

The concept of "Isnaad" and learning Islam or accepting its teachings from Orientalists and Muslim scholars who are unskilled in the relative division of Islamic sciences

"Isnaad" linguistically refers to the attribution of one element to another. In the science of hadith it refers to relating the statement of one person to another. Thus, contextually within Islamic Law, especially in the sector of hadith where the prophetic traditions are transmitted, the "Isnaad" basically refers to the chain or link of narration from one individual or scholar to another individual or scholar, e.g. "Mr. A" said that "Mr. B" said "xy & z" or "Mr. A" said that "Mr. B" said that "Mr. C" said "xy & z."

In life, we do not necessarily always believe a child who says, e.g. that something is burning in the kitchen, except after verification by sight or hearing about the same from another person whose statement could probably be accepted. Upon hearing that any or some of our investments have dropped in value, we try to ascertain the reality of the case since it has importance to us. Likewise, the Deen is very important and it is not to be acquired from those who do not know it and from those who cannot be trusted to teach us the proper Islamic teachings.

Imaam Bukhari's work, the Sahih, gains prominence in Islam because every hadith is narrated by a trusted, reliable and honest Muslim who could not be accused of lying or who did not engage in Islamically prohibited activity. The same methodology was used by every narrator of hadith, in Bukhari, to acquire it from another. Thus the entire "Isnaad" or "chain of narration," in Bukhari, is a link from one individual of integrity to another of integrity. There is not a single "Kaafier (Non-Muslim)" narrator in Imaam Bukhari's work. Neither would you find a "Kaafier" narrator in the entire six major collections of hadith. Let alone this, even the other works of hadith, which have some or many weak narrations, do not include any "Kaafier" narrator. This is because it is a condition, for the acceptance of the hadith, that the narrator be Muslim. The great Imaams never learnt Islam from scholars who were not pious or those who were attributed with having to create disapproved innovations in Islam. Islamic scholars have always said: "Be concerned from whom you acquire the knowledge of Islam."

A non-Muslim Orientalist scholar, whether Christian or Jew or whether he or she might be German, British or of any other race, does not have the attribute of Imaan. Why then does this Orientalist scholar place his or her research and field of interest in the study of a religion to which he or she does not belong? Give your answers to this question. How many of such Orientalist scholars have ever accepted Islam? The answer could probably be "very few."

Can a Muslim ever allow himself or herself to be trapped into the folly of accepting the Orientalist scholars' interpretation of Islam and its teachings? Is this not the discarding and rejecting of the interpretation of Islam from its own great scholars who were not mere scholars, but were rather great A'imma (leaders) of Islamic sciences - jurisprudence, Arabic, linguistics, *Tafsier* and *Hadith*. They were also men of great *Taqwa & piety*.

Was it the methodology of the *Sahabah Radhiyallahu anhum* to study the Shari'ah from the pure fountain source of Nubuwwah (prophethood) or did they engage into a comparative study - comparing Nabi *Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam's* teachings to those of the other

prevalent religions? A comparative study, of Islam's teachings to that of any other religion, could be justified, for the sake of Dahwah, within the present world order or environment of debate and educational methodology.

The study of Orientalist scholars' works could also be justified by arguing that such a study is to refute their objections against Islam and their false views. To what extent do we continue to engage in such scholastic refutation that eventually or mainly is limited to a small and fractional readership or which remains shelved in the archives of universities? Give this issue ... only some of your thought! However, we can never ever accept any Orientalist scholar's interpretation of an Islamic ruling unless it is verified and accepted by our Muslim Ulema. A ruling of the Shari'ah cannot be based from the work of an Orientalist. Neither can any teaching of the Shari'ah be accepted from the works of Orientalists and other non-Muslim scholars or writers. We could only do so, if we can verify, from the primary and secondary sources of our great Muslim scholars, that such teachings are part of the Shari'ah and that the quotations given in the Orientalists' works are exact quotations or translations of such sources. Without such verification, any Muslim scholar, who accepts Islamic information from Orientalists' sources, is firstly placing his own Imaan in danger and secondly, is misguiding others because of his ignorance. He or she is also openly giving preference to Orientalist scholars and showing clear disregard for the original Arabic sources of the Shari'ah. The latter sources have great importance in Islam; to the extent that a Muslim scholar cannot base any Shari'ah ruling through an inference that is solely made from the translated texts of the Qur'aan, hadith or other primary sources of the Shari'ah even if he be a scholar of erudition and of the highest Islamic learning, even if he be a "Qaadhi (judge)" or Mufti and has the greatest degree of piety in Allah's sight since the exact Arabic text of the Qur'an and hadith have no equivalent in providing an exact meaning or shade of meaning.

We neither accept any historical conclusion nor historical facts given by the Orientalists. A Muslim writer cannot thus conclude, upon the basis of his readings regarding certain historical details given by Orientalists or other non-Muslims, that the events were actually as given by such non-Muslim scholars, unless if such facts are meticulously verified. Not even our Muslim writers and historians have recorded every facet of Islamic history in flawless precision, how then could we conclude such details through Orientalists' writings since we cannot rely upon them for a truthful record. History is important as well and an impure history destroys your roots and origins. It also disfigures the realities of Islamic growth, spread and development. If Islam was ignorant to allow the free acceptance of its teachings from other sources, then surely all Islam's enemies would have been clever enough to write thousands of works which would have sufficiently served them to misguide and mislead Muslims.

Muslim writers, especially students who study in the various universities that have departments for Islamic studies, must be careful of these issues. There is no objection against studying in such departments since this enables the student to acquire research methodology, skills in writing, knowledge of the various styles of laying out academic papers and allows him to become acquainted with hundreds of other sources.

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