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IMAM SHAFIEE



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IMAM SHAFI'EE A DEVOTED SEEKER OF KNOWLEDGE

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

INTRODUCTION

The lives of all the great figures of Islamic history are instructive indeed but those of great scholars are at once enlightening and soul stirring. They have a social message for our youngsters in their impressionable years.

This children's book comprises the English version of the autobiographical account of a Meccan youth's academic quests. He tells us how at the age of about fourteen years he set out on a long journey in pursuit of true knowledge, resisted the temptations of worldly gains during his studies and returned home, enlightened with the teachings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) and respected by all as a great scholar of Islam.

This young scholar was Muhammad Bin Idrees Shafi'ee who is regarded to this day as one of the greatest authorities on the principles of Islamic law

or Fiqh. He founded a separate school of Fiqh which is named after him. There are millions of Muslims in the world who follow Imam Shafi'ee.

You may well ask what inspired the lad Muhammad Shafi'ee, penniless as he was, to undertake what would seem to us an impossible journey and how he succeeded in attaining his goal ? The answer is not far to seek. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) has laid great emphasis on the importance of learning in his own golden words, 'The man who sets out in quest of knowledge is guided by Allah to the path leading straight to Paradise.' The Muslims in their heyday did not only believe in all sincerity in the wisdom of what the Prophet (S.A.W.) taught but strove in the right earnest to translate it into practice. The Prophet's emphasis on learning infused in them an insatiable thirst for true knowledge and they were prepared to travel to the farthest corners of the world to acquire it and acquired it for its own sake and not for the sake of worldly gains or obtaining degrees as we do today. No knowledge was more valuable to them than that of the Prophet's Traditions or Hadith and they took great pains in learning and collecting them with as much accuracy as possible.

So Young Shafi'ee travelled from country to country for about a decade to gratify his passion for religious knowledge in general and for learning the

Prophet's Traditions in particular. He learnt them from all the eminent scholars of the day. As the people in those days set great value on learning and held the students in esteem, they encouraged this Meccan youth in every possible way.

I am confident that this English version of the most vital and edifying episode of Imam Shafiee's life story will kindle the fire of Islamic spirit in our children and serve them as a source of inspiration in both, learning and action.

THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

A man travelled hundreds of miles from Madina and arrived in Syria. He went to the grand mosque of Damascus to call on Hazrat Abu Darda, a companion of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.).

“Well, brother; what brings you here ?” asked Abu Darda.

“Sir, I have come to learn one of the Holy Prophet’s sayings from you. I have come to know that you have heard the traditions from the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) himself,” replied the traveller.

“Have you really come for this purpose alone and not for any other ?”

“It is for this purpose alone that I have undertaken such a long journey.”

“Please do tell me if you have come for some business”, repeated Abu Darda.

“Not at all,” said the traveller emphatically.

“If you have come to hear the Holy Prophet's traditions from me, then listen”, said the Holy Prophet's companion, “I have heard the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) himself say that the man who sets out in pursuit of knowledge is guided by Allah to the path leading to Paradise, that the angels lay their wings in his way to seek his pleasure: that all the created beings in heaven and earth, even the fish (in the waters) pray for the scholar of religion and seek the forgiveness of Allah for him; that such a scholar is superior to a devout person like the moon as compared to all the stars; that the successors of Prophets are only those people who acquire religious knowledge, for the legacy of Prophets consists of such a knowledge alone and not of gold or silver coins; and that any one who has been fortunate enough to acquire the wealth of knowledge has, therefore, amassed great wealth.”

IN PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

I was extremely fond of religious knowledge right from my early childhood and had already learnt a lot when I was still a small boy. I learnt the Holy Quran by heart and committed quite a number of sayings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) to memory. My thirst for knowledge was so intense that whenever I heard of any scholar, I wished, I would go to him at once and benefit from his learning. I was hardly fourteen years old when I insisted on my poor old mother to let me travel to far off lands for the purpose of acquiring knowledge. As there was nobody else at home to support her in her old age, she would listen to me and say nothing.

I was greatly distressed to see her dejected. So I tried to console her. 'Don't worry, dear mother,' I said, 'I won't go. I will remain at home to serve you and try to learn as much as I can, here at Mecca only'.

She was overwhelmed with grief and replied with tears trickling down her eyes, "No my son, I am not worried because you wish to pursue your studies.

In fact, your love of learning is the dream I have been dreaming even since you were born. I have been praying to Allah from the depth of my heart to enrich your mind with the teachings of our Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) so that you may be a permanent source of knowledge for the world and guide humanity to the right path. I am rather worried because I have neither food nor money to provide you with on your journey". So saying, she burst into tears.

But my old mother was a wonderful woman – a woman of strong will and firm determination. She considered no sacrifice too great for the sake of Islam.

She quickly regained calm and continued, "Don't worry, dear. As you are setting about to seek the path of Allah, He will Himself provide you with everything you need. He helps His virtuous servants unawares in a thousand different ways."

She then handed to me two old Yemeni cloaks, and wiping her tears gave me her blessings. As she bade me good-bye, she raised her both hands and prayed to Allah "O Lord of heavens and earth ! I am sending my dearest one to learn the traditions of Thy beloved Prophet. Help him in his journey

and let me live to see him return enriched with knowledge."

Having finished her prayers she patted me on the back, hugged me and bade me farewell.

"Adieu, my son "she said," May you rise as the brightest star on the horizon of learning and may Allah protect you. He is the best of Protectors and Most Merciful."

I thus left Mecca with the blessings of my dear mother but with my pockets empty.

The First Noble Host

When I arrived at a place called 'Zi Tuwa', I saw some people encamped there. I stopped to spend the night with them. There was an elderly gentleman in the camp who was very nice and kind to me. He was having his supper along with his companions and invited me to join him. As he insisted, I accepted his invitation and began to share his meals without any formality. I noticed that those people were using all their five fingers in eating, whereas I was accustomed to using only three. I too began to eat with all my five fingers to make them feel at home with me.

Having finished my meals, I took a glass of water and thanked Allah for providing me with food

and water. I then turned to my host and thanked him too.

He asked me if I had come from Mecca. I replied in the affirmative.

“Do you belong to the Quraish tribe?” He enquired.

“Yes I do”, I answered, “but how do you know so much about me?”

“Why, boy, I have seen the world and can well judge who is who. From your dress I could see that you are a townsman, and from your informal behaviour at supper I took it for granted that you are a Quraishi. Those who join others to share their meals freely are hospitable themselves, and hospitality is the distinguishing mark of the Quraish.”

I found out that the old gentleman belonged to Madina, the City of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.).

“Well uncle” I said, “Could you, please, let me know who is the best scholar at Madina today?”

“The greatest living scholar of Islam is Malik Bin Anas, who is also the head of Bani Asbah tribe. May Allah bestow greater honours upon him.”

“Amen”, said I, heaving a deep sigh, “Oh, how

I wish to have access to him ! ”

“I had already concluded from the manner of your conversation that you are a student and that you have left home to acquire the knowledge of Islam”, said my host in a soft and affectionate voice. “It is a very noble purpose indeed for which you have undertaken such a long journey. Allah will take care of you.”

Allah's Help

We talked about different things for some time and then he offered me a beautiful camel for travelling along with him to Madina and promised that he would himself introduce me to the great scholar Imam Malik.

All the camels of the caravan were standing in a row by then, ready to resume their journey. The old gentleman kindly helped me to mount my Camel and we all set out on our journey to the Holy City.

Recitation of the Quran

As the Caravan proceeded on its way, I started reciting the Holy Quran. I chanted its verses without a break and was able to recite the whole book once in the day and once at night. It took us eight days to reach our destination, during which I recited the Holy book sixteen times.

The Thrilling Sight of Madina and Holy Prophet's Mosque

On the eighth day we reached the suburbs of the city where we offered our afternoon prayers. I was impatient to have a view of the Holy Prophet's city. By and by I caught the first sight of it, while chanting the last verses of the Quran, I was over-awed. Everyone of us was enthusiastically drawn towards it like a magnet and our joy knew no bounds as we set foot on its sacred soil.

When I saw the Holy Prophet's Mosque for the first time, I was in a state of bliss with joyful tears raining from my eyes.

Lesson in the Mosque

As we entered the Holy Prophet's Mosque, our legs were shaking as if we were all intoxicated. We offered our prayers there and then called at the Holy Prophet's Mausoleum to pay our homage. When I returned to the mosque, I found a saintly figure sitting there surrounded by a number of young men respectfully listening to him. He was wearing a cloak and had covered his head with a piece of cloth. His face was glowing with the light of learning. He was saying "It was told to me by Naf'e and to Naf'e by

the son of Umar that he who lays in there (pointing towards the Mausoleum) said that

The learned man was no other than Imam Malik himself who was teaching to his pupils the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). I was over-awed by his scholarship and sat down where I could find a place. The Imam related the traditions one by one pointing each time towards the tomb of the Holy Prophet and the curious students were listening to him spell-bound.

I picked up a straw and, moistening it in my mouth, wrote down on my palm every tradition the great teacher related to his pupils. The Imam was watching me unawares. When the lesson concluded, the students began to leave the mosque. The Imam was waiting to see if I followed suit. But I did not move. He waved his hand asking me to draw near him. I obeyed and moved close to him.

He observed me for a while and then enquired if I belonged to the Holy city of Mecca. I replied in the affirmative.

“Well, you seem to have all the good qualities of a Meccan”, he said, “But I saw you doing something that did not behove a Meccan. It was an improper act.”

I was taken aback and asked him what I had done to offend him.

"Well, you were playing with a straw when I was relating the sayings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.)", said he.

"I was not playing Sir", I explained, "In fact, I was writing down every word of that you taught, because I wanted to memorize the sayings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) word by word. As I had no paper to write on I was obliged to do the exercise on my palm with the help of a straw".

The Imam, astonished as he was, drew my hand see for himself what I had written, but he could not see any thing written there.

"Why, this is all blank", he said.

I had to explain again that I just wrote with my saliva, which had dried up, but the exercise had served its purpose all the same as I learnt by heart all the traditions he had related.

"Well, then", said the Imam with growing amazement, "If what you say is true, would you just repeat a single tradition that you have heard today?"

To his delight I repeated all the twenty five say-

ings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) he related in that sitting.

A Few Days as the Guest of Imam Malik

It was now time for the night (Isha) prayers and we joined the congregation in the mosque. After the prayer was over, the Imam ordered his servant to take me to his house, where I was to stay as his guest.

I followed the servant to the Imam's house who conducted me into a small room and told me which way the Qibla was, where the latrine was situated and where the waterpot was kept.

After a short while the Imam himself arrived accompanied by a servant carrying a tray of meals. He took the tray from the servant put it down and saluted me warmly.

The Manners of Washing Hands before Meals

The Imam then ordered the servant to bring the basin and waterpot to help us wash our hands. The servant first moved towards me with the pot. But the Imam stopped him and said that the host should wash his hands first before the meals and the guest should wash first after the meals.

I asked the reason for this.

“The host invites the guest”, explained he, “and, therefore, he should wash his hands first and wait for the guest at the meals. But after the meals the host should be the last to wash his hands as some other guest may come and the host should be able to join him, too”.

It was a good practice and I liked it very much.

The Exemplary Character of the Imam

The Imam then removed the cover of the tray. It contained two pots full of milk and dates. He began to partake of them with the name of Allah, the Most Merciful. I followed suit. Thus both of us had our meals together. The Imam believed that the milk and dates were not enough for us two people and begged to be excused on that account.

“Dear Brother”, said he, “That was all a poor man could offer to another poor man.”

“You have done me a great favour, Sir,” said I, “Why should you appologize?”

We had a long conversation after the meal during

which the Imam enquired from me all about the people of Mecca. However, realizing that I must have been weary because of the long journey, he asked me to rest and left the room. I was really fatigued and no sooner did I lay on the bed than I fell into sound sleep.

Next morning I was awakened by a knock at the door. Some body was telling me in a gentle voice that it was the time for morning prayer . I got up and opened my eyes to find the Imam standing, in person, with a waterpot in his hand. I was abashed to see the great scholar stoop to serve a humble student like me. The Imam obviously knew from the expression of my face how I felt.

“It is no matter for surprise,” he said, “It is our duty to serve the guests, especially one who is the guest of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) himself.”

I was deeply impressed by the nobility of the Imam and said to myself “What a great man he is indeed.”

Then I quickly prepared myself for the prayers and went to the Prophet's Mosque to join the congregation.

The Lecture of Imam Malik.

It was still quite dark when the Imam led the prayers. So the people remained in their places after the congregation, reciting the Holy Book and praying to Allah.

After sunshine, the Imam moved to the place where he taught and handed me his collection of traditions called Moatta, which I read out and all other students got busy writing down. Thence forward, it became a daily practice with me to read out the book to the students. Thus I spent full eight months with the Imam and learnt his book by heart.

Those eight months were the most precious period of my life during which the love of the Imam took roots deep in my heart. I became so intimate and free with him that it was extremely difficult for a stranger to tell the host from the guest.

The Hajj season had now began. Some Egyptian pilgrims came to Madina to pay their homage to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) after performing the Hajj. They also came to visit the Imam and requested that the Moatta be read out to them. As I learnt the Moatta by heart, I orally repeated the whole book.

The Iraqi Pilgrims

The Egyptians were followed by the Iraqi Pilgrims. I went out to see them as they were paying their homage to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) at the Mausoleum. I came across a handsome young man among them who was offering his prayers between the tomb and the pulpit of the Mosque. From his appearance I gathered that he was a perfect gentleman.

When he finished his prayers, I stepped forward and said to him, "Excuse me, gentleman, may I know your name and the country you belong to?"

I have come from Iraq, he replied.

Which city of Iraq have you come from?" I enquired.

He said that he belonged to Kufa, a city with many historical associations. I then enquired of him who was the most prominent scholar of the Quran and Sunnah at Kufa.

"Abu Yousuf and Mohammad Bin Hassan are the most eminent," he said. "Both of them are the distinguished pupils of the great Imam Abu Hanifa.

They are the most revered scholars of Kufa at present."

"When will you be leaving for home?" I asked.

"Tomorrow morning", he said.

I hastened to the Imam at once and told him that there were great scholars at Kufa and as I had left home in pursuit of knowledge I wanted to learn the Prophet's traditions as much as I could. The Imam in reply urged upon me not to miss that opportunity and to go anywhere in the world to achieve the noble aim I had set before me.

Heavenly Assistance

Next morning when I was to take leave of him the Imam accompanied me to Baqi, a place outside Madina, to give me a warm send-off.

At Baqi, the Imam sprang a surprise. He made an announcement that he wanted a camel on hire. I knew well that he had no money to pay for the camel. When the announcement was made again and again, I could not keep quiet.

"What are you doing, Sir" said I, "I know full

well that you have no money, nor do I have any, I wonder how we can hire a camel.

The Imam smiled and revealed to me in secret that a gentleman called Ibne Qasim came to visit him at night with a present in his hand and requested the Imam to accept it. The Imam could not refuse and the gentleman handed over to him a purse of one hundred dinars. The Imam had kept fifty of them for himself and had brought the rest for me.

I cannot find words to describe my deep sense of gratitude at the Imam's generosity. I said to myself once again "What a great man the Imam is indeed."

Somebody offered to hire out his camel for four dinars, which the Imam paid to him then and there. The rest of the amount he handed over to me. Our caravan then departed. The Imam stood watching it till it was out of sight.

Arrival at Kufa

The caravan travelled for twenty four days before it arrived at Kufa. I offered my evening prayers in a mosque of the town and sat down to rest in a corner of it. I noticed a young man offering his prayer in a haphazard manner. I had no patience for a man like

him. So I said to him, "Please, offer your prayer peacefully. It would be a great pity if a handsome man like you is cast into Hell".

The youngman was offended by my advice.

"I guess you are a man from Hijaz," he said sourly, "for Hijazis are very rough and harsh unlike the Iraqis who are so genial and good humoured. I have been praying in this mosque for the last fifteen years. Mind you, this is the very mosque in which great scholars like Abu Yousuf and Muhammed Ibne Hassan lead prayers. But none of them has ever objected to the way I pray. You are nobody to find faults with me." So saying the young fellow contemptuously turned his back and left the mosque.

I felt insulted at his behaviour. However, what he said came to me as a surprise. I wondered why the two Imams he spoke of did not care to correct him.

Put to Test

Incidentally, both the imams happened to be present at the door of the mosque. The young fellow complained to them that I had found faults with his prayers and asked them if they had seen anything wrong in the way he prayed. The two

scholars replied in the negative and decided to put me to test. They sent the young man back into the mosque to enquire of me how should one 'enter' the prayer.

The young fellow accordingly came back into the mosque and put the question to me. I replied that to commence the prayer two things must be performed as essential duties and one thing as Sunnat or the Holy Prophet's Practice.

Those scholars were apparently impressed by my reply and sent the man again to me with the question as to what the essential duties were and what comprised Sunnat in that particular case.

I answered that the first essential duty to say the 'Niyat' in the right earnest i.e. one's intention to offer prayers, that the second duty was to say Allah-o-Akbar and that the Prophet's practice consisted in raising ones hands to the ears while saying Allah-o-Akbar.

When the man conveyed my answer to the two Imams, they came into the mosque and looked at me for a while from some distance, but finding me to be a bit too young, they did not give me much importance. They moved to a side, sat down there and sent for me.

When that young fellow brought their message to me, I could easily guess that they wanted to test my knowledge. However, I assumed superior airs and said in reply that those who had a thirst for knowledge should take the trouble of coming themselves to me rather than I should go to them.

On receiving my message the two scholars promptly walked towards where I sat and saluted me. I rose up with a smile and received them politely. They sat down and I followed suit respectfully. Imam Muhammad then entered into conversation with me.

“Well my young friend,” he said, “I believe you belong to Mecca.”

“Yes, Sir, I do,” I replied.

“Are you an Arab?”

“I thank Allah that I am an Arab,” I, answered.

“Which family of the Arabs do you come of?” was the next question.

“I come of the family of Shafi'ee, a descendent of Muttalib”, I answered.

"Have you ever had the opportunity to meet Imam Malik?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir", I informed him "I have been with him for quite a few months. In fact it is from him that I have come here directly."

"You must, then, have read his famous book Moatta, haven't you?" said Imam Muhammad.

"I have not only read it but have learnt it by heart", I replied.

Examination Paper

But Imam Muhammad could not believe me. He sent for pen and paper then and there and wrote down a few questions and passed on the question paper to me.

"Please, answer the questions in the light of what you have read of Moatta", said he.

I took the paper, cast a cursory glance over the questions and began to write my answers in the space left in between the questions. I illustrated every answer of mine with reference to the Quran, Sunnah and the consensus of the Ummah. Having written all my answers, I returned the paper to the Imam.

Imam Muhammad went through my answers and then ordered his servant to take me to his residence as his guest.

I followed the Imam's servant with my habitual informality. When I arrived at the door of the Mosque, the servant asked me to wait a little as the Imam had instructed him to fetch a mule to convey me. He went off and came back after a few minutes with a well equipped mule fit for a noble-man to ride on. I mounted the mule but as I looked at the rags I was wearing. I felt ashamed of my poverty all the way long. The Imam's servant was much better clad than myself. As he led the mule by the reins through the streets of Kufa, I sat on its back with my head down with a sense of inferiority and by, the mule came to a big mansion and halted in front of it.

The splendid gates and the beautiful doors of the building were all engraved with flowers and designs of all sorts. The sight of all this splendour reminded me of the abject poverty of the people of Hijaz and I was deeply moved to think of them.

I said to myself with my eyes brimming with tears, "What a pity ! The Iraqis are living in houses decorated with gold and silver while the Hijazis are left to lead a miserable life.

Tears were still trickling down my eyes when the Imam came in. He thought that I was distressed by something wrong he must have done and naively tried to defend himself.

"Dear Brother", he began, "there is nothing at all that you should be so unhappy. I have earned by the sweat of my brow everything you see here. I have duly paid Zakat on each and everything and I am confident that Allah will not call me to account for not paying Zakat on a single thing that I have. My life of ease and comfort delights my friends while it grieves my enemies." So saying the Imam went inside the house and presently came back with a nice suit of garments for me.

"Please do accept these clothes as a humble present from a brother", he said offering me the suit, "Have a bath, and put it on."

I took the suit from the Imam and was delighted to find that it was very expensive, valuing at least one thousand dinars.

I took my bath quickly, put the suit on and came back to the Imam fresh and happy. He took

a book from his library written by Imam Abu Hanifa and gave it to me for reading as a pastime. The name of the book was Kitab-ul-Ausat. I cast a glance over it here and there and found it to be profoundly interesting. By the grace of Allah, I committed the whole of it to memory by the next morning. But Imam Muhammad did not know of it.

The Imam was acknowledged as the greatest Mufti of Kufa, whose verdicts were accepted without a question. One day as I was sitting beside him a gentleman came in and sought his verdict on a certain problem.

The Imam thoughtfully listened to the gentleman and calmly gave his judgement on the problem referred to him, quoting Imam Abu Hanifa as his authority. But I thought that Imam Muhammad had erred in his judgement and pointed it out to him without any hesitation.

"Excuse me the interruption, Sir", I said, "What Imam Ahy Hanifa says in this particular matter is somewhat different from what you have cited. The Imam is quite clear on this point."

I then cited Imam Abu Hanifa's words as I had memorized from his Kitab-ul-Ausat. Imam Muhammed heard me with a mixed feeling of regret

and amazement. He sent for 'Kitab-ul-Ausat' immediately and looked it up for its great author's opinion about the problem. The words of the books tallied with what I had cited and Imam Muhammed had to revise his judgment accordingly.

He was wonder-struck at my memory. But the reward I got for it was that I was never given any book to read again.

Departure from Kufa

I had been with Imam Muhammed for a good many days and thought that it was time to take leave of him.

One day I said to the Imam, "Sir, you have been so nice and kind to me all these days that I find it hard to take leave of you. But the purpose for which I left my poor old mother demands that I must be going now."

The Imam smiled and said in reply that he did not usually allow his guests to leave. But when I insisted, he said "Well my friend, there is one condition on which you may leave. You will have to share half of my wealth with me."

I protested that it was not for acquiring wealth.

that I had undertaken such a long journey and that my old mother had let me leave her only for the purpose of enlightening myself with the teachings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). I, therefore, requested the Imam again to let me leave and proceed on my journey to fulfil the wish of my mother.

The Imam kept quiet for a while, Then he ordered all the money he had in the home to be brought immediately. The amount turned out to be three thousand dinars. He offered the entire amount to me and insisted that I should accept it as a present from an elder brother and meet the expenses of my journey."

I could not help accepting it. I then, took leave of Imam Muhammad and set out on my journey to Persia and Iraq. I travelled from one town to another and wherever I could find any scholar of traditions, I strove to take the best advantage of his learning.

I travelled through Persia for a very long time till I was twenty one years of age.

At the Gate of Baghdad

I returned to Iraq during the reign of caliph Haroon-ur-Rasheed. As I had just entered the gate of Baghdad, the Capital of Haroon's Kingdom, some-

one stopped me and asked my name in a soft voice. I told him my name.

“Your father’s name, please ?” asked he.

“Idrees Shafi‘ee” was my reply.

“Are you a descendent of Muttalib, “he asked next.

I replied in the affirmative.

The man repeated my name again and again then he took a note book out of his pocket, wrote it down and let me go.

I left the man thoughtfully and was straight to the Grand Mosque of Baghdad where I intended to stay. As I lay down to rest I thought of man who had noted down my particulars. I feared some trouble in store.

However, tired as I was, I dropped off to sleep. But I was awakened at the dead of night by the police who had ransacked the whole mosque in search of someone they wanted. The policemen observed carefully everyone present there with lamps in their hands and came to me also. I was actually the man they were looking for and were glad to find me out. They asked me to accompany

them to the Caliph. I had no choice but to follow them.

In the Caliph's Palace

The Police took me to Caliph Haroon-ur-Rasheed's Palace and presented me to him. The Caliph was sitting on his throne majestically. I greeted him with 'As Salam-o-Alaikum' in a harsh and clear voice.

My forthright and uncourtly behaviour seemed to be much to the liking of the Caliph. He signalled me to sit down. I took my seat before him as unceremoniously as I had greeted him. He then entered into conversation with me.

"Are you a Hashmite?" enquired the Caliph.

"Yes, I am" said I.

"Let me know your whole line of descent." asked Haroon.

I described in details my whole pedigree, tracing my lineage right up to Hazrat Adam himself.

Haroon-ur-Rasheed was hearing me with a mixed feeling of pleasure and amazement. When I finished,

he praised my eloquence and said that a descendant of Muttalib alone could be so eloquent.

Offer of Qazi's Office

"Would you like to become a Qazi and share with me the Administration of Justice?" asked Haroon, "I want you to help me in providing justice to the people in accordance with the Quran and the Sunnah."

I reflected over the offer for a moment and was bold enough to refuse it.

"I am sorry, Sir," I said, "it is not possible for me to accept your offer in the prevailing conditions."

My reply shocked the Caliph. He burst into tears with a scream. The Court officials were greatly perturbed to see the Caliph so unhappy and looked at me angrily.

After a few minutes the Caliph regained calm and asked me if I would accept something worldly.

"I would, if something is given to me without loss of time so that I may leave this place at once," I answered.

Haroon ordered a purse of one thousand dinars

to be brought forthwith. His command was carried out within no time. I got the purse and took leave of the Caliph.

As I came out of the Palace, the slaves and servants of the Court crowded all around me asking for their tip. I did not think it proper to dismiss them with a frown. So I divided the amount in equal shares and distributed it among them, retaining for myself an equal share.

Writing of a Book Off Hand

I returned to the Grand Mosque with a few dinars in my pocket and went to sleep. However, after a short while I was awakened again by the call for the morning prayer. A youngman with a melodious voice led the prayer. I was deeply impressed the way he recited the Holy Quran. But he was not properly educated. He committed an error during the prayer and did not know how to make amends for it. Prostration or "Sajda" was essential for the atonement of the error, of which the young man knew nothing and completed the prayer without going into Sajda.

When the prayer was over, I said to him that one who leads the prayer ought to be well acquainted with all the problems relating to it and that owing

to the error he had committed the prayer had to be said afresh.

He complied with my instructions and led the prayer once again. I was impressed by his submissive attitude and asked him to fetch me pen and paper so that I might write down for him all the problems relating to the *Sajda* that is essential to make amends for committing a mistake during the prayer.

I was in my elements at the moment and in a single sitting wrote off-hand a whole book on the subject comprising as many as forty parts. The young man's name was Zafran, so I named the book after him as '*KITAB-UZ-ZAFRAN*'.

As the Collector of Najran

I spent some three years in Baghdad during which the Caliph continued to press upon me to accept some office and benefit the society with my talents. I could refuse no longer. I accepted the job of a Collector and was posted at Najran. But as I was wedded to learning, such a job was not to my liking at all.

A few days had passed, when the pilgrims began to return from Hijaz after performing their Hajj. I was anxious to know the welfare of my benefactor Imam Malik and also how things were going in my homeland.

The Desire to Return to Imam Malik

So I went out to meet the pilgrims and enquired after the welfare of Imam Malik. I came across a young man who was coming back from Madina on his camel. He knew me well and when I raised my hand to salute him, he asked the camel driver to halt and then turned to me.

I drew close to him and asked him if he had brought any news from Mecca. He replied, that all was well there. I then enquired after Imam Malik.

“Well Sir”, he said, “do you want to learn all about him in detail or simply wish to know his welfare?”

“Please tell me in brief how he is”, was my answer.

“He is hale and hearty and is rolling in wealth, leading a very happy life indeed”, he informed.

“Is the Imam really rich?” I was amazed to learn of his richness.

“Yes, Sir”, he repeated, “he has all the pomp and show about him that wealth brings with it and gives lessons in the Holy Prophet’s mosque like a Prince.”

I had seen the Imam in his poverty. Now I had the burning desire to go back to him at once and see for myself how he conducted himself as a rich man.

The young pilgrim could easily guess from my impatience that I was desirous of going back to the Imam.

"Sir", he said, "the people of Iraq are so fond of you that they can hardly bear your separation. However, you seem bent upon going, I offer all that I have". He generously advanced a purse full of money and continued, "Please, accept it and make arrangements for your journey."

"Well my friend," I said with a deep sense of gratitude, "If you gave away all of it, you won't have anything left for yourself. You must certainly be needing money to meet your own expenses."

"Oh, don't worry about me, Sir," he replied, "I am influential enough to get what I need."

I did need money for my journey but I did not like to get it the way it was coming. The young man insisted again that I would be doing a great favour if I accepted at least as much amount as I might be needing for travelling to Madina.

I yielded at last and took out of the purse half of the amount it contained. I, then, lost no time to make preparations to leave for Rabi'a on my way to Madina.

An Amusing Episode

After a few days journey I arrived at Harran. It was Friday on which every Muslim considers it a virtue to take his bath. I thought of getting a hair-cut before taking my bath. So I went to a barber's shop and the barber set about his business. But he had cut the hair of only one half of my head when a noble man came to the bath and sent for the barber. No sooner did he learn who the noble man was than he went away leaving his job unfinished.

I felt greatly insulted. After a short while he returned and said that he could not help to leave me waiting as he had been wanted by such a big dignitary of the city. He proceeded to resume his job, but I refused to get my hair cut by him any more. He paid no heed to my protest and busied himself with another customer. Feeling doubly insulted, I was put to the end of my patience and walked out of his shop. As he followed me to receive his remuneration, I handed over to him the entire amount that I had with me.

"You have been foolish to belittle me", I said,

"Take this as a warning and never look down upon a stranger in future."

The barber could not believe his eyes. He looked by turns at me and the big sum in his hand with round-eyed wonder, while I continued to reproach him.

In the meantime the passersby crowded around us to see what was going on. When they came to know that I had paid so much money to the barber, they expressed their disapproval of what I had done.

"What a strange fellow," they said, "He has given away such a big sum to a petty barber."

While I was dealing with the barber, another noble man came out of the bath. His servant promptly brought his horse and he got on to its back. But the noble man having heard me shout at the barber, dismounted again. He came straight to me and enquired if I was Shafi'ee. On hearing that I was really Shafi'ee, he presented his horse to me and requested in all humility that I should do him the honour to be his guest. I accepted his invitation with my usual informality and mounted the horse. His servant walked ahead of the horse to conduct me to my host's residence.

The crowd of bystanders was wonder struck. They were puzzled to find a stranger paying so much money to a barber and a big nobleman of the town requesting such an odd stranger to do him the honour of being his guest and presenting him his own horse to ride on.

Knowledge is Unbreakable Bond between the Educated

A few minutes ride took me to the nobleman's residence. He followed me presently and humbly conducted me into the house. I was surprised to find that he was all courtesy for me and behaved like an humble student. I could not recollect where I had met him before.

After a short while, meal was served, which consisted of delicious dishes of various kinds. The nobleman took a waterpot in his own hand and requested me to wash my hands. Having done so, I sat down but did not touch the meal.

"What is the matter, Sir? Are you unwell?" asked my host.

"I would not have a morsel", I replied shrinking from the meal.

My kind host was greatly perturbed and asked me if he had done anything to offend me.

"Oh no, dear, no", said I, "not at all. But I would not partake of your meal unless you tell me who you are and how you know me."

He heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Well, Sir, you wrote a very important book and read it out to your admirers in Baghdad. I was one of them. Thus I consider myself to be your humble pupil and owe my respects to you on that account."

I was overjoyed and rose to embrace him.

"Knowledge is so unbreakable a bond between educated people", I said and began to partake of the meal with pleasure.

The Pupil's Generous Offer

I had no hesitation now to be the young noble's guest. I stayed with him for three days. On the fourth day as I was having a chat with him, he said to me that he owned four Villages in the neighbourhood of Harran which had such a fertile land that no other village in the area could stand comparison with them and that I should accept them as an humble gift from him and settle down in Harran.

I thanked him for the generous offer and replied, "My dear friend, if you give away all the four villages how can you provide for yourself?"

"Oh Sir, you need not worry about me. Look there," he pointed to a few boxes in the room. I have as many as forty thousand dinars in them. I will do some business with that money."

I politely declined to accept the villages as my sole aim was to acquire knowledge, for which I had left my dear old mother.

"It is really a very noble purpose indeed," continued my host, "May Allah crown your efforts with success". He kept quiet for a while and then came out with another offer. "I request you to accept the money I have in those boxes. You have set out on a long journey in pursuit of a noble end and Allah knows how many more lands you will have to travel to achieve that end. Please do accept it so that you may not be faced with financial difficulties on your way."

I was deeply impressed by his sincerity and affection and could refuse no further. So I took forty thousand dinars from him and left Harran overloaded with money.

I thanked Allah for His benevolence. But I set no value on wealth at all.

I met many a learned man during my journey, including eminent scholar like Ahmed Bin Hambal, Sufyan Bin Uainiah and Auzai. I distributed the money among all of them and when I reached the town of Ram'la, I had only ten dinars left in my purse.

I hired a camel at Ram'la and proceeded on my journey to Madina to visit my benefactor Imam Malik once again. It took me twenty seven days to reach the Holy City. On my arrival at the mosque I saw a splendid chair placed in it with a beautiful cushion and luxurious Egyptian pillow, on which the first Kalima was gracefully inscribed.

The Greatest Scholar of Hadis

While examining the wonderful chair, I just looked towards the door of the mosque called Bab-un-Nabi and saw Imam Malik Bin Anas coming in majestically like a prince. No sooner did he enter than the mosque was perfumed with sweet smells. The Imam was followed by a large number of students. They must have been over four hundred in number. Four attendents were walking with their heads down lifting up the Imam's robe. The Imam seated himself in the high chair gracefully, cast a glance over the students and then started his lesson. The subject for the day was the problems arising

out of a case of causing wilful injury. I too sat down at a distance from the great teacher and listened to him.

The Episode of an Illiterate Imam

The Imam referred to a problem arising out of causing wilful injury and put a question to the students about it. All of them began to reflect over the question. But I knew the correct answer. An illiterate person happened to sit close to me. I just whispered the answer to him which he repeated aloud addressing the Imam. But the Imam remained silent, waiting for others to supply their answers. The students did attempt to answer the question but they all were wrong.

The Imam said that the only correct answer was the one given by the student who had spoken first. He then repeated my answer. The illiterate man was extremely pleased to find that he had surpassed all the students of the Imam.

The Imam put another question and the illiterate fellow turned towards me again for the answer. I provided him the correct answer in the same way, which he repeated aloud. Other students too thought out their answers but none of them was correct. The Imam again gave full marks to the illiterate fellow rejecting the answers given by others.

"Please come here and sit near me" said the Imam gently, "That is not the place for a learned man like you."

The illiterate man drew close to the Imam accordingly. The Imam, then, enquired of him if he had studied Moatta. The man replied in the negative.

"Have you studied Ibne Jurej?" asked Imam Malik.

"No, Sir, I have not read any of his books", was the answer.

"Well, then, have you ever met Imam Jafar Sadiq?"

"I have had no opportunity to profit by his company, either," replied the illiterate fellow.

The Imam was exceedingly amazed and asked him how else he had acquired the knowledge of such knotty problems.

The ignorant fellow was perplexed. He had no choice left now but to tell the Imam plainly who had actually provided the correct answers to his questions.

"Sir, all those answers were whispered to me by the young scholar sitting over there," he told the Imam pointing towards me.

The Chair of Imam Malik

The Imam asked the man to go back to the place where he had been sitting before and send the young scholar to him instead. So the man returned to his original place while I drew close to the Imam and sat down by him respectfully.

Imam Malik regarded me for a while and then enquired if I was Muhammed Ibn Idrees Shafi'ee I answered in a low voice that I was Shafi'ee.

Imam Malik suddenly rose up leaving his chair and hugged me affectionately.

"Please take my chair" said he," and complete the lesson I have left unfinished."

I obeyed and presented as many as four hundred problems arising out of a possible case of wilful injury.

The students were so much overawed by my learning that none of them was able to give a single correct answer.

Imam Malik patted me on the back and prayed to Allah for my welfare.

Imam Malik's Splendid Residence

It was getting dark now. We all joined the congregation of the evening prayers in the mosque after which Imam Malik seized me by the hand and took me to his residence.

I was struck with amazement at the sight of his splendid house.

"Good God" I said, "where is your old house, Sir?"

"It stood on that very ground where you see the new buildings", he replied.

I was greatly distressed to think of Imam's passion for worldly possessions and burst into tears.

The Imam, apparently moved to find me overwhelmed with grief, explained in a voice choked with emotion, "Why should you be so upset, my friend. Do you think I am given to worldly pursuits at the expense of the Hereafter?"

"Yes, Sir," I replied, "I shudder to think of a

saintly scholar like you to care so much for material things.”

“Dear Shafi‘ee” he said, “I am proud of your friendship and wish I have more friends as sincere as you. God willing, I will never allow myself to be ensnared by worldly pleasures. All that I possess has come to me by the Grace of Allah. I have taken no pains in getting it. All my riches consist of the gifts I have been receiving from the lovers of knowledge in Khorasan, Egypt and other remote corners of the world. You know well that the Holy Prophet did not refuse to accept any thing presented to him as a gift. So I have followed his example and have never disappointed my friend by rejecting the gifts.

“My friends send me all kinds of gifts and they are still pouring in” continued the Imam after a short pause, “I have boxes full of three hundred Egyptian and Khorasani suits of the highest quality. I offer all of them to you.”

He then pointed to a few boxes and told me that they contained five thousand gold coins on which he had been paying Zakat regularly.

“Will you be so good as to accept half of those coins?” He made his offer with great pleasure.

I stared at him in wonder and felt his greatness in the depth of my heart. It was the third time that I had sensed his greatness as a man and was convinced that the wicked world could have no attraction for such a pious man.

"It is impossible not to accept your gift, Sir," I replied gratefully, "I cannot find words to thank you for this bounty. I am doubly indebted to you as you have enriched me both with the knowledge of Islam and material possessions."

I paused for a moment and then frankly told him that as both of us had our heirs, he should execute a document with regard to the gift he had bestowed upon me in order to safeguard against any dispute that might arise about it in future.

The Imam smiled and said, "You are very shrewed and never miss a chance to apply your knowledge."

Later in the night he drew a document to regularise his gift.

I went to sleep that night as a rich man. The next morning I offered my prayer with the Imam in the mosque after which he walked back to his residence hand in hand with me. When we arrived at his house,

I saw a number of beautiful horses of Khorasan on one side of the gate and numerous fine mules of Egypt on the other.

As we entered the house I said, "How beautiful are the manes of those horses. I have never seen more attractive animals before."

Hardly had I uttered those words when the Imam declared that all of them were mine.

"Dear me", I said, "What? you are giving away all of them to me and you would not have a single horse for yourself to ride on?"

The Imam was overwhelmed with emotion. He said with tearful eyes, "Dear Shafi'ee, I feel ashamed of the very idea of riding a horse on the sacred soil under which the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) is lying in eternal rest.

I gazed at him respectfully, his face was brightened with the love of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) and tears were streaming down his cheeks.

I felt once again that he was too great a man to yield to the temptations of this temporary life.

Back to Mecca

I stayed with the Imam in Madina for three days

and was now feeling extremely homesick. My mind was filled with the memories of my home and my old dear mother from whom I had been separated for years together and who had been impatiently waiting to see the plant of knowledge she had sown to bear fruit. I could not bear to be away from her any longer.

So I begged leave of the Imam, who was not only good enough to give me permission but asked me to prepare immediately for my journey to Mecca. He took care to send a messenger to my mother with the glad tiding that her son was returning home. Meanwhile, I lost no time to pack up all my belongings and was ready to leave.

I departed from Madina with great pomp and show. There were a large number of Khorasani horses and Egytian mules trotting ahead and behind me loaded with gold, precious garments and food-grains.

My journey back to Mecca was quite different from those I have been making for several years. I was thinking all the way of my old mother, my friends and the streets of my home town.

As I approached Mecca I saw a number of women outside the town standing expectant along with my

feeble mother who was impatiently waiting with open arms to embrace me. No sooner did I dismount than she hugged me most affectionately. My aunt also received me warmly with a kiss of my forehead, singing the following couplet:

The Wave of death has not washed away thy
mother,

This day every heart is filled with mother-love
is mother to thee.

Those were the first passionate words I heard
in Mecca and my joy knew no bounds.

Quite a number of men, women and children
had turned up to receive me and all of them gave
me a rousing ovation.

Knowledge Versus Wealth

I stood there for some time looking by turns
at my mother and my precious belongings. My
mother was silent and seemed to be a bit dejected.

"Come, mother, let us go", I said breaking the
silence.

"Where do you want me to go to, son?" said
she, heaving a deep sigh.



“Why, won’t you go home?” I asked amazingly.

“Well, son, do you remember I had only two pieces of cloth when I was sending you off on your journey. Seeing that you were so fond of learning I handed those pieces over to you and bade you farewell. I wished you to return to me enlightened with the teachings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). I never wanted you to bring back all these riches. My dear boy, wealth makes a man proud. Have you brought all these things to look down upon your poor cousins and kinsmen ?”

I was wonderstruck at her piety and indifference to worldly things. What a great woman was my mother indeed. I was suddenly awakened to the fact that whatever I had attained was only the result of her yearnings and prayers, and tears began to flow from my eyes. I realized that despite all my learning and scholarship, I had yet to learn what my mother taught me at the end of my journey.

“My dear mother, “said I kissing her hand, “what do you want me to do then?”

“My dear Son” she replied, “All that you have to do is to proclaim that the hungry should come to you and get foodgrains, the pedestrians should come to get the animal to ride on, the bare backs should

come to get clothes and the poor should come to get the money."

I made the proclamation accordingly and all my riches were distributed among the poor people of Mecca. When I entered the town, I had only one mule and fifty dinars left with me.

Incidentally my whip dropped down on the way and a maid-servant who happened to be carrying a water bag, picked it up and handed it back to me respectfully.

I took five dinars out of my purse for her. My mother asked if I had only that much left.

"No, mother, I still have ten dinars in my purse" I replied.

"What do you want to keep them for?" asked she.

"Well, we may need them, As there are no food-grains left for us, we may, perhaps, be in need of money presently", said I.

"It is strange, son," she returned, "you hinge on ten dinars to meet your needs instead of trusting in God, who provides us with everything we need Give her all those ten dinars you have."

obeyed her command. I was peniless now but at heart I felt to be richer than ever before.

My mother thanked Allah and said to me, "Well, my son, you enter your house as poor as you had left it. But it will be shone with a light which it never had before. Your mind is enlightened and I wish that it is not spoilt with the lust for worldly things that are but shortlived. May your knowledge serve as a beacon light to Muslims in this life as well as the life Hereafter."

The news of all that happened on my arrival at Mecca spread far and wide. Imam Malik also came to know of it. He was exceedingly delighted. He sent me a message of congratulations with a promise that he would be sending every year as much as he had given me. At the same he advised me to spread the light of knowledge among the people of Mecca. The great Imam kept his promise. He lived for eleven years more and regularly sent me gifts till his sad demise. May Allah rest his soul in peace: Amen:

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**SOME GOLDEN SAYINGS
OF
IMAM SHAFI'EE**

- 1) Do not befriend the man who does not love knowledge.
- 2) The Company of a shameless man in this world will bring shame on you on the Day of judgement.
- 3) Knowledge must be adorned with piety and dignity.
- 4) To keep oneself busy in acquiring the knowledge of religion, is better than offering thanksgiving prayers.
- 5) Next to the performance of duties, acquisition of knowledge is the best way to come closer to Allah.
- 6) The greatest fault of a learned man is to pre-occupy himself with what is forbidden by Allah and to show reluctance to what is enjoined by Him.

- 7) A man can be safe from the curse of atheism only if he guards his own faith jealously.
- 8) The man who loves the world, is a slave of the men of the world.
- 9) Shun the company of those friends who praise you for qualities that you do not possess at all; for when they become your enemies they will denounce you for the vices which you do not have.

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