

# THE PRACTICAL GUIDEBOOK



THE PRACTICAL GUIDEBOOK  
OF  
ESSENTIAL ISLAMIC SCIENCES

A COMMENTARY ON IBN ASHIR'S  
AL-MURSHID AL-MU'IN

by Shaykh Ali Laraki al-Husaini



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
وَالصَّلَاةِ وَالسَّلَامِ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ  
وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ



مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا  
يُعَفِّهِ فِي الدِّينِ

Whomever Allah wills good, He grants him  
deep understanding (*fiqh*) of the Deen.  
(Malik, Muslim, al-Bukhari)



**PREFACE BY**  
**SHAYKH ‘ABDULHAYY AL-‘AMRAOUI**

In the name of Allah,  
the Merciful and Compassionate  
Blessings on the Messenger of Allah

CERTAINLY, MANY MUSLIM brothers and sisters, who do not know Arabic are in dire need of beneficial books like the one authored by ‘Abdulwahid Ibn ‘Ashir al-Andalusi and its commentary, by Muhammad Ibn Ahmad from Fes by origin, residence and upbringing, known as Mayyara, who based themselves on the three concepts that appear in the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings upon him) narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih*, from ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, who said:

“One day while we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ a man came up to us whose clothes were extremely white, whose hair was extremely black, upon whom traces of travelling could not be seen, and whom none of us knew, until he sat down close to the Prophet ﷺ so that he rested his knees upon his knees and placed his two hands upon his thighs and said, ‘Muhammad, tell me about Islam.’

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Islam is that

you witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and establish the prayer, and give the *zakah*, and fast Ramadan, and perform the Hajj of the House if you are able to take a way to it.' He said, 'You have told the truth,' and we were amazed at him asking him and [then] telling him that he told the truth.

He said, 'Tell me about *iman*.' He said, 'That you believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and that you believe in the Decree, the good of it and the bad of it.' He said, 'You have told the truth.'

He said, 'Tell me about *ihsan*.' He said, 'That you worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you don't see Him then truly He sees you.'

He said, 'Tell me about the Hour.' He said, 'The one asked about it knows no more than the one asking.'

He said, 'Then tell me about its signs.' He said, 'That the female slave should give birth to her mistress, and you see poor, naked, barefoot shepherds of sheep and goats competing in raising buildings.'

He went away, and I remained some time. Then he said, 'Umar, do you know who the questioner was?' I said, 'Allah and His Messenger know best.' He said, 'He was Jibril who came to you to teach you your Deen.'

The Deen consists of three elements, as reflected in the aforementioned hadith, when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'It was Jibril who came to you to teach you your Deen'. This three elements are the ones contained in the poem of Ibn 'Ashir and its commentary by Mayyara. The first third is *Iman*, the second third is

*Islam* and the third third is *Ihsan*, which is the adoption by the servant the manners that befitting servanthood. And this is the science of *Tasawwuf*.

Our brother ‘Ali Laraki has done a good thing translating this book into English in order to transmit to the people the rulings of their Deen. It will be a good thing if other follow his example and translate it into Spanish, French, German, Italian and Hebrew, so the speakers of those languages could also benefit by it.

The Muslim has to believe in the Messenger Musa – blessings and peace upon him – and the book revealed to him, the Torah, and to believe in the Messenger ‘Isa – blessings and peace upon him – and the book revealed to him, the Injil, as he has to believe in all the noble Messengers – blessings and peace upon them. In Sura Al-Baqara, verse 284, is stated: “*The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. Each one believes in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers. We do not differentiate between any of His Messengers.*” This matter is what is contained in the first third of this book.

Our brother ‘Ali Laraki, has responded to the saying of the Messenger ﷺ: “Transmit from me even if it is only one verse.” He has, indeed, transmitted a number of verses, the first being the words of Allah – exalted he is – in Surat al-Ma’ida: “*O you who believe! When you get up to do salat, wash your faces and your hands and your arms to the elbows, and wipe over your heads, and your feet to the ankles. If you are in a state of major impurity, then purify ourselves.*” And has transmitted the words of

Allah – ta‘ala – in Surat al-Baqara: “*Establish salat and pay zakat and bow with those who bow.*” (verse 42). And he has transmitted the verse of fasting, stated in Sura Al-Baqara under number 182: “*O you who have iman! Fasting is prescribed for you.*” And he has transmitted the verse of Hajj, stated in Sura Al ‘Imran under number 97: “*Hajj to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all mankind – those who can find a way to do it.*”

Despite not knowing the English language into which this book has been translated, I am very pleased by the matter. Therefore, I am very grateful to our brother ‘Ali for this great work and I ask Allah to grant him success.

‘Abdulhayy al-‘Amraoui

## PREFACE

### *The Author*

HE IS THE great imam, the sea of knowledge, the mujahid, Abu Muhammad, ‘Abd al-Wahid ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Ashir, of the Ansari line, originally from Andalusia but brought up in Fes which he made his home.

He had vast knowledge of various disciplines, like Qur’anic readings (*qira’at*), Qur’anic writing (*rasm wa dabt*), grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*sarf*), syntax (*i’rab*), Qur’anic commentary (*tafsir*), hadith, theology (*kalam*), law (*fiqh*), sufism (*tasawwuf*), logic (*mantiq*), elocution (*bayan*), poetic meters (*‘arud*), time calculation (*tawqit*), arithmetic (*hisab*), principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), inheritance law (*fara’id*), medicine (*tibb*), and others.

He performed the pilgrimage to Makka, participated in jihad military campaigns, frequently retreated to the mosque for *i’tikaf* and performed *tahajjud* prayers at night.

He has compositions on various knowledges, amongst them this incomparable poem that we have translated and commented upon, entitled *al-Murshid al-Mu’in ‘ala ad-Daruri min ‘Ulum ad-Deen* on Ash‘ari ‘aqida, Maliki fiqh and Junaidi tasawwuf. In it he gathered both the roots and branches of the Deen to such an extent that

whoever reads it and understands its points, is able to abandon once and for all the taqleed – imitation – of someone whose soundness of Iman is disputed, being able to learn the sciences that Allah has made incumbent on him.

He died in the city of Fes, where he is buried, on the 3rd of Dhu'l-Hijja 1040 AH / 3rd of July 1631 CE. May Allah cover him with His Mercy and place him in His spacious Garden.<sup>1</sup> Amin.

### *The Work*

The work is the very famous poem entitled *al-Murshid al-Mu'in 'ala ad-Daruri min 'Ulum ad-Deen*. Its meaning is *The Helpful Guide to the Necessary Sciences of the Deen*.<sup>2</sup> This poem is memorised and studied in Morocco, where the author lived, and throughout North and

<sup>1</sup> From *ad-Durr ath-Thamin*.

<sup>2</sup> This word is normally translated by other authors as 'religion'. The reason why we are not going to translate it is because the word religion has the Judeo-Christian connotation of belief and relation with the Divine and their institutionalisation that we are trying to avoid. The Arabic word Deen brings about the nuance of obedience, liability, subjection, indebtedness, etc.; in other words, the way a person transacts throughout his life, on the basis of what he believes reality to be. This will include all transactions between human beings themselves and the Divine. The word Deen also includes anything a person believes about this world and the next, regardless of belief or not in God and the afterlife. Therefore, atheism, ecumenism, democracy are also Deens. Consequently, when we say that Islam is a Deen, we mean a religion, as well as all the social and political consequences derived from its worldview.

West Africa. It is considered the first book to be studied on Islamic teaching in the *Madrasas* (Qur'anic Schools) after, or along with, the memorisation of the Noble Qur'an. It is an introductory treatise about Ash'ari belief, Maliki jurisprudence and Junaidi Sufism. It consists of everything a believer needs to know to acquire a basic knowledge of the Deen.

Initially the book was written to deal with the pillar of Hajj, but the author introduced the rest of the five pillars of Islam with the addition of a chapter on Sufism. It was conceived as a poem to be easily memorised and for the illiterate.

The structure of the work is as follows:

1. General introduction presenting the author and the sciences to be mentioned. (verses 1 to 5).
2. Introduction to the chapter of beliefs and a brief description of what a rational statement is and the signs of responsibility (*taklif*) (verses 6 to 13).
3. Exposition of the Muslim creed according to the school of al-Ash'ari (verses 14 to 47).
4. Introduction to the science of fiqh with definition of legal judgement and its ratings (verses 48 to 53).
5. Chapter on Purification (*tahara*) (verses 54 to 98).
6. Chapter on Prayer (*salat*) (verses 99 to 181).
7. Chapter on *Zakah* (verses 182 to 210).
8. Chapter on Fasting (*sawm*) (verses 211 to 228).
9. Chapter on Pilgrimage (*hajj*) (verses 229 to 290).
10. Chapter on Sufism (*tasawwuf*) (verses 291 to 312).
11. Epilogue (verses 313 to 317).

These eleven points are divided into three basic parts:

- Ash‘ari ‘aqida (Creed).
- Maliki fiqh (Jurisprudence).
- Junaidi tasawwuf (Sufism).

The reason why the work is divided into three parts is because they are the sciences (‘aqida, fiqh and tasawwuf) that correspond to the three parts of the Deen mentioned in the famous hadith of Jibril. In this hadith – also called *Umm al-Ahadith* (the matrix of all hadith) – the Angel Jibril – appears physically to the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ, hence its importance– asks the Prophet ﷺ what is Islam, what is Iman and what is Ihsan. The Prophet ﷺ answers and upon the departure of Sayyiduna Jibril, he informs the Companions – who until that moment did not recognise the questioner – that it was Jibril who came “to teach them their Deen.”

From these last words of the hadith, the ‘ulama have concluded that the Deen is structured in three parts:

- Islam
- Iman
- Ihsan

Islam being what regulates the seven limbs that Allah has made us responsible for, namely:

- ears
- eyes
- tongue
- belly
- genitals

- hands
- feet

Iman being what our hearts must believe in.

And Ihsan or excellence of action and state achieved by travelling the spiritual path that starts with our awareness of being seen by the One Who sees everything (*muraqaba*), and ends with His contemplation (*mushahada*).

Therefore, the three sciences that correspond to the three parts of the Deen are:

- The science of ‘aqida for *Iman*
- The science of fiqh for Islam
- The science of tasawwuf for Ihsan

This has been the traditional formulation of Islam throughout the whole of Muslim history, geography and the great centres of knowledge, like the universities of al-Qayrawiyyin, az-Zaytuna and al-Azhar, until innovators appeared in the last two centuries redefining Islam and misguiding people.

### *The Translation*

I have based my translation on the edition of the *Murshid al-Mu’in* that appears in the *Mukhtasar ad-Durr ath-Thamin* published by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs of Morocco. I have numbered the verses and added extra sections for ease of reference.

From among the numerous commentaries I have chosen the *Mukhtasar ad-Durr ath-Thamin* by Mayyara – also known as *Mayyara as-Sugra* – as a primary source for my own commentary and its gloss (*hashiya*) by Ibn

Hamdun Ibn al-Hajj as a second reference along with the commentary *al-Habl al-Matin* by al-Marrakushi al-Muwaqqit. I have made wide use of the *Risala* by Ibn Abi Zaid al-Qayrawani, the *Aqrab al-Masalik* and the *Mukhtasar* by Khalil ibn Ishaq with their commentaries. Sporadic reference has been made to modern authors like al-Habib ben Tahir<sup>3</sup> and al-Ghiryani.<sup>4</sup>

### *Reasons to Undertake This Effort*

A translation of the *Murshid al-Mu'in* and its commentary is needed for English-speaking Muslims coming from the West, owing to the lack of knowledge of the Deen among Muslims in general and the damage done by the spread of deviant versions of Islam that increase confusion, alienation, division and hostility.

In sha'Allah, this work will provide an understanding of the Deen that will configure the essential structure needed by the student to appropriately categorise and correctly understand any further studies of the Islamic sciences.

Properly understood, this work can be considered a commentary on the previously mentioned hadith of Jibril. In it, the author explains and elaborates on the meanings of Islam, Iman and Ihsan, teaching what every Muslim should know about them.

As far as Iman and its corresponding science – 'aqida – is concerned, the poem will teach the correct way to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Fiqh al-Maliki wa Adillatuh.*

<sup>4</sup> *Mudawwanat al-Fiqh al-Maliki wa Adillatuh.*

Messengers, the Last Day and the Decree, neutralizing the false and anthropomorphic deviations that have been introduced among poorly informed Muslims, endangering their belief in Allah and impeding them from reaching true knowledge of their object of worship.

As far as Islam and its corresponding science – fiqh – is concerned, it teaches the way to learn the rules of ‘ibada (worshipping) like the prayer, zakah, fasting and pilgrimage (hajj) in the only rational way possible for a person who does not have any previous knowledge of fiqh; by adhering to and following one of the four acceptable schools of fiqh in operation today.

Not to adhere to a madhhab while learning fiqh has proven tantamount to not learning any fiqh at all due to the confusion created in the mind of the student, who is incapable of understanding and apprehending legal rules without this necessary foundation.

In fact, not to adhere to a school is to reject the science of fiqh while claiming a superior understanding of the Deen to those great men who founded the madhhabs as well as their students who continued by expanding and fine-tuning their teacher’s work.

The truth is that the followers of the founders produced the legal framework of the most glorious civilisations humanity has ever witnessed, and the non-madhhabi muftis have, in some instances, been the cause of confusion, social ailment and destruction.

What is important for every Muslim to understand is that a person who does not fulfil the conditions of ijtihad is categorically obliged to adhere to a madhhab;

the rigorous conditions of ijtiḥād being as follows:

- To be Muslim;
- To be responsible;
- To have moral integrity (*'adala*);
- To be aware of the social circumstances of the time and place where we live;
- To be perspicacious;
- To master Arabic broadly. This implies grammar, lexicology and Arab rhetoric;
- To know the Qur'an. This implies knowing the different causes of the revelation of the verses related to the law and whether abrogating or abrogated; to know each and every verse dealing with legal matters (500 verses approximately); to know the commentaries of the Prophet – peace be upon him – on those verses and those made by the Sahāba, the Tabi'ūn and other scholars in the science of Qur'anic exegesis; to know the different readings (*qira'at*) of the Qur'an and the legal implications that their differences may originate;
- To know the Sunnah. This implies knowing all of the ḥadīth which relate to the law, to know the abrogating and abrogated; to know the ḥadīth and their transmitters; and the ḥadīth that specify and restrict other ḥadīth in their legal implementation; to know the science of the different levels of ḥadīth and their respective strengths;
- To know the legal opinions of the Sahāba and the verification of their transmissions;
- To identify the points of law where there is consensus or not;
- To know the rules of analogy (*qiyas*) and its correct

application;

- To master the science of the Fundamentals of Fiqh (*Usul al-Fiqh*);
- To know the objectives of the Shari'ah (*Maqasid ash-Shari'ah*) and its application in order to balance the letter and spirit of the law and avoid rigidity that can lead to absurdity, unnecessary difficulty and injustice.

This being the case, it is clear that the great majority of the Muslims do not fulfil these conditions and are obliged to make taqlid, that is, to follow a mujtahid or his school and therefore, it is necessary to understand that taqlid can only be made of one of the recognised four schools of fiqh, and to make taqlid of other than them is forbidden by consensus.<sup>5</sup>

A layman cannot request legal evidence (*dalil*) regarding points of fiqh as if he had the capacity to understand it and judge its appropriateness. He must adhere to a madhhab and follow its Imam since he is the *dalil*.

As far as Ihsan and its corresponding science – *taawwuf* – is concerned, its denial means abandoning a third of the Deen and its fundamental core.

To summarise: this work will – in sha'Allah – provide the Muslim with a deep grounding in the three essential sciences of the Deen, enabling him or her to identify deviant doctrines that promote an anthropomorphic conception of Allah, or discredit the schools of fiqh, or deprive the Deen of its spiritual teachings.

Shaykh Ali Laraki

<sup>5</sup> See in this regard *Maraqī as-Su'ud* by ash-Shinqiti, verse 958 and its various commentaries *Nashr al-Bunud*, *Nathr al-Wurud*, etc.

### *Transliteration and Italicisation of Words*

In this work we have adopted the following procedure with respect to the transliteration and italicisation of words. The words are not transliterated according to the standards of academic orientalists as in our view this is a part of a quite concerted programme of erasing the Arabic script and replacing it with the Latin script, as has been done successfully in Turkey, Malaysia and many other countries. The serious student will easily find out the Arabic spellings of the words we have used. For the person whose concern is simply to know the knowledge outlined in this book for the sake of his own practice, the transliteration scheme we have adopted will be quite sufficient.

With italicisation we have followed the convention that foreign words and book titles are to be italicised, but have taken the position that a huge numbers of Arabic words are no longer foreign words in the English language, particularly for Muslims, but indeed even for non-Muslims. For the purposes of this book words such as Sunnah, wudu', salat and zakat are to all intents and purposes now English words.