

The Hadith on the Recommendation Not to Perform Excessive Prayer in Sunan Ibn Majah: A Study of Conflicting Hadiths

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Abstract. This article examines the hadiths found in Sunan Ibn Majah regarding the recommendation to avoid excessive prayer and the hadith about prayer as the most virtuous deed, which appear contradictory, through the science of *Mukhtalif al-Hadith*. This study is qualitative research conducted through library research, gathering data from hadith collections and books relevant to the topic of discussion. The findings reveal that both the hadith recommending avoiding excessive prayer and the hadith on prayer as the most virtuous deed are authentic (*sahih*) and of the singular (*ahad*) type in terms of transmission. The study concludes that these two hadiths can be reconciled using the *al-Jam'u* method through a contextual approach. Based on the compromise between these two hadiths, it is understood that the recommendation to avoid excessive prayer emphasizes that one should not overindulge in worship and instead prioritize simple but consistent acts of worship. On the other hand, the hadith about prayer as the most virtuous deed underscores the importance of not neglecting prayer, as it holds numerous virtues not found in other acts of worship or deeds. Thus, this hadith does not suggest continuous, uninterrupted worship but rather emphasizes the necessity of maintaining and not abandoning prayer.

Keywords: Excessive Prayer; Mukhtalif Hadith; Sunan Ibn Majah

INTRODUCTION

Hadith is a source of Islamic teachings that holds many virtues in life. Its significance as a guide after the Qur'an encompasses various forms of practical application in daily life. The widespread presence of hadiths in society has led to diverse practices based on them, which often results in differences in interpretation and understanding. Consequently, the perception sometimes arises that certain hadiths contradict others. This phenomenon, in which one hadith is

presumed to be in conflict with another, is commonly referred to as *mukhtalif al-hadith*.¹

One example of a hadith that appears to be contradictory in its matn (text) is found in the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah, No. 4241, as follows:

حَدَّثَنَا عَمْرُو بْنُ رَافِعَ قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا يَعْقُوبُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْأَشْعَرِيُّ، عَنْ عِيسَى بْنِ جَارِيَةَ، عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، قَالَ: مَرَّ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَى رَجُلٍ يُصَلِّي عَلَى صَخْرَةٍ، فَأَتَى نَاحِيَةَ مَكَّةَ، فَمَكَّثَ مُلِّيًّا، ثُمَّ انْصَرَفَ، فَوَجَدَ الرَّجُلَ يُصَلِّي عَلَى حَالِهِ، فَقَامَ فَجَمَعَ يَدِيهِ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْقَصْدِ ثَلَاثَةٌ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَمْلُثُ حَتَّى تَمْلُوَا²

Translation: “*Amr bin Rafi‘ narrated to us, Ya‘qub bin ‘Abdullah al-Ash‘ari narrated to us, from ‘Isa bin Jariyah, from Jabir bin ‘Abdullah, who said: The Messenger of Allah passed by a man who was praying on a rock. The Messenger of Allah then went toward Makkah and remained there for a considerable time. When he returned, he found the man still praying as before. The Prophet then stood and clasped his hands together and said, ‘O people, be moderate in your prayer (he repeated this statement three times), for indeed, Allah does not grow weary until you grow weary.’*”

Meanwhile, in another hadith also narrated by Ibn Majah, No. 277, concerning prayer as the foremost deed, it is stated:

حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا وَكِيعٌ، عَنْ سُفِّيَانَ، عَنْ مَنْصُورٍ، عَنْ سَالِمِ بْنِ أَبِي الْجَعْدِ، عَنْ ثَوْبَانَ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: اسْتَقِيمُوا، وَلَا تُخْسِنُوا، وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ خَيْرَ أَعْمَالِكُمُ الصَّلَاةَ، وَلَا يُحَافِظُ عَلَى الْوُضُوءِ إِلَّا مُؤْمِنٌ³

Translation: “*Ali bin Muhammad narrated to us, he said: Waki‘ narrated to*

¹ Mohamad Anas and Imron Rosyadi, “Metode Memahami Hadis-Hadis Kontradiktif,” *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadis* 3, no. 1 (2013): 123.

² Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Yazid al-Qazwīnī Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albāni, Juz 2 (Riyāḍ: Maktabah al-Ma‘ārif li al-Naṣr wa al-Tauziy, n.d.), h. 1417.

³ Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Yazid al-Qazwīnī Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albāni, Juz 1, h. 101.

us, from Sufyan, from Mansur, from Salim bin Abi al-Ja‘d, from Thawban, who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, ‘Be upright (steadfast), though you will not be able to (perfectly), and know that the most virtuous of your deeds is prayer, and none maintains ablution except a believer’.

At first glance, the two hadith texts above appear to be contradictory. The first hadith, narrated by Ibn Majah No. 4241, seems to convey that performing excessive prayer is something the Prophet did not recommend. In contrast, the second hadith, narrated by Ibn Majah No. 277, clearly shows that the Prophet himself stated that prayer is the most virtuous of deeds. Thus, increasing the performance of prayer becomes a merit when referring to the second hadith, which emphasizes that prayer is the foremost act of worship.

Indirectly, the composition of these two hadith texts may lead to misunderstanding and, consequently, misinterpretation of the hadiths. In reality, each hadith has its own context, and therefore, systematic steps are required in order to properly understand hadith texts. Misinterpretation of hadiths may result in incorrect practices or spark controversy. The science of *Mukhtalif al-Hadith* was first introduced by Imam Muhammad bin Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī in his work *Ikhtilaf al-Hadith*.⁴

A contradictory hadith, commonly referred to as *mukhtalif al-hadith*, is technically defined as a condition in which two hadiths differ or conflict in meaning. A hadith is considered to be in contradiction with another when certain criteria are met: (1) the legal rulings contained in the hadiths are in opposition to one another; (2) the individual receiving the differing rulings is the same person; (3) the time of the occurrence of the rulings is the same; and (4) the hadiths that

⁴ Abdul Haqqi, Ahmad Tamimi, and Ahmad Daman Huri, “Hadis Berobat Dengan Benda Haram Dalam Sunan Abu Daud Metode Mukhtalif Al-Hadis Syaikh Shalih Al-Usaimin,” *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Agama Dan Filsafat (JURRAFI)* 2, no. 2 (2023): 3.

appear to be in contradiction are of equal strength (both being *sahih* or *hasan*). Hadiths of unequal quality are not categorized as part of *mukhtalif al-hadith*.⁵

Conflicting hadiths in terms of meaning can be resolved through several approaches: (1) the method of *jam'* (reconciliation), which seeks to harmonize seemingly contradictory hadiths by examining their textual structure; (2) the method of *tarjih* (preference), which involves favoring one hadith over another by analyzing the chains of transmission (*isnād*) to determine which is stronger; and (3) the method of *naskh* (abrogation), which entails nullifying the legal ruling of the later hadith.⁶

Based on the explanations above, a question arises regarding how to understand the seemingly contradictory hadiths in Sunan Ibn Majah concerning the Prophet's advice against performing excessive prayer and his statement that prayer is the foremost act of worship. Therefore, the author is interested in studying these hadiths through a qualitative descriptive approach based on the science of *mukhtalif al-Hadith* using library research. Data collection was conducted by reviewing relevant literature on the topic. The author began by examining the hadiths under study and then sought to reveal their content through the perspectives and opinions of scholars, aiming to find a point of convergence between the two apparently conflicting hadiths.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach through library research. Data were collected from hadith compilations and other books relevant to the topic under discussion. This research aims to contribute intellectually by educating the community to understand hadiths carefully, with the objective of minimizing

⁵ Lalu Abdurrahman Wahid, "Term Ilmu Mukhtalif Al-Hadis Dan Analisis Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Didalamnya," *Anvaruk: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Dakwah* 1, no. 1 (2021): 11.

⁶ Muhammad Alif, "Teori Naskh Hadis: Metode Alternatif Penyelesaian Hadis Mukhtalif," *Jurnal Holistic Al-Hadis* 02, no. 02 (2016): 175.

problems caused by misinterpretations of hadith texts, thereby fostering harmony in the practice of Islamic teachings.⁷

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Takhrij al-Hadith

The author conducted *takhrij al-hadith* as an initial step to identify the placement of the hadiths in various source books. The reference used for this hadith tracing was *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḡīr wa Ziyādatih*, authored by Imam al-Albānī. The author examined this text and obtained relevant information regarding the codes that indicate the location of the hadiths within different hadith collections, as follows:

أيها الناس عليكم بالقصد فإن الله تعالى لا يمل حتى تملوا.
(صحيح) ... [هـ ع حـ بـ] عن جابر.⁸

The codes obtained from the hadith investigation are as follows:

- a) The code (صحيح) indicates that al-Albānī regards this hadith as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*).
- b) The code [هـ ع حـ بـ] عن جابر signifies that the hadith is found in the collections of Sunan Ibn Majah (٥), Musnad Abū Ya'la (ع), and Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān (حـ بـ), narrated from the Prophet's Companion Jabir.

استقموا ولن تحصوا واعلموا أن خير أعمالكم الصلاة ولا يحافظ على
الوضوء إلا مؤمن.
(صحيح) ... [حـ مـ هـ كـ هـ قـ] عن ثوبان [هـ طـ بـ] عن ابن عمرو [طـ بـ] عن
سلمة بن الأكوع.⁹

⁷Ahmad Siddiq Setiawan et al., "Aplikatif Interpretasi Tekstual Pada Kandungan Hadis," *Tahdīs: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Al-Hadīs* 15, no. 1 (2024): 47–64.

⁸Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Jāmi' Al-Ṣaḡīr Wa Ziyādah*, Juz 1 (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiy, 1988), h. 532.

⁹Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Jāmi' Al-Ṣaḡīr Wa Ziyādah*, Juz 1, h. 225.

The codes obtained from the hadith investigation are as follows:

- a) The code (صحيح) indicates that al-Albānī regards this hadith as authentic (*sahīh*).
- b) The code حم هـ كـ هـ قـ [حم هـ كـ هـ قـ] عن ثوبان means the hadith is found in Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (حم), Sunan Ibn Majah (كـ), Mustadrak al-Ḥākim (ـ كـ), and Sunan al-Bayhaqī (ـ قـ), all narrated from Thawbān.
- c) The code هـ طـ بـ [هـ طـ بـ] عن ابن عمرو indicates the hadith is present in Sunan Ibn Majah (بـ) and Mu‘jam al-Kabīr Ṭabrānī (طـ بـ), narrated from Ibn ‘Amr.
- d) The code طـ بـ [طـ بـ] عن سلمة بن الأكوع shows the hadith is recorded in Mu‘jam al-Kabīr Ṭabrānī (طـ بـ) from Sulaymah bin al-Aqwā’.

After conducting a hadith investigation using the method of *takbrij*, the author has identified several references within primary source collections. The results of the investigation indicate that the hadiths under study are found across seven major hadith compilations: Sunan Ibn Majah, Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ṣahīh Ibn Ḥibbān, Musnad Abū Ya‘lā, Sunan al-Bayhaqī, al-Mustadrak by al-Ḥākim, and al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr by al-Ṭabarānī. The author then proceeded to assess the authenticity of the hadiths that serve as the objects of this study.

As previously explained, one of the necessary conditions for identifying a contradiction between two hadiths is that both must fall under the category of *maqbūl* (acceptable) hadiths. If there are two seemingly contradictory hadiths but one of them does not meet the criteria of a *maqbūl* hadith, then the contradiction is not considered valid.

Authenticity of the Hadith

Based on the results of the hadith tracing, it was found that the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah No. 4241 appears in three hadith collections: *Sunan Ibn Majah*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, and *Musnad Abū Ya'la*. All versions of this hadith are transmitted through the same Companion of the Prophet, namely Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh. Therefore, in terms of quantity, this hadith—regarding the recommendation not to perform excessive prayer—is classified as an *ahād* hadith of the *gharīb* type.

Meanwhile, the results of the investigation regarding the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah No. 277—stating that prayer is the most virtuous deed—show that the hadith is found in five hadith collections: *Sunan Ibn Majah*, *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, *al-Mustadrak* by al-Ḥākim, and *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr* by al-Tabarānī. It is narrated by three Companions of the Prophet: Thawbān, Ibn 'Amr, and Salamah ibn al-Akwā'. Therefore, in terms of quantity, this hadith is categorized as an *ahād* hadith of the *mashhūr* type. Al-Albānī classified this hadith as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic).

The author found that the *isnād* quality of the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah No. 4241 is *ḥasan li-dhātīhi*, due to the presence of one narrator whose reliability is subject to scholarly disagreement—namely, Ya'qūb ibn 'Abdullāh. However, the *ḥasan* status of this narration is strengthened by the existence of a *shāhid* (a corroborating transmission from a different Companion), thereby elevating its classification to *ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrīhi*, as explained by al-Albānī:

قال البوصيري في "الزوائد": إسناد حسن، يعقوب مختلف فيه، لكن الحديث صحيح، فإنه يشهد له حديث بريدة مرفوعاً: عليكم هدياً قاصداً، فإنه من يشاد هذا الدين يغليه.¹⁰

As for the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah No. 277 concerning prayer as the most virtuous deed, although no direct scrutiny was conducted on each

¹⁰Abū Abdul al-Rahman Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilah al-Āḥādīṣ al-Ṣaḥīḥah wa Sya'īn min Fuqahā wa Fawā'idahā*, Juz 4 (Cet. I; Riyad: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1995 M), h. 354.

individual narrator within the chain of transmission, the author considers the hadith to be acceptable due to its *mashbūr* status and the support it receives from scholars who have classified it as *sahīh* (authentic).

Commentary on the Hadith

Historically, the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah No. 4241, concerning the recommendation not to perform excessive prayer, was preceded by a specific event, as explained by Ibn Ḥamzah al-Ḥusaynī al-Hanafī, which is also reflected in the matn (text) of the hadith:

سَبَبَهُ كَمَا فِي ابْنِ مَاجِةَ عَنْ جَابِرٍ قَالَ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَى
رَجُلٍ يُصَلِّي عَلَى صَخْرَةٍ فَأَتَى تَاحِيَةً بِمَكَّةَ فَمَكَثَ مَلِيًّا ثُمَّ انْصَرَفَ فَوْجَ الرَّجُلِ
يُصَلِّي عَلَى حَالِهِ فَقَامَ فَجَ معَ يَدِيهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ أَيَّهَا النَّاسُ فَذَكَرَهُ

Excessive zeal in worship may lead to weariness; therefore, it is advisable for a person to observe moderation and simplicity in performing acts of devotion. Continuous and consistent worship, even if performed in small amounts, is considered more virtuous. The Prophet (peace be upon him) once admonished Mu‘ādh for prolonging the recitation during congregational prayer while leading as an imam, as the conditions of those praying behind him were not all the same.¹¹

Imam al-Nawawī stated, “A small deed that is performed consistently reflects obedience to Allah, for such consistent acts will accumulate over time, whereas abundant deeds that are burdensome will not be sustained.” This highlights the recommendation to adopt a moderate approach and the prohibition of excessiveness in worship, even when performed with fervent enthusiasm.¹²

¹¹ Ibnu Hamzah al-Husaini al-Hanafi Ad-Damsyiqi, *al-Bayan wa al-Ta’rif fi Asbab Wurud al-Hadis al-Syarif*, terj. Suwarta Wijaya dan Zafrullah Salim, *Asbabul Wurud: Latar Belakang Timbulnya Hadits-Hadits Rasul*, Juz 2 (Jakarta: Kalam Mulia, 2005), h. 247.

¹² Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, *Fathul Baari: Penjelasan Kitab Shahih Al-Bukhari*, ed. Amiruddin, Abu Rania, and Titi Tartilah, Jilid 1 (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2003), h. 186.

Hadith scholars interpret the phrase “فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَمْلُكُ حَتَّىٰ تَمَلُّوا” as

meaning: “Allah does not become weary or bored with you; rather, He ceases to bestow reward, blessings, and mercy only when you yourselves become weary and abandon your deeds.”¹³

Excessive or immoderate worship tends to cause boredom, leading the worshipper to discontinue their acts of devotion over time. Based on the aforementioned explanations, it can be understood that the Prophet’s advice to avoid excessive worship serves as counsel to maintain a moderate and measured approach in worship—one that is sustained consistently—rather than performing a large amount of worship in a short period without continuity.

Regarding the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah No. 277 about prayer being the most virtuous deed, it can be understood by referring to explanations from scholars, such as Imam al-Shīrāzī who stated, “Prayer is the foremost act of worship because it unites various deeds that draw a person closer to Allah, which are not found in other acts of worship, such as dhikr and sending blessings upon the Prophet. Furthermore, prayer prohibits actions that are permitted in other forms of worship, such as talking, walking, and other behaviors.”¹⁴ Abdullah bin Abdurrahman al-Bassam also stated that:

قال شيخ الإسلام: الصلاة إذا قام من الليل أفضل من القراءة في غير صلاة،
نص على ذلك أئمة الإسلام: لقوله - صلى الله عليه وسلم -: اعلموا أنَّ خير
أعمالكم الصلاة¹⁵

¹³Imam An-Nawawi, *Al-Minhaj Syarah Shahih Muslim*, Jilid 4 (Jakarta Timur: Darus Sunnah, 2009), h. 423.

¹⁴Imam An-Nawawi, *Al-Majmu': Syarah Al-Muhadzab*, ed. Muhammad Najib Al-Muthi'i, Jilid 4 (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2009), h. 23.

¹⁵“*Syaikhul Islam*” berkata, “Shalat sunnah bila dilakukan di malam hari maka akan lebih utama daripada membaca al-Qur'an di luar shalat, hal ini dinyatakan oleh para imam Islam berdasarkan sabda Nabi bahwa, “sebaik-baik amal kalian adalah shalat.” Baca: ‘Abdullah bin 'Abdurrahman al-Bassam, *Tandihu al-Abkam min Bulughul Maram*, Juz 2 (Cet. V; Makkah: Maktabah al-Asadiya, 1423 H/2003 M), h. 423.

Imam Shāfi‘ī was once asked about performing night prayers throughout the night, to which he replied, “I do not dislike it except for those who disrupt their Fajr prayer.”¹⁶ Thus, it is understood that the prayer referred to as the foremost deed in the hadith is an act of worship that possesses its own distinct virtue

Resolution of the Hadiths

The two seemingly contradictory hadiths will be reconciled using the science of *mukhtalif al-hadīth* through the *jam‘u* (reconciliation) method. This method resolves apparent contradictions between hadiths by eliminating the outward conflict through finding a common ground between their meanings. There are three approaches that can be applied in the *jam‘u* method: the *usūl* (principles) approach, contextual understanding, and the correlative approach.¹⁷

The Prophet’s statement “عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْقَصْدِ” (You should adopt moderation) was uttered upon observing that the individual continued worshipping without pause; thus, the Prophet advised maintaining moderation in prayer. Meanwhile, the Prophet’s phrase in the hadith narrated by Ibn Majah No. 277, “خَيْرُ أَعْمَالِكُمُ الصَّلَاةُ” (The best of your deeds is prayer), signifies that prayer is an act of worship that must not be underestimated, as it contains virtues not found in other forms of worship or deeds. This hadith does not imply that one must engage in continuous, uninterrupted worship, but rather emphasizes the importance of consistently maintaining prayer and not abandoning it. Based on the explanations presented, the two hadiths found in Sunan Ibn Majah (Nos. 4241 and 277) do not contain any contradiction whatsoever.

¹⁶Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, *Fathul Baari: Penjelasan Kitab Shahih Al-Bukhari*, ed. Amiruddin, Abu Rania, and Titi Tartilah, Jilid 6 (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2003), h. 300.

¹⁷Ilyas Husti, *Hadis-Hadis Mukhtalif: Antara Teori Dan Praktek*, (Cet. I; Riau: CV. Asa Riau, 2017), h. 198.

CONCLUSION

Based on the conducted research, both the hadith advising against excessive prayer and the hadith describing prayer as the foremost deed are classified as authentic (*sahih*) and fall under the category of solitary (*'ahād*) hadiths. The author resolves the apparent contradiction between these two hadiths using the *al-jam'u* (reconciliation) method. From a contextual perspective, the hadith advising against excessive prayer, as narrated by Ibn Majah No. 4241, contains the Prophet's warning to avoid excessiveness in prayer and to prioritize moderate worship that is consistently maintained.

Meanwhile, the hadith regarding prayer as the foremost deed, narrated by Ibn Majah No. 722, indicates that prayer is an act of worship that must not be underestimated, as it contains many virtues not found in other acts of worship or deeds. Thus, this hadith does not imply that one should worship continuously without pause, but rather emphasizes the importance of consistently maintaining prayer and not abandoning it.

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