

The Biography of Shaykh Salih al-Ja'fari (may Allah ta'ala be pleased with him and please him).

His birth – may Allah be pleased with him:

Our shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, was born in the town of Dongola in Sudan, on the 15th of Jumada al-Thani 1328 A.H. (the 24th of June, 1910). There he memorized the noble Qur'an at its ancient mosque and excelled at it. Then he went to Egypt to study at the Azhar and there he contacted his relatives who lived in al-Salmiyya village near Luxor.

His noble descent:

He is the descendant of as-sayyid **Ali al-Hadi**, bin as-sayyid **Muhammad al-Jawad**, bin as-sayyid **Ali ar-Rida**, bin as-sayyid **Musa al-Kadhim**, bin as-sayyid **Ja'far as-Sadiq**, bin as-sayyid **Muhammad al-Baqir**, bin as-sayyid al-imam **Ali Zayn al-Abidin**, bin mawlana al-imam **al-Husayn**, bin al-imam **Ali** the husband of the pure lady sayyida **Fatima al-Zahraa**, the daughter of our Prophet sayyidna **Muhammad**, the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his family.

His early life- may Allah be pleased with him:

He was brought up in the city of Dongola and raised a religious upbringing filled with the obedience of Allah Most High and the following and love of the Messenger of Allah, *salla Allahu alayhi wa Alihi wa sallam*. His noble family was famous for its learning, piety, righteousness, generosity and the study of the noble Qur'an and the noble sciences of the religion. There he learned how to read and write, and memorized the noble Qur'an and excelled at it, at the hand of shaykh Sayyid Hassan Effendi, who was a student of his grandfather. For his grandfather, sayyid Saleh Rifa'i, may Allah be pleased with him, had a Qur'an school (Kuttaab), where he produced a great number of Dongola's Qur'an memorizers and teachers. There the shaykh learned some of the different recitations of the Qur'an and the fiqh of Imam Malik, may Allah be pleased with him.

What he said- may Allah be pleased with him – about his Ja'fari ancestors:

The shaykh may Allah be pleased with him tells us about his relatives and ancestors in al-Salmiyya, saying: "They are from the town of Luxor in Upper Egypt, from the tribe known as the 'Alawiyya, which comes from the Ja'afira tribe, and they are scattered between Luxor, al-Hilla, al-Hulayla, and ad-Dir, and their numbers have diminished. In al-Salmiyya there is the grave of my great-grandfather Rifa'i in the cemetery of the father of the Ja'afira, the noble sayyid, Prince Hamad, as he used to live there. And the Ja'afira have many ancient records of their lineage that have been preserved, and among the most famous of them who have shown these lines of descent recently are the sharif sayyid Ismail an-Naqshabandi and his student shaykh Musa al-Mir'ayabi, and their descendants still keep these records of the lineage with its many blessed branches.

His taking the path and its chain:

Our shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, took the tariqa of sayyidi Ahmad ibn Idris, may Allah be pleased with him, from sayyidi Muhammad ash-Sharif, may Allah be pleased with him. And our imam al-Ja'fari tells us about that:

“I was given an ijaza in this tariq (path) by my shaykh and teacher, the murabbi (he who takes care of the spiritual upbringing) of the seekers, the noble sayyid Muhammad (ash-Sharif) from his father sayyidi Abd al-‘Aali, from his shaykh the great scholar Muhammad ibn Ali as-Sanusi, from his shaykh, sayyid Ahmad ibn Idris, may Allah be pleased with him.”

His Journey for Knowledge:

His coming to Egypt to join the Azhar was by a sign from shaykh Abd al-‘Aali, may Allah be pleased with him. And he tells us about that, saying: “Before I came to the Azhar, someone from town brought a volume of al-Nawawi’s commentary on Sahih Muslim, so I borrowed it from him and began to study it. So I saw (in a vision) sayyidi Abd al-‘Aali al-Idrisi, may Allah be pleased with him, sitting on a chair, and with him his sustenance for travel, and I heard someone saying: ‘The sayyid wants to travel to Egypt, to the Azhar,’ so I came and greeted him, and kissed his hand, so he said to me sharply: ‘Knowledge is taken from the chests of men, not from books!’ and he repeated it, so I woke up from my sleep and was inspired by my Lord to travel to the Azhar. And when I reached it I found the hadith scholar shaykh Muhammad Ibrahim as-Samaluti, teaching al-Nawawi’s commentary on Sahih Muslim, so I sat down to listen to him, and heard him teaching the hadith: “There is no hijra after the Opening of Mecca, but only Jihad and intention. When you are called upon to go, then go forth!”

His shaykhs in the noble Azhar:

The shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, received the knowledge at the noble Azhar at the hand of a group of the greatest scholars, those who acted upon their knowledge and combined between Shari’a and Haqiqa, among them shaykh Muhammad Ibrahim as-Samaluti, (the Grand Mufti of Egypt) shaykh Muhammad Bakhit al-Muti’i, and the great muhaddith shaykh Habib Allah ash-Shanqiti, author of *Zad al-Muslim* and other greatly beneficial works, and with whom the shaykh had many blessed moments and karamas. Our shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him tells us:

“I went to the house of shaykh Habib Allah ash-Shanqiti near the Citadel, intending in my heart to ask his permission to be his reciter of the texts of al-Bukhari and Muslim. So when I arrived at his house and sat in the reception room, and that was the first time I ever visited him, he came to me smiling. So when I greeted him and kissed his hand he said to me: ‘You are the one who, inshaAllah, will be my reciter this year.’ And *alhamdulillah* I stayed with him until his death, and went into his grave, and buried him with my own hands.

And I used to give a lesson to the brothers who were present before his arrival at the Husaynid Mosque, and if anyone objected to me or gave me a hard time, he would whisper in my ear after coming and sitting on his chair: ‘They give you a hard time but you are better than them’ as if he was with me! And then in his lesson he would correct everything that I had erred in or missed in my lesson, as if he had been sitting with me listening to what I was saying, and this happened from him many times.

And if he had any reason that he could not come, he would send me a student telling me to read the lesson in the place of the shaykh. But one day, he sent me a letter written in his own handwriting, saying: ‘I have assigned to you the reading of the lesson.’ And this surprised me: why did the shaykh change his custom from verbal to written? And then the supervisor

of the mosques came while I was giving the lesson and said: ‘Did the shaykh charge you to give the lesson?’ So I said: ‘Yes.’ So he said: ‘And where is the assignment?’ So I gave him the paper that was sent by the shaykh, which made him happy, and he prayed for goodness for me. So that was a *karama* from him, may Allah Most High have mercy on him and forgive him and give him residence in His most spacious Gardens. For he used to love me very much and say to me: ‘You are the *baraka* of the lesson! I give you *ijaza* in all my *ijazas* and writings.’

And I stayed with him for fifteen years.. And he used to say to me: ‘Study well my commentary *Zad al-Muslim* (on the hadiths that are in both Bukhari and Muslim), for I did not leave anything out of it, big or small!’”

And among his shaykhs was shaykh Yousef ad-Dijwi, may Allah have mercy on him, about whom our shaykh says: “And he was also one of the scholars who were knowers of Allah, and I regularly attended his lesson after the Fajr prayer at the noble Azhar Mosque in the Abbasid Hall for seven years. And whenever sayyid Hasan al-Idrisi would come from Sudan, he would meet me at his lesson, and after the lesson would greet the shaykh, which would make the shaykh most happy and he would say: ‘The sayyid Ahmad ibn Idris is a Qutb unlike other Qutbs!’

And shaykh ad-Dijwi had taken the Idrisi tariqa from my shaykh sayyid Muhammad ash-Sharif, may Allah be pleased with him, and shaykh ad-Dijwi was from the Council of the (great) Scholars of the Azhar, and he had many greatly beneficial writings, and most valuable articles in the al-Azhar magazine, and I attended his lessons of Quranic commentary from the Sura of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) until the end of Surat an-Nas, after which he began commenting on Sahih al-Bukhari. And he used to memorize the Qur’an with the proper tajweed and all its recitations, and mention the sayings of the Quranic commentators, and explain the grammar of each aya of the Qur’an very precisely and clarify its terminology, and would, while doing so, present the different jurisprudential rulings of the four schools of Law, and would recite the hadith with its complete chain, and give a short biography for each of the men in the chain. And he would mention many great and valuable proofs of tawassul by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, most of which he mentioned in the Azhar magazine, which was then known as *Nur al-Islam*.”

And our shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, used to attend the lessons of such scholars with great presence of mind and understanding, as a lover of learning and its people, and many times he would discuss things with his shaykhs, and they would be impressed by his intelligence, the strength of his memory, and the strength of his proofs, and would praise him and ask Allah to bless him and give him tawfiq.

Our shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, tells us one example of that with his shaykh ad-Dijwi, saying:

“He was once, may Allah have mercy on him, reading the hadith of the questioning of the grave in *Sahih al-Bukhari*. And I had studied the commentary of al-Kirmani on al-Bukhari, and saw in it that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, appears to the one being questioned when the angel says to him: ‘What do you say about this man?’ And after the lesson I kissed his hand and said to him: Shaykh al-Kirmani says that, he peace and blessings be upon him, appears to the one being questioned. So he poked me in my chest and

said to me: I studied the commentary of al-Kirmanī and read that matter in it, so why did you not remind me of it in the lesson so that the people would hear it from me?

Once he was speaking about the vision of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, in the sleep. He said: ‘The Shaytan does not take his form, peace and blessings be upon him, if he came in his original form. And the correct opinion is that he also does not take his form in other than his original form.’ So I said to him: ‘Our shaykh the *sayyid* Ahmad ibn Idrīs may Allah be pleased with him narrated in his book *Ruh as-Sunna* that he, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, said: “He who has seen me has truly seen me, for I appear in every form.”’ So he rejoiced greatly at this and said to me: “This *hadith* is the evidence that the Shaytan does not take his form, even if he were to come in other than his original form! You are blessed oh shaykh Salih! May Allah benefit the Muslims by you!”

Among his shaykhs was also shaykh Ali ash-Shayeb, may Allah have mercy on him, with whom our shaykh studied the commentary on the composition *Jawharat at-Tawhid* (on Creed) of shaykh al-Laqqani. Our shaykh says of him:

“He used to teach it in my first year in the noble Azhar, and he used to teach it out of memory, both the original text and its commentary, and he was one of the righteous scholars, and whenever he entered the dome of sayyidna al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him, a great state of *khushoo*’ (fear and awe) would happen to him, as if he was witnessing him, and he would sweat profusely.

I studied with him the commentary of Ibn ‘Aqil on the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Malik (on grammar) and one night I saw the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, in the sleep, telling me of a matter of *‘ilm* that I had gotten wrong. So he got angry, peace and blessings be upon him, and called me ‘boy!’ and that was part of a long talk. So when I woke up in the morning, and went to the lesson, I said within myself, while seated: ‘The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, calls my “boy.” Am I a boy?’ So the shaykh turned to me while teaching and said: ‘We only called you ‘boy’ because it is the custom of the Arabs, not because you are young!’ And the likes of this shaykh are known to the Sufis as the People of the Hearts, and perhaps he was one of the Muhaddatheen (those who are spoken to), who are mentioned in the *hadith* in al-Bukhari, and among whom is sayyidna Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him.”

And among his teachers also are Shaykh Hassan Madkour, Shaykh Abd ar-Rahman ‘Illish, shaykh Muhammad Abul Qasim al-Hijazi, shaykh Abd al-Hayy al-Kittani, shaykh Abul Khayr al-Midani the shaykh of the scholars of Syria, and shaykh Ahmad al-Sharif al-Ghomari and his brother shaykh Abdallah al-Ghomari, and shaykh Ali Adham al-Maliki as-Sudani, and shaykh Hasan al-Mashshat one of the scholars of Mecca, and shaykh Mustafa Safwat, and shaykh Abd al-Haleem Ibrahim, and shaykh Abu Yousef, and shaykh Muhammad al-Halabi, and shaykh Abd al-Khaliq al-Shabrawi, and shaykh Muhammad Atiyya al-Buqali, and shaykh Muhammad Hasanayn Makhloof al-‘Adawi al-Maliki, and shaykh Muhammad al-‘Anani the shaykh of the Malikis of his time, Shaykh al-Delishni, shaykh Salama al-‘Azzami, shaykh Sadeq al-‘Adawi, Shaykh Ahmad Wadidi from Sudan, shaykh Ali Muhammad the imam and orator of the mosque of Dongola in Sudan and the three teachers at that mosque: shaykh Sayyid Hasan Effendi, shaykh Ali bin Awf, and shaykh Ahmad Najjar, as well as other teachers and scholars of the Azhar Mosque.

These great scholars all had a great impact on the wide learning and knowledge of the shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, combined with what Allah gave him of a powerful intelligence and a great memory. So the shaykh studied hard and struggled until he received the 'Aliya and 'Alimiyya degrees from the Azhar, and then he became a teacher at the noble Azhar mosque.

His appointment – may Allah be pleased with him – as imam and teacher at the noble Azhar Mosque:

As for the story of his appointment, may Allah be pleased with him, as a teacher at the Azhar mosque, it is a story that is worth recounting because of what it shows of the shaykh's gifts in ilm and of his great love for ilm and its teachers. Dr. Muhammad Rajab al-Bayyoumi relates:

“From among the shaykh's most wonderfully touching actions was his eulogy of his great teacher shaykh Yousef ad-Dijwi, may Allah be pleased with him. I was a student at the Arabic language faculty, and someone called out announcing the death of the old shaykh, and announcing the time of his funeral. So I hurried there to say my goodbyes to the shaykh, and the scene was touching, led by a group of the greatest scholars, headed by shaykh Mustafa Abd al-Razeq (the Grand Shaykh of the Azhar at the time). And when they reached the grave, shaykh Salih al-Ja'fari stood up as an orator, eulogizing his teacher, and began his eulogy by quoting the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him: 'Allah does not take away the ilm by pulling it away from the people, but He takes it away by the death of the scholars, until when there are no scholars left, the people will take ignorant leaders who, when asked, will give answers without knowledge, and so will go astray and lead others astray.' Then he spoke about the great rank of the scholar that was lost, and of his brave stands against the innovators and the atheists. The majesty of that event, and the awe of it, and the gathering of the great crowds, made the breath of the shaykh expand and flow, and his voice shook in a way that moved the souls and captured the minds. And as soon as he ended his eulogy, the Grand Shaykh asked about him, most impressed, and then assigned him as a teacher at the Azhar mosque.” (From an article by Dr. Muhammad Rajab al-Bayyoumi in Al-Ahzar Magazine, Shawwal 1309 A.H. / September 1979 A.D.)

After that he, may Allah be pleased with him, began giving his lessons at the noble Azhar mosque, his soul having been filled with the love of ilm, following in the steps of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. Our shaykh said:

“The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, used to guide the people by the lessons of *'ilm*, and by the great Qur'an, and our shaykh *sayyidi* Ahmad ibn Idris – may Allah be pleased with him – followed him in that, and so he guided the people by the noble Qur'an and by *'ilm*, and continued upon that way until he met his Lord. And I have asked Allah Most High to give me *tawfiq* to follow the way of our shaykh the great scholar shaykh Ahmad ibn Idris of the most precious knowledge, may Allah be pleased with him.

So all my brothers must help me in attending the lessons of *'ilm*, and to memorize something from the noble Qur'an, and inshaAllah we will create a special place for the brothers to memorize the noble Qur'an. For what we have is only the lessons and the memorization of the Qur'an. So assist me with high spirits and aspirations, for I have not brought you together over anything but this lesson, in which is the explanation of the Qur'an and its recitation, for worship is for Allah alone, and the scholars are the inheritors (of the Prophet) and the guides (of the people).”

“The Sharia revolves around the ilm, and the Prophecy and the Message are ilm, and the Prophet, may Allah’s blessings be upon him and his family, was only honored by the ilm, the Prophecy, and the Messenger-ship. And he said, peace and blessings be upon him: ‘The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophet, and the Prophets did not bequeath neither dinar nor dirham; they bequeathed knowledge. Whoever takes it has taken an ample portion.’

So it is incumbent upon every man of knowledge to teach what he could, and to teach the people the radiant Shari’a, and if the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, was here now, he would teach the people the ilm, because that is his job.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, entered a mosque and found two circles: he found a group reading and studying the ilm amongst each other, and a group doing dhikr of Allah Most High, so he praised the people of both circles, then he sat with those who are studying the ilm and said: ‘I was only sent as a teacher.’

And his Lord spoke to him saying: “And so that you explain to the people what was revealed for them.” (16:44)

And he who learns becomes close to acting upon what he learned, as for the ignorant, action is far from him, so you must, oh people, listen to the ilm and study it, for it is the light by which humans are guided. Sayyidna Ali, may Allah be pleased with him and ennoble his face, said: ‘The people are dead, and the people of ilm are alive.’”

His circles of learning and his famous Friday lesson at the Azhar:

As for our shaykh al-imam al-Ja’fari’s lesson after the Friday prayer in the noble Azhar, it was an Islamic Sufi school: its ilm was the Qur’an, the Sunna, and the law, and it was infused with the spirituality of Sufism and its spiritual upbringing, so that it revealed the Sufi truths. And his method and path was (as the hadith): “Allah is the one who took care of my upbringing and He taught me the most beautiful manners,” with what he inherited of great Prophetic guidance. He infused his lessons with iman from his soul, so that the purity of zuhd, piety, and righteousness appeared, and the lights of guidance shined, and the purity of the fitra showed.

He became, may Allah be pleased with him, a tongue for guidance to the truth, and in this world he made the springs of wisdom and the treasures of ilm, ma’rifa, and the secrets of the Qur’an all burst to the people. He brought to the people new understandings of the Qur’an that no one had brought before, and that is because his mind was a gifted and inspired mind. So he gave from the treasures of his intellect, and the gifts of his thought, and the overflowings of his heart, and the spirituality of his soul, and the humanity of his self, and he would address the inner thoughts of the listeners, and answer what their minds were wondering. Thus his lessons were an Islamic university, upon the way of learning, and the spirit of Sufism, connecting the Shari’a with the Haqiqah, the Outer with the Inner, the nafs with the soul, the intellect with what occurred to the hearts.

An example of this is given by one of the righteous scholars who loved the shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, and attended his lessons, and that is shaykh Ahmad Abdul Jawad ad-Doumi, who used to be the supervisor over the preachers and teachers in Cairo. He said in the speech that he gave in the mawlid celebration of the shaykh in the year 1403 A.H.:

“One day I entered the Azhar mosque in the morning and read Surat al-Kahf, and when I reached His saying Most High: ‘And their dog was stretching out its forelegs in the *waseed*’ I wanted to know the meaning of the word ‘*waseed*.’ But when I wanted to get my copy of the Qur’an which contains an explanation of its words, I remembered that my house was far away, so I said to myself: ‘I will give my lesson first, and then when I go home I will get that book and find out what it means.’ And our shaykh, shaykh Salih al-Ja’fari, had a lesson from Dhuhr until ‘Asr, as he usually did, so I went and sat in the circle to listen to him. And in his lesson he was explaining an aya from the Qur’an that was not from Surat al-Kahf, but he suddenly went quiet.

So I thought to myself: Why did the shaykh interrupt his lesson?

Then he began to recite some ayas from Surat al-Kahf until he reached ‘And their dog was extending his legs in the *waseed*,’ and then he stopped and said: ‘The dog extends his legs in such-and-such a manner, and the *waseed* is the dooryard. Now back to our lesson, oh beloveds!’

So I said within myself: ‘May Allah Most High reward you...’ And that is from the light of Allah.”

At the Maghrebi Hall in the noble Azhar mosque:

Our shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him, made the noble Azhar mosque a home that he would never leave except for the most important of duties, like the Hajj, for Allah Most High helped him go to Hajj 27 times, or for visiting the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. And he made for himself a khalwa (place of seclusion) inside the Maghrebi Hall, in which he would do dhikr of Allah Most High by the noble Qur’an and by istighfar, and tasbih, and tahlil and takbir, and the sending of blessings upon the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, and by the studying and spreading of ilm, and by meditating upon the signs of Allah, those in the Qur’an, those in the universe, and those in the people.

His passing – may Allah be pleased with him – to the Highest Companion:

He lived, may Allah be pleased with him, 71 years, in constant dhikr of Allah Most High, and calling to Him, and following the Sunna of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and in service to Islam and the Muslims, until he met his Lord, well-pleased and well-pleasing, on the evening of Monday the 18th of Jumada al-Awwal 1399 AH (the 16th of April, 1979), and was buried in his light-filled tomb next to his mosque in the heart of Cairo, on top of the al-Darraasa hill, the minarets of his blessed mosque rising into the skies next to those of the mosque of his grandfather sayyidna al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him, and the minarets of the noble Azhar mosque, the lighthouse of knowledge.

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