

# Nafisa at-Tahira

## Rare Lady Saint of the Egyptians

[Excerpted from *From the Light of Ahl al-Bayt: My Spiritual Experiences Unveiled*]

by Imam Metawalli ash-Sha`rawi

Sayyida Nafisa was born in Makkah on the 11th of Rabi`a al-Awwal, the same night that the Prophet (s) was born, in the year 145 H. Her father had been appointed governor of Madinat al-Munawwara in the year 150 H. She accompanied her father to Madina at the tender age of five. There she memorized the entire Qur`an and studied Islamic jurisprudence in depth. Being extremely intelligent she also became adept in explaining the Qur`an despite her young age.

She was the daughter of al-Hasan al-Anwar, the son of Zaid al-Ablaj, son of al-Imam al-Hasan (r), brother of al-Imam al-Husayn (r), son of the Daughter of the Prophet (s) Sayyida Fatimat al-Zahra (r). She is from the family of the Prophet (s) about which Allah said in the Holy Qur`an “*Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying.*” [33: 33]

Young Nafisa frequented the grave of her grandfather the Prophet (s) (*mulazamat qabri jaddiha al-Mustafa*). The People of Madina loved her deeply. She became renowned for her abstemiousness (*zuhd*) and piety (*taqwa*), for fasting the day, spending the nights in prayer and for her excessive devotion to worshipping Allah (swt).

Sayyida Nafisa had many titles by which she was known among the people, derived from her many different miracles (*karamat*). She is known as *Nafisat al-`ilmi wal-ma`rifat*, (the Rare Lady of Knowledge and Gnosis) because of what she achieved and accumulated from knowledge of the Family of the Holy Prophet (s). She is called *Nafisat al-Tahira*, the Rare Lady of Purity, and *Nafisat al-`Abida*, the Rare Worshipful Lady, and *Nafisat al-Darayn*, the “Rare one among ladies in this life and the next”, and *Sahibat al-Karamat*, “the Lady of Miracles”, and *Sayyidat Ahl al-Fatwa*, “the Leading Lady in deriving rulings and verdicts”, and *Umm al-Awajiz*, “the Mother of Elderly Women”, and *Nafisat al-Masriyyin*, “the Rare Lady of the Egyptians”, because of the Egyptian people’s intense love for her and her love for them, and her being their recourse for their every problem - collectively and individually.

Sayyida Nafisa used to pray the five prayers regularly behind her father in Masjid an-Nabawi (s) from the age of six. Her father used to take her by the hand and enter inside the room of the grave of the Holy Prophet (s), which is the house of Sayyida `Ayesha (r). He would address the Prophet (s) directly saying: "Ya Rasullullah!, O Beloved Prophet of Allah! I am pleased with my daughter Nafisa!" He continued these visits repeatedly until one day the Prophet (s) appeared to him in a dream saying to him, “Ya Hasan, I am pleased with your daughter Nafisa, because you are pleased

with her, and Allah is pleased with her because I am pleased with her.

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### Intercession

Here Imam Metawalli Ash-Sha`rawi has elucidated the true meaning of intercession (*shafa`a*) in the understanding of the scholars and saints (*awliya*) of Islam, showing that it is a method chosen by the early spiritual pioneers of Islam (*as-salaf as-salih*) as the most excellent means of approach to Allah and His good pleasure - the path to perfection and purification.

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On the 5th of Rajab, 161 H. at the age of sixteen years, Nafisa married her cousin Ishaq al-Mu'taman, a direct descendant of Imam al-Husayn (s). She bore from him a son named Al-Qassim (r) and a daughter they named Umm-Kulthum (r).

She performed hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) thirty times – most of them on foot. She would say, "I am following my grandfather Imam al-Husayn (r) in doing that, for he said, 'I feel shy to meet my Lord having never walked to His House,'" for which reason he used to make the pilgrimage walking.

It is said that on her circumambulation around the Ka`aba, she asked Allah (swt) "O Allah! be satisfied with me (*mati`ani bi-ridaaka `annee*), I see nothing that veils You from me."

She memorized the Qur`an and its explanation. It is said that when she recited Qur`an she would pray, "O Allah make it easy for me to visit the grave of Sayiddina Ibrahim al-Khalil," for she knew he was the father of prophets and father of her grandfather Prophet Muhammad (s). She knew that the mission of her grandfather Prophet Muhammad (s) was due to the prayer of Ibrahim (as), when he said, "*Our Lord! And raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite unto them Thy revelations, and shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom and shall purify them. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Mighty, Wise.*" [2: 125]

#### **Visit to Ibrahim al-Khalil (as)**

It was only after many years that Allah (swt) answered that prayer making it possible for Sayyida Nafisa to visit the grave of al-Khalil, the Prophet Ibrahim (as) (in Palestine). When she finally arrived, she sat there in front of his grave weeping and reciting, "*And when Ibrahim said: My Lord! make this city secure, and save me and my sons from worshipping idols:*" [14: 35]

As Sayyida Nafisa sat in front of the grave of Ibrahim al-Khalil (as), reciting the Qur`an, she felt an intense presence, almost tangible, and saw the image of Sayyidina Ibrahim (as) in front of her. Of that moment she said, "My heart began to beat harder and my eyes to blink." She called upon him saying "O my grandfather! - *Ya Jiddee!*" in the present tense. "I came to you in body and spirit.... as my soul has come to you before many times, I now come to you in body as well. I seek your good pleasure with me and I seek your guidance and instruction in order that I may worship Allah until my dying breath." At that moment she heard a voice emerging from the image of Sayyidina Ibrahim which was before her saying, "Good tidings my granddaughter!

You are chosen to be one of the sanctified, worshipful maidservants of your Lord. My advice to you is to recite Surat al-Muzammil, wherein Allah says, "*O thou folded in garments! Stand (to prayer) by night, but not all night,...*" [73:1] until its end and seek to meditate on what you recite.

"By reciting this chapter you will be guided to the forms of worship and devotion that contain no hardship, as Allah said, 'Allah does not burden any soul with more than it can bear.' O my granddaughter! The intensity of your worship has made your body weak - try to keep everything in balance."

Zainab bint Yahya, Sayyida Nafisa's niece, accompanied her throughout her life as her assistant, staying with her even after her marriage until her passing. Zainab relates that Sayiddina Ibrahim continued guiding her, saying, "Read the verse '*Thy Lord doth know that thou standest forth (to prayer) nigh two-thirds of the night, or half the night, or a third of the night, and so doth a party of those with thee...*'" [73:20] until the end of Surat al-Muzzamil.'

Know that Allah made the night prayers voluntary, after it had been made obligatory on the Prophet (s), for He(swt) knows that many of His servants are engaged during the day in the struggle to educate people in God's Way, or working for their provision, and this work therefore is a form of worship. Have mercy on yourself and give yourself a chance to rest in order to have strength for the next day. You are already considered among the first ranks of the pious."

At that time she said, "O my great-grandfather I am going to fulfill your instructions. And I wish from your pure soul to grant to my soul purity and refinement until I meet Allah (swt) and He is pleased with me." She heard the voice of Sayiddina Ibrahim saying "O my granddaughter, Good tidings for you, Allah inspired to me that He has accepted your du`a. And I will accompany you until we meet in the world of souls in the everlasting life, and we meet on the Judgment Day. Then he recited the verse, "*And fear the Day when ye shall be brought back to Allah. Then shall every soul be paid what it earned, and none shall be dealt with unjustly.*" [2: 281]

### **Relocation to Cairo**

When Sayyida Nafisa was 44 years old she moved to Cairo. She arrived on the 26th of Ramadan in the year 193 H. On her way, she passed through the city of Arriche. When people knew of her arrival, they rushed forth en masse to meet her, for her renown as a devout worshipper and lady saint had preceded her. Historians say the men and women of Egypt went to receive her in a huge procession, riding on horses, camels, donkeys and on foot; waiting overnight in tents; greeting her in the morning with the chanting of 'la ilaha ill-Allah' and 'Allahu akbar', and accompanying her in a huge procession from Arriche to Cairo, according her great dignity and respect.

One of the notable merchants of Cairo, Jamaluddin Abdullah al-Jassas, hosted her in his home for many months. From every distant corner of Egypt people used to come to visit her and to take blessings from (*tabarukki biha*) her. Sayyida Nafisa felt that her presence might become too great a burden on her hosts, so she moved to a place of her own, in the District of Khalaf, in the Mosque of Shajarat al-Durr, in Khalifa Street, now known as the al-Hasaniyya District. The house to which she moved was

owned by an Egyptian woman named Ummu Hani, renowned for her piety. This move did not bring any surcease to the flood of Egyptians coming from every far distant area, often in huge groups, to visit her and receive her *baraka*, especially women who came simply to touch her and request her du`a.

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### Touching a Pious Person for Baraka

Al-Tabarani, and Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* (5:67-68) with a sound chain as stated by al-Haythami narrated through Handhalah Ibn Hudhaym that the latter went with his grandfather, Hudhaym, to the Prophet (s). Hudhaym said to the Messenger of Allah (s): "I have sons and grandsons, some of whom are pubescent and others still children." Motioning to the young child next to him, he said: "This is the youngest." The Prophet (s) brought this young child whose name was Handhalah next to him, wiped on his head, and told him, "*barakallahu fik*," which means: "May Allah bless you." After that, people started to bring Handhalah a person with a swollen face or a sheep with a swollen udder. Handhalah would place his hand on that part of his head the Prophet (s) wiped, then touch the swollen part and say 'Bismillah', and the swelling would be cured.

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### Sayyida Nafisa's Longing for Her Grandfather (s)

At that point Sayyida Nafisa began to feel a tremendous burden due to the huge gatherings of people visiting her and asking her du`a, who came camping around her home, often overnight. She decided to leave Egypt and return to Madina al-Munawwara, feeling she was losing time for worship in meeting the endless throngs. Discovering her decision to leave, thousands of people sought out Sayyida Nafisa, begging her to reverse her decision and remain in Egypt.

They swarmed the Governor of Egypt, As-Sirri bin al-Hakam, asking him to request Sayyida Nafisa to stay. He paid her a visit, politely urging her to stay for the sake of the people who so needed her *baraka* and her prayers. She informed him that she had decided to stay in Egypt. "However," she said, "I am a weak lady and these people have gathered in thousands which prevents me from observing my daily recitations. Also my home is tiny and unable to accommodate these huge crowds. I began to feel extreme longing for my grandfather (s), so my heart is calling me to return to Madina to visit my grandfather's (s) grave."

The governor replied, "O granddaughter of Prophet (s)! I promise you I will try my best to solve this problem, for I know your house is small. But from the depths of my heart, without asking anything in return, for the sake of Allah I am giving you a mansion I own in the district of Dirr as-Sabah. I beg you to accept this house from me and to use it in whatever way you wish."

Sayyida Nafisa paused for many minutes, engaged in deep meditation. Finally she lifted her head from her reverie and said, "I accept your offer of your house." Then she said, "O governor of Egypt! What am I to do with these huge crowds of people?"

He said, "Assign Saturday and Wednesday for people to visit, and dedicate the other days purely for worship."

Sayyida Nafisa moved to the larger house, granted to her as a gift (*hiba*), without giving anything in return, for the governor had granted it to her solely out of regard for her personal piety and sincerity. She followed his suggestion, relocated her residence and received people on Saturdays and Wednesdays, devoting the remaining days to worship of her Lord.

### **Sayyida Nafisa and Imam Shafi`i**

Sayyida Nafisa hosted most of the scholars of her time, experts in jurisprudence, hadith, and Qur`anic explanation. But by far the greatest scholarly gatherings were those she hosted for the pillars of *tasawwuf* and the pious of her time (*Aqtab al-tasawwuf*). Among these pillars of *tasawwuf* and *fiqh* was Imam al-Shafi`i who had moved to Egypt from Baghdad in 109 H., five years after Sayyida Nafisa's arrival in Cairo.

Imam Shafi`i stayed in Egypt for over four years until his passing. There he classified his books and assembled his school of jurisprudence; it was in Egypt that he acquired fame and people came to sit in his *majlis* - association. His new school of thought was modified greatly from the school he had developed earlier in Baghdad, according to the change of times, culture and customs. His judgments were written in the book "*Al-Umm*".

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### **Imam Shafi`i Differs With Himself**

From Imam Shafi`i's careful tuning of his "Baghdadi school" to produce the different "Egyptian school", we see the importance he gave, in making a juristic decision about an issue, of taking into account not only the relevant verses of Qur`an and applicable hadith, but the characteristics of the people he was giving the ruling for as well, including aspects of culture, behavior, the overall public level of morality and other intangibles. So whereas Imam Shafi`i could be said to have differed with himself on some issues, unfortunately today, differences in jurisprudence between the imams have caused one group of Muslims to accuse another of insincerity, innovation (*bida`*), unbelief (*kufur*) and worst of all, polytheism, (*shirk*).

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### **Scholarly and Spiritual Association with Sayyida Nafisa**

Imam Shafi`i began teaching after Fajr prayer every day his students of Qur`an and its exegesis (*tafsir*) and other distinguished scholars would sit to study. Immediately after sunrise the hadith students would arrive and the students of exegesis would leave. Following them were the students of hadith explanation, followed by the group of speculative philosophy (*kalam*) students, then students of jurisprudence (*fiqh*)

shortly before noon. Thus Imam Shafi`i would sit at least six hours, with different groups of students, teaching one course after another. The fertility and fruitfulness of Imam Shafi`i's fiqh was a result of his vast intellect and life experience, acquired during his extensive travels throughout Muslim lands, and in his ongoing debates with other scholars.

When Imam Shafi`i arrived in Egypt, a relationship evolved with Sayyida Nafisa, based on adherence to faith and piety in religion. He used to visit her in her home going to and returning from his associations at the Mosque of `Umar ibn al-`Aas, in al-Fistat district.

Imam Shafi`i used to lead *taraweeh* in the Masjid of Sayyida Nafisa and she would pray following him for the entire Ramadan. Historians say that despite his tremendous scholarship, Imam Shafi`i used to visit Sayyida Nafisa to ask her invocation (du`a) and seek her *baraka* (blessing).

Imam Shafi`i also used to sit in Sayyida Nafisa's association, learning hadith from her. When on occasion he was sick, he would send one of his students to sit in her association. He would invariably tell her, "Your cousin ash-Shafi`i is sick and requests your du`a." Immediately, Sayyida Nafisa would raise her hands in supplication, asking Allah to cure Imam ash-Shafi`i. Often by the time the messenger returned to Imam ash-Shafi`i he would find him already cured, by means of her du`a.

### **Sayyida Nafisa Recites His Funeral Prayer**

One time Imam ash-Shafi`i fell sick and as usual sent his messenger asking Sayyida Nafisa's du`a. She sent him the message, "Tell him that may Allah make his meeting with Him the Best of meetings and may Allah lift him to His proximity." When the messenger returned with this message, the imam understood that his death was imminent. Immediately Imam Shafi`i wrote his will, stating that Sayyida Nafisa should pray the funeral prayers (*salat al-janaza*) over him. He died at the end of Rajab, 204 H.

Sayyida Nafisa also executed his will. Incapacitated due to her constant worship, they brought the imam's body from his house in al-Fistat district to her home. There she prayed the funeral prayer (*salat al-janaza*) over him from the women's section, following Imam al-Buwaiti who lead the prayer.

### **Sayyida Nafisa's Majlis**

Not only did Imam ash-Shafi`i sit with her, learn hadith from her, request her du`a and seek her baraka, but so too did many other scholars and great Sufis (*kaana hunaak katheera alulama'i wa kibaar as-sufiyya*). Among them were al-Imam Uthman bin Sa`eed al-Misri, Dhun-Nun al-Masri, Masri al-Samarkandi, Imam Abu Bakr al-Adfawi, (author of one of the greatest explanations of Qur`an, *al-Istiftah fi `ulum al-Qur`an*), and Abul Hasan bin Ali bin Ibrahim who wrote ten volumes on Qur`anic grammar, and many others.

### **Her asceticism**

Sayyida Nafisa was renowned for asceticism and for living a life of hardship (*zuhd*).

When asked what her meals consisted of, Zainab, daughter of her brother, replied, "My auntie used to eat once every three days. She had a basket hanging in her niche. Whenever she wanted something small to eat she would find something in that basket, sent from Allah (swt). She never ate anything other than food from her husband and that which Allah sent her as a gift."

One day the governor of Egypt sent Sayyida Nafisa 100,000 dirhams (equivalent to perhaps millions of dollars in today's money). He said, "Take this money from me. I ask nothing in return, but I thank Allah for this opportunity to repent. I give this money to you because of your piety." She took that money as her own and distributed it to the poor until nothing remained. Princes, nobles and many ordinary people sent her gifts. She accepted them, then distribute them in whatever way she liked.

Historians report her niece Zainab saying, "I served my auntie Sayyida Nafisa for forty years. I never saw her sleeping at night and I never saw her eating during the day, except the days forbidden to fast - the two `Eids and the Days of *Tashriq* (11th - 13th of Dhul Hijja)." Zainab once said to Sayyida Nafisa, "You must take care of yourself." She replied, "How shall I take care of myself before I reach my Lord? Ahead of me are so many barriers which no one can cross except the successful ones (*al-faizun*)."

### **The Servant Returned to The Master**

When she began to feel her death approaching, Sayyida Nafisa dug her grave with her own hands inside her home. Every day she would enter the grave and worship in it, as a reminder of the coming afterlife. She used to pray all her supererogatory prayers inside that grave. Al-Allama al-Ajhuri said, "She completed the Holy Qur`an while sitting in her grave six thousand times, and she granted the rewards of that recitation to all deceased Muslims." [This is in contradistinction to the Salafi ideology's rejection of gifting recitation of the Qur`an to the dead.]

When Sayyida Nafisa's illness worsened she wrote to her husband Ishaq al-Mu`taman, who was living in Madina al-Munawwara, asking him to return to Egypt. He came with their son Qassim and daughter Umm-Kulthum. She became very ill at the beginning of Ramadan, 208 H. Her companions asked her to stop fasting to keep her strength. She refused, saying, "I have been asking Allah to die fasting for thirty years; now you want me to break the fast?"

Upon her passing, her husband prepared to move her body to Madinat al-Munawarra, to be buried in Jannat al-Baqi`, but the people of Egypt asked him not to do that, but to bury her in the grave she had dug with her own hands. The governor of Egypt along with many people asked Ishaq al-Mu`taman to bury Sayyida Nafisa in Egypt. They collected a large sum of money and offered it to him. Returning the next day, they asked for his decision. He replied, "I have decided to bury her here. I saw the Prophet (s) in a dream last night, and he told me, 'Give them back their money and bury your wife in Egypt.'"

The night Sayyida Nafisa died was an immense tragedy for the people of Egypt, who were stunned at the news. Coming from every village in Egypt, people gathered at her

house in Cairo, lighting candles and weeping. For them Sayyida Nafisa was a beacon of knowledge and a source of blessing, *baraka*, from the family of the Prophet (s). It was a day of sorrow and mourning throughout Egypt. The day they attempted to bury her, it was very difficult to move her body to her final resting place, due to the crowds of people lamenting, crying, and calling on Allah by His Names and Attributes. The like of that gathering was unprecedented in all of Egypt.

### **From Her Miracles**

More than 150 miracles were recorded by historians as appearing from Sayyida Nafisa. Imam Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani wrote about them.

The story is related that when Sayyida Nafisa arrived in Egypt and settled in her home, there was a non-Muslim family living beside her, whose daughter was paralyzed from the waist down. One day the girl's mother brought her to Sayyida Nafisa to watch while she went shopping. She left her daughter in one corner of Sayyida Nafisa's house. Sayyida Nafisa began making ablution and water from her ablution flowed towards the girl. As the water touched the body of the girl, she experienced something strange. She began to take the water from Sayyida Nafisa's ablution and rub it on her paralyzed feet and legs. Suddenly by Allah's (swt) Mercy, the paralysis disappeared completely and she was able to stand.

Meanwhile Sayyida Nafisa was busy in prayer. The girl stood up and seeing her mother just returning from the market, ran to meet her to tell her what had happened. Her mother cried with joy declaring, "That woman is truly holy and her religion is the truth." She came in, hugged Sayyida Nafisa, thanked her for healing her daughter and asked her to pray that she be guided from darkness to light. Sayyida Nafisa then taught her to recite the *shahada*.

When the father of the girl returned home that evening, whose name was Ayyub Abu Surraya, and saw his daughter cured, he was overjoyed. He asked his wife about what happened and she told him the whole story. He raised his head heavenwards saying, "O Allah! You guide whom You like and I now know that Islam is the true religion, completing what we believe in." He went to the home of Sayyida Nafisa. Speaking to her from behind a veil he said, "I believe in your religion, and I accept it. I testify that there is none to worship except Allah and that your grandfather Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah." That miracle was the cause for the entire tribe of Sayyida Nafisa's neighbors to enter Islam.

### **A Prisoner Set Free**

One of Sayyida Nafisa's miracles relates to a Muslim man married to a Christian woman. They had a son. When he grew up he began to travel. While traveling in a country far from home he was captured and held prisoner. After hearing of his capture, his mother used to frequent the church, praying that her son be released and returned to them. Years passed but he was not released. One day she told her husband, "I heard that there is a saintly woman Nafisa bint al-Hasan al-Anwar whose prayers are always answered. Since you are Muslim go and ask her to pray for the return of our son." He went and asked Sayyida Nafisa for her du`a.

Late that night they heard a knock at the door. Waking and wondering who it could be they went and opened the door. To their astonishment they found their son standing there. They asked him, "How did you come here?" He said, "Tonight I was sitting there in prison, in chains. Suddenly I felt a spiritual presence, and I heard a voice saying, 'Free him! Nafisa bint al-Hasan interceded for him.' Suddenly I found myself standing here at the door of our house." That day his mother went to visit Sayyida Nafisa, thanking her for saving her son, then accepting Islam at her hand.

### **The Nile fails to flood**

In the year 201 H. (816 CE) the Nile failed to flood, as is its normal annual custom. People went to Sayyida Nafisa asking her to pray that Allah cause the Nile to flood, for without the usual flood no crops would grow. Sayyida Nafisa gave them her faceveil telling them, "throw that in the Nile and by Allah's grace it will flood." They took her *burqa* and threw it in the Nile. Immediately the river began to rise and overflow its banks.

[One should note here this is a miracle extremely similar to the incident of the shirt of Sayiddina Yusuf (as), which when cast on the face of his father Ya`qub (as), was the cause for his sight to be restored by Allah's Will. Again, such incidents clarify the true meaning of *tawassul* and *shafa`a* (intercession) by means of objects related to pure, pious individuals.]

### **Stolen wool**

Al-Imam al-Munawi mentions a story of Sayyida Nafisa, related to him from al-Azhari in his book *al-Kawakib as-sayyaara*:

There was an old lady who had four daughters. This woman used to spin wool into yarn, then take the yarn and sell it. With half the earnings she would buy more wool spending the rest on their food and drink for the week. One day the old lady set out for the market, with the spun wool wrapped in a red package. Without warning an eagle dove out of the sky, grabbed the package in its claws and flew off. The old lady, overcome with fear and worry, fainted. When she awoke she began crying. People around her, hearing her story told her about Sayyida Nafisa. She went to Sayyida Nafisa and related this strange incident. Sayyida Nafisa said, "O Allah! Exalted in Power and Owner of this creation: put right what the affairs of Your servant this lady *fulana*. She is Your servant and her children are Your servants and You are powerful over all things." She told the old lady to return to her home and wait.

The old lady went home crying with worry for the sake of her young children. Night found her still crying. Suddenly a commotion was heard outside. It was a group of people seeking Sayyida Nafisa. They told her, "Something very strange just happened to us. We came to you because we have been ordered to do so."

She said, "What happened?" They related, "We were on a ship traveling at sea. As we began approaching land one of the planks suddenly sprung loose and the boat began

to flood. Some of us did not know how to swim and we were in deep water still five hours from shore. The boat began to fill up and sink. All of a sudden an eagle appeared holding a red package in its claws. It threw that package, which was full of spun wool, into that crack filling it. The water stopped flooding and we managed to reach shore safely. We heard a voice saying, 'Go to Sayyida Nafisa.'

The boat crew presented Sayyida Nafisa a gift of 500 dinars. Sayyida Nafisa began to cry, "O Allah you are so merciful to Your servants." She asked the old lady, "How much did you usually get for your wool each week?" The lady replied, "I used to get 20 dinars." Sayyida Nafisa gave her the 500 dinars and she went home overjoyed. She told her neighbors what happened and they came in droves to see Sayyida Nafisa. Many ended up giving themselves over to her service, helping her cook food for the poor, distribute alms and aid the sick and lame.

### **Miracles after her death**

The miracles after Sayyida Nafisa's death are too numerous to mention. Once thieves entered her mosque in 683 H. and stole sixteen silver lamps. As the thieves tried to escape they discovered there was no longer a door. They were trapped inside until morning, when the caretaker arrived, opened the door and found the thieves with the lamps.

Recently in 1940, fifty years ago, a similar occurrence took place. A person, well-known in the area, entered the Mosque of Sayyida Nafisa and hid himself. When everyone had left that person stole a beautiful Kashmiri shawl, a gift from the King of Kashmir to Sayyida Zainab. When he tried to escape he could not find the door. He was kept prisoner until morning, when the people found him and took him to the police.

It is related in history that Abul `Izz al-Yamani said, "I was very well-known in my community, rich in my family, owning many farms. I was proud of myself and arrogant. Then I came down with a sickness that caused me to lose my sight and I fell into great difficulties. I spent most of my wealth seeking a cure, but alas doctors were unable to help me. They told me I would be blind for the rest of my life. Finally I sought out Sayyida Nafisa's help. While waiting to see her I fell asleep. I saw a dream in which Sayyida Nafisa visited me and put something in my eyes. When I awoke my sight had been fully restored."

### **The Story of Affan bin Sulayman**

Historians relate the story of an Egyptian named Affan bin Sulayman al-Masri. He bought a house and one day discovered a treasure buried under it. He began to spend his newfound wealth on the poor and the unfortunate.

One day he bought 1000 camel-loads of wheat from Prince Ahmad bin Keeghalgh. After some time the prices soared due to scarcity of wheat, shooting up to thrice its normal value. Prince Ahmad called Affan to his palace. The prince told him, "Either return the 1000 camel-loads or pay me for the wheat at today's price." Affan bin Sulayman refused, leaving angry. He went and distributed all the wheat to the poor and needy, leaving only a small portion for himself and his family.

Prince Ahmad went to the governor of Egypt Taqueen bin Abdullah al-Harbi, an arrogant and ruthless ruler. He ordered that all of Affan bin Sulayman's wealth and holdings be impounded. Affan bin Sulayman decided to leave Egypt, running from the oppression of the governor Taqueen. He told his story to a descendant of the Prophet (s), Ash-Sharif `Ali bin Abdullah a very pious man. He took him to the grave of Sayyida Nafisa and both of them sat facing the grave reciting verses of Qur`an, asking Allah to send the rewards of the recitation to Sayyida Nafisa and asking Allah (swt) in her presence and for her sake and the sake of her grandfather the Prophet (s) to solve the problem of Affan bin Sulayman. Suddenly they both fell asleep. They both saw Sayyida Nafisa in the dream telling him, "Go together with Affan bin Sulayman to the governor of Egypt Taqueen. I solved his problem."

Together they left and visited the governor, who to their surprise hosted them in grand style. The governor said, "Sayyida Nafisa appeared to me in a dream saying, 'Be generous and host As-Sayyid Ali very well and return all Affan's money to him; he asked for our intercession.'"

Taqueen, raising his hands said, "O Allah forgive me for what I did." Turning to Affan b. Sulayman he said, "I am releasing all your money." The governor Taqueen ordered Affan's money returned to him and ordered that his own treasuries be opened and spent on the poor. He used to say, "All Egyptians are afraid of me, but I am afraid of Affan bin Sulayman and his du`a at the grave of Sayyida Nafisa." With that du`a, the governor of Egypt corrected his wrong and unjust ways and lived as a righteous governor for the rest of his life. He wrote in his will that he should be buried in Bayt al-Maqdis, Jerusalem. When he died, that took place according to his orders.

### **Her Maqam**

The first one to build a masjid by the grave of Sayyida Nafisa was the governor of Egypt, Ubaydullah bin Sirri bin al-Hakam. Then it was renovated by Badr al-Jamali, the commander in chief of the army of Egypt, in the year 482 H. It was renovated again by Muhammad bin al-Qalawun in 740H. Then Prince Abdur Rahman Katakhadha renovated it further in the year 773 H. Finally the Ministry of Religious Endowments renovated it in 1314 H. to the structure it has today. The copper room which is entirely hand-carved over her grave was made in 1266 H. The door which is now there is ornately engraved, and was placed there by Ali Pasha, governor of Egypt in 1170. Water was piped in for people to drink. Above the water-dispensing room is a room for memorizing Qur`an. All Abbasid caliphs were buried on the eastern side of the grave in the time of al-Zahir Baybars.

From her death and until today, around the year and around the clock you will find people visiting Sayyida Nafisa's grave: from the highest Islamic scholars to common people. Over her grave her lineage to the Prophet (s) is engraved. Under that is written "Anyone experiencing difficulties in his life should visit the grave of Sayyida Nafisa, recite *surat al-Fatiha* (Qur`an, 1), *surat al-`Ala* (87), *surat al-Ikhlās* (112) and *al-muwadhhatayn* (113, 114), gift that recitation to her and make du`a for Allah to solve that problem."

The method of greeting Sayyida Nafisa is also described, "In a low voice say, 'Peace be upon you, *as-salaamu `alayki*, O Sayyidina Nafisa, daughter of Hasan al-Anwar,

son of as-Sayyid Zayd al-Ablaj, son of As-Sayyid Hasan, son of Sayyida Ali, and of Sayyida Fatima, daughter of the Prophet (s)."

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