

## Transcript: Sources, Hadith and Sunna

The Sunna of Muhammad is his customary practice; what he did, said, taught and the things of which he approved. In recognition of the critical importance of this, Muhammad's companions made sure to remember everything in minute detail. These records are the Traditions or Hadith of Muhammad. Muhammad made it clear when he was speaking in his own right as the Prophet and when he was conveying the revelation from God in the Qur'an. The two were quite distinct.

As each Hadith was memorised and taught to others, a chain of transmitters (*isnad*) developed. These were carefully preserved as proof of the authenticity of the Hadith. What's more, painstaking research has been undertaken to check that the connections in the chain were valid and that every person involved was of sound character and pious life so that their word could be trusted.

Malik ibn Anas (712 – 795) was the first to give us a written deposit of Hadith. He lived in Madina and was a descendant of one of the Companions of Muhammad. In Baghdad, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780 – 855), was reported to have memorised a million Hadiths and left a collection of around forty thousand called the *Musnad*. Schools of Law were named after both of them.

As early as the ninth century, due to the availability of mass-produced quantities of paper, it became possible to write down great systematic collections, arranged around particular topics. The Hadith were classified into categories according to the reliability of their chain of transmission. The highest classification was for those Hadith which were sound and without defects or *sahih*. The next category down was *hasan* - good and reliable but not as well-authenticated as a *sahih* and so on... Further down the scale, we have classifications covering cases where there is a break or uncertainty in the chain of communication. These are weak Hadith or *da'if* and can only be used in Law as supportive evidence. There are six major collections of Sunni Hadith. The most important two are those drawn up by Al-Bukhari (810 – 870) and Muslim (820 – 875). These contain thousands of Hadith, all of which are classified as *sahih*.

For the Shi'a, the infallible Imams are the guarantors of the authenticity of the Hadith. Each is traced back to one of them. The confusion of the early centuries renders the tracing back of chains of transmitters to the Prophet unreliable for the Shi'a, they prefer to rely on the infallible word of one of the Imams. The great Shi'a collections of Hadith, like *al-Kafi*, date from the 10<sup>th</sup> century.