

SUMMER IMMERSION

LEGACY: LIVES OF THE FOUR IMAMS



Shaykh Hasan Suleiman

SESSION 3

1. Imam Abu Hanifa (Cont.)

- Worship:
 - He finished the Qur'an in a single rak'ah (unit of prayer).
 - Historical texts document that only a select few individuals were known to recite the entire Qur'an in one rak'ah. This elite group consists of:
 - Uthman ibn Affan (Sahabah)
 - Tamim al-Dari (Sahabah)
 - Sa'id ibn Jubayr (Tabi'i)
 - Imam Abu Hanifa (Tabi'i)
 - He had profound taqwa which was apparent.
 - Imam Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan, teacher to Imam Malik, met Imam Abu Hanifa and heard narrations of fiqh from him. He remarked that one could clearly see the fear of Allah written on Abu Hanifa's face.
 - He spent the entire night in a single sajdah.
 - It was narrated by the mosque caretaker that after Isha prayers, he came to lock the doors and discovered Imam Abu Hanifa performing voluntary prayers in sujud.
 - The following morning, upon returning to prepare for Fajr, he found him still in prostration. He was so deeply immersed that the caretaker had to gently alert him as the time for Fajr arrived.

- Imam Abu Hanifa urged the caretaker to keep the matter confidential, so the story only became publicly known after his lifetime.
- He had the habit of praying Isha and Fajr with the same wudu for 40 years.
 - Many of the students narrated that he maintained his wudu from Isha all the way through Fajr for the vast majority of his life.
 - This implies he never broke his state of purity throughout the night, dedicating his nocturnal hours either to standing in worship or dozing lightly over his books.
 - The mention of "40 years" is not an exact tally, but serves to highlight the extraordinary length and lifelong habit of constant devotion.
- He was known to constantly repeat one ayah all night.
 - Multiple narrations indicate that Imam Abu Hanifa frequently focused on a single verse during his Tahajjud prayers, a practice rooted in the profound emotional impact of contemplating Allah's words in the night prayer.
 - Several verses are often cited in narrations which he repeated throughout the night:

فَمَنْ أَلَّهَ عَلَيْنَا وَوَقَّنَا عَذَابَ السَّمُومِ

So Allah conferred favor upon us and protected us from the punishment of the Scorching Fire. (52:27)

بَلِ السَّاعَةُ مَوْعِدُهُمْ وَالسَّاعَةُ أَدْهَى وَأَمَرُّ

But the Hour is their appointment [for due punishment], and the Hour is more disastrous and more bitter. (54:46)

- Teachers:
 - Many of Imam Abu Hanifa's primary teachers in Kufa were direct students and successors of the prominent Companion Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.
 - Ibn Mas'ud possessed a profound dedication to knowledge and the Qur'an — a scholarly trait that deeply influenced his successors and became a cornerstone of Imam Abu Hanifa's educational background.
 - Based on accounts of his daily routine, scholars have estimated the number of times Imam Abu Hanifa completed the Qur'an throughout his life. These records suggest he finished it approximately 70,000 times, maintaining a consistent habit of two khatams a day — one in the morning and one in the evening.
 - Biographers record that Imam Abu Hanifa studied under over 4,000 scholars from the elite Tabi'in generation. Scholars consider this extensive network of teachers a profound virtue, highlighting the depth of his wisdom, experience and intellectual maturity.
- Direct teachers:
 - Imam al-Sha'bi
 - Imam al-Sha'bi was considered the oldest mentor in Imam Abu Hanifa's life, but he is categorized as an inspirational catalyst rather than one of his core due to the little time he spent with him. Imam al-Sha'bi had met more than 500 Sahabah.
 - Hammad ibn Abi Suleiman
 - Imam Abu Hanifa studied under Hammad ibn Abi Suleiman, who was his primary teacher for a span of 18 years. He loved him so much, he named his son Hammad, in his honor.

- Before teaching, Imam Abu Hanifa spent a decade studying fiqh under Hammad. When Hammad visited Basra, he left Imam Abu Hanifa in charge of issuing fatwas and instructed him to record every question and answer. Upon his return, he reviewed the answers and agreed with 40 of the 60 rulings.
- Recognizing the need to further master legal reasoning, Abu Hanifa took an oath to remain Hammad's student for the rest of the teacher's life. So he continued learning from him for 8 more years until Hammad passed away.
- Imam Abu Hanifa's deep reverence for Hammad was so profound that even since he became his student, he never stretched his legs in the direction of his teacher's home.
- Although they were close in age, this beautiful display of respect teaches us that in the pursuit of knowledge, age is irrelevant. When someone possesses greater knowledge and holds the wisdom we seek, an unwavering level of respect is always required.
- Imam Abu Hanifa said: "I have not prayed a prayer since Hamad passed away except that I have sought forgiveness for him alongside my parents and I seek forgiveness for every person I have learnt from and every person I have taught."
- Ata ibn Abi Rabah
 - Ata ibn Abi Rabah was originally from Sudan but served as the Mufti of Makkah while the Sahabah was still alive. He was one of the main students of Abdullah ibn Abbas and had the rare privilege of meeting at least 200 Sahabah.

- During Hajj, Abdullah ibn Umar famously redirected people to seek fatawa from Ata ibn Abi Rabah instead. This highlights his deep understanding of fiqh.
- Imam Abu Hanifa spent significant time studying under Ata ibn Abi Rabah while visiting Makkah for Hajj.
- Despite his position, Ata ibn Abi Rabah lived a life of poverty, dressing in very simple attire. Once, while performing tawaf, Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and his two sons noticed a massive crowd swarming a man in tattered clothes — only to discover it was none other than Ata ibn Abi Rabah.
- Qasim ibn Abdulrahman
 - He is the grandson of the prominent Companion Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, from whom Imam Abu Hanifa directly narrated in Iraq.
 - He is the son of Zayn al-Abidin and grandson of Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib.
 - He was a highly revered contemporary and teacher of Imam Abu Hanifa, who studied under him and transmitted narrations directly from him.
- Imam al-Zuhri
 - He was the most prominent hadith scholar of his era.
 - He was the first individual on earth to compile books of hadith under the directive of Caliph Umar ibn Abdul Aziz.
- Hisham ibn Urwa
 - He was a prominent narrator of hadith.
 - He is the son of Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, and the grandson of the revered Companion Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, who was one of the Ashara Mubashara (the ten promised Paradise). He is also the grand-nephew of Aisha (RA).

- Indirect teachers:
 - Imam Malik
 - Imam Abu Hanifa encountered Imam Malik in Hajj one year.
 - Imam Malik had huge praise for him and his unparalleled intellect. When Imam Abu Hanifa left the gathering Imam Malik said, "I saw a man of such caliber that if he claims that this pillar [made of wood] is made of gold, he will prove it to you."
 - Imam al-Awza'i
 - Imam al-Awza'i, who was a muhaddith, initially had reservations about Imam Abu Hanifa, viewing his reliance on qiyas over hadith as an unwelcome innovation in Kufa.
 - While in Lebanon, Abdullah ibn Mubarak — a prominent student of Imam Abu Hanifa met with Imam al-Awza'i.
 - He presented Imam al-Awza'i with a collection of juristic questions and fatawa compiled from "a shaykh in Iraq".
 - After reviewing the complex legal issues and methods within the book, Imam al-Awza'i was highly impressed, praising the deep knowledge and intellect of the anonymous Iraqi scholar.
 - When Imam al-Awza'i asked who the author was, Abdullah ibn Mubarak revealed that it was none other than Imam Abu Hanifa himself.
 - Imam al-Awza'i retracted his stance and praised Abu Hanifa, remarking: "How vast is this man's knowledge, and how profound is his intellect!"
- Students:
 - Abu Yusuf

- He was a prominent student of Imam Abu Hanifa and the most senior amongst them.
- Alongside Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, Abu Yusuf was one of Imam Abu Hanifa's closest disciples. Together, they are known as the Sahibayn (The Two Companions).
 - Both scholars were of such a remarkably high calibre that they could easily have established their own madhhabs.
 - Despite frequent disagreements, they shared a deep mutual respect, and Imam Abu Hanifa actively welcomed and encouraged diverse perspectives within his circle.
 - Records indicate that by the end of his life, roughly 800 of his disciples became the foremost fuqaha of their era.
- He was appointed as the first Qadi al-Qudat (Chief Justice) in the Abbasid Caliphate by Caliph Harun al-Rashid.
- He came from a background of poverty, and his father initially wanted him to learn a trade to earn a living. However, he kept slipping away to study with Imam Abu Hanifa.
 - When Abu Yusuf's father threatened to pull him from the study circle, Imam Abu Hanifa urged him not to, reassuring him that the knowledge the boy was gaining would one day earn him *faludhaj* (a sweet pistachio pudding) fed to him by the Caliph.
 - Imam Abu Hanifa financially sponsored Abu Yusuf so he could dedicate himself fully to his studies. Years later, he became the Qadi al-Qudat.
- He authored *Kitab al-Kharaj* (Book of Taxation) is considered his magnum opus. It functioned as a vital administrative and ethical manual for managing state finances and public welfare of the Caliphate at that time.

- Muhammad ibn Hasan
 - Despite his younger age, he is Imam Abu Hanifa's most significant student due to his unparalleled contributions in shaping the Hanafi madhhab.
 - He is credited with compiling the first structured books of fiqh. He organized the teachings and consultative discussions (shura) of Imam Abu Hanifa into a systematic written format.
 - The Zahir al-Riwayah (manifest narrations) are the six foundational texts of Hanafi madhhab which he compiled and they represent the agreed-upon legal positions of the earliest Imams.
 - His contribution is what sustained the Hanafi madhhab. No other fuqaha was backed by a student with such an exceptional capacity to systemize their work to that extent.
 - He had the habit of staying up late. When he was asked why he spent so much time staying up and writing late into the night, he replied: "How can I sleep when the eyes of the Muslims have closed due to their reliance on us? They say: 'If an issue occurs, we will bring it to Muhammad and he will reveal it to us.' Hence, if I sleep, it will be a waste to the religion."
 - He dedicated his entire life to knowledge with an unwavering sense of urgency. He frequently reminded his students: "The pursuit of knowledge is from the cradle to the grave." This highlights the seriousness and commitment he brought to the field.
- Zufar
 - He is frequently cited within the Hanafi madhhab and its books of fiqh.
 - He primarily studied under Imam Abu Hanifa's students more so than Imam Abu Hanifa himself.

- Hasan ibn Ziyad
 - Similar to Zufar, he took directly from Imam Abu Hanifa, but deeply studied under his senior disciples.
- Abdullah ibn Mubarak
 - He was the leading hadith scholar of his era and a foundational mentor to Imam al-Bukhari.
 - He holds such a lofty status that Imam al-Bukhari frequently narrated from him through just one person.
 - He was a direct student of Imam Abu Hanifa in fiqh and held him in the highest regard that he praised him excessively.
 - He recounted how Imam Abu Hanifa demonstrated profound composure and intense focus while teaching.
 - Once while Imam Abu Hanifa was teaching a class, a snake fell from the ceiling directly into his lap. Though his students fled in panic, he calmly shook it off and continued his lecture.
- Hamza az-Zayyat
 - He was a master of qira'at and tajweed in Kufa and one of the seven canonical imams of Quranic recitation.
 - His method of recitation continues to be meticulously preserved and passed down through centuries.
- Waki' ibn al-Jarrah
 - He was a student of Imam Abu Hanifa who famously taught Imam al-Shafi'i and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal.
- Death:
 - Imam Abu Hanifa passed away 150 AH in prison at the age of 70, following political upheaval.
 - Starting in 127 AH, severe political turmoil swept through Iraq as the Umayyad Caliphate collapsed and the Abbasid Caliphate was established.

- During this chaotic period, the Khawarij faction grew in power and staged uprisings in the region.
- Khawarij uprising:
 - In that same year (127 AH), the Khawarij successfully captured the city of Kufa and expelled its governor. They demanded that Imam Abu Hanifa repent.
 - Their demand stemmed from his praise of Ali ibn Abi Talib; the Khawarij branded Ali a kafir (disbeliever) due to his arbitration decisions and viewed anyone who defended him as an enemy.
 - Instead of submitting to their coercive demands, Imam Abu Hanifa outmaneuvered them in a debate and the Khawarij leader had no choice but to concede.
 - Imam Abu Hanifa defended the principle that major sins (like consuming alcohol or adultery) do not expel a person from Islam.
 - During a debate, he famously outsmarted members of the Khawarij who considered these sins to be kufr (disbelief). When asked if these sinners were destined for Hell, he responded by outmaneuvering their logic, securing their agreement that anyone who utters the Shahada remains a Muslim and cited verses from the Qur'an.
- Pressured by the Umayyad Governor:
 - Three years later, when the Umayyad leadership sought to appoint Imam Abu Hanifa as Qadi, he rejected the offer. Because he refused to lend his name and credibility to a government whose revolts and bloodshed he strongly disapproved of, he faced severe retaliation.
 - The authorities initially threw him in prison for 10 days, subjecting him to 10 lashes in public every single day, then finally releasing him.

- Abbasid Uprising:
 - In the year 145 AH the Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur faced a massive, multi-front uprising from Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his brother Ibrahim, who were descendants of the Prophet (ﷺ). Imam Abu Hanifa actively supported Ibrahim's campaign in Iraq.
 - Abu Ja'far al-Mansur attempted to legitimize his new rule by offering Imam Abu Hanifa the highest judicial office in the empire. His refusal to compromise his principles for the Abbasids led to his imprisonment in Baghdad.
 - While in prison, they restricted his access to food and water, and denied him proper care. His life eventually ended when the Caliph had his food poisoned.
- Final moments:
 - Before his death, Imam Abu Hanifa requested that his body not be buried in Baghdad, as it is a stolen land that the ruler had misappropriated or unjustly taken. Thus, he was buried outside the city.
 - An estimated 50,000 citizens of Baghdad gathered to participate in his funeral prayer. People continuously gathered to perform funeral prayers for him for almost a month.

The Legacy of Imam Abu Hanifa

- The Hanafi madhhab remains the most widely followed madhhab since the era of Imam Abu Hanifa and it continues until this day.
- Because it maintains the largest global following, it is the most heavily scrutinized and criticized madhhab than any other madhhab.

- The madhhab is widely followed due to several reasons:
 - 1. The Qada of Imam Abu Yusuf
 - It gained widespread traction under the Abbasid Caliphate, largely because Imam Abu Yusuf, was appointed Qadi al-Qudat.
 - By embedding the school's legal reasoning into state administration, it spread naturally across Abbasid territories.
 - 2. The systemic organization
 - The well-organized framework of the Hanafi madhhab facilitated its seamless spread throughout the Muslim world.
 - Today, upwards of 600 million followers reside in the subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh).
 - 3. The practical rulings
 - The madhhab is celebrated for its flexibility and its rational approach.
 - There are 1.2 million documented scenarios of fiqh rulings that were discussed in the Ahnaf books.
 - This comprehensive approach ensured the rulings remained functional across diverse, expanding regions.
- The following points outline the legacy of advice left by Imam Abu Hanifa for his students:
 - Never abandon knowledge:
 - Even if a decade passes without access to books or if illness strikes, stay connected to your studies. Turning away from knowledge leads to a restricted life.
 - Nurture students:
 - Treat your students with the deep care and affection you would show your own children. This builds mutual trust and a stronger desire to learn.

- Avoid petty debates:
 - Do not engage in arguments with members of the general public who have not studied, as it wastes time and diminishes spiritual dignity.
- Observe civility:
 - If you visit a new city, do not immediately start your own study circle or attempt to assert dominance. Blend in with the local civilians.
- Share the spotlight:
 - If asked a legal or theological question in a foreign locale, avoid taking center stage or dragging yourself into a dispute.
- Speak the truth fearlessly:
 - Never let shame or fear prevent you from stating the truth, even if addressing the highest authority or "sultan of the world."
- Avoid hypocrisy:
 - Ensure your private life perfectly matches your public persona. Knowledge finds stability only when public and private states are identical.
- Act with caution around power:
 - If offered a government or official position, do not accept it unless you are absolutely certain the ruler is appointing you to utilize your knowledge rather than for political maneuvering.
- Practice what you preach:
 - Do not be pleased with personal acts of worship unless your dedication is multiplied many times over compared to those around you. The public looks to you as an example.

- Maintain boundaries:
 - Be cautious with your socialization. Do not mix excessively with the masses, reserving your private hours solely for the remembrance of Allah.
- Imam Abu Hanifa's legacy stands as a profound reminder that standing firm on principle and seeking the pleasure of Allah over worldly power is what truly endures. His life demonstrates that our standing in the sight of Allah is the only measure that matters in the end.

