

WAYS UNTO HEAVEN



By Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853-1927)
The African Muslim Leader of Nonviolence

English Translation and Commentaries by
Abdoul Aziz Mbacke

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(*Masālik-ul-Jinān*)

By



SHEIKH AHMADOU BAMBA
(1853-1927)

The African Muslim Leader of Nonviolence
And Founder of the Muridiyya
(Senegal, West Africa)

English Translation and Commentaries by

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"Bamba's sacred literary legacy remains for the most part untranslated into Western languages from Arabic and Wolof. The total number of works on Bamba in English are relatively few, even though, as David Robinson writes, Bamba became one of the most outstanding poets and mystical leaders of the last 100 years...Further study into the contribution Bamba made in the cultural and spiritual revival of his people will demonstrate the significance his universal message and nonviolent struggle has for attaining peace in the world today."

Michelle R. Kimball



Sheikh Muhammad Mourtada Mbacke,
son of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, reading the Qur-ān

Preface

I wish to dedicate this work to the late Sheikh Muhammad Mourtada Mbacke, who never spared any efforts and any pains to spread peacefully the true word of Islam throughout the world, in spite of his old age. This translation is the right outcome of his work. Thank you *Goor Yàlla*.

I wish also to acknowledge all who contribute in whatever form to the publication of this book. May they all be eternally rewarded thereof by the Almighty Lord.

This book was written in Arabic by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba during his thirties, before he became famous, owing to 33 years of tense relationship with the French colonial authorities. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is an African Muslim Sufi master, born in 1853 in Senegal (West Africa), during French colonization, just after the official abolition of slavery in the colonies. He was born into a renowned Muslim clerical family, the Mbacke, well-known for their deep-rooted attachment to learning and teaching religious knowledge. Islam had then nearly a thousand years of history in Senegal.

Showing precociously gifted inclination towards learning and imitating the noble devout Sufis he heard about, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba started, in his early youth, to write books devoted to the fundamentals of religious knowledge any believer is compelled to know—Islamic Law (*Fiqh*), Theology (*Tawhīd*), Spiritual education (*Tarbiyya*), Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) etc. His high concern to preserve and to spread in an easier form true knowledge and the valuable Islamic principles among his people led him to put in verses many of the reference prose books of that time he found too hard-learning for most of his contemporaries. *Masālik-ul-Jinān* (Ways unto heaven) belongs to this category of books.

During the years following *Masālik*, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba founded the first Muslim brotherhood ever been founded by a black

man in all Islamic history (the Muridiyya) and settled new forms of teaching he thought more suitable to his disciples and more likely to rekindle their human dignity depreciated by long years of political and intellectual domination. Many from all around the country, from all social classes, came to join the revival movement he initiated through teaching and worshipping God in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH) and with the rules of Sufism. Thanks to his charismatic virtues and to the spiritual lights his disciples were shining, his reputation soon expanded and crowds towards his *daaras* (schools) fast took larger proportions.

Such a trend aroused a libelous campaign against Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, from some native colonial representatives, and provoked strong mistrust to the French colonial power who suspected him of preparing his disciples to *Jihad* (holy war). This bias was all the most unfair if we consider the nonviolent philosophy of the Sheikh as well as his concept of *Khidma* (Rendering Service to the Prophet) which excluded any violence, even against the vilest creature. Indeed the kind of spiritual and intellectual *jihad* the Sheikh was carrying on was quite different from all what was known by western people about Muslim leaders' resistance. The Sheikh wrote on this purpose: **"I am waging my Jihad through Knowledge and Fearing the Lord"**. However, regardless of such kind of concern, the colonial authorities decided to arrest and deport him to Gabon (Central Africa), in September 1895. After eight years of a very trying exile, during which the Sheikh wrote, in loneliness, an impressive number of poems all dedicated to the Lord and His Messenger (PBH), the French decided to let him go back home, in November 1902. But, in fearing his growing charisma over the masses aroused by his success, they exiled him again to Mauritania, afterwards they maintained him in house arrest in Senegal until his death in 1927. However history proved later that colonial strategies of "containment" did not succeed in holding back Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's teachings and work from shaping deeply the thoughts and the culture of his nation and of millions of people all around the world.

Abdoul Aziz Mbacke
Touba, January 2009

Abbreviations used

d. = date of death.

h. = year of the Hijra (the beginning of Islamic Calendar);
usual subsequent date put in brackets represents the
corresponding year in Christian calendar.

p. = page.

Qur-ān xx. 25 = *Sūrah* 20, Verse 25 of the Holy Book.

Cf. = compare.

PBH = Peace and Blessings be upon Him (the Prophet).

lit. = literally.

“The Sheikh” and “the Servant of the Prophet” refer to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Transcription of Wolof and Arabic nouns follows sometimes the usual forms better known.

Trandator's note

Indeed translating the *Masālik* was not an easy task inasmuch as the allusive style imposed by the constraints of versification made it sometimes very arduous to render accurately into perfect English the basis of the original Arabic text. Fortunately, a previous French translation of this book has already been performed in 1979 by the late Serigne Sam MBAYE (God be Satisfied with him) who did so the spadework regarding equivocal references; which contributed much to facilitate our undertaking. (May the MERCIFUL LORD reward him for his immense contribution and his providing light to many who committed themselves in the Kingly Path towards the Lord.)

However purist readers of the original Arabic text may be sometimes disconcerted by some "liberties" we happened to take with it as far as certain particularly arduous passages were concerned, or when we came across verses which, in our opinion, couldn't be fully understandable for a Western trained mind without taking particular classification standards. Here are some of such reorganization measures we decided to adopt to make our text easily readable:

□ We have decided to publish this translation in two forms:

1. A digital complete version which include 4 parts corresponding to

- The preamble of *Masālik* (660 verses)
- The two first chapters: The Creatures (211 verses) and The Serious Vices (216 verses)
- The third chapter: Muslim Ethics (*Adab*) (476 verses)
- Two Appendixes (relating to the main points of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's biography and the holy city he founded (Touba)), four annexes including the biographies of the

authors quoted in the *Masālik*, and the references of our quotations

You can access this complete version at this URL
www.majalis.org/masalik.

2. This lightened book version which includes all the 3 first above-mentioned parts except few sections dealing with particular acts of worship or phrases of invocations liable to burden somewhat a reader not familiar to Islamic spirituality enough.

□ We have followed the original subdivision of the book into chapters and sections even if we have added now and then other divisions liable to show better the logical linking of certain parts

□ The verses are numbered (as in the French translation) although we happened at times to group together some adjacent verses which relate intimately to the same theme

□ To avoid letting the usual digressions of religious poems (pleas, calling for blessings, harangues and so) distract the reader from the main point of the text, we have chosen to skip them or to write such parts in italics.

Example:

72- [I beseech my LORD] in the name of our Beloved Prophet Aḥmad, the Accredited Intercessor - *may Peace and Blessings be ensured, for aye, to him*

□ Every time we came across neighboring verses among which one is the necessary complement of the others, we added suspension points before the completing verse.

Example:

73- *...As to his Family, his Companions and all that will follow in his footsteps, till the Day of Trials*

□ As for obvious quotations, we put them in italics and in bold.

Example:

54- Do call to thy remembrance, thou that art scorning my work, this Prophetic maxim (*hadith*): "My community is like a rain, [no one knoweth which part thereof is the best; the first part or the last part]"

□ GOD's Attributes and Fine Names are in capital letters (as a sign of awe and veneration); as for words which relate to Eminent Figures of Islam we just put their first letters in capital.

□ We have also tried to go a bit farther than the French translation as far as footnotes are concerned. So one can find in this work many notes likely to clarify certain points or to show the pertinence of some maxims according to the Holy Book and various accredited sources. Naturally any who would find it laborious to always refer to footnotes and would content himself with the text itself (so as to lose not the thread) may well disregard these.

□ A certain number of diagrams and annexes have been attached to the digital version, so as to give a synoptic view of some particular questions.

We are infinitely indebted to the admirable Interpretation of the Qur-ān performed by Yusuf Alī, for its concern about construing in accessible and accurate English many Islamic concepts and notions. Thus, as one may notice it, did we not deny ourselves imitating sometimes its "religious" and classical style (whose beauty has also the virtue to contrast holy writings with secular writings) while trying however to avoid overusing ancient English forms liable to cumbersome such a style for modern readers.

Thus, we make ours, with due allowances, this preface of Yusuf Ali to the first edition of his famous English translation of the Qur-ān in 1934:

"Gentle and discerning reader! what I wish to present to you is an English Interpretation... The English shall be, not a mere substitution of one word for another, but the best expression I can give to the fullest meaning which I can understand from the Arabic Text. The rhythm, music, and exalted tone of the original should be reflected in the English interpretation.

It may be but a faint reflection, but such beauty and power as my pen can command shall be brought to its service. I want to make English itself an Islamic language, if such a person as I can do it, and I must give you all the accessory aid which I can."

However, we do humbly admit that rendering quite rigorously the content of *Masālik* (for lack of its admirable form) is a pretence we are far from claiming to achieve. Future editions will be in charge of correcting possible mistakes and noticed misconceptions. So if there are any mistakes or misinterpretations in the text we put forward here, we do beseech our BOUNTIFUL LORD - the MOST MERCIFUL of those who show Mercy - to grant us His Pardon and not to call us into account thereof in the Hereafter, HE Who said:

"O My Servants who have transgressed against your souls! Despair not of the Mercy of GOD for GOD forgives all sins. He is OFT-FORGIVING, MOST MERCIFUL."

(Qur-ān xxxix. 53)

But as for any single verse whose English construction doesn't run counter its basic meaning, we do praise thereof the SUPREME HELPER and do we say after the Blessed!:

"And they shall say: 'Praise be to GOD, Who has guided us to this (felicity). Never could we have found guidance, had it not been for the Guidance of GOD.' "

"And the end of their prayer will be:

'Praise be to GOD, the CHERISHER and SUSTAINER of the Worlds!

'"

¹ Qur-ān vii. 43 and x. 10

Transliteration of Arabic words and names

ا	a	ض	d
ب	b	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	th	ع	'
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	h	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	هـ	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ي	y

Short Vowels		Long Vowels	
َ	a	ا	ā
ِ	i	ى	ī
ُ	u	و	ū

However, we write sometimes some words in the spelling forms commonly accepted.

Glossary

Adab: Ethics which implies as well an idea of correctness with people as that of reverence of the Lord.

At-Taṣawwuf (Sufism): translated sometimes as “Muslim Mysticism”, it describes schematically a trend of Muslim masters who theorize the purification of the heart and of the soul, so as to attain God’s “Neighborhood”.

Dhikr: remembrance of God and assiduous repetition of His Fine Names.

Hadīth: maxim or story reported from the Prophet (PBH).

Haḍratu-l-Lāh: God's “Neighborhood” the worshipper is aiming to attain.

Haqīqah: knowledge of deeper realities dealing with inner spiritual states and other mystical considerations.

Ijma': consensus of the doctors of Islamic law who adopt unanimously the same juridical award (*fatwa*) on a particular question.

Khādimu-r-Rasūli Lāh: the Servant of the Prophet (PBH), the spiritual title of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Murīd: GOD-seeker, disciple who aspires to get nearer the LORD under the guidance of a spiritual master (*Shaykh* or *Sheikh*); commonly the followers of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Murīdiyya (or Muridism): The *tarīqa* (brotherhood or order) founded by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Nāfila (plur.: *Nawāfil*): optional prayers which are strongly recommended by Islamic Law although their being not mandatory.

Rak'a: division of the prayer; most prayers are made up with 2 or 4 rak'a.

Ṣalāt alā Nabī (plur.: *Ṣalawāt*): Calling for Blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (PBH).

Shari'a: Islamic law.

Sheikh: spiritual master (however when we say "the Sheikh" without any other particular we are referring to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba).

Shirk: assigning partners to God Most High; the opposite of *Tawhīd*.

Ṣūfi: who that puts into rigorous practice the principles of Sufism.

Sunnah: acts and maxims of the Prophet (PBH) any Muslim has to comply with.

Sūrah (plur. *Surā*): a chapter of the Qur-ān.

Tarīqa (plur. *Turūq*): Islamic brotherhood or Sufi order.

Tawhīd: deep faith and certainty in God's Unity (also knowledge which deals with such a theme).

Wird: set of pleas, of Koranic verses and of various invocations any member of a *tarīqa* (Sufi brotherhood) has to repeat a certain number of times everyday.

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IN THE NAME OF GOD, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL

May GOD bestow His Peace and His Blessings upon our Master
Muḥammad.

"Whoever expects to meet his LORD, let him work righteousness and,
in the worship of his LORD, admit no partner"
(Qur-ān xviii. 110)

GOD is my LORD and I assign Him no partner.

There is no Power, no Means but in Him.

O my LORD! Rank us amongst those who really fear Thee, those
whose deeds Thou acceptest.

Never rank us among "*those whose efforts have been wasted in this life,
while they thought that they were acquiring good by their works*" (Qur-ān
xviii. 104).

And deprive not us of the reward of this versified work or that of any
other deed, by the name of our Noble Master Muḥammad,

May he be granted Peace and Blessings.

Foreword

IN THE NAME OF GOD, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL

1- As an [humble servant] named **Aḥmad Al-Mbackiyu**, and as the disciple of my father² - *may GOD, the ETERNAL ABSOLUTE, let him enter the loftiest Paradise*

2- *...In the company of any sincere Muslim and all who profess that worship must exclusively be devoted to the Only GOD - Amen*

3- I begin in praising GOD, Who requires from us genuine deeds and compliance with the rules of Ethics (*Adab*)³,

4- He Who looks at our inner heart and at our spiritual qualities but not at our mere external appearances

5- Then be Peace and Blessings upon [the Prophet] who that shall intercede for us in the Hereafter,

6- Who that is adorned with the virtues of rectitude and that is free from any peril-leading vice:

7- ...[The Holy Messenger named] **Muḥammad**, who has relieved us of pain. [May such Peace and Blessings be granted as well] to his Family, his Companions and all the Muslim Community

² Until his father's death - during the month of *Muḥarram* 1300 h. (1882-83) - the Sheikh Aḥmadu Bamba considered himself and behaved strictly as the humble disciple of his father who taught him in the past. So had he the habit to introduce himself in such terms in all the books he composed during their coexistence and during the period succeeding his father's death.

³ The word *Adab* (Ethics) implies, in Mystics' language, as well an idea of politeness and *savoir-vivre* with people as an idea of reverence and "propriety" vis-à-vis the LORD through our everyday attitude (Cf. Chapter III); what are considered by Sufis as the highest standards of real « ethics »..

8- And may that so be as long as any who strives hard against Satan, his basic drives and his lust will gain one day [right to dwell aye in] Heaven

9- And as long as whosoever endeavours to cleanse his soul of any vice will gain Divine Light and achieve GOD's Satisfaction

10- And as long as any who devotes not himself entirely to this present life will get closer to GOD, the Ultimate Truth



11- Thereupon, do know that the Science of GOD's Unity (*At-Tawhīd*) may be divided into two sorts; so does it exist two kinds of *Tawhīd*

12- * The first one is just verbal, consisting in a oral profession of faith
* Whereas the second one consists in true knowledge [of GOD's Attributes] and in deep understanding⁴

13- The first sort is quite widespread [among believers] whilst the second one is reserved [to just few chosen people]

14- As regards that which is widespread we have already consecrated thereto a previous work put into verses⁵

⁴ For the Masters a distinction has to be made between (1) the profession of GOD's Unity uttered by the common of Believers and (2) that of the Elite of the True Knowers which results from their factual experience of the unique basis of the Creation.

⁵ This is a reference to a former book called *Mawāhibu-l-Qudūs* (The Gifts granted by [GOD], the HOLY ONE) consecrated by the Sheikh to the basic elements of theology any Muslim has to know.

15- [Taking up in fact] a former book written in prose by As-Sanūsī, a great-grand-son of the Messenger

16- *May GOD be Satisfied with [As-Sanūsī] and impart to [the Prophet] Peace and Blessings as great as the number of existing creatures-*

17- As regarding that which is reserved [to the Elite], we are going to devote this present versified work thereto

18-[Nonetheless do realize that] the Virtuous [Masters] have already written thereof books of merit which are all endowed with secrets [of benefit]

19-Such as our Sheikh, the renowned Regenerator [of Islam], the Great Imam Al-Ghazālī⁶, such as the Eminent Ibn 'Ata Lāh

20-Such as our Master Sīdi Mukhtār, related to the Kuntiyu family, who that is endowed with Pure Lights, the *Ghawth*⁷ of the creatures, the Eminent *Qutb*,

21- Such as our Sheikh named Muhammad [Kuntiyu], the Caliph leant on the Truth coming from the LORD of the creatures

22- Such as our Sheikh Muḥammad, related to the Deymani tribe, the great commentator of the Qur-ān

23- And others amongst the honorable Masters- *may GOD gather us with them on the Resurrection Day-*

⁶ For information about the authors mentioned by the *Sheikh*, refer to the biographical annex (Tome IV, at www.majalis.org/masalik).

⁷ The notion of *Ghawth* (Supreme Rescuer) and that of *Qutb* (Spiritual Pole) are closely connected with the technical vocabulary of *Tasawwuf* (Muslim Mystics). Each period is spiritually under the leadership of a Saint (*Ghawth*) assisted by another Saint (*Qutb*) chosen among the August Congregation of Godly Men. These Spiritual Degrees may be held concurrently.

24- Nevertheless their works, due in part to their voluminous sizes, are neglected by most of the people of this generation

25- As for me, I have chosen to put in verse Al-Yadālī's prose book [The Seal of Sufism] relying only on the Help of GOD, the SUPREME HELPER

26- Because that book embodies verily the *Seal of Sufism* inasmuch as it gathers everything that has been written previously by the Virtuous Ancients thereon

27- I composed thereof a work which contains remedies for any such whose heart has been dulled by earthly lusts [so as to make it spiritually ill]

28- ...And verses which enable to improve the spiritual state of any novice or even experienced person, naturally if he is not filled with jealousy

29- For an envious person shall never profit from the advantages imparted to his contemporary and never shall he follow him

30- And nothing would ever rejoice him but learning that latter's sudden death!

31- *May GOD protect us from a jealous and from any evil caused by an enemy filled with hatred or by a denier*

32- I have revived in this book the lights of knowledge people have rendered dead letter in their errant ignorance

33- Hoping to be granted as a reward, for my brother Al-Yadālī and I, lofty degrees in Paradise

34- Therewith, I do solicit prayers from all who will cast their eyes over [our book], or that will leaf through it and mostly from any who will read it [entirely]

35- May any that will cast a glance over it intend for us the Most Excellent Prayers ever been meant for a servant

36- For prayers are, of a certain, beneficial as well to the dead in the grave as to the living and [there is no doubt about their] entailing Reward

37- I have entitled this book "*Masāliku-l-Jinān*" (**WAYS UNTO HEAVEN**) based on Al-Deymani's⁸ prose work "

38- Because I put in verse here everything Al-Deymani has made mention of in his book called *Khātimatu-t-Taṣawwuf* (The Seal of Sufism)

39- And I have drawn afterwards further useful complements liable to enhance the merit of [The Seal of Sufism] from another book entitled *A-Dhahabu-l-Ibrīz* (The Pure Gold)⁹

40- I have also happened to add other developments quoted from other books different from both of these so as to supplement their contents

⁸ The Sheikh happens sometimes to mention Al-Yadālī under the name of *Al-Deymani* (the member of the Deyman tribe) according to the habit consisting in assigning a person the name of his tribe or people.

⁹ This book has not to be mistaken, as did Fernand Dumond in *La Pensée Religieuse d'Amadou Bamba* (Nouvelles Editions Africaines, Dakar 1975), with another book entitled *Kitab-al-Ibriz min Kalam Sayd 'Abd-al-'Aziz Al-Dabbagh*. This latter was written in 1119 h (about 1709) by Aḥmad ibn Al Mubarak a Moroccan disciple of the prestigious 'Abd-al-'Aziz Al-Dabbagh, a Saint belonging to the Tijāni *tarīqa*. That book was known as the "livre de chevet" of the West-African Tijāni. As for *A-Dhahabu-l-Ibrīz* (The Pure Gold) it was written by Al-Yadālī.

41- Such as *Ihyā Ulūmi-d-Dīn* (Enlivening Religious Knowledge) [by the famous Imam Al-Ghazālī] and *Junatu-l-Murīd* (The Shield of the GOD-seeker) of our eminent Master [Sīdi Mukhtār Kuntiyu]

42- Therein whenever I shall happen to write "*he said*" with no further particulars do infer that I am quoting Al-Ghazālī, the famous [Master]

43- But as regarding [quotations from] any other author amongst these Noble Sheikhs, I shall mention explicitly his name

44- And whenever you see the phrase "*I say*", do know that it would be an inference I have drawn from their texts

45- Thence everything that is in this book is authentic; so have faith in it and do follow its recommendations

46- And may not my low renown in this generation¹⁰ divert thee from giving credit to this pious deed!

47- And never be dissuaded from holding this book in due regard by my belonging to the black race

48- For [as quoted from the Book] the most honorable human being before GOD is who that fears HIM the most, without any possible doubt,¹¹

49- So black skin does not imply insanity or ill understanding

50- O thou that art shrewd! Never neglect my verses on the [alleged] pretence that I do not apply their contents

¹⁰ During that period, the young Sheikh had not yet gained his tremendous fame.

¹¹Cf. Qur-ān xlix. 13: "*Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of GOD is (he who is) the most righteous of you.*"

51-And do not grant the Virtuous Ancients the exclusive prerogative of the Favors bestowed by GOD - *wouldst thou then be led astray*

52- For it happens sometimes that a man living in *modern times* know secrets which were ignored by men living in *ancient times*

53-As goes the saying: "*Drizzle may well precede pouring rain, however pouring rain is far better to the crops than drizzle*"

54- O thou that art scorning my work! Do call to thy remembrance this Prophetic maxim (*hadith*): "My community is like a rain, [no one knoweth which part thereof is the best; the first part or the last part]"

55- I have composed these verses in the sole order to serve my Muslim Brethren, hoping to obtain thereby the Satisfaction of GOD, the MOST GRACIOUS

56- And that is solely from GOD, my LORD, I solicit to accept my pious deeds and from Whom I seek the favour to attain my aim - HE is verily the MOST BOUNTIFUL LORD!

57- I also beseech HIM to grant His Oft-forgiveness, His Compassion and His Mercy to the entire Muslim Community, in the life here below as in the Hereafter

58- I do hope that HE will lead unto guidance any who reads this work - *HE is verily the MAJESTIC LORD Who holds grace for His devotees*

59- I also expect from HIM the favor of making these verses a shield from Blame for all their readers

60- And that this book may entail for us, once in the grave, Salvation from its trials and from the Panic of the Great Gathering Day

61- And that it bring to us, by Heavenly Mercy, the two Lights of the two Houses¹²

62- May also the MOST HIGH enhance our uprightness, our spiritual knowledge and our benefits through its recommendations

63- And that is solely with HIM I do seek safeguard from shortcomings and from Blame

64- And I hope from HIM the Fortitude to always act in conformity with the Tradition (*Sunnah*) of the Elected Messenger, the Best one in adoring the LORD

65- *May GOD impart Him Peace and Blessings as well as his Family, his Companions and all that have followed his footpath*

66- We seek refuge in GOD, in the name of [Muhammad], the Head of the Prophets, from the mischief of Satan, the Head of the damned

67- We seek His Safeguard from any rebelling creature and from the "*mischief of the envious as he practises envy*" (Qur-ān cxiii. 5)

68- We ask for His Protection from any sort of evil stemming from man's eye or man's tongue and from any harmful creature

69- From the MAJESTIC LORD that grants complete Satisfaction to any who makes longingly his way towards Him

70- ...I do solicit Salvation for any such that will read our book or that will meditate on its content

71- ...And for any that will acquire it, either in possession or through renting, and for any that will write it out or that will borrow it

¹²GOD's Guidance in this world and, in the Next Life, the Light provided to the Believers and about which the Qur-ān teaches (lxvi. 8): "*Their light will run forward before them and by their right hands (...)*"

72- [I beseech my LORD for this] in the name of our Beloved Prophet Aḥmad, the Accredited Intercessor - *may Peace and Blessings be ensured, for aye, to him*

73- ...As to his Family, his Companions and all that will follow in his in his footsteps until the Day of Trials



74- This work is made up with three main chapters preceded by a preamble; they have, nonetheless, to be considered altogether [as forming a whole]

75- □ The first chapter is devoted to the creatures and their respective relations with [GOD], enumerated and thoroughly examined [by the Masters]

76- □ The next one goes into human vices, those which are discernible or hidden, wherever they may be found

77- □ The third chapter deals with the rules of Ethics (*Adab*) and some beneficial practices of worship

78- Now that is time to enter the heart of the matter and, for such a purpose, GOD's Assistance do we beseech

79- So - after having first said the *Basmalah*¹³, rendered thanks to GOD, asked for Blessings upon the Prophet and testified that "*There is no Power, no Means but in GOD*" - do we say this

¹³The phrase "Bismi-Lāhi Raḥmāni Raḥīmi" (In the Name of GOD, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL) any Muslim is recommended to say before any action or undertaking.



Preamble

Preamble

80- According to the Masters, religious knowledge is divided into two kinds:

- Exoteric knowledge (*'Ilm Zāhir*)
- Esoteric knowledge (*'Ilm Bātin*)

81- Exoteric knowledge is in charge of improving human actions while esoteric knowledge deals with human spiritual moods and degrees

82- The first one is known under the name of *Fiqh* [Islamic Law] whilst the second one is called *Tasawwuf* [Sufism]

83- It behoves to any believer to comply first with the Rules of *Fiqh* prior to practising *Tasawwuf*

84- Thence whosoever disregards the Legal Rules of Worship (*Fiqh*) [and undertakes the practising of *Tasawwuf*] shall perish in this world by the sentence of the Doctors of the Law¹⁴

85- Any such who neglects the inner aspects of religion (*Tasawwuf*) shall perish in the Next World by the Will of the MAJESTIC LORD

¹⁴This concerns specially *Sūfis* who attained indefinable spiritual states so much so they gave up the Legal Rules of worship; the reason why public Islamic authorities had in the past to put them to death according to the Law. Refer to the famous case of the Mystic Mansur Al-Hajj (about 858-922), an ancient disciple of Al-Junayd, who turned away from Mystics' classical teachings and who undertook a life of wanderer between Persian provinces, preaching Love for GOD. Maintaining mystical junction with the LORD, he proclaimed publicly "I am the Truth!" (*Anna Al-Haqq*), which was considered as an usurpation of GOD's Supreme Power (*Shirk*), reason for which he was put into death by public authorities after 8-years' detention.

86- So it is considered as compulsory for any servant to combine respect for the established Rules of Worship [*Fiqh*] with concern for inner aspects [*Taṣawwuf*] so as to obtain reward

87- Know thou that who that conforms to the apparent modes of worship whilst giving no credit to inwardly considerations is assuredly a thorough rascal!

88- As for who that does quite the reverse [focusing on inner aspects so as to deny any importance to the external rules of worship], his case is ranked among the heretics'

89- But as regards who that succeeds in combining both of them [*Fiqh* and *Taṣawwuf*], that is a fine model [of balance] thou hast to pattern thyself upon

90- This award has been passed by the Imam Mālik¹⁵ - *may [GOD], the ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGN (Al-Mālik) impart him Mercy and be Satisfied with him*

91- Do know that knowledge and action (or theory and practice) are both the way unto Bliss, yea!

92- So devote resolutely thyself to both of them, do cleanse thyself of any failing and remain in absolute purity (*Iḥlās*)

93- Endeavour to always conforming to [seeking for godly knowledge and to putting it into practice], in sincerity and pure-heartedness - so shalt thou gain fine qualities

¹⁵The Imam Mālik ibn Anas (94-179 H.) was one of the four great founders of *Madhhāb* (Islamic Juridical Schools) inasmuch as he founded the Madinah Juridical School called also the *Malikite* School in which belongs Sheikh Aḥmadu Bamba.

94- ...And shalt be ranked amongst those who follow the Tradition of the Chosen [Prophet] - *be upon him Peace and Blessings from [GOD], the MAKER of the earth and the heavens*

95- ...As upon his Family, his Companions and all that are following in their footsteps and are taking them as models

96- Be thou steadfast in always fulfilling the hard actions relating to [knowledge and its putting into practice] and do flee from laziness!

97- Behave as thou wouldst do if thou knew that thy death was impending - as recommended [by the Holy Prophet]

98- If, in accomplishing such two principles, thou bear patiently the hardships befalling on thee during the short stay thou wilt spend on earth

99- ...Shalt thou, o my Dear Fellow!, obtain Salvation and dwell for aye in the Garden of Delight

100- Know however that far-reaching knowledge with many actions of worship while one is full of shortcomings [constitute an delusion]

101- However giving up both of them lest one should have one's effort besmirched by [unavoidable] failings, or their [absented-mindly] fulfilment without any true reverence in the heart, are among the most dangerous illusions

102- As for delaying one's repentance, lest one should relapse into similar sins, that is naught but a Snare of Satan, the Rebel

103- Do know, o my Brother!, that knowledge prevails over action, being its principle and root - *bliss to whom is endowed with it!*

104- Nevertheless, knowledge could not bear fruit and bring profit without its subsequent putting into practice; so try to combine both of them

105- Few actions based on definite knowledge will, of a surety, entail more Reward than a host of actions performed with ignorance

106- Useful knowledge [in the Hereafter] is just that which has been learnt and taught for the Sole Countenance of the MAJESTIC LORD, the ONE

107- But not that which has been learnt for superficial debates, making parade and searching for glamour¹⁶ - *know thou this!*

108- Nor that which has been acquired for worldly purposes as the liking for authority and high responsibilities

109- Nor that which has been got in order to fill people's hearts with admiration -*think thou about*

110- Whosoever makes a great effort to acquire [religious] knowledge for just such kinds of worldly purposes

111- ...And who repents not thereof before his death or his old age, and who tries not hard to make up for his errors of youth,

112- ...That one shall get, on the Day of Questioning and Reckoning, naught but Misfortune, Blame and Chastisement!

113- For his vast knowledge will become an argument against him on that Day; one has verily to fear such an argument

114- Useful knowledge is that which fills its bearer with Fear (*Taqwā*) of GOD, the CREATOR of the servants

¹⁶Cf. Qur-ān xl. 56: "*Those who dispute about the Signs of GOD without any authority bestowed on them, -there is nothing in their breasts but (the quest of) greatness, which they shall never attain to. Seek refuge, then, in GOD: it is He Who hears and sees (all things).*" Qur-ān vi. 68: "*When thou seest men engaged in vain discourse about Our Signs, turn away from them unless they turn to a different theme. If Satan ever makes thee forget, then after recollection, sit not thou in the company of those who do wrong.*"

115- That which inspires humility, asceticism, Ethics (*Adab*), self-effacement and the awareness of one's weakness [before GOD]

116- That which purifies the heart, helps in mastering the soul and prevents man from transgressing the Orders of the MAKER

117- As for such knowledge that has not these virtues, it can save no one from our LORD's Hell, yea!

118- Best [religious] knowledge is indisputably that which treats of Theology and GOD's Unity (*'Ilm Tawhīd*)

119- Come afterwards the Exegesis of the Qur-ān (*Tafsīru-l-Qur-ān*) and the Science of Prophetic Tradition (*Hadīth*) - as conveyed by *Al-Daymānī*

120- After these three [main disciplines] come Islamic Law (*Fiqh*)

121- ...And literary sciences serving as tools for these chief disciplines

122- Such as grammar, prosody, rhetoric, language and the like

123- The best deed one may performed is assuredly that which is liable to entail the most widely spread profit [to society] like knowledge

124- ...Which helps in removing ignorance and in keeping men far off mischief and which, moreover, is beneficial to any upright person

125- Or any action that helps to purify the heart, as trifling as it may appear, provided it is regularly and firmly accomplished - so put it the *Wise*

126- Or any act which is hard-doing for the Soul - as spending money [in GOD's Cause] for any miserly person

127- As fasting for the greedy one or discretion and good deeds concealment for any who is eager for celebrity and praises

128- The worst transgression is, most certainly, that which hardens the heart and makes it forget GOD's worship

129- The best *Dhikr* [GOD's Remembrance] a servant can perform is reading meditatively and thoroughly GOD's Holy Book [the Qur-ān]

130- A single verse read with thoughtfulness is indeed more beneficial than the heedless reading of the entire Book

131- And little does it matter that [such a reflective reading] is made during a prayer or with the Text before one's eyes, were it in a low or in a loud voice – [this last mode is however preferred] if one feels safe from ostentation¹⁷

132- Performance of *Nawāfil* (optional prayers) indoors is also credited with well-renowned advantages, mostly those accomplished in the night, particularly during its last part¹⁸

133- [O my Brother! know that] the greatest wish of the dead is coming back to life

134- ...So as to spend on earth were it only the slightest lapse of time and to perform a single good deed liable to entail some benefit for them once back to the Hereafter¹⁹

¹⁷ Cf. verses 306-316.

¹⁸ Night is traditionally divided into three parts; its last third is here implied.

¹⁹Cf. Qur-ān lxxxix. 21-24: "*Nay! When the earth is pounded to powder, and thy LORD cometh, and His angels, rank upon rank, and Hell, that Day, is brought (face to face), -on that Day will man remember, but how will that remembrance profit him? He will say: "Ah! Would that I had sent forth (good deeds) for my (future) life!"*

135- Thence do make the most of the rest of thy life, regretting past times [misused in trivialities] without adoring GOD, and race thou towards good deeds before it become too late!

136- Forget not to improve thy inmost heart [in keeping a watchful eye on thy defects]

137- Strive thou, o Dear Brother!, in always mastering thy senses and be among "those who take care of their breath"

138- For any time [as brief as] a human breath will be worth a precious jewel

139- ...With which one would be able to buy a Wondrous and Eternal Treasure [on the Last Day] - *wake thou up!*

140- Losing such a time without adoring [GOD] shall entail great loss on the Last Hour

141- But if ever thou spend it in transgressing [the Heavenly Orders], that is an irretrievable disaster - *do know it*

142/144- So devote thyself in reviving thy lifetime with

- Due fulfilment of Canonical Obligations (*Farā'id*) out of any heedlessness
- Accomplishment of voluntary deeds (*Nawāfil*)
- Regular fasting
- *Wird*²⁰ daily practice
- Remembrance and utterance of GOD's Holy Names (*Dhikr*)²¹
- Meditation on GOD's Signs (*Fikr*)²²

²⁰Practice consisting in regular repetition of a set of gathered verses and pleas taken from the Book and from other accredited sources (Cf. chapter devoted to *wird* (v. 267-298)).

²¹Practice consisting in repeating in reverence one of GOD's numerous Fine Names (*Asmāu-l-Husnā*) or other phrases of Glorification, of Praise and so (Cf. chapter devoted to *zikr* (v.299-408)).

²² Cf. verses 409-461.

- Spending in alms and in aid for the needy, just for the Satisfaction of [GOD], the SUPREME PROTECTOR

145-[Always perform good deeds], especially on the Favourite Days²³, in favour of thy kin and for the Men of Merit

146- Persevere in always acting with good intentions and never be weary thereof

147- Is likewise [held as valuable] conveying good tidings and joy to our fellow Muslims but not bad news or evil

148- Keep for thyself provisions [for Future Life] in regularly practising one of the accredited *wird*

149- ...Were it little, likely to be of some benefit for thee on the Day of Distress and Sorrow

150- Do make a point of performing it in purity and in discretion, without people knowing²⁴ - so wilt thou be praised on the Day of Rewarding

151- For most of the pious deeds openly accomplished will not be meritorious enough on that Day once disclosed

²³Friday, the Day of *Ashūrā* and so (Cf. verses 236-254).

²⁴Lest one should give way to ostentation.

True Knowledge

[a] admonitions and complement taken from
"A-Dhahabu-l-Ibrīz " (The Pure Gold) and from other
works

152- Satan, the Damned - I tell you - has deluded people; the reason why they continually concern themselves in only what will bring misfortune to them

153- They cease not seeking to know things devoid of any sort of benefit, neither in the grave nor during the Great Gathering of the Resurrection

154- They devote themselves to [worldly affairs] which are unable, on the Day of Anguish and Affliction, to ward off the Hellish Chastisement; they entirely throw themselves into heedlessness and pleasures

155- Is not any knowledge useful and - thence - all "learned" persons are not comparable

156- There are certain kinds of knowledge which harden the heart, which entail pride and the forgetting of the LORD

157- So will be amongst the "learned" persons many who will receive as a reward Tomorrow naught but ruin and reprimanding!

158- We may read [in this instance] in some Al-Hilālī's poem - *may GOD, that Who holds all Majesty, be Satisfied with him -*

159- "True knowledge is that which fills the heart with Fear of GOD, the ALL-KNOWER; any that is not endowed with such knowledge is a blameworthy ignoramus, of a certain!"

160- Will not be of any benefit - I tell you - such knowledge which has been learnt for the sole sake of being continually admired and praised by people

161- The same for that which has been acquired just for competition and rivalry - as a Pharisee would do

162- [Useful knowledge is] neither that which has been learnt [in order to be consecrated *Mufti*] so as to rush at *Fatwas* (juridical opinions) and awards likely to cause harm

163- Nor that which has been searched in aiming thereby to enslave one's brethren

164- Or knowledge with which man spends his whole time in sport and amusement - [*weigh ye up the relevance of these remarks*], o ye my Brethren!

165- Or that which fills the heart with envy, resentment, arrogance and going astray

166- Or that which incites unto animosity, controversies and endless verbal sparring

167- Or that which prompts unto presumptuousness, self-praising and aggressiveness

168- Or that which leads unto quarrelling, quick-temperance, deceitfulness and struggling

169- Or that with which one is aiming earthly goods through hoarding and denying [to spend on GOD's Cause] or that which incites unto vain chattering

170- Nay! Nay! But useful knowledge is that which shows first one's own failings to any that is endowed with it

171- That which drives unto patience, generosity, kindness, purity of worship and sense of decency

172- That which leads unto loving the Truth, spiritual retreat, meditation, contemplation and thought

173- Such knowledge which instils fine spiritual virtues and other discernible qualities

174- Such knowledge which inspires fear of GOD and which prompts unto putting one's entire trust in HIM; that which incites unto asceticism, unto well-founded hope²⁵ and withdrawing often from society so as to devote one's time to the LORD

175- Such knowledge which leads out of excessive desires and out of relying on the creatures [disregarding so their Very CREATOR]

176- Such knowledge which cures from jealousy, arrogance, going astray, hatred and self-conceit

177- And which encourages unto assisting and maintaining good relationship with one's Muslim brethren for the Sole Countenance of the ETERNAL-ABSOLUTE

178- Indeed thus is the true nature of knowledge: either does it lead unto uprightness who that is endowed with it or shall it unavoidably lead him down towards profound perdition

179- [Al-Ghazāli] added that: "Whosoever helps who that is seeking for knowledge, in his aim or in any of his worldly affairs,

²⁵Hope must be the right outcome of the effort made by a steadfast worshipper in GOD's Service, relying on His Infinite Mercy, but not a self-deluding feeling one cherishes without turning in the least aside from sinning...

180- "...Will share with him aught he might be imparted as a reward, just the way any such that knowingly sells a sword to a brigand should be involved in the crimes perpetrated by this one."

181- Knowledge does not consist in a great number of reports and quotations, nay! but that is a Pure Light brightening with true understanding the heart [of whom that is endowed with]²⁶

182- Thence do seek thereby the only Countenance of the MAJESTIC - o thou Dear Fellow! – so permanent delights shalt thou be granted

183- Indeed any who fears not the LORD of the Worlds is far from being "learned"; had he mastered all the branches of knowledge!

²⁶Cf. Qur-ān viii. 29: "O ye who believe! If ye fear GOD, He will grant you a Criterion (to judge between right and wrong)."