

THE FOUR GREAT IMAMS



The rulings given to us by Almighty Allah and His Messenger Muhammad ﷺ (peace be upon him) are found in the sacred text of the Qur'aan and in the Sunnah (practices and teachings of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions). In order to derive rulings directly from the Qur'aan & Sunnah, one needs to be highly qualified and have mastered many different disciplines. After the time of the Sahabah , many highly qualified and learned scholars were consulted by Muslims around the world for guidance on Islamic rulings. As Islam had spread far and wide in a short space of time these scholars were required to impart their knowledge to Muslims across many lands. Each of these highly qualified scholars who were masters of many disciplines would form principles (Usool) which they would use to derive rulings from the Qur'aan and Hadith. These great scholars were many in number however, four of these gained great appreciation and following across the Muslim world. These four well-known scholars are Imam Abu Hanifa (R.A. – Rahmatullaahi Alayhi: May Allah's mercy be on him), Imam Malik (R.A.), Imam Shafi'i (R.A.) and Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (R.A.). They were all highly proficient in the subjects of Islamic knowledge e.g. Tafseer (Qur'anic explanations), Hadith (Prophetic narrations), Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) and the Arabic language.

Each one of them was a Muhaddith and a Faqeeh. A Muhaddith is one with deep knowledge of the Prophetic teachings and actions. A Faqeeh is one who has a deep understanding of Islamic law & jurisprudence, and can derive the laws from its primary sources. The rulings derived by these four great Imam's of Fiqh and the principles they used to derive these rulings were collated together and referred to as individual Schools of Islamic law (Madhab). These Madhab's are commonly referred to as the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools of thought. The Madhab's of the four great Imam's are structured to make it easy for Muslims to act upon the injunctions of the Qur'aan and Sunnah. The differences between these schools of thought are in minor practical differences, as most Muslims consider them all fundamentally the same.

All four Madhabs are correct and applicable in their own right.

*The Four
Great Imams
of Fiqh
Part 1*