

**JOHANNES CORNELUS NOBELS**

*A Journey of Knowledge and  
Gratitude*

*From the Minarets of Cairo to the Heart of Sumatra*



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## One

### *The Call of Ancient Wisdom*



The story of Ahmed Rafiq Al-Farooq is not merely a personal narrative; it is a reflection of the timeless strength of Islamic education and the transformative influence of community support. Across generations, the pursuit of sacred knowledge has required not only intellectual dedication but also the presence of guiding institutions and compassionate individuals who help sustain those on the path of learning. For centuries, the city of Cairo has served as a central meeting point for students seeking a deeper understanding of Islamic sciences. At the heart of this intellectual landscape stands the Al-Azhar University, one of the oldest and most respected institutions of learning in the Muslim world.

To a young man growing up in Bengkulu, located on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, Al-Azhar represented far more than an academic destination. It symbolized authenticity, credibility, and a living connection to centuries of Islamic scholarship. For Ahmed Rafiq Al-Farooq, the dream of studying there was shaped not only by academic ambition but by a spiritual aspiration to engage with the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence in an environment where tradition and modernity coexist. His journey began with a calling rooted in both faith and curiosity. Like many international students before

him, he saw Egypt as a place where Islamic Sharia could be studied within its classical framework while remaining responsive to contemporary realities. In an era marked by ideological polarization and rapid societal change, the balanced approach to Islamic thought promoted at Al-Azhar offered an appealing alternative. This commitment to moderation—often described through the principle of *Wasatiyyah*—encouraged students to approach religious scholarship with nuance, empathy, and intellectual rigor.

Upon enrolling in the Faculty of Islamic Sharia, Ahmed entered an academic environment defined by its depth and complexity. Here, students are not only expected to memorize classical texts but also to engage critically with them, applying timeless legal principles to modern social contexts. The curriculum demanded patience, discipline, and resilience. It was a space where intellectual growth was accompanied by moral reflection, and where the responsibility of knowledge was emphasized as much as its acquisition.

To fully appreciate Ahmed's determination, one must consider the historical significance of Al-Azhar itself. Established more than a millennium ago, the institution has endured political transitions, colonial pressures, and cultural transformations. For an international student, stepping into its lecture halls is akin to stepping into a living archive of Islamic intellectual history. Ahmed was not simply studying Islamic law; he was participating in a scholarly tradition that has shaped religious discourse for centuries.

Yet, the path toward academic fulfillment was not without its challenges.

Moving from the relatively quiet environment of Bengkulu to the vibrant intensity of Cairo required a profound adjustment. Cairo is a city where historical monuments stand beside modern infrastructure, where the sounds of daily life create an atmosphere both inspiring and overwhelming. For Ahmed, the initial excitement of arrival soon gave way to the practical realities of living abroad.

Although Al-Azhar provides tuition-free education, daily life in Cairo carries unavoidable expenses. Housing, transportation, food, and study materials must all be managed independently. For students from modest economic backgrounds, these costs can become a persistent source of stress. The pursuit of knowledge, therefore, often depends on the ability to balance intellectual focus with financial survival.

In neighborhoods such as Nasr City and Darrasa, many international students search for affordable accommodation while navigating unfamiliar transportation systems and adapting to new cultural norms. The daily struggle is rarely visible but deeply felt. Even the most motivated student may find their concentration divided between academic responsibilities and financial concerns.

It was during these moments of uncertainty that Ahmed encountered an essential source of support within the Indonesian student community.

The Indonesian Students Charity and Welfare Fund (BWAKM) emerged as a critical resource for students facing financial hardship. Rather than functioning solely as a funding mechanism, BWAKM embodies the principle of collective responsibility. It provides assistance that enables students to remain focused on their studies without being overwhelmed by economic limitations.

Central to the development of this organization was the leadership of Sheikh Mohamed Yahia Nabil (Johannes Cornelus Nobels). Through careful management and a commitment to student welfare, he helped shape BWAKM into a dependable support system for those in need. His approach recognized a fundamental reality: academic success is difficult to achieve when basic needs remain unmet.

Under his guidance, BWAKM offered both financial aid and moral encouragement. For Ahmed, this assistance represented more than temporary relief—it

provided stability during a critical phase of his education. By helping to cover essential living costs, the organization enabled him to maintain his academic focus and continue progressing toward graduation.

Supported by this network and strengthened by his own perseverance, Ahmed dedicated himself fully to his studies. His academic journey culminated in his graduation in 2019, marking the successful completion of years of sustained effort. Throughout this period, he developed a deeper understanding of Fiqh and gained insight into the ethical dimensions of legal scholarship.

Equally important were the personal values cultivated along the way. Patience and gratitude became guiding principles, reinforcing the understanding that knowledge is both a privilege and a responsibility.

The influence of BWAKM and its leadership extended beyond individual assistance. By supporting students collectively, the organization contributed to the development of a generation of scholars equipped to serve their communities. Ahmed's own achievements reflect the broader impact of this vision.

Following his graduation, he returned to Indonesia with a renewed commitment to educational service. Today, he serves as the principal of an Islamic theological secondary school in Bengkulu. In this capacity, he works to translate the knowledge acquired in Cairo into practical guidance for younger students.

His responsibilities extend beyond administrative duties. As an educator, he seeks to inspire critical thinking, ethical awareness, and social responsibility among his students. Each lesson he delivers reflects the experiences and support that shaped his own academic journey.

Through his work, Ahmed demonstrates that the true value of education

lies not only in personal advancement but in communal benefit. The knowledge gained within the historic environment of Al-Azhar now informs his leadership within a local educational context, creating a bridge between global scholarship and community development.

Ahmed Rafiq Al-Farooq's journey illustrates the interconnected nature of educational success. Behind every graduate stands a network of teachers, mentors, donors, and institutions that contribute to their progress. His achievements serve as a reminder that academic accomplishment often depends on collective effort.

This book offers an expression of gratitude to Sheikh Mohamed Yahia Nabil and all those who have contributed to the work of BWAKM. By supporting students in their pursuit of knowledge, they invest in a future shaped by informed leadership and ethical understanding.

When a student is given the opportunity to learn, the benefits extend far beyond the individual. Education empowers communities, strengthens institutions, and fosters social stability. In supporting one learner, a foundation is laid for future generations to grow and contribute.

As Ahmed continues to serve in Bengkulu, his life reflects the enduring influence of shared generosity. His journey from the minarets of Cairo to the classrooms of Sumatra stands as a testament to the impact of compassion, dedication, and collective support.

## Two

### *Trials in the City of Knowledge*



When Ahmed Rafiq Al-Farooq reflects upon his years as a student in Cairo, he does not remember his experience merely as a period of academic instruction. Rather, he understands it as a divinely guided journey marked by trials that tested both his patience and sincerity in the pursuit of sacred knowledge. For indeed, the path of knowledge in Islam has never been free from hardship. From the earliest generations of scholars, the acquisition of understanding has required sacrifice, perseverance, and reliance upon Allah.

Ahmed arrived in Cairo with a heart full of hope and intention. The opportunity to study Islamic Sharia in one of the most historically significant centers of learning in the Muslim world was a blessing for which he felt immense gratitude. Yet he was also aware that blessings are often accompanied by tests. The transition from Bengkulu in Sumatra to the vast and unfamiliar environment of Cairo required not only physical relocation but spiritual endurance.

Daily life in a foreign land presented challenges that extended beyond academic responsibilities. Although he had studied Arabic prior to his arrival, the language of everyday interaction differed significantly from the

structured grammar of classical texts. Engaging in simple conversations at local markets or navigating public transportation systems demanded humility and patience.

In moments of misunderstanding or confusion, Ahmed was reminded of the importance of sincerity in intention. Knowledge sought for the sake of Allah requires steadfastness even when obstacles appear in unexpected forms. Each difficulty encountered became an opportunity for spiritual growth, reinforcing the understanding that perseverance is itself an act of worship when aligned with righteous purpose.

Financial hardship emerged as one of the most significant trials during his time in Cairo. While tuition at the university was provided without cost, the necessities of daily living remained the responsibility of each student. Rent, food, transportation, and study materials all required consistent funding.

For Ahmed, managing these expenses often involved difficult decisions. Should he allocate limited resources toward academic books essential for his studies, or preserve them for meals required to maintain physical strength? Such dilemmas were not uncommon among international students pursuing knowledge abroad.

Islamic tradition teaches that reliance upon Allah must be accompanied by practical effort. Thus, Ahmed approached these challenges with both supplication and determination. Late nights spent reviewing legal texts were often preceded by earnest prayers for ease and understanding. In times of uncertainty, he found comfort in the remembrance that Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity.

Life within the bustling neighborhoods of Cairo required constant adjustment. Long commutes to academic facilities became a daily reality. Crowded transportation systems and unfamiliar routes tested both patience and resilience. Yet these journeys also provided moments for reflection.

Ahmed would often review memorized passages or contemplate the ethical dimensions of jurisprudential principles while traveling.

The academic environment itself demanded intellectual discipline. Students were expected not only to memorize classical legal texts but to engage with them critically, applying timeless principles to contemporary social contexts. This responsibility underscored the ethical implications of knowledge.

For Ahmed, the study of Fiqh extended beyond theoretical understanding. It represented a means of contributing to communal welfare through informed guidance. The realization that knowledge carries accountability fostered a sense of humility.

Yet intellectual progress was sometimes accompanied by emotional strain. Being separated from family and familiar surroundings introduced moments of solitude that could not easily be alleviated. During periods of academic pressure or financial difficulty, feelings of isolation were inevitable.

It was during such times that communal support proved to be a manifestation of divine mercy.

The Indonesian Students Charity and Welfare Fund (BWAKM) served as a critical resource for students experiencing financial hardship. Established with the intention of ensuring that economic limitations would not hinder educational progress, the organization provided assistance for essential living expenses.

Ahmed recalls receiving support at a particularly challenging moment in his studies. The provision of financial aid alleviated immediate concerns regarding rent and food, enabling him to maintain focus on his academic responsibilities.

Beyond material assistance, BWAKM fostered a sense of belonging among

Indonesian students residing in Egypt. Regular gatherings offered opportunities for mutual encouragement and shared reflection. In these settings, Ahmed was reminded that the pursuit of knowledge is sustained not only by individual effort but by collective compassion.

Under the leadership of Mohamed Yahia Nabil, the organization emphasized transparency and accountability in its operations. His commitment to student welfare reflected an understanding that academic success is closely linked to physical and emotional well-being.

Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of supporting those engaged in the acquisition of knowledge. The assistance provided by BWAKM exemplified this principle in practice. By addressing the practical needs of students, the organization enabled them to continue their studies without undue distraction.

Over time, the trials encountered in Cairo contributed to Ahmed's spiritual maturation. Patience became an essential virtue, cultivated through repeated experiences of uncertainty and relief. Gratitude likewise assumed greater significance as each obstacle overcome served as a reminder of divine assistance.

By the final stages of his studies, Ahmed had developed not only a comprehensive understanding of Islamic jurisprudence but also an appreciation for the ethical responsibilities associated with scholarly engagement.

Graduation in 2019 represented the culmination of years defined by perseverance and reliance upon Allah. The ceremony itself marked the successful completion of an academic journey sustained by both personal effort and communal support.

Returning to Indonesia, Ahmed assumed the role of director at an Islamic secondary school in Bengkulu. In this capacity, he sought to translate the

knowledge acquired in Cairo into practical guidance for younger students.

His leadership approach was informed by personal experience. Recognizing that students often face unseen challenges, he endeavored to create an environment characterized by empathy and encouragement.

Lessons delivered within the classroom frequently incorporated reflections upon patience, gratitude, and communal responsibility. By sharing insights gained through hardship, Ahmed aimed to inspire resilience among his students.

Public addresses offered further opportunities to express appreciation for those who had contributed to his educational journey. He frequently acknowledged the generosity of donors whose support had enabled students to pursue knowledge without interruption.

Such contributions, he noted, yield benefits that extend far beyond individual advancement. By investing in student welfare, benefactors participate in the cultivation of informed leadership and ethical understanding within broader communities.

Ahmed often concludes his speeches with supplications for those who have offered assistance. May their generosity be rewarded with blessings in this life and the Hereafter.

The trials encountered within the City of Knowledge ultimately served to strengthen Ahmed's commitment to service. His journey illustrates that education is rarely a solitary endeavor. Rather, it is sustained by networks of compassion that enable students to overcome adversity.

Through perseverance and collective support, the pursuit of knowledge becomes not merely attainable but transformative.

## Three

### *Knowledge as Amanah*



The completion of formal education is often celebrated as an end in itself. Diplomas are awarded, ceremonies are held, and families gather to recognize years of effort and sacrifice. Yet within the Islamic intellectual tradition, graduation represents not a conclusion but the beginning of a greater responsibility. For those who have pursued sacred knowledge, learning is not a possession to be privately guarded but a trust to be honored. This trust—known in Arabic as *amanah*—transforms knowledge from a personal achievement into a moral obligation.

For Ahmed Rafiq Al-Farooq, the realization that knowledge is an *amanah* did not emerge suddenly at the moment of graduation. Rather, it developed gradually throughout his years of study, shaped by both academic instruction and lived experience. The challenges he encountered in Cairo taught him that the pursuit of knowledge is inseparable from the responsibility to apply it for the benefit of others.

Knowledge in Islam is never intended to elevate the individual above the community. Instead, it functions as a means of service, guiding actions that promote justice, compassion, and ethical awareness. Scholars throughout

history have emphasized that the value of learning lies not in intellectual distinction but in its capacity to improve the moral condition of society.

Ahmed carried this understanding with him upon his return to Indonesia. Having completed his studies in Islamic Sharia, he was no longer merely a student seeking guidance but an educator entrusted with providing it. This transition required a reorientation of purpose.

In Bengkulu, where he assumed the role of director at an Islamic secondary school, Ahmed encountered a new set of responsibilities. Administrative duties, curriculum development, and student mentorship demanded sustained attention. Yet beyond these practical tasks lay a deeper calling: the obligation to translate theoretical knowledge into meaningful guidance for younger generations.

Teaching, within this framework, became an act of worship. Each lesson delivered in the classroom represented an opportunity to fulfill the trust that had been placed upon him. Concepts once studied within lecture halls in Cairo were now conveyed to students navigating their own educational journeys.

Ahmed understood that knowledge must be communicated with wisdom and sensitivity. Students differ in temperament, background, and intellectual capacity. Effective instruction therefore requires empathy as well as expertise.

His own experiences of hardship informed this approach. Having struggled to balance academic commitments with financial limitations during his time abroad, he recognized that many students face unseen challenges that extend beyond classroom performance.

By fostering an environment characterized by encouragement rather than judgment, Ahmed sought to create conditions conducive to both intellectual

growth and moral development.

The Islamic conception of amanah extends beyond the mere transmission of information. It encompasses the ethical example set by those entrusted with knowledge. Actions must align with instruction if credibility is to be maintained.

Ahmed remained mindful of this principle in his daily interactions. Leadership, he realized, is expressed not only through formal authority but through consistent demonstration of integrity.

Students observe far more than lectures. They notice how educators respond to disagreement, how they address injustice, and how they balance personal responsibilities with professional commitments.

Thus, fulfilling the trust of knowledge required vigilance in both public and private conduct.

Community engagement formed another dimension of this responsibility. The insights gained through years of study were intended to benefit not only individual students but society at large.

Ahmed participated in local educational initiatives aimed at improving access to quality instruction. Workshops and public discussions provided opportunities to address contemporary social issues from an informed perspective.

Topics such as ethical financial practices, communal cooperation, and social accountability were explored through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence.

In each instance, the objective remained consistent: to demonstrate that sacred knowledge possesses practical relevance in modern contexts.

This integration of theory and practice reflects a foundational principle within Islamic scholarship. Legal rulings and ethical guidelines are not abstract concepts but tools for navigating complex social realities.

Ahmed encouraged students to view their studies as preparation for service rather than competition. Academic achievement, he emphasized, should inspire humility rather than pride.

Gratitude likewise played a central role in his educational philosophy. The assistance he had received from charitable organizations during his time in Cairo served as a reminder that individual success often depends upon collective support.

By acknowledging these contributions, students are better equipped to appreciate the interconnected nature of educational progress.

Ahmed frequently reminded his pupils that knowledge carries accountability. To understand a principle is to assume responsibility for its application.

This awareness fosters a sense of ethical obligation that extends beyond examination results.

Graduates of Islamic institutions are expected to contribute positively to their communities. Whether serving as educators, administrators, or advisors, they are entrusted with promoting justice and compassion.

Ahmed's own leadership reflected this expectation. Decision-making processes within the school were guided by considerations of fairness and inclusivity.

Staff members were encouraged to participate in discussions regarding curriculum development and student welfare.

Such collaborative practices reinforced the understanding that authority must be exercised responsibly.

Parents and community leaders were likewise invited to engage with educational initiatives. By fostering open communication, Ahmed aimed to strengthen the relationship between the school and the broader society it serves.

This approach aligns with the Islamic emphasis on consultation and mutual respect.

The influence of BWAKM during Ahmed's years as a student continued to inform his perspective on charitable engagement. Recognizing the transformative impact of financial assistance, he advocated for similar initiatives within his local context.

Scholarship programs were established to support students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

These efforts ensured that financial hardship would not prevent capable individuals from pursuing education.

By facilitating access to learning opportunities, Ahmed sought to honor the support he himself had received.

In this manner, the trust of knowledge was extended through acts of generosity.

The ethical dimensions of leadership remained a constant focus. Transparency in administrative decisions and equitable allocation of resources were prioritized.

Students were encouraged to participate in community service projects