

Imam Al-Ghazali (1058 – 1111)

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- Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Tusi al-Ghazali.
- Ghazali was one of the greatest and most original thinkers in Islam.
- He was a prominent individual in society, being a teacher and a prolific writer with immense intellectual position.
- Influencing Islamic thought and defining its practice for nearly nine centuries.
- Often referred to as the 'Proof of Islam'. This indicates the high regard there is for him and his ongoing influence.

Historical Context

- Al Ghazali was born in 1058 AD in Tus, which lies within the Khorasan Province of Persia (Iran).
- He started to learn about Islam at the age of 7 by attending the local madrasa (school).
- He studied Arabic, Persian, the Qur'an and the principles of religion.



Historical Context

- He went on to intermediate and higher education at a *madrasa*.
- Here he studied *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Quran'ic exegesis) and *hadith* (Prophetic tradition).
- Towards the age of fifteen, Al-Ghazali moved to Jurjan to study *fiqh*.
- He then moved to Nishapur, where he studied *fiqh*, *kalam* (scholastic theology), logic and, possibly, some philosophy. Al-Ghazzali was 23 at the time.
- He also began to write and study Sufism.

Historical Context

- At the age of 28 he moved on travelling to meet Nizam ul-Mulk, the Seljuq minister, and remained with him in his 'camp' for six years, during which time he lived the life of a 'court jurist'.
- He took part in political and learned disputes and wrote books until he was appointed as a professor to the Nizamiya *madrassa* at Baghdad, the most celebrated and important centre of science and teaching in the *Mashriq* (Islamic East) at that time.
- He worked there for 4 years.

The Struggles in the Muslim World

- Al-Ghazali played an important role in three political and intellectual controversies which were raging in the Islamic world at that time:
 - the struggle between philosophy and religion (between Islamic and Greek culture), in which he took the side of religion against philosophy;
 - the struggle between the Sunnites and the Shi'ites, in which he defended the 'Abbasid Caliphate against the Batinites; and
 - the struggle between revelation and reason... and between *fiqh* and Sufi mysticism.

Philosophy vs Religion

- Al-Ghazzali resolved the conflict between philosophy and religion by maintaining that philosophy was correct in as far as it agreed with the principles of (Islamic) religion, and was flawed wherever it was at variance with it.
- Wrote the book titled *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. He summed up his opposition to the philosophers in twenty major points, dealing with God, the universe and man.
- This greatly weakened philosophy in the Muslim world.

Sunnites vs Shi'ites

- As military and intellectual confrontation flared up between the Sunnites and the Shi'ites, and between the 'Abbasid Caliphate and the Fatimid State and its supporters.
- His main attack was on the infallibility of the imams which is an important part of Shi'te understanding.

Historical Context

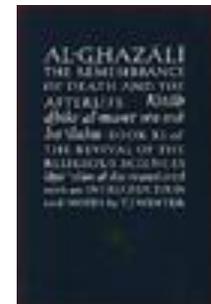
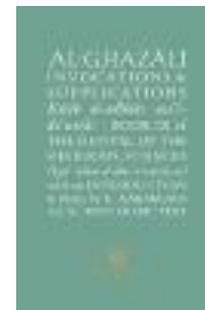
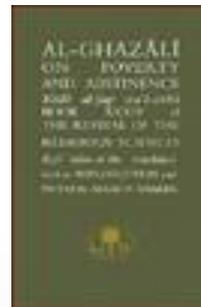
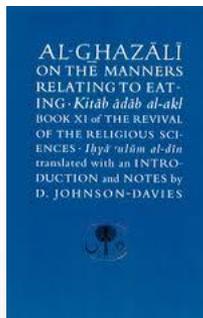
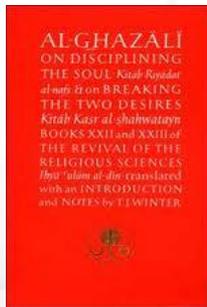
- In 1095, at the age of 38, Al-Ghazali suddenly underwent a six-month-long spiritual crisis; internal conflict between rational intelligence and the spirit, between this world and the hereafter.
- He began by doubting the validity of existing doctrines and schools (knowledge as such), and eventually came to question the efficacy of the tools of knowledge.
- This crisis brought on a physical illness which prevented him from speaking or teaching, finally caused him to leave his post and renounce wealth, fame and influence.

Reason vs Sufism

- Al-Ghazali spent nearly two years in seclusion and wandering between Damascus, Jerusalem and Mecca.
- In the end, he came to prefer Sufism and revelation (inspiration).
- It was during this period that he began work on his most important book; *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences).
 - 4 volumes
 - 1500 pages
 - Deals with devotional practice, social customs, the causes of spiritual decline and the means of salvation.

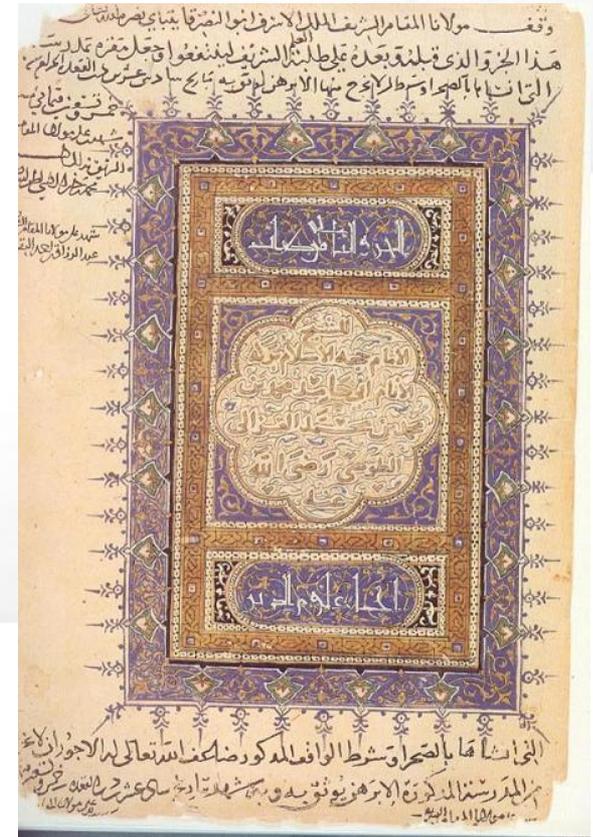
Al Ghazali's Impact on Sufism

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Page from another manuscript of *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*

Al Ghazali's Impact on Sufism

- Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism that seeks to rid oneself of the ego, will and self-centred actions and thought to seek God's pleasure.
- As a result of his support, Sufism gained momentum in mainstream Islam. Sufism for Al Ghazali bridged the gap between the current transient world and the world of the hereafter.
- Al Ghazali reconciled Shari'a and Sufi mysticism at a time when Sufism was being rejected as being un-Islamic.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Sufism

- He defined Sufism as: “two things: truthfulness with God Almighty and good conduct with people. Anyone who practices these two things is a Sufi”.
- He stated, “The Sufi path consists in cleansing the heart from whatever is other than God... I concluded that the Sufis are the seekers in God's Way, and their conduct is the best conduct, and their way is the best way, and their manners are the most sanctified. They have cleansed their hearts from other than God and they have made them as pathways for rivers to run, carrying the knowledge of God”.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Sufism

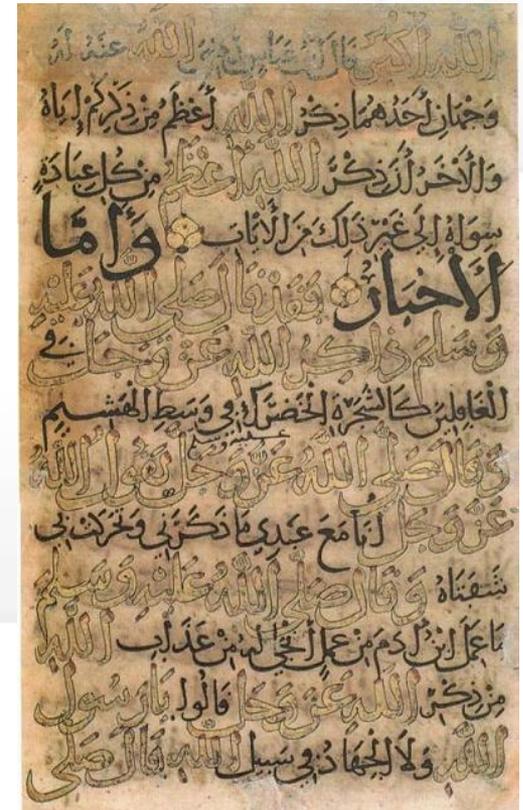
- Al Ghazali's *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (four volumes) is one of the most widely read books in Islam
- It has become one of the most influential books of all time.
- It was translated into Latin and Hebrew and influenced many of the scholarly texts that are still used today in Christianity and Judaism.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Philosophy

- Al Ghazali's book titled *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* marks a major turn in Islamic philosophy in its strong rejections of Aristotle and Plato.
- Al Ghazali bitterly denounced Aristotle, Socrates and other Greek writers as non-believers and labelled those who employed their methods and ideas as corrupters of the Islamic faith.
- Some have argued that Ghazali killed the progress of science as a result of his attacks on philosophy.
- However, this is not quite accurate – as Islam's progress continued and even increased after his time.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Education

- Al Ghazali influenced Islamic education by providing theories outlining the aim of education, the paths to be followed and the means by which objectives can be achieved
- From the 12-13th century AD, Islamic thinking in education was heavily influenced by Al Ghazali.



Page from the manuscript of *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revival of the sciences of religion)

Al Ghazali's Impact on Kalam (Theology)

- Greek philosophical ideas had entered the realm of Islamic Theology and this had tainted the image of *kalam* – hence the negative attitude towards *kalam*.
- Before Ghazali's time there were great debates, and even sects that were formed.
- Central to this debate was the role of reason (*'aql*) in theology in particular and religion in general.
- The *Mu'tazilite* school, who placed reason as the central filtering tool to understand religion was of concern.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Kalam (Theology)

- Ghazali was a follower of the *Asharite* school.
- While the leader of this school of Abu Hasal al-Ashari defined the perimeters of orthodox belief Ghazali not only 'hit the nail over the coffin' – but he also took the subject matter into the realm of spirituality and Sufism.
- Other than this – he helped shaping the criteria of determining orthodox faith and argued against sectarianism and *takfir* – through works such as *faysal tafriqa* and *Ijlam al-awwam* 'an 'ilm al-kalam.
- He helped contribute to plural nature of Sunni Islam.

Al Ghazali's Impact on *Mantiq* (Logic)

- Through his books such as *Miyar al-'ilm* and *Qistas al-Mustaqim*, Ghazali argued for the importance of logic
- “I would not trust the knowledge of someone who does not know *mantiq* (logic)”
- His contribution was unique – because he derived key logical principles directly from the verses of the Qur'an.
- Though famous scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Al-Suyuti rejected the science of *mantiq*.
- *Mantiq* entered the curriculum of *madrasas* (Islamic learning centres) across the Muslim world for centuries that followed.

Al-Ghazzali and Philosophy

- To further appreciate the context to which Al Ghazali's works was revealed, Ibn al-Subki wrote:
- “He came at a time when people stood in dire need of replies against the philosophers than the darkest night stands in need of the light of the moon and stars.”

In Summary

- The influence of Al Ghazali on Islamic thought may be summed up as follows:
- He reinstated the 'principle of fear' in religious thinking and emphasized the role of the Creator as the centre around which human life revolves, and an agent intervening directly and continuously in the course of human affairs (once the 'principle of love' had gained supremacy among the Sufis).
- He introduced several principles of logic and philosophy (despite his attacks on those subjects) into the disciplines of *fiqh* and *kalam*.

In Summary

- He reconciled *shari'a* and Sufi mysticism (the *fuqaha'* and the Sufis) and contributed to the spread of Sufi brotherhoods.
- He defended Sunnite Islam against the tenets of philosophy and Shi'ism.
- He contributed to the weakening of philosophy and the natural sciences.

Al Ghazali Today

- Today his works still form major parts of curriculums in Islamic studies around the world.
- Unfortunately, a recent trend has arisen where Muslims who are influenced by the *Salafi* thinking – do not appear to be big fans of Imam Ghazali.
- Ironically, the debate over the orthodoxy of Sufism still continues in the mind of many Muslims.
- Ghazali is seen as a source of inspiration for both those who choose to follow a path (*tariqa*) and those who do not.