

من علمك النظر؟

Who Taught You How to Think?

*An Introduction to Maulānā Shahbāz
Iṣlāhī*

By Dr Mohammad Akram Nadwi
Translation by Dr Abu Zayd

سلسلة إملاء الخاطر | Imlā al-Khāṭir Series



AL-SALAM
INSTITUTE

A Centre for Arabic and Islamic Sciences

Oxford . London . Online

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جميع الحقوق محفوظة

Imlā al-Khāṭir Series

In this series, which he names *Imlā al-Khāṭir* (literally, “dictation of thoughts”), Dr Mohammad Akram Nadwi follows in the tradition of the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* and shares with the world his reflections on a variety of topics ranging from theology to law, history to heart softeners, philosophy, education and more. Composed in a casual, conversational style consisting of questions followed by their brief answers (each portion predicated by *qālū/qultu*, “they said”/“I responded”), he utilizes therein the highest level of Arabic, reflecting his love of the language and his extensive expertise in Arabic grammar and rhetoric. These short but poignant reflections are part of the *balāghah* genre and tradition of Arabic literature. It should be noted that these translations, done by his senior students, serve as a guide and can never fully match the style, tone and eloquence of the original Arabic. Also note that Dr Akram does not necessarily review each translation and is not responsible for any errors, improper word choices, or the likes, that are an inevitable part of the translation process.

Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi is a world-renowned scholar of Indian origin who has resided in England for an extensive time. After receiving in-depth training to an advanced level in the traditional Islamic disciplines at the famous Nadwat al-Ulama seminary in Lucknow, India, and receiving a PhD in Arabic literature from Lucknow University, he became a research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, where he conducted research for a number of years on a variety of topics, including Ḥadīth and Sufi orders in India. He has published widely in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English, including translations (like his work on Shāh Waliullah, *Bustan al-Muhaddithin*), editions of Arabic texts (such as a renowned critical edition of *Usul al-Shāshī* in Ḥanafī jurisprudence), and original monographs on Islamic law, female ḥadīth narrators and such figures as Abū Ḥanīfah and Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwi. His groundbreaking work, yet to be published, is an encyclopedic 40-volume documentation of the legacy of female scholarship in the Islamic tradition. He co-founded the Al-Salam Institute in 2006 where he continues to serve as Principal and Senior Lecturer.

Introduction

One of the great influences on Dr. Akram has been his teacher, the late Maulānā Shahbāz Iṣlāḥī, who has been characterized as an original thinker who always preferred research and critical examination over blind following. He was, at the same time, a great teacher, able to teach and impart into his students the art of critical thinking. In this essay, Dr. Akram shares some of his thoughts on what critical thinking is, while introducing us to his late teacher.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

من علمك النظر؟

بقلم: محمد أكرم الندوي

أو كسفورد

قالوا: ما هو النظر؟ قلت: النظر هو القياس، وهو الترتيب والترابط بين شيئين أو أمرين، بين معلوم ومجهول، أو بين مفهوم وشبه مفهوم، والنظر الصحيح هو الناشئ من ترتيب صحيح وترابط دقيق بين القضايا المختلفة: أسبابها ومسبباتها، معلولاتها وعللها، مقدماتها ونتائجها، وأصولها وفروعها، بحيث يصبح المسار بين جميع العناصر والأجزاء واضحاً جليئاً وثابتاً محكماً، فإن أعوز المسارَ الوضوحَ والجلالةَ نَمَّ ذلك عن السعي الناقص في البحث عن الروابط بين العناصر والأجزاء، بل كان دليلاً على التنضيد المختلّ الغبي والتنسيق الفاسد الوهمي للتصورات والقضايا، ويمكن أن يُشَبَّه هذا النوع من التفكير بالترابط الحاصل في الرؤيا، وهو ترابط شبه فوضي لا يؤدي معنى متكاملًا متسقًا للنائم إذا انتبه، ولا تتولد المعاني الصحيحة المتسقة إلا باللجوء إلى جهد دؤوب في التفكير وتعب مُضِنٍ في النظر.

قالوا: وهل النظر كله من جنس واحد؟ قلت: لا، النظر نظران: نظر العقلاء والحكماء بصفة عامة، ونظر المتخصصين في فرع من فروع العلم والمعرفة مثل نظر الفلاسفة والمتكلمين والأصوليين، قالوا: ما الفرق بين النوعين؟ قلت: كلاهما هام وضروري، فالأول نحتاج إليه في كل مطلب من مطالب حياتنا وفي جميع ما يعيننا من أحوالنا وشؤوننا وهيئاتنا، والثاني نعلم عليه في الفرع العلمي الخاص الذي ندرسه مميّزًا إياه من غيره من الفروع، غير جامعين بين متفرّقين ونقيضين، ولا مفرّقين بين صنويين ومثيلين.

قالوا من تعلمت منه النظر؟ قلت تعلمته من شيوخ لي كثيرين، ولعل أمّهم علي بذلك هو شيخنا شهباز الإصلاحي رحمه الله تعالى، فلم أرَ نظرًا مثله شرقًا ولا غربًا، ولا مسلمًا أو غير مسلم، قالوا: نراك لا تتعب من ذكر فضله عليك، ووددنا لو قدّمت الماعّة من سيرته، قلت: هو العلامة الكبير المفسر العظيم المحقق الفريد شهباز الإصلاحي بن محمد حبيب بن الطاف حسين بن نعمت ميان، أحد الأذكياء الألباء والنافذ البصيرة النبهاء، اشتغل بعض أجداده قاضيًا في جونغور أيام الملك الصالح أورنك زيب، وكان أبوه محمد حبيب من أثرياء زمانه، حبيبًا لدى أهل قريته مسلمين وهندوسا، محبا للصالحين، من مردي الشيخ آسي الغازيفوري، وأنشأ مدرسة مهمّما بشؤون المسلمين التعليمية والدينية.

ولد شيخنا في قرية بجوته من أعمال سيوان في ولاية بهار من الهند سنة ثمان وأربعين وثلاثمائة وألف تقريبًا، وأخذ عن أخيه وبعض العلماء في قريته، وشارك أخاه في حركة تحرير الهند وهو في الثانوية مشاركة فعالة، واطلع على مؤلفات للأستاذ أبي الأعلى المودودي، فتأثر بها وأعجب بها أيما إعجاب، وترك الدراسة في المعاهد العلمانية الرسمية، والتحق بمدرسة دينية في كانفور، ثم التحق بعد سنة بمدرسة الإصلاح في سراي مير بأعظمكراه في الخامس من ذي القعدة سنة ست وستين وثلاث مائة وألف، وتخرج فيها في الرابع والعشرين من شعبان سنة سبعين وثلاثمائة وألف، درس على صدر الدين الإصلاحي، وجيل أحسن الندوي، ومصطفى الندوي، وعبيد الله الرحمان، وآخرين، ولازم أخت أحسن الإصلاحي تلميذ الإمام حميد الدين الفراهي ملازمة خاصة، واستفاد منه منهج الإمام الفراهي وفكره في التفسير، وروى عن العلامة المقرئ محمد طيب القاسمي، والإمام أبي الحسن الندوي، والشيخ عبد الفتاح أبي غدة، وقد أجازوه إجازة عامة.

وتقدم في اللغات العربية والفارسية والأردية تقدمًا كبيرًا، وأتقن اللغة الإنكليزية، وعرف بتمكنه من التفسير وعلوم القرآن الكريم، والحديث وعلومه، والفقه وأصوله، والحساب، والاقتصاد، والسياسة، والشعر، والعروض، والنقد، وكان يحفظ مئات من الأبيات في اللغتين الأردية والفارسية، ويجيد الشعر باللغة الأردية.

واشتغل بالدعوة والإصلاح، والتأليف والكتابة، والتدريس، وأخيراً عزل نفسه عن كل شيء إلا التدريس، وكان لا يألو جهداً في نفع الطلاب وإفادتهم، ولا يشعر في ذلك بتعب ولا ملل، درّس في جامعة الفلاح بأعظمكراه، ثم الجامعة الإسلامية ببتكل، وأخيراً في دار العلوم لندوة العلماء، وذلك سنة سبع وتسعين وثلاثمائة وألف، ولم يأخذ إجازة قط إلا في أيام مرضه.

وبايع العالم الرباني وصي الله الفتحفوري، ثم شيخنا أبا الحسن الندوي، وصحب الشيخ سعيد أحمد خان من أعظمكراه، والعالم الرباني أبرار الحق، والعالم الرباني محمد صديق الباندوي، وكان - أي شيخنا المترجم له - زاهداً، متواضعاً، محبا للعلم وأهله، مخلصاً، بعيداً عن تشهير نفسه أو التصدر للرئاسة، ومؤثراً لحياة التقشف، وخادماً للطلاب وعامة الناس.

قرأت عليه أصول الشاشي، وتفسير سور من القرآن الكريم، وكتاب الصوم والاعتكاف من موطأ الإمام مالك، وكتاب الزكوة من صحيح مسلم ومقدمته، وكتاب الأدب من سنن أبي داود، وحضرت مجالسه، وصحبته طويلاً، وناقشته في المسائل العلمية والأدبية والفكرية والسياسية، واقتنست منه كثيراً من آرائه وتشرفت برسائل منه إلي، أجب فيها عن بعض أسئلتني، وشجعني على العلم والتحقيق، وله عليّ منة كبيرة في تعليمي وتزيتي لن أنساها، فجزاه الله تعالى خيراً، أجازني بجميع مروياته في الرابع والعشرين من ربيع الأول سنة تسع عشرة وأربع مائة وألف، وذلك في

رسالة كتبها إلي، ولا أراه أجاز أحدًا غيري، وتوفي إلى رحمة الله تعالى في الثالث من شهر رمضان المبارك سنة ثلاث وعشرين وأربع مائة وألف فلم يخلف مثله.

قالوا: ما مبلغه في النظر والتفكير. قلت: قد بلغ في النظر ذروته، لم يكن يقلد أحدًا في العلوم والأفكار، بل كان محققًا فيها ومجتهدًا، ولا سيما في التفسير، ولعل الهند لم تشهد مثله في فهم كتاب الله تعالى بعد الإمام حميد الدين الفراهي.

قالوا: ما هو منهجه في النظر؟ قلت: هو الاستقراء وفحص الفروض والسبر والتقسيم، فكان يجمع بين الأجزاء المختلفة والوجوه، ويحصر الأوصاف، ثم يحللها تحليلًا علميًا دقيقًا، بعرض كل وصف أو سبب أو وجه على الميزان الصحيح، وتعيين ما كان وصفًا أنسب أو سببًا ألام أو وجهًا أوفق، وكان أبعد الناس عن غموض في الفكر والنظر، مقربًا بين المتوافقات والمثالثات، ومفرقًا بين المتخالفات والمتنافرات.

قالوا: ما هو أسلوبه الذي كان يتبعه في تعليمكم النظر الصحيح؟ قلت: كان يتبع أسلوبين، وكلاهما نفعنا نفعًا لا يوصف مداه، قالوا: ما هما؟ قلت:

الأول: إظهار الخلل في أنظار من سبقه من العلماء والفلاسفة والحكباء، فكان يوجه إلينا السؤال عن معنى آية أو حديث أو جزئية فقهية أو رأي

أو فكرة أو قضية من القضايا، ثم يكلفنا أن نأتي بالحجة على قولنا الذي اخترناه من بين سائر الأقوال، فيكشف لنا عن موضع الخلل والفساد فيما اخترنا، فنستبدله بقول آخر فينتقضه ويبطله إبطالا، فما قدمنا من رأي أو وجه مستعار ممن تقدمنا من العلماء، أو رأي رأيناه إلا نقضه نقضا علميا مقنعا.

الثاني: تقديم القول الذي كان يراه صحيحًا مبرهنا عليه بالنقل والعقل ومحتجا له بسواطع الحجج وبواهر الأدلة، فإذا وجهنا سؤالا أو أوردنا إشكالا أو اعتراضا على قوله، أبان عن مبانيه وأسسها إبانة، ووهى إشكالنا واعتراضنا وهدمه هدمًا.

قالوا: هل اتسم بشيء من معايب المناظرين والمجادلين؟ قلت: لا، بل كانت مناقشاته مناقشات علمية هادئة، في رفق وتأن، وصبر واحتمال، ولم يفرض علينا قوله أو رأيه قط، وكان نزيبها عن العصبية المذهبية والعقدية والفكرية، ومرتفعا عن المشاكسة والخصام والعناد ترفعا.

قلت: تأملوا ما وصفت لكم من منهجه متدبرين، ودرّبوا أنفسكم على النظر العلمي تدريبا حابسيا عليه مصطبرين.

Who Taught You How to Think?

An Introduction to Maulānā Shāhbāz Iṣlāḥī

By Dr Mohammed Akram Nadwi
Oxford, UK

They asked: What is critical thinking?

I replied:

The faculty of critical thinking is basically the process of analogical deduction, which consists of drawing order and connection between things and matters, linking the known with the unknown, and that which is understood with that which is less understood. Sound critical thinking emanates from the correct ordering and precise linking between different issues, such as causes with their effects; results with their reasons or rationale; starting premises with their end results; and fundamental principles with their subsidiary, peripheral issues. This must be done such that the path and link through these components and parts becomes explicitly clear and firmly established.

If that path lacks clarity or precision, this will indicate an endeavor lacking in discovering the true linkages between parts and elements. Rather, it can be proof of deficient and foolish composition, or a corrupt and imagined arrangement of concepts and issues. This type of thinking can often resemble the associations found in one's dreams—specious and chaotic as they often are—which rarely lead to a complete and harmonious meaning upon awakening. Sound and harmonious meaning can only arise by resorting to persistent and exhaustive efforts in thinking and observation.

They asked: Is all critical thinking the same type?

I replied:

No. There are two basic types of critical thinking: the first being the general thinking and observation of the intellectual and wise ones; and the second

being the observations of the specialists of various secondary disciplines and arts, like philosophers, theologians and jurists.

They asked: What is the difference between them?

I replied:

Both of them are essential and important. We need the first type of thinking in all of life's endeavors and all that affects us from our various states, matters and organizations. We must rely on the second type when we study specific advanced disciplines, so that we don't wind up muddling scattered and opposite ideas or separating equivalent or similar concepts.

They asked: From whom did you learn this type of thinking?

I replied:

I have learned it from many teachers of mine, but perhaps I am most indebted to our teacher Shaykh Shahbāz Iṣlāḥī, may God have mercy on him. I have not met a thinker of his likes, not in the East nor in the West, not from the Muslims nor from others.

They asked: We find you never tiring of mentioning his grace upon you. We wish you would present to us a glimpse from his life.

I replied:

He is the great erudite scholar, noble commentator of the Qur'ān, the solitary researcher Shabāz Iṣlāḥī son of Muḥammad Ḥabīb son of Alṭāf Ḥusayn son of Ni'mat Miān. He was a brilliant and insightful scholar, of penetrating and profound insight. Some of his ancestors worked as judges in Jawnpūr during the days of the righteous ruler Aurangzeb. His father Muḥammad Ḥabīb was from the wealthy people of his time, loved by the Muslim as well as the Hindū residents of his village. He loved the pious, was a follower of Shaykh Āṣī Ghāzīpūrī¹ and established a school concerned about the educational and religious needs of the Muslims.

Shaykh Shahbāz was born in India in the village of Bijehata in the district of Sīwān in the state of Biḥār, in the year 1348/1930, approximately. He began

¹ A revered and pious Muslim scholar and poet, who died in Ghāzīpūrī in 1917.

his studies under his brother and local scholars of his village. His brother participated in the Indian freedom movement, being involved at a secondary level.

He studied the works of the author Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī and was greatly influenced and impressed by them. He left his secular studies at the official schools for the religious school at Kānpūr, and, after a year, enrolled in the Iṣlāhī seminary in Serāṭ Mīr in Azamgarh, on the 5th of Dhū al-Qi'dah in 1366/1947. He graduated from there on the 24th of Sha'bān 1370/May 30, 1951. He had studied under Ṣadr al-Dīn Iṣlāhī, Jalīl Aḥsan Nadwī, Muṣṭafā Nadwī, 'Ubaydullah Raḥmānī and others. He also spent time under the particular tutelage of Akhtar Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, student of the Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, gaining from him the thought and methodology of Farāhī in tafsīr. He also narrated from the reciter Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī and Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah, all of whom granted him a general Ijāzah (license).

He became renowned and preeminent in language, including Arabic, Persian and Urdu, as well as English. He was known for his mastery in tafsīr (Qur'ānic exegesis) and the rest of the Qur'ānic sciences, ḥadīth and its sciences, fiqh and its principles, mathematics, economics, politics, poetry, prosody and literary criticism. He had committed to memory hundreds of verses of Urdu and Persian poetry, and was a renowned poet of Urdu himself.

He was preoccupied with da'wah and reform, writing and teaching. In the end he stopped all activities except for teaching. He never stopped helping and benefiting students, never tiring from that. He taught at the Falāḥ Seminary in Azamgarh, later at the Islamic seminary in Bhatkal, and finally the Dār al-'Ulūm of Nadwat al-'Ulamā', where he began teaching in 1397/1977. He never took a vacation or break except for the days he became ill.

He had pledged² to the devout scholar Waṣīyullāh Fataḥpūrī and later to Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī. He also became a companion of Shaykh Sa'īd

² This refers to the religious pledge known as *bay'ah* which is expressed by students and followers at the hands of their spiritual guides.

Aḥmad Khān of Azamgarh, the devout scholar Abrār al-Ḥaqq, and the devout scholar Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Bāndwī.

Maulānā Shahbāz was otherworldly and greatly humble, a lover of knowledge and its seekers. He was sincere and far from seeking fame for his own self or desiring any position of leadership. He preferred instead an austere life, opting to serve students and others.

I read to him Uṣūl al-Shāshī,³ the tafsīr of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, the Book of Fasting and I'tikāf from the Muwaṭṭa' of Imām Mālik, the Book of Zakāh and the Muqaddimah of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, and the Book of Etiquette from the Sunan of Abū Dāwūd. I attended his circles and accompanied him for a long period of time. I discussed with him many academic, literary, intellectual and political matters, and wound up adopting many of his views. I was honored by many letters he wrote to me personally, in which he answered many of my questions. He inspired me to learn and research. In my personal study and training, I owe a massive debt to him which I can never forget. May Allah give him the best reward.

He granted me Ijāzah⁴ in all of his transmissions on the 24th of Rabī' al-Awwal in the year 1419/1998, in a letter he sent to me. I don't think that he ever granted anyone else Ijāzah. He passed on to the mercy of God on the 3rd of Ramaḍān in the year 1423/2002, leaving behind no one like him.

They asked: What was the extent of his observation and thinking?

I replied:

He reached the heights of intellectual thinking. He never followed another person in any science or thought, but researched matters for himself, especially in tafsīr. Perhaps India itself has not seen one of his likes in understanding the Book of God the Exalted after Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī.

They asked: What is his methodology in thinking?

I replied:

³ A primer in Ḥanafī fiqh authored by Imām Niẓām al-Dīn al-Shāshī.

⁴ Ijāzah is a license, or formal authorization of a teacher allowing a student to teach or transmit various texts on the teacher's authority.

It was thorough investigation, full examination of suppositions, probing and proper division and ordering. He used to gather various parts and elements together, isolate their characteristics, and then analyze them academically and precisely, presenting every feature, rationale or dimension in its true balance, and assigning the most appropriate feature, the most harmonious rationale and the most suitable dimension. He was the farthest from muddled thinking, able to bring together congruous and homogeneous elements, and separate incongruous and contradictory elements.

They asked: What was his way of teaching you correct thinking?

I replied: He followed two ways, both of them benefiting us in ways whose extents cannot be described.

They asked: What were they?

I replied:

The first was by revealing some of the faults in the positions held by previous scholars, philosophers and wise men. He would pose a question to us about the meaning of a verse, ḥadīth, subsidiary fiqh matter, opinion, thought, issue or case; and then commission us to come up with proof for one particular view over others. He would then proceed to expose for us the flaws and defects in our argument. We would then substitute those with other views which we would then defend, and he in turn would deconstruct and nullify those. Whatever view or statement we presented, whether it was borrowed from previous scholars or arrived at independently, he would scrutinize in an academic and persuasive way.

The second way was by presenting what he considered to be the right position and proving it through texts and rational evidences, relying on the brightest proofs and most brilliant evidences.

Whenever we encountered a question or came across a problem or objection to any of his views, he would explain them clearly starting from their foundations, and establish them clearly, thereby removing our problems and objections completely.

They asked: Could he be characterized by any of the flaws that so commonly affect those who debate and argue?

I replied:

Absolutely not, for his arguments were academic and tranquil, delivered in a manner that was always courteous and mature, patient and tolerant. He never obliged us to follow any single view of his. He was free of fanaticism towards any juristic, theological or intellectual school, and far above the need to quarrel, argue or be obstinate.

I concluded:

Reflect over what I have described to you from the Shaykh's manner, train yourself in academic thinking and devote yourself to it completely.