

IMAM AL GHAZALI¹

Imam Al Ghazali's achievements in the field of knowledge are too expensive. In the history of mankind, only several learned people have truly left a deep impact on the way man thinks. Many learned scholars can only front theories but fails to execute them. However, Imam Al Ghazali taught, wrote and spread knowledge that he can execute. Mohammad Haniff Hassan² explains:

"Imam Ghazali whose real name is Muhammad Al-Ghazali was born in Iran, on the year 450 Hijrah. He is well known not only amongst scholars but also among the general public because of the popularity of his books within the society. Imam Ghazali is not only a recognised thinker of Islam, he is also a renowned thinker of human science, specifically in the discipline of philosophy, education as well as also morals. He not only became the reference point for discussion amongst scholars of Islam but also amongst Western scholars for his leadership specifically in the academic field given his extensive knowledge in various fields such as fiqh, Tasawuf and many more."

In the book Heroes of Islam, it is told of how, one day in the journey back to his home, in Tus, the area of Khurasan, Iran, Imam Al Ghazali was robbed. A group of robbers stole his manuscripts as well his books. Al Ghazali pleaded that his books to be returned. The chief robber questioned that if the Imam Al Ghazali's knowledge are restricted to books only, is it then apt for him to be hailed as a knowledgeable person. Spurred by the chief robber's sarcasm, Imam Al Ghazali commenced to memorise all his available knowledge and tried to spread it.

"If we examine the history of Imam Al Ghazali, we find a culture that Muslims must emulate, that is, the culture of seeking knowledge. We can see it in the process by which he searched for knowledge. He is an orphan, but this did not stop him from searching for knowledge. One of his teachers was Imam Al Haramayn. His determination to garner knowledge was well acknowledged such that he was accepted to be one of the students in the institute of higher learning, Nizamiyya in Baghdad. This prestigious institute can be likened to Oxford and Harvard today."

At age 34, he was appointed Professor and Head of Nizamiyya. After holding the post of professor for four years, Imam Al-Ghazali travelled to several places to fulfill his desire to use the knowledge though he felt that it was insufficient. Mohammad Haniff explains that the acknowledgement that Imam Al Ghazali has garnered is largely the product of his determination in his quest and shaping knowledge;

"If we examine one of the titles given to him by the other ulamas, that is Hujjatu'l-Islam, we recognise that his prestigious title is a symbol of his tremendous contribution to the Islamic faith and knowledge of Islam. Firstly, he overcame wayward philosophical teachings that have influenced Muslims at that time. Secondly, he overcame errant tasawwuf practices that were errant during his time. The result was that philosophy almost no longer dominated Islamic thinking during his time while tasawwuf practices can be weaned from his writings."

Imam Al-Ghazali proved to be an icon of learned leaders who wrote more than 400 books. One of them was Ihya Ulum Ad Din (The Rise of Knowledge). According to An-Nawawi, a write in the thirteenth century, if all the writing materials in the world were to vanish from this world, we would still be able to survive with Ihya Ulum Ad Din only.

Imam Al Ghazali passed away at the age 55. He proved to be an exemplary learned leader par excellence. His determination to seek knowledge is an example that can become a lesson to all

levels of society. Theories he came up with from various fields of knowledge were not only absorbed by Europe but also influenced Jews and Christian intellectuals like Thomas Aquinas. It also developed into new ideas for other Islamic intellectuals. Because Imam Al Ghazali's influence, the handicapped can walk fast and those who cannot appreciate melody can now be a singer!

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