

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Imām Sufyān al-Thawri

Ustādh Abu Eesa Niamatullah

He is Imām Sufyān b. Saʿīd b. Masrūq Abu ʿAbdillāh al-Thawri *radhy Allāhu ʿanhu*, *Shaykh ʿl-Islām*, *Sayyid ʿl-Ulemā* in his time, *al-Hāfidh*, *Amīr ʿl-Muʿminīn* in Hadīth and a *Mujtahid* to boot.

He was born in Kūfah in the year 97h and learnt from his *Muhaddith* father Saʿīd b. Masrūq (*radhy Allāhu ʿanhu*) who was one of the companions of Shaʿbi and Khaythamah and thus from the younger *Tābiʿīn*.

Ibn al-Mubārak said,

“I’ve written Hadīth from 1100 scholars but I never wrote from better than Sufyān.”

Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyāni said,

“I never met anyone better from Kūfah than Sufyān.”

Barāʿ said that he heard Yūnus b. ʿUbayd say,

“I never saw anyone as great as Sufyān.” It was then said to him, *“But you’ve seen Saʿīd b. Jubayr, Ibrahīm, ʿAtāʿ and Mujāhid!”* Yūnus replied, *“As I said, I never saw anyone as great as Sufyān.”*

ʿAbd ʿl-Rahmān b. al-Mahdi said,

“My eyes have not seen the likes of four: I never saw anyone who had preserved the Hadīth more than Sufyān, no-one who was as strict upon himself as Shuʿbah was, no-one who was as intelligent as Mālik and no-one who was as sincere in his counsel to the Ummah as ibn al-Mubārak.”

Yahya b. Saʿīd al-Qattān said in an amazing statement,

“There is no-one as beloved to me as Shuʿbah and no-one is equal to him but if Sufyān differs with him, I take the statement of Sufyān.”

The point here is that according to the scholars of Hadīth, Yahya b. Sa‘īd al-Qattān has no equal in the science of Hadīth, of the most strictest of them in critical appraisal of narrators, so for him to say this is truly incredible.

‘Abd’l-Rahmān b. al-Mahdi said,

“Abu Ishāq saw Sufyān whilst he was still young and remarked, “And we gave him wisdom when a child.” (Maryum, 12)””

Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah said,

“I never met anyone more knowledgeable about the halāl and harām than Sufyān al-Thawri.”

Ibn al-Mubārak said,

“I never met anyone described to me except that he turned out to be less than he was described to be, except Sufyān.”

Imām Ahmad said,

“Sufyan b. al-‘Uyaynah said to me, “Your eyes will never see anyone like Sufyān al-Thawri.”

Yahya b. Sa‘īd al-Qattān said,

“Sufyān is more aware of the Hadīth of A‘mash than A‘mash himself.”

We could go on and on about all the statements that have been said about him.

So why don’t we?

Bishr al-Hāfi said,

“For us, Sufyān was the Imām of the Muslims.” He also said, *“Sufyān in his time was like Abu Bakr and ‘Umar in their time!”*

Can you imagine the impact this *Imām* had amongst this playground of superstars he arrived in?

Abu Bakr b. al-‘Ayyāsh said,

“Verily, if I see a man accompanying Sufyān, he becomes great in my eyes.”

This is not some mythical tale and this is not a case where Imām Sufyān al-Thawri paid everyone off to speak well about him. These people who are mentioning him spent their entire lives critically appraising people to ensure that the purity and sanctity of the *Sunnah* was preserved – so for them to be confident about a person took a lot, and our *Imām* proved it with his actions and knowledge, the two most important things a person will use in this life to prioritise what to do and think about and thus be successful in the Next Life.

One of his beautiful and famous statements was,

“Those Kings have left for you the Ākhirah, so leave for them the Dunya.”

Qabīсах said,

“I never sat with Sufyān except that I would remember death.”

Today, all we do when we sit down together is talk about the *dunya* and thus life itself as if we’re never going to even meet death.

Death? So what’s all *that* about then?

Ibn al-Mahdi said,

“I could never hear the recitation of Sufyān because he would cry so much.”

Yūsuf b. Asbāt said,

“Sufyān would urinate blood due to his intense worry and anxiety (with respect to the next life).”

Sufyān al-Thawri’s importance for honour is significant, hoping that he would never be found wanting from the people, so much so that he said,

“That Allāh holds me to account for 10,000 dirhams is more beloved to me than to be in the need of people.”

We should remember such *'izzah* and respect for oneself and the emphasis on working hard and doing things ourselves the next time you think you need help and are about to ask someone. Indeed, this is the special Prophetic advice given to His choice Companions as is well known i.e. to take oneself out of the need of people and put ones trust in Allāh alone. It is something very difficult to do and that is why only the greatest of people actually achieve this status.

A man came to ask advice about going on Hajj and so Imām Sufyān told him,

“Don’t accompany someone who will be excellent and generous to you for if you try to equal that by spending on him the same, he will harm you (because you’ll struggle to find that much wealth to do so), and if he does more for you than you do for him, he will humiliate you.”

They said that he asked Ibn al-Mahdi to recite *Sūrah Yāsīn* upon him when he became very ill, because it was said to relieve the difficulties of death (amongst the scholars at that time). Sufyān eventually passed away from his illness in the year 161h.

Abu Usāmāh said,

“I met Yazīd b. Ibrāhīm the morning after the death of Sufyān and he said to me, “In my dream last night, it was said to me, “The Leader of the Believers has died.” So I said to that person in my dream, “Sufyān al-Thawri has died?” “Yes” he replied.”

Yūsuf b. Asbāt said,

“I saw al-Thawri in a dream and I asked him, “What action did you find was best (for us)?” He replied, “The Qur’ān.””

He had over 600 Shaykhs, some of them who narrated directly from major Companions like Abu Hurayrah and Jarīr b. Abdillāh. He was involved with over 20,000 narrators. He was a giant and he was the defender of this religion.

We could have said so much but we have to stop somewhere. It’s enough to know that in the magnificent work called *Hilyat’l-Awliyā’* of Abu Nu‘aym al-Asfahāni, which is one of the greatest biographical collections of the Companions and *Salaf* and has everyone you’d wish to find in there from the early few generations, the largest biography is on a certain...Imām Sufyān al-Thawri *radhy Allāhu ‘anhu*.