

SUMMER IMMERSION

LEGACY: LIVES OF THE FOUR IMAMS



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SESSION 6

3. Imam Shafi'i

- Birth and Lineage:
 - He was born 150 AH in Gaza, Palestine. This year also marked the passing of Imam Abu Hanifa. Some sources say it was the same day.
 - He belonged to the Banu Hashim clan. The lineage connects to the great-great grandfather of the Prophet (ﷺ).
 - He was specifically a descendant of Banu Muttalib. Both clans descend from Abd Manaf; Banu Hashim and Banu Muttalib are essentially one. They share the same ruling as Ahl al-Bayt regarding the prohibition of accepting zakat etc.
 - His father died when he was an infant or a very young child, leaving him and his mother.
 - His mother (named Fatimah bint Abdullah) belonged to the Azd tribe from Yemen, while other recorded lineages trace her ancestry back through the family of Ali ibn Abi Talib (specifically through Al-Hasan or Al-Husayn).
 - Before his birth or during her pregnancy, his mother dreamed that the planet Jupiter emerged from her womb, traveled to Egypt, and shattered into pieces that scattered light over every land. Scholars interpreted this vision as a sign that her son's knowledge and wisdom would spread far and wide.

- She moved to Makkah when he was a young child, at the age of two to preserve his noble Qurayshi lineage and to find support among their extended family and relatives, so he would grow up among them.
- Education:
 - His mother ensured his early education by placing him under the guidance of local scholars. She encouraged him to attend the study circles around the mosque despite their extreme poverty.
 - He memorized the Qur'an at age seven and the Muwatta' at ten. Alternative reports mentioned nine or twelve.
 - He had an extraordinary memory. When reading books or manuscripts, he used to cover the opposite page with his hand so he would not memorize both pages at the same time out of fear that the lines would get mixed up in his mind.
 - He acted as a teacher's assistant or substitute instructor in place of his teacher when the teacher was absent, receiving a waiver on tuition fees due to poverty.
 - Because he could not afford writing paper, he collected bones, palm tree fronds, and stones to record his lessons.
 - His early love was for Arabic language and poetry. The grand mufti of Makkah at the time Muslim ibn Khalid al-Zanji, who, recognized his unique brilliance and eloquence, guided him toward the study of fiqh, which laid the foundation for his monumental role in Islamic law.
 - Despite this, he never left his passion for language and poetry. He spent 17 years with the Hudhayl tribe, recognized as the most eloquent, to secure pure linguistic mastery.
 - He mastered the pure Arabic language with them, and he also trained extensively in horseback riding and archery. He became a highly skilled archer, reportedly hitting targets with extreme accuracy, 10 out of 10 times

- Scholars noted that his intellectual and legal sharpness was far greater than his excellence in archery.
- Sufyan ibn Uyaynah, the prominent Muhaddith of Makkah, was a foundational teacher and profound influence on him, shaping his mastery of hadith and sacred law.
- He began formally teaching in Makkah at the age of 13. Narrations note that biologically, he had not yet reached puberty at this stage. Because of this, he shared the same temperaments as Abdullah ibn Abbas. As both advanced to positions of authority in their youth, they disliked having their maturity or capability undermined by others based on their age.
- Travels:
 - He is the most well-traveled of all four imams, traveling extensively within all regions in the world.
 - This is why he bridged the methodologies of Imam Malik's reliance on traditions and Imam Abu Hanifa's school of independent reasoning.
 - Madinah:
 - At age 23, he traveled to Madinah to study under Imam Malik ibn Anas in year 173 AH, a few years before his passing. He studied Muwatta' with him despite having memorized the Muwatta' at age 13.
 - His mother sold many of their possessions to support his journey in Madinah. She sought a recommendation letter from the governor of Makkah to help him gain access to Imam Malik in Madinah.
 - When Imam Malik saw the letter delivered by the governor of Madinah, he initially expressed disapproval, remarking that knowledge should not require political connections or letters of recommendation.

- He would sit outside Imam Malik's classes and revise notes with other students. After weeks, he mustered the courage to respectfully approach Imam Malik. When he began reciting the Muwatta' from heart, his eloquent delivery and accuracy impressed Imam Malik, who then took him in as his student.
- When he returned home and proudly told his mother he acquired knowledge first and adab second, she was unsatisfied. This echoes the famous advice given to Imam Malik by his own mother when she dressed him for class to learn the adab of his teacher before taking his knowledge.
- He possessed extraordinary firasa (intuitive insight) like Imam Malik, allowing him to read people's traits and backgrounds. Once, they disagreed on whether a specific man was either a blacksmith or a carpenter. It turned out the man had worked as both, making both of their insights correct.
- He used to respectfully disagree with Imam Malik. When he disagreed, he used gentle manners and waited for the elder scholar to finish before sharing his own views. This demonstrates that academic differences do not negate respect.
- Example: The Case of the Moon and Divorce
 - A man tried to compliment his wife by saying she must be more beautiful than the moon, or else she is divorced.
 - Imam Malik's view: Conditional or hyperbolic statements made to a spouse regarding divorce count as a valid oath, meaning if she is legally judged not to surpass the moon, the divorce takes effect.

- Imam Shafi'i's view: He negated the divorce by reciting or applying the Qur'anic principle that human beings are created in the best of forms, legally establishing that a human's stature surpasses the beauty of celestial objects like the moon.
- Yemen:
 - He traveled to Yemen because the governor of Yemen offered him an administrative and judicial position in Najran.
 - He accepted the post in Najran but clashed with a corrupt local official due to his strict justice, and was falsely accused of treason.
- Iraq:
 - He was brought to Baghdad (184 AH) in chains as a prisoner under false political accusations from Yemen, where he met and engaged with Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani, the prominent jurist and student of Imam Abu Hanifa.
 - During the trial, he eloquently and logically defended himself, demonstrating profound knowledge and clear proof of his innocence, which deeply impressed Imam Muhammad and led to his pardon and release.
 - Following his release, he stayed in Baghdad to study intensively under Imam Muhammad.
 - The students of Imam Muhammad noted that the two master scholars would passionately debate and raise their voices discussing fine points of law late into the night, reflecting their immense dedication to truth.
 - Exposed to Imam Shafi'i's rigorous synthesis of Hijazi tradition and linguistic precision, Imam Muhammad began reconsidering and revising certain legal positions.

- Return to Makkah:
 - After three years, he left Baghdad for Makkah carrying a full camel load of books written by Imam Muhammad. He remained in Makkah for nine years; 36-45 years old.
 - At either age 36 or 37, he met Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal for the first time during Hajj, who then became his student. Imam Ahmad would praise Imam Shafi'i in his circles.
 - Imam Ahmad's son, Abdullah, recounts hearing his father constantly praise Imam Shafi'i more than once saying: I would not have known the details of hadith without him.
 - He authored Al-Risalah, his first major classic text on Usul al-Fiqh, the principles of deriving rulings from the Qur'an, Sunnah, consensus (ijma), and analogical reasoning (qiyas).
- Return to Iraq:
 - He spent three months in Baghdad, Iraq, where he authored Al-Hujjah, which contained the legal opinions and positions that he formulated and taught during his stay.
 - He was offered a judicial position by Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun, but declined it. Al-Ma'mun adopted Mu'tazilite aqidah, which emphasized rationalist theology over strict traditionalist views on certain divine attributes.
 - Al-Ma'mun later forced scholars to state the createdness of the Qur'an in the time of Imam Ahmad.
 - He was able to dismantle the Mu'tazilite views through his debates countering their rationalist claims about the creation of the Qur'an.
 - Example: The Qur'an is a "thing"
 - The opponents claimed that because Allah is the Creator of everything and the Qur'an is a "thing," the Quran must therefore be created.

- Imam Shafi'i pointed to Surah al-Ahqaf (46:25), which describes the wind that destroyed the tribe of Aad: "Destroying everything by the command of its Lord."
 - The wind did not destroy the heavens, the earth, or the mountains, even though the verse uses the word "everything."
 - It meant everything that the wind was meant to destroy. Thus, calling the Qur'an a "thing" does not mean it falls under the category of created things.
- After receiving imprisonment and death threats, he fled to Egypt.
- Egypt:
 - Around the age of approximately 48-50, he visited Egypt for the first time.
 - He visited the grave of Imam al-Layth ibn Sa'd to pay his respects, honoring his immense scholarly legacy.
 - He famously held that al-Layth was even more deeply knowledgeable in fiqh than Imam Malik, though al-Layth's students did not record and spread his legal school with the same organization.
 - He taught at the historic Amr ibn al-As Mosque, which had been originally built when the Muslims conquered Egypt.
 - His presence sparked intense academic debates and initial tension with local scholars and students of Imam Malik, because he introduced new legal positions, especially with Ashhab ibn al-Aziz.
 - He studied with renowned hadith scholar, Nafisah bint al-Hasan (great-granddaughter of Hasan ibn Ali). She was married to Ishaq ibn Ja'far, who was the son of Ja'far al-Sadiq — from the lineage of the Prophet (ﷺ).

- He compiled and dictated Kitab al-Umm in Egypt, what would be his final book. He reviewed and revised many of the legal opinions he had previously held in Iraq (al-madhab al-qadim).
 - Nafisah reviewed the book entirely and approved it. Thus, he started teaching from this book.
 - It is the first foundational reference text of the Shafi'i madhab.
 - The book is primarily narrated and transmitted by his prominent Egyptian student, Al-Rabi' ibn Sulayman al-Muradi.
- Physical Characteristics:
 - He was tall and skinny.
 - He had narrow cheeks and a dark complexion.
 - He used to dye his hair and beard with henna in his older age.
 - He had a naturally beautiful and captivating voice while reciting.
 - He typically wore moderate clothing consisting of a turban and khuffayn (leather socks).
- Mannerisms:
 - He was light-hearted, often starting lessons with riddles and jokes.
 - He used to avoid argumentation, adopting the same stance as Imam Malik.
 - He would say: "The flesh of the scholars is poisonous. Anybody that smells it gets sick and anybody that eats it dies."
 - He was known for his generosity despite his entire life living in poverty.
 - When he received gifts from Imam Muhammad and the Caliph at that time, upon his return, his mother told him that had he kept even a single dirham, she would not have allowed him into her home.

- After this incident, any money he had earned, he distributed to charity, leaving him to pass away with nothing.

