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Understanding the Spirit of Time and Interdisciplinary Perspective in the Interpretation of Ḥadīth¹

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Abstract

Throughout history, Muslim scholars have strived to understand the true meaning of the Prophet's (pbuh) aḥadīth and interpret them according to the changing conditions of the time. Sciences of Ḥadīth emerged specifically to meet two objectives; first, to distinguish authentic aḥadīth from fabricated ones via the chains of report and texts criticism and second, to elaborate it further in order to meet any new conditions or changes introduced into life with the passage of time. Sciences of Ḥadīth and its sub-disciplines are open to further development. The evolving structure of the Sciences of Ḥadīth from its succinct form to its current elaborate structure is clear evident of its dynamic and progressive character. In this study, the researcher focuses on additional critical points in the pursuit of gaining a better understanding of aḥadīth, such as comprehending the spirit of the time and adopting an interdisciplinary perceptive.

Keywords: Interpretation, Ḥadīth texts, Spirit of Time, Interdisciplinary Perspective.

Hadis Yorumunda Zamanın Ruhunu Anlamak ve İnterdisipliner Perspektif

Özet

İslâm âlimleri Hz. Peygamber'den bize ulaşan hadislerin şahih olup olmadıklarını, onların muhtevasını doğru anlamak ve zamanın değişen şartlarına göre yorumlayabilmek için büyük çaba göstermişlerdir. Hadis ilimleri bu gayretlerin tabii sonucu olarak doğmuş ve zaman içerisinde gelişmiştir. Bu da hadisleri doğru anlamak için konulmuş disiplin ve kaidelerin geliştirilmeye açık dinamik yapısını işaretler. Biz de bu çalışmada hadislerin amacına daha uygun yorumlanabilmesi için çağdaş hadis yorumcusunun daha önceden yapılmış metin anlama tekniklerine ilaveten yeni donanımlara muhtaç olduğunu göstermeye çalıştık. Bu meyanda hadis yorumcusunun içinde yaşadığı çağın ruhuna, bu çağı yöneten dünya görüşüne vakıf olmasının gerekliliğini ve interdisipliner perspektifin sunabileceği müsbet katkıları inceledik.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yorumlama, Hadis metinleri, Zamanın ruhu, İnterdisipliner perspektif.

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Introduction

Throughout history, Muslim scholars have strived to understand the true meaning of the Prophet's (pbuh) words, deeds and tacit approvals as well as interpret them according to the changing conditions of time. This then led to the formation of various disciplines in Ḥadīth studies. They first embarked on a remarkable and unique project by collecting scattered *aḥadīth* and then distinguishing *ṣaḥīḥ aḥadīth* (authentic ones) from fabricated ones. In this regard, the unique Islamic science of *jarh wa ta'dil* (criticism of *ḥadīth* narrators) was established and with its rigorous founding principles, authentic and fabricated *aḥadīth* were distinguished by criticising the chains of narrator and the texts.

Nevertheless, establishing the authenticity of a *ḥadīth* does not suffice in ensuring the application of religious principles in life because the crux of the Prophet's (pbuh) mission lies in the meaning and interpretation of His *aḥadīth* in the context of religion. Thus, clarifying the message of the *aḥadīth* for the Muslims, as part of the Prophet's (pbuh) mission, is a critical task. The significance of this arduous task is better understood when the multiple layers of meaning of *aḥadīth* are taken into consideration. For a more detailed analysis, scholars then developed further disciplines such as *Gharibul Ḥadīth*, *Mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth*, *Asbab Vurudul Ḥadīth* and, *al-Nāskh wāl Mansukh*.

The principles of understanding *ḥadīth* correctly and its subdisciplines however are open to further development. The evolving structure of the science of *Usūl al-Ḥadīth* from its succinct form to its current elaborate structure is clear evidence of its dynamic and progressive character. In this study, we aim to focus on some additional critical points in understanding the message of *aḥadīth* and their convey once to Muslims.

The Problem of Understanding the Contemporary Time in Ḥadīth Interpretation

Fiqh is an area of study which analyzes the rules scattered in the Quran and *Sunnah* in a methodical way and translates them for application in life. A *Faqih* is a person who has the ability and the authority to deduct *shar'ī* regulations from evidence.² *Faqihs* offer a simplified life to Muslims by merging regulations which ordinate life with all its aspects. Certainly, it should not be forgotten that scholars have different opinions on the same subject. These differences which stem from different perceptions, methods and backgrounds are the depth of this field. In the end, the interpreter's duty is to try to understand the true interpretation of the Divine Will in human life.

2 See. Hayreddin Karaman, the article "*Fakih*", Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, İstanbul, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayın Matbaacılık ve Ticaret İşletmesi, v.12, pp. 127-128.

A *ḥadīth* interpreter in a way assumes the responsibility of a *Faqih* and tries to lay out the *Fiqh* of *sunnah*. The interpreter tries to unearth the meaning embedded in the regulations as well as the *'illah* (reason) behind the regulations. He also applies the *'illah* of the regulation he has determined on other cases with the same *'illah*. This requires understanding the case in its context and determining what Allah's (swt) Will would be in that case. Such an application necessitates an understanding of the regulation and the context in its entirety. Both man and his biological and spiritual aspects as well as his environment in relation to other environments should be scrutinized thoroughly.

Among Islamic disciplines, *Fiqh* is one which involves many variables. Therefore, throughout history it has followed a dynamic and developing course. Since *Fiqh* aims to give direction to changing circumstances based on permanent ones, the dynamic nature of *Fiqh* compels even those who claim that the door of *ijtihad* has been closed to often resort to *ijtihad*.

The dynamic nature of Islamic *Fiqh* makes the task of delineating *Fiqh* of *sunnah* arduous for the *ḥadīth* interpreter. In the past, life flew in a slower course, and socio-cultural as well as socio-political events revolved around permanent parameters. Administrative methods, agrarian lives and lives based on livestock, military structures and scientific activities advanced slowly and thus transformed life slowly. This slow pace enabled the interpreter to have a better understanding of the transforming life and offer solutions to problems.

In modern times, life has gained incredible speed. Activities in all fields ranging from cultural exchange to scientific endeavours have changed rapidly. Especially in the last few decades, advances in technology have given momentum to transformation of cultures and lives. The quality and quantity of the nature of this transformation have perplexed scientists and *ḥadīth* interpreters alike.

The biggest handicap faced by the majority of *ḥadīth* interpreters is the difficulty of grasping the spirit of the contemporary era. Today, scientific disciplines have flourished to a level which prevents man from mastering various fields at the same time. Nevertheless, the *ḥadīth* interpreter is expected to grasp the worldview of today and determine its philosophical background and how and through what mechanisms it steers life. Only then can the *ḥadīth* interpreter defend permanent values, analyze changing variables and offer solutions. In this regard, important issues as a separate subtitle have been delineated above.

A Ḥadīth Interpreter Observing *Fiqh* of *Maqāṣid*

Throughout history, as in other fields, Muslims have experienced discontinuities in the interpretation of sacred texts. While they went through stagnation in scientific fields, they always able to overcome them, for example, with the systematization of the *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* (Founding Principles of Shari'a)

which was a result of fulfilling such a need.

The *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* refers to the spirit of Islamic principles which should be observed while making practical deductions in the method of *Fiqh*. In the early history of Islamic *Fiqh*, the *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* was not included in the methodology books. This does not mean that the *fuqaha* did not know or observe “*Maqāṣid al-Shari’a*”. On the contrary, their edifice in general was shaped by *maqāṣid al-Shari’a*. This *Fiqh*, recorded in the minds of *fuqaha* rather than *Fiqh* books then started to weaken in edifice and was overlooked while issuing *fatwa*. ‘*Illah* (effective cause) in *aḥkām* and resemblances in appearance rather than the main aim were deemed to be sufficient in issuing *fatwa*. In order to rectify this situation, methodologists systematized the *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* and included it in the methodology books.

The concepts of “*Maqāṣid al-Shari’a*” or “*maṣlaḥat*” constitute a prominent position in methodology principles because it systematizes the *maṣlaḥat* of people in the world and the hereafter in issues relating to Allah’s orders and prohibitions. These principles were included as *maṣlaḥat* in methodology books and later were formulized as “*Maqāṣid al-Shari’a*”.

In this regard, *Maqāṣid al-Shari’a* was contained in Imam al-Juwayni’s (d. 438 AH / 1047 CE) “*al-Burhan*” for the first time under the category of “essentials” on five main foundations.³ Imam Ghazali (d. 505 h / 1111 CE) is one of the pioneers to have analyzed the issue of “*maqāṣid*”. His book “*Shifa’ul Ghalil fi Bayan ah-Shubah wal Muhayyal wa Masalik al-Ta’lil*” and “*al-Mustasfa*” are especially worthy of attention.

Fahrud-dîn ar-Rāzi’s (d. 606 AH. / 1209 CE.) “*al-Mahsûl*”, Abdulaziz ibn Abdusselam’s (d. 660 AH. / 1262 CE.) work which brought a sufi perspective to the concept of *maṣlaḥat* “*Qāwaid al-Ahkām fi Masalihi’l Anām*”, Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 728 AH. / 1328 CE.) “*Majmā’ati al-Rasāil vel Masāil*” and İbn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya’s (ö. 751 AH. / 1350 CE.) “*T’lām’ul Muvakkîin*” are examples of such books.⁴

Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi’s “*Al-Muvāfakāt fî Usul al Islāmî*”⁵ is a cornerstone in *maqāṣid* studies. It studies the concept of “*Maqāṣid a-Shari’a*” in an unprecedented way by analyzing it as a *qat’i* (definitive) instead of *zanni* (hypotetical) and a *kulli* (complete) instead of *juz’i* (partial) principle. As contemporary Muslim thinkers and scholars also continue to pay attention to *maqāṣid*, many books have been

3 See Abdul Mālik bin Abdullah Al-Juwaynī, “*al-Burhān Fī Usūl al-Fiqh*”, (Vafa, 1418), vol. 2, p.602.

4 Muhammed Khalid Masud, “*Islamic Legal Philosophy: A Study of Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi’s Life and Thought*”, Pakistan, Islamic Research Institute, 1977, p. 150.

5 Ibrahim b. Mūsa Al-Shāṭibī, “*Al-Muvāfakāt Fī Usūl al Fiqh*”, Bayrūt, Dār al Marifah.

written in the field such as Muhammed Al Tāhir ibn Ashūr's (d. CE 1973) book "*Makāsīdu al-Sharia 'ul Islāmiyye*".⁶

It has been argued that the rationale for the systemization of the *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* in methodology books as a principle was the lack of attention to the spirit of Islam as the foundation of *Fiqh* in issuing *fatwas*. The spirit observed by the *fuqaha* (jurists) of the early period of Islam was overlooked in the following centuries and issues were reductively interpreted, irrespective of their main context. These approaches necessitated the revival and systemization of this spirit. This principle aims to return to the origin, not detaching itself from *Fiqh*. On the other hand, it is unacceptable to assume that *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* can pose as an alternative to the science of *usul al-Fiqh*. Such an approach would undermine the significance of *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* itself.

While dealing with the physical world affairs, the ḥadīth interpreter should do it holistically; in other words, he should be able to use the opportunities provided by the *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid*. His comprehension of this essence, especially in modern times, will enable him to stand close to the Divine Will. Thus, understanding the spirit of the contemporary era is essential in accomplishing this task.

Aḥadīth on prophetic medicine can exemplify this situation. al-Ṭīb al-Nabawī (Prophetic medicine) texts constitute a substantial number of *aḥadīth* included in ḥadīth literature and Muslim practice. Prophetic medicine refers to the medical practices and advice of the Prophet (pbuh). After his demise, Muslims maintained a reputable literature in this field and wrote books on Prophetic medicine. This literature originates from *aḥadīth* in "*Kitāb al-Ṭīb*" and "*Kitāb al-Marḍā*" sections of ḥadīth collections as well as *aḥadīth* included in various other sections of ḥadīth literature.

As a consequence of the Prophet's (pbuh) role in Islam, the prophetic medical tradition has a considerable impact on Muslims' perception of medicine. This tradition in its entirety has been regarded by many scholars in a divine sense and attributed a religious meaning which has led to a literature esteemed by the Muslim masses. For example, Ibn Qayyūm al-Jawziyyah (d.751/1350) claims that the medical advices and practices of the Prophet (pbuh) have binding nature on believers. In his work on Prophetic medicine he says that this branch of medicine has such wisdom that even the greatest doctors would feel incompetent.⁷

In this regard, it is important to understand who to interact with regard to the

6 al-Tāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, "*Maqāṣid al-Shariyyah al-Islāmiyyah*", Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣri & Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnāni, 1. ed, 2011.

7 Muḥamad Ibn al-Qayyūm al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṭibbu al-Nabawī*, Ed. 'Abidu al-Ghanī 'Abd al-Khāliq,, Bayrūt, Dār al-Fikr), p. 1.

ṣaḥiḥ aḥadīth in this literature. The issue of how to understand the *ṣaḥiḥ aḥadīth* in this field, to distinguish the ones of revelation origin and those of traditional Arab medicine and what should be followed and what should be abandoned is an important issue.

The issue of how to understand prophetic medicine in modern times has become controversial for Muslims. al-Ṭīb al-Nabawī means the methods applied and medicine advised by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). After the demise of the Prophet (pbuh), a vast literature was built in this field. Medical advices of the Prophet (pbuh) were collected in many works called “al-Ṭīb al-Nabawī”. The main sources of this literature are the “*Kitāb al-Ṭīb*” and “*Kitāb al-Marḍā*” sections of *ḥadīth* collections. However, as recognized by experts of the field, the sources are not confined to these two sections; many *aḥadīth* on health can be found in other sections of *aḥadīth* collections as well.

Due to the status of the Prophet (pbuh) in religion, prophetic medicine tradition penetrated the depths of medical culture in Muslim societies. This tradition is regarded as sacred, it deploys religious values and a literature has been created in this plane.⁸

The Prophet (pbuh) is a role model who received revelations. Hence, perceiving all of his medical practice and advices as merely historical practices or as an extension of Arab culture is not appropriate. The *ḥadīth* interpreter should sort them out and distinguish between revelation-based and non-revelation based,⁹ which enables the use of this heritage without endangering human life.

The Prophet (pbuh) received revelations and he became a role model for humanity. Thus, studying his advice and applications in medicine only from the historical context and regarding them merely as an extension of the Arab culture cannot be accepted. Instead, the prophetic medicine based on revelation and experience should be evaluated separately by experts. Only then inconsistency of the theoretical framework can be prevented.

When this literature is studied carefully, it will be recognized that prophetic medicine aims to prioritize methods of preservation of health and medication.¹⁰

8 Many scholars have written books on al-Ṭīb al-Nabawī such as: ‘Abd al-Mālik b. Ḥabīb al-Anḍalūsī, (d.238/852), Muḥammad al-Nīsābūry (d.245/860), Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Dīnāwāry (d.364/975), Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahāny (d.430/1038), Shams al-Dīd al-Dhahaby (d.748/1347), Ibnī Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d.751/1350), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭy (d.911/1505).

9 For detailed information see, Serdar Demirel and Saad Eldin Mansour, “A Theoretical Framework for ‘al-Ṭīb al-Nabawī / Prophetic Medicine’ in Modern Times”, *Revelation and Science Journal*, vol. 01, No. 02 (1433H / 2011), pp. 34-45.

10 Imam Al-Bukhāry narrated, “Allah has not sent down an illness without sending down a cure for it.”

(Muḥammad Bin Ismā‘īl Al-Bukhāry, *Ṣaḥiḥ al-Bukhāry*, Ed. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā, Bayrūt,

Even though tools and methods might change, the aims remain the same. Thus, the *ḥadīth* interpreter should comprehend that the changing means should not be regarded as essential and the main principle of the texts should be upheld.

It is crucial to distinguish revelation-based and non-revelation based medicine related to *aḥadīth* and to prioritize the main aims of the prophetic medicine rather than its means and methods. The main aim should be the human health as the Prophet (pbuh) advised medical treatment and emphasized that it is not against fate.¹¹ If all of the medical method applied during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) is seen and applied as a religious duty, human health and even life can be jeopardized and this goes against the very main aim of the prophetic medicine. In this regard, *Fiqh* of *maqāṣid* is a holistic principle to be observed by the *ḥadīth* interpreter.

A Ḥadīth Interpreter Grasping the Spirit of the Time

In the modern world, the cultural boundaries between the East and the West, the South and the North are not sharply divided. In a globalised world, while maintaining their local forms to an extent, cultures rapidly resemble to the secular Western culture and adopt profane role models through the channels of the internet, television, film and the media. In this transformation process, however, the internalized profane worldview is often overlooked. Ordinary people do not pay much heed to ideologies; thus, the responsibility of constructing an Islamic life on permanent parameters of Islam lies with Muslim intellectuals.

A *ḥadīth* interpreter will not be able to grasp the practices permeating the Muslim life as constructed within Western ontological and epistemological contexts without understanding and reckoning with the Western paradigms of edifice. Only with such an understanding can the *ḥadīth* interpreter assess the similarities in essence and form between the Western and Muslim communities. Sciences of *Fiqh* and *ḥadīth* offer the opportunities for such an evaluation with their developing, dynamic structures, but such a task can be achieved only by interpreters with the necessary formation. Omar Ibn Al Khattab's (r.a) statement

Dār Ibn Kathīr al-Yamāma, 3rd ed, v. 5, p. 2151, ḥadīth no. 5354)

Similarly Imam Muslim narrated, "For every disease there is a cure so if the medicine comes upon the disease it cures it by the will of Allah, the Most High."

(Muslim Bin Ḥajjāj Al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. by Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Bāqī. Bay-rūt, Dār Ihyā al-Turath al-'Arabī, v. 4, p. 1729, ḥadīth no. 2204)

Aḥadīth mentioned in this category do not only rule the permissibility of treatment but advise seeking ways of treatment, causes of illnesses and their cures.

11 Yusuf Al-Qaraḍāwī, "*al-Sunnah Maṣḍrān lil Ma'rifaḥ Wāl Haḍārah*", Dār al-Shuruq, 2nd ed, pp. 148– 172; Yusuf Al-Qaraḍāwī, "*Kayfa Nat'āmal Ma' al Sunnah*", United State of Amerika, 2nd ed, pp. 139-154.

that “Those who do not know jahilliyyah cannot know Islam”¹² summarizes this notion if the word “*jahilliyyah*” is interpreted as non-Islamic ideas and cultures shaping the life.

The profane and Islamic issues should be understood and evaluated with a worldview penetrating and steering the spirit of the time. Understanding requires a perspective which grasps the profundity of the analyzed issue and making sense necessitates a stance which gives direction to the perception. In order to have a stance, one should understand his own position and the relationship of his stance with others. Bearing in mind the definition of *Fiqh* as knowing, understanding, comprehending, grasping something¹³, it becomes clear that such an understanding does not only refer to knowing the spirit of principles. Comprehending the spirit of the case is also equally important in order to compliment the assessment of the principle. Thus, *Fiqh* has a comprehensive meaning referring to *ḥadīth* texts as well as the cases to which they are applied because the discipline of *Fiqh* consists of principles and attitudes which guide an individual to learn his rights in his favour and against him, and understanding the essence of *Fiqh* should be a priority. *Fiqh* derives its sources from the Quran and *Sunnah*. Hence, a profound understanding of the revelation is essential for a *ḥadīth* interpreter. Since revelation is to be applied in real life, then understanding dominant paradigms and assessing how and to what extent to interfere should be balanced. In order to minimize inapplicable *ijtihad* and subjective interpretations of the revelation, knowledge of Shari’a and particular events should be combined because if the essence underlying new events is overlooked, the interpreter will evaluate an event procured within a foreign reality and misinterpret it. In that sense, he will force the boundaries of traditional *Fiqh* and attribute erroneous interpretations to the event without realizing its depth. Injunctions are often interpreted and victimized by such reductionist approaches while the interpreter remains unaware of the anachronic oddness. The solutions offered by such well-intentioned yet inadequate interpreter of contemporary edifices will inevitably mislead his followers.

In the past, even Bedouin and urban interpreters were distinguished. In modern times, comprehensive perceptions should extent not only to cities but to the entire globe. In an era when all cultural boundaries are blurred, cities, tastes, education methods and economic regimes are almost uniformed; an encompassing perspective is desperately needed. In this regard, the stipulation that the capitalist system overlaps with Islam can exemplify this worldview.

12 Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Shaykh, “*Sharḥ Kashf al-Shubahāt*”, ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Qāsim, (Ṭab ‘Alā Nafaqah Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Qāsim, 1. ed, 1419H), p.27.

13 Hayreddin Karaman, “Fıkıh”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, v.13, pp. 1-14.

Free market economy is widely accepted throughout the world. The necessity of following the rules of the global economy in order to expand in a global economic market and compete with global economic companies is commonly claimed by Muslims.¹⁴ Those who overlook the differences between Islamic free market and capitalist free market usually refer to these *aḥadīth*:

Narrated By Abu Hurayrah: A man came and said: “Apostle of Allah, fix prices. He said: (No), but I shall pray (for blessing).” Again the man came and said: “Apostle of Allah, fix prices. He said: It is but Allah Who makes the prices low and high. I hope that when I meet Allah, none of you has any claim on me for doing wrong regarding blood or property.”¹⁵

Anas (ra) narrates: People came to the Prophet (pbuh) and said: “O Prophet (pbuh), prices have risen, please fix prices.” The Prophet (pbuh) replied: “Allah makes the prices. He makes your *rizq* (providence) high and low. I hope that when I meet Allah, none of you has any claim on me for doing wrong regarding blood or property.”¹⁶

As indicated by the *aḥadīth* above, in Islam, where demand and supply are determinant, free market is essential. Thus, the majority of scholars refuse fixed prices and take fluctating prices as fundamental.¹⁷ However, this situation is not absolute. Scholars have accepted that authorities can intervene and fix prices when necessary. The priority is to protect the seller and the buyer from damage and establish mutual contentment. The Quran states:

“O you who have believed, do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves [or one

14 Turkey has a fast-growing economy and came second in economic growth pace after China in 2011 at the global scale. The role of the current Justice and Development Party government and its supporting religious businessmen cannot be denied in this success story. Many researchers, on the other hand, drew attention to the congruency between the economic growth of the religious community and free market capitalism. The term “Islamic Calvinists” was coined to mark this compatibility. Both international and local media presented headlines such as “Muslim Protestants” and “Islamic Calvinists”. Şükrü Hanioglu, objects to this term and maintains the intellectuals who can discuss Turkish Muslim community, its cultural problems and history only in Western paradigms in his article “Max Weber - İslami Calvinistler” . See M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Max Weber - İslami Calvinistler”, Zaman Gazetesi: 02-02-2006.

<http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=252508> Retrieved: 25-12-2011.

15 Sulayman Bin Al-Ash’as Abū Dāwūd, “Sunan Abī Dāwūd”, Bayrūt, Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, vol. 3, p.286, ḥadīth no: 3452.

16 Muḥammad Bin ‘Isā Tirmidhī, “Sunani al-Tirmidhī”, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr, Bayrūt, Dār Iḥyā al-Turath al-Arabī, n.d., v.3, p. 605, ḥadīth no: 1314; Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad al-Shaybānī Ibn Ḥanbal, “Musnad Aḥmad”, Egypt, Mu‘assasat Qurṭubat, n.d., v. 3, p. 286, ḥadīth no. 14089.

17 Al-Mubārakfūrī, Muḥammad Bin ‘Abdu Rahman bin ‘Abdu Rahim, “Tuhfatu al-Aḥwazī Bi Sharḥi al-Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī”, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyy), v. 3, p. 433.

another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful” (Nisa: 4/29).

If the mentality of the contemporary liberal economy, its operation and foundational parameters are taken into consideration, it becomes evident that the situation indicated by the *aḥādīth* is not compatible and their resemblance is only in form. It is a premise of the discipline of logic, “In order to pass judgements about something, first, you have to grasp it.” Therefore, if the *ḥadīth* interpreter cannot comprehend the essential crux of his subject of study, then his evaluations and judgement will prove to be wrong because free market economy prioritizes “expansion” by all means, unlike Islam which aims for “distribution” and “cooperation”. Free market economy needs a market situation where government intervention does not exist or is minimized. This concept does not concern itself with “fair market”. Such economic perception bases its structure of production on “fulfilling insatiable desires”, not on “legitimate and limited necessities”. It aims to expand according to psychological needs established and provoked by itself rather than biological needs.

In sum, it traps man in a vicious cycle where he produces to consume and consumes to produce. It springs from the motto “let them do, let them pass”. Interest, sex and alcohol based consumption are the pillars for a vibrant market. Capitalism sanctifies its absolute area of consumption. Free market system detests commercials to be restricted in any way. Thus, it is not bound by “halal” or “haram” restrictions. The only reason why it ventures into “halal food” sector is to benefit from this market and to increase its profit margin.

Modern capitalism came to existence as a result of mental changes, not technology. Hence, free-market-based modern capitalism is a result of secular worldview. It does not allow God in particular, the sacred in general, to interfere in economy and advocates absolute personal property. On the other hand, in Islam, the absolute owner of property and the determiner of prices is Allah (swt). In this sense, proposing that Islam supports the capitalist free market system and referring to the aforementioned *ḥadīth* is not realistic. Thus, the *ḥadīth* interpreter should not prioritize the similarities in form but focus on the similarities and differences in essence. Otherwise, without understanding the word view behind the social phenomena, he will justify non-Islamic rulings by misinterpreting *ḥadīth* texts.

The Ḥadīth Interpreter and Inter-disciplinary Perspective

The *ḥadīth* interpreter, when relating to his field, should try to benefit from sociology, psychology, politics, medicine and other scientific fields. As these disciplines shape life and shed light on contemporary aspects of rulings, in order to make substantial statements, the *ḥadīth* interpreter needs an interdisciplinary perspective. This, however, does not mean that the *Fiqh* of *ḥadīth* should be dominated by modern scientific disciplines.

In order to demonstrate this point, the issue of when a human being gains life right can be given as an example as it constitutes a prominent place in Islamic jurisprudence as well as various religious and judicial understandings.

Does the man gain his life right before or after birth? This question is significant because it is concerning human life based on individual and social laws. The main issue pertaining to human life is the issue of “abortion” as a widespread practice around the world. A 2007 study published in *The Lancet*, one of the world’s best-known and most respected general medical journals, found that the global rate of abortion was 45.6 million in 1995 and 41.6 million in 2003.¹⁸

These numbers should suffice to show the seriousness of the issue. Muslim scholars stipulate that a human being gains his right to live in the womb when the spirit is breathed into him. Nevertheless, they dispute about when the spirit is breathed. The source of the dispute is the ambiguous structure of the injunction. Most of the Muslim jurists agree that having abortion, without any exigency, 120 days after conception is *haram*. This opinion is based on the interpretation that the spirit is breathed into a foetus 120 days later.¹⁹ Some injunctions refer to 40, 43 and other similar numbers.²⁰ Of course the gap between 120 and 40 days

18 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion#cite_note-Worldwide-0. Retrieved 31-12-2011.

19 ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Rajab, “*Jāmi‘u Al-‘Ulūm wāl Ḥikam*”, Bayrūt, Dār Al-Ma‘rifah, 1408 H., p. 48; Ahmed Abdel Aziz Yacoub, “*The Fiqh of Medicine*”, London, Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd, 2001, p. 211.

20 A ḥadīth is reported by Al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Mas‘ud about human development in which Prophet Muhammad said:

“In any one of you, all components of his creation are collected together in his mother’s womb by 40 days, and in that it is an alaqah (a clinging object) like that, then in that it is a mudghah (a lump looking like it has been chewed) like that. Then God sends an angel and order him with four instructions. He is told to record his livelihood (his sustenance), his age, his deeds, whether he will be miserable or happy, and then the spirit is breathed into him (the soul is acquired)...”

(Al-Bukhārī, v.3, p.1174, ḥadīth no. 3036. See Al-Bukhārī also, v.6, p.2713, ḥadīth no. 7016, Abū Dāvūd, *Sunan Abī Dāvūd*. v.4, p.364, ḥadīth no. 4710)

The same ḥadīth is also reported by Muslim with a change in the order of some of the words and the phrase “in that” (*Fī dhalika*) was not mentioned in the narration of Al-Bukhārī. Muslim’s narration on the authority of the same companion Abdullah Ibn Mas‘ud is as follows:

“In any one of you, all components of his creation are collected together in his mother’s womb by 40 days, then it is a clinging object (‘Alaqah) for a similar (period). Thereafter, it is a lump looking like it has been chewed (Mudghah) for a similar (period). The angel is then sent to him and breathes into him the spirit. Allah sends His angel to it with instructions concerning four things, so the angel writes down his livelihood, his death, his deeds, his fortune and misfortune.”

(Muslim Bin Ḥajjāj. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, v. 4, p.2036, ḥadīth no. 2643)

Another ḥadīth says:

“The ‘Nutfah’ stays in the womb for forty nights, then the angel, gives it a shape”

(Muslim, v.4, p.2038, ḥadīth no.2645)

is quite big and as the issue pertains to the crucial right of a human being to live, information about the matter should be as precise as possible.

In this regard, can the advanced discipline of “modern medicine” shed light on the issue? Can the *ḥadīth* interpreter use the opportunities offered by medical science to understand the issue better? Our answer would be “yes”. We can summarize this point in the following. Spirit, as a metaphysical being, is not subjected to the experiments in the field of medicine. On the other hand, where the physical aspect of when the spirit is breathed is concerned, all phases of the foetus are relevant to medicine. How many days each phase last, when bones are formed, when the heart starts beating, when the foetus starts moving and when it starts to be affected by its environment can be calculated and monitored closely.

All this concrete information offered by medicine presents us with the opportunity to determine or very closely approximate when the spirit is breathed into the foetus. The Quran and *aḥadīth* texts inform us of three fundamental stages that the baby goes through before birth. After these stages, the spirit is breathed. In this regard the Quran states:

Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm (Nutfah) in a place of rest, firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm into a clinging object ('Alaqa); then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump looking like it has been chewed (Mudghah); then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh: then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be Allah, the Best to create!’ (Al-Muminun: 23/13-14)

The stages mentioned in the injunctions are *nutfah* (a drop of sperm), *'alaqaa* (clinging object) and *mudghah* (lump looking like it has been chewed). All these stages occur before the breathing of the spirit into the foetus. All Muslim scholars agree that the spirit is breathed immediately after the completion of these stages.

In our opinion, *aḥadīth* and other textual sources should be interpreted in accordance with medical observations about the length of these stages²¹ because the medical data are conclusive while the interpretations on the *aḥadīth* texts are speculative. In the light of such evidences, rulings on abortion should be reevaluated.

The *ḥadīth* above also denotes that ‘four months’ as each stage forty days as well as “the creation of one of you is gathered in his mother’s womb in forty days” implies that from “*Nutfah*” to “*'Alaqa*” and from “*'Alaqa*” to “*Mudghah*”, the creation is completed within forty days.

21 Professor Zaghoul El-Naggar says that the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet indicates that the first three stages from the “*Nutfah*” to the “*Mudghah*” take about 40 days, which is proven by modern scientific facts.

(See. Zaghoul El-Naggar, “*Treasures in the Sunnah, A Scientific Approach, Part Two*”, Cairo, Al-Falah Foundation, 2005, pp. 31-33.

This study does not aim to discuss the abortion issue or shed light on its various aspects exhaustively. This issue has been chosen to illustrate the opportunities offered by an interdisciplinary perspective and why the *ḥadīth* interpreter should focus on such a perspective.

There are numerous *aḥadīth* that can be understood better with an interdisciplinary perspective. Some pertain to psychology while others concern political science, economy and many other fields. Another ḥadīth to be understood in an interdisciplinary framework is the Prophet's utterance of “*Yataqarabu'l aswāq*” “there will come a time when markets will come closer/ intersect”.²² Today, globalism is studied from various perspectives; this ḥadīth presents an insightful description of its multiple layers of meaning. For centuries, ḥadīth interpreters could not explain this ḥadīth in the sense we understand it today. Like this ḥadīth, many *aḥadīth* can be fully understood only with the passage of time. It is evident that the most outstanding characteristic of globalism is the merge of markets. Despite the vast distances separating markets, stock markets and production hubs, technology and transportation bring them close together. A businessman living in Tokyo can buy and sell in New York stock markets while another residing in Istanbul can scrutinize Jakarta stock markets minute by minute. Our contemporary era renders national borders meaningless and merges stock markets. Until recently, this ḥadīth marked a period beyond the horizons of humanity. Instead of leaving the understanding of this ḥadīth in obscurity in *aḥadīth* books, this ḥadīth should be reinterpreted in the light of economics, politics and sociology. This shows that interdisciplinary ḥadīth studies will bring us closer to the truth.

Conclusion

Our observations on the interpretation of *ḥadīth* texts should not be evaluated separately from the Muslim historical experience. When Islam was expanding, it came across different civilizations. All these civilizations challenged Muslims with their respective civilization paradigms. However defeated they were on the battle field, in the field of civilization they still had much to offer in the philosophical and cultural sense. Muslims faced these challenges that were aimed at epistemological and ontological roots of their religion, took necessary precautions, sifted incompatible elements and transformed what was to be deconstructed. For example, the field of *Ilm Kalam* is a product of such endeavours. Muslims' political and military superiority gave them confidence and enabled them to confidently analyze challenges posed by other civilizations.

But today, the situation is different, and the task of the contemporary *ḥadīth*

22 Ahmad, v.2, p.519, ḥadīth no. 10735.

interpreter is much more daunting than that of his predecessors because the modern individual and the social issues today are much more complex. Western worldview is imposing its political, military and cultural hegemony at a global scale.

Islamic rhetoric can be formulated only when the *hadīth* interpreter can confidently analyze the phenomena and challenges experienced by the Ummah with its unique edifice of being. For example, using methodological knowledge alone does not suffice to implement Islamic teachings of economy; the *hadīth* interpreter should also be equipped with knowledge of stock markets, modern economy, online commerce and as such.

Hence, Islamic education centers should adopt such curricula to meet these challenging demands and, if necessary, restructure their entire academic institutes. This problem is very challenging but not insurmountable. For this, future *hadīth* interpreters should be equipped with the Islamic system of knowledge and knowledge of the spirit of the time. Muslims can exist in history with their religious identity only through Muslim interpreters who exist in a particular period of history and yet steer variables from an Islamic perspective without deconstructing the edifices of being and life in religion.

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