The Hadith “My Companions are like the stars…”
by GF Haddad – Shawwal 1425

“My Companions are like the stars, whoever among them you use for guidance, you will be rightly guided.”

This hadith is either fair due to its many chains (ḥasan li-ghayrihi) or, at worst, weak; but not forged, and its meaning is true.

Chains

The hadith is narrated through many weak chains as stated by Ibn Ḥajar in al-Kāfi al-Shārīf Takhrij Abādīth al-Kashshāf (4:94) from:

1. Ibn ʿUmar C by ʿAbd ibn Ḥumayd in his Musnad (Muntakhab Kuwait ed. 2:28= Cairo ed. p. 250), Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr in Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm (2:924 §1759), and Ibn ʿAdi in al-Kāmil (2:785-786), all with very weak chains through the forger Ḥamza ibn Abī Ḥamza al-Jufrī al-Jazīrī cf. al-Suyūṭī in Manāhīl al-Ṣaḥā (p. 193 §1027), Ibn ʿAdi in al-Kāmil, and Talkhīṣ al-Ḥabīr (4:190);

2. Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh C by al-Dāraquṭnī in Faḍāʾil al-Ṣahāba and al-Muʿtafī wal-Mukhtafī (4:1778), Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr in Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm (2:925 §1760=2:110-111 ʿadīf), and Ibn Ḥazm in al-Ikhtān (6:244 ʿawdū) with a weak chain because of Sallām ibn al-Ḥārith although this is the best chain in this chapter and al-Bayhaqī declares it strong in al-Iʿtiqād (p. 319); Ibn Ḥazm narrates it through Sallām ibn Sulaymān (ibn Sawwār) who is also weak;

2a. Jābir by al-Dāraquṭnī in Gharāʾib Mālik through an unknown from Imām Mālik cf. Talkhīṣ al-Ḥabīr;

3. Abū Hurayra Ṣ by al-Quḍāʾi in Musnad al-Shihāb (2:275 §1346) with a very weak chain because of Jaʿfar ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Ḥashūnī who is accused of lying as stated by Ibn Ḥajar;

4. ʿUmar Ṣ (a ḥadīth qudsi) by al-Bayhaqī in al-Madkhal (p. 162=1:145-146 §151), al-Ḵaṭīb in al-Kītiya (p. 48=§p. 66=§p. 95), al-Bazzār who graded it ʿadīf munkar as quoted by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr in Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm (2:924), Nizām al-Mulk (408-485) in Maglisān min Anāʾīl Nizām al-Mulk (p. 52), al-Sijzi in al-Ibānā, and Ibn ʿAsākir, all with a very weak chain because of ʿAbd al-Rahīm ibn Zayd al-Amrī who is discredited cf. Ibn al-Jawzī, Itlā (1:282), al-Dhahabī, Mīzān (bīṭil), al-Suyūṭī, Jāmiʿ Sahīḥ (§4603 ʿadīf), al-Shaṭṭānī, Tawdīḥ al-Akhār (p. 264), al-Munāwī, Fayḍ al-Qudr (4:76 bīṭil), and al-Ghumūrī, al-Mughīrī (p. 56 ʿawdū);

5. Ibn ʿAbbās Ṣ munqatī by al-Ḵaṭīb in al-Kītiya (p. 48=§p. 65-66=§p. 95), al-Bayhaqī in al-Madkhal (p. 163-164=1:147-148), and Ibn ʿAsākir cf. al-Suyūṭī, Mīḥāl al-Jawṣa (p. 45=§p. 93-94 §180), all with a very weak chain because of Juwaybir ibn Saʿīd al-Azdī (cf. Taqrib) in addition to its being broken between al-Dāhībī and Ibn ʿAbbās;


Qādi ‘Iyād attributes it positively to the Prophet ﷺ in al-Shif‘a’ (p. 535 §1302). Al-Bajawī said in his commentary of the Shuf‘a (2:613): “The ḥadīth Master al-‘Irāqi said: The author (‘Iyād) should not have cited it as if it were definitely a ḥadīth of the Prophet.” Al-Halabi said: “The author should not have cited it as if it were definitely a ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ as per what is known about it among the experts of the science, and he has done the same thing several times before.” Al-Qārī replies in his Sharh al-Shif‘a (2:91): “It is possible that he [‘Iyād] had established a chain for it or that he considered the multiplicity of its chains to raise its grade from da‘īf to ḥasan due to his good opinion of it, not to mention the fact that even the weak ḥadīth may be put into practice for meritorious acts (fa‘āl al-a‘māl), and Allāh knows best.” See also Ibn al-Athīr, Jāmi‘ al-Ulūm (8:556-557).

Al-Bayhaqī in al-Madkhal concludes “Its matn is well-known and its chains are weak, not one of them being sound” but he declares one of its chains strong and adduces it in al-I‘tīād (p. 319), confirming its meaning while Ibn Hājur supports him in Talkhīs al-Ḥābirī (4:191) cf. al-Mubārakfūrī, Tuḥfat al-Ahwādī (10:156).


Al-Ṣaghānī declared it fair (ḥasan) as stated by Ḥasan al-Ṭibī and al-Sayyid’s respective commentaries on the Mishkāt and al-Lacknawi’s Iqāmat al-Ḥujja (p. 49). Shaykh ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddā in his commentary on al-Qārī’s Fath Bāb al-‘Ināya (1:13) rejects the grading of mawdū’ and tends to accept al-Lacknawi’s grading of ḥasan in his marginalia to the Iqāma but he petulantly rejects his suggestion of saḥīh bil-kashf – in his marginalia on the latter’s Tuḥfat al-Akhbār titled Nukhbat al-An‘ām (p. 53) and in the introduction to his al-‘Athār al-Murtū‘a ﬁ al-Akhbār al-Mawdū‘a – for which the latter cites al-Sha‘rānī’s phrase in the Mīzān al-Kubrā: “Even if the authenticity of this ḥadīth is questioned among the Scholars of ḥadīth, nevertheless it is sound among the people of spiritual unveiling (kashf).” See also the Tamīm brothers’ marginalia on al-Qārī’s Sharh Sharh Nukhbat al-Fikr (p. 557).

The “Salafi” scribeling Sa‘īd Maš‘ūsha in his tract al-Muqallidūn wal-A‘innat al-‘Arba‘a (Beirut: al-Maktab al-‘Ismālī and Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1999) (p. 102) said, “this ḥadīth is forged (mawdū‘) as Ibn Ḥazm said in Usūl al-‘Akhbār (§810), al-Shawkānī in al-Qawwāl al-Mudīl (p. 30), and al-Allānī in al-Sīhah al-Da‘īfa (§58) and a number of the scholars.” This statement is a flat untruth as al-Shawkānī adduces this narration as a proof in his Irshād al-Fuḥūl (1:337, 1:394) and all he said in al-Qawwāl al-Mudīl ﬁ Adillat al-Iṣṭiḥād wal-Taqlīd on page 9 of its original 1347/1929 edition is: “This ḥadīth was narrated through different routes from Jābīr and Ibn ‘Umar, and the Imāms of narrator-criticism have explicitly said that none of them are sound (lā yasīhihu minhā shay‘) and that this ḥadīth is not firmly established as a Prophetic narration…. In sum, this ḥadīth forms no proof.” This is the same opinion as what we have quoted from other scholars but it is a far cry from saying the ḥadīth is forged. Furthermore, it is untrue that “a number of the scholars” have declared it forged as the only scholar who did so was Ibn Ḥazm, imitated in our time by various semi-Ulema. One of the ironies of Maš‘ūsha’s book is that he attacks taqlīd on every page yet relies blindly on Albānī for ḥadīth authentication, without reference to the ḥadīth Masters!
Meaning

Al-Hākim al-Tirmidhī in Nawādir al-Uṣūl (3:62) and others consider the meaning of this hadith true. Its meaning is confirmed by countless corroborative evidence such as the following:

- The hadith from Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī narrated by Muslim and Ahmad, “My Companions are trustkeepers for my Community,” part of a longer hadith in which the Prophet compares himself and his Companions to the stars. This comparison is unique in the hadith and, together with the verse (and by the stars they find a way) (16:16), shows the truth of the hadith “My Companions are like the stars.”

- The hadith from Anas in the Musnad and Zuhd of Imām Ahmad, “The simile of the people of learning (al-ulāmā‘) on the earth is the stars in the sky by which one is guided in the darkness of the land and the sea. When the stars are clouded over, the guides are about to be lost.”

- The hadith from Anas in the Sahihayn and Sunan, “You are the witnesses of Allāh on earth! You are the witnesses of Allāh on earth! You are the witnesses of Allāh on earth!”

- The hadith from Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, Rāfi‘ ibn Khadījī, and Zayd ibn Thābit by Ahmad, al-Tabarānī, al-Hākim, Ibn Abī Shayba, al-Tayālīsī, al-Qudī‘ī, and al-Bayhaqī, “Mankind makes up one portion (hayyyīz) and I and my Companions make up one portion [counter-balancing it].”

- The report that our liege-lord Abū Bakr said to a desert Arab who had objected to the allotment for him agreed upon by the Muslims: “If the Emigrants are satisfied, you are but followers!” – using the word “followers” (taba‘ūn) to mean ‘without any prerogative to consider, question, or discuss.’ Similar to this is the word of Allāh: When those that were followed disown those that followed (2:166), which uses follow (ittabā‘ū) for the most basic blind imitation.

- The fact that our liege-lord ‘Umar referred to this paradigmatic guidance of the Companions when he defined them as “Those whom people look at and take (knowledge) from” at the time he disapproved of the difference of opinion between Ubay ibn Ka‘b and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd.2

- The fact that Imām Ahmad confirmed this understanding in his definition: “The Religion is nothing but imitation itself” (al-dīn innamū huwa al-taqlīd) and he continued, “This imitation is for the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh.” To al-Sayrafi who was asking him whether it is permissible to verify the variant positions of the Companions “in order to know which is correct so that we may follow it,” Ahmad replied: “It is not permissible to verify [the differences] among the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh!” Al-Sayrafi said: “Then what do we do?” He replied: “You imitate whomever of them you like!” (tuqallīdu ayyahum aḥhabb). This is an explicit stipulation (nass) from Imām Ahmad that by taqlīd he means taqlīd not “following the proof” or “ittibā‘ū” or some such invented distinctions aimed at diluting or nullifying the meaning of taqlīd.

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3Narrated from Abū Muhammad al-Barbāhārī by Ibn Abī Ya‘lā in Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābīlā (1:29).
Similarly, Ahmad said to al-Maymūnī: "Abū al-Ḥasan! Never speak over any matter in which you do not have an Imām [to imitate]."\(^5\)

As for the objection of Ibn Ḥazm that “not through every star is one guided,” it is refuted at the root by the verse \(\textit{and by the stars they find a way}\)! (16:16) and was anticipated by al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī who said in \textit{Nawādir al-Uṣūl}: “Not everyone that met him and followed him or saw him once is meant by the hadith ‘My Companions are like the stars’ but only those that studiously kept his company morning and evening, received his conveyance of the Revelation, took from him the Law that became the path of the Umma, and looked to him for the ethics of Islam and to his noble traits. Those became, after him, the Imāms and proofs in which resides right guidance and in whose path is found right emulation and in them is safety and right belief.”\(^6\) And Allāh knows best.

\(^5\)Narrated by Ibn al-Jawzī in \textit{Maṣāqīb Ahmad} (p. 178).