing embraces all the people of the time in all previous eras. Likewise, this needy soul in my weakness offers universal ijaza to all the people of the age according to the conditions known to traditionists (ahl al-athar).

In summary, this religion is both knowing and doing (‘ilm wa ‘amal). It is not merely a matter of association, ijazas, and certificates. Then, there is no real difference between there being a student of knowledge today and Al-Shawkani by five or 2/5 number of traditionaries, because these isnads and this narration do not confirm a religious teaching; no legal issues are established thereby; they neither make a thing lawful nor make it unlawful; and they do not raise themselves to the level of a source of Shariah. Rather, all of that is found established and known in the books of hadith narration whose compilation ended close to a millennium ago. So, it is not within the capacity of those who came after them to do anything more than to ascribe the isnad to them, and then on their strength to do the same to their predecessors.

This is not meant to discourage the pursuit of ijazas. For my son, Sidi Yahya—may Allah protect and look over him—who has yet to reach ten years of age already possesses more than 100 ijazas in noble hadith isnads and some direct transmissions from some of the great hadith specialists. And he is just a young child who is not even pubescent, still unaccountable for his actions. So, this is an honor and blessing. But it must be given its proper place. So, showboating and bragging about these things never issues from a forbearing student of knowledge. And Allah, the Exalted, knows best.

Also, some ijazas in this age constitute a certificate of connection to So-and-So or So-and-So, not a confirmation of isnads to hadiths nor an elevation to those hadiths nor direct transmission. And Allah, the Exalted, knows best. There is nothing wrong with this as long as it is not for boasting and competition. As for when some ignorant people acquire certificates of ijaza from shaykhs for boasting and competition, the hadith of our master, Allah’s messenger—Allah’s blessing and peace upon him and his family—applies to them when he said, “The one who takes his full of what he was not given is like the one who wears two garments of falsehood.” The hadith has been related by Imam Muslim on the authority of ‘Aisha—Allah be pleased with her.

Additionally, most ijazas these days, with the exception of ijazas in the sciences and sound direct transmissions, mean nothing more than merely a confirmed meeting (liqa’) and the request of ijaza. Rather, even the mere encounter is not a prerequisite. For, it does not necessarily mean that one is bearing knowledge or narration at all. It is at times merely for blessing (tabarruk) or for the study of a small late book on the topic of one of the tool sciences or another. As for direct learning (sama’at), what a blessed thing it is! Especially when it happens to be the reading of a student along with mastery (dabt) even though this is rarer than red sulfur in these times. That’s because most direct transmission these days are babble sessions; in addition to the fact that mastery in these times is mastery of a book rather than the mastery of a shaykh. That is, the shaykh is regulated by the book whose publication and collection goes back to the age of narration and codification. And the scholars of narration declared babble and the reading of the errant person to be a basis of devaluation. This is most of what prevails in later times. And even when some were less strict regarding the matter of babble, it was because the shaykh and student were both knowledgeable of what was being read in the book. So the ijaza became a way to restore an imperfection and redress a shortcoming, assuming its existence. As for when the one who is reading and listening does not know what is in the book, then ijaza becomes the foundation, not direct transmission (sama’)...”

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله كما ينبغي لجلاله وكماله، والصلاة والسلام على سيدنا محمد وآله، وبعد:
فقد طلب مني الأستاذ الفاضل الحبيب الشيخ عبد الله بن حميد علي حفظه الله تعالى ورعاه أن أخص كتابة ما ذكرته له على الهاتف في قضية الأسانيد الحديثية وإجازاتها هذه الأيام، فأجبتة لذلك قائلاً في كلام وجيز:
الإسناد ليس مقصداً بحد ذاته، وإنما هو وسيلة لمعرفة صحة ما يوصلك السند إليه من معلومة. فمنتهى السند هو المقصد، لأن منتهى السند المرفوع هو سيدنا رسول الله صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم، وإذا صح منتهى السند إليه، فالمتن هو دين، لأن ما قاله سيدنا رسول الله صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم دين، لا يختلف في ذلك مسلمان. ولذلك كان علم الحديث الشريف أشرف العلوم بعد القرآن الكريم.

يذكر كثير من أصحاب الإجازات الورقية هذه الأيام ما ذكره الأئمة الحفاظ عن الإسناد وأهميته، كمثل ما رواه الإمام أبو عبد الله الحاكم في كتابه القيم "معرفة علوم الحديث" بإسناده عن عبد الله بن المبارك، قال:
("الإِسْنَادُ مِنَ الدِّينِ، وَلَوْلَا الإِسْنَادُ لَقَالَ مَنْ شَاءَ مَا شَاءَ". قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ: فَلَوْلَا الإِسْنَادُ وَطَلَبُ هَذِهِ الطَّائِفَةِ لَهُ وَكَثْرَةُ مُوَاطَنَتِهِمْ عَلَى حِفْظِهِ لَدَرَسَ مَنَارُ الإِسْلَامِ، وَلَتَمَكَّنَ أَهْلُ الإِلْحَادِ وَالبِدْعِ فِيهِ بِوَضْعِ الأحَادِيثِ، وَقَلْبِ الأَسَانِيدِ، فَإِنَّ الأَخْبَارَ إِذَا تَعَرَّتْ عَن وُجُودِ الأَسَانِيدِ فِيهَا كَانَتْ بُتْرًا).

وما رواه الخطيب البغدادي في "الرحلة في طلب الحديث" عن عبد الله بن أحمد بن حنبل، يقول: (سَمِعْتُ أَبِي، يَقُولُ: " طَلَبُ عُلُوِّ الإِسْنَادِ مِنَ الدِّينِ ") وغيرها من أقوال السلف رضي الله تعالى عنهم ورحمهم، يُوحون بذلك أن أسانيدهم المذكورة في الإجازات التي تحصلوا عليها تندرج تحت ما ذكره ابن المبارك أو الإمام أحمد أو أمثالهم من الأكابر. وفي هذا مغالطات كبيرة وإسقاط الأشياء في غير محلها، وقد يصل إلى اللباس ثوبي زور. والسبب في هذا أن أئمة أهل الحديث من السلف رضي الله تعالى عنهم تكلموا عن الإسناد وأهميته لعدة أسباب، منها:

1- وجودهم في عصر التدوين أو عصر الرواية، فكان لهؤلاء الأئمة الكبار كأحمد وغيرهم مسانيد وكتب جمعوا فيها الحديث النبوي ودونوه.

وعصر الرواية: يقصد به القرون التي دون فيها كل ما ورد عن سيدنا رسول الله صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم من قول أو فعل أو تقرير، والتي أولها الصحابة والتابعون وتابعوهم اهتماماً بالغاً كونها المصدر

الثاني من مصادر التشريع الإسلامي بعد القرآن الكريم. وقد مرَّ عصر الرواية والتدوين بمراحل عديدة بدأت في عصر سيدنا النبي صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم، ثم في القرن الثاني حيث بدأ تدوين الحديث بكتابته بعد أن كان مقصوراً على المشافهة. قال الحافظ العراقي في ألفيته: وأول من كتب الحديث والأثر*** ابن شهاب أمر له عمر. وابن شهاب هو الزهري رحمه الله تعالى. ثم تطوّر الأمر من مرحلة الجمع البحت إلى مرحلة التصنيف والترتيب تارة بحسب المواضيع الفقهية وأخرى بترتيب الأحاديث بحسب الراوي وغير ذلك. ثم تشعبت تصانيف كتب الحديث بين الموطآت والصحاح والمصنفات والمسانيد والسنن والجوامع والمستدركات والمستخرجات والمعاجم والأجزاء وغيرها. وقد توقفت عملية التدوين الفعلي للحديث أو عصر الرواية بحلول القرن الخامس الهجري، حيث انتهت عملية الجمع لكل ما وصل من حديث سيدنا النبي صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم، والله تعالى أعلم. والمقصود أن كل الأحاديث جُمعت خلال عصر الرواية في كتب الرواية، فلا بد لمن بعدهم أن يروي إليهم ويأخذ منهم وينهل عنهم ولا يمكن الخروج عن المصنفات التي جُمعت في عصر الرواية بحال.

2- حيث أنهم كانوا في عصر التدوين والرواية كان لا بد لهم من التثبت لإبراء الذمة -على الأقل- بتدوين اسم من أخذوا هذا الحديث عنه، ثم عمن أخذه إلى التابعي، فالصحابي، فالنبي عليه وآله الصلاة والسلام. فقد احتاجوا لذكر الأسانيد الموصلة إلى صاحب الشريعة صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم، إذ أنه لا يليق أن يدون الراوي حديثاً عن صاحب الشريعة صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم بدون ذكر الإسناد إليه، ومن ثم يتفرغ النقاد من أهل الحديث لنقد سند الحديث وتصحيحه للبناء عليه أو تضعيفه وعدم البناء عليه.

3- الإسناد في عصرهم كان حاجة أساسية ضرورية لا غنى عنها لأنه بصحة السند بين الراوي في عصر الرواية وبين النبي صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم يثبت الدين، وتوَصَّلُ الأصول الشرعية الملزمة، ويجل الحلال، ويحرم الحرام، وتنسب المسائل الشرعية إلى سيدنا النبي عليه وآله الصلاة والسلام.

4- ولذلك قال الإمام الحاكم -كما تقدم-: (فَلَوْلَا الْإِسْنَادُ وَطَلَبُ هَذِهِ الطَّائِفَةِ لَهُ وَكَثْرَةُ مُوَاطَبَتِهِمْ عَلَى حِفْظِهِ لَدَرَسَ مَنَارُ الْإِسْلَامِ، وَلَتَمَكَّنَ أَهْلُ الْإِلْحَادِ وَالْبِدْعِ فِيهِ بِوَضْعِ الْأَحَادِيثِ، وَقَلْبِ الْأَسَانِيدِ، فَإِنَّ الْأَخْبَارَ إِذَا تَعَرَّتْ عَنُ وُجُودِ الْأَسَانِيدِ فِيهَا كَانَتْ بُرْئًا). وهذا واضح، لما وضعه الوضعاء، وكذبه الكذابون، ونسبوه زوراً إلى النبي صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم، فكان الإسناد وصحة الإسناد هما الفيصل والفرقان بين ماروي عن رسول الرحمن وما دسّه أولياء الشيطان، وبذلك حَفِظَ اللهُ تعالى سنة نبيه وكمال دينه إلى يوم القيامة.

أما ما بعد عصر التدوين والرواية، أي بعد القرن الخامس تقريباً، فغاية ما تذكره الإجازات هو رفع الإسناد إلى أحد المصنفات التي دوّنت في عصر التدوين والرواية. ومنها بأسانيدھا إلى النبي صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم. هذا في عصور ما بعد الرواية، أما في عصورنا هذه البالية، فمعظم هذه الإجازات هي للتبرك بأسانيدھا، وغاية ما تذكره هي الإقتصار على رفع الإسناد لثبّت الأمير أو الشوكاني أو الدهلوي وأمثالهم رحمهم الله تعالى، وهذا عمل يكاد أن يكون هو وعدمه سواء، والمتفاخر بهذه الأسانيد ظناً أنها مثل أسانيد وجمع أحمد والطبراني والبرّار وأمثالهم، فهو مغبون. وليس هناك من فائدة سوى التبرك بعلو السند في هذه العصور، بل يقول بعض الصوفية أن نزول السند أعظم بركة لكثرة العلماء وأهل الحديث فيه، فكلما كثروا كلما كثرت البركة، وبالترحم عليهم بذكرهم، وبذكر الصالحين تنزّل الرحمت. وعمد غير قليل من كبار مشايخنا ومشايخهم رحمهم الله تعالى إلى إجازة أهل العصر كافة، فإن صحت إجازة كهذه، فالبركة متوافرة لجميع أهل العصر في العصور الماضية كلها، والفقير على ضعفي أجزى أهل العصر كافة بالإجازة العامة بالشروط المعروفة عند أهل الأثر. والخلاصة العملية أن هذا الدين علم وعمل وليس مجرد انتساب وإجازات وورق. فليس هناك فرق حقيقي بين أن يكون بين طالب علم في هذه الأيام وبين الشوكاني خمس وسائط أو خمسين، لأن هذه الأسانيد وهذه الرواية لا يثبت بها دين، ولا تنسب بها مسائل شرعية، ولا تحل الحلال ولا تحرم الحرام ولا تؤصل للأصول الشرعية، فكل ذلك موجود ثابت معروف في كتب الرواية التي انتهى التدوين فيها منذ قرابة ألف عام، وليس يوسع من بعدهم إلا رفع الإسناد إليهم، وشم من خلاهم إلى من فوقهم.

وليس هذا تزهداً في الإجازات، فولدي السيد يحيى حفظه الله تعالى ورعاه والذي لم يكمل عشر سنوات من عمره بعد، لديه أكثر من مائة إجازة في الأسانيد الحديثية الشريفة وبعض الساعات العالية من بعض كبار المسندين وهو صبي صغير لم يبلغ الحلم ولم يجر عليه القلم، فهذا شرف وتبرك، ولا بد من وضعه في موضعه، فالمباهاة والمفاخرة في هذه الأشياء لا تصدر عن طالب علم حليم، والله تعالى أعلم.

وبعض الإجازات في هذا العصر هي ورقة انتساب لفلان أو فلان، لا إثبات للأسانيد الحديثية أو رفع لها أو سماعات، والله تعالى أعلم، وهذا لأبأس به إن لم يكن للتفاخر والتنافس. أما أن يتحصل بعض الجهلة عن أوراق إجازة من مشايخ للتفاخر والتنافس، فهؤلاء يصدق فيهم حديث سيدنا رسول الله صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم الذي أخرجه البخاري (5219) ومسلم (2133) عن سيدتنا أسماء بنت سيدنا أبي بكر الصديق رضي

الله تعالى عنهما، قالت: (قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: الْمُتَشَبِّعُ بِمَا لَمْ يُعْطَ كَلَابِسِ ثَوْبِي زُورٍ ").
والحديث رواه مسلم عن السيدة عائشة رضي الله تعالى عنها.

ثم إن الإجازات هذه الأيام في أكثرها -ما خلا الإجازات العلمية والسماعات الصحيحة- لا تعني سوى مجرد اللقاء وطلب الإجازة، بل وحتى مجرد اللقاء ليس شرطاً، فهي لا تعني تحمّل العلم أو الرواية بالضرورة مطلقاً. فقد تكون تبركاً صرفاً أو دراسة لكتيب متأخر في علوم الآلة أو غيرها. أما السماعات فنعم ما هي، وخصوصاً إذا كانت قراءة دارس، مع الضبط، على أن هذا أندر من الكبريت الأحمر في هذه الأزمان وذلك لأن معظم السماعات هذه الأيام هدرمة إضافة إلى أن الضبط هذه الأيام ضبط كتاب لا ضبط شيخ، فالشيخ مضبوط بالكتاب الذي يرجع تصنيفه وجمعه إلى عصر الرواية والتدوين. وأعلّ علماء الرواية الهدرمة وقراءة اللحّان، وهذا هو معظم السائد في الأزمان الأخيرة، وإن تساهل البعض في شيء من الهدرمة، فلأن الشيخ والطالب كانا عالمين بما يُقرأ في الكتاب، فجاءت الإجازة جبراً لنقص وتداركاً لتقصير على فرض وقوعه، أما وأن من يقرأ ويسمع لا يعرف ما في الكتاب فالإجازة عندئذ تصبح الأساس لا السماع!! والإجازة هذه الأيام تحصيل حاصل وتبرك كما تقدم. والميزة لسماعات هذه الأيام -في معظمها- بالمقارنة مع الإجازة الورقية هو سماع الصلاة على سيدنا رسول الله والصلاة عليه صلى الله تعالى عليه وآله وسلم، والله تعالى أعلم. ومع ذلك فالسماعات قليلة، وأوراق الإجازات كثيرة، والسماع رزق. والكل يرجع إلى مادون في عصر الرواية. فالإسناد في عصور الرواية يثبت به الدين، والإسناد في هذا العصر لا يثبت به من الدين شيء، والأفضل الإشتغال بعلم الجرح والتعديل، والعلل، وغيره.

وقد كان السيد الوالد رحمه الله تعالى وأحسن مثواه كثيراً ما يردد: "مغبون من أخذ الرواية وأهمل الدراية".

قاله حامداً مصلياً مسلماً:

محمد بن يحيى النينوي

عفا الله تعالى عنه

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