

معنى الإجازة

# The Meaning of Ijāzah

*The True Role of Ijāzah within Islamic  
Scholarship*

By Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

Translation by Dr Abu Zayd

سلسلة إملاء الخاطر | Imlā al-Khāṭir Series



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جميع الحقوق محفوظة

## Imlā al-Khāṭir Series

In this series, which he names *Imlā al-Khāṭir* (literally, “dictation of thoughts”), Dr Mohammad Akram Nadwi follows in the tradition of the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* and shares with the world his reflections on a variety of topics ranging from theology to law, history to heart softeners, philosophy, education and more. Composed in a casual, conversational style consisting of questions followed by their brief answers (each portion predicated by *qālū/qultu*, “they said”/“I responded”), he utilizes therein the highest level of Arabic, reflecting his love of the language and his extensive expertise in Arabic grammar and rhetoric. These short but poignant reflections are part of the *balāghah* genre and tradition of Arabic literature. It should be noted that these translations, done by his senior students, serve as a guide and can never fully match the style, tone and eloquence of the original Arabic. Also note that Dr Akram does not necessarily review each translation and is not responsible for any errors, improper word choices, or the likes, that are an inevitable part of the translation process.

## Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi is a world-renowned scholar of Indian origin who has resided in England for an extensive time. After receiving in-depth training to an advanced level in the traditional Islamic disciplines at the famous Nadwat al-Ulama seminary in Lucknow, India, and receiving a PhD in Arabic literature from Lucknow University, he became a research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, where he conducted research for a number of years on a variety of topics, including Ḥadīth and Sufi orders in India. He has published widely in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English, including translations (like his work on Shāh Waliullah, *Bustan al-Muhaddithin*), editions of Arabic texts (such as a renowned critical edition of *Usul al-Shāshī* in Ḥanafī jurisprudence), and original monographs on Islamic law, female ḥadīth narrators and such figures as Abū Ḥanīfah and Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwi. His groundbreaking work, yet to be published, is an encyclopedic 40-volume documentation of the legacy of female scholarship in the Islamic tradition. He co-founded the Al-Salam Institute in 2006 where he continues to serve as Principal and Senior Lecturer.

## **Introduction**

*The Ijāzah is a unique and cardinal feature of the Islamic tradition, arising from the earliest times to ensure a degree of protection and accuracy to the transmission of knowledge. At the same time, its usage over time varied while its exact meaning, scope and role within the Islamic sciences remains hotly contested and misunderstood from various quarters. Here, Dr. Akram, a traditional scholar par excellence, shares his valuable thoughts on this subject.*

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

## معنى الإجازة

بقلم: محمد أكرم الندوي

أو كسفورد

قالوا: نراك محتفياً بالاستجازة من الشيوخ مشافهة ومكاتبة احتفاءً عظيمًا، ومُحلاً إياها موضع إجلال واعتبار بالغين، منهوماً بها غير شعبان، فما غناء هذه الإجازات التي اقتنيتها واعتلقتها مفتتناً بها افتتان الناس بالذهب والفضة والأجار الكريمة وسائر ما يسمى بالهوايات؟ قلت: يعتمد بلوغ قيمتها على استيعاب مدلول السند ومغزاه. قالوا: فما هو السند؟ قلت: العلم إما نظر أو خبر، فإن كان من نظرك أي مما طوّرتّه واستنبطته أنت باستخدامك حوائيك وعقلك، فإنك تحتاج إلى أن تثبتته وتقرّره بدليله، وإن كنت تلقّنته من غيرك ممن طوّره واستنبطه، فإنك تحتاج إلى أمرين: الإحالة على مصدره، وتقرير دليله، إلا إذا انتهى العلم إلى نبي، فحسبك إحالتك على وسائطك إليه، وهذه الإحالة تُسدُّ مَسَدَّ الأمرين جميعاً مستغنيةً عن تقريره بدليل أو برهان.

قلت: فلما بَانَ أن الخبر يُعَوَّل صدقُهُ على الوسائط بينك وبين مصدره الأول الذي بدأ منه فاعلموا أن هذا الدين أساسه القرآن والسنة، وقد تعهد الله عز وجل بحفظ كتابه لفظاً ومعنى، فملاً الأساعَ نعيمةً به هنيئةً، ورددته الألسن عطرة به متضوعة منه، ووعته القلوب خاشعة له مطمئنة به، وقَرَّت به العيون مستعبرة دامعة، من عهد النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى يومنا هذا جيلاً إثر جيل وقرن بعد قرن مجتمعة عليه غير مختلفة، فلا تحتاج فيه إلى ذكر وسائطك. قالوا: فما رأيك في مصاحف الصحابة رضي الله عنهم، واختلاف القراءات؟ قلت: سأعرض لذلك جلياً له معللاً في مقال آخر إن شاء الله تعالى.

قلت: تلقي أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم سننه وسائر ما يتصل به إما من نطقه الشريف أو من فعله أو من تقريره حافظين لها عن ظهر غيب أو مقيدين لها كتابة، وبلغوها من بعدهم في صدق وأمانة، ثم تلتهم طبقات من العلماء متتابعة تتناقل الأحاديث والآثار كلها كتابة ورواية، وآضت الأخبار تُروى سماعاً من ذويها، أو قراءة عليهم مقرونةً بذكر الوسائط من مبدئها إلى منتهاها، والسماع والقراءة أشرف وسائل الأخذ والتلقي وأساسها، وأمتن طريق وأحكمها لتوثيق الخبر وصيانتها من التحريف والتصحيف، وسموا الوسائط سنداً، لأن الخبر بها ينتصب وعليها يقوم مستحكما موثقاً، فقولهم: "مالك عن نافع عن ابن عمر" سند

يُظَاهِرُ أَنَّ مَالِكًا أَخَذَ هَذَا الْخَبَرَ عَنِ النَّافِعِ، وَأَنَّ النَّافِعَ أَخَذَهُ عَنِ ابْنِ عَمْرٍو،  
وَذَكَرَ السَّنَدَ يُسَمَّى إِسْنَادًا.

قالوا: أيقنًا غير رائبين أنه أفضل منهج علمي لتوثيق خبر أو حديث، ولكن ما جدوى بقاء السند عن مالك بعد أن ضمن مروياته الموطأ، وما لهم لم يجيلوا على الموطأ مباشرة؟ قلت: من أجل أمرين: أحدهما أن كل من أخذ الموطأ من مالك اختلف عن غيره في حديثه وفي كيفية الأخذ، فمست الحاجة إلى أن يسمى الراوي عن مالك تمييزاً لمرويه عن غيره، والثاني: أن العلم بحمد بشري يتكون من ثلاثة عناصر: المعلم والمتعلم والمعلوم، والمعلوم هو معلوم هذا الإنسان الذي استفدته منه، وبعد أن اكتسبته منه أصبح هو معلومك، تنقله إلى غيرك، فالمعلم إنسان، والمتعلم إنسان، والمعلوم إنساني، إذًا لا بد في تناقل العلم وتوارثه من عملية إنسانية، قالوا: فأين يقع الكتاب من ذلك؟ قلت: الكتاب هو أثر ذلك المعلوم وتقييد له، وليس هو المعلوم نفسه، والواجب أن ترفع المعلوم إلى شيخك الذي وصل إليك منه، ولم ينزل الله تعالى الكتب والصحف وحدها، بل أرسل معها أنبياء يعلمونها الناس ويبينونها لهم بيانا.

قالوا: قد أدركنا خطورة الإنسان في مسار العلم، ولكن ما صلة ما أفصت فيه بالإجازة؟ قلت: إن السماع والقراءة هما الواسيلتان الأساسيتان لنقل العلم مطبقةً عليها عامة الشعوب والأمم غير متنازعة ولا متباينة، وليس يخفى أن علوم الناس أوفر وأغزر من أن يستقصيها

الطالب سماعاً من شيخه أو قراءة عليه، وهي مسطورة في بطون الكتب والدواوين، ويسلك عامة الشعوب في الاستفادة منها مسلك الوجدادة، فترجع إليها مباشرة تستقي منها المعلومات، عازية إليها ما تحمّل منها وما تقتبس، والوجدادة فيها آفتان: أولاهما الاستغناء عن الشيخ والمعلم، والثانية قلة الدقة والضبط والإتقان، وقد تفشت تصرفات الناس في الكتب زيادة ونقصانا وتحريفاً وتصحيفاً، بل وكُم من كتب أُلصقتُ بغير أصحابها. فشدد أهل الحديث في أمرها وبالغوا في الحذر، ولم يسمحوا للرجل بالعزو إليها ونقلها وروايتها إن لم يسمعها أو لم يقرأها إلا أن يجيزه بها شيخ من الشيوخ معروف بسنده إليها، فالإجازة طريق من طرق التلقي تالية السماع والقراءة في الرتبة، وهي مقيدة بالمعرفة والعدالة، أي لا يصح لتلقيها أن يجيز بها غيره إلا إذا كان عارفاً لما يجيز عادلاً فيه.

قالوا: ولكن تسرّب إلى الإجازة من التساهل والتغافل ما أنت

به عليم. قلت: لا يقتصران على الإجازة دون السماع والقراءة، فكم من مسمع غير متيقظ وغير عالم بما يسمعه، وكُم من سامع غير منتبه وغير واع لما يقرأ، والتساهل والتغافل في السماع والقراءة متوافران في العلوم الدينية والعلوم والفنون غير الدينية، وهما من أسباب تضعيف الخبر وتوهينه لدى أهل هذا الشأن.

قالوا: عرفنا قيمة الإجازة، ولكن ما هذا الاستكثار منها وأي

طائل تحت الاستزادة منها؟ قلت: ألا ترون أن الكاتب قد يحيل على

مصدر أو مصدرين وقد يحيل على مصادر يستوفيا استيفاء، فإذا  
عَزَزت المصادر وتنامت تعاضد بعضها ببعض، وكذلك الإجازات تتعاضد  
وتتساند، ثم إذا تعددت الطرق وتباينت الوجوه تيسرت المقارنة بينها  
والموازنة، وهان ترجيح خبر على آخر، وتفضيل الأسانيد بعضها على  
بعض.

قالوا: فما ثمة الإجازات النازلة، وقد رأينا الرجل يروي الصحيح  
من طريق أهل الهند إلى أبي العباس أحمد بن أبي طالب الحجار، ثم من  
طريق الحجازيين والشاميين إلى الحجار، ثم من طريق المصريين والمغاربة  
إلى الحجار، قارنًا بينها وضامًا بعضها إلى بعض من الحجار إلى البخاري،  
هلاً اقتصر على طريق واحد إلى الحجار؟ قلت: أليس الكاتب يعزو إلى  
مصدر أصلي أساسي مضيئاً إليه مصادر فرعية هامة لاسيما المشهورة منها  
والغريبة؟ قالوا: بلى، قلت: كذلك الأسانيد والإجازات فإنه يُهمُّ أهل هذا  
الشأن سردُ طرق المتأخرين المشهورة والغريبة رغبة منهم أن يتحققوا من  
طريق ابن حجر إلى الحجار، ثم طريق ابن ناصر الدين إليه، ثم طرق  
غيرهما، ويُعنون بطرق من اشتهر من المتأخرين من المصريين والحجازيين  
والشاميين والمغاربة والهنود، والأصل في ذلك هو التعزيز والتعصيد.

قالوا: قد نرى الناس يتفخرون بكثرة إجازاتهم وتشعب طرقهم  
وأسانيدهم. قلت: ما لهم يُفردون بالطعن من بين غيرهم ممن يتظاهر في  
كتاباته بكثرة الإحالات ويتباهى بتفخيم مصادره ومراجعته؟

قالوا: كيف يجيز المحدثُ من ليس بعالم، بل وقد يجيز الصغار.  
قلت: إن منشأ هذا السؤال هو عدم التمييز بين معنى الإجازة ومعنى  
الشهادة. فالشهادة هي إصدار سند توثيقي للطالب بما حصل من الكتب  
والعلوم والفنون والآداب، كشهادة العالمية والفضيلة والشهادات في  
الجامعات. وليست الإجازة شهادة، وإنما هي إذن للطالب بالرواية إذا  
استكمل الأهلية، وثمة فرق بين حال الأخذ والتلقي وحال الإسماع  
والإقراء، يصح للطفل أن يتلقى الإجازة ولكن لا يصح له أن يجيز بها،  
وكما أن المتلقي من طريق السماع والقراءة ليس من شرطه أن يكون عالماً  
كذلك المتلقي من طريق الإجازة وما دونها ليس من شرطه أن يكون عالماً  
أو متقدماً في الطلب.

# The Meaning of Ijāzah

## *The True Role of Ijāzah within Islamic Scholarship*

By Dr Mohammed Akram Nadwi  
Oxford, UK

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They asked: We see you greatly welcoming the quest for Ijāzah from various teachers, both verbally and in writing, and we see you placing them in a position of tremendous esteem and respect, even coveting them without end. Our question is: what is the value of these Ijāzahs that you have acquired and are proud of, being charmed by them in the same way people are normally allured by gold, silver, precious stones, and all other human passions?

I replied:

The full extent of their value only rests upon comprehending the significance and meanings of the sanad.

They asked:

What is the sanad?

I replied:

### **Knowledge Comes Through Two Ways**

Knowledge basically comes through either observation (nazar) or transmission (khabr). If it happens to come from your own observation, i.e. from what you have developed or deduced yourself through the use of your own sense perception or intellect, then you only need to establish it and prove it through its evidences. If, however, you have received the knowledge from someone else who has in turn developed or deduced it himself, then in that case, you need to do two things: first, reference it back to its source, and then establish its evidences.

When the source of the knowledge happens to be a Prophet, however, then it is sufficient to reference one's intermediaries to the source. This

referencing takes the place of both tasks and does not stand in need of further establishing its evidences.

I also said:

Since it is apparent that the veracity of a report relies upon the intermediaries between yourself and the source—which is the origin of the report—then know that this religion is based only upon the Qur’ān and Sunnah.

### **The Mass Transmission of the Qur’ān**

Ever since God undertook the responsibility to preserve His Book in wording and meaning, it has continued to fill welcome ears in enjoyment and continued to be repeated by fragrant tongues echoing its aroma. It has continued to fill the consciousness of submissive hearts seeking solace, and to fill human eyes with flowing tears. All of that occurred from the era of the Prophet to our day, generation after generation, century after century. And all of that in full uniformity without dispute. For these reasons, in the matter of Allah’s Book, there is no need to mention one’s intermediaries.

They asked:

What is your view on the muṣḥaf of the Companions and the variant Qur’ānic Readings?

I replied:

I will present that topic in a detailed form in another article, God-willing.

### **The Transmission of Sunnah and Ḥadīth**

I also said:

The Companions received the practices of the Prophet and all of what was connected to him, including his noble speech, actions or approvals. They preserved it in memory or through writing and conveyed that to those who came after them in a trustworthy and earnest way. Then, generations of scholars came after them, transmitting from them reports of ḥadīth and other matters, all of that in writing as well as transmission. Then reports began to be narrated from these scholars, either through hearing from them

directly or the reading of these reports to them along with mention of the intermediaries from the beginning to the end of the chains of transmission.

## **Importance of Sanad/Isnād**

And audition (*samāʿ*) and recital (*qirāʿah*)<sup>1</sup> is simply the most noble and eminent means of taking and receiving knowledge. It is the most robust and firm path of verifying reports and protecting them from distortion and errors. These intermediaries were called the sanad (literally “support” or “back”), because to them the reports are ascribed, upon them they stand, and with them they are fortified and verified. So the statement, “Mālik from Nāfiʿ from Ibn ʿUmar” is a sanad that expresses that Mālik took this report from Nāfiʿ and that Nāfiʿ took it from Ibn ʿUmar. The process of mentioning the sanad became known as isnād.

They said:

We are convinced beyond doubt that this is the best academic way to verify reports or ḥadīth, but what is the advantage of the persistence of the sanad to Mālik after he included all his reports in the *Muwaṭṭaʿ*, and why don't scholars now refer to the *Muwaṭṭaʿ* directly?

I replied:

## **Why Not Books?**

### **Knowledge is a Human Enterprise**

For two reasons:

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional method of ḥadīth transmission was primarily two-fold: through audition (*samāʿ*), which consisted of passively hearing ḥadīth directly from the mouths of the teachers; or recital (*qirāʿah*), in which the ḥadīth are actively read by the students to the teacher. Conversely, from the perspective of the student, either the student recites to the teacher (*qirāʿah*) or listens to others, or the teacher, reciting (*samāʿ*). Here Dr. Akram is pointing out that this is in fact a general methodology that extends to all knowledge. Either you read about something or hear it from someone. Either, instruction is oral or written, coming from the teacher passively or being read to the teacher actively.

Firstly, because each person who took the Muwaṭṭa' from Mālik differed in the content of their reports and in the manner in which they took the Muwaṭṭa' from him. Therefore, a need was felt to mention the narrators of Mālik in order to distinguish their narrations from Mālik.

Secondly, because knowledge is a human effort that is composed of three elements:

1. mu'allim (the possessor of knowledge, i.e. teacher),
2. muta'allim (the seeker of knowledge, i.e. student), and
3. ma'lūm (that which is known. i.e. subject matter).

The subject matter is that which was known by this human being whom you benefited from. After you acquired it, it now becomes that which you know, and you in turn can relay it to others. Know that the teacher and student are both human beings, and that which is known (the subject) is also a human enterprise. Therefore, the transmission and inheritance of knowledge must necessarily be a human enterprise as well.

They asked: Where does the book fall with respect to this?

I replied:

A book is the tracing or documentation of that which is known, but the book does not directly represent that which is known. So it is essential for you to trace that which is known back to your teacher from whom the knowledge originated in order to reach to you. God did not reveal the books and scriptures by themselves but sent along with them Prophets to teach and explain them to the people.

They asked:

We have understood the centrality of the human being in the path of knowledge, but what does that have to do with the Ijāzah?

I replied:

## **The Role of Ijāzah in Protecting the Accuracy of Knowledge**

Audition and recital are two basic means to transmit knowledge as applied by all people and nations without dispute or differing. It is also not hidden that human sciences are simply too vast and abundant for a student to hear them all from a teacher, or read them to one, and so these sciences become inscribed within books and volumes. In this way, the masses of people benefit from them directly in the manner of discovery (wijādah)<sup>2</sup>, consulting them directly to draw information, reference and cite what they contain.

But this has two basic shortcomings: firstly, it makes one independent of teachers and guides, and secondly, it lacks the depth, accuracy and precision of real learning. Consider how widespread is the problem of tampering in various books, in terms of adding, taking away, distortions and mistakes. Beyond that, consider how many books are even put together by other than their authors.

The ḥadīth scholars were strict in this matter and warned against it greatly. They did not allow people to quote or transmit books without having heard or recited them, and they only allowed them to do so when they were authorized by a teacher who was known for possessing sanad in those particular books.

The Ijāzah is a methodology that follows after audition and recital in rank, and it is qualified by comprehension of the material and the uprightness of the person. In other words, it is not allowed for the receiver to grant Ijāzah to another person unless he knows the subject of the Ijāzah and is upright with respect to transmitting it to others.

They asked: But laxity and negligence have crept into the Ijāzah system, which you are well aware of.

I replied:

You are correct, but know that these two deficiencies are not confined to the Ijāzah alone, but have also affected audition and recital as well. How many teachers hear their students without paying attention or even perhaps

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<sup>2</sup> Wijādah in the terminology of ḥadīth referred to relating reports from books or manuscripts that were “discovered” or found. Since the element of Ijāzah or permission was bypassed, this method of relating reports was considered surreptitious and frowned upon.

comprehending what is being recited, and how many students are not aware of or understand what they are reciting? Laxity and negligence are abundant in all sciences, religious and non-religious. They are simply causes of weakness in reports as known by the masters of this craft.

They asked: We have understood the value of Ijāzah, but why is there so much emphasis on them and what is the utility of having so many of them?

I replied:

Haven't you seen writers refer to one or two sources, or to many sources in a comprehensive way? When multiple sources are used, they simply support and strengthen one another. Similarly, multiple Ijāzahs support and mutually strengthen one another. And when the various paths become numerous and varying aspects begin to emerge, it becomes easier to compare them all and find the balance, and to prefer one report over another or some chains over others.

They asked: What is the benefit of these extended and low Ijāzah chains? For we have seen a person narrate the Ṣaḥīḥ from the people of India from Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Abū Ṭālib al-Ḥijāz, or through the chains of the people of Ḥijāz and Syria from al-Ḥajjār, or through the chains of the Egyptians and North Africans from al-Ḥajjār, comparing them and joining some of them to another, from al-Ḥajjār to Bukhārī. Shouldn't they confine themselves to one chain to al-Ḥajjār?

I replied:

Don't you see writers refer to original sources and supplement those with important secondary sources, including those that are popular as well as those that are lesser known?

They replied: Of course.

I said:

The same goes for Ijāzah and isnād chains, for the scholars of this discipline were concerned to present all the chains of the later scholars, including those that were well-known as well as those that were not, in order to document the path from Ibn Ḥajar to al-Ḥajjār, as well as the route of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn to him, as well as others. They sought the support of the chains

of those who were well-known from the later scholars of Egypt, Arabia, Syria, North Africa and India. The basic principle here was simply reinforcement and support.

They asked: We see people boasting about the number of their Ijāzahs and isnād chains.

I replied:

Why should they be singled out for blame over others, like writers who in their works cite multiple references and are proud of the quality of their sources and references?

They asked: How does a ḥadīth scholar grant Ijāzah to one who is not a scholar, or even to children?

I replied:

The reason this question arises is the lack of distinguishing between the meaning of Ijāzah and Shahādah. A Shahādah is the issuing of a certificate to a student documenting what they attained in terms of books, fields of study, or other type of learning, such as an 'Ālimiyyah or Fāḍil degree,<sup>3</sup> as well as any other university degree. The Ijāzah, however, is not simply a Shahādah, but a permission to the student to transmit upon condition of competency. There is a qualitative difference between the state of acquiring and attaining knowledge, and the state of transmitting it through audition or recital. A child can thus attain an Ijāzah—without being able to transfer it to others at that time—just as the one who acquires any knowledge through audition, recital, Ijāzah or any other means need not be a scholar nor even an advanced student at the time.

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to the formal Islamic scholarship degree granted by religious seminaries inspired by the Dār al-'Ulūm model of Muslim India, which are loosely based upon the Niẓāmī curriculum.