

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hambal

An Event in The Mountain of Faith “I am a Muslim and I don’t walk alone”

- Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal memorized the Quran before the age of 10.
- At his time, Al-Mu’tazila had a strange view of the Quran.
 - They were putting mind before the Message and reason before revelation.
 - They denied many of the attribute of Allah Subhanahu Wa ta’aalaa.
 - Ex: Allah cannot speak because humans speak and God cannot be human.
- At that time the khalifah was of the Mu’tazila
 - He also believed that the Quran was created.
 - He persecuted whoever said otherwise.
- Some of the ulama’ said yes it was created from fear.
- Some who were trying to be in the middle path said, that the Quran is not created but if the khalifa said it was created then it is created.
- Only few of the ulama’ said no it wasn’t created.
 - Imam Ahmad was one of them.
 - This happened around the year 218 after Hijra.
- There were around 26 scholars who had held pretty strong. After torture, 17 of them gave in and the other seven were tortured so bad that they either died or fainted.
- Finally, there were only 2 left:
 - *Imam Ahmad and his student Muhammad Ibn Nuh.*

- The man from the desert encountered Imam Ahamad and told him to stay firm and to hold strong.
- This man’s name was Jabir Ibn Amir, a poet.
- His famous saying as he was being tortured “The fall of the scholar is the fall of the community”.
- His Kunya was Aba-Abdillah.
- Ma’mun was from the Abbasid family, close to the prophet (WAS).
- As soon as Imam Ahmad made his dua to end what was going on the Khalifa died (Power of Du’aa – the Weapon of the Believer).
- Mohammad Ibn Nuh (Imam Ahmad’s student) feels sick and lies down and encourages Imam Ahmad more.

- After that Mohammad Ibn Nuh fell dead. Imam Ahmad washed his body and did the prayer on him.
- Imam Ahmad was the only one left to go to prison. He said, “I know to be prison is bad, I know the shackles are horrible...etc, but in the way of Allah is easy.”
- Imam Ahmad wouldn't drink the water and the ice, if the rest of the prisoners couldn't have it as well.
- His uncle Ishaq visited him and encouraged him to give in and used the ayah that says “Ilaa man ukriha waqalbuhu mudhma'inun bil iman”.
- Imam Ahmad refuses, countering with a hadith.
- The other prisoner encouraged him not to worry about the lashes...which was the only thing that worried him to be impatient. Every night they would send him and an scholar to argue with him.
- Ishaq Ibn Ibrahim used the ayah against him “ina ja'alnahu qur'anan arabiya” Imam Ahmad used “faja'alnahum kacasfin ma'kuul” against the man.
- Despite his condition, he prayed all night in his room.
- Imam Ahmad used a hadith that was narrated by Ibn Abbas and it had nothing about creation.
- Al-Mu'tasim says if I had not found you in another man's hand, I would have never touched you.
- He was about to let him go, then he asked him one more question and said what do you say about the Quran.

Ahmed ibn Hambal – Safi Khan

→ Second day of interrogation: People gather outside Palace of Mu'tasim. Imam Ahmed was brought to him in chains. Imam Ahmad could hardly walk.

→ Mu'tasim asked about Imam Ahmed's night in the jail. Imam Ahmad said, “It was fine, alhamdulillah, except I saw something really strange”.

Mu'tasim, “what did you see?”

Imam Ahmad, “I made wudhu and started my salaah (qiyamul layl). I started praying, did the first rak'a, read Fatiha and Sura Falagh, stood up for the second raka'a, read Fatiha and then Sura Naas. I finished my salaah and got up for the second of set of 2 raka'a. I read Fatiha in that second set and then I tried to read Sura Ikhlas, but I just couldn't read it. For some reason, I could not read sura Ikhlas or any other Sura or any other Ayah from the Quran. So, I finished my Salah and sat there.” So looked like dozed off while sitting. Imam Ahmad continued, “In a dream I saw that, while I was looking at a corner of the prison from my jail cell,

the Quran was laying down dead. So I washed the Quran, shrouded it, prayed janaza on it and buried it”.

→ Mu'tasim was shocked to hear a scholar of such a caliber say something like that. He said, “Woe to you, ya Ahmed, does the Quran die?” Imam Ahmad responded, “You say that the Quran is created and everything that is created dies.”

→ Mu'tasim understood the intelligent argument of Imam Ahmad and said, “Ahmad has completely overwhelmed us”. Mu'tasim looked at his scholars and said, “answer him, argue with him”. Nobody got up. Mu'tasim then ordered one of his scholars (Abdurahman ibn Ishaq) to say something on his behalf. Abdurahman got up and said, “Ya Ahmad, what do you say about the Quran?” He started the argument all over again. Imam Ahmad responded, “Ya Abdurahman bin Ishaq, what do you say about the knowledge of Allah?” Abdurahman knew that put him in a very difficult position. If he said knowledge was created, that would put him into Kufr, if he said it was uncreated, would he would then have to agree with imam Ahmad, so he just went back to his seat. Imam Ahmad was able to refute the arguments of the army of mu'tasim scholars.

→ Imam Ahmad then turned to Mu'tasim and said to him, “Ya ameerul mu'mineen, give me some proof from the Quran and the sunnah.” One of the scholars of Mu'tasim, Ahmad ibn Abi Duad, stood up and said, “O Ahmad, you don't speak anything other than the Quran and the Sunnah?” i.e. you don't use your mind? Imam Ahmad smiled and looked at his face as if to say, of course not, we just look at the Quran and the Sunnah. Ahmad ibn Abi Duad got very upset and said, “O Ameerul Mumineen, this Ahmad is misguided and is misguided the people and is an innovator.” And then he looked at the people that were gathered at the place watching the show and said to Mu'tasim, “these are you judges, so asked them what they think.” For a brief moment everyone was quiet.

→ Imam Ahmad asked them to proof how he was misguided or how he was an innovator. Imam Ahmad was able to destroy all their proofs. Imam Ahmad said, “As I was responding to them with so much speed, it was as if my voice was louder than all of their voices put together.” No body could stump Imam Ahmad.

→ One of the scholars of Mu'tasim stood up and said, “Doesn't Allah say that Allah created everything?” Imam Ahmad said, “yes?”

The Mu'tasim scholar said, "The Quran is a thing, therefore the Quran is created".

Imam Ahmad smiled and said, "Doesn't Allah say (referring to the Thamud) that when the winds came, they destroyed everything?"

The Mu'tasim scholar said, "yes?"

Imam Ahmad said, "then how did Allah say, right after that part, to complete the Ayah, nothing was seen of them except their dwellings?" i.e everything was destroyed but their dwellings. The Mu'tasim scholar was speechless. The point was, yes, Allah created everything but there are some things that are not created such as Allah's vision, Allah's hearing, Allah's knowledge, Allah's speech and so on. So, similarly, not everything was destroyed. The fact that certain things are destroyed and certain things aren't is up to Allah. Again he stumped them. And again, the entire day was a very frustrating day for the scholars of Mu'tasim.

→ Just like the first day, Mu'tasim abruptly called an end to the second day as Dhuhr approached.

→ Mu'tasim asked everyone to get up and leave except Imam Ahmad and one of his leading scholars, Abdurahman ibn Ishaq. He wanted to have a private meeting with these two.

Mu'tasim then asked Imam Ahmad, "Do you know this man named Saaleh-ar-Rasheedi?"

Imam Ahmad said, "Yes, I know him."

Mu'tasim said, "He used to be my teacher when I was young. And one day, he was sitting in the same place you are sitting, O Ahmad, and he started talking about the Quran. And he differed with me. So, I ordered that he be dragged on his face and I stomped on his head." Mu'tasim was telling Imam Ahmad that if I did this to my teacher, imagine what I'll do to you if you don't watch what you are saying.

Imam Ahmad looked him squared in the eye, with out fear, as if to say, "so what?"

Mu'tasim saw that it had no effect on him, so he said to him, "Who are you? I don't know who you are." Imam Ahmad never went to the khalifa like the other scholars did.

Abdurahman ibn Ishaq said, "Ya ameerul mumimeen, I've known this scholar for the last 30 years and he believes that one should obey the leader and assist him if he calls out for Jihad and so on."

Mu'tasim was a little bit at ease now because he realized that Imam Ahmad was not out to have a struggle against him.

Mu'tasim said, "I'd love to have Imam Ahmad on my side and we'll have him refute anyone who comes to argue with me. I'll even free him with my own hands, *if only he would agree with a small part* of what I say. I'll even go to him as student to learn from him." So Mu'tasim wants to be a

student of Imam Ahmad, because he was impressed with his intelligence, if Imam Ahmad would agree with a *small part* of what Mu'tasim says. After saying that, Mu'tasim looked into Imam Ahmad's eyes and said, "What do you have to say, Ahmad?"

Imam Ahmad responded, "Give me something (a proof) from the book of Allah or the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him)." Mu'tasim got upset and ordered the guards to return Imam Ahmad to the jail cell. So, Imam Ahmad was returned to his jail cell in Baghdad, on the second day.

→ We are going through these stories for inspiration and to learn lessons from the struggles that Imam Ahmad waged.

→ Imam Ahmad stood up for this issue because the Quran was and still is very important. It is the basis of all truths.

→ Many of us today say we believe in the Quran but are not ready to take it as a constitution for our lives. How many of us know how to read the Quran properly?

→ Everything we do in Islam, there has to be a proof for it from the Quran or the Sunnah.

→ Imam Ahmad was asking for proofs from the Quran and the Sunnah.

→ Mu'tasim tried to tempt Imam Ahmad (Agree with me on a small part of what I say). Today, we are being asked to compromise our religion.

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→ When Imam Ahmad went back to his cell, 2 of the scholars of Mu'tasim came to debate but again, they left frustrated.

→ Mu'tasim's deputy sent Ahmad ibn Abi Duad to ask Imam Ahmad what his decision was. Remember that Imam Ahmad is still in chains. They were hoping that he'll soften up after all the debating. Imam Ahmad again responded, "Give me something from the book of Allah or the Sunnah of the Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him). Ahmad ibn Abi Duad again tried to scare Imam Ahmad by saying that he'll be whipped. Imam Ahmad, once again responded, "Give me something from the book of Allah or the Sunnah of the Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him).

→ Imam Ahmad narrates that on the 3rd day, he had a feeling that something was going to happen. So, Imam Ahmad sent the guards to bring him a string to tighten his pants for the reason that were he to become unconscious while being whipped, his pants wouldn't fall.

→ When Imam Ahmad was taken to the Palace, he saw that the environment was different. Many people had gathered outside of the Palace and that everyone had a weapon. Inside of the Palace, there were many troops and government people, all were armed as well.

→ Before the hearings begun, the khalifa sent two messengers to convince imam Ahmad to change his mind, but he responded as usual, "Give me something from the Quran or the Sunnah."

→ An eye witness on that day, a government worker by the name of Ahmad ibn Alfaraj narrates that everyone in Baghdad had closed down his/her business that day and grabbed their weapon in support of Imam Ahmad. People were ready to give up their lives and sacrifice whatever they could to support Imam Ahmad. The Khalifa saw the number of people outside the Palace and reinforced his Palace with more troops.

→ When the people were asked why they were gathered, they would say, "Today imam Ahmad will be tested because of the Quran."

→ Imam Ahmad was brought in with his jail cloths and a hood over his head. Imam Ahmad was sat in front of the Khalifa. He put his hands over each other and said, "La hawla walaa Quwwatta ila Billah" [There is no movement nor strength except with Allah]. Meanwhile, more and more people were gathering outside the Palace.

→ The interrogation started:

Mu'tasim: You are Ahmad ibn Hambal?

Imam Ahmad: I am Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hambal.

Mu'tasim: Are you the one who says Allah talks and speaks and the Quran is not created? Where do you get this from?

Imam Ahmad: From the book of Allah.

Mu'tasim: Where in the book of Allah?

Imam Ahmad: There are many places.

Mu'tasim: Like what?

Imam Ahmad: Quoted a verse in Sura Sajdah: Allah says, "My word (the speech of Allah) is going to come true. And I'm going to fill hell fire with Jinn and men." Imam Ahmad said, "this is what Allah says. Do you think there is someone other than Allah who said this?"

Mu'tasim was dumbfounded. He turned to his scholars and told them to debate or refute imam Ahmad. But all these scholars had debated imam

Ahmad before and they couldn't defeat him, so they were all frustrated. In their frustration, all they could say was, "Ya Ameer-ul-mumineen (O leader of the believers), kill him."

Mu'tasim slapped Imam Ahmad so hard that Imam Ahmad fell on the floor unconscious. When that happened, some of the troops from Khurasan got up and left (they were friends of Hambal, the grandfather of Imam Ahmad). Mu'tasim was surprised. He was afraid that there will be a revolution against him. So, he told the guards to sprinkle Imam Ahmad with water to bring him back into consciousness. They took off the hood from his face and after sprinkling numerous buckets of water on him, Imam Ahmad regained consciousness. He then saw his uncle, Ishaq ibn Hambal in front of him, pleading with the Khalifah to let Imam Ahmad go. His uncle had capitulated to the Khalifah's position (that the Quran was created). Imam Ahmad, while still laying on the floor, started talking to his uncle, while ignoring the Khalifah. Imam Ahmad said, "It looks like the one who threw the water on me is upset" – Imam Ahmad said this purposely to upset the Khalifah, as if to say, "Look, we were debating and talking like human beings and now you are going to hit me because I have arguments from the Quran and the sunnah. Is that just?" Mu'tasim got upset and said, "You don't think that I know what you are trying to do?" – Meaning, are you trying to talk down on me? Some of the people there said, "O Ameer-ul-mumineen, kill him so that we will be relieved of his presence." Mu'tasim said that he swore to Allah that he was not going to kill him by the sword. The other scholars (Mu'tasim's scholars) said that he should whip him. Mu'tasim said he won't stop whipping Imam Ahmad until he says the Quran is created. So the punishment started.

→ Imam Ahmad narrates: "They dragged me on my face. They took me between two huge planks of wood and then they tied me up". And then they brought two huge men who would whip him. Mu'tasim told the first man to whip Imam Ahmad as hard as he could and to inflict as much pain as possible. There was a long line up of people who were going to whip Imam Ahmad. Mu'tasim didn't want his men to get tired of whipping Imam Ahmad so after two strikes, he would tell each one to step a side and let the other continue. Mu'tasim and his scholars were getting angrier by the minute because Imam Ahmad was still holding strong. One of the man shouted at Imam Ahmad, "your khalifa is standing in front of you, you should obey him." Mu'tasim got up from his seat and starting beating Imam Ahmad with the metal handle of his sword.

→ There were a lot of calls for Imam Ahmad to just say what the Khalifah wants to hear to save himself, but Imam Ahmad did not listen to them. Mu'tasim, frustrated returned to his seat. He then got his strongest man

and asked him how many whips it will take to kill Imam Ahmad. The man said at the most 20 whips. So Mu'tasim gave the order for the man to start whipping Imam Ahmad in order to kill him. After the 14/15th whip, blood started gushing from the shoulders of Imam Ahmad. The people were amazed at Imam Ahmad's patience. They admired his courage.

→ The Police chief of Baghdad (Ishaq ibn Ibraheem) got up and addressed Mu'tasim. He said, "O commander of the believers, this is a man who is weak in body, so let him go". Mu'tasim said I won't let him go until he says what I'm saying. Ishaq ibn Ibraheem came up with a plan. Imam Ahmad was beaten so badly at this point that he didn't know what was going on. Ishaq ibn Ibraheem went up to Imam Ahmad and told him (whispered in his ears) that the Khalifa had gone back on his words (the fact that the Quran was created), and says, La ilaha illa Allah (There is no God but Allah) and that he has repented. Imam Ahmad only heard the last part, that is, La ilaha illa Allah (there is no God but Allah). So he responded with a lot of exhaustion in his voice, "this is a statement of sincerity and devotion to Allah, and so I too say La ilaha illa Allah (there is no God but Allah)". So Ishaq ibn Ibrahim upon hearing this shouted, "O commander of the believers, he says like you say." When Mu'tasim heard this, he thought Imam Ahmad had finally relented. People couldn't believe that Imam Ahmad had changed his view. Mu'tasim couldn't believe it either. People started talking and shouting and the voices got louder, Mu'tasim sent his messengers to the balcony to find out what was going on. The messengers came back and told Mu'tasim that the people were very upset and think that something happened to Imam Ahmad and that they swear they are going to kill you. Mu'tasim asked the guards to take Imam Ahmad to the balcony so that the people can see that he was fine. When Imam Ahmad was taken outside, the people said to Imam Ahmad, "O Abu Abdullah (Imam Ahmad's kunya), what did you say so that we can say the same thing?" Imam Ahmad waited for the people to calm down and then responded, "What else would I say?" He then continued, "All you reporters and all you masses of Muslims, listen carefully and bear witness to what I'm about to say. The Quran, is the speech of Allah. It is not created. It originated from Allah and it will return to Him." The people were amazed and happy that Imam Ahmad did not change his position. The Khalifa was furious. He ordered that Imam Ahmad be returned inside and the door closed. They started punching, kicking and whipping Imam Ahmad. Imam Ahmad became unconscious because of the intensity of the beating. They poured water on him to bring him back to consciousness. Then they brought this sweet date drink and asked him to drink. Imam Ahmad said, "I swear by Allah I will not break my fast. I'm fasting." Imam Ahmad was fasting despite the beating and torturing he received.

→ Later on that night, the Khalifa sent a doctor to the jail cell of Imam Ahmad. The doctor said, he's seen people who had been whipped even a thousand times, but he had never seen someone who was beaten so badly as Imam Ahmad was. The doctor also narrated that Imam Ahmad was very patient despite the fact that there was no anesthesia while cutting of his dead flesh. Imam Ahmad kept smiling and saying alhamdulillah while the doctor used a hot iron to cut/burn off the dead flesh. Imam Ahmad said that the marks stayed with him for the rest of his life.

→ Imam Ahmad's son said that he heard his father say, "I gave all I had for the sake of Allah. Even after all the prosecution and all I have gone through, when I depart this world, I pray that I leave with my score all even. There is nothing for me or against me." Imam Ahmad was worried about himself. Such was the level of his imam.

→ Mu'tasim later freed Imam Ahmad to his uncle and was placed under house arrest. There were guards all around his house. He was not allowed to teach anyone or hold any halaqaat. Imam Ahmad accepted the conditions and was released.

→ Imam Ahmad was clement, forgiving and compassionate. He didn't take anything personally. Later on, while Imam Ahmad was still under house arrest, the woman from 'Amooriyah called out to Mu'tasim for help when she was harassed by non-Muslims, Mu'tasim sent an army of 100,000 soldiers to rescue the woman. Imam Ahmad prayed for the Muslim army under Mu'tasim to be victorious. He said, "O Allah help him (Mu'tasim) towards victory". When the messengers came back and Imam Ahmad heard that the Muslim army was victorious, he forgave Mu'tasim for all his beating and prosecution. Imam Ahmad forgave all the beating and the whipping but what he didn't forget was the bi'da and innovation Mu'tasim stood for. Imam Ahmad also said that he kept thinking about the Ayah "let them forgive and overlook things. Don't you wish that Allah forgive you when you err." And another Ayah "whoever forgives and reconciles and makes up with people, then their reward is with Allah." After thinking and pondering over this ayaat, Imam Ahmad decided to forgive everyone who tortured him. Imam Ahmad had a bigger goal than keeping grudges – To please Allah.

We should learn from Imam Ahmad's courage - the courage to forgive and be merciful.