

## Imam Bukhari: A Role Model for the 'Ulema and Da'wah Carriers to Follow Taimullah Abu Laban

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The importance of the righteous 'Ulema cannot be overstated. 'Ulema are the heirs of the Prophets (as) as informed by the Messenger of Allah (saw). They are like stars looked upon by the rest of the Ummah, in search for solutions when it is afflicted with trials and difficult problems. However, there are also 'Ulema who savor the sweetness of this world, craving for fame, higher posts and to be referred to for any issue. They feel pride, not shame or guilt, when they are seen at the doors of corrupt rulers. Their fatawa are not based on what is closer to the truth. Instead, they are based on what is more beneficial to the tyrants and for their interests.

The true Ulema, who rose to the status of heirs of Prophets (as), are the ones who strive in this world to succeed in the following two matters:

- 1- Diligent work to research, acquire and disseminate Islamic knowledge.
- 2- Steadfastness upon the truth, seeking the pleasure of Allah (swt) in their knowledge.

Imam Bukhari was one of those true Ulema. He was not confined to acquiring enormous knowledge in the Deen. It was a knowledge that was neither hypothetical nor impractical. It was knowledge which he acquired and disseminated, such that it was not just useful to his generation alone. Instead, it is useful to this Ummah until the Day of Judgment, by the grace of Allah (saw).

Imam Bukhari was also an illuminating example of sincerity (ikhlas). He was neither concerned with the temporary temptations of this world, nor was he concerned with pleasing the rulers. Instead, he had only one concern, which was to please Allah (swt) by calling and preserving His Deen, so that it dominates all the other ways of life.

This article provides the brief summary of the following:

- 1- Knowledge acquired by Bukhari, how diligently he worked to acquire and disseminate the knowledge.
- 2- Insights into his life that show his indescribable sincerity and love for the truth and Deen.

The following abridgement from the biography of Bukhari does not give justice in providing and describing the complete details about his personality, his work and his trials. However, we ask that this abridgement will grant useful points for the carriers of Da'wah and those who seek knowledge by reading.

### **An innate love and passion for Islamic knowledge:**

Imam Bukhari was born in the year 194 AH in the city of Bukhara in present day Uzbekistan. His name was Muhammad and his father's name was Ismail bin Ibrahim. His father was also an 'Aalim who studied with 'Ulema like Imam Malik. However, Imam Bukhari neither knew his father, nor learnt anything from him as his father died when he was a child.

Being an orphan did not prevent him from searching for knowledge. At an early age, he memorized the Quran and began to memorize ahadeeth. As a young boy, his interests had developed a discrimination of authentic ahadeeth from the weak. By around the age of

fifteen, it is believed that he collected almost all the knowledge of ahadeeth that prevailed in Khurasan, in the time that he lived there. He even memorized the books of 'Ulema like Abdullah bin Al Mubarak.

At the age of sixteen, he went for a long journey from Bukhara to Makkah to perform the obligation of Hajj, along with his mother and brother, Ahmed. However, after completing Hajj, he did not return to Bukhara along with his family. Although he was just sixteen years old, he believed that it was important for him to stay in Hijaz where he could access 'Ulema and knowledge that was not available in Bukhara.

This decision to leave his family to seek knowledge and for the benefit of Ummah is the first major sign of his sincerity and sense of responsibility towards the Ummah. He lived in an era when neither the internet nor even printing machines had been invented. It was clear to him that much work in the field of verifying the ahadeeth of the Prophet (saw) was needed, as there was no complete work on the compiling of the authentic ahadeeth at the time.

Within two years, at the young age of eighteen, he had completed his first work in al-Madinah al-Munawwarah. This book is called, At-Tareekh al-Kabeer (التاريخ الكبير "The Great History"). It was not merely a single book, but a compendium of nine volumes which became a major reference for the 'Ulema of ahadeeth, the muhaditheen, as this book dealt with more complex issues in the knowledge of ahadeeth, knowledge of the men (of narration) (*'ilmur Rijal*) and knowledge of *Jarh wa Ta'dil* (knowledge of accepting the witnesses of narrators of hadiths). The book instantaneously became a reference for the 'Ulema of ahadith, and it remains as reference until now as the book that includes the biographies of nearly 40,000 male and female narrators.

From Madinah, he travelled to many great cities of the Islamic world, searching for knowledge and disseminating it. Soon he became famous and was considered as the most knowledgeable 'Alim in the field of ahadeeth.

His most famous and respected work was, "Collection of Selected True Reports of the Prophet, his Practices and Times," (الجامع المسند الصحيح المختصر من أمور رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم) ( *al-Jāmi' al-Musnad al-Sahīh al-Mukhtaṣar min umūr Rasūl Allāh sallAllahu alayhi wa sallam wa sunnanihi wa ayyāmihi*). The book is simply called "*Sahih Al-Bukhari*." The book is the summary of more than 600,000 Ahadeeth, of which 23,000 Ahadeeth were without repeated texts of narrations. He collected these Ahadeeth throughout his life. Of these collections, only 7200 Ahadeeth, of which 2600 Ahadeeth were without repeated texts of the narrations, made their way to his Sahih. His Sahih is confirmed by the fact that none of the narrations in his Sahih are narrated by weak narrators.

This work is the most important reference when it comes to the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw) until this day.

Despite his vast knowledge in the field of Ahadeeth, his writings were not restricted to the knowledge of Ahadeeth. Instead, he even wrote in the fields related to jurisprudence and in the issue of 'Aqeedah. Thus, he was a jurist of illuminating Iman. This itself is a testimony for his sense of responsibility as a Muslim and an explanation for his astonishing, hard work in search of knowledge.

### **The Incident of the Alleged Stolen Dinars:**

One of the Incidents of Bukhari revealed his true personality, which is the famous incident of alleged stolen Dinars. The incident is mentioned by Maulana Abdul Salam Mubarakpuri in his book "Seerat ul--Bukhari, the Leader of Jurists and Imam of Muhaditheen" (سيرة الإمام البخاري سيّد الفقهاء وإمام المحدثين). The incident in the life of Bukhari suffices to confirm the sincerity and level of responsibility shown by Bukhari's deep feeling towards the religion and

Ummah, “Imam Bukhari travelled by ship once during his days of seeking knowledge. He had one thousand Dinar (a huge sum at that time). A man from the people aboard the ship approached Imam Bukhari and manifested his love, affection and attachment for him. He began to build a close relationship with Imam Bukhari and sat with him often. When Imam Bukhari saw the man’s love (for him), he inclined towards him and trusted him, so much so, that Imam Bukhari informed him, during some of their sittings, regarding the amount of wealth he was travelling with. One day, the man woke up crying and screaming, tearing his clothes while hitting his face and his head. The people were startled by the man’s cries, so they approached him and asked him what had happened. The man said, ‘I had a pouch which contained a thousand dinars, and I have lost it!’ They began to search the passengers one by one. Imam Bukhari secretly brought out the pouch containing one thousand dinars, without anyone noticing, and threw it into the sea. Those who were going around searching the passengers reached him and searched him and continued on with their search, until they completed searching everyone on board the ship. They did not find anything. They returned to the man, reprimanded him and rebuked him severely. Once they had reached their destination and the people disembarked the ship, the man approached Imam Bukhari and asked him, “What did you do with the pouch full of dinars?” Imam Bukhari replied, “I threw it in the sea.” The man said, “How did you bear losing that great amount of wealth?” Imam Bukhari replied, “O ignorant one! Do you not know that I have spent my whole life compiling the Aḥadith of the Messenger of Allah (saw) and that the world (i.e. everyone) has known my trustworthiness. So how can I subject myself to an accusation of theft? Am I to trade the invaluable pearls (of trustworthiness and uprightness) which I have attained throughout my life, for the sake of a number of dinars?”

This devotion, perseverance and complete sincerity in collecting the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw) is a testimony that he is amongst those whom Allah (swt) had chosen to preserve the Deen. Allah (swt) said, ﴿ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا﴾ **“Then we caused to inherit the Book those We have chosen of Our servants;”** [TMQ Surah Fatir: 32]. Bukhari had taught more than 90,000 students throughout his life, including two of the foremost muhadditheen, Imam Muslim and Imam Tirmidhi. In what condition would the Ummah be today without Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim and Sunan Tirmidhi?

### **Refusing the demand of ruler:**

This incident occurred during his later years, perhaps this incident is amongst the most important. Being an old man, he returned to his homeland for the first time ever since he had left his hometown, during his young age. This gave him an opportunity to live a prestigious life. This opportunity became most likely when he received a letter from the Ameer of Bukhara, Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Dhuhli. Al-Khatib Al-Baghdad reported in his book “History of Baghdad,” that Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Dhuhli, the Ameer Khalifa Thahiriya of Bukhara asked Abu Abdullah (Imam Bukhari) to come to his house and teach “Sahih Bukhari” and “The Great History” to his children. Abu Abdullah (Bukhari) refused to attend to him. The Ameer then asked him to convene the Majlis exclusively for his children, where no other persons to attend. Imam Bukhari refused this and said, “I cannot single out some people to listen to the Majlis, while leaving others.”

This astonishing stance of Bukhari is what ultimately identifies him as a true ‘Alim and heir of the Prophets (as). Being an ordinary person, what could be more famed than going to the ruler's palace, sitting privately with him and with his family? No doubt, there had been a large financial compensation provided for education, let alone educating the children of the leader.

Some 'Ulema today would not hesitate for a moment, if they receive an invitation from one of the rulers of Ummah to attend the corruption of their luxury in their palaces. Rulers who rule by other than Islam seek out 'Ulema to distort Shariah to legitimize their actions that are not based on Shariah.

In contrast, Bukhari refused the demand of the ruler who did not rule with clear kufr, ruling by Shariah, unlike today's rulers. Moreover, the ruler did not ask Bukhari to give an illegitimate fatwa. Instead, he asked him to teach his children, which is clear that he wanted to benefit his children of the knowledge of Sunnah, which is good and not vice.

As for Bukhari's response, "I cannot single out some people to listen to the Majlis, while leaving others," it shows his sense of responsibility as an 'Alim towards the Deen and the Ummah. Thus, he said that restricting the knowledge of Islam or teaching only particular individuals was not acceptable. Instead knowledge must be within the reach of the entire Ummah and all the Muslims.

In other words, he told the ruler, "If you want your children to be educated, then let them attend circles in the mosques like the rest of people." What indescribable courage he had! What sincerity this man possessed! He is a genuine seeker of Islam. This stance came at the expense of his worldly life, as he was expelled later from his home town and he died without the appreciation and the support which he deserved. And Allah (swt) only knows his status in Hereafter and we ask Allah (swt) to give him the highest status.

### **How is it obliged for us to protect the bequest of Bukhari today?**

Although Bukhari lived in an era when there was a prevalence of great 'Ulema, it did not prevent him from deeds. He utilized the golden age of Islam and the prosperity of Islamic knowledge, at a time when there were great 'Ulema like Imam Ahmed and Imam Shafi'i.

However, this did not cause his motivation or sense of responsibility to diminish to a minimum level. This was an era when Islam was dominating the world and the Ummah rose to the level of the best people of humanity as described. The Khilafah (Caliphate) was present and the Shariah was the only source of legislation in the Islamic world. Despite all this, he devoted his whole life to work for the Deen of Islam. He was neither satisfied with what was less than perfection, nor with doing little. He never wasted his time in seeking or completing worldly affairs.

How can one today justify negativism and negligence in carrying the Da'wah and working towards reviving the Deen of Allah (swt), while we are living in the time when there is no Khilafah? How can we justify inaction for ourselves in a period when man-made laws are enforced throughout the Islamic world and the honor and lives of Muslims are being attacked daily? Therefore, let us strive hard to become one amongst those whom Allah (swt) has chosen to carry the message of Islam. Allah (swt) said, **﴿ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا﴾** **"Then we caused to inherit the Book those We have chosen of Our servants;"** [TMQ Surah Fatir: 32] Islam was not strange during the life time of Bukhari as it is now today. Thus, let us strive to live in order to be amongst the Ghurabah (strangers) who will reform what is corrupted by the people, by working to raise the Islamic Deen. RasulAllah (saw) said, **﴿بَدَأَ الْإِسْلَامُ غَرِيبًا وَسَيَعُودُ غَرِيبًا كَمَا بَدَأَ، فَطُوبَى لِلْغُرَبَاءِ﴾** **"Islam started as something strange, and it would revert to its (old position) of being strange. so glad tidings for the strangers (Ghurabah)."**