

## **An Analysis of Ibn Qutaybah’s Positive Synchronisation Methodology of *Mukhtalif Al-Hadīth***

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of contemporary rebuke on allegedly problematic *ahādīth* of the Prophet ﷺ by many critics gives rise to claims that these narrations are illogical or conflicting with the Qur’ānic teachings. However, those narrations highlighted as problematic were systematically elaborated, discussed, and codified in detail by many outstanding Muslim scholars of the past. Among them was Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawārī (d. 276AH. / 894CE). This paper applies a descriptive method through content analysis of Ibn Qutaybah’s book *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth* to derive his method of synchronising the alleged *mukhtalif al-hadīth* with the Qur’ānic teachings. It also intends to develop the guidelines in dealing with the alleged problematic ḥadīth relevant for today’s consumption. This paper concludes that utilising the positive method of *ta’wīl* (allegorical interpretation) will increase the possibility of a positive approach in understanding and implementing the teachings of the Prophetic Tradition.

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**Keywords**

*Ta'wīl*, ḥadīth, pseudo-ḥadīth, synchronisation

Ibn Qutaybah is among the early Muslim scholars who led a prolific life during the third century of Hijrah.<sup>1</sup> During his time, the political situation was in an unruly state due to conflict between the children and the beneficiaries of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (reigned between 170–93AH/ 786–809CE).<sup>2</sup> This dispute led to the change of the Caliphate's capital city, massive destruction to the Iraqī heartland, and the authority's reshuffle to Caliph al-Ma'mūn (reigned between 198–218AH/ 813–833CE).<sup>3</sup> His heir al-Mu'taṣim (218–27AH/ 833–42CE)<sup>4</sup> preferred the Turkish military elites and administrators instead of the Arabs<sup>5</sup> and selected Samarra<sup>6</sup> as the new palace city. Later, during Caliph Al-Mu'tamid (256 AH/ 872 CE), the power of the Turkish elites was restricted, and the central authority was restored to the capital city of Baghdad. Ibn Qutaybah, a forty-three-year-old scholar, became witness to a series of political turmoil with eight 'Abbasid caliphates in succession. These political changes, according to him, paved the way for the masses to choose their desired leaders and denominations using sources of their own.<sup>7</sup>

1. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, trans. Bayard Dodge, 2 volumes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 1:170
2. Ibid., 1: 351–380; G. Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 245, 250, 256–7.
3. Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abdillāh Al-Dhahabī, *Siyār A'lam al-Nubalā'*, vol. 11 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2007), 236.
4. Abū al-Ḥasan Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar*, trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Routledge, 1989), 222, 231.
5. Ibn Qutaybah, *Fadl al-Arab wa tanbīh 'alā Ulūmiha*, trans. Sarah Bowen and Peter Webb (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 20.
6. Tāhīr Muzaffar al-'Amīd, *The 'Abbasid Architecture of Samarra in the Reign of both Al-Mu'taṣim and Al-Mutawakkil* (Baghdad: Al-Maaref Press, 1973).
7. See Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, trans. Che Amnah Bahari (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2009), 29–40.

Despite the political instability during Ibn Qutaybah's era, the development of religious sciences was at its apex. The reason contributing to this incredible achievement was due to Muslim scholars' vigorous response to the Qur'ānic teachings such as *nazr* (*Al-Ankabūt* (29): 20). This essence of *nazr* urges man to spiritually search, observe and contemplate the creation of Allah so that man may realise that the One who originates life can quickly bring to death the living. Equally vital is the spiritual journey of Prophet Ibrāhīm (*Al-An'ām* (6): 74–83) which urges man to investigate further their intellectual contemplation on signs of Allah (*Al-Rūm* (30):7–9, 20–25) and experience the spiritual yearning for His proximity. Hence, we observe numerous writings of Muslim scholars during Ibn Qutaybah's time presenting an integrated approach between scientific truth (*ʿaql*) and divine revelation (*naql*).<sup>8</sup> The prophetic traditions which inspire man and oblige Muslims to learn, acquire, teach and spend wealth in seeking knowledge<sup>9</sup> became the precursor to Ibn Qutaybah's contribution to knowledge such as literature, the Arabic language, the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of the optimistic synchronisation of *mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*,<sup>11</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, in *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, provided numerous examples of people during his time who misappropriated ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ to support their

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8. Some examples: in the field of economics—Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām (d. 224AH /838CE), *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, trans. Imran Nyazee (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2003); in the field of eschatology—Al-Hārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243AH/ 857CE), *Kitāb al-Tawwāḥum* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2009); in the field of political administration—Abū Naṣr Muhammad al-Fārābī (d. 339AH/ 950CE), *Risālah fī Arā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fādilah*, trans. R. Walzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
  9. Muhammad Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Sūḥib al-Bukhārī*, (Riyād: Dār al-Salām, 1994), vol. 2, book 24, ḥadīth 490; vol. 9, book 92, ḥadīth 410; vol. 6, book 60, ḥadīth 70.
  10. *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 1: 170.
  11. See Mannā' Khattān, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, trans. M Abdulrahman (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Kautsar, 2005), 103–5; Muhammad 'Ajāj al-Khaṭīb *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth wa Mustalāḥuhu* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1989).

thought and denomination. In some cases, he clarified that pseudo-ḥadīth was used to suit their wrongdoings. To solve this predicament, he provided clarifications and applied the method of *taʿwīl* comprising semantic aspect of the Arabic language, rhetoric (*uslub balāghah*) and analogy (*majāz*). *Taʿwīl* also refers to clarification of a keyword or period, or understanding the reality of an event.<sup>12</sup> According to al-Suyūṭī (d. 911AH/1505CE), when an interpretation of a verse of the Qurʾān is made based on specific knowledge, it is known as *tafsīr*, and if it is based on personal *ijtihād*, it is *taʿwīl*.<sup>13</sup> Al-Attas offers a broader meaning: “*tafsīr* is a scientific interpretation of a Qurʾānic verse while *taʿwīl* refers to a rigorous form of *tafsīr*.”<sup>14</sup> In both *tafsīr* and *taʿwīl*, the reference to the Qurʾān and the Prophetic *ahādīth* is extensively examined to derive a correct interpretation. The knowledge of the semantic field that relates to the conceptual structure of the Qurʾānic vocabulary projecting the Islamic vision of reality and truth is equally vital for the process of *taʿwīl*.<sup>15</sup>

*Mukhtalif* is a derivative of *khalafa*,<sup>16</sup> which refers to the disputed or disagreed, and which emerged as a scientific term in ḥadīth studies as early as the third century of Hijrah.<sup>17</sup> This disagreement is connected with the use, meaning and common conflict found in the *matn* or text of the ḥadīth. During Ibn Qutaybah’s era, the masses used *ikhtilāf* in their discussion and distinguished it into two types: *mukhtalaf* and *mukhtalif*. *Mukhtalaf* signifies the differences of opinion that can be quickly simplified and understood by many. In contrast, *mukhtalif* refers to a dispute

12. Muhammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādr, 1994), 82–97.

13. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, 2 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, nd.), 2: 222.

14. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 5.

15. *Ibid.*, 5.

16. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 82–97.

17. Al-Shāfiʿī, *Al-Risālah*, trans. Majid Khadduri (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2008), 333–352.

over the *matn* of a ḥadīth which is difficult to reconcile and requires a long explanation supported by evidence.<sup>18</sup> Thus, *mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* comes to the forefront due to the critical observations by scholars of the past and today to reconcile the apparent contradiction between two ḥadīths or to prefer one of them.<sup>19</sup> Ibn Qutaybah utilised the term to discuss synchronisation of ḥadīths.

Synchronisation refers to a process of arranging or representing events so that they co-occur, being two or more things at the same time.<sup>20</sup> In daily activity, synchronisation of movement is defined as the aligned movements between two or more people.<sup>21</sup> The process of synchronisation also exhibits an increase in affiliation, cooperation and trust.<sup>22</sup> In ḥadīth study, positive synchronisation of *ahadīth* means “aligning the differences” or “harmonising the disparities” or “melding the variations” in line with the teaching of the Qur’ān,<sup>23</sup> in harmony with the established ḥadīth, in accord with the rational investigation (*al-naẓar*) and in sync with rational proof (*hujjat al-‘aql*). Some of them are shown by Ibn Qutaybah, as examined in the next two examples.

### Two Contradictory Ḥadīths: Example One<sup>24</sup>

They said: You have reported that Khabbāb ibn al-Arāt said: “We complained to the Prophet ﷺ on the

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18. Muhammad ‘Alā Thanawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1993), 441–442.
  19. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rahmān al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrib al-Rāwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, nd), 196.
  20. “Synchronize,” *Merriam-Webster.com*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/synchronize> (accessed 10 December 2020).
  21. Ping Dong et al., “Actors Conform, Observers React: The Effects of Behavioral Synchrony on Conformity,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 108, no. 1 (January 2015): 60–75.
  22. Scott S Wildermuth, and Chip Heath, “Synchrony and Cooperation,” *Psychological Science* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 1–5.
  23. Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, 129.
  24. *Ibid.*, no. 145, 154.

parchment of the ground due to excessive heat, but he did not listen to us.”<sup>25</sup> This complaint is about the scorching heat, and they asked the Prophet whether they could perform during the cooler part of the day. The Prophet ﷺ did not take heed of their query. In another narration, they reported, the Prophet ﷺ said: “Perform your prayer during the cooling part of the day for the intense heat is emitted from the hellfire.”<sup>26</sup> They said that there existed an apparent contradiction and divergence.<sup>27</sup>

Studying the response given by Ibn Qutaybah, firstly, we observe that he did not reveal the person who asked the question. He cited “they said – *qālū*,” a similar type of response found in the writing of his *Taʾwīl*. This practice of not revealing the inquirer’s name is in line with the spirit of “hate the sin but not the sinner”;<sup>28</sup> it sounds simple, yet it is a forgotten practice today. It would be more constructive if we offer a silent prayer for them and ourselves.

Secondly, in response to the above-cited statement, Ibn Qutaybah, using his *kunyah*,<sup>29</sup> Abū Muḥammad, affirmatively stated that there is neither divergence nor contradiction between the two ḥadīths, serving as a form of mindsetting to the reader. Then, he clarified that the content of the cited ḥadīth which states that the pleasure of Almighty Allah (رضى الله) exists in the early part of the prayer and His forgiveness (استغفاره) is at the last part of it. Performing prayer in the early part of the time specified is thoroughly recommended, while in the last

25. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd Ibn Mājah al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), *Kitāb al-Salāh, Al-Muḥjam* 1, ḥadīth 667.

26. *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, vol. 1, *Kitāb al-Salāh, Al-Muḥjam* 4, ḥadīth 680.

27. Ibn Qutaybah, *Taʾwīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, 155.

28. See also *Al-Hujūrāt* (49):12.

29. A *kunyah* كنية is a teknonym in Arabic names. A person’s name which is decently given to the mother or father in the tradition of the Arabs. A wedded person (especially ladies) is called by their *kunyah* name, which is *Umm* (mother) or *Abū* (father) plus the name of their first child.

part is considered as a concession (تقصير). The Prophet ﷺ has practised the concession (تقصير) several times to indicate its approval whenever required.<sup>30</sup> Here, Ibn Qutaybah applies fiqh issue on تقصير as one form of *ta'wīl* to resolve the apparent contradiction in the ḥadīths cited above.

To provide a positive synchronisation on the ḥadīth, Ibn Qutaybah, in his third response, clarified by expressing the significance of punctuality in deeds. Accordingly, it “is preferable to forsake an action rather than performing it with lesser rewards.”<sup>31</sup> Ibn Qutaybah related this notion to the silent reaction of the Prophet ﷺ on the request to defer prayer by his companions who were with him.<sup>32</sup> By resorting to *ta'wīl*, the Prophet’s silence is for Ibn Qutaybah a sign of the importance of punctuality in one’s action. In other words, Ibn Qutaybah intends to highlight the vital role of self-discipline in performing *ṣalāh* on time despite the intense heat of the day. Parallel to this choice of *ṣalāh* on time, Anas bin Mālīk narrated: [When we offered the *Ṣalāt al-Ẓuhr* behind Allah’s Messenger we used to prostrate on our clothes to protect ourselves from the heat],<sup>33</sup> and in another narration, Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh narrated: “The Prophet ﷺ used to offer the *Ẓuhr* prayer at midday... .”<sup>34</sup> In another ḥadīth narrated by Abū Hurayrah, the Prophet ﷺ informs that people will crawl to perform *Ṣalāt al-Ẓuhr* on time if they knew its reward: “... if they knew the reward of *Ẓuhr* prayer (during the early moments of its stated time) they would have raced of for it (go early)...”<sup>35</sup> These *ahādīth* specifically indicate the significance of performing not only *Ṣalāt al-Ẓuhr* on time but implicitly other daily *ṣalāh* as well. The tenacity

30. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, trans. Muhsin Khan, vol. 2 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), *Kitāb Taqṣīr al-Ṣalāh*, ḥadīth no. 1084.

31. Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, 155.

32. Ibid.

33. *Ṣahīh al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, *Kitāb Mawāqīt al-Ṣalāh*, ḥadīth 542.

34. Ibid., vol. 1, *Kitāb Mawāqīt al-Ṣalāh*, ḥadīth 560.

35. Ibid., vol. 1, *Kitāb al-Adhān*, ḥadīth 615.

and steadfastness of the Prophet ﷺ in praying *Zuhr* right at the time, after the sun's deviation from the zenith, is in line with the directives of the Qur'an. Allah says in *Al-Nisā'* verse 103: "Verily, the prayer is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours." The verse establishes not only the indispensability of prayer, but also that it be observed at its prescribed time. Delaying of prayer from its designated time does amount to direct contempt of that verse of *Al-Nisā'*. The Qur'an also warns us to not delay prayers from its prescribed time as mentioned in verse 59 of *Maryam*: "Then, there has succeeded them a posterity who have given up the prayer and have followed lusts so that they will be thrown in Hell."

Islam is a religion of *wast* (moderation) which emphasises the attributes of justice, excellence and balance.<sup>36</sup> It teaches Muslims to be balanced in all aspects of life, whether in matters of religion, worship, relationships, ideas, or daily activities. Such activities include performing *ṣalāt* on time, as seen in Ibn Qutaybah's fourth response in synchronising the apparently contradictory ḥadīths. He reiterated that the Prophet ﷺ permitted his companions to defer their prayer in the colder period of the day:

Whenever the Prophet ﷺ started a journey before noon, he used to delay the *Ṣalāt al-Zuhr* prayer till the time of *Ṣalāt al-Asr* and then offer them together; and if the sun declined (at noon) he used to offer the *Ṣalāt al-Zuhr* prayer and then ride for a journey.<sup>37</sup>

This citation to delay the prayer is meant for a traveller or due to unusual or scorching weather. In this explanation, Ibn Qutaybah applies his *ta'wīl* on deferring *ṣalāt* to mean for

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36. Mohd Kamal Hassan, *Voice of Islamic Moderation from the Malay World*, (Ipoh: Emerging Markets Innovative Research, EMIR, 2011); Muhammad Haniff Hassan, "Wasatiyyah as Explained by Prof. Muhammad Kamal Hassan: Justice, Excellence and Balance," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 6, no. 2 (March 2014): 24–30.

37. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 2, *Kitāb Taqṣīr al-Ṣalāh*, ḥadīth 1111.



traveller or due to excessive heat. Although the Prophet ﷺ had preferred that prayers be done on its pristine time, the fact that the Qur'ān calls him *rahmatan li al-‘ālamīn*<sup>38</sup> naturally draws him to consider the wellbeing of Muslims at all times. When it came to the extreme and excessive heat of the sun at times during the *Ṣalāt al-Ẓuhr*, he ordered the delay of the prayer during such situations only. It was not a replacement of the original preference of saying prayer at the beginning of its time. It becomes clear thus that the action of the Prophet ﷺ in performing *Ṣalāt al-Ẓuhr* immediately after the sun crossed the zenith did not contradict his statement of allowing people to delay the *Ẓuhr* prayer due to excessive heat at midday.

The question which arises here pertains to what method of *ta'wīl* was applied by Ibn Qutaybah to synchronise the seemingly contradictory ḥadīths above and how relevant these ḥadīths are in today's context. In brief, the *ta'wīl* method applied by Ibn Qutaybah in Example 1 is as follows:

1. Concealing the enquirer's background;
2. Affirming that the ḥadīth has to be viewed according to proper perspective;
3. Clarifying the content of ḥadīth—to perform the *ṣalāt* on time;
4. Making clear the fiqh issue—concession for travellers or extreme temperature;
5. Relating the vital role of self-discipline with the *ṣalāt* on time;
6. Explaining the purpose of Islam i.e to ease human life—through deferring *ṣalāt* due to hardship.

As for its relevance today, we can comprehend that the Prophet's instruction to delay prayer during uncharacteristically extreme temperatures was yet another manifestation of his Prophetic vision. He knew well that the devastating health

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38. *Al-Anbiyā'* (21): 107.

consequences could lead to morbidity and even mortality when exposed to high temperatures. This issue in today's term is characterised as "heatwave."<sup>39</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that more than 150,000 deaths were caused by heatwave alone between 1998 and 2018 worldwide.<sup>40</sup> The WHO also predicts that by 2030 there will be almost 92,000 deaths per year from heatwaves, with sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South and Southeast Asia bearing the most massive burden.<sup>41</sup> Of late, global climate change has fuelled the intensity and frequency of heatwaves around the globe. The 1995 Chicago heatwave left 500 people dead, and another 52,000 Europeans in 2003, with the highest of 14,800 deaths in France alone, and scientists predict the higher temperature as a result of green gas emission.<sup>42</sup> We can thus conclude that Ibn Qutaybah's optimistic synchronisation of the Prophetic ḥadīth related to the deferred performance of *Ṣalāt al-Ẓuhr* due to excessive heat has its scientific wisdom and is still relevant today.

### **Two Contradictory Hadīths: Example Two<sup>43</sup>**

They said: You have narrated from 'Ā'ishah: "The Prophet ﷺ never passes urine while standing."<sup>44</sup> In another narration, Ḥudhayfah said: "I the Prophet

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39. W. Suparta and A. N. M. Yatim, "An Analysis of Heat Wave Trends Using Heat Index in East Malaysia," *Journal of Physics*, Conf. Series 852, (2017): 1–8.
  40. Lee Veronique, Zermoglio Fernanda and Ebi C. L., eds., "Heat Waves and Human Health: Emerging Evidence and Experience to Inform Risk Management in a Warming World," World Health Organization (Washington: United States Agency for International Development, (USAID), 2019), 5.
  41. *Ibid.*, 5.
  42. *Ibid.*, 7; Darkwah Williams Kweku et al., "Greenhouse Effect: Greenhouse Gases and Their Impact on Global Warming," *Journal of Scientific Research & Reports* 17, no. 6 (2017): 1–9.
  43. Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, no. 131, 136.
  44. Muhammad ibn 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, trans. Abū Khalīl, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), *Abwāb al-Ṭahārah, al-Muḥam* 8, ḥadīth 12.

ﷺ came to the dumps of some people and urinated there while standing.<sup>45</sup> Thus there is a contradiction between the two.

To respond to the apparently contradictory ḥadīths above, Ibn Qutaybah, just like in Example One earlier, practised the same ethics of non-disclosure of the enquirer. He then proceeded to condition the reader's mindset by asserting that there is no contradiction between the two ḥadīths regarding the Prophetic manner of urinating,<sup>46</sup> one while sitting and the other, while standing. Secondly, Ibn Qutaybah clarified the *matn* by asserting that the Prophet ﷺ never passed water standing while at home but would stand while doing so in the muddy, murky and filthy area.<sup>47</sup> Here, Ibn Qutaybah applied his *ta'wīl* in the form of a comparison of action and situation: standing due to dirty condition and sitting while at home. This comparison calls for *ikhtiyār* or choice for the better in one's daily activities. Alternatively, in academic discussions, facts given must be explained in the context of events which occurred, known as *asbāb al-nuzūl*<sup>48</sup> or *asbāb al-ruwāt*.<sup>49</sup>

Thirdly, Ibn Qutaybah asserted that the report made by Ḥudhayfah was accurate; for, the Prophet ﷺ was at a garbage area where he stood while passing water. Reflecting his mastery in jurisprudence, Ibn Qutaybah affirmed that judgement on actions during emergency is different from that which is done out of free will. Again, readers can observe Ibn Qutaybah's

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45. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol.3, *Kitāb al-Maḏālim*, ḥadīth 2471.

46. Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, 136.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Asbāb al-nuzūl* refers to the reasons behind the revelation of verses of the Qur'ān. See Al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), 1.

49. *Asbāb al-ruwāt* or *ʿulūm al-ruwāt* deals with the narrators of ḥadīth, their levels and categories, as well as the terms and conditions of a ḥadīth to be accepted or rejected. Refer to A.Q. ʿAbd al-Mahdi, *Turūq Takhrīj Ḥadīth Rasūlillāh* (Cairo: Dar al-ʿItisām, 1987); ʿAbd al-Fattāh, *Lamahāt min Tārīkh al-Sunnah wa ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabah Dār al-Salām, 2008).

method of *ta'wīl* of fiqh issue in which he highlights the situation that warrants either acts of free will or acts in an emergency.

Fourthly, to further explain, Ibn Qutaybah cited another ḥadīth, also reported by Hudhayfah:

I saw the Prophet ﷺ going to the garbage area and passing water while standing; I moved, but the Prophet ﷺ said: “Come close to me!” and I went near until I stood behind the Prophet ﷺ. He then took his ablution and *masaha* (wiped) his shoes.<sup>50</sup>

Such reveals the *ta'wīl* method of Ibn Qutaybah, where he ascertains his point by referring to another ḥadīth.

Parallel to Ibn Qutaybah’s synchronisation of the differences between the two ḥadīths, it is observed that fourteen ḥadīth books containing the ḥadīth reported by ‘A’ishah—though with minor differences of wording—are strikingly similar in tone. Al-Nasā’ī writes in his *Sunan*: “Whoever tells you that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ urinated standing up, do not believe him; for, he would not urinate except while squatting.”<sup>51</sup> This narration of ‘A’ishah is also reported by Bayhaqī’s *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā* and Abū ‘Awānah in *Musnad Abū ‘Awānah*. The same ḥadīth narration is cited in *Al-Mustadrak ‘alā Ṣaḥīḥayn* of Al-Ḥakīm al-Naysābūrī, and the list goes up to twelve books. A slight variation in the words occurs in *Sunan Ibn Mājah*: “Whosoever informs you that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ urinated standing, do not believe him. He only urinated in a squatting position.”<sup>52</sup> These reports reveal a similar meaning. The aforementioned explains how detailed and careful the assessment of the past Muslim scholars’ in synchronising the differences between narrations had been in ensuring the sanctity of the Prophetic traditions, the veracity

50. *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, vol. 1, *Abwāb al-Taḥārah*, *al-Muṣam* 9, ḥadīth 13; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, *Kitāb al-Wudū’*, ḥadīth 224.

51. Ahmad ibn Shu‘ayb ibn Alī ibn Sinān al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, trans. Nāsiruddin al-Khattab, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Darrusalam, 2007), *Kitāb al-Taḥārah*, *al-Muṣam* 25, ḥadīth 29.

52. *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, vol. 1, *Abwāb al-Taḥārah*, *al-Muṣam* 14, ḥadīth 307.

of which few unwittingly doubt today.<sup>53</sup> Equally important is the ḥadīth narrated by Hudhayfah which is mentioned in other books such as *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, and many others. However, a slight variation of words is noted in *Sunan Ibn Mājah*: “It was narrated from Hudhayfah that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ came to the garbage dump of some people and he urinated on it standing up.”

Based on the above narrations, the conclusion is:

1. Each of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ was reporting based on close observation and certainty;
2. ‘Ā’ishah’s denial that the Prophet ﷺ was sitting while passing water is based on her personal experience at home;
3. Hudhayfah’s description is based on his experience outside the house where ‘Ā’ishah was not present. Hence, both of them are correct in their respective descriptions;<sup>54</sup>
4. Both narrations are authentic, and there is no circumstantial evidence to support one above the other, and it is not possible to use both narrations simultaneously in terms of their application. The reason is that the events of sitting and standing took place at different times and in different circumstances.

To solve the supposedly apparent contradiction, Ibn Qutaybah, through his *ta’wīl* method, emphasised the situation which warrants either acts of free will or acts during exigency. Both narrations are thus applicable in the following terms:

1. Legally, the ḥadīth narrated by ‘Ā’ishah is for the general practice while that of Hudhayfah is applicable only on specific occasions.

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53. See Muntasir Zaman, “Can We Trust Hadith Literature? Understanding the Processes of Transmission and Preservation,” Yaqeen Institute, (30 October 2018), <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/muntasir-zaman/can-we-trust-hadith-literature-understanding-the-process-of-transmission-and-preservation> (accessed 21 April 2021).

54. Refer to the comment made by Ibn Mājah in his *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, vol. 1, *Abwāb al-Taḥārah*, *al-Muḥjam* 14, ḥadīth 307.

2. Historically, ‘Ā’ishah, as the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, spent a remarkable amount of time with him in different situations and conditions. The fact that she did not recall a single moment of the Prophet ﷺ passing water standing, gets to show that squatting was his habit when urinating.
3. Circumstantially, the ḥadīth of Ḥudhayfah also makes it clear that it was at the garbage area where the Prophet ﷺ stood and urinated.

A point to consider here is that unless it is a burden and an inconvenience, the preferred posture by the Prophet ﷺ is to squat while relieving oneself. This is yet another proof of the Prophet’s ﷺ perceptiveness and acumen that he has to legislate laws whose enactment shall guarantee accessibility and ease in religion. So, those who commit such acts as deemed appropriate during exigencies should not feel as if they are deserting the way of the Prophet ﷺ. Hence, people with arthritis, gout, and knee injuries, pregnant women, and people of advanced aged are involuntarily impaired to squat and relieve themselves. Even a healthy person might still be unable to squat due to such other valid reasons as dirty places as shown in the second ḥadīth by Ibn Qutaybah regarding the Prophet ﷺ standing at *al-subātah*. The fact that the Prophet ﷺ went as far as furnishing a detailed explanation on where and how to relieve oneself is yet another demonstration of Islam being a complete way of life and of him being “mercy unto humanity.”

It is hence worth looking at today’s condition of building lavatory for easing oneself and its impact on health. There has been vast literature in the medical field on the posture for defecation.<sup>55</sup> A number of those studies have long recommended

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55. Although the above discussion speaks on urination but once we mentioned defecation, we must understand that both acts are simultaneously performed. Indeed, defecation is the final act of digestion, by which organisms eliminate solid, semi-solid, or liquid or excessive feces; defecation (usually accompanied by urination) occurs involuntarily, soiling a person’s undergarments. Other associated symptoms can include abdominal bloating, abdominal pain, and abdominal distention. See Brit Long, et al., “Emergency Medicine Evaluation and Management of Small

that if the hip joints are flexed (as per in a squat position), this will significantly increase the anorectal angle, thereby levelling the anal canal, resulting in further ease of defecation. On the other hand, when sitting on the toilet, the anorectal angle is only partially straight, thus straining evacuation of faeces or urine. In the long run, conditions associated with straining the evacuation may include haemorrhoids, rectal prolapse, diverticula and rectal fissures.<sup>56</sup> This idea is seen in the following Diagram 1.

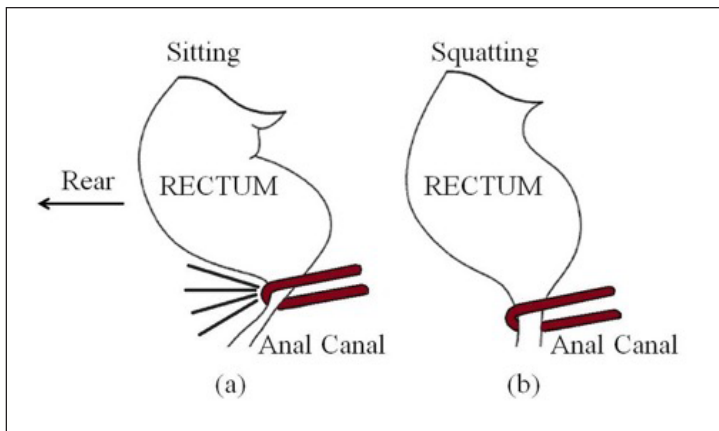


Diagram 1: Sitting versus squatting

Source: Taggart Reb, "The Anal Canal and Rectum, Their Varying Relationship and Its Effect on Anal Continence, Diseases of the Colon and Rectum" 9, (1966): 449–452.

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Bowel Obstruction: Evidence-Based Recommendations," *The Journal of Emergency Medicine* 56, no. 2 (2019): 166–176; Agrawal et al., "Treat-to-Target in Inflammatory Bowel Diseases, What Is the Target and How Do We Treat?," *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy Clinics of North America* 29, no. 3 (2019): 421–436.

56. Natural Health and Wellness [NHW], "Straining to Defect," (2017). <https://nhwdenver.com/straining-to-defecate/> (accessed 2 November 2020).



Diagram 2: Squatty Potty

Source: Mark Sisson, “Why Squatting Is So Important,” 2013.  
<http://www.marksdailyapple.com/why-squatting-is-so-important-plus-tips-on-how-to-do-it-right/#axzz3TBWJe0op> (accessed 2 November 2020).

An epidemiologist Dov Sikirov informs that in the middle of the 20th century, a group of physicians working in rural Africa were surprised by the near absence of hemorrhoids, constipation, hiatus hernia, and diverticulosis among the black populations. The physicians hypothesised that this was due to a high fibre diet. They introduced the intake of high fibre diet in the West but it failed to prevent the growth of the said diseases. Sikirov says that his study has shown that the rural Africans did not contract the diseases because of their squatting method of defecation.<sup>57</sup> Sikirov, therefore, appeals to the Western world to at least adopt the usage of a footstool to achieve a squat-like position whilst sitting on a toilet which reduces the duration and laborious process of defecation. Hopefully, over

57. Dov Sikirov, “Comparison of Straining During Defecation in Three Positions: Results and Implications for Human Health,” *Digestive Diseases and Sciences* 48, no. 7 (July 2003): 1201–1205.



a period of implementation, such human abdominal disorders and gastrointestinal diseases as hemorrhoids, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, and colon cancer may be attenuated by sitting posture habits, as shown in Diagram 2.

In the context of the ḥadīth on squatting while relieving oneself as shown in Diagram 2, numerous advantages can be listed as follows:

1. Time: A study on 33 volunteers by 3 Loughborough University lecturers established that the average defecation time spent on seated toilets is 113.5 seconds while 55.5 seconds was spent on squatting position. So, squatting position resulted in quicker bowel movements.<sup>58</sup>
2. Effort: The volunteers' grading of the effort required to defecate was 2.5 in a seated position (moderate) and 1.4 when using the squatting position (comfortable).<sup>59</sup>
3. Economic: Eco-friendly because the process used less water as compared to sitting without the potty chair.<sup>60</sup>
4. Exert strain: It is evident from the study that defecation in sitting position is a complicated and incomplete process and is against the non-consonance of human physiology and anatomy. This process compels one to exert strain on evacuation.
5. The strain in point 4 has a positive impact on the pelvic nerve. It guards the pelvic nerves against excessive stretch and injury. It is the part that controls the urogenital organs like the prostate, bladder, and uterus.<sup>61</sup>

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58. C. Edgar, K.M. Sohail and S. Cavill, "Rethinking the Effectiveness of Defecation Postures and Practices: It's Not What You Do It's the Way that You Do It!" *Waterlines* 36, no. 4 (2017): 367–374.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Melda Genc, "The Evolution of Toilets and its Current State," (master's thesis. Middle East Technical University, February 2009), 91.

61. B. Sudip, V.K. Chutta and A. Singh, "Health Promotion and Prevention of Bowel Disorders Through Toilet Designs: A Myth or Reality?" *Journal of Education and Health Promotion* 8, (15 February 2019). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6432810/> (accessed 2 November 2020). Cited as Health Promotion and Prevention of Bowel Disorders: A Myth or Reality?

6. It prevents “faecal stagnation,” a causative factor for irritable bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel, appendicitis, and colon cancer.<sup>62</sup>
7. The colon is supported by the thighs that prevent straining, hernias, and pelvic organ prolapse.<sup>63</sup>
8. Regular squatting is beneficial for a natural delivery.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, there are also disadvantages for squatting:

1. Squatting posture may not be comfortable for all, especially for the disabled and elderly.
2. The public toilets are arguably often used but cleaned less frequently; hence, the footrest may hold bacteria that may spread around.

In brief, based on the above ḥadīths as synchronised by Ibn Qutaybah, we may now get to understand why the Prophet ﷺ preferred to relieve himself in the aforesaid manner. However in a time where many public toilets do not accommodate squatting but instead encourage standing while passing water, hence rendering it hard to do the ideal, it is not at all sinful to adopt the alternative posture.

## **Conclusion**

In our attempt to present Ibn Qutaybah’s method of positive synchronisation of ḥadīths which seem to contradict each other, we manage to demonstrate how Ibn Qutaybah, with his mastery of the Qur’ānic studies, Arabic language, ḥadīth, jurisprudence, and *kalām*, was able to explain away the alleged contradictions among such ḥadīths as held by the people of his

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62. S. Rad, “Impact of Ethnic Habits on Defecographic Measurements,” *Archives of Iranian Medicine* 5–2, (2002: 115–117).

63. Ibid.

64. Sudip, “Health Promotion and Prevention of Bowel Disorders: A Myth or Reality?”

time due to their supports for their respective denominations. By laying all of the relevant pieces of evidence for readers to understand, Ibn Qutaybah affirmed that the Prophetic ḥadīths must be viewed from such proper perspectives as the reason and circumstances for their narration, their narrators, their *matns* as well as their parallelism to other narrations by the *muhaddithūn*. Observing Ibn Qutaybah's positive synchronization of the ḥadīths may help readers apply such guidelines in settling the disputes as shown in Examples One and Two above and realise the wisdom and relevance of the Prophetic teachings, despite being 1,400 years old.

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