CHAPTER IV

FOUNDATIONS OF THE SAUDI STATE - II

Reforms of Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab

The school of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal had commanded much influence over the Muslims and had a considerable following up to the fourteenth century A.D. After the conquest of Syria and Egypt by the Ottomans in 1517 A.D., the Ottoman regime, to the extent that it gave pre-eminence to Hanafism, was not favourable to the development of Hanbalism. During this period Hanbalism suffered a continuous diminution till the eighteenth century. The dominant fact in the history of Hanbalism under the Ottomans was the appearance of the Wahhabi movement in the eighteenth century under Shaykh Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. As referred to above the Shaykh and his disciples were much influenced by the works of Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and to a lesser degree by that of the works of his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). Beyond these two writers, the Shaykh’s teachings are still more closely linked to the formulation of Hanbalism as found in the works of earlier writers, such as the Shaykh ‘Abd Allah (d. 290/903) or Abu Bakr al-Khallal (d. 311/924).

though the shaykh often mentions in his works non-Hanbali 
Sunni sources such as Ibn Hazm. Thus 'Wahhabism is in the 
main a form of Hanbalism, or a revival of it. The more 
advanced Wahhabi of today, that is the liberal minded one, 
prefers to call himself a Hanbali. The Shaykh's chief aim, 
then, was 'revival -- return to the purity of Islamic 
teachings at its source, war on luxury, subtlety and 
insidious wilful error'.

The teachings of the Shaykh, as set out in 
his main doctrinal work the Kitab al-tawhid, are on the 
lines of the strictest Hanbali doctrines thus revealing his 
early Hanbalite training and education. As he himself says 
'we, praise be to God, are followers, not innovators in the 
school of Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal. There are also impressions 
of Ibn Taymiyya's thoughts in his teachings since he had 
read thoroughly the works of Ibn Taymiyya and had great 
respect and admiration for him. 'I know of no one', he 
says, 'who stands ahead of Ibn Taymiyya, after the Imam 
Ahmad Ibn Hanbal in the science of interpretation and the 
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2. Ibid., p. 678.
3. A. Rihani, op. cit., p. 248
Hadith'. Laoust elaborates this statement further in the following words:

"Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab and his disciples made much use of the works of Ahmad b. Taymiyya, in particular the Wasitiyya, the Siyasa Shar'iyya, the Minhadj al-Sunna and the various dissertations of this author against the cult of saints and certain forms of Sufism (notably that of the Ittihamiyya). After Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kayyim is also often cited".

At another place Laoust has described the theology of the Shaykh as 'a fresh edition of Hanbalite doctrines and of the prudent agnosticism of the traditional faith'. Another scholar, W.M. Watt, has made a comparison of the teachings of the Shaykh with those of Ibn Taymiyya and shows how much he depended upon Ibn Taymiyya in the formulation of his doctrines. About his teachings Watt writes that:


"Its clearest dependence of Ibn Taymiyya is in its attack on the cult of saints and its general insistence on a return to the purity of original Islam. For the most part it is concerned largely with externals, like much of Islamic religious thought. It shows no interest in the methodology of Ibn Taymiyya, which he devised in order to escape from the rigidity of the scholastic methods and to make possible an adaptation of Islamic truth to contemporary conditions."

From the above it can be easily deduced that the teachings of the Shaykh were not different from the basic teachings of Islam as is frequently asserted and made to appear by his antagonists. He sought to restore Islam in its primitive uncorrupted purity and simplicity animated by the spirit of stern puritanism in every sense -- a return to the original principles of Islam, i.e. a return to the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet and excluding, as man made innovations, all such practices for which authority could not be found in the orthodox writings. He was against the corruption and laxity into which the society had immersed. Defending the teachings of the Shaykh against the assertions of his opponents, J.L. Burckhardt says that 'to describe the Wahhabi religion, would be to recapitulate the Muselman faith; and to show in what points this sect differs from the Turks would be to give a list of all the abuses of which the latter are guilty'.

He was against the corruption and laxity into which the society had immersed. He opposed the introvert warmth of the mystics as well as the alien intellectualism of philosophy and theology. Rejecting all dissensions in Islam including the Shi'a, he relies solely on the Shari'a. His belief, according to Ahmad b. Hujr, was that of the Salaf al-Salih (pious ancestors), i.e. the same as that of the Prophet and his Companions, the successors of the Companions, the jurists and the Traditionists such as: Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi'i, Ahmad, Sufyan Thuri, Ibn 'Uyayna, Ibn Mubarak, Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Da'ud. In returning to the ways of the pious ancestors, he places great emphasis on the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna. Regarding the tenets of the Shaykh the remarks of Burckhardt are worth quoting in full. He writes:

"The doctrines of Abd el-Wahab were not those of a new religion; his efforts were directed only to reform abuses in the followers of Islam, and to disseminate the pure faith among Bedouins; who, although nominally Muselmans, were equally ignorant of religion, as indifferent about all the duties which it prescribed. As generally has been the case with reformers, he was misunderstood both by his friends and enemies. The latter hearing of a new sect, which

accused the Turks of heresy, and held their prophet, Mohammed, in much less veneration than they did, were easily persuaded that a creed was professed, and that the Wahabys were consequently not merely heretics but Kafirs or infidels."

In actual practice the Shaykh’s reformation can rightly be said to be a strictly puritan reformation which aimed at reforming all the abuses that had crept into the religion by abolishing various superstitious practices and calling to a return to the purity of early Islam. He condemned every sort of change that had been affected either through the writings and interpretations of the medieval theologians or through ceremonial or mystical innovations.

To the Shaykh ‘tawhid’ (Unity of God) was of utmost importance and therefore his main emphasis was given to the observance and maintenance of the true sense of tawhid in theory as well as in practice. For this reason his call is often referred to by his followers as "al-da’wa ila’l-tawhid" (call towards unity), i.e., summoning to belief in the Unity of God, neither more nor less than a reaffirmation of the call of the Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of Islam, a reaffirmation directed towards men who wilfully or unwittingly had drifted away from his early belief and the conduct it entails. To highlight the

significance of tawhid he compiled his famous work **kitab al-tawhid** in which he defined the unity of God and also described all such beliefs and practices which are contradictory, in one way or the other, to the true meaning of tawhid. According to him: 'to declare "La Ilaha illa Allah" (There is but one God) means that God alone must be venerated. Worship accorded to any other amounts, consciously or unconsciously, to giving God associates. A man who asks any person to intercede with God for him may not realize that he is putting this person on the same level as his Maker'. He, therefore, vehemently opposed the practice of offering prayers to any one other than God may he be any prophet, wali, pir, or saint. He strictly believed that the meaning of prayer is tawhid and that any one who does not pray to God does not believe in tawhid. He has frequently emphasized the many virtues that tawhid brings to the believer and has stated that the belief in tawhid not only brings reward to the believer but also brings to him expiation from sins.

The practice most common in the Shaykh’s period was that of shirk (association of persons of things

with God). He found that the Muslims of that age usually engaged in undesirable practices giving the impression of shirk, association with God, who, has no associate. According to the Shaykh's belief worship did not simply imply the performance of certain practices in the light of the Qur'an and Sunna, the adoption of Islamic character and habits too are indispensable. What matters in this world is actions; one cannot be called a true Muslim just because one believes in God and His holy Prophet; one must also behave according to the practice of Islam. In combating syntheism, the Shaykh exalted the doctrine of tawhid. The Shaykh distinguished three categories of tawhid: tawhid (wahdaniyya) al-rububiyya, unity of Lordship; tawhid al-uluhiyya, unity of divinity; and tawhid al-asma wa'l-sifat, unity of names and attributes, which, as will be seen in the following lines, structured many of the beliefs and actions of the followers of his call.

The recognition of tawhid al-rububiyya is common to all Muslims, although its definition in Wahhabi literature went far to validate their claim of exclusive righteousness in contrast to other Muslim groups. All

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Muslims must recognize the absolute and unique lordship of God and His deeds above everything, inanimate and human in this world. God is the omnipotent lord of creation, forbidding the attribution of divine powers to anyone but Himself. He is the creator of all as well as the Sustainer of all and is known by His signs and His creations around us. The Shaykh said that many people abused this because they did not look to God, but only sought a lord. This was not Islamic and the Prophet justly fought them and outlawed them and their property even if they claimed to be Muslims.

The *tawhid al-uluhiyya* is referred to as Practical Tawhid or *tawhid al-‘amali*. It includes all the daily rituals, beliefs and acts of faith, and strivings in love, fear, hope and trust in God. Stated differently, it is the unity of God as seen in the deeds of His followers in the things that they lawfully have to do. It is the submission to Islam, to God’s word and guidance, and to all which that entails. For all devout Muslims there were three incumbent principles: knowledge of one’s Lord, His religion, and His Prophet — *ma’arifa rabbihi wa dinihi wa nabiyihi*. This was based on the five pillars of Islam. It included belief in God and


his omnipotence, His angels, His revealed books, His prophets, and the Last Day (the Day of Judgement).

The chief aspect of the Shaykh's teachings, then, was the absolute incomparability of God. Therefore, worship must be given to God alone, and offerings made to Him only; He can only be influenced by good deeds. It is useless to search for Him in the tombs of the sages, or to pray at these for the fulfilment of worldly desires. God must be worshipped in the ways laid down by the Prophet. He declared that Islam is not only a form of words, an imitation of what others have said; at the Day of Judgement it will not be enough to plead that I heard people saying something and I said it too. It is our duty to find out what true Islam is; it is, above all, a rejection of all gods except God, a refusal to allow others to share in that worship which is due to God alone. When it is evident that worship is due to God alone, then, to associate anyone in that worship is shirk. Shirk is evil, no matter what the object is, it may be 'king or prophet, or saint or tree or tomb.


28. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Kitab al-Tawhid, p. 56. For the Shaykh's defence of tawhid and condemnation of shirk and bida' also see Ahmad Amin, Zu'ama'l-Islah fi'1-'Asr al-Hadith (Cairo, 1949), pp. 10ff.

Shirk also consisted in seeking refuge with anyone other than God, and to call and seek help from anyone other than God is defined by the Shaykh as grave shirk (al-Shirk al-Akbar). On the other hand he defines hypocrisy as small shirk (al-Shirk al-Asghar) and further on he elaborates that pious men are more prone to hypocrisy. Citing an example of a hypocrite he says that a hypocrite is one who ostensibly prays for the sake of God but his real motive is to show piety.

Another practice of that age which invited special criticism of the Shaykh and which, according to him, also amounted to shirk was the matter of swearing by a name other than God. To swear in such a way is against the spirit of tawhid. This practice is opposed unanimously by almost all the ulama but it is so much prevalent even today that not only the general population but also a majority of the educated elite class is engaged in it and the picture is the same in all Muslim territories i.e. to swear by the prophets or the pious men. Regarding this practice the Shaykh explicitly declares that to swear by anyone other than God is shirk and also that a true oath by anyone other than God is a graver sin as compared to a false oath by God.

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31. Ibid., p. 58.
32. Ibid., p. 30.
33. Ibid., p. 126.
34. M. A. Nadwi, op. cit., p. 145.
Another similar practice is to swear by one’s ancestors. This again was impassionately rejected and condemned by him and was declared outrightly as forbidden (haram). Furthermore the Shaykh proclaimed that one who is not satisfied by an oath by God should be punished.

It is clear that the Shaykh was especially critical of bida’ (innovations). The first and foremost amongst the numerous practices considered as bida’ by the Shaykh is tawassul (intercession). He divides tawassul into two categories -- the first carries his sanction and approval and consists of the tawassul by which God is approached through one’s own good deeds and the second type, condemned vehemently by him, is that by which man intercedes through other pious men. To him it was sinful to invoke the intercession of departed saints or to honour their mortal remains more than those of any other person because a man

36. Ibid., p. 142; W.F. Smalley states that the Wahhabis had four classifications of shirk: (1) al-‘Ilm, ‘ascribing knowledge to others but God’; (2) al-tasarruf, ‘ascribing power to anyone but God’; (3) al-‘adat, ‘praying, taking oaths, or performing other acts for or by the dead’; and (4) al-‘ibadat, ‘worshipping anyone or thing but God’, Cf., ‘The Wahhabis and Ibn Sa‘ud’, pp. 238-9.

37. i.e. all those practices which were not prevalent in the Prophet’s time and had crept in since then.

38. Ibn Taymiyya made a strong condemnation of tawassul in his polemical work Qa‘idah Jalilah fi’l-Tawassul wa’l-wasilah.

39. Ahmad b. Hujr, op. cit., p. 44.
who asks any person to intercede with God for him may not realize that he is putting this person on the same level as his Maker. Therefore, anyone who begs any creature to ward off evil or being good or otherwise do anything which only God can do, is not a monothiest but a panthiest.

According to his belief the real meaning of tawhid is not to seek help (istighatha) from anyone except God. In this connection he further says that no one is more misguided than the one who calls anyone other than God and the person called will have enmity with the caller on the Day of Judgement. To him it was allowable to ask of God for the sake of a saint but not to pray to the saint and this applied to the Prophet Muhammad too. Amin Rihani expresses the Shaykh's pronouncements in the following words:

"... If a Muslim testifies that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah but continues in his prayers to ask the dead - meaning the saints - for favours and invokes them instead of, or with, God, then he is a polytheist and infidel and his blood is forfeit."

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40. Hafiz Wahba, op. cit., p. 91
42. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, op. cit., p. 59.
43. Amin Rihani, op. cit., p. 249.
The Shaykh believed and admitted the right of intercession on the Day of Judgement to the Prophet and all other prophets, and to angels, saints and little children, but the intercession can only be asked from Him who can grant it. Thus one must pray, "O God, permit our Prophet Muhammad to intercede for us on the Day of Judgement", or "O God, permit thy saintly servant" or some such phrase. The usual phrases "O Saintly servant of God, I beg you to intercede for me", or "O Prophet of God, help me or rescue me" are tantamount to associating others with God, and no justification for them is to be found in the Qur'an or the hadith or the lives of the early Muslims. Regarding the intercession of even Prophet Muhammad the Shaykh categorically specifies that he is not yet an intercessor but he will definitely be when he will, on the Day of Judgement, first prostrate before God and then he would get permission to intercede.

Another conviction of the Shaykh was that apart from those persons who were engaged in erroneous tawassul, others, who are also actively plunged in polytheism, include those who visit the graves of saints (walis) and prophets, including that of Prophet Muhammad, to beseech for intercession and who in inconspicuous ways end

44. Hafiz Wahba, op. cit., p. 91.
45. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, op. cit., p. 72.
up by venerating their would be intercessors and thus they infringe the Unity of God. Although visiting tombs is of course a commendable reminder of the vanity of this world, besides entailing prayers for the departed, it must be done properly—in the way, in fact, in which the Prophet himself used to do it. But for a man to offer sacrifices at the tombs, or to seek protection from them, or to kneel before them, all amount to associating fellow-men with God. And to build domes and monuments with inscriptions on them is forbidden practice and mentioned as such in many of the sayings of the Prophet and his Companions. To use tombs as mosques is forbidden by canon law but many people perform prayer inside them which is forbidden according to established traditions. To light lamps hung in them is likewise forbidden. Woman were also forbidden to visit graves. To use a grave as a mosque is nothing but exaggerated reverence which gradually develops into veneration and supplication, this is polytheism. Lighting lamps over a tomb is a sort of veneration. It was for such reasons that the Shaykh declared that the domes and other

monuments built above the graves, and the stones that are kissed for their imagined blessings and to which vows are made, nothing of such type should remain on the face of the earth.

Thus the Shaykh’s detestation of domes and other things relating to the ornamentation of graves was due to the false practices mentioned above. This also drove him strongly against the building of anything over the graves so much so that he has devoted a good portion of his kitab al-tawhid particularly to emphasize just this point. As is his usual approach he cites from the Qur’an, and the hadith in order to justify his views, and then he has gone on and attacked the commonly held belief in the power of saints and pious men and the practices consequent upon these beliefs—worship of and at saints’ tombs, reliance upon the

\[48\] This opinion of his was based on the saying of the Prophet that the best graves are those which are not visible together with the Qur’anic revelation ‘to Allah alone all worship is due; to Him the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth.’ Cf. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Loc. cit. Regarding the false practices consequent upon the visitation of tombs, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya’s views as expressed in his Ighathat al-Lahfan, are well presented by Ahmad Abdul Ghafur Attar thus: “Among evil practices are using them as religious festivals, performing prayers in them, walking round them, kissing and touching them, rubbing the face against the dust, worshipping persons buried in them, and calling on them for sustenance, health, repayment of debts, alleviation of distress, aid to the needy, and other things such as idolaters used to ask of their idols.” Cf. op. cit., pp. 151-2.

\[49\] Cf., pp. 80-88
intercessions of the prophets and saints, indeed the whole gamut of popular religion. It is indeed a fact that it was at his instance that his followers had pulled down the domes and mausoleums in order to make the visitors who frequented these places to turn to Allah alone, call on Him only, and ask Him alone for favour and bounty. Burckhardt, writing about the destruction of tombs, states that:

"The destruction of cupolas and tombs of saints became the favourite taste of the Wahabys. In Hedjaz, Yemen, Mesopotamia, and Syria, this was always the first result of their victory; and as many domes formed the roofs of mosques, they were charged with destroying these also. At Mekka not a single cupola was suffered to remain over the tomb of any renowned Arab; those even covering the birthplace of Muhammad, and of his grandson, Hassan and Hosseyn, and of his uncle, Abou Taleb, and his wife Khadydje, were all broken down."

It has often been mis-stated by scholars that the Prophet's tomb at Madina was also 'pulled down and looted by the Shaykh's followers'. Burckhardt has written that even the large dome over the tomb of Prophet Muhammad,

50. Attar, op. cit., p. 132.
at Madina, was destined to share a similar fate. Sa‘ud had given orders that it should be demolished; but its solid structure defied the rude efforts of his soldiers, and after several of them had been killed by falling from the dome, the attempt was given up. The allegation that the Prophet’s tomb was damaged nay even intended to be damaged is based on hearsay. In fact the Shaykh had all respects for the Prophet and regarded him as a human being but divinely chosen and gifted. Concerning this allegation a biographer says that they accused the Shaykh of reviling the Apostle of Allah and his family, forgetting that he was a Muslim and no man would be considered a Muslim if his heart harboured any such feeling. There is nothing in the Shaykh’s messages and works save great love for the Prophet. His call was a manifest sign of this love, for its objective was to renovate Islam and revive the way of the honoured Prophet.

Similarly the allegation that the Shaykh forbade the visitation of tombs is also untrue. He never did forbid the visiting of graves as his own feelings were that if a man punctually visited graves with good intention and genuine feeling, and to strengthen his spiritual

54. Attar, op. cit., p. 137.
55. Ibid., p. 150.
relationship with those who died before, his faith would grow, his creed would be purified, and in this case would be more averse to crime and forbidden acts, for faith and iniquity never go together. He further emphasized that the graves may be visited as a sign of respect for the dead or as a reminder of the nearness of death. The visitor may also pray for the dead. The sin consists in asking the dead to intercede with God. The fact that he permitted the visiting of graves is accepted even by some of his opponents.

In keeping with the objection to tawassul, mystics, Shaykhs of Orders, so-called saints and Shi’ite imams are all condemned by the Shaykh because they claim a special relationship with God, and frequently, exemption from regular religious duties. The Shaykh disliked and almost rejected sufism with scorn because of the malpractices and beliefs inculcated or encouraged by sufism. He condemned the technique of the sufis, such as ecstatic group chanting (dhikr), music, dancing, erotic poems, individual ecstasy and the like. These views of the Shaykh

58. Attar, loc. cit.
were in conformity with the Hanbalite view, as Laoust remarks:

"..... Very hostile to the sects which had always been denounced by the Hanbalis as incompatible with Sunnism (Shi'a, Mu'tazila, Khawaridj, etc.), Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab criticized even within Sunnism, all the forms of kalam or of Sufism which tended to introduce into the dogma or the law of Islam innovations (bid'a) considered to be heretical or schismatic."

An important aspect of the Shaykh’s interpretation concerning his stress on the belief in tawhid is related to the attributes of God. On this subject the Wahhabis have been much more fundamentalists and liberalists as far as the body of the text of the Qur’an is concerned. They insist that any religious text must be given precedence over any scientific fact even if the latter may be very well authenticated. In this matter the Wahhabis strictly follow Ibn Taymiyya and other early ‘Ulama’ who, on war footing, opposed Ibn Rushd (1126 - 1198) and other philosophers and professors of logic, and also on the Mu’tazila school of theologians, who had attempted to give a rational interpretation to religious texts whose apparent meaning contradicted reason and philosophical or logical principles.

62. Hafiz Wahba, op. cit., p. 95
Thus the Wahhabis take the anthropomorphic terms of the Qur'an in their literal sense. God has a hand (yadu'llah), God settles Himself on His throne (istiwa); so it must be held 'without inquiring how and without comparison'. In other words, such terms of the Qur'an are to be understood in their literal (haqiqi) sense and not figuratively (majazi); but at the same time they say 'it is not revealed how God sits and in what sense he has a hand.

The Shaykh did not compare the attributes of God with those of his creature because he believed that there is no namesake of God, nor a rival, nor a partner and that God knows most about His essence and about other things and He is the best and the truest in His word. Furthermore, the Shaykh declared that in matters of belief, the way of the Companions was to believe on the attributes of God and all His names which He Himself has given and by which He has mentioned Himself in the Book and through His Prophet. We should believe in them as they are without affecting even the slightest change, neither we should interpret them in such a way that their sense is changed from what is evident nor

63. D.B. Macdonald, Development of Muslim Theology, p. 283.
64. T. P. Hughes, Dictionary of Islam, p. 662.
65. Ahmad b. Hujr, op. cit., p. 34.
should we compare His attributes with those of his creatures. The Companions have retained them as they were and its real knowledge, they believed, only God has. And, above all, it involves unbelief to interpret the Qur'an by ta'wil. Therefore, anyone who denies any of the attributes of God or any of His various names is an unbeliever.

The Shaykh was fully aware of the writings of the scholastic theologians (mutakallimin) and rejected their methods in dialectics and logic as they were misleading and ran counter to the way of the Qur'an and the Sunna. Also philosophy would be of no avail if we made religion subservient to it because it represents personal opinions of heathen philosophers, and even if anyone of them professed monotheism, it is not that prescribed by the Qur'an. If learned and highly cultured men like the Mu'tazila deviated from the truth and fell into error, others inferior to them in knowledge, are liable to fall into falsehood. Apart from this scholastic theologians have never been included in the

66. Ibid., p. 41.
69. For a detailed discussion on the Mutakallimun see, Attar, op. cit., pp. 106-17.
classes of 'ulama' in any age they were rather considered to be the introducers of innovations and erroneous doctrines.

In short, since the Shaykh's prime emphasis was on tawhid therefore he wanted to believe on the attributes of God literally as they were without any comparison (tashbih) whatsoever lest the believers be misguided by the different interpretations which may be contrary to the concept of tawhid because he believed that God will only be content with the muwahhidun and the mushrikun will not have any benefit of intercession (Shifaa).

Regarding the nature of the Qur'an the Shaykh explicitly proclaimed that the Qur'an is the 'Word of God', revealed by God, uncreated, it has been sent by Him and will return to Him. He has actually spoken through the words of the Qur'an and he has revealed it upon the Prophet Muhammad. In Winder's opinion the Shaykh's views about the nature of the Qur'an was that it is something actually spoken by God and that it is neither created nor uncreated. However, since the Shaykh was against ilm al-Kalam therefore he did not like to discuss such issues as are related to it.

70. Ibid., p. 110.
71. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, op. cit., p. 36.
72. Ahmad b. Hujr, op. cit., p. 35.
73. R. B. Winder, op. cit., p. 9.
Regarding the sources of the Shari'a, the Shaykh 'recognised mainly only two authorities — the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet along with the precedents of the Companions. Since, however, the Hadith — substantiating the Prophetic Sunna — was actually authoritatively collected only in the 3rd/9th century, his followers later had to modify this stand and accepted the ijma' or consensus of the first three centuries of Hijra as binding. Of course the Qur'an was given the first place among the sources of the Shari'a by the Shaykh and next came the hadith — the collection of the sayings and acts of the Prophet. All of these acts and sayings are not corroborated in the different commentaries, some are cited in one or two only while others are variously quoted, and still others are questioned, even considered false, by one or more of the commentators.

But Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, who came after the others, undertook to sift the evidence to arrive at a state of knowledge in conformity with the Qur'an. He accepted as authentic and binding only those acts and sayings that are corroborated in all the commentaries. Ibn Taymiyya was the chief exponent of Ibn Hanbal's ideas and the Shaykh was a great admirer of Ibn Taymiyya. Thus he accepted the Hanbalite view regarding Sunna. As W.C. Smith remarks:

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76. W.C. Smith, op. cit., p. 49
"...... The classical Law, said the Wahhabis, is the sum and substance of the faith - and that in its straitest, most rigid, Hanbali version, stripped of all innovations developed through the intervening centuries. Obey the pristine Law, fully, strictly, singly; and establish a society where that Law obtains. This, they preached, is Islam; all else is superfluous and wrong."

77 And again he writes:

"...... The Wahhabi reform named as authoritative, as the source of inspiration not just the Qur’an, but the Qur’an and pure Sunnah. We should interpret this as signifying in part that they were advocating allegiance not to the Qur’an as pure idea but to the Qur’an as implemented; yet as implemented originally, correctly -- as Westerners might say, ideally."

In agreement with Ibn Hanbal, the Shaykh altogether rejected *qiyas*, the analogical method of reasoning, to interpret the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*. An important aspect of his teachings was that he declared that the gates of *ijtihad* were always open. Therefore he encouraged the exercise of independent reasoning -- freedom to interpret the Holy Books in relation to changing needs,


as opposed to the slavish adherence to the interpretations of past sages. He himself wrote several treatises in favour of *ijtihad*, most of them based on Ibn Qayyim’s *I’lām al-Muwaggi’in*. He himself had originated certain alterations in past practices. Regarding these problems which were not directly covered by the text (*nass*), the door was opened for more liberal forces to interpret the text more freely than the principle of analogical reasoning as developed by medieval legists, would allow. However against all this Ahmad Abd al-Ghafur Attar states that the Shaykh was no introducer of false doctrines, being a stubborn enemy of innovations, and did not resort to private judgement (*ijtihad*) because it means additions to the Holy Revelation and he had no intention of adding anything new, for, the revelation leaves no room for anything of the sort; and he was content with personal judgements of old doctors of

79. Hafiz Wahba, *op. cit.*, p. 93. A.H. Siddiqui writes that ‘the gates of *ijtihad* were reopened after nearly six hundred years. The Muslim society felt the need of a new approach towards *fiqh*. A feeling of unrest was generally felt towards everything which was not in accordance with the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*, and the educated people began to feel that no finality and definiteness could be legitimately attributed to any interpretation or conclusion regarding any problem not justified by the *nass* of either of the two sources. In other words, they began to believe that the *ijtihad* of even the greatest Muslim scholar could not be binding on them’. Cf. ‘Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab and His Movement’, pp. 1449-50.

80. Hafiz Wahba, *loc. cit*.

theology before him, who made use of deduction and analogy. At another place the same scholar writes that he is both a mujtahid and a non-mujtahid, in the one case because he renewed the call to the true Islam, and in the other because he did not add any new opinion to the heritage of Muhammad’s religion.

The Shaykh was a staunch follower of Ibn Taymiyya and adopted liberally from Ibn Hanbal’s school in matters concerning fiqh, and in the practical parts of religious doctrines (furu’) but if he found anything in other schools of ahl al-Sunna more in accordance with an authentic tradition of the Prophet then against the Hanbalite doctrine he followed that school. The Shaykh himself said that in furu’ and ahkam our belief is that of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. We do not claim ijtihad and if we come across any authentic tradition of the Prophet then we act according to it and do not give preference to anyone else’s sayings.

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82. Attar, op. cit., p. 129. The author further says that he rejected ijtihad out of piety, for what Allah hath sent down is sufficient, and those who resort to their personal judgement have made many mistakes. Cf. op. cit., pp. 129-30.
83. Ibid., p. 129.
The Shaykh was critical of *taqlid* and vehemently condemned it. He was, although, a follower of Ibn Hanbal's school of *fiqh*, yet he did not follow it rigidly. In *al-Hadiyya al-Saniyya* he had made a frank confession of this view of his. He forthrightly says that 'Imam Ibn Qayyim and his illustrious teacher Ibn Taymiyya were both righteous leaders according to the Sunni school of thought and their writings are dear to my heart, but I do not follow them rigidly in all matters.

On the relation between the ruler and the ruled his view was that the ruler of the age should be obeyed by all. This view of the Shaykh was in harmony with Ibn Taymiyya's views. Similarly, agreeing with Ibn Taymiyya, he held that if anyone becomes the caliph by overthrowing the caliph of the time by force then it is obligatory on every soul to obey him and it is forbidden to revolt against him unless he orders to transgress God's law (*shari'a*). Similarly, the ruler's main function is of upholding the law and expanding the community until it embraces all men. To achieve this, the ruler, after

consulting his religious advisers, may force the individual to do these things which he should do anyway. The lazy or the resistant may be forced to pray. Similarly the payment of zakah and the duty of fasting in the prescribed month are not optional matter. The Imam has the right and duty to declare a jihad if he believes that this is necessary for the public good; it is, then, the population's religious duty to support him by immediately volunteering for service. In this way all their raids, according to them, have been lawful jihad. To the Wahhabis jihad is to be invoked to expand the community and to bring it closer to God's will; it also includes the idea of 'holy war' especially if waged against polytheists.

Among other things prohibited by the Shaykh was the wearing of silk garments and gold ornaments by men as ordained by the Shari'ah, and allowed only a small quantity of silver to be worn. The Turkish costume was little in accordance with these prohibitions and hence they evolved the abhorrence of the Shaykh. He was also strict in

89. R.B. Winder, op. cit., p. 11.
90. Hafiz Wahba, op. cit., p. 93.
91. R.B. Winder, op. cit., p. 11.
92. Hafiz Wahba, op. cit., p. 95.
prohibiting intoxicating liquors and on being legally established that any person was guilty of this sinful act, the prescribed punishment was strictly enforced. Similarly he did not approve of the smoking of tobacco because of its impurities which change the smell of mouth. However he was not so strict with visitors. Among the other practices prohibited by him included the practice of congregating to listen to the life of the Prophet in the belief that this brings the hearers nearer to God, and also to the inclusion in the Azan, or call to prayer, of certain additional phrases. He permitted only four festivals to be observed, namely 'Id al-Fitr, 'Id al-Azha, Ashura, and Laylat al-Qadr. Among the practices considered as innovations by the Wahhabis are included following: of funeral to the grave by women, large scale visiting of cemeteries on certain days, observance of the ceremony of maulid on the anniversary of the Prophet's birth or celebrations of the birthday of other saintly men, holding special zikr meetings and, as certain dervishes do, dancing and playing the flute at meetings of this kind. Another prohibited practice mentioned by certain

95. Ibid., pp. 135-154.
97. T. P. Hughes, Dictionary of Islam, p. 662.
98. Hafiz Wahba, loc. cit.
scholars include praying over the rosary i.e., the names of God are to be counted on one’s fingers and not on the rosary. But this practice has been very common with Muslims and it is doubtful whether it was really prohibited by the Shaykh.

Although, mentioned above are most of the teachings of the Shaykh meticulously collected but still the possibility of some or more still being left over always remains there. At the same time it is not easy to assess these teachings at length, but a good assessment has been made by J.L. Burckhardt when he states that:

"Not a single new precept is to be found in the Wahaby code ... the only difference between this sect and orthodox Turks, ... is, that the Wahabys rigidly follow the same laws which the others neglect, or have ceased altogether to observe."

In similar fashion another writer, Andrew Crichton, gives his own opinion regarding the Shaykh’s teachings in the following words:

99. T. P. Hughes, loc. cit.
100. J. L. Burckhardt, op. cit., p. 112.
"The doctrines of Abdel Wahab, it will be seen, were not those of a new religion, though they have been described as such by several European travellers. His sole guide was Koran and the orthodox traditions, and his efforts were entirely directed to remove corruptions and abuses, and restore the faith of Islam to its original purity. Whether this great reformer, when he preached to his countrymen ... had any idea of establishing a new dynasty to reign over the proselytes of Arabia, is much to be doubted ... But it cannot be denied that his doctrines had a favourable effect on the people, by suppressing the infidel indifferences which universally prevailed, and which has generally a more baneful effect on the morals of a nation than the decided acknowledgement even of a false religion."

It has also been rightly remarked that his call 'is an appeal for a return to earlier ways and therefore a rejection of later ways'. It has been narrated that when Muhammad Ali Pasha (d. 1847) of Egypt asked the followers of the Shaykh to give an explanation of the tenets of the Shaykh to the leading learned scholars of Cairo, they met repeatedly, and his followers had the best of controversy because they proved each and every proposition of theirs by a verse of the Qur’an followed by an authentic hadith and the ‘ulama’ had to declare that they could find no heresy.

Also at that time a book was received in Cairo which contained various treatises written by the Shaykh on different religious subjects. After having gone through the work thoroughly the doctors of Law at Cairo who were his fiercest political opponents, had to declare that they could find nothing heretical in his publications.

Thus, all the biographers of the Shaykh agree that his call was nothing less than the call of true Islam and in strict agreement with the spirit of Islam. The contemporaries of the Shaykh confused the call with the doctrine and interpreted it as being opposed to Islam whereas the Shaykh had no doctrine of his own but preached a new call to renovate religion and do away with heresies and idolatrous usages. It is well said that perhaps the people who claimed that he introduced a new doctrine, confused the call with what they termed a doctrine. He was not himself a prophet but merely a religious reformer; he therefore had no special teachings and opinions. In doctrines and in their relations with other people, Wahhabis, like other Muslims, follow early Muslims in and dissociate themselves from later agglomerations. Their teachings are identical with those of Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples,

although they do hold differing opinions on some matters. They believe that in doctrinal and social matters the majority of Muslims have departed from the original lines laid down by Islam.

105. Hafiz Wahba, *op. cit.*, p. 90