

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Imam Abu al-Barakat al-Dardir on the Qualities of a True Shaykh

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In the end of the famous poem of al-Imam al-Sayyid Abu al-Barakat al-Dardir *The Illustrious Pearl* the author addresses the foundations of spiritual rectification according to the teachings of Islam. The author himself was a well-known and respected scholar, worshipper of the highest caliber, and a man of *tasawwuf*.¹ Among the things that he addresses in this section is a commentary on the qualities of a true Shaykh.²

There is much conversation in the American Muslim community around the idea of fake shaykhs and cases of spiritual abuse. As such we felt that this small section may be valuable for those who understand the need for spiritual mentorship, but also recognize the very real potential dangers in such a relationship.

The entirety of the relevant section is the author's commentary on half a line of his poem wherein he said:

“And follow the way of the Nasikin, the Ulama.”³

What makes this section so relevant and interesting is that the author was someone who was speaking from within the tradition of *tasawwuf* and understood the importance of a real Shaykh. In fact, he was basically unanimously agreed upon by the great people of knowledge and piety of his

¹ As a community we need not fear the word *tasawwuf*. In fact, this term and idea existed in the dictionary of Islamic terminology from very early on and was embraced, within the guidelines of *aqidah* and *sharia*, which will come, by Muslim scholarship. Deviations and excesses from those who claim a connection to *tasawwuf* do not take away from the truth of the concept and its centrality to how we understand our faith.

² “Shaykh” refers here to someone who is able to provide spiritual guidance and rectification for his or her followers, not what we commonly call anyone who has a college level Islamic education.

³ Explanation of the terms will come in the commentary.

time to have been one. At the same time, his comments on the topic are coming within a work that he wrote on Islamic theology, which would later become a standard primer for studying the topic in schools such as al-Azhar. So, we cannot say that he did not understand *aqidah*, which is a common refrain against those scholars who engage in this field of exploration. He was also a great scholar and commentator in the Maliki *madhhab*, authoring works there that would become standard textbooks for the study of the school.

His comments give us insight into the development of Islamic thought, its main areas of study, and how to approach the important question that is at the center of this selection. Preceding the translation is a biography of the Imam authored by Ustadh Fouad Elgohari. After the selection there is a reflective essay written on the topic by Shaykha Muslema Purmul.

May Allah grant us *tanfiq* and give us good in all affairs.

Biography

IMAM ABU AL-BARAKĀT Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abu Ḥamid al-‘Adawī al-Dardīr⁴ came from a pious family and a community known for producing Islamic scholars. He was born in the Upper Egyptian village of Banī ‘Adī, on the outskirts of present day Asyūṭ in 1127 AH/1715 CE. The village of Banī ‘Adī received its illustrious name after the Banū ‘Adī Tribe of the Quraysh who settled there. Thus, al-Dardīr’s noble lineage returns to the second Caliph of Islam, Amīr al-Mu’minīn ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. His father, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dardīr (d. 1138/1726) was a pious man who had a strong attachment to the Qur’an. He taught Qur’anic memorization and recitation locally and was held in high regard by the townspeople who considered him a saintly figure. Al-Dardīr recounts numerous saintly miracles seen not only by his immediate family, but often by the locals, regarding his father. His mother related a famous account to al-Dardīr that she often saw a light emanating from his father’s room, as if a candle was lit, in the darkest hours of the night. When his father was asked about this light his reply was that it was from the light of offering salutations and benedictions upon the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Dardīr also relates that his father refused to accept any compensation for teaching the book of God and would often provide food and shelter for his students who did not have much.

⁴ The shaykh received the name “*al-Dardīr*,” as did his grandfather who was granted the honorific title by an Arab tribe. The term connotes one who is bestowed with recurring blessings.

⁵ Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ṣa‘īdī began his studies with Al-Azhar and other institutions. He would say that “often during my studies I would sleep hungry— unable to afford to buy paper. But if I had anything I would usually give it as *sadaqah*, and (because of it) saw numerous blessings in my sleep and while awake.” He worked in the sciences of *ḥadīth* studies and was the first to introduce

Imam al-Dardīr was greatly influenced by his community and the number of highly esteemed scholars hailing from his village. One such scholar, known for both his erudite knowledge and his principled stance in confronting the Mamlūk emirs, was Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ṣa‘īdī (d. 1189/1777).⁵ Presiding over the dormitory of al-Azhar for the students of Upper Egypt, al-Ṣa‘īdī had many disciples who followed his lead of both highly advanced scholarship and an unwavering commitment to intercede on behalf of the townspeople in addressing their grievances with the ruling elite. This high regard for both principled social engagement and scholarly pursuit became a hallmark of the scholars of Upper Egypt.

Raised by, and having kept company with, such an immensely pious, principled, and scholarly class, it is no surprise that al-Dardīr was influenced to study sacred knowledge at a young age. He received his initial education in Qur’anic memorization and recitation from his father, and his love for studying the sacred disciplines continued to grow. After completing his primary education in Banī ‘Adī, al-Dardīr travelled to Cairo to further pursue his studies at Al-Azhar University. There he attended many of the highly acclaimed study circles of renowned Islamic scholars of his time⁶ and would eventually earn the distinction of participating in the circles of *ḥadīth* scholars Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 1162/1749 CE), the “Shaykh al-Azhar” Shams al-Dīn al-Ḥifnī (d. 1181/1768), and the renowned Mālikī jurist

the *ḥawāshī* to the commentaries of the Mālikī legal texts.

⁶ It is recorded that he sat in the lessons of Shaykh al-Mallāwī and al-Jawharī. He heard the *ḥadīth al-raḥma (al-musalsal bi’l anwalīyyah)* from Shaykh Muḥammad al-Dafrawī. It can be expected that he was trained extensively in the Islamic canon of the era which included Arabic language and its ancillary disciplines, alongside the core disciplines of theology, jurisprudence, and *taṣannuṭ*.

and theologian Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ṣa‘īdī. Al-Dardīr would further extend his relationship to both Shaykh al-Ḥifnī and Shaykh al-Ṣa‘īdī who became his two principal teachers and who constituted his most formative training. Imām al-Dardīr would eventually take Shaykh al-Ḥifnī as his spiritual guide by whom he was initiated into the Khalwatī *ṭarīqah*. He likewise studied extensively with Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ṣa‘īdī, who regarded Imām al-Dardīr as his greatest pupil. Both scholars would eventually pass their perspective rank onto Imam al-Dardīr, making him Mufti of the Mālikī school, Rector of the residence hall/college (*rivāq*) for the students from Upper Egypt, and one of Shaykh al-Ḥifnī’s most notable spiritual successors (*khulafā’*).

His Career

Imam al-Dardīr’s formal career as Mufti and Rector began around the year 1189 AH/1775 CE after the passing of his master, Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ṣa‘īdī. He taught the disciplines of theology, jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, and the Arabic disciplines in the mosque of al-Azhar. A close friend and student of Imām al-Dardīr, the Indian polymath Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205 AH/1791 CE), wrote a hagiographical entry for al-Dardīr describing him (amongst other things) as: “unequaled in his time in the rational and transmitted disciplines.”⁷

In addition to his scholarly role al-Dardīr was also taken by many as a spiritual guide and is regarded as a reviver of the Khalwatī order by some. Imam al-Dardīr eventually would go on to establish a sub-order within the *ṭarīqah* and his own *ẓamīyah*, funded by the Sultan of Morocco, Muḥammad III (d. 1204/1790) after being astonished at the astute character and generosity of al-Dardīr with the sultan’s son. A notable aspect to al-Dardīr’s spiritual path and revival was that it

brought together both scholars/students of sacred knowledge and the laity. His concern for the common man in his society was evident in his writings, which were always tiered to include material that could be easily read and understood by all the Muslims in his society. Imam al-Dardīr also followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, Shaykh al-Ṣa‘īdī and Shaykh al-Ḥifnī, who commanded the respect and admiration of the ruling class and were not shy in publicly rebuking their injustices and unethical behavior. Imam al-Dardīr was particularly admired for interceding on behalf of oppressed commoners who sought his aid against the ruling class. In fact, there are numerous accounts in al-Dardīr’s own works that offer social and political commentary aimed to push back on the injustices of the ruling class. This can also be seen in the famous historical chronicles of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *‘Aja‘ib al-Athār fī-l-Tarājim wa-l-akhbār*. Though he was not appointed the position of “Shaykh al-Azhar,” al-Jabartī famously notes that al-Dardīr was seen as the “Shaykh of all of Egypt.” Al-Jabartī substantiates this position by noting that Imām al-Dardīr:

“Would command to the good and forbid the evil, repelled what was vile, and strove to implement truth for the sake of God. He did not fear blame or criticism and he valiantly strove in his pursuit of good.”

This general disposition regarding al-Dardīr is further supported by al-Jabartī in several accounts where he cites miraculous incidents seen at the hands of al-Dardīr in confronting the injustices of the ruling class. Many of these incidents were witnessed publicly and became widespread in the community affirming the high rank of the Imam. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (d. 1978 CE), in his biographical work of Imam al-Dardīr mentions that you will find no scholar of Al-Azhar in disagreement about the saintly miracles (*karamāt*) of Abu al-Barakāt al-

⁷ al-Zabīdī, *Al-mu‘jam Al-Mukhtasṣ*, 122.

Dardīr, by which God would open the closed doors of the oppressed of Egypt through the supplication of the shaykh.⁸ Moreover, corroborating accounts related by al-Jabartī, al-Zabīdī, Shaykh Yusuf al-Nabahānī (d. 1350 AH/1932 CE) and others provide further evidence that many of these miraculous incidents were testified to by hundreds of people. Shaykh al-Nabahānī highlights this point in a section of his compendium on saintly miracles, *Jāmi' Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*, describing al-Dardīr as “the sun of experiential knowledge, the gnostic of his era, and the object of consensus for all Muslims from all the different schools of thought as to his high rank, sainthood (*wilāya*), spiritual guidance, and overall benefit in every Muslim land.”

His Written Works

Imām al-Dardīr wrote on a number of different religious disciplines, including Qur'ānic exegesis, dialectic theology, jurisprudence, *taṣawwuf*, Prophetic biography, rhetoric, and a beautiful array of poems. The bulk of the work that he is most known for, and to which the foundation of traditional Islamic studies in the contemporary period still relies heavily on, are within the three core disciplines of jurisprudence, theology, and *taṣawwuf*. Amongst his major works are the following:

Manḥ al-Qadīr fī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Khalīl: (The Award of al-Qadīr: Commentary on the Abridgment of Khalīl).

Aqrab al-Masālik 'ilā Madhhab al-Imām Mālik: (The Closest of Paths to the *madhhab* of Imām Mālik).

Sharḥ al-Dardīr 'alā Aqrab al-Masālik: (Dardīr's Commentary on *Aqrab al-Masālik*).

Sharḥ al-Dardīr 'alā Manzumatibi al-Musamma al-Kharīda al-Bahīyya: (Dardīr's Commentary on his Didactic Text, “The Luminous Pearl”).

Sharḥ al-Dardīr 'alā Fawa'id al-Farā'id fī Dābiḥ al-'Aqā'id: (Dardīr's Commentary on the Theological Epistle of Muhammad b. Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī).

Hāshiyat al-Dardīr 'alā Sharḥ al-Hudhūdī 'alā al-Sanūsiyya: (Dardīr's Gloss on the Commentary of 'Alī al-Ṣa'idī on the Sanusiyyah Creed).

Risalat al-'Iqd al-Wahīd fī Tdāḥal-Su'al 'an al-Tawḥīd: (The Special Gem Treatise: Clarification on the Inquiry of God's Oneness).

Tuhfat al-Ikhwān fī Adāb abl al-'Irfān: (The Treasure of the Brethren on the Decorum of The People of Gnosticism).

Minḥāj al-Ṣādiqīn wa Tibyān al-Sālikīn: (The Methodology of the True Believers and the Modality of the Wayfarers).

Al-Tawajjuh al-Asnā bi Naẓm al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā: (A Poem of Supplications using the 99 Names of God).

Tuhfat al-Qārī lī Kitāb al-Bārī fī al-Mutashābih: (The Treasure of The Reader of God's Book Pertaining to Seemingly Anthropomorphic Verses).

Sharḥ al-Dardīr 'alā al-Adāb al-'Aḍudīyya: (Dardīr's Commentary on 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī's Epistle on the Original Usage of Language).

⁸ Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Abū Al-Barakāt Sayyidī Ahmad Al-Dardīr* (Cairo: Dar al-M'ārif, 2001).

His Death and Legacy

Although Imam al-Dardīr was engaged in many of the intellectual pursuits of his time, and advanced to the highest levels of erudition, his main focus was always fundamentally a spiritual pursuit. As he so eloquently recalls of his own spiritual teacher, Shaykh al-Ḥifnī:

The magnificent Imam, whom kings were in awe over, was a magnanimous character whose enemies testified to his dignified demeanor and generosity. This quality was to the degree that everyone recognized that kings were unable to tend to their own affairs as much as he was able to. Those who sat with him always longed for more of his beautiful character and love— even to those who were envious. He was beauty, his face like the sun during the peak of the day, to the point that all who laid eyes on him were reminded of God, the Almighty, Ever Forgiving. The common people and the elite were blessed simply by gazing upon him, and they would flock to him yearning for relief. He was the one who brought together the reality of the external sciences and the secrets of the Divine. The interpreter of thoughts, as was seen by those who traversed the spiritual path with him. He would cultivate his companions by gazing at them and serving them as a guide. They revered him in a way that you would not find amongst even heroic figures.

In relation to this quotation, the former Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd said about al-Dardīr, “if we recounted all of these qualities that were spoken of in relationship to Shaykh al-Dardīr, we would see that he too achieved these noble qualities that are so loved by God and His messenger.”⁹ It is altogether fitting that al-Dardīr, who saw such remarkable qualities in his teachers, whom he so loved, and sought to emulate seeking the Prophetic way, would likewise be sought after by so many for these same qualities.

Al-Dardīr died in 1204 AH/1786 CE and his funeral prayer was held at al-Azhar mosque, garnering a large crowd of people from all walks of life. His body was then buried nearby at his *zāwiyah*, where he remains until the current day. His works remain a beacon of light for our time, as we strive to gain an understanding and a manifestation that binds us to our holistic tradition. We pray his legacy of scholarship and service to the people live on in all those who inherit from the Imām their connections to the beloved



⁹ Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Abū Al-Barakāt Sayyidī Ahmad Al-Dardīr* (Cairo: Dar al-M'ārif, 2001).

Translated Section:

The fifth¹⁰ is to follow a Shaykh who knows God and has traveled the path of the people of God on the hand of a similar Shaykh leading all the way back to the Messenger, God extol him and grant him perfect peace. The one who does not keep the company of a Shaykh who can guide him on the path to God and suffices himself with what he has from worship and knowledge, has exposed himself to the deceptions of Shaytan. For this reason, it is said, “The one who does not have a Shaykh, Shaytan is his Shaykh.”

Generally speaking, one who does not travel to God on the hand of a Shaykh who knows Him, will not be able to attain the stations of proximity to God, even if his worship is equivalent to that of all of the jinn and humans.

The signs of such a Shaykh are: (1) generosity, (2) good character, (3) concern for the creation of God, (4) his not being engrossed in acquiring worldly things, (5) not making claims—even speaking with the terminology of the people of spirituality unless there is a specific need for doing that, (6) not complaining about constriction in worldly affairs or from people not giving them attention, (7) to see upon him the signs of humility, brokenness, and loving to be hidden from the people, (8) to see the signs of *barakah* and rectitude on his followers.

All of this we have taken from the line in the poem: *follow in your path the way*, meaning the method, *of the nāsikīn*, plural of

nāsik, which means worshipper, *the ‘ulamā*. ‘*Ulamā* is plural for ‘*ālim* which refers to someone who knows the rulings of the Shariah, which are the foundation of the soundness of one’s religion, relating to beliefs and deeds. What is meant by *the nāsikīn*, *the ‘ulamā* are the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and those who followed them with excellence. Their path can be summed up as one of beliefs, knowledge, and deeds in accordance with that knowledge.

Those who came after *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* from the great Imams of the religion, who we are required to follow, are comprised of three categories:

- 1) Those who dedicated themselves to clarifying the rulings of the Prophetic Law relating to deeds. They are the Four Imams¹¹ and the other *mujtahid* Imams of that time. However, from the accepted schools of practice only those of the Four Imams remain.
- 2) Those who dedicated themselves to working on clarifying the beliefs of *al-salaf*. They are [Imam] al-Ash‘ari and [Imam] al-Maturidi and those who followed their methodologies.¹²
- 3) Those who dedicated themselves to actual deeds and spiritual exertion in accordance with what was laid out by the first two groups. They are [Imam] Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd and those who followed his way.

These three groups are the elect of *al-Ummah al-Muhammadiyah* and anyone on other than them is upon misguidance, although some of them may still be

are, and an understanding of why those doctrines are true. This “epistemological” emphasis was gleaned from the Qur’an itself which mandated upon Muslims to “know” or “have knowledge” that there is no deity except God (Q 47:19). This statement should not be understood to exclude from acceptability the way of Imam Ahmad in beliefs because his way is to simply cling tightly to what *al-salaf* said without explaining or clarifying.

¹⁰ This section contains ten points that are foundational for the spiritual path and this particular one is number five from those that Abu al-Barakāt al-Dardīr mentions.

¹¹ Abu Hanifah, Malik, al-Shafii, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

¹² The methodology referenced is the approach of mainstream Sunni theology which presented both what the religious doctrines which Muslims had to believe

considered to be upon Islam.¹³ The one who is saved is the one whose beliefs are in accordance with what was clarified by *Ahl al-Sunnah* and whose deeds are according to what was laid out by the four acceptable schools in deeds.¹⁴ In addition, complete blessing and salvation is in following the way of al-Junayd and his followers, after rectifying one's religion in accordance with the first two groups previously mentioned.

From those who took the way of al-Junayd are:¹⁵ Imam Ahmad ibn al-Rifā'ī and his followers, Imam Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and his followers, al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi and his followers, al-Sayyid Ibrahim al-Dusuqi and his followers, al-Sayyid 'Alī Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhulī and his followers, al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Khalwati and his followers, and al-Sayyid 'Abdullah al-Naqshabandi and his followers. They are the masters of *al-Ummah al-Muhammadiyah*. May God be pleased with them, and us by them. Ameen.

The Shaykh [or Shaykha] who guides to God must have (1) taken the path to God from a true Shaykh from the Shaykhs of The Path.¹⁶ (2) He must have exhausted himself and struggled against himself until his soul was purified and the base diseases and desires of his human condition were removed. **If this is not the case, then he must be avoided.**¹⁷

There are many people who followed one of the Four Imams, but their beliefs strayed

from the beliefs of the Imams, and so they did not believe according to the way of *Ahl al-Sunnah*. There are many deviant sects of this type, such as *al-Qadariyyah*.¹⁸

There are also those who did not accept to follow the Four Imams in deeds or *Ahl al-Sunnah* in beliefs, and they are even more misguided than the first group.

And then there are those who claim that they have taken the path of the people of God, wearing their style of clothes and speaking in a way that deludes the people into believing that they are from them. The reality is that this type of person is useless. He fills his stomach with food with no regard for its permissibility, sleeps all through the night, and desires the material world like a predator stalks its prey. The ego of such a person convinces him that he is a true shaykh. He has followers that hunt the filth of this life for him under the false deity of his shaykhhood. They make claims that they have something of real value. They are liars. They are the ones referred to by al-Sayyid Ibn al-Farid in the following verses of poetry:

*They contented themselves with their fantasies and
were tried by their base desires,
They claimed to swim in the oceans of divine love, but
they never even got wet.
They are the ones who never left their starting place in
their journey,
They didn't even go anywhere, and they still got tired.*

¹³ This is to note that a group can hold beliefs that are considered misguidance while still being considered Muslims and another group can hold beliefs that would take them out of Islam even if they claimed to be Muslims. This is a topic of immense importance, but beyond the scope of this selection.

¹⁴ Meaning that in their beliefs and deeds they follow the way of the first two groups mentioned above.

¹⁵ Note that the expression indicates that these are some of them but not necessarily all of them.

¹⁶ The Path translates *al-Tariq* which is commonly used in works of spiritual rectification to refer to the method and journey of spiritual development that leads to the knowledge of God.

¹⁷ Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ A group in early Muslim theological debates who took the position that human beings have absolute free will. They are contrasted by another group known as *al-Jabriyyah* who took the opposite position. Namely, that human beings have no free will and are completely under the control of God in everything they do and every choice they make. Both were rejected by mainstream Sunni orthodoxy, which took an approach to the question that walked the line between free will and Divine decree, asserting responsibility for human beings for their actions while acknowledging the ultimate omnipotence and omniscience of God.

Indeed, they even went backwards because they followed what their base desires compelled them to, so Satan drove them to whatever he wanted from them. As the poet said:

*They strayed from my way, out of jealousy,
When they chose blindness over guidance.*

It reached the point that when someone would give them charity, or be generous towards them, they would take that as an established norm. They would corner those who do good to them and say to them, “Give us what we are used to receiving from you or we will see what happens to you!” They give the impression to the people that they are people of spiritual states and that God supports them in what they say. No! This is not the way of the impoverished people of God!¹⁹ Their way is the way of humility, brokenness, not wanting to be known, temperance, lack of materialism, preferring others over themselves, and completely relying on God.

As for these other people, they are the worst of people. They take people’s wealth unjustly and claim elevated status when they are lowly. They have become so plentiful in this time that they have occupied every land and place. We seek refuge in God from them. Al-Sayyid al-Bakri said about them in his thousand-line poem on *tashannuf*:

*Their evil has increased in these times to the point that
great harm is caused by them,
And there is no one here to repel them for the sake of
this Pure Religion.*

And when the people of God saw their large quantity, the amount of corruption they were doing, and their deviations in beliefs, they closed the doors to the *zawiya*s²⁰ of guidance and turned the affair over to the Lord of the servants. They blended in with the people, until nobody even knew who they were, except for the ones whom God had chosen to receive His divine illuminations and eternal bliss.

So, the one who is committed to traveling the path of true liberation and drowning in the oceans of Divine Oneness should be constant in their *taqwa* and their seeking protection in God. They should call upon God, through the rank of His Messenger, asking Him to join him with a true Shaykh who knows Him and can give him *tarbiyah*.²¹ A Shaykh who can remove him from the darkness of his base self and purify him, giving him the drink of Love. If God knows your sincerity and truthfulness, he will join you to such a Shaykh. If you find him, take his hand and be with him like a dead corpse would be, and say, “All praise is due to God who guided us to this and if it were not for Him we would not have been guided.”²²

¹⁹ In works of spirituality the people of God are often referred to as *fuqara* which we have translated above as “impoverished.” This is a term affirming their state of recognizing their complete and utter dependence on God and His lack of need from anything or anyone. It is not necessarily indicative of their financial status.

²⁰ Islamic civilizations have always had multiple institutions where religious teachings were imparted in addition to the masjid. One such institution was called *zawiya*. They are kind of like small masjids where a shaykh would teach and spend time with his students. Sometimes they would also live there and learn other

things such as trades as well. They also went by names such as *khanqah*, *tekke*, and others.

²¹ Spiritual training and disciplining. This can only be truly received from someone who fits the description that is mentioned earlier in the selection. A dua that is mentioned sometimes in this regard is, “O Allah. Guide me to one who will guide me to You.”

²² Meaning, if you find someone you can truly trust for such a task then turn yourself over to him/her and allow them to guide you. It is very important to understand statements such as this one in the context of everything else that has preceded in this section.

Put in the work, call upon God, and spend from yourself, not your wealth.²³

²³ This marks the end of the translated section from Imam al-Dardir, God be pleased with him.

Concluding Reflections by Shaykha Muslema Purnul:

The understanding that the world even has something called a True Shaykh was something I discovered much later on in life. It is the most incredible blessing after faith itself. While I had heard time and time again, “the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets,” I did not realize what that meant. I actually didn’t even have a proper conception of the *Awliyah* (the intimate friends of God, His saints, male and female). I did not comprehend the significance of *dhikr* or *salawat* on the Prophet (ﷺ). I thought the word ‘*ihsan*’ was a fleeting experience, that comes and goes. I grew up in the American Muslim masjid, I was very active in the Muslim community throughout my youth and young adulthood and even went to Al-Azhar University and studied Shariah. Through all of this, I was still veiled to this important, life-changing, healing, and uplifting reality in the world. It is **foundational** to our religion and was for centuries of our religious tradition. This was our orthodoxy. This is our orthodoxy. This reality is not a footnote. It is the antidote to much of the distress we see in our *Ummah* globally. And yet, how many are still only now hearing about these things?

I knew there were False Shaykhs because I had unfortunately met some, and a great number were also reported to me by women and sometimes men, around the world while I was a student overseas. Emails would come in from people I did and didn’t know describing terrible situations of harm by someone claiming to be a Shaykh. Sometimes the “Shaykh” had studied formally, more often they had not. I couldn’t help but wonder, “Why do we even need Shaykhs? Can I study my religion formally at a university and not have to defer in mentorship or counsel to other teachers, male teachers especially? Can I get my own accreditation so I don’t have to rely on someone else?” Yet what I found even

after my undergraduate studies in Al-Azhar was that every student of knowledge whose beautiful character I admired, without exception, wanted, searched, and tried to find a good mentor in a Shaykh or Shaykha: A person of brilliance in their scholarship, integrity in their example, and righteousness in their practice. Upon reflecting upon why we as believers *need the person who embodies the teaching* and not just the information we read in books, I realized we all miss the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). We are looking for him everywhere. We want to be from his devoted followers, to be directly molded by his teachings and mentorship, to be supporters of his way and upholders of his mission. So, until we find someone who truly carries the light of our Beloved Prophet (ﷺ), we are missing something, unfulfilled. Degrees will not satiate this hunger. Books will never be enough. When Allah sent His religion to mankind, He always sent it with His Messengers, and placed in the hearts of His seekers, the yearning to find them.

Yet, unfortunately, many will fill this very real yearning (and many have) by turning in devotion and deference to a False Shaykh, a Charlatan, a Pretender. Not everyone is intentionally a fraud. Some are just weak, others truly deluded (may Allah protect us all). The Prophet (ﷺ) told us, “Allah will aid His religion, even by a man who is licentious.” Sometimes the false teacher is not even someone who claims to have any kind of spiritual authority, but they take their sense of entitlement from their Islamic legal studies or specialization in another branch of sacred knowledge, and abuse people through the platforms they are given. While spiritual abuse is one of the most painful traumas for one to experience, true Shaykhs and teachers are from the greatest sources of healing and upliftment. The True Shaykh helps put us back together, their very presence helps to renew our faith in miraculous ways and brings us into increased presence in our

remembrance of God. There is an order of good in the world that has existed and persisted through the ages that have passed. Allah did not leave us in chaos to deal with the darkness of this world without also sending us people of much more powerful healing light. May we find His most beloved ones, may we learn from them, may we honor and love them as He loves, and may He allow us to benefit from them as much as possible in this life, and gather us with them in the next. Amin.

I leave you with a prayer for one seeking a true Guide:

“O Allah guide me to one who will guide me to You and connect me to one who will connect me to You.”

اللهم دلني على من يدلني عليك وصلني بمن يصلني بك