

SUMMER IMMERSION

HADITH MASTERS



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Sufyan al-Thawri

Statements About Him

- The people who sat with him said that he had occupied his entire life with 'ilm (knowledge) and 'amal (worship)
- Ibn Mubarak said: "I have never seen anyone like Sufyan."
- Ahmad ibn Hanbal: "Do you know who is the Imam? The Imam is Sufyan Al-Thawri. No one can surpass him."

Background

- He was the son of the tabi'i Saeed ibn Masruq, who was also a muhaddith.
- He was born in Kufa, Iraq and spent most of his life there
- Both of his parents encouraged him to seek knowledge
 - His mother would tell him to learn from the muhaddithoon and write and memorize just ten ahadith at a time
 - She told him not to exhaust himself
- He was quick to absorb knowledge
- His classmates said that when they were young, people would walk down the streets and ask for Sufyan to ask him a question
- He took from six hundred teachers
- One of his students said: "I wrote down some thirty thousand ahadith from him."
- To take a hadith from him was a mark of one's authenticity

- He learned fiqh from the scholars of Kufa
 - Kufa was the base of Ibn Masud (RA) for many years, so it was his fiqh that was prevalent there
- He was also a mufassir

Characteristics and Events

- He established his own madhab
 - Fudayl ibn Iyad followed his madhab
- He was known as a great zahid of his time
 - Zuhd literally means disinterest
 - Zuhd entails a few things:
 - One gives preference to akhira over dunya
 - One's heart is not stuck with dunya and what it has to offer
 - They don't allow dunya to compromise akhira
 - There are levels of zuhd
 - Mandatory: abstaining from haram
 - Staying away from the doubtful things (taqwa)
 - Abstaining from everything unnecessary of dunya - not because it's haram, but because it can be distracting
 - He encouraged people to leave aside whatever removes your focus from akhira
 - However, he still encouraged seeking halal earning and taking what was needed from dunya
 - He discouraged zuhd to the extent that one becomes dependent on others
 - Wisdom and moderation is important
 - When Fudayl ibn Iyad was asked who his model was for zuhd, he replied: "Sufyan Al-Thawri."
- The rulers at the time wanted Sufyan to be close to them

- He didn't want to be so tied to politics because it could take him away from deen
- Different scholars had different ways of dealing with this
 - Imam Zuhri would spend time with rulers and advise them
- Sufyan Al-Thawri was once in Mecca exchanging dinars (gold coins) for dirhams
 - There was a man standing next to him
 - A dinar fell from the pocket of Sufyan
 - The money changer and the man next to him saw the dinar
 - The money changer told him to pick it up since it was his coin
 - Sufyan refused out of the fear of the possibility that the coin belonged to the man next to him

Statements

- He once said, "zuhd in dunya is zuhd in the people of dunya"
 - Meaning, disinterest in dunya means being disinterested in people who have a lot of dunya
 - The Prophet (SAW) said that when you become disinterested in dunya, you become beloved to Allah; when you become disinterested in people, you become beloved to people
 - You don't have a motive behind meeting people
- He also said, "the first person you should become disinterested in is yourself"
 - We can't be controlled by our nafs
 - Our minds have filters - we have ways of categorizing people
 - We gravitate towards people who have what we want
- "The first phase of 'ilm is to learn to stay quiet"
 - Teach yourself how to be quiet
 - Physically, as well as in your mind
 - Free your mind of other thoughts
 - Then teach yourself how to listen attentively

- Use what works for you - ex: taking notes
- Then you teach yourself how to retain that 'ilm
 - This means to commit it to memory
 - Imam Malik would revise under a tree, and it would look like he was talking to himself
 - 'Ilm is to capture it - not to retain part of what you learn
 - The scholars would say - knowledge is like prey that you're hunting, and writing it is like a snare to capture it
- We should also implement what we can right away
 - Practicing is also preserving it
- Teach the knowledge to others
- Also make sure that your life is in order before spending all of your time casually in circles of knowledge

Political Encounters

- Once, Abu Jafar Al Mansur (khalifa) was doing tawaf and recognized Sufyan there
 - He gripped Sufyan's shoulder and asked, "do you know me?"
 - Sufyan said he didn't, but "your grip is the grip of an oppressor."
 - Abu Jafar said, "give me some advice."
 - Sufyan said, "what have you practiced with what you already know? Why should I tell you something that you don't know?"
- While Sufyan was in Mecca, a warrant was issued for his arrest
 - The governor of Mecca, however, did like Sufyan
 - He let Sufyan go
 - Many scholars were being arrested
- Sufyan went to Yemen at one point
 - Someone blamed Sufyan for theft - he was arrested and brought to the governor of Yemen
 - Sufyan denied stealing
 - The governor asked to speak to Sufyan alone

- He asked for Sufyan's name, who said "Abdullah ibn Abdul Rahman" (he didn't give his real name)
- The governor asked for his real name on the name of Allah, and he replied with his real name
- "You're the one who the khalifa is looking for!" Sufyan affirmed it.
- The governor was angry that they used a ploy to try and get Sufyan arrested
- He told Sufyan he could stay in Yemen safely
- Later, Sufyan went to Basra
 - He worked to survive
 - Once he was asked to make bread, but he didn't know how
 - His boss beat him
 - Later, when Sufyan was in a study circle with scholars, his boss finds him and realizes it was Sufyan Al-Thawri who had been working for them
 - He apologizes and Sufyan brushed it off easily
- Sufyan was constantly being searched for
 - There was a bounty
- Once, he was working in a garden and a government official walked by
 - The official asked "are the dates of Basra or Kufa better?"
 - Sufyan said, "the dates of Kufa are very sweet, but I haven't had the dates of Basra"
 - The official was amazed that he lived in Basra but never had its dates
 - Sufyan worked in the garden, so out of his zuhd he never ate a single date there
 - Later, the official casually mentioned the encounter to the governor
 - The governor realized that it was Sufyan because of his zuhd

Later Life and Lessons

- Sufyan had to go through many trials, like many scholars
 - He always lived on the same principles despite the difficulty
- There was a huge cancel culture at the time
 - The scholars put up with it
 - They cared more about the reward from Allah
- These are the ones who are remembered
 - Our relationship with the muhadditheen should be that we see them in a high position, but we learn from their trials
 - They were human beings who went through suffering
 - The dislike they were receiving was based on power, greed, and jealousy
- Sufyan Al-Thawri was known for his 'ibadah
 - He was always reciting Quran
 - He recited Quran, read hadith, slept, then prayed tahajjud at night
- Sufyan, at one point, ran out of food
 - He wouldn't accept gifts from people because he wouldn't be bribed into anything
- When he passed away, people compared his death to the death of 'Umar (RA)
 - It was a tragedy
 - Allah puts love into the hearts of mankind for people who seek Allah's pleasure
 - You can't buy love in the hearts of people like this
- He left behind a whole generation of people of taqwa, 'ilm, and piety
 - He brought the ummah back to the moderate path of zuhd