

**The Life, Teachings and
Influence of Muhammad ibn
Abdul-Wahhaab**

(an abridged version)

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I Introduction

This work is an abridgement of the author's *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab*. Being an abridgement, many details were deleted and lengthy discussions were cut short, however, the bulk of the topics touched upon in the original work are also discussed here. (Only the review of English literature concerning Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab has been completely removed for this abridgement.)

With the addition goal of providing a compact and brief exposition of the topics, the motivations behind the writing of this abridgment are the same as that of the original work.

This book is not one with a political agenda. It is meant neither to support nor to critique any contemporary regimes or policies. Indeed, the driving force behind this work is much greater and more important than that. It has to do with, first, the religion of Islam as preached by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself and, second, with the honor and rights of an individual Muslim, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

The name Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab (and correspondingly "Wahhabis" and "Wahhabism") has been

heard quite often throughout both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds during the past two centuries. In reality, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab is not a man who is “shrouded in mystery.” His writings, as well as the writings of his closest students and descendents, are well-known and easily available today in virtually any part of the world. Although he is not shrouded in mystery what has been said about him over the years has definitely been filled with both fact and fiction.

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was a fellow human being. As such, he has the right to be studied in an impartial and objective manner. That is, he has the right to a “fair trial.” No matter how much one may oppose his teachings, one does not have the right to wrong him.

In all cases, impartiality, objectivity, scholarly integrity and fairness are to be expected from all, but especially from other Muslims. From an Islamic perspective, this must be true even when dealing with one’s enemies or one’s opponents. Allah has clearly instructed, “O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor. Allah is a better protector to both (than you). So follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you avoid justice. And if you distort your witness or decline to give

it, verily Allah is ever well-acquainted with all that you do” (*al-Nisaa* 135).

In this work, an attempt has been made to present a fair and accurate presentation of the life and teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. To accomplish this goal, conclusions were derived based only on historically and logically the most reliable, accurate, substantiated and proof-based sources-be they from Muslims or non-Muslims.

II The Life of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

The Land of Najd

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab hailed from the land known as the Najd of al-Yamaamah. Najd is described as being bordered by the Mountains of Shammar or by the Great Nafod Desert to the North, Hijaaz to the West, the desert land known as the “Empty Quarter” to the South and al-Dahnaa and al-Ahsaa to the East.

From 317 A. H. until the time of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, there appeared no unified rule over the land of Najd, such that historians paid that land but scarce attention. Thus, by the time of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, Najd fell under the control of the small states and rulers coming out of Bahrain or small emirates in the area.

The Ottomans, in particular, never gave much thought to Najd and had no influence over Najd. In fact, an Ottoman government document recorded by Yameen Ali Effendi in 1018 A.H. (1609 C.E.) shows that the Ottoman state was divided into thirty-two “states” or “provinces.” Of those, fourteen were Arab “states”;

however, Najd was not included among them.¹ In fact, as Vassiliev states, “Thus around the time that Wahhabism emerged, Arabia had largely been left to itself for several decades.”²

There were other attempts to bring Najd under political control. In particular, the Sharifs of the Hijaaz and the Tribe of Khaalid in al-Ahsaa attempted to dominate the land. The Tribe of Khaalid had a stronghold in the Mount of Shammar in the North and also the *Ameer* of al-Uyainah seemed to recognize their authority in a small way. However, as a whole, these attempts were essentially unsuccessful and Najd continued without any strong governing force.³

By the Twelfth Hijri Century, Najd was divided into many small and independent “city-states,” each having their own *ameer* or ruler (passed down through the family) and being completely independent of the other states. Al-Uyainah was under the control of the Family of Muammar (probably the strongest family in the region), al-Diriyyah

¹ Saalih ibn Abdullah al-Abood, *Aqeedah al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab al-Salafiyyah wa Atharuhaa fi al-Alim al-Islaami* (Madinah: Maktabah al-Ghurabaa al-Athariyyah, 1996), vol. 1, p. 41.

² Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 60.

³ Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, *Rasaail al-Imaam Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab al-Shakhsiyyah: Diraasah Daawiyyah* (Riyadh: Daar Ishbeeliyaa, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 53-54.

under the Family of Saud, Riyadh under the Family of Dawaas, Haail under the Family of Ali, al-Qaseem under the Family of Hujailaan and the north of Najd under the Family of Shubaib. Unfortunately, these different “city-states” often engaged in merciless feuds, devastating raids, plunder, battles and skirmishes, many times for very trivial reasons.¹

The Family and Early Life of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was born in al-Uyainah in 1115 A.H. (1703 or 1704 C.E.)² into the Family of Musharraf of the tribe of Tameem. Since the Tenth Hijri Century, this family was known for its religious scholars and leaders.³

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s grandfather Sulaimaan ibn Ali was probably the greatest scholar in Najd during the Eleventh Century. He was the judge of al-Uyainah and the religious reference concerning disputed

¹ Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab: Hayaatuhu wa Fikruhu* (Riyadh: Daar al-Uloom, n.d.), pp. 13-15; Abdul Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 1, p. 52; Vassiliev, pp. 60-63.

² Many authors, especially many Western authors, made errors concerning both the date and the place of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s birth. For a review of their statements, see al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 25, fn. 3.

³ For examples of such scholars, see al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 24.

fiqh issues for the other scholars in the area. His students included his sons Abdul Wahhaab, Ibraheem and Ahmad.¹

Muhammad's father Abdul-Wahhaab was also a scholar and a judge in al-Uyainah. He was specialized in fiqh and wrote some books on various fiqh topics. However, his status as a scholar never reached the level of his father Sulaimaan.²

Thus Muhammad was born into a family well-known for its devotion to knowledge and learning. Most likely, this laid down a firm foundation for his future advances in learning and his dedication to the faith. In addition, the sources also state that he was very intelligent and had a strong memory. They describe him as not liking to waste his time in the games that the other children played. He memorized the Quran by the age of ten.³ He studied with his father who was very impressed with his abilities, saying that he has benefited from his son Muhammad on some points.⁴ He reached puberty around the age of twelve and his father found him qualified to be the Imam for the prayers and appointed him as such. His

¹ Al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, pp. 24-25. Also see Abdullah al-Bassaam, *Ulamaa Najd Khilaal Sitta Quroon* (Makkah: Maktabah al-Nahdhah al-Hadeethah, 1398 A.H.) vol. 1, p. 26.

² Al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 25.

³ Hussain ibn Ghannaam, *Tareekh Najd* (Naasir al-Deen al-Asad, ed., 1982), vol. 1, p. 75.

⁴ See ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 75.

father then married him off at the age of twelve (not an uncommon age at that time and place) and gave him permission to perform the Hajj.¹

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab studied Hanbali fiqh with his father. In addition, he used to study books of Quranic commentary and hadith, as well as books on *tauheed* (Islamic monotheism).² In particular, he was drawn to the books of Ibn Taimiyyah and ibn al-Qayyim. He personally transcribed many of the books of ibn Taimiyyah, and some of those manuscripts are still in existence at the British Museum.³ The influence of those two great scholars on him became very obvious in his writings and letters. Most likely it was through their works that he developed his great insight into the meaning of *tauheed* (Islamic monotheism) and the other aspects of beliefs, an insight that many who simply study fiqh may be lacking. This study must have made it very clear to him that the affairs of the Muslims around him were not proper in the light of the clear teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. However, the time was not yet for him to openly rebuke the wrongs that he had seen. That would have to come after he matured as

¹ About the letter that his father wrote about him, see ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 75.

² Al-Uthaimin, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 28.

³ Mirfat bint Kaamil Usrah, *Ihtisaab al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab* (Riyadh: Daar al-Watan, 1998), p. 93.

a scholar and an individual. Hence, there is no clear sign that he took any major steps of reform in al-Uyainah during those early years.¹ Instead, he first sought to increase his knowledge by following the established custom of traveling from one's area for the purpose of attaining knowledge.

Travelling for the Purpose of Study

After returning from his first Hajj and then studying with the scholars of his hometown, Muhammad again set out for Hijaaz. It is said that he studied with the scholars of Makkah.² After possibly a short stay in Makkah, he moved on to Madinah.

In Madinah, he was faced with an academic environment that was very much different from that of al-Uyainah. For example, in al-Uyainah, the emphasis of study was on Hanbali fiqh. In Madinah, on the other hand, scholars and students from all over the world were present. Different schools of fiqh as well as all of the other branches of Islamic sciences were taught there.

Muhammad studied under a number of scholars present in Madinah at that time. These scholars included Ali al-Daaghistaani and Ismaeel al-Ajalooni. However, the

¹ Cf., Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 29.

² Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, pp. 20-21; Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 30.

scholars that Muhammad was definitely closest to were first Abdullah ibn Ibraaheem ibn Saif and then later Muhammad Hayaat al-Sindi¹ (who, according to al-Uthaimeen, had the greater impact on Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab). These two not only conveyed knowledge to Muhammad but they set him on his path as a reformer.²

The first one mentioned above, Abdullah ibn Ibraaheem, was a Hanbali jurist and a scholar of hadith. He passed on all of his works from al-Bali to Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, including all of the standard works of hadith and hadith commentaries traced back via chains to their original authors.³ Both Abdullah and al-Bali were very much impressed with Ibn Taimiyyah and it is more than likely that Abdullah encouraged Muhammad ibn

¹ Muhammad Hayaat ibn Ibraaheem al-Sindi was born in Sind province in the Indo-Pak subcontinent. After studying in Sind, he moved to Madinah to continue his studies, later teaching there. He was a great scholar of hadith. He was also a Hanafi jurist and legal theorist. He authored a number of books, including *Sharh al-Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb* as well as a commentary on the *Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi*. He died in Madinah in 1163 A.H. See Khair al-Deen al-Zirkili, *al-Alaam: Qaamoos Taraajim li-Ashhur al-Rijal wa al-Nisaa min al-Arab wa al-Mustamareen wa al-Mustashriqeen* (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm al-Malayeen), vol. 6, p. 111. Al-Sindi had a number of students who became great scholars and callers to Islam throughout the Muslim world (al-Uthaimeen, *Shaikh*, p. 34).

² Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 31.

³ Ahmad ibn Hajar Ali-Bootaami, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab: Aqeedatuhu al-Salafiyyah wa Dawatuhu al-Islaahiyyah wa Thana al-Ulamaa alaihi* (Kuwait: al-Daar al-Salafiyyah, 1983), p. 16.

Abdul-Wahhaab to read ibn Taimiyyah's works. Furthermore, Abdullah was well aware of the situation in Najd, having originally come from that area. He was able to discuss with Muhammad the many evil practices that the people of that land had fallen into. In fact, one time he asked ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, "Do you want to see the weapons that I have prepared for al-Majmaa [his family's original hometown]?" When ibn Abdul-Wahhaab replied, "Yes," Abdullah took him to a house wherein many books were stored and he said, "These are the weapons I have prepared."¹ Thus, he showed ibn Abdul-Wahhaab that the strongest tool against their evil practices was the true knowledge that should make clear to them the falsehood they were on and show them the way to the straight path.

It was Abdullah who introduced ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to al-Sindi and recommended him as a student. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and al-Sindi became very close and ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stayed with him for some time. Al-Sindi was a great scholar of hadith. He was also well known for repudiating innovations, objecting to polytheistic practices and calling to *ijtihaad* (scholarly juristic reasoning)—all salient features of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's later teachings.² In fact, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's great grandson

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, pp. 28-29.

² Al-Uthaimin, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, pp. 31-32; Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 1, p. 77.

Abdul-Lateef ibn Abdul-Rahmaan said that al-Sindi had the greatest influence on ibn Abdul-Wahhaab with respect to *tauheed* of worship, freeing oneself from blind obedience (*taqleed*) and preoccupying oneself with the study of the Book and the Sunnah.¹

Return to al-Uyainah and Travels to Basra and al-Ahsaa

After spending some time in Hijaz, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab returned to al-Uyainah. At that time, he must have still been fairly young (possibly in his early or mid twenties). According to one report, he stayed in al-Uyainah for one year before setting out again for the purpose of study, perhaps realizing that he needed more study and maturation before truly being able to reform his people.²

He intended to go to Damascus, which was the center for the Hanbali school. However, his journey to Damascus would first take him to Basra, where he remained for some time. Basra was a prosperous, metropolitan trade center. In addition, it was home to many Shiites. It probably exposed ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to many things that he had not witnessed in his native Najd

¹ Abdul-Lateef is quoted in Ismaaeel Muhamamd Al-Ansaari, "*Hayaat al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab wa Athaaruhu al-Ilmiyyah*."

² Cf., al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 33.

(although he probably would have witnessed some such aspects in Hijaaz).

In Basra, he studied fiqh, hadith and Arabic language. He studied with Shaikh Muhammad al-Majmoo'ee. It was in Basra that Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab began to object to some of the innovations, heresies and polytheistic acts that he saw around him. In particular, he stressed that all worship must be directed to Allah alone. (In fact, according to one report, he wrote his *Kitaab al-Tauheed* during this stay in Basra.) It seems, that al-Majmoo'ee supported him in those efforts. However, those who supported him were greatly outnumbered by those who opposed him and often times the debates between them would become heated.¹

Al-Uthaimen notes that Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab greatly benefited from his stay in Basra in three ways: (1) He increased his level of knowledge, especially in fiqh, hadith and Arabic language; (2) He became exposed on a very close basis to the beliefs and practices of the Shiites; (3) The opposition and arguments he faced gave him some training in how to answer and repel the doubts and questioners.

¹ Al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 34.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was met with much opposition, to the point that he was forced to leave Basra in the heat of the midday, walking barefoot. While on the road between Basra and al-Zubair, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was about to die of thirst. A resident of al-Zubair, known as Abu Humaidan, found him. Feeling that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was a very respectable looking person, he gave him water and led him to al-Zubair. Muhammad stayed there a few days but wanted to depart to Syria. However, he had somehow lost the needed money for such a trip (perhaps it had been stolen from him). Hence, he decided to return to Najd via the eastern province of al-Ahsaa.¹

At that time, al-Ahsaa was a center of learning for all of the four schools of fiqh. Many students from Najd flocked to that area. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab studied there with scholars from different schools. There he studied under Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Abdul-Lateef al-Shafi'ee (discussing with him some of the issues of Asharite belief as found in ibn Hajar's commentary on *Sahih al-Bukhari*).²

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 30; Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 1, p. 83.

² Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 30. See Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 250. In this letter, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab praises Muhammad for choosing opinions related to faith that contradicted his traditional Asharite thoughts.

After spending some time in al-Ahsaa, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab left to Huraimilaa in Najd, where his father had now moved to.

Huraimila and the Beginning of the Call (*Dawah*)

During Muhammad's travels, his father, Abdul-Wahhaab, was relieved of his duties of judge in al-Uyainah due to a dispute with the new *Ameer*, Muhammad ibn Hamad ibn Muammar. Hence, he left al-Uyainah and took on the position of judge in Huraimila.¹ Thus, when his son returned from his journeys, he headed to his father's new home. This return took place between 1144 and 1149 A.H.

It was in Huraimila that Muhammad began his public *dawah* activities. He began to give lessons in the mosque. A large number of people attended these lectures and greatly added to his prestige.² This was a practice that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab would continue throughout his entire life, even when he was one of the leaders of a state. He also started to object to the heresies and polytheistic practices of the people around him. From the beginning, he had supporters (who, it seems, were relatively small in number at first) and opponents. This would be a pattern

¹ Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 1, p. 87.

² Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 77.

that would continue throughout his life—and still continues today.

While his father was still alive, Muhammad, out of deference to his father's position, was not overly active and public in his *dawah* (propagation) efforts as he was to become after his father's death in 1153 A.H.

When Abdul-Wahhaab died, Muhammad was about thirty-eight years old. With the death of his father, he became the leading scholar in the area. He became more open in his teaching and calling of others to the straight path. He openly criticized the abundant innovations and heresies. He began to order what is good and eradicate what is evil. His reputation spread to the surrounding areas. Students began to flock to Huraimila to study with him. Even some of the surrounding *ameers* began to be influenced by or attracted to him, including Uthmaan ibn Muammar, the *Ameer* of al-Uyainah.¹

For a number of reasons (possibly including a plot to kill him), ibn Abdul-Wahaab decided to leave for al-Uyainah. The *ameer* of al-Uyainah was already attracted to and impressed by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings. The *ameer* Uthmaan's support would provide a great deal of assistance to the *dawah* itself, as al-Uyainah was in a much

¹ Cf., ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 78.

stronger position than Huraimila.¹ Furthermore, it was also ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's birthplace and his family had a prestigious and respectable position there.² Additionally, due to the strength of two competing tribes, the situation in Huraimila was closer to that of anarchy and would not be a suitable place to set up the kind of mission ibn Abdul-Wahhaab had envisioned.³ Hence, once al-Uyainah became available to him (after its *Ameer* had accepted his teachings), it was the logical choice for him to move there to allow the call to grow in strength and numbers. This move took place around the year 1155 A.H.

Residence in al-Uyainah

Upon his arrival in al-Uyainah, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was very much welcomed and honored

¹ Abu Hakimah (p. 130) states that ibn Muammar "by the virtue of being the chief of 'Uyayna, was the strongest among the chiefs of Najd. Thus, no other chiefs could attack" ibn Abdul-Wahhaab while under his protection.

² Al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 42.

³ Cf., Al-Nadwi, p. 44.

by its ruler. Upon meeting with him, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab explained the fundamental principles of his teachings. He explained to the ruler and his people that this belief was the key to success in both this life and the Hereafter. He further explained to them that the key to their relationship was the support of the statement, "There is none worthy of worship except Allah." Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab told the *Ameer*, "I hope that if you truly work to support the belief in, 'There is none worthy of worship except Allah,' that Allah will make you strong and give you the dominion over Najd and its Bedouins."¹ These principles were accepted by the *Ameer* Uthmaan and Muhammad was given a free reign to preach the pure Islam. The relationship between the two grew and, in fact, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab ended up marrying Uthmaan's aunt, al-Jauharah bint Abdullah ibn Muammar, a very influential woman in the area.²

With the necessary personal prestige as well as the needed political support, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab set about transforming the teachings of Islam into a reality in al-Uyainah. His followers and supporters grew to large numbers in al-Uyainah and the surrounding areas. Given his new position and authority, one could perhaps say that

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 33.

² See ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 33.

in reality he had no excuse but to physically remove many of the polytheistic and heretical acts that he saw around him. And this is exactly what he commenced to do.

At the time, people of al-Uyainah used to revere and seek blessings from a number of trees and bushes in the area. Furthermore, there was a grave nearby in al-Jubail that was supposedly the grave of Zaid ibn al-Khattaab (the brother of Umar ibn al-Khattaab), who had died in that area while fighting the great liar Musailamah. People would go to that grave and seek blessings there, slaughter animals on its behalf, make oaths and so forth. With a very short period of time, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was able to remove all of these sources of polytheism from the land. He did so with the support of the Ameer and without the wrath of God falling upon him—convincing those less familiar with Islamic teachings that what he did must not have been all bad.

Thus, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab had entered into a new stage.¹ This new stage was one in which, in general, many people were either going to be strong supporters or they are going to be strong opponents.

Going well beyond the simple removal of polytheistic practices, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab attempted to

¹ Al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, pp. 43-44.

create a true Islamic society in al-Uyayna. The laws of the Shareeah (Islamic Law) were to be implemented in every aspect of life—superseding any customs or practices that contradict them. In particular, he insisted on the performance of the prayers in congregation in the mosque.

During this time, a woman came forward to Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to admit her crime of adultery. She wanted to be purged of her sin—much like the woman who came forward to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to purge herself of the same sin. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab followed the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He made sure that the woman was not insane, was not raped and that she was making the confession of her own free will. After meeting the necessary conditions, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab had the woman stoned, with Uthmaan himself throwing the first stone. Then ibn Abdul-Wahhaab ordered that her body be washed, wrapped in a shroud and have the funeral prayer performed for it. All of this was both her wish and completely in accordance with Islamic Law.¹

Al-Uthaimeen notes that this action on the part of the woman reflects how greatly the call of ibn Abdul-

¹ See ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 79-80; ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 32.

Wahhaab had penetrated the hearts of the individuals of that society. Indeed, it became a new society as before ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's time, there was no great alarm over evil practices such as adultery. However, this woman felt so much sorrow over her act that she came to have herself purified of the sin.¹

Like what happens to virtually every purifying call or teaching, those who take part in evil deeds meet the steps of purification with great alarm and fear. The following passage from Abu Hakima demonstrates how alarming and how dangerous this event was to the people around Uyayna:

Shaikh Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab and his followers at 'Uyayna ordered an adulterous woman stoned to death. *Consequently the enemies of the movement² tried to suppress it before it spread to other parts of Najd.* But because Shaikh Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab was under the protection of 'Uthman b. Mu'ammār, the chief of 'Uyayna, the chiefs of the weak neighbouring towns

¹ Al-Uthaimin, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 44.

² The teachings and followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab are referred to by many researchers as a "movement." However, many have objected to this term in relation to Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his call to return to the true teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. Hence, throughout this work, save via quotes from others, the teachings, followers and effect of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab shall be referred to as his "call" or *dawah*, which is a much more accurate term.

turned to the Shaikh of the Bani Khalid, who had the power to command Ibn Mu'ammār to do whatever those chiefs wanted. Shaikh Sulaymān's [of the Tribe of Khalid] power was so great that Ibn Mu'ammār yielded instantly to his orders.¹

The Tribe of Khaalid were the rulers of al-Hasaa. During times of drought in Najd, the Bedouins would go east to al-Hasaa, needing to rely upon their hospitality. Hence there was a strong connection between the two. Furthermore, there was a matter of a great deal of money. Abu Hakimah describes the source of this money that was threatened:

Many people from Najd owned farms in towns of the more fertile al-Hasa, which led to complications with the Governors of that territory. For example, Uthman b. Mu'ammār, the Shaikh of 'Uyayna in the province of al-Arid, owned a palm-tree grove in al-Hasa which yielded an annual profit of 60,000 golden rials. When he sheltered Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhaab, Sulaymān b. Muhammad Al-Hameed, ruler of the Bani Khalid, threatened to prevent the Shaikh from taking his profit if he continued to protect

¹ Abu Hakima, p. 130 (emphasis added).

ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This resulted in the expulsion of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.¹

Elsewhere, Abu Hakima also notes the greater danger of displeasing the rulers from the Tribe of Khaalid, as “the Shaikh of the Bani Khalid [then] raided the towns of Najd and returned with the booty to his quarters in al-Hasa.”² Finally, al-Uyainah’s trade was also partly carried out through the ports of al-Ahsaa.³

Due to the threat of this new moral tendency and the complaints that he had received, Sulaimaan, the Shaikh of the Tribe of Khaalid, ordered that Uthmaan either kill Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab or expel him from his land.⁴ Uthmaan acquiesced. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab tried to convince him to remain patient and that the help of Allah would come to them if they would remain true to the faith. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab told him, “This thing that I have established and am calling people to is the statement, ‘There is none worthy of worship except Allah,’ the pillars of Islam, ordering good and eradicating evil. If you adhere to it and support it, Allah will give you dominance over your enemies. Do not let Sulaimaan worry you or frighten you. I hope that you will see establishment in the land and

¹ Abu Hakima, p. 39.

² Abu Hakima, p. 128.

³ Vassiliev, p. 81.

⁴ Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 80.

power such that you will control his land and what is beyond it and what is before it.” Uthmaan was shy and evil people around him convinced him to acquiesce to the demands of the leader of al-Ahsaa.¹

Finally, for whatever reason (fear of losing some of his wealth, cowardliness, fear of harm coming to his people through an attack from the Tribe of Khaalid), Uthmaan told ibn Abdul-Wahhaab that he could no longer afford to protect him. However, it was not becoming Arab honor that he should be killed while under his protection. Thus, Uthmaan told ibn Abdul-Wahhaab that he would have to leave his city. This led to ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s migration to al-Diriyyah in 1157 A.H. and his pact with its *Ameer*, an event in history whose ramifications are still being experienced today.

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s stay in al-Uyayna, although it ended in his expulsion, was definitely not a failure. His efforts were appreciated and when he left, Uthmaan sent with him a number of his horsemen to guard him on his journey to his new home.² Furthermore, as Ibn Ghannaam noted, no idols were left in the land of Uthmaan

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 33.

² Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 33-34.

and the true religion had become well-accepted and clear to everyone there.¹

Migration to al-Diriyyah

After being expelled from al-Uyaynah, a logical place for Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to move to was al-Diriyyah. Although it was a fairly small town, having only a thousand residents and some seventy houses, al-Diriyyah was a stable state under the leadership of Muhammad ibn Saud, who had held the position of *Ameer* for some twenty years by the time Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab came and whose reputation was quite good. Furthermore, it was not under the sphere of influence of the Tribe of Khaalid; in fact, relations between the two were not good, the two of them having fought as recently as 1133 A.H. Hence, its inhabitants would be a people who would be willing to defend someone from the threats and attack of the Tribe of Khaalid.²

Perhaps, though, the most important reason for moving to al-Diriyyah is that Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's call had already been accepted by a number of prestigious people in al-Diriyyah, such as the Family of Suwailim. In fact, some of the members of the Saud family

¹ Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 78.

² Cf., al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 53.

were also drawn to ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's message, such as the *Ameer*'s two brothers Thunayaan and Mashaari, as well as the *Ameer*'s son Abdul-Azeez.¹

There is evidence to suggest that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab moved to al-Diriyyah at the invitation of its *Ameer* Muhammad ibn Saud.² *Ameer* Muhammad ibn Saud welcomed ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, promising him support and protection. Ibn Saud told him, "Have glad tidings of a land better than your land. Have glad tidings of honor and strength." Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab replied to him, "And I give you glad tidings of honor and being established in the land. As for the statement, 'There is none worthy of worship except Allah,' whoever adheres to it, abides by it and supports it will then have authority over the land and the people."³ At that point, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab explained to the *Ameer* the principles of his teachings. He explained to him what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his Companions were following, that every heresy is misguidance, that Allah honored the believers through jihad and that much of what the people of Najd were following at that time was nothing but *shirk*, heresies, oppression and wrongdoing. The two agreed to work together to spread those noble

¹ Al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 53.

² For the details of this report, see al-Husain, p. 187.

³ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 35.

principles. An alliance was made based on the principles of the religion of Allah and His Messenger, jihad for the sake of Allah, implementing the principles of Islam, ordering good and eradicating evil.¹

But Ibn Saud also asked that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab not object to the tax that he was taking from the people at harvest time. For this, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab did not agree but simply told him that perhaps Allah would provide him with some wealth such that he would not need those things.² Thus, to this condition, according to al-Uthaimeen, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab gave a non-decisive reply. He simply stated that he hopes that Allah replace that with spoils for him that would suffice him. Al-Uthaimeen concludes by saying that if it is accepted that this second condition was true, then it shows that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab gave preference to the general interest of his message against a particular issue and he was fully confident that he would be able to solve that problem more easily in the future.³

Attar, on the other hand, has a different understanding concerning this second condition. He narrates the incident in the following manner,

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 35.

² Cf., ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 81; ibn Baaz, vol. 1, p. 35.

³ Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 55.

The Shaikh would not ponder both conditions stipulated by the amir: he permits what Allah permits, and forbids what Allah forbids. His position and his need for the ruler's pleasure did not deter him from declaring what he believed was right. He agreed to the first condition but rejected the second, rejoining in plain language: "As to the first, stretch your hand: we are one in affluence and distress (blood for blood, destruction for destruction), and to the second may Allah grant you conquests the spoils of which would make up for the tax you exact." The attitudes of Shaikh al-Islam [ibn Abdul-Wahhaab] show clearly how he was most careful to stick to the Quran and the Sunna.¹

Now with the true freedom to spread his message, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab concentrated on teaching and giving lectures in the mosque. Large numbers benefited from his explanations of some of the most basic concepts of Islam—concepts that the people there had become unfamiliar with (and unfortunately even today many Muslims remain unfamiliar with). In addition to the locals of al-Diriyyah, many supporters, students and others who

¹ Ahmad Abdol Ghafour Attar, *Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab* (Mecca Printing and Information, 1979), p. 51. This is also the way that Vassiliev understood the action. Vassiliev (p. 82) writes, "Although Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not object to the first condition, he rejected the second, promising Muhammad ibn Saud that his share in the returns from raids and jihad would far exceed the proceeds from taxation."

heard of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's call were flocking to al-Diriyyah. Many of them came from the ruling families of their locales. Others who came were quite poor and were forced to work at night and attend the lectures during the daytime, as ibn Bishr noted.¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab noticed the hardship that they were facing and he began to borrow money from wealthier people to help meet some of the expenses of the poorer students.²

Around these devoted students of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab developed a new Islamic state and society. The law of Islam was the law of the land. People had a new-found respect for the Quran and Sunnah. The prayers were attended, zakat was given and so forth. In fact, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab recognized that establishing such a society was part of his responsibility as a person whose words and directives were listened to. After stating that he is a person whose instructions are heeded, he wrote in a letter, "I oblige those under my authority to establish the prayers, give the zakat and perform the other obligations toward Allah. And I forbid them *riba* (interest), alcohol and other forbidden acts."³

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 37.

² Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 39.

³ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 150.

During his first two years in al-Diriyyah, besides lecturing and teaching, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stepped up his campaign of writing to other scholars and rulers to join the call and the new state. Some of his letters turned out to be quite fruitful. Huraimila and Manfoohah (just south of Riyadh) seemed ready to join with al-Diriyyah. However, other city-states refused. At that time, people started to call him a sorcerer, accuse him of innovations, accuse him of lying and so forth, just like they did with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).¹

A New Stage in the Call (*Dawah*): Jihad

The year 1159 A.H. marks a turning point in the call. After trying to convince the people of Najd via peaceful means to give up their polytheistic acts and heresies, the time had come for the use of force. Ibn Ghannaam described the environment behind this momentous change:

[ibn Abdul-Wahhaab] continued to call to the path of his Lord with clear proofs and beautiful admonition. He did not first call anyone a disbeliever and he did not begin any aggression. Instead, on all those points, he hesitated as an act of piety on his part and in the hopes that Allah would guide those who were astray. [This continued] until they all rose up against him with enmity. They cried out in all

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 38.

the lands, declaring [ibn Abdul-Wahhaab] and his followers disbelievers and they permitted the spilling of their blood. They did not affirm their false claims with proofs from the Book of Allah or the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They were not concerned with the crimes of falsehood and libel that they perpetrated against him. Nor were they concerned with what were the consequences of that in the form of punishment and banishment for his followers. Even though, he [ibn Abdul-Wahhaab], may Allah have mercy on him, did not order the spilling of blood or fighting against most of the people of misguidance and desires until they started by making the judgment against him and his followers that they are to be fought and that they are disbelievers. At that time, the Shaikh gave the command of jihad to his group and encouraged his followers to fulfill it. And they executed his command.¹

By this time, Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's followers were greatly increasing in number (many of them not having the ability to migrate to al-Diriyyah) and fear was spreading throughout the land concerning this new collection of believers. The followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab recognized it as their duty to spread the true message of Islam. Hence, the Muslims of al-Diriyyah were ready to

¹ Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 83.

fight, regardless of whether they originally came from al-Diriyyah or they were among those who had emigrated to al-Diriyyah. This was a bond that superseded tribal, city-state and family loyalties, for it was a bond of faith.

The land of Najd was well-accustomed to raids and skirmishes between the tribes, Bedouins and city-dwellers. Such was nothing new. Indeed, that was the manner by which a tribe's rule would be expanded or strengthened. However, in the past, those expeditions were meant basically for worldly purposes. They were not done in the name of Islam, with the hope that they would help spread the Islamic state and bring more followers into its fold. Thus, although the methods of the new state were much the same as what Najd was familiar with, the purpose and the goal behind the fighting was much different. Speaking about this background, Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote to some who used to fight and now that the jihad had come were hesitant,

O Allah, how strange!... You used to fight against Ibraaheem ibn Sulaimaan [the *Ameer* of Tharmadaa] due to one word he would say about your neighbor or due to a donkey worth about twenty coins that he would take from you. For that, you would sacrifice your wealth and your men... Today, Allah has given you the religion of His

prophets which is the price of Paradise and freedom from the Fire, and now you are acting cowardly?¹

Furthermore, this new state was truly under the leadership of a religious scholar and reformer. Although Muhammad ibn Saud (and later Abdul-Azeez ibn Muhammad) were officially the political leaders, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab still had a great influence over the affairs of the state. In general, many important matters were taken to him for a final decision. This included, as ibn Ghannaam and ibn Bishr noted, matters related to zakat, finances, concluding peace treaties, sending of armies and so on.²

Ibn Ghannaam, the closest and earliest chronicler, states that the first clash between the supporters and the opponents of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab came when Dahhaam ibn Dawwaas, the leader of Riyadh, attacked Manfoohah (just south of Riyadh), which was in alliance with al-Diriyyah. It seems that the only reason he attacked Manfoohah was because it was in alliance with al-Diriyyah. Due to the alliance, al-Diriyyah had no option but to come to the defense of its partner. Thus, as ibn Ghannaam noted, the first fighting that took place was actually in self-defense, assisting one of the call's

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 207.

² Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 83-84; Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 39.

partners. Indeed, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab himself stated in a letter to Abdul-Rahmaan al-Suwaidi, “As for fighting, until today we have never fought anyone except in the defense of life and honor.”¹

In Huraimila itself, in the year 1165 A.H., there was a kind of revolution against Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. This was instigated by its judge, Sulaimaan ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, Muhammad’s own brother. Sulaimaan even tried to convince the inhabitants of al-Diriyyah to revolt. He wrote a book attempting to refute ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, especially in matters related to declaring Muslims disbelievers and issues of fighting, and sent it to the inhabitants of al-Diriyyah. Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab quickly responded by writing a refutation of Sulaimaan’s book.² Abdul-Azeez ibn Muhammad ibn Saud was able to lead a force of around eight hundred men to quell the unrest in Huraimila. Sulaimaan fled to al-Sudair.³ Similar small uprisings occurred in Manfoohah and Durma, but they were both quieted. Within Najd, thus, it can be said that all the attempts—the use of force and the

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 38.

² This work is entitled *Mufeed al-Mustafeed fi Kufr Taarik al-Tauheed*. Cf., al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, pp. 61-62. This work is found in *Muallifaat*, vol. 1, pp. 279-329.

³ For more details concerning the battles over Huraimila, see ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 100-101, 103-104, 110-111.

use of false arguments—failed to stop the growth and strength of this collection of Muslim.

External Enemies

For about thirteen years, the only opponents that al-Diriyyah had to face in combat came from within Najd. However, there were two much larger foreign enemies that loomed on the horizon. Both the Tribe of Khaalid in al-Ahsaa and the Sharifs of Makkah had reason to be concerned with the new call and new state. They both had direct interests in Najd, although the Tribe of Khaalid's ties were much closer and stronger.

From the beginning, the Tribe of Khaalid showed enmity toward the call (*dawah*). But when Sulaimaan (the leader of the Tribe of Khaalid who had Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab expelled from al-Uyainah) was expelled from al-Ahsaa in 1166 A.H. (1752 C.E.), Urai'ir ibn Dujayn succeeded him and took the first steps against al-Diriyyah. His reign would last for over twenty years and during that entire time they would be at war with Najd.

The people of al-Diriyyah heard the news that Urai'ir was preparing for war. The followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab started fortifying al-Diriyyah and their other cities. The first forces from the Tribe of Khaalid, with the support of some Najdi tribes, came in the year 1172 A.H.

(1758 C.E.). This army was defeated by the followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab at the city of al-Jubailah, about 6.5 kilometers due East of al-Uyaynah. The strong army was forced to retreat. The morale and confidence of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's people must have gotten a boost, as they held off one of the strongest forces in the area. In fact, this resulted in many tribes coming to make peace with the leadership in al-Diriyyah and paying tribute to this new central government. In fact, their confidence was so great that they themselves raided al-Ahsaa in 1176. Although it was a "very minor affair,"¹ its purpose seemed to have been to demonstrate their strength and confidence. As a result, one of their greatest enemies, Dahhaam ibn Dawwaas came forward to make a peace settlement with al-Diriyyah.²

However, in 1178 A.H. (1764 C.E.), an unexpected opponent attacked the growing state. The Shiite Hasan ibn Hibatullah al-Makrami, the chief of Najraan, well to the south, perhaps at the request of the Ajman Bedouin who feared the approach of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's followers, attacked and routed the forces of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab near al-Diriyyah, killing five hundred and taking two hundred prisoners. This must have been quite a blow at

¹ As described by Abu-Hakima, p. 131.

² Cf., Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 90.

a time when their confidence was greatly building. However, a peace treaty was concluded between the two parties, wherein ibn Abdul-Wahhaab displayed diplomatic skill, agreed to the payment of a contribution and the exchange of prisoners.¹

According to the unknown author of *Lama al-Shihaab*, Urai'ir tried to enter into an agreement with al-Makrami of Najraan to rout al-Diriyyah. However, al-Makrami remained faithful to his peace agreement with al-Diriyyah, leaving Urai'ir's forces to battle alone. Once again, the forces from the Tribe of Khaalid were defeated.² Abu-Hakima writes, "Although 'Uray'ir failed to capture al-Dir'iyya, this battle proved to the Wahhabis that the Bani Khalid would seize any opportunities to destroy them. Thus they learned to distrust any truce promises that the Bani Khalid might offer. 'Uray'ir had violated an existing truce when he saw Dir'iyya being attacked by Dahham."³ Furthermore, during this battle, Dahhaam, who had also earlier supposedly made peace with al-Diriyyah, joined

¹ Cf., Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, pp. 93f.

² Cf., Abu-Hakima, p. 132.

³ Abu-Hakima, p. 76. It should be noted that Abu-Hakima uses the term Wahhabis to describe the followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, although they themselves did not use this term.

forces with Urai'ir and he was forced to once again ask for peace from the rulers of al-Diriyyah.¹

The *Ameer* Muhammad ibn Saud died in 1179 A.H. (1765 C.E.).² Muhammad ibn Saud had been a leader of his people for well over thirty years. The people of al-Diriyyah, according to Mengin, then “elected” Abdul-Azeez ibn Muhammad ibn Saud to be the new *Ameer*.³ The new state of al-Diriyyah continued to spread under Abdul-Azeez. By 1183 A.H. (1769/70 C.E.), the majority of the population of al-Qaseem province to the north swore allegiance to Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and would, for the most part, remain ardent supporters for many years to come.

In 1187 A.H. (1773 C.E.), Dahhaam ibn Dawwaas finally faced the inevitable—that he was no match for the forces of al-Diriyyah. Hence, he escaped from Riyadh and Abdul-Azeez ibn Muhammad ibn Saud entered the city without any opposition.⁴ This was obviously a great and important victory. The greatest enemy within Najd was

¹ Cf., ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 122f.

² About that same year, the *Ameer* sent a delegation to Makkah with permission to perform the Hajj. However, that delegation was imprisoned and only some were able to escape. Before that time a similar event occurred. See al-Nadwi, p. 90.

³ Vassiliev, p. 85. “Election,” especially among the Bedouin tribes, was one of the ways in which a person would become chief or ameer.

⁴ Cf., ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 112.

vanquished. Among other things, this meant that troops could be sent off to distant lands without any fear of attack from within Najd. Furthermore, the money that came as booty was immense. Ibn Bishr states that it was enough to allow ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to pay off all of his debts that he had accrued to pay for his poorer students and supporters.¹ At this time, the situation of the state had become settled and the affairs were good. Thus, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab left the affairs of the state in the hands of Abdul-Azeez and “retired” to acts of worship and teaching, although Abdul-Azeez still sought his advice and approval for his decisions.²

The continued show of strength by the followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab led many cities to realize that it was in their best interest to join with the new state. Hence, a number of delegations poured into al-Diriyyah to pledge their allegiance to Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and Abdul-Azeez ibn Muhammad ibn Saud. These included the people of Hurmah, al-Majmaah and al-Hareeq.³ By 1190 A.H. (1786 C.E.), the lands to the south, being the lands of the Aflaaj and al-Dawaasir, were under the authority of al-Diriyyah, although “anti-Wahhabi

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 38.

² Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 84.

³ Cf., ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 138; ibn Bishr, vol. 1, pp. 114-115.

insurrections continued for a long time in the latter province.”¹

By the beginning of thirteenth century Hijri, Najd had become a united and strong state. Indeed, with the internal struggles among the Tribe of Khaalid, it was probably the strongest force in the area. By this time, it turned its attention from simply defending itself to expanding its message to the outlying areas. This, once again, meant that it would have to encounter the rulers of al-Ahsaa. By the time of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s death, virtually all of al-Ahsaa was under the control of the new state.

The other important threat in the Arabian Peninsula was the Sharifs of Makkah, the rulers of the Hijaz. The Turkish historian Sulaimaan Izzi states that in the year 1163 A.H. the Shareef of Makkah informed the Ottoman Sultan of the appearance of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in Najd. He consulted with the scholars of Makkah who concluded that Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab should be convinced to change his views and, if he did not do so, he should be put to death. Based on that, the Shareef of Makkah sent a letter to Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. There was a delay in ibn Abdul-

¹ Vassiliev, p. 87.

Wahhaab's response. Therefore, the ruler of Makkah captured sixty of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's followers who were in the act of performing the Hajj; he punished and then expelled them.¹

It is clear, says al-Uthaimeen, from Izzi's description that the information that the Shareef of Makkah had about Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was mostly based on rumors. This is further supported by what Dahlaan himself stated. Ibn Ghannaam reported that by this time the opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in Najd were already spreading false reports about him in the Hijaaz.² Thus, the first news of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab that reached the Hijaz was distorted news.³

In 1185 A.H. the Shareef Ahmad requested the leaders in al-Diriyyah to send them a scholar to explain the true nature of their call. They sent Abdul-Azeez al-Husayyin who was also carrying a letter from Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. This scholar explained to the scholars of Makkah their message. He debated the scholars in the presence of Shareef Ahmad and also brought forth the Hanbali book of fiqh *al-Iqnaa* to demonstrate to them that their teachings were completely consistent with the

¹ Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 66.

² Cf., ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 160-161.

³ Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 67.

Hanbali School. Al-Husayyin debated with them the issues of declaring a Muslim to be a non-Muslim, destroying the tombs over the graves and praying to the deceased. He was able to present the relevant evidence related to these issues and returned well-respected by the scholars of Makkah. In fact, there was no disapproval from the scholars of Makkah.¹

However, the Shareef Ahmad was driven from power in 1186 A.H. and replaced by his brother Suroor, bringing an end to the short-term good relations between Makkah and al-Diriyyah. Suroor did not allow the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to perform the Hajj, save in the year 1197, after expensive presents were offered to Suroor.²

In 1202 A.H., Suroor died and was followed by Ghaalib, beginning perhaps the most strained relationship between the Shareefs and al-Diriyyah. In the first two years of his rule, Ghaalib consolidated his internal power. After that, he requested that al-Diriyyah send a scholar to dialogue with the scholars of Makkah. Again Abdul-Azeez al-Husayyin was sent. This time, though, the scholars of Makkah refused to meet with him.³ According to al-

¹ Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 131-133.

² Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 157.

³ Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, pp. 173.

Uthaimen, it seems that this was done at the request of Ghaalib himself. This might have been nothing but a ploy before his planned military offensive in the following year.¹

By the time that the nascent state had gained control over virtually all of Najd, on the verge of controlling all of al-Ahsaa and having the possibility of influencing the tribes living between Makkah and Najd but under the authority of the Shareef, there was no question that the rulers of Makkah had to resort to something of a military nature. Hence, in 1205 A.H. the first troops of the Shareef were dispatched against the followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. However, the followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab defeated them.

The Death of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab died in Shawwal 1206 A.H. (1791/1792 C.E.). He lived some ninety-two years. When he died, though, he did not leave behind any wealth. Nothing was distributed to his heirs. Even though it is well known that the jihad brought forth a good deal of war booty for his followers, all of the wealth that he had received was spent for the cause and in assisting others.

¹ Al-Uthaimen, *Al-Shaikh Muhammad*, p. 68.

After the death of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, the call and teachings continued to spread and the strength of the new state continued to grow for some time. By 1793 C.E. all of al-Ahsa was under the control of Saud ibn Abdul-Azeez. By the late 1790s, military engagements began with the Pasha of Baghdad and the Saudi state was quite successful in many of those encounters. In 1803 C.E., they peacefully conquered Makkah. However, after suffering from diseases, they fell to the Ottoman forces in July of 1803 C.E.. Later that year, Abdul-Azeez was assassinated in al-Diriyyah. It is not clear who assassinated him, although many theories have been presented. Saud, his son and military leader, returned to al-Diriyyah and received the pledge of allegiance from its people. In 1805 and 1806 C.E., Saud's forces once again conquered the Hijaz. The new state also spread its influence into Oman, putting it into a direct collision course with British colonial interests in the area. Years of famine, drought and cholera epidemics in Arabia up to 1809 C.E. greatly weakened the new state and left it open for attack. Saud died in 1814 C.E. and was followed by his son Abdullah, although this choice met with some internal opposition in al-Diriyyah. By this time, the Albanian Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman ruler of Egypt, was well on his way to recapturing the lands taken by the state in al-Diriyyah. In 1811 C.E., Muhammad Ali started to move across the Hijaz, defeating

the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In April 1818 C.E., Muhammad Ali's son Ibraaheem had reached al-Diriyyah. Abdullah sued for peace and he finally surrendered in September, after six fierce months of battle. Al-Diriyyah was ransacked. Some of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's descendents were taken prisoner and sent to Egypt, some eventually going to Turkey for execution. This ended what is described as "the first Saudi state."

The Personality of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was greatly devoted to the acts of worship. He would constantly be mentioning the name of Allah. He would often be heard reciting the verse of the Quran, "My Lord! Grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds such as please You, and make my offspring good. Truly have I turned to You in repentance and truly do I bow (to You) in Islam" (*al-Ahqaaf* 15). He performed the late-night prayers. He also made it a point to attend the congregational prayers. Even when he was old and weak, he would be helped to the mosque to pray in the congregation.¹

He was also a brave man devoted to his convictions concerning the religion of Allah. Without the help of Allah

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 162 and 164. Cf., ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 84.

and then this noble quality, it would be inconceivable to think of him accomplishing the achievements he accomplished. Vassiliev describes him thusly,

A prominent figure of his era and his society, he [Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab] was a man of great courage and passion. A remarkable boldness was needed to challenge the entire religious system of Arabia at that time and face the advocates of the old. His life was constantly under threat and he was sent into exile three times, but this did not crush his will... Mengin notes that 'he was extremely persuasive and won hearts by his speeches.'¹

He was known to be very humble and beloved to the people. Ibn Bishr stated, "We have not heard of anyone softer or kinder than him to the students of knowledge, to the questioner, to the one in need..."² He was also very generous and simple, never fearing poverty and never attracted by the riches of this world. Although after some time the treasury of al-Diriyyah began to have great wealth and although he was the leading spiritual figure and teacher, he did not take any stipend from the public treasury.³ He would distribute any wealth he would receive

¹ Vassiliev, p. 89.

² Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 162.

³ Cf., Abdul-Mushin ibn Baaz, vol. 1, p. 506, quoting from Abdul-Rahmaan ibn Abdul-Lateef al-Shaikh.

and was often in debt due to his taking care of students, guests and travelers.¹ When he died, he left behind no wealth—in fact, he had debts that were paid by others on his behalf.²

He was not overbearing when it came to his opinions. When he was unaware of something, he would readily admit that. He would make statements like, “I do not know anything concerning that issue.”³ In a letter he wrote to a group of scholars, he said about himself, “I do not claim to be free of mistakes.”⁴ He would not be adamant about his personal opinions nor blindly stick to any scholar or school. In the same letter referred to above to a group of scholars, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also stated, “If I give a ruling or perform any deed and you know that I am wrong, it is obligatory upon you to clarify the truth to your brother Muslim.”⁵ In another letter, he wrote, “If the truth is with them [that is, his opponents] or if we have some truth and some falsehood or we have gone to an extreme in some matter, then it is obligatory upon you to point it out and to advise us and to show us the statements

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 163.

² Cf., Abdul-Mushin ibn Baaz, vol. 1, p. 507, quoting from Abdul-Rahmaan ibn Abdul-Lateef al-Shaikh; ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 84.

³ Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 213. For more examples, see al-Abood, vol. 1, p. 319.

⁴ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 241.

⁵ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 240.

of the people of knowledge. Perhaps, through you, Allah will guide us back to the truth.”¹

One of his outstanding characteristics is that he always attempted to be just and fair even with the greatest of his opponents. Once he quoted the verse of the Quran, “Let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice” (*al-Maaidah* 8), and stated that such was revealed with respect to the hatred that one must have towards the disbelievers (that is, although one will naturally have that hatred, it cannot allow one to swerve from being just). He says if such is the case with people like the disbelievers, one must be even more careful and make all attempts to be just with the Muslim who has an incorrect interpretation, a misunderstanding or even some desire.² Furthermore, he would often mention his opponents’ good qualities while restricting his critique to the relevant issues. For example, with respect to the *ahl al-kalaam* or “scholastic theologians”, he stated, “The *ahl al-kalaam* and their followers are from the most intelligent and discerning of people. In fact, they have an intelligence, memory and understanding that is simply mind-boggling.”³

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 301. See, in the same volume, pp. 42, 289 and 318.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 13, p. 52.

³ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 164.

He always held out hope that even his enemies would come around to the truth and sincerely follow the religion of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). For example, he wrote to Abdul-Wahhaab ibn Abdullah ibn Isa, whom both he and his father troubled ibn Abdul-Wahhaab much, "I would supplicate for you in my prostration. You and your father are most important of all people to me and most beloved to me..."¹

In fact, immediately after mentioning the circumstances that led ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to declare jihad, ibn Ghannaam wrote,

He would always beseech Allah, who gave him this great bounty, to open the breasts of his people to the truth, to protect him by His power and might from their evil and to turn their harm away from him. He would always be very kind and forgiving to them. Nothing was more beloved to him than one of [his enemies] coming to him with excuses such that he could quickly forgive him. He never treated anyone in a harmful manner after he had been given victory over him, even if had that person been given power over him he would cut their ties and made him suffer the most grievous of punishment and mutilation...He would always be merciful to them. He would forget what they had done to

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 280. For more examples of this nature, see al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 36-38.

him, as if they had never done anything. He would smile at them and give them a cheerful face. He would be generous and giving to them. This behavior is not found except among the noble pious people and the truly scholarly whom Allah has blessed with God-consciousness, knowledge and guidance.¹

In sum, one can say that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was not simply a scholar. His in-depth knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah were important in presenting the logical arguments to convince people of the truth. However, more than that, he was a wise caller to the faith who put the faith in practice in his own life and in the lives of those closest to him. Hence, he was able to win the hearts of people, influencing and guiding many others to the straight path. This is what he dedicated his entire life to. This is what one can truly say his life was all about.

The Results of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's Efforts

Allah says in the Quran, "Whoever works righteousness—whether male or female—while he (or she) is a true believer, verily to him will We give a good life, and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do" (*al-Nahl* 97). From all apparent indications, this was the goal of

¹ Ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 83.

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his followers. This good life is for both this life and the Hereafter. Abu-Hakima seems to have hit the mark when he described ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his followers, saying, “The Shaikh and his followers, the *Muwahhidin*¹, believed that if they stamped out *shirk*² and *bida*³, so that God was acknowledged throughout Islam as the one and only God and men trod the right way He had set for them, all Moslems would indeed become brothers, peace would prevail and the world would prosper.”⁴

Indeed, life under the leadership of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was completely transformed in Najd. Jameelah noted,

Under the rule of Amir Muhammad ibn Saud, the way of life, beliefs and character of his people were completely transformed. Previously most of these people, even in the holy cities, were Muslims in no more than name... Now everyone was required to offer his prayers with the congregation, fast during Ramadan and pay their Zakat. Tobacco, silk and all other symbols of luxurious living were abolished. All un-Islamic taxes were annulled. For the first time in many centuries there was such peace

¹ That is, the upholders of Islamic monotheism.

² That is, polytheism.

³ That is, innovations and heresies.

⁴ Abu-Hakima, p. 127.

and prosperity in the realm that the bedouin could sleep at night without any fear of their cattle and belongings being stolen. Even a black slave could bring his grievances before the ruler of the mightiest tribes and call him to account for his misdeeds. Sectarian conflicts ceased as the ulema of every recognized school of thought took turns in leading the congregational prayers.

Shaikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab proved himself a Mujaddid of the first rank and a worthy successor of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taimiya.¹

Finally, Ibn Bishr wrote, “[Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s] excellence and virtues are too much to count and more famous than need be mentioned. If I were to detail those matters, the pages would not be sufficient... It is enough for his virtues that as a result of him heresies were removed, the Muslims were united, the congregational prayers and Friday prayers were held, the religion was

¹ Maryam Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice* (Lahore, Pakistan: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1976), p. 118. Unfortunately, Jameelah herself was obviously influenced by *Lam' al-Shihaab* or someone who used that book as a reference, as some of the information (such as on p. 119 where she states that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab studied Tasawwuf in Iran) is erroneous. However, her general understanding of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s call is good. What is however most remarkable is, after praising ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in very glowing terms, she ends her book with a prayer to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), asking him to rescue the Muslim Nation from its current plight.

revived after it was lost and the roots of *shirk* were cut after they had been planted.”¹

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 164.

III The Salient and Revivalist Teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

Islam at the Time of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

Some say that the state of the Muslims began to steadily decline after the seventh century Hijri (after the fall of Baghdad). By the time of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, Islam had reached its lowest state in history on a number of fronts. Politically speaking, the Ottoman Empire had lost much of its authority and prestige. Religious speaking, since the time of the Abbasids, when foreign “sciences” and philosophies were being translated into Arabic, the deviation from the pure Islamic teachings became greater and greater. The influence of Greek, Indian and Persian thought became greater, effecting the beliefs and practices of common Muslims. At the same time, the true fiqh schools became dormant and ineffective, as many scholars claimed that the door to *ijtihaad* had become closed.

One can get a glimpse of the state of affairs in Vassiliev’s words. Speaking about a time shortly after ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s death about the state of affairs of Ottoman lands: “Since 1803 the Wahhabis had put all kinds of obstacles in the way of pilgrims from the Ottoman empire, particularly those from Syria and Egypt... The

pilgrims were accompanied by musicians, playing tambourines, drums and other instruments [such as flutes]. Many pilgrims brought alcohol with them and it was not unusual to find groups of prostitutes in the caravans. All this could not fail to provoke the Wahhabis' hostility because of its incompatibility with their religious and moral standards.”¹

Further, Vassiliev writes about the reforms brought to Makkah as a result of its occupation by the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab,

The strict morals introduced in Mecca ran counter to its people's customs and habits. The status of the holy city made its inhabitants feel superior to all other Muslims and led them to excuse a certain lewdness of behavior. Whole blocks of Mecca belonged to prostitutes, who even paid a tax on their occupation. Homosexuality was widespread. Alcohol was sold almost at the gate of the Kaaba and drunkenness was not uncommon.² The new rules might meet with the approval of the pious *ulama* and sincere believers, but they were burdensome for the greater part of the population. No less burdensome was the humiliation caused by the submission to the Najdis for the first time in centuries. All these facts, whether of an

¹ Vassiliev, p. 105.

² These observations are based on Burckhardt's travel experiences.

economic, a political or a psychological nature, created an anti-Wahhabi climate in Hijaz.¹

The American Lothrop Stoddard wrote about Islam in the 18th Century C.E. (12th Century A.H.),

As for religion, it was as decadent as everything else. The austere monotheism of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had become overloaded with a rank growth of superstition and puerile mysticism. The mosques stood unfrequented and ruinous, deserted by the ignorant multitude which, decked out in amulets, charms and rosaries, listened to the squalid faqirs or dervishes and went on pilgrimage to the tombs of the “holy men” worshipped as saints and intercessors... Could Muhammad return to earth, he would unquestionably have anathematized his followers as apostates and idolaters.²

Furthermore, the Sufis, who so often claim to be the true adherents of the religion, practiced things that could only be supported if one completely ignores both the Quran and Sunnah. Again, Vassiliev states, “The Sufis sang and played musical instruments, and some of them drank alcohol, smoked tobacco and hashish and earned

¹ Vassiliev, pp. 138-139.

² *The New World of Islam*, pp. 25-26. Quoted from Jameelah, p. 116.

their living by fortune-telling on the basis of astrology and magic.”¹

It is no surprise, therefore, that there was a great deal of ignorance spread throughout Najd, with Bedouins forming the majority of the population. Common among the Bedouin, as Vassiliev describes based on early Western accounts, were: a cult of the sun, the moon and the stars; rites and legends running counter to Islamic teaching; the cult of ancestors; making sacrifices at ancestors’ graves; animism; fetishism and so forth.²

In toto, the greatest forms of religious deviation can be summarized as the following:

- (1) The cult of grave-worship and the veneration of graves.
- (2) The cult of saints and saint worship.
- (3) Veneration of trees and other inanimate objects.

In addition to aspects related to beliefs, social ills contrary to the teachings of Islam were also widespread. In particular, the practice of dealing in interest and usury was common. Vassiliev noted,

¹ Vassiliev, pp. 69-70.

² Vassiliev, pp. 72-73.

Doughty writes about the peasants [of Najd], “They and their portions of dust of this world are devoured (hardly less than in Egypt and Syria) by rich money-lenders: that is by the long rising over their heads of an insoluble usury.” The phenomenon was probably widespread on the eve of the emergence of the Wahhabi movement and might explain the Wahhabis’ vigorous denunciation of the charging of interest on loans.¹

In fact, for many parts of Najd, especially where the Bedouins ruled, the law of the land was not the Shareeah but local custom (known as *urf* or *saalifah*).

Even though these matters were widespread, it does not mean that the people had left Islam completely or that there were no scholars or studying of the religion whatsoever in Najd. But this description of Najd brings up an important question: How is it that there were scholars and religious knowledge in Najd and yet such incorrect practices were so widespread? This is a question that is very relevant to the current situation among Muslims—and is another issue concerning which contemporary Muslims can learn from the life of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In general, the small presence of scholars and knowledgeable people is not enough to stop the masses

¹ Vassiliev, p. 38.

from following customs and practices that are dear to them, even if they be in contradiction to Islamic law. On one hand, many of the masses are ignorant as to the rulings of these practices and, on the other hand, the social pressures to engage in such practices from fellow Muslims is often great.

Nusair adds another very important point. She notes that before the influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, the nature of the study of the scholars was such that it did not lead them to think about the changes that were required. Their knowledge was restricted to passing on what the earlier scholars stated, without question or debate about how it is to be or how it is practiced at that time.¹ Without capable scholars to lead, guide and advise the people, it is expected that the ignorant and the strong will then come to the forefront and drag people into practices that may not be consistent with the Quran and Sunnah.

To reform and change society requires an in-depth understanding of the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a strong dedication to the faith, a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of Allah and the ability to withstand the onslaught of criticisms and attacks from those who do not wish to change their ways

¹ Nusair, p. 59.

regardless of what the Quran and Sunnah may say. It takes someone with the understanding of the faith and of the caliber of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to change the entire foundation and edifice of society. This reality should lead to a greater appreciation for what people like Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab accomplished as well as a greater appreciation for the task ahead of the Muslims of today.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and *Aqeedah* (Beliefs and Faith)

Aqeedah—which is actually a term for the Quranic word *al-imaan* or faith—is the foundation of a person's life and actions. Straying in matters of belief and faith has ramifications for one's entire outlook, goal, purpose and behavior.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's Methodology

Before discussing the main aspects of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's *aqeedah*, it is important to first note his methodology concerning matters of *aqeedah*. The basic principles concerning faith can easily be derived from the Quran and Sunnah. However, over the years, many are the Muslims who have sought to ignore this pristine methodology and follow instead the ways of the philosophers, mystics, Jews, Christians and so forth. This is part of what Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was up

against. Much of his revivalist teachings were concerned with this question of making people understand on what basis one's beliefs must be founded.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's methodology in matters of *aqeedah* can be summarized in the following points:¹

(1) The source and foundation of all beliefs must be the revelation that has come from Allah as found in the Quran and the Sunnah: The Quran and Sunnah are sufficient in guiding mankind to all of the essentials of the faith. Hence, the Quran and Sunnah must take precedence over any other "source" of knowledge. They must take precedence over human reasoning when such reasoning comes to a conclusion that definitively contradicts the Quran or Sunnah.² This principle is clearly demonstrated in the writings and teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

(2) Affirmation of the place of the Sunnah in matters of *aqeedah*. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab affirmed that all

¹ Cf., Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 1, pp. 271-286.

² This does not mean that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab considered human reasoning as having no positive role to play. However, when it comes to matters of the "unseen" which are beyond the knowledge and understanding of humans, one must restrict oneself to what has come from Allah via revelation. Furthermore, as ibn Taimiyyah demonstrated before him, there was nothing in ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's beliefs that are contradicted by human reasoning. Thus, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab said, "We have not come with anything that contradicts [the revealed texts] that have been passed down nor that is rejected by sound reasoning." Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 98. For more details, see al-Abood, vol. 1, pp. 334f.

authenticated hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) must be believed in regardless of the topic.

(3) Using the statements of the Companions and the consensus and explanations of the early scholars as supportive evidence: The Companions learned and grew up in Islam directly under the guidance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). There is no question that their understanding and devotion to the faith is greater than any generation that came later. In fact, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself said, “The best of my Nation are my generation, then those who come after them and then those who come after them.” (Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.) Hence, in numerous of his writings and letters, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab insisted upon following the ways of the early pious Muslims.

(4) Adhering to all of the relevant texts concerning an issue, seeking to resolve any apparent contradiction between them without discarding any of them: This is a very important issue related to *aqeedah* (beliefs). Ignorance of this principle is what led many earlier groups astray. In fact, if one wanted to briefly summarize the mistakes that led to the creation of these different heretical groups, it was a failure to combine together all the relevant

texts on an issue and understand them as a consistent, relevant whole.

(5) There is no complete allegiance and submission to the teachings of any human save the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): As a corollary to the first point, it follows that every human commits mistakes and no one is to be completely followed in everything that he says save the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab once wrote,

I—and all praises be to Allah alone—am not calling to a Sufi, fiqh or theological school. Nor am I calling to any of the Imams that I greatly respect, such as ibn al-Qayyim, al-Dhahabi, ibn Katheer and others. Instead, I am calling to Allah alone, who has no partners, and I am calling to the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) which he advised the first and the last of his nation to follow. And I hope that I never reject any truth that should come to me.¹

(6) Avoidance of any and all heresies in the religion. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, “And avoid matters newly-introduced

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 252.

[into the religion]. Verily, every heresy is a going astray.”¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab himself stated, “You [supporters of heresies] call [such heresies] ‘good heresies,’ while the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, ‘Every heresy is misguidance and every misguidance is in the Fire.’ He did not point out any exception to that for us.”²

(7) Avoidance of the discussions of the philosophers and dialecticians in matters of faith (*aqeedah*)—again, relying solely on the clear teachings of the Quran and Sunnah.³ When it comes to the matter of knowing true faith, the sciences of philosophy, divinity and so forth are not beneficial, according to Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. He presents quotes from many of the early scholars who found those types of sciences blameworthy. In fact, he states that there was a consensus on this point.

ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s Belief in Allah

The aspect that Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stressed the most during his entire life was the proper

¹ Recorded by Abu Dawood and al-Tirmidhi. This hadith is *sahih*. A detailed discussion of its authenticity may be found in Jamaal Zarabozo, *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi* (Boulder, CO: Al-Basheer Company, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 1043-1045.

² Quoted in Al-Uthaimeen, *Al-Shaikh*, p. 129.

³ For a discussion of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s stance towards *ilm al-kalaam* (scholasticism), see Nusair, pp. 102-104.

belief in Allah. This proper belief necessitates knowing what to believe in and properly enacting that knowledge in one's life.

The proper belief in *tauheed* (Islamic monotheism) is comprised of three interrelated components: (1) The belief in Allah alone as the Lord and Creator of this and all creation; (2) The belief in the absolute uniqueness of Allah's names and attributes, wherein He does not share in any of the attributes of the created nor does any created being share in any of the attributes of the Divine¹; (3) The belief in and practice of dedicating all acts of worship to Allah and Allah alone (known as *tauheed al-uloohiyyah*). All three are essential to make a person a Muslim and a believer. All three were emphasized and taught by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

¹ Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab defines this category in the following manner: "Part of the belief in Allah is belief in what He attributed Himself with in His book and upon the tongue of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). [The belief in those attributes is] without distorting or denying their meanings. I believe that there is nothing similar to Allah and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing. I do not deny about Him what He has described Himself with nor do I distort its proper meaning. Nor do I negate His names and signs. Nor do I discuss their nature or compare any of His attributes with the attributes of His creatures, as Allah has no equal, similar one or partner. One cannot make an analogy between Him and His creation. Verily, Allah is most knowledgeable of Himself and of others, He is the most truthful in speech and the most eloquent in words." Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 8. In this way, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was following the way of the earliest scholars of Islam whose approach was the safest, wisest and most knowledgeable.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stressed, in particular, the comprehensiveness of the proper belief in God as the sole object of worship. Thus, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote, “The meaning of Godhood is not only that no one creates, provides sustenance, manages the affairs, gives life or gives death except Allah. The disbelievers who fought the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) affirmed all of that.”¹ He also stated, “The thing that enters one into Islam is *tauheed al-uloohiyyah*. This is wherein one does not worship anything except Allah—not even an angel close [to Allah] or a prophet who was sent [by Allah].”²

Tauheed al-uloohiyyah was the aspect concerning which ibn Abdul-Wahhaab noted that the people were most ignorant, even though it can be called the essence of *tauheed*. The masses and their leaders were either ignorant concerning this issue or they did not fulfill their responsibility of implementing it properly. While speaking to some leaders, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote, “What is even more amazing than that is that you do not understand the testimony of ‘there is none worthy of worship except Allah’ and that you do not object to these idols that are worshipped in al-Kharj and elsewhere which are from the

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 187.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 150.

greater form of *shirk* according to the consensus of the people of knowledge.”¹

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s position on this issue can be easily justified via texts of the Quran and Sunnah. For example, a Muslim reads in every prayer, “You alone do we worship and in You alone do we seek help.” Another verse states, “The mosques are only for Allah, so do not invoke anyone along with Allah” (*Jinn* 18). The Prophet also said, “Supplication is the [essence of] worship.”²

In reality, the experience of Islamic monotheism (*tauheed*) is the opposite of the experience of ascribing partners to Allah or *shirk*. The one who listens to, understands and submits to the word of Allah is not in need of heresies, partners with Allah and so forth. The one who knows Allah will have his heart filled with the love of Allah, trust in Him, hope in Him, reliance on Him and so forth. His heart will not be in need of any other central source of happiness. However, the one who is distant from the word of Allah and the true *tauheed* will definitely seek to find something that will fill a necessary void in his life.

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 278.

² Recorded by Abu Dawood, al-Nasaai, al-Tirmidhi and others. Graded *sahih* by al-Albaani. See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1988), vol. 1, p. 641.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and the Question of Who is a Muslim

A common belief at the time of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and, unfortunately, still a common belief today is that if an individual prays and pays zakat, there is no way that he could ever be considered a disbeliever, even if he does acts or believes in things that are described in the Shareeah as *kufir* or blasphemous.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab emphasized that not everyone who claims to be a Muslim or makes the testimony of faith is truly a Muslim and pleasing to Allah. He also demonstrated through clear hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that there are conditions to the testimony of faith. Furthermore, he showed via the Quran and hadith that there are deeds that can take one out of the fold of Islam, even when one is praying, fasting and claiming to be a Muslim. He referred to the actions of the Companions of the Prophet to demonstrate that faith also has minimum practical implications that must be met. He quoted Abu Bakr who said, in his determination to fight those who refused to pay the zakat, "Verily, the zakat is part of its right," that is it is part of the right of the statement, "There is none worthy of

worship except Allah.”¹ Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also pointed to the Tribe of Haneefah who “accepted Islam” yet they also accepted Musailamah as a prophet and, thus, the Companions fought them due to their disbelief. Furthermore, the hypocrites during the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed, fasted and even fought with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) but Allah has declared that they will be in the lowest abyss of the hell-fire.

In reality, this question of defining who is a Muslim is dealt with in virtually every major work of Islamic jurisprudence, in the section dealing with apostasy. For the most part, this became something for academic or theoretic discussions only. Thus, people would fall into blasphemous acts, perhaps simply out of ignorance, and no one, even the scholars, would object. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab repeatedly noted how scholars would remain silent when people fell into disbelief (*kufr*) or polytheism (*shirk*). Even if such acts were done out of ignorance, the scholars have a duty to correct the wrong. He says that if someone were to marry his own daughter or his aunt out of ignorance, those very scholars would not remain silent but would correct the situation. However, when it comes to the

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 138.

greater wrong of *shirk*, they allow the people to follow their ignorant ways.¹

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was well aware of the conditions that must be met before anyone could be declared a disbeliever.² For him, the first thing that everyone must know or be taught is the true meaning of monotheism (*tauheed*). No one can be declared a disbeliever until *tauheed* is explained to him and, even then, only if afterwards he obstinately insists on following the deeds of polytheism (*shirk*) and disbelief (*kufr*). Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stated, “We declare as disbelievers those who associate partners with Allah in His Godhood after the proofs of the falsehood of *shirk* have been made clear to him.”³ Also, no one can be declared a disbeliever simply on conjecture. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stated, “Whoever outwardly shows [an attachment] to Islam and we suspect that he has negated Islam, we do not declare him a disbeliever based on that conjecture, as what is apparent is not overridden by conjecture. Similarly, we do not declare as a disbeliever anyone from whom we do not know disbelief simply based on a negating factor that is

¹ Cf., Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 126.

² In his reply to Sulaimaan ibn Suhaim, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab blames him for making a general statement declaring all the Qadariyyah disbelievers. See Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 88.

³ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 60.

mentioned about him that we have not verified.”¹ Furthermore, no one can be declared a disbeliever except on those points that the Quran and Sunnah clearly declare to be disbelief. For example, the committing of a major sin, such as adultery, does not mean that a person has fallen into disbelief, as opposed to what the Khawarij and other extremist groups have believed. Thus ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stated, “We do not declare any Muslim to be a disbeliever simply due to a sin he committed.”²

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, Islamic Jurisprudence, Juristic Reasoning and Blind Following

As noted above, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab firmly believed that Allah has made it obligatory upon all humans to obey Him and to obey His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). There is no absolute obedience to anyone other than the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Quran was revealed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to bring mankind out of darkness into light. Turning away from this revelation is nothing but disbelief. Hence, Allah says, “Say: ‘Obey Allah and the Messenger.’ But if they turn away, then Allah does not like the disbelievers” (*ali-Imraan* 32). The Prophet’s Sunnah is a portion of that

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 24.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 11.

revelation and “completes” it by giving further details of Allah’s revelation.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote, “If an authentic act of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is made clear to us, we act according to it. We do not put anyone’s statement before it, regardless of who it may be. Instead, we receive it with complete acceptance and submission. This is because in our hearts, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is greater and more important than to give precedence to anybody else’s statement. This is what we believe and this is how we worship Allah.”¹

This means that the Quran and Sunnah are the ultimate authorities. If something is definitively stated in the Quran or Sunnah, there is no room for personal reasoning or following any other view. If there should arise any difference of opinion, that difference should be resolved by reference to the ultimate authorities. This is, in fact, what Allah has commanded in the Quran, “O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day.

¹ Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 252.

That is better and more suitable for final determination.”
(*al-Nisaa* 59).

In general, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his close followers were Hanbalis but were not absolute in their following of that school. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote, “We, and all praise be to Allah, are followers and not innovators, upon the school of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal.”¹ Even though he followed that school since the time of his youth, he definitely was not a blind, obstinate follower who supported it against all other views. He would follow Ahmad’s school when it was supported by evidence.² At other times, he would follow the other schools if their views were stronger in the light of the evidence. Thus, he stated, “We are followers of the Book, the Sunnah, and the pious predecessors of the Nation and what is supported in the opinions of the four Imams, Abu Hanifah al-Numaan ibn Thaabit, Malik ibn Anas, Muhammad ibn Idrees [al-Shafi’ee] and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, may Allah have mercy on them.”³ Even with the two scholars who were perhaps the dearest to him, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab took this same approach. He wrote, “In our opinion, Imam ibn al-Qayyim and his teacher [ibn Taimiyyah] are Imams of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* and their books are the most noble of books.

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 40.

² See ibn Ghannaam, vol. 1, p. 34.

³ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 96.

However, we do not blindly follow them in every issue. Everybody has some of his statements taken and some left save for our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).”¹

Furthermore, he would accept the right of the people to follow the opinions of the other schools. He stated, “As for our school, it is the school of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the Imam of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. We do not object to the people of the four schools as long as they do not contradict a text of the Book, the Sunnah, Consensus and the statements of their majority.”² He made it very clear, though, that the individual’s intention in cases of difference of opinion must be to obey Allah. In fact, in this way, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his followers were truly following the teachings of the founding scholars of the schools who prohibited a blind adherence to their opinions or adherence to any opinion that contradicts the Quran or Sunnah.³

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was completely in favor of reviving the concept of *ijtihaad* (juristic reasoning) and seeking the solutions of contemporary problems from the Quran and Sunnah. In this manner, he actually was not

¹ Quoted in Nusair, p. 79.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 107.

³ See the numerous quotes from the different Imams of the four schools in Usrah, pp. 94-96.

being “innovative” but he was returning the Muslim nation to the understanding that the early generations had. As Nusair noted, “The first generations of Muslims passed on and they concluded on a consensus that *ijtihaad* is an obligation. It is a communal obligation upon the Muslim Nation as a whole. If they leave it completely, they are sinful. But it is sufficient if some of the capable scholar fulfill this obligation.”¹

Although the discussion of *ijtihaad* and *taqleed* (blind following of juristic schools) is often seen in the light of fiqh, its ramifications go well beyond fiqh. The idea that the door to *ijtihaad* was closed actually closed people’s thinking in many ways. It was the final barrier between the people and the revelation, as in matters of belief and “spirituality” (mysticism, Sufism) wherein many had already begun to doubt the relevance of the words of revelation. Hence, to revive the thinking process, it was necessary to reestablish that link between the Muslim individual, especially the scholar, and the Quran and Sunnah. When that is done, the decay in fiqh as well as the decay in matters of faith and spirituality can be overcome. As Nusair noted, this was the only way to make the proper bridge between the rightful place of human thinking and the authority of revelation. She states that

¹ Nusair, p. 82.

nobody was able to fulfill that role of breaking down such barriers until Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab came along and blazed the path. True monotheism (*tauheed*) was lost to ascribing partners to Allah (*shirk*) precisely due to the lack of knowledge concerning the way of the early generations of pious Muslims. Instead of going to the sources of guidance, people blindly adhered to later writings. It was Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab who brought his followers back to the Quran and Sunnah.¹

In sum, one can say that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's approach to fiqh was an approach that was based on the original intent of the Shareeah, going back to its original sources, freeing it from the restrictions of the human conclusions of later scholars and returning it to its flexibility needed to meet the needs of humans in all times and places.²

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and *Dawah* [Propagating the Faith], Ordering Good and Eradicating Evil

In Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's view, the noblest activity—after affirming true monotheism (*tauheed*) and avoiding associating partners with Allah in

¹ Nusair, p. 10-11.

² Cf., Abu Sulaimaan, vol. 1, p. 413.

one's own life—is the calling of others to the path that is pleasing to Allah. To support his contention, he quoted the verse, “Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah” (*Fussilat* 33), and the hadith, “By Allah, one person being guided by you is better for you than the best quality camels.”¹ (Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.) Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, therefore, stressed the teaching and propagating of this religion. He stressed that it must be taught to all, the scholars, the commoners, men, women, young and old. For example, he stated about the basics of the religion and the dangers of *shirk*, “It is obligatory to spread this [truth] among the people, the women and the men. And may Allah have mercy for the one who fulfills the obligation upon him.”²

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab clearly recognized the importance of ordering good and eradicating evil for society as a whole. As Jameelah noted, “[He] was not content merely to preach Islam but was determined to build a society where Islam in its undiluted purity would be embodied as a practical scheme of life.”³ In order to achieve that goal, it is not sufficient simply to purify one's own soul. Instead, one must spread the teachings as well as encourage others to also purify their souls. This must

¹ See Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 48.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 127.

³ Jameelah, pp. 117-118.

also include the next step of ordering what is good and forbidding what is evil.

In fact, for ibn Abdul-Wahhaab ordering good and eradicating evil is an obligation that one has towards Allah and to accept any request not to perform that act is tantamount to disobeying Allah. He stated, “If you mean that you want me to remain silent in the presence of disbelief and hypocrisy... you should not make such a request. And there is no obedience to anyone in a matter of disobedience to Allah.”¹

Issues of Priority

An important characteristic in ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s approach to *dawah* [propagating the faith] is giving priority to the more important issues. As is clear by now, the most important of all issues is the correct belief in Allah. He based this approach on the famous hadith recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim wherein the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sending Muaadh to Yemen as a teacher. He told Muaadh, “You are going to be coming upon a People of the Book. Let the first thing that you call them to be the worship of Allah. If they then recognize Allah, inform them that Allah has obligated upon them five prayers during their days and nights...” Ibn

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 319.

Abdul-Wahhaab commented, “Thus, a person is not to be asked to pray five times a day except after he knows true monotheism (*tauheed*) and he submits to it. [If that is the case with the prayer,] what should be the case with the secondary issues in which there is a difference of opinion?”¹ He also wrote,

Know that the most important obligation upon the human is to recognize that Allah is the Lord of everything and its owner and He administers it according to His will. If you know that, then you must ponder over what are the rights of those attributes upon you—such as worship with love, esteem, awe, fear, hope and recognizing Him as the God, which encompasses humble submission to His commands and prohibitions. This comes before the obligations of prayers and zakat.²

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 166.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 174.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and the Qualities of the One Who Orders Good and Eradicates Evil

As is clear from the above, even given the great overall importance of ordering good and eradicating evil, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab understood fully well that it is not something that is to be done in a haphazard manner nor is everyone qualified to fulfill this important role. There are certain principles that must be followed in the ordering of good and eradicating of evil. Similarly, there are certain qualities that are musts for the one who undertakes this important job.

Throughout ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's writings one can extract the most important qualities that he emphasized for the people who undertake this important role.¹ These qualities include, among others, the following:

(1) *Ikhlāas* or the quality of performing a deed purely and solely for Allah's sake: This is a quality that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stressed for all deeds.

(2) Knowledge: Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stressed the importance of attaining knowledge. In reality, the ignorant person who pretends to order good or eradicate evil may cause much greater harm than good. Hence, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab insisted upon and greatly stressed the condition of

¹ For more details, see *Usrah*, pp. 131-181.

knowledge. For example, he wrote, “It is not allowed for a person to object to an act until he has knowledge. The first step in repelling an act is your knowledge that said act contradicts the command of Allah.”¹

(3) *Hikmah*: With respect to ordering good and eradicating evil, *hikmah* (“wisdom”) implies knowing what approach to use at the appropriate time based on the guidance offered in the Quran and Sunnah. For example, one must understand when gentleness as opposed to harshness is required or when a tougher stance is justified and so on. Thus, he once wrote, “Some of the people of religion eradicate an evil—and they are correct in that—but they are mistaken in their harshness in the matter that it leads to division among the brethren.”²

In addition to discussing the above characteristics, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also delineated some very important principles related to ordering good and eradicating evil.³ These principles include the following:

(1) Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stressed that the evil that is to be removed must be something confirmed and apparent. Thus he wrote to Muhammad ibn Suwailim and Thuniyaan ibn Saud, “Inform them about two matters. First, they

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 284.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 296.

³ For more details, see *Usrah*, pp. 182-209.

should not be hasty and they should not speak without verifying matters, for there is much falsification [and lying today]. Secondly, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) knew the individual hypocrites yet he accepted their outward acts and he left their inward secrets to Allah. If something apparent appears from them concerning which they should be fought, only then fight them.”¹

(2) Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also alluded to the principle that it is not permissible to remove an evil if the removal of that evil should lead to a greater harm. Thus he wrote, “The scholars mention that if objecting to an evil is a cause for division, then it is not allowed to object to it. By Allah, you must act on this principle and understand it as otherwise your objecting to evil may actually be harmful to the religion.”²

(3) A third important principle is that one should not object to another’s action that is based on a permissible *ijtihaad* or juristic reasoning. Hence, he rebuked those who objected to kissing a scholar’s hand. He said that such should not be objected to because the scholars have differed on that and it is even related that Zaid ibn Thaabit kissed ibn Abbas’ hand and said, “This is how we have

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 284.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 296.

been ordered to treat the members of the Prophet's household."¹ However, this does not apply to every issue in which there is a difference of opinion. One needs to distinguish between rulings that are based on clear and definitive texts, not open to various opinions, and those rulings that are based on non-definitive texts that are open to various understandings.

A very important aspect of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's life and teachings is that he did not confine himself to changing simply one portion of life or society. Many are the leaders or movements that may stress one aspect—such as worship—while being neglectful of the many other important aspects of life. Such attempts at reform may bring about positive results but such results are most likely doomed to be very partial when looked at in the greater picture. Thus, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, following the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself, did not restrict himself to any one aspect of Islam. Instead, he sought to change the entire edifice of society, from the individual and his behavior to the government and what principles it is guided by.

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 284.

Summary

In sum, one can see that the salient and “revivalist” teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab were truly not more than a return to the pure and unadulterated teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. However, of course, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab highlighted those matters that needed the greatest attention given his time and environment. He started with the most important issue: freeing one’s worship from the filth of *shirk*. However, he was not unidimensional in any way. His call and teachings encompassed education, politics, preaching, ordering good, eradicating evil and jihad. These are salient aspects that one finds in the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself. In addition, he opened the door to *ijtihaad* and proper thinking about religious issues. He turned people’s attentions to the Quran and Sunnah, the real roots of Islamic learning. By doing so, he once again opened the door for Muslims to truly enter into Islam completely, rather than following other ways that lead away from the Straight Path.

IV The Legacy and Influence of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

Note on the Use of the Words “Wahhabis” and “Wahhabism”

The followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab never used the term “Wahhabis” or “Wahhabism” in referring to themselves or their beliefs. In general, they would use terms like “the Muslims”, the *muwahhideen* (“the monotheists”) and they would call their message, “the call of true monotheism (*tauheed*),” “the religion of Islam,” “the call of the *Salaf*” (referring to the early, pious generations of Muslims) or just “the call.”¹ The *muwahhideen* was their favorite term to be used for themselves, as a way of distinguishing themselves from other Muslims who were involved in practices that strike at the root of true monotheism.²

It is very clear that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was nothing more than a follower of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), his Companions, the followers and

¹ In fact, speaking in reference to the early 20th Century, Muhammad Haamid al-Fiqi stated that the people of Najd would never use the term “Wahhabi.” He said that all of them, including their religious leaders, many of whom were descendents of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, would call themselves Najdis, with respect to where they are from, and Hanbalis, with respect to their religion and beliefs. Al-Fiqi is quoted in Dhaahir, p. 29.

² Cf., al-Uthaimeen, *al-Shaikh*, p. 102.

some of the great scholars who came later, such as Imam Ahmad, ibn Taimiyyah, ibn al-Qayyim, ibn Katheer and others. However, to give ibn Abdul-Wahhaab a name that would correctly represent his approach—such as *salafi* (meaning one who follows the ways of the pious predecessors)—would not have met the goal and purpose of those who came up with the name “Wahhabi”.

Al-Uthaimeen states that there is no doubt that the first people who used this term were the opponents of the call, although it is not clear who first used the term. However, by the time of or shortly after Muhammad Ali Pasha’s attack on al-Diriyyah, the term started to be common.¹ There is no question that this term was originally used in order to “drive people away” from the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. Of course, in addition to calling them “Wahhabis,” they were also called heretics, infidels and Khawarij.²

¹ Al-Uthaimeen, *al-Shaikh*, p. 101. See also al-Nadwi, p. 203.

² The missionary Zweimer noted that ibn al-Qayyim had similar views to that of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and concluded that although ibn al-Qayyim considered himself a Hanbali, he was actually a Wahhabi. The fact that ibn al-Qayyim lived centuries before ibn Abdul-Wahhaab seemed to have been lost on Zweimer. See al-Nadwi, p. 201. Actually, it became the vogue that anyone who followed the Quran and Sunnah and opposed *shirk* was called a “Wahhabi.” Al-Saabiq, earlier this century, wrote that he had met many who called Imam Ahmad, ibn Taimiyyah and others like them “Wahhabis.” He stated that if the Companion Abu Bakr would appear among these people, they would definitely call him a “Wahhabi” also. See Fauzaan al-Saabiq, *Al-Bayaan wa al-Ishhaar li-Kashf Zaig al-Mulhid al-Haaj al-Mukhtaar* (N.c. N.p. 2001), p. 60.

Aali-Bootaami says (probably too optimistically) that the plot of the enemies of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab on this point definitely backfired. What was originally meant to be a disparaging term has now become the signpost for the true following of the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Once one hears the word “Wahhabi” today, one knows that it refers to someone who is calling to a true following of the Quran and Sunnah, the following of evidence, the ordering of good and eradicating of evil, the elimination of heresies and superstitions and an adherence to the ways of the righteous predecessors.¹

However, in the current situation, once again, the term is being used to drive people away from the true Islam. Still today, many people lack the bravado or otherwise find it unwise and imprudent to come out and attack Islam openly. Hence, they try to find other means by which to attack Islam—while at the same time appearing to be sympathetic to some Muslims and some form of Islam. There has to be a smokescreen. The attempt is to try to fight against any implementation of Islam that will have any real meaning and significance in the lives of Muslims. Many in the West fear the challenge of Islam and the only way that they can defeat Islam—the way that they

¹ Ali-Bootaami, pp. 65-66.

have been following for centuries—is by trying to paint it in the worse possible way. Nowadays, that means to portray those Muslims who truly follow the Quran and Sunnah as nothing more than fundamentalists, extremists, backwards and terrorists. In fact, one of the methods that is used by people who are “anti-Wahhaabis” is that they trace aspects that they deem unacceptable back to the “Wahhaabis” while never mentioning that those things are explicitly mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah. Hence, their problem is not with the “Wahhaabis” but it is truly with the clear and unequivocal meaning of the Quran and Sunnah.

A final important point is that the “followers” may not always reflect the true stance of the original teacher or teachings. This is true for any leader. Any set of teachings, call or movement may have followers who are attached to it who do not completely understand the message, who are ignorant in themselves or who are not completely sincere in their attachment to the call. Indeed, with respect to any set of teachings, one must distinguish between the knowledgeable followers who are truly carrying on the message in word and deed and the non-scholar followers. Hence, actions may be taken for which the original teacher and teachings cannot be blamed. As al-Uthaimeen noted, this problem began quite early with respect to ibn Abdul-

Wahhaab's call. During the lifetime of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, some of his followers objected to the descendants of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) wearing a distinctive garment to mark themselves off from the others. However, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab himself did not object to that and he had to correct his "followers." A second, more important, example given by al-Uthaimeen concerns the year 1217 A.H. (after the death of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab), when the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab conquered Taif. The "followers" in their zealousness destroyed the religious books in the city. It was Abdullah, the son of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, who had to censure that action and try to correct their ways.¹

In contemporary times, two things are happening: many are being labeled "Wahhabis" and "Wahhabis" are being blamed for everything. Many people who claim to have some connection with the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab are doing things that are inconsistent with the principles of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. Thus, once again, it may be a time in which it is preferable not to use the term "Wahhabi" or "Wahhabism" and,

¹ Al-Uthaimeen, *al-Shaikh*, p. 103.

instead, force all to trace their claims back to the Quran and Sunnah.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's Influence Outside of Najd

In different parts of the world, the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab contributed to and sometimes even ignited a return to the true teachings of Islam or an Islamic revival that is still of influence today. In fact, the influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings, in one way or another, has reached all corners of the Muslim world. Religious peoples and communities have sprung up opposing licentiousness, innovations and superstitions while teaching people the authentic teachings of the faith.

Introductory Comments concerning Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's Influence

It is difficult to write conclusively about the extent of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's influence. This is so for the following reasons:

(1) Those who are truly students and "influenced" have to be distinguished from those who are supporters and along the same path, having come to that path independent of the influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

(2) Those who liked some aspects of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's reform but were not actually truly followers, in

the sense that just one aspect does not make one “influenced” especially when the entire portion of one’s teachings goes against what he said. In particular, this would include people like the poet Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Abduh.

(3) Any time a Muslim individual, organization or group appeared that was displeasing to the colonial powers or some sectors of Muslims, they would be termed “Wahhabis,” even if they had no contact with the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab or very little in common with ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. This was simply a propaganda device to drive Muslims away from that movement. In some cases, there may have been no substance whatever to the claim. In other cases, the movement may have had many of the same teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, leading the people truly back to the Quran and Sunnah. The question then arose: How can people be prevented from being attracted to a call that is so consistent with the clear revelations that no doubt many will accept that movement? The answer: Give that movement a name that will drive people away from it. In the past, that name for many locales was “Wahhabism,” which had already faced so much negative and false propaganda that the mere mention of the name would keep many from even looking into what the movement was teaching.

(4) The continuous attacks upon “Wahhabis” led to a situation where it was dangerous for people to show any liking for or link with them. Hence, even if someone greatly admired ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and closely followed his teachings, he may not have had the ability to express that publicly or it would not be prudent or beneficial to express it publicly.

(5) In addition, many who have written on this question seem to go to extremes. Some try to encompass virtually every movement since the time of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab as a direct result of his teachings and efforts. For example, Abdul-Haleem al-Jandi wrote, “Every reform movement in the two centuries after the death of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab are students of his in thought and live by his teachings in general and in detail.”¹ However, al-Abood after listing a number of movements that were supposedly influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, notes that without substantial evidence, it cannot be claimed that these movements were influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In most cases, he says, the claim for the supposed influence is based on reports of Westerners who are just relying on presumption. He says that in reality most of those movements were home-grown, as a result of their own

¹ Quoted by Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 2, p. 711, from Abdul-Haleem al-Jandi, *al-Imaam Muhammad Abdul-Wahhaab wa Intisaar al-Minhaj al-Salafi*.

environments. He even says that some such leaders may not have even heard of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab save through the false propaganda spread about him.¹

On the other hand, others try to virtually deny any influence or effect of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings outside of Najd.² For example, Abdul-Kareem al-Khateeb stated that such movements were simply a natural outcome of events and there is no reason to assume or claim any influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab upon any of the other reform movements.³

Ibn Baaz explains the reason behind such varying conclusions concerning the influence of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. The apparent great difference, he writes, boils down to two causes. First is a failure to exactly define "influence." Does it mean that a person followed his methodology, studied from his books, learned from students of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and so forth? Or does it simply imply a similarity in approach and methodology

¹ Al-Abood, vol. 2, pp. 463-464. Among the groups or individuals that he specifically mentioned as having doubtful ties to ibn Abdul-Wahhaab were the Sannusi movement, the movement of Ahmad ibn Ifraan, the Faraid movement, the movement of Nazaar Ali, the Padri movement in Indonesia, the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Abduh, Jamaal al-Deen al-Afghaani, the Mahdi movement, Ish Muhammad Kool and a few others.

² See Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 2, p. 711.

³ Abdul-Kareem al-Khateeb, *al-Dawah al-Wahhaabiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Shurooq, n.d.), p. 5.

while ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was the first to come with said approach in the current era? The second reason is the attempt to apply one conclusion to a number of different movements and personalities even though they may differ greatly in how they originated, in their environment and in their methods. For example, it is difficult to make the same judgment concerning Uthmaan Dan Fodio (of what is nowadays Nigeria) and the Mahdi of the Northern Sudan. The former learned directly from students of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings and efforts, lived for sometime in the Hijaz and studied ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's works while the latter had a very different background and believed himself to be the Mahdi, although he did not fit the description found in the hadith. Furthermore, the Mahdi did not visit the Hijaz nor is there any evidence that he studied the works of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

Thus, if by influence one means a complete acceptance and following of the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, then it is true that most of the movements that have come since ibn Abdul-Wahhaab were not influenced in that sense. If, however, by influence one means a kind of general effect or spiritual influence, wherein ibn Abdul-Wahhaab revived the spirit of Islam, the concept of Islamic brotherhood, the concept of implementing Islam completely from its true sources, then definitely the other

movements that heard about ibn Abdul-Wahhaab were effected by his outcome and his works. That, though, can be true for any effective movement in the Muslim world: when its news reaches other parts of the Muslim world, it will revive their hope in Islam and reinvigorate their efforts to bring about the true Islam. Furthermore, when they received the true news of what ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stood for, then definitely this would engender a kind of love and support for one's fellow Muslim who stood and sacrificed for the sake of Allah. If this is what is meant by "influence," then it is true that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab influenced—or perhaps more rightly stated affected—the majority of the movements that came after his time.¹

Furthermore, it is not necessary that everyone who makes the same call that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab made was actually influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In reality, any and all who return to the true path of the Quran and Sunnah as implemented and taught by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his Companions will come to virtually the same conclusions that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab came to. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab often would say that he is not coming with anything new. That is true. Thus,

¹ Cf., Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 2, pp. 713-718.

someone else may come to the same conclusions and teachings quite independent of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

Finally, it must be noted that the discussion of this chapter will concentrate on movements and supporters before the mid-1900s. The reason for this is to demonstrate that although the means of communication and media were not that strong, the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab had become known and to some extent accepted long before the “oil money” started pouring into Saudi Arabia. Of course, with the new riches and with breakthroughs in communication, it was possible for ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s teachings to spread to an even greater extent. Thus, if one wanted to review ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s influence today, it would be too great to capture. Virtually, every country and Muslim community is familiar with his teachings. Furthermore, his teachings are such—being so consistent with the Quran and Sunnah—that as soon as many Muslims hear them, it resonates in their hearts and mind. They readily accept such teachings regardless of whether they are told that such teachings have been propagated by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab or not.¹

¹ It should be noted that the religious people of Saudi Arabia have found themselves in a no-win situation. When they take the wealth that Allah has provided for them and use it to build mosques, schools and centers throughout the world, they are accused of “propagating their brand of Islam.” However, if they would not use that money in such a fashion, one would undoubtedly hear

With this introduction, examples of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's direct influence may be noted.

Arab Lands

In Iraq, a number of scholars were influenced by the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. The Iraqi scholar Abdul-Azeez Bik al-Shaadi went to Hajj and met with the leaders from the Saud family. He even passed by al-Diriyyah on his way back to Iraq. He was convinced of the truth of their call and returned to Iraq and became an active propagator of the message. Over many years, he was able to teach many the correct beliefs of Islam.¹

Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Saeed al-Suwaidi al-Baghdaadi al-Abbaasi was a scholar of hadith and history. Born in Baghdad, he died in Damascus 1232 A.H. He corresponded with ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. He tried to convince the governor of Baghdad, Sulaimaan Pasha al-Sagheer, to adhere to the call of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. His methodology was definitely the same as that of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.² He imbibed his student Shihaab al-Deen al-Aloosi (1802-1854 C.E.) with the teachings of ibn Abdul-

cries about how much wealth Allah has given these people and yet they do not use it to help their brethren Muslims.

¹ Cf., al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 25; Jumuah, p. 182.

² See al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 25; Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 2, p. 688.

Wahhaab and set the scholarly family of al-Aloosi on the path of defending ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.¹

Perhaps the most important influence supporting and propagating the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in Iraq were the members of this Aloosi family. Mahmood al-Aloosi (d. 1835 C.E.) was the compiler of a famous Quranic commentary. Numaan (d. 1899 C.E.) was staunch in his defense of ibn Taimiyyah.² Mahmood Shukri (1857-1924 A.H.) was a great defender of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, author of *Tarikh Najd* ("The History of Najd"), a commentary on ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's work *Masaail al-Jaahiliyyah*, and two books refuting opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab (one refuting ibn Jarjees and the other refuting al-Nabahaani).³

In 1793 in "Greater Syria" (al-Shaam), the forces of Abdul-Azeez ibn Muhammad ibn Saud were able to conquer a portion of "Greater Syria". By 1791, some of the Bedouin tribes had accepted the rule of the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. Some of these are the same tribes that Burckhardt later visited and noticed the influence of the "Wahabbi" teachers, judges and leaders. After 1806, according to Jumuah, the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

¹ Cf., Commins, p. 59.

² See Commins, pp. 60-63.

³ For more on the Aloosi family, see al-Zuhaili, vol. 3, p. 335-336; Jumuah, pp. 183-193.

had preachers and scholars entering the main cities of Syria and propagating their message.¹

One of the most influential of the *salafi* scholars in Syria was Jamaal al-Deen al-Qaasimi (1283 A.H./1866 C.E.-1332 A.H./1914 C.E.). He was already a prominent Imam and scholar by the time he visited Egypt and Madinah. (In addition to having visited Madinah, he and other Syrian scholars were in contact with the Iraqi scholars and strong supporters of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab of the al-Aloosi family.²) Upon his return to Syria, he was accused of attempting to start a new school, *al-Madhhab al-Jamaali*, and arrested in 1313 A.H. The main accusations against him were a tendency to *ijtihaad* (“juristic reasoning”), support of the “Wahhabis” and membership in the Arab Nationalist Assembly. However, being accused of being a “Wahhabi” was the greatest accusation one would ever have to face in front of the Ottoman/Turkish authorities.

Other influential religious leaders who gave their support to and spread the *salafi* and “Wahhabi” teachings in that area at that time were Abdul-Razzaq al-Bitaar, Taahir al-Jazaairi, Muhammad Kaamil al-Qasaab, Ameer Shakeeb Arsalaan and Muhammad Kurd Ali. The political

¹ Jumuah, p. 124.

² See Jumuah, p. 131; Commins, p. 53.

and social environment was very difficult in Syria for anyone to openly and clearly espousing the views of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab but many of the above (such as Arsalaan and Kurd Ali) clearly mentioned the “Wahhabis” by name and stated that they were calling to the way of the Quran and Sunnah.¹ These *salafi* scholars of this era, including al-Qaasimi, also had good ties with Muhammad Rasheed Ridha, who was prominent in disseminating the writings of both ibn Taimiyyah and ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.²

Moving on to Egypt, the historian and Azhari scholar Abdul-Rahmaan al-Jabarti (1167-1237 A.H.) was very influenced and impressed by the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and he spread their thoughts in Egypt. He saw in them the greatest potential to revive the Muslim world.³

One of the most influential and controversial figures in the Muslim world at the beginning of the 20th century was Muhammad Abduh. He was probably familiar with ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s teachings. Actually, Fauzaan al-Saabiq, the first “Saudi ambassador” to Egypt, praised him. He did believe in opposing innovations and superstitious beliefs as well as opening the door to *ijtihaad* and freer thought. In the process, he opposed Sufism. That

¹ See al-Abood, vol. 2, pp. 410-411.

² For other aspects of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s influence in “Greater Syria,” see al-Abood, vol. 2, pp. 395-412.

³ See al-Zuhaili, vol. 2, p. 334.

was probably the extent to which there was any agreement between the two sets of teachings. Otherwise, although called by many a *salafī* (“a follower of the early, pious generations”), Abduh had no interest in going back to the way Islam was understood and practiced by the Companions of the Prophet. Instead, he wanted to forge ahead with a new understanding of Islam that would be compatible with the European West of his time.

Muhammad Rasheed Ridha (1282/1865-1354/1935) was originally from Syria but he moved to Egypt in 1891 C.E. After moving to Egypt, he became very close to Muhammad Abduh and for many years was the main espouser of his view. However, in many ways, he was very different from his Shaikh Muhammad Abduh, especially when it comes to a leaning toward the *salaf*. He was a strong supporter of ibn Taimiyyah—publishing his works—as well as of the scholars of Najd—publishing their works in his magazine and in a separate anthology entitled *Majmooah al-Rasaail wa al-Masaail al-Najdiyyah*. In his introduction to al-Sahwasaani’s refutation of Dahlaan, Ridha, in a lengthy passage, described ibn Abdul-Wahhaab as a *mujaddid* (“religious revivalist”), repelling the innovations and deviations in

Muslim life.¹ Through his magazine, *al-Manaar*, Muhammad Rasheed Ridha greatly contributed to the spread of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings in the whole Muslim world. In fact, he published some of his articles from that magazine in a work entitled *al-Wahhaabiyoon wa al-Hijaaz* ("The Wahhabis and the Hijaz"). His magazine was unique in its thought and popularity. As a result of many students coming from all over to study in al-Azhar, in Cairo, this magazine's popularity spread throughout North Africa, Greater Syria and even into the Indo-Pak subcontinent and Malay Archipelago.²

Afterwards, Muhammad Haamid al-Faqi was one of the strongest supporters of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings in Egypt. He was the founder of "the association of supporters of the Muhammadan Sunnah."

Concerning Algeria, Uwais makes the point that there were always "reform" movements in Algeria trying to take people back to the Quran and Sunnah, in other

¹ Muhammad Rasheed Ridha, introduction to Muhammad Basheer al-Sahsawaani, *Sayaanah al-Insaan an Waswaswah al-Shaikh Dahlaan* (third edition, no publication information given), pp. 6-7.

² For more details about Muhammad Rasheed Ridha, see Jumuah, pp. 159-170.

words calls and teachings that were similar in nature to ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's. However, the first one to explicitly spread ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings in Algeria was the historian Abu Rawaas al-Naasiri. He and others from North Africa had met with some of the students of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in Makkah and were convinced of his teachings.

However, it was later when ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings made a much stronger impact, during the first half of the thirteenth Hijri century. Although the French occupiers tried valiantly to fight the presence of Islam, they were not able to put an end to the Hajj, which gave an opportunity for many from Algeria to go to the Hijaz and study ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings.

In Morocco, according to the French historian Julian, Sidi Muhammad ibn Abdulllah al-Alawi (1757-1790 C.E.) was very much influenced by the pilgrims returning from Makkah who had studied under the "Wahhabi" scholars. He said about himself, "I am Maliki in my school of fiqh, Wahhabi in my beliefs." He set out to destroy the books having incorrect beliefs and some of

the *zaawiyah* (Sufi cloisters). He called the people to *ijtihaad* and the *Sunnah*.¹

Then there was Maula Sulaimaan ibn Muhammad ibn Abdullah (1792-1822 C.E.). Al-Zirikili and many Western references mention that he was greatly influenced by the “Wahhabis” after the year 1225 A.H. (1810 C.E.) and he afterwards opposed the innovations of the various Sufi orders. He was in direct contact with Abdullah ibn Saud and sent delegations to Makkah to make Hajj and study under the scholars there. However, he did not meet with much success in spreading the beliefs of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.²

Sub-Saharan Africa

Uthmaan Dan Fodio (b. 1169 A.H./1754 C.E.) was from the Fulani tribe. At an early age, Uthmaan learned the Quran and Arabic language. While traveling to further pursue his studies, he studied under Shaikh Jibreel ibn Umar in the land of the Tawaariq. Previous to that, Shaikh Jibreel had made the pilgrimage and was greatly influenced by the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in Makkah. Uthmaan himself decided to make the Hajj and

¹ See al-Husain, p. 425; al-Zuhaili, vol. 2, p. 323; Jumuah, p. 235; Muhammad al-Shuwair, *Tasheeh Khata Tareekhi Haul al-Wahhaabiyyah* (Riyadh: Daar al-Habeeb, 2000), pp. 24-34.

² See al-Husain, p. 426; al-Zuhaili, vol. 2, p. 324; Jumuah, pp. 235-237.

in the process met with many of the scholars in the Hijaz who were followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In the Hijaz, he studied the writings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and personally transcribed copies for himself.

After staying one year in the Hijaz, he returned to his homeland and earnestly started his reform movement. He fought against common heresies within his tribe. He struggled to remove the final remnants of polytheism, animism and ancestor worship from his area. He began his movement with polite admonitions, reminders, ordering good and eradicating evil. As his followers increased in number, he, like ibn Abdul-Wahhaab before him, turned to one of the local authorities to gain political strength. He went to King Nafta, the strongest of the Hausah rulers, and explained to him Islam and the principles upon which he wished to work. The two entered into an alliance, although there existed those who opposed Uthmaan. He eventually was able to unite his people under his political authority. He took part in a number of jihads to spread the faith, starting in 1802 A.H. By 1804, he had established the Sultanate of Sokono, a relatively large Islamic empire that continued after Uthmaan Dan Fodio's death.

Of all the movements that are ascribed as having been influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, Uthmaan Dan Fodio was definitely the closest to ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in

his teachings and approach, leaving very little doubt that the influence was quite strong. In fact, Uthmaan's brother Abdullah ibn Muhammad explicitly stated that Uthmaan started his movement after returning from the Hajj and leaving the practices of his people that contradicted the Shareeah.¹

Another famous movement in a nearby region was the Mahdi movement of the Sudan, founded by Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdullah (b. circa 1260 A.H.-1302 A.H./1885 C.E.). He wished to remove the Sufi orders and the different schools of fiqh and unite everyone around the Quran and Sunnah. He took part in jihad and established a government, attempting to completely free his land from the colonialists. His way of running the government was very similar to the government of al-Diriyyah and the priority he gave to removing the excesses of Sufism was also similar to that of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, leading Hasan Ahmad Mahmood to conclude that there was a clear influence there.² Al-Zuhaili, also, concludes that although there were some major differences in the two sets of teachings, the Mahdi's movement was definitely influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings.³

¹ He is quoted in Jumuah, p. 114.

² Quoted in Jumuah, p. 221.

³ See al-Zuhaili, vol. 2, pp. 329-331; Jumuah, pp. 221-226.

The Indo-Pak Subcontinent

Al-Sayyid Ahmad ibn Irfaan al-Bareli (1201-1246 A.H.) was from Rae Bareli and originally of the Naqshabandi Sufi order. However, later he became an active *salafi* worker. In 1219, after studying in Lucknow, which was ruled by a Shiite leader, he moved to Delhi. In Delhi, he studied under Shah Abdul-Azeez, the eldest son of Shah Waliullah. The Indian scholars at that time were very fond of using philosophy in their religious discussions. It was the school of Shah Waliullah that impressed upon them the study of the Quran, hadith and fiqh to understand their religion. It is said that Al-Sayyid Ahmad performed the pilgrimage in 1236 A.H. (1822 C.E.) and was influenced by the scholars there. He returned and established his own state ruling Kabul and Peshawar, ruling by the Shareeah. In 1826, he declared jihad against the Sikhs and later also fought the British. After more than four years of fighting, he became a martyr (Allah willing) when slain by Sher Singh at Balakot in 1831. His followers remained for some time, setting up authority in Sattana. The British in the Umbeyla War of 1863 C.E finally defeated them.¹ His state then came to an end, although the influence of his movement continued for

¹ Cf., T. P. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam* (Lahore: Premier Book House, n.d.), p. 661.

some time, playing a strong role in the later independence movement.

Al-Bareli's teachings were very close to those of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, stressing Islamic monotheism and insisting that the state be ruled by the Shareeah. However, there is a difference of opinion as to whether he was truly influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings. Although there is some difference between the teachings of the two leaders, the amount of similarity between them is still great. Hence, many authors are of the opinion that this movement in India was definitely influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings. On the other hand, there are many who deny any influence. Thus, Abdul-Kareem Uthmaan concludes that this movement was called "Wahhabis" by the British only to try to defeat any renaissance Islamic movement and to smear its name. Muhammad Ismaeel al-Nadwi notes that Ahmad and his partner al-Shaheed Ismaael were still greatly influenced by Sufism, precluding a direct and close connection to the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.¹

Qeyamuddin Ahmad, in his extensive work on this movement in India, also doubts any strong connection between ibn Abdul-Wahhaab of Najd and those called

¹ Cf., Jumuah, pp. 63-81.

Wahhabis in India. Both Bareli and ibn Abdul-Wahhaab derived their teachings from the same revelation and there were some commonalties between them but there were also some marked differences between them, such as the influence of Sufi thought on Bareli. Qeyamuddin Ahmad though seems to accept the conclusion that it is difficult to either affirm or deny any true connection between the two calls.¹

There were others, perhaps less famous scholars outside of the Indo-Pak subcontinent, who were followers and supporters of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and were part of what is known as the *ahli-hadeeth* movement. These included Basheer al-Deen al-Qanooji (1234-1296 A.H.), Abdullah al-Ghaznawi (1245-1326 A.H.), Muhammad Basheer al-Sahsawaani, Abdul-Haleem al-Laknawi (1272-1345 A.H., the first to translate *Kitaab al-Tauheed* into Urdu) and numerous others.²

There were yet other movements in that area that are said to have been influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In

¹ Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahhabi Movement in India* (New Delhi, India: Manohar Publishers, 1994), pp. 31-32.

² See Abdul-Jaleel, pp. 59-127.

particular, there were some movements that opposed the British occupation. One of them was al-Faraidi that was established in 1804 C.E. under the leadership of al-Hajj Shareeatullah (1178-1256 A.H.). He was from Bengal. He lived a long time in Makkah, from 1799 to 1818 C.E, during which time the “Wahhabi” movement was gaining strength. His movement was similar in that he fought against heresies and superstitions and took to fighting against the British colonialists. He declared his native land *daar al-harb* (“the land which war is to be declared against”) since it was under British rather than Islamic rule. After Shareeatullah’s death, Dudhu Miyan led the movement until it was finally defeated in 1860. Many are the scholars who believe that this movement was definitely influenced by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s teaching. Shareeatullah sought to purify Islam from Hindu and extreme Sufi thoughts. He even avoided using Sufi terms, such as Pir (“Shaikh”), and used terms like *muallim* (“teacher”) instead.¹

Southeast Asia

In Sumatra, after three individuals returned from the Hajj in 1218 A.H. (1802 C.E.), they started a *Salafi* (“Wahhabi”) movement. Their leader was al-Haaj Miskeen. They struggled to reform the ways of the Muslims in

¹ Jumuah, pp. 82-86.

Indonesia. They also fought against the Dutch. The Dutch recognized that this movement was a real threat to their colonial power and they worked quickly to crush it. Unfortunately, the Dutch were able to take advantage of the internal fighting between the reform-minded *Salafi* Muslims and the Muslims who were content on following the heresies and innovations that had crept into their religion. The movement was finally defeated in 1837 C.E. after sixteen years of struggle. Although many of the leaders of the struggle were killed during that fighting, their followers continued to spread their message peacefully after that. After that time, the movement was also able to spread to the other Indonesian islands.¹

On the Island of Java, in the 1910s and 1920s, a number of organizations sprung up propagating, in general, the same teachings as those of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. One of them was lead by al-Haaj Ahmad Dahkiaan. He spent some time around 1902 in the Hijaz and was greatly influenced by the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. He was the *khateeb* in the Mosque of Sultan in Jakarta and used that position to spread those teachings and to eradicate some of the innovations that had developed on the island. He continued to spread the message until his death in 1923. But his organization,

¹ Cf., Arnold, p. 410; al-Zuhaili vol. 2, p. 323; Jumuah, pp. 88-103.

Jameeah Muhammadiyyah, continued to spread to all of the islands. Indeed, it had a branch, mosque, hospital or orphanage in virtually every city of Indonesia. It became the largest *dawah* organization in Indonesia. Another organization, Jameiyyah al-Wahdah al-Islaamiyyah was also very active in carrying the same message. Although lots of negative propaganda was being spread about the “Wahhabis,” as some of the Indonesians performed the pilgrimage, they learned the truth about ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and therefore the movement continued to spread throughout Indonesia.¹

In 1919 C.E., a young man from Indonesia, Ahmad Wahhaab, visited the mosques and Muslim communities in Bangkok. He slowly but surely started to preach the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. He challenged the resident scholars to support their innovations. He started his own reform movement and published a magazine, *al-Bidaayah*, in which he confronted the heresies and superstitions of the Muslim population. This led to a split in the Muslim community, some following the old ways filled with innovations and others following the new movement following the teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. It seems that the friction between the two groups grew quite intense.

¹ For more details about the influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in Indonesia, see Najeed Abdullah, “*Tathar al-Dawaat al-Islaahiyyah fi Andooneesiya bi-Dawah al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab*” in *Buhooth Nadwah Dawah al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab* (Riyadh: Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 391-422; Jumuah, pp. 202-212.

For many years, this movement was quite strong, publishing numerous books and tracts.

In southern Thailand, a movement independent of the happenings in Bangkok appeared. Although from its earliest moments, the reform (“Wahhabi”) movement was under attack as a “new religion” and so on, in the south of Thailand a reform movement began around 1943 C.E. under the leadership of Ismaaeel Ahmad. This was after he had studied at the Nadwat al-Ulamaa in Lucknow, India, under the guidance of Abul Hasan al-Nadwi. The call of his message was exactly the *salafi* call of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.¹

Summary

It can be stated without a doubt that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab had an impact not just on his homeland but on many parts of the Muslim world. At the very least, he instilled in the Muslim mind the correct idea that by going back to the original teachings of Islam, this religion can be

¹ For more details about the influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab in Thailand, see Ismaaeel Ahmad, “*Tathur al-Dawaat al-Islaahiyyah al-Islaamiyyah fi Tailaand bi-Dawah al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab*” in *Buhooth Nadwah Dawah al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhaab* (Riyadh: Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 369-390.

revived and blessed by Allah. To this day, in his homeland and elsewhere, one can still feel the influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's call to the pure monotheism.

V An Overview of the Criticisms and Allegations Made Against ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

For various political or “religious” reasons, many have tried to attack Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In this chapter, some of the more widespread accusations shall be discussed. The complete baselessness of many of these claims demonstrates the extreme to which some people will go to try to defeat an enemy that has, in reality, a very strong basis and foundation.¹

The Allegation that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab Claimed Prophethood

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote, “I believe that our prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the seal of the prophets and messengers. A person’s faith is not sound until he believes in his being a messenger and testifies to his prophethood.”² He also wrote, “The greatest [of rights upon a Muslim] are the rights of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Your testimony of faith requires you to give him the position of Messenger of Allah and seal of the prophets. You should know that if you were to raise any of the Companions to

¹ For the sake of brevity, lengthy quotes from the accusers will not be presented here unless necessary. However, they may be found in the unabridged version of this work.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 10.

the position of prophet, you would become a disbeliever.”¹ This belief is very clear throughout his writings and the writings of his descendents, students and followers. No one could rationally claim anything else concerning ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.²

Somewhat unbelievably, Al-Haddaad, for example, wrote, “He would hide the claim to prophethood. Its signs would become apparent through the ‘tongue’ of his state rather than the tongue of his words. This is attested to by what the scholars stated: that at the beginning Abdul-Wahhaab³ was passionately fond of reading about those who falsely claimed prophethood, such as the liar Musailamah, Sajaah, al-Aswad al-Ansi, Tulaihah al-Asadi and their likes.”⁴ Dahlaan mentioned the same claim in his *Khulaasah al-Kalaam* and *al-Durar al-Sanniyyah fi al-Radd ala al-Wahaabiyyah*.⁵ Many others also made this claim.⁶

The first issue, of course, is if this is something that he hid in his heart, how can anyone make such a claim about him, unless, of course, one claims knowledge of the

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 81.

² For more details, see al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 78-81.

³ He says Abdul-Wahhaab rather than ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

⁴ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 82-83.

⁵ Quoted in al-Husain, p. 267.

⁶ See al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 83.

unseen or claims to be a prophet himself? Indeed, this claim completely casts doubt upon the one who is making such a claim. Furthermore, what were the signs that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was making such a claim in person and action rather than with his tongue? The authors mentioned above do not give any such sign. In reality, Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's entire life and mission was about returning to the Quran and to the Sunnah. He never, in any of his words, claimed that his statements or position were above or equal to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Indeed, he readily admitted that he was a human being, prone to making mistakes and in need of the advice of the scholars around him. Furthermore, his writings and the writings of his descendents, students and followers are all available. Therein there is no evidence whatsoever to support the claims of lies and fabrications such as this one.

In sum, as stated above, this allegation gives a clue as to the caliber of person one is dealing with while discussing the opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.¹

¹ Thus, for good reason, al-Nadwi (p. 40) wrote that Dahlaan's books are so filled with mistakes and fabrications that one does not even wish to rely upon them for even a trivial issue.

**The Allegation that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab
Belittled the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be
upon him)**

This is one of the first allegations made against ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. Ibn Suhaim made such claims concerning ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and stated those allegations in the letters that he sent to the surrounding areas. Ibn Suhaim wrote, “He [ibn Abdul-Wahhaab] burnt the book *Dalaail al-Khairaat*¹ simply because it has the words, ‘our leader,’ and ‘our lord (*maulaana*)’ [while referring to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)]... It is also true that he said, ‘If I could get control over the room of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) I would destroy it.’”² In his letter to the scholars of Iraq, ibn Suhaim further said that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab does not respect the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his position. Al-Hadaad and Dahlaan later added to the fabrications of ibn Suhaim.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab himself explicitly denied the early charges of ibn Suhaim against him. He stated that they are all pure fabrications—except for his opposition to

¹ This book was written by Muhammad ibn Sulaimaan al-Maghribi of the Shaadhili Sufi order.

² See al-Huqail, pp. 168-169.

the book *Dalaail al-Khairaat*, which he explained that he opposed because the people considered its reading more virtuous than reading the Quran.¹

Actually, virtually all of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's writings and efforts clearly point to the falsehood of those claims made against him. In numerous works, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab makes his belief about the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) very clear. In addition to what was quoted above, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also wrote, "From here we recognize the necessity above all necessities: the individual has to know the Messenger and what he came with. There is no path to success except upon his hands. Nor is there any way to distinguish the good from the evil except through his means of distinguishing them. The person's necessity to know the Messenger is greatly above any other need that is hypothesized and any other necessity that is presented."² He also wrote, "The Messenger of Allah Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the leader of the intercessors, the person of the praiseworthy station. Adam and all who came after him will be under his banner."³ Actually, five volumes of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's collected writings are nothing more than the Prophet's hadith. Another volume is

¹ See Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 37.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 6, p. 13.

³ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 90.

his abridged biography of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Yet another one is his abridgement of ibn al-Qayyim's *Zaad al-Maad* which is completely about the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). How could anyone claim that this man belittled the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when he stressed the study of the Prophet's sayings, life and deeds?

However, what ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his followers do not do is go to an extreme with respect to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). But this attitude is also in obedience to the Prophet's own commands. Thus, they do not raise him above the noble position that Allah has given him. This is the stance that is bothersome to the opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, the Sufis and Shiites among them in particular.

The Question of Declaring People Outside the Fold of Islam and Fighting Against Them

The knowledge of issues of who or what falls within or outside of the fold of Islam are of extreme importance for the spiritual health of an individual Muslim as well as for that of a Muslim community. Mistaken views concerning this issue can lead to one of two extremes: the extreme of declaring Muslims to be non-Muslims or the

extreme of accepting rightfully non-Muslims into the fold of Islam (hence, not putting an end to evils and idolatry that should be stopped). Thus, in general, it is important that these types of topics be understood in some depth. For these reasons—and in the presence of the idolatrous practices that had swept through the Muslim lands by his time—ibn Abdul-Wahhaab paid a great deal of attention to these types of issues and brought them to the forefront after they had been seemingly neglected by Muslim scholars for centuries.

This topic differs from some of the other topics in that, concerning this topic, many of his opponents were in agreement with ibn Abdul-Wahhaab on a theoretical level but not so on a practical level. In other words, as ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote in some of his letters, they recognized that the actions that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab were describing as *kufir* (disbelief) and *shirk* (idolatry) were in fact *kufir* and *shirk*. However, they disagreed with him actually putting that into practice by then fighting against such *kufir* and *shirk* and against those who defend or fight for such *kufir* and *shirk*.¹ It seems clear from ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's writings that he was frustrated by the fact that scholars would agree that such acts were blatantly and

¹ Cf., Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 24-26.

enormously wrong but they would not agree upon the fact that such acts must be opposed, fought and eradicated.

Such attacks against ibn Abdul-Wahhaab first appeared relatively early during his preaching, while he was in al-Uyainah. Ibn Afaaliq wrote to the *Ameer* ibn Muammar, “This man declares the [Muslim] Nation to be disbelievers. In fact, by Allah, he belies the messengers and has ruled that they and their followers have committed *shirk*.”¹ Al-Qabbaani, ibn Suhaim, al-Hadaad and Dahlaan all made similar claims. The same allegations continue today on the pens of, for example, the Shiite Muhammad Jawaad Mughniyah and the Turkish Naqshabandi Huseyin Hilmi Isik.²

As noted above, these accusations first appeared during ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s lifetime. He immediately addressed these issues in a number of his letters. On one occasion he wrote, while refuting such false claims, “In fact, I call Allah to bear witness of what He knows in our hearts that whoever acts upon monotheism (*tauheed*) and is innocent of idolatry (*shirk*) and its adherents is a Muslim in any time and any place. And we only declare as disbeliever whoever associates partners with Allah in His

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 163.

² Cf., al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 168-169. For more quotes of such allegations, see al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 163-169; al-Husain, pp. 282-285.

Godhood and the falsehood of *shirk* has been made clear to him.”¹ He also wrote, “If we do not declare a disbeliever the one who worships the idol over the grave of Abdul-Qaadir or the idol over the grave of Ahmad al-Badawi and the like due to their ignorance and not having had the truth explained to them, how could we declare as disbeliever the one who does not associate partners with Allah or who does not migrate to us...?”²

Note that Abdullah, the son of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, also wrote, “As for [al-Boosairi] the writer of the *Burdah* and others in whose words one finds *shirk* and extremism in the religion and who have died, he [ibn Abdul-Wahhaab] did not declare them to be disbelievers. However, it is obligatory to object to their words and explain that whoever believes the apparent meaning of those words is an idolater, disbeliever. However, as for the one who stated it, his affair is left to Allah. It is not necessary to speak about the dead and one does not know if they repented or not...”³ Similarly, Shaikh Abdul-Lateef, the grandson of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, wrote, “Shaikh Muhammad [ibn Abdul-Wahhaab], may Allah have mercy on him, was one of the most careful and abstaining when it came to a general

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 60.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab., *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 48.

³ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 172.

declaration of disbelief. In fact, he did not even definitively declare the ignorant of the grave-worshippers who call upon other than Allah disbelievers. Nor did he declare others disbelievers if they had not had one who advised them and conveyed to them the proof that such actions make their doer a disbeliever.”¹

The Allegation that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab Considered Some Things to be Disbelief (*Kufr*) Which Are Not Disbelief

This is probably the arena in which the differences between ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his opponents are the greatest. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab delineated based on the Quran and Sunnah those actions that clearly and unequivocally take one out of the fold of Islam. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his fellow scholars distinguished between the greater *kufr*, that takes one out of the fold of Islam, and the lesser *kufr*, which is a grave sin but does not take one out of the fold of Islam. Similarly, they differentiated between the greater act of ascribing partners to Allah (*shirk*) and the lesser *shirk*.

However, the state of affairs in the Muslim lands—among the scholars and the commoners—had reached such a level that they did not recognize the fact that a

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 173-174.

person may claim to be a Muslim and recite the testimony of faith but his own beliefs, statements or actions belie that claim and take him out of the fold of Islam. Furthermore, the real definition of *tauheed* had been lost on the people after years of wrangling by scholastic theologians and the mystical teachings of the Sufis. The people had truly become blind to the very essence of Islam itself. They did not see any harm in directing acts of worship to other than Allah as long as one admitted that Allah is the only creator and sustainer. They failed to realize that even the polytheists of Makkah at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) accepted that much. The Muslims had forgotten that the meaning of *ilaah* (“God”) is the worshipped one. They had forgotten that the meaning of the testimony of faith is that there is none worthy of worship—meaning none should be worshipped via any act of worship—except Allah. As noted earlier, Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab described this view in one of his letters where he said that even those who claimed to have knowledge would say, “Whoever says, ‘There is no deity except Allah,’ is not to be declared a disbeliever, even if he rejects the resurrection or rejects all of the Shareeah.”¹

A reading of the criticisms of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, in the words of the critics themselves, makes it evident that

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 41.

it is the critics who either did not understand the real teachings of the faith or they were intentionally distorting the real teachings. Unfortunately, there is no third possibility.

Thus, while speaking about the grave-worshippers, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's opponent al-Haddaad wrote, "Those greatly revere the prophets and saints. They do not believe about them what they believe concerning the Truth [Allah], blessed and exalted, when it comes to complete, true, general creation. They only believe that they have an honored position with Allah concerning a particular matter and they attribute such [powers to] them in an allegorical manner. However, they believe that the source and action is only with Allah."¹ Dahlaan also specifically stated that *shirk* only occurs when one believes that someone other than Allah actually has real effect, and he says that no Muslim believes such.²

With this supposed concept of monotheism, sacrificing animals to other than Allah or seeking refuge with deceased people are not acts of *shirk* that take one out of the fold of Islam. Ibn Afaaliq early on denied that these acts constitute *shirk*, as they are merely forbidden acts. In

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 195.

² See the quotes from him in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 196. Similar statements may be found from many other authors in al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 196-199.

his letter refuting ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, he stated, “The Nation is agreed that sacrificing animals or making vows for other than Allah is simply forbidden. Whoever does it has disobeyed Allah and His Messenger.”¹ Sulaimaan ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and the Shiite al-Amali similarly defended such practices.

Herein a detailed refutation of these types of illogical claims is not intended. However, the simplest and the most obvious question is how are the claims of these opponents in any way consistent with what Allah and His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) have said? Does not Allah say in the Quran, “And the mosques are for Allah (Alone), so invoke not anyone along with Allah” (*Jinn* 18). “So invoke not with Allah another god lest you be among those who receive punishment” (*al-Shuaraa* 213). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, “Supplication is the [essence of] worship.”²

Furthermore, if the common non-scholar Muslim truly believes that these people he is praying to actually have no affect, why then do they pray to them? Is it not true that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 197.

² Recorded by Abu Dawood, al-Nasaai, al-Tirmidhi and others. Graded *sahih* by al-Albaani. See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1988), vol. 1, p. 641.

Allah be upon him) and his Companions never prayed to anyone or sought refuge from anyone in a grave, not from the earlier prophets nor from the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) after his death? If this is such a beneficial act that truly helps one's prayers be answered by Allah, why did that best generation not set the example for that supposed beautiful and important act of worship? Given that the answers to these questions are obvious and it is very possible, if not a fact, that praying in such matters is truly a violation of one's *tauheed*, would it not be prudent for a Muslim to avoid such an act to safeguard the very foundation of his faith? However, the argument of the opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, then and now, are no different from what Allah describes in the following verses concerning the polytheists of Makkah: "So who does more wrong than he who forges a lie against Allah or denies His signs? Surely, the sinners will never be successful! And they worship besides Allah things that hurt them not, nor profit them, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allah.' Say, 'Do you inform Allah of that which He knows not in the heavens and on the earth?' Glorified and Exalted be He above all that which they associate as partners with Him" (*Yoonus* 17-18). Allah also says, "Surely, the religion is for Allah only. And those who take protectors and helpers besides Him (say), 'We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah.'

Verily, Allah will judge between them concerning that wherein they differ. Truly, Allah guides not him who is a liar, and a disbeliever” (*al-Zumar* 3).

The Allegation that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab revolted against the Ottoman Caliphate

As described earlier, Najd, at the time of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, was not truly under the authority of the Ottoman rulers. It was a rather lawless state with each small village or Bedouin tribe having its own ruler. Furthermore, when ibn Abdul-Wahhaab began his call in earnest, upon moving to al-Uyainah, he did so with the agreement and in alliance with the local *ameer* or established authority. Similarly, when he moved to al-Diriyyah, he made a pact with the *ameer* of that land for some twenty years, Muhammad ibn Saud. Hence, at no time did ibn Abdul-Wahhaab revolt against the rulers in his area. Furthermore, since Najd was never truly part of the Ottoman rule, he never revolted against the Ottoman rulers either.

Even though such was clearly the case, Ibn Afaaliq wrote, “Your monotheism (*tauheed*) includes revolting against the Muslims... That is blasphemy not *tauheed*.”¹ As noted earlier, ibn Abideen also considered the

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 233.

“Wahhabis” renegades. Dahlaan, al-Amali and others also made similar claims.¹

On this point, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab made his beliefs very clear. They are the same beliefs held by the *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah* throughout its history. In his letter to the people of al-Qaseem, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote, “I believe in the obligation to listen and obey the leaders of the Muslims, the pious and the impious among them, as long as they do not command an act of disobedience to Allah. This obedience is for whoever takes the position of caliph, concerning whom the people have agreed and are pleased with. Even if he overpowered them with force and became the caliph, it is obligatory to obey him and it is forbidden to revolt against him.”²

Muhammad Naseeb al-Rifaa’ee’s description of what truly occurred between ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and the Ottoman rulers seems to be fairly accurate. He wrote,

Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab never gave any thought to overthrowing the Muslim caliphate... However, the people around the caliph, who were from Sufi orders, distorted the news in order to rally the caliph against them [the “Wahhabis”], making it look like it was

¹ Cf., al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 233.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 11. See also vol. 1, p. 394.

a movement against the caliphate itself, attempting to bring back the caliphate to the Arabs... However, the beliefs of the Shaikh are the true Islamic beliefs that does not take away the hand of obedience from a standing caliph unless he exhibits a clear, distinctive act of *kuf*r. The Shaikh did not see anything of that nature that would lead him to call the people to remove the caliph. Even if the caliph were an evildoer in himself, as long as that impiety did not reach the level of a clear and pure *kuf*r, it is not allowed to revolt against him or to negate his rule.¹

The Issue of *Tawassul* (Seeking a Means of Nearness to Allah) and Seeking Relief from Other Than Allah

Allah says, “O you who believe! Do your duty to Allah and fear Him. Seek the means of approach to Him, and strive hard for His Cause as much as you can, so that you may be successful” (*al-Maaidah* 35).

One of the most repeated claims concerning ibn Abdul-Wahhaab is that he prohibited any type of *tawassul* (specific ways of making requests of and getting closer to Allah). The opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab claim that it is permissible to seek a means of approach to Allah via people who are deceased. In other words, they see no

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 237-238.

difference between those who are still living and those who have passed away—both groups have similar abilities and similar standings in the sight of Allah. Actually, they went further and saw no harm in praying directly to the deceased for aid and assistance. Hence, the opponents are calling for something that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his followers see as *shirk* and *kufr*.

Those who objected to ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's position on this issue include ibn Afaaliq, Umar al-Mahjoob, al-Haddaad, Ismaeel al-Tameemi, Ahmad Dahlaan and numerous others.¹ Again, the position of many of these authors is that if the person believes that Allah is the ultimate “doer” and no one has any true power save Allah, then it is permissible to request or pray to any “saint” or prophet as means of getting closer to Allah or to invoke Allah in the name of any prophet or “saint.” For example, Dahlaan wrote, “*Al-tawassul* [seeking a means of approach], seeking intercession and seeking aid are all of the same meaning. In the hearts of the believers, their only meaning is seeking blessings by mentioning those beloved to Allah, since it is confirmed that Allah has mercy upon His servants due to them, regardless of whether they are alive or dead. The one who truly brings about the effect and existence is only Allah. Mentioning those precious souls is

¹ Cf., al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 242-256.

simply a common means that produces that result like any other common [material] means that does not have any real effect.”¹

The concept or the term *tawassul* or *waseelah* is derived directly from the Quran, as found in the Quranic verse quoted above. However, over time it began to take on different meanings from how it was originally understood by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself and his Companions. Thus, one finds in al-Tabari’s Quranic commentary, one of the earliest complete commentaries, that in the verse quoted above (*al-Maaidah* 35), “seek the means [of nearness, *al-waseelah*] to Him,” refers to performing the righteous deeds that are beloved to Allah. That is how one comes closer to Allah. In fact, that is the only interpretation that al-Tabari offers, although it was his practice to present every view passed on from the early scholars.²

The means of getting closer to Allah were divided by later scholars into those that were permissible means and those which were heretical. The permissible ones, all supported by authentic hadith, included seeking a means of approach by invoking Allah’s own names and attributes,

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 249.

² See Muhammad ibn Jareer al-Tabari, *Jaami al-Bayaan an Taweel Ayi al-Quraan* (Amman, Jordan: Daar al-Alaam, 2002), vol. 4, pp. 293-294.

by referring to a righteous action that one has performed and by having a living righteous person pray on one's behalf.

Over time, though, there developed a new way of approaching Allah. In this way, one begs of Allah by invoking the name or by referring to the honored status of one of Allah's servants. Hence, one says, for example, "O Allah, I beseech you by the right or status of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), grant me..." Or, "O Allah, I beseech you by the status of the 'saint' Abdul-Qadir, grant me..." Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab considered this type of *tawassul* as a type of innovation that should be avoided. However, he never considered this type of *tawassul* an act of *kufir*, especially not when done in the name of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), since in this case the person is truly praying toward Allah. Such a form of prayer is considered an innovation because it was never performed by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), his Companions or their followers.

Even though, in a blatant fabrication, Dahlaan wrote, "In every Friday sermon in the mosque in al-Diriyyah, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab would say, 'Whoever makes *tawassul* through the Prophet has committed an act

of disbelief.”¹ In his letter refuting ibn Suhaim, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab specifically stated that this claim—that he considers the one who makes *tawassul* via the pious a disbeliever—is nothing but a fabrication.² In fact, he considered this issue of seeking a means of approach by invoking the names of the righteous as an issue of fiqh in which there is a difference of opinion. Since there was an acceptable difference of opinion, he would not even rebuke those who performed such an act.³

However, as alluded to above, matters evolved even beyond that. In the name of *tawassul*, people starting to pray directly to the deceased, asking them to intervene between themselves and Allah or, even worse, asking them to forgive their sins, thinking that they had some special dispensation from Allah for that purpose. They claimed that all of this was simply a type of *tawassul*, which is permissible. In other words, it was claimed that *istighaathah*, or seeking rescue and help, from other than Allah was permissible because it is no more than a type of *tawassul*.

Concerning this latter issue, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was adamant. This was not simply a difference of opinion in a matter of fiqh. This was an issue that struck at the core

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 255.

² See Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 64.

³ Cf., al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 255-256.

of faith. Supplications and prayers fall under the category of *ibaadah* (“worship”) and as such they must be exclusively directed toward Allah alone. One cannot ask of anyone else anything that is beyond his apparent and normal means as a human being. Hence, to ask of the deceased to cure an illness, forgive sins, rescue one from a problem and so forth, all of which some scholars have justified in the name of *tawassul*, is nothing less than pure *shirk*. In addition, there is an implied claim that the deceased can perform said acts. However, knowledge of that fact is from the unseen and there is no proof in the Quran or Sunnah that the deceased can perform any act on behalf of the living. To the contrary, in the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) one finds that it is the deceased who are in need of the prayers of the living and not vice-versa. Furthermore, they are claiming that the deceased can continue to perform wonderful righteous deeds while in their graves—such as interceding on behalf of poor sinful individuals—while the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) clearly stated, “When a human dies his deeds come to an end, save for three: an act of charity that continues to ‘flow,’ knowledge that is still benefited from and a pious child who prays for him.” (Recorded by Muslim.)

Closely related to this issue is the general question of making prayers or supplications to someone or something other than Allah. Although for many Muslims in the West today—perhaps partially due to the long-run beneficial influence of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s students, followers and supporters—this may seem like a very clear-cut issue, this is yet another issue in which ibn Abdul-Wahhaab faced a great deal of opposition. Thus, for example, al-Qabbaani wrote about praying for help to other than Allah, “As for what he claims that *istighaathah* (seeking help and rescue) is a type of worship of other than Allah and that it is part of the greater *shirk* of the *shirk* of the disbelievers, he does not establish any proof or evidence for that.”¹ Al-Hadaad made similar remarks and said that the idea that one cannot pray to the “saints” is one of the lapses of “the Najdi,” that is, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.²

The views of the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab are well expressed by his grandson Sulaimaan who wrote,

Verily, *dua* [supplications, prayers, beseeching] is a form of worship, of the greatest forms of worship. In fact, it is the most honorable of all worship to Allah... If directing it towards others is not a type of *shirk*, then there

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 349.

² Cf., al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 349. For statements from other opponents, such as ibn Jarjees, Dahlaan, ibn Daawud and others, see al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 350-357.

is no *shirk* on earth. If there is *shirk* on earth, then *shirk* with respect to *dua* must definitely be considered more of a *shirk* than associating partners with Allah in any other act of worship. In fact, *shirk* with respect to *dua* is the greatest form of the *shirk* practiced by the polytheists that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent to. They would pray to the prophets, righteous and angels. They would get close to them so that they could intercede for them with Allah. Thus, during times of hardship, they would make their prayers purely to Allah and they would forget their [supposed] partners. It is even related that if they would face hardships while on the seas, they would throw their idols overboard and say, “O Allah, O Allah,” due to their knowledge that their “gods” could not remove any harm or save the one in need.¹

The Issues of Demolishing Tombs and Visiting the Graves

One of the most horrendous acts, according to the Sufis and the Shiites, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his followers performed was the tearing down of tombs and the prohibition of pilgrimages to graves and mausoleums. Indeed, to them, this was virtually the final insult that ibn

¹ Sulaimaan ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Taiseer al-Azeez al-Hameed fi Sharh Kitaab al-Tauheed* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1400 A.H.), p. 219.

Abdul-Wahhaab gave to the prophets and the “saints”. Ibn Suhaim, al-Mahjoob, al-Hadaad, Dahlaan and numerous others joined in this attack on the “Wahhabis.”¹

The practice of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was truly completely consistent with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)—however, averse the people may be to that fact. One can say with certainty that neither the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) nor any of his Companions ever built a mosque, mausoleum, tomb or structure over any grave—neither with the intent of using it as a place of worship nor even simply for the sake of marking the location. Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab explained the position of the “Wahhabis” on this issue. He wrote,

Building domes over graves is one of the distinguishing signs and portents of disbelief. Allah sent Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to destroy the idols, even if they were upon graves of righteous people. Al-Laat² was a pious man. When he died, they gathered around his grave, built a building over it and honored it. When the people of Taif embraced Islam,

¹ Cf., al-Abdul-Lateef, pp. 302-311.

² The idol known as al-Laat is referred to in the verses of the Quran *al-Najm* 19-23.

they requested that the tomb of al-Laat not be destroyed for one month, so that their women and children would not fear, until they entered into the religion. That request was rejected and he [the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)] sent al-Mugheerah ibn Shubah and Abu Sufyaan ibn Harb with them and ordered them to demolish it.¹

Furthermore, Muslim records in his *Sahih* that Ali ibn Abu Taalib said to al-Asadi, “Shall I not send you on the same type of mission that the Messenger of Allah sent me on: Do not leave any statue without demolishing it and do not leave any raised grave without leveling it.”

Summary

In this chapter one has been able to see the quality of the criticisms as well as, one could argue, the nature of the critics. Many of the criticisms were nothing but pure fabrications while others were merely twisting the truth. These criticisms did not damper ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s spirit nor did they confirm for him that he was on the wrong path. On the contrary, he knew that such trials were bound to come. He also knew that as long as he remained faithful to Allah’s words and the Messenger’s words, in the end, nothing but good could be the result. He wrote in one

¹ Quoted in al-Abdul-Lateef, p. 315.

of his letters, after explaining that he and his brethren were doing well and after expressing joy that those that he was writing to had joined the cause,

Perhaps Allah will grant us and you the good of this life and the Hereafter. And He will grant us fortitude on this matter. But, o my brothers, do not forget Allah's statement, "We have made some of you as a trial for others: will you then have patience? And your Lord is Ever All-Seer (of everything)" [*al-Furqaan* 20]. He also said, "Do people think that they will be left alone because they say, 'We believe,' and they will not be tested? And We indeed tested those who were before them. And Allah will certainly make (it) known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make (it) known (the falsehood of) those who are liars" [*al-Ankaboot* 2-3]. Therefore, you must know with certainty that whoever follows this religion is going to be tested. Have patience for just a little and then have the glad tidings for that little time of the good of this life and the Hereafter. And remember Allah's words, "Verily, We will indeed make victorious Our Messengers and those who believe in this world's life and on the Day when the witnesses will stand forth" [*Ghaafir* 51]... If Allah provides you the patience for that and you become the "strangers" who adhere to the religion while the people have left it, then have glad tidings. Have glad tidings, as

you will be from those about whom your Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spoke, “Islam began as something strange and it will return as it began [that is, as being something strange]. So glad tidings of *Tooba* [a tree in Paradise] for the strangers.”¹ They said, “O Messenger of Allah, who are the strangers?” He replied, “Those who rectify themselves when the people have become evil.”² Isn’t that a wonderful blessing? Isn’t that a great matter? May Allah make us and you from those who follow the Messenger and gather us under his banner and present us at his cistern, at which those who adhere to his way in this life will be presented.³

It should be noted that the opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab tried to destroy his call both physically and intellectually (if one wants to call it that, although their arguments were intellectually very weak). Even when they could militarily get an upper hand on the followers of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, it did not mean that the call would die. Vassiliev stated, discussing the aftermath of the fall of al-Diriyyah, “[T]he Egyptians became absolute masters of central Arabia and started to root out the influence of the

¹ This portion of the hadith was recorded by Muslim.

² This latter portion was recorded by Ahmad. With this exact wording, the hadith, according to Shuaib al-Arnaaoot, et al., is very weak. However, with a very similar meaning, a hadith is recorded with a good chain. See Shuaib al-Arnaaoot, et al., footnotes to *Musnad*, vol. 27, pp. 237-238.

³ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, pp. 308-309.

Saudis and the Wahhabis by fire and the sword. Emirs, military commanders and *ulama* were tortured, shot (singly and in groups), fastened to the muzzles of guns and torn to pieces... Captain G. F. Sadlier describes Ibrahim's campaigns as a series of barbaric atrocities and violations of his most sacred obligations..."¹ Even after the state was crushed, the teachings lived on. In fact, today the teachings are dominating many parts of the world. This is because Allah does not will that His light shall ever be completely extinguished, even if the unbelievers are averse.

There is another point that constantly comes to this author's mind when reading the works of the opponents of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. It is not really ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings that they oppose. It is the actual and clear teachings of Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In fact, the opponents do not even resort to Quranic verses or authentic hadith to refute ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. Indeed, one is directly reminded of the kind words of support and admonition that Allah gave His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), "We know indeed the grief which their words cause you (O Muhammad): it is not you that they deny, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers deny. Verily, (many) Messengers were denied before you, but with

¹ Vassiliev, p. 158.

patience they bore the denial, and they were hurt, till Our Help reached them, and none can alter the Words of Allah. Surely there has reached you the information (news) about the Messengers (before you)” (*al-Anaam* 33-34).

Indeed, it can be concluded that the way of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his Companions. Those who opposed or oppose him are simply being blind to the truth of this matter, although it is clear and open for all to see. Even Vassiliev noted, “The Wahhabis seem orthodox from a dogmatic viewpoint. This is their own opinion, as well as that of the majority of objective experts, both in the Arab world and outside; it is also the view of contemporaries of the initial movement and of later scholars.”¹ Then he stated,

Burckhardt reports that the Cairo *ulama*, who were generally opposed to the Wahhabis, stated that they had found no heresy in their teaching. Since this statement was made contrary to the *ulama*’s ‘own will’, it hardly causes any suspicion. After reading Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s book, many Cairo *ulama* declared unanimously that if it expressed the Wahhabis’ opinion, they too (the *ulama*) were wholeheartedly of their faith. Abu Ras al-Nasiri, an

¹ Vassiliev, p. 75

Algerian *alim*, asserted that the Wahhabis' dogma was entirely orthodox. Ibn Sanad, a chronicler from Basra, noted that the Wahhabis were the Hanbalis of the past...¹

¹ Vassiliev, p. 75.

VI Lessons for Today's World from the Life of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab

There are many lessons that one can take from the experience of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In fact, learning about people like ibn Abdul-Wahhaab provides a great lesson. It may be difficult for a person to picture himself among the likes of the prophets and their close Companions. Indeed, one may even convince himself that it is not possible to be like them—but then come individuals throughout the history of Islam who have many of the same noble characteristics but they are not prophets or companions of the prophets. They are, in a sense, “normal people.” Furthermore, the society in which they grew up and their environment may be very much similar to that of the individual who is studying them.

With respect to the Muslims of today, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab fits this mold very well. There are a lot of similarities between the Muslim world he grew up in and the Muslim world today. The Muslim world was in a very difficult state at his time. The European powers were gaining more and more ground upon the caliphate and the Ottoman Turks as in elsewhere in the Muslim world. Within the Muslim world, Muslims seem to have had lost the true spirit, meaning and practice of Islam. Many of them began to be overwhelmed by the scientific

advancements of the West. The Shareeah had been a forgotten part of Islam in many areas.

Today, much of the same is repeating itself, although the methods and means may have changed. Politically, the Muslim countries as a whole are very weak. Man-made laws have replaced the Shareeah in most countries. Disunity and even hatred exists among various Muslim populations. Some Muslims, for example, are falling for the crass materialism of the West. Again, the true meaning of Islam is being lost on many Muslims. In many Muslim lands, religion is hardly being taught in the government run schools.

Finally, when people do return to the true Islam of the Quran and Sunnah, they are immediately “labeled,” just like ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and his followers were immediately labeled. During his time, it was being a Kharijite, heretic or disbeliever. Today, one is called a fundamentalist or, much worse, a terrorist.

Yet ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, his supporters and followers were able to change their situation. At least for their own part of the world—and in many ways for almost every part of the world—they were able to bring back Islam. Surely in the momentous change that came about there are lessons to be by learned Muslims of today who

are looking at a bleak situation similar to that which he faced.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab obviously was not a prophet nor was he corrected by divine revelation. He was prone to make mistakes as were his followers. Obviously, his statements and actions do not share the same kind of authority as the Quran or Sunnah. However, it is his efforts within the guidelines of the Quran and Sunnah that are of interest here. How he applied the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah to his own situation is the key. He did not come with a new religion or teachings. Instead, he went back to the Quran and Sunnah, understood them properly and had the vision to understand how they were supposed to be applied given his time and place. That was the key to the changes that came as a result of Allah's bounty and then his efforts. Those are the lessons that shall be explored in this chapter.

The Importance of Starting with Correcting One's Beliefs (*Aqeedah*) in Theory and Practice

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spent the first thirteen years of his mission, those years in Makkah before the migration to Madinah, teaching virtually solely the concept of *tauheed* and other aspects of *aqeedah*. Allah makes it very clear that every messenger was sent with a primary message—and that message was *tauheed* and faith. Allah specifically states while describing the words of many of the prophets to their people: “O my people! Worship Allah [alone]. You have no other god besides Him” (*al-Araaf* 59, 65, 73, 85 and *Hood* 50, 61, 84).

This should be a clear message to every Muslim generation, movement and group, that the correct belief has to be firmly implanted in the heart before any true fruits are to be expected. It is this proper and true *imaan* that allows the person to internalize the Quran and apply its injunctions sincerely and properly, everything from avoiding *shirk*, establishing the prayers, avoiding alcohol to risking one's life for the sake of Allah. These are part of the fruits of the beautiful tree of faith and monotheism.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab understood very well that it is via correcting the *aqeedah* that one can then correct the acts of worship, the behavior and manners, and all aspects of a person's life. To correct the “outer” without first

correcting what is in a person's mind and heart will not have any true, long-lasting benefit. As noted earlier, this is the aspect that rang through all of his teaching, writing and communication. In particular, he stressed the very foundation of belief in God and what contradicts that foundation. There is no question that at the time of Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, spreading the correct belief about the nature of the worship of God was the most important and also the most difficult task that he had to fulfill.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab once set out his methodology very clearly when he wrote,

First comes knowledge—and that is knowledge of Allah, knowledge of His prophet and knowledge of the religion of Allah with its corresponding evidence. Second comes acting in accordance with [said knowledge]. Third comes calling to it. Fourth comes bearing patiently the harm that comes due to it. The proof for this [methodology] is Allah's statement, "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. (I swear) by time. Verily, mankind is in loss except those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and recommend one another to the truth, and recommend one another to patience."¹

¹ Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 1, p. 185.

Not to Despair No Matter How Great the Ignorance and Wrongdoing May Be

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent to mankind, religiously speaking, the world was in a total state of darkness. Yet within a very short span of time, a portion of humanity rose from the abyss to lead mankind into a new era, in which godliness would once again be the essential virtue. Although the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is no longer alive and his leadership in physical form in this world is no longer possible, the guidance that he received will always be preserved to lead mankind whenever they take it upon themselves to turn to it.

By the time of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, Islam, and hence all of humanity, had once again reached a very sad state. Through his travels, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was well aware that the darkness that had overcome Najd was not restricted to Najd alone but was apparent throughout Muslim lands. Yet as great as that darkness was, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab knew that if the people would correct their beliefs and change their ways, their lives could be completely transformed.

The example that he and his followers gave can once again give hope to mankind today. As long as that

guidance is there—the Quran and Sunnah as propagated by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), which was followed and implemented by ibn Abdul-Wahhaab—there can always be hope that mankind may wake up and return to those great teachings. That revelation has the ability to stir in the hearts of mankind and revive the deadened souls.

If Muslims, with religious scholars as their leaders, return to that revelation, there is hope for the Muslim Nation and there is hope for all of mankind. But as Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab told Muhammad ibn Saud, there are some conditions for this change and eventual support and victory from Allah. Simply by calling oneself Muslim while not obeying Allah and adhering to His religion will not change the state of a people. Instead, they must turn to Allah, purify their beliefs and submit to Him completely.

The point is that this change can happen and has happened more than once in the history of mankind. It can happen within one generation—indeed, within the lifetime of one true scholar who is sincere to Allah, learns his faith correctly and is willing to sacrifice for that goal. No matter how terrible a state the Muslims may be in, there should always be hope; a true believer should never be driven to despair. A Muslim should always work for the desired

change. Allah willing, the change will come about in this world, but in any case the person's efforts will never go unappreciated by Allah.

The Importance of “Education” For All

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim.”¹ However, the most important of the Prophet's teachings was not the issue of literacy or “science” but the issue of beliefs. And this important knowledge, he imparted to all, from the nobles to the humblest slave-girl. Over time in the Muslim world, this was something that was lost and, in some areas, religious knowledge became the privilege of only certain classes.²

Ibn Bishr, while speaking of the accomplishments of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote,

He taught *tauheed* to the young and the old while before it was just known to the elite ... He would teach these things to the young and old, to the literate and illiterate, while before only the elite would know them. All of the peoples of the lands benefited from him because

¹ Recorded by a number of authorities, including ibn Maajah. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, p. 727.

² Cf., al-Qataan and al-Zain, p. 17.

they would ask about what he was ordering and what he was prohibiting.¹

In contemporary times, one hears a great deal of discussion of the importance of literacy for all. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab understood and implemented something much more important than that. He stressed the education of all Muslims concerning the fundamentals of the faith—this is in fact the most important type of education that first needs to be spread (in many cases, it can be spread alongside literacy as people learn to read the Quran and hadith). He wrote, “The conclusion is that the issues of *tauheed* are not from those matters which are the concern of the religious elite alone. Instead, researching these issues and learning them are a necessary obligation upon the scholar, the ignorant, the male, the female...”²

The basics of the faith cannot be restricted just to certain classes. If that is the case, the practice of the faith will not permeate all the different classes and echelons of society. The complete society could not become truly Islamic. With ignorance, individuals can never develop a true attachment and love for this faith. However, if everyone—or as many as possible—are given the proper education, then everyone will be able to grow in this faith,

¹ Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 163.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 189.

have the correct belief about Allah, appreciate and love the faith, practice it in their lives and be correspondingly blessed by Allah due to their knowledge, practice and devotion to the faith.

This was clearly the type of society that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab envisioned and worked to bring about. He made it obligatory that the fundamentals of the faith be taught in the mosque—and he even prepared short epistles specifically for teaching the uninitiated. Hence, his work, *The Three Fundamentals*, was studied in the mosques and recited from memory after the Fajr Prayers. This work comprises knowledge that is based not on the statements of later scholars or “saints” but directly on the Quran and Sunnah—thus linking the individual and the revelation from Allah.

In addition, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab sent teachers to the smaller villages and even to Bedouin tribes. These teachers taught the people their faith: who is their Lord, who is their Prophet and what is their religion. They taught the five pillars of Islam and the six basic articles of faith. They taught the rights of Allah and the rights of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Ibn Baaz notes, “Thus, the commoners among the Muslims and Bedouins began to know the foundations and fundamentals of the faith concerning which many people today who hold

degrees of higher learning are themselves ignorant.”¹ With this correct knowledge came a great attachment and devotion to the Quran and Sunnah.

He was not simply concerned with the outward practices of the faith. He also taught the people about *zuhd* (proper abstinence from desiring the goods of this world), purification of the soul, the importance of increasing one’s acts of worship, continual remembrance of Allah, imploring Allah for guidance, continual prayers to Him and the ever important two conditions of purity and following the revelation in every righteous act.² He also stressed that learning without its subsequent application meant nothing. Thus, he wrote, “Knowledge is not to be called knowledge unless it bears fruit [that is, deeds]. If it does not bear any fruit, it is ignorance. Thus, Allah says, ‘Those who truly fear Allah among His servants are the knowledgeable’ [*Faatir* 28].”³

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was just as much concerned about the proper and essential education of women as he was for men. In any kind of society, women are bound to play an important role. However, they are of utmost importance in an Islamic society in which family and

¹ Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 2, p. 729.

² Abdul-Muhsin ibn Baaz, vol. 2, p. 747.

³ Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 162.

moral values are stressed. It does not benefit the society when the greatest caretaker of the future generation is not knowledgeable of the religion and morals of the society. Thus, in numerous letters, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stressed that the religion must be taught to both men and women. In a letter quoted above, he stated, “The conclusion is that the issues of *tauheed* are not from those matters which are the concern of the *mutawwas* alone. Instead, researching these issues and learning them are a necessary obligation upon the scholar, the ignorant, the male, the female...”¹ On another occasion, he wrote that the teachings of the faith “must be spread among the people, the women and the men.”² When speaking about loving for the sake of Allah, hating for the sake of Allah, having loyalty for the sake of Allah and disassociating for the sake of Allah, he said that the men must learn this and “it is obligatory upon the men to teach their wives and the members of their household this aspect.”³

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 189.

² Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 127 and p. 323.

³ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 127. Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also worked to remove some of the wrong that was being done to the women in his society. In addition to encouraging their education, he also fought against the common practice of leaving endowments that practically prevented women from receiving their rightful inheritance.

Following the “Cause and Effect” in This World While Putting One’s Complete Trust in Allah

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the example *par excellence* of understanding how one must adhere to the apparent and material causes of this world while at the same time putting all of one’s reliance and trust in Allah alone. For example, in his battles against the disbelievers, he took all the necessary steps that he could take and struggled, realizing that all the results lay with Allah’s decree.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also combined following the causes and being cautious and careful with a strong trust in Allah and relying upon Allah alone. He considered putting one’s trust and reliance in Allah as one of the necessities of faith.¹ However, ignoring the “apparent causes” in this physical world is in contradiction to the example set by the Prophet while complete reliance upon them—thinking that they alone can bring about some benefit, forgetting that only if Allah wills can they result in any benefit—can be a type of *shirk*. Thus, as ibn Abdul-Wahhaab stated, he sought to “combine the trust in Allah with the following of causes, in contradiction to the extremists among the jurists [who rely merely on causes]

¹ See Nusair, p. 172.

and the extremists among the Sufis [who rely merely on a false concept of trust in Allah].”¹

From the outset, his goal was quite clear: the reformation of Muslim society. In order to achieve that goal, he first acquired the necessary knowledge. Secondly, he sought the necessary backing that would allow such a goal to be implemented, similar to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) emigrating to Madinah. Under the circumstances he lived in, without the backing of a respected authority, his call would have been doomed to failure. Since his call was such an affront to the ignorant customs of his people, it is not difficult to conceive of him being assassinated, for example, early on. Indeed, when ibn Abdul-Wahhaab went to destroy the tomb of Zaid ibn al-Khattaab, he told Uthmaan, the ruler, “I fear that the people of al-Jubailah will attack me. I am not able to destroy it without your presence.”² In addition, Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s move from Huraimila to al-Uyainah and his subsequent move to al-Diriyah (where he already had a following and who were the opponents of the Tribe of Khalid) were further examples of following the “outward causes” that may lead to success and not simply wishing

¹ Quoted in Nusair, p. 172.

² Ibn Bishr, vol. 1, p. 32.

and hoping that Allah will change the situation of the people.

By now it is obvious that many of the lessons discussed in this chapter tie into one another and tend to go back to the original issue: that of completely correcting one's belief system and having the proper faith. In other words, some of the most important "apparent causes," although not necessarily physical causes in the eyes of the materialists, are: correcting one's belief, leaving all *jaahiliyyah* and *shirk* behind as well as any desire for it, correcting one's morals and behavior. In fact, in general, one should never take part in a physical struggle, such as military jihad (or what some Muslims may foolishly resort to—terrorism) and expect to be victorious until one has tended to these forms of important causes. This was very clear in the life of the Prophet as well as in the life of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab.

The Necessity of Having Support for the Call

Perhaps closely related to the previous point is another feature that one finds exhibited in the method of

ibn Abdul-Wahhaab: the importance of having political support for the teachings and call. With the backing of the “powers that be,” the call can be one of both knowledge and action, theoretical and practical. The importance of political support and “strength” is highlighted in the Quran.

For example, when speaking to his transgressing people, Lot alluded to the fact that he had no power or strength to keep them from fulfilling their desires. Thus, Allah quotes him as saying, “Would that I had strength (men) to overpower you, or that I could betake myself to some powerful support (to resist you)” (*Hood* 80).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also sought support before moving to Madinah, as is clear in the following hadith: Jaabir stated, “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spent ten years in Makkah following the people to their places at the gatherings in Ukaadh and Majanah and during the gathering at Mina. He would say, ‘Who will assist me? Who will support me such that I can convey the message of my Lord and for him will be Paradise?’”¹

¹ Recorded by Ahmad, al-Haakim and others. According to al-Arnaoot, et al., the chain is *sahih* according to Muslim’s criteria. See Shuaib al-Arnaoot, et al., footnotes to Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 23, pp. 346-349.

It is especially during times like those of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and like those of today, wherein the heresies, incorrect beliefs and evil practices have become so entrenched that without some strength in society, one's reform and purification movement can be crushed easily. Al-Atram noted that in such an environment as ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's, it was not possible to remove the wrongs simply with the speech of the scholars. Instead, it needed someone who would threaten them and have the authority behind him to fulfil his threats. Then al-Atram quoted the famous expression: Allah removes via the government or rule what He does not remove via the Quran.¹

One finds that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab understood very well the importance of this concept. The religion of Islam is meant to be established as the guide for all aspects of society. A complete reformation of society means a reformation of personal behavior as well as state and public behavior. Without the support of at least some of the "powers that be," it would be expected that its enemies would crush any such call or movement. Even if someone may believe in something, he may not have the ability to implement what he believes—that is, he may find it necessary not to speak or implement everything that he knows is true. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab touched on this point

¹ Al-Atram, vol. 1, p. 265.

while speaking about scholars during his own lifetime. In one letter he wrote, “As for the matter that people rebuke me, hate me and oppose me for, if one were to ask any scholar from al-Shaam, Yemen or elsewhere about it, they would say, ‘It is the truth. It is the religion of Allah and His Messenger. However, I do not have the ability to show it openly in my place because the government does not approve of it. However, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab is able to show it openly because the ruler in his land does not object to it.’”¹

Thus, when ibn Abdul-Wahhaab first moved to al-Uyainah, he presented his beliefs to Uthmaan and called him to believe in the proper *tauheed* and to support the religion of Allah. Uthmaan accepted what ibn Abdul-Wahhaab taught and assisted him in preaching and spreading the truth. Hence, the call got a firm footing, attracted many followers and was able to actually put its teachings into practice. It was able to remove the false objects of worship and even institute the punishment for adultery. The same was true when ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was forced to leave al-Uyainah and go to al-Diriyyah. Again, in al-Diriyyah, the *Ameer* Muhammad ibn Saud

¹ Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 32.

accepted ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's message and supported it to the fullest.

It is perhaps for this reason that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's teachings and following actually had a greater impact than even his intellectual mentor ibn Taimiyyah and other great reformers. Speaking in comparison to other reformers, Attar noted that their impact was "a limited intellectual one that did not go beyond a small number of thinkers who were impressed by them and influenced by their reformist ideas."¹ Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, on the other hand, was able to participate in the building of an Islamic state that continued to exist after his death.

Refusal to Compromise the Fundamental Beliefs

Allah tells the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), "So (O Muhammad) obey not the deniers. They wish that you should compromise (in religion out of

¹ Attar, p. 92.

courtesy) with them, so they (too) would compromise with you” (*al-Qalam* 8-9).

In the life of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, one can find someone who was attacked on all fronts. Even though he was greatly in need of support and aid to fend off those foes, not once does one find him compromising on any of the fundamental teachings of Islam. In particular, he did not make a compromise with those supposed “people of knowledge” who were differing with him concerning the meaning of *shirk*. He once wrote to his opponent Abdul-Wahhaab ibn Abdullah ibn Isa, “If you thought in your mind that I wanted to compromise with you concerning the religion, even if you were more important to us than you are [I would not do so]...”¹ Indeed, upon coming to al-Diriyyah and making the historic pact with Muhammad ibn Saud, ibn Saud offered him two conditions, as described earlier. Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab explicitly accepted the first and implicitly rejected the second, even though at the time he was greatly in need of ibn Saud’s support and a place of refuge.

This is a fundamental point that should be clear in every Muslim’s mind. As in the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself and as

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, 280.

in the example of the scholars who came after him, such as ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, there are certain aspects of this faith that cannot be compromised whatsoever. Indeed, compromising on such aspects would be tantamount to discarding the faith. One has to remain true to Allah and His religion in those types of matters.

The Caller Himself and Those With Him Must Apply the Principles of the Call

In particular, a leader must be a leader in practice also, not just in words and ideas. This was the case with the Prophet and it was also the case with the reformer ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. He truly led by example. For example, he simply did not tell people that gravesites that had become objects of worship must be abolished and then expect his followers alone to go out and fulfill that teaching. When it came to destroying the tomb over the grave of Zaid ibn al-Khattaab, it was ibn Abdul-Wahhaab who took the lead and began the demolition. Furthermore, he strictly adhered to the pillars of the faith and made sure that those around him did the same. He once wrote, “I oblige those under my authority to establish the prayer, give the zakat and perform all other of Allah’s

commandments and I also forbid them from interest, drinking intoxicants and other lewd acts.”¹

The importance of the example for the call or movement as a whole should not be underestimated. Without the example—somebody showing all the others that the goals and ideals of the call can truly be put into practice—many may feel that what the call or movement is aspiring to is no more than mere dreams and chasing after clouds in the sky. But once people see it truly being put into practice by the leader and the devoted followers around him, they no longer have this excuse and must, if they are sincere believers, force themselves to try to live up to the ideals of the teachings of the faith.

The Importance of Refuting the Doubts and Allegations Concerning the True Call

A lesson that one can get from ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s approach is that one should not allow false allegations to be left unanswered. The allegations can be

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 36.

very dangerous for the call or movement—even when the call or movement is completely based on truth. They must be refuted. Hence, much of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's time was spent in refuting the false claims and misconceptions that were being spread about him, his message and his followers. Thus, everyone, follower and foe alike, will have the truth clearly in front of them. The followers' mindsets will be clearer and their thoughts will not be opened to doubts when the issues are clearly answered for them. As for the foes, Allah may open their hearts to the truth via sound arguments or Allah may make the proof completely established against them.

There is a final important note to mention. As shall be noted, Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's opponents resorted to falsehood and abuse. However, in his defense, he never resorted to such behavior. He simply presented the truth established in the Quran and Sunnah. He allowed that truth to stand for itself. He realized that, like the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), there is no excuse or reason to turn to means that are disliked by Allah.

Realizing What Means the Enemies of the Truth May Resort to

The way of disbelief can have a strong hold for those whose life is patterned on such misguidance and

desires. It is not an easy task to convince people to give up a life that they have enjoyed for a long time, that their fathers had passed on to them or that they are materially benefiting from. Thus Allah says in the Quran about the polytheists during the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “Intolerable for the polytheists is that to which you call them” (*al-Shoora* 13). Only when one understands this fact can one understand how the disbelievers at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) resorted to all types of attacks upon the person of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to dissuade him, his followers and anyone considering following him. He lived among them for many years and was known as “the trustworthy one.” But as soon as he started calling them to the truth and pointing out the errors of their ways, nothing was too vile for them to stoop to. They even called him a liar although they knew very well that a man like Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would never stoop to lying.

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s life also demonstrates that nothing is too low for the enemies to resort to. In reading the words of his opponents, one finds blatant lies and fabrications, distortions of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s statements, distortions of the meanings of the

Quran and Sunnah. All of these things occurred during his lifetime. However, such is not surprising. These same types of people, his opponents, showed no respect for the Quran, the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) or the way of the Companions. Hence, it is not surprising that they showed and continue to show neither decency nor respect when dealing with a “poor uncultured desert Arab from Najd.”

Every Muslim worker who desires to call people back to the way of the Quran should realize that such people exist. He may have to hear all sorts of false accusations, lies and innuendo being spread about him. However, like the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and those who followed in his footsteps, such as ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, this should not deter anyone from following and calling to the way of Allah, the path whose truth is clear and unquestionable.

Finally, one may ask a very simple question: Why is it that the enemies of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the enemies of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab (even those today) and the enemies of all Muslim workers who simply proclaim the clear truth of the Quran and Sunnah always seem to resort to such lying and fabricating? The answer, to this author, is quite clear. The opponents of the truth have absolutely nothing to stand on

in the face of the clear and unequivocal injunctions of the Quran and Sunnah. They cannot possibly debate against the truth in an honest and straightforward fashion. They cannot support their claims on the basis of clear verses, authentic hadith or even logic. Hence, they have to resort to deception and trickery. It is nothing more than a last gasp effort to try to save themselves. Allah willing, as often as they come with falsehood, their plots and lies will be defeated and refuted in the end.

Truth or Falsehood is Not To be Affirmed Simply Based on Numbers

A point that Allah has alluded to in numerous places in the Quran is that the sheer number of adherents to a creed does not in any way indicate the soundness of that creed. For example, Allah says, “And indeed We have fully explained to mankind, in this Qur’aan, every kind of similitude, but most mankind refuse (the truth and accept nothing) but disbelief” (*al-Israa* 89; see also *al-Anaam* 116).

Thus, one should never be fooled by or deceived by mere numbers. It is very possible that the masses—even the Muslim masses—may be deceived and may follow falsehood. Those who recognize and follow the truth may be a very small number indeed. However, the important

point that each and every Muslim must remember is not the number of companions but whether they are in fact along the Straight Path that is pleasing to Allah. As long as one can be certain that what he is following or believing in can be clearly proven from the Quran and Sunnah—the ultimate authorities—he never has to worry whether or not it is consistent with what the masses are following. In fact, Allah told the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “Yet no faith will the greater part of mankind have, however ardently you [O Muhammad] do desire it” (*Yoosuf* 103)

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab is one scholar who clearly understood this concept and realized that a Muslim must be ready to face a situation where he, by following the truth, is very much in the minority and may even be despised. However, the truth must always be supported and adhered to, no matter how great the opposition. Such is a virtuous act indeed. In responding to a question put forth to him, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab wrote, “Know first that if the truth shines forth and is clear, it is not harmed by the large numbers who oppose it and the small numbers who agree with it. You know how some aspects of *tauheed* have

become strange, although they are clearer than the prayer and fasting; and that [strangeness] does not harm it at all.”¹

Vassiliev wrote, “In the present writer’s opinion, however, the Wahhabis were sectarians precisely because they opposed Sunnism in its then dominant form, even though from the position of wanting to ‘purify’ it.”² What Vassiliev touched upon is actually very important in evaluating the “Wahhabis” or any similar call. It may be one of the reasons that the “Wahhabis” were criticized and attacked. The outsiders will call such people who adhere to the truth, regardless of what the masses are following, “sectarians.” In reality, though, this is the proper or acceptable type of “sectarianism.” If the people as a whole are ignoring the truth, one has to adhere to the truth, even though it will make him appear as an outsider or a “sectarian.” It is as the Companion ibn Masood told Amr ibn Maimoon after advising him to stick to the *jamaah* (“congregation, community”) and then told him to pray alone if the rulers delay the prayer. This seemed to be a contradiction to Amr, so he asked ibn Masood about that. Ibn Masood explained to him, “The *jamaah* is whoever is in agreement with the truth, even if it be just you by

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 3, section on *Fatawa*, p. 88.

² Vassiliev, p. 75.

yourself.”¹ In other words, it is the truth that one must adhere to, even if that makes one “an outsider” with respect to the masses who may be following a different way.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spoke of a time in which this will be the proper course of action for a believer. In fact, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Islam began as something strange and it will return as it began [that is, as being something strange and different]. So glad tidings of *Tooba* [a tree in Paradise] for the strangers.” (Recorded by Muslim.) Another narration describes those “strangers” as: “Pious people among evil people. Those who disobey them are more than those who obey them.”²

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab also gave the following advice, “If you find it difficult to go against what the people are doing, ponder over Allah’s words...” and then he quoted the following verses of the Quran: “Then We have put you (O Muhammad) on a plain way of (Our) commandment. So follow you that, and follow not the desires of those who know not. Verily, they can avail you nothing against Allah (if He wants to punish you). Verily, the wrongdoers are

¹ Quoted in Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, p. 236.

² Recorded by Ahmad. According to al-Albaani, this narration is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, p. 728.

protectors to one another, but Allah is the Protector pious” (*al-Jaathiyah* 18-19); and, “And if you obey most of those on earth, they will mislead you far away from Allah's Path. They follow nothing but conjectures, and they do nothing but lie” (*al-Anaam* 116).¹

The Importance of Understanding the Contemporary Reality

This is one aspect that was clearly seen in ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s approach. He analyzed the practices, faults and virtues of the people around him. From his own experience and study, he realized the roots of the problems of society. He did not speak about the truth in abstract terms. Instead, he tied those teachings directly into the practices of the people during his time. Indeed, this was a major cause of contention since he did not just say, for example, “Allah is to be obeyed” and leave it like that. Instead, he would say, for example, “Allah is to be obeyed and that which you are doing today is a violation of that teaching...” Knowing these roots allowed him to concentrate on the main ways that these problems could be solved. In so doing, he concentrated on what the people needed. As was noted earlier, he even used colloquial

¹ Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, pp. 256-257.

language when needed to allow the people to understand exactly what he was speaking about.

Thus, Idris, while noting ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's admiration for ibn Taymiyyah and his extensive quoting of him, stated that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab's style was very different from ibn Taymiyyah's. Idris gave the following explanation,

Ibn Taymiyyah had lived in Damascus at a time when it was teeming with philosophers, philosophical theologians, Sufis, Christians and Jewish scholars, scientists, and so on. But Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab lived in a simple cultural milieu where there was no such erudition. He therefore steered clear of Ibn Taymiyyah's style. While Ibn Taymiyyah resorted to elaborate, and in many cases [purely] rational, arguments to buttress and defend Quranic teachings on theological matters, 'Abd al-Wahhab was mostly content with religious evidence. He avoided the subject of philosophical theology altogether. With the exception of his personal letters, his style is legalistic, concise, and somewhat terse.¹

¹ Idris, p. 5.

Ascribing Partners to Allah (*Shirk*) is The Greatest Evil and All Means Must Be Taken to Avoid It

The greatest lesson that can be learned from ibn Abdul-Wahhaab and the concept that was most prominent in his message is: *Shirk* (the associating of partners with Allah in any way whatsoever) is the greatest of all evils. It seems appropriate at the end of this chapter, coming at the end of this work on the life and teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, to delve into the concept of *shirk* in more detail. The conclusion can be stated now: The issue is exactly as Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab preached. *Shirk* is the greatest evil. A Muslim should avoid it at all costs. Indeed, all of the means that lead to it should be blocked by individuals, scholars and the Muslim community as a whole. It is completely irresponsible on the part of any Muslim—whether he be hailed as a scholar or not—to be lackadaisical or remiss on this issue or to excuse any form of *shirk* or any of the means that lead to *shirk*. This is not solely the conclusion of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. This is what is clear in the Quran. This is what was taught and implemented by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). And this is the view upheld by the four schools of fiqh.

Allah speaks about *shirk* throughout the Quran. Of those numerous verses, only a handful will be presented

here. However, this handful will demonstrate without any doubt that *shirk* is most hateful to Allah. In fact, if a person knowingly practices and dies in a state of *shirk*, it is the sin that the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, the Oft-Forgiving and Ever-Pardoning does not forgive. Allah has said, “Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He pleases, and whoever sets up partners with Allah in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin” (*al-Nisaa* 48). Allah repeats that same stern warning when He says, “Verily! Allah forgives not (the sin of) setting up partners in worship with Him, but He forgives whom he pleases sins other than that, and whoever sets up partners in worship with Allah, has indeed strayed far away” (*al-Nisaa* 116).

Probably all the readers are very familiar with verses such as those above that emphasize how distasteful *shirk* is to Allah. The next point to be stressed is the great extent the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went to in order to prevent any act that may eventually lead to the development or growth of *shirk*. It is simply unfortunate that so much of what he had to say was simply ignored by later Muslims.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prohibited many acts that, in the understanding of the

scholars, were prohibited because they could eventually lead to *shirk*. In fact, many of the acts that he prohibited did actually lead to *shirk* in earlier communities. Allah describes the people of Noah as saying, “And they have said (to each other), ‘You shall not leave your gods, nor shall you leave Wadd, nor Suwaa', nor Yaghooth, nor Ya'ooq, nor Nasr’¹” (*Nooh* 23). It is explained in the books of Quranic commentary that these were the names of pious individuals during the time of Noah. After they died, Satan inspired some people to erect monuments where they used to sit and to name those monuments by their names. They did so. However, the practice of worshipping them did not actually start until those people who built those altars died and the reason why those were built was forgotten. After that time, the people started to worship these as idols. Note that those deceased people were pious people but later folk came along and did not realize the real reasons that those monuments were put there. They thus fell into *shirk*.

One can see from the examples of the previous peoples that the graves of deceased pious—or sometimes even impious—people can be the greatest threat to the purity of one’s *tauheed*. Hence, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), as inspired by Allah, blocked all the means that could possibly lead to a grave

¹ These are names of different idols that they used to worship.

tempting a person to an incorrect act of worship. Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prohibited elevating graves, writing on them, sitting on them, taking them as mosques, facing them while praying and undertaking a journey solely to visit them.¹

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was also obviously very concerned about how the people would behave towards him. This was only natural since it was the earlier prophets and righteous individuals who were later worshipped or treated in ways that constitute an affront to the true *tauheed*. Thus, in numerous hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave instructions that clearly indicate that one must be very careful in such a matter. For example, he said, “Do not overly praise me like the Christians overly praised the son of Mary. I am His slave-servant, so say, ‘Servant of Allah and His Messenger.’” (Recorded by al-Bukhari.)

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went even further to prevent any road to *shirk*. On one occasion, the Muslim army was heading out to Hunain and passed by the tree on which the polytheists would hang their weapons for the sake of blessings. This tree was called *dhaat al-anwaat*. Some Muslims with a limited

¹ Cf., Muhammad al-Khamees, *Bayaan al-Shirk wa Wasaailuhu ind Ulamaa al-Maalikiyyah* (Riyadh: Daar al-Watan, 1413 A.H.), pp. 28-30.

understanding of Islam said to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “Appoint for us a tree like they have *dhaat al-anwaat*.” The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, “Exalted and perfect be Allah. This is just like what the people of Moses said [to Moses,] ‘Make for us a god like they have gods.’ By the One in whose hand is my soul, you shall certainly follow the ways of the people before you.”¹

The above is truly just the tip of the iceberg concerning all of the texts that show how the religion of Islam means to keep its adherents away from any trace of *shirk* whatsoever. But it should not be understood, as some opponents seem to imply, that all of this was foreign to the Muslim Nation until ibn Abdul-Wahhaab came along and taught these matters. No, indeed, this was something well-known to the scholars and all four of the schools of fiqh made clear and unequivocal statements that these kinds of acts are to be avoided.²

¹ Recorded by al-Tirmidhi and Ahmad. In another narration in Ahmad, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied by saying, “You have said exactly as the people of Moses said...” According to al-Albaani and Shuaib al-Arnaaoot, et al., this hadith is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, vol. 2, p. 235; Shuaib al-Arnaaoot, et al., footnotes to *Musnad*, vol. 36, pp. 225-227.

² Thus it was possible for ibn Abdul-Wahhaab to quote scholars from all four schools of fiqh to support his opinions against those of his opponents. He even explicitly stated (vol. 7, p. 38) that he debates with followers of each school according to what their own books state, demonstrating that the acts of disbelief

A contemporary writer, Muhammad al-Khamees, has done a study of the four schools of fiqh and their view of *shirk*. In these works, he delineated what the schools considered *shirk* and what are the means that lead to *shirk*, which are consequently forbidden by those schools. For each of the acts of *shirk* or means to *shirk*, he gives detailed references to standard books of fiqh in each school. In each of his studies, al-Khamees also discusses the types of *shirk* and the acts that constitute *shirk* according to scholars of all four schools of fiqh as found in their major reference works.¹ In general, one can say that all of the acts that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab objected to as acts of *shirk* are also mentioned by each of the four schools of fiqh as acts of *shirk* that take one out of the fold of Islam.² Hence, again, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was not an innovator bringing something new and unheard of. Instead, he was reviving teachings found in every school of fiqh that had been

are such according to their own scholars. See, in particular, the two letters in which he quoted the different schools at length. Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, *Muallifaat*, vol. 7, pp. 176-180 and 250-267.

¹ One has to realize that many of the acts of *shirk* appeared after the time of the founders of these schools. Hence, some of them did not mention any of these acts specifically because they simply did not exist and were not an issue at their time.

² These acts include praying for help from the deceased, setting up intermediaries between oneself and Allah, sacrificing animals for other than Allah, giving the complete right of obedience to other than Allah and so forth. See al-Khamees, *al-Hanafiyah*, pp. 15-26 and 31-68; al-Khamees, *al-Maalikeyyah*, pp. 19-25 and 41-58; al-Khamees, *al-Shaafi'iyah*, pp. 23-28 and 44-61; al-Khamees, *al-Hanaabilah*, pp. 13-26 and 34-57.

ignored or forgotten. Those teachings touch the core of Islam and whenever they are ignored or forgotten, it is a must that they be restored.

One can understand from all of these texts and scholarly conclusions that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab was completely right when he opposed, with the greatest of effort, *shirk* in all of its manifestations and all the paths that lead to it. The most important thing that a human can be saved from is falling into this evil *shirk*. It is not an overstatement to say that all Muslim leaders and scholars should take great efforts to keep the Muslims from falling into *shirk*. Furthermore, in the light of the Quran and Sunnah, it is completely inexcusable for any Muslim to take this matter lightly—not to speak of attempting to justify as a manifestation of “true Islam” those very same acts that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prohibited. One can only plead to Allah for help and guidance to rescue the Muslim Nation from any form of *shirk* that it currently is engaged in.

Summary

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s life and example provide many lessons for the Muslims of today. The current plight of the Muslims today resembles, in many ways, the situation at the time of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab’s

life. His emphasis on the basics of the faith, the proper beliefs, education and the pillars of Islam went a long way in reforming society at that time and can go a long way in reforming society today. His responses to the forces that opposed him were based on a clear insight into the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. Undoubtedly, he is someone that the Muslims of today should study and learn from.

VII Conclusions

This has been a brief but intensive review of the life, teachings and influence of Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. It is not claimed here that the man himself or his followers had no shortcomings. However, an unbiased study of his life and teachings demonstrate that he was someone who was living by and calling to the basic teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. In fact, if one were to make one conclusion about his life it would be concerning the importance and necessity of returning to the pure and original teachings of Islam.

Allah says, “And verily, this is my Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His Path. This He has ordained for you that you may become pious” (*al-Anaam* 153). Allah has thus announced that there is His path and there are other paths that divert one from His path. Anyone with true faith will desire with great intensity to follow that one true path. That one path, obviously, is the path laid out in Allah’s revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), comprising both the Quran and the Sunnah.

It is part of the great mercy of Allah upon the Muslim Nation—a feature that distinguishes this Nation from that of all of the previous prophets—that Allah promised to preserve the revelation to the final Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Allah says, “Verily We: It is We Who have sent down the *Dhikr* and surely, We will guard it (from corruption)” (*al-Hijr* 9).¹ Thus the message will always be preserved. To find the truth, it is simply a matter of turning to that message sincerely and understanding it in the proper way, the way in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) practiced and propagated it. But beyond that, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also stated that there shall always be people who are along that path of truth. The Messenger said, “A group from my Nation will always remain obedient to Allah’s orders, and they will not be harmed by those who abandon them nor those who oppose them, until the command of Allah comes while they are [still] in that state.” (Recorded by al-Bukhari.)

That group that adheres to the Straight Path may be small or it may be large. Regardless of its numbers, the important point is that they are following the path that is

¹ This verse implies a preservation of the entire message received by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), that is, inclusive of both the Quran and Sunnah.

pleasing to Allah. In fact, the pleasure of Allah is their ultimate goal. Hence, those who forsake them and those who openly oppose them cannot bring them any true harm whatsoever since they are on the path of ultimate happiness.

The above, in a way, summarizes the message and teachings of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab. In reality, ibn Abdul-Wahhaab opened the minds of the believers and brought them back to the true revelation of Allah. This is the real danger of ibn Abdul-Wahhaab for those who opposed and oppose him. He truly opened people's minds and made them think about the way of life that they were following: Was it the true way of life? Does it meet their purpose in this life? Was it consistent with the Quran and Sunnah? And this thought process should lead to action—the willingness to implement what one believes at all cost and to sacrifice for it.

Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab brought about change by emphasizing the very basics of the faith. The basis of the religion is the true monotheism (*tauheed*). This is the one thing that is constant from the time of Adam until the end of mankind. It does not change for time, place or people. All the messengers came with the same essential message. It is associating partners with Allah (*shirk*)—in all of its manifestations, ancient or modern—which is the deviation

from the true course and the real deviancy. When this point is understood properly, it permeates the individual, the family and the complete society. There is a complete change. The aspirations, the goals, the dreams and actions of the individual and the society are transformed. The soul desires to be purified, the heart yearns to become pure. The heart seeks to be lit with the light of true knowledge. Allah becomes most beloved, most feared. Nothing else enters the heart in that fashion. The religion comes first. Sacrifice follows. Allah's blessings and victory are soon to come. This is the message that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) brought to mankind and this was the message that ibn Abdul-Wahhaab revived in this Muslim Nation. May Allah continue to strengthen this religion and bring people back to the path that is pleasing to Him.

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