

Al Ghazali Festival - a phenomenal success

About 1000 people attended the Al Ghazali Festival that was held from the 17-27 October, a series of three events: a workshop, conference and book expo at the Al Ghazali College in Erasmia, Pretoria; the Qurtuba Islamic Academy in Johannesburg; the Orient School in Durban and the Islamic College in Cape Town.

The workshop focused on a unique curriculum for children based on the Ihya Ulum-ud-Deen of Imam Al Ghazali which is an adaptation of his teaching in story form. Sr Ayesha Gray Henry from Fons Vitae (USA), who is the director and publisher of this series of books, conducted the workshop where she explained how this unique curriculum can be implemented at home and at schools.

She explained that the aim of the Ghazali Children's books is to support children in their ability to recognize and maintain their innate human dignity, in becoming aware of their True Selves and in identifying with this pure aspect of their being rather than with the lower, false, egoic and separative nature which is centered on itself (al-nafs al-ammara). It focuses on a child's spirituality which hitherto was never taught to our children in this manner as explained by Al Ghazali. By using this curriculum, they will become self-observant and self-correcting, in that they take responsibility for their thoughts, words and actions. She explained how the 4 books are arranged and how each book has a workbook with various activities. There is an interactive website where people upload their activities, videos, etc., thereby creating an international platform for sharing. More than 130 pilot schools are now using the curriculum from Indonesia to the US.

The speakers at the conferences aside from Sr Gray were Sh Sharif Hasan Al-Banna (UK) and Sh Hamza Maqbul (US) who shared their insights on the works of Imam Al Ghazali by reflecting on his teachings and explored how we can imbibe his teachings in our daily lives.

Sh Sharif focused on the Ghazalian approach to personal transformation in a very professional, inspiring and motivational presentation. He spoke on the unique personality of Imam Ghazali who is regarded as the 'Proof of Islam', a genius and polymath and one of the greatest and most influential Islamic scholar to have ever lived. He then went on to explain the 7 steps to personal transformation, viz. scepticism & doubt, ambition, self-discovery, migration (hijra), seclusion (khalwa), self-critique, and sincerity.



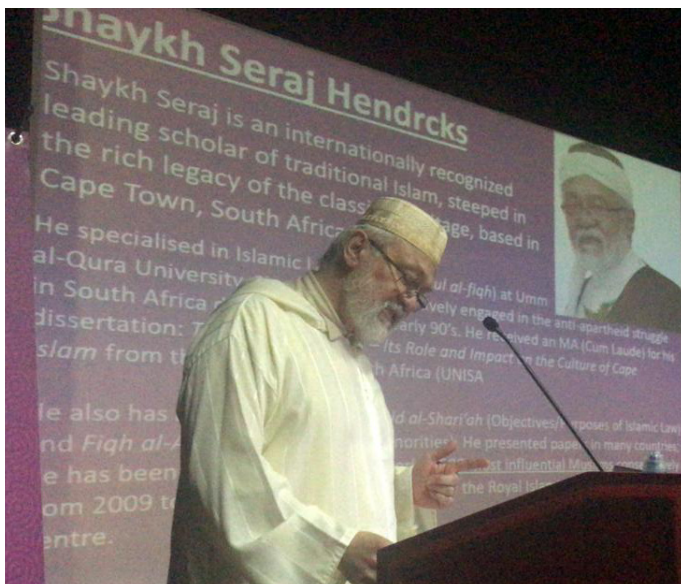
Sister Ayesha Gray Henry from Kentucky, United States of America

Sh Hamza Maqbul spoke on one of the most famous of Imam Ghazali's books Ay-u-hal Walad (Dear Beloved Son), where he gives a list of advices to his disciples. In this moving talk the Shaykh touched on a few of Ghazali's advices and emphasised most importantly that there is no value in acquiring knowledge if it is not applied and practised upon. Knowledge must become a lived experience.

Ebrahim Rasool opened the Cape Town conference in Cape Town reminding the audience on how Islam survived under extremely difficult conditions in the Cape during the Dutch period of enslaving Muslims in the Cape, how Islam survived and prospered inspite of such oppressive conditions. He acknowledged the resilience of these Muslims and in particular because they were many learned scholars and leaders among them. However, he lamented on the deep concern he has on the identity of Muslims in the Cape despite this survival. He expressed concern that we are doubting our selves and we have become victims of hate speech from the radio stations and mimbars. He therefore felt that we need a dose of Ghazali's teachings, who can teach us how we can be true to ourselves. He also expressed the need to take this curriculum to schools and madrassas and in particular to the youth so that they know what it is to be Muslim.

Sh Seraj Hendricks addressed the Cape Town conference where he spoke on Imam Al Ghazali's Epistemology: An Islamic Perspective. He explored Imam Al Ghazali's conceptualization and categorization of Knowledge ('Ilm). He presented a framework that would enable one to navigate the wisdom and ideas of Al Ghazali in a deeper and more systematic way. The two major areas of interest on this topic – but not to the exclusion of a number of other categories – was the exposition of the concepts al-'Ulum al-Shar'iyyah (The Sacred Sciences) and al-'Ulum al-'Aqliyyah (The Intellectual or Rational Sciences).

For the book expo over 25 titles of Imam Ghazali's works were on display and sold at very reasonable prices. These books are still available on line at www.hikmah.co.za



Shaykh Seraj Hendricks from Cape Town



Shaykh Hamza Maqbul from USA



Shaykh Sharif Hasan Al-Banna from UK



Ebrahim Rasool opened the conference in Cape Town



Al-Ghazali Festival - Cape Town



Al-Ghazali Festival - Erasmus

Shaykh Sharif Hasan Al-Banna on HALAL BUT UNISLAMIC

The Islamic Forum hosted Shaykh Sharif Hasan Al-Banna at the Suleman Lockhat Auditorium, Mariam Bee Islamic Centre on Sunday 21 October 2018 where he discussed the concept of Halal but un-Islamic.

It was an interesting topic and one that is not generally discussed as the focus is more in getting fatwas instead of dealing with our realities. He went on to say "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."

He enquired whether the notion of "tahsin" (determining an act to be good and sound) and "taqbiḥ" (determining an act to be evil) is determined by intellect (aql) or does it require revelation (wahy/naql). Three schools of thought addressed this notion and they were the "Mutazilites", "Asharites" and the "Maturidites".

The Mutazilites believed that good and evil is determined by intellect and that rationality was seen as the key to revelation and that there could be no contradiction between reason and the Texts..

The Asharites believed that good and evil is determined by God and through revelation and that it is revelation which shapes Islamic ethics and that God inspires human beings in their quest for good, then, by His exclusive will, establishes what constitutes good and evil.

The Maturidites on the other hand believe that good and evil can be determined by the intellect but revelation is required to provide moral obligation and determine consequences. their stand is halfway between rationalism and revelation.

He went on to discuss the principles of halal and haram and what is Islamic? "Islamic is that thought or action which meets the ethical ideals of Islam, not just legal compliance."

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



Dr Ahmed Manjra introducing guest speaker Shaykh Sharif Hassan Al-Banna

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." His talk led to many questions and it was felt that this topic needs to be dealt with in more depth at a future stage.

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.