

Arab Republic of Egypt

Ministry of Awqaf

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## Using Reasoning to Understand Religious Texts

### Imam Abu Hanifah and His School of Islamic Jurisprudence as a Role Model

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all worlds, Who says in His Ever Glorious Book, “This is a blessed Scripture which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to think about its messages, and for those with understanding to take heed.” I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is His Servant and Messenger. May Allah’s Peace and Blessings be upon him, his Household, Companions and upon those who follow their path to the Day of Judgment.

Islam gives a paramount importance to “reason”, because it is the basis of religious obligations commanded by Allah, the Almighty. Moreover, Islam states that the preservation of mind is one of the most important objectives of the Islamic Shari’ah, and one of the six fundamentals that all laws and religions agreed to preserve.

The Almighty Allah has guided us to use the faculty of reason in thinking and contemplating the various phenomena of the universe in order to find out His Greatness (Glory be to Him) and His Oneness. He, the Almighty, says, “**There truly are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth, and**

**in the alternation of night and day, for those with understanding.”** He, the Almighty, also said, **“Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. There truly are signs in this for those who know.”** When reviewing the verses of the Qur’an, one always finds that it uses different expressions to urge us to think and meditate such as “So as you may understand,” “Do you not heed,” “For people who understand,” and “For people who contemplate,” etc.

The Islamic Shari‘ah urges scholars to use reasoning to deduce legal rulings from their specific evidence in order to facilitate people’s life affairs and guide them in the affairs of the Hereafter, while preserving the fundamentals of the Shari‘ah that cannot be changed. The Prophet (PBUH) said, **“Whoever makes a reasoned decision (Ijtihad) and is correct will receive two rewards, while he who does so and is incorrect will receive one reward.”**

It is a fact that Imam Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man (may Allah have mercy on him), the founder of the well-known Hanafi school of Jurisprudence, was one of the great scholars who pioneered the movement of using reasoning in understanding texts. He was blessed with a brilliant mind and therefore, he refused to just take the apparent meaning of the texts. He, instead, relied on the purposes of the text and therefore, he became the leader of the school of reasoning in approaching the religious texts. This was why scholars said about him: Everyone who wants to gain expertise in jurisprudence is dependent on Abu Hanifah.

In his school of jurisprudence, Imam Abu Hanifah took into account the circumstances of time, place, people's conditions, their habits. Therefore, he relied on the principles of *Qiyas* (analogical deduction), *Istihsan* (*Juristic Preference*) and *'Urf* (custom), relying on the Hadith of Mu'adh (may Allah be pleased with him), when the Prophet (PBUH) sent him to Yemen. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him how he would judge when the occasion arose, and he replied, "I would judge in accordance with Allah's Book." The Prophet (PBUH) asked again what he would do if he could not find guidance in Allah's Book, and Mu'adh replied, "I would act in accordance with the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah." The Prophet (PBUH) asked what he would do if he could find no guidance in the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, and Mu'adh replied that he would do his best to form an opinion." The Prophet (PBUH) then commented, "Praise be to Allah who has guided His Messenger's Messenger." There are other Hadith that urge the use of mind in understanding the text within the framework of the general purposes of legislation.

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All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds; may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his companions and followers:

Religions have come to bring happiness to people, not hardship as Allah says, "**It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent down the Qur'an to you,**" and says, "**He has chosen you and placed no hardship in your religion,**" and "**Allah wants ease for you, not hardship.**" Whenever the

Prophet (PBUH) was given a choice between two things, he would opt for the easier unless it involves a sin. Undoubtedly, we cannot neglect the role of mind in understanding authentic texts and applying them to the cases of real world.

We emphasize that a Muslim Jurist should also be familiar with the conditions and developments of his time, people's affairs, customs and traditions, so as to be able to issue a *Fatwa* according to the circumstances of his time not according to the circumstances and conditions of other eras.

He who issue a *Fatwa* without considering people's circumstances, time, place and the nature of their lives would put them into hardship and distress, though our Shari'ah is based on facilitation and removal of hardships.

Oh Allah! Give us deep understanding in our religion, and protect our country and all other countries of the world.