

A Profile of Imam Hasan al- Basri ؓ

By Maulana Muaz Billoo

From among the greatest and most revered figures in all of Islamic history is the Tabi'ee, Imam Hasan ibn Abul Hasan Yasar al-Basri ؓ. He left behind such a legacy and had such an impact on Islamic history, that even those Muslims who are not well acquainted with Islamic history recognize his name. Who was this great Imam? Hafiz Zahabi describes him as, "The Imam, the Shaikh al Islam, Abu Sa'eed al Basri."¹

Imam Hasan al Basri ؓ had a very noble beginning to his life. He was born in the year 21 AH which was within the era of the khilafah of 'Umar ibn al Khattab ؓ, and witnessed many of the great companions of the Prophet ﷺ. 'Allamah Ibn al Jawzi ؓ states, "Hasan lived at the same time as a very large group of the companions." He has also mentioned that 'Umar rdy had performed *tahneek*² on him. Additionally, at a young age, he was honored to have been in the company of one of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, our mother, Umm Salamah ؓ. When he was a young child, he would cry whenever his mother was away, so she would leave him in the care of Umm Salamah rdy who would suckle him with her own milk.³ It is for this reason that the scholars have stated that the source of his wisdom and eloquence was the barakah of the milk of Umm Salamah rdy.⁴ Hafiz Mizzi ؓ has related that Umm Salamah rdy would bring him to the companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and they would make dua for him. On one occasion, she brought him to 'Umar ibn al Khattab rdy, who made the following du'a for him, "Oh Allah grant him a deep understanding of the religion, and make him beloved to the people."⁵ The imam would go on to become one of the most revered figures in all of Islamic history. Although he never met the Prophet ﷺ and therefore cannot reach the level of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, he did share some semblances with them in his piety, knowledge, and bravery.

As for his piety, he was constantly focused on his meeting with Allah swt. Those who observed him noted that he was always worried and concerned. This worry was not of a worldly nature, but it was a worry for the preparation of his meeting with Allah swt. 'Allamah ibn al Jawzi ؓ states, "[Imam] Hasan [Al Basri] was perpetually worried and would cry in abundance yet he was far-removed from any theatricalities. He would not brandish his ascetic nature although it was clearly manifest within him. He would adorn himself and would not refuse to wear new clothing. He would not abstain from eating with people, nor did he decline an invitation for food. He had such a way of life that was easily discernible for anyone who saw him."⁶ Hafs ibn 'Umar said, "Hasan once cried, and so it was said to him, 'What makes you

¹ *Tadhkiratul Huffadh* v. 1, p. 71

² A prophetic practice in which a small portion of a date is chewed and placed in the mouth of an infant child.

³ *Sifatus Safwah* #500

⁴ *Tahdhibul Kamal*, v. 2, p. 114

⁵ *Tahdhibul Kamal*, v. 2, p. 115

⁶ *Adabul Hasan Al Basri*, p. 24

cry?’ He responded, “I fear that I will be thrown into the fire tomorrow.”⁷ Hisham ibn Hassan said, “I heard Hasan taking an oath by Allah, ‘None have honored the dirham (i.e. wealth) except Allah had disgraced them.’”

As for his knowledge, the entire Muslim world has acknowledged as a great Imam. Mu’tamir ibn Sulaiman said, “My father used to say, ‘Hasan is the shaikh of the people of Basrah.’” His transmissions of Hadith are well known and can be found within the majority of Hadith texts. The imams of the six famous books of Hadith (Bukhari, Muslim, Nasai, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah) have all transmitted Ahadith through him in their works. The other imams of his time would come to him to learn from him. Hafiz Zahabi narrates that in one incident, Hasan came to Makkah and performed salah behind the *Maqam Ibrahim*. Thereafter, ‘Ata, Tawus, Mujahid, and ‘Amr ibn Shu’aib came and sat before him. He once said, “had it not been for forgetfulness, there would have been an abundance of knowledge.”

Abu Qatadah said, “Adhere to this shaikh, for I have not seen anyone who resembles ‘Umar in his views than him,” i.e. Hasan Basri. Yunus ibn ‘Ubaid said, “I have not seen anyone whose speech matched his actions more than Hasan.” Abu Burdah said, “I have not seen anyone resemble the companions of Muhammad ﷺ more than him.” The great Imam of Hadith, Abu Zur’ah Razi said, “For every instance that Hasan has said, ‘The Messenger of Allah ﷺ,’ I have found a basis for it with the exception of four Ahadith.” Abu Salamah Tabudhaki said, “8,000 legal matters have been memorized from Hasan.” Bakr ibn Abdullah Muzani said, “Whoever wishes to look at the one with the deepest understanding of the religion from those whom we have seen, then let him look at Hasan.” This demonstrates the Imam’s vast knowledge of the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ and their practical applications.

Imam Hasan Basri ؒ was also a warrior. Sulaiman at Taymi said, “Hasan used to fight in the battlefield, and Jabir ibn Zaid Abush Sha’tah was the Mufti of Basrah. Then Hasan came, and he (Hasan) would give the fatawa (legal verdicts).” Hisham ibn Hassan said, “Hasan was the bravest of the people of his time.”⁸ The revered historian, Muhammad ibn Sa’d ؒ, said, “Hasan, may Allah have mercy on him, was a compendium, an eminent scholar, a reliable jurist, a proof, trustworthy, a servant (of Allah), a worshipper, vast in knowledge, eloquent, beautiful, and graceful... he came to Makkah and they provided a place for him to sit. The people gathered around him and he narrated to them. From those who would come to him were Mujahid, ‘Ata, Tawus, and ‘Amr ibn Shu’aib. They said, or some of them said, ‘We have not seen anyone like him.’”⁹

Imam Hasan Basri ؒ left behind such a significant legacy and example for the Muslims to follow. His life and times cannot be fully enumerated in this article. For more details, one may refer to ‘Allamah ibn al Jawzi’s *Adabul Hasan al Basri*.

⁷ *Sifatul Safwah* #500

⁸ See: *Siyar A’lam an Nubala*, v. 4, p. 563 - 588

⁹ *Tabaqat ibn Sa’d*, v. 9, p. 158

