

"A person can never become perfect until he does not give preference to religion over his personal desires."

Hazrat Rabiya Basri

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY:

Birth Name: Abu Hamid Ghazali

Born in: Iran, in the year 1058

In depth:

In the Middle Ages he was known as Algazel, the mystic and theologian. He mastered Arabic at a very young age and was fluent in his native Persian tongue as well. His education was far reaching within Islamic learning. He completed his education in theology and law in Nishapur where he also was schooled in Islamic mysticism, also known as Sufism.

At the age of 33, Imam Ghazali was sent to be a professor at the famous Nizamiyya school founded by Vizier Nizam al-Mulk. Lecturing on law and theology, Imam Ghazali had become one of the most prominent men of the capital at that time.

While reaching the end of his fourth year as a professor, Ghazali entered a period of skepticism.

He was saved by God in a moment of pure enlightenment.

Becoming aware of the absolute futility of the life he was living, he began a mental journey to break away from the life he was living, to live the life of a hermit in rapt contemplation. He had to be careful so that none of his colleagues or friends would try to stop him so he made it known that he had planned a pilgrimage to Makkah, which satisfied even his closest of allies.

He explains in another of his books titled *Al-Munqidh Min al-Dhalaal* (Deliverance from Error) that he had mastered all the zahiri (manifest) knowledge like shari'ah (sacred law) and fiqh (jurisprudence) as well as what the philosophers had to say, but he yearned to achieve yaqin (certitude).

To acquire this, he decided in Dhul Qa'da 488 A.H, to entirely give up his position, status and fame and to adopt the life of a dervish. He had realised that achieving personal religious experience was the only way to gain this certitude. He supplicated to Allah to make it easy for him to renounce the world (duniya) and Allah accepted his dua.

He went for Hajj and Ziyara to Makkah and Madinah, as well as to Bayt ul Muqaddas and Damascus where he went into khalwa (spiritual retreat) in the khanqa (or spiritual lodge) of the Jami Mosque. Since then, the khanqa has been named after him.

Ten years after his pilgrimage, he was influenced to once again return to teaching, which he did so at his original place of lecturing, at the Nizamiyya school. He returned knowing that his inner peace had been met and that through his outward appearance and lectures he could further renew the faith and pass the word of the importance of spiritual renewal. His followers in Sufism believed that it was his destiny to be the one to renew their religion, a promise made by Rasulallah for the end of the century.

Imam Ghazali is well known for his strong faith.

He may not have held a high seat of royalty, but his scope and breadth of religion and mysticism was immense for the period in which he lived. He saw the need for mysticism to flow freely throughout the whole Islamic land, spreading to the farthest parts and smallest corners. In his books and lectures, he repeatedly emphasized the need for spiritual enlightenment, sighting that Sufism is the only true cure for skepticism, as well as the highest way of life.

In spreading the word of Sufism, Imam Ghazali was able to address the highest of society as well as the most uneducated.

He could speak the language of the elite, and the ghetto without hesitation. He realized how much information could be handled by the masses, seeing that too much is not a good thing. Being able to bridge the gap in the levels of the entire Islamic community allowed him to reach many more people. Sufism became available to everyone, irregardless of the level of education. Imam Ghazali had made mysticism available, understandable and easy to follow.

Imam Ghazali has been termed a moderate mystic, though he believed undeniably that God is the true reality in all that is faced. Uncompromising in his beliefs, he wrote many books on the subject, reaffirming his belief in the following of Sufism and being truly spiritual. The end result of following the mystic path, for Imam Ghazali was uniting with God; a majestic path to follow and one that was rewarding for the mind, body and soul.

It is reported in the Sharh of al-Habib 'Abdul Qadir al-'Aydaroods that after Hazrat Imam Ghazali passed away, Shaikh Shihabuddeen Ahmad az-Zabidi saw oneday, while he was sitting, that the gates of heaven opened and some Mala'ika (angels) descended.

A certain grave opened and a person came out whom they clothed in a green robe, and they ascended with him on a conveyance, passed the seven Heavens and beyond sixty veils till they were lost out of sight. When he asked who that person was, the reply was: "This is Imam Ghazali".

Imam Ghazali woke up one early morning and as usual offered his prayers. He then enquired what day it was and 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.

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 its shell deserted, I am a bird, and this body was my cage, Whence I have now flown 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 Heavens, 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 dwelling 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 nigh, 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 forever more be yours.'"