The Childhood & Student Days Of Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (Rahmatullahi Alaih)

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Childhood

Glad Tidings of Birth

It is the timeless way of Allah Ta'ala that when He selects someone for righteousness and guidance then even before sending the righteous guide He gives glad tidings of the coming via His accepted servants. When Hafiz Saheb heard the complaint he made *du'aa* and said:

> *"They die in the tug-o-war of Umar and Ali. The next time hand it over to Ali. It will stay alive."*

No one could comprehend this Majzoobi puzzle. However his mother, who possessed unusual understanding and insight, understood at once and said:

> *"Hafiz Saheb means that the boys' father is Farooqi and mother Alawi. Previously the names that were kept, viz. Fazl-e-Haq, etc. were after the father's name. The next occasion when there is a boy his name should be kept after the names on the mother's side. The ending should be Ali."*

[*Majzoobs* are a class of Awliya whose actions and statements are at times incomprehensible to even Ulama, let alone the masses. Famous Majzoobs include Hazrat Bahlool (Rahmatullahi alaih) who lived during the time of Imaam Abu Haneefah (Rahmatullahi alaih), Hazrat Sha'baan the shepherd who lived during the time of Hazrat Imaam Shaafi' and Imaam Ahmad Bin Hambal (Rahmatullahi alaihim).

Hazrat Haafiz Ghulaam Murtaza who said the cryptic words above simply gave glad tidings of the coming birth of two sons and he furthermore advised on what their names should be. He did not say that Umar and Ali are gods and that they are enemies of each other fighting over the names of the offspring of Hazrat Thanwi's father.

This is the simple interpretation of the above statement. There is neither myth nor superstition associated with the above episode. By way of *kashf* Hafiz Saheb was informed of the birth of two sons; one destined to be a guide for the Ummah and the other a layman. A denier of *kashf* is a jaahil and mubtadi'. The *kashf* of the Awliya literally run into the millions.]

Determining the Name and Profession

Hafiz Saheb smiled at her comprehension of this puzzle and commended her, saying:

> *"Truly this is what I mean. This girl seems to be very intelligent. Insha Allah, she will have two sons and they will live. Keep the one's name Ashraf Ali Khan and the second Akbar Ali Khan. Both will be fortunate. One child will be mine. He will be a Molvi and he will be a Hafiz. The second will be a worldly figure."*

In this manner, Haq Ta'ala manifested his name and even profession with the words of a chosen servant of His before pregnancy; when he was as yet in the *Aalam-e-Arwaah*.

When that Buzrug proposed this name, another woman requested Hafiz Saheb at that same time to give a name for her grandson. Hafiz Saheb rejected this very scornfully with these words:

"Am I a bard who goes around giving names?"

From this it is clear that his pre-birth augury and the name given by that Buzrug was through inspiration from the unseen and it was something special.

Date and Place of Birth

He was born on the 5th of Jumaadal Ukhra 1280 AH on a Wednesday at the time of Subh Sadiq at his maternal grandfather's home, which is situated in the Khail neighbourhood in the town of

Thanabawan. According to the directive of that Majzoob his name was kept Ashraf Ali. Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi would therefore say:

> *"Sometimes the funny things I say are the effect of the spiritual gaze of that Majzoob Saheb through whose du'aa I was born. Since my tab'iat [nature] is free like Majzoobs I cannot stand problematic things."*

In accordance to the glad tidings he became a Hafiz, Qaari, Moulana, Mu'allim, Mutakallim, Faqeeh, Mufassir, Muhaddith and Muslih. His younger brother, Munshi Akbar Ali Marhoom became the secretary of Bareilli Municipality.

A Magnificent Grace

Just as the Du'aa of Khaleelullah [the Friend of Allah Ta'ala, title of Ibraheem (Alaihis Salaam)] was a cause of Rahmatullil Aalameen [the Mercy of the universe, title of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu alaihi wasallam)] coming, similarly by virtue of the Du'aa of that Majzoob Karam-e-Azeem came. The historical root of the year in which he was born turns out to be Karam-e-Azeem[1] which in every aspect is a magnificent grace. The magnificent grace of Allah Jalla Shaanuhu upon him is that he left behind a precious and magnificent practical and academic treasure which can serve as directions for the Road [to Allah Ta'ala] for centuries to come.

Virtue over Brother

He was just five years of age when his mother passed away and he became deprived of his mother's loving-care. After his mother passed away he started living with his father's elder sister.

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[1] This is a system of codifying numbers in the Urdu Language. The code name derived from the year Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was born is 'Karam-e-Azeem' which means: magnificent grace.

His father loved him even more than what he loved the mother of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi. Due to excessive affection he brought him up very gracefully. In spite of his father being stern, he dealt with Hazrat Thanwi very leniently. Even if he would be naughty, very seldom would his father spank him. Once his paternal aunt lodged a complaint to his father of this preferential treatment to which his father replied:

> *"Bhabi Sahibah! In the first instance the younger one teaches the older one naughtiness. Secondly, the older one learns his sabaq, for this reason I love him more. And the younger does not learn his sabaq."*

Hazrat Thanwi would say himself:

> *"Very seldom would I receive hiding. And rarely did I get hiding from Ustaads; almost zero. The reason was that I would learn my sabaq and I would remain with adab."*

Inculcation of Self-Respect

In the month of Ramadhaan it is custom to distribute confectionary, etc. on the occasion of Khatm-e-Qur'aan. Neighbourhood boys on such occasions attempt to extract maximum benefit [by taking as much of the delicacies as they can]. However, his father could not tolerate him being a beggar. To make him independent in temperament, therefore, his father would not allow him to go to the Masaajid on such occasions. Children incumbently feel offended at such refusals. To ward this off his father thought up an amazing plan. Hazrat gives details of this in his own words. He says:

> *"He would never allow me to participate during the distribution of sweetmeats in the Masaajid at the Khatm of the Qur'aan. Rather, he would purchase sweetmeats instead on that day from the shops and give me even more to eat. He would say: 'To go to Masjids for mithai is disgraceful. In this beautiful manner he saved us from greed and protected our self-respect."*

Disgust for Loafing

The foundation for loafing is generally laid during childhood when children are given all the opportunity to associate and play with others. In his nature he disliked this. Thus he would play at home with his sister, rather than play with the neighbourhood boys. The neighbourhood boys would view this as an insult to them and they would run behind him with knives to intimidate him to play with them. For his protection, therefore, a butler would be sent to accompany him to Madrasah.

When this did not restrain them [the louts] and they continued with their intimidation, then as a last resort a report was handed in to the local police station. The station commander summoned all the boys and gave them a good hiding with his stick which he was carrying with him coincidentally. The station commander warned: "If in future any of you force him to play with you then I am going to give you such a punishment that you will never forget for the rest of your life." Thereafter, no one invited him to play with them.

Love for Namaaz

He would not even play anything futile with his sister at home. For instance, he would gather everyone's shoes, place one pair in front and make rows with the others behind. Out of joy he would enthusiastically tell the others: *"See, the shoes are also reading Namaaz."*

Habit of Tahajjud

It was the effect of enthusiasm and love for Namaaz that in childhood he was in the habit of Tahajjud. He was only twelve years of age when he started reading Tahajjud. His elder paternal aunt who loved him dearly would moan at seeing him engaged in Nawaafil and Wazaaif in the middle of the night. Thinking that he is yet a child and he may be overcome by fright she would stay awake with him at the time of Tahajjud. She would affectionately

and caringly say: “Son! You are not as yet obligated to read Tahajjud.” However, this did not deter him. He would remain engaged in Tahajjud and Wazeefahs. But she would keep guard of him as long as he was engaged.

Accepted and Loved

The effect of his love for the Deen was that Allah Ta’ala created love for him in the hearts of people right from his childhood. Not only was he beloved in the eyes of Buzrugs and his own people, others would also maintain silence at such actions of his which would belittle their customs and practices. He thus states:

> *“Through the Fazl of Allah Ta'ala from childhood wherever I stayed, whether with relatives and family or strangers and non-family I was dear to all. Whereas I would be very playful during my childhood, but not like the dirty pranks of boys of today. For this reason instead of detestation it would appear nice to people.*
>
> *During the period of Diwali in Meerath Chowni Bazaar lamps would be lit and placed in two rows on both sides of the road. We two brothers would start walking from the two sides of the road and shake our roomaals [headscarves] to extinguish all the lights. No one would take offence, even the Hindus.”*

As if he was, from childhood, a manifestation of:

“Verily those who have Imaan and they do righteous deeds, Rahmaan will instil (in the hearts of others) love for them.”

(Surah Maryam, 96)

Exquisite Nature

Haq Ta’ala bestowed him with such an exquisite nature that in childhood he could not bear to look at the exposed stomach of

anyone. Looking at the exposed stomach of anyone would immediately induce him to vomit.

The neighbourhood boys came to know of this. To trouble him they would open their stomachs and reveal it to him. He would vomit and become nauseous.

This was the amazing arrangement of the All-Powerful, that He made this exquisite nature a means of him not associating with local boys. In this manner he was made a homely boy and saved from bad company.

System and order were instilled in his nature. He himself would say:

> *"From childhood my mind is unaccustomed to comprehending anything explained unsystematically, even though it may be something minor. Neither do I speak confusingly nor do I understand anyone else's confusing talk because since childhood my mind is accustomed to a set pattern."*

It was the effect of this exquisite nature that if someone spoke something confusing to him or did something haphazardly in some work pertaining to him then at once he would become feverish and get a headache. Whereas his mind was so strong that he would work tirelessly the entire day and even during sleeping time. He would not become tired at all.

The Shadow of the Cloud of Mercy

It is popularly believed that:

> *"To make Taubah in youth is the nature of a Prophet."*

However, it was not something major for the Being through Whose special grace Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi passed his

childhood and youth with good character and taqwa, to make the means for his comfort and ease in accordance to the promise:

"Verily the pious are in a safe abode."

(Surah Dukhaan, 51)

By the virtue of this, at times His special mercy would even appear in the form of the shadow of a cloud. The author of *Ashrafus Sawaanih* elucidated this with these words:

> *"Another sign of piety worth mentioning is that which Hazrat Wala's paternal aunt by whom Hazrat stayed in his childhood, mentioned to Hazrat Wala himself. She said that when he was young, often it was noticed that if he had to incidentally travel clouds would invariably appear and the journey would be covered in comfort. Hazrat would say: 'I also remember this to have occurred on several occasions."*

[This would happen to Rasool-e-Akram (Sallallahu alaihi wasallam) as we find in the life-story of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu alaihi wasallam). In conclusion, even the childhood of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi resembled the noble childhood of the Nabi of Allah Ta'ala. And that is grace from Allah Ta'ala. He grants it to whomever He wishes.]

Acquisition of Knowledge

Wonderful Selection

Just as the Directives of the Ambiya (Alaihimus Salaam) were based on Divine Revelation, similarly the glad tidings of the Awliya-Ullah enjoy Divine Support and from the unseen means are forthcoming for their completion.

The augury which Hazrat Hafiz Ghulaam Murtaza Panipati made of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi becoming a Molvi and Hafiz was realized through the unseen in the following way: His honourable father, who was a wealthy person of his time, selected him for Deeni Ta'leem and his younger son, Munshi Akbar Ali Marhoom for secular education, namely English studies. Whereas, the rich and famous on a large scale regard it to be of honour and pride to send their children for worldly education and they consider Deeni Ta'leem to be a cause of embarrassment.

The grand and pure childhood of Hazrat, furthermore, demanded that he should be taught a pure education by virtue of which the honourable qualities which the All-Powerful embedded in his nature come to the fore.

Arabic Education

His educational course commenced with Ta'leem of the Qur'aan of which a few paarahs he did by Akhun Jee, a resident of Khatoli in the district of Meerath. Thereafter he did Hifz of the Qur'aan by Hafiz Husain Ali who was from Meerath and residing in Meerath.

He learnt the elementary Arabic text books in his hometown of Thanabawan by Moulana Fatah Muhammad. However, only upon reaching Darul Uloom Deoband did he systematically pursue the course with *Mishkaat Shareef*, *Mukhtasarul Ma'aani*, *Noorul Anwaar* and *Mulla Hasan*. He enrolled at Darul Uloom at the end of Zul Qa'dah 1295 Hijri and early in 1301 Hijri, that is the duration of approximately five years when his age was just 19 or 20 years, he graduated.

Persian Education

His initial education in the Persian Language was at the hands of Ustaads from Meerath. The intermediary text books were studied

in Thanabawan by Moulana Fatah Muhammad who was an accomplished teacher in Persian Literature. The higher text books till *Abul Fazl* were studied by his maternal uncle, Waajid Ali who was also an accomplished Persian teacher.

When he came to Deoband he studied *Panj Ruq'ah*, *Qasaa'id-e-Urfi*, *Sikandar Naamah, etc.* by Moulana Manfa'at Ali Deobandi and thus completed his Persian studies.

Whilst studying, at the age of only 18 years he compiled *Mathnawi Rezobam* and with this his career as an author began.

Perfection in Logic

In Logic he achieved perfection. In this regard he says himself in an expression of gratitude:

> *"Al-Hamdulillah! I am proficient in Mantiq. And why must I not say something that is true as I am neither one who flaunts humility nor one who shows arrogance. Why should I deny something which Haq Ta'ala bestowed? It is the Deen of Allah Ta'ala; none of my greatness. And, in fact, I do not regard it to be anything great because by virtue of straightening the shoes of Buzrugs it has become embedded in my mind that:*
>
> *'Sharpening the mind and intelligence is not the way*
> *Only a broken-heart gains the grace of the Almighty"*

Comfortable With the Rational Sciences

He had a great interest and understanding of the rational sciences [philosophy, maths, geometry, physics, etc.]. On account of this he would peruse intricate kitaabs such as *Sadra*, *Shams-e-Baazighah* without need for translating. Challenging texts would appear straightforward to him.

However, notwithstanding this skill he never stopped at the rational sciences like others. On the contrary, he always regarded it to be a tool for Deeniyyaat [Islamic Sciences/Deeni Studies].

Since moderation and sound-thinking was part and parcel of his nature and hence he would maintain everything on equilibrium, in comparison to the traditional sciences [Tafseer, Hadeeth, Fiqh, etc.] he would always dislike the rational sciences in spite of his profound ability in those subjects. Therefore, when commencing a lesson of Philosophy, instead of *Bismillaahir Rahmaanir Raheem*, he would recite *A'oothu Billaahi Minash Shaitaanir Rajeem*. This is proof of his foresightedness because Shaitaan invariably makes inroads through this path [the path of rational and modern science]. As a matter of fact he would say:

> *"Al-Hamdulillah! I never allow my feelings to dominate my intelligence and I never allow my intelligence to dominate the Shariat."*

The above episode testifies to his foresightedness being divinely bestowed, not personally earned.

Qiraat Training

He did Hifz of the Qur'aan-e-Kareem at an early age. *Mashq* of Qiraat, however, he did by the renowned, Qaari Muhammad Abdullah Muhaajir-e-Makki at Madrasah Sowlatiyyah in Makkah Mu'azzamah. Qaari Muhammad Abdullah Saheb was an excellent and accepted expert in the Art of Qiraat, even among the Qurraa of Arabia.

In regard to Qiraat his Ustaad disclosed to him an exceptionally wonderful rule: *"Don't pay any attention to the tune. All your attention must be focused on the correction of the Makhaarij, because after correcting the Makhaarij the tune that is produced will be meritorious."*

Hazrat, in consequence, never focussed his attention on tune, whereas, by and large the Qurraa are at great pains to enhance their tunes. As a result of not focussing his attention to tune, his sound became so captivating that when he would practice Qiraat on the top-storey of the Madrasah, pedestrians would halt at the attraction of the sound. Furthermore, they would be unable to say whether the Ustaad was reciting or the student.

Power of Debating

In his student days he found the power of debating within him. During the course of his education in Deoband when he was still a youth he scaled such heights in instinctive replies, articulate speech, intelligence, brilliance and logic that whenever any preacher would come there to debate he would immediately make his way to him. In a matter of minutes he would render the opponent speechless.

Ustaads on the one side would be apprehensive of him being overawed due to his young age, yet he would be fired up to floor his opponent. It was as if during his student years he was training in:

"He (Allah) sent His Messenger with guidance and the True Deen to raise it (the Deen of Islam) above all other religions."
(Surah Baraa-at,33)

He engaged in dynamic debates in his student days with Christians, Aryans, Shiahs, Ghair Muqallids and the lot. However, there wasn't a time in any debate when he discarded the rules of debating or did he ever evade accepting of the truth.

Upon hearing his logical reasoning the Chief of Debaters, Moulana Sayyid Murtaza Hasan would become ecstatic and he would proclaim:

"You have such skill in Munaazarah [debating] that top debaters cannot hold their seat against you."

The Secret to Honour

Although the wise have declared:

"One percent of honour is endowed and ninety nine percent of it is obtained through toil and struggle,"

Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was among those esteemed personalities of the human race whose honour and awe was not the product of toil and struggle. Rather, it was Allah-given. In this regard Hazrat would say:

"I never made effort in learning. Whatever Allah Ta'ala bestowed was bestowed by virtue of maintaining a relationship of respect and love for Ustaads and Buzrugs. And, Al-Hamdulillah, I can say that not for a minute did I make any Buzrug of mine unhappy. The degree of respect I have in my heart for the Buzrugaan-e-Deen, perhaps there may be no one today who has that much in his heart."

Gaze of Asaatizah

The special gaze of his Asaatizah on him was also the product of his honour. In fact, his life and his ways in his student days automatically put the special gaze of his Asaatizah on him. They would be honoured that of thousands there is one [student] ready to take their place. Appearing hereunder are anecdotes in this regard.

Appreciation of Time

In this world there is nothing more precious than time. Time is such an astonishing bounty that once passed it cannot be reclaimed even by spending the entire world's treasures. Whoever appreciates it is looked upon in high regard.

In his student days he considered it to be a sin to waste even a minute. He would not mix with anyone. All the time he was engrossed in his studies.

[Clarification: In section *The Secret to Honour,* Hazrat Moulana Thanwi's statement of him never making effort in his student days, was mentioned. This seems contradictory to what is mentioned here. Actually there is no contradiction. According to Hazrat Thanwi, he made no effort. For him his continuous engrossment in his studies required no effort. It was natural. He had an inborn fervour for studies. It did not require any special effort on his part.]

If he had some free time he would go and sit in the service of his special Ustaad, Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob the most senior Mudarris.

Once, Moulana was out of town. Now he had a valid reason for being unoccupied. However, he could not bear being unoccupied and he went to sit in the service of another of his Ustaads, Moulana Sa'eed Ahmad. He was surprised at this irregular visit and enquired the reason to it. In perfect simplicity he honestly said:

> *"Hazrat Moulana Ya'qoob Saheb has gone out. Therefore I have presented myself in your service so that my time is not wasted."*

Abstention from Squandering of Time

In his student days he would stay at the boarding of the Madrasah notwithstanding that in Deoband some of his distant family were also residing there. Often they would urge Hazrat to have meals at their home. They would say that it is his home; there is no need for formalities. Leave alone meals, he would not even associate with them considering it to be squandering time.

Finally after much persistence from their side he wrote to his honourable father as he did not wish to do anything without the prior consent of his father. The thought also occurred to him that his relatives may complain about him to his father, therefore he wrote. In response his father wrote the following caution:

"Did you go there for family ties or for Ilm?"

This much was sufficient for him and as long as he studied in Deoband he never went to any family member. Thus he would say:

> *"Al-Hamdulillah! Just as I went there unscathed I returned after five years unscathed. When I completed my studies then without any restraint I went to meet all my relatives and I even accepted their invitations to meals. Prior to this I did not associate with anyone, neither with relatives nor with students and nor with the townsfolk. If anyone wished to strike up a relationship with me I would ignore the person for which people regarded me to be haughty, whereas, this was not the case. Actually I loathed squandering my time in futility."*

Avoiding Trivialities

Generally in educational institutions special and light-hearted gatherings and get-togethers are organized where students freely engage in fun and games. He would, however, avoid participation of such occasions to his utmost.

On one occasion students of the Madrasah were invited during the mango season. [People owning mango farms generally invite others to enjoy the mangoes of the season.] His Ustaads, Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob and Moulana Muhammad Qaasim were also invited. When a few mangoes remained Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob departed knowing that now they are ready for a 'peel and pit fling'. He too perceived this and departed from the gathering with his Ustaad. Moulana Muhammad Qaasim Saheb remained out

of politeness. When he too left then it was free for all and the students started causing chaos. So much so that Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob Saheb was forced to return and stop them. Upon seeing Moulana they ran away in shame.

From this it can be adequately gauged how much he would avoid trivialities during that period.

Habit of Solitude

In addition, he was in the habit of remaining in solitude which is imperative during student years. Otherwise, through disturbances one's studies cannot be carried out at ease and with peace.

Whenever he would see boys coming to his room he would immediately close the door so that his studies were not interrupted and his time was not wasted. Students are generally offended by this. Hence, on the same day of the mango-eating invitation when he departed early the boys considered it to be against the festive mood and after the invitation they headed straight for his room to throw him with peels and juice in revenge. Without saying a word to them he merely shut the door in their faces.

In short, just as he was homely in childhood in his student days he would prefer privacy which is a salvation for humans from evil company.

Fervour for Ilm

It was the *barkat* of solitude that he remained totally engrossed in acquisition of knowledge. His fervour for acquiring knowledge can be gauged simply form this that he learnt some Kitaabs which were not included in the Madrasah syllabus due to a tight schedule, by some Asaatizah whilst they would make wudhu and he would be reading. This extraordinary passion and fervour caused the

Asaatizah to have a high regard for him. In fact, they would even boast about him.

Brilliance and Wit

Where the fervour for knowledge distinguished him above all his fellow class students it also made him brilliant and witty. Even his Asaatizah acknowledged this. In consequence, when Hazrat Moulana Gangohi (Quddisa Sirruhu) came to take *imtihaan*, Shaikhul Hind Moulana Mahmoodul Hasan (Rahmatullahi alaih) lauded praise of his brilliance and wit. Due to the words of Hazrat Shaikhul Hind, that is the praise lauded on Hazrat Moulana Thanwi, Hazrat Moulana Gangohi posed extremely difficult questions to him. The answers he gave, however, pleased Moulana tremendously.

When his Ustaad, Moulana Sayyid Ahmad Saheb took his examination of *Sikandar Namah* he could not recall the explanation which the Ustaad gave of a certain poem. He therefore gave his own explanation. Moulana enquired: *"Can there be another explanation?"* Upon this he put forward another explanation from his own side. Moulana asked again: *"Besides this can there be another explanation?"* He gave a third explanation. Thereupon Moulana commented: *"None of the explanations you gave was correct. However I will pass you solely on account of your brilliance."*

His reputation among the students was largely on account of this brilliance, wit and his memory.

Power of Retention

By virtue of his extraordinary memory he was bestowed the power of retention through which he drew excellences from his accomplished Asaatizah to perfection. For a stranger it became difficult to recognize the Ustaad from the Shaagird. An example of

this was given under *Qiraat Training*. Thus he was the complete manifestation of his honourable tutors and why not, when the Asaatiza-e-Kiraam whom Haq Ta'ala gave him were the Ghazaalis and Raazis of their time. This will be expounded on in the following chapter.

Natural Taste for Tasawwuf

Since his Asaatizah were paragons of practical and spiritual virtues, therefore, in his student days a natural taste for Tasawwuf developed in him. Together with academic studies he commenced studies in Tasawwuf during that period. He became obsessed with the way of Tasawwuf which the Junaid and Shibli of the time, Shaikhul Arab wal Ajam, Hazrat Haji Imdaadullah (Quddisa Sirruhul Azeez) picked up through his illuminated insight sitting thousands of miles from Deoband, in Makkah Mu'azzamah. For observation he called him there. Details of this will appear in the *Chapter on Bai't*.

During his student days when the nobleman of Meerath, Shaikh Ilaahi Bakhsh (by whom his father enjoyed private estate ownership) came to visit Moulana Shah Rafee'ud Deen Saheb, the Principal of Madrasah Darul Uloom Deoband, he became astounded at his [Hazrat Thanwi's] appearance and student image. Spontaneously he remarked to Hazrat Muhtamim Saheb:

"Hazrat, you have made the lad totally Fana fish-Shaikh!"

[*Fanaa fish-Shaikh* is a term in Tasawwuf meaning: to be a complete replica of the spiritual mentor.]

Total Simplicity

The foregoing was precisely the reason for him adopting total simplicity in the Madrasah. Not only did he take from his Asaatizah academic knowledge, he moreover embraced their way of life. Thus, in emulation of the illustrious staff of Madrasah Deoband he

abandoned his family's style trouser and started wearing the style of his Asaatizah.

In his dress and appearance, ways and habits, in short in everything simplicity stood out. Once, during his student years he came home during holidays. In total simplicity he wrapped himself in a blanket. He had not donned the blanket properly with both sides equal; without any side hanging. His honourable father was astonished at this sight and said to him: *"Don't you know how to put on a blanket?"*

Notwithstanding that he would have a lot of fear for his father; he would show a great amount of respect. That occasion, however, he spontaneously responded:

> *"Hazrat! If you had in mind that I must learn how to put on a blanket then you shouldn't have sent me to Madrasah Deoband. There no one knows the art of putting on a blanket. All are haphazard."*

His father said nothing to him despite his hot temperament. Nor did he reprimand him over such things.

Looking at his student days of simplicity and the extravagant and stylish dress of students in the era of his Masheekhat [Spiritual Mentorship] he laments much and says:

> *"This is proof that their gaze is not sublime and they are out of touch with Ilm. Otherwise they would never pay attention to such frivolous and inferior things."*

Preaching at Home

He would similarly beg to differ with his honourable father in general household matters and in particular regarding Masaail of permissibility and non-permissibility.

Once, his father kept someone's land in mortgage. This was whilst he was still pursuing Ilm. When this news reached him then in execution of the duty of Tableegh he wrote to him that this in *na-jaaiz*. Upon this his honourable father complained to a Hindu acquaintance:

> *"We sent our son to learn Arabic. Over everything he criticizes us, that this is against the Shariat and this is na-jaaiz. He advises us to leave mortgage, and so forth."*

The Hindu said upon this:

> *"Munshi Jee! This is something to be very happy about. It seems that your son is very able. He wishes the best for you. If you sent him to learn astronomy he would have spoken to you about the stars; if you taught him constitutional law he would have told you about the law of the land; if you taught him medicine he would have informed you of harmful and healthy things. You sent him to learn Deen. So obviously he is going to tell you about Deen. Make shukr. He is very able; very concerned. He saves you from the chastisement of the Aakhirat. You ought to be happy that whatever you are spending in his education is bearing fruit."*

In his student days caring for Tableegh and opposing the ideals of his family, *Subhaanallah*! This was proof of him being a Man of Allah Ta'ala.

Issuing Fatwa

Then he was not only a Muballigh. In fact, he was a Mufti even during his study days. This was due to his Special Ustaad, Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob Saheb entrusting the work of Fatwa to him considering his extraordinary brilliance and intelligence, and his knowledge and piety.

He would answer difficult and lengthy questions with extreme ease and comprehensiveness but concisely. Once he brought a lengthy, exhaustive and proof-packed answer to a similar lengthy question for Moulana's endorsement. Moulana perused the entire answer and upon signing remarked:

> *"It seems that you have plenty of time at your disposal."*

From then on he would suffice with concise and precise answers.

Perceiving Reality

In spite of possessing such Allah-given capabilities in his student years his perception of reality was so lofty that in 1300 Hijri when a grand Jalsah was inaugurated in Deoband in which he was to be crowned with the turban, he and some of his fellow students upon hearing of the *'dastaar bandi'* came to Hazrat Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob Saheb and humbly said:

> *"Hazrat! We have heard that a 'turban-tying ceremony' will be held for us and certificates will be issued to us, whereas we are not at all worthy of this. Therefore, do cancel this proposal. If not then the Madrasah will be defamed, truly; such misfits have been issued with certificates!"*

Having listened to this Moulana became emotional and declared:

> *"Your thought is erroneous. Here, since you are in the presence of your Asaatizah, therefore you do not see yourself to be anything. And it should be like that. When you go out from here then you will come to know of your worth. Wherever you go it will just be you; only you. The field will be clear for you. Rest assured."*

This forecast was fulfilled to the letter. Leave alone the general public and Ulama, eminent Ulama and Fuzala respected his worth and rank.

Spiritual Training

Since Haq Ta'ala bestowed him with such extraordinary capabilities which were automatically nurturing him spiritually and He granted him such an illuminated insight which showed him *Siraat-e-Mustaqeem* from childhood, there was no need for anyone to concentrate on giving him special spiritual training from childhood till he completed his studies. All his work automatically was being carried out correctly. Therefore, there was never the need for reprimand and rebuke or warning and cautioning. The need for encouragement, as a matter of fact, did not even arise. If there was some deficiency left, which escaped the gaze of anyone, the All-Powerful made special arrangements for its fulfilment. This is endorsed by the following episode which he himself wrote in *Sidqur Ru'ya*:

> *"During my study days in Madrasah Aaliyah Deoband I saw a Buzrug in a dream. He asked me: 'What is your age and when is your birthday?' I told him my age and that my birth date is 5th Jumaadath Thaani. That Buzrug went on to say: 'Two days before your birthday keep two fasts. There will be barkat.' I practised on that and for several years I continued until I became complacent. Once, during that period I practised on that deed. However I must have kept one fast. I mentioned that dream to one of my close relatives. He asked me the description of that Buzrug. After listening to the description he said: 'That was Hafiz Ghulaam Murtaza (Quddisa Sirruhu)'. He was Majzoob but a pure Buzrug. The Shuyookh of Tareeqat have praised him. In fact, Hazrat Murshidi Haji Saheb (Quddisa Sirruhu) also praised him."*

Similarly, Hazrat Moulana Shaikh Muhammad Muhaddith-e-Thanwi who was amongst the elite Khulafaa [Vicegerents] of Miaji Noor Muhammad (Nawwarallahu Marqadahu) and the Peer-Bhai [Co-Mureed] of Hazrat Haji Imdaadullah (Quddisa Sirruhu), when

he used to see him [Hazrat Thanwi] going to primary Madrasah he would comment:

"After me this boy will take my place."

It happened as such. After him [Hazrat Shaikh Muhammad Saheb] in that town Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali was the embodiment of academic and spiritual knowledge. After Hazrat Shaikh Muhammad Saheb's demise, in the realm of dreams he said to Hazrat Thanwi:

"Even now our gaze is on you just as it was in our lifetime."

To summarize, his student days were also a manifestation of Haq Ta'ala's limitless favours. Otherwise, chances are rare of seeing so many excellences in one person, that as a student he is a Muballigh,[2] a Mufti,[3] a Musannif,[4] a Muttaqi,[5] a Munaazir,[6] a Ma'qooli,[7] a Mu'tadil,[8] a Maahir[9] and then Munfarid[10] above all.

"That is the grace of Allah Ta'ala which he gives to whomever He wishes."

Asaatiza-e-Kiraam

Moulana Muhammad Qaasim Saheb Nanotwi

Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi did not acquire any prescribed and particular education by him. However, he would occasionally join Moulana Qaasim Saheb's *Jalaalain Class* out of good faith,

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[2] preacher
[3] authorized in issuing religious verdicts
[4] author
[5] devout
[6] debater
[7] philosopher and logician
[8] temperate
[9] expert
[10] unique

eagerness and in pursuit of Ilm. Moulana passed away just a year after his admission. Yet, Moulana picked out this Rising Star of the Madrasah early on in his studies. He recognized him to possess some natural and inborn wonders. Therefore, he directed his special care to him.

He taught him one lesson which forever remained his way. That was when one day Moulana asked him: *"What kitaabs are you studying?*" He was so awed and overwhelmed with respect for Moulana that he forgot the kitaabs' names. To remove this fear Moulana changed the subject, and he opened up. Then Moulana said to him:

> *"See! One is parhna [to learn] and one is gunna [to master]. Mere learning is not sufficient. There is a need for mastering as well."*

To illustrate this Moulana said:

> *"There was an Aalim who memorized Hidaayah. Another Aalim who was not a Hafiz of Hidaayah, however he studied Hidaayah properly with understanding. He mentioned a mas-alah to the Hafiz of Hidaayah. The Hafiz of Hidaayah asked: 'In which kitaab is this mas-alah?' To which the Aalim replied: 'In Hidaayah'. The Hafiz of Hidaayah said: 'No! I know Hidaayah by heart. It is nowhere in Hidaayah.'*
>
> *The non-hafiz of Hidaayah replied: 'This mas-alah is in Hidaayah'. He called for a copy of Hidaayah and opened up to a passage and showed the Hafiz of Hidaayah. The mas-alah was not cited explicitly, but it was inferred from the passage.*
>
> *After elucidating, the Hafiz of Hidaayah conceded: 'Really this is Hidaayah's mas-alah.' With much regret he exclaimed: 'Really, Hidaayah, in actual fact, you have*

studied. As if I did not study Hidaayah! What purpose does mere memorization serve!'

After relating this anecdote Hazrat Nanotwi said:

"This is precisely the difference between parhna and gunna."

Moulana Fatah Muhammad Saheb Thanwi

He was an eminent and excellent Aalim, perfect dervish, embodiment of the Deen, exceptionally blessed and a Saahib-e-Nisbat [one with a strong bond with Allah Ta'ala] Buzrug. First he was *bai't* to Hazrat Nawab Qutbud Deen Khan Dehlwi (Rahmatullahi alaih). After his demise, for perfection in *Sulook [Tasawwuf]* he turned to Shaikhul Arab wal Ajam, Hazrat Haji Imdaadullah Muhaajir-e-Makki and he was conferred with *Khilaafat*.

He was the first Ustaad of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi, by whom Hazrat studied the elementary Persian and Arabic text books. It was the good fortune of Hazrat or the beautiful order of creation that Hazrat received in his early age when his heart was pure from all contamination such a perfect Ustaad whose *Ta'leem and Tarbiyat* proved to be a key to blessings and fortune and a switch for goodness and piety for Hazrat. Through the spiritual blessings of his company love for the Deen was inculcated in his heart. Thus Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi in acknowledgement says:

"The true capital, that is Love for Deen, I acquired through the faiz of the suhbat of Moulana because Moulana was an Aashiq of the Deen. Through the barkat of Moulana my enthusiasm for Deen increased to such a level that as a minor I started to read Tahajjud."

Special Care of Honour to the Ustaad

Where Moulana Fatah Muhammad Saheb was so comprehensive in his academic and spiritual knowledge, in physique and stature he was slight. Furthermore, he was humble in nature and simple in dress. Outwardly therefore, it was not a simple matter to gauge his rank.

Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi also had a special inclination and affection for his Ustaad. Once, a visitor came to Hazrat. He took him to meet his Ustaad. In view of Moulana being a person with insight and he could see that today's student will be the Ustaad of tomorrow, therefore, notwithstanding him being the Ustaad he would honour and respect Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi much. Accordingly, when Hazrat came in the presence of Moulana along with the visitor, Moulana met him with the usual honour and respect; as one meets a Buzrug. They spoke casual talk and close to Maghrib he returned. The visitor said: *"You told me you are taking me to your Ustaad. Are you not going there?"* Hazrat replied: *"That's where we have been."* The visitor was astonished and he remarked: *"That's your Ustaad! He cannot be distinguished from even a Shaagird [pupil]."*

Apology of the Ustaad

In student days the Ustaad, out of care and urge for improvement, sometimes raises his hands on the student. Moulana Fatah Muhammad, who was all-out Muttaqi, once came to his dutiful pupil and said:

> *"When two people live together then a relationship develops between them and due to this relationship some rights are also established. These rights tend to be neglected. Therefore, I must have been also neglectful. For this I apologise."*

Hazrat understood at once that reference was to his student days when Moulana may have on a rare occasion hit him. For this he was apologising in this subtle way. He therefore replied:

> *"Hazrat! I understand what you are asking maaf for. Hazrat! Taubah, Taubah! That was the essence of care and mercy. There is no need to ask maaf for that. This little which I have learnt was through the barkat of that."*

Moulana said: *"Just make maaf."*

Hazrat tried to evade, however Moulana relented, to which Hazrat said: *"I have made maaf."* Moulana then became very pleased.

The Janaazah of the Ustaad at the Home of the Student

It was Moulana's practice that out of humility and care he would go and visit his Shaagird. From this the rank of the Shaagird can be adequately gauged.

In this regard, when Moulana Fatah Muhammad Saheb passed away during the period when there was a severe outbreak of pestilence the day of his demise saw heavy thundershowers coming down. Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi, therefore, was unable to attend the Janaazah Namaaz. Moulana's family were also people of knowledge and understanding and they were well aware of the teacher-student relationship. For this reason they considered Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi to have a valid reason for not attending and, instead, brought the Janaazah to him. It was as if Moulana lived up to his practice [of visiting his student] even at the time of departure from this world.

Directing Special Attention from the Aalam-e-Barzakh

From the foregoing episode it can be understood to what degree the Ustaad's attention was on the pupil. This is further corroborated from this incident: Once, Hazrat returned from a journey to

Kanpur. The son-in-law of Moulana Fatah Muhammad, Hafiz Ismatullah Marhoom who, in childhood attended lessons with Hazrat, saw Moulana in a dream telling him in regard to Hazrat:

> *"He has returned from Kanpur. Why do you not invite him for meals? Invite him and slaughter the chicken which has been raised at home and feed him."*

Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob Saheb Nanotwi

This was Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi's most special, dearest and most honourable Ustaad. He was the number one teacher in Darul Uloom Deoband; unique in teaching and academic sciences; one who possessed great spiritual powers and inspiration and he could demonstrate miracles. He is ranked among the *Awliya-e-Kaamileen*. He was among the eminent Khulafaa of Hazrat Haji Imdaadullah (Quddisa Sirruhul Azeez) and he commanded the position of *Qutub-e-Takween* [the Head of the Awliya charged with events of the world].

Confidence of the Pupil

The spiritual rays of light of Moulana fell onto Hazrat Thanwi's pure heart to such a degree that he developed utmost confidence and love for Moulana. So much so that when Hazrat Moulana Rasheed Ahmad Saheb Gangohi commenced Hadeeth lessons in Gangoh, many students went there. They tried to talk him into going as well saying:

> *"Moulana is absent too often. Therefore, you also come [to Gangoh]."*

He replied:

> *"I do understand that Hadeeth classes will be better there, but I view it to be unfaithful to leave my Ustaad. Until Moulana does not tell me that his Ilmi Capital is depleted and he cannot teach me further, I will remain with him. Although*

he is absent often, but when he teaches then he thoroughly satisfies one."

Loving-Care of the Ustaad

The effect of this faithful attachment was that his Ustaad would have special care and devotion for him in contrast to other students. He would, in his presence, expound more on experiences and divine mysteries and on academic points and subtleties. And he [Hazrat Thanwi], through his extraordinary retentive power would derive more spiritual grace and blessings than others and he would continue to learn wonderful and amazing knowledge. He would describe the *dars* [lesson] of Moulana thus:

> *"What was his session of dars? It was a session of tawajjuh. The state of it was that a lesson of Tafseer was being imparted; he would be explaining the meanings of the Aayaat and from his eyes tears would be streaming down."*

Honour of Ifta and Imaamat

His love and potential, produced in the heart of his Ustaad confidence. As a result, Moulana started taking Ifta work from him in his student days. Sometimes he would also put him forward to make Imaamat in his place.

Once he told him to perform Zuhr Namaaz. He put forward the excuse: "Hazrat! I haven't read my Sunnats yet." Moulana gave an amazing reply. He said:

> *"We are going to follow you in the Fardh. Where are we going to follow you in the Sunnats?"*

Shaikhul Hind Moulana Mahmood Hasan Saheb Deobandi

He was also among the elite Asaatizah of Hazrat by whom he studied many kitaabs in his student days. Moulana was the fourth most senior teacher in Darul Uloom Deoband. He progressed to

become the most senior teacher. He was the righteous student of Hazrat Moulana Qaasim Saheb Nanotwi and the distinguished Khaleefah of Hazrat Moulana Rasheed Ahmad Saheb Gangohi.

Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi also had much good thoughts and affection for him. Often he would extol his virtues. In fact, he compiled and published a treatise on his practical and academic excellences entitled *Zikr-e-Mahmood*. During the period of political campaigning, although Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi differed with him, however Moulana Mahmood Hasan Saheb continued to speak well of him and their relationship was not ruptured or spoilt at all.

Extreme Loving-Care

Moulana also was greatly attached and fond of him. Since Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was always eager in his student days to debate, therefore, whenever he heard of a challenge to debate he would take it up immediately.

Once, a European Christian set up tent close to Deoband Station for debating. When Hazrat came to know, he became restless and hastened to take up the debate. Somehow Moulana heard of this. Fearing that his pupil was yet young, new and inexperienced and will thus be disadvantaged he immediately set out to aid his dutiful student. Upon reaching there he took the seat of Hazrat and proceeded to debate. In just a few words he had the missionary packing up his belongings and leaving.

Observing Utmost Respect

In *Zikr-e-Mahmood* Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi writes with great regret:

> *"It was my neglect or weakness that very seldom did I correspond with Hazrat (Rahmatullahi alaih). Some*

occasions I did and he invariably bestowed me with replies, but necessary arrangements were not made to preserve it.

Now I can recall only three letters preserved. One is in connection with a question on Tafseer and its answer. It has been published in the supplement to Volume Four of Fataawa Imdaadiyah, p. 326. The other two [letters], I am reproducing hereunder for barkat. These are not less than two righteous witnesses to Hazrat's temperament of humility and loving-care.

In the two letters Hazrat Shaikhul Hind addresses his righteous pupil with these titles:
a. Embodiment of virtue and excellence. May Allah Ta'ala honour you and place you above multitudes of people.
b. Mine of goodness and piety. May your shadow be extended.

Regarding the words used by Moulana for Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi to others, in *Zikr-e-Mahmood* Hazrat Thanwi writes:

"Hazrat used some words which are much loftier than my status. Hence I have not reproduced them as:

What relation does sand have with the universe!"

The Pupil's Difference

Moulana was a big supporter of the Congress Party. However, his righteous pupil, the embodiment of virtue and excellence, the gold-mine of goodness and piety strongly differed in this matter. In other words, how much Moulana supported the Congress Party so much Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was against it. And what an opposition! On the one side, all the Elders of Deoband and on the other side this solitary Durwaish of Thanabawan.

In view of the difference of opinion of the two Buzrugs – Ustaad and Shaagird – being of an *ijtihaadi nature* [personal understanding and judgement] and based purely on sincerity and *Lillaahiyat*, just as was the difference among the Aimma-e-Mujtahideen and Salaf-e-Saaliheen from antiquity, therefore, notwithstanding this difference the personal relationship between the two was not harmed at all.

Their unacquainted friends and unintelligent devotees however became embroiled over this. The faithful of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi did not have the courage to utter anything in this matter. Moulana's devotees, however, would complain to him often whilst Moulana would pass good opinions of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi, commend his Deeni services and stop those short-sighted persons from their objections. Once he went so far as to say to one Aalim from Panipat:

> *"Bhai! To differ with one's own people does not seem right. Why don't I change my stand and agree with him [Hazrat Thanwi] because I don't receive Wahi that my opinion is the correct one."*

On another occasion when Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi in spite of the ongoing difference, came to meet Moulana in Deoband a devotee of Moulana seized the opportunity and incited Moulana saying: "He [Hazrat Thanwi] has come. If these matters of difference are discussed with him perhaps he will be in agreement with us." Moulana answered:

> *"No! It is not appropriate. One who shows due consideration should not be argued with. Furthermore, opinions do not change through conversation; they change through circumstances."*

In spite of these differences the bond between the teacher and pupil remained as before; intact and firm and whenever Moulana would

write a letter to his Shaagird he would address him with words such as: Master, Honourable, etc. Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi petitioned Moulana not to write such words and save him embarrassment. However, Moulana only used such titles. Thereupon Hazrat Thanwi wrote:

> *"By my request not being accepted it appears that Moulana is comforted by this even though I am uneasy. However, I take Hazrat's comfort above my comfort. Now whatever is desired let it be used. I will bear."*

Such examples of respect for the Ustaad and regard for the Shaagird can only be found among Men of the Truth. It cannot be conceived from slaves of desire and carnal pleasures.

Moulana Sa'eed Ahmad Saheb Dehlwi

He was also among the Asaatizah of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi. He did not study mathematics by any Ustaad. Solely by his Allah-given intellect and understanding he pursued this science and acquired it. He achieved perfection in mathematics to such a degree that the Chief of the Intelligent, Moulana Muhammad Ya'qoob Saheb said about him:

> *"If Iqleedas, [Euclid, the renowned Greek mathematician of the 3rd B.C.], was intelligent then just this much. Not more than him."*

Other Asaatizah

Hazrat would also name Mulla Mahmood and Moulana Abdul Ali among his Asaatiza-e-Kiraam.

Qaari Muhammad Abdullah Saheb Muhaajir-e-Makki

Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi practised the art of Qiraat by him. He was accepted by the Qurraa of Arabia to be an exceptional and highly qualified Qaari. He was reputed to be an Imaam of the art.

He, too, saw some extraordinary talent in his righteous pupil that he instructed Hazrat to teach the students of the Madrasah several lessons of some works on Qiraat. This was all in nurturing Hazrat's practical skill and making him familiar with the books on the subject.

Glad Tidings of Deeni Honour

Hazrat Moulana Rafee'ud Deen Saheb (Rahmatullahi alaih) was the Khaleefah of Hazrat Moulana Shah Abdul Ghani Dehlwi and Hazrat Shah Saheb was among the Asaatizah of Moulana Rasheed Ahmad Saheb Gangohi and Moulana Muhammad Qaasim Saheb Nanotwi (Rahimahumullahu Ta'ala). During the period of Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi's pursuit of Ilm in Darul Uloom Deoband, he [Moulana Rafee'ud Deen Saheb] was the principal. Although he was not an Aalim, yet he was a paragon of spiritual insight and an administrator of the highest calibre. He viewed Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi with great favour.

One day, Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi went to meet him. He was sitting on a chaarpai, [the traditional bed in India with wooden framework] in such a way that there was barely any place left at the feet side. Out of sheer respect Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi went to sit at the feet side [as sitting at the head side is regarded to be for elders]. Moulana took his hand and drew him to the head side. Hazrat politely excused himself. However, Moulana stated:

> *"One should obey one's elders. Where they seat one, there one should sit."*

Thereupon Hazrat sat at the head side, albeit reluctantly.

On this occasion Moulana related to Hazrat the story of Dara Shakooh and Aalamgeer when they went to meet a Buzrug. Both

of them, one after the other, went to request Du'aa for ascendancy to the throne. Dara Shakooh never sat at the Buzrug's seat in spite of the Buzrug persisting and out of respect he sat below. When he requested Du'aa, the Buzrug replied: "I wished to place you on the throne, however, you did not accept." He was now overcome with much regret. He, however, did not disclose this incident to Aalamgeer. When Aalamgeer presented himself then the Buzrug told him to sit in his place. Immediately, in compliance to the instruction he sat. And when he too requested Du'aa for ascendancy to the throne and being crowned the king, the Buzrug replied: 'I have placed you on the throne. As far as the crown is concerned it is not in my control. It is in the hands of so-and-so attendant of yours."

In this subtle way Muhtamim Saheb gave glad tidings to Hazrat of Deeni honour which, besides Hazrat, no one in this age received. This was due to that Buzrug of insight perceiving that this student is pious by birth. He would, therefore, take him along on journeys now and again.

In fact, often he would appoint him as the Imaam of the Masjid and he would read Namaaz behind him. Hazrat considered it to be lack of respect for him to have such a Buzrug as his Muqtadi and hence he would put forward excuses. To avoid insistence he started reading his Namaaz in another Masjid.

In short, by virtue of the pupil being saalih [pious], the student too received such accomplished Asaatizah.

Underlying Reason for the Honourable Treatment

These perfect personalities however did not show respect and honour for their righteous pupil solely on account of his piety. Rather, it centred on a peculiarity which will be mentioned in the *Chapter of Mujaddidiyyat.* Otherwise, in his class Hazrat Moulana

Ashraf Ali Thanwi had such fellow students who shone like the sun and moon in the sky on account of their knowledge, excellences, abstinence and their piety. They, however, did not receive that special attention as Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi received.

Taking the Seat at Faiz-e-Aam

The oldest Deeni Institution in Kanpur was *Madrasah Faiz-e-Aam*. Its head-teacher was Moulana Ahmad Hasan Saheb (Rahmatullahi alaih) who was among the renowned Ulama of his time. He was an expert in rational sciences and very popular among students.

Since Haq Ta'ala wished to place Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi on the 'Seat of Beauty' [the position of Ustaad/in the place of Moulana Ahmad Hasan], *Muqallibul Quloob* [the Rotator of Hearts] put something in the heart of Moulana Ahmad Hasan Saheb due to which he left the Madrasah very bitterly and established his own Madrasah by the name of 'Darul Uloom'.

In view of the fame of his knowledge and virtues no one had the courage to take his place and rug. Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was totally unaware of developments there. So when a request from there came for a *Mudarris*, he left under the instruction of his Asaatiza-e-Kiraam and with the permission of his honourable father towards the end of Safar 1301 Hijri. He commenced teaching there. Thus after graduating from Madrasah he was firstly honoured with being a *Mudarris* which is the most respected and honourable profession.

Directives for Students

On the basis of his experience Hazrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi would state to students:
"If you make incumbent upon yourself three things then I guarantee and take responsibility that you will achieve Ilmi potential.

1. Without fail make *mutaala'ah* of the *sabaq* you are going to take. And *mutaala'ah* is no stiff task because the purpose of *mutaala'ah* is simply to recognise what you know from what you do not. Don't dig further than that.
2. Understand the lesson thoroughly from the Ustaad. Don't go forward without understanding. If the Ustaad is not in a mood to explain then ask on another occasion.
3. Thereafter lecture the lessons once yourself.

That is all. After abiding to these three principles then rest at ease, whether you remember or not. Insha Allah, *isti'daad* [aptitude] will certainly be inculcated.

These three things are mandatory. And there is one other thing which is preferable. That is, to revise previous work daily."