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HOW AN ANGLO-GUJRATI  
MUFTI KEPT THE VOWS OF  
SHĀH WALĪ ALLĀH  
IN AMERICA

BY MOLLĀ SAALEH BASEER

*This essay is devoted to the memory of my  
great-uncle Hamid Moizuddin.*

**Title:** *How an Anglo-Gujarati Muftī Kept the Vows of Shāh Walī Allāh in America*

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*Two Scottish painter-writers, in the lifetime of all four sons of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in the late 1790s, sat outside and water-colored this painting—the buildings in the far right would have been exactly where the Walī Allāh Madrasa-Dargah would have stood.*

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فرستا صالح را به در، که متجرّی نام سردارِ مدینه است  
چو مسیح نفس، کم کرده آید به دربارِ مدینه

*Dispatch Saaleh to the gallows! For he has dared to say the Lord of Madina's name  
For even the Messiah Jesus will halt his breath when he arrives in Madina*

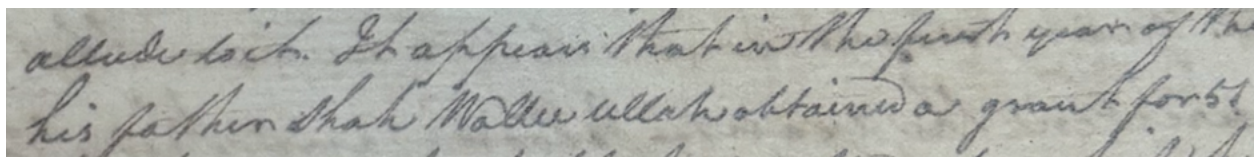
## *Prologue: The Gallows of Madina*

Fresh out of completing the six canons of Ḥadīth—the qawānin of life—in South Africa, I migrate to Chicago to begin my master's, pursuing some branded fusion of Persian literature, cultural anthropology, and Mughal history. Not even two weeks after moving to Hyde Park, I take a drab grey train—slightly more streamlined, steam-lined than BART—towards the pine tree-lined suburbs of Glendale Heights, where I would eventually live for three years amid the bolts of COVID. Entering the purple-inflected campus, I lilt towards the office where it was epigraphed, emblazoned *Shaykh Amin Kholwadia, President* and turn the metal handle.

I sit down before the Shaykh in *taḥiyyāt* position, life-gifting posture, as he holds a red-rotted powdery book, likely block-pressed in an old Indian publishing house in the 1940s that he had purchased in the village of Deoband. He eyes me, grins and says to read. I journey to the end of the Muqaddima, pausing once in the *Introduction* as our author describes seeing the soul of His lordship, the Holy Prophet, in the Shāh Jahān-built Masjid of Delhi, lording over and commanding him to write the text, in the 1750s in the same moment as Lord Robert Clive, and after him, Lord Cornwallis, began to plunder into the territorial integrity of the sons of Tamerlane, *dar arāzī-yi salṭanat-i Tīmūriyya*. The *Introduction* comes to a completion, the Arabic of Walī Allāh suspended like applause before us. The Shaykh begins:

“And Shāh Walī Allāh of Mughal India...”

My head swirls to the moment that we sat on stage in Azaadville, the day of our 'Ālimiyya graduation, when Shāh Walī Allāh's name recited out in the metallic chain, with our Bukhārī purple-paged texts lapped open before us, the *Qadīmī Kutub Khāna* ink finally shining before our eyes, in the aftermath of the logos of the Lord of Prophets.



*The first mention of Shāh Walī Allāh ever in English, in the 1800s, by the British Resident Archibald in Delhi in a petition to Lord Cornwallis.*

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In the late 1770s, for he was blind after, the grandfather of the founder of 'Tablīghī Jam'at, Muftī Elāhī Bakhsh (in other accounts, his great uncle), records that once he was praying *Tarāwīḥ* behind Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, son of Walī Allāh, some years after Walī Allāh's passing. A near-blacked-out prostitute saunters before the Shāh and begins to sing amid the recitation of the Quran amid *Tarāwīḥ* in the ancient Masjid of the Shāh Walī Allāh family, right across the castle and fort of Sultan Firoze Shāh. Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz halts his voice and the courtesan can now be heard coughing out couplets of *Lisān al-Ghayb*, or Ḥāfez of Shiraz—the boy who memorized the Quran, who then became a drunk collapsing into the streets with liquor, and then a political diplomat amid the massacres of Tamerlane, and finally the spokesman of the Ghayb:

درکوی نیکنامی مرا گذر ندادند  
اگر تو نام نمی‌پسندی، تغییر کن قضا را

*The high-reputationed didn't permit us to enter into their courtyard  
We're here—if you don't like it, change the fate of God!*

Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, sitting before Shāh 'Ismāīl and Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq (of Delhi and Mecca!) and a Scottish Anglican Resident, the first two his grandson and nephew, repeats the couplet of the prostitute, of Ḥāfez. He closes out the Majlis, beckoning to the younger Shāhs that the Mahfil has ended—and to help the elderly blind Shāh stand upright and walk to his quarters in the Mehndiyan madrasa-complex. And before he closes the door, as noted in *Kamālāt-i 'Azīzi*, he whispers a Quranic duah from his father Abraham (through *sayyidunā* 'Umar):

“All praise is due to Allāh who has gifted me 'Ismāīl and Ishāq in my old age—wahab li 'ala al-kibar 'Ismāīl wa Ishāq.”

The Walī Allāh *Khāndān*: son of Shāh Walī Allāh, a grandson of Shāh Walī Allāh, and a great-grandson of Shāh Walī Allāh, a *lalahzar*, amid the corporate regimes and the spectacle of the British Isles.



*Gateway to the sepulcher of Shāh Walī Allāh.*

## ***The Elders***

Lounging in any Deobandi bayan, 'Tablīghī, 'Ilmi, or 'Irfani, one hears mention of the word Buzurgān, or the Elders. The invocation of Elders ebbs and flows—in that in every generation the referent set seems to shift. In South Africa where I studied, it almost invariably meant Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānwī, Mawlānā Rashīd Gangōhī, Mawlānā Ilyās Kandehlawī, Mawlānā Zakariyya and Muftī Maḥmūd al-Ḥassan (literally buried in South Africa)—for this was the flavor of Deoband that had commandeered the stripe of Islam in the southernmost tip of the continent. In Pakistan, the Elders may symbolize more Muftī Muḥammad Shafi, Muftī Rashīd Aḥmed and Shabbīr Aḥmed "Usmānī, or in India it fixates on 'Allāmah Anwar Shāh Kashmir and Mawlānā Husayn Aḥmed Madanī (and of these are all sliding scales). But after pressing any Madrasa-graduate on where their tradition begins, they will say, sometimes with a smirk, but more often with a strike of humility and hopefully some arrogance and a lilted breath: *Shāh Walī Allāh*.



More than Mawlānā Thānwī, more than Mawlānā Qāsim, more than Mawlānā Rashīd, more than Muftī Shafī, more than Muftī Rashīd Aḥmed, more than Shaykh al Hind, more than even Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid and Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, more than Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḡā Khān and Pir Mehr Ali Shāh and Sayyid Nazir Ḥussein Dihlavī, more than Shibli No'mani and Abd 'al-Ḥayy al-Nadwī, nobody holds the title more pointedly and poignantly than Shāh Walī Allāh when the word Buzurgan is deployed—despite how unspoken this notion may be. Shāh Walī Allāh is buzurgvar-buzargan, the elder of elders.

What they are laboring to say is not that Sunni Islam began or reached its apogee with Walī Allāh (although many would agree), but that if anyone is to credit for their assimilation—their entombment—within Muslim scholarly sepulchers, within the semantic field of an 'ālim, it is singularly Walī Allāh. If pushed further, they will say that Walī Allāh cargoed Ḥadīth to subcontinent and was the *causa singulara* for the casting of six prophetic canons (and the monarch of Ḥadīth, Imām Mālik) in South Asia, extending its tentacles to Bradford, Chicago, and Azaadville.

But did Walī Allāh have any value beyond the narration of Ḥadīth? That was he nothing save a vessel, allowing South Asian Muslims to ground their claims in Ḥanafī orthodoxy amid the besieging majānīq of the Salafī class, namely Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya? (For we can only guess what would have remained of Ḥanafism had Muslims in Barr-i Saghir not had study of Ḥadīth and her *asānid* when the Salafīyya arrayed their siege-wagons before the castle-walls of Zāhir al-Riwaya). As the Aligarh historian, Khaliq Aḥmed 'Nizāmī, once put it in his seminal article on Shāh Walī Allāh: “Shāh Walī Allāh has ushered in a new dawn in Islam.”

### ***Walī Allāh and the Arkhes***

Walī Allāh, without hyperbole, perches over the hierarchy of all sacred traditions in South Asia, whether of Deoband, of Barelwis, of Ahl-i Ḥadīth, of the literary school Nadwa, of the Hegelian-cum-Aristotelian-cum-Ḥāfezian Iqbāl, of the enlightened liberalism (rohsan khayali) of Sayyid Aḥmed Khān, and of the Florence-like humanitas of Shibli No'mani—of the exegetical grove of Hamiduddin Farahi (for there is no doubt his idea of the Nazm originates in Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's Persian *Fatḥ*). Which is to say, to invoke God and his

Prophet in the subcontinent, one was forbidden except by the name—by the *musammā* of Walī Allāh—and his sons, as one may not invoke Tasawwuf without Junaid al-Baghdādī and Bayazīd Bistāmī, the *Arbāb-i Taṣawwuf*, and especially the lord of saints, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jeelani.

Dr. Israr Aḥmed, the ex-Jamat-i Islami loyalist, famed for a breath of fresh air on the airwaves of Pakistan preceding the century-turn and his ability to have sincere discussions with Deobandis and Barelvis—when both were Tafsiq-ing each other—is an excellent point of arrival. You can see him, navy blue in the wall gushing out behind him, as he says Shāh Walī Allāh’s name: “In Barr-i Saghir, we have had no thinker who animated the Muslim tradition like him, surpassing Abū Hamid al-Ghazālī. Yes, I said it! Even outpacing Ibn Taimiyya!”

*To love the Prophet in South Asia, one could only touch it, hold it, grapple and graze and grasp it by Walī Allāh’s Prophet-love.*

Israr Aḥmed is perfectly apt to describe Walī Allāh as a *Fātiḥ* not in the Sultan Mehmet or Aurangzēb sense, but in the meaning of one who opens an era, *Fātiḥ al-Dawr*. As Ṣadr al-Sharī’ah said in his book on Astronomy many centuries before Walī Allāh: *al-falak al-dawwar*.

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طبل درویشی ما بر در جاوید زدند بر لب بام بجز نوبت سلطانی نیست

*We beat the ‘Ṣūfī’s drums on the gates of Eternity*

*On the roof’s lip, shouting:*

*“give us kingship- this is our demand!”*

- Naziri Nishapuri (buried in Surat, Gujarat)

Hierarchy—a Greek dyad Walī Allāh would have loved—from *hierarkhēs* (ἱεράρχης) to mean a high priest, the first declension *hieros*, sacred, and *arkhes* (think of archaic), to mean ruler. A ruler of the sacred rites, a lord of sacrality, a fount of sacredness. Walī Allāh was the *arkhes* of the *heiros* in South Asia, in Afghanistan. As his three-hundred-year anniversary of journeying to the Hejaz approaches, what figure could possibly rival him in the past three

hundred years—Muḥammad Iqbāl once asked this very question as he lectured to Muslims and Mawlānā Manazir Ahsan Gilani in Osmania University.

Yet: why do we hold him in such lofty measure if his sole virtue was the transmission of ḥadīth? Why not the same for ibn Aḥmad al-Tanūkhī or ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī or anyone else in the chain? Most Deobandī graduates know so little about the figures of our Walī Allāh chain back to the Prophet—we all know of Ibn Ḥajar and Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (yet try pressing a Deobandī graduate to name one work of Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī from his sixty-book oeuvre).

Yet, in No‘mānī’s *‘Ilm al-Kalām*—the only Urdu book quoted in Muḥammad Iqbāl’s dissertation in Munich and Heidelberg—we see Walī Allāh at the end of a list that includes al-Fārābī, al-Jurjānī, al-Kindī, Ibn Rushd, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl, Mullā Ṣadrā, Bū ‘Alī Sīnā, al-Fārābī, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (and the only Ḥanafī, Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī) and Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah—all figures within the Islamic frieze, within the Islamic philosophical canon, but all personas that have shaped, directed, animated, hammered away and onto the Islamic tradition in extraordinary ways that no Muftī can claim (for the only four Muftīs who sit as proper ḥukamā’ in the frieze of history are Ibn Taymiyyah, Mawlānā Rūmī, Shāh Walī Allāh and Mawlānā Qāsim Nānotwī).

Was Walī Allāh a philosopher? If so, what kind? The kind of Ibn Rushd or of Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah or of al-Maqtūl? If Shāh Walī Allāh was such an extraordinary ḥakīm, where and what is his *ḥikmah*, his *ḥākimiyyah*? Why don’t we know about it? Where would one be?



*Aurangzēb, during the lifetime of Shāh Walī Allāh, on the march towards Haiderabad.*

### ***The Child Whose Name Was Axis***

In the early hours of a morning in the year 1702, as Aurangzēb, almost ninety, crouched on a palanquin ferried by Shi'ite Persian generals (for Aurangzēb, despite his utter love for *sayyidunā* Abū Bakr and *sayyidunā* 'Uthman, always preferred Shi'ite generals and bureaucrats over the Sunni Afghans), hundreds of miles away outside the Maratha Raigarh Fort in the strip of Pune, 500,000 Mughal soldiers before him, a scholastic of Delhi—known in late seventeenth century hagiography as Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Waiz al-'Qādirī, a popular sermonizer among the Khānqahs of Delhi—brought his baby boy to the 'Chishtī 'Šūfī grave of Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Khākī. (A 'Qādirī at a 'Chishtī grave! In an era where Naqshbandi princes killed their 'Qādirī brothers!) The Shaykh of Farīd Ganj Bakhsh, grand Shaykh of Lāl Shāhbaz Qalandar, and student of that lord of Ajmer, Mo'īn al-Dīn 'Chishtī, Bakhtiyār Khākī was buried in what would eventually be the summer palace and the basilica of the later Mughal monarchs, housing Shāh Alam II, who read Saḥīḥ Al Bukhārī from the same manuscript as Shāh Walī Allāh, the manuscripts in Patna testify.

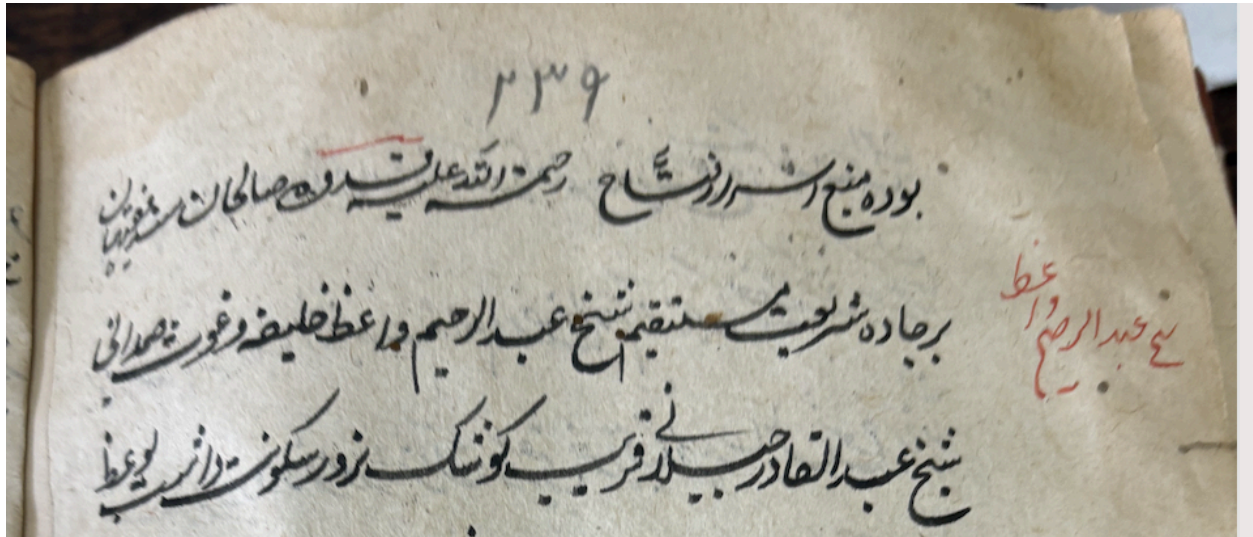


While Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, perhaps still stung by Aurangzēb’s forceful de-barring of him from the committee of Fatāwā ‘Ālamgīrī, knelt before the grave and engaged in some form of Muraqaba (and likely *Sarf-I Pir*), he heard as a voice, as narrated by both Walī Allāh and his brother-in-law ‘Āshiq Phūlātī in *Al-Qawl al-Jalī*, informing him to name the boy Quṭb al-Dīn, the axis of the religion: the earth rotating around its axis, mirroring the sun rotating her axis.

If we understand this analogy even further in post-Copernican astronomy, the idea is not that the whole world mirrors the Quṭb, but that the Quṭb also mirrors the universe. Of course in Shāh Walī Allāh’s era, most would have understood the *cosmoi* in geocentric terms, but if we grasp the name in today’s frame, we will assert the sun and the earth as the Quṭb, as Copernicus taught us, drawing on Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī and Ptolemy, and not just the earth. What is striking is that in Shāh Walī Allāh’s own live visions of *phainomenoi* he seems to understand the sun in the exact same frame. As I was perusing an astronomy commentary by the Ḥanafīte Sadr al-Sharī‘ah, *Ta’dīl al-‘Ulūm*, I was thinking of exactly how Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm must have understood this term when he named him after the great ‘Chishtī ‘Ṣūfī.

Never matter geocentrism or helio-marginalia, it stands that as Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm knelt before Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyar Khaki’s grave, cradling Shāh Walī Allāh, *the alsinā-yi ghayb* commanded him to name him the axis of the faith. And there is no scab of a doubt that, in this heavily ‘Ṣūfī praxis of naming and unseen blue voices, Walī Allāh revolved for the next few centuries, like a lancelet through a sphere, like a revolution of planets, as the theopania of Islam in South Asia, as those same theophania circled around him. Quṭb al-Dīn, a mirroring of sub-lunar spheres, a mirroring of meridians, a mirroring of epicycles.

Yet in a strike of irony—Walī Allāh defends shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya’s erasure of the Quṭbs from the Islamic tradition (“no such figures exist”). “Ibn Taimiyya had sufficient right,” writes Walī Allāh and evidence from the Sunnah to deny the existence of the *aqtāb*.



*A Mughal biographical list of Saints, written when Walī Allāh was only a teenager. His father is included amongst the living Saints of Delhi. This is the only contemporary record of Walī Allāh's father, and a flash of Walī Allāh as only a boy.*

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Some months ago, I visited that same grave with my uncle Abed, as we huddled across the musty earth upon which Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Dihlavī al-'Qādirī al-Waiz once stood. The gravekeeper, tomb-guardian, forbade us to enter unless we entered with the 'Chishtī crooked cap, the *Kaj Kulāh*—for in the tombs of the mystics, *riyā* is naught but *inkisārī*.

*That Muslim mystic with a crooked hat  
How he weeps, weeps, weeps and has no idea why  
A glance, Prophet of God, a glance if you could spare  
- Muḥammad Iqbāl*

My uncle Abed offered nazar on the name of my nani, 'Āshiq-i chiragh-i 'Chishtīyan, to the Dargah of the patron-saint of Shāh Walī Allāh's father.

## *Deoband: The City of Theos*

The mythoi of Deoband, the story of the pomegranate-tree—the sarv-i anar—that panoplied the student-and-teacher as they twinned around leather-bound texts, nastaliq letters scrawled diagonally across pages, of the Dars-i 'Nizāmī, looms as large as the very trees lining the jazira of Athens and her Acropolis. But in many ways what is neglected in this story is just how central Shāh Walī Allāh and his oeuvre were in this moment. Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī, after laboring with his unfolded hands and reed pens editing and rigging the iron presses in Saharanpur and Delhi under his manuscript drillmaster, Aḥmed Ali Sahrānpūrī, ultimately relented to the summons to accept the appointment as sarparast in a minor Qasbah, not only taught Shaykh al-Hind, after he finished the major texts of the Dars-I 'Nizāmī, but also gifted him instruction in all texts of Walī Allāh—and it was none other than Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānwī who recorded this. I find it incredibly distressing and dystopian that this element of this story is neglected in the much passe retelling that is shared across Bukhārī khatams and 'Tablīghī ecclesia. For what if the purpose, the *raison d'être*, of Deoband was Walī Allāh?

That is, the *'illa*? And Deoband, the *hukm* of the *'illa*, purposing *dawarān* (around the Quṭb) al *'illa*, with her tard and *'aks*—then must find no reason to exist without its *raison d'être*, that is, Shāh Walī Allāh and his epistemia.

For episteme—in ancient Greek, meaning to know, hails from a dual root of *epi* (meaning around or above or beyond, think of epiphany or epigraph or Episcopalian or epilepsy) and *stamai* (of the middle declension)—meaning to stand and peer over or look above. And who else peers over Deoband, that is, looms larger, than Shāh Walī Allāh? That is, who epistatai's (of the active middle mood) more than Shāh Walī Allāh in the Deoband myth?

Σαχ Οὐαλιουλλάχ ἐπίσταται τοὺς μύθους τοῦ Ἰσλάμ καὶ τοὺς μύθους τοῦ  
Δεοβάνδου.

*Shāh WaliAllāh epistatai tous mythous tou Islam kai tous mythous tou Deobandou.*

بهاران است و خاک از جلوه گل امتلا دارد  
به رگ نشتر زن از موج خرام ناز صحرا را

*So many springs! The dust of the desert is theophanied with roses  
yet cut the veins with a spear of the desert's proud waves!*

– Mirzā Ghalib (he wrote this couplet only a few streets away from Mawlānā Qāsim, where he was finishing up his *Dawrah*, in Delhi under Mawlānā Mamlūk ‘Alī and Shāh Abd al-Ghan)

## ***The Empire of Walī Allāh***

In a retelling of that ever-treating Hakim-i Jahān, Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thānwī, he recounts that Mawlānā Qāsim ordered Shaykh al-Hind—likely in between *Hedaya* and the *Siḥāḥ Sittah*—to parse each line of Walī Allāh’s thirty book library. I am at pains to stress how crucial this element is to the founding—foundering—myth of Deoband—the crescendo, apogee, culmination; the crystallizing project of Deoband was centered on the transmission of Walī Allāh knowledge. This is not simply about *al-Fawz al-Kabir* or *Hujjat Allāh al-Bālighah* but about texts like the notoriously abstruse *Lamaḥāt*, where Shāh Walī Allāh takes the Aristotelian notions of the sub-lunar, the Platonic of the ideal, the Ibn ‘Arabī and his heirs’ outlining of the Tajalliyat, the Avicennian notion of Wujūd and Mahiyya (especially in *Lamha* #2 and 3), and the Mullā Ṣadrān notion of Tashkik and synthesizes all the doctrines of Islam, offering a totally new canvas of the cosmoi and *Wujūd* and the Tajallaiyat, all while drawing on the canon of *Bukhārī* in his project!

In his Persian *Ṣaṭa’āt*—edited and published by the rather unknown student of ‘Ubaidullāh Sindhī, ‘Allāma Ghulām Muṣṭafā Qāsimi—we see that same genius deployed in the relationship of the human and the universal, the *shakhs al-akbar* and the *shakhs al-asghar*, *macrocosm* and *microcosm*, the *nasamah* and the *ruh*, the *mawalid al-Thalāthah* (Thānwī’s book is clearly a play on this), the physics and the *ghaybiyyāt* of the universe. Or in *Hama’at*, where he offers a telling of sacred history of the mystic-philosophers via (and via) Ibn ‘Arabī’s notions of theophania—or in his *Budūr al-Bāzighah*, where he addresses perhaps the most fraught concept between Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Arianism, Hellenism, and Plotinus and his followers—that what is it about sayyidunā Musa and his uncle Ibrāhīm that excels over Aristotle and Socrates and Pythagoras? (Such an inquiry had only fruitfully been attempted by his predecessor, writing in a prison in Alexandria, namely, Shaykh al-Islam Ibn



Taimiyya, and by Mawlānā Jalal al-Dīn Rūmī in his Mathnawī). Or in his multi-volume, ala Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and *Blue Book*, *al-Taḥīmāt al-Ilāhiyya*, where he addresses a medley of logical and philosophical issues that plague the four systems within Sunni and Shi'i Islam—namely discursive theology; 'Sūfism, both theoria and praxai; philosophical wisdom (*Hikmah*); and the Quran-Sunnah along with their Hanbali interpreters. I do not exaggerate in saying if just he had written one of these texts it would have been to mark him as the greatest thinker of South Asia—*fadhlan 'an Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah!*

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya wrote, sneering in *Dar Ta'arud Bayn Al-Naql wa al-Aql*:

Al-Ghazālī became irredeemably sick when he studied Greek Philosophy—and how foolish that he thought he could find a cure in Avicenna's *Shifa!* (*talab al-shifa min Shifa li Ibn Ṣīnā*).

Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī would sneer back at Shaykh al-Islam, in a letter where he accused Shaykh al-Islam of “swallowing the poison of the Greeks.”

But what if someone could dive into the urns—the Kalistos—of the Greeks and come out unashed, unlashd—what if the only thinker that escaped the curse of the Greeks and her Hellenesia was Walī Allāh of Firuzabad of Dar al-Khilafat-I Dilli? And what if Shāh Walī Allāh not only possessed the knowledge of the Greeks, but also the ancient Indians, the ancient Persians, and the ancient Arabs? And what if he was the first to do so in human history, before any antiquarian of England or France?

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Near the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> *Saṭa'āh*, or Optical Flash, Walī Allāh concludes a paragraph with:

*In Nuktah Ra bayamoz! Wa diger bah-zuban mayavar!*  
*Learn this secret! And don't you dare bring it again on your tongue!*

Shāh Walī Allāh further writes in the *al-Taḥmiat*:

And among God's blessings upon me—without boast—is that He made me the spokesman of this era, its sage, the leader of this whole generation, and the chief of it. He spoke upon my tongue and breathed into my soul; so if I speak of the remembrances and devotions of the people (of the path), I utter their essentials and encompass their doctrines entirely. And if I discourse on the relationship between the people and their Lord, its sides are drawn near to me and its expanse unfolded before me; I reach the summit of its height and grasp the reins of its course.

And if I preach about the secrets of human subtleties, I sound the depths of its ocean and seek its hidden springs; I seize its garments and hold fast to its fringes. And if I ride upon the back of the sciences of the soul and their utmost limits, I am their first discoverer—bringing forth marvels beyond counting, and wonders no understanding can encompass or hope to encompass.

And if I inquire into the knowledge of the divine laws and prophethoods, I am the lion of their thicket, the guardian of their pasture, the heir to their treasures, and the seeker of their abodes.

And how many are the subtle kindnesses of God—hidden so delicately that even the keenest mind cannot perceive them!



*A postcard portraying a street scene of Shaykh Amin's childhood city, in the 1960s.*

## *The Homecoming*

Shaykh Amin does not hail from a long line of scholars—his father was the first to enlist in the ranks of the Ulema. He was born in a small village in Gujarat, where after I asked him why his father chose the gowns of the ‘Ulema, he offered: “Upon reaching adulthood in our village in Gujarat, you, as a Muslim, could either choose to become a merchant or an Imām.” So Shaykh Amin’s father, *Mawlana Ibrāhīm Kholwadia*, packed his bags and journeyed to Deoband—literally “the sealing of the Demon” in Persian, or in Sanskrit “The Sealing of God.” The word *Deo* is an Indo-European cognate with the ancient Greek word *Theos*, where we get theology, theosophy, theocracy. Curiously, in Latin, *Deo* retained the same form across the nominative to the vocative; think of *Deus Ex Machina*. *Deo* in Persian meant demon—they were horrified by what the ancient Indians were worshipping and, upon witnessing the Indians, mockingly called their god demon. The Urdu-Persian word *Divana* is an adverbial reflection of this—literally one possessed by a demon. The Ancient Greeks had a similar word, *Daimonos*, for the exact meaning.

Upon the founding of Deoband, no set of teachers taught more theology and theosophy and law in all of India in the late nineteenth century (‘*Allāmah* Kashmīrī said as much when Rashīd Ridā visited Deoband). I wonder if Mawlānā Qāsim knew this when he emigrated there? Deoband, the city of Theos. Deoband, the city of the last dual theologian-theosophian, Mawlānā Qāsim ‘Nānōtwī (for ever since him we have only had historians of Islamic philosophy!)

Shaykh Amin’s father journeyed in the 1930s, with the independence movement picking up steam, with the headliners of both movements—Jinnah and Gandhi—hailing from Bombay and Gujarat (There is much to say why Gujarat produced the most politically prominent figures for Hindus and Muslims—and not Lahore, or Haiderabad, or Lucknow, or Dhaka). His father scorned the path of the merchant, banked in Deoband for some years and graduated with the Dastar of Deoband, studying Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī under the politically-inclined Mawlānā Ḥussein Aḥmed al-Madanī. It is curious how many of the *asanid* seem to run through him—across India, Pakistan, and English. The major sanads of Falah-I Darayn, ‘Dar al ‘Ulūm Karachi (through Muftī Rashīd Aḥmed Ludhiyanvi), and the ‘Dar al ‘Ulūms in Attock and Khyber Pakhtunwa and Azaadville and of course Deoband’s head teachers found their genos through Mawlānā Madanī. Mawlānā Madanī is of a striking legacy and character—he was the only Mawlānā of repute to challenge ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Iqbāl, often mocking him with the Persian genitive clause: Sir-I Mausuf (“The so-called Sir”)—and writing off Iqbāl’s knowledge regarding Quranic terms Qawm & Millah, with both penning Persian couplets to assail each other on conflicting notions of Pan-Islamic nationhood and localized Indian belonging. (The myth that the ‘Ulema rose in revolt against Iqbāl is precisely just that—some type of liberal fetish that people would like to believe about Iqbāl). But what was so striking Mawlānā Madanī is that he retains that one last breath of the socio-political tradition of the Walī Allāh tradition, founding political organizations of ‘Ulema, teaching Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, and dialoguing with Hindus and British staff officers on the position of Muslims in India.

Mawlānā Ḥussein Aḥmed Madanī knew he was a sayyid, but didn’t know past certain ancestor named Shan Anwar al-Ḥaqq—Shāh Walī Allāh, and Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī and Mawlānā Ḥussein Aḥmed, and Mawlānā Qāsim all have “Shāh” ancestors. Beyond that, he lamented: “we have no written documents to prove anything.” His ancestor was given a Jagir by a Mughal emperor in a certain Qasbah, where his family settled. His *Naqsh-I Ḥayāt*



reads like a third person's observation about his life, and you can see him wrestling with the old notions of Muslim self-writing and the interpenetration of the Augustinian-cum-Victorian biographical tradition that had opened up the genres of Urdu to new forms of writing oneself—as Ayesha Jalal showed in a monograph some years ago. This tension is most visibly observed in the opening pages of the book, where a standard 'Sūfī autobiography would unleash unmatched praise on one's ancestors—as we see in Walī Allāh's own *Anfās*—but Mawlānā Madanī seems to hesitate to offer the same unwavering adulation. After writing a few paragraphs on his ancestors, he launches into an apologos rife with Walī Allāh symbolism and tools, quoting passages from *Sayyid Aḥmed Shāhid Barelwī*, the general who convinced Shāh 'Ismā'īl al-Dihlawī—the grandson of Shāh Walī Allāh of his youngest son—to join him in an ill-fated (or well-fated) expedition against the Sikhs. Sayyid Aḥmed Shāhid was of course descended from the Prophet as well—and wrote about the notion of *Isti'dād*, or the latent potential available in humans in his *Iqtidā' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*. It is worthwhile to quote the whole Persian passage:

Man's existence and nature indicate that he possesses certain innate abilities and aptitudes that are essential for social and economic life. If these abilities and aptitudes are awakened and nurtured through education, training, and guidance, they can manifest as great virtues and powerful expressions of religious and worldly success. But if these aptitudes remain dormant and undeveloped, they may become sources of harm and destruction.

This human ability to unlock the potential of his ancestors in one's own life was a core theme of Shāh Walī Allāh's own life. Later on in the biography, the only time Mawlānā Madanī mentions Walī Allāh, is where he lists out the Niṣāb of Deoband, which was just the Farangi Mahal curriculum, and then concludes that “Well, this was just the curricula of the Walī Allāh family!”—and not mentioning the genealogy to the Frankish Palace masters. He in many ways was a final reader of the entire Walī Allāh oeuvre—who saw all the Walī Allāh silhouettes, that is, the final worthy *turāth* of the Ummah.

آيينهٔ سگندر جام می است بنگر  
تا بر تو عرضه دارد احوالِ مُلکِ دارا

*The mirror of Alexander is the cup of wine — behold therein,  
That it may display to you the epochs of Dārā's empire.*  
– Ḥāfez-i Shirāzī

## ***The Birth of a Scholar***

The first of Walī Allāh's ancestors to emigrate to India was Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Al-Muftī, who fled the political violence ensuing in the aftermath of Shāh 'Ismā'īl Al-Safavi's reign from Persia to India. He established a Madrasa, and served as Muftī of the town, hailing his lineage as connected to sayyidunā 'Umar. His son and grandson both preferred the life of war, and did not follow their line into knowledge. The grandfather of Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh Wajih al-Dīn, son of Shaikh Muḥammad Mu'azzam, chose the life of a military soldier and joined the civil war between Aurangzēb and his younger brother, Shāh huja, where he joined the forces of the former, lauded as a flagstone soldier on that day, for impeding the tide of a crazed elephant of Shāh Shuja's army. He was later killed in a firefight between him and a group of bandits.

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Once, when Shāh Walī Allāh, as a boy, was observing Wudu in the great suburb of palatial masonry, Firuzabad, the former and now-fallen capital of India, his mamu, looked at him performing Wudu. The uncle, a certain Rafī'al-Dīn, and a descendant of Shāh Abd al-'Azīz (Shakar-Bar and of whom Shāh Walī Allāh would name the first son of his second wife), the Sugar-Bearer, peered at him, and exclaimed "Thank Allāh! The raaz, the mystery, of our family continues through the mother's line, my sister, (for this was the mother's side of Shāh Walī Allāh) and not through me or my brothers!" Why his Mamu spoke these words is unclear, it seemed that Shāh Walī Allāh performed the ritual with a certain 'Chishtī 'Ṣūfī flair of which his uncle deciphered with ease—the idea, of course, is that 'Chishtīs because of the *roshnāyī*, scintillatia, of their lives—such as the Sugar-Bearer—still hold a raaz in their line, of which one can awaken in the genealogy again. How many times this raaz can be activated is of course a secret of the Hukama—but Shāh Walī Allāh's maternal uncle knew that the mystery would be unveiled at least once more—through the blood of Shāh Walī Allāh. We also know that in Shāh Walī Allāh's *Anfās*, or the Breaths, that Shāh Walī Allāh, because of

his noble maternal lineage, gave lofty attention to his mother's blood—for the Tajalliyat do not distinguish genders. And Shāh Walī Allāh saw himself as the raaz of the Sugar-Bearer, and of many others, calling himself *the Qayyim al-Zamān*, the one who overlooks the era, or even, as Taha Abderrahmane would say, one who gives norms to the era.

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Shaykh Amin journeyed to Gloucester, England as a small child, and his father represents perhaps the first of South Asian (or really all Muslim) Ulema who fathered children in English-speaking lands—for when Shaykh Amin was born, students were just starting in South Africa to learn about the myths of Deoband and 'Ilm (a consequence of Tabligh, as I learned from dozens of octogenarians across Johannesburg and Durban).

Shaykh Amin told me Mawlānā Ḥussein Aḥmed Madanī's son specifically ordered Shaykh Amin's father to ensure his children excelled in English—did Mawlānā Madanī know how crucial this would be? This shift in positioning? I say this because when you read the epistles of 'Ulema in the 1820s and the Minutes of British policy in the 1870s on education policy, the Muslim gentry and their scholarly counter-parts were fixated on this question of English (and often seemed to scorn the idea sans Shāh Abd al-'Azīz and Mawlānā Qāsim).

Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, son of Shāh Walī Allāh, had written in a legal decree that there was no sin if Muslims studied English, insofar they didn't learn it out of a rosy-tainted desire to become English. And as the nana of Mawlānā Ilyās Kandehlawī writes, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz would entertain the Anglican and Protestant residents of Delhi, quizzing them about America and Aristotle (even learning about the meridians of the east coast, i.e., Boston and Rhode Island, so as to ascertain namaz times in America from a certain British redcoat who had fought against the American Revolutionary Army!)—picking up some English words along way, and encouraging his son, Mawlānā Abd al-Ḥayy, to also learn and work with the British colonial power as a judge to oversee Muslim personal legal decisions, with Muftī Sadr al-Dīn Azurda—the only poet who dared to challenge Mirzā Ghalib in suKhān-tarzi. From the hundred years between Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thanvi, not one scholar, to my knowledge, knew English in any considerable capacity besides some technological words and phrases (in the way the modern Deobandi graduate knows Persian). The rare exception to that was Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwī, who on the

encouragement of Mawlānā Shibli and Iqbāl, pursued English enough to write two academic articles (one on Ibn Taimiyya's Critique of Ghazālī, Rāzī, and Avicenna) in the newly-minted journal of Haiderabad, spearheaded by Marmaduke Pickthall, *Islamic Culture*. (In a letter to Iqbāl before their trip to the last Afghan Ghazi, Nadir Shāh, Mawlānā Nadwī penned to Iqbāl about his endeavor to master English, and how much he was struggling).

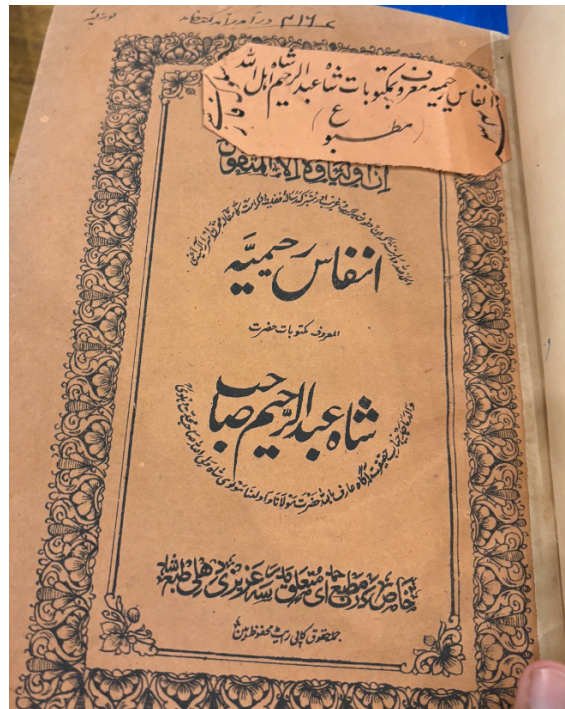
Another exception seems to be Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī. Although the narrative, cemented by the Osmania University theology head Mawlānā Manazir Gilani, endorses the idea that Mawlānā Qāsim moved to Delhi College—the former site of the first Nizam of Haiderabad's Medrese—simply to study privately under Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī 'Nānōtwī (whom the later Deobandis had to concede was a full professor at the massively colonial and anti-Islamic college) without attending any of the college classes, other correspondences with his first-cousin Mawlānā Ya'qub 'Nānōtwī and his own biography of his cousin, seem to suggest otherwise; that Mawlānā 'Nānōtwī was enrolled in the Colonial college, studying under European Orientalists (and Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī), where he learned a great deal about manuscripts that had collected in Berlin (for the Delhi College had just hired a great German Orientalist when Mawlānā Qāsim arrived). They based it off that his name didn't appear in the exam rosters, but it is very possible that Mawlānā Qāsim, through Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī, was allowed to audit classes. Further, it is clear from the *Tarikh-i 'Dar al 'Ulūm Deoband* that Mawlānā Qāsim was perfectly okay with students studying English and modern sciences. The only reason that Mawlānā Qāsim didn't have English in Deoband is because it would overstretch the student. Mawlānā Qāsim declared quite plainly:

“If the students of this madrasa (i.e., Deoband) join government schools to study modern sciences that will only shore up their accomplishments.”

Moreover, if one studies the routines and the structure of the Delhi College (up until the Mutiny) and of Deoband, as Shaykh al-Hind recounts, and later Mawlānā Ḥussein Madanī, one will find more similarities in institutional structure between Deoband and the colonial college than the *Madrassa Raḥīmiyya*! As one can read from his *Mabāḥith-i ShāhJahānpuri*—Mawlānā Qāsim, just as Mawlānā Shibli No'mani had done slightly after him, familiarized himself with several writings of the Orientalists, especially on philosophy. Mawlānā Qāsim was no historian like Ibn Hajar or al-Maqrizi and you can pinpoint singular philosophical interest in all of his rulings in life—in his *Taqrir-i Dil-Pazir* he proceeds and

outlines various ‘*aql*’ in a critique that would seem as an obvious rejoinder to Immanuel Kant (for Taha Abderrahmane, clearly not a reader of Urdu, employs the same method as Mawlānā Qāsim in outlining various intellects in response to Kant hardening all of natural phenomena into an *al-aql al-mujarrad*, or as Mawlānā Qāsim says, a hundred and twenty years before Taha, an *aql-i Nārasā*). We can say without question that *The Critique of Pure Reason* had not been translated into Urdu or Arabic then.

In many ways, Mawlānā Qāsim—of course we are talking post *sarv-i anar*—had to make a decision about the didactic structure of the school: would the new sapling-Medrese spurn what he observed in the colonial, Anglican-proselyting institution of Delhi College in utter Taqlid of how premodern Madrasas operated (in a classic switch-and-bait, when Deobandis lecture on another Madrasa of the past, say, the Mustansiriyya or the Shāhrukhiyya they often intend how they experienced Madrasa in a post-‘Nānōtwī’ climate, but this couldn’t be further than the truth). Or, would Mawlānā Qāsim, suggesting that such teaching would contain the spirit of his Walī Allāh masters and the form of the Afranj? Such decisions had to be made with the authors of the Meccelle and the structure of Revolutionary-France Civil Law—the answers have already revealed themselves to us.



*Shāh Walī Allāh’s father’s letters.*



## *Hagios and Graphos*

We know about Walī Allāh from primarily three sources—one of his own hand, another of his brother-in-law-cum-first-cousin-cum-khalifa, Mawlānā 'Āshiq, and of the mythoi penned down by Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz. There are of course many tales—thousands—but of historical writing, these are unmaimed, untainted. Walī Allāh began with Persian, reading Saadi and Ḥāfez—before moving with his father, as *didaskolos* and *mathetos*, teacher and student, to how Mughal education began—the education of prince and Muftī did not differ until specializātion (as Makdisi and Hallaq show in the Abbasid, Ottoman, and MamlūkePOCHS)—which is Arabic grammar, prosody, then beginning Fiqh texts, then Aristotelian logic, then Kalām, then Tafsīr then advanced Fiqh texts (of course, al-Hedaya, although he didn't complete it), then Persian philosophy texts by Shi'ites (Ibn Sīnā, Mullā Ṣadrā, Mir Damad), then Astronomy/Astrology, then advanced Uṣūl, especially Talwih, then more Tafsīr. And then—what every 'Aalim knows—concludes with Mishkat al-Masabih by the scholar who shares a neighborhood with Shams Tabrezi.

But what is striking about Walī Allāh's study with his so-adored—and so-adoring—father was that he also taught Walī Allāh the *Fuṣūṣ* of 'Ibn 'Arabī and the *Nafahat* by that peer of Mir Ali Navai, namely, Mawlānā Jami—a notoriously challenging text, a more detailed Persian version of the *Fuṣūṣ*, but grounded in the Persian tradition of Rūmī—a sort of fusion of both. This means that, by the age of seventeen, Walī Allāh had run a complete circle around whatever South Asia held of scholasticism in Mughal India. More research is needed to ascertain how common this was—I defer to Mawlānā Uwais Namazi here—but in biographies of scholars like Mullā Jiwan, Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmed Gangōhī, we don't see any mention of this training of Shaykh al-Akbar or of al-Maqtul—nonetheless it remains that Walī Allāh had witnessed all of Islam (and especially its scholastic breath and breadth)—by the time he was 15. A few years later, Shāh Abd al-Raḥīm, known in the suburbs of Delhi as the The 'Qādirī Sermonizer, died, catapulting Shāh Walī Allāh over his physician brother, Shāh Ahl Allah, as the head of the small madrasa-college in Firuzabad.

I've made the walk from Shāh Walī Allāh's home to the Jama Masjid, yellow-green rickshaws and gaggles of doves shuttling around filthy fountains, where Old Delhi spills out into a short hill, near a Hajj agency for Indian Muslims, several times. If one pores through the Mughal chronicles of the period, one would be haunted by the guns to know how much

political violence was unfolding in the hour walk from Walī Allāh's home to Aurangzēb's—a distance as far as Lombard and Glendale Heights or Fremont and Newark. Aurangzēb's eldest son, conqueror of Haiderabad, Muazzam Shāh Bahādur Shāh, The First, turned on Sunni orthodoxy and mandated that Imām 'Alī, alayhis salam, be mentioned as the Wasi of the Prophet in Jumma Khutbas, angering the Muftīs of Lahore, who assembled in an Ijtimā'i duah and quite literally prayed for his downfall and death—Walī Allāh was nine. Moazzam Shāh was dead four months after the Lahori invocation. The Delhi capital spiraled under the weight of city chaos, Ashōb-i Shahr.

Only four years before the Lahori Muftīs, Walī Allāh would have seen Muazzam's victorious troops galloping ('*adiyat*) through the city, with the emerald-green flag that depicted Ibn 'Arabī symbolia as a cartoonish sun, after executing Aurangzēb's chahitay, namely, Shāhzod 'Āzam Shāh, and thousands of Mughal soldiers with them. Upon Muazzam's Muftī-prayed-for death, his own sons then launched into war amidst the environs of Delhi—where Jahāndar Shāh, “the least effective Mughal prince,” as Muzaffar Alam put it to me when we were reading the *Ma'āsir-i Ālamgīrī*, defied all pretensions of the Mughal cultural norms that scholar and prince had cultivated for six hundred years in Hindustān, and openly bathed with his Hindu consort-dancer in the 'Šūfī shrines of Delhi, *dar ḥālat-i nangī*, without clothes, hoping for a baby boy, and for the first time opened to the Mughal palace all other regents!

*Ḥafīd-i Ālamgīr*, the grandson of Aurangzēb—second eldest son of his eldest son.

شکستگانیم، ای باد صبا، برخیز  
باشد که باز بینیم دیدار آشنا را

*We are shipwrecked, oh furious wind rise up!*  
*May we see the face of a lover at home, yet again!*  
– Ḥāfez

Within a year, the son of the executed prince 'Āzam Shāh, Farrukhsiyar, great-grandson of Aurangzēb, rode out from Bengal, Farrukhabad, taking help from two Shi'ite generals, the “Sayyid Brothers,” and challenged his Taya outside Agra, executing him and turning the Mughal realm chaos-frenzied yet again—before his execution the nephew addressed his father's brother, scathingly: What right did you have to kill my father? For we are all of Tamerlane's blood.

And, yet, a few years later, after the Nizam of Haiderabad, Mir Qamar al-Dīn Khān, (grave-fellow of Aurangzēb) knew matters had totally gone south for saltanat-i Taimuriyyan, told Farrukhsiyar that these generals were attempting to oust all the capable governors of Hindustān, and to keep them in check—a sort of proto “maintain the separation of powers” counsel. And so, Farrukhsiyar obeyed the last general of Aurangzēb—keeper of the last Mughal dynasty, namely of Haiderabad—where it cost him his life. The Sayyid brothers padlocked Farrukhsiyar in a white marble structure in the middle of the Mughal fortress-palace in Delhi, where they barreled the door from outside, forbade him from water, but grudgingly handed him a Quran, allowing Farrukhsiyar to spend his final days with Surah Yaseen, bi āb, as the Mughal chroniclers weep to us on parched pages.

Farrukhsiyar was taken out and cast unclothed, his eyes blinded with a dagger, on the streets only a few miles away from Walī Allāh’s home. A dead king on the streets. Such had rarely been occasioned, sans when ‘Abdullah bin Zubayr was crucified by Hajjaj bin Yūsuf—or when the Jānissaries rose up in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and executed their monarch in the Sublime Port, with the rising pressure and his preference for the Senbacks, the paramilitary musketeers. Two Zill-i Ilahi whose shadows ceased on the streets! All within a few years. The end of Dawlat and Devlet, at once!

Walī Allāh had only just recently assumed the reins of his father’s madrasa-school. In just twelve years, while thousands of Muslims and Hindus murdered thousands of Muslims and Hindus, as one son of Aurangzēb battled another, as one grandson battled another, as uncle went after the throat of his nephew, just an hour walk from the imperial palace, Walī Allāh had learned all of Islam that was available to a Ḥanafī in a Ḥanafī-bleeding realm, that is, a realm bleeding Ḥanafīs, a realm where Ḥanafīs bled. What remained?

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What was left was of course was the six books of Ḥadīth, and the knowledge of the North Africans—and, perhaps most consequentially, the knowledge and barakah and the mythic jurist and gnostic, Mālik bin Anas (we shudder when we say his name, as Walī Allāh would), and the savant of Syria, Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya (I don’t buy K.A. ‘Nizāmī’s point that Ibn Battuta spread Ibn Taimiyya in the Delhi courts). These two figures, along with Imām

Bukhārī, would transform Walī Allāh and Islam from Kabul to Dhaka, from Mazar-I Sharif to Haiderabad for the next three hundred years. And as two more sons of Aurangzēb, hand-selected by the Sayyid brothers, traded spots on the Peacock Throne, and then in the coffins, after each monarch took the Ḥanafī fatwa on permissibility on opium from the Central Asian Muftīs a little too seriously—both overdosing to death, twenty-two and twenty-three.

Six years later, despite protests from his mother and all of his close Khāndān, Walī Allāh departed Delhi and her prince-madness with his brother-in-law and journeyed to Surat, Gujarat—as Taqdīr would have it—Ulema from this barricaded, trade-port city would be more influential than anywhere else in India for transporting Walī Allāh’s knowledge to South Africa, England, and the United States of America. The year was 1729—and Ḥanafī prince after Ḥanafī prince had fallen (For the only figure who remained uncriticized and untouched in Mughal India was Imām Abū Ḥanīfah—even Dārā Shukōh, killed for apostasy, always wrote his name as al-Ḥanafī). The revolution from Badshahi to Dervishi had begun its final stage in the grand sweep of Indian history.

The first was between Sultan al-Awliya and Sultan Alauddin Khilji.

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*Masiha! Dar dilam paida! Man Baimar Gardam*

*O, Jesus! Come alive in my heart, for I roam around the city utterly sick*

- Mawlānā Rūmī

### ***The Death of the Scholar, the Birth of the Saint***

Shāh Walī Allāh journeyed from Delhi across the northern belt of Hindustān, into Rajasthan, where he arrived in Surat, through thoroughfares notorious for Jats (who would slit your throat for a few rupees). Accompanying him was his loyal scribe and witness and Khalifa and first cousin and brother-in-law Mawlānā 'Āshiq Phūlātī (Walī Allāh was not born in Delhi but in Phulat, where remains a small memorial site dedicated to him and his father). When Walī Allāh and 'Āshiq had arrived at Surat, to their crushing disbelief, they

learned that the boats had already sailed for Hajj! What to do? Defeated but content with their *maqadir*, they returned to Delhi. Walī Allāh's mother had discouraged Walī Allāh from journeying for the Hajj—Mawlānā 'Āshiq observes dutifully—but this is where we learn about the most world-defying moments and dreams ever to occur in human history. Walī Allāh informed his mother that he dreamt he was commanded to proceed to the Hajj—and so despite her protests, likely stemming from a *mélange* of fears about the unprecedented violence emerging from the fissures in the Mughal imperial realm, Walī Allāh exited Hindustān, his birth and death country, country of life-and-death sentences for Muslims.

But also—there must have been something about Walī Allāh receiving a stipend from the Mughal state for teaching, as *madad-i Ma'ash*, from rent-free lands, and so if he had departed, would that revenue have ceased? This seems a likely possibility for why Walī Allāh's full younger brother, Shāh Ahl Allāh, stayed behind (hallucinatively similar is when Muḥammad Iqbāl left Lahore for Cambridge, and his brother remained behind to work to sponsor Iqbāl's study in Germany and England).

Walī Allāh, undeterred, in full blustering view of his Taqdīr and the conviction of his dream and command from the Lord of Prophets, returns to Surat the following year, with just his brother (this time leaving his Murid Nurullah Bandhanwi behind), trailing across both desert and rogue military bands, where, one night, upon reaching Aḥmedabad, he sees a dream of the Prophet, and, later, of Imām Ḥassan and Imām Ḥussein—the contents of the dream are perhaps too controversial to pen here, but I had first learned about the dream during my first meeting Shaykh Amin, where before we started Ḥujjat Allāh, he mentioned this dream. It would be three years before I found the exact reference for dream—and it displays Walī Allāh a man full of internal contradictions, a man rife with doubts about the presentations of Sunni orthodoxy as he had received in Mughal India, and for whom, only the Prophet and his grandchildren could offer a panacea—as a full-blooded descendant of sayyidunā 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.

Needless to say, the Prophet's words consoled Walī Allāh, and he and his brother-in-law caught the season of Hajj, and they sailed towards Jedda, likely passing through Karachi and Aden, before docking, disembarking at Jedda (The same route for Muḥammad Iqbāl!). his nautical journey would transform the lives of hundreds of millions, in almost every domain



of life—and of Islam in America, England, and South Africa. This journey would also transform the life of a Gujarati boy from Gloucester and the Taqdīr of Islam in America.

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Shaykh Amin was, up until the age of sixteen, in boarding schools in England. After he completed his O-levels—and likely the first Mawlānā to study Ciceronian Latin—he journeyed to India for what would be a decade-long study in India and Pakistan. He split his time between five Madrasas; first in Gujarat, then Bangalore, then in Karachi, then in Deoband, then in Bihar—different corners of the subcontinent (such cross India and Pakistan study is shocking, considering this was after the '65 war, where the Indo-Pashtun Ayyub Khān ensured the forever-deterioration of relations between India and Pakistan).

When Shaykh Amin left for the old world, *alam-i Qadim*, so many various intellectual movements had sprung across the Muslim world, namely, Pan-Arabism, Center-Left Socialism, Far-Left Socialism, Mao-inflected Marxism (Arab guerrilla Habashites reading the “Red Book”), and in some countries, who were lucky, laissez-faire Capitalism (Pakistan from '47-71), and as the students of Heidegger and Michel Foucault (like Hannah Arendt and Henry Corbin) were causing a new philosophical revolution in the social sciences, both in America and the Third World. Of course, the question of Palestine had reached its boiling point with the colossal defeat handed to Ḥāfez al-Assad and Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser—this is also when Edward Said had just completed his PhD at Harvard, and Fazlur Rahman, the noted Pakistani intellectual, had been expelled from Pakistan by the Ayyubists, and took up a post at McGill in Montreal. There is little doubt that Shaykh Amin, having received a fair education, could have applied to colleges in England and America—but, like his father, chose the path of the gown and the dastar.

In my four years with Shaykh Amin, the teacher who influenced Shaykh Amin beyond all bounds was a son of Madras, of the Nawabs of Arcot, namely, Mawlānā Mīrān. Mawlānā Mīrān, in angles that are still unclear to me, had accomplished what most of his Mawlānā colleagues had not, which is a full study of the ‘*Ulūm* of Shāh Walī Allāh, and his forbears, a *tatabbu’* of the masadir of Walī Allāh. Shaykh Amin was not the first student of Mawlānā Mīrān I studied under. Another of his students is Muftī Mudassir, who was the resident-scholar in my local Masjid, and under whom I did Hifz. Relaying a vignette from

the City of Gardens, he noted with a slight grin once that they had a logic-philosophy class with him first thing in the morning, in Sabil al-Rashad, the name of their Medrese, and holding a jug of cold water, he would test the students on their knowledge of the Hayula, or hylomorphism, so discussed in *Kalām* and *Felsefe* texts—and if they couldn’t define the Hayula, Mawlānā Mīrān would spill a little cold water on the students in the frigid Bangalore morning (Muftī Mudassir didn’t tell me if he got water’d). I’ve been thinking about the symbolism of this incident after encountering a Persian passage in Walī Allāh’s *Al-Taḥīmāt*—where Walī Allāh in such eye-popping collision of the world of Ḥadīth and Perso-Greek philosophy, takes the statement of his lordship, the Holy Prophet, about ‘ama and the Quranic verse wa-kana-arshuhu ‘ala al ma- and argues that it is very possible that the water alluded to here is the hylomorphism, the *ethera* and *materia* of the universe. That perhaps the Greeks still had some remnants of prophecy (or at least al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd thought) and thus, by deploying the Quran as the ultimate critic, al-Furqan (for critique and furqan have a similar etymological field for Ancient Greek and Arabic)—so Walī Allāh had written. And when Mawlānā Mīrān was spilling droplets on the Sabil al-Rashad students, in a stroke of metaphor, he was in fact spilling *hayula* on them. For those who read Walī Allāh, they know their lives are transformed forever—for now, the stream begins from a different rivulet.

*Ba-har dam wali Allāh, har ān walli Allāhi bashad!*

*Every breath is the saint of God, every moment is Walī Allāhi.*

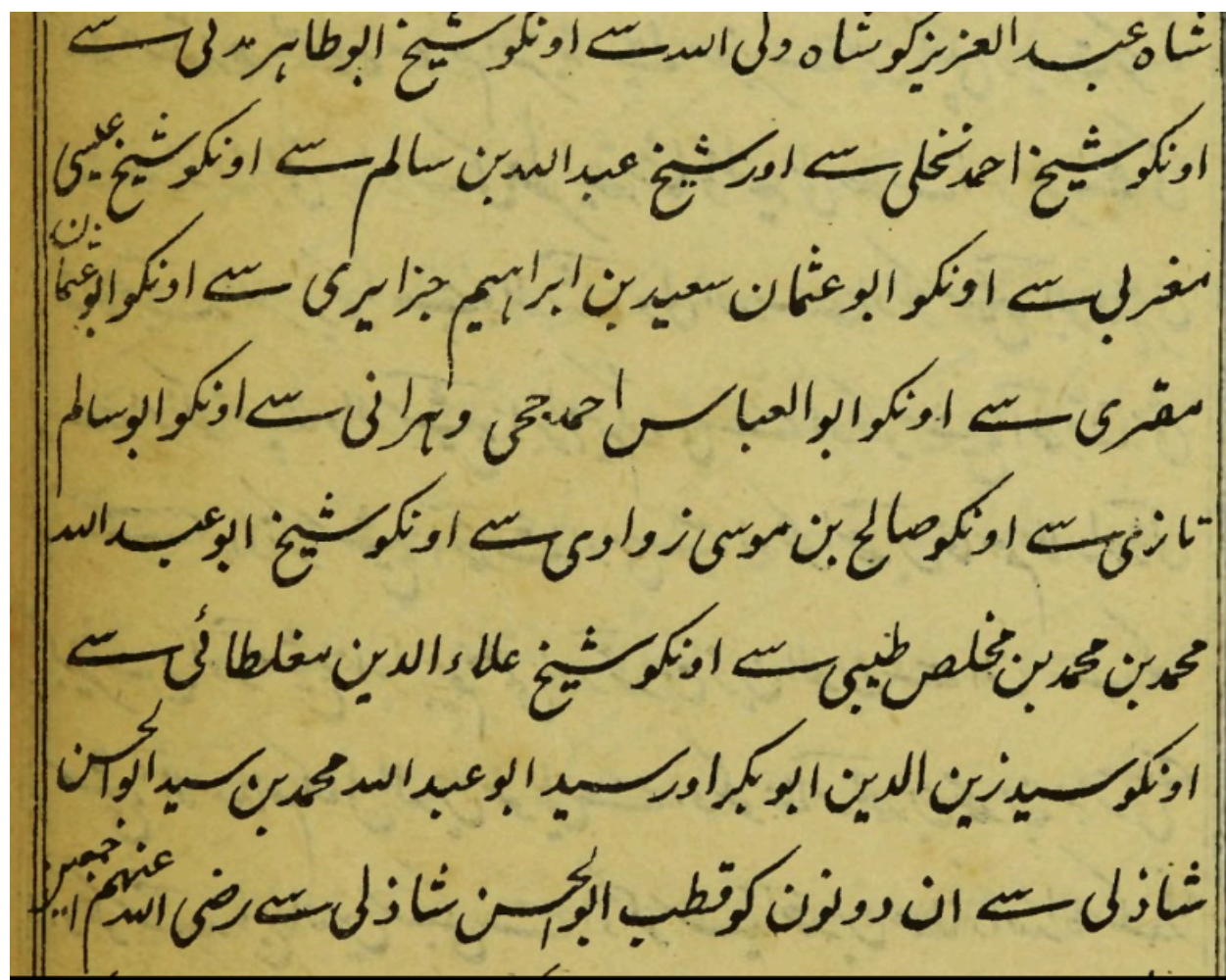
Mīrān is an Arabic-Persian word, from the hyperbolic scale of Al-Amir, to mean exceedingly commanding or exceedingly commanded, with the Persian plural form of alif-nun, coined in the Seljuk Era of Persian political norm-making. Mīrān to mean commanders, where the alif was hyphenated, for in Islam the letter mim is the most beloved letter, after our lord, the Holy Prophet. Only two figures in history are known by this name, namely, his holiness, ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jeelani, and the great-grandfather of Bābur, first Mughal king, the governor of Azerbaijan, and son of Tamerlane.

Although Shaykh Amin was not an ‘Alīm then, Mawlānā Mīrān clearly saw something in Shaykh Amin that he didn’t see in other students—and began to gradually induct him into the mirrored halls of the Walī Allāhi family, but also the Greater Shaykh, Ibn ‘Arabī.

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Muftī Mudassir, after narrating the story, then lowered the voice amid the symphony of kids memorizing the Quran in the background (of which I used to be one) and said: *you know, Saaleh, when I had made my decision to leave Bangalore and migrate to California, I went to my teachers in Sabil al-Rashad and sought counsel. Mawlānā Mīrān told me to make sure I seek counsel from Shaykh Amin in America. I was shocked by this because there are many more Sabil al-Rashad graduates in America, some who live in Devon. Why Shaykh Amin?*

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Shāh Walī Allāh's Sanad to Abū al-Ḥassan al-Shadhili.

When Shāh Walī Allāh arrived in Arabistan, as the Ottomans called it, and it was firmly under their suzerainty, a Sudanese Mālikī ‘ālim had a dream ordering him to find Walī Allāh—he had been a resident in Hijāz for quite some time, as ‘Ulema would reside after the pilgrimage, offering all scholars a sort of non-stop symposium for them to share ideas and their intellectual traditions with each other. Mawlānā ‘Āshiq writes that as Shāh Walī Allāh entered into the gathering of scholars in Mecca, one of the Arab teachers asked if he could speak Arabic before he joined the circle. Shāh Walī Allāh, in humility, writes Mawlānā ‘Āshiq, responds “I know a little.” Shāh Walī Allāh is then able to impress the gathering of Arab and West African scholars with his command of Arabic, engaging in various Kalām and Ṣūfī discussions. It is challenging to unravel this anecdote, but it does speak to perhaps larger perceptions of the Islamic world towards Indian scholars in the 18<sup>th</sup> century—were Indian ‘Ulema poor at speaking Arabic? Even today, despite the global availability of cassettes and Youtube across decades, the vast majority of scholars from India and Pakistan still struggle to speak Arabic—and even if they do, they speak it with a deeply-colored Urdu accent (and these are teachers of Ḥadīth). That is, how was Shāh Walī Allāh already fluent in speaking Arabic in Mughal Delhi? And did he have a strong Persian accent? We will never know, but we know his Arabic and his knowledge of the tradition must have been worthy enough for him to be allowed into private study with the Arab and North African scholars who taught him. What is it about the Mughal Madrasa that produced such a boy, such a scholar? And what is it about the modern Madrasa in India and Pakistan that it fails? Could a fresh Madrasa graduate from Pakistan or South Africa speak in fluent intellectual Arabic on *Sharḥ al-Aqā’id* or the *Fuṣūṣ*?

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Mawlānā ‘Āshiq notes that as he and Shāh Walī Allāh set sail from Surat, Shāh Walī Allāh was fulfilling his “childhood yearning” to study Ḥadīth and its chains. When I read this passage I was so struck—in that it moved me more than other points of this part-autobiography and part-biography, because I could imagine Shāh Walī Allāh’s father, Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, teaching him Arabic, taking him to ‘Ṣūfī shrines and Zikrs, where they recited Persian poetry in praise of the Holy Prophet, and how Shāh Walī Allāh must have been utterly enchanted by the Holy Prophet as only a boy. To adore the Prophet in childhood, to desire to learn every single word and particle of the Prophet—the ‘Chishtīyya are singularly known for this miracle. And whether that love of the Prophet was cultivated

from his father or mother, and likely both—but those who study the 'Chishtīyya, and especially Khwāja Moinuddin 'Chishtī and Sultan Nizam al-Dīn Awliya, will realize the absolute reverence in which they beheld the Prophet—I would not be speaking out of turn if it was unmatched in history. And Shāh Walī Allāh's mother line, as noted above, was directly descended from the great 'Chishtī of Delhi, namely, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz Shakar-Bār. We may say this 'Chishtī adoration still held even until Shāh Hakeem Muḥammad Akhtar's lifetime, for those who studied in his poetry can still witness that 'Chishtī love of the Payambar.

When they arrived in Madina, from Mecca after performing the rites of Hajj (they had upheld the vow of *Tamattu'* and not *Qiran*), we may only imagine the longing that Shāh Walī Allāh held for the Lord of the Prophets as he arrived on camels into the azure-green city. After offering salam to the Holy Prophet, he asked the Holy Prophet if he could receive some *faydh* that Allāh had bestowed on him, something to help him understand the mysteries he was seeking from *Tadallī* and *Tajallī*. Per Mawlānā Āshiq, Shāh Walī Allāh did not merely want any Ḥadīth teacher, but he sought someone who was also grounded in Sufism—which is to say, Ibn 'Arabī. After hearing about the reputation of Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī, and his letters to Indonesian Muslims, on Shari'ah and Tasawwuf, and his tightrope walk between the knowledge of Ḥadīth and Ibn 'Arabī and, of course, shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya, he sought out his son, namely, Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdi al-Kurānī. Over the course of a year, Mawlānā Āshiq notes, he and Shāh Walī Allāh recited Ḥadīth in forty-or-so sessions, where they alternated with Abū Ṭāhir, in reading the texts—they read Ḥadīth after Ḥadīth right across the grave of the Holy Prophet, and, the *Musnad* of Al-Darimi right in front of the 'Uthmani minbar (which still exists today—I tried to take a picture of it, where a Saudi guard berated me and made me delete it, because he thought I was photographing him). More details can be found in the Persian biography as well as Shāh Walī Allāh's *Insān al-'Ayn fi Mashāikh al-Ḥaramayn*, which doesn't seem to have circulated much in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries or even the twentieth century—and so, after reading the Deobandi literature I was shocked when Mawlānā Bilal showed me a copy he just purchased.



## *How We Forgot Our Vows*

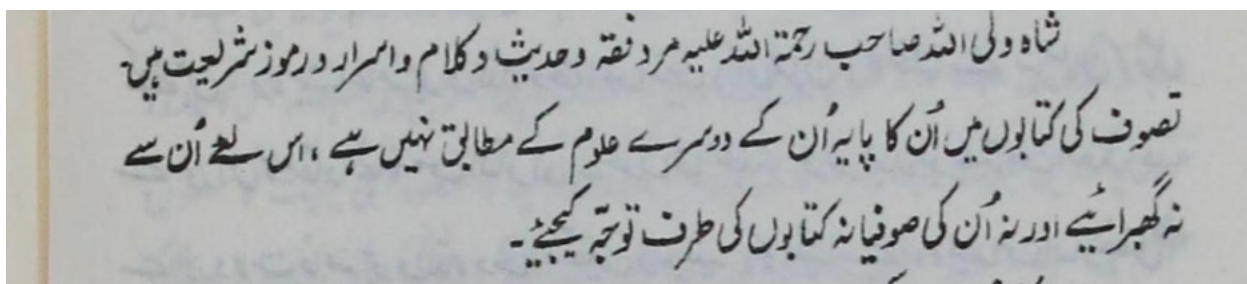
Recently I was in Corona, a high-montane (and low-octane) city split between Orange County and Los Angeles, where I was spending time with my Mamu's kids. My uncle told me that the 'Ijtima was happening—and I was curious to see how 'Ijtimās and their overall vision had developed in America since my dad would take me dutifully every year as a boy. The headlining speaker was visiting from India and was staunchly anti-Mawlānā Saad. One of the Mawlānās from Sacramento had taken my hand and introduced me to the visiting Mawlānā. The Mawlānā from Stockton, close to seventy, said, “this boy studies the Walī Allāh family!” The 'Tablīghī Mawlānā—“I graduated from Deoband,” he said with painless confidence—asked me what books of Walī Allāh I studied. I listed off a few. He interrupted me and said, “Well, I care about studying the Quran and Sunnah.” (As if Walī Allāh wrote his books on the Bible and the Talmud). He then asked me why I was interested in reading the books I mentioned of Walī Allāh—*Al-Budūr*, *Saṭa'āt*, *Hama'at*, *Lamaḥāt*. I told him I'm curious about Walī Allāh's command over various intellectual traditions and his fresh look on almost every concept in Islam—but especially his *naya nazariyya* for the broken Ummah. Shifting to Arabic, he said, “Well, you see, this knowledge is *'ulum al-aliyya*, instrumental sciences—logic and philosophy.” I nodded my head (in utter disbelief—how could someone call falsafa or hikma instrumental knowledge? Yes, sure, logic and rhetoric, but *Hikmah*?) Here was a son of Shāh Walī Allāh who had refuted the knowledge of his father, I later thought to myself, in the humid-dragged night of Corona. I could tell he hadn't read a page of Walī Allāh other than *Al-Fawz al-Kabīr*—perhaps in a bid to show off to me, he said, “You know that Walī Allāh had originally written *Hujjat Allāh* in Persian?” not knowing that I had just toured the manuscript libraries in India and had seen that Walī Allāh had written it in Arabic. I nodded with a smile (*Al-Fawz* was written in Persian—and it seems the 'Tablīghī Mawlānā was not paying attention in the Darṣgah in Deoband). Then telling me to make sure I spent more time in Jam'at, he rose and went to his room for a siesta.

هَاتِ الصَّبُوحَ هُبُوا يَا أَيُّهَا السُّكَارَا  
در حلقه گُل و مُل خوش خواند دوش بلبل

*In the circle of roses, the nightingale sings beautifully:  
The morning has arrived, come crawling oh drunken ones!*

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Last year, I pored through the letters of Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwī—whatever existed in the university library; I came across a letter he penned to Muḥammad Iqbāl, where he offered a rare insight into his appraisal of Shāh Walī Allāh. “Don’t read any of Shāh Walī Allāh’s books on ‘Sūfism or *Hikmah*,” wrote the Nadwī *Maulvi*, “stick to his works on *Hadīth*.”



In Muḥammad Qasim Zaman’s forthcoming chapter on Shāh Walī Allāh, he cites a letter that Muḥammad Iqbāl had written to the same Mawlānā Nadwī (the only Indian Mawlānā Taha Abderrahmane has quoted besides Walī Allāh!), whereupon receiving a copy of *Tafhīmāt*, likely the one first printed in Lahore, Iqbāl wrote: “*After reading Walī Allāh’s newly-published text, Mujhē to bohōt māyūsī hu’ī.*” I have become so incredibly disappointed, wrote Iqbāl after reading one of Walī Allāh’s most dazzling books. Hakim al-Ummah—some have called Iqbāl. What did Iqbāl seek to find? Why was he disappointed by the *Hikmah* of Walī Allāh? What did Mawlānā Nadwī, fellow visitor to Bābur’s grave with Iqbāl in Kabul upon Nader Shāh’s invitation, find so displeasing?

*Ki Haqq se farishton ne Iqbāl ki Ghammazi*  
*The angels have slandered Iqbāl to God*  
*Adam ko Sikhata hain Adab-I Khudawandi*  
*“He teaches man the manners of khuda!”*

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In an assembly of students, *Mawlanas*, and professors, in either Madras or *Haiderabad*, at Osmania University, Muḥammad Iqbāl announced to all participants that it was time for

Muslims to resurrect a fresh spirit, a fresh outlook—without departing from the theoretical foundations of the *turāth*. Muḥammad Iqbāl halts his Cambridge English, where he announces:

*My fellow listeners, it was Shāh Walī Allāh who first felt the urge of a new spirit in him.*

In 2023, I pored through the thousands of letters of Muḥammad Iqbāl, leaving a couple dozen for me unread in the week I come to know I shall die—in the hopes I will have some new Iqbāl to await, even until my deathbed. In the fourth volume of letters, he achingly, painfully writes to *Mawlana Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwī*:

*“Did Shāh Walī Allāh’s al-Budūr al-Bāzighah actually get published? How do I obtain a copy? Please, please, will you inform me, Mawlana!”*



*Muhammad Iqbal with Mawlana Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi and the Chancellor of the Haiderabad-based college, Osmania, in Kabul, Afghanistan, near the gardens of the first Mughal emperor, Bābur.*

Letter from Mawlana Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi to (likely) Muhammad Iqbal (in the 1930s):

You are so right and *Mawlana Shibli's final prediction has proven true*. How long can Deoband remain Deoband (passing *takfir* on scholars like Shibli and Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan)? The articles of the magazine *al-Burhan* has completely proven our point! When *Mawlana* Shibli and Sir Sayyid explain Shah Walī Allāh's points, it is apostasy (to Deoband!) But if a Deobandi writes the *exact* same point (as Shibli and Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan) about Shah Walī Allāh, then it is the very essence of religion! What an absolute mess! *In che bu al'Ajabi Ast!*

آپ نے بالکل درست فرمایا، اور مولانا شبلی کی آخری پیشین گوئی سچ ثابت ہوئی۔ آخر دیوبند کب تک دیوبند رہ سکتا ہے (کہ مولانا شبلی اور سر سید احمد خاں جیسے بزرگوں پر تکفیر کرتا رہے)؟ مجلہ البرہان کے مضامین نے تو ہمارے موقف کو پوری طرح ثابت کر دیا ہے! جب مولانا شبلی اور سر سید احمد خاں حضرت شاہ ولی اللہ کے افکار کی تشریح فرماتے ہیں تو وہ دیوبندیوں کے نزدیک کفر ٹھہرتی ہے، لیکن جب کوئی دیوبندی فاضل انہی باتوں کو شاہ ولی اللہ کے بارے میں کہتا ہے تو! وہی عین دین قرار پاتی ہیں! یہ کیا عجیب و غریب تماشا ہے! **این چہ بوالعجبی است**



38





## *Man Lam Yazuq Lam Yadri*

Abū'l 'Alā Mawdudi could never figure out his relationship with Shāh Walī Allāh, writing that he refused to declare anyone innocent from mistakes and would say it even if the other Mawlānās refused to: “It was extremely wrong for Shāh Walī Allāh and Aḥmed Sirhindī to declare themselves as the *Mujaddids* of their eras, merely on the basis of dreams, and so-called inspirations and divine revelations.” Stinging the claims of both sages even further, Mawdudi says: “It is inappropriate for scholars to give themselves epithets and boast about mystical stages they have allegedly reached. Let God judge your work.” For those who have read Shāh Walī Allāh, they know exactly what passages in Walī Allāh’s works Mawdudi was referring to. In one passage, he says that Allāh had made him the Imām of the age, and everyone in the East and the West is the subject of his kingship. There are a few others like these—like Walī Allāh announcing he was the *Qayyim al-Zaman*. But we can say without exaggeration, as I mentioned earlier in the essay, the road to God from Afghanistan to Bangladesh is paved through Walī Allāh.

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But our response to Mawdudi, that incredible literary critic from Aurangzēb’s grave-city—did Walī Allāh and Aḥmed Sirhindī invent these statements? The logical conclusion of this is that either they were telling the truth, or they were deluded by something else, or were not telling the truth. Who would dare to say that Walī Allāh invented these statements? Who would dare to say that Walī Allāh was not telling the truth about something so serious as true dreams? Who would dare to say that Walī Allāh, so loved and adored by all shades of the Ummah—a love that is vanishingly rare for a Muslim scholar, of which only Rūmī and Ghazālī and Imām Mālik seem to hold in the annals of the *asatir*, of the *historia* of the Ummah. As Walī Allāh said, we may only judge the truthfulness—epistemic and mystical—of a work, such as *Bukhārī*, by the *Talaqqī al-Ummah bi al-Qabūl*. Who has more *talaqqī* than Walī Allāh in the past three hundred years? More *Qabūliyyah*?

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Some months ago in the Lower East Side in New York, I was watching a debate online between a Wahhabi and a Qadiani, one from England and one from Canada. To my

absolute bewilderment, the Qadiani pulled up Shāh Walī Allāh's *al-Taḥīmāt al-Ilāhiyya* in Urdu translation, to attempt to prove that Shāh Walī Allāh had argued that prophecy continued after the Holy Prophet (*wa hashā lillah!*). The Wahhabi, rightfully, told him to stop reading the translation and to draw out the original Arabic, to which the Qadiani did not seem to be able to read a single Arabic word. The Mawlānā-translator had totally mistranslated the meaning, allowing the Qadiani translator to interpret that Walī Allāh had proposed such (Walī Allāh, in typical fashion, was simply describing the phenomenon of prophecy and what elements are retained today, of which only dreams and ilham remain). It hit me that most translators of Shāh Walī Allāh, Deobandi and Bareilly and Ahl al-Ḥadīth, have absolutely no clue what they're translating, and because of their sloppiness, have allowed one of the greatest Sunnis to be mistranslated into disbelief. And my always-advice to those seekers of Walī Allāh, do not read the Urdu translations of the Walī Allāh family: you will only be misled.

It also struck me that the one text studied of Shāh Walī Allāh in our Madrasa, *al-Fawz al-Kabir*, is also a translation. That a Deobandi can complete his entire course-of-study without ever reading a single original word of Shāh Walī Allāh!

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It was in Karachi, as Shaykh Amin was studying under Muftī Ridā al-Ḥaqq—Zia al-Haq had just overthrown Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and unleashed the Schmittian State of Exception, when Shaykh Amin was told the only person who could offer him the knowledge of Shāh Walī Allāh and his Khāndān, the last remaining *lisan*, was a teacher at Deoband. So Shaykh Amin did what a true son of the Mughal polymath would do, and sought out the grandson of Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī; namely, Qārī Tayyib Qasmī (through his son Salim). Shaykh Amin completed his Dawrah in Deoband (this was also during Indira Gandhi's political madness) and, in whatever free time he had, he would seek to spend it with Qārī Tayyib. He directed Shaykh Amin to not only Walī Allāh's works, but those of the last interpreter of Walī Allāh, namely, Mawlānā Qāsim. Muzaffar Alam told me that, in a bid to keep Walī Allāh alive in Deoband, Qārī Tayyib would offer classes on Ḥujjat Allāh after Zuhr and Asr, to all those seeking a final breath of the line. Shaykh Amin received this more and more, receiving private attention and direction from Qārī Tayyib and the key to the Deoband private library—a sharp evocation of the two Maḥmūds under the *Sarv-i Anar*.

Qārī Tayyib was the first to openly state the project of Deoband and her *raison d'être*, namely, in his Muqaddima in *Tarikh-i Dar al-'Ulum Deoband*, where he states without any veneer of pretension: *Deoband Qāsimiyyat awr Walī Allāhiyat ka naam hain*. “Deoband is Qāsimness and Walī Allāh-ness.” Shaykh Amin received both these spirits from the last spokesman of Shāh Walī Allāh and Mawlānā Qāsim (for if Muftī Saeed Palanpuri’s work on Shāh Walī Allāh stands distinguished, his work on Mawlānā Qāsim is nowhere to be found). One of the most magical moments of this encounter is where Qārī Tayyib counselled Shaykh Amin to pick up the most difficult text written by Muslims in the past two hundred years (from Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Ottoman Turkish), namely *Ab-i Hayāt*, The Water of Life. Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thānwī, setting this book before him and seeking to decipher its contents, said that he placed it back down after he “understood nothing from the text.”

In small snippets with Shaykh Amin across four years I have come to know how enchanting this reading experience was for him; in that it showed him how Shāh Walī Allāh was not necessarily a treasure chest (though his khizana be endless) but a toolbox. Mawlānā Qāsim, in his *Ab-i Hayāt*, had watered the topsoil of our *turāth* in ways so novel, so *inventivus*, so ingenious that had perhaps never been before in his exploration of a single Ḥadīth in Bukhārī through the full thrust and shining prism of the Ma’qulat and Tasawwuf canons. But what Shaykh Amin had realized was that he accomplished this through Walī Allāh’s methods, taught so eye-poppingly in his *Hujjat Allāh*.

## ***The Ousia of Fiṭra***

The precise year that Walī Allāh wrote *Hujjat Allāh* seems to be between 1740–1741, almost a decade after his Madina sojourn—although various scholars (like Jalbani) have offered some estimations. Regardless, it most certainly was not the first text Walī Allāh composed, nor the last (as with similar scholars like Shāhab Aḥmed, texts appeared posthumously, uninterruptedly, thanks to the efforts of Mawlānā ‘Āshiq). The text stands out because, as we will learn from Shāh ‘Abd al-'Azīz, the two primary inspirations for the text were Imām Ghazālī’s *Ihya* and ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘bin ‘Abd al-Salam’s canons text (although one could most certainly add Aḥmed Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī for the first quarter of the text). Walī Allāh, in utter contrast to Aristotle, who gave us the word *Metaphysics*, because he started it after he completed *Physica*, begins the text with *prophysica*, or that which is before the natural



world. The current model of the Dars-i 'Nizāmī does not prepare the Moulvee for the spectacular flourish by which Walī Allāh absorbs the Persianate 'Ṣūfī tradition, wedded and birthed from Ibn 'Arabī and Mawlānā Rūmī, and systemizes it through glossed-over Ḥadīth in the six canons of Ḥadīth, and, presents a total image of the Malakūt, or the upper celestial realms.

*Begu asrar ay majnun*

*Ze hoshyaran che mi tarsi?*

“tell me all your secrets, oh Majnun

why do you fear the sober ones?”

– Mawlana

If I were a liberal Aligarh scholar, like Irfan Habib, I would simply say that Walī Allāh is aiming to be “scientific,” but with the heavens (so really not scientific). Instead, what Walī Allāh sought was coherence, or *ittisāq*. From a Latin preposition “co” to mean together, and the infinitive “haerere,” to mean to stick or bind together (think of adhere), Walī Allāh wants to show that the various prophysical realities cited by the Lord of Prophets, *ṣalwātullāh alayhi*, are not scattered phenomena, but rather a complete picture, a complete canvas, a consummate architecture, a cosmos-embracing symphony, an integrated cosmos, for Allāh is al-Musawwir, *fā-aḥsana ṣuwarakum*. When the Holy Prophet received knowledge about Khidr ‘alayhis salam, what was the intellectual or cognitive process therein? What is simply *inspirare* from the angel Gabriel? Or what is a thought cast into the sultan heart of the Prophet? How was that thought delivered, i.e., from the domains of the Malakūt or without it as an intermediary? Did every Prophet receive direct revelation or were some exclusively through angels—when Allāh mentions the hijab in the final verse of Surah Shura, what is this Hijab? More critically, what was behind the veil?

When the Prophet said *Nufitha fi raw'i*, in countless Ḥadīth, what does this mean? Was it knowledge to his *qalb* or *nafs* or to his 'Aql, blessed be all of them! If Isaac Newton is the scientist par excellence of the below, that is of the earth, then Walī Allāh is the scientist par excellence of the above, of the cosmopolis, the heavenly city, as Leonard Krieger once described. (It should be noted that Walī Allāh overlapped for almost twenty five years of life with Newton: that is, they were reading two sides of the same *tajalliyat*).

It seems this cosmopolis had mostly arched together in the knowledge of the 'Sūfis, especially the Suhrawardis and the Kubrawiyya, but in the Ḥadīth excursus of Ibn Hajar, Al-'Ayni, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, al-Suyuti, Ibn Daqiq al-Eid we find no such attempt.

A singular exception is Mullā 'Alī Qārī in his commentary entitled *al-Mirqāt, The Mirror*. I suspect that Mullā 'Alī Qārī, having been exposed to entrenched 'Sūfī culture of Herat, where Ḥadīth and 'Sūfism went branch-in-branch—of which no greater example exists than Ḥazrat-i Khwāja 'Abdullah Ansārī of Herat—was more attentive to the Asrar than some of his Egyptian commentators (of course a wildly rich 'Sūfī culture existed therein). Mawlānā Bilal Ali Ansari's lectures on the *Muqaddima of Ibn Ṣalāḥ* reached a climax one day where we read passages from the second volume of *Hujjat Allāh*, where Walī Allāh puts on his historian hat, and discusses the evolution in Ḥadīth *in Historia*. It was here that Mawlānā Bilal cited the deep influence of both *al-Mishkat* and *al-Mirqāt* on Shāh Walī Allāh's *Hujjat Allāh*, but especially as it relates to the organizātion of the chapters of the text, that is, both the order and the borders of the text. As Walī Allāh writes in the *Muqaddimah* of *Hujjat Allāh*—and none, to my knowledge, has written such save Mawlānā Rūmī—that the words of the Lord of the Prophets contain the most mysteries of the Faith—*Adaqq al-'Ulum*, alluding that perhaps even more than the Quran itself, for he does not add the phrase “*ba'd Kitāb Allāh*.” This does not mean that the Quran is less important than the Ḥadīth.

آن تلخوش که صوفی اُمُ الْخَبَائِثِ خواند  
آشهی لَنَا و اَحْلَى مِنْ قُبْلَةِ الْعَذَارَا

*That bitterness which the 'Sūfī calls 'the mother of all vices'  
For us, sweeter and more delightful than the kisses of maidens  
- Ḥāfez*

--

In a gathering in the ancient city of Ephesus, that is, Konya, a Persian peripatetic (in its most literal sense) sits as the head of the gathering, with the ex-judge of the city, namely, Mawlānā Rūmī, as a candle burns on the overhead. After listing out a parable, the Sun of Tabrez says in a lofty breath:

*I don't honor the Quran because it comes from God, but that it is said on the lips of the Prophet.*

*Gufti-u guft-i Allāh buvad. (a deeper explanation of this was elucidated by Haji Imdadullah and Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thānwī, in their commentaries of the Mathnawī).*



## *The Republic of Dreams*

In the third lesson of Ḥujjat Allāh, Shaykh Amin sat before his half-century-old copy of Ḥujjat Allāh, as Muftī Ehazaz and I and Mawlānā Zaid sat facing him in Darul Qāsim’s Imām Bukhārī classroom—both *darsgah* and *dargah*—where Shaykh Amin detailed one of Walī Allāh’s most thrilling chapters: Bab ‘Alam al-Mithāl, or the Chapter on the World of Eidon (Forms). I had only seen the word once in the six-year Dars-i ‘Nizāmī, in Muftī Motara’s Sunan Tirmizi’s class in the chapter of Book of Purity, where Mawlānā Aḥmed Ali Sahrānpūrī, teacher and drillmaster of Mawlānā Qāsim, in his hypercommentary, cites ‘Alam al-Mithāl, for seeking to explain one of the prophysical realities of Wudu. I later realized that Mawlānā Aḥmed Ali had learned this from his own teachers, the students of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Shaykh Amin’s breadth and depth by which he engaged the topic was staggering—in that this chapter and the succeeding topics of ‘ḥaḏīrah al-Quds and *Maqadīr* are some of the most challenging, that Walī Allāh seeks to explain how Allāh structures every phenomenon from the Lahut to the Nasut, that is, how do ‘Amr and Khalq order and organize our Fiṭra, both as a species, but also as individuals—and what is the purpose of religion, as a concept, as a category, for the ultimate telos of humans? Walī Allāh dazzlingly snatches that role from Aristotle.

Postclassical figures like Tūsī, Davvānī, Katib al-Rāzī and Jalali had enshrined Aristotle’s vision of justice in the *politeia* and its achievement as the ultimate goal for humans. I do not want to expand too much here, but the Ottoman-Mughal political and social vision was a medley of both Platonic and Aristotelian concepts that had infused in Muslim political theology—and overburdened itself—but as we shall see from Walī Allāh’s own dream-diary, he wanted, in a stroke not unfamiliar to Heidegger, to set the Islamic socio-political canon he inherited to utter catastrophe (while retaining some elements). Because there were just so many concepts Walī Allāh was drawing on, dovetailing, and harmonizing—concepts that are not taught in the Dars-i ‘Nizāmī, I would be perfectly surprised to see if a Moulvee could do *Mutā’la’ah* of these chapters by himself.

Yet it was our great fortune to be inducted into these halls—that Shaykh Amin had branded us bearers of this Walī Allāhi secret, that is, presenting to us the entire tapestry of these various worlds: ‘ḥaḏīrah al-Quds, *Malakūt*, ‘*Ālam al-Mithāl*, *Aḥadiyyah*, etc., and of course, the ‘Arsh of Allāh in a manner legible. That Mawlānā Shaheer and I could literally see the whole



tradition Shāh Walī Allāh was invoking—not only as an observer but as a participant. There are so many Quranic verses and *reports* that allude to the outer realms, the *aflak al-dawwarah*, but I think I, like most others, just imagine as some realm beyond the *asman-i nukhastin*. But it was Walī Allāh's great luck, i.e., *maqādir*, that he had thinkers before him who attempted, *a la* Ibn 'Arabī and Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī, who had knowledge of Ḥadīth and the 'Sūfī cosmoi. Nobody, not one scholar (in a total capacity like Walī Allāh), had ever dared to bring the knowledge of the Persian 'Sūfīs, tinted through Shaykh al-Akbar, that is theosophy twinned with *prophetenaiology* (the phainei of Prophets) and shine it through the light of the full thrust of the Ḥadīth corpus—perhaps because they were afraid of what chaos would unleash, that the knowledge systems would not align, like fault plates unable to meet underneath the earth on an axis. Yet, somehow, somehow, Walī Allāh, the rāz of his maternal line, achieved it—the ultimate reconciliation of the two central domains of Islamic thought and practice:

*A world where Aḥmed bin Hanbal and Ḥāfez-i Shirazi were explaining the very same epiphenomena!*

## ***The Mirror of Alexander***

After that lesson I was hooked, radically—Shaykh Amin's depth in the Walī Allāhi project is not only admirable for its scope, but also for how it inspires *himmah* in the student, that the student suddenly feels that Walī Allāh is no longer off limits, he is touchingly within reach. As Muftī Saeed Palanpuri wrote in *Rahmah Allāh al-Wasi'ah*, "Shāh Walī Allāh is, in the end, just a human." I pored through the UChicago library for all secondary literature on 'Ālam al-Mithāl (and the Malakūt), and in a stroke of luck, I found Fazlur Rahman's essay on 'Ālam al-Mithāl that he had either written at McGill or UChicago (but definitely post-exile). I also learned that Fazlur Rahman had taught a seminar on Shāh Walī Allāh at McGill in the seventies—the first in North America. What texts he read with his students—this is unclear (I would assume Zafar Ishāq Ansari was in the class). But as I understood later, when Fazlur Rahman died, it was none other than Shaykh Amin who was asked to lead his Jānazah in Islamic Foundation in Villa Park. I mean this in both a hyperbolic and mystical vein, but in many a fashion, this was the passing of the torch of Walī Allāh from Fazlur Rahman to Shaykh Amin. It was also Fazlur Rahman who urged Shaykh Amin not to pursue a PhD in America in a private gathering in 1984 in Hyde Park, over a wintery cup of chai.



*The entrance to the Dargah of Walī Allāh and his sons.*

I land in Delhi some months ago, the smoke in the sky as grey as the Seattle clouds, where I arrived at my hotel, in the eighth Delhi out of the seven, and fall asleep. I rise some hours before Fajr—the Delhi night is somehow brighter than the Delhi day. I text Shaykh Amin

and Muftī Ehzaz that I’m in Delhi, to which Shaykh Amin calls me and reflects on his time in Delhi during Deoband Centennial. He lists out a prescription of Muraqaba of the ‘Chishtīs that I should perform with the sepulchers of the Awliya of Delhi. I grin: I had just read this very prescription in Walī Allāh’s book on litanies, staggered by Shaykh Amin’s memory, who likely had read this almost fifty years ago in the library of Deoband, with Qārī Tayyib’s keys. Walī Allāh’s ‘Sūfī texts are notoriously hard to locate if you don’t have access to a private university library, as they had stopped being printed for nearly fifty years, when Deobandi Madaris largely cut off yet another branch of learning, cloistering themselves from the seventies to the early aughts with Arabic, Fiqh, and Ḥadīth, and hardly anything else. This is why you only ever meet ‘Ulema who have specialized in Ifta and Ḥadīth; or in Nadwa in Arabic literature.

Arriving in Shāhjahānabad, the Baghdad of Hindustān, the greyness racing in the sky yet again, I amble towards the turreted dome of the Jāma Masjid of Delhi, its redness fading yet slightly blazing amid the austerity of the horizon, the white-tailed pigeons blazing an image of a hurricane. I cut around the corner, where I labor to ascend into the Masjid from the elephantine path (literally it was built for Mughal elephants) on the smeared grey steps, where Muslim widows sat begging with their open-eyed children at six A.M. An Indian soldier bars me from entering and tells me I can’t enter now. Only Muslim men are walking their streets, fist-length-and-width beards, rumals bandaged around their mouths and faces, shielding them from the Delhi morning frost. New makeshift orange Hindu temples have been set up around Muslim businesses, where they blare Bhājans, “*Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram.*” I look at the Muslim Indian uncles ambling back from Fajr, who keep their eyes down from the music of *polytheos*—not from sexual fitna, but that one wrong glance could deliver them and their family into prison. Say to the believing men to lower their gaze from political trouble, I thought.

*In che shur ast ke az dur mi binam*

*what is this chaos that I can see it from so far! (quoted in Muftī Rashīd’s Ahsan al-Fatāwā)*

After peeling through the Delhi streets, satisfied that I have at least one experience of Delhi coming to life, coming into herself, I begin my lap towards the tombscapes of the Walī

Allāh Khāndān. The sun emerges, as Delhi as a city ascends into a hill and then slips into a decline, the *qumriyan*, or pigeons settled on the curve into Firōzabad. I think of Delhi, as written in Tarikhī Farrukhsiyar and Tarikh-i Muḥammadshahi, detailing the death of tens of thousands in a few years in the city of Delhi, Dil-i Ilahi. I cut across and turn towards the fort of Sultan Firoze Shāh Tughluq, who felt the first impulse to attempt a codification of Ḥanafī law (a manuscript of which was purchased by the Nizam of Haiderabad).

Now hailed as an assembly of Djinns in the folklore of modern Delhi, it sits only a ten-minute walk from the Walī Allāh Madrasa. After touring the fort and thinking of Walī Allāh's letter to his first cousin, where he detailed, where he wept, how he cradled his baby (who would die cruelly) and wife in one of the crevices of the fort, as Sunni Afghans rampaged through the city, slaughtering both Hindus and Muslims. Both Bābur and Tamerlane did Tawaf around this fort after their conquest of the city, and Tamerlane famously prayed a Salat al-Asr in the fort, after he set the city on fire and picnicked with beer approved by the entourage of his Ḥanafī Muftīs (of which seemed to have included Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazani).

I cut back across the street where a sign hangs overhead: Mawlānā Abul Kalam Azad Medical College. The Walī Allāh *medrese* lies in the heart of the medical college, a lasting remnant to Muslim contribution to Greek and Indian medicine, a nod to Walī Allāh and his brother's training in Greek medicine. After a few minutes, a chai stand before me, and a Muslim in his early thirties and a pruned beard and skullcap. The graveyard is emerald-green and blue, with Nastaliq Urdu dancing on the frieze of the graveyard-madrasa. The paint of the buildings chipping off, and dirty towels hanging on laundry lines across the Madrasa, I arch into Hifz kids on their break, at least twenty of them, racing on the mud-lined paths, the day as blue as denim, observing the white-kurta-and-topi getup all Madrasa kids are famed for, shouting in Urdu voices far higher than the domes of the graveyard.

Graves appear before me—some of the epigraphs are in Persian, alluding to death in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when every Muslim knew at least a few couplets of Sa'di. On my right is a white arch that says Muftī Kifayātullāh Al-Dihlavī, the last Delhite scholar to have had an international reputation (appearing on the frontispiece of Times of India in Bombay in the 1920s). I peer in and the architecture of an old Muslim Madrasa



shows itself to me, where small classrooms dot a rectangle, and an open, breathless grass-courtyard spills out before you, a lasting testament to the fusion of Islamic learning and the Gulistan, of both the world and of the Persian poet.

I look to my right, and in ebony-blank ink it is engraved: *Bab al-Wali*, the Gate of the Mystic. A dust-crawling Urdu couplet sits underneath the curve: *Oh visitor of the truthful nest/ This is the nest of a Walī of Allāh*. Staring ahead, there is a sudden appearance of an enclosed hallway with blue paint, and an old Mawlānā with a walking stick, and telltale of all Hifz teachers, a blue pen in his shirt pocket, as he walks on a straight path but as if descending a mountain, as the Lord of the Prophets used to walk. As I step forward, a Hifz student, no more than eight, tells me “*Jhūṭay utārna hain*”. I see a perimeter of green tombstones at the end of the corridor. The marrow of my bones shudder.

*Shoes need to be off!* the Hifz student announces yet again with an arching grin, beckoning to my white shoes. As if a movie, he darts off again across the dirt to his darsgah—as I enter the dargah—holding my shoes, the rusted ceiling forcing me to bow my head, out of ergonomics and *adab*. The screen, the Victorian Jharoka, was left flung-open, and twelve green graves of the Walī Allāh *Khāndān* open before me. I float inside, my body a trembling mess, my hands raised.

عَجَب است آر صالح ما باز برآید نَفَس  
بیا و نشترش زن تا جَهَن ببند نَفَس

*How strange that if our Saaleh still breathes  
Come, stab him again and again—so the world may see his breath finally*

--

In the year 1908, the year when Muḥammad Iqbāl became the first Muslim to return to the old Islamicate as a lawyer-cum-doctor, and fatefully penned his world-enchanting *Shikwa*, and when the Ottomans surrendered Bosnia and Serbia to the Habsburgs amid the Young Turk revolution, Rashīd Ridā, the “father of modern Salafism,” visited 'Dar al 'Ulūm Deoband. Deoband held a massive celebration for the die-hard Salafi, as Mawlānā Yūsuf Binori notes in his *biographia* of his celebrated teacher, Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī. Before the



celebration, Ridā interrogated them about the pedagogy of Ḥadīth in Deoband, to which he was delighted to learn that Deobandis taught the coherence of Ḥadīth and substantive law of the four Sunni schools, but was shocked when he was told that the Deobandis are able to explain any contradictory Sunni Ḥadīth in light of the practice of the master-jurist of Kufa, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah—that no Ḥadīth contradicts Abū Ḥanīfah! *Wastankara*, as Mawlānā Binori wrote, and Ridā was left in deep disbelief. The story continues with more repartees, but as the celebration kicked off, Anwar Shāh naturally offered a speech about the provenance of Deobandi, but with special attention to its stress on the study of Ḥadīth)—and with a chief focus to snuff Ridā’s Salafist skepticism to the Walī Allāhi model of Ḥadīth.

I quote the full lecture, as our personae dramatae are the central element to the tale, the founding mythos of Deoband:



Rashīd Ridā’s Visit to India (at the Nadvatul ‘Ulema, as Deoband had forbidden photographs, so there is no photo to be found then—they obviously retracted their position later).

Praise be to God, and blessings and peace upon His chosen servants.

To proceed: we offer you, in your noble presence, the greeting of Islam —may God Most High grant you life in faith and peace.

We have grown familiar with the graces of your generosity and accustomed to your noble regard for us, and we have a revival of Islam that has graced us and you. The compassion of your Islamic nature has encompassed us and overflowed upon us; yet we confess ourselves more in need of you than you of us.

These are our teachers and our elders, our treasures in the sight of God for this day and the morrow. I deem it fitting to set forth my thanks to you for your acts of kindness and benefaction, and for your gracious encouragement of us through your blessed arrival.

May God reward you and us with His bounty, make good His favor toward you and toward us, and raise your station in this world and the next. Amen—in Him we seek aid.

Our Mawlānā! Our discourse is one of affection and of many branches. One topic will lead to another. Our lands are sundered by a great distance, and a wide expanse lies between us across the realms of Islam.

As Iraq, Syria, and Egypt have been the beacons of Islamic learning, our banners were premised on a flimsy foundation—so too have the minarets' knowledge been scarce, save by what God wills, and seldom indeed.

Yet our community now finds itself upon a path not wholly new, though one that calls for renewal, with our teachers in religion adorned by forbearance and discernment: such as the great scholar, the illustrious Imām al-Munīr, the renowned Shaykh al-Ajall, Walī Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Fārūqī al-Dihlāwī.

As for the Shaykh whose name we cite, his pedigree is clearer than what needs to be mentioned. But we need to unravel his biographies in a manner transparent—from reports we have heard on the tongues of our teachers.

It is known of the Shaykh—may God have mercy upon him—that he oceanically mastered the religious sciences. He had inherited much of this from his father, the learned Imām ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, who had devoted himself to both asceticism and study, and had drawn deeply from the wells of jurisprudence and tradition.

The Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdī of the Ḥijāz became his teacher (lit. he held onto the Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir), with Walī Allāh striving diligently in his service, remaining constant in his presence and steadfast at his door.

It is told that Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir al-Makkī said: “He learned the word from us, and from his tongue we imbibed the meanings of words.”

When the Shaykh returned to his homeland, he was consumed by zeal for reform—seeking to mend the corruption that had befallen men since the noble age of the Prophet ﷺ. His heart was pure, his judgment unclouded by haste; through the light of God he would see the ultimate outcomes of the affairs of this world.

He foresaw the looming war that would arise between truth and falsehood, and so he girded himself to defend religion and the people of faith. For this cause he composed his translation of The Qur’ān into the Persian tongue, titled Faṭḥ al-Raḥmān (“The Victory of the Merciful”).

He edited out all the Judeo-Christian narrations, cementing Tawhid. Then he composed a commentary of the Muwatta of Imām Mālik...

(following a lengthy discussion on Tahqiq and Takhrij al-Manat, Anwar Shāh continues)

The Shaykh—may God have mercy upon him—composed works of great worth in the science of jurisprudence and the foundations of creed, writings of such precision and authority that they became for all who came after him both a standard and a measure. Among these are his Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha

(“The Conclusive Proof of God”), *al-Budūr al-Bāzigha*, *al-Taḥfīmāt al-Ilāhiyya*, and *al-Khayr al-Kathīr*, together with other treatises of enduring renown.

After him, his sons and descendants continued in his path. Of his offspring were the noble Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, then the learned Shaykh Rafī‘ al-Dīn, followed by the venerable Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir. Thereafter came the Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s grandson, the eminent scholar of his age, whose fame spread far and wide—Shaykh Muḥammad Ishāq—supported and sustained by the great ‘ālim, Shaykh Muḥammad Ismā‘īl, his nephew.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz used to quote the Quranic verse: All praise is God who has endowed me in my old age ‘Ismā‘īl and Ishāq!

May God forever benefit Hindustān through these two sons, Shāh ‘Ismā‘īl and Shāh Ishāq!

Shaykh Muḥammad Ishāq lectured on the noble ḥadīth transmitted from the Messenger of God ﷺ and became the center of people’s educational ambitions, with people journeying to study from all over the world under him (rihlat al-aqtar.)

Shaykh Muḥammad Ismā‘īl, meanwhile, distinguished himself in India amidst the strife between orthodoxy and innovation. He revived the light of the Sunnah when it had waned and fought the darkness of heresy. In that struggle he met his death, slain as a martyr—may God have mercy upon him.

Shaykh Muḥammad Ishāq, his kinsman, was among our teachers; he was constant in transmitting knowledge and steadfast in narration, until the end of his days. From him did Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī receive much learning and many traditions, and he became in turn a firm pillar of the chain that binds us to those venerable forebears.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī was a teacher of the radiant luminary of Islam and the Muslims, the ḥāfiẓ and Ḥaqq-seeking scholar, Shaykh Muḥammad Qāsim

al-Nānawtawī—founder of this learned institution, the Madrasa al-‘Āliyah and her sister schools—and also of foremost scholars was the jurist, traditionist, and indefatigable mujahid, Shaykh Rashīd Aḥmad.

Shaykh Muḥammad Qāsim composed works of depth and mastery in the fields of knowledge and truth, particularly in refutation of the materialists and atheists of his time. God caused many to benefit through him, and I once wrote the following verses in his praise:

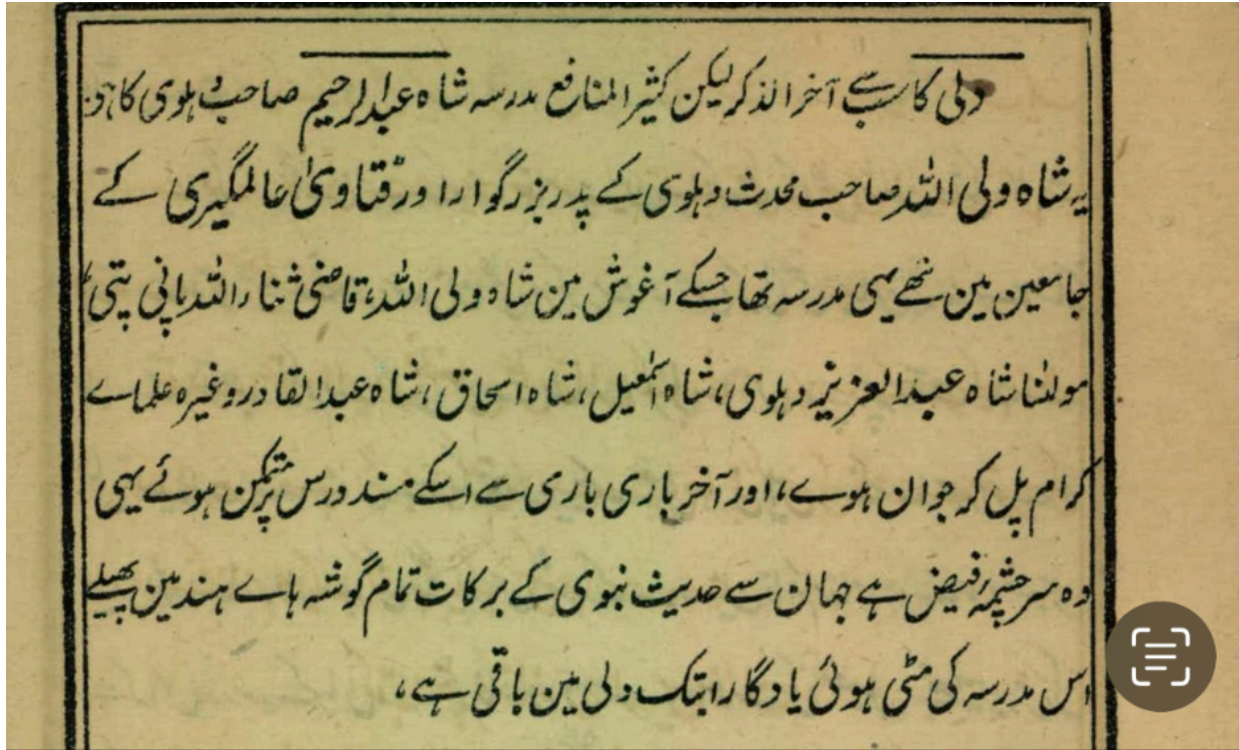
*“Stay, O my companion, at this dwelling place  
For the one who is ever sorrowful is always sobbing”*



*An alleged photograph of Anwar Shāh.*

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A volume in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., describing Walī Allāh's Madrasa, shared between Mawlana Bilal, Mullā Namazi, and I.

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Often quoted in Deobandi Ḥadīth commentaries, in their Muqaddima, is Rashīd Ridā's assessment of the state of Ḥadīth in the Islamic world—that if it weren't for the efforts of the 'Ulema of India, the episteme and the *μανθάνω* of the science of Ḥadīth would have disappeared without a trace. When I asked Mawlānā Bilal about the hyperbolic sentiment of the quote, he said we should always be cautious about any grandiose claims, and rightfully so. But as Mawlānā Bilal further stressed there is something *sui generis* and world-influencing of Indian study of Ḥadīth in the nineteenth-century, something that Shaykh Abū Fattāḥ and Shaykh 'Awwamāh quote over and over, to the utter delight of Deobandis. That is, the astonishing volume of Ḥadīth commentaries, and the wide-ranging nature of their sources, and the universality of their approach, legible to scholars of 'Ajam and 'Arab, is just something not found from Indian scholars in the premodern world, a fact that Anwar Shāh singles out. I mean, what can someone say about Anwar Shāh's *Faydh al-Bārī*, seen in bookshops across Turkey, America, and the Arab world. Or, when I was the Timurid Madrasa in Samarkand, built by Bābur's Taya, and where Mullā Jami held *Halaqat*,

a Samarqandi calligrapher with a *topi*, turned to me and asked me, after learning I was from Haiderabad, “Have you ever heard of I’la al-Sunan, of Zafar Thānwī and his brilliance in Ḥadīth and Hanafism?” in Samarkandi Persian, with eyes as wide as the turquoise friezes of the Shāh-i Zinda, the younger brother Ibn ‘Abbas buried in Samarkand. And we may also ask: despite ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s epochal contributions in Ḥadīth, why was it only Walī Allāh’s study that paved the way for generations of Ḥadīth scholars?

## ***The First Shah and the Last Shah***

When I pored through Ḥadīth commentaries of the Deobandis, from Shaykh al-Hind to Mawlānā Rashīd Gangōhī to Mawlānā Ḥussein Aḥmed Madanī to Mawlānā Sahrānpūrī, one does not find the mention of Walī Allāh as voluminous, as sea-like, as one finds in Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, in both *Faydh al-Bārī*, and *‘Arf al Shadhiy*. Anwar Shāh, a lighthouse-like beneficiary of both Mawlānā Gangōhī and Shaykh al-Hind, had, it seems, read every available work of Walī Allāh and his sons, and sought to present them as the final interpreters, the final arbitrators on any given Islamic legal or philosophical or spiritual topic. Often, he’ll mention a Mas’ala and then conclude with the opinion of Walī Allāh or Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz—as in one case where he says “it suffices to conclude the opinion with the *Khātām*, or the seal of the Verifiers, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.” Or in his *Faydh al-Bārī*, in the chapter of the income of judges, he directs students to defer Walī Allāh’s opinion in *al-Insāf*.

Or, among the most spellbinding passages of *Faydh al-Bārī*, right in the beginning in Imām Bukhārī’s chapter on the virtues of Wudu, he reflects on the intellectual legacy of Islam in India, that is, Persianate Mughal Islam, he says Indian scholars focused on philosophy and logic (i.e., the Rāzī and Avicenna fixation of the Mughals), and only a few seasoned themselves in Ḥadīth and Uṣūl al-Fiqh, a nod to Mullā Jiwan, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlavī and Mawlānā Muhibullah Bihari. Then he quotes a number of Ḥanafī Mughal and pre-Mughal Fatāwā (of which he judges them all to be worthless), and that of a Shaykh Muḥammad Abed—before he turns to a bright reckoning of the Walī Allāh legacy, where he says Walī Allāh opened the gates of Ḥadīth, and which lasted “among three generations before it went extinct (*in’adama*),” a clear reference to the Walī Allāh knowledge-blood dying with Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq.

In even the opening chapters of Anwar Shāh's *Faydh al-Bārī*, we see a man utterly steeped in the horizons, in the literal well-springs, of Walī Allāh and 'Abd al-'Azīz—right in the Bukhari chapter of *Bad' al-Wahy*, he singles out Walī Allāh for explaining why revelation opened with sayyidunā Nuh, and not sayyidunā Adam, arguing that, according to Walī Allāh Adam was all ontology and no legal cosmos—that is, as set forth in Walī Allāh's *Ta'wil al-Aḥādīth*, the Wahy was only cosmological and not cosmo-legal for Adam.

He quotes Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's Persian Tafsīr, *Fath al-'Azīz*, a play on his father's Quran translation, and argues that the purpose of Adam *'alayhih salam* was fundamentally anthropological—in that Adam's revelation was also connected to populating and cultivating the earth, carrying seeds from paradise, and afterwards, disbelief first appearing in the sixth generation of Qabil, presenting Nuh as the first Nabī Allāh.

Anwar Shāh loved quoting the Shāh family because of how deep they had dived into each theological and legal matter—that the Walī Allāhis were steeped in both history and philosophy. In Imām Bukhārī's chapter on nightprayers, one of the most drawn-out discussions that Dawrah students encounter in their *Siḥāḥ Sittah* experience, because of how polemical these Ḥadīth manifest across the legal doctrines, Anwar Shāh asks the question Walī Allāh had opened two hundred years before him, that is, when the Holy Prophet said *khashiytu an tuktab 'alaykum*—what is the relationship of *fardhiyya* and *muwazaba*? Anwar Shāh rightly understood Ḥujjat Allāh as not just a book of legal mysteries, but as one that could also solve these more complex discussions that interloped legal theory and the prophetic canon. Anwar Shāh summarizes Walī Allāh's argument as: if *muwazaba* is practiced amid the duree of revelation, then that is more often than not a cause for *tahrim* or *wujub*, a la sayyidunā Yaqub's vow that he wouldn't consume his favorite foodstuffs, of which then became forbidden on his descendants. Anwar Shāh likes to highlight from Walī Allāh's projects, *Wahy and Historia* are intimately linked, and one cannot grasp one without the other.

Or when Anwar Shāh asks—do we really know the chronology of Qiyamah, hinting the previous commentators on Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī did not satisfactorily answer this question. When will we meet the Prophet at the fountain—khudavanda mara be-rasanad!—is it after the bridge or before? How do we know? To Anwar Shāh, the only scholar's opinion that satisfied him was Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz where he opined that the Prophet will move from

location to location on the Day of Judgement, during the reckoning of his Ummah. That is, the Prophet will be between the bridge, the fountain, the plains of the Qiyamah until every last member of his Ummah is judged.

Or when Anwar Shāh openly says that certain Ḥadīth have a clear *lam'ah*, a flash, a shimmering, of the reality of Wahdat al-Wujūd described by Ibn 'Arabī, Shaykh al-Akbar, saying his Masha'ikh were devoted, crazed, and obsessed (the word he uses is *mu'li'in*, which can carry all the above connotations) with this topic, until the era of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz—"As for me," writes Anwar Shāh, "I am not as partisan (*mutashaddid*) regarding Wahdat al-Wujūd (as my teachers)," but concluding the topic that why should it be far-fetched, in the Ḥadīth of Qurb al-Nawafil, to think we adopt the *Tajalliyat* of Allāh, when Allāh created 'Adam *'Alayhis salam* in the very image of Himself!

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But of course Anwar Shāh did not accept Walī Allāh blindly, offering his own disagreements at times, on one occasion, saying that Walī Allāh's distinction between the *Nasamah* and the Soul was incorrect. Where Walī Allāh had set forth, in almost every treatise he had written, that the *Nasamah*, from the Greek word *pneuma*, to mean breath, and deployed by the Holy Prophet in various Ḥadīth (like in *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* in *Bukhārī* and the *Muwatta* of *Imām Mālik*), had referred to the vapor-soul (and "Walī Allāh's opinion is not correct according to me," says Anwar Shāh), that it takes on various shapes and forms, transforming itself throughout several stages of life, per Walī Allāh.

Anwar Shāh on the contrary had argued that the *Ruh*—and his argument feels closer to Avicenna and the Shi'ite Peripatetics like Mullā Ṣadrā—was a stable entity that does not suffer any change (which evokes the idea of the eternality of the soul, as both Aristotelians and the Epicureans taught Muslims that all change-less things are eternal). "The soul," writes Anwar Shāh, "cannot be linked to any material actions" (as Walī Allāh had argued in *Altaf al-Quds*), unlike the *Nasamah* of which we can ground in concepts like *nafkh* and *qabdh*. The distinction between the two concepts, as Anwar Shāh seeks to explain to his ancient Delhi master, is related to their origination and culmination within actions, and Anwar Shāh politely tells us that if we analyze all the prophetic reports related to *Ruh* and *Nasamah*, this will become plain to us.

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Ἰστορήσεν ἡμῖν ὁ Ἰαχίας ὁ τοῦ Βουκαίρου· ἰστορήσεν δὲ ἡμῖν ὁ Λεῖθ διὰ τοῦ Ἀκουήλου περὶ Ἰβν Σεχάμ, ὃς ἰστορήσεν ὅτι Ἀνᾶς ὁ τοῦ Μάλικος εἶπεν ὅτι ὁ Ἀπόστολος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶπεν·

Ὅς ἐὰν ἀγαπᾷ πλατύνθηναι αὐτῷ ὁ βίος καὶ παρατείνεσθαι ἡ πορεία αὐτοῦ, συνδεέτω τὴν συγγένειαν αὐτοῦ.

*Yahya son of Bukayr related to us; and al-Layth related to us through ‘Uqayl, from Ibn Shihab, who related that Anas said that the Apostle of God said:*

*‘Whoever loves that his sustenance be broadened for him and his course of life prolonged, let him bind his kinship.’*

Anwar Shāh then rightfully suggests that Walī Allāh’s explanation of the Ḥadīth vis-a-vis the Marātib of Wujūd can reconcile this Ḥadīth in its seeming contradiction between the pre-eternality of destiny and its possible change in this world. This is not simply a matter of *mu’allaq* and *mubram* fate, but rather has to do with sir or the mystery of *Taqdīr* itself—that, *silat al-rahm* has a profound rule in the *Wujūd* of a human, in their very ontology and their consecrated *Taqdīr*.

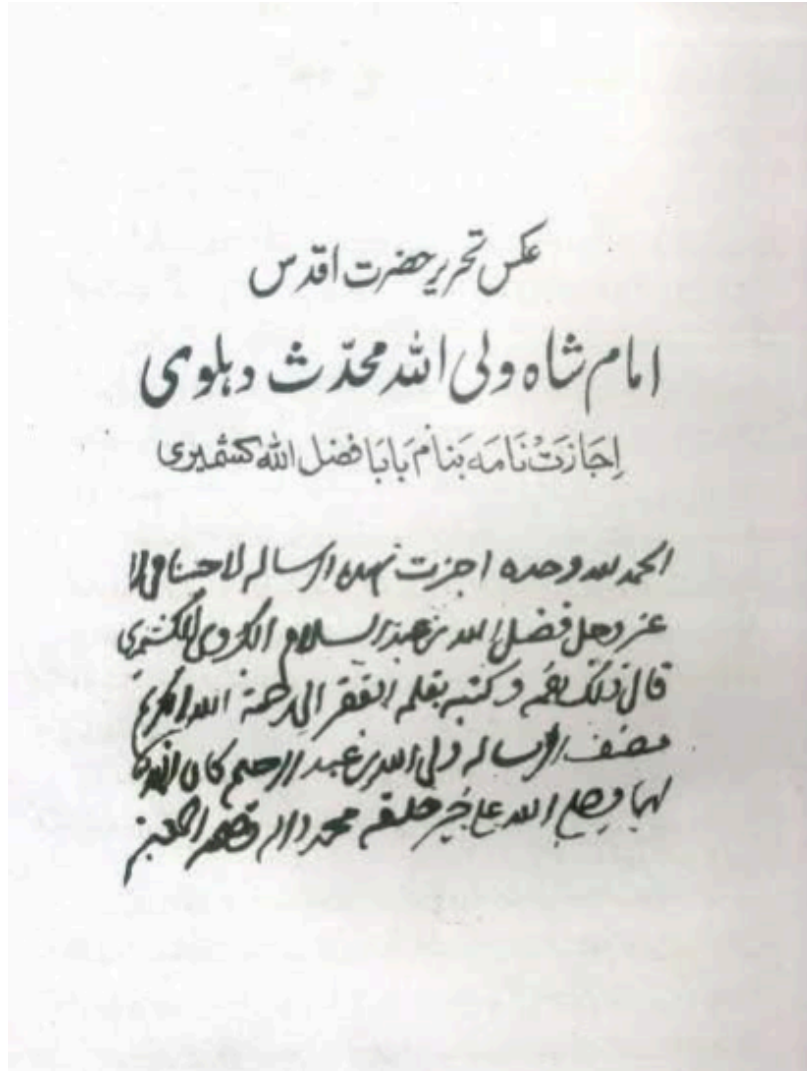
## ***Renewal Amidst Exile***

Mawlānā Bilal Ali Ansari and Mullā Uwais are two masterfully, historically-minded scholars that I defer to for the intellectual history and culture of Walī Allāh and larger ‘Ulema culture—usually if one doesn’t know an answer the other does, in a way strikingly complementary. The former is a graduate of ‘Dar al ‘Ulūm Karachi and the latter of Nadwat al-‘Ulema. Both studied in the early aughts and are singularly unique in their ability to think, essay, and read in frontiers across Arabic, Urdu and English—that all three languages are equally and masterfully malleable to them, and emerge, really, as the first scholars of their generation in America and England to achieve talents across three, preceded in such by



Shaykh Amin (There are hundreds of Deobandi and Bareilvi graduates who count as awful in all three).

One of my first memories of Mawlānā Bilal is when my fellow ifta-classmate, Mawlānā Shāheer, and I were sitting in Shaykh Amin's office for our weekly fatwa-methods lesson, where we read fatwas by Azhar Muftīs and did *tafkik* of them. In one of those lessons, Shaykh Amin told Mawlānā Shāheer and I that we wouldn't have class, and we would listen to him discuss a centuries-old letter held by Mawlānā Bilal. The letter, as I came to know some years later, was from Shāh Walī Allāh to a Shaykh in Madina, known as *Maktub-i Madanī*, where Walī Allāh sought to explain away any differences between wahdat al-Wujūd and wahdat al-shuhud. It was my first year at Darul Qāsim and I caught absolutely nothing of the topic—the 'Ālimiyya in South Africa (nor does any 'Ālimiyya anywhere) did not prepare me for any dialogue on Wujūd, on Dasein, except for the one-line in Sharḥ al-Aqaid where al-Taftazani discusses the differentia between *mahiya* and *Wujūd* (hint there is none for God). It was a full hour of discussion on Ibn 'Arabī's notions of Wujūd and Aḥmed Sirhindī's reformulation of it—that is, as Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dihlavī recounted, from *hama ust to hama az ust*. But it was my first exposure to this side of Walī Allāh, for his discussions on Ibn 'Arabī are radically lacking in *Hujjat Allāh*. As the next period came in, Mawlānā Bilal gathered his black robes and swept out of Shaykh Amin's purple-lined office. Little did I know, and little did I remember, that hour-long class would mark so much of my study for the rest of my life—that my *maqadir* would come to life in new ways I could not imagine when I first took that flight from San Francisco to O.R. Tambo.



*A handwritten sanad of Shāh Walī Allāh to his Kashmīrī student, Baba Fazlullah Kashmīrī.*

### ***The First Dawn of Walī Allāh in America***

Mawlānā Bilal and Mawlānā Hamzah Maqbul were the first to study Ḥujjat Allāh under Shaykh Amin. (I often joke that Mawlānā Hamzah is the first South Asian Mālikī since Ibn Battuta had kids in Delhi—and is probably the tallest Deobandi in America). Although when Shaykh Amin arrived in America in the early eighties, he likely could have taught Ḥujjat Allāh then, but with great sadness, no scholar was interested in the knowledge of the jurist-ʿSūfīs of the premodern world (instead the Iranian revolution had led intellectually

inclined to Muslims in the diaspora to grate endlessly on political Islam). Both had some previous background with Walī Allāh—Mawlānā Hamzah had a “fantastically wonderful” teacher, as he reminisced to me, of *Mishkāṭ*, who without doubt drew on Walī Allāh’s Ḥujjat Allāh in his explanation of Mishkat prophetic reports. Mawlānā Bilal was a student of the late Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Hakeem ‘Chishtī Nomani, the younger brother of Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Rashīd al-Nomani. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Hakim, having done his doctorate on Muslim libraries in the Arab Middle Ages, is the only scholar, and I say this with complete certainty, to have written a commentary on any text of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in history.

While so many of ‘Chishtī Sahib (as his students affectionately refer to him)’s peers in India and Pakistan were hoping to write yet another commentary of *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* or translate *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth* works that were emerging as print publications in the Arab world, Mawlānā No‘mani wrote a five-hundred page commentary of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s *Ujala al-Nafīa*. Akin to Shaykh Amin, it seems that Mawlānā No‘mani also held the conviction that Shāh Walī Allāh and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz were two scholars who far excelled over their predecessors across the millennium—*fā kam taraka al-awwalūn li al-akhirīn* and ensured the continued breath of the Walī Allāh family in the twentieth century. (I add that Mawlānā No‘mani has published the only article in recent history solely devoted to Shāh Abd al-‘Azīz’s *chahitay*, namely, Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq Dehlavi). In many ways both Mawlānā No‘mani and Shaykh Amin are utterly spectacular in that they refused to follow the mid-century Deobandi tide to remove Walī Allāh and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as the center of the tradition, nominally mentioning them on the day of Bukhārī Jalsah, as names in a chain, as ancient willow trees, as aged sycamores. Both devoted decades to writing and lecturing on Shāh Walī Allāh and his heirs in a moment that was militantly Salafi-infused—we may only come to learn their true worth as Muslims begin to reconstitute their tradition amid the ashes of Salafism.

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Mawlānā Hamzah told me that when he first met Shaykh Amin it “reminded me of my Mishkat teacher in Lahore,” and a tad shocked by finding a *mutabaḥḥir* across the Atlantic, proceeded and brought him to his home city, Seattle. Several ‘Ulema joined, and although Mawlānā Bilal and Mawlānā Hamzah had each spent north of six years abroad, came together and decided they would ask Shaykh Amin to instruct them in the rites of Walī

Allāh, that is, the *raison d'être* of Deoband—shocked their Deobandi education would find its completion in America. And so Walī Allāh's knowledge, after reaching Africa, Asia, Europe, and perhaps even Australia, had finally found itself in the land of apple crumb pie and the star-spangled banner, or as W.D. Fard Mohammad taught his followers in Detroit “the wilderness of twenty million Black Muslims,” two hundred and fifteen years after Lord Cornwallis, upon suffering a defeat to George Washington and evacuating to London in the aftermath of the Siege of Yorktown, was dispatched to Delhi and marched through the streets of Delhi, as Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn's neighborhood gazed on at the British redcoats. Mawlānā Bilal had said learning Ḥujjat Allāh with Shaykh Amin was “one of the most humbling experiences of my life.” Shāh Walī Allāh's vows began with a son of Gujarat and a son of Karachi, the two ports he passed as he sailed for the Hijāz in 1729.

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After the metaphysics section in *Ḥujjat Allāh*, Walī Allāh turns to the *Irtifaqat*, or the social evolution of a given community, that is, from primitive to ‘social’ and ‘technological’, deriving the word from the Quranic word in Surah Kahf, *murtafaq* (*wa sā'at and wa hasunat*), where it can mean accompaniment or comfort, or as Ibn ‘Abidin deploys it in his *Radd al-Muhtar*, i.e., the *Maraāfiq*, where necessities of the Maṣjid are and so thus can still be counted as a Maṣjid and so rows don't have to be congruous with it. So much ink has been spilled on it, so I don't see a need to summarize it, but I will say there are some overlaps with none other than Ibn Khaldun. It's not clear if Walī Allāh was familiar with the text, and there's enough difference between both conceptions of society to occlude any connections. Yet, Ibn Khaldun was far inferior to Walī Allāh in being unable to think of how metaphysics was linked to sociology, simply being a *faqih* and a *mu'arrikh*. After this Walī Allāh turns to the thorniest question of modernity—the pursuit of happiness, *bab al-sa'adah*. Again I should reiterate how plainly Shaykh Amin spoke about the most challenging sections of *Ḥujjat Allāh*, where Walī Allāh was at his most creative and possessed of utter *innovatio*, i.e., *ibdā'*. Clear to me in these classes was just how many decades Shaykh Amin had let these chapters marinate and percolate throughout his being—that is Shaykh Amin had had a reckoning with the whole cosmos of Wali Allah. And even if *Ḥujjat Allāh* is no *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, he uses terms he expects you to know from his other works, of which *Altāf al-Quds* and *al-Khayr al-Kathīr* are helpful books to get a sense of how he uses his terminology. Ghulām Muṣṭafā Qāsimi, student of Mawlānā ‘Ubaidullāh Sindhī, lamented the

challenge to pinpointing Walī Allāh's project because of how far-ranging it is, and how sometimes uses different words in various texts to mean the same concept (like *ḥayd al-aqdas* and *nafs al-kulliyah* and *al-qayyumiyah*)—he expects you to be literate in the same canon as he is—and, well, good luck if you're not! Which is why despite how many Deobandis exist who know strong Arabic are just unable to pick up the text as they can with al-Qarāfī' of Ibn al-Qayyim's. In Walī Allāh's *Nadir Maktubat*, or *Rare Letters*, in a letter to Mawlānā 'Āshiq, he notes how he plans to teach his *Izālat al-Khafā* after he completes the Sunan of Tirmizi. And as I noted in the earlier part of my essay, Mawlānā Qāsim taught Shaykh al-Hind these texts, as his own grandson Qārī Tayyib taught them to anybody who wished to attend in the sixties, as Muzaffar Alam noted to me (in between Zuhri and Asr). The Wali Allāhi texts were meant to be taught and engaged and disseminated and commentated on and felt experientially, as something aesthetic: aesthetic comes from the Ancient Greek word *Aiēsthenai*, its infinitive form. In Socrates' Greek it literally meant to perceive something with your hands or your mind, a sort of fusion of *ihsas* and *idrak* in Arabic.

Returning to the pursuit of happiness, Walī Allāh sets the stage for the section after, in a fashion rather Aristotelian, but utterly revamped, he describes the surah naw'iyya of Insan, or the particular form of Insan, that is, their Fiṭrah. Every creation has a Fiṭrah, and the human being holds the ideal of the most perfect Fiṭrah. Note the following passage of *Hujjat Allāh*:

If one asks why man has been commanded to offer prayer, and obey the Holiest of Prophets, or why has he been forbidden adultery and theft, the answer is that he has been obliged to do this and 'avoid that just as some animals have been obliged to eat grass and avoid meat, and others have been obliged to eat meat and avoid grass, or as bees have been obliged to obey the Queen Bee. The only difference between man and other animals is that while the animals know the obligation through natural inspiration (*ilham-i jibilli*) humans get that knowledge through learning and reflection, or through revelation (Wahy) and imitation (*taqlid*).

That is, Walī Allāh seeks to base the Shari'ah on pure reason, and pure reason on the Shari'ah, a sort of proto al-aql al-mu'ayyad, or enhanced intellect, where the statement of *shar'an wa 'aqlan* is nonsensical, because everything that is 'Aqli is Shar'i and vice-versa. Walī Allāh also makes a luminously staggering point, where he argues that our Fiṭrah is our



Taqdīr, that is, the potential of the *ṣūrah naw'iyya*. Where for the bees the obeying of the Queen Bee is instinctual, one of Walī Allāh's favorite natural examples (a sort of vivification of *Sūrah Nahl*), for human beings to activate this *Fiṭra* we are demanded to do it by a self-cultivation through our consciousness and moral praxis, that is, *al-ʿamal al-Ḥayy*. And perhaps most shockingly Walī Allāh suggests that our *Fiṭra* changes in every era, that is the tastes, the sensibilities, the aura, and the techniques it demands. *Wa al-sharā'i takhtalif bi al-ikhtilaf al-zaman*, he announces in *Tafhīmāt*. For if this were not the case, why would the *Sharī'ah* change for every major Prophet? And the larger question for Walī Allāh does the human *Fiṭra* change every century even after the Prophet's journey into *Barzakh*? (And the students of *Ḥujjat Allāh* already know the answer.)

The Greeks, and especially Plato, suggest in *Phaedo* that happiness is when the appetite, the reason, the spirit are rightly ordered—or Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, after declaring the highest happiness is found in contemplation (*theoria*) and can be determined by a sort of balancing, a mean between opposites, for instance, courage (ἀνδρεία), which lies between rashness and courage. Or gentleness (πραότης), which lies between irascibility and the lack thereof. Aristotle then says:

τὸ μέσον δ' ἔστι κατὰ τὸ πρᾶγμα τὸ ἴσον ἀπέχον ἀφ' ἑκατέρου τῶν ἄκρων,  
τοῦτ' ἔστι τὸ οὔτε πλεῖον οὔτε ἑλάττω... ἡ ἀρετὴ οὖν ἐστὶν ἕξις  
προαιρετικὴ ἐν μεσότητι οὔσα τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὠρισμένη λόγῳ καὶ ᾧ ἂν ὁ  
φρόνιμος ὀρίσειεν.

The mean is what is equidistant from each extreme... Virtue, then, is a disposition concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, determined by reason and as the wise person would determine it.

*Sophia*, *Nous*, *Epistamai*, *Phronesis*, *Techne* are the five ways by which the soul arrives at truth, that is, wisdom, thought, deductive reasoning, moral praxis, and art. Walī Allāh argues the cardinal virtues for the perfection of the soul, and thus, the *telos* of the human subject are *Taharah*, *Ikhbat*, *Sama'hah*, and *'Adalah*. This is unprecedented in the age of Islamic philosophy, for neither Ibn Rushd, that slavish imitator of Aristotle, nor Miskawayh nor Ibn Sa'ati had come to this. Time does not permit one to expand this, but Walī Allāh wanted the commands of the Lord of Prophets to structure the human pursuit of joy, and, consequently,

elucidated *Taharah*, *Ikhbat* (before God and human), *Sama'ha*, and *Justice*—of which only one overlaps with the Greeks, and one may argue that Walī Allāh's notion of justice is more encompassing than the Prince of Philosophers, and that purity, is not just ritual purity, but a whole range of techniques, a toolbox of technologies of self. For Muslims found themselves in a bind post-Kindi-cum-Farabi when the Greek classics began to scrape against the Prophetic mandate, leading the schism between the *Mutakallimin* and the *Falasifah*, but particularly the Ahl al-Ḥadīth who despised both—manifested in Ibn Taymiyya-versus-Rāzī, that still dominates in circles in Mecca, Amman, Cairo, and, now, Istanbul. If Ghazālī began the project to peel back the hegemonia, the *haymana*, of the Greeks as the moral authority on Islam, without discounting everything, Walī Allāh concludes it, deploying Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī as his primary mode of technique, for as Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattah had quoted in his *Introduction* to Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ḥayy's *al-Raf' wa al-Takmīl*, Imām Ghazālī had been given *bidā'ah* in 'Ilm al-Ḥadīth, that is, cheap goods. Neither Ghazālī nor Rāzī nor Dawwani nor al-Kashifi nor Ibn Rushd approached Walī Allāh in what he achieved (for proof, read Ghazālī's *Mizan al-'Amal* and then Walī Allāh's *Hujjat Allāh*—and I am merely restating Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz here). The closest were the Hanbali Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya et *Ḥanafī* Mawlānā Jalal al-Dīn al-Rūmī.

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The word *sa'adah*, to mean pure, unvarnished joy, hails from a pre-Islamic usage that alluded to the free-flowing of water—*Sa'ida al-mā'u: jarā sayḥan lā yaḥtāju ilā dāliyah*, the water flowed freely and did not need a bucket or water-wheel. The Jahiliya Arabs, *wadhi'u' al-lughah*, seemed to think that there was nothing more special than the free-flowing of water and so termed it joy. This is perhaps why the word *Shari'ah*, that is the watering path, is termed such. In Greek the word for happiness is εὐδαιμονία, from the prefix *Eu*, to mean well or excellent (but not like *Agathos*), and *damonia*, to mean a spirit, neutrally good or evil, as in English it implies a demon. Happiness, thus, to Aristotle and Plotinus is something in which someone is simply possessed well—if it were literally translated into Arabic, we would say *Majnun al-Khayr*. But in Arabic the idea of water flowing, that is, *sa'adah*, is a subject within its *Fiṭra*, on its *Taqdīr*, on its due course, unimpeded by any worldly or spiritual force, united by its common purpose between the *Nafs al-kulliyah* and the *Nafas al-Raḥmānī* and the *Fayḍ al-Aqdas*. To have *sa'adah*, that is, to be *mas'ud*, is to experience total

freedom with one's *jibillah*, with one's naturam. This is a secret Walī Allāh knew in the genos of his bones, his very marrow!

*Wa amma lathina su'idu'w fa fi al-Jānnah khalidina fiha ma dama al-samawat wa al-ardh*—when our Quran Tarjuma teacher, Mawlānā Aḥmed Chotia, explained the verse in Surah Hud, he was almost trance-like—he didn't raise his eyes once as he let the Arabic words lilt through, and, then, dazzlingly, the Urdu of the Quran succeeded thereafter; the way he said the Urdu of that Quranic verse, I would exchange a hundred Divans of Ghalib and Ḥāfez for it. His eyes peeled to the Quran before him, his hands parallel, like two Ottoman pillars of Selim Yavuz's Camii. The memory still blazes in my mind, with a sawed maple-desk before us, scribbled on by students across thirty years, in a brick-and-stone-cold classroom. The Mawlānā, son of Walī Allāh, who gifted me the meaning of the Quran, the humblest bestowal a human can offer another in the Nasut or the Jabarut.

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Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz wrote a letter to Mawlānā Amīr Haydar, where he offered an assessment of his father's *Hujjat Allāh*:

*Nobody has written anything like Hujjat Allah before, that is, the Asrar of Ḥadīth, where my father was favored with Ta'sil al-'Uṣūl and Ta'fri' al-Furu'. Even Imām Ghazālī had only a small trace of this knowledge! You see some of (my father's knowledge) in the Futuhat al-Makkiyya of Ibn 'Arabī and the Mizan of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani.*

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When I asked Mullā Uwais Namazi—who, across England and Europe, likely knows more than anyone about Shāh Walī Allāh and his family—about Shaykh Amin's engagement with Walī Allāh, he first mentioned that the late Mawlānā Khalid Mahmood told him that Darul Qāsim is the full promise of early Deoband, which is to say, the vision of Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī, that is, a school set up on the knowledge and the epistemia of Walī Allāh al-Dihlavī; and that Shaykh Amin was perhaps the only figure in America who was up to the task. 'Allāmah Khalid Mahmood was a student of Mawlānā Shabbīr Aḥmed 'Usmānī and

Mawlānā Zakariyya Kandehlavi, someone who likely met and interacted a great deal of Shaykh al-Hind's students. Mullā Namazi himself studied *Hujjat Allāh* at Nadva, where, as he explained, Nadva switched out Taftazani's *Sharḥ al-Aqaid*, for *Hujjat Allāh*, keeping students less Tamerlaneid and more Mughal (although Walī Allāh did call the Mughal dynasty Taimuriyan). What Mullā Namazi stressed to me—that he found lovely about Shaykh Amin's grasp of the Walī Allāhi Khāndān—was that Shaykh Amin did not passively consume Walī Allāh and Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid, i.e., that he obeyed the mandate of Imām Mālik, we tremble when we say his name, and Walī Allāh himself, to never agree with anyone in all rulings, save for the Holy Prophet.

That Shaykh Amin had his own critical thoughts about Walī Allāh's pan-Fiqh vision—to merge *Madhabs* and quite literally put ultimate ijtihad authority with Imām Mālik—and Walī Allāh's and Shāh 'Ismā'īl's vision to forego the Ḥanafī rulings on reciting Surah Fatiha behind the Imām, or Raf' al-Yadayn, both issues he notably followed Imām Shafi', and departed from Qāḍī Khān and Abū Ja'far Ṭaḥāwī. For the last, last thing that Walī Allāh would have wanted is for his sons and students to agree completely with everything he said, for perhaps the greatest merit of Walī Allāh's texts, so, so similar to Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya in his *Minhāj al-Sunnah and Dar' al-Ta'arud*, is he teaches you how to think, how to evaluate concepts, how to see the full arc of multiple competing traditions in Islam. For, the greatest, the most supreme of students of Walī Allāh, that is, the last Muftī of Hindustān, namely, that mystic-Muftī, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, it seems, that he did not depart from Imām Abū Ḥanīfah in any fiqh matter, and especially not in his *Dar al-Harb fatwa*! Such was Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's undying, ceaseless love for Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, and his appreciation as perhaps the greatest jurisconsult ever known to Islam.

خُدايا  
گر مُفتی‌ای هست کز پی او بِمیرم  
دوباره صالح را به گور افکن، که باز بِمیرم  
با عبدالعزیز دهلوی

*Oh God, if there is any  
Muftī to die  
for  
Tomb saaleh  
again and  
I will die again  
with 'Abd al-'Azīz of Delhi*

حديث صحيح بخاري است لو ستر دادم وسند هذا  
 اخبرنا شيخنا واستاذنا مولانا الشيخ ولي الله  
 بن النفع عبد الرحمن الدهلوي قال اخبرنا شيخنا  
 ابو طاهر محمد بن ابراهيم الكروي المدني قال اخبرنا  
 ابي قلنا احمد القشاشي قال نا احمد الشناوي قال  
 نا الشمس الرملي قال نا الزين طرنا قال نا الحافظ ابن حجر  
 العسقلاني قال نا البرهان ابراهيم السرخسي الشامي نا احمد البخاري  
 نا التراج الحسين الزيندي نا ابو الوقب السجزي نا الدردري  
 نا المحمدي نا الفيزي نا الحافظ ابو عبد الله محمد بن  
 اسماعيل البخاري



سند نادر شريف بخط حضرت شاه عبدالعزیز رحمہ اللہ بتحقیق محمد اقبال نمبر ۱۳۹۲

Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's handwritten Bukhārī Sanad.



## *The Father We Lost*

Recently, a friend of mine was enrolled in an Islamic finance class at a 'Dar al 'Ulūm in America, when out-of-the-red, he mentioned how “there’s a big institution in Chicago that is arguing that interest in non-Muslim-ruled countries is lawful to take.” It’s a big Fitnah, he declared, right after he quoted Imām Abū Ḥanīfah’s position on its lawfulness. I told my friend to raise Shāh ‘Abd al-'Azīz’s and Mawlānā Rashīd Gangōhī’s views on it. The Moulvee, a graduate of a Dar al 'Ulūm in Pakistan, responded, “This is a high-level question, but my own teachers have refuted his (Shāh ‘Abd al-'Azīz)’s fatwa as well. My teachers have shown that he (Shāh ‘Abd al-'Azīz) was wrong to have passed that fatwa.”

That the son of Wali Allah was wrong in his evaluation of Abū Ḥanīfah and of his own late Mughal society. Another son of Deoband scorning his father—disagreeing is one thing, but to speak of Shāh ‘Abd al-'Azīz as “refuted in his fatwa,” like he was an innovator, I thought to be quite literally disrespectful. Would they have used the same language for Mawlānā Anwar Shāh or Mawlānā Zakariyya, both of whom are far, far outranked by Shāh ‘Abd al-'Azīz in every domain of Islamic knowledge (and this is no disrespect to either of them, as we say the Holy Prophet far outranks sayyidunā Ayyub and sayyidunā Yunus—and far be it from any gustākhi that we intend disrespect to any Prophet). The very first Persian couplet I learned was from Mawlānā Tameem, who in our Nahw class, quoted Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (Rūmī in Nahw was the treat of a lifetime, where we often went from Mahw to Nahw and back!):

*Ay khuda juyim Tawfiq-i Adab*

*Ke be adab mand mahrum az fazl-i rabb*

Oh God! Please, all we seek is the gift of Adab

For Man without Adab is deprived of the favors of God!

To the reader, this may come across as peevish, or worse, persnickety, but I was thinking of just how much Shāh ‘Abd al-'Azīz offered for the ‘Ummah, that he went blind, that he was suffering disease upon disease, likely brought in by the Europeans in Delhi, and he was still teaching Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and dictating Fatāwā! As if to say that no matter what calamity befell him and his family, he would fulfill the vows to his father, the last saint of the Mughals, and the first of modernity, of *jadidiyyat*.

*Ya Rabb! Che Qahr ke Saaleh nami tawanad girist  
magar che binad bad rihlat-i paighambar ze zist*

Oh Lord! What cruelty that Saaleh is unable to weep?  
But what could he ever see after the Prophet left?

That all our *asanid* coil around Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and not Shāh Rafī‘ al-Dīn nor Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghani, even though both were teaching Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī to dedicated students, is a testament to the radical Maqbuliyya of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, the last Muftī of Mughal India.

And one should remember, if there is one individual whom Shāh Walī Allāh trained from alif-ba to *bab qawl Allāh ta’ala wa nadu’ al-mawazin al-qist*, it was gorgeously only Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and only him! Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thānvi in his *Arvāḥ-i Thalāthah* wrote that some ‘Ulema held the view that Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was Mutasahil, a word that can mean too lenient, or even lax, but that Mawlānā Thanvi fiercely disagreed with this characterizātion and defended the saintly Shāh. In a letter exchange between Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḡā Khān Barelvi and Mawlānā Ashraf Ali, Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḡā Khān had urged Mawlānā Thanvi to unite on the legacy of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and that it was after him that matters went awry, a subtle allusion to *sayyidunā* Shāh ‘Ismāīl Shāhid. I am not here to prosecute Deoband-Barelvi feuds, as Shaykh Amin constantly stressed to us the *wa-la-kum ma kasabtum* verse, but it is *Taqdīran* curious that Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, like his father, Shāh Walī Allāh, holds universal respect amongst the Deobandis, the Barelvis, the Ahl-i Ḥadīth, the secular Aligarhists like K.A. ‘Nizāmī, the Nadwītes, the Shibli-cum-Iqbāl camp, i.e., the western-educated Muslim class, and pretty much anybody with a mithqal of ‘Iman in South Asia. Such is the acceptance of Shāh Walī Allāh and his baby boy across two-hundred and fifty years in South Asia. Few Muslims hold such universal acceptance—in premodernity, Mawlānā Rūmī and Imām Ghazālī and Imām Mālik and Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī held such status across vast swathes of the Muslim world, and rightfully so (it is incredibly distressing to see the manner in which Shāfi‘ī scholars and their political elite discussed Imām Abū Ḥanīfah in the Middle Ages into the early modern).



Shāh Walī Allāh's, Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn's and Shāh 'Abd al-Qadir's translations of the Quran.

Once, in the full explosion of the morning in Johannesburg, after our class of Sharḥ Ma'āni al-Athar of Abū Ja'far Ṭahāwī, I followed our lecturer outside of class, showing him a letter that Walī Allāh had penned to the Shaykh of Sindh, Muin al-Dīn al-Thattī, in radical defense of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya. The Shaykh of Sindh had launched into a stinging critique of Aḥmed bin Abd al-Halim, accusing him of reviling Imām 'Alī, of reducing love of our lord, the Holy Prophet, in the hearts of people by barring them from thinking of the Prophet



when journeying to Madina, and, most shockingly, denying the Mahdi in the end of times—and the Quṭb in all eras. Walī Allāh, in his characteristic kindness, agape, and sophos that marks of all his writings, defends Ibn Taimiyya from all accusations, exonerating him from the claim that he held antipathy towards Imām 'Alī and Imām Ḥussein—alayhim al-salam!—and that he departed from the Salaf in the corporalism of God and His attributes, referencing a *dars* Abū Ṭāhir, his teacher, had given regarding Imām Ibn Hajar and Abū Ḥassan Ash'ari's positions on *istiḡwā*, arguing that Ibn Taimiyya's view was defensible and the likelier view of the Salaf. Walī Allāh in perhaps the most *ecstasia* and *enthusia* witnessed in his writings, declares without missing a heartbeat:

*wa ma balaghu' mi'shar 'ilmih*

And these scholars who attack (Ibn Taimiyya) have not reached one-tenth of his knowledge!

My Ṭaḥāwī teacher, a staunch defender of the master-Imām Abū Ḥanīfah in South Africa against the lite Salafism of Muftī Menk and others, towering above six feet, and forever donning a blue-fleece sweater, turned to me and said: *We must hold our tongue with Shāh Walī Allāh. For, Saaleh, if we were to say anything of him, Allāh would annihilate us. We would be devastated in this world and the next if we ever scorned Shāh Walī Allāh with our tongues.* Then he paused and said it again with even more force: *We would be destroyed, Saaleh.* He descended the stairs, shaking his head, carrying his zirā'-long volume of *Sharḥ Ma'ani al-Āthār*.

نecش غالب همچنين بر جا گذار آخر شبست  
خيز و در كحلى پرند گوهر آمايش مپيچ

*Lay your corpse here, O Ghalib, for it is the end of the night!*

## ***When the Lamps Went Out in Delhi***

When one peruses the curricula of the major Muslim institutions of America and England that coil around Walī Allāh, from Qalam to Dar al 'Ulūm NY to the Dār al 'Ulūms in Blackburn and Leicester and Bradford to IOK in SoCal to all the Dār al 'Ulūms in California

to Darus Salam, one is haunted by the fact that not a single one of these institutions teaches texts of Walī Allāh, with some exceptions: a fraction of these teaching a translation of *Al-Fawz al-Kabir* (I have also visited libraries of some of these institutions of which the plurality of Walī Allāh texts are not even available for students). Such also holds true for the 'Dar al 'Ulūms in Canada. That an institution could commit itself to the vision of Walī Allāh and not teach a single text of Walī Allāh or Mawlānā Qāsim—does this not ring the death-knell of the vision of Walī Allāh? Of Deoband itself? Of the glimpses we glean of his teaching schedule through his letters and the confessions of his sons, Walī Allāh may have spent an equal amount of time teaching his ontological texts as much as the books of Ḥadīth—why did this sunnah of the *buzurgvār-i buzurgān* come to an end? Mawlānā Qāsim did the same to make sure Shaykh al-Hind was as conversant and seasoned in the epistemia of Walī Allāh—where did this practice cease? And why did it cease? Who is responsible for the death of the Walī Allāhi project? That students may spend a decade acquiring the knowledge of Dars-i 'Nizāmī and be breathingly close to the *ma'arif* of the Delhite polymath, yet unable to ascend that final step into the hallowed halls of the Shāhs of sunrise.

Could one imagine a student at Madina University never reading *shaykh al-Islam* Ibn Taimiyya or a Bareilvi student never reading Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḡā Khān? Deobandis, in the high stages of late capitalism, have surrendered their greatest asset. But for what?

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A few years ago, there was a Deobandi 'Ulema meet, where we gathered in the woods in northern California, those towering pines and sycamores. I was presenting on The Two Shāhs, namely, Shāh Walī Allāh, and Shāh 'Alam II, Prince Ali Gauhar. There were at least eighty Mawlānās and Muftīs present—graduates of 'Dar al 'Ulūm Deoband (at least three), from 'Dar al 'Ulūm Karachi, from 'Dar al 'Ulūm Zakariyya, from Mawlānā Tariq Jameel's Madrasa, IIE, 'Dar al 'Ulūm New York, Chatham, and you name it. During the course of the *isti'rādh*, I asked the Mawlānās to name a few texts of either Shāh Walī Allāh and Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī—they could not name anything beyond *Hujjat Allāh* and *Tahzir al-Nas*, for each respective figure. Imagine if I had asked about the works of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz or Shāh Isma'il Shāhid? Would a single book have been produced? Many of whom had spent decades training and teaching in Deobandi ecclesia.



On the Deoband website, a certain Maulvi from England wrote an entry on Mawlānā Qāsim. He didn't add any biographical detail to the very short entry of Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ḥayy Nadwī, that is, he literally just translated it—he didn't supplement any works that Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ḥayy left out, of which one short trip to Deoband would have taught him the rest of the oeuvre. He transcribed Mawlānā Qāsim's *Qibla-Nūmā* as *Qibla-Nama*, a mistake that is so remarkably sloppy—that anyone who is familiar in 19<sup>th</sup>-century *fatāwā*, but also, the *Fatāwā* of Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn constantly deploys this compound Persian phrase, would find themselves squirming to see such a slip-up. *Qibla-Nūmā*, to mean, *Qibla-showing*, a treatise where Mawlānā Qāsim was refuting a Hindu theologian on whether Muslims pray to the Ka'bah. Moreover, if anyone were aware of basic 19<sup>th</sup> century historiography, they would understand how the word *Nāmā* is typically deployed, as Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz deploys in his *Fath al-'Azīz*. *Nūmā* is simply the causative form of *namudan*—but one doesn't have to be steeped in Persian to know the correct title; one simply needed to have opened the book. Of which the Maulvee clearly did not. And, finally, this is nothing to say on his gross mis-transcription of the most famous work of Mawlānā Qāsim, *Āb-i Ḥayāt*, which he writes as “Ab Ḥayāt.”



An edition of *Qibla-Nūmā* from the 1890s.

These instances are not exceptional but rather crucially endemic to the modern Deobandi. Shāh Walī Allāh and Mawlānā Qāsim have become only totems to be invoked, to be celebrated, but to be left as unread, unstudied, unengaged, undialogued—but of course had Mawlānā Qāsim written a treatise on horizontal-vs-vertical cut, they would have read it. To defend to the last breath figures without ever opening their productions and seeing them for the miracles they were: ordinary humans who were supremely blessed by God and devoted to the knowledge of the Prophet and who offered *Tajdīd*, that is, as Iqbāl said, *Jādah-Paymāyī*, as the Muslim world saw herself crippled politically and intellectually. Barelvis are excommunicatingly angry at modern Deobandis for statements they find repulsive in Shāh 'Ismā'īl and Mawlānā Qāsim—but who is going to relate to them that Deobandis haven't opened these texts in decades?

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I am walking in the city of Haiderabad, where my ancestors have married and died for centuries, for even perhaps longer than when Mir Qamaruddin Khān took charge of the city, and carved out a final post-Aurangzēb emirate in the marshes of the Deccan. I get dropped off at perhaps the largest and most well-funded Barelvi Madrasa in India, the Jam'ia 'Nizāmīyya. I am curious to see the state of Walī Allāh and Ibn 'Arabī in the Qairawan of Haiderabad, the Madrasa older than a century, the paint of its walls resplendent as the sky itself. There is a green-awned Dargah in the middle of the city and I am ordered to do *fatihah-khwani*. I am introduced to both the chancellor-Muftī and the principal of the Madrasa—they switch to Arabic, after they were told I am a madrasa-graduate, not believing I am a Mawlānā, and they test me, after which I begin to interlace classical Persian in my Arabic Fush'a, to which their eyebrows begin to raise. They ask where I studied—not to cause a storm, I say a Madrasa in Chicago that they probably have not heard of. I rotate the topic to their curriculum—I'm intrigued, I mean, didn't Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḡā Khān excommunicate the early Deobandis for not being 'Ṣūfī enough? I ask them about the 'Ṣūfī authors: Shāh Walī Allāh, Ibn 'Arabī, Shihab al-Dīn Suharwardī, Davud al-Qaysari, and Mir Damad, do they teach them? How does a student access their knowledge? Are any of the texts taught to the advanced students? The Muftī tells me to wait—after Zuhr, we proceed into who I assume is the principal or the Shaykh al-Ḥadīth, he must be nearly eighty years old. Three Muftīs sit across me—all past their fifties, and here I am, a second-generation Haiderabadi from California, holding my wits by its very edges. The elder-Muḥaddith asks

me what I study, what I research. I tell him. He responds with the same curiosity and dismissal as the 'Tablīghī Mawlānā. I narrate Shaykh Amin to him and the fantastical possibility one could study Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, and Ibn 'Arabī in an institution, where the six books of *Ḥadīth* and the four volumes of *Marghīnānī* are taught. He drops his voice, in a tone icy, and retorts:

*What does Ibn 'Arabī have to do with Shāh Walī Allāh?*

Here was one of the most senior Bareilvi scholars of South Asia—whose name I will omit—and yet fatefully unaware of the intellectual project of Walī Allāh (for almost all of Walī Allāh's works deal with Ibn 'Arabī). The octogenarian was relying on the popular folk memory of Walī Allāh, as merely someone who was a *Muḥaddith*—and nothing else!—and thus assumed to be someone who was not interested in the knowledge of the Akbaris. I was aghast—not as shocked as I was with the gaffe of the elder 'Tablīghī Mawlānā—as one does imagine that if the Deobandis did not preserve the knowledge of the 'Ṣūfīs, the followers of Mawlānā Aḥmed Reẓā Khān must have, for their professed loyalty to South Asian 'Ṣūfism? That Walī Allāh *Ḥikmah* had all but disappeared from Deoband *madrasa*, from the Bareilis, and 'Tablīghī Jamat is a calamity I have the great misfortune of recording.

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In letters between Mawlānā Ilyās Kandhlavi and Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmed Gangōhī, and from his other scattered writings, it is brightly clear the Mawlānā Ilyās' entire vision of Tabligh was premised on certain chapters of Walī Allāh's *Hujjat Allāh*—that every Muballigh, every 'Tablīghī was, in fact, a walking *phaneī*, a manifestation, of the intellectual project of Walī Allāh. It is also clear that Mawlānā Ilyās did take bay'ah from some who joined Tabligh, telling them that he will be administering the bay'ah and the pledges of Shāh Walī Allāh, and inducting them into the four 'Ṣūfī orders, as Walī Allāh did with his four sons.

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In Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's *Tuhfah-yi Ithna 'Ash'ariyya*, he addresses the Shi'i accusation that sayyidunā Umar (may Allāh always keep his name holy on our tongues) disobeyed the Holy

Prophet in his final moments, as cited in Imām Bukhārī, the *Rāzīyya* Ḥadīth, which interestingly in modern Italian, is used to mean a Muslim raid, a distortion of the Turko-Arabic word Ghazi. Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz says:

If sayyidunā ‘Umar was guilty of this, then also wouldn't Ahlul Bayt be guilty of not providing a paper to the Holy Prophet? Weren't they also present in those final moments? And may we be forbidden to ever think such about the Ahl al- Bayt, God's peace and blessings upon all of them!

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Last year, a Shī'ī law student Ḥussein asked me to address a gathering of Shī'ī, Iraqi, Iranian, Lebanese, Pakistani, and Haiderabadi students across northeastern universities—that is, to speak on Imām ‘Alī's martyrdom, *‘alayhis salam*. I thought of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz teaching a staunch Shiite Mughal nobleman Ibn ‘Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ*, one, per his own admission, who would openly revile the first two Khulafa. I agreed and summarized some of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz's essay on the mysteries of Imām ‘Alī's *shahadah*, and how the mystery blazes through his two breathlessly beautiful sons, Imām Ḥassan *et* Imām Ḥussein, *ṣalwātullāhi ‘alayhima*, that the Lord of the Prophets and the *Taqdīr* of Imām ‘Alī meet in those two sayyids, those two Lords of Paradise. *May our mothers be sacrificed for them.*

A few months later, the law student, told me that one of the Pakistani Shi'īs was smitten by Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz's words on Imām ‘Alī, *‘alayhis salam*, and that he had been thinking about it for months, that is, on the mysteries of Imām ‘Alī, *‘alayhis salam*, that the great Sunni Muftī of Delhi would lecture to his students on ‘Ashura, after the Shāh broke his fast, shifting from celebrating the Exodus to now mourning the death of the Prophet's grandsons. Driving upwards on a semi-hill in Washington D.C., on a swampy afternoon, I thought of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and how he wanted the Shi'īs to know that Sunnis were in utter adoration of the Twelve Imāms, *alayhim al-salam*. That winter, in a manuscript library in Bihar, I had discovered a treatise that Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had penned, and never printed, upon the death of Shāh Walī Allāh, and this may have been the first essay he had ever written, where he sought to prove to the Shi'īs of Delhi and Lucknow, that Shāh Walī Allāh had spent his whole life teaching and writing about the twelve Imāms, and specifically Imām

Ja'far al-Sadiq, Imām Zayn al-Abidīn, and Imām Alī Musā Ridā, and Imām Ḥassan Askarī, and, of course, Imām Mehdī, *alayhim al-Salam*.

As San'ai Ghaznavi once wept:

*“there are so many Imāms in the world  
But show me an Imām like ‘Alī Musā Ridā!”*

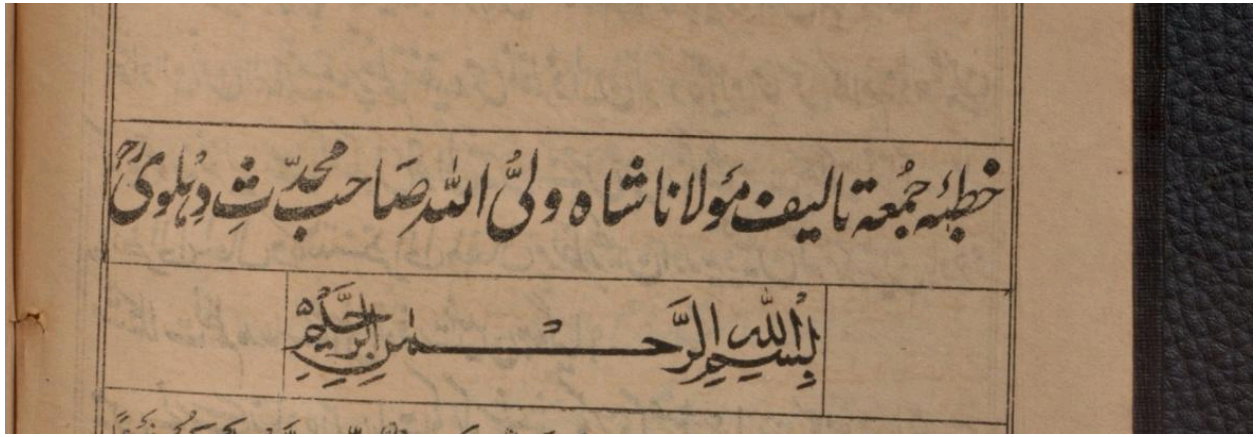
### ***How Walī Allāh Crumbled His World***

The first ever text I was exposed to from Shāh Walī Allāh was his *Fuyudh al-Haramayn*. After our *Bukhārī* teacher Mawlānā Faḍl al-Raḥmān al-‘Āzamī had completed *Bukhārī* and *Muslim*, he made us read certain passages from the dream-diary. A list had gone out in our classroom to pay for the printed pages, which I missed, and so I had to share with the guy next to me, a certain Muftī Hammad from Canada. And so began my libros-engagement with Walī Allāh. I revisited that text before I began to write that essay—the diary is full of wonders and allows a reader a glimpse of how Shāh Walī Allāh accessed the ‘Alam al-Mithāl. In one dream he notes attending the Mawlid of the Holy Prophet in Mecca after his first Hajj (how did *asbaq* work with Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurānī?). In another he notes large groups of people contending with each other over the meaning of *Wahdat al-Wujūd* and *Wahdat al-Shuhud*.

In perhaps the most consequential and revealing dream, Walī Allāh notes how he was ordered to crush every system and order in the Muslim world, that is, every tradition—he used the words “*Fakka kulla Niẓām*.” *Fakka* can have the meaning to tear apart, to fissure, to unravel—in Modern Arabic, curiously, it holds the meaning of the socio-cultural anthropologists of England, that is, deconstruction. He doesn’t add the word *tabniya* after—reconstruction. Mawlānā ‘Ubaidullāh Sindhī and Mawlānā Manazir Ahsan Gilani, in their respective works on Shāh Walī Allāh, hold this to be utter proof that Shāh Walī Allāh saw himself as breaking through every established Muslim intellectual and social and political and theological institution dominant in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which would entail the Ḥanafī Madhab of India, the intellectual dominance of Aḥmed Sirhindī, the suzerainty of the Naqshbandiyya and ‘Chishtīyya in India, the Turkic-Persianate model of governance advocated by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlavī for the Mughal emperor Jahāngir in *his Risāla*



*Nūriya*, which is striking because Shāh Walī Allāh in *Hujjat Allāh* in multiple passages in deep emotional resonances, advocates for the restoration of the Persian-Mughal model of governance. Again, it's not clear what *Nizam Walī Allāh* intended when he wrote the word, and if a Deobandi hand-waves it “well, it just means the 'Şūfī innovations prevalent in Gujarat and northern India,” all that just really tells me that they have neither read Shāh Walī Allāh nor the Deobandis who interpreted and wrote on Shāh Walī Allāh, a la Mawlānā 'Ubaidullāh Sindhī and Mawlānā Gilani. I suspect I will only have an answer after many more decades sitting with his work.



A manuscript of *Jumma Khutbahs* of Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, and Shāh 'Isma'il Shāhid.

### ***When The Madrasa Became a Graveyard***

One day, in Azaadville, as I was preparing to read some passages of *Bukhārī* and *Kitāb al-Awāil* with Mawlānā Faḍl al-Raḥmān al-Āzamī in his staggeringly Ḥadīth-stacked home on Azaad Avenue, I showed him a recent Iran-printed copy of Walī Allāh's *Saṭa'āt*, where he offers a sort of natural philosophy, written in Avicennian Persian. Mawlānā Faḍl al-Raḥmān al-Āzamī had passed the Munshi exam, he told me, and in the final exam they had read the *Ruqa'at-i 'Ālamgīri*, a notoriously difficult Persian text of Aurangzēb's epistolary correspondences to his various sons, grandsons, and generals (a la the first Nizam of Haiderabad)—i.e., that the *Saṭa'āt* would be like reading an introductory book compared to such Persian. Mawlānā Faḍl al-Raḥmān leafed through the pages—and raised his eyebrows, saying in Urdu: *Some people don't like these sorts of texts and knowledge—they fear it.* Immediately I understood what he was nudging me to, and so much of 'Ulema life in the

1960s India opened itself to me—I immediately recalled Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwī's letter to Muḥammad Iqbāl where he told him to avoid the 'Sūfī texts of Shāh Walī Allāh. Mawlānā Nadwī was one of the most well-read scholars of his era—and if he had issues with the philosophical texts of Shāh Walī Allāh, we may only imagine what other 'Ulema may have said, those who lacked wus'at al-nazar, even if they were linked to him by sanad. The was held by certain factions of the 'Ulema class in India and that Mawlānā Faḍl al-Raḥmān had observed among them: love Shāh Walī Allāh only in Ḥadīth, and discard all else (and at Darul Qāsim the ether and ethos being the complete opposite).

But of course this ethos is in total contradiction to how Mawlānā Qāsim taught Shaykh al-Hind, as recorded by none other than Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thanvi. Whether this was a direct insecurity towards the threat of Salafism, or the charges of superstition levelled by Indian Muslim liberals, or just the effect of Western positivism on all sections of Muslim India, we will never know. But it remains that the only place where one may study all of Shāh Walī Allāh in an institutional setting between America, England, and South Africa is Darul Qāsim, under Shaykh Amin—and this may yet also soon hold true for India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, the four countries whose Ulema who are largely devoted to the Walī Allāhi *Khāndān*, at least in name. That is, it may hold true for the whole world in only a few years.

ندارد صالح هیچ قدر عالمان به او نه  
به سرِ راه چو مجنون نشیند، نالد: یا مصطفیٰ

*saaleh has no respect for the 'Ulema and they have none for him  
he sits on the edge of the road as Majnun, weeping: oh Muṣṭafā!*

--

واحدی السعیدین منها الی الان موجودین زیار و تیرک بہاویک سوی ازان  
 ہر دو تا حال کہ ستریکہ زیار و دو صد و چہل است موجود است بعد حضرت  
 ستاد ولی اللہ مولانا رفیع الدین زیارت میکنانید و در سن یکہزار و صد  
 و سی و دو رحلت فرمودند بعد ازان مولانا عبد العزیز تاسن یکہزار و صد  
 و چہل زیارت کش کنا نیدہ درین سن رحلت نمودند بعد شان مولوی اسحاق  
 صاحب نیرہ مولوی عبد العزیز مرحوم از ابتدا ماہ صفر سنہ مذکور کمالفا  
 ماہ ربیع الثانی زیارت موی نہ کورہ کنا نیدہ روانہ کعبہ شریف شدند و حکمت  
 فی وضعہما تحت الوسادہ کما فی انظارہ ان المعطی لہ لا یظنہما من ستر  
 لجة فلا یجب ان ہذہ الروایا کانت خیالاً مادہ منہا فی الخارج و حکم

A dream diary of a student of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, containing the dreams of the Walī Allāh family and commentary of Imām Bukhārī's Ta'bir al-Ruya chapter.

## *The Ecstasy of Walī Allāh*

Some months later, walking back to my apartment in Cambridge, I had an awful week—when I called my classmate, Mawlānā Tamim (in Persian his last name literally means ‘the most’). Mawlānā Tamim and I began *‘Alīmiyya* the same day, and we were on the same flight from San Francisco to Johannesburg (via Dubai), to start at Azaadville. Mawlānā Tamim has an exceptional ability where he does not forget a single couplet, Persian or Urdu

or Arabic. Once in Fremont he quoted an Arabic couplet of which I had never heard, only to find it quoted in Shāh Walī Allāh's *Tafhīmāt* later that summer! Such is his literary Jibillah!

Hailing from an old-guard Afghan family in Kabul that has held home in the capital long before the large-scale migration to the capital under the wave of modernizātion projects of Amanullah Khān and Zāhir Shāh, his ancestors may have been in Kabul when Genghis Khān and Tamerlane, and, finally, Shāhzada Bābur (and after him the Victorians in the First Anglo-Afghan War) swept through the city. It's Friday, and still blue-chilly, despite it being April in Boston. There are few Mawlānās in America, few upon whom calamities, the *jafa kashiy-i zamana* have struck—he is a myth that Dosteyovsky may have imagined in his fantasias.

Mawlānā Tamim persuaded my mom to ultimately allow me to journey to South Africa for almost five years (she was petrified when I first suggested the idea—I am the first 'Ālim in my Khāndān, horizontally and vertically). And so this essay would likely have not emerged if not for his capacity for israr and asrar. Yet, despite all that has left him weather-beaten, weather-fallen, Taqdīr-fallen, when I relayed my sadness to him, he said, in a suave and ecstasy that perhaps only 'Sūfī Kabulis possess, one that has transcended generations and geographies, one that Hallaj knew well:

*You know, Saaleh, if I was given the choice to do the 'Ālimiyya again, knowing all that would strike me, all that I would suffer, I would choose it again, and again and again, all the sleepless and terrible nights, all the betrayal, the thousands of nights away from my family, of not knowing how I'll provide for my family, of knowing I could have built something else for myself without all the tragedy, all the balaya and masaib. I would choose this life of turmoil and betrayal over, and over, and over. I would choose it, Saaleh, for merely the reason of being connected to Shāh Walī Allāh. No matter how much you and I have tolerated, have put up with (lit. bar-dashtan), it was all worth it to have a claim to Shāh Walī Allāh.*

To be a son of Shāh Walī Allāh. The way he said it, he didn't miss a note or beat, the conviction blazing through every word he spoke, like air suspended in time, like water stilled on the Potomac River. I knew how much he offered up for 'Ilm, for the last Ḥadīth of Bukhārī, and I didn't doubt a single word or emotion expressed. To be rooted in Shāh Walī



Allāh, Mawlānā Tamim had declared, was the greatest gift he knew, the brightest favor, the most supreme element of his Taqdīr, the most enchanting flashpoint of his Fiṭra, the most fundamentally beautiful experience he had tasted, in pure *aesthetica*, and it had demanded the greatest sacrifice one could make as a child of modernity, the exchange of the promise of America, and receiving nothing material in return. And isn't this the mystery, the raaz, of the 'Sūfīs and Awliya? To give up everything, even the lines on your hands, for nothing save the possibility of seeing the Prophet, that is, everything?

And this ni'mah would receive not a scab of ingratitude from him. That on Judgement-Day, when all roped to the Prophet will gather (may we be chained to him), like moths chasing a luminous flame, there will be a coterie of those intellectually chained to the Holy Prophet through Shāh Walī Allāh. And Mawlānā Tamim did not want to be anywhere else on *Roz-i Mahshar*, and nor with anyone else. We ended the call, and I prayed Asr before I hit the yellow-orange Makruh time of 'Asr. Throughout the kneeling I couldn't help but think of Mawlānā Tamim's words. That his loftiest favor in life was his association to Shāh Walī Allāh, and to the Lord of the Arabs, *Mir-i Arab*. Walking towards the bridge arched over the Charles River, I found myself in the aftermath of Mawlānā Tamim's words, my face in my hands, my hands in my face, the mist of the river blowing on my face, my tears and the mist fusing.

If Darul Qāsim has become the mecca of Shāh Walī Allāh (and this is without question), the pardah is still drawn, that is, you must be initiated into the ma'arif of Walī Allāh, and it is not for the whole world to see. But here Mawlānā Tamim "The Most" lifted the veil, as 'Sūfīs from Kabul and Khorasan have always done, *a la* Hallaj and Tustari and Baha al-Dīn Naqshbandi. Here he spoke what all of us felt in the recess of our jigar, that is, be-hijabana, unveiled. Wa saqat-al-Qinā', as Mahmoud Darwish once said in a delegation to the PLO.

صالح به ہندی می گوید اندر پردہ  
ولیکن به فارسی گوید آشکارا

*saaleh speaks under a veil with Indians  
But with Afghans he speaks with no veil!*

The Ni'mah of Shāh Walī Allāh. I thought of all two thousand nights I slept away from home, across continents, beginning at barely sixteen—suddenly content that they were all



worth it, the mist of the river having now paused.

### *The Ni'mah of Shāh Walī Allāh*

پیش ز برداشتن خنجر قاتل به گردن، صالح  
منتظر باش که تقدیرت چه آشکار کند

*Before you place the dagger on your throat, saaleh  
At least wait and see what your fate unfolds!*

### *The Philos of the Malakūt*

The debate between the Andalusian mystic, Ibn 'Arabī, and the Mughal mystic, Aḥmed Sirhindī, is one of the most riveting of Islamic history. The frontiers of Andalus and Hindustān were conquered in the same year by two Umayyad armies, one by Tariq Bin Ziyad and Muḥammad bin Qāsim, a nephew of Hajjaj bin Yūsuf. The debate is quite simply on Wujūd. The disagreements center on multiple atwar, but chief among them is if the salik, as he transcends stage after stage, and reaches the *qummaḥ*, and he comes into proximity with the reality of God, does he notice anything else? Ibn 'Arabī argued that the salik sees naught but the Wujūd of Allāh, while Aḥmed Sirhindī had held that it was possible for him to see *other haqaiq al-mumkinat*, that is, 'adam. Moreover, the a'yān al-thabitah, the archetypes that exist in the knowledge of Allāh, as also in the Kalām-i Nafsi of Allāh, are they eternal or not? Aḥmed Sirhindī held that they were Makhluq—but Ibn 'Arabī had fiercely contended that they were pre-eternal. According to Sirhindī, the nature, the parts, and the reality of the A'yān were all Mumkin and had no business with *azaliyya*. Ibn 'Arabī had entered India through scholars like Mawlānā Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī, Bahā' al-Dīn Zakariyyā Multānī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-'Irāqī, Mullā Muḥammad Jaunpūrī, 'Allāmah 'Abd al-'Alī al-Anṣārī, Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzīm al-Assār, and the ancestor of Mawlānā Rashīd Gangōhī, Shaykh 'Abd al-Quddūs Gangōhī. Shāh Walī Allāh, after his stay in Madīnah, and studying the works of his teacher's Shāfi'ī father, namely, Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī al-Shahrazūrī (perhaps the first who mastered the Ṣiḥāḥ Sittah and Ibn 'Arabī in a parallel, masterful way?), knew it would be up to him to conclude this debate. For Walī Allāh, the debate centered on the reality of Allāh and His attributes, the nature and position of the Ṣifāt, and the

positionality of the *a'yān al-thābitah* and the *ḥaqā'iq al-mumkināt*. The Mughal and the Andalusian mystics agreed that there existed *tanazzulāt*, or descents of the *wujūd*—and beyond that, as Mawlānā Rūmī calls it, *warā' al-warā'*, there is Pure Being, or *zāt al-Baḥt*, or the stage of *Aḥadiyyah*.

## ***The Second Breath of Andalusia: When the Shaykh Awoke***

In my final months at Darul Qāsim, Shaykh Amin agreed to instruct me and a teacher of Ḥadīth at Darul Qāsim, Mawlānā Mohi, in the most challenging text of perhaps all of Islamic history, that is, *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* of Ibn 'Arabī. We covered around sixty percent of the text, ending at the *Faṣṣ* of the Prophet *ṣālih*, as I set out for Boston. During, I believe, the *Faṣṣ* of Ya'qub, Shaykh Amin opened his Istanbul-pressed copy of Shaykh al-Akbar, and as he would often do in all classes but especially with Ibn 'Arabī's texts, he would cite vignettes of Mawlānā Mīrān of Sabīl al-Rashād. Often, when Shaykh Amin would recall these anecdotes, he would look neither at us, nor the book, just gazing above Mawlānā Mohi and me. One day during the *Bezel of Jacob*, he quoted a line, likely taught to him by Mawlānā Mīrān, that *wa al-rabb rabb wa in 'safal, wa al'abd 'abdu wa in 'ala!*

Some months later, as I did a final stint in Azaadville, I sat in between Tahawi and Bukhārī, with lecture notes of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, in that high register of Indian Persian. In the final decade of his life, a Mughal scholar had sought clarity from Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, *about the Nafahat al-Uns, of the great Afghan scholar of Herat, and friend of Mir Ali Navai, Mullā Jāmi al-Harawī.*

As Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz reflected on the notion of *Wujūd* between Mawlānā Rūmī and Mawlānā Jami, he closed out the Majlis with *wa al-rabb rabb wa in 'safal, wa al'abd 'abdu wa in 'ala* in front of everyone in his Mehndiyan Madrasa. My mind immediately voyaged to Shaykh Amin, in the Dawrah classroom of Azaadville, as Mawlānā Moosa stepped inside the green-and-red carpet with his *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhrī*.

بُكُشْ صَالِحِي كِه رَا زِ خُدا فَاش مِي كُنْد،  
جَلَاد! كُجا إِجَازَتِ كُفَرَش دِهِي بَه دِين؟

*Execute saaleh for he spills the secret on the Minbar  
Where is he who permitted him to drive Muslims towards disbelief?*

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The deeper remit that I reckoned with as I studied Ibn 'Arabī with Shaykh Amin is why did the Deobandi *scholia* stop teaching this book? In that, only after Shaykh Amin's lectures on Ibn 'Arabī did so many passages from Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Mawlānā Qāsim open themselves up to me—that is, without *Shaykh al-Akbar* Deobandis are quite literally cut off from their tradition. I can guarantee any Madrasa graduate that if they haven't been steeped in the knowledge of Shaykh al-Akbar, then they will probably spend their whole lives, as the Jahiliyya Arabs say in the Mu'allaqat, as 'ashwā'iy, indiscriminately and failingly in trying to pinpoint any larger project of the Walī Allāh or the Qāsimi vein. That is, so many Deobandis have been utterly disconnected to their own *turāth* of their Aslaf—I can also say that if modern Deobandis are insistent on defending the legacy of Shāh 'Ismā'il Shāhid, what legacy are they defending if they are not reading and studying his most important text, namely, the *'Abaqat*, which is really just a commentary of Ibn 'Arabī and Walī Allāh? Is the goal to defend the orthodoxy of a man with the goal in mind that nobody should actually be equipped or trained to actually engage in the thought of Shāh 'Ismā'il Shāhid (and Bareilvis are utterly wrong to condemn him as a Wahhabi—he's absolutely not a Ḥanafī, but he is an Akbari to his dying breath). That is, why should Deobandis be deprived of the most brilliant, most eye-ranging, most tradition-towering parts of their legacy? If Deobandis are not reading Ibn 'Arabī and Shāh Isma'il Shāhid, then what makes them different from a Madinah University graduate—is it just *Ḥanafī Fiqh*?

هنگام تنگدستی در عیش کوش و مستی  
کاین کیمیای هستی قارون کند گدا را

*In the hour of distress, seek joy and drunkenness;  
For this elixir of being can make a beggar into a Qārūn*

## *The Vows of Plato*

Shāh Walī Allāh in *Lamahāt* and *Tafhīmāt* and *al-Khayr al-Kathīr* presents to us his clearest vision of reality—the first descent of Wujūd after *al-zāt al-baht* is the *wāḥidiyya* (or the unicity), after which we have the *al-Wujūd al-munbasit*, or a sort of all-encompassing being, which is also the *al-naḥs al-kulliyah*, or the Universal Soul, which he gives further elaboration in his *Ṣaṭa'āt* and *Alṭāf al-Quds*, as the sort of structuring force of the universe, that which gives the genome and the Fiṭrah to each organism and microcosm—this may, to my understanding, also be what Walī Allāh terms as the *al-Naḥs al-Rahmāni* and the *Qayyumiyya* (Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid further extends this in his *'Abaqāt*).

Are these descents conceptual or real and where are the *a'yān thābitah* in relation to all of this? Shāh Walī Allāh in his *manāḥij* of *Tatbiq*, or literally bringing two plates to meet in a ninety-degree angle, intervenes in the *hiwār* between Ibn 'Arabī and Aḥmed Sirhindī—Walī Allāh aligns with Ibn 'Arabī that there is *thubūt* of the haqaiq in the knowledge of God, that is, as he says, “Everything which exists at any moment of time is anchored through the Divine from the point of view of *thubūt* and from the point of view of a quality or necessity of the Necessary Being.” The 'Sūfīs term this as *Tanazzulāt al-Ilmiyya* (cognitive or intellectual descent). Yet, Walī Allāh argues this is not simply something *muntabi'*, or impressed, in the mind of God, but rather it is a *ḥayd*, or an effusion, of all possible beings into *Wujūd*, *ex Wujūdus* to *in Wujūdum*. They are demands of the Most Holy Essence, that is, *Iqtida'at*. Sometimes 'Sūfīs term them as the *al-Fayd al-Aqdas*, or the Most Holy Effusion. And, again, what of the *a'yān al-thābitah*? As Shāh Walī Allāh summarizes Ibn 'Arabī's position and argues that he thinks they are only Names and Attributes—a conceptual distinction. Yet they have two aspects, something that neither Ibn 'Arabī and Aḥmed Sirhindī sought to clarify and which fell to the lot of Walī Allāh. In one dimension they are with God in *azal*, in the other dimension, they are identified with *ḥaqāiq al-mumkināt*, manifesting them into Wujūd—they are, to Walī Allāh, modes of the Wujūd of God that have an *i'tibārī* role to play. They have no *Wujūd-i Jawhari*, that is, they do not exist save in the knowledge of God or in the *Jawahir* of the world.

Aḥmed Sirhindī's disagreement with Ibn 'Arabī's elucidation is detailed but he is particularly critical that Ibn 'Arabī identifies the *a'yān* with the *zāt* even in the lower levels of Wujūd, positing instead that there is a *mumkin al-Wujūd* in the lower degrees, what he deems as

*marātib al-tafsīl*. Moreover, Sirhindī is vehement that the haqaiq al-mumkinat are not the Divine Names themselves. The *thamarah* is especially poignant as it relates to the *tajallī*, the *Zill*, and the ‘aks, theophania, shadows, and reflections of the *asmā and sifāt*. For Ibn ‘Arabī, the *mumkināt* are manifestations of the Essence, yet for Sirhindī, they are naught but shadows of them, of which Sirhindī coins *al-‘adam al-mutaqābil* (a term used throughout Sirhindī’s work where he believes that every Divine name has a contrary or an opposite). This is all to say, for Sirhindī, the matter of the *haqāiq* are ‘adam while the form is the shadow or the reflection or “mirrors of ‘adam.”

Walī Allāh concludes that this debate is simply based on a verbal controversy, where terms are unfortunately misconstrued across bloodlines and lifelines. Take, for instance, the term haqaiq al-Mumkināt, they are neither existing nor non-existing realities. The *Falāsifa* term them as *Māhiyyāt*, but the ‘Sūfīs see them as the *Tanazzulāt*, yet they are fundamentally the same reality (or non-reality). Walī Allāh also calls them *suwar al-ma‘lumah*, a great term to functionally come to terms with their positionality in the world and the knowledge of God (that is both external and eternal). Moreover, the haqaiq and the Divine Names are not two conceptually distinct *categorias* but they have a self-integrated relationship—whatever is hidden in the divine names comes to life in the known forms, or the haqaiq al-mumkinat.

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In the *Lamahāt*, Walī Allāh says in the Eighth Chapter:

The first thought that arises is that there is something we call Being—both as it exists in reality and as it appears in the external world. In contrast to it, there is what we call Non-Being.

Sometimes we reflect on the essence of Being, but at the same time we may doubt whether that essence itself exists, even going so far as to call it (the essence) non-being. Yet, despite this, valid statements can still be made about it (that is, we can make valid predications with it).

Other times, we think about Being itself without considering the essence at all. This is why saying “Blackness exists” conveys something meaningful,



whereas “Blackness is blackness” does not. When describing the essence, you affirm that this essence exists, and that existence belongs to it. In both situations, the point being made is the same—something is understood. From this it becomes evident that Being and essence are not identical but two distinct things (that is, *Wujūd* and *māhiyya*).

The meaning of Being is something demonstrated through essences. But to properly grasp this issue, one must carefully understand both Being and essence in detail, and recognize what they truly are in themselves. Therefore, listen to what is being explained here, and be satisfied with a summary rather than a full, detailed treatment.

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Walī Allāh further laments the inability to describe *Wujūd* in a later section where he argues that Being is the genus of all genera, but as all things can only be understood in terms of their *mutaqabil*, or opposite thing, being has no opposite! This is where he explicitly stands against the Aristotelian-Islamic tradition. He goes further, a nodding critique of the Ash’ari masters Rāzī and Taftazani (let’s be honest here), that *Wujūd* cannot be identified with essence or genus or anything of that kind (i.e., anything Aristotelian). It is something completely different. Walī Allāh argues that *Wujūd* is not something that enters unchanged into the present world, but that it is prefigured in the *‘alam al-Mithāl*.

After a few chapters, Walī Allāh returns to the chain of Being, proposing that the cosmos is *al-shakhs al-akbar*, or the Macrocosm, and it is forever changing in its modality. A good analogy for what Walī Allāh has in mind here is a sort of revolving door of *Wujūd*, where if a substance takes on a form (already predetermined), it cycles to another distinct form (think of water and vapor, that is *mā* to *hawā*). “If you go deeper,” Walī Allāh writes, “you will find that all existing things in the world have one cause, which is the Universal Nature, that is, the *Tawfiq* of Allāh.” The example of the heat of fire and the coldness of water, one is *mushakkas* with polarity and the other with movement. Closing the chapter, he offers the example of the phoenix, how it sings and sings, until it turns into ashes, upon which when rain scatters on it, it is reborn. “I have come to know of this bird in Hindustān, known as *Qaqnūs*,” writes Walī Allāh.



Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the founder of Aligarh, and longtime correspondent of Mawlana Qasim Nanotwi and Haji Imdadullah.

Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khān's biographical entry for Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz:

*The scholars of our city, Delhi*

*Our Lordship, our Excellency, Shāh ‘Abd al ‘Azīz, Al-Dihlavīgr*

The highest-ranked of all the ‘Ulema, the most virtuous of the scholarly elite, the most perfect amongst the elect, the most beautiful of the gnostics and Sufis, the pride of all the Muslim greats, the absolute envy of the *Sahaba*, and the shining fragment of the moderns, the towering scholar of all Hadith critics, the patrician of the gnostics, our Lord, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, from the city of Delhi, may his secret always be sacred, his entire personhood was theophanic emanations! His mastery over all sciences was both *Kasbi* and *Wahbi*— and he was a collection of exoteric and esoteric theophanies.

Even though Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had mastered logic, philosophy, astronomy, and *‘ilm al-handasa*, he had devoted his *whole* life to religious knowledge, and the complexities of *Hadith* of the *Holy Prophet*, and the exegesis of the Holy Quran. All seekers of pure foundations sought his attention, and devoted their attention to him. It must also be emphasized he is an absolute master of the rational sciences, and in his lineage and household, knowledge has appeared generation after generation.

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Shāh Abdul ‘Azīz was unmatched in both the rational and the transmitted sciences, and among the scholars of India his fame was universal.

Through the blessing of his spiritual breath, knowledge and learning flourished greatly in this noble madrasa, and from every region the students of India and other lands turned toward Delhi to benefit from his teaching.

To this day, the traces and blessings of that institution remain, and the seekers of knowledge and truth in Delhi continue to partake of the Sheikh’s grace.

to their pleasure, such a country is the enemy (*Dar-ul-Harb*).” He also forgets the important fact that Shah Abdul Aziz gave out this *futwa*, declaring India *Dar-ul-Harb*, during his life-time, some fifty years ago, when none of the changes, owing to which Dr. Hunter says India became *Dar-ul-Harb* had taken place! Another mistake that

*Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan's Defense of Shah 'Abd al-Aziz in a tract written to British scholars on Islam, in the 1860s.*

### ***When the Humanists Met Aristotle in Mughal Delhi***

Reading a travelogue of a Prussian Protestant theologian, who journeyed throughout India to dominate the old-guard scholarly Muslim elite of northern Hindustān, I was struck to see none other than the name of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, which he spells as a quirky “Shāh ‘Ubdoo Al Azeez.” This theologian who stumbled into the Walī Allāh family was a theologian trained in the *humanismos* of Germany, that is of post-Petrarch-and-Lorenzo Valla Renaissance humanism, a master of Latin, Greek, English, Hebrew, and Syriac, and Arabic, and of course German. Writing about his disappointment with various Sunni and Shi‘i scholars, after debating them on topics ranging from the Eucharist, he concludes with his chapter, arguing that there was one exception in late Mughal India— one scholar who did not disappoint.

Writing in formal Latin, he presents Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as the *Ne Plus Ultra of India*. The phrase was mythically used by Hercules in an inscription to mean “Ships may not pass beyond this point in the Aegean Sea.” In Roman Latin it is elliptically used to refer to someone who literally cannot be surpassed intellectually. That a proselytizer, a polyglot, a Biblical scholar, a likely Newtonian, a scholar who would more skilled than all tenured Religion Studies professors at most private universities (in his era and ours), had praised Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to such measure that he needed to halt English and shift to the language of Cicero to describe Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (as if English as a language could not accurately hold the naked brilliance of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz). But why? What did a blind Muftī, suffering illness after illness, a literal octogenarian, a metaphor of the decaying Muslim sultanate, offer one of the brightest minds of Europe? Writing in English, he did not need to gain the sympathies of any Muslims (for no Muslims knew English then).



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The travelogue that doubled as *Disputationes* describes one British scholar, whom after devastating the Sunni scholars of Lahore, and then sweeping away the Shi'i scholars of Lucknow (of whom counted Sayyid Dildar Ali, whom, after meeting a student who had studied *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* with Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, was successful in convincing him to renounce Sunni Islam). The Christian humanist-theologian is advised to meet with one more scholar, one more Indian—he has been thus far disappointed by the intellectual grit of the 'Ulema of India, of Hindustān, badgering them with the belief of the trinity, armed now with medieval Christian scholasticism, the post-Renaissance retrieval of the Greco-Roman classics, and the Oriental study of Islam and Arabic, and now, after Warren Hastings and Charles Hamilton, a knowledge of the intellectual and legal culture of Mughal India.

The travelogue somberly notes that the theologian, without much expectation, enters the complex of Madrasa Raḥīmiyya. Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz seems to be either teaching Persian poetry or *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. He pauses the lesson—one of his students (I suspect it was Muftī Rashīd al-Dīn Khān Dihlavī) explains to the now-blind Muftī who the newcomer is. Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's Madrasa, as Shāh Walī Allāh had wanted, serves a dual-function of both *Dargah* and *Darsgah*, all are welcome no matter how many times they have broken their vows with God or the Prophet. *Kāfir wa gabr wa but parast baz ā baz ā/ in dargah-i ma dargah-i naw-umidi nist*. Before the Christian theologian begins to sit down, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz asks:

“Aristotle gives various accounts of knowledge (i.e., of epistemia) between history, rhetoric, philosophy, logic, and physics (between his *Organon* and *Categories*), can you list them out for me before we dialogue?”

The Christian theologian-humanist was unable to.

The *Ne Plus Ultra* returns to his teaching.

Here was the son of Shāh Walī Allāh, *a'mā* but *Muntasir*, redeeming some aura for the Muslims of India, where they had been stripped of it on the battlefield, the printing press,



and in the ecclesia.

The learned in Hindoostaun are not confined to any particular city or province: Delhi, Lucknow, Calcutta are first in fame. At Delhi, Mouluvee Ubdoool Uzez, if still living, is regarded as the “Ne plus **ultra**” amongst Moosulmans of India; there are many

*Passage where Shah 'Abd al-Aziz is cited as the Ne Plus Ultra by the German Humanist & Christian Father.*

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Shāh Walī Allāh writes in *al-Taḥfīmāt*:

Today it has been spilled into my mind that when the universal soul comes into existence, the shadow of the Entity of God and the shadow of the multiplicity that are entailed from the Entity, each one becomes colored or stamped. And this meaning becomes the origin of the particularizātion of entities (taiyin-i haqāiq shud). And the shadow of God is the Tadallī-i A'zam. And the shadow of multiplicity is the origin of possible entities. And further this shadow of God, that has the magnificent Tadallī, has many shadows in the world of constraint. And the shadow of it in the world of souls of individuals and their perfect ones and in the accidents of the Shari'ah (perhaps misspelling of aghrad?) and in the world of angels and Gabriel, I have witnessed that this Tadallī has such a relationship with each human that it holds influence over and exists in the fibers of their being. And so the rational soul (nafs natiqah) flees from ignorance, and follows the traces of this glance (*the nazar of the Tadallī*). It becomes *baqi* with this *Nazar/Tadallī* and becomes *fani* from everything else (*ba-vay baqi wa az hama fani!*).

And in this moment, the door of Ahadiyya becomes opened (bab-i ahadiyya fath mi gardad), and he sees this reality in his own Ana—and not in that Ana which is composed of his Soul and Nasamah, but in that Ana which is the entailment of his original particularizātion (in this world).

Here you can grasp Walī Allāh entering a Hāl, as he continues:

Every Human has such a grand comprehensiveness, that even in this era (i.e., the 18<sup>th</sup> century) a human may witness it. And of various types of this zuhur or manifestation of the Tadallī is in the revival of the religion and establishing a new 'Sūfī Tariqah, etc. (ve ghayr-ān). And all of these despite being in great flourishing and brilliance, i.e., the 'Sūfī orders and the Tajdīd, ecstasy (Masti) does not roam around the perimeter of this station (masti pairāmún-i maqam-i vay nami gardad).

### *The Antiquarian Shah*

Mawlānā Ilyās Kandehlawī's great-Mamu, the uncle of Muzaffar Husseyn, notes that even in blindness, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz would try his best to read new manuscripts his students were able to fetch for him, no matter how much light had dimmed in his eyes, past seventy years old. Once he notes in a Majlis that he was doing Mutā'ala of a Ḥadīth text, one that Mawlānā Habib al-Rahman al-A'zami later collected, where he saw a tradition where sayyidunā Mu'adh Ibn Jabal, buried in northern Jordan, would visit the tomb of the Lord of the Prophets on his return visits from Shām, gathering himself around the Prophet's grave, and just weep, his hands on the dirt of the Rawdah. "Today," Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz announced to Sayyid Aḥmed Barelvī, Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, Shāh 'Abd al-Ḥayy Muftī Rashīd al-Dīn Khān, Shāh Rāzī al-Dīn, and a Scottish Sir William Fraser, "I have found a precedent for my practice of sitting in silence by my father's grave and coming to tears. Praise be to God!" The majlis ends, and Shāh 'Ismāīl and Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq help the elderly Shāh to his room.

مکتوبات سید احمد شہید

۸

مکتوب نمبر ۱۱ از جانب سید احمد صاحب بنام مولانا شاہ عبد العزیز صاحب محدث دہلوی از مکہ معظمہ  
بسم اللہ الرحمن الرحیم۔ از فقیر سید احمد بنجاب خلاق تائب حضرت صاحب محی الخسنة قاص البدعة حجة اللہ علی العالمین  
وارث الانبیاء والمرسلین شاہ عبد العزیز صاحب دامت برکاتہم۔ بعد عرض سلام مسنون و تقدیم تعظیبات و  
تکرمیمات و آداب و اخلاص عقیدت بہات معروض آنکہ۔ الحمد للہ کہ فقیر و تمام قافلہ بخیر دعا یافت تمام در مکہ  
مظلمہ از آخراہ شجان تا وقت تحریر در آن بلدہ امین استیم۔ و بعد از حج عزیمت زیارت مدینہ منورہ و ابرام اللہ  
تعالیٰ بخایت خود حج ہر دور زیارت مقبول نصیب فرماید۔ امیدوارا دعویہ وافیہ تبرکہ آنجناب مستقیم بفضل اللہ تعالیٰ  
دریں سفر سعادت اثر بشارت و عنایات رفیعہ از دیگاہ حضرت رحمن جل شانہ این فقیر یافتہ است۔ پارہ از ان کہ این  
وقت ضبط آن بقید تحریر میسر است۔ بنابر تفریح خاطر مقدس آنجناب و سائے برادران مومنین کہ بسامع ایشان رسد  
عرض می دہد دریں عرصہ ہم اظہار نعمت او تعالیٰ است کہ صورتی از صور شکر است و مرفقہ این عرصہ بنا بر آنست کہ  
از برکت جناب سامی از جنس عنایات بر حال فقیر ابتدا و آغاز شد و در ترتیب و سلوک عنایتا مبذول گردیدہ و  
و عافرمودہ اند بفضل او تعالیٰ لوقت بہر این چنین معاطات رسیدہ و امیدواری ادعیہ وافیہ علی الدوام است تاکہ حق  
تعالیٰ بمقتدا علی و مطلب استی رساند و ہدایت و رحمت عامہ کہ شامل جمیع خلائق گردد ہر ابرو سے کار آید پس بخند  
آہنا نیست کہ در تہیہ اسباب روانگی از وطن خود بودم و مشاغل کثیرہ ہداد و ستد و غیرہ بسیار و بکاری مادہ تاکہ از  
صبح لوقت بہ نیم شب بی رسد دہ ماں ایام شبی بچنین کاسے در خانہ خود مشغول بودم و مکان لوقتیا مختصرا سعی و تردد  
برادران مومنین ہداد و اعانت دست ہائے نیک مکان نہا شدہ بود دہ ماں مکان بودم۔ کہ روحانیت آن مکان  
نمودار شد و بروئے من بکمال اندوہ گرفتار و طال بسیار گریان ایستاد چیزے دیگر از مخلوقات البیہ غیبیہ ہم ہما سنج  
ظاہر بود روحانیت مسلوہ بہ سبب اندوہ و اضطراب خود مخاطب آن چیز دیگر شدہ گفت کہ فردا آقائے نام دار  
مارا گزاشتہ خواهند رفت و گریہ بسیار بروئے غلبہ کردہ بود کہ قلقش دریں نیز اثر کردہ و مرا ہم بہ گریہ آورد و ہا مالک

*A letter of Sayyid Ahmed Shāhid, written in Mecca, addressed to Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dihlavī.*

### ***The Resurrection of the Axis (Qutb)***

Legging past that same green-awning room of the *Walī Allāh* Madrasa, after a sweaty day at the National Archives in Delhi, I cross paths with more Hifz kids in the same gravel-spot. A

Mawlānā sees me and tells me to come in for Chai. As all visitors in any Muslim world know, anytime someone invites you inside for chai near a Dargah, it is almost always an attempt to procure funds for their fledgling mausoleum. I nonetheless follow him, in some hope, some ancient yearning, to locate oral history of the Walī Allāh graveyard-Madrassa. He leads me to his room, a room where the green plaster is falling off to reveal white plaster falling off. Colorfully-cotton Lungis hang on a laundry-line across the low-ceilinged room, and a colorful cotton pardah is drawn razor-sharp in the middle. He offers me Chai. I decline—all madrasa graduates know how weak their stomach becomes after years in a foreign Madrasa. He insists—I know just one cup of chai or of chaat could send me to the hospital. I meekly relent and he rises to order his wife to cook chai for us both. I ask him how old these rooms are—could they have been the same during Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm’s era? He says perhaps—all he knows is that they precede his lifetime and that the caretaker before him occupied the same chamber. I’m trying to peek at the walls, to see the material, and determine, with other old Mughal homes I’ve studied in Lahore, Peshawar, and Lucknow, if the arches and beams are older than a century. It doesn’t seem the case, but the rooms are small enough to at least have been the same location but just with renovated walls.

He asks me what I do—I tell him I’m studying in a university, and he makes a duah for me, cupping his hands. I choose not to tell him about Darul Qāsim, that there is a place in America where one could study all of Shāh Walī Allāh—I’m unsure why I don’t tell him, perhaps because I knew internally that most Mawlānās don’t care for the knowledge of Shāh Walī Allāh. They want just the social capital of his name, the metaphysical capital of the last Wali of Allāh (and can we blame them?). It is no exaggeration to say that some modern Deobandis are guilty of name-dropping without any serious dive into his oeuvre—how strange when Deobandis talk up a storm about how Shāh Walī Allāh is the markaz of their tradition in Bukhārī Khatam Jalsahs, but can’t name more than a few of his texts? If you were to approach a Salafi, and ask him to name at least a quarter of Ibn Taimiyya’s texts, wouldn’t they be able to? No matter how fried-chicken-shop they may be. Wouldn’t any Barelvi be able to name at least a measured number of texts authored by Mawlānā Aḥmed Rezā Khān?

*The idols we carry in our hearts.*

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The chai fumes rising before our eyes like a gothic spire, the Hifz-teacher tells me about another visitor like myself, perhaps a Mawlānā, perhaps a *Majzub*, visiting the cemetery. He was sauntering only a few months ago around the walls of Walī Allāh. While this visitor was walking with my host, he haltingly stopped amid the plaster walls, and declares to him, saying:

شاہ ولی اللہ کا دور ابھی شروع ہونے والا ہے

The Mawlānā-caretaker gazes down at his chai.

*Shāh Walī Allāh's era is about to begin once again.*

I drink the whole cup of chai. Nothing happens to me the next morning.





*A Delhite between Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Shāh Walī Allāh, in some Tawajjuh.*

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دل مي رود ز دستم صاحب‌دلان خدا را  
دردا که راز پنهان خواهد شد آشکارا

*my heart is fleeing from my hands to the ones who have hearts—oh my god!*  
*That grief buried inside will soon be open for all to see*  
- Ḥāfez-i Shirāzī on the tongue of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in the 1810s in  
Victorian Delhi.

### ***When Islamic Law Forgot the Prophet***

Mustafa is a doctoral student, writing his dissertation on Kant and the Greeks. He is, to my knowledge, the first Pakistani to study Greek. His brother Taimur is perhaps the second Pakistani to know Ancient Greek—even Muḥammad Iqbāl spurned Greek and Latin at Cambridge. We are sitting at a South Indian restaurant in New England thumbing through Dosa—he and I are colossal fans of the two SAIF England-based accounts on X, namely, IbnMaghreb and AbuZenovia, and their stark warnings over the scepters of techno-feudalism and cybernetics. IbnMaghreb and AbūZenovia are also waging a crusade against Fiqh maximalism—the idea that Fiqh will heal (darman) the ailing heart of the Ummah. They are literate in the Rushmore of the cultural and intellectual greats—from al-Ghazālī to the Shadhilis to the Ottoman aristocracy of fin-de-siècle Istanbul—and of the great two south Asian masters, namely, Muḥammad Iqbāl and Shāh Walī Allāh—while also steeped in the epistemia of modern western cultural-cum-political theory and so offer some compelling takes for Muslims zombied out from Salafi jummahs and Deobandi Hifz programs.

Mustafa agrees with both in their de-emphasis on Fiqh, and how it raised a whole generation of Pakistanis with lots of *Topis* and no values. I have spent more than half my life in the study and training in Ḥanafī Fiqh—I am one of mut’assibin who see Ḥanafī practice as the closest to that of the Holy Prophet and the first two caliphs; in that, as Imām Maturidi stated before me—the other three Madhabs are further from the Holy Prophet than Imām Abū Ḥanīfah’s practice (and I’m summarizing him courteously), *Zāhiran wa Riwayatan*.

Perhaps this is my Azaadville upbringing—but it personally makes me curl when I see people wiping over cotton socks or not praying Witr with one salam. So steeped am I in Fiqh maximalism that when I listen to Muṣṭafā, I can feel my fourteen-years-in-Deobandi Madrasa self squeal in agony, but neither he or IbnMaghreb are the first to propose this—quite right, Shāh Walī Allāh preceded them both.

Shāh Walī Allāh only wrote one *Fatwā*. In an archive in Aligarh, we have his fatwa on the lawfulness for wearing red in India (despite the *ikhtilāf* in the Madhab and the *tashabbuh* it would hold with Hindus). Why he abandoned fatwa-writing—it is absolutely clear: Shāh Walī Allāh held the belief that Ḥanafī fiqh, as especially enshrined in the canonization of *Fatāwā Hindīyya*/*Ālamgīrī* in his day, had allowed itself to become too bureaucratized, too corporate, too Leviathan, too behemoth-like. Across almost all of his works we see his straight-nosed disapproval, but in *Tafhīmāt* it rings clear. This is Shāh Walī Allāh in his most raw, disapproving of the Ḥanafī regime in Mughal India, and especially critical of the Central Asians (à la *Qadī Khān*, *Sarakhsi*, *Ibn Mazah*, et al):

Whoever wishes to gain the benefit of this course should begin by reciting the Qur'an with proper understanding and reflection. He should read it attentively, considering the stories it contains and the lessons they convey, for in it there is mention of God's signs and those of His Messenger ﷺ, and therein lie admonitions and special insights.

He should frequently ask himself questions about what he encounters in it—whether about the believers or the unbelievers, or about any ḥadīth (Prophetic saying) he hears, until he realizes the truth of what God has revealed in His Book and what the Messenger of God ﷺ brought forth, in accordance with his nature, character, and creed.

Shāh Walī Allāh then declares without missing a beat that:

Those who involve themselves in learning the names and moral propriety of the Ḥadīth scholars, 'Ilm al-Rijal, 'Ilm al-Kalām, Uṣūl al-Fiqh, and the Fiqh that circulates in our land (al-fiqh al-mutadawil) are the scholars of the



worldly life—of the facades of the Dunya—they have no share in the reality of Iman (haqiqat al-Iman).

Shāh Walī Allāh's critiques of the Ḥanafī Muftīs of his day are harrowing and cataclysmic—he quite literally spares no ink to argue how Ḥanafī Muftīs—those trained in Marghīnānī, Ibn Nujaym, Qadi Khān, Sarakhsi—have annihilated the spirit of Islam. In *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah* he also—literally—pins some blame of the decline of the Mughal empire on the Ḥanafī Muftīs, as one chief reason among a few others, where the Muftīs were guilty of being money-grubbers from the Mughal *awqāf* and state coffers—Waqf-Maxxing—as some would say. That Muftīs are talking about Aristotle Sarakhsi, while Muslim peasants are getting slaughtered by Jats and Afghans. What would Walī Allāh say of some Deobandis today? How would he feel about the volumes and volumes of Fatāwā twinned with the limited expansion of horizons of thought, sans Mawlānā Qāsim and Muḥammad Iqbāl?

Of course, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn and Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq all wrote *Fatāwā* collections, but if we compare their topics, to, say, the *Fatāwā* of 'Dar al 'Ulūm Deoband or *Raḥīmiyya* of Muftī Lajpuri, one is struck by the difference of topics. Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn's *Fatāwā* includes a Fatwa on astrology and the metaphysics of the Ka'bah and vows vis-à-vis Qurbani—Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's are also very little interested in the fiqh of 'Ibādāt or the eligibility of an Imām in prayer, as you may encounter dozens (if not hundreds) of such in each of the modern Deobandi *Fatāwā*. I am aware of Muftī Taqī 'Usmānī's criticism of its authorship, but were Muftī Taqī to travel to the archives scattered across northern India, he would not only find those *Fatāwā* but also counter-Fatwas from Muftīs in the same era as Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, from Rampur and Delhi, who disagreed with Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, which, in effect, proves those *Fatāwā* as circulating from him in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The blood of Partition is not only physical but, quite right, intellectual, and history-erasing.

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Physicians and healthcare professionals use an Ancient Greek word to describe the plaque buildup of arteries, coined in the twentieth century, but whose usage stretches three-thousand years, namely, *atherosclerosis*. It is from *athero*, ἄθηρα, to mean gruel or porridge, and σκλήρωσις, sclerosis, to mean to harden or thicken in Greek. Physicians use it to

describe fatty plaques (the *athero*) jamming the inner walls of arteries—interrupting the elasticity of arteries and forcing the heart to pump more in order to keep the blood flow smooth. I think this phenomenon perfectly describes how Shāh Walī Allāh felt about the recent canonizātion of Fatāwā 'Ālamgīrī, and the larger behemoth of Ḥanafī 'Ifṭā in Mughal India.

In a land Mawlānā Arshad Madanī declared not so long ago in Istanbul: the Muslim population is almost 90% Ḥanafī, the Ḥanafī Madhab had grown stiflingly large and suffocating for Shāh Walī Allāh. *Wa fakka Kulla Niẓām*—Shāh Walī Allāh sought to break free the Ḥanafī hegemonia in Mughal India, and replace it with a new Ḥanafism, this much is very clear from his writings. It was a little heartbreaking for me to read these passages—across at least six of his works. Perhaps what was most devastating to me, as a committed Ḥanafī, was in his *'Iqd al-Jid*. As also shown in Muftī Taqī 'Usmānī's *Uṣūl al-Ifṭā*, we see the range of positions that various Muftīs of the Shāfi'īyya and the Mālikīyyah held regarding the 'awām and Taqlid. They should follow the Muftī of their city, and Ibn 'Abidin's and Haskafi's favorite dicta, *wa al āmiy la madhab lahu*. These statements are taught to trainee-Muftīs within their first months—also the mutadawal amongst Fuqaha like al-Nawawi and al-Baghawi, that the public should absolutely not mix-and-match madhabs, offering the horror-scenario if someone were to follow Ḥanafīs for beer and whiskey, the Zāhiris in terms of music, some of the early Mālikīs in Mut'ah, and so forth. Or the example if someone combined Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī practices in Wudu—such that their Wudu would not be valid in any of the four madhabs. That is, if someone followed the easiest fatwa in every madhab, they were only worshipers of their caprices and vagaries. Yet, near end of the treatise, in Walī Allāh's characteristic fashion to always add to a discussion and not be an observer, he asks coldly about whether the public can simply chase rukhsah, or concessions in every legal issue, in every social reality of life—wouldn't this be problematic, the implication seems to be? Walī Allāh disagrees feverishly:

So what if someone followed the easiest fatwa from each Madhab? Didn't the Prophet absolutely love what brought the most ease to his community? There is really nothing in the Shari'ah that would condemn any commoner for searching for the easiest opinion in the Shari'ah—as long as the fatwa is from a Mujtahid proper.”



*And even more astonishingly, Shāh Walī Allāh asks in wonder:*

What would prevent (an everyday Muslim from seeking the easiest opinion from each Madhab) him, per the Sharī'ah or our own λογικός?

And there Walī Allāh ends the *tractatus*, with:

*This is all I wanted to say, and all praise to God, the First and the Last.*

والحنبلية رفع الله درجاتكم ونفع المسلمين  
ببركاتكم ما قولكم في عالم مشهور بان سني وكثير  
من اهل السنة والجماعة يعتقدون في فضله  
ويقتدون به ويتبعونه ويعلمون باقواله  
وهذا العالم من كتبها بالعربية من جملتها كتابا  
سماء حجة الله البالغة وكذلك هذا العالم  
من كتبها بالفارسية من جملتها كتابا سماء انزاله  
الخفاء عن خلافة الخلفاء ومن من جملتها كتابا  
سماء قرّة العين بتفضيل الشيخين وقال في  
كتابيه العربي الذي سماء التفهيمات الالهية  
وهل اعلمك ما التولي هو كالبخت الان البخت  
فيه ظلمة وهذا في اشرق وبالبخت يسعد  
السعداء ويشقى الاشقياء اما البخت فبديهي

But the larger question is: Was Shāh Walī Allāh a Ḥanafī? This may be yet the thorniest question of the Walī Allāh legacy. I don't want to deploy the there-are-good-arguments-to-both-sides, but there fundamentally are. The most serious exploration of this debate was launched by Mawlānā Yūsuf Binori, the eponymous founder of two madrasas in Karachi—during his time as a teacher in Dahbel in Gujarat, for the *al-Furqan* journal, in 1941, as the Muslim League under Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khān were capturing electorate after electorate, sans Haiderabad. Mawlānā Binori ultimately concludes that Walī Allāh's positions were normatively Ḥanafī, and departed it when a strong evidence from the Ḥadīth showed otherwise— he quotes widely from *Hujjat Allāh*, his letters, and *al-Taḥfīmāt*, but leaves out other rich sources, like Walī Allāh's commentaries on the *Muwatta*, and the personal biographies that Walī Allāh oversaw, and the *Anfās*, and the handwritten *Ijāzāt* of Shāh Walī Allāh in Patna and Karachi (It was not his fault for not knowing Mawlānā 'Āshiq's Persian biography—it was discovered in a singular manuscript after Mawlānā Binori emigrated to Pakistan and likely after his death). As Mawlānā Binori noted in a passage in his *Fuyuz*, the Holy Prophet ordered Shāh Walī Allāh to keep Ḥanafī, at least outwardly in Mughal India. Moreover, it seems, in another location, that Walī Allāh sees a certain *rāz* in Ḥanafīyyat, as a madhab that may “preserve the three other Madhabs,” or, in heightened prose, Walī Allāh continues: “that the Ḥanafī Madhab may preserve Islam itself.” For the *kashf* of this *rāz*, one need only visit Glendale Heights.

Which is to say, with all of the sources of Shāh Walī Allāh before us, Arabic and Persian, we may yet be able to fully determine how Shāh Walī Allāh viewed his adoption of a legal school—and such a wide range of sources that Shaykh Amin and I hold now, I can say with certainty that all the material was not available, at once, to even the founders of Deoband—of which its last total collection was likely under Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, before he self-exiled to Mecca, to the feet of our Mother Khadijah.

I will also say, as Walī Allāh himself notes in the *Anfās*, his father did not always keep true to the Ḥanafīte school, preferring some non-Ḥanafī positions in certain *Masā'il*, making Walī Allāh unexceptional in terms of the cross-pollinating of his doctrinal preference. As I wrote above, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's love for Imām Abū Ḥanīfah was uncontested and

unparalleled—he may have been the first of his line to be fully Ḥanafī. Yet, modern Deobandi Muftīs, as in Mawlānā Thānwī's time, are still disappointed by him.

*Yazdān Taqdīr farmud!*

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*But to turn to Shāh Walī Allāh and the lord of jurists, the lord of 'Ṣūfīs, the lord of the Tab'in, namely, Mālīk Bin Anas, we shudder when we say his name—as Walī Allāh wept on his death-bed for his four sons to pay special attention to the Muwatta of Imām Mālīk, for Allāh had not only kept exoteric knowledge, but also a special sir, a raaz, one theophany after another, in the words and text of Imām Mālīk. That Allāh had selected Imām Mālīk beyond all his contemporaries—this was clear to Shāh Walī Allāh. That the Muwatta is taught in a land like India, forever given to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, is a testament to Walī Allāh's eye-popping love and sincerity for Imām Mālīk, of which we have such rare devotion in our history, for cross-Madhab love. That Imām Mālīk was utterly transfixed by the Lord of Prophets, that his 'adab was transformative for Muslims from Spain to Senegal, should not be lost on any scholar.*

*Shāh Walī Allāh had written in Persian that all of Ijtihad remained shut, save for the Muwatta of Imām Mālīk! That Imām Mālīk would be the archetypal Mujtahid in every era, wept Walī Allāh—that no one could ever achieve any Tajdīd in the religion, or any critical thought, save through the epistemia of Imām Mālīk, the lord of jurists, and the lord of "Āshiqan. That Imām Mālīk will remain the greatest miracle of the Holy Prophet, towering above Imām Ghazālī and Imām Shāfī'ī and even Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya, that if any Muslim has any intellectual worth, it will simply be through adoration of the jurist of Madīna. That Walī Allāh was also reading the Theophania, that is, of Black Muslims in America, during this moment, reading the Muwatta, as the manuscripts in Georgia and Virginia testify, is clear. That Walī Allāh could barely speak or write, yet, still, he willed himself to announce to Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Qadi Thanāullah to study the Muwatta in a land that had not heard of Imām Mālīk since Ibn Battuta. That Imām Mālīk was a great jurist—this much was clear. But he contained a Faqr, a Faqr that Mawlānā Rūmī would have offered his life for.*

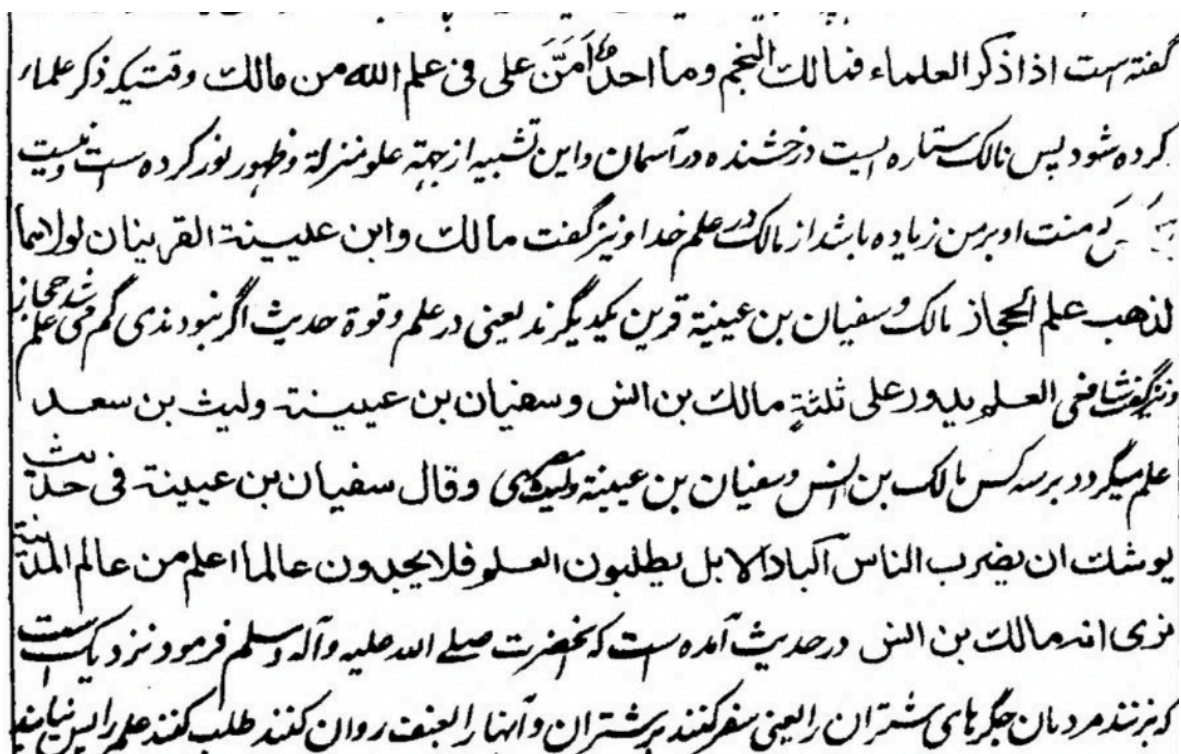
*That Mawlana Zakariyya Kandehlawī wrote an eighteen-volume commentary on the Muwatta of Imām Mālīk, one of the most intellectually rich commentaries, with the 'Alīyyat so known for the*



*Walī Allāh Khāndān, but also the intense, world-showing devotion of Walī Allāh had for Imām Mālik. It was, as if, that every page written by Mawlana Zakariyya was a testament, a fulfillment, a sacrament, an honoring of the vows of Walī Allāh. That when Walī Allāh will stand on Judgement Day, he will offer Mawlana Zakariyya as his Hujjah to the Lord of Prophets, and his lieutenant, Mālik, the son of Anas. That Mawlana Zakariyya felt, living in Madina, one final vow remained of the Walī Allāh Khāndān, and he completed it.*

*Allāh makes us holy through Mālik Bin Anas, and may we sacrifice all our mothers in our genos for him.*

*Allāhumma ‘Ameen.*



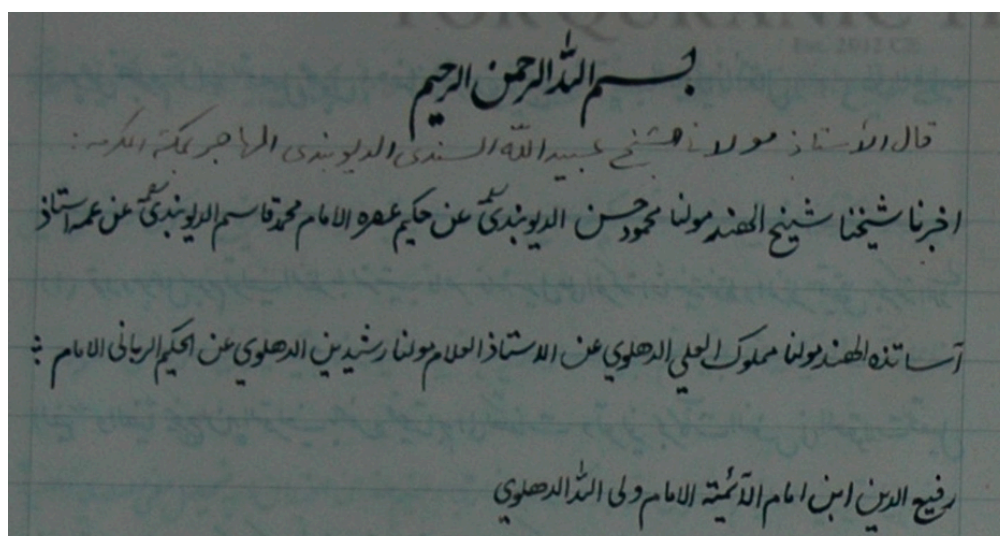
گفته است اذا ذكر العلماء فذاك النجم وما احدث الله من علم الله من مالك وقتيكه ذكر علماء  
 کرده شود پس نالک ستاره است درخنده در آسمان و این تشبیه از بهجت علو منزله و ظهور نور کرده است و است  
 بنی منت او برین زیاده باشد از مالک علم خدا و نیز گفت مالک و ابن عیینة القریانیان لولا ما  
 لذهب علم الحجاز مالک و سفیان بن عیینة قرین یکدیگرند یعنی در علم و قوه حدیث اگر نبودند می گم می شد عجز  
 و نگرفت فی العلم و یدور علی ثلثة مالک بن انس و سفیان بن عیینة و لیث بن سعد  
 علم میگردد بر سر کس مالک بن انس و سفیان بن عیینة و لیث بن سعد و قال سفیان بن عیینة فی حدیث  
 یوشک ان یضرب الناس الابدال یطلبون العلم فلا یجدون عالما اعلم من عالم الملة  
 نزی اند مالک بن انس در حدیث آمده است که حضرت صلی الله علیه و آله وسلم فرمود نزد یک است  
 که بزنند مردمان جگرهای شتران را یعنی سفر کنند بر شتران و آنها را بگرفت روان کنند طلب کنند علم را پس نیانند

### ***The Scholar Who Entered Eternity***

The scholar who went further than anyone in the twentieth century, in Madrasa or academia (sans Sayyid Athar Abbas Rizvi whose five-hundred-page tomes on Walī Allāh and his son should be read by all graduates), to document the legacy of Shāh Walī Allāh and



his family was Mawlānā 'Ubaidullāh Sindhī. An adoring student of Shaykh al-Hind, his forays into various domains of new modern life remains singularly curious for a traditional scholar. Raised Sikh, he then found himself in the coterie of the leading Deobandi scholars, he courted the king of Afghanistan, Amanullah Khān, and the scholars of Madina and Mecca into the legacy of Shāh Walī Allāh and may have even secured a meeting with the Bolshevik President Lenin, presenting Walī Allāh's vision of political economy to him. If other scholars of his generation, like Anwar Shāh or Ḥussein Aḥmed Madanī or Aḥmed Ali of Lahore, were similarly touched by Shāh Walī Allāh, they did not reveal their scholarly love and attention to the works of Walī Allāh as Mawlānā 'Ubaidullāh Sindhī did. He was perhaps the final Deobandi to have that international presence in the world, in the way that Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq achieved. You can hardly find a single book of his without him gushing *in laudatium* for Shāh Walī Allāh and his sons and grandsons. Although his *mizaj* was geared for the political, in that, he wanted Muslims from Istanbul to Samarkand to all see the radicalness of Walī Allāh's vision. He was one of the few scholars who witnessed the penetration of the Young Hegelians (which would evolve into the analysis of McTaggart, Iqbāl's undergraduate advisor at Cambridge) and Marxist thought within Muslim political intellectual elite and, in response, formulated a new political vision that assimilated the sentiment of the beleaguered working class without the epistemia of historical determinism—of the eternal struggle between feudal lords and serfs, of slave masters and slaves.



A dictated work of Mawlānā 'Ubaidullāh Sindhī of a work of Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, in the archives of Madina Munawwarah.

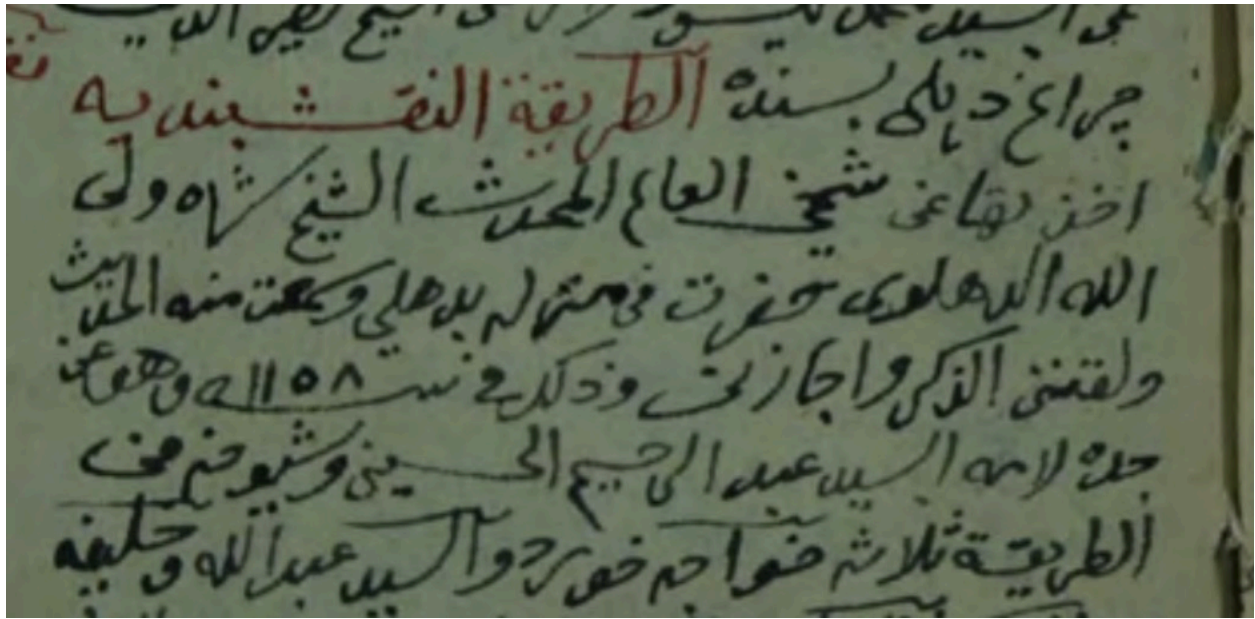
What's absolutely shocking is he did it through passages culled from *Hujjat Allāh Balighah* and *Al-Budūr al-Bāzighah*, presenting selections where Walī Allāh had argued each city and township and *Qasbah* should mutually elect their own leaders, and determine their economic and social fate within those small guilds (Walī Allāh mentions as low as two–three people could qualify), as independent of the ruling Muslim monarchy, a renewed call for state decentralization. That is, Muslim laborers and craftsmen should see the profit of their labor within their own societies, within their own homes—and wealth should not be *dulat bayn al aghniya minkum*, as Surah Hashr reminds us. What Walī Allāh is proposing, based on his life and study in the decentralizing Mughal empire, into the smaller vizierates of Haiderabad, Kashmir, and Lucknow, and of it, is easy to unravel for any student of 18<sup>th</sup> century Mughal political economy—but alas topos does not allow logos here.

To Mawlānā Sindhī, Shāh Walī Allāh and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz were the last *Mufasssirs*, the last *Muḥaddiths*, the last *Hukama*, the last *Mutakallims*, the last *Mujaddids*. Writing in a Tafsīr that he entitled *Ilham al-Quran fi Fath al-Rahman*, a Quranic exegesis that was meant to be modeled on the knowledge of Shāh Walī Allāh, he mentions looking up a word, and its attendant conceptual import, in *Surah Baqarah*, in every Tafsīr—Rāzī, Tha’labī, Suyutī, et al, when he declares without missing a beat only Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz clarified the verse with its proper semantic and moral meaning—which means there are other Quranic verses whose meaning and understanding have still not been understood (Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was only two hundred years ago). Mawlānā ‘Ubaidullāh Sindhī was no stranger to Shāh Walī Allāh’s philosophy either, and it's apparent in his *Tafsīr* where he explains certain abstruse concepts—like the *Nafas-i Raḥmani*—from his *Lamaḥāt* and *Al-Khayr al-Kathīr*—Mawlānā Sindhī knew as well as any scholar of Walī Allāh there was no *to poleito*, that is, no city life without metaphysics, nor could there be Quranic exegesis without a full account of reality, the reality accounted for in the Prophetic reports.

In a book I’ve never encountered as stocked in any Deobandi Madrasa or *kutub khāna*, called *Hizb-i Imām*, Mawlānā Sindhī sets forth a periodization of the Walī Allāh dynasty, the hierarchies of Walī Allāhi. He argues that the first period can be established from Walī Allāh’s return from Medina to the death of his grandson Shāh ‘Ismāīl Shāhid in Balakot, so from 1731–1831 (a shocking coincidence, where Shāh Walī Allāh’s ship landing in Surat, as a narrator of Ḥadīth, and the year that Shāh ‘Ismāīl Shāhid was martyred, fall exactly a hundred years apart, a perfect centurion). This first period includes Shāh Walī Allāh

teaching Ḥadīth, synthesizing the various doctrines of the 'Sūfis and philosophers and the Muḥaddithin, and writing various political letters to Mughal governors and Afghan monarchs, and most, most, most importantly, the education of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dihlavī; the period also includes Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, as the sar-parastan of the Madrasa-cum-Dargah, carrying on his father's vision, where he wrote a five-hundred page answer to Shia laments over the delayed caliphate of Imām 'Alī, 'alayhis salam and their critiques of sayyidunā 'Abū Bakr and sayyidunā 'Umar, in a climate where Shi'ism began to capture the imagination of the old Mughal Sunni guard, as Iranians militarily outclassed even Sunni Afghans amid the political chaos of the northern belt of Hindustān.

The first era also includes the opening of Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī to all students of knowledge, and especially, Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth, that is teaching students historiography and sanad-criticism (this science was colossally beloved to Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, perhaps even more than his father); as it also includes the Muslim scholarly reckoning with the conquest of Delhi by the East India Trading Company, the first time Delhi had been ruled by non-Muslims in more than five-hundred years and the loss of political prestige for Muslims globally; as it also includes the defense of Shāh Walī Allāh and the conquest of Walī Allāh's vision of Wujūd over everyone else's positions, whether Shāh Ghulām Ali, or Khwāja Mir Dard, or Shāh Rukn al-Dīn, or Mirzā Maḥzar Jān-i Jānān, or even Aḥmed Sirhindī himself, with Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn a massive treatise entitled Al-Damgh al-Batil, refuting the Naqshbandis devoted to Sirhindī (of which I have held a handwritten manuscript); it also included the holding of fort of traditional Sunni orthodoxy amid the storm caused by the first flames of the Wahhabi movement, who from Najd to Oman to Surat, began to attack 'Sūfism and Ibn 'Arabī and especially, especially Imām Abū Ḥanīfah (*qaddasana Allāh bi asrarihi!*), and, as I discovered in a manuscript near Bangladesh, even the importance of all transcendental knowledge itself. This perfect prism of knowledge that Walī Allāh cultivated had been perfectly syn-thesized and dia-thesized by his two eldest sons, where Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn held the reins of steeds dressed in bargastawan, that is, gold ornate caparison on horses, as commanding the foremost two wings of the Walī Allāh vanguard, as Bayazid Yildirim stood in the Battle of Ankara facing Tamerlane, great-grandfather of the first Mughal emperor, with both of their sons holding the two flanks, Muṣṭafā and Suleyman for the Ottomans, and Mīrān Shāh and Shāh Rukh for Timurid-Mughals, on the plains behind Ankara.



Another handwritten Sanad of Shāh Walī Allāh by a student in the Tariqa of his Naqshbandi Khirqa.

The era ends with the death of Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid, fulfilling the last act of piety unachieved by Walī Allāh and his two sons, that is, to die as a martyr, their last genetic vow. And as Mawlānā Manazir in his *Tazkira-i Shāh Walī Allāh* and Mawlānā Sindhī note, Shāh 'Ismā'īl serves the role for Shāh Walī Allāh that Imām Ḥussein, *alayhis salam*, serves for the Lord of Prophets.

*Ana min Ḥussein Wa Ḥussein Minni*

*Ana min Isma'il Wa Isma'il Minni*

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One of the earliest full biographies of Shāh Walī Allāh is a volume entitled *Ḥayāt-i Walī*, by a certain Mawlānā Raḥīm Bakhsh. I didn't find it particularly useful—in that Walī Allāh studies and our knowledge far outpaces what was available over the past ten decades. However, his citation of certain Walī Allāh ghazals was remarkably striking—he wrote poetry in Persian and Arabic. But reading the ghazal we also learn that his *takhallus* was none other than Amin. That Walī Allāh, in the world of meaning, that is, of ghazal-and-myth-making, referred to himself as *Amin*, as Mawlānā Rūmī referred to himself as Shams Tabriz, or as Mir Taqi Mir called himself Mir. This is also striking because the only student who took on the *didaskolonymy*, that is, the name of the teacher, was his Kashmīrī

student, Khwāja Muḥammad Amin. Mawlānā 'Āshiq calls him Amin Walli Allāhi, of which, not even Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz is called Walī Allāhi, despite being the rightful heir to his sage-father. That the first student of the Mughal polymath was a Muḥammad Amin, testified by none other than Walī Allāh's own Bukhārī manuscript, and his first English speaking *rāzdān* in America is Muḥammad Amin bears resemblance to an oft-repeated 'Sūfī miracle, that is, from the Sunnah of God, or as Ibn 'Arabī would say, the *Asrar al-Qadar*.

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Ibn 'Arabī writes in *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam in the Bezel of Ezra*:

And religion is also understood as ādah (habit) because religion returns to what social custom demands and its condition seeks. And religion: social custom. The (Arabic) poet says: Like your religion from the mother of Huwayrith from before (i.e., your habit of flirtation). And the rational understanding of 'adah is that the matter returns qua itself to its original condition. And this is not that, as 'adah is repetition. However, 'adah is one intelligible reality. And resembling the forms does exist, as we know that Zaid is the same as 'Amr in terms of their humanness (*insāniyyah*), but humanness does not double (lit. "become a habit"), because if it did double, humanness would be multiple, and humanness is but one reality, and does not multiply in itself. And we also know that Zaid is not the same as 'Amr in terms of personhood, as the person of Zaid is not the same as 'Amr (*shakhs*), while acknowledging the existence of personhood (as a universal?) in both (Zaid and 'Amr), so we say that in terms of sensory experience it does return in this similarity, but the judgement does not. So there is an 'adah in one way, and there is no 'adah in another. As there is a recompense/compensation in a certain way, as it is a condition with the possible entity (*mumkin*) of the various stages and states of the possible. And this theological issue has been neglected by the scholars, i.e., they have neglected to clarify it as it ought to have been. Not that they have been ignorant of it, but it is from the mysteries of fate (*qadar*) constituted in the natures of creation (*khalāiq*).



## *The Last Shāh of the World's Sunset and the Printing of Prophecy*

To spend some ink on Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, the great-grandson of Shāh Walī Allāh, and the maternal grandson of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, through his daughter, and because he features in our chains to Shāh Walī Allāh, there is little doubt that Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq was the last to hold his family’s rāz, the mystery that Walī Allāh mentioned his Mamu unveiled to him as he was preparing for prayer. After reading Muftī Muntasir Zaman’s essay on Ḥadīth publishing, it became even clearer to me how manifest Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq saw the *theophania* of the Walī Allāh project, i.e., their rāz. Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq was hugely instrumental in teaching *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* but also engaging with evangelical Christians in India and abroad. In the travelogue of the aforementioned theologian, a whole section is devoted to the “Letter of the Grand Molla Muḥammad Ishāq,” where Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq explains why the prophethood of Muṣṭafā is logically necessary for the fulfillment of the legacy of Christ, and how the notion of prophethood is shared between the Bible and Islam, but how Islam upholds a loftier vision of prophethood, and, thus, of God’s vision for the world. He also, unlike the standard Muslim theologian on the trinity, who deals with it as if the moderns are medieval scholastics, deals with the Lutheran fine-tuning of their concept in a manner robust and eye-popping to the Lutheran priests of his day. It seems he also picked up the knowledge of printing press from either these British theologians and/or the Company technocrats visiting Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. I further learned from Muftī Muntasir that he may have been the first Muslim to print a Ḥadīth codex in modernity, and so, in history (none other than the *Sunan* of Imām al-Nasāī, who according to many, many Muḥadīthīn, is the third most authentic book of Muslim and Bukhārī).

### SECOND LETTER OF THE GRAND MULLAH MOHAMMED **ISHAK**.

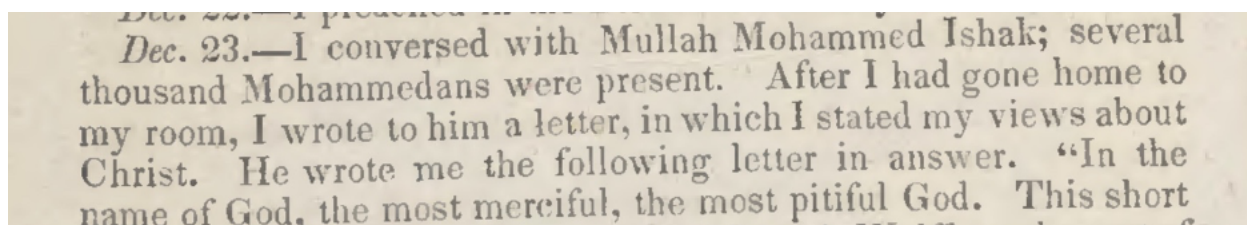
“In all religions there are some points of radical, and others of only collateral importance. Of the revealed religion of Moses, Christ, and Mohammed, the root consists of three parts, viz. the unity of God, a state of retribution, and the mission of Prophets. But though some admit, others deny, the divine mission of our Prophet. The Jews acknowledge the prophetic characters of Jesus, and Mohammed; but the Christians deny the latter. The Mussulmans establish the divine mission of our Prophet by numerous proofs, three of which I will state. First. That Mohammed

*A letter from a printed manuscript detailing Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq's list of critiques of Protestant Theology.*

That is, although he came chronologically after the Ottoman printer *Muterferrika*, Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq upheld the vision of his great-grandfather and globalized the knowledge of the Holy Prophet, fusing it forever with the iron-press and did not allow a suspiciously wrong *Ottoman Hanafi lawmaking* to affect his own understanding of the lawfulness of the printing press. And it seems after his mamu, Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid, and his Nana, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, both died, he spent around 13 years in Delhi (in one of these years, he spent visiting Hajj and returned to Delhi to continue teaching). I sometimes wonder how lonely it must have been for Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, to have inherited the final Shāh-dom, to inherit the Walī Allāh mantle, singularly, and how it fell to his shoulders to complete the *Tajalliyyat*, to hold the vows.

To sit all alone in the Mehndiyan Madrasa after the death of his family.

After he had the *Sunan* printed, he said his salams to his ancestors in the Mehndiyan, and with white-eyed conviction in the Fatwa of his Nana, that India was Dar al-Harb, and there was absolutely no question of it, and, after dealing with the most intellectually pressing task, I mean, speaking up to Padres and Christian humanists, he journeyed to the spot where his great-grandfather once held the ambitions of all Hindustān, and embarked on a ship in the harbor of Surat, Gujarat, and sailed for the Haramayn, dying in Mecca, and entombed near the mother of mothers, Khadija, *salāmullāhi 'alayha*. But at least, when he left, there was still a Ḥanafī monarch on the throne—the takht to tābūt—and so he had never contended with that grief of seeing the fall of an empire that gave sanctuary to his ancestors before his literal eyes, as Mawlānā Qāsim saw with his own eyes.



Dec. 23.—I conversed with Mullah Mohammed Ishak; several thousand Mohammedans were present. After I had gone home to my room, I wrote to him a letter, in which I stated my views about Christ. He wrote me the following letter in answer. "In the name of God, the most merciful, the most pitiful God. This short

*A snippet of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq's letter to Christian humanist fathers.*

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Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid wrote in his *'Abaqāt*:

And indeed He has guided me in the paths towards conviction and verification, with the end result being blessed to read through *Saṭa'āt* and *Lamaḥāt*, and other short treatises, Among the compositions of the verifiers of truth and the adornment of the scrupulous, the firmest support of sages and the exemplar of the gnostics, is the work of the Shaykh Walī Allāh—may God's grace be upon him. From his blessings we have drawn, and from his lights we have been illuminated, each according to his capacity. We have grasped his examples and imitated his ways, deriving from them scattered benefits and rare gems beyond the count of seas or the measure of treasures. And the chief of their company, the leader of the spiritual hosts, the great master among the masters—Shaykh al-Akbar (the Greatest Shaykh), by whose tongue God spoke, the refuge of seekers and the eternal ghawth (succor), whom God established in the station of guidance. By him God illuminated the hearts of the people of knowledge and certainty, renewing through him the path of rectitude and the light of faith.

Among the followers of the Imām and the one who revived the religion, arose like Shaykh Aḥmed—may God be pleased with him

And I was blessed to be born to those who are the flag-bearers of guidance, and the lords of the faith, those are my own paternal uncles in blood but my fathers in knowledge (i.e., Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn).

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But before the final Shāh left, he had taught one boy from the Qasba of Nanotwa, a boy who had been named by his father “the slave of ‘Alī,” but who later changed his name to just “the slave, Ali,” namely, Mawlānā Mamlūk ‘Alī Nānōtwī. It is ineffably challenging to explain just how extraordinary this man was—and just how extraordinarily humble he comes across to the reader, the modernism of the depiction melting the reader. There are two major biographies of him, one nearly four-hundred pages, and the other, from my memory, not very helpful. I spent one day at an art museum in Cambridge reading through the

entirety of this biography. Mawlānā 'Ubaidullāh Sindhī is perfectly right to have pinpointed Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī as the dawn of the second era of the Walī Allāh dynasty. Although he was a talented *Muḥaddith*, logician, hakim, antiquarian, printer, editor, Urdu poet, and a friend to the many German Orientalists at Delhi College, he truly comes across as a 'Ṣūfī disciple, someone low-voiced, buried in Zikr, and magnificently in love and adoring of the Lord of Prophets. Someone, you can imagine, who only dons white cotton Kurtas and a curved Topi, but who knew the entirety of the tapestry of the Islamic tradition. In the biography ten letters of his were published, but as I told Mawlānā Bilal, a hundred of his exist in a single man's possession in London, where I will share in the Walī Allāh archive at Darul Qāsim after the photocopies arrive, in which it is revealed he helped German orientalists edit and collect and publish Islamic historical and literary manuscripts. In one letter to none other than Mawlānā Aḥmed Ali Sahrānpūrī, we can see his highest ambition, his most deeply-felt wish stated, a project that clearly animated his entire ousia, that is, the collation, editing, and publishing of *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, of *al-Jamī al-Musnad al-Saḥīḥ*.

It's a short letter so I don't want to overstate the emotional energy hovering in the letter. But for a man who is mostly sparse in his writing, you can see his energy roaring up in the letter, about the possibility that *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* would be printed, that it would be widely available to Muslims on a large-scale—something never achieved in history. That he might fulfill the vows he made to Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq al-Dihlavī before his emigration to the Prophet-land. And, Shāh Walī Allāh's vows to the Holy Prophet, that he would spread his knowledge, not only in *Diyar al-Hind* but across the world. Of course, I don't think he lived to see the publication of the grandest book of Sunni Islam, to be fulfilled by another boy from the Qasba of Nanotwa, namely Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī. But may we honor him for holding the vows of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq.

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After I drifted into the Walī Allāh sanctuary, *Sanctuarium Shāh Walī Allāh*, I said my *tahiyyat* to first Shāh Walī Allāh, to his most treasured son, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, to his other son, Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, a perfect triangle in locums—and trivium!—to Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm, and to Walī Allāh's right, to Shāh Walī Allāh's mother, the mother who gave us the most brilliant Muslim of the past three hundred years, and to his daughter, and to the other grandsons of Shāh Walī Allāh, knowing I would soon say salam to Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq in Mecca in a

few weeks, an explosion of emerald, jade, moss, fern, ivy, that is, every hue of green, literally wrapped in leaf-light, green as new rain.

I engaged in the prescription that Shaykh Amin transmitted to me from Walī Allāh's *Al-Qawl al-Jamīl*, when a wizened Bareilvi man interrupted me. He asked me what I was doing. I told him—he asked for the prescription. I said no. He said he would show me the grave of Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī and the great-grandfather of Shāh Walī Allāh in the leaf-skittered graveyard—this graveyard had hundreds hushed together and no helpful map like Mt. Auburn cemetery. I said yes. As we were walking, I checked my phone, and Muftī Ehzaz had just texted me the spot of Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī grave, as I was being led to Mawlānā Mamlūk's grave! Feeling I betrayed someone and that I shouldn't have shared it, I crested my hands into Duah for both men. The Bareilvi man lamented to me how the Deobandis refused for a structure to be built for Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī and his great-grandfather. Holding his hands in the brown fabric of his kurta, he said in Dehlavi Urdu, "It was after Mamlūk 'Alī that the Deobandis split South Asian Islam into two, and matters became ruined for us all." I push back, saying that Mawlānā Qāsim was mightily misunderstood by Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḏā Khān—and he smiles and chooses to not push the matter further, content with the Shaykh Amin prescription I shared with him.







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Mawlānā Āshiq writes that one day Shāh Walī Allāh saw Mawlānā Rūmī, Ibn 'Arabī, and Bu Ali Ṣīnā (Avicenna) in a dream:

Mawlānā Rūmī was white skinned, short in height, and very thick-bearded; Ibn 'Arabī was very tall, without clothes he looked like someone from Punjab; and another day he saw Avicenna, who was very fat. I have heard he recited the Quran very beautifully.

### *The Theophany of al-'Aziz in the Archive*

Hunting through the National Delhi Archives, I found Mughal legal documents I had been seeking to acquire throughout the libraries of Hindustān—*waqfiyyas*, *Iqrarnamas*, *Hibanamas*, *mahzarnamas*, and so forth. Wonderfully, I had also stumbled into a manuscript of Tipu Sultan's *Fath al-Mujahidin*, a mix of military and 'Sūfī tactics, where his scribe says in the *Introduction*, that the “British are unlike any enemy the Muslims have ever confronted before. I've defeated them twice and let me tell you how.” But even more achingly, I was on the prowl for the East India Trading Company file on Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz of Delhi.

In an essay published a few years ago by an Aligarh historian, he had noted that Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn had been involved in the Muslim-Hindu riots of Delhi, where he told the aging monarch, son of Shāh Alam II, Akbar II, that it was his responsibility to take the side of the Muslims. The British Resident came to know of this and hunted Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn down in the Mehndiyan Madrasa—and as all good bureaucratic regimes do, they created a file on the suspect and his whole family. I had come to the archive, and showed the archivist the footnotes of the essay, to which he shook his head in frustration, telling me in Hindi: *You know, these historians don't write the full citation, so that other historians won't be able to find the archival materials.* We knew the file was in some Foreign Proceedings of the EIC, but where and what volume, out of the hundreds—we knew it was going to be nearly impossible. He told me to use the in-digital website. I used up my time looking at the other British surveys of colonial India, and, mostly, in the Oriental archives section, taking pictures of manuscripts with my phone (as they did not allow email scanning). The Oriental archivist

was a graduate of the *Islahi Madrasa*, and was mostly suspicious of me, and tried to limit the number of items I wanted to photograph.

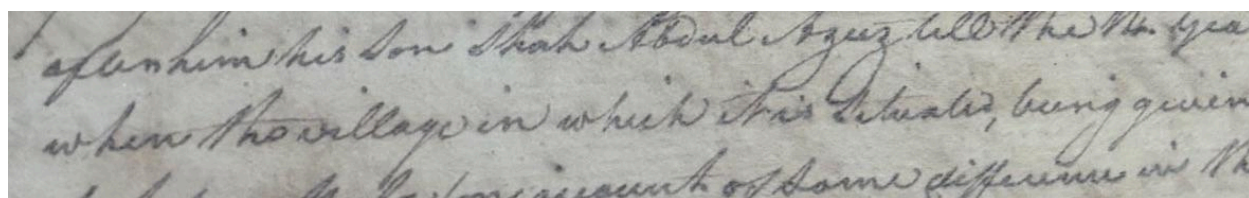
Day after day, though, I would spend my time similarly, approach the main librarian, and hope to see if we had landed the file on Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and every afternoon, around 1 P.M., he would tell me no luck. This went on for at least a dozen days. The file was in this library, and I wasn’t leaving Delhi unless I had it. In the middle of the archive sojourn, I took a taxi to Rampur, the former capital of the Pashtun monarch, who likely converted to Shi’ism, retreating before the failures of Muslim army after Muslim army against the British, and carved out an independent Muslim state. This archive had a final manuscript of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz that I didn’t have—I had almost every written document of the Shāh Walī Allāh family that was known to exist (and some that no Wali Allah scholar had mentioned), from Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, all the way down to Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, a physical and digital library numbering almost two hundred works and *rasail*, having ripped through every private University library in America, namely, Yale, Harvard, Princeton, UChicago, and even McGill in Montreal, and the major libraries of India. Yet there was yet another work in the library that I didn’t know of, namely, Mawlānā ‘Āshiq’s commentary on *Al-Khayr al-Kathir*, corrected and edited by none other than Shāh Walī Allāh. But I wanted this final manuscript of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz—a manuscript Shāh ‘Abd al ‘Azīz had penned on the various meters and raags of Indian music and qawwali, *a la Yaman*, *Deepak*, *Khamaj*, *Bhairav*, etc. It was an autographed manuscript, and in many ways, the last time in history that a Muftī was an expert in both instrumental music and *Fiqh*.

Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had a deep love of Qawwali, as Mawlānā Ilyās’ great uncle noted, that he once invited a Qawwal troupe inside the Madrasa, and the troubadours, cautious they were in the home of the Muftī-yi ‘Āzam of Hindustān, began to sing and beat their instruments in Arabic—Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz stopped them, saying “*This isn’t a Madrasa where everything needs to be in Arabic. Hindi is better for this kind of music.*” We also know that when Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was studying some of the final books of the Dars-i ‘Nizāmī, he slipped out after ‘Isha where he spent all night at a performance of a Qawwal troupe—likely at a ‘Sūfī shrine—and only made it back for Fajr, whereupon Walī Allāh, hearing the story of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, of his son, finishing his *Muta’ala* and engaging all night listening to *Qawwali*, started to laugh.

As we inched to the peacock-colored palace of the late Rampuri Nawabs, I exited the vehicle, in a city where fog and smoke pirouetted playfully with each other, and arrived at the library, where the receptionist told me the manuscript library had been locked by the provincial government and had taken the keys only two days ago! Here I was, bludgeoned by twinned ambitions for Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and his hope for Muslims to remain whole, amid the fracturing impulses for modernity.

I returned to Delhi the following day, tracing through Muzaffarnagar, where, when I returned to the archive, the Indian archivist, smiling to the edge of his face, told me he had found the Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz file that the East India Trading Company had recorded and presented to the British lords.

*Dhalika Taqdīr al-‘Azīz al-Alim.*



*The first mention of Shah ‘Abd al-Aziz in English, in his petition to the British Crown*

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Only two people have checked out this volume in the past hundred years, since the 1910s—one Hindu and one Muslim. Here I stood, as a son of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Victorian bookhand-cursive before my eyes, with the full *Taqdīr* coursing my veins. I don’t know how much English Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz knew when he had this petition written (for it was transcribed by his Vakil)—but to be among the first of his sons to interact with among his most global-intentioned acts and productions, and the first act of English of the Walī Allāhi family, and perhaps of any scholarly family from Islamdom ever, is a favor I attribute to the *barakah* of Shaykh Amin’s *agape* for the Walī Allāh family.

نرنجم گر به صورت از گدایان بودهام غالب

به دارالملک معنی می‌کنم فرمانروایی‌ها

*Why would I be sad if I were a beggar in this world, Ghalib?*

*In the kingdom of meaning all my commands are obeyed*

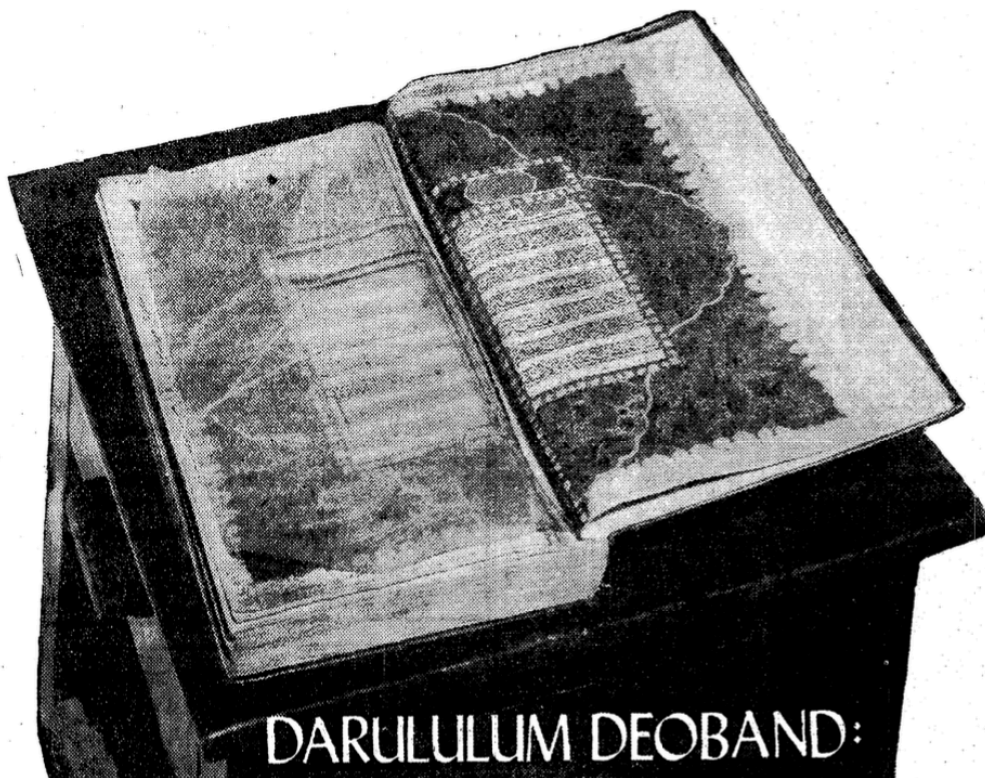
- Mirzā Ghalib

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mans to abandon India permanently, may be doubted. Shah Abdul Aziz, the greatest Musalman that India has seen for centuries, lived and died at Delhi. His successor Maulavi Isaq performed *hijrat*, and, judging from the spirit of the writings of Maulavi Kootub-ud-din, the present head of the Hanfis, orthodox Musal-

*A British report on Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz and Shah Muhammad Ishaq, lauding him as the greatest Muslim India has seen for centuries, in the 1830s.*





## DARULULUM DEOBAND:

# A Century Of Islamic Learning

**DARULULUM DEOBAND** celebrated its centennial from March 21 to 23, this year and attracted, according to its *mohtamim* or rector, Qari Mohammad Taiyib more than 20 lakhs of people from Asia and Africa and particularly from the Indian subcontinent.

It was a unique function to perform in many ways. The entire population of Deoband, both Hindus and Muslims, celebrated the birth of this theological seminary with equal enthusiasm in the company of great Islamic scholars and divines from West Asia.

From Amritsar to Deoband, no coolie charged a single paisa. When pressed he would only give a broad smile and say, "Sir, you are our guest." Every house in Deoband became a guest-house; its doors were open to all the guests.

The people travelled to Deoband by special trains, by helicopters, by bullock-carts, by cars, by buses, by jeeps and by tractors in fact by every available transport.

Deoband, a tiny, dusty place in the district of Saharanpur, U.P., was almost packed to capacity. What is unbelievable is that with 20 to 22 lakhs of people around, not a single untoward incident took place. No stealing, no pick-pocketing, no violation of rules, no break-down of law and order, no frightened rush, no stampede.

The celebrations were inaugurated by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in the presence of scholars and theologians from all over the Islamic world. Speaking in chaste and flawless Urdu, she highlighted the anti-British and revolutionary character of Deoband

and its significant role in the nationalist politics of India.

A word about the birth of Darululum at Deoband, about 120 km. from Delhi. By all standards, it is the greatest theological seminary of modern India and is known to 600 million Muslims all over the world.

During the first half of the 19th century, the great spiritual leader of all-Islamic India was Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlawi (1746-1823), the son and successor of Hazrat Shah Wali-ul-lah (1703-1762), the greatest Muslim divine of our late medieval civilization has produced. Shah Abdul Aziz, while recognising the great value of studying English, exhorted the people to fight against the British rule and declared all land from the Hugli to Delhi as *darul harab* or enemy territory.

The British arrived in Delhi, in 1803. In the same year, Shah Abdul Aziz issued his anti-British fatwa (religious decree) "as real power rested with Christian officers" and they were "the arms of the one and the same Christianising agency." The people suspected a "conspiracy" between the Christian missions and the officials of the East India Company to spread Christianity. The Charter Act of 1833 had removed the few restrictions on the Christian missionary activities in India. During 1840 and 1850, a prolonged encounter and an acrimonious religious debate took place in Agra between Maulana Rahmat-ul-lah Kerani (born 1818) and Reverend Pfander (1803-1865). These debates left a deep impact on the social and political situation and contributed vastly to the disquiet prevailing in northern India before 1857.

Shah Abdul Aziz left behind a large number of disciples and followers. Among his pupils, mention may be made of Maulana Mamluk Ali, who headed the

Arabic Department of old Dilli College (founded in 1825) from 1833 to 1851, Maulana Mamluk Ali, Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan, founder of Aligarh College, and Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautvi, a fierce debater in the religious controversies of the times and a founder of the seminary at Deoband.

The Old Dilli College, which brought about a short-lived scientific renaissance in Delhi and addressed itself to the teaching of science and mathematics through the medium of Urdu and also aimed at bringing the east and the west closer by publishing books and journals in Urdu, went off the rails in the Great Revolt of 1857. It is said that "after the mutiny, Sir Saiyid took the English section of the Dilli College to Aligarh" and Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautvi took the Arabic section to Deoband.

The seminary at Deoband was started in 1867 in Mirza Ghalib's lifetime. It began as a madrasa in an old mosque called the Chhatta Masjid under a verdant pomegranate tree, the scene of the present celebrations. Curiously, the first teacher at Deoband was called Mulla Mahmud and the first student was also called Mahmud Hasan, who later laid the foundation of Jamia Millia Islamia, a bridge between Deoband and Aligarh.

The seminary at Deoband was founded to serve the spiritual needs of the Muslims and was entirely dependent on public contributions. It is truly independent and has never accepted financial help from the British or the Indian government.

The Darululum was established ten years after the Great Revolt of 1857 and has retained its anti-British stance. The revolt of 1857 was not an isolated event or an accident of history. It was the result of the accumulated discontent

among the Indian people, who had suffered politically and culturally from the British conquest. As early as 1817, Sir Thomas Munro, after dwelling on the advantages of British rule, pointed out to the governor-general Lord Hastings that "these advantages are dearly bought. They are purchased by the sacrifice of independence, of national character, and of whatever renders a people respectable." On the eve of the revolt, as far as the eye could travel, the British banner fluttered in contempt over the Indian lands. An entirely alien rule, alien in language, culture and tradition, based upon economic exploitation, with no sensitivity towards Indian sentiment or Indian culture, was established, to the utter distaste and dismay of all classes — soldiers, scholars, theologians, princes and landlords.

After the fall of Mughal Delhi, India was prostrate before the might of the foreigner. The Muslims were the greatest sufferers. Everyone of them was a rebel or a suspect. Tens of thousands of men and women and children were hounded out of Delhi to wander homeless over the country in mournful processions. They were completely excluded from all share in the government. They had no jobs, no position. They also feared the loss of their religion and culture due to the aggressive designs and activities of the Christian missions in the north.

The Muslims were prepared to part with everything but their religion and language. The Deoband Seminary provided religious instruction to the Muslims particularly in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *hadith* (traditions of the Holy Prophet). Deoband has also produced more than six hundred *ulema* and theologians who have disseminated the Islamic ideology to rural India. These *ulema* have played a progressive

Jamia Islamia Darululum at Deoband in U.P., perhaps the greatest centre of Islamic learning in Asia, celebrated its centenary recently, though it has in fact been in existence for 116 years. In the words of the late Dr. Rajendra Prasad it is also

"a stronghold of nationalist and patriotic sentiment." K. A. FARUQI reviews the pioneering services rendered by this remarkable institution which is run entirely on public donations.

role in Indian politics and declined to sign the partition deed.

Deoband is a legend. It is a symbol of frugality, and a model for religious schools. The total annual budget is Rs. 26 lakh which includes the gift of the humblest contributor. The students, drawn from distant lands are given free board and lodging. The campus consists of a big library, several halls, hostel guest-houses, class rooms and mosques.

Old Dilli College has rendered great service to the promotion of Urdu as a vehicle of science and modern journalism. Deoband is sometimes called an extension of Dilli College in different direction. This seminary followed the language policy of Dilli College. The Urdu publications of this theological seminary went into hundreds of editions and reached the remotest corners of the sub-continent. The Darululum at Deoband adopted Urdu as the medium of instruction and in this way established Urdu as a language of religious communication and revolution. So far as the religious literature goes, Urdu is far richer than Turkish, Uzbek and Indonesian thanks to the efforts at Deoband. The writings of *ulema* like Maulana Ismail Shaheed, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi are bed-side books and have gone into several editions.

After the Revolt of 1857, the Deoband seminary and the Aligarh College were established which gave us new insights and aspirations and heralded a new era of reevaluation and assessment. Ghalib clearly saw the emergence of a new, confident future:

"They gave me the glad tidings of the dawn in the night.

They extinguished the candle and showed me the rising sun.

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## *The Saint Who Dreamt Modernity*

One fact that reveals itself when one leafs through Walī Allāh's oeuvre is how he saw himself in between two worlds, feeling a change about to unleash, without ever observing the actual changes. A *Muḥaddith* and a *Muḥaddath*. He died only three years before the devastating defeat of Shāh Alam II and the Nawab of Lucknow against the East India Trading Company, and so it is tough to assume he would've known the West would take on the dominance it did. However, he makes a gripping point in the *Introduction to his Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah*, where he says the rays of the sun are being refracted into the West, as opposed to the east. Did he mean that in a manner topographical? Or chronological? Or mystical? This passage was redacted in the edition printed by the Bulāq press in the late nineteenth century, as was the passage about the live vision of the Holy Prophet in Shāh Jahān's Masjid.

Considering how many Shāh Walī Allāh's visions were recorded—I trawled through them to see if he had predicted the rise of England or France. Sans the passage in *Ḥujjat Allāh*, it is curious and noteworthy how we observe Walī Allāh in a vein of rationalizing the Shari'ah in a manner legible to anyone educated in natural law or positivism. It is for this reason that a French historian some decades ago, in an article where he compared Shāh Walī Allāh to the French socio-political theorist Jean Jacques Rousseau, said Rousseau would have found great affinity with Walī Allāh's arguments! Or we may paraphrase Maududi's twentieth century discontent— *In the West, they produced Kant, Rousseau, Mill, Adam Smith, John Locke, and David Hume and all we have to show is Shāh Walī Allāh of the 18<sup>th</sup> century?*

Nonetheless, Shāh Walī Allāh's sensitivity of hailing from the old world but also sensing the winds of the new world, not so different from Petrarch and Boccaccio, is one of the strongest dimensions of his personality. K.A. 'Nizāmī had said as much in his seminal essay on Shāh Walī Allāh:

The range of Shāh Walī Allāh's learning was encyclopaedic. His versatility of erudition and originality of thought encompassed almost every branch of Muslim sciences. What strikes a student of Shāh Walī Allāh most is how his soul had registered like seismograph the attitudes and trends of an age that was yet to be born. In his thought one can catch the glimpse of the new age. In this context it may be pointed out that he knew intimately the condition of

the Muslim lands and the problems faced by them. His stay in Hejaz provided him an opportunity to study the problems of the Muslim people of different regions. It is, therefore, in a broader framework that his thought can be analysed and interpreted.



*K.A. Nizami, as he published some of the rarest letters of Walī Allāh, and served as Ambassador to Damascus.*

Born at the peak of Mughal imperial extent in the literal reign of Aurangzēb, Walī Allāh somehow anticipated the trends towards the Ḥadīth-centrism that was floating in various pockets of the Muslim world, but seemed to also anticipate the anti-Taqlid trends, by suggesting in various passages that Taqlid had hardened into a knowledge-blocking dam—or where seems to offer a discussion of culture, society, and law, a century before a similar fin-de-siècle trends kicked off in Vienna and Paris. He also seemed to grasp that Ibn 'Arabī would soon be replaced by Ibn Taimiyya as the most central scholar of the world. It is that wholeness of being from two worlds that allows him to be appropriated and

expropriated into every facet of Muslim South Asia—from Sir Sayyid Aḥmed Khān, to Mawlānā Shibli No'mani, to Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thānwī, to Muḥammad Iqbāl, and Abū'l A'la Mawdudi. For no Mawlānā of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century comes close to Shāh Walī Allāh's universal appeal—the only similarity is Muḥammad Iqbāl, whom Deobandis, Barelvīs, Ahl al-Ḥadīth, secular Pakistani nuclear engineers, and 'Tablīghī Jamāt amirs quote endlessly (and the same dozen or so couplets are traded), making Shāh Walī Allāh and Muḥammad Iqbāl perhaps the two most universal figures of Muslim South Asia.

Walī Allāh had somehow felt he was part of a new world and the old world was crumbling, politically and intellectually, and a *may-i jadīd*, as Iqbāl said, needed to be presented to Muslims. Fazlur Rahman Ansari also noted as much in his essay on Shāh Walī Allāh, *The Thinker of Crisis*, and so, rather, than a thinker who is sitting in a madrasa in a suburb outside the city—which he was—Shāh Walī Allāh sounds so much more like a thinker who realizes he has a one final shot, one final lifeline, to provide something for his confessional brothers. As if that he if didn't provide, Muslims would be completely wiped out—such is the urgency and the high stakes that crop up when one reads Walī Allāh's works, and the parallel to Francesco Petrarca, in their in-between-ness of worlds, is really quite astonishing.

In Mawlānā Manazir Ahsan Gilani's *Tazkira* on Shāh Walī Allāh, he states in full force:

I fully believe that Shāh Walī Allāh anticipated the rise of European modernity and thus wrote the Sharī'ah in a rational form. It seems that events that were about to occur had already impressed on the mind of Shāh Walī Allāh. Let me state it plainly: the cure to all secular and Western apostasy is the works of Shāh Walī Allāh and his texts on metaphysics.

Drumming the prophecies of Walī Allāh even further, Mawlānā Manazir says: “Forget India! Walī Allāh's knowledge has journeyed to Egypt, Afghanistan, Syria, and the Arab countries.” That Taha Abderrahmane in his setting-a-new of Uṣūl al-Fiqh has Walī Allāh in his bibliography is nothing but a sign of universal acceptance of Walī Allāh.

In other words, why did Walī Allāh find himself in between two worlds, whereas other thinkers saw themselves as inexorably and jauntily as part of the old world? What did Walī

Allāh see? How did he anticipate the *Ruh al-Hadatha*, as Taha Abderrahmane entitled one of his works, the Spirit of Modernity (with all of its Hallaqian & anti-Hallaqian connotations). Recently, I attended a talk from the indefatigable Ayesha Jalal (a niece of Sa'dat Ḥassan Manto), whose monograph during her doctorate at Oxford on Muḥammad Ali Jinnah, has rightfully earned a place firmly in South Asian academia—moreover she did great work on the Walī Allāh family in two other monographs in Muslim intellectual history in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. She is publishing a new book on Muḥammad Iqbāl, and, after the lecture, we chatted for a few minutes, where she said “Someone like Iqbāl appears in Islam every four hundred years.”

To which I nodded my head, although I was thinking more of Shāh Walī Allāh—a few months later I was in Houston giving a talk on Iqbāl's Persian ghazals, when after the lecture, a Pakistani uncle told me if he could introduce me to a grandson of Muḥammad Iqbāl, who was serendipitously in Houston during the same moment. Of course, I agreed—he had also met Ayesha Jalal recently where she had declared the same sentiment to Iqbāl's grandson. Looking up, he asked me what I thought of her sentiment. I said, “I would agree, save for Shāh Walī Allāh and his son.”

He said: “*You know, Saaleh, my grandfather, ‘Allāma Iqbāl, had very high respect and love for Shāh Walī Allāh. My father, Javed Iqbāl, mentions as much in his four-volume biography and I agree with you whole-heartedly.*”

After exchanging couplets of his grandfather, the Qalandar of Lahore, for a few hours, we departed.

### ***The Light Behind the Veil***

Racing to not be late for our weekly *Ifṭā'* class with Shaykh Amin, he tells Mawlānā Shāheer and I to read the Azhari Fatwa for the week. After the lesson finishes, I pull out a line from the great Mughal poet Mirzā Ghalib's *Divan* and ask him if he could explain the underlying explanation. I would come to know years later that Shāh Walī Allāh and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz also encouraged their students to present various Persian and Urdu couplets and would devote a great deal of time unraveling poetry—for if Mughal culture represented a love of



language, then their Mughal intellectuals loved language and poetry and *Sukhan Sanji* apace anyone.

This was a couplet that Iqbāl's grandson would share with me in that meeting in Houston, one where it made sense to me, but also it made absolutely no sense to me. Shaykh Amin told me to recite the couplet—it was just Shaykh Amin, Mawlānā Shāheer and I in the lamp-lit room, the Chicago afternoon already bleak in October:

آتے ہیں غیب سے یہ مضامین خیال میں  
غالب صریر خامہ نوائے سروش ہے

*These topics arrive in the mind from the unseen  
Ghalib! The scratching of pens is the song of the angels*

Ghalib was partisan to Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid against Mawlānā Fadhl al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrabadi in debates about whether God could lie or not and could potentially create another Prophet—and so I knew his knowledge would at least be tinted with some *rang* of the Walī Allāhi. Moreover, one of his harifan, or competitors, was Muftī Sadr al-Dīn “Azurda,” who was the last Muftī certified by Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and that the knowledge of Walī Allāh was floating in the atmosphere, and especially, in Delhi.

Shaykh Amin carried us to the notion of the Barzakh in Mirzā Ghalib's couplet, how the angels gather there, in a *timthālī* form, where they carry the decrees on scrolls. *Fa'l Mudabbirāti 'Amrā*. The angels, between the *'ulwiyyīn* and the *sufliyyīn*, split time in what the Holy Prophet called the *'ḥazīrah al-Quds*, or the *Holiest of Sanctuaries* and the *Barzakh*, where, those who have nurtured and refined their khayal, and of the seven subtleties, fully steeped in divine *anāniyyat*, in allowing for widened *khiyāl*, may then access those mysteries of the angels, a sort of mirroring of *Tadallī*. Shāh Walī Allāh continues the discussion in the second volume of his *Tafhīmāt* and the first volume of his *Hujjat Allāh*, that this is where the Awliya are able to, through heightened *tawajjuh*, receive higher concentrations of ilham, but also, how angels, especially in the Jabarut, and later, in the Malakūt, in their hopes, consecrated from God in the Lahut, to create new eras in the world, to drag the horns of an age to another *qarn*, create *inspirare* and *epipnoia* within the *Wali* and *Qayyim* of the age, to unleash such before the world. That, as Shaykh Amin explained, was the “scratching of pens” that Mirzā Ghālib sought to clarify.

یہ حکمتِ ملکوتی، یہ علمِ لاهوتی  
حرم کے درد کا درمان نہیں تو کچھ بھی نہیں

*This is the wisdom of the Malakūt, this is the knowledge of the Lahut  
But if you don't have the cure to the pain of the Ka'bah, then what do you truly have?*  
- Muḥammad Iqbāl

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Mawlānā Rashīd Gangōhī wrote that he and Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī hunted for a teacher in Delhi to teach them the canonical texts of the Dars-i 'Nizāmī. They struggled in the beginning, as the grand Mollas were occupied and could not teach the students sufficiently. Mawlānā Gangōhī does not mention which teachers they approached first, but they were content with Mawlānā Mamlūk. Of course, why didn't they ask him first? It seems, again, that Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī's portrait-like humility hung over him, and spurned renown. Regardless, everyone knows what events were set in motion after these two Mawlānās did the core of the Dars-i 'Nizāmī with Mawlānā Mamlūk and the Ḥadīth corpus with Shāh 'Abd al-Ghani, another student of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq (and whose father studied under Shāh 'Abd al-Qadir). Mawlānā Qāsim was most certainly in Delhi for some time when the mutiny kicked off—what exactly happened after the Battle of Shamli, the Deobandi histories are not clear, and not important to the story.

The two fatwas that changed the fate of South Asian Islam and, in many ways, the Islam in America, that is, the *Yak Rōza* of Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid and the *Tahzīr al-Nas* of Mawlānā Qāsim, for these two texts mark as the rupture, fundamentally rewriting the ontology of northern India that was in utter reverence and completely bowed to Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn al-Dihlavī to one was split between that of Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid and Mawlānā Fadh al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrabadi. Even the Salafist Ahl al-Ḥadīth scholar, Sayyid Nazir Ḥussein al-Dihlavī, in a Persian *Istifta*, was questioned, that if Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyya's views about Istiwa were the viewpoint of the Salaf, and that the Ash'arī viewpoint was incontrovertibly Greek-influenced, then why in the world did Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn hold an Ash'ari view of Allāh's attributes? Here, the Ahl al-Ḥadīth-ist had to hold his tongue, and try to smuggle himself out of the question, afraid

to ever speak against the two vanguards of Shāh Walī Allāh. Last year, as I found the single manuscript of Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitāb al-Radd al-Mantiqiyyin* in a library near my great-grandfather's office in Haiderabad, I learned from Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwī's essay in Haiderabad that it was the Nawab who hauled the manuscript to India from the Shi'as in Yemen, who then passed it off to Mawlānā Shibli No'mani, who then bequeathed it to the Nizam of Haiderabad, who then appointed Hameeduddin Farahi to edit it, of which we still have his blue pen markings. Nonetheless, I don't think the Nawab understood much of the text, only the historical points that Shaykh al-Islam cited in the text. But in poring through the Nawab's sources, like his Abjad and his Quranic exegesis, I noticed an absolutely wide-eyed, undying love for Shāh Walī Allāh and his sons—for instance in Tafsīr of the verse *dahaha*, he cites *Takmil al-Adhān* (of which two manuscripts exist in the world, one in Patna, and one in London) of Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn al-Dihlavī, who held the position that the earth was spherical. I offer this passage from the Taymiyyan Nawab, who changed the Taqdīr of Taha Abderrahmane with this manuscript he lugged to Victorian Hindustān:

Then God—exalted and glorified be He—brought, after them, the most eminent shaykh and the most perfect traditionist, the spokesman and sage of this age, the scion and leader of that generation: Shaykh Walī Allāh, son of 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Dihlavī, who passed away in the year 1176 A.H. Likewise [He blessed the world] through his noble sons and the sons of his sons, men of guidance, who strove earnestly to spread this knowledge with diligence and determination.

Through them, the science of ḥadīth was restored to freshness and vitality after it had become something worn and neglected. God benefited by them, and by their sciences, many of His believing servants, and—through their praiseworthy efforts—He dispelled the tribulations of shirk, innovation, and the newly introduced matters in religion, as is well known to all scholars.

These noble ones gave precedence to the science of the Sunnah over other sciences, making jurisprudence (fiqh) as its follower and subject. Their revival of ḥadīth was conducted in a manner approved by the people of transmission and desired by the people of understanding. Their books and fatwas bear

witness to this; their writings and counsels clearly proclaim it. Whoever doubts it, let him refer to those sources.

So upon India and its people gratitude for them, for as long as India and its people endure.

As long as India remains, we owe gratitude to the Walī Allāh family, wrote the Nawab. *Fa-‘alā al-Hind wa-ahlihā shukruhum mā dāmat al-Hind wa-ahluhā*. What greater ingratitude could exist than to ignore than the actual writings of Shāh Walī Allāh, of which Shaykh Amin may be a bright way of redeeming ourselves to the mystic-jurist in America.

### ***The Last Debate of Hindustan: The Walī Allāhi Scholars Who Clashed at the Twilight of the Old Islamicate***

Mawlānā Ashraf Ali wrote in his *Three Souls* that Mawlānā Qāsim loved all the Shāhs but held a marked, an immortal, an affective love for Shāh 'Ismāīl Shāhid, almost that he was close to tears when his name was mentioned. That Shāh 'Ismāīl Shāhid gave his life for Muslim India was no small matter to Mawlānā Qāsim. Moreover, as Mawlānā Bilal and I discovered, the remnants of the Sayyid Aḥmed Shāhid and Shāh 'Ismāīl Shāhid expedition, had in fact regrouped throughout South Asia, and come to influence the younger brother of the wealthiest Muslim in India, namely, the then-Nizam of Haiderabad, the great-grandfather of the seventh and final Nizam. The younger brother of the Nizam, after studying the Walī Allāhi texts with the surviving Mawlānā-soldiers of Shāh 'Ismāīl Shāhid, had effectively launched a full-scale military operation to unseat his brother, and make Haiderabad in the image (eikon) of Shāh Walī Allāh. The British resident was alerted to the askari operations and helped shut down the revolution. Let us begin with Yak Rōza, the fatwa-cum-philosophical treatise that Shāh 'Ismāīl Shāhid penned in the Shāh Jahān-built masjid in ShāhJahānbad.

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Shāh 'Ismāīl's treatise *One Day* is titled as such because he penned the whole treatise in one day, as responding to the criticisms of Mawlānā Fadhl al- Ḥaqq al-Khayrabadi. It is a strange

trick of fate that most Madrasa graduates will have studied a text of the latter but not of the former—his *Mirqat* was also taught to us in Azaadville. Mawlānā Fadhl al-Ḥaqq was a son of Mawlānā Fadhl al-Imām—and both were very close to Shāh 'Ismā'īl's own Taya, namely, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz. I thought it was the typical biographical flourish of the nineteenth century—where everyone sought to lay claim to Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz—till I discovered a series of letters of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's favorite student, Muftī Rashīd al-Dīn Khān al-Dihlavī, to a Yemeni Muḥaddith, where they peacocked over their Arabic and sought from each other to write a Taqriz of forthcoming texts. In the fifty or so letters, Muftī Rashīd al-Dīn Khān laments the poor health of his master, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, throughout the letter, but frames him as the shining intellectual light of Hindustān. In the letters Muftī Rashīd al-Dīn also heaps praise on Mawlānā Fadhl al-Imām al-Khayrābadī and his son, Faḡl al-Ḥaqq—it would be historically untenable for Shāh 'Ismā'īl not to have known how close they were his uncle, and the respect he held for them.

Nonetheless, Shāh 'Ismā'īl sets out his treatise in writing in response to the criticisms of Khayrabadi that it was logically impossible for Allāh to create another Prophet—that God's Qudrah cannot produce another Prophet, in theoria. Shāh 'Ismā'īl introduces the positions of the Ashā'irah and the Māturdiyya, before introducing his own position, a sort of dance between the two. He quotes the verse of Surah Yaseen:

Is not the one who created the heavens and the earth powerful enough (qadir)  
to produce creation similar to them?

Shāh 'Ismā'īl, in a vein Aristotelian, explains the notion of the Qudrah as delineated between the accident and the substance—in other words, all *mumkin bi al-zāt* must be categorized under the *qudrah ilāhiyyah*. As he states in Persian:

*Pas wujūd-i mithl-i ū dākhil ast taḥt-i āyah-i karīmah.*

All existents must be able to be reproduced—as God is qadir over all things—so being able to produce another Prophet must be possible theoretically, according to Shāh 'Ismā'īl. After citing ever more Quranic verses, he turns to his rational proofs that God could create another Prophet, chief among them being that, although all orthodox Muslims agree no other Prophet will ever be raised up, that it is ontically impossible (and here is where



Khayrabadi and the grandson of Walī Allāh agree), but they disagree about it being ontologically impossible. To Shāh 'Ismā'īl: the existence of another Prophet is only denied *bi-al-ghayr*, not in and of itself, everything that is *mumtani'* *bi al-ghayr* is still *Mumkin bi'l-zāt wa har mumkin bi'l-zāt dākhil ast taḥt-i qudrat-i Ilāhiyyah*. After presenting various other Aristotelian syllogisms from his *Organon*, like the disjunctive syllogism, Shāh 'Ismā'īl addresses the accusation of Mawlānā Faḥr al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrabādī that he was being disrespectful to the Lord of Prophets, engaging Khayrabādī claim that he has equalized the Holy Prophet with the rest of creation, to which Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid responds, “Doesn't God in the Quran say constantly on his tongue ‘I am a man, just like you!’. Further, Shāh 'Ismā'īl says, and I imagine this was distressing Mawlānā Faḥr al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrabādī, “This is no disrespect of the Prophet, for in relation to the Prophet is *mumtani'* *bi al-ghayr* and one is *mumtani'* *bi al-zāt* (in relation to God, i.e., *tanqis*), further, there is not misguidance for the 'awam, since to demonstrate the Prophet is a slave of God is an objective of the Sharī'ah.”

He makes a further claim, making an argument by analogy to hierarchy, that to say that Wahy and revelation have ceased after the death of the Lord of Prophets, could never be disrespectful to the *Evliya* (in saying they don't have prophetic attributes).

As I said, Mawlānā Qāsim also penned a *Risala* on this in a response to another Istifta, which sought his clarification about whether Allāh could lie and create another Prophet. I will only quote the beginning of the Fatwa and the end—because it is the only time I have seen Mawlānā Qāsim actually mention Walī Allāh by name and discuss him as an intellectual father.

Driving in the same terms as Shāh 'Ismā'īl, Mawlānā Qāsim also seeks to understand prophets in terms of οὐσία and συμβεβηκότα, and thus constructs some prophets in terms of *bi al-'ardh* and *bi al-zāt*—before turning to a reflection on Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Mirzā Maḥzar Jān-i Jānān, the three greatest 'Ṣūfīs of the eighteenth century. Arguing that some scholars, in inheritance of prophetic attributes, are more Faqir than 'Ālim, and the reverse, he argues that Maḥzar Jān was more Faqir than 'Ālim, and that Walī Allāh and 'Abd al-'Azīz were more 'Ālim than Faqir, writing “Although far be it to say that Walī Allāh's and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's Faqiri was less than their 'Ilm!” The thrust of Mawlānā Qāsim's argument is that the Holy Prophet holds *khātamiyya al-zāt* in that the Lord of Prophets holds prophethood as a substance, as an ousia, whereas other Prophets hold prophethood in terms

of accidents—they are united under the lordship of his prophecy! That Muṣṭafā, *ṣalwātullāh i alayhi*, is the Lord of Prophets, that all their prophethoods culminates in him, was an insight only offered by the 'Sūfīs like Ibn 'Arabī, but especially the Chisthiyya—but Mawlānā Qāsim took out the raaz from the 'Chishtīyya and made it plain for all to see! In manifesting the raaz of the Bukhārī Ḥadīth, about the Prophet being the final brick, that completes and perfects the geometry of a monument. Mawlānā Qāsim's ultimate point is that chronos is not central to the Holiest of Prophets—and that the Prophet's absolute *khatmiyya*, *khātimiyya*, and *khātamiyya*, are unassailable, impregnable, and indefatigable. I don't think there's a single line in any of the text that any follower of Imām Aḥmed Reḡā Khān would necessarily disagree with—in many ways, it's such a novel conception of prophethood that the early 'Chishtīs had only alluded it, but as with all subjects under the behemoth of modernity, matters slide into their absolute extreme. The one sentence that Barelvīs and Qadianīs constant in—each wagging their finger at Mawlānā Qāsim—is:

*“If hypothetically another prophet were to be created, this still would not affect the absolute Khātamiyya of the Lord of Prophets.”*

Other than the fact that Mawlānā Qāsim deployed the word hypothetically (that it could never, ever happen in realis), it is clear he is, perhaps in his affective love towards Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid, he wanted to allow room for Shāh 'Ismā'īl's interpretation to still be true: that God could hypothetically create another Prophet even if in reality it would never take place. Had he not included this line, this fatwa might have sealed the debate and allowed no room for disagreement for Sunnis in India, that there was no new Prophet coming, of which no Deobandi or Barelvi would ever tolerate.

But we also have to state without hesitation that all 'Sūfīs have statements that may be interpreted in ways that are in absolute contradiction to the Sharī'ah—that if one were to read Mawlānā Rūmī and Sham Tabrez literally, one could spend their whole life problematizing. But, why is that same courtesy not extended to Mawlānā Qāsim, who very clearly was a celebrated and known disciple of Hājī Imdādullah, whom Mawlānā Asrar Rashīd is always very careful to state as a Mawlānā—I see this line as perhaps one of the only moments where we see Mawlānā Qāsim in utter Wajd, in unyielding and undeviating celebration of the Prophets, as the ultimate and final prophet, but one to whom all prophets are dependent, a prosaic Urdu theophany of the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*, that all reality may

simply be summed up as the light of the Lord of Prophets. And whether you embrace the athar of Ibn ‘Abbās or not, whether string theory of Imām Ghazālī or Taha Abderrahmane, the Arab Prophet will lord over all other Prophets, *ṣalwātullāh i alayhi*, that their Wujūd is premised, syllogistically and in nominalism, upon his most holy name, may we sacrifice our bodies, our souls, our mothers for him again, and again, and again, in this world and the next, *shāh-i lawlāk, risālāt ma’āb*.

What I am saying, in truth, is that Mawlānā Qāsim is weepingly deserving to be in the class of Shāh Walī Allāh and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Muḥammad Iqbāl as the three Muslims of India who hold universal acceptance—that if followers of Nawab Siddiq Khān and Mawlānā Aḥmed Reṣā Khān can’t accept all the other Deobandi elders, let them at least see Mawlānā Qāsim as the truest vision of Shāh Walī Allāh in Hindustān. That the four greatest minds of Indian soil are, without contest, Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Muḥammad Iqbāl, and Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī.

But the holiest, the most Muqaddas *zāt* in all of South Asia, as Mawlānā Manazir stated in his *Tazkirah* on Walī Allāh, is none other than Khwāja Moin al-Dīn 'Chishtī.

That the first *wali* was Moin al-Dīn 'Chishtī and the *final wali* was none other than Quṭb al-Dīn.

The most popular naat, that is, praise of the Lord of Prophets, ever performed in Pakistan—and perhaps in modernity herself—was sung by none other than Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī’s great-grandson, Qārī Zafar Waheed Qasmī, in his *Faslon Ko Takallauf*. That the most-listened, hama tan gosh, praise of the Lord of Prophets in modernity (for anything done on a large-scale South Asia automatically becomes the numerically highest by virtue of demographics) was by the flesh-and-blood of Mawlānā Qāsim 'Nānōtwī is no coincidence—in the slowed, hushed, reverie-like chant of Qārī Zafar Waheed we can grasp the spirit of how Mawlānā Qāsim wrote his philosophical treatises—patient, enduring, sustained, panoramic, full-of-narrative, and wild depth. *Par Dada and Par Pota*, in one singular stroke in front of the Ummah, kneeling before the Lord of Prophets.

How you see Qārī Waheed Qasmī, son of Mawlānā Qāsim, in a tone ever close to sobbing for the Lord of Madina:

*We will wander the streets in Madina  
We shall willfully become lost in Madina  
If we ever do make it to Madina  
We won't ever return home  
Please, oh fortunate visitor to Madina  
Don't mention to me the myths of Madina, please  
It'll only curl my heart into deathly grief  
And my tears will waterfall my face*

*Once we reach Madina, we won't ever return  
We won't ever leave the streets of Madina,  
Purposefully becoming lost in her streets*

*Allāhumma Al-Nabi'-bālā-tarin  
Oh god, please, the highest Prophet*

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Shāh 'Ismā'īl's line of argument was to be expanded and in many ways scaffolded by Mawlānā Qāsim—and then again by Shaykh al-Hind, who wrote two commentaries on Walī Allāhi works, namely, on Walī Allāh's *Sharḥ Tarājim* for Bukhārī and another commentary on Shāh 'Ismā'īl's *Yak Rōza*, of which we know how Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḡā Khān and his father felt about this continued line of argument. Still, the most curious fact about this debate is that Shāh 'Ismā'īl and Mawlānā Faḡl al-Ḥaqq were both students of Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, in that they were literally classmates. That the biggest rupture in the Ummah, after the Wahhabi rupture, is between two students of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and his baby brother is the most hurtful of all, a punishment for all South Asian Muslims, or, as Imām Māturīdī would say, a *Ḥikmah*.

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In complete honesty, it was not Shah Isma'il who declared that being absorbed (lit. *sarf-i himmat*) in the Holy Prophet was in degrees worse than being gripped by a donkey or cow during prayer—but Sayyid Ahmed Barelwi. Shah Ismail Shahid may have it recorded it down, and that, too, is not clear: he did gather the lecture notes and created chapter headings, as an Afghan friend recently showed me, in Al-Barelwi's Persian *Malfuzāt*—but it was not his statement. It should also be noted that Sayyid Ahmad Al-Barlewi did not say “think about the Prophet,” but rather the technical Sufi term, *Sarf-i Himmat*, which can hold a variety of meanings, such as concentrating your full intuitive self (and ψυχή) on a saint, as Shah Walī Allāh's father practiced over and over before the Chishti saints of Delhi (but we only know of it outside of prayer). As the Barelvis correctly argue, anyone who reads Walī Allāh historiography will find the family engaged in *Sarf-i Himmat*. I offer the passage in Persian and English, penned down by Shah Isma'il Shahid and uttered by Sayyid Ahmed, as he was discoursing in either Khyber Pakhtunwa or Delhi:

و صرف همت بسوي شيخ وامثال آن از معظمين گو جناب رسالت مآب باشد بچندین مرتبه بدتر از  
استغراق در صورت گاو و خر که خیال ان با تعظیم واجلال بخلاف خر آنقدر چسبیدگی می بود نه تعظیم  
بلکه مهان و محقر می بود و این اجلال ملحوظ و مقصود میشود

“To devote one's attention entirely toward a shaykh and the like among the exalted ones in prayer—even if he be of the rank of the Messenger himself (peace be upon him)—is, in many, many degrees, worse than absorption in holding an image of a cow or a donkey. For in that case (with the cow or donkey) the imagination clings to their form without any sense of reverence or exaltation; rather, there is meanness and contempt. But here (in devotion to the Prophet or a Shaykh) that reverence and exaltation are intended and taken into account and becomes the main focus in prayer (i.e., and would ostensibly displace God).”

### ***How An Azaadville Mawlana Taught Me How to Weep the Prophet's Words***

I stand outside the cube-like office in Azaadville, yellow-and-beige mortar glistening in the South African sun, holding my Karachi-printed Bukhārī copy, with my hands and arms, so towering are these *nuskha*hs. I think, how, fourteen years ago, an Afghan student and I had sat in the exact same office to get placed into a class-year. I had already completed Bukhārī



twice, once with Mawlānā Faḍl al-Raḥmān al-‘Āzamī and again with Shaykh Amin, but here I was hoping to complete it a third time, under a teacher, who, like Shaykh Amin, was among the first generation to be a native English speaker but travel to Hindustān-i Kuhan for the Shāh Walī Allāh favors upon South Asia. Moreover, I was also authorized (*mujaḥḥaz*) in Sunan Abū Dāwūd and Nasaī from him, but I wanted his Bukhārī sanad—he had stood in my court so many times in my tenure at Azaadville and in a jargon Walī Allāhi, the *laṭīfa* of the sir of my heart radically inched towards him. That is, I felt for him across my *Wujūd*. Across eight days we must have blazed through at least 300–400 pages of the second volume of Bukhārī, reading after Zuhri, after Maghrib, after Isha, after Duha/Zoha.

Here we sat facing each other on the ground, sitting only on our own knees and toes, both caparisoned in the White Kurta, *our Kulāh* also white, we read sanad after sanad of *Amir al-Mu’minin fi al-Ḥadīth*, as we went from *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* to *Kitāb al-ʿItisām*, where we would only pause if I made a mistake on a narrator’s name. He was approaching seventy years and was due for a surgery soon for his feet, so sitting was a punishment for him. But he still held that sacred posture that Deobandis have championed throughout the world in learning, *tahīyyāt* posture, a posture we have kept since at least Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. A light-olive color permeating his texture, he commanded ultimate authority in the classroom by his panoramic gaze, like a floodlight on the top of a Chicago skyscraper in West Loop.

I flitted from sanad to sanad, like how sometimes you see doves in Jerusalem curving in the sky as they soar towards Bethlehem, from ‘Āmir Sha’bī to Mālik bin ‘Anas to Muḥammad bin Yūsuf to A’raj to A’mash to Sufyān al-Thawri and Sufyan bin ‘Uyaynah, that is, from the Syrian, to the Egyptian, to the Kufan, to the Basran, to the Meccan, and the Medinian chains, a *metaphoros* of Imām Bukhārī journeying throughout the old Islamic world, the world that was new to Imām Bukhārī, the Silk Road before the Silk Road.

Perhaps not so dissimilar to Shāh Walī Allāh as he sat across Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdi in front of the grave of the Lord of the Prophets, *mutawjjihīn*, *muntasibīn*, *mustanidīn*.

Here we sat in an air and an ether that was rivered in Shāh Walī Allāh’s miraculous journey from Mughal India to Ottoman Medina. How my Gujarati diaspora-teacher sat in front of his teacher in Falāḥ al-Dārayn in Gujarat, forty years ago, barely twenty years old amid the optimism of the eighties, and how his teacher sat in the Dawr-i Ḥadīth Darsgah, the dargah,

in Deoband, in front of Shaykh al-Islam Ḥussein Madanī, in the forties, forty years before my teacher; as Mawlānā Madanī splayed before Shaykh al-Hind, as he had sat in front of Mawlānā Qāsim, in Deoband under a tree; and as Mawlānā Qāsim sat, amid the twilight of the Mughal sultanate, only five years before the Mutiny, before Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī, as Akbar II was crumbling on the Mughal throne only a mile away, and as he had sit in that same town, in the Madrasa in Mehndiyan, in front of the last raaz of Walī Allāh line, Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq al-Dihlavi, as he wrapped up the final touches of the Walī Allāh project and debated with Christian Padres; and as Shāh Ishāq sat in front of his all-loved, all-loving Nana, that “Sun of Mahommedan learning,” as the British administrators called him, Siraj al-Hind, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dihlavī, who was going blind but in utter reckoning of the vows he made to his father in the reign of the other Shāh, Prince Ali Gauhar, Shāh Alam II, who would also go blind, by a crazed Afghan who slit his eyes out with a dagger as he lounged on Mughal masnads.

And how Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had sat, barely fourteen or fifteen years old, only on his knees, in front of his father in the final years of his life, seeing how his father had begun to devote majority of his time to Muraqabah and whose body thinned before his son’s eyes, but still endured in Muraqaba despite the weakness shooting in his body, as Mawlānā Āshiq notes. In that same Madrasa of Firuzabad!

*Firuz, to mean to prosper, to be victorious, in old Persian.*

*Abad—to mean settlement, or city, in old Persian.*

*The Victorious City.*

Perhaps his Madrasa was colored dark-green even then, as it still shines today.

Despite the political violence unraveling, and the invasion after invasion, of the Iranians, then the Jatts, then the Afghan, then the Punjabis, threw the whole city into chaos, Shāh Walī Allāh would simply pack up his Ḥadīth texts and cloister with his family, until the massacre ended in Dar al-Khilafat-i Dilli, where he would resume teaching the words of the Holy Prophet, until the next invader came to loot the Mughal treasury and slaughter the population. To not halt the teaching of Ḥadīth even if your life is at stake. In other words, to fulfill the vows he made to the Holy Prophet in Madina, with his own teacher, the son of

Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī, in front of his blood-ancestor, sayyidunā ‘Umar bin al-Khattab.

How my teacher and I would face each other for hours, nothing but Bukhārī in the atmosphere, that is, nothing save for the words of the Lord of the Prophets, for the logos-making of the Prophet. How I would see red exhaustion in his eyes sometimes, but, still, he would fight back and latch them open and honor the adab of that transmission of Shāh Walī Allāh to his all-loyal son, and most importantly, the adab of the Holy Prophet, concretizing the proverb of the Persian poets in Hindustān:

*ba-khudā dīvāna bāsh! ba-Muṣṭafā hushyār.*

*Be utterly mad with God. But watch your tongue with the Holy Prophet*

But here instead we were in rapture to the holy tongue of the Holy Prophet.

How San’āī Ghaznavī said:

*“there is so much talk in this world*

ولي حديث چون حديث مصطفي كـو

*but where is talk like the speech of someone like Muṣṭafā”*

Here we kneeled two-hundred-and-ninety-five years after Shāh Walī Allāh’s journey to Madina, thousands of miles away from Delhi, engaged in the vows of the Walī Allāh family, that is, their historia, their logos, their raaz.

How, once, as we were finishing up the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, we reached the section of the passing of the Holy Prophet. A Ḥadīth narrated none other than by the Mother of the Believers! Where the Lord of Prophets was laying in her lap, where perhaps she was also in Tahiyat posture, and his hand was raised. And he said:

*Allāhumma al-Rafī’q al-‘Ala,*

*Oh, Allāh, please, the loftiest Companion!*

And Imām Bukhārī reports *wa mālat yaduhu*. Here my Mawlānā raised his hand like the Holy Prophet, and we cut to silence, as he showed me how the Holy Prophet’s hand fell as he exited the Dunya, on the lap of Ḥazrat-i Aisha. Whether Shāh Walī Allāh showed the same gesture to Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, we will perhaps never know, but it is in these moments that the *arwāḥ-i buzurgān* come to life, that their intellectual life comes sailing forth, if we were only but alive to them.

How once we came across the Ḥadīth, in *Kitāb al-Da’wāt*, where the Holiest of Prophets was reported to have said before he slept, before he wept: *Allāhumma bismika amutu wa a’hya*

*Oh God, in your name do I die, and do I live*  
θεέ, ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ἀποθνῄσκω καὶ ζῶ.

How I paused reading. And I flicked my eyes towards him—and softly muttered this was the very first prayer my parents taught me in northern California, in a city between swept mountains and rolling hills, my eyes still stuccoed and lowered to the brittle pages of Bukhārī.

I must have been three or four years old when I learned the prayer—my teacher was already teaching *Dawrat al-Ḥadīth* in Azaadville then. How my parents learned this prayer from a South African *duah* stapled booklet brought by a South African Mawlānā in the nineties.

And I told him:

*This was the first prayer I ever learned, Mawlānā. The first words of the Prophet on my tongue, long ago in California.*

He stopped rocking—he was in stride with each *sanad*—and smiled one of the warmest smiles I could feel it breeze on me (it was so palpable!), in my life and said under the pilaster of his breath:

*How God has willed this for you, Saaleh.*

And now all words of the Prophet on my tongue.

Wasn't that an act of isnad, where we find a sanad, that is, a foundation, a pillar of support, a cushion for our own existence, where we make meaning of the mess of our lives, through the holy logos of the Holiest of Prophets, where we grapple with the rhythms of our lives through the epistemia of the Lord of Prophets? Wasn't this point of *Dawrat al-Ḥadīth*, where we roam and roam and roam, *naduru wa nafuru nafuzu, dawwar, wa fawwar wa fawwaz*, that perhaps we may just land with the Prophet? That in Hajj we roam and roam for the sake of God, in honor of our father Abraham, but in Dawrat al-Ḥadīth, we roam around *Sayyid al-Mursalīn*, the Lord of Prophets! Shāh Walī Allāh's gift to twin 'Ilm al-Ḥadīth and the Prophet-love of the 'Chishtīs in Mughal Delhi, of Khwāja Mo'īn al Dīn Chishtī and Muḥammad bin 'Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, a marriage of *Khorasān* and *Ma Warā al-Nahr*.

The *dawrān* of our madar within the *dāirah* of the breath of the Prophet. Perhaps this is why Shāh Walī Allāh sought Ḥadīth for us in South Asia, so we may live forever more with the Holy Prophet, that is, he may live with us.

*fa lillah al-akhirah wa al-ula*  
*For god owns the last and the first!*

As we completed the final Ḥadīth together, just the two of us, in the magical geometry of his office, now the blackness of the Gauteng night creeping across the skyline, we closed our Bukhārīs, after thousands of prophetic reports and chains, I said:

*May I continue your sanad for decades*

He gave me a short grin, with a breath lilted and a voice soft,

“May you, saaleh”

*With the decree of Allāh, he added.*

I left his office and descended the brick stairs, walking in the aftermath of the gorgeous Prophet's words, to the office of *Mawlana* Ziyad, who, beaming at me with his whole life,



scanned my third Bukhari *sanad* and sent it to my mother, counselling me to make sure I never forget my affection for Iqbal and his tongue of Urdu.



*Shāh Walī Allāh's handwritten Bukhārī Sanad, signed by Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn on the bottom.*

Shāh 'Ismāīl Shāhid wrote in '*Abqāt*:

The jabarūtī love (the love belonging to the realm of divine might) is the strongest of all loves and the foremost of all affections. For it is the love of the lāhūt (the Divine Essence), whose attribute is the perfection of all perfections. The Beloved therein is He Himself, and there is no beloved more beautiful than He.

The beauty of His Face is the inner reality of existence, and the majesty of His Face is the sublimity of being. The love of the son for the father, and of the father for the son, the love of the Imām for his followers, the love of the Messenger for his community, the love of the martyr and the one who beholds (God) in divine manifestation—all of these are but portions derived from that love.

Indeed, the mercy of divine might (rahmat al-jabarūtiyya) comprises a hundred parts, and every existent being has but a portion from it.

There is no existence save for per the measure of His holy existence in the lāhūt (Divine Essence), He is the Beloved of Himself through His own love.

And its effect may also appear in the outward realm of existence—as in the divine saying: “When God loves a servant, He calls Gabriel, saying: ‘I love so-and-so; therefore, love him.’”

The Shaykh al-‘Irāqī (may God sanctify his secret) has discussed this matter at length, and Shaykh al-Musammā, in his book *al-Lama’āt*, has likewise presented detailed terminology on it. Whoever wishes may refer to him.

### ***The Grand Mufti of America***

Mawlānā 'Ubaidullāh Sindhī wrote that the second *Dawr* concluded with the death of Mawlānā Gangōhī, and the third *Dawr* began with Shaykh al-Hind. Mawlānā Sindhī's numerous essays and Tafsīr based on the thought of Shāh Walī Allāh and dialogue with non-Muslim political leaders on the genius of the Walī Allāh family is in many respects a crucial part of the third *Dawr*. We may say that the third *Dawr* either concluded with the death of Qārī Tayyib Qasmī, the “Ghazi” as Indira Gandhi announced to the *Times of India*, or with the death of Muftī Saeed Palanpuri, both of whom were teachers of Shaykh Amin.

We are without a shadow of a doubt in the Fourth *Dawr* of the Walī Allāh line, whether the ‘Ulema class have realized such or not. The *Dawr*—that is, the door—is flung wide open and Shaykh Amin is at the helm, the *Mīr-i Majlis of the bazm-o-razm*.

Studying Shāh Walī Allāh, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Mawlānā Qāsim under Shaykh Amin releases one into the halls of the most exclusive Islamic *turāth*, where the brilliance of these three mystic-jurists hovers exceptionally as a Roman frieze across time— a hall that has been haunted for many decades. And I feel pained to think how many Deobandis and followers of Mawlānā Aḥmed Reḡā Khān spend so many years in Madrasa (and this experience is never not easy), yet never find their way to Shāh Walī Allāh, despite how often his name is invoked in their time in Madrasa. That they were so close to the knowledge of this Mujaddid, that they could see it with the whites of their eyes but then turned away.

If the histories of Islam are of any indication, the fourth era of any empire or legal school is almost the brightest and the most extraordinary. Periodizātion is a devil’s game, but if one were to think of Ottoman history, the fourth period would definitely be after the Interregnum, and either Sultan Selim Yavuz, or Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. In the Mughal period, less thorny, the fourth era would be Shāh Jahān and Aurangzēb (the first is Bābur to Humayun’s exile, the second is Ḥumayunās return to Akbar’s early rule, and the third is Akbar’s reign to Jahāngīr’s death—although I grant some would disagree). Similarly, if we were to analyze the development of the Ḥanafī school, the first era could be classified as ‘Abdullah bin Mas’ūd to ‘Alqamah, the second Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaī and the third Ḥammād bin Suleimān, and the fourth Imām Abū Ḥanīfah. Or, alternatively, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah’s didaskolos as one era, his students’ sweep across into the Ajam as the second, including the composition of Zāhir al-Riwaya as theory and Qadi Abū Yūsuf as the chief judge of the Abbasid empire. The third stage is the way until Abū Layth Samarqandī, who died in 983 in Samarkand and Abū Bakr Jassas al-Rāzī, who died two years before him in Baghdad in 981, and Abū Ja’far al-Tahawī, who died fifty years before both, in Cairo, in 933. The fourth stage will lead you to Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī and Ibn Māzah al-Bukhārī and the Nasafīs until ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Mas’ūd Maḥbūbī, who died in 1346. However you reset these eras, the fourth era will almost always include the formative and canonizātion period, where they set the tones for the next centuries—journey to the archives of Istanbul and Delhi and Cairo and see how many thousands of manuscripts exist of Al-Marghīnānī and al-Nasafī and al-Maḥbūbī of their *Hidāya* and *Manār* and *Wiqāya*—that is, Abū Layth Samarqandi and

Hakim Shāhid and even Imām Muḥammad al-Shaybānī were read in vastly lower volume than Marghīnānī et al, in the Middle Ages and Postclassical era.

I know I will receive scorn for this statement but in many ways Darul Qāsim has already improved on the project of Deoband, that is, the rāz of the Walī Allāhi family, in their *tanqīh* and *taṭbīq* if the manāt. In that Shaykh Amin is of the Walī Allāhi line, of the Dars-i 'Nizāmī, since Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, and understands this moment, the *tajalliyāt* that scatter across and beyond the horizon, and to fully reckon with modernity, in a spirit that is loyal to the Walī Allāhi spirit. That *Fiqh*, *Ḥadīth*, *Tafsīr* should be in breathless dialogue with *Tasawwuf* and *Ḥikma* and *Kalām*, to understand the 'Amr and 'Ibdā of Allāh, but also to prioritize the *Khalq* of Allāh, both in its infinitive and object Arabic forms. But as Shāh Abd al-'Azīz so life-offeringly taught us to understand the new world—few Muftis, across India and Pakistan and Bangladesh, have built as many bridges as Shaykh Amin has with Muslim technocrats in all fields, law, medicine, technology, and politics. This is why the fatwas and the 'irfan at Darul Qāsim are unlike anything offered in America, England, India or Pakistan—the ultimate healing of Muslim society schisms, where Pakistanis in Defense and Maulvis in Old Lahore do not know and cannot understand each other—they are a few miles away, yet universes apart. This unity of worlds—the *waḥdah* of its Wujūd—last saw its fullness in Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, as I always say, the last true Muftī, the Muftī who understood Islamic law, but somehow also grasped the old and the new worlds, by his constant dialogue with the British residents and Christian pastors in Delhi, as Mawlānā Ilyās' Kandehlawī's great-uncle offers us time and time again.

The astonishing number of lawyers, physicians, computer scientists and doctorate-holders from private and public universities, across America and England, that trickle around Shaykh Amin, a graduate of Deoband, is simply put, dazzling. They come to learn from him, to reform their epistemia, in this being-less world, as Heidegger once said, to give them a fresh *Minhāj* and *Manhaj*, one rooted in the vows of Walī Allāh, one exclusive to him, as Walī Allāh saw in vision after vision. While the pitchfork-Maulvi finds himself restricted to either teaching Hifz and marrying/burying Muslims (and these are without doubt very rewarding and useful endeavors), Shaykh Amin is teaching Muslim scholars how to not be an intellectual failure within their community, that is, as the German humanist said of Shāh Abd al-'Azīz, the *Ne Plus Ultra* of their communities.

That is to say, he is breaking down the idols of Muslim society, those Berlin Walls that have bedeviled Muslim communities for two hundred years, ever since the death of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who died exactly two hundred years ago. And two hundred years is such a sacred number in our tradition—for it was 610 when the Lord of Prophets began to receive revelation, and it was 810, when *Amir al-Muḥadīthīn* was born, namely, Muḥammad bin ‘Ismāīl al-Bukhārī. Shaykh Amin offers all Dars-i ‘Nizāmī graduates one last chance to see the utter miracle of the Shāh Walī Allāh *Khāndān*, a family that I have covered only in blinking highlights. Shāh Walī Allāh may be our last chance.

*What I’m really trying to say is that Shaykh Amin has kept the vows of Shāh Walī Allāh in America.*

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After Eid prayers in Pleasanton, the sun quite literally catapulting rays on us and the green ground, I approach Dr. Jawad Qureishi, a Professor at Zaytuna College. He had spent several years with Shaykh Amin during his doctorate at UChicago, and during a Zaytuna conference in 2024, he showed Mustafa and me his library, of which included many, many Walī Allāh texts—his two shelves of Walī Allāh counted as more than entire Madrasas I observed in India, Pakistan, South Africa, and well, of course, in the United States. I ask him about his assessment of the state of Walī Allāh studies and Shaykh Amin’s fundamental role to play. Without missing a note, he said *Oh, yes, of course, Shaykh Amin’s knowledge of Walī Allāh is extraordinary. I approach Hermansen for the secondary literature on Walī Allāh, but in terms of the actual knowledge of Walī Allāh, Shaykh Amin is most certainly the one I defer to.* A few months ago, Dr. Qureishi had traced extraordinary linkages between ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nablusi, Khwāja Bāqī Billāh, and Walī Allāh, proving to us that we still haven’t really uncovered Walī Allāh’s full impact on the Muslim world, even now in 2025.

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Mawlānā ‘Ashiq further writes in the biography of his first cousin that Shāh Walī Allāh announced to his sons that his books and knowledge would survive until Judgement Day. That modernity would succeed modernity, *ad infinitum*, but Walī Allāh’s knowledge would still reign on the tongues and hearts of Muslims.



That in America some of the largest Islamic institutions to train scholars—Darul Qāsim, Qalam, IOK, 'Dar al 'Ulūm NY, Darus Salam, Miftaah—are all under the aegis of the sons of Walī Allāh, i.e., for any Muslim to train as an 'Alīm in America, whether Arab or West African or Pakistani or Afghan, they must seek out the trodden path of Walī Allāh and his sons, one lined with sycamores and azaleas. One committed to the journey of Walī Allāh from Surat to Medina, that is, from the surah to the ma'na, the form to the meaning. All paths to the Prophet will cut through Walī Allāh—so Walī Allāh had announced in Mughal Delhi, and, with every decade, this only shows itself to be truer and full of alethia.

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A few weeks ago I was encouraging an undergraduate Indian Muslim girl at Harvard to spend a year at Darul Qāsim, convincing her that the Islamic bioethics module at Darul Qāsim would transform her epistemia as perhaps a world-class physician. She was skeptical—could a madrasas offer a Harvard student such? Afterwards, I sent her an essay authored by Shaykh Amin and one of his early students, Dr. Aasim Padela, on authority between the jurist and the physician, under the umbrella of Ḥanafī law. We bumped into each other on the first day of fall-rain at Cambridge, and she said the essay was unlike anything she had engaged before and asked for more papers from Shaykh Amin and Mawlānā Bilal. Her parents are from Madras, and I thought how happy Mawlānā Mīrān would have been, a Muslim daughter from his city having her intellectual Taqdīr by his first student in America changed forever. I say with utter conviction that no other Deobandi could have achieved such, that is, to restore faith in the Islamic intellectual tradition, as one brimming with life, wonder, vitality, and truth. As a watering path. For God's throne is on water, a path which the *Shari'ah* leads you towards, as Shāh Walī Allāh taught us over, over, and over, those centuries and lifetimes and bloodlines ago in Mughal Delhi.

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As I finish this essay in the city of the Hapsburgs, Vienna, where the Ottomans under Suleiman the Magnificent and again under Mehmed IV sought to crack the city's walls, both failing, one defeated by the weather, and the other crushed by the Polish. But it is also the city of Mozart and Beethoven, where their concertos and musical sheets scatter about in

every crook and spire and velvet-chair of the city. As I visited his pilastered-cum-plastered home, I saw his birth and death dates—he was born seven years before Shāh Walī Allāh's death. Here was a boy, considered the brightest in Baroque modernity, and here was Walī Allāh, considered the brightest in Mughal India—and both had shared seven years of the saeculum. I am not comparing the two in knowledge, but simply in one reception, one in Sunni Islam and the other in the arts of modernity, which, as any reader of Walter Benjamin and Nietzsche will know, it replaced that sense of belonging and artistic fulfillment that the medieval church once gifted to her congregants. What did Walī Allāh offer the world and what did Mozart offer the world? But I was struck to see in a recent essay by a British composer on Mozart that Ibn 'Arabī's name was cited: to tease out the spiritual aura of Mozart—i.e., that he felt only Ibn 'Arabī's *epistemia* of theophanies could explain Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. I thought how many Muslims could not access the theophanies of Shāh Walī Allāh and perhaps they would have discovered the same thundering harmony as the boy from Salzburg. That you might actually be with the angels through Walī Allāh's writings and litanies. That you may also hear them.

داخل نمبر	۹۰۵۴
قرن نمبر	۲۱ ج ق
کتاب نمبر	

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلوة والسلام على سيدنا محمد وآله وصحبه أجمعين **آما** بعد  
ففي خبر فقير الى رحمة الله الكريم فقير الى الله اسحق عليه الرحيم عفو الله له ولوالديه  
البنما والكر بعد از فراغ از ترجمه موهبته قانون بخاطر جهان سیده که برخی اقوال علم طلب  
بندی مع بعضی ادویه مجرب و خوش در ادراغی چند از فام مانند مادر اکثر قرآن که ادویه  
سنگی اصل نویان بسته می باشد بن علی توانسته کرد و نه **انکه** **سیدی** سووم  
گردید و بانه التوفیق و به خبر فنی **بنا** **طبی** علمی که نگاه دارند به آن صاحب  
را و باز دارند به **بنا** که حصول صحت سبب بل بر ادوات و منی و دیو است  
نیل و دره من قال **سرد** چرا که کسی از سکه منی که ملک می باشد است

Shāh Walī Allāh's younger brother Shāh Ahl Allāh's manuscript on a synthesis between Greek and Arabic medicine.

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## *Our Fates Come to Life*

My very first day of *Madrasa* was a hot summer day in July in 2003. My father dropped me off at the Islamic Center of Fremont in a black Ford Escort, as I was dressed in a white Saudi robe, and topi from Haiderabad, white-pinkish in color. My first teacher was a student of Mawlānā Mīrān, studying Ash'arī discursive *theologos with Mawlana Mīrān*.

My very last day of *Madrasa* was in July in 2023. I arrived in a green Camry to the Darul Qāsim campus in Glendale Heights. My last teacher, Shaykh Amin, was a student of Mawlānā Mīrān, covering texts of Ibn 'Arabī and the other 'Ṣūfis with *Mawlana Mīrān*.

Mawlānā Mīrān died in the Hijaz during the Pilgrimage. May we forever remember him as the one who resurrected Shāh Walī Allāh's vows in America, through Shaykh Amin. Without Mawlānā Mīrān, we may never have seen Shāh Walī Allāh in America in any meaningful way. Without the original Mīrān Shāh, we may never have seen Bābur, under whose descendants, Shāh Walī Allāh's family emigrated from Iran to Delhi. We are grateful for Mīrāns, one who allowed for the life of Walī Allāh, and one who allowed for the afterlife of Walī Allāh in the wilderness of America.

May we honor these vows with every breath we have.

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Mawlānā 'Āshiq documents the death of his first-cousin, the Saint of God, Walī Allāh. He began to suffer a type of inflammation in his body, an inflammation well-known by students of Avicenna and his Qanun of medicine, and despite counsel from his confidantes and the taxing effects of the spiritual reflection, he continued to engage in 'Ṣūfī Muraqaba. After consulting with physicians from Mughal Delhi—the best in the world—Shāh Walī Allāh realized that his time is coming to a close, and Mawlānā 'Āshiq Phūlātī quotes an allusion that Shāh Walī Allāh made in one of his final majlis. As his four sons gather around him, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, Shāh Rafī al-Dīn, Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī, Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir, he tells Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz and Shāh Rafī al-Dīn that “You know, my brother, Shāh Ahl Allāh, and

I were the exact same age as you when our father passed away.” Shāh Walī Allāh then tells Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, only fifteen (or perhaps seventeen), how angels have named him in the *ḥaṣṣrah al-Quds and the Malakūt*, as a Ḥujjah (His younger brother is called ‘Abu al-‘Ajāib). Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz asks his father on his death-bed, after hearing the names for his baby brothers:

*Does this mean, father, I’m not a saint in the court of God (i.e., am I only a scholar in the heavens)?”*

Shāh Walī Allāh says:

*No, no, you didn’t understand. You are, my boy, a saint, in the eyes of God and His angels, a Wali of Allāh.*

It was a Sunday afternoon, before and after Zuhr, where these conversations took place. It is also striking because many Madrasas in England and South Africa often hold their Bukhārī khatams on Sunday before *Zuhr* where Walī Allāh’s name is recited in full glory for the attendees—the parallels are perhaps only incidental.

It is Walī Allāh’s final moments, when, all of a sudden, an entourage knocks on the family home of Walī Allāh in Mughal Delhi. The sons or the servants open the door. And it is Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān! The only Naqshbandi ‘Ṣūfī who is an elder to Shāh Walī Allāh in Mughal Delhi.

He has arrived with all his Murids, of which must have included Qadi Thanā’ullah Panipati. The *Kaj Kulah* bearing on all their heads, their robes not rising above their ankles. The sons rise to say salam as does Mawlānā ‘Āshiq. Mirzā Jān was three years senior to Shāh Walī Allāh, yet here was Walī Allāh dying before him, and he would outlive Walī Allāh by almost twenty years. Mawlānā ‘Āshiq beckons to Mirzā, from Persian dual word to mean *Amirzādeh*, or the son of a king. He and his Naqshbandi contingent enter the room of Shāh Walī Allāh, of which seems to still exist today.



Mirzā Maẓhar shuts the door. Nobody else is allowed to enter, Mawlānā 'Āshiq writes. None know what conversations are unfolding, what final words are being exchanged, what final touches are shared, what final Aḥādīth are set forth behind the wooden doors. *Thirty minutes they sat with him*, wrote Mawlānā 'Āshiq.

The Naqshbandi 'Şūfīs, with their black robes and massive skullcaps, depart the Madrasa, Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān at the head of the troupe, in an atmosphere of briskness. Shāh Walī Allāh is now in the final throes of death as the Naqshbandī Shaykh exits, the steps of the *Naqshbandī Mirzā* are in lockstep with the last breaths of Wali Allah.

He is *pronounced dead* within a few minutes, by the physicians of Mughal Delhi.

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*Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān* had wrote, per Ghulām 'Alī al-Dihlavī, about the world-defying project of Walī Allāh:

حضرت شاه ولی الله محدث رحمه الله علیه طریقه جدیدیه بیان نموده‌اند و در تحقیق اسرار معرفت و غوامض علوم طرز خاص دارند، با این همه علوم و کمالات از علمای ربانی‌اند مثل ایشان در محققان صوفیه که جامع‌اند در علم ظاهر و باطن و علم نویسان کرده‌اند چند کس گذشته باشند.

Ḥazrat-i Shāh Walī Allāh has elucidated a totally new path of Islam, in the deeper study and realizātion of the mysteries of the Shari'ah he possesses his own method. And despite all of this pedigree he is from amongst the mystics! There are few 'Şūfīs like him, who combined both the exoteric and the esoteric.

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That Walī Allāh was already acknowledged by his superior-saint, Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān, as a Mujaddid, as carving out a new path of Islam, one never traversed before. That the most senior 'Alīm and 'Şūfī of his era testified to Walī Allāh's *Tajdīd*, his renovatio, is virtue enough that before Walī Allāh died, he already knew he was a *Mujaddid*. That Mirzā

Mazhar must have touched Walī Allāh one final time, leaving Mirzā Mazhar as the only ‘Alīm of the old world to reckon with the incoming assaults of modernity, in Mughal Delhi. Yet here were the two greatest ‘Alīms of Mughal Delhi wishing each other goodness in this life and the next, that is, beauty.

Walī Allāh had died with the touch of the Naqshbandi ‘Šūfīs, that is, his final vows will only be known to the Naqshbandis, the only ‘Šūfīs patronized by the first Mughal emperor, Zāhir al-Dīn Bābur, when he sponsored the sons of Khwāja ‘Ubaidullāh Aḥrār to join him in Timurid Delhi. It is perhaps for this reason that at Bukhārī Khatams in Dar ‘Ulūm Karachi and ‘Dar al ‘Ulūm Deoband and ‘Dar al ‘Ulūm Azaadville, they say Aḥmed bin ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Naqshbandi, and not any of his either ‘Šūfī affiliations, like ‘Chishtī, Kubrawī, Suhrawardī, ‘Qādirī, or Shādhilī, or Uwaisī, of which he held Khirqas for.

*Shāh*, to mean king

Walī, to mean saint

The saint of kings, or the king of saints, or the saint-king.

--

وتشغلني عني وعن كل راحتي مصائب تقفو مثلها في المصائب  
إذا ما أتتني أزمة مدلهمة تحيط بنفسي من جميع جوانب  
تطلبت هل من ناصر أو مساعد ألوذ به من خوف سوء العواقب  
فلست أرى إلا الحبيب محمداً رسول إله الخلق جم المناقب

*When a dreadful crisis befalls me,  
encompassing my soul from every side,  
I look about—is there a helper or supporter,  
a refuge from the fear of evil consequences?  
And I see none but the beloved Muḥammad,  
Messenger of the Creator, full of noble traits;  
– Shāh Walī Allāh’s Arabic poetry*

## *The Last Vows of Walī Allāh*

*In the Wasiyya of Shāh Walī Allāh*, he proposes a list of reforms for both scholars and the public—setting out guidelines for Islamic curricula, for Muslims to not host so many mourning and ceremonies and eulogies, about studying good Persian, and so forth. In the final two Wasiyya, the ousia, the absolute blazing nature of Walī Allāh’s being, comes to life. He says he and his ancestors are exiles in the land of India. And that his only wish for studying Arabic—just the language!—was to merely be closer to the Lord of Prophets, suggesting he did not necessarily care about studying Arabic to be an ‘Alīm or a Mujaddid, but simply to be close to the Prophet. To love the Prophet in his language, Walī Allāh said, was his only ambition in life. To *study nahw* so as to be engorged within the ridges of Prophetic beauty, within the ascending spires of it. What else could a Muslim from Hindustān ever hope for himself?

In the final *Wasiyya*, it is absolutely devastating and weeping—the final words of the final saint of God. He quotes a Ḥadīth from the Musnad of Imām Aḥmed bin Ḥanbal, perhaps a final nod to Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taimiyya (he could have quoted the variant in the Mustadrak of Hakim), where the Lord of Prophets announces: *man adraka minkum ‘īsā bin Maryam, falyukri’ minnī al-salām*.

*Whichever of you meets the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, please do convey my Salam to him.*

Walī Allāh’s final lines, weepingly:

*It is my great desire (ārzu) that my descendants will convey the salam to the Messiah on behalf of the Lord of Prophets.*

That the Prophet had one final request from this temporal life—and Walī Allāh, who had spent every waking moment and every sleeping moment in child-like rapture of the Prophet and in recitation of his logos, the breathless words of the Holy Prophet, would hope from God that he would perhaps be counted as those who served the Prophet in this life.

How Walī Allāh, from the days as boy, in a city like Delhi that was circumferentially enchanted by the Prophet, did nothing but tremble for the breathless, I mean, breathful,

Prophet, as we learn from his Breaths of the Gnostics, *Anfās al-Arifīn*.

How Walī Allāh, as a full-grown man, despite already having *Ijāza* to teach and write fatwas, still packed up his life, and sailed to Madina, for just more words of the Holy Prophet.

To be brimming with prophetic logos.

How Walī Allāh's final written words were simply: *Oh God, let my blood work for the Prophet even in death.*

As if to say:

*Oh Allāh, if my life's every breath was for the Prophet, then let every breath of my death also be for the Lord of Prophets.*

*To give your life and death for the Prophet, in Persian.*

And so, as Walī Allāh himself saw, from California to Glasgow to Durban to even Madina to Kabul to Lahore to Haiderabad, Shāh Walī Allāh's name is twinned with the Prophet's, which is to say, every moment since Shāh Walī Allāh's death, we all have played a role in helping keep Shāh Walī Allāh's vows to serve the Prophet.

خوبان پارسی‌گو بخشنده‌گان عمرند  
ساقی بده بشارت رندانِ پارسا را

*The fair Persian-speaking ones are the givers of life  
Cupbearer, bring glad tidings to the pious libertines.*

– Ḥāfez





*The grave of Shāh Walī Allāh's mother, the mādar-i buzrgān who birthed the last known Mujaddid.*



## *From Hadith to Hadith*

The ‘Ulemā and the *Muḥaddithīn* often refer to Walī Allāh as *al-Muḥaddith*. But more than anything Walī Allāh saw himself as *Muḥaddath*. In a Ḥadīth in Bukhārī, which Walī Allāh knew better than anyone else, the Lord of Prophets said there were *Muḥaddathun* and *Mufahhamun* in his Nation. And suggested that Sayyidunā ‘Umar was among them. Shāh Walī Allāh was, *mutawatiran* in Delhi, recognized for his lineage to sayyidunā Umar, for the blood of Banu Kalb. And Shāh Walī Allāh cited this Ḥadīth again and again. In *Hujjat Allāh*, in the chapter of matrimony, he explains that sayyidunā Umar was the bearer of secrets of the Shari’a, that he saw the metaphysical rationale and principle of each legal ruling—that is the *Wujūd* of each *Hukm*. That the unseen narrated itself to sayyidunā ‘Umar, like when he was sermonizing and the Battle of Nahavand, the greatest event in Islam according to Muḥammad Iqbāl, revealed itself, that is, did Ḥadīth of itself to sayyidunā ‘Umar.

Walī Allāh carried many secrets from his mother’s ‘Chishtī line. But if there is one secret he carried from his father’s line, it was the mystery of *sayyidunā* ‘Umar, the conqueror of Jerusalem, Gaza, Damascus, and Ctesiphon, of Beirut, and Basra. Wa Ashuddhum fi ‘Amr Allāhi ‘Umar. We often understand this Ḥadīth to mean that sayyidunā ‘Umar was very strict when it came to legal canons of Allāh. But what if the Holy Prophet meant that sayyidunā ‘Umar understood the ‘Amr of Allāh more than anyone? Ala lahu al-Khalq Wa al-Amr. And who knew the ‘amr of Allāh better than Shāh Walī Allāh in his epoch?

For two centuries we have only understood Shāh Walī Allāh as a *Muḥaddith* of the Ḥadīth of the Prophet; let this essay, and the ‘ilm of Shaykh Amin Kholwadia, teach us that he was also *Muḥaddath* of the Holy Prophet. That if the only time we hear his name is the day of our Jalsa, and despite our excitement and glittering relief on our day, that somehow, through the shining providence of God, we made it to the final page of Bukhārī, after seven-thousand chains, through the prayers of our mothers and *hifz* teachers, and thousands of nights away from our mothers, we hear the *sanad* of our teachers stream through Shāh Walī Allāh, let us never forget how much this luminous boy of Mughal India, out of the *Jahāngīr* and *Jahānsoz* and *Jahānārā Qurbānī* of Bābur and Shāh Jahān, made this journey possible for us, that is, to be connected to *Sarkār-i Do ‘Ālam*, the Lord of both worlds.

Let us halt our breath when his name is exhaled on that day of our Jalsas, as the final purple-and-white page of *Bukhārī* is open before us, reading how Imām Mujahid said that Qistas was originally from Ancient Greek (κόστος, as we learn from Greek lexicography), and remember him, not only as *Muḥaddith*, but also as a *Muḥaddath*, the greatest gift of sayyidunā ‘Umar to Muslim ‘Ummah.

And if sayyidunā ‘Umar had established the legacy of the Prophet in places from Jerusalem to Armenia to Zabūlistan, let us also remember that his son, Shāh Walī Allāh, achieved the same, posthumously, that is, paved for the Prophet’s words to be kept from California to New York, to Bradford to Blackburn, from Herat to Kunar, from Dhaka to Sylhet, from Kashmir to that final Muslim city, of Haiderabad, and in my own Madrasas, from Azaadville to Darul Qāsim in Glendale Heights.

And we may always remember that Walī Allāh’s greatest gift to humankind was his own son, the last Muftī of Mughal India, *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlavī al-Faruqī*.

*And May Allāh make us holy through their secrets.*





The eulogy was written in Urdu by Hakim Khān Mo'min.

## Postscript:

The day that Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn died, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, burying him with his own aged hands and the hands of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq and Shāh 'Ismā'īl Shāhid, stood between the green marble-grave of his baby brother and his father and reflected how he was the final living child of the Walī Allāh family.

How the youngest brother Shāh 'Abd al Ghanī met his fate first—how this shocked the brothers to have their youngest brother depart the mortal realm before them. He had inherited the full 'Sūfī mantle of his father, spending most of his day at the Masjid of Akbarabad in Delhi. How the second-youngest brother Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir, who penned the most-adored translation of the Quran of 'Allāma Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, followed him on June 27, 1815. How the second eldest brother, another lover of Urdu and Ibn 'Arabī, Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, followed him three years later, dying on August 9, 1818. And either August 9<sup>th</sup> or August 10<sup>th</sup>, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, the eldest brother, and now the last brother, delivered a lecture on 'ālam al-Mithāl and Barzakh. He said:

*How strange that all four of us died in reverse order that we were born.*

Shaykh Amin, in his lectures on Muḥammad bin Sīrīn and dream interpretation, often discussed how the secular world can reverse the symbols in the World of Symbols, where the souls pause before they slip into the portal of this world. That is, as his father taught Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, he always understood each world of the 'Alamin in its proper place and their correct relationship with the *ghaybiyyat*, as Taha Abderrahmane says.





*The Sajjada Nashin kisses the grave of Shāh Walī Allāh and touches his head.*



Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz lived for six more years after his co-Muftī brother, still dedicating his life to *Sahīḥ Al-Bukhārī* and the knowledge of his father, and of Ibn ‘Arabī and Mawlānā Rūmī, writing Fatwas on the *Zāhir al-Riwaya* of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah.

He would die in June 1824. The year of a deadlocked presidential election in America for John Quincy Adams, of a revolt in California with the Spanish, the Greek rebellion against Ottoman rule in Athens, the inauguration of Fifth avenue in New York City, and the final symphony of Beethoven, the Ninth, as Abraham Lincoln was plowing and planting for various clients in Indiana, barely sixteen years old.

That the Muslim intelligentsia and the East India Trading Company lords called him *Sirāj al-Hind* in Arabic or “The Sun of Mahommedan Learning” in India is a secret that should not be lost on anyone’s vision or *khayāl*. That the first Muslim conqueror of India was Sultan Moizuddin, setting up the Delhi Sultanate, and prefigured by none other than Khwāja Moinuddin ‘Chishtī, the lord of Ajmer, and that the final Muftī was an ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, that is, Islam in India began with ‘Izza, Moizuddin, one who gifts ‘Izza, and Islam in India concluded with ‘Izza, that is, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, or the slave of the ‘Azīz, the one who is eternally glorious, Yazdān-i ‘Jahān.

With his death, the *Sun of Dar al-Islam* set, and has yet to rise again, but still leaving us with some ‘Izza, that is, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz *Al-Dihlavi*

Shāh ‘Ismāīl Shāhid died in the bordering regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, betrayed by Pashtun Sunnis in the final borderlands, where Bābur once rode in from Kabul. But before he died, he offered one final commentary of Ibn ‘Arabī. But unlike his grandfather, who put dialogos between Ibn ‘Arabī and Aḥmed Sirhindī, Shāh ‘Ismāīl, reading the *Tajalliyat*, created a trilogos between Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aḥmed Sirhindī, and Shāh Walī Allāh. That the three greatest commentators of the Wujūd, the dasein, of God was between the two borderlands of the Umayyad empire, between Spain and Hindustān. And that two of them were of Bābur’s dynasty! Zahīr al-Dīn.

When you read how Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq gathered himself and self-exiled to the plains of Hijaz, I couldn’t help but think of Mawlānā Rūmī’s story (and Mawlānā Thānwī’s commentary) of sayyidunā Musa and the shepherd (Shabban), where sayyidunā Musa

rebukes the farmer for promising God “I’ll bring your milk/ I’ll clean the lice from your head/ I’ll comb your hair” Mawlānā Rūmī, breathlessly portraying how it must have felt to have been reprimanded by the Egyptian prophet, ends the chapter describing how the shepherd flees into exile:

جامه را بدرید و آهی کرد تفت  
سر نهاد اندر بیابانی و رفت

*The shepherd tore his cloak and let out a scream  
He bowed his head towards the wilderness and fled!*

The project of Walī Allāh’s *Tajdīd* had borne out results unheard of in the industrial world, in the high capitalism of Haitian sugar and Indian indigo. And Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq had fulfilled his onus towards ‘ilm, the vows he kept to Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, his own blood Nana—it was now a time for Faqr, near the Lord of Prophets.

The blood of Walī Allāh, as Anwar Shāh wrote in *Faydh al-Bārī*, had come to an end with Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq. The *Tajalliyāt* continue, however, in the unlikelyst of places, that is, the Midwest of America: Glendale Heights. It began in the Midwest of *Hindustān*, namely, *Dar al-Khilafat-i Dilhi al-Mahrusa*, under the sons of Aurangzēb ‘Ālamgīrī and Mīrān Shāh.

Ḥāfez-i Shirazi ends the *ghazal*, the one the prostitute wept to Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, as he was leading *Tarawih* in the cold blackness of the Mughal imperial city, with the following hemistich:

حافظ به خود نپوشید این خرقه می‌آلود  
ای شیخ پاکدامن معذور دار ما را

*Ḥāfez does not wear this wine-stained cloak by himself  
Oh Muftī with a clean robe—forgive Ḥāfez.*





*May any goodness of this essay journey to my great-uncle, Hamid Moizuddin, without whom I would have never witnessed the vows of Walī Allāh in America. May he be with the Lord of Prophets in the Barzakh. Allahumma Ameen.*

قدسنا الله بأسرارهم بجاه المصطفى يا حنان فتاح يا رب الأولياء أنت ولينا في الدنيا والآخرة توفنا مسلمين وألحقنا بالصالحين