



The Biography  
*of*  
**Imam Ahmad  
bin Hanbal**

(May Allah have mercy on him)

Salahuddin Ali Abdul Mawjood  
Translated by : Sameh Strauch

**DARUSSALAM**

The Biography of  
**Imam**  
**Ahmad bin Hanbal**

(May Allah have mercy on him)

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*In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent,  
the Most Merciful.*

## **Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal**

### **His Name and His Lineage:**

He is Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal bin Hilal bin Asad bin Idrees bin ‘Abdillah bin Hayyan. His agnomen was Abu ‘Abdillah.

‘Abdullah bin ‘Ata’ said: “Ahmad bin Hanbal and the Prophet ﷺ have a common ancestor, Nizar, because the Prophet ﷺ was one of the descendants of Mudhar bin Nizar and all of Quraish are from Mudhar, while Ahmad bin Hanbal was descended from Rabee’ah bin Nizar, who was the brother of Mudhar bin Nizar. Nizar’s sons were four in number: Mudhar bin Nizar, Rabee’ah bin Nizar, Iyad bin Nizar and Anmar bin Nizar, and from these four all of the Arab tribes are descended.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Al-Asma’i said: “Abu ‘Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal was from Zuhl and his father was a leader.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Muhammad, the ‘father of Abu ‘Abdillah’ was one of the soldiers of Merv<sup>[3]</sup> and he died while still a young man, aged around thirty years. Ibn Al-Jawzi said: “His father was a professional soldier.

Imam Ahmad was originally from Basrah; his grandfather was Hanbal, who was one of the supporters of the ‘Abbasid call and the Governor of

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 20.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 31.

<sup>[3]</sup> Merv: A town in Turkmenistan.

Sarkhas and he was subjected to harm in the course of his calling to the family of Al-'Abbas.

Whether his father was a professional soldier, as some say, or whether he was a leader, as other say, he was a warrior, as all Arabs were at that time; they were not farmers, or craftsmen, but fierce warriors.

So both his father and his grandfather were brave fighters and from them Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - inherited his courage, his steadfastness in supporting the truth and his patient perseverance in the face of adversity and difficulty.

The mother of Abu 'Abdillah Ahmad bin Hanbal was from the Shaibani tribe; her name was Safiyyah bint Ma'moonah bint 'Abdil Malik Ash-Shaibani, from the tribe of Banu 'Amir. His father stayed with them and married her. Her grandfather was 'Abdul Malik bin Sawadah bin Hind Ash-Shaibani, from Banu Shaiban; Arab tribes used to stay with him and he would provide hospitality to them. <sup>[1]</sup>

### **His Birth and His Upbringing:**

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal was originally from Basrah, but his grandfather migrated to Khurasan and there he became the Governor of Sarkhas during the rule of the Umayyads. Then when the 'Abbasid call appeared on the horizon, he supported those who called to it and joined their ranks. His father was situated in Merv and there his mother conceived him; then she went, while carrying him to Baghdad, where she gave birth to him. He was born - may Allah have mercy on him - in the

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 31.

month of Rabee' Al-Awwal, in the year 164 A. H. and there is no dispute regarding his date of birth, since he himself informed us of it. His son, 'Abdullah said: "I heard my father saying: "I was born in the month of Rabee' Al-Awwal, in the year 164."

His other son, Salih said: "He (i.e. his father) was born in the year 164, in the month of Rabee' Al-Awwal and he was carried (in his mother's womb) from Merv."<sup>[1]</sup>

His father died while he was still a young man and Ahmad a small boy, after which he was taken care of by his mother. He spoke of this on one occasion, saying: "I was brought from Khurasan while still a babe in the womb and she gave birth to me here, so I never saw my grandfather or my father."

As we mentioned earlier, his father died while still a young man aged thirty years and his mother took care of him. His son, Salih reported from his father: "She (i.e. his mother) pierced my ears and placed in them two pearls and these she later presented to me and I sold them for thirty dirhams." It is possible that his mother learnt this custom of ear-piercing from Khurasan, because it was not a well-known custom in the lands of the Arabs. Imam Ahmad began to reveal his outstanding qualities from a young age, becoming a scribe from a young age; he said: "I became a scribe when I was a small boy, then I obtained a position in the *Deewan* when I was fourteen years old."

He was known, even as a young boy, for his extreme

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 12.

politeness and good manners, his high moral character, his fine writing and his refusal to pen anything objectionable. Abu 'Afeef said of him: "He was one of the scribes with us when he was a young boy and we acknowledged his virtue. The Caliph was at Ar-Riqqah and the people<sup>[1]</sup> would write letters to their homes; and they would send their women to the master with messages, saying: "Send Ahmad bin Hanbal to us," so that he could write the replies to their letters, and he would come to them with his head lowered and write the replies to their letters. Sometimes, they might dictate something improper or objectionable to him, but he would not write it for them."<sup>[2]</sup>

Abu Siraj bin Khuzaimah was impressed by his politeness and good conduct and he said one day: "I support my children financially and I provide teachers for them, so that they may be educated and well-mannered, but I do not see them becoming so. Yet this boy, Ahmad bin Hanbal, who is an orphan, see how he has turned out!" And he was amazed.<sup>[3]</sup>

The boy Ahmad stood out among his contemporaries, due to his piety, the meticulous attention which he paid to his work, his patience and earnestness and his perseverance in the face of those things which he disliked. He was not a boy who spent his childhood in frivolous pursuits; rather he was a complete man, in spite of his tender years. It is likely that was due to the

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<sup>[1]</sup> That is, the people with him, such as the soldiers, the governors and others would write letters to their families.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 22.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 23.

fact that he was forced to depend on himself so much when he was a child and the independent nature that he had had since his earliest years. These attributes attracted the attention of the scholars with whom he came in contact during this period, to such an extent that Al-Haitham bin Jameel said of him: "If this young boy lives, he will be a cited as an evidence as the people of his time."<sup>[1]</sup>

It is clear that this prediction was fulfilled, for this young boy became a man and lived to the age of seventy-seven years and he was a guiding light to the people of his time, due to his knowledge, his moral character, his piety, his patient perseverance, his great tolerance and his disdain for the harms (which he suffered) for the sake of his beliefs.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **His Description:**

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was a tall man, with a good-looking face and a brown complexion; he was kindhearted and extremely humble. Reports of his actual height varied; some said that he was tall, while others said that he was of medium height. Possibly the reason for these contradictory reports was due to the different ideas of what constitutes "tall" among the people.

Abu Ja'far bin Zareeh Al-'Ukbari said: "I sought out Ahmad bin Hanbal to ask him about a certain matter

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam* by Az-Zahabi, in the biography of Imam Ahmad.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal – His Life and Times, His Opinions and His Jurisprudence* by Az-Zahabi, by Imam Muhammad Abu Zahr, p. 20.

and I sat at the door of the house until he came. Then I stood up and greeted him with salutations of peace and (I saw that) he was a tall, old man, with dyed hair and a very brown complexion.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Muhammad bin Al-'Abbas bin Al-Waleed An-Nahwi was heard to say: “I saw Ahmad bin Hanbal (and he was) a handsome man, of middle height, having hair dyed with unripe henna, not with red. His beard had some black hairs in it. I saw his garments and I observed that he was wearing an ‘Imamah’<sup>[2]</sup> and an ‘Izar.’<sup>[3]</sup> ‘Abdul Malik Al-Maimooni said: “The garments of Ahmad were of an average kind; a typical garment of his would cost about one dinar. He was neither too mild-tempered, nor too quick-tempered.” Al-Fadl bin Ziyad said: “I saw Abu ‘Abdullah wearing two shirts in the winter and a coloured Jubbah<sup>[4]</sup> in between them. Sometimes, he would wear a shirt and a heavy fur, and sometimes, in extremely cold weather, I would see him wearing a fur over a Jubbah. I also saw him wearing an ‘Imamah’ over a Qalansuwah.<sup>[5]</sup> At other times, he would wear a Qalansuwah without an ‘Imamah.’”

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was clean in both his body and his dress; ‘Abdul Malik Al-Maimooni said: “I do not think I have seen anyone

<sup>[1]</sup> Tareekh Dimashq Al-Kabeer, by Ibn ‘Asakir, vol. 5, p. 289 and Tareekh Al-Islam by Az-Zahabi, vol. 18, p. 66.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Imamah*: A headdress, consisting of a piece of cloth wrapped around the head.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Izar*: A garment wrapped around the lower half of the body.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Jubbah*: A long outer garment, open in the front, with wide sleeves.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Qalansuwah*: A type of cap.

cleaner in his dress, nor more meticulous about his personal toilet, such as trimming his moustache and his head hair and removing his pubic hair, nor with cleaner or whiter garments than Ahmad bin Hanbal.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Imam Ahmad possessed an awe-inspiring quality; Muhammad bin Muslim said: “We used to be apprehensive about disputing or debating with Ahmad bin Hanbal in (religious) matters (i.e. because of his loftiness and his meticulous adherence to the religion of Islam).”<sup>[2]</sup>

Al-Hasan ibn Ahmad – the Governor of Al-Jisr – said: “I entered the presence of Ishaq bin Ibraheem and so-and-so and so-and-so (and he mentioned some of the rulers), but I have not seen anyone more awe-inspiring than Ahmad bin Hanbal; I went to him in order to speak to him about something, but I was overcome with shivering when I saw him, due to the awe which he inspired.”<sup>[3]</sup>

‘Abdoos said: “Abu ‘Abdullah saw me one day and I was laughing; and now to this day I feel embarrassed in front of him.”

Abu ‘Ubaid Al-Qasim bin Salam said: “I have sat with Abu Yoosuf, Muhammad bin Al-Hasan, Yahya bin Sa’eed and ‘Abdur-Rahman bin Mahdi but I was not awed by any of them as I was by Ahmad bin Hanbal. I visited him when he was in prison, in order to give

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi and Ahmad bin Hanbal.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib*.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Manhaj* by Ahmad (vol. 1, p. 26) and *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 391.

salutations of peace to him and a man asked me about a matter, but I was so awed by him (i.e. Imam Ahmad) that I did not answer."

### **His Wives:**

Imam Ahmad married late in life, due to his preoccupation with acquiring knowledge, as he informed us himself, when he said: "I did not marry until after my fortieth year." His first wife was Umm Abi 'Abbasah bint Al-Fadl, an Arab woman from Ar-Rabadh, but she did not bear him any children, except one boy, whom they named Salih. Then she died. It has been narrated that she was a woman of good character and that he found her agreeable obedient. He said: "Umm Salih lived with me for thirty years and she and I never had a single disagreement."

When Umm Salih died, he married an Arab woman whose name was Raihanah and she bore him a son, named 'Abdullah.

Ahmad bin 'Abthar relates the story of his marriage to Raihanah in the following words: "When Umm Salih died, Ahmad said to a woman among them: "Go to so-and-so, the daughter of my uncle, and make a proposal of marriage form me to her." She said: "So I went to her and she accepted his proposal." When she returned to him, he said: "Did her sister hear your words?" He said: "And she has only one eye?" She said: "Yes." He said: "Go to her and propose marriage to the one who has only one eye." So she went to her and she accepted the proposal, and she was the

mother of his son, 'Abdullah.<sup>[1]</sup>

It was said that she said to him, a few days after she had taken up residence with him in the marital home: "Do you have any (adverse) comments about me?" He said: "None, except with regard to these shoes which you wear; such shoes were not worn during the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ." So she sold the shoes and bought a torn pair, which she wore."

Az-Zahabi says, in his book *Tareekh Al-Islam Wa Wafayat Al-Mashaheer Al-A'lam* that Imam Ahmad married Raihanah during the lifetime of Umm Salih, not after her death, because Salih was ten years older than 'Abdullah; so if Imam Ahmad lived with Umm Salih for more than thirty years, then he must have married Umm 'Abdullah while Umm Salih was still alive.

When his wife Umm 'Abdullah died, he bought a slave-girl, whose name was Husn.

### **His Children**

#### **1. Salih bin Ahmad bin Hanbal:**

His agnomen was Abul Fadhl and he was Ahmad's firstborn. He was born in the year 203 A. H. and Ahmad loved him and honoured him. Many people narrated from him and he played a major role in spreading his father's jurisprudence. Salih was extremely generous and had a large number of dependents. He was appointed judge in Asfahan and

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam* by Az-Zahabi (vol. 18, p. 95), second edition, 1994 C. E., published by Dar Al-Kitab Al-'Arabi, Beirut.

he died there in the month of Ramadhan, in the year 265 A. H. Salih also had a son, who was a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and his name was Zuhair bin Salih; he narrated on the authority of his father and others and he is considered to be a trustworthy reporter by scholars of *Hadeeth*.

## **2. 'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal:**

His agnomen was Abu 'Abdur-Rahman and he was the foremost narrator of his father's legal verdicts and opinions. He was blessed with a superior memory and Ahmad said of him: "My son, 'Abdullah has been blessed with knowledge of *Hadeeth* (or he said:) memorization of *Hadeeth*."<sup>[1]</sup> He died in the year 290 A. H. and was buried in the graveyard at Bab At-Tibn, and his nephew, Zuhair performed the funeral prayer.

### **His Other Children:**

After Imam Ahmad purchased his slave-girl, Husn, she bore him a daughter named Zainab, whose agnomen was Umm 'Ali. Then she bore him twins, Al-Hasan and Al-Husain; but they died shortly after being born. Then she bore him Al-Hasan and Muhammad and they lived until they were about forty years old. After them, she gave birth to Sa'eed, who was born approximately fifty days before the death of his father. He died a long time after the death of his brother, 'Abdullah.<sup>[2]</sup> bin Al-Jawzi said: "As for Al-Hasan and Muhammad, we do not know anything about them."<sup>[3]</sup>

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[1] *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* and *Tareekh Baghdad*.

[2] *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* and *Tareekh Baghdad*.

[3] *Tareekh Al-Islam*, by Az-Zahabi (vol. 18, p. 97).

## His Quest For Knowledge and His Striving For it

Imam Ahmad's desire for knowledge was apparent from his earliest years; while still a young man, he chose the men of *Hadeeth* and (adopted) their methods. He turned to them, but this does not mean that he rejected completely the works of the scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, such as their legal verdicts, their judgements and their exegesis. On the contrary, he studied them, but they were not of primary importance to him. Commenting on this, Al-Khallal said: "He wrote and memorized the books of (juristic) opinion, then he paid no heed to them."<sup>[1]</sup>

The first person from whom Imam Ahmad narrated *Hadeeth* was Abu Yoosuf; he said: "The first person from whom I wrote down *Hadeeth* was Abu Yoosuf."<sup>[2]</sup> Abu Yoosuf combined the approach of the scholars of juristic opinion with that of the scholars of *Hadeeth*.

Ahmad studied *Hadeeth* from the earliest years of his manhood and once he had resolved to do so, he found no alternative but to acquire knowledge from all of the scholars of *Hadeeth* in Iraq, Ash-Sham and Al-Hijaz. It is probable that he was the first scholar of *Hadeeth* to collect and record the *Ahadeeth* from all of these regions; indeed, his *Musnad* testifies to this fact, for he collected the *Ahadeeth* from Al-Hijaz, Ash-Sham, Al-Basrah and Al-Koofah and listed them in their appropriate categories.

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam* by Az-Zahabi, vol. 18, p. 69.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 26.

It was logical that he should begin by collecting *Ahadeeth* in the city where he lived, which was Baghdad. It was also natural at the start of his academic life that he should need a teacher from whom he could acquire knowledge exclusively, without reference to any other teacher, until such time as he became strong (in knowledge) and his ability to distinguish and select developed. That teacher was Hushaim bin Basheer bin Abi Hazim, who died in the year 183 A. H. Imam Ahmad began learning from him in the year 179 A. H., when he was sixteen years old. Imam Ahmad commented on this allegiance, saying: "We started recorded *Hadeeth* from Hushaim in the year 179 A. H. and we remained with him throughout the years 180, 181, 182 and 183 A. H., in which year he died."<sup>[1]</sup>

"I began to study *Hadeeth* when I was sixteen years old and Hushaim died when I was twenty years old. I first began to hear from Hushaim in the year 179 A. H."<sup>[2]</sup>

After the death of Hushaim, Ahmad began to acquire *Ahadeeth* wherever he could find them and he was extremely avid in doing so. He used to undergo great suffering in the cause of obtaining such knowledge and he said regarding this: "I would sometimes wish to go very early to study *Hadeeth*, but my mother would catch hold of my garment and say: "(Wait) until permission is given to the people (i.e. the students), or until daybreak."<sup>[3]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 29.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 26.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 31.

## Journeys Undertaken in Pursuit of Knowledge

The journeys which Imam Ahmad undertook in pursuit of knowledge in order to acquire knowledge from the men of *Hadeeth* began in the year 186 A. H. He travelled to Al-Basrah, Al-Hijaz, Yemen and Al-Koofah; and his journeys to these places and the hardships which he endured during them prove his keen desire to acquire knowledge and his readiness to exert himself to the utmost and to spend his wealth in pursuit of that goal.

Imam Ahmad travelled to Al-Basrah five times and he would sometimes remain there for six months or longer.

He also made five journeys to Al-Hijaz, the first of which was in the year 187 A. H.; and during this visit, he met Imam Ash-Shafi'i and in addition to the *Hadeeth* of bin 'Uyainah – which had been the object of his journey – he learnt the jurisprudence of Imam Ash-Shafi'i.

He spoke of his journeys to Al-Hijaz as follows: "I performed *Hajj* five times – three times on foot – and during one of these pilgrimages, I spent thirty dirhams and during one of them, I lost the way when I was walking, so I stood in the road and I began to call out: "Oh, slaves of Allah! Show me the way..."<sup>[1]</sup>

He performed *Hajj* on foot in order to carry out the rites of *Hajj*, so that he could get close to the Sacred House of Allah and also learn the *Ahadeeth* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and to study the legal verdicts of his loyal Companions رضي الله عنه.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Ibn Katheer*.

He hoped for the reward of *Hijrah*<sup>[1]</sup> from Allah, for he knew what a great recompense there is for the *Muhajir*<sup>[2]</sup> and so he sought it, and neither long distance nor the difficulties of travelling prevented him from seeking knowledge.

In the year 198 A. H., he decided to go to *Hajj* and after performing the *Hajj* and then staying for a while in the vicinity of the Sacred Mosque, to go to 'Abdur-Razzaq bin Hammam in San'a'. He and his fellow-seeker of knowledge, Yahya bin Ma'een had agreed to do this, so they entered Makkah and while they were performing *Tawaf Al-Qudoom*,<sup>[3]</sup> they saw 'Abdur-Razzaq bin Hammam performing the *Tawaf*. Ibn Ma'een recognized him, for he had met him before and he gave salutation of peace to him and said to him: "This is your brother (in Islam), Ahmad bin Hanbal." To which he replied: "May Allah grant him long life and make him steadfast, for I have heard nothing but good of him." Yahya said: "We will come to you tomorrow, if Allah wills, so that we may hear and write." Then when 'Abdur-Razzaq had left, Imam Ahmad remonstrated with Yahya, saying: "Why did you take an appointment from the *Shaikh*?" Yahya replied: "In order to hear from him; Allah has saved you a month's journey there and a month's journey back and He ﷺ has saved you the expense." Ahmad said: "I do not wish that Allah should see me having forsaken the intention I made (to go to Yemen) because of what you have said, that we should stay

<sup>[1]</sup> *Hijrah*: Migration for Allah's sake.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Muhajir*: One who migrates for Allah's sake.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Tawaf Al-Qudoom*: The circumambulation of the *Ka'bah* made upon arrival in Makkah by the *Hajj* pilgrim.

and hear from him.” So after *Hajj*, he went on to San'a’, where he heard from him.<sup>[1]</sup>

During this journey, he suffered discomfort, illness and poverty, his supplies running out while he was on the road and so he found employment with some baggage carriers until he reached San'a’.

When he arrived in San'a’, ‘Abdur-Razzaq tried to help him, saying: “Oh, Abu ‘Abdullah! Take this and use it, for our land is neither a land of business nor profit.” So saying, he proffered some dinars to Imam Ahmad, but he said: “I am alright.” So he remained in this state of hardship for two years.<sup>[2]</sup>

When Ahmad bin Hanbal returned to Makkah, after visiting ‘Abdur-Razzaq, the signs of tiredness and suffering were clear upon his face and his body, but he was happy at the *Ahadeeth* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ which he had acquired.

Ibraheem Ad-Durooqi: “When Ahmad bin Hanbal returned to Makkah from ‘Abdur-Razzaq, I saw that he was pale and emaciated and the effects of illness and exhaustion were clear upon him, so I said to him: “Oh, Abu ‘Abdullah! You have inflicted much hardship on yourself during your journey to ‘Abdur-Razzaq.” But he replied: “How slight is the hardship compared to the benefit we gained from ‘Abdur-Razzaq; we recorded from him the *Hadeeth* of Az-Zuhri on the authority of Salim bin ‘Abdullah, who reported on the authority of his father and the *Hadeeth*

<sup>[1]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Abu Zahrah, pp. 24 and 25 and *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 34.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Abu Zahrah, p. 25.

of Az-Zuhri on the authority of Sa'eed bin Al-Musayyib, who reported on the authority of Abu Hurairah.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Imam Ahmad did not cease seeking knowledge, even after he had become famous, narrated many *Ahadeeth* and attained the status of Imam. A man from among his contemporaries saw him with an inkwell in his hand from which he was writing and listening. The man said: “Oh, Abu ‘Abdullah! You have achieved this status and you are the Imam of the Muslims.” He replied: “(I will be) with the inkwell until (I go to) the graveyard.”

He also said: “I will seek knowledge until I enter the grave.”<sup>[2]</sup>

He would walk for long distances in order to acquire knowledge; his son, ‘Abdullah said: “My father went Tarsus on foot and he went to Yemen on foot.”<sup>[3]</sup>

He saw no problem in acquiring knowledge from those who had less knowledge than he; he stayed with Yahya bin Sa'eed Al-Qattan, then he travelled to Wasit and Yahya bin Sa'eed asked about him. It was said: “He has gone to Wasit.” He asked: “What will he do with Wasit?” They said: “He is staying with Yazeed bin Haroon.” He asked: “And what will he do while he is with Yazeed bin Haroon?”<sup>[4]</sup> By this, he meant that bin Hanbal was more knowledgeable than bin Haroon.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 37.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 37.

<sup>[3]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya* and *Tahzeeb Al-Kamal* (vol. 1, p. 450).

Among the proofs of his devotion to knowledge, his dedication to acquiring it and his preference for it over the pleasures of this earthly life, is the fact that he was not preoccupied with acquiring money or getting married – he did not marry until he had attained forty years of age and he had acquired the knowledge which he desired.

### **His Influence and Authority in the Fields of (Islamic) Knowledge and Jurisprudence**

Imam Ahmad held a high status as a scholar and other contemporary scholars knew this and acknowledged it, speaking (highly) of him.

Ahmad bin Salamah An-Neesapoori said: “I mentioned Yahya bin Yahya, Ishaq bin Rahawaih and Ahmad bin Hanbal to Qutaibah bin Sa’eed and he said: “Ahmad bin Hanbal is the greatest (in knowledge) of all those whom you mentioned.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Ishaq bin Rahawaih said: “I was sitting with Ahmad bin Hanbal, Yahya bin Ma’een and our companions in Iraq and we were speaking together of *Hadeeth* narrated via one, two or three routes. Yahya bin Ma’een said: “I say, has not this route been declared authentic by a consensus of scholars?” They said: “Yes.” He said: “So I ask, what is intended by it, what is the explanation of it and what is the jurisprudence which may be derived from it?” But all of them remained,<sup>[2]</sup> except Ahmad bin Hanbal.”<sup>[3]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta’deel*.

<sup>[2]</sup> That is, all of them remained silent.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta’deel*.

Muhammad bin Muslim bin Warah was asked about 'Ali bin Al-Madeeni and Yahya bin Ma'een, which of them had memorized the most *Hadeeth*? He replied: "Ali transmitted more *Ahadeeth* and had a more comprehensive knowledge (of *Hadeeth*), while Yahya had a greater understanding of authentic and weak *Ahadeeth*... But the person who combined the attributes of both of them was Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal; he was a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence, he had memorized a great number of *Ahadeeth* and he possessed knowledge and understanding."<sup>[1]</sup>

The scholars' acknowledgement of Ahmad's superior knowledge did not come when he was advanced in years and his hair had turned white; on the contrary, it came when he was a young man, before his hair had turned white. It is reported on the authority of Ahmad bin Sa'eed Ar-Razi that he said: "I have not seen a blacker head of hair (i.e. such a young man), nor a person who had memorized more *Ahadeeth* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, nor one with a greater knowledge of the Islamic jurisprudence derived from them and a greater understanding of their meanings than Ahmad bin Hanbal."<sup>[2]</sup>

Al-Muzani said: "Ash-Shafi'i said: "I saw a young man in Baghdad, who, if he said: "*Haddathana...*"<sup>[3]</sup> the people would all say: "He has spoken the truth." I

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel.*

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam.*

<sup>[3]</sup> That is, "I was told". This an expression commonly used by scholars of *Hadeeth* to indicate that they heard a *Hadeeth* directly from someone.

asked him: "And who was he?" He replied: "Ahmad bin Hanbal."<sup>[1]</sup>

Many scholars were hugely impressed by him, and one senses this in every word they said about him; Ibraheem Al-Harbi said: "I saw Ahmad and it was as if Allah had combined in him the knowledge the ancient peoples and the later generations."

Abu Bakr Al-Athram said: "I have seen a man with a greater knowledge of the *Sunnah* than Ahmad."<sup>[2]</sup>

Abu Ja'far An-Nufaili said of him: "Ahmad was one of the most distinguished leaders of the religion."

And it is reported on the authority of Muhammad bin Nasr Al-Mirwizi that he said: "I met with Ahmad bin Hanbal and I asked him about some matters and (I found that) he knew more *Ahadeeth* than Ishaq bin Rahawaih, that he was more knowledgeable in matters of Islamic jurisprudence than he."

But Ahmad's knowledge was not simply that of a large number of *Ahadeeth*; on the contrary, it was also knowledge derived from reliable sources, which is why 'Amr An-Naqid said: "If Ahmad agrees with me regarding (the authenticity of) a *Hadeeth*, I do not care who disagrees with me."

### **His Polite and Courteous Behaviour in the Presence of His *Shaikhs***

He who understands the value of knowledge appreciates the worth of the teacher and treats him

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam*.

with esteem and conducts himself with courteousness and politeness in his presence. Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - understood more than most people the value of knowledge and its importance, for which reason, he honoured his teachers, held them in high esteem and behaved with courteousness and politeness in their presence. 'Amr An-Naqid said: "We were with Wakee' and Ahmad came and sat down and Wakee' began to praise his humility in his presence." 'Amr said: "So I said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! The *Shaikh* is honouring you; so why do you not speak?" He said: "Even though he may honour me, it is incumbent on me to revere and respect him."<sup>[1]</sup>

Qutaibah bin Sa'eed said: "I arrived in Baghdad with no intention except to meet Ahmad bin Hanbal, and he came to me, accompanied by Yahya bin Ma'een and we talked together for a while, then Ahmad bin Hanbal stood up and came and sat down in front of me and said: "Read this to me." Then we talked for a while, then he stood up and came and sat in front of me, so I said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! Sit in your place." But he said: Do not concern yourself with me, I only wish to take the knowledge in the correct manner."<sup>[2]</sup>

Ishaq Ash-Shaheedi said: "I was watching Yahya Al-Qattan offer the 'Asr prayer, then he leaned on the base of the minaret of his mosque and 'Ali bin Al-Madeeni, Ash-Shazkooni, 'Amr bin 'Ali, Ahmad bin Hanbal, Yahya bin Ma'een and others stood before

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 70.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 71.

him and they asked him about *Hadeeth* while they were standing up, until the time for the *Maghrib* prayer approached; and none of them said: "Sit down, nor did they sit, out of reverence and respect for him."<sup>[1]</sup>

And there is a rare example of this Imam's greatness, his reverence for knowledge and his politeness and courteousness in the presence of scholars, reported by Khalaf, who said: "Ahmad bin Hanbal came to me to hear the *Hadeeth* of Abu 'Awanah and I attempted to seat him in an elevated position, but he refused, saying: "I will not sit except facing you; we were ordered to show humility before those from whom we are learning."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **The Respect and Esteem Which the Scholars Had for Imam Ahmad**

If Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – revered and respected the scholars, they also revered and respected him, due to his knowledge, his piety, his dignity, his awe-inspiring manner and his earnestness and zeal in seeking knowledge and his high moral character.

Ahmad bin Sinan Al-Wasiti said: "I did not see Yazeed bin Haroon honouring anyone the way he honoured Ahmad bin Hanbal, and he used to treat him with respect and dignity and he would not joke with him."<sup>[3]</sup>

When Abul Mugheerah 'Abdul Quddoos bin Al-Hajjaj

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 71.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 71.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel*.

died, Ahmad came forward and offered the prayer over him – and the scholars among the people of Hims were numerous at that time – but they gave preference to Imam Ahmad, although he was still a young man, because of his eminence and the high esteem which they had for him.

Yahya bin Ma'een – in spite of his own elevated status and great knowledge – used to say: "The people wished that I should be like Ahmad bin Hanbal. No, by Allah! I will never be like Ahmad."<sup>[1]</sup>

'Abdur-Rahman said: "I heard my father saying: "I saw Qutaibah in Makkah coming and going and nothing was recorded from him, so I said to the people of *Hadeeth*: "How can you neglect Qutaibah when I have seen Ahmad bin Hanbal in his sitting room?" When they heard this from me, they went to him and recorded his words."<sup>[2]</sup>

Yahya bin Sa'eed Al-Qattan said of him: "No one the like of Ahmad bin Hanbal has come to me."<sup>[3]</sup>

Abul Waleed At-Tayalisi said: "There is no one in the two cities – meaning Al-Basrah and Al-Koofah – more beloved to me than Ahmad bin Hanbal, nor is there anyone whom I esteem more deeply in my heart than him."<sup>[4]</sup>

'Abdullah bin Al-Mubarak – who was a venerable *Shaikh* – told us: "I was in the house of Isma'eel bin 'Ulayyah and someone spoke about something and

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel*.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Tahzeeb Al-Kamal*, vol. 1, p. 449.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Tahzeeb Al-Kamal*, vol. 1, p. 451.

some of us laughed, while Ahmad bin Hanbal was there." He said: "So we went to Isma'eel bin 'Ulayyah and found him in a state of anger, and he said: "Do you laugh, when Ahmad bin Hanbal is here with me?"<sup>[1]</sup>

### His Knowledge of Arabic Language:

No one can claim to be a *Mujtahid*,<sup>[2]</sup> or a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence, or an authority on any branch of Islamic Science, unless he is a scholar of Arabic language, its grammar, inflection and rhetoric; he must also have an expert literary style, a minute knowledge of the language's intricacies and secrets, in order to be able to understand the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ correctly. Such knowledge and understanding does not come to a person unless and until he has studied a great deal of poetry and prose and trains himself with it, so that he only speaks in a manner which accords with the Arabic way of speaking. Thus was Imam Ahmad. It is sufficient testimony for him that a man who was himself a master of the Arabic language, well-acquainted with its secrets and well-versed in its mysteries testified to Imam Ahmad's proficiency and knowledge; and that man was Imam Ash-Shafi'i - May Allah have mercy on him - who said: "Ahmad is an *Imam* in eight fields: He is an Imam in *Hadeeth*, in Islamic jurisprudence, in (Arabic) language, in the

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tahzeeb Al-Kamal*, vol. 1, p. 448.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Mujtahid*: A scholar who is able to apply juristic reasoning to a matter and reach an independent decision based on the interpretation and application of the four *Usool* (Qur'an, *Hadeeth*, *Qiyas* (analogy) and *Ijtihad*).

*Qur'an, in poverty, in ascetism, in piety and in the Sunnah."*<sup>[1]</sup>

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – knew the importance of Arabic language to those who desired to have a broad understanding of the Words of Allah and to unearth the treasures of (Divine) Commandments, Wisdoms and Admonitions, and that is why he engaged himself in writing Arabic, as he said: "I wrote more Arabic than did Abu 'Amr bin Al-'Ala'.

He used to be asked about Arabic expressions in the Qur'an and in the *Sunnah* and he would answer in the most clear and erudite manner. Al-Mirwazi said: "Abu 'Abdullah – Ahmad bin Hanbal – did not use slang in his speech."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **His Lectures:**

Imam Ahmad did not hold teaching sessions or deliver formal legal verdicts until he was an accomplished scholar and word had spread of his God-fearing character, his piety, his modesty and integrity, his devotion to seeking knowledge and his striving to that end, no matter what difficulties he encountered and no matter how far the distances he had to travel.

Imam Ahmad did not deliver formal legal verdicts until after he had attained forty years of age – which was the age at which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ began his Prophetic Mission – but that does not mean that he

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 5.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Kitab Ahmad bin Hanbal* by 'Abdul Ghani Ad-Daqr, p. 78.

did not answer those who asked him questions about certain (Islamic) matters until he reached that age. It was not his intention to conceal knowledge, it was simply that he did not intend to deliver legal verdicts until and hold teaching sessions until that age, when he found a place vacant, which he filled.

It is clear that Imam Ahmad did not hold teaching sessions and deliver legal verdicts until the people started coming to him and asking him questions about *Hadeeth* and Islamic jurisprudence, which obliged him to hold sessions in which he might answer them in the mosque. His excellent characteristics after that caused his fame to grow and increase and the people spread word of his virtue, his diffidence towards that which the administrators and governors had, his care for the sanctity and safety of the Muslims, his humility and the absence of any desire on his part for fame. In addition, the trials which he endured revealed the measure of his steadfastness and the strength of his perseverance and patience and the fact that he would not attribute anything to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ except the truth, even though a sword might be held to his neck – all of this the people knew and so his fame spread and delegations came to him, seeking his knowledge, to such an extent that it was said that the number who listened to his lessons was five thousand and that about five hundred of them used to record (what he said).<sup>[1]</sup> The result of the attendance of this great number of people at his lessons was that there were a great number who narrated his jurisprudence and his *Hadeeth*.

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* and Ibn Hanbal, p. 32.

We should mention at that point that not all of those present were desirous of acquiring Ahmad's knowledge; on the contrary, some of them wished to take advice or admonishment from him, while others came to see the circumstances of this unusual man and to observe his manners, his guidance and his character. It was mentioned in *Al-Manaqib* that one of his contemporaries said: "I visited Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal for twelve years when he was reading *Al-Musnad* to his sons, but I did not write a single *Hadeeth* from him; I was simply drawn to his guidance, his morality and his manners."<sup>[1]</sup>

It is clear that he used to hold two teaching and *Hadeeth* sessions, a private one in his house for his students and his sons and another one in the mosque, which was attended by the ordinary public and by his students. Now if those who attended his lessons were five thousand in number, as it was said, and five hundred of them wrote down (his words), i.e. one tenth of them, then it is clear that it was those who wrote the *Hadeeth* from him and narrated them; and they were his selected students. As for the most select of those chosen students, it was those who used to go to his house and learnt from him with his sons and his family members.<sup>[2]</sup>

His lessons were held in the mosque, after the 'Asr prayer and they were characterized by calmness and solemnity. It was not his nature to make jokes or

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi and *Ibn Hanbal* by Abu Zahrah, p. 33.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal - His Life and Times, His Opinions and His Jurisprudence* by Abu Zahrah, p. 33.

indulge in vain talk and this spread to his teaching sessions; his companions knew this and so they never joked in his presence, whether it was in a teaching session or in any other place. Indeed, even his teachers knew this of him and they did not joke in his presence. Regarding this, Khalaf bin Salim said: "We were sitting in the presence of Yazeed bin Haroon and Yazeed joked with his scribes, and on hearing it, Ahmad bin Hanbal made a coughing sound,<sup>[1]</sup> upon which, he (i.e. Yazeed) struck his forehead and said: "Why did you not inform me that Ahmad was present, so that I might have refrained from joking?"<sup>[2]</sup>

During his lessons, he avoided any kind of levity, for he considered narrating the *Sunnah* to be an act of worship.

Al-Mirwazi – Imam Ahmad's companion – described his lessons as follows: "I have not seen a poor person honoured in any gathering as he was honoured in the gatherings of Abu 'Abdullah. He had a great liking for them, preferring them to the people (who were immersed in the life) of this world. He was a gentle person, and he was neither hasty, nor impatient. On the contrary, he was humble man, endowed with surpassing calmness and dignity. When he sat in his lessons after the 'Asr prayer, he would not speak until he was asked a question."<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> That is, a sound indicating disapproval, as one might say in English: "Ahem."

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal*, p. 33.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam*, by Az-Zahabi and *Ibn Hanbal*, p. 34.

Truly, Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – did not speak unless he was asked, because that had a greater effect on the listener – unless it was from his *Musnad*, for he used to recite that to his sons and his chosen students, without being requested to do so.

Imam Ahmad would not reply to a question until he had referred to his books, in spite of the fact that (i.e. Ahmad) was a *Hafiz*<sup>[1]</sup> and was reliable and trustworthy. Indeed, there is a consensus among narrators that there was no greater *Hafiz*, nor was there anyone more reliable and trustworthy than he in his time.<sup>[2]</sup> As for the legal verdicts in matters of Islamic jurisprudence which he was obliged to give, he did not permit his students to transmit them from him, nor did he permit them to write them down. He considered that knowledge of the religion was confined to knowledge of the Book (of Allah) and the *Sunnah* and that it was an innovation to write down people's opinions in religious matters alongside the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger ﷺ. Nothing made him angrier than to see a book in which his legal verdicts were written – may Allah have mercy on him – and he hated that his companions should transmit his legal verdicts.

### ***Al-Musnad***

The books known as *Masaneed* (plural of *Musnad*)

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Hafiz*: One who has memorized many *Ahadeeth*, along with their chains of narrators and has a profound knowledge and understanding of the science of *Hadeeth* and the study of *Hadeeth* narrators.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Abu Zahrah, p. 35.

differ from the books known as *Sunan* (plural of *Sunnah*). The *Musnad* is a book in which the author has placed the *Ahadeeth* narrated by each companion in separate chapters, each of them under the name of the relevant companion. Among the *Masaneed* are the *Musnad* of 'Abdu bin Humaid, the *Musnad* of Ad-Darimi, the *Musnad* of Abu Ya'la, the *Musnad* of Al-Bazzar, the *Musnad* of Abu Dawood, the *Musnad* of Al-Hasan bin Sufyan, the *Musnad* of Ishaq bin Rahawaih, the *Musnad* of 'Ubaidullah bin Moosa and the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad.

As for the *Sunan*, they are arranged according to topics of Islamic jurisprudence, *Seerah*,<sup>[1]</sup> *Tafseer*<sup>[2]</sup> and other subjects, such as the *Sunan* of At-Tirmizi, the *Sunan* of Abu Dawood, the *Sunan* of An-Nasa'i, the *Sunan* of bin Majah and similar to them is *Al-Jami' As-Saheeh* by Al-Bukhari and *Saheeh Muslim*.<sup>[3]</sup>

Imam Ahmad's *Musnad* was the greatest book of *Hadeeth* in the lifetime of the author and after it and it is an abundant spring of the *Ahadeeth* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the *Ijtihad*<sup>[4]</sup> and sayings of the Companions رضي الله عنهما and some of the *Tabi'oon*.<sup>[5]</sup> In it there are numerous chains of narrators and *Hadeeth* texts which are equivalent to those in *Saheeh Muslim* and indeed, to those found in Al-Bukhari's *Saheeh*, but

[1] *Seerah*: Biography of the Prophet ﷺ.

[2] *Tafseer*: Explanation and commentary of Qur'anic Verses.

[3] *Ahmad bin Hanbal*, by 'Abdul Ghani Ad-Daqr, p. 40.

[4] *Ijtihad*: Juristic reasoning based upon the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence.

[5] *Tabi'oon*: Those who met and learnt from one or more of the Companions رضي الله عنهما, but did not meet the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and who died as Muslims.

they were not narrated by either of them; in fact, none of the compilers of the four books (Abu Dawood, At-Tirmizi, An-Nasa'i, and bin Majah) reported them, as Al-Hafiz bin Katheer said.<sup>[1]</sup>

bin Khallikan said: "He was the leader of the scholars of *Hadeeth*; he compiled his book, *Al-Musnad* and he gathered in it *Ahadeeth* not found in other collections."<sup>[2]</sup>

'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: "I said to my father - may Allah, Most High have mercy on him - : "Why do you dislike the writing of books, when you have made *Al-Musnad*?" He said: "I made this book as an *Imam*, so that if the people disagree regarding the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, they may refer to it."<sup>[3]</sup>

Imam Ahmad said to his son, 'Abdullah: "Take care of this *Musnad*, for it will be as an *Imam* for the people."

Abu Bakr bin Malik said: "I attended a teaching session of Abu Yoosuf Al-Qadi in the year 285 A. H., in order to hear from him *Kitab Al-Wuqoof*, and he said: "Whoever has *Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal*, then (I ask) what is he doing here?" Or he spoke words to that effect."<sup>[4]</sup>

Imam Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - began writing his *Musnad* around the year 200 A. H., when he was aged thirty-six years, after returning from

<sup>[1]</sup> *Ikhtisar 'Ulloom Al-Hadeeth*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Wafayat Al-A'yan*, vol. 1, p. 30.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Khasa'is Al-Musnad*, p. 2.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Ahmad bin Hanbal, Imam Ahlus-Sunnah*, by 'Abdul Ghani Ad-Daqr, p. 41.

'Abdur-Razzaq in San'a'. From more than seven hundred thousand *Ahadeeth* which he had heard during his travels, he selected around thirty thousand *Ahadeeth*, which he narrated on the authority of two hundred and eighty-three of his *Shaikhs*.<sup>[1]</sup> The manner of collection was not based upon arrangement or chapters. He wrote it on separate sheets of paper, in individual sections, in the manner of a rough draft.<sup>[2]</sup> He narrated it to his son, 'Abdullah to be transcribed and arranged in sections and he would order him: "Place this in the *Musnad* of so-and-so and this in the *Musnad* of so-and-so."<sup>[3]</sup> He continued to reread and revise it until the end of his life.

It was not the intention of Imam Ahmad to arrange his book in chapters relating to Islamic jurisprudence (such as purification, prayer, *Zakah*, fasting, *Hajj* etc.); rather, his aim was to classify the *Ahadeeth* which were well-known throughout the Muslim lands, with *Asaneed*<sup>[4]</sup> connected to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, in accordance with the narrators from among the Companions ﷺ.

Imam Ahmad wrote this book – in spite of his well-known dislike of writing books – in order that it might be a source and an authority to which people could refer, in an age when beliefs, philosophies and juristic reasoning had become mixed up; this is why he said: "I made this book as an *Imam*, so that if the people

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Mas'ad Al-Ahmad*.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'* by Az-Zahabi.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Asaneed*: (sing. = *Isnad*) chains of narrators.

disagree regarding the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, they may refer to it.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Around the year 225 A. H., following the trial to which he was subjected,<sup>[2]</sup> Imam Ahmad began letting his sons, Salih and ‘Abdullah and his cousin, Hanbal bin Ishaq listen, as he reviewed his *Ahadeeth* and he ordered ‘Abdullah to remove those narrations which it was evident had some weakness in them, and he continued this until he died. ‘Abdullah attended these readings more than the others and it was he alone who narrated *Al-Musnad* on the authority of his father, after his death.

### **Those Whose *Ahadeeth* Are Included in *Al-Musnad***

Those who *Ahadeeth* are included in *Al-Musnad* are: Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, ‘Ali and the *Imams* among the Companions ﷺ and it ends with the *Masaneed* of the *Ansar*, the Makkans, the Madinans, the peoples of Al-Koofah and Al-Basrah and the people of Ash-Sham. In summary, Al-Hafiz Abu Moosa said: “As for the Companions, they number around seven hundred men and a hundred and odd women, while as for the sons they are eight, according to bin Abza. As for his *Shaikhs* mentioned in *Al-Musnad*, they number two hundred and eighty-three men. In addition to this, we find that for each Companion there is a large amount written about his jurisprudence and his legal verdicts;

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Khasa'is Al-Musnad*, p. 2 and *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*.

<sup>[2]</sup> This is a reference to his imprisonment and torture during the Caliphate of Al-Ma'moon, because he refused to subscribe to the Mu'tazilite doctrine, which declared that the Qur'an was created.

in the *Musnad* of 'Umar ﷺ, for example, there are a number of the legal verdicts which he delivered, while in the *Musnad* of 'Ali and those of 'Uthman, 'Abdullah bin Mas'ood and others, there are great and important legal verdicts from them and judgements made by those of them who were in positions of authority.

It is clear that Imam Ahmad arranged the Companions ﷺ in his *Musnad* based upon a number of considerations: Their precedence, how early was their conversion to Islam, nobility of lineage and the volume of narrations attributed to them. Thus, he began his *Musnad* with the *Masaneed* of the four righteous caliphs, then the remaining Companions from among the ten who were given the glad tidings of Paradise, then the *Musnad* of the members of the Prophet's household, then the *Masaneed* of those Companions who narrated large numbers of *Ahadeeth*, such as the four 'Abdullahs: bin 'Abbas, bin Mas'ood, bin 'Umar and bin 'Amr. Then followed the *Musnad* of the Makkans and the *Musnad* of the Madinans, then that of the people of Ash-Sham, then the people of Koofah, then the people of Al-Basrah, then the *Musnad* of the *Ansar*, then that of the women.<sup>[1]</sup>

In arranging the Companions ﷺ, he followed a number of methods: It was arranged alphabetically, or according to tribe, or how early was their conversion to Islam, or nobility of lineage or other considerations. Some of the *Masaneed* might contain only one Companion, such as that of Abu Bakr ؓ, or

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<sup>[1]</sup> Introduction to the *Musnad* of Iman Ahmad.

they might contain *Ahadeeth* from a number of Companions, such as the *Musnad* of the four and the ten, or a group who had one thing in common, such as the *Musnad* of those who narrated but few *Ahadeeth* and others.<sup>[1]</sup>

Ibn Al-Jawzi said of *Al-Musnad*: "I was informed of the whole of this book – and it is a book of *Hadeeth* the superior of which has not been seen on this earth – from the *Shaikhs* by word of mouth and I was given permission to transmit this knowledge."<sup>[2]</sup>

He also said: "There is no *Hadeeth* which does not have a basis in this *Musnad*."

In *Tareekh Baghdad*, it is written: "The people disagreed regarding the number of *Ahadeeth* and narrations from the Companions ﷺ and the *Tabi'oon*, because the early scholars did not mention the exact number of *Ahadeeth* in it and there is much repetition of some of the routes via which a single *Hadeeth* is narrated, some of them containing some minor differences, which made it difficult for any consensus to be reached. Some people hold that the number is between twenty-eight thousand and twenty-nine thousand, while Abu Bakr bin Malik said: "It is said that the total number of *Hadeeth* comprised in *Al-Musnad* is just thirty or forty short of forty thousand." Abu Bakr Al-Khateeb said: "Ibn Al-Munadi said: "There is no one on earth who narrated more from his father than he (referring to 'Abdullah bin Ahmad) because he heard *Al-Musnad* and it is thirty thousand and the explanations, which

<sup>[1]</sup> *Ar-Risalah Al-Mustatrafah*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Mas'ad Al-Ahmad*, pp. 28-29.

are a hundred and twenty thousand - eighty thousand of which he heard and the remainder of which he acquired from reading, without hearing them directly. (Now I do not know if Ibn Al-Munadi was referring here to those *Ahadeeth* which are not repeated, or whether he meant those which are repeated as well)."<sup>[1]</sup>

### **His Adherence to the *Sunnah***

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – held fast to the *Sunnah* and carefully adhered to the practices of the Companions ﷺ and the *Tabi'oon*, which is why 'Abdul Malik Al-Maimooni said: "My eyes have not befallen anyone better than Ahmad bin Hanbal and I have not seen anyone among the scholars of *Hadeeth* who attached greater importance to the Prohibitions of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Prophet ﷺ than he, if a narration proved to be authentic; and there was no one who adhered to it more strictly than he."<sup>[2]</sup>

Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – used to say: "It (i.e. the religion) is the *Sunnah* and adherence (to it). As for *Qiyas*,<sup>[3]</sup> it is to compare with something that has a basis (in the *Sunnah*). However, to come and destroy the basis and then say: "This is *Qiyas...*" (necessitates the question:) On

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 9, p. 375. (Translator's note: I have checked the aforementioned volume and page in *Tareekh Baghdad* and I found that the words in brackets (Now I do not know if Ibn Al-Munadi etc.) are not present and I have been unable to ascertain the source of them).

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib*, by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 243.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Qiyas*: Deduction in religious matters, based on analogy.

what was this *Qiyas* based?"

On the subject of his adherence to the *Sunnah*, Abu Bakr Al-Athram said: "With regard to the (religious) matters concerning which we heard from Abu 'Abdullah, if there was a *Hadeeth* from the Prophet ﷺ relating to the matter, he would not accept the words of any Companion or of those who came after them, if it contradicted the *Hadeeth*. But if there were differing opinions among the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in any matter, he would select from their opinions (that which appeared correct to him) and he would not leave their opinions in favour of the opinions of those who came after them. But if there were no sayings of the Prophet ﷺ or his Companions ﷺ regarding the matter, he would select from the opinions of the *Tabi'oon* (that which appeared correct to him). Sometimes, there might be a *Hadeeth* from the Prophet ﷺ in his *Musnad* relating to a matter, but there might be some defect in its chain of narrators, but he might still act upon it, if he did not find anything more authentic which contradicted it, and sometimes he might act upon a *Mursal*<sup>[1]</sup> narration, if he did not find anything which contradicted it."<sup>[2]</sup>

He - may Allah have mercy on him - was asked about whisperings (in the heart) and thoughts and he said:

[1] *Mursal*: A narration in which a *Tabi'i* says: "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said such-and-such," or: The Prophet ﷺ did such-and-such," without mentioning that he heard it from one of the Companions ﷺ. Such a narration is considered weak by scholars of *Hadeeth*, since its *Isnad* is broken.

[2] *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 244.

"Neither the Companions nor the *Tabi'oon* discussed them."<sup>[1]</sup>

It was said that because of his strict adherence to the *Sunnah*, he asked his wife's permission to take slave-girl, seeking thereby to follow the *Sunnah*, and she gave it, after which he bought a slave-girl for a moderate price and called her Raihanah.<sup>[2]</sup>

The story of his discussion with 'Abdur-Rahman At-Tabeeb provides a unique example of his strict adherence to the *Sunnah*; he said: "Ahmad bin Hanbal and Bishr bin Al-Harith both fell ill and I visited Bishr and asked him: "How do you find yourself?" And he would glorify Allah, saying: "I praise and thank Allah to you; I find such-and-such." Then I would visit Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal and say: "How do you find yourself, Oh, Abu 'Abdullah?" And he would say: "I am in good stead." So one day, I said to him: "Your brother, Bishr is ill and when I ask him about his condition, he begins by praising and thanking Allah, then he informs me (of his condition)." Upon hearing this, he said: "Ask him from whom he took this?" I said: "I am afraid to ask him." He said: "Say to him that your brother, 'Abu 'Abdullah asks from whom did you take this?" He said: "So I visited him and informed him of what he had said, upon which he said: "Abu 'Abdullah does not accept anything without an *Isnad*."<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 246. (Translator's note: That is to say, they did not speculate about such matters).

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 243.

<sup>[3]</sup> That is to say, he will not accept any words or deeds unless they can be traced via an authentic chain of narrators to the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions ؓ.

It is reported on the authority of Ibn ‘Awn, who reported on the authority of bin Seereen that he said: “When a slave praises and thanks Allah before voicing a complaint, then it will not be a complaint. I only say to you: “I find such-and-such, in order to acknowledge Allah’s Power over me.” He (bin ‘Awn) said: “So I left him and went to Abu ‘Abdullah and informed him of what he had said. After that, I found that if I visited him, he would say: “I praise and thank Allah to you,” then he would mention what ailed him.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Abu Bakr Al-Murawwizi said: “I said to Abu ‘Abdullah: “(Is it correct to say that) whoever died as a Muslim and following the *Sunnah* has died in good circumstances?” He said to me: “Be silent; whoever died as a Muslim and following Islam has died in the best of all circumstances.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Abu Bakr Al-Khallal related: “Al-Marroozi told me: “Ahmad said to me: “I did not write any *Hadeeth* from the Prophet ﷺ except that I acted upon it. As such, when I read a *Hadeeth* in which it was stated that the Prophet ﷺ had *Hijamah*<sup>[3]</sup> performed on him and that he paid Abu Teebah a dinar,<sup>[4]</sup> I (also) paid the *Hajjam*<sup>[5]</sup> one dinar when I had had *Hijamah* done.”<sup>[6]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 113, *Al-Manhaj Al-Ahmad*, vol. 1, p. 276 and *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 246.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 248.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Hijamah*: A medical practice in which an incision is made in the back or the head and blood is drawn out by means of a heated cup.

<sup>[4]</sup> Narrated by At-Tabarani in ‘Al-Kabeer’ and by Al-Bukhari in ‘The Book of Sales’.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Hajjam*: One who performs *Hijamah*.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi.

It was said to Ahmad: "May Allah grant you long life, Oh, Abu 'Abdullah, on (the path of) Islam." He said: "...and the *Sunnah*."<sup>[1]</sup>

### **His High Regard for *Ahlus-Sunnah*:**

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – used to honour and esteem the scholars of *Hadeeth* and there is no doubt that this high regard flowed from his love for the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his respect and admiration for it. His son, Salih said: "I heard my father saying: "Whoever revered the scholars of *Hadeeth* will be held in high regard by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ (on the Day of Resurrection) and whoever despised them, he will be low in the estimation of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, because the scholars of *Hadeeth* are the scribes of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ."<sup>[2]</sup>

Al-Fadl bin Ahmad Az-Zubaidi said, regarding his respect and admiration for the scholars of *Hadeeth*: "I heard Ahmad bin Hanbal say, when the scholars of *Hadeeth* had come with their inkpots in their hands, looking towards the said inkpots: "These are the lights of Islam."<sup>[3]</sup>

Abu 'Imran Al-Makki said: "Ahmad bin Hanbal saw the scholars of *Hadeeth* leaving a *Muhaddith* with their inkpots in their hands and he said: "If these are not the people, then I do not know who are the people."<sup>[4]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah* vol. 1, 249, *Al-Manhaj Al-Ahmad* vol. 1, p. 322 and *Al-Manaqib*, p. 248.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah* (vol. 1, chapter 426) and *Al-Manaqib* p. 248.

Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Abith-Thalj said: "My grandfather told me: "I said to Ahmad bin Hanbal: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! Which is more beloved to you, that a man should write *Hadeeth*, or that he should fast and pray?"<sup>[1]</sup> He replied: "That he should write *Hadeeth*." I asked: "On what basis do you prefer the writers of *Hadeeth* to fasting and praying?" (I prefer the writing of *Hadeeth*) in order that a person will not say: "I saw a people doing something and so I followed them."<sup>[2]</sup>

Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - would not tolerate that any ill should be spoken of the writers of *Hadeeth*; and when any such a thing occurred, intense anger would be apparent in him.

Ahmad bin Al-Hasan said to him one day: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! The scholars of *Hadeeth* were mentioned to bin Qutailah in Makkah and he said: "(They are) a bad people." Upon hearing this, Ahmad stood up and shook his garment, then he said: "(He is) a *Zindeeq*,<sup>[3]</sup> a *Zindeeq*, a *Zindeeq*," then he entered his house."<sup>[4]</sup>

### **His Shunning of the Innovators:**

His shunning of the innovators was closely bound to his love for the *Sunnah* and his adherence to it, for if someone loves the *Sunnah*, he adheres to it; and if a person adheres to the *Sunnah*, he must perforce shun innovation and hate it; and if a person hates a thing, he

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<sup>[1]</sup> Meaning voluntary fasts and prayers.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 249.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Zindeeq*: A heretic or disbeliever.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah* vol. 1, p. 38 and *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 248.

will hate those who do it. For this reason, it was not surprising that Imam Ahmad should shun the innovators and remain distant from them – and we have seen his love for the *Sunnah* and his strong devotion to it.

His son, Salih reported something which confirms his shunning of the innovators, indeed, even those who had contact with them, although they were not themselves innovators; he said: “Al-Hazzami came to my father and he had gone over to bin Abi Dawood, so when he came out and saw him, he closed the door in his face and went back inside.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Abu Dawood As-Sijistani asked Ahmad bin Hanbal: “If I see a man from *Ahlus-Sunnah* with a man from among the innovators, should I stop talking to him?” He said: “No, on the contrary, you should inform him that the person with whom you saw him is an innovator, then if he stops speaking to him (all well and good), but if not, consider him to be with him (i.e. an innovator also). bin Mas’ood ﷺ said: “A person is (known) by the company he keeps.”<sup>[2]</sup>

He – may Allah have mercy on him – considered that knowledge of *Hadeeth* is what protects a Muslim from falling into innovation, which is why he said: “I do not know of any time when the people needed to acquire knowledge of *Hadeeth* more than those living in this time.” He was asked: “And why is that?” He said: “Innovations have appeared, and whoever does not have knowledge of *Hadeeth* will fall into them.”<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 250.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib*, p. 250.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Manaqib*, p. 251.

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – held that the innovators should not be asked for help in any matter relating to the Muslims, because there is the greatest harm in this to the religion, which is why when Al-Mutawakkil asked him about those who assume positions as judges – and among those he mentioned was Ahmad bin Rabah – he wrote about him saying: “He is a *Jahmi*<sup>[1]</sup> and well-known for that. If he undertakes anything relating to the affairs of the Muslims, it will cause harm to the Muslims, because of the beliefs he holds and his innovations.”<sup>[2]</sup>

He was asked about Al-Fath bin Sahl and he spoke similar words concerning him.”

He was also asked about bin Ath-Thalji and he said: “He is an innovator with heretical tendencies.”

And he was asked about Ibraheem bin ‘Attab and he said: “I do not know of him, except that he was one of the companions of Bishr Al-Mareesi, so beware of him, do not get close to him and do not let him have any position over the affairs of the people.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Imam Ahmad’s position regarding declaring the apostasy of those who corrupted the meanings of Qur’anic Verses in a manner not supported by the Companions ﷺ and the early generations of Muslims,

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Jahmi*: Named after the founder of the movement, Jahm bin Safwan, their beliefs included: That Hell is not eternal, that human beings are under compulsion (i.e. have no free will) and negation of Divine Attributes.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib*, p. 252.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Ibid.*

*Al-Murji'ah*,<sup>[1]</sup> *Ar-Rafidah*,<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Qadariyyah*<sup>[3]</sup> and *Al-Jahmiyyah*<sup>[4]</sup> was clear; and although their misguidance had been spoken of previously, he did an excellent job of elucidating the wrongness of their beliefs and practices, of revealing their wicked slanders and of warning against their misguidance.

### The Trial

The cause of the trial to which Imam Ahmad was subjected was the call of Al-Ma'moon (the Caliph) to the scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and *Hadeeth* to support the belief that the Qur'an was created, which

[1] From the linguistic point of view, the meaning of *Murji'ah* is putting off all deeds and actions and isolating these deeds from faith. By this they have given hope for all wrongdoers that their bad deeds are not in conflict with their faith. As such, *Al-Murji'ah* believe that deeds and faith are entirely unconnected and that deeds have neither a positive nor a negative effect on faith.

[2] *Ar-Rafidah*: The Shiites.

[3] *Al-Qadariyyah*: The deniers of Divine Pre-Determination who claimed that Allah has no power over His creation and that mankind is totally independent of His Will and Power. *Al-Qadariyyah* are people who claim that Allah forces us to choose the wrong religion. The sect was initiated at the hands of Ma'bad Al-Juhani, and they denied destiny. Ja'd bin Dirham, another pioneer of the sect, was the first to claim the Qur'an is created. Those Companions who still remained alive – among them 'Abdullah bin 'Umar, Jabir bin 'Abdillah, Abu Hurairah, 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas and Anas bin Malik, abjured *Al-Qadariyyah*. They instructed people not to greet them with salutations of peace, nor to pray over their dead, nor even to visit their sick.

[4] *Al-Jahmiyyah*: This sect of people came out in the last era of Umayyid empire. It belongs to "Jahum bin Safwan" At-Tirmidhi. They deny the names and attributes of Allah, similar to the extremist of *Murji'ah* and *Jabariyah*.

was the belief of the *Mu'tazilah*, whom Al-Ma'moon allowed to get close to him and from whom he took ministers, advisers and close friends, and he adopted their ideas and believed in their views, among which was the belief that the Qur'an was created.

It is reported that the first person who said that the Qur'an was created was Al-Ja'd bin Dirham, during the time of the Umayyad Caliphs. Another of his claims was that Allah did not speak to Moses ﷺ and that He did not take Abraham as His *Khaleel*.<sup>[1]</sup>

Khalid bin 'Abdullah Al-Qasri killed him, at the command of Haroon Ar-Rasheed, on the day of 'Eed Al-Adha, in Al-Koofah and he said in his last sermon: "Go and slaughter your sacrificial animals – may they be accepted – for I am going to slaughter Al-Ja'd bin Dirham." Then he descended and killed him.

The *Mu'tazilah* discussed the view that the Qur'an was created with great zeal and some scholars of Islamic jurisprudence joined with them. The discussion of this view increased during the Caliphate of Ar-Rasheed and they began to call the people to it; but Ar-Rasheed was not among those who encouraged this discussion in matters of beliefs. However, when his son, Al-Ma'moon became Caliph, the *Mu'tazilah* surrounded him and became one of them, heart and soul. When the *Mu'tazilah* realized the position, they suggested to him that it would be a good thing for him to declare his belief that the Qur'an was created and he approved of this idea and he acted upon it in the year 212 A. H, although he left the people free to accept it or reject it as they wished.

<sup>[1]</sup> *Khaleel* : Friend.

However, in the year 218 A. H. – which was the year of his death – it occurred to him to call upon the people, using the power of the Sultan to adopt the belief that the Qur'an was created. He began this by sending his letters from Ar-Riqqah to Ishaq bin Ibraheem, his deputy in Baghdad, letters which contained a test for the scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and *Hadeeth*, forcing them to declare that the Qur'an was created.

Ishaq bin Ibraheem hastened to carry out the wishes of Al-Ma'moon, assembling the scholars of *Hadeeth* and Islamic jurisprudence and those who delivered legal verdicts – among them Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal – and he warned them that they would be severely punished if they did not affirm what was requested of them. Upon this, all of them declared their acceptance of this belief, except four, among whom was Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal – may Allah have mercy on him – then two of them changed their minds and Muhammad bin Nooh remained with Imam Ahmad, both of them insisting that the Qur'an was not created.

Salih bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: "My father and Muhammad bin Nooh were taken in chains and we went with them to Al-Anbar. Abu Bakr Al-Ahwal said to my father: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! If you are faced with the sword, will you answer (i.e. accept)?" He said: "No."

Thus Imam Ahmad and Muhammad bin Nooh were taken in chains to Tartoos, but it was Allah's Will that Al-Ma'moon died before Ahmad bin Hanbal was brought to him.

Salih bin Ahmad said: "My father said: "We went to Azanah<sup>[1]</sup> and then we went on from there in the middle of the night and its gate was opened for us, upon which a man entered and said: "News! The man (i.e. Al-Ma'moon) has died."

On the road, Imam Ahmad's fellow captive, Muhammad bin Nooh died. Salih bin Ahmad said: "When my father and Muhammad bin Nooh reached Tartoos, they were sent back in chains and when they arrived at Ar-Riqqah,<sup>[2]</sup> they were taken by ship and upon arrival in 'Aanat,<sup>[3]</sup> Muhammad bin Nooh died and his bonds were removed and my father prayed over him.

Hanbal bin Ishaq said: "I heard Abu 'Abdullah - Ahmad bin Hanbal - saying: "I have not seen anyone so youthful and having so little knowledge who was more true in following Allah's religion than Muhammad bin Nooh and I hope that Allah has written good for him. He said to me one day: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! Allah! Allah! You are not like me; you are a man whose example is followed and the people have stretched out their necks to you to hear what you will say, so fear Allah and hold firm for His religion..." or words to that effect. Then he died, so I prayed over him and buried him..." I think he said at 'Aanah."

<sup>[1]</sup> Azanah: A well-known seaport near Al-Maseesah. ('Mu'jam Al-Buldan', vol. 1, p. 132).

<sup>[2]</sup> Ar-Riqqah: A well-known town on the Euphrates river, on the eastern side. (*Mu'jam Al-Buldan* vol. 3, p. 85).

<sup>[3]</sup> 'Aanat: A well-known town which lies between Ar-Riqqah and Maheet. It overlooks the Euphrates and in it is located a Al-Qal'ah Al-Haseenah (the Fortified Castle), which is also known as 'Aanah. (*Mu'jam Al-Buldan*, vol. 3, p. 85)

Imam Ahmad was then taken in chains to Al-Mu'tasim and they began to argue with him and Al-Mu'tasim urged one scholar after another to reply to what he said. He was taken to Ishaq bin Ibraheem, who said to him: "Oh, Ahmad! By Allah, it is your life. He will not kill you by the sword; he has sworn that if you will not answer him (i.e. accept this belief), he will have you beaten repeatedly and he will kill you in a place where you will see neither sun nor moon. Did not Allah say: "We verily have made it a Qur'an in Arabic."<sup>[1]</sup> Would it be "made" if it was not something created?" Ahmad said to him: "'And He made them like an empty field of stalks.'<sup>[2]</sup> Did He then create them (like an empty field of stalks)?" Ishaq remained silent.

Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - related: "When we reached the well-known place at Bab Al-Bustan, I went out and a riding beast was brought and I was carried on it, while the chains were still on me and I had no one with me to hold onto me; more than once, I nearly fell on my face, due to the weight of the chains. Then I was brought to the residence of Al-Mu'tasim and I was placed in a room and the door was locked on me. This was in the middle of the night and there was no light in the house. I wanted to perform ablution for prayer, so I stretched out my hands and found a vessel in which there was water, so I performed the ablution and prayed. The following morning, I removed the waistband from my

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Soorah Az-Zukhruf* 43:3.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Soorah Al-Feel* 105:5.

*Saraweele*<sup>[1]</sup> and I fastened it around my chains, so that I could carry them, then I folded up my *Saraweele*. Then the messenger of Al-Mu'tasim came and said: "Answer (i.e. accept)." Al-Mu'tasim ordered the scholars to argue with him and turn him away from his view, but he did not change his opinion, nor did he waver. Al-Mu'tasim said to him: "Woe to you! Answer me with something which will give me the smallest opening through which I may free you." But Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – said: "Give me something from the Book of Allah and I will take it back. These attempts to dissuade Imam Ahmad from his opinion continued, sometimes through persuasion and sometimes through intimidation and threats, but neither approach was of any avail. Then when Al-Mu'tasim had despaired of changing his opinion, he ordered his two torturers to advance, upon which they advanced and (one at a time,) inflicted two stripes on him, after which, he would withdraw and throughout this, he would say: "Be vigorous, may Allah cut off your hand."

The situation continued thus, the first torturer advancing and inflicting two stripes, after which the second torturer would advance and do likewise and they kept on until he lost consciousness – for he was fasting – and the blood ran from his shoulders. He was flogged time after time, and each time, he was not left until he fainted and he was pricked with a sword, but he did not feel anything.

Hanbal bin Ishaq said: "I heard Abu 'Abdullah saying:

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Saraweele*: Long pants worn under an outer garment.

"I lost consciousness many times, and each time, when the beating ceased, I would return to my senses, and if I slumped and fell, the beating would cease and this happened to me many times."

This was repeated, along with his imprisonment for around twenty-eight months, then when they despaired of him and some feelings of compassion stirred in their hearts, they released him and returned him to his home.

Salih said: "My father returned to his house and in the morning, someone came to him, wishing to see his wounds and treat them and he looked at him and said: "By Allah, I have seen persons punished with a thousand lashes, but I have not seen a beating more severe than this; it has been inflicted on him from the back and from the front." Then he inserted a probe into those wounds and he said: "There is no end to them." Then he began to treat his wounds. His face had been struck in more than one place. He continued to treat him for as long as Allah willed, then he said: "Here is something that I wish to cut." So he caught hold of the flesh and began to cut it with a knife, throughout which Imam Ahmad was patient, by Allah's Grace. After this, he recovered, but he continued to suffer pain in certain places and the scars from the beating remained visible on his back until he died.

So Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – returned to his home, but his wounds made him weak and the repeated, severe beatings along with his sojourn in the prison had exhausted him.

Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – remained in his home after returning to it in a state of weakness, having no strength to walk and his classes and *Hadeeth* narration remained suspended until his wounds had healed, his strength had returned and the effects of this trial and the pains caused by the torture had diminished. The scars and traces of the wounds which covered his body bore testimony to man's inhumanity to his fellow man, but in spite of them, Imam Ahmad returned to his classes and to his teaching in the mosque until Al-Mu'tasim died and Al-Wathiq became Caliph.

Al-Wathiq recommenced the trial upon Imam Ahmad, but he did not use a whip to beat him as Al-Mutasim had done, because he saw that that increased his stature among the people and increased his fame, in addition to the fact that it angered the populace. For these reasons, Al-Wathiq did not reinstitute corporal punishment against him; instead, he banned him from associating with the people and he said to him: "Do not gather any persons in your presence and do not stay in any town in which I am present." So Imam Ahmad remained in his house and he did not go out to prayer or anywhere else.

Hanbal bin Ishaq spoke of this, saying: "During the reign of Al-Wathiq, Ya'qoob came to us by night with a letter from Ishaq bin Ibraheem to Abu 'Abdullah, (which stated that):

"The Governor informs you that the Commander of the Faithful has spoken of you and (he has ordered that) no one may gather to you, that you may not stay

in the same land with him, nor any city in which he is residing. So go to any land you wish."

So Abu 'Abdullah remained hidden in his house for the remainder of Al-Wathiq's life. This trial occurred during the time in which Ahmad bin Nasr was killed, so Abu 'Abdullah remained hidden in nearby houses of others, then he returned to his own house in secret and he hid there, not coming out to prayer or for any other reason, until Al-Wathiq died.

Due to this, Ahmad was cut off from his studies for a period of time spanning more than five years, until the year 232 A. H., after which he returned to his teaching and narration of *Hadeeth*, honoured and respected.

There is no doubt that this trial increased Imam Ahmad in celebrity and prestige, raised his status in the hearts of those who loved him and made him a symbol of courage, steadfastness and fortitude in the face of injury and offence.

Abu Zur'ah said: "I used to hear the people speak well of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and speak more highly of him than of Yahya bin Ma'een and Abu Khaithamah, but they praised him even more highly after he had been put to trial. After that, his praises were sung to the skies."

### **The Principles of Deriving Conclusions in Hanbalite Jurisprudence**

Each school of Islamic jurisprudence has four principles upon which its legal verdicts are based, but bin Al-Qayyim mentioned the principles on which Imam Ahmad based his legal verdicts and they are

five in number:

1. The first is the evidences (of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*); and if he found some evidence there, he would rule in accordance with it and he would pay no regard to anything which contradicted it, which is why he gave preference to textual evidence (from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*) over the verdicts of the Companions ﷺ. An example of this is the fact that he paid no heed to the sayings of Mu'az and Mu'awiyah رضي الله عنهما regarding the appointing of Muslims as heirs to non-Muslims, due to the *Hadeeth* which forbids this.
2. The second principle is the legal verdicts given by the Companions ﷺ, if no verdicts contradicting them are known. So if he found that some of them have given legal verdicts and he did not know of any verdicts contradicting them, he would not abandon them in favour of the verdicts of others.
3. The third principle is from the principles mentioned by bin Al-Qayyim, which is that if the Companions ﷺ disagreed, he would select from their sayings that which seemed closest to the Book (of Allah) and the *Sunnah* and he would not deviate from their opinions. If it did not appear to him that any of them was in agreement with the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, he would report that there was a difference of opinion and he would not pronounce in favour of any of their sayings.
4. The fourth principle is acting upon *Mursal* narrations and weak *Ahadeeth* if there is nothing in the matter which refutes it; and it was he who

gave preference to it over *Qiyas*.<sup>[1]</sup> It should be added that what he meant by weak was not that which is false, nor that which is deemed objectionable, nor that which contains in its chain of narrators persons accused (of lying, dishonesty, fabricating *Ahadeeth* etc.) and whose narrations it is not permissible to accept. bin Al-Qayyim mentioned that many scholars had accepted this principle.

5. The fifth principle was mentioned by bin Al-Qayyim and that is *Qiyas*. If Imam Ahmad had no evidence (from the Qur'an or the *Sunnah*), nor any saying of the Companions ﷺ in a matter, nor any *Mursal* or weak narration, he would resort to *Qiyas*.

Imam Abu Zahrah commented on this classification, saying that:

1. The first principle, which is the textual evidences in fact consists of two principles, and they are the Book (of Allah) and the *Sunnah*, because evidence comes either from the Book (of Allah), or from the *Sunnah*, but he did as Ash-Shafi'i had done before him, considering them as one thing, because the position of the *Sunnah* in relation to the Book (of Allah) is that it explains it and makes its whole meaning clear. So both of them share a common status, which is why the explanation of it is from the explanation of the Noble Book (of Allah).
2. The second principle includes the third, and that is

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Qiyas*: Deduction by analogy.

a legal verdict given by a Companion ﷺ when he disagrees with another Companion ﷺ and they are the verdicts of all the Companions ﷺ in matters upon which there is agreement and those in which there is differing.”

The fourth principle which he mentioned was that accepting a *Hadeeth* which is *Mursal* and weak is included in the citing of texts as evidence. Although Ibn Al-Qayyim made it abundantly clear that in the arrangement of evidences which may be cited one may not give precedence to a *Mursal* or weak *Hadeeth* over the verdict of a Companion ﷺ and widely reported, authentic evidences are given preference over the verdict of a Companion ﷺ, this does not prevent it being included in the evidences, and in fact, the word *Sunnah*, according to Ahmad, includes the widely reported, authentic *Ahadeeth*, the verdicts of the Companions ﷺ and *Mursal* and weak *Ahadeeth*.

So the principles which bin Al-Qayyim mentioned may be considered as four, and they are: The Book (of Allah), the *Sunnah*, the legal verdict of a Companion ﷺ and *Qiyas*.

### *Al-Maslahah Al-Mursalah:*

*Al-Maslahah Al-Mursalah* is from his principles which were not mentioned by bin Al-Qayyim and it means, in the parlance of the scholars of *Usool Al-Fiqh*<sup>[1]</sup> a benefit for which no law was legislated by the Legislator (Allah) in order that it be attained and for

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Usool Al-Fiqh*: Fundamental principles of Islamic jurisprudence.

which there is no legal evidence to indicate that it is valid or invalid. It is known as general, because it is not tied to any evidence which would indicate that it is valid or invalid.

Examples of this would include the benefit for whose attainment the Companions ﷺ legislated the use of prisons, or the minting of coins, or other benefits which necessities, needs or advances dictated, and for which no laws had been legislated.

The evidence for *Al-Maslahah Al-Mursalah* is that the Companions ﷺ and the *Tabi'oon* passed many laws in order to attain general benefits: Abu Bakr ؓ collected the dispersed pages on which the Qur'an was written, he made war on those who refused to pay *Zakah* and he appointed 'Umar ؓ as his successor. 'Umar ؓ forbade that shares from *Al-Fai'*<sup>[1]</sup> be given to those whose hearts were inclined towards Islam, he imposed land tax, established the *Deewans*. 'Uthman ؓ united the Muslims upon one recitation of the Qur'an, distributed it and burnt the others and he granted a share of inheritance to the ex-wife of a man who had divorced her merely to prevent her from inheriting from him.

As for Imam Ahmad, he acted upon them in legal policy in general and that was the path the Imam pursued in order to improve the people, to make them do that which was beneficial and to steer them away from that which was harmful and he determined certain punishments for those who fell into the latter, even if there were no textual evidences (from the

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Fai'*: Spoils obtained without fighting.

*Qur'an and Sunnah*) to support them. The companions and students of Ahmad progressed far in the field of legal policy and they delivered many legal verdicts, whose foundation was the benefit of the society, relying on the fact that benefit was a fundamental principle for the establishment of just Islamic law and the protection of Islamic society. An example of this was the killing of one who spies on the Muslims, if necessity dictated that he be killed. But in order that benefit should not be used as a means for following vain desires or treating the people with injustice, he said that it was absolutely essential that three conditions be met:

1. The first is that the benefit is genuine, not imaginary, and that some advantage is obtained from it or some harm is prevented by it.
2. The second is that the benefit is general, so that advantage obtained by it affects the greatest number of people.
3. The third is that the legislation of this benefit does not conflict with any law or principle confirmed by textual evidence (from the *Qur'an and Sunnah*) or by the consensus of Islamic scholars (*Ijma'*).

### *Al-Istishab :*

The meaning of *Al-Istishab* is that what was confirmed in former times, the fundamental principle is that it should remain in force in the present and in the future; it was taken from the Companions رضي الله عنه and so it should remain, as long as there is nothing which would change it. Thus, it was said: The ruling of so-and-so

was made in the past and all that was in the past should not be thought to be non-existent.

So if the *Mujtahid* is asked – concerning a matter relating to conduct or behaviour towards others, not worship – about a ruling and he does not find any textual evidence in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, nor does he find any legal evidence which might be applied to its ruling, he should declare that contract or action to be *Mubah*,<sup>[1]</sup> based upon the fact that the principle regarding things is that they are *Mubah*, and that is the state in which Allah created all that is in the earth; so if there is no evidence to alter that state, then the thing remains in its original state of *Ibahah*.<sup>[2]</sup>

This is a jurisprudential principle, which is relied upon by the Hanbalite scholars, in compliance with the teachings of their *Imam*, since it was one of the principles of legal verdicts in his view. This is because when the Legislator (Allah) commissions the slaves with something, everything which is identified as a means to carry out that thing becomes obligatory along with it, while, if He forbids the people from something, then all that leads to its commission is also forbidden. This is confirmed by examination of those things which Allah has ordained for us to do and not to do; we find, for example, that the Legislator (Allah) forbids something and He forbids all that leads to it and He commands something and He enjoins all that leads to it. He commanded that prayer be performed in congregation and He commanded that we hasten to

[1] *Mubah*: Permissible, i.e. neither obligatory, nor recommended, nor forbidden, nor disliked.

[2] *Irshad Al-Fuhool* by Ash-Shawkani (*Ibahah*: Being *Mubah*.)

it and commanded us to abandon trade, because abandoning trade is necessary in order to hasten to prayer. He commanded people to love one another and He forbade them to hate one another and to be disunited and He forbade all that leads to such things; for example, He forbade that a person should make a proposal of marriage while the woman is considering the proposal of his Muslim brother, or to submit an offer for something, while his brother has already submitted an offer for it. This is because such behaviour is the cause of mutual hatred, which Allah has forbidden. The Prophet ﷺ forbade the cutting off of hands during battle, because the thief might meet with the enemy and he might spy on the Muslims and reveal their secrets.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **His Devoutness and His Piety:**

Ahmad bin Hanbal was renowned for his piety, for he devoted his whole life to Allah, night and day, his silence and his speech, his time at home and the time he spent on the road. He was seldom seen except fasting, standing at night in prayer, reciting the Book of Allah, seeking knowledge, sitting teaching the people, or migrating in Allah's cause. His food was little and his sleep was short, his silences were long and his perseverance in Allah's cause was great.

Ahmad bin Hanbal – may Allah have mercy on him – used to mention Allah in times and places where none would mention Him except those whose hearts are filled with love and remembrance of Allah and from whose hearts He is never absent. And those whose

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Abu Zahrah.

hearts and souls are filled with (love and remembrance of) Allah see Him (i.e. see His Hand) in everything and mention Him before every speech and every action.

His son, Salih said: "My father would not let anyone draw the water for his ablution but himself and if the bucket came out full, he would say: "All praise and thanks be to Allah." I said: "Oh, my father! What is the benefit in this?" He said: "Oh, my son! Have you not heard Allah, the Almighty, the All-powerful say: "Say (Oh, Muhammad): "Tell me! If (all) your water were to be sunk away, who then can supply you with flowing (spring) water?"<sup>[1]</sup>

The narrations reported concerning the devoutness of Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – confirm that his whole day was devoted to worshipping Allah. Regarding this, his son, 'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: "My father used to offer three hundred *Rak'ahs* of prayer every day and night, then when he became ill due to those beatings which had weakened him, he would offer a hundred and fifty *Rak'ahs* every day and night and he was almost eighty years of age. He also used to recite seven (sections of the Qur'an) each day and he would complete the recitation every seven days. He would also complete the recitation (of the Qur'an) in seven nights, as he did during the day. Sometimes, he would offer the '*Isha'* prayer and then have a light sleep, after which he would stand up to offer the night prayer and supplicate until the morning."<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> Soorah 'Al-Mulk 67:30.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*.

Ja'far bin Abi Hashim reported: "I heard Ahmad bin Hanbal saying: "I completed the recitation of the Qur'an in one day and I counted the places in which patience is mentioned and they were more than ninety..."

The reports of his patient perseverance in worship and his constancy in praying, fasting and reciting the Qur'an are numerous, among them is the story related by Ibraheem bin Hani' of the time when Abu 'Abdullah hid from the Sultan and he hid in his house, after which he said: "I have not seen anyone more abstemious, more devout in worship, nor anyone who exerted himself more (in Allah's cause) than Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal. He would fast during the day and he would hasten to break his fast, then he would perform a number of *Rak'ahs* after *'Isha'*, then he would have a light sleep, after which he would get up and purify himself and he would continue praying until *Fajr* time. Then he would offer a *Witr* prayer of one *Rak'ah*. This was his custom throughout the time he remained with me. I did not see him slacken for a single night and I was unable to keep up with him in worship; and I did not see him fail to fast except on one day, when he did not fast in order to have *Hijamah* performed on him."<sup>[1]</sup>

When Ahmad grew old, (it was as if) he was racing against time and he increased his worship; all of his words and deeds said: "I am preparing for the journey (to the Hereafter), in order to increase my provisions for a long trip." Isma'eel bin 'Abdullah Al-'Ajali

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 385.

related this, saying: "I came to Abu 'Abdullah for the last time and he came out and sat in the hallway and I said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! I used to see you holding back from certain things in Islamic jurisprudence – do you have some saying regarding them?" He replied: "Oh, Abu An-Nadr! This is the time for endeavour, this is the time for action." And he continued in this vein until we stood up."<sup>[1]</sup>

His son, 'Abdullah said: "I saw my father when he became old becoming more assiduous in reciting the Qur'an and increasing the number of prayers he performed between the *Zuhr* and *'Asr* prayers and whenever I entered his presence, he would stop praying and then sometimes he would speak and sometimes he would remain silent. If I observed that (his silence), I would withdraw and he would continue his prayers and I also observed him quietly reciting the Qur'an."<sup>[2]</sup>

This does not mean that he was remiss in his worship until he felt that he had little time left in this world; on the contrary, worship and piety were his habit from the time of his youth. Ibraheem bin Ash-Shammas said: "I knew Ahmad bin Hanbal when he was a young boy and he used to spend the nights in prayer."<sup>[3]</sup>

Ahmad's whole life – from his earliest years until he departed this life – was devoted to Allah.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[2]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 385.

### His Ascetism:

Ascetism (*Zuhd*) means to abstain with one's heart from the life of this world and it is the pinnacle of every act of worship; thereby the heart is emptied of the distractions of this worldly life, Allah, Alone is honoured and revered, one becomes independent of all created things, and finds pleasure in the unexpected and does not dwell on the affairs of this earthly life.

Ascetism is of two types: Abstaining from that which is forbidden – and that is obligatory – and abstaining from that which is permissible – and that is virtue.<sup>[1]</sup>

Imam Ahmad described ascetism as follows: It is for a person not to be happy when it – i.e. (the pleasures of) the life of this world – comes to him and not to be sad when it departs from him. He was asked about a man who has a thousand dinars with him, can he be an ascetic (*Zahid*)? He replied: "Yes, on condition that he does not become happy if it increases and he does not become sad if it decreases."

Imam Ahmad wrote a great book on ascetism, the like of which has not previously or since been seen.

Imam Ahmad was renowned for his ascetism; indeed, he was a model of ascetism and abstinence from the (pleasures) of this life and his soul was averse to its adornments and its deceptive fineries. This ascetism was apparent in his food, his drink, his accommodation and his lectures.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Ahmad bin Hanbal, the Imam of Ahlus-Sunnah by 'Abdul Ghani Ad-Daqr, p. 214

Abu Dawood said: "In the later lectures of Ahmad, nothing was mentioned pertaining to the life of this world and I never saw Imam Ahmad mention the life of this world."<sup>[1]</sup>

And because the life of this world held no value to him – indeed, it was in his eyes a barrier between him and the bliss of Paradise – he was happy when his hand held nothing of it.

His son, Salih said: "My father said to me one day: "If I have not even a small coin, I am happy."

'Ali bin Al-Madeeni said: "I entered the house of Ahmad bin Hanbal and his home was exactly as the home of Suwaid bin Ghafalah was described, with regard to its simplicity and humbleness."<sup>[2]</sup>

The ascetism of Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was genuine, flowing from his sincere desire for that which is with Allah and a profound understanding of the life of this world, of its brevity and its limited pleasures. Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was not forced to live an abstemious life due to unavoidable poverty; on the contrary, the life of this world sought him and he fled from it. Ascetism was a form of worship in his eyes and a philosophy of life.

Nasr bin 'Ali said: "The position of Ahmad bin Hanbal in the Hereafter would be better, because the life of

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 10, p. 329.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 174. Suwaid bin Ghafalah was one of the most eminent *Tabi'oon*, who was renowned for his ascetism.

this world came to him and he rejected it.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Ahmad bore poverty with patience for seventy years; millions knocked at his door, with the objective of turning him from a poor man into the richest of men, but he refused. When Ibraheem bin Mattah As-Samarqandi asked Abu Muhammad ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abdur-Rahman about Ahmad bin Hanbal and whether he was an Imam, to which he replied: “Yes, by Allah! Truly, Ahmad patiently bore poverty for seventy years.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Just as Ahmad refused to embrace the life of this world and to have any fondness for it, he disliked it for his family also. His son, Salih said: “Sometimes we would buy something and we would hide it from him, so that he would not see it and rebuke us for it.”<sup>[3]</sup>

One day, Imam Ahmad entered the house of his son, Salih after Salih had changed the ceiling of his house, decorating it with red and green material; when he observed that, he called him and reminded him of the narration of Al-Hasan, in which he said: “Al-Ahnaf bin Qais returned from a journey and found that they had changed the ceiling of his house and they said to him: “Do you not see the ceiling of your house?” He replied: “My apologies to you; I did not see it. I will not enter until you change it.”<sup>[4]</sup>

His son, ‘Abdullah said: “I was sitting with my father

<sup>[1]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'* vol. 9, p. 18.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 330 and *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 176.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel*, vol. 1, p. 306 and *Al-Manaqib*, p. 331.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Manaqib Ahmad bin Hanbal* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 331.

one day and he looked at my feet and saw that they were smooth, without cracks and so he said: "What are these feet? Why do you not walk barefoot, so that your feet become rough?"<sup>[1]</sup>

He – may Allah have mercy on him – used to advise his friends to be abstemious in the life of this world, because its days are numbered and its pleasures will fade away. On one occasion, he advised Shuja' bin Makhlad Al-'Attar, saying: "Oh, Abul Fadhl! It is food without food and clothing without clothing and they (the days of this life) are but few."<sup>[2]</sup>

He disliked to meet with those who presented the life of this world in a favourable light to him and attempted to induce him to partake of its delights. On one occasion, Ahmad bin 'Eesa Al-Misri entered his presence, accompanied by a people who were speaking about the army and Ahmad bin 'Eesa said to him: "What is (the reason for) this sadness, Oh, Abu 'Abdullah? Islam is the true religion; it is tolerant and forbearing, (and it is) a spacious house." Imam Ahmad – who was lying down – looked at them and when they had gone out, he said: "Look at these people! I do not want any of them to enter my presence."<sup>[3]</sup>

This was not surprising in a man who said: "My happiest day is one on which I awake and I have nothing."<sup>[4]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Ahmad bin Hanbal* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 334.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 171.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 332 and *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*, vol. 11, p. 325.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 334.

### Ahmad bin Hanbal's Modesty:

Imam Ahmad was modest and content and he rejected that which was in the hands of the people. This attribute is strongly connected to ascetism, because when a person rejects the life of this world, his needs are less; and if his needs are less, he is content with but little and he turns his attention away from what is in the hands of the people. Likewise, the abstemious soul is naturally connected to high ideals and it is hurt by having to lower its head and ask people, or to bend its back and accept what is extended to it, even if it is given willingly and happily. Ahmad bin Hanbal turned his soul away from the pleasures of this life in which there is no humility, so is it likely that he would extend his upturned palm and that he would accept gifts of charity?

The stories of his modesty are amazing and in them there is a profound lesson for every Muslim and a unique example of self-respect, honour and holding oneself aloof from that which is deemed dishonourable and diminishes one's reputation.

Ibn Al-Jarawi said: "I went to Ahmad bin Hanbal and said to him: "Here is a thousand dinars; buy some food for the children with it." But he refused to accept it." He said: "He respected me and when I said this to him, he said: "I prefer that if you need anything that you do not come to me. But if you wish to ask me about something, you may send a message to me." So I stayed away from him."<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Ahmad bin Hanbal* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 331.

Muhammad bin Moosa bin Hammad Al-Barbari related: "Al-Hasan bin 'Abdil 'Azeez Al-Jarawi's inheritance was conveyed to him from Egypt and it amounted to a hundred thousand dinars. He took three bags, each containing a thousand dinars, to Ahmad bin Hanbal and he said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! This is from a lawful inheritance; take it and use it for your family." But he said: "I am not in need of it. I have sufficient." So he returned it and did not take anything from it."<sup>[1]</sup>

And when Ahmad bin Hanbal went to Yemen to acquire knowledge from 'Abdur-Razzaq, he used the little money he had with him and his companions offered him some dirhams, but he did not accept them and he instead took up with some camel-herders and on one occasion, he pledged his shoes as a deposit with a baker, in exchange for some food which he took from him and 'Abdur-Razzaq offered him a substantial amount of dirhams, but he did not accept them.<sup>[2]</sup>

He – may Allah have mercy on him – preferred to work with his hands – even as a porter, or a maker of waistbands – rather than to take charity from anyone.

Ishaq bin Rahawaih – who was with 'Abdur-Razzaq in Yemen – said: "I observed that his resources were exhausted and I offered him something, but he refused it. I said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! If you wish, take a loan and if you wish, (take) a gift." But he refused and I

<sup>[1]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 175 and *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 317.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 175, *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel*, vol. 1, p. 301 and *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 310.

looked and saw that he was sewing waistbands and selling them and supporting (himself)."<sup>[1]</sup>

Ahmad bin Hanbal was not tempted by the largest sum of money offered to him, nor did it weaken his resolve. Muhammad bin Sa'eed At-Tirmizi said: "One of our friends came from Khurasan and he said: "I have sold some goods and I intend to give the profit to Ahmad bin Hanbal; the profit is ten thousand dirhams, so I will take it to him." He (the narrator) said: "I said: "I will go to him and see how his situation is." So I went to him and greeted him with salutations of peace, then I mentioned so-and-so to him and found that he knew him. I said to him: "He has sold some goods and has designated the profit for you and it comes to ten thousand dirhams." He said: "May Allah reward him with goodness for his solicitude. We are not in need, we have plenty." So he refused to take it, may Allah have mercy on him."<sup>[2]</sup>

And in circumstances of poverty, need and hardship which none could bear except the possessors of greatness among men, Imam Ahmad refused four thousand dirhams; his son, Salih said: "I visited my father during the days of Al-Wathiq<sup>[3]</sup> – and Allah knows well what our condition was – and found that he had gone to the 'Asr prayer and the mat on which he used to sit was very old and worn and under it was a letter written on a piece of paper, which read: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! I have been informed of the hardship which you are suffering and the debt which you have

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Madeenah Dimashq* by Ibn 'Asakir.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 317.

<sup>[3]</sup> Al-Wathiq Billah Abu Ja'far Haroon (842), the Caliph who succeeded Al-Mu'tasim.

and so I have sent to you four thousand dirhams via so-and-so, so that you may discharge your debt and provide for your family. This money is not charity, nor is it *Zakah*, it is only an inheritance which was left to me by my father." So I read the letter and then replaced it and when he entered, I said to him: "Oh, my father! What is this letter?" His face became red and he said: "I took it from you." Then said: "Go with the answer," and he wrote the letter to the man, saying: "Your letter has reached me, and we are in a good state. As for the debt, it is owed to a man who does not pressure us and as for our family, they are in the Grace of Allah, Most High, all praise and thanks be to Allah."

So he went with the message to the man who had delivered the letter and he said: "Woe to you! If Abu 'Abdullah had accepted this thing, and thrown it in the Tigris, he would have been rewarded, because it is not known that this man did any acts of kindness." After some time had passed, a letter to this effect arrived from the man and he replied to him in a similar manner. Then after a year – or a little more or a little less – had passed, he said: "If we had accepted it, it would have gone (by now)."<sup>[1]</sup>

This incident confirms the peoples' great love for Ahmad bin Hanbal, for this man from whom no charitable deeds were expected wished to give Ahmad bin Hanbal four thousand dirhams and it is not possible that this could have resulted from anything but great love and high esteem, which made him sacrifice his love of wealth for the sake of his love for

<sup>[1]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'* vol. 9, p. 178.

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – and likewise, this incident reveals the philosophy of Imam Ahmad in refusing to take gifts from the people, when he said: “If we had accepted it, it would have gone (by now).”

All of the blessings of the life of this world are fleeting and whatever he might take from people would pass away, but his humility would remain and likewise, whoever accepted a gift once would accept it repeatedly and it would become one of his characteristics, then the gifts would cease and this trait would continue to be spoken of by the people.

Ibn Yahya bin Yahya related that his father bequeathed his grandfather's garments to Ahmad bin Hanbal and he said: “So I took them to Baghdad and entered his house and I informed him of the bequest of my father and sought his permission to convey the garments to him. He agreed, saying: “Bring (them).” So I brought the garments, but when he saw them, he said: “Oh, my son! These are not the sort of clothes which I wear; had they been so, I would have accepted them.” So he did not take them.”

Ahmad bin Hanbal's rejection of that which the people possessed was not only ascetism; it was also the pinnacle of dependence on Allah (*Tawakkul*), because he only had no need of people's help due to his trust in Allah and his profound belief that Allah, Alone is the true Provider. So if He provided him with sustenance, it was from His Bounty and His abundant Generosity. And if He kept him in straitened circumstances, it was because He knew him better than he knew himself and

was more Merciful to him than he was to himself, which is why when Ahmad bin Hanbal – may Allah have mercy on him – was asked about *Tawakkul*, he said: “(It is) renouncing dependence on (Allah’s) creation.” It was said to him: “Then what is the need for it?” He replied: “It is (implicit in) the words of Abraham when he was placed in the mangonel, then cast into the fire, upon which Gabriel ﷺ came to him and said: “Do have any need?” He replied: “Not from you.” Gabriel ﷺ said: “Ask Him from Whom you have need.” He said: “Whichever of the two things is preferable to Him is preferable to me.”<sup>[1]</sup>

### His Piety:

The essence of piety is abstaining from unlawful things and shunning them, then to abstain from whatever resembles the unlawful; Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq ؓ said: “We used leave seventy doors to the lawful, out of fear that we might enter one of the doors to the unlawful.”<sup>[2]</sup> The basis of all this is the saying of the Prophet ﷺ: “Verily, the lawful is clear and verily, the unlawful is clear and between them are unclear things, which are unknown to many people; so whoever is on his guard against the unclear things safeguards his religion and his honour, while whoever falls into the unclear will fall into the commission of unlawful deeds.”<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Dimashq*, vol. 5, p. 308 and *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 390.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ahmad bin Hanbal* by ‘Abdul Ghani Ad-Daqr, p. 211.

<sup>[3]</sup> Narrated by Muslim, in *Al-Musaqah/ Acting Upon the Lawful and Avoiding the Unclear*, 1599 and *Al-Bukhari*, 52 and 2051.

It is also based upon the saying of the Prophet ﷺ:

“Leave that which makes you doubt in favour of that which does not make you doubt.”<sup>[1]</sup>

As a result of Ahmad’s endeavour to safeguard his religion and his performance of all that is pleasing to his Lord, he was extremely pious; and this is not strange or surprising, for the abstemious soul is highly suited to piety, because if one who leaves something in which there is no doubt out of abstemiousness, it is more fitting that he should leave something in which there is doubt – no matter how slight it might be – due to piety; and the piety of Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was not exhibited in only certain aspects of his life, but rather it was apparent in all of them, including his legal verdicts, his acceptance of *Hadeeth*, his earnings and his food and drink.

There are numerous stories related concerning his piety, which confirm each other. He would not accept money from a governor or a ruler due to his piety and when Al-Mutawakkil sent him ten thousand dirhams with one of his chamberlains, the chamberlain said to him: “He send salutations of peace to you and he says to you spend this.” But he refused to accept it. The chamberlain said to him: “Oh, Abu ‘Abdullah! I fear that your refusal will cause enmity between you and him, so it is in your interest to accept it.” And he left it with him and departed. Then at the end of the night, Imam Ahmad called his family, his nephews and his dependents and said: “I have not slept this night

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<sup>[1]</sup> Imam Ahmad’s *Musnad* (1/200) and *Al-Hakim* (2/13) and authenticated by Al-Albani in *Irwa’ Al-Ghaleel* (20749).

because of this money." So they sat with him and they wrote the names of those in need among the followers of *Hadeeth* and others among the inhabitants of Baghdad and Al-Basrah, then in the morning, he distributed it among the people, in portions of fifty, a hundred and two hundred, leaving not even a dirham. Among those to whom he gave were Abu Kuraib and Abu Sa'eed Al-Ashajj. He gave away the bag in which it came and he did not give anything of it to his family, even though they were in the direst of straits and the most urgent need. Then his son, Salih came and took a piece of it for his son, and Imam Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - said nothing. The Caliph was informed that he had given the whole of this gift in charity, until nothing remained of it and that he had given the bag in charity. 'Ali bin Jahm said: "Oh, Commander of the Faithful! He accepted it from you and gave it in charity on your behalf. What does Ahmad want with money? A loaf of bread is sufficient for him." Upon which, the Caliph replied: "That is true."<sup>[1]</sup>

This story is evidence of his piety and also confirms his ascetism with regard to the life of this world and its pleasures.

When the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil summoned him to the army to address the people, he and those with him were presented with the most appetizing food, but he refused to eat it, in spite of the fact that he was ill, because he would not consume the wealth of the Sultan.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 414.

"My father remained with the army in the presence of the Caliph - Al-Mutawakkil - for sixteen days, eating nothing of it except a quarter of a *Mudd* of *Saweq*,<sup>[1]</sup> breaking his fast only every three days with it, while sitting on a mat made of plaited palm leaves and he continued this until he returned home and his health did not return to him until six months had passed."<sup>[2]</sup> Al-Baihaqi said: "The Caliph had sent many things to his table, but Ahmad would not take anything from it."<sup>[3]</sup>

On one occasion, the Caliph Al-Ma'moon sent some gold, to be shared among the scholars of *Hadeeth* and there was not one of them who did not take from it, except Ahmad bin Hanbal, who refused it."<sup>[4]</sup>

It was also said that he (i.e. Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal) passed three days without any food, so he sent to a friend of his, asking if he might borrow some flour from him. In the house they realized his great need for his food and so they quickly baked some bread and when it was placed before him, he said: "How did you know? You have baked this so quickly." They said: "The clay oven in the house of Salih (his son) was heated, so we quickly baked this for you." He said: "Take it." And he did not take anything from it, but ordered that his door be closed to the inhabitants of Salih's house.

Al-Baihaqi said that it was because Salih had taken a

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Saweq*: A kind of porridge made from wheat or barley.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 388.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[4]</sup> *Ibid.*

stipend from Al-Mutawakkil 'Alallah (the Caliph).<sup>[1]</sup>

Whenever Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – had doubts about anything, he would leave it, out of caution, a desire to safeguard his religion and to prevent anything unlawful from entering his house.

On one occasion, he pawned a pail to a seller of dried fruit in Yemen and when he came to redeem it, the man came out to him with two pails and said: "Take your property." But Imam Ahmad was unsure which was his, so he said: "You are free to do what you will with it and with the deposit." Having said this, he left him.<sup>[2]</sup>

Commenting on his piety, Ja'far bin Muhammad bin Ya'qoob related that a messenger came to him from the house of Ahmad bin Hanbal to inform him that Abu 'Abdur-Rahman was ill and that he craved butter, so he gave one of his companions a coin and said to him: "Buy him some butter with this. The man brought it to him on a leaf. Imam Ahmad looked at the leaf and asked: "From where did you get this?" He said: "I took it from the grocer." He asked: "Did you ask his permission for that?" The man said: "No." Imam Ahmad said: "Return it."<sup>[3]</sup> He took great care to look for anything in which there was any doubt observing things that others did not and he would

<sup>[1]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p.177 and *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 388.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 389, *Tareekh Dimashq* (which reported something similar), vol. 5, p. 301 and *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*, vol. 11, p. 203.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi and *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel*, vol. 1, p.301.

take into account things that no one else did.

His son, Salih said: "A child was born to me and a friend gave a present. Some months later, he wanted to go to Al-Basrah and he said: "Speak to Abu 'Abdullah and ask him to write a letter for the scholars of Al-Basrah." So he spoke to him, but he said: "Were it not for the fact that he had given something to you, I would have written it for him."<sup>[1]</sup>

He would refuse those positions offered to him, which would make men proud and arrogant, in spite of his poverty and his dire need for the salary that would have accompanied such a position.

It is reported on the authority of Ash-Shafi'i that he said to Ar-Rasheed: "Yemen is in need of a judge." He said: "Choose a man and we will appoint him to it." So Ash-Shafi'i said to Ahmad bin Hanbal, who was visiting him among a number of seekers of knowledge: "Will you not accept (the post of) judge in Yemen?" But he refused vehemently to accept it, saying: "I only visit you for the sake of (acquiring) the knowledge which causes me to abstain from the life of this world. Do you order me to accept the position of judge? Were it not for the knowledge, I would not speak to you after today." Upon hearing this, Ash-Shafi'i became embarrassed.<sup>[2]</sup>

It was narrated that he would not pray behind his uncle, Ishaq bin Hanbal, nor behind his sons, nor

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi and *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel*, vol. 1, p. 301.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 386 and *Manaqib Ash-Shafi'i* by Al-Baihaqi.

would he speak to them, because they had taken a stipend from the Sultan.<sup>[1]</sup> Al-Mutawakkil settled on his son and his family the sum of four thousand dirhams every month, but Abu 'Abdullah sent a message to him, saying: "They have sufficient." Al-Mutawakkil replied to him, saying: "It is for your son, what has it to do with you?" Then Ahmad said to his uncle: "Oh, my uncle! How many years remain of our lives? It is as if the matter were already settled in your case. Allah... Allah... They are (in reality) but a few days; if that which is hidden from the slave were revealed to him, he would know the good and evil which is upon him. (All that is required is) a little patience and (one will receive) a long-lasting reward. It is only a temptation."<sup>[2]</sup>

The money which Ahmad bin Hanbal refused when he went to the army was counted and it amounted to seventy thousand (dirhams)."<sup>[3]</sup>

### His Generosity:

Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was kind and generous, despite his poverty and his need for that which he gave away in charity and the highest form of generosity is to give in charity that which one needs. There are many stories which speak of his generosity.

'Umar bin Salih At-Tartoosi related: "A pair of scissors fell from the hand of Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin

<sup>[1]</sup> Ibid., and *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 176, which reported something similar.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 11.

<sup>[3]</sup> Ibid.

Hanbal into a well. A man who dwelt by the well came and got them out for him. Abu 'Abdullah gave him a little more or less than half a dirham, but he said: "The scissors are only worth a very small sum; I will not accept anything for them." Then he departed. After a few days had passed, he said to him: "How much do you owe for the rent of the shop?" He said: "Three months' rent, and the rent for each month is three dirhams." So he paid his account and said: "You are free."<sup>[1]</sup>

Sometimes Abu 'Abdullah would share his food and on one occasion, Abu Sa'eed Adh-Dhareer came to him and complained to him; Imam Ahmad answered him, saying: "Oh, Abu Sa'eed! We have nothing but this palm trunk." So he brought a porter to carry it and Abu Sa'eed took the trunk and sold it for nine dirhams and two *Danaqs*<sup>[2]</sup>.<sup>[3]</sup>

Yahya bin Hilal said: "On one occasion, I went to Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal and he produced for me four dirhams, saying: "This is all I possess."<sup>[4]</sup>

'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: "Abu Sa'eed bin Abi Haneefah, Qur'anic teacher said: "I would go to your father and sometimes, he might give me something and say: "I have given you half of what we have." On one occasion, I went to him and I sat for a long time, then he came out with four loaves and he

<sup>[1]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 179 and *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 324.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Danaq*: An ancient coin worth 1/6 of a dirham.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 325.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p.406.

said: "Oh, Abu Sa'eed! This is half of what we have." Then I said to him: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! These four loaves are more beloved to me than a thousand from any other person."<sup>[1]</sup>

Concerning his charitableness with his food and his kindness in that regard, Abu Muhammad An-Nasa'i Ja'far bin Muhammad said: "One 'Eed, Abu 'Abdullah said to me: "Enter!" So I entered and found a table spread and a large bowl, in which there was a bone covered with meat and to the side of it was a pot. He said to me: "Eat." When he saw my expression, he said: "Al-Hasan used to say: "By Allah, you will certainly eat!" bin Seereen used to say: "Food was only placed (in the earth) to be eaten." Ibraheem bin Adham used to sell his clothes and spend the money on his companions and the life of this world was less to him than that. Then he indicated a stump that had been placed on the floor and I was happy and ate."<sup>[2]</sup>

Among the proofs of his kindness is the fact that whenever he was given a gift, he returned something better than it. Abu Bakr Al-Maroodi said: "I saw Abu 'Abdullah when a person had given him some *Zamzam* water and he sent him *Saweeq* and sweetmeats and he ordered me to buy for someone a gift to the value of approximately five dirhams and he said: "Go to his children, for he has given Sa'eed something."<sup>[3]</sup>

Ishaq bin Ibraheem said: "Jaween - a neighbour of Abu 'Abdullah - gave him a gift of walnuts, raisins

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 324.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 325.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 327.

and dates in a bowl, worth three dirhams or less and he gave me a dinar and said: "Go and buy ten dirhams worth of sweetmeats and seven dirhams worth of dates and take them to him at night." So I did that.<sup>[1]</sup>

Salih bin Ahmad said that a man gave his father some fruit and he sent him a garment.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **His Love of Solitude and Remembering Allah in Secret:**

Imam Ahmad was inclined to favour solitude and limited mixing; this was because solitude is better for guarding one's tongue and purifying one's heart, for the people may distract him from remembrance of Allah and from pondering on His Kingdom and they might also distract him from acquiring knowledge. Likewise, there is a danger of harm to a great scholar from the mixing with people that he will succumb to pride when he sees the people's devotion to him and how they eulogize him, unless his intention in mixing with the people is to teach them and guide them, or unless his reason for mixing with them is called for by the Islamic law or is ordered by the religion.

This love of solitude which Imam Ahmad had is connected to something else and that is the preferability of mentioning Allah in secret. This is because raising one's voice when mentioning Allah is more likely to lead to *Riya'*<sup>[3]</sup> and pride; and nothing diminishes deeds more than *Riya'* and pride. Imam

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 328.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[3]</sup> *Riya'*: Performing righteous deeds in order to be seen by people.

Ahmad was the most covetous of people in seeking solitude; indeed, it is clear from many of his statements his love of seclusion and his desire for it. He used to say: "I desire that which is not; I desire a place in which there is no one."<sup>[1]</sup>

Regarding his covetousness in seeking solitude and his patience when alone, 'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: "My father was the most patient of people when alone, while Bishr - may Allah have mercy on him - was not patient when alone, but would go out from time to time."<sup>[2]</sup>

He (i.e. 'Abdullah) also said: "My father was not seen except in the mosque, attending funerals or visiting the sick, and he hated to walk in the markets."<sup>[3]</sup>

Abu Bakr Al-Maroozi said: "I mentioned 'Abdul Wahhab to Abu 'Abdullah and suggested that they meet, but he said: "Is it not so that some (scholars) have expressed dislike of meetings?" Then he said: "He dresses up for me and I dress up for him; solitude is the best way of acquiring knowledge and the *Faqeeh* is one who fears Allah."<sup>[4]</sup>

He - may Allah have mercy on him - also used to say: "I would like to visit Makkah and cast myself in one of its ravines, that none should know me."<sup>[5]</sup>

### **His Humbleness:**

It is reported in an authentic *Hadeeth* that the Prophet

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 374.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 375.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 375.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Ibid.*

 said: "Whoever is humble towards Allah, Allah will raise him up." This *Hadeeth* is very true when applied to Ahmad bin Hanbal, for the measure of his humbleness is reflected in the measure of his renown throughout the lands and the degree to which his fame has spread to all corners of the earth. It is but fitting that a person such as Ahmad bin Hanbal should have been humble, because anyone who understands the greatness of Allah must realize the relative insignificance of all others. The life of this world counted for little in Ahmad's eyes and his abstemious was due to naught but his realization of the true value of the life of this world, the swiftness of its passing and its unimportance in the Sight of its Creator. Whoever shuns the life of this world will not be proud; it is only those who revel in this life and its pleasures who become proud and Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was the last person to revel in such pleasures or to be deluded by them. Yahya bin Ma'een said regarding his humbleness: "I have not seen the like of Ahmad bin Hanbal and we have been his companions for fifty years. He was never proud or arrogant towards us because of his righteousness and goodness."<sup>[1]</sup>

His son, Salih said: "Sometimes my father would take an axe and go to the abodes of the people and work with his hands and sometimes he would go out to the grocer and buy a bundle of faggots or something and he would carry them with his own hands."<sup>[2]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 366 and *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, 1819.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 367.

Neither did Ahmad bin Hanbal – may Allah have mercy on him – display pride in his lineage or claim nobility for himself. Even when he was asked, he would refrain from doing so. ‘Arim bin Al-Fadl said: “Ahmad bin Hanbal was here with us in Al-Basrah and he came to me with a pouch belonging to him – or he said: a purse in which he had some dirhams – and every so often, he would come and take something from it. I said to him: “Oh, Abu ‘Abdullah! I have been informed that you are a man from the Arabs, but from which Arabs are you?”” He said to me: “Oh, Abu An-Nu’mān! We are a poor people.” Every time he came to me, I would repeat the question to him and he would answer me thus and he continually declined to inform me until the time he left Al-Basrah.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Isma’el bin Ishaq Ath-Thaqafi said: “I said to Abu ‘Abdullah the first time I saw him: “Oh, Abu ‘Abdullah! Permit me to kiss your head.” But he replied: “I have not attained that.”<sup>[2]</sup>

On one occasion, it was said to him: “May Allah reward you with goodness for (your service to) Islam.” But he replied: “No, on the contrary, may He reward me with Islam.” Then he said: “And who am I? And who am I?”<sup>[3]</sup>

This was the way he responded to all those who tried to elevate him above his position. Often he would say, when people came to him: “Who am I that you should come to me? Who am I that you should come to me?

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 367.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p.367.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 368.

Go and seek (knowledge of) *Hadeeth*.<sup>[1]</sup>

When a letter was sent to him from a man who asked him to supplicate Allah for him, he said: "And if we supplicate for this man, who will supplicate for us?"<sup>[2]</sup>

On one occasion, it was said to him: "How numerous are those who supplicate on your behalf!" He said: "I fear that this might be a temptation leading to destruction. I ask Allah that He make me better than what they think (of me) and forgive me for what they do not know (about me)."<sup>[3]</sup>

His son, 'Abdullah said of him: "I saw my father when *Shaikhs* and young men from Quraish or some other noble tribe came to him and he did not leave the mosque until he had made them leave (first) and they walked in front of him, then he exited after them."<sup>[4]</sup>

Because of his humble nature, when he walked on the road, he hated that anyone should follow him.

Among the signs of his humbleness was the love and affection he demonstrated for the poor and the respect that he showed to them. Regarding this, Abu Bakr Al-Marroozi said: "I have not seen a poor man revered in any meeting as he was in that of Imam Ahmad."

Al-Marroozi also said: "Abu 'Abdullah mentioned a poor, sick man to me and he said: "Go to him and say to him: "What do you desire, that we may do it for

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<sup>[1]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[2]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[3]</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 364.

you?" And he gave me some perfumed oil and said: "Perfume him with it."<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition to being evidence of his humbleness, this love that he had for the poor is also a clear proof of the sincerity of his faith, because any man who loves the poor does so for Allah's sake, since the poor man has no wealth that he might seek and no power, that he might ask for his help. Love for Allah's sake is a clear sign of true faith.

### **His Shaikhs (Teachers)**

All those from whom he acquired Islamic jurisprudence, or some aspect of the *Sunnah* or from whom he narrated *Ahadeeth* are considered his *Shaikhs* – regardless of whether he travelled to them or met them in Baghdad.

bin Al-Jawzi enumerated Imam Ahmad's *Shaikhs* in his book, *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* and they totalled more than a hundred; now if the number of his *Shaikhs* was this great, we cannot say that all of them affected him to the same degree. It is possible that he only narrated *Ahadeeth* from some of them; indeed, it is possible that he only met some of them a few times and that he did not turn to them for guidance or knowledge, even though they might have furnished him with some narration from the *Sunnah* that was previously unknown to him, or they might have supplied him with an alternative chain of narrators for a *Sunnah* that was known to him before with an authentic chain. However, we shall study the *Shaikhs*

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 364

of Imam Ahmad who influenced him and we shall not be much concerned with knowing all those from whom he heard or learnt something. Rather, we will be solely concerned with those of them who instructed him and whose instruction was in accordance with his own personal endeavours and his efforts of which we know after that; here we will suffice ourselves with two personages:

### **1. Hushaim:**

His name was Hushaim bin Basheer bin Abi Khazim; he was born in the year 104 A. H. and he died in the year 183 A. H. He had a great influence on Ash-Shafi'i, being the first of his teachers and instructors, who made him a seeker of knowledge, travelling to the farthest corners of the known world in search of the same, traversing deserts and plains. When he chose the path of knowledge, at sixteen years of age, he turned to Hushaim and stayed with him for about four years, during which he developed. The instruction that he received from him was purely related to the *Sunnah*; and although he reported a great many parts of the *Sunnah* from the other scholars of *Hadeeth* in Baghdad, Hushaim was the person who had the greatest influence on his life during these four years – and these were the formative years during which he developed as a scholar of *Hadeeth*. Hushaim himself had acquired knowledge from some of the *Tabi'oon*, such as 'Amr bin Deenar, Az-Zuhri and others. He specialized in knowledge of the narrations of bin 'Umar and bin 'Abbas  and the circle of *Hadeeth* scholars in Baghdad came to him. When Ahmad applied himself to the study of *Hadeeth*, the

*Shaikh* of this circle found him and he was a man of high reputation in Islam, held in great respect by Ahmad - may Allah be pleased with him - upon whom he exercised a powerful influence, to such an extent that he seldom asked him a question, so great was the awe in which he held him and so high was the esteem which he had for his knowledge. He never asked him more than one or two questions throughout the whole time he was with him. He used to glorify Allah's praises after the narration of each *Hadeeth* and he would say: "*La Ilaha Illallah*" (none has the right to be worshipped except Allah), drawing out his voice over the long vowels as he did so. It was as if he used to mention the Greatness and Majesty of Allah, Most Glorified, Most High in order to fill himself with remembrance of Allah and fear of Him, when narrating the *Ahadeeth* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and transmitting the fundamental principles of the religion.

The life of this man Hushaim was wholly devoted to the acquisition of knowledge. He struggled in Allah's cause, opening up a path for himself. It was as if Imam Ahmad did not only acquire knowledge from him, but also acquired from him the concept of *Jihad* (struggle) in seeking it and perseverance in the face of adversity. Hushaim was originally from Bukhara, his father having lived in Wasit. It was reported that he was a cook in the employ of Al-Hajjaj bin Yoosuf and when his family moved to Baghdad, he was still working in at this job. When his son declared his intention to seek knowledge, it was not considered normal by his family; on the contrary, it was considered to be

something strange by them and they forbade him from doing so; indeed, they rebuked him. But he bore their rebukes with fortitude and struggled in the pursuit of acquiring *Ahadeeth*. He attended the lectures of Abu Shaibah, the judge and he debated with him in matters of Islamic Jurisprudence. On one occasion, it happened that he was taken ill and Abu Shaibah missed him. It was said to him: "He is ill." Upon hearing this, he said: "Come with me and let us visit him." The members of the lecture circle all stood up and went to visit him, in obedience to the judge. They arrived at the house Basheer, the cook and informed him of the reason for their visit and when the judge came out accompanied by him, Basheer said to his son, Hushaim: "Oh, my son! I used to forbid you from learning *Hadeeth*, but from today, I will not. The judge came to my door! I could not have hoped for such a thing."<sup>[1]</sup>

Hushaim departed after that, in search of (knowledge of) *Ahadeeth*, making a number of different journeys in the pursuit thereof: He travelled to Makkah, where he met Az-Zuhri, from whom he acquired around a hundred *Ahadeeth*, although it was also said that the number was three hundred. He also travelled to Al-Basrah and to Al-Koofah and to other cities, in search of *Hadeeth*. He continued to do so on foot, until he became a scholar of some repute. After this, he became an acknowledged leader in the field of *Hadeeth* in Baghdad, where he conducted a study circle and gained an unequalled reputation for his learnedness. It is sufficient to know that his narrators included the likes of Malik bin Anas.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 14, p. 92.

Hamad bin Zaid said of him: "I have not seen among the scholars of *Hadeeth* one nobler than Hushaim." Some of the *Hadeeth* scholars who were considered reliable preferred him to the *Imam* of *Hadeeth*, Sufyan Ath-Thawri. He was spoken of highly by Malik bin Anas رض, who said that there was no scholar in Iraq who was his equal; he said: "Is there anyone in Iraq for whom it is meet that he should narrate *Hadeeth* besides that (man) Al-Wasiti (i.e. Hushaim)?"<sup>[1]</sup>

Hushaim had a great influence on Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – for he memorized everything that he heard from him. He said: "I memorized everything from Hushaim before his death."<sup>[2]</sup>

## 2. Imam Ash-Shafi'i:

He was Ahmad's second *Shaikh* – may Allah have mercy on him – for it appears that he acquired a large number of *Ahadeeth* from Hushaim and a small amount of Islamic jurisprudence. For this reason, it was necessary for him to make up this deficiency from another person who was possessed of sufficient knowledge to do so. Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – found that person in Imam Ash-Shafi'i – may Allah have mercy on him. Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – had contacted him shortly after the death of Hushaim. When he went to perform *Hajj* to the Inviolable House of Allah, he met Ash-Shafi'i and was highly impressed by his legal

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 14, p. 92.

<sup>[2]</sup> Comments regarding Hushaim taken from *Kitab Ibn Hanbal* and transmitted by Shaikh Abu Zahrah (pp. 67-78).

mind, his ability to derive legal judgements from sources and the rules and criteria that he used as the basic principles of his derivation. This meeting took place at a time when Imam Ash-Shafi'i was giving his lectures in the Sacred Mosque and that Imam Ahmad was very impressed was clear from the words that he spoke regarding Ash-Shafi'i; he said to Ishaq bin Rahawaih: "Oh, Abu Ya'qoob! Ask about this man; my eyes have never seen his like." He used to say: "It is narrated from the Prophet ﷺ that he said: "Verily, Allah, the Almighty, the All-powerful sends to this nation at the turn of every century a man who is a religious reformer therein." 'Umar bin 'Abdil 'Azeez was at the turn of the century and I hope that Ash-Shafi'i is the one who is sent at the turn of this century."

Imam Ash-Shafi'i's name was Muhammad bin Idrees bin Al-'Abbas bin 'Uthman and his agnomen was Abu 'Abdullah. His genealogy concurs with that of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ via 'Abdu Manaf. He was born in Gaza, in the year 150 A. H. and he grew up as a poor orphan. He spent a long time in the desert and acquired a great fluency and eloquence in Arabic and he memorized all of the poetry of Huzail. He was also renowned for his beautiful speaking voice and his emotive tones during recitation. Likewise, he was well known for his love of knowledge and his exceptional ability to memorize by heart, memorizing the Qur'an while still a child. He migrated to Al-Madinah from Makkah and studied under Imam Malik, who told him on the first day they met: "Oh, Muhammad! Fear Allah and avoid sin, for you will be a man of great

importance." Ash-Shafi'i did not acquire knowledge only from Imam Malik in Al-Madinah; on the contrary, he did not leave any of the *Shaikhs* of Al-Madinah without taking something from him. Ash-Shafi'i was a master of the Arabic language, to such an extent that his words were cited as linguistic evidence. This enabled him to understand the Book (of Allah) and the *Sunnah*. He learnt from the greatest authorities, such as Malik bin Anas, Sufyan bin 'Uyainah and Muslim bin Khalid Az-Zinji.

Ash-Shafi'i migrated to Egypt, where he became extremely well-known and people migrated to him, in order to hear him. In Egypt, he gathered a number of famous students, including Al-Buyooti, Al-Mizani, Ar-Rabee' bin Sulaiman and bin 'Abdil Hakam. Among the most well-known of Ash-Shafi'i's books is *Al-Umm*, in which he collected all of the books and treatises that he had written during his long travels. This book exemplifies the jurisprudence that he established and his *Ijtihad*. Historians are in agreement that his book, *Al-Umm'* is from the narration of Rabee' bin Sulaiman Al-Muradi and what he heard from him. The latter was a revered scholar, sincere and reliable. Other well-known works by Ash-Shafi'i include *Ar-Risalah*, which was the first book he wrote on the subject of *Usool*. It is a book containing a letter which he wrote to 'Abdur-Rahman bin Mahdi, before he went to Egypt. This letter he then rewrote it while he was in Egypt and it is this version that is the well-known one. Ash-Shafi'i called it *Al-Kitab*. What is surprising is that Ash-Shafi'i wrote this letter on *Usool Al-Fiqh* when he was still a young man.

He was asked to do so by a scholar of *Hadeeth* in Baghdad, who was the *Imam* of *Hadeeth* scholars. Al-Mizani said of this letter: "I read the letter five hundred times and I never read it without gaining some new benefit from it."

Ahmad bin Hanbal was highly impressed by Ash-Shafi'i and when his son asked him: "Oh, my father! What kind of man was Ash-Shafi'i, for I have frequently heard you supplicating on his behalf?" He replied: "Oh, my son! Ash-Shafi'i was like the sun to the earth and good health to mankind. Ask yourself, is there anything more essential than these two things?"<sup>[1]</sup>

Sulaiman Al-Ash'at said: "I have not seen Ahmad bin Hanbal as favourably disposed towards anyone as he was towards Ash-Shafi'i."<sup>[2]</sup>

Az-Za'farani – who narrated Ash-Shafi'i's old books said: "I never attended the lectures of Ash-Shafi'i without finding Ahmad bin Hanbal there."<sup>[3]</sup>

Ibn Hanbal benefitted greatly from his close association with Ash-Shafi'i, acquiring much knowledge from him. He acknowledged his debt to Ash-Shafi'i when he said: "All, or most of this (knowledge and learning) which you see is from Ash-Shafi'i. I have spent forty years supplicating Allah for Ash-Shafi'i."<sup>[4]</sup>

The scholars placed great trust in the knowledge of

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tahzeeb Al-Kamal*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Tahzeeb Al-Kamal*.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Tahzeeb Al-Asma'i Wal-Lughat*.

Ash-Shafi'i; Abu Thawr said: "Whoever claimed that he saw the like of Muhammad bin Idrees in eloquence, knowledge, constancy and capability has lied."

Muhammad bin Idrees Ash-Shafi'i was without equal during his lifetime and when he died, no one spoke ill of him.<sup>[1]</sup>

Hilal bin Al-'Ala' said of him: "The scholars of *Hadeeth* are indebted to Ash-Shafi'i; he opened the locks for them."<sup>[2]</sup>

He was renowned - may Allah have mercy on him - for his generosity, chivalry and his good moral character and he died - may Allah have mercy on him - in the years 204 A. H.

### **Some of Those Who Transmitted the Jurisprudence of Ibn Hanbal:**

There were many scholars who transmitted Islamic jurisprudence from Imam Ahmad; among them were those who transmitted *Ahadeeth* from him, those who transmitted both *Ahadeeth* and jurisprudence from him and those who narrated (only) jurisprudence from him. Some of them transmitted only as little from him, while others transmitted many narrations from him. And they themselves were held in high esteem by Imam Ahmad for their transmission, their precision and their memory. Among those who transmitted extensively from him were his two sons, 'Abdullah and Salih, Ibraheem Al-Harbi, Ibraheem bin Hani' and his son, Ishaq, Abu Bakr Al-Marroozi, Abu Bakr Al-

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad* and *Tahzeeb Al-Kamal*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tareekh Dimashq*.

Athram, Abul Harith Ahmad, Abul Muzfir Isma'eel, Bishr bin Moosa, Bakr bin Muhammad, Abu Dawood As-Sijistani, 'Abdullah bin Fawran, 'Abdullah Al-Maimooni and many others. Here we shall mention some of those who were most important in spreading his knowledge.

### **1. Salih bin Ahmad bin Hanbal:**

He was the eldest son of Imam Ahmad and we have spoken of him when we spoke of the sons of Imam Ahmad.

### **2. 'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal:**

If Salih's concern was Islamic Jurisprudence, then 'Abdullah's concern was the study of *Hadeeth*; his father recognized this predilection for *Hadeeth* in him and he caused it to grow and encouraged him to continue in it.

We have spoken of his personality when we discussed the sons of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and those who wish to do so may refer to it there.

### **3. Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hani' At-Ta'i and Abu Bakr Al-Athram:**

He was one of the companions of Ahmad who met him in his later years. Prior to that, he worked in the fields of Islamic jurisprudence, *Takhreej*<sup>[1]</sup> and areas in which there is a difference of opinion among scholars. But after meeting him, he confined himself to the

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Takhreej*: The study of *Asaneed* (chains of narrators), by which the authenticity of a *Hadeeth* is determined.

study of *Al-Athar*.<sup>[1]</sup> Regarding this, he said: "I used to memorize Islamic jurisprudence and differences among scholars, but after taking up company with Ahmad bin Hanbal, I left all of that."

He remained with Ahmad after that and resembled him in piety, abstemiousness and humility. He considered that silence was better than speech, unless it was for the purpose of advising.<sup>[2]</sup>

He narrated a number of matters pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence from Imam Ahmad and he narrated many *Ahadeeth* from him. Among the matters relating to Islamic jurisprudence was his view that reciting the Qur'an with a melodious or musical intonation is an innovation, not something commendable. Al-Athram said: "I asked Abu 'Abdullah about reciting with a musical intonation and he said: "I do not like any innovation, unless the voice of the man is not forced or affected."<sup>[3]</sup>

He narrated from Ahmad the permissibility of wiping over the '*Imamah*'<sup>[4]</sup> and dispensing in such cases, with the necessity to wipe over the head. It was narrated from him that he said: "I heard Abu 'Abdullah being asked about wiping over the '*Imamah*'; it was said: "Do you approve of it?" He replied: "Yes; (it has been reported) via five different sources from the Prophet ﷺ."

[1] *Al-Athar*: Traditions from the Companions ﷺ relating to the deeds and utterances of the Prophet ﷺ.

[2] *Ibn Hanbal* by Shaikh Abu Zahrah, p. 141.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

[4] *Imamah*: Headdress worn around the head.

Abu Bakr Al-Khallal said of Al-Athram: "He was a scholar of high ranking and a *Hafiz*. When 'Asim bin 'Asim arrived in Baghdad, he requested a man who could derive benefits (from *Ahadeeth*) which he might then recite. At that time, we found no one for him except Abu Bakr Al-Athram. But when he saw him, it appeared that he was not impressed, due to his tender years, but he (Al-Athram) said to him: "Take out your books and (as he looked through them), he said: "This *Hadeeth* is wrong, this *Hadeeth* is such-and-such, this is incorrect..." and such like. On hearing this, 'Asim was pleased and he remained with him for about fifty lectures. When they were shown to Ahmad bin Hanbal, he said: "These are authentic *Ahadeeth*."<sup>[1]</sup>

There is a difference of opinion regarding the date of his death; it was said that he died in the year 260 A. H. Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar said that he died in the year 261 A. H. It was also said that he died in the following year – and Allah knows better.

#### **4. Ibraheem bin Ishaq Al-Harbi:**

His name was Ibraheem bin Ishaq bin Ibraheem bin Bishr bin 'Abdullah bin Daisam Abu Ishaq Al-Harbi. He was born in the year 198 A. H.. He kept company with Imam Ahmad for about twenty years and learnt his *Ahadeeth* and Islamic jurisprudence. He used to say to his companions: "All of this that I say to you is the saying of the scholars of *Hadeeth* and it is the saying of Ahmad bin Hanbal. He placed in our hearts obedience to the *Ahadeeth* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the sayings of the Companions ﷺ and (a desire to) follow

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah* vol. 1, p. 72.

the example of the *Tabi'oon* from the time we were young boys.”

Ibraheem bin Ishaq was an *Imam*, a prominent ascetic, knowledgeable in the field of Islamic jurisprudence, well-versed in the study of legal verdicts, a *Hafiz* of *Hadeeth* and author of a great many books, including *Ghareeb Al-Hadeeth*, *Dala'il An-Nubuwah*, *Kitab Al-Hammam*, *Sujood Al-Qur'an*, *Zamm Al-Gheebah*, *An-Nahi' Anil Kazib*, *Al-Manasik* and others.<sup>[1]</sup>

He was held to be reliable in his knowledge; Ahmad bin Hanbal used to say to his son, 'Abdullah: “Proceed to Ibraheem Al-Harbi, so that he may recite to you *Al-Fara'id*.<sup>[2]</sup>”

Muhammad bin Salih Al-Qadi said of him: “We do not know of anyone produced by Baghdad who is the like of Ibraheem Al-Harbi in poetry and literature, *Hadeeth*, Islamic jurisprudence and abstemiousness.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Ibraheem did not only learn *Hadeeth* and Islamic jurisprudence from; he also learnt from him abstemiousness and piety. Indeed, out of all his companions, he was the most like Imam Ahmad in behaviour. It was reported that the Caliph Al-Mu'tadhid sent him ten thousand dirhams, but he rejected it, asking instead that he might distribute it among his neighbours. He said to the messenger who brought it: “May Allah keep you! We did not work to collect this money and so we shall take no part in disbursing it. Tell the Commander of the Faithful:

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, pp. 86 and 92.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Fara'id*: Legal obligations in Islam.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Ibid.*

"Either you leave us alone, or we will move from your neighbourhood."<sup>[1]</sup> And he had returned the thousand dinars, even though he and his family were in the direst poverty and the most severe hunger.

In addition to his knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence and *Hadeeth* – may Allah have mercy on him – he was a scholar of Arabic language. He would not miss a lecture on it, except in order to attend a lecture on Islamic jurisprudence or *Hadeeth*. Tha'lab, was an Imam of Islamic jurisprudence, said: "I never noticed Ibraheem Al-Harbi absent from lectures on Arabic language."<sup>[2]</sup>

He died – may Allah have mercy on him – on a Monday, with nine days remaining of Zul Hijjah, in the year 285 A. H. and was buried in his house.

## **5. Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Al-Hajjaj Abu Bakr Al-Maroozi:**

He was the most distinguished and the closest of Imam Ahmad's companions. It was he who was entrusted with the task of washing Imam Ahmad's body when he died. He was greatly favoured by him. It was he who narrated *Kitab Al-War'* (the Book of Piety) on the authority of Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – who trusted him

implicitly, trusting in his transmission as he trusted in his piety and his intellect, to such an extent that, as Al-Khallal reported: "Everything that you transmitted from me, I did indeed say."

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 213.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Shaikh Abu Zahrah, p. 143.

Abu Bakr narrated Imam Ahmad's opinions and verdicts on a number of issues in Islamic jurisprudence and these were transmitted by Al-Khallal, who was highly impressed by him and it was narrated from some of his companions that he used to say of him: "I do not know anyone who was more staunch in defending Allah's religion than he."

He narrated much jurisprudence from him, but he narrated less *Ahadeeth* from him. He died – may Allah have mercy on him – in the year 275 A. H.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 6. 'Abdul Malik bin 'Abdil Hameed Mahrana Al-Maimooni:

He heard from Imam Ahmad and others of his contemporaries, such as bin 'Ulayyah, Abu Mu'awiyah, Yazeed bin Haroon and others. He was mentioned by Abu Bakr Al-Khallal, who said: "The Imam was one of the companions of Ahmad; a man of high repute, he was just under a hundred years of age when he died. Imam Ahmad held him in high esteem, doing things for him that he would do for no other. He said to me: "I was a constant companion of Abu 'Abdullah from the year 205 A. H. until the year 227 A. H. After that, I departed, but I would return to him from time to time and he would compare me to bin Juraij bin 'Ata', due to the great number of questions I asked him; he would say to me: "I do not do for anyone what I do for you."

(Al-Khallal continued:) "He narrated from Abu 'Abdullah his opinion on a great number of

<sup>[1]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Shaikh Abu Zahrah, p. 143.

questions relating to juristic matters, in sixteen volumes and two large volumes written in a fine hand, covering around a hundred pages each, *In Sha' Allah*, which none had heard from him but I – so far as I am aware – and some important and excellent questions relating to juristic matters in which no one participated with him. Abu 'Abdullah used to ask him about his news and his livelihood and he would encourage him to improve his living. He (Ahmad) was extremely solicitous regarding his welfare. He died – may Allah have mercy on him – in the year 281 A. H.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **7. Harb bin Isma'eel bin Khalaf bin Al-Hanzali Al-Karamani:**

His agnomen was Abu Muhammad, or it was said that it was Abu 'Abdullah. There existed a great bond of affection between him and Al-Marroozi; he used to stay with him when he visited Imam Ahmad. He did not meet Imam Ahmad until he was advanced in years. The reason for this was that he had formerly been an adherent of Sufism and so he did not attend to listen to Imam Ahmad's lectures. It was Al-Marrozi who encouraged his pupil, Al-Khallal to travel to him and listen to him. Al-Khallal did so and heard his verdicts on many juristic matters and said of him: "He is a man of great ability." He also said: "He was a man who was the leading scholar of Islamic jurisprudence in the land."

He heard a great deal of jurisprudence from Imam Ahmad, but he did not hear all that he quoted from

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 213.

him, which led Al-Khallal to declare: "He memorized four thousand questions relating to Islamic jurisprudence from Ahmad and Ishaq bin Rahawaih before hearing from them, but when he met Ahmad, he wrote certain questions which he heard directly from him."

Al-Marroozi – in spite of his relationship with Ahmad – transmitted from Harb bin Isma'eel what he had written and Al-Khallal transmitted from Al-Marroozi.

Az-Zahabi said, in *Tabaqat Al-Huffaz*: "He died in the year 280 A. H. (may Allah have mercy on him)." <sup>[1]</sup>

## **8. Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Haroon Abu Bakr Al-Khallal:**

He was one of those who devoted himself to the task of collecting and recording the knowledge of Ahmad bin Hanbal, to which end he made many journeys. Some of them were records of what he had heard first hand from Imam Ahmad, while others were written accounts of what he had heard transmitted from others. These he then organized into books. There was no one among the *Hanafis* who collected more of Imam Ahmad's knowledge than he; he collected knowledge from the companions of Ahmad whom we have mentioned and from others. He collected many of Imam Ahmad's sayings and opinions. Of this, bin Al-Qayyim said: "Ahmad greatly disliked the writing of books; he liked only the recitation of *Hadeeth* and he hated that his words should be recorded. It was

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Shaikh Abu Zahrah and *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, p. 144.

intensely aggravating to him; but Allah knew that his intention and his aim were good. He recorded more than thirty volumes of his opinions and legal verdicts and Allah, Most Glorified has blessed us with most of them and they have not erred, save in a few of them.” Al-Khallal collected his narrations in *Al-Jami' Al-Kabeer*, which comprised around twenty volumes or more. His legal verdicts, his *Ahadeeth* and his opinions in certain juristic matters were narrated throughout the centuries, becoming a source of guidance and an example to *Ahlus-Sunnah* in their various times.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Al-Khallal kept company with Al-Marroozi until he died and it would appear that it was he who engendered in him a love for narrating the jurisprudence of Imam Ahmad; indeed, he was quite passionate about it, traversing distant lands in pursuit thereof, acquiring knowledge of the same from the sons of Ahmad bin Hanbal and his uncle, Harb Al-Karamani, Al-Maimooni and many others. Al-'Ulaimi described those from whom he heard as being too numerous to mention; he said: “Their number is so great, it would be difficult to mention all of their names. He heard the opinions of Ahmad in certain juristic matters and he achieved more in this field than any who came before or after him.”<sup>[2]</sup>

In addition to Ahmad's jurisprudence, he narrated a great volume of wisdoms which had come to Ahmad from those scholars of his time who had preceded him. After collecting his narrations, Al-Khallal taught them to his students in Al-Mahdi Mosque, in Baghdad and

<sup>[1]</sup> *A'lam Al-Mooqi'een*, vol. 1, p. 73.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manhaj Al-Ahmad*, vol. 1, p. 392.

it was from this blessed circle that the Hanbalite school of jurisprudence spread and was transmitted by the people in around twenty volumes, having previously been verbal narrations and individual writings spread around the countryside and preserved in the hearts of men, or in their private collections, without being available to any except a few privileged persons.

Scholars are in agreement that he collected the majority of those opinions on juristic matters attributed to Ahmad; and there is no doubt of this. But was he accurate in his transmission of these narrations? The answer is that there is no doubt that he was accurate, because numerous scholars of *Hadeeth* accepted his narrations, therefore it is even more befitting that his transmission of Islamic jurisprudence should be accepted. The scholars of his generation accepted his transmissions and they did not challenge them. If his transmissions had been the subject of doubt, they would have been challenged by his contemporaries and such dispute would have been passed on through the generations, until it reached us. But instead, the scholars of his generation accepted his narrations and transmitted them.

Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Al-Husain said: "We are all followers of Al-Khallal, because as a collector (of narrations and jurisprudence) and scholar, he was without equal." He also said: "All those who seek knowledge encounter Abu Bakr Al-Khallal; who can achieve what Al-Khallal achieved in the field of narration?"<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 5, p. 113.

He did not restrict himself with transmitting written narrations alone; he also transmitted what he heard from his companion. Had he only transmitted what was written, without the addition of oral narrations, he would not have made those numerous journeys that he undertook – during which he suffered great discomfort and difficulties – throughout the Muslim lands. This was the work of Al-Khallal: transmitter of Hanbalite jurisprudence and he was followed by those who came after him, who also transmitted it, summarized it and explained it, then balanced it with the opinions of scholars from other schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Thus, he was known as the transmitter of Hanbalite jurisprudence. He died in the year 311 A. H. – may Allah have mercy on him.<sup>[1]</sup>

### The People's Praise for Him

Imam Ahmad received the kind of praise that very men receive; but this is not strange, because his was a unique personality, having few who were his equal in knowledge, trustworthiness, ascetism, piety, kindness, modesty, high moral character and steadfastness in the cause of truth. So it is not surprising that praise should have been heaped upon him by so many, that so much should have been written about him, that word of him should have spread far and wide and that his name should have been mentioned in so many households.

We cannot detail all that has been said of him, however we will suffice ourselves with mention of the most important of them. Imam Ash-Shafi'i said: "I left Baghdad and I did not leave behind any man who

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal* by Shaikh Abu Zahrah, p. 147.

was better, more knowledgeable, possessed of greater understanding and more pious than Ahmad bin Hanbal.<sup>[1]</sup> He also said: "I have not seen anyone more intelligent than Ahmad bin Hanbal and Sulaiman bin Dawood Al-Hashimi."<sup>[2]</sup>

Ishaq bin Rahawaih said: "Ash-Shafi'i did not see the like of Ahmad bin Hanbal and had it not been for his efforts, Islam would have been lost."<sup>[3]</sup> He also said: "Ahmad is proof between Allah and His creation."<sup>[4]</sup>

'Ali bin Al-Madani said: "Verily, Allah strengthened this nation with Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq, during the time of the apostasy and with Ahmad during the trial."<sup>[5]</sup>

### **Regarding His Knowledge, it Was Said:**

Ibraheem Al-Harbi said: "I have come upon three the like of whom will not be seen again and women will be unable to bear such as them; I saw Abu 'Ubaid Al-Qasim bin Salam, whom I can only describe as a mountain into which a spirit had been breathed, I saw Bishr bin Al-Harith and I could not compare him but to a man composed from head to foot of intellect and I saw Ahmad bin Hanbal and it was as if Allah had collected for him the knowledge of the first and last generations from all of mankind, saying what He willed and refraining from what He willed."<sup>[6]</sup> He also said: "Since he was a youth, the people of

[1] *Tareekh Dimashq*, vol. 7, 235.

[2] *Tareekh Al-Islam*.

[3] *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*.

[4] *Tareekh Al-Islam*.

[5] *Tareekh Dimashq*.

[6] *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 77.

knowledge expected that he would become a great scholar, when he exhibited brilliance and evinced determination in seeking knowledge.” He asked Al-Harith bin Al-‘Abbas Abi Mashar: “Do you know of anyone who preserves the religion of this nation?” he said: “I know of none except a young man in the east, (i.e., Ahmad bin Hanbal).”<sup>[1]</sup>

Al-Haitham bin Jameel said: “If this youth lives (i.e. Ahmad bin Hanbal), he will be a proof against the people of his time.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Ash-Shafi’i said: “I saw a young man in Baghdad, who, if he said: “*Haddathana*”,<sup>[3]</sup> all of the people would say: “He has spoken truly.” He was asked: “Who is he?” He replied: “Ahmad bin Hanbal.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Abul Qasim bin Al-Jabali used to say: “Most people think that Ahmad bin Hanbal is only mentioned so much due to the position he adopted during the great trial, but this is not so; whenever Ahmad bin Hanbal is asked about a matter, it is as if the knowledge of the world is between his eyes.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Hubaish bin Mubashshir, who considered him to be one of the scholars of Islamic jurisprudence said: “We all discuss and argue with each other during our debates, but when Ahmad bin Hanbal comes, we

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Jarhu Wat-Ta’deel*, vol. 1, p. 293 and *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 106.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Jarhu Wat-Ta’deel*, vol. 1, p. 293.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Haddathana*: An expression used by scholars of *Hadeeth*, meaning literally: “He (the narrator) told us” and indicating that the narration was heard directly from him.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam*.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 77.

cannot do aught but remain silent.”<sup>[1]</sup>

‘Abdur-Razzaq said: “Four leaders in the field of *Hadeeth* journeyed to us from Iraq (they were): “Ash-Shazakooni, who was the one with the greatest knowledge of *Hadeeth*, bin Al-Madani, who was the most knowledgeable regarding differences therein, Yahya bin Ma’een, who was the most knowledgeable of them in the field of narrators and Ahmad bin Hanbal, who was the one with the most knowledge in all of these fields.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Abu Zur’ah said: “I have not seen Ahmad bin Hanbal’s like in the various fields of knowledge and none has contributed what he has contributed.”<sup>[3]</sup>

‘Ali bin Al-Madani said: “If I was put to trial by anything and Ahmad bin Hanbal delivered a verdict for me, I would not care if I met my Lord how it was.” He also said: “I took Ahmad bin Hanbal as a proof between me and Allah, the Almighty, the All-powerful.” Then he said: “And who can rival Abu ‘Abdullah?”<sup>[4]</sup>

Abu Bakr bin Abi Dawood said: “Ahmad bin Hanbal is superior to every person whoever held a pen and inkwell (i.e. in his time).”<sup>[5]</sup>

Quataibah said: “Ahmad bin Hanbal and Ishaq bin Rahawaih are the Imams of the world.”<sup>[6]</sup>

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[2] *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 88.

[3] *Tareekh Al-Islam*, vol. 14, p. 73.

[4] *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 409.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta’deel* 2,551.

Sulaiman bin Al-Ash'ath said: I heard my father saying: "I heard Qutaibah saying: "If you see that a man loves Ahmad bin Hanbal, then know that he is a follower of the *Sunnah*."<sup>[1]</sup>

'Abdullah bin Ahmad Shabbuwaih said: "I heard Qutaibah saying: "Were it not for Ath-Thawri, piety would have died and were it not for Ahmad bin Hanbal, they (i.e. people) would have introduced innovations into the religion." I said to Qutaibah: "Was Ahmad bin Hanbal in contact with any of the *Tabi'oon*?" He said: "He was in contact with the most eminent of the *Tabi'oon*."<sup>[2]</sup>

Qutaibah also said: "When Ahmad bin Hanbal dies, innovations will appear."<sup>[3]</sup>

'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: "I did not see my father narrating a *Hadeeth* that was not written down, except less than a hundred *Ahadeeth* and I heard my father say: "Ash-Shafi'i said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! If you find that a *Hadeeth* is authentic, then inform us, so that we may refer to it; you are more knowledgeable than we are with regard to authentic narrations. So if a narration is authentic, inform me, so that I might go to it, regardless of whether it is from Koofah, Basrah or Ash-Sham."<sup>[4]</sup> <sup>[5]</sup>

Muhani bin Yahya said: "I have seen bin 'Uyainah,

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 103.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104 and *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 4, p. 417.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*, vol. 10, p. 46.

<sup>[4]</sup> He did not say from Al-Hijaz, because he knew better about that.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*.

Wakee', Baqiyah, 'Abdur-Razzaq, Dhamrah and (other) people but I have not seen anyone with a more comprehensive knowledge nor one who was more abstemiousness and pious (and he mentioned some other qualities) than Ahmad."<sup>[1]</sup>

He was also consistently truthful and unwavering in his (pursuit of) knowledge. Sulaiman bin Harb said to a man: "Ask Ahmad bin Hanbal and see what he says regarding such-and-such a question, for he is an *Imam* in our opinion."<sup>[2]</sup>

Al-Marroozi said: "I was present with Abu Thawr when he was asked a question and he said: "Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal, our *Shaikh* and our *Imam* said such-and-such regarding this question."<sup>[3]</sup>

Yoosuf bin Muslim related: "Haitham bin Jameel narrated a *Hadeeth* on the authority of Hushaim and he made a mistake in it, upon which it was said to him: "There are those who contradict you in this." He said: "Who contradicts me?" The speaker answered: "Ahmad bin Hanbal." On hearing this, he said: "Would that a portion be taken from life and added to that of Ahmad bin Hanbal."<sup>[4]</sup>

Abu Bakr Al-Athram related: "I spoke one day, when were visiting Abu 'Ubaid, regarding a certain question relating to Islamic jurisprudence and someone present said: "Who said this?" I said: "One who has no superior in the east or the west - Ahmad bin Hanbal."

<sup>[1]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[4]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 166.

Abu 'Ubaid said: "This is the truth."<sup>[1]</sup>

Abu Zur'ah said: "I have not seen any *Shaikh* who has memorized more *Ahadeeth* than Ahmad bin Hanbal. I estimate his books to be equivalent to twelve double-sided saddle-bags; and all of this he had memorized by heart."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Regarding His High Moral Character, it Was Said:**

Abu Bakr Al-Marroozi said regarding the moral character of Abu 'Abdullah: "Abu 'Abdullah did not behave rudely or ignorantly towards anyone and if anyone behaved so towards him, he responded with gentleness and forbearing, saying: "Allah is Sufficient."

He was without malice or spite and he was not hasty; he was very pious, a man of high moral character, always good tempered, gentle, never curt or impolite. He loved for Allah's sake and he hated for Allah's sake. And if it was regarding a matter relating to the religion, he would be extremely angry, but he would bear with fortitude any hurt inflicted on him by his neighbours.<sup>[3]</sup>

'Umair bin An-Nahhas Ar-Ramli said of bin Hanbal: "May Allah have mercy on him, there was none more patient than he with regard to the (allure of) the life of this world, towards those who inflicted torment and torture on him, there was none like him and there was no one more attached to the righteous folk than he.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Dimashq* vol. 5, p. 286.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tahzeeb Al-Asma'i Wal-Lughat*, vol.1, p. 110.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*.

The life of this world was offered to him and he refused it, while innovations he rejected.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Yahya bin Ma'een said: “I have not seen the like of Ahmad bin Hanbal; I kept company with him for fifty years and he never behaved arrogantly or proudly towards me on account of his good qualities.<sup>[2]</sup>

Regarding his life, his morality, his good conduct and the respect that he showed towards others, Abu 'Asim An-Nabeel related: “bin Hanbal came to us and I heard the people saying: “bin Hanbal has come, bin Hanbal has come.” I said: “Show me this bin Hanbal.” They said: “That is he.” So I said to him: “Oh, so-and-so (i.e. bin Hanbal)! You have not treated us justly. You have come to our city and you have not made yourself known to us, that we might honour you and treat you in the manner you deserve.” He replied: “Oh, Abu 'Asim! you will do it and you are willing to sacrifice for it.” He said: “And I saw that he possessed honesty and ethics that reached a level no one else would ever reach.”

There is another story, which shows clearly his good manners and his high moral character and at the same time displays his knowledge and understanding and the depth of his learning. 'Abdullah bin Ahmad said: “Some people from among the scholars of *Hadeeth* attended a lecture given by Abu 'Asim Ad-Dahhak bin Mukhallad and he said to them: “Do you study Islamic jurisprudence when there is none among you who is a jurist?” And he began to berate them. They

[1] *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*.

[2] *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*.

said: "There is a man among us." He asked: "Who is he?" They said: "He is coming now." Then when my father arrived, he said: "Come forward." He replied: "I dislike to advance before the people." Upon hearing this, Abu 'Asim said: "This is from his jurisprudence; make room for him." So he entered and Abu 'Asim made him sit before him, then he asked him a question and he answered it, then he asked him a second question and he answered it, then a third and he answered it, upon which Abu 'Asim said: "This is a creature of the sea, not a creature of the land," or he said: "This is a creature of the land, not of the sea."<sup>[1]</sup>

Hajjaj bin Ash-Sha'ir said: "My eyes have not seen a soul in a body better than Ahmad bin Hanbal."<sup>[2]</sup>

'Abdur-Rahman bin Al-Mahdi said of him: "I never look at this man without thinking of Sufyan Ath-Thawri."<sup>[3]</sup>

Ahmad bin Hanbal would be greatly praised in every religious gathering, but they would not speak overmuch of his virtues, no matter for how long or how much they praised him. Muhammad bin Al-Husain Al-Anmati said: "We were in a gathering which include such persons as Yahya bin Ma'een, Abu Khaiithamah Zuhair bin Harb and a number of other great scholars and they began to praise Ahmad bin Hanbal and to mention his virtues. Then a man said: "Do not speak too much in this way." Upon hearing this, Yahya bin Ma'een said: "Excessive praise of

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 96.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tareekh Madeenah Dimashq*.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 168.

Ahmad bin Hanbal is inadvisable; if we were to sit in our gatherings and praised Ahmad bin Hanbal throughout them, we would not mention all of his virtues.”<sup>[1]</sup>

‘Eesa bin ‘Affan said: “They used to come and listen to my father – Yahya bin Ma’een – and Abu Khaithamah and those mentioned with them and Ahmad bin Hanbal came and heard from my father, then he departed and my father said to me: “He is unlike them (i.e. due to his virtue).”<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Some Sayings of Ahmad bin Hanbal**

Here we shall present some of his sayings, because a person’s sayings impart a true picture that person and his beliefs, what he loved, what he hated, the strength of his intellect and the breadth of his knowledge or ignorance. In short, they present a living picture of him, especially if he was, like Imam Ahmad, a stranger to hypocrisy – never saying anything except what he believed.

Regarding belief, he – may Allah have mercy on him – said:

Faith consists of words and deeds; it increases and decreases.

All piety springs from faith and sinful acts diminish faith.

He also said: “I speak not except that which is from the Book (of Allah) and the *Sunnah*, or from the

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<sup>[1]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 99.

Companions and the *Tabi'oon*. As for other sources, the words therein are not commendable."

You should follow the *Sunnah* and the *Hadeeth* and you should avoid disagreements and arguments, for whoever loves disputation will never be successful.

He was asked whom he regarded as the most esteemed of Muslims and he replied: "According to the *Hadeeth* of bin 'Umar ﷺ, Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman ﷺ."

Salih bin Ahmad said: "My father was asked – in my presence—if those who placed 'Ali ﷺ before 'Uthman ﷺ should be accused of heresy and he said: "They deserve to be condemned as heretics, because the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ placed 'Uthman before 'Ali ﷺ."

Imam Ahmad said: "The principles of the *Sunnah* in our opinion are holding fast to the practices of the Companions ﷺ and avoiding innovations, disputations, keeping company with heretical sects and arguments."

Abu Bakr Al-Marroozi said: "While we were with the army, one of the messengers of the Caliph came and said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! What do you say regarding what transpired between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah?" He replied: "I say naught but good regarding them."<sup>[1]</sup>

Abu 'Abdullah was asked about loving a person for Allah's sake and he replied: "He does not love him due to any desire for the life of this world."<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam* by Az-Zahabi.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi.

Al-'Abbas bin Hamzah said: "I heard Ahmad bin Hanbal saying: "Glory be to You (Oh, Allah)! How unmindful is this creation (i.e. man)! The fearful among them are remiss and the hopeful among them are hesitant."<sup>[1]</sup>

'Ali Al-Madeeni came and said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! Is there anything you would advise me to do?" He said: "Yes; make piety your provision and make the goal before you the Hereafter."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Wonderful Wisdoms**

Among his wonderful wisdoms is his saying: "For everything there is a blessing; the blessing of the hearts is being pleased with Allah, the Almighty, the All-powerful."<sup>[3]</sup>

When his son, 'Abdullah said to him: "Advise me, Oh, my father," he said to him: "Oh, my son! Intend good, for you will continue to be in good stead as long as you intend good."<sup>[4]</sup>

Among his profound wisdoms – in spite of his abstemiousness and his abandonment of the life of this world – is that when Rizqullah Al-Kalwazi and a number of others, including Yayha bin Ma'een and Abu Khaithamah invited him to eat *Loozeenj*,<sup>[5]</sup> he said: "No, if the life of this world were to be collected

[1] *Tareekh Dimashq*.

[2] *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 273, *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 226 and *Al-Manhaj Al-Ahmad*, vol. 1, p. 97.

[3] *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 276.

[4] *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 274.

[5] *Loozeenj*: A kind of sweetmeat, being a pastry stuffed with almond paste.

and placed in a mouthful, then it was taken by a Muslim man and placed by him in the mouth of his Muslim brother, it would not be extravagant." Upon hearing this, Yahya said to him: "You have spoken the truth."<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Regarding the life of this world, he said:**

"A little of it suffices, but much of it does not suffice."

He also said: "I cannot compare youth with aught except something that was in my sleeve and then it fell out."<sup>[2]</sup>

And he said: "Whatever is lacking in the life of this world will be less for the Reckoning."

And he said: "How insignificant is the life of this world to His *Awliya'*."<sup>[3]</sup>

### **Regarding nobility:**

Ahmad was asked about nobility and he said: "It is to abandon that which you desire for the sake of that which you fear."<sup>[4]</sup>

### **Regarding hastening to do good, he said:**

"Occupy yourself with every good deed and hasten to do it before something prevents you from doing so."<sup>[5]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 76 and *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 271.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 106.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 272.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Regarding the followers of the Qur'an being attached to the life of this world, he said:

"It is hard for me to see the life of this world consuming the hearts of men who have memorized the Qur'an."<sup>[1]</sup>

And he was asked: "How can a people advance to such a degree that they are commended?" He said: "Through truth."<sup>[2]</sup>

He used to take care to advise his companions, desiring their welfare.

'Abdus-Samad Sulaiman bin Matar said: "I stayed with Ahmad bin Hanbal and he brought me water. In the morning, he found that I had not used it and he said: "A scholar of *Hadeeth* does not offer prayers during the night?!" I said: "I am a traveller." He said: "Even though you are a traveller! Masrooq performed *Hajj* and he did not sleep without prostrating."<sup>[3]</sup>

### **Regarding friends, he said:**

"When a man's friends die, he is humbled."<sup>[4]</sup>

The surprising thing about his wisdoms is that Ishaq bin Hassan wrote to him to consult him about marriage and he replied to him, saying: "Marry a virgin and take care that she does not have a mother."<sup>[5]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 274.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 58.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 217 and *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 273.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 276.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 113.

Ahmad bin Hanbal wrote to Sa'eed bin Ya'qoob, saying: "To proceed: The life of this world is a sickness and the scholar is a physician; so if you see the physician drawing the sickness to himself, then beware of him. And may the peace of Allah be upon you."<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Regarding death:**

Al-Marroozi said: "Whenever Abu 'Abdullah mentioned death, he would become deeply affected by the warning and he would say: "Fear prevents me from eating food and drinking and whenever I think of death, every matter pertaining to the life of this world becomes unimportant to me; it is but food without food and clothing without clothing and they are but few days. I do not equate anything with poverty. If I found a way, I would go out so that there would be no mention of me."

### **His Praise For Some Scholars**

#### **1. His Praise of Sufyan Ath-Thawri:**

In spite of the fact that Sufyan Ath-Thawri died three years before the birth of Imam Ahmad, he considered him an example and imitated him and he said of him: "No one holds a dearer place than him in my heart."<sup>[2]</sup>

#### **2. His Praise of 'Umar bin 'Abdil 'Azeez:**

Imam Ahmad said: "I do not know of any saying of the *Tabi'oon* that is held as a proof aside from the

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Manaqib* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 283 and *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 168.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 10, p. 134.

saying of ‘Umar bin ‘Abdil ‘Azeez and that is sufficient for him.”<sup>[1]</sup>

He also said: “If I see that a man loves ‘Umar bin ‘Abdil ‘Azeez, speaks of his good qualities and spreads news of them, then know that there is goodness behind that.”<sup>[2]</sup>

### **3. His Praise of Imam Malik:**

He said: “If *Hadeeth* is mentioned, then Malik is the star.” He also said: “Malik is careful in checking the authenticity of *Ahadeeth*; he is one of the most reliable of scholars.”<sup>[3]</sup>

### **4. His Praise of Imam Ash-Shafi’i:**

Imam Ash-Shafi’i received the greatest accolade that Imam Ahmad paid to any scholar or *Imam*; this was due to the fact that he was his contemporary, studied under him and acquired a great deal of knowledge from him. He admired his personality greatly, just as Ash-Shafi’i admired his personality. Ishaq bin Rahawaih said: “I was with Ahmad in Makkah and he said: “Come and I will show you a man, the like of whom you have never seen.” Then he showed me Ash-Shafi’i.”<sup>[4]</sup>

He said of him: “We would not have understood the derivations of most of the *Sunan* without the teaching of Ash-Shafi’i.”<sup>[5]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 9, p. 192.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Seerah ‘Umar bin ‘Abdil ‘Azeez*, p. 61.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Min Tarteeb Al-Madarik Ma Yata’allaq Bi-Malik*, p. 132.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Sifah As-Safwah*, vol. 2, p. 1429.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Tazheeb Al-Asma’i Wal-Lughat*, vol. 1, p. 61.

He also said: "Na'eem bin Hammad came to us and he encouraged us to study *Al-Musnad*, then when Ash-Shafi'i came, he made us study '*Al-Mahajah Al-Baida*'."<sup>[1]</sup> And he said: "Islamic jurisprudence was locked to its followers, until Allah unlocked it through Ash-Shafi'i."<sup>[2]</sup>

And he said: "We did not know which of the narrations from the *Sunan* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ abrogated and which were abrogated by others, nor which were particular and which were general, nor which were general principles and which were explanatory until we sat with Ash-Shafi'i."<sup>[3]</sup>

Acknowledging his superiority, Imam Ahmad said: "No one holds a pen and inkwell except that Ash-Shafi'i's words are in his throat." One feels the great love that Imam Ahmad harboured for Ash-Shafi'i in all of his sayings and his praises, even though they are not always explicit. When he does speak clearly of his love for him, his words almost give off a fragrant aroma of truth; listen to these words:

"Ash-Shafi'i is the love of my heart; he has differed with us and we have differed with him, but we have never seen anything but good from him and he was strict in following the *Sunan*."<sup>[4]</sup>

And in words which expressed clearly his love for him, he said: "Ash-Shafi'i was like the sun to the world and like health to the body; do you see anything

<sup>[1]</sup> *Ash-Shafi'i* by Ad-Daqr, p. 120.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tawali At-Ta'sees*, p. 57.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Manaqib Ash-Shafi'i* by Al-Baihaqi, vol. 2, p. 255.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 2, p. 289.

after these two things, or any replacement for them?"<sup>[1]</sup>

And he left this advice for all of us:

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – says: "It has been reported in a *Hadeeth* that when the slave begins to pray, Allah turns His Countenance towards him and He does not turn away from him until he finishes, or turns to the right and the left.

It is mentioned in the *Hadeeth* that so long as the slave remains in prayer, he retains three qualities: (i) piety, which is bestowed on him from the clouds in the sky to the parting in his hair, (ii) angels surround him from around his feet to the clouds in the sky and (iii) a caller calls out: "If the slave knew in Whom he is confiding, he would never leave." So may Allah, the Almighty, the All-powerful have mercy on whomsoever approaches prayer in submission, meekness and humility to Him, in fear and submissiveness, desiring (to please Him), dreading (His Anger), anxious and hopeful (of His Reward), devoting most of his attention in prayer to his Lord, his confidences to Him and his standing before Him, his sitting, his bowing and his prostrating, for the purpose of which he empties his heart and strives to perform the obligatory acts which He has enjoined upon him, not knowing if he will offer another prayer after that one, or if he will die ere he stands before his Lord, the Almighty, the All-powerful again, sad and pitiful, hoping that it will be accepted and fearing that it may be rejected. If He accepts it, he will be happy and if He

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Ash-Shafi'i* by 'Abdul Ghani Ad-Daqr.

rejects it, he will be wretched. What is of greater importance to you - Oh, my brother - in this prayer and in the rest of your deeds and those things that cause you worry, sadness, fear or apprehension and the other things which Allah has made incumbent upon you? You do not know if a prayer will ever be accepted from you, yet in spite of this, you laugh and you are careless; yet camels will not benefit you when the certainty (i.e. death) comes to you. You are heading to the fire and certainty that you will come out of it has not come to you. So who has more right to your tears and long sadness than you, that Allah may accept it from you? Then, in addition to this, you do not know whether or not you will wake up in the morning when go to sleep at night, nor whether you will see another evening when you wake up in the morning, after which you will be given the tidings of Paradise or you will be given the tidings of the Fire. I have only reminded you - Oh, my brother - of this danger; it will behove you to be happy with family or wealth. Your long disregard and carelessness in this important matter and your diversion from it is a most amazing thing, while you are being driven on harshly (to your destiny) with every day and night - indeed, every hour and every blink of the eye.

So expect that your time may come - Oh, my brother - and be not disregardful of this great danger which hangs over you, for sooner or later, you must taste death. It may descend upon you in your home, in the morning or the evening; its advent is the easiest thing, upon which, it will be as if you have been removed from all of your world and robbed of it. Thence you

will go on either to Paradise or to the Fire and all the events of your life will be ended, stories finished in your life. (i.e. because you are dead,) everything you wanted to do until the moment of death is over.

Have you not heard – Oh, my brother – the words of the righteous slave: “I am amazed how the one who would flee from the Fire sleeps and I am amazed how the one who would seek Paradise sleeps.”<sup>[1]</sup>

### **His Supplications and His Confidences (With Allah)**

Imam Ahmad used to supplicate much and speak to Allah constantly, turning to Allah with regard to every major or minor matter and asking His Protection, seeking His Pleasure and requesting His Shelter from his own weakness and the evil of every living thing, by His Power and Ability; having complete faith that He would not forsake anyone who asks Him, nor give up anyone who enters His Protection.

‘Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: “I often used to hear my father saying at the end of his prayers: “Oh, Allah! Just as you preserved my countenance from prostrating to anyone besides You, preserve my countenance from asking anyone other than You.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Abu ‘Eesa ‘Abdur-Rahman bin Zathan Ar-Razzaz related: “We prayed while Abu ‘Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal was present and I heard him say: “Oh, Allah! Whoever is following heretical ideas or his own

<sup>[1]</sup> *The Book of Prayer* by Imam Ahmad, pp. 18-19 and *Ahmad bin Hanbal* by ‘Abdul Ghani Ad-Daqr, pp. 273-274.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 392.

opinion and thinks that he is following the truth, when he is not, return him to the truth, so that he may not misguide anyone in this (Muslim) nation. Oh, Allah! Busy not our hearts with matters other than those which You have enjoined upon us and do not make us regarding your Sustenance as slaves to other than You, nor forbid us the good that is with You, due to the evil that is with us, nor see us doing those things which You have forbidden to us, nor lose us doing the things which You have enjoined upon us. Strengthen us and do not humiliate us; strengthen us with obedience and do not humiliate us with disobedience.”<sup>[1]</sup>

He – may Allah have mercy on him – did not restrict his supplications to himself, but frequently supplicated on behalf of his brothers, the true Believers; he loved good for the people, just as he loved it for himself.

Abu Ja’far Muhammad bin Ya’qoob As-Saffar said: “We were with Abu ‘Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal and I said: “Supplicate Allah for us.” He said: “Oh, Allah! You know that we know that You are much more than anything we love in this life so give us something You love (i.e. Your Pleasure).” Then he was silent for a time and it was said to him: “Oh, Abu ‘Abdullah! Supplicate more for us.” So he said: “Oh, Allah! We ask you by Your Omnipotence what You said to the heavens (and the earth): “Come both of you, willingly or unwillingly.” They both said: “We come willingly.”<sup>[2]</sup> Oh, Allah! Grant us success in

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Tabaqat Al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 205 and *Al-Manhaj Al-Ahmad*, vol. 1, p. 306.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Surah Fussilat*, 41:11.

achieving Your Pleasure. Oh, Allah! We seek refuge with You from being in need except of You and we seek refuge with You from humility except towards You. Oh, Allah! Do not give us so much that we become transgressors, nor give us so little that we forget; and grant us from Your Mercy and abundance from Your Sustenance that which is sufficient for us and wealth from Your Bounty.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Often he used to supplicate in a few words, but they would be great in meaning. Sindi Al-Khawateemi said: “I visited Ahmad after he had been beaten and he had been removed from the Caliph’s palace and I saw him prostrate on his face in his house and he was supplicating Allah; I heard him saying: “Oh, Appreciative One of all that is created! Make for me that which will make You Appreciative of me.”

Al-Marroozi said: “A number of people went to visit Ahmad and they said to him: “Supplicate (Allah for us).” So he said: “Oh, Allah! Do not demand from us that we thank You adequately for the Blessings You give to us.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Often he would take his supplications from the narrations reported from the Prophet ﷺ; Muhammad bin Ya’qoob As-Saffar said: “At the end of his prayers, Ahmad would supplicate Allah saying: “Oh, Allah! I ask You for the means to achieve Your Mercy, the fulfillment of the obligations of Your Forgiveness, the reward of every good deed, freedom from every sin, the attainment of Paradise

<sup>[1]</sup> *Siyar A’lam An-Nubala’,* vol. 11, p. 229.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, pp. 394-395.

and salvation from the Fire. Do not leave any of our sins without forgiving them, nor any affliction without providing a means of escape from it, nor any need without fulfilling it.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Talhah bin ‘Ubaidillah Al-Baghdadi – who used to live in Egypt – said: “It so happened that I travelled on a boat with Ahmad bin Hanbal and he was silent for a long time; when he did speak, he said: “Oh, Allah! Cause us to die upon Islam and the *Sunnah*.”<sup>[2]</sup>

And he used to say: “Oh, Allah! If you accept a ransom from the disobedient ones among the nation of Muhammad ﷺ, then make me a ransom for them.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Imam Ahmad used to praise Allah at all times; indeed, praise was never far from his lips and he would seek refuge with Allah every few moments; indeed, seeking refuge was never far from his heart. In fact, he would praise Allah on occasions which most people would neglect.

Salih bin Ahmad said: “My father would not let anyone draw water for him for the purpose of making ablution; rather, he would undertake that task himself and if the bucket came out full, he would say: “All praise and thanks be to Allah.” I asked him: “Oh, my father! What is the benefit in that?” He said: “Oh, my son! Have you not heard the Words of Allah, the

<sup>[1]</sup> This supplication was reported in the *Hadeeth* narrated by At-Tirmizi, no. 479 in the ‘Book of Prayer’, in the Chapter: “What has Been Said Regarding the Prayer of Need” and by Ibn Majah (no. 1384).

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 5, p. 323.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Bidayah Wan-Nihayah*, vol. 14, p. 390.

Almighty, the All-powerful: "Say (Oh, Muhammad): 'Tell me if (all) your water were to be sunk away, who then can supply you with flowing (spring) water?' "<sup>[1]</sup>

### The Power of His Understanding

Ahmad bin Hanbal – may Allah have mercy on him – was a man of great perspicacity, deep intelligence and broad understanding, which is why Ibraheem Al-Harbi said of him: "I saw Ahmad bin Hanbal and it was as if Allah had collected for him the knowledge of the first and last generations from all of mankind, saying what He willed and refraining from what He willed."<sup>[2]</sup>

Among his legal verdicts and his irrefutable replies, one finds words which confirm the power of his understanding.

Ahmad was asked about a man who says to another man who is a Christian: "May Allah honour you." He replied: "Yes, he says: "May Allah honour you," intending to say thereby: "May Allah honour you with Islam."

Ahmad was asked about a man who swears an oath to divorce his wife three times if he does not have sexual intercourse with her at night, but then he finds that she is menstruating." He said: "His wife will be divorced from him and he must not have sexual intercourse with her, for Allah has permitted divorce, but He has forbidden sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman."

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Soorah Al-Mulk*, 67:30.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 2, p. 412.

Abul Wafa' 'Ali bin Al-'Aqeel - may Allah have mercy on him - said: "Among the evidences we have found of the understanding of Imam Ahmad and his precise knowledge is that he was asked about a man who swore an oath to circumambulate the House (of Allah) on all fours. He said: "He should make two circumambulations and he should not do so on all fours." Look at this understanding; it is as if he looked at the walking on all fours and considered it to be unlike the behaviour of human beings and more like the behaviour of animals, so he protected man from such behaviour and he protected the House and the Mosque from such a shameful thing, but he did not invalidate the ruling of its being described as proceeding on the hands, replacing them with the legs, which are the limbs used for walking.

Ibn 'Aqeel said: "The uncommon judgements of Ahmad display a deep understanding of the highest level; this is shown by the fact that Abu 'Ubaid sought him out and he stood up after meeting him and said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! It has been narrated that: "A person has the greatest right to sit in his place."<sup>[1]</sup> Ahmad replied: "On the contrary, whoever is more loved should sit or be sat in it." There is nothing that can be added to this understanding, notwithstanding the speed of the explanation."<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Sunan At-Tirmidhi, Hadeeth no. 2752*, in the Book of Good Manners, in a chapter entitled: 'What Has Been Said Regarding a Man Who Gets Up From His Place, Then Returns to it' and *Musnad Al-Imam Ahmad*, (3/422).

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, pp. 81-82.

### His Illness

On the night of the 1<sup>st</sup> of Rabee' Al-Awwal in the year 241 A. H., which was a Wednesday, Ahmad bin Hanbal was stricken with fever; his son, Salih came to visit him and found him to be feverish and breathing stertorously. Salih used to nurse him whenever he was ill and so he said to him: "Oh, my father! Upon what did you breakfast yesterday?" He replied: "The water of broad beans." Then he desired to rise, so he said: "Take my hand." So Salih took his hand and when he reached the privy, his legs became weak and he leaned on his son. There were many people (waiting for him), so Salih said: "Oh, my father! There are many people (waiting to see you)." He said: "What is your opinion?" Salih replied: "Ask their pardon and they will supplicate Allah for you." He said: "I will seek Allah's Guidance." So they began to enter his presence in crowds, until the house was filled, asking their questions of him and then supplicating Allah for him, then departing, after which another crowd would enter. The number of people continued to increase and the street became filled with them. So his sons closed the gate to the alley and one of their neighbours came, wearing henna and entered his presence. Upon seeing him, Imam Ahmad said: "I see that this man is reviving something from the *Sunnah*, so I am happy with him." So he entered and began to supplicate for him, saying: "... for him and for all of the Muslims." Then a man came and said to his son, Salih: "Permit me an audience with him, for I was present on the day when he was beaten in the Caliph's palace and I wish to seek absolution from him." But Salih prevented him

and continued to do so, until his father said: "Admit him." So Salih admitted him and he stood before him and began to weep and he said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! I was one of those present on the day when you were beaten and now I have come to you, so if you desire retaliation, I stand here before you. But if you wish to absolve me, then do so." He said: "(I will do so) on condition that you never do such a thing again." The man said: "Yes." Imam Ahmad said: "In that case, I absolve you." Then the man went out crying and those present wept also.

Imam Ahmad had a piece of cloth in which he kept coins and whenever he needed anything, he would give something from it to someone to buy it for him. On the Tuesday, he said to Salih, who was with him: "Look in my purse and see if there is anything in it." He looked in it and found some dirhams, so he said to his son: "Go and buy some dates and use them to make expiation for an oath (I made)." So he went and bought the dates and used them to atone for the oath, after which there remained three dirhams or thereabouts and he informed him of this. Imam Ahmad said: "All praise and thanks be to Allah. Read this will." So he read it to him and he confirmed it.

It was said that he was ill for nine days and when his illness worsened, word of this spread to the people and they came to visit Him - as we said - and they increased in number and congregated around his door, camping there night and day. The Sultan heard of the large number of people and so he sent a number of his troops and his intelligence men to the door of the

house and the gate of the alley. Sometimes Abu 'Abdullah would permit the people to enter and they would do so in large numbers and give salutations of peace to him and he would reply to them with his hand, then when the troops came, they prevented people from entering and the gate of the alley was closed, so the people stayed in the streets and in the mosques, so that a part of the marketplace was blocked off and those who wished to buy and sell were prevented from gaining access to it. When anyone wished to see him, they would either enter via one of the other houses, or he might climb.

The tribe of Banu Hashim came and entered his presence and they began to weep over him, then a young boy belonging to his uncle, Abu Yoosuf came to fan him and he indicated to him with his hand that he should not do that, because he had been purchased with something that he hated. Then 'Abdul Wahhab came and when he asked permission to enter, Abu 'Abdullah said: "He has honoured me by visiting me as a free man." Then when he entered, he bent over him and took his hand and he kept hold of his hand until he stood up to leave, and a man said to him: "Allah has given you that which you desired for the Muslims." He said: "Allah has answered your prayers."

A day or two before his death, he said with difficulty: "Call the children." They came and drew close to him and he began to stroke them and caress their heads with his hand and as he did so, his eyes filled with tears. A man said to him: "Do not worry about them, Oh, Abu 'Abdullah!" But he made a gesture with his

hand, which they interpreted as meaning: "That is not what I meant."

He would pray in a sitting position and he would pray lying down and he did so almost without ceasing, raising his hands to indicate bowing. Mujahid bin Moosa entered his presence and said: "Oh, Abu 'Abdullah! Good news has come to you; the people testify for you. Do not worry if you come to Allah, the Almighty, the All-powerful this hour." He began to kiss his hand, weeping and he said to him: "Advise me, Oh, Abu 'Abdullah!" Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - pointed to his tongue and his mind was still sound at this point and as he did so, he said: "What day of the month is it?" And Salih answered him. He would sleep at night by his father's side and when he wanted anything, he would wake him and he would bring it for him. He said to him: "Bring me the book containing the *Hadeeth* of bin Idrees on the authority of Laith bin Tawoos; he hated groaning." So Salih brought him the book and read the *Hadeeth* to him, after which no groans were heard from him until he died, may Allah have mercy on him.

### His Will

Ahmad bin Hanbal - may Allah have mercy on him - wrote his will during the days of the trial and we have mentioned that he said to his son, Salih, during his terminal illness: "Read to me the will," so he read it to him and he confirmed it. It was worded as follows:

"In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful; this is the will made by Ahmad bin Hanbal: I advise (first of all) that I testify that none has the right

to be worshipped except Allah, Alone, without partners and that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger; He sent him with Guidance and the religion of Truth, that it may prevail over all religions, even though the pagans may detest it. I also advise those who obey Him from among my family and my kin to be among those who worship Him, to be among those who praise Him and to advise the Muslim community. I also advise that I am well pleased with Allah, the Almighty, the All-powerful, with Islam as a religion and with Muhammad ﷺ as a Prophet. I also advise that I owe to 'Abdullah bin Al-Ma'roof in *Fawzan* around fifty dinars, and he is trustworthy in what he says; so let it be paid from the revenue of the house, if Allah wills. Once this is paid, then let Salih and 'Abdullah, the sons of Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal give every male and female ten dirhams, after what I owe to bin Muhammad has been paid. Witnessed by Abu Yoosuf and Salih and 'Abdullah, the two sons of Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal."<sup>[1]</sup>

### His Death

In the volume of Muhammad bin 'Abdullah bin 'Ilmid-Deen he said: ""Abdullah bin Ahmad said: "When death approached my father, I sat with him and in my hand was a scrap of cloth with which I wanted to tie his beard and he began to drift in and out of consciousness, then he opened his eyes and said, indicating with his hand: "No, not yet. No, not yet." And he repeated it three times. After the third

<sup>[1]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, pp. 212-213.

repetition, I said to him: "Oh, my father! What is this thing which you have said at this time? You fall into unconsciousness so that we say that you have gone, then you return (to consciousness) and say: "No, not yet. No not yet." He said to me: "Oh, my son! Do you not know?" I said: "No." He said: "Satan - may Allah's curse be on him - stood before me, he lowered himself on his knuckles and said to me: "Oh, Ahmad! You have eluded me." But I replied: "No, not yet, not until I die."<sup>[1]</sup>

Imam Ahmad - may Allah have mercy on him - was, up to the moment of his death, rational and in full possession of his faculties. Regarding this, 'Abdullah bin Ahmad was asked: "Was your father rational up to the time of his death?" He replied: "Yes; we were washing him and he signed with his hand. Salih said to me: "What did he just say?" I said: "He said: "Wash between my fingers." So we washed between his fingers. Then he stopped signing with his hand and within the hour, he was dead."<sup>[2]</sup>

He never ceased to remember Allah during his final moments; his son, Salih said: "My father began to move his tongue and continued to do so until he died."<sup>[3]</sup>

### **The Date of His Death:**

Hanbal bin Ishaq said: "Abu 'Abdullah died on a

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 183. Az-Zahabi said: "This story is Ghareeb (narrated by a single reporter at one or more points in its chain). It was narrated only by Ibn 'Ilm - and Allah knows better.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 547.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548.

Friday, in the month of Rabee' Al-Awwal, in the year 241 A. H., when he was seventy-seven years old.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Muhammad bin 'Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al-Hadrami said: “Ahmad bin Hanbal died on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Rabee' Al-Awwal, in the year 241 A. H.”

'Abdullah bin Ahmad said: “My father died on Friday morning and we buried him after the 'Asr prayer, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Rabee' Al-Awwal, in the year 241 A. H.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Some consider that the fact that his death took place on a Friday is another favour granted to him; it was mentioned in the book *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, by Al-Hafiz Ibn Al-Jawzi (pp. 551-552): “Abu 'Amir said: “We were informed by Hisham (i.e. bin Sa'd), on the authority of Sa'eed bin Abi Hilal, who reported on the authority of Rabee'ah bin Saif, who in turn reported on the authority of 'Abdullah bin 'Amr, who reported on the authority of the Prophet ﷺ: “There is no Muslim who dies on a Friday, except that Allah will save him from the trial of the Grave.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Many great leaders died on a Friday, among them 'Uthman bin 'Affan ؓ who was killed on a Friday and 'Ali ؑ, who was stabbed on a Friday, although he died on the Sunday night.<sup>[4]</sup> Al-Husain bin 'Ali ؑ was killed on a Friday and Al-'Abbas bin 'Abdil

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Baghdad*, vol. 4, p. 422.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Hilyah Al-Awliya'*, vol. 9, p. 162.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 169 and by At-Tirmizi (1074); Al-Albani said, in *Saheeh Al-Jami'* (5773): “It is a *Hasan* (i.e. sound) *Hadeeth*.”

<sup>[4]</sup> That is, Saturday night, according to Western calculations; this is because, according to Islam, the day begins after sunset, not after midnight.

Muttalib رضي الله عنه died on a Friday. Al-Hasan Al-Basri also died on a Friday, as did bin Seereen and many others, too numerous to mention."

### **The Washing and Shrouding of His Body:**

We will let Salih bin Ahmad narrate to us the details of these moments – i.e. the moments of the washing of and shrouding of his body – he said: "When my father died and the people gathered in the streets, I stood before them to inform them of his death and to tell them that I would bring him out after the 'Asr prayer. Then bin Tahir – the governor of Baghdad's representative – arrived with his chamberlain, Muzaffar and two slave boys, who were carrying kerchiefs containing garments and perfumed oil. He said: "The governor sends greetings of peace to you and he says: "I have done that which – were he present – the Commander of the Faithful would have done for him." I said: "Convey our greetings of peace to him and say to him: "The Commander of the Faithful had pardoned him during his lifetime for the thing which he disliked and I do not wish to follow on after his death with that thing which he hated during his life." So he returned and said: "It will be his undergarment, not his outer garment." So I repeated my earlier saying to him. The servant-girl had made him a garment from a piece of strong material which was ten cubits long for twenty-eight dirhams, in order that two shirts might be cut from it; so we cut two coverings from it and we took another covering from *Fawzan*, then we wrapped him in three covers. We also purchased for him some embalming oil and one of our companions from among the perfume sellers asked me if he could

bring some embalming oil, but I did not agree to that. Water was poured in a vessel of ours and I said: "Tell Abu Muhammad to buy a pourer and transfer the water in the pourer from which he used to drink, for he used to hate introducing things into his home from our houses." Then we finished washing him and shrouding him. Around a hundred people from Banu Hashim came while we were shrouding him and they began to kiss his forehead as we lifted him onto the bed."<sup>[1]</sup>

### The Prayer Over Him and His Burial:

It was a day witnessed by many and was evidence of this noble Imam's status in the hearts of the Muslims and showed the extent of their love for him and their attachment to him. This day also demonstrated that fame chases those who run from it. How careful was he that mention of him should be suppressed, that none should remember him; he used to say: "Blessed be he whose mention is suppressed by Allah." This day likewise confirmed that the highest levels and leadership in knowledge are not attained except through earnestness and striving, freedom from vain desires and performing one's deeds purely and sincerely for Allah's sake.

This day – the day of prayer and burial – was truly his day and the narrations reported from him by the historians inspire both amazement and admiration in those who hear them.

His sons, his companions and the Hashemites – who

<sup>[1]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*, vol. 11, p. 338.

came to bid their last farewell to him – had prayed over him in the house, before taking out his body to the graveyard and bin Tahir turned to Salih and asked him: “Who will pray over Abu ‘Abdullah?” Salih replied: “I.” Then when the gathering had proceeded to the desert, bin Tahir advanced a few steps towards the sons of Imam bin Hanbal and expressed his condolences to them. Then the bed was laid down and Salih stepped forward to pray and they began to form up in rows. At this point, bin Tahir came up to Salih and seized one of his hands, while Muhammad bin Nasr seized his other hand and said: “The Governor!” Salih resisted them, but they pushed him aside and bin Tahir led the prayer, while the people remained unaware of what had taken place. On the following day, when they became aware of what had happened, they went to his grave and prayed over the grave and the people remained for as long as Allah willed, coming and praying over the grave.<sup>[1]</sup>

As we have already stated, this day was truly Ahmad’s day; there was a large crowd of people, whose number was great, the like of which the people of that time had never seen. There were hundreds of thousands of men, women and children, all of whom had come to bid a final farewell to the noble Imam and to convey at the same time, the high esteem, honour and love which they had for this individual, a man possessed of singular knowledge, good character, abstemiousness, humility and piety. They came from every direction, filling the roads, the squares and the mosques. Bunan bin Ahmad Al-Qadibani<sup>[2]</sup> informs us

<sup>[1]</sup> *Siyar A’lam An-Nubala’,* vol. 11, p. 338.

<sup>[2]</sup> In *Siyar A’lam Al-Qasbani* and that is the correct spelling.

that he attended Ahmad's funeral and the rows of worshippers stretched from the square to the archway of Al-Qatee'ah gate. It is estimated that the men numbered eight hundred thousand and the women numbered sixty thousand. Those who offered the 'Asr prayer in Ar-Rasafah Mosque were seen and they were in excess of twenty thousand.<sup>[1]</sup>

Moosa bin Haroon Al-Hafiz said: "When Ahmad died, the footprints in the flat places where the people used to pray were counted and the number of people there was estimated to be around six hundred thousand or more; this is aside from those in the surrounding areas, on the rooftops and in diverse localities, with the inclusion of whom, the number was more than a million."<sup>[2]</sup>

Abu Salih Al-Qantari said: "I have attended the *Hajj* for forty years and I have not seen a gathering like this."<sup>[3]</sup>

'Abdul Wahhab Al-Warraq said: "We know of no one like Imam Ahmad – either in the *Jahiliyyah*<sup>[4]</sup> or in Islam and it was correctly estimated that the number who attended his funeral was around a million and that the women numbered sixty thousand. The people opened the doors of their houses onto the streets and alleyways and called out to those who wished to perform the ablution for player and those who bought water and gave it to them to drink were numerous."<sup>[5]</sup>

[1] *Tareekh Al-Islam*.

[2] *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 558.

[3] *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, p. 558.

[4] *Jahiliyyah*: The days of ignorance prior to the advent of Islam.

[5] *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*, vol. 11, p. 339.

All who spoke of that day agreed that Ahmad bin Hanbal's funeral was a unique event, the like of which Baghdad had never witnessed before. It might be observed that there is a degree of exaggeration in the reports of the number of those who attended Ahmad's funeral, such as the saying of Abu Zur'ah, who said: "I was informed that Al-Mutawakkil ordered that the footprints of the people who offered the funeral prayer be counted and they came to two million, five hundred thousand."<sup>[1]</sup>

These exaggerations confirm that a large number of people attended the funeral and the fact that the numbers were unprecedented does not contradict this. People had not seen the like of it before and so estimating the numbers was not an easy matter for them. But even if the number was half of what was said, or a quarter, then it was a very large number, in comparison with the number of Baghdad's residents. Even in our time, when cities have become overcrowded with people, it is not easy for such a large number of people to gather, for a funeral or for any other purpose.

The day of Imam Ahmad's funeral was a day of victory for the *Sunnah*, for Imam Ahmad was a symbol for firm adherence to the *Sunnah*, so it was as if the huge number of people who came to offer prayers over him and bury him wished to say to the innovators: "The truth will always be victorious and the truth will always be with the Book of Allah and *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. It was as if Imam

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Al-Jarh Wat-Ta'deel.*

Ahmad, with his perspicacity and farsightedness was expecting what happened on that day, for his son, 'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal said: "I heard my father saying: "Tell the innovators: "Between you and us is the day of funerals.""<sup>[1]</sup>

Allah confirmed his words on that day, for he - may Allah have mercy on him - was the Imam of the *Sunnah* in his lifetime and he had opposed them thereby. The large number of people who came out, willingly, neither due to greed nor fear is a measure of the sincerity of those who gathered to offer prayers over him and follow his funeral procession. His perspicacity was proven true - may Allah have mercy on him - for it is found that many of those who died as innovators or their supporters did not have their funerals attended except by a very few. For example, when one of the main innovators who opposed Imam Ahmad - whose name was Al-Qadi Ahmad bin Abi Dawood - died, no one marked his death and none bade him farewell except a few of the Sultan's officials. Likewise, in spite of Al-Harith bin Asad Al-Mahasi's abstemiousness, piety, erudition, his self-assessment of his thoughts and actions, no one prayed over him except three or four persons - and the matter both before and after is in Allah's Hands.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala'*, vol. 11, p. 340.

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