

MIFTAAH SEMINAR

HUJJATUL ISLAM: IMAM GHAZALI



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SESSION 1

The Life of Imam Al-Ghazali

- In his commentary on the first ayah ever revealed, ayah 1 of Surah Al-Qalam, he stated: there are two types of reading: reading the written form of revelation (the Quran) and reading the unwritten form of revelation (the universe).
 - In several ayahs in the Quran Allah SWT orders us to look at the world around us and ponder about it.
 - Through this commentary we see that Imam Ghazali had a clear meaning of this word **إقرأ** (read).
- Imam Ghazali was born in 450 AH and he died in 505 AH.
- He was from Persia, or modern day Iran.
- He was born into a poor family.
 - His father sold wool for a living.
- Al-Ghazali's father passed away at an early stage of his life.
 - He had two children: Al-Ghazali and his brother, Ahmad.
 - He wanted to entrust his children to a righteous guardian so he chose one of the righteous Suffis that he knew to be their guardian after he passed away.

- He told this person that he regretted the fact that he did not seek knowledge because he was busy with other matters of life and that he wished that the money he was leaving would be spent on both of his sons so that they can seek knowledge.
- The money that their father left was not much so it was used up in a short period of time.
- The righteous man who was now their guardian was also poor and he did not have any more money to spend on them, so he told them that they should apply to get a scholarship from one of the schools so that they could continue gaining knowledge and also be taken care of.
- Later on Ghazali reflected on this incident and he stated that he knew their intention was not purely for the sake of Allah because they went to the school so that they could be given financial support and not just to gain knowledge.
- Ghazali said: We sought knowledge not for the sake of Allah but Allah SWT forced us to make this knowledge for His sake.
 - He began to study fiqh with a Shafi'i scholar.
- Scholars would give the advice that a person should exhaust all of their local resources of knowledge before they travel to seek knowledge.
- Al-Ghazali applied this advice and he studied fiqh in his city.

- When he finished with his scholar he traveled to another city and studied with a scholar named Abu Nasr Al-Ismaeli.
 - One of the famous books in the Shafi'i school of thought at that time was called Al-Ta'leeqa and he studied this book with this scholar.
- After studying this book, he decided to go back to his hometown.
- On his journey, a group of highway robbers attacked the caravan which he was travelling with. They took something from every person in the group. Imam Ghazali only had a backpack with him so they took it. As they began running away Al-Ghazali began to chase them. The robbers saw him and threatened to kill him if he did not leave. Al-Ghazali continued to chase them and he begged them to give him his notebooks and take anything else. The robber asked him what was in the notebook and he told him that it was his notes from the book Al-Ta'leeqa which he studied with his teacher. The robber laughed at him and said: "How can you claim that you have knowledge when we have just taken it from you. You have been separated from this knowledge and that means that you don't have it." Then he gave Al-Ghazali the notebook.

- This incident changed the mentality of Al-Ghazali. He realized that he had been simply taking notes without actually learning the knowledge.
- Ghazali said after this moment: The words of this robber were a sign from Allah SWT.
- When he arrived in his hometown he spent 3 years memorizing the knowledge that he had gained from that scholar so that if he was robbed again it could not be taken from him.
- Then he moved to another city in Iran called Neysabor.
- Here he had the opportunity of learning with one of the greatest Imams at that time named Imam Al-Juwayni.
 - Al-Juwayni was given the title of Imam Ul-Haramain because he spent time teaching in both Mecca and Madinah.
 - He studied with Imam Al-Juwayni for 8 years.
- Imam Al-Juwayni said about Al-Ghazali that he was a copious ocean of knowledge.
 - When Imam Al-Juwayni passed away, Imam Al-Ghazali left to join Nizam al-Mulk which was the court of the Seljuk sultans.
- This was a gathering place for scholars.
 - It consisted of the most brilliant scholars of the time.
 - It was where scholars would debate and discuss any issues of the time.

- The sultan wanted to appoint Al-Ghazali as a professor, so he sent him to Baghdad to be a professor in the Nizamiyah.
 - He became very popular because of his style of teaching and the amount of knowledge that he had.
- He became very famous in a short span of time (about 4 years).
- He had over 300 dedicated students during this time.
- All of a sudden he decided to isolate himself from everyone and he stopped teaching.
- He wanted to contemplate what he was doing and if his intentions were pure.
- He was skeptical of the purpose of his life and the purpose of everything that he was being offered in his life.
- Essentially, he was undergoing a spiritual crisis.
- He publicly announced that he would be going for Hajj but he did not reveal to everyone that he would not be coming back after he finished.
- He left all of his wealth and went to Damascus for a short period of time and then he went to Masjid Al-Aqsa in Palestine.
- He lived in the area of Masjid Al-Aqsa.
 - This was known as Jiwaar.
 - Scholars would live very close to the masjid with the purpose of learning or teaching in the masjid.

- Then he came back to Damascus and did itikaaf in a small area of Masjid Al-Umawi.
- He disappeared from the intellectual scene for about 10 years.
 - Noone knew where he was or if he was teaching.
 - He did not want to return to the public life and he was very strict about this.
 - One scholar said: While Al-Ghazali was in Damascus he entered one of the schools and overheard a teacher quoting one of his teachings. When he heard his name being mentioned in the classroom he left the entire city.
 - This was how strict he was about protecting his heart from any feelings of arrogance or pride.
- He continued to wander different countries.
 - He went to Egypt and several other countries.
 - He planned to go to Morocco because he heard of a very famous sultan named Yusuf ibn Ul-Tashafeen.
 - This sultan was very strict in his religious views.
 - When Al-Ghazali heard that he was a just ruler, he wanted to visit him, however he didn't end up going to visit him.
- Eventually he returned to Baghdad, but he did not take on the position that he was in before he left.
 - He had a gathering in which he would remind people of Allah and having taqwa.
 - This would be a spiritual gathering.

- He also started writing and teaching his most famous work, Ihya' Uloom Ul-Deen, Reviving the Religious Sciences.
- This 10 year time period which he spent away can be classified in two stages:
 - The first 2 years were spent in the East of Syria and doing Hajj.
 - The remaining time was spent in Baghdad.

His Most Famous Work: Ihya' Uloom Ul-Deen

- The style of writing at this time was that a scholar would discuss a specific concept, then mention an ayah from the Quran which supported the concept, then mention various ahadith which supported the concept, and then mention various supporting evidences.
- Imam Al-Iraqi clarified all of the hadith used in Ghazali's work in terms of which ones were strong and which were weak.
 - He said that Imam Ghazali's book was one of the most prominent books in the deen in regards to halal and haram matters.
- This book also had a component of fiqh in it.
 - The way that fiqh was incorporated in this book was different than any other book of Ghazali's.
 - Ghazali combined the fiqh ruling along with the spiritual manifestations of those rulings.

- He would state what the halal or haram thing was and then he would explain why it was halal or haram.
- For example, when he spoke about salah he would mention the various steps to prayer and he would mention why we have to do each specific step (why we raise our hands when we say allahu akbar, why we make wudu, etc.).
- This book was classified into 4 main sections and each section was split into 10 chapters.
- The 4 sections were titled:
 - The Quarter on Acts of Worship
 - The Quarter of Habits and Customs
 - This was on things that were not acts of worship but were still a part of Islamic law.
 - The Quarter on Acts Which Will Save You From the Punishments of Allah SWT
 - The Quarter on Acts Which Will Ruin A Person
 - This was on things that will bring on punishment of Allah SWT.
- Imam Al-Ghazali realized that everything in this life is about Allah SWT.
- Everything which we do or abandon is for Allah SWT.
- If a person is not content with the decree of Allah SWT then they are not content with Allah Himself.

- He said that Allah SWT gives every person tests and blessings in their life and a person's role is to react correctly in both situations.
- Through this book he wanted to explain how the nafs (inner soul) of a person worked.
- The concept of being tested in this life and how a person should react to these tests is clear in this book and this was meant to change the one who reads it.
- This book had immense impacts on scholars and people of knowledge throughout history.
- One scholar said: The one who does not read The Revival is one who is not revived (not alive).
- Imam Ghazali concluded this book with the chapter on death.
- This was to remind the reader that there is always the possibility of death and no one knows when they will die.
- It also reminded the reader that everything leads to death but the only thing which leads to a good death is having Ihsan.
- Imam Al-Ghazali dedicated the first part of the book to be specifically about knowledge and the virtues of knowledge.
- He discussed two aspects of knowledge which are:
 - The knowledge which every individual Muslim must know

- This includes what Muslims should know in terms of fiqh (laws) and aqeedah (creed) and how they lead the heart to spiritual excellence.
- The knowledge which the Muslim community as a whole should know
- This is what makes the Muslim ummah thrive on a communal level.
- It includes math, sciences, and various talents and skills.
- The community needs people who provide these resources in order to be a successful community.
- These are things that perhaps Allah SWT will question the community about if they fall short of fulfilling them.
- This secondary knowledge must be obtained after the primary knowledge of each individual is fulfilled.

Imam Ghazali's Intellectual Journey

- What made Al-Ghazali special was that he encompassed the knowledge of Quran and Sunnah, but at the same time he was well versed in philosophy.
 - He understood what motivated the society that he lived in.
- He encountered a problem with his situation on a social, political, and academic level.

- He interacted with several different academic forces at that time including:
 - The Mu'tazilahs
 - The Baatiniyah
 - A group which scholars considered their thoughts to be unislamic.
 - He had a lot of interaction with them and he wrote a book titled The Scandals of the Baatiniyah (Fadaih Ul-Baatiniyah).
 - The Philosophers
 - He wrote a book titled The Incoherence of the Philosophers after his interactions with them.
 - The Suffis
 - The Jurists
- After interacting with all of the various groups of scholars and people, he went through a time of skepticism and doubt.
- His skepticism occurred in stages.
 - He was first skeptical about which of all of the groups were correct or most authentic.
 - He decided that he was not a follower and that he needed to find the answers on his own.
 - He stated that he would exclusively use his intellect and his senses to make decisions.
 - Then he became skeptical of his senses.
 - He said that senses may give a person the wrong perception of things.

- After some time he stated that he began to doubt his intellect as well.
 - Upon leaving the internal and external senses he began to question if there was anything greater than the intellect that would lead to more authentic judgements.
- This skepticism occurred at the beginning of the 10 year period in which he disappeared from the public eye.
 - Imam Ibn Ul-Arab Al-Maaliki, who was a judge and a great scholar of the Maaliki school of thought, interacted with Al-Ghazali several times.
- He said that he was once walking in the desert when he saw Al-Ghazali with a staff in his hand and a pot on his shoulder and he was wearing a patched cloak. When he saw him in that condition he was astonished because he saw the same person sitting in Baghdad and teaching people and in front of him were 400 turbans of the highest class of people in Baghdad taking knowledge from him. He walked up to Al-Ghazali in the desert and said salam to him. He then said to Ghazali, "Isn't teaching knowledge in Baghdad better than this situation which you are in now?" Al-Ghazali looked down at him and said, "when the full moon of happiness has risen in the horizon of desire and will, then the sun of reason approaches the setting place of attainment."

- Then Al-Ghazali continued and stated a beautiful couplet of poetry. He said, "I abandoned the love of Laila and my happiness was far away and I returned to the companionship of the very first place which I started from. My desires called out to me gently and they said 'wait, hold on. Those are the sanctions of the ones who you love, so go slowly (spend some time here).'"
 - This piece of poetry was metaphorical. There was not actually a person named Laila in his life and he didn't really go back to the literal place which he started in.
- Al-Ghazali continued and began to reference Baghdad saying, "I had spun a fine thread for them and I didn't find a reader for my thread, so I broke my spindle."
 - This reference is saying that he found that all of the fame, teaching, students, and money were fake.
- After his whole journey, he concluded that the sources of knowledge are two things:
- The basic knowledge of the intellect
 - This includes the physical sources of knowledge like Hadith, Quran, and Sunnah.
- The light of spiritual knowledge which is the guidance from Allah SWT
- He stated that these two sources can not be separated from one another.

- Although the intellect is the highest level of knowledge, it can not survive without the light of spirituality from Allah SWT.
- He would describe the intellect as the sight of the eye and spirituality as the light of the sun which gives the eyes the light that they need to see.
- He looked at all of the philosophies during that time and then decided what the philosophy of Islam was.

Al-Ghazali's Contributions to Important Spiritual Concepts

- The concept of fitrah, or natural purity which a person is born with, is discussed extensively amongst scholars.
 - External factors influence this natural purity and cause several internal diseases and spiritual problems within a person.
 - These external factors can bring a person to deviate from the path of Allah SWT.
 - The Prophet SAW said: Allah SWT did not send down a disease except that He sent a cure with it, so seek remedies oh servants of Allah.
 - Scholars reflected on this hadith and concluded that it has a command from the Prophet SAW to seek the remedies of diseases.
- Scholars debated whether this command was an obligation or a recommendation.

- By definition, when there is a command in hadith it can either be an obligation to do that act or a recommendation.
- Scholars also discussed whether his hadith included both physical and spiritual diseases or just physical diseases.
- They concluded that it is in reference to both.
- Scholars agreed that when it comes to spiritual diseases, this command is an obligation.
- There is an obligation to find the cure to spiritual diseases.
- They also agreed that when it comes to physical diseases, this command is a recommendation.
- Scholars then discussed whether humans are born with spiritual diseases or if these diseases are acquired through external factors.
- The majority of scholars concluded that every human was born pure and without any spiritual diseases.
 - They based this conclusion off of several hadith and verses from the Quran.
- Imam Al-Ghazali went against the majority when it came to this belief.
- He believed that a person was born with spiritual diseases and that Allah SWT cures them from these diseases through one of two things:
 - Either by choosing that person to be a prophet
 - Or by choosing that person to be a guided person

- He looked at the story of the Prophet SAW when he was a young boy and the two angels split his chest and cleansed his heart.
 - From this story he took that since the Prophet SAW had something in his heart which needed to be cleansed, then every human must have some spiritual diseases in their heart.
- From this we see how concerned Imam Al-Ghazali was with coming to the most authentic conclusions possible.
- We also understand where his emphasis on remedies for spiritual diseases came from.
 - He was one of the most prominent scholars in terms of offering cures for diseases of the heart.
- Scholars concluded that they could agree on their differences and stated that there was a difference between having the ability to acquire these diseases and actually having these diseases.
- The angels removed the potential of acquiring these diseases from the heart of the Prophet SAW but this does not mean that he actually had any spiritual diseases.
- This way both opinions were relevant and accepted.
- Imam Ghazali said: If you studied knowledge for 100 years and you grasped 1000 books, you can not be potentially able to acquire the Mercy of Allah SWT except through practice and actions.

The Death of Imam Al-Ghazali

- Ahmad, the brother of Ghazali, narrated the condition in which Al-Ghazali passed away.
- He stated that Al-Ghazali made wudu and prayed fajr on a Monday morning. After he prayed he said that he needed his kafan (the shroud/cloth for a dead body). He took the kafan, kissed it, and put it on his head and eyes. Then he said, "I listen and obey and welcome the angel of death". Then he laid down and passed away.
- This shows how connected he was with Allah SWT.

