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# Handbook on Islam

By

Shaykh 'Uthman dan Fodio

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Handbook on Islam

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# Biography of Shaykh 'Uthman dan Fodio

## Shaykh 'Uthman dan Fodio

'Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn 'Uthman ibn Salih, the author of the *Kitab Usul ad-Deen* and the *Kitab 'Ulum al-Mu'amala*, was born in Maratta in Gobir on the last day of Safar, 1168 AH (15 December 1754). He became known as Uthman dan Fodio (son of Fodio). Fodio, in the Fulani language, means "learned" and was a name given by the people to his father Muhammad who was a scholar and the first teacher of the Shaykh, instructing him in the Qur'an.

During his childhood his father settled in a place called Degel, some fifty miles north of modern Sokoto, and it is here that Shaykh Uthman lived for most of most of his life. After studying with his father, Uthman dan Fodio went on to other teachers including his relative, the scholar 'Uthman Binduri, staying with him about two years and moulding himself to his pattern of piety, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. From him, he went to Jibril ibn 'Umar in Agades.

Shaykh Jibril was a Berber of North African origin who had come to settle among the Tuareg of the Southern Sahara. Uthman dan Fodio gave himself up entirely to his Shaykh and gained through him great knowledge, enabling him in his turn to pass on this pure teaching. Shaykh Jibril was known for his absolutely uncompromising Islam and also for the fierceness with which he communicated it to the Tuareg tribesmen about him. Uthman dan Fodio, while equally uncompromising, is remembered for the gentle-

ness with which he treated his followers. After he had been with Shaykh Jibril for only a year, the Tuareg became so discomfited by the presence of Shaykh Jibril in their midst that they forced him to leave and he went on *Hajj* to Makka. Uthman dan Fodio returned from Agades to Degel.

Uthman dan Fodio began teaching others when he was only twenty years old and still studying. By passing on what he had learned he followed the traditional practice of Muslim scholarship, both studying and teaching simultaneously. Throughout his life, he taught openly, accepting all who came. He taught people according to their capacity and in a language that all could understand. His following, which grew rapidly, consisted mainly of ordinary people and the nobility. Few scholars visited him or showed enthusiasm for his community. Their desire was for a more exclusive brand of scholarship, consisting of the reading of obscure classical texts in a narrow circle, while the Shaykh's work was to communicate the basic teachings of Islam to as many people as possible.

His most famous book, *Ihya' as-Sunna* (The Giving Life to the Practice) instructs people in the daily practices of Islam as shown in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. His life was the fulfillment of his book. He spoke against pagan practices that had been introduced by so-called Muslim rulers and against other abuses of power, calling people of the clear straight way laid down in the Qur'an and illustrated by the practice of the Prophet and the life of his companions in the first Muslim community.

He spent most of his time at Degel and established there a functioning Muslim community con-



sisting of his family and followers. The community was quite large, comprising at least sixty-two households, including his brother 'Abdullah and several scribes, scholars and Qur'an reciters. Shaykh Uthman's life was very simple. He avoided property, living without wealth or servants. He would occasionally go into retreat, though only for short periods. During this time he received *karamat* which he describes in his book, *Lama Balaghtu*.

Many would come from far away to stay with him, learning and absorbing. Afterwards, with instructions from the Shaykh, they would return to their homes to spread to others the knowledge of Islam they had acquired. In this way the influence of Shaykh Uthman was felt far and wide. He himself confined his movements mainly to the area surrounding Degel, holding gatherings and teaching the people. Every night of *Jumu'a* he held meetings for invocations and teaching at Degel. He avoided the courts of the rulers and advised his followers to do the same.

His increasing popularity alarmed the rulers themselves, and in 1202 AH (1788) Shaykh Uthman was summoned by the Sultan of Gobir to go to Magami for the prayer of *'Id al-Kabir*. After the prayer all the Sultan's scholars, numbering about a thousand in all, left him to join the Shaykh. Although it is said that his original intention had been to kill the Shaykh, the Sultan agreed to five conditions proposed by the Shaykh:

- 1) That he should be allowed to call people to Allah without hindrance.
- 2) That none should be stopped from following him.

- 3) That any man wearing a turban should be treated with respect.
- 4) That all prisoners should be freed.
- 5) That the subjects of the Sultan should not be overburdened with taxes.

This agreement put the Shaykh and the Muslim community in a very strong position and enabled him to teach and send his students to teach far and wide, establishing Islam wherever they went.

Ten years later, however, after this Sultan, Bawa, had died, a new Sultan, Nafata, clamped down on the Muslim community. He issued a proclamation:

- 1) Only the Shaykh was to be permitted to teach.
- 2) No son could be converted away from his father's religion.
- 3) All who had become Muslims were to return to the religion of their fathers.
- 4) No one was to be permitted to wear a turban or a veil.

This was a direct attack against the Muslim community and it marks the beginning of the *Jihad* (armed struggle).

The Shaykh did not respond directly to this hostility, and continued to teach. When Nafata's son, Yunfa, became Sultan of Gobir, he tried to have him killed, influenced by his courtiers who felt that their power and authority were being threatened by the expansion of the Muslim community. The attempt on his life was not successful, and it was at this time that the Shaykh wrote a book called *al-Masa'il Muhimma* (Important Questions). In it it clearly stated the obligation of *hijra* (emigration and *jihad* for the Muslims when they are threatened by pagans.

Under the threat of attack by the Gobirawa army, the Muslims made *hijra* Northwest to a place called Gudu. It was February, a time of year when food and water were scarce, and the Muslims, despite having been armed in self-defence for six years, were not fully prepared either for travel or war. Yunfa became alarmed at the numbers joining the Shaykh and he forbade further emigration, harassing those who tried to go and confiscating their property. Confrontation was now inevitable, and the Muslims prepared their defences and elected a leader. Despite reluctance on the part of the Shaykh, and his insistence that he was not strong enough to bear the burden of a *Jihad*, the Shaykh was formally chosen as Khalif of the community and *Amir al-Mu'minin*.

The first skirmish occurred when a small punitive expedition from Gobir was beaten back. After this the Muslims captured two towns, Mantakari and Konni, and the Shaykh had to appoint his close companion, 'Umar al-Kammu as Treasurer to the community to make sure that the spoils were distributed according to the *Shari'a* (the injunctions of Islam). Finally, the Muslims met the full Gobirawa army led by the Sultan at a place called Kwotto. The Muslims were outnumbered and not equipped to face the heavy cavalry of the enemy, but they were fighting for Allah and the establishment of Islam, and after a fierce fight the Gobirawa were routed.

After this victory, support for the Muslims increased considerably and they were able to travel more freely in the land. For the most part they were successful in the fighting. Eventually, after travelling some seven hundred miles over a period of eighteen months, the Muslims built a permanent base for the Shaykh.



In the meantime Shaykh Uthman's son, Muhammad Bello, had been sent by his father to meet with Muslim leaders from Katsina, Kano, Daura and Zamfara. He read a letter from the Shaykh greeting the leaders and inviting them to make *ba'ya* (an oath of allegiance) with the Khalif as the Qur'an and *Sunna* demanded. The letter also contained counsel. The leaders accepted the Shaykh's authority. In this way most of what is now northern Nigeria became included in the Shaykh's community.

The campaigning continued and Islam spread to the South and the East. Finally, in 1223 AH (1808) Alkalawa, the capital of Gobir, the great stronghold of the enemies of the Muslim community, fell, and the Sultan was killed. Most of the inhabitants accepted Islam, and those who did not fled to the North. With the fall of Alkalawa, resistance to the Muslims was broken everywhere, and the Khalifate of Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio was firmly established in the land.

Shaykh Uthman had previously written a small book about administration and what was necessary for it in a Muslim community. This is what was set up in the various Amirates throughout the Khalifate. Apart from the Amir who acted as governor and was responsible for collecting the *zakat* (poor tax), the other officials that he considered necessary were a *Qadi* (judge), an Imam and one man called a *Muhtasib* was responsible for overseeing all the others, making sure that none exceeded or skimmed in their appointed tasks. The Shaykh appointed Amirs in every part of the Khalifate. They were known as flagbearers since they each carried a flag that had been blessed by the Shaykh. Each would carry a letter of instruction from the Shaykh.

Shaykh Uthman was able to return to his work of teaching and writing, which he did day and night. All his books are of immediate relevance and guidance to the people of his community. His oral teaching was against oppression and misuse of power. He warned against extortion from the poor and condoning the crimes committed by one's own household. As always, he continued to convey to people the basic teachings of Islam.

From Gwandu he moved North to Sifawa, where he stayed for five years. In 1230 AH (1815) he moved to Sokoto where his son established a town. He died there on 3 *Jumada al-Akhira* (20 April 1817) at the age of 63. As he had meticulously followed his beloved Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, during his life, so he followed him in death, dying at the same age.



Since the beginning of man's history a clear pattern can be seen. Time after time one man arises in his community, calling his people to the Truth, to the worship of One God. He shows them how to worship and how to live. He gives them the good news of the reward of the Garden in the Next Life for those who accept and follow him, and warns them of the terrible punishment of the Fire in the Next Life for those who reject him and turn away. These men were the Prophets and Messengers sent by the Creator of the Universe as a mercy and guidance for man, the most noble of His creatures.

The final Messenger who brought for all people the last and most perfect Way was Muhammad, upon

him be peace and blessings. Since his death, men have appeared in different places at different times renewing his way and calling men back to it. They are the men who have given themselves up entirely to their Lord, and they have in turn been chosen to transmit the teaching to those around them, and around them has sprung up a rebirth of Islam.

Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio is one of these men. His whole life bears this out. His only concern was the spreading of the teaching of Islam and calling people to the Truth, to Allah, demonstrating by his words and his actions the teaching and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He was a man utterly unconcerned with power or wealth, and his entire time was spent teaching, writing, and counselling others to Truth, may Allah cover him with mercy and give him the best of rewards. To this day his light persists, and in those places where his flags were planted, the tree of Islam continues to flourish.

Abdalhaqq Bewley

**The Kitab 'Usul ad-Deen**  
The Foundations of the Life-Transaction

by  
Shaykh 'Uthman dan Fodio,  
may Allah cover him with mercy. Amen.



*In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate*

May Allah bless our Master Muhammad  
and his family and Companions and  
grant them perfect peace.

Says the slave, the poor man in need of the mercy of his Lord, 'Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn 'Uthman, known as Dan Fodio, may Allah cover him with mercy, Amin:

Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds, and blessings and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

This book is called the *Foundations of the Life-transaction* and will be of use, if Allah wills, to all who look to it for support. I say - and success is by Allah - that the whole universe, from the Throne to the spread carpet of the earth, is situated in-time and its Maker is Allah, may He be exalted! His existence, may He be exalted! is necessary - from before endless-time without beginning, going on forever, without end. He is not comparable to any being in-time. He has no body and no attributes of body. He has no direction and no place. He is as He was in pre-existence before the universe came into being. He is wealthy beyond dependence on place or designation. He is One in His Essence and in His Attributes and in His Actions. He is powerful by means of His power, He wills by means of His will, He knows by means of His knowledge, He is living by means of His life, He hears by means of His hearing, He sees by means of His sight, and He speaks by means of His speech. He has complete freedom as to whether He acts or leaves undone. All Divine perfections are



His by necessity. Any deficiency, the opposite of divine perfection, is entirely impossible for Him.

All the Messengers from Adam to Muhammad, may Allah bless all of them and grant them peace, are truthful and trustworthy and they conveyed what they were commanded to convey to creation. All human perfection is theirs by necessity and all human imperfections are impossible for them. Permitted to them are eating, drinking, marriage, buying and selling, and any illness which does not lead to imperfection.

The angels are all preserved from wrong-action. They do not disobey Allah in anything He commands and they carry out all that they are commanded to do. They are made of light and are neither male nor female. They neither eat nor drink.

The Books from Heaven are all true and truthful. Death at its appointed time is true. The questioning of the inhabitants of the graves by Munkar and Nakir and others is true. The punishment of the grave is true. The ease of the grave is true. The Day of Rising is true. The awakening of the dead on that day is true. The gathering of the people in one place on that day is true. The giving of the books is true. The weighing of actions is true. The Reckoning is true. The narrow bridge is true. Drinking from *Kawthar* is true. The Fire is true. The endlessness of the Fire with its people is true. The Garden is true. The endlessness of the Garden with its people is true. The vision of Allah by the believers in the Next World is true. Everything that Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, came with is true.

These are the foundations of the Life-transaction. Allah has confirmed them all, divinity, prophethood

and the Next World, in the Vast Qur'an. All who are responsible must believe in them just as they have come to us. In the case of the common people simple belief in and acceptance of all these tenets is sufficient. In the case of the elite, they form the basis of further knowledge. This is because of the difficulty the common people have in understanding proofs.

As it was said by 'Izz'ud-Din, Sultan of the scholars, in *The Foundations of the Sciences and the Islam of the People*, "For that reason the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, did not make those who became Muslims delve into these things. Instead he would make them firm since it was known that they would be separated from him. This was the way followed by the Rightly-guided Khalifs, and rightly-guided scholars still establish these foundations in this way."

As for those who are among the people of inner sight, they must reflect on these foundations in order to abandon blind following and become convinced with the eye of the heart. This is in order that the life-transaction of the people of inner sight should be based on clear vision, particularly for those who reach the station of calling others to Allah. Allah says, "*Say: This is my way. I call to Allah with inner sight, I and whoever follows me.*"

Here ends the *Book of the Foundations of the Life-transaction*.

O Allah! Give us success in following the *sunna* of Your Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. O Allah! Bless our master Muhammad, and the family of our master Muhammad, and grant him abundant peace.

# **The Kitab 'Uloom al-Mu'amala**

The Book of the Sciences of Behaviour

by

Shaykh 'Uthman dan Fodio,  
may Allah cover him with mercy. Amin.

*In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate*

May Allah bless Sayyiduna Muhammad  
and his family and Companions, and  
grant them peace abundantly.

So says the poor man in need of his Lord's mercy,  
'Uthman b. Muhammad b. 'Uthman, known as Dan  
Fodio, may Allah cover him with His mercy!

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,  
and blessings and peace be upon the Seal of the  
Prophets, and on all his family and Companions. I  
bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone,  
without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad  
is His slave and Messenger, the best of the first and  
the last, with a witnessing upon which we will die  
and upon which we will be raised up, Allah willing,  
among the trustworthy ones.

This is *The Book of the Sciences of Behaviour*.

It is in three parts:

- 1) **ISLAM** - the science of *fiqh*, concerning the out-  
ward aspects of the *deen*.
- 2) **IMAN** - the science of *tawhid*, concerning the  
beliefs comprising the foundations of the *deen*.
- 3) **IHSAN** - the science of *tasawwuf*, concerning  
the inward aspects of the *deen*.



# 1

## ISLAM

### the Science of *Fiqh*

Every responsible person must learn as much of it as is necessary for him to be able to fulfil his obligations.

#### Unit 1: Purification

Allah says, "We sent down pure water out of the sky."

Pure water is needed for all acts of purification. This means water which is both pure in itself, and able to purify other things - such as rain-water, sea-water and well-water. It must not have been changed in any of its three basic qualities (colour, taste and smell) by anything which might have been added to it, like milk, honey, oil, ghee, grease, fat, soap, filth, urine, or excrement. If any of the three qualities we have mentioned has been changed, it is not acceptable to use it for *istinja'* (cleaning yourself from urine or faeces), *wudu'* (ablution) or *ghusl* (major ablution).

Water which has been changed by the addition of something pure can be used for ordinary purposes but not for acts of '*ibada* (worship). If it is changed by something impure, it cannot be used either for ordinary purposes or for acts of '*ibada*. If it is changed by something occurring naturally at its bed, like earth or salt, or by something that grows in it like water-moss, or by the length of time it has stood, it is not impaired and it can be used for ordinary things and for acts of '*ibada*.