

175224 - How could a woman have acquired knowledge of hadith?

the question

How could the female scholars of hadith have taught in the mosques, when both men and women would be present in the study circle? Were there partitions, and was there eye contact, and so on? Did these women travel to acquire knowledge of hadith without a mahram, as some people believe that it is permissible for women to travel with a mahram for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, and travel today is safer than it was before, because the means of transportation are safer, and they may assume that the prohibition in the past was because of safety issues, such as banditry in the desert and so on?

Detailed answer

Seeking knowledge in Islam is not only a human activity; rather it is an act of worship by means of which the Muslims seek to draw closer to their Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, and by means of which they seek reward with Him, may He be glorified, in the highest levels of Paradise, with the Prophets, the strong and true in faith (*siddeeqeen*), the martyrs and the righteous.

Because knowledge is an act of worship, the Muslims were keen to adhere to the laws of Allah when acquiring it and teaching it, knowing that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, is watching every thought that crosses their minds and every inclination of their hearts, so that they would not drift away from the path of seeking knowledge only for the sake of Allah. One aspect of that is that the way in which knowledge was sought by Muslim women and young women must have been within the framework of Islamic rulings. At the same time, these rulings and guidelines did not prevent them from acquiring a high level of religious knowledge, as ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: The best women are the women of the Ansaar. Shyness did not prevent them from seeking to acquire deep knowledge of religion. Narrated by Muslim (no. 322).

We may see – from the books of biographies of women, narrators of hadith and scholars – how the commitment to Islamic guidelines on the part of the female seekers of knowledge has many aspects, as follows:

Firstly:

The prohibition on travelling without a mahram is something on which there is consensus among the scholars, and some of the fuqaha' and scholars of hadith did not make any exception except travelling for the obligatory Hajj and 'umrah. So it is not known that any woman travelled long distances and exposed herself to the grave dangers that existed during those times except with a mahram, so that she would not be disobeying Allah in a matter in which she wanted to obey Him, and so that her efforts to seek knowledge would not backfire on her on the Day of Resurrection. See the answer to question no. [82392](#).

Secondly:

With regard to mixing with men and men and women looking at each other, our righteous forebears, the fuqaha' and scholars of hadith, were the furthest removed from that. In her pursuit of knowledge, the female scholar or seeker of knowledge must observe complete hijab, which includes the face and hands, or she must listen and speak from behind a curtain or partition, following the example of the Mothers of the Believers (may Allah be pleased with them). The Taabi'een learned from the Mothers of the Believers everything that they narrated, hundreds of hadiths, from behind a partition, in response to the command of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted (interpretation of the meaning): *"And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts"* [al-Ahzaab 33:53].

This ruling was not only applicable to the Mothers of the Believers. al-'Allaamah al-Ameen ash-Shinqeeti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The fact that Allah, may He be exalted, explained the reason for this ruling – which is the obligation of hijab – by saying that it was purer for the hearts of both men and women and offered protection against suspicion is a clear proof that this ruling is intended to be general in

application. That is because none of the Muslims would say that anyone other than the wives of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not have any need for their hearts to be more pure, or that the hearts of men are more free of suspicion than the wives of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). End quote from *Adwa' al-Bayaan* (6/242).

We have stated this previously in many answers on our website, including no. [46921](#) .

Thirdly:

Similarly, you will find in the books of biography many cases in which it is stated that listening was done from behind a curtain or partition, in obedience to the command of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. The scholars of hadith said, in response to those who rejected the report that Muhammad ibn Ishaq heard from Faatimah the wife of Hishaam ibn 'Urwah: It may be that he heard from her with a partition between them in the absence of her husband. Adh-Dhahabi said: That is what one would expect of them, which is the way in which many of the Taabi'een learned from the female Sahaabah. And it may be that he went to listen to her and he saw her and learned from her when he was still a minor. It is also possible that he learned from her when she had grown very old; that is possible because she was more than ten years older than Hishaam.

End quote from *Siyar A'laam an-Nubala'* (7/42):

In *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad* (33/401) it says: Some scholars of hadith came and asked for permission to visit Abu'l-Ashhab. He gave them permission to come in, and they said: Narrate to us. He said: Ask me something. They said: We do not have anything [in particular] to ask you about. His daughter said from behind the curtain: Ask him about the hadith of 'Arfajah ibn As'ad whose nose was cut off on the day of [the battle of] al-Kilaab. End quote.

Similarly, it was narrated from Imam Maalik (may Allah have mercy on him) that when the *Muwatta'* was read to him, if the student made a mistake in the pronunciation, or added or omitted something, his daughter would knock on the door, and her father would say to the student: Go back and check, for you have made a mistake. And the student would go back and find the mistake. *Al-Madkhal* by Ibn al-Haaj (1/215).

It says in *ad-Daw' al-Laami' li Ahl al-Qarn at-Taasi'* (12/22), in the biography of Haleemah, the daughter of Abu 'Ali al-Mazmalaani, that she listened from behind the partition to [the book] *Thamaaniyaat an-Najeeb* when al-Jammaal al-Hanbali was teaching it.

Thus we can be certain that the way in which women sought Islamic knowledge was in accordance with Islamic etiquette. It is also an example of making sacrifices for the sake of acquiring knowledge, and achieving a high level of knowledge, as the books of history record the names of hundreds of women whose memory will live forever in this world and who played a role in Islamic history. For more information, we advise you to read the following books:

- 1.. *'Inaayat an-Nisa' bi'l-Hadith ash-Shareef*. Mashhoor Hasan Salmaan.
- 2.. *Juhood al-Mar'ah fi Nashr al-Hadith wa 'Uloomihi*. 'Afaaf 'Abd al-Ghafoor.
- 3.. *Safahaat Mushriqah min 'Inaayat al-Mar'ah bi Saheeh al-Bukhaari*. Muhammad ibn 'Azzooz.
- 4.. *Dawr al-Mar'ah fi Khidmat al-Hadith fi'l-Quroon ath-Thalaathah al-Oola*. Amaal bint Qardaash. Published in *Silsilat Kitaab al-Ummah*, Ministry of Awqaaf, Qatar, issue no. 70.
- 5.. *Juhood al-Mar'ah ad-Dimashqiyyah fi Riwaayat al-Hadith ash-Shareef*. Muhammad ibn 'Azzooz.
- 6.. *A'laam an-Nisa'*. 'Umar Rida Kahhaalah.
- 7.. Foreword by Muhammad ibn 'Azzooz, annotator of *Tarqiyat al-Mureedeen bima tadammanathu Seerah as-Sayyidah al-Waalidah min Ahwaal al-'Aarifeen*. Al-Haafiz 'Abd al-Hayy al-Kattaani.
- 8.. Chapter entitled *Suwar min Seerah al-Muslimah al-'Aalimah*, in *'Awdat al-Hijaab* (2/580).
- 9.. *Nisa' sana'na 'Ulama'*. Umm Isra' bint 'Arafah Bayyoomi.
- 10.. *Jaami' Akhbaar an-Nisa' min Siyar A'laam an-Nubala'*. Khaalid ibn Husayn.

And Allah knows best.