

## Imam Ghazali's Theory of Khilāfa and Politics

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Some form of a daunting task, which requires a lot of study, a lot of understanding. And quite frankly, a lot of time to discuss. We'll try our best to do what we can do and hopefully navigate the enormous knowledge of Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī رحمته الله and see how we can benefit from his knowledge, *in shā' Allah*.

Imam Ghazali رحمته الله did not live in a vacuum. He lived in the fifth century of Islamic Hijrī. In his time, he was also facing a lot of political problems. The fight between the Bāṭiniyya, the Shī'a, and the fight with the Sunnis and the 'Abāssids. He was obviously with the 'Abbāsī camp. He became a giant scholar, and very famous in the Nizāmiyya *madrasa* of Baghdad. He was a celebrity. He was initially sponsored by Nizām al-Mulūk, who was the Prime Minister of the 'Abāssids in that area. He wrote some invaluable books even before he became the Imam al-Ghazali رحمته الله that we know today. He was a *faqīh* (jurist). He was an *uṣūlī* (principled in his juristic method). He understood all the principles of jurisprudence. He understood Shāfi'ī fiqh. He was a *mutakallim* (theologian) and an Imam of 'Asharī theology. He was just a very unique person and almost a polymath. This is Imam al-Ghazali رحمته الله as we know him, before the seclusion that he went into later on. And when he came back, he didn't come back to Baghdad, he went home to his hometown al-Ṭūs<sup>1</sup>. That's where he lived. Eventually, that's where he died.

There's a theory that we want to present today, Imam Ghazali's رحمته الله theory of *khilāfa* and what we call nowadays, a political theory. It came about because he was commissioned to write a rebuttal to the Bāṭiniyya; the Shī'a's. He wrote a book called *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyya*. Literally translated as: 'the immoral, or the scandalous opinions about the Bāṭiniyya' and that they hold some theological positions, which were totally erroneous, at least from the Sunni point of view. He goes through that book, enumerating their ideology, their philosophy, their theology, their practices, the various groups that they had, and goes through a long list of errors that he felt they were making. Amongst those was the issue of *Imāma* (leadership and state authority). He talks about it there. And he talks about it in other books that he has written as counsels for rulers and other books specifically for rulers and leaders.

*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*<sup>2</sup> is his magnum opus. We all know that. But then he wrote another book just for the 'ulamā' (scholars), to show the 'ulamā' of his time that they're not exempt from this type of reform. *May yaar* is that book that he wrote exclusively for them. That is how we see Imam Ghazali رحمته الله wanting to reform the Ummah, but politics, as we might see it today, is slightly different. It may not be that "quote unquote" political. Sometimes we have

<sup>1</sup> a town in modern day Iran.

<sup>2</sup> translates to: the Revivification of the Islamic Faith

problems, especially coming from the west, while trying to impose our style of reading, our paradigms, or values on to another system and trying to see if there's a bridge. Sometimes, it's very difficult to reconcile two very different types of works and two very ancient types of reading, where nowadays, politics and words that are linked with politics, such as human rights and democracy, were not the words that they used. Even though they may sound very similar, it is like having a hard drive, and trying to use a soft drive that's not compatible on that hard drive. Likewise, Islamic literature and Islamic religious literature is not to be measured against the modern day, post Jeffersonian human rights language, and against modern understandings of politics and democracy because they were written in a very Islamic language.

When you are writing in an Islamic language, you are going to use some words that are from the Qur'ān and Sunnah. They have a very different connotation, even though they may sound the same in modern discourse and especially that discourse which is Eurocentric. When non-Muslims comment about our scholars, and sometimes they make claims that they've understood, and they analyze and think about that. This is probably more of a process of what we call eisegesis, where you're trying to impose your view on the author's writing. Whereas in our madrasa system, one of the most important methodologies that we use is to understand the *murād* (intended meaning) of the *mutakallim* (speaker). What is the intent of the speaker? What is the intent of the author? So, if you want to understand the intent of the author, you have to understand him, the context in which he wrote, and more importantly, you have to understand the language he's using. Therefore, a modern political language is not the best language by which one can measure any of the early classical Muslim works on the same subject.

In Islam, the generally translated word for *khilāfa* (governance) is *siyāsa* (political authority). That word itself is subject to debate. What does *siyāsa* actually mean? Politics in the way we understand politics today? The prophet ﷺ mentioned the word:

كَانَتْ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ تَسُوسُهُمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ

*The prophets ﷺ governed<sup>3</sup> over the Banī Isrā'īl.<sup>4</sup>*

That's one place where the word *siyāsa* actually comes as a verb. Then, the Prophet ﷺ said the *Banū Isrā'īl*, they were governed and they were managed by the prophets ﷺ. The prophets ﷺ now have a role to manage, govern, and enforce Allah's ﷻ will and enforce the law, the Shariah, and so on. It is here that I think we should begin the discussion of what *Siyāsa Islamiyya* is all about. It is much broader than what we might presume today.

<sup>3</sup> The Arabic word used here was *tasūsu*. This word shares the same root letters as the word *siyāsa*, proving prophetic usage of this term, with the meaning of 'governance' or 'presiding over as a ruler.'

<sup>4</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, #3455

There are different levels of *siyāsa*. Through Imam Ghazali's رحمته الله works himself, I think we can analyze that. There are four or five levels of *siyāsa*. One is *siyāsat al-ambiyā'* that is the *siyāsa* of the prophets ﷺ. Raising, training, inculcating values in their Ummah and helping them accept the *dīn* (religion) and apply the laws of Shari'a in their communities as state law. This is where the *ambiya* ﷺ also use *tarbiyah* (spiritual nurturing) and they also use reform language in their *siyāsa*. They want to reform virtue, value, mindset, and behavior. The *akhlāq* (ethics and morals), of people and bring virtue into society. Whereas, modern day *siyāsa* may be doing that somewhere, but it's not one of the main prime objectives.

For the Amīr; --Imam Ghazali رحمته الله, based on this-- separates knowledge into basically two categories: knowledge that is foundational and knowledge that is now teleological, which is based on consequences and results. Knowledge that is intrinsic in the word '*ilm*, knowledge of the Qur'ān, Sunnah, *wahy* (revelation), *aḥkām* (rulings) of Shari'a. This discussion is in the beginning of *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*, where he's saying there's beneficial knowledge and detrimental knowledge. Knowledge that is essential and knowledge that is auxiliary knowledge, meaning it serves as an *āla* (aide). He brings in this discussion and then he says that the knowledge of *siyāsa*, of ruling and governing, is actually not a foundational knowledge. It's there to serve justice through the *ḥākim*, the governor/the ruler, whoever it is. The goal being to maintain law and order, stay away from chaos and violence, and an implementation of law and order. One can see his mind is basically on a level that is based on the knowledge of the prophets ﷺ, because the prophet's ﷺ role is not just to govern here in this world with justice, but it's also to help people procure salvation, which is in the *ākhirah* (hereafter).

The *ākhirah* based discussion is very different and broader than the secular discussion of law and order and politics. For this reason, he separates the *siyāsa* of the *ambiyā'* ﷺ from all other forms of *siyāsa*. The high level of *siyāsa* is the level of the *ambiyā'* ﷺ; of the prophets who can not only rule the apparent bodies and the society, but they also rule the inner values of human beings and develop ethics and moral behavior. More than that, they develop their spirituality, their association and their *ta'aluq* (connection) with Allah ﷻ. How they worship Allah ﷻ, how they see Allah ﷻ, and they develop a closeness to Allah ﷻ.

For all human beings that is very comprehensive, and that is how I think we should see Imam Ghazali's رحمته الله following the same model in his understanding of *siyāsa* in this dunya. The model is much broader. It is a very vast model. The basic *siyāsa* of other people, he defines as *siyāsa* of the '*ulamā'*, the true scholars in Islam. They have a *siyāsa*, a role, in not only defining the moral values of society, but also giving advice to rulers as to how they should govern, lead, and rule. This is always the case with Muslims as far as the initial *khilāfa* of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* (rightly guided caliphs) ﷺ. He would like them to be almost like the *siyāsa* of the *ambiyā'* ﷺ, a step lower than that obviously. Since those *khulafa*, '*ulamā'*: Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه, 'Umar رضي الله عنه, 'Uthman رضي الله عنه, and Ali رضي الله عنه, they're both scholars and in their own rights are able

to govern and lead not only with the letter of the law, but also with the spirit of the law. They were attached to *‘ibāda* (acts of worship) in their own private times. They were very God fearing and very pious, as much as they were judicious. They had insight and foresight; *basīra* and *firāsa*. They were able to rule and govern people as far as establishing the *qānūn* (judicial system), the constitution, if you would use that word. They were able to do the mundane part of ruling and governing and they were also able to do the spiritual part of ruling and governing, where people looked up to their piety. People looked up to their ethics and moral behavior, and a combination of both the inner and the outer was present in the four *khulafā’*



Later on, there was a split, honestly, so that then the people who had now authority, political authority, were not necessarily always that pious that people would flock to them and follow them. He makes another category of people *siyāsat al-wa‘āz* (preachers), the *siyāsat al-ṣaliḥīn* (righteous) over people. There's a story where Imam Zain al-‘Ābidīn رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ walks into the *ḥaram*<sup>5</sup> with a huge entourage of people. Hundreds of people are walking into the *ḥaram* with him. Then Farazdaq رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ, who is a *shā‘ir* (poet) there, he is observing. Now, the entry of the *khalīfa*, who also happens to be the president of Makkah, he's also entering with his guards, and his security detail, and he's looking at Zain al-‘Ābidīn رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ, who is from the *ahl al-bayt* (lineage of the prophet ﷺ). He has a sea of people behind him. He's asking his guards and everybody else, “who is this person? How come he's being followed much more than I'm being followed, and then no one looks to me? They don't even say *salām* to me? Everybody's now kissing his feet.” So Farazdaq رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ composes a magnificent poem in which he says:

If you don't know him, then it is a matter of:

الْحَلُّ يَعْرِفُهُ وَالْحَرَمُ يَعْرِفُهُ

that the people outside of the *ḥaram* know him, and people inside the *ḥaram* know him.

This is an example of a type of *siyāsa*, a power to govern, showing authority over people. However, Zain al-‘Ābidīn's رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ authority over people was spiritual. It was not legal. He was not the *ḥākim*, not the ruler, but people flocked to him because of this spiritual kind of attachment. People want to be pious and be associated with pious people. That is where the *‘ulamā’* have always had a much larger, greater, and deeper impact on society than the rulers. There are exceptions, like ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ and others who were very pious.

On the whole, this categorization of *siyāsa* shows that Imam Ghazali رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ is grading the whole idea of *siyāsa* which could focus more on leadership imposing and enforcing authority so that people will stay on the right track. Later on, you have the *siyāsa*, of the *khulafā’* and *mulūk*. Whoever was *khalīfa* was a king or monarch, and they had their own *siyāsa*. However,

<sup>5</sup> sanctified compound in Makkah, referring to the vicinity around the Ka‘ba. Ḥaram translates to the prohibitive land, as in a sanctified area, certain actions are prohibited.

their *siyāsa* was now limited to mundane affairs and mundane law, so that there was no violence, no injustice, no chaos, but law and order. Based on this categorization, we see that Imam Ghazali رحمه الله, as he wrote *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*, was now dividing the Ummah and the community into two or three groups. The first group are concerned about their *ākhira*. They are concerned about being able to witness Allah's ﷻ beauty, Allah's ﷻ face *mubārak* on the day of judgment, and in *Jannah* (paradise). They are worried about eternal happiness and pleasure, not just mundane and secondary happiness. Thus, he concedes that they are both levels, but one level is higher than the other and people who want to be more realistic about life, they should pursue the higher level and not simply the lower one. That is how he writes the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn* because in his time, which is very ironic nowadays, but the most prestigious professions were to be a theologian, Muslim lawyer, or Muslim judge. They were paid the most and the most celebrated. The industry really flourished because everyone who had knowledge of *dīn* and Sharia wanted to be close to the ruler, to the judge and they had endowments and stipends for them. They were commissioned to write books, and commentaries on Islamic knowledge, etc. The thing to be was a Muslim theologian. They were the closest to administration, rulers, and the courts.

Imam Ghazali رحمه الله is looking at this because he was one himself. When he retreats and understands that the inner beauty of Islam is to develop one's ethics, moral behavior, and to develop one's attachment to Allah ﷻ. One must be able to learn from sources other than what's written in the books., you should perhaps learn how the other earlier '*ulamā'* learned and the Saḥāba ﷺ learned without the aid of a book. Otherwise known as the oral tradition. He goes into this phase of his life where he becomes holistic, comprehensive, and inclusive giving merit to the apparent sciences of Sharī'a, *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, *hadith*, and *kalām*. These are all very good, noble disciplines and you must learn them. He says the purpose of learning these disciplines is much higher than seeking a favorable position with the ruler or in the court is much more than earning money and happiness in this world, rather it is to attain happiness in the other world. He then had an abridged version of *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn* in his mother tongue Farsi, which he called *kīmiyā-e-sa'ādat*, that means the alchemy of happiness. Imam Ghazali رحمه الله was all about promoting joy and happiness, but not at the expense of salvation, and at the expense of being punished here in this world, in the grave, or on the day of judgment.

This is his broad theory on ruling. Governing in this world is part of it. He says it is *farḍ kifāya*; a communal duty that you must appoint an Imam, for taking care of the political lives of Muslims and non-Muslims and for making sure there's peace, security, no violence and no injustice. Essentially, you can see that this is a necessary component of this life. he starts off with an idea based on the concept:

الدُّنْيَا مَرْعَى الْآخِرَةِ

the Duniyā; this world here, is a farmland for the *ākhira*.

You farm here and you reap the fruits there. But you can't reap the fruits here and so you use this world. whatever you do in this world is your farming, you're sowing the seeds, and you're taking care of the plants and the crops and the new agriculture. Then making sure that you harvest when you die, in *Jannah*, but you can't do that without being here. He gives a tremendous amount of importance to Muslims being here in this world and not staying aloof like hermits. You have to be here.

The Shari'a gives us the formula to do all of this. That is why you have to maintain Shari'a law in terms of making sure people do not openly sin, and do things that are vile, disgusting, and immoral. The *khalīfa* or the Imam is there to make sure that happens along with making sure that you have *sadd al-zuhūr*, taking care of the frontiers, so that no enemy comes in and attacks or kills you, and making sure that there's an infrastructure of a civil society in this world. He's all about civility in this world, *adab*. He will speak about all of this in *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*, where he takes us through the various developmental stages in each ethic, moral value and each vice. There's a whole book or chapter on those actions which he calls *munjīyāt*, those actions that will save us and then those actions referred to as *muhlikāt* and *mūbiqāt*, actions that are destructive and detrimental to our health here and also our health in the *ākhirah*. He goes into that.

Imam Ghazali رحمته الله wanted the '*ulamā'* to be the most refined and the most reformed because he saw them as a catalyst between the government and people. People always approach the '*ulamā'* and the '*ulamā'* were always consulted by the rulers. They played this role of being a liaison for the people and the rulers. He wanted to reform the whole ummah by reforming the ethics and morals of the '*ulamā'*, who were the gateway to the rulers and the political system. They were the eyes and ears of the people. This is his solution. I think the *Iḥyā'* has many facets, angles, purposes, benefits, but one of the most important is that he wanted to reform the '*ulamā'*. When he felt that the '*ulamā'* didn't quite get the message, he wrote a separate book for them, which is *al-mi'yār* (the standard).

This book was exclusively for the '*ulamā'*. the '*ulamā'* would know that when they represented Islam and the Muslim community in front of the rulers, they must be just, pious, honest, and forthright. They had to make sure that they were not endorsing injustice, any kind of favoritism, or violating the rights of other people. His main focus was now as you see from the title, the title itself *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*, reviving the sciences of *dīn* (religion), by reviving the spirit and the *ruh* (spirit) in the '*ulamā'*. The '*ulamā'* class was the most important class to actually reform and develop, so that the whole ummah will be reformed and developed, slightly different nowadays. He goes through these phases of *siyāsa*, *siyāsat al-ambiyā'*, *siyāsat al-'ulamā'*, and *siyāsat al-wa'āz* and the *siyāsa* of the *khulafā'*, and the *ḥukamā'* (governors).

In his discussions with rulers and ministers, because they all came to him for advice, he wrote separate letters to some of these rulers. In those letters, he really focuses on the same thing: develop your relationship with Allah ﷻ, make sure your salvation is now airtight, make sure that you have the ability to speak to Allah ﷻ on the Day of Judgment in a good way to

take care of your inner and then obviously reform your outer. When he says reform your outer, what he's saying is that your role is to enforce peace, security and justice in the people that you are ruling and governing. He builds out a system for Muslim rulers and how to behave, how to be, and that's always been the case with all the 'ulamā' or of the Ummah. As far back as Hārūn Rashīd رَحِمَهُ اللهُ، the great 'Abassi *khalīfa*, and his right hand man was none other than Qāḍī Abu Yūsuf رَحِمَهُ اللهُ who was the prime student of Abu Ḥanīfa رَحِمَهُ اللهُ. Qāḍī Abu Yūsuf رَحِمَهُ اللهُ was the first supreme justice in history. And he was the right hand man, advisor for Hārūn Rashīd رَحِمَهُ اللهُ, who had a great *khalīfa* and a great empire.

Qāḍī Abu Yūsuf رَحِمَهُ اللهُ was always advising the *khalīfa*, and he wrote several books for him like *Kitāb al-amwāl*, *Kitāb al-kharāj*. How to dispense money, how to take care of the state's treasury, and then he also wrote another fascinating, small book, on how to treat prisoners. It is in that book that he shows his prowess. He shows his understanding of administration. He shows his understanding of government and so on. I'm not going to go into what he said, because I'm just using Abu Yūsuf رَحِمَهُ اللهُ as an example of how 'ulamā' have always played a foundational and functional role in developing government, making sure that there are checks and balances, and making sure that if the government or the *ḥākim*, the ruler, does anything wrong and they are there to state that sometimes at the expense of their lives. In Muslim history, this has happened to two scholars where they had been persecuted, punished, and basically executed.

The role of Imam Ghazali رَحِمَهُ اللهُ is nothing other than the role of all 'ulamā' that came before him and after him. In his treaties against the Bāṭiniyya, he brings out some of his ideas and theories of Muslim governments, Muslim *siyāsa*, if you want to call it that. I think we must see what he says there, so that we understand his role in developing a coherent, consistent theory for Muslim governance or Muslim government rule. I'm not too fond of calling anything Islamic a democracy, nor am I fond of calling it a theocracy and Imam Ghazali رَحِمَهُ اللهُ was the same. We take our lead from him and others who came before him. We don't want to use and label Islam with these foreign labels. They are alien to us, theocracy and democracy. We should take charge of our own civilization and start re-presenting our original positions with our original words, terminology, and nomenclature, so that it is ours and not something that is Eurocentric. We need to take an original stance about our civilizational values and the terminology we use so that it's not just to impress other people through the use of similar terminologies. Rather it is for revealing the truth.

The truth is that Imam Ghazali رَحِمَهُ اللهُ, in a very intriguing way, starts to justify the Sunni position of *khalīfa* and *imāma* by initiating the conversation about the first *khalīfa*. In the first *khalīfa*, the method and process by which we elected/selected Abu Bakr ؓ to be the *khalīfa* is kind of strange to say the least. Abu Bakr ؓ was there, in the meeting place of Banū Sā'ida, and the *Anṣār* and some of the *Muhājirūn* were there. They started discussing leadership, and the *Anṣār* said that there will be a leader from you and there'll be a leader from the *Muhājirūn*.

Everybody said no to that, as they felt it didn't make any sense and that is not leadership. After some discussion, 'Umar ؓ put his hand over Abu Bakr's ؓ hand and said: "I'm taking a pledge. I'm taking bay'a with you and you are now my *khalīfa*." A few moments later, everybody acquiesced and followed. They all took a pledge of allegiance for Abu Bakr ؓ to be the *khalīfa*. This is the basic story, simply stated.

Imam Ghazali رحمه الله now looks at this story. He said basically:

الإِمَامَةُ عِنْدَنَا تَنْعَقِدُ بِالشُّوْكَةِ

That the first rule is that *imāma*, political authority is established through power, through domination, if you want to use that word, I'm not sure that's the best word. By establishing that you are in power and you have an authority over people, *shawka* which is a good word. Then he further says:

وَالشُّوْكَةُ تَقُومُ بِالمُبَايَعَةِ

That *shawka*, political authority and power, stands on *bay'a* (pledge to authority). It is established by *mubāya'a*, that you have a free Muslim person who's willing to take *bay'a*. You have free Muslims who are willing to offer their *bay'a*. As he uses *mubāya'a*, two-way traffic, so the person there must be free, meaning the leader, and the people following, they must also be free.

*Ikhtiyār*, choice and volition, is huge for Imam Ghazali رحمه الله. From this, people will decipher and have decided that he's talking about democracy. The word didn't exist in their minds at that time, but it is freedom, like *rahatadīn*, so then there's no compulsion. you're free to acquiesce, you're free to agree, and you're also free to disagree until you agree. That was the case with 'Alī ؓ. He did not take *bay'a* immediately, he took *bay'a* six months later. There is *ikhtiyār* there, Islam gives a choice for free individuals to exercise their freedom and volition freely, and not in a compulsive way. This he says is the key to the *bay'a* of Abu Bakr ؓ. 'Umar ؓ freely took *bay'a* with Abu Bakr ؓ and then the other Saḥāba ؓ, who were present at that time, they also willingly and freely gave their *bay'a* to Abu Bakr ؓ. This is how *bay'a* is established. Imam Ghazali رحمه الله is trying to understand that process as the origins of the Sunni systems. It is necessary for us to establish our system of how we elect or select.

In the second *khilāfa* (era of caliphate rule), Abu Bakr ؓ appointed 'Umar ؓ. In the third, then 'Umar ؓ appointed a counsel of six, where they decided who will be the *khalīfa* and then afterwards war broke out. And that was the end of discussion. But all these three conventions, what they show us is that there is some flexibility and nothing is written in stone. the whole idea of *siyāsa* now becomes *ijtihādī*. And the reason it is *ijtihādī* is because there are no clear cut *naṣ* (religious text) that we can say defines the political system of selecting/electing. I think that it's very important that Imam Ghazali رحمه الله brings this out in his *Faḍā'ih* of the *Bāṭiniyya*.

Another discussion arises from the *Iḥyā'* itself, and that is the political power on the role of the *ḥākim* (governor) and the *khalīfa* is very mundane. I'll stop short of using the word secular because it's just another term for mundane affairs. The *khalīfa* is there to supervise, maintain, and manage the mundane affairs, the civil affairs of the ummah. This also goes back to what the Saḥāba رضي الله عنهم said about Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه. When the Saḥāba رضي الله عنهم all agreed to the *khilāfa* of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه, they made a statement and the statement is very intriguing. They said that the Prophet [saw] entrusted Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه in matters on their *dīn* when he appointed him to be his Imam when the prophet was sick. He appointed Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه to lead the salaah for all the Saḥāba, so he appointed him to be his *khalīfa* in matters of *dīn*. We have now appointed Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه to be our Imam in matters of the dunya, the mundane matters and that's very intriguing that there, the theory Sunnis develop is that the *khalīfa* is in charge of all mundane affairs of the state; the *dawla*, the people that you rule. So, you have to establish a police force, courts, institutions for education, and collecting *zakāt*. Additionally, you have to establish the rules and regulations of trade and everything that's needed to run a state like establishing an army and everything else that a state needs. In the *Iḥyā'*, Imam Ghazali رحمه الله mentions this in a different place, by the way this has been mentioned by many other scholars before him., this is not unique to Imam Ghazali رحمه الله, but he mentions this in the categorization of knowledge. He says that any skill set or profession that's needed in order to maintain and enhance the community is *farḍ kifāya* for us to establish as an ummah. For instance, you cannot live in this world today without a doctor, lawyer, engineer, somebody in agriculture or whatever the field may be., the '*ulamā'* of *uṣūl* (legal theory) say it is *farḍ kifāya*, meaning that if you do not have a lawyer, engineer, doctor, or accountant in your community you are committing a collective sin because without them the community will not function as a community.

That's how important the mundane affairs of the Ummah have been seen by the '*ulamā'*. They did not want Muslims to believe that they have to be hermits, and go out and live in the wilderness. No! You have to engage as a society and community because acquiring these skill sets is *farḍ kifāya*. Therefore, facilitating the acquisition of these skill sets also becomes *farḍ kifāya*. You must now establish these institutions: places of learning, *madāris*, schools, high schools, colleges, and universities or whatever name you want to give them. Imam Ghazali رحمه الله mentions this in the chapter of knowledge and the classification of knowledge. He is well in line with the values and synchronized with the rest of the Ummah and previous '*ulamā'* as to how necessary the mundane affairs of the Ummah are. It is a collective duty not just an individual duty.

Surprisingly, and ironic for us, is that he laments the fact that one could not find any doctor except from the *dhimmīs*.<sup>6</sup> He says the ummah, the Muslim ummah, does not produce any doctors. There was no one who could treat Muslims when they were sick, yet they had thousands of Muslim theologians, scholars, muḥaddith, and *mufassir* (Qur'ānic exegete). He lamented the fact that there was no institution of *ṭibb* (medicine). This shows us that they really wanted to make sure that their mundane services were provided by Muslims and not by

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<sup>6</sup> the term refers to a non-Muslim under state protection.

the *dhimmi*, even though the *dhimmi*s were there, and they were employed by the ruler, and the *ḥākim*.

In this very cohesive understanding is revealed the mind of Imam Ghazali رحمته الله about leadership, *siyāsa*, and the need to address all the mundane affairs of the ummah. He makes the statement, [Arabic statement] that *bay'a* (a pledge) is necessary in order to justify the *imāma* (leadership) of a human being. What is important to address here is that he, as all the previous '*ulamā*' that I know of say, there must be one person in charge. They're not in favor of a parliament or Congress. Now that being said, it's not *ḥarām* either. I mean, as far as I know, this is all *ijtihādī*. It can change with time and on several occasions, it was almost as if Muslims just left politics to be what we call *laissez faire*. "Let it be what it is, and if it works, it's fine. If it doesn't work, then change it." There's nothing set in stone that will say this is the definite, monolithic theory of politics in Islam, meaning rulership, government, governing people, and establishing these institutions and facilities infrastructure for Muslims.

It doesn't matter how you do it, but you must do it. we don't tolerate injustice, but we do tolerate the idea that if there's one person who has already established his authority and power, then we won't remove him. And that is absolute injustice and violence, and so on. I think that has to be also understood. In that case you can have a sense of democracy and kind of have a sense of theocracy. In the concluding statement Imam Ghazali رحمته الله says [statement in Arabic], is that the *takwīn* (divine ordinance) in the cosmological sense, maybe in a theological sense, that rulership and leadership is something that Allah ﷻ decides., he goes off there also. From this, people may say that Imam Ghazali رحمته الله is supporting theocracy, but there was nothing like that at the time and they didn't have it even in their minds.

We see that this is based on the *āya*:

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكِ الْمَلِكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ

That Allah ﷻ is the One who gives Kingdom authority to whomever He wants to, He takes away Kingdom authority from whomever He wants to.

(Sūrat Āl-ʿImrān Q: 3:26)

He sees this as a divine order that's coming down into the minds of people by people willingly giving their pledge to a person. This is kind of almost a divine component to the whole idea of who governs and who doesn't, but it has to be institutionalized by human beings. When Allah ﷻ won't come down with an *āya* of the Qur'ān or Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ that you must do this this and that, it is just something that is cosmologically provided and ascertained by people at large in terms of he does appreciate *aghlabiyya* (prevalence) that there's a general majority consensus as who is now the ruler. This is also fine, you can accommodate that too. The whole idea is that Imam Ghazali رحمته الله is saying that the most important thing is to understand that the effects of leadership must be good. And the effects of leadership, whoever's in power, they cannot be good.

In one of his books, *al-Tibr*, he writes about politics, if you want to call it politics, more of leadership and governance. In this book he likens all of this to a tree. He says that the root of the tree is *tawhīd* (montheism), and the trunk is your *‘ibāda*. The branches come out into justice, tolerance, facilities, conveniences, infrastructure, and all of that. The fruit is the fruit of *Īmān*, which hopefully manifests itself in *Jannah*. He says you must cultivate the trunk, roots, and make sure the roots are firmly rooted in the ground. It's only with this kind of approach that you have an ideal for what a Muslim government and governance is all about. Unless the government is rooted in *tawhīd*, rooted in the abide of Islam, unless the *tawhīd* grows into a very formidable trunk, until that trunk yields itself into branches, and the branches don't get fruit, you won't have an idea of what Islamic leadership, Islamic politics is all about.

He's not ignoring the idea of Islam in politics. He does write about it in various chapters of *Iḥyā’*. He does write about it sometimes in separate books that he writes to rulers, and so on. This now is Imam Ghazali's رحمته الله theory, since it ties the mundane with the spiritual, it ties this world with the other world. You get a sense he is a comprehensive thinker, so he places everything where it belongs. He doesn't beat around the bush. He's very coherent and very cohesive, and very consistent in his understanding of how human beings should be.

The bottom line is that Imam Ghazali رحمته الله is ensuring that salvation is procurable with or without a government. He says a society, a Muslim society, cannot function as a Muslim society without Islamic law, Islamic rules. That's a given. You can function as a Muslim who wants to procure salvation without government, like we do when we're living here in the West. the ideal is to have a Muslim *khalīfa*, a Muslim *ḥākim*, a Muslim ruler, a Muslim governor who's going to uphold all of Islam, all of Islamic principles that combine benefits of mundane existence and all the fruits of the spiritual existence that is yet to come in the other world. *in shā’ Allah*. This is a *khulāsa* (summary), of these kinds of very vast writings. Imam Ghazali رحمته الله wrote on so many different subjects. He wrote extensively on Islamic law, legal theory, logic, *‘aqīda* (fundamental theology), and on refuting the false claims made by deviant Muslims in the *khilāfa*. He was also very much engaged in dialogue with different types and groups of people.

He provides us with a roadmap for felicity, a roadmap for happiness in the hereafter. obviously people before him like al-Farabi رحمته الله and people after him like Ibn Rushd رحمته الله and Ibn Khaldun رحمته الله, they've written their theories and their treatises about Muslim government, if you want to call it sociology, which we don't want to call it that. Yet, what separates Imam al Ghazali رحمته الله is his concern for Muslims in the *ākhirah*, which is very close to the mindset of prophets and the *khulafā’ al-rashidīn* رضي الله عنهم. The mindset of the Prophets ﷺ when they came to rule and govern like the *Banī Isra‘īl*, who were kind of blessed with prophets, who would succeed prophets. And they were also blessed with kings and rulers so they always had somebody to oversee their mundane affairs and the prophets would oversee their spiritual affairs along with the mundane.

Imam Ghazali رحمته الله wants the ummah to go back into the *khulafā' al-rashidīn* model and see what they can do. But he said, out of pure necessity, he could see that some of the rulers were not the most pristine in terms of Islamic ideology. They perhaps did not meet certain requirements and standards of Islamic leadership, whether they're eligible or not, whether someone is Qureshi and all that., he says in order to avoid a huge calamity (*fitna*) we have to concede that this is where if you have ascertained, **shawka**; power and authority through a process of *bay'a*; pledging allegiance to the ruler, then that will be enough for the moment, but that's not necessarily the ideal.

Many times you have to acquiesce to circumstances. And removing harm from the Ummah is a principle in Islam and making sure there's no more bloodshed in the ummah is following a Sunnah of Imam Ḥasan رضي الله عنه. That's what he did when he conceded the *khilāfa* to Muā'wiya رضي الله عنه. The reason he gave is I don't want any more bloodshed in the Ummah. Many Muslims are just dying and being killed just for political reasons and that's not a fight I'm going to fight. I want to make sure Muslim blood is spared. the later Sunni 'ulamā' followed Imam Ḥasan رضي الله عنه in this. They did the same. This shows they may not strictly be following the code of eligibility, but he is established and if he is established we're not going to overthrow him until he is blatantly uttering *kufr* and blatantly butchering and so on.

This is the *khulāṣa* that Imam Ghazali's رحمته الله mindset is all about, being close to Allah ﷻ. Whether you're the *ḥākim* or whether you're the street cleaner. What you have in common is *tawhid*. What you have in common are the 'aqā'id. What you have in common are all the rituals that you need to do. What you have in common is the idea that you develop yourselves, your good behavior, and so on. no one in leadership can abuse anyone who is now following and who is a subject and maybe who is a citizen, if you want to use that word, of your particular kingdom or your *khilāfa*. That is the bottom line. He is very clear and very objective. He brings in *uṣul al-fiqh* to show that his level of understanding, what is called *dharura* (necessity), applies also to politics not just to other issues of fiqh. At the political level there is the *dharura* to maintain law and order and to avoid bloodshed and *fitna*. He uses that in order to justify his position for his time *in shā' Allah*.