



***Shaykh Ahmad ibn Salih al-Habbal* (adapted and translated by Shoayb Ahmed from information supplied by *Shaykh Muhammad al-Ya'qubi*)**

Ahmad ibn Muhammad Salih ibn 'Abd al-Fattah al-Rifai' al-Habbal was born in 1905 (1323).

He was a scholar known for his immense piety and devotion. He was the person who led the gatherings in praise of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. In fact his contemporaries and other righteous scholars acknowledged his piety and status in front of Allah.

One of the leading scholars of Qurān and Tajwīd, *Shaykh Muhyi al-Din al-Kurdi* (d. 2009) used to say that whenever something serious happened he sought Allah's help through the rank and position *Shaykh Ahmad al-Habbal* held.

Shaykh Makkī al-Kettānī who was the leading authority in the Māliki *madhhab* and the leader of the 'Ulama League of Syria had referred to *Shaykh Ahmad* as one of the *abdāl* more than forty years ago.

Shaykh Zakariya al-Bukhari (d.) in Madinah was another person who acknowledged *Shaykh Ahmad's* piety and virtue.

He narrated from his father (died in 1380) who in turn narrated from *Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id ibn 'Umar al-Habbal* 1908 (1326).

Shaykh Ahmad also narrated from *Shaykh Sa'd Allah al-Hariri* 1964 (1384) and *Shaykh Badr al-Din al-Hasani* 1935 (1354).

He heard a portion of *al-Arba'in al-'Ajluniyyah* from *Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir ibn Muhammad Salim al-Iskandaranī* 1943 (1362).

He is said to have been a close friend of *Shaykh Yusuf al-Nabhani*.

Shaykh Ahmad passed away on 27 January 2009 (1 Safar 1430).

Contrary to what some may think, *Shaykh* Aḥmad as not an illiterate person with a great affection for the Prophet Muḥammad. He was a true *zāhid*, one who truly knew Allah and a Ṣūfī of the first category. He was granted permission in the sufi order to guide people but instead he preferred to attach himself to the Prophet Muḥammad until he is said to have reached a state where he saw the Prophet while awake. The reports of many righteous persons who saw the Prophet with *Shaykh* Aḥmad on his side in their dreams is countless.

He progressed in his spiritual rank until when he was in his seventies he was considered as one of the *abdāl*, then the *qutb* of Shām and then possibly one of the four *awtād*.

He inherited this honor from the *qutb* before him who was *Shaykh* ‘Arif ‘Uthmān and prior to him this position as held by *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī.

Shaykh Aḥmad may be distinguished in this day and age from others due to his ‘*ibada*, devotion, abstinence, love for the Prophet Muḥammad, *dhikr*, humility and servitude of the people.

The question then is where did he acquire these characteristics from? What made the man?

In order to appreciate this illustrious personality we have to look at the factors which contributed to his personality and his piety. This may be understood when we look at his upbringing and his family.

His father, *Shaykh* Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥabbāl (1294-1379=1877-1961)

He is the son of *Shaykh* Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥabbāl who was a *zāhid* and a devout scholar who adhered to various acts of ‘*ibāda*. He was particular on performing the Ṣalāt in congregation even during the Syrian Wars and is said to have performed Hajj thirty-fourty times. He was very particular on what he consumed and therefore only ate from that which he had earned by his own hands.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ accompanied his uncle, *Shaykh* Sa’id al-Ḥabbāl who was a senior Shāfī’ scholar and a pivot of piety. There are many *karāmāt* attributed to him about which people still speak of.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ also accompanied *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Tarābulṣī (d.1339) who was a *Shaykh* of the Naqshbandī Sufi Order. *Shaykh* Aḥmad met *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Razzāq through his father’s company. Thus *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Ḥabbāl was also Naqshbandī in his Sufi Order but Rifa’ in his genealogy. His lineage links up to *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Rifāī’ and then ultimately to the Prophet Muḥammad. It is reported that *Shaykh* Ṣāliḥ never consumed food in a home other than his own and he adhered to the fasting on a Monday and a Thursday.

So *Shaykh* Aḥmad is a result of this pure environment. One filled with *taqwā*, *dhikr*, consumption of *ḥalāl*, *jihād* and *mujāhada*. So *Shaykh* Aḥmad was successful because he accompanied those who were successful. In this way we observed that he too loved performing Hajj and visiting the grave of the Prophet Muḥammad. *Shaykh* Aḥmad’s first Hajj was with his father in 1909 (1330). *Shaykh* Aḥmad was still only eleven years old and the journey was carried out on camels. The young boy on seeing the Ka’ba supplicated to Allah and asked Allah to grant him frequent visits to this blessed place.

Allah answered this supplication and *Shaykh* Aḥmad is said to have performed about 50 Hajj, the first his own obligation and the remainder on behalf of the Prophet Muḥammad. Although the number visits that may have included ‘Umra total to about 80.

It has reported by reliable sources that *Shaykh* Aḥmad never missed the Fajr Ṣalāt in the Umayy Mosque for eighty years. In fact he arrived at the mosque one hour before Fajr to complete his early morning litany (*wird*). This as known as *wird al-sahr* and one of the most famous *dhikr* circles of this nature was that of the Bakriyya Order. *Shaykh* Sa’id al-Ḥabbāl led these sessions and he was followed by *Shaykh* Rashīd al-Jundalī (d.1355). *Shaykh* Rashīd was succeeded by *Shaykh* Muḥammad al-‘Alāwī who was succeeded by *Shaykh* Aḥmad. Many other illustrious scholars were connected to these *dhikr* sessions and they included *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī and *Shaykh* Ahmad al-Dardayr.

Shaykh Rashīd al-Jundalī was a pious and devout scholar who had studied under the scholars of the Khatīb family. One of his colleagues as a student was *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Qaṣṣāb about whom *Shaykh* Amīn Suwayd said that he carried the banner of *wilāya* in Damascus for sixty years. *Shaykh* Aḥmad accompanied *Shaykh* Rashīd and benefited from him. *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Ḥarūn was also one of his students and *Shaykh* Muhammad Ṣāliḥ al-Khatīb is one of those who received *Ijāza* from him.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥabbāl engaged himself in the recitation of the Qurān and this is something his son had inherited from him. He read the Qurān under renowned scholars who included *Shaykh* Muḥammad Salīm al-Ḥalwānī and *Shaykh* Yaḥyā al-Makkāwī. He adhered to the practice of five juz daily till the time prior to his illness when he devoted himself completely to the Qurān completing it once daily.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ had acquired these noble qualities from his illustrious family. His father was a righteous scholar and his paternal uncle was *Shaykh* Sa’id al-Ḥabbāl who was the leading Shāfi’ scholar in the Umayyad Mosque until his death in (1326). *Shaykh* Sa’id was an authority in Taṣawwuf and in the narration of Hadith. He narrated from *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Kuzbarī (d. 1262) from whom he received *Ijāza* and he thus possessed a very high chain of transmission. *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kettānī visited two of his senior students in (1325) and received *Ijāza* from them with the chain of transmission through *Shaykh* al-Kuzbarī. The last person to narrate from *Shaykh* al-Kuzbarī with a genuine and specific *Ijāza* is *Shaykh* Abu al-Yusr ‘Abidīn.

Shaykh Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī (1267-1354=1851-1935)

Shaykh Aḥmad was honored to have been connected to the illustrious Ḥasanī family through suckling there. The Rifāi’, al-‘Anī and Ḥasanī families shared close ties. More so since *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn’s wife, Ruqayya, the daughter of *Shaykh* Muḥyi al-Dīn al-‘Anī breastfed *Shaykh* Aḥmad thus making *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn his spiritual and foster father. In fact *Shaykh* Sa’id al-Ḥabbāl was a student of *Shaykh* Muḥyi al-Dīn al-‘Anī. The ‘Anī and Rifāi’ Ḥabbāl families are related through the illustrious *qutb* *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Rifāi’. This afforded *Shaykh* Aḥmad the chance to derive maximum benefit from this noble and pure household. As a young boy he frequented the house before Fajr and was therefore influenced by the ways and habits of *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn. He remained closely attached to and in the company of *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn until he took ill and was taken to

his son, *Shaykh* Tāj al-Dīn's home. *Shaykh* Aḥmad was among the few who were present at the time of *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn's demise. In fact, when *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn breathed his last, *Shaykh* Aḥmad kissed his forehead and his feet. The time spent with *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn left an indelible impact on his life. He continued to remain devoted to the family and served *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn's children.

Through his attachment to *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn he was able to relate various anecdotes and useful aspects on the life of *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn. Amongst the incidents he related was that one year, on the second day after 'Īd, *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Karīm al-Rifāi' visited him and he was asked about the reason for his absence from the lesson? *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Karīm said that everyone was busy celebrating 'Īd. *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn replied and said that he has no 'Īd other than 'ilm (sacred knowledge).

If we were to ignore *Shaykh* Badr's level of knowledge and his mastery in various Islamic sciences and instead focus on his spirituality, his abstinence and his love for the Prophet Muḥammad, we will realize how difficult it is to find an individual with all these noble qualities. If we were for a moment to look at his piety and righteousness we will observe immense love and veneration for the Prophet Muḥammad and a person who loved the recitation of the Qurān. We will find various qualities which could each produce true 'men'. Many of the 'ulama regarded *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn as one of the *abdāl* and they attributed this to his love for sending salutations on the Prophet Muḥammad. He was a man of few words. If the need arose for him to speak then it was to answer someone's question and to do this he referred the questioner to the specific book wherein the answer could be found.

Shaykh Sharīf al-Yaqūbī (1282-1362=1865-1943)

The other person who influenced *Shaykh* Aḥmad was *Shaykh* Sharīf al-Ya'qūbī. It is sufficient proof of his position and status to mention that the three largest funeral processions in recent times were for *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn, *Shaykh* Sharīf al-Ya'qūbī and *Shaykh* 'Alī al-Daqr. *Shaykh* Aḥmad accompanied and served *Shaykh* Sharīf for about twelve years.

Shaykh Aḥmad had accompanied him until shortly before his death. In fact *Shaykh* Aḥmad used to say that his eyes had not seen anyone like *Shaykh* Sharīf. *Shaykh* Sharīf was a person who resembled the illustrious *tabi'īn* in his ways and his character and his love for the Prophet Muḥammad. *Shaykh* Tāj al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī said that one who saw *Shaykh* Sharīf will enter Janna.

He was very particular on following the sunna and is said to have never missed the opening *tabkīr* at the time of Ṣalāt. The obligatory Ṣalāt was always performed in congregation and he never abandoned or neglected his daily litany. He was neat and elegantly dressed. His face was illuminated and he was awe inspiring. His character was like that of the Prophet Muḥammad. *Shaykh* Aḥmad acquired this attachment for the Prophet Muhammad from *Shaykh* Sharīf. When he spoke of the Prophet he only referred to him by prefixing the word (*sayyid*) and he never refused anyone who asked him for some need in the name of the Prophet Muḥammad.

He was a reputable scholar and an authority in Taṣawwuf. He was known for his active participation in *jihād*. Many prominent scholars had benefited from him. Some of them are:

- *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khatīb (1307-1367)
- *Shaykh* Muḥammad Bashīr al-Khatīb (1328-1382)
- *Shaykh* ‘Arif ‘Uthmān
- *Shaykh* Muḥammad Salīm al-Baḥrāwī
- *Shaykh* Murād Siwār
- *Shaykh* ‘Alī al-Daqr
- *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Mu’damānī
- *Shaykh* Sa’īd al-Burhānī
- *Shaykh* Muḥammad Taysīr al-Kaywān (1323-1383)
- *Shaykh* Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Yallas
- *Shaykh* Makkī al-Kettānī
- *Shaykh* Ṣalāḥ al-Za’īm
- *Shaykh* Ṣāliḥ al-Farfūr
- *Shaykh* Ḥasan Ḥabannaka al-Maydānī
- *Shaykh* Sa’īd al-Aḥmar
- *Shaykh* Ibrāhīm al-Ṣabbāgh
- His brother, *Shaykh* Ismā’īl al-Yaqūbī
- His nephew, *Shaykh* Ibrāhīm al-Yaqūbī

Shaykh Aḥmad accompanied *Shaykh* Sharīf in the mosque, at his home and during his *dhikr* sessions. *Shaykh* Sharīf was the successor of *Shaykh* Muḥammad al-Mubārak (d.1330) and thus continued these sessions according to the Shādhī Order. He even accompanied him on Hajj and on his visit to Beirut. It was *Shaykh* Sharīf who had introduced him to *Shaykh* Yūsuf al-Nabhānī. *Shaykh* Aḥmad served *Shaykh* Sharīf on the journey to perform Hajj and numerous *karāmāt* have been recorded that have been verified and documented in the book titled; *al-Riḥla ilā al-Madīna* by *Shaykh* Maḥmūd Yāsīn.

Shaykh Aḥmad remained faithful to his *Shaykh* and to his family and to this extent he even behaved like a student in front of *Shaykh* Ibrāhīm al-Yaqūbī who as younger than him.

An example of his faithfulness to his *shuyūkh* was that ever since *Shaykh* Yūsuf al-Nabhānī passed away he used to complete the entire Qurān in the month of Ramadan after which meals were served to the people. The reward of this was transferred to *Shaykh* Yūsuf.

Shaykh ‘Arif ‘Uthmān (1289-1385=1872-1965)

Shaykh ‘Arif was the next person who influenced *Shaykh* Aḥmad. *Shaykh* ‘Arif was a person who had dedicated his life to the Prophet Muḥammad. In addition he as fortunate to have studied under:

- *Shaykh* Yūsuf al-Nabhānī. He made a vow that all his books be used to promote the illustrious *sīra* of the Prophet Muḥammad and to encourage them to love him.
- *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn Jafar al-Kettānī. He revived the love for the Prophet Muḥammad in the land of Shām. When the Prophet's name was mentioned he trembled and the reverence for the Prophet as clearly visible on his face.

Shaykh Salīm al-Ḥamāmī mentioned that whenever *Shaykh* 'Arif's watch stopped functioning he merely offered greetings and salutations on the Prophet Muḥammad and the watch worked.

Shaykh 'Arif is the person who initiated gatherings and sessions dedicated to offering salutations on the Prophet every Monday. They used to recite 100 000 salutations on the Prophet after which they recited the ode (*qasīda*) of *Shaykh* Yūsuf al-Nabhānī and the ode known as al-Muḥammadiyya by Imām al-Buṣayrī. The reward was transferred to the Prophet Muḥammad. Thereafter they recited the story of the *mawlid* (blessed birth of the Prophet Muḥammad). Thereafter they all stood while repeating the great name (Allah, Allah) according to the Shādhli etiquette. Some of the very righteous and devout scholars used to attend these gatherings. Among them were; *Shaykh* Muḥammad al-Hāshimī, *Shaykh* Sa'id al-Burhānī, *Shaykh* Yahyā al-Ṣabbagh, *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ṣalāhī and *Shaykh* Muḥammad Wafā al-Qaṣṣāb.

Shaykh 'Arif was succeeded by *Shaykh* Sa'id al-Burhānī who in turn requested that none other but *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Ḥabbāl succeed him.

Shaykh 'Arif Uthmān also performed Hajj about thirty times.

Shaykh Aḥmad adhered to the teachings of his *shuyūkh* and followed the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad in all aspects. He inherited this love, affection and attachment to the Prophet Muḥammad from his *shuyūkh* whom he always spoke about and many times tears were seen rolling down his cheeks as he remembered them or even their families. The 'ulama mention that the Moroccans attain high levels of spirituality (*wilāya*) by exerting themselves in devotion (*mujāhada*) while the scholars in the east attain this level through serving their *shaykhs* (*khidma*). *Shaykh* Sharīf had two such persons; *Shaykh* Aḥmad served him in his household chores and *Shaykh* Sa'id al-Aḥmar served him in his business. Both of them were eventually regarded as *awliyā*.

Shaykh Aḥmad was kind and compassionate to the poor and weak and he accepted their invitations.

So we can safely say that the persons who had the greatest and most profound influence on him were; his father, *Shaykh* Ṣāliḥ (1961); then the fact that he accompanied the illustrious and devout muḥaddith, *Shaykh* Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī, the saintly scholar, *Shaykh* Sharīf al-Ya'qūbī and *Shaykh* Sharīf 'Uthmān.

Shaykh Aḥmad was a true Prophetic heir in his attachment to the Prophet Muḥammad. This is in addition to the fact that his genealogy linked him to *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Rifāi' and ultimately to the Prophet Muhammad. This is supported by the various dreams seen about him herein people were informed that he was the Prophet's representative in the land of Shām. One of the reasons for having attained this position was because he accompanied people who had reached this level. He continued revering and honoring his *Shaykhs* throughout his life. This is an explanation of what the Ṣufi's say: "None will succeed except through the company of those who have succeeded." Another important aspect is that he did not align himself to one particular group. Therefore the people of Syria all were part of his group and this was apparent in the thousands that emerged for his funeral.