

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND
CIVILIZATION (ISIAC)

UNIVERSITY NADWIH FOR STUDY OF THE SHARI'AH -
A STUDY OF THE APPROACH OF IMAM AL-SUYUTHI
IN HIS IMAM AL-KHANA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
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Imám al-Sha'rání in His *Mizán al-Kubrâ*

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I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master (M.A.) in **Islamic Thought**

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الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
بِنُورِ سُنَّتِيْ اِسْلَامٍ اَنْبَارًا اِيْجَسًا مِلْدِسِيَّا



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION
(ISTAC)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
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INTRODUCTION

1. General Background	1
2. Methodolgy	5

BIOGRAPHY

1. Life..	7
2. Madhhab	10
3. Teachers	11
4. Works	13

WHAT IS THE *MIZÂN*?

1. Translation of the Introductory Sermon	15
2. Integrity of Texts	18
3. Exoneration of Imâms	48

WHY THE *MIZÂN*?

1. Translation of Introductory Principle	58
2. Exposition of Introductory Principle	59

ARGUMENTS AGAINST DIFFERENCE BEING A MERCY

1. Argument One	83
2. Argument Two	86
3. Argument Three	91

DEFENSE OF AHL AL-SUNNAH

1. Accusation of Sectarianism.	99
2. Accusation of Kufr	105

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a preliminary study of Imām al-Sha'rānī's approach to understanding the diversity within the *Sharī'ah*, from the source texts of the religion to the opinions of the *mujtahid* Imāms. This discussion is intended to satisfy a pressing need in our times to provide a satisfactory explanation for the diverse opinions of the four *madhhabs*, in view of modernist attacks against the traditional understanding of Islam.

The *Mizān al-Kubrā* of Imām al-Sha'rānī is a work which explains this diversity by explaining that the *Sharī'ah* itself has come on more than one level, in order to account for the diversity of people. He argues that it has come on two levels, between which may be degrees—*takhfīf* (lenience) and *tashdīd* (insistence). Thus, rulings are of two types—*rukhaṣ* (dispensations) and *'azā'im* (strict rulings). For people may be divided into two broad categories, the strong and the weak, with respect to their belief and spiritual capacity. Al-Sha'rānī argues that all the diverse opinions of the Imāms are nothing but the two sides of the scale of the *Sharī'ah*. Al-Sha'rānī affirms that all *mujtahids* are correct and so one may move from one *madhhab* to another if it is more befitting to one's state. Thus he sees all the *madhhabs* as one grand *madhhab* and the difference to be only with respect to the person the ruling is addressed to. If one is weak, he should take the dispensations of other *madhhabs* than his own. If one is strong, he should take the stricter rulings, even from other *madhhabs*.

In our thesis, we discuss these ideas in light of the established principles in the sciences of *Ḥadīth*, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* and Islamic thought in general. We demonstrate how his ideas are but a continuation of some established notions in these sciences and accord with

the general methodology of its scholars. We also show how his method excels previous methodologies in certain respects.

Finally, we provide a defense of the *madhhabs* from modernist accusations who argue that difference of opinion cannot be a mercy and that following *madhhabs* is to fall into sectarianism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge my weakness, ignorance and sheer incapacity to be a good human being.

Oh Allah, forgive me.

I acknowledge that every good in my life, whether in my religion or in my worldly affairs, is due to the Messenger and Beloved of Allah, our Prophet Muḥammad (Allah bless him and give peace), the opener of that which was sealed, the seal of what went before, the victor of truth by truth. Oh Allah, send your blessings and peace upon your Beloved and upon his family and descendents, and grant us his intercession on the Day of Rising.

Since we cannot thank Allah without first thanking people, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the entire ISTAC staff. As far as I can recall, they have always been very kind to this unworthy individual. Particularly, I would like to extend my thanks to YM Professor Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, ISTAC's Founder-Director, and Professor Dr. Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, the Deputy Director, for accepting me in the Institute and allowing me to complete my studies therein. The Institute has also supported me financially, for which I am most grateful.

ISTAC's Founder-Director YM Professor Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas has always emphasized the fundamental unity of the Islamic worldview despite the diversity of schools existing within it, be they juristic, mystical or theological. This is manifest in his landmark works such as *Islām and Secularism* and *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*, as well as being a frequent topic of his famous Saturday night

lectures. The inspiration for writing this present thesis draws greatly from his ongoing efforts, may Allah reward him graciously. *Āmīn*.

I must also extend my gratitude to all the professors and teachers at the Institute, those that have left and those who are still there, for opening my eyes in many ways to issues of great importance, for solving many intellectual riddles and for their general support whenever I needed it. My supervisor, Professor Dr. Omar Jah, has been more of a close friend than an academic supervisor in the normative sense. To him I am most grateful, and proud to be his student.

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It is important that I make mention of my friends during my stay in Malaysia, particularly brothers such as Emre Yeser, Shafiqullah Khan, Nik Roskiman, Sīdī Mohd Nor and Prof. Misbah Al-Hasan of IIUM. Moreover, I must make mention of those who have taken care of me since my move to the UAE, particularly to Akram Ibrahim, who has been more than a brother to me. To all of them, I am most indebted.

This thesis is dedicated to my late father Dr. Mackean Elkateb. No words could give due credit to this distinguished man, may Allah shower his mercy upon him. I also dedicate this work to my wife and kids for their sheer patience with me and to the Shādhillī *Ṭarīqah*, for changing my life. May Allah accept this work and overlook its many shortcomings. *Āmīn*.

INTRODUCTION

1. General Background

All Muslims accept that there is one *Sharī'ah* given as a gift by Allah for his creatures to follow. However, at the same time, Muslims have always recognized that there exists great diversity within the unity of the *Sharī'ah*. For many centuries, there has been a consensus amongst *Sunnī* Muslims to the effect that the diverse teachings of the four traditional *madhhabs* are all perfectly authentic, acceptable, and authoritative.¹ Common folk were strongly urged to follow the teachings of any one of the four acceptable *madhhabs*, to do so strictly and with genuine discipline.

In more recent times, due to important developments in the history of the Muslim *Ummah*, such as the rise of Colonialism, Orientalism,² and Wahhābism,³ many voices calling for the scraping of the traditional *madhhabs* have risen.⁴ These calls are largely based on the contention that the *madhhabs* are often contradictory to

¹ There is an excellent article, in this regard, by Abdal Hakim Murad (alias TJ Winter of Cambridge University) entitled 'Understanding the Four Madhhabs' which details the historical development of the four schools of jurisprudence, and the consensus of the Muslims to their validity. The article may be found at the following Internet site: www.masud.co.uk under the Abdal Hakim Murad menu.

² For an excellent and concise discussion on Orientalist accusations pertaining to our discussion, see: Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, *Hadīth Literature, Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, ed. and rev. Abdal Hakim Murad (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 124–135. Hereafter referred to as *Hadīth Literature*.

³ Though this movement has been traditionally termed by scholars '*Wahhābiyyah*', it is known today as the *Salafiyyah* movement to escape the accusation of sectarianism by identifying themselves with the early Muslims, not to a modern would be reformer. The best, and most just, discussion of this movement is without doubt by al-Būṣfī. See: Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Būṣfī, *Al-Salafiyyah Marhalatun Zamaniyyatun Mubārakatun Lā Madhhab Islāmī*, second impression (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1990). Hereafter referred to as *Salafiyyah*.

⁴ In his many outstanding expositions, both written and verbal, Al-Attas has meticulously analyzed the reasons for the rise of such groups within the Muslim *Ummah*. Briefly put, the spread of secularism as a philosophical program has led to the corruption of knowledge within the *Ummah*. This in turn has led to a loss of *adab*, which resulted in the rise of false leaders who perpetuate the problem. See his refutation of these groups and his exposition on the Muslim Dilemma in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1978; second impression, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 106 in particular and the chapter as a whole. Hereafter referred to as *Secularism*. Also see Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 95–96. Hereafter referred to as *Educational Philosophy*.

each other, and that they do not represent a genuine continuity or expression of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*.⁵ Calls for going back to the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, alone and directly, have been used to destabilize people's confidence in the four *madhhabs* and in the 'Ulamā' who represent them and teach them.

Under the guise of calls for unity and source authenticity, innumerable authors and public speakers have succeeded in demolishing a profoundly intricate edifice of juridical sciences and authoritative teachings, built up over many centuries of strenuous effort (*ijtihād*) by the 'Ulamā' of our *Ummah*.⁶ Such eminent scholars as al-Kawtharī and al-Būṭī have labeled this general anti-*madhhab* tendency *lā madhhabiyyah* (non-*madhhabism*).⁷ These scholars attacked this tendency, and cogently pointed out that it is a destructive form of *bid'ah* (blameworthy innovation) that is corrosive of the tradition and the spirit of this *Ummah*. Furthermore, such scholars pointed out that this tendency, ironically, constitutes nothing more than an attempt to create *ex-nihilo* a brand new *madhhab* by would be scholars of mediocre

⁵ Some have even gone to the extent of saying that the *madhhabs* are the reason for the lack of development of the Muslims in the modern world. See for example Aḥmad Shākir's introduction to: Al-Shāfi'i, *Al-Risālah*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, second impression (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1979), 8.

⁶ Probably the most prominent figure of these reformers, and the one who has done the greatest damage, to my knowledge, is Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī. This figure has gone through the entire *Ḥadīth* corpus authenticating and weakening traditions according to the *Salafī madhhab*. Innumerable works have been written in refutation of this reformer, works that have adequately shown his lack of knowledge, unscholarly conduct, mediocre competence in the sciences of *Ḥadīth*, innumerable contradictions... Here are but a few of these works: Ḥasan al-Saqāfī, *Tanāquḍāt al-Albānī al-Wāḍiḥāt 2*, second impression (Amman: Dār al-Imām al-Nawāwī, 1992). This author has written a whole collection of works refuting al-Albānī. Maḥmūd Sa'īd Mamdūh, *Al-Ta'rīf bi-Awhām man Qassam al-Sunnah ilā Ṣāḥih wa Ḍa'īf*, 6 vols. (Dubai: Dār al-Buḥūth lil-Dirāsāt, 2000). Hereafter known as *Ta'rīf*. He also has a collection of works in refutation, besides this six-volume encyclopedia. Ṣālāh al-Dīn al-Idlibī, *Kashf al-Ma'lūl mimā Sumiyya bi-Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣāḥihah*, 1st Vol. (n.p.: Ṣālāh al-Dīn al-Idlibī, 2000). As for al-Albānī's attacks on the *madhhabs*, we will discuss his arguments in the relevant sections of this thesis.

⁷ Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Būṭī, *Al-Lāmadhhabiyyah Akhtar Bid'ah Tuhaddid Al-Sharī'ah Al-Islāmiyyah* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Fārābī, n.d.). Hereafter referred to as *Akhtar Bid'ah*. Also of relevance is his work: *Al-Salafiyyah Marḥalatun Zamaniyyatun Mubārakatun Lā Madhhab Islāmī*, second impression (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1990). Hereafter referred to as *Salafiyyah*. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-Kawtharī* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1998), 106–111. Hereafter referred to as *Maqālāt*.

stature and greatly inferior knowledge. Al-Kawtharī, al-Būfī, al-Attas and the many other defenders of the Islamic tradition,⁸ have warned of the grave danger of charlatanism in juridical matters, and of the disrespectful attitude of many young people today who are misled by non-*madhhabism*.

The arguments of these scholars have mainly focused on proving the authenticity of the four *madhhabs*, and the continuity of the teachings of the Imāms with the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. While this focus is appreciated and of great importance, there remains a fundamental need to justify the existence of diversity within the *Sharī'ah* itself; from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*⁹ to the juristic differences between the Imāms. This thesis is a preliminary study of a work from the tenth *Hijrī* century that offers not only a powerful explanation for this diversity, but goes on to show that this diversity is indeed a divinely and mercifully intended feature of the *Sharī'ah*. This work is the *Mizān al-Kubrā* of Imām al-Sha'rānī.

The *Mizān* is not merely a book of *Fiqh* but also a treatise on '*Aqīdah*, for it touches upon the fundamental integrity of the source-texts of our religion.¹⁰ In this respect, Imām al-Sha'rānī said of his methodology in the *Mizān*, "and that is from the

⁸ Among the best of these responses to the Salafiyyah in English are the articles of Nuh Ha Mim Keller found at the Internet site mentioned above: www.masud.co.uk under the Nuh Ha Mim Keller menu. See also Muhammad Hisham al-Kabbani, *Islamic Beliefs & Doctrine According to Ahl al-Sunna. A repudiation of "Salafi" Innovations*, Volume 1, ed. Gabriel F. Haddad, 2nd ed. (Mountain View, CA: As-Sunna Foundation of America, 1997).

⁹ This is important in light of Orientalist accusations of contradiction within the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). For defenses of the *madhhabs* usually point out that the different opinions of the Imāms are a continuation of different prophetic traditions and opinions of the Companions (may Allah be well pleased with them). This opens a great door of justification for these claims of the Orientalists if the existence of these differences themselves is not sufficiently explained. See Goldziher's arguments in *Hadīth Literature* 125–128. And for a summary of reasons for scholarly differences, see the introduction of: Muḥammad Amīn Ibn 'Ābidīn, *Ḥāshiyat ibn 'Ābidīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣubḥī al-Ḥalāq and 'Amir Ḥusayn, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1998), 15–20, particularly 19.

¹⁰ For Allah says in the Qur'ān: *Had it been from other than Allah, they would have found much discrepancy therein. Al-Nisā'* (4): 82.

perfection of the station of *Imān*.¹¹ There are two main objectives that may be discerned in the book. Firstly, upholding the integrity and efficacy of all the admissible proof-texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. The point of which is to establish the fundamental unity of the divine texts. Secondly, the exoneration of the four Imāms from prescribing any juristic rulings without manifest indication from the divine texts themselves. The point of which is to establish the fundamental unity of the juristic schools of *Islām*, and the preservation of our religion as a whole. These two objectives are achieved through explaining the one basic principle of the *Mizān*, that the *Shar'iah* has come according to two levels—*tashdīd* (insistence) and *takhfif* (lenience), and demonstrating these two levels in both the source texts and juristic opinions of the Imāms.

In this thesis, we strive to accomplish the following tasks:

1. Retrieve and explicate the explanation provided by Imam al-Sha'rānī of the diversity within the unity of the *Sharī'ah*.
2. Explicate al-Sha'rānī's position that the diversity within *Sharī'ah* is divinely and mercifully intended.
3. Highlight the traditional genealogy of al-Sha'rānī's approach in the sciences of Principles of *Ḥādīth* (*Uṣūl al-Ḥādīth*) and Jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*). This genealogy involves a comparison of the main features and strategies of al-Sha'rānī's approach with elements of the traditional sciences. Such a comparison not only relates al-Sha'rānī's work to the tradition, but also forms a sort of criterion by which his work is to be judged.

¹¹ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Mizān al-Kubrā al-Sha'rāniyyah al-Mudkhillah li Jamī' Aqwāl al-ʿImat al-Mujtahidīn wa Muqallidihim fil-Sharī'at al-Muḥammadiyah*, 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1998), 1: 6. Hereafter referred to as *Mizān*.

4. Highlight the *Ṣūfi* genealogy of the spirit of al-Sha‘rānī’s approach in the teachings of his direct masters and those of ibn al-‘Arabī.
5. Illustrate how al-Sha‘rānī’s approach excels his predecessors’ attempts at reconciliation between ostensibly contradictory traditions, and explanations for the diversity of juristic opinions.
6. Explicate al-Sha‘rānī’s would-be response to recent Wahhābī claims regarding the diversity within the *Shari‘ah*.

After a brief biography of Imām al-Sha‘rānī, the main body of the thesis is divided into four chapters. The chapters ‘What is the *Mizān*?’ and ‘Why is the *Mizān*?’ take care of the first five tasks. The chapters ‘Arguments against difference being a mercy’ and ‘Defense of *Ahl al-Sunnah*’ takes care of the sixth task. The thesis then ends with a conclusion indicating the fruitfulness and usefulness of al-Sha‘rānī’s work today, and highlighting the need for further research.

2. Methodology

Consonant with our defense of the Islamic tradition, is the methodology we have adopted for the study itself. This is manifest in two ways. Firstly, by the grace of Allah, I had the opportunity of reading the text with a scholar who had a *sanad* and *ijāzah* in the *Mizān*, extending back to Imām al-Sha‘rānī himself. Following the example of ISTAC’s Deputy Director, we have tried to revive the tradition of commentary in our academic thesis.¹² Traditionally, students searched for scholars

¹² “The practice of studying and analyzing the works of authoritative scholars, contemporary or otherwise, is indeed an important characteristic of the Islamic intellectual and educational tradition which modern Muslims have practically ignored. The tradition of commenting upon important works starting from the Qur’ān (*tafsīr*) to philosophical, theological, or linguistic treatises

who had *ijāzahs* in the texts they wanted to study so that the correct interpretation of the text was preserved. And so it is that the bulk of the general insights I attained from the book including, most importantly, the principle of the *Mizān* itself came from the Shaykh I sat with—‘Abd al-Rabb al-Nazzārī.¹³ The second way I have tried to capture the traditional method of commentary is by first translating significant portions of the book itself, then unraveling the important issues discussed therein against the background of the Qur’ān, *Sunnah* and traditional sciences. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rabb’s comments will appear from time to time in our discussion, since I have read these sections with him line by line. With the *tawfiq* of Allah, some of the benefits of this methodology should appear in the thesis.

The main objective of this thesis is to show that al-Sha‘rānī’s approach to the diversity in the unity of the *Sharī‘ah* is an authentic and powerful one, and can help overcome many illusions and difficulties that the *Ummah* faces today. It is hoped this work can help regain some of the consensus and unity that recent attacks on the *madhhabs* have unfortunately caused. And Allah alone gives success.

(*tashriḥ*), which in an earlier age had gone to the great heights of creativity and wonderful imagination, is now practically non-existent.” *Educational Philosophy*, 29.

¹³ Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Rabb al-Nazzārī, born in 1952 in Tā‘iz, Yemen. A *sharīf* of Ḥasanī lineage. He acquired the bulk of his Islamic knowledge from the traditional scholars of Zābid. Besides his *ijāzahs* in all the Islāmic sciences, he graduated from Madīnah University (1985), acquired his masters from Umm al-Qurā University in Mecca (1988), and acquired two doctorates, one from Umm Durman University in Sudan (1995) and another from the University for Islamic studies in Pakistan (1996). One of his doctorate theses was in the field of *al-ta’arūḍ wal-tarjūḥ*, which is the concern of our study. He is also an authorized *Ṣūfī* Shaykh in the *Shādhillī Tariqah*, his Grand Shaykh being the famous Ahmad al-‘Alawī of Algeria. He has over a thousand students all over the Muslim world. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rabb is currently the *Kabir al-Wu‘āz* in the *Awqāf* of Dubai in the UAE and gives regular radio and TV programs (details of the Shaykh were taken from his personal CV and close relatives). A man of tremendous humility, he was incredibly generous with his time to a mysterious young man like myself, appearing out of nowhere, agreeing from our first meeting by coincidence to sit with me on a daily basis on the text of the *Mizān* despite his hectic schedule. This took place in January 2001 in his home in Dubai. These sessions were recorded for my benefit and general reference. During the writing period of this thesis, I would phone the Shaykh for advice whenever I was puzzled with something. May Allah reward him, and increase his like. Fortunately, my supervisor in this thesis —Professor Dr Omar Jah— already knew the Shaykh personally and had great respect for him; thus encouraging me to pursue my research with him.

BIOGRAPHY¹

1. Life

Abu al-Mawāhib 'Abd al-Wahhāb bin Aḥmad al-Sha'rānī (898-973A.H / 1493-1565 C.E.),² his lineage goes back through Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyah to Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may Allah be pleased with them all. Al-Sha'rānī was born on the 27th of Ramaḍān of the year 898A.H in Egypt in Qalqashand, though he acquired the title of al-Sha'rānī as he moved forty days after his birth to his father's village – Abu Sha'rah.³ Besides his date of birth, which is a subject of some controversy, al-Sha'rānī's life is easy to piece together from his youth to his later years for the simple reason that al-Sha'rānī was kind enough to right us a work that may be termed an autobiography. The reason we say 'may be called' is because al-Sha'rānī's intention for writing this work was not to write a systematic autobiography in the modern style that we are familiar with. Rather, what al-Sha'rānī intended—and is manifest in the title of the book—was to let the world know of Allah's gifts upon him which started from his birth or even preceded it; in accordance with the Qur'ānic injunction—and as for the blessings of your Lord make mention.⁴ Thus, he entitled the book, '*Laṭā'if al-Minan wal-Akhlāq fī Wujūb al-Taḥadduth bi Ni'mat Allah 'alā al-Īlāq*' (Subtleties of gifts and Character, in the obligation of making mention of the blessings of Allah unconditionally), or shortly, al-

¹ For a bibliography on al-Sha'rānī in English, see the otherwise horrendous article by: Kathryn Johnson, "'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī: A Brief Study of the Life and Contributions of a Sixteenth Century Mystic," *Islamic Culture*, Vol 71, no.1 (1997): 35–39. Hereafter referred to as *Life and Contributions*.

² 'Umar Riḍā Kahālah, *Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1993), 2: 339. Hereafter referred to as *Mu'jam*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Al-Duḥā* (93): 11.

Minan al-Kubrā (the Grand blessings).⁵ Al-Sha'rānī recounts what he recollects of Allah's blessings upon him by way of mentioning the great character traits that Allah has honored him and the vast knowledge Allah has bestowed him; attributing all of it to Allah Exalted, not to himself.

Al-Sha'rānī's life was always full of *'ibādah* and *'ilm* from the very beginning, memorizing the Qur'ān by the age of eight and never missing a prayer since then.⁶ Having lost his father in his youth, he recalls a most significant incident at the age of twelve. The orphan Sha'rānī journeyed from his hometown to Cairo in the year 910h and took refuge in the mosque of Abu al-'Abbās al-Ghamrī. The Shaykh of the mosque and his children had much compassion for this young man, they fed him from what they ate and dressed him from what they dressed. Not having to worry about his livelihood, al-Sha'rānī stayed with them long enough to memorize the basic books of *Sharī'ah* and grasp its principles at the hands of the Shaykhs teaching in the mosque.⁷

Al-Sha'rānī tells us that he had always led an upright life as far as his outward character was concerned, but it was not until he met with his Shaykh in the spiritual path—'Alī al-Khawwāṣ—that his mastery of the outward sciences of *Islām* and its semblances was to be coupled with an inward illumination; to become a complete human being (*insān kāmil*). Despite his living in a time which was ripe with scholars who joined between the outward and the inward such as al-Suyūṭī, al-Laqqānī, al-Ramlī and Shaykh al-Islām Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī; Allah had destined al-Sha'rānī's illumination at the hands

⁵ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Minan al-Kubrā aw Laṭā'if al-Minan wal-Akhlāq fī Wujūb al-Taḥadduth bi Ni'mat Allah 'alā al-Īṭlāq* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1999). Hereafter referred to as *Minan*.

⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷ Ibid., 56.

of this man—'Alī al-Khawwās—who could neither read nor write.⁸ To make matters worse, one of the first things that his Shaykh asked him to do was to sell all his books and to give the money to the poor people.⁹ This was the beginning of the initiation of al-Sha'rānī into the realm of 'ilm ladunnī (divinely bestowed knowledge).¹⁰ After years of spiritual exercise, al-Sha'rānī was authorized as a guide in the spiritual path—a master of the outward sciences, and a master of the inward sciences. It was not long before al-Sha'rānī set up his own *zāwiyah*, and not long before his *zāwiyah* was an important center for dhikr, worship, learning the traditional sciences, tasting the sweetness of *Imān* and first hand experience of the Divine.¹¹

As for the nature of his *Tasawwuf*, al-Sha'rānī was of the *awliyā'* who joined between *Sharī'ah* and *Haqīqah* in a manifest way.¹² Practically all his books bear witness to this. In fact, it is fair to say that many of his works were written with the intention of reconciling the apparent contradiction that many people imagine between the law and the spiritual path. Indeed, al-Sha'rānī deemed this one of Allah's special favors upon him, he says:

And from what Allah Blessed and Exalted has bestowed upon me of favors is: my harmonization between what the 'arifūn (accomplished mystics) are upon of subtle secrets and what the messengers have come with, and few are they who have harmonized between them, [most people] only make what the 'arifūn are upon outside of the realm of the *Sharī'ah*.¹³

⁸ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1999), 2: 205. Hereafter referred to as *Ṭabaqāt*.

⁹ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Anwār al-Qudsiyyah fī Ma'rifaḥ Qawā'id al-Ṣūfiyyah*, ed. Ṭā Hā 'Abd al-Bāqī Surūr and al-Sayyid Muḥammad 'Id al-Shāfi'i, 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Al-Maktabat al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 7. Hereafter referred to as *Anwār*; *Minan*, 85–86.

¹⁰ See: *al-Kahf* (18): 65; *Minan*, 86.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 620–621. For other information on his *zāwiyah*, see: *Life and Contributions*, 22.

¹² For an exposition of the relationship between *Sharī'ah* and *Haqīqah*, see Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas, *A Commentary On The Ḥujjat Al-Ṣiddīq Of Nūr Al-Dīn Al-Ranīrī* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture, 1986), 183–186.

¹³ *Minan*, 463.

Despite many envious people's attempts to ruin al-Sha'rānī's reputation by corrupting the texts of his books, al-Sha'rānī was very well received by his contemporaries.¹⁴ In fact, he tells us that it was his habit to first show any book that he had just written to the great scholars of his time before giving it to the people, saying to them, "if you approve I will give it to the people, if you don't like it I will throw it away."¹⁵ This, we are told, he did out of his love for unity and his hatred for difference and disputation. After his death, al-Sha'rānī's books remained popular and well read down to our present day, and his tomb in Cairo is regularly visited and venerated.

2. *Madhhab*

As far as his *Fiqh* is concerned, he was originally a Shafi'ī.¹⁶ We say 'originally', not because he moved to another *madhhab*, but because he reached a degree of knowledge (both formal and experiential) where he believed he could take the rulings directly from the Book and the *Sunnah*. This is manifest in his book of *Fiqh* '*Kashf al-Ghummah*' which is not written according to any *madhhab*.¹⁷ However, all his books are filled with praise of the great Imāms of this *Ummah*, particularly the four Imāms of *Fiqh*, and never calls the commonality of people to leave the *madhhabs* as people are doing in our day. Consider these words of his after quoting Imām Aḥmad as advising people to take their *Fiqh* directly from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*:

¹⁴ *Minan*, 73–79.

¹⁵ *Mizān*, 1: 7.

¹⁶ *Minan*, 5.

¹⁷ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Kashf al-Ghummah 'an Jamī' al-Ummah*, 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988).

... these words only refer to those given the capacity for *ijtihād*. As for the weak, it is obligatory upon them to imitate one of the Imāms. Otherwise, they will be destroyed and go astray.¹⁸

3. Teachers

Al-Sha'rānī mentions about fifty Shaykhs that he took his *Fiqh* and *Ḥadīth* from.¹⁹ Probably the most famous of these is Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (826-926h), one of the most prominent figures in the late Shāfi'ī school and a prominent-*Ṣūfī* in his own right.²⁰ Of similar stature in the Shāfi'ī school is Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ramlī (d.971h),²¹ with whom he studied several of the classic works. Al-Sha'rānī also had the fortune of studying with one of the *Ummah's* most famous *Ḥadīth* scholars, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qaṣṭalānī (d.923h), the author of a well known commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.²² If one were to ponder upon the list of books that al-Sha'rānī tells us he memorized, the books he read with his teachers, the books he read by himself and how many times he read them, we would be quite astonished to say the least.²³

As for his Shaykhs in *Tasawwuf*, we have already mentioned 'Alī al-Khawwās, who was the Shaykh Allah illuminated al-Sha'rānī at the hands of. Nūr al-Dīn al-Shūnī, whom al-Sha'rānī calls 'my father', was another Shaykh with whom he spent thirty-five years in service.²⁴ His authorization in the spiritual way was from Shaykh Muḥammad al-Shinnāwī, and his *talqīn* (initiation) in the path was at the hands of five Shaykhs: 1.

¹⁸ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Yawāqīt wal-Jawāhir fī Bayān 'Aqā'id al-Akābir*, printed with the *Kibrīt al-Aḥmar* of the author in the margin, 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī & Mu'assasat al-Tārikh al-'Arabī, 1997), 478. Hereafter referred to as *Yawāqīt*.

¹⁹ *Mizān*, 91-93; *Minan*, 57-60.

²⁰ *Mu'jam*, 1: 733-734; *Ṭabaqāt*, 2: 167-170.

²¹ *Mu'jam*, 1: 94; *Minan*, 60. See also: Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Iḥāf al-Sādat al-Muttaqīn bi Sharḥ Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 14 vols. n.p. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 2: 467. Hereafter referred to as *Iḥāf*.

²² *Mu'jam*, 1: 254.

²³ *Mizān*, 1: 91-95.

²⁴ See al-Sha'rānī's entry on his Shaykhs in *Ṭabaqāt*, 2: 233.

Muḥammad al-Sarrawī²⁵ 2. ‘Alī al-Murṣafī,²⁶ who were the Shaykhs of 3. Muḥammad al-Shinnāwī²⁷ and 4. Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī. 5. ‘Alī al-Khawwās.²⁸ All of whom were blessed with a spiritual lineage (*silsilah*) going back to Junayd al-Baghdādī, to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, back to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace).²⁹

Most significant perhaps of all his teachers, despite preceding him by several centuries, is Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī. Al-Sha‘rānī was an intense reader of the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, which he was to later summarize and, through a process of quotation and simplification, popularize to the masses. Consider, for example, what he tells us at the end of the *Yawaqūt*, a book which excellently arranges and organizes ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics in a comparative manner with the traditional views of the *Sunnī mutakallimūn*. He tells us that, in the preparation of this work, he read every chapter of the *Futūḥāt* before writing on any subject, thus making him average reading the entire *Futūḥāt* two and a half times a day!³⁰ Of course, this is to be considered a *karāmah* (miracle).³¹ But, its being a *karāmah* should not veil one from seeing the intellectual depth needed for the accomplishment of even a single reading of the *Futūḥāt*, let alone two and a half times a day. In general, al-Sha‘rānī’s ideas were greatly influenced by ibn

²⁵ Ibid., 173–174.

²⁶ Ibid., 174–176.

²⁷ Ibid., 181–183.

²⁸ It would be a shortcoming not to mention something of the great influence that ‘Alī al-Khawwās had on al-Sha‘rānī, for al-Sha‘rānī himself devotes two books entirely to his discourses (*Mu‘jām*, 2: 339). Moreover, most of al-Sha‘rānī’s works don’t go five pages without a quotation from this great Shaykh. Even in the *Mizān*, which is a work of *Fiqh* and *Uṣūl*, some of the key concepts in the book are expositions of al-Khawwās’ discourses such as the notion of *ijmāl* and *tafṣīl*. See: *Mizān*, 1: 68.

²⁹ *Anwār*, 19.

³⁰ *Yawaqūt*, 676.

³¹ For a discussion on the miracles of the saints, and their affirmation by Muslim orthodoxy, see: Ahmad ibn Naqīb al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller (Abu Dhabi: Awqāf, 1991; Revised edition, Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1999), 917–920. Hereafter referred to as *Reliance*.

al-'Arabī, and the *Mizān* is no exception. For the *Mizān* may be looked at as the flowering of a conceptual seed already present in the *Futūḥāt*.³²

4. Works

Biographers estimate that he wrote over sixty books in the various fields of *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, *Ḥadīth*, *Tasawwuf*, *Ṭabaqāt*, Arabic language, all of which amply attest to his mastery of each discipline.³³ A salient feature of many of his works is the reconciliation he attempts, whether it be between the diverse juridical schools of the Muslims, between the outward and inward sciences or between *Ṣūfī* metaphysics and traditional *Kalām*. Al-Sha'rānī focused much of his attention on Shāykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī, defending him, summarizing his works and popularizing his ideas.

Al-Sha'rānī's love for unity and harmonization was not limited to the *Ṣūfīs*, rather, he was concerned with the unity of the *Ummah* as a whole, and particularly unity between the *madhhabs* of *Fiqh*. The *Mizān* is only one of the works, albeit the most important and most systematic, in which al-Sha'rānī defends *all* the *mujtahid* Imāms. From his autobiography, we find that this love for reconciliation was there from his younger years. As he tells us in the *Laṭā'if*:

During my youth, I had a vision of the Greatest Imām Abu Ḥanīfah (may Allah be well pleased with him) and Imām Mālik was sitting on his left, and I was standing in front of them. Then Imām Mālik (may Allah be well pleased with him) said to Imām Abu Ḥanīfah: No one has defended us like this young man.³⁴

² We will highlight these seeds in the appropriate places in our study.

³ *Mu'jam*, 2: 339.

⁴ *Minan*, 194.

This defense was to manifest in his later years with books such as the *Mizān*, *al-Ajwibah al-Mardīyyah ‘an A’imat al-Fuqahā’ wal-Şūfiyyah* and other works.³⁵ Furthermore, he authored a book on the proofs of the Imāms for their positions (*al-Minhaj al-Mubīn fi Bayān Adilat al-Mujtahidīn*) about which he says that the history of *Islām* has not known the like of.³⁶

To summarize, al-Sha‘rānī is a scholar who made a valuable contribution to the Muslim library. He wrote many works that, even though their seeds may be found in others’ works or in his Shaykhs’ discourses, are very original. Al-Sha‘rānī died in the year 973h. May Allah have mercy on his soul, and exalt his rank in paradise. *Āmīn*.

³⁵ *Mu’jām*, 2: 339.

³⁶ *Yawāqūt*, 477.