

Ascent to Felicity: A Technical Analysis of Shurunbulali's Manual on Islamic Creed and Hanafi Jurisprudence

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In the expansive landscape of Islamic legal literature, few texts manage to balance brevity with comprehensive legal rigor as effectively as **Maraqi 'I-Sa'adat**, known in the English-speaking world as **Ascent to Felicity**. Authored by the 11th-century (Hijri) polymath **Imam Abu 'I-Ikhlās al-Shurunbulali**, this manual serves as a fundamental primer for students of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence (madhhab). For the modern practitioner and the technical researcher alike, understanding this text requires more than a cursory reading of ritual; it demands a deep dive into the **theoretical framework** of Hanafi legal reasoning and the theological foundations of the Islamic creed (Aqidah).

The Scholarly Context of Imam al-Shurunbulali

Imam Abu 'I-Ikhlās Hasan bin 'Ammar al-Shurunbulali (d. 1069 AH / 1659 CE) was a preeminent jurist of the Ottoman era, teaching at the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo. His contributions to the Hanafi school are monumental, with his work *Nur al-Idah* (The Light of Clarification) remaining a standard textbook for centuries. **Ascent to Felicity** represents a more refined pedagogical approach, integrating both **theological tenets** and **practical legal applications** into a single cohesive manual. This integration is crucial because, in the Hanafi tradition, correct action (Fiqh) is inextricably linked to sound belief (Aqidah).

Part I: Theoretical Framework of Islamic Creed (Aqidah)

Before delving into the mechanics of law, *Ascent to Felicity* establishes the **ontological and epistemological foundations** of Islam. The text follows the **Maturidi** school of theology, which is the predominant theological school followed by Hanafis.

Technical Definitions of Belief

- Knowledge of God (Ma'rifatullah):** The text delineates the mandatory attributes of the Divine, categorized into Sifat al-Salbiyya (Attributes of Negation, such as Pre-eternity) and Sifat al-Ma'ani (Attributes of Meaning, such as Power and Knowledge).
- Prophethood (Nubuwwah):** Shurunbulali outlines the necessary qualities of Prophets—truthfulness, trustworthiness, and the delivery of the message—and the impossibility of their opposites.
- The Hereafter (Sam'iyat):** This involves matters known only through revelation, such as the questioning in the grave, the scales (Mizan), and the bridge (Sirat).

The manual utilizes a **deductive logical structure**. It posits that a sound understanding of the Creator is the prerequisite for the validity of worship. Without the "intent" (niyyah) rooted in correct creed, the physical actions of jurisprudence are legally void (batil) in the metaphysical sense.

Part II: Technical Analysis of Hanafi Jurisprudence (Fiqh)

Hanafi Fiqh is characterized by its sophisticated use of **Istihsan** (juristic preference) and **Qiyas** (analogical reasoning). *Ascent to Felicity* simplifies these complex methodologies into actionable rules for the layperson and the student. The manual primarily covers **'Ibadat** (acts of worship), which are the technical interactions between the

individual and the Divine.

1. The Mechanics of Ritual Purification (Taharah)

Purification is the "key to prayer." Shurunbulali provides a technical breakdown of **water classification** and its legal status for purification. This is not merely about hygiene but about the **legal state of purity** (Taharah).

Water Classification	Legal Status (Hukm)	Practical Application
Absolute Water (Ma' Mutlaq)	Pure and Purifying	Rain, sea, well water; used for Wudu/ Ghusl.
Used Water (Ma' Musta'mal)	Pure but not Purifying	Water already used for a mandatory ritual act.
Mixed Water (Ma' Mukhtalat)	Conditional	Purifying if the original characteristics remain dominant.
Impure Water (Ma' Najis)	Impure and Non-purifying	Water containing visible or invisible filth (Najasah).

2. The Architecture of Prayer (Salah)

The technical execution of prayer in the Hanafi school is divided into **Arkan** (Integrals), **Wajib** (Necessary actions), and **Sunnan** (Recommended actions). A failure in an *Rukn* (Integral) renders the prayer void, while a failure in a *Wajib* requires a **Prostration of Forgetfulness** (Sajdah al-Sahw).

Technical Breakdown of Prayer Components:

- Takbir Tahrimah: The opening declaration. Technically, it is a condition (shart) that enters the worshipper into a state of sanctity.
- Qiyam (Standing): Mandatory for those physically capable. The manual defines the minimum duration and posture.
- Qira'at (Recitation): In the Hanafi school, the minimum recitation is one long verse or three short verses of the Quran.
- Ruku' and Sujud: The physical geometry of the prayer is specified to ensure uniformity and legal validity.

Part III: Operational Workflows: Zakat, Sawm, and Hajj

Beyond daily rituals, *Ascent to Felicity* provides the **mathematical and temporal frameworks** for the pillars of Zakat (Almsgiving) and Sawm (Fasting).

The Zakat Calculation Model

Zakat is not a simple percentage of income but a 2.5% tax on **surplus wealth** held for a lunar year (Hawl). The manual defines **Nisab**—the minimum threshold of wealth—using the historical metrics of gold and silver.

- Nisab for Gold: 20 Mithqals (~87.48 grams).
- Nisab for Silver: 200 Dirhams (~612.36 grams).
- Exclusions: Primary residences, tools of trade, and basic necessities are excluded from the calculation (Hajat al-Asliyya).

The Legal Parameters of Fasting (Sawm)

Shurunbulali categorizes the invalidators of fasting into two technical groups: those requiring **Qada** (make-up fast) and those requiring **Kaffarah** (expiation). This distinction is a hallmark of the Hanafi school's nuanced approach to legal liability (Dhaman).

Part IV: Practical Implementation and Field Guide

For a student utilizing *Ascent to Felicity* as a field guide, the following **step-by-step procedure** for determining

legal validity is essential:

Step 1: Assessing Legal Capacity (Ahliyyah)

Before a ruling (hukm) applies, the individual must possess **Ahliyyah al-Ada'** (Capacity for Execution). This requires being of sound mind (Aql) and having reached puberty (Bulugh).

Step 2: Identifying the Nature of the Act

One must determine if the act is **Fard** (Strictly Obligatory), **Wajib** (Necessary), or **Mandub** (Recommended). The Hanafi school is unique in distinguishing between Fard and Wajib based on the strength of the textual evidence (Qat'i vs. Dhanni).

Step 3: Verification of Conditions (Shurut)

Every act of worship has conditions that must exist *before* the act begins. For example, for Salah, the conditions include **Waq**t (Time), **Taharah** (Purity), **Satr al-'Awrah** (Covering), and **Qiblah** (Direction).

Part V: Case Studies and Troubleshooting

In technical jurisprudence, "troubleshooting" refers to **Sajdah al-Sahw** (Prostration of Forgetfulness) and **Qada** (Making up missed acts). *Ascent to Felicity* provides a logic-based approach to errors.

Case Study: Error in Prayer Sequence

Scenario: A worshipper forgets the first sitting (Qa'dah al-Ula) in a four-rak'ah prayer. **Solution:** The manual dictates that if the worshipper has already stood up, they should not return to the sitting position. Instead, they complete the prayer and perform two prostrations before the final salams. This corrects the deficiency caused by omitting a **Wajib** action.

Common Failure Modes in Purification:

- The Doubt Factor:** Shurunbulali applies the legal maxim: "Certainty is not overruled by doubt." If one is certain they performed Wudu but doubts if they broke it, the Wudu remains valid.
- Excessive Water Usage:** The text highlights that using water beyond the three-wash limit is Makruh (disliked), emphasizing the balance between ritual precision and resource conservation.

Comparative Analysis Table: Hanafi vs. Other Major Schools

While *Ascent to Felicity* focuses on the Hanafi school, understanding its technical standing requires a comparison of key ritual nuances.

Feature	Hanafi (Shurunbulali)	Shafi'i / Maliki / Hanbali
Recitation in Prayer	Recitation of any Quranic verse suffices for validity.	Recitation of Surah al-Fatihah is an absolute integral (Rukn).
Wudu Sequence	Sequence (Tartib) is a Sunnah, not an integral.	Sequence is an integral; Wudu is void if out of order.
Wajib vs. Fard	Maintains a distinct category between the two.	Generally treats Wajib and Fard as synonymous.
Intention (Niyyah) for Wudu	Recommended (Sunnah) but not a condition for validity.	Condition (Shart) for the validity of the purification.

Summary and Broader Implications

The **Ascent to Felicity** is more than a 17th-century artifact; it is a meticulously engineered blueprint for Islamic living. By condensing the vast ocean of Hanafi Fiqh into a structured manual, Imam al-Shurunbulali provided a tool that remains relevant for the 21st-century practitioner. The text's emphasis on **clarity, hierarchy of evidence, and practical remediation** makes it a foundational document for anyone seeking to understand the mechanics of Islamic law.

For the technical writer and the student of knowledge, the manual demonstrates that jurisprudence is not a collection of arbitrary rules, but a **logical system** designed to facilitate the "ascent" of the human soul through disciplined, correct, and intentional action. The integration of **Aqidah** ensures that the "how" of ritual is always supported by the "why" of belief, creating a holistic framework for spiritual and legal excellence. In an era of information overload, the structured, authoritative, and concise nature of *Maraqi 'l-Sa'adat* continues to serve as an essential guide for navigating the complexities of faith and practice.

Tags: #Hanafi Fiqh #Imam al Shurunbulali #Islamic Creed #Maraqi 'l Sa'adat #Islamic Manuals

