

RAMADAN

IMMERSION



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Introduction

- Our sessions will be covering topics in Bidayat Al-Hidayah (The Beginning of Guidance) by Imam Al-Ghazali.
- Imam Al-Ghazali authored Bidayat Al-Hidayah in his final years as a concise, practical guide of his six-volume magnum opus, Ihya Ulum Ad-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), recognizing that not everyone would fully read his extensive work.

The Background of Imam Al-Ghazali

- Imam Al-Ghazali was born in 450 AH (1111 CE) in the town of Tabran in the district of Tus, located within the Khorasan region of Persia (modern-day Iran).
- The title "Al-Ghazali" originates from his father's trade. "Ghazal" is derived from "Ghazil," which means weaving thread, as his father was a thread merchant. He spent his early life assisting his father in this industry.
- From a young age he was recognized as a child prodigy. He was exceptionally intelligent and academically gifted.
- Around age 16, he left his home in Tus for Nishapur to pursue advanced studies under the renowned scholar Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni.
- Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni was a distinguished jurist, famous for his polemical skills against deviant groups. The Imam became a long-term mentor to him until his death.

- He later moved to Baghdad, the world's leading hub for trade and knowledge. At the time, the Seljuks managed the affairs of the Abbasids, utilizing their expertise in warfare and governance to transition the region into the Seljuk Empire.
- Nizam Al-Mulk, a powerful individual in the empire with a profound devotion to scholarship, sought to institutionalize the spread of knowledge across the Seljuk Empire. He had heard about the brilliance of Imam Al-Ghazali.
- When Nizam Al-Mulk established the prestigious Nizamiyyah university system, launching its first campus in Baghdad before expanding to other major cities, he appointed Imam Al-Ghazali to oversee the entire university network as its Dean.
- He was only about 33 or 34 when he headed the Nizamiyyah. His fame spread far and wide.
- He was a versatile polymath; a master of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence and a leading scholar of Islamic legal theory (usul al-fiqh). Beyond religious sciences, he was equally esteemed as a master of logic.
- He was known for his debating skills, particularly in the fields of theology and philosophy. He thoroughly studied the doctrines of various intellectual groups in order to challenge them effectively. He heavily targeted the falasifa (philosophers of his time), rigorously debating their views.
- As part of his refutation against the falasifa, he first authored Maqasid al-Falasifa (The Principles of the Philosophers), a summary of their philosophical tenets.
- Shortly after, he published Tahafut al-Falasifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), a systematic deconstruction and refutation of their philosophical principles, exposing the contradictions in their thought.
- He left his post after a while, tired of the attention and overwhelmed by praise. He did not desire excessive attention and praise, just like the pious predecessors before him.

- The pious predecessors were cautious of excessive praise, viewing it as a tactic Iblis uses to cultivate arrogance in people's hearts.
- This restraint stems from the Sunnah, as the Prophet (ﷺ) often warned against face-to-face praise to protect hearts from arrogance.
 - Al-Miqdad reported: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said,

إِذَا رَأَيْتُمُ الْمَدَّاحِينَ فَاحْثُوا فِي وُجُوهِهِمُ التُّرَابَ

"When you see those who flatter others, throw sand in their faces." (Sahih Muslim)

- Imam Al-Ghazali said the sincere person does not allow their heart to take pleasure with the praises of people nor be saddened by their criticism. Praise and criticism are equal to the one who is sincere.
- Recognizing our insignificance, we should not seek respect or special treatment. Our focus should be solely on pleasing Allah, acting in righteousness only for Him, not for the validation of people.
- After leaving his position, he spent roughly 10 years as a wandering mystic, embracing anonymity to focus on refining his soul and recognizing the importance of spiritual purification of the heart.
 - Purification of the heart protects us against Shaytan's attacks on our minds, focus and heart. A pure heart is harder for Shaytan to corrupt.
- After a long period of travel and seclusion, he settled in Tus to dedicate his final years to teaching students.
- In one of his final memoirs, his last counsel to his student was to act upon what he knew.
- Before his death in Tus, Imam Al-Ghazali repeated the instruction:
- عَلَيْنَا بِالْإِخْلَاصِ ('Alayka bil-ikhlas), urging everyone to "Be sincere", three times. This final plea highlights his lifelong dedication to sincerity in worship and intention.

- This is the reason why in our tradition, we cherish worshipping Allah in the depths of the night, because acts of worship performed in solitude, away from the eyes of people, known only to Him, carry the greatest weight on the Day of Judgment.

Bidayat Al-Hidayah

On Refraining from Disobedience

- Imam Al-Ghazali highlights that our religion consists of two parts:
 - 1. Refraining from disobedience:
 - To abandon sins.
 - This part is more important and difficult.
 - Only the truly sincere are able to let go of their desires.
 - 2. Performing of acts of obedience:
 - To obey Allah with righteous actions
 - This part is easier than the first.
 - Everyone can obey, but not everyone can control their desires.
- The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "The Muhajir (emigrant) is the one who abandons evil, and the Mujahid (warrior) is the one who fights his passions" (Mustadrak).
 - Muhajir:
 - A muhajir is someone who abandons evil to embrace righteousness.
 - Hijrah means to emigrate; to move from one place to another. It also means moving away from bad deeds towards good ones.
 - Mujahid:
 - A mujahid is one who engages in jihad; struggling and fighting in the cause of Allah.
 - This entails a dual struggle — both physical and spiritual — against their own desires.

Disobedience Committed with the Limbs

- Imam Al-Ghazali highlights that when a person fails to guard their limbs, they transform these blessings into instruments of disobedience.
 - Our limbs are a ni'mah (blessing) and an amanah (trust) from Allah, yet we often use them to disobey Him.
 - Using the very gifts Allah blessed us with to disobey Him, is the pinnacle of ingratitude, while breaching His trust is the pinnacle of tyranny.
 - A trust is a responsibility placed in our care. Honoring Allah's trust means we are tasked to return our bodies just as He gave them to us. Through tawbah, we strive to return this trust to Allah in the best possible condition.
 - Just as a shepherd guards their herd, we must be mindful and take responsibility caring for every limb because we will be questioned on how we use our bodies to seek Allah's pleasure.
 - Abdullah ibn Umar reported: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said,

أَلَا كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

"Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock" (Sahih al-Bukhari)

- On the Day of Judgment, Allah will allow our own body parts to testify regarding the actions we committed.
 - He tells us:

يَوْمَ تَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَلْسِنَتُهُمْ وَأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

On the Day their tongues, hands, and feet will testify against them for what they used to do. (24:24)

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

On this Day We will seal their mouths, their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will testify to what they used to commit. (36:65)

The Seven Body Parts

- Everything we possess belongs to Allah. Allah holds authority over our bodies, which will bear witness to our deeds on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, we are responsible for guarding our body parts.
- Imam Al-Ghazali mentioned seven major parts of our body which should be closely guarded to ensure they are used in obedience rather than disobedience:
 - 1. The eyes
 - 2. The ears
 - 3. The tongue
 - 4. The stomach
 - 5. The private part
 - 6. The hands
 - 7. The feet
- Jahannam has seven gates or layers; with each one designated for a specific group of people who disobeyed Allah with these seven limbs. Therefore, guarding these seven limbs protects a person from the gates of Jahannam.
- According to mufasssireen the phrase Alhamdulillah consists of eight letters, matching the eight gates of Jannah. For those who understand, honor, and act upon the meaning of this praise — they will be granted an entry into Jannah.
- **1. The Eyes**
 - Our eyes were created to:
 - Guide us in finding our way in times of darkness; spiritually and physically.
 - Help us gaze at the wonders and beauty of the heavens and the earth.
 - Allow us to take lessons, witness and reflect on the countless signs of Allah.

- Our eyes should be protected from four major things:
 - Looking at things that are haram (forbidden)
 - Looking at things with desire
 - Looking at other Muslims with disdain
 - Looking at other Muslims to find fault