

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful

Imam Al Bukhari

(may Allah have mercy on him)

"The most authentic book after the Holy Qur'an." This is the conclusion that every learned religious Scholar came to. No matter how great these Scholars were, they were forced to unanimously agree that 'Sahih Al-Bukhari' is the most authentic work in Hadith literature ever compiled.

We seem to have heard a lot about the magnificence of this compilation, but how much do we really know about the person who actually compiled this book? How much do we know about the man who had spent endless years traveling to many lands in search of people who had picked up the gems that had fallen from the lips of the Noble Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) so that he may gather these precious gems and present them to the world in the form of 'Sahih Al-Bukhari.'

Imam al-Bukhari is one of the most eminent of those pious people who have given endless bliss upon the Muslim Nation of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). This is made manifest in the book of Ahadith an-Nabawi that Imam Al Bukhari has compiled, commonly known as Sahih al-Bukhari. It is universally acknowledged as the most authentic book after the Holy Qur'an. So long as there is one Muslim left on the Earth, the blessings of Imam Bukhari will have a place in his or her Iman and Islam. Let us briefly examine below a short survey of his life and works.

His Early Years

Imam al-muhaddithin Hadrat Imam Abu `Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari was born on the 13th of the Islamic month of Shawwal, 194AH, in the famous city of Bukhara, of the land "beyond the canal" - present day Uzbekistan -. The father of Imam Bukhari, Isma`il ibn Ibrahim ibn Mughirah al-Ja`fi, was a great muhaddith and ascetic from whom he inherited his characteristics of literary zeal and excellence. During his childhood his father died and his mother took on the entire responsibility of bringing him up.

Imam Bukhari became blind at a young age. He had recourse to many famous and skilled doctors of his time but their treatments made no difference. His mother was a pious worshipper and a righteous woman. She cried out for help in the court of Allah the Almighty, for her child and begged for the restoration of his eyesight. At last, "the river of mercy flowed over her," and Almighty Allah accepted her invocation. One night, she visited Ibrahim `alayhis-salim in a dream and was told, "Allah has restored the sight of your son because of your intense and beautiful invocations." In the morning, as Imam Bukhari got up from his bed, glimmers of light reached out into his eyes.

Primary Education and Interest in Hadith

When Imam Bukhari reached the age of ten and after acquiring his elementary education, Almighty Allah inserted the interest in the science of Ahadith into his heart and he obtained admission in the Hadith class of Bukhara. He obtained his education after vigorous study. A year later, he had such a good retention of the text and chains of transmission of Ahadith, that sometimes teachers got their corrections from him. Imam Bukhari had been acquiring religious education with competence and swiftness and at the tender age of sixteen, he had completely learnt by heart the books of `Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak, al-Waki` and other learned companions of al-Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah be pleased with him).

The Visit to the Haramayn and the Commencement of His Ahadith Compilation

At the age of eighteen, He visited Mekkah accompanied by his mother and elder brother, Ahmad ibn Isma`il. After performing the pilgrimage, his brother returned with the company of his mother, but Imam Bukhari stayed there for further education. Meanwhile, he wrote a book called, Qadaya as-Sahabah wat-Tabi`in. After this he went to Madinah al-munawwarah to compile the famous book of Asma` ar-rijal (Names of men of transmission) called, Tarikh al-kabir, while sitting by the tomb of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) during moonlight hours. Immediately after completing this, a series of imitations had begun. Mohammad ibn Yusuf al-Furyabi said that at the time he had copied Tarikh al-kabir, Imam Bukhara did not yet have any facial hair.

Imam Bukhari traveled to cities far and wide for the transmission of Ahadith and had gained immense knowledge while sitting far from his own country for several years. He stated himself, "To seek knowledge, I traveled to Egypt and Syria twice, Basra four times, spent six years at the Hijaz and left for Kufa and Baghdad on so many occasions accompanied by Muhaddithin."

His Remarkable Memory

Imam Bukhari was a man with a very strong memory. When we look at his memory, it is as if his body from head to toe stored it. Seeing his memory, the memory of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased) is rekindled in the hearts of Muslims. Hashid ibn Isma`il states that in his childhood: "Imam Bukhari used to go with us to the Scholars of Basra to listen to Ahadith. All of us used to write Ahadith down, except Imam Bukhari. After sixteen days, we thought about it and we condemned Imam Bukhari saying that, 'you had wasted so many days work by not writing down Ahadith.' Imam Bukhari asked us to bring our notes to him. So we all brought our notes, upon which Imam Bukhari began to read Ahadith one by one from the top of his head until he narrated to us more than fifteen thousand! Hearing these, it seemed that Imam Bukhari was reteaching us all of the Ahadith we had noted."

Muhammad ibn Azhar Sajistani says: "I used to go to Sulayman ibn Harab accompanied by Imam Bukhari for listening to Ahadith. I used to write the Ahadith, but Imam Bukhari wouldn't. Someone said to me, 'Why doesn't Imam Bukhari note the Ahadith down?' I told him, 'if you missed any Hadith in writing, you could obtain it from the memory of Imam Bukhari.'"

Imam Bukhari's memory could be understood by knowing that if he glanced through a book, it would be committed to memory instantly. In his early period of acquiring knowledge, he memorized seventy thousand Ahadith and later in his life, this figure reached three hundred thousand. Of these, one hundred thousand were sahih (rigorously authenticated) and two hundred thousand were not sahih (hasan, da`if, etc). Once he went to Balkh and the inhabitants asked him to recite one Hadith from each of his sheikhs. Then he orated from one thousand Sheikhs one thousand Ahadith.

Sulayman ibn Mujahid says about Iman Bukhari: "One day I was present in the company of Muhammad ibn Salam Baykandi. Muhammad ibn Salam said, 'If you had come earlier, I would have shown you the child who has seventy thousand Ahadith in his memory.' Sulayman stood up from his company and started looking for Imam Bukhari. Shortly he found him and asked, 'Are you the one who has committed seventy thousand Ahadith to memory?' Imam Bukhari replied, 'I have learnt more Ahadith than this by heart. I even know the place of birth, death and residence of most of those companions from whom the Ahadith are narrated.'"

His Extraordinary Intellect

Along with his extraordinary memory, he also had an outstanding fascinating intellect. He did not depend on pen and paper as much as he relied on his sharp memory. People examined the extraordinary capabilities of Imam Bukhari in the science of Hadith repeatedly but he always remained successful as a result of Allah's gift of intelligence and superb memory.

Hafiz Ahmad ibn `Adi said about Imam Bukhari: "When the people of Baghdad had learnt that Imam Bukhari was due to arrive there, the Muhaddithin of Baghdad decided to test him by changing the text and chains of transmission of one hundred Ahadith. They joined the chain of one Hadith with the text of another and attached the chain of this Hadith with the text of the prior. Like this, they mixed up the text and chains of transmission of one hundred Ahadith and gave these to people who would test Imam Bukhari with these.

"When Imam Bukhari arrived at Baghdad, the people held a gathering in his honour, in which most of the scholars, nobles and public were present. One person stood up according to the plan and asked a question regarding a Hadith with its altered chain of transmission. Upon this, a second person stood up and recited in similar manner. Like this, the people completed the hundred Ahadith and awaited Imam Bukhari's reply. He said that he had not apprehended those Ahadith. When he saw that everyone had asked the questions he need, he stood up and started describing the chain of transmission of the first Hadith that was read and then gave its correct chain. Like this, he traced the faulty chains on the Ahadith of all one hundred set up by the scholars. He had given the correct chains of transmission to every Hadith. When he finished, the entire audience was full of praise and recognition of the superiority and greatness of Imam Bukhari."

Glimpses of his private life

1. Self sufficiency:

Imam Bukhari's father, Muhaddith Isma`il ibn Ibrahim was very rich and Imam Bukhari had inherited a huge share of his wealth. He used to give his wealth on the basis of silent partnership (e.g. if a person is in possession of a shop, the profits are shared equally, but only one partner does all the work). Abu Sa`id Bakr ibn Munir narrated: "Once Abu Hafs sent some goods to Imam Bukhari and when traders learnt of this, they came to him and offered five thousand dirhams. He asked them to come in the evening. A second group of traders came and offered ten thousand dirhams, but he told them, 'I have already made an agreement with someone else. I do not want to change my intention for the sake of ten thousand dirhams.'"

2. Simplicity and humbleness:

Imam Bukhari was a simple and hard working person. He used to look after his own needs. Despite being a wealthy and honorable man, he always kept a little number of servants and never indulged himself in this matter. Muhammad ibn Hatim Warraq, who was one of his main disciples, narrated: "Imam Bukhari was establishing an inn near the city of Bukhara and as he was placing the bricks with his own hands, I came forward and asked him to leave laying the bricks for this building to me.' But he refused; saying: 'On the day of judgement, this act will be of benefit to me.'"

Warraq goes on to say: "When we accompanied Imam Bukhari on a journey, he would gather us in one room and stay in another room alone. Once I saw Imam Bukhari get up between fifteen and twenty times during the night and every time, he lit the lamp. He took some Ahadith out, marked them and then placed his head on his pillow and laid on his couch. I said to him, 'Why did you go through all this trouble during the night, you could have woke me up to help you.' He said: 'You are young and in need to get sufficient amount of sleep and I did not want to disturb

your sleep."

3. Generosity

Just as he was generous with this wealth, he was also generous with his heart and emotions. Sometimes, he would give three thousand dirhams as a donation in one day. Warraq says that Imam Bukhari's earnings were five hundred dirhams per month and he would spend all of it on his students.

4. His abstention (Zuhd)

Imam Bukhari used to stay away from all worldly desires and temptations. In his quest for knowledge, he used to spend his time eating dried grass (hay). Usually he would eat only two or three almonds in a whole day. Once he became ill and the doctors told him, "Your intestines have become dry because you have been eating dried leaves." It was at that moment that Imam Bukhari told the doctor that he had been eating dried leaves for forty years and during this span of time he never even touched any kind of curry.

5. Fear of Allah

He was blessed with the highest rank of piety and righteousness. He feared Allah in everything he did. He kept himself away from backbiting and suspicion and always respected people's rights.

Imam Bukhari was so vigilant in his worship, that he would pray Sunnah and keep fasts in abundance. He would read the whole Qur'an on each day in the month of Ramadan and also recited ten chapters of the Holy Qur'an late at the night. He would complete the Holy Qur'an in the Tarawih prayers and always reciting twenty verses in each rak`a. He was very polite, tolerant and gentle. He never got angry when mistreated by others and prayed forgiveness for those who attributed evil to him. If he needed to correct any person, he would never embarrass him in public.

His Arrival in Nishapur and the issue of the creation of the Qur'an

In 250 AH, Imam Bukhari went to Nishapur. After hearing this news, joy and happiness spread among its people. In those times, Muhammad ibn Yahya adh-Dhuhli was the head of the literary kingdom of Nishapur. He advised and led the inhabitants of the city to gather together to welcome Imam Bukhari. A large amount of people went to the outskirts of the city to welcome Imam Bukhari, with extreme magnificence and honour. Imam Muslim ibn Hajjaj says that in all his life, he had never seen such a reception ever given to a scholar or even a ruler.

Imam Bukhari started giving lectures on Hadith in Nishapur. In each session, a huge crowd always packed the area to listen and many included people who had arrived specifically to learn about Hadith. However, some unpleasant people were envious about the reputation and popularity of Imam Bukhari. These people set up Muhammad ibn Yahya adh-Dhuhli to become his opponent. In this incident, Muhammad ibn Yahya considered the *pronunciation* of the Qur'an as eternal..." and "Imam Bukhari said, 'Our actions are created and the pronunciation is one our actions.'".

Once, a man came to Imam Bukhari and asked him whether the Qur'an was created (makhluq) or not created (ghayr makhluq). Imam Bukhari paused for a while. The man insisted on getting a reply, so Imam Bukhari told him: "The Qur'an are the words of Allah and they are not created (ghayr makhluq)." The asked some more questions about the words of the Qur'an, upon which Imam Bukhari said, "Our actions are created and the pronunciation is one our actions."

After this, mass propaganda was stirred against Imam Bukhari, which led to accusations that he believed the words of the Qur'an to be created. When Dhuhli heard these rumours, he disconnected his ties with Imam Bukhari and became his enemy. He started warning people by announcing that they should not attend the lectures of Imam Bukhari. As a result, people refrained from attending the Imam's lectures, except Muslim ibn Hajjaj. At last, due to his disappointment, Imam Bukhari left the city of Nishapur and returned to Bukhara.

Banishment from his homeland

When the people of Bukhara heard that Imam Bukhari was coming back to his homeland, they were extremely happy and erected tents many miles outside the city to welcome him. They greeted him with splendour for his return. He established a school there where he spent a great deal of time teaching with satisfaction.

Even here, there were envious people who never stopped disturbing him. They met the governor of Bukhara, who was a representative of the Khilafat `Abasiyya, Khalid ibn Ahmad. They told him to call Imam Bukhari to his house and make him as busy as possible with teaching his son. When told Imam Bukhari about this suggestion, he was told, "I do not want to abuse knowledge and carry it to the footstep of the rulers. If anybody wants to learn, they should join my school." The governor said: "If my son was to attend your school, he should not sit with ordinary people. You would have to teach him separately." Imam Bukhari answered: "I cannot stop any person from hearing Ahadith." Upon hearing this, the governor of Bukhara got mad at him and got a fatwa (verdict) from the time wasting opportunist (ibn al-waqt) `Ulama against Imam Bukhari to banish him from the city.

Imam Bukhari was majorly upset at the thought of being banished from his homeland. Not even a month passed, before the Khalaf of Baghdad dismissed the governor of Bukhara, Khalid ibn Ahmad adh-Dhuhli. The governor was expelled from his palace in extreme disgrace and dishonour, being mounted on a she-ass and then thrown into prison, where he died after few days.

Writings and Other Compilations

Imam Bukhari wrote many kitaabs besides Bukhari Shareef (Al Jamius Sahih).

Hereunder are some books written by Imam Bukhari

- ✍ Al Aadaabul Mufrad
- ✍ Juz - Raf-e-Yadain
- ✍ Juz - Qiraat-Kalful-Imam
- ✍ At-Taareekh-Al Kabeer - Al Awsat-As Sageer
- ✍ Kitabul Ashribah
- ✍ Kitabul Hibah
- ✍ Mabsoot
- ✍ Kitabul Ilal

- ✍ Kitabul Wuhdaan
- ✍ Af'aalul Ibaad
- ✍ Al-Aadabul-Mufrad

His passing

After returning from Bukhara, Imam Bukhari decided to go to Samarqand. He was still many miles from the city, when he heard that the people there had two views about him. So he decided to stay at a village called "Kharteng". There, he made the following invocation one night after the late-night prayer, saying: "O Allah, the Earth despite its grandeur is becoming narrow and is troubling me greatly. So take me back to You." After this invocation, he became ill. Meanwhile, the people of Samarqand sent a messenger to bring him there. Bukhari got up and was ready to travel, but his strength gave way. He began to invoke Allah at length, then he took to his bed and his soul passed away to his Lord - may Allah have mercy on him. An indescribable amount of perspiration came out of him even after he consigned his life to the Creator of life. When this abated, he was shrouded. He died on the night of `Id al-Fitr, the first night of Shawwal in the year 256 AH, at the age of 62 years.

Imam Bukhari devoted his entire life, in the search for the way of life given by Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), in acting upon his sayings and researching into this science. His each and every action was a fragment of the way of the Messenger.

Imam Bukhari was not only a scholar, worshipper, a devotee and a prosperous man, but he always feared Allah and shone with the love of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). The knowledge he gave to the world during his life is still being given today and as the Muslim Nation goes about its daily acts of worship, they realize how important the role played by Imam Bukhari was. He used to spread the Ahadith of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) everywhere he goes and Allah spread his status to every corner of the world.

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mr.ghouse@gmail.com