

## Days with the Imam

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There was a certain inimitable trait in Shaykh Osama's character. People who never had the chance to interact with him personally are unaware of this aspect of his personality, which is the tenderness of his heart. People are accustomed to seeing this lion of Allah roaring, 'America and Americans will never even dream of peace until we see peace in Palestine', or giving threats to Bush; but most people perhaps don't know that the Shaykh was extremely soft-hearted, forbearing, and sensitive. The Shaykh possessed exceptional modesty and noble manners, a fact recognised by all. Anyone who had the chance to sit with him could not fail to appreciate his noble manners, graceful demeanour and high character.

This can be clearly observed in an incident I wish to narrate, which involves myself. In Tora Bora, when a brother came bearing the news of my family's martyrdom, the Shaykh prevented him from informing me. When we stood up for Fajr prayer, the Shaykh asked me to lead. After the prayers, we engaged ourselves in the morning *zikr*<sup>1</sup>, after which I noticed that the brothers had begun to leave the room, one after the other, until I alone remained. Then, the brother who had brought the news came in. He began by offering his consolation and then exhorted me to be patient. He then continued by informing me of my wife's martyrdom; then my son's; and finally told me that my daughter had also been among the martyrs. Finally, he informed me of three brothers who had been martyred along with their families.

On this I read the prayer '*Inna Lillahiwa Inna IlaihiRajioon*<sup>2</sup>' and asked Allah for patience and reward. At this moment, the Shaykh entered and embraced me. Tears flowed profusely from his eyes as he wept. He consoled me, and then brothers started coming in, one by one. They too offered consolations, which increased my resolve, and gave me courage. It had been agreed that, according to pre-planned arrangements, we were to shift to another place that day. We numbered around thirty people. The Shaykh instructed the brothers to set out on their journey, and told me that he, with a few other brothers, will remain with me. I advised that we set off, as movement and travel help one forget his sorrows. But the Shaykh insisted that we stay.

So we spent the day there until my feelings and emotions were somewhat less tense. We set out on our journey the next day. I ask Allah (swt) to accept our families and those who have passed away and not deprive us of His reward. Later, when I was over the initial shock, I would sometimes mention my son Muhammad in front of the Shaykh, only to see his eyes overflow with tears.

Another incident that I will always remember with feelings of gratitude is when Shaykh Osama,

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<sup>1</sup> Remembrance of Allah; invocations

<sup>2</sup> To Allah we belong, and to Him alone we shall all return

being the first person to do so, offered me his condolences on the death of my mother, in a beautifully written letter that gave me fortitude. I thanked him and told him how strange it was that the news of my mother's death reached him before me! May Allah reward him!

Whoever spent time with the Shaykh knows all too well what a soft heart he possessed. Tears would in no time glisten like pearls in his eyes. His eyes often overflowed with tears during conversations or talks. It is well-known that he was easily moved to tears. He once told me "Some people tell me that 'even before you start talking, tears begin to flow from your eyes, try, therefore, a little to stop them.'"

The Shaykh then asked me, 'What should I do about it?' I said, 'Shaykh, this is compassion that Allah has placed in your heart. There is no need to worry about it; rather consider it a blessing that Allah has bestowed upon you.'

I would like to narrate another incident in this regard, which I myself witnessed. Once, we were present in the military training center of 'Ainaq', near Kabul, and were later joined by a few other brothers. In those days the Shaykh had just issued a statement about Palestine and Gaza, in which he had mentioned the obligation of helping the Palestinians. This was perhaps the same statement in which he addressed the people of Palestine saying, 'The blood of your sons is the blood of our sons and your blood is our blood. And only blood can avenge blood, and only destruction can avenge destruction.' One of the brothers present recalled having seen in the media a demonstration in which Palestinian women were holding a placard declaring, "O' Osama! We are waiting for the fulfilment of your promise."

Hearing this, the Shaykh fell silent. The impact of those words was clearly visible in his facial expressions. After this, we headed towards the mosque of the camp for the Isha prayer. The light was very dim. After offering the obligatory prayers, the Shaykh went to a corner of the mosque to offer his Sunnah prayers, during which I could clearly hear him sobbing. I understood that this was due to the news that had reached him of the Palestinian women who were awaiting the fulfilment of his promise. I believe that, through his actions, he indeed did fulfil his promise.

A beautiful aspect of the Shaykh's life was his relationship with his children. The high standard of respect and reverence instilled in his children was observed by everyone who lived close to the Shaykh, and was an example in its own right. May Allah protect them and make our children and the children of all the faithful obedient. Being the children of a rich billionaire did not prevent them from serving the guests themselves. The guest would be prevented from doing anything himself; from having his hands washed and dried to being accompanied wherever he went. In short, they demonstrated such immense respect and reverence for their guests as to make them the envy of all.

I myself have heard these words from so many people; 'How great an upbringing that the Shaykh has given his children!' The Shaykh took special care of his children's education, despite the endless travels, the constant shifting of homes, and the extremely hard conditions. The thing that was highest on the list, as far as the education of his children was concerned, was the memorization the book of Allah. I believe that most of his children must have memorized a great part of the Quran; perhaps some may have even completed it. May Allah grant the children of the

faithful the good fortune of performing this noble deed! Anyhow, to teach his children the Quran, the Shaykh hired a special teacher.

Here, I wish to briefly introduce this personality. He was no ordinary teacher; rather he was amongst the most esteemed scholars of Shanqeet, and had exceptional command of the language, as well as Quranic recitation, and script of the scripture. Many Mujahideen, including myself, have benefitted from him. He was a teacher of mine, about whom I have shed some light in my book '*Al Tabri'ah*<sup>3</sup>'. He was not only a teacher but an emigrant and a fighter in the path of Allah, and like Shaykh Osama, an expert horse rider.

He had kept a horse in the 'Arab Village', which the Shaykh later bought and included in his stable. The 'Arab Village' is another tale all in itself and deserves a separate mention. If Allah gives us the opportunity, we will talk about this blessed village. This was a strange and blessed place the like of which I have never seen in my entire life, and the days I spent there... such fortunate days I have never experienced since! Whenever we went to the Shaykh's house to attend his lessons, he himself would serve us excellent Mauritanian tea, besides preparing food for us. We used to object, 'You are our teacher, why do you embarrass us like this?' But he always ignored us and served us himself. I remember that when I requested that he teach me the sciences of the Quran and the Arabic language, he replied, 'The first thing with which we shall begin our lessons is the correct recitation of the Book of Allah, because the right of the Book of Allah comes before the knowledge taught by man, after which we will begin with the Arabic language.' I have mentioned in my book '*Al Tabri'ah*' that he dictated a medium-sized introduction to the science of recitation, after which we started studying '*Al Jazari*'.

*Mashallah!* He was an ocean of knowledge; yet, his teaching style was simple and easy to follow. I would observe him imparting the knowledge of the rules of recitation in his unassuming style in the mosque of the village. For example while explaining the difference between *Ikhfaa*<sup>4</sup> and *Idghaam*<sup>5</sup> he would hold up an object and then wrap it in a cloth and say, 'Look! It has been concealed. Whereas this is another object whose impression has faded, and so has become *mudgham*<sup>6</sup>' In this manner, he would make people understand everything in a very simple manner. When I was taking lessons in Al Jazari with him, we would sometimes be joined by Shaykh Abu Obaida, the Mauritanian, and Shaykh Abu Hafs.

While passing by the market, the Shaykh would sometimes buy us some fruits. I would tell him, 'Shaykh! This is our responsibility.' In response he would say, 'It is not for you, rather it is for your son Muhammad.' Similarly, he once brought fish for us. I told him, 'Our master! This is our obligation. Why do you do this?' He again said, 'This is not for you, this is for your son Muhammad.' This was the same learned scholar who taught the children of Shaykh Osama, and whom I feel honoured to have been a student of.

He was very strict when it came to teaching the children of the Shaykh. I remember him once scolding the children of the Shaykh in this manner, "O' boy! You will not understand mere talk.

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<sup>3</sup> The Exoneration

<sup>4</sup> Concealment of sound

<sup>5</sup> A diphthong: sound formed by the combination of two vowels in a single syllable

<sup>6</sup> Diphthong

Talk from now on is reserved for your father. As for you, you will be made to understand the language of the stick!”All along, the children of the Shaykh sat tight, looking scared. As a result of the respect Shaykh Usama taught them, they would not dare to look at their teacher in his eyes.

Shaykh Osama gave special attention to the subject of raising children. Sometimes, he would give lessons in the mosque of the village titled ‘Raising of Children in Islam’ and arrange a formal study course based on the book ‘Bringing up of Children in Islam’.

I know that the Shaykh’s children had extreme love and affection for their father. I have seen them, on many occasions and on different fronts, ready to protect their father, circling him to form a protective ring. They stuck to him like a shadow and were always ready to sacrifice their lives for him. The Shaykh’s relationship with his children and his security contingent is a topic in itself, which we may discuss on another occasion. Right now it is as if a flood of memories is streaming in!

I would like to mention two extremely moving incidents regarding the Shaykh and his children. The first incident took place in Jalalabad. When the hypocrites started taking over Jalalabad, we decided to move to the mountains. We had not yet anticipated how fast events would unfold and how soon we would have to abandon Kabul. At that time, of the children that were with the Shaykh, three were very young. One of them was Khalid, may Allah have mercy on him, who was later martyred with the Shaykh. Khalid was the oldest of the three. We moved out of the city and headed for the mountains of Tora Bora. That evening, between Asr and Maghrib, a brother brought the three children, so that they may bid their father farewell.

The Shaykh had entrusted the brother with shifting the children to a safe place, from which they would then be returned to their family. When the moment of farewell arrived, the Shaykh took them to the side. I stood there watching this moving scene from a distance. A father saying farewell to his three little kids, not knowing when, or even whether, he shall see them again; not knowing whether this is their first farewell or last! I watched the Shaykh saying farewell to them and telling them to go with their uncle who was to take them to their family. The eyes of the eldest child were filled with tears and the Shaykh himself became very emotional. The younger one was unable to fully appreciate the significance of that moment, complaining to the Shaykh, ‘But father, my problem is that I forgot my new bag in Kabul! How will I get it back now?’ Little did he know that, by then, the Crusaders had occupied Kabul. The Shaykh said, ‘Don’t worry, my dear! Your uncle will buy you a new one!’ They then parted. This was a very moving scene; the father departing from his son and the son from his father, neither knowing when and how they will meet.

Similarly another incident which filled my heart with esteem for the Shaykh took place during the Crusader attack, at a time when we were constantly on the move, accompanied by one of the Shaykh’s sons. Totally helpless, we were travelling in the dark of the night, with trust in Allah as our only support. The car stopped at a certain point, from where the Shaykh intended to travel on with his guide in one direction, while we were to travel in another. At this moment, the Shaykh came out of the car to say farewell to his son. Allah alone knew whether they will be able to see each other again. Just imagine what the Shaykh said to his son in those

moments! He said, “O’ son! Let us make an oath that we will never leave the path of Jihad in the way of Allah.”

These are some of those great moments which I can never forget.

“By Allah, targeting the American enemy is from the core of faith and from the essence of *Tauheed* (belief in the oneness of Allah). The *Deen* (Islam) cannot be established except by demolishing false idols. *La ilaha ilallah!* There is none worthy of worship except Allah; we must negate all false idols. ‘Whoever rejects *taghut* (false claimant of divinity) and believes in Allah has taken a firm support that never gives way...’ Therefore, there must be disbelief in this false idol.”

Shaykh Osama bin Laden

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