

“A Wise Young Boy”

Many years ago, during the time of the Taabi’een (the generation of Muslims after the Sahabah), Baghdad was a great city of Islam. In fact, it was the capital of the Islamic Empire and because of the great number of scholars who lived there and it was the center of Islamic knowledge. One day, the ruler of Rome at that time sent an envoy to Baghdad with three challenges for the Muslims. When the messenger reached the city, he informed the Khalifah that he had three questions which he challenged the Muslims to answer.

The Khalifah gathered together all the scholars of the city and the Roman messenger climbed upon a high platform and said, “I have come with three questions. If you answer them, then I would leave with you a great amount of wealth which I brought from the king of Rome. As for the questions, they were:

1. What was there before Allah?
2. In which direction does Allah face?
3. What is Allah engaged in at this moment?

The great assembly of people was silent. (Can you think of answers to these questions?) In the midst of these brilliant scholars and students of Islam, there was a man looking on his young son. “O my dear father! I will answer him and silence him!” said the youth.

So the boy sought the permission of the Khalifah to give the answers and he was given permission to do so. The Roman addressed the young Muslim and repeated his first question, “What was there before Allah?” The boy asked, “Do you know how to count?” “Yes,” said the man. “Then count down from ten!” so the Roman counted down, “ten, nine, eight...” until he reached “one” and he stopped counting. “But what comes before ‘one’?” asked the boy. “There is nothing before one – that is it!” said the man. “Well then, if there obviously is nothing before the arithmetic ‘one’, then how do you expect that there should be anything before the ‘One’ who is Absolute truth. All-Eternal, Everlasting, the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden?”

So he asked, “Then tell me, in which direction is Allah facing?” “Bring a candle and light it”, said the boy, “and tell me in which direction the flame is facing.” “But the flame is just light – it spreads in each of the four directions, North, South, East and West. It does not face any one direction only,” said the man in wonderment. The boy cried, “Then if this physical light spreads in all four directions such as you cannot tell me which way it faces, then what do you expect of the Nur-us-Smawati-wal’Ard: Allah – the Light of the Heavens and the Earth!? Light upon Light, Allah faces all directions at all times.”

The Roman was stupefied and astounded that here was a young child answering his challengers in such a way that he could not argue against the proofs.

So, he desperately wanted to try his final question. But before doing so, the boy said, “Wait! You are the one who is asking the questions and I am the one who is giving the answers to these challenges. It is only fair that you should come down to where I am

standing and that I should go up where you are right now, in order that the answers may be heard as clearly as the questions.

“This seemed reasonable to the Roman, so he came down from where he was standing and the boy ascended the platform. Then the man repeated his final challenge, “Tell me, what is Allah doing at this moment?” The boy proudly answered, “At this moment, when Allah found upon this high platform a liar and mocker of Islam, He caused him to descend and brought him low. And as for the one who believed in the Oneness of Allah, He raised him up and established the Truth. Every day He exercises (universal) power (Surah 55 Ar-Rahman, verse 29).”

The Roman had nothing to say except to leave and return back to his country, defeated. Meanwhile, this young boy grew up to become one of the most famous scholars of Islam. Allah, the Exalted, blessed him with special wisdom and knowledge of the Deen (religion). His name was Abu Hanifah (r.a.) and he is known today as Imam Abu Hanifah (Imam-e-Azam), the Great Imam and scholar of Islam.