



Dhahabi's Gifts of Gold 2

SURKHEEL (ABU AALIYAH) SHARIF

TAKING FROM TEACHERS

In the biographical notice on 'Alī b. Riḍwān, a fifth century philosopher and physician, Imam Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī remarked:

“He did not have a teacher (*shaykh*). Instead, he busied himself with learning knowledge from books alone. He authored a book about acquiring a skill or craft solely by reading books and that this was more appropriate for the student. But this is wrong.”¹

Elsewhere, al-Dhahabī cites Imam al-Awzā'ī lamenting: “This knowledge used to be noble when men took it from other men. But when it entered into books, those who were not fit for it became involved in it.”²

PRAISEWORTHY TRIAL

While speaking about the severe ordeal experienced by Imam Mālik in which he was severely beaten, so much so that “his arm was wrenched out of its socket, and an enormous crime had been perpetrated against him. Yet, by Allah, Mālik never ceased being held in high repute,” Imam al-Dhahabī wrote:

“Such is the result of a praiseworthy ordeal which only serves to elevate the person's honour and esteem in the eyes of believers. Whatever the case, it is what our own hands have earned; yet Allah pardons much. “Whoever Allah intends to show goodness to, He tries him through ordeals.”³ The Prophet, upon whom be peace, also said: “Everything decreed for the believer is good for him.”⁴ Allah, Exalted is He, says: *We shall try you till We know those of you who strive and those who are patient.*⁵ The following words were revealed by Allah concerning the

battle of Uḥud: *When a disaster befell you after you had inflicted losses twice as heavy, you exclaimed: “How did this happen?” Say: “It was from yourselves.”*⁶ Allah also said: *Whatever misfortune befalls you, it is what your own hands have earned, and He pardons much.*⁷

“So a believer, when he is tried, is patient, takes admonition, seeks Allah's forgiveness and does not busy himself in blaming the one who ill-treated him. For Allah's judgement is just. Instead he should thank Allah that his faith remains intact, realising that worldly punishment is both lighter and better for him.”⁸

FALCON AMONG FLEDGLINGS

Imam al-Shāfi'ī remarked: “People are all dependents of Abu Ḥanīfah in jurisprudence (*fiqh*).” After citing these words, Imam al-Dhahabī asserts:

“Leadership in jurisprudence, along with its minutiae, is undeniable for this Imam. This is a matter about which there is no doubt:

*Intellects cannot be sound at all;
If a proof is required for the daytime.*⁹

His life would require two separate volumes to detail; may Allah be pleased with him and have mercy on him. He died as a martyr in the year 150H, at the age of seventy, after being poisoned. A huge dome has been built over him in Baghdad, and a magnificent tomb; yet Allah knows best.”¹⁰

RESEMBLANCE AND REVELATION

“Whoever resembles Allah to His creation,” said Nu'aym

b. Ḥammād, “has disbelieved, and whoever denies what Allah described Himself with has also disbelieved. For there nothing in what Allah describes Himself with, or His Messenger, that smacks of resemblance (*tasbiḥ*).” Al-Dhahabī, considering this to be “an excellent saying,” and one related through “the soundest of chains,” goes on to comment:

“What is intended is that the Divine Attributes follow on from the One being described. Now since the One being described, Exalted is He, *There is nothing like Him*¹¹ in respect of His Holy Essence, then likewise His Attributes have no comparison. For there is no difference between speech concerning His Essence and speech concerning His Attributes. This was the way of the Predecessors (*wāḥidū madhhab al-salaf*).”¹²

TRACING THE TRACES OF BARAKAH

In the section dealing with Imam Aḥmad’s manners and ways, al-Dhahabī relates the following: “Said ‘Abd Allah son of Aḥmad: I saw my father take a strand of hair of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and put it to his lips and kiss it. I believe I saw him place it on his eyes too. He also dipped it into some water and drank the water to seek cure from it. I saw him take the Prophet’s bowl, upon whom be peace, rinse it in some water, and then drink from it. I observed him drinking Zamzam water seeking a cure thereby, wiping his hands and face with it.” After citing these examples of Imam Aḥmad seeking blessings or *tabarruk* from the prophetic relics (*āthār*), al-Dhahabī unleashed this remark:

“I say: where is the extremist critic of Imam Aḥmad now? For it is authentically confirmed from ‘Abd Allah that he asked his father about those who touch the pommel of the Prophet’s pulpit, peace be upon him, and touch the Prophet’s Chamber. He replied: ‘I do not see a problem in this.’ So may Allah protect us and you from the views of the *Khawārij* and from innovations.”¹³

CONCERNING IBN TAYMIYYAH

In deliberating upon *uṣūl al-dīn* or “foundations of the religion,” al-Dhahabī cautions his readers against losing their way in the quagmire of speculative arguments, as he felt Ibn Taymiyyah had somewhat done. Thus to any who imagine that studying and refuting such matters is necessary for an individual, al-Dhahabī wrote:

“If you were to excel in the principles and its affiliates: logic, ethics, philosophy, the sayings of the ancients and the conandrum - all the while protecting yourself with the Book, the Sunnah and the principles of the *Salaf*, combining between reason and text, still, I do not think you would reach the rank of Ibn Taymiyyah, nor even, by Allah, come close to it! Yet you saw what happened to him: the attacks on him; people shunning him; accusation of misguidance, disbelief and mendacity levelled against him - rightly and wrongly. Yet before he entered into this discipline, he was beaming with light, enlightening others, bearing the marks of the *Salaf* on his face. Then, in the view of a great many people, he grew dark, lightless, and a shadow fell upon him, becoming, in the eyes of his enemies, a liar, imposter and disbeliever. In the eyes of a group of the wise and intelligent, he was an innovator, though a virtuous and meticulous researcher (*muḥtadī fāḍil muḥaqqiq bāri*). And in the eyes of the generality of his colleagues, he was the standard-bearer of Islam, the defender of the faith, and the reviver of the Sunnah; which is what I say to you.”¹⁴

Ibn Ḥajr al-‘Asqalānī offers these remarks about Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah:

“Those of his stances that were objectionable were not said by him out of mere caprice. Nor did he obstinately or deliberately persist in them after the proof was established to him. For here are his works overflowing with replies to those who held the belief of *tajsīm*; that Allah is a corporeal body, yet despite this, he was a man who made mistakes and was also correct. So that which he is correct in - which is the majority - is to benefited from and Allah’s mercy should be invoked for him due to it. As for what he erred in, it cannot be blindly followed. Indeed, he is excused for his mistakes since he was one of the Imams of his age and it has been witnessed about him that he fulfilled the conditions of *ijtibād*.”¹⁵

ON LOVERS AND LIMITS

“None of you truly believes,” runs a well-known hadith, “until I become more beloved to him than his children, parents and all of humanity.”¹⁶ It is precisely such love that compelled al-Dhahabī’s to write:

“Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im related to us ... that Ibn ‘Umar disliked touching the Prophet’s grave; peace be upon

him. I say: he disliked it, for he thought it disrespectful. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was once asked about touching the Prophet's grave, peace be upon him, and kissing it, and he saw nothing wrong in it: his son, 'Abd Allah, related this from him. If it is asked, 'Why did the Companions not do this?' We reply:

"Because they beheld him with their very eyes when he was alive; delighted in his direct presence; kissed his very hand; nearly fought each other over the remnants of his ablution water; shared his blessed hair on the day of the Greater Pilgrimage; and even if he spat, it would virtually not fall except in someone's hand so that he could wipe it over his face. Since we have not had the tremendous fortune of sharing in this, we throw ourselves on his grave as a mark of commitment, reverence and acceptance - even to kiss it.

"Do you not see what Thābit al-Bunāni did as he kissed the hand of Anas b. Mālik and placed it on his face, saying: 'This is the hand that touched the hand of Allah's Messenger; peace be upon him'? Indeed, Muslims are not moved to such acts except by their overwhelming love for the Prophet, peace be upon him. For they are asked to love Allah and the Prophet, peace be upon him, more than their ownelves; their children; all humanity; their wealth; and even Paradise and its maidens. There are even some believers who love Abu Bakr and 'Umar more than their ownelves ...

"Do you not see that the Companions, in their state of overwhelming love for the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him: 'Should we not prostrate to you?' He replied: "No!" Yet if he had permitted them, they would have prostrated to him as a mark of reverence and respect, not as a mark of worship - just as the brothers of Joseph prostrated to him. Likewise, certain Muslims prostrating to the grave of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is with the intention of honour and reverence. One is not to be accused of disbelief at all because of this; though he is being disobedient. Thus, let him be informed that this is actually forbidden, as is the case of praying towards the actual grave."¹⁷

So a true believer's love for the Prophet, peace be upon him, as deep and profound as it is, must never manifest itself in a way contrary to the rulings of the Sacred Law,

or to its *adab*; its propriety. Object we may to quantifying love as 'excessive'; for how can one ever love Allah's Beloved enough or too much? But object we must if this love is expressed incorrectly or inappropriately. Imam al-Dhahabi explains:

"One who visits the Prophet's grave, may Allah shower him with peace, and oversteps the proprieties in his visitation; or prostrates to the grave; or something else not prescribed by the Sacred Law, such a person has done good and bad. He must thus be gently taught; and Allah is indeed Forgiving, Merciful. By Allah, a Muslim is not brought to this state of disquietude or lamentation, or to kissing the walls or weeping profusely, except that he loves Allah and His Messenger: love of him being a distinctive hallmark between the dwellers of Paradise and the denizens of Hell."¹⁸

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END NOTES

1. Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1998), 18:105.
2. *ibid.*, 7:114.
3. Al-Bukhāri, no.5645.
4. Muslim, no.2999.
5. Qur'an 47:31.
6. Qur'an 3:165.
7. Qur'an 42:30.
8. *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, 8:80-81.
9. The Arabic versifies: "*laysa yaṣīḥū fi'l-adbbāni sbay'un idbā iḥtāja'l-nabāru ilā dalīli.*"
10. *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, 6:403.
11. Qur'an 42:11.
12. *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, 13:299-300.
13. *ibid.*, 11:212. Al-Mardāwī, a leading authority in the Ḥanbalī school, says about touching the blessed chamber or grave: "It is preferred not to touch the grave, according to the soundest view of the school." *Al-Inṣāf fi Ma'rīfat al-Rājibi min al-Kbilāf* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1957), 4:53.
14. *Zaghl al-'Ilm* (Beirut: Maktabah al-Saḥwah al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 42-3.
15. Cited in Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, *al-Radd al-Wāfir*, 245.
16. Al-Bukhāri, no.15; Muslim, no.70.
17. *Mu'jam al-Sbuyūkb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), no.58.
18. *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, 4:484.