

Lessons from the Life of Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani ﷺ

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Allah ﷻ says in Surah al-Tawbah, ayah 122,

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنْفِرُوا كَافَّةً فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

Translation: “Nor should the believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to attain a perfect understanding in faith, and admonish the people when they return to them so that they may beware of sin.”

Allah ﷻ mainly revealed this verse to the believers to inform them of the communal obligation of joining the battle of *Tabuk* and alongside that, he commands that a group from among them go out to tread the path of knowledge so that they may become streams of guidance for their people.

The word *لِيَتَفَقَّهُوا* falls on the scale of *taffa'ul* and those familiar with Arabic know that one of the special traits of this scale is *takalluf*, which roughly means to go out of one's way to do something. Allah ﷻ uses this scale to show that *fiqh* isn't something which is easily obtained, rather it is something which takes countless years of dedication to master. *Fiqh* refers to a deep understanding of the faith.

The benefits of seeking knowledge within the prophetic tradition are abundant, however there is one *hadith* found within *Abu Dawood* which can easily summarize most of its merits,

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَظْلُبُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَلَكَ اللَّهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا مِنْ طُرُقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَإِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَتَضَعُ أَجْنِحَتَهَا رِضًا لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ وَإِنَّ الْعَالِمَ لَيَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالْحَيَاتَانِ فِي جَوْفِ الْمَاءِ وَإِنَّ فَضْلَ الْعَالِمِ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفَضْلِ الْقَمَرِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ عَلَى سَائِرِ الْكَوَاكِبِ وَإِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَإِنَّ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ لَمْ يُورَثُوا دِينَارًا وَلَا دِرْهَمًا وَرَثُوا الْعِلْمَ فَمَنْ أَخَذَهُ أَخَذَ بِحِطِّ وَافِرٍ

He ﷺ says, “Whoever treads a path seeking knowledge then Allah ﷻ will cause him to tread one of the paths of *jannah*.”¹ There after Rasoolullah ﷺ lists out the virtues found within such a seeker,

¹ *Sunan Abu Dawud* 3621

- 1) The angels will lower their wings out of contentment for the seeker of knowledge.
- 2) All those creatures contained within the heavens and the earth will seek forgiveness from even as far as the fish in depths of the ocean. From this we come to know that the angels are also included and how can those who are free from any blemishes or sins be rejected when seeking forgiveness on our behalf?
- 3) The superiority of the scholar over the devout is like the full moon in comparison to all the other stars in the night sky.
- 4) The scholars are the heirs of the prophets ﷺ and the prophets ﷺ did not leave behind any form of wealth such as *dirhams* and *dinars* however they did leave behind knowledge and who takes from that knowledge has taken a great portion. Although the scholars have not inherited any monetary assets, they have inherited something far greater and far more valuable than any form of wealth.

Among those who have tread this sacred and blessed path is Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Shaybani ؒ who was born in the year 132 AH, and he was the earliest Imam to codify the Hanafi school of Jurisprudence into one accessible place for future generations.

Imam Muhammad ؒ was born in *Waasit*, a governorate in Eastern Iraq and later migrated to *Kufa* which was one of the epicenters of Islamic knowledge. When he reached the age of discretion, he began learning the Quran, memorizing portions, and gradually began attending the assemblies of Arabic and *Hadith*.

Once Imam Muhammad ؒ reached the age of fourteen, he sincerely requested Imam Abu Hanifa to take him in as one of his students. Imam Abu Hanifah ؒ agreed but on the condition that he memorizes the Quran before sitting in his circles. Subsequently Imam Muhammad ؒ returned seven days later with the entire Quran memorized from cover to cover and he took the position of a disciple of Imam Abu Hanifa ؒ.²

This Quran which Imam Muhammad ؒ memorized was the same Quran that we have before us and he was able to commit the entire book to memory while retaining it with excellence. This incident should kindle within us some passion to memorize some portions of the Quran as the virtues of memorizing a single ayah outweigh everything and anything we can imagine with our limited intellect. Furthermore, Allah ﷻ says in Surah Qamar, verse number seventeen,

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

² *Bulugh al-Amaani fi Seerat al-Imam Muhammad al-Hasan al-Shaybani p.4*

“Indeed, we have made this Quran easy to remember. So, is there anyone who will be mindful?” Allah ﷻ mentions this exact verse without any change whatsoever four times within the same *surah* implying that Allah ﷻ has truly made this Quran easy. Hafiz Ibn Kathir ﷺ (d.774) quotes in his exegesis that Dhaak ﷺ relates that Ibn Abbas ﷺ said, “Had it not been for the fact that Allah ﷻ had made the Quran easy on the tongue of people then not a single person would be able to utter a single word from the speech of Allah ﷻ.”

Some of the virtues of reading the Quran are,

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ الرَّبُّ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مَنْ شَغَلَهُ الْقُرْآنُ عَنْ ذِكْرِي وَ مَسْأَلَتِي أُعْطِيَتْهُ أَفْضَلَ مَا أُعْطِيَ السَّائِلِينَ وَفَضْلَ كَلَامِ اللَّهِ عَلَى سَائِرِ الْكَلَامِ كَفَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ³

- 1) In the above narration, Rasulullah ﷺ narrates that Allah ﷻ says that the person who is engaged in the remembrance of Allah ﷻ and he is unable to ask Allah ﷻ for certain favors due to his spending a lot of time engaging with the Quran, then Allah ﷻ he will give him more than he gives to those who merely ask him for things. The merit that the speech of Allah ﷻ holds over other speech is similar to the superiority Allah ﷻ holds over the entire creation.

Now just as comparing the creation with Allah ﷻ is unfathomable similarly the Quran completely outshines all other forms of speech.

Among us are those who shy away from reading the Quran due to our finding certain words too difficult to articulate or our lack of fluency in reading Arabic. Rasulullah ﷺ says:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: الَّذِي يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ وَهُوَ مَاهِرٌ بِهِ مَعَ السَّفَرَةِ الْكِرَامِ الْبَرَّةِ، وَالَّذِي يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ وَيَتَعْتَعُ فِيهِ وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِ شَاقٌّ لَهُ أَجْرَانِ⁴

He ﷺ says that a person who is well versed when it comes to reciting the Quran will be in the company of the noble scribes (referring to the angels). As for the one who falters when reading it and has to push through it then for him are two rewards.

³ Jami' al-Tirmidhi 2926

⁴ Sahih al-Muslim 798

Going back to Imam Muhammad ؑ, he was a symbol of piety, embodiment of the sunnah, an expert in the legal concepts of Islamic Law and overall, an intellectual genius.

He ؑ authored many books but the one that is most celebrated and widely accepted is *Al-Asl* which is from among the *Zahir al-Riwayah*, the 6 main books which serve as the foundation of the Hanafi school of Jurisprudence.

Imam Muhamad ؑ passed away at the age of 57 in the year 189 AH which coincided with the day in which The Imam of *Nahw* and *Qiraat* Imam Kisai ؑ passed. The passing of these two left such an impact on the Muslim world that the *Khalifa* of that time, Haroon al-Rasheed ؑ said, “Today we have buried both *Fiqh* and Arabic.”

May Allah ؑ allow us all to take heed on what has been said and may he allow us to tread the sacred path of knowledge and to learn the Quran as best as we can.