

## ABU HAMID AL-GHAZALI (1058-1128 A.D.)

Abu Hamid Ibn Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Tusi al-Shafi'i al-Ghazali was born in 1058 A.D. in Khorasan, Iran. His father died while he was still very young but he had the opportunity of getting education in the prevalent curriculum at Nishapur and Baghdad. Soon he acquired a high standard of scholarship in religion and philosophy and was honoured by his appointment as a Professor at the Nizamiyah University of Baghdad, which was recognised as one of the most reputed institutions of learning in the golden era of Muslim history.

After a few years, however, he gave up his academic pursuits and worldly interests and became a wandering ascetic. This was a process (period) of mystical transformation. Later, he resumed his teaching duties, but again left these. An era of solitary life, devoted to contemplation and writing then ensued, which led to the authorship of a number of everlasting books. He died in 1128 A.D. at Baghdad.

Ghazali's major contribution lies in religion, philosophy and sufism. A number of Muslim philosophers had been following and developing several viewpoints of Greek philosophy, including the Neoplatonic philosophy, and this was leading to conflict with several Islamic teachings. On the other hand, the movement of sufism was assuming such excessive proportions as to avoid observance of obligatory prayers and duties of Islam. Based on his unquestionable scholarship and personal mystical experience, Ghazali sought to rectify these trends, both in philosophy and sufism.

In philosophy, Ghazali upheld the approach of mathematics and exact sciences as essentially correct. However, he adopted the techniques of Aristotelian logic and the Neoplatonic procedures and employed these very tools to lay bare the flaws and lacunas of the then prevalent Neoplatonic philosophy and to diminish the negative influences of Aristotelianism and excessive rationalism. In contrast to some of the Muslim philosophers, e.g., *Farabi*, he portrayed the inability of reason to comprehend *the absolute* and *the infinite*. Reason could not transcend the finite and was limited to the observation of the relative. Also, several Muslim philosophers had held that the universe was finite in space but infinite in time. Ghazali argued that an infinite time was related to an infinite space. With his clarity of thought and force of argument, he was able to create a balance between religion and reason, and identified their respective spheres as being the infinite and the finite, respectively.

In religion, particularly mysticism, he cleansed the approach of sufism of its excesses and reestablished the authority of the orthodox religion. Yet, he stressed the importance of genuine sufism, which he maintained was the path to attain the absolute truth.

He was a prolific writer. His immortal books include *Tuhafut al-Falasifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), *Ihya al-'Ulum al-Islamia* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), "The Beginning of Guidance and his Autobiography", "Deliverance from Error". Some of his works were translated into European languages in the Middle Ages. He also wrote a summary of astronomy.

Ghazali's influence was deep and everlasting. He is one of the greatest theologians of Islam. His theological doctrines penetrated Europe, influenced Jewish and Christian Scholasticism and several of his arguments seem to have been adopted by St. Thomas Aquinas in order to similarly reestablish the authority of

orthodox Christian religion in the West. So forceful was his argument in the favour of religion that he was accused of damaging the cause of philosophy and, in the Muslim Spain, [Ibn Rushd](#) (Averros) wrote a rejoinder to his *Tuhafut*.

## Imam al-Ghazzali

**By Dr. G.F. Haddad**

Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad, Abu Hamid al-Tusi al-Ghazzali [or al-Ghazali] al-Shafi'i (450-505), "the Proof of Islam" (Hujjat al-Islam), "Ornament of the Faith," "Gatherer of the Multifarious Sciences," "Great Siddiq," absolute mujtahid, a major Shafi'i jurist, heresiographer and debater, expert in the principles of doctrine and those of jurisprudence. Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi stated that, like 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz and al-Shafi'i for their respective times, al-Ghazzali is unanimously considered the Renewer of the Fifth Islamic Century. Ibn al-Subki writes: "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."

Among his teachers in law, debate, and principles: Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Radhakani in Tus, Abu Nasr al-Isma'ili in Jurjan, and Imam al-Haramayn Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni in Naysabur, from where he departed to Baghdad after the latter's death. Ibn 'Asakir also mentions that al-Ghazzali took al-Bukhari's Sahih from Abu Sahl Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Hafsi. Among his other shaykhs in hadith were Nasr ibn 'Ali ibn Ahmad al-Hakimi al-Tusi, 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Khawari, Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn Muhammad al-Suja'i al-Zawzani, the hadith master Abu al-Fityan 'Umar ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Ru'asi al-Dahistani, and Nasr ibn Ibrahim al-Maqdisi. Among his shaykhs in tasawwuf

were al-Fadl ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Farmadi al-Tusi – one of Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri's students – and Yusuf al-Sajjaj.

On his way back from Jurjan to Tus al-Ghazzali was robbed by highwaymen. When they left him he followed them but was told: "Leave us or you will die." He replied: "I ask you for Allah' sake to only return to me my notes, for they are of no use to you." The robber asked him: "What are those notes?" He said: "Books in that satchel, for the sake of which I left my country in order to hear, write, and obtain their knowledge." The robber laughed and said: "How can you claim that you obtained their knowledge when we took it away from you and left you devoid of knowledge!" Then he gave an order and the satchel was returned to him. Al-Ghazzali said: "This man's utterance was divinely inspired (*hâdhâ mustantaqun*): Allah caused him to say this in order to guide me. When I reached Tus I worked for three years until I had memorized all that I had written down."

Al-Ghazzali came to Baghdad in 484 and began a prestigious career of teaching, giving fatwa, and authoring books in nearly all the Islamic sciences of his day. His skill in refuting opponents was unparalleled except by his superlative godwariness, which led him to abandon his teaching position at the Nizamiyya school four years later, deputizing his brother Ahmad, famous for his preaching, to replace him. Upon completion of pilgrimage to Mecca al-Ghazzali headed for Damascus, then al-Qudus, then Damascus again where he remained for several years, taking up the ascetic life with the words: "We sought after knowledge for other than Allah's sake, but He refused that it be for anything other than Him."

He came out of seclusion in 499 and travelled to Cairo, Iskandariyya and other places, finally returning to Baghdad where he taught his magnum opus *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* until his death in nearby Tus, occupying the remainder of his time with

devotions, Qur'an recitations, prayer and fasting, and the company of Sufis. Ibn al-Jawzi narrated in *al-Thabat 'Inda al-Mamat* ("Firmness at the Time of Death") from al-Ghazzali's brother Ahmad: "On Monday [14 Jumada al-Akhira] at the time of the dawn prayer my brother Abu Hamid made his ablution, prayed, then said: 'Bring me my shroud.' He took it, kissed it and put it on his eyes, saying: 'We hear and obey in readiness to enter the King's presence.' Then he stretched his legs, facing the Qibla, and died before sunrise – may Allah sanctify his soul!" It is related that al-Shadhili saw a dream in which the Prophet (s) pointed out al-Ghazzali to Musa (as) and 'Isa (as) asking them: "Is there such a wise scholar in your communities?" to which they replied no.

The following is a list of some of al-Ghazzali's works as found in al-Zabidi's and Ibn al-Subki's recensions:

- Four works in Shafi'i fiqh: the large *al-Basit*, the medium, seven-volume *al-Wasit*, and the two-volume *al-Wajiz*, condensed in *al-Khulasa*. *Al-Wasit* received many commentaries and abridgments, among them al-Nawawi's *Rawda al-Talibin*.
- Four books on usul al-fiqh: *al-Mankhul*, written in the lifetime of his teacher, Imam al-Haramayn; *Shifa' al-Ghalil fi Masa'il* [or *Masalik*] *al-Ta 'lil*; *al-Maknûn*; and *al-Mustasfa*. "Imam al-Ghazzali's Encyclopedia of Shari'a Source Methodology, his fourth book on the subject, and his last word, was *al-Mustasfa*, which has been printed several times in Egypt and elsewhere. Indeed, this is the work he wrote after coming out of his period of meditation and seclusion."
- *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, among his last works.
- *al-Imla' 'ala Mushkil al-Ihya'*, in which he replied to some of the insinuations made against the *Ihya'* in his lifetime. This book is also called *al-Ajwiba al-Muskita 'an al-As'ila al-Mubhita*.

- *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, now lost.
- *Jawahir al-Qur'an*.
- *al-Arba'un fi al-Tawhid*, originally part of *Jawahir al-Qur'an*.
- *al-Asma' al-Husna*.
- *al-Ma'akhidh*, on the divergences of jurists.
- *Tahsin al-Ma'akhidh*, a commentary on *al-Ma'akhidh*.
- *Kimya' al-Sa'ada*, The Alchemy of Happiness, originally written in Persian.
- *al-Lubab al-Muntakhal*, on disputation.
- *al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*, in which he said:

"The anthropomorphists (*al-Hashwiyya*) assert direction for Allah while guarding themselves from divesting Allah of His attributes (*ta'til*), falling thereby into likening Allah to creation (*tashbih*). Allah has granted success to Ahl al-Sunna in establishing the truth. They have recognized the proper goal in establishing their method, and understood that direction is denied and disallowed for Allah because it pertains to bodies and complements them; while vision of Him is firmly established because it directly follows knowledge and attends it as its perfecting component."

- *Mi'yar al-Nazar*.
- *Mihakk al-Nazar*.
- *Bayan al-Qawlayn*, on al-Shafi'i's two schools.
- *al-Mustazhiri*, a refutation of the esotericists or Batiniyya.
- *Qawasim al-Batiniyya*, another refutation.
- *Tahafut al-Falasifa* declaring the disbelief of the philosophers, to which the qadi of Andalus Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd al-Maliki responded with *Tahafut al-Tahafut*.
- *al-Maqasid fi Bayan I'tiqad al-Awa'il*, also known as *Maqasid al-Falasifa*.
- *Asrar Mu'amalat al-Din*.
- *Asrar al-Anwar al-Ilahiyya bi al-Ayat al-Matluwwa*.

- *Akhlaq al-Abrar wa al-Najat min al-Ashrar.*
- *Asrar Ittiba' al-Sunna.*
- *Asrar al-Huruf wa al-Kalimat.*
- *Bayan Fada'ih al-Ibahiyya*, against freethinkers.
- *Bada'i' al-Sani'.*
- *Tanbih al-Ghafilin.*
- *Talbis Iblis*, a title later used by Ibn al-Jawzi against al-Ghazzali and others.
- *Khulasa al-Rasa'il ila 'Ilm al-Masa'il*, an abridgment of al-Muzani's *Mukhtasar*.
- *al-Risala al-Qudsiyya fi 'Ilm al-Kalam.*
- *al-Sirr al-Masun*, a book of Qur'anic invocations against enemies.
- *Sharh Da'ira 'Ali ibn Abi Talib*, also known as *Nukhba al-Asma'.*
- *'Aqida al-Misbah.*
- *'Unqud al-Mukhtasar*, an abridgment of Imam al-Haramayn's abridgment of al-Muzani's *Mukhtasar*.
- *Rasa'il* ("Epistles"), published recently in a single volume, in seven parts, comprising the following epistles:

(1) *Al-Hikma fi Makhluqat Allah -- Subhan wa Ta'ala --; Mi'raj al-Salikin.*

(2) *Rawda al-Talibin wa 'Umda al-Salikin* [in *tasawwuf* and *tawhid*]; *Qawa'id al-'Aqa'id fi al-Tawhid* which he included in the *Ihya'* in full; *Khulasa al-Tasanif fi al-Tasawwuf* in which he defines *tasawwuf* as follows:

Know that *tasawwuf* is two things: Truthfulness with Allah Almighty and good conduct with people. Anyone that practices these two things is a Sufi. Truthfulness with Allah is that the servant put an end to his ego's shares in the divine command. Good conduct with people is to not prefer one's

demands over theirs as long as their demands are within the parameters of the Law. Whoever approves of the contravention of the Law or contravenes it can never be a Sufi, and if he claims he is, he is lying.

(3) *Al-Qistas al-Mustaqim; Minhaj al-'Arifin; Al-Risala al-Laduniyya; Faysal al-Tafriqa (fi al-Takfir); Ayyuha al-Walad*, originally written in Persian.

(4) *Mishkat al-Anwar; Risala al-Tayr; al-Risala al-Wa'ziyya; Iljam al-'Awam 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam; al-Mad-nun bihi 'ala Ghayri Ahlih; Al-Ajwi-ba al-Ghazzaliyya fi al-Masa'il al-Ukh-ra-wiyya.*

(5) *Bidaya al-Hidaya; Kimya al-Sa'ada; al-Adab fi al-Din; al-Kashf wa al-Tabyin fi Ghurur al-Khalq Ajma'in.*

(6) *Sirr al-'Alamayn wa Kashf ma fi al-Darayn; al-Durra al-Fakhira fi Kashf 'Ulum al-Akhira.*

(7) *Qanun al-Ta'wil; al-Ahadith al-Qudsiyya; al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, in which he said:

The Sufi path consists in cleansing the heart from whatever is other than Allah... I concluded that the Sufis are the seekers in Allah'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 cleaned their hearts from other than Allah and they have made them as pathways for rivers to run, carrying the knowledge of Allah.

- *Fatawa*, in which he states the following responses:

Q. What is the reply concerning someone who considers prayer as a means towards achieving true worship and knowledge of Allah so that, when he achieves the latter, he no longer feels the necessity of prayer although he continues to pray?

A. This deluded person must realize that true worship and know-ledge of Allah are the goals of prayer, but they are not the only goals ... Just as the words pronounced and written in the protective invo-cations (al-ruqya) have a specific effect towards protection from snakes – indeed, towards the subjugation of jinns and devils; and just as some of the supplications transmitted to us in poetic forms attract the services of the angels in answer to the one who supplicates; the mind falling short of apprehending the modality and precise character of these invocations, which are apprehended only through the power of prophecy, when Prophets are shown their meaning from the Pre-served Tablet; similarly, the forms of the prayer (al-salât) which entail one bowing, two prostrations, specific numbers [of supplica-tions], and specific Qur’anic utterances that are recited, at various lengths and times upon sunrise, noon, and sunset, have a specific effect in stilling the dragon (al-tinnin) that nestles in the human breast and breeds many-headed snakes – equal to the number of his traits – biting and snapping at him in the grave. ... Its harm extends to the soul, as indicated by the Prophet’s -- Allah bless and greet him -- saying: "A dragon with ninety-nine heads is empowered over the disbeliever in the latter’s grave, doing such and-such etc." There are many

such dragons in the human make-up, and nothing subdues them except divinely-prescribed obligations. Those obligations are the deliver-ance from peril, and they are also equal to the number of his bad traits. ?And none knows the hosts of your Lord save Him? (74:31)... O people of permissiveness! It shall be said to you on the Day of Resurrection: ?What has brought you to this burning? They will answer: We were not of those who prayed? (74:42-43).

Q. What is the preferred course of action for someone who has ascertained that he achieves humility (*khushû*) in prayer only when alone, but if he prays in congregation, his energy disperses and he is unable to achieve humility?

A. It is better and more correct for him to pray alone due to the hadith of the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him --: "One performs prayer and it may be that not one tenth of it is recorded to his credit." The Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- said: "Con-gregational prayer is twenty-seven times preferable to prayer alone." It follows that if one achieves one instant of humility in congregational prayer, it is as if he had achieved twenty-seven of them in prayer alone. Therefore, if the rate of his humility in congregational prayer is less than one-twenty-seventh of what it is in prayer alone, it is better for him to pray alone, but if it is more, then congregational prayer is better.

Ibn al-Subki comments: "Shaykh ‘Izz al-Din ibn ‘Abd al-Salam gave a similar fatwa concerning one who attends the Congregation out of self-display.

... I say, to pray in congregation is better in any case.... Abandoning humility for the sake of following the Sunna is in itself humility, and better than humility which results in the course of isolating oneself. Consider this, for it is a fine point. The gist of it is that the Sunna, even if it is lacking something – in this case, congregation without humility – is preferable to general abandonment of the Sunna for the sake of a particular Sunna which is humility."

This is obviously preferable as congregational prayer is an emphasized Sunna by Consensus and a communal obligation (*fard kifâya*) whereas humility is part of the perfection of one's manners in and out of prayer, and Allah knows best.

Ibn al-Subki cited the following opinions from al-Ghazzali's contemporaries:

Imam al-Haramayn: "Al-Ghazzali is a quenching sea."

Al-Ghazzali's student Imam Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn Mansur al-Naysaburi al-Shahid: "He is the second al-Shafi'i."

As'ad al-Mihani: "None attains the knowledge of al-Ghazzali's science nor his merit except one who has attained or almost attained perfection in his intelligence." Ibn al-Subki comments:

I like this verdict, for he who wishes to look into the level of one who is above him in knowledge, needs intelligence and understanding.... I heard

the Shaykh and Imam [Shaykh al-Islam Taqi al-Din al-Subki] say: "None knows the rank of a person in knowledge except he who is his peer and has known him personally, and he only knows him to the extent of what he himself was granted to know." He also used to say to us: "None of his companions knew al-Shafi'i like al-Muzani knew him, and al-Muzani knew al-Shafi'i only to the extent of al-Muzani's strength. Nor can anyone estimate the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- as he deserves except Allah -- may He be exalted --, and each knows him -- Allah bless and greet him -- only to the extent of what he himself possesses. Thus the most knowledgeable in the Community about the Prophet's -- Allah bless and greet him -- rank is Abu Bakr -- Allah be well-pleased with him -- because he was the best of the Umma, and Abu Bakr knows the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- only according to Abu Bakr's strength."

As the foremost exemplar of the Sufi Ash'ari scholar of knowledge al-Ghazzali, like his teacher Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, has attracted the faultfinding skills of latter-day critics of *tasawwuf* and Sunni doctrine as defined by Ash'aris. Ibn Taymiyya peppered his discussions of al-Ghazzali with Ibn al-'Arabi's verdict – "Our master swallowed the seas of the philosophers in order to defeat them, but when he tried to throw them up he was unable" – and slighted al-Ghazzali's *lhya'* as "containing both good and bad, but the good outweighs the bad." Burhan al-Din al-Biq'a'i (d. 885) attacked al-Ghazzali for saying "There is no possibility of

anything more perfect than what exists." Al-Suyuti refuted al-Biqā'i's insinuations in his epistle *Tashdid al-Arkan fi Laysa fi al-Imkan Abda'u Mimma Kan* ("The Buttressing of the Pillars Concerning al-Ghazzali's Saying 'There is no possibility of anything more perfect than what exists'") and, after him, al-Haytami who states:

Al-Biqā'i's fanaticism led him to criticize the saying of al-Ghazzali the Proof of Islam, "There is no possibility of anything more perfect than what exists." He went vituperating him until people became disgusted. Then, one day, he went to visit one of the scholars of knowledge who was sitting somewhere alone. The latter took his slipper and began to hit al-Biqā'i with it until he almost destroyed it, all the while scolding him and saying: "Are you the one who criticizes al-Ghazzali?! You are the one who says such-and-such about him?!" until some people came and delivered him, although no-one disapproved of the incident. Following this, the people of his time rallied against al-Biqā'i and published many refutations against him in defense of al-Ghazzali.

The gist of their replies concerning al-Ghazzali's statement is that when Allah's will linked itself to the origination of this world and He originated it, ordaining the abiding of part of it to a set limit and that of its remainder indefinitely – meaning Paradise and Hellfire – this precluded the linkage (*ta'alluq*) of divine power to the eradication (*i'dām*) of the entirety of this world. For divine power is not linked except to the possible, while the eradication of the entirety of this world is not

possible – not ontologically (*li dhâtihi*) but because of the aforementioned linkage. Since its eradication is excluded according to what we said, it follows that its origination in the first place was the apex of wisdom and completion, and the most perfect of all that can possibly be created, for, as concluded above, there is none other in existence.

Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* ranks as one of the most widely read books in Islam, having earned the praise of the scholars and the general acceptance of the Community. Among those who praised it:

- Ibn al-Subki: "It ranks among the books which Muslims must look after and spread far and wide so that many people may be guided by reading them. Seldom has someone looked into this book except he woke up on the spot thanks to it. May Allah grant us insight that shows us the way to truth, and protect us from what stands between us and the truth as a veil."

- Al-Safadi: "It is among the noblest and greatest of books, to the extent that it was said, concerning it, that if all books of Islam were lost except the *Ihya'*, it would suffice for what was lost."

- Fakhr al-Din al-Razi: "It was as if Allah gathered all sciences under a dome, and showed them to al-Ghazzali."

The *Ihya'* was also strongly criticized for a variety of reasons, among them the number of weak or forged narrations cited in it, a list of which is provided by Ibn al-Subki, who stressed that al-Ghazzali never excelled in the field of hadith. Abu 'Abd Allah al-Maziri al-Maliki said in *al-Kashf wa al-*

*Inba' 'an Kitab al-Ihya'* that most of the narrations cited in it were flimsy (*wâhin*) with regard to authenticity, while the Maliki censor Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Walid al-Turtushi (d. 420) exclaimed in his epistle to Ibn Zafir – Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Atiyya: "He has crammed his book full with forgeries." Ibn al-Subki replied:

"Al-Maziri was a passionate champion of al-Ash'ari's positions – both the authoritative, the modest, the great, and the small – declaring an innovator anyone who went beyond them in the least. In addition to this he was a Maliki with a strong bias for his school, which he de-fended strenuously. On the other hand, al-Juwayni and al-Ghazzali reached a level of expertise and knowledge which every impartial observer can acknowledge as unmatched by anyone after them, and where they may have seen fit to contradict Abu al-Hasan [al-Ash'ari] in questions of *kalâm*. Ash'aris, particularly the Moroccans, do not take kindly to this nor allow anyone to contravene Abu al-Hasan in the least. Further complicating matters is al-Juwayni and al-Ghazzali's weakening of Imam Malik's position on certain points, such as rulings inferred from public welfare or the favoring of a certain school over another. ... As for al-Maziri's saying: "al-Ghazzali was not a foremost expert (*mutabahhir*) in the science of *kalâm*," I agree with him on this, but I add: He certainly had a firm foothold in it, even if, in my opinion, it did not match his foothold in other sciences. As for al-Maziri's saying: "He engaged in philosophy before he became an expert in the science of principles,"

this is not the case. He did not look into philosophy except after he had become an expert in the science of usûl, and he indicated this in his book *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, adding that he involved himself in the science of *kalâm* before turning to philosophy. ... As for Ibn Sina, al-Ghazzali declares him a disbeliever – how then could he possibly rely on him? ... As for his blame of the *Ihya'* for al-Ghazzali's indulgence in some narrations: it is known that the latter did not have skill in the hadith, and that most of the narrations and stories of the *Ihya'* are taken from his predecessors among the Sufis and jurists. The man himself did not provide a single *isnad*, but one of our companions [Zayn al-Din al-'Iraqi] took care to document the narrations of the *Ihya'*, and only a small amount were declared aberrant or anomalous (*shâdhah*). I shall cite them for the sake of benefit ... Nor is al-Ghazzali's phrasing "the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- said" meant as a definitive attribution to him but only as an attribution that appears definite. For if he were not assuming it true, he would not say it. The matter was not as he thought, and that is all. As for al-Turtushi's statement concerning the forgeries found in the *Ihya'*, then – I ask you – is al-Ghazzali the one who forged them so that he may be bla-med for them? To blame him for them is certainly nothing more than inane fanaticism. It is an attack which no serious examiner can accept. " End of Ibn al-Subki's words from *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra*.

Ibn al-Jawzi – a detractor of Sufis – similarly dismisses the *Ihya'* in four of his works: *I'lam al-*

*Ahya' bi Aghlat al-Ihya'* ("Informing the Living of the Mistakes of the Ihya'), *Talbis Iblis*, *Kitab al-Qussas*, and his history *al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wal-Umam*. His views influenced Ibn Taymiyya and others. The basis of their position was also that al-Ghazzali used too many weak or baseless hadiths.

Other moderate hadith masters documented almost every single hadith in the *Ihya'* without questioning its usefulness as a whole, accepting its immense standing among Muslims and contributing to its embellishment and spread as a manual for spiritual progress. Among these scholars:

- Zayn al-Din al-'Iraqi (d. 806): *al-Mughni 'an Haml al-Asfar*;
- His student Ibn Hajar: *al-Istidrak 'ala Takhrij Ahadith al-Ihya'*;
- al-Qasim ibn Qatlubagha al-Hanafi: *Tuhfa al-Ahya' fi ma Fata Min Takhrij Ahadith al-Ihya'*;
- Sayyid Murtada al-Zabidi al-Husayni (d. 1205): *Ithaf al-Sada al-Muttaqin fi Sharh Asrar Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* in ten massive volumes, each scholar completing the previous scholar's documentation.

More importantly, the majority of hadith masters hold it permissible to use weak hadiths in other than the derivation of legal rulings, such as in the encouragement to good and discouragement from

evil (*al-targhib wa al-tarhib*), as countless hadith masters have indicated as well as other scholars, such as Imam al-Safadi. It must be understood that al-Ghazzali incorporated all the material which he judged of use to his didactic purposes on the bases of content rather than origin or chain of transmission; that most of the *Ihya'* consists in quotations from Qur'an, hadith, and the sayings of other than Ghazali, his own prose accounting for less than 35 of the work; and that three quarters of the huge number of hadiths cited are authentic in origin.

The Hanafi hadith master Murtada al-Zabidi began his great commentary on the *Ihya'* with an explanation that al-Ghazzali's method of hadith citation by conveying the general meaning without ascertaining the exact wording, had a basis in the practice of the Companions and Salaf:

"The verification of the wording of narrations was not an obligation for al-Ghazzali – may Allah have mercy on him! He would convey the general meaning, conscious of the different significations of the words and their mutual conflict with one another avoiding what would constitute interpolation or arbitrary rendering of one term with another.

"A number of the Companions have permitted the conveyance of Prophetic hadiths in their meanings rather than their wordings. Among them: 'Ali, Ibn 'Abbas, Anas ibn Malik, Abu al-Darda', Wathila ibn al-Asqa', and Abu Hurayra – may Allah be well-pleased with them! Also, a greater number of the

Successors, among them: the Imam of imams al-Hasan al-Basri, al-Sha'bi, 'Amr ibn Dinar, Ibrahim al-Nakha'i, Mujahid, and 'Ikrima.... Ibn Sirin said: "I would hear a hadith from ten different people, the meaning remaining one but the wordings differing." Similarly, the Companions' wordings in their narrations from the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- have differed one from another. Some of them, for example, will narrate a complete version; others will narrate the gist of the meaning; others will narrate an abridged version; others yet replace certain words with their synonyms, deeming that they have considerable leeway as long as they do not contradict the original meaning. None of them intends a lie, and all of them aim for truthfulness and the report of what he has heard: that is why they had leeway. They used to say: "Mendacity is only when one deliberately intends to lie."

"Imran ibn Muslim [al-Qasir] narrated that a man said to al-Hasan [al-Basri]: "O Abu Sa'id! When you narrate a hadith you put it in better and more eloquent terms than when one of us narrates it." He replied: "There is no harm in that as long as you have fully expressed its meaning." Al-Nadr ibn Shumayl (d. 208) said: "Hushaym (d. 183) used to make a lot of mistakes in Arabic, so I adorned his narrations for you with a fine garment" -- meaning, he arabized it, since al-Nadr was a philologist (*nahwī*). Sufyan [al-Thawri] used to say: "When you see a man show strictness in the wordings of hadith, know that he is advertising himself." He narrated that a certain man began to question Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan (d. 198) about a specific

wording inside a hadith. Yahya said to him: "O So-and-so! There is not in the whole world anything more sublime than Allah's Book, yet He has permitted that its words be recited in seven different dialects. So do not be so strict!"

"In the hadith master al-Suyuti's commentary on [al-Nawawi's] *al-Taqrīb*, in the fourth part of the twenty-sixth heading, the gist of what he said is as follows:

"If a narrator is not an expert in the wordings and in what shifts their meanings to something else, there is no permission for him to narrate what he has heard in terms of meaning only. There is no disagreement concerning this. He must relate the exact wording he has heard. If he is an expert in the matter, [opinions have differed:] a large group of the experts of hadith, fiqh, and *usūl* said that it is not permitted for him to narrate in other than the exact same words. This is the position of Ibn Sirin, Tha'lab, and Abu Bakr al-Razi the Hanafi scholar. It is also narrated as Ibn 'Umar's position. But the vast majority of the Salaf and Khalaf from the various groups, among them the Four Imams, permit narration in terms of meaning in all the above cases provided one adduces the meaning. This dispensation is witnessed to by the practice of the Companions and Salaf, and shown by their narrating a single report in different wordings.

"There is a hadith of the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- relevant to the issue narrated by Ibn Mandah in *Ma'rifa al-Sahaba* and al-Tabarani in *al-Kabir* from 'Abd Allah ibn Sulayman ibn Aktham al-

Laythi [= 'Abd Allah ibn Sulaym ibn Ukayma] who said: "I said: 'O Messenger of Allah! Verily, when I hear a hadith from you I am unable to narrate it again just as I heard it from you.'" That is, he adds or omits something. The Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- replied: "As long as you do not make licit the illicit or make illicit the licit, and as long as you adduce the meaning, there is no harm in that." When this was mentioned to al-Hasan he said: "Were it not for this, we would never narrate anything."

"Al-Shafi'i adduced as his proof [for the same position] the hadith "The Qur'an was revealed in seven dialects."

"Al-Bayhaqi narrated from Makhul that he and Abu al-Azhar went to see Wathila [or Wa'ila] ibn al-Asqa' and said to him: "Narrate to us a hadith of the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- in which there is no omission, no addition, and nothing forgotten." He replied: "Has any of you recited anything from the Qur'an?" (\*) They said: "Yes, but we have not memorized it very well. We sometimes add 'and' or the letter alif, or omit something." He said: "If you cannot memorize the Qur'an which is written down before you, adding and omitting some-thing from it, then how about narrations which we heard from the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him --, some of them only once? Suffice yourself, when-ever we narrate them to you, with the general meaning!" He narrated something similar from Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah in al-Madkhal: "Hudhayfa said to us: 'We are Beduin Arabs, we may cite a saying without its proper

order.'" He also narrated from Shu'ayb ibn al-Hajjab: "I visited al-Hasan together with 'Abdan. We said to him: 'O Abu Sa'id! Someone may narrate a hadith in which he adds or from which he omits something.' He replied: 'Lying is only when someone deliberately intends this.'" ... [He also narrated something similar from Ibrahim al-Nakha'i, al-Sha'bi, al-Zuhri, Sufyan, 'Amr ibn Dinar, and Waki'.] " End of al-Suyuti's words from *Tadrib al-Rawi* as quoted by al-Zabidi, and end of al-Zabidi's excerpt from *Ithaf al-Sada al-Muttaqin*.

(\*) In al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi's version in *Nawadir al-Usul* (p. 389) Makhul asks: "Has any of you stood in prayer at length at night?"

The Imams of hadith are unanimous in accepting the narration in meaning only on condition that the narrator has mastered the Arabic language and his narration does not constitute an aberration or anomaly (*shudhûdh*), among other conditions. Al-Zabidi's documentation of the majority position that it is permissible to narrate the hadiths of the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- in their meanings rather than their wordings is also the position of Ibn al-Salah in his *Muqaddima*, but the latter avers that the dispensation no longer applies at a time when the hadiths are available to all in published books. Shaykh Nur al-Din 'Itr adopts this latter position: "The last word on this subject is to prohibit hadith narration in the sense of meaning only, because the narrations have all been compiled in the manuals of hadith, eliminating the need for such a dispensation."

A generation after al-Ghazzali's death, the *Ihya'* was burnt in Andalus upon the recommendation of the qadi Ibn Hamdayn who was named Commander of the Believers in Qurtuba in 539 then fled to Malaga where he died in 548. Shortly thereafter, the Moroccans rehabilitated the book as stated by Shaykh al-Islam Taqi al-Din al-Subki – in a long poem that begins with the words "Abu Hamid! You are truly the one that deserves praise." Ibn al-Subki narrated with his chain from Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili that Ibn Hirzahn, one of the Moroccan shaykhs who had intended the burning of the book, saw the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- in his dream commending the book before al-Ghazzali and ordering that Ibn Hirzahn be lashed for slander. After five lashes he was pardoned and woke up in pain, bearing the traces of the lashing. After this he took to praising the book from cover to cover.

Another rallying-cry of the critics of the *Ihya'* is that it contains no exhortation towards jihad and that its author remained in seclusion between the years 488-499, at a time when the Crusaders ravaged the Antioch and al-Qudus, killing Muslims by the tens of thousands. Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi replied to these insinuations with the following words:

The great Imam's excuse may be that his most pressing engagement was the reform of his own self first, and that it is one's personal corruption which paves the way for external invasions, as indicated by

the beginning of Sura al-Isra'. The Israelites, whenever they became corrupt and spread corruption in the earth, were subjected to the domination of their enemies. But whenever they did good and reformed themselves and others, they again held sway over their enemies. He directed his greatest concern toward the reform of the individual, who constitutes the core of the society. The reform of the individual can be effected only through the reform of his heart and thought. Only through such reform can his works and behavior be improved, and his entire life. This is the basis of societal change to which the Qur'an directs us by saying "**Lo! Allah changes not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts**" (13:11).

Shaykh al-Islam Taqi al-Din al-Subki said about the detractors of the *Ihya'*:

I consider them similar to a group of pious and devoted men who saw a great knight issue from the ranks of the Muslims and enter the fray of their enemies, striking and battling until he subdued them and unnerved them, breaking their ranks and routing them. Then he emerged covered with their blood, went to wash himself, and entered the place of prayer with the Muslims.

But that group thought that he still had some of their blood on his person, and they criticized him for it.

Among the most famous commentaries of the *Ihya'*:

- The hadith master Murtada al-Zabidi's ten-volume *Ithaf al-Sada al-Muttaqin Sharh Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* ("The Lavish Gift of the Godwary Masters: Commentary on al-Ghazzali's 'Giving Life to the Religious Sciences'") which contains the most comprehensive documentation of the hadith narrations cited by al-Ghazzali.

- 'Abd al-Qadir ibn 'Abd Allah al-'Aydarus Ba 'Alawi's *Ta'rif al-Ahya bi Fada'il al-Ihya* ("The Appraisal of the Living of the Immense Merits of the *Ihya'*").

- Mulla 'Ali al-Qari's *Sharh 'Ayn al-'Ilm wa Zayn al-Hilm* ("The Spring of Knowledge and the Adornment of Understanding") on the abridged version. Al-Qari begins it by stating:

"I wrote this commentary on the abridgment of *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* by the Proof of Islam and the Confirmation of Creatures hoping to receive some of the outpouring of blessings from the words of the most pure knowers of Allah, and to benefit from the gifts that exude from the pages of the Shaykhs and the Saints, so that I may be mentioned in their number and raised in their throng, even if I fell short in their following and their service, for I rely on my love for them and content myself with my longing for them."

End of biographical notice on Hujjatul Islam al-Ghazzali by Hj. Gibril --

Allah forgive him! -- written out of duty and love, not arrogance. Main source: Ibn al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra* (6:191-389 #694).

O Allah! bring us out of the darkness of illusion into the light of knowledge, adorn our manners with gentleness, and grant us deeds that are accepted in Your Presence. Glory to You! Truly we know nothing except what You teach us.

O Allah! benefit us with the Proof of Your Religion, Imam al-Ghazzali, and thank him on behalf of Muhammad's Community -- upon him Your blessings and peace.

Allah's blessings and peace upon the best of prophets and messengers, our master Muhammad, and upon his Family and all his Companions. Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

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## THE LAST WORDS OF IMAM GHAZALI

Imam Ghazali woke up one early morning and as usual offered his prayers and then enquired what day it was, his younger brother, Ahmad Ghazali replied, "Monday." He asked him to bring his white shroud, kissed it, stretched himself full length and saying

"Lord, I obey willingly," breathed his last. And underneath his head rest they found the following verses; composed by him, probably, during the night: .

"Say to my friends, when they look upon me, dead  
Weeping for me and mourning me in sorrow  
Do not believe that this corpse you see is myself  
In the name of God, I tell you, it is not I,  
I am a spirit, and this is naught but flesh  
It was my abode and my garment for a time.  
I am a treasure, by a talisman kept hid,  
Fashioned of dust, which served me as a shrine,  
I am a pearl, which has left it's shell deserted,  
I am a bird, and this body was my cage  
Whence I have now flon forth and it is left as a token  
Praise to God, who hath now set me free  
And prepared for me my place in the highest of the heaven,  
Until today I was dead, though alive in your midst.  
Now I live in truth, with the grave - clothes discarded.  
Today I hold converse with the saints above,  
With no veil between, I see God face to face.  
I look upon "Loh-i-Mahfuz" and there in I read

Whatever was and is and all that is to be.  
Let my house fall in ruins, lay my cage in the ground,  
Cast away the talisman, it is a token, no more  
Lay aside my cloak, it was but my outer garment.  
Place them all in the grave, let them be forgotten,  
I have passed on my way and you are left behind  
Your place of abode was no deweling place for me.  
Think not that death is death, nay, it is life,  
A life that surpasses all we could dream of here,  
While in this world, here we are granted sleep,  
Death is but sleep, sleep that shall be prolonged  
Be not frightened when death draweth night,  
It is but the departure for this blessed home  
Think of the mercy and love of your Lord,  
Give thanks for His Grace and come without fear.  
What I am now, even so shall you be  
For I know that you are even as I am  
The souls of all men come forth from God  
The bodies of all are compounded alike  
Good and evil, alike it was ours  
I give you now a message of good cheer  
May God's peace and joy for evermore be yours."