

The Excellence of Knowledge



IBN RAJAB AL-HANBALĪ



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THE EXCELLENCE OF KNOWLEDGE

of the *Salaf* over that of the *Khalaf*

al-Hafiz Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali

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The Author



Hafiz Abu'l-Faraj Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali

He is the Imam and Hafiz, Zaynu'l-Din 'Abdu'l-Rahman ibn Ahmad ibn 'Abdu'l-Rahman ibn al-Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn Abu'l-Barakat Mas'ud al-Sulami al-Hanbali al-Dimashqi. His agnomen was Abu'l-Faraj, and his nickname was Ibn Rajab, which was the nickname of his grandfather who was born in that month.

He was born in Baghdad in 736H and was raised by a knowledgeable and pious family. He died on a Monday night, the fourth of Ramadan, 795H in al-Humariyyah, Damascus.

He learned and took knowledge from the greatest scholars of his time. In Damascus, he studied under Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Zaynu'l-Din al-'Iraqi, ibn an-Naqib, Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Khabbaz, Dawud ibn Ibrahim al-'Attar, ibn Qati al-Jabal and Ahmad ibn 'Abdu'l-Hadi al-Hanbali. In Makkah, he heard from al-Fakhr 'Uthman ibn Yusuf al-Nuwayri. In Jerusalem, he heard from al-Hafiz al-'Ala'i. In Egypt, he heard from Sadru'l-Din Abu'l-Fath al-Maydumi and Nasiru'l-Din ibn al-Muluk.

Many students of knowledge came to him to study under him. Amongst the most famous of his students were: Abu'l-'Abbas Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr ibn 'Ali al-Hanbali; Abu'l-Fadl Ahmad ibn Nasr ibn Ahmad; Dawud ibn Sulayman al-Mawsili; 'Abdu'l-Rahman ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Muqri'; Zaynu'l-Din 'Abdu'l-Rahman ibn Sulayman ibn

Abu'l-Karam; Abu Dharr al-Zarkashi; al-Qadi 'Ala'u'l-Din ibn al-Laham al-Ba'li; and Ahmad ibn Sayfu'l-Din al-Hamawi.

Ibn Rajab devoted himself to knowledge and spent the vast majority of his time researching, writing, authoring, teaching, and giving legal rulings.

Many scholars praised him for his vast knowledge, asceticism and expertise in the Hanbali school of thought. Ibn Qadi Shuhbah said of him, 'He read and became proficient in the various fields of science. He engrossed himself with the issues of the *madhhab* until he mastered it. He devoted himself to the occupation of knowledge of the texts, defects and meanings of the hadith.' [Ibn Qadi al-Shuhbah, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, p. 195]

Ibn Hajr said of him, 'He was highly proficient in the science of hadith in terms of the names of reporters, their biographies, their paths of narration and awareness of their meanings.' [Ibn Hajr, *Inba'u'l-Ghamr*, vol. 1, p. 460]

Ibn Muflih said of him, 'He is the Shaykh, the great scholar, the Hafiz, the ascetic, the Shaykh of the Hanbali madhhab and he authored many beneficial works.' [*al-Maqsad al-Arshad*, vol. 2, p. 81]

He wrote many beneficial works, some of them outstanding such as *al-Qawa'id al-Kubra fi'l-Furu'* about which it was said, 'It is one of the wonders of this age.' [Ibn 'Abdu'l-Hadi, *Dhayl 'ala Tabaqat ibn Rajab*, p. 38.] His commentary to al-Tirmidhi is said to be the most extensive and best ever written so much so that al-'Iraqi; about whom ibn Hajr said, 'He was the wonder of his age'; would ask for his help when compiling his own commentary to the same book.

Moreover he has many valuable monographs explaining various ahadith such as: *Sharh Hadith Ma Dhi'bani Jai'an Ursila fi Ghanam*; *Ikhtiyar al-Awla Sharh Hadith Ikhtisam al-Mala' al-A'la*; *Nur al-Iqtibas fi Sharh Wasiyyah al-Nabi li ibn 'Abbas*; and *Kashfu'l-Kurbah fi Wasfi Hali Ahli-l-Ghurbah*.

In exegesis his works include: *Tafsir Surah al-Ikblas*; *Tafsir Surah al-Fatihah*; *Tafsir Surah al-Nasr*; and *al-Istighna' bi'l-Qur'an*.

In hadith his works include: *Sharh 'Ilal al-Tirmidhi*; *Fathu'l-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*; and *Jami' al-'Ulum wa'l-Hikam*.

In fiqh his works include: *al-Istikhraj fi Ahkam al-Kharaj*; and *al-Qawa'id al-Fiqhiyyah*.

In biographies his works include the monumental *Dhayl 'ala Tabaqati'l-Hanabilah*.

In exhortation his works include: *Lata'if al-Ma'arif* and *al-Takhwif min al-Nar*.

CHAPTER ONE



All praise and thanks are due to Allah. May Allah extol and shower abundant blessings of peace upon Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions.

To proceed:

These are some brief words about the meaning of knowledge (*'ilm*) and its classification into that which is beneficial and that which is not [ibn 'Abdu-l-Barr and ibn al-Qayyim], as well as a note regarding the excellence of the knowledge of the Salaf over that of the Khalaf. So we say, seeking Allah's aid, and there is no strength or ability except with Him:

In His Book, Allah sometimes mentions knowledge in a praiseworthy way; referring to beneficial knowledge, and at other times in a blameworthy way; referring to knowledge that is not beneficial.

1.1 Beneficial Knowledge

As for the first category, its example lies in the sayings of Allah, Exalted is He,

Say: are they equal, those who possess knowledge and those who do not?

[*al-Zumar* (39): 9]

Allah bears witness that none has the right to be worshipped save Him, and so do the angels and those

firmly endowed with knowledge, upholding justice.
[*Ali Imran* (3): 13]

And say: My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.
[*Ta Ha* (20): 114]

It is only the learned amongst His servants who truly
fear Allah.
[*Fatir* (35): 28]

It also lies in what Allah, Glorious is He, recounts of the story of
Adam. He taught him the names of all things and then presented them
to the angels, who said,

Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except that
which You have given us. You alone are the Knowing,
the Wise.
[*al-Baqarah* (2): 32]

Further mention of it can be seen in what Allah, Glorious and Exalted
is He, recounts of the story of Musa (*'alayhis as-salam*) who asked
Khidr,

May I follow you so you may teach me the right-
guidance which you have been taught?
[*al-Kahf* (18): 66]

this being none other than beneficial knowledge.

Moreover we have been informed about a people who were recipients
of knowledge but their knowledge was of no avail. This knowledge, in
and of itself, is beneficial but the one to whom it was granted was not
benefited by it. Allah, Exalted is He, says,

The likeness of those who were entrusted the Torah and who did not carry out its requirements is like that of a donkey laden with books.

[*al-Jumu'ah* (62): 5]

And recite to them the tale of him who We gave Our Signs but he sloughed them off, so Satan overtook him and he became of those who were deceived. If We had wanted to, We would have raised him up by them, but he gravitated towards the earth and pursued his whims and base desires.

[*al-A'raf* (7): 175]

And after them came a people who inherited the Book. They took the goods of this lowly life, saying, 'We will be forgiven for it.' Yet if a similar chance came to them again, they would seize it.

[*al-A'raf* (7): 169]

Allah also says,

So Allah allowed him to stray despite knowledge.

[*al-Jathiyah* (45): 23]

One of the explanations of this verse is that Allah sent him astray in spite of his knowledge.

1.2 Non-Beneficial Knowledge

As for the second category of knowledge, the category that Allah mentioned by way of censure, examples of it can be found in His mention of magic (*sihr*),

And they learn that which harms them and profits them not. And surely they know that he who purchases it would have no portion in the Hereafter.
[*al-Baqarah* (2): 102]

He also says,

And when their messengers brought them clear proofs, they exulted in the knowledge that they already had, but they were soon overtaken by that which they had mocked.
[*Ghafir* (40): 83]

They know the outer things of the life of this world, but are heedless of the Hereafter.
[*al-Rum* (30): 7]

1.3 The Division of Knowledge in the Sunnah

It is for this reason that the Sunnah also divides knowledge into that which is beneficial and that which is not, directing us to take refuge from knowledge that is not beneficial and to ask for knowledge that is.

Muslim records on the authority of Zayd ibn Arqam that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, used to say,

Allah! I take refuge with You from knowledge that does not benefit; from a heart that has no fear; from a soul that is never content; and from an invocation (*da'wah*) that is not responded to. [Muslim #2722]

The compilers of the Sunan [Tirmidhi #3482, Nasa'i 8/255, ibn Majah #250 and Abu Dawud #1533] also recorded this via a number of

different routes, from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him. In some of them there occur the words,

from a supplication (*du'a*) that is not heard.

and in others there is the additional wording,

I take refuge with You from these four.

Nasa'i records on the authority of Jabir that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, used to supplicate,

Allah! I beseech You for knowledge that benefits and I take refuge with You from knowledge that does not benefit. [ibn Hibban #82 and Haythami]

This was also recorded by ibn Majah, his wording being that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, "Ask Allah for beneficial knowledge and take refuge with Allah from knowledge that does not benefit." [Ibn Majah #3843]

Tirmidhi has also recorded it on the authority of Abu Hurayrah with the wording,

Allah! Benefit me by what You have taught me, teach me what will be of benefit to me, and increase me in knowledge. [Tirmidhi #3593 and ibn Majah #251-3833]

Nasa'i records the hadith on the authority of Anas that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, used to supplicate with the words,

Allah! Benefit me with what You have taught me, teach me what will be of benefit to me, and nourish me with

knowledge by which You may benefit me. [*al-Jami‘ al-Kabir*]

Abu Nu‘aym records the hadith of Anas that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, used to say,

Allah! I ask You for faith that endures since faith could well disappear, and I ask You for knowledge that benefits for some knowledge could well be of no benefit.

Abu Dawud records the hadith of Buraydah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Of a surety, some forms of speech (*bayan*) are magic [1] and some knowledge is ignorance.” [Abu Dawud #5012] Sa‘sa‘ah ibn Sawhan explained the statement, “and some knowledge is ignorance” to mean, ‘A scholar burdens himself with taking on knowledge that does not concern him by which he becomes ignorant.’ [Abu Dawud #5012] It has also been explained to mean, ‘That knowledge which brings about harm and does not benefit is actually ignorance,’ [Ibn al-Athir] this is because being ignorant of it is better than knowing it. So understand that if the one ignorant of it is in a better condition than then one who learned it, than this knowledge is actually worse than ignorance. Such is the case with magic and other types of knowledge that harm ones religious or worldly well-being.

CHAPTER TWO



2.1 Branches of Non-Beneficial Knowledge

An explanation of some of the branches of knowledge that do not benefit has been reported from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him. Abu Dawud, *al-Marasil*, records on the authority of Zayd ibn Aslam that it was said, ‘Messenger of Allah! How astonishing is the knowledge of such-and-such a person!’ He inquired, “Of what?” They replied, ‘Of people’s genealogies.’ He remarked, “Knowledge that is of no benefit, the ignorance of which causes no harm.” [Abu Dawud]

Abu Nu‘aym, *Riyad al-Muta‘allimin*, records this hadith via the route of Baqiyyah; from ibn Jurayj; from ‘Ata’; from Abu Hurayrah; from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him. This version mentions that they answered, ‘He is the most learned of people concerning the genealogies of the Arabs, poetry, and the differences that existed amongst the Arabs’, the end of this version adds, “Knowledge is of three types, anything additional is surplus: an unequivocal verse of the Qur’an, an established Sunnah, and an equitable inheritance.” [2] The chain of narration of this version is not authentic; Baqiyyah is a *mudallis*, committing *tadlis* by avoiding making mention of a narrator who is not trustworthy.

The end of this hadith has also been recorded by Abu Dawud and ibn Majah from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘As that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Knowledge is of three types, anything additional is surplus: an unequivocal verse of the Qur’an, an established Sunnah, and an equitable inheritance.” [Abu Dawud #2885 and ibn

Majah #54] Its chain of narration contains ‘Abdu’l-Rahman ibn Ziyad al-Ifriqi who is well-known to contain weakness.

2.2 Genealogy and Astronomy

The command to learn of genealogies such amount as would lead to knowing ones kinfolk has been reported on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Learn of your genealogies such amount as would allow you to join the ties of kinship.” Recorded by Tirmidhi and Ahmad. [Tirmidhi #1979 and Ahmad #8868]

Humayd ibn Zanjawayh records this hadith via another route on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Learn of your genealogies such amount as would allow you to join the ties of kinship, then desist. Learn of the Arabic language such amount as would allow you to understand the Book of Allah, then desist. Learn of astronomy such amount as would allow you to travel in the darkness of land and sea, then desist.” [Bayhaqi, *Shu‘ab al-Iman* #1723] Its chain of narration contains the narrator, ibn Lahi‘ah.

He also records, via the route of Nu‘aym ibn Abu Hind, that ‘Umar said, ‘Learn of astronomy such amount as would allow you to travel through land and sea, then refrain. Learn of genealogies such amount as would allow you to join the ties of kinship and would teach you which women are lawful for you and which are not, then refrain.’ [Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur*]

Mas‘ar reports from Muhammad ibn ‘Ubaidullah that ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab said, ‘Learn of astronomy such amount as would allow you to know the direction of the Qiblah and routes of travel.’ Nakha‘i did not see any harm in a person learning enough about astronomy to be guided through the land. [Ibn Abi Shaybah]

Ahmad and Ishaq allowed learning about the phases of the moon as quoted from them by Harb. Ishaq additionally said that it was allowable to learn the names of the stars such as would allow one to be guided (while travelling). Qatadah disliked that the phases of the moon be learnt [Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur*], while ibn ‘Uyaynah did not allow it; Harb quoted this from them. Tawus said, ‘Perhaps the one who studies the stars and the letters of Abu Jad [3] has nothing in his favour with Allah,’ recorded by Harb. It was also recorded by Humayd ibn Zanjawayh from Tawus as a saying of ibn ‘Abbas [Abdu’l-Razzaq and Bayhaqi]. This is to be understood to refer to the knowledge of astrology, not to that knowledge that allows one to navigate through the earth, the former being totally false and prohibited. [4]

There is a hadith concerning this in which the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Whoever acquires knowledge from the stars has acquired a branch of magic.” Recorded by Abu Dawud on the authority of ibn ‘Abbas [Abu Dawud #3905 and ibn Majah #3726]. He also records the hadith of Qabisah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Taking good omens from the flight of birds after frightening them (*‘iyafah*), taking evil omens in things (*tiyarah*), and geomancy (*tarq*) are all forms of magic.” [Abu Dawud #3907 and Ahmad #15915-20603] *‘Iyafah* refers to the practice of divination through frightening birds and *tarq* refers to the practice of divination through drawing lines on the earth. Therefore astrology is false and prohibited, and enacting those actions that lead on from it such as seeking to draw close to stars or offering sacrifices to them constitute disbelief.

As for learning such knowledge as would allow one to navigate through the earth, know the direction of the Qiblah, and know the routes leading to various places, this is permissible in the view of the majority. There is no need to learn any more of this science than this

amount and to do so would serve to preoccupy one from learning more important things. It is possible that studying this science in minute detail would lead one to start doubting the directions of the Qiblah that have been set up by the Muslims in their lands, indeed this has actually happened to many astronomers, past and present [ibn Qudamah, *al-Mughni*]. This then leads to the belief that the Companions and Tabi‘in prayed in the wrong direction in many of the lands they settled in and this is a false, invalid belief. This is why Imam Ahmad rejected the use of the North Star [for determining the direction of the Qiblah], instead saying, ‘All that is reported is, “What is between the east and the west is the Qiblah.”’ [Tirmidhi #344 and ibn Majah #1011] Meaning that there is no hadith stating that North Star or any other star should be given consideration in such matters.

Ibn Mas‘ud rejected the words of Ka‘b when he said, ‘The heavenly spheres are subject to determined movement’ and likewise such matters were rejected by Malik and others. Imam Ahmad even rejected the statement of some astronomers that noon (*zawal*) occurs at different times in different lands. It is possible that their reasoning behind rejecting this, or at least the reasoning of some of them, was the fact that the Messengers had never spoken about such issues - this despite the fact that the astronomers declare this fact with certainty. It is well possible that devoting oneself to the minutiae of such sciences may lead to severe problems and widespread friction.

Some astronomers used their knowledge to reject the hadith of Descent at the last third of the night [5] by saying, ‘The last third of the night occurs at different times in different countries so it is not possible that this Descent occur at one time.’ The repugnance of this claim is known in the religion by necessity. If the Messenger, peace and blessing be upon him, or the Rightly-Guided Khalifs were to have heard such claims, not only would they have not listened to them, but they would

have rushed to punish these people or would have considered them amongst the rank and file of the deniers and hypocrites.

2.3 Delving into the Minutiae of Permissible Sciences

The same applies to delving too deeply into the science of genealogies; there is no need for it. The words of ‘Umar and others have preceded concerning its prohibition despite the fact that a group of the Companions and Successors knew this science and studied it.

The same applies to delving too deeply into the Arabic language and its morphology, indeed to do so serves to distract one from learning more important matters, and to devote oneself to it prevents one from acquiring much beneficial knowledge. al-Qasim ibn Mukhaymarah disliked Arabic morphology, he said, ‘Its beginning stages is a distraction and its end is transgression,’ [Abu Khaythamah, *al-‘Ilm* #150] meaning by delving too deeply into it and its complexities. The same stance was held by Ahmad who disliked studying the Arabic language too deeply and, when he learned of Abu ‘Ubaid doing so, objected by saying, ‘It diverts one from studying more important matters.’ [Ibn Hani’, *Masa’il al-Imam Ahmad*] This is why it is said, ‘The Arabic language is like salt on food,’ meaning that you take of it as much as would correct ones speech and anything additional spoils it.

The same applies to delving too deeply into mathematics even though it be required to carry out duties such as the apportioning of inheritance, wills, and the division of property amongst those who are due it [ibn ‘Abdu’l-Barr]. Anything additional to this is merely mental exercise and serves to sharpen the mind, there is no need for it and to delve into it preoccupies one from that which is more important.

As for those sciences that were invented after the time of the Companions, whose proponents claim that they are true knowledge and

that whoever is not aware of them is either an ignoramus or misguided, all of them are innovations and are to be counted amongst the newly invented affairs that have been prohibited.

2.4 Discussing *al-Qadr*

From amongst these sciences are those innovated by the Mu‘tazila in their discussion of Qadr [Asha‘ri, *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*] and setting up analogies for Allah while a clear prohibition has been mentioned against delving into Qadr. Ibn Hibban and Hakim record the hadith of ibn ‘Abbas that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “This nation shall always remain steadfast and balanced so long as they do not discuss [the final destination] of children and the divine decree.” [Ibn Hibban #1824] This has also been reported as a statement of ibn ‘Abbas only and some declared this to be the stronger case.

Bayhaqi records the hadith of ibn Mas‘ud that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “When my Companions are mentioned, refrain, and when the stars are mentioned, refrain also.” [Abu Nu‘aym #4953; and Tabarani, *al-Kabir* #10488] This has been reported via a number of routes, all of the isnads being problematic. It is reported that ibn ‘Abbas said to Maymun ibn Mihran, ‘Beware of researching into the stars for they incite towards fortune telling, beware of researching into the divine decree for this leads to heresy, beware of abusing any of the Companions of Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, for Allah would throw you face first into the Fire.’ [Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur*] Abu Nu‘aym also reports this as a statement of the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, but it is not authentic.

The prohibition of delving into the divine decree encompasses a number of matters:

- 1) Using parts of the Book to contradict other parts such that the one who affirms the divine decree quote a particular verse, while the one who denies it quote another verse and they start quarrelling. It is reported that such an event happened during the time of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessing be upon him, whereupon he became angry and prohibited it [Muslim #2666]. Such matters are to be considered as disputing about the Qur'an and this has been prohibited.
- 2) Discussing the divine decree, either by way of affirmation or negation, by rationalising and employing logical arguments. This is exemplified by the saying of the Qadariyyah, 'Were Allah to decree everything and then punish people, He would be unjust and oppressive,' and the saying of their diametric opposite [i.e The Jabariyyah], 'Allah has coerced the servants into performing their actions,' and the likes.
- 3) Delving into the workings of the divine decree, the prohibition of which has been reported from 'Ali and others from amongst the Salaf. This is because the servants will never be able to understand its true reality.

2.5 Discussing the *Dhat* of Allah

Linked to this is the innovation concocted by the Mu'tazila, and those who traverse their path, in their discussion of the essence (*dhat*) of Allah, Exalted is He, and His Attributes through the medium of rationalisation. This is of a greater danger than delving into the divine decree because discussing the divine decree is to discuss the actions of Allah whereas here one is discussing His very essence and Attributes! This group is divided into two categories:

The first: Those who negate much of what is reported in the Book and Sunnah concerning the Attributes due to the implication, in their view, of a likeness between the creation and Creator. From amongst these are the Mu‘tazila who said, ‘If He can be seen, He must be a body because one requires a direction in which to see’, ‘If His speech can be heard, He must be a body.’ Those who negated His *istawa* did so by means of the same reasoning. This is the path of the Mu‘tazila and the Jahmiyyah about whom the Salaf were agreed as to their being innovators and misguided. This path of theirs has been traversed, in some matters, by many of those who are attributed to the Sunnah and Hadith amongst the latter generations.

The second: Those who wished to affirm the Attributes via logical rationalisations that are not mentioned in the narrations and through these they refuted the stances of the first group. Examples of this lie with Maqatil ibn Sulayman and those who followed him such as Nuh ibn Abu Maryam; these were in turn followed by a group of the *Muhaddithin* of the past and present. This is also the way of the Karramiyyah [al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*]. From amongst these were those who affirmed a body for Allah, either in meaning or wording, as an outcome of their affirming His Attributes. Others from amongst them affirmed attributes for Allah that have not been mentioned in the Book and Sunnah such as ‘movement’ which they believe to be necessary outcomes of His Attributes that have been established. The Salaf refuted the manner employed by Maqatil in his refutation of al-Jahm and they went to great lengths in censuring him to the extent that some of them considered it lawful to kill him! Amongst these was Makki ibn Ibrahim, the teacher of al-Bukhari.

The correct position in all of this is the position of the Righteous Salaf in their leaving the verses and ahadith concerning the Attributes as they came without explanation, asking how, or likening them to

creation. There is nothing at all contravening this position that is authentically reported from them, especially Imam Ahmad. Neither is anything reported from them proving that they probed into their meanings or propounded analogies and similitudes for them. This even though there were some who lived close to the time of Ahmad who did do some of this, following the way laid out by Maqatil, but they are not to be followed in this. Those who should be followed are the Imams of Islam such as ibn al-Mubarak, Malik, Thawri, Awza'i, Shafi'i, Ahmad, Ishaq, Abu 'Uбайд and their likes.

One will not find anything in the words of those mentioned above that bears resemblance to the words of the Speculative Theologians (*Mutakallimin*) let alone the words of the philosophers, indeed this is not to be found in the words of anyone who has not been censured or disparaged. Abu Zur'ah al-Razi said, 'Whoever possesses knowledge, yet his knowledge is not refined, and as such requires speculative theology (*kalam*) to spread it, you should have nothing to do with him!'

2.6 The Rationalisation of the People of Opinion

From amongst the innovated sciences is that which has been introduced by the Legal Jurists belonging to the People of Opinion comprising rational principles and rules which govern the legal rules and regulation, not caring whether they conform to the Sunnah or oppose it. The root basis of these principles may well be based upon interpretations of texts from the Book and Sunnah, however others opposed the interpretations employed. This was what the Imams of Islam rejected when they refuted the Legal Jurists amongst the People of Opinion in Hijaz and Iraq, indeed they went to great lengths in censuring and refuting them. As for the Imams and Legal Jurists amongst the Ahlu'l-Hadith, they followed any authentic hadith provided that the hadith was acted upon by the Companions and those who came after them, or at least by some of them. As for those ahadith

which the Salaf unanimously agreed to leave, it is not permissible to act by them since they left acting by them because of their certain knowledge that they should not be enacted. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz said, ‘Take from opinion that which conforms to the practice of those who came before you for they were more knowledgeable than you.’

As for the specific case where the hadith contradicted the practice of the inhabitants of Madinah, Malik was of the opinion that the practice of the inhabitants of Madinah should be adhered to whereas the majority adhered to the hadith [ibn Taymiyyah, *Qa’idah fi ‘Amal Ahl al-Madinah*].

2.7 Debating About the Religion

From amongst the matters rejected by the Imams of the Salaf was argumentation and disputation about issues concerning the lawful and prohibited [6], this was not the way of the Imams of Islam. This was innovated later by the Legal Jurists of Kufah and Basrah, for example, in their authoring works dealing with the differences amongst the Shafi‘is and Hanafis and then devoting a great deal of time and energy in discussion and argumentation [as to which stances were correct]. Matters went to such an extreme that this became the limit of their knowledge, it preoccupied them, and distracted them from beneficial knowledge. All of this is from the newly invented matters.

The Salaf rejected this and there is a hadith recorded in the Sunan concerning this in which the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “A nation never went astray after being guided except by means of disputation,” [Tirmidhi #3253 and ibn Majah #48] then he recited the verse,

They only say this to you for argument’s sake, they are
indeed a disputatious people.

[*al-Zukhruf* (43): 58] [7]

Some of the Salaf said, ‘When Allah desires good for His servant, He opens for him the door of action. When Allah desires evil for His servant, He locks the door to action and opens instead the door of disputation.’

Malik said, ‘I have met the inhabitants of this city and they used to abhor this excessiveness in which we find the people today,’ [Khatib, *al-Faqih wa’l-Mutafaqqih*] meaning delving into minute details of issues and widening them. He used to censure excessive speech and legal verdicts saying, ‘They speak as if they were lascivious camels saying, “It is like this, it is like that” being reckless with their words.’ He used to abhor answering when faced with many questions and would say, ‘Allah says,

“They ask you about the soul, say: the soul is my
Lord’s concern”
[*al-Isra*’ (17): 85] [8]

and he would then not respond to the question.’ It was asked, ‘A person who has knowledge of the Sunnah, should he argue in order to defend it?’ He replied, ‘No, he should inform the other of the Sunnah, if he accepts, fine, otherwise he should remain silent.’ He would say, ‘Arguing and disputing about knowledge takes away the light of knowledge,’ and, ‘Disputing about knowledge hardens the heart and breeds cursing.’ Frequently would he say in response to questions that he was asked, ‘I do not know.’

Imam Ahmad traversed the same path as that followed by Malik in this.

There also occurs a prohibition concerning asking excessive questions [Bukhari #1477-2408-5975-6473-7292 and Muslim #1715], asking tricky and difficult questions [Ahmad #23687-23688] and Abu Dawud #3656], and also about events that have yet to occur [ibn ‘Abdul-Barr, #2055-2069]. Mentioning the narrations concerning this would only prolong the discussion beyond what is necessary.

However, despite all this, there does occur in the words of the Imams such as Malik, Shafi‘i, Ahmad and Ishaq, a clear indicator to the sources of jurisprudence and the intellectual basis of the divine laws, given in a succinct and comprehensive way, such that one can understand the meaning without undue difficulty. Their words also contain a refutation of those who oppose the Sunnah, phrased in the nicest of words and composed in the best of ways such that the person who understands them is left in no need of comprehending the laborious discussions of the Speculative Theologians when they tried to do the same. Indeed their lengthy, laborious discussions could be completely devoid of any of the correctness that is found in the concise statements of the Salaf and the Imams.

2.8 The Way and Wisdom of the *Salaf*

Therefore the Salaf, when they refrained from excessive argumentation and debating, did not refrain because of ignorance and inability, rather because of knowledge and the fear of Allah! Those who came after them who did speak much and went to great lengths in widening issues, did not do so because they had knowledge that the Salaf did not, rather because of the love of speech and lack of scrupulousness (*wara’*) [9]. When al-Hasan heard a group of people arguing he said, ‘These have tired of worship, speech has become easy and trivial to them, there scrupulousness has lessened and this is why they speak such.’ [Ahmad, *al-Zuhd*] Mahdi ibn Maymun said, ‘I heard Muhammad ibn Sirin say, whenever a person tried to argue sophistically with him, “I

know what he means, and if I wished to argue with you, I know full well the methods of disputation,” and in another narration, ‘I know more about disputation than you, but I will not dispute with you.’ [Ajurri #134] Ibrahim al-Nakha‘i said, ‘I have never argued.’ ‘Abdu’l-Karim al-Jazari said, ‘A person of scrupulousness will never dispute.’ [Ajurri #123 and ibn Battah] Ja‘far ibn Muhammad said, ‘Beware of disputing about this religion for it preoccupies the heart and breeds hypocrisy.’ [Abu Nu‘aym] ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz used to say, ‘When you hear disputation, refrain.’ He also said, ‘Whoever makes his religion a tool for disputation will frequently change his stances.’ [Ajurri #116 and Darimi #310] He also said, ‘The predecessors stopped at a point out of knowledge, through penetrative insight did they refrain, even though they were more capable of arguing [than their opponents] were they to have argued.’ There are many quotes from the Salaf concerning this.

Many of the later people have been tried with this, thinking that one who increases his words and arguments, and disputes about matters of the religion is more knowledgeable than one who does not. This is naught but pure ignorance! Just look to the senior Companions such as Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Ali, Mu‘adh, ibn Mas‘ud, and Zayd ibn Thabit; what was there state? Their words were less than the words of ibn ‘Abbas yet they had more knowledge than he! Similarly the words of their successors were more than those of the Companions even though the latter had more knowledge than them. The words of the next generation of successors were more than those of the first generation successors even though the latter knew more than the former.

Therefore knowledge is not narrating a great deal, nor is it having an opinion on everything, rather it is a light which is implanted in the heart [10] by which the servant comes to understand the truth, employs it to differentiate between truth and falsehood, and is able to express that truth in brief, concise words. The Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, was granted pithiness in speech [Bukhari #2977-6998-7013-7273

and Muslim #523] and his words were the most concise of words [*Jami‘ al-‘Ulum wa’l-Hikam*]. All of this goes to show why there is a prohibition against excessive speech and being loose in ones words [11].

The Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Allah never sent a Prophet except as a conveyor; and doctored, elaborate speech is from Satan,” [‘Abdur-Razzaq] meaning by this that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, only ever spoke to the extent required of him to convey the message. As for excessive, doctored, and elaborate speech, it is blameworthy. The sermons of the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, would be brief and to the point [Muslim #866] and his speech was such that the number of words employed could easily be counted [12]. He said, “Indeed from speech is that which is magic.” He said this by way of censure, not by way of commendation as thought by some. Whoever considers the context of these words would be certain of this. Tirmidhi and others quote the hadith of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Allah hates the excessively eloquent among men, those who move their tongues between their teeth just as cows do.” [13] There are many narrations from the Prophet and the Companions, such as ‘Umar, Sa’d, ibn Mas‘ud, ‘A’ishah, and others carrying this meaning.

Therefore it is necessary to realise that not everyone who speaks a lot, delving into great detail, with regards normal speech and knowledge is more knowledgeable than one who does not.

We have been tried by the ignorant amongst people who start believing that just because someone speaks a lot, he is more knowledgeable than those who have preceded him! Amongst them are some who believe that a particular person is more knowledgeable than the Companions and those who came after them simply because he goes to minute details when explaining matters and has an opinion on everything. Some of this group say that he is just more knowledgeable

than the famous Legal Jurists who enjoy a following, however this statement of theirs implies the same as the previous. This is because those famous Legal Jurists spoke more than those who came before them, hence if someone who came after them knows more than them just because of his detailed discussions, then for sure he should be more knowledgeable than those who spoke less than them such as Thawri, Awza'i, Layth, ibn al-Mubarak, those of their generation, and those who came before them of the Successors and Companions. Such a stance constitutes clear disrespect of a serious nature towards the righteous Salaf and indeed amounts to having an evil opinion of them and accusing them of ignorance or deficiency in knowledge. There is no strength or ability except with Allah! [Ajurri #127]

Ibn Mas'ud spoke the truth when he said, 'Amongst mankind, they had the most righteous of hearts, they had the most profound and in-depth knowledge, and they were the least pretentious,' [ibn 'Abdu'l-Barr #1810] thereby indicating that those to come after them are of a lesser stature with regards knowledge but more pretentious. The likes of this has also been reported from ibn 'Umar [Abu Nu'aym].

Ibn Mas'ud also said, 'You are in a time in which the scholars are many but whose speakers are few. After you will come a time in which the scholars are few but the speakers are many.' [Abu Khaythamah #109 and Tabarani] Hence whoever's knowledge is great but speech is little is to be commended, and whoever is the opposite is to be censured.

The Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, testified that the people of Yemen had faith and understanding [Bukhari #3499-4388-4390 and Muslim #52]. The people of Yemen are the least of people with regards speech and delving into the minutiae of the various sciences. However, their knowledge is beneficial knowledge that has taken root in their hearts and they express of it only that which is required. This is beneficial understanding.

The best of what exists with regards the sciences of exegesis of the Qur'an, explanation of hadith, and discussion of the lawful and prohibited is that which is related from the Companions, the Successors, and the following generations until the generation of the famous Imams we have previously referred to. The proof that this portion is indeed the choicest of these sciences, arising from the most profound depth of understanding and discernment, is that which occurred after them of delving into minute details and widening issues, most of which contains no benefit unless it be an explanation of their words. As for that which contradicts their speech, most of it is false or contains no benefit whatsoever.

Their words suffice us and more, there is no truth that one finds in the words of those who came after except that it can be found in their words in the most succinct and comprehensive of ways. There is no falsehood to be found in the words of those who came after except that you will find in their words, after understanding and due consideration, a clarification of its falsity. There is to be found in their words such profound meanings and subtle derivations that those who came after would never have even begun to broach, let alone been guided to!

Whoever does not take knowledge from their words will miss out on all that good as well as falling into much falsehood by way of following those who came after. However, whoever wishes to collate their words is in need of knowing the authentic from the weak. This comes about by knowing the science of authenticating and disparaging narrators (*jarh wa'l-ta'dil*) and the defects of hadith. Whoever does not know this is not to be depended upon when he quotes from them and quickly will such a person confuse the truth of it with the falsehood. Such a person is not to be depended upon when he reports from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, or the Salaf because of his ignorance of the authentic from the weak. It is even possible that such a person, as a

consequence of this ignorance and subsequent confusion, go to the extreme of believing that all of it is false.

Awza'i said, 'Knowledge is that which the Companions of Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, conveyed, anything else is not to be considered knowledge.' [Ibn 'Abdu'l-Barr #1420-1421] This was also stated by Imam Ahmad and he said concerning the Successors, 'You are free to choose,' meaning it is up to you if you wish to record their words or leave them. Zuhri used to write their narrations and Salih ibn Kaysan disagreed with him on this only to later regret that he himself never wrote them.

In our times it is imperative that the words of the Imams of the Salaf, who are followed up to the time of Shafi'i, Ahmad, Ishaq and Abu 'Ubad, be written down. Let the people beware of those affairs that happened after them, for many new matters occurred amongst which was the appearance of those who attributed themselves to following the Sunnah and Hadith such as the Zahiriyyah and their likes. The Zahiriyyah often oppose the Sunnah due to their founders' deviation from the stances held by the Imams and following his own understanding, or his taking to those texts that the Imams before him did not take to.

As for delving into the words of the speculative theologians and the philosophers, this is pure evil! Rare is it to find one who delves into them without being sullied by some of their filth. Ahmad said, 'None delves into speculative theology (*kalam*) except that he takes on board the ways of Jahm.' He, as well as the other Imams of the Salaf, used to warn against the People of speculative theology (*Ahlu'l-Kalam*) even if their intention be to defend the Sunnah.

As for what is to be found in the words of those who love this rhetoric and follow its adherents in censuring those who do not excel in

disputation and debate, accusing them of ignorance and Hashw, - or that they do not have gnosis of Allah, or that they do not possess true understanding of this religion - all of this is from following the footsteps of Satan. We take refuge with Allah from such a person.

2.9 The 'Inner Sciences'

From those sciences that have been innovated is the discussion and analysis of the 'Inner Sciences' i.e. sciences dealing with matters such as gnosis, the actions of the heart, and related issues based upon pure opinion, spiritual experience (*dhawq*), or spiritual realisation (*kashf*). This contains a great danger and was rejected by the greatest of the Imams such as Ahmad and others.

Sulayman [al-Darani] used to say, 'Sometimes a point of inspiration occurs to me as it does to the nation [of ascetics], but I do not accept it except by the testimony of two just witnesses: the Book and the Sunnah.' [Sulami, *Tabaqat al-Sufiyyah*]

Junayd said, 'This knowledge of ours is governed by the Book and the Sunnah, whoever has not read the Qur'an or written the hadith is not to be followed in this knowledge of ours.' [Abu Nu'aym] This knowledge has been greatly abused and some of those who laid claim to it fell into various forms of heresy and hypocrisy: claiming that the *Awliya* 'were better than the Prophets, or that they had no need of the Prophets, belittling the laws conveyed by the Messengers, having the belief of incarnation and unification (*hulul wa'l-ittihad*), the belief of the unity of being (*wahdatu'l-wujud*), and other such matters which form the foundations of disbelief, sin, and transgression; such as the claim that many of the prohibited matters are lawful to them. Through this approach they have introduced many affairs into this religion that have nothing to do with it. They thought some of these affairs would engender softness of the heart such as singing and dancing. They

thought other matters would serve to refine the soul such as passionately desiring forbidden pictures and looking at them. Yet others they thought would break the soul or lead to humility such as the desire for clothes and other such matters whose legitimacy has not been proven by the Divine Law (*Shari'ah*). Indeed some of these matters actually distract away from the remembrance of Allah and prayer such as singing and looking at that which is prohibited to see; in this they resemble those who took their religion as mere play and amusement.

2.10 Beneficial Knowledge with regards the 'Inner Sciences'

Beneficial knowledge in this arena is to strictly follow the texts of the Book and Sunnah, to understand their meanings, and in order to do so, confine oneself to what has been reported from the Companions, the Successors, and their successors in matters to do with the Qur'an, hadith, the lawful and prohibited, asceticism, softening of the heart, gnosis, and other such things. It is upon one to exert himself in distinguishing the authentic narration from the weak, then after this to exert himself in correctly understanding the authentic narrations. In this there is sufficiency for any who possess intelligence and adequate material for those who seek beneficial knowledge.

Whoever suffices with this, makes his intention sincere - seeking the Face of Allah, Mighty and Magnificent - and seeks His aid, He will aid him, guide him, grant him the divine accord, make him firm, grant him understanding, and bestow upon him inspiration. At this juncture this knowledge will sprout its special fruit: the fear of Allah, just as He, Mighty and Magnificent, says,

It is only the learned amongst His servants who truly
fear Allah.

[*Fatir* (35): 28]

Ibn Mas‘ud and others said, ‘Sufficient knowledge is it that one fears Allah, and sufficient ignorance is it to be deceived of Allah.’ [Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Barr #1514; Ahmad, *al-Zuhd*] Some of the Salaf said, ‘Knowledge is not narrating a great deal but knowledge is the fear of Allah.’ [Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Barr #1400-1401] Others said, ‘Whoever fears Allah is the scholar and whoever disobeys him is the ignoramus.’ [Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Barr #1544] There are many quotes from them carrying this meaning.

The reason for this is that beneficial knowledge leads to two matters:

1. Knowledge of Allah and what befits Him of Beautiful Names, Lofty Attributes, and Awe-Inspiring Actions. This necessarily leads to venerating Him, glorifying Him, having fear of Him, being in awe of Him, loving Him, having hope in Him, putting ones reliance in Him, being content with His decree, and bearing His trials with patience.
2. Knowledge of what He loves and is pleased with and that which He detests and angers Him of beliefs, actions - the outer and inner, and statements. This leads one to rush towards performing that which Allah loves and is pleased with and avoiding all that He detests and angers Him.

When knowledge sprouts these fruits, it is beneficial knowledge. When knowledge is beneficial and takes root in the heart, the heart fears Allah, submits to Him, and humbles itself in awe, glorification, fear, love, and veneration. When this happens the soul is content with the humblest of lawful worldly provisions and this in turn leads it to turn away from the world and all temporal effects. As such there remains no property, status, or surplus effects that is looked at wantonly by the servant which would be a cause for the decrease of his portion with Allah of the bliss of the Hereafter. This was stated by ibn ‘Umar and others from amongst the Salaf and has been reported from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him.

When all of this happens, this special relationship between Allah, Mighty and Magnificent, and the servant is engendered. If he asks, He grants, and if he supplicates, He answers as is mentioned in the hadith qudsi, "...my servant continues to draw closer to Me by performing the optional deeds until I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his leg with which he walks. Were he to ask of Me, I would grant him, and were he to take refuge with Me, I would grant him refuge," [Bukhari #6502] and in another narration, "Were he to supplicate to Me, I would respond." [Ahmad #26193]

In his, peace and blessing be upon him, advice that was directed to ibn 'Abbas there occurs, "Be mindful of Allah, He will be mindful of you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him in front of you. Know Allah in times of ease and He will know you in times of hardship." [Ahmad #2669-2763-2803]

The goal of the servant is that there be, in his heart, a specific gnosis between him and His Lord whereby he finds Him close all the time and takes comfort with Him in times of solitude. He finds pleasure in remembering Him, supplicating to Him, privately discoursing with Him, and serving Him. None would experience this except he who obeys Him in open and in secret. It was asked of Wuhayb ibn al-Ward, 'Can one who disobeys [Allah] experience the sweetness of obedience?' He replied, 'No, and neither can one who merely wishes to disobey him.' [Abu Nu'aym]

When this is actualised in the servant, he can then be said to have gnosis of his Lord and a special relationship develops between the two such that when he asks, He grants; when he supplicates, He answers. Sha'wanah said to Fudayl when he asked her to supplicate for him, 'Does there not exist between you and your Lord a relationship such that if

you supplicate to Him, he answers you?’ upon which he fell unconscious. [Abu Nu‘aym]

The servant continually faces hardship and difficulty in this world, in the *barzakh* [14] and at the place of the final standing. When there exists this special gnosis between the servant and His Lord, Allah will suffice him during all of this. This is what is indicated in his, peace and blessing be upon him, advice to ibn ‘Abbas, “Know Allah in times of ease and He will know you in times of hardship.”

It was asked of Ma‘ruf, ‘What is it that has roused in you the desire for seclusion?’ The questioner mentioned death, the grave, the place of the final standing, Paradise and Hell as possible causes to which he replied, ‘All of this is in His hand, when there exists a gnosis between you and Him, He suffices you during all of this.’

So beneficial knowledge is that which engenders a gnosis between the servant and his Lord and leads to this such that he comes to know his Lord, singles him out alone in belief and worship, takes comfort in Him, develops a sense of shyness (*haya*) of Him, and worships Him as if he sees Him.

This is why a group of the Companions said, ‘The first knowledge to be raised from the people would by humility (*khushu*’).’ [Ahmad #23990] Ibn Mas‘ud said, ‘There are people who recite the Qur’an yet it does not descend beyond their throats; were it to reach the heart and take root therein, it is then that it would benefit.’ [Muslim #822]

al-Hasan said, ‘Knowledge is of two types: knowledge that is superficial utterance upon the tongue, that is Allah’s proof against the children of Adam; and knowledge that takes root in the heart and that is beneficial knowledge.’ [Darimi #376 and ibn Abi Shaybah] The Salaf used to say, ‘The scholars are of three categories: the scholar who knows

Allah and His commands; the scholar who knows Allah but not His commands; and the scholar who knows His commands but does not know Allah. The best and most complete of them is the first - he is the one who truly fears Allah and knows His rulings.' [Darimi #375 and ibn 'Abdu'l-Barr #1543]

The fundamental matter here is that the servant uses knowledge to engender a gnosis of his Lord. When this comes to fruition he will find Him close. When this happens, He will bring him close and answer his supplications. It is mentioned in a Judeo-Christian narration, 'Son of Adam! Seek me and you will find Me, when you find Me you will find everything. However if you don't find Me, you will have lost everything. I am more beloved to you than anything else.'

Dhu'l-Nun used to repeat these verses by night,

Seek for yourselves

The likes of what I have found.

I have found a place of rest wherein

He never falters in His love:

If I move away, He draws me close

And if I move closer, He draws nigh. [Abu Nu'aym]

2.11 The Foundation of Knowledge

Imam Ahmad, may Allah have mercy upon him, used to say about Ma'ruf, 'He possesses the foundation of knowledge: the fear of Allah.' Therefore the foundation of knowledge is that knowledge which leads to fearing Him, loving Him, drawing close to Him, taking comfort with Him, and ardently desiring Him. Then this is followed by knowledge of the rulings of Allah, all that He loves and is pleased with from the servant of statement, action, spiritual condition, and belief. Whoever realises these two types of knowledge has found beneficial knowledge; he

has attained beneficial knowledge, a fearful heart, a content soul, and a supplication that is responded to.

Whoever does not attain this knowledge will fall into the four matters that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, sought refuge from and his knowledge will actually become a source of misery for him and a proof against him. He will not benefit by it because it did not make his heart fearful of his Lord, it did not satisfy the desires of the soul for this world, rather it only strengthened it, his supplication went unheard because he did not obey the commands of his Lord and avoid all that He detests and angers Him. This provided that his knowledge is that knowledge from which benefit can be hoped, i.e. that knowledge derived from the Book and Sunnah. Whatever knowledge may be derived from other than these two sources is not beneficial and there is no hope of deriving benefit through it, indeed its harm is greater than its benefit!

2.12 The Signs of Beneficial and non-beneficial Knowledge

The sign of knowledge that does not benefit is pride, arrogance, and conceit. Such a person seeks high position and ranking in this world and competes for it. He debates with the scholars with the aim of defeating them, and argues with the foolish with the aim of directing their attention towards him. It is reported from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, that whoever seeks knowledge for this purpose, “for him is the Fire, the Fire!” [Ibn Majah #254 and ibn Hibban #290]

It is possible that some who possess this type of knowledge claim to have gnosis of Allah and that they only desire Him and nothing else. Their purpose behind this claim is naught but the desire for precedence in the hearts of people such as kings and others, that people think well of them, and that they enjoy a large, dedicated following.

The sign of this is that they will openly make the claim of *wilayah* just as was the habit of the People of the Book, and later, the practice of the Qaramita, the Batiniyyah and those like them [Ibn Majah #254 and ibn Hibban #290]. This is the exact opposite of the state of the Salaf who used to think little of themselves, both inwardly and outwardly. ‘Umar said, ‘Whoever says, “I am a scholar” is an ignoramus, whoever says, “I am a believer” is a disbeliever and whoever says, “I am in Paradise” is in Hellfire.’

A further sign of this is that such a person will not accept the truth or submit to it. He will act arrogantly towards those who speak the truth, especially if they are seen to be of a lesser stature than him in the eyes of the people. This person will persist upon his falsehood simply out of fear that the hearts of people may become averse to him by his accepting the truth and therefore changing his stance. Perhaps such people may even outwardly censure themselves and show that they think little of themselves in front of an audience so that people believe that they are humble and thereby praise them. This is from the more subtle forms of showing off (*riya*) as pointed out by the Successors and those scholars who came after them. These people will openly accept praise and encourage it in a way that negates truthfulness (*sidq*) and sincerity (*ikhlās*). The truthful person will always fear falling prey to hypocrisy and meeting an evil end. The truthful person is always trying to avoid praise and always trying to avoid willing acceptance of it if it comes to him.

This is why a sign of the People of Knowledge is that they do not think themselves to be of any great stature or station, they detest in their very hearts praise and commendation and they do not act arrogantly towards anyone. al-Hasan said, ‘The Legal Jurist is one who is abstemious of this world and desirous of the Hereafter, he has perspicuous insight into his religion, and is continuous in the worship of his Lord,’ in another narration, ‘One who does not envy those above

him, or mock those beneath him, and does not take wages for knowledge that Allah has taught him.’ [Ahmad, *al-Zuhd*] The meaning of this last statement has also been reported to us from ibn ‘Umar [Darimi #298 and ibn ‘Abdu’l-Barr #858].

Each time the People of this beneficial knowledge increase in knowledge, they increase in humility before Allah, fear of Him, and submission to Him. Some of the Salaf said, ‘It is desirable that the scholar sprinkle dust on his head out of humility before his Lord.’ [Khatib, *al-Faqih wa’l-Mutafaqqih*] Each time he increases in knowledge and cognisance of his Lord, he increases in fear and love of Him, as well as humility and submission.

From the signs of beneficial knowledge is that it will teach one to flee from the worldly effects, the greatest of which is the desire for leadership, fame, and praise. It will teach one to avoid these and to expend effort in staying away from them. If any of this does occur, without his choice or desire, he is in a state of extreme fear of his end because it could just be a divine plan and a means of gradually leading him to perdition (*istidraj*). It was because of this that Imam Ahmad used to be in a state of fear when he became famous.

From the signs of beneficial knowledge is that one does not lay claim to having knowledge or become boastful of it. He does not accuse others of ignorance unless they oppose the Sunnah and its people, in which case he speaks against him out of anger for the sake of Allah, not out of personal anger or the desire of gaining ascendancy over him.

As for he whose knowledge is not beneficial, he has no concern but to show his supremacy over the rest of the people by means of his knowledge, to accuse them of ignorance, and to demean them. This is from the meanest of traits to be found in people! It is possible that this person even accuse the scholars who came before him of ignorance and

negligence; such a person loves his self and desires to promote it, he has a good opinion of himself and a bad opinion of those who came before him.

The People of beneficial knowledge are the exact opposite; they have a bad opinion of themselves and have a good opinion of the scholars of the past. Their hearts accept the nobility and excellence of their predecessors and their inability to come close to their ranks, let alone actually reach them! Excellent indeed is the saying of Abu Hanifah when he was asked as to which of the two was better, ‘Alqamah or al-Aswad, ‘By Allah we are not even deserving of mentioning them let alone determining which of them is better!’

When the manners of the Salaf were mentioned to him, ibn al-Mubarak would say the following lines of poetry,

Do not mention us in the same context as them
The healthy, when walking, are not like the decrepit.

Whoever’s knowledge is not beneficial and deems himself better than those who preceded him in his stances and his elaborate, laborious speech, will also deem himself better than them in knowledge or ranking in the Sight of Allah. He will look down upon those who came before him and mock them for having little knowledge. This pauper does not realize that the lack of speech arising from the Salaf was because of their *wara’* and fear of Allah, had they wished to lengthen or detail their discussions, they were fully capable of doing so. When ibn ‘Abbas heard some people debating about the religion he said, ‘Do you not know that to Allah belong certain servants, though they are fully able to respond and are not dumb, the fear of Allah has silenced them and given them tranquillity. They are the true scholars, the eloquent ones, the intelligent, the noble; scholars of the Days of Allah, except that when they brought to mind the greatness of Allah, their minds were

overcome, their hearts split for the fear of Allah, and their tongues were silenced. When they recovered from this state they rushed to performing righteous deeds thinking themselves to be amongst those who were negligent when in reality they were the sagacious, those of strong determination; thinking themselves to be oppressors and sinners when in reality they were pious worshippers, free of oppression and sin. They did not think that abundant worship was too much for Him; they were not content with little worship, and they did not look down on any actions of worship. Wherever you were to meet them you would find them sombre, solicitous, in a state of dread and fear of their Lord.’ Reported by Abu Nu‘aym and others [Abu Nu‘aym].

Imam Ahmad and Tirmidhi record the hadith of Abu Umamah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Modesty and cautiously withholding the tongue (*al-‘ayy*) are two branches of faith. Lewdness and eloquent speech are two branches of hypocrisy.” It was declared hasan by Tirmidhi and also recorded by Hakim who declared it sahih [Tirmidhi #2027 and Ahmad #22312].

Ibn Hibban records the hadith of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Clear speech is from Allah and *al-‘ayy* is from Satan. Clear speech does not come about by a great deal of speech, rather it comes about by decisively stating the truth. *al-‘Ayy* does not mean little speech but it means to make a mockery of the truth.” [Ibn Hibban #5796]

Amongst the mursal reports of Muhammad ibn Ka‘b al-Qurazi from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, is that he said, “There are three matters which would cause the servant loss in this world, but he will find that which is greater than them in return in the Hereafter: joining the ties of kinship, modesty, and withholding the tongue.”

‘Awn ibn ‘Abdullah said, ‘Three matters are from faith: modesty, chastity, and withholding; withholding the tongue, not withholding the heart or actions. These are things which cause gain in the Hereafter and loss in this life but what is gained in the Hereafter is greater than what is lost in this world.’ [‘Abdu’l-Razzaq] This has also been reported from the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, but is weak [Munawi].

Some of the Salaf said, ‘Perhaps a man sits with some people and they think that he is unable to speak when in reality he is fully capable of speech, but he is a Muslim scholar.’ Therefore he who knows the worth of the Salaf will know that their silence over certain matters such as excessive speech, argumentation and debating, and increasing upon explanation beyond what is necessary did not arise out of the inability to speak, nor ignorance, nor due to shortcoming; instead it arose due to their scrupulousness, their fear of Allah, and their preoccupying themselves with those affairs which would be of benefit rather than those affairs that contain no benefit.

2.13 All Goodness lies in Traversing the Way of the *Salaf*

Regardless of whether it be in the foundation of the religion or its subsidiary issues, the exegesis of the Qur’an, the explanation of hadith, asceticism, matters which soften the heart, points of benefit and wisdom, exhortations - whatever the Salaf spoke about - whoever traverses their path in this is rightly guided, and whoever does not; instead involving himself in excessive questioning, disputation, and speculation; is not rightly guided. However, if this latter person was to admit their excellence and his own shortcoming then his state is better. Iyas ibn Mu‘awiyah said, ‘Only a fool is unaware of the defects of his own soul.’ It was asked of him, ‘What is your defect?’ He replied, ‘Speaking too much.’ [Abu Nu‘aym] However, if this latter person was to attribute excellence to himself and deficiency and ignorance to those

who preceded him, then he has clearly deviated and has suffered a great loss.

In summary, in these corrupt times, it is upon the person to either be content that he is a scholar in the sight of Allah, or not be content with this and instead content himself with being a scholar in the eyes of people. If he chooses the first, let him suffice with Allah's knowledge of him; whoever has a state of gnosis existing between him and Allah will suffice with Allah's knowledge of him. Whoever chooses the second then he comes under the saying of the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, "Whoever seeks knowledge to compete with the scholars, or to argue with the fools, or to win the attention of people, let him take his place in the Fire." [\[15\]](#)

Wuhayb ibn al-Ward said, 'It could well be that a scholar in the eyes of the people is counted to be amongst the ignorant in the Sight of Allah.'

Muslim records the hadith of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, "The first to be burnt in the Fire are three....," amongst whom are the scholar and the reciter of the Qur'an who only learnt their knowledge that it may be said of them, 'He is a scholar', 'He is a reciter of the Qur'an.' It was indeed said of them and they will be dragged face first into Hellfire [\[16\]](#).

If one does not content his soul with this, contenting it instead with the position of judge simply because this is a position that people respect, then he has chosen that which is lesser in exchange for that which is best, and he has moved from the ranking of scholar to the ranking of oppressor. This is why, when one of the Salaf was offered the position of judge, he refused saying, 'I only learnt knowledge that I may be resurrected with the Prophets, not that I may be resurrected with

kings. The scholars are resurrected with the Prophets and judges are resurrected with kings!'

2.14 Bear this Life with Patience!

It is necessary that the believer have patience for a short while such that through it he will attain everlasting bliss. If he despairs and becomes impatient, he is as ibn al-Mubarak said, 'Whoever has patience, how short a time does he have to be patient for. Whoever despairs, how a short time does he have to enjoy himself!'

Imam Shafi'i used to say the following lines of poetry,

O my soul, it is only a few days, bear them patiently.
A lifetime seems but a flitting reverie.
O my soul, through this world pass swiftly
And leave it for true life ahead does lie! [Shafi'i, *Diwan*]

We ask Allah for beneficial knowledge and we take refuge with Him from knowledge that does not benefit, from a heart that does not fear Him, from a soul that is not content, and from a supplication that is not answered. O Allah we take refuge with You from these four!

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds. May Allah bestow his peace and blessings upon our master, Muhammad, upon all of his family and all of his Companions [\[17\]](#).

Chapter THREE



3.1 The People of the Book and their Hard Hearts

Consider carefully Allah's censure of the People of the Book, the hardness of their hearts even after being given the Book and their witnessing miracle after miracle such as the revival of the dead man after being struck with a part of the cow [*al-Baqarah* (2): 72-74]. We have been prohibited from resembling them and it has been said to us,

**Has the time not arrived for the hearts of those who
have faith to yield to the remembrance of Allah and to
the truth He has revealed, so they are not like those
who were given the Book before for whom the time
seemed over long so that their hearts became hard?
[*al-Hadid* (57): 16]**

In another place Allah explained to us the cause of their hard hearts saying,

**But because of their breaking of their covenant, We
have cursed them and made their hearts hard.
[*al-Ma'idah* (5): 13]**

Thereby informing us that the hardness of their hearts arose as a punishment for their breaking the covenant of Allah. This by opposing His commands and doing what He prohibited after they had accepted the contract, then Allah says,

They distort the true meaning of words and have forgotten a good portion of what they were reminded of.

Allah mentions that the hardness of their hearts led to two blameworthy characteristics,

1. Distorting the true meanings of words.
2. Their forgetting a portion of what they were admonished with, meaning by this: their abandoning and ignoring a portion of the wisdom and goodly exhortation given them. They forgot it, left acting upon it, and ignored it.

These two matters are to be found amongst our scholars who have been corrupted due to their having the traits of the People of the Book. They distort the true meanings of words because they are not sincere in their learning of knowledge and hence their hearts become hard. Therefore they do not preoccupy themselves with deeds but rather with distortion of words. They twist the words of the Book and Sunnah away from their correct meanings and import, doing so craftily and by the employment of subtle methods; methods such as claiming that they are metaphorical, thereby giving them far-fetched meanings, and casting doubts on the wordings of the Sunnah when they are unable to do so with regards the Book. They censure those who adhere firmly to the divine texts, accepting their clear meanings, and call them ignorant or Hashwi [ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*]. This trait is to be found amongst the Speculative Theologians, the Legal Jurists amongst the People of Opinion, and the Sufis from amongst the philosophers and Speculative Theologians.

They also leave aside a portion of the beneficial knowledge they have been admonished with, hence their hearts do not accept admonition and

exhortation, instead they censure those who learn that which makes them weep and softens their hearts, branding them story-tellers!

In their works, the People of Opinion state, quoting their teachers, that the fruits of knowledge indicate the nobility of that knowledge. So the fruit of whoever preoccupies himself with exegesis of the Qur'an is to narrate stories and admonish people, and the fruit of whoever preoccupies himself with their opinions and their knowledge is that he is able to give legal verdicts, pass judgments, and teach! Such people come under the meaning of the verse,

They know the outward aspect of the life of this world but are heedless of the Hereafter.

[al-Rum (30): 7]

It is their intense love for this world and position that has made them like this. If only they would lessen their desire for this world and instead direct it to the Hereafter, if only they were sincere to themselves and the servants of Allah, they would then strictly follow what Allah has revealed to His Messenger and they would enjoin the people to this as well. As a result most people would not violate the dictates of *taqwa*, and the texts of the Book and Sunnah would suffice them, with only a few of them not being satisfied with them. These few, Allah would cause to return to the truth by way of those who had correctly understood the divine texts, and hence people would be left in no need of these concocted, false, subsidiary rulings and crafty tricks through which the doors to usury and other proscriptions have been opened. Today we see the proscribed being prescribed by way of the simplest of tricks and twists, just as the People of the Book used to do!

May Allah guide those who believe to the truth in those matters in which they have differed *“and Allah guides whoever He wills to the Straight Path.”*

May Allah send abundant blessing of peace upon our master,
Muhammad, upon his family and his Companions until the Day of
Judgment.

*“Allah suffices for us and an excellent
disposer of our affairs is He.”*

End notes



[1] Refer to ibn Hajr, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 10, p. 238, and ibn Hibban, *Rawdatu'l-'Uqala'*, p. 179. Khattabi, *A'lam al-Hadith*, vol. 3, p. 1967, said, 'Bayan is of two types: the first whereby the intended meaning is expressed clearly, whatever language it may be in, this category is not regarded as magic; the second whereby the intended meaning is expressed in eloquent, cleverly doctored phrases based upon specific rules such that one listening takes pleasure in hearing the words and they affect his very heart. This category is what has been likened to magic as it captivates and beguiles the heart and overcomes the soul to the point that the face of reality could be transformed to illusion and the one captivated perceive only that which the speaker wants him to perceive. This category can be used in a commendable fashion and in a blameworthy fashion. As for the commendable form, it is to direct the person towards the truth and use these methods to aid the truth.... As for the blameworthy form, it is to direct the person towards falsehood or envelop him in confusion such that the truth is seen as falsehood and falsehood as truth. This is completely blameworthy and has been likened to that which is completely blameworthy - magic.' [\[Return\]](#)

[2] Hafiz ibn Hajr said, 'It is not established, it also quoted as a statement of 'Umar and is not established' as quoted of him by Munawi, vol. 4, p. 431. The hadith is also recorded by ibn 'Abdu'l-Barr, #1385-1386 who declared the isnad da'if. [\[Return\]](#)

[3] i.e. assigning values or mystical meanings to the letters of the alphabet. Refer to ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu' Fatawa*, vol. 12, p. 62; and ibn Hajr, *al-Matalib al-'Aliyah*, vol. 3, p. 124. [\[Return\]](#)

[4] Baghawi, *Sharh al-Sunnah*, vol. 12, p. 183, said, ‘The prohibited form of knowledge of the stars is that knowledge that leads its proponent to predict future events such as the occurrence of strong wind, the onset of rain, snow, cold and hot weather, the fluctuation in prices of commodities etc., thinking that they can come to know this through the motions of the stars. However this is knowledge that Allah has kept to Himself and none knows it save Him, *“Truly Allah has knowledge of the Hour and sends down abundant rain and knows what is in the womb. No self knows what it will earn tomorrow and no self knows in what land it will die”* [Luqman (31): 34]. As for that knowledge that comes about through studying the stars, through which one can know matters such as the direction of the Qiblah, this is not prohibited. Allah, Glorious is He, says, *“It is He Who has appointed the stars for you so you might be guided by them in the darkness of the land and sea”* [al-An‘am (6): 97].’ [\[Return\]](#).

[5] Bukhari #1145-6321-7494 and Muslim #756/1772-1778 record on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “Every night, when the last third of the night remains, our Lord, Blessed and Exalted is He, descends to the lowest heaven and says, ‘Is there anyone who invokes Me that I may respond? Is there anyone asking of Me that I may give it to him? Is there anyone who asking My forgiveness that I may forgive him?’” [\[Return\]](#).

[6] Ajurri #112-113 records from Muslim ibn Yasar that he said, ‘Beware of disputation, for through it does the scholar slip into ignorance and by means of it does Satan desire to cause him to slip and err.’ The isnad is sahih. Ajurri #115 records from Mu‘awiyah ibn Qurrah that he said, ‘Arguing about the religion destroys ones deeds.’ The isnad is also sahih.

Even aiding someone who is debating could be a grave wrong. Hakim #7051 records on the authority of ibn ‘Umar that the Prophet, peace

and blessing be upon him, said, “Whoever, without due right, comes to the aid of one debating, is under the displeasure of Allah until he withdraws.” Hakim said that the isnad was sahih and Dhahabi agreed.

[\[Return\]](#)

[7] Ajurri, vol. 1, p. 434, said, ‘When the People of Knowledge amongst the Tabi‘in and the Imams who followed them heard this, they did not debate or dispute about matters concerning the religion and they warned the Muslims against this as well. They enjoined the Muslims to follow the Sunnah and that which the Companions were upon, may Allah be pleased with them all. This is the way of the People of Truth, those to whom Allah, Exalted is He, has granted His divine accord.’

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[8] Abu Nu‘aym, vol. 8, p. 405 #12690, as a statement of Ma‘ruf al-Karkhi. He also recorded #12691 that Ma‘ruf said, ‘For a person to discuss matters that do not concern him is a sign that Allah, Exalted is He, has forsaken him.’

Abu Dawud #4800 records on the authority of Abu Umamah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, “I stand guarantor that a house will be built on the outskirts of Paradise for whoever abandons argumentation, even if he be in the right; a house will be built in the middle of Paradise for the one who abandons lying even if it be in jest; a house will be built in the most lofty part of Paradise for one who makes good his morals and manners.” It was ruled sahih by Albani, *al-Sahihah* #273. [\[Return\]](#)

[9] Bayhaqi, *al-Zuhd al-Kabir* #832 and Harawi, *Dhamm al-Kalam* #114 record from Dahhak that he said, ‘As for them, they learnt *wara‘*, however there will come upon you a time wherein people will merely learn how to speak.’

ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Fawa'id*, p. 118, said that *wara'* was, 'Leaving all that one fears may harm his Hereafter.' al-Jurjani, *al-Ta'rifat*, p. 325, said that it was 'The leaving of anything doubtful for fear of falling into the prohibited. It is also said that it is to adhere firmly to all beautiful deeds.' Tabarani, *al-Kabir* records on the authority of Hudhayfah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, "The excellence of knowledge is better than the excellence of worship. The best of your religion is *wara'*." Mundhiri said that its isnad was hasan and it was declared sahih by Albani, *Sahih al-Targhib* #68. [\[Return\]](#)

[10] Ibn 'Abdu'l-Barr #1398-1399 records that Imam Malik said, 'Knowledge does not come about by a great deal of narration, instead it is a light that Allah implants in the hearts,' and, 'Knowledge and wisdom are a light though which Allah guides whoever He wills, they do not come about by knowing many issues.' [\[Return\]](#)

[11] Bukhari #1477-2408-5975-6473-7292 and Muslim #1715 on the authority of al-Mughirah. Ahmad #8822 and Bayhaqi, *Shu'ab* #4970 also record on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, "Should I not inform you of the worst of you? Those who prattle, those who speak rashly and without care, and the arrogant braggart. Should I not inform you of the best of you? Those of you who have the best morals and manners." It was ruled sahih by Albani, *al-Sahihah* #751-791-1891 and Arna'ut, vol. 14, p. 418. [\[Return\]](#)

[12] Muslim #2493 on the authority of 'A'ishah.

Ibn Abi al-'Izz, *Sharh 'Aqidah at-Tahawiyyah*, p. 19, said, 'Our Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, was granted pithiness in speech, he was sent with universal, comprehensive sciences and knowledge pertaining to this world and the Hereafter in the best and most complete of fashions. However each time someone introduced an innovation, they

went to great lengths in justifying it and this is why the discussions of the latter people are long and laborious and of very little benefit. In contrast, the words of the early generations are few but of great blessings.’ [\[Return\]](#)

[13] Tirmidhi #2853 and Abu Dawud #5005.

Tirmidhi ruled it to be hasan as did Suyuti #1849 and it is to be found in Albani, *al-Sahihah* #880; *Sahih al-Jami*’ #1875.

Munawi, vol. 2, pg. 359, ‘The resemblance lies in the fact that this person moves his tongue over his teeth and mouth while speaking just as the cow moves its tongue when eating.’

Bayhaqi, *Shu‘ab* #4978 records from ibn al-Mubarak that he said, ‘I found that our companions would suddenly end their speech,’ the sub-narrator explained this by saying, ‘Meaning out of fear that they would fall under the hadith about a people moving their tongues in their mouths as a cow does when it eats.’ [\[Return\]](#)

[14] *al-Barzakh*, refers to a barrier placed between a person who has deceased and this worldly life. It is a way of referring to the first stages of the life of the Hereafter. A very good treatment of *al-Barzakh* and the issues related to it can be found in Muhammad al-Jibaly, ‘Life in *al-Barzakh*’ [*Al-Kitaab & As-Sunnah* publishing, 1998]. [\[Return\]](#)

[15] The author, may Allah have mercy upon him, has actually combined two separate ahadith in one. The first is the hadith, “Whoever acquires knowledge to compete with the scholars, or to argue with the fools, or to win the attention of people, is in the Fire.” Recorded by Tirmidhi #2654 and Ibn Majah #253 on the authority of ibn ‘Umar. It was declared sahih by Albani, *Sahih al-Targhib* #109.

The second is the hadith, “Whoever seeks knowledge for other than Allah - or, intending thereby other than Allah - let him take his place in the Fire.” Recorded by Tirmidhi #2655 and Ibn Majah #258 on the authority of ibn ‘Umar. It was declared da‘if by Albani, *Da‘if al-Jami‘* #5687. [[Return](#)].

[16] Muslim #1905/4923 on the authority of Abu Hurayrah with the words, “The first man (whose case) will be decided on the Day of Judgment, will be a man who died as a martyr. He shall be brought forth and Allah will recount His blessings (which He had bestowed upon him) and he will acknowledge them. Then Allah will ask, “What did you do with them?” He will reply, “I fought for Your sake until I died as a martyr.” Allah will say, “You lie. You fought so that you might be called a ‘brave warrior’ and you were called so.” Then a command will be given and he will be dragged on his face and cast into Hell.

And a man who acquired knowledge and taught it and recited the Qur’an. He will be brought forth and Allah will recount His blessings (which He had bestowed upon him) and he will acknowledge them. Then Allah will ask, “What did you do with them?” He will say, “I acquired knowledge and disseminated it and recited the Qur’an for your sake.” Allah will say, “You lie. You acquired knowledge so that you might be called ‘a scholar,’ and you recited the Qur’an so that it might be said, ‘He is a Qari,’ and it was said. Then a command will be given and he will be dragged on his face and cast into Hell.

And a man whom Allah had made abundantly rich and had granted every kind of wealth. He will be brought forth and Allah will recount His blessings (which He had bestowed upon him) and he will acknowledge them. Then Allah will ask, “What did you do with them?” He will say, “I spent money in every cause in which You wished that it should be spent for Your sake.” Allah will say, “You lie. You did so that it

might be said, “He is generous,” and it was said. Then a command will be given and he will be dragged on his face and cast into Hell.’ [\[Return\]](#)

[17] Ajurri, *al-Shari‘ah*, vol. 1, p. 451, said, ‘Whoever possesses knowledge and intelligence and understands all that has preceded in this book will know that he is in need of performing righteous deeds. If Allah wishes good for him, that person will adhere firmly to the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, that which the Companions were upon, may Allah be pleased with them all, and the way of those who followed them in good: the Imams of each generation. He will learn knowledge so as to remove ignorance from himself, his intention being to learn it for the sake of Allah, Exalted is He, Alone. His intention is not to be for the sake of excelling in argumentation, disputation, and debate; and neither is to be for a worldly purpose. Whoever’s intention is pure will be safe from desires, innovation, and misguidance, if Allah wills, and will follow that which the Imams of the Muslims were upon before him.’ [\[Return\]](#)

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