



Star line-up for al-Ghazali Festival - Jhb, CT & Dbn

The al-Ghazali Festival scheduled to take place in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban during October has a star line up of speakers who will be delivering lectures on al-Ghazali. This series is being organised by Baitul-Hikmah in association with Afrika Impressions, ITV, AwqafSA, FonsVitae, Islamic Forum and a number of other organisations.

Opening the series will be Shaykh Sharif Hasan al-Banna on **Why Ghazali matters today**. This will be followed by Shaykh Hamza Maqbul on the **Ghazalian Council for the Seeker of Success** and after which Sister Gray Henry of the USA will talk on **how Ghazali came into her life at age 25 and changed her life at 75**. The series will be concluded by Shaykh Seraj Hendricks on **Imam al-Ghazali's Epistemology - An Islamic Perspective**.

See www.islamicforum.org.za for lecture schedule and registration. The lecture in Durban is scheduled to take place at the Orient School on Sunday 21 October after Zuhr.

Mohamed Amra will conclude the series with a talk on: **Re-building Our Ummah: An Extension of the scope of the Maqasid As Shariah based on the original framework laid out by Imam Al Ghazali**.

In the talk he will outline and make the following observations:

With a cursory glance on the state of the Muslim Ummah, one concludes that the image of Islam and Muslims is in a serious state of tension. The Ummah today is facing challenges from within and from the wider world. The critical problems are the fundamental tensions within the house of Islam which must be confronted. The Ummah must come to grips with its own challenges.

The multiple interpretations and 'expressions' of Islam have given rise to this tension, as each group lays claim to be the true interpreters of Islam competing for influence and followers, regionally, nationally or globally. A singular interpretation-expression is utopian. However, we may differ there needs to be some basic foundation on which we agree, apart from our verbal testimony of Quran and Sunnah.

Muslims have established institutions to serve their needs, but have, of late, largely failed to build strong communities, whether in Muslim countries or as minorities. This tension must be addressed as some of the primary institutions have become dysfunctional, in particular, the masjid. This, due to the religio-cultural expression of Islam, which is expressed by the religious performance of rituals with little regard to social responsibilities

and hence, the conspicuous absence of active Muslims in civil society beyond the Muslim NGO establishments.

The problem is the absence of a visionary framework by which Muslim communities must operate in society to build strong Muslim communities, interacting and integrating with other non-Muslim communities.

The framework we refer to is the Maqasid As Shariah as originally founded by Imam Al Ghazali, which, has been forgotten, lost or buried in theological schools and not taken to the communities. It is imperative we re-visit the Maqasid, (higher objectives) of the Shariah and extend its scope, which will raise the bar, move the boundaries and propel us to become a community that will be socially relevant, educationally excellent, culturally dynamic, spiritually profound, and economically self-sufficient.

Some ideas will be presented on how we can rebuild our communities if we have a more informed understanding of the Maqasid and embrace it with greater enthusiasm. We need to widen the scope of the Maqasid of which, there are 5, and make every objective relevant to every Muslim everyday of their lives, practical examples will be given. This is the surest way of realising the higher intents of the Shariah.



**Sr Gray Henry
(USA)**



**Sh Seraj
Hendricks
(Cape Town)**



**Sh Hamzah Maqbul
(USA)**



**Sh Hassan Sharif
Al Banna
(UK)**

"He was completely inner focussed on the Divine and had left the world behind him. When I entered into his presence I said: 'You are the lost thing I have been looking for all of my life. You are the imam who will guide me'. Our meeting was an epiphany of inward knowledge. I witnessed something from him that was ineffable. He was a man that if you saw him, you saw a manifest spiritual state. If you knew him, you knew a vast ocean..." - Recollections of a great Maliki scholar who visited al-Ghazali just before he died. He related his experience with Imam Ghazali during a retreat near Baghdad.

[Quoted from the Introduction by Sh. Hamza Yusuf to 'The Book of Knowledge' by al-Ghazali]

"I found everyone hankering after the material gains. People had become forgetful of the eternal salvation, while the 'ulama who are guides to the right path were not to be found any longer. There remained only those who had lost their soul to the worldly temptations. These people had led everyone to suppose that knowledge consists simply in the debates and arguments by which they spread their fame; or else ornate sermons by which they held the people spell-bound; or else legal opinion, by which they sat in judgment to settle disputes of others. The knowledge that was required to illuminate the path leading to the world-to-come had thus completely disappeared. I could not endure this state of affairs and ultimately decided to sound the alarm"

Shaykh Sharif Hasan al Banna on HALAL BUT UNISLAMIC



The last three hundred years of Muslim history has witnessed the gap between law and ethics widen. Throughout various intervals in history, the discipline of law lost its connection with the ethical paradigm of Islam. The Islamic faith has been reduced to a legal barometer, a code of halal and haram. The microscopic lens of our legal tradition which dissects and deciphers to offer creative legal solutions is the pre-eminent and predominant framework through which we analyse and make sense of the world around us. The result? More fatwas – legal opinions and verdicts – in dealing with our realities.

So how can the halal be un-Islamic? It can be and it is. This is when fiqh is divorced from its ethical setting. It is when the legal value of an action is the only concern, sometimes at the expenses of other considerations. In pursuit of halal, we forget that the Shariah, often thought of as a body of law, is foremost an encompassing ethos derived over time from the primary sources – of which legal norms (fiqh) derived in pluralist fashion (ikhtilaf) are only a part. We forget to recognize that Islam did not originate in a legal tradition nor are ultimate truths reached through legislation.

Consider the following examples:

- Food
- Finance
- Art and Culture

So “what is Islamic” about any thought or action? Is it limited to scriptural legal validation or can it be determined by an ethical vision alignment? People generally fall into two camps – one which wants to Islamise everything and the other which harbours an inferiority complex in using the word ‘Islamic’ or sees a limited role for faith in the public space.

I would contend that the term ‘Islamic’ has both legal and ethical dimensions. If it is permissible in law, then it is ‘halal’ or ‘mubah’ and if it is validated by the ethical standards of Islam, only then does it become ‘Islamic’. Legislation and ethics are two sides of the same coin and should depend on each other as an integrated whole. Traditionally, this distinction did not exist and thus the master jurist Imam Abu Hanifa defined fiqh itself as ‘knowledge of

the responsibilities and liabilities of one’s self.’ This definition encompasses both the legal and ethical facets.

This interpretation of the word ‘Islamic’ also entails acknowledging that whilst Islam’s ultimate quest, like all other monotheistic traditions, is the spiritual quest of the human self to the celestial, it does not hold back in providing insight into the mundane world. In some cases, the insight is detailed and scriptural like in the areas of marriage, divorce, inheritance and financial transactions. However in other areas, the human mind, collective wisdom and experience is left to navigate through the complexities of life based on generic scriptural principles and maxims. Take, politics and management as an example. What is Islamic about them? What does the Quran or Hadith say about them such that we can term them Islamic? Very little actually in terms of detailed instructions. However, good politics and good management is ‘Islamic’.

Building on the logic of this argument, any thought or action which does not contravene Islamic principles, law or ethics can be deemed ‘Islamic’ even if the source is not Islam (though there is no need to term it as such). Seen in this light, the efforts of

many responsible citizens across the globe to raise awareness about global warming and climate change, is an ‘Islamic’ initiative as it is a manifestation of Quranic environmental ethics. The legendary singer and songwriter Michael Jackson’s song Man in the Mirror for example, can be viewed as deeply ‘Islamic’ as it reflects values of self-change according to Quranic principles.

Professor Tariq Ramadan’s proposed distinction between “adaptive” and “transformative” reform is also relevant to this discourse in bridging the gap between law and ethics. If we merely seek to normalise our existence with the realities around us and adapt to it, then we need fiqh alone. However if we aspire to challenge, change and shape our realities, then we need an ethical construct from which to project our transformational vision for society. Islam thus becomes an actor and not just a passive onlooker.

In Islam, the primary ethical corpus is derived from Quranic and prophetic traditions and is interwoven with literary and social mores, as well as a robust intellectual tradition of which al-Muhasibi, al-Tusi, Miskawayh, Isfahani, al-Farabi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Shah Wali-ullah are exemplars. The ethical tradition of Islam thus finds rich expression in the plenitude of virtually a millennium-and-a-half of historical experience. It is our sincere hope that CILE (Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics) rises to the challenge of re-articulating the discourse of maqasid and ethics and contribute in restoring the ethical core of Islam in the 21st Century.- Sharif Hasan al-Banna

Shaykh Hasan al-Banna will be delivering one talk only on “Halal but Unislamic” at the Suleman Lockhat Auditorium, Mariam Bee Islamic Centre on 222 Kenilworth Road, Durban on Sunday 21 October from 9am-12 noon. Admission is free but hand-out is R50. Register at www.islamicforum.org.za

Shaykh Sharif Hasan al-Banna is a scholar, author and entrepreneur.

He is the Founding Director of the Islamic Institute for Development & Research (IIDR) in the UK and an Advisory Board Member of the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics, a think tank based at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar Foundation. He is also a Board Member of Maqasid Institute (USA) and teaches courses on Islamic Law and Ethics at Oxford University.

Shaykh Sharif al-Banna is passionate about social transformation and impact through knowledge, entrepreneurship and civic engagement. From his early days as a university student, he has been challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. He resides in London with his wife and three young children.