

Al-Ḥāfiz, Moulānā Ibrāhīm Khapi – A Condensed Biography

On the 14th of January 2016, corresponding to the 3rd of Rabī‘ al-Ākhir, Al-Ḥāfiz Moulana Ibrāhīm Khapi of Rochdale returned to his Lord at an estimated age of 96-105, with his Misbāḥ/Subḥa (rosary beads) in his hand; having spent a lifetime in the Taṣbīḥ (glorification) of Allāh it was only fitting that he leave this world with his companion.

The venerable Moulānā – May Allāh sanctify his soul – grew up in the village of Manubar, close to Bharuch in the Indian region of Gujrat in the 1920’s, during an age where Ḥadīth in the Indian subcontinent was at its zenith. Having memorized the entirety of the Qur’ān at the age of 9, he went on as amongst the first of his villagers to seek knowledge for a number of years at the Jāmi‘ah Hussainiyya Madrassah, graduating as an ‘Ālim, having studied the traditional Islamic sciences in Arabic, Urdu and Persian and gaining authorization in the 6 most authoritative collections of Aḥādīth (al-Kutub al-Sittah) at the prestigious Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband. He was fortunate enough to have seen the likes of Ḥakīm al-Umma, Moulānā Ashraf Alī Thānwī, and performed services (Khidma) for Moulānā Husain Aḥmad Madanī – May Allāh sanctify their souls.

Amongst his teachers were:

- Moulānā Aḥmadu ‘I-lāh – May Allāh have mercy upon his soul
- Moulānā Isma‘īl Aḥmad Mullā – May Allāh have mercy upon his soul
- Moulānā Shabīr Husain – May Allāh preserve him

Having come from a poor family, he had little in the way of wealth; his mother would pack for him ghee on his way to the madrasa. Despite the impoverished conditions in which he grew up, his generosity and service was evident from a young age. He would often observe his teacher studying late into the hours of the night, with the little ghee he was given, he would cook for his teacher whatever food he could, much to his teachers surprise. His teacher enquired as to why he would do this for him, to which Moulānā Ibrāhīm replied: ‘I do so for the pleasure of Allāh’, his noble teacher commented: ‘You will be successful’. After his subsequent teaching of the religion, he would attend to the fields as a farmer, cutting the food for the grazing animals, and would also sell tea. It is estimated that his combined salary was around 70 rupees per month, with which he would have to cover his entire expenditure for himself and his family; in totality Moulānā Ibrāhīm raised 7 of his own children and took care of 4-orphaned children as his own.

Between 1976-1977 Moulānā Ibrāhīm travelled to the UK intending to come and teach the religion, first arriving in Blackburn, and then moving to Rochdale upon the advice of Baba Asghār of Manchester Road, Rochdale – May Allāh have mercy upon his soul – due to Rochdale being bereft of anyone to teach the newly emerging Muslim community, thereby fulfilling the communal obligation (Farḍ al-Kifāyah) on behalf of the Muslim’s of the locality. He performed services for the Muslim community of Rochdale ever since.

Moulānā during his many years in Rochdale would remain independent, putting his trust solely in Allāh, his independence extending over non-reliance upon public transport often walking as far as Bamford and Heywood to teach the Qur'ān and the religion to his students. His simplicity was a testimony to his asceticism. During his introduction into the community, he lived in a household devoid of any amenities such as a kitchen or a bathroom, his accommodation was furnished with only a bed and a small electric gas cooker. Despite his life spent in Rochdale, his connection to his roots remained firm, collecting finances over the course of his life for the madrasa in which he graduated.

From his early years to his last days, Moulānā was known for his intensive engagement in the remembrance (Dhikr) of Allāh, often being heard at the Jumu'ah Ṣalāh reciting:

‘يَا حَيُّ يَا قَيُّوْمُ’ – O Eternally-living, O self-Existing One’

Even during his last years he stood for the entire 20 Rak'āt of Tarāwīh in the first row, listening attentively and correcting the recitation of the Imām. His children report that he would spend his nights awake in the remembrance (Dhikr) of his Lord, in night vigil (Tahajjud), in supplication (Du'ā'), in worship (Ibādah) and in frequently re-reading books of knowledge in order to keep his knowledge vivid and fresh in order to benefit the community.

His final advice was:

‘Pray your prayers, and undertake hallowed acts’

May Allāh sanctify his soul, elevate his ranks, forgive and have mercy upon his soul, continue his benefit, and allow us to appreciate his sacrifices and devotion.

Āmīn.

Compiled by Iḥsān b. Sharīf

Laylat 'l-Jumu'ah, 18th of Rabī' al-Ākhir, 1437.