

The Teaching Method of Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani in the 8th Hijri / 14th Century CE — His Career and His Scholarly and Educational Positions

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Abstract

The purpose of this text is to document the method of teaching which was employed by Abu Abdallah al Sharif al-Tilimsani during the 8th Hijri Century as well as describe his academic employment and standing within the context of Zayyanid controlled Tlemcen. Tlemcen had attained a great intellectual flourishing, and Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani came from a great lineage of scholars and studied with some of the greatest scholars in the Zayyanid sphere including Tlemcen, Tunis, and Fez, thereby allowing him to master all of the transmitted and rational sciences available at that time. Abu Abdallah al-Sharif provided evidence of his admirable qualities as a scholar through his humility, patience, and respect for the scholarly community and, although he was still near-to the political authority, he showed no evidence of flattering it. Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani's method for teaching included using dialogue as a means of having his students learn through encouraging them and they had a great deal of freedom in their learning, where he focused on creating strong scholarly personalities among his students rather than on overwhelming his students with excessive writing assignments. In addition, he placed great emphasis on conducting research, debating, and developing the capabilities of his students. The many years of influence which Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani has had upon his students demonstrate how effective and successful Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani's method of teaching was with respect to disseminating knowledge and creating intellectually capable individuals.

Keywords: Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani, Teaching methodology, Zayyanid Tlemcen, Islamic education, Scholarly development

Introduction

Education is considered one of the most important pillars through which the building of the earth and humanity is achieved. This is what our noble religion emphasized from the first revelation to our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), when the words of God Almighty were revealed: “Read in the name of your Lord who created” (Surah Al-‘Alaq, verse 1), where God commands reading and learning. This is what our scholars understood when they followed this path and adopted the way of development until they contributed to the building of an Islamic civilization in both the East and the West. Thus, the construction of cities and urban centers flourished through education, such as Granada, Cairo, Baghdad, Fez, and Tlemcen. The latter illuminated the Zayyanid state with its intellectual brilliance and cultural activity,

attracting large numbers of students and scholars from all regions of the Islamic world, so that Tlemcen became a center of knowledge through the activity of its schools and mosque pulpits, and the circles of transmitted and rational sciences became a destination for all. This city was praised by poets and ascetics, as Al-Qalasadi says in his travel account: “Then we went to the intended destination, Tlemcen... I met many scholars, righteous people, worshippers, and jurists. At that time, the market of knowledge was thriving, learning was valuable, ambitions were high, and efforts in it were rising. I studied there with many well-known scholars famous for eloquence and expression.”(Al-Qalasadi, 1978, p. 95)

In reference to the academic pursuits of the Zayyanid Community in 8th and 9th century Tlemcen (Hijri), a plethora of scholars were present who provided instruction; for example: Ibn al-Imam (Abu Musa Isa & Imam Abdullah), Shaykh al-Abili, members of the family of Marazqa and members of the family of al-Sharif al-Tilimsani¹ just to name a small number of them. In light of this reality, it is important to note that a study of the biographies of such scholarly figures as well as an examination of their contributions will reflect the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) about the virtues of speaking about good people and loving good people in order to follow the path they have set before us. It is our purpose through this project to examine the teaching style of the family of al-Sharif al-Tilimsani while considering their commitment to the teaching profession as their primary occupation.

What particularly drew my attention in the study of this family is the aspect of discourse etiquette and the ethics of interaction that characterized them across generations. I therefore chose the theme of education to highlight the areas of distinction of the scholars of the Al-Sharif al-Tilimsani family through this paper entitled: “The Teaching Method of Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani in the 8th Hijri Century – His Career and Scholarly Positions.”

In this study, I relied on several points: the biography of the Al-Sharif al-Tilimsani family; Abu Abdallah al-Sharif – his career and positions; and the ethics of education among the scholars of the Al-Sharif al-Tilimsani family.

The lineage of the Al-Sharif al-Tilimsani family: This is a family honored by noble lineage, and further elevated by knowledge. The Al-Sharif al-Tilimsani family is considered one of the major scholarly families in Tlemcen during the 8th Hijri century, under the Zayyanid rule. Their lineage traces back to the Prophet Muhammad through the descendants of Fatima al-Zahra and Ali ibn Abi Talib (may God be pleased with them).

The family was characterized by prominence, intelligence, good management, and righteousness. It was a family of knowledge and piety, as al-Hafnawi said about them: “...their

¹ The lineage of this noble family traces back to its founder, Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif. See: Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, *Rihlat Ibn Khaldun*, edited and annotated by Muhammad ibn Tawait, verified by Nuri al-Jarrah, 1st ed., Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2004, pp. 69–70. Yahya Ibn Khaldun, *Bughyat al-Ruwad fi Dhikr al-Muluk min Bani ‘Abd al-Wad*, edited, verified, and annotated by Abd al-Hamid Hajiyat, vol. 1, special edition, Dar al-Ma’rifa for Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, 2011, p. 158. Abu Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn Maryam, *Al-Bustan fi Dhikr al-Awliya wa al-‘Ulama bi Tilimsan*, reviewed by Ibn Abi Shunab, al-Tha’alibiya Press, Algeria, 1908, p. 164. Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, *Nayl al-Ibtihaj bi Tatriz al-Dibaj*, edited by Abd Allah al-Harama, vols. 1–2, 1st ed., Publications of the Faculty of Islamic Da’wa, Tripoli, 1989, p. 430. Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, *Kifayat al-Muhtaj bi Ma’rifat man Laysa fi al-Dibaj*, edited by Muhammad Mati’, vol. 1, Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Morocco, 2000, pp. 210, 252. Adel Nuweihid, *Mu’jam A’lam al-Jaza’ir min Sadr al-Islam hatta al-‘Asr al-Hadir*, 1st ed., Dar al-Abhath, Algeria, 2013, p. 292. Nasr al-Din ibn Dawud, *Buyutat al-‘Ulama bi Tilimsan from the 7th–10th centuries AH / 13th–16th centuries CE*, PhD thesis, University of Tlemcen, 2009–2010, pp. 113, 115.

house was a gathering of scholars and righteous people.” In them combined the honor of lineage and the honor of knowledge, which reflected signs of leadership, virtue, and piety (Muhammad Hafnawi, 1906, p. 116).

Ibn Khaldun also mentions that their lineage was well-known and firmly established, saying that their family’s lineage was not disputed, although some ignorant people might cast doubt on it, but such claims were considered baseless and ignored (Ibn-Khaldūn, 2003, p. 69) .

1. The scholarly career of Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani (d. 771 AH):

Imam Abu Abdallah Muhammad was known as al-Sharif al-Tilimsani, the founder of the Al-Sharif al-Tilimsani family. He is: Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Yahya ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-Qasim ibn Hammud ibn Muhammad ibn al-Qasim ibn Hammud ibn Ali ibn Abdallah ibn Maymun ibn Umar ibn Idris ibn Idris ibn Abdallah ibn Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (may God be pleased with him). His son's, Abdallah al-Sharif al-Hasani al-Tilimsani, handwritten account of the family's ancestry references both the family's male members and the father (Abu al-Abbas Ahmad al-Sharif) being scholars as well; but his son, Abdallah, was the one who secured the family's distinction and notoriety through his extraordinary efforts toward researching and sharing knowledge.

This eminent scholar was born in 710 AH / 1310 CE, most likely in the village of al-‘Alwin or al-‘Alwiyyin ² , and was therefore nicknamed al-‘Alawi. He later moved to Tlemcen, where he grew up and studied under its leading scholars. Among them was Shaykh Abu Zayd ibn Ya‘qub, from whom he learned the Holy Qur’an through memorization and correct recitation. He then studied Arabic grammar under Shaykh Ibn Hadiya al-Qurashi (d. 736 AH / 1335 CE), a specialist in rhetoric and literature, whom Yahya ibn Khaldun described as “a virtuous scholar among the imams of language and literature, knowledgeable in documents, and renowned for merit and piety.” (Ibn Khaldūn, p. 116)

He also studied Hadith with Shaykh Abdallah al-Majasi (d. 741 AH / 1340 CE), and later with the two scholars, the judge al-Tamimi (d. 745 AH / 1344 CE) and Imran al-Mashdali (d. 745 AH / 1344 CE), the latter known as the leading scholar of Tlemcen, its teacher and mufti, distinguished by his extensive knowledge in jurisprudence and dialectics. (Al-Maqqarī, 1968, p. 236) He benefited from them in Islamic jurisprudence. This represents the first stage of Abu Abdallah al-Sharif’s education (Al-Maqqari, 1968, p. 223).

After this period, Abu Abdallah moved to the stage of consolidating the foundations of his knowledge and progressed to a second phase in which he expanded his intellectual horizons and refined his understanding. He attended the study circle of the Ibn al-Imam family of Ténès al-Burshuki ³ : Abu Musa Isa (d. 750 AH / 1349 CE) and his brother Abu Zayd Abd al-Rahman

² **The village of al-‘Alawiyya:** It is located in the outskirts of Tlemcen. It was mentioned by al-Ya‘qubi, who said: “...then to the town called al-‘Alawiyyin, which was in the hands of the ‘Alawiyyin, descendants of Muhammad ibn Sulayman...”. See: Ahmad ibn Abi Ya‘qub al-Ya‘qubi, *Al-Buldan*, with annotations by Muhammad Amin Dhanawi, 1st ed., Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1422 AH / 2002 CE, p. 196. See also: Ibn Maryam, *op. cit.*, p. 164; Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, *Nayl al-Ibtihaj*, *op. cit.*, p. 433. The researcher Ben Ramadan Shaouch identifies it as the village of ‘Ayn al-Hut in Tlemcen, which still exists today. See: Nasr al-Din ibn Dawud, *op. cit.*, pp. 116–117.

³ The two scholars, sons of the Imam, were Imam Abu Musa ‘Isa and Imam Abu Zayd ‘Abd al-Rahman, the latter being younger. Their origins go back to Barshak. Their father was an imam, and thus the family became known by this name. The two brothers traveled together, both east and west. As for Abu Musa, he was close to the Marinid sultans, known for his leadership and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*). He died during the plague in 749 AH.

(d. 743 AH / 1342 CE), where he studied the principles of Islamic jurisprudence and theology under them (Ibn-Khaldūn, 2003, p. 69)

He then closely studied with his teacher Abu Abdallah al-Abili (d. 757 AH)(Al-Ziriklī, 1970), from whom he absorbed the rational sciences and deepened his expertise, to the point that knowledge seemed to flow abundantly through his understanding, as described by the scholar Ibn Khaldun. This major intellectual figure was highly regarded by many scholars of his time, including Ibn Marzuq al-Khatib, who described him as “the master of the Maghreb in rational sciences and the leading scholar of his time.” The polymath author of *Nafh al-Tib* also said of him that he was “unique in his time, unmatched in his mastery of rational disciplines and the soundness of his reasoning.”

He traveled to Tunisia in 740 AH / 1339 CE to meet its leading scholar, Abdullah ibn Abd al-Salam (d. 749 AH / 1348 CE), the prominent figure of knowledge there. He benefited from him greatly and held his scholarly rank in high esteem. This scholar was described as an imam, a learned man, and a master of both jurisprudential principles and theology, skilled in Arabic expression and rhetoric, strong in argumentation, sound in reasoning, and unique in his time in his region (Ibn Farhun, *al-Dibaj al-Mudhahhab fī Dhikr A‘yan wa ‘Ulama’ al-Madhab*, p. 336).

From Tunisia, he then moved to Fez, where he attended the teaching circles of its leading scholars, among them Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Sulayman al-Satti (d. 749 AH / 1348 CE).(Ibn-al-Qāḍī & Al-Maknāsī, 2002, p. 365)

Afterwards, he returned to his hometown Tlemcen, where he became a leading figure in teaching and instruction, and his reputation spread widely among students. This period also coincided with Tlemcen’s exposure to a Marinid attack under Sultan Abu al-‘Inan in 753 AH / 1352 CE⁴. The sultan selected Shaykh al-Sharif al-Tilimsani to join his royal scholarly council. Ibn Maryam reports that the sultan “chose al-Sharif Abu Abdallah for his scholarly council among other leading scholars and took him with him to Fez.”

He then taught and became well known for his legal opinions and knowledge. After the death of Sultan Abu al-‘Inan in 759 AH / 1350 CE, al-Sharif returned to Tlemcen, where he was warmly received by the Zayyanid ruler Abu Hammu Musa II, who even married him to his daughter. The sultan later built him a school in 765 AH / 1364 CE, known as the Yaqoubiyya School, where he remained until his death in 771 AH / 29 June 1369 CE.

Imam Abu Zayd ‘Abd al-Rahman was born in the second decade of the latter half of the 7th century AH. He traveled to Tunis after the ordeal of his father’s killing in 684 AH, where he studied under its scholars. From there, he went to Fez and joined al-Qarawiyyin University to benefit from its scholars. He then returned to Algeria, where he taught, and later moved to Miliana in 705 AH, where he was appointed judge. After that, he went to Tlemcen to the court of Sultan Abu Hammu Musa II, who built a madrasa for him in 710 AH, where he took up teaching. He died in 743 AH.

⁴ **Al-Saṭṭī**: He is Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī al-Saṭṭī, attributed to the tribe of Saṭṭa from Awriya in the region of Fez. He was among the most knowledgeable people in the Mālikī school of law and was known as a jurist specializing in inheritance law (*farā’iḍ*). He attained a position of leadership and distinction with the Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Marīnī. He died in 749 AH.

2. Biographies of the two sons of al-Sharif al-Tilimsani:

Abu Muhammad Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani (d. 792 AH / 1390 CE):

He was a scholar, son of a distinguished and accomplished scholar, and the son of the authoritative imam Abu Abdallah al-Sharif. He was born in 748 AH, and his father raised him with great care, so he became known for noble qualities and good character, and he was highly devoted to seeking knowledge like his father. It was even reported that his father was given glad tidings of his birth before he was born, being told that he would have a son who would become a scholar and would not die until he saw him leading scholars.

He studied and memorized the Qur'an under Abu Abdallah ibn Zayd in Fez, and memorized the Qur'an, Ibn Malik's *Alfiyya*, and *Jumal al-Khunji*. He also studied under several scholars, including Ibn Hayyati al-Gharnati, Ibn Marzuq the preacher (al-Khatib), Ahmad al-Qabbab, al-Hasan al-Wansharisi, and Abu al-Abbas al-Shamma', among others.

He also studied with his father jurisprudence, principles of faith, logic, and other sciences, including al-Ghazali's works, Ibn Sina's writings on grammar, al-Ghazali's *al-Maqasid*, and his father's work *Miftah al-Usul*. He studied geometry through Euclid and logic through *Jumal al-Khunji*, and he also attended his father's Qur'anic teaching sessions from Surah Al-Nahl to the completion of the Qur'an.

After his father's death, he took his place, and major scholars attended his teaching sessions without objecting, instead acknowledging his excellence. He later traveled to Fez, where scholars confirmed his high level of mastery, and it was said that there was no one in the Maghreb more dedicated to teaching than him. Al-Abbas ibn Musa praised him for his vast knowledge and clarity of teaching. The judge Abu Uthman al-'Uqbani also acknowledged his status when asked about theology, writing: "May God expand your chest and raise your rank among scholars." (Al-Timbukti, 1989, p. 430)

He then traveled to Andalusia to teach, and upon finishing his mission there, he died while returning to Tlemcen, drowning at sea in 792 AH at the age of no more than forty-five years.

Abu Yahya Abd al-Rahman al-Sharif (d. 826 AH / 1424 CE) (16):

He is the second son of the scholar Shaykh al-Sharif al-Tilimsani. He was born on the 19th of Ramadan 757 AH. Sources mention that his father was given glad tidings of his birth in a dream, and on the day of his birth his father was staying at the house of two prominent scholars, Abu Zayd ibn Khaldun and Abu Yahya ibn al-Sakkak, each of whom asked the father to name the child after him. He was therefore named Abd al-Rahman and given the kunya Abu Yahya.

His father recognized in him signs of knowledge and righteousness, and he was his first teacher, teaching him works such as *al-Taqassi*, *Ibn al-Hajib al-Asli*, *Mitharat al-Ghalat*, and *al-Muwatta'*, among other foundational texts. After his father's death, he studied under his brother Abu Muhammad Abdallah ibn Muhammad al-Sharif, from whom he acquired many sciences and books.

Among his external teachers were Abu Uthman al-'Uqbani, from whom he studied *Idah al-Farisi* and *Jumal al-Khunji* and attended his Qur'anic exegesis sessions, as well as Ibn Hayyan al-Gharnati and Abu al-Qasim ibn Ridwan, from whom he heard *Sahih Muslim* and *Shifa'* of Qadi 'Iyad, and later received authorization (ijaza). Many scholars narrated from him,

including Abu Zayd al-Jadari, Ibn Zagu (d. 845 AH), and Shaykh Abu Abdallah al-Qaysi. He taught in Fez in the presence of its ruler and scholars. He died at dawn on 26 Rajab 826 AH (Al-Timbukti, 1989, p. 252)

3. Scholarly positions of Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani:

Scholars are the heirs of the Prophets on earth, and therefore they are the most worthy of being followed and taken as models through observing their paths in seeking and spreading knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge enables them to fulfill the commands of God and avoid His prohibitions. Whoever examines the Prophet Muhammad's method in conveying his message finds that its core is noble character, which is considered the essence of worship. God Almighty says: "Indeed in the Messenger of God you have an excellent example for whoever hopes in God and the Last Day and remembers God often" (Surah Al-Ahzab: 12). This applies to scholars when studying their biographies across the Islamic world.

We have taken the scholar Shaykh Abu Abdallah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani as a model to be followed in character before knowledge, as he was known for noble ethics in his dealings with scholars and students of knowledge. This is clearly reflected in several situations recorded in the sources that documented his life. We mention, for example, but not limited to:

Ibn Maryam mentions in his *al-Bustan* that Shaykh Abu Abdallah was raised in a scholarly environment from an early age. When his uncle Abd al-Karim recognized his intelligence and sharpness, he loved him greatly and took him to the gatherings of scholars. On one occasion, while he was in the gathering of the scholar Abu Zayd ibn al-Imam, who was interpreting the Qur'an and mentioned Paradise and its delights, Muhammad al-Sharif—still a young boy—stepped forward and asked: "My master, is knowledge taught there?" meaning in Paradise. The scholar replied: "Yes, there is whatever the soul desires and wishes." The boy responded: "If you had said there is no knowledge in it, you would have said there is no pleasure in it." The scholar admired his response and prayed for him (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, pp. 164-171)

It is mentioned in the books that when he traveled to Tunisia and joined the study circle of its scholar Ibn Abd al-Salam for the first time, he sat at the end of the gathering. This act reflects his refined manners and his awareness of proper etiquette, as he did not interrupt the lesson.

While seated, he heard the teacher asking about the meaning of remembrance (dhikr): is it associated with the heart or the tongue? This occurred while the teacher was interpreting the verse: "O you who believe, remember God with much remembrance" (Surah Al-Ahzab: 41).

The teacher asked whether the intended meaning of remembrance refers to the tongue or the heart, and whether its essence is verbal remembrance. Abu Abdallah replied: "My master, remembrance is the opposite of forgetfulness, and forgetfulness resides in the heart, not the tongue; therefore, opposites must share the same locus."

The teacher Abd al-Salam responded that remembrance is the opposite of silence, and silence is located in the tongue; therefore, its opposite—remembrance—must also be located in the tongue, making verbal expression its essence. Abu Abdallah said: "I remained silent out of respect and reverence for him, although I knew that the opposite of silence is speech, not remembrance." (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, p. 168)

Another position of the teacher Abu Abdallah al-Sharif is reported from the time when he attended the court of the Marinid Sultan Abu Inan. When the scholars gathered, al-Maqqari was ordered to deliver a Qur'anic exegesis lesson, but he refused out of respect for his teacher Abu Abdallah al-Sharif, saying that al-Sharif was more entitled to it than him.

The sultan said to Abu Abdallah: "You are knowledgeable in Qur'anic sciences and among the people of interpretation." He replied, in acknowledgment and fairness toward Abu Abdallah: "Abu Abdallah is more knowledgeable in this than I am, and I cannot teach in his presence."

Al-Sharif al-Tilimsani then delivered the interpretation of the Qur'an in the presence of the sultan and the scholars. The sultan was greatly impressed by his understanding and mastery, to the extent that he descended from his throne and sat with him on the mat. When the session ended, Abu Inan said: "I see knowledge emerging from the roots of his hair," as a recognition of his competence and excellence (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, p. 168).

Scholars of that era were distinguished by their etiquette toward one another, openly acknowledging the merit of other scholars and recognizing the strength of their knowledge even when others were more knowledgeable than them. This quality characterizes every scholar who understood the value of knowledge and practiced humility toward ordinary people, let alone toward fellow scholars.

Andalusian scholars were among those who most recognized his status and showed him the greatest respect, as Ibn Maryam mentions in his *al-Bustan*: "Whenever Ibn al-Khatib composed a new book, he would send it to Shaykh Abu Abdallah to review it and request that he write his commentary on it in his own handwriting."

Likewise, the jurist Abu Sa'id Ibn Lab al-Andalusi, whenever he encountered a difficult issue, would turn to al-Sharif al-Tilimsani for clarification, acknowledging his scholarly merit. Ibn Marzuq al-Khatib also said upon his departure to Tunisia: "I was saddened by his separation, but I praise God for seeing in Ifriqiya someone like him from the scholars of the Maghreb."

As for the jurist Musa al-'Abdusi of Fez, he used to carefully record everything transmitted from Abu Abdallah, even though he was older in age, as Ibn Maryam reports.

He was known for his devotion to knowledge as a means of drawing closer to God, and for his avoidance of worldly life despite the rulers' interest in him. We mention here the incident when Sultan Abu Inan became angry and imprisoned him after discovering that he had concealed an issue of a trust for which Sultan Abu Sa'id al-Zayani had entrusted him as a witness. When Abu Inan learned of this, he strongly reproached him because he had not informed him, and reminded him of the favor of bringing him close and elevating his rank above other scholars. The scholar al-Sharif replied: "I only possess testimony that I am not required to reveal but rather to conceal. As for your favor in bringing me close, it has harmed me more than it has benefited me, and it has diminished my religion and my knowledge." The sultan became angry with him and imprisoned him.

He was known for his devotion to knowledge as a means of drawing closer to God, and for his turning away from worldly life by keeping distance from rulers, even though they were drawn to him. We mention the incident in which Sultan Abu Inan became angry and imprisoned him after learning that he had concealed the matter of a trust for which the Zayyanid Sultan

Abu Sa'īd had entrusted him as a witness. When Abu Inan found out, he strongly reproached him for not informing him, and reminded him of the favor of bringing him close and elevating his status above other scholars. Al-Sharif replied: "I only hold testimony that I am not required to disclose but rather to conceal. As for your favor in bringing me close, it has harmed me more than it has benefited me, and it has reduced my religion and my knowledge." The sultan became angry with him and imprisoned him (Al-Tinbuktī, 1998, p. 439).

This shows that Abu Abd Allah did not fear the blame of any critic in the cause of God, and he did not flatter rulers; even when they brought him close to them, he upheld the people of truth in their hearts without seeking personal gain. When he died in 771 AH, Ibn 'Arafa heard of his death and said: "With his death, rational sciences have died." The Zayyanid Sultan Abu Hammu Musa II deeply mourned his passing and said to his son Abu Muhammad Abd Allah: "Your father has not died; rather, it is I who have lost him, for I used to take pride in him before kings." (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, p. 176)

Al-Sharif Abu Abd Allah is not truly dead, for he left his knowledge to his students and his sons, Abd Allah and Abd al-Rahman, and instilled in them the ethics and manners of knowledge.

The sources mention the issue of inheriting the profession of teaching. Sheikh Abd Allah inherited it, and when he later fell ill, he asked his brother to take his place, knowing his strong mastery of knowledge. Abd al-Rahman initially refused out of respect for his brother. When he insisted, Abd al-Rahman eventually succeeded him in 784 AH, reached a high level of knowledge, and firmly established himself in the sciences. He then wrote to his brother acknowledging his merit, saying: "I reviewed what you transmitted and understood what you inherited, and I found it built upon the foundations of rigorous investigation." (Al-Tinbuktī, 1998, pp. 430-445)

Third: The teaching methodology of Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani

Scholars of Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif's time testified to his deep mastery and uniqueness in all fields of knowledge. The traditionist and jurist, Judge Abu Yahya al-Mutghari, said: "I attended many sessions of great scholars, but I have never seen anyone like Abu Abd Allah and, after him, his two sons." Judge Abu Mansur ibn Hidayat said: "Every jurist who studied in our time acquired whatever portion of knowledge was destined for him, except Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif, whose effort and diligence kept increasing, and God knows best where his pursuit of knowledge ultimately ended." (Al-Tinbuktī, 1998, p. 252)

The love of Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani for the profession of teaching and his mastery of its aspects led him to embrace it fully, shape it with his moral character, pass it on to his sons, and distinguish himself from all his contemporary scholars. Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif understood that if you give knowledge all of yourself, it will give you all of itself. Al-Dailami said: "Scholars are three types: a scholar who lives by his knowledge and people live through him; a scholar through whom people live but who destroys himself; and a scholar who lives by his knowledge but no one else lives by it."⁵

⁵ Quoted from Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir al-Tanlāfī, *Al-Durra al-Fākhira fī Dhikr mā Tawātara min al-'Ulamā' wa al-Ashrāf*, manuscript preserved in the Koussam Library (Adrar), folio 1. The report states: "The scholars are three: a man by whom people lived and he lived by his knowledge, a man by whom people lived while he destroyed himself, and a man who lived by his knowledge and no one else lived by it." It is attributed to Anas ibn Mālik and

Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif belongs to the first category: he lived by his knowledge and benefited people through it. He reached a high level of expertise in the sciences, which became widely known. He combined Sharia and spiritual truth, striving to master both through the most reliable methods and the most precise paths in spreading knowledge. When he spoke about knowledge of God, no one could match him. He interpreted the Qur'an over twenty-five years, producing remarkable and extraordinary insights (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, p. 172).

He knew that whoever carries knowledge in his heart needs someone to engage him through questioning, so he found no way to convey this except by taking his place at the head of teaching gatherings. His teaching sessions and study circles were never without scholars, righteous people, distinguished students, and even senior rulers. His gatherings became the scholarly authority of his time due to his broad understanding, his mastery of various sciences, and his ability to present them in a clear, smooth, and accessible manner. With eloquent language and strong expression, he attracted people's attention without confusion. He did not only master jurisprudence and its foundations, but also mastered the methodology of teaching itself, and thus his influence extended to all sciences after him (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, p. 172).

Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif gave special attention to teaching and chose it as his profession over other fields. He understood the principles of this vocation and shaped it with his moral character, until his reputation shone within it. He loved this noble profession and devoted all his time to it. Both common students and elite scholars admired him, and people came to him from all directions.

He dedicated himself to teaching and did not give importance to excessive writing and authorship. He believed that forming people is more important than writing books. In this, he was influenced by his teacher al-Abili, who used to say: "What corrupts knowledge is the abundance of writings."

This idea was also transmitted to some of his students. Ibn Khaldun considered that the abundance of written works can hinder learning. He argued that, for knowledge to be truly beneficial and for the goal of learning to be achieved, one must directly engage with scholars, as this strengthens intellectual ability and corrects concepts and information.

Therefore, the Sheikh did not focus on authorship and left behind only a limited number of works, including: "Miftah al-Wusul ila Bina' al-Furu' 'ala al-Usul" (Al-Ḥajj al-Mahdī, 1992–1993 pp. 67-68); a commentary on the abridgment of "Nihayat al-Amal fī al-Mantiq" by Afdal al-Din al-Khunjī (d. 624 AH), known as "Sharh Jumal al-Khunjī"; and a treatise on dialectics titled "Mutharat al-Ghalat fī al-Adilla," in which he aimed to clarify confusion between rational and jurisprudential evidence, highlighting issues arising between wording and meaning, making it a purely educational work. He also wrote "Al-Qada' wa al-Qadar" and "Al-Mu'awadat" (or "Al-Mu'atat"), both of which are now lost (Al-Ḥajj al-Mahdī, 1992–1993 p. 68).

transmitted by al-Albānī in *Al-Silsila al-Ḍa'īfa* (no. 3950), also recorded by al-Daylamī in *Al-Firdaws* (no. 4212) and al-Ṣan'ānī in *Al-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr* (7/394), and cited by al-Ḍiyā' al-Maqdisī through Abū Nu'aym al-Azharī. The narration is judged fabricated (*mawḍū'*) due to the presence of Yazīd al-Raqqāshī, whom al-Dhahabī reports as abandoned (*matrūk*) according to al-Nasā'ī and others. A related wording is also transmitted by 'Abd al-Razzāq through Mu'ammār, from Ayyūb, from Abū Qilābah, describing three types of scholars with similar meaning regarding their relationship to knowledge and people.

Although he did not produce many books, he shaped many hearts through knowledge. He loved teaching and devoted all his time to it for twenty-five years. Throughout his entire teaching career, he did not receive a salary; instead, he spent from his own lawful wealth.

He was a scholar who chose to dedicate his effort and life to learning and to the proper dissemination of knowledge among students. He was sparing in writing and authorship, and focused instead on forming learners and spreading various fields of knowledge and sciences (Al-Ḥajj al-Mahdī, 1992–1993 p. 69).

His grandson, Ahmad ibn Abi Yahya Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Sharif, noted this in his biography, saying: “May God have mercy on him. He was not much engaged in authorship; rather, his concern was spreading knowledge in people’s hearts and bringing them out of darkness into light. He had a large number of students, and many people benefited from him.” (Ahmad ibn Abi Yahya Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad)

Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif gave special attention to teaching and instruction, which led him to take exceptional care of his students. This resulted in a large number of people attending his circles and in the graduation of students who attained high scholarly status and contributed to spreading his reputation and knowledge. Some of them studied under him through direct companionship, while others obtained his authorization through correspondence (Muhammad Ali Farkous, p. 105).

- Abu Zayd Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun (d. 808 AH / 1405 CE)
- Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Khaldun (d. 780 AH / 1378 CE)
- Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Musa al-Lakhmi, known as al-Shatibi (d. 790 AH / 1388 CE)
- Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Yusuf, known as Ibn Zamrak the minister (d. 795 AH / 1392 CE)
- Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Masmudi (d. 805 AH / 1402 CE)
- Abu Muhammad Abd Allah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani (d. 792 AH / 1392 CE)
- Abu Yahya Abd al-Rahman al-Sharif al-Tilimsani (d. 826 AH / 1422 CE)
- Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn Qunfudh al-Qusantini (d. 810 AH / 1407 CE)
- Abu Yahya Muhammad ibn Abi al-Barakat Ibn al-Sakkak al-‘Iyadi (d. 818 AH / 1415 CE)
- Al-Khatib Abu Sa‘id Ibn Labb (d. 782 AH / 1380 CE)
- Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib (d. 776 AH / 1374 CE)

The ethics of Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif al-Tilimsani and his conduct with students

Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif devoted himself to teaching and instruction, which made him beloved by both the elite and the general public. He was a scholar who benefited from his own practice and benefited others through it. His teaching method came to be regarded as a guiding model followed by teachers and educators after him, and it can even be considered, in modern pedagogical terms, an educational approach for forming individuals, based on the following steps:

1. The love of the teacher for his students and his care for them:

This exemplary teacher took the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as his role model and followed his example in dealing with people in general and students in particular. Just as the Prophet loved his companions and those close to him, Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif loved his students and considered them the dearest of people to him. He would ask them if they had

any needs, support them if they were wronged, honor them, offer them hospitality, and fulfill their needs (Al-Ḥajj al-Mahdī, 1992–1993 pp. 70-71) .

Among these qualities, we mention an incident that demonstrates the high moral standing of this teacher and his deep concern for his students. Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, in his book *Nayl al-Ibtihaj*, reports a noble episode involving Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif when he was in the presence of Sultan Abu Inan. The Sultan asked him about Ibn al-Hajib al-Asli, and he replied that a certain student understood it better than he did. This student was poor and in need, so the Sultan sent for him, but he could not be found in Fez. The Sultan then sent to the governor of Sijilmasa ordering that the student be provided with clothing and brought immediately. When he arrived and was asked the question, he answered it correctly. When asked where he had learned it from, he replied: “From my teacher, Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif.”

2. Freedom of choice for students :

This is the second method adopted by Sheikh Abu Abd Allah, whereby he allowed his students the freedom to choose the fields of knowledge that were most accessible to them, while encouraging and motivating them. He often repeated to them his saying: “Whoever is granted a door of knowledge should stick to it.” Thus, he worked on selecting the best ways to deliver information to each student according to their level of understanding. In this way, the lesson proceeded in harmony between the student and the subject, benefiting the learner and rewarding the teacher (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, pp. 164-172).

3. Assigning students research tasks :

Sheikh Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif adopted the method of assigning students research work and encouraging them to engage in debate and questioning. He would allow space for discussion, then intervene afterward to correct and evaluate. This approach strengthens abilities and reveals students’ potential, allowing them to stand out and excel. The Sheikh also built close relationships with his students, treating them as his own close circle, addressing each one by name, encouraging them, and motivating them to pursue knowledge actively (Al-Ḥajj al-Mahdī, 1992–1993 pp. 69-70) .

4. The qualities of patience and forbearance in teaching:

These two qualities characterized the personality of the tolerant and just scholar Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif, who embodied them in all his circumstances, especially in seeking and teaching knowledge. He used to sleep for a third of the night, spend another third in reflection, and recite eight portions of the Qur’an in his prayers during the day, and the same at night. He showed great patience in reading and study; one of his close companions mentioned that he once found seventy books open in front of him. His son once said that he did not see his father for six months, as he would leave for knowledge at dawn while they were asleep and return at night while they were still asleep. He was patient with hunger but never patient with stopping reading.

Thus, he combined forbearance and knowledge, gentleness and kindness, patience and wisdom, which were reflected in his teaching profession, making the practice of knowledge a value in itself and turning him into a true master of his craft. The scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Qadir al-Tinlani said: “Knowledge is the life of Islam, the pillar of religion and faith; knowledge is the companion of the believer and reason is his guide; action is its value, forbearance its minister, patience its leader, gentleness its father, and kindness its brother. Knowledge is religion and prayer.” (Al-Tinlānī).

5. Competition and appreciation in the teaching methodology:

Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif followed the approach of his teachers. He would take pride in his most outstanding students when they demonstrated excellence, distinction, and uniqueness, thereby encouraging a spirit of healthy competition among them. He would remind them of God's saying: "And for this let the competitors compete" (Qur'an 83:26).

This is further supported by what his teachers said about him⁶ in his virtues. His teacher al-Abili said: "He is the most intellectually capable among those who studied with me and the most accomplished in achievement. I taught many students from east to west, but I have not seen more gifted than four; Abu Abd Allah al-Sharif was the most successful among them in intellect and the most accomplished in attainment..." He also said that whenever a difficult question arose among the students in his circle, he would say: "Wait for Abu Abd Allah..." His teacher Ibn al-Imam Abu Zayd also praised him, saying (Ibn-Maryam, 1908, p. 171):

**I taught him archery every day,
but when his arm grew strong, he shot me instead.**

Conclusion:

Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Sharīf did not flatter rulers or people of authority, nor did he fear blame in the cause of God. On one occasion, while he was teaching, a high-ranking minister was present and leaned toward the students, so the Shaykh publicly rebuked and reprimanded him, and the minister did not respond. He sought nothing from teaching except the pleasure of God; although rulers drew close to him, he did not seek closeness to them, and he consistently honored people of truth, supported the oppressed, and pursued no personal gain. His teaching was based on eloquence, integrity, and careful verification; whenever he addressed an issue, he devoted his entire day to clarifying it through instruction, study, and recitation. He would read approximately a quarter of a section of Qur'anic exegesis daily alongside scholarly research, and when students encountered a difficult question, he would ask them to write it down and then carefully explain and resolve it. He possessed noble character and refined manners that gave him a dignified presence, and his speech had a persuasive clarity that influenced his students and guided them toward truthfulness and the pursuit of knowledge. He also adopted a method of attentive listening to students, interpreting their words in the best possible way and presenting them clearly and effectively. Indeed, as Shaykh Abū Yaḥyā al-Mutghārī said: "I attended many gatherings of great scholars, but I have never seen ..."

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⁶ These testimonies concerning the teachers of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Sharīf are mentioned in all the biographical works that translated his life, including, but not limited to: Aḥmad Bābā al-Tinbuktī, *Nayl al-Ibtihāj* (previous source), p. 440; Ibn Maryam, *Al-Bustān* (previous source), pp. 164, 172.

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