



MUSLIM INTER-SCHOLASTIC TOURNAMENT 2010

Islamic Scholastic Bowl

Topic III: Models of Modesty

Table of Contents:

Uthman ibn Affan (R)

Abdur Rahman ibn Awf (R)

Abdullah ibn Hudhafah As Sahmi (R)

Sa'd ibn Aamir Al Jumahi (R)

Utbah ibn Ghazwan (R)

Rabi'ah ibn Ka'b (R)

Sa'id ibn Zayd (R)

Hasan al Basri (R)

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (R)

Uthman ibn Affan (R)

Uthman ibn Affan ibn Abi al-As ibn Umayya ibn Abd Shams, Abu Amr, Abu Abd Allah, Abu Layla al-Qurashi al-Umawi (d. 35), the Prophet's Friend, *Amîr al-Mu'minîn*, the third of the four Rightly-Guided Successors of the Prophet and third of the Ten promised Paradise. He is named *Dhu al-Nûrayn* or "Possessing Two Lights," a reference to his marriage with two daughters of the Prophet, Ruqayya then Umm Kulthum. He is among those who emigrated twice: once to Abyssinia, and again to Madina. He gathered together the Qur'an which he had read in its entirety before the Prophet. During his tenure as Caliph, Armenia, Caucasia, Khurasan, Kirman, Sijistan, Cyprus, and much of North Africa were added to the dominions of Islam. He related 146 hadiths from the Prophet. Among the Companions who narrated from him in the Nine Books are Anas, Abu Hurayra, Jundub, Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, Abd Allah ibn Abbas, Abd Allah ibn Umar. A host of prominent Followers narrated from him, among them al-Zuhri, Ibn al-Musayyib, al-Dahhak, and Alqama.

Uthman was extremely wealthy and generous. When he heard the Prophet say: "Whoever equips the army of al-Usra, Paradise is for him," he brought the Prophet a thousand gold dinars which he poured into his lap. The Prophet picked them up with his hand and said repeatedly: "Nothing shall harm Uthman after what he did today." It is also narrated that he equipped the army of al-Usra with seven hundred ounces of gold, or seven hundred and fifty camels and fifty horses.

The Prophet said: "The most compassionate of my Community towards my Community is Abu Bakr; the staunchest in Allah's Religion is Umar; and the most truthful in his modesty is Uthman." The pebbles were heard by Abu Dharr glorifying Allah in the hands of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman. The Prophet particularly praised Uthman for his modesty and said: "Shall I not feel bashful before a man when even the angels feel bashful before him?"

He was humble and was seen at the time of his caliphate sleeping alone in the mosque, wrapped in a blanket with no one around him, and riding on a mule with his son Na'il behind him.

It is related through several sound chains that Uthman recited the Qur'an in a single *rak'a*. Ibrahim ibn Rustum al-Marwazi said: "Four are the Imams that recited the entire Qur'an in a single *rak'a*: Uthman ibn Affan, Tamim al-Dari, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, and Abu Hanifa." Ibn al-Mubarak also narrated that Uthman used to fast all year round. Ali ibn Abi Talib said: "Uthman was one of those who were **mindful of their duty and [did] good works, and again [were] mindful of [their] duty, and [believed], and once again [were] mindful of their duty, and did right. Allah loves those who do good.**' (5:93)" Ibn Umar said that Uthman was meant by the verse **"Is he who pays adoration in the watches of the night, prostrate and standing, beware of the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord. . ."** (39:9).

Anas narrated: When Hudhayfa campaigned with the people of Iraq and al-Sham in Armenia, the Muslims contended with regard to the Qur'an in a reprehensible manner. Hudhayfa came to Uthman and told him: "O Commander of the Believers, rescue this Community before they differ in the Qur'an the way Christians and Jews differed in the Books." Uthman was alarmed at this and sent word to Hafsa the Mother of the Believers: "Send me all the volumes in which the Qur'an has been written down." When she did, Uthman ordered Zayd ibn Thabit, Sa'id ibn al-As, Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr,

and `Abd Al-Rahman ibn al-Harith ibn Hisham to copy them into volumes. He said: "If you all differ with Zayd concerning the Arabic, then write it in the dialect of Quraysh, for truly the Qur'an was only revealed in their dialect." There is Consensus around the integral contents of `Uthman's volume. This means that one who denies or questions it in whole or in part has left Islam.

`Uthman was neither tall nor short, extremely handsome, brunet, large-jointed, wide-shouldered, with a large beard which he dyed yellow and long hair which reached to his shoulders, and gold-braced teeth. `Abd Allah ibn Hazm said: "I saw `Uthman, and I never saw man nor woman handsomer of face than him."

The plot to kill `Uthman marked the onset of Dissension (*fitna*) in the Community. Together with deadly division, the great sign of this Dissension was the beginning of falsehood. The timing of the spread of falsehood was foretold by the Prophet in the hadith: "I entrust to you the well-being of my Companions, and that of those that come after them. Then falsehood will spread." To counter this, the sciences of hadith and hadith criticism were innovated within the half-century which followed `Uthman's death in order to sift true Prophetic and Companion-reports from false ones. This was done by verifying the authenticity of transmission chains (*isnâds*) embodied in the honesty and competence of transmitters, and by examining the conditions and contents of transmission in their minutest historical, linguistic, and doctrinal details. Ibn Sirin (d. 110) said: "We used to accept as true what we heard, then lies spread and we began to say: Name your transmitters." Confirming this is al-Hasan al-Basri's (d. 110) reaction to someone who requested his *isnâd*: "O man! I neither lie nor was ever called a liar!" Later scholars such as Ibn al-Mubarak (d. 181) declared: "*Isnâd* is an integral part of the Religion, otherwise anyone can say anything."

The principle of authentication was founded by the Prophet himself and used by the Companions. This is proved by the Prophet's questioning of the man who said he had seen the new moon of Ramadan: "Do you bear witness that there is no God except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah?" When he replied in the affirmative, the Prophet accepted his news. Similarly, Ibn `Abbas said: "If a trustworthy source tells us of a *fatwa* by `Ali, we do not seek any further concerning it." This shows that they already distinguished between true and dubious sources. Furthermore, all the Companions are considered trustworthy sources according to Allah's saying: **"You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind"** (3:110) and several other verses and hadiths to that effect. This evidence was listed by al-Khatib in *al-Kifaya* and Ibn Hajar in *al-Isaba*.

The Prophet spoke of `Uthman's forthcoming martyrdom on numerous occasions:

"Give him [<`Uthman] the tidings of Paradise after a trial that shall befall him."

"A dissension shall surge like so many bull's horns. At that time, he [indicating a man wearing a veil] and whoever is with him are on the side of right." Ka`b ibn Murra al-Bahzi then ran to the man, lifted his veil, and turned him towards the Prophet saying: "Him, O Messenger of Allah?" The Prophet said yes. It was `Uthman ibn `Affan.

`Uthman said: "The Prophet took a covenant from me [not to fight at the time of my martyrdom] and I shall fulfill it."

"O `Uthman! It may be that Allah shall vest you with a shirt. If they demand that you remove it, do not remove it."

Ibn `Umar said: "As `Uthman was delivering a sermon, Jahjah al-Ghafari walked up to him, snatched his stick, and broke it on his knee. A shard of wood entered his thigh and it got gangrened and was amputated. Then he died within the year. Al-Qadi `Iyad relates in his book *al-Shifa'*, chapter entitled "Esteem for the things and places connected with the Prophet," that this staff had belonged to the Prophet.

`Abd Allah ibn Salam said to the Egyptians at the time they were besieging the Commander of the Believers `Uthman ibn `Affan: "Never did Allah's sword not remain sheathed from harming you since the Prophet came to it until this very day." Yazid ibn Abi Habib said: "I have heard that most of those that rode to kill `Uthman were later seized by demonic possession." Al-Dhahabi mentioned that `Ali had pronounced a curse on `Uthman's killers. One of the reasons for the climate of hatred stirred up against the Caliph was the grievance of some parties from Egypt and Iraq that `Uthman was favoring his relatives among the Banu Umayya with public offices and demanded that he remove them.

Ibn al-Musayyib related that a group of seven hundred Egyptians came to complain to `Uthman about their governor Ibn Abi Sarh's tyranny, so `Uthman said: "Chose someone to govern you." They chose Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, so `Uthman wrote credentials for him and they returned. On their way back, at three days' distance from Madina, a black slave caught up with them with the news that he carried orders from `Uthman to the governor of Egypt. They searched him and found a message from `Uthman to Ibn Abi Sarh ordering the death of Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr and some of his friends. They returned to Madina and besieged `Uthman. The latter acknowledged that the camel, the slave, and the seal on the letter belonged to him, but he swore that he had never written nor ordered the letter to be written. It was discovered that the letter had been hand-written by Marwan ibn al-Hakam. `Uthman was besieged for twenty-two days during which he refused both to give up Marwan and to resign. He was killed on the last day of Dhu al-Hijja, on the day of *Jum`a*, by several men who had crept into his house.

Ibn `Umar related from `Uthman that the previous night the latter had seen the Prophet in his dream telling him: "Be strong! Verily you shall break your fast with us tomorrow night." When his assailants came in they found him reading the Qur'an. `Uthman was first stabbed in the head with an arrow-head, then a man placed the point of his sword against his belly, whereupon his wife Na'ila tried to prevent him with her hand, losing several fingers. Then `Uthman and Na'ila's servant were killed as the latter fought back. She ran out of the house screaming for help and the killers dispersed. It is narrated that `Uthman was killed as he was reading the verse "**And Allah will suffice you for defense against them. He is the Hearer, the Knower.**" (2:137) Several reports state that at the time of `Uthman's siege and death Zayd ibn Thabit had marshalled three hundred *Ansâr* in his defense together with Abu Hurayra, Ibn `Umar, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, `Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, but `Uthman forbade all of them to fight.

Among `Uthman's sayings:

"If I were between Paradise and the Fire, unsure where I will be sent, I would choose to be turned into ash before finding out where I was bound."

"I swear by Allah that I never committed fornication in the Time of Ignorance nor in Islam. Islam only increased me in modesty."

His servant Hani' narrated: "Whenever `Uthman stood before a grave he wept until his beard was wet. He was asked: 'You have seen battle and death without a tear, and you cry for this?' He said: 'The grave is the first abode of the hereafter. Whoever is saved from it, what follows is easier; whoever is not saved from it, what follows is harder. The Prophet said: "I have not seen anything more frightful than the punishment in the grave."'"" `Uthman also related from the Prophet that whenever the latter finished burying someone, he would stand by the grave and say: "All of you, ask Allah to forgive your brother and make him steadfast, for he is now being questioned."

The Prophet said: "More men will enter Paradise through the intercession of a certain man than there are people in the tribes of Rabi`a and Mudar." The elders considered that this was `Uthman ibn `Affan.

Main sources: Abu Nu`aym, *Hilya al-Awliya'* 1:92-100 #3; al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A`lam al-Nubala'* 1/2: 566-614 #4.

Abdur Rahman ibn Awf (R)

He was one of the first eight persons to accept Islam. He was one of the ten persons (al-asharatu-l-mubashshirin) who were assured of entering Paradise. He was one of the six persons chosen by Umar to form the council of shura to choose the Khalifah after his death. His name in Jahiliyyah days was Abu Amr. But when he accepted Islam the noble Prophet called him Abdur-Rahman - the servant of the Beneficent God. Abdur-Rahman became a Muslim before the Prophet entered the house of al-Arqam. In fact it is said that he accepted Islam only two days after Abu Bakr as-Siddiq did so.

Abdur-Rahman did not escape the punishment which the early Muslims suffered at the hands of the Quraysh. He bore this punishment with steadfastness as they did. He remained firm as they did. And when they were compelled to leave Makkah for Abyssinia because of the continuous and unbearable persecution, Abdur-Rahman also went. He returned to Makkah when it was rumored that conditions for the Muslims had improved but, when these rumors proved to be false, he left again for Abyssinia on a second hijrah. From Makkah once again he made the hijrah to Madinah. Soon after arriving in Madinah, the Prophet in his unique manner began pairing off the Muhajirin and the Ansar. This established a firm bond of brotherhood and was meant to strengthen social cohesion and ease the destitution of the Muhajirin. Abdur-Rahman was linked by the Prophet with Sad ibn ar-Rabi'ah. Sad in the spirit of generosity and magnanimity with which the Ansar greeted the Muhajirin, said to Abdur-Rahman: "My brother! Among the people of Madinah I have the most wealth. I have two orchards and I have two wives. See which of the two orchards you like and I shall vacate it for you and which of my two wives is pleasing to you and I will divorce her for you." Abdur-Rahman must have been embarrassed and said in reply: "May God bless you in your family and your wealth. But just show me where the suq is.."

Abdur-Rahman went to the market-place and began trading with whatever little resources he had. He bought and sold and his profits grew rapidly. Soon he was sufficiently well off and was able

to get married. He went to the noble Prophet with the scent of perfume lingering over him. "Mahyarn, O Abdur-Rahman!" exclaimed the Prophet - "mahyam" being a word of Yemeni origin which indicates pleasant surprise. "I have got married," replied Abdur-Rahman. "And what did you give your wife as mahr?" "The weight of a nuwat in gold." "You must have a walimah (wedding feast) even if it is with a single sheep. And may Allah bless you in your wealth," said the Prophet with obvious pleasure and encouragement.

Thereafter Abdur-Rahman grew so accustomed to business success that he said if he lifted a stone he expected to find gold or silver under it! Abdur-Rahman distinguished himself in both the battles of Badr and Uhud. At Uhud he remained firm throughout and suffered more than twenty wounds some of them deep and severe. Even so, his physical jihad was matched by his jihad with his wealth. Once the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was preparing to dispatch an expeditionary force. He summoned his companions and said: "Contribute sadaqah for I want to dispatch an expedition." Abdur-Rahman went to his house and quickly returned. "O Messenger of God," he said, "I have four thousand (dinars). I give two thousand as a qard to my Lord and two thousand I leave for my family. "

When the Prophet decided to send an expedition to distant Tabuk - this was the last ghazwah of his life that he mounted - his need for finance and material was not greater than his need for men for the Byzantine forces were a numerous and well-equipped force. That year in Madinah was one of drought and hardship. The journey to Tabuk was long, more than a thousand kilometers. Provisions were in short supply. Transport was at a premium so much so that a group of Muslims came to the Prophet pleading to go with him but he had to turn them away because he could find no transport for them. These men were sad and dejected and came to be known as the Bakka'in or the Weepers and the army itself was called the Army of Hardship ('Ussrah). Thereupon the Prophet called upon his companions to give generously for the war effort in the path of God and assured them they would be rewarded. The Muslims' response to the Prophet's call was immediate and generous. In the fore front of those who responded was Abdur-Rahman ibn Awl. He donated two hundred awqiyah of gold whereupon Umar ibn al-Khattab said to the Prophet: "I have (now) seen Abdur-Rahman committing a wrong. He has not left anything for his family." "Have you left anything for your family, Abdur-Rahman?" asked the Prophet. "Yes," replied Abdur-Rahman. "I have left for them more than what I give and better." "How much?" enquired the Prophet. "What God and His Messenger have promised of sustenance, goodness and reward," replied Abdur-Rahman.

The Muslim army eventually left for Tabuk. There Abdur-Rahman was blessed with an honor which was not conferred on anyone till then. The time of Salat came and the Prophet, peace be on him, was not there at the time. The Muslims chose Abdur-Rahman as their imam. The first rakat of the Salat was almost completed when the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, joined the worshippers and performed the Salat behind Abdur-Rahman ibn Awl. Could there be a greater honor conferred on anyone than to have been the imam of the most honored of God's creation, the imam of the Prophets, the imam of Muhammad, the Messenger of God!

When the Prophet, peace be on him, passed away, Abdur-Rahman took on the responsibility of looking after the needs of his family, the Ummahat al-Muminin. He would go with them wherever they wanted to and he even performed Hajj with them to ensure that all their needs were met. This is a sign of the trust and confidence which he enjoyed on the part of the Prophet's family. Abdur-Rahman's support for the Muslims and the Prophet's wives in particular was well-known. Once he

sold a piece of land for forty thousand dinars and he distributed the entire amount among the Banu Zahrah (the relatives of the Prophet's mother Aminah), the poor among the Muslims and the Prophet's wives.

When Aishah, may God be pleased with her, received some of this money she asked: "Who has sent this money?" and was told it was Abdur-Rahman, whereupon she said: "The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: No one will feel compassion towards you after I die except the sabirin (those who are patient and resolute)." The prayer of the noble Prophet that Allah should bestow barakah on the wealth of Abdur-Rahman appeared to be with Abdur-Rahman throughout his life. He became the richest man among the companions of the Prophet. His business transactions invariably met with success and his wealth continued to grow. His trading caravans to and from Madinah grew larger and larger bringing to the people of Madinah wheat, flour, butter, cloths, utensils, perfume and whatever else was needed and exporting whatever surplus produce they had.

One day, a loud rumbling sound was heard coming from beyond the boundaries of Madinah normally a calm and peaceful city. The rumbling sound gradually increased in volume. In addition, clouds of dust and sand were stirred up and blown in the wind. The people of Madinah soon realized that a mighty caravan was entering the city. They stood in amazement as seven hundred camels laden with goods moved into the city and crowded the streets. There was much shouting and excitement as people called to one another to come out and witness the sight and see what goods and sustenance the camel caravan had brought. Aishah, may God be pleased with her, heard the commotion and asked: "What is this that's happening in Madinah?" and she was told: "It is the caravan of Abdur-Rahman ibn Awl which has come from Syria bearing his merchandise." "A caravan making all this commotion?" she asked in disbelief." "Yes, O Umm al-Muminin. There are seven hundred camels." Aishah shook her head and gazed in the distance as if she was trying to recall some scene or utterance of the past and then she said: "I have heard the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, say: I have seen Abdur-Rahman ibn Awl entering Paradise creeping."

Why creeping? Why should he not enter Paradise leaping and at a quick pace with the early companions of the Prophet? Some friends of his related to Abdur-Rahman the hadith which Aishah had mentioned. He remembered that he had heard the hadith more than once from the Prophet and he hurried to the house of Aishah and said to her: "Yaa Ammah! Have you heard that from the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace?" "Yes," she replied. "You have reminded me of a hadith which I have never forgotten," he is also reported to have said. He was so over-joyed and added: "If I could I would certainly like to enter Paradise standing. I swear to you, yaa Ammah, that this entire caravan with all its merchandise, I will give sabilillah." And so he did. In a great festival of charity and righteousness, he distributed all that the massive caravan had brought to the people of Madinah and surrounding areas. This is just one incident which showed what type of man Abdur-Rahman was. He earned much wealth but he never remained attached to it for its own sake and he did not allow it to corrupt him. Abdur-Rahman's generosity did not stop there. He continued giving with both his hands, secretly and openly.

Some of the figures mentioned are truly astounding: forty thousand dirhams of silver, forty thousand dinars of gold, two hundred awqiyah of gold, five hundred horses to mujahidin setting out in the path of God and one thousand five hundred camels to another group of mujahidin, four

hundred dinars of gold to the survivors of Badr and a large legacy to the Ummahaat al Muminin and the catalogue goes on. On account of this fabulous generosity, Aishah said: "May God give him to drink from the water of Salsabil (a spring in Paradise)." All this wealth did not corrupt Abdur-Rahman and did not change him. When he was among his workers and assistants, people could not distinguish him from them. One day food was brought to him with which to end a fast. He looked at the food and said: "Musab ibn Umayr has been killed. He was better than me. We did not find anything of his to shroud him with except what covered his head but left his legs uncovered. . Then God endowed us with the (bounties of) the world... I really fear that our reward has been bestowed on us early (in this world)." He began to cry and sob and could not eat. May Abdur-Rahman ibn Awl be granted felicity among "those who spend their substance in the cause of God and follow up not their gifts with reminders of their generosity or with injury. For them their reward is with their Lord, on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve". (The Quran, Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 262).

Abdullah Ibn Hudhafah As-Sahmi (R)

History would have by-passed this man as it had by- passed thousands of Arabs before him. He, like them, would have had no claim to attention or fame. The greatness of Islam, however, gave to Abdullah ibn Hudhafah the opportunity to meet two world potentates of his time; Khusraw Parvez the King of Persia and Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor. The story of his encounter with Khusraw Parvez began in the sixth year of the hijrah when the Prophet decided to send some of his Companions with letters to rulers outside the Arabian Peninsula inviting them to Islam. The Prophet attached great importance to this initiative.

These messengers were going to distant lands with whom there was no agreement or treaty. They did not know the languages of these lands nor anything about the ways and disposition of their rulers. They were to invite these rulers to give up their religion and forsake their power and glory and enter the religion of a people who shortly before were almost their subjects. The mission was undoubtedly hazardous.

To make known his plan, the Prophet called his companions together and addressed them. He started by praising God and thanking Him. He then recited the Shahadah and went on: "I want to send some of you to the rulers of foreign lands but don't dispute with me as the Israelites disputed with Jesus, the son of Mary. "O Prophet of God, we shall carry out whatever you wish," they responded. "Send us wherever you desire." The Prophet commissioned six of his Sahabah to carry his letters to Arab and foreign rulers.

One of these was Abdullah ibn Hudhafah. He was chosen to take the Prophet's letter to Khusraw Parvez, the Persian king. Abdullah got his camel ready and bade farewell to his wife and son. He set out, alone, and traversed mountains and valleys until he reached the land of the Persians. He sought permission to enter into the king's presence informing the guards of the letter he was carrying. Khusraw Parvez thereupon ordered his audience chamber to be made ready and summoned his prominent aides. When they had assembled he gave permission for Abdullah to enter. Abdullah entered and saw the Persian potentate dressed in delicate, flowing robes and wearing a great, neatly arranged turban. On Abdullah was the plain, coarse clothes of the bedouin. His head though was held high and his feet were firm. The honour of Islam burned fiercely in his breast and his power of faith pulsated in his heart. As soon as Khusraw Parvez saw him approaching he signalled to one of his men to take the letter from his hand. "No," said Abdullah. "The Prophet commanded me to hand over this letter to you directly and I shall not go against a command of the Messenger of God." "Let him come near to me," Khusraw said to his guards and Abdullah went forward and handed over the letter. Khusraw then called an Arab clerk who originally came from Hira and ordered him to open the letter in his presence and read its contents.

He began reading: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of God, to Khusraw the ruler of Persia. Peace on whoever follows the guidance" Khusraw only heard this much of the letter when the fire of anger burst within him. His face became red and he began to perspire around the neck. He snatched the letter from the clerk's hand and began tearing it to pieces without knowing what else it contained and shouted, "Does he dare to write to me like this, he who is my slave"? He was angry that the Prophet had not given him precedence in his letter. He then commanded Abdullah to be expelled from his assembly. Abdullah was taken away, not knowing what would happen to him. Would he be killed or would he be set free? But he did not want to wait to find out. He said, "By God, I don't care what happens to me after the letter of the Prophet has been so badly treated." He managed to get to his camel and rode off. When Khusraw's anger had subsided he commanded that Abdullah be brought before him. But Abdullah was nowhere to be found. They searched for him all the way to the Arabian peninsula but found that he had gone ahead. Back in Madinah, Abdullah told the Prophet how Khusraw had torn his letter to pieces and the Prophet's only reply was, "May God tear up his kingdom". Meanwhile, Khusraw wrote to Badhan, his deputy in the Yemen, to send two strong men to "that man who has appeared in the Hijaz" with orders to bring him to Persia. Badhan despatched two of his strongest men to the Prophet and gave them a letter to him in which he was ordered to go with the two men

to meet Khusraw without delay. Badhan also asked the two men to get whatever information they could on the Prophet and to study his message closely.

The men set out, moving very quickly. At Ta'if they met some Quraysh traders and asked them about Muhammad. "He is in Yathrib," they said and they went on to Makkah feeling extremely happy. This was good news for them and they went around telling other Quraysh, "You will be pleased. Khusraw is out to get Muhammad and you will be rid of his evil."

The two men meanwhile made straight for Madinah where they met the Prophet, handed him the letter of Badhan and said to him, "The king of kings, Khusraw, has written to our ruler Badhan to send his men to get you. We have come to take you with us. If you come willingly, Khusraw has said that it will be good for you and he will spare you any punishment. If you refuse, you will know the power of his punishment. He has power to destroy you and your people."

The Prophet smiled and said to them, "Go back to your mounts today and return tomorrow." On the following day, they came to the Prophet and said to him, "Are you prepared to go with us to meet Khusraw?" "You shall not meet Khusraw after today," replied the Prophet. "God has killed him and his son Shirwaih has taken his place on such a night and on such a month." The two men stared in the face of the Prophet. They were completely dumbfounded. "Do you know what you are saying?" they asked. "Shall we write about this to Badhan?" "Yes," replied the Prophet, "and say to him that my religion has informed me about what has happened to the kingdom of Khusraw and that if he should become Muslim, I would appoint him ruler over what he now controls".

The two men returned to the Yemen and told Badhan what had happened. Badhan said, "If what Muhammad has said is true, then he is a Prophet. If not then we shall see what happens to him." Not long afterwards, a letter from Shirwaih came to Badhan in which he said, "I killed Khusraw because of his tyranny against our people. He regarded as lawful the killing of leaders, the capturing of their women and the expropriating of their wealth. When this my letter reaches you, take the allegiance of whoever is with you on my behalf." As soon as Badhan had read Shirwaih's letter, he threw it aside and announced his entry into Islam. The Persians with him in the Yemen also became Muslim. That's the story of Abdullah ibn Hudhafah's meeting with the Persian king.

His meeting with the Byzantine emperor took place during the caliphate of Umar ibn alKhattab. It too is an astonishing story. In the nineteenth year after the Hijrah, Umar despatched an army to fight against the Byzantines. In it was Abdullah ibn Hudhafah. News of the Muslim force reached the Byzantine emperor. He had heard of their sincerity of faith, and their willingness to sacrifice their lives in the way of God and His Prophet. He gave orders to his men to bring to him any Muslim captive they might take alive. God willed that Abdullah ibn Hudhafah should fall captive to the Byzantines and he was brought before the Emperor. The Emperor looked at Abdullah for a long time. Suddenly he said, "I shall make a proposal to you." "What is it?" asked Abdullah. "I suggest that you become a Christian. If you do this, you will be set free and I shall grant you a safe refuge."

The prisoner's reaction was furious: "Death is preferable to me a thousand times to what you ask me to do." "I see that you are a bold man. However, if you respond positively to what I propose to you, I will give you a share in my authority and swear you in as my aide." The prisoner, shackled in his chains, smiled and said, "By God, if you give me all that you possess and all that the Arabs have in exchange for giving up the religion of Muhammad, I shall not do so." "Then I shall kill you." "Do what you want," answered Abdullah.

The emperor then had him put on a cross and ordered his soldiers to throw spears at him, first near his hands and then near his feet, all the while telling him to accept Christianity or at least give up his religion. This he refused over and over again to do. The emperor then had him taken down from the wooden cross. He called for a great pot to be brought. This was filled with oil which was then heated under a fierce fire. He then had two other Muslim prisoners brought and had one of them thrown into the boiling oil. The prisoner's flesh sizzled and soon his bones could be seen. The emperor turned to Abdullah and invited him to Christianity.

This was the most terrible test that Abdullah had had to face up till now. But he remained firm and the emperor gave up trying. He then ordered that Abdullah too be thrown into the pot. As he was being taken away he began to shed tears. The emperor thought that he had at last been broken and had him brought back to him. He once more suggested that Abdullah become a Christian but to his astonishment, Abdullah refused. "Damn you! Why did you weep then?" shouted the emperor. "I cried," said Abdullah, "because I said to myself, 'You will now be thrown into this pot and your soul will depart'. What I really desired then was to have as many souls as the number of hairs on my body and to have all of them thrown into this pot for the sake of God." The tyrant then said, "Will you kiss my head? I will then set you free?" "And all the Muslim prisoners also?" asked Abdullah.

This the emperor agreed to do and Abdullah said to himself, "One of the enemies of God! I shall kiss his head and he shall set me and all other Muslim prisoners free. There can be no blame on me for doing this." He then went up to the emperor and kissed his forehead. All the Muslim prisoners were released and handed over to Abdullah. Abdullah ibn Hudhafah eventually came to Umar ibn alKhattab and told him what had happened. Umar was greatly pleased and when he looked at the prisoners he said, "Every Muslim has a duty to kiss the head of Abdullah ibn Khudhafah and I shall start." Umar then got up and kissed the head of Abdullah ibn Hudhafah.

Sa'id Ibn Aamir Al-Jumahi (R)

Said ibn Aamir al-Jumahi was one of thousands who left for the region of Tan'im on the outskirts of Makkah at the invitation of the Quraysh leaders to witness the killing of Khubayb ibn Adiy, one of the companions of Muhammad whom they had captured treacherously. With his exuberant youthfulness and strength, Sa'id jostled through the crowd until he caught up with the Quraysh leaders, men like Sufyan ibn Harb, and Safwan ibn Umayyah, who were leading the procession. Now he could see the prisoner of the Quraysh shackled in his chains, the women and children pushing him to the place set for his death.

Khubayb's death was to be in revenge for Quraysh losses in the battle of Badr. When the assembled throng arrived with its prisoner at the appointed place, Sa'id ibn Aamir took up his position at a point directly overlooking Khubayb as he approached the wooden cross. From there he heard Khubayb's firm but quiet voice amid the shouting of women and children. "If you would, leave me to pray two rakaats before my death ." This the Quraysh allowed. Sa'id looked at Khubayb as he faced the Ka'bah and prayed.

How beautiful and how composed those two rakaats seemed! Then he saw Khubayb facing the Quraysh leaders. "By God, if you thought that I asked to pray out of fear of death, I would think the prayer not worth the trouble," he said. Sa'id then saw his people set about dismembering Khubayb's body while he was yet alive and taunting him in the process. "Would you like Muhammad to be in your place while you go free?" With his blood flowing, he replied, "By God, I would not want to be safe and secure among my family while even a thorn hurts Muhammad."

People shook their fists in the air and the shouting increased. "Kill him. Kill him!" Sa'id watched Khubayb lifting his eyes to the heavens above the wooden cross. "Count them all, O Lord," he said. "Destroy them and let not a single one escape." Thereafter Sa'id could not count the number of swords and spears which cut through Khubayb's body.

The Quraysh returned to Makkah and in the eventful days that followed forgot Khubayb and his death. But Khubayb was never absent from the thoughts of Sa'id, now approaching manhood. Sa'id would see him in his dreams while asleep and he would picture Khubayb in front of him praying his two rakaats, calm and contented, before the wooden cross. And he would hear the reverberation of Khubayb's voice as he prayed for the punishment of the Quraysh. He would become afraid that a thunderbolt from the sky or some calamity would strike him. Khubayb, by his death, had taught Sa'id what he did not realize before that real life was faith and conviction and struggle in the path of faith, even until death. He taught him also that faith which is deeply ingrained in a person works wonders and performs miracles. He taught him something else too that the man who is loved by his companions with such a love as Khubayb's could only be a prophet with Divine support.

Thus was Sa'id's heart opened to Islam. He stood up in the assembly of the Quraysh and announced that he was free from their sins and burdens. He renounced their idols and their superstitions and proclaimed his entry into the religion of God. Sa'id ibn Aamir migrated to Madinah and attached himself to the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him. He took part

with the Prophet in the battle of Khaybar and other engagements thereafter. After the Prophet passed away to the protection of his Lord, Sa'id continued active service under his two successors, Abu Bakr and Umar. He lived the unique and exemplary life of the believer who has purchased the Hereafter with this world. He sought the pleasure and blessings of God above selfish desires and bodily pleasures. Both Abu Bakr and Umar knew Sa'id well for his honesty and piety. They would listen to whatever he had to say and follow his advice.

Sa'id once came to Umar at the beginning of his caliphate and said, "I adjure you to fear God in dealing with people and do not fear people in your relationship with God. Let not your actions deviate from your words for the best of speech is that which is confirmed by action. Consider those who have been appointed over the affairs of Muslims, far and near. Like for them what you like for yourself and your family and dislike for them what you would dislike for yourself and your family. Surmount any obstacles to attain the truth and do not fear the criticisms of those who criticize in matters prescribed by God. "Who can measure up to this, Sa'id?" asked Umar. "A man like yourself from among those whom God has appointed over the affairs of the Ummah of Muhammad and who feels responsible to God alone," replied Sa'id.

"Sa'id," he said, "I appoint you to be governor of Homs (in Syria)." "Umar," pleaded Sa'id, "I entreat you by God, do not cause me to go astray by making me concerned with worldly affairs." Umar became angry and said, "You have placed the responsibility of the caliphate on me and now you forsake me." "By God, I shall not forsake you," Sa'id quickly responded. Umar appointed him as governor of Homs and offered him a gratuity. "What shall I do with it, O Amir al-Mu'mineen?" asked Sa'id. "The stipend from the bayt al-mal will be more than enough for my needs." With this, he proceeded to Homs.

Not long afterwards, a delegation from Homs made up of people in whom Umar had confidence came to visit him in Madinah. He requested them to write the names of the poor among them so he could relieve their needs. They prepared a list for him in which the name Sa'id ibn Aamir appeared. "Who is this Sa'id ibn Aamir?" asked Umar. "Our amir," they replied. "Your amir is poor?" said Umar, puzzled. "Yes," they affirmed, "By God, several days go by without a fire being lit in his house." Umar was greatly moved and wept. He got a thousand dinars, put it in a purse and said, "Convey my greetings to him and tell him that the Amir al-Mu'mineen has sent this money to help him look after his needs." The delegation came to Sa'id with the purse.

When he found that it contained money, he began to push it away from him, saying, "From God we are and to Him we shall certainly return." He said it in such a way as if some misfortune had descended on him. His alarmed wife hurried to him and asked, "What's the matter, Sa'id? Has the Khalifah died?" "Something greater than that." "Have the Muslims been defeated in a battle?" "Something greater than that. The world has come upon me to corrupt my hereafter and create disorder in my house." "Then get rid of it," said she, not knowing anything about the dinars. "Will you help me in this?" he asked. She agreed.

He took the dinars, put them in bags and distributed them to the Muslim poor. Not long afterwards, Umar ibn al-Khattab went to Syria to examine conditions there. When he arrived at Homs which was called little Kufah because, like Kufah, its inhabitants complained a lot about their leaders, he asked what they thought of their flair. They complained about him mentioning four of his actions each one more serious than the other. "I shall bring you and him together," Umar promised. "And I

pray to God that my opinion about him would not be damaged. I used to have great confidence in him."

When the meeting was convened, Umar asked what complaints they had against him. "He only comes out to us when the sun is already high," they said. "What do you have to say to that, Sa'id?" asked Umar. Sa'id was silent for a moment, then said, "By God, I really didn't want to say this but there seems to be no way out. My family does not have a home help so I get up every morning and prepare dough for bread. I wait a little until it rises and then bake for them. I then make wads and go out to the people."

"What's your other complaint?" asked Umar. "He does not answer anyone at night," they said. To this Sa'id reluctantly said, "By God, I really wouldn't have liked to disclose this also, but I have left the day for them and the night for God, Great and Sublime is He."

"And what's your other complaint about him?" asked Umar. "He does not come out to us for one day in every month," they said. To this Sa'id replied, "I do not have a home help, O Amir al-Mu'mineen and I do not have any clothes except what's on me. This I wash once a month and I wait for it to dry. Then I go out in the later part of the day."

"Any other complaint about him?" asked Umar. "From time to time, he blacks out in meetings," they said. To this Sa'id replied, "I witnessed the killing of Khubayb ibn Adiy when I was a mushrik. I saw the Quraysh cutting him and saying, "Would you like Muhammad to be in your place?" to which Khubayb replied, "I would not wish to be safe and secure among my family while a thorn hurts Muhammad." By God, whenever I remember that day and how I failed to come to his aid, I only think that God would not forgive me and I black out."

Thereupon Umar said, "Praise be to God. My impression of him has not been tainted." He later sent a thousand dinars to Sa'id to help him out. When his wife saw the amount she said. "Praise be to God Who has enriched us out of your service. Buy some provisions for us and get us a home help." "Is there any way of spending it better?" asked Sa'id. "Let us spend it on whoever comes to us and we would get something better for it by thus dedicating it to God." "That will be better," she agreed. He put the dinars into small bags and said to a member of his family, "Take this to the widow of so and so, and the orphans of that person, to the needy in that family and to the indigent of the family of that person." Sa'id ibn Aamir al-Jumahi was indeed one of those who deny themselves even when they are afflicted with severe poverty.

Utbah Ibn Ghazwan (R)

Umar ibn al-Khattab, the head of the rapidly expanding Muslim State went to bed early just after the Salat al-Isha. He wanted to have a rest and feel refreshed for his nightly tour of inspection of the capital city which he often did incognito. Before he could fall asleep however, the post from the outlying regions of the State arrived informing him that the Persian forces confronting the Muslims were proving especially difficult to subdue. They were able to send in reinforcements and supplies from many places to relieve their armies on the point of defeat. The letter urged Umar to send reinforcements and in particular it said: "The city of al-Ubullah must be considered one of the most important sources providing men and material to the Persian forces under attack."

Umar decided then to dispatch an army to take the city of al-Ubullah and cut off its line of supplies to the Persian armies. His main problem was that he had so few men left with him in the city. That was because young men, men of maturity and even old men had gone out on campaigns far and wide in the path of God, fi sabilillah. In these circumstances he determined to follow the strategy which he knew and which was well-trying that is, to mobilize a small force and place it under the leadership of a strong and able commander. He considered, one after another the names of the individuals who were still with him, to see who was the most suitable commander. Finally, he exclaimed himself: "I have found him. Yes I have found him." He then went back to bed: The person he had in mind was a well-known mujahid who had fought at Badr, Uhud, al-Khandaq and other battles. He had also fought in the terrible battles of Yamamah and emerged unscathed. He was in fact one of the first to accept Islam. He went on the first hijrah to Abyssinia but had returned to stay with the Prophet in Makkah. He then went on hijrah to Madinah. This tall and imposing companion of the Prophet was known for his exceptional skill in the use of spears and arrows.

When morning came, Umar called his attendants and said: "Call Utbah ibn Ghazwan for me," Umar managed to put together an army of just over three hundred men and he appointed Utbah as their commander with the promise that he would send reinforcements to him as soon as possible.

When the army was assembled in ranks ready to depart, Umar al-Faruq stood before them bidding them farewell and giving instructions to his commander, Utbah.

He said: "Utbah, I am sending you to the land of al-Ubullah. It is one of the major fortresses of the enemy and I pray that God helps you to take it. When you reach the city, invite its inhabitants to the worship of God. If they respond to you, accept them (as Muslims). If they refuse, then take from them the jizyah.. If they refuse to pay the jizyah then fight them... And fear God, O Utbah, in the discharge of your duties. Beware of letting yourself become too haughty or arrogant for this will corrupt your hereafter. Know that you were a companion of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. God honoured you through him after your being insignificant. He strengthened you through him after you were weak. You have become a commander with authority and a leader who must be obeyed. What a great blessing if this does not make you vain and deceive you and lead you to Jahannam. May God protect you and me from it."

With this chastening advice and prayer, Utbah and his army set off. Several women were in the army including his wife and the wives and sisters of other men. Eventually they reached a place called Qasbaa not very far from al-Ubullah. It was called Qasbaa because of the abundance of reed-like stalks which grew there. At that point the army was absolutely famished. They had nothing to eat. When hunger gripped them, Utbah ordered some of his men to go and search the land for something to eat.

One of the men told the story of their search of food: "While we were searching for something to eat, we entered a thicket and, lo and behold there were two large baskets. In one there were dates and in the other small white grains covered with a yellow husk. We dragged the baskets with the grain and said: "This is poison which the enemy has prepared for you. Don't go near it all." We went for the dates and began eating from it. While we were busy eating the dates, a horse which had broken loose from its tether went up to the basket of grain and began eating from it. By God, we seriously thought of slaughtering it before it should die (from the alleged poison) and benefit from its meat. However, its owner came up to us and said: "Leave it. I shall look after it for the night and if I feel that it is going to die, I will slaughter it." In the morning we found the horse quite healthy with no sign of ill effects.

My sister then said: 'Yaa akhi, I have heard my father saying: Poison does not harm (food) if it is placed on fire and cooked well.' We then took some of the grain, placed it in a pot and put it on a fire. After a short while my sister called out: 'Come and see how it has become red and the husks have begun to separate leaving white grains.' We placed the white grains in a large bowl and Utbah said to us: 'Mention the name of Allah on it and eat it.' We ate and found it exceedingly delicious and good. We learnt after that the grain was called rice."

The army of Utbah then went on to the fortified city of al-Ubullah on the banks of the River Euphrates. The Persians used al-Ubullah as a massive arms depot. There were several fortresses in the city from which towers sprang. These were used as observation posts to detect any hostile movements outside the city. The city appeared to be impregnable. What chance had Utbah of taking it with such a small force armed with only swords and spears? A direct assault was obviously futile and so Utbah had to resort to some stratagem.

Utbah had flags prepared which he had hung on spears. These he gave to the women and ordered them to march behind the army. His instructions to them then were: "When we get near to

the city, raise the dust behind us so that the entire atmosphere is filled with it." As they neared al-Ubullah, a Persian force came out to confront them, they saw the Muslims boldly advancing, the flags fluttering behind them and the dust which was being churned up and which filled the air around. They thought that the Muslims in front of the flags were merely the vanguard of the advancing army, a strong and numerous army. They felt they would be no match for such a foe. They lost heart and prepared to evacuate the city. Picking up whatever valuables they could, they rushed to boats anchored on the river and abandoned their well-fortified city.

Utbah entered al-Ubullah without losing any of his men. From this base he managed to bring surrounding towns and villages under Muslim control. When news spread of Utbah's successes, and of the richness of the land he had occupied, many people flocked to the region in search of wealth and easy living. Uqbah noted that many Muslims now inclined towards a soft life and followed the ways and customs of the region and that this weakened their determination to continue struggling. He wrote to Umar ibn al-Khattab asking for permission to build the garrison town of Basrah. He described the locations he had chosen for the city and Umar gave his assent. Basrah lay between the desert and the ports of the Gulf and from this base expeditions were launched further east. The positioning of the town was for maximum military effectiveness (not merely to support an army of occupation).

Utbah himself planned the city and built its first great masjid which was a simple enclosure, roofed over at one end and suitable for mass assemblies. From the mosque, Utbah and his men went out on military campaigns. These men eventually settled on the land and built houses. Utbah himself however did not build a house for himself but continued to live in a tent of cloth. He had seen how preoccupation with worldly possessions had caused many people to forget themselves and their real purpose in life. He had seen how men who not long ago knew no food better than rice boiled in their husks, getting accustomed to sophisticated Persian patisserie like *fasludhanj* and *lawzinaj* made with refined flour, butter, honey and nuts of various kinds to the point where they hankered after these things.

Utbah was afraid that his *deen* would be affected by his *dunya* and he was concerned about his hereafter. He called men to the masjid of Basrah and addressed them thus: "O people! The *dunya* will come to an end and you will be carried from it to an abode which will not wane or disappear. Go to it with the best of your deeds. I look back and see myself among the early Muslims with the Messenger of Allah may God bless him and grant him peace. We had no food then apart from the leaves of trees and our lips would fester. One day I found a *burdah*. I tore it in two and shared it with Sad ibn Abi Waqqas. I made an *aazar* with one half and he did the same with the other half. Here we are today. There is not one of us but he is an amir of one of the garrison towns. I seek Allah's protection lest I become great in my own estimation and little in the sight of Allah.."

With these words Utbah appointed someone else to stand in his place, and bade farewell to the people of Basrah. It was the season of pilgrimage and he left to perform the Hajj. He then travelled to Madinah and there he asked Umar to relieve him of the responsibility of governing the city. Umar refused. He could not easily dispense with a governor of the quality of Utbah and said to him: "You place your trusts and your responsibilities on my neck and then you abandon me to myself. No, by God, I shall never relieve you." So Umar prevailed upon him and commanded him to return to Basrah, Utbah knew that he had to obey the Amir al-Muminin but he did so with a heavy heart.

He mounted his camel and on his way he prayed: "O Lord, do not send me back to Basrah. O Lord, do not send me back to Basrah." He had not gone far from Madinah when his camel stumbled. Utbah fell and the injuries he sustained proved to be fatal.

Rabiah Ibn Kab (R)

Here is the story of Rabiah told in his own words: "I was still quite young when the light of iman shone through me and my heart was opened to the teachings of Islam. And when my eyes beheld the Messenger of God, for the first time, I loved him with a love that possessed my entire being. I loved him to the exclusion of everyone else.

One day I said to myself: 'Woe to you, Rabi'ah. Why don't you put yourself completely in the service of the Messenger of God, peace be on him. Go and suggest this to him. If he is pleased with you, you would find happiness in being near him. You will be successful through love for him and you

will have the good fortune of obtaining the good in this world and the good in the next.' This I did hoping that he would accept me in his service. He did not dash my hopes. He was pleased that I should be his servant.

From that day, I lived in the shadow of the noble Prophet. I went with him wherever he went. I moved in his orbit whenever and wherever he turned. Whenever he cast a glance in my direction, I would leap to stand in his presence. Whenever he expressed a need, he would find me hurrying to fulfil it. I would serve him throughout the day. When the day was over and he had prayed Salat al-Isha and retired to his home, I would think about leaving. But I would soon say to myself: 'Where would you go, Rabi'ah? Perhaps you may be required to do something for the Prophet during the night.' So I would remain seated at his door and would not leave the threshold of his house. The Prophet would spend part of his night engaged in Salat. I would hear him reciting the opening chapter of the Quran and he would continue reciting sometimes for a third or a half of the night. I would become tired and leave or my eyes would get the better of me and I would fail asleep.

It was the habit of the Prophet, peace be on him, that if someone did him a good turn, he loved to repay that person with something more excellent. He wanted to do something for me too in return for my service to him. So one day he came up to me and said: 'O Rabi'ah ibn Kab.' 'Labbayk ya rasulullah wa Sadark - At your command, O Messenger of God and may God grant you happiness,' I responded. 'Ask of me anything and I will give it to you.' I thought a little and then said: 'Give me some time, O Messenger of God, to think about what I should ask of you. Then I will let you know.' He agreed.

At that time, I was a young man and poor. I had neither family, nor wealth, nor place of abode. I used to shelter in the Suffah of the mosque with other poor Muslims like myself. People used to call us the "guests of Islam". Whenever any Muslim brought something in charity to the Prophet, he would send it all to us. And if someone gave him a gift he would take some of it and leave the rest for us. So, it occurred to me to ask the Prophet for some worldly good that would save me from poverty and make me like others who had wealth, wife and children.

Soon, however, I said: 'May you perish Rabi'ah. The world is temporary and will pass away. You have your share of sustenance in it which God has guaranteed and which must come to you. The Prophet, peace be on him, has a place with his Lord and no request would be refused him. Request him therefore, to ask Allah to grant you something of the bounty of the hereafter.' I felt pleased and satisfied with this thought.

I went to the Prophet and he asked: 'What do you say, O Rabi'ah?' 'O Messenger of God,' I said, 'I ask you to beseech God most High on my behalf to make me your companion in Paradise.' 'Who has advised you thus?' asked the Prophet. 'No by God,' I said, 'No one has advised me. But when you told me 'Ask of me anything and I will give to you,' I thought of asking you for something of the goodness of this world. But before long, I was guided to choose what is permanent and lasting against what is temporary and perishable. And so I have asked you to beseech God on my behalf that I may be your companion in Paradise.'

The Prophet remained silent for a long while and then asked: 'Any other request besides that, Rabi'ah?' 'No, O Messenger of God, Nothing can match what I have asked you.' 'Then, in that case, assist me for your sake by performing much prostration to God.' So I began to exert myself in worship in order to attain the good fortune of being with the Prophet in Paradise just as I had the

good fortune of being in his service and being his companion in this world. Not long afterwards, the Prophet called me and asked: 'Don't you want to get married, Rabi'ah?' 'I do not want anything to distract me from your service,' I replied. 'Moreover, I don't have anything to give as mahr (dowry) to a wife nor any place where I can accommodate a wife.'

The Prophet remained silent. When he saw me again he asked: 'Don't you want to get married, Rabi'ah?' I gave him the same reply as before. Left to myself again, I regretted what I had said and chided myself: 'Woe to you, Rabi'ah. By God, the Prophet knows better than you what is good for you in this world and the next and he also knows better than you what you possess. By God, if the Prophet, peace be on him, should ask me again to marry, I would reply positively.' Before long, the Prophet asked me again: 'Don't you want to get married 'Rabi'ah?' 'Oh yes, Messenger of God,' I replied, 'but who will marry me when I am in the state you know.' 'Go to the family of so-and-so and say to them: the Prophet has instructed you to give your daughter in marriage to me.'

Timidly, I went to the family and said: 'The Messenger of God, peace be on him, has sent me to you to ask you to give your daughter in marriage to me.' 'Our daughter?' they asked, incredulously at first. 'Yes,' I replied. 'Welcome to the Messenger of God, and welcome to his messenger. By God, the messenger of God's Messenger shall only return with his mission fulfilled. 'So they made a marriage contract between me and her. I went back to the Prophet and reported: 'O Messenger of Allah. I have come from the best of homes. They believed me, they welcomed me, and they made a marriage contract between me and their daughter. But from where do I get the mahr for her?'

The Prophet then sent for Buraydah ibn al-Khasib, one of the leading persons in my tribe, the Banu Asiam, and said to him: 'O Buraydah, collect a nuwat's weight in gold for Rabi'ah. This they did and the Prophet said to me: 'Take this to them and say, this is the sadaq of your daughter.' I did so and they accepted it. They were pleased and said, This is much and good.' I went back to the Prophet and told him: 'I have never yet seen a people more generous than they. They were pleased with what I gave them in spite of its being little...Where can I get something for the walimah (marriage feast), O Prophet of God?'

The Prophet said to Buraydah 'Collect the price of a ram for Rabi'ah.' They bought a big fat ram for me and then the Prophet told me: 'Go to Aishah and tell her to give you whatever barley she has.' Aishah gave me a bag with seven saas of barley and said: 'By God, we do not have any other food.'

I set off with the ram and the barley to my wife's family. They said: 'We will prepare the barley but get your friends to prepare the ram for you.' We slaughtered, skinned and cooked the ram. So we had bread and meat for the walimah. I invited the Prophet and he accepted my invitation. The Prophet then gave me a piece of land near Abu Bakr's. From then I became concerned with the dunya, with material things. I had a dispute with Abu Bakr over a palm tree. 'It is in my land,' I insisted. 'No, it is in my land,' Abu Bakr countered. We started to argue. Abu Bakr cursed me, but as soon as he had uttered the offending word, he felt sorry and said to me: 'Rabiah, say the same word to me so that it could be considered as qisas -just retaliation.' 'No by God, I shall not,' I said. 'In that case, replied Abu Bakr. 'I shall go the Messenger of God and complain to him about your refusal to retaliate against me measure for measure.'

He set off and I followed him. My tribe, the Banu Asiam, also set off behind me protesting indignantly: 'He's the one who cursed you first and then he goes off to the Prophet before you to

complain about you!' I turned to them and said: 'Woe to you! Do you know who this is? This is As-Siddiq... and he is the respected elder of the Muslims. Go back before he turns around, sees you and thinks that you have come to help me against him. He would then be more incensed and go to the Prophet in anger. The Prophet would get angry on his account. Then Allah would be angry on their account and Rabi'ah would be finished.' They turned back.

Abu Bakr went to the Prophet and related the incident as it had happened. The Prophet raised his head and said to me: 'O Rabi'ah, what's wrong with you and as-Siddiq?' 'Messenger of God, he wanted me to say the same words to him as he had said to me and I did not.' 'Yes, don't say the same word to him as he had said to you. Instead say: 'May God forgive you Abu Bakr.' With tears in his eyes, Abu Bakr went away while saying: 'May God reward you with goodness for my sake, O Rabi'ah ibn Kab... 'May God reward you with goodness for my sake, O Rabi'ah ibn Kaab..."

Sa'id Ibn Zayd (R)

Zayd the son of Amr stood away from the Quraysh crowd as they celebrated one of their festivals. Men were dressed in rich turbans of brocade and expensive Yemeni burdabs. Women and children were also exquisitely turned out in their fine clothes and glitte ring jewelry. Zayd watched as sacrificial animals, gaily caparisoned were led out to slaughter before the Quraysh idols. It was difficult for him to remain silent. Leaning against a wall of the Kabah, he shouted: "O people of Quraysh! It is God Who has created the sheep. He it is Who has sent down rain from the skies of which they drink and He has caused fodder to grow from the earth with which they are fed. Then even so you slaughter them in names other than His. Indeed, I see that you are an ignorant folk."

Zayd's uncle al-Khattab, the father of Umar ibn al-Khattab, seethed with anger. He strode up to Zayd, slapped him on the race and shouted: "Damn you! We still hear from you such stupidity. We have borne it until our patience is exhausted." Al-Khattab then incited a number of violent people to harass and persecute Zayd and make life extremely uncomfortable for him.

These incidents which took place before Muhammad's call to Prophethood gave a foretaste of the bitter conflict that was to take place between the upholders of truth and the stubborn adherents of idolatrous practices. Zayd was one of the few men, known as hanifs, who saw these idolatrous practices for what they were. Not only did he refuse to take part in them himself but he refused to eat anything that was sacrificed to idols. He proclaimed that he worshipped the God of Ibrahim and, as the above incident showed, was not afraid to challenge his people in public.

On the other hand, his uncle al-Khattab was a staunch follower of the old pagan ways of the Quraysh and he was shocked by Zayd's public disregard for the gods and goddesses they worshipped. So he had him hounded and persecuted to the point where he was forced to leave the valley of Makkah and seek refuge in the surrounding mountains. He even appointed a band of young men whom he instructed not to allow Zayd to approach Makkah and enter the Sanctuary. Zayd only managed to enter Makkah in secret. There unknown to the Quraysh he met with people like Waraqah ibn Nawfal, Abdullah ibn Jahsh, Uthman ibn al-Harith and Umaymah bint Abdul Muttalib, the paternal aunt of Muhammad ibn Abdullah.

They discussed how deeply immersed the Arabs were in their misguided ways. To his friends, Zayd spoke thus: "Certainly, by God, you know that your people have no valid grounds for their beliefs and that they have distorted and transgressed from the religion of Ibrahim. Adopt a religion which you can follow and which can bring you salvation." Zayd and his companions then went to Jewish rabbis and Christian scholars and people of other communities in an attempt to learn more and go back to the pure religion of Ibrahim.

Of the four persons mentioned, Waraqah ibn Nawfal became a Christian. Abdullah ibn Jahsh and Uthman ibn al-Harith did not arrive at any definite conclusion. Zayd ibn Amr however had quite a different story. Finding it impossible to stay in Makkah, he left the Hijaz and went as far as Mosul in

the north of Iraq and from there southwest into Syria. Throughout his journeys, he always questioned monks and rabbis about the religion of Ibrahim. He found no satisfaction until he came upon a monk in Syria who told him that the religion he was seeking did not exist any longer but the time was now near when God would send forth, from his own people whom he had left, a Prophet who would revive the religion of Ibrahim. The monk advised him that should he see this Prophet he should have no hesitation in recognizing and following him.

Zayd retraced his steps and headed for Makkah intending to meet the expected Prophet. As he was passing through the territory of Lakhm on the southern border of Syria he was attacked by a group of nomad Arabs and killed before he could set eyes on the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. However, before he breathed his last, he raised his eyes to the heavens and said: "O Lord, if You have prevented me from attaining this good, do not prevent my son from doing so."

When Waraqah heard of Zayd's death, he is said to have written an elegy in praise of him. The Prophet also commended him and said that on the day of Resurrection "he will be raised as having, in himself alone, the worth of a whole people". God, may He be glorified, heard the prayer of Zayd. When Muhammad the Messenger of God rose up inviting people to Islam, his son Sa'id was in the forefront of those who believed in the oneness of God and who affirmed their faith in the prophethood of Muhammad.

This is not strange for Said grew up in a household which repudiated the idolatrous ways of the Quraysh and he was instructed by a father who spent his life searching for Truth and who died in its pursuit. Said was not yet twenty when he embraced Islam. His young and steadfast wife Fatimah, daughter of al-Khattab and sister of Umar, also accepted Islam early. Evidently both Said and Fatimah managed to conceal their acceptance of Islam from the Quraysh and especially from Fatimah's family for some time. She had cause to fear not only her father but her brother Umar who was brought up to venerate the Ka'bah and to cherish the unity of the Quraysh and their religion.

Umar was a headstrong young man of great determination. He saw Islam as a threat to the Quraysh and became most violent and unrestrained in his attacks on Muslims. He finally decided that the only way to put an end to the trouble was to eliminate the man who was its cause. Goaded on by blind fury he took up his sword and headed for the Prophet's house. On his way he came face to face with a secret believer in the Prophet who seeing Umar's grim expression asked him where he was going. "I am going to kill Muhammad..."

There was no mistaking his bitterness and murderous resolve. The believer sought to dissuade him from his intent but Umar was deaf to any arguments. He then thought of diverting Umar in order to at least warn the Prophet of his intentions. "O Umar," he said, "Why not first go back to the people of your own house and set them to rights?" "What people of my house?" asked Umar. "Your sister Fatimah and your brother-in-law Said. They have both forsaken your religion and are followers of Muhammad in his religion..." Umar turned and made straight for his sister's house. There he called out to her angrily as he approached.

Khabbab ibn al-Aratt who often came to recite the Quran to Said and Fatimah was with them then. When they heard Umar's voice, Khabbab hid in a corner of the house and Fatimah concealed the manuscript. But Umar had heard the sound of their reading and when he came in, he said to them: "What is this haynamah (gibbering) I heard?" They tried to assure him that it was only normal

conversation that he had heard but he insisted: "Hear it I did," he said, "and it is possible that you have both become renegades."

"Have you not considered whether the Truth is not to be found in your religion?" said Said to Umar trying to reason with him. Instead, Umar set upon his brother-in-law hitting and kicking him as hard as he could and when Fatimah went to the defense of her husband, Umar struck her a blow on her face which drew blood. "O Umar," said Fatimah, and she was angry. "What if the Truth is not in your religion! I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Fatimah's wound was bleeding, and when Umar saw the blood he was sorry for what he had done. A change came over him and he said to his sister: "Give me that script which you have that I may read it." Like them Umar could read, but when he asked for the script, Fatimah said to him: "You are impure and only the pure may touch it. Go and wash yourself or make ablutions." Thereupon Umar went and washed himself, and she gave him the page on which was written the opening verses of Surah Ta-Ha.

He began to read it and when he reached the verse, 'Verily, I alone am God, there no deity but me. So, worship Me alone, and be constant in Prayer so as to remember Me,' he said: "Show me where Muhammad is." Umar then made his way to the house of al-Arqam and declared his acceptance of Islam and the Prophet and all his companions rejoiced. Said and his wife Fatimah were thus the immediate cause which led to the conversion of the strong and determined Umar and this added substantially to the power and prestige of the emerging faith. Said ibn Zayd was totally devoted to the Prophet and the service of Islam. He witnessed all the major campaigns and encounters in which the Prophet engaged with the exception of Badr. Before Badr, he and Talhah were sent by the Prophet as scouts to Hawra on the Red Sea coast due west of Madinah to bring him news of a Quraysh caravan returning from Syria. When Talhah and Said returned to Madinah the Prophet had already set out for Badr with the first Muslim army of just over three hundred men. After the passing away of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, Said continued to play a major role in the Muslim community. He was one of those whom Abu Bakr consulted on his succession and his name is often linked with such companions as Uthman, Abu Ubaydah and Sad ibn Abi Waqqas in the campaigns that were waged. He was known for his courage and heroism, a glimpse of which we can get from his account of the Battle of Yarmuk.

He said: "For the Battle of Yarmuk, we were twenty four thousand or thereabout. Against us, the Byzantines mobilized one hundred and twenty thousand men. They advanced towards us with a heavy and thunderous movement as if mountains were being moved. Bishops and priests strode before them bearing crosses and chanting litanies which were repeated by the soldiers behind them. When the Muslims saw them mobilized thus, they became worried by their vast numbers and something of anxiety and fear entered their hearts. Thereupon, Abu Ubaydah stood before the Muslims and urged them to fight. "Worshippers of God" he said, "help God and God will help you and make your feet firm." "Worshippers of God, be patient and steadfast for indeed patience and steadfastness (sabr) is a salvation from unbelief, a means of attaining the pleasure of God and a defence against ignominy and disgrace." "Draw out your spears and protect yourselves with your shields. Don't utter anything among yourselves but the remembrance of God Almighty until I give you the command, if God wills."

"Thereupon a man emerged from the ranks of the Muslims and said: "I have resolved to die this very hour. Have you a message to send to the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace?" "Yes" replied Abu Ubaydah, "convey salaam to him from me and from the Muslims and say to him: O Messenger of God, we have found true what our Lord has promised us."

"As soon as I heard the man speak and saw him unsheathe his sword and go out to meet the enemy, I threw myself on the ground and crept on all fours and with my spear I felled the first enemy horseman racing towards us. Then I fell upon the enemy and God removed from my heart all traces of fear. The Muslims engaged the advancing Byzantines and continued fighting until they were blessed with victory." Sa'id was ranked by the Prophet as one of the outstanding members of his generation. He was among ten of the companions whom the Prophet visited one day and promised Paradise. These were Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Abdur-Rahman ibn Awl, Abu Ubaydah, Talhah, az-Zubayr, Sad of Zuhrah, and Said the son of Zayd the Hanif. The books of the Prophet's sayings have recorded his great praises of the Promised Ten (al-'asharatu-l mubashshirun) and indeed of others whom on other occasions he also gave good tidings of Paradise.

Hasan Al Basri

He was one of the most renowned tabi`een (the generation after the death of the Prophet ﷺ) and prominent figures of his time. He was a jurist and a scholar. He was a pious and devout person. He was famous for his eloquence, inspiring speeches, wisdom, asceticism, and deep knowledge. He is the revered tabi`ee and the scholar of the people of Basrah, Abu Sa`eed Al-Hasan Ibn Abi Al-Hasan Ibn Yasaar Al-Basri ر.ه.

Al-Hasan Al-Basri was born in Al-Madeenah in 21 A.H., 642 A.C. during the caliphate of the leader of the Believers, `Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab ر.ه. Both his parents were slaves. His father became a prisoner of war when the Muslims conquered Misaan, an area between Basrah and Waasit in Iraq. His father embraced Islam and lived in Al-Madeenah where he married a bondwoman called Khayyirah who was the maid-slave of Umm Salamah ر.ه. the wife of the Prophet ﷺ. The Mother of the Believers, Umm Salamah ر.ه. freed Khayyirah after she gave birth to her son Al-Hasan.

Al-Hasan spent his early years with his family in Waadi Al-Qura near Al-Madeenah. Before he was fourteen years old, he managed to memorize the Glorious Quran. He also learnt reading, writing, and some mathematics. He heard many sayings of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ and he used to listen to the leader of the Believers, `Uthmaan Ibn `Affaan ر.ه. whenever he delivered the Friday sermon. Al-Hasan was fourteen years old at that time.

When he was fifteen years old, Al-Hasan moved to Basrah, Iraq in 36 A.H., 656 A.C. He began learning jurisprudence, Hadeeth, and the Arabic language at the hands of a large number of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ who were living in Basrah at that time. His tutor for the recitation of the Glorious Quran was Hattaana Ibn `Abdullaah Ar-Riqashi while his tutor for the methodology of delivering sermons, religious speeches, and recounting religious tales, was Ibn Surayyi `At-Tameemi, the poet.

Delivering sermons and recounting religious tales appealed to Al-Hasan and he took a place in the mosque of Al-Basrah to teach people. Many story tellers back then tended to exaggerate. They were all banned from telling religious tales in the mosque of Al-Basrah except for Al-Hasan who adopted a different methodology. He used to talk about the life after death, reminding people of death, drawing their attention to the religious and moral defects they may have, and how they could overcome them according to what he had learnt from the Book of Allaah, the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, and the revered companions ﷺ.

Al-Hasan Al-Basri had a large class in the mosque of Al-Basrah in which he taught people the Prophetic Hadeeth, jurisprudence, the Glorious Quran, the Arabic language, and rhetoric. He also conducted a special class in his house to teach people about asceticism and deliver touching speeches.

Al-Hasan was one of the most knowledgeable people on jurisprudence and the lawful and unlawful acts. He loved the religion of Allaah and he was a pious man who used to refrain from committing any illegal act. He adhered to the straight path in all his affairs. He shouldered the responsibility of guiding and advising people to save his society from the deviations and aberrations that were beginning to prevail. Al-Hasan Al-Basri adopted the doctrine of the companions. He was their student and he had the pleasure of accompanying them. He was influenced by their methodology and he steered their course.

Al-Hasan Al-Basri used to frequently advise the rulers and governors and he never feared anybody except Allaah. He was especially well-known in the last years of the reign of the Umayyad caliph, Mu`aawiyah Ibn Abi Sufyaan ﷺ. Al-Hasan lived in Iraq when Al-Hajjaaj Ibn Yoosuf Ath-Thaqafi was the ruler and Al-Hasan used to severely criticize Al-Hajjaaj's harsh policies.

Al-Hasan Al-Basri was a close friend of the Rightly-Guided Umayyad Caliph, `Umar Ibn `Abdul-`Azeez رضى الله عنه who loved him very much and used to consult him in some affairs related to administering the Muslim State. Al-Hasan became the judge of Al-Basrah in 102 A.H., 720 A.C. and performed this role on a voluntary basis.

Imaam Al-Hasan Al-Basri was a peerless scholar with vast knowledge. He was eloquent and an ascetic and pious worshipper who used to fast many voluntary days. When he recited the Glorious Quran, he would weep until his tears flowed down his cheeks reflecting the extent to which he was deeply influenced by the Holy Book. He was also a courageous fighter who loved to perform Jihaad in the way of Allaah. Whenever Al-Muhallab Ibn Abi Sufrah fought the polytheists, he used to put him in the front line. Al-Hasan was greatly admired and esteemed by his contemporary scholars.

Abu Burdah said: "I have never seen a man who did not accompany the companions of the Prophet ﷺ yet resembled them, like this scholar (meaning Al-Hasan)."

Abu Qataadah Al-`Adawi said: "Follow this scholar, for I have never seen a man who had similar opinions to `Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab رضي الله عنه except him."

Abu Qataadah also said: "Al-Hasan Al-Basri was one of the most knowledgeable people on the lawful and unlawful acts."

Humayd and Yoonus Ibn `Ubayd said: "We have never seen a man more decent and courteous than Al-Hasan Al-Basri."

They also said: "We have seen many jurists, but none was more knowledgeable than Al-Hasan Al-Basri."

`Awf said: "I have never seen a man who knows more about the way leading to Paradise, except Al-Hasan."

Al-Hasan Al-Basri was a wise, eloquent man whose words were just like pearls. For example, he said: "Son of Adam, you are no more than a few days. Whenever a day passes, a part of you has gone."

He also said: "Son of Adam, never please anybody if this entails the Wrath of Allaah. Never obey anybody if this entails disobedience to Allaah. Never thank anybody for something which Allaah granted you. Never blame anybody for something which Allaah did not grant you. Allaah created people and they steer the course pre-determined for them. Whoever thinks that extra care and interest will increase his provisions, let him try such extra care and interest in increasing his life span, changing his color, or increasing the size of his limbs and build!"

He also said: "Whoever gives money undeserved high esteem, Allaah will humiliate him."

Al-Hasan Al-Basri died on the first of Rajab, which was a Thursday night, 110 A.H., 728 A.C. His funeral was attended by a large number of people. Before his death, he stated that the following should be written down in his will:

This is what Al-Hasan Ibn Abi Al-Hasan believes: He testifies that none is worthy of being worshiped but Allaah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allaah. Whoever sincerely believes in this upon his death will enter Paradise."

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal

Imam Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal al-Shaibani, Abu 'Abdullah, was conceived in Merv in current day Turkmenistan. His mother carried him in her womb, on route to Baghdad, where he was born in the year 164 AH. His father passed away when he was little more than years old, and thereafter he was raised by his mother.

Childhood

He was a distinguished child known for his piety, cleanliness and asceticism. Once, his uncle sent him with several documents containing information about some people to the Caliph's office. Ahmad took those papers and did not see his uncle for a long time. When his uncle eventually met him, he asked him about the documents and discovered that Ahmad – who was then a boy – did not deliver them. When asked why, Ahmad replied: "I wouldn't hand in those reports, and I have thrown them in the sea!" To this, his uncle replied: "This little boy fears Allah so much! What then of us?" Thus, Ahmad refused to act as an informant, even on behalf of his uncle, due to the fear of Allah that had been instilled in his heart from such a young age.

Youth and Education

He started his career by learning jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) under the celebrated Hanafi judge, Abu Yusuf, the renowned student and companion of Imam Abu Hanifah. He then discontinued his studies with Abu Yusuf, in the pursuit of Hadith, travelling around the Islamic Khilafa, at the tender age of 16. As a student, he was held in awe by his teachers, to the same degree that they would respect their own.. Ibn al-Jawzi states that Imam Ahmad had 414 Hadith masters whom he narrated from. Imam al-Shafi'i was from the most beloved of Ahmad's teachers, held in high esteem by him for his deep insight into jurisprudence. Al-Shafi'i equally admired Ahmad, for his expertise in jurisprudence and Hadith. He would often say to Imam Ahmad: "Tell us if you know of an authentic Hadeeth so that we may act on it." What demonstrates Imam Ahmad's love and admiration for al-Shafi'i is that when the latter would pass by him riding a mule, Imam Ahmad would follow al-Shafi'i on foot to enquire about various issues of jurisprudence. The great affection and regard between the two Imams is clearly reflected in the resemblance between the Shafi'i and Hanbali schools of jurisprudence.

Imam Ahmad did not suffice himself with seeking knowledge, but he also adorned it with actions, by making Jihad, performing the guard duty at Islamic frontiers (Ribat) and making Hajj five times in his life, twice on foot.

Expertise in Various Sciences

The Imam spent 40 years of his life in the pursuit of knowledge, and only thereafter did he assume the position of a Mufti. By this time, Imam Ahmad had become a leading authority in six or seven Islamic disciplines, according to al-Shafi'i.

Imam Ahmad became – unquestionably – a leading authority in Hadith, and left a colossal Hadith encyclopaedia, *al-Musnad*, as a living proof of his proficiency and devotion to this science. He is also remembered as a leading and the most balanced critic of Hadith (Naqid) of his time.

Imam Ahmad became a principal specialist in jurisprudence, since he had the advantage of benefiting from some of the famous early jurists and their heritage, such as Abu Hanifah, Malik, al-Shafi'i and many others. Imam Ahmad further improvised and developed upon previous schools, such that he became the founder of a new independent school, that was to be attributed to him as the Hanbali school. Some scholars, such as Qutaiba b. Sa'id noted that if Ahmad were to witness the age of Sufyan al-Thawri, Malik, al-Awza'i and Laith b. Sa'd, he would have surpassed them all.

Imam Ahmad, despite being bilingual, became an expert in the Arabic language, poetry, grammar. He gave great importance to the Arabic language, the proper application of grammar and correct

pronunciation, such that he would often discipline his daughter for making a grammatical error in her everyday speech.

Imam Ahmad established himself as the Imam in the sciences of Quran, authoring works in exegesis (*Tafsir*), science of abrogation (*al-Nasikh wal-Mansukh*), as well as the different modes recitations (*Qira'at*), preferring some modes of recitation over others, and even expressing dislike for the recitation of Hamza due to its exaggerated elongation of vowels.

Imam Ahmad notably evolved into the most celebrated theologian, to be known as the 'Imam Ahl al-Sunnah', the leading authority on the Orthodox doctrine. Imam Ahmad personified the theological views of the early orthodox scholars, and in particular, the founders of the three juristic schools before him, Hanafi, Maliki and al-Shafi'i. This proved to be historically significant, since the Hanbali doctrine remained the only school representing the views of the founders of the other three juristic schools, that later became dominated by Ash'arites or the Maturidis. What also gained him a resounding reputation was his vigorous refusal to accept the dogma of the 'creation of the Quran', in spite of going through a protracted, arduous period of severe persecution. He is often likened to Abu Bakr, as the lone champion of Islam during the wars of apostasy.

Imam Ahmad was equally considered to be a leading example in *Zuhd* (material and spiritual asceticism), for he lived a very simple life, detached from worldly pleasures. His work on *Zuhd* (*Kitab al-Zuhd*) is regarded to be the most profound contribution to the Islamic heritage. Abu Dawud, the famous compiler of Sunan, observed that sessions with Ahmad were sessions devoted to the Hereafter, for he would never mention anything of this world.

Ahmad's Five Basic Juristic Principles

Despite being an exceptional jurist, Imam Ahmad detested that his opinions be written and compiled, fearing that it may swerve his students away from studying the sources of Law, the Quran and the Sunnah. Yet, as Ibn al-Jawzi comments, Allah knew the sincerity in his heart and raised around him faithful students who would record his opinions, such that an independent school of jurisprudence and theology was formed and attributed to Imam Ahmad.

Imam Ahmad employed exceptional caution while formulating juristic opinions and issuing verdicts, and would frequently warn his students of speaking in a matter in which you have no reputable predecessor. This prudent attitude is clearly demonstrated in the thought process applied by Ahmad in extrapolation of laws from the divine sources, which is as follows:

1) Divine text (Nass) from the Quran and the Sunnah was the first point of reference for all scholars of jurisprudence, and in this, Ahmad was not an exception. Whenever he noticed a divine textual evidence for an issue, he never referred to other sources, opinions of the Companions, scholars or resorted to analogical deduction (Qiyas).

2) Verdicts issued by the Companions were resorted to when no textual evidence was found in the Quran or the Sunnah. The reasons for ranking the verdicts of the Companions after the Quran and the Sunnah are obvious: The Companions witnessed the revelation of the Quran, and its implementation by the Prophet – Sallallahu 'alaihi wa-sallam, who advised the Ummah to adhere to the rightly-guided caliphs, hence, the Companions ought to have a better understanding than the latter generations.

Imam Ahmad, would likewise, never give precedence to a scholarly opinion or analogical deduction (Qiyas) over that of the Companions', to the extent that if they were divided into two camps over an issue, two different narrations would similarly be documented from Imam Ahmad.

3) In a case where the Companions differed, he preferred the opinion supported by the divine texts (Nass).

4) In instances where none of the above was applicable, Ahmad would resort to the Mursal Hadith (with a link missing between the Successor and the Prophet – SallAllahu 'alaihi wa-sallam) or a weak Hadith. However, the type of weak Hadith that Ahmad relied on was such that it may be regarded as 'fair' Hadith due to other evidences (*Hasan li Ghairihi*), not the type that is deemed very weak and thus unsuitable as an evidence for Law. This was due to the fact that, during his time, the Hadith was only categorised into 'sound' (*Sahih*) and 'weak' (*Dha'if*). It was only after Ahmad, that al-Tirmidhi introduced a third category of 'fair' (*Hasan*).

5) Only after having exhausted the aforementioned sources would Imam Ahmad employ analogical deduction (Qiyas) due to necessity, and with utmost care.

Ahmad's doctrine

As demonstrated previously, Imam Ahmad became the leading authority on the Orthodox doctrine of Islam, which represented the first three blessed generations of Islam, untainted with foreign dogmas. Ahmad's doctrinal influence can be measured by the fact that, out of the four traditional schools, the Hanbali school alone maintained its own theological view, unlike the Hanafi school which adopted the Maturidi doctrine, or the Shafi'i and Maliki schools that adopted the Ash'ari doctrine. The secret for this was the depth and length at which Ahmad spoke in matters of theology, due to the prevailing unorthodoxy in his age, headed by the Mu'tazilites. Due to this it is noted that there have been, in comparison to other schools, very few Hanbalis who inclined towards unorthodox views, for the copious volume of narrations from Imam Ahmad dealing with specific issues of doctrine made it extremely difficult for his followers to adhere to any other, yet still remain faithful followers.

Imam Ahmad's doctrine could be summarised as follows:

1) He would believe in the description that Allah gave to himself in the Quran, or inspired the Prophet with, and affirm them at their face value (*Dhahir*), while generally negating any resemblance between the Creator and the creation.

2) He would vigorously reject negative theology (*Ta'til*), as well as allegorical exegesis (*Ta'wil*), with respect to belief in Allah, which was heavily employed by the Jahmites, Mu'tazilites and the Kullabites (later to be known as the Ash'arites) to justify their philosophical approach to God.

3) He believed that Allah Speaks with letters and sound, for he believed every word and letter of the Quran to be the word of Allah, contrary to the Kullabites, who, in their opposition to the Mu'tazilites, affirmed eternal Speech for Allah, yet still agreed with them in that they believed that the Quran, which is composed of letters, was created.

4) He believed that Allah literally Hears and Sees; that He has two Hands with which He created Adam; that Allah has a Face

- 5) He believed that Allah literally Rose over the Throne after Creating the heavens and the Earth in six days.
- 6) He believed that Allah is High above and distinct from His creation
- 7) He believed that Allah is all Knowing, All Wise, All Power and All Able, and that Allah has His own Will, He Does what He likes out of His Wisdom. Whatever Allah has Written and Decreed upon His creation, must come to pass. Nothing leaves His knowledge, or happens without His Permission or Will.
- 8) He believed that Allah becomes Pleased when obeyed and Displeased when disobeyed.
- 9) He would regard the Jahmiyah (followers of al-Jahm ibn Safwan), and the Rafidha (the Imami Shias) who curse the Companions, to be disbelievers (*Kuffar*).
- 10) He held that the sinners amongst the Muslims are under the threat of Allah's punishment; that if He wishes He may Punish them or Forgive them; Contrary to the *Khawarij*. He would not declare a Muslim to be a disbeliever (*Kafir*) on account of his sins, nor would he exclude actions from Iman unlike the *Murjia*. Once he was asked about those who declare their belief in the five pillars of Islam, yet refuse to perform them; he said, in reply, they are disbelievers (*Kuffar*).
- 11) He believed in the miracles that occurred at the hands of the *Awliya* (pious Muslims) as a favour from Allah.
- 12) He believed that Abu Bakr is the best of the Companions, followed by Umar, then the six companions chosen by the latter as *Ashab al-Shura* (members of Shura council): Uthman, Ali, al-Zubair, Talha, 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Awf and Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas; followed by the fighters of *Badr* from the Emigrants (*Muhajirin*) and then the Helpers (*Ansar*).
- 13) He prohibited discussions on the differences between the Companions or dislike of any of them; for the honour of Companionship with the Prophet – Sallallahu 'alaihi wa-sallam – is sufficient a virtue to rank them higher than the entire Muslim *Ummah* until the end of time.

The Trial

Imam Ahmad is remembered as a legendary figure in the Islamic history for his uncompromising stance and for withstanding immense pressure during the trial of 'the creation of the Quran'. The Caliph at the time, Ma'mun, subjected the scholars to severe persecution, at the behest of the Mu'tazilite theologians who attributed themselves to Imam Abu Hanifa in jurisprudence. The Mu'tazilites were a heretical Muslim sect, who sanctified their intelligence above the revelation and espoused the belief that, even though, the Quran is the speech of Allah, He created that speech as a distinct entity and called it 'the Quran'. This was in opposition to the orthodox belief that Allah spoke every word of the Quran, and indeed: 'Allah spoke to Moses directly', as Allah states in the Quran.

The Mu'tazilites were discredited throughout the Umayyad rule and never given the position of prominence and influence, until the Caliph al-Ma'mun came to power, during the 'Abbasids, who took them into confidence and bestowed them with official positions within the state as judges. Bishr al-Marrisi and Ahmad b. Abi Du'ad were the two important figures behind the Mu'tazilite inquisition,

which systematically placed many jurists and traditionists on trial until they were forced to acknowledge that the Quran is created, and their acknowledgement publicised in all major cities.

Nearly all the scholars of Baghdad from the jurists and the traditionists were tested, and all of them acknowledged the doctrine of the created Quran, with the exception of the two; Ahmad b. Hanbal and Muhammad b. Nuh. This greatly pained and angered Imam Ahmad, such that he boycotted some of the great traditionists for their acknowledgement, and often refused to narrate from them. Amongst those boycotted were a close companion and a colleague of Imam Ahmad, Yahya b. Ma'in, about whom, it is said that Imam Ahmad refused to speak to him until he died and composed the following lines of poetry censuring his acknowledgement of heresy:

Ya ibn al-madini al-ladhi 'uridat lahu

Dunya fa Jada bi dinihi li yanalaha

Madha da'aka li intihali maqalatin

Kunta taz'umu kafiran man qalaha

O Ibn al-Madini, to whom the world was offered,

So he strove to attain it at the expense of his religion

What made you embrace a dogma (about which)

You would impute disbelief on the one who adopts it!

Finally, Ahmad b. Hanbal and Muhammad b. Nuh were also put to the test on the order of al-Ma'mun, but they refused to acknowledge the creation of the Quran. Consequently, they were despatched in irons to be dealt with by al-Ma'mun himself. On the way, Imam Ahmad supplicated to Allah to prevent him from meeting al-Ma'mun. His prayer was answered in the sudden death of al-Ma'mun due to which they were both sent back. Muhammad b. Nuh passed away on their return journey, and there was none to prepare his funeral, pray over, and bury him, except Imam Ahmad. He remained imprisoned in Baghdad until al-Mu'tasim assumed power. Al-Mu'tasim, unlike al-Ma'mun, was a destitute to knowledge. Nevertheless, he continued the Mu'tazilite inquisition as explicitly requested by al-Ma'mun in his will. His rule was perhaps the most brutal towards Sunni scholars in general, and Imam Ahmad in particular who intransigently continued to resist all attempts by the authorities to force him to acknowledge the creation of the Quran. The frustrated Caliph finally ordered Ahmad to be flogged in public, which resulted in Ahmad falling unconscious. Imam Ahmad was released shortly afterwards, when al-Mu'tasim feared that the commotion caused in Baghdad due to mistreatment of Ahmad may reach an uncontrollable pitch.

After al-Mu'tasim's death, al-Wathiq took over the office of *Khilafa*, and ordered his loyal Mu'tazili judge in Egypt, Ibn Abi al-Layth to press hard with the inquisition. This caused many to flee from Egypt, while the prisons became full of jurists and traditionists who resisted the government demands. In Baghdad, however, the general public had become enraged over the policies of the government, which made it difficult for al-Wathiq to pursue the inquisition with the same vigour. He

therefore, instead of re-imprisoning Imam Ahmad, resolved on banishing him from Baghdad, saying: "Do not live with me on this earth!", and henceforth, Ahmad b. Hanbal went into hiding.

Towards the end of al-Wathiq's reign, a close student of al-Shafi'i, Ahmad b. Nasr al-Khaza'i was caught by the officials and charged for organising an uprising in Baghdad. When Ahmad al-Khaza'i was brought to al-Wathiq in chains, the latter, instead of asking him about his role in the uprising, questioned him about his belief in the creation of the Quran, to which Ahmad al-Khaza'i gave the standard Sunni reply. The enraged Caliph, upon hearing his response, personally decapitated him. His head remained in Baghdad, while his body remained on a crucifix in Samurra for six years, as a grisly warning to potential rebels.

After al-Wathiq's death, his brother al-Mutawakkil took charge of the office. Al-Mutawakkil, unlike his predecessors had the utmost respect and admiration for the Sunni school, and through him, Allah decided to put an end to the inquisition. Promptly after assuming the position as Caliph, he sent orders throughout the *Khilafa* to put an immediate end to all discussions regarding the Quran, released all the prisoners of faith, dismissed the Mu'tazili judges, and more significantly deported the chief instigator of the inquisition, Ahmad b. Abi Du'ad along with his family. He further ordered that the Mu'tazili judges responsible for the inquisition be cursed from by the pulpits, by name.

Al-Mutawakkil, on the other hand, showed his utmost reverence to the Sunni hero of the inquisition, Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal, and wished to take care of all his affairs. Ahmad, however, turned down the offers due to his general dislike of being close to the rulers. Al-Mutawakkil, knowing that Imam Ahmad would refuse his offerings, instead presented some gifts to his son, Salih b. Ahmad. When it came to his knowledge, Imam Ahmad showed strong disapproval and refused to consume anything from his son's wealth.

Illness, Death and Funeral

After Imam Ahmad turned 77, he was struck with severe illness and fever, and became very weak, yet never complaining about his infirmity and pain until he died. In spite of his debilitation, he would urge his son, Salih b. Ahmad, to help him stand up for prayer. When he was unable to stand, he would pray sitting, or sometimes lying on his side. After hearing of his illness, the masses flocked to his door. The ruling family also showed the desire to pay him a visit, and to this end sought his permission. However, due to his desire to remain independent of any influence from the authority, Ahmad denied them access.

Once during his illness, an old man entered upon Imam Ahmad and reminded him of his account before Allah, to which Imam Ahmad began to weep profusely. On another occasion, a man who partook in the beatings inflicted on Imam Ahmad, came to Salih b. Ahmad, the son of the Imam, and begged him to seek permission from his father to allow him to enter, for he felt the guilt of his involvement in the suffering of the Imam. When he was finally given permission, he entered upon the Imam and wept, begging for his forgiveness. Imam Ahmad forgave him on the condition that he would never repeat his actions. The man left the Imam, and all those present, in tears.

'Abdullah b. Ahmad b. Hanbal narrates, that while Imam Ahmad was on his death bed, he kept drifting in and out of consciousness, and gesturing with his hands saying: 'No... No... No...' When enquired about it, Ahmad replied: 'The Devil was standing near me, trying his hardest to mislead me, saying: 'Come on, Ahmad!', and I was replying back: 'No... No...'

On Friday, the 12 of Rabi' al-Awwal 241 AH, the legendary Imam breathed his last. The news of his death quickly spread far and wide in the city and the people flooded the streets to attend Ahmad's funeral. One of the rulers, upon hearing the news, sent burial shrouds along with perfumes to be used for Ahmad's funeral. However, respecting the Ahmad's wishes, his sons refused the offering and instead used a burial shroud prepared by his female servant. Moreover, his sons took care not to use water from their homes to wash Imam Ahmad as he had refused to utilise any of their resources, for accepting the offerings of the ruler.

After preparing his funeral, his sons prayed over him, along with around 200 members of the ruling family, while the streets were teeming with both men and women, awaiting the funeral procession. Imam Ahmad's funeral was then brought out and the multitudes continued to pray over him in the desert, before and after his burial at his grave.

During the trial of Imam Ahmad, he would often say: "Say to the heretics, the decisive factor between us and you is the day of funerals"; meaning, the adherents to the orthodox doctrine always have a good end, for they earn the love of Allah, as well as the affection of the multitudes, and their death has a great impact on people's lives. This is exactly what took place in this instance, for it is estimated that about 1 300 000 people attended his funeral. One of the scholars said in relation to this that such a massive attendance at a funeral has never been equalled in the history of the Arabs, neither in the pre-Islamic era (*Jahiliyah*) nor in Islam. The masses were engulfed in the genuine popular emotion, while the scene of his grave became overwhelmed by such sentiments that the graveyard had to be guarded by the civil authorities.

Another scholar relates that when he attended the funeral of Ahmad, he wanted pray over him at his grave. But the crowds were so awe-inspiring that he didn't reach the grave until after a week. The funerals of the famous opponents of Imam Ahmad, however, were in stark contrast, which were not attended by more than a handful. The funeral procession of the Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ad – the chief instigator of the inquisition – went largely unnoticed, with none willing to carry his funeral to the graveyard, except a few from the ruling family. Such was also the case with al-Harith al-Muhasibi – a theologian and an ascetic – who, despite being a bitter enemy of the Mu'tazilites, was still discredited by Imam Ahmad for his interests in *Kalam* (speculative theology). Only three or four people prayed over al-Muhasibi, and a similar fate met Bishr al-Mirrisi.

In the Islamic history, Ahmad's funeral is noted as the day when the Mu'tazilite doctrine was brought to a decisive and a humiliating end, whilst the Sunni Islam and the Prophetic guidance were the order of the day. Ahmad's death had proven the ineffectiveness of the Caliph's role in defining Islam, and further unquestionably acknowledged that it were the scholars, rather than the Caliphs, who were the true 'inheritors of the Prophets'. Ahmad's funeral was marked by the multitudes flocking, and openly cursing al-Karabisi and al-Marrisi, the chief heretics. This became a frequent practise amongst the subsequent Hanbali funerals throughout Islamic history, where the masses would rally behind prominent Hanbali funerals proclaiming: This day is for Sunnis and Hanbalis! Not Jahmis, Mu'tazilis or Ash'aris!

The Madhab of Imam Ahmad

After the death of Imam Ahmad, his students travelled across the Muslim world along with the *responsa* (*Masa'il*) of Ahmad concerning theology, jurisprudence and traditions. From the foremost of his students are: his two sons, Salih and Abdullah, Hanbal ibn Ishaq, al-Marrudhi, al-Kawsaj, Ibn

Hani, Abu Dawud (compiler of Sunan Abi Dawud), al-Athram, Abu Zur'ah al-Razi, Abu Hatim al-Razi, 'Abdul-Wahhab al-Warraq, al-Tirmidhi and many others.

However, it was not until al-Khallal travelled the Muslim world, collecting the *responsa* of Imam Ahmad from his students scattered across the *Khilafa*, that the *Madhab* of Imam Ahmad was compiled in an organised form. This vast compilation became known as *al-Jami'*, which is still used in the 8th Islamic century by Ibn Taymiyah and his contemporary Hanbali jurists.

This collection was then summarised into a short treatise on the *Fiqh* of Imam Ahmad by the Baghdadi-Hanbali jurist al-Khiraqi, which became known as *Mukhtasar al-Khiraqi*. This treatise was the first *Fiqh* manual ever written in the *Madhab*, and its first ever commentary was also written by its very author, thus, making *al-Khiraqi* the first author of a *Fiqh* manual in the *Madhab*, the first one to write a commentary on a manual, and indeed the first Hanbali to comment on his own manual.

The summarised treatise on *Fiqh* by al-Khiraqi proved to be the most important contribution to Hanbali *Fiqh*, with over 300 commentaries, according to Yusuf b. 'Abd al-Hadi, which even today remains an excellent introductory manual to the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. The famous commentaries to *al-Mukhtasari* include, but are not restricted to: a commentary by Ibn Hamid, then al-Qadhi Abu Ya'la, then Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi, whose commentary, *famously known as al-Mughni*, is considered to be a timeless masterpiece.

Hanbali Books on Theology

Since Hanbalism is as much a school of theology as it is a school of Law, the Hanbali theologians have contributed several works, at various intervals in history, representing the doctrine of Ahmad b. Hanbal. Imam Ahmad himself played a leading role in authoring books on doctrine, such as the *Kitab al-Sunnah* (Book of Sunnah) and *al-Radd 'Ala al-Zanadiqah wa al-Jahmiyah* (The refutation of the Heretics and the Jahmis). Apart from these two works, Imam Ahmad wrote several letters addressed to some of his contemporaries, explaining the orthodox creed, found in the *Tabaqat* of Ibn Abi Ya'la, although not all of the letters are authentic.

Subsequently, the students of Ahmad in particular, and the rest of his followers, continued to contribute works in theology. Several Hanbalis authored books, in the footsteps of their Imam, with a common title: *Kitab al-Sunnah*, such as al-Athram, 'Abdullah (the son of Imam Ahmad), Hanbal ibn Ishaq (the cousin of Imam Ahmad), al-Khallal.

Some of the important manuals on doctrine accepted by the mainstream Hanbalis include: *Lum'at al-I'tiqad* by Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi, *al-I'tiqad* by al-Qadhi Abu Ya'la, *al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad* by 'Abd al-Ghani al-Maqdisi, and various treatise written by Ibn Taymiyah, such as *al-Wasitiyah* and *al-Tadmurriyah*, as well as his close student Ibn al-Qayyim, such as his famous *Nuniyah*, an ode rhyming in the letter *Nun*.

It is worthy to note that many works on theology by some Hanbalis were reactionary to the Hanbali-Ash'ari feud, such as *al-Radd 'Ala al-Asha'irah* (Rebuttal of the Ash'arites) by Ibn al-Hanbali, and by Abul-Wafa Ibn 'Aqil with the same title. Another example of such work is *Ibtal al-Ta'wilat li Akhbar al-Sifat* (Negation of the Allegorical Interpretations of the Traditions Pertaining to Divine Attributes) by al-Qadhi Abu Ya'la, which came is a rebuttal of the book *Mushkil al-Hadith wa Bayanuhu* (The Problematic Traditions and their Interpretations) by Ibn Furak, the Ash'ari theologian and a

traditionist, who compiled the aforementioned book, giving allegorical interpretations to divine texts that seemed problematic according to Ash'ari principles; and *al-Munadhara fi al-Quran ma'a Ahl al-Bid'ah* (The Debate Regarding the Quran with Some Heretics), by the great Hanbali jurist, Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi, where he relates his violent discourse with his contemporaries from the Ash'aris, whom he refers to as 'Heretics', about the nature of the Quran contained in a book-form (*Mushaf*), whether it is created or uncreated.

Other Hanbalis, although they did not author books dedicated to doctrine, they did, however, include sections of doctrine in books of *Fiqh* and *Suluk* (ethics). *Al-Ghunya*, by Abdul-Qadir al-Jilani – a famous Hanbali jurist and the founder of the Qadiri Sufi order – is for the most part, a manual in ethics and morality, yet it begins with a thorough presentation of the Hanbali doctrine, which paints al-Jilani as an ardent follower of the mainstream Hanbalism, and an avowed antagonist of the Ash'aris.

Hanbali Books on Fiqh

The first manual in *Fiqh*, as mentioned earlier was the famous *al-Mukhtasar* by al-Khiraqi, which has remained up until this day, from the most important introductory works on Hanbali *Fiqh*, with its commentary *par excellence*, *al-Mughani* by Ibn Qudama.

Al-Majd Ibn Taymiyah, who was the grandfather of the famous Hanbali theologian and jurist, Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyah, was considered to be one of the great authorities in the school, along with Ibn Qudama, such that if the two Sheikhs agreed upon an issue, it would be considered the reliable opinion (*mu'tamad*) in the school. Al-Majd Ibn Taymiyah authored his famous and reliable *Fiqh* manual called *al-Muharrar fi al-Fiqh*.

Ibn Qudama played a key role in developing a Hanbali curriculum of *Fiqh* for all levels of students. He wrote a preparatory manual for the beginners called *al-Umdah*, with the objective of developing an all-round surface understanding of jurisprudence, without confusing the student with difference of opinion within the school. For the students at an intermediate level, he authored *al-Muqni'*, aimed at training the students at exercising preference (*tarjih*) upon conflicting opinions (*ta'arudh*) within the school. For the next level, he authored *al-Kafi*, with the goal of acquainting the student with the sources of the Law, and the methodology for extrapolating rules from the revelation. *Al-Mughni* (lit. rich), which is a commentary on *al-Mukhtasar* by al-Khiraqi, was compiled for the advanced students, to familiarise them with the difference of opinion and the respective arguments, beyond the school, even surpassing the four traditional schools.

The aforementioned book, *al-Muqni'* by Ibn Qudama had received two main important commentaries: *al-Sharh al-Kabir* (the Great Commentary) by al-Muwaffaq Ibn Qudama's nephew, Shams al-Din Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi; and *al-Insaf* by the famous Hanbali jurist and judge, 'Ala al-Din al-Mardawi. These two commentaries have remained popular amongst post-Ibn Qudama generations up until today.

Al-Muqni', also has a very popular abridgment by the famous Hanbali jurist Sharf al-Din Abu al-Naja al-Hajjawi called: *Zad al-Mustaqni' fi Ikhtisar al-Muqni'*. This abridgement became particularly famous amongst the Hanbalis from Najd, where it is regarded as the primer to the Madhab. The most common and widely accepted commentary on *Zad* was written by the Egyptian Hanbali jurist, Mansur b. Yunus al-Buhuti called: *al-Rawdh al-Murbi'*, which was further commented on by the Najdi-Hanbali

jurist, 'Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad b. Qasim. The latter commentary, which is informally known as *Hashiyat Ibn Qasim* is regarded to be one of the greatest contributions to the school in the modern times. Another invaluable contribution to the school has been *al-Sharh al-Mumti' 'Ala Zad al-Mustaqni'*, by the famous and profound Hanbali jurist, theologian, traditionist, linguist and a grammarian, Muhammad b. Salih al-'Uthaimin. *Al-Sharh al-Mumti'*, originally, was delivered as a series of lectures over the years, which was then written, compiled and then published by his loyal students into volumes.

The aforementioned author of *Zad al-Mustaqni'* – al-Hajjawi, is also the author of *al-Iqna'* which serves today as a major reference work for verdicts (*Ifta*) in Saudi Arabia, along with *Muntaha al-Iradat* by al-Futuhi. Both of these voluminous manuals have been commented on by several authors. The most famous of those commentaries are *Kashaf al-Qina' 'An Matn al-Iqna'*, which is a commentary on *al-Iqna'*, and *Sharh Muntaha al-Iradat*, both by al-Buhuti.

Increasing Number of Hanbalis

Historically, the Hanbali Madhab has always been known for having fewer followers comparatively to the remaining schools. Some even argued that the small number of followers was indicative of an inherent weakness of the Madhab and its lack of popularity. Hanbalis often responded with the following verse of poetry:

Yaquluna fi ashabi ahmada qillatun

Fa qultu lahum inn al-kirama qalilu

They say of Ahmad's followers: How few they are!

Thus, I said to them: The dignified are always few

The secret behind the spread of any particular Madhab, or lack thereof, has mainly been the authorities, responsible for bestowing the Islamic courts to one faction, at the expense of the other. In a land where courts were dominated by a particular Madhab, a student qualifying in a different Madhab had no future, and consequently, was forced to migrate, or embrace the native Madhab, or conspire with fellow Madhabists to seize the courts for themselves, by any means necessary. This was one of the main reasons behind Hanafi-Shafi'i rivalry in the Islamic history, which at times led to violent clashes.

The Hanbalis, however, had an inherent tendency of declining lofty positions offered by the authorities. Hence, Abu al-Wafa Ibn 'Aqil al-Hanbali remarks that the Hanbali Madhab has been 'oppressed' by none other than Hanbalis themselves. For whenever a Hanbali would excel in knowledge, he would submerge himself in worship and gratitude to Allah, embrace the ascetic life (*Zuhd*) and divorce himself from fame, status and worldly life. This was also confirmed by a prominent Shafi'i traditionist and a historian, al-Dhahabi, in his book *Zaghl al-'Ilm* where he describes the Hanbalis with similar distinguishing qualities.

The Hanbalis had remained an insignificant minority, and perhaps, close to extinction, until Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab arose in Najd forming an influential revivalist movement, with the aim to purify the true understanding of Islamic monotheism, in a society stained with pre-Islamic pagan

beliefs and practices. After a period of persecution and exile, he joined forces with Muhammad b. Su'ud and successfully revived the enforcement of the much-neglected Shariah laws.

It is solely to the credit of the Wahhabist revivalist movement, that until today, the courts in the Arabian Peninsula are predominantly Hanbali, bar some areas to the south near Yemen, which still remain Shafi'i. The significance of the Wahhabist call is demonstrated in an undeniable fact that nearly all Islamic reformist movements in the 20th century, directly or indirectly, are influenced by the basic call of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Egypt, for example, apart from being the centre for Ash'ari learning, with its political life dominated by a brutal socialist-dictatorship, has been historically at odds with the followers of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab; yet, one cannot but notice that the majority of 'The Youth of Awakening' (*Shabab al-Sahwah*) are somewhat more inclined towards the Wahhabist thought than the dogma propagated by the local Azharites. Hence, it comes at no surprise that 'Wahhabism' has been singled out as an ideological target in the so-called 'War on Terror'.

A scant reading of the Islamic history illustrates that the Hanbalis are known for having an outstanding character, fearlessness and eagerness for enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, with Imam Ahmad setting the precedence by remaining steadfast during the inquisition. After the demise of Imam Ahmad, the Hanbalis grew stronger in Baghdad, and as Ibn 'Asakir notes, they would patrol the streets, during which, if they noticed a man with an unrelated woman, they would report him to the police; or if they noticed a musical instrument or a bottle of alcohol, they would smash it. Al-Khiraqi, who was the first Hanbali scholar to write a *Fiqh* manual, died after being severely beaten while attempting to combat evils in Damascus. Ibn Taymiyah would likewise patrol the streets with his students, during which, if they noticed anyone playing chess they disrupt the game; or if they saw utensils of alcohol or musical instruments, they would smash them. Ibn Taymiyah was also greatly admired for his fearless encounter with the ruthless Mongolian invader of Damascus, Qazan; as he is also remembered for his frequent imprisonment for in defence of the orthodox doctrine.

Conclusion

If a hundred-and-fifty pages by al-Dhahabi, or over seven-hundred pages by Ibn al-Jawzi could not encompass all the details in the life of such a magnificent figure in our history, as that of Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaibani, then how can one claim to do justice in this brief twenty page introduction. The unavoidable omission of detail in such a piece, should not be considered as a disservice to the Madhab.

The enthusiastic reader with a keen interest to inquire more about Imam Ahmad is recommended to read the most comprehensive biography of Imam Ahmad by Ibn al-Jawzi called *Manaqib al-Imam Ahmad*; followed by Imam Ahmad's biography by al-Dhahabi in *Siyar al-'Alam al-Nubula*'. Those seeking in-depth information about the Madhab are recommended to read the richest introduction to the Madhab by Dr. Bakr b. 'Abd Allah Abu Zaid called *al-Madkhal al-Mufassal Ila Fiqh al-Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal* (A detailed introduction to the jurisprudence of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal). Equally recommended is another primer, albeit not so detailed, but still unique, titled: *al-Madkhal ila Madhab al-Imam Ahmad*, by Ibn Badran al-Dimashqi. *Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Sirah wal-Madhab* (Ahmad ibn Hanbal – the life and the Madhab) by Sa'di Abu Jaib is similarly recommended for a devotee of the Madhab, dealing with various aspects of the life of Imam Ahmad and his Madhab not addressed in the two aforementioned introductory books.

Sources:

Sahaba.net

Sunnah.org

Islamicawakening.com

Islamweb.net