

Selected Writings by Ash-Shaykh Yūsuf Al-Asīr

(Chronological order)

[Preface to the book *Sharḥ Rā'id al-Farā'id*]

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Praise be to the inspirer of what is right, and the reliever of difficulties, and the teacher of whomever desires to learn the duties of the Book, and the compensator of good deeds, and peace and blessings be upon him who has received the Sharī'ah on his tongue, and shared these revelations with his companions, and related to them its importance. And they transmitted them to the nations. And they wrote them down and compiled them in the Book for the nation. May Allah be pleased with them all. And through them Allah has transmitted unto us his abundant grace. Having said that, *farā'id* is one of the most exalted and voluminous disciplines. It is of the most beautiful formulation, of the highest merit and in most demand. Especially that the masses have advocated its teaching and learning. In reciting Allah's prayers upon this science and in submission to him. Learn the *farā'id* and teach them to people. All prayers and blessings of Allah be upon him, for he placed the learning of this science in the highest regard. That is why I persevered in learning this science. I dedicated myself to the study of this science until I was able, with the help of the Almighty, to unravel its symbols and throw open its treasure chests. And so I picked up its pearls of wisdom and composed them in a *rajaz* poem in order for it to be memorized. For this is a science that could be easily forgotten if not reviewed time and again. Thus, with the grace of the Almighty, this poem turned out like a magnificent necklace of words, in an elegant structure of neatly aligned jewels, strung together to form but one whole solid chain. Its eloquence will impress the scholar (of *farā'id*). It will be of inordinate benefit to those who peruse it. And it will speak to the logic of their minds. And good honey is

palatable. For mentioning the blessings of Allah Almighty is akin to worship. And I have named this book *Rā'id-ul-Farā'id* (The Champion of Duties). For the difficulties encountered in the study of this science require a trainer, who reads between its lines and facilitates its understanding. And presents itself eloquently to those who seek it. I was asked for an explanation that delves deep into this science. And reveals its hidden meanings and deciphers its mysteries. And unravels its details. And so I explained its topics like the flowing rivers, with verses as translucent as glass windows, and charts brilliant as the light of day. And its rays unfurled, through the cracks in the closed doors. And so it became glaring like a sun shining through the clouds, its light escaping through cracks in the closed doors, and its bride, of noble descent, emerged from underneath her veil. May Allah Almighty safeguard this work from the malice of envious, and benefit others until the Day of Judgement, especially those who assisted in its publication and played a role in disseminating this work to the general public. I have opened this book with the mention of the name of God, that he may grant his blessings of a sound heart upon the reader. Thus, here is what I have said

In the name of the ultimate inheritor who has apportioned /
All praise be to him, the judge of all creation

“*B-ism*” (in the name) is a connotation for beginning or commencing or composing, and “*al-ilāh al-ma'būd*” (The Worshipped God) is a verbal noun *fi'āl* in the passive participle *maf'ūl* such as *kitab* (book) in the meaning of *maktūb* (written), and “*al-wārīth*” (The Inheritor) is one of the Beautiful Names of God mentioned in the Quran and it signifies the One, who endures after all his creation has perished. The passive participle *maf'ūl* of *qasam* (has apportioned) is omitted owing to it being a contraction or abbreviation for the intended meaning of the term for God apportions provisions, and designs every person's age and so forth. “*Muhāsib al-khalq*” (Judge of all creation) refers to God, who reveals deeds on the Day of Judgment, resurrection and the afterlife and conceals many sins and forgives many others, Praise be to his justice and grace. “*Al-ḥamd*” (praise) is for glorification and is used here in magnifying the praise of Allah and “*al-atamm*” (all or whole) refers to a most complete state in the truest meaning of the word, and the phrase “*Lahu-l-Hamd*” (Praise

be to Him) is a nominal relative clause serving as a modifier to the phrase *Bismillah* (in the name of Allah). It is no secret that this opening stanza exhibits ingenuity in outlining all the topics to be discussed in this book by using the terms the agent nouns of their verb stem inherit, apportion and judge, all of which encapsulate the science of ordained quotas (*farā'id*) and God Almighty knows what is right. I then go on to add

Prayers and peace be forever more upon / Aḥmad the Chosen One for guidance
And upon his pure and kind forebears / and his progeny and pious cognate

After initiating with mention of the Almighty and offering praise to his Sublime self, I give my perpetual blessings and salutations to Aḥmad, or mercy and safety that always emanate from God Almighty. “*Li Aḥmad*” (upon Aḥmad) refers to our prophet (peace be upon him), who was chosen from amongst God’s servants as their source of guidance until the Day of Resurrection. And here what “*uṣūlihi*” (forebears) stands for is his forefathers and foremothers, as from his forefathers are prophets and believers, and also from his foremothers are believers. And the kind (*al-karīm*) is in contrast to the parsimonious and the spiteful, and “*al-anqiyā*” (the pure) is the plural form of *naqiy* and implies the chosen (*al-muntakhab*), and progeny (*furū'ihī*) are his descendants, and cognate (*ḥawāshīhi*) are his kin through both his paternal and maternal lineage, and “*al-atqiyā*” (the pious) is the plural form of *taqiy* and it means the one who is dutiful in following God’s commands and abstains from that which God has forbidden. What is also ingenious about this prelude is mention of those words that are derived from the concept of lineage (*nasab*), which is also one of the themes of this science and is divided into forebears (origin) and progeny (branch) and immediate cognate and distant cognate, and here the plural form of cognate (*ḥawāshī*) has been employed since from the distant cognate stem more cognate. Thus, the branch of every forebear (origin) is considered their cognate, so for example the branches of one’s grandfather and one’s great grandfather are considered cognate and so forth. And also cognate is used in its plural form because plurality is employed when something is more than one in number and specifically in this science. The omitting of the final *hamza* (apostrophe) from *al-anqiyā* and *al-atqiyā* is by virtue of both words appearing at the end

of each hemistich, which renders the final hamza unnecessary. Thus, I have avoided it with the blessing of Allah Almighty, and Allah Almighty is the Reconciler. Then I have said:

Thereafter, the poor slave Yusuf / who as the Azharite Captive he is known
Recites an *urjūza* with what was inspired / by the Nu‘man Doctrine on inheritance

It would have been more obvious to say “I recite an *urjūza*”, however I refrained from doing so and instead use the passive voice for the purpose of humility. And *al-‘abd* (slave) and *al-faqīr* (poor) are similar word pairs, the first meaning the submissive obedient and the latter meaning the needy. As for Yusuf, it is a Hebraic name meaning an increase or abundance, and by tracing his lineage, he is the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, peace and prayers be upon our Prophet and upon them. As for the epithet *al-asīr* (captive), it means captive and follows the form of the verbal noun *fa‘īl* in the passive participle *maf‘ūl*. I inherited this title as a result of the Franks capturing my grandfather from aboard a ship during the war of Malta, where he had resided for awhile before returning as a free man to his homeland of Sidon and recounting what he had witnessed from its people.

And *al-Azharī* (the Azhari) is in reference to al-Azhar, which is the mosque built by Gawhar, commander of Caliph al-Muiz, during his conquest of Egypt, and it is still bustling with scholars more plentiful than the planets in the sky. And I was only identified with al-Azhar because in its presence I was flooded in the light of its full moon, may Allah be pleased with them all and by His Grace place me next to them in the Garden of Bliss alongside the prophets and martyrs and righteous. And I used the genitive masculine singular noun *thī* as an indication of the forthcoming poem, and the word *urjūza* (rajaz poem) is of the measure *uf‘ūla* and in the dictionary it is defined as a form of poetry with a six-foot pattern along the mnemonic measure *mustaf‘ilun*, and it was named as such for its truncated form and shorter lines. Al-Khalil does not classify the *urjūza* as traditional poetry but rather as prosody of dimetrical and trimetrical verses, from which originates the *urjūza*. And *irtajaza* (to compose verses in the *rajaz* metre) is the thunder that rang out, and then the clouds moved slowly. And my mention of *bima astafī* (what was inspired

from) is in reference to this *urjūza* being a comprehensive narrative of the topics related to inheritance law in accordance with the doctrine of Imam Abī Ḥanīfah bin Nu‘mān. And what is meant by his doctrine is the legal views he has derived and that which his disciples have adhered to, in that they have not diverged from the foundations or canons of his doctrine, may Allah be pleased with him and them altogether. However, I have chosen this doctrine because its application is relevant at all times and in all places. I have then gone on to explain the teleological reason for choosing this metre, and so I said:

I composed this as a memento for myself / full of hope that it will benefit my kind

Naẓm (ordering or composing of words; metrical speech) is in essence akin to the stringing of pearls on the thread (of a rhyme), and it is the opposite of *nathr* (prose). Then it became customary practice to arrange words along a specific metre. And *tadhkara* (memento) is a reminder of something, or a memoir, and it is used as *hāl* (circumstantial clause) or *maf‘ūl lahu* (accusative adverbial of purpose). What is meant by *jinsī* (my kind) are those who are intent on this science, May Allah hear my calls and answer my wishes, Amen.

Ash-Shaykh Yusuf-al-Asir,

“Preface” in *Sharh Ra‘id-il-Fara‘id* (Commentary by the Trainer of the Ordained Quotas), Baabda, al-Matba‘a-l-‘Uthmaniyyah, 1318 AH (1900 AD), p. 2-5.

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Irshād-ul-Wara fī Takhṭī‘at Jawf-il-Farā

(Guiding Mankind towards Invalidating the Belly of the Onager)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Praise be to the inspirer of those who wish to follow the right path. And the endower of wisdom and decisive speech to those who seek. Peace be upon those who have followed

and led the path of truth and with their guidance illuminated the finest of creation. And thus, after having examined the book of Nasif al-Yāzījī entitled *Nār al-Qirā fī Jawf-il-Farā* (The Fire of Hospitality in the Belly of the Onager), I was compelled to demonstrate its premises and clarify its meanings. Thus my commentary has attempted to distinguish what is right and wrong by contrasting his book with the words of the imams in order to draw a distinction between the void and the valid. And my intent in doing so is for the reward gained by guiding its readers on the right path. I entitled my work *Irshād al-Warā li Nār-il-Qirā* (Guiding Mankind towards the Fire of Hospitality) and upon the break of day one will be grateful for the passing of night. And here is what I have to say with the help of God, who is in charge. The author begins his work with *Bismillah-il- 'Alī-yil- 'Azim* (in the name of Allah the Sublime, the Great) and in return I say that he wanted to be a contrarian for the sake of attention due to his inadequate mention of the great and beautiful names of God Almighty, for the author can profit from seeking divine guidance and invocation. Do you not see that it is not befitting to say, *Yā Qahhār* (O Subduer) *irḥamnī* (have mercy on me)? If his intention is to convey that his book possesses an aspect of being sublime and great, then I say that you shall realize it is but a trifle of nonsense and pettifoggery. The right thing, had he been aware, would have been to avoid the *basmalah* (invocation) in the first place because it is not permissible to be used for what is of little value. In articulating this point, there is a time and place for everything, and the author must carefully weigh his words before presenting his work to the most learned minds [...].

He then goes on to say "Having said that, this is a commentary that I called *Nār- ul-Qirā* (The Fire of Hospitality) along the rajaz poem [an exposition on syntax] that I called *Jawf-ul-Farā* (the Belly of the Onager), which undertakes to clarify its meanings without delving into many details, and to expand on its structure in most of its sections." I say there is no agreement in *lafẓ* (form or poetic expression) or *ma 'na* (function) between *jawf al-farā* (the belly of the onager) and *nār al-qirā*. As for form, *nār al-qirā* (the fire of hospitality) is usually kindled atop a high place as a beacon for travellers to see and proceed towards and not on the belly of the wild ass. As for function, if *nār al-qirā* were to be placed on or in the belly of the onager, as he mentions on the first page, then it would release a foul smell,

and the ass would not be properly cooked because the wild ass is placed on a fire to be grilled, as is customary, and not the other way around. And his saying “undertakes to clarify its meanings” indicates the state of being in the progressive act of clarifying whereas it would have been more fitting for him to rather to use the word “undertook” in its perfective aspect. Also, his saying “to expand on its structure in most of its sections” does not hide the fact that *Jawf-ul-Farā* is an *urjūza* whose form is in harmony with its structure, and cannot possibly be expanded because the poetical metre (sea for *bahr*) does not allow for it. Perhaps what may have inspired his aforementioned words was a commentary by aṣ-Ṣabbān on Ibn Malik’s *Alfiyyah* (Thousand Verses), where he says: “and I turned to deciphering its structure and emending its function in the most earnest attempt,” and so al-Yāzījī reworded this phrase and ruined its meaning. And his words “in most of its sections” — with regard to clarifying its meaning and expanding on its structure — can be construed as him failing in many sections to clarify and expand on his *urjūza* thus leaving his commentary without insight and narrow. In relating that to his words “to expand on its structure,” the inconsistency arises in that some may be expanded on and some may remain narrow. The same applies with regard to his words “without delving into many details”. Whatever it may be, it is haphazardly because annotations should follow a uniform method, while he went about juxtaposing words without any line of reasoning, and as the saying goes, say I am not a poet but just a wordsmith. And could whoever writes like this at the start of his book be considered an author, given that the start of a book is a frame of reference for what is to come? And as the saying goes, a book can be known from its title (suggesting that appearance is important) and so the frogs croaked and the cooing bulbuls were silenced. O, take pity on science and its folk! For the ignorant has overcome them with his ignorance and crushed Ibn Hisham. And *Ibn ‘Aqīl* in the Levant was brought to his senses upon the appearance of *Jawf-il-Farā*. And from him exuded a smell without the spark of a flint. And this concerns those in question. For how much better it would have been to place the belly of the onager on the ember. But lifting the ignoble is harmful to the precious. And the living souls sway towards the bride’s slave girl. And with the help of the Almighty, you shall see from my clarifications within this book what substantiates the credibility of my words, and you shall realize that in his verbiage this author has rendered

himself nonsensical. Then he says “and I appeal to the masters of this trade to excuse what oversights (*zalal*) they may notice and correct errors (*khalal*) they may come across.” Needless to say, it is not correct for the second line of the *sajʿ* (rhymed prose; unmetrical poetry) to be shorter than the first line, while in this case the first line is the same length as the second. It is also clear that his phrase “*anā altamis*” (and I appeal) is an emphatic clause by repetition of the *isnād* (attribution) and we have accordingly responded to his appeal with regard to the second line, and that is correcting the *khalal* (errors), an act which has proven to be tedious with all the many errors that exist therewith, as shall be revealed. And he has wronged in using this expression “*anā altamis*” (and I appeal) in several ways. Firstly, an appeal should be addressed to someone on his level. And if those who correct his book were to be like him, then this would only further degrade his work. He would have been more correct to use the term *astadʿī* (call on) instead of appeal. Secondly, the expression of *ṣanʿah* (trade) is not befitting for such a rank because it refers to a vocation, which is a wright’s trade and vocation. Trade and craft are a source of income and all that someone has worked at and toiled in. And here *ṣināʿat al-naḥū* (the trade of grammar) stands merely for the practice of inflection but not for the deep understanding of the rules and principles of grammar, which apparently qualifies one to perform the act of correction. Thirdly, in his asking them to *yusfihū* (to excuse) and *yuslihū* (to correct) lies a contradiction because to be excused from something is to be dismissed while correcting something requires an engagement in this thing and according to the dictionary to be excused from something is to be dismissed and let go. Then he says “and Allah is the Guide along the right path in every word and deed”. Here *fi kulli qawl* (in every word) was used for the purpose of *sajʿ* and is fallacious because God did not guide him along the right path in all his words and deeds. If what he meant was in all the words and deeds of human beings, it is also erroneous because God Almighty has not guided everyone along the right path in their every word and deed. Had he said “I ask God to guide me along the right path in my words and deeds,” he would not have been held accountable, but rather he composed his sentence in the indicative mood. For if it were to be argued that he had wanted to express the subjunctive and wishful mood in this sentence, to that we say that what is implied from his words is that he had intended the indicative mood.

Al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Asir,

Irshād-ul-Warā li Nār-il-Qirā (Guiding Mankind towards the Fire of Hospitality), *al-Irshād* is by the most learned scholar ash-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Asūr and *al-Jawf* is by Nasif al-Yāzījī. Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-Jawā‘ib, 1290 AH, (1873 AD), p. 2-5.

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[Hymn “The Ten Commandments of God”]

Of the masterpiece hymns, which he had composed for the American missionaries, is a hymn on “The Ten Commandments of God”, and it goes like this:

I am the Lord your God, behold! / You shall not other idols uphold!
You shall not my name abuse / Nor in oath disgrace or misuse
Keep the Sabbath and may / You honour your parents and obey
You shall take heed not to kill / Your words and deeds keep in goodwill
You shall not steal nor cheat / Only virtuous words repeat
You shall never covet / What your neighbour has got
These represent altogether / The will of our Lord the Redeemer
Persevere in loving our Lord / And love thyself and others with one accord.

Al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Asir,

Quoted in “Viscount Phillippe de Tarrazi”, in *Tārīkh as-Siḥāfa al-‘Arabiyyah*, Vol. 1. Beirut, al-Maṭba‘a-l-Adabiyyah, 1913, page 138.

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