

"WAHABISM EXPOSED!"

Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al Wahhab

Hidaayah Islamic Foundation [Sri Lanka]

In the first half of the twelfth century (Hijra) the Islamic World had reached its extreme decline, degradation and utter fall. The atmosphere was very gloomy and darkness had covered all its regions. Moral degradation and corruption was rampant everywhere. As for religion it was decadent as everything else. The pure and austere monotheism (TAWHEED) of the Prophet (sal) had become corrupted with the burgeoning growth of superstition and mysticism. The mosques stood empty, unfrequented and even deserted. The ignorant multitude decked out in amulets, charms and rosaries listened to and blindly followed squalid faqeers and ecstatic dervishes. These men urged them to perform pilgrimages to the tombs of Saints and seek their intercession with Allah. As for the moral precepts ordained by the Qur'an they too were ignored as well as defied. Even the consumption of intoxicants and opium were well nigh universal. In all certainty the life had been bulldozed out of Islam, leaving behind naught but a dry husk of meaningless ritual and degrading superstition.

The period of the Pious Predecessors being already passed, innovations and superstitions cropped up and vastly mushroomed. The people went back to their old practices of idolatry. They started paying homage to shrines and graves, so much so that they even directed their devotional prayers and supplications towards the graves to the exclusion of Allah. They gave precedence to the philosophical views and taqleed (blind following) over the Sunnah. They divested Allah of His essential attributes by making false interpretations on the Qur'anic texts.

But, all praises to Allah, no generation, persistently beset with innovations and abominable Shirk was ever devoid of sincere reformers who revived the faith to its pristine purity. In such darkest hour, a voice came crying out of the vast Arabian desert, the cradle of Islam, calling the faithful back to the true path, the one and only way - the Qur'an and the Sunnah. That was the great Mujaddid and puritan reformer, the celebrated Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who kindled a fire, which spread and engulfed the remotest corners of the Muslim World, purging Islam of its decadence and reviving the fervor of days gone by. The morning of reformation had dawned and the great re-awakening of the Islamic world had begun.

This peaceful, religious, revivalist movement of the Sheikh was obnoxious to the Turks and others for more reasons than one. They tried to crush this movement by force. They even killed some of the leaders, but could not destroy the movement outright. The movement lived on and is now growing all over the world. Everywhere in the Muslim world we are witnessing, the raising of the banner of Tawheed and the revival of the Call to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

All around the Muslim world, we see some Muslims, individually and collectively proclaiming the Call to

Tawheed and the return to the Qur'an and Sunnah in the face of opposition by the 'Saint-worshippers', 'Grave-worshippers', 'the Sufis' and the 'Tariqat followers'. These deviant groups

all purport or make the false claim to be Ahl us Sunnah wal Jam'aah and label the true callers to The Sunnah as 'Wahhabis'

In view of the ignoble and false propaganda mounted against the reformatory movement of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab and the derogatory use of the word 'Wahhabi' for the movement and its followers, we will Insha Allah in the course of this booklet, give a short account of the important events of his life and salient features of his creed and of his works.

HIS LIFE STORY

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab ibn Sulaiman ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rashid al Tamimi was born in the year 1115 A.H.(1703 C.E.) in 'Ayina to the north of Riyadh, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the reign of Abdulla ibn Muhammad ibn Hamd ibn Muammar. He excelled over his contemporaries in intelligence and physique and was able to commit the Quran to memory by the time he was ten years old. His father found him capable of leading the congregational prayers and decided to get him married that year.

He studied the Hanbali Jurisprudence, Tafsir and Hadith from his learned father. During his childhood itself, he directed his full attention to the books on Tafsir, Hadith and Aqidah and particularly to the writings of Sheik al Islam Ibn Taimiya and Ibn al Qayyim and made a deep study of them.

He left his native town to perform the Hajj and then proceeded to Madinah. At that time Sheikh Abdullah bin Ibrahim ibn Saif belonging to the progeny of Saif Najdi was chief of the scholars of Madinah. Sheikh Muhammad acquired a good deal of knowledge from him and came to be loved and held in high esteem by his teacher. His strong stand on Thawheed and his deep concern over false beliefs and evil deeds brought about a strong bond between the Sheikh and his teacher. He was so impressed by his student that Sheikh Abdullah granted him permission of narrating well-known hadiths of two of the authorities. Firstly on the authority of Ibn Muflih reporting from Sheikh Ibn Taiymiyah and reaching up to Imam Ahmad. Secondly on the authority of Abd al Rahman bin Rajab, reporting from Ibn al Qayyim who narrated it from his teacher Sheikh ibn Taiymiyah reaching up to Imam Ahmad. Sheikh Abdullah also authorized him to narrate all the traditions reported by Sheikh Abd al Baqi Hanbali, the chief among the great teachers of his time. He also authorised him to narrate the traditions of the Sahih of Bukhari and the traditions of the Sahih of Muslim and commentaries of both, the Sunan of Tirmidhi, Nasa'ai, Abu Dawud, Ibn Maajah, the Muwatta of Imam Malik and the Musnad of Imam Ahmad.

During this time he came to know and benefited from the knowledge of other scholars such as Ali Afendi Daghestanee, Ismaeel Ajluni and others. Then he moved on to Nejd, Basra and Syria for the purpose of acquiring further knowledge. He stayed for a long time in Basra, where he pursued his studies under a number of renowned scholars, among whom Sheikh Muhammad Majmui was most prominent. During this time he compiled and published many valuable books on the topic of innovations, superstitions and the supplication to the dead ones in the graves. He supported his treatises with manifest evidence from the Quran.

The adherents of falsehood defamed, tortured and turned him out of Basra. They also

persecuted his teacher Sheikh Majmui. He left for the town of Zubair in the scorching heat of the summer and was almost dying of thirst, when Allah sent to him a man called Abu Hamidan. He found the Sheikh to be a man of learning and righteousness. So he mounted him on his animal and took him to Zubair. Sheikh Muhammad thought of going to Syria to quench his thirst for more knowledge, but soon fell short of provision and was compelled to return to Nejd. He arrived at Ahsa and stayed with the Sheikh Abdullah ibn Abd al Latiff Shafi'i and studied under him.

UN-ISLAMIC PRACTICES OF THAT TIME.

Sheikh Muhammad then went to Harimala, a village of Nejd because his father had transferred there and stayed with him. He devoted himself fully to the learning of Tafsir and Hadith, particularly the works of Skeikh ibn Taiymiyyah and Sheikh ibn Qayyim. This immensely increased his knowledge and insight and infused in his heart a spirit of determination and steadfastness. With his deep insight he could visualize all the un-Islamic notions and corrupt practices prevailing in Nejd and the countries he had visited. Even in Madinah, he saw people invoking the Prophet (sal) and making supplication to him. He decided to disseminate the True message of Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

The Sheikh found that Nejd was infested with corrupt beliefs and religious practices repugnant to the fundamentals of the True Religion. There were a number of graves in the Nejd area which were attributed to some of the Companions of the Prophet (sal). People visited these graves and invoked them for help in their hour of need. In Jubila they visited the grave of Zaid ibn Khattab and seeking relief for their needs. In Manfuha, people sought mediatiothrouga male palm-tree believing that a spinster, who pays a visit to it, soon gets married.

In Dariya there was a cave which people frequented. Similarly there was grave of Dirar ibn al Azwar in the valley of Ghabira. It was the same story as in Basra and Zubair where people worship idols of the pre-Islamic period. A similar sad state of affairs prevailed in Iraq, Syria Egypt and Yemen.

He compared all these practices in the light of the Quran and the practices of the Prophet (sal) and his Companions and found them far removed from and inconsistent with the religion and spirit of Islam. This was the sorry state of affairs not only with the people of Nejd but of other places as well, in the Muslim world.

CALL FOR REVIVAL OF PURE MONOTHEISM

The Sheikh found that the people had abandoned their faith, and the more he studied their deviations, the firmer he grew in his conviction and determination that Muslims should inevitably change themselves and tread the path of the Pious Predecessors. The hadiths of Prophet (Sal) say as follows:

1. 'You must necessarily tread the path of those who lived before you'.
2. 'The last hour shall not come, until some of the people of my Ummah begin to worship idols.'

3. 'Islam was born a stranger and shall return as a stranger in similar manner.'

Sheikh Muhammad had by now resolved to publicly declare unto his people that they had gone astray from the right path.

He started with his call to the people in the town of Harimala, and made it clear to them, that he called them only unto Allah. He reminded the people that everything should be for Allah alone and that they should give up their wrong beliefs and practices. This naturally led to a dispute and struggle with the people and even with his father, who had been led away by the false sayings of the deviated followers.

The Sheikh continued to pursue his cause undeterred by making speeches, writing as well as practically guiding the people. Eventually a good majority of his people accepted his views. His father and brother Sulaiman too were convinced after prolonged discussions. In the year 1153 A.H. his father Abd al Wahhab passed away.

After the death of his father the people openly accepted the call of the Sheikh and forsook their false notions. They responded to the call for a return to the Sunnah of the Prophet (sal) both in words and deeds.

During this time his town was dominated by two tribes both claiming leadership but none able to take full control and maintain justice. These tribes were in the practice of keeping slaves and indulged in every mischief and sin. When the Sheikh thought of admonishing them, they got wind of it and set upon him but were prevented by the timely action of some good people.

The Sheikh left Harimala for his native town Aйна, where his forefathers once lived and ruled. Here he met one Uthman bin Hamd bin Muammar, to whom he explained his reformist movement based on the Quran and Sunnah. He explained the significance of Thawheed and how much the beliefs and actions of the people differed from the true path. He told Uthman that if he would uphold the cause of Allah and his word, he would soon come to the leadership in Nejd and crowned with eternal bliss.

Uthman responded readily to the Sheikh's call. Here again the Sheikh urged the people to return to the worship of Allah only (Thawheed) and a strict adherence to the Sunnah of the Prophet (sal). The Sheikh managed to cut down trees that were being worshipped in the area. He succeeded with the help of Uthman, in bringing down the dome over the grave of Zaid ibn al Khattab. He also carried out the prescribed punishment for adultery on a woman who had confessed to it.

The Sheikh and his message came to be widely known, and his reputation spread far and wide and it also reached Sulaiman bin Muhammad bin Urai'ir, the Governor of Ahsa and the children of Khalid. This impudent and ignorant man sent a letter to Uthman bin Muammir saying, "this man who is with you is saying this and did that, and when you receive this letter slay him, if not we shall withhold your kharaj (revenue) which is with us in Ahsa." This was a tricky situation for Uthman. To oppose Urai'ir was too much for him. Fearing this threat and weak in his faith ibn Muammar ordered the Sheikh to be banished from his town.

The Sheikh left the town on foot escorted by a horseman through the desert in the scorching sun, with only the thought of Allah, until he reached Dariya as the guest of Abd al rahman bin Suwailim. Through ibn Suwailim most of the prominent people of Dariya came to know of the Sheikh. They visited him in secret and he explained to them the real meaning and the significance of Thawheed. Among those who visited the Sheikh were the two brothers of Prince Muhammad bin Saud. These two brothers after much discussion and tutoring by the Sheikh were enlightened. They explained to their brother prince Muhammad that Sheikh Muhammad was staying with Ibn Suwailim and that he was a blessing from Allah sent to them. They urged the prince to meet the Sheikh.

PRINCE MUHAMMED BIN SAUD ACCEPTS THE SHEIKH

Prince Muhammad accepted the suggestion and met the Sheikh. He invited the Prince to Thawheed saying that it was the message, with which all the Messengers were sent by Allah. He also drew the attention of the Prince to the polytheistic practices and notions prevalent among the people of the Nejd. He wished that the Prince should assume leadership of the Muslims. The prince acceded to the wish of the Sheikh and offered him all help and assistance to carry out his task. He also promised to adhere to the Sunnah of the Prophet (sal) to command the good and to prohibit the evil.

After the Sheikh had settled at Dariya, people began to throng to him from all sides even claiming kinship and accepting his Call. In the meantime Uthman ibn Muammar who exiled the Sheikh from his town came to know of Prince Muhammad's acceptance of Sheikh Muhammad and his message. Now Uthman very much regretted what he had done to the Sheikh.

Uthman ibn Muammar, accompanied by a large delegation came to Dariya and called on the Sheikh to tender their apologies. They requested the Sheikh to come back with them. He replied that it depended entirely on the wish of Prince Muhammad. Prince Muhammad refused to accede to their request and Uthman and his followers went back disappointed.

SHEIKH GAINS A FOLLOWING

Now people came in large numbers to the Sheikh, seeking pure knowledge without the adulteration of fables and falsehood. He explained to them the real meaning of "La ilaaha illallah" and its significance. He stressed the importance of the negation of all false deities and the affirmation of Allah and his attributes.

The Sheikh communicated with people of other cities and invited them to accept his call and join his movement in order to eradicate Shirk and all its abominable practices.

Some accepted while others rejected and some even ridiculed him and accused him of sorcery. He continued with his mission undeterred. The opponents exerted their utmost to rally their forces to destroy this nascent movement by any or all means. Sheikh Muhammad and the Prince had no alternative but to resort to the sword to defend this movement. This war went on for many years and village after village fell to the new alliance. Some opponents voluntarily began to accept them when they realized the true nature of the movement.

All the efforts by the misguided group to rally their forces to destroy this nascent movement by any means miserably failed. After the conquest of Riyadh in 1187 A.H. the Sheikh entrusted the governing of the people to Prince Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad bin Saud and devoted his time to worship, learning and teaching. Prince Muhammad and his son Abd al Aziz always consulted him before they undertook anything and he gave his ruling. After an arduous struggle and having reached his goal he passed away in Dhul Qa'dah of 1206.

BOOKS WRITTEN BY SHEIKH MUHAMMAD

The Sheikh was the author of a number of books, prominent among them being the celebrated KITAB AL TAWHID, which needs no introduction. The other books are Kashf al Shubuhah, Thalabat al Usul, Mukhtasar al-Sal-Nabawiyyah, Mukhtasar al-Insaaf, the Sharh al-Kabir fi'l Fiqh, the Nasihat al-Muslimin bi-ahadite Khatam al-Nabiyyin, Kitab al-Kabair, Ahadith al-Fitn and several other treatises and most of them were pertaining to the topic of Tawheed.

It is mentioned in the work Unwan al-Majid that the Sheikh had many pupils amongst whom were his sons who later became eminent scholars. His four sons Hussain, Abdullah, Ali and Ibrahim established schools close to their homes and taught the young students from Dariya and other places. The fifth son had not studied under him and had died in his youth.

Some of the students who benefited from his knowledge and rose to the position of Qadis and Muftis are as follows:

Sheikh Abd al Aziz bin Abdullah al Hussein al Nasim who was a Judge in the territory of Al Washm.

Sheikh Said bin Hijji who became Judge of Hauta of Bani Tamim,

Sheikh Abd al Rahman bin Nami, who became Judge of Aйна

Ahsa, Shaikh Ahmad bin Rashid al-Uraini the Qadi of Sudair.

The most notable student was Sheikh Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Abdul Latiff bin Abdul Rahman bin Hassan who was the grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia.

A SUMMARY OF THE STRUGGLE OF SHEIKH MUHAMMED

Due to the Sheikh's strong views on Tawhid he was a controversial figure throughout his life and after his death to this day. We will reproduce here some of his communications and excerpts of treatises he had written for the benefit of the readers. Here is what he wrote to al-Suwaidi one of the scholars of Iraq in reply to his letter:

"From Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to his brother in faith Abd al-Rahman ibn Abdalla- Peace be upon you and also the Mercy and the Blessings of Allah. To continue: I am pleased to receive your letter. May Allah make you one of the leaders of the pious people and also one of the missionaries calling people to the Religion of the Chief of the Messengers. I would like to inform you that I am by the Grace of Allah a follower of the Pure Religion and not a Mu'tadi(Innovator).

My Creed and Religion with which I obey Allah is the same Madhab as that of the Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'ah and as that held by the leaders of the Muslims such as the four celebrated leaders of law and their followers till the day of resurrection.

However, I have laid emphasis on faithfulness and sincerity in following the Religion of Allah. I have asked the people not to invoke the living and the dead from among the saintly and pious people seeking help. I have also advised them to avoid committing acts of SHIRK (associating other objects in the worship of Allah) while offering devotion to Allah in such matters like slaughtering for sacrifice, making vows, trusting in anyone or in Sujood (Prostration) and such other matters which are exclusively reserved for Allah alone. None is to be taken as a partner unto Allah may he be an angel or a prophet commissioned by him. It is he alone that all the messengers from the first to the last were ordered to obey and worship. This is the Madhab followed by the Ahl al Sunnah wal Jama'ah.

I have also told the people in clear words that the first and the earliest of people who introduced acts of SHIRK were the Rafidah (Shia extremists) who invoked Ali and others, seeking help for their needs and to rid them of their afflictions.

I hold an office in my town where people listen to me and obey me. This was disliked by some of the chief magnates of the town as what I said was against their traditions. I lead the people in the stipulated prayers and induce them to pay their Zakat and to perform other acts of devotion to Allah. I forbade them to indulge in RIBA, in drinking wine and all other intoxicants. The people opposed these corrupt leaders and rose against them. This is the Thawheed I have been commanded to preach. These mischievous magnates of the town began to ascribe different kinds of fabrications to me. The mischief flared up and they attacked us with all the armies of Satan, the cavalry and the infantry. They allege that I branded all the people as 'Kaafirs' except those who follow me and that I have solemnized their marriages in a wrong and illegal manner. I wonder how a sane man can think of and say such silly things. I however, declare myself free from such calumnies in the presence of Allah. Such talks can only emanate from the mentally deranged. In short whatsoever is mentioned about me- except that I invite them to Thawheed and prohibit them from committing acts of Shirk, is absolutely false."

MATTERS TO WHICH THE SHEIKH INVITED THE PUBLIC AND WHICH GOT HIM INTO DISPUTE WITH SOME OF THE ULEMAS:

1.Tawhid al-Ubudiya-

He explained to the people that Ibadah is nothing but exclusive obedience to Allah and compliance with His commands. This is a comprehensive term for everything that Allah loves and such words and deeds He is pleased with. The forms of Ibadah (Worship) which are to be offered to Allah alone are many, such as Salat (Prayers), Saum (Fasting), Zakat and Sadaqah, slaughtering of sacrificial animals, tawaf and invocation. He said that anyone who happens to direct any of these acts to anyone other than Allah becomes a Mushriq as Allah the Exalted says:

" And whoever invokes (or worships) besides Allah any other ilah (god) of whom he has no proof, then his reckoning is only with his Lord. Surely Al-Kafirun (the disbelievers in the Oneness of

Allah polytheists, pagans idolaters etc.) will not be successful." Al Quran 23:117

2. Tawassul –

This means a fervent plea and is of two types: the permitted and the prohibited. The permitted one is by means of faith and righteous deeds and the Glorious Names of Allah and his attributes. The prohibited one is entreaty using the name of the Messenger, pious people and saints. Here is what Allah the Exalted says:

"O you who believe! Be mindful of your duty towards Allah and seek the means of approach and strive in His cause as much as you can so that you may be successful." Al Quran 5:35

3. Journeying to Mosques on Pilgrimage -

He asked the people not to undertake any pilgrimages to mosques other than the three mosques as given in an authentic hadith.

"Do not undertake a journey but to the three mosques - the Sacred Mosque Makkah) my mosque (Madinah) and the further Mosque (Al Aqsa)."

4. Construction over graves, covering and decorating them etc. -

The Sheikh openly declared that to construct buildings over the graves is unlawful. So is to shroud the graves with beautiful coverings and decorating them. It is prohibited to burn candles over the graves or to set up stone inscriptions. He also declared that it is illegal to have custodians and caretakers of shrines. Visiting such places tantamount to idol worship and can lead to other prohibited actions such as kissing them and going round them. He supported his statements with numerous hadiths prohibiting such constructions, visiting them and praying in them. The Shaikh quoted the hadith of Abu 'l-Hayyaj al-Asadi whom Ali ibn Abi Talib asked:

"Should I not commission you with a duty with which the Messenger of Allah had commissioned me-to leave no statue but to crush it, and no grave raised above the surface of the ground but to level it down?"

5. Unity with respect of the Holy Names and Attributes of Allah-

On this the Sheikh held the views of the Pious Predecessors and the four celebrated teachers of law and others who held the same view, namely the affirmation and recognition of the Names and Attributes of Allah without employing Tamtheel (finding similarity with Allah's attributes) or Takeef. (e.g. To explain how Allah does some thing).

6. Innovations-

The Sheikh very much disliked and spoke out against innovations (Bida') especially:

1. The celebration and holding of gatherings on the Prophet's Birthday.
2. Making Dhikr and salawath before pronouncing the Adhan.

3. Verbally pronouncing the Niyyah (intention) particularly before Takbir Tahrim.
4. Recital of a hadith of Abu Huraira before the Khatib ascends the Minbar. (Pulpit)

The Sheikh also abhorred and condemned the innovated practices of Tariqas (Orders), Tawassuf (Mysticism) and other practices which have no authority or sanction either from the Messenger (sal) or from the Companion (R.A). Several Ulema had compiled works on this subject even before Sheikh Muhammad such as Ibn-Waddah, al-Turthushi and al-Shatibi on these abominable innovated practices and heretical actions.

This is a short biography of the best of reformers and the greatest of Mujahids and a renowned scholar of Islam, whom Allah blessed with deep insight. This reform movement was initiated by Sheikh Muhammad and not by Sheikh Abdul Wahhab. The correct name for this movement should have been "al-Muhammadiya" and not "al Wahhabiya". In the light of the above facts it is left to the reader to judge whether the Sheikh initiated a new madhab or was reviving the deen of the Prophet (sal), his noble companions and their successors.

Indeed all Praise and thanks be to Allah the Exalted, who has graced us with the favor of preparing this life sketch of the Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. May Allah be merciful to him and Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon Muhammad (sal) upon his family, all his noble companions and their successors until the last day.