

Chapter – 30

Imam Abu Hanifa

(700 - 768 AD)

His name is Nu'man, Abu Hanifa is Kunniya and Imam A'azam (*the Great Imam*) is his title. Although Imam had no offspring yet he is famous with his Kunniya. In fact this Kunniya carries its attributive meaning. Quran says:

فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا

{So follow the true religion of Ibrahim (03:95)}

Therefore, the Imam adopted the same verse as ابوالملة حنيفا (*father of the upright religious group*). He was born in 80AH/700AD in Kufa. His father's name is Thabit bin Zowti. Abu Muti' has counted him from the Arab race. Because when his father attended Hazrat 'Ali in his childhood, he prayed good for his family. Nevertheless, he was from a non-Arab family, and belonged to the Persian race.

His ancestors used to do trading of cloths. So his typical growth came from being a normal businessman. So in the beginning he had no regular education. His childhood was spent in a completely disturbed environment. First the rule of Hajjaj bin Yusuf came and then Walid's ruling came and in both these periods he did not get any opportunity to pay attention to the education. But after that, when the era of Suleiman began, the discussions of knowledge became common in Iraq. So these circumstances fascinated to him very much. Incidentally, one day he was passing by in the market, he met Imam Sh'abi, who

was the then Imam of Kufa. The Imam asked him, "To whom do you study?" Abu Hanifa said, "No one". Imam Sh'abi said to him, "*You sit in the company of the scholars.*" This advice penetrated in his heart and then his attention completely diverted towards education.

Allah gave him a fascinating face along with a decent character. He was having medium height and attractive face. He used to speak loudly but soft and lovable. No matter how complicated the subject is, he could very easily handle it eloquently. By temperament he was a cool person. He always preferred to dress himself nicely. Although he had never been associated with any royal environment, yet he used to wear a cap which is exclusively related to a royal family.

Even though he had not heard any hadith from any Companion of the Prophet, but he has personally seen Anas bin Malik, the special servant of the Noble Prophet who died in 93AH/712AD. In addition, it is said that Abdullah bin Abi Adna was one of the Companions who lived in Kufa at that time. That is why Abu Hanifa is called "تابعي" (*the person who has met with at least one Companion of the Prophet*).

Remember that as long as Islam remained confined to Arabia, its problems remain limited. But on its reaching to Persia, Egypt and Syria, its actual color started to change. Gradually, complications in belief began to develop. Disagreements between the narrators led to different sects. The earlier upright people used to keep themselves at a distance of all these things, but by the time they were also felt its opposition, and so a debate started. As a result, a new subject, "*the use of logical arguments for proving Islamic beliefs* (علم الكلام)" was born. To get knowledge of this special subject the theological understanding and nature ability was required, and the Nature had bestowed these two things to Imam Abu Hanifa. First of all,

he turned his attention to the theological knowledge and then in the art of this special subject. Very soon he created the wonder in it so much so that the great scholars used to avoid discussions with him. In those days, the city of Basra became like a fighting arena of debates. When Abu Hanifa used to go to Basra for trade, he had to often face debates but he always conquered them. In the beginning, he was very supportive of this art, but as the age and experience increased, his nature ceased to continue. In this connection, his own statement was: *"I used to consider this subject as a superior art, but later it came to my mind that the Companions of the Prophet remained always secluded from such discussions, even though who could understand the truth of these things better than them? Moreover, I saw the behavior of the present learned people. They would say one thing and do something different, so I became irritated with this subject."*

Hammad was the famous Imam and teacher of Kufa in those days. He was also benefited from Hazrat Anas. So Abu Hanifa started to learn jurisprudence from him. Within a few days his teacher was so impressed with his intelligence and memory that he began to put him in the frontline of his class. Since he wanted to exert with full zeal on the subject of jurisprudence, it was not possible to fulfill his desire without the teaching of hadith. That is why at the same time he started learning hadith as well. However, till that time, the subject of hadith was not fully organized, Even the greatest scholars of hadith were unable to remember more than two to four hundred hadiths, and this number was insufficient to take care of solving essential issues. Thus, he reached to every Imam of Kufa and started collecting the hadiths. These Imam include the then great sheikh al-Sh'abi and Imam Shu'ba. He also collected large numbers of hadiths from the institutes of Iraq, but to

obtain a certificate of completion, it was essential for him to go to Heramain (*Makkah and Madinah*). Therefore he reached to Makkah. In those days, there was a great deal of teaching going on in Makkah. Atta bin Abi Rabah, who was a well-known Taba'i and lived with several Companions, was the most extensive and authoritative scholar. When Abu Hanifa reached to Atta to become a student of him he asked his faith. Abu Hanifa said, "*I do not say anything bad for my elders and forefathers.--- I do not consider a sinner as Kafir.--- I concede to the fate and destiny.*" Hazrat Atta was satisfied with his answers and allowed him to sit in his class. Soon he acquired a place as well in the heart of Hazrat Atta. Apart from Hazrat Atta, in Makkah, he also studied with Hazrat Makrama.

In 102AH/721AD, he reached Madinah. Here he learnt the hadiths from Hazrat Suleiman (*who was also a slave of Um al-Mu'minin Hazrat Maimuna*) and was second on the list of "*the Seven Scholars of Jurisprudence*". In addition, Hazrat Salim, the grandson of Hazrat Farooq, also narrated hadiths to him. Abu Hanifa also met Imam Baqir in Madinah and then he got benefited as well from the companionship of his son Hazrat Jafer Sadiq.

Abu Hafs Kabir claims that Imam Abu Hanifa got narrations of hadiths from at least 4000 personalities. One of the main reasons for the Imam's intellectual development was the companionship of great scholars. By the end of his tour of Heramain, his reputation as a major and worthy scholar was spread all over. It reached to this point that wherever he used to pass-through, there would be a rush of people to meet him. When he arrived in Kufa and started teaching, most of the established institutes closed down and joined to his institute. Even the teachers of his own institute began to benefit from him and motivate others as well.

Imam Sahib's trade was vast. There were millions of transactions. In spite of his big business, he always valued honesty and caution so as not to make even a single penny illegally. Due to this extra care sometimes he had to suffer. In fact his goal in trade and earning wealth was to benefit the general public. Whenever he saw any of his student in need, he would support him. To help a person who is deprived of education due to poverty, he will make a way for him.

Despite his richness and greatness, he was very contagious, humble and kind-hearted. If he would see anybody in trouble he would feel to it. In response to any disrespect for him he would show his patience. He used to ignore those who say bad words for him. He was a pious worshipper. He always prayed very sincerely. Mostly, he felt highly moved while praying or reciting Quran, and often wept for a long time.

The intelligence of Abu Hanifa was exemplary. For most difficult problems, his mind used to work so fast that people would be amazed. There are several examples of this quality. As is mentioned, once a man became angry with his wife over something. And he swore, "*Unless you speak to me, I will not speak to you*". The woman was temperamental so she also swore and repeated the same words that husband said to her. But when their anger finished both of them felt sorry for this matter. So the husband went to the city Imam and narrated the incident. The Imam said that compensation have to be paid. The husband got frustrated with this solution and then reached to Abu Hanifa and asked, "*Do you have any solution for this?*" He said, "*Go and talk to your wife, and there is no expiation for you*". When the first Imam heard he was very upset and went to Abu Hanifa and said, "*Do you give people wrong solutions?*" Abu Hanifa said to the Imam, "*I still say this*", and explained that when a woman addressed her husband and said those

words, then the woman started conversation on her side, then where were their pledges? The city Imam said, "*Abu Hanifa, what you understand at the time, we do not even think of it.*"

Once many Kharijees came to Abu Hanifa and said, "*Repent from your Kufr.*" He immediately said "*Yes I repent from your Kufr*". Kharijees believe that committing sin makes a person as Kafir. Thus Abu Hanifah actually repented of that sin. Their friends said that Abu Hanifa deceived you, he meant something else. He then went to Abu Hanifa and caught him for the right answer. He said, "*Are you sure for this or just presumed*". They said, "*Just presumed*". Imam said, "*Now you have to repent, because Allah says that supposition is a sin*".

One more happening. Once a person came to Abu Hanifah and said that I have put the money somewhere and now I do not remember where I put it. I am now badly in need of money, so suggest a solution for this. He said, "*Brother, this is not a problem of Jurisprudence, yet I recommend you to go and pray the whole night*". He began to offer prayers. It was early in the prayers that he soon remembered where he had placed the money. He rushed to Imam and informed that his plan worked. Imam said, "*The Shaytan cannot tolerate to see you worshipping all night, so he helped in remembering you. But still it would have been better if you would wake up all night and worship in thanksgiving to Allah*".

Although Tafseer, Hadith, and Jurisprudence began immediately with Islam, but its process of formalization started after a century. Explanations of the Quran, the rules of Hadith narrations, the principles of Jurisprudence, debates, the conditions of speculation and limits of consensus, etc. are the issues that are called components of the Jurisprudence. For all of these subjects, Imam Abu Hanifa had laid down the necessary rules and regulations. Earlier among the Companions,

Hazrat 'Ali and 'Abdullah bin Masood, were called Faqih (*the masters of Jurisprudence*). Since these personalities lived mostly in Kufa therefore Kufa became the Core of Jurisprudence. Imam Malik and Imam Auzai etc., also wrote books, but their efforts were individual. Imam Abu Hanifa called and stressed for collective work for compiling Islamic laws rather than individual efforts. As such Imam Abu Hanifa was called as "*The founder of the Jurisprudence*". In this regard, he selected 40 Islamic law experts and set up an academy. The basic way of doing this work was to ask a hypothetical question, what should be done if anything happens this way? Then there would be a long discussions on this issue. When everyone reached a conclusion, Imam Abu Yusuf, the secretary of the academy, would write it down. In this way, Imam Abu Hanifa carried out one of the most important and memorable works in the history of Islamic law.

Under the rule of the Caliph Haroon Rashid '*Fatawa Abu Hanifa*' was implemented as the rules of the whole kingdom. In the Mughal era, their most families were Hanafi. Based on Hanafi Fiqh, Mahmood Ghaznavi wrote his own book named as "*An-Nafreed*" is also a well known work. Nooruddin Zangi, Cherkassy of Egypt, Aal-Taimur, all were Hanafi scholars. During the tenure of Aurangzeb, '*Fatawa Alamgiri*' is an excellent compilation on the Hanafi Fiqh . The Turkish Caliphate, which lasted for about 625 years, was largely consisted of the Hanafi rulers. Apart from it, the present sub-continent consisted of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the majority of the Muslims are Hanafi. Afghanistan is also a place where Hanafi Fiqh is implemented.

After 125AH/743AD, when the reign of Yazid An-Naqis came, Iraq's leading Faqih started to be appointed on civil services. Imam Abu Hanifa was also given the post of

Treasurer, but straight away he refused. Yazid insisted and began to force him in every way, but he did not accept at all. Yazid, outraged and ordered that he should be beaten ten lashes every day. This cruel order was followed, still he did not change his mind. Yazid finally gave up and left him free.

In 132AH/750AD, the rule of Banu Umayyad was abolished and Aal-Abbas became the holder of the throne. When Mansoor became the King of Iraq, he also proposed the position of Qazi for Abu Hanifa. Imam turned down for it and continued to deny, so in 146AH/764AD, the King ordered imprisonment for him. During the stay in prison Abu Hanifa started teaching. Imam Muhammad who is known as the master of Hanafi Jurisprudence, continued to meet him and get lessons from him in the prison. Thus, what Mansoor feared from the Imam that remained in the prison as well. At last the King thought to give him poison in ignorance. When Imam felt the effect of poison, he prostrated and died in the prostration state. Thus in 150AH/768AD the Imam was released from captivity upon his death.

On his death, all the Baghdad rushed on his funeral. His popularity can be judged from the fact that his funeral prayers were offered six times. According to the historian, people kept praying for his funeral for 20 days even after the burial. What could be more proof of his popularity.

In 459AH/1067AD, Sultan Alp-Arsalan built a dome on his grave. At the same time he built a school and a lodging house there. Besides, he also built a school, named Madrasa Nizamia, which is now considered as the father of all Islamic institutes. This was the first institute of Baghdad. This school is now famous as "*Mashhad Abu Hanifa*". The place where his tomb is located is still known as "*Azamia*". People are still being benefited and will continue to benefit from the wealth of precious education and knowledge he has distributed.