

# البحر المحيط من صحراء شنقيط AN OCEAN FROM THE DESERT



ترجمة الشيخ

محمد الأمين الشنقيطي

صاحب تفسير أضواء البيان في إيضاح القرآن بالقرآن

للشيخ عطية محمد سالم  
قاضي المحكمة الشرعية بالمدينة المنورة

A BIOGRAPHY OF THE SHAYKH  
MUHAMMAD AL-AMĪN AL-SHANQĪTĪ

AUTHOR OF THE MAGNIFICENT TAFSĪR  
ADWĀ' AL-BAYĀN (LIGHTS OF ELOQUENCE)

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*AN OCEAN FROM THE DESERT:*

*A BIOGRAPHY OF THE SHAYKH MUHAMMAD AL-AMĪN AL-SHANQĪTĪ*

*BY SHAYKH 'ATIYYAH MUHAMMAD SALIM*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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Al-Quran Society

جَمْعِيَّةُ الْقُرْآنِ

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*Dated 1394 H (1974 CE),*

*the following is the text of a lecture*

*given in honour of his deceased Shaykh*

*by his student, the Shaykh 'Atiyyah Muhammad Salim,*

*during a Cultural Season of the Islamic University of Madinah,*

*in the presence of some of the Shaykh's sons and students;*

*with editors' additions from the brief biography of the Shaykh by Shaykh Khalid al-Sabt,*

*the latter also drawing on biographies by the Shaykhs al-Majdhub, al-Sudays & al-Tuyan.*

## **In Memoriam – Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti**

### ***Introduction: In Praise of God, and then of the Prophet, and of Medina***

Praise be to God, Possessor of the Attributes of Majesty and the Names of Perfection, Uniquely Everlasting and Eternal. He brought creation into existence from non-existence and decreed upon them death and annihilation. He made this world a planting field for the hereafter, its harvest being reward and punishment. He selected from amongst His servants Messengers to proclaim His Message, intermediaries between Him and His creation. He chose and purified their Seal, Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace: the *crème de la crème*, and sent him as a mercy to the worlds.

So he came with the generous, primordial religion that dawned from the summit of Mount Hira in Mecca. Its sun shone from generous Taybah (Medina) that shaded his emigrant companions with love and loyalty. So the Noble Companions inherited his legacy of guidance and light, and passed it on through the generations, via parents to children.

Medina's lights continued to shine, illuminating the world with its dazzling flashes. Generation after generation produced for the world the elite of the people of knowledge who stood truly and sincerely for God, spreading knowledge with honesty and integrity. They drank from the pure source before it was mixed with earth or muddied by the buckets of others. Where revelation had descended, they pitched their tents; in the Prophet's Garden were their daily movements by morning and evening, in beatitude and bliss.

They studied the Book of God, with its commandments and wisdoms: its verses continued to be a cure for diseased hearts; veils of meaning continued to be removed, exposing more suns and lights beneath.

They followed the ways of the Prophet Muhammad, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, the Companions and the Followers, for these were their examples and role-models: stars and guides, lighting and showing the way during the night-journey, leaders of the community and trustworthy custodians of the religion.

## ***Condolences upon the Shaykh's Departure from this World***

In this noble neighbourhood of Medina, we are most especially aware of the importance of knowledge and the status of the people of knowledge: we are the quickest to rejoice in their arrival, saddest in grieving their death, most pained by separation from them, for the death of people of knowledge is enough to make anyone feel estranged.

No doubt, such pain multiplies and such grief is more and more intense when we have known a person of knowledge or been their contemporary, felt their grace and benefited from their knowledge. This is true of the people of knowledge in general, and our Shaykh al-Amīn in particular.

I was like one of his sons, and am one of his many students. I stand here today: offering and receiving condolences, biographing him and praying for him. The affliction is great and not conducive to offering condolences easily. Someone asked me, "To whom should we offer condolences regarding the Shaykh?" I answered spontaneously in [rhyming Arabic] verse:

*I say to the questioner who asked:*

*Whom should we comfort in this state?*

*Offer condolences to everyone you meet*

*But begin with yourself at first.*

*Comfort everyone at his death*

*And tell them that the affliction is awesome:*

*The death of a person of knowledge*

*Is a disastrous loss for the world!*

*If this calamity befell a peak, it'd*

*Demolish the entire mountain.*

*The best condolence is that we're all*

*Returning to God, Mighty and Majestic!*

Everyone deserves to receive condolences on the news of the departure of Shaykh Muhammad Amin, but three people deserve it more than anyone:

- (i) Shaykh 'Abdul 'Azīz bin Bāz, due to his 21-year friendship with, and esteem of, the Shaykh.
- (ii) Shaykh 'Abdul 'Azīz bin Sālih Âl al-Shaykh, the first to recognise his worth in Saudi Arabia and the one who facilitated the Shaykh's stay there.
- (iii) His Royal Highness Prince 'Abdullāh bin 'Abd al-Rahmān [Âl-Sa'ūd] due to his love and respect for the Shaykh.



Qādī ‘Iyād<sup>1</sup> reported that one of his Shaykhs said, “What is the matter with you all? You take knowledge from us and benefit from us, then you mention us without invoking mercy upon us!”

May Allāh shower His Encompassing Mercy upon our Shaykh, and may Allāh have mercy on the people of knowledge amongst the Muslims in every time and place.

### ***Announcement of the Shaykh’s Departure from this World***

Departed to the Mercy of Allāh and His Beautiful Presence, the man of virtue, symbol amongst the landmarks, the majestic Shaykh, Imām, man of high aspiration, pure of soul, exalted in status, noble and generous in disposition, having beautiful character, chastity in speech and praiseworthy qualities, the pious and trustworthy, our father the Shaykh Muhammad al-Amīn al-Shanqītī. He passed away on the morning of Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> Dhul Hijjah 1393 H (1973 CE) at his home in Mecca after returning from the Hajj.

### ***Funeral prayers for the Shaykh***

His funeral prayer was led by the respected Principal of the Islamic University, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin ‘Abdullāh bin Bāz, in the Sacred Mosque of Mecca after the *Zuhr* (Afternoon) Prayer that day, and he was buried in the *Jannat al-Mu’allāh / Ma’lāh* Garden & Cemetery in the *Rī’ al-Hajūn* (*Hajūn*<sup>2</sup> Hill) area of Mecca.

On the night of Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> Dhul Hijjah after the ‘*Ishā* (Night) Prayer, the funeral prayer was performed for him in absentia in the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah, led by the respected Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin Sālih Āl al-Shaykh, *Imām* and *Khatīb* of the Prophet’s Mosque and Head of the Sharia Authority of Madinah and of the Law Courts of the Madinah district. Countless pilgrims participated in this prayer.

One of the amazing coincidences and good omens was that the *imām* recited in the ‘*Ishā* prayer the following *āyāt*: in the first *rak’ah*,

إن الذين آمنوا وعملوا الصالحات كانت لهم جنات الفردوس نزلا  
خالدين فيها لا يبدلون عنها حولا...

*Truly, those who had faith and worked righteousness,  
for them the Gardens of Paradise were a welcome.  
They lived there for ever,  
never wanting to depart from there, ...*

to the end of *Sūrat al-Kahf* (i.e. the last four *āyāt* of the surah).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Qādī ‘Iyād (or ‘Ayyād) was an Andalusian scholar and judge (*qādī*), born in Ceuta in 476 H / 1083 CE, died in Marrakesh in 544 H / 1149 CE.

<sup>2</sup>The *Hajūn* area of Mecca may be named after the fourth wife of Prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) in Islamic tradition after Hājar, Sārah and Qantūra. Cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Qisas al-Anbiya’* [*Stories of the Prophets*], Section on the Children of Ibrāhīm, quoting Abū l-Qāsim al-Suhaylī’s *Al-Ta’rif wa l-I’lam* [*Introduction to Great Personalities*]. Other notable people buried at Hajūn include the Prophet Muhammad’s grandfather ‘Abdul Muttalib and the Prophet’s first wife Khadījah, as mentioned by Imam al-Dhahabi in his *Siyar A’lām al-Nubalā’* [*Biographies of the Noble Notables*].

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Kahf* (The Cave), 18:107-110

In the second *rak'ah*, he recited the last few verses of *Sūrat Maryam*, including:

إن الذين آمنوا وعملوا الصالحات سيجعل لهم الرحمن ودا

*Truly, those who had faith and worked righteousness,  
The Most Merciful will grant them Love ...<sup>4</sup>*

I asked the respected *imām* about his recitation: did he intend and choose these *āyāt* or did they happen to come to his mind and heart?

He, may Allāh protect him, replied, “No, they happened to come to mind and heart. Is there any particular reason for the question?”

I said, “It is an amazing coincidence, since you prayed over the Shaykh al-Amīn, may Allāh have mercy on him, afterwards, so I thought you recited them with that purpose in mind, but it was beautifully appropriate!”

His funeral prayer in absentia was also held at the Islamic University of Madīnah and at several other mosques.

### ***His Legacy***

He died, may God have mercy on him, after reviving sciences that had faded and left a lasting legacy. He cultivated multitudes: thousands of graduates of the colleges and institutes of Riyadh and of the Islamic University of Madīnah.

He did not die until every level of government in every corner of the country included one of his sons, for his students were just like his sons; and in every Islamic land, there was a delegation of graduates who had been provided with study scholarships at the Islamic University of Madīnah.

He did not die until he had left in every learned library and home his *Adwā' al-Bayān* (*Lights of Eloquence*) to repel the darknesses and guide to the path. Thus it is neither far-fetched nor an exaggeration to say: *He has not died, he who has left such a legacy!*

He delivered that message during his life, to leave a long-lasting legacy amongst future generations. He delivered an important message, and departed to the Highest Fellowship to reap what he sowed and harvest the fruits of what he had planted, and to enjoy what he had sent forth. May God shower him with infinite mercy!

---

<sup>4</sup> *Maryam* (Mary), 19:96

# Biography of the Shaykh

## *Why the need for this biography*

He lived here ever since he came to fulfil the obligation of the Hajj pilgrimage, after which he resolved to remain and worked in the highest institutes and universities of learning. He authored and lectured widely, but not a word was written about him.

People did not write about him, for he did not like that. Yet the young and old, near and far, the scholar and the layman, all knew him because his actions and his works spoke for him. Thus, his death was not a loss to any particular individual, family, group or district, but to the entire Islamic world.

I only wrote a few lines about him before, which were published in the introduction to his lecture on the *āyāt* about the Attributes of Allāh. He died with only a little written about him, such as his birth and childhood. Therefore, I have now written something about him, not to introduce him since everyone knows him: the pulsating landmark, the towering mountain, the dazzling sun. So this biography is not to introduce him but to record his story and explain his worldview based on what I heard from him directly and experienced during my long association with him. I write this about him for those near and far; to everyone who knew him as a scholar but not as a student, or knew him here but not in his land of origin. I will attempt to do justice to him, but I cannot do so because of the magnificence of his station and the elevation of his rank.

Later generations have always fulfilled the due of their predecessors: preserving their history by biographing them, as a service to their legacy and keeping alive their memory.

It is related that the Imām Sakhāwī<sup>5</sup> said,

من ورخ (أرخ) مؤمنا فكأنما أحياه

*“Biographing a departed believer, is like bringing them back to life.”*

I believe truly that the biographies of men are the educators of the generations, through their knowledge and milestones in life.

---

<sup>5</sup> Imām Sakhāwī was a Hadith scholar, born in Cairo in 831 H / 1428 CE, died in Medina in 902 H / 1497 CE. His teachers included the Imām Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 H / 1448 CE, attributed to ‘Asqalān aka Ashkelon, near Gaza in Palestine) and his students included Imām Suyuti (d. 911 H / 1505 CE, attributed to Suyūt aka Asyūt in Egypt).

## ***Three Types of Biographies***

Any biography of a person is considered from two aspects: facts about his life, and his character and methodology.

Biographers always fall into one of three categories:

- 1) The friend under the influence of the person. He often falls under the sway of emotion, so only looks from one angle. It is said about him,

*“The eye of pleasure ignores Kalilah’s defects...”*

- 2) The ardent opponent who falls under the sway of his vehemency, so the rest of the previous line of poetry is true about him,

*“... Just as the eye of wrath exposes the faults.”*

- 3) The moderate and objective writer who seeks to evaluate with balanced scales. Such a person will miss many matters that he is not enthused with, without this being a shortcoming.

Thus, no writing about any person is entirely accurate or complete. Friends and opponents may be reluctant to write biographies, fearing the accusation of being biased and influenced by emotion. Others may be reluctant, fearing that they will not do justice since they did not know the subject well. Thus, unique personalities may depart without their biography being recorded, so those present lose them and later generations lose the story of their life. Remember, the biographies of people are the educators of the generations.

The respected father, Shaykh Muhammad al-Amīn, may God have mercy on him, had an outstanding personality and a clear character, known to anyone who met him, attended his gatherings, listened to his teaching sessions, read his books or even heard about him. His reputation reached the horizons.

Writing about his like, may God have mercy on him, is very difficult due to the numerous aspects of his personality and the breadth of his scholarly scope. There is no source for writing about him except association and long companionship with him, and gathering reports from his closest friends. Yet the people who have most right to write about him are his students and sons. Allāh honoured me with his companionship and a lengthy association, by day and night, resident and travelling, within and outside the Kingdom. I learnt many, many things from him. Therefore, I see myself as having most right to write about him, yet when I bring to mind that exemplary personality, I hesitate to write. But this is the situation with every biographer: he cannot comprehensively capture his subject, neither concisely nor in detail, so why should I not contribute what I can, the student of a shaykh having most right to write about him? All this without emotion taking me to great lengths, nor awe and respect forcing me to be too concise. He was indeed my Shaykh, and dearer to me than my own father!

He was actually my father in many ways, for I lived under his care for many years in his house, and one roof would gather us in the same room for long periods. He cared for me like one of his sons, and often made sacrifices to give me preference over himself. But dearer than that were the knowledge and traditions that he passed down to me: cultural guidance, virtue in character, loftiness in personality. He did this through his sittings, conversations and lessons without limit and without worrying about the time, for all his sittings were sittings of knowledge, may God have mercy on him. All his conversations were regarding cultured manners and guidance. He would not need to prepare for any lesson, nor research to answer a question.

I did not have any special time with him due to the numerous brothers who studied with him, living with him in his house, except one specific time: study time between Maghrib and 'Isha for a period of two years whilst we were in Riyadh. During this time, I studied with him the *tafsir* of *Surat al-Baqarah*.<sup>6</sup> That study was my main capital for most of what I earned, and upon it was the foundation of my real study, whether of fixed curricula or otherwise. This was because all chapters of *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) were included in that study, and most of the principles in *Usul* (Principles of Jurisprudence) were employed in those discussions. Thus it is not far-fetched to say that all *surahs* after it are commentaries on it, or that whoever knows its *tafsir* well finds the *tafsir* of following *surahs* easy. This study was also the reason for the compilation of the two books, *Daf' Iham al-Idtirab* (Refuting the Misconception of Contradiction within the Qur'an) and *Adwa' al-Bayan* (Explanation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an). Each of them resulted from the process of question and answer. I also studied *Usul*, fundamentals of Logic and subtle matters of *Balaghah* (Rhetoric) during that time.

I was honoured to serve him, and fortunate to have his companionship. I feel a heavy debt upon me in writing about him, so this will only be a start, not the end and perhaps others will complete what is left or lacking.

---

<sup>6</sup> *The Heifer* (2)

## **Biographies & Autobiographies**

Biographies are of two types: autobiographies and external biographies. Several scholars and philosophers wrote autobiographies, including:

- 1) Ibn Sīnā (d. 428 H / 1037 CE) – his autobiography was a reference for all his students who wrote about him.
- 2) ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī (d. 597 H / 1201 CE) in the introduction to his book *al-Barq al-Shāmī* (“The Syrian Lightning”)
- 3) Ibn al-Khatīb (d. 776 H / 1374 CE)
- 4) Ibn Khaldūn (d. 805 H / 1406 CE)
- 5) Sūyūtī (d. 911 H / 1505 CE), and others.

What I shall write is in a sense a mixture of biography and autobiography, since much of it is what I heard from him directly and what I sensed and felt of his life during my long companionship with him. May Allāh make his life a good example for his students, and make amongst his sons a fitting follow-up to a precedent of goodness. May He reward us in our affliction and give us goodness in place of it. May He shower him with His Mercy and admit him to the expanses of His Garden ...

## Basic Biographical Facts About The Shaykh

(These facts were heard directly from the Shaykh.)

**Name:** Muhammad al-Amin, a proper name compounded from two names. The choice of “Muhammad” in the name is to draw blessings from it.

**Nickname:** Âbbā, with a prolonged *hamzah* and doubled *ba*’.

**Father’s name:** Muhammad al-Mukhtar bin ‘Abd al-Qadir bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Nuh bin Muhammad bin Sidi Ahmad bin al-Mukhtar, of the descendants of Talib Awbak, a descendant of Karir b. al-Muwafi b. Ya’qub b. Jākin al-Abar, forefather of the large and famous tribe known as the Jakanis, and also as the Tajakant.

**Tribal lineage:** This tribe traces back to the Himyar [of Yemen], as the Mauritanian poet Muhammad Fāl says, invoking their eloquence as proof of their Arab origin,

*We, the sons of Hasan, our eloquence proves  
That our lineage is traced to the purest Arabs.  
If there is no evidence that we are Arab,  
Our tongue proves that we are  
Look at every rhyming line that we have!*

Another poet explains the lineage of this tribe to Himyar by saying:

*O you who doubt that we are Arab:  
Our age and colour made you belie us!  
The mark of Arabness is clear in our qualities;  
In our forefathers were dignity and faith:  
The lions of Himyar and the champions of Mudar,  
With reddened swords, never humiliated.*

The special qualities of Arabness were found abundantly in the Shaykh and in his family and relatives, in poetry and prose. Different sciences and arts were also abundant in his home and tribe. One of their poets explained their inheriting a grounding in Arabness from their mothers by saying to the sceptic:

*We have the eloquent Arabness, and we have  
Most right out of everyone to carry it in our ribs.  
You have plucked it from books and learnt it  
While we have been suckled in it directly.*

**Date of birth:** 1325 H (c. 1907 CE)

**Place of birth:** He was born near an oasis called Tanbeh in the district of Kifa, region of Shanqit, now known as the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Note that Shanqit (Chinquett) was, and still is, also the name of a village in the district of Atar in remote, north-western Mauritania.

## The Local Situation in Mauritania during the era of the Shaykh

The society was composed of Arabs and non-Arabs, although Arabic was the language of all.

The non-Arabs, descended from Black Africans, tended to be farmers and craftsmen.

The Arabs tended to be of two types: cultured and uncultured. The cultured ones were those who are occupied with education and trade. The uncultured ones were occupied with trade and raids. The Arabs consisted of numerous tribes: some tribes concentrated on education, others on raids and fighting.

The Jakani tribe uniquely combined education with the arts of war, whilst avoiding the looting of other people's property. Their tradition of education was strong in both situations: whether they were settled or wandering nomadically, as said by one of their Shaykhs, the 'Allamah al-Mukhtar b. Buna,

*We are an organised riding-party of nobles,  
Most honourable of our time, worthier than the rest.  
Well-bred camels' backs are our school:  
There we explain the religion of Allah in full.*

As for generosity of nature, this was ingrained in them, a quality with which children would grow young, and the elders would grow old. One of their customs was that whenever a delegation of guests stayed at someone's house, all the neighbours would send whatever they had, whether much or little, in order to participate in serving the guests.

This was the environment in which our Shaykh was brought up. I heard him say:

*My father passed away whilst I was a child. I was still reciting Juz' 'Amma<sup>7</sup> then.*

*I inherited a substantial amount of animals and wealth, so I then lived with my mother's relatives, for my mother was my father's cousin (daughter of his paternal uncle).*

*I memorised the Qur'an from my maternal uncle 'Abdullah b. Muhammad al-Mukhtar bin Ibrahim bin Ahmad Nuh, Ahmad Nuh being my father's great-grandfather too.*

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<sup>7</sup> The 30<sup>th</sup> & final part of the Qur'an, as traditionally divided for daily recitation over a month.



## The Shaykh's Education

He memorised the Qur'an in the house of his maternal relatives, from his maternal uncle 'Abdullah, as mentioned above. He was ten years old at the time. He said:

*I then learnt the script of the 'Uthmani Mushaf<sup>8</sup> from my cousin (maternal uncle's son), Sidi Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Mukhtar. I also studied with him Tajwid in the recitation of Nafi', the narration of Warsh via Abu Ya'qub al-Azraq and the narration of Qalun via Abu Nashit. I took the sanad (chain of narration) back to the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) in that from him when I was sixteen.*

### Types of Qur'anic Study

Studying the sciences of the Qur'an is regarded as a multi-faceted, complementary curriculum, and not limited simply to memorisation and recitation. Rather, it extends to knowledge of the script of the *mushaf*: where letters are joined up or discrete, where prolongations are part of the script or are pronounced without the presence of a letter of prolongation (*madd*), and other such matters.

The next discipline is to learn exactly the features of the *mushaf*, whether in script or recitation. In this science, a famous and well-known poem is *al-Bahr* ("The Ocean") by Muhammad bin Bujah. In this composition, every word that is mentioned in the Qur'an precisely once, twice, thrice ... up to twenty-seven times, including compounded forms, is explained. Each number of repetitions forms a separate chapter.

For example, the word أعينهم (*a'yunuhum*, "their eyes") in the nominative case occurs precisely three times in the Qur'an: "their eyes were ..." <sup>9</sup>, "they turned, with their eyes ..." <sup>10</sup> and "their eyes revolving ..." <sup>11</sup> Ibn Bujah summarises this thus:

أعينهم بالرفع من غير حضور من بعد كانت وتولوا وتدور

"Their eyes," nominatively, without presence<sup>12</sup>

After "were," "turned" and "revolving."

Similarly, the word أشياع (*ashyā'* with 'ayn, meaning "similar groups") occurs precisely twice: "... as was done with groups similar to them in the past," <sup>13</sup> and "We destroyed your similar groups, so is there any to take admonition?" <sup>14</sup> The corresponding line in *al-Bahr* reads,

<sup>8</sup> the *Mushaf al-Umm* or original Source-Copy of the Qur'an

<sup>9</sup> *al-Kahf* (The Cave), 18:101

<sup>10</sup> *al-Tawbah* (Repentance), 9:92

<sup>11</sup> *al-Ahzab* (The Confederates), 33:19

<sup>12</sup> referring to the absent third person

<sup>13</sup> *Saba'* (Sheba), 34:54

<sup>14</sup> *al-Qamar* (The Moon), 54:51

أشيع بالعين فهل من مدكر في سبأ من قبل بأنهم ذكر

“Similar groups,”— is there any to take admonition?

*And in Sheba in the past, is their mention.*

Our Shaykh studied all of this in his childhood, and even composed further supplementary verses as an addendum to it to increase its benefit. For example, he composed the following regarding the last lines mentioned above, explaining the vowels and grammatical cases of the occurrence of the word:

في سورة القمر خاطب وانصبا وجره وغيبته في سبأ

*In Chapter: The Moon, address and accuse,*

*But make it genitive and in absentia in Sheba.*

i.e. In *Surat al-Qamar* (The Moon), the word is recited in the mode of being addressed since the *ashyā'* belong to the second person plural and are in the accusative case, whilst in *Surat Saba'* (Sheba) the *ashyā'* belong to the absent third person and are in the genitive case.

This type of study is extremely rare, except as Allah wills. It is an amazing scholarly pursuit to preserve the script and words of the Qur'an from change and alteration, and one of the consequences of Allah's promise to safeguard this Qur'an, revealed from Himself, Glorified is He!

### ***Fiqh (Jurisprudence), Grammar and Arabic Literature***

Our Shaykh further said: *During this period of learning, I also studied some of the concise texts regarding Malik's fiqh, such as the poetical treatise of the Shaykh Ibn 'Āshir, and comprehensively studied Arabic literature with my aunt (wife of my maternal uncle), mother of my cousin.*

In other words, his cousin taught him the special sciences of the Qur'an, whilst his cousin's mother taught him Arabic literature. He said:

*I learnt from her:*

- ◆ *the basics of grammar, such as the Ājrumiyyah;*
- ◆ *wide-ranging studies in the genealogy and history of the Arabs;*
- ◆ *the Life of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace;*
- ◆ *the poem on Military Expeditions [Ghazawāt] by Ahmad al-Badawi al-Shanqiti that exceeds 500 verses, plus its commentary by the author's nephew Hammād, the son of his sister;*

- ◆ *the poem on Arab Genealogy by the afore-mentioned author that has thousands of verses, plus its commentary by the afore-mentioned commentator regarding the descendants of ‘Adnān<sup>15</sup>, for the commentator died before commenting on the verses related to the descendants of Qahtān.<sup>16</sup>*

Thus, his mother’s relatives’ household comprised his first school, for he studied with his uncles, aunts and cousins. As for the rest of the fields of study, he said:

**[Māliki Fiqh (Jurisprudence) – this was the dominant *Madhhab* of the land]**

*I studied the Mukhtasar Khalil [Concise Text of Khalil], beginning its study with Shaykh Muhammad b. Sālih and continuing until the section on ‘Ibādāt [Ritual Worship]. I then studied with him half of the Alfīyah [Poetical Treatise on Arabic Grammar] of Ibn Mālik.*

He then studied the other fields with numerous *shaykhs*, all of them being Jakanis and some of them being famous ‘*ulama* of the land. They included:

- 1) The Shaykh Muhammad b. Sālih, famously-known as Ibn Ahmad al-Afram
- 2) The Shaykh Ahmad al-Afram b. Muhammad al-Mukhtār
- 3) The Shaykh and ‘*Allāmah*, Ahmad b. ‘Umar
- 4) The Great Jurist, Muhammad al-Ni’mah b. Zaydān
- 5) The Great Jurist, Ahmad b. Mūd
- 6) The ‘*Allamah*, Expert in Various Fields, Ahmad Fāl b. Aduh

Our Shaykh said:

*I learnt all these subjects from these shaykhs: Nahw (Grammar), Sarf (Morphology), Usul (Foundations of Law), Balaghah (Rhetoric), some Tafsir (Commentary on the Qur’an) and Hadith. As for Logic and Etiquettes of Research and Debate, we attained this through our own study and research.<sup>17</sup>*

The above is what he dictated to me and I recorded.

It should be remembered that despite all the fields that he studied with *shaykhs* or from books, he did not stop there. Rather, he was always analysing and studying, attaining more and more proficiency until he became virtually an expert in every field. In fact, he had his own *ijtihad* and independent research in each field, and we shall touch upon some of these under his methodology for scholarly study and his scholarly legacy.

<sup>15</sup> A descendant of Prophet Ismā’il (Ishmael), and ancestor of the Northern Arabs, including the Prophet Muhammad himself.

<sup>16</sup> Ancestor of the Southern Arabs who originated in Yemen, including the Himyar.

<sup>17</sup> This comment by the Shaykh confirms the obvious reality that traditional Islamic learning includes an element of self-teaching, once one has mastered various branches of knowledge.

## The General Methodology for Students in Mauritania

Before explaining the Shaykh's scholarly methodology in his studies, we shall glimpse at the dominant and general methodology of his land for seekers of knowledge and their manner of attaining it.

Studying is regarded as an essential part of life in that land amongst the nomads, whether they are settled or wandering. If a Shaykh settles in one place for a time, delegations of students come to study with him and take from his knowledge. If he settles permanently to teach continually, he is known as a *Murābit* (one who guards the frontier) due to his permanent stay to spread knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

The *Murābit* does not take any payment from his students; if he is well-off, he helps his needy students. Students who have travelled from afar may also help the needy students of that place. The students stay around the Shaykh's house, setting up tents or temporary houses where they live and have gatherings of knowledge: study, discussion and revision.

The *Murābit* may be a specialist in one or more fields. If he is a specialist in one field, he teaches in turn different groups of students who are at various levels of study, e.g. beginner, intermediate, advanced. If he specialises in several fields, he divides the student groups according to subject as well.

### ***Single-Subject Study***

The student does not study more than one subject at a time, but rather completes studying one subject before moving on. E.g. he completes a study of *Nahw* (Arabic grammar) before turning to *Balaghah* (Rhetoric) and *Fiqh* (Law) before studying *Usul* (Foundations of Law) to completion. This applies whether the student studies with one shaykh or more.

### ***Manner of Daily Study***

The student begins by writing as much text on wooden tablets as he can memorise. Once he has memorised it, he erases it and writes another section, continuing until he has memorised a portion of the recommended text according to the usual division. E.g. in grammar, the *Alfiyyah* [of Ibn Mālik] is divided into four portions, as is the text of Khalil in jurisprudence.

Once the student has memorised his portion of the text, he comes to the teacher who explains the text according to the student's capacity to absorb, without opening any book or referring to another source. Once all the students have done this, they go away to revise amongst themselves and discuss what the Shaykh said. They may refer to some commentaries to compare against what they have heard. They do not move on in that study until they reckon that they have learnt everything there is to

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<sup>18</sup> Presumably, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf's famous Mauritanian teacher, Shaykh Murabit al-Hajj, may God have mercy on him, takes his title from this category.

learn in that chapter. The emphasis is not upon speed or finishing a book: it is upon understanding and absorbing each chapter of study.

It is said about one student who was well-known for his high intelligence and capacity to absorb that he would only cover two lines at a time from the text of Khalil. Upon being asked why he did not cover more even though he had a high capacity to absorb, he replied, "I am in a hurry to return to my family."

When it was said to him that the hasty one takes a bigger section at a time, he replied, "I wish to perfect what I learn so that I am not forced to study it again, thus becoming delayed!"

## The Shaykh's Studies

The studies of the Shaykh were carried out in this manner, except that he showed outstanding abilities in some aspects that are rarely found in other people:

- 1- He had an opportunity to study that others rarely have, for the house of his maternal relatives was his first school and he did not need to travel to begin his study. He was also an only child, and was thus shown special care and attention.
- 2- He said, may God have mercy upon him: *I used to be more inclined towards play than towards study until I learnt the letters of the Arabic alphabet and they began teaching me them with the vowels: bā fathah ba, bā kasrah bi, bā dammah bu and similarly with thā etc. I asked them whether all letters were treated this way, and they replied in the affirmative so I said, "Enough – I can recite all of them like this," so that they would leave me alone. They said, "Recite them," so I recited them all, based on the three or four that they had taught me. Thus, they recognised that I had learnt the underlying principle and left me alone. From that time, I began to love reading and studying.*
- 3- He further said, may God have mercy upon him: *When I had memorised the Qur'an and learnt the 'Uthmani script, surpassing my fellow-pupils, my mother and her family gave me special attention and determined to send me for studies in other subjects. My mother prepared two camels for me: one having my saddle and books; the other carried my provisions and money. A servant accompanied me with a number of cows. My dress and saddle were prepared in the best possible way out of happiness and encouragement for me in seeking knowledge. This was how I began the path of seeking and attainment.*

A life of study is based upon complete love and a lack of formality, whether amongst students or between students and their teacher, along with total *adab* (etiquette) and respect. It is punctuated by cultured humour and poetical exchanges. Of these, the Shaykh, may God have mercy upon him, narrated to me, saying:

*I came to a Shaykh in order to study with him, and he did not know me so he asked who I was. (He was sitting amongst a group of his students.) I replied spontaneously:*

*This is a young man from Jakan, affected by  
Longing, who has departed from the Arabic tongue.  
High aspiration has cast him towards you:  
When the lightning of knowledge flashed, its light shone  
So he came, hoping for a formation of cloud  
To dress his tongue with its shining ornaments.  
He became constrained by ignorance of grammar,  
Unable to distinguish the 'ayn's form in fa'ala,  
So he has come today with yearning, passionate:  
With Praise to Allah, seeking nothing else.*

i.e. he wanted to study the *Lamiyyah al-Af'al* [Poem in *Lam* about Arabic Verbs].

He continued to be foremost in seeking knowledge, so one of his shaykhs recommended that he should master two subjects together at a time, due to his quick mind and high capacity. He thus gained a high aspiration in study and attainment.

One of his colleagues offered him a female relative's hand in marriage, to which he replied, encouraging the seeking of knowledge instead:

*Sincere friends called me to marriage,  
They said: marry a coquettish one,  
She smiles with soft lips,  
Her glances are like the piercing of arrows,  
No wonder, for the glances of the fair-eyed,  
How many have they killed, without  
I said to them: leave me alone, for my heart  
I am preoccupied with untouched virgins,  
I see them in the parchment, wearing  
I spend the night thinking about them, until they dawn*

*Offering me the fair and beautiful.  
With charming looks and a roving sash.  
That turn clear water into wine.  
Making the heart taste painful wounds.  
Strike like polished spears.  
Weapons other than fragile eyelashes?  
Is screaming today from ignorance.  
Whose faces are like the light of dawn.  
Veils over their beautiful meanings.  
Upon the slow-minded with lowered wing.*

Indeed, he used to spend nights seeking knowledge, studying, researching and thinking until he overpowered difficult matters. He *rahimahullah* narrated to me:

*I came to the Shaykh to study with him and he explained the text to me as usual. However, he did not satisfy me fully and did not quench my thirst. I left at the end of my study session with him, feeling the need to remove some confusion and clarify some obscurity. It was Zuhr [afternoon] time, so I took some books and sources and studied them until 'Asr [late afternoon]. However, I had not fulfilled my need so I continued until Maghrib [sunset], but I had still not finished. My servant lit some firewood for me so that I could study by its light, as per the usual practice of the students. I continued studying, drinking green tea every time I became tired or lazy. My servant remained at my side, kindling the fire. This continued until the dawn broke. I had remained in my seat, getting up only for the obligatory prayers and to eat. Finally, as the day progressed, I completed my study and clarified my confusion, finding this part of the studies clear and understood like the rest. I therefore finished studying and went to sleep, instructing my servant not to wake me for my usual lesson for that day. This was because I had attained enough in that session and needed to rest after the rigours of the all-night vigil.*

Truly:

*He spent the night thinking about them, until they dawned  
Upon the slow-minded with lowered wing.*

This is a lesson for his students, a path for the seekers of knowledge, in patience and perseverance. Allah has benefited me through this incident in my studies and teaching, especially in a difficult case of inheritance that I had not studied with anyone, for the examinations used to be regarding details, not the core principles. (This is incidentally a flaw of today's organised education.) Every time I became impatient in researching it, I remembered his story (*rahimahullah*) and persevered until I reached the goal, Praise be to Allah. This lasted from afternoon until the depths of the night, but how much was my delight and enjoyment at succeeding!

### ***Depth of Knowledge & Breadth of Reading***

God granted the Shaykh extraordinary intelligence, rare memory skills and high ambition. He put all of these gifts to service in attaining and gathering knowledge in diverse fields and areas, such as '*aqidah, tafsir, hadith, usul, Arabic, etc.*

His knowledgeable conversation would amaze anyone who heard it: the hearer would even imagine that the Shaykh had spent his entire life in that field of study and did not excel in any other!

This is no exaggeration: anyone who read his book, *A Pilgrimage Journey to the Sacred House of God*, or heard any of his lectures or debates, whether in Madinah or those that were recorded during his visit to ten African countries at the head of a delegation from the Islamic University, knows this reality.

Furthermore, his recorded lessons in *tafsir* are the biggest witness to this reality. He told the truth when he said:

*I have studied every verse of the Qur'an separately ...  
I know everything said by previous authorities about any verse.*

Someone once said to him: *Sulayman al-Jamal, author of the marginal commentary (hashiyah) on the Tafsir al-Jalalayn, did not say such-and-such [i.e. did not mention a view that you are expressing].*

He replied: *I swear to you by Allah that I know more about what the Book of Allah says about this matter than Sulayman al-Jamal. This is because I have studied the Qur'an from beginning to end: I have followed up the views of the people of knowledge about every verse, and I know what they have said.*

The Shaykh had also memorised thousands of lines of Arabic poetry and instances of classical Arabic usage. He had also memorised most of the hadiths of the two *Sahih* collections, Bukhari and Muslim. He had also memorised lengthy poetical treatises such as the *Alfiyyah (Ode in A)* of Ibn Malik about the Arabic language, *Maraqī al-Su'ud (Rungs of Ascent)* about *Usul*, the *Alfiyyah (Ode in A)* of 'Iraqi about Hadith sciences and others in the fields of the Prophet's biography (*Sirah*) and military expeditions (*Ghazawat*), genealogy (*Ansab*) and Qur'anic words, in addition to other texts, in both poetry and prose, about jurisprudence.

Anyone who heard any of his *tafsir* lessons would not find this surprising.



## Reluctance to Compose Poetry

Despite possessing this tender poetic ability with sweet, overflowing meanings and a simple, generous style, he *rahimahullah* would generally refrain from reciting poetry, even though he had memorised copious amounts of it.

I did ask him once (*rahimahullah*) about his refraining from poetry despite his outstanding ability in it. He replied,

*I have not seen it to be an attribute of the best of the people; I fear that I will become famous for it (poetry). I think of the lines attributed to Imam al-Shafi'i:*

ولولا الشعر بالعلماء يزري  
وأشجع في الوغى من كل ليث  
ولولا خشية الرحمن ربي  
لكنت اليوم أشعر من لبيد  
وآل مهلب وبني يزيد  
حسبت الناس كلهم عبيدي

***Were it not that poetry demeans the people of knowledge,  
I would this day be a better poet than Labīd.***<sup>19</sup>

*Also, a poet speaks about every matter, and the sweetest poetry is that which is most untrue. Therefore, I do not bother with too much of it.*

However, he (*rahimahullah*) did compose a number of poetical treatises about various subjects, as I will explain later if Allah wills.

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<sup>19</sup> The full poem by Imam Shafi'i may be rendered thus:

*Were it not that poetry demeans those of knowledge,  
Be braver in crisis than every lion,  
Were it not for the fear of my Lord Most Merciful,  
I would regard all men as my slaves, indeed!*

Alternative translation:

*Were it not that poetry demeans those of knowledge,  
Be braver in crisis than every lion,  
Were it not for the fear of my Lord Most Merciful,  
I would this day excel Labid in poetry,  
Muhallab's kin, and Yazid's progeny.  
I would regard all men as mine in slavery!*

## **His work as a teacher, *mufti* and *qadi* in his native Mauritania with the French colonial rulers**

This was similar to other people of knowledge in his land: teaching and giving *fatwa*. However, he had become famous for his ability and insight as a judge. Despite the presence of the French colonial rulers, the natives of his land had huge trust in him and therefore came to him for judgment, with delegations coming from distant places to wherever he would be staying.

### ***His Method in Judgment***

When the two parties came to him, he would ask them to put in writing their willingness to refer to him for judgment and their acceptance of his judgment. He would then write the claimant's claim, underneath which he would write the defendant's defence, followed by his verdict alongside the claim and defence. He would then give this document to the two parties and say, "Take this to any Shaykh or Governor that you wish [for confirmation and enforcement]." As for the Shaykhs, they would agree with any judgment that he gave, whilst the governors would immediately enforce any judgment issuing from him. He would judge in all matters except those involving murder and the *hudūd* [statutory criminal punishments].

Cases involving murder were treated specially: the French authorities would enforce capital punishment for murder, but only after careful investigation, a thorough, comprehensive trial, and the agreement of two of the leading '*ulama* of the land with the verdict. These two experts comprised the Murder Panel: no execution of a murderer would be carried out unless they agreed to it. Our shaykh *rahimahullah* was a member of this panel.

## Leaving Mauritania; Settling in Saudi with the “Wahhabis”

By the time he left his land, he had become extremely precious and highly-respected. He was a landmark of his land and commanded the respect and trust of all its people, whether governors or governed. He left on 7<sup>th</sup> Jumada II 1367 H (c. 1947 CE), to fulfil the obligation of the Hajj, intending to return home afterwards. He travelled by land, writing a collection of precious treatises during his journey, including his *Pilgrimage Journey to the Sacred House of God*. The last of these treatises was a discussion of issues in logic, in a debate with the ‘*ulama* of the *Ma’had ‘Ilmi* (Research Institute) at Umm Durman, Sudan.

After he had reached Saudi Arabia, his intention changed: he now wished to stay here. Perhaps it is instructive and good to mention the reason for this change. Like others in his land, he had heard accusations against this country, about their being “Wahhabis.” However, chance meetings can change viewpoints, “*for when Allah wishes a matter, He enables its causes.*”

A strange coincidence was that our Shaykh ended up in a neighbouring tent to that of the Prince Khālid al-Sudayri<sup>20</sup> at one of the stations of the Hajj, with neither of them knowing of the other. Prince Khālid, who had a great taste for literature, was discussing some lines of poetry with his companions. The discussion continued until they asked the Shaykh to participate, and found him to be an ocean without a shore. From that sitting and tent, a new idea emerged. The Prince asked him to visit two Shaykhs when he reached Madinah: Shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Zahim and Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz bin Salih, may God preserve them.

In Madinah, he met the two of them. He was explicit with them about what he had heard about the country (and their being “Wahhabis”); they replied with wisdom about the way of the people here: their *madhhab* in *fiqh* and their path in ‘*aqidah*. Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz bin Salih presented our Shaykh with *Al-Mughni*<sup>21</sup> as the basis of the *madhhab* and with some of the works of Shaykh-ul-Islam (Ibn Taymiyyah) as a guide to the ‘*aqidah*. The Shaykh read these and continued his meetings with the other Shaykhs, with long sittings. Our Shaykh found that the people of this country followed a known *madhhab* of an Imam of *Ahl al-Sunnah*, Ahmad bin Hanbal, and a sound path in ‘*aqidah* based on the Qur’an, Sunnah and the way of the Salaf. Thus, the forgery of false accusations disappeared and the source of the true reality became apparent. The relationship between the two sides became entrenched and a mutual desire developed that the Shaykh should stay here in order to benefit the Muslims.

Our Shaykh, *rahimahullah*, desired this noble neighbourhood and would say, “*There is no deed greater than explaining the Book of Allah in the Masjid of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.*” He was appointed to do this by order of King ‘Abdul ‘Aziz *rahimahullah*, for the two afore-mentioned Shaykhs were the closest of people to him. Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz bin Salih then studied *sarf* (morphology) and *bayan* (rhetoric) with our Shaykh.

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<sup>20</sup> The men of the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, Âl-Sa’ūd, often marry women from the Âl-Sudayri family. Thus, the Sudayris are in general the maternal uncles and brothers-in-law of the Sa’ūdis.

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Mughni* is an important reference work for jurisprudence in the Hanbali school.

## The Influence of Saudi Arabia upon his Knowledge

Here, a reality must be stated, especially for the seekers of knowledge. We add it to the scales of justice and the law of integrity: the Shaykh's stay in Saudi Arabia, for the rest of his blessed life, had two intertwined areas of benefit: for himself, and for others. We begin with how his adopted country benefited him.

### ***Broadening his Knowledge of Hadith and Fiqh***

The Shaykh's settling in Saudi Arabia had a clear influence in increasing his reading and broadening his circles of knowledge. Studies in his home country had been based upon Maliki fiqh, to the exclusion of other *madhhabs*, as well as upon the sciences of Arabic, *usul*, *sirah*, and *tafsir*: the Shaykh had mastered all of these. We have already noted that the Shaykh studied logic via his own reading. However, Hadith was not studied as deeply as other subjects, due to the people's limiting themselves to the Maliki *madhhab*.

When the Shaykh resolved to stay in Madinah and began teaching in the Prophet's Mosque and mixing with scholars as well as laymen, he came across representatives of the Four *Madhhabs*, as well as those who would discuss these, and research and seek evidence for different views. He also found that studies in the Prophet's Mosque were not limited to a particular *Madhhab*, neither that of Malik nor of anyone else. Thus, it was necessary for anyone leading the teaching in this environment to research all the valid *Madhhabs* and know the views of various people of knowledge about each issue, whilst mastering the various fields of knowledge connected to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, since only these can settle *Madhhabi* differences. The Shaykh thus began increasing and widening his knowledge of Hadith, to encompass as much tradition as possible, along with increasing his power of deriving rulings from evidence and his precision of argument in weighing up different views. He was helped in this effort hugely by his mastery of the fundamental sciences of the Arabic language, as well as by increasing his study of Hadith texts, especially the encyclopaedic ones such as Shawkani's *Nayl al-Awtar*, Ibn Hajar's *Fath al-Bari* and others.

This influence is very prominent when he discusses jurisprudential issues in his *Adwa' al-Bayan (Lights of Eloquence)*: he provides the views of the people of knowledge in full, and favours what appears to him to be the preferred opinion, according to jurisprudential evidence, whether rational or textual.

This methodology is the way of the people of attainment: following a path of study, and continuing with research and analysis.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Another leading Mauritanian Maliki scholar did *not* benefit from this kind of broadening, hence his fatwa on following only one of four *madhhabs* and his view that the Zahiri school was obsolete; Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin reached exactly the opposite conclusions on these two matters because of his quarter-of-a-century wider exposure in Mecca and Medina. Shaykh al-Amin's 160-page discussion on following *madhhabs* may be found in his commentary in *Adwa' al-Bayan (Lights of Eloquence)* on Surah Muhammad, 47:24.

## **'Aqidah (Doctrine)**

The Shaykh mastered this subject, rationally and textually, then summarised it in his lecture on the verses about the Names and Attributes of God, one of his first lectures at the Islamic University. He expanded upon this with immense and comprehensive clarity towards the end of his life in his book *Etiquettes of Research & Debate*, giving evidence and evidence-based arguments, as well as masterful and detailed presentation. One of the effects of his explanation of this topic and manner in doing so was what the respected Shaykh 'Abdul Latif bin Ibrahim Al al-Shaykh said when he heard the Shaykh's explanation of the 'aqidah of the Salaf in the Shaykh Muhammad bin Ibrahim Mosque:

*“May God reward the Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin well on our behalf for this explanation of his: the ignorant learnt doctrine, whilst the learned learnt the way, manner and style of teaching it.”*

### **Conclusion: the importance of broadening one's knowledge**

This reality is placed before the seeker of knowledge as a methodology to increase learning and be ambitious about it, as the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said:

*“There are two (types of) greedily-obsessed people: the seeker of knowledge, and the seeker of wealth.”*

## **The Shaykh's Work in the Land of the *Haramayn***

We now turn to how the Shaykh's stay in his adopted country of Saudi Arabia, for the rest of his life, benefited others.

### ***The historical importance of the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah as a centre of learning***

Teaching in the Prophet's Mosque is one of the most important roles, in one of the world's great centres of learning, for spreading knowledge. The Prophet's Mosque, since the time of the Prophet himself, was the first university of the Islamic Sharia where the Prophet taught. This continued when Gabriel, peace be upon him, would come to teach Islam in the assemblies of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. It further continued in the assemblies of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the Learned Companions, may God be pleased with them all.

Thus, Madinah was the knowledge capital and preserved its centrality with regard to knowledge: every era has included people of knowledge who discharge their divine duty of teaching and transmission there.

Before our Shaykh arrived there, Shaykh Tayyib headed the teaching at the Prophet's Mosque. God benefited many through him, until his soul was taken in 1363 H (c. 1943 CE). Our Shaykh thus continued the work of his predecessor, alongside the latter's students and other shaykhs.

### ***Tafsir of the Qur'an in the Prophet's Mosque (1367-71 H / 1947-51 CE)***

Our Shaykh completed explaining (*tafsir* of) the entire Qur'an in the Prophet's Mosque twice; his student, Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Amin said that he completed it three times.

#### **His methodology in teaching *tafsir***

It is well-known that *tafsir* is not limited to a particular topic, since it is comprehensive and all-encompassing, by virtue of the comprehensiveness and all-encompassing nature of the Qur'an.

Our Shaykh would begin by explaining the meanings of individual words, then the grammar and morphology of the verse, followed by its rhetorical qualities, all accompanied by supporting evidence. Next, he would address any rulings if the verse had jurisprudential aspects: covering all the possible rulings derived from it, explaining different views and stating his preferred view. He would support this with principles of *usul*, the explanatory rhetoric (*bayan*) of the Qur'an, as well as other Qur'anic sciences such as the general (*'amm*) and the specific (*khass*), the absolute

(*mutlaq*) and the conditioned (*muqayyad*), the abrogating (*nasikh*) and the abrogated (*mansukh*), and the circumstances of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*).

If the verses related to stories, he would highlight the lessons learned from each story, explain its history and relate the present to the past. For example, he would link the tribulation of contemporary nudity to Iblis' seduction of Adam and Eve in the Garden, where he removed their clothes to show them their ugly parts. His style was thus one of simultaneously teaching and cultivating character, as it was simultaneously teaching rulings and the wisdoms behind them.

His teaching was like a garden full of birdsong, having the most delicious fruits and the most beautiful flowers, interconnected roots and irrigation channels: a breath of fresh air for the soul, healing for the heart and tear-inducing for the eyes. Everyone attending would benefit, taking whatever was appropriate for them and according to their capacity.

He would occasionally digress from the basic discussion with a complete treatment of an issue: for example, his refutation of Ibn Hazm's denial of analogy (*qiyas*), by discussing all its types under God's saying to Iblis, "***What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?***" This refutation has been published as an appendix to his *Mudhakkirat al-Usul (Aide Memoire of the Fundamental Principles of Sharia)* to widen its reach.

With such comprehensive and detailed treatment, he would not leave any space or need for any questions. I remember that he was once asked about several important matters and gave detailed, convincing and comprehensive answers. The Qadi of the town of Qarw, Mauritania, was present and remarked, "There is nothing for any of us to say, because Truth has prevailed. There is no scope for questions, because all confusion has cleared."

Thus, in the Prophet's Mosque, he benefited immensely the locals and the visitors, the near and the far.

Towards the end of his life, our Shaykh began another course of *tafsir*, but death came to him when he was still engaged in explaining *Surat al-Tawbah* (Repentance, 9). Those of these *tafsir* lessons that have survived in recordings have been published in five volumes as *Al-'Adhb al-Namir min Majalis al-Shanqiti fi l-Tafsir (Pure Delight from Shanqiti's Assemblies of Exegesis)*.

### ***Teaching Tafsir & Usul in Riyadh (1371-81 H / c. 1951-61 CE)***

Our Shaykh taught for a decade in the various institutes and colleges of religious education that were established in Riyadh around this time, returning to Madinah during holiday periods. These included the Higher Institute for Religious Scholars and the Colleges of Sharia and Arabic. To fully appreciate his influence in Riyadh, we briefly look at the state of education there at the time.

## **Studies in Riyadh: the old way**

Riyadh was the scholarly and political capital of Najd. Seekers of knowledge from all over Najd came in delegations there to learn from Al al-Shaykh (the descendants of Shaykh Muhammad bin ‘Abdul Wahhab). The centres of learning and teaching were the mosques, with the exception of the elite students of his excellency the Mufti [Shaykh Muhammad bin Ibrahim], who would be taught by him in his house in the mornings. Studies in Riyadh were based around *tawhid*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, *sirah* and *nahw*. These blessed centres of study graduated all the people of knowledge of Najd, until the new movement of organised colleges that began in 1371 H (c. 1961 CE).

## **Studies in Riyadh: the new colleges**

Our Shaykh told me that the new movement for organised learning stemmed from a desire of King ‘Abdul ‘Aziz, may God have mercy on him. He had told a group of religious scholars during a private gathering,

*“Riyadh has always been full of people of knowledge. It has always been thriving with religious teaching. But many of them have returned to God’s Mercy, leaving behind them no comparable figures. I would like you to co-operate with His Excellency the Mufti in cultivating a generation of seekers of knowledge upon authentic sciences and sound doctrine: we and you share this responsibility.”*

Hence this revival, cultivated by royal care and scholarly duty. The new Higher Institute was headed by the Mufti and directed by his brother, Shaykh ‘Abdul Latif bin Ibrahim. Studies were open to suitable students from the mosque circles, including the elite students and sons of the Mufti, Shaykh Muhammad.

Studies were organised as parallel with three years of secondary schooling, followed by three years of college. This was followed by the Higher Institute, followed by the graduate colleges.

## **Curriculum of the new institutions**

The curriculum was based on Islamic and Arabic sciences, complemented by social sciences and even mathematics, calendrical study, calligraphy, oral transmission and *tajwid*. The curriculum was strong in its subject-matter, comprehensive in scope. The students were the cream of those who had studied in the local mosques, thirsty for knowledge and beginning to broaden their scope. The teachers were a select few of respected shaykhs, both locals and Azharis. The atmosphere was truly serious and knowledge-based, the lofty ambitions of good students being matched by the determined resolve of masterful shaykhs. All were led by the realisation that this was the beginning of a comprehensive, knowledge-based revival.



## The Shaykh's teaching in Riyadh

Our Shaykh was like a father to everyone, students and teachers. He was asked to teach the highest subjects: *tafsir* and *usul*. In *tafsir* lay a comprehensive scope, encompassing all subjects and areas of knowledge. Whilst he followed the curriculum and allotted subject-matter, whenever he discussed any subject, the listener would think that he specialised in it. Everyone recognised his worth and wished to learn from him, even the college teachers. Some of the latter wished to study the writings of Shaykh-ul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah and to absorb his nuances: there was none better than our Shaykh for this.

Here, he taught the following:

- ◆ Some of Ibn Taymiyyah's books, taught to the lecturers at the Institute in its courtyard in Dakhna, between the sunset and night prayers.
- ◆ *Usūl*, taught to older students in the Mosque of Shaykh Muhammad bin Ibrahim. These lessons were open to all, and people would flock from all over Riyadh to these. Shaykh 'Abdul Rahman al-Ifriqi [the African] used to teach Hadith, but studied Usul with our Shaykh as a breakthrough in this field.
- ◆ *Usūl*, taught to his closest students at his home after the late afternoon prayer: this was requested by them since the lessons in the mosque were public and thus not as advanced as they wished. During the course of this, he also dictated to one of his students, our brother Ahmad al-Shanqiti, a commentary on the classical *Usūl* text, *Maraqī al-Su'ud (Rungs of Ascent)*. His house was also a school for his students, as well as for his sons who accompanied him to study with him.

## Influence of the Shaykh's teaching in Riyadh

His teaching at the Higher Institute, the Colleges, the mosque and home had positive influence and great results: these spoke for themselves in the work of the mass of graduates, spread throughout the Kingdom, prominent in their workplaces and reaching the highest levels of every Ministry. It would be no exaggeration to say that all the graduates of Riyadh's religious centres were either his direct students, or students of his students, so they were like his children and grandchildren.

## Official regard for the Shaykh

Our Shaykh was highly-regarded by all official figures because of his knowledge, his sincerity, his effort and his humility. This especially included the respected shaykhs of Al al-Shaykh, King 'Abdul 'Aziz and Prince 'Abdullah bin 'Abdul Rahman, the person who appreciated him the most. King 'Abdul 'Aziz even granted, by royal command, Saudi nationality to the Shaykh, all of his family and clan and all those in his care, including servants, as a gesture of total trust in, and honour of, the Shaykh.

When King Muhammad V of Morocco visited Riyadh, he sought the Shaykh's permission to accompany him to Madinah, doing so to appreciate and honour him. The Shaykh delivered his lecture in the Prophet's Mosque, in the presence of King Muhammad V, entitled with the ayah of the Qur'an, *Today, I have perfected for you your religion, completed My Favour upon you, and chosen for you Islam as a religion.*<sup>23</sup> This has been published twice.

Thus, the Shaykh arrived in Riyadh to a warm and honoured welcome, and departed it as a revered personality, after leaving a beautiful influence there and participating in the greatest scholarly revival the country has ever seen.

### ***Teaching Tafsir & Usul at the Islamic University of Madinah (1381-93 H / 1961-73 CE)***

He taught *tafsir* and *usul* here from 1381 H (1961 CE), when the Islamic University was founded, until his death in 1393 H (1973 CE). As well as being a professor at the university, he was a member of its governing council, contributing to its smooth running and curriculum. He also taught the etiquettes of research and debate.

The founding of the Islamic University at Madinah was a continuation of the modern scholarly revival of Riyadh. The sons of the Islamic world came here for study and personal development.

Our shaykh extended a generous, helping hand to this institution, giving it his full attention and effort. In his classes, conversations and lectures, whether with students or teachers, he was a merciful father and a sincere, trustworthy preacher. His students carried knowledge from him to all corners of the Islamic world and beyond, especially after full scholarships for study in Madinah were opened to all Islamic countries.

**Thus, we could even say that he held the unofficial role of the Shaykh of Islam (Shaykh-ul-Islam) during this era. *That is the Grace of God: He grants it to whomever He wills; God is Possessor of Magnificent Grace.***

### ***Head of A Preaching Mission to Nine African Countries***

The Islamic University of Madinah had opened windows for Saudi Arabia upon the entire Islamic world, whose sons had come to it to study. These sons had a right of care, as did their places of origin. This needed a strengthening of relations. Thus, the idea arose of sending delegations to Islamic lands, especially in Africa.

The Shaykh headed an Islamic University delegation for *da'wah*, that lasted for over two months, to nine African countries in 1385 H (1965 CE), beginning with Sudan and ending with Mauritania. This journey of his was packed with talks and lectures, academic meetings and beneficial research, leaving a massive influence on those countries.

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<sup>23</sup> *Surat al-Ma'idah* (The Last Supper), 5:4

I remember, during this trip, a gathering to honour the delegation, hosted by a respected leader in Mauritania. In the latter's closing remarks, he said,

*“Memories are being renewed. This an amazing instance, where the wheel of time has turned full cycle: the Shaykh was born and brought up here, then emigrated to the Hijaz and now returns as the head of a delegation and mission. The seeds of his knowledge were planted here: he then went to the Hijaz where they sprouted and grew into a tree whose branches extended so much that their shade covered the lands of Islam in the east and west. Here we are, in the tree's place of origin, harvesting the fruits of its planting and benefiting from its extended shade!”*

Thus, this trip truly involved a cycle of relationships, a renewal of acquaintance and a revival of milestones of Islam.

His recorded lectures from this trip have been transcribed and published as *Al-Rihlah ila Ifriqiya (A Journey to Africa)*.<sup>24</sup> I wish to add to these remarks that his manner and conduct with everyone from rulers to young students and the public were notable, marking the correct way to invite to God upon clear perception, wisdom and beautiful admonishment.

### ***Teaching Tafsir & Usul at the Higher Institute for Judges, Riyadh***

When this Higher Institute was established in 1386 H (1966 CE), headed by Shaykh ‘Abdul Razzaq al-‘Afifi, and employing a visiting-lecturer model, the Shaykh would teach *tafsir* and *usul* as a visiting lecturer there from time to time.

### ***Founding Member of the Council of Senior Scholars***

When this Council, the *Hay’at Kibar al-‘Ulama* was established on 8<sup>th</sup> Rajab 1391 H (c. 28<sup>th</sup> August 1971), to replace the office of the Mufti after his death in 1389 H (1969 CE), the Shaykh was chosen as one of the 17 original members. He chaired one of its sessions, displaying exemplary diplomacy and achieving praiseworthy results.

Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz bin Salih, another member, was heard saying, “He was better than all those who preceded him in organising the running of the session and its conclusions, along with his deep insight into relevant matters.”

### ***Founding Member of the Muslim World League (1381 H / 1962 CE)***

The Shaykh was a founding member of *Rabitah al-‘Alam al-Islami (Muslim World League)* when the latter was founded in accordance with a resolution adopted during a meeting of the General Islamic Conference in Makkah on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> Dhul Hijjah 1381 H (18<sup>th</sup> May 1962).

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<sup>24</sup> This publication lists the nine African countries visited as follows: Sudan, Nigeria, Dahomey (now Benin), Niger, Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and Chad.

He once told me, as we were standing beside the League offices, about a stance he took during a quandary for the League that could have led to a serious rift or escalating crisis:

The representative for Iran came with a request for the League to recognise the Ja'fari *Madhhab*, supported by a document from a very influential Islamic authority. Were the League to accede to this request, they would enter into a Sunni-Shia impasse; were they to reject it, this would also be damaging. The League entrusted the matter to our Shaykh, to address in a private sitting.

In this sitting, the Shaykh said the following:

*We have gathered to work to unite the Muslims and increase their mutual loyalty in front of the danger of their common enemies. Now, we Sunnis are united with the Shia on the following fundamentals:*

*Islam is our common religion. The Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, is our common Messenger. Our common Qur'an is the Book of God. The Ka'bah is our common qiblah. We agree upon the five daily prayers, the Ramadan fast and the Hajj pilgrimage to the Sacred House of God. We also agree on the prohibition of certain matters, such as murder, drinking wine, adultery, fornication, theft, etc.*

*All of the above is enough for us to assemble and build relationships. However, there are other matters that we all know we differ about. This is not the place to discuss them. If the Iran representative would like to discuss them and follow the truth, then the Shia should select a group of scholars and we will do likewise. These scholars can then jointly discuss our disagreements, announce the truth regarding them and resolve to hold together to those truths. Either that, or he can withdraw his request now.*

Everyone present agreed with the Shaykh's approach, and the member for Iran withdrew his request.

Thus was the Shaykh: wise in teaching, wise in preaching, wise in discussion and persuasion. All of this becomes extremely clear in his writings, to which we turn next.

## The Shaykh's Authored Works

There is no doubt that every authored work narrates the personality of its author: his knowledge, his intellect and even his persuasion, as in the saying:

من ألف فقد إستهدف  
*Every author becomes a target!*

This is because he presents his knowledge and views publicly, in full sight of people.

Our Shaykh authored many works, some in Mauritania and some in Saudi Arabia.

### **Works composed in Mauritania (in manuscript form only, unpublished)**

1. *Khalis al-Jumān fī Dhikr Ansāb Banī 'Adnān*  
(*The Pure Pearl: The Genealogy of the Sons of 'Adnān*)

He named it in its opening line:

سميته بخالص الجمان في ذكر أنساب بني عدنان

A genealogy of the Arabs descended from 'Adnan: he wrote this before puberty, but buried it in the earth later (to destroy it), explaining that he had written it with the wrong intention of rising above his peers. His teachers criticised him for burying it, saying that he could have corrected and improved his intention.

2. A *rajaz* poem of thousands of lines about the detailed jurisprudential rules (*furū'*) from the *Madhhab* of Mālik, focussing on contracts of sale and guarantee. It began with the following lines:

*Praise be to God Who encouraged us  
To separate sales from usury so dubious,  
And favoured us with knowledge's fountains  
Who pulverised ignorance's mountains,  
Removing veils from the heart's perception  
When veils covered true intellection!*

3. A poem in *alif* about logic. It began as follows:

*In Praise for One Who showed intellectuality  
Realities from tradition and rationality,  
Purifying our minds from ignorance  
With clear proof and evidence;  
Opened doors for people, deep and sound,  
To see clearly what lies beyond!*

4. A poem about inheritance rules, including the following lines:

*Inheritance rule types go first to fifth  
After those, there is no sixth.  
The rule of five is by induction:<sup>25</sup>  
To the wilderness, throw false intellection!  
The first is the rights of owners,  
Such as victims of crime or pawners,  
Or the zakat on dates' and grains' harvestation  
If he dies after the time of obligation.*

### **Works composed en route to Mecca for his first Hajj**

5. A commentary on al-Akhdarī's *Sullam (Ladder)* text about logic.
6. *Al-Rihlah ilā Bayt Allah al-Harām (Journey to the Sacred House of God)*, published 10 years after his death.<sup>26</sup>

### **Works composed in Saudi Arabia (all published)**

7. *Man' jawaz al-majaz fi l-munazzal li l-ta'abbud wa l-i'jaz (The impossibility of metaphor in what has been revealed for worship and as an incomparable miracle)*

This treatise is about affirming that the verses of the Qur'an about the Names and Attributes of God are *haqiqi* (real) and not *majazi* (metaphorical). He expanded on this theme in his later *Adab al-Bahth wa l-Munazarah (Etiquettes of Research & Debate)*.

8. *Daf' iham al-idtirab 'an ayat al-kitab (Refuting the Doubt of Inconsistency within the Verses of the Book)*

This was written in 15 nights: it was the source text for the academic examinations in 1373 H [c. 1954 CE]. In it, he clarified misconceptions about every alleged contradiction in the Qur'an. For example, God's sayings: **Make them stand: they will truly be questioned** and **So, on that Day, no-one will be questioned about his sin: neither human nor genie**. Here, he explained that there are different occasions of questioning and multiple standings on the Day of Judgment, so there is no contradiction.

9. *Mudhakkirah Usul al-Fiqh 'ala Rawdah al-Nazir (Aide Memoire of the Fundamentals of Jurisprudence, as a commentary on the Garden of the Analyst)*

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<sup>25</sup> Induction (*istiqra'*): holistic reading of the texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah, to arrive at general rules. This method in *usul* was developed and championed by Imam al-Shatibi of Andalusia (720 – 790 H / 1320 – 1388 CE).

<sup>26</sup> This includes Shaykh's account of his meetings, stay and valuable discussions with Shaykh Mahfuz bin Bayyah, Qadi of Timbuktu, en route to the Hajj, and with Sayyid 'Alawi al-Maliki in Mecca.

This was dictated to his students during the first few years of teaching at the Sharia College inaugurated in Riyadh in 1374 H [c. 1955 CE]. It was only published in 1391 H [c. 1971 CE]. In his commentary, he gathered the fundamental principles of Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi'i jurisprudence. It is a textbook for the Colleges of Sharia and Da'wah at the Islamic University of Madinah.

10. *Adab al-Bahth wa l-Munazarah (Etiquettes of Research & Debate)*

Part 1 was completed on 28/3/1388 [24/6/1968]; Part 2 on 14/5/1388 [8/8/1968]. In it, he explained the etiquettes of research, such as precisely defining questions, explaining evidence and so forth. It is also a textbook at the Islamic University of Madinah.

11. *Adwa' al-Bayan fi Idah al-Qur'an bi l-Qur'an (Lights of Eloquence in Explaining the Qur'an by the Qur'an)*

He reached the end of *Surat al-Mujadilah* [no. 58, i.e. he completed more than 27 of the Qur'an's 30 parts]. It is the largest and most magnificent of his books, an entire school in itself that speaks for itself. Another amazing coincidence is that the last verse he wrote a commentary upon was the following, being the end of *Surat al-Mujadilah*:

أولئك حزب الله - ألا إن حزب الله هم المفلحون

***Those are the Party of God:  
Lo! The Party of God,  
They are truly the Successful!***

12. *Bayan al-Nasikh wa l-Mansukh fi Ay al-Dhikr al-Hakim (Eloquent Explanation of the Abrogating and the Abrogated among the Verses of the Wise Reminder)*

This is a short treatise of four and a half pages, published at the end of *Adwa' al-Bayan*. In it, he explains the 10 lines of poetry that Suyuti wrote in *Al-Itqan* about the abrogated verses. The Shaykh wrote it and later dictated it in Dhul-Hijjah 1373 H (c. 1954 CE) to his student, Shaykh 'Atiyyah Salim, who thus wrote a copy and read it back to his Shaykh.

13. A commentary on *Maraqi al-Su'ud (Rungs of the Ascent)*

He dictated this to one of his students, Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti, completing it on 22/7/1375 (4/3/1956). He had commented on the entire text of the *Maraqi*, but a portion of his commentary, covering 164 lines of the original poetical text, does not survive in written form. The commentary was published as *Nathr al-Wurud 'ala Maraqi al-Su'ud (The Scattering of Scented Roses upon the Rungs of the Ascent)*, with his students naming the work since the Shaykh did not name it himself.

### **Public Lectures (all published)**

14. *Manhaj al-Tashri' al-Islami wa Hikmatuhu (Methodology and Wisdom of Islamic Legislation)*, 1384/1964, on wisdoms accompanying Sharia rulings.
15. *Al-Muthul al-'Ulya (The Highest Similitudes)*: in it, he explained exemplary similitudes relating to doctrine, law and character.
16. *Al-Masalih al-Mursalah (Common Good / Public Benefit in Islamic Law)*, 1390 / 1970. In it, he explained conditions for applying this principle in a balanced way, between the extremes of neglect and overuse.
17. *Al-Islam Din Kamil (Islam: A Perfect Religion)*

A commentary on the verse, “**Today, I have perfected for you your religion ...**”, delivered at the Prophet’s Mosque in 1378 (1958), in the presence of King Muhammad V of Morocco.

18. *Manhaj wa Dirasat li Ayat al-Asma' wa l-Sifat (Verses of the Names & Attributes of God – Curriculum and Studies)*

Delivered at the Islamic University of Madinah on 13/9/1382 (7/2/1963).

19. *A lecture on Misconceptions around Slavery*

Delivered on his behalf by his student, Shaykh ‘Atiyyah Salim during the Cultural Season at the Islamic University of Madinah. In it, he clarified misconceptions around the false allegation that Islam enslaved free people.

### **Miscellaneous Fatwas and Answers to Questions Posed**

20. *Fatwa on wisdoms as the reasons for legislation (question posed by Shaykh Abdullah bin Mani')*
21. *His viewpoint on the ruling of walking between Safa & Marwah on the roof of the covered area between them.*
22. *A short, six-page treatise on how to pray in an aeroplane, 1385 H (1966 CE).*
23. *A 16-page treatise in answer to a question received from one of the emirs in Mauritania: Is the world created and sustained from the blessings of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, or via other causes?*
24. *A treatise answering three questions received from Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin bin Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr: (a) Where does the intellect reside in the human? (b) Does the word 'mushrikun' [associationists] include the Ahl al-Kitab [People of the Book] ? (c) Is a non-Muslim allowed to enter God's mosques other than the Sacred Mosque in Mecca?*



## **Revivalist Influence of the Shaykh's Teaching & Writing**

The Shaykh's scholarly methodology in his discussions, lessons and writings caused a revival of sciences that had fallen into oblivion, and corrected concepts gone awry.

### **Usul**

Amongst the sciences that he revived was that of *usul* (fundamentals of jurisprudence): the basis for all rulings derived from evidence and indication, and for juristic reasoning (*ijtihad*) and weighing up different opinions (*tarjih*). It is also the foundation and source for the advanced jurist (*mujtahid*): if one is ignorant of it, they are not qualified for *ijtihad* and must stick to pure *taqlid* (following the opinion of another), as in the saying:

جهلة الأصول عوام العلماء

Those ignorant of *usul* constitute the mass of the learned.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, he opened the doors to *usul*, eased its difficulties and explained its principles. He brought it near, making it accessible for scholars to engage with it, facilitating the deriving of rulings from their original sources and connecting the branches of jurisprudence to its roots.

### **Research & Debate**

He revived the etiquettes of research and debate, laying down the curriculum and writing its standard textbook. This has been a great service to Islam, in the style of explaining it, the manner of affirming its truths and defending it, and in the ways of resolving disagreements.

### **Qur'anic sciences**

He opened wide new doors and invented unique arts relating to the Qur'anic sciences.

These included his *Denial of Metaphor* and affirmation that the verses of the Qur'an about the Names and Attributes of God are *haqiqi* (real) and not *majazi* (metaphorical), thus closing the door to their denial.

Furthermore, his *Refuting the Doubt of Inconsistency within the Verses of the Book*, a refutation of all alleged inconsistency within the Qur'an, explained how the verses mutually confirm each other without contradiction or doubt.

Most importantly, in his *Lights of Eloquence in Explaining the Qur'an by the Qur'an*, he drew out a sound method in *tafsir*. He explained the Word of God by its internal references, clarified its rulings and wisdoms, opened its treasures, exposed its precious gems and scattered its pearls upon the seekers of knowledge.

All of the above constituted a new breakthrough in the sciences of the Qur'an, previously unparalleled in style and never taught before in this way.

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<sup>27</sup> i.e. that most religious scholars are incapable of *ijtihad*, since they focus on learning details, not fundamental principles.

## **The correct use of logic**

As a secondary impact of his work, he corrected many misconceptions, including the idea that logic dictates that reason is superior to revelation, and that revealed texts and logic are in mutual conflict. This misconception was practically one that cast doubts on Islamic doctrine by exploiting barren issues. The Shaykh summarised discussions about logic and used it for good purposes, producing fruitful outcomes, arranging its sound forms and employing its syllogisms to assert truth, whether in doctrine (*'aqidah*) or in the fundamentals of rulings (*usul al-ahkam*). Thus, after logic had been employed against Islamic teachings, it was now used to serve them. He explained all of this in his *Etiquettes of Research and Debate*.

## **The Shaykh's Piety & Asceticism**

The true person of knowledge is one whose knowledge leads him to the awe of God and to watching over oneself, all whilst avoiding the actions of fools such as fighting like dogs over worldly matters and being diverted by them from God and the Hereafter.

One is amazed at the reality of the Shaykh: it seems almost that he was one of the pious predecessors who are followed in knowledge and action, piety and asceticism.

### ***“Do not be greedy with the excuse of wanting to give charity”***

His son ‘Abdullah narrated:

*The Shaykh said, “What reassures us (about our worldly pursuits) is that had the world been carrion, God would have allowed us to eat enough of it to stave off starvation.” He also warned me against “gathering worldly gain and being greedy about it with the excuse of wanting to donate it in charity, building schools and ribats [teaching centres], for it is like bitter water. God has not obliged His servants to gather wealth in order to donate it in charity. Moreover, the reality most of the time is that when a person gathers wealth, he does not donate it in charity.”*

### ***“Do not become tainted by the world”***

The Shaykh also said: *I am most capable amongst people of becoming the richest of people, but I have abandoned the world because I know that when a person becomes tainted with it, he cannot escape from it, except those whom Allah saves.*

### ***Giving away excess wealth***

The Shaykh would not keep any wealth with him except what he needed for that month [until his next monthly salary], distributing any excess amongst poor students, those unable to work and widowed relatives. He would say: *By Allah, if I had my daily staple, I would not accept a salary from the university; but I am forced to do so, because I do not know any other skill or craftsmanship with which to earn a living, and I am going grey and weak.*

### ***Refusal to earn wealth from the books he authored***

The Shaykh forbade the selling of his books, saying:

*Knowledge that we exhausted ourselves in gaining – is it to be sold whilst I am alive? This is not possible! Rather, I provide the knowledge: another can provide the money, for the knowledge to be distributed to people freely. I know that it will reach people who do not deserve it, but it will also reach those [who deserve it and] cannot afford to pay for it.*

Shaykh Bakr Abu Zayd said: I said to the Shaykh Shanqiti, whilst next to him in the Blessed Prophet's Mosque, "Were *Adwa' al-Bayan (Lights of Eloquence)* to be printed commercially, it would reach a wider audience." He replied to me: *I will not commercialise the explanation of the Book of God, the Exalted. If anyone dares to sell my book for profit, I will say a prayer against him and I expect that such a prayer will be answered.*<sup>28</sup>

### ***A Treasure from Mauritania: Contentment***

The Shaykh used to say: *I came from my land with a treasure that rarely does anyone have: contentment [with whatever I have]. If I wanted to hold positions, I know the way to that, but I will not prefer this world over the Hereafter, and I will not disseminate knowledge in order to attain worldly goals.*

### ***Disdain for outward appearances***

The Shaykh was amongst the people most distant from care for outward appearances. Examples of this include:

1. He would sometimes leave his house with odd, non-matching sandals: one red, one green.
2. Shaykh Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaymin said, "Whilst studying at the Institute of Knowledge, Riyadh, we were once sitting in the classroom when a shaykh entered. When I saw him, I thought: 'This is a Bedouin Arab, having no knowledge!' His dress was shabby, he had no outward gravitas and did not care about his appearance, so he was insignificant in our eyes. I thought of Shaykh 'Abdur-Rahman al-Sa'di<sup>29</sup> and said to myself: 'Why have I left Shaykh 'Abdur-Rahman al-Sa'di to sit in front of this bedouin?!' But when al-Shanqiti began his lesson, pearls of exquisite knowledge dropped upon us from the ocean of his abundant knowledge. We now knew that we were in the presence of one of the experts of the people of knowledge: one of their stallions. We benefited from his knowledge, his manner, his character, his asceticism and his piety."<sup>30</sup>
3. On one of his visits to the Judiciary Institute at Riyadh, he was wearing a tacky robe, so one of his students spoke to him about it. He replied: *The issue is not about clothing: it is about what knowledge resides under the clothing!*

Imam al-Shafi'i had already addressed this issue in his poetry:

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<sup>28</sup> Bakr Abu Zayd, *Fiqh al-Nawazil, Risalah Haqq al-Ta'lif (Jurisprudence of Critical Matters: Essay on Copyright)*, 2/183

<sup>29</sup> Shaykh 'Abdul-Rahman bin Nasir al-Sa'di (1307-1376 H / 1889-1956 CE), the foremost scholar in his time in 'Unayzah and Qasim provinces. Author of many works, including an influential *tafsir*.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Hikmah* journal, no. 2, p. 22

*I wear clothes, such that if  
They were all sold for a copper coin,  
The coin would be worth more  
Than all of them.*

*But inside them is a soul:  
If only some of it were measured  
Against the souls of all people,  
It would be more valuable and greater.*

*The sword's blade is not harmed  
By the decay of its sheath  
And it remains sharp, when  
You direct it to strike.*

*Were the days  
To dishonour my clothes:  
Many swords lie  
Beneath decaying covers!<sup>31</sup>*

4. When Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Amin, one of his students for whom he composed the commentary on *Maraqi al-Su'ud (Rungs of Ascent)*, tried to dissuade him from the Hajj shortly before his death, due to his weak health, he replied: *Don't try to dissuade me: I intend to travel to London to seek a medical cure; I must compensate for this with a Hajj pilgrimage.*

The Shaykh died, leaving no worldly possessions behind: may Allah shower His Infinite Mercy upon him.

### ***His Stance towards Truth – a case involving Hajj***

The Shaykh was strong and firm in his expositions, whilst being soft and gentle in his manner, especially with regard to returning to the Truth when this became apparent to him.

In one of the years when I accompanied him on the Hajj pilgrimage, we arrived in Makkah on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Dhul Hijjah. He was performing the *ifrad* ritual of Hajj.<sup>32</sup> On 'Eid day (the 10<sup>th</sup>), I accompanied him in visiting the Mufti [Shaykh Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al al-Shaykh] at Mina. The Mufti asked him which Hajj ritual he was performing, to which he replied: *Ifrad, and on purpose.*

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<sup>31</sup> *Diwan al-Imam al-Shafi'i; Hilyat al-Awliya'*

<sup>32</sup> There are three types of Hajj rituals, all of which are in relation to the lesser pilgrimage or '*umrah*':

- (i) *ifrad*: "uniquely" performing Hajj rituals, with no '*umrah*';
- (ii) *tamattu'*: performing the '*umrah*' first, then exiting the state of sacredness (*ihram*) and "enjoying" (*tamattu'*) life without its restrictions, before entering *ihram* again for the Hajj;
- (iii) *qiran*: "combining" '*umrah*' with the Hajj, with no gap in between, unlike *tamattu'*.

Islamic tradition is divided as to which of these the Prophet himself performed for his only Hajj, and as to which, if any, is preferred. Shaykh Shanqiti masterfully discusses when explaining *Surat al-Hajj*.

The Mufti realised that there was something behind this, but asked diplomatically, “Do you regard this ritual as preferable, may God protect you?”

He replied: *May God protect you too. No, I did not choose the ifrad ritual because I hold it to be preferable, but I heard and confirmed that some seekers of knowledge were saying that ifrad is not valid: they were obliging those performing ifrad to exit ihram via ‘umrah [and hence perform tamattu’]. This is not appropriate for the multitude of delegations to the Sacred House of God: each has a chosen ritual, and all are following valid views.*

The ensuing discussion was one of the most valuable ones I have ever heard in rooting this issue by analysis of evidence and weighing the relative strengths of various views. Our Shaykh concluded:

*I’m not concerned about explaining the preferred view, because that is a disputed matter and every scholar will adopt whatever he finds most preferable. But we must falsify the view that negates the validity of ifrad in Hajj, because this is an unprecedented view and the Muslim nation unanimously agreed [ijma’] upon the validity of ifrad.*

His excellency the Mufti approved of our Shaykh’s conclusion and prayed for him.

I felt that the Shaykh was practically demonstrating the example set by ‘Ali, may God be pleased with him, when it reached him that ‘Uthman, may God be pleased with him, was forbidding *tamattu*. He visited the latter and asked him, “*How can you forbid something that we did alongside the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace?*” He then departed, saying: “*Here I am, O God, for Hajj and ‘Umrah [in the tamattu’ ritual].*”

### ***Returning to the Truth when this became apparent to him***

He was known for this humility in returning to truth when this became apparent to him. We present a couple of examples.

#### **Fighting during the Sacred Months**

Under *Surat al-Tawbah / Bara’ah (Repentance / Disavowal, 9:5)* when discussing fighting during the sacred months, he wrote:

*We used to hold this view – that the prohibition of fighting then (during the sacred months) has been abrogated – and we spent a long time advocating this view and firmly stating that it was the more correct one. Later, it became apparent to us that the more correct view, and closer to the truth, is that the prohibition of fighting during the sacred months remains, and has not been abrogated.*

He reiterated this under *ayah* no. 34 of the same surah. In his last Ramadan lessons in the Prophet’s Mosque [1393 H / 1973 CE], he further reiterated and announced his retraction in this regard, saying that he had stated in his *Refuting the Doubt of Inconsistency* that this ruling was abrogated, but that it was now apparent to him upon

further reflection that this was not the case. The fact of non-abrogation was the truth, which should be relied upon and referred to.

Furthermore, he held a number of views that he established in his *Commentary on Maraqi al-Su'ud* but later retracted and opposed in his *Adwa' al-Bayan*.

### **Gold Jewellery**

This involves a conversation I once had with him, that led me to revere his humility and justice even more.

In his discussion of *zakat* on gold jewellery in his *Lights of Eloquence*, he mentioned that amongst the evidence of those who obligate this is the hadith of the Yemeni woman whose daughter was wearing two gold bangles. The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, asked her, "Do you pay the *zakat* on these?" When she replied in the negative, he said, "They will be your portion of the Fire." So she took them off and threw them away. Those who denied any obligation of *zakat* on gold jewellery said that this incident was before gold was allowed for women.

If the latter was the case, I asked the Shaykh that was this not unbefitting of the Prophet, i.e. remaining quiet about the fact that the gold was prohibited, but only asking about its *zakat*? He replied that this was indeed an issue, and that therefore gold must have already been allowed for women at the time of this incident. He further said that if his book were to be published again, he would add a note regarding this, despite the fact that all the other sources (of *hadith* and *fiqh*) mentioning this incident had not touched upon this point.

Thus, he was practically teaching seekers of knowledge his approach to truth. I was reminded of Caliph 'Umar's letter to Abu Musa al-Ash'ari:

*Let not a judgment that you gave in the past, but which you then thought about and realised that the truth lay elsewhere, prevent you from changing your judgment, for Truth has most right to be followed.*

Moreover, we know of Imam Shafi'i's changing his opinions almost entirely between his old and new *madhhabs*. This is what is dictated by the responsibility of having knowledge and by the justice of its people.

This is what I have been able to mention of his scholarly life: his origin, learning and teaching; his scholarly legacy via his writings and his parental influence upon his own children and upon the children of the entire Islamic world, may God shower him with His Infinite Mercy.

### ***Further Personal Qualities: An Epitome of Perfection***

An evaluation of his personal qualities: his manner, character, etiquettes, generosity, chastity, piety, asceticism and nobility would deserve a study in itself. I cannot conceive of it all at present, and time does not permit me to go into detail.

He did not like to be praised for any of that but in summary: if there was an example amongst today's men of all the virtues, graces, nobilities, good characters and qualities of perfection, he was most deserving of that description.

### **Manliness**

The people of knowledge about virtue describe manliness as the basis, for men, of all good character and grace. Our Shaykh epitomised manliness: it ruled all his interactions, whether within himself or with his peers, students and others, whether he knew them or not. Someone once said about him,

*“He has no faults, except one: that we will miss him after his death.”*

A detailed description is best left to those who mixed with him at home. It is difficult for me to comment about that, but I feel as the poet said:

*I am in awe of you, your majesty without power  
Over me, except for filling my eye with its beloved!*

An indication is enough when detailed expression is impossible.

### **Asceticism & Contentment**

The most obvious thing to mention is his asceticism with regards to worldly matters, his lack of covetousness for what other people possessed and his noble contentment with whatever he had. Only those who mixed with him knew this, and even then not all of them: only those who accompanied him and lived with him.

The simple truth is that this world was worth nothing to him: he did not care about it at all. Ever since he arrived in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and was connected to its rulers until he left this world, he never requested a grant, a salary, a salary increase, compensation, expenses or allowance: he would simply accept whatever came his way without his asking for it. Whatever he did attain, he would not save it up but rather distribute it immediately amongst the needy: widows, orphans and the destitute. I know this because I had the responsibility of distributing it and sending it from Riyadh to both Makkah and Madinah. He died without leaving a single coin, neither gold dinar nor silver dirham, but he was rich, being enriched by his integrity and contentment. Out of his chastity, he would even renounce his personal entitlement, as he did with his unique and leading authored works: he did not accept any earnings from them, but left them as a free gift to the seekers of knowledge.



I once heard him say: *I brought with me from my land a magnificent treasure, enough to last me my entire life, and I fear losing it.*

I asked him, “What is it?”

He replied: *Contentment with whatever I have.*

His conviction here is mirrored by the poet who said:

الجوع يطرد بالرغيف اليابس      فعلام تكثر حسرتي ووساوسي

*Hunger may be repulsed by a dried loaf of bread  
So why do I have so many regrets and temptations?*

### **Concern for Knowledge**

His concern was for knowledge, and knowledge alone. All branches of knowledge were for him a tool and a means: knowledge of the Book of God was the only goal. He would often quote the poetical lines of the man of letters, Muhammad bin Hanbal al-Hasan al-Shanqiti:

*Never think ill of knowledge, young man  
For doing so is an immense harm.  
Let no-one sway you from knowledge, just because  
The ignorant have prevailed over masters of virtue.  
If you see the mature one of knowledge, rubbed in the dust,  
Empty-handed, unaided by any means  
While you see the ignorant hoarding riches  
Of every type, secure from desirous others:  
Remember that lions may starve in their dens  
Whilst vicious wolves feast till late!  
Discipline yourself to endure attaining knowledge:  
Reluctant training involves hunger and humiliation.  
But the harvesters of fruit fear not the thorns;  
The pollinating bees multiply their returns!*

Truly, our Shaykh never thought ill of knowledge, and in attaining it he feared neither date-palm prickles nor stinging bees, always gaining the knowledge he intended.

### **Nobility of character**

As for the nobility and generosity of his manners and character, and his regard for the feelings of his fellows, these reached impossible heights. Ever since I accompanied him, I never heard him say to anyone, even if the person was wrong, anything to hurt their feelings. He would never reproach anyone for something that could be corrected, and would overlook many transgressions against his own person. When I asked him about this, he would quote the poetical line:

ليس الغبي بسيد في قومه      ولكن سيد القوم المتغابي

*The mindless cannot be leaders of people,  
But leaders must be personally unmindful.*

He would never backbite anyone, or allow anyone to be backbitten in his gatherings.

He would often say to his brothers: *Atakāyasū!* (*Will you all be careful?!*), i.e. of the danger of backbiting. He would also say: *If a person understood that whatever he says will appear in his record of deeds, he would only say good things.*

### **Avoiding giving fatwas towards the end of his life**

Towards the end of his life, the Shaykh strongly avoided giving fatwas: if anyone insisted, he would say, *“I will not take any responsibility: the people of knowledge say such-and-such.”*

When he was asked about this, he replied, *“A person remains safe as long as he is not tested. Being asked about religion is a test, because you speak on God’s behalf and you do not know whether or not you have attained God’s command. So as long as there is no decisive text from the Book of God or the Way of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, one must be cautious about it.”*

Here, he would quote the lines of poetry:

*If you have killed a matter with study,  
Then speak your view  
But do not speak of anything  
About which you are ignorant:  
Whoever desires to be seen as prominent  
And hates saying, “I do not know,”  
Will be struck where it kills him!*

### **Conclusion of Shaykh ‘Atiyyah’s Lecture**

In conclusion, our Shaykh was the best and most excellent of examples in every aspect of life, being a person of knowledge and deeds – I do not declare anyone pure before God. He left two respected, cultured sons who both teach at the Sharia College of the Islamic University, may God make them the best successors to the best predecessor.

*It is God I ask to admit him to live in His vast Garden,  
to shower the Pleasure of His Mercy upon him,  
to elevate his station and to raise his rank amongst the People of Knowledge,  
the Truthful Ones and the Witnesses: a Most Beautiful Fellowship!*

*May God benefit us by his knowledge and enable us to follow the path of his deeds  
insofar as this pleases Him, Blessed is He and Exalted above us.*

*May God bless His Servant and Messenger, Muhammad, and grant him peace.  
May Peace be upon you all, and the Mercy of God and His Blessings.*



**Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti**  
(photograph accuracy confirmed visually by his student, Shaykh Suhaib Hasan)

الشيخ  
**محمد الأمين الشنقيطي**

*صاحب تفسير أضواء البيان في إيضاح القرآن بالقرآن*

**SHAYKH MUHAMMAD AL-AMĪN AL-SHANQĪTĪ**

(1325-1393 H / 1907-1973 CE)

AUTHOR OF THE MAGNIFICENT *TAFSĪR*

***ADWĀ' AL-BAYĀN FĪ DĀH AL-QUR'ĀN BI L-QUR'ĀN***

***(LIGHTS OF ELOQUENCE IN EXPLAINING THE QUR'AN BY THE QUR'AN)***

**LEADING SCHOLAR OF MAURITANIA  
SENIOR JUDGE IN HIGH COURT FOR MURDER CASES, MAURITANIA**

HEAD EXEGETE OF THE QUR'AN AT:

**THE INSTITUTE OF KNOWLEDGE, RIYADH  
HIGHER INSTITUTE FOR THE JUDICIARY, RIYADH  
COLLEGE OF SHARIA, THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, MADINAH  
THE MOSQUE OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PEACE BE UPON HIM), MADINAH**

*MAY ALLAH BESTOW HIS INFINITE MERCY UPON HIM*

## **Tribute by Shaykh ‘Abdul Ghaffar Hasan (1330-1427 H ~ 1913-2007 CE)**

Shaykh ‘Abdul Ghaffar Hasan was a colleague of Shaykh Shanqiti for nearly a decade, since he taught at Madina University (1964-1980), before his return to Pakistan. So naturally, Shaykh ‘Abdul Ghaffar overlapped with Shaykh Shanqiti for almost a decade: nine years to be precise, until the latter’s departure from this world in 1973. Shaykh ‘Abdul Ghaffar wrote about Shaykh Shanqiti:

*He made his name in the science of tafsir.*

*He held the view of sama’ al-mawta [that the dead can hear].*

*We were discussing this with him once.*

*I said that our saying to the deceased in the graveyard,*

*“Peace be upon you, O people of the graves”*

*does not mean that they can hear, any more than our saying,*

*“My Lord and your Lord is God”*

*to the new crescent moon means that it hears us.*

*Furthermore, the Qur’anic verse,*

***Neither are you making them hear, those in the graves!***

*explicitly denies that the dead can hear.*

*Shaykh Majdhub<sup>33</sup> was present and was smiling.<sup>34</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup> Shaykh Muhammad Majdhub was born in Tartus, Syria in 1325/1907. He was imprisoned and persecuted for joining the uprising against the French. He taught Arabic Literature at Madinah University 1383-1403 H (1964-1983 CE), before returning to Syria in 1996, where he died in 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Note this example of debate about *sama’ al-mawta* (whether or not the dead can hear) happening in Madinah between scholars from Delhi and Shanqit, conducted with impeccable *adab*.

## Shaykh Suhaib Hasan's memories of the Shaykh

Shaykh Suhaib Hasan studied at Madina University, 1962-66. He said:

*Shaykh Shanqiti was at a higher level than even the Shaykhs Ibn Baz and al-Albani.*

*Shaykh Shanqiti was sometimes difficult to follow for us young students, since he spoke at such an elevated level, especially when quoting high-class Arabic poetry all the time to explain the words of the Qur'an.*

*The Shaykh had a phenomenal ability of recall: for every situation, he could recall Qur'anic verses or lines of poetry. His lectures were like a raging tsunami of knowledge.*

### Incidents

#### Only one Shahadah

*Once, he said: People come to me and ask, "Which shahadahs (university degrees) do you have?" I reply, "I only have one shahada, and it is enough for me: the Shahada (bearing of witness) that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God."<sup>35</sup>*

#### Tribute by an Iranian university chancellor

Once, the Chancellor of an Iranian university attended our lesson with Shaykh Shanqiti as a guest. After listening to the lesson, he asked the Shaykh's permission to say a few words and proceeded:

*I have seen many people of knowledge. But this is the first time that I have ever seen a teacher like you: an Ibn Jarir al-Tabari in Tafsir, a Bukhari in Hadith, a Saibwaih<sup>36</sup> in Grammar, etc. etc., all in one person.*

He then got up and left the classroom. Whilst listening to these remarks, the Shaykh simply said repeatedly to his students:

*What's he on about? (aysh yaqulu hadha?)*

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<sup>35</sup> This famous Shaykh Shanqiti story endears him to those thousands, nay millions of us, who have studied like him in the traditional way at home, learning Qur'an from our mothers and fathers, and from our Shaykhs at mosque, as Muslims have done in every city of learning until the establishment of modern universities, themselves based on the Islamic model of congregational mosque (*jami'*)-based university (*jami'a*) learning. We do not particularly need university degrees (*shahadahs*) in Islamic Studies. The *Shahada* plus study of the Qur'an with teachers at home & mosque is often superior to university studies!

<sup>36</sup> Although pronounced *Sibawaih* in Arabic, his name is Persian in origin as given: *Saib-waih* meaning, "of the apple" or what might be called *Saib-(apple)-wala* in Hindi or Urdu. His parents named him this because his complexion and baby face were like that of an apple. Similarly, the Imam Ishaq bin Rahwaih of Baghdad, often Arabised to Rahawayyah: his father was named *Rah-waih*: "of the road" because his mother gave birth to him en route during a journey.

## Tafsir

Shaykh Shanqiti taught us the *tafsir* of Surahs *Baqarah*, *Al-‘Imran*, *Nisa’* and *Ma’idah*. He taught us many *tafsir* gems, including the following:

- ◆ the “symmetry” between the Names of God at the beginning & end of the Qur’an: *Rabb*, *Malik*, *Ilah* in both *Surat al-Fatiha* and *Surat al-Nas*;
- ◆ the *waw al-thamaniyah* (W of eight);
- ◆ the *ba’ al-sababiyyah* (B of causation) vs. the *ba’ al-‘iwad* (B of recompense).<sup>37</sup>

## Poetry

We learnt some famous poems directly via oral transmission from Shaykh Shanqiti:

Plurals are feminine

إن قومي تجمعوا وبقتلي تحدثوا  
لا أبالي بجمعهم كل جمع مؤنث

*My people did gather  
And discussed my murder.  
I care not for their gathering,  
For every plural is feminine!*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This is a subject for another time, except to note that the Abrahamic “salvation through deeds” vs. “salvation through grace” debate hinges entirely on these two senses of this quintessential Qur’anic Arabic letter, with which the Qur’an possibly begins! A breathtaking example of the openness of the nature of the Qur’an is that Muslims have always disagreed as to even which letter it begins with, the answer being *A* or *B*!

<sup>38</sup> Some people may cry sexism or misogyny upon reading this, but careful consideration shows that this poem makes two statements:

- (i) Many plurals, even of masculine nouns, are feminine.

E.g. The Messengers of God mentioned in The Heifer are all men, but as a group, *The Messengers* is feminine: *tilk al-rusul*. (*Al-Baqarah*, The Heifer, 2:253)

I will leave it to Arabic linguists or philosophers to comment on the significance of this.

- (ii) The author of the poem is literally the target of a murder plot by vicious men. He dismisses them by effectively saying that *he doesn’t care because they’re a bunch of women*, using a profound principle of Arabic grammar to mock his enemies.

## Zamakhshari's poem on *madhhabist* sectarianism

The famous poem by another *tafsir* master, Abu l-Qasim Mahmud bin 'Umar bin Muhammad bin 'Umar al-Khawarizmi al-Zamakhshari (467-538 H ~ 1075-1144 CE):

إذا سألوا عن مذهبي لم أبج به وأكتمه كتمانہ لي أسلم  
فإن حنفياً قلت قالوا بأني أبيع الطلا وهو الشراب المحرم  
وإن مالكيًا قلت قالوا بأني أبيع لهم أكل الكلاب وهم هم  
وإن شافعيًا قلت قالوا بأني أبيع نكاح البنت والبنت تحرم  
وإن حنبليًا قلت قالوا بأني ثقيل حلولي بغيض مجسم  
وإن قلت من أهل الحديث وحزبه يقولون تيس ليس يدري ويفهم  
تعجبت من هذا الزمان وأهله فما أحد من ألسن الناس يسلم  
وأخبرني دهري وقدم معشرًا على أنهم لا يعلمون وأعلم  
ومذ أفلح الجهال أيقنت أنني أنا الميم والأيام أفلح أعلم

When they ask me about my madhhab, I don't declare it:

*I hide it, for concealing it is safer for me.*

For if I say I'm Hanafi, they say that I

*Permit wine, the prohibited drink.<sup>39</sup>*

And if I say I'm Maliki, they say that I

*Permit the eating of dogs, but they're the dogs.<sup>40</sup>*

And if I say I'm Shafi'i, they say that I

*Permit marrying one's daughter, which is prohibited.<sup>41</sup>*

And if I say I'm Hanbali, they say that I

*Am dense, incarnationist, hated, corporeal.<sup>42</sup>*

And if I say I'm from the people and party of Hadith,

*They say that I'm a goat who neither knows nor understands.<sup>43</sup>*

I'm amazed at this age and its people:

*For no-one is safe from the tongues of the people!*

My time has held me back and brought forward another group:

*Even though they clearly don't know, but I do know.*

But ever since the ignorant have succeeded, I have certainty that I,

*I am the M, whilst the days have torn lips, upper and lower.<sup>44</sup>*

<sup>39</sup> i.e. the minority Hanafi view that prohibited wine is only that mentioned in the Qur'an, i.e. date-wine & grape-wine; other forms of alcoholic drink, such as beer from barley or hops, are permissible.

<sup>40</sup> i.e. the Maliki view that shark-meat is permissible to eat. Shark is *dog of the ocean* (*kalb al-bahr*). The jurists differed over the permissibility of eating shark-meat, due to two conflicting texts: **Permitted to you are the catch of the ocean ...** (*Qur'an, The Last Supper, 5:96*) & **Predators with fangs are prohibited to eat** (*sahih hadith*). Most jurists gave primacy to the hadith on this issue; the Malikis differed, and allowed the consumption of shark, a type of dog, being *dog of the ocean*.

<sup>41</sup> i.e. the Shafi'i view that a man may marry his illegitimate daughter: because she is illegitimate, she is not a legitimate daughter and therefore this is not incest.

<sup>42</sup> i.e. a stereotype of Hanbalis relating to their doctrinal position about the Attributes of God.

<sup>43</sup> i.e. a stereotype of Hadith scholars that they do not understand the texts they narrate.

<sup>44</sup> A brilliant last line with wonderful wordplay: at first glance, it would appear to be saying that *the days are more successful (aflah) and more knowledgeable (a'lam)*. However, as Shaykh Shanqiti taught, Zamakhshari was using the rare meanings of the last two words, found in the great Arabic lexicons: *aflah* means torn upper lips; *a'lam* means torn lower lips. So the author is saying he doesn't fit into his times: the *M* requires both lips to meet to be pronounced, and this is impossible with both lips being torn. Furthermore, the author had used *a'lam* and *aflah* in the previous lines in their more usual senses of knowledge and success, respectively (*a'lamu*: I do know, and *aflah al-juhhalu*: the ignorant have succeeded). Thus, the brilliant wordplay and punnery.



*An Ocean From The Desert* is the first English-language biography of Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti (1325-1393 H / 1907-1973 CE), one of the greatest authorities on the Qur'an of the 20th century CE and the 14th Islamic century.

Born into a pious and scholarly family in present-day Mauritania when that country was still under French colonial occupation, Shaykh Shanqiti became one of its leading Islamic scholars. In 1947, at the age of 40, he embarked on the Hajj (Pilgrimage) journey to Mecca, travelling by land, a journey that lasted around six months. During the Hajj, he was introduced to Saudi royalty and clergy who recognised the depth of his learning and understanding of the classical Islamic sacred sciences. They asked him to stay in Saudi Arabia, and he gladly accepted, being based there for the rest of his life.

For the next decade, Shaykh Shanqiti helped to cultivate a generation of Islamic scholars and judges via his involvement with a new advanced college in Riyadh. He was also a father figure at the new Islamic University of Madinah, founded in 1961. In 1965, he led a delegation of scholars from the university on a tour of nine African countries, including his homeland of Mauritania. He was also a founding member of the Mecca-based Muslim World League (1962) and the Council of Senior Scholars of Saudi Arabia (1971).

Shaykh Shanqiti taught the entire Qur'an twice or thrice, with commentary (*tafsir*), in the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, a duty to which he was appointed by King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia. He also compiled a written *tafsir* known as *Adwa' al-Bayan (Lights of Eloquence)*, now a classic work from which a great multitude of students have benefited and continue to do so. He would say: *There is no deed greater than explaining the Book of Allah in the Masjid of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace!*

The Shaykh was revered by the public from Africa to Arabia and beyond, from the widows, peasants and poor of the Holy Lands to royalty. King Muhammad V of Morocco asked permission to accompany the Shaykh from Mecca to Medina and attended the Shaykh's lecture at the Prophet's Mosque.

He died at his home in Mecca, days after completing the Hajj of 1393 H ~ 1973 CE.

This biography mainly draws from that written by the Shaykh's leading student, Shaykh 'Atiyyah Salim, a senior judge in Madinah, who described the Shaykh as the *Shaykh-ul-Islam of his time* and commented:

*He has not died – he who leaves such a legacy!*

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