



## Sharīf ‘Abdul Raḥmān al-Khitāmy

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‘Abdul Raḥmān b. Aḥmad Badawī b. Ḥabīb Ṣālih Jamāl al-Layl, better known as Sharīf Khitāmy, was one of the foremost scholars of this generation. He excelled as a scholar, teacher, medical practitioner and caller to Allah.

He was born on the island of Lamu, in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Kenya. The island and surrounding archipelago’s strong connection to Arabia and, in particular Ḥaḍramawt probably predates Islam. Steady Arab migration to East Africa began during the fourteenth century (CE). Among the migrants from Arabia were scholarly families and descendents of the Prophet from the Maḥdālī family and a few from the Bā ‘Alawī line of Abū Bakr b. Salīm.

The Bā ‘Alawī’s descend from the noble Messenger ﷺ through the lineage of Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā known as al-Muhājir and through Muḥammad b. ‘Alawī known as al-Faqīh al-Muqqadam. The influence of the Bā ‘Alawīs had been limited prior to the arrival of a

young scholar whose mother was from the Comoro Islands and whose father was from the Jamāl al-Layl branch of the Bā ‘Alawī clan. Sharīf Khitāmy is the grandson of this young Comorian Sayyid. The Sayyid, known as Ḥabīb Sālīḥ Jamāl al-Layl, introduced the Mawlid of his Shaykh al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī Ḥabashī and established a *madrasa* based on al-Ḥabīb Alī’s Seyoun school. Both schools share the name ‘al-Riyādah’. Sharīf Khitāmy was to follow in his grandfather’s footsteps and preside over annual *mawlid* which attracts thousands of people from all over Eastern Africa and smaller numbers from as far away as Indonesia, Ḥaḍramawt and Europe. The *mawlid* was a vehicle for *da’wa* and whole tribes entered into the religion of Islam at the festival. He followed his grandfather as director of al-Riyādah and as the leading traditional healer in the region.

Ḥabīb Ṣālīḥ had a profound love of and connection to the Egyptian Sufi al-Sayyid Aḥmad Badawī. His love was so great that he named his son Aḥmad Badawī. ‘Abdul Raḥmān was the tenth and last child to be born to ‘Ā’isha bint ‘Abdullāh Bā Kathīr, the wife of Sayyid Aḥmad Badawī. It was for this reason he had been given the nickname ‘Khitāmy’ meaning ‘my last one’.

He was born on 29<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan 1240 AH, 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1921. His early studies were under his father, maternal uncle Abū Bakr b. ‘Abdullāh Bā Kathīr and his elder brother Sayyid ‘Alī Badawī, an established poet and jurist. He studied under most of the leading scholars of the island. His particular interest was *fiqh*.

His uncle took him regularly to Zanzibar and it was there that he met many of the visiting scholars among them Ḥabīb Salīm b. Ḥafīz, the grandfather of al-Ḥabīb ‘Umar bin Ḥafīz. It was in Zanzibar that he studied under al-Shaykh Sulaymān ‘Alawī and Muḥammad ‘Adnān al-Ahdal and came into contact with the most eminent Bā ‘Alawī scholar of the time, al-Ḥabīb ‘Umar b. Sumayt.

It was al-Sharīf Sa’īd al-Bayd that recommended that his focus of studies should shift from *fiqh* to traditional medicine that had been so important in the *da’wa* work of his grandfather, al-Ḥabīb Ṣālīḥ. Among his teachers in *al-Ṭibb*, traditional medicine, were Sharīf Sa’īd al-Bayd, his paternal uncle Sayyid Aidarūs and his brother Sharīf Dīn.

He was later to spend a year accompanying the great Shaykh al-Ḥabīb ‘Umar b. Sumayt before returning to Lamu to establish his *da’wa* and teaching program. Among the pillars of the *da’wa* was the *mawlid* celebration which has traditionally attracted large numbers of non-Muslims and those whose adherence had waned. It was an opportunity to reconnect or become acquainted with the noble Messenger ﷺ through a series of poetry recitals, lectures and the general feeling of love and esteem that the Muslims showed their Prophet. Another pillar of the way of his grandfather was providing medical and social support to the poorest and most disadvantaged communities. The *mawlid* and medicine were complemented by a thriving *madrasa* that focused on *fiqh*, language and *tasawwuf*. Al-Riyādah and its many satellite schools around East Africa produced Imāms and callers to Allah who would then go out into the surrounding non-Muslim areas to serve people and call them to Allah. In 1369 AH, 1950 CE, he moved to Mombassa but maintained strong links with his home island.

He produced many scholars of *fiqh*, medicine most notably his own sons. Among my greatest honours is that Sharīf Khitāmy counted me as one of his students.

He passed away in 1426 AH / 2005 CE on the anniversary of the death of the great scholar, the author of the *mawlid* that was so influential in *da'wa* in East Africa and the founder of the original Riyādah in Sayoun , al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī al-Ḥabashī. The date of both their deaths was 20<sup>th</sup> Rabī‘ al-Thānī. May Allah benefit us by them both and by their grandfather the Master of the Prophets ﷺ.

