

English Article >>IMAM AL-FAKHR AL-RAZI (Alaih Rahmah)

Muhammad ibn `Umar ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Husayn1 Abu `Abd Allah al-Qurashi, al-Bakri, al-Taymi, al-Tabaristani al-Shafi`i, known as Ibn al-Khatib and as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (543-606) Alaih Rahmah, Shaykh al-Islam, the imam of the learned scholars of Kalam and the foundations of belief, a major jurist of the Shafi`i school, specialist of usul, Sufi, commentator of the Qur'an, philologist, genealogist, heresiographer, logician, and physician. "An ocean that contains more pearls than the ocean." The principal spokesman of Ahle al-Sunnat in his time, he refuted all the sects with which he came into contact, particularly the multifarious groups of the Mu`tazila, Shi`a, and Hashwiyya as well as the Jews and Christians. A student of his father Khatib al-Rayy Diya' al-Din `Umar and Majd al-Din al-Jili al-Maraghi principally, then Abu Muhammad al-Baghawi and Kamal al-Din al-Simnani, he memorized early on Imam al-Haramayn's work in Kalam entitled al-Shamil. He began his scholarly career in poverty and died at sixty-three at the height of fame and wealth, poisoned, it is said, by the Karramiyya of Herat who were envious of his great following among the princes of Khurasan.

A superb teacher, al-Razi Alaih Rahmah could debate and preach in both Arabic and Persian, and he answered gracefully and at length the questions of the scholars of all four schools in Herat. He would often break into emotional states while preaching, moving to tears whoever listened to him. He was expelled from Khwarizm and Transoxiana by the Mu`tazila and returned to his native Rayy where he authored a series of works which achieved widespread fame in a short time. Among them:

Al-Tafsir al-Kabir, also known as Mafatih al-Ghayb, among the greatest commentaries of Qur'an in Islam, in twelve to thirty volumes depending on the edition, he spent the last fifteen years of his life working on it and did not finish it. The commentator Abu Hayyan criticized its prolixity in acerbic terms.

`Isma al-Anbiya'.

Bahr al-Ansab.

Kitab al-Mantiq al-Kabir.

Al-Mahsul wa al-Muntakhab, in which he amended Abu al-Husayn Muhammad ibn `Ali al-Basri al-Mu`tazili al-Shafi`i's (d. 463) al-Mu`tamad fi Usul al-Fiqh.

Al-Arba`in.

Nihaya al-`Uqul

Al-Bayan wa al-Burhan fi al-Radd `ala Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Tughyan

Al-Mabahith al-`Imadiyya fi al-Matalib al-Ma`adiyya

Al-Mabahith al-Mashriqiyya.

Ta'sis al-Taqdis fi Ta'wil al-Sifat, a methodical refutation of the anthropomorphists. Ibn Taymiyya attacked it in a book entitled al-Asas Radd al-Ta'sis.

Irshad al-Nuzzar ila Lata'if al-Asrar.

Al-Zubda.

Al-Ma`alim fi Usul al-Din, a commentary on Abu al-Ma`ali al-Juwayni's Luma` al-Adilla.

Al-Ma`alim fi Usul al-Fiqh

Sharh Asma' Allah al-Husna

Sharh Nisf al-Wajiz li al-Ghazzali

Sharh al-Isharat.

Al-Mulakhkhas fi al-Falsafa.

Al-Matalib al-`Aliyya.

Al-Milal wa al-Nihal.

Sharh Kulliyat al-Qanun fi al-Tibb.

Manaqib al-Shafi`i.

Sharh Siqt al-Zand li Abi al-`Ala'.

Al-Tariqa al-Baha'iyya fi al-Khilaf. Siraj al-Din al-Ghaznawi translated it into Arabic from its original Persian.

Sharh Mufassal al-Zamakhshari.

`Uyun al-Hikma.

The spurious Asrar al-Nujum on magic and divination, falsely attributed to the Imam.⁵

Imam al-Razi Alaih Rahmah said in his "Testament" (wasiyya):

I have explored the ways of Kalam and the methods of philosophy, and I did not see in them a benefit that compares with the benefit I found in the Qur'ân. For the latter hurries us to acknowledge that greatness and majesty belong only to Allah, precluding us from involvement into the explication of objections and contentions. This is for no other reason than because human minds find themselves deadened in those deep, vexing exercises and obscure ways [of Kalam and philosophy].

Therefore, I say that everything that stands established by literal proofs concerning the necessity of Allah's existence, His oneness, His exemption from any and all partners, as well as His beginninglessness and pre-existence, His disposal of all things, His exclusive efficacy: that is what I also believe, and what I hope to meet Allah with.

As for what is ultimately subtle and unclear, as well as all that is mentioned in the Qur'an and the sound books of hadith that specifically bears one meaning: it is all exactly as the text says. Whatever is otherwise, I say: O God of the worlds, I see that all of creation concur that You are the most generous of all generous ones, and the most merciful of them; therefore, concerning anything I wrote or thought, I bear witness that if You saw that I tried to declare true something false, or declare false something true, then do with me as I deserve; but if you saw that I only tried to declare transcendent whatever I considered truly transcendent, and believed so truthfully, then let Your mercy be commensurate with my intention, not with my outcome....

As for the books which I authored and in which I listed and explicated countless questions, let whoever looks into them remember me kindly and pray for me out of compassion and benevolence, or else, strike out any wrong words. For I did not intend other than abundant investigation and the sharpening of thought, all the while relying upon Allah.

Ibn al-Subki Alaih Rahmah quotes the following lines of poetry from Imam al-Razi:

The daring of minds ends in shackles,
Most of mankind's undertakings are folly.
Our souls are indifferent to what our bodies do,
And the sum of our lives is affliction and harm.
We did not benefit from our lifelong search
Except in collecting what these said, and those.
Atop many a mountain men have triumphed
And gone, while the mountains remained.
How many men and states have we seen
Goaded to disappear one and all.

Al-Razi Alaih Rahmah is, with al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi Alaih Rahmah, among those to whom Shaykh Muhyi al-Din Ibn `Arabi Alaih Rahmah frequently refers in his books.

Main sources: Ibn al-Subki *Alaih Rahmah*, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra* 8:81-96 #1089; Ibn Qadi Shuhba, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya* 1:-396-398 #366.

NOTES

1 In Ibn Qadi Shuhba: Ibn `Umar Ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Hasan.

2 The Karramiyya are the followers of Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Karram al-Sijistani (d. 255) who used to say: "Allah is a body unlike bodies" and "Allah is firmly seated on the throne and He is in person (dhâtan) on the upper side of it." Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (1:108) and al-Dhahabi, *Siyar* (10:10). Al-Baghdadi gave an exhaustive description of their doctrines in *al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq* (1977 ed. p. 202-214).

3 List taken from Ibn al-Subki's *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra*, Ibn Qadi Shuhba, and Hajji Khalifa's *Kashf al-Zunun* (1:224, 2:1198, 2:1527, 2:1561, 2:1864).

4 To the point he said: "One of the scholars said that his Tafsir contains everything but Tafsir!" In Hajji Khalifa, *Kashf al-Zunun* (1:431) and elsewhere.

5 Al-Dhahabi included an entry on Imam al-Razi in his compendium of narrator-discreditation entitled *Mizan al-I'tidal* in which he says: "He [al-Razi] authored a book named *Asrar al-Nujum* which contains blatant sorcery." Al-Dhahabi, *Mizan al-I'tidal*. Ibn al-Subki in *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra* (8:88) rejects this attribution as spurious and rightly attributes its mention to al-Dhahabi's anti-Ash`ari bias, noting that since al-Razi is not even known as a hadith narrator he did not belong in the *Mizan* in the first place - the latter being a compendium of narrators whose name was brought up in connection with narrator-discreditation. `Abd al-Karim ibn Khaldun al-Maghribi al-Maliki in the introduction to his *Tarikh* and Ibn Qadi Shuhba cite the book as *al-Sirr al-Maktum fi Mukhataba al-Shams wa al-Nujum* and similarly cast doubt on the authenticity of its attribution to al-Razi.

6 In Ibn al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra* (8:91-92).