

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Notes From the 1st ash-Shifa Class
Part #2

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Though this class is named in honor of ash-Shifa (The Healing), it will serve more as our foundation rather than the text from which this class will be based. What is explained in detail in the Shifa is summarized in a book that many of us know by its short name – Ta'leem al-Anaam (The Education of Mankind). This blessed book contains seven chapters which summarize the Shifa and also serves as an introduction to it. Its author, Abdullahi Dan Fodio, is none other than the younger brother of the famous Mujaddid (Reviver of Islam) 'Uthman Dan Fodio. Within the coming weeks, with the permission of Allah, Nur uz-Zamaan Institute will be publishing its own short biographical sketch Shehu (Shaykh) 'Uthman.

The writings of the Sokoto (also written Sakwato) scholars are of particular relevance for us during these times. Unlike the writings of most of our scholars from the golden era of Islam, these scholars were in the process of building an Islamic society that had suffered generations of decay. The situation was so bad that it was as if they were building an Islamic society from scratch, even though the masses of people claimed al-Islam as their way of life. Many people were involved in the Bori cult, which is a type of voodoo or magic. Women were prevented from seeking knowledge; scholars used their knowledge to enrich themselves with money and followers but did nothing to rectify the evils of society. In fact these evil-scholars used their knowledge to justify and lend support to the corruption taking place. Some kings were involved in the slave trade, selling Muslims and non-Muslims into European chattel slavery. Many of the scholars of the past wrote in the context of a society in which Islam was already established. However, we live in a time in which Islam is not the rule of the day, even in societies which have majority Muslim populations. Thus, these writings are like a breath of fresh air for us as we strive to rebuild what was destroyed and revive what has died; for they serve as a manual and a blueprint for us because their situation was almost identical to ours.

"Shaykh Abdullah Ibn Dan Fodiyo, the younger brother of Shaykh 'Uthman ibn Dan Fodiyo, was born in the village of Magami in 1766-7 to a Fulani family called Toronkawa. His family is said to have migrated from Senegambia to avoid being involved in the wars between the Toronkawa and Falgo Fulanis, and settled in Birnin Kwanni in Hausaland. The date of the family's arrival in Hausaland is said to be around 1450 C.E. During Tuchman's boyhood the family moved to Degel, a place between Wurno and Gwadabawa. That was where the Shaykh started his religious activities.

Abdullahi's father, Muhammadu Fodiyo, was a man of learning and piety. He, like most of the Muslims living in North Africa and the Sudan, was a Sunni and was trained in the Maliki School of law, which gained much popularity throughout northern Africa, with the exception of Lower Egypt, and eastern Arabia. The influence of Malik's teaching spread to West Africa long before the Shaykh was born. He (the father) also belonged to the Qadiriyyah order, the oldest and the most widely accepted Sufi order in the Sudan.

Abdullahi and his elder brother, the Shaykh, received their elementary education from their father in the traditional manner of the day. In those days the common be given the basic instruction on how to read and write the Glorious Qur'an. After that, he would have to look for learned teachers (mu'allims) under whom he would study specific subjects. After a successful completion of his studies, he would be granted

permission (ijazah) to pass on the knowledge he had acquired to others. This system of learning is up to the present day being adhered to in many parts of West Africa, in spite of the influence of the modern methods of learning.

In the same manner as described above, Abdullahi received his instructions in the Qur'an from his father Muhammad Fodiyo. And at the age of thirteen he was handed over to his elder brother, the Shaykh, for further training. From now on Abdullahi became a constant companion of the Shaykh whether at home or on travels. Under him Abdullahi studied various subjects including theology, poetry, Islamic law (fiqh), hadith and others. The books he used in his studies were many and diversified. The majority of these books seem to have come from the library of the Shaykh himself who was presumably ever on the lookout for the arrival of new books in the Sudan. It was from the Shaykh that Abdullahi always used to copy any new book on theology that had arrived, as soon as he knew of its existence.

Abdullahi's learning did not end with the Shaykh's instructions; for we see him looking for other teachers whom he might perhaps have considered to have more scholastic experience than the Shaykh. Abdullahi's move in this direction was the outcome of his desire to diversify his learning and hear various interpretations of the holy writ. This is no doubt required that he should look for many teachers with differing specializations in the various subjects known during his time. In this connection we see the Shaykh himself, in spite of the tremendous knowledge he had acquired in his boyhood, was still on the move to acquire more in his adulthood. Thus we see him and some renowned scholars like Hajj Jibril, who is said to be a religious reformer who was intent on ridding the Sudan of its evil practices.

When the Shaykh left Hajj Jibril for home, he left Abdullahi behind to study al-Kawkab al-Sati based on Jibril's interpretation. Abdullah remained with Hajj Jibril for about two months learning that book and listening to various books read by Jibril's disciples. When Abdullahi returned home, he found the Shaykh had gone to another renowned scholar, Hajj Muhammad bin Raji, to read al-Bukhari under his supervision. Abdullahi wasted no time in following the Shaykh and was lucky to find that he had not started the reading. The Shaykh together with Abdullahi and the rest of Ibn Raji's students went on to read al-Bukhari in the traditional manner of those days, whereby one of the students would read the text while others listen. And the teacher would follow up with his commentary. In this case, it was the Shaykh who had read the text with other students listening.

Teaching and learning occupied the greater part of Abdullahi's time throughout his life. His immense knowledge coupled with his piety and deep sense of responsibility has earned for him respect and honor to this day. This can be seen through the wide popularity in which his works are held in northern Nigeria. He also earned a great influence as a poet and a propagandist of the jihad movement. It was due to his profound learning, his sense of responsibility and his convincing argument that the Shaykh on many occasions asked him to give answers to many criticisms levied against some aspects of his activities. Abdullahi is claimed to be the builder of the body of theoretical work necessary for the conduct of a government based on the principle of the Shari'ah. His *Diya' al-Hukkam*, *Diya' al-Siyasah*, and *Diya' al Sultan*, the three works which formed the textbooks on government for the jihadists, may possibly justify this claim."

Shaykh Abdullahi was a scholar who was concerned with knowledge that was beneficial. In other words, he wrote and taught, not to establish his standing or rank, but for that knowledge to be acted upon. One example of this, are the circumstances which led to his writing of the book called *The Guide to the Administrators*, which details what an Islamic society is supposed to look like and how it is to be established.

"In the fourth year after the hijrah of Shaykh 'Uthman from Degel to Gudu, Abdullahi felt dissatisfied with the current trends of events in his homeland. The dissatisfaction was brought about by what he observed in his fellow jihadists. The ideals for whose sake the jihad was fought were being abandoned. Schools and mosques were deserted and the society was learning more and more towards material benefits. His

reaction to these negative developments culminated in his decision to withdraw from armed struggle. Consequently, he thought the only way out of this disturbing situation was to go on pilgrimage to Makkah where he could perhaps find a consolation. He, therefore, withdrew from the army which was on its way to invade Alkalawa and turned towards the east with the intention of going in pilgrimage (Hajj).

After some days journey, he arrived at Kano where, to his disappointment, he found a situation worse than that of his homeland. He found negligence in the upkeep of schools and mosques. He saw ignorant malams who did not care to seek knowledge from competent scholars engaging themselves in arbitrary interpretation of the laws to suit their desires. Competitions in the acquisition of public office and titles, in collecting concubines and fine horses for the purpose of pomp and such circumstances, were the order of the day. Bribery and corruption were widespread, and ignorant persons found their way to eminent positions in the official circles. The general public and the officials alike were becoming more concerned with lutes and flutes and beating of drums. And selling of free men as slaves was rampant, etc.

This disturbing state of affairs at Kano probably served as one of the contributing factors in discouraging Abdullahi from going ahead with his original plan. He might have thought that if he were to leave these people without guidance, he would be guilty of shirking his responsibility as an Islamic Scholar. When a request was therefore made to him to stop to teach and write a legal work which would serve as a guide to the people of Kano in managing their affairs as prescribed by the Shari'ah, he gave his consent.

Abdullahi wrote a work for the people of Kano in particular and for the Muslim state in the Sudan in general, which he named 'The Guide to Administrators (Diya' al-Hukkam)."

He is most famous for one of his two or three tafsirs that he wrote call Diya at-Ta'weel fee Ma'ani at-Tanzeel (The Light or Guide of Interpretation Regarding the Meaning of Revelation). He died in 1829 at the age of sixty-six and was the city of Gwandu (located in modern-day Nigeria).

Perhaps Nur uz-Zamaan Institute will produce a more detailed biography of Shaykh Abdullahi in the near future. We only mentioned this much about him so that the participant of this class will have some familiarity with the author of text that we will be covering. This text is none other than the one which we mentioned in the beginning of these notes by its short name: Ta'leem al-anaam Ta'zeema Allahi linabeeyina 'alaihi afdalus Salaati was-Salaami (The Education of Mankind: Regarding Allah's Great Estimation of Our Prophet, upon him be the best of blessings and peace). This book is divided into seven: Chapter [1] On Allah's Praise of the Prophet, Chapter [2] On Mentioning Some of the Prophet's Miracles, Chapter [3] On the Rights Which People Owe the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, Chapter [4] On the Necessity of Loving the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, Chapter [5] On the Prayer Upon the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, Chapter [6] On the Judgment Concerning Those Who Abuse Him, Impute Faults to Him, or Relate What is Untrue Concerning Him, His Brothers Among the Prophets, the People of His House, and His Companions, Chapter [7] On Some of What Occurred Regarding the Illness Which Led to the Prophets Passing, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, Conclusion On What Occurred after the Passing of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. With Allah's permission our class will flow in the order of this book.

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