

A Profile of Imam al-Tahawi ؒ

By Maulana Muaz Billoo

Al-Imam Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Salamah At Tahawi ؒ was from among the greatest scholars in all of Islamic history. His knowledge was encyclopedic, and his depth in knowledge was unparalleled in his time. Al Hafidh Badruddin al 'Ayni states in his commentary of Imam Tahawi's *Sharh Ma'ani Al Athar*, entitled, *Nukhab Al Afkar*, that the Imam was born in the year 229 AH. Ibn Asakir mentions in his *Tarikh Dimishq* that he was born in the year 239 whilst Ibn Khallikah has mentioned in *Wafayatul A'yan* that he was born in the year 238.

In any case, he left behind timeless and invaluable works dealing with the sciences of Hadith narration and explanation. He was able to acquire mastery in the fields of Hadith, Fiqh, and its principles. He was among those few who were able to combine between these fields in such a way that very scholars of the Muslim Ummah have been able to.

He studied under numerous luminaries of his time. Among the foremost in his lifetime was his own uncle, Imam Ismail ibn Yahya Al Muzani, who was from the direct students of the Mujtahid Imam, Muhammad ibn Idris Ash Shafi'i. It is from Imam Muzani that Imam Tahawi transmitted Sunan Ash Shafi'i. Although Imam Muzani was a Shafi'i in fiqh, Imam Tahawi became Hanafi in fiqh. Al Hafidh Al 'Ayni has mentioned that Muhammad ibn Ahmad Ash Shurooti once asked Al Imam At Tahawi, "Why did you go against your uncle's *madhab*, choosing the *madhab* of (Imam) Abi Hanifah?" He responded, "Because I would observe my uncle constantly looking into the books of Abi Hanifah, so for that reason I shifted towards him."

Considering that Imam Tahawi lived within the same era as many of the Imams of six famous books of Hadith, he shared many of the same shuyookh as them, such as Haroon ibn Sa'eed Al Ayli, who, as Al Hafidh Abdul Ghani Al Maqdisi has mentioned in the biography of Haroon ibn Sa'eed, "Muslim, Abu Dawud, An Nasai, Ibn Majah, and Abu Hatim narrated from him." Ibn Asakir himself has stated, "At Tahawi narrated from An Nasai." He travelled throughout the world in his quest for knowledge. Allamah Zahid Al Kawthari states, "Whoever goes through the biographies of the shuyookh of At Tahawi will realize that among them are Egyptians, Moroccans, Yemenis, Basris, Kufis, Syrians, Khurasanis, and from various corners of the world. He acquired from them what was with them from the (historical) reports and narrations."

Some of the shuyookh of Al Imam At Tahawi included:

- Ismail ibn Yahya Al Muzani (d. 264)
- Bakkar ibn Qutaybah (d. 270), the Qadi of Egypt
- Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb An Nasai (d. 303), the prolific Imam of Hadith
- Ar Rabee' ibn Sulayman Al Muradi (d. 270), who was from the greatest students of Al Imam Ash Shafi'i
- Ahmad ibn Abi Imran (d. 280), the Qadi of Egypt

Some of his students included:

- Sulayman ibn Ahmad At Tabarani (d. 360), the imam of Hadith and author of the three famous *Ma'ajim*
- Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Mansur Ad Damaghani Al Qadi
- Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Zabar Al Qadi (d. 329)
- Abdur Rahman ibn Ishaq Al Jawhari, Qadi of Egypt
- Abdur Rahman ibn Ahmad ibn Yunus (d. 347), The *Hafidh*, The Historian

Al Badr Al 'Ayni said, "As for At Tahawi, everyone was in agreement regarding his reliability, piety, trustworthiness, overall excellence, and his depth in the fields of Hadith, *ilal*, and abrogation. Nobody was able to surpass him in that. Both the earlier and later generations praised him." Ibn Yunus said, "At Tahawi was a reliable, strong, intelligent jurist. He did not leave behind anyone like him." Ibn Abdil Barr said, "At Tahawi was Kufan in his (fiqhi) madhab (i.e. he was Hanafi in fiqh). He was well-versed in all of the schools of the jurists." Ibn Al Jawzi said, "At Tahawi was a reliable, strong, sharp, and intelligent jurist. He was from Taha, a town from the land of Egypt." Adh Dhahabi said, "The Jurist, the *Muhaddith*, the *Hafidh*, one of the well-versed scholars. He was a reliable, strong, intelligent jurist." Ibn Kathir said, "He was one of the reliable and strong, experienced *Huffadh*." After mentioning many of those who praised Al Imam At Tahawi, Al Hafidh Al 'Ayni said, "All who have mentioned him from the scholars of Hadith and history have praised him, including At Tabarani, Abu Bakr Al Khatib, Abi Abdillah Al Humaidi...etc."

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Some of his works include, but are not limited to:

- ***Sharh Ma'ani Al Athar***: One of his most famous works as it is studied in the Darse Nizami syllabus. In it, Imam Tahawi delves into various legal issues regarding which the

various legal schools had differed over. He endeavors to provide the proofs which are put forth by the various schools for each issue, and concludes by providing proofs and counter arguments on behalf of the Hanafi school.

- ***Sharh Mushkil Al Athar:*** In this work, Imam Tahawi reconciles between seemingly conflicting Ahadith. This work is a standard in the field of *Ikhtilaf Al Hadith*.
- ***Ikhtilaf Al 'Ulama:*** A work in which Imam Tahawi presents the varying views of the Imams in legal issues.
- ***Mukhtasar At Tahawi:*** Imam Tahawi's fiqh *matn* (text).
- ***Bayan I'tiqad Ahlis Sunnah Wal Jama'ah:*** One of the most celebrated works in the entirety of Islamic history, Imam Tahawi outlines the beliefs of the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah.