

## SHAFI'I

The Shafi'i school of thought was headed by Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (150 – 198 AH). Adherents of this sect are mainly from the Middle East.

Imam Ash-Shafi'i unified revealed sources with human reasoning. He, was a Hashimi, brought up by his mother, in poor circumstances, in Makka spending a great deal of time with the Bedouins through whom he acquired a thorough knowledge of old Arab poetry. When he was about twenty years old he went to Madina to be with Malik b. Anas and remained there until the latter's death. He also studied the system of Abu Hanifa and subsequently developed an eclectic system of his own taking an intermediate path between independent invention of laws and the use of traditions. He knew the whole of the Muwatta by heart and was unrivalled for his knowledge of the Quran, the sunna, and the sayings of the Companions

He was widely travelled and following his studies he set up a school in Baghdad. The Shafi'i school of thought emerged in Egypt. At the time of the Fatimid Dynasty, the Egyptians were mainly followers of Ahlul Bayt, and the teachings of Ahlul Bayt were being taught in al-Azhar University. Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi came and waged an extensive war against the school of Ahlul Bayt by banning the teaching of their madhhab (school of thought) in al-Azhar and resurrecting the other madhahib, including that of Imam Shafi'i, who was killed in Egypt in 198H.

## HANBALI

The Hanbali school of thought was headed by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164-214 AH). The Hanbali jurisprudence is considered very strict and conservative. It is an uncompromising return to traditionalism and adheres to a literal interpretation of the Quran and the hadith. It is practiced mainly in Saudi Arabia, Qatar as well as in parts of Syria and Iraq Imam. Hambal gained popularity in Najd (a region of the Arabian Peninsula) because of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahabism. The Hanbali madhhab spread in Najd primarily due to the teachings of Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (661H–728H).

# THE FIVE SCHOOLS OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT (MADHAAHIB)



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Today, the five schools of Islamic thought accepted by all Muslims are:

1. Ja'fari 23%
2. Hanafi 31%
3. Maliki 25%
4. Shafi'i 16%
5. Hambali 4%

The remaining follow other minority schools, such as the Zaydi and the Isma'ili.

# JA'FARI

The Ja'fari school of thought was headed by Imam Ja'far As Sadiq (pbuh) (83-148AH). He had the opportunity to formulate and establish the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh) in what came to be known as Al Fiqh Al Ja'fari. His teachings were collected in 400 usul (foundations) which were written by his students and encompass hadith, Islamic philosophy, theology, commentary of the Qur'an, literature, and ethics. After a period of time, three distinguished scholars categorized these 400 usul in four books, which are the main sources of hadith for the Shi'a school of thought.

They are:

Usul al-Kafi by Al-Kulayni (d.329 AH),

Man La Yahduruh al-Faqih by Al-Saduq (d.381AH),  
and Al-Tahdib and Al-Istibsar by Al-Tusi (d.460A H).

These three scholars were known as the "three Muhammads" since their first names were all Muhammad.

While these four books are the main sources of hadith for the Shi'a, their authors still did not label their books as "sahih" (authentic). Although they did their best to gather only authentic traditions, but if a particular tradition contradicted the Noble Qur'an then it was not accepted as legal and valid. Hadith, according to the Ja'fari school of thought, are accepted only if the Qur'an verifies them.

# HANAFI

His school of thought is practiced widely in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans and Turkey. The majority of Sunni Muslims practice the Hanafi jurisprudence.

The Hanafi school of thought was headed by Imam al-Nu'man ibn Thabit (Abu Hanifa) (80-150 AH).

He was not an Arab, was raised in Kufa in 699CE where his grandfather had been brought as a slave, and died in Baghdad. He made a living as a cloth merchant but his life was dedicated to theology and he exercised a considerable influence which resulted in the rise of the Hanafi School of thought. The characteristic of the school is seen in its approach to theological questions being interpreted by using a rationalistic method (ra'i). Unlike Malik, who lived at Medina, with its memories of Muhammad, Abu Hanifa made little use of the traditions as the basis of his judgments. He was opposed by other scholars on the grounds that he did not use tradition so his disciples later issued the so called Musnad of Abu Hanifa which assured his opponents that he did use tradition in his judgements.

This school of thought prevailed during the time of the Abbasid Empire when a student of Imam Abu Hanifa, Abu Yusuf al-Qadi became the head of the judiciary department and the highest judge, and thus he spread this madhhab (school of thought), in particular, during the caliphates of al-Mahdi, al-Hadi, and al-Rashid.

No other man was as close to the Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid as was Abu Yusuf al-Qadi, but the Abbasid caliph, al-Mansur also worked hard to support and consolidate Imam Abu Hanifa's school of thought. Imam Abu Hanifa studied under the instruction of Imam As Sadiq for two years, and said in regards to him, "I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable than Ja'far ibn Muhammad, and indeed, he is the most knowledgeable one in the nation."

# MALIKI

The Maliki school of thought was headed by Imam Malik ibn Anas al-Asbahi (93-179 AH). Its adherents are mostly from North Africa, United Arab Emirates, and parts of Saudi Arabia. He is known as the Imam of Madina as he never left the city. It was his attachment to the city of Madina which caused his Maliki school to differ from

the other three schools for they used the practice of the people of Madina (amal ahl al-madina) as a foundational source for establishing Islamic law. He was opposed to making decisions based on the rationalistic method. His disagreement with Imam Abu Hanifa gave him a reputation of being the leader of the school of tradition (hadith), while Imam Abu Hanifa was the leader of the school of opinion (ra'i). Yet, most Muslim governments were supportive of Imam Abu Hanifa.

Imam Malik joined the 'Alawiyyin, the descendants of Imam 'Ali, and studies under Imam As Sadiq. At one point he angered the government, and was dragged through the streets by his clothes and lashed. In 148AH, his fortunes reversed and he regained his popularity.

The Abbasids tried to set him up as a popular reference for the nation in giving verdicts and injunctions. The Abbasid caliph al-Mansur asked him to write al-Muwatta', his book of fiqh, which contains the principles of the Maliki school of thought. Furthermore, during the hajj season, the official announcer of the government proclaimed that no one had the authority to give fatawas (religious decisions) except for Imam Malik.

The Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid sat on the floor to listen to him, and the caliphate in general said that no book on earth, besides Qur'an, was more authentic than that of Imam Malik's.

Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi says that two schools of thought were spread due to the government and the sultan: the school of Imam Abu Hanifa, since Abu Yusuf al-Qadi only appointed Hanafi judges; and the school of Imam Malik ibn Anas, for a student of Imam Malik, Yahya ibn Yahya was so respected in the caliph's palace that no judge was ever appointed in Andalus, Spain without his consultation and advice.