

من علمك ذكر الله؟

# Who Taught You the Remembrance of God?

By Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

Translation by Dr. Abu Zayd

سلسلة إملاء الخاطر | Imlā al-Khāṭir Series



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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**

*In this monograph, Dr. Akram fondly recalls the life of Maulānā Muḥammad Aḥmad of Pratapgarh, from whom he learned what it means to love and remember God.*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## من علمك ذكر الله؟

بقلم: محمد أكرم الندوي

أو كسفورد

قالوا: نسمعك دائماً تُدكرنا برتينا عز وجل مسبحاً له وحامداً، ولائذا به مستغيثاً، وترغبنا في حبه وطاعته، والعبادة والتأله محرزاً إيانا ومشوقاً، فكيف نرتي أنفسنا على هذه الصلة بالله تعالى وننشئها عليها إنشاءً؟ قلت: الله ربنا ومولانا، لا رب لنا سواه ولا مولى، ذكره معولنا، وحمده غذاؤنا، وتسبيحه زادنا، وبجبه تحلو الحياة وتطيب، وإذا خلت منه فهي مُرُّ أجاج، وإذا رضي عنا لم يهمننا إذا سخط الأنام وغضبوا، وإذا عمّر الذي بيننا وبينه لم يضرنا إذا كان الذي بيننا وبين العالمين خراباً، وله العتبي حتى يرضى، ولا سبيل لنا إلى توثيق ارتباطنا به إلا بأن نذكره ذكراً كثيراً بكرة وأصيلاً، ونلجأ إليه مستعينين به ومعتمدين، وسائلين إياه وبه متحصنين، وفي كل ما سواه زاهدين، وإياه مُجافين ومُجانين.

قالوا: ما العون على ذلك؟ فقد تغلب علينا الهوى واستحكم فينا الكسل، قلت: عليكم بخصلتين متشبتين بها تشبثاً: قراءة القرآن فهماً وتدبراً منعمي

النظر فيه ظاهراً وباطناً، وصحة الأخيار الصالحين الخاشعين القانتين،  
فلمصلحة تأثير عجيب في تطهير النفوس وتزكيتها، ومعافة القلوب  
وسدادها، ووصلها بالله تعالى وتعليقها به، وقصدها إياه في وجد وشوق،  
قالوا: اذكر لنا الصالحين الذين صحبتهم وجالستهم، فانتفعت بهم في ذكر  
الله تعالى وابتغاء الوسيلة إليه محبته منيباً، قلت: هم بضعة عشر رجلاً،  
أجلهم إلي وأبلغهم رتبة وشرفاً هو الشيخ السبّاق المقرّد محمد أحمد  
البرتابكرهي رحمه الله تعالى.

قالوا: اختر لنا من حياته وسيرته ما يقربنا إليه تقرباً، قلت: هو العالم  
الرباني الصالح التقي محمد أحمد بن غلام محمد البرتابكرهي، ولد  
سنة سبع عشرة وثلثمائة وألف في فولفور من أعمال برتابكره، وأخذ عن  
الشيخ الكبير المحدث حافظ صحيح البخاري بدر علي من سدونة في رأي  
بريلي من خلفاء فضل الرحمن الكنج مرادآبادي، وحصل له منه الإجازة  
والخلافة في الطريقة، ثم اتصل بالشيخ وارث حسن الحسيني الحنفي  
الكوري اللكنوي أحد خلفاء شيخ الهند محمود الحسن الديوندي، وعمل  
رياضات شاقة ومجاهدات طويلة تحت رعايته وتربيته في مسجد التل  
التاريخي الشهير في مدينة لکنؤ.

ثم أقبل على الدعوة إلى الله تعالى صارفاً نفسه عن الوشائج الدنيوية وكابحاً  
جماعها في وجه المصالح المادية، متجولاً في القرى والبوادي يعلم الناس  
دينهم ويصلحهم ويطهرهم ويربيهم تربية، بعيداً الهتم عن الطعام والشراب

والملبس والمسكن، واتخذ حب الله تعالى وإيثاره والزهد في الدنيا مذهباً له، وأخيراً تحول إلى مدينة إله آباد حيث قصده الناس من أقصى البلاد وأدناها، وأصبح مؤئلاً الخلق ومرجع الأنام، ولقد رأيت كبار مشايخ عصرنا شيخنا الإمام أبا الحسن علي الندوي، والمحدث الجليل الشيخ حبيب الرحمن الأعظمي، والعالم الرباني أبرار الحق، والقارئ صديق أحمد الباندوي يقدمونه على أنفسهم، ويزورونه، وينهلون من منبئه الصافي الزلال، وعاش على هذه الطريقة مستقيماً عليها ثابتاً إلى أن وافاه الأجل يوم الأحد الثالث من ربيع الثاني سنة اثنتي عشرة وأربعمائة وألف في إله آباد عن عمر يزيد على تسعين سنة، وخلف بنين وبنات، وبنوه: الشيخ اشتياق أحمد، وإرشاد أحمد، والمقرئ مشتاق أحمد.

قالوا: أخبرنا بفضلہ، قلت: كان منقطع النظر في العبادة ومحبة الله والتفاني فيه والتوكل والزهد والقناعة والتواضع، صفا ولم يكدر، وأخلص سره صادقاً، تالياً لكتاب الله تعالى في تدبر وتفقه، ومتبعاً لسنن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ومتأدباً بأدابه، وكان لكللماته نفوذ في القلوب وسلطان على النفوس، وانجذب العلماء والصلحاء وعامة الناس بل والهندوس إليه انجذاباً غريباً متواضعين على حبه وتقديره وإجلاله وتعظيمه، يقول شيخنا أبو الحسن علي الندوي رحمه الله تعالى: "لما زرته للمرة الأولى وجدته في غاية من البساطة في ملبسه وحديثه، لم أر فيه شيئاً من المشيخة، ولما سمعت موعظته وجدت فيها من الإخلاص والروحانية والربانية والذكر

الإلهي والتذكير باليوم الآخر والإنابة إلى الله وإصلاح النفس ما لم أجد إلا لدى عدد قليل جدا من الوعاظ والخطباء."

قالوا: قُص علينا من صلتك به، قلت: حضرته مع بعض زملائي أكثر من مرة في لكتناؤ وفي إله آباء، ولعله أفضل من جالسته وصحبته من العلماء الصالحين الربانيين، وكلما زرناه حَصَنَّا وضمَّنا إليه وعانقنا عناقًا طويلاً بقلب ملؤه الحب والشفقة، وهو في الحب كالأم الحنون والأب الشفوق، وذلك دأبه مع كل من قصده وقدم عليه، وكان هذا الحب طبيعياً فيه، لا تكلف فيه ولا تصنع، وكنت أعجب من همته ونشاطه وقوته وسرعته رغم كبر سنه وضعف بنيته، وكان يوصينا دائماً بقراءة القرآن الكريم واتباع السنة، وما رأيته إلا ذكرت الله تعالى، وكان في غاية من التواضع يجلس مع الزوار ويؤاكلهم ويشارهم ويهتم بأمرهم ويهدي إليهم بما جاءه من الفتوح، ولم يدخر شيئاً من المال ولا اقتنى ديناراً ولا درهماً مع انهيار الدنيا عليه في آخر أيام حياته.

قالوا: هل استجزته؟ قلت: لقد حرمت إجازته، ولو استجزته لأجازني، وإسناده عال نادر، فإنه يروي عن شيخه في العلم والطريقة المحدث الكبير بدر علي عن المحدث الكبير العالم الرباني فضل الرحمن الكنج مرادآبادي، قالوا: ما لك متحسراً على فوات إجازته كل هذا التحسر، وقد حصلت لك إجازات من الرواة عن أصحاب فضل الرحمن الكنج مراد آبادي. قلت: صدقتم، ولكن هذا طريق نادر: رواية محدث شيخ في

الطريقة عن شيخ مثله عن مثله، والثلاثة معروفون بالعلم والصلاح والتعليم والتربية، ففيه علو وندرة، وإني أحبُّ مولانا محمد أحمد محبة كبيرة مُجلاً له أي إجلال، فيا ليتني استجزته ورويت عنه.

قالوا: ما مدى حبه لله تعالى وذكره له، قلت: غلبته المحبة والمودة، فأصبح هو والحب توأمين متلازمين، مُعنى القلب مكروبا، ومن أذى الحب في عذاب مذيّب، وأبت نار غرامه إلا التهابا، وقف نفسه في سبيل الحبيب عالقا به قلبه، وأنسه في حضوره حافظه وفي مغيبه.

قالوا: حدّثنا عن شعره، قلت: كان شاعرا موهوبا، وقد تغلغل الحب في شعره، فإذا ترنحت قريحته أرسل النفس على سجيّتها، وأتى بأبيات حافلة بالنكت العلمية، والفتات الدعوية، وجياشة بالعواطف الإيمانية والغيرة الدينية، وطبع له ديوان باسم "عرفان محبت"، وقدّم له شيخنا أبو الحسن الندوي رحمه الله تعالى، وترجمت منظومة شعرية له من الأردية، وطبعت في صحيفة الرائد الصادرة في دار العلوم لندوة العلماء، بلكنّاؤ، وفرح جدا، ودعا لي، وكتب إلي رسالة ضاعت مني، وحزنت جدا على فقدها.

وتحدث في شعره عن مبلغ حبه، فقال: "أحرقني نار المحبة، ومثُّ بها، فلما مثُّ وجدت الحياة" ولكنه لم يتخط الحد في هذا الحب بل جعل الشرع والعقل حافظين له، يقول: "لم يبق الآن شيء من الإفراط والتفريط، فلما اكتمل الحب اعتدل".





# Who Taught You the Remembrance of God?

By Dr. Mohammed Akram Nadwi  
Oxford, UK

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They asked: We always hear you reminding us of our Lord, Mighty and Exalted is He, glorifying and praising Him, seeking His refuge and His aid. You exhort us to love Him, to obey Him, and to worship Him, always encouraging and inspiring us. How do we train ourselves in this connection with God and cultivate it further?

I replied:

God is our Lord and our Master, and there is no Lord nor Master other than He. His remembrance is our object of reliance, His praise our nourishment, and His glorification our provision. With His love life becomes sweet and pleasant, and without His love it becomes bitter and salty. When He is pleased with us it matters not if the rest of creation is angered. When that which is between us and Him is strong it does not matter if that which is between us and the world is broken. To Him we submit until we earn His pleasure.

There is no way for us to strengthen our connection with Him other than remembering Him profusely, morning and evening, and that we resort to Him in seeking assistance and refuge. We ask Him alone and fortify ourselves with Him. We become indifferent to all save Him and turn our sides to Him.

They asked: What will help us in this regard, for our desires and laziness have predominated over us?

I replied:

You need to tenaciously hold on to two characteristics:

1. Reciting the Qur'ān with understanding and deliberation, casting your sharp eye deep into its apparent and deeper meanings.

2. Keeping the company of the pious ones who are humble and obedient, for such company has an amazing effect on cleansing the soul and rectifying hearts, connecting them with God and orienting them to the discovery of and intense longing for God.

They asked: Can you mention some of the pious ones whom you accompanied and sat with, benefiting from them by remembering God and seeking access to Him in humility and repentance?

I replied:

There are over ten such individuals, but the most excellent of them and the most solid in rank and honor is the preeminent and unique Shaykh Muḥammad Aḥmad of Pratapgarh, God the Exalted have mercy on him.

They asked: Please give us a glimpse into his life to familiarize us with him.

I replied:

He is the godly and pious scholar, fearful and pure, Muḥammad Aḥmad son of Ghulām Muḥammad from Pratapgarh, born in the year 1317/1899 in Pālpūr in the district of Pratapgarh. He learned from the great scholar and ḥadīth expert, the memorizer of Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Badr ‘Alī from Sadūnah in Raebareli, one of the spiritual successors of Faḍl al-Raḥmān Ganjmurādābādī. From Badr ‘Alī he received Ijāzah<sup>1</sup> and Khilāfah in the spiritual path.<sup>2</sup> He then met Shaykh Wārith Ḥasan al-Ḥusaynī the Ḥanafī scholar of Kūra, Lucknow and one of the spiritual successors of the scholar of India Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan of Deoband. Under his leadership and training,

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<sup>1</sup> Ijāzah is a traditional license, or formal authorization, of a teacher allowing a student to teach or transmit various texts, ḥadīth or disciplines on the teacher’s authority.

<sup>2</sup> In the spiritual hierarchy and practice of Sufi orders, a spiritual master (shaykh) would take a pledge of allegiance (bay’ah) from each follower (murīd) for their spiritual path or journey. From these followers, the master would deputize some of those who were competent enough to become his successors (khalīfah).

he underwent difficult exercises and prolonged struggles in the historic and famous Mosque of the Mound in Lucknow.<sup>3</sup>

He then undertook the path of calling others to God, turning himself away from worldly connections and curbing the soul's stubbornness in the face of worldly interests. He traveled through towns and villages to teach people their religion, to reform them, purify them and train them. He did so with no regard for food, drink, clothing or shelter, and took only the love of God, preferring Him to all else and forsaking the world as his methodology. In the end he settled in the city of Allahabad where people from all over the land sought him out. He became a refuge for people and a reference point for them. I have seen the greatest scholars of our time—like our Shaykh Imām Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, the great ḥadīth scholar Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān A'zamī, the Godly scholar Abrār al-Ḥaqq, and the reciter Ṣiddīq Aḥmad Bāndawī—prefer him over themselves, visit him frequently and drink from his pure and fresh spring. He faithfully persisted on this path until his worldly term came to an end on Sunday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Rabī' al-Thānī of the year 1412/ October 12, 1991 in the city of Allahabad at over ninety years of age. He left behind many children, including Shaykh Ishtiyāq Aḥmad, Irshād Aḥmad and the reciter Mushtāq Aḥmad.

They asked: Tell us about his virtues.

I replied:

He was without parallel in the worship and love of God, in His annihilation, in complete reliance upon Him, in abstinence from the world, contentment and humility. He was pure without being sullied in the least, and faithfully kept his secret for God.<sup>4</sup> He abundantly recited the Qur'ān with deliberation and contemplation, and followed the ways of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and adopted his characteristics. His words had influence over hearts and command over people. Scholars, pious ones and the common people—even Hindus—were attracted to him in an amazing way, humbled by his

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<sup>3</sup> The Tilī Wālī Masjid, named after the mound (tīla) upon which it stands, is a historic 350-year mosque built by the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb that houses 6,000 worshippers and is an exquisite example of Mughal architecture.

<sup>4</sup> Keeping one's secret in spiritual terminology of taṣawwuf refers to not divulging the intimacy and closeness one enjoys privately with God.

love, appreciation, reverence, and veneration. Our Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, God have mercy on him, said: “From the very first time that I visited him, I found him to be extremely simple in his dress and his language. I found no trace of fame in him at all. When I heard his exhortations, I found in them such sincerity, spirituality, Godliness, remembrance of God, reminders of the Hereafter, turning to God and reforming the souls, which are rarely found among preachers and speakers.”

They asked: Tell us about your connection to him.

I replied:

I visited him on more than one occasion with my companions in Lucknow and Allahabad. He might well be the best of the pious and Godly scholars that I sat with and accompanied. Whenever we visited him, he embraced us and brought us close to him, hugging us tightly with a heart full of love and tenderness. In this he was like a loving mother or a tender father. This was his practice with all those who came to him, and this love came naturally to him, without being forced or artificial. I used to be amazed by his resolve, energy, strength and speed despite his advanced age and frail body. He always advised us to recite the Noble Qur’ān and follow the Sunnah. I never saw him except that I remembered God. He was extremely humble, always sitting with visitors, eating and drinking with them, expressing concern about their affairs and guiding them with what came to him [from inspiration]. He did not save any wealth nor acquire a single coin, despite the opening of the world to him towards the last days of his life.

They asked: Did you seek Ijāzah from him?

I replied:

Unfortunately, I was deprived of his Ijāzah. Had I requested him, he would surely have granted me. His isnād (chain) was extremely rare and elevated,<sup>5</sup> for he narrated from his teacher in knowledge and the spiritual path, the

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<sup>5</sup> An elevated chain is one with the fewest intermediaries to the source of the narration. The fewer the intermediaries, the higher—and more virtuous—is the chain.

great ḥadīth scholar Badr 'Alī who narrated from the great muḥaddīth and Godly scholar Faḍl al-Raḥmān Ganjmurādābādī.

They asked: Why are you regretful over losing this Ijāzah, for you have attained Ijāzah from many other narrators who are students of Faḍl al-Raḥmān Ganjmurādābādī?

I replied:

You are right, but this is a rare chain: the narration of a great ḥadīth scholar and shaykh of the spiritual path who narrates from his like who narrates from his like—and the three of them are known for knowledge, reform, teaching and training—and there is elevation and rarity in the chain as well. I surely love Maulānā Muḥammad Aḥmad greatly and hold him in high esteem, and I wish that I would have sought his Ijāzah and narrated from him.

They asked: What was the extent of his love for God and his remembrance of Him?

I replied:

He was overtaken by love, such that he and love became like two necessary twins, troubling the heart with perpetual torment, with a fire continuing to inflame without fully destroying. He stood on the path of the beloved, attaching his heart to Him, and finding comfort in His presence and company.

They asked: Tell us about his poetry.

I replied:

He was a gifted poet. Love pervaded his poetry. When his talent would become carried away, he would bring the soul to its natural disposition, and come with verses filled with academic points, admonitions, faith-filled emotions, and religious zeal. His poetry was published in a work called *'Urfān-e-Maḥabbat*, which contained a foreword from our Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī. I also translated a small poem of his from Urdu into Arabic, which was published in a newsletter in Dār al-'Ulūm Nadwat al-'Ulamā' of

Lucknow.<sup>6</sup> He was extremely happy about that and supplicated for me, in a letter he wrote to me, which tragically I have lost.

In his poetry, he spoke about the extent of his love:

Love's fire burned me, caused me to perish

But in this demise, new life I have found

However, he did not exceed the bounds of that love but placed the Sharī'ah and the intellect as a protector over it:

No trace of excess or shortcoming has remained here now

For balance is found once love is complete.

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Akram's alma matter.