TRACING THE SCHOLARS OF ISLAM

SERIES 40

HAMZAH FANSURI

The Sufi Scholar and Poet Who Enriched the Malay Language



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِۦ نَفْسُهُۥ ۖ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ ٱلْوَرِيدِ

"And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein."

SURAH QAF 50:16

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise is due to Allah, who is closer to His servant than his jugular vein, and who sent every Messenger in the language of his people. Blessings and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and upon his family and his Companions.

This eBook is specially dedicated to my beloved wife,

ZAHARAH MOHD LATIF;

my dear children,

MUHAMMAD HAFIZ, NOOR HAZWANI, ABDUL HAKIM, NOOR HIDAYAH, NOR AQILA and **NOR ATIQAH**;

and my sons- and daughters-in-law,

FAZILAH, MALEK, HANIN, FAIRIZAL and **FIRWAN**.

This fortieth book of Tracing the Scholars of Islam — the first figure from the Malay world in this series — tells the story of Hamzah Fansuri of Barus, who wrote of the love of Allah in beautiful Malay. May his story teach us to love our mother tongue as a means of da'wah, and to be careful in matters of creed.

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ABOUT THE COVER OF THIS EBOOK

The cover of this eBook is an **AI-generated image** — an ***imaginative depiction, not a real likeness*** of Hamzah Fansuri. This label is also printed on the cover. This time the viewpoint is ***from ground level***, among the roots of a huge ***camphor tree***.

He stands beside the trunk in a **white baju**, **sarong** and **turban**, holding a **book** to his chest and gazing toward the sea.

In the background are the **west coast of Sumatra**, **trading boats** at a river mouth, and a **wooden mosque with a tiered roof** among coconut palms. The camphor tree was chosen because ***Barus (Fansur)*** was famous worldwide for its camphor.

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Colour guide: green box = verses of the Qur'an; gold box = Hadith; brown box = history note (reports from the books of history and biography); blue table = comparison. Underlined blue narrator names can be clicked to open the narrator's page on sunnah.com.

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HAMZAH FANSURI

The fortieth book of **Tracing the Scholars of Islam** tells the story of ***Shaykh Hamzah Fansuri***, Sufi scholar and poet from ***Barus*** (Fansur), Sumatra, who lived in the ***16th century CE***. He is ***the first figure from the Malay world*** in this series.

He is considered ***the first Malay poet known by name***, and among the earliest to write ***religious knowledge in Malay*** in the Jawi script. His Sufi teachings also became ***a subject of debate*** among scholars to this day.

This eBook explains ***the verses on Allah's nearness*** that inspired his poems, ***the town of Barus*** and ***its camphor***, ***his travels and Hajj***, the birth of ***the Malay syair***, and ***the debate on creed*** that followed — holding to the position of ***Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah***.

Note: The translation of Qur'anic verses in this eBook is that of Sahih International. The grading of each Hadith is stated in the Hadith box. Information from books of history and modern research is **biographical narration (not Hadith)** *and is placed in the brown "History Note" boxes. The cover image is an AI-generated image and is marked as such. His dates of birth and death are uncertain.*

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CLOSER THAN THE JUGULAR VEIN

SURAH QAF 50:16

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِۦ نَفْسُهُۥ ۖ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ ٱلْوَرِيدِ ﴿١٦﴾

And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/50:16

Allah declares: ***"We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein"***. This verse is a frequent theme of Hamzah Fansuri's poems: seeking Allah ***not far outside***, but by ***knowing oneself and one's heart***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 50:16.

The scholars of tafsir explain that ***Allah's closeness is by His knowledge and power***, not that Allah is united with creation. The Malay translation of Basmeih makes this explicit by adding the word ***"(knowledge)"***.

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INDEED I AM NEAR

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:186

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/2:186

Allah says: ***"indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 2:186.

Allah's nearness is ***a nearness that gives hope***: He hears every supplication without any intermediary. Sufi poets such as Hamzah Fansuri described the servant's longing for this ***near*** Lord in beautiful language.

MEANING OF ALLAH'S NEARNESS	EXPLANATION OF AHL AS-SUNNAH SCHOLARS
Near by His knowledge	Allah knows the whispers of the heart before they are spoken.
Near by His power	Nothing escapes His power.
Near by His help	Allah answers prayers and helps the obedient servant.
Not union	Allah is exalted above uniting with or incarnating in creation.

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HE IS WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU ARE

SURAH AL-HADID 57:4

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ۖ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنزِلُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۖ وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٤﴾

It is He who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He knows what penetrates into the earth and what emerges from it and what descends from the heaven and what ascends therein; and He is with you wherever you are. And Allah, of what you do, is Seeing.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/57:4

Allah says: ***"and He is with you wherever you are"***. In the same verse Allah mentions that He ***"established Himself above the Throne"*** and ***"knows what penetrates into the earth"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 57:4.

The scholars explain that ***"with"*** here means ***with His knowledge, watchfulness and power*** — because the verse itself begins and ends by mentioning Allah's ***knowledge*** and that ***"Allah, of what you do, is Seeing"***.

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THERE IS NOTHING LIKE UNTO HIM

SURAH AL-SHURA 42:11

فَاطِرُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنۡ أَنفُسِكُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗا وَمِنَ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ
أَزۡوَٰجٗا يَذۡرَؤُكُمۡ فِيهِۚ لَيۡسَ كَمِثۡلِهِۦ شَيۡءٞۖ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡبَصِيرُ ١١

[He is] Creator of the heavens and the earth. He has made for you from yourselves, mates, and among the cattle, mates; He multiplies you thereby. There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/42:11

"There is nothing like unto Him". This verse is ***a foundational rule of creed***: whatever comes to mind about the form of Allah, Allah is not like that. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 42:11.

This verse is the ***scale*** for weighing Sufi expressions. Any expression implying that Allah ***resembles or unites*** with creation must be ***rejected or interpreted*** according to the rules of the scholars.

EXPRESSION	THE SCALE OF 42:11
"Allah is near His servant"	True — by His knowledge, power and mercy.
"Allah is with us"	True — by His watchfulness and help.
"Allah unites with creation"	Rejected — contradicts 42:11 and 112:4.
"Creation is Allah"	Rejected — creation is created; Allah is the Creator.

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SAY: HE IS ALLAH, THE ONE

SURAH AL-IKHLAS 112:1–4

قُلْ هُوَ ٱللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾

Say, "He is Allah, [who is] One."

ٱللَّهُ ٱلصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾

Allah, the Eternal Refuge.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾

He neither begets nor is born.

وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌۢ ﴿٤﴾

Nor is there to Him any equivalent.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/112:1-4

Surah al-Ikhlas sums up tawhid in four verses: ***"He is Allah, [who is] One"***, ***"the Eternal Refuge"***, ***"He neither begets nor is born"***, and ***"Nor is there to Him any equivalent"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 112:1.

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WHAT PERISHES AND WHAT REMAINS

SURAH AL-RAHMAN 55:26–27

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ﴿٢٦﴾

Everyone upon the earth will perish.

وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٢٧﴾

And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/55:26-27

"Everyone upon the earth will perish", ***"And there will remain the Face of your Lord"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 55:26.

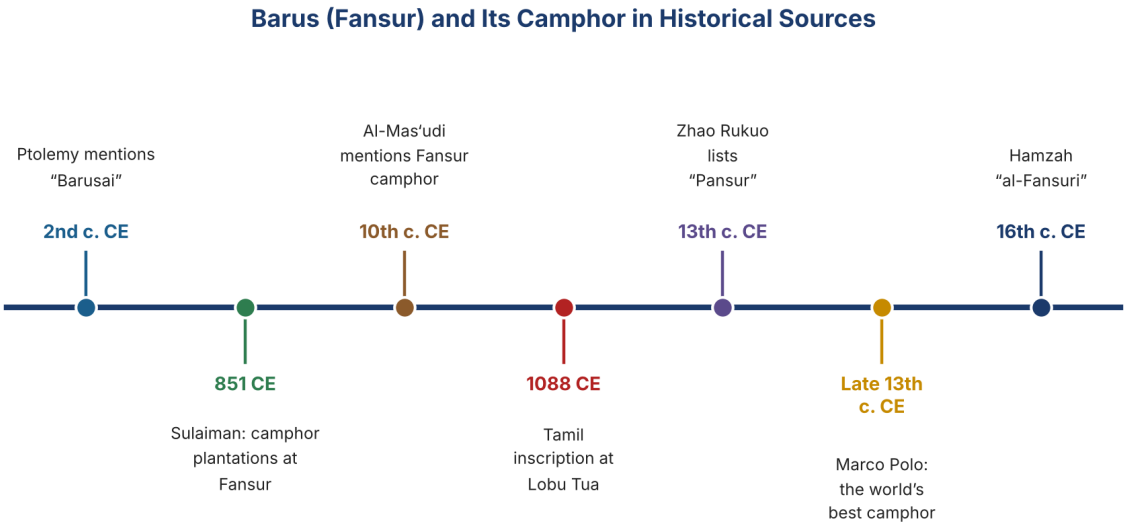
The themes of ***fana'*** (the passing away of creation) and ***baqa'*** (the permanence of Allah) appear very often in Hamzah Fansuri's poems. He urges readers ***not to be deceived by the world*** that will perish, and to ***turn their hearts to Allah***, the Everlasting.

ATTRIBUTES OF CREATION	ATTRIBUTES OF ALLAH
Has a beginning and an end	The First without beginning, the Last without end.
Needs others	Needs nothing; everything depends on Him (112:2).
Changes	Exalted above change and deficiency.
Will perish (55:26)	Remains forever (55:27).

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BACKGROUND: BARUS, THE CAMPHOR TOWN

The name ***"Fansuri"*** comes from ***Fansur***, the Arabic name for ***Barus*** — a port on the west coast of Sumatra, now in Central Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatra. Barus was famous throughout the world for its ***camphor***.



Source: Wikipedia, "Barus" — drawing on Arab, Chinese and European records.

Figure 1: Barus (Fansur) and its camphor in historical sources.

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HISTORY NOTE: BARUS IN THE RECORDS OF THE WORLD

The geographer ***Ptolemy*** (2nd century CE) recorded ***"Barusai"***, which some scholars think refers to the Barus coast.

The merchant ***Sulaiman*** (851 CE) mentioned ***camphor plantations at Fansur***. ***Al-Mas'udi*** (10th century CE) also mentioned Fansur camphor. ***Marco Polo*** called Fansur camphor ***the best in the world***, selling ***for its weight in gold***.

A ***Tamil inscription*** dated ***1088 CE*** was found at ***Lobu Tua***, Barus — evidence that merchants from South India once settled here. Islamic gravestones at ***Bukit Hasang*** show Arab and Persian influence.

REFERENCES:

Wikipedia, "Barus". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barus

WHY DOES THIS BACKGROUND MATTER?

Barus was ***an international town***: Arab, Persian, Indian and Chinese merchants met there. This setting allowed a local son such as Hamzah to ***learn Arabic and Persian***, and then ***travel*** to the centres of Islamic learning.

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THE CAMPHOR TREE OF OUR FORESTS

Genuine Barus camphor comes from the ***kapur*** tree (***Dryobalanops aromatica***), a member of the ***Dipterocarpaceae*** — the family of great tropical rainforest trees.

FEATURES OF THE KAPUR TREE	DETAILS
Scientific name	Dryobalanops aromatica.
Height	An emergent tree reaching up to 65 m, possibly 75 m.
Distribution	Sumatra, Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo.
Habitat	Mixed dipterocarp forest, on deep yellow sandy soils.
Uses	Resin for incense and perfume; heavy hardwood traded as "Kapur".

According to the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia, the camphor of this tree was once ***worth more than gold*** and drew early Arab traders to the region. https://www.forestry.gov.my/images/info-perhutanan/damar/kapur_en.pdf

REFLECTION — PLANTS AS SIGNS OF ALLAH'S GREATNESS

A single tree growing in the forests of Sumatra became ***the name of a town***, ***the name of a scholar***, and ***an international trade good***. Truly every creation of Allah has ***benefit and wisdom*** for those who reflect.

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WHO WAS HAMZAH FANSURI?

The name “Fansuri” shows that he came from, or lived long in, ***Barus (Fansur)***. Another view links him with ***Ayutthaya*** (Shahr-i-Naw) in Siam, though he may only have visited it.

His dates are ***uncertain***. The older view places his death around ***1590 CE***, and some propose a later date in the time of ***Sultan Iskandar Muda*** of Aceh. He may have served at ***the court of the Aceh Sultanate***.

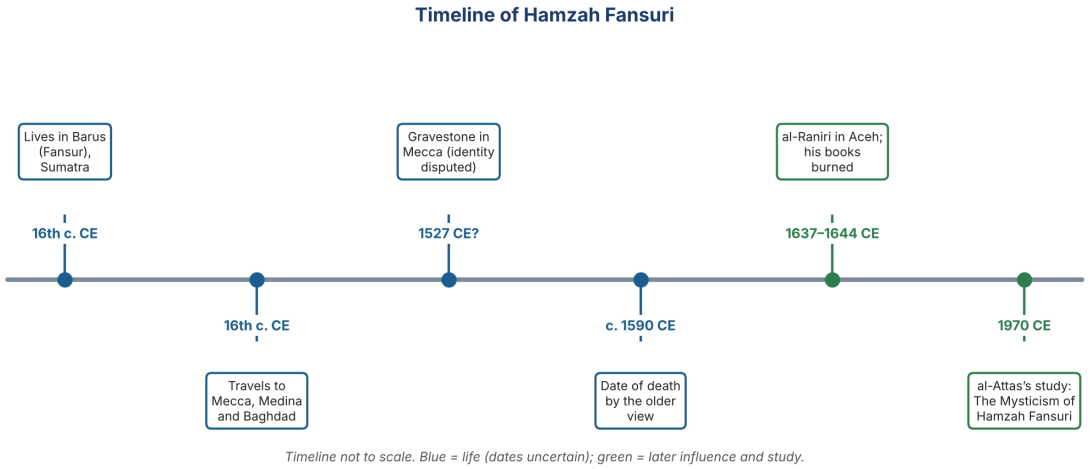


Figure 2: Timeline of Hamzah Fansuri (dates uncertain).

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PROFILE SUMMARY

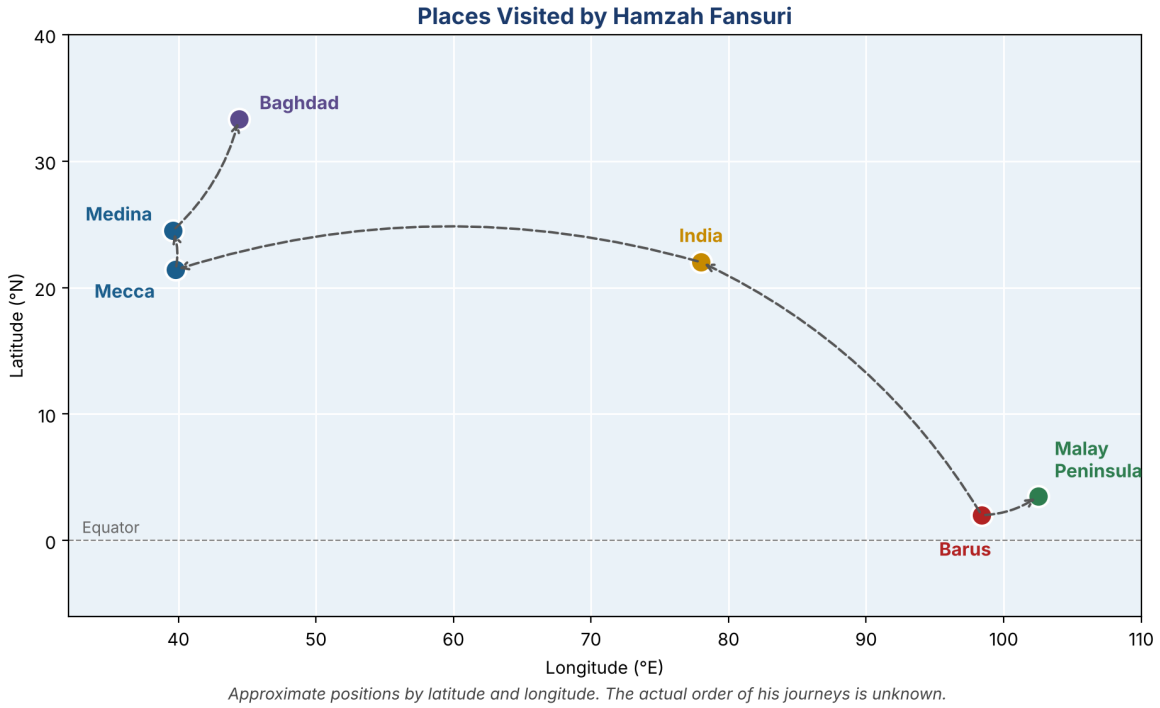
ITEM	DETAILS
Name	Hamzah Fansuri (al-Fansuri: “from Fansur”).
Origin	Barus (Fansur), west coast of Sumatra.
Era	16th century CE; exact dates uncertain.
Fields	Sufism, poetry and religious prose.
Languages	Malay, with Arabic and Persian material.
Works	32 surviving poems and 3 prose books.
Influence	Continued by Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani in Aceh.

Hamzah is also said to have ***been initiated into a Sufi order*** during his travels. In each of his poems he placed ***his own name*** in the final stanza — as ***the author’s mark*** (takhallus).

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A TRAVELLER IN SEARCH OF KNOWLEDGE

Hamzah Fansuri travelled widely — to the ***Malay Peninsula***, Mughal-era ***India***, ***Mecca***, ***Medina*** and ***Baghdad***. He was among the earliest known Southeast Asians to ***perform the Hajj*** in the early 16th century CE.



Approximate positions by latitude and longitude. The actual order of his journeys is unknown.

Figure 3: Places visited by Hamzah Fansuri (approximate positions).

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LIKE A STRANGER OR A TRAVELLER

The life of a travelling Sufi reminds us of the advice of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to Ibn ‘Umar:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 6416

حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ أَبُو الْمُنْذِرِ الطُّفَاوِيُّ، عَنْ سُلَيْمَانَ الأَعْمَشِ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي مُجَاهِدٌ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ ـ رضى الله عنهما ـ قَالَ أَخَذَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم بِمَنْكِبِي فَقَالَ «كُنْ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَأَنَّكَ غَرِيبٌ، أَوْ عَابِرُ سَبِيلٍ». وَكَانَ ابْنُ عُمَرَ يَقُولُ إِذَا أَمْسَيْتَ فَلاَ تَنْتَظِرِ الصَّبَاحَ، وَإِذَا أَصْبَحْتَ فَلاَ تَنْتَظِرِ الْمَسَاءَ، وَخُذْ مِنْ صِحَّتِكَ لِمَرَضِكَ، وَمِنْ حَيَاتِكَ لِمَوْتِكَ.

TRANSLATION:

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar رضى الله عنهما said: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ took hold of my shoulder and said: **“Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a traveller.”** Ibn ‘Umar used to say: “When evening comes, do not wait for the morning; when morning comes, do not wait for the evening. Take from your health for your sickness, and from your life for your death.”

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from ‘Ali ibn ‘Abdullah al-Madini, from Abu al-Mundhir at-Tufawi, from Sulayman al-A‘mash, from Mujahid, from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar رضى الله عنهما.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Softening of Hearts, Hadith No. 6416.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6416

LESSONS FROM THIS HADITH

This world is ***a stopping place***, not a permanent home. A traveller carries ***enough provision*** and always ***remembers the destination***. That is also the theme of many of Hamzah’s poems: ***provision for the Hereafter***.

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HAJJ TO THE HOUSE OF ALLAH

SURAH AL 'IMRAN 3:97

فِيهِ ءَايَٰتُۢ بَيِّنَٰتٌ مَّقَامُ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَۖ وَمَن دَخَلَهُۥ كَانَ ءَامِنٗاۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ
حِجُّ ٱلۡبَيۡتِ مَنِ ٱسۡتَطَاعَ إِلَيۡهِ سَبِيلٗاۚ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ
ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٩٧

In it are clear signs [such as] the standing place of Abraham. And whoever enters it shall be safe. And [due] to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House - for whoever is able to find thereto a way. But whoever disbelieves - then indeed, Allah is free from need of the worlds.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/3:97

Allah made obligatory ***"a pilgrimage to the House - for whoever is able to find thereto a way"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 3:97.

SURAH AL-HAJJ 22:27

وَأَذِّن فِي ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلۡحَجِّ يَأۡتُوكَ رِجَالٗا وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ ضَامِرٖ يَأۡتِينَ مِن كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٖ

٢٧

And proclaim to the people the Hajj [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/22:27

Allah promised that pilgrims ***"will come from every distant pass"*** — including from ***the Malay world***, after months at sea. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 22:27.

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HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 1773

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ يُوسُفَ، أَخْبَرَنَا مَالِكٌ، عَنْ سُمَيٍّ، مَوْلَى أَبِي بَكْرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ عَنْ أَبِي صَالِحٍ السَّمَّانِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ ـ رضى الله عنه ـ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ «الْعُمْرَةُ إِلَى الْعُمْرَةِ كَفَّارَةٌ لِمَا بَيْنَهُمَا، وَالْحَجُّ الْمَبْرُورُ لَيْسَ لَهُ جَزَاءٌ إِلاَّ الْجَنَّةُ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: **"(The performance of) 'Umrah is an expiation for the sins committed between it and the next 'Umrah, and the reward of an accepted Hajj (Hajj mabrur) is nothing except Paradise."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from 'Abdullah ibn Yusuf, from Malik, from Sumayy (freed slave of Abu Bakr ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman), from Abu Salih as-Samman, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of 'Umrah, Chapter on the Obligation and Virtue of 'Umrah, Hadith No. 1773.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:1773

LESSONS FROM THIS HADITH

An ***accepted (mabrur)*** Hajj — sincere, following the Sunnah and changing one's character — is rewarded with ***Paradise***. The Hajj journeys of Malay scholars also became ***bridges of knowledge*** between Mecca and the Malay world.

HISTORY NOTE: THE GRAVESTONE IN MECCA

A gravestone in ***Mecca*** records the name ***Shaykh Hamzah ibn 'Abdullah al-Fansuri*** with a date corresponding to ***11 April 1527 CE***. A copy of the epitaph was published by the researchers ***Claude Guillot*** and ***Ludvik Kalus***.

If the grave is his, Hamzah died in Mecca ***earlier*** than the older estimate (around 1590 CE). However, the ***identity*** of the grave's owner ***is still disputed*** by some scholars.

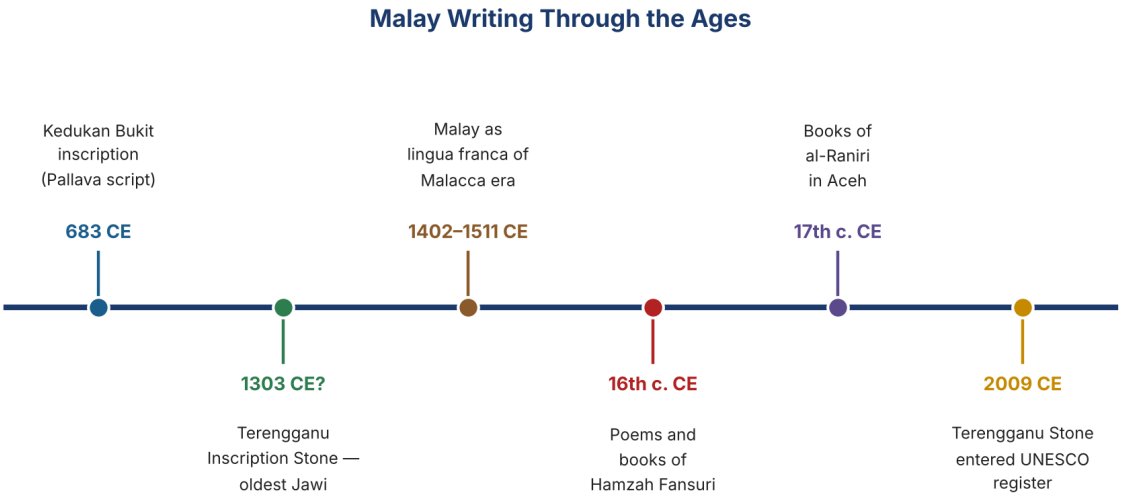
REFERENCES:

Wikipedia, "Hamzah Fansuri". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamzah_Fansuri

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THE MALAY LANGUAGE BEFORE HAMZAH

Malay had long been written before Hamzah Fansuri's time. The ***Kedukan Bukit*** inscription (683 CE) was written in ***Pallava*** script. The ***Terengganu Inscription Stone*** (possibly 1303 CE) is ***the oldest known evidence of Jawi writing***.



Sources: Wikipedia, "Malay language" and "Terengganu Inscription Stone". The 1303 CE date is still debated.

Figure 4: Malay writing through the ages.

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HISTORY NOTE: THE TERENGGANU INSCRIPTION STONE

The stone was found in ***1887 CE***, half-submerged on a bank of the ***Tersat River***, Kuala Berang, Hulu Terengganu. It contains a ruler's proclamation urging his subjects ***to uphold Islam***, with ***10 laws*** based on the Shari'ah.

Its date may be ***702 AH (1303 CE)*** or ***789 AH (1387 CE)*** because the date portion is damaged. In ***2009***, UNESCO added it to the ***Memory of the World Register***. The original stone is kept at the ***Terengganu State Museum***.

REFERENCES:

Wikipedia, "Terengganu Inscription Stone". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terengganu_Inscription_Stone

THE DIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES AS A SIGN

SURAH AL-RUM 30:22

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ خَلْقُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَٰنِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِى
ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّلْعَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/30:22

Allah made ***"the diversity of your languages and your colors"*** a sign of His power. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 30:22.

Today Malay (including Indonesian) is spoken by about ***300 million people*** as a first or second language. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malay_language

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FATHER OF THE MALAY SYAIR

Hamzah Fansuri is considered one of the earliest to use the ***syair*** form in Malay — four lines per stanza with the same end rhyme. ***32 of his poems*** survive, most of them ***13 to 15 stanzas*** long.

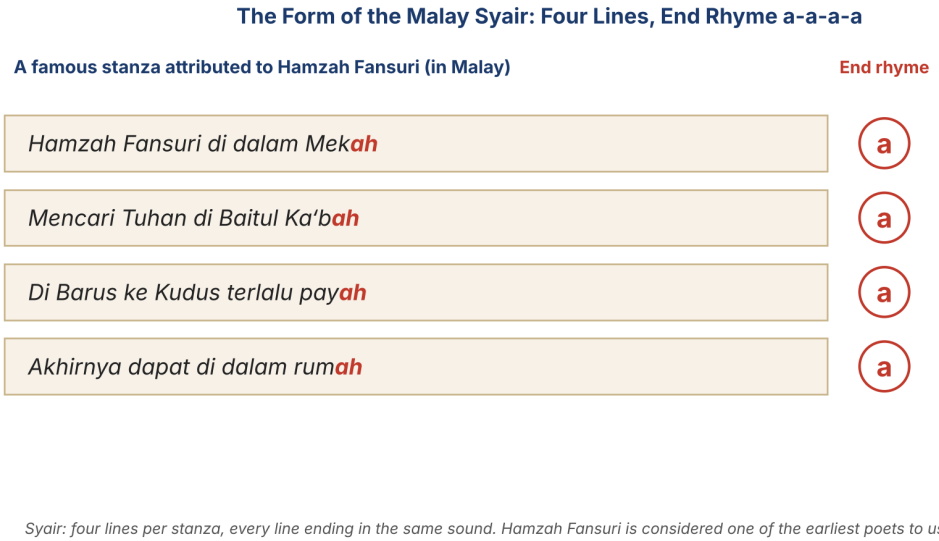


Figure 5: The Malay syair form in a famous stanza attributed to Hamzah Fansuri.

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UNDERSTANDING THE STANZA

The stanza in Figure 5 depicts someone seeking God far away — ***in Mecca***, ***from Barus to Kudus*** (which some researchers understand as ***al-Quds***) — and then realising that ma'rifah begins ***within his own self and heart***.

According to ***Ahl as-Sunnah***, the safe meaning is: ***knowing Allah begins with knowing oneself*** as a weak servant ***in need of Him***, and Allah is ***near by His knowledge*** (50:16) — ***not*** that Allah dwells inside a human being.

FEATURES OF THE MALAY SYAIR	EXAMPLE IN THAT STANZA
Four lines per stanza	Mekah — Ka'bah — payah — rumah.
End rhyme a-a-a-a	Every line ends with the sound "-ah".
Continuous narrative	Stanza after stanza conveys one meaning.
Author's name (takhallus)	"Hamzah Fansuri" is named in the stanza.

He wrote in the language of ***his people***, following the way of the Messengers sent ***"in the language of his people to state clearly for them"*** (14:4). Tafsir Ibn Kathir 14:4.

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POETS IN THE QUR'AN

SURAH AL-SHU'ARA' 26:224–227

وَٱلشُّعَرَآءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ ٱلْغَاوُۥنَ ﴿٢٢٤﴾

And the poets - [only] the deviators follow them.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّهُمْ فِى كُلِّ وَادٍ يَهِيمُونَ ﴿٢٢٥﴾

Do you not see that in every valley they roam?

وَأَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ مَا لَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢٢٦﴾

And that they say what they do not do.

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَذَكَرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَٱنتَصَرُوا۟ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا ظُلِمُوا۟ ۗ وَسَيَعْلَمُ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓا۟ أَىَّ مُنقَلَبٍ يَنقَلِبُونَ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

Except those [poets] who believe and do righteous deeds and remember Allah often and defend [the Muslims] after they were wronged. And those who have wronged are going to know to what [kind of] return they will be returned.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/26:224-227

The Qur'an criticises poets who ***"in every valley they roam"*** and ***"say what they do not do"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 26:224.

Yet Allah makes an exception for ***"those [poets] who believe and do righteous deeds and remember Allah often"***. So Islam ***does not reject poetry***; what is judged is ***the content and the deeds of the poet***.

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FOUR QUALITIES OF PRAISEWORTHY POETS

QUALITY IN 26:227	MEANING FOR WRITERS TODAY
Believing	Writing grounded in correct creed.
Doing righteous deeds	Words in harmony with actions.
Remembering Allah often	Works that call readers to dhikr and taqwa.
Defending the truth	Using the pen against injustice.

Hamzah Fansuri's poems are full of ***dhikr***, ***reminders of death*** and ***longing for Allah***. Yet some of his expressions ***caused confusion in creed*** — which is why they should be read ***with a teacher's guidance***.

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SOME POETRY CONTAINS WISDOM

Islam does not reject poetry. Poetry that ***contains wisdom*** and calls to good was praised by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 6145

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو اليَمَانِ، أَخْبَرَنَا شُعَيْبٌ، عَنِ الزُّهْرِيِّ، قَالَ أَخْبَرَنِي أَبُو بَكْرِ بْنُ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ، أَنَّ مَرْوَانَ بْنَ الحَكَمِ، أَخْبَرَهُ أَنَّ عَبْدَ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنَ الأَسْوَدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ يَغُوثَ أَخْبَرَهُ أَنَّ أُبَيَّ بْنَ كَعْبٍ أَخْبَرَهُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ «إِنَّ مِنَ الشِّعْرِ حِكْمَةً».

TRANSLATION:

Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: **"Indeed, some poetry contains wisdom."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Abu al-Yaman, from Shu'ayb, from az-Zuhri, from Abu Bakr ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman, from Marwan ibn al-Hakam, from 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn al-Aswad ibn 'Abd Yaghuth, from Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Good Manners, Chapter on Permissible Poetry, Rajaz and Camel-Songs, Hadith No. 6145.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6145

LESSONS FROM THIS HADITH

Good poetry is a means of ***da'wah and education***. Its measure is ***its content*** — if it calls to Allah and good character, it is praiseworthy; if it calls to sin or misguidance, it is blameworthy.

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THE PEN AND THE PROSE BOOKS

SURAH AL-'ALAQ 96:1–5

ٱقۡرَأۡ بِٱسۡمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ ١

Recite in the name of your Lord who created.

خَلَقَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مِنۡ عَلَقٍ ٢

Created man from a clinging substance.

ٱقۡرَأۡ وَرَبُّكَ ٱلۡأَكۡرَمُ ٣

Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous.

ٱلَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِٱلۡقَلَمِ ٤

Who taught by the pen?

عَلَّمَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مَا لَمۡ يَعۡلَمۡ ٥

Taught man that which he knew not.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/96:1-5

The first revelation commanded ***reading*** and mentioned Allah ***"Who taught by the pen"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 96:1.

Allah also swears (68:1): ***"By the pen and what they inscribe"*** — a sign of ***the honour of written knowledge***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 68:1.

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THE THREE PROSE BOOKS OF HAMZAH FANSURI

Besides poetry, Hamzah Fansuri wrote three prose works that survive. These are among the ***oldest scholarly works*** in Malay that have reached us.

BOOK	BRIEF CONTENT
Sharab al-'Ashiqin ("The Lovers' Beverage")	A short guide to the Sufi path: shari'ah, tariqah, haqiqah and ma'rifah.
Asrar al-'Arifin ("The Secrets of the Gnostics")	A commentary on his own poems about ma'rifah.
Al-Muntahi ("The Adept")	Arabic and Persian quotations with discussion in Malay.

These works were later ***re-examined*** by modern scholars — among them ***Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*** (1970) and ***G.W.J. Drewes and L.F. Brakel***, who edited and translated his poems (1986).

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THE SWEETNESS OF FAITH

Hamzah Fansuri's poems are full of ***longing and love for Allah***. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ explained how a believer tastes ***the sweetness of faith***:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 16

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْمُثَنَّى، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْوَهَّابِ الثَّقَفِيُّ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا أَيُّوبُ، عَنْ أَبِي قِلاَبَةَ، عَنْ أَنَسٍ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « ثَلاَثٌ مَنْ كُنَّ فِيهِ وَجَدَ حَلاَوَةَ الإِيمَانِ أَنْ يَكُونَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَحَبَّ إِلَيْهِ مِمَّا سِوَاهُمَا، وَأَنْ يُحِبَّ الْمَرْءَ لاَ يُحِبُّهُ إِلاَّ لِلَّهِ، وَأَنْ يَكْرَهَ أَنْ يَعُودَ فِي الْكُفْرِ كَمَا يَكْرَهُ أَنْ يُقْذَفَ فِي النَّارِ ».

TRANSLATION:

Anas رضى الله عنه narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: **"Whoever has three qualities will taste the sweetness of faith: that Allah and His Messenger are dearer to him than anything else; that he loves a person only for the sake of Allah; and that he hates to return to disbelief as he hates to be thrown into the fire."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Muhammad ibn al-Muthanna, from 'Abd al-Wahhab ath-Thaqafi, from Ayyub as-Sakhtiyani, from Abu Qilabah, from Anas ibn Malik رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Faith, chapter on the sweetness of faith, Hadith No. 16. Also narrated by Muslim (No. 43).

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:16

LESSONS FROM THIS HADITH

Love for Allah and His Messenger must ***surpass everything***, and is proven by ***following the Shari'ah***. That is true Sufism: a loving heart, and deeds that follow the Sunnah.

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THE PROOF OF LOVE IS FOLLOWING THE MESSENGER

SURAH AL 'IMRAN 3:31

قُلْ إِن كُنتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ ٱللَّهَ فَٱتَّبِعُونِى يُحْبِبْكُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۚ
وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

Say, [O Muhammad], "If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/3:31

"If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you". Tafsir Ibn Kathir 3:31.

Allah also praises the believers who ***"are stronger in love for Allah"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 2:165.

SIGNS OF LOVE FOR ALLAH	EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE
Following the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ (3:31)	Prayer, fasting and character as he taught.
Remembering Him often	Morning and evening dhikr, reciting the Qur'an.
Loving for the sake of Allah	Befriending righteous people (Sahih al-Bukhari 16).

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THE HEART THAT ALLAH LOOKS AT

The people of Sufism focus on ***purifying the heart***. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 2564

حَدَّثَنَا عَمْرٌو النَّاقِدُ، حَدَّثَنَا كَثِيرُ بْنُ هِشَامٍ، حَدَّثَنَا جَعْفَرُ بْنُ بُرْقَانَ، عَنْ يَزِيدَ بْنِ الأَصَمِّ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم «إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَنْظُرُ إِلَى صُوَرِكُمْ وَأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يَنْظُرُ إِلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَأَعْمَالِكُمْ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: **"Indeed, Allah does not look at your appearance or your wealth, but He looks at your hearts and your deeds."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from 'Amr an-Naqid, from Kathir ibn Hisham, from Ja'far ibn Burqan, from Yazid ibn al-Asamm, from Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Righteousness, Joining Ties and Manners, Hadith No. 2564c.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim, the second most authentic book of Hadith after Sahih al-Bukhari.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:2564c

LESSONS FROM THIS HADITH

Allah judges ***hearts and deeds***, not appearance and wealth. This is the core of true Sufism: cleansing the heart of ***showing off, envy and arrogance***, and filling it with ***sincerity and taqwa***.

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HEARTS AT REST THROUGH REMEMBRANCE

SURAH AL-RA'D 13:28

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَتَطۡمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُم بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِۗ أَلَا بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطۡمَئِنُّ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ ٢٨

Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/13:28

"Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured". Tafsir Ibn Kathir 13:28.

DISEASES OF THE HEART	THEIR CURE IN THE QUR'AN AND SUNNAH
Riya' (showing off)	Sincerity — doing deeds for Allah alone.
Hasad (envy)	Contentment with Allah's decree and praying for others' good.
Kibr (arrogance)	Remembering one's origin and death.
Heedlessness	Dhikr and reciting the Qur'an (13:28).

In his poems Hamzah Fansuri often reminds readers ***not to be heedless*** of the world's passing. This advice is ***in harmony*** with the Qur'an and Sunnah, even though some of his philosophical expressions are disputed.

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THE WUJUDIYYAH TEACHING AND IBN ‘ARABI

Hamzah Fansuri was influenced by the teaching of ***wahdat al-wujud*** (“unity of being”) associated with ***Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi*** (born in Murcia, al-Andalus, 1165 CE; died in Damascus, 1240 CE).

HISTORY NOTE: THE SEVEN GRADES AND THE PERFECT MAN

Hamzah described ***seven grades (martabat)*** of the manifestation of being, ending with the concept of ***al-Insan al-Kamil*** (the Perfect Man). Some of his expressions were understood by critics as ***equating the Creator with creation***.

Ibn ‘Arabi himself is a major and ***debated*** figure of Sufism: some scholars praised him, others strongly criticised his expressions. His famous works are ***al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*** and ***Fusus al-Hikam*** (1229 CE).

REFERENCES:

Wikipedia, “Hamzah Fansuri”. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamzah_Fansuri
Britannica, “Ibn al-Arabi” (summary). https://www.britannica.com/summary/Ibn-al-Arabi

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THE POSITION OF AHL AS-SUNNAH WAL-JAMA'AH

The position of ***Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah*** is clear: Allah is ***exalted above union (ittihad) or incarnation (hulul)*** in creation. Creation is ***created***, and Allah is ***the Creator — "There is nothing like unto Him"***.

TERM	BRIEF EXPLANATION
Wahdat al-wujud	"Unity of being"; interpreted in various ways, some of them rejected.
Hulul	The idea that God incarnates in creation — rejected by Ahl as-Sunnah.
Ittihad	The idea that God unites with creation — rejected by Ahl as-Sunnah.
Ma'rifah	Knowing Allah through knowledge, worship and reflection — required.

General readers are advised ***not to read books of philosophical Sufism on their own***, but to study Sufism ***under qualified teachers***.

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AL-RANIRI AND THE BURNED BOOKS

Hamzah's teaching was continued in Aceh by his student ***Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani***. In the 17th century CE things changed when a scholar from Gujarat, ***Nuruddin al-Raniri***, arrived in Aceh.

HISTORY NOTE: THE BURNING OF BOOKS IN ACEH

Al-Raniri arrived in Aceh in ***1637 CE*** and gained the patronage of ***Sultan Iskandar Thani*** (reigned 1636–1641 CE). He denounced the scholars of Sultan Iskandar Muda's time and ***ordered their books to be burned***.

Another source says the effort to erase Hamzah's works and name took place under al-Raniri's influence in the time of ***Sultana Taj ul-Alam***. The sources ***differ*** on the details.

In the 20th century, ***Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*** argued that Hamzah was ***misunderstood***, and that his teaching must be read within the wider context of Sufism. The debate ***continues***.

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TWO SIDES OF THE DEBATE

SIDE	MAIN ARGUMENT
Critics (al-Raniri)	Some of Hamzah's expressions confuse the Creator with creation and endanger the creed of ordinary people.
Defenders (al-Attas and others)	Hamzah was a Sufi who understood tawhid; his expressions are symbolic and misinterpreted.
A careful stance	Value his contribution to language and literature; weigh creed by the Qur'an and Sunnah.

REFLECTION — BOOKS BURNED, LANGUAGE ENDURES

Although his books were burned, ***some manuscripts survived*** and reached us. Hamzah's contribution to ***the Malay language*** — religious terms, the syair form and prose style — ***lives on*** to this day.

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ETIQUETTE IN DISAGREEMENT

SURAH AL-NISA' 4:59

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِ مِنكُمۡۖ فَإِن تَنَٰزَعۡتُمۡ فِي شَيۡءٖ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمۡ تُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞ وَأَحۡسَنُ تَأۡوِيلًا ٥٩

O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/4:59

When disagreement arises, Allah commands: ***"refer it to Allah and the Messenger"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 4:59.

The way of calling and debating (16:125): ***"with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best"***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 16:125.

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THE RELIGION IS SINCERE ADVICE

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 55 — THE 7TH HADITH OF AL-ARBA'IN AN-NAWAWIYYAH

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبَّادٍ الْمَكِّيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا سُفْيَانُ، قَالَ قُلْتُ لِسُهَيْلٍ إِنَّ عَمْرًا حَدَّثَنَا عَنِ الْقَعْقَاعِ، عَنْ أَبِيكَ، قَالَ وَرَجَوْتُ أَنْ يُسْقِطَ، عَنِّي رَجُلاً قَالَ فَقَالَ سَمِعْتُهُ مِنَ الَّذِي سَمِعَهُ مِنْهُ أَبِي كَانَ صَدِيقًا لَهُ بِالشَّامِ ثُمَّ حَدَّثَنَا سُفْيَانُ عَنْ سُهَيْلٍ عَنْ عَطَاءِ بْنِ يَزِيدَ عَنْ تَمِيمٍ الدَّارِيِّ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ «الدِّينُ النَّصِيحَةُ» قُلْنَا لِمَنْ قَالَ «لِلَّهِ وَلِكِتَابِهِ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلأَئِمَّةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَعَامَّتِهِمْ».

TRANSLATION:

Tamim ad-Dari رضى الله عنه reported that the Prophet ﷺ said: **"The religion is sincere counsel (nasihah)."**

We said: "To whom?" He said: **"To Allah, to His Book, to His Messenger, to the leaders of the Muslims and to their common people."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Muhammad ibn 'Abbad al-Makki, from Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah, from Suhayl ibn Abi Salih, from 'Ata' ibn Yazid al-Laythi, from Tamim ad-Dari رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Faith, Hadith No. 55; the 7th Hadith of al-Arba'in an-Nawawiyyah.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim, the second most authentic book of Hadith after Sahih al-Bukhari.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:55a

Criticising a wrong teaching is part of ***sincere advice for Allah and His Book***. But advice must be given with ***knowledge, justice and wisdom*** — not with resentment or harshness.

ETIQUETTE OF DISAGREEMENT	EXPLANATION
Refer to the Qur'an and Sunnah	Not personal opinion or political interest (4:59).
Wisdom and gentleness	Argue in the way that is best (16:125).
Be fair to opponents	Acknowledge their good while rejecting their errors.
Leave hearts to Allah	Only Allah knows a person's true intention.

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CONVEYING KNOWLEDGE IN THE PEOPLE'S LANGUAGE

Hamzah Fansuri's greatest contribution was bringing ***religious knowledge*** to the Malays in ***their own language***. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ encouraged conveying knowledge:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 3461

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو عَاصِمٍ الضَّحَّاكُ بْنُ مَخْلَدٍ، أَخْبَرَنَا الأَوْزَاعِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا حَسَّانُ بْنُ عَطِيَّةَ، عَنْ أَبِي كَبْشَةَ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو، أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ «بَلِّغُوا عَنِّي وَلَوْ آيَةً، وَحَدِّثُوا عَنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَلاَ حَرَجَ، وَمَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَلْيَتَبَوَّأْ مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ».

TRANSLATION:

'Abdullah ibn 'Amr رضى الله عنهما reported that the Prophet ﷺ said: **"Convey from me, even if it is a single verse. And narrate from the Children of Israel, there is no harm (in it). And whoever lies about me deliberately, let him take his seat in the Fire."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Abu 'Asim ad-Dahhak ibn Makhlad, from al-Awza'i, from Hassan ibn 'Atiyyah, from Abu Kabshah as-Saluli, from 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr رضى الله عنهما.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of the Prophets, Hadith No. 3461.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3461

LESSONS FROM THIS HADITH

Every Muslim can be a conveyor — even of ***one verse***. But he also warned severely against ***lying in his name***. Conveying must go together with ***accuracy***.

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HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 2674

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ، وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ، قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - يَعْنُونَ ابْنَ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ «مَنْ دَعَا إِلَى هُدًى كَانَ لَهُ مِنَ الأَجْرِ مِثْلُ أُجُورِ مَنْ تَبِعَهُ لاَ يَنْقُصُ ذَلِكَ مِنْ أُجُورِهِمْ شَيْئًا وَمَنْ دَعَا إِلَى ضَلاَلَةٍ كَانَ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الإِثْمِ مِثْلُ آثَامِ مَنْ تَبِعَهُ لاَ يَنْقُصُ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آثَامِهِمْ شَيْئًا».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: **"Whoever calls to guidance will have a reward like the rewards of those who follow him, without that diminishing their rewards in the least.** And whoever calls to misguidance will bear a sin like the sins of those who follow him, without that diminishing their sins in the least."

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya ibn Ayyub, Qutaybah ibn Sa'id and 'Ali ibn Hujr, from Isma'il ibn Ja'far, from al-'Ala' ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman, from his father 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Ya'qub, from Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Knowledge, Hadith No. 2674.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim, the second most authentic book of Hadith after Sahih al-Bukhari.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:2674

Whoever calls to guidance receives ***a reward like the reward of those who follow him***. Imagine the reward of every scholar who wrote books in ***Malay*** that were read for centuries. Scholars after Hamzah — including al-Raniri himself — wrote ***many books in Malay***, making it ***a language of Islamic learning*** in Southeast Asia.

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VERIFY BEFORE YOU SPREAD

SURAH AL-HUJURAT 49:6

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن جَآءَكُمۡ فَاسِقُۢ بِنَبَإٖ فَتَبَيَّنُوٓاْ أَن تُصِيبُواْ قَوۡمَۢا بِجَهَٰلَةٖ فَتُصۡبِحُواْ عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلۡتُمۡ نَٰدِمِينَ ٦

O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/49:6

Allah commands: ***"investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance"*** before accepting or spreading news. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 49:6.

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, INTRODUCTION NO. 5 — FROM IMAM MUSLIM'S OWN INTRODUCTION

وَحَدَّثَنَا عُبَيْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مُعَاذٍ الْعَنْبَرِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا أَبِي ح، وَحَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْمُثَنَّى، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ مَهْدِيٍّ، قَالاَ حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ، عَنْ خُبَيْبِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ، عَنْ حَفْصِ بْنِ عَاصِمٍ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم «كَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ كَذِبًا أَنْ يُحَدِّثَ بِكُلِّ مَا سَمِعَ».

TRANSLATION:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: **"It is enough of a lie for a person to narrate everything he hears."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from 'Ubaydullah ibn Mu'adh al-'Anbari, from his father Mu'adh ibn Mu'adh; and from Muhammad ibn al-Muthanna, from 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Mahdi, both from Shu'bah, from Khubayb ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman, from Hafs ibn 'Asim. In the following narration, Imam Muslim narrates it with a connected chain: from Abu Bakr ibn Abi Shaybah, from 'Ali ibn Hafs, from Shu'bah, with the same chain, from Hafs ibn 'Asim, from Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in the Introduction to Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 5; the connected narration through Abu Hurairah is in the Introduction, narration 7 (sunnah.com/muslim/introduction/7).

GRADE: SAHIH — Imam Muslim placed it in the Introduction to Sahih Muslim and narrated it with a connected chain through Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:5

OLD FIGURES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Stories of figures such as Hamzah Fansuri are often ***embellished*** — either to praise or to condemn. Some attribute ***every Sufi poem*** to him, while others ***declare all his teachings misguided*** without study.

BEFORE SHARING	QUESTIONS TO ASK
Source	Who reported it? Is the source trustworthy?
Evidence	Is there a manuscript or academic study supporting it?
Context	Was the quotation cut from a fuller explanation?
Effect	Does it harm someone's name without proof (49:6)?

This attitude is ***a trust of knowledge***. We may differ about Hamzah, but we ***must be honest*** about what is truly known.

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BETWEEN ESTABLISHED REPORTS AND POPULAR STORIES

The table below separates what is established from what needs checking about Hamzah Fansuri.

STORIES AND THEIR STATUS

POPULAR CLAIM	STATUS
Hamzah Fansuri wrote poems and Sufi books in Malay.	Established. Manuscripts of his works still exist.
He was the first Malay poet known by name.	Accepted by many researchers; no earlier named Malay poet is known.
He came from Barus.	Very likely, based on his name; there is another view (Ayutthaya).
He died in Mecca in 1527 CE.	Disputed. The gravestone may belong to someone else of the same name.
His books were burned in Aceh.	Reported in historical sources, during al-Raniri's influence in the 17th century CE.
All his teachings were misguided.	Not absolutely accurate. Some were strongly criticised; some scholars defend him. Needs study with teachers.
Every poem attributed to him is his own work.	Needs checking. Some poems may have been written by his students or followers.

REFLECTION — HONOURING WITHOUT EXAGGERATING

We value Hamzah Fansuri's contribution to ***the Malay language and literature***, while being ***careful*** with disputed matters of creed — following the position of ***Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah***.

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LESSONS AND CONCLUSION

LESSONS FROM THIS EBOOK

First: Allah is always near by His knowledge, power and help (50:16; 2:186; 57:4).

Second: There is nothing like unto Allah — the scale for every expression (42:11; 112:1–4).

Third: The world will perish; Allah remains (55:26–27).

Fourth: Value nature and the treasures of the forest, like the camphor tree that named Barus.

Fifth: Be a traveller in this world carrying provision for the Hereafter (Sahih al-Bukhari 6416).

Sixth: The reward of an accepted Hajj is Paradise (3:97; 22:27; Sahih al-Bukhari 1773).

Seventh: Use your people's language to convey knowledge (14:4; 30:22).

Eighth: Poetry with wisdom is praiseworthy (26:227; Sahih al-Bukhari 6145).

Ninth: Love for Allah is proven by following the Messenger (3:31; Sahih al-Bukhari 16).

Tenth: Allah looks at hearts and deeds (Sahih Muslim 2564; 13:28).

Eleventh: Disagree with good manners, referring to the Qur'an and Sunnah (4:59; 16:125; Sahih Muslim 55).

Twelfth: Study Sufism and creed under teachers, and verify before spreading (49:6).

CONCLUSION

Although the date of his death is uncertain, Hamzah Fansuri's works are still studied today as ***an early treasure of the Malay language***. The next book of **Tracing the Scholars of Islam**, in sha Allah, will tell the story of ***Wali Songo***, the nine scholar-preachers of Java. Wallahu a'lam.

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GLOSSARY AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

GLOSSARY

TERM	MEANING
Fansur	The Arabic name for Barus, Sumatra.
Barus camphor	Fragrant crystals from the Dryobalanops aromatica tree.
Syair	A Malay poem of four-line stanzas rhyming a-a-a-a.
Jawi	Malay writing based on the Arabic script.
Tasawwuf (Sufism)	The science of purifying the heart and character.
Ma'rifah	Knowing Allah through knowledge, worship and reflection.
Wahdat al-wujud	The debated idea of the "unity of being".
Hulul and ittihad	Incarnation and union — rejected by Ahl as-Sunnah.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does Allah's nearness in verse 50:16 mean according to the scholars of tafsir?

2. Why was Barus famous throughout the world in the past?

3. What are the features of the Malay syair? Give an example from Hamzah Fansuri's stanza.

4. Which poets are excepted in verse 26:227?

5. Why were Hamzah's books burned in Aceh? What should our attitude be towards this debate?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Write a four-line syair stanza (rhyme a-a-a-a) about the greatness of Allah, and place your name in the last line.

Activity 2: Find Barus, Mecca, Medina and Baghdad on a map. Estimate the distance of Hamzah Fansuri's sea and land journeys.

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SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:261

مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنۢبَتَتۡ سَبۡعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنۢبُلَةٖ مِّاْئَةُ حَبَّةٖۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُضَٰعِفُ لِمَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٢٦١

The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/2:261

SURAH SABA' 34:39

قُلۡ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبۡسُطُ ٱلرِّزۡقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ مِنۡ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَقۡدِرُ لَهُۥۚ وَمَآ أَنفَقۡتُم مِّن شَيۡءٖ فَهُوَ يُخۡلِفُهُۥۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ٣٩

Say, "Indeed, my Lord extends provision for whom He wills of His servants and restricts [it] for him. But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] - He will compensate it; and He is the best of providers."

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/34:39

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 2588

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ، وَابْنُ، حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - وَهُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « مَا نَقَصَتْ صَدَقَةٌ مِنْ مَالٍ وَمَا زَادَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا بِعَفْوٍ إِلاَّ عِزًّا وَمَا تَوَاضَعَ أَحَدٌ لِلَّهِ إِلاَّ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Charity does not decrease wealth.

Allah does not increase a servant who forgives except in honour. And no one humbles himself for the sake of Allah except that Allah raises him in rank."

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya bin Ayyub, Qutaibah bin Sa'id and 'Ali bin Hujr, from Isma'il bin Ja'far, from al-'Ala' bin 'Abd al-Rahman, from his father 'Abd al-Rahman bin Ya'qub, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه .

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Virtue, Good Manners and Joining the Ties of Kinship (Kitab al-Birr wa al-Silah wa al-Adab), chapter on the encouragement of forgiveness and humility, Hadith No. 2588.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:2588

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 1631

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ، - يَعْنِي ابْنَ سَعِيدٍ - وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - هُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « إِذَا مَاتَ الإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلاَّ مِنْ ثَلاَثَةٍ إِلاَّ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "When a person dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: an ongoing charity, knowledge that is benefited from, or a righteous child who prays for him."

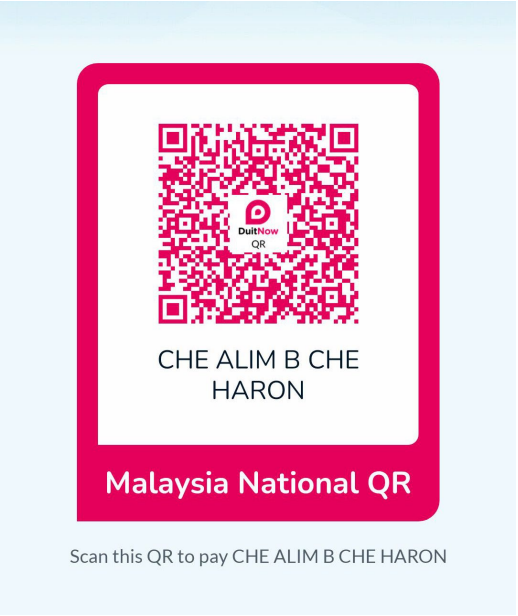
CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya bin Ayyub, Qutaibah bin Sa'id and 'Ali bin Hujr, from Isma'il bin Ja'far, from al-'Ala' bin 'Abd al-Rahman, from his father 'Abd al-Rahman bin Ya'qub, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه .

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Wills (Kitab al-Wasiyyah), chapter on the reward that reaches a person after his death, Hadith No. 1631.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:1631

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